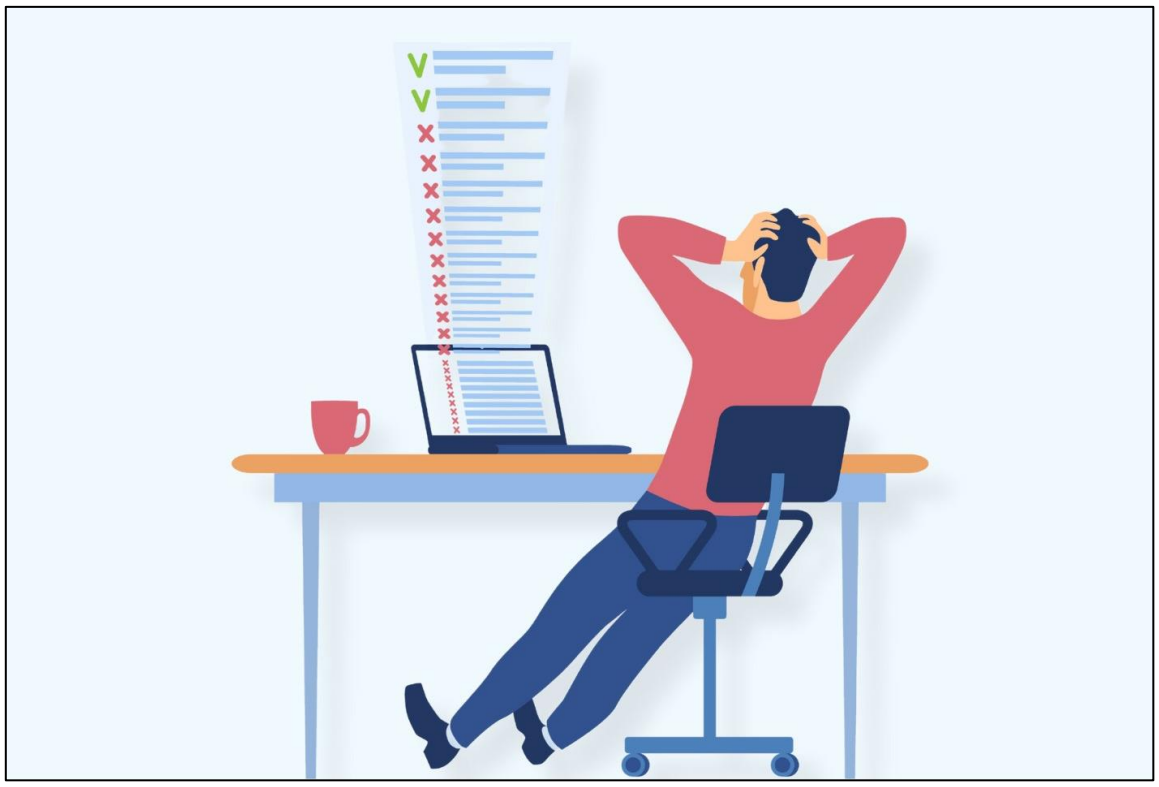

Access Denied

The (in)accessibility of European Political Party websites

This study is a collaboration between:

EUROPEAN DISABILITY FORUM

Funka Foundation

Date: March 2024

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Funded by the European Union

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements **4**

Executive Summary **5**

Introduction **7**

About the Authors **8**

Results summary **9**

Summary of websites 9

Summary for documents 11

Scope **13**

Needs of persons with disabilities 13

Results per party **15**

European People's Party (EPP) 15

Example – European People's Party 16

Party of European Socialists (PES) 17

Example – Party of European Socialists (PES) 18

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) 19

Example – Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe 19

European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) 21

Example – European Conservatives and Reformists 21

European Greens 23

Example – European Greens 23

European Left 25

Example – European Left 25

Identity and Democracy Party (ID Party) 26

Example – Identity and Democracy 27

Results per tested criteria **28**

Non-text Content (9.1.1.1 and 10.1.1.1) 28

Captions (pre-recorded) (9.1.2.2) 46

Contrast (minimum) (9.1.4.3. and 10.1.4.3) 47

Keyboard (9.2.1.1) 65
Focus Visible (9.2.4.7) 70
Pause, Stop, Hide (9.2.2.2) 71
Error Identification (9.3.3.1) 76
Meaningful sequence (10.1.3.2) 83
Tagged 86
Bookmarks 89

Conclusion 92

Annex 1 – explanation of scope 93

Pages and channels analysed 93

Documents analysed 93

Selected EN 301 549 and other requirements 94

Acknowledgements

We thank the Funka Foundation, and especially Malin Hammarberg, Péter Kemény and Susanna Laurin for ensuring technical expertise on the revision of the accessibility of political parties' websites.

Executive Summary

Our democratic systems and political processes rely on citizens being able to cast an informed vote. However, as seen in this report, the over 100 million persons with disabilities living in Europe are largely failed by political parties in their duty to provide accessible, reliable political information.

European political parties seem to be neglecting their obligation to provide information to all voters, whether they have specific access needs or not. In doing so, they are creating a barrier not only for persons with disabilities but for the democratic process itself.

While we recognise that the majority of voters will rely on information given by national political parties – and provided through a variety of means – we consider these disappointing results to provide an accurate snapshot of the inaccessibility of the political process, especially election campaigns, when it comes to the needs of persons with disabilities.

The disappointing results show that:

1. All political parties' websites have **severe accessibility issues**, excluding groups of users from content while making it difficult for others to access information.
2. Some instances of **insufficient colour contrast** were the worst that any of the involved experts had ever measured before. A depressing record.
3. Some website owners had **actively removed** code that benefits users, thereby deliberately making the interface less accessible.

This report analyses accessibility through the angle of persons with disabilities. This means that technical and practical arrangements are in place to ensure persons with disabilities can access and interact with society and enjoy their rights on an equal basis with others. This is far from the reality displayed in our study.

We call on EU political parties and all political actors to:

1. **Train** web authors and other relevant staff in basic accessible publishing.
2. Use the European standard for accessible ICT (EN301549) when **procuring**, **designing** and **developing** digital interfaces. The standard is free of charge.

3 **Involve** end users with disabilities in designing, developing and testing digital interfaces, to make sure they work for everyone.

Finally, we encourage all political actors to meaningfully involve organisations of persons with disabilities in accordance with the disability movement's updated motto: "Nothing without us."

Introduction

This report on European political parties' websites is intended as a constructive exercise to call attention to the accessibility issues still present for voters with disabilities. The study presents a path for improvement for European and national political parties, and all political actors. It shows what they must do during the next five years to ensure voters with disabilities can access relevant information and guarantee that the next European elections in 2029 ensure full, informed participation of persons with disabilities.

Due to capacity constraints, the report focused on the 7 European political parties, namely:

- European People's Party
- Party of European Socialists
- ALDE Party
- ECR Party
- European Greens
- European Left
- Identity and Democracy

We acknowledge that analysing European political parties' websites presents a limited scope of all the actors that engage in elections, and of the means through which they share information. However, we believe the results present an accurate snapshot of how political communication is still not accessible. We hope that European political parties can also engage their national members in an in-depth process to ensure accessible communications and events during electoral campaigns.

About the Authors

The **European Disability Forum (EDF)** defends the interests of over 100 million persons with disabilities living in Europe. We are an umbrella organisation of persons with disabilities, created in 1996 to ensure that decisions at European level concerning persons with disabilities are taken with and by persons with disabilities.

We are run by persons with disabilities and their families and serve as a strong united voice of persons with disabilities in Europe.

The Funka Foundation is an independent not-for-profit organisation. We carry out user centred research, studies, training and assignments to support inclusion and accessibility for persons of all abilities. We are active in standardisation and believe in empowerment through involvement.

We work with all sectors and stakeholders with a mission to act as a knowledge centre on accessibility, user involvement and inclusion and collaborate closely with organisations representing persons with disabilities.

Our subject matter experts are certified by the International Association of Accessibility Professionals (IAAP), and we lead the IAAP Nordic chapter.

Results summary

Summary of websites

All tested websites have severe accessibility issues that exclude groups of users from content and make it difficult for other groups of users to access information and carry out tasks. The issues are found across the board, from technical errors in the code to graphic design problems, user interface and navigation issues, and mistakes made by web authors.

Some of the cases of insufficient colour contrast measured when testing were surprisingly bad. It is not usual to find such low readability these days, as user behaviour includes using screens outdoors, in bright sunlight etc.

The most disappointing discovery is that some website owners have actively removed code that benefits users, thereby deliberately making the interface less accessible.

The Authors ran tests on **7 elements** (further developed in “Results per tested criteria” section).

All tested websites fail on “Non-text content” making interfaces hard or impossible to use for users who are blind. Non-text content on websites and documents includes images, graphics, videos, audio clips, and other interactive elements like buttons or icons. To accommodate users that cannot see or hear, the same information needs to be provided as text often called “alt-text” or “alt-attribute”.

All but one website fails the “Contrasts” requirement, making the readability difficult for everyone, including users with dyslexia, visual or cognitive impairments. Text and objects need to have sufficient contrast to the background.

All but one website fails on “Pause, stop, hide”, which makes the website difficult to read, understand and navigate for everyone, but especially for users with visual or cognitive impairments, or who are not tech-savvy. “Pause, stop, hide” means that users should be able to pause, stop or hide objects that are moving or blinking.

All but one website fails on “Keyboard navigation”, meaning that users can navigate using the keyboard, which is important for most assistive technology users.

Half of the websites fail on “Focus visible”, meaning that the object in focus is highlighted visually, which means that users with motor impairments are often excluded from content.

When it comes to “Error identification”, two websites pass, and one passes partly. However, the error identification is quite difficult to understand on all tested websites. Error identification means that users can easily find and correct errors in input fields.

All videos tested had auto captions, which is good. However, one party provides podcasts without transcripts, removing access for deaf and hard of hearing users.

The table below shows a summary of how each party performed on the tests:

	Non-text content	Captions (pre-recorded)	Contrast (minimum)	Key-board	Pause, stop, hide	Focus visible	Error identifi-cation
EPP	✗ Fail	✓ Pass	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail
ECR Party	✗ Fail	✓ Pass	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail
PES	✗ Fail	✓ Pass	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✓ Pass	✓ Pass
ALDE Party	✗ Fail	✓ Pass	✗ Fail	✓ Pass	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail
European Greens	✗ Fail	✓ Pass	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✓ Pass	◑ Partly
European Left	✗ Fail	✓ Pass	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✓ Pass	✓ Pass
ID Party	✗ Fail	✓ Pass	✓ Pass	✗ Fail	✓ Pass	✓ Pass	✗ Fail

Summary for documents

The tested documents have very low accessibility.

Two of them were scanned with low resolution, which means they are completely inaccessible.

All documents had technical issues, making them hard or impossible to handle for users of assistive technology.

The Authors ran 5 tests:

- Non-text content
- Contrast
- Meaningful sequence
- Tagged
- Bookmarks

All documents fail the “Non-text content” requirement, making them hard or impossible to use for users who are blind.

Half of the documents fail on “Contrast”. Poor contrasts make readability difficult for everyone, including users with dyslexia, visual or cognitive impairments.

3/4 of the documents fail the “Meaningful sequence” requirement, meaning that assistive technology will not read the content of the document in the intended order, which makes it difficult or impossible to understand the content for many users with visual or cognitive impairments.

2/3 of the documents were not tagged at all and the rest seem to be automatically tagged when being exported from a word processor document, with some issues. This means that content is not accessible or is only partly accessible for users of assistive technology.

None of the documents have bookmarks or meaningful bookmarks, that would help navigating long or complex documents. The lack of bookmarks makes it more difficult for everyone to handle these documents, but especially for users with visual, motor or cognitive impairments.

Many of the issues found showed inconsistency, leading us to wonder whether the accessible parts were more of a coincidence than a strategy. For example, when parts of the documents are not tagged, elements are in focus twice or when the same type of content is sometimes focusable and sometimes not.

The table below show a summary of how each part performed on the tests:

	Non-text content	Contrast (minimum)	Meaningful sequence	Tagged	Bookmarks
EPP	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail
ECR Party	✗ Fail	✓ Pass	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail
PES	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail
ALDE Party	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✓ Pass	**N/A** Not applicable
European Greens	**N/A** Not applicable	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail
European Left	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	✗ Fail
ID Party	**N/A** Not applicable	✓ Pass	✗ Fail	✗ Fail	**N/A** Not applicable

Scope

A website needs to work for everyone, no matter their abilities.

A full accessibility analysis of a website requires hundreds of hours of testing with end users as well as experts. In this report, we relied on a set number of "spot checks". We chose these spot checks based on the harmonised European standard EN 201 549, which is used to conform with EU legislation such as the Web Accessibility Directive[1]. The spot checks cover desktop and mobile interfaces and with:

- A selection of requirements where inaccessibility risks fully excluding groups of users.
- Requirements that support diverse users: users who are blind, users with low vision, users who are hard of hearing, users with motor impairments, speech impairments or cognitive impairments.
- Analysis of important sections of the website, including the start page, the page with a manifesto or what the party stands for, the accessibility statement, contact information, and a sample of multimedia contents and documents.

Needs of persons with disabilities

The analysis focused on 10 elements that websites need to have to ensure persons with diverse types of disabilities can interact without spending more time and effort than others:

- Description of Non-text content: ensuring that buttons, icon links, video and audio only content include appropriate description to ensure access to persons that cannot access visual information.
- Captions: ensuring captioning is provided in audio and video content.
- Clear Contrast: text and images need to have an appropriate contrast ratio for visual perception.
- Keyboard navigation: ensure websites can be navigated using only the keyboard.
- Pause, Stop, Hide: Ensuring automatically moving content (videos, animations) can be paused, stopped, or hidden by the user.
- Visible indicator when focusing on page elements: ensuring that users navigating with keyboard can understand which element they are selecting.
- Error identification: there are precise instructions on how and where to fix errors when filling out forms.

[1] European standards EN 301 549 v 3.2.1

The table below shows how each element interacts with diverse user needs. “Primary” means that having that element is essential for a user with a specific impairment be able to interact with the website at all. Secondary means the element being correctly implemented will help the user interact on an equal basis with the website.

	Vision	Hearing	Speech	Motor	Cognition
Non-text content	Primary	Primary	-	-	Secondary
Captions (pre-recorded)	-	Primary	-	-	Secondary
Contrast (minimum)	Primary	-	-	-	Secondary
Keyboard	Primary	-	Secondary	Primary	-
Meaningful sequence	Primary	-	-	-	Secondary
Pause, stop, hide	Primary	Primary	-	Primary	Primary
Focus visible	Primary	-	Secondary	Primary	Primary
Error identification	Primary	-	-	-	Primary
Tagged	Primary	-	Secondary	Primary	Primary
Bookmarks	Primary	-	Secondary	Primary	Primary

Results per party

European People’s Party (EPP)

The European People's Party (EPP) website has significant accessibility challenges across multiple domains. Issues found risk excluding users with visual, cognitive and motor impairments.

The most severe problems found mostly affect users with cognitive impairments or even users who are not tech-savvy. There is content that continuously changes without any chance for the user to pause, which may be highly difficult to cope with for any user. There is a lack of clear error messages and error indications, which makes it difficult for users to succeed in filling in forms.

Blind users who rely on assistive technology risk being completely or partly excluded from content because of issues with keyboard navigation. This issue is compounded by a lack of alternative descriptions on elements like links and images, which is needed for these users to receive the information as audio or Braille.

On mobile, the menu is not accessible via any assistive technology.

Users with motor impairments with and without assistive technology may face important barriers because of the malfunctioning keyboard navigation. Even more serious, the party – or the service provider contracted by them - has **deliberately removed the built-in visual keyboard focus of standard browsers**, making it extremely hard for users of assistive technology to navigate.

Low-vision users may find the website difficult to handle because of low contrast and information that is dependent on the perception of colour, making it hard or impossible to reach and understand some content.

Positively, hard-of-hearing users are supported by auto-captioned video. The documents are not accessible.

Example – European People's Party

Figure 1: A screen capture of the top part of the start page a large moving video is continuously playing; there is no function to pause it. The menu items and main heading is displayed in white on top of the moving video.

"The EPP website has a constantly playing video in the large banner in the top of the start page. The users cannot pause the video. To make things worse, the main menu is placed on top of the video, making the text extremely hard to read."

Party of European Socialists (PES)

There is a video playing in the background continuously, without any chance for the user to pause, which may be highly difficult to cope with for any user, especially for people with visual or cognitive impairments.

Many visual elements lack alternative text, which makes navigating difficult for visually impaired users. Social media links are actively removed in the code which hides them from users of assistive technology, excluding them from navigating to the social media channels from the website.

On mobile, the menu opens, but the menu items are not reachable for assistive technology. Furthermore, the “hamburger” menu icon changes name on each page, which makes it impossible to interact with for users of assistive technology.

The mobile interface also contains a Floating Action Button with headphones that starts reading random parts of the page. It's difficult to understand what this feature is intended to do or who the intended target audience would be.

Insufficient contrast makes it difficult for users with low vision to use the website, as they may miss important content. The use of the red colour may be problematic for users with visual impairments.

Hard of hearing users are supported by auto captioned video, which is positive.

The documents are not accessible.

Example – Party of European Socialists (PES)

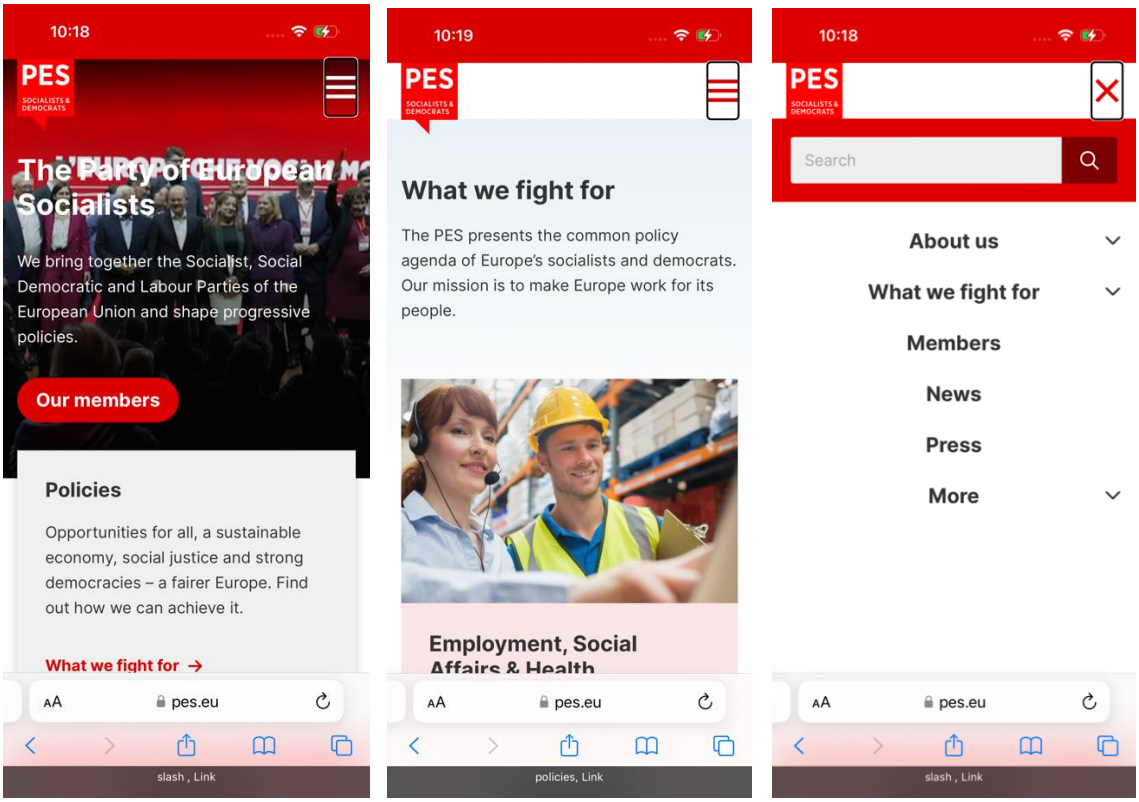


Figure 2: Three screen captures from an iPhone; the first shows that assistive technology announces the “hamburger” menu icon on the start page as “slash, link”. The second shows that assistive technology announces the “hamburger” menu icon on the “What we fight for”-page as “policies, link”. The third shows that assistive technology announces the “close menu” icon on the start page as “slash, link”.

In mobile, the “hamburger” menu is missing a name, and is announced as “slash, link” on the start page. Interestingly it changes name on all pages. So, when the user is on “What we fight for”, the menu is now announced as “policy, link”. The close button for the menu is also announced as “slash, link” or “policy, link”, etc. This makes the mobile menu highly inaccessible for users of assistive technology.

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)

The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party's website has accessibility issues that particularly affect users with visual, cognitive, and motor impairments.

The most severe problems found in the spot checks affect users with cognitive impairments, or users who are not tech-savvy. There is content that continuously changes without any chance for the user to pause, which may be highly difficult to cope with for any user, but especially these groups.

The absence of clear error messages, reliance on colour alone for cues, and inconsistent error handling in forms makes it difficult for many users to succeed in filling in forms.

Users who are blind and rely on assistive technology risk being completely or partly excluded from content because of a lack of alternative descriptions on images.

There is insufficient contrast in crucial areas such as the main menu, headers, buttons, and where text is placed on top of visually distracting images. These issues make it difficult or impossible for users with visual impairments to use the website.

It is possible to navigate the website using a keyboard, but the focus elements have been modified, making them nearly invisible and making navigation nearly impossible for motor-impaired users of assistive technology.

Hard-of-hearing users are supported by captioned videos, which is positive.

The mobile interface has the same issues as in desktop.

The documents are partly accessible.

Example – Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

No focus:

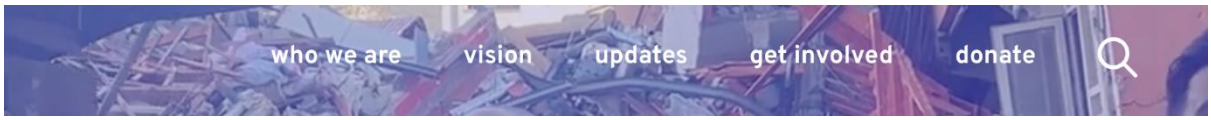


Figure 3: A screen capture of the header showing the white menu items in the header without focus.

Button in focus:

Figure 4: A screen capture of the header, the second menu item in the header has focus and it is now light blue instead of white.

ALDE Party has created a custom focus that is incredibly hard to see. Sometimes it is just a small colour change that is hardly noticeable and sometimes the focus is actively removed and not visible at all.

The menu alternative goes from white to light blue when it has focus.

European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)

The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Party website has multiple accessibility barriers related to various crucial areas. These issues significantly impact individuals with diverse impairments and make it difficult to navigate the website and access essential content.

The most severe problems found in the spot checks affect users who are blind and rely on assistive technology. This group risks being completely or partly excluded from content because of issues with keyboard navigation and a lack of alternative descriptions on essential navigational elements, links and images, which is needed for these users to receive the information via audio or Braille.

Other severe problems found in the spot checks affect users with cognitive impairments, or users who are not tech-savvy. There is content that continuously changes without any chance for the user to pause, which may be highly difficult to cope with for any user, but especially these groups. There is a lack of clear error messages and error indications, which makes it difficult for users to succeed in filling in forms.

On mobile, the menu is technically possible to open with assistive technology, but the menu is not properly named and therefore extremely difficult to interact with.

Insufficient contrast on vital components like headings, buttons, and form fields makes them difficult to find and distinguish between for individuals with visual impairments and unnecessarily unclear for other groups. Important information is conveyed with colour alone which creates barriers for many groups of users.

Users with motor impairments with and without assistive technology may face important barriers because the party – or the service provider working for it – **deliberately removed the built-in visual keyboard focus of standard browsers**, making it extremely hard for users of assistive technology to navigate. Despite these issues, it's positive that every function can still be accessed with a keyboard, providing some level of accessibility.

Hard of hearing users are supported by auto captioned video, which is positive.

The documents are scanned with low resolution and are highly inaccessible.

Example – European Conservatives and Reformists

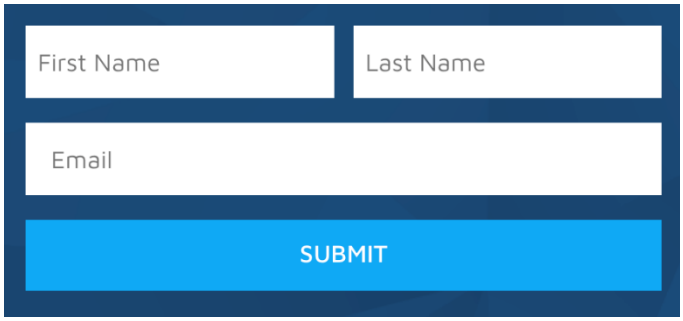


Figure 5: A screen capture of the input field in the start page without any error.

