

ICT accessibility policy and regulatory framework overview in the CIS region

The ITU report on policy and regulatory frameworks for telecommunication/ICT accessibility for persons with disabilities in CIS countries is a guideline document that provides ITU membership and stakeholders with an overview of good practices and strategies in the CIS region. These guidelines support ITU Member States in their efforts to implement ITU Target 2.9 of Strategic Goal Nr. 2, which states that by 2023 enabling environments ensuring accessible telecommunications/ICTs for persons with disabilities should be established in all countries. This report also provides information to support the CIS region in the implementation of ICT/digital accessibility as a key element to reach the overarching goal of digital inclusion of everyone, regardless of gender, age, ability or location.

The report covers international approaches to ICT accessibility, highlighting the role of the Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Article 9, including the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and its Action Lines. It also provides readers with details of International Telecommunication Development Bureau (ITU-D) activities aimed at promoting ICT accessibility in the CIS region Member States, for example recently developed self-assessment and ITU toolkits for ICT accessibility implementation towards building inclusive digital communities.

General approaches to ICT accessibility in CIS region are also covered including regulatory programmes and plans, strategies, laws on telecommunications providing readers with exhaustive information on the maturity of policy and regulatory frameworks in each country and outlining ICT accessibility measures undertaken to make the digital environment accessible for all. This includes information on how CIS countries ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities for television and video programmes, mobile communications, emergency communication as well as web accessibility, public procurement. It highlights the use of sign language and the status of activities such as the promotion of training and staff development in ICT accessibility adoption and how regulatory approaches are being implemented in each of the CIS countries.

The report also outlines CIS initiatives, strategies and projects regarding ICT accessibility undertaken by Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation within the framework of the ITU regional initiatives implementation during the last two cycles of the ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference

(WTDC) action plans, as well as ITU-D study periods that also focus on the topic of ICT accessibility.

Specific guidelines in this report set out how to strengthen and mainstream ICT/digital accessibility in public spaces, television and video programmes, mobile communications, emergency communication and ICT public procurement as well as web accessibility in the CIS countries.

This report also provides extensive information on currently developed ITU-D recourses, including guidelines, toolkits and reports, video tutorials, training and knowledge development programmes, including relevant links, aimed at promoting ICT accessibility and enabling CRPD implementation.

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ICT accessibility policy and regulatory frameworks overview in the CIS region

The majority of ITU Member States in the CIS region have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), with the exception of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The Optional Protocol to the CRPD was signed by Armenia and Kazakhstan, and ratified by Azerbaijan. Turkmenistan joined the Convention in 2008 and the Protocol in 2010. Kazakhstan aims to ratify the Protocol in 2022.

Some CIS region countries have developed regulatory instruments aimed at prompt implementation of the UN CRPD provisions through national legislation:

- Belarus has developed and approved the National Action Plan for CRPD implementation.
- Kyrgyzstan has approved the Plan of Priority Measures for CRPD provisions implementation for 2020-2022.
- Uzbekistan has developed the State programme of comprehensive measures to further improve, support, and strengthen the protection of the rights and freedoms of persons with disabilities to prepare for CRPD ratification in accordance with the presidential decree "Measures on fundamental improvement of government support for persons with disabilities".

These regulatory documents include a wide range of measures aimed to ensure the accessibility of information, communications and ICT to reflect provisions of Article 9 of the CRPD. In addition, despite CIS countries having few policies, programmes, or separate legislation aimed at regulating the accessibility of telecommunications/ICT for persons with disabilities, the report shows that most countries have developed mature regulatory practices in this field.

ICT accessibility in the CIS region is generally covered by legislation on social protection of persons with disabilities. In the majority of CIS countries, the government guarantees a broad set of ICT accessibility rights including equal access to information and telecommunications/ICT facilities and services. For example, in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan laws on social protection of persons with disabilities include ICT accessibility issues.

In the CIS region, ICT accessibility is also included in conceptual, regulatory, and legal documents:

