



# Global Affairs Canada

## Progress report on accessibility 2024



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## Executive summary

The Global Affairs Canada (GAC) Progress report on accessibility 2024 provides updates on the collaboration of key stakeholders to remove barriers and further foster the inclusive participation of persons with disabilities at GAC. The report presents progress made in the 7 priority areas named in the *Accessible Canada Act* plus an eighth to promote workplace culture change.

Stakeholders, including employees with disabilities and their departmental champion, either took part in consultations or provided input on their activities for the report. Employees with disabilities highlighted the persistent barriers that have negative impacts on their inclusion and participation at GAC.

Activities documented in the report include improvements to hiring practices and to the accommodation process. Improvements are also being made to facilities management and accessible communications, and employees are taking training to address inclusion, accessibility, better procurement processes and the use of plain language. Additionally, GAC is developing a performance measurement framework to track progress on improvements.

Extensive renovations are ongoing at GAC headquarters, which provide an opportunity to improve accessibility although the renovations may contribute to short- and medium-term accessibility challenges. A project is also underway to determine where barriers for persons with disabilities are located in the network of Canadian missions abroad. This work will assist with the prioritization of construction projects and will provide clear information for employees with accessibility considerations.

Quarterly reminders are sent to stakeholders involved in the implementation of activities to improve accessibility in the plan's 8 priority areas. GAC is determined to positively address the organizational culture by consulting employees with disabilities and continuing to improve policies, programs, procedures and initiatives to ensure an inclusive environment for all.

## General

GAC is pleased to present its Progress report on accessibility 2024. The *Accessible Canada Act* (ACA) sets out 7 pillars under which federally regulated entities must develop an accessibility action plan (AAP) that removes barriers for persons with disabilities and prevents new ones from forming, as well as progress reports about the implementation of the plan. The 7 ACA pillars are: employment; the built environment; information and communications technologies (ICT); communications other than information and communication technologies; the procurement of goods, services and facilities; the delivery of programs and services; and



transportation. The eighth pillar of the GAC AAP 2023 to 2025 and progress reports focus on making GAC a more inclusive organization for persons with disabilities through workplace culture change. This change is meant to promote the full inclusion of persons with disabilities so that they may bring their best selves to work. The AAP underscores GAC's commitment to cultural transformation, achieving barrier-free access and building a diverse workplace.

The Progress report on accessibility 2024 includes updates on all efforts to enhance accessibility and make the environment more inclusive for persons with disabilities. While GAC has made progress in the priority areas, there is still much work to be done to ensure that all persons with disabilities feel fully included within the department.

## How to provide feedback

Feedback may be sent by email, by phone, through the feedback form, or by mail using the contact information listed below. Feedback will be acknowledged through the same means by which it was received unless it was received anonymously.

Please send feedback to the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility adviser at [hmae-plandaccessibiliteamc-gacaccessibilityplan@international.gc.ca](mailto:hmae-plandaccessibiliteamc-gacaccessibilityplan@international.gc.ca).

## Contact us

Please send your feedback:

**By email:** [hmae-plandaccessibiliteamc-gacaccessibilityplan@international.gc.ca](mailto:hmae-plandaccessibiliteamc-gacaccessibilityplan@international.gc.ca)

**By online form:** [Provide your feedback](#)

**By mail:**

Global Affairs Canada – Accessibility Feedback  
c/o Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Advisor, HMAE (Accessibility Action Plan)  
200 Promenade du Portage  
8th floor  
Gatineau, Québec  
J8X 4B7

**By phone:** Toll-free 1-800-267-8376

Canadians who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech-impaired can obtain access via their own interpreter or via Canada VRS, which provides an interpreter: <https://srvcanadavrs.ca/en/>



## Social media:

- [Official corporate X account for Global Affairs Canada: @GAC\\_Corporate](#)
- [LinkedIn: Global Affairs Canada](#)

## How to request alternate formats

The contact information listed above may be used to request a copy of the plan, the feedback process description or the progress report in these alternative formats:

- print
- large print (larger and clearer font)
- braille
- audio or an electronic format (that is compatible with adaptive technology that is intended to assist persons with disabilities)

GAC will provide the format requested as soon as possible. Braille and audio formats may take up to 45 days. Print, large print and electronic formats may take up to 15 days.

## Feedback

The General section of the progress report includes an integrated feedback process with an online form. The form allows anyone to provide feedback on the plan and barriers they experience when interacting with GAC. Feedback is also received through the general mailbox named above.

In 2024, GAC received 5 messages through the feedback process. Feedback was forwarded to the appropriate departmental authorities for consideration and a response, where one was requested. They are as follows, including the accessibility action plan (AAP) pillar under which they fall:

1. Information and communications technologies (ICT): A message was received regarding the lack of accessibility when interacting with the GAC Modus web page (Modus is the department's repository of approved processes and tools) and the need to consider accessibility as the department shifts to the use of SharePoint as a document repository. The feedback was sent anonymously.



