



# Regional ICT Accessibility Assessment Report for the Americas Region



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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Regional Consultation for the preparatory work for the **Accessible Americas V event: Information and Communication Technologies for ALL (ICTs for ALL)** held in Montego Bay, Jamaica, from 28 to 30 November 2018, was conducted between July and October 2018. Its objective was to prepare the discussions and the agenda of the event, highlighting best practice and achievements of the ITU Member States as well as the main challenges for the implementation of policies for accessible and inclusive ICTs. The Regional Consultation questionnaire, which is the basis for this Report, was sent in electronic format to the 35 ITU Member States of the Americas Region, to the government bodies and agencies responsible for policies for the inclusion of persons with disabilities and for telecommunications policies.

Fifteen questionnaires from 14 countries were received, representing a response rate of 41% which is an increase of 27% compared to 2017. This is quite significant considering that the consultation responses were voluntary. Overall, the questionnaires were answered in full with some countries providing the legislation related to the topic in support of their analysis. Those countries whose responses were more consistent, seem to have a more advanced policy of inclusiveness and it is clear that the respondents prioritized questions 1 and 3 concerning their advances and achievements in this process.

Based on the analysis of the Consultation, it may be said that the countries of the Americas region are at different stages, marked by the following phases:

- **Legislation:** Countries involved in the discussion and approval process of local legislation for the regulation of actions and policies relating to the use of ICTs for the accessibility and inclusion of persons with disabilities.
- **Awareness and Capacity Building:** Countries that already have legislation and regulation in force, that develop actions focused on raising awareness in society and awareness among the actors directly involved in its implementation. They also conduct training activities for the actors as well as for the persons with disabilities.

- **Services and infrastructure:** Countries that have activities oriented towards the definition, the facilitation and the creation of accessible services and infrastructure adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities, focussing primarily on the mobile phone, Internet, television and communication sector. Also, in some cases, applications and solutions are developed to attend to the specific demands of persons with disabilities.
- **Network building and mainstreaming:** Countries involved in the topic in a more active manner, developing actions for the strengthening of networks and developing intersectoral actions with other sectors of government and of society. Many highlight the importance of this work, above all in creating groups of persons with disabilities, companies and agents involved with this issue. Some actions point to the use of ICTs in complementing and supporting other basic needs such as education, work, employment, culture and transport.

It is important to highlight that these phases do not define the development stages of the policies, but illustrate the level of maturity in each country with regards to the matter. As soon as actions are triggered systematically, they can and even should be articulated and developed in a complementary manner.

## **2. GENERAL CONTEXT**

Persons with Disabilities (PwD) face a range of obstacles and challenges related to access to information, education and employment, which can be mitigated through equitable access to ICTs, and, in this sense, the work of legislators, public policy makers and regulators is decisive in terms of the development, production, cost and availability of certain requirements and equipment. In addition, the mobilization, awareness and capacity building of the society and the monitoring of policies are part of their role.

The Accessible Americas regional events are held as a result of the efforts of the International Telecommunication Union Development Sector (ITU-D) to raise the visibility of Member States' ICT accessibility policies. The series began in 2014 with the first event in Brazil, followed by the 2015, 2016 and 2017 editions held in Colombia, Mexico and Costa Rica respectively. Accessible Americas became one of the main ITU digital inclusion events in the Americas region that addresses the issue of ICT accessibility for persons with disabilities, including in the discussion other groups of persons with specific needs (women, girls, youth, the elderly, indigenous peoples, among others), and brings together government representatives, the private sector, civil society, regional and international organizations to work together towards the development of a more accessible and inclusive Americas region.

After four cycles of collecting information, one can see that countries are at different stages of progress with regards to the promotion of access to ICT, compared to where we were in 2014 when the first Accessible Americas was held, which shows the importance of the event for this development.

The main objective of this report is to offer a regional summary of the public policy commitments that the countries are implementing in terms of ICT accessibility, and, at the same time, to identify emerging trends and the greater value added of commitments to enhanced accessibility to ICTs.

This Consultation is also very important for the planning of capacity building actions resulting from the Accessible Americas, since the expectations and needs of the participants of the event are evaluated.