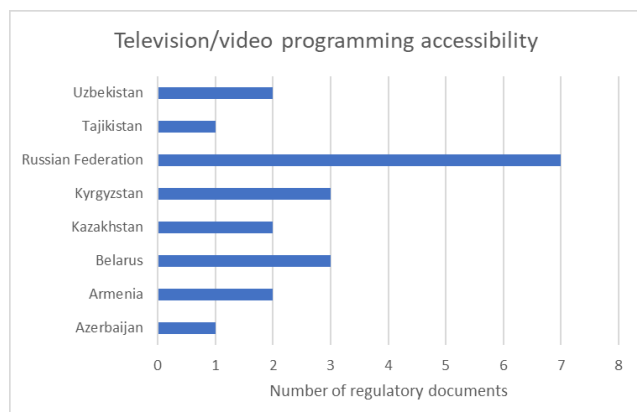
- In Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, and Tajikistan, concept papers on social integration of people with disabilities set out steps, objectives, and timeframes to ensure accessibility of communications and ICT services in addition to fostering integration of persons with disabilities in society. These concept papers include accessibility of communication through the media, such as television programmes, and websites of state bodies, to create positive attitude towards persons with disabilities in society.
- Concept papers on facilitating digital transformation have been developed and are being successfully implemented in all CIS countries, and most papers include telecommunication/ICT accessibility considerations.
- Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have published concept papers that identify steps and objectives to ensure accessibility of telecommunication/ICT services for persons with disabilities. These concept papers encourage the development of digital skills, methods, tools, and support as well as the creation of accessible digital solutions and digital content and software to foster teleworking and distance-education as part of governmental support for the integration of persons with disabilities in digital transformation processes.
- All CIS countries have telecommunication laws, but despite regulating accessibility, they do not specifically foster telecommunications/ICTs accessibility with the exception of the Federal Law on Communications of the Russian Federation, which contains a wide list of instructions to telecommunication operators aimed at ensuring unimpeded access to communication facilities for persons with disabilities.
- Some legislation covers regulatory considerations of ICT accessibility and examples include ICT regulation on media, access to information and the Internet, as well as national standards and guidelines, and other legislation not directly related to ICT regulation for persons with disabilities includes laws on culture, librarianship, social benefits and guarantees.

This report also highlights the need for independent bodies in CIS region countries that have a mandate to promote and foster multi-stakeholder approaches ICT accessibility regulation, a responsibility which is still in the hands of coordination councils and inter-ministerial councils. As a common practice in the region, representatives of ministries responsible for

ICT and telecommunications are the members of these administrative councils. The CIS region countries make all efforts to involve persons with disabilities in policy making, reflecting the principle of sustainable development "nothing about us without us", and in general, representatives of public associations of persons

with disabilities participate to some degree in the development of policy and its implementation.

Television/video programming accessibility



Although, it was shown that no countries in the CIS region have separate legislation aimed at regulating television/video programming accessibility, television and video accessibility is broadly addressed within national laws on social protection of persons with disabilities, as well as other legal instruments:

- Azerbaijan provides broadcasting of educational and informational programmes for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.
- Armenia provides subtitles, sign language and creeping lines to the television programmes.
- Belarus ensures the accessibility of electronic media for persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing by providing subtitles and sign language interpretation.
- Kazakhstan ensures sign language interpretation and subtitles to programmes of republican and regional television channels.
- Kyrgyzstan requires television and radio broadcasting organizations to broadcast news with subtitles and sign language interpretation.
- Russian Federation ensures the provisions of subtitles, sign language interpretation and audio description of television programmes and video, as well as national standards to define the general technical requirements for subtitles and audio description to ensure television and video accessibility.
- Tajikistan ensures accessibility of television programmes for persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing and persons who are blind or visually impaired, such as sports, news, cultural, political broadcasts, and films.
- Uzbekistan State television broadcasts news programmes with sign language interpretation or subtitles.

In some countries of the CIS region, accessibility considerations are included in conditions for obtaining a broadcast licence:

- In Armenia television and video accessibility is included in the conditions for obtaining a broadcasting licence and relates to all broadcasters.

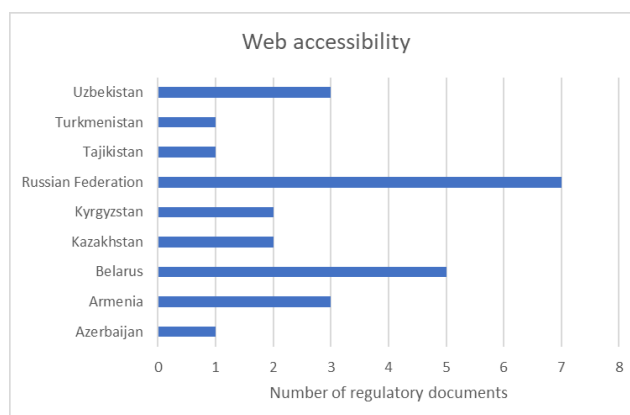
- In the Russian Federation according to licence requirements for television and radio broadcasting, accessible media content should be provided for at least 5 per cent of the total weekly broadcast (excluding non-recordable television programmes and broadcasts) for persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

The following accessible content is also required:

- In Armenia at least one news programme and one programme for children should be accessible.
- In Belarus it is planned to provide not less than 2026 hours per year of television content accessible on governmental channels for persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.
- In Kazakhstan at least one prime-time news programme with subtitles or sign language interpretation will be required.
- In Kyrgyzstan it is envisaged to provide persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing with accessible news programmes (sign language interpretation and subtitles) on governmental, municipal and public television broadcasts in three or more regions.