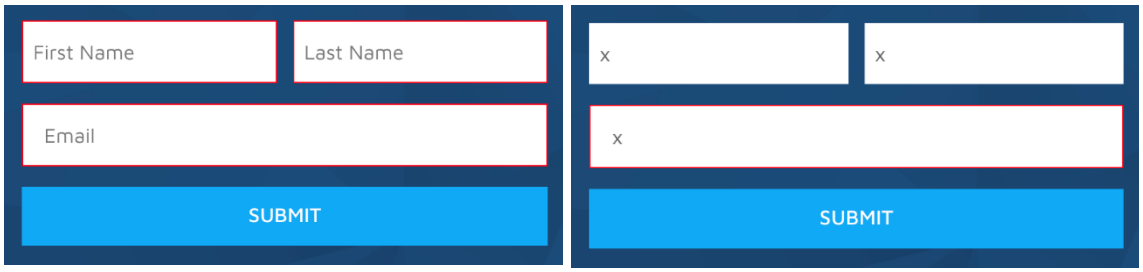


Figure 6: Two screen captures of the input field. The first one shows that when the input fields are left empty, there is no error message; the only indicator is a thin red line around the field. The second one shows that when an input field is incorrectly filled, there is no error message; the only indicator is a red thin line around the field.

The form on the start page only uses colour to show if there are mistakes. It doesn't show error messages or indicate which fields are required. Also, error messages are not announced for screen readers.

European Greens

The European Greens website struggles with contrast issues, particularly affecting readability for users with visual impairments. Low-contrast text on buttons and links, as well as inadequate contrast between text and background colours, makes the website hard or impossible to navigate and understand for several user groups. This is a very severe issue.

Hard of hearing users are supported with auto captioned video, which is positive, but the absence of alternative text for podcasts excludes the same user groups.

The website has alternative text for images, but the qualitive of these are inconsistent. For example, "link icon" doesn't provide the necessary information for a user of assistive technology (what icon?).

On mobile, the "hamburger" menu is correctly announced and possible to open. However, the menu items are not possible to interact with using assistive technology.

Issues with keyboard navigation prevent users with motor impairments using assistive technology from accessing menus and the search function making it difficult or impossible to navigate the website.

Inconsistent error message placement and patterns make the forms difficult to use for all users, especially for users with cognitive impairments.

The documents are not accessible.

Example – European Greens

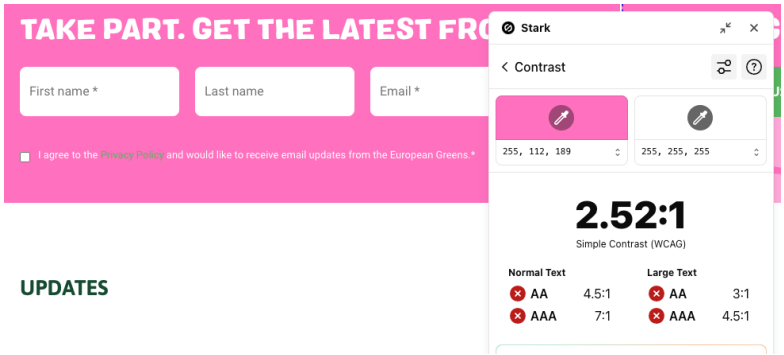


Figure 7: Example of white text on pink background, with a contrast ratio of 2.52:1.

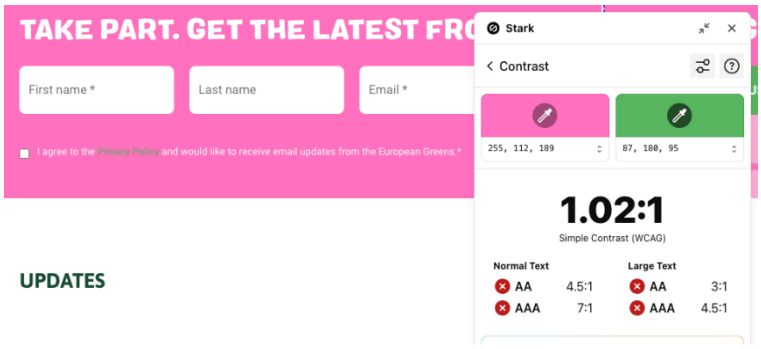


Figure 8: Example of light green link text on pink background, with an extremely low contrast ratio of 1.02:1.

White text on pink background is hard enough for readability, but the light green colour indicating link on pink background may be one of the worst contrasts we have ever measured.

European Left

The continuous auto-updating carousels on the European Left website, with no possibility to pause or stop the movement, make it very hard to use for many users.

Alternative text for essential elements like the logo and search icon is missing, making the interface difficult to use for screen readers. These elements are instead marked as “decorative”, which indicates that someone has actually considered accessibility but made decisions that result in less access for users.

On mobile, the menu is not accessible via any assistive technology.

The use of the red colour may cause readability issues and also risks signalling an error (when that is not intended). The non-standard type of font and moving navigation objects make the website generally hard to read. Contrast issues on the website, including low contrast on important objects such as links and dates, makes it hard to use for users with visual impairments.

The inability to access the search function using only the keyboard makes it difficult or impossible for users with motor impairments and users of screen readers to navigate the website.

Hard of hearing users are supported by auto captioned video, which is positive.

The documents are not accessible.

Example – European Left

Figure 9: A screen capture of the header, showing the tab order; the search function is excluded from the tab order.

On the website of the European Left, it isn’t possible to reach the search function using only the keyboard.

Identity and Democracy Party (ID Party)

Outside of the tests carried out for this study, the structure of the whole website is a disaster for users of assistive technology.

The most severe problems found in the spot checks have to do with understandability, as the website uses a mix of languages. For citizens who do not read French, this website is very hard to handle as links, buttons, error messages etc. are all in French. This is of course confusing for all users but may be especially hard to cope with for people with reading and writing difficulties or cognitive impairments.

Another severe problem is that blind users who rely on assistive technology risk being completely or partly excluded from content because of issues with keyboard navigation and forms and error messages that are not made accessible to screen readers.

On mobile, the menu is possible to open with assistive technology, but all menu items are announced “commande de menu” (menu item), making it impossible to interact with.

Users with motor impairments with and without assistive technology may face barriers because of the malfunctioning keyboard navigation.

Low vision users may find the website difficult to handle because of low contrast on input fields and information being dependent on perception of colour, making it hard or impossible to reach and understand some content.

Hard of hearing users are supported auto-captioned video, which is positive.

The document found is not accessible.

Example – Identity and Democracy

Figure 10: Two screen captures of the contact forms' input fields; one is from the form on the chat function and one from the form on the contact page. Both show that there are error messages close to the input fields, but the error messages are in French and not in English.

The required fields are not set as required programmatically which means that users with assistive technology won't get this information. Error messages are in French, and the language changes without notice. This means the content will be pronounced wrongly in text-to-speech assistive technology. The error messages are marked by colour only, and not announced to assistive technology. The error messages do not represent the error: the same error message is presented, no matter if the field is left empty or if the field is filled in incorrectly.

Results per tested criteria

Non-text Content (9.1.1.1 and 10.1.1.1)

Non-text content on websites and documents includes images, graphics, videos, audio clips, and interactive elements like buttons or icons. To accommodate users that cannot see or cannot hear, the same information needs to be provided as text – as an alternative - often called “alt-text” or “alt-attribute”.

These attributes ensure that everyone, regardless of their abilities, has equal access to information.

What we tested

- If all images have an alt attribute.
- If the logotype in the header has appropriate, equivalent alternative text.
- If icon buttons and icon links, for instance the search icon or the social media icons, have appropriate, equivalent alternative text.
- If video-only and audio-only content have either a short description of the media or a transcript.

Disclaimer:

- We did not assess the quality of the alternative text, focusing solely on its presence. All parties failed the basic requirement, but it is of course key to not only provide an alternative text, but a relevant one.

The result

The spot checks carried out in this study show significant deficiencies when it comes to alternative texts across all the tested EU political party websites. For example, vital images like logos and navigational elements lack alternative text attributes, affecting users with visual impairments and users navigating via voice commands. But there are also podcasts where the equivalent information cannot be found as a transcript.

In practice, these issues may prevent users from, or make it significantly harder to, access essential functionalities of the tested websites. For example, it directly excludes some users from podcast content and makes it hard or impossible to use the search function, to navigate back to the start page or to the social media channels.

The accessibility issues found particularly affect users with the following impairments: **vision, hearing, motor, cognition.**

European People's Party (EPP)

In the spot check, no (zero) alt attributes were found on the EPP's website, including essential elements like the logo and search function and social media links. This severely hampers accessibility for screen reader users and users navigating via voice commands.

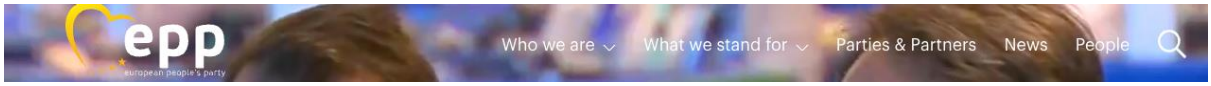


Figure 11: A screen capture of the header on EPP's website.

Figure 12: A screen capture of the header on EPP's website when images are disabled. This is how the webpage is shown in assistive technology. The red squares indicates where the images are supposed to be; no alternative text is visible.

Also, in mobile layout, the logo is missing an alternative text. The logo is announced as "Cepp, link image, banner, landmark", which is not very informative.

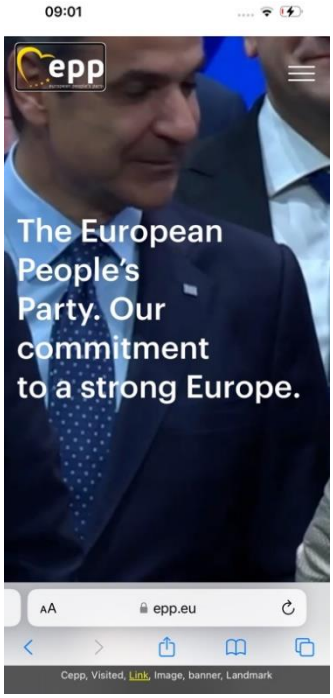


Figure 13: Screen capture from an iPhone shows what the screen reader (VoiceOver) will read out on the logotype, “Cepp, link image, banner, landmark”.

Figure 14: A screen capture of a part of the start page showing an arrow icon in front of a link and an image.

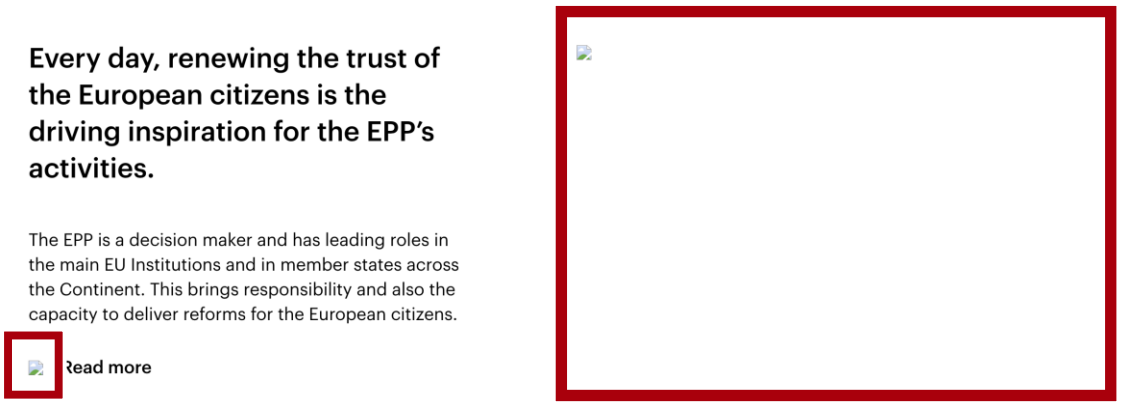


Figure 15: A screen capture of the same part as in figure 4, but here the images are disabled, is how the webpage is shown in assistive technology. The red squares indicates where the images are supposed to be; no alternative text is visible.

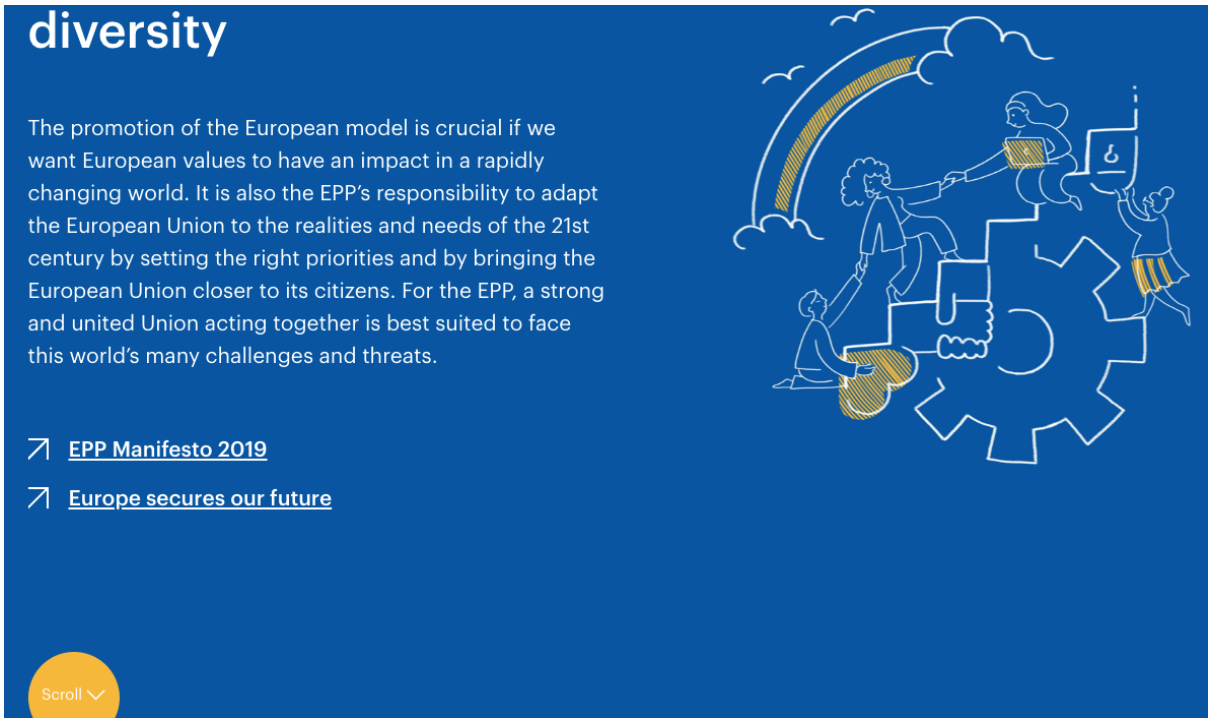


Figure 16: A screen capture of a part of the commitments page showing arrow icons in front of links, an illustration, a yellow scroll instruction followed by a down arrow.

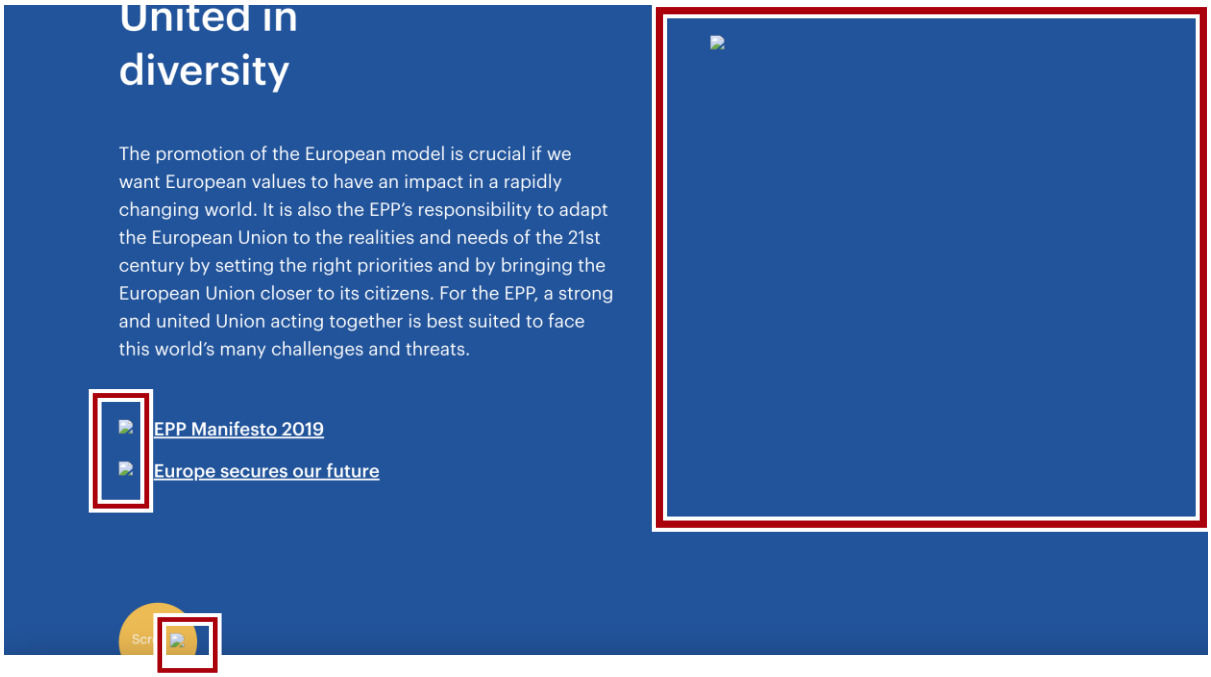


Figure 17: A screen capture of the same part as in figure 6, but here the images are disabled, is how the webpage is shown in assistive technology. The red squares indicate where the images are supposed to be; no alternative text is visible.

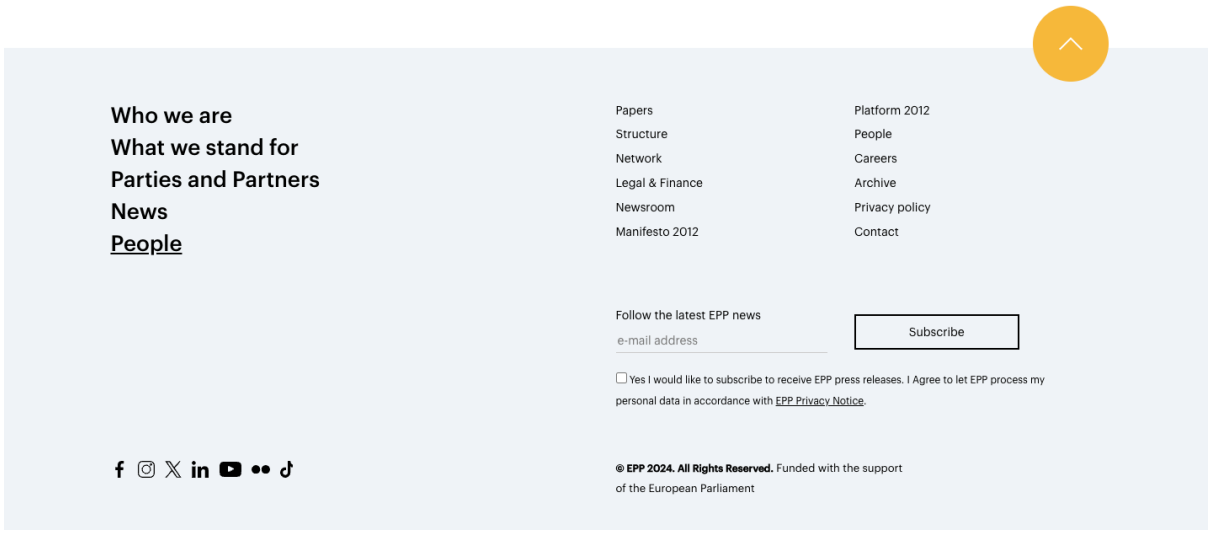


Figure 18: A screen capture of the footer showing an up-arrow icon and social media icons.

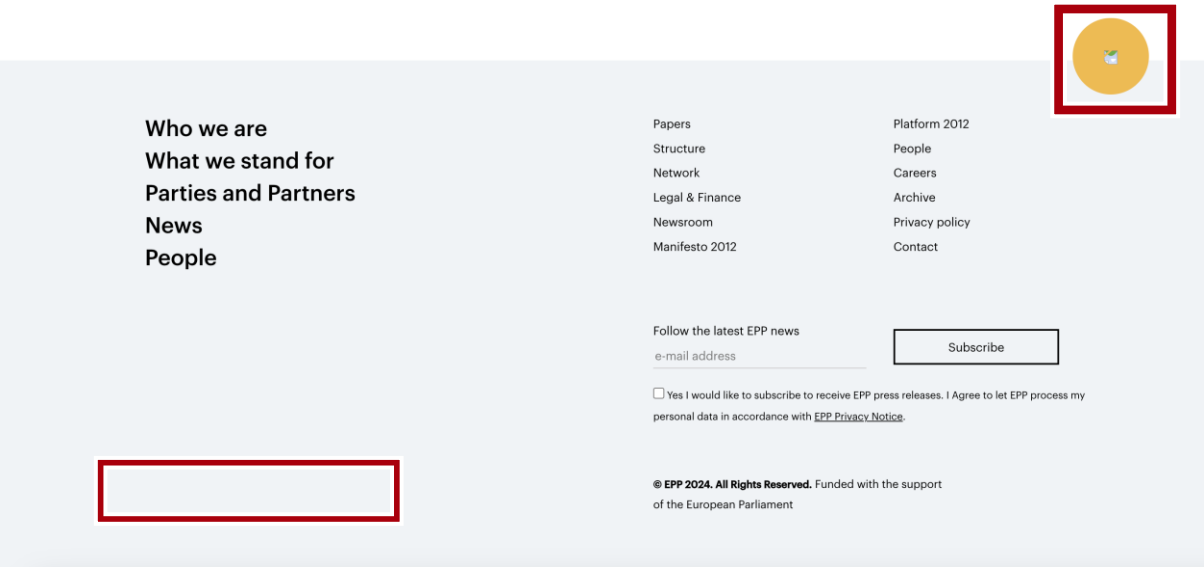


Figure 19: A screen capture of the footer on EPP's website when images are disabled is how the webpage is shown in assistive technology. The red squares indicates where the images are supposed to be; no alternative text is visible.

In mobile, there are several elements that are missing names, so they are only announced to a screen reader as "link" or "button", which makes them impossible to interact with.

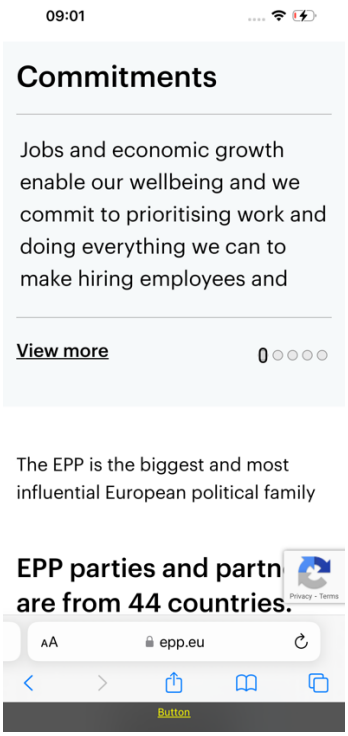


Figure 20: Screen capture from an iPhone shows that the screen reader (VoiceOver) announces "button" on the page indicators.

Logotypes in the tested documents were set as decorative, meaning assistive technology will skip these in the reading order, which is not a good practice. Images lack alternative text.

Party of European Socialists (PES)

In the spot check, no (zero) alt attributes were found on the webpage - instead title attributes are used. The alt attribute is a description for images that helps everyone understand what the image is about. This is vital for users who can't see the image. The title attribute, on the other hand, is a little pop-up message that appears when you hover your mouse over something. It can give extra information, but it's not as reliable for everyone, especially for those who can't see or use a mouse, and it is not an approved substitute for the alt attribute.

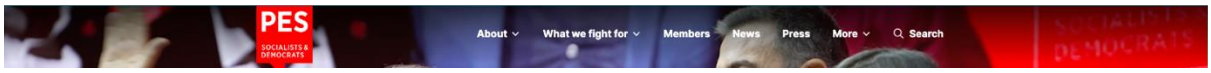


Figure 21: A screen capture of PES's header. A logo to the left and search icon to the right.

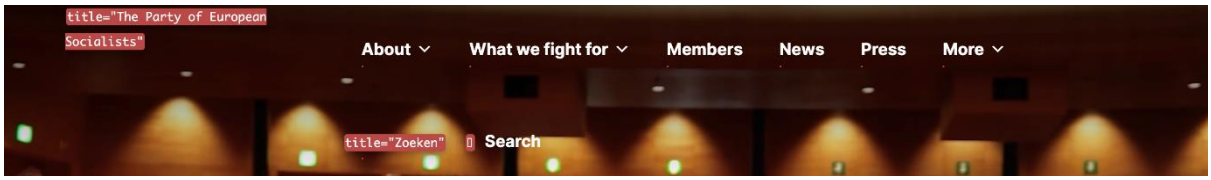


Figure 22: A screen capture of PES's header when images are disabled, this is how the webpage is shown in assistive technology. The logo has no alternative text, but there is a title text on it. The search icon has no alternative text but a Dutch title "Zoeken".

In mobile the "hamburger" menu is missing a name, and is announced as "slash, link" on the start page. Interestingly it changes name on all pages. So, when the user is on "What we fight for", the menu is now announced as "policy, link". The close button for the menu also is announced as "slash, link" or "policy, link", etc. This makes the mobile menu highly inaccessible for users of assistive technology.

