

Accessibility of the websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies

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The Council took stock of progress on a proposal to make websites more accessible. Under the draft directive, EU-standardised accessibility features would become mandatory for certain types of public sector bodies' websites. **A report prepared by the Italian presidency** sets out the work accomplished thus far in the Council working party.

Better business conditions and easier web use: a harmonised set of accessibility rules will help website developers to offer their products and services across the EU without extra production costs and other difficulties resulting from different national approaches in the sector. This should improve the functioning of the internal market and contribute to growth and competitiveness.

Certain principles and techniques that make web content more usable are to be applied when creating websites. This will benefit all users, especially people with disabilities, older people and those with temporary disabilities such as a broken hand. Moreover, it is particularly important for the public sector to make its websites more accessible so that they can extend their reach and fulfil their public tasks.

Work in the Council: during the working party discussions, a number of changes were made to the proposal.

- **scope:** the scope has been widened to **cover all public sector websites in their entirety**. This implies the deletion of a number of other parts of the proposal, including the Annex (although an illustrative list of websites covered could still prove useful), as well as minor consequential changes throughout the text. On the other hand, it is not proposed to extend the scope to cover websites published by private entities. However, there is an issue regarding websites supported by public funds or published by public-private partnerships;
- **less red-tape:** the proposal requires Member States to take measures to promote and monitor the application of these rules. Mindful of red tape, the presidency text requires member states to monitor compliance with the rules periodically, instead of continuously as suggested by the Commission. Similarly, the annual reporting obligation proposed by the Commission is to be replaced by less frequent reporting;
- **standards:** Article 5 has been changed to reflect the existence of EN 301 549. This standard now exists and Article 5 provides that compliance with that standard in itself establishes a presumption of conformity with Article 3. EN 301 549 contains accessibility requirements intended for public procurement. However, the focus on public procurement would not appear to pose a problem for making the relevant parts of it applicable also for this Directive, as long as the content of the standard is suitable for that. However, the parts of the standard relevant for this Directive should be identified;
- **deadlines:** the current compromise text suggests that once the directive has entered into force, Member States will have two years in which to adopt national provisions so as to comply with the directive. The web accessibility requirements will be applicable three years from the entry into force of the directive;
- **implementing acts:** the implementing act in Article 7(4) has been replaced by Commission guidelines. All the Articles concerning the exercise of delegation and committee have been deleted.

Next steps: the Italian presidency intends to continue work on the proposal during the remainder of its term. Its aim is to enable the Council to start talks with the European Parliament, so that a deal could be struck under the next presidency.