Accessibility training and staff development are a high priority in CIS region countries. Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan implement a large number of activities aimed at training specialists in sign language and audio description.

Web accessibility



Countries in the CIS region have no separate legislation aimed at regulating Web accessibility. At the same time, these issues are regulated by a wide range of regulatory acts that cover government body website accessibility:

- Armenia ensures access to government websites and services, as well as websites for medical services for persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing and persons who are blind or visually impaired.
- Belarus ensures accessible information on government websites and organizations for persons who are blind or visually impaired.
- Kyrgyzstan is planning to create government and municipal body websites by 2022 for persons who are blind or visually impaired.
- Russian Federation ensures the accessibility of websites of federal government bodies persons who are blind or visually impaired.

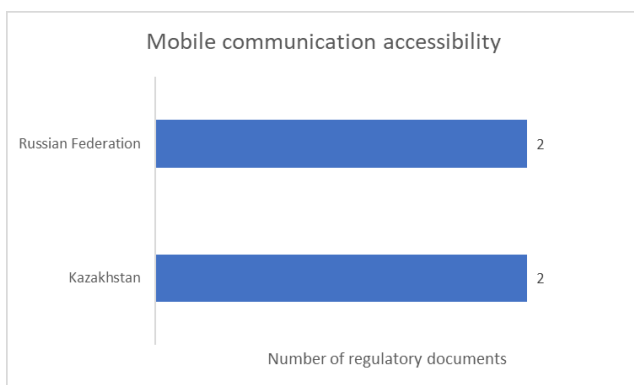
- Tajikistan envisages ensuring the accessibility of the websites of government bodies (zooming, subtitles and capturing, etc.).
- Uzbekistan envisages providing the official websites of state bodies and organizations with additional accessibility functions for persons with disabilities to ensure the accessibility of information and services provided via these websites.

Some countries in the CIS region support and promote web accessibility more widely, in addition to government website accessibility. In Azerbaijan web accessibility is ensured in line with the international standard Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1. In Belarus, a questionnaire has been developed to evaluate the accessibility of Internet resources, which includes a wide list of success criteria. In Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, and Turkmenistan, additional measures are implemented to increase the accessibility of Internet resources:

- In Kazakhstan laptops equipped with a web camera for persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing as well as laptops with software providing synthesized speech are included in the list of assistive technology provided to persons with disabilities by the government.
- In Turkmenistan telecommunication operators provide discounts for Internet services for vulnerable social groups.
- In the Russian Federation, braille displays and screen access software are provided to persons with disabilities for free.

National standards are also an important element used to ensure the accessibility of web resources. They are widely used in Belarus and the Russian Federation, where technical requirements for both web-site accessibility and workplace computers have been developed. Additionally in Armenia, the development of national standards for web accessibility for persons with disabilities is underway - an amendment is being developed to Government Decision N 1521-N "On Approval of the Minimum Requirements for Official Websites of State Bodies". This standard will be based on WCAG.

Mobile communication accessibility

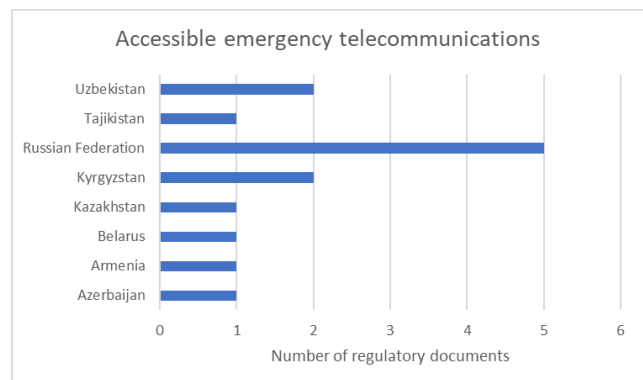


Countries in the CIS region have yet to adopt separate legislative acts that regulate accessibility of mobile communication networks and services, although Belarus,

Kazakhstan, and the Russian Federation have some related elements:

- The Kazakhstan national plan for ensuring the rights and improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities considers the use of sign language and the development of synthesized speech for computer software, reading machines and mobile phones, in addition to assistance provided by the government to persons with disabilities that includes mobile phones supporting sound messages.
- In the Russian Federation, mobile phones that support video communication, navigation and text are included in the list of assistive technology for rehabilitation provided by government to persons with disabilities, and in accordance with the Methodological Recommendations regarding television content, broadcasting and ICT accessibility, affordability of these services (discounts for tariffs, compensations, etc.) should be considered by operators and broadcasters.
- Mobile operators also provide special tariffs for persons with disabilities in Belarus, Kazakhstan, and the Russian Federation. These tariffs may include discounts, lower prices and special bundles for persons with different disabilities.

