"Accessible Europe: ICT FOR ALL"

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Note: Participants of Accessible Europe 2018 are kindly invited to provide comments to EURregion@itu.int by 20 January 2019.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The 1st Regional Forum **"Accessible Europe: ICT for ALL"** was jointly organized by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and European Commission (EC), and hosted by United Nations Vienna. The Forum was held in Vienna, Austria, from 12 to 14 December 2018.

The "Accessible Europe" was held within the framework of the implementation of the 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). The aim of the regional initiative is bridging the digital divide and equipping all groups of society, including persons with disabilities and specific needs to take advantage of ICT, by enabling capacity building in digital skills.

Furthermore, the objectives of the ITU-EC Forum were set in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, in partiucular SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities, World Summit on the Information Society Action Line C3 on Access to Information and Knowledge and with the ITU Strategic Goal Two "Inclusiveness", Target 2.5.B: "*Enabling environments are ensuring accessible telecommunication/ICT for persons with disabilities should be established in all countries by 2020*", and they included:

- Promoting the development of accessibility in countries and institutions;
- Fostering cooperation of stakeholders at the national and regional level;
- Sharing good practices, projects, initiatives, and solutions already implemented;
- Identify possible prospects for concrete actions fostering implementation of ICT accessibility at the national and regional levels.

In line with the above mentioned, the ITU and EC have joined efforts to encourage governments, industry, academia, and other stakeholders to implement to promote ICT accessibility to create fair and equal opportunities for all people, as well as support a regional development agenda by treating ICT accessibility as a cross-cutting development issue.

The regional forum "Accessible Europe" comprised of **10 sessions during which around 50 speakers** delivered their presentations and shared expertise, interactive networking opportunities and bilateral meetings.

The sessions included the following topics:

- International, Europe region and European Union vision, targets and actions and key resources to support in ICT accessibility
- Examples of accessibility legislation/regulations/standards in the EU Member States and outside Europe
- Stocktaking implementation of accessibility and assistive technology in Europe
- Web Accessibility: Regulation/standards/resources
- Audio-visual media services, TV and video programming
- Procurement of accessible ICTs and universal design
- Implementation of equal access in telecom
- Telecom relay services: Practical experience, challenges, and opportunities in Europe
- Innovation and good practices in implementing ICT accessibility products and services for PWD

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Furthermore, a separate session was devoted to the **"Project Laboratory" of the ITU Regional Initiative for Europe** "*Accessibility, affordability and skills development for all to ensure digital inclusion and sustainable development*". The session focused on the identification of regional, sub-regional and national projects advancing implementation of the ITU Regional Initiative, setting up of twinning programmes and the implementation of envisaged actions for 2019-2021, as well the newly proposed ones.

In addition, within the ITU-EC Forum, a **Regional Competition for Europe on Innovative Digital Solutions for an Accessible Europe** was held with the aim to promote the creation and development of new solutions involving digital and mobile applications for any platform. The competition focused on developing innovative and creative solutions to benefit persons with disability, bringing more social inclusion and interaction, comfort and quality of life to their daily routine through assistive technologies.

2. PARTICIPATION

The conference brought together over **150 participants** representing all stakeholders types (governments, regulatory authorities, industry, academia, non-governmental associations representing persons with disabilities, academia) from more than **30 countries** in Europe and outside Europe.

In the opening ceremony, the addresses were delivered by **Ms. Marrianne Thyssen,** European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, **Mr. Jaroslaw Ponder,** Head of ITU Office for Europe**, Mr. Max Rubisch,** the Federal Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology, Austria, **Mr. Charles Havecost**, Chief of Information Technology Service, UN Vienna, **and Mr. Rodolfo Cattani**,

Executive Committee member, European Disability Forum. A special keynote address was delivered by **Ms. Daniela Bas,** Director of the Division for Inclusive Social Development, United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA).

The "Accesible Europe" regional forum was recognised to be a valuable platform for all stakeholders to join forces in ensuring the accessible ICT ecosystem for all, and persons with disabilities and specific needs in particular. Governments are encouraged to implement ICT Accessibility policies and regulations, industry to manufacture accessible ICTs, public and private sector partners to ensure that ICT access and services are accessible and affordable, and academia to empower people through technology education and training.


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3. PRESENTATIONS AND INTERACTIVE DISCUSSIONS

The following provides an overview of the presentations that were delivered within the 10 sessions, outlining the key discussion points. The main take aways that were presented at Session 10, and made available for the participants' comments, have been included in the report.

