

QUESTION 7/1

Access to telecommunication/ICT services by persons with disabilities and with specific needs

1 Statement of the situation or problem

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that one billion persons in the world live with some type of disability. According to WHO, about 80 per cent of persons with disabilities live in low-income countries. Disability appears in different forms and degrees, regarding physical, sensitive or mental aspects. Also, increasing life expectancy results in elder persons having reduced capabilities. Thus, it is likely that the number of persons with disabilities will continue to rise.

The inclusion in society of persons with disabilities is a policy of Member States. The objective of such policy is to bring about the necessary conditions for persons with disabilities to enjoy the same opportunities in life as the rest of the population. The disabilities policy has evolved, and is not limited to basic healthcare, education of children with disabilities and rehabilitation of persons who have suffered disability during adulthood. The implementation of the disabilities policy has made urban infrastructure accessible, and has improved health and rehabilitation services for this group. Moreover, the principles of equal opportunity and non-discrimination are common policies of Member States.

With respect to telecommunications, at the World Telecommunication Development Conference (Istanbul, 2002) Member States resolved, by Resolution 20 (Rev. Istanbul, 2002), that access to technologies, facilities and telecommunication services must be provided on a non-discriminatory basis.

Telecommunications/ICTs have been acknowledged as essential for social, cultural, economic, political and democratic development as well as exercising several fundamental rights. Within the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), both the Declaration of Principles and the Tunis Commitment emphasized the immense impact that telecommunications/ICTs have in almost every aspect of life and that they are considered an instrument for productivity, economic growth, employment generation, good government and dialogue between persons and nations.

WSIS acknowledged that special attention should be given to the needs of elder persons and persons with disabilities.

In recognition of the accessibility to telecommunications/ICT by persons with disabilities, the ITU Council approved the theme "Connecting people with disabilities: Telecommunications/ICT opportunities for all" for the World Telecommunication and Information Society Day (17May) in 2008.

On 13 December 2006, the United Nations General Assembly approved the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The CRPD was opened for signature on 30 March 2007 and, as of 16 February 2009, 137 countries had signed it, while 81 had signed the Optional Protocol. Of these, 48 had ratified the Convention and 28 the Optional Protocol. The CRPD establishes basic principles, and also a State's obligations to ensure equal access to telecommunications/ICTs, including Internet, by persons with disabilities.

There is a lack of specific legal provisions governing telecommunication/ICT accessibility. Certain countries have anti-discriminatory laws or telecommunication laws. Some have legal provisions from a medical standpoint which considers disability as a "defect" rather than addressing disability with emphasis on ability and integration. Legal provisions should be available to turn good accessibility provisions into reality.

It is also pertinent to mention that broadband access and usage are highly dependent on literacy and ICT literacy as well. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that 774 million people (around 11 per cent of world population) aged 15 and above worldwide are illiterate, i.e. they cannot read or write; and two-thirds of them, i.e. 493 million, are women. Among them, 52 per cent live in South and West Asia and 22 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa.

Several issues encountered by both disability groups and illiterate groups of people have common solutions.

1.1 Accessibility standards

Accessibility standards are essential in order to make it possible for equipment and services to be usable by the broadest range of persons, interoperable and provide the required quality services. ITU-T has prepared several Recommendations and documents that provide information on a wide range of accessibility standards.

It is also important to consider stakeholder participation where persons with disabilities should be involved in the process of elaborating legal/regulatory provisions, public policy and standards.

It would also be important to consider assistive technologies to be used by persons with various types of disabilities. These assistive technologies should aim to overcome or reduce the gap between standard telecommunications/ICTs generally available and those which address the needs of persons with disabilities.

1.2 Information and statistics

It is also important to gather information and data addressing many important issues relating to accessibility to telecommunications/ICT by persons with disabilities. Therefore, a methodology should be developed to assist the information-gathering process.