Accessible emergency telecommunications

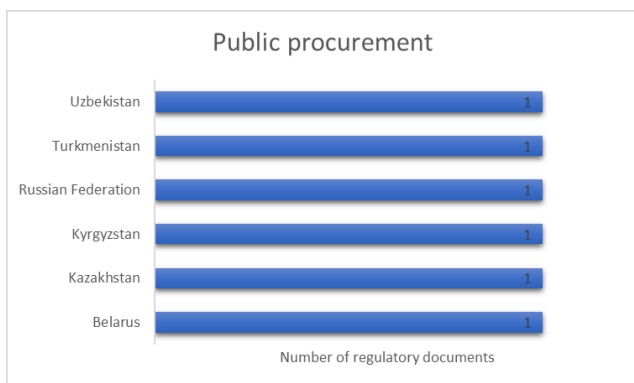


Many CIS countries have developed and successfully implemented common alerting protocols but most accessibility considerations in the area of emergency telecommunications are covered by other regulatory acts:

- Armenia plans to include the accessibility issues of emergency warning in regulatory and legal acts. It also aims to provide subtitles and sign language interpretation in emergency alerting via broadcasting services.
- Belarus aims to improve the standards that ensure assistance and support in emergency situations to persons with disabilities, taking into account their individual needs.
- Kazakhstan provides measures to ensure the safety of persons with disabilities in case of social, natural, and man-made emergencies.
- Kyrgyzstan plans to implement sign language interpretation for emergency warnings via television, Internet and telephone services, and urgent emergency or national security risk warning will be provided with sign language interpretation or subtitles.

- The Russian Federation implements accessibility of emergency warning for persons with disabilities through a number of regulatory acts. Currently, a unified (single window) approach to emergency number calls (112) makes this service accessible for persons who are blind or visually impaired.
- Tajikistan plans to develop and implement standards for accessible emergency services with sign language interpretation.
- Uzbekistan plans to ensure accessible emergency services by persons with speech and hearing disabilities via modern means of communication. Since 2019, a help desk has been created as part of the Ministry of Emergency Situations to support persons with speech and hearing disabilities.

Public procurement



- In Belarus, preferences have been established in relation to goods (works, services) produced by Belarus organizations in which at least 50 per cent of employees are persons with disabilities.

- In Kazakhstan, it is envisaged to increase the competitiveness of public associations of persons with disabilities, and the organizations created by them, in the supply of goods, execution of work and provision of services.
- In Kyrgyzstan, general legal and economic principles of public procurement have been established for goods produced by societies or organizations of persons with disabilities including the provision of government departments and institutions with products and goods produced by enterprises or societies of persons with disabilities.
- In the Russian Federation, it is envisaged to provide preference by up to fifteen per cent for organizations of persons with disabilities participating in procurement for contracts and prices of single items of goods, work, services in accordance with government approved lists of goods, works and services.
- In Turkmenistan, it is envisaged to further the support of supplies to small and medium enterprises, and public organizations of persons with disabilities, including the possibility of a special (tender) fee.
- In Uzbekistan, governmental bodies and organizations must comply with accessibility criteria for all categories of persons with disabilities in public procurement of information and communication equipment and information support.

The table below provides a snapshot of the number of policy and regulatory frameworks available in each country in the CIS region for television and video, web, mobile communications and emergency communication, public procurement and the promotion of sign language and training of accessibility specialists.

Number of regulatory documents for each area of ICT accessibility

CIS country	Television/ video pro- gramming accessibility	Web accessibility	Mobile com- munication accessibility	Accessible emergency telecommu- nications	Public pro- curement	Sign language regulation	Training of specialists	Total in the country
Azerbaijan	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	3
Armenia	2	3	-	1	-	1	-	7
Belarus	3	5	-	1	1	2	2	14
Kazakhstan	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	12
Kyrgyzstan	3	2	-	2	1	1	2	11
Russian Federation	7	7	2	5	1	1	3	26
Tajikistan	1	1	-	1	-	1	2	6
Turkmenistan	-	1	-	-	1	1	-	3
Uzbekistan	2	3	-	2	1	1	1	10
Total in the Region	21	25	4	14	6	10	12	

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