**[TRANSCRIPT]**

# Accessibility Now: Will you be ready for the European Accessibility Act in 2025?

Speakers:

* James Taylor, Director of Communications and Freedom to Publish, International Publishers Association
* Cristina Mussinelli, Secretary General, Fondazione LIA
* Laura Brady, Director of Cross Media, House of Anansi Press
* Rachel Comerford, Senior Director of Accessibility Outreach and Communication, Macmillan Learning

**- [James Taylor]:** Welcome everyone. And thanks for joining us for this session on Accessibility and Accessible Publishing, as well as the Accessible Books Consortium International Excellence Awards Ceremony. My name is James Taylor and I'm the Director of Communications and Freedom to Publish for the International Publishers Association. So why accessibility now? Well, the clock is ticking and those of you selling ebooks into Europe only have four years left to get ready for the implementation of the European Accessibility Act. Today we will find out exactly what the European Accessibility Act is all about. We will celebrate a publisher and an initiative that are already doing great work on accessibility as we host the ceremony for the World Intellectual Property Organization's Accessible Books Consortium International Excellence Awards. We will then hear from two publishers who have started their own accessibility journey and will share their advice on how you can too. Those of you joining remotely can use the opportunity of this session to submit questions, and we'll try to get to those if we have time at the end of the session. So today's session is organized by the Frankfurter Buchmesse, the World Intellectual Property Organization, the International Publishers Association, the Federation of European Publishers, and is organized in the framework of the Aldus Up program supported by the European Commission. So without further ado, allow me to welcome our first speaker today, the LIA Foundation's Cristina Mussinelli and winner of last year's ABC International Excellence Award in the Initiative category.

**- [Cristina Mussinelli]:** Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be here. We are an organization that has been funded by the Italian Publishers Association in collaboration with the Italian Blind Union. So it's a quite unique organization, and we are really focused on promoting accessibility in the publishing industry.

**- [James Taylor]:** Thanks for being with us today, Cristina. So maybe without going into the background of the legislation as such, maybe you can tell us what exactly is the European Accessibility Act.

**- [Cristina Mussinelli]:** TheEuropean Accessibility Act is a European directive, quite recent, that will require by 2025 to all the publishing industry, not only publishers, but all the publishing value chain, the digital publishing value chain to embrace accessibility. That means that publishers should produce born accessible publications. And also the other actors in the value chain, for example, retailers or distributors or people selling devices to read or people who will have applications where you can read should embrace accessibility, and all these elements of the value chain should be accessible since the first production. So it's something that should be included in the project of and in the design of every activity related with digital publication.

**- [James Taylor]:** Okay, so this is in fact, we're not just talking about an effect on publishers. This is the whole value chain.

**- [Cristina Mussinelli]:** It's the whole value chain, yes.

**- [James Taylor]:** Okay, and when we talk about publishers,are all publishers affected? I mean, different types of genre, different sizes.

**- [Cristina Mussinelli]:** Every publisher who publishes digital publications should be involved. The only exception are what is called in European language, microenterprises, that means a publisher who have a revenue less than two million euros or less than 10 employees. So all the others should be compliant with this new legislation.

**- [James Taylor]:** Okay, and so what, in fact, so you spoke earlier about born-digital publications. What exactly do publishers need to do? What's expected of them really?

**- [Cristina Mussinelli]:** The publisher should include accessibility, as I told before, since the beginning of the production process. So they should produce accessible publications, including all the requirements that are available in the standards for the digital publications that are managed by organizations like W3C, and you should then adapt your production workflow to this standard. It's not a very complex thing. It's something that you can easily do while you produce a book. And you need to be trained, you need to acquire the knowledge, but it's not impossible. We have a very good example of publishers that are big and also small who already adopted this, for example, in Italy.

**- [James Taylor]:** Thank you for being reassuring there at the end because you started talking about standards and things like that. It sounds like there's quite a lot of things for a publisher to take into account, but where can they start?

**- [Cristina Mussinelli]:** First of all, I think it's important to have the involvement of all the company. It's not only a problem of the people working in production. It's a completely different mindset. I think it's something that should be a culture within the publishing house. So you need to create a culture of accessibility and you also need to understand the advantage of digital and of new technology for people who are blind or visually impaired or also dyslexic, because it's not only for people who are print impaired but more general. And also you should consider that if you produce accessible content, your content will be of a higher quality for everyone. So if you embrace accessibility, you will also have better digital publications for all your readers.

