

RAW FILE

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ITU-T JOINT COORDINATION ACTIVITY ON ACCESSIBILITY AND  
HUMAN FACTORS, RELAY SERVICES: WHAT THEY ARE, WHO THEY ARE  
FOR, AND HOW THEY BEGAN

6:45 A.M. CT

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(Captioner standing by.)

(Captioner standing by to be admitted to Zoom room.)

>> AUTOMATED VOICE: Recording in progress.

(Video plays, no dialogue.)

>> ANDREA SAKS: Good afternoon. Or good morning. Or

good evening, wherever you are in the world. My name is Andrea Saks. And I am the chairman of the Joint Coordination Activity on Accessibility and Human Factors. And I'm also the Inter-Sector Coordinator for the Inter-Sector Coordinator Group on Accessibility. So I report back to the ITU Inter-sector Coordination Group what goes on, on accessibility, in the other two sectors, being the D for Development of Developing Countries and also the ITU-R, Radio Sector. I would like to begin by telling you this is a special event on relay services. What are they? How they work? And who they are for? And we have a selection of four experienced speakers. All of them can use a relay service and some of them have created them. They are experts. We have Lidia Best of the European Federation of Hard of Hearing People, she's president. We have Seth Bravin from T-Mobile who works in relay. We have Yasunobu Ishii from Japan on The Nippon Foundation, who started the relay service in Japan, and also was able to see it go over to being coordinated with the government. He will explain that when he gives a presentation. And we have a long-term pioneer on relay, Gunnar Hellstrom, from GHAccess, GH stands for Gunnar Hellstrom Access, I found out. I met him in 1983, and he started with Omnitor. He and I have been working together for many years and he's one of the pioneers for standardization for accessibility standards.

So I would like to start with Lidia Best. So she is going to speak to you about her experiences. Can we put her on? Can you put your camera on, Lidia?

>> LIDIA BEST: I have my camera on.

>> ANDREA SAKS: Speak.

>> LIDIA BEST: Thank you. So I will speak. Thank you very much, Andrea, for the introduction of the workshop

and my introduction, as well. Also, I'm Co-Vice Chair of Joint Coordination Activities on Accessibility and Human Factors. And in addition, I'm also Chairman of the National Association of Deafened People in UK. Who are deafened people? Deafened people are usually people who have been hearing most of their life and lost their hearing later in life. It could be through an accident or just in general fast degeneration of hearing loss. And sometimes, it can happen overnight. Today, you are hearing, and the next day, you are not. And often, there are no explanation.

But while we are talking about deafened people, let's go back. How do hearing people in general relay on audio information? That's why we know in majority of cases people will prefer to use the telephone with telecalling assistance or to use it, especially now, it's very popular and very good possibility of using your telephone, especially mobile phones, with good connection, and that's fine. I grew up with someone who has been Hard of Hearing most of my life and I didn't know anything else except for using the telephone with, for example, the telecoin. But when I became deafened in rapid succession in just a few months, I was suddenly left with no other option but to rely on relay services. This is the case for many people across the world. So what is, then, available to you when you suddenly cannot hear? If you are lucky, if your country provides relay services, which also include a text relay services, then you are able to gain back some of your independence.

However, if your country does not provide any of those services, then you have to rely on your children, neighbors, friends, or your spouse, partner.

You probably have seen some of -- some of you probably have

seen the news about CODA winning the Oscars this year. While we are mostly talking about CODAs of Deaf adults, usually using sign languages in the family, there are CODAs also of people who were hearing and suddenly lost their hearing. CODAs, in my case, they are sometimes supporting parents, and they need to -- we need to suddenly be the connector, the relay, between us and the outside world. Luckily for me, in the UK, I was able to use a relay UK service with a phone that was showing the text. And I was able to communicate as much as possible.

Currently, in the UK, we are also running in relaying captioning service, which is much more equivalent service to what a typical text service, like a mini-com text phone is, which means you can simply pick up the phone, pick up the handle, and start making your conversation, and see on the screen of your phone a text running in real-time to show what the other person is telling you.

This is something what I would like everybody to realize, but there are lots of different situations where someone might not be able to just use amplified phone or Bluetooth connections. It's also, but sometimes we forget, for different people around us. And there are also deaf people who are Hard of Hearing whose hearing who is not as good to be able to make local phone calls and those people also rely on those services.

