

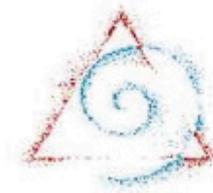


AEMA – Adult Education Made Accessible

Organisational Standards for National Accessibility Checkpoints *and* Structures for the EU Accessibility Quality Network

www.aemanet.eu

Partners



Symbiosis Foundation



"This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This document reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein."



Contents

Inhaltsverzeichnis

1. Introduction	4
1.1 <i>Background: The AEMA project</i>	4
1.2 <i>National Accessibility Checkpoints</i>	6
2. Organisational standards	7
2.2 <i>What are the characteristics of an NAC organisation?</i>	9
Values	9
Characteristics	9
Knowledge	9
Skills	10
2.3 <i>Making improvements visible: Accreditation & Badge System</i>	10
Adult education providers: Accreditation of achievements	10
Accessibility experts: Accreditation of competencies	10
Badge System	11
3. Quality standards	13
3.1 <i>Information</i>	13
3.2 <i>Dissemination</i>	13
3.3 <i>National Trust Network</i>	14
4. European Accessibility Quality Network	15
4.1 <i>Chair</i>	15
4.2 <i>National Accessibility Checkpoints & Membership</i>	15
4.3 <i>Decision-making</i>	15
4.4 <i>Costs</i>	16
4.5 <i>Communication</i>	16
4.6 <i>Dissemination</i>	16
4.7 <i>Shared responsibilities</i>	16
5. Financial concept	17

1. Introduction

1.1 Background: The AEMA project

This paper is one of the results of the project **AEMA: Adult Education Made Accessible**. AEMA was funded by the Lifelong Learning, Grundtvig programme of the European Commission and was carried out between 2014 and 2017 by 12 organisations from 11 European countries.

AEMA aimed at **making adult education provisions more accessible** to all learners by developing a joint network and a quality framework of accessibility issues in the field of adult education.

Access to adult education is seen as one of the key factors for **inclusion**. But not all citizens have equal access to adult education. Comparative data shows that people with disabilities have the **lowest participation rates** in both post and upper secondary education, which contribute to disadvantages on the labour market. In the EU Action Plan on Adult Learning ("It is always a good time to learn") from 2007¹, people with disabilities are mentioned as one of the most disadvantaged groups in terms of their low participation rates in adult education.

To tackle this problem, the AEMA Network has created a comprehensive and holistic **Accessibility Framework** that addresses the needs of people with disabilities and the situation in adult education provision equally.

This Accessibility Framework was the basis for an online **(self-)assessment tool (Maturity Matrix)** that adult education providers can use to assess and improve their accessibility. This assessment is based on **six areas** of accessible and inclusive adult education:

- Developing positive attitudes and values towards adult learners with disabilities
- Providing an accessible environment for learning
- Providing an accessible digital learning environment for learning
- Planning accessible learning
- Supporting accessible learning
- Communicating and public relations

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/resource-centre/content/action-plan-adult-learning-it-always-good-time-learn-2007>



Each area has **five dimensions** that express the level of self-assessed accessibility/inclusion:

- Aware
- Exploring
- Developing
- Integrated
- Transformative

Adult education providers can easily **assess themselves** online by ticking the cells in this matrix. In this way, the organisation obtains an overview of the level of its accessibility and inclusiveness for all learners and an idea of possible improvements.

If the organisation is ready to improve in certain areas and wants to be supported in this effort, it can **easily get in contact with experts** that are competent in this specific field of accessibility (e.g. web design, easy-to-read) and are located in the respective region.

Accessibility experts that want to be part of the network can **assess and show their competencies** that are relevant to support adult education providers in their efforts to increase their level of accessibility and inclusiveness.

➔ Register on <http://aemanet.eu/en/pre-register> for uploading your profile and doing the assessment

1.2 National Accessibility Checkpoints

In order to build up the project and pilot its tools, the AEMA partners acted as National Accessibility Checkpoints, i.e. **one-stop-shops** or **interface organisations** between adult education providers and experts. They are also the founding members of the **European Accessibility Quality Network**.