Actions taken: The message was forwarded to stakeholders in ICT and the Information Management Support and Services (IMSS) team. Plans are already underway to make major updates to Modus. Accessibility tools were shared with and are being examined by IMSS for application in other areas as well, such as SharePoint and MS Word.

2. Built environment: An employee who suffers from restricted mobility contacted the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) team to explain that the toilets in their building (200 Promenade du Portage) are too low. They also raised concerns with the toilet seat design in the larger stall.

Actions taken: The IDEA team sought solutions. The toilet seat in that stall has since been replaced. All GAC spaces in the National Capital Region are either owned or managed by Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) and have stalls that meet the Federal Accessibility Standard.

3. ICT: A member of the public with a cognitive impairment requested that GAC consider making travel advisories available on an interactive map so that information could be more easily available and in an alternate format.

Actions taken: The IDEA team reached out to the Travel Advice, Training, Engagement and Outreach team to encourage integrating accessibility into plans for future upgrades to the site.

4. Culture change: The IDEA team received an anonymous feedback message stating that the GAC Duty to Accommodate (DTA) program is not compliant with the Directive on the DTA, the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, the Treasury Board Secretariat Duty to Accommodate General Process for Managers or the Government of Canada Accessibility Passport in the Workplace. The feedback also alleges the AAP is causing “systemic harassment and discrimination to employees with disabilities due to its failure to address the Duty to Accommodate.”

Response: The message was shared with the team responsible for the Duty to Accommodate Program for consideration. As the feedback was sent anonymously and without specifics, it was not possible to directly address the complaint.



5. Communications (other than ICT): The director of the GAC Centre for Learning Services contacted the IDEA team to ask how the department is promoting the importance of writing emails in an accessible way.

Response: The IDEA team sent the person a link to the AAP, identified the section on Communications, other than ICT, and shared the message with the departmental contact on the AAP's communications pillar. The GAC communications branch will collaborate with the Centre for Learning Services on learning opportunities to promote accessible communications in the coming months.

## Consultations

In preparation for this report, the IDEA team regularly consulted with the GAC Champion for persons with disabilities as well as the Persons with disabilities network representative through online discussions and emails. In September 2024, a draft of this report was shared with the Champion and representative for their feedback. They provided editing recommendations, most of which were integrated.

The IDEA team organized focus groups with employees with disabilities. The consultation process also involved members of the persons with disabilities network who previously agreed to be contacted for consultation purposes. The call for consultations was also posted in the network's Microsoft Teams group.

In total, 41 employees received an invitation to take part in virtual focus groups: 1 English session and 1 French session, each 1 hour in duration. The English session was held on October 22, 2024, and had 12 participants, 10 of whom identified as persons with disabilities. The French session was held on October 25, 2024, and had 1 participant. Although the IDEA team indicated to participants that they were not required to disclose their disabilities, the following types were voluntarily disclosed: vision, hearing, neurodivergence and mental health. Following the focus groups, 3 more participants sent comments in writing, and 1 thoroughly reviewed and edited the report. Their input was thought provoking and resulted in some edits.

In each session, the IDEA team asked participants the following questions:

- Do you see anything in the report that removes barriers in your personal situation (if you are willing to share)?
- Do you still experience barriers even after accessibility activities have been put in place in any of the 8 priority areas?
- What improvements do you suggest we make to the activities in the progress report?



- Do you have any other observations about the report?

Participants described their experiences related to report activities; many participants continue to encounter persistent barriers and their circumstances have not improved during the first year that the *Accessible Canada Act* and Accessibility action plan have been in place.

Participants expressed that barriers have negative impacts on their productivity, as well as on their mental and physical health.

Consultation participants provided the following input on barriers.

Employment:

- Concerns were raised that the department has not yet implemented the Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport even though it is in place in most other federal departments.

Communication, other than information and communications technologies (ICT):

- Participants expressed that barriers for persons with disabilities persist due to infrequent use of live captions in meetings and limitations of Microsoft Teams transcription, especially during bilingual meetings; rapid switching between English and French makes virtual meetings inaccessible for those needing closed captioning.

The built environment:

- Focus group participants highlighted challenges such as the need for in-house expertise to ensure accessibility before renovations begin; participants said that the ongoing renovations increased barriers for those with environmental sensitivities, mental illness and neurodiverse conditions, and for those with hearing impairments.
- Mitigations they requested included greater access to quiet workspaces, building accessibility during emergencies and noise cancellation devices that do not interfere with hearing aids.
- Participants also raised challenges regarding the migration across the department to a hotelling work environment, which increases barriers for employees with accessibility requirements as it is more challenging to have dedicated workspaces with specialized office equipment.
- Some participants expressed that interactions with both their managers and with the duty to accommodate process feels dehumanizing.

