European Parliament “worst in class” on digital accessibility

European Parliament website scores behind all national parliament websites

The low score of the European Parliament, a barely passing grade of 55.8 out of 100, was revealed in the new report “Democracy, Digital Accessibility and the European Union”, launched today by the European Disability Forum and Siteimprove. The report analysed the accessibility of the official website of the parliaments of the 28 Member States and included the European Parliament website.

This is not a surprise for persons with disabilities working in EU affairs. Complaints include lack of captioning in their livestreams, rendering them unusable for deaf or hard of hearing users, pages that are not correctly marked, rendering them unreadable to blind and partially sighted persons relying on assistive technology, among others.

Rafał Kanarek, a Polish person who frequently uses the website described his experience: “I find the websites overloaded. Navigation with screen readers, a type of software that reads aloud the information on the page and allows us to interact with it, is not easy. Recently, I could not select the language of the website with the screen reader I was using (Jaws 12). Next to the language selector, I found an unlabelled button. Also, the documents in PDF are often not accessible for blind and partially sighted persons”.

National parliament websites rank better but not by much. Only 3 Member States scored above the classification of poor accessibility: Greece, Denmark and the Netherlands.

This is an effective breach of rights of EU citizens with disabilities, who will face additional difficulties in accessing political information. It is especially worrying as EU Member States face legal obligations to render all public sector websites accessible by 2021, thanks to the EU Web Accessibility Directive [1].

Yannis Vardakastanis, President of the European Disability Forum, said: “It is especially sad to see the inaccessibility of the European Parliament’s website, given their recent call for engagement in the European Elections. The European Parliament needs to lead by example and assure their website is to all EU citizens.”
Related information

- Full report “Democracy, Digital Accessibility and the European Union”
- Accompanying Map
- European Blind Union’s Access Denied report – November 2014
- European Blind Union’s Access Denied report Annex III – Overview of the accessibility European Parliament website November 2014 (word file)

Additional testimony:
“My name is Frankie Picron and I am a Policy Assistant at the European Union of the Deaf. As a Policy Assistant, I need to follow plenary sessions or meetings of the committees of the European Parliament. Unfortunately for me as a deaf person it’s impossible to do it during online and at the actual times of the meetings, due to the fact that the website of the European Parliament is not accessible for the deaf persons. Recordings or live streams of the committee meetings and plenary sessions are not available in sign language. Also, there are no subtitles. After the meetings finish, I have to wait for the transcripts to find out what was discussed. And even then, the transcript is only available in the original language and is not translated into other languages.

The videos on European Parliament’s website are available in all EU languages. Unfortunately for me and others citizens who are deaf, the video content, live or recorded, is not available in sign language and is not subtitled despite available technology for live subtitling in all EU languages.”

Notes to editors

[1] The “directive on making the websites and mobile apps of public sector bodies more accessible” was published on 2 December 2016 and entered into force on 22 December 2016; The directive establishes a series of rules to make websites accessible for all citizens - in particular for the blind, the hard of hearing, the deaf, and those with low vision and with functional disabilities. The Directive covers public sector bodies' websites and mobile apps, from administrations, courts and police departments to public hospitals, universities and libraries.

The European Disability Forum is an umbrella organisation of persons with disabilities that defends 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. It is run by persons with disabilities and their families. EDF is a strong, united voice of persons with disabilities in Europe.
Siteimprove offers the world's most comprehensive cloud-based Digital Presence Optimisation (DPO) software. The Siteimprove Intelligence Platform provides eye-opening insights that empower you and your team to create higher quality content, drive better traffic, measure digital performance, and work towards regulatory compliance—all from one place. At Siteimprove, we're passionate about making the internet a better place for all its users. By providing our customers with real-time accessibility data and the knowledge they need to address issues, we are proud to take steps toward a more inclusive internet every day. Find out why more than 7,000 organisations around the world use Siteimprove at https://siteimprove.com/en/

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