

# Everything you need to know about **digital accessibility**

(without the jargon)



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# Accessibility matters

Today's world is digital, and inclusivity is no longer optional. As websites, apps, and digital services become central to daily life, they need to be accessible for users with disabilities. **Are you in line?**

Globally, over 1.3 billion people (or 16% of the world's population) live with some form of disability, according to the **World Health Organization (WHO)**. This represents a significant (and growing!) audience whose needs can no longer be overlooked.

At the same time, regulatory requirements like the **European Accessibility Act (EAA)** and the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** are tightening. Failure to meet accessibility standards can result in legal penalties, reputational damage, and the loss of valuable business opportunities.

**Accessibility compliance** isn't just about avoiding risk. It's about creating **better**, more **inclusive** experiences for **all users**. It's also about future-proofing your business, putting smiles on customers' faces, and opening your digital doors to a broader market.

## Quick fact

Over **70% of websites** have critical **accessibility issues** that could block users from accessing key content. (WebAIM Million Report, 2023)

## What is the European Accessibility Act (EAA)?

The European Accessibility Act (EAA) is a landmark piece of legislation designed to make products and services more accessible to people with disabilities across the European Union.

Adopted in 2019 and coming into full effect on **June 28, 2025**, the EAA sets out a harmonized framework for accessibility requirements that apply across the EU's digital single market.



### Its goal is simple but powerful:

To make sure that people with disabilities can access and use digital services just as easily as everyone else.

## Who does the EAA apply to?

The Act affects many types of businesses, especially those offering digital products and services to customers. This includes (but is not limited to):



**E-commerce platforms**



**Banking services**



**Transport booking sites and apps**



**Public sector service portals**



**eBooks and related hardware/software**

## But what's needed?

Simply, businesses must make their digital services like websites, mobile apps, and online tools compliant with recognized accessibility standards (such as WCAG 2.1). In real terms, this means making sure content is usable by assistive technologies, navigable via keyboard, legible, and perceivable to all users.

### A snapshot of key compliance deadlines:

 <b>Milestone</b>	 <b>Date</b>
EAA adopted	<b>June 2019</b>
Member state laws finalized	<b>June 2022</b>
Enforcement begins	<b>June 28th 2025</b>

## How does the EAA compare to other guidelines?

The Act affects many types of businesses, especially those offering digital products and services to customers. This includes (but is not limited to):

### ADA (U.S.)

Focuses on public access but recent case law has extended its application to websites

### WCAG

This guideline sets the global technical standard used by both

### EAA (EU)

Specifically mandates digital accessibility for defined services and products

# Who must comply and what's covered?

Not every business is required to comply with the European Accessibility Act (EAA), but many are.

## So, which businesses need to comply?

Under the EAA, compliance is mandatory for most business-to-consumer (B2C) companies operating within the EU. This includes both EU-based companies and non-EU companies selling into the EU market.

### Rule of thumb

If you offer digital services or content to EU consumers, there's a strong chance you're in scope. Specifically, you need to comply with the European Accessibility Act (EAA) if you meet BOTH of these conditions:

- Sell products or services to consumers in the EU

#### AND

Meet at least ONE of the following criteria:

- Have 10 or more employees
- Have an annual turnover exceeding €2 million OR a balance sheet total exceeding €2 million

## Let's take a closer look at the affected sectors:



**E-commerce and online marketplaces**



**Media platforms (TV, radio, streaming)**



**Banking and financial services**



**eBooks, hardware, and reading software**

**Transport and travel booking  
(rail, air, buses, etc.)**



**Telecommunications and public services**

 **There are a few common misconceptions:**

- “We’re a small company, so we must be exempt.”**
- False.** Size alone doesn't determine compliance; market activity does.

- “We’re not based in the EU.”**
- If you serve EU consumers, you may still be required to comply.

**However, there are some exceptions:**

- Microenterprises** (fewer than 10 employees AND annual turnover not exceeding €2 million OR annual balance sheet total not exceeding €2 million)
- Cases where compliance would require a **“fundamental alteration”** to a product or service
- Situations where compliance would impose a **“disproportionate burden”** on the economic operators concerned
- Specific types of **pre-existing content** on websites and mobile applications

## And there’s a **simple, handy compliance check**

- Ask yourself:**
- Do you sell products or services online in the EU?
  - Is your business consumer-facing?
  - Do you offer any customer self-service or content via web or app?

If the answer is **yes** to any of these, **accessibility compliance is most likely on the cards.**

# Understanding WCAG: The cornerstone of accessibility

The European Accessibility Act (EAA) explains why accessibility is essential, and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) tell you how to implement it.

Published by the **World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)**, WCAG is the global standard for web accessibility. It’s the **framework used in most accessibility laws worldwide**, including the EAA.

# To make it easier, there are four WCAG principles

WCAG is built around four core principles. Essentially, to be accessible, content must be:

## Perceivable

All users can perceive the content (e.g., all images have alt text, and all videos have captions).

