Remote Access and Participation: Articles 9 (Accessibility), 27 (Work and Employment) and 30 (Participation in cultural life, recreation and sport)

During the pandemic, the government and many private businesses adapted to enable remote participation. Many people with energy limiting conditions (ELCs), many of whom are at least partially housebound,[[1]](#footnote-1), [[2]](#footnote-2) were frustrated that it took such extreme circumstances to facilitate the remote access to work and cultural life that they had been demanding for so long, and were rightly concerned that this access might evaporate as soon as able-bodied people did not need it.[[3]](#footnote-3) In this section we discuss the importance of remote participation as an accessibility measure in regard to both employment and recreational activities.

Remote access and work

A survey conducted by the Chronic Illness Inclusion Project before the pandemic found that 72% of respondents who had requested remote access were denied this adjustment.[[4]](#footnote-4) This survey also found that there were three main barriers experienced by people with ELCs when requesting and using remote access: attitudinal barriers, organisational barriers, and technological barriers. Many people with ELCs encountered disbelief about their impairment, leading them to doubt their legal status as disabled people and consequently their right to accessibility. These attitudinal beliefs often seep into organisational barriers, as participants reported that “feeling like a minority makes it harder to be heard or get my points across”.[[5]](#footnote-5) Another organisational barrier is the size of meetings, as it is harder to hear and see what is going on over video conferencing in a large meeting. Technological access was also a major issue, with participants regularly having their requests dismissed due to vague bureaucratic reasons, poor internet connections at venues, and an unwillingness from organisers to make an event accessible, with one participant being told “it’s too disruptive to have mixed methods” of both remote and face to face participation.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The widespread rollout of remote participation in both the public and private sector demonstrates that these adjustments could have been put in place all along. Rather than pushing to return to life as ‘normal’ with work in the office, remote access in the workplace should be understood as an issue of accessibility for people with ELCs.

Remote access and participation in culture, recreation and sport

As part of their ratification of the UNCRPD and its National Disability Strategy, the UK Government promised to widen disabled people’s participation in arts, culture and sport, recognising that, “[d]isability is one of the main barriers people give for not attending art and cultural events, and disabled people are nearly twice as likely to be physically inactive.”[[7]](#footnote-7) However, this has not been reflected in any commitment to remote participation in culture, recreation or sport. Although remote access to leisure activities emerged during the lockdown, much of this disappeared when lockdown was lifted. For instance, while “56% of publicly subsidised theatres had at least one online performance during the first 18 months of the pandemic,” the same theatres had no online performances scheduled for the autumn season of 2021, offering in-person shows only.[[8]](#footnote-8) This is especially egregious considering the number of theatres that are publicly subsidised by Arts Council England.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Access to leisure is just as important to people with ELCs as access to work, because “disabled people deserve the right to have a life like everyone else.”[[10]](#footnote-10) It may even be more important, given that many people with ELCs would be unable to work even if remote participation were a widely recognised reasonable accommodation.[[11]](#footnote-11) While remote access is not, and should never be, an alternative to accessible venues, remote access provisions should be continued so that people who are housebound are not entirely cut off from recreation and cultural life.

A note about terminology: what we mean by ‘housebound’

Chronic Illness Inclusion (CII) recognises that ‘housebound’ is a contentious term in disability activism because it has been used to naturalise the confinement of people with impairments to their homes or to institutions, when these people can in fact leave their homes if provided with appropriate, self-directed support. However, this is a term that many people with ELCs feel describes their lived experience, as there are often not support or accommodations that can enable people with energy impairment to leave their homes safely.

In our survey on women’s health, CII defined being ‘housebound’ as:

“either 1) being always or sometimes unable to leave the home to get to a medical appointment even with support or assistance, or 2) the exertion from leaving the home to attend a medical appointment would result in significant worsening of symptoms, flareup, relapse, or setback as a consequence, e.g., for days or weeks.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

Remote access thus allows many people to engage in aspects of work and social life from which they will otherwise be barred, either because it is not physically possible for them to leave their homes, or because the cost of doing so in pain and fatigue is intolerable.

1. Hale, C., Benstead, S.. Lyus, J., Odell, E. & Ruddock, A. (2020) *Energy impairment and disability inclusion*. Centre for Welfare Reform, p.61. <https://chronicillnessinclusion.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/energy-impairment-and-disability-inclusion.pdf>  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Hale, C., Brough, J., Allam, A., Lydiard, S., Springfield, F., Fixter, A., Wright, N., Clutton, V. and Bole, K. (2021) *Submission to the Department of Health and Social Care’s Inquiry into Women’s Health and Wellbeing in England*. Chronic Illness Inclusion, p.8. Available from: <https://chronicillnessinclusion.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/CII.DHSC-Womens-Health-England-June-2021.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hale, C. with Allam, A., Clutton, V. and Gunn, L. (2020) ‘What does Covid-19 mean for the chronic illness community?’ *Disability Wales*. Available from: https:// [www.disabilitywales.org/coronavirus-and-chronic-illness/?fbclid=IwAR27SZ8O2-td8fRQ99wJ0\_S37A6pTNaqVc\_XURQFcJYFV14SFT9KMQ5dX20](http://www.disabilitywales.org/coronavirus-and-chronic-illness/?fbclid=IwAR27SZ8O2-td8fRQ99wJ0_S37A6pTNaqVc_XURQFcJYFV14SFT9KMQ5dX20) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Hale, C., Allam, A., Meyer, P., and Springfield, F. (2020). *Turning the Remote Access Revolution*

*into Reasonable Adjustments*, p.8.
<https://chronicillnessinclusion.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/remote-revolution-to-reasonable-adjustments.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Hale, Allam et al (2020), p.11. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Hale, Allam, et al (2020), p.9. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Disability Unit, UK Government. (2021) *Leisure: National Disability Strategy explained.* Available from: <https://disabilityunit.blog.gov.uk/2021/07/28/leisure-national-disability-strategy-explained/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Sherwood, H. (2021) ‘50% of UK theatres streaming shows online during Covid revert to in-person only’. *The Guardian*. 10 October 2021. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/oct/10/50-of-uk-theatres-streaming-shows-online-during-covid-revert-to-in-person-only> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Statistica.com. (2021) *Leading subsidized theatres ranked by amount of funding received from Arts Council England from 2018/19 to 2021/22\** Available from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/510623/most-subsidized-theaters-by-funding-amount-in-england-uk/> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ryan, F. (2021) ‘Remote working has been life-changing for disabled people, don’t take it away now’. *The Guardian.* 2 June 2021. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jun/02/remote-working-disabled-people-back-to-normal-disability-inclusion> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
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