# Countdown to EAA, T-367 Days – webinar transcript

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<https://daisy.org/news-events/articles/countdown-to-eaa-t-367-days-w/>

Welcome, everyone to “Countdown to the European Accessibility Act”, proudly hosted by the DAISY Consortium. My name is Richard Orme, and I'm delighted to have you join us today for the first of the series that will delve into the critical aspects of this landmark legislation, which is set to reshape the accessibility landscape across Europe.

In today's session, we'll kick off the series with a fascinating interview with George Kerscher, the leading thinker and doer who made the first accessible e-books and coined the term print disabled. The European Accessibility Act is broad in scope, and so we'll have a brief reminder of how this directive relates to publishing and reading specifically, before hearing from industry professionals who are actively working to prepare their organizations and others. Now how ready for the EAA are we? DAISY has launched a survey to gather your perspectives on this, and we’ll share some of the early findings. And finally, I'll let you know about the next webinars we have coming up and how you can tell us what else you'd like us to cover.

So let's turn to that interview with George. So hey, George! When we were together recently in Paris, you gave the keynote at the EDRLab Digital Publishing Summit. And in that speech, you described your earliest exploits in accessible books. Tell us more.

Yeah, I had a lot of fun doing the presentation. And I started out by telling the history of some of this. And I was a teacher in 1986, and I left my job teaching in school and going for a Master's in Computer Science. I had just gotten my first primitive talking computer, and I'm in school and there's no books. There's absolutely no audio cassette books or any kind of books at that level of computer science. And I wrote letters to publishers asking for the stuff that drove their printing presses. And Cybex came back and sent me three diskettes. They, had the “Mastering” series, Mastering WordPerfect and so on. And I put the diskettes in my computer, looked at them, and they were just gibberish. They were just garbage. I couldn't read anything. So I put those diskettes in my drawer. And at the beginning of Christmas break, I started to write code to convert it to the first digital book. And by the end of Christmas break, I was sitting there with my mouth open, just amazed. I was blown away by what I had in front of me. My computer was reading me this book, and I instantly recognized how important this would be to blind people around the world. That summer, I started a company called Computerized Books for the Blind and Print Disabled. And that term, was the beginning of, the term “print disabled”, which we still use today. So the name of the company coined that term, and I was sending diskettes out all over the world, and it was great fun. Yeah.

You know, George, I was working at the UK blindness organization RNIB at the time. I was working in the Employment and Technology unit. And you sent us books on disk, which we then provided to blind people who needed to know how to use WordPerfect and Lotus 123 and other programs in order to do their jobs. So it was just such an essential and new service that we were able to to tap into. And a few years later, RNIB was the founding, one of the founding members of the DAISY Consortium, the global organization centered on accessible publishing and reading. So let's fast forward now to 2001. And another speech you made, this time at the DAISY Technical Conference that year. Tell us about that.

So this was just before the CSUN Conference, where we held a meeting of DAISY Consortium people who were converting analog cassette books into a digital version, and they needed training. And I was asked to do a presentation. And I wanted to be inspiring. And so I borrowed from Dr Martin Luther King's “I Have a Dream” speech. And I really got theatrical. So, I was there and I said, I have a dream. I have a dream that someday blind and print disabled people all over the world will be able to have their computers read to them. I have a dream that people who have low vision will be able to increase the character size on their computer and have the computer read to them as they're reading, along with large print. I have a dream that people who are dyslexic will be able to change the font and color and spacing of the text, and have their computer read to them as they, follow along with the highlighted text. And I just had a whole lot of fun in that, and it was very well received.

It was, it was a good conference. And, we were very successful in our work to convert analog books to the digital version. So, DAISY's role really was to develop technical standards and specifications, for the special organizations who were serving people with disabilities with libraries. But later, those specifications and standards found their way into the mainstream. Tell us how that happened, George.

Well, in the late 90s, devices were starting to appear on the market where, handheld devices for reading and there was 5 or 6 of them that were out. And every everybody was using a different format. And newest in the United States started to look at the development of specifications, standardize this. And they held a conference in Washington, D.C., and about 150 people showed up. And interestingly, six of us were blind. And, it was it was it was fascinating because we knew what was needed to be in, a digital book. And so the development of the specifications were really driven by blind people in, in that group, you know, didn't, didn't hurt that we had ten years of experience already of using these digital books. And so the specifications that developed that were 100% accessible, it was HTML, it was a navigation center. It was a zip file. Pretty familiar. And that became, a specification in 1999 called the open E-book format. And eventually that that changed over to to Epub. But the problem that we ran into was that the early implementation of reading systems, the companies didn't pay any attention to accessibility. And also DRM got in the way. So all of these books were were accessible, but the reading systems were not. And it was a terrible injustice. And Jim Fruchterman, who created Bookshare, and I wrote a article called A Soundproofed Book, and it got a lot of press. A lot of people took note of it, and, I think it really had an impact in the development of the next generation of reading, of reading systems and mainstream technologies. Yeah. No, that's great. George. So, you're telling us about the history here. and you've described the dream in 2001, and you've also described how the different parts of the publishing ecosystem all need to kind of address accessibility for the solution. But now we're looking forward, and we're counting down to June 2025, one year until the EAA comes into effect. Are you still a dreamer, George? I think that my dreams are coming true. This this is absolutely real. I am not hallucinating. the EAA is promising everything that I talked about in my I Have a Dream speech, and the EAA promises that people who are blind and print disabled will be able to have their computers read to them the promises that people with low vision will be able to enlarge the text on the screen and have the information read to them as they follow along. And the EAA promises that people who have dyslexia will be able to change the font and color and spacing on the computer and be able to read along as it's being highlighted using text to speech. So everything that, we're hoping for is going to happen in a year from now. Legislation isn't implemented overnight, of course, and we know that the EAA has been coming for a while. Back in April 2019, the clock started when the directive was established to outline the legislation, and the process allowed three years for the adoption of that directive. International laws bringing us to 2022 and then a further three years to prepare for implementation of the act, which comes into force on June the 28th, 2025, to provide insight into the content of the act in relation to accessible publishing. We were previously very fortunate to hear from Inma Placencia Porrero, who, as a senior expert on disability at the European Commission, has been heavily involved in the Act for quite some time.

So in the Act we have basically two pillars. I would say on the first side, the legislation puts obligations on accessibility to a number of products and services. On the other hand, the same accessibility requirements that are compulsory for products and services. and used to render operational the obligations, general obligations of accessibility in other EU law. For example, when public procurement when buying accessible or when using European money in some EU funds in the list of products, we have a very strong ICT components that for the subject matter of today, I would say that what is more relevant is computers, because you can read books in computers, but also dedicated hardware such as readers. When it comes to the services, there is a specific point on e-books and their dedicated software. What is an e-book is being described to in the article three of the directive, and it says is a service consisting of the provision of digital files that convey an electronic version of a book that can be accessed, navigated, read and use, and the software, including mobile devices based services including mobile applications dedicated to accessing, navigating, reading and use of those digital files. And it excludes the software covered, of course, in the definition of point 42, which is the dedicated software for the for the e-reader, we have a list of general obligations for products they relate to. As I said before, the accessibility requirements, but also for all those in the chain of putting products in the market from manufacturers, importers, distributors, and so forth. Products gets a CE marking and this would be very relevant for the e-readers because they will have all the actors in the chain will have to address them and their accessibility will be, as a first instance, declared by the, economic operator. We have the obligations for services. So this would be for e-books. So if you fulfill the obligations, the accessibility obligations, then you immediately get access to the whole internal market. This is what we call the free movement of products and services. And this is very important because it would be clear in Europe what needs to be done in order to have accessible e-books in the market. Now the obligations are placed on service providers, and there will be also a list of authorities that are going to be responsible for compliance and checking the compliance with those services in the directive. The directive in the in a recital clarifies that the concept of service provider could include a publisher or any other economic operators involved in the distribution of these books. There are some exemptions for organizations providing services for economic operators providing services. Micro-enterprises are exempt it. They don't have the obligation to, comply with the accessibility requirements of the of the directive. And there are two safeguards important to mention. One is disproportionate burden, meaning that the obligations on accessibility apply as long as they do not impose a disproportionate burden in the economic operator and fundamental alteration. So in this case, if you are making electronic books, nobody is asking you to make paper books. For example, printed Braille books. It is electronic books that have to be accessible. So the nature, the character of your service in this case can be preserved. What we have is the summary of the main elements of the chain of enforcement of the directive. This means that we start in a soft way. Economic operators first declare that they comply with the accessibility requirements when placing their service, in this case, the e-books in the market. Then we have authorities of member states that have to check compliance. They can also receive complaints, for example. But ultimately we have got the possibility for consumers to take actions before the court. And in those actions, not only individuals which are a consumer, but also public bodies that have got an interest may engage. To that end, the enforcement requires that if there is noncompliance, penalties that are effective, proportionate and dissuasive can be put and also remedial actions, the idea is to remedy the accessibility and not to just get a penalty. The first and most relevant technical annex is annex one that contains all the accessibility requirements. And those requirements are some general requirements for all services, but some specific requirements for for e-books. And those are in section four of annex one. They relate to ensuring that when an e-book contains an audio in addition to text, they are synchronized. It contains requirements to ensure that the software or the digital file of the e-book does not prevent assistive technology from working properly, that there would be alternative allowing alternative renditions, so that the the content of the book is perceivable, understandable, operable and robust, that metadata is discoverable, that containing the accessibility features and ensuring that the digital rights management measures do not block accessibility features. I thank you for your attention.

Wonderful. It's great to have that clear explanation from Inma. Over the course of this countdown series, we'll get perspectives from different stakeholders, what they hope for from the EAA, and we'll hear what they feel should be an important focus during the countdown to implementation. So let's hear now from Elin, from Hans and from Cristina.

I am Elin Ljungvall at the Hegas publishing house in Sweden, we do easy to read books for children and youth. Hi, I'm Hans Beerens from Dedicon, the Netherlands. As a library serving persons with print disabilities, we produce accessible alternative formats. We also make a passionate plea for inclusive publishing, take part in projects and share knowledge and skills by providing training. Hi, I am Cristina Mussinelli, the Secretary General of the Lia Foundation, a nonprofit organization created by the Italian Blind Union and the Italian publishers Association that promote the accessibility in the field of publishing. The most important part is not how you read it is that you read. Matching the right book with the right reader makes a huge difference in the reading experience of a child, and it is every child's right to discover the joy of reading, no matter what format they require to do so. That is our firm belief at Hegas I guess with the European Accessibility Act, I want to see clearer guidelines ensuring that we can all move in this direction together, providing the right book for the right reader in the right format. Oh, I expect that all the information that's being shared because of the EAA is going to make accessibility more accessible to a wider audience. My hopes are that it's going to raise awareness that accessibility leads to better products and services, and to good user experiences for all. So ultimately, many more accessibility features will hopefully become mainstream and therefore inclusive, as, for example, video captions and textual adjustments already are. I hope the European Accessibility Act will allow print impaired people to read how, when and what they want as any other reader. Fostering social integration, active participation in the world of culture, school and work. Hey, this already includes accessibility in our core production. All our books are made in print, audio in EPUB3 with sentence highlighting. But we need to see how we can make accessibility a part of our whole organization, make adjustments and improve. The coming year. We will focus on alternative text for images and see how we can make it the part of our production flow in a sustainable way. From the perspective of the Netherlands, I would say that there's much awareness already. In my opinion, key focus should therefore now be on supporting the development of skills and knowledge as a publisher. It is, in my view, important to start not to wait and learn by doing. Learn on the job. One way of doing that is by training Inclusive Publishing In Practice is a learning platform that fosters and supports that step by step learning process. With free courses in English, French, German and Dutch, you could make use of that, and you should also could also contact experts for specific training. on making born accessible publications. awareness, awareness, awareness and support all the actors involved, including end user in understanding the value of an accessible publishing system and to help them to create it. And for example, we in Lia do this offering consultancy services to all the actors. Because in the EAA only not only publisher, but all the actor like distributor bookstore are involved.