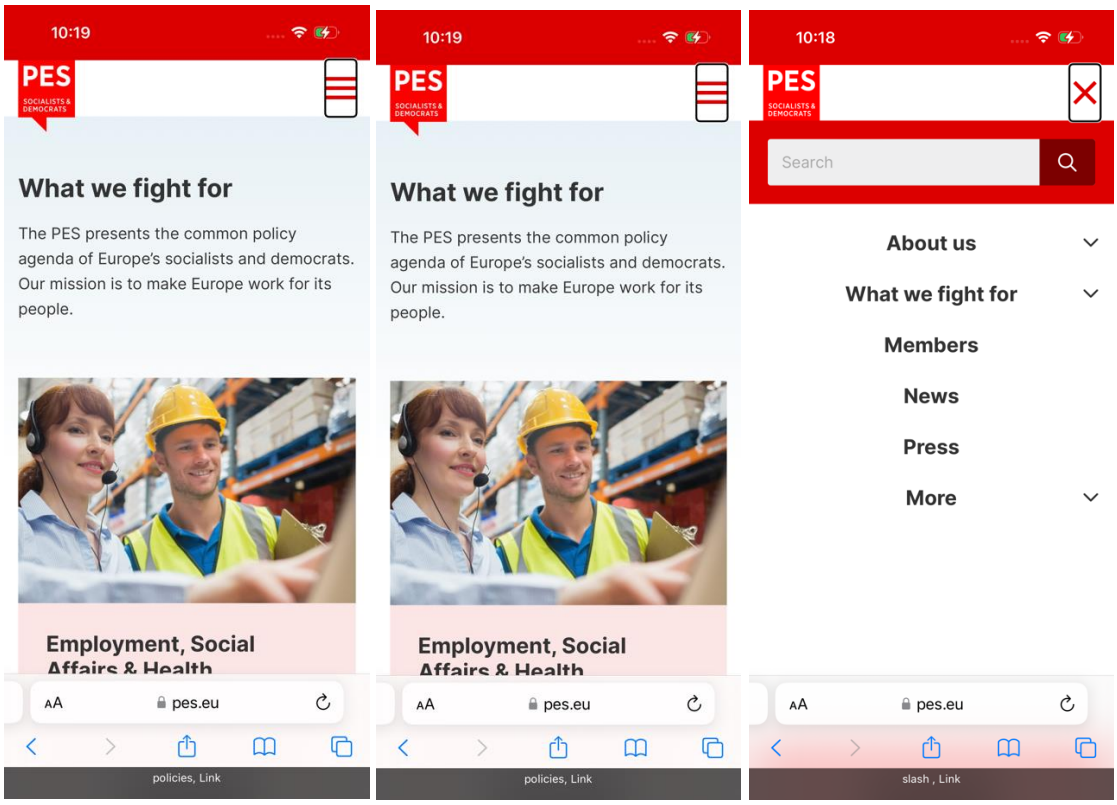


Figure 23: Three screen captures from an iPhone. The first shows that the screen reader (VoiceOver) announces the "hamburger" menu icon on the start page as "slash, link". The second shows that the screen reader announces the "hamburger" menu icon on the "What we fight for" page as "policies, link". The third shows that the screen reader announces the "close menu" icon on the start page as "slash, link".

The Facebook logo is not visible to screen readers at all. This makes it impossible for these user groups to get information about what source of the content is.

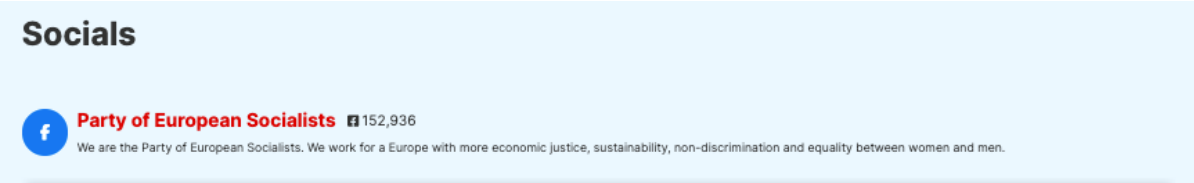


Figure 24: A screen capture of a social media section on the start page.

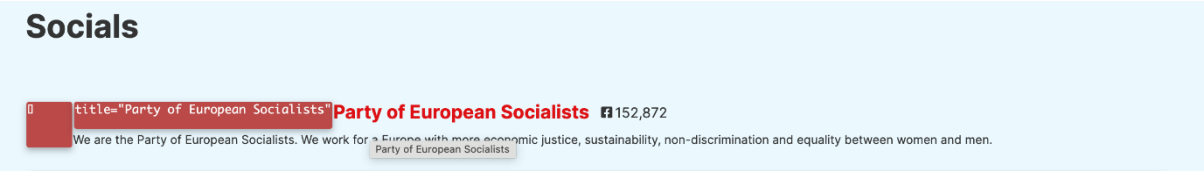


Figure 25: A screen capture of the same social media section on the start page, but with the images disabled. The Facebook logo has no alternative text; it is titled "Party of European Socialists".

The social media links are actively removed for users of assistive technology. This is outside of the requirements tested, but since this malpractice excludes every user of

assistive technology from navigating from the webpage using the social media links, it is worth mentioning.

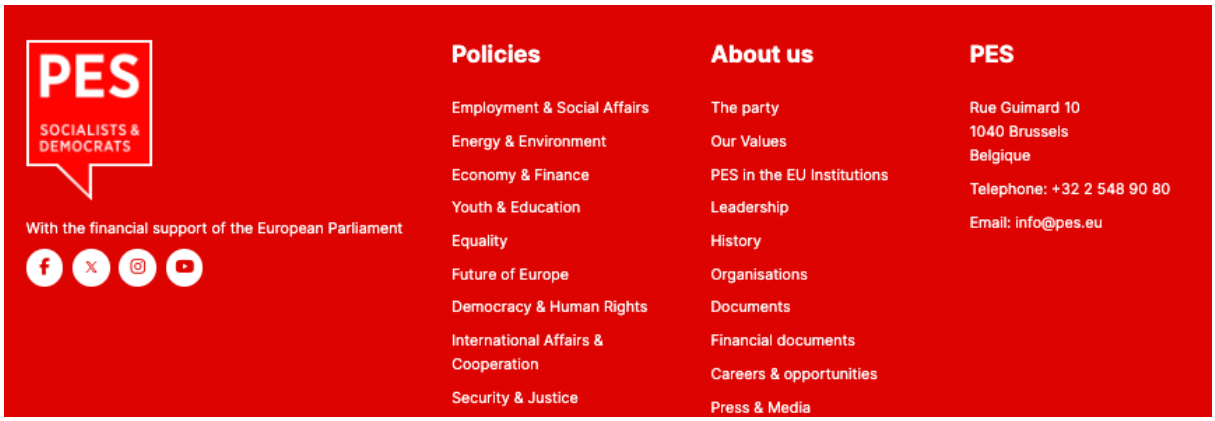


Figure 26: A screen capture of the footer on PES's website.

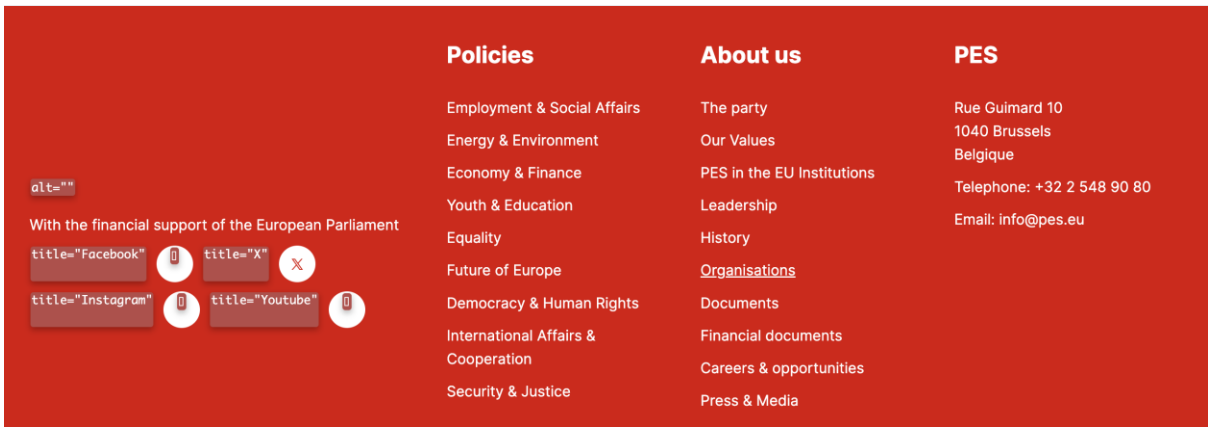


Figure 27: A screen capture of the footer on PES's website, but this time with images disabled. The social media icons have no alternative text.

Logotypes in the tested documents are set as decorative, meaning assistive technology will skip these in the reading order, which is not a good practice.

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party

The logo and search in the header and the social media links in the footer do have alternative texts. That said, alt attributes are missing from the main content of the website.

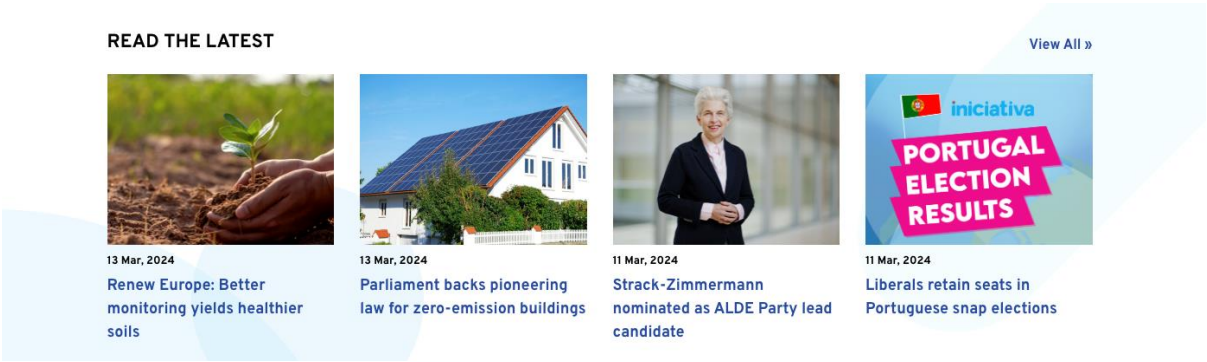


Figure 28: A screen capture of news cards on ALDE's webpage, each containing an image, a date and a heading.

Figure 29: A screen capture of the same news cards on ALDE's webpage when images are disabled. This is how the webpage is shown in assistive technology. The images are missing an alternative text; all the user will see is that there is an image there, but no info about the image.

The "download report" icons are missing the alt attribute. Instead, the alt attribute has been placed on the link, where it is not announced to assistive technology at all.

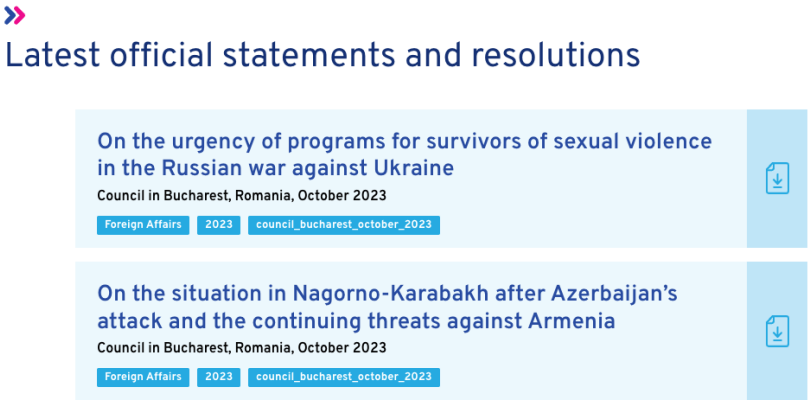


Figure 30: A screen capture of publications on ALDE's webpage. Over the heading there is a decorative arrow icon and each publication contains a download icon.

Figure 31: A screen capture of publications on ALDE's webpage when images are disabled. Instead of the decorative icon and download icons, broken images are shown. None of the icons have an alternative text; the assistive technology won't know which images are important and which aren't.

On the contact page, there are icons in front of the phone numbers helping to differentiate the phone number from the fax number. Since these icons are missing alternative texts, users with screen readers do not get this information.

Figure 32: Screen capture of the contact card. The first image shows it with the images: there are two phone numbers, and in front of the phone number an icon indicates if it is a telephone number or a fax number. The second image shows the contact card with images disabled, as it will be presented by assistive technology. Now there is no difference between the numbers and the user using assistive technology won't know which number is which.

Logotypes in the tested documents were set as decorative, meaning assistive technology will skip these in the reading order, which is not a good practice. Images in the documents have no alternative texts.

European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Party

The ECR Party website lacks alt attributes for all the links to social media channels; they either missing alternative text all together or are set as decorative.

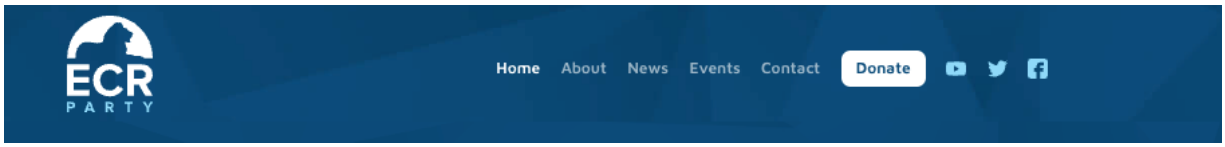


Figure 33: A screen capture of the ECR Party's header: a logo to the left and social media icons to the right.

Figure 34: A screen capture of the ECR Party's header when images are disabled. This is how the webpage is shown in assistive technology. The logo has an alternative text, but the social media icons are missing alternative texts.

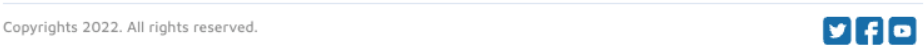


Figure 35: A screen capture of the ECR Party's footer. Social media icons are shown to the right.

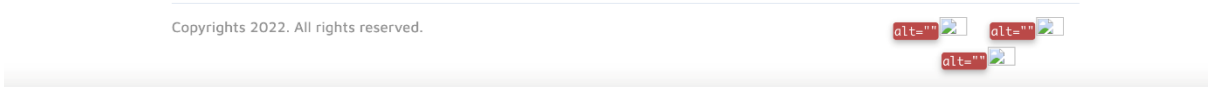


Figure 36: A screen capture of ECR Party's footer when images are disabled. This is how the webpage is shown in assistive technology. The social media icons are set as decorative.

In mobile the "hamburger" menu is missing a name, and is announced as "end, banner", which makes it highly inaccessible to users of assistive technology. The social media icons in the menu have extremely strange names.

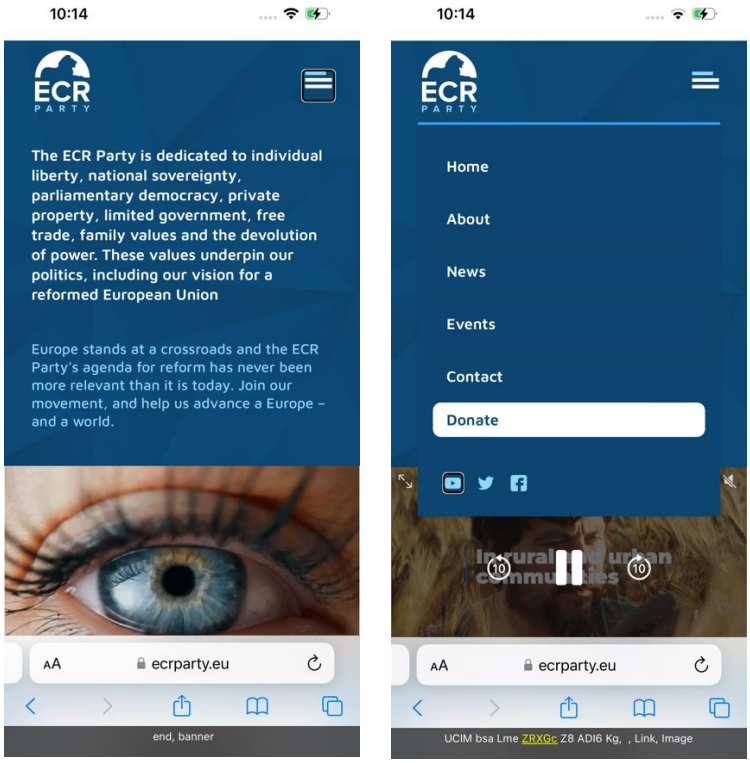


Figure 37: Two screen captures from an iPhone. The first shows that the screen reader (VoiceOver) announces the “hamburger” menu as “end, banner”. The second shows the menu open and that the screen reader announces the YouTube social media icon as “UCIM bsa Lme ZRXGc Z8 ADI6 Kg, link, image”.

This is an example of an image of text (instead of real text) that makes the content impossible to enlarge for visually impaired or motor impaired users, or to handle with assistive technology for users with reading and writing impairments who need explanations. The image also has no alternative text, which means that it excludes screen reader users (including blind, visually impaired, dyslexic and cognitively impaired users) from the content. These users won't receive any information about the content of the images, leaving them unaware of the social media channels being referenced.

Figure 38: An image from the ECR Party's webpage containing the text “European Conservative and Reformist Party. Follow us on [Facebook] @ECRParty, [Twitter] @ecrparty, [Instagram] @ECRparty”.

The ECR Party has a prominent video playing on their website, with a lot of written text that is not read out loud. Users who cannot see will not get any of the

information, and users who need to magnify the text, or take more time to read it, may have difficulties doing so.

Figure 39: A screen capture from the ECR Party's website showing a part of the video with the text: "Reykjavík declaration. European Conservative and Reformists (ECR) Party brings together partied committed to individual liberty, national sovereignty, parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, private property, low taxes sound money free trade, open competition and devolution of power".

Some elements are missing names, so they are only announced to screen reader users as “link” or “button”, which makes them impossible to interact with.

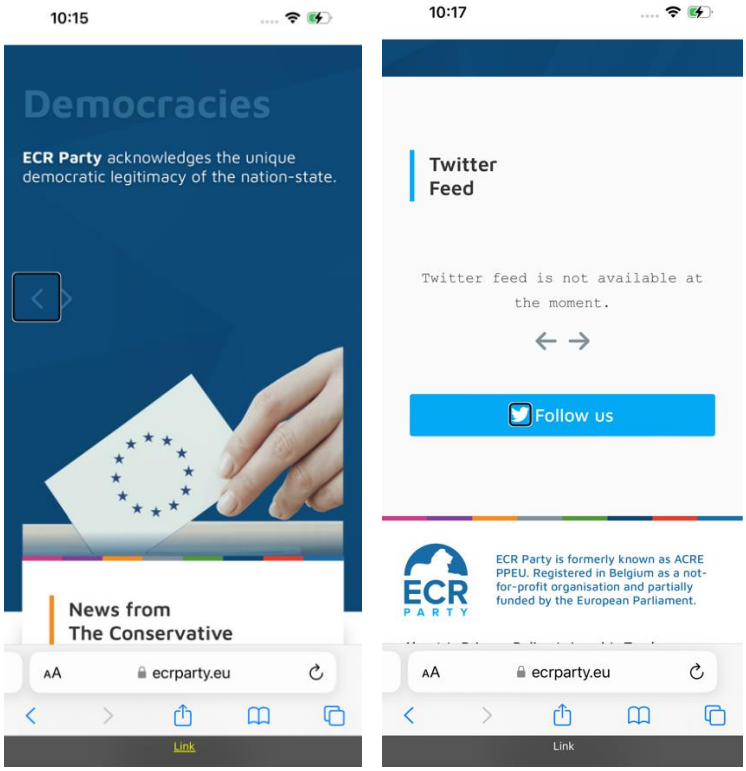


Figure 40: Two screen captures from an iPhone. The first shows that the screen reader (VoiceOver) announces a “back arrow” icon as “link”. The second shows that a Twitter icon is announced as “link”.

Images and logotypes in the documents have no alternative texts.

European Greens

Images have alternative text, but some of them are not descriptive enough (for example, “link icon”).

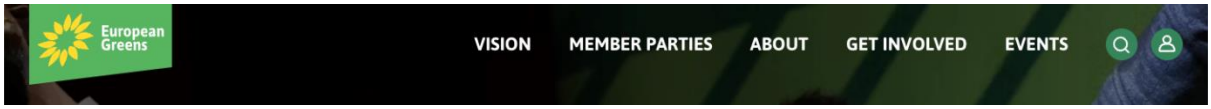


Figure 41: A screen capture of European Greens’ header. A logo to the left and search and profile icons to the right.

Figure 42: The screen capture of the European Greens’ header with the images disabled. The alternative texts are shown instead of the images, the logo is represented by “EGP Logo”, the Search by “Search icon” and the profile by “Link icon”.

The podcasts do not provide an alternative for users who are deaf or hard of hearing.

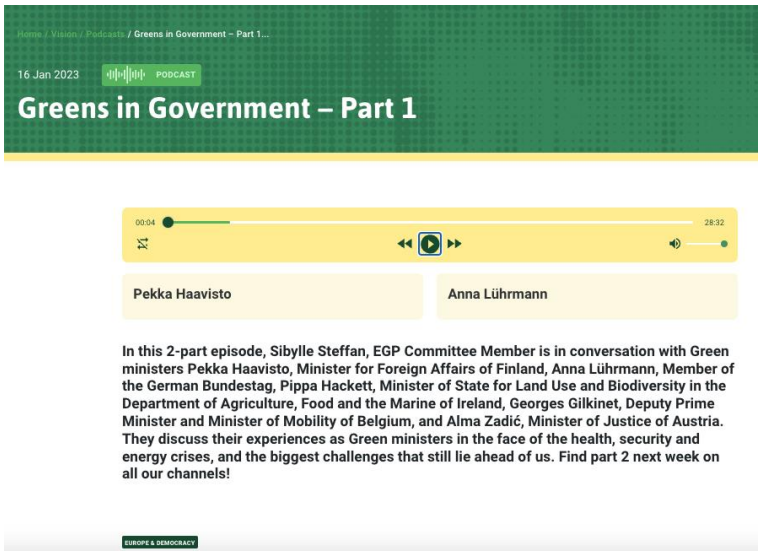


Figure 43: A screen capture of one of the podcasts on European Greens website. The podcast contains no transcript and no link to find a transcript.

European Left

The main logo in the header and the search icon do not have alternative text.

Figure 44: A screen capture of the European Lefts' header. A logo to the left and search icon and map to the right.

Figure 45: A screen capture of the European Lefts' header with images disabled. No alternative text is available for any of them.

Also, in mobile layout, the logo was missing an alternative text. The logo is announced as "slash, link image, banner, landmark". The "hamburger" is missing a name all together, making it inaccessible for assistive technology.

Figure 46: A screen capture from an iPhone shows that the screen reader (VoiceOver) announces the logo as “slash, Visited, Link banner, Landmark”.

In the footer, all images are set as decorative. Marking an image as decorative will signal to a screen reader to skip over the image, taking it out of the reading flow.

The icons in front of the phone and fax numbers are set as decorative, so users with screen readers won’t know which number is a phone number and which is the fax number.

The logos “The Left in the European Parliament” and “Transform Europe” are also set as decorative. If these logos are not important, they should be removed; if they are important, all users should get the same information.

The social media icons are set as decorative, which means the user will only hear “link” or nothing at all. This makes it difficult or impossible for users with screen readers to understand the purpose or destination of the links. It will also affect users that rely on navigating using voice commands, since the link doesn’t have a name.

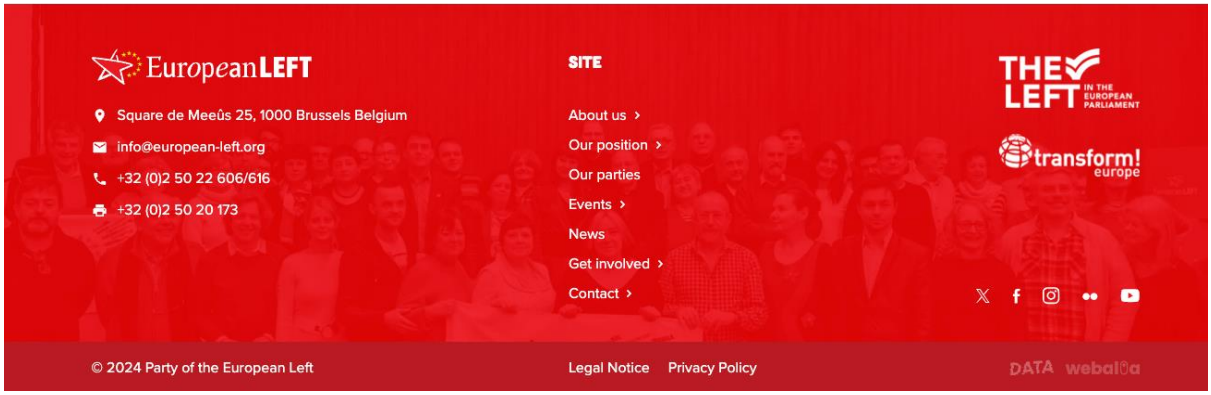


Figure 47: A screen capture of the European Lefts' footer. There are three logos: European Lefts, The Left in the European Parliament, and Transform! Europe. There are icons in the contact info and there are two phone numbers; in front of the phone number, an icon indicates if it is a telephone or fax number. There are icons for the social media links.

