ITU Forum on ICT Accessibility

ICT Accessibility A Requisite Towards An Inclusive Digital Society

23 February 2018, the Zero Project Conference - Vienna, Austria

WEB ACCESSIBILITY: DIGITAL CONTENT AND WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT

ITU ACTIONS AND KEY RESOURCES

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN IMPLEMENTING ICT ACCESSIBILITY

PROCUREMENT OF ACCESSIBLE ICTs

IMPACT OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN ON ICT PUBLIC SERVICE ACCESSIBILITY

TOWARDS ACCESSIBLE EUROPE 2018

ITU REGIONAL INITIATIVE FOR EUROPE ON ACCESSIBILITY, AFFORDABILITY AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL TO ENSURE DIGITAL INCLUSION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Held at the

Zero Project Conference 2018

Innovative Practices and Policies on Accessibility

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1. INTRODUCTION

ITU organised a Forum: "ICT Accessibility a Requisite Towards an Inclusive Digital Society", in Vienna, Austria, within the framework of Zero Project Conference, on 23 February 2018.

The Zero Project, an initiative of the Essl Foundation, focuses on the rights of persons with disabilities globally. Annually, the research and conferences focus on a particular theme from the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UN CRPD) with a sole objective to assist in creating a world without barriers. This year, the conference "Innovative Practices and Policies on Accessibility" was held from 21-23 February 2018 in Vienna (Austria). More information is available through the ITU Forum event webpage.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have a vital role for ALL people's empowerment and represent an enabler for inclusion in the society. For persons with disabilities (PwD) accessible ICTs can remove barriers and help them to have an independent life. Therefore, we should all join efforts to identify and remove barriers by all means to enable human development and social inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PwD). ITU is "committed to connecting the world" without any discrimination.

PP Resolution 175 (Rev. Busan, 2014) and WTDC Resolution 58 (Rev. Buenos Aires. 2017) on Telecommunication/information and communication technology accessibility for persons with disabilities and specific needs mandate the Telecommunication Development Bureau to undertake specific action to enhance digital inclusion of PwDs. The ITU Regional Initiative for Europe on ICT Accessibility for PwD, agreed at WTDC-17, is focused on tangible progress and concrete implementation of ICT Accessibility to ensure that access and use ICTs by PwDs, are the same as for other citizens in Europe region.

 The objectives of the ITU Forum are:

- To have a understanding of ITU's work in promoting accessible ICTs
- To inform on the top priorities of our Member States in implementing ICT accessibility as per WTDC-17
- To share key resources developed to support the implementation of ICT Accessibility globally

The Forum comprised of four presentations which were delivered by **Ms. Roxana Wiedmer-Iliescu** (Senior Programme Officer and ITU-D Focal Point for ICT Accessibility) and a moderator, **Ms. Monica Duhem** as ITU expert in web accessibility and representative from private sector, (Hearcolors, Mexico**),** **Ms. Amela Odobasic,** as government representative **(**Head of Public Affairs of Communications Regulatory Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina**)** and **Mr. Donal Rice,** as ITU expert in ICT accessibility and public procurement (National Disability Authority of Ireland)**.** Additionally, **Ms. Inmaculada Placencia,** Deputy Head of Unit for Rights of Persons with Disabilities within the Directorate General for Justice of European Commission both attended the Forum and indicated the European Commission support to the launch of the ITU proposed event "Accessible Europe" to be held on 11/12 December 2018.

2. PARTICIPATION

The session was attended by over 50 participants. Interactive discussions on accessible ICTs for an inclusive digital society will take place to share views and good practices.

The conference brought together almost 700 participants from all sectors of society (the Zero Project network and partners) from more than 70 countries. At the heart of the Zero Project Conference 2018, were presentations of 68 innovative practices, 15 innovative policies and 22 social indicators from 105 countries that contributed to the International Study that Zero Project issue yearly on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

3. PRESENTATIONS

Expert-led presentations were delivered on how to implement accessible ICTs and contribute to the development of inclusive society for Persons with Disabilities. The presentations are available at ITU Forum event page https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Regional-Presence/Europe/Pages/Events/2018/ZPC/ITU-Forum-ICT-Accessibility-a-Requisite-Towards-an-Inclusive-Digital-Society.aspx

Ms. Roxana Widmer-Iliescu introduced the ITU as a global network composed by leading representatives in ICT sector with over 1000 Members from 193 countries. In her presentation "ICT Accessibility Enables Communications for All", Ms. Widmer- Iliescu informed that ITU supports governments to develop ICT Accessibility policies and regulations, industry to define and manufacture new accessible ICTs, public and private sector partners to ensure that ICT access and services are accessible, affordable, equitable for All, as well as academia to empower people through technology education and training. Additionally, she stated that the activities of ITU-D in the field of digital inclusion are designed to promote the accessibility of ICTs and their use for the social and economic development for all.