All presentations and information about the speakers are available at https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Regional-Presence/Europe/Pages/Events/2018/AE/InteractiveProgramme.aspx

Session 1: International, Europe region and European Union vision, targets and actions and key resources to support in ICT Accessibility

The session focused on ITU actions and challenges, EC actions and challenges, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on the accessibility of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) with a particular emphasise on the implementation.

The session was moderated by **Mr. Jaroslaw Ponder,** Head of ITU Office for Europe.

Following the interactive discussion, it was indicated that:

- The EC has developed concrete legislation, guidelines, and standards that are available to support the implementation process.
- Key EU legislation to ensure accessibility and achieving equality are outlined (European Accessibility Act, Web Accessibility Directive, the Code on Electronic Communications, AVMS Directive, Public Procurement Directives, and EU Funds Regulations).
- Key ITU resources (model policies and guidelines, training courses, video tutorials on how to develop accessible digital content, a programme on web accessibility, the Study group on Question 7/1 as a working platform) are available to support the stakeholders' implementation of ICT accessibility.
- Implementation requires a pro-active involvement of telecom operators in ICT accessibility.
- Opportunities provided by Gigabit technology as a game changer + 5G should be used.

Session 2: Examples of accessibility Legislation/Regulations/Standards in EU Member States and outside Europe

The focus of the session was the legislation/regulations framework/standards in the European Union and outside Europe. Besides, the case studies presented the good practices and challenges in ICT accessibility.

The session was moderated by **Ms. Inmaculada Placencia Porrero,** Deputy Head of Unit for Rights of Persons with Disabilities within the Directorate General for Justice of European Commission.

Following the interactive discussion, it was indicated that:

- There is a multiplicity of ICT accessibility legislation and regulatory frameworks.
- Development of legislation should be timelier to keep a pace with technological innovation.
- It is necessary to create and nourish ICT accessibility ecosystems.
- It is important to have adequate monitoring of ICT accessibility and measure the impact on persons with disabilities.
- Universal design is a tool to achieve accessibility.
- The industry should be incentivized and involved.


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Session 3: Stocktaking implementation of accessibility and assistive technology in Europe

The focus of the session was on the implementation of ICT accessibility policies, programmes, projects, and solutions. Hardware, software and IT media have to be accessible for persons with disabilities to be able to access and use them without difficulty, and generally, without any external assistance. To achieve these, built-in tutorials on how to learn and use accessibility features ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

The session was moderated by **Mr. Alejandro Moledo**, European Disability Forum.

Following the interactive discussion, it was indicated that:

- Assessing and promoting accessible features are key in ensuring the inclusion of persons with disabilities.
- Accessibility is also relevant in social networks.
- Key elements are feedback from users (persons with disabilities, research/design/engineering/roll out levels).
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a powerful tool as it becomes more available, accessible and affordable.
- ICT accessibility is essential for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the work market, as well as training of IT professionals on accessibility.

Session 4: Web Accessibility: Regulation/Standards/Resources

The focus of the session was to identify the role of the governments in providing accessible public information and websites, as well as the benefits for the private sector. The session presented the new trends on web accessibility and discussed the user perspective and the role of Academia in promoting web accessibility. The dual objectives of the EU Directive on Accessibility of Website and Mobile application of Public Sector Bodies were discussed: a) social component aims to increase the digital inclusion by ensuring websites are more accessible to users and in particular to Persons with Disabilities, b) to improve the functioning of the internal markets.

The session was moderated by **Ms. Roxana Widmer-Iliescu**, Senior Programme Officer, Digital Inclusion division, Telecommunication Development Bureau (ITU).

Following the interactive discussion, it was indicated that:

- The accessible website generates economic and social benefits.
- Measures to ensure compliance with the EU Directive on the Accessibility of Public Sector Websites and Mobile Applications are available, and they include feedback mechanisms, on-demand provision, enforcement mechanism, training, awareness raising, stakeholder consultation.
- It is important to make the tools that support users visible.
- Two key drivers to achieve accessible website are: raising awareness and creation of capabilities.
- ITU **National programme on web accessibility "Internet for @ll",** which has a holistic approach ranging from: political buy-in, training in the development of digital content, designing and managing accessible websites, as well as generating in-country expertise and necessary funds to train the end users, pointed out as a good (self-sustainable) practice to implement.