I would like to ask the countries to work towards those kind of solutions. Thank you, Andrea. This is my talk.

>> ANDREA SAKS: Thank you very much, Lidia. And I'm very grateful that you were able to come on. I was a bit worried. I'm going to proceed to the next speaker who is Seth Bravin who is in the United States. And Seth, you will introduce yourself and also explain that you have interpreters speaking ASL, and you work in Relays for

T-Mobile. Would you please take the floor?

>> SETH BRAVIN: Hello, this is Seth. Hi, everyone. Just one moment for us to pin. I want to introduce Sara Romes and Jenny Thomas who are interpreting with me today. I will give you a brief history about the history of relay services in the U.S. The Americans with Disabilities Act passed in 1990, Title 4, covers relay services. They cover text, video, and captioning. We have had some growing pains over the years, specifically with interoperability. We had several different providers but you couldn't use different providers because they had different platforms and different technology. We've had a long history in the relay service. Back, we were a part of the business called Sprint before the merger with T-Mobile. We were the only relay service providing relay services in the United States during that time. With the pandemic during the last two years, we've been fortunate that the Federal Communications Commission recognized the challenges and actually provided an exemption for service levels that were allowed. One of those is interpreters were allowed to work remotely from home. Those were important to be able to provide relay services during the pandemic.

We've learned some new best practices and had some lessons learned as well. During the merger from Sprint to T-Mobile two years ago, the Sprint accessibility business had been around for 30 years. Really experienced T-Mobile welcoming us with open arms. But during that time there have been a lot of challenges. We've seen a lot of countries that don't have relay services, and that was especially necessary during the pandemic. How could a Deaf or Hard of Hearing or a DeafBlind person work remotely without relay services? Get situations like emergency

situations to be able to contact a hospital or a medical provider? Some of you might not know that the ITU has published relay service guidelines. This happened a couple of years ago. That can help countries that are developing this kind of relay service really get a head start in what they're doing. Some future opportunities that might be exciting for all of us that we might benefit from are recognizing the balancing act between compliance with law and innovation. 5G is going to be a key enabler for wireless connectivity around the globe. Especially for things like video, internet of things or IoT, artificial intelligence, AR, and VR, augmented reality and virtual reality.

For example, with connected vehicles, smart homes, also holograms with 5G might be possible in the future where you could have a holographic interpreter who might be present in the same room as a holograph. So I might be able to be in a room with someone and not have an interpreter there present but through the technology we would be able to see an interpreter and have that communication access. So there are some exciting opportunities but there are also some pain points. For someone who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing or DeafBlind, you have three or four different phone numbers.

For example, I have my mobile phone number, my video relay service number, and my text relay phone numbers. So for example, if I were to give my daughter's teacher my phone number, I'd have to tell her how to contact me. For example, I gave her my mobile number to text, and instead she tried to call me. So when she wants to call me, I have to give her a video relay service phone number. And then every once in a while somebody will try to text me with the video relay service phone number. So I think one

important pain point that we need to solve in the future is having one phone number for all of the services no matter if it's video relay, text, or text-based relay.

Another future opportunity for us on the international level is international relay. ITU is looking at working on coming up with some discussions around international relay service, and that would open up a lot of opportunities for all of us to be able to make phone calls across borders.

And for all of this to happen, we're going to really need an ecosystem of innovation, something that can create some acceleration and progress, having key players from different sectors involved. NGOs, governments, private sector, as well as universities.

I look forward to working with all of you. Those are my talking points for the moment.

>> ANDREA SAKS: Thank you very much, Seth. I appreciate you going into the history because you are an old-timer. I'm an old-timer. I'm a very ancient CODA. I interpreted for my Deaf parents from the moment I could talk and I've not stopped since. The next person I wish to introduce is all the way from Japan. Yasunobu Ishii. Who is part of the Nippon Society. Was executive director. And started the relay services in Japan. Yasunobu, can you take the floor, please?

>> YASUNOBU ISHII: Yes. Thank you, Andrea.

It is my great honor to join this webinar and speak about the start of relay service in Japan.