This paper lays out the **organisational standards** for organisations that work as National Accessibility Checkpoints (NAC) and it provides an overview of the **characteristics and tasks** of organisations that would like to join the European Network as national partners. Thus it contributes to the quality of the entire network and the services it provides.

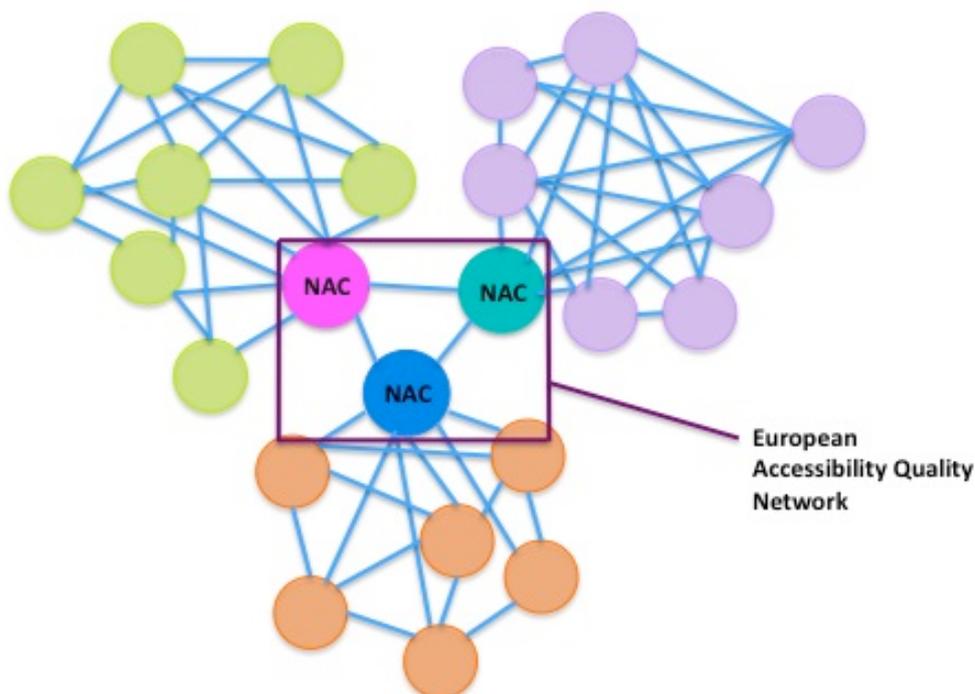
2. Organisational standards

2.1 What is a National Accessibility Checkpoint?

A National Accessibility Checkpoint (NAC) is an **interface** between different stakeholders and target groups at the national or regional level and beyond and acts as a **one-stop shop** regarding the various elements developed in the AEMA project.

Very generally speaking, an NAC brings together **adult education providers** interested in becoming accessible and inclusive organisations and **accessibility experts** that are qualified and capable of supporting the education providers in reaching their accessibility goals. At the European level, the NACs in the participating countries constitute a network dedicated to advance accessibility issues in adult education and to keep up high standards in this effort. The National Accessibility Checkpoints are thus highly relevant **points of intersections** in a two-level network structure:

- At the **national level**, the NAC builds up and maintains the so-called "National Trust Network" of adult education providers, accessibility experts and relevant stakeholder (see 3.3).
- At the **European level**, the NAC is part of the "European Accessibility Quality Network" (see 3.4).



Furthermore, the NAC is responsible for the following **core tasks**:

- The NAC gets in contact with accessibility experts and (adult education) organisations, informs them about the AEMA portal and **thus further develops the National Trust Network** (see 3.3).
- The NAC provides **technical support** to the adult education providers and the accessibility experts that want to join the (online) network.
- The NAC is responsible for the **distribution of badges** and for the **accreditation process**, as described in chapter 2.3.
- The NAC staff regularly **update the AEMA portal** with current information on new laws and regulations, interesting projects, websites and publications on accessibility/inclusion (in the field of adult education).
- The NAC monitors if the **assessment tools provided on the AEMA portal** still fit new legal, social, political, technical and didactical developments and standards.
- It **takes an active role** in the European Accessibility Quality Network (see 3.4).