**- [James Taylor]:** Okay, and so you spoke earlier that it's about the requirement. If you're selling ebooks, do the accessible solutions only apply to ebooks? Is that right?

**- [Cristina Mussinelli]:** No, they apply to ebooks, to reading solutions, to apps, and to websites that sell ebooks. So all ecommerce websites should comply with the requirement of the directive. So online retailers should be aware of that. And also you need to provide the information on the requirements of accessibility to end users. So you also need to display a site to the bibliographic information, also information related with the characteristics of accessibility of your titles. So also distributors should be involved in that.

**- [James Taylor]:** And from your work at the Foundation,do you see this cooperation between different parts of the chain?

**- [Cristina Mussinelli]:** Yes, we see that it's growing.It's a quite new topic. It's a journey I think that you need to start, but we see a lot of people willing to move on that. And I also see a relevant interest from the people with disability in this field, because for them it's a very important topic because they can have the same book at the same time as every other reader. So they won't have to expect and to ask for a special edition, but it would be the same digital book for any reader. So you don't have a different version for them. So this is a completely different paradigm in the publishing industry.

**- [James Taylor]:** Very good, I hope this is inspiring some questions from our audience. I remind them all please submit your questions if you have any. We've got Cristina with us. I'm sure she'll be happy to answer them. So is this Act and the publisher's involvement in implementing it, is this just about doing the right thing in making books accessible to more people or—

**- [Cristina Mussinelli]:** I think it also goes beyond because it's also providing high quality content and website to all your readers. Just to make a simple example, if you have an accessible book, you will be able from the index to reach every paragraph and to reach the notes and not to have to browse all the pages. That is completely different. For blind people, it's absolutely necessary, but it would be much better for us as well. So I think this is one important thing. And we were able to convince the Italian Publishers to join the foundation and to start producing accessible books. We have now 28,000 titles of ebooks in Italy that are already fully accessible. And we work with big publishers but also with very small ones. So it's possible for everyone.

**- [James Taylor]:** Okay, and so you're optimisticat least within Italy that—

**- [Cristina Mussinelli]:** Yes, but I have a quite wide overview. And I know that also in many other countries, the situation is changing, and there are a lot of good examples. We will listen to some later. But there are good experiences in Canada who is the guest of honor. There are good experiences in Germany because the publishers association is working with the blind organization very strongly on that. So I'm quite sure that it would be possible to achieve the result by 2025.

**- [James Taylor]:** That's great. And you mentioned earlier, we'll close with this, maybe training and things like that. Is that something that you've seen developing?

**- [Cristina Mussinelli]:** I think that training is important. It should be a training, as I explained before, that should be a general training to understand the need of this category of readers, but it's also a very technical training on the production and the distribution topics. So I think this is important. We do a lot of training in Italy for publishers, training and consultancy.

**- [James Taylor]:** Great, well, thank you, Cristina. I think that sets the scene perfectly actually. Now we're going to move from talking about what needs to be done to celebrating those who are already doing it. I'm delighted to welcome virtually Mrs. Sylvie Forbin, the Deputy Director General of the World Intellectual Property Organization, who will present the Accessible Books Consortium International Excellence Awards. [In French] Madame Forbin, over to you.

**- [Sylvie Forbin]:** I have the honor of announcing the two winners of the 2021 ABC International Excellence Award for Accessible Publishing. Every year the WIPO-led Accessible Books Consortium recognizes a publisher and a project initiative that demonstrate outstanding achievement in advancing accessibility for persons who are print-disabled. A jury of experts selected this year's winners among many excellent nominees. The finalists in the publisher category are the House of Anansi Press from Canada, the Taylor & Francis Group from the United Kingdom, and the University of Michigan Press from the United States. And the winner is the Taylor & Francis Group. The jury was impressed by their innovative approach in requiring their authors to include alternative text for images, graphs, and diagrams when submitting their manuscripts. Alternative text is a key element of accessibility. It allows people who are print-disabled to obtain the information contained in the images. We will now hear from our winner in the UK.

