

Industry insights

Bookshops and accessibility



What is Industry insights?

RISE Industry Insights is a series of research papers that investigate priority topics for the bookselling sector. They give insights into key issues, policy reforms and external initiatives that affect the bookselling sector. In addition, they provide network members with tools to engage with relevant political stakeholders, culture sector professionals and private sector representatives to ensure that their priorities are adequately upheld and supported.

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About RISE Bookselling

Resilience, Innovation and Sustainability for the Enhancement of Bookselling' (RISE Bookselling), is a three-year EU co-funded programme run by the European and International Booksellers Federation (EIBF) for its network members, aimed at upscaling, reinforcing and maximising the capacity and resilience of the European bookselling sector.

About EIBF

The European and International Booksellers Federation (EIBF) is a non-commercial European and international umbrella organisation representing national booksellers associations and booksellers across Europe and worldwide. Our mission is to represent our members and their interests on a global platform, as well as to provide a forum for cooperation and foster the exchange of best practices.

About Creative Europe

Creative Europe is an EU programme that supports a wide range of cultural and creative sectors, as well as encouraging cooperation and exchanges among cultural organisations and artists within Europe and beyond.

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Introduction

The way in which people buy and read books is constantly evolving, influenced by changing consumer trends, needs and behaviours, as well as by increased digitalisation in our daily lives and constant technological developments. Some of these changes are already upon us: from the rapid growth of online retail and the influence of *BookTok*, to the popularity of subscription-based plans to access and consume literature, to name a few examples.

While it is important for all stakeholders in the book value chain to keep up to speed and adapt to these fast-paced developments and changing ways of buying and reading (or listening) to books, it is also vital that no one is left behind in the process, so that all readers have an equal chance to access their favourite books. This is particularly relevant

for people with disabilities, who are the very centre of the upcoming European Accessibility Act (EAA), a European legislation that aims to make everyday products and services – including e-books, webshops and e-readers – easily accessible for them.

Against the backdrop of the EAA, this RISE Industry Insights paper will delve into the topic of book accessibility, providing an overview of the current legislative framework and upcoming requirements for the book industry, with a particular focus on book retail. The paper will also bring forward several case studies of positive initiatives and best practices already in place across European countries with regards to book accessibility, before concluding with an analysis of its likely impact on the future of the bookselling sector.

Context and legislative framework

According to multiple sources and reports,¹² less than 10% of all published books are currently available in formats accessible to people with print disabilities,³ with this percentage being significantly lower in the Global South.⁴ This is particularly concerning given that, as of 2021, there are around 295 million people living with moderate-to-severe visual impairment or disability, and 43 million blind people around the world. The exclusion of this large section of the population from accessing books has commonly been referred to as ‘book famine’, particularly widespread in developing countries.

Efforts to reduce this ‘book famine’ and to ensure book accessibility for visually impaired people are not new: for years, countries around the world have been able to allow for copyright exceptions in their national legislation to ensure books could be shared in accessible formats for visually impaired people, without requiring copyright holders’ permission. However, a noticeable disparity in the number countries allowing for such an exception was observed, and even among those who allowed it, a significant difference in the number of accessible titles per country. There was also an additional hurdle: national copyright laws did not allow for the import and export of accessible books across borders. As an example of what this meant in practice, accessible books from Spain could not be freely exported to a number of Latin-American countries, such as Argentina, which had a significantly lower number of accessible books published.⁵ The same applied to other countries and regions sharing a common language, but a huge disparity in accessible format books.

Marrakesh Treaty

With the mission of bridging these gaps and ensuring a legally binding international standard that would ensure equal chances for all visually impaired people to access books, no matter where they were in the world, in 2013 and under the framework of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), 63 countries formally adopted the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons who are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled, commonly referred to as the **Marrakesh VIP Treaty**.

The Marrakesh Treaty is the first international commitment to make it easier for accessible copies of books to be created and shared with ease, particularly across borders, removing pre-existing legal barriers that prevented that. Countries signing the Treaty are required to make an exception in their national laws to make books in accessible formats and allow for the exchange across international borders.

In 2018, the EU ratified the Marrakesh Treaty as a bloc, ensuring that all EU member states comply with the requirements in their national legislation.⁶ Since then, more and more countries continue to join. As of 2022, 117 countries worldwide have joined the Marrakesh Treaty since its adoption in 2013.⁷

While the Treaty has undoubtedly been a big step forward in international copyright law and a vital development in global efforts towards ensuring availability of accessible books, more work is underway to ensure that a broad range of products and services are also ‘born’ accessible in the near future.