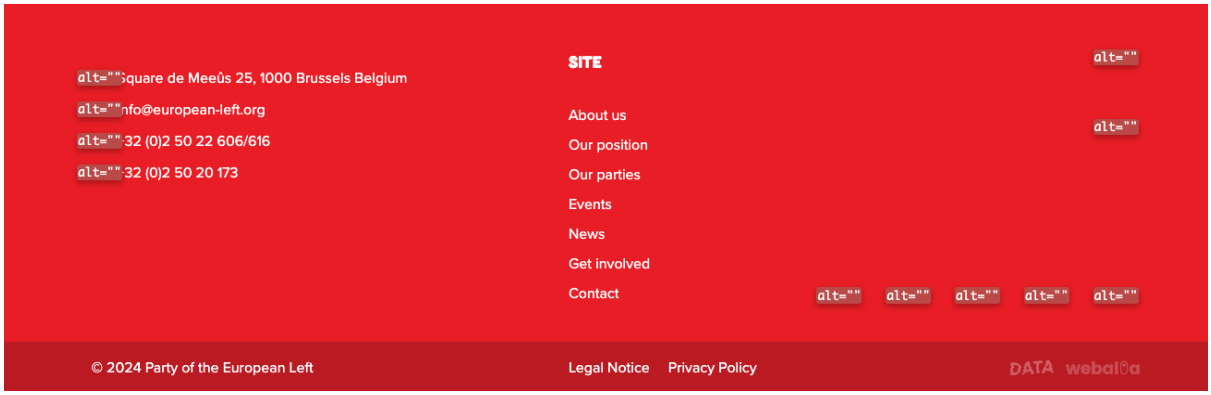


Figure 48: A screen capture of the European Lefts' footer with images disabled. All images are set as decorative and will be skipped by assistive technology, none of the logos are visible, there is no way to differentiate between the telephone and the fax number, and there is no way to differentiate between the social media icons.

Images in the documents are not tagged and are missing alternative texts.

Identity and Democracy Party (ID Party)

Some of the images in the main content lack alt attributes and are announced to the screen reader as "unlabelled image" instead of relevant information.

The chat function is missing alternative text and is presented to screen readers as "image". Interactive elements need descriptions for users of assistive technology to be able to use them.

Figure 49: A screen capture of an image and the chat function on ID Party's website.

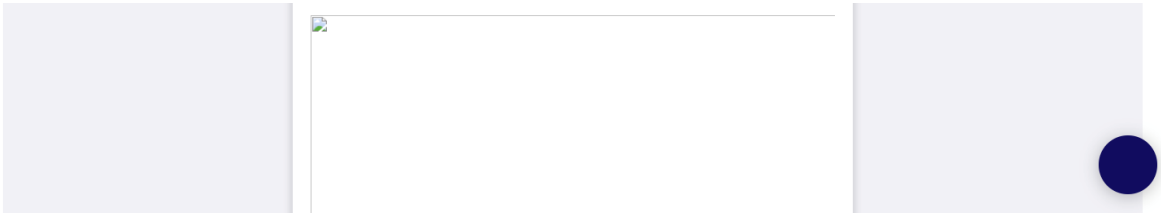


Figure 50: A screen capture of an image and the chat function on ID Party's website when images are disabled. No alternative texts are available.

Images in the documents are not tagged and are missing alternative texts.

Captions (pre-recorded) (9.1.2.2)

Captions for pre-recorded content are essential for ensuring accessibility to individuals who are hard of hearing, and also many deaf users – although deaf users may prefer sign language. Furthermore, captions are beneficial for non-native speakers and some users with cognitive impairments, or anyone in a noisy environment or who forgot their earphones and would like to see a video in a public space. Captions should cover spoken dialogue as well as other sounds that are essential to understand the content.

What we tested

- Synchronized captions are provided for non-live video.

Disclaimer:

- We did not assess the accuracy of the captions, focusing solely on their presence. The quality of captions is, of course, key.

The result

The spot check shows that all political parties tested are using autogenerated captions for pre-recorded content.

While this is a positive and important accessibility measure, it's crucial to recognise the limitations of auto-captioning technology.

Automatic captions are generated by machine learning algorithms, so the quality of the captions may vary. Technology providers are constantly improving speech recognition technology, but automatic captions might misrepresent the spoken content due to mispronunciations, accents, dialects, or background noise.

While autogenerated captions provide a baseline level of accessibility, political parties should strive for higher accuracy and reliability in their captioning efforts. It is therefore important to always review automatic captions and edit any parts that haven't been properly transcribed.

By prioritising accurate and reliable captions for pre-recorded content, political parties can enhance accessibility for all users.

Contrast (minimum) (9.1.4.3. and 10.1.4.3)

In order for text and other elements on websites to be readable, there needs to be enough visual contrast between the colour of the text or object and the background where the text or object is placed. Good enough contrasts are especially important for people with visual impairments, people who are elderly (from about 45 years of age) or anyone using a device in bright sunlight, but it can also cause uncertainties for users with cognitive impairments.

What we tested

- Text and images of text have a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1.
- Large text – at least 18 point (typically 24px) or 14 point (typically 18.66px) and bold – has a contrast ratio of at least 3:1.

The result

The spot checks show that all the tested EU political party websites fail this requirement on colour contrast. The contrast issues found are particularly important as they include essential elements such as main menus, headers, buttons, and contact forms.

The accessibility issues particularly affect users with the following impairments: **vision, cognition.**

Vision

Cognition

European People's Party (EPP)

EPP does not have enough contrast on important content like the main menu, the main header on the start page, and the contact form. Unfortunately, low contrast was found in several other places as well. There are also numerous examples of text written on top of visually distracting images.

The contrast of the main menu is also dependent on the shifting background of the video that continuously plays.

Figure 51: The contrast ratio of the menu text. The white menu text is on top of an image, and the contrast is taken from when the menu item is on top of a forehead; the contrast ratio is 1.52:1.

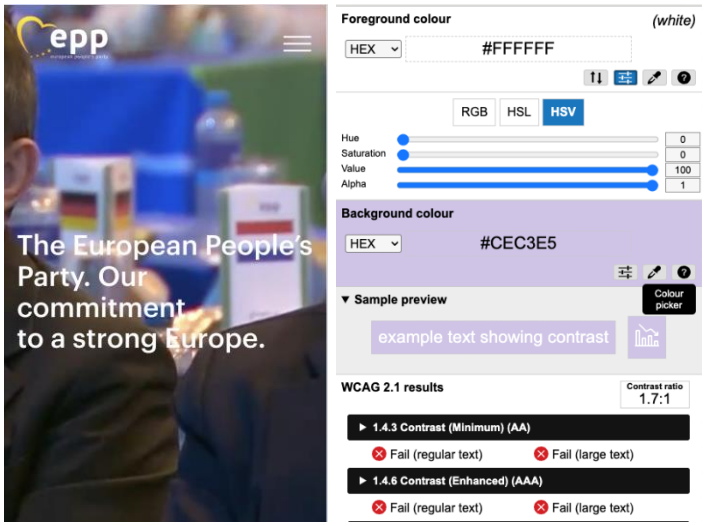


Figure 52: Screen capture from mobile that shows the shifting contrast that the main heading and "hamburger" menu have in mobile, and how hard it is to read the heading text. The contrast ratio is as low as 1.7:1.

The yellow “scroll” button and “back to top” button have too low contrasts.

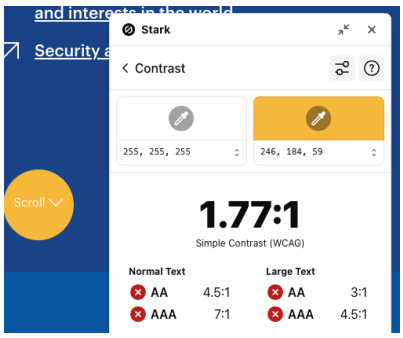


Figure 53: The contrast ratio of 1.77:1 on white text against a yellow background.

The input fields, the underline and the labels have too low contrast. While these objects are very hard to detect even for people with perfect eyesight, they are almost invisible to other users.

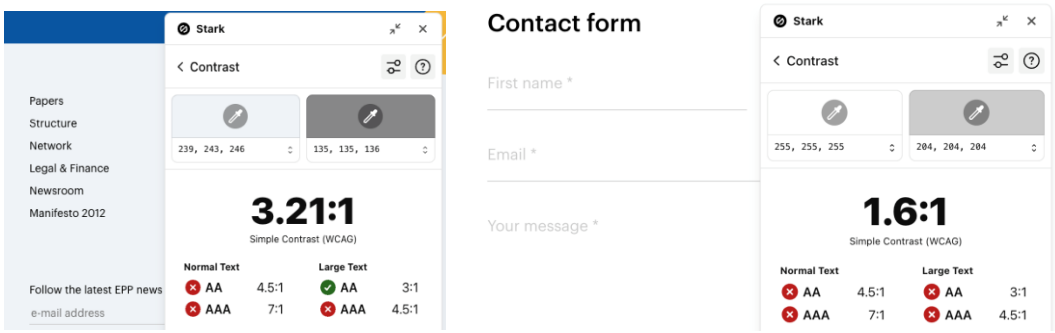


Figure 54: The contrast ratio on the label on the input field in the footer is 3.21:1 and the contrast ratio on the label on input fields in the contact page is 1.6:1; neither of these are approved.

In the documents there is also some bad contrast.

Figure 55: The contrast ratio on part of the text in one of the PDF documents is 2.2:1.

Party of European Socialists (PES)

PES does not have enough contrast on important content like the main menu or the main header on the start page. Low contrasts were found on several other places as well.

The contrast of the main menu also depends on the background in the video that is continuously playing.

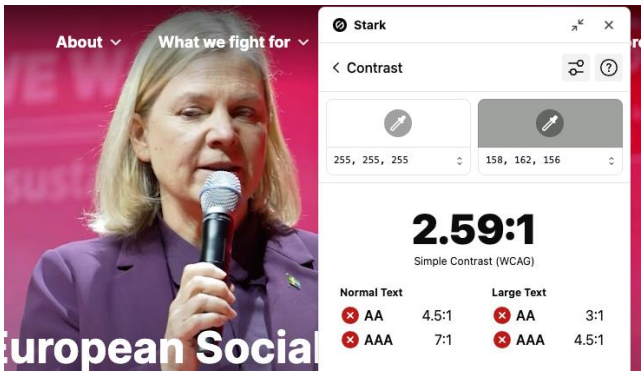


Figure 56: The contrast ratio of the menu text. The white menu text is on top of an image, and the contrast is taken from when the menu item is on top of a forehead; the contrast ratio is 2.59:1.

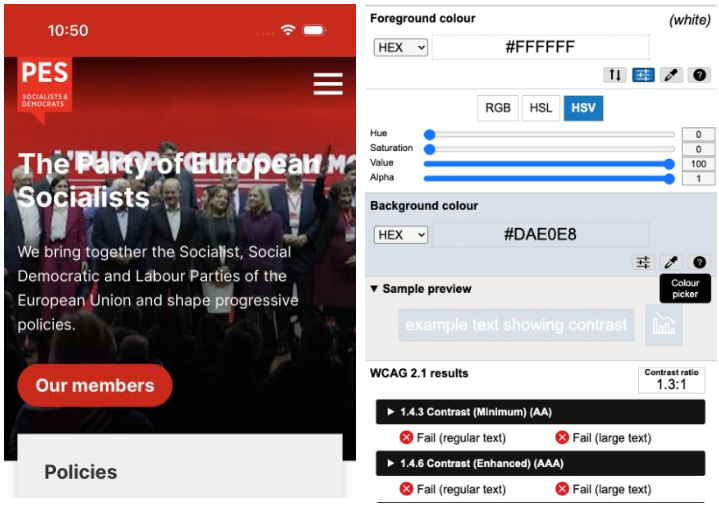


Figure 57: Screen capture from mobile that shows the shifting contrast the main heading and how hard it is to read the heading text. The contrast ratio is as low as 1.3:1.

The date on news articles has too low contrast. The light grey colour of the date makes it hard for users to read the text.

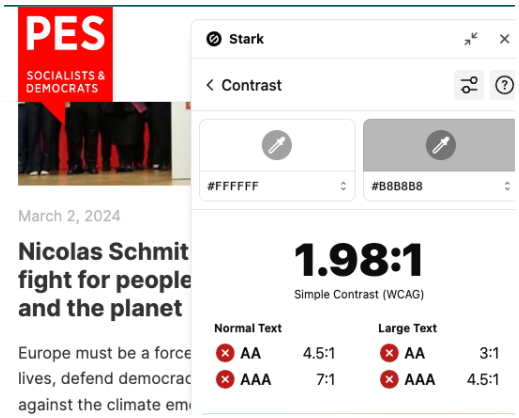


Figure 58: Shows the light grey date text on the news card has a contrast ratio of 1.98:1 and not approved for small text.

Light grey text on white background is often difficult. In this example, the light grey text is used both on a button and as text on light blue background. The result is very difficult to read for many users.

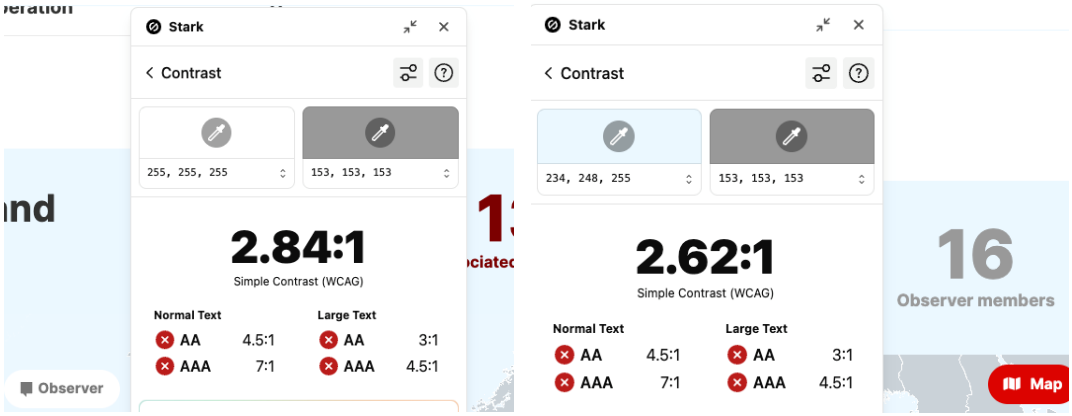


Figure 59: The light grey button text on the map has a contrast ratio of 2.84:1 and the light grey text on light blue background has a contrast ratio of 2.62:1.

On the page where PES explains what they stand for, the colours of the buttons change, and some of the colours have a very low contrast to the background.

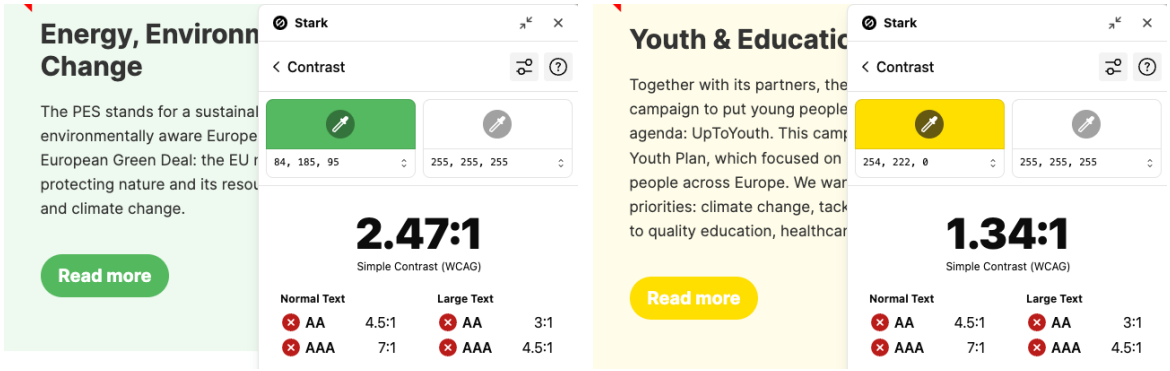


Figure 60: Two “read more” buttons: one has white text on a light green button and a contrast ratio of 2.47:1, the other has white text on a light-yellow background and a contrast ratio of 1.34:1.

PES's light grey breadcrumb has a too low contrast, and the low contrast of the input fields’ frame makes them almost invisible to some users.

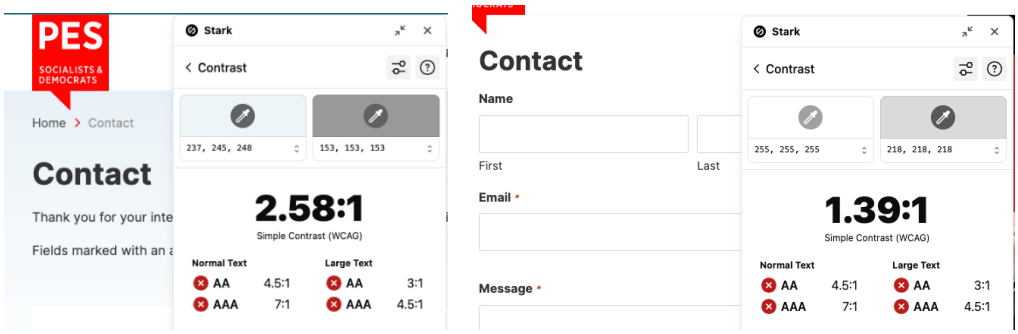


Figure 61: Two contrast failures on the contact page, one on the breadcrumb which is light grey on a light blue background with a contrast ratio of 2.58:1, and one of the borders of the input fields which has light grey border with a contrast of 1.39:1.

In the documents, insufficient contrast was found when text was written on images or on gradient backgrounds, but also when red was used on nearly white or white backgrounds.

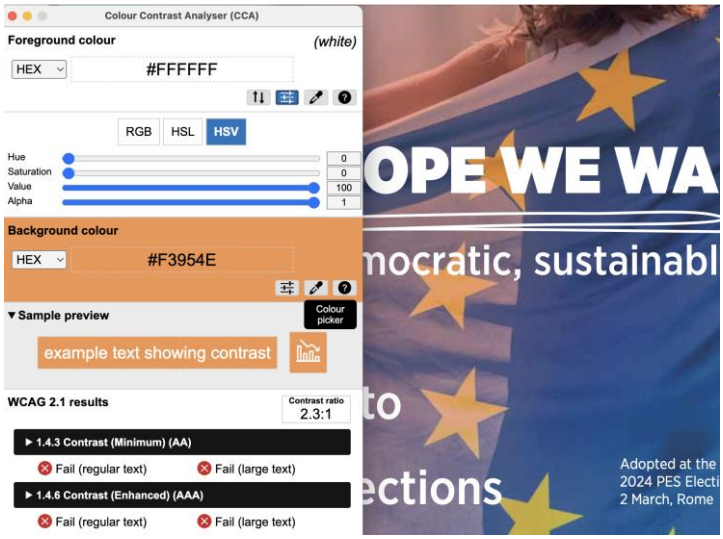


Figure 62: A PDF document with white text on top of an image, where parts of the text have a contrast ratio of 2.3:1 against the background.

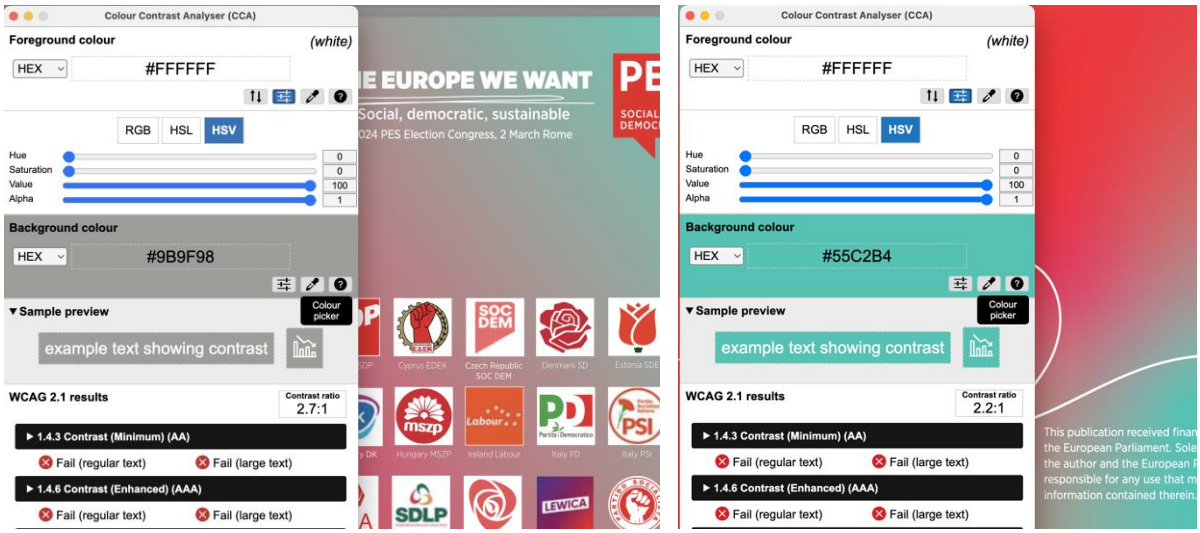


Figure 63: Two examples of a PDF document with white text on top of a gradient background where parts of the text have a contrast ratio as low as 2.2:1 against the background.

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party

The ALDE Party does not have enough contrast on important content like the main menu, the main header on the start page, and buttons. Low contrast was found in several other places as well. There are also numerous examples of text written on top of visually distracting images.

The contrast on the main menu and main heading are dependent on the background of the video that is continuously playing.

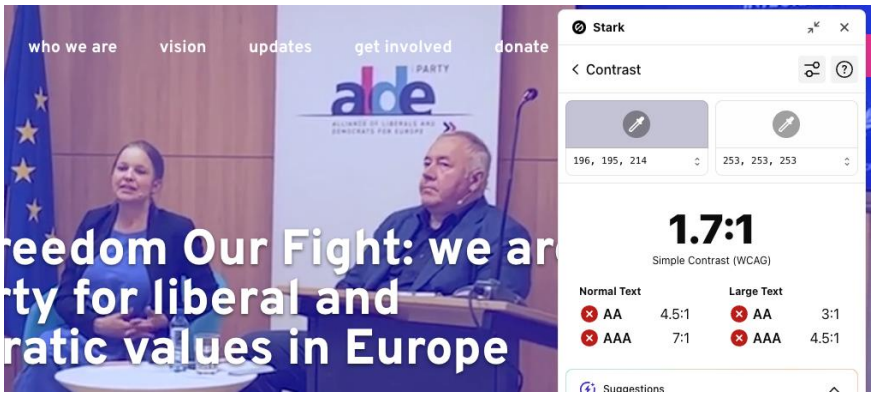


Figure 64: The contrast ratio of the menu text. The white menu text is on top of an image, and the contrast is taken from when the menu item is on top of a nearly white background; the contrast ratio is 1.7:1.

It gets even worse when the menu alternative is in focus – that makes the menu almost disappear into the background.

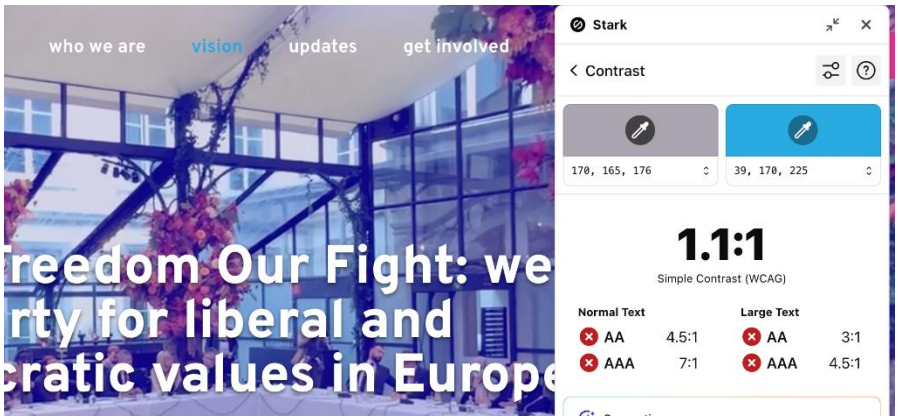


Figure 65: The contrast ratio of the active menu text. The light blue active menu text is on top of an image, and the contrast is taken from when the menu item is on top of a nearly white background. The contrast ratio is 1.1:1, making it hardly visible to all users.

Text written on top of visually distracting images makes it very difficult to read, not only because of the insufficient contrast.

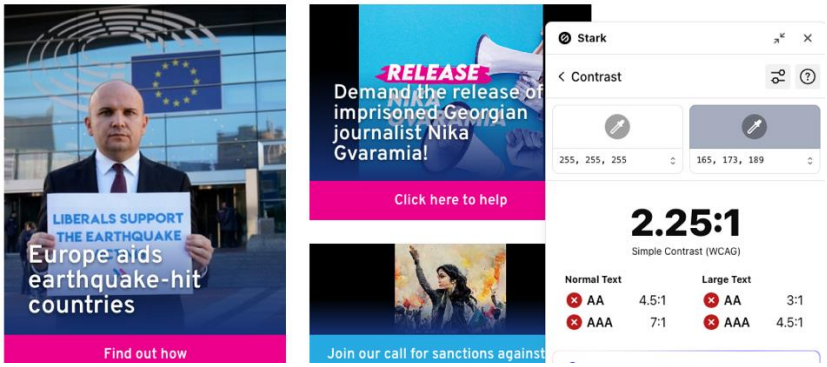


Figure 66: News card where white text is put on top of messy images. The contrast ratio is as low as 2.25:1.

