Accessiblü

Managed Digital Accessibility Ops

Accessibility Evaluation Report:

CQ Researcher

January 26, 2026

Conducted by: Accessiblü, LLC

For: Library Accessibility Alliance (LAA)

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Summary of Accessibility Findings

Accessiblü conducted a high-level accessibility evaluation of the CQ Researcher platform from SAGE Publishing to assess its usability for individuals with disabilities. The review was conducted using the JAWS and NVDA screen readers, keyboard-only navigation, and manual inspection for conformance to select WCAG 2.2 AA success criteria.

CQ Researcher demonstrates thoughtful design in several areas, including comprehensive keyboard navigation support and semantic HTML structure in many sections. The platform provides valuable research content with multiple access points and search functionality. However, our evaluation identified some accessibility barriers that may create challenges for users with disabilities, particularly those relying on screen readers and keyboard navigation.

The platform shows strong potential for enhanced accessibility through systematic improvements to heading structures, ARIA implementation, and form labeling. These opportunities for improvement would benefit not only users with disabilities but enhance the overall user experience for all researchers accessing this valuable content.

Key Findings

Our evaluation revealed that CQ Researcher provides robust content with multiple pathways for research discovery. The platform includes functional search capabilities, filtering options, and content organization that supports various research workflows. However, some users may experience challenges with navigation efficiency and content comprehension due to structural and interactive elements that could benefit from accessibility enhancements.

Addressing the identified opportunities would significantly improve the experience for users of assistive technology while maintaining the platform's research-focused functionality. Most improvements involve systematic adjustments to existing code patterns rather than fundamental architectural changes.

Top 3 Issues Identified

1. **Heading Structure Optimization**

    a. **Headings appear out of logical sequence**, with H4 elements preceding H2 and H3 elements on the homepage.

    b. **Impact**: Users relying on heading navigation may experience confusion about content hierarchy and miss important sections.

    c. **WCAG Success Criteria:** 1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A), 2.4.6 Headings and Labels (AA)

2. **ARIA Implementation Enhancement**

    a. **Several ARIA attributes** reference non-existent elements or contain invalid values, affecting assistive technology communication.

    b. **Impact**: Screen reader users may receive incorrect or incomplete information about interactive elements and page structure.

    c. **WCAG Success Criteria:** 4.1.2 Name, Role, Value (A), 1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A)

3. **Form Element Accessibility**

    a. **Search fields and filter controls** lack visible labels, relying solely on title attributes or placeholders for identification.

    b. **Impact:** Users may have difficulty understanding the purpose and function of form controls, particularly with screen readers.

    c. **WCAG Success Criteria:** 1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A), 2.4.6 Headings and Labels (AA), 3.3.2 Labels or Instructions (A)

Disabilities Impacted

Blind and Low-Vision Users

Issues: Navigation challenges due to inconsistent heading hierarchy, missing alternative text for linked images, and incomplete ARIA labeling of interactive elements.

Impact: Screen reader users may experience difficulty understanding page structure, locating specific content sections, and comprehending the purpose of certain interactive elements. Navigation efficiency could be reduced, requiring additional time to complete research tasks.

Users with Motor Disabilities

Issues: Range sliders in advanced search are not accessible via keyboard arrow navigation, requiring tab-based navigation which may not be intuitive for all users.

Impact: Users relying on keyboard navigation may miss important filtering options or require alternative navigation patterns to access all search functionality.

Neurodiverse Users

Issues: Inconsistent heading structure and unclear form labeling may create cognitive load and reduce predictability of interface patterns.

Impact: Users may experience increased mental effort to understand page organization and form functionality, potentially affecting research efficiency and task completion.

Page-Specific Findings and Impact Analysis

The following section lists the accessibility findings by page and WCAG violations, describing their impact on users with disabilities.

