

“To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems...”

Art. 9, c.1 - Un Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities

Subject: **Note on the Accessibility of the questionnaire** "The European Union Strategy on the Rights of the Child: Consultations with boys, girls and adolescents"

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1. Foreword

The European Commission is preparing two very important documents that focus on protecting and guaranteeing the rights of children and adolescents. The aim of these documents is to ensure that every child and young person in the European Union (EU) has access to all the services they need, so that everyone has equal opportunities to develop themselves and reach their potential.

For this purpose the European Commission together with four organizations has developed a questionnaire for underage citizens to listen directly to their voice. All the answers will be included in a document, which will show the developments of the European Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the Child Guarantee.

In this path **we believe it is fundamental to be able to put in the most favorable conditions to express their thoughts all young people in the European Union but in particular young citizens with disabilities or expressing disability or fragility.** It is they who sometimes fail to see equal opportunities in every area of life recognized by the Member States. It is they who very often are not consulted and their voices are not heard.

We believe it is essential that the Questionnaire should be inclusive and accessible, in order to enable even young persons with intellectual, sensory or communication disabilities to express their thoughts.

2. Object of evaluation

The subject of the evaluation will be the accessibility and usability of the questionnaire: [Italian version source](#)

3. Evaluation objective

The objective of this study is to assess the degree of accessibility and usability of this questionnaire.

At the same time, an attempt will be made to provide useful information to facilitate the use, readability and understanding of the Questionnaire by the widest possible audience of girls and boys in the European Union, in particular girls and boys with disabilities or with specific needs.

4. Analysis and evaluation of the questionnaire in terms of better accessibility, readability and use of the text

The text of the questionnaire has some features that reduce the Accessibility and readability of the text.

In order to promote the readability of the text by young people with sensory or intellectual disabilities or with specific reading or decoding disorders of the written text, the following aspects should be noted:

- A)** requirements to promote the readability of documents and technical requirements for accessibility of digital documents
- B)** requirements to facilitate the fruition of content and written text
- C)** making the questionnaire available in alphabetical form only, with no alternative integrated/associated methods of communication

For the following evaluations, reference has been made to **WCAG 2.1** criteria and the "**Easy to read**" indications. We believe that the European Union should strive in the production of texts and documents communicated via the web to adopt these criteria in order to try to favour all citizens with disabilities in the Member States.



Image 1 -W3C symbol

With regard to the **WCAG 2.1** criteria, W3C (World Wide Web Consortium), in order to meet the needs of different groups and situations, has defined three levels of compliance. In view of the strategic importance of the Questionnaire in question we believe that in this case we should approach the highest level of compliance (level AAA).



Image 2 - "Easy to Read" symbol

To facilitate the understanding of the text it is appropriate to decline the text by adopting the criteria "**Easy to Read**". This methodology provides guidance that makes it easier to write more readable and understandable texts. For example, the use of shorter sentences or simpler words makes it easier for everyone but it is essential especially for those with intellectual disabilities, sensory or communication deficits; the "Easy to Read" criteria also benefit those who find it difficult to read or express specific disorders that make it difficult to decode or to understand written language.

4A. requirements to promote the "readability" and "accessibility" of digital documents

- Drawing on the background

The blue design on the background makes the text more difficult to read: it should be removed;