I'm Yasunobu Ishii. Executive director of The Nippon Foundation, telecommunication relay service. Our foundation is established in August, 2020. And designated by the Minister of International Affairs and Communications. That is abbreviated MIAC, and we're

designated as the sole provider of relay service in Japan.  
Next slide please.

Yes, we started relay service since July 1, last year.  
Our services are two kinds. One is video relay service  
and the other is text relay service. What I meant by text  
relay service is the way that Deaf and Hard of Hearing type  
what they want to say, and the operator voice it to the  
hearing counterpart.

Our services provided for 20 hours, seven days a week, and  
maximum capacity is 10 video relay service booths, 12 text  
relay service booths, and two emergency call booths. And  
in our country, Deaf and Hard of Hearing users need to pay  
telephone bill as hearing people do so.

At the end of March -- thank you. At the end of March,  
2022, the end of our first fiscal year, 9,192 people  
registered to our services. Since the start of our  
service, we provided more than 96,000 video relay service  
and 113,000 text relay service, and 312 emergency calls,  
in total, in nine months.

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And now, let me talk about how the relay service in Japan  
is starting.

Before I am engaged in relay service, I was working more  
widely for improving information and communication access  
for Persons with Disabilities. Such as Deaf, Hard of  
Hearing people, and Blind, and Partially Sighted people.  
I worked mainly in Asian countries and in Japan.

And in March, 2011, as you know, we had a catastrophic  
disaster in the Northeast part of Japan. In order to help  
Deaf and Hard of Hearing victims in the damaged area, we  
started VRI, VRS, and other remote service from Tokyo.  
And tried to utilize remote communication technology and  
build society back better.



And after a few years, we found that the need for relay service was most evident among others. So since September 2013, we narrowed down our service only to relay service. On the other hand, we widened our service, not from the damaged area, but also to all over Japan. That was the starting point of our mass scale project of relay service in Japan. The funding to run the modern project came 100% from The Nippon Foundation. That is a private foundation and it is our parent organization now. Our goal was set to make relay service as a public service and make it to be financially sustainable. The model project was fully funded by the Foundation and served only 8 in the morning to 9 in the evening. And also not responded to emergency calls. But at the end of the model project, 13,000 different Hard of Hearing people registered. By this model project, we successfully proved that huge potential need for relay service was there in Japan. Next slide please.

Since the beginning of model project, we approached governmental officials, political leaders, telephone company executives, and media. From this stage, we start working with Japanese Federation of the Deaf and other organizations of Persons with Disabilities.

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In the beginning, there were lack of knowledge and misunderstandings.

And also, sometimes people have no interest in it. Here are some examples. All these questions and opinions seem to me just an excuse for not starting the relay service. The first one is, "Budget is limited and cannot make an exception in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing people. Every person with disabilities should be treated equally."

Against this opinion, we argued that in many countries in

the world relay services are funded either by government or by telecommunication carriers. So these approaches can be applied in Japan as well.

And the second, "It is not the times of telephone anymore. The telephone is outdated and emails and chat suffice the needs."

We argued against this opinion. We need telephone, even though we frequently use emails and chat. You can't imagine that you don't use telephone in the rest of your life.

And third one, "It is not the time of human support anymore. AI solves the problems."

But in fact, although quality of voice recognition has been improved very much, it is not perfect yet. Also, in the case of sign language, the quality of automatic interpretation is far from practical use.

The next opinion was, "We were sent around one office to another."

Because sometimes it was thought the relay service is part of the matter of social welfare, and sometimes it was thought as the matter of telecommunications.

So when we talk to the Ministry of Social Welfare, people said, "Please consult the Ministry of Information."

And when we talk to Ministry of Information, people said, "You should contact the Ministry of Social Welfare."

Like that.

And lastly, some people tried to ask us to prove the economic benefit of establishing relay service. But we thought accessibility of information and communication is the right of Persons with Disabilities. And it is not the matter of economically beneficial or not.

Next slide please.

We continued our effort and in the course of our

negotiation from many stakeholders, ocean and mountain accidents happened. The relay service were used to call rescues. Three cases have happened consecutively. And finally, unavailability of public relay services was questioned in the House of Councilors several times. As a result, in 2018, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said that relay service should be a public infrastructure in Japan and he ordered MIC to take charge of the legislation and implementation.

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In 2020, the law of relay services was enacted. And in 2021, we are designated as the sole relay service provider in Japan.