The role of the NAC may vary from country to country or region to region and is also dependent on the number of the National Accessibility Checkpoints per country/region, but it may include the **following working areas**:

- The NAC **lobbies** for issues such as inclusion, accessibility etc. at the national and/or regional level by building up networks with relevant stakeholders (from the fields of politics, administration, pressure groups etc.).
- It acts as an **influencer** for accessibility and inclusion by **dissemination activities**.
- The NAC is a **national or regional knowledge centre** for the issues of accessibility and inclusion in the field of adult education.
- It **organises events** (e.g. workshops) to increase the general awareness of stakeholders for accessibility/inclusion and to strengthen the exchange and the networking in these fields.

It is possible to have **more than one NAC per country**. In this case, the national NACs have to **cooperate closely** and take care of a **reasonable distribution of tasks** among them.

2.2 What are the characteristics of an NAC organisation?

Any organisation that is interested in becoming a National Accessibility Checkpoint and a member of the European Accessibility Quality Network should possess the following **characteristics and qualifications**:

Values

An NAC organisation stands for accessible adult education provisions in its country and beyond and therefore has to credibly represent the **values and attitudes** of the AEMA project. In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities², the National Accessibility Checkpoint works for an inclusive (adult) education system and is committed to bringing us closer to an **inclusive society with equal rights and possibilities for all of its members**.

The NAC follows a **social model of disability** and is thus committed to identify and change barriers and attitudes that contribute to the (social, economic, educational etc.) exclusion of people that are labelled as „disabled“.

Characteristics

In order to be an authentic agent for the issue of accessible and transformative environments (in adult education), the NAC organisation commits itself as far as possible to standards such as **open-mindedness, participation, inclusiveness and the willingness to learn** in its daily work.

A National Accessibility Checkpoint could either be located at a **profit or a not-for-profit organisation**. The organisation's **work focus** is of secondary importance, an NAC organisation could e.g. work in research, development or consulting. As one of the major ideas behind the AEMA project is to act as a **broker** and bring adult education providers aiming at more inclusiveness and experts of accessibility together, the NAC organisation should be as **independent** and **neutral** as possible regarding both fields.

However, a National Accessibility Checkpoint organisation ideally has **excellent contacts** (or the ability to easily network) with adult education providers and accessibility experts as well as with other stakeholders in politics, administration, disability pressure groups and the media.

Knowledge

The staff of the National Accessibility Checkpoint has knowledge in the **national adult education landscape**, knows about the main providers and the challenges of adult education work in general. Furthermore, they are experts regarding **accessibility** in the respective country and beyond, e.g. the major stakeholders, laws and regulations, relevant programmes or the status of the disability/accessibility discourse at various (national, EU) levels.

² <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

Skills

As a National Accessibility Checkpoint is responsible for maintaining the internet platform, providing interesting content for its users, attending and organising meetings of various kinds etc. (see 2.1) its staff has to reach a certain level of

- technical,
- conceptual,
- editorial,
- networking,
- organising and
- marketing & PR skills.

In order to actively participate in the European Accessibility Quality Network, at least one NAC staff member should be able to communicate in **English** to enable the exchange with the European partners.

2.3 Making improvements visible: Accreditation & Badge System

Adult education providers: Accreditation of achievements

The National Accessibility Checkpoint is responsible for the **support of adult education providers** willing to join the National Trust Network. In order to join the Trust Network and make improvements in accessibility visible, the adult education provider has to undergo a **systematic accreditation process** that is the prerequisite for the AEMA **Badge System**.

