

EU Approves Public Sector Digital Accessibility Rules

Public-sector websites and mobile apps across Europe are to be made [accessible](#) to those with [disabilities](#) under a directive agreed by EU legislative and executive bodies on Tuesday night.

The European Parliament, the European Council and the European Commission approved the Directive on Web Accessibility for Public Sector Websites, which is particularly aimed services to be used by the blind, the deaf and the hard of hearing.

Rules to apply broadly



The EC noted that 80 million people in the EU are currently affected by a disability, with the figure expected to rise to 120 million by 2020.

The directive is intended to outline a common approach for ensuring accessibility across Europe as well as supporting the EU's Digital Single Market plan by making digital services more widely available.

The new rules apply to all new public sector websites and apps and also requires existing websites to be updated, while older content such as archived videos or word-processing documents are to be made available in accessible form on demand.

Government videos are to be required to have closed captioning or another accessible alternative, while live-streamed content will be required to have such features within 14 days of broadcast.

Online services, such as paying fines or fees, must be accessible, and if parts of a website aren't accessible the site will have to include a statement explaining this.

App 'victory'

Dita Charanzová, the Czech MEP who authored the directive, said it was a "major victory" that mobile apps were included, and argued the rules would lead closer to a world where all government services would be available in digital form.

“A blind person should not be forced to queue any more than someone else,” she said in a statement.

But for the directive to have its full effect, she said, it will be necessary to ensure governments apply more than the minimum standards when transposing the legislation into their own national law. She also suggested such rules must eventually be applied to “more than just public websites and apps”, including the private-sector digital services people use in day-to-day life, such as watching television, paying utility bills and carrying out online banking transactions.

“We must ensure that any attempts to weaken the European Accessibility Act proposal or to block true requirements for accessibility in the revised AVMS directive fail,” she stated, alluding to proposed measures that would impose accessibility rules broadly across services provided in the EU.

The text of the directive must now be formally approved by the European Parliament and the Council, after which it is to be published in the Official Journal and will enter into force. Member states will then have 21 months to transpose it into their own legislation.

In 2012, [when the legislation was initially proposed](#), the EC said accessibility for public sector websites was “dire” and predicted the laws could open up a €2 billion (£1.6bn) web accessibility market.

At the time the EC said only one-third of Europe’s 761,000 public sector and government websites were fully accessible to people with disabilities.

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