Web Accessibility: A Practical Overview

This short guide explains what web accessibility means in practice, which rules matter most, and where responsibility sits between a website and the tools it uses. It is also the document you are reading right now in Equa11y's accessible viewer.

Why It Matters

Roughly one in six people lives with a significant disability. Many more face temporary or situational barriers: a broken arm, bright sunlight, a noisy room, an ageing screen. An inaccessible site quietly turns all of them away, and in most of Europe it now also carries legal risk under the European Accessibility Act.

Accessibility is rarely about exotic technology. It is usually about ordinary craft: readable text, predictable navigation, honest structure, and controls large enough to hit.

The Four Principles

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines organise every requirement under four ideas, often shortened to POUR:

- Perceivable - information must be available to sight, hearing or touch.
- Operable - every control must work by keyboard, not only by mouse.
- Understandable - language and behaviour must be predictable.
- Robust - the markup must work with assistive technology.

Where Most Sites Fall Short

Audits tend to surface the same handful of problems again and again. None of them are difficult to fix once they are visible:

- Text and background too close in contrast to read comfortably.
- Images with no alternative text, or decorative images announced aloud.
- Forms whose labels are placeholders that vanish when typing starts.
- Keyboard focus that is invisible, or that jumps in an illogical order.
- Motion that starts automatically and cannot be stopped.

What a Widget Can and Cannot Do

An accessibility widget gives visitors a layer of control over how a page is presented: text size and spacing, contrast and colour, reading aids, speech, cursor size. That layer is real and it helps real people, immediately, without rebuilding the site.

It is not a substitute for accessible code. A widget cannot write alternative text that does not exist, cannot restructure headings that were never marked up, and cannot add a keyboard path through a control that has none. Any vendor promising automatic legal compliance from a single script is overstating what the technology does.

The honest position is that the two work together: the widget serves the visitor in front of you today, while the underlying site is improved over time.

Getting Started

Progress comes faster from a short, ordered list than from a full audit nobody has time to read. A reasonable first pass:

- Check colour contrast on body text, buttons and links.
- Navigate the main journey using only the Tab key.
- Give every meaningful image a short, factual description.
- Mark up headings in order, without skipping levels.
- Make sure nothing important depends on colour alone.

About This Document

This PDF carries a real text layer, which is what makes it convertible. Equa11y extracts that text and rebuilds it as ordinary web content, so it reflows when enlarged and responds to every adaptation in the menu.

A scanned document is different: it is a picture of text, with no text layer at all. No viewer can reflow pixels, which is why scanned files fall outside what this feature can do.

Prepared by the Equa11y team.