

Concept Note

Coordinated by:



Implementing Partners:



TITLE /THEME: Strengthening the ICT-centric Innovation Ecosystem for Accessible Europe

Location(s) (<i>beneficiary country(ies), region(s), and/or global</i>)	Europe Region (46 countries)
Expected duration (<i>in months or years</i>):	1 year (with foreseeable extension)
Estimated Budget (<i>including currency</i>):	N/A
Coordinating Agency	International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
Implementing Partners	International Telecommunication Union (ITU), ZeroProject, Others

1. Background and context

1.1 General Introduction/Context

This initiative is proposed within the framework of the ITU Regional Initiative for Europe on Accessibility, affordability and skills development for all to ensure digital inclusion and sustainable development adopted by the World Telecommunication Development Conference 2017 (WTDC-17). This regional initiative aims at bridging the digital divide and equipping all groups of society, including persons with disabilities and other groups of people with specific needs, to take advantage of ICT.

Within this context, over the past two years, ITU has been joining forces with the European Commission to organise Accessible Europe, a conference on ICT accessibility and digital inclusion that is organized on an annual basis in December, close to the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December). The conference gathers experts and stakeholders from the public and private sectors as well as European disability associations, academia and civil society to discuss key challenges in the field of ICT accessibility and draw concrete recommendations on needed actions in Europe Region.

Beyond seeking to (i) facilitate policy and regulation discussions, (ii) develop knowledge about the topic in the region and (iii) contribute to the standards development process, one of the **4 pillars** of Accessible Europe is to create an **ICT-centric innovation ecosystem** that supports innovators in the field of ICT accessibility in line with ITU strategic goals and priorities.

To this end, a **Regional Competition** for Accessible Europe seeking innovative digital solutions aimed at improving the lives of People with Disabilities and specific needs is organized each year. This opportunity generates good engagement in the European landscape, with a growing number of projects submitted each year. Moreover, shortlisted solutions gain good visibility through social media campaign and participation at the Accessible Europe forum, thus contributing to the creation of the ICT-centric innovation ecosystem.

1.2 Problem statement

Lack of consistent support to start ups throughout the year in the scaling up phase has been identified in Europe Region. Within the European ICT-centric innovation ecosystem in field of accessibility, several startups face the following challenges on a daily basis:

- a. Funding opportunities
- b. Visibility opportunities
- c. Market access
- d. Ecosystem mapping
- e. Training and knowledge development

1.3 Justification

Taking the foregoing into consideration, a solid, reliable, identifiable ICT-centric innovation ecosystem that can support in a durable way innovators in the field of ICT accessibility in Europe is far from being a reality. Creating opportunities and delivering durable value by supporting the challenges encountered in scale up phase (1.2), is key to foster and elevate innovation in this field in Europe.

By joining forces with organizations that already carry out activities relevant to fostering of ICT-centric innovation ecosystem, this initiative acts as a catalyst, gathering inputs from interested parties to deliver sustainable value to innovators through time.

1.4 Relationship to ITU Programmes/Activities

At the ITU 2010 Plenipotentiary Conference held in Guadalajara (Mexico), through Resolution 175 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) on “Telecommunication/information and communication technology accessibility for persons with disabilities, including age-related disabilities”, Member States resolved that ITU’s mandate is to “coordinate accessibility-related activities between ITU [...] and other relevant organizations and entities where appropriate, in order to avoid duplication”. Moreover, new Resolution 205 (Dubai, 2018) resolved that the Union should seek to foster telecommunication/ICT-centric innovation in the development and deployment of telecommunication/ICT infrastructure that contributes to the development of the digital economy.

On this basis, the ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference 2017 (WTDC-17) held in Buenos Aires reviewed WTDC Resolution 58 (Rev. Buenos Aires 2017) including the mandate for the Telecommunication Development Bureau to “promote the exchange of experiences and best practices in terms of access to telecommunication and ICT services” as well as Regional Initiative for Europe 3 on accessibility (WTDC Res. 17).

