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Web technologies are an essential means to delivering and accessing information and services in today's society. Web accessibility means that everyone, including people with disabilities, can perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with the Internet.

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Accessibility has become particularly important because of the explosive growth in on-line information and interactive services provided on the web: online banking and shopping, dealing with government and public services, communication with distant relatives... If web accessibility is not achieved, many people are at risk of being partially or totally excluded from society.

Efforts to make websites accessible result in a better user experience for all, not just for users with disabilities. Simple changes that make sites easier to use bring huge improvements for everyone, and economic gains for businesses as they can reach a larger customer base.

Web accessibility is not just a question of technical standards and of web architecture and design. It is not a concern for web developers only, but also a question of political will and of moral obligation now enshrined in the United Nations [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) [2] (UNCRPD). Article 9 of the Convention requires that appropriate measures are taken to ensure access for persons with disabilities, on equal basis with others, to inter alia information and communication technologies, including the Internet.

A new momentum for web accessibility is provided by the ratification of the convention by the EU in December 2010, the adoption of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 (WCAG 2.0, learn more about it thanks to its [theme song](#) [3]), the finalisation of the work on [standardization mandate 376](#) [4] to incorporate accessibility in public ICT procurements, and the European Commission's proposal for a Directive on the accessibility of the public sector bodies' websites.

Support via financing of research and pilots

The Commission is providing financial support to research on web accessibility and accessible technology, and to the deployment of solutions through its RTD programmes.

One such project is [WAI-ACT](#) [5], a Cooperation Framework for Guidance on Advanced Technologies, Evaluation Methodologies, and Research Agenda Setting to Support eAccessibility. The project seeks

to address critical areas of advanced accessibility support through activities that build upon the strengths of both past web accessibility work and harmonize existing work. In addition, it aims at helping shape a research agenda in coordination with key stakeholders in Europe and internationally.

Proposal for a Directive on the accessibility of the public sector bodies' websites

Many national authorities in Europe are committed to the accessibility of public websites and most Member States have introduced guidelines or regulation based on WCAG 2.0, and consequently the level of accessibility of the government websites is much higher than that of private sites.

The actual accessibility however is still low. For instance, the latest report (2011) from the "[Monitoring eAccessibility in Europe](#)" [6] (MeAC) study estimates that only one third of the content generated by public authorities across the EU is accessible. The study also reveals a fragmented and slow adoption of WCAG 2.0 across the EU.

On 3rd December 2012 the European Commission adopted a [proposal for a Directive](#) [7] on the accessibility of the public sector bodies' websites. The proposal will forerun and complement the [European Accessibility Act](#) [8] that the Commission is preparing.

In addition to action 64, the Commission's [eGovernment Action Plan 2011-2015](#) [9] calls for the development of services designed around user needs and ensuring inclusiveness and accessibility.

Accessibility of the European Commission's websites

The Commission is committed to setting an example of good practice in Web accessibility. Since January 2010, all new EUROPA websites have been created in compliance with WCAG 2.0, level AA success criteria. Additionally, the [Information Providers Guide](#) [10] details the accessibility requirements that everyone who develops and publishes material for EUROPA websites has to conform with.

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