Light grey buttons on light blue background are hardly visible.

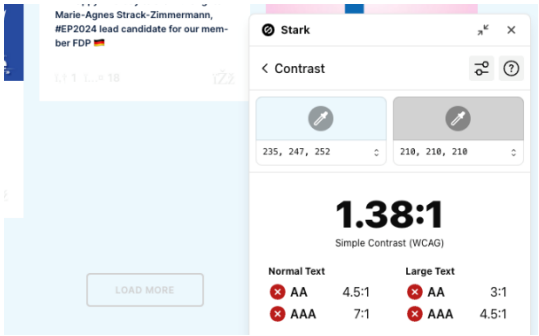


Figure 67: A light grey button on top of a light blue background; the contrast ratio is 1.38:1.

The form in the footer on the start pages is very hard to read. The contrast is bad to begin with, with white text on a pink background, but becomes even worse when the text is placed on an illustration of a light blue paper plane.

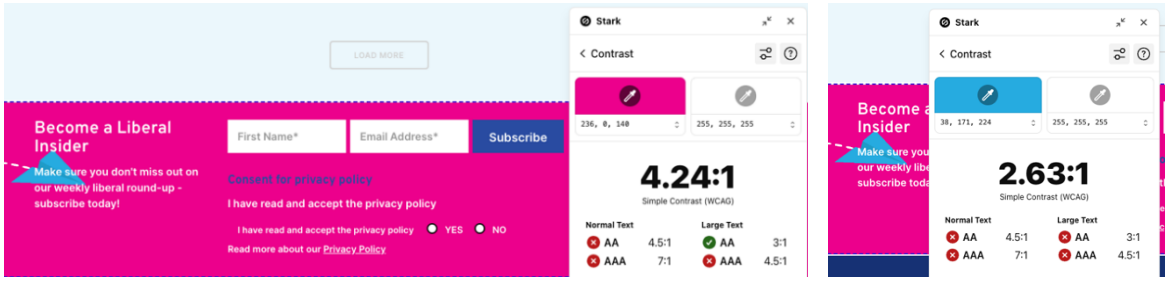


Figure 68: The white text on the pink background has a contrast ratio of 4.24:1 and the white text on top of the light blue paper plane has a contrast ratio of 2.63:1. Both are too low for text this small.

The heading “Consent for privacy policy” is hardly readable when purple is used on the pink background. The label for the input fields has too low contrast and will be very hard to read for some users.

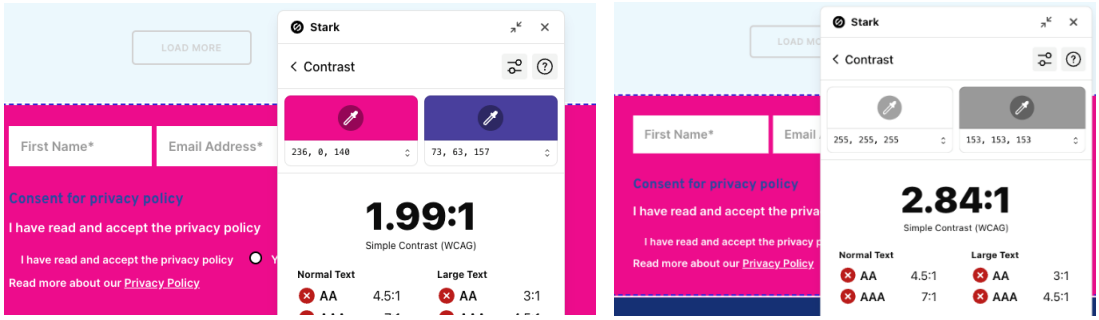


Figure 69: Same form. Here it shows the dark purple header text on top of the pink background with a contrast ratio of 1.99:1 and the light grey label text on white background with a contrast ratio of 2.84:1.

In the footer, a blue text colour is used on a blue background. This makes it very hard to read.

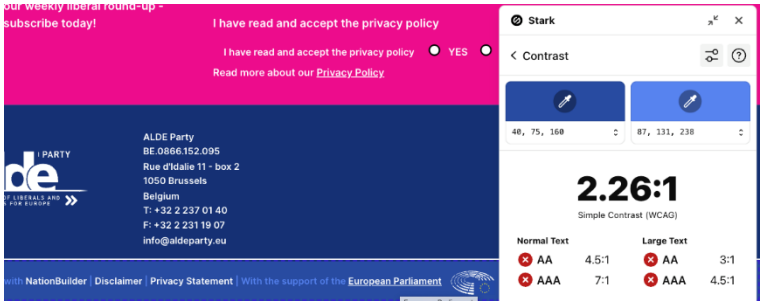


Figure 70: In the footer there is blue text on a blue background which has a contrast ratio of 2.26:1.

When filling out forms, a pop up appears, with very low contrast on the text. Even more importantly, the contrast is very low on the close button, making it hardly noticeable for users.

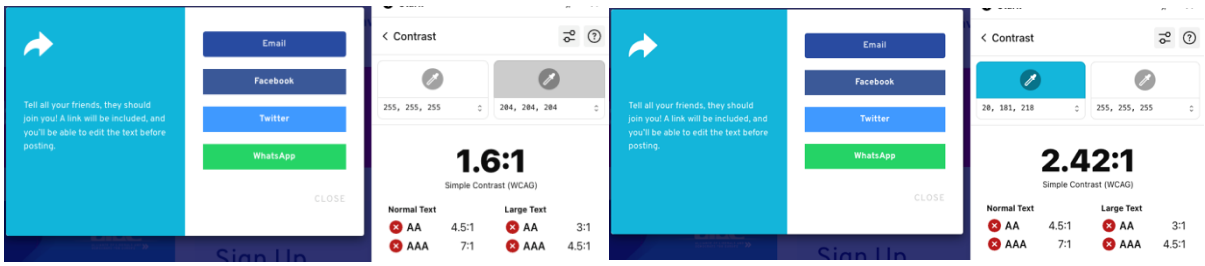


Figure 71: The light grey text on the close button against the white background has a contrast ratio of 1.6:1 and the white text against the light blue background has a contrast ratio of 2.42:1.

On the Vision page, the tags are hardly readable, with white text on a light-blue background. Unfortunately, the buttons to download the papers have a light-blue icon on a light blue background, which makes the element very hard to see.

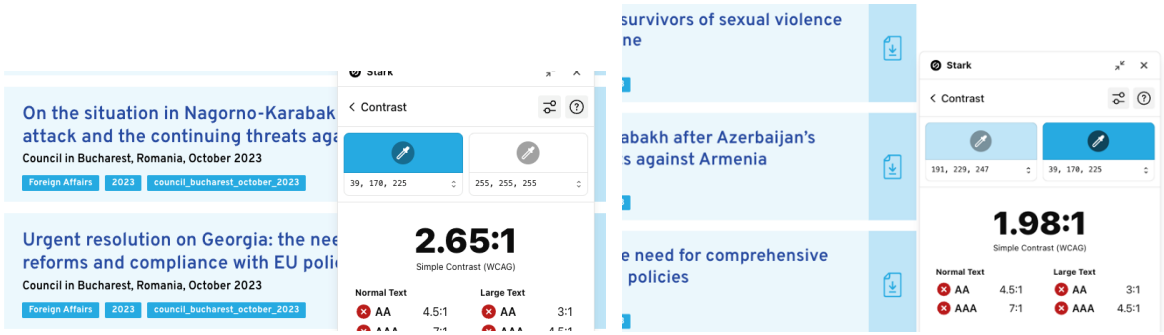


Figure 72: On the publication page there are tags with white text on light blue background with a contrast ratio of 2.65:1. There is also a “download document” icon button where the light blue icon on a light blue background has a contrast ratio of 1.98:1.

The documents have too low contrast at several places: blue on blue, white on light blue and pink on various blue nuances, but also pink and white in small text. Here are some examples of too low contrast in the documents.

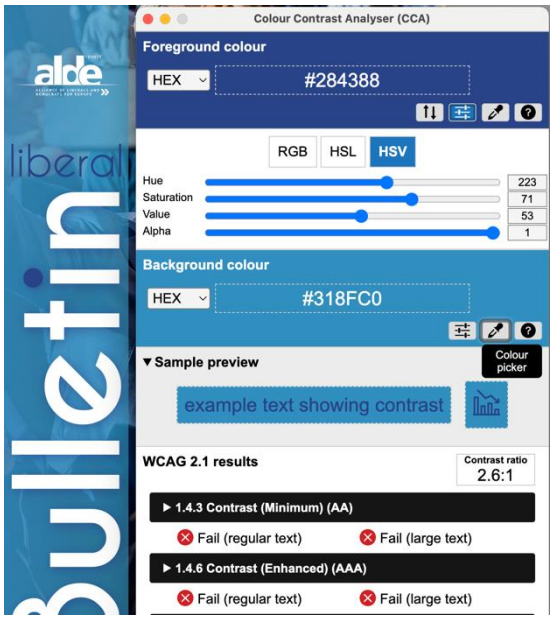


Figure 73: Blue text on a light blue background in a PDF document has a contrast ratio of 2.6:1.

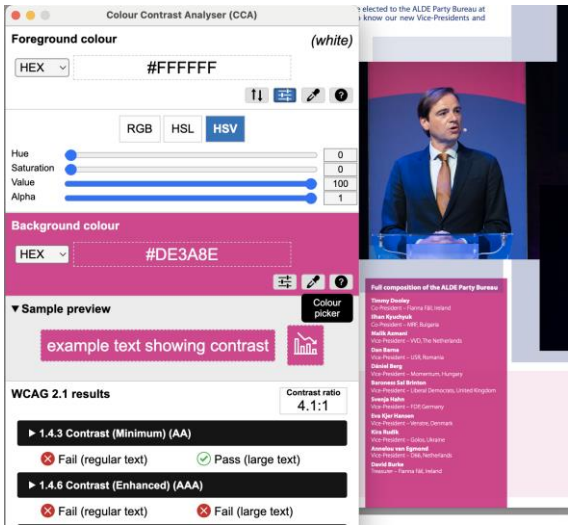


Figure 74: Examples of small white text on a pink background in a PDF document that has a contrast ratio of 4.1:1, and small white text on a light blue background that has a contrast ratio of 3:1. None of these have enough contrast for small texts.

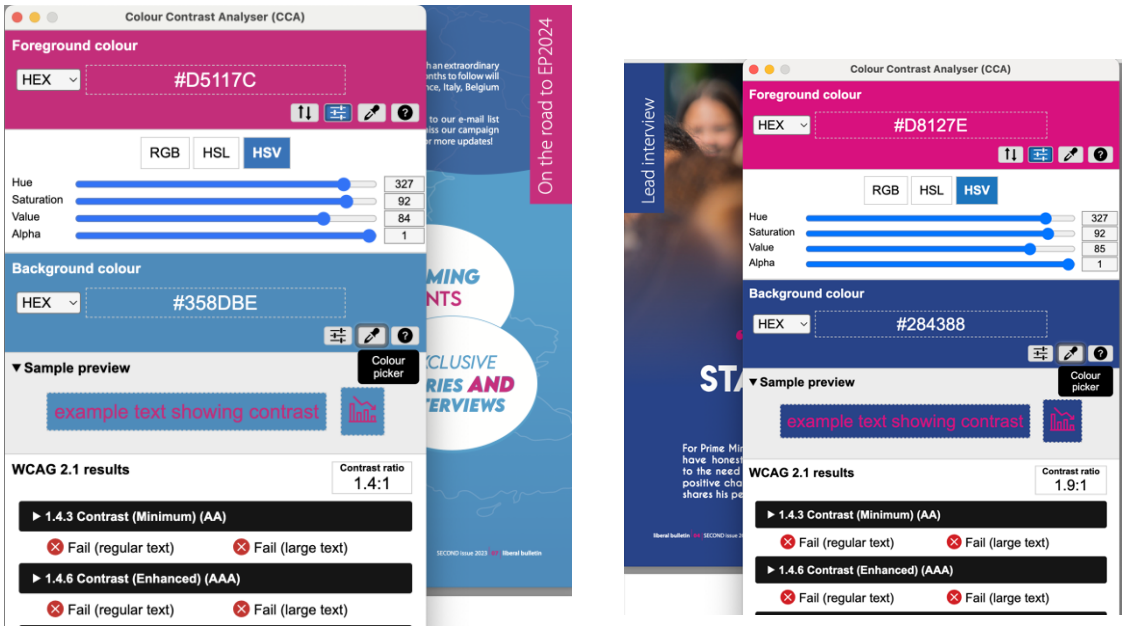


Figure 75: Example of the pink page number in PDF files on different blue backgrounds. On a light blue background, the contrast ratio is 1.4:1, and on a dark blue/purple background the contrast ratio is 1.9:1.

European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Party

The ECR Party does not have enough contrast on important content like the headings for their vision, buttons, and the contact form, just to mention a few.

The low contrast of the light blue buttons makes them hard for many users to read and interact with.

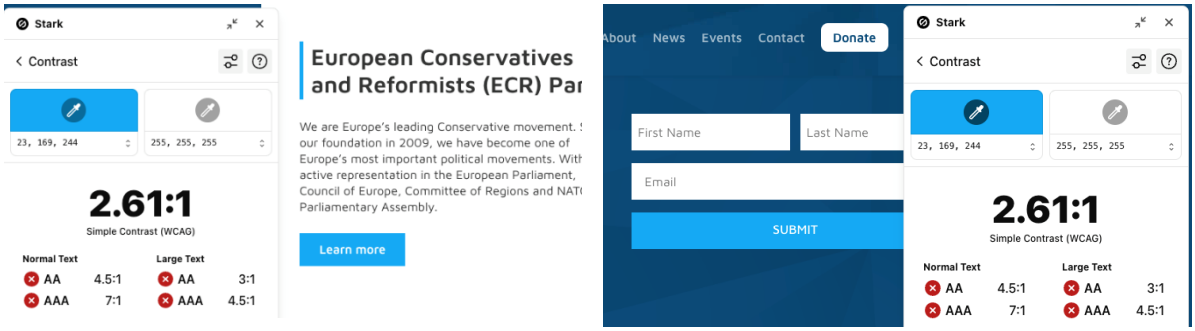


Figure 76: The contrast ratio of white text on light blue is 2.61:1, which is not approved.

The heading on the ECR Party's beliefs has extremely bad contrast and will be unreadable for some users.

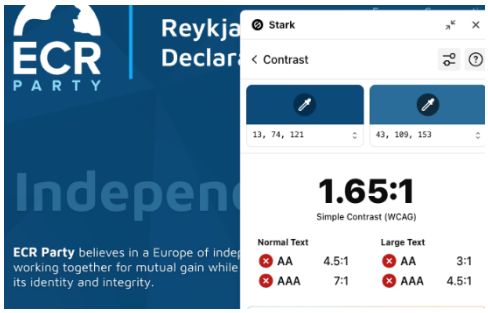


Figure 77: The contrast ratio of the dark blue heading against the dark blue background is 1.65:1, which is not approved.

Light grey text on the paragraph text makes it hard for users to read the text.

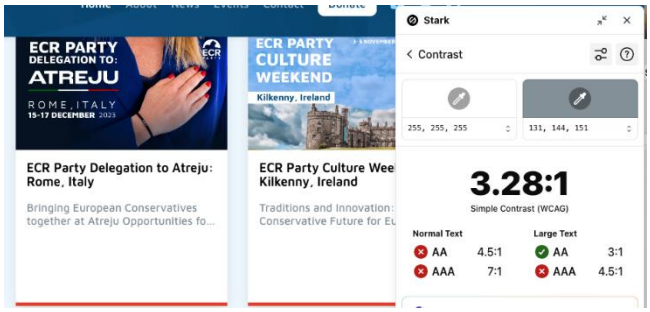


Figure 78: Light grey paragraph text on the news card has a contrast ratio of 3.28:1 and is not approved for small text.

White text on a yellow background and white text on a shifting background makes text very difficult to read.

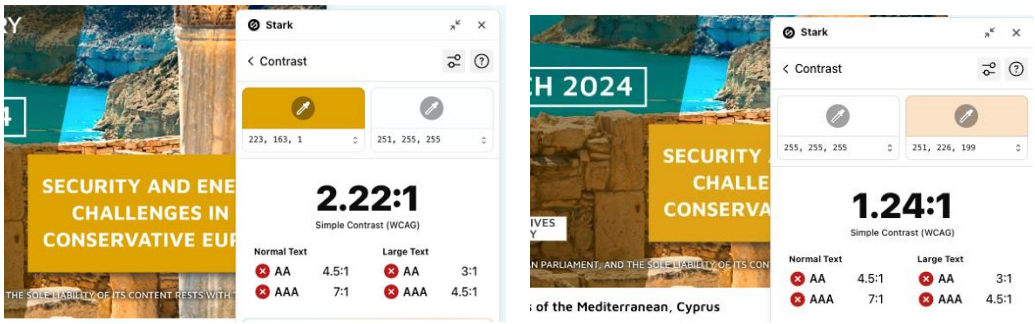


Figure 79: White text on a yellow background has a contrast ratio of 2.22:1 and small white text on a light messy background has a contrast ratio of 1.24:1.

The input fields' frame and label have too low contrast, which make these fields difficult for many and almost invisible to some users.

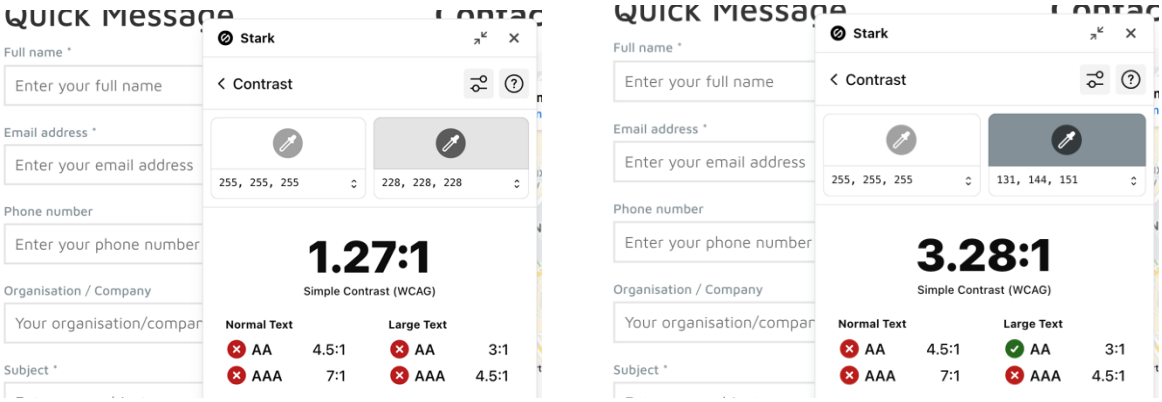


Figure 80: The border around the input fields has a contrast ratio of 1.27:1 and the label has a contrast ratio of 3.28:1. Neither of these has enough contrast.

European Greens

The European Greens do not have enough contrast on important content like buttons and links. Low contrast was found in several places.

The white text on light green background does not have enough contrast.

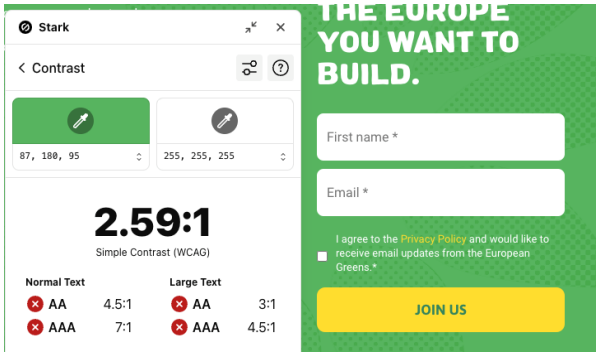


Figure 81: Example of white text on light green background. This has a contrast ratio of 2.59:1.

Yellow text on the light green background is hardly noticeable, for instance with the yellow link on light green background.

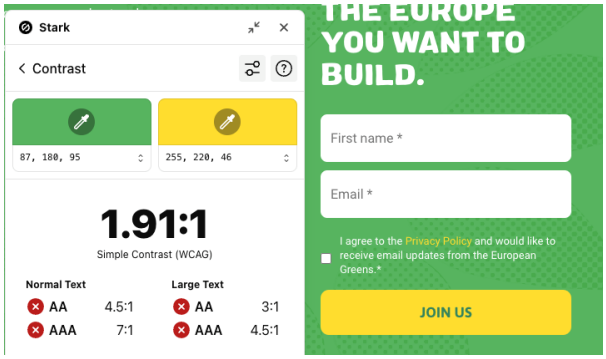


Figure 82: Example of yellow link text on light green background. This has a contrast ratio of 1.91:1.

White text on pink background is hard enough for readability, but the light green colour indicating the link on pink background **may be one of the worst contrasts we have ever measured.**

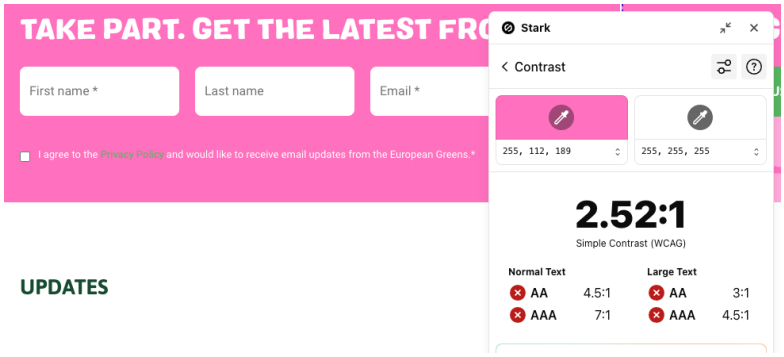


Figure 83: Example of white text on pink background. This has a contrast ratio of 2.52:1.

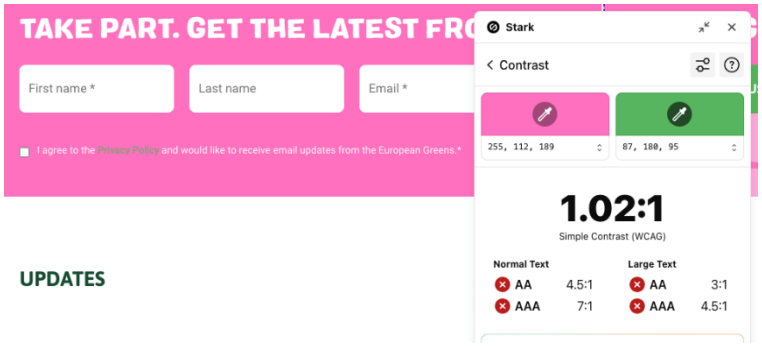


Figure 84: Example of light green link text on pink background. This has a contrast ratio of 1.02:1; this is barely visible for any user of any kind, and also the lowest contrast we have ever encountered.

Green text on light green background does not make enough contrast.

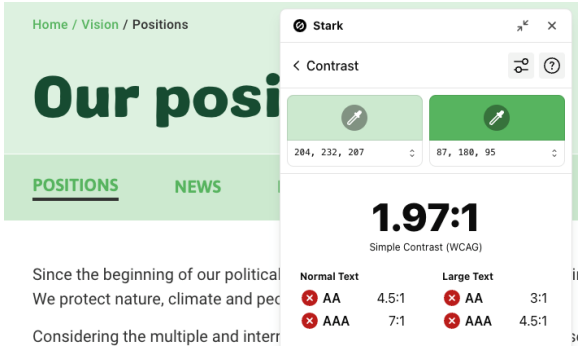


Figure 85: On subpages, light green text is used on a light green background. This has as low a contrast as 1.97:1.

In the input fields on the contact page, both the frame and label have too low contrast. This low contrast makes these fields almost invisible to some users.

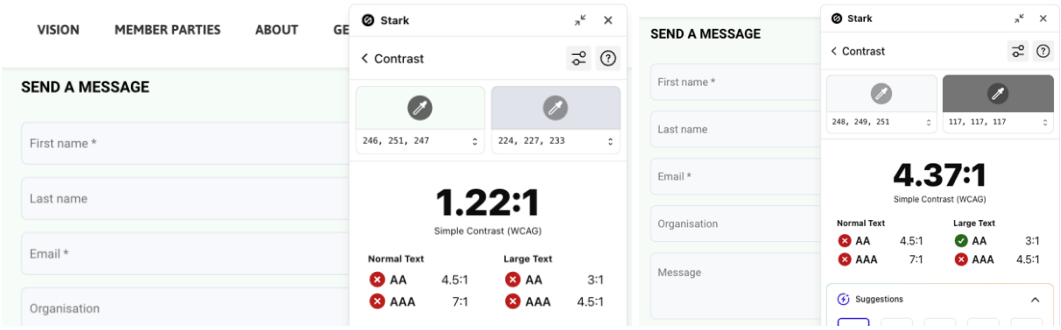


Figure 86: The labels on the input fields are grey on a light grey background. This has a contrast ratio of 4.37:1. Also, the input field light grey border on a light green background has too low contrast, at a ratio of 1.22:1.