Within this framework, the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau is promoting innovation in the field of access to Telecommunication and ICT for persons with disability and specific needs through two regional events, Accessible Europe and Accessible Americas, now at their second and fifth edition respectively and both containing an innovation track.

Finally, this project relates to global objectives in the framework of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ITU World Summit on the Information Society Action Lines (ALs). In particular, expected results will contribute to SDG 10 on “Reduced Inequalities” and WSIS AL 3 on “access to information and knowledge ICTs”.

2. Description

2.1. Objectives

The objective of this initiative is to create, develop and curate an ICT-centric Innovation Ecosystem composed by institutions who already promote development and deployment of Accessible ICTsto deliver sustainable value for innovators in the field of ICT accessibility.

Expected results

Main Deliverable: Self-sustainable mechanism to support ICT-centric innovation ecosystem in the field of ICT accessibility to empower innovators in providing innovative digital solutions and services designed for Persons with Disabilities and specific needs.

To achieve this result, the initiative would, among other things, **map potential opportunities for innovators** including, conferences, competitions, training and workshops (focusing on funding, market access, compliance, etc.). Moreover, partners will **facilitate participation in identified activities**, share relevant national and international **information and knowledge** in the field of ICT accessibility and provide **the space for connecting with relevant institutional and non-institutional stakeholders**, including representatives from government, standardization bodies, IT companies or disability associations. In addition, partners shall **leverage existing capacity of the organizations** (e.g. delivery of trainings, workshops, conferences) and include such activities in the opportunities for the community.

This initiative would build upon implementing partners' communities while remaining open for newcomers to strengthen the reach of this initiative. This might require additional actions as follows:

- 1) To issue an Open call for innovators in the field of ICT accessibility to join the platform and Community.
- 2) To reach out to innovators that are already participating in relevant activities in Europe relating to accessibility. Partners will ensure that appropriate channels are used to have the widest reach possible.
- 3) Explore the possibility of building an online platform to create visibility, simplify networking and connecting, and create a brand name for the initiative

2.2. Implementation strategy/methodology

Conferences

- ITU-EC Accessible Europe 2020 (Dec-20)
- ITU World Summit on Information Society Forum 2020 (Apr-20)
- ITU forum on innovative digital solutions at ZeroProject Conference 2020 (Feb-20)
- ZeroProject Conference 2020 (Feb-20)
- *(Proposal)* Access Israel Conference*(May-20)*
- *[to be added by partners]*

Competitions

- Regional Competition on “Innovative Digital Solutions for Accessible Europe”
- World Summit on Information Society Prizes 2020
- Zero Project Call for Nominations with permanent track on ICTs.
- *[to be added by partners]*

Training & Knowledge development

- ITU Self-Paced Online Training on ICT Accessibility
- ITU workshops related to Study Groups’ work in field of accessibility (standardization and development)
- Zero Project Impact Transfer: an accelerator program that supports 10 outstanding innovations every year. One from them is jointly selected with the ITU and gets special support from all partners to scale their innovation.
- European Commission workshop/webinar on funding opportunities for R&D as well as scale up.
- *(proposal)* WIPO workshop on intellectual property in field of assistive technologies
- *[to be added by partners]*

3. Partners

- International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
- ZeroProject/ESSL Foundation
- European Commission
- *[World Intellectual Property Organization]*

4. Budget and Financial Arrangements

Within the framework of the ITU Regional Initiative 3 on accessibility, Europe Office will act as the Secretariat for this initiative. All partners are invited to submit proposals for in kind / in cash contributions facilitating implementation of this initiative.

5. Communication Strategy and Plan

This initiative will be presented at Accessible Europe forum that will be held in Malta from 4 to 6 December 2019, specifically on 5th December, during session 11 on “Partnerships for Accessible Europe”,

Stakeholders will have the opportunity to discuss and raise their interest in contributing during the Project Laboratory to be held in the morning of 6th December. Contributions will be taken into account while establishing the implementation plan for 2020.

The first of the program’s activities is the ITU Forum of the Zero Project Conference 2020 to be held in Vienna on Feb 19, 2020.

6. Contact information

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