1. The adult education provider **registers on www.aemanet.eu**.
2. The adult education provider **self-assesses its level of accessibility and inclusion in six defined areas** by using the AEMA assessment tool.
3. It decides upon the **area(s) of accessibility** in which it wants to further develop and improve its performance.
4. It **chooses one (or more) expert(s)** that support the development process in the previously defined area(s).
5. As soon as the improvement(s) is/are **implemented**, the adult education provider gives information ("Reference") on them via the **References Tool**.
6. The accessibility expert that has supported the implementation **confirms the entry**.

In this accreditation process, the NAC **supports** the adult education provider when needed.

Accessibility experts: Accreditation of competencies

Experts that want to work with adult education providers and support them in their efforts for improved accessibility are invited to upload their profile on www.aemanet.eu. In this way, they can show and market their expertise in their

respective accessibility area(s) and get in contact with possible customers. In order to become part of the network, the expert has to take the following steps:

1. He/She registers on **www.aemanet.eu**.
2. He/She fills in the **registration form** including contact information, information on the biographical background and the **presentation of competencies** that is based on the six accessibility areas (**Accessibility Competency Portfolio**).
3. He/She provides information on one or more **reference project(s)** and gives a **description of the expertise** provided by this/these project(s).
4. The client(s) is/are invited by email to **confirm the reference**.

In this process, the NAC **supports** the accessibility experts and **monitors** the entries and updates made by him/her.

Badge System

For **adult education providers**, there are **three AEMA Badges** that show their willingness and further development in improving the level of accessibility and inclusion in their organisation. These electronic badges can be integrated into the adult education provider's website to send a signal to future learners, the public, sponsors, corporate or public purchasers etc. regarding the awareness for the issue and the implementation of accessibility measures.



The three badges for adult education providers represent three levels of accessibility awareness/implementation:

- The **blue badge ("Accessibility level 1")** shows the initial commitment of an organisation. Anybody who wants to support the AEMA values of adult education accessibility gets this badge after assessing their organisation by using the Accessibility Maturity Matrix. This badge is delivered automatically by the AEMA badge system.
- The **green badge ("Accessibility level 2")** recognises that an organisation has demonstrated some progress in making learning more accessible. This badge is awarded as soon as the adult education provider enters one reference (accessibility project) in one of the six areas of accessibility and the responsible expert confirms its completion. This badge is also delivered automatically by the AEMA badge system.
- The **pink badge ("Accessibility level 3")** recognises that an organisation has demonstrated an extended and continuous commitment to making learning more accessible to persons with disabilities. It is awarded to adult education providers that document (confirmed) improvements in all six areas of accessibility. This badge is awarded by the National Accessibility Checkpoint.

Individual badges recognise a **professional with an expertise in one or more areas of accessibility (orange badge)**. It is a single badge not referring to any specific area. The badge holder describes his/her personal expertise by his- or herself. The expert badge is awarded as soon as he/she enters an accessibility project (reference) that is confirmed by the respective customer.



3. Quality standards

3.1 Information

The **information** provided on the AEMA portal, social media channels, at meetings etc. – either at national or European level – has to be **up-to-date** and **reflect** the current (e.g. legal) status-quo.

The information is provided in an **accessible and inclusive way**, regarding the wording, the language used, the technical background etc.

The AEMA networks (either national or European) are **transparent** and **open**. Every member is listed, every expert, adult education provider or other person/organisation that complies with the requirements (e.g. accreditation) can become a member of the network.

3.2 Dissemination

The National Accessibility Checkpoints are responsible for national **dissemination activities** regarding the AEMA portal and its services and benefits. European dissemination activities are coordinated by the current chair organisation and are decided upon by the European Quality Assurance Network (see below).