## Operable

All users can navigate it (e.g., everything works with a keyboard).

## Understandable

Content is clear and easy to follow (e.g., consistent layouts, helpful instructions).

## Robust

Content works well with different technologies, including screen readers and browsers.

## What do “Level A, AA, and AAA” mean?

When we talk about WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines), we also talk about three different conformance levels: A, AA, and AAA. These levels indicate how thoroughly a website or digital service meets accessibility standards.

Here’s what each level means in practice:

### Level A: Basic accessibility (minimum compliance)

This level covers the most essential accessibility features. Meeting Level A means that users can at least access basic content and perform fundamental actions on a website. However, many barriers remain for users with disabilities.

#### Examples of Level A requirements:

- Images must have alternative text (alt attributes)
- Pages must be navigable without a mouse (keyboard access)
- No elements should trap keyboard focus (users must be able to tab out of interactive content)

### Level AA: Enhanced accessibility (the standard for legal compliance)

Level AA builds on Level A and adds broader protections. It’s the standard required by most accessibility laws worldwide, including the European Accessibility Act (EAA) and many ADA settlements.

#### Examples of Level AA requirements:

- Text must have sufficient color contrast against the background (minimum 4.5:1 ratio)
- Forms must have clear labels and accessible error messages
- Navigation must be consistent across the site
- Pages must be usable even when text is enlarged up to 200%

## Level AAA: Advanced accessibility (ideal for highly sensitive or public service content)

Level AAA offers the highest standard of accessibility, but it's extremely difficult for most websites to meet across the board. It's often used for specific content types, like educational materials, health services, or government platforms.

### Examples of Level AAA requirements:

- Sign language interpretation for video content
- Extremely high contrast (minimum 7:1 ratio) for small body text
- No time limits for reading or interacting with content unless essential

**A NOTE TO REMEMBER:** Most businesses are expected to meet Level AA.

### In Short

**Most businesses should focus on achieving WCAG 2.1 Level AA** to help meet accessibility requirements and deliver a significantly more inclusive user experience.

## What does this look like in the **real world**?

A few examples:

Alt text on product images



**Perceivable**

Logical tab order on forms



**Operable**

Clear error messages in checkout



**Understandable**

Compatibility with screen readers



**Robust**



# Practical solutions and implementation

Compliance might sound complex, but taking the first steps toward accessibility doesn't have to be. For most businesses, the best approach is to start with high-impact, low-effort improvements, then build toward full compliance over time.

## Start with **accessibility testing**

Before fixing anything, identify where you stand. Simple steps include:

- 01 **Running an automated scan with tools like WAVE, Google Lighthouse, or iubenda**
- 02 **Manually checking that all key interactions work using just a keyboard**
- 03 **Verifying that images have alt text, and that video content includes captions or transcripts**

## The **common issues** (and easy wins)

Poor color contrast?



**Adjust CSS to meet WCAG ratios**

Missing labels on form fields?



**Use <label> elements**

No visible focus indicator?



**Add simple CSS outline**

Uncaptioned videos?



**Use free tools to auto-generate and edit captions**

These improvements are quick and benefit all users, not just those with disabilities.

## How **iubenda** helps: a simple first step

The iubenda Accessibility Widget offers businesses a fast, cost-effective way to start improving compliance:

- ✔ **Automatically adds key accessibility enhancements**
- ✔ **Requires no redesign or redevelopment**
- ✔ **Helps demonstrate proactive intent while longer-term fixes are in progress**

Want to check it out?

# Your first accessibility action plan

You don't need to overhaul everything at once. Here's a simple, actionable plan you can use to begin their journey toward compliance, and build momentum quickly.

## Your step-by-step checklist

- 01 Audit your digital assets** Use tools like WAVE, axe DevTools, or iubenda to scan your website and app for accessibility issues.
- 02 Identify high-priority pages** Focus on pages where users take key actions: checkout, contact forms, login, or sign-up.
- 03 Fix quick wins** Update alt text, form labels, and color contrast issues. These can often be resolved with minimal effort.
- 04 Put iubenda's Accessibility Widget to work** Add the widget to start addressing accessibility gaps immediately while planning broader improvements.
- 05 Create a long-term accessibility roadmap** Plan for content updates, development improvements, and team training over time. Ensure you've published an accessibility statement. See our guide and template for help.

## Next steps

**Accessibility** isn't just a legal requirement; it's a **commitment** to building digital experiences **that work for everyone**. With the European Accessibility Act (EAA) deadline approaching, now is the time for businesses to take action.

**By following this guidance, you can:**

- ✓ Understand what the EAA and WCAG mean in practical terms
- ✓ Identify if you need to comply
- ✓ Take immediate, low-effort steps toward greater accessibility
- ✓ Strengthen your brand reputation and open doors to a wider audience

**Ready to take the next step?**

Contact us to understand how to start making your website more accessible. Together with iubenda's Accessibility Widget, we can start making positive change today.