

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 European Commission adopted a proposal for a new 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. Following the completion of trilogue negotiations, which resulted in a provisional agreement in December 2018, the European Parliament is expected to vote on the proposal in plenary during March.

Background

More than 70 million people live with [disabilities](#) in the European Union (EU). 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](#). Yet people with disabilities usually face a number of challenges that hamper their daily activities. 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 [air 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.

European Commission proposal

In December 2015, the Commission adopted a [proposal](#) that should substantially improve the proper functioning of the internal market for accessible products and services, through helping to dismantle barriers between Member States. The proposed directive 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. Second, the proposal aims at using the same accessibility requirements to clearly define the obligation of accessibility as laid down in European law.

European Parliament position

On 25 April 2017, Parliament's Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) adopted its report on the proposal. After interinstitutional (trilogue) negotiations, Parliament and Council reached a [provisional agreement](#) on 19 December 2018, which was then approved by the IMCO committee on 22 January 2019. Micro-enterprises would be exempted, and more generally, the directive should avoid imposing red tape on economic operators. It should include accessible emergency calls to 112. The agreed text is now due to be voted by Parliament during the March I plenary session.

First-reading report: [2015/0278\(COD\)](#); Committee responsible: IMCO; Rapporteur: Morten Løkkegaard (ALDE, Denmark). For further information see our 'EU Legislation in progress' [briefing](#).

