

Digital Barriers or Compliant Delivery? WCAG Accessibility Analysis of Top Courier Websites in Romania and UK Post-EAA Adoption

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Abstract

This research evaluates leading courier websites in Romania and the United Kingdom conformity to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) following the adoption/enforcement of the European Accessibility Act (EAA) and related UK accessibility obligations. It aims to compare prevalent barrier patterns across the two markets. This study combines a targeted literature review on digital accessibility regulation and WCAG-based evaluation with an empirical, practice-oriented application in the courier sector. Ten courier providers (five Romanian, five UK) were selected based on parcel volumes and revenue data, and their key customer-journey website pages were audited using the QualWeb automated evaluation framework against WCAG 2.1 Level A/AA/AAA. Failures were quantified by success criterion and aggregated by the WCAG POUR principles (Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, Robust) to support cross-country comparison. Substantial accessibility gaps were identified across both markets, with frequent violations related to non-text alternatives, color contrast, focus order, and form labelling; Romanian websites generally exhibited higher conformance than UK counterparts. The paper provides sector-specific empirical evidence on post-EAA accessibility compliance in logistics by benchmarking two jurisdictions under different regulatory contexts using a consistent automated audit approach. Results indicate that courier operators should treat accessibility as an integral part of digital service design (particularly on tracking and form-heavy pathways) to reduce regulatory risk and improve inclusive access to parcel-delivery services.

Keywords

Web accessibility; WCAG; European Accessibility Act; courier websites; automated accessibility audit; QualWeb; Weighted Conformance Index.

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Introduction

The rapid expansion of global e-commerce has positioned courier and postal services as indispensable intermediaries in the modern digital economy and supply chains. As online platforms serve as the primary customer interface for millions of consumers across Europe and the United Kingdom, ensuring equitable access to these digital infrastructures has become a critical component of sustainable and inclusive business practices. However, for the estimated 15% of the European population living with disabilities, persistent digital barriers frequently impede independent access to essential services (Chiou et al., 2023).

To address this digital divide, regulatory frameworks have decisively shifted from voluntary guidelines to strict legal mandates. The enforcement of the European Accessibility Act (EAA) in June 2025 marks a milestone, compelling private sector services—including e-commerce and transport nodes—to conform to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Level AA (European Union, 2019). In Romania, this

is reinforced by national legislation such as Law 232/2022 (Legea nr. 232/2022). Conversely, in the post-Brexit United Kingdom, operators must navigate overlapping mandates under the Equality Act 2010 and retained EAA provisions for cross-border EU operations. Consequently, non-compliance now carries significant corporate risk, including potential legal liabilities, consumer litigation, and substantial regulatory penalties under the enforcement mechanisms of the EAA (European Union, 2019).

Despite these pressing regulatory milestones, the logistics sector exhibits notable accessibility challenges regarding digital inclusivity. Courier websites rely heavily on complex, interactive user interfaces—such as parcel tracking systems, dynamic address entry forms, and service selection portals. These are precisely the elements most susceptible to WCAG violations, including insufficient color contrast, keyboard unnavigability, and missing accessible labels.

The originality of this research lies in its pioneering comparative analysis of web accessibility within the courier sector at the critical juncture of the EAA 2025 enforcement. While previous studies have extensively mapped accessibility in the public sector (Pribeanu, 2020) or general retail e-commerce, this research provides, to our knowledge, the first dedicated, post-EAA audit of the logistics industry. The study introduces a novel dual-perspective framework by contrasting a mature digital market under post-Brexit regulations (the UK) with a rapidly evolving Eastern European market (Romania), thereby identifying differing patterns of compliance maturity. By combining the QualWeb automated evaluation framework with a Weighted Conformance Index (WCI) based on the four POUR principles—Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, Robust (W3C, 2018)—this paper establishes a high-resolution, empirical baseline for accessibility compliance immediately following the June 2025 deadline.