**- [Brianna Walker]:** Hello, my name is Brianna Walker and I'm the Head of Content Management for Taylor & Francis books, and a member of our Accessibility Working Group. Taylor & Francis is honored to accept the 2021 International Excellence Award for Accessible Publishing. Thank you to the World Intellectual Property Organization, the Accessible Books Consortium, and to the selection panelists who have recognized the commitment we've made to our customers and our content. And congratulations to the other shortlisted nominees, House of Anansi Press and the University of Michigan Press. This award represents more than two years of dedicated work. What started with a small group of colleagues working to improve our ebook specifications has grown into a large community of stakeholders working to implement accessibility considerations across all areas of our publishing programs and culture. We've recently hired an accessibility officer who will shape our forward publishing strategy with accessibility at its core and a firm focus on customer support. We've also published an informative accessibility statement, increased the site functionality of our websites and product platforms, and improved the accessibility of our ebooks and journals. As part of this work, we'd like to thank the authors and contributors who have engaged with writing alternative text for images for both our journals and books publications. We've also supplied more than 28,000 accessible file requests directly to customers, both institutional and individual through our Taylor & Francis Alternate Format Request Program. Through our partnerships with Bookshare, the Royal National Institute for Blind People, and the AccessText Network, we've been able to expand this to more countries and more communities ensuring that our research and content is accessible to those who need it most. We are grateful for these partnerships and their support. Taylor & Francis will continue to build and improve our accessibility program to better support customers with equitable and fair access to our research and our content. From all of us at Taylor & Francis, thank you so much for this award.

**- [Sylvie Forbin]:** And now the award in the Initiative category are the Dorina Nowill Foundation for the Blind from Brazil, the National Network for Equitable Library Services from Canada, the Sao Mai Center for the Blind from Vietnam, and the Interdepartmental Steering Committee for the Promotion of Born Accessible eBooks to People with Disabilities from France. And the winner is the National Network for Equitable Library Services. NNELS converts content on-demand to accessible formats for their client base. The jury noted NNELS' work in organizing the Accessible Publishing Summit in the past three years to push for meaningful change at the publisher and library level. We'll now hear from our winner in Canada who has a very personal interest in accessibility.

**- [Daniella Levy-Pinto]:** Hello, my name is Daniella Levy-Pinto and I am the manager of NNELS, National Network for Equitable Library Service in Canada. I am honored to accept the Accessible Books Consortium International Excellence Award on behalf of NNELS. I am totally blind and I understand firsthand the impact of barriers to reading. So it is incredibly meaningful for me to be here today. NNELS is grateful to the members of the expert jury for having selected us. And we are also very grateful to our nominator. NNELS works to ensure that people with print disabilities can have access to the same content as all other readers at the same time. Since it was created in 2013, NNELS evolved from a repository, digital content, and an alternate format producer to a catalyst in how Canada thinks about equitable reading and accessibility. NNELS puts users at the center and builds capacity by employing people with lived experience of print disability, including blindness, low vision, and dyslexia who provide insights and expertise as accessibility testers and consultants. Much of our work is possible with support from the government of Canada's Social Development Partnerships Program disability component. We are also thankful to NNELS' provincial and territorial funders for providing instrumental support. And we are also grateful to all our partners, including publishers, publisher associations, libraries, library organizations, other alternate format producers, content creators, and of course people with print disabilities. This is an exciting time for accessibility. It is wonderful to witness publishers learn about and work towards producing accessible content for everyone. This award motivates us to continue our efforts towards the goal of a fully inclusive and equitable reading landscape in Canada and beyond. The momentum created by stakeholders collaborating together at a global scale means that we are looking at a bright future for accessibility. NNELS is proud to be part of that movement. Thank you.

**- [Sylvie Forbin]:** A big congratulations go to our two winners. I will turn over to James in Frankfurt where he will continue moderating the seminar on accessibility, which I hope will convince many publishers to produce fully accessible digital publications. Thank you.

**- [James Taylor]:** [In French] Thank you very much Madame Forbin. And congratulations to our winners, Taylor & Francis Group and NNELS, an inspiration to many who are wondering where to start their accessibility journey. Let's continue in that spirit of inspiration by welcoming our guests, two guest publishers who will talk about their work within their publishing houses to make accessible books a reality. Our guests are Canadian publisher Laura Brady of the House of Anansi, shortlisted as you just heard for this year's prize. My commiserations, Laura, at not taking home the award this time. And our second guest, Rachel Comerford of Macmillan Education. Rachel is also a past winner of the ABC International Excellence Award. Very happy to have you both with us today. Laura, Canada is the guest of honor, so maybe I can start with you. And I'm going to start with the subtitle of today's session. So will you be ready for the European Accessibility Act in 2025?