This assessment can also be used to highlight good practices that help inspire other countries to face new challenges, and to this end, the document compiling "good practices and achievements of ICT accessibility in the Americas region" has been made available. It is expected not only to inspire but to push the actors into undertaking a multilateral alliance and to play a leading role in making ICT accessible to all, without discrimination.

What we seek is to make the Americas region more inclusive through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). We all know that ICTs are a tool for inclusiveness. ICTs create new opportunities for social inclusion, improve human development, contribute to reducing poverty and influence and generate positive impact when they are used, especially in schools. ICTs are indispensable for citizen participation in society and for the exercise of the right to information and communication.

### **3. CONSULTATION AND DATA COLLECTION PROCESS**

It was decided to use a questionnaire to collect information and data from countries with regard to ICT accessibility. The questionnaire is easy to use and can reach a large number of respondents. The fact that the participation of a large number of respondents was needed was the reason why the questionnaire was sent electronically to all ITU Member Countries in the Americas region, to facilitate the follow-up process. The use of the questionnaire was considered the best methodology to gather information in this case, since it allows enough time for the respondents to focus on answering it.

The ITU sent the questionnaire to 35 ITU Member Countries in the region. Fifteen Administrations, corresponding to 14 Member States, returned the questionnaires duly answered, - as contributions were sent from 2 different entities of one country - representing a total of 40% of the Member States of the region. The ITU had expected a larger number of responses to be received this year, but, compared to the previous year when 11 responses were received, this year's responses represented a growth of 27%. This year's results, as well as those of the previous year, show that we have to work even harder for this methodology to attract wider representative acceptance – the promotion of the questionnaire can undoubtedly be improved and some adjustments made to the format and methodology of the Consultation. Given the number of our target audience, a methodology involving observations or interviews cannot be used, hence the questionnaire was chosen as the most effective method.

ITU trusts that the number of responses will increase in the coming years as it continues to monitor the progress reported by the countries.

#### 4. QUESTIONNAIRE QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES RECEIVED

1. What were the major achievements and developments of your institution, or your country, on implementing ICT accessibility for persons with disabilities?
2. What were the greatest challenges of your institution, or your country, regarding the implementation of ICT accessibility policies?
3. Which actions have proven to be more appropriate/successful in implementing ICT accessibility in your institution or country?
4. According to your experience, which of these actions should be prioritized to accomplish the objective of building a more inclusive society in the Americas region?
5. What actions has your institution initiated and/or implemented, to increase the quality and offer of accessible ICT products and services to persons with disabilities?
6. What actions has your institution initiated and/or implemented, to strengthen awareness among key national stakeholders on the importance of developing and promoting ICT accessibility policies and programs?
7. In addition to the previously identified actions, does the agenda of your institution include any action plan or goals to contribute to accessible ICTs in the Americas region?
8. In your view and according to your experience, what else could your institution do to contribute to the inclusion of persons with disabilities through the access to and use of new technologies?



9. In your view and according to your experience, what more could or should other stakeholders, such as public sector, private sector, industry, civil society (including organizations and NGOs that work with persons with disabilities), international organizations, and academia, do to promote ICT accessibility to persons with disabilities in your country and the Americas region?
10. What is the current situation of the Universal Services Fund in your country and is it envisaged that it may be used to accelerate ICT accessibility for persons with disabilities? What is your view about the use of resources from the Telecommunications Service Funds to implement social/digital inclusion projects?
11. Please indicate if there is any specific issue related to ICT accessibility (e.g. cell phones, web, TV and video, access to public spaces, emergency services, public procurement etc.) that you would like to know better or that you would like to bring to the attention of the participants at Accessible Americas V.

#### **COUNTRIES THAT SENT CONTRIBUTIONS:**

- Brazil
- Canada
- Chile
- Colombia
- Ecuador
- Grenada
- Guatemala
- Honduras
- Jamaica
- Mexico
- Paraguay
- Peru
- Dominican Republic
- Uruguay

## **5. CONSULTATION RESPONSES SUMMARY**

### **1. What were the major achievements and developments of your institution, or your country, on implementing ICT accessibility to persons with disabilities?**

Given the diverse realities of the countries which responded to the survey and the stages they are in, there is a great disparity and many differences among the aspects highlighted by each country. It can be inferred in a simplified and superficial way, that it is a tiny diagnostic of the situation in each country.

