

Transforming Parliaments webinar series: Digital accessibility at the European Parliament

11 June 2026



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Key takeaways

On 11 June 2026, the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) Centre for Innovation in Parliament (CIP) hosted a *Transforming Parliaments* webinar entitled "[Digital accessibility at the European Parliament](#)", in partnership with its IT Governance Hub, hosted by the European Parliament. The session was moderated by Ms. Stefania Boschetto (Strategic Coordination, Digital Partnerships and Legal Advice Unit, European Parliament), who introduced three colleagues from the Solution Design and Quality Assurance Unit of the European Parliament's Directorate-General for Information Technologies and Cybersecurity (DG ITEC): Mr. Gerrit Potoms, Head of Unit; Ms. Tanja Kleut, team leader of the accessibility testing section and a certified accessibility professional; and Mr. Nuno Jesus, coordinator of the Digital Accessibility Competence Centre. Together, they explained why digital accessibility is a democratic imperative, how the European Parliament has built its accessibility programme, and what other parliaments, whatever their size, can do to get started.

Resources:

- [Video of the webinar](#)
- [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\)](#)
- [IPU Centre for Innovation in Parliament](#)
- [IPU Transforming Parliaments webinar series](#)

Digital accessibility: A democratic imperative

Opening the session, Ms. Boschetto framed digital accessibility as a matter of democracy, not a technical detail. Making parliamentary websites and services accessible to all citizens is a question of transparency and of strengthening democratic participation, leaving no one behind.

Mr. Potoms set out the scale of the issue. Digital accessibility means designing digital products – from websites and mobile apps to electronic documents – so that everyone, including people with disabilities, can perceive, navigate, and interact with them.

Globally, there are 1.3 billion people with disabilities, or roughly one in six people on the planet. For Mr. Potoms, this is the single most important fact for institutions to take away: accessibility is not a niche concern, a box-ticking exercise or purely a matter of compliance. It is about including a substantial part of the citizens that parliaments and civil servants serve.

He also introduced the "kerb-cut effect", which refers to the phenomenon whereby accessibility measures that are designed for one group routinely benefit everyone else, too. For instance, captions help not only deaf and hard-of-hearing users, but also anyone watching a video in a noisy environment, while simple interfaces help not only people with

cognitive disabilities, but also older people who are less comfortable online. Universal design – design with everyone in mind – is simply better design.

Key learning: Frame accessibility as a democratic obligation and a design-quality issue that benefits the whole user base, not as a compliance burden.

The WCAG principles, and accessibility as a legal right

Ms. Kleut walked through the four WCAG principles that guide the European Parliament's digital development:

- **Perceivable:** Can users see or hear the content? This includes alt text on images for users who are blind, captions and audio descriptions on multimedia, and sufficient colour contrast, which also helps everyone reading a screen in bright sunlight.
- **Operable:** Can everyone navigate the interface? Components must work with mouse, keyboard and touchscreen alike, with visible focus indicators for keyboard users. Time limits on tasks must be adjustable, since users of assistive technologies often need more time, for example to enter a one-time password.
- **Understandable:** Is the interface clear and logical? This means consistent navigation patterns across a site, clear instructions and labels on forms, and clear messages when something goes wrong.
- **Robust:** Is the content compatible with assistive technologies? Interactive elements need programmatic names, roles and states (link, button, pressed or not pressed) that screen readers can interpret, and dynamic content changes must be announced to users who cannot see them happen.

Ms. Kleut also stressed that digital accessibility is a right, not a favour: it is enshrined in European Union (EU) legislation, including the Web Accessibility Directive and the European Accessibility Act, and parliaments are legally obliged to meet these requirements.

Key learning: Anchor accessibility work in the four WCAG principles – perceivable, operable, understandable and robust – and treat compliance as a legal obligation, not a voluntary add-on.

Building institutional capacity: The Digital Accessibility Competence Centre

Mr. Potoms described how the European Parliament had built the institutional structures to act on these principles. It has established a Digital Accessibility Competence Centre, a central hub of expertise working under the motto “nothing about us without us”: the team includes certified accessibility professionals who themselves live with disabilities, and whose lived experience Mr. Potoms described as indispensable to the Centre's work.

Before anything else, the Centre secured a formal strategy and mandate approved by top management – a step Mr. Potoms identified as critical for any organization seeking this kind of change. That mandate covers four areas: developing internal policies and harmonized standards for accessibility testing; introducing accessibility testing into procurement; coordinating digital accessibility both across the European Parliament and with other institutions; and training parliamentary staff, which acts as a force multiplier to bring colleagues across the organization on board.