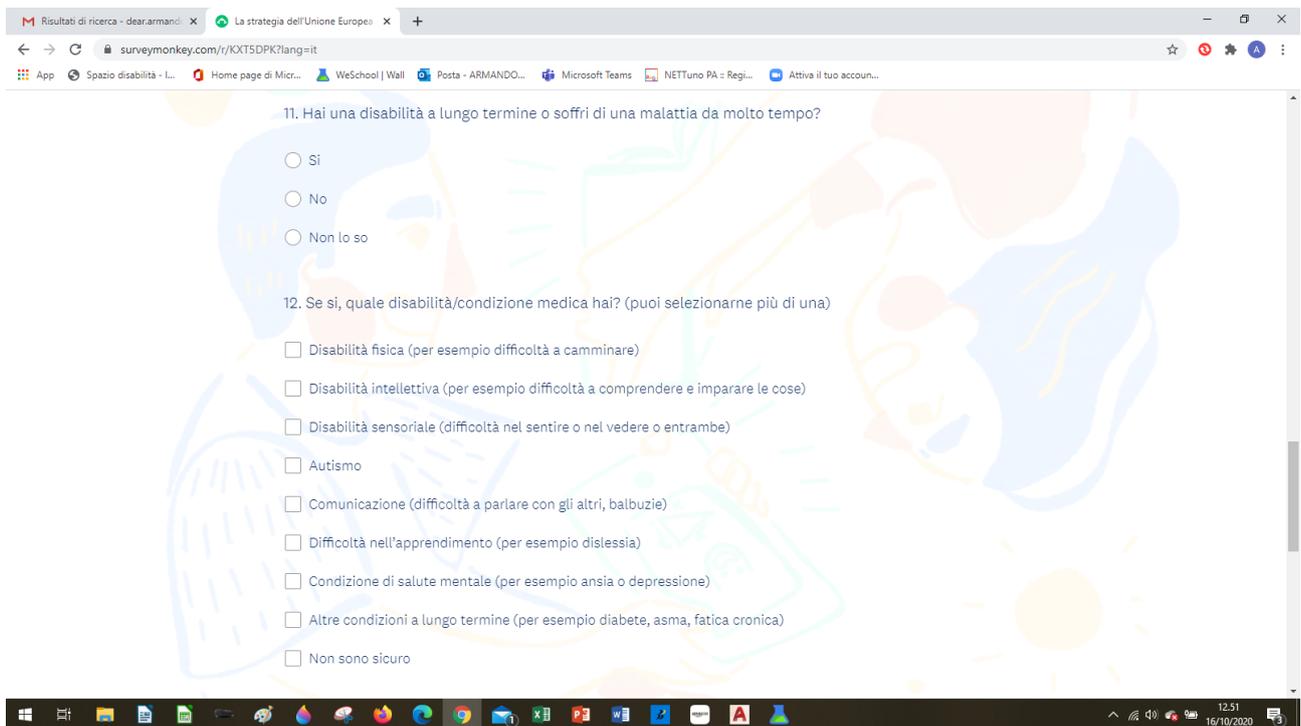


Image 3 - Abstract questionnaire with blue drawing in the background

- Contrast

The color of the font used (light blue) is not very contrasting with the white/light blue background; in particular, the orange text on a white background is not very readable: to make it easier to read, it is necessary to use a text color with more contrast than the background page;

- Font

The font used has too thin outlines that are not very visible for visually impaired children (better to use as a font: Tahoma, Arial, Helvetica, Verdana, ...);

- Line spacing

The line spacing in the presentation text of the questionnaire is not minimal but the readability can be improved by spacing the lines of composition more widely;

- Voice synthesis

The text from a first analysis is readable by voice synthesis but is in general not very accessible for children with visual disabilities. It would also be useful to have a function within the questionnaire that allows access to voice reading of each question.

4B. requirements to facilitate the fruition of content and written text

- Syntax and vocabulary

The text that introduces and explains the questionnaire and some parts of the questionnaire itself use an articulated and complex syntax and vocabulary, sometimes unclear and difficult to use.

Here are two examples, the first taken from the Questionnaire (Image 4) and the second taken from the introductory text of the Questionnaire (Image 5):

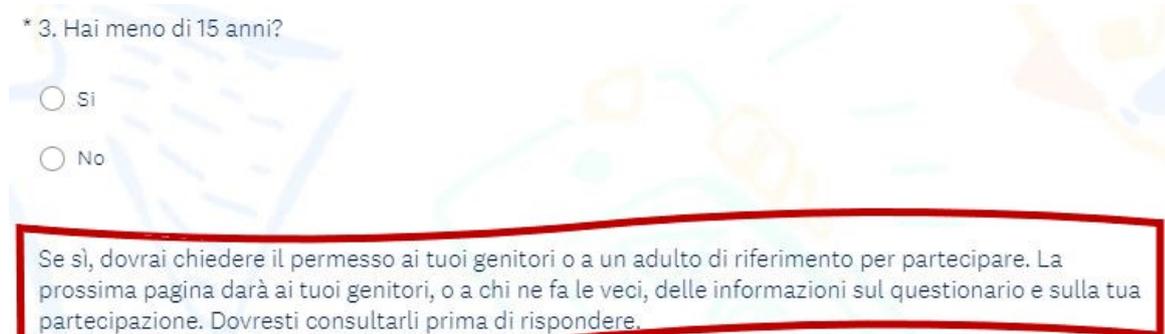


Image 4 - Example Syntax and Lexicon taken from the Questionnaire

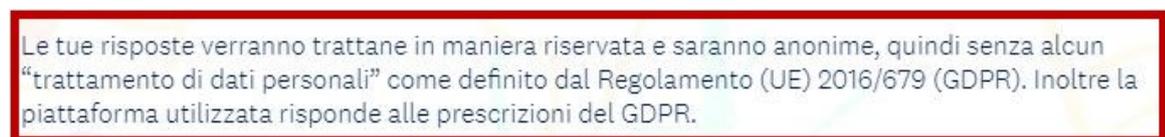


Image 5 - Example Syntax and Lexicon taken from the introductory text to the Questionnaire

- Questionnaire length and articulation

Evidence of administration of the questionnaire to children with disabilities and with specific disorders revealed a difficulty related to excessive length and articulation. To complete the 52 questions of the questionnaire implies a heavy commitment in terms of attention, which leads some to abandon the compilation of the questions or to answer with little attention.