Homepage (https://sk.sagepub.com/cqresearcher)

Opportunity Area	WCAG Success Criteria	Description	Example
Navigation Menu Structure	1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A)	Main navigation menu with role="menubar" contains child elements that do not follow expected ARIA menu structure patterns.	Navigation elements marked with role="none" and role="link" within menubar structure
Tab Control Enhancement	4.1.2 Name, Role, Value (A)	Tab interface elements reference invalid aria-controls values that do not correspond to existing page elements.	Multiple tab elements with aria-controls="test-tab" referencing non-existent elements
Color Contrast Optimization	1.4.3 Contrast (Minimum) (AA)	Link text does not meet minimum color contrast ratio requirements against the background.	"Browse All CQ Researcher" link has contrast ratio of 4.22:1 (requires 4.5:1)

Heading Content Addition	2.4.6 Headings and Labels (AA)	Page contains heading element without visible text content, which may confuse screen reader navigation.	Skip-link element marked as heading level 1 but contains no readable text

Impact Summary:

The identified opportunities on the homepage would enhance navigation efficiency and content comprehension for users with disabilities. Implementing consistent ARIA patterns would improve screen reader communication, while optimizing color contrast would benefit users with low vision. Establishing proper heading hierarchy would create more predictable navigation patterns for all users accessing the research content.
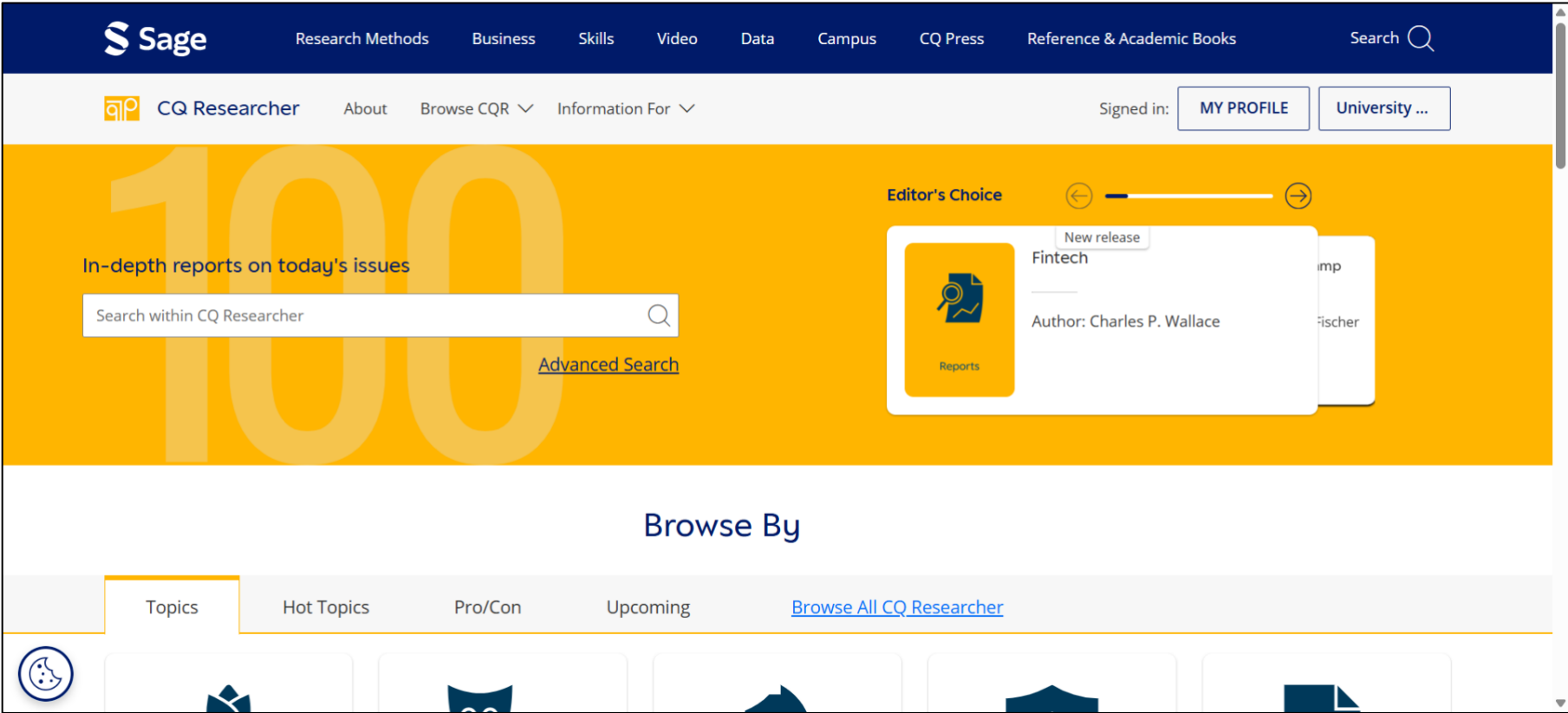
Homepage Screenshot

Figure 1. CQ Researcher homepage with main search functionality and content browsing options.