Culture change:



- Focus group participants expressed that managers should have greater flexibility to implement accommodation measures based on the needs of their employees; participants stated that they found the process for requesting workplace accommodations to be confusing and said it caused delays.
- Participants expressed that managers do not have the awareness and training needed to effectively support their employees with disabilities; mitigation suggestions from the focus groups included enforcement of policies, mandatory training, and ensuring the effective use of tools and resources to bridge gaps.
- The 13 focus group participants were not aware of the consultation processes, or the initiatives mentioned in this report; none of the focus group participants had been invited to participate in consultations on the renovations or on ICT.
- Participants would have preferred that the consultation focus on addressing barriers more generally rather than the contents of the report and called for more frequent consultations; mitigation suggested included improved engagement strategies, accessible communication channels, and proactive outreach to ensure all voices are heard and considered in future initiatives.

## Areas in [section 5 of the Accessible Canada Act \(ACA\)](#)

This report presents the progress made in workplace culture at GAC, as well as each of the 7 areas of focus under the ACA:

- employment
- the built environment
- information and communications technologies
- communication, other than information and communication technologies,
- the procurement of goods, services and facilities
- the design and delivery of programs and services
- transportation

All “Progress updates” and “Other progress updates” listed in the following section of the report are activities that were underway as of mid-September, 2024.

### Employment

The following barriers in policies, programs, practices and services have been identified:

- The process for requesting workplace accommodations is confusing and causes delays.



- Tools, such as the workplace accessibility passport, have not been implemented in the department.
- Managers do not have the awareness and training needed to effectively support their employees with disabilities.
- Employees with disabilities fear disclosing their disability and asking for support.
- Employees with disabilities perceive unfairness in hiring, onboarding, training and career advancement practices.

**Actions in the AAP: The Corporate and Operational Human Resources (HR) team will continue to provide the necessary accommodation to candidates during staffing processes to provide fair assessments and enable candidates to fully demonstrate their competency.**

- GAC will provide documentation to all candidates that clearly explains all hiring-process stages and discuss appropriate accommodation measures with candidates.
- GAC will continue to ensure that hiring managers and HR specialists are aware of their obligations and understand how to support persons with disabilities during selection processes.
- GAC will provide tools to hiring managers and HR specialists to review and improve assessment methods used in selection processes to identify and mitigate potential bias and barriers.

Progress updates:

- On an ongoing basis, steps are explained to all candidates during hiring processes and the accommodations process is outlined in all communications to candidates.
- On an ongoing basis, accommodation measures are discussed during staff meetings within Staffing Operations (SO), who have also received neurodiversity training on 2 occasions in 2024.
- The SO team provides ongoing support and tools to limit bias in staffing processes using the “all-in-one form,” \* which has a section dedicated to the evaluation of biases and barriers based on requirements set in the *Public Service Employment Act (PSEA)*.
- The SO team provides tools to hiring managers and HR specialists to review and improve assessment methods used in selection processes to identify and mitigate potential bias and barriers; the PSEA is implemented in collaboration with hiring managers.
- The SO team maintains a list of volunteers from employment equity (EE) groups who are available to participate as selection board members during staffing assessments, including persons with disabilities



\* The “all-in-one” form is used during staffing processes. It combines 7 forms to increase efficiency, reduce documentation requirements and ensure that everything is on file when appointments are made. It also refers to policies, directives and the PSEA, which governs staffing in the public service.

**Actions in the AAP: In 2023, the IDEA team will launch an awareness campaign on self-identification and employment equity data. This will provide a deeper understanding of the GAC workforce and employees’ intersectional identities.**

- Ensuring all new employees understand self-identification and self-declaration
- Encouraging and reminding existing staff to complete the new Treasury Board Secretariat self-identification form while providing assurances that their information will be protected and used judiciously according to the *Privacy Act*.

Progress updates:

- GAC is awaiting the launch of the new self-identification questionnaire and process before initiating an awareness campaign that will emphasize how secure the new process will be; how it respects employees’ right to privacy; and the difference between self-identification and self-declaration.
- All letters of offer to GAC employees include a paragraph encouraging them to self-identify if they are members of an employment equity group; once they have access to the Human Resources Management System (HRMS), each employee receives a pop-up message asking them to fill in self-identification information. The message continues to pop-up every time the employee uses HRMS until they either self-identify or refuse to do so by checking off a refusal box.
- In all staffing processes, candidates are encouraged to self-declare if they are a member of an employment equity group.