To that end, the primary objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to quantify WCAG 2.1 conformance across the top ten courier websites in Romania and the UK by computing a continuous Weighted Conformance Index (WCI) derived from pro-rated POUR principle pass rates, (2) to identify dominant barrier types and the interface components in which they most commonly occur, and (3) to comparatively assess compliance maturity across the two jurisdictions in light of their differing regulatory contexts. The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows: Section 1 reviews the literature on web accessibility regulations and sectoral audits. Section 2 details the methodology and the quantitative scoring model. Section 3 presents the results and discusses the implications of the findings in relation to regulatory and corporate compliance dynamics. Finally, the paper concludes with practical and policy recommendations as well as limitations and future research directions.

1. Literature review

1.1. Bibliometric Trends in Web Accessibility

Scholarly output accelerated following the EU Web Accessibility Directive (European Union, 2016) and intensified further in the lead-up to the European Accessibility Act (European Union, 2019) becoming enforceable in June 2025 (Figure no. 1).

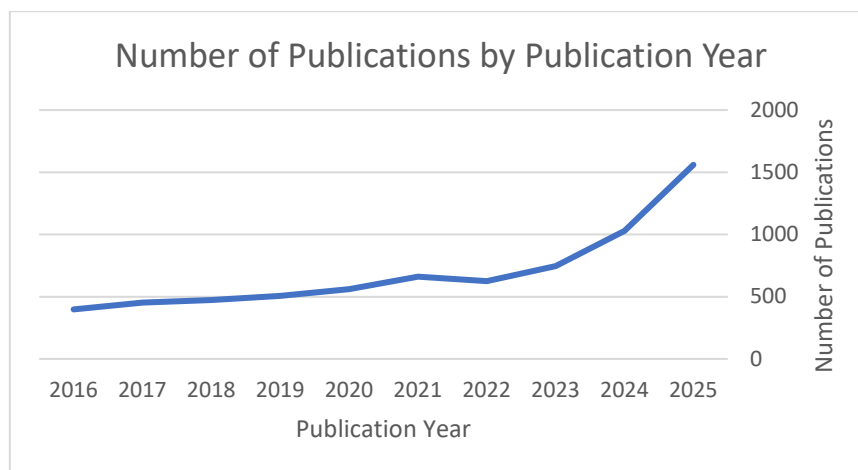


Figure no. 1. Annual publication volume on “Web Accessibility” (2016–2025)

Reflecting an era of heightened regulatory urgency, publication volume for “Web Accessibility” surged from a historical average of 553 papers per year (2016–2023) to 1,029 in 2024 and 1,560 in 2025. This

represents an 85.9% increase in 2024 and a 181.9% jump in 2025 over the previous eight-year average, signalling a shift from niche technical concern to a primary academic and legal priority.

This surge reflects a growing need for evidence on sector-specific readiness and on how organisations operationalise WCAG 2.1 requirements beyond the public sector. However, despite this expanding body of work, logistics and courier platforms—highly dependent on interactive tracking and booking journeys—remain underrepresented in empirical accessibility audits, motivating the present study.

1.2. Regulatory Evolution: From WAD to EAA

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1, developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C, 2018), serve as the definitive technical benchmark for digital inclusion. The guidelines organize success criteria into four foundational principles: Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, and Robust (POUR). Initially, Level AA conformance was only mandatory for public sector bodies under the EU Web Accessibility Directive (European Union, 2016). However, the European Accessibility Act (European Union 2019) represents a paradigm shift, extending these strict AA requirements to private digital services, effective June 2025. The regulatory landscape across the jurisdictions analyzed in this study—Romania and the United Kingdom—presents a nuanced comparative framework. In the UK, post-Brexit regulatory divergence means that domestic private-sector websites are governed primarily by the *legislation.gov.uk*, 2010, which requires "reasonable adjustments" but does not explicitly mandate WCAG conformance. However, because the European Accessibility Act applies to any economic operator providing services to consumers within the EU, UK logistics companies conducting cross-border business are legally bound by its standards regardless of their physical location (European Union, 2019).