Search Results Page

Opportunity Area	WCAG Success Criteria	Description	Example
List Structure Enhancement	1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A)	Filter controls use list item elements without proper parent list containers.	Radio button group items marked as without containing or parent
Heading Sequence Improvement	1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A)	Search result headings jump from H1 to H5, skipping intermediate heading levels.	Result titles marked as H5 without H2, H3, or H4 structure preceding them
Page Structure Clarity	2.4.6 Headings and Labels (AA)	Page lacks a primary H1 heading to establish main content purpose and context.	Search results page missing level-one heading to identify page purpose
Landmark Organization	1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A)	Multiple content info landmarks and nested landmarks create confusion for screen reader navigation.	Duplicate footer landmarks and complementary landmark within main content area

Impact Summary:

Improvements to the search results page would significantly enhance content discovery and result comprehension for users with disabilities. Establishing proper heading hierarchy would enable efficient navigation between search results, while correcting list structures would improve filter usability. Adding a clear H1 heading would help users understand the page context and their location in the research workflow.
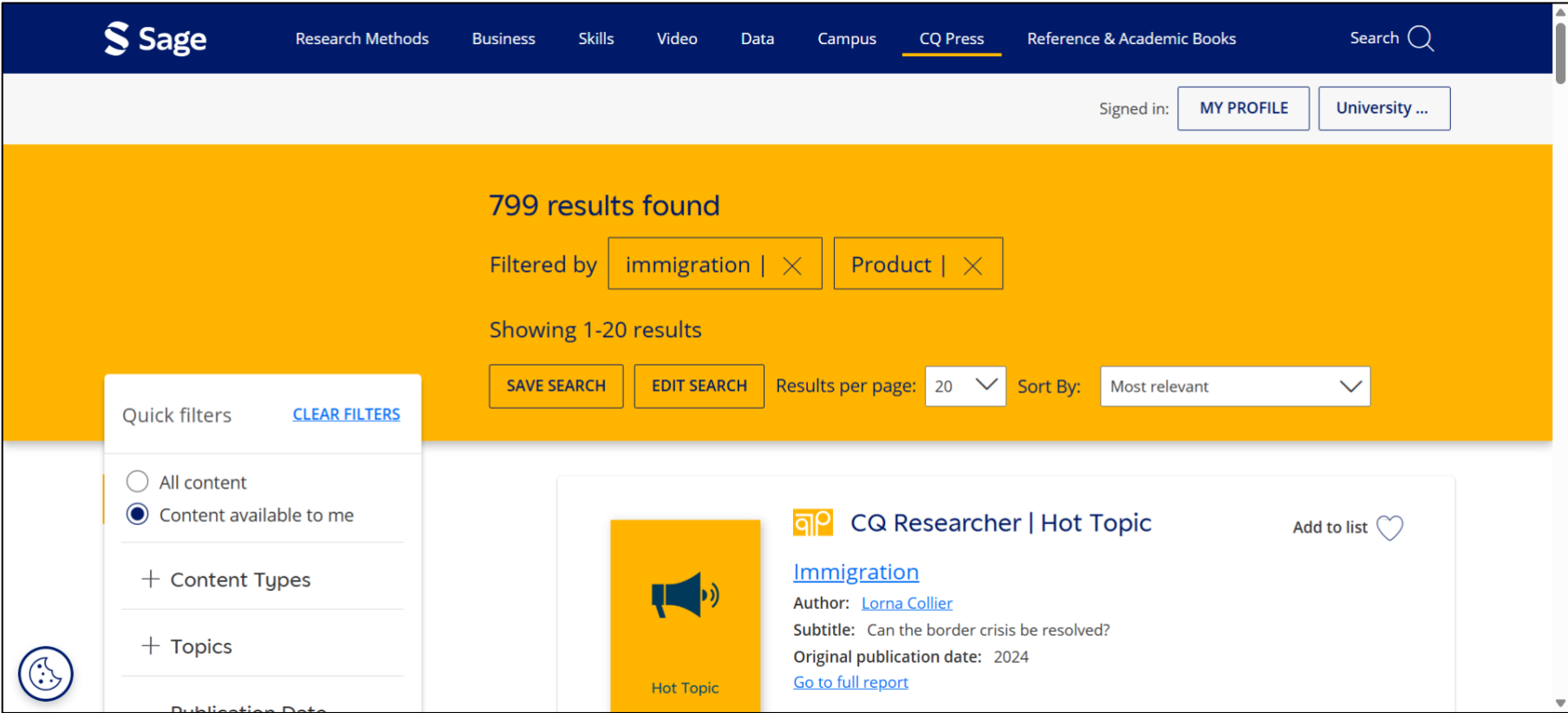
Search Results Screenshot

