

Accessibility Issue – Images not being accessible.

As part of any website, images are used to make content more pleasant and easier to understand for many people. Images found on a website can serve several purposes such as being decorative or functional, it is important to ensure that all images found within a website are made accessible. Users making use of screen readers, speech input software and other assistive technologies will require images to be full accessible. It is also worth noting that accessible images will also benefit mobile users and search engine optimization for your website.

What you need to know

The first step into making images accessible is to identify what the image is being used for. A decorative image will have different accessibility requirements than an image which is used in a functional manner.

Types of images:

- **Decorative** - These images don't add information to the content of a page. For example, the information provided by the image might already be given using adjacent text, or the image might be included to make the website more visually attractive.
- **Informative** - Informative images convey a simple concept or information that can be expressed in a short phrase or sentence.
- **Functional** - Functional images are used to initiate actions rather than to convey information. They are used in buttons, links, and other interactive elements.
- **Complex images, galleries and image maps** – If a website is required to display specific information such as complex images (graphs, data etc.), image collections and image maps these may require additional accessibility features such as long descriptions and built-in web based accessibility features.

ALT image attributes:

ALT (alternative) image attributes are used to convey an image's content in text format. It is important to create suitable ALT attributes for each image depending on the type of image. When determining appropriate alternative text for images, context is everything.

A decorative image which is used to style a web page, create design elements or which has been already explained is required to have an empty ALT attribute. On the other hand, informative and functional images will require the ALT attribute to convey the same visual information in text format. ALT attributes are required to be added programmatically through HTML code or through a CMS (Content Management System) platform such as WordPress or Drupal.

Implementing ALT attributes

As mentioned above different image types will require different ALT attributes, below are some common examples.

Decorative Image example:

- An image used solely in the page design border.

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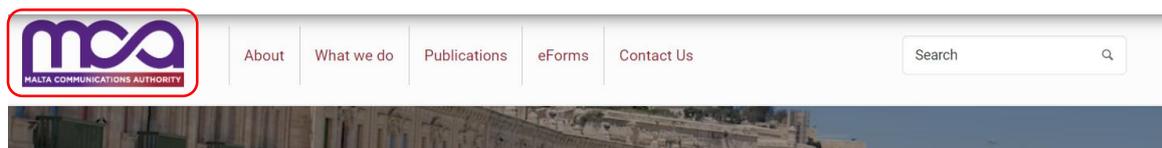
- An image used in the same context as adjacent text

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Functional Image example:

- An image of company or organisation logo used as a link to navigate to the homepage.



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Informative Image example:

- An image is used to supplement other information.



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Common mistakes:

- **Images containing a lot of text** – It is recommended to avoid images with a lot of text since these can be very difficult to convey in an ALT attribute.
- **Not tagging icons and logos** – It is very easy to overlook small images such as icons and logos.

Related WCAG criteria:

Success Criterion 1.1.1: Non-text Content

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Understanding/non-text-content.html>

Success Criterion 1.4.5: Images of Text

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Understanding/images-of-text.html>

Success Criterion 2.4.4: Link Purpose (In Context)

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Understanding/link-purpose-in-context.html>

WCAG best practises and recommended techniques:

How to identify the type of image

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/tutorials/images/decision-tree/>

Providing short text alternative for non-text content that serves the same purpose and presents the same information as the non-text content

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Techniques/general/G94>

Using alt attributes on img elements

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Techniques/html/H37>

Using CSS to control visual presentation of text

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Techniques/css/C22>

Combining adjacent image and text links for the same resource

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Techniques/html/H2>