**- [Laura Brady]:** Hi, I am delighted to say that I think we will be, yeah. We have been working on our accessibility profile at the House of Anansi Press for some time, and that includes things like remediating our backlist, working on our audiobook program, working really hard on our workflows from Word to layout programs to ebook exports and testing in the various reading systems that our books head into. We've done a lot of work. I think we'll be ready.

**- [James Taylor]:** Okay, great, that's great news.So maybe we can put that into context for our audience. So could you maybe just tell us a little bit about the House of Anansi, your size, the kind of books you publish.

**- [Laura Brady]:** For sure. So House of Anansi Press is one of the biggest independent publishers in Canada, so that's outside of the multinationals. We publish adult trade fiction and nonfiction, and we have a children's imprint called Groundwood Books which publishes children's picture books and fiction as well. So we have a fairly diverse output. It's not academic publishing like Rachel will talk about in a minute. So, in fact, it's a little bit easier to make that content accessible than in higher ed publishing. But we can have a fairly big impact on the market in that our books are on Giller shortlist and are prize-winning on the regular. And so the products that we put out in the market infiltrate the market, if that makes any sense.

**- [James Taylor]:** Sure, okay. And maybe how long have you been working on accessibility at the House of Anansi?

**- [Laura Brady]:** So I've been at Anansi for about four years and have been working on accessibility that whole time. Before I came to Anansi, I worked in the ebook development community and was very busy working as a consultant, a trainer, and a developer. So actually in the weeds making ebooks. I think it's salient to the example of House of Anansi that I used to code ebooks every day and so know how to implement change. I also helped plan ebookcraft, a conference that's around sort of focused on the craft of making ebooks and brought an accessibility focus to that as well.

**- [James Taylor]:** And how much has changed in those four years? From what you said earlier, it sounds like you've made great progress, but tell us a little bit more about those four years.

**- [Laura Brady]:** Sure, sure thing. I think we've made great progress. I bring a fairly strict accessibility lens to what I do. So I'm the annoying person every single meeting at Anansi that says, but what about accessibility, but what about accessibility? But I think that role is super important, and I'll speak to that in a minute as well, but at this point in time, our editors and our authors are writing alt text, and the alt text gets copy edited which is a big deal. We're working on our Word to InDesign to EPUB workflows. We've actually hired a person on a year-long contract whose only job is to write image descriptions for our website. So she's currently working on image descriptions for all of our book covers going back five or six years. I'm so lucky to have that body doing that work. And we plan content that is consistently taking accessibility into account. And then finally we have a braille publishing program. So we publish a few titles a year in both digital and physical braille simultaneous with the print pub date which is a sort of critical note. It doesn't come three or four months later. The braille is available on the publication date. And we work with the fine folks at NNELS to get that done. They are excellent co-conspirators in the accessibility space.

**- [James Taylor]:** Okay, right, so, yeah, it sounds like you're really tackling this from many different angles and putting the resources in to do it. And you alluded to this a little bit in what you just said, in your biography, you just described yourself as an accessibility busybody. And I guess there's a lot of, I've heard Cristina also talked about this being part of the culture of the companies. How important is that evangelist sort of role?

**- [Laura Brady]:** So I think it’s critical. A piece of advice I'd give to anyone who's just starting out on their accessibility journey, especially small publishers is to designate someone as the accessibility busybody inhouse. So I definitely fill that role internally, but I also fill it externally. So I'm involved with the Accessible Books Consortium. I'm involved with eBOUND Canada which is a publisher support organization when it comes to digital publishing. I consult a little bit for the Canadian government on funding and projects and how best to support publishers. I still do a lot of training and mentoring and consulting. So if people should have the least bit of interest in accessibility, I pretty much pop up like some kinda genie and say, how can I support you? How can I help you do this a little bit better? Like please let me bring what I know to help you because House of Anansi doing well is one thing, but more publishers in Canada doing well is quite another, and that's really what I want to see.

**- [James Taylor]:** Well, it's nice that youtalk about it that way. So Canada is the guest of honor here in Frankfurt, and we've just seen also for the Initiative award, NNELS receiving that. You were shortlisted. It seems like Canada is very active on this issue. Is that really the case? Is that representative and why so?