Figure 2. Search results page displaying filtered results and sidebar navigation options.

Advanced Search Page

Opportunity Area	WCAG Success Criteria	Description	Example
Landmark Structure Refinement	1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A)	Multiple main landmarks and nested footer landmarks create navigation confusion.	Two main landmarks identified: "#main" and "#main-content" with duplicate footer elements
Form Control Accessibility	2.1.1 Keyboard (A)	Date range sliders are not accessible via arrow key navigation, requiring tabbing to access controls.	Publication date range sliders (1920-2026) not discoverable through standard screen reader navigation
Status Communication	4.1.3 Status Messages (AA)	Clear all button provides visual confirmation but no programmatic announcement to screen readers.	"All search filters have been cleared" message displayed visually but not announced
Skip Link Accessibility	2.4.1 Bypass Blocks (A)	Skip navigation link is not contained within a landmark region, reducing its effectiveness.	Skip link element exists outside of landmark structure

Impact Summary:

Enhancements to the advanced search page would significantly improve research precision and efficiency for users with disabilities. Resolving landmark structure issues would create clearer page organization, while improving slider accessibility would ensure all filtering options are available to keyboard users. Adding status message announcements would provide essential feedback about search modifications and results.

Advanced Search Screenshot

Figure 3. Advanced search page with comprehensive filtering and search parameter options.

Individual Report Page

Opportunity Area	WCAG Success Criteria	Description	Example
ARIA Attribute Enhancement	4.1.2 Name, Role, Value (A)	Content presentation elements use inappropriate ARIA attributes that may confuse assistive technology.	Slide container element with aria-expanded="true" without appropriate interactive role
Tab Interface Structure	1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A)	Tab control structure does not follow expected ARIA tablist/tab/tabpanel relationships.	Content tabs contain improper child elements and missing tabpanel associations
Search Field Labeling	3.3.2 Labels or Instructions (A)	In-document search field relies solely on title attribute rather than visible label for identification.	"Search within this hot topic" field identified only by title attribute
Sidebar Landmark Positioning	1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A)	Complementary sidebar landmark is nested within another landmark, reducing navigation clarity.	Sidebar with supplementary content contained within main content landmark

Impact Summary:

Optimizations to individual report pages would enhance content consumption and research efficiency for users with disabilities. Correcting ARIA implementation would provide accurate information to assistive technology, while improving tab structures would create more intuitive content navigation. Enhanced search field labeling would improve content discovery within lengthy research documents.
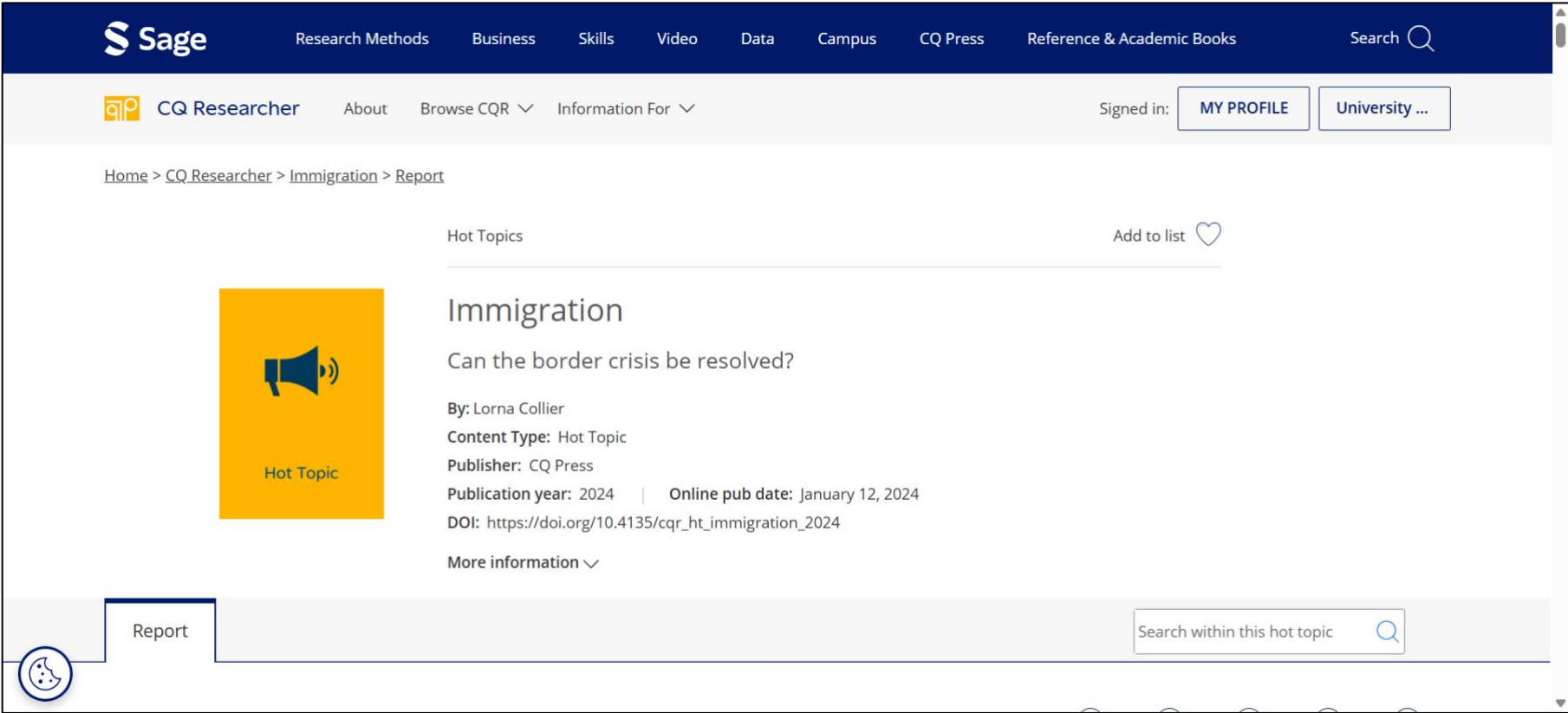
Individual Report Screenshot

Figure 4. Individual report page displaying research content for "Immigration" with navigation and search tools.

Code Recommendations and Technical Guidance

The following HTML-first solutions address the primary accessibility opportunities identified during our evaluation. These code suggestions are recommendations and not guaranteed fixes. All changes should be thoroughly tested with assistive technology (screen readers, keyboard-only navigation) to confirm effectiveness before implementation.

WCAG guidelines are designed to provide multiple paths to compliance. Developers have flexibility to implement these improvements using alternative approaches with CSS and JavaScript, as long as the underlying accessibility principles are met.

