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Eurostat Web Accessibility Action Plan 2023

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1. PURPOSE

This Eurostat Web Accessibility Action Plan 2023 describes a set of concrete actions to meet the strategic goal of improving the accessibility of Eurostat's dissemination products and of tackling the specific web accessibility challenges.

2. EXPECTED OUTCOME

The DM is invited to

- Take note of the need to improve accessibility for our users and the progress already achieved.
- Endorse the proposed actions for 2023 and support their implementation by unit B4 and the production units.

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

3.1. Background

Web accessibility means that websites, tools and technologies are designed and developed so that people with or without disabilities can use them. This encompasses the use of digital products and tools by people who use assistive technologies (for example screen readers, screen magnifiers, braille haptic devices) but also by people who find themselves in a (temporary) situation that makes it more difficult for them to use these products and tools (for example watching a video in a loud environment, using a small screen, limited internet connectivity, etc.).

About 1 in 4 Europeans live with some type of disability¹, which means that around 87 million people may experience difficulties when accessing services and information online. As the European population ages, the number of people experiencing disability or limitations is expected to increase. The EU is committed to fighting discrimination in all its policies and activities². In its efforts to ensure that all citizens have equal access to public information and services, the Commission adopted the Web Accessibility Directive which has been in force since 22 December 2016³. The Directive obliges websites and apps of public sector bodies to be “more accessible”. A technical standard⁴ supports the directive, clarifying what is expected by the term “accessible”.

¹ Disability in the EU: Facts and figures, European Council, 2022 (based on Eurostat data). <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/disability-eu-facts-figures/>

² Article 10 of TFEU: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12012E#d1e362-47-1>

³ More on the work of European Commission regarding web accessibility and related legislation: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/web-accessibility>

⁴ European Standard 301 549: https://www.etsi.org/deliver/etsi_en/301500_301599/301549/03.02.01_60/en_301549v030201p.pdf

A Commission Action Plan on Web Accessibility 2022-2025 was adopted and published in 2022⁵, in the context of the Commission Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030⁶. It aims to ensure compliance of EU websites, documents published on these websites and online platforms, with European accessibility standards. At the same time, DG COMM prepared detailed corporate guidelines on web accessibility of Commission websites and digital content⁷. In line with the corporate rules, an accessibility audit is needed for all Commission websites and its findings are to be incorporated into an accessibility statement published on the websites of the DGs.

3.2. State of play in Eurostat

Eurostat has committed to producing high quality statistics that take into account the diversity of the European Union and to make them accessible to all citizens in its 2021 Equality Action Plan⁸. Accessibility is an important aspect of the Equality Action Plan.

In its Communication and Dissemination Strategy, Eurostat also committed to providing equal access to its data and products for all users, in line with the principle of impartiality and the quality dimension ‘accessibility and clarity’ as enshrined in Regulation (EC) No. 223/2009 and the European Statistics Code of Practice.

Web accessibility is also an important element when it comes to implementing the ESS Innovation agenda project to improve dissemination and communication to the non-users.

In 2021, unit B4 set up an internal working group that identified necessary changes to improve web accessibility of Eurostat’s dissemination portfolio, such as:

- All videos need to be subtitled (for people who are hard of hearing).
- All areas of the website should be accessible by using keyboard (for people who are unable to use a mouse) and for screen readers.
- Colours should not be the sole conveyor of a message and visuals need to have sufficient colour contrast (for people with colour-blindness).
- All publications and PDFs, Word, Excel files on the website, including in dedicated sections, need to be accessible using a screen reader (for people with visual impairments).
- All visuals (graphics, charts, images, infographics) should include alternative text describing the main message (for the visually-impaired), also when placed in PDF, Word, Excel files.

