80 million people in the EU are currently living with disabilities. Improving accessibility can enable them to actively participate in all aspects of society, from employment and education, to participation in the democratic process. But it can also benefit Europe more widely, opening up new possibilities for digital inclusion.

**Why does accessible ICT matter for the public sector?**

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are a key part of the drive towards accessibility. When public sector procurement decisions favor accessible technologies, people with disabilities can more easily obtain government jobs, exchange information with public entities, and use e-government solutions. In short, they can more fully participate in society and exercise their rights as citizens. The public sector has enormous purchasing power. If exercised in the right way, this can change lives and have a truly positive social impact.

“The potential of ICT lies in its ability to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of life in the 21st century.”

Rodolfo Cattani, Secretary-General, European Disability Group

Making accessibility the norm, not an afterthought, will foster demand, market competition, and innovation for accessible technology solutions.

**Accessible ICT and public procurement in the EU**

In 2014, the EU published a revised European Procurement Directive, which obliges all public entities across Europe to consider accessibility criteria as part of their procurement policies and decisions.

This was an important step towards implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified by the EU in 2011.

The European Standard EN 301 549 is the basis for measuring the accessibility performance of ICT products and services for public procurement.

All EU public procurement officials should consider making accessibility a mandatory award criterion in their procurement decisions and correctly use and evaluate ICT options against the EN 301 459.

If you are interested in learning more about the EN 301 549 standard and how to integrate accessibility into procurement processes, check out this video series.

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**How to procure accessible ICT solutions**

An inclusive society starts with the decisions we make.

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Want to know more? www.microsoft.com/accessibility
How to score accessibility criteria

Accessibility is not a case of pass or fail. It may not always be possible to purchase solutions or products which are fully accessible, but the technology should be used by as many people as possible. Minor exceptions don’t make products inaccessible for everyone.

If the technology falls short of or exceeds standard requirements, request detailed explanations from potential suppliers. This can be via accessibility support channels for customers with disabilities or other help documentation. Information should include details on items such as product roadmap, information on compatibility with assistive technologies, and suggestions for how to achieve the most accessible experience, including recommended temporary work arounds where features are not yet fully accessible.

The EN 301 459 will be updated over time to keep up with new technological developments. In the meantime, new solutions may outperform the standard. The EN 301 459 can be treated as a minimum standard to judge new accessibility solutions by what they can do, rather than to the letter.

Microsoft and accessibility standards

Microsoft is a signatory to the G3ict Charter, which urges governments to insist on accessible technologies in procurement, and to incorporate accessibility standards into all purchasing decisions.

We have integrated the EN 301549 criteria into our own Microsoft Accessibility Standard (MAS), which also incorporates the most common global accessibility standards such as ISO/IEC 40500 (WCAG 2.0) and US Section 508.

We are also providing self-declarations of conformance to the EN 301 549 that demonstrate how our products and services meet the standard. You will find more information here.

Our enterprise Disability Answer Desk (edad@microsoft.com) provides dedicated support to customers who have questions about accessibility within Microsoft’s products and services or compliance reports.

How to include accessibility into procurement processes?

To start integrating accessibility criteria into your procurement processes, you should consider:

1. Requesting a conformance statement for the EN 301 459 from ICT providers as part of your RFP.
2. Comparing how the technical requirements and functional performance standards are met.
3. Deciding on the basis of what provides the most accessible solution for as many people as possible.
4. Designing additional mitigation plans for users with disabilities if necessary.

Want to know more? www.microsoft.com/accessibility