**- [Laura Brady]:** Yeah, so Canada is really active in this space. And so about 2 1/2 years ago, the federal government announced what I like to call a big old pot of gold for accessibility projects. It was 28.5 million to be spent over five years in funding and support both directly to publishers at the publisher support organizations for both projects and workflow and consultancies. So what that's done, there's really great projects happening all around the country that's tapping into those monies and those supports. And it's meant that people are doing things like fixing their backlist. A lot of backlist is EPUB 2, converting that to EPUB 3, and shining it up a little is a major step forward when it comes to accessibility. The year-long contract that we have with the person writing image descriptions is tapping into that government funding. So more and more initiatives like that are happening quite across the country. There's also a lot of training and resource development for publishers, both at sort of high-level and in the nitty gritty in the weeds. There's quite a lot happening when it comes to that. In addition to workflow, consultants, and websites that are designed to support publishers, there's a lot of projects that derive directly from the federal government support of this kind of accessibility work.

**- [James Taylor]:** Okay, so they've spoken about sort of external funding, being able to sort of set off decisions to invest in accessibility. I guess over your last four years, how often is budget part of the conversation that you have to have when raising accessibility issues?

**- [Laura Brady]:** Such a good question. This is a labor of love for a lot of people. It's also the right thing to do morally. But there is a business case to be made for working better on accessibility. As Cristina talked about earlier, a really well-made ebook that hits accessibility standards is better for all readers, for a plurality of readers across the spectrum. That said, budget is a consideration. It's a consideration every single time. A lot of publishers in Canada are very small and have limited employee capacity. Their employees are doing two or three or four jobs wearing many hats. So being able to have government support for accessibility projects is kind of critical especially for the smallest publishers who just don't have the capacity for it. The profit margins are slim in the best of times, and we're still in the middle of a pandemic. So support from a place like the Department of Canadian Heritage is really critical.

**- [James Taylor]:** Okay, and I have Cristina in the studio nodding her head along with you. And maybe one last question before I bring Rachel in to share her insights. Talking to you and Cristina, we covered a wide range of things from standards to metadata to all of these things. So what would you give as advice to a publisher just starting out? It can maybe seem a bit daunting, but what was your first advice maybe?

**- [Laura Brady]:** Yep, well, my main advice is to just start. Take baby steps. Do it one step at a time and start to incorporate accessibility into how you think about publishing from the contract stage to the editing stage to the production stage. There's a lot to think about in there. So baby steps, just start. And then again just like you designate someone in your office space as kind of the fire board, who need to make sure everybody gets out during a fire drill, designate someone in your office as the accessibility person, spend money on their training, send them to conferences, train that person with an accessibility point of view. Ideally a person with the lived experience of a print disability, if at all possible, but have a person who is your internal accessibility busybody and that will go a long way towards getting things done.

**- [James Taylor]:** Okay, great, thanks Laura. And before I come to Rachel, just a reminder, those of you watching, we've already had a few questions in. Please we've got some great people with us today. Take this opportunity to ask your questions. So Rachel, Macmillan Education, from what Laura said, it sounds like you have a tougher job than her with your accessibility work. So I was still gonna start with the same question though. Are you as optimistic as Laura? Do you think you'll be ready for the European Accessibility Act in 2025?

**- [Rachel Comerford]:** Congratulations to this year's winners. It's quite an achievement. I'm grateful that I work with an organization that recognizes the urgency and the importance of accessibility, and not just in terms of legislation like the European Accessibility Act, but also in terms of just the individuals that are depending on accessibility to learn, to make a living, to participate in their communities. A few years ago, though it feels like yesterday, Macmillan Learning invested in the Global Certified Accessible Program from Benetech so that we could ensure that our ebooks are accessible for all users. The changes in our workflows and the changes in our standards, that took almost two years for us to complete. It was quite an investment. And we're kind of in a constant state of updating as we learn more about users, as we learn more about accessibility, as we learn more about technology. But that certification has really given me a lot of confidence. We've managed to maintain it for three years yet now. So I think that we're ready for the European Accessibility Act. But I also think that we're really ready to keep pivoting based on the continued feedback that we get.

**- [James Taylor]:** Okay, well, that's great. It sounds like that, yeah, the investment's been made to make it possible. So maybe just as Laura did, what's maybe different in terms of the size of Anansi compared to Macmillan in terms of the challenges, the particular challenges you make that makes accessibility that bit more difficult apparently?