The presentation explored the ICTs beyond a traditional concept informing that nowadays ICTs have a multi-faceted impact on our daily life as well as in the society as a whole. Furthermore, the presentation explained that globally over 1 billion people live with some form of disability. According to the 2017 U.N Report on World Population Ageing the number of older people (age 60 and above, who face age-related disabilities) is expected to grow up to 2.1 billion in 2050, and additionally, as per U.N. WHO-ITU Making Listening Safe Initiative, 1.1 billion youth are in danger of hearing loss due to their unsafe listening habits. It means that in the next 30 years the number of persons affected by a form of disability could include half of the world's population, all of whom require accessible information and communication technologies (ICTs). Accessibility for persons with disabilities should ensure equitable access to information and communication without limitation. The lack of affordability is also a barrier to access ICTs, and a Universal design was indicated as a mechanism for overcoming the barriers and enabling communication and information for All.

In her presentation "Role of Government in Ensuring Accessible ICT Ecosystem," **Ms. Amela Odobasic** spoke about the importance of ensuring political buy-in as a key component in ensuring accessible ICTs as well as by using the tools for mobilization to meet the international standards and implement existing best practices. In particular, she described the implementation cycle that was applied in Bosnia and Herzegovina which includes reaching out to governments to build political will as a cornerstone for the development of ICT policies and strategies, creating a roadmap of requirements to ensure implementation of accessible ICT policies and services, providing training available to all stakeholders, including policymakers. Besides, Ms. Odobasic emphasized that it is crucial to strengthen regional co-operation through ITU regional initiatives and events in line with the EUR Regional Initiative EUR3: "Accessibility, affordability and skills development for all to ensure digital inclusion and sustainable development" taken by ITU Members at the last WTDC-17 to reinforce the work on ICT Accessibility in the region.

Ms. Monica Duhem's presentation "Web Accessibility - Market Opportunity" focused on the market opportunity for web accessibility. Besides complying with laws, regulations and corporate responsibility, an accessible website also generates economic benefits. Globally, 9 out of 10 websites are not accessible because a very few developers and website designers know about web accessibility. Research has shown that companies that invest in User Experience (UX) see a lower cost of customer acquisition, lower support cost, increased customer retention and increased market share. Research-based estimates suggest that every dollar invested in UX brings 100 dollars in return. The presentation also noted the two drivers to create a market for web accessibility - education and awareness. The ITU's National Program on web accessibility "Internet for All" was pointed out as a good practice that brings in addition to the political buy-in of ICT accessibility in country, the curriculum and the creation of national capabilities in developing accessible digital content and website. Furthermore, it proposes a model that enables creation of a fund for developing digital training of persons with disabilities on the use of accessible websites. The International Association of Accessibility Professionals (IAAP) was also mentioned as a possibility of increasing the professionalization on web accessibility.

Mr Donal Rice's presentation "Achieving ICT accessibility through capacity building, training and education" provided a snapshot of some of the leading examples of capacity building resources and online training and education on ICT accessibility available today. The presentation highlighted at existing national and international accreditation systems for ICT professionals (e.g., Austria). The presentation also highlighted the key tools developed by ITU on policy and regulation guidelines on accessibility for a range of technology areas such as television, telecommunications and mobile phones, web accessibility, public access services and public procurement, which are freely available in all 6 UN languages and in accessible format (Model Policy Report). These resources are aimed at regulators and policymakers seeking to develop and improve policy provisions for ICT accessibility. The presentation considered two Massive online open courses, called MOOCs, one from Europe called "Digital Accessibility: Enabling Participation in the Information Society" and one from the USA, called "Information and Communication Technology Accessibility." The presentation also indicated the ITU available training materials and online courses on topics such as the public procurement of accessible ICTs, a new set of 3 self-paced training courses online as well as video tutorials in digital content that will become available this year.