Here is the fundings scheme in Japan. Every telephone user is forcibly charged a small amount, say, six were year, equivalent to four to five cents per year, my telecom carriers. Then telecom carriers pay to telecommunications carriers association, which is called TCA, as a burden.

Then next, TCA gives the grant to us and we provide services using this grant.

MIC, as the responsible ministry, authorizes and supervises TCA and us.

Next slide please.

In the end of my presentation, I'm talking about challenges. One is caption telephone service. It is highly desired by Hard of Hearing people and elderly people who don't want to and/or are not good at type what they want to express. And the other is to fill the shortage of skilled sign language interpreters, especially those who can work overnight.

And lastly, after we established a stable system in our country, we strongly hope to help other countries to set

up relay service as a public service. Thank you very much.  
>> ANDREA SAKS: Thank you, Mr. Ishii-san. I think you have illuminated a lot of the problems and you have certainly come a long way from when we met ten years ago. I am extremely pleased at some of the progress that you have made and it is a very valuable lesson you're giving the world right now.

Thank you.

We will keep going.

And at the end of all our speakers we will open the floor for questions and comments.

I would like to now introduce Gunnar Hellstrom. He's from Sweden. He was one of the founders of the first accessibility resolution that was done, standard, that was done in the ITU, the International Telecommunications Union, which is part of the UN. He was one of the first people to start a relay service in Europe, in Sweden. There's a lot I could say but I'll let him speak for himself. Please go ahead, Gunnar.

>> GUNNAR HELLSTROM: Thank you. Thanks for inviting me. It's a pleasure to be here.

And I have a set of slides. I hope they can be shown. I want to talk about some trends in communication that we must take care of now in relay services.

Otherwise, we will lose the good benefit of relay services in the future.

As Seth also said, we have a lot to still develop and communication develops and we must follow on.

So next slide please.

We heard that the principle of relay service is to provide modality conversion. There are a couple of types. There is sign language to speech. There is text to speech.

There are a couple of variants for speech to speech. So

by that, we can make sure that everybody can handle interpersonal communication regardless of how they communicate. The first text relay services were introduced in the 1970s. And the first public video relay services for sign language was introduced in 1997 in Sweden and Texas, nearly in parallel. And the picture here shows approximately how the video phones looked at that time, with huge PCs or dedicated video phones.

Using the ISDN network, which gave barely suitable quality for sign language. It was a bit shaky, but we managed. Now, the current relay services, they assume that the speaking part has a telephone, with a telephone number. That is one of the problems I will show we have.

We have now left the problems with quality. We had an enormous development making it possible to have good sign language and text and voice calls from anywhere with mobile phones, and increased network speed. So such quality problems are gone.

But the problems to keep up with communication development is still there.

So there are some trends in electronic communication, which really threaten the usability of the current relay services. We need to follow the trends and that is what I want to present.

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So the first trend we must visit is the non-number-based calling. Speech calls are more and more often called without using a phone number. You click on a button, you click on a name on the screen, you get a link from a friend, you click on that link, and the call is made without a phone number. So relay services must follow on and need to open for non-number-based calling. The picture here shows what you'll usually see. There's no number. It's just

a camera or a handset to click on, to make your call. Now, what do we need? We need regulation and we need inventions. In Europe, we are happy the regulation is ready for a move to a non-number-based calling. We have the electronic European communication code, EECC, a directive of the Commission and also the European Accessibility Act, the EAA. These both require relay services to operate on a non-number-based calling, as well as the old number-based methods. So, so far, it's good. But the relay services do not seem to be ready. The technology must be improved. And also, of course, the other regions must do the same as done in Europe to make your regulations be agnostic to how the call is made. And let's see what more trends we have found. Next slide please.

Number two is multiparty calling. More and more calls are made with more than two parties in the call. Remote meetings have become very common the last two or three years, as you know. And it is therefore essential that we have affordable and smooth access to such meetings with support of relay services. So that the meeting can be in general with voice, but some people participate by text, and others by sign language, and they're all communicate. Our European directives also require multiparty meetings in relay services. So it's good there. But again, technology must be improved. We see here that in currently, in this session, we have what we need to have very easily, smoothly started, multiparty call with people using different modalities and we have support from captioning and interpreters.

