

More accessible products and services for EU citizens: Council approves the provisional agreement with the European Parliament

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Today the Council's Permanent Representatives Committee approved the provisional agreement reached with the European Parliament on 8 November 2018 on the proposal for a European Accessibility Act (EAA). The proposal aims at making various products and services in the European Union more accessible for persons with disabilities. It is thought that more than 80 million people in the EU are affected by some degree of disability.

The new rules will bring benefits not only to tens of millions of Europeans, but also to many elderly people in the Union. Businesses will be able to provide services or to manufacture, sell or import products across the EU benefiting from uniform requirements at EU level.

Beate Hartinger-Klein, Federal Minister of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection of Austria

The European Accessibility Act includes accessibility requirements for key products and services such as:

- phones, computers, payment terminals or self-service terminals for buying passenger transport tickets;
- consumer banking services;
- electronic communications services, including for example phone and Internet services;
- the 112 emergency number calls;
- access to audio-visual media services;
- e-books;
- e-commerce.

The directive also includes common accessibility requirements on the user interface and functionality design of products, as well as more specific

accessibility requirements for some electronic consumer equipment. For consumer products covered by the directive, packaging, installation instructions and other product information are to be accessible.

In the case of services, there are some common requirements (e.g. on webpages) and, in addition, service-specific requirements. The directive requires that support services should also be accessible.

Some examples of more specific accessibility requirements included in the directive are: self-service terminals, such as, for instance, ticketing machines or ATMs, will have to provide the possibility to use personal headsets so that visually impaired persons be able to follow audio instructions. Where a self-service terminal provides for visual modes of operation, it shall provide at least one mode of operation that does not require user perception of colour.

Micro-enterprises /fewer than 10 employees and an annual turnover below €2 million/ that provide services are exempted from the directive and those providing products will be exempted from some obligations. As a whole, the directive avoids imposing a “disproportionate burden” on the economic operators.

Background and next steps

The Commission presented its proposal in December 2015. The negotiations between the Council and the European Parliament started in March 2018 and ended with a provisional agreement on 8 November 2018. Following today’s approval of the agreement by the Permanent Representatives Committee, the directive will be sent to the European Parliament for adoption in the plenary. The final adoption in the Council is planned to take place in a Council meeting next year.

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