European Commission

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Dear Ms O'Reilly,

Thank you for your letter 16 February 2016 seeking to gather information on the current position regarding the accessibility of websites and online tools managed by the European Commission.

The Commission is well aware of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to which the EU is a signatory and is committed to setting an example of good practice in web accessibility. Even before the UN Convention entered into force for the EU in 2011, the Commission had already adopted the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0, compliance level AA.

Directorate-General for Communication in the Commission assesses the accessibility of websites and online tools in various ways such as when major updates to a website's infrastructure have been implemented, upon request of a specific Commission service or through sample accessibility assessments across EC web content.

The Commission is currently creating a single, coherent web presence for all its services. One of the design principles of the 'digital transformation' project is to 'be inclusive' and aims to make services accessible to as many users as possible[1]. Web pages and their components are tested for accessibility as part of the development phase by a dedicated accessibility expert.

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[1] http://blogs.ec.europa.eu/eu-digital/design-principles_en

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However, providing features such as information in sign language and easy to read formats go beyond the level AA compliance[2] we aim for and would have an impact on our resources. The Commission strives to make content accessible in other ways such as offering videos with subtitles and providing guidelines for clear web writing.

Major site updates or revamps must be approved by the Information Providers Guide team in the Commission. This ensures that the compliance of websites is regularly assessed against the rules outlined in the Information Providers Guide. Once the assessments have been carried out, a report is sent to the respective web team with recommendations on how to make their websites compliant. A follow-up assessment is done to ensure that compliance has been achieved. As mentioned above, this team also assesses websites upon services' requests or by making sample assessments.

The Commission offers a course on accessibility as part of its training catalogue and it is open to any staff member working on websites. In addition, webmasters can contact the Information Providers Guide team to ask questions or raise issues. The team also participates actively in internal social network channels, such as Yammer, where web- and accessibility-related topics are discussed within the Commission's web community.

Systematic checks of websites – in particular after major updates – as well as sample checks are part of the Information Providers Guide team's work. This ensures that most of the Commission's assets are compliant with the rules of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 level AA standard. As mentioned already, an accessibility check is now part of the digital transformation development process.

To illustrate our above mentioned answers, I am including below some examples of good accessibility practices on websites managed by the European Commission:

On the inter-institutional portal of the European Union, europa.eu:
• Infographic on europa.eu visitors[3]: in addition to the infographic image, an additional html page reproducing the content of the infographic in text format was created.
• Facts and figures: Living in the EU - The Economy[4]: charts, tables and tabs: colour contrast, charts easily enlargeable, tables correctly marked up, tabs are keyboard operable.
• Countries[5]: All the information on the map is also accessible in html text on the page.

On the European Commission websites:
The Commissioners' profiles[6] and the political priority pages[7] have undergone accessibility tests during their initial development. Following a move to a new template, they will now be tested once again and improved where necessary. The new web presence will be available soon as a test site and is also accessible.

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[2] *Providing sign language interpretation is a level AAA requirement*
https://www.w3.org/TR/UNDERSTANDING-WCAG20/media-equiv-sign.html
[3] *http://europa.eu/abouteuropa/index_en.htm#goto_6*
[4] *http://europa.eu/about-eu/facts-figures/living/index_en.htm*
[5] *http://europa.eu/about-eu/countries/index_en.htm#goto_3*
[6] *http://ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019_en*
[7] *http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/index_en*

As chair of the Inter-institutional Editorial Committee on the Internet, the Commission has regularly addressed web accessibility in the meetings of this Committee. In the last couple of years, various presentations were given e.g. the web accessibility standards, how persons with disabilities experience websites, web accessibility assessments with online tools and with disabled users, the scope and impact of the legislative proposal on accessibility for public sector websites. At the last meeting on 1 March 2016 the Commission recalled the importance of the matter and invited all EU institutions to share best practices on the Committee online collaboration tool that the Commission has made available for sharing knowledge and best practices.

Consequently, the members of this Committee, heads of online communication teams of institutions, bodies and agencies, are very much aware of the importance of web accessibility. As each institution, body and agency has autonomy over its own websites, they will be able to provide you with their own web accessibility policy, assessments and best practices.

I hope that the answers provided meet your expectations. My services remain at your disposal for any further information or any clarification you may find useful.

Yours sincerely,