In that sense, we discovered that the text part, the real-time text, was not really ready for multiparty calling. So during last year, two new standards for

real-time text in multiparty situations have been created and are ready now to be included in the relay services. And of course, in everyday communication, as well.

The European Telecommunications Standards Institute, ETSI, is working on a report on more user level of this, about real-time text, where we point out that multiparty is ready and how it can be done.

The audience here was not part of the setup of this call, but if you had been, you would have seen that it's not really smooth yet to get different interpreters into the picture and make them visible and so on. So definitely there is more development to do in this area.

And next slide please.

Next observation is that communication is moving to the web. More and more calls are made with real-time web communication technology. So you start from a web page, or from an app, with web communication. And therefrom, you make your connection. And it's not really the old telecom operators anymore that lead the communication. Again, the European directives are valid, also, for this case. It's technology agnostic. But here, as well, relay services need to be moving to web-based calling. I mention that we had two new standards for real-time text, and one of them is for web-based calling with real-time text. So there, it's good. It just needs to be implemented.

It's also interesting to observe that the interoperability moves from being required from operators to relay be required from web browser software. The web browsers must handle this web-based communication technologies in the same way. So that you can get the whole call and whatever is needed in the media in the call through, between all devices.

So therefore -- and also, accessibility requirements must be met. So even if you make your web software for communication, you need to remember that there are people who need screen readers. There are people who need Braille displays. And they all need to work properly with every communication software that are placed nowadays in web pages. So that's a challenge.

So next slide please.

So we have seen three developments. The goal of relay services is to make interpersonal communications most simple and affordable when different parties use different communication modalities.

And we need to have them to continue in that way, also, with the new developments in communication.

So these trends, they should cause a rapid redefinition of relay services and their regulation and implementation, because of these things. One is the move to a non-number-based calling. The second was the move to multiparty calling. And the third was the move to web-based technology for calling.

So let us keep the usability of relay services following these trends.

And next slide please.

Is just a thank you for listening. Thank you.

>> ANDREA SAKS: Thank you, Gunnar. Thank you very much. What I've been doing is getting some feedback from different people about different questions. Some of which you have covered. And some which have not been covered as well.

Does anyone -- I'm going to ask the panel. Does anyone know how many relay services exist in the world? It looks like nobody knows. Is there somebody who is going to raise their hand and tell me? I don't see anybody doing that.



>> YASUNOBU ISHII: Hi. This is Yasunobu Ishii.

>> ANDREA SAKS: Ah, right, go.

>> YASUNOBU ISHII: We searched several years ago and at that time there was -- there were 25 countries, except for Japan. So I guess 26 or some more.

>> ANDREA SAKS: Thank you. I've come up against the number 26. But it is not really known. And this is something that I would like to see some researchers investigate. Thank you for that. That was the number we had before, when we met so long ago. So there must be more. And does anybody know, besides the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing who use relay services, who are not Deaf or Hard of Hearing? Here I am. I'm sorry. Somebody just asked me to do that.

If nobody is going to take that question on, it's an open question, I can very --

>> LIDIA BEST: Andrea?

>> ANDREA SAKS: Yes, is that you?

>> LIDIA BEST: Did you see my hand up?

>> ANDREA SAKS: I now see it. Go ahead if you'd like to take that question, Lidia.

>> LIDIA BEST: Thank you. For the UK and also in countries we talk about people who are autistic, people who do not really like to speak on the phone but prefer text communication, and also people with speech difficulties, it could be temporary or longer-lasting where you really need to be able to connect with companies, utilities, by the phone. Thank you.

>> ANDREA SAKS: Thank you, Lidia. I was hoping you would bring up persons who had autism because I didn't know that until we medicine a gentleman at the ITU who told me categorically that we use the Autistic Association, they use the relay services when they're available.

How many relay services are free and open or do you have to register to belong to them if you have the disability? That's the question. We know that people want to call into them who do not have disability that use the phone in the normal way, do not have to register, but is the practice of registration to use the relay service, if you are a person with a disability? Is this in practice in your relay services? Thank you. Gunnar?

>> GUNNAR HELLSTROM: Yes, in Sweden we do not register to the relay service. It can be used directly through web communication, but many users are instead members of a couple of communication operators who are kind of accessibility operators, having teleconversation devices. But the relay service itself does not require any registration.