4. INTERACTIVE DISCUSSIONS

Ms. Roxana Widmer-Iliescu initiated a discussion about the ITU organization of the "1st Accessible Europe" regional forum to be held on 11/12 December 2018 and invited **Ms. Inmaculada Placencia,** Deputy Head of Unit for Rights of Persons with Disabilities within the Directorate General for Justice of European Commission to join ITU in the launching of this event. The interactive discussion was jointly moderated by Ms. Widmer-Iliescu and Ms. Placencia.

Ms. Widmer-Iliescu highlighted that "Accessible Europe" is in line with:

- ITU goal no. 2 on "Inclusiveness" target 2.5 that calls for "*enabling accessible environments in all countries by 2020*";
- The ITU Members decisions brought at the last WTDC-17 in which implementation of ICT Accessibility, web accessibility, in particular, was identified as a priority;
- The EUR Regional Initiative EUR3: "Accessibility, affordability and skills development for all to ensure digital inclusion and sustainable development" taken by ITU Members at the last WTDC-17 to reinforce the work on ICT Accessibility in the region,

and asked the participants to identify key topics, issues and/or concerns related to ICT Accessibility implementation in Europe that should be discussed during this Accessible Europe event.

The participants indicated several concerns and topics as key, including:

o Awareness raising in ICT accessibility (among all stakeholders involved) and how to put it into practice?
o Implementation of ICT Accessibility in EU (what: existing regulation, policies, standards to be followed and which are the tools available)
o Web accessibility (from understanding the need to provide accessible content through accessible websites; who benefits and the positive impact for the government, the private sector, industry up to end users and how to do it?)
o Mobile accessibility features available and the importance of extending the accessible content (from web to mobile-considering that mobile is the device most used for all type of communication, including access to Internet content and services)
o Public procurement (positive impact on governments, industry and end users /tools available)
o International best practices that can be replicated in the EU (to avoid duplication of efforts and learn for other countries/regions challenges).

Ms. Placencia presented the support by the European Commission to the launch of the 1st event "Accessible Europe" and explained the current situation in ICT Accessibility at EU level. She indicated that the EU has in place concrete guidelines and standards developed that are available to the countries beyond the EU membership, to encourage them in the implementation process. **Ms. Placencia** also explained that it is important that accessible information and communication are available to all including accessible content (reinforcing the role of accessible content in education) and accessible websites. Public procurement was noted as an efficient instrument in ensuring accessible ICT in line with the EU Directive on public procurement.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions from the ITU Forum are

- Accessible ICTs are "Win for all"
    o Persons with disabilities can have an independent life like persons without disabilities;
    o Governments ensure that all citizens have access to information and communications, education, public services (e-health, emergency, etc.) and work market;
    o Industry/manufacturers/private sector create a market for accessible ICTs and increase their business value (extend the number of their customers).
- Accessibility should be envisaged from the Universal Design perspective, which has both economic and social benefits
    o Economic benefits include: increase in sales, client acquisition, search engine positioning, more visibility, profitability, competition diversity and increase in market share;
    o Social benefits include government for all, online banking, access to information, online education, social responsibility and independent living.
- Raising awareness in ICT accessibility and capacity building are key components
    o Governments are implementing their obligations towards their citizens and achieving inclusive digital societies;
    o PwD are made aware of the available products and services that can facilitate their life and increase their social inclusion and economic development;

- o Universities recognize the value of increasing their curriculum on ICT accessibility;
  - o Private sector companies are learning about the market value that digital accessibility can provide.
- Existing guidelines, tools, courses to enlarge expertise and competence on ICT accessibility
  - o ITU and other organisations are developing guidelines, tools and training courses aiming to develop capacity on ICT accessibility at international and/or national level.
  - o These courses provide excellent learning opportunities for policymakers, regulators, public procurement professionals, and ICT professionals as well as for all who were wished to understand and learn about policy and practice on ICT accessibility.
- ICTs must be accessible and affordable for All. ACCESSIBLE EUROPE is an ITU led initiative welcomed by all participants with interest. Topics proposed by participants to be addressed at ACCESSIBLE EUROPE are:
  - o Awareness for ALL
  - o Implementation in EU
  - o Web Accessibility
  - o Mobile Accessibility
  - o Public Procurement
  - o International Best Practices for consideration in EU