1.3. Prior Sectoral Audits and the Logistics Research Gap

While WoS-indexed audits exist across sectors, including hospitality (Teixeira et al., 2022), banking (Martínez et al., 2014), health (Jonsson et al., 2025) and government (Csontos & Heckl, 2021), yet no peer-reviewed studies address courier/delivery platform accessibility, which are critical post-EAA channels for EU/UK disabled users.

Web accessibility is increasingly framed as part of corporate social responsibility, and evidence from listed firms shows that firm size and national culture/legislation significantly shape accessibility outcomes (Lorca et al., 2012). These determinants suggest that smaller logistics operators and platforms operating across varied regulatory contexts may be less likely to embed accessibility in CSR, which helps explain the lack of peer-reviewed audits for courier/delivery services.

2. Research methodology

2.1. Sample Selection and Data Collection

To assess the current state of digital accessibility in the courier sector, a purposive sample of the top ten parcel delivery providers across two distinct regulatory environments (Romania and the United Kingdom) was selected. The top five Romanian operators—Sameday, Fan Courier, Cargus, DPD Romania, and GLS—were identified based on national parcel volumes and revenue data (Autoritatea Națională pentru Administrare și Reglementare în Comunicații, 2025). The top five UK operators—DPD UK, Royal Mail, Evri, Parcelforce, and Yodel—were similarly selected utilizing the latest UK communication regulator market reports (Office of Communications, 2025).

Data collection was conducted in March 2026. The automated accessibility audits were executed using the QualWeb open-source evaluation framework, specifically configured to test against the WCAG 2.1 Level A, AA, AAA standard. The evaluation generated detailed JSON reports containing raw error metrics categorized by WCAG success criteria and POUR principles.

2.2. The Weighted Conformance Index (WCI) Model

Standard automated evaluations typically yield raw error counts, which can distort comparative analysis due to varying website sizes and the disproportionate impact of certain violations on user experience. To synthesize WCAG 2.1 conformance into standardized, comparable metrics, we developed a Weighted Conformance Index (WCI) and also computed aggregated conformance rates by POUR principles, grouping success criteria according to their assigned conformance level.

The WCI aggregates the conformance rates across the four accessibility principles defined by the W3C: Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, and Robust (POUR) from corresponding Success criteria (SC) (W3C, 2018). The model applies specific weights to each principle based on the empirical frequency and

severity of barriers encountered by users with disabilities. The WCI is calculated using the following formula:

$$WCI = \sum_{i=1}^4 w_i \cdot PI_i \quad (1)$$

where:

- i indexes POUR principles: Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, Robust (W3C, 2018).
- $PI_i = \frac{1}{n_i} \sum_{j=1}^{n_i} p_{ij}$ (principle pass rate; $p_{ij} = 1$ if SC j passes, 0 otherwise);

$w_i = [0.40, 0.30, 0.20, 0.10]$ represents the assigned weight for each principle.

The weighting system strategically prioritizes Perceivable (40%) and Operable (30%) principles. Prior empirical studies using automated evaluation tools demonstrate that the vast majority of detected accessibility failures fall within the Perceivable category. For example, a 2015 study of Turkish municipal websites found that 52% of errors were related to the Perceivable principle, while a 2019 large-scale evaluation of Romanian websites found that 85.63% of all detected errors were Perceivable failures (most notably missing alternative text and missing link descriptions). In contrast, errors within the Operable category make up a much smaller fraction of the detected failures, with the 2019 Romanian study reporting that they accounted for only 6.84% of total errors (Pribeanu, 2020; Laamanen et al., 2022). Understandable (20%) and Robust (10%) criteria receive lower weighting, reflecting their smaller proportion of total criteria and lower reliable automated detection rates. The resulting WCI yields a continuous score between 0 (complete failure) and 1 (full conformance), with scores ≥ 0.70 designated as indicating "high conformance".