**Actions in the AAP: By 2024, GAC managers will be encouraged to reinforce positive actions related to accessibility.**

- Managers are expected to seek support to fully understand their responsibilities in providing accommodation to their employees; actions will include required check-ins with employees about their accessibility and accommodation needs, expected outcomes and key success indicators.
- Managers will keep communication lines open and ask employees for feedback on how to improve accessibility and accommodation.



- Employees will be encouraged to provide feedback on how their accommodation requests are addressed.

#### Progress updates:

- The departmental Disability Management team (DDMT) provides advice and guidance to managers on specific situations and takes opportunities to educate them by offering training and other available resources.
- On an ongoing basis, the DDMT advises managers to always keep the lines of communication open with their employees.
- The DDMT provided awareness training to managers on the duty to accommodate and on managing specific situations, both in conjunction with the possible implementation of the accessibility passport.

#### Other updates on progress:

- An ongoing review of procedures on the department's Modus web page is being conducted with respect to instructions on the accommodations process.
- The SO team ensures that managers are supported by staffing advisors and provided with tools, including the all-in-one form for example, to minimize and remove bias in staffing processes.
- Article 36.2 of the *Public Service Employment Act* has been implemented in collaboration with hiring managers; tools supporting implementation are available to HR advisors and managers.
- The SO team ensures that letters of offer clearly state that the probation period for new employees does not begin until required accommodations are implemented.

#### **Actions in the AAP: By 2024, GAC will practice inclusive and accessible hiring so all candidates, including those with disabilities, can demonstrate their competencies.**

- Before an assessment method is used, managers and staffing advisors will conduct an evaluation to identify whether the method, and the way it will be applied, includes, or creates biases or barriers that disadvantaged people belonging to equity-seeking groups, including persons with disabilities. Should biases be identified, managers and staffing advisors will take every step to remove them and mitigate their impact (from S.36.2 of the *Public Service Employment Act*).
- Make improvements by providing the proper tools to allow greater flexibility in assessments, including design and delivery and identifying and mitigating potential biases and barriers.



- Conduct targeted campaigns to recruit persons with disabilities to address representation gaps.

#### Progress updates:

- All systems used in application and assessment processes (Public Service Resourcing System, VidCruiter, etc.) are compliant with accessibility requirements; tools are available to eliminate or mitigate biases and barriers, such as the section in the all-in-one form that addresses biases and barriers.
- Staffing advisors participated in the David C. Onley Initiative for Employment and Enterprise Development, in partnership with Algonquin College, Carleton University, La Cité and the University of Ottawa, to connect students and recent graduates with disabilities with employment opportunities in the Government of Canada; a database of resumes collected at this event has been created and shared with hiring managers with positive results. Significant outreach to various equity-seeking groups was done during the recruitment process in advance of posting entry-level positions.
- Two targeted staffing processes were launched in 2023-2024; staffing advisors are promoting an inventory of resumes to hiring managers that includes candidates who self-declared as persons with disabilities.
- The most recent iteration of the GAC Deputy Minister Sponsorship Program for EX-01 development of non-EX employees who self-declared as members of an employment equity group launched in December 2023; an employee with a disability was selected to participate (and gave their permission to share this information).

#### **Action in the AAP: In 2024-2025, GAC will review its practices and procedures related to workplace accommodations.**

- Review duty to accommodate internal procedures
- Develop a process to better track data related to workplace accommodations
- Review, analyze and make recommendations on the implementation of the Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport

#### Progress update:

- The DDMT is currently updating and aligning internal procedures with data collection activities.
- The DDMT has begun consultations on the implementation of the Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport and has integrated feedback received into



their proposed accessibility passport implementation plan.

## The built environment

The following barriers in policies, programs, practices and services have been identified:

- Employees with disabilities are not consistently consulted during all phases of planning and implementation of changes to the built environment.
- Employees have limited knowledge of the Building Emergency Evacuation Plan and how they can be accommodated during an emergency.
- Employees with disabilities do not have readily available information about accessibility at Canadian missions abroad.
- Availability of accessibility features varies across GAC offices and buildings.

**Action in the AAP: By the end of 2024, the Procurement and Asset Management (PAM) directorate will review the built environment in partnership with persons with disabilities, key stakeholders and Public Service and Procurement Canada to identify ways to make buildings more accessible and inclusive.**

- PAM will seek feedback from stakeholders on the results of the accessibility assessments and how to address barriers.
- PAM will track and monitor the implementation of improvements.

Progress update:

- To make buildings more accessible, PAM is continuing outreach through surveys and consultations with internal and external stakeholders, including persons with disabilities, for all planned and future renovations.
- PAM has researched a tracking and monitoring system which will be implemented in the long term but is currently delayed due to unforeseen project challenges.

**Action in the AAP: In 2024 and 2025, the Fire Prevention and Emergency Measures (FPEM) team will increase awareness of the safety of employees with disabilities in case of an emergency.**

- Continue to support the individualized emergency needs of persons with disabilities through the optional Persons Requiring Assistance (PRA) process.



- Ensure that employees in the immediate work area find a support person (if necessary, the immediate supervisor is required to help with this process).
- Training the person requiring assistance on how to use the emergency red phone and on the building evacuation procedure.
- Promote the option for persons with disabilities to register as a person requiring assistance as part of the Building Emergency Evacuation Plan.

#### Progress update:

- The FPEM team:
  - Increases awareness of safety measures in case of emergency by ensuring that PRA are aware of accessibility considerations during building evacuations through promotions and communication.
  - Publishes quarterly broadcast messages throughout the department to inform all GAC employees of the entrances PRA may use and to encourage employees to register as a PRA, which also ensured that PRA are aware of accessibility considerations during an evacuation.
  - Prepares and revises emergency evacuation plans to provide information on the evacuation procedures for PRA and the responsibilities of support persons for PRA
  - Maintains the list of PRA that is made available to firefighters during an evacuation.
  - On an ongoing basis, ensures that employees in the immediate work area of any PRA find a support person by meeting with them one-on-one and advising them that they may choose colleagues to act as support persons (if necessary, their immediate supervisor may assist in designating support persons for them).
  - Continue regular online and in-person training sessions for persons requiring assistance on the building evacuation procedure and how to use the emergency red phone
  - Have updated the PRA form, converting it to HTML for ease-of-use and for increased accessibility
- The FPEM team continues to advise managers to foster an accessible culture beyond daily operational duties within the workplace and in their role under the accessibility action plan.
- The FPEM team motivates managers to be communicators, advocates, coaches, liaisons and active proponents of accessibility; managers play an important role in encouraging employees with disabilities to register as a PRA.

Other progress updates the FPEM team is working on include:



- Collaborating with the building management firm Brookfield Global Integrated Solutions to ensure regular winter maintenance through the snow removal program at GAC headquarters.
- Developing a structured approach to ensure sidewalk repairs, curb ramp installations and other amendments related to accessibility issues are completed.
- Identifying how the department can be more accessible, inclusive and comply with new accessibility codes and standards by assessing projects, observing present deficiencies and advocating for further accessibility (for example, the FPEM team insisting on the installation of an accessible ramp at the front entrance of 125 Sussex instead of the proposal to have PRAs leave from the back of the building; advocating for automatic door operators on all doors, not just the minimum required by code; and pushing for accessibility on all GAC Reno projects).
- Collaborating with GAC Reno and Accommodation Services to ensure that all new projects are accessible by default (contrary to the practice of only meeting the minimum of code compliance) by requesting and advocating for: more accessible ramps, pathways and doors; emergency strobe lights for persons with hearing impairments; OC Transpo drop-offs at 125 Sussex Drive instead of further away at King Edward Avenue; and other accessibility accommodations.

**Action in the AAP: By the end of 2024, the Missions Operations, Policies and Innovations (MOPI) team, with the assistance of the IDEA team, will create an excel tracking tool where employees can readily access up-to-date information about mission accessibility.**

- Consulting with stakeholders, including employees with disabilities and dependents with disabilities, about information they need related to mission environments, education, healthcare and living quarters.
- Partnering with MOPI to gather mission information on various accessibility needs including in the built environment (mission and staff quarters); accessible housing availability, accessibility at each posting and documented in a place where employees can easily access the information.

Progress update:

- The IDEA team has begun outreach and consultations with its partner, International Platform Branch, and has developed questions for Canadian missions abroad to disclose where barriers are located and what accessibility features exist; the next step is to develop a mission engagement plan and process to obtain the information and make it available to employees.



#### Other progress:

- The GAC International Platform Branch is undertaking renovation projects at missions that incorporate accessibility for persons with mobility disabilities in the design phase.

#### **Action in the AAP: In 2024-2025, Procurement and Asset Management (PAM) will review and adjust its office workspace design to consider the needs of persons with disabilities.**

- Ensuring that furniture and amenities are accessible for persons with disabilities (round vs. square tables, accessible kitchen, etc.)
- Assessing how to identify quiet workspace in all GAC office locations, for employees who require them. GAC uses these spaces for employees who need a break from the noise and activity of the open-plan office.

#### Progress updates by PAM:

- Reviews of domestic accommodations are ongoing with internal stakeholders and PSPC.
- Confirmation with internal stakeholders and PSPC that all furniture procurement processes maximize flexibility and accessibility.
- Increasing awareness of accessibility and invisible disabilities at headquarters and in regional offices through ongoing consultations with various GAC employee networks.
- Building quiet workspace options in all its office locations for employees who require them, broadcasting this information through messaging to the department and in Modus and providing lists of GAC-controlled spaces that are used for this purpose.

### **Information and communication technologies**

The following barriers in policies, programs, practices and services have been identified:

- The process to request workplace accommodations is confusing and causes delays in obtaining assistive and adaptive technology.
- Some employees are not aware of assistive and adaptive technology that are available to them.
- Employees with disabilities need more coaching on how to use assistive and adaptive technology and equipment.



**Action in the AAP: In 2024, the Information Management and Technology (IMT) team will assess current technology for accessibility features to identify gaps and enable accessibility features in existing programs and technology.**

- Consulting with stakeholders including employees with disabilities to understand their concerns, needs and requirements.
- Consulting with Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) and Shared Services Canada (SSC) to leverage options for services and support related to accessible information and communications technologies (ICT) tools used across the Government of Canada.
- Conducting a formal ICT assessment to highlight accessibility gaps in systems and software.
- Making recommendations regarding specific technologies, practices and processes that hinder accessibility.

Progress update:

- The Information Management and Technology team:
  - Is conducting ongoing internal consultations with employees with disabilities and other stakeholders to understand their ICT concerns, needs, and requirements
  - Consulted with SSC's Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology team and ESDC to leverage options for services and support related to accessible IT tools used across the Government of Canada
  - Has initiated and continues performing a formal assessment to find accessibility gaps in systems and software
  - Is researching and developing ICT guidelines for web and non-web applications for stakeholders.

**Action in the AAP: In 2024, based on funding provided, the IMT team will establish a centre of IT expertise that will help employees better understand and use IT tools and systems.**

- Create an accessibility portal on Modus to provide information on relevant services, supports, processes and contacts.
- Provide accessibility training for IT staff to sensitize them to the importance of adapting services and interactions.

Progress update:

- The Information Management and Technology team:



- Is gathering information required to create an accessibility portal on Modus for IT developers by December 2024. It will provide information on relevant services, supports, processes and contacts. The SSC Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology Team and the ESDC IT Accessibility Office have provided useful tools and resources for this purpose.
- Identified Canada School for Public Service courses (Addressing Disability Inclusion and Barriers to Accessibility (INC115) and Disability Management and Workplace Wellness (INC120) for potential training that will be reviewed and recommended to all IT staff to complete in 2025.

**Action in the AAP: In 2024, the IMT team will also improve awareness and communication about accessible ICT tools and supports.**

- Reviewing, in consultation with employees with disabilities, the effectiveness of the App Store and improving it to ensure it provides the information required by employees with disabilities.
- Consulting employees with disabilities and relevant stakeholders and creating a communications plan to increase awareness of accessibility-related ICT tools and support among GAC staff.

**Progress update:**

- The Enterprise Architecture team is developing an anonymous survey to consult employees about accessibility to identify gaps, barriers and process improvements to current ICT offerings at GAC, including the GAC App Store; the survey will be published in winter 2025 via a broadcast message to all employees.

**Other progress:**

- To support employees with disabilities in acquiring accessibility-related ICT tools, the Business Relationship Management group improved their request process by prioritizing accessibility-related requests to reduce delays in acquiring requested tools.

**Communication, other than information and communication technologies**

The following barriers in policies, programs, practices and services have been identified:

- Communications are not consistently in plain language or in accessible formats.
- Employees across the department have not been trained on accessible communications.



**Action in the AAP: The Public Affairs Branch (PAB) is committed to providing barrier-free communications products and services that both the public and employees can readily access and understand.**

- In 2024-2025, PAB will:
  - Develop an internal communications plan to raise awareness and promote accessibility within the organization.
  - Develop and promote processes to ensure its digital content is accessible by default.
  - Consider accessibility needs and requirements when exploring new digital and social platforms.
  - Provide communications products in alternative formats, where applicable and possible.
  - Promote best practices for the use of live captioning at events.
  - Continue to consult users of GAC's intranet and internet sites regarding user experience, including accessibility.
  - Implement iterative design processes that consider accessibility during website updates.
  - Review and update corporate templates for accessibility (e.g., briefing notes and PowerPoint templates).

Progress update:

- PAB:
  - Continues to implement a promotional campaign on the importance of accessibility, launched in 2023-2024 within the department (for example, a broadcast message was published and a banner within the daily messages was added during National Accessibility Week from May 26 to June 1, 2024).
  - Integrated the development and promotion of accessible digital content by default.
  - Ensured that intranet and web design updates include accessibility compliance as part of the web adviser's responsibilities.
  - Ensures accessibility of SharePoint communications sites through the Communications Site Committee's review and approval process.
  - Developed and delivered training material that speaks to accessibility considerations for social media (like alt text, plain language, emoji use and more).
  - Produced transcripts and closed captions for video content so such content is more accessible across all social media platforms leveraged by GAC.
  - Included alternative text in all posts for the various channels managed by PAB while creating content through platform-provided options.