From a wider and more general perspective, almost all countries pointed to advances in their legislation. In fact, the recent enactment of many laws shows that the issue is still new within the legal frameworks of each country. However, although all of the countries have indicated, and some have shown, sections of their legislation, the disparity among them can be perceived. Some countries point to the issue from the perspective of a universal right, even based on their constitutions, without going into greater detail or identifying more specific legislation. On the other hand, other countries already present a more detailed legal framework where the issues of accessibility, inclusion and access to ICTs are clearly developed. Although this study does not have this objective, and there was no specific question about legislation, it is recommended that this issue be further examined, possibly by way of a study comparing the definition and construction of a legal framework and the progress in its implementation.

Another important advance is the implementation of actions for inclusion and accessibility. This can be divided into some areas and actions, such as: awareness, training and capacity building, access to equipment, communication infrastructure such as broadband, access to broadcasting and telecommunication content, access to the Internet, different services of telephony and initiatives for the use of ICTs with a transversal perspective for inclusion and for the routing of other needs that are not directly linked to ICTs, such as access to health, labour education and mobility.

Although many of these initiatives are in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and in accordance with good

international practices and with the laws of the countries and the demands of persons with disabilities, it is very difficult to, through this instrument, evaluate its effectiveness, quality and scope. The challenges for accessibility and inclusion are very great and require a series of actions that depend on the articulation of different agents of governments and of the society. However, it is perceived that in some countries there are both implementation of the laws and articulation between sectors

Therefore, the answers can be classified according to these large issues: legislation and rights; telecommunications and concessionaire services; training and capacity building; information and awareness; and actions articulated in projects with the use of ICTs.

**Please find some relevant contributions that can be considered as examples for the countries:**

*“Workshops to empower persons with disabilities and seniors. During the year 2018, various training workshops were held, in which issues related to telecommunications, technology and user rights were addressed, with the participation of 120 primary school children and 120 secondary school children, both of low income, as well as 120 people with visual disabilities and 120 older adults.”*

*“When required by persons with disabilities, telecommunications service providers must send, free of charge, physical documents (contracts, offers, service plans and others) in an accessible format to persons with visual disabilities.”*

*“All information on the service providers’ websites must be in an accessible format for all types of disabilities.”*

*“Service providers should promote assistive technologies devices, such as subtitling, message applications, screen reader, audio description, beeps, scanner, text transcription for the voice, voice recognition and others. The promotion must occur by an instrument that allows people with disabilities to know the commercial offering of devices, through remote centres and in the establishment.”*

*“Accessibility Program for Public Institutions 2017-2018: Its objective is to contribute to the development of action plans for accessibility and necessary adjustments of public institutions, through the assessment and diagnosis of accessibility and information and communication systems. It involves: Evaluation of the accessibility of 150 public websites; Development of a Web platform to support the evaluation carried out; and audio-visual material on Web accessibility.”*

*“Accessibility in the Museum of Memory and Human Rights: Implementation of an accessible information system through the use of wireless technology and ICTs for the delivery of museographic content in accessible formats, and the displacement of people with disabilities in the Museum of Memory and Human Rights, contributing to diminishing the barriers of physical access and of information, allowing the community to visit the site independently and get the most out of the cultural contents offered. This process was implemented by the University of Santiago de Chile and the national developer of inclusive technology, Lazarillo App.”*

*“Use of ICTs, such as tablets and interactive screens, at school and at home to promote quality of life, learning and inclusion of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).”*

*“Cinema for all: It generates inclusion spaces through ICTs for the population with visual, auditory and cognitive disabilities, allowing them to enjoy free of charge the seventh art by incorporating elements of accessibility to films offered in various functions throughout the country. In addition, it promotes capacity building processes so that persons in a condition of disability move from being spectators to active creators of audio-visual content. ‘Cinema for all’ is developed through 4 strategic lines: Regular functions, functions in PVD, RadioCine and SmarTIC Inclusive”.*

**2. What were the greatest challenges for your institution, or your country, regarding the implementation of ICT accessibility policies?**

Several challenges have been pointed out in the answers, as such challenges are also linked to the results. This is consistent with the understanding that accessibility and inclusion is a process which, despite many advances, will always present challenges.