**- [Rachel Comerford]:** So, well, Macmillan Learning, it's a privately held family-owned education publishing and services company. We distribute all of our contents including digital textbooks and learning platforms internationally. As Laura said, textbooks can be quite complex. We have nonlinear narratives. We have tons of content asides, so it's that little boxed content that you see in textbooks often. We have complex diagrams and imagery. We have a ton of math and science, and representing that in an accessible format can be quite challenging. So all of those really add to the complexity of making a textbook accessible. But at Macmillan, accessibility is kind of a part of our larger diversity equity and inclusion principles and it's really deeply ingrained in the culture. So we feel the responsibility of the broad impact that educational publishing has. There are opportunities in what we do to sort of rebuild the future of education, to reset expectations for the next generation of learners and to set them up for a world where they can continue to contribute to making content accessible, making accessible technology.

**- [James Taylor]:** Okay, so, yes, you joined onto what both Cristina and Laura said where this is bigger than just implementing legislation and being ready for it. It's a broader thing. You talked about diversity and inclusion as well as part of that. So I guess to understand your journey better, because I think a lot of us try to think of this accessibility as a journey, starting from somewhere and trying to get to 2025, how many years have you been doing this? You've spoken about some of the parts of the journey so far. What have you seen are the changes in that time?

**- [Rachel Comerford]:** The changes are they occur on a very small level and also a really large one. So there are increased investment in all of our content and engineering teams in terms of just understanding what accessibility is and how it impacts users. We now have alt text on all the images in our books. We have captions and audio description on all of our videos. We have an accessible navigation. We have the print page numbers embedded into the metadata of our digital books so that users can switch back and forth between the two without losing their place. Even just the move from having a fixed layout textbook, something that's in a format that just doesn't resize very well to the EPUB format which allows the text to go up to 200, 300% of the original font size and still reflow and have this easy reading experience for users. And the latest investments that we're seeing in terms of creating accessible STEM content, the sciences and math, has really made a huge difference in the quality of our textbooks, being able to provide students with math that's readable, but also math alt text that gives them more of a plain language description of what's happening on the page.

**- [James Taylor]:** Okay, wow. That covers so much. So do I understand that you are the evangelist, the accessibility evangelist within Macmillan Learning?

**- [Rachel Comerford]:** I am, I'm Macmillan's busybody. But I have to say Laura is one of my favorite accessibility busybodies, and I think she describes that role better than anybody else ever could. But I think that the intimidating part of accessibility is that we get so focused on expertise. We wanna be the accessibility maestro. And then we fall short of that goal and we get discouraged. I think that the role of the evangelist or the role of the busybody is really important because accessibility should be integrated into the discipline knowledge base that we're working from. So we don't need engineers and accessibility engineers. We need engineers that code correctly, and that is to say engineers that code excessively. So the busybody is sort of the connection point for that knowledge shift. I think the most satisfying part of my job, and I really hope that my boss is not listening when I say this, is when I'm not necessary. So when I check with design and they've already taken contrast into account, and I talk to the content team and the alt text and the closed captions have already been written, and I talk to UX and they've interviewed students with disabilities and on and on and on. And to me, that means that I've been doing my job well, and I've been asking the right questions. So basically I'm trying to make myself obsolete as an evangelist.

**- [James Taylor]:** Okay, great. So we only have a few minutes left ahead of us. We've had a couple of questions in, some of which I think we've answered already, but I still have one more question for you, Rachel, before we move on to that. And so Cristina spoke, she mentioned earlier standards and training, but if we look at standards, I saw you doing a webinar a couple of weeks ago, you're speaking a lot about standards. Publishers starting out, should standards be a daunting thing for them to consider?

**- [Rachel Comerford]:** I think standards are really great for insomniacs. There's no prescription required. They'll put you to sleep really fast. But it doesn't take away from the importance of their existence. So standards create a template for publishers to work from in terms of making content accessible. It means that no publisher is starting from nothing. So they get to build from this really strong base that these editors and programmers and testers have put together for them. So they're pretty dry. But I like white wine and British humor. So I think dry can be a positive thing.

**- [James Taylor]:** Great, thank you. I'll take that as a compliment on British humor. (laughs) So thank you, Rachel. So a couple of questions that we had. And so, as I say, I think we've covered one, but so does accessibility include descriptions of all images and graphs in an ebook? Yes, Cristina.