European Accessibility Act (EAA)

Since the adoption of the Marrakesh Treaty, the accessibility legislative framework has been reinforced and expanded, particularly in Europe, with the aim of making products and services that have been identified as being most important for persons with disabilities, accessible by default and design. The prime example of legislation in this space is the **European Accessibility Act (EAA)**.

The EAA is a European law that aims to set EU-wide common requirements for certain products and services to be accessible for persons with disabilities, removing barriers created by different rules in individual EU member states.

The law, adopted in 2018, is already implemented in most EU countries since 2022. However, most of the rules under the EAA only begin to apply from 2025. More specifically, as of 28 June 2025, businesses placing a number of products and services on the European market, will need to make sure that they are fully accessible by design and accompanied by appropriate instructions for use.

The list of products and services in the scope of the EAA includes products and services used by citizens in everyday life, from ATMs to smartphones and computers. Most importantly, however, it covers some of particular relevance to the book sector: **e-books and e-readers**, as well as **e-commerce** websites and **web shops**.



Requirements for bookshops

The EAA introduces a list of general and technical requirements that must be met by businesses who produce, distribute and sell e-books and e-readers from 28 June 2025, so that they are made fully accessible for people with disabilities. Equally, users with disabilities will need to be able to easily navigate all websites and e-commerce platforms – including web shops and apps – and purchase products without any impediment.

This is expected to have a big and direct impact on how the book ecosystem operates, from book publishing all the way to retail in bookshops. Publishers arguably have the biggest task, as they must make changes at early production stages, ensuring formats and book metadata meet the required accessibility standards. All of this, naturally, requires specific technology, know-how and adequate training ahead of the 2025 deadline.

When it comes to bookshops, medium-sized shops and book chains that sell e-books and/or e-readers through a website, web shop or e-commerce app as of 28 June 2025 will have to comply with accessibility rules. In practice, this means that readers in all EU member states will have to be able to find an e-book online (either on a bookshop's web shop or other e-commerce platform), buy it and, finally, read it with an e-reader or mobile app without any restrictions.

It is important to mention that small bookshops, meaning those which employ fewer than 10 persons and have an annual turnover or annual balance sheet not exceeding 2 million EUR, will not have to comply with the EAA requirements for now. Still, while not legally obliged to do so, all bookshops are encouraged to consider accessibility as an area to pay attention to, if not now, in the near future, for instance, by having an accessible website. Having an

accessible website sends the message that everyone is welcome and included, allowing books to reach more readers, all while benefitting the bookshop's business.

The European and International Booksellers Federation (EIBF), the organisation behind the RISE Bookselling project and the voice of booksellers, has made information available to its members, primarily national booksellers associations, with the aim of helping booksellers all over Europe and the world become familiar with the EAA and the rules coming their way. Some basic steps and recommendations for all bookshops to consider include:

- 1** Consult your national booksellers' association to receive information and guidance on the current laws on accessibility in your country, including any possible exemptions or specific requirements.
- 2** If your bookshop is large enough to comply with the criteria, and places the listed products or services in the EU market, make sure you comply with the necessary requirements outlined in the EAA and transposed into law in your country.
- 3** Investigate the current state of accessibility of your web shop.
- 4** Check if your current web developer knows how to design and code for accessibility. If not, find a person or team that can.
- 5** Depending on the outcome of step 3: redesign or rebuild your web shop to meet the necessary accessibility standards.
- 6** Train your team to create and maintain accessible content.
- 7** Communicate / Talk about your accessible Webshop.

Initiatives and good practices supporting accessibility in the book sector

While accessibility requirements under the EAA become applicable in June 2025, many initiatives supporting book accessibility have been in the works, and even in place, long before.

This section will spotlight positive accessibility practices in place across several European countries, with the aim of sharing the resources and information beyond national borders and to identify relevant points of contact in the field.

Italy

Long before the Marrakesh Treaty came into force and the EAA was incepted, in 2014 in Italy, the Italian Publishers Association (*Associazione Italiana Editori*) set up a project with the support of the Italian Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities, with the aim of creating a catalogue of accessible books, which now consists of over 24,000 accessible e-books for blind and visually impaired people⁹. This is how the **Fondazione LIA** was born.

Fondazione LIA is a non-profit organization that promotes the culture of accessibility in the publishing field. Since its origins as a pilot project, it has since grown into an organisation of its own, a pioneering institution with a strong focus on technological innovation and a clear vision to promote the creation of an international accessible digital publishing ecosystem. To do so, they work across a

number of areas. For starters, their mission is to continuously build on and expand the aforementioned catalogue, which hosts more than 24,000 titles from 76 different publishing brands, and each month is enriched with new titles. They also provide resources and information on accessible international standards in the book sector. For instance, for several years, they have issued multiple resources⁹, including a report analysing the evolution of e-book formats and its white paper “*E-books for all. Towards an accessible publishing ecosystem*”¹⁰, which aims to be an ‘agile manual’ for all actors in the book value chain – from publishers to distributors and retailers – in their journey to a more accessible book sector, identifying the role each actor may play in an accessible ecosystem, describing the elements to be considered and providing the relevant guidelines and specifications to be followed. It has been translated into several languages¹¹, including into Japanese, Lithuanian, and most recently in 2022 and as further elaborated on below, German.

Fondazione LIA also collaborates with other international bodies in the book sector, including the Federation of European Publishers (FEP), W3C, Daisy Consortium, European Digital Reading Laboratory (EDRLab) and EDItEUR to ensure that the accessibility standards currently used in the book sector, such as the use of EPUB as an accessible format, may also become those adopted by the EAA. Additionally, they run and take part in innovative projects, such

as their ongoing APACE (Accelerating Publishing Accessibility through Collaboration in Europe) Project. Co-funded by the Creative Europe programme, the APACE project¹² serves as a network to enhance social inclusion for over 100 million print impaired in Europe. Joining forces with the Italian Publishers Association (AIE), the German Publishers and Booksellers Association (Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels e.V.), the Bulgarian Book Association (ABK), Stichting Dedicon, Accessibility Library Celia and the Lithuanian Audiosensory Library, the project aims to fill the current gap of competences in the accessibility field of the European publishing industry by, among other actions, improving capacity-building opportunities through training courses and an Accessibility Summer School, organising awareness events in various formats to promote accessibility best practices and developing new methods for producing and distributing accessible e-books.

This year, 2024, the LIA Foundation celebrates its first ten years. In conversation with Cristina Mussinelli, Secretary General of the Fondazione LIA, she tells us that the most significant accomplishment of these first ten years is the awareness about accessibility raised in the publishing industry, not just in Italy, but also across Europe and around the world.

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I think that the most significant accomplishment of these first ten years for Fondazione LIA is the awareness about accessibility raised in the publishing industry, not just in Italy, but also across Europe and around the world. We could say that we have made accessibility an approach, a network, an ecosystem, in which now we are globally recognized as a point of reference.

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CRISTINA MUSSINELLI

Secretary General of the
Fondazione LIA

When discussing the role that the bookselling sector has to play in creating a more accessible book ecosystem, she believes that, first and foremost, it is necessary to distinguish between physical and online bookshops. For the former, it is important that, wherever possible, they allow for the possibility of autonomous access into the store without any physical barriers. For the latter, online bookshops larger than micro-enterprises, will have to comply with EAA e-commerce requirements, even if they only sell paper books and not e-books. They will, therefore, have to align with international standards for accessibility, providing an accessibility statement and guaranteeing their payment systems are compliant with the web accessibility standards.

While public funding opportunities are limited to facilitate compliance and accessibility requirements in Italy, the LIA Foundation does offer training for those interested in starting their own journey into the world of accessibility and continue to explore the potential of technological innovation in the field of accessibility.





Germany

Meanwhile in Germany, practices have long been in place to accommodate the reading needs of visually impaired and blind people. As early as 1894, an association was founded in Leipzig to provide blind persons with literature: the German Central Library for the Blind.¹³ 125 years later, this association has grown to become the German Centre for Accessible Reading - **dzb lesen**, a facility and production centre for braille and audio media, large print and tactile media, which also operates as a library, offering roughly 100.000 titles of all kinds on loan through its catalogue,¹⁴ and selling self-produced braille books, tactile picture books for blind children, relief and large print calendars, games and so on.

dzb lesen cooperates with many other partners in the book sector to improve access to literature for all without barriers. Working hand in hand with them is the **German Publishers and Booksellers Association** (*Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels* - BOEV), the main trade association representing the interests of Germany's book publishing, distributing and bookselling industries in the public and political spheres. Given its unique role and influence in the German book sector, the Börsenverein has been actively working on the topic of accessibility for several years, in order to ensure that German publishers, distributors and booksellers have access to all the right resources and information, and are well prepared ahead of the requirements coming into force in June 2025. For instance, already in 2020, a taskforce on accessibility was put in place, bringing together a panel of experts from Germany, Austria and Switzerland to help make concrete recommendations, support national legislation and seek exchange with European and international partners.