Regarding the institutions’ greatest challenges with respect to the implementation of ICT accessibility policies, the aspect most frequently cited by respondents was the lack of knowledge about accessible resources and about the needs of persons with disabilities. This points to the need to set up a continuous process of research and investigation for systematized information. Some countries even mention the difficulty of decision-making in light of the limited information and data on the population with disabilities and their needs.

The lack of awareness and of commitment to accessibility is mentioned as one of the factors that cause the accessibility policies to be limited or lack compliance on the part of the various sectors responsible for ICTs. Many countries point to limited resources as a great challenge, which in a way is linked to the lack of commitment and the need to raise awareness among administrators and the society in general.

According to the respondents, the professionals who work in this area often did not have accessibility as a part of the ICT agenda contemplated in their academic training. In the same way, the various sectors that execute and finance projects in the area of ICTs are not committed to this issue.

A great challenge that persists in some countries is the lack of specific legislation, and also of broader plans and a clearer and more defined public policy. In addition, those that do have legislation point to the challenge of compliance with legislation and rules, mainly with regards to the accessibility of internet websites.

Furthermore, the lack of knowledge and information on the part of persons with disabilities themselves, with respect to accessibility resources, is also mentioned, as well as the lack of articulation and dialogue with institutions and groups linked to the population with disabilities in the country.

Some contributions:

*“To date, advances in accessibility related to the implementation of ICT policies have been scarce. The lack of development and implementation of public policies (new and already formulated) that are socially inclusive and that involve various ministerial bodies and government institutions has tended towards a diminished development of inclusive adaptive solutions. Right now, it is important to evaluate and analyse the needs of the population, and formulate ICT policies on accessibility that allow for homogeneity throughout the society. It remains an important challenge to identify the needs that society has, universalizing the right of access to ICTs and telecommunications in order to achieve the country’s objectives, as well as the SDGs (UN Sustainable Development Goals), in order to reduce the existing digital divide in a multisectoral manner within the country.”*

*“The subject of Universal Accessibility is not contemplated in the academic training of professionals in related fields, such as architects, engineers, communicators, and others. It also does not contribute to the*

*development of inclusive products or services, nor does it contribute to the generation of a culture in this regard. The incorporation of topics such as access to information, web accessibility and technologies for inclusion in universities is one of the challenges that exists and that can be solved by the State and the academic sector working together.”*

*“Build the culture of ownership and technological empowerment in communities with disabilities.”*

*“To be able to raise awareness of the importance of this issue in society in general.”*

*“We can indicate that, at the country level, one of the main challenges has been precisely the formulation of a national policy on ICTs and accessibility. Several initiatives including INDOTEL have been promoted but they do not respond to a policy.”*

*“The biggest challenges are related to the economic aspect and institutional commitment, as well as being able to count on strategic partners that have the same objective.”*

### **3. Which actions have proved to be most appropriate/successful in implementing ICT accessibility in your institution or country?**

The most successful activities are quite closely linked to the main results indicated. Most countries mention the articulation and the building of networks between sectors of society and persons with disabilities, as one of the great successes in their actions. These networks are constituted, in most cases, by creating working groups with the participation of different actors affected by the public policies expressing their needs and opinions. Many highlight as fundamental, the participation of persons with disabilities and organizations of persons with disabilities in this process, as an improvement.

Great emphasis was placed on the awareness and training activities as great breakthroughs. Also the capacity building of professionals linked to ICT sectors, and of persons with disabilities.

Among the specific actions that were widely cited, the availability of tools for analysing and diagnosing the accessibility status of both public and private websites and portals, were highlighted.

No less important, and an issue that was often mentioned in the responses to the questionnaire was the subject of legislation, standardization and regulation.