2 Question or issue for study

Analyse policies and strategies to promote, develop and implement the most advanced technological solutions to enable equal access to telecommunications/ICTs by persons with disabilities to that enjoyed by the rest of the population.

3 Expected output

It is proposed that the Question for study should result in a report that will enable Member States, especially developing and least developed countries (LDCs), to design policies and execute strategies for promoting and implementing services and solutions which provide access to telecommunications/ICTs by persons with disabilities and with specific needs, and for people with difficulties mastering reading and writing. Furthermore, the report will help Member States and Sector Members identify commercial best practices relating to telecommunications/ICT that should apply in relation to persons with disabilities.

The report should contain the regulatory policies necessary for ensuring accessibility to telecommunications/ICT for persons with disabilities, including, but not limited to:

- a) the principles to be applied by service providers and equipment manufacturers (i.e. equal access, accessibility/compatible devices);
- b) a recommendation on the desirable access to telecommunications/ICT;
- c) suggested schemes for the implementation of policies and strategies;
- d) an economic cost evaluation and a comparison of the available technological solutions;

- e) a recommendation on commercial best practices applied by service providers for overcoming the difficulties faced by persons with disabilities in accessing telecommunications/ICT.

4 Timing

These activities should be included in the programme of activities of ITU-D Study Group 1 for the period 2014-2018, as a new Question.

4.1 Mid-term report is expected by 2016.

4.2 Final report is expected by 2017.

5 Proposers/sponsors

Mexico/CITEL

India, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology
Mr Kishore Babu GSC Yerraballa
Tel.: +919013130220
E-mail: dirir2-dot@nic.in

India, Center for Development of Telematics (CDOT)
Mr B. Sreedharan
Tel.: +919013130220
E-mail: srib@cdot.in

6 Sources of input

The following stakeholders are encouraged to supply information for the Question: Member States, Sector Members, relevant international and regional organizations, public and private institutions and civil-society organizations involved in the design of policies and advocacy for the development of technological solutions to alleviate the difficulties faced by persons with disabilities in accessing telecommunications/ICT.

7 Target audience

Target audience	Developed countries	Developing countries¹
Telecom policy-makers	Interested	Very interested
Telecom regulators	Interested	Very interested
Service providers/operators	Interested	Very interested
Manufacturers	Interested	Interested

a) Target audience

The result of the study will serve Member States, and particularly administrations of developing countries and LDCs, to design policies and to execute strategies and actions for implementing technological solutions that improve accessibility to telecommunications/ICT by persons with disabilities. Moreover, it will enable Sector Members and service providers located in those countries

¹ These include the least developed countries, small island developing states, landlocked developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

to design and apply proven and successful commercial practices to meet the needs of persons with disabilities and facilitate their access to telecommunications/ICT.

b) Proposed methods for implementation of the results

Authorities from Member States could consider designing policies and strategies to implement the most suitable technological solutions in the light of the characteristics of their populations and countries. In this respect, there could be short-term, medium-term and long-term action plans so as to permit implementation in phases.

The report should also be useful for administrations of Member States, Sector Members and service providers to encourage the adoption of commercial practices applicable to meet the needs of persons with disabilities and with specific needs.

8 Proposed methods of handling the Question or issue

a) How?

- 1) Within a study group:
 - Question (over a multi-year study period)
- 2) Within regular BDT activity (indicate which programmes, activities, projects, etc., will be involved in the work of the study Question)
 - Programme: digital inclusion
 - Projects
 - Expert consultants
 - Regional offices
- 3) In other ways – describe (e.g. regional, within other organizations with expertise, jointly with other organizations, etc.) To be defined in the work plan.

b) Why?

The Question will be addressed within ITU-D Study Group 1, in close cooperation with ITU-T Study Group 16 (Question 26/16).

9 Coordination and collaboration

Coordination is recommended with relevant international organizations, and with service providers that have adopted best practices to meet the needs of persons with disabilities and facilitate their access to telecommunications/ICT.

10 BDT programme link

To be defined in the work plan.

11 Other relevant information