An Inclusive Digital Single Market

# Introduction

The European Commission is determined to boost the European digital economy by making the EU’s single market freedoms “go digital”, and releasing new opportunities for citizens and companies in terms of jobs, growth and better e-services. The **European Disability Forum (EDF) and AGE Platform Europe support the Commission’s commitment to adopt an ambitious Digital Single Market (DSM) strategy as long as it leaves nobody behind**. We understand access to the DSM as a fundamental right that everyone should enjoy.

# Facts

* There are **80 million Europeans with disabilities**, and **190 million people aged 50+**, over 35 % of EU population.
* **33% of persons with disabilities have never used the internet**, which represents 54% of those who never went online. Furthermore, **over 53% of people who lack basic digital skills are aged over 65**, and 69% are over 55.
* Due to the rapid evolution of ICTs and the **lack of digital literacy**, persons with disabilities and older people are at great risk of not taking full advantage of the possibilities of the future DSM.
* When available and accessible, persons with disabilities use ICT in a greater extent than their peers to avoid barriers in the offline world. In fact, the breakthrough of accessible technologies has been a **great asset for many persons to access the labour market, have an independent life, and participate in all aspects of society**.
* The European Commission has identified **Silver Economy** as a key domain for jobs and growth. To succeed, the ICT solutions must be accessible and usable for older persons too.
* However, there is still “**much for improvement**” with regards to accessibility of websites (less than 1/3 accessible); equal access and choice in telecommunication products and services (huge variation across the EU); and in the accessibility of audiovisual content[[1]](#footnote-1).
* **Accessibility does not imply an extraordinary burden** when incorporated from the outset.
* **Guidelines and standards to address accessibility are ready**[[2]](#footnote-2) with benefits for all users.
* The EU must comply with its legal framework, in particular with the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, which explicitly requires accessibility for information and communication technologies and systems (article 9).

# General Recommendations

* **Mainstream “accessibility” throughout the DMS strategy**  
  Accessibility must be understood and addressed as other key characteristics of the digital environment, such as privacy, security or data protection. The aim should be to balance them, whilst enforcing a minimum appropriate level and striving for the highest possible one.
* **Complement the DSM strategy with an “e-Inclusion Strategy”**A parallel strategy is needed to highlight the benefits of “going digital”, as well as to tackle the barriers that persons with disabilities and older people face, including the lack eSkills.
* **Require interoperability with assistive technologies**For those persons with disabilities and older people that use assistive technologies such as screen-reader or screen magnification software, hearing aids, etc., the access to the ICT and its interoperability to different devices should be ensured.

# Specific Recommendations

* **Facilitate a swift adoption of the proposal for a Directive on the accessibility of public sector bodies’ websites** that covers e-services of general interest.
* **Release the long-awaited European Accessibility Act** with a broad scope that includes ICT products and services, and a robust enforcement mechanism.
* **Ensure an accessible e-commerce throughout the whole chain of value**: from accessible formats of information and reliable and trustworthy payment mechanisms to the customers’ services and right to redress.
* **Adjust copyright rules to allow the free movement of accessible content**. The EU has signed the Marrakech Treaty, but has not yet ratified it.
* **Ensure equal access and choice on telecommunication goods and services**. Persons with disabilities and older people use alternative means of communication (such as relay services), but these are not ensured equally in all Member States, including in emergency services.
* **Strengthen media rules to enable greater accessible audiovisual services**. The current provision in the AVMS Directive just addresses visual and hearing impairments.
* **Protect the data of all citizens, including those deprived of their legal capacity**. Clear information on how personal data will be used is crucial to take informed decisions.
* **Promote and support accessible e-Skills training programmes**, in which the special needs of persons with disabilities and older people are taking into consideration.

# About

**EDF**

**AGE**

1. Study on Assessing and Promoting E-Accessibility 2013: <http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/news/study-assessingFa-and-promoting-e-accessibility> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Links to references [↑](#footnote-ref-2)