2.3. Data Processing and Pro-rated Scoring

A significant methodological challenge in automated accessibility scoring is the potential for double-counting, as specific ACT Rules and WCAG techniques frequently map to multiple success criteria across different POUR principles. For instance, technique QW-WCAG-T24 simultaneously affects Operable and Understandable criteria. To ensure analytical rigor, a proportional apportionment (pro-rating) method was implemented (W3C, 2018). If a single technical failure impacted multiple criteria, its penalty was mathematically distributed. For example, a single failure impacting two Operable criteria and one Understandable criterion contributed a 2/3 failure weight to the Operable pass rate and a 1/3 failure weight to the Understandable pass rate. Furthermore, ACT Rules lacking explicit success criteria mapping in the default QualWeb outputs (e.g., QW-ACT-R20) were manually mapped to primary WCAG criteria using official W3C documentation (W3C, 2018). The aggregation, pro-rating, and final WCI calculations were executed via a custom Python script, which parsed the raw QualWeb JSON outputs to generate the final comparative dataset used for descriptive statistics and cross-country significance testing.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Overall WCI Conformance and Cross-Country Comparison

The automated audit of the ten courier platforms generated a comprehensive dataset mapping WCAG 2.1 AA compliance across Romania and the United Kingdom. Applying the Weighted Conformance Index (WCI) model established in Section 2.2, a clear compliance gap was identified across the sector.

Table no. 1 presents the aggregated WCI scores alongside the pro-rated pass rates for each of the four POUR principles. The data reveals that none of the analyzed logistics platforms achieved full WCAG conformance, and all platforms failed to reach the 0.70 threshold indicative of high accessibility maturity.

Table no. 1. Weighted Conformance Index (WCI) and POUR Principle Pass Rates by Operator

Jurisdiction	Courier Operator	WCI Score	PI Perceivable (40%)	PI Operable (30%)	PI Understandable (20%)	PI Robust (10%)
Romania	Cargus	0.53	44%	41%	69%	92%
	DPD RO	0.54	47%	60%	54%	67%
	Fan Courier	0.54	45%	39%	80%	84%
	GLS RO	0.51	37%	47%	75%	74%
	Sameday	0.51	36%	47%	74%	81%
	RO Average	0.53	42%	47%	70%	80%

UK	Evri	0.56	50%	41%	74%	93%
	DPD UK	0.52	46%	38%	74%	77%
	Yodel	0.48	48%	20%	76%	80%
	Royal Mail	0.44	30%	30%	74%	78%
	Parcelforce	0.41	32%	26%	68%	67%
	UK Average	0.48	41%	31%	73%	79%

Source: Authors' calculations based on QualWeb WCAG 2.1 audit results (March 2026)

A comparative assessment reveals an unexpected inversion of anticipated digital maturity. Contrary to the assumption that the UK's long-standing legal pressures under the legislation.gov.uk (2010) would yield superior results, the Romanian cohort demonstrated a higher baseline WCI average (0.53) compared to the UK (0.48). To interpret this counter-intuitive pattern, we examine which WCAG principle most strongly drives the cross-country gap.

Across Perceivable, Understandable, and Robust, the two markets perform comparably. The divergence emerges in the Operable principle: UK platforms exhibited higher failures (averaging a 31% pass rate, compared to Romania's 47%). Platforms such as Yodel (20%), Parcelforce (26%), and Royal Mail (30%) drag down the UK average, indicating severe deficiencies in keyboard navigation and interactive element operability.

Contrary to the expectation that the United Kingdom's longer-standing domestic accessibility obligations would yield superior digital maturity, the slightly superior performance of the Romanian market suggests that recent national legislative transpositions, such as Law 232/2022, may have successfully catalyzed more active web architectural updates. Conversely, legacy UK platforms appear heavily burdened by complex, inaccessible tracking and booking portals, which frequently lack basic programmatic labelling and effectively lock out users reliant on assistive technologies.

