

## ACCESSIBLE EUROPE 2019 – CONTRIBUTION

European Commission



*An European Ecosystem for ICT Accessibility*

### ACTIVITY COVERAGE

- ☒ Regional cooperation and stakeholder engagement: the activity strengthens and supports regional cooperation and the engagement of all relevant stakeholders, in line with the European Accessibility act, in the development and implementation of ICT accessibility policies and solutions in the European region.
- ☒ ICT accessibility policies: raising awareness and/or promoting relevant guidelines on public policies, including exchanging knowledge and sharing best practices on ICT accessibility. This may include the development of standards.
- ☒ Public procurement with accessibility features: promoting regional and in-country deliver of public procurement as a tool to improve the inclusion of persons with disabilities and specific needs.
- ☒ Web Accessibility: developing regional and in country capacity through web accessibility features and/or training to ensure that websites and related services are available and accessible to all citizens.
- ☒ Media Services Accessibility: raising awareness about accessibility possibilities of TV and video streaming on digital platforms, and promoting the implementation of appropriate solutions.
- ☒ Innovation and Accessibility: promoting the development of regional and in-country capacity building on programming for all, including persons with disabilities and specific needs. This may include embedding “accessible by design” in the product’s innovation/development process.



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## DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT/RECENT ACTIVITIES

This presentation provides an overview of EU policies and legislation on ICT accessibility in order to improve access by persons with disabilities to ICT on equal basis with others. In addition, it shares a number of measures that motivate and incentive economic operators to develop accessible ICT products and services.

While ICT is omnipresent in all areas of our lives accessibility is not catching up with the speed of development and penetration of ICT. Learning from the implementation of accessibility in the built environment leads to stepping up the prevention of accessibility barriers in new technologies. ICT accessibility consolidates as a precondition for access and use of products, services and infrastructures, a precondition for enjoyment of rights by persons with disabilities. It is essential to shift towards setting up ecosystems that maximises opportunities for ensuring ICT accessibility in order to achieve equal access for persons with disabilities.

A first key element is to embrace "definitions" or "concepts" of accessibility that contain as much as possible concrete accessibility requirements. They should set characteristics of products, services and infrastructures. Defining ICT accessibility implies adopting requirements of what ICT should provide in terms of choices, personalisation, options, and features and functions so that persons with disabilities can access and use ICT in an effective manner. These definitions must be based on user needs, of course, but setting an effective ecosystem requires going beyond stating what user needs and describing the accessibility characteristics of the ICT. A careful balance needs to be met between the specificity of those requirements and the necessary flexibility for innovation.

An effective ecosystem must frame the technical work of developing accessibility requirements within clear policy and legal measures. These measures should, on one hand, put obligations on those responsible for the products, services and infrastructures to make them accessible and, on the other hand, incentivise and reward those compliant with accessibility. For the ecosystem to work, these measures should include enforcement provisions that are effective in remedy breach of accessibility.

The EU has adopted a number of complementary laws that address ICT accessibility from various perspectives and provide a very complete ecosystem:

- Accessibility legislation that contains direct obligations for economic operators to place in the market accessible ICT mainstream products and services. Example of those are the European Accessibility Act, that regulates the accessibility of key ICT products and services setting functional requirements and using those same requirements to render operational other EU legislation with accessibility provisions. There is also the Electronic Communications Code that requires the provision of equivalent access for persons with disabilities to "telecommunication services". In addition, it sets certain obligations for their availability and affordability as well as for the provision of assistive technologies. The Audio-visual Media Services Directive contains accessibility obligations for audio-visual media content.



- Accessibility legislation that contains obligations for public authorities to provide ICT accessibility. The most recent example is the Web Accessibility Directive that requires the accessibility of public sector websites and mobile apps, for example when providing online public services.
- Legislation that requires public authorities to buy, inter alia, accessible ICT. The European Public Procurement Directives require accessibility for all procurements that are intended for use by persons, whether they are for the general public or for staff of the contracting authorities.
- Legislation regulating the use of key EU Funds that requires observing accessibility when those funds are spent. Examples relevant for ICT accessibility include the European Structural and Investment Funds, the Trans-European networks, and some external action funds.