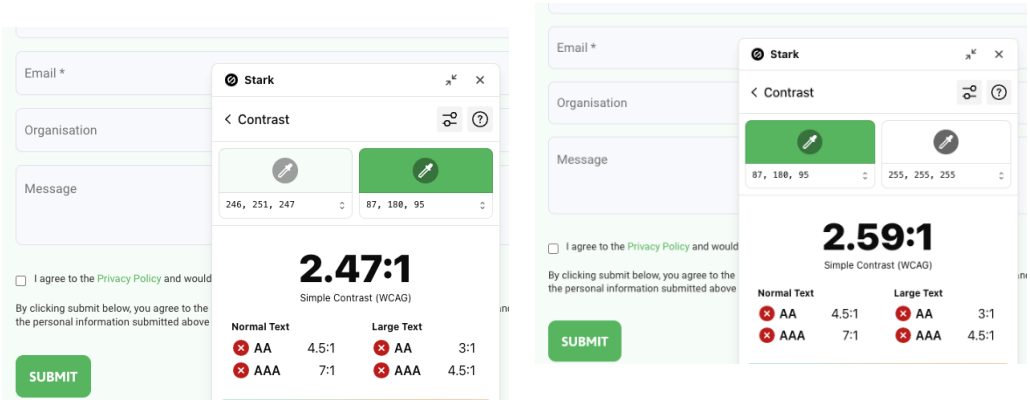


Figure 87: The light green link on the light green background has too low contrast, with a contrast ratio of 2.47:1. Also the white text on the light green submit button has too low contrast, with a ratio of 2.59:1.

When sending in the form, an almost invisible text is shown using white text on an almost white background. This has almost no contrast at all, and most users will not see this text.

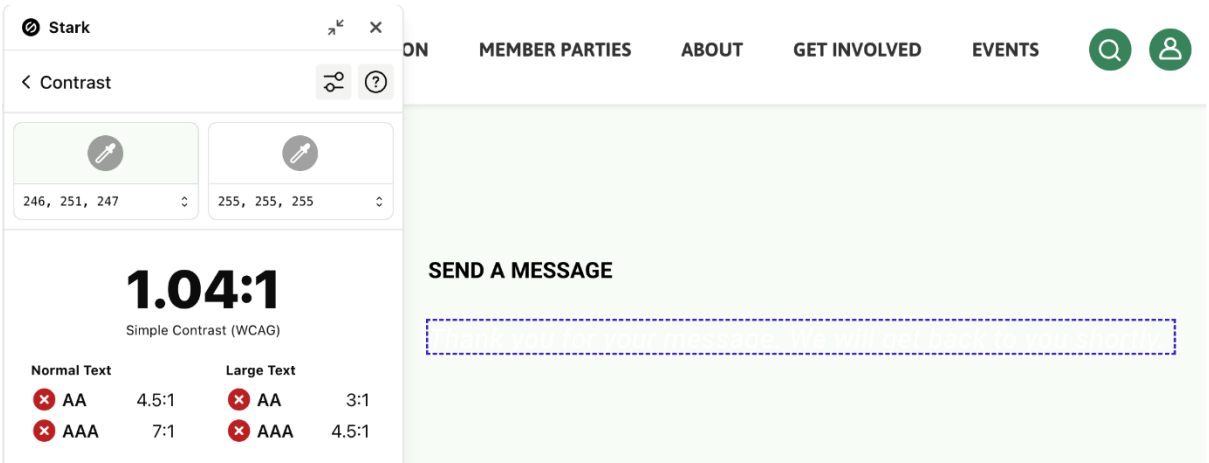


Figure 88: After sending in a contact form a success message is shown. It is in white text on a nearly white background. This has a contrast ratio of 1.04:1, which is so low that most users will never be able to see or read this text.

In the documents there are also some contrast issues.

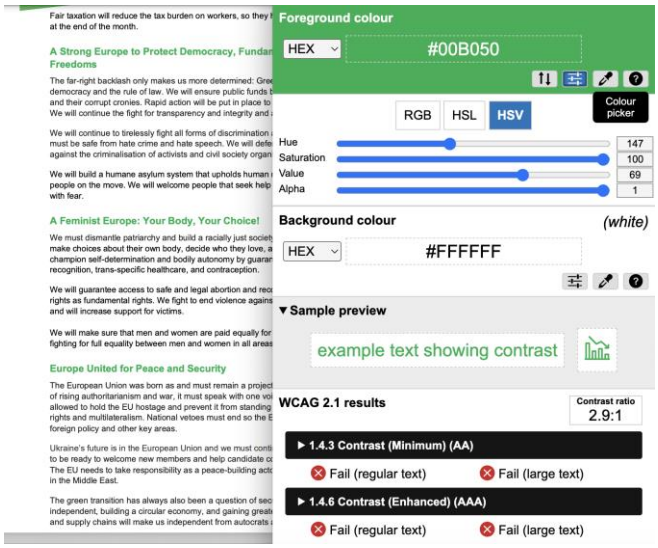


Figure 89: A light green header is used in PDF documents; the header has a contrast ratio to the white background of 2.9:1.

European Left

The European Left does not have enough contrast on important content like links and dates.

The red colour used together with white has almost enough contrast, but for many partially sighted people the combination of red and white is hard to see unless the text is bold and very large.

Figure 90: Example of red text on a white background found on the founding manifesto page. The contrast ratio is 4.49:1.

Some of the colours chosen for the areas the European Left is working in do not have enough contrast. Light purple, light blue, and yellow need to be darker so that their contrast is better against the white background.

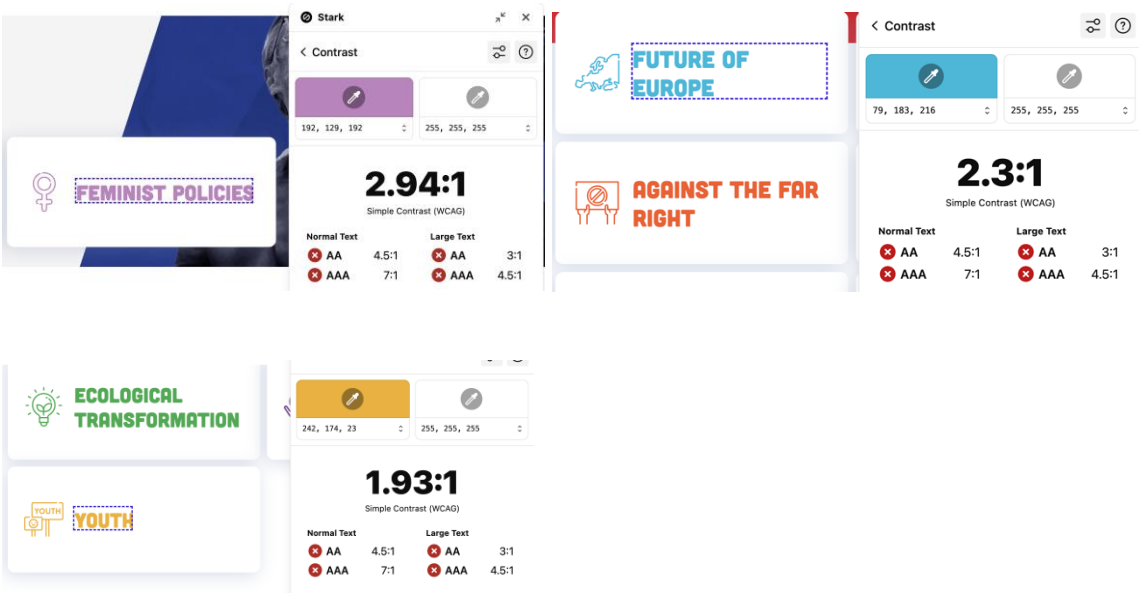


Figure 91: Three screen captures of link cards where light colours have too low contrast against a white background: light purple with a contrast ratio of 2.94:1, light blue with a contrast ratio of 2.3:1 and yellow with a contrast ratio of 1.93:1.

The light grey text on white background or vice versa has very low contrast, almost invisible to some users.

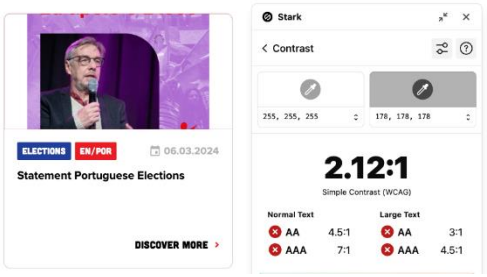


Figure 92: The light grey date text on the news card has a contrast ratio of 2.12:1 and is not approved for small text.

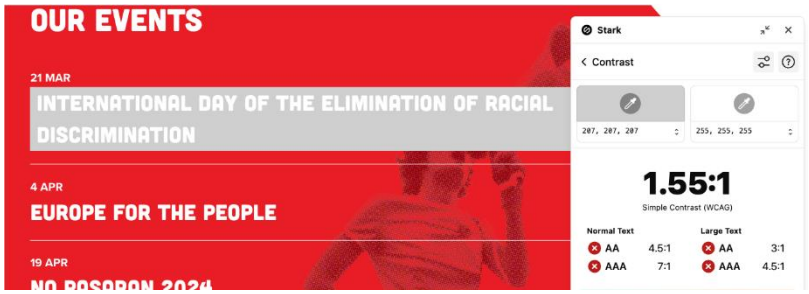


Figure 93: A highlighted event that has white heading text on a light grey background, with a contrast ratio of 1.55:1.

Identity and Democracy Party (ID Party)

The form fields' outline and underline do not have sufficient contrast.

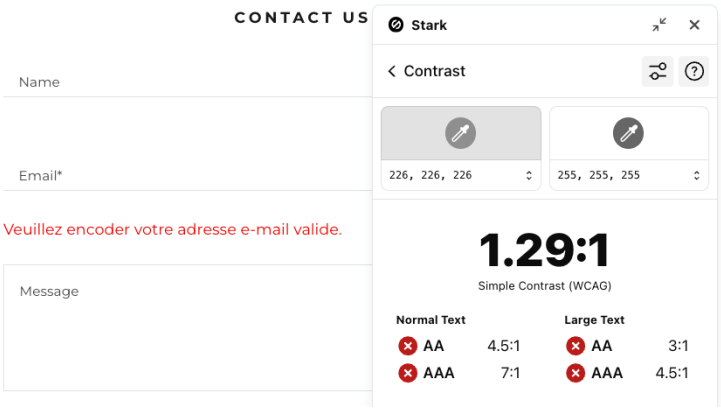


Figure 94: The border around and the underline below the input fields have a contrast ratio of 1.29:1; it is not enough contrast.

Keyboard (9.2.1.1)

For users of assistive technology for input, keyboard accessibility is essential. Done right, keyboard accessibility means that users can reach and interact with everything on the screen while only using the keyboard. This is especially important for users with motor impairments and blind users, but highly useful for many.

What we tested

- If it is possible to reach all clickable objects using only the keyboard.

The result

The spot checks show problems with keyboard access on half of the tested EU political party websites.

The accessibility issues found particularly affect users with the following impairments: **vision, motor.**

Vision

Motor

European People's Party (EPP)

On EPP's website, keyboard navigation is not possible to reach the submenu under "Who we are" and "What we stand for". The "Subscribe" button in the footer is also not possible to reach using the keyboard or a screen reader.

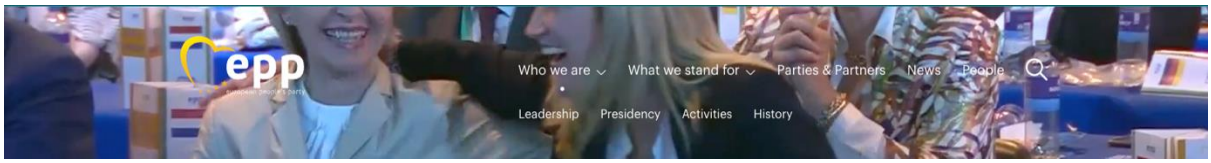


Figure 95: Screen capture that shows the expanded menu alternatives in the header. The menu isn't possible to expand using only the keyboard.

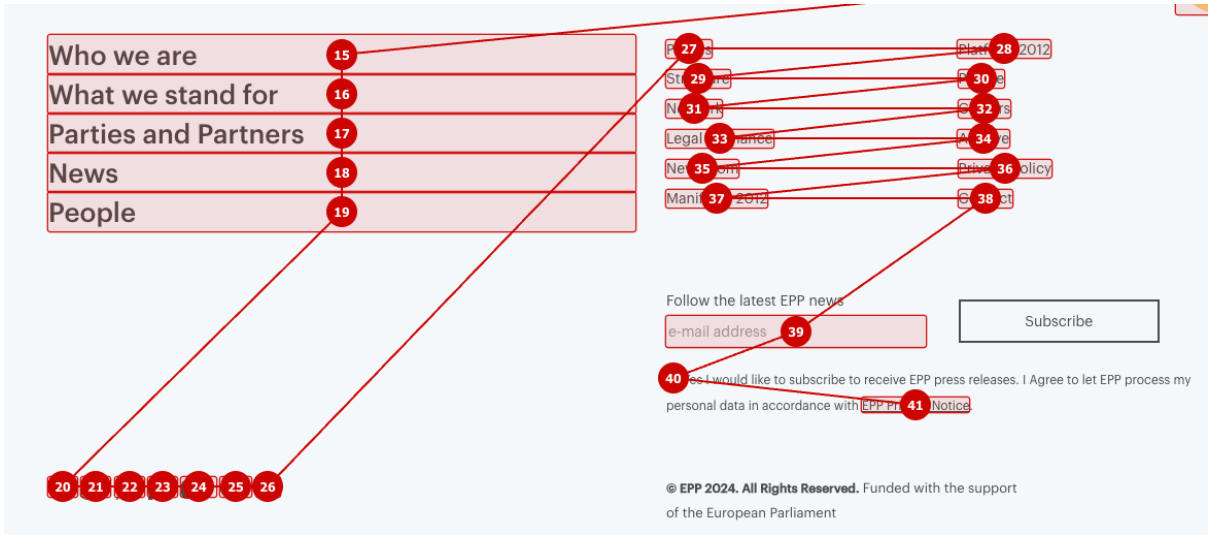


Figure 96: A screen capture of the footer, showing the tab order. The subscribe button is excluded from the tab order.

On mobile, the menu is not accessible via any assistive technology.

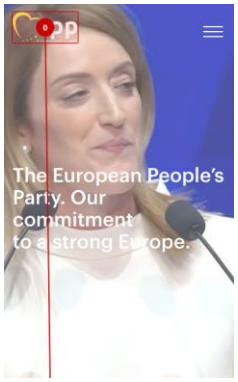


Figure 97: A screen capture from a mobile layout, showing the tab order, the "hamburger" menu is skipped in the tab order, meaning it is not accessible to some assistive technology.

Party of European Socialists (PES)

On mobile, the menu opens visually, but the menu items are not reachable for assistive technology. Furthermore, the "hamburger" menu icon changes name on each page, which makes it impossible to interact with for users of assistive technology.

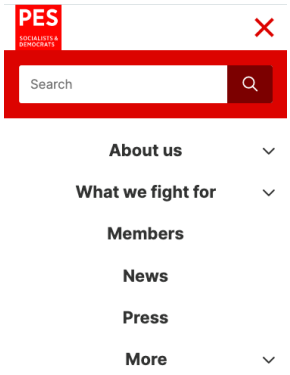


Figure 98: A screen capture from a mobile layout. The menu is open, focus is placed on the content under the menu and not on the open menu.

European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Party

On mobile, the menu is technically possible to open with assistive technology, but the menu is not properly named and therefore extremely difficult to interact with.

Figure 99: A screen capture from a mobile layout showing the tab order. The "hamburger" menu is skipped in the tab order, meaning it is not accessible to some assistive technology.

European Greens

On the European Greens' website, keyboard navigation is not possible to reach "Vision", "About" or "Get involved", including their submenus. It is also not possible to reach the search function using only the keyboard.

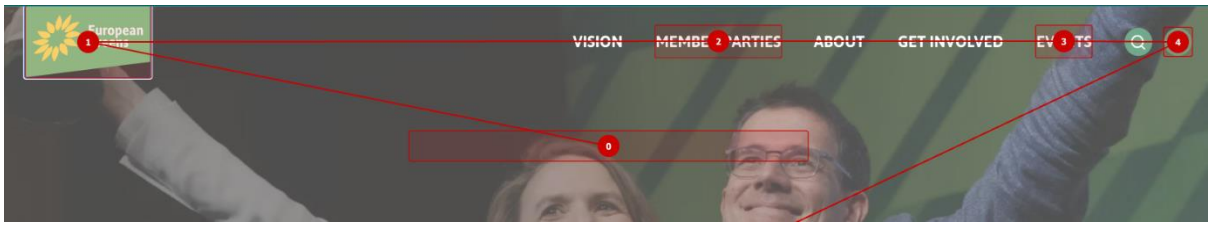


Figure 100: A screen capture of the header showing the tab order. All the menu items with submenus are excluded from the tab order.

On mobile, the “hamburger” menu is correctly announced and possible to open. However, the menu items are not possible to interact with using assistive technology.

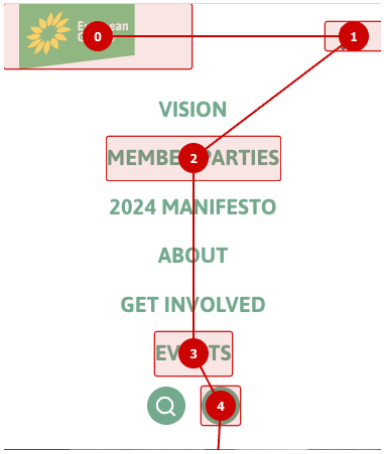


Figure 101: A screen capture from a mobile layout showing the tab order. Several menu items are skipped in the tab order, as is the search function, meaning these are not accessible by assistive technology.

European Left

On the website of the European Left, it isn’t possible to reach the search function using only the keyboard.

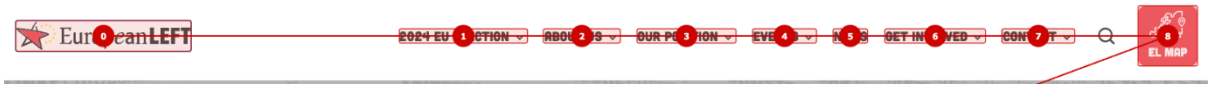


Figure 102: A screen capture of the header showing the tab order. The search function is excluded from the tab order.

On mobile, the menu is not accessible via any assistive technology.

Figure 103: Screen capture showing the tab order in mobile. The "hamburger" menu is skipped in the tab order, meaning it is not accessible by assistive technology.

Identity and Democracy Party (ID Party)

The “expand more” button with the French name “+ Afficher plus” is not accessible using keyboard navigation. The chat function is not accessible to keyboard users, screen readers or users who navigate with voice commands. To screen readers, the icon is announced as “image”.

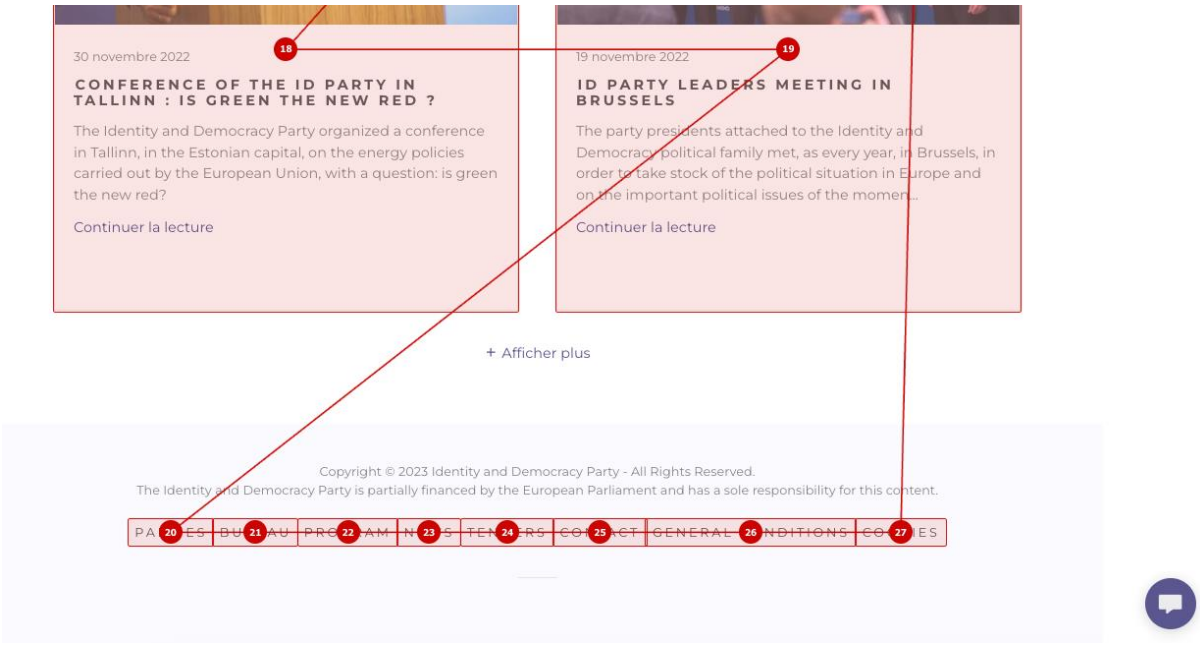


Figure 104: A screen capture of a part of the start page, showing the tab order. The “+ Afficher plus”- link and the chat FAB (Floating Action Button) is not included in the tab order and therefore not accessible via keyboard.

Focus Visible (9.2.4.7)

For sighted keyboard users, it is, of course, vital to understand where they are on the screen, just as a mouse user would look for the mouse pointer. The visible focus is usually an outline, frame or colour change around a button or link when it receives focus. For blind keyboard users, the navigation is provided via audio or Braille.

What we tested

- There is a visible indicator for page elements when they receive keyboard focus.

The result

The spot checks show significant deficiencies in the handling of keyboard focus on half of the tested EU political party websites. In two websites, the **built-in focus elements are actively removed**. In one website, the focus is customised in such a way that it is almost not visible anymore. This is an active choice of exclusion, as major browsers like Chrome, Safari, Firefox, Edge, etc. provide a basic visible focus as standard. This built-in focus is not always good enough, but removing it indicates severe unawareness of accessibility requirements.

The accessibility issues found particularly affect users with the following impairments: **vision, speech, motor, cognition.**

European People's Party (EPP)

EPP has actively removed the focus on all elements on its website. No focus is visible at all on EPP's website.

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party

The ALDE Party has created a custom focus that is incredibly hard to see. Sometimes it is just a small colour change that is hardly noticeable and sometimes the focus is actively removed and not visible at all.

The menu alternative goes from white to light blue when it has focus.

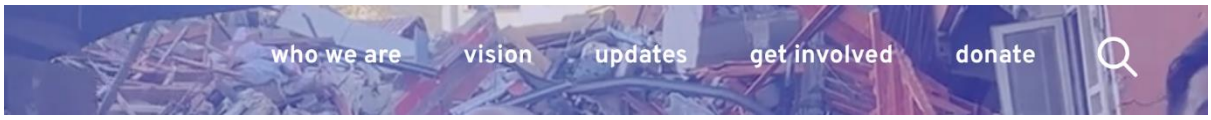


Figure 105: A screen capture of the header showing the white menu items without focus.

Figure 106: A screen capture of the header; the second menu item in the header has focus and it is now light blue instead of white.

The black text has focus, the blue doesn't. This change is so subtle that it is very hard to detect.

Figure 107: A screen capture of the news cards. One has a black heading, and one has a dark blue heading. The black heading is the one with focus.

European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Party

The ECR Party has actively removed the focus on all elements on its website. No focus is visible at all on the ECR Party's website.

Pause, Stop, Hide (9.2.2.2)

"Pause, stop, hide" is a requirement that enables users to control moving or blinking content like videos, audio or carousels on websites, preventing distractions that may affect their ability to concentrate, read, navigate, etc.

What we tested

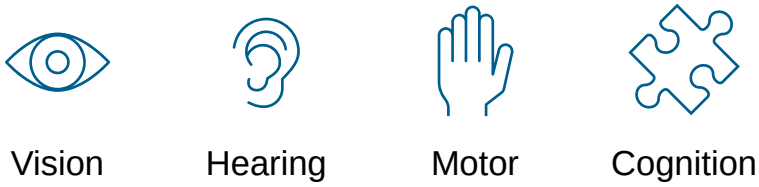
- If there is any "moving, blinking and scrolling" content, i.e. if the visible content conveys a sense of motion. Common examples include motion pictures, synchronised media presentation and animations.
- If there is any "Auto-updating" content, i.e. if content updates or disappears based on a preset time interval. Common time-based content includes audio, automatically updated weather information, news, stock price updates, and auto-advancing presentations and messages.

The result

The spot check shows significant deficiencies in the handling of content that continuously changes without any means for the user to turn it off or pause it, across

all the tested EU political party websites. There are examples of videos, slideshows, text and illustrations that continuously update and change, without any possibility for the user to pause or stop the movement.

The accessibility issues found particularly affect users with the following impairments: **vision, hearing, motor, cognition.**



European People's Party (EPP)

The EPP website has a constantly playing video in the large banner in the top of the start page. The users cannot pause the video. To make things worse, the main menu is placed on top of the video, making the text extremely hard to read.

Figure 108: A screen capture of the top part of the start page. A large moving video is continuously playing with no function to pause it.

Further down on the start page, there is a continuously moving illustration.

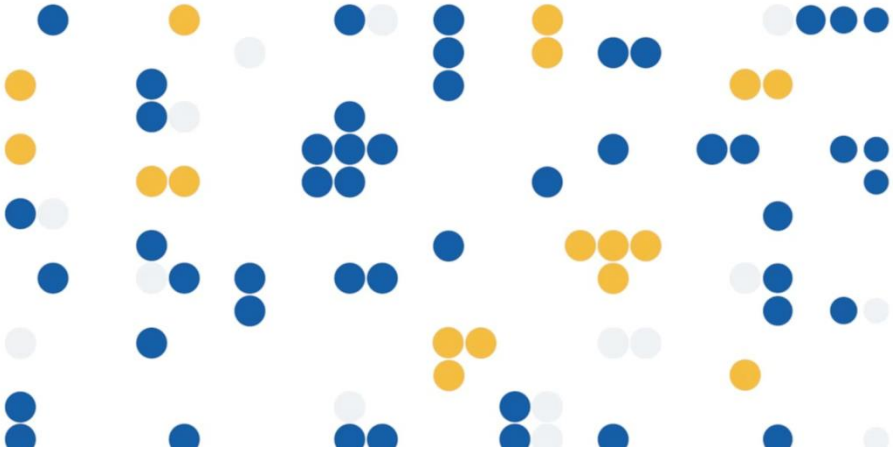


Figure 109: A screen capture of another part of the start page. A large moving illustration is continuously changing, and there is no function to pause it.

On the commitment page, there are several continuously moving illustrations; for example, this one:

Figure 110: A screen capture of one of the illustrations on the commitment page. A moving illustration is continuously changing, and there is no function to pause it.

Party of European Socialists (PES)

The PES website has a constantly playing video in the large banner in the top of the top of the start page. Most users cannot pause the video. To make things worse, the main menu is placed on top of the video, so it is very difficult to read the text.

An interesting finding is that the video has been made possible to pause for screen reader users – but only for them. Navigating with mouse or touch makes it impossible to reach the controls necessary to pause, and when navigating using a keyboard, the controls are hidden under the blocks. They only appear for screen reader users.

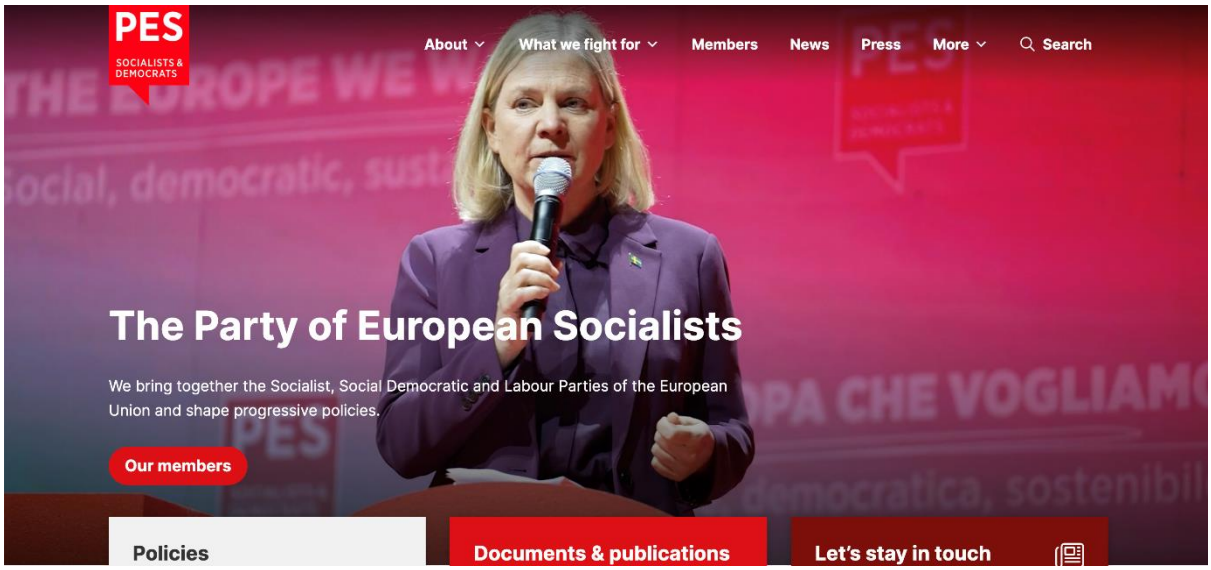


Figure 111: A screen capture of the top part of the start page. A large moving video is continuously playing, with no function to pause it.

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party

The ALDE Party website has a constantly playing video in the large banner in the top of the top of the start page. Most users cannot pause the video. To make things worse, the main menu is placed on top of the video, so it is very hard to read the text.

Figure 112: A screen capture of the top part of the start page. A large moving video is continuously playing, with no function to pause it.

European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Party

The ECR Party website has a video on the start page that does have a pause function, which is good. However, further down on the start page, there is auto-updating content in form of a carousel that is continuously changing heading, text and images. There, there is no way to pause, stop of hide the moving content.

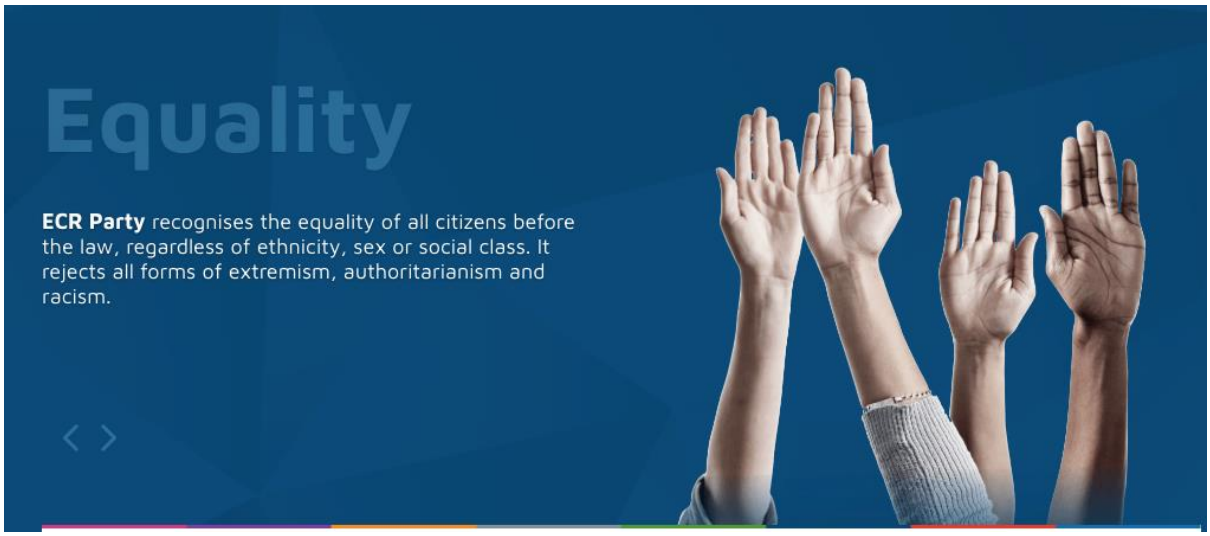


Figure 113: A screen capture of the carousel on the start page. It is continuously playing, and there is no function to pause it.

European Greens

The website of the European Greens has auto-updating words in the prominent first heading, “Building power for [auto updating word(s)] future” that isn’t possible to pause.

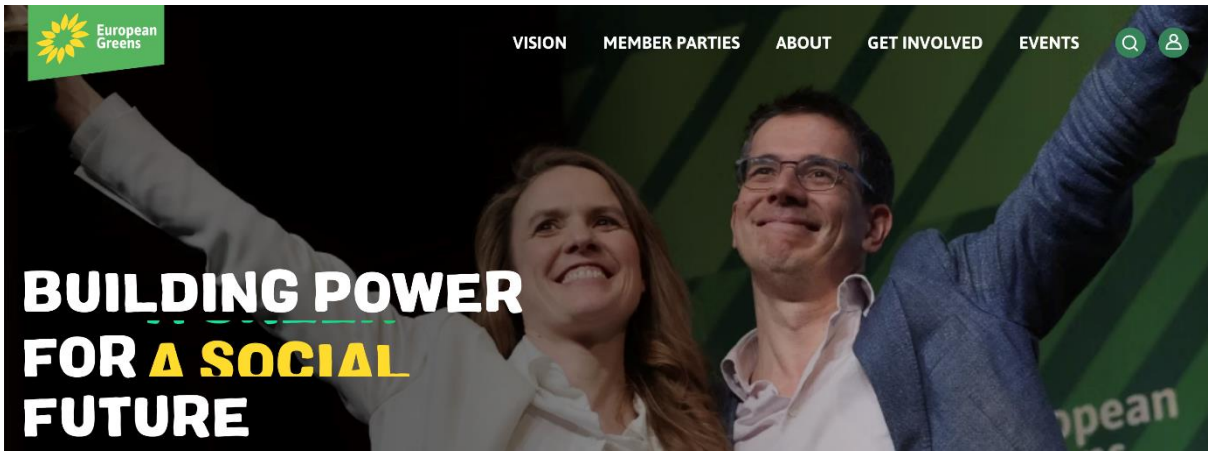


Figure 114: A screen capture of the top part of the start page. Words in the main header are continuously changing, and there is no function to pause them.

European Left

The website of the European Left has an auto-updating carousel that is continuously changing the text and buttons. Both text and buttons are displayed and disappear, and the position of the button changes. The carousel isn’t possible to pause. This becomes even harder if the user has zoomed in, as it is easy to miss content and hard for even a fast reader to have time to receive and interact with the content.

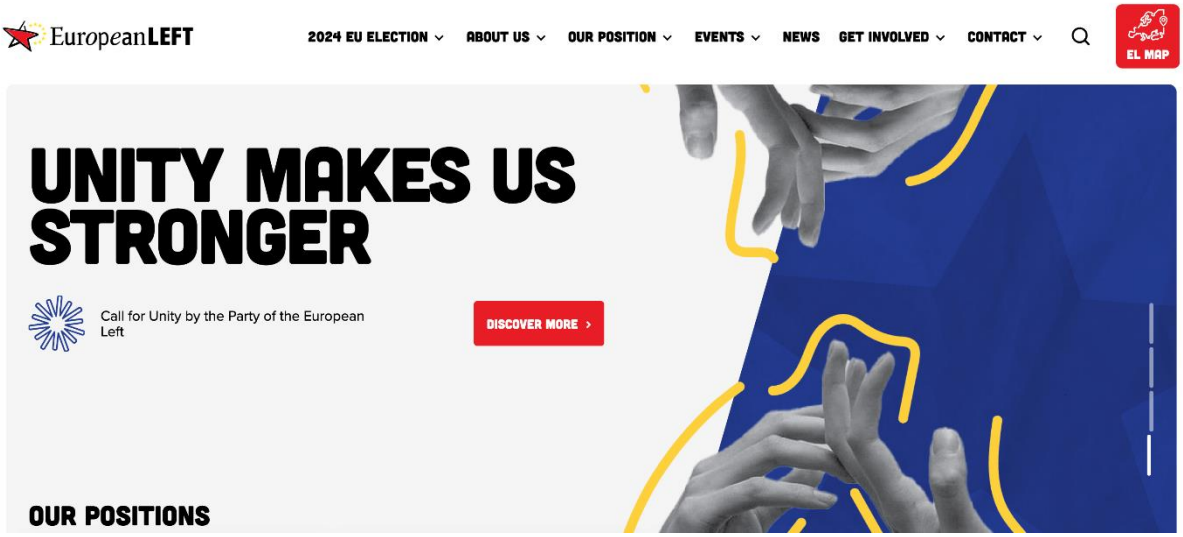


Figure 115: A screen capture of the carousel on the start page. It is continuously playing, and there is no function to pause it.

Error Identification (9.3.3.1)

Error identification ensures that websites clearly communicate errors to users, helping them understand what went wrong and how to fix it. By including clear error messages and instructions, websites become more user-friendly and easier to use for everyone.

What we tested

- If there is a precise instruction and an example on how to fix errors. This instruction is contextual.
- If there is a visual indicator making it easy to find the errors.
- If colour alone is used as the sole method of conveying errors.
- If all error messages are consolidated at the top of the page to provide the user with an overview of necessary corrective actions. If multiple errors are present, ensure the text specifies the number of errors that need addressing to proceed.
- If a required field is marked as required in the code.
- If a field with errors are marked as having errors in the code.

The result

The spot checks show that half of the EU political party websites tested have issues with error identification, such as reliance on colour cues, lack of error messages, and inconsistent error message placement and patterns.

The accessibility issues found particularly affect users with the following impairments: **vision, cognition**.

Vision Cognition

European People's Party (EPP)

The form at the bottom of the page only uses colour to show mistakes. It doesn't show error messages or which fields are required. Also, errors are not announced for screen readers.

Figure 116: A screen capture of the input field in the footer without any error.

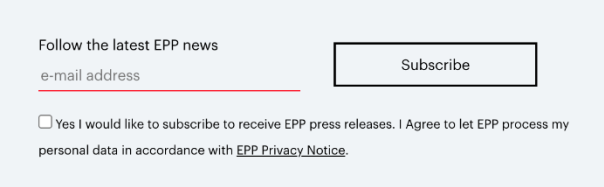


Figure 117: A screen capture of the input field in the footer when a field is left empty. There is no error message; the only indicator is a red line under the field.

Figure 118: A screen capture of the input field in the footer when a field is incorrectly filled. There is no error message; the only indicator is a red line under the field.

Figure 119: A screen capture of the checkbox in the footer when it is left unchecked. There is no error message; the only indicator is a red frame around the checkbox and label.

On the contact page, the error message disappears as soon as the user starts writing, which makes the error hard to remediate for many users, including users with

cognitive impairments. It also only shows one error at the time, making it cumbersome to fill in the form since the user may need to go back and forth several times. Additionally, error messages in the different forms are inconsistent, which leads to confusion for the user.

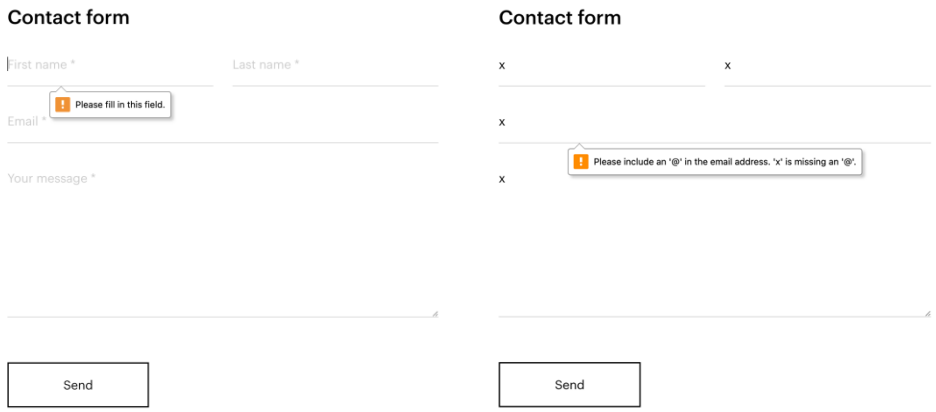


Figure 120: A screen capture of the error messages on the input fields on the contact page. These are completely different from the one in the footer. The input fields have no error indicator of which field is wrong; instead, there is a popup that describes the error messages.

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party

The required fields in the forms are not coded as required, which means that screen reader users won't get the information that the fields are required.

The error message disappears as soon as the user starts writing, which makes the error hard to remediate for many users, including users with cognitive impairments. It also only shows one error at a time, making it cumbersome to fix the form since the user may need to go back and forth several times. The forms are overall confusing and hard to understand. After filling the form, the page changes to another page with a large modal on top. Unexpected redirection is confusing for all users, but particularly for people with ADHD, anxiety, or autism spectrum disorders, users who navigate with a screen reader, users with vision impairments, and inexperienced users.

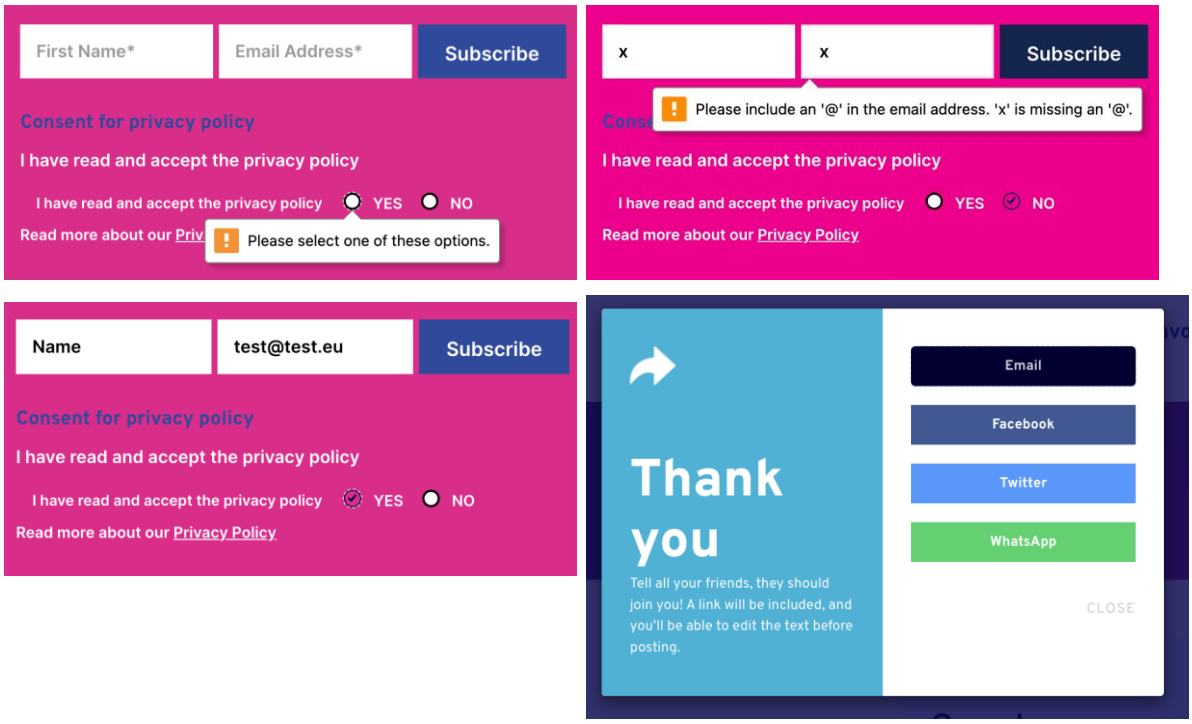


Figure 121: A screen capture of the error handling on the form on the start page, showing how only one error is present at a time with no indicator on which fields are wrong. When filled in, the user gets redirected to a new page and a popup is presented with very low contrast on the “close” button.

Which field has an error is not marked out visually; it is also not announced for screen readers. There are two different types of error messages – one that summarises at the top and one that disappears as soon as the user starts writing – but they do not have the same text. It also only shows one error at a time, making it cumbersome to fix the form since the user needs to go back and forth several times.

Furthermore, if the user fills in the form on the contact page, the same modal pops up, but this time there is no redirect. Leaving the required fields empty and trying to click send, the same thing happens, the same modal pops up. It is impossible to understand whether a message is sent or not. The content of the modal has nothing to do with the message form, so it is a very confusing experience.

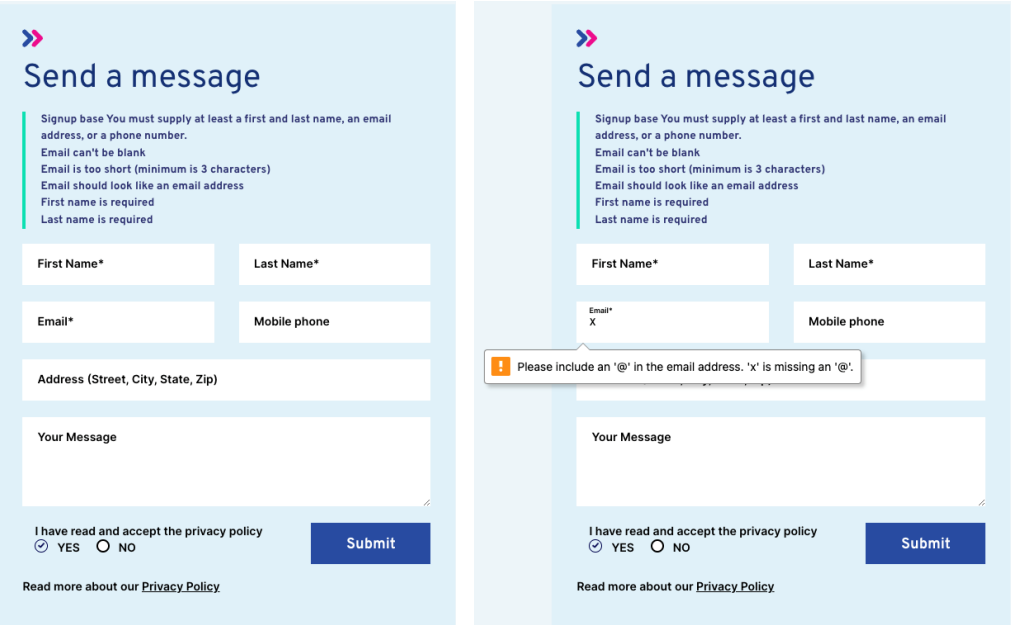


Figure 122: A screen capture of the error handling on the form on the contact page. A summary is shown at the top of the form field, but it is not connected to which fields are wrong. Neither is the error message shown close to the field, and fields aren't marked in any way. Sometimes another error message is shown with another design.

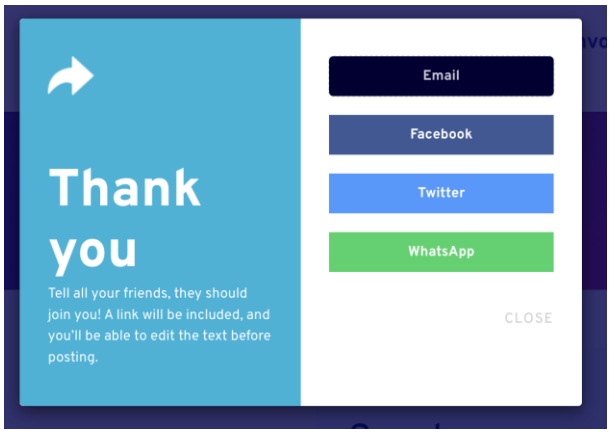


Figure 123: A screen capture of the success message popup. When filled in, a pop up is presented with very low contrast on the "close" button. The message in it is confusing, asking the user to tell their friends to join.

European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Party

The form at the start page only uses colour to show if there are mistakes. It doesn't show error messages or which fields are required. Also, error messages are not announced for screen readers.

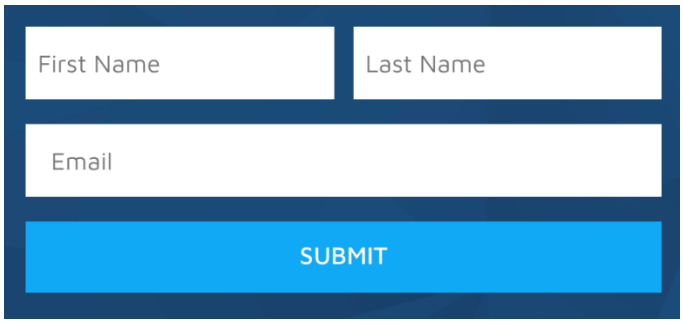


Figure 124: A screen capture of the input field in the start page without any error.

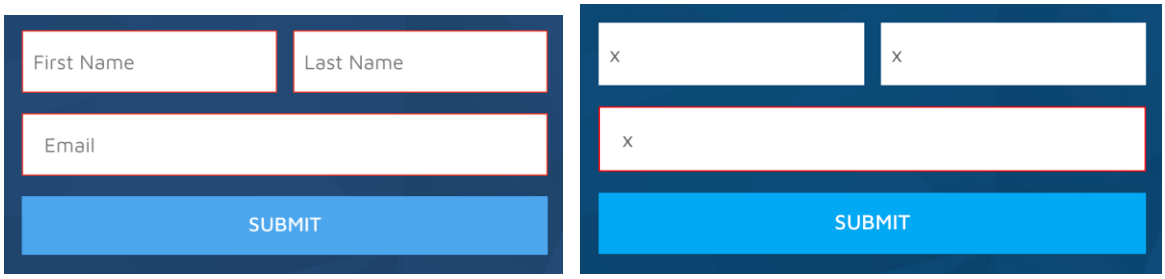


Figure 125: Two screen captures of the input field. The first one shows that when the fields are left empty, there is no error message; the only indicator is a thin red line around the field. The second one shows when a field is incorrectly filled. There is no error message; the only indicator is a thin red line around the field.

The form on the contact page is much better and has no accessibility issues. The error messages are inconsistent, which leads to confusion for the user.

European Greens

The error messages are inconsequential since they do not follow the same pattern and placement. Consistency is very important for overall accessibility, particularly for people with ADHD, anxiety, or autism spectrum disorders, users who navigate with a screen reader, users with vision impairments, and inexperienced users. For instance, the summary error is not always present.