3.2. Prevalent Accessibility Barriers in the Logistics Sector

To complement the aggregated WCI results, we analysed the QualWeb JSON outputs at the ACT-rule and WCAG-technique level to identify the most frequent recurring failures detected on key courier customer-journey pages. The results below summarize the dominant barrier types and the interface components in which they most commonly occur.

Unlike Section 3.1, which reports normalized WCI scores, Table no. 2 presents the absolute number of QualWeb rule failures observed in each jurisdiction. This rule-level view is intended to highlight what breaks most often (and where), rather than to provide an additional maturity score.

Table no. 2. Most Frequent QualWeb ACT Rule Failures by Jurisdiction (Top Issues)

Code	Name	RO	UK	Total
Total Result		294	280	574
QW-WCAG-T23	Adding a link at the top of each page that goes directly to the main content area	25	30	55
QW-ACT-R76	Text has enhanced contrast	23	30	53
QW-WCAG-T28	Using `percent, em, names` for font sizes	27	22	49
QW-ACT-R37	Text has minimum contrast	28	14	42
QW-WCAG-T35	`id` attribute value is unique	19	23	42
QW-WCAG-T9	Organizing a page using headings	22	17	39
QW-ACT-R12	Link has accessible name	14	18	32
QW-ACT-R17	Image has accessible name	14	14	28
QW-WCAG-T20	Supplementing link text with the title attribute	12	16	28
QW-WCAG-T21	Failure of Success Criteria 2.4.4, 2.4.9 and 4.1.2 due to not providing an accessible name for an image which is the only content in a link	13	10	23
QW-ACT-R30	Visible label is part of accessible name	8	13	21
QW-WCAG-T17	Positioning labels to maximize predictability of relationships	6	15	21

QW-WCAG-T31	Failure of Success Criterion 1.4.3, 1.4.6 and 1.4.8 due to specifying foreground colors without specifying background colors or vice versa	9	12	21
QW-ACT-R14	meta viewport does not prevent zoom	10	9	19
QW-ACT-R16	Form control has accessible name	11	2	13

Source: Authors' calculations based on QualWeb WCAG 2.1 audit results (March 2026)

High-frequency content presentation and navigation barriers most recurrent issues cluster around basic page navigation support and readable presentation. The single largest item across both jurisdictions is the absence of a working “skip to main content” mechanism (QW-WCAG-T23; 25 failures in RO and 30 in UK; 55 total), which forces keyboard and assistive-technology users to traverse repeated headers and menus on every page. Visual readability problems are also dominant: contrast-related checks were repeatedly flagged—both “Text has enhanced contrast” (QW-ACT-R76; 53 total) and “Text has minimum contrast” (QW-ACT-R37; 42 total)—indicating frequent insufficient text-to-background differentiation in branded components and status elements. In addition, typography scalability remains problematic (QW-WCAG-T28; 49 total), suggesting continued use of non-relative font sizing that can restrict resizing and reflow on different devices.

Interaction and control-labelling barriers in courier journeys are tracked at the rule-level profile which indicates recurring problems with how interactive elements are named and exposed to assistive technologies in tracking, address entry, and account/service flows. “Link has accessible name” (QW-ACT-R12; 32 total) and the related failure case where an image-only link lacks an accessible name (QW-WCAG-T21; 23 total) show that many clickable targets are not announced with meaningful names, which increases navigation effort and error risk. Similar issues appear for other embedded controls and media (“Image has accessible name”, QW-ACT-R17; 28 total). Finally, visible text labels do not consistently match the programmatic name (“Visible label is part of accessible name”, QW-ACT-R30; 21 total), which can confuse users of screen readers and speech input when the spoken/announced label differs from what is displayed on screen.

