

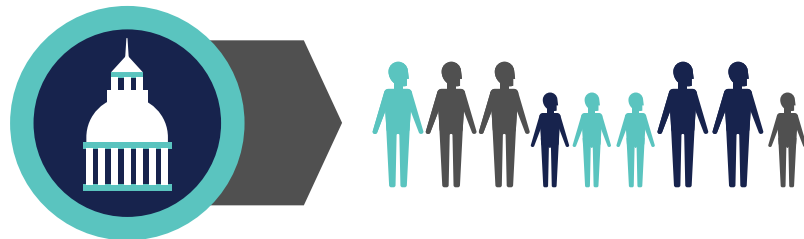


Building Accessible Government Websites

Key Points

- Many governments have taken steps to promote accessibility in public-sector websites, but implementation has been sporadic.
- The widely endorsed international standard ISO/IEC 40500:2012 is making it easier for governments to improve the accessibility of their websites.
- As governments commit to making their websites accessible, they should harmonize their policies with ISO/IEC 40500:2012 and institute self-assessment and conformance practices.
- Microsoft encourages governments to join industry in supporting web accessibility outreach programs for users, developers, and content authors.

Accessible government websites enable people of all ages and abilities to stay informed, participate fully as citizens, and seek public-sector employment more easily. While many governments have taken steps to promote accessibility in public-sector websites, implementation has been sporadic. As countries increasingly implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Microsoft and its partners are working to support broader and more effective implementation efforts.



Article 9 of the CRPD addresses web accessibility. The 150-plus countries that have ratified the CRPD will need to make their government websites accessible. The widely endorsed international standard ISO/IEC 40500:2012 will make this transition much easier.¹

As governments at the national, regional, and local level commit to making their websites accessible, they should work to harmonize their web accessibility policies with ISO/IEC 40500:2012. By doing so, they can avoid technical and policy risks that could come with creating their own web standards.

Microsoft Approach

Microsoft has a long history of promoting a more accessible Web—by helping to develop international technical standards, authoring how-to guides for governments and organizations, supporting policy discussions, providing developer training, and creating products that help advance accessibility.



Governments. Microsoft has supported collaboration between the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and G3ict to create a model web accessibility policy for use by governments around the world. Microsoft also provides web accessibility policy guidance directly to governments. Examples include collaborating with the government of Colombia on policy workshops and policy planning and supporting efforts by the state of Maharashtra in India to institutionalize the use of accessible web documents in all departments.



Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Microsoft collaborates with disability NGOs around the world to raise awareness of the benefits of making the Web more accessible. Microsoft is working closely with G3ict and Disabled People's International to provide training to NGOs on web accessibility.



Technology partners. Microsoft works with leading technology companies around the world to create standards that help developers build websites that better meet the needs of people with disabilities. Microsoft has been a leading contributor to ISO/IEC 40500:2012 and the World Wide Web Consortium's Authoring Tool Accessibility Guidelines (ATAG) 2.0.



Developers. Microsoft SharePoint and Visual Studio help developers create more accessible websites and meet current U.S. and international accessibility standards.

Policy Considerations

Governments have an important role to play in advancing web accessibility in the public sector and promoting digital inclusion. Microsoft believes that public-sector web accessibility policies should do the following in order to succeed:

- ▶ **FOCUS SPECIFICALLY ON GOVERNMENT WEBSITES** To avoid confusion, policymakers should create a policy that applies specifically to government websites. They should address other types of technology—such as hardware, software, and mobile applications—in separate policies.
- ▶ **ADOPT ISO/IEC 40500:2012 IN ITS ENTIRETY, WITH LEVEL A OR AA AS THE TARGET**
 - Microsoft encourages the adoption of ISO/IEC 40500:2012 level AA guidelines and recommends that governments adopt them in a way that will automatically accommodate future versions of the standard.
 - ISO/IEC 40500:2012 is technology neutral and directs developers to meet functional outcomes whether they use HTML, Java, Flash, or other web technologies. Countries should avoid modifying the standard, which can lead to trade consequences.
 - ISO/IEC 40500:2012 was written to help web developers create accessible web content and should be applied only to websites. Other accessibility standards, such as EN 301 549 from the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI), are for other types of technology, such as software applications and mobile apps.
- ▶ **PROMOTE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION** When governments adopt standards in their policies, they should also institute self-assessment and conformance practices.
 - Government agencies should maintain up-to-date, detailed conformance reports instead of implementing simple pass/fail assessments. They should also practice ongoing quality control and institute timely remediation.
 - Governments should avoid relying on third-party certifications. Websites, including those created by government agencies, are continually being updated, which means that maintaining accessibility is a daily operation rather than something implemented for a one-time certification.
 - When governments rely on vendor products or services to create their websites, they should request a Supplier Declaration of Conformity (SDoC) during the procurement process.
- ▶ **PROMOTE WEB ACCESSIBILITY AWARENESS** Education and training are crucial to developing a more accessible Web. Microsoft encourages governments to join industry in supporting web accessibility outreach programs for users, developers, and content authors.
 - Governments should encourage public- and private-sector entities to train web developers in accessibility practices.
 - Governments should create programs that raise awareness of and promote voluntary progress toward web accessibility in the private sector.
 - Governments should serve as a model for the private sector and highlight the business and corporate citizenship benefits of making websites accessible. Governments and the private sector can also share best practices as they implement new tools and standards.