- Continued to explore new digital platforms for web publishing and work collaboration (the digital solutions team ensures that accessibility remains part of requirements gathered for the development of new solutions and platforms within the M365 environment and the rest of the suite of tools used by Web Services).
- Co-chairs the SharePoint Communications Site Review Board, which grants groups across the department access to use SharePoint as a short- and medium-term communications vehicle.
- Developed accessible mandatory templates for the abovementioned sites and guides groups in creating accessible content and design.
- Established a user experience and content design team, which is performing user testing on web and intranet content to ensure user experience is at the forefront of the design process. It tested intranet HR, international development, and information management/information technology themes as well as international trade as part of the canada.ca navigation; and web accessibility with the SiteImprove platform.
- Explored an increased use of videos to communicate announcements and ministerial visits.
- Ensures that communications products are available and accessible on the intranet and on GAC's external websites in alternative and accessible formats, such as alternative text, Hyper Text Markup Language content and an accompanying PDF version, where possible.
- Promoted streaming meetings on YouTube or Microsoft Teams as each can deliver live captioning.
- Is conducting reviews of standard operating procedures for accessibility on an ongoing basis.
- Used live transcription services while streaming corporate events.

**Action in the AAP: PAB will provide training to employees on accessibility needs and requirements.**

- In 2024 and 2025, PAB will:
  - Provide information, workshops or training sessions to GAC employees on Web accessibility and plain language.
  - Provide advice and guidance to clients on communicating in plain language and meeting web accessibility standards.
  - Share accessibility-related best practices for social media, web, strategic communications and media relations.

**Progress update:**

- In 2024 PAB:



- Offered plain language training to all staff at the end of March.
- Supported the use of plain language and descriptive text for all published images.
- Provided material and resources on accessibility compliance to divisions across GAC that are building SharePoint communications sites through the review and approval process of the Communications Site Committee.
- Focused on plain language in its Web Community of Practice for Content and Design.
- Sent employees on plain language training
- Offered 3 workshops to International Assistance Report and Trade clients on writing for the web in plain language.
- Provided plain language information sessions to internal partners in the Trade Commissioner Service Support Division and the Gender Equality team
- Provided advice and guidance to clients on writing their reports and other documents in plain language and meeting web accessibility standards.
- Provides access to a readability tool, VisibleThread, and reports generated through that tool, to encourage plain language writing in digital communications products.
- Continued to share accessibility best practices as part of the web advisor function for all web and intranet digital communications.
- Worked on a new departmental visual identity that will be launched in the fall of 2024 and will be accessible.
- Many employees participated in a workshop on neurodiversity.

## The procurement of goods, services and facilities

The following barriers in policies, programs, practices and services have been identified:

- Procurement officers and managers lack training in accessible procurement processes.

**Action in the AAP: Procurement officers will complete Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC)/Shared Services Canada (SSC) learning sessions on accessibility in procurement when offered.**

- Procurement and Asset Management will leverage PSPC/SSC accessibility learning sessions offered to procurement officers; these learning sessions provide an overview of the *Accessible Canada Act*, the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada, and the roles and responsibilities of technical and contracting authorities.

Progress update:



- The Contracting and Material Management Policy team sent quarterly reminders to the GAC Procurement Community to continue taking PSPC/SCC accessibility learning sessions; for easy access, sessions were posted on the GAC Procurement and Materiel Management Colleague Portal Wiki for the GAC procurement community and on the GAC Procurement and Materiel Management Client Portal Wiki for Business Owners.

## The design and delivery of programs and services

The following barriers in policies, programs, practices and services have been identified:

- Accessibility is not fully integrated into all corporate programs and services

**Action in the AAP: In 2024, GAC will begin equipping branches with the necessary training and tools to provide programs and services accessible to persons with disabilities by design.**

- GAC will consult with other government departments to obtain and adapt existing educational materials to promote awareness and understanding of accessibility issues in service design and delivery.

Progress update:

- The IDEA team consulted with contacts in Canada Border Services Agency, Canada School of Public Service, and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to obtain and adapt existing educational materials that promote awareness of accessibility issues in service design and delivery; GAC is currently considering how best to leverage the information, including IRCC's Accessible Service Delivery Playbook which may potentially be adapted and used in the GAC environment.

## Transportation

The following barriers in policies, programs, practices and services have been identified:

- Employees with disabilities do not have information readily available on accessible transportation at missions abroad

**Action in the AAP: In 2024, GAC will take steps to increase accessible transportation for employees**



- As part of the creation of a database tool for employees to access up-to-date information on mission accessibility, the IDEA team will add a section on accessible transportation with public and private options.

Progress update:

- The IDEA team, with the support of the International Platform Branch, has developed questions, to be provided to missions, on accessible transportation options in cities that host a Canadian mission abroad; this activity will continue into 2025.