>> ANDREA SAKS: Thank you. I'm going to switch to Seth for a minute to ask him to answer the question, because he actually works in the relay service business. Seth, can you answer that?

>> SETH BRAVIN: This is Seth. Just like in Sweden, individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or have Speech Disabilities, they have to register to use the relay service. It's one time only. The other end user who is hearing does not have to register. At the same time, it does require a lot of awareness and education, because sometimes someone who has never used a relay service or received a relay service call, they don't know who it's from. I remember calling many times when it was early in us providing that service and the other person would hang up because they didn't know who was calling. So I think that kind of awareness is also necessary. But registration is required in the United States.

>> ANDREA SAKS: Thank you, Seth. I have another question

for you in a second. I'm going to give Lidia the floor to keep the same question, Lidia, please?

>> LIDIA BEST: Thank you. So in the UK, for emergency services, we have a simple registration by sending to SMS 999 a text register, and then your mobile phone is connected automatically; we know you can use it. For general relay services, such as text relay in UK, Relay UK at the moment is the name. You do not have to register whatsoever. You just use it straight away by downloading an app. But at the same time, there is a restriction that you have to have where UK sim card, of course. So for services now, international, for example, sim card are not. Across Europe, there are all different areas. Sometimes there's registration. Sometimes there's not, even for emergency services, where it can be quite extensive registration required, even regarding private information, which should not have to be. So that's in UK and Europe. Thank you.

>> ANDREA SAKS: Thank you, Lidia. The thing I wanted to ask in relation to that, to Seth first, and then to anyone who would like to take the floor, when you travel, if you are a person who is autistic or a person who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing or does not use speech, how do you use a relay service in a foreign country? Or can you?

Seth, you want to take it?

>> SETH BRAVIN: Sure. This is Seth. That's a really great question. It actually depends on the type of relay you're trying to use. Text relay service or IP relay service that T-Mobile provides won't allow international phone calls whatsoever. We have a long history of fraudulent use, unfortunately, in the U.S., where people from other countries would use IP relay or text rely services who did not have a disability or a hearing loss.

But with video relay, it is a little bit different. So when I do travel to another country, for example, if I go to Germany, I have to notify the video relay service provider that I will be traveling to another country, and then they will enable me to make inbound calls to the United States. But while I'm in the United States, I can't make phone calls to other countries. And so it isn't quite as simple as it could be, and I think there's a lot of work that could be done. In other countries, I know it varies greatly, but for the United States, we still have some room for improvement in that area.

>> ANDREA SAKS: Thank you, Seth. Gunnar, you have your hand up.

>> GUNNAR HELLSTROM: Yes, I just want to complete the picture that in Sweden we have not had these problems with fraud. And we make the connection by internet. So there is no restriction. There's no check where the call is coming from. And we can call out on the hearing side, also, to international calls.

>> ANDREA SAKS: Thank you, Gunnar. Lidia, would you like to add to that?

>> LIDIA BEST: Yes. I would like to add to, actually, what Seth also has said. Because in general, it's not possible for everyone to use the internet. Not for everyone to have smartphones. Especially when it comes to people who are older, they are less likely to use smartphones for example and digital devices. That's one thing.

Another thing is the actual funding of relay services, which Mr. Ishii has made a point about Japan. The way the services are funded, they are nationally funded. That's why, like Seth has said, the government does not really allow to use international callers to use our services.

So if I am visiting U.S., I will not be able to use it, will I? Likewise, in UK, I can actually make a call to another country if somebody I want to speak to understands English well, anyway, but if I'm in any other country and I need access to services, when especially in European Union, when we have 1-1-2 emergency number, there is no real information about how to access it by text service or general relay service, but information is not there. The only information we know is how to actually call the services by making the actual call. Thank you.

>> ANDREA SAKS: Thank you. Lidia, I want to come back to you about something but first I want to ask that other question to Seth since he actually works for a relay services provider. How many relay services are in the United States? It's unique because in most countries there's only one, or it's on the internet. But in the United States, I understand there are more than one relay service provider. How does that work?