Some contributions:

*“Work in conjunction with different organizations, State institutions, collectives and civil society to attend to the needs of persons with disabilities.”*

*“Use an experiential approach for awareness raising about the reality and the barriers that a PwD faces and lives through in our society in general. This socialization allows for the strengthening of inclusive services and of access to ICTs for PwDs.”*

*“The greatest progress has been to define inclusion public policies in the telecommunications sector and the information society.”*

**4. According to your experience, which of these actions should be prioritized to accomplish the objective of building a more inclusive society in the Americas region?**

The respondents mentioned various types of actions that must be adopted by their countries' institutions for the construction of an inclusive society in the Americas. Among them, the main actions are aimed at raising awareness, training and capacity building of the population in order to disseminate knowledge, and the importance of accessibility resources in ICTs. The focus is on training the professionals and the community involved, such as technicians, members of governments and companies responsible for telecommunications services and other services directed at the PwD community. In this regard, the importance of training both persons with disabilities, who will benefit from accessible resources, and the people responsible for the development and implementation of projects related to ICT is discussed. The capacity building of persons with disabilities includes the use of computers, the internet and software to guarantee greater autonomy and independence in their lives, mainly in fundamental areas such as education, health, work and legal rights.

Another matter specified is to ensure that governments comply with accessibility laws and regulations, in addition to promoting and giving continuity to the inclusion policies already in force in the countries. The creation of regional regulations has also been

stated as relevant, so that countries in the Americas can all adhere to a commitment to develop affordable and inclusive ICT policies.

The creation of groups with different representatives from society involved and interested in this agenda was also suggested as a priority action.

Some contributions:

*“It is considered that greater importance should be given to the promotion and training of persons with disabilities, in order to strengthen a digital environment and so that, through ICTs, they can have conducive access to carry out their usual and future activities in an autonomous, safe, free and reliable way.”*

*“The implementation of a group formed by representatives of various segments of society (providers, regulatory agencies, representative associations of persons with disabilities, and public bodies), (...) is an action that must be prioritized in order to consider the different views of society, thus we can count on a more efficient inclusion and discussion process.”*

*“Actions such as including in the training of professionals subjects such as universal accessibility; investing resources in the development of inclusion technology; training professionals on web accessibility and disseminating technical knowledge at the State level to ensure the delivery of accessible content through public channels, products and services, as well as issuing regulations that require compliance with the right to information, will, without a doubt, contribute to the reduction of the digital divide among the population with disabilities and to get our region to move forward in terms of inclusion through good practices such as those mentioned above.”*

*“Raise awareness and sensitize citizens in general about the obstacles faced by PwDs in all areas of society, as well as socialize public and private actors at the national level on subjects of ICT accessibility.”*

**5. What actions has your institution initiated and/or implemented, to increase the quality and offer of accessible ICT products and services to persons with disabilities?**

The respondents mentioned various types of actions that their institutions initiated and implemented, for example, the creation of telecommunications services communication channels for users with disabilities, offering courses and workshops for



professionals, advisory services for projects geared towards persons with disabilities and for officials of public sector institutions that provide information to the population with and without disabilities.

Actions in the legal framework were also brought up, through the promotion of laws and regulations that seek to guarantee the availability of accessible resources in the services and materials offered to the citizens of each country.

Some contributions:

*“The delivery of courses and workshops focused on strengthening the enabling digital environment so that the users of the telecommunications services with some disability can carry out their usual and future activities, in an autonomous, safe, free and reliable manner.”*

*“The General Regulation of Accessibility - RGA is an action that encourages the improvement of the quality and availability of accessible products and ICTs, through rules that oblige providers to promote assistive technologies on the devices, according to the type of disability.”*

*“Advise officials of public sector institutions that provide information and services to the citizens, on the implementation of Web Accessibility in their web portals and applications.”*

*“Advise public institutions and universities on the use of assistive technology tools for access to these services by students and staff with disabilities.”*

*“The elaboration and dissemination of communication mechanisms and materials for persons with disabilities, which allows them to know their rights and assert their value, as well as to be aware of the advantages of ICTs in their lives.”*

**6. What actions has your institution initiated and/or implemented, to strengthen awareness among key national stakeholders on the importance of developing and providing ICT accessibility policies and programs?**

The respondents commented that their institutions are developing a series of actions aimed at raising awareness among the sectors involved in this process of accessibility and the needs of persons with disabilities. These actions include workshops and

conferences, for example that address the issue of accessibility, the training of public officials and advisory services to public and private institutions.