## Workplace culture

The following barriers in policies, programs, practices, and services have been identified:

- Employees at all levels need more training and guidance on accessibility
- Accessibility progress is slower than desired

**Action in the AAP: By July 2024, GAC branches will complete the Accessibility Self-Assessment Tool (SAT) to assess the organization's current accessibility readiness in the key priority areas.**

- The SAT is an educational tool developed by the Office of Public Service Accessibility to assess an organization's state of readiness and provide focus areas for the concentration of effort and monitoring; GAC will use the results of the SAT to add more focus to the accessibility action plan (AAP).
- GAC will develop an annual departmental accessibility survey using the 2023 Building the GAC Accessibility Action Plan: Nothing Without Us survey as an instrument to measure barriers and determine the extent of cultural shifts toward equity and inclusivity.

Progress update:

- The SAT will be postponed to 2025 and be used in the development of the next AAP.
- The survey was developed as a tool to assist in determining where barriers are located and how to best direct resources to remove and prevent them from forming (it was updated in 2024 and was ready to publish when it was determined by the Office of the Accessibility Commissioner that the results could not be used as a consultation tool in the preparation of the GAC progress report; instead, resources were diverted to plan focus group consultations about the report).



**Action in the AAP: In 2024 and 2025, the IDEA team will work collaboratively with the Canadian Foreign Service Institute (CFSI) to promote accessibility training offered to GAC employees and create a learning roadmap.**

- CFSI will establish an accessibility strategy for learning products and services, including:
  - Offering learning content on a single platform that is fully accessible, supports accessible learning material and is led by a team with accessibility expertise.
  - Add a requirement that only fully accessible courses are added to the GAC list of mandatory training for all employees.
  - Reviewing and updating all online courses offered by the CFSI to ensure they fully meet accessibility standard by the end of 2023-2024.
  - Reviewing and updating all CFSI instructor-led courses, including foreign language training, to ensure they fully meet accessibility standards by the end of 2023-2024.

Progress update:

- CFSI established an accessibility strategy for learning products and services, ensuring that all online courses offered by CFSI fully meet accessibility standards; CFSI is on track to add a requirement that only fully accessible courses be added to the GAC list of mandatory training for all employees.
- By the end of 2024-2025, CFSI will complete a review and update of all their instructor-led courses to ensure they fully meet accessibility standards; they will offer learning content on a single, fully accessible platform that supports accessible learning material and is led by a team with accessibility expertise.

Other progress updates:

- GAC is in the final stages of developing its Anti-Racism and Diversity Impact Assessment Tool (ARDIAT) for use by employees to assess if GAC's corporate policies and programs are equitable and inclusive; it includes a Gender-based Analysis Plus lens to integrate intersectionality and accessibility and will help assess where improvements will be made to the inclusion of persons with disabilities.
- During 2024, the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Anti-Racism division made 13 presentations to employees in GAC branches, bureaus and missions on topics relevant to accessibility, anti-racism and inclusion, including legal obligations, making communications and the workplace more accessible, avoiding microaggressions, defining equity, sharing resources and promoting inclusion.
- As part of CFSI's commitment to offer fully accessible learning materials and to support learning providers as they update their learning materials, CFSI has launched an



Accessibility Toolbox for learning providers. CFSI has planned several learning sessions on accessibility and learning solutions topics and is holding bi-weekly “doors open” sessions where experts are available to answer questions from the learning community and will measure progress toward a fully accessible curriculum; their commitment to accessible learning solutions is also shared through the GAC Learning and Development Network, a community of practice for learning professionals, mission learning coordinators and subject matter experts.

## Performance measurement

GAC is developing a performance measurement framework featuring short-, medium- and long-term timelines for planned actions and clear measures to indicate and track progress. Whenever possible, performance indicators relevant to the AAP will align with the performance measurement frameworks of the GAC Equity Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan and the Anti-Racism Strategy and Action Plan. Where possible, GAC will use existing data from the Public Service Employment Survey as our baseline. Additional key success factors and key performance indicators will be included in the AAP Performance Measurement Framework.

## Conclusion

Improving accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities is a process that requires ongoing, conscious efforts. GAC continues to rethink how activities are performed and commits to doing better. GAC is also promoting a culture of inclusion by supporting efforts toward recruitment, retention and advancement of persons with disabilities and by working with stakeholders across the department in our collective responsibility to create a healthy, safe and welcoming work environment.

GAC will continue to learn alongside employees and become more representative, inclusive and accessible through activities, consultations and feedback received. These will help to hold the department accountable for delivering on the accessibility action plan (APP). GAC is also looking forward to the opportunity to renew and improve the AAP in 2025, based on experience gained and valuable input from employees. GAC will continue to engage with people with disabilities to better understand and meet their needs, so that all may have barrier-free access, feel included and thrive in our environment.