Examples of the products and services concerned by those legislations include computers and operating systems, ATMs, ticketing and check-in machines, payment terminals, telephones and smartphones, TV equipment related to digital television services, telephony services, broadcast services and content as well as access to those services, certain elements such as websites, on-line information, real time information or smart ticketing of air, bus, rail and waterborne passenger transport services, consumer banking services, e-books, e-commerce, online public services, websites and mobile apps and emergency calls. The provision of accessibility to this list of products and services brings an opening for the development of the untapped potential of persons with disabilities to access, for example, education and employment and reduce the poverty risk.

While legislation is essential, it is not sufficient. Legal measures need to be accompanied by other ICT accessibility policies.

There is a need for accessibility standards that provide in a voluntary manner details about possible ways to implement accessibility. A number of Mandates for developing these standards are issued at EU level and have already delivered. The EU Mandate 376 has resulted in a standard for ICT accessibility. It contains provisions for products, software, hardware web, telecommunications ICT content, documents and refers to W3C/WAI for the Web. Also recently a kind of process oriented standard has been adopted under Mandate 473. The standard describes what organisations need to do, following a Design for all or Universal design approach, to ensure that, for example, the products they manufacture or the services they deliver are accessible for persons with disabilities. Finally, under Mandate 420, a new standard on accessibility of the built environment is under adoption process. This standard contains relevant requirement, for example, to place ICT products such as self-service terminals in an accessible settings. Given the global nature of ICT these standards are developed to be coherent at international level.

Among the key successful measures to promote and reward accessibility, the EU counts with the Access City Award competition. Since 2010, EU cities that undertake remarkable efforts or



achieve important accessibility results in their infrastructures and services are rewarded on an annual basis. This year for the first time the award is planned to be accompanied with financial prizes of approximately 350,000 Euros to be shared by the three first cities. A special mention has been made available for accessible smart cities. While the world is now creating the new infrastructures for digital cities more needs to be done with a view to ensuring their accessibility and preventing new barriers.

An additional incentive enshrined in the EU Funds rules is the possibility to get funds to remove existing accessibility barriers. Authorities in the EU that would like to improve accessibility can make recourse to and be rewarded with additional EU financial support.

While a lot is being done to provide accessibility of ICT a word of caution is needed. The key word is prevention. Today accessibility is relatively common in areas such as the web or telephony but it remains a rare phenomenon in new ICT areas. Equal access for persons with disabilities in the near future in our digital society will depend on the accessibility of new technologies that are already emerging in products in the market. They include Artificial Intelligence applications, robotics, services based on the Internet of Things, future generations of mobile networks, smart cities and many others that are today in the research labs.

In addition, it is clear that, given the evolution of technology, its participatory nature and the increasing shared ownership of ICT resources, accessibility is not a one off issue. It requires joint and continued efforts for its maintenance. ICT created accessible, will not remain accessible, unless continued attention is paid to its changing configurations or its related growing content. In addition to ICT professionals, the use and applications of ICT as well as ICT related content are under development and enriched by contributions of many authors and not only ICT professionals. The sustainability of ICT accessibility is more and more depending on successful training programmes. Investing in digital skills must go hand in hand with investing on training on accessibility of ICT in order for the ecosystem to function properly and to ensure that no one is left behind in the digital world.

Activity running in:

- 2016 or before
- 2017
- 2018
- 2019
- 2020
- 2021
- 2022
- 2023

Comments:

In the European Union we are finalising a cycle. The current European Disability Strategy is coming to an end in 2020. Currently we are evaluating the results but also identifying remaining challenges and new actions that will contribute to ensure that investments done in the current Strategy will produce the needed results. It is evident that for a well-functioning ICT accessibility ecosystem sustained investments and efforts are needed in the future.





**ORGANISATION INFORMATION**

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