- difficult words

Difficult words are always replaceable by other words that are easier to understand. In the educational field, where it is considered to use "difficult" or uncommon words, it is always appropriate to explain their meaning. Let's try to make two examples with two words used in the introductory text to the questionnaire: before talking about *strategy* or *consultation*, we should explain what these words mean.

- what is a strategy?

"the strategy is when you make a plan to achieve what you want; usually the strategy is a plan that lasts a long time and tries to figure out how to do it to ... "

- what is a consultation?

"the consultation serves to know what is your opinion, to understand what you think ..."

- target

The text illustrating the questionnaire to children is written in a "mixed" language, not dedicated exclusively to young people from 11 to 17 years old. Perhaps it would be worth writing a text intended only for young people and dedicate a separate section for parents. In any case, going forward in the questionnaire there is a section dedicated to parents of children under 15 years of age to give consent and authorization.

- legislative references, standards, acronyms

It is recommended not to include in the text intended for minors legislative references, standards, acronyms, etc., because they make it more difficult to understand the message. Alternatively it is preferable to specify these references at the bottom of the page, in a separate section.

For example, the following sentence makes the text difficult to use and easy to digest:

"... as defined by Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR). In addition, the platform used meets the requirements of the GDPR".

4C. provision of the questionnaire in alphabetical form only, with no integrated/associated alternative communication methods

- questionnaire in **Augmentative and Alternative Communication (CAA)**

In order to allow or facilitate the use of the Questionnaire to children with intellectual disabilities we believe that the European Union can try to elaborate a text with the symbols of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (CAA). Processing a Questionnaire in CAA format is not easy.

In the following two links, we try to provide two examples of CAA questionnaire templates:

a basic trial version, with selectable boxes associated with symbol

- [It is a basic trial version, with selectable boxes associated with your choice with a symbol](#)

a version of the complete questionnaire on the experience during confinement

- [a version of the complete questionnaire on experiences during confinement](#)

- move keys between the pages of the questionnaire

The questionnaire has two "keys" at the bottom of the page that allow you to move from one section to another (see Image 6 below).

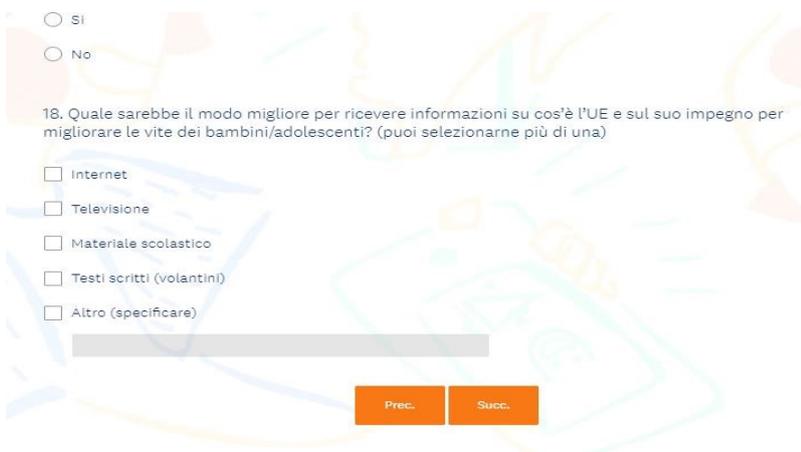


Image 6 - navigation keys within the questionnaire not accessible

In order to improve the usability and understanding of this function we suggest (in addition to changing the color contrast of the text/background, as already mentioned) not to use as a caption of the function the abbreviated words "Prec." and "Succ." but to write "FORWARD"-"BACK" combined with a symbol that reinforces the message (see example of Image 7 below).



Image 7 - Positive example of key to navigate within the web document

5. Conclusions

If children and young people with intellectual disabilities, sensory disabilities, communication deficits or specific disorders do not receive "good information" they will be left aside. If the information, **if the questionnaire is not very accessible, they will not be able to participate and will have difficulty in expressing their thoughts**, in some cases they will not be able to do so and will have to wait for others to choose and decide for them. Finally, this Questionnaire gives children the opportunity to "listen to their voice". The opportunity is important to take care of all of them by making the questionnaire easier to read and understand, accessible, enjoyable and workable.

“States Parties shall ensure that children with disabilities have the right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity, on an equal basis with other children, and to be provided with disability and age-appropriate assistance to realize that right.”

Art. 7, c.3 – UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities