

## **Accessibility – how to ensure accessibility to digital tools and resources to those with a physical or learning disability?**

### The initiatives of CNIPA for the accessibility of e-learning

*De Vanna Antonio (CNIPA), Schaerf Mirella (CNIPA), Sintini Steven (CNIPA)*

During 2003, the European year of people with disabilities, the Italian Government chose to address the topic of eAccessibility through a body of legislative acts which at the moment is made up of a law (no. 4/2004), containing the general principles, and two decrees, containing the implementation regulations and the technical accessibility requirements.

The law provides that public services and information should be accessible, that disabled people should be provided with adequate IT working instruments and equipment and the public eProcurement should always take into consideration the accessibility criteria.

The technical accessibility requirements for Web sites, software and personal computers are already listed in the Ministerial Decree dated July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2005 but the law also applies to didactic materials and teaching software, thus implicitly including eLearning platforms and objects.

Furthermore article 2, paragraph 2, of Presidential Decree no. 75/2005 establishes that the Minister for Innovation and Technologies, the Ministry for Instruction, University and Research and CNIPA (National Centre for IT policy-making in Public Administration) should write a specific set of rules regarding the accessibility of didactic and teaching instruments.

In order to enforce such provision CNIPA set up three Work Groups whose aim was the production of guidelines regarding the accessibility of:

- School text-books,
- Teaching software,
- eLearning platforms and object.

The eLearning Working Group was chaired by Prof. Paola Salomoni (University "Alma Mater Studiorum" of Bologna) and was made up of representatives coming from central and local Administrations, W3C Italy, Microsoft Italy, IWA (a web developers association), UNINFO (a standardisation body) and from associations of the disabled.

The Italian law already had technical requirements for public Web sites that were inspired by international standards and recommendations such as those issued by ISO and by the Web Accessibility Initiative (W3C) and by the experience of Section 508 of the American Rehabilitation Act.

Even though many of the accessibility requirements can easily be applied to the case of eLearning courses, some of these (especially those regarding the use of HTML Frames and client-side scripting languages) had to be reconsidered in order to guarantee compatibility with eLearning standards such as SCORM and to take into consideration the fact that eLearning contents often

have aims which may vary considerably from those of a traditional Web site containing pure information.

In the end the Work Group produced a study containing guidelines to address the accessibility requirements of eLearning platforms on those of Learning Objects (LO).

Such guidelines are publicly available on the Italian institutional Web site on eAccessibility ([www.pubbliaccesso.gov.it](http://www.pubbliaccesso.gov.it)) and they will probably soon merge with the guidelines produced by the other two abovementioned Work Groups into a Ministerial Decree.

In order to put the guidelines regarding the accessibility of eLearning platforms to the test, CNIPA has signed a collaboration with the University of Rome "La Sapienza" with the aim of adapting Moodle, one of the world's most used Open Source platform, to the accessibility requirements. This version shall be made available in the next few months to all the Italian Public Administrations and to the Moodle Community which shall care for its maintenance.

CNIPA has also recently contributed to the creation of a public eLearning course on "Web Accessibility" which has been developed by the region of Tuscany and Project TRIO. The course shall be the basis for the future training of web masters and editors of all public web sites.

#### CNIPA

Centro Nazionale per l'informatica  
nella Pubblica Amministrazione  
Via Isonzo, 21/b – 00198  
Rome – Italy

e-mail: [schaerf@cnipa.it](mailto:schaerf@cnipa.it)

phone: +39 06 8526 4418