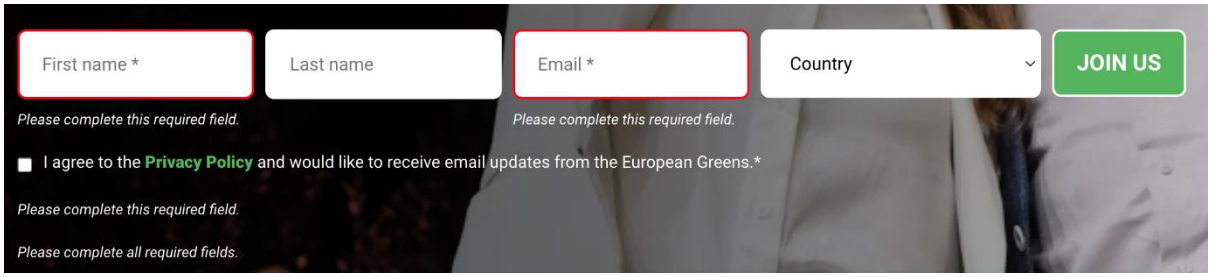


Figure 126: Errors are shown close to the input field, but the errors are ambiguous, and the summary is not in the top but in the bottom. A thin red frame marks the wrongly completed field, but there is no marker on the checkbox.

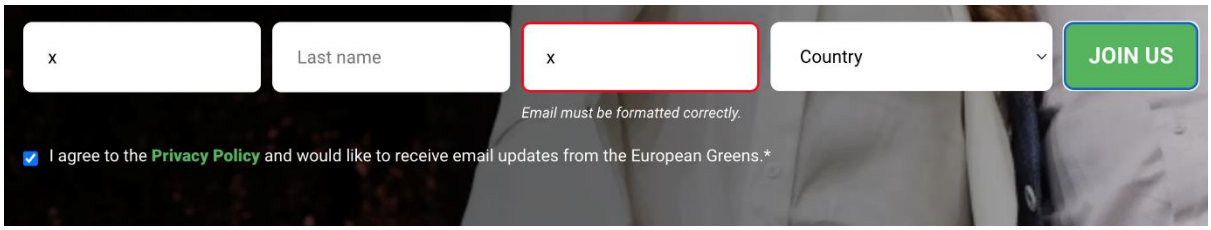


Figure 127: The summary is only shown when there are one or more fields missing input. A thin red frame marks the wrongly completed field.

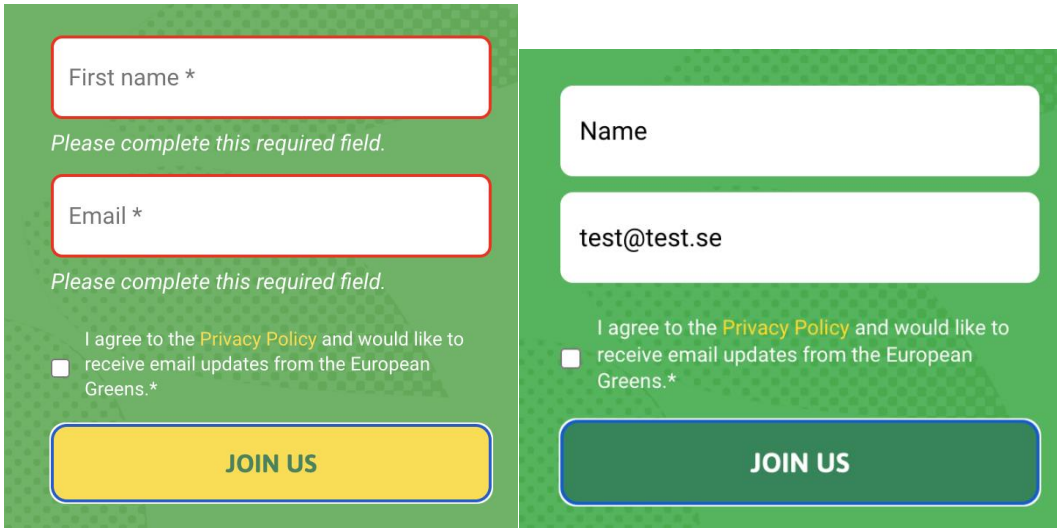


Figure 128: On another field, the checkmark is missing an error message, and the summary is not present at all. A thin red frame marks the wrongly completed field.

Identity and Democracy Party (ID Party)

The contact forms are extremely hard for various user groups. Several objects have a mix of languages, making it hard for users who do not speak French, including assistive technology users. Tools for text-to-speech and screen readers will try to pronounce the French parts in English, which will be hard to understand.

The links (in French only) are only marked with colour, which make them difficult to discover and read for many users.

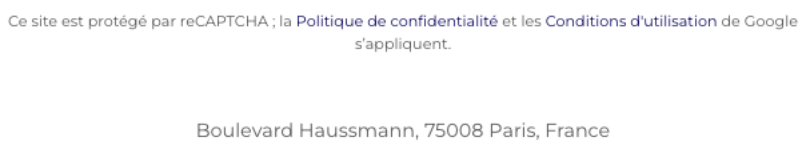


Figure 129: A screen capture of dark blue links, almost indistinguishable from the black surrounding text for many users.

The required fields are not set as required programmatically, which means that users with assistive technology won't get this information. Error messages are in French, and the language changes without notice. This means the content will be pronounced wrongly in text-to-speech assistive technology. The error messages are

marked by colour only, and not announced to assistive technology. The error messages do not represent the error: the same error message is presented, no matter if the field is left empty or if the field is filled in incorrectly.

Figure 130: Two screen captures of the contact forms input fields; one is from the form on the chat function and one from the form on the contact page. Both show that there are error messages close to the input fields, but the error messages are in French and not in English.

Meaningful sequence (10.1.3.2)

The requirement for meaningful sequence means that the order in which assistive technology would read the content is logical, consistent, and reflects the intended meaning. In documents, it mostly means that this reading order is in line with the visual reading order.

If assistive technology reads the content in the wrong order, (for example, the text is in two columns, but it is read out as if it would be continuous text) the user might not understand it.

What we tested

- If the reading order follows the visual order.
- If the content is understandable, when the reading order does not follow the visual order.
- If the reading order is logical, when it does not follow the visual order.
- If the reading order is consistent, when it does not follow the visual order.

The result

The spot checks show that 3/4 of the documents tested had reading order issues (mostly due to the lack of tagging). The documents with the correct reading order have a simple, linear structure.

The accessibility issues found particularly affect users with the following impairments: **vision, cognition**.

Vision

Cognition

European People's Party (EPP)

The publication style document (manifesto) is not tagged apart from its last page, therefore the reading order for assistive technology is not determined.

The simple, informative document (resolution) has a logical reading order. However, the document has a linear structure, which grants a good reading order if the document is tagged.

Party of European Socialists (PES)

The publication style document (manifesto) is not tagged, therefore the reading order for assistive technology is not determined.

The simple, informative document (declaration) has a logical reading order. However, it should be mentioned that the footer (containing contact information) is not tagged, and so it is not included in the reading order.

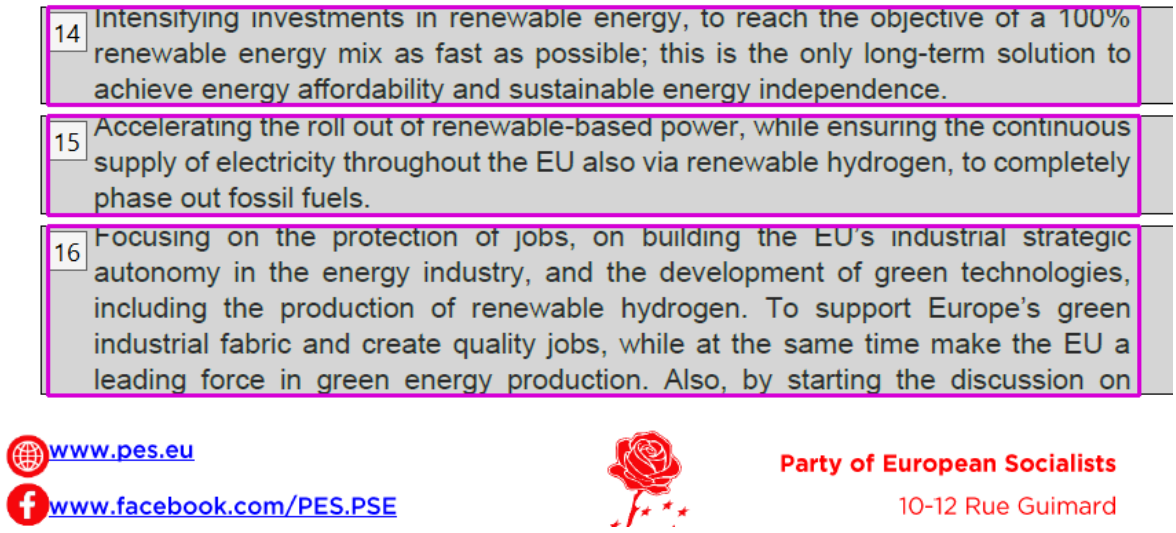


Figure 131: A screen capture of a page in the PES declaration, showing that the untagged content in the footer has no number assigned to it that would indicate its place in the reading order.

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party

The publication style document (bulletin) has issues with the reading order. On some pages the content has a wrong reading order, and as a result, users of assistive technology will not understand the content.

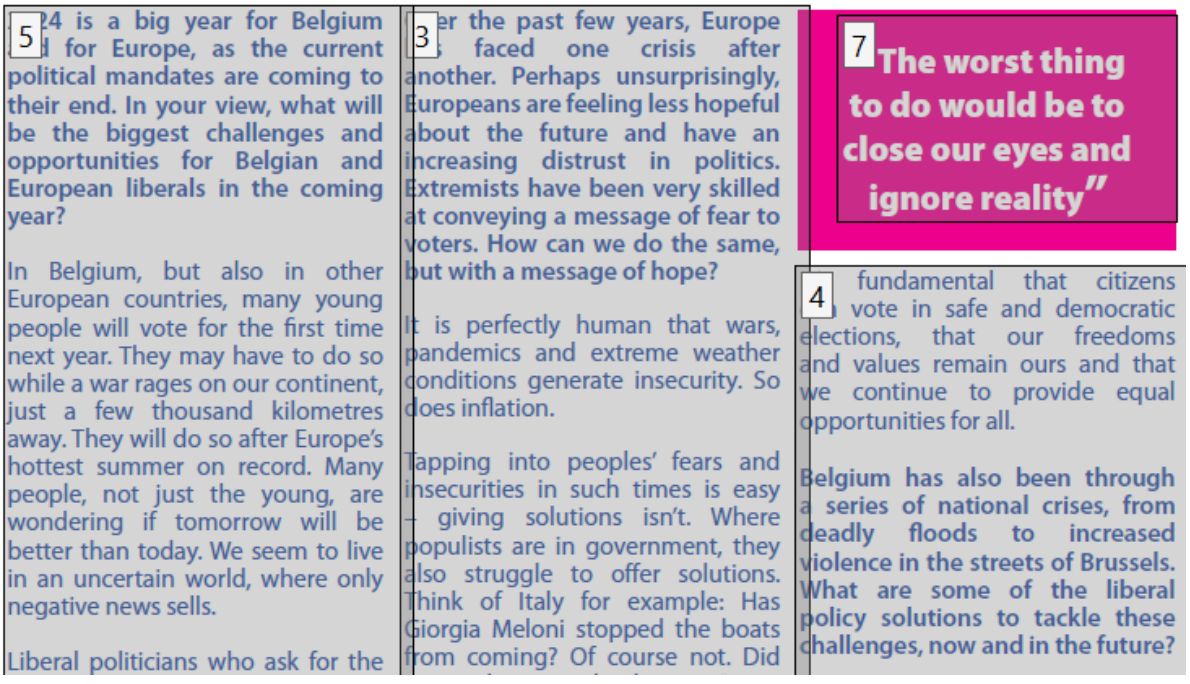


Figure 132: A screen capture of a page of the ALDE Bulletin, with the reading order numbers showing a mixed-up order: assistive technology reads the middle text column first, then the right column and then the left column.

Additionally, the reading order of the footer is inconsistent all over the document: it is sometimes among the first elements, other times among the last elements. (It should

be noted that this type of recurring information in the footer should not be tagged, according to good practice.)

Figure 133: Screen captures of parts of the footers from two pages of the ALDE Bulletin, showing that the page numbering is at the end of the reading order in one page (marked at sixth place) and at the beginning in another page (marked as first place).

The simple, informative document (resolution) has a logical reading order. However, the sidebar is not tagged, and so it is not included in the reading order.

European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Party

Both documents are scanned, “image only” documents, and assistive technology cannot read them.

European Greens

The documents tested are not tagged, therefore the reading order for assistive technology is not determined.

European Left

The documents tested are not tagged, therefore the reading order for assistive technology is not determined.

Identity and Democracy Party (ID Party)

The document tested is not tagged, therefore the reading order for assistive technology is not determined.

Tagged

If a PDF is tagged, people using assistive technology have the possibility to read and navigate the document. Tags make it possible for assistive technology to identify content as headings, lists, tables, links, images, etc., to add alternate text for images and to define the reading order.

What we tested

- If the PDF document has any tags.
- If the document has tags, whether all parts with meaningful information are tagged.
- If the document is tagged, whether headings are tagged as headings.

The result

The spot checks show that nearly all documents have issues with tagging: 2/3 of the documents tested were not tagged at all, the others seem to be tagged automatically. 1/4 of the documents were partially tagged, where some parts of the text with meaningful content was left untagged. Only 1 document had no tagging issues; however, it had a simple structure (without headings).

As tagging affects many accessibility functions, the issues found particularly affect users with the following impairments: **vision, speech, motor, cognition**.

European People's Party (EPP)

The publication style document (manifesto) is not tagged, apart from the last one of the 25 pages.

In case of the simple, informative document (resolution), all meaningful content i tagged. Tagging of headings was not checked as the document is not structured by headings.

Party of European Socialists (PES)

The publication style document (manifesto) is not tagged.

The simple, informative document (declaration) is mainly tagged, but the footer on the first page, with contact information and website address is not tagged, therefore it is not perceived by assistive technology.

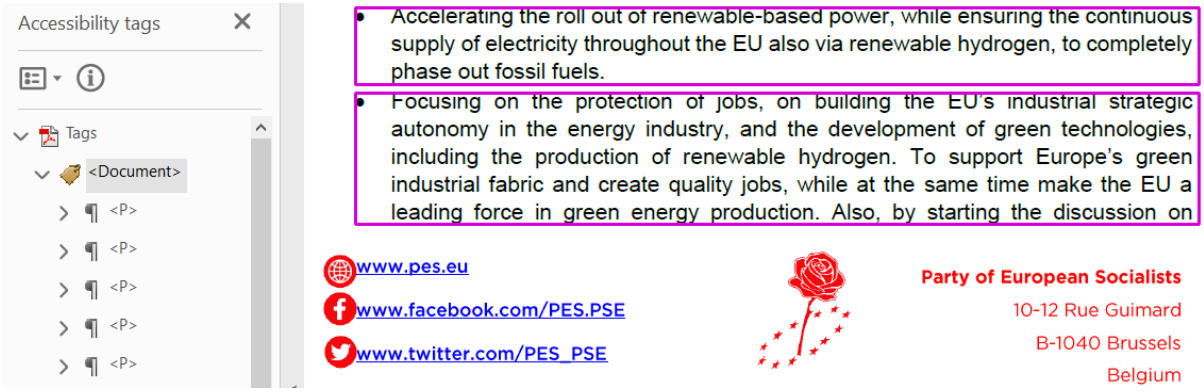


Figure 134: A screen capture of a PES declaration document showing that the content of the footer is not highlighted, indicating that it is not tagged.

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party

Most of the publication style document (bulletin) is tagged, apart from the word “Bulletin” on the cover page. Headings are not tagged as headings (<H#>), but as normal paragraphs (<P>), making it difficult for users of assistive technology that cannot rely on visual cues to navigate the document.

Figure 135: Screen capture of a header in the ALDE Bulletin document and its tagging: it is tagged as <P>, so assistive technology will not interpret it as a heading.

The main body of the simple, informative document (resolution) is tagged, but the sidebar with information on the type of the document is not.

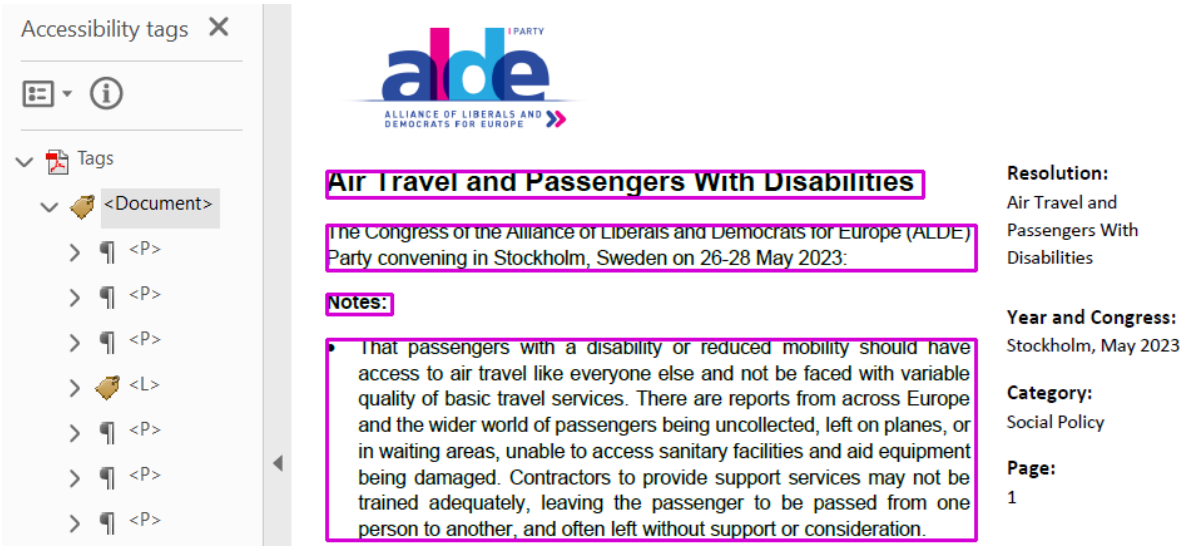


Figure 136: A screen capture of an ALDE resolution showing that the content of the sidebar is not highlighted, indicating that it is not tagged.

European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Party

Neither of the documents tested are tagged. Furthermore, they are scanned with low resolution, which means they are completely inaccessible.

Figure 137: Screen capture of the ECR Financial report, a scanned, untagged PDF document with low resolution text content.

European Greens

Neither of the documents tested are tagged.

European Left

Neither of the documents tested are tagged.

Identity and Democracy Party (ID Party)

The document tested is not tagged.

Bookmarks

Bookmarks help navigating through a long or complex document. Having bookmarks is not a requirement in EN 301 549, but they are very useful for many users with disabilities and constitute good practice. The Adobe Acrobat Accessibility Checker marks it as a failure if a document that is longer than 20 pages has no bookmarks.

What we tested

- If the document that exceeds 20 pages in length has bookmarks.
- If the document that exceeds 20 pages in length is structured with headings.
- If the bookmarks follow the document structure: whether they cover the whole document and are correct.

The result

The spot checks show that only one of the documents tested has bookmarks, and even in that case, they are meaningless.

The accessibility issues found particularly affect users with the following impairments: **vision, speech, motor, cognition**.

Vision Speech Motor Cognition

European People's Party (EPP)

The bookmarks in the publication style document (manifesto) are not helpful to navigate the document: they only mark the cover page, the second page where the main content starts, and the last page. The document is visually structured, with at least two heading levels, but those headings do not appear in the bookmarks at all.

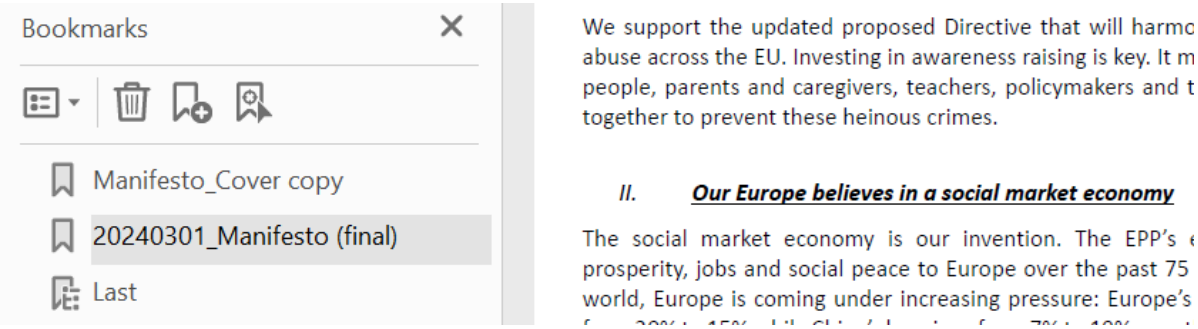


Figure 138: A screen capture of the EPP Manifesto document, showing bookmarks that do not help navigating through the document and do not reflect the structure provided by the visually identifiable headings.

The simple, informative document (resolution) is less than 21 pages.

Party of European Socialists (PES)

The 24-page publication style document (manifesto) has no bookmarks. The simple, informative document (declaration) is less than 21 pages.

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party

The publication style document (bulletin) is only 20 pages long, the simple, informative document (resolution) is less than 21 pages.

European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Party

One of the documents is 22 pages and is structured with headings, but it has no bookmarks. The other, similar document is less than 21 pages.

European Greens

The 30-page, simple style manifesto document is structured with headings, and has no bookmarks. Neither of the documents tested are tagged. The simple, informative document (resolution) is less than 21 pages.

European Left

The 24-page publication style document (manifesto) has no bookmarks. The simple, informative document (statutes) is less than 21 pages.

Identity and Democracy Party (ID Party)

The document tested is less than 21 pages.

Conclusion

This report is a starting point. It illustrates the scope of the problem and highlights issues that political parties can remediate. Some are relatively easy and quick to fix, while others require more planning.

The results are disappointing but there is a path forward. There is a wealth of actionable knowledge that political parties can draw from to ensure the accessibility of their campaigns. European Union legislation such as the Web Accessibility Directive and the European Accessibility Act have created strong obligations for the public sector and some actors in the private sector. Political parties just need to join other sectors in the journey towards full accessibility.

During this journey, political parties must reach out to both accessibility experts and to representative organisations of persons with disabilities. They have the expertise necessary to ensure no one is left behind in political discourse.

We now call on EU political parties and all political actors to:

1. **Train** web authors and other relevant staff in accessibility for websites, digital channels and publishing.
2. **Involve** end users with disabilities in designing, developing and testing digital interfaces, in order to make sure they work for everyone.
3. Use the European standard for accessible ICT (EN301549) when **procuring**, **designing** and **developing** digital interfaces. The standard is free of charge.

These are essential to ensure that our democracies represent everyone and reflect the motto of the disability movement: “nothing without us”.

Annex 1 – explanation of scope

Pages and channels analysed

The table below shows which specific pages, channels and documents we analysed.

Party	Start page	Manifesto	Contact	Multimedia YouTube
EPP	https://www.epp.eu	/commitments	/contact	@EPPtv
ECR Party	https://ecrparty.eu	-	/contact	@ecrparty6021
PES	https://pes.eu	/policies	/contact	@pes_pse
ALDE Party	https://www.aldeparty.eu	/vision	/contact	@aldeparty
European Greens	https://europeangreens.eu	/vision	/contact	@europeangreens
European Left	https://www.european-left.org	/manifesto2023	/contact-us	@europeanleftparty
ID Party	https://id-party.eu/	/program	/contact	@identitydemocracyparty6303

To check the accessibility of the documents published on the websites, we chose two files on each website where available. We aimed to choose consistently:

- the most recent “publication style” document (typically a Manifesto or a Bulletin);
- the most recent simple, informative document.

Documents analysed

For documents, the PDF/UA standard was considered, and we also checked whether the documents are tagged and have bookmarks. If a document is tagged correctly, users of assistive technology can read and navigate the content. Tagged and Bookmarks are not a legal requirement, but as they are crucial for many users, we therefore include them in document testing. Instead of Keyboard on documents we tested Meaningful sequence.

Party	Document name/URL	Document type
EPP	EPP Manifesto 2024	Design: Manifesto
EPP	Emergency resolution Nr. 6 adopted at the EPP Congress, Bucharest (Romania), 6th – 7th March 2024	Simple: Resolution
ECR Party	Publication of accounts 2016	Complex: Financial report
ECR Party	Publication of accounts 2017	Complex: Financial report
PES	PES Manifesto 2024	Design: Manifesto
PES	Energy affordability and energy security are EU imperatives	Simple: Presidency declaration
ALDE Party	ALDE Party Liberal Bulletin 02/2023	Design: Bulletin
ALDE Party	Air Travel and Passengers With Disabilities	Simple: Resolution
European Greens	The social dimension of the Green New Deal	Simple: Manifesto
European Greens	Green transformation of EU trade policy	Simple: Resolution
European Left	European elections manifesto	Design: Manifesto
European Left	Statutes of the Party of European Left	Simple: Statutes
ID Party	Appel d'offres : location d'une salle pour un meeting public à Paris	Simple: Call for tender

Selected EN 301 549 and other requirements

	Website reference	Document reference
Non-text content	9.1.1.1	10.1.1.1
Captions (pre-recorded)	9.1.2.2	Not applicable
Contrast (minimum)	9.1.4.3	10.1.4.3
Keyboard	9.2.1.1	Not tested

Meaningful sequence	Not tested	10.1.3.2
Pause, stop, hide	9.2.2.2	Not applicable
Focus visible	9.2.4.7	Not applicable
Error identification	9.3.3.1	Not tested
Tagged	Not applicable	Not in EN 301 549
Bookmarks	Not applicable	Not in EN 301 549