⁵ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/WEBGUIDE/Web+accessibility+action+plan>

⁶ Strategy and related Commission initiatives: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1484&langId=en>

⁷ Europa Web Guide, chapter 12. Accessibility
<https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/WEBGUIDE/12.+Accessibility>

⁸ https://myintracomm.ec.europa.eu/dg/ESTAT/main/equality/Documents/Eurostat%20action%20plan%202021_final_endorsement_by_DM.pdf

In February 2022, unit B4 also organised an ‘Accessibility Awareness Raising Month’ at Eurostat with several presentations and training courses for staff to raise awareness about web accessibility for Eurostat’s work. A [web accessibility page](#) was set up with the following information and is being continuously updated:

- Overview of corporate rules and guidance
- Guidelines for the accessibility of content produced by Eurostat (see Annex)
- How to make Word and PDF documents accessible
- Rules for making dedicated sections accessible
- Guidance for Statistics Explained articles
- Links to training offers

Unit B.4 hired an external accessibility expert for consultancy and assistance on this complex issue, and also to perform the accessibility audits and prepare the accessibility statement for the website.

Following the adoption of the Commission Web Accessibility Action Plan, DG COMM performed an audit of the European Commission websites in autumn 2022, starting with the most visited ones of which Eurostat website is part. Eurostat received the audit report in January 2023. The degree of compliance was below Commission average at the time. However, as the DG COMM audit was done on a sample of pages on the Eurostat website in the old look, many of the issues identified (e.g. colour contrast issues for links) have meanwhile been addressed. All parts of the website which are in the new look and feel were designed with accessibility in mind. DG COMM also audited the Statistics Explained website and Eurostat received the report in May 2023. As Statistics Explained is undergoing a revamp to align with the website, Eurostat is applying the same ‘accessibility by design’ principle as for the website.

A Eurostat accessibility statement, in line with corporate rules, was published at the end of November 2022. As this accessibility statement is based on the revamped website, it reflects much better the current state of play than the DG COMM audit. At that time, the website was found to be partially compliant with the technical standards and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1. As the website revamp is gradually extended to all parts and dedicated sections of the website, the degree of compliance with the standard is gradually improving. However, many accessibility issues are still outstanding, in particular for files in MS Office format and static infographics/dynamic visualisations.

The Eurostat web accessibility action plan 2023 therefore aims to address the remaining issues and ensure that all future dissemination products are compliant with the Commission’s accessibility standards. It focusses on actions to be implemented in 2023 so that the internal audit of the website can be repeated and an updated Eurostat accessibility statement can reflect the progress achieved by the end of the year. Following a second round of audits of Commission websites by DG COMM next year, the state of play and outstanding issues will be reported to the DM again in 2024.

4. PROPOSED ACTIONS

4.1. Overall objective and principle

The overall objective of the action plan is to ensure that the Eurostat website and the content published on it are compliant with the Web Accessibility standards as defined at the corporate level (WCAG 2.1 Level AA and the related European standard⁹). Creating content in line with these standards will ensure that all users – regardless of the device or software they are using – can access and use the information, services, and tools we provide. Attaining this objective requires increased knowledge and skills in-house and time to implement the changes. Accessibility is not a button you push and magically make everything accessible, but a skill and a mind-set which requires creators of products to continuously consider all of their users during concept and creation phases.

Web accessibility is a complex process. It is an interplay between providing a good user experience for people with and for those without limitations. To achieve 100% accessibility compliance is sometimes not possible, for example when it would negatively impact the user experience of people without limitations. Web accessibility is not just about being compliant, but about thinking about our users first. It is one of the guiding principles for creating products and services for all Eurostat users:

- User friendliness,
- Responsiveness,
- Accessibility, and
- Clear and inclusive language.

The accessibility actions need to be complemented by:

- Increasing the level of awareness, knowledge, and skills of staff
- Incorporating accessibility in corporate processes/documents and ensure support from management at all stages of the process.

4.2. Actions in 2023 and responsibilities

The implementation of the action plan will require a shared effort of Unit B4, responsible for dissemination and user relations, and all colleagues involved in the design, drafting and production of dissemination products. The action plan also includes awareness-raising activities, guidance and training offers.

Actions falling under scope of Unit B4

Unit B.4 is taking the lead on ensuring accessibility of dissemination products falling under their management:

⁹ With the exception of maps

- **Eurostat visual style guide:** the [new visual style guide](#) already takes accessibility into account and includes guidelines for use of colours.
- **Eurostat website:** all revamped parts of the website are designed having accessibility in mind. All new tools and products follow the ‘accessibility by design’ principle. A feedback mechanism allows all users to provide feedback or request an alternative access to content if needed. This excludes files in MS Office format in dedicated sections.
- **Statistics Explained:** the revamp of Statistics Explained, which is currently ongoing to implement the new visual style guide, will include accessibility requirements from the start. The updated version of the Excel add-in that is used for creating visuals in Statistics Explained articles uses the new Eurostat colours and includes several accessibility improvements
- **Key figures and flagship publications:** in collaboration with the Publications Office and the contractor, the PDF publications are produced with accessible content. This work will continue in 2023.
- **Methodological publications:** new templates are being prepared to help in-house authors improve the accessibility of their manuals and guidelines (in collaboration with the Publications Office)
- **Data visualisations, including interactive publications:** accessibility is being improved with every update by level of severity based on guidance provided by our accessibility expert
- **Navigation tree:** following an internal audit of the data browser navigation tree, improvement actions will be addressed as part of the next maintenance cycle.
- **Other products:** the accessibility of Eurostat’s social media posts (with improved use of colour and alternative text), webinars (captions), and podcasts (all episodes have transcripts) will continue to be improved.

Moreover, Unit B4 will offer guidance and training on accessibility, and cooperate with other DGs and the ESS:

- **Skills development:** regular trainings and events for staff in B.4 to be able to develop skills needed to ensure and check accessibility
- **Support to units:** Unit B.4 prepared guidelines on web accessibility and creating alternative text. Regular courses¹⁰ are organised on how to create accessible Word and PDF documents (in collaboration with the Publications Office). The publications’ framework contract includes the accessibility requirements.
- **Corporate collaboration:** Unit B.4 is active in the corporate accessibility networks (with DG COMM, DG CNNCT, DIGIT, OP, and others) to be proactive and anticipate changes, influence decision making, share experience and prepare for new requirements.
- **ESS collaboration:** Unit B.4 is reaching out to NSIs to exchange experiences and accessibility solutions within the Dissemination Working Group

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<https://eulearn.europa.eu/ilp/pages/description.jsf#/users/@self/catalogues/1144428/coursetemplates/67048938/description>

Actions falling under scope of production units

Other Eurostat units are requested to ensure accessibility for products and tools under their management, in order to complement the work of unit B.4 and not introduce new accessibility issues in any project that has an external dimension (i.e. the creation of content that will either be published on a Eurostat website, under Eurostat logo or shared with the public).

In particular, this concerns:

- Dedicated sections: files in MS Office format and graphics or static visuals
- Manuals and guidelines/statistical working papers
- Statistics Explained articles
- Working with external contractors¹¹ on any projects that involve external dimension and all products and tools created by the units that are to be published on the Eurostat website or under Eurostat logo: these products and tools have to comply with accessibility requirements as laid out above. The responsibility for complying with those requirements lies with the unit managing the contract.

In order to be able to comply with these requirements, staff in production units are encouraged to take part in trainings organised by unit B.4 and other DGs, as well as actively consult corporate and Eurostat guidelines as appropriate.

Actions related to the Data Browser

The Data Browser was not designed with accessibility in mind, and it should be considered that making complex datasets with many dimensions fully accessible is a difficult task. Improving the accessibility of the Data Browser is one of the most important goals, as this would enable all European citizens to have direct access to Eurostat data and thus aid them in using their rights and to fight disinformation.

To better assess the concrete accessibility issues, Unit B.4 will complete an audit of the Data Browser in the second half of 2023. The results of the audit will then be translated into remedial actions and integrated into the maintenance cycle for 2024. In addition, the experiences from NSIs and other international organisations will be identified and the adoption of good practices will be considered.

5. RESOURCE IMPACT

Unit B.4 will extend the contract with an external accessibility expert (part-time) to ensure continued expert support for all the work being done in Eurostat.

¹¹ It should be noted that accessibility is just one of the corporate requirements for all such projects. Other requirements include GDPR, Eurostat style guide application and corporate communication requirements.

6. TIMETABLE

This action plan lists actions and goals to be implemented in 2023. DG COMM announced that their external audit will be repeated in 2024 and Unit B.4 will then take stock of the achievements made and report back to the DM.

7. SERVICES CONSULTED

Unit A.3 was consulted on actions related to the data browser and B1 provided suggestions on the guidelines.

ANNEX: Guidelines for the accessibility of content produced by Eurostat