Reference was also made to the importance of disseminating information related to the rights and benefits of ICTs through the media and events that address the issue of persons with disabilities. Working in conjunction with institutions and associations that are directly linked to persons with disabilities was also advocated.

Some contributions:

*“ Dialogue with the different social sectors and the promotion of the rules on accessibility in telecommunications services are the main actions to develop ICT accessibility programs.”*

*“Train employees, educators, family members, administrators of ‘Puntos Vive Digital’ and, in general, the population with disabilities in the use and appropriation of technologies.”*

*“Every 25th of April of each year, ‘**Inclusion Day for Persons with Disabilities**’ is celebrated. The activities held are very well received, as they aim to raise awareness among the main national actors.”*

**7. In addition to the previously identified actions, does the agenda of your institution include any action plan or goals to contribute to accessible ICTs in the Americas region?**

The respondents said little about action plans that aim to contribute to the accessibility of ICTs in the Americas region in an integrated manner. Instead, they reaffirmed their projects and regional policies mentioned in the previous questions.

They also acknowledged the execution of studies that aim to systematize examples of good practices related to ICTs and identify what are the needs of the public with disabilities, targeting the improvement of the services and products offered to them..

Some of the respondents also mentioned the commitment undertaken by their institutions in international conventions that address issues related to the inclusion of persons with disabilities, for example, the "United Nations Convention on the Rights of

Persons with Disabilities" and the "Digital Agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean (ELAC)".

Some contributions:

*"The participation of our country is limited to the context of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the United Nations and the Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities."*

*"In the framework of ELAC 2020, progress was made in this regard with a draft resolution in favour of accessibility. The meeting was held in Cartagena and, of course, as a participating and guarantor country, the initiative was supported, taking into account the accessibility decree project which we had already been working on."*

**8. In your view and according to your experience, what else could your institution do to contribute to the inclusion of persons with disabilities through the access and use of new technologies?**

The main actions stated by the respondents were those to promote and encourage inclusion policies and accessibility resources related to ICTs. In this sense, it is essential to establish alliances with telecommunications operators, institutions and associations involved with the subject, with the objective of strengthening the inclusion policies of each country.

They also mentioned the creation of groups with the purpose of investigating and studying which aspects of the inclusion of persons with disabilities should be improved and what are the needs of that audience. Additionally, there were comments on the importance of awareness raising, dissemination and capacity building as a means to contribute to inclusion, so that the population is aware of their rights and how to demand them when necessary.

Finally, respondents acknowledged the importance of their institutions actively ensuring compliance with inclusion policies.

Some contributions:

*“Information is the most important element to keep users empowered; the permanent dissemination of the rights of telecommunications services users with disabilities and the way to make them enforceable is therefore fundamental.”*

*“The promotion of existing regulations in relation to access to information and the web, through activities of technical knowledge transfer to the citizens and other public services.”*

*“Establish techno-social laboratories where ideas, solutions, knowledge, methodologies and technological developments converge.”*

*“Further promote the articulation between entities of the State like Ministries, centres of technical and professional training and science and technology bodies.”*

*“Promote the adaptation of web pages, with the goal that they are accessible to all persons with disabilities.”*

**9. In your view and according to your experience, what more could or should other stakeholders, such as public sector, private sector, industry, civil society (including organizations and NGOs that work with persons with disabilities), international organizations, and academia, do to promote ICT accessibility to persons with disabilities in your country and, furthermore, in the Americas region?**

On this matter, the respondents, for the most part, reaffirmed the actions and commitments mentioned above in the other questions, and emphasized the importance of establishing effective articulation between the public sector, the private sectors and the civil society.

Regarding the public sector, the importance of the commitment of the regional governments to promote and disseminate inclusiveness policies related to ICTs, in an articulated manner with the other sectors was reiterated, in order to guarantee the continuity and fulfilment of the established regulations and to replicate good inclusive practices.

With regard to the private sector, the need for this sector to be committed to the needs of persons with disabilities is noted, offering their services and products to the public in an accessible and inclusive manner.