Session 5: Audio-visual media services, TV and video programming

The focus of the session was on ensuring accessible audio-visual media services and provided the views of both broadcasters and content producers. Besides, the session presented the emerging technologies, looked at consumer perspective and shared the good practices and challenges in the implementation in Europe.

The session was moderated by **Mr. David Wood**, European Broadcasting Union (EBU).

Following the interactive discussion, it was indicated that:

- AVMSD (2018/1808) requires EU member states to provide accessibility. Obligations include: reporting to NRA, reporting to EC, have an accessibility action plan, have a line contact point, and make emergency information accessible.
- TV accessibility applies to all forms of TV and video programming.
- The need was expressed to have: a) accessibility icons standardised, b) technical standards for streaming and audio subtitles.
- Strengthening collaborative approach in: a) business benefits of access services, b) creating synergies between the work of ITU/EC.
- AI can be used in "object-based" broadcasting to learn about users viewing habits, and tailor how programmes are delivered to them based on the requirements.
- Providing subtitles for 100% is feasible.
- Successful implementation of standards depends on whether the editorial guidelines require accessible production or not.

Session 6: Procurement of Accessibile ICTs and Universal Design

The session focused on EU legislation/regulatory framework public procurement of accessible ICTs. An overview of the new legislative framework at a European level related to public procurement was presented and explained in light of the EU Accessibility Act and the European structural funds. The public procurement market in Europe is significant and makes between 60 to 70% of the EU gross domestic products. In ICT, it makes up to 78% of the GDP. The presentation also highlighted policies and guidelines on public procurement contained in ITU Model Policy Report, as well as self-paced online courses entitled "ICT Accessibility: the key to inclusive communication", which includes a course on achieving ICT accessibility through public procurement.

The session was moderated by **Ms. Roxana Widmer-Iliescu**, Senior Programme Officer, Digital Inclusion division, Telecommunication Development Bureau (ITU).

Following the interactive discussion, it was indicated that:

- Public procurement is a powerful instrument in ensuring accessible ICT.
- Legal framework on Public Procurement with accessible provisions is available in EU.
- Accessibility provisions in public procurement relate to technical specification, quality assurance standards, the award of contracts, public oversights.
- There is a need for meaningful data and monitoring of systematic use of accessibility requirements in procurement.
- Strengthening collaboration at all levels (UN, EU, national) to include decision-makers, politicians, procurement specialists, academia and organisation of persons with disabilities.
- Universal design was indicated as a mechanism for overcoming the barriers and enabling communication and information for All.

Session 7: Implementation of Equal Access in Telecom

The session focused on emerging issues, accessible emergency services and inclusive smart cities. The European Electronic Communications Code, as a legislative instrument, including new objectives such as the promotion of connectivity and access to and the rise of high capacity networks. In particular, in the Code, the universal service and end-user rights have been additionally reinforced to ensure persons with disabilities have equal access to the services, through their active engagement and consultation on their needs.

The session was moderated by **Ms. Rosheen Awotar- Mauree**, Programme Officer, ITU Office for Europe, ITU.

Following the interactive discussion, it was indicated that:

- The EU Code on Electronic Communications helps to shape the right environment for digital networks and services to be accessible. It promotes connectivity and access, stimulates sustainable competition, drives investments, reinforces internal markets, strengthens consumer rights.
- There is a need to raise further awareness about accessibility features in telecom devices.
- Important to enhance the availability of accessible information about products and services, the features and components.
- Availability, affordability, and accessibility are the focus of the new universal service rules.

Session 8: Telecom relay services: practical experience, challenges and opportunities in Europe

The session focused on the implementation of relay services in Europe, the challenges and opportunities. The telecommunications relay services as essential service to enabling persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing or who have speech disabilities to engage in voice telecommunications, to make voice telephone calls to other persons using four common types of relay services: text relay, video relay, captioned telephone service relay and speech-to-speech relay. It was noted that less than 20 countries provide telecom relay services with equal functionality, which means the rest countries don't comply with UNCRPD. Relay service considerations include: network, confidentiality & security, a CA (communication assistant), emergency call outreach with immediate answer and response, call processes and end user agreement including confidentiality agreements for all CA's. Sharing of good

practices of existing relay services in Europe and outside Europe, through a collaborative approach, is expected with the existing relay services providers.

The session was moderated by **Ms. Andrea J. Saks**, Chairman, Joint Coordination Activity on Accessibility and Human Factors (JCA-AHF).