1. ARIA Controls Enhancement

Current implementation:

```
<input type="radio" aria-controls="test-tab">
```

Recommended implementation:

```
<input type="radio" aria-controls="research-content-panel" id="research-tab"> <div id="research-content-panel" role="tabpanel" aria-labelledby="research-tab">
```

2. Proper List Structure for Filter Controls

Current implementation:

```
<li class="sage-radio-group-item">   <input type="radio" name="content"> </li>
```

Recommended implementation:

```
<ul role="radiogroup" aria-labelledby="content-filter-heading">   <li class="sage-radio-group-item">     <input type="radio" name="content">   </li> </ul>
```

3. Heading Hierarchy Correction

Current implementation:

```
<h4>CQ Researcher</h4> <h2>Editor's Choice</h2> <h3>Fintech</h3>
```

Recommended implementation:

    `<h1>CQ Researcher</h1> <h2>Editor's Choice</h2> <h3>Fintech</h3>`

4. Form Label Enhancement

Current implementation:

    `<input type="search" placeholder="Search within CQ Researcher" title="search field">`

Recommended implementation:

    `<label for="main-search">Search CQ Researcher</label> <input type="search" id="main-search" placeholder="Enter search terms">`

5. Status Message Implementation

Current implementation:

    `<button onclick="clearFilters()">Clear All</button> <!-- Visual message only -->`

Recommended implementation:

    `<button onclick="clearFilters()">Clear All</button> <div aria-live="polite" id="status-messages"></div> <!-- JavaScript: document.getElementById('status-messages').textContent = 'All search filters have been cleared'; -->`

6. Navigation Menu Structure

Current implementation:

    `<ul role="menubar">   <li role="none"><a role="link">Research Methods</a></li> </ul>`

Recommended implementation:

    `<nav aria-label="Main navigation">   <ul>     <li><a href="/research-methods">Research Methods</a></li>   </ul> </nav>`

Testing Requirements:

While HTML-first solutions are recommended for their reliability and broad support, developers may explore CSS and JavaScript alternatives that achieve equivalent accessibility outcomes. All implementations should be validated with:

• Screen reader testing (JAWS, NVDA, VoiceOver)

• Keyboard-only navigation verification

• Automated accessibility scanning tools

• User testing with individuals who have disabilities

Final Thoughts and Recommendations

CQ Researcher demonstrates strong foundational accessibility practices with comprehensive keyboard navigation and semantic structure in many areas. The platform provides valuable research resources with multiple discovery pathways that serve diverse user needs effectively.

The identified opportunities represent strategic investments that would enhance the platform's usability for all users while ensuring compliance with accessibility standards. Most improvements involve systematic adjustments to existing patterns rather than fundamental architectural changes, making implementation both achievable and cost-effective.

Recommended Fixes

Immediate Priority (High Impact):

- Establish consistent heading hierarchy across all pages, starting with H1 for primary page purpose

- Correct ARIA attribute references to ensure valid relationships between interactive elements

- Enhance color contrast for navigation links to meet WCAG 2.2 AA requirements

High Priority (Significant Impact):

- Implement proper list structures for filter controls and navigation elements

- Add visible labels or enhance labeling for search fields and form controls

- Resolve duplicate landmark issues to create clearer page structure

Important Priority (Enhanced Experience):

- Improve slider controls accessibility for advanced search functionality

- Add status message announcements for dynamic content updates

- Enhance tab interface structure for content navigation

Complimentary Consultation Included

As part of this evaluation, Accessiblü's partnership with the LAA includes one hour of complimentary consulting with the team that conducted this evaluation. This session can be used to discuss implementation priorities, review technical approaches, or address questions about specific recommendations. To schedule this consultation, contact Jeff Rodgers directly at jeff@accessiblu.com.

Disclaimer

Accessiblü prepared this report as a high-level accessibility evaluation of the CQ Researcher platform. The evaluation utilized industry-standard testing methodologies, including screen reader testing (JAWS 2025), keyboard-only navigation, and manual inspection for select WCAG 2.2 AA success criteria.

This report does not represent a comprehensive WCAG compliance audit and should not be seen as a certification of accessibility compliance. While we have identified significant accessibility concerns and usability barriers, this evaluation was limited in scope and may not encompass all accessibility issues on the platform.

No Legal Liability:

Accessiblü offers this report for informational purposes only. It assumes no legal responsibility for accessibility violations or compliance failures resulting from its use. Organizations seeking formal certification should conduct a comprehensive audit and user testing with people with disabilities.

Limitations of Testing:

This evaluation was conducted at a specific time, and platform updates may have occurred after testing was completed. Additionally, while automated tools and expert reviews were utilized, real-world users with disabilities determine the true measure of accessibility.