Within the context of promoting articulation among sectors, the role of civil society is fundamental in this process, since the various groups and associations that work together with persons with disabilities serve as an effective means of communication for listening to the needs and demands of this public, seeking to improve the offer of services and products made available by the public and private sectors.

Some contributions:

*“The public sector should seek to promote and inculcate among their institutions, and raise awareness within the private sector of the importance of social inclusion in issues of accessibility to ICTs for persons with disabilities.”*

*“Sharing the best practices in the area of accessibility of ICTs carried out locally is considered to be a fundamental element to implement homologous mechanisms and jointly develop projects among the countries that make up the Americas region, which allows for an effective analysis in order to develop and improve public policies aimed at the inclusion of persons with disabilities in ICTs.”*

*“Regarding the efforts in intersectoral coordination, it is important that public agencies develop plans, programs and initiatives that start from ideally binding public consultations and are framed in comprehensive plans for the development of Accessible Information and Communication Technologies.”*

*“Civil society: Raising civil society awareness and helping them to be empowered in accessibility issues.”*

**10. What is the current situation of the Universal Services Fund in your country and is the possibility envisaged to use them to accelerate ICT accessibility to persons with disabilities? What is your view about the use of resources of Telecommunications Service Funds to implement social/digital inclusion projects?**

The vast majority of respondents stated that in their respective countries there is no Universal Service Fund or that, in the case of countries that do have this resource, there is no project related to accessibility financed by this means.

In isolated cases, the use of this resource was mentioned, for example, in Brazil. In that country, there is the Fund for Universalization of Telecommunications Services (FUST),

but, according to the respondent, there is only knowledge of one accessibility project financed by this fund.

Finally, respondents from Ecuador, the Dominican Republic and Peru also indicated the existence of Universal Service Funds for ICTs and telecommunications services, but did not specify what kind of actions were carried out for persons with disabilities.

Some contributions:

*“The USF is one of the institutions that has provided great support to persons with disabilities in terms of providing resources to secure equipment and software for persons with disabilities. More funds are needed for the community.”*

*“There is no knowledge of the implementation of the Universal Services Funds.”*

*“The USF administrator has used and will continue to use the USF to promote access to technologies for persons with disabilities because we believe that the USF is the most practical way to promote ICTs among persons with disabilities according to our mandate.”*

*“We have no knowledge of the existence of that fund. The country is not conscientious of this accessibility issue, very few of us know it, we understand it and we know clearly how to face it.”*

*“... through the projects of the Telecommunication Development Fund, it has made it easier for persons with disabilities in the country to connect to ICTs through Technological Centres, through the provision of computer equipment to specialized persons or institutions, as well as through the deployment of workshops on ICT training and talks with the support of specialized entities in the disability sector.”*

**11. Please indicate if there is any specific issue related to ICT accessibility (e.g. cell phones, web, TV and video, access to public spaces, emergency services, public procurement etc.) that you would like to know better or that you would like to bring to the attention of the participants to Accessible Americas V.**

Of the various topics mentioned by the respondents, those that were mentioned most frequently were:

- Examples of good practices and projects that have been successful in other countries;
- Technological innovations related to the accessibility of ICTs and the improvement of the quality of life of persons with disabilities;
- Accessibility in websites, television and mobile applications;
- Multimedia technologies to access services and public spaces, for example, hospitals, emergency services and public transport;
- Multimedia content platforms for education;
- Purchases and assistance to users with disabilities through electronic services.

Some contributions:

*“The best practices carried out by the countries of the region that have favoured integrally the inclusion of users of telecommunications services with some disability.”*

*“It would be very important to get to know experiences and formats of work by other countries in all the detailed topics, since it would allow for the improvement of the national actions in the matter.”*

*“Open source developments. Internet of things for persons with disabilities. Public television with accessibility components.”*

*“Without a doubt, it would be useful to know in depth about ICTs accessibility initiatives in mobile phones; TV and video; and Emergency Services. Similarly, it is of special interest to access a compilation of best practices of regulators and universal service funds at the regional level, in terms of accessibility.”*

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Recommendations for Accessibility, Digital Inclusion and ICT Policy in the Americas.**

For the development of accessible ICTs, the articulation and strengthening of actions in an integrated and networked manner is fundamental. It is important to involve different actors in the development of digital inclusion policies and strategies, and it is also important that a collaborative environment be encouraged among all parties interested and responsible for accessibility and inclusive actions. This initiative depends on everyone working and contributing their efforts so that achievements such as those indicated in this research, should become increasingly common. There is no one party responsible, since it is a task for all, with the leadership of different national and international organizations.