Following the interactive discussion, it was indicated that:

- It is important to ensure that persons who are deaf, hard-of-hearing or with speech disabilities have access to telephone relay services with equal functionality as the non-disabled world uses the telephone in real time.
- Direct collaboration with stakeholders including governments, the telecommunication industry and the various communities of persons with disabilities is vital. Meeting benefited from the case studies of existing relay services is the USA, Switzerland, United Kingdom and France. Collaboration with these stakeholders and other relay services providers for the exchange of good practices.
- It was noted that that less than 20 countries provide telecom relay services with equal functionality, which means the rest countries don't comply with UNCRPD. Direct Collaboration with stakeholders including governments, the telecommunication industry and the various communities of persons with disabilities is vital.
- ITU-T F.930 "Multimedia telecommunication relay services" provides a functional description the four common types of relay services in use today: text relay; video relay; captioned telephone service relay; and speech-to-speech relay.
- Relay service considerations include: network, confidentiality & security, a CA (communication assistant), emergency call outreach with immediate answer and response , call processes and end user agreement including confidentially agreements for all CA's.
- Future collaboration between ITU, EC, and ISO in the area of telecom relay services will be explored to harmonize the existing standards of relay services for the facilitation of Global access for persons with disabilities.

Session 9: Innovation and good practices in implementing ICT Accessibility products and services for PWD

The session focused on innovative products and services for persons with disabilities and funding opportunities. Standards, manuals, toolboxes, competence centers, co-creating content-platforms, orientation map-apps, orientation technologies, (half)automated captioning, IT-platforms connecting peers, training professionals in accessible design, technology boosting sign language and easy language were discussed. Many good practices were exchanged to showcase innovative assistive technologies for persons with disabilities, but also demonstrating how diversity and inclusion can lead research-driven innovations.

The session was moderated by **Ms. Rosheen Awotar- Mauree**, Programme Officer, Europe Coordination, Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT), ITU

Following the interactive discussion, it was indicated that:

- Sharing good practices and fostering processes to exchange and engage innovation.
- Innovation, good practices, standards, manuals, toolboxes, competence centers, tools for creating content, platforms, orientation maps, are available to support the implementing ICT accessibility.
- Studies have shown the value of promoting diversity.

- Develop products and services facilitating cutting-edge mobile and communication technology.

Concluding Session: Beyond Accessible Europe

Final session of the "Accessible Europe" provided an opportunity for taking stock of main take-aways from all nine sessions of the Forum. All main outcomes from each session were presented for comments by all present and amended accordingly.

In addition the outcomes of the "Accessible Americas" held on 28-30 November 2018 in Montego Bay (Jamaica) were presented.

Closing of the Main Programme

The regional event was closed by Ms. Inmaculada Placencia Porrero on behalf of the European Commission and Mr. Jaroslaw Ponder, on behalf of the International Telecommunication Union.

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4. REGIONAL COMPETITION ON INNOVATIVE DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

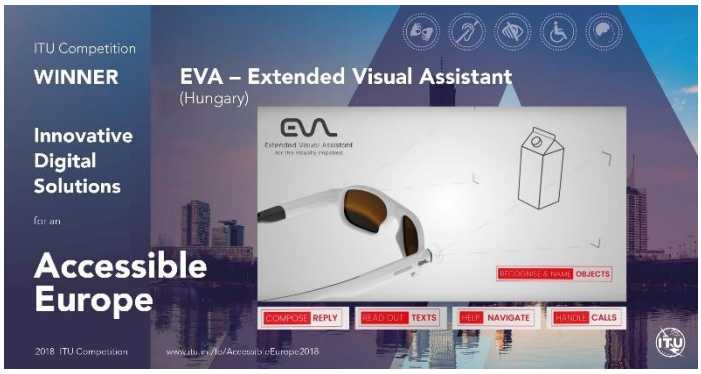
Within the ITU-EC Forum, a Regional Competition for Europe on Innovative Digital Solutions for an Accessible Europe was held with the aim to promote the creation and development of new solutions involving digital and mobile applications for any platform. The competition focused on developing innovative and creative solutions to benefit persons with disability, bringing more social inclusion and interaction, comfort and quality of life to their daily routine through assistive technologies.