Since then, the German transposition of the EAA – the Accessibility Strengthening Act (*Barrierefreiheitsstärkungsgesetz* – BFGS) – has been adopted, and the Börsenverein has set up a dedicated page with a list of resources on accessibility¹⁵. These include a practical Frequent Asked Questions (FAQ) guide, a summary of the legal requirements, several webinars and guidelines for accessible publishing, a German translation of the Fondazione LIA's white paper and links to exchanges with other German and international partners in the industry to help with implementation, including aforementioned Fondazione LIA and dzb lesen, as well as the German Institute for the Blind (blista) and the Federal Office for Accessibility (Bundesfachstelle Barrierefreiheit).

The **Bundesfachstelle Barrierefreiheit**, or **Federal Office for Accessibility**, is an institution set up in 2016 that systematically collects and processes existing knowledge on accessibility across Germany and makes it available to the public. The office is intended to advise and support authorities and administrations in implementing accessibility rules, as well as businesses and civil society impacted by the law. As such, among other useful guidelines and resources, they have launched a series of webinars to increase awareness among businesses ahead of the BFGS law coming into force. The webinar series is of particular relevance to the bookselling sector, as it addresses a key theme which will affect their business: e-commerce and accessibility.¹⁷ A total of six webinars have been recorded under the theme of e-commerce, covering questions from legal accessibility requirements across e-commerce platforms and specific implementation of accessibility in online shops using practical examples to discussions on return on investment.

With all these organisations working to raise awareness on accessibility and making a wide range of resources available to help the different parts of the book chain, it is important to assess how these changes will impact bookshops in Germany. To get a better sense of the upcoming changes, we spoke to Sarah Lübbers, owner of Magic Books bookshop in Delbrück, Germany. To her, the topic of accessibility is not only important on a broader societal level, but also on a personal one, having grown up with an eye disease. Because of that, she understands the importance of accessibility and the limits that come with non-existent accessibility to different services and products. This is especially the case when it comes to books:

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Books are a product we use every day. They impart knowledge and help people to learn. If books are not accessible to everyone, we are denying many people the opportunity to benefit from them. We deny access to knowledge. And especially in this day and age, this can have fatal consequences.

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SARAH LÜBBERS

Owner of Magic Books bookshop

As a result, she decided to take matters into her own hands, by opening up her own bookshop in March 2023, making it completely barrier-free and ensuring as many books as possible are available to all, no matter their ability or condition.

Many bookshops are aware of accessibility requirements coming their way, but perhaps do not know where to begin. To Sarah, the most important step for booksellers is to be aware of the various barriers that exist in their bookshop and to put themselves in the shoes of a disabled person either entering their bookshop or wishing to buy a book online. Where do they identify the barriers and what practical changes can be made to adapt? Needless to say, not all physical spaces can always be made 100% accessible, as conditions vary. However, taking active steps in consultation with local members of the community who may be affected by lack of accessibility is already a positive first step. When it comes to online accessibility of websites and web shops, she points out the resources available through the Börsenverein dedicated page, as well as other organizations' material.

It also must be pointed out that adapting to comply with accessibility requirements may not always be easy or straightforward for a bookshop. Smaller local bookshops may have fewer resources and find it difficult to understand the necessary technical requirements to adapt online websites in the near future. Besides access to information and resources, training and support through public funding should be made available, particularly in cases when it is a legal requirement to comply with accessibility rules.

As for next steps in her bookshop, Sarah is planning a workshop on accessibility to show other bookshops and businesses what accessibility means in reality, and what steps can be taken to create an accessible environment for all. She also envisions becoming a coach on accessibility alongside her bookselling career, to keep providing support and making the world around her more accessible, one step at a time.



France

Moving on to our third case study and European country which has also been actively involved in digital accessibility for several years through a number of initiatives and projects, we have France.