Many countries have the challenge of understanding the needs of persons with disabilities. The lack of systematic information about this sector of the population and about the available activities and services is also an obstacle. In this way, proposing the creation of specific research where data and the needs can be compared can be a good step for the development of more integrated policies in the region. Despite the cultural differences, the availability of resources and the different priorities, the needs of the population with disabilities tend to be very similar in all countries. This facilitates the comparison and the search for common solutions. It is also important to intensify the action and the mapping of the actions that civil society has developed, and to seek greater alignment of strategies, allowing for a more effective analysis of the progress made in policy. It is important that this research be aligned with international frameworks, mainly with the monitoring process of the UN Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which may bring important information for the crossing of data and as a secondary source.

The importance of mapping and disseminating good practices has been widely cited in the research. The creation of a repository of good practices and innovative actions, where standardized information can allow for comparisons, advances and exchanges between countries, in the moulds of what the *Zero Project* has done, an initiative aimed at promoting the rights of persons with disabilities with the mapping of



innovative practices for the solution of everyday problems. The repository could even be able to store and make available to the different sectors of society, courses and training on topics that are fundamental for the implementation of accessible and inclusive public policy, which is a great deficiency for the majority of the countries, as indicated by the Consultation.

The encouragement and the pursuit of the creation of regional agreements with big tech companies and operators of telecommunications services is important for the standardization and optimization of resources while seeking better services for the population with disabilities. Also, looking for alternatives for financing and promoting solutions for accessibility.

It is also essential to search for alternatives in financing and resources for the implementation of policy. There are few countries that have resources from universalization funds for investment in accessible ICT initiatives. In the construction of regulatory frameworks it is crucial that resources be allocated for the effectiveness of these policies and that there be clear sanctions in case of non-compliance. Advocacy for the inclusion of the issue in financing mechanisms and in projects with incentives, to promote initiatives in the area, contributes to the viability of the implementation of these policies.

Regional sources of funding can also be used to make the necessary progress and to counter the challenges identified in the Consultation. Furthermore, they can seek to encourage multilateral financing of initiatives that benefit the countries of the region.

In addition to public resources, the search for private funding sources can contribute to the increase of resources invested in the development of solutions that meet the needs of persons with disabilities. A suggested path is to consider the importance that the demands related to accessibility be incorporated in procurement processes of companies and governments. In this way, financing may also originate from the creation of demands for solutions, products and services that meet the growing demands of the population with disabilities. These demands can follow the *ITU Model*

*ICT Accessibility Policy Report*<sup>1</sup>, which in its Module 6 points out a series of recommendations for public procurement policy for governments.

It is important that systematic actions of rapprochement, association and collaboration be developed with civil society organizations, persons with disabilities, universities and international organizations, mainly those linked to the United Nations System for the strengthening, optimizing of resources, sharing and transfer of knowledge and the research that contributes to the construction of an inclusive society. In this sense, such articulation can promote and contribute to guaranteeing rights in the different areas, since ICTs are indispensable for the formulation and implementation of policies, programs and projects in all sectors of society. Technologies are increasingly universal in their use, with clear and defined standards, facilitating the development of common actions for its popularization and the guarantee of access.

These challenges are many, but there is a growing interest in the subject. There is much to be done, but the result of the Consultation shows that the countries of the region are developing a series of initiatives in line with the demands of persons with disabilities. Various actions converge towards a propitious moment to strengthen more inclusive and accessible practices, policies and actions. Promoting the adhesion of society in this movement is fundamental to guarantee and ensure the effectiveness of inclusive policy.

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<sup>1</sup> Available in: [https://www.itu.int/pub/D-PHCB-SIS\\_A.01](https://www.itu.int/pub/D-PHCB-SIS_A.01)