>> SETH BRAVIN: This is Seth. So for video relay service in the United States, we have I think four providers. Twenty years ago we had as many as 30 video relay service providers. But with the new FCC regulations put in place, as long as there were requirements, that number went down. For example, relay services must have in-house relay service providers, they can't contract that out, to prevent fraud and misuse. So a lot of companies ducked out, and we only have four right now. For IP relay service, T-Mobile is the only one providing that. For captioning services, there were five or six for a long time, but as automatic speech recognition is becoming prevalent in the United States and there are a large amount of people with hearing loss or those who are aging in the United States, I think there are seven or eight new

providers who have asked for conditional certification with the FCC. And that could be as many as maybe ten. We're seeing that grow every year. The FCC, the reimbursement rate for caption telephones has been decreasing. It's now 1.30 cents a minute because they're assuming that provision of that service is still going down in the way of using automated speech recognition. So there are some growing pains, I think, in that industry. So it really varies depending on which type of relay service we're focusing on. Lastly, for speech to speech, T-Mobile is also the only provider of that. It's a small population that uses it, but it's growing.

>> ANDREA SAKS: Would you explain what speech to speech is, please? And who would use it?

>> SETH BRAVIN: Sure. Absolutely. It's a really important service that many people are not very aware of. The operators are trained to understand a person who has a speech disability. To really understand the nuance of their speech and their language. They have that kind of training. And what they do is they respeak what the person is saying to the individual that they are calling. It's a third party who is still providing a type of relay service in that sense.

>> ANDREA SAKS: Okay. I have -- we only have two minutes left. And I would like to be able to, next year, at WSIS, have more time because we've only scratched the surface. What would you like to see happen with regard to international trade agreements between relay services like the telephone companies have? I will start with Lidia, please.

>> LIDIA BEST: I'm not exactly sure how to answer this question, to be honest. Because it requires probably much more insight, knowledge, of those kind of agreements. But

what we would like to see definitely is a way of allowing relay services to be used by service users whichever country we are in, in exactly the same way as anyone who has no hearing problems can simply pick up the telephone and call anywhere in the world when we need to. Thank you.

>> ANDREA SAKS: Thank you, Lidia. Seth, would you like to make a comment on that, too, please?

>> SETH BRAVIN: This is Seth. I think this is an opportunity for us to all work together to create that type of ecosystem. The ITU is going to play a really important role in making sure that that happens.

>> ANDREA SAKS: Okay. Now, Yasunobu Ishii, would you like to make a comment, please?

>> YASUNOBU ISHII: Yes. I would say we need to cooperate to provide less expensive system for relay service for developing countries that can be affordable for those countries. Thank you.

>> ANDREA SAKS: Thank you. That's a very important point. We don't have time to go into that one, thoroughly, but we will on the next one. Gunnar, would you like to make a comment, please?

>> GUNNAR HELLSTROM: Yes. If you look back to my trends, you see that communication is moving. It's not only the big operators anymore who are expected to set up or fund relay services. Communication comes from everywhere. So a completely new set of funding them is needed. Sweden has had tax funding of the relay services forever and that might be a way to merge the different kinds of funding and also different technologies.

And yes, the need is there for international relay services, whatever kind of technology we are using.

>> ANDREA SAKS: Thank you. We could go on. This is a subject that needs to be developed and talked about in

greater detail. How international travelers who need to use relay could actually use the relay of the country that they're in. I would like to propose that the next time WSIS does it that we have an hour and there are other people on the -- who are on the -- I can see them, who use relay services, and unfortunately, there's no time to ask them for questions. But I would like to say, I would like to thank our speakers very much for putting together their presentations. I would like to thank the wonderful sign language interpreters. We have two. We have ASL and BSL. We have two for each one. And I would like to thank our captioner. And we will be able to provide anyone who writes in to the Joint Coordination Activities on Accessibility and Human Factor, JCA-AHF -- it's a tongue twister. If you put my name, Andrea Saks, it will find me, and we would be happy to share that captioning dialogue with you at another time.

If there are no further questions at the moment that are terribly urgent, I'm afraid we have run out of time. Thank you everyone for attending, everyone for contributing, and I want to thank Kaoru Mizuno, our secretariat who helped me put this together, and thank Gent Bajrami in the Technical Department with WSIS, the young lady who helped us get this all together. I wish you all a very happy day, evening, or morning. Thank you very much for joining us. I think we will have to close.

(Session ends at 8:00 AM Central Time.)

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