The structural deficiencies highlighted in Table 2, particularly the pervasive navigation and operability barriers found within essential customer pathways (such as tracking interfaces and dynamic address entry forms), demonstrate that complex web architectures in the logistics sector may not fully align with the universal design mandates of the EAA. The high frequency of these presentation and control-labelling errors indicates that accessibility is frequently treated as an afterthought in software development lifecycles rather than a foundational design requirement.

As existing literature indicates that corporate scale and regional contexts dictate digital inclusion, our data confirms that digital inclusion is not yet fully embedded within the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) frameworks of private logistics operators.

Conclusions

This study presents the first cross-jurisdictional empirical audit of digital accessibility within the European logistics and courier sector following the landmark enforcement of the European Accessibility Act (EAA) in June 2025. By introducing a novel Weighted Conformance Index (WCI) to evaluate WCAG 2.1 AA compliance, the research transitions the discourse from binary pass/fail metrics to a nuanced understanding of digital maturity in a sector vital to the digital economy.

The main empirical contribution of this paper is the identification of a counter-intuitive compliance gap between the analyzed markets. The Romanian courier cohort achieved a higher baseline WCI average (0.53) than the United Kingdom cohort (0.48). As discussed, this disparity is primarily driven by substantial operability limitations observed within the UK cohort.

Despite these regional differences, the overarching conclusion is that the logistics sector remains systemically unprepared for digital inclusion mandates. Courier platforms universally fail to meet the ≥ 0.70 WCI threshold for high accessibility, frequently treating universal design as an optional feature rather than a core pillar of sustainable corporate governance.

To address these critical shortfalls and align the logistics sector with the inclusive mandates of the European Digital Single Market, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Managerial Implications for Logistics Operators:** Companies must immediately transition from reactive, automated remediation to systemic, “shift-left” inclusive design strategies. Immediate priority must be

given to remediating interactive tracking forms and dynamically generated status updates (addressing prevalent ARIA label and color contrast failures). Furthermore, accessibility standards must be embedded into third-party software procurement contracts to prevent vendor-introduced digital barriers.

- **Policy Implications for Regulatory Bodies:** As regulatory agencies begin enforcing EAA compliance, monitoring mechanisms should prioritize heavily utilized consumer pathways—such as tracking and payment portals—rather than merely auditing static homepages. Additionally, policymakers should complement punitive GDPR-aligned enforcement mechanisms with proactive capacity-building frameworks, offering technical subsidies or tax incentives for logistics SMEs transitioning to WCAG 2.1 AA compliance.

- **Integration with Sustainable Business Frameworks:** Digital accessibility must be formally integrated into corporate Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) reporting. For the courier industry, equitable access to parcel delivery is not merely a technical IT requirement, but a fundamental metric of the "Social" dimension of sustainability.

While this study provides a robust empirical baseline, it is limited by its reliance on automated evaluation tools (QualWeb), which current literature acknowledges capture only a fraction of contextual WCAG violations. Consequently, the actual accessibility deficit is likely more severe than the automated WCI scores suggest.

To complement these technical findings, future research should expand this baseline by integrating hybrid methodologies that combine automated tracking with manual heuristic evaluations and user-centered testing involving individuals with disabilities.

While automated audits excel at rapidly detecting missing ARIA labels or poor color contrast across hundreds of pages, they cannot assess logical barriers or semantic context. Manual testing is critical for evaluating the actual usability of a dynamic parcel-tracking form, the cognitive load required to complete a booking flow, or the frustration caused by illogical focus order when navigating strictly with a keyboard or screen reader. User-centered evaluations would translate the technical barriers identified in this study into real-world user experience (UX) metrics, providing logistics companies with the necessary context to prioritize their remediation efforts effectively. Furthermore, longitudinal studies tracking these specific ten operators over the next three years will be vital to measure the true, long-term deterrent effect of EAA financial penalties on corporate web architecture.

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GitHub Copilot was responsibly used for coding assistance to develop and refine the scripts necessary for website scraping and data analysis. Additionally, Gemini Pro was responsibly used for language improvement, structural outlining, and manuscript formatting. After this process, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the present article.

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