

Brussels, 2 December 2015

Commission proposes to make products and services more accessible to disabled persons

See an [accessible version](#) and a [memo](#)

[[Videomessage of Commissioner Thyssen](#) with the sign language translation]

The European Commission today proposed a European Accessibility Act, which will set common accessibility requirements for certain key products and services that will help people with disabilities at EU level to participate fully in society.

The products and services covered have been carefully selected in consultation with citizens and civil society organisations as well as businesses. They include ATMs and banking services, PCs, telephones and TV equipment, telephony and audiovisual services, transport, e-books and e-commerce.

The proposal for a Directive aims to improve the functioning of the internal market, making it easier for companies to provide accessible products and services across borders. Common accessibility requirements will also apply in the frame of EU procurement rules and for the use of EU funds. The initiative will stimulate innovation and increase the offer of accessible products and services for the around 80 million persons with disabilities in the EU.

Attention has been paid to ensure proportionality of the requirements, in particular for small and micro-enterprises. A common sense clause avoids that accessibility requirements would impose a disproportionate burden and for micro-enterprises lighter compliance measures are foreseen. Experience shows that in most cases it makes good business sense to provide accessible products, in particular when accessibility is foreseen at the design phase.

Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, **Marianne Thyssen**, commented: "Disability should not be a barrier to full participation in society, nor should the lack of EU common rules be a barrier to cross-border trade in accessible products and services. With this Act, we want to deepen the internal market and use its potential for the benefit of both companies and citizens with disabilities. In fact, we all may benefit from it".

The European Accessibility Act will make it easier for producers and service providers to export products and services that comply with the EU requirements, since they won't need to adjust to divergent national rules. In particular, this will help small business to take full advantage of the EU market.

As a consequence, people with disabilities will benefit from a greater supply of accessible products and services at more competitive prices. The improved offer can also benefit older citizens with similar needs for accessibility, as well as others in the wider public facing challenges linked to an accident, a temporary illness or a difficult environment such as low light or high noise. This will help increase active participation in society, including in education and in employment, as well as more autonomy and mobility opportunities.

Background

Around 80 million people in the EU are affected by a disability to some degree. Due to the ageing of the population, the figure is expected to increase to 120 million by 2020. Accessibility is a precondition to their equal participation and active role in society. And it can contribute to ensure smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

The [UN Convention](#) on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities contains accessibility obligations. It requires that its Parties, like the EU and the Member States, take the necessary measures, including legislation to ensure accessibility. Without EU action, each EU country will continue to develop different laws as they implement their obligations, thus fragmenting the EU market more and more.

EU action can prevent such fragmentation and create more market opportunities for businesses. It can reduce the cost of accessible products and services and have a positive impact on public budgets on the long-term, by reducing the dependency of older and disabled persons.

In 2011, the EU ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) This addresses disability as a human rights issue – not from a medical or charity perspective. It covers civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, and a wide range of policy fields: from justice to transport, employment to information technology, and so on. Article 9 of the Convention contains the obligations for State Parties on accessibility to ensure to persons with disabilities access on an equal basis with others.

All Member States have signed the Convention and 25 have ratified it. Finland, Ireland and the Netherlands are preparing for ratification. This means that the EU, as well as those Member States that are parties to it, are committed to uphold and protect the rights of persons with disabilities as enshrined in the UN Convention, within their respective competences.

For more information

See also a [fact sheet](#)

[News item on DG Employment website](#)

Follow [Marianne Thyssen](#) and [Social Europe](#) on twitter

Subscribe to the European Commission's free e-mail [newsletter](#) on employment, social affairs and inclusion

Hashtag: [#EUdisability](#)