

Question 20/1: Access to telecommunication services for people with disabilities

1 Statement of the situation

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 600 million people 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, the increase in life expectancy results in elder persons having a reduction in their capabilities. Thus, it is likely that the number of persons with disabilities will continue to increase.

The inclusion in society of persons with disabilities is a policy in 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 their 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, during 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.

Persons with disabilities face particular difficulties to access and make use of telecommunication services. Under the principles of equal opportunity and non-discrimination, access to telecommunications for persons with disabilities must be equivalent to that enjoyed by the rest of the population. Additionally, improving access to telecommunication services for persons with disabilities may contribute to their personal development and social integration and improve their economic conditions. However, only in few countries have solutions been implemented for persons with disabilities which have made possible or improved access to telecommunication services.

In this context, countries that have implemented policies, strategies and actions to eliminate the obstacles that persons with disabilities face in regard to access to telecommunication services may cooperate with those which have not yet implemented such policies. Taking into account that a great number of persons with disabilities are located in developing and in least developed countries (LDC), it is desirable that the administrations in those countries should be provided with a comprehensive report regarding the policies and technological solutions that will enable the implementation of adequate accessibility to telecommunications for persons with disabilities.

2 Question for study

Analyse policies and strategies to promote, develop and implement the most advanced technological solutions to enable equal access to telecommunication services for 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 (LDC), to design policies and execute strategies for promoting and implementing services and solutions which provide access to

telecommunication services for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, the report will help Member States and Sector Members identify commercial best practices that telecommunication service providers should apply in relation to persons with disabilities.

The report should contain the regulatory policies necessary for ensuring accessibility to telecommunications for persons with disabilities, 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 minimum desirable access to telecommunication services;
- c) a suggested schedule to Member States for the implementation of policies and strategies;
- d) an economic cost evaluation and a comparison of the available technological solutions;
- e) a recommendation of commercial best practices applied by service providers for overcoming the special difficulties faced by persons with disabilities face in accessing telecommunication services.

4 Timing

These activities should be included in the programme of activities of ITU-D Study Group 1 for the period 2006-2010, as a new Question.

4.1 Mid-term report is expected by 2008.

4.2 Final report is expected by 2009.

5 Proposers

Mexico/CITEL

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