For the last few weeks, we've been conducting a survey on the EAA to learn more about preparations to support accessible publishing that's taking place in the different regions, and also to assess how people are feeling about the legislation. The information about work in the different regions is really important to us. It will help us to signpost people to the latest resources. Work has progressed significantly since the last survey on this topic two years ago. Indications are that governments have established departments to look after the accessible publishing aspects of the act. The majority of respondents so far have indicated that while activity is happening in their region, there do remain concerns about being ready on time. Most people agreed that the EAA was likely to have significant and lasting impact on publishing and that accessible publications were generally better for everyone. But there remain some serious challenges, especially around mainstream tool support for accessible book creation, the awareness of accessible content creation, best practices, authoring image descriptions, and reliance on established inaccessible processes. Most of the people responding so far believe that it will take at least a year after the implementation of the act for us to establish a shared understanding with some people, indicating that they don't think this will happen until around 2030. The survey remains open and we'd love to hear your views, especially if you're in a position to share details about resources and the preparation. That's happening within your region. If you can help, please visit daisy.org/EAASurvey

Whether you're a publishing professional, policymaker or advocate for accessibility, or you work for a disabled persons organization, the DAISY Consortium experts and member organizations who have decades of experience making accessible books are here to help you prepare. well. We all have a lot to do over the next year, and we expect to have, a fair share of issues that come up and bumps in the road. And we would like to hear from from all of you out there on the problems you're having and what we might do to help you resolve those problems. We've got a lot of experts we could call on, and feel free to come to us and ask us for assistance. We will try to find the experts who can answer the questions that you have. And over the next year in this series, we hope to help you in your journey so that the launch will be as smooth as possible in a year from now. Thank you, George, and thank you for making this kickoff event so special.

Well, in the treasure trove that is the DAISY webinar archive, you will find more than 30 hours of videos, articles and links to resources related to accessible publishing. There are two specific to the EAA. The first is the European Accessibility Act. Considerations for the Publishing industry and benefits for consumers globally. And the second is EU Accessibility Act update. You can reach our webinar archive by visiting daisy.org/webinars

This webinar is the kickoff event for our Countdown series, a 12 month program. in which we'll be exploring all aspects of accessible publishing and reading, facilitating knowledge sharing, and helping all involved to understand and prepare for the European Accessibility Act.

So now I'm happy to share with you the next three scheduled topics on July the 24th, with 339 days to go. We have technical approaches to upgrading the backlist. There are a series of strategies that, if adopted, can aid the process of upgrading the accessibility of existing content. And so in this webinar, we'll hear from those that are actively involved in supporting the rework of backlist titles to ensure that they're compliant with the EAA. Implicit in the title is that we won't be discussing legal perspectives. This session is focused on the technical and business processes.

Then on August the 28th, with 304 days to go, we'll turn to accessibility testing. In this webinar, we'll explore the diverse range of tests and assessments, both automated and manual, that can be performed to refine the user experience and to support accessibility.

On September the 25th, there are just 269 days to go, and it's the turn for image descriptions. This webinar will discuss the practical workflow approaches taken by a number of publishers to ensure that high quality image descriptions are efficiently authored for both front and backlist titles.

You can find out more information at daisy.org/webinars where you can also sign up to the webinar announcements, mailing list to learn more about new topics as we add them. And if you'd like to suggest a subject or you're considering presenting a webinar, then please email us at webinars@daisy.org

Thank you for joining us today and I hope you'll join us again next time. Goodbye.