In 2015, France was selected among a number of European cities to host the European Digital Reading Lab (EDRLab), a non-profit development laboratory working on the deployment of an open, interoperable and accessible digital publishing ecosystem worldwide. It was founded by a number of French publishing houses and other associations and stakeholders within or working with the book sector, including the French Publishers Association (Syndicat National de l'édition), the National Book Centre (Centre National du livre - CNL) and the French government. EDRLab's mission and strategy has remained the same for years: to increase the number of books made accessible to people with disabilities by developing technology to accelerate the adoption of digital reading in different forms: text, audio and image. The main path to achieve is to help publishers produce readily accessible e-books using EPUB 3, a format introduced above, which is born accessible.

France also counts with a key institutional player supporting progress in book accessibility: the French Ministry for Culture. Besides financially or logistically supporting innovative projects and organisations such as EDRLab, the policy of the Ministry for Culture is to fully align with the French transposition of the EAA and its impact on the book sector, as well as the additional legal decrees which clarify the conditions of accessibility of digital books and the software necessary for their use, all transposed into French law in 2023. To support all actors in the book value chain in their efforts to align with the EAA, the Ministry for Culture has also set up a website, LINA25, which is the direct result of the Ministry-led steering committee's work since 2018 to implement their strategic plan for the development of a digital book offering accessible to people with disabilities.

The LINA25 website, which stands for "Accessible Digital Book 2025" (Livre Numérique Accessible 2025) was launched in 2023 by EDRLab and the French Ministry for Culture. As of 2025, businesses in the book sector will need to make some adjustments to ensure they comply with the requirements laid out in the EAA. The LINA25 website serves as a knowledge and resource hub for all those French businesses working in the digital book value chain, providing them with the necessary tools to successfully approach digital accessibility, whether they are designing, producing, describing, distributing or selling books, or creating or selecting accessible reading tools.

There is also an important player in France tasked with the role of ensuring compliance with the rules under the French transposition of the EAA and with helping clarify accessibility provisions: the French Regulatory Authority for Audiovisual and Digital Communication (Autorité de régulation de la communication audiovisuelle et numérique - ARCOM). Working with professionals in the sector and representatives of the disability community, ARCOM will also be responsible for investigating and potentially fining companies that do not comply with the accessibility requirements.

The role of ARCOM will be crucial in particular situations, as there are still some grey areas in the EAA which may need further clarification or a case-by-case examination. For instance, a clause under the EAA grants businesses impacted by the EAA with the possibility of being exempted from complying with certain accessibility requirements, if compliance imposes a 'disproportionate burden' on them, by forcing them to fundamentally alter or modify the product or service to ensure it is fully accessible. If such a case applies, it must be adequately notified and documented, and it is the task for the regulators at national level, such as ARCOM in France, to decide whether an exemption shall be granted.

From the perspective of the bookselling sector, there are several key associations that have been actively involved with the aforementioned players, to ensure French bookshops are up to

date with the applicable requirements: these are the French Booksellers Association (Syndicat de la librairie française - SLF) and the Association des librairies informatisées et utilisatrices des réseaux électroniques - ALIRE), both members of EIBF.

The SLF is the French organisation representing the interests of independent bookshops at national level since 1999, working across a number of areas and topics, such as the preservation of the single book price, green bookselling and low VAT for books, and committed to cultural diversity, the development of reading and the promotion of bookshops. One of the areas they also work on is, naturally, accessibility, both in terms of bookshops as accessible spaces and online accessibility. SLF is part of and actively participates in the French Ministry for Culture's aforementioned steering committee which developed the Strategic Plan for the development of a range of digital books accessible to people with disabilities. They also collate a list of practical information and resources relevant for bookshops, such as, examples of bookshop websites that display accessible e-books and a "step by step" guide to support book sector professionals in their digital accessibility journey.

Meanwhile, ALIRE is a book trade association bringing together booksellers who share the same objective: to develop the use of high-performance IT tools, supplied with reliable, up-to-date information at controlled costs. It is an association specialised in digital topics, including accessibility of e-books. Also part of the French Ministry for Culture's steering committee on digital accessibility, ALIRE provides its bookshop members with updated information and resources, and works together with other partners in the French book sector on the signposting of digital books on online sales sites in order to bring retailers' websites up to standard and enable all customers, including those with temporary or permanent accessibility technology needs, to buy, read and enjoy books in a seamless way.

To get a better understanding of the needs and requirements of blind and partially-sighted people who may want to purchase products online, including books on a bookshop's website, we spoke to Manuel Pereira, Head of Accessibility at the Association Valentin Haüy, an association that works to support blind and partially-sighted people across France. More specifically, they raise awareness among companies and public authorities on the importance of digital accessibility for these groups of people. As Manuel puts it:

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If we want blind and partially-sighted people to be independent in their professional and daily lives, measures need to be put in place to facilitate this, including access and use of tools and services such as websites and mobile applications.

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MANUEL PEREIRA

Head of Accessibility at the Association Valentin Haüy

This is where the EAA and national legislations are so important. While Manuel and the Association Valentin Haüy welcome the transposition of the Act into French law, and celebrate that in France it goes even further than the European directive's objectives, Manuel regrets that certain areas have still been left behind, such as household appliances.

As for the book sector, he believes that the first barrier for partially-sighted or blind people is that, currently, the large majority of book formats on offer are not accessible to them; only people with a good command of technological tools can sometimes buy books and read them. The next obstacle comes with buying books, as websites selling books online are difficult to navigate, making it a hard task for people to find the right book and then buy it. His advice for booksellers who wish to play an active role in improving access to books for visually impaired people is to start by making their websites accessible and learning what steps to take to get there.

This step, naturally, requires awareness raising, access to information and resources and, most importantly, funding. Manuel believes smaller French bookshops do not have the sufficient financial resources to make their websites accessible. As a result, public authorities, and in particular the Ministry of Culture, should offer them financial incentives to improve their websites' accessibility.



A look beyond Europe

While most of these case studies have focused on European countries, given the context of the European Accessibility Act (EAA), there are also active efforts beyond European borders to ensure books are accessible to all readers. This section, whilst not an exhaustive list, will briefly cover some countries and other initiatives at an international level addressing accessibility.

Canada

Canada is a country with over six million people (aged 15 and over), who have a disability of some kind, including blindness or visual impairment, print or perceptual disability. In 2019, the Accessible Canada Act came into effect, becoming a landmark law which sets to achieve a barrier-free Canada by 2040.³⁰

With this important development, the Canadian book sector has also made efforts to advance on the topic of accessibility. For instance, BookNet Canada is a non-profit organization founded in 2002 that develops technology, standards, and education to serve the Canadian book industry. As early as 2015³¹, **BookNet Canada** has covered the topic of book accessibility, sharing resources and information to support the production and distribution of born-accessible books.³² The Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) and the National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS) are additional organisations who provide information and serve as resource hubs on all book accessibility questions.³³

As part of available public funding for the Canadian publishing and bookselling sectors under the Canada Book Fund³⁴, in 2019, the Canadian federal government launched the

Accessible Digital Books Initiative, an investment of \$22.8 million for the development of an initiative to support the sustainable production and distribution of accessible digital books by Canadian independent publishers over the course of five years, until end of 2024.³⁵ Nevertheless, funding under this initiative is not expected to continue beyond 2024, leaving many actors in the sector concerned and fearful for the standard of future accessible formats, both for e-books and particularly for audiobooks, given their growth in popularity.³⁶

From the bookselling sector's perspective, bookshops can count on the **Canadian Independent Booksellers Association (CIBA)**, the leading association representing the interests of the independent bookselling community in Canada, to support them on the topic of accessibility. For instance, in autumn 2023 CIBA organised an event to help independent bookshops audit their retail environments to discover no-cost and low-cost ways to improve their store's accessibility.³⁷

USA

In the United States of America (USA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has been in place since 1990, becoming the first comprehensive civil rights law addressing the needs of people with disabilities, prohibiting discrimination in employment, public services, public accommodations, and telecommunications.

Since then, the ADA has been amended in 2008 to broaden the definition of disability and the scope, and further debated. More specifically, in 2019, a debate emerged as to whether the ADA should apply to websites and apps of businesses, that is, to online retail. While no additional amendments were made to the ADA, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and Supreme Court effectively ruled that it did, indeed, apply.

The **American Booksellers Association (ABA)**, the leading trade association promoting and representing independent bookshops in the USA since 1900, has monitored the legislative changes on accessibility, particularly regarding digital accessibility and the requirements that websites must incorporate in order to ensure compliance with the ADA.³⁸ As part of their monitoring and their role in providing independent bookshops with expert advice and information, the ABA has set up a number of practical resources to help booksellers take some first steps towards making their website more accessible.³⁹

However, as addressed previously in this paper, accessibility practices extend beyond the digital sphere, also to physical spaces. ABA works extensively on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access (DEIA), to advocate for and help ensure that bookshops as physical spaces remain as accessible, welcoming and inclusive to all as possible. A summary of the ABA's work in 2023,⁴⁰ and previous years,⁴¹ on DEIA can be found on their website and include, among others, hosting Disability Community group meetings with disabled-identifying booksellers and bookshop owners, reviewing ABA conferences and events and offering feedback to improve accessibility, equity, access, and inclusion, for example, establishing an ABA accessibility fund for members who need scooters for mobility during these events. The ABA also applies many of these practical tips and recommendations to their own organisation of events, for instance, its annual Winter Institute conference, for instance, providing accessible priority seating at the front of the rooms and space and handouts for those with hearing, sensory, and/or processing needs.⁴²



Transnational organisations and initiatives

Beyond national borders, there are multiple organisations and initiatives that operate at international level in the field of book accessibility, many of which have already been referred to in this paper. It is, therefore, vital to highlight their expertise when it comes to accessibility in the book world and recognise their contribution in the progress achieved so far.



IDPF and the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)

Two of the most important international organisations working on accessibility are the **International Digital Publishing Forum (IDPF)** and the **World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)**. Up until 2016, the former was a global organisation dedicated to the development and promotion of electronic publishing and content consumption, more specifically, developing, maintaining, and promoting standards and specifications related to electronic publications. Their biggest success story is the development of the EPUB (electronic publication), a widely recognised open and accessible electronic format which is supported by most e-readers and compatible with hardware and software features in most smartphones, tablets, and computers. It is considered to be essential for accessibility and recommended to be used as the standard in the publishing industry.

In 2017, IDPF merged⁴³ with W3C, an international organization that works on developing international standards for the World Wide Web, credited with spearheading the work on website accessibility. More specifically, over the years, W3C has published a variety of strategies, standards, and supporting resources to help make the Web more accessible to people with disabilities, many of which can be found via their W3C Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI).⁴⁴



The DAISY Consortium

The DAISY Consortium is a global consortium of organizations founded in 1996, whose mission is to work to improve access to reading for people with print disabilities. Among other areas, they lead on the development of software and digital tools used around the world in the creation, conversion and validation of accessible publications. For instance, they have developed specific software that checks the accessibility of EPUB formats, capable of reporting accessibility errors, and created their own DAISY format, which offers a flexible and navigable reading experience for people who are blind or print disabled.⁴⁵

Among other additional initiatives, there is one of particular relevance to the bookselling sector: the DAISY Consortium, in collaboration with Fondazione LIA and other partners, is creating a User Experience Guide for Displaying Accessibility metadata for EPUB⁴⁶ on how to implement accessibility metadata in the web pages of online bookshops. This resource is expected to be of great value, particularly ahead of the EAA requirements coming into force in June 2025.



Accessible Books Consortium (ABC)

The **Accessible Books Consortium (ABC)**⁴⁷ is a public-private partnership led by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) founded in 2014 with the aim of implementing the goals of the Marrakesh Treaty. Similarly to the previous organisations and groups mentioned above, their mission is to increase the number of books worldwide in accessible formats - such as braille, audio, e-text, large print – and to make them available to people who are blind, have low vision or are otherwise print disabled.

This 2024, the ABC celebrates its 10-year anniversary. Since its foundation, they have contributed to the creation of approximately one million books in specially adapted formats, ensuring that people with visual impairments or print disabilities have access to information, knowledge, and literature.⁴⁸

Additionally, the ABC supports accessible publishing in developing and least-developed countries, providing training opportunities and technical assistance to NGOs, government bodies and publishers, among other stakeholders.



EDItEUR

Last but not least, EDItEUR is the international group coordinating development of the standards infrastructure for e-commerce in the book, e-book and serials sectors. Created in 1991 and established as a standards organisation in 1994, EDItEUR is credited for having developed the ONIX standards used to generate metadata for accessibility.

As for EAA requirements, publishers and booksellers alike will have to display book metadata, that is, data that describes the bibliographic, commercial and technical characteristics, in an accessible way. The ONIX family of standards, created by EDItEUR, is as of today the international standard in the market to do so.

Main takeaways for the bookselling sector

1. Bookshops have a role to play in complying with accessibility requirements

As explained in this paper, the European Accessibility Act (EAA) and its key accessibility requirements will come into force across EU member states as of June 2025. Some of these requirements – including web accessibility, display of e-book metadata and adequate labelling of e-readers – apply to book distributors and bookshops, except for those that are micro-enterprises.

Failure to comply with these requirements might lead to fines and other penalties, as well as potential removal of products from the market. We strongly encourage Booksellers Associations (BAs) and their legal services across the EU

to familiarise themselves with their national legislation on accessibility, deriving from the EAA and its objectives.