From 52 submissions and 36 projects that entered the competition from 22 different countries, the three projects were nominated for special recognition by by the judging committee according to evaluating criteria as winners of the ITU organized 2018 Innovative Digital Solutions Competition for an Accessible Europe. Project called **EVA – Extended Visual Assistant** (Hungary; www.eva.vision) was selected as a winner of the contest and the following two projects were recognized as Runners up: **Feelif** – *from Slovenia;* https://www.feelif.com/). **Pedius** – *(Italy* - www.pedius.org).

WINNER

EVA – Extended Visual Assistant by EVA Vision – FROM HUNGARY (www.eva.vision)

EVA (Extended Visual Assistant) is a wearable mobility assistant for the blind and visually impaired. The device that resembles smart glasses, provides a multitude of services that assist in interpreting and interacting with your surroundings, orientation guidance, and handling phone calls and message services with a paired smart phone. [*presentation*]



RUNNER UP

Feelif – FROM SLOVENIA (https://www.feelif.com/)

Feelif devices are adapted smartphones and tablets, which give blind and visually impaired people the ability to use digital content without limitations through haptic/tactile interaction with the device. [*presentation*]

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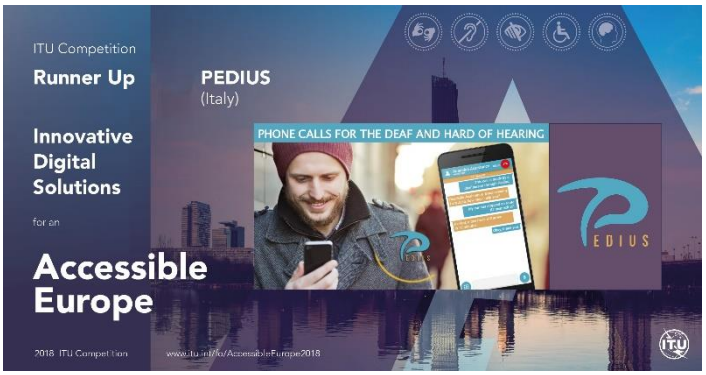
RUNNER UP

Pedius – FROM ITALY (www.pedius.org)

Pedius provides phone calls for the deaf and hard of hearing. The communication service allows the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to make phone calls 24/7, through easy to use real time phone call transcription and text to speech service. [*presentation*]



5. CONCLUSIONS

Bearing in mind that enabling environment ensures accessible telecommunications/ICT for persons with disabilities should be established in all countries by 2023, the participants of the 1st "Accessible Europe: ICT FOR ALL" agreed that:

- "Accessible Europe" should continue to act as an open, multi-stakeholder platform fostering innovation and regional implementation in line with the UN CRPD, thus contributing to achieving the SDGs.
- Key steps to achieve ICT accessibility require national policies and legal frameworks, development of standards, creating accessibility experts, raising awareness, sharing good practices and ensuring implementation.
- Accessible, available and affordable ICTs are key to achieving the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities and are essential for their independent living.
- All stakeholders are encouraged to engage in the regional and global activities advancing ICT accessibility, through a collaborative approach, including:
  - ITU Regional Initiative for Accessibility for Europe
  - ITU Digital Inclusion Programme
  - Ongoing technical standardization in ICT accessibility
  - Effective application and implementation of the EU accessibility legislation which is available as a model for other countries.
- The primary goal of the digital inclusion is a full implementation of UN CRPD, in particular, the ICT accessibility related provisions, and ensuring participation of persons with disabilities in all decision-making processes, monitoring, and development of standards.
- At the EU level, a great breakthrough has been made by several pieces of specific accessibility legislation, as tools for the implementation of the UN CRPD, such as:
  - EU Directive on Web Accessibility and Mobile Applications for all public-sector bodies.
  - European Accessibility Act Directive is harmonising accessibility requirement throughout the EU internal market.
  - Other pieces of the EU legislation that mainstream accessibility.
- Accessibility should be envisaged from the Universal Design perspective, which has both economic and social benefits.
- Raising awareness in ICT accessibility and capacity building are key components to ensure digital inclusion for persons with disabilities and other persons with specific needs.
- Good practices exist throughout Europe and should be shared and replicated.
- Accessible ICTs are "Win for all":
  - Persons with disabilities can have an independent life like persons without disabilities;
  - Governments ensure that all citizens have access to information and communications, education, public services (e-health, emergency, etc.) and work market;
  - Industry/manufacturers/private sector create a market for accessible ICTs and increase their business value (extend the number of their customers).
  - Universities recognize the value of increasing their curriculum on ICT accessibility and lead research-driven innovations.