The dissemination activities address the **key target groups and beneficiaries** of the project:

- adult education providers
- accessibility experts
- people with disabilities
- organisations of/for persons with disabilities
- other relevant stakeholders (e.g. decision makers in politics and/or administration, learners, corporate or public purchasers of adult education provisions)

The **aims of the dissemination/communication activities** are to

- build-up and expand the National Trust Network by approaching possible new members
- popularise the AEMA portal and its services and benefits
- raise general awareness for the issue of accessibility/inclusion (in adult education)

The **basic means of communication/dissemination** is the **AEMA portal** itself which has to be updated by the National Accessibility Checkpoint staff on a regular basis. Furthermore, the NAC provides information for the **social media platforms** (i.e. Facebook) of the network or updates the page(s) itself.

The **other means of communication/dissemination** are open to the decision of the NAC and depend on the groups they target. The following means of communication and dissemination have proven helpful and should be considered:

- presentations at various events (e.g. conferences, workshops)
- flyers
- mailings (snail mail or electronic)
- electronic newsletters
- press relations (e.g. press releases)

It is highly recommended to habitually **monitor the effects of the dissemination activities** by documenting and keeping track of results (e.g. web statistics, inquiries by email/telephone, a number of flyers distributed at a conference, a number of openings after a newsletter campaign, clippings).

The dissemination activities and products are **accessible and inclusive**, regarding the wording, the language used, the technical background etc.

3.3 National Trust Network

The National Accessibility Checkpoint is responsible for the set-up, the maintenance and the management of the **National Trust Network**. The National Trust Network consists of accessibility experts, adult education providers, disabled people's organisations and relevant stakeholders interested in the issue of accessible and inclusive adult education.

The National Trust Networks are based on the following **joint quality standards**:

- **Comprehensiveness:** The National Trust Network unites the **relevant** organisations and persons in the field. **Each of the six areas** of accessibility is represented by the accessibility experts involved.
- **Credibility:** The adult education providers and the accessibility experts that are part of the National Trust Network should have a **profile** on the AEMA website.
- **Transparency:** The National Accessibility Checkpoint keeps and regularly updates the **list** of organisations and individuals that have agreed to take part in the National Trust Network. The list of the network partners is **available** on the AEMA portal.
- **Contact:** The NAC takes care of the management of the National Trust Network by **keeping its members updated** on new regulations, interesting projects and publications etc. relevant in the context of accessible adult education. The information may be distributed by electronic newsletters or other adequate means. At least once per year, a **meeting** of the National Trust Network is organised by the NAC to guarantee personal contact and exchange of information between the network partners.

4. European Accessibility Quality Network

The National Accessibility Checkpoints are partners in the **European Accessibility Quality Network** that is an on-going platform for the exchange of experience and further development. The following **standards of cooperation** form the basis of the joint work in the European Accessibility Quality Network:

4.1 Chair

- The **National Accessibility Checkpoints are the members** of the European Accessibility Quality Network. The European Network is **chaired** by one of its members. Every year, the chair is passed to another NAC. The current chair is publicly named on the AEMA portal.

4.2 National Accessibility Checkpoints & Membership

- The European Accessibility Quality Network consists of National Accessibility Checkpoints. In order to become an NAC, a **membership in the European Accessibility Quality Network is mandatory**.
- In order to become a member of the European Network (and in this way an official AEMA National Accessibility Checkpoint), the organisation willing to be an NAC has to **apply for membership**. The application is made to the current chair of the European network (see above).
- To apply for a membership, the organisation has to fill in the **Maturity Matrix** and prove its **willingness to further develop its own accessibility performance**. Furthermore, the future NAC has to **prove its dedication** to the issues of accessibility and inclusion and **document its (inter-)national networks and achievements** in the field (e.g. practical work, research projects, political work, publications, awards, memberships).
- Their current **chair reviews the documents**. If the organisation is considered as a prospective member and thus a new National Accessibility Checkpoint, the European Network partners are asked to cast their votes. **All material and documents** considered relevant by the network partners for the decision-making process have to be provided by the candidate.

