Regional Conference on

"The Role of Information and Communication Technologies in the Development of Inclusive Society for Persons with Disabilities"

8-9 October 2015, Belgrade, Republic of Serbia

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussion, the participants identified the following **recommendations** which may serve as a base for planning and implementing future activities in the area of ICT accessibility by persons with disabilities and persons with specific needs in the Europe region, and South East Europe (SEE) in particular. The set of recommendations developed by the community gathered at this meeting are all equally important and are non-binding and only for consideration. They are designed to identify areas for future cooperation on ITU EUR Regional Initiative 3 and to assist countries in implementing their ICT accessibility obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

1. *Promote engagement of all relevant stakeholders within the ITU European Regional Initiative to support the Member States in the implementation of ICT accessibility and strengthen regional co-operation to exchange knowledge on accessibility policies and solutions. National regulatory authorities (NRA's) and civil society should be a driving force in mobilizing policy makers and industry in mainstreaming the issue of accessibility in practice.*
2. *Countries could refer to the ITU Model ICT Accessibility Policy Report in developing their ICT accessibility policies and regulatory frameworks.*
3. *Encourage NRAs to work with relevant standard bodies (policy makers, legislators, service providers) and adopt relevant international standards to ensure interoperability of ICT products and services. Recommend revision of regulatory frameworks to create incentives for service providers to develop and improve their services using existing successful models in the area of mobile and web accessibility including the mandatory purchase of mobile devices.*
4. *Consult with persons with disabilities and specific needs on accessible services and involve them in the evaluation of the developed accessible services and policies to ensure that these services meet their needs.*
5. *Foster capacity building of persons with disabilities and specific needs to strengthen their advocacy effectiveness in promoting an enabling environment for ICT accessibility.*
6. *Ensure the implementation of ICT accessibility policies, strategies and guidelines by the relevant stakeholders by making the provisions on accessibility mandatory. Current policies should be periodically updated.*
7. *Raise awareness and educate all relevant stakeholders about accessibility technology trends and ensure their implementation. In that respect, governments can consider collaborating with industry and universities, and universities can be encouraged to share their relevant curriculums.*

8. *Ensure promotion of affordability, such as special or discounted rates and plans for persons with disabilities, like text only plans for the deaf and hard hearing who don't use voice services. Likewise, awareness can be created among TV and film producers on the importance of including accessible services from the design stage.*

9. *Identify a central national organisation that will act as a focal point for all accessibility matters and that is to be made known to all ITU Member States in the region to foster collaboration. This organisation would be encouraged to gather and promote accessibility data, standards and solutions.*

10. *The countries in the region should carry out surveys about the needs of persons with disabilities and specific needs, produce reports and advocate for their efficient implementation.*

11. *Involve research centres as reliable partners to support broadcasters in developing technological and strategic solutions to provide accessible programmes.*

12. *Develop, promote and deliver on-line training courses available for all stakeholders involved in accessible ICT solutions and services, including the online training on public procurement of accessible ICT products and services, since accessible ICT Public Procurement can improve inclusion of persons with disabilities and specific needs in education, employment, economic and social life. Service providers should update public procurement procedures to meet the needs of persons with disabilities in line with principles of non-discrimination, availability and affordability.*

13. *Recognizing that the most successful countries implementing ICT accessibility in Europe have set down a clear set of laws and regulations in public broadcasting services, the countries of SEE region can follow these best practices, including obligations to provide access services during prime time and specifying quotas. The need to increase current quotas is noted in the countries of the SEE region.*

14. *The countries of SEE could consider adopting policies that require mobile operators to stock available mobile devices that are accessible to persons with different kinds of disabilities and make them available to persons with disabilities and specific needs. The policies should include measurable targets, timelines, annual reporting and periodic review to address technological advancements. They could also contain clear provisions concerning training the staff on the accessible features, how to serve customers with disabilities and run promotion campaigns. Mobile operators need to ensure that persons with disabilities can use mobile phones for emergency communications, including sending real-time text messages or using video relay services.*

15. *It was noted that websites should not only be made accessible for persons with disabilities, but the countries could consider developing complaint mechanisms across countries, including monitoring websites accessibility and encouraging collaboration among countries to carry out benchmarking on website accessibility.*

16. *The countries of SEE region could work together to identify and exchange existing accessibility applications and free content, in particular in the countries where there is no language barrier. Models of innovative services for Persons with Disabilities and specific needs from EU member states could guide the non-EU members from the SEE region.*

17. *It was noted that there are few specialized ICTs for Persons with Disabilities and the elderly in SEE. Therefore, the "Design for All" principle should be applied, promoted and used in the development of mobile apps, and end users should be involved in all stages of the process of designing mobile apps.*

18. *Enhance regional cooperation between research centers and academia in the area of speech technologies (TTS, Text-Speech, for everyone who can listen, Automatic Speech*

Recognition (ASR), Speech-Text for everyone who can read). Improving these technologies can help to overcome disabilities.

19. *Raise awareness about accessibility possibilities of TV and video programming in digital platforms, which is a crucial platform for the inclusion of persons with disabilities and specific needs. TV accessibility applies to all forms of TV and video programming (traditional, IPTV, Integrated Broadcast Broadband System (IBB), Hybrid Broadcast Broadband TV (HBB)) and also applies to electronic programme guides (EPGs), remote control and TV devices.*

20. *Policy makers could consider producing legally binding roadmaps towards achieving accessible television/video programming services requiring broadcasters to provide sub-titling for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH), audio description (AD) and sign language (SL) interpretation in their programmes, including quality of service standards and prime time emission requirements. Standards on the audio description (AD) could be included in regulatory and standardization provisions, which could be complementary and mandatory.*

21. *Possible sources of funding of AD and SDH could involve producers and film makers as well as requiring access services for government-funded video programming content. Content creators should be responsible for creating the access features. Relevant end-users should be consulted on quota requirements, and quality standards (sound mix for audio description) have to be taken into account as the important standard requirement.*