

European Accessibility Act

To ensure the full participation of people with disabilities in society and to reduce the fragmentation of legislation governing their access to products and services, the Commission has adopted a proposal for a directive – often referred to as the European Accessibility Act. This would provide a common EU definition of, and implementation framework for, accessibility requirements for certain products and services in the internal market. Parliament is due to vote on the proposal in the September plenary.

Background

More than 70 million people live with [disabilities](#) in the European Union (EU), representing 15 % of the population. This share is likely to increase with an [ageing population](#). Like all EU citizens, people with disabilities are entitled to accessibility, i.e. 'to [live independently and participate fully](#) in all aspects of life'. In its [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), the EU considers the accessibility of people with disabilities to be a fundamental right (Articles 21 and 26). In this area of shared competence with Member States, the EU has ratified the United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities ([UNCRPD](#)). Yet people with disabilities usually face a number of challenges that hamper their daily activities, such as difficulties in accessing public transport and buildings or in using household appliances or e-commerce services.

To remedy this situation, the European Commission adopted a [European disability strategy for 2010-2020](#), highlighting accessibility as one of its priorities. Since then, the Commission has promoted [accessibility](#) in its [digital agenda](#), given significant attention to provision of assistance to [passengers](#) with reduced mobility, and invested in the development of common voluntary [standards](#) on accessibility in specific areas, such as information and communications technologies (ICT) and the built environment. Regarding the accessibility of products and services – the prevention and elimination of obstacles that pose problems for people with disabilities when using products, services or infrastructure – supply is insufficient and there is regulatory [fragmentation](#) in the EU market. Both of these factors obstruct competition and keep prices high.

Commission proposal for a European Accessibility Act (EEA)

The Commission adopted in December 2015 a 'business-friendly' [proposal](#) that should substantially improve the proper functioning of the internal market for accessible products and services, in order to help dismantle barriers between Member States. The proposed directive aims to encourage competition between economic operators and the free movement of accessible products and services. It has two major objectives. First, it aims at harmonising accessibility requirements for a list of products and services. It focuses on computers, telephones, televisions, media services, transport, banking services, e-books and e-commerce. Its objective is not to impose detailed technical solutions to render a product or service accessible but simply to establish 'accessibility principles'. Second, the proposal aims at using the same accessibility requirements to clearly define the obligation of accessibility as laid down in European law, particularly in the field of public procurement and the structural funds.

European Parliament position

For some time, Parliament has been highly [supportive](#) of the idea of an EEA to enshrine the rights of disabled people at EU level. The Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) adopted its [report](#) on 25 April 2017. The report is expected to be discussed and voted during the September plenary session. This would open the way to trilogue negotiations, once the [Council](#) has agreed its position on the proposal.

First reading: [2015/0278\(COD\)](#); Committee responsible: IMCO;
Rapporteur: Morten Løkkegaard (ALDE, Denmark). See also the
EPRS 'Legislation in Progress' [briefing](#).

