



EAA: Buying accessible a must for public authorities in the digital age

Governments use procurement to serve all their citizens, including persons with disabilities. In this regard, the development of eGovernment is a key element of the Digital Single Market introducing a 'digital by default' principle. Beyond eGovernment, the creation of smart cities, intelligent transport and buildings will make the use of ICT technologies pervasive in public life over the next years. These technologies must be accessible to allow persons with disabilities to participate fully in all aspects of society on an equal basis with others.

According to Rodolfo Cattani, EDF Executive Committee member, "we cannot accept anymore that our tax money is spent on inaccessible products, services and buildings, infringing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and discriminating 80 million Europeans with disabilities". Accessible digital technologies have the potential to support governments in ensuring people with disabilities participate in society and economy, providing easier access to public services for all, facilitating participation in public opinion-making, and improving independent living and quality of life. "To reap these opportunities and create a digital society inclusive of all citizens, accessibility of public products and services for persons with disabilities and the elderly is crucial", says DIGITALEUROPE Director-General Cecilia Bonefeld-Dahl.

Extensive experience from regions outside the European Union also shows the importance of ensuring accessibility in public procurement for promoting accessibility in the private market. By applying accessibility criteria in their procurement of ICT goods and services, public authorities serve as a catalyst to promote innovation through competition, furthering progress toward the shared goal of deploying increasingly accessible technology more quickly and broadly across Europe.

We thus regret that legislators are considering the removal of the provision related to public procurement from the European Accessibility Act or restricting this provision to only those products and services included in the obligations for economic operators of the Act. Embedding accessibility requirements for public procurement in the Act creates synergy with the general provision in the Public Procurement Directive, and additionally facilitates the implementation of the recently adopted Directive for the Accessibility of Public Websites and Mobile Apps. Standards such as the European Standard "Accessibility requirements suitable for public procurement of ICT products and services in Europe" (EN 301 549) can be used to provide additional guidance to implement the functional

accessibility requirements in legislation as well as fostering cross-border procurement. Furthermore, using European standards aligned with global and international standards will lead to a regulatory approach consistent with other world regions – creating the largest possible market for public sector procurement. Finally, this approach will also facilitate the use of public procurement procedures while respecting the provisions of non-discrimination and accessibility for persons with disabilities enshrined in the European Structural and Investment Funds, as foreseen by the Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.

To ensure the right framework for a successful and inclusive transition into a digital future in the EU, the European Disability Forum and DIGITALEUROPE thus recommend to the European Parliament and the Council that they reconsider this issue. The legislators need to keep the provisions and the accessibility requirements for public procurement of all products and services, including those procured under the EU Structural Funds and for the Trans-European Networks (TEN-T), fully in the scope of the European Accessibility Act.

The **European Disability Forum** is an independent NGO that represents the interests of 80 million Europeans with disabilities. EDF is a unique platform which brings together representative organisations of persons with disabilities from across Europe. EDF is run by persons with disabilities and their families. We are a strong, united voice of persons with disabilities in Europe.

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DIGITALEUROPE represents the digital technology industry in Europe. Our members include 60 of some of the world's largest IT, telecoms and consumer electronics companies and 37 national associations from every part of Europe. DIGITALEUROPE wants European businesses and citizens to benefit fully from digital technologies and for Europe to grow, attract and sustain the world's best digital technology companies.

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