Mr. Jesus, who coordinates the Digital Accessibility Competence Centre, described the Digital Accessibility Officer Network, a community of practice that shares responsibility for accessibility across the administration and political groups. The Centre provides three core services: accessibility audits of ICT products and services (documents, websites, newsletters, software and mobile apps); awareness events, workshops and training; and policy and disability rights consultancy. Training is tailored by profile, with distinct learning paths for editors, designers and developers, and is backed by an online accessibility toolkit on the intranet containing guidelines, checklists, demonstrations and quizzes.

Key learning: A formal, top-management-approved mandate, a dedicated cross-institutional network, and the direct involvement of people with disabilities are what turn accessibility from good intentions into an operating model.

Procurement and compliance: EN 301 549 and the VPAT

Ms. Kleut turned to procurement, a topic she described as one of the most important practical levers available to parliaments. Under the EU's Financial Regulation, digital accessibility is a mandatory requirement in public procurement. Contractors must demonstrate technical accessibility against the EN 301 549 standard, which covers websites, software, hardware, mobile applications and electronic documents.

For commercial off-the-shelf products, the European Parliament requires suppliers to provide a Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT), an industry-standard report declaring the level of accessibility compliance of a product or service. For internally developed solutions, the European Parliament applies the same EN 301 549 requirements from the outset, using internal guidelines and checklists to support development teams, and testing and auditing products throughout their entire life cycle rather than only at the end.

Key learning: Build accessibility into procurement and development from day one, using EN 301 549 and VPATs to make supplier compliance explicit and auditable, since adding accessibility later is more costly.

Seeing it in practice: A live screen reader demonstration

To make these principles tangible, Ms. Kleut, who is blind, gave a live demonstration of how she navigates a European Parliament website – the EU long-term budget pages – using NVDA, an open-source screen reader. The demonstration illustrated, in real time, the difference between a page that merely looks right and one that is genuinely accessible: structure, labelling and state information that are invisible to sighted users but essential for those using assistive technology.

Key learning: Test with real assistive technology and with users who rely on it daily. Structural details invisible on screen, as well as titles, landmarks, labels and states, can impact the experience for someone using a screen reader.

Getting started: Key takeaways for any parliament

Closing the presentation, Mr. Potoms set out a practical checklist for any parliament beginning its accessibility journey, regardless of size:

- **Raise awareness across the organization.** Accessibility only progresses if everyone, not just IT, understands why it matters.

- **Secure a formal mandate from top management.** Without this backing, sustained change is difficult.
- **Build accessibility into procurement.** Make clear to suppliers that products which are not accessible will not be purchased.
- **Design for accessibility from the outset.** Incorporating accessibility requirements at the start of development is far cheaper than retrofitting them later.
- **Make compliance testing a standard part of the process,** not an afterthought.
- **Treat accessibility as a shared responsibility.** It requires a genuine shift in mindset across the whole organization, supported by role-adapted training and dedicated, specialized expertise in audits, accessible development and accessible procurement.

Key principles for digital accessibility in parliaments

- **Treat accessibility as a democratic right, not a compliance checkbox.** Framing accessibility around the 1.3 billion people – one in six globally – who experience a significant disability, and around the universal design benefits it brings to everyone, builds a far stronger case for action than legal language alone.
- **Get a formal mandate from top management early.** A clear, approved strategy gives an accessibility programme the authority to set standards, influence procurement and require staff training.
- **Anchor practice in the four WCAG principles: perceivable, operable, understandable and robust.** These provide a common, internationally recognized framework spanning websites, documents, apps and software.
- **Use procurement as a lever for change.** Mandatory accessibility requirements (EN 301 549) and supplier-provided VPATs put the onus on the market to deliver accessible products, and most providers will engage in dialogue rather than lose the business.
- **Build accessibility in from the start.** It is far cheaper to design for accessibility from the outset of a project than to remediate it later.
- **Include people with disabilities in the work itself.** The European Parliament’s “nothing about us without us” approach, with certified experts who themselves use assistive technology, surfaces issues that desk-based testing alone would miss.
- **Make accessibility a cross-institutional, shared responsibility.** Accessibility, cybersecurity, procurement, communications and development teams all need to work together, with accessibility embedded into every relevant process rather than siloed.
- **Tailor training by role.** Editors, designers, developers and decision makers need different things; centralized toolkits and customized learning paths help meet those needs at scale.

This document was prepared on the basis of the IPU Transforming Parliaments webinar [Digital accessibility at the European Parliament](#), held on 11 June 2026. More information about the Transforming Parliaments webinar series can be found on the [IPU website](#).