

Accessibility Issue – Incorrect use of colour

When designing a website, colour is often used to enhance the overall aesthetic appeal of each web page. An organisation usually chooses to make use of colours which form part of their brand design or logo. Colours within a web page can also be used to emphasise certain functional elements such as links and buttons. Making use of colour is always encouraged however it is also important to keep in mind that not all users perceive colour in the same way. It is important to always find a balance between what is most aesthetically pleasing and what is considered accessible.

What you need to know

Users with partial sight often experience limited colour vision, and many older users do not see colour well. In addition, people using limited-colour or monochrome displays and browsers will be unable to access information that is presented only in colour.

Using Colour as a functional tool

Colour can be used as a functional tool to signal information such as; required fields in forms, links, buttons and any object which contains focus. Colour can also be used in other functional aspects, it is important that these are assessed individually to determine whether they are accessible or not.

Colour Contrast requirements

- **Text Contrast** - If the background is a solid colour one should make sure that the text being used has a minimum colour contrast of 4.5:1 as per WCAG 2.1 level AA standards. There are various online tools such as <https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/> which can be used to determine if the level of contrast is sufficient. One should avoid putting text on backgrounds such as images or backgrounds which contain a gradient effect since the level of contrast will be much harder to determine.
- **Non-text Contrast** – Low contrast controls are more difficult to perceive, and may be completely missed by people with a visual impairment. If colour is used to convey certain information such as buttons and links it is important that these are distinguishable with at least a 3:1 contrast ratio as per WCAG 2.1 level AA standards.

Making use of colour

The below are some common examples of accessible colour use

Colour is used to highlight mandatory fields in a form.

The below form contains mandatory fields which are flagged by a red *, it is important that the information is also conveyed in text format since not all users will perceive the * in the same way.



Public Sector Website Accessibility Complaint Form

Fields marked in * are required.

Name and Surname *

Name of person entering complaint

Email address *

Email address of person entering complaint

Using colour to highlight a button in a form

When using colour to distinguish a button it is important that it has a minimum contrast of 3:1.

Home Phone

Mobile No.

Email

[Next Page >](#)

Using colour to highlight links in text

Colour can also be used to highlight links with a minimum contrast of 3:1 between adjacent text.

In terms of the [Electronic Communications \(Regulation\) Act \(Chapter 399 of the Laws of Malta\)](#), undertakings wishing to provide commercial electronic communications are required to notify the Malta Communications Authority for a General Authorisation to provide such services.

The documents below are found in the following [section](#):

Related WCAG criteria:

Understanding Success Criterion 1.4.1: Use of Colour

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Understanding/use-of-color>

Understanding Success Criterion 1.4.3: Contrast (Minimum)

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Understanding/contrast-minimum.html>

Understanding Success Criterion 1.4.11: Non-text Contrast

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

WCAG best practises and recommended techniques:

Ensuring that information conveyed by colour differences is also available in text

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Techniques/general/G14>

Including a text cue for coloured form control labels

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Techniques/general/G205>

Ensuring that a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1 exists between text (and images of text) and background behind the text

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Techniques/general/G18>

Ensuring that additional visual cues are available when text colour differences are used to convey information

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Techniques/general/G182>

Using a contrast ratio of 3:1 with surrounding text and providing additional visual cues on hover for links or controls where colour alone is used to identify them

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Techniques/general/G183>

Using CSS to change the presentation of a user interface component when it receives focus

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Techniques/css/C15>