**- [Cristina Mussinelli]**: It's a mandatory request because for blind people, if the image is not described, it doesn't exist. I mean, if the image has relevance in the text, it should be described. Only the decorative images can be skipped, but if you have a graph, if you have an infographic, if you have a picture and the picture has relevance in the text, it should be described.

**- [James Taylor]:** Okay.

**- [Cristina Mussinelli]**: And to just comment related with the standards that I think is important, the standards for accessibility are not different standards from the ones used in the publishing industry. This publishing industry already have standards like EPUB and WCAG for the website that include accessibility, so you don't need to use a different standard. You need to use these standards that the one you already use in your publishing industry and just implement the accessibility features that are already embedded in them. So it's not a different workflow, it's not a different process. You can include accessibility while you produce a paper version of your book or the digital version of your book. So you don't have to invent something completely different. You have to include accessibility in your path. And I think this is very important because I don't want to give the impression that you need to do something different. You should do the same as you do, including accessibility.

**- [James Taylor]:** Any follow-up comment on that, maybe Laura, Rachel, in terms of the standards?

**- [Rachel Comerford]:** I think one of the most important things to keep in mind when you're writing alt text though is to not repeat the content that's already in the text. And this goes back to textbooks being a little bit more complicated sometimes in that we provide a ton of information in the basal text and a ton of information in the caption. Sometimes this renders, these complex graphs, unnecessary in terms of alt text explanation, and so the alt text tends to become very truncated. And that's okay because the student is getting that information from other parts of the text.

**- [Cristina Mussinelli]**: And if you would like to have an idea which are the advantages of a person who is blind or visually impaired reading a book that is accessible, you may go to the Fondazione LIA website or the Fondazione LIA YouTube and you will find some videos will explain quite easily what happens when you have an accessible or inaccessible publication or website. That is very important because it's easy to understand that. We spoke about a lot of things, but it's much easier than being told. And it's very impressive to see the advantage for the people who get benefit out of accessibility.

**- [James Taylor]:** Thanks, okay, we have one last question before we wrap up. So they ask about the best options for paper books, referencing experts, how can we prepare a book for everyone? And asked for some examples.

**- [Cristina Mussinelli]**: In paper books?

**- [James Taylor]:** Paper books.Now from what I understand, the Accessibility Act itself doesn't apply—

**- [Cristina Mussinelli]**: No, the Accessibility Act applies only to digital publications. Normally the paper versions of accessible content are created by organizations like NNELS or other organizations. They are normally the braille version or the enlarged character version, so they are produced as a conversion from the paper, from the book provided by the publisher. For the paper version, I don't think that publishers, except some very good examples like Anansi normally don't produce the braille version or the enlarged character version.

**- [James Taylor]:** Laura, maybe you have something that you could add on that question.

**- [Laura Brady]:** For sure. Yeah, so as someone who manages a stable of typesetters and designers, I could also say that there are very good print best practices. Don't typeset on a super long measure, for example. Make sure that there's enough leading that the content is really readable. Don't get super fancy with your fonts especially handwriting or script fonts. Those tend to get in the way of legibility. There are very good standards around just basic typesetting. So I just re-typeset a book that has an accessibility focus and took it from 240 pages to 368 pages because it needed to breathe in order to be accessible. There's a lot you can do around that. And in particular, mind things like contrast, pay attention to the reading experience, make sure there's space for thumbs. Make sure that there's enough of a gutter that people who may have trouble holding open a print book can hold it open with some ease and without any trickiness.

**- [James Taylor]:** Thanks, thanks, Laura. So, and, well, thanks to all of you, Laura, Rachel, Cristina. That's all we have time for today. My congratulations again to the winners of the ABC International Excellence Awards, Taylor & Francis Group and NNELS. My thanks to the partners who made this session possible, WIPO's Accessible Books Consortium, the Frankfurter Buchmesse, IPA, the Federation of European Publishers and Aldus Up. And should anyone in the audience have more questions, they didn't get a chance to ask, please write to us at accessible.books@wipo.int and we'll be happy to answer them. Now 2025 is just around the corner, but I hope that today's session has given you some inspiration on how you can start your accessibility journey and be ready for 2025. Thank you very much. Goodbye.

**- [Cristina Mussinelli]**: Thank you.