4.3 Decision-making

- To come to joint decisions, the **quorum** is more than 50 percent of the Network members. The **required majority** is also more than 50 percent.
- **Decisions that considerably affect joint services and products** (e.g. basic definitions, Maturity Matrix) or the **structure of the network** (e.g. new members, the expulsion of members) have to be made in an open vote with a higher quorum (2/3) and a required majority of at least 75 percent.
- **Votings** can take place at meetings, Skype conferences but also via email if a meeting in person is not possible.

4.4 Costs

- **Costs deriving from the joint infrastructure** (e.g. programming costs for the AEMA platform, meeting costs) are shared equally between all partners whereas all national costs are covered by the National Accessibility Checkpoints themselves.

4.5 Communication

- The European Accessibility Quality Network **comes together at least once a year**. If a meeting in person is not possible, the network may also refer to other means of communication such as Skype. The meeting is coordinated and called by the current chair organisation.
- The members of the European Accessibility Quality Network regularly (i.e. every two months minimum) **communicate** via email regarding the status quo of the National Accessibility Checkpoints. This email communication is coordinated by the current chair NAC.
- The members of the European network are **listed on the AEMA platform**.

4.6 Dissemination

- Joint dissemination activities (e.g. press releases of the European Network) have to be decided upon by the 50 % quorum (in person, by email, via Skype etc.) and the 50 % majority (see above). The activities are then **coordinated by the current network chair**.

4.7 Shared responsibilities

- Every single National Accessibility Checkpoint is responsible for **updating the AEMA website** and social media channels by **writing blog posts** about new (legal, political, social etc.) developments regarding accessibility and inclusion in their countries.
- Every NAC uploads **good practice examples** deriving from its National Trust Network to the AEMA platform.
- The current chair **supervises** the up-to-dateness of the information provided on the platforms.

5. Financial concept

The National Accessibility Checkpoints are maintained by national partners of the European Accessibility Quality Network. Their work was financed by European funds within the 36 months' period of the AEMA project. A qualitative maintenance of the each of the National Accessibility Checkpoints beyond the lifecycle of the project, requires financial resources to serve adult education providers, allow technical adaptations, continue public relation work, etc.

A wide variety of options has been discussed within the European Network to ensure the existence of the checkpoints in the long run, each of them based on the specific conditions in the respective countries.

5.1 Regional or National funds

- Accessibility is one of the top priorities on the social agenda within the European Union. As a result, initiatives are launched on the regional or national level to set actions for improvement. We understand relevant ministries (e.g. Social Affairs, Education, Economics) as partners to further develop and fund the National Accessibility Checkpoints. In Austria, a meeting was already held with the Ministry of Social Affairs to discuss opportunities for cooperation.

5.2 Programmes or awards

- The topic accessibility addresses a number of different programme-areas and awards (e.g. adult education, social entrepreneurship, innovation, start-ups, regional development), where our partner-organisation see very good opportunities to apply for further financial support. Making use of those programmes, we see chances to expand the European Accessibility Quality Network beyond the current status of participating countries (e.g. Danube Programme, see <http://www.interreg-danube.eu/>).

5.3 Membership fees

- While the application for (further) regional, national or European funds is seen as an approach to finance the infrastructure of the respective National Accessibility Checkpoints, membership fees of the Accessibility Experts displayed at the AEMA portal shall be used to guarantee the quality enhancement of the European Accessibility Network. Income generated by membership fees shall be used to accelerate both the quality and extent of services offered and increase the size of the network (e.g. organisation of the annual meeting).

5.4 Consultancy service

- The National Accessibility Checkpoint is responsible for the **support of adult education providers** willing to join the National Trust Network. In order to join the Trust Network and make improvements in accessibility visible, the adult education provider has to undergo a **systematic accreditation process** that is the prerequisite for the AEMA **Badge System**. While the consultancy was free of charge during the period of the AEMA project, partners consider to charge for this service in the future.

5.5 Online advertising

- Taking into consideration the rising interest for the topic accessibility in general and the AEMA portal in particular, the long-term financing of the European Accessibility Quality Network might be based on income of online advertising.