This paper, alongside EIBF's factsheet on the EAA and resources prepared by some BAs in EIBF membership mentioned in this paper such as the German Publishers and Booksellers Association (Börsenverein), the SLF and ALIRE, provide a good basis for BAs and booksellers across Europe to better understand the accessibility obligations coming their way ahead of 2025.

2. More awareness on the importance of accessibility is needed in the bookselling sector

Awareness around the importance of producing born-accessible books has been on the rise in the last few years. However, much of it remains contained in expert groups within the publishing sector. This is understandable to a degree, given that most of the bulk of the work begins with creating open and accessible e-books. However, for a fully accessible experience for blind and visually impaired people, the entire book ecosystem needs to be engaged in the conversation and aligned in their common objectives.

Many important resources by international standards organisations or other stakeholders in the book sector have been featured in this paper, but few of them are directly aimed at bookshops, those in direct contact with blind or visually impaired customers. As mentioned above, some BAs in EIBF membership featured in this paper, such as the German Publishers and Booksellers Association (Börsenverein), the SLF and ALIRE have already actively worked at national level to raise awareness on the importance of book accessibility and the EAA obligations, producing guides, FAQs and

additional resources for booksellers in Germany and France respectively. Together with EIBF, they can serve as ideal contact points to learn more about the topic.

Additionally, as highlighted by several of the guest interviewees of this paper, accessibility is multifaceted, particularly in the bookshop: it involves thinking of the customer's experience, not only when purchasing online but also when accessing and moving around the physical shop. To do so, it is vital that booksellers engage with customers in their local communities to better understand their needs. BAs in EIBF membership, such as the American Booksellers Association (ABA), already do great work through their Antiracism, Equity, Inclusion, Access & Representation activities to advocate for and help bookshops remain as accessible, welcoming and inclusive to all as possible. We encourage all BAs and bookshops to prioritise their customers' physical and online accessibility needs when visiting a bookshop and buying books.

3. Adequate training and financial resources are vital to leave no one behind

The need for more resources, guidelines and information on accessibility aimed directly at booksellers, as well as increased awareness beyond the publishing sector has already been addressed. Nevertheless, these resources need to be accompanied by adequate training and public funding wherever possible, particularly for smaller bookshops who do not have the technical know-how or capacity to comply with all the necessary requirements, such as adapting their website or web shop.

While some countries and organisations provide publishers and other stakeholders with tailor-made training courses and webinars, such as Fondazione LIA and the German Publishers and

Booksellers Association (Börsenverein), there are currently very few public funding schemes and sources to support the book sector in the process of aligning with accessibility requirements, and in some cases, such as Canada, the limited funding strands available are ending and not being renewed. While all actors in the book value chain understand the importance of ensuring access to literature for all, smaller bookshops and those with limited resources must be supported with adequate funding and training, so that adopting accessibility requirements does not come at the expense of running a small business.



Conclusion

Accessibility, in all its forms, is here to stay. The Marrakesh Treaty set the wheels in motion, and the adoption of legislation in the EU – the European Accessibility Act (EAA) – confirms this new reality. And with that, a growing awareness can be observed across the book sector, with key stakeholders working hard to ensure that as many people as possible, regardless of ability or condition, have access to knowledge through literature.

While for many years, research and developments on book accessibility have been spearheaded by organisations and initiatives within the publishing industry, and most of the resources and information have been contained within this sector, it is clear that booksellers and their bookshops have a crucial role to play in ensuring that consumers and readers with disabilities have access to their favourite books.

With the EAA requirements coming into force across the EU in June 2025, it is vital that all parts of the book value chain are prepared to comply with the new accessibility rules – from e-book and e-reader accessibility, to online accessibility in websites and web shops – as well as willing to apply important (if not legally binding) measures to improve access to books, for instance, by improving accessibility in physical bookshop spaces.

To ensure booksellers are actively aligned with accessibility requirements and involved in future developments moving forward, increased awareness, adequate training and access to funding are paramount for bookshops at local, national and international levels. EIBF and RISE Bookselling will continue to play their part and engage with this important topic to ensure that, in the near future, books in all their formats are accessible to all.

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Syndicat de la librairie française (SLF)



**Association des librairies informatisées et utilisatrices
des réseaux électroniques (ALIRE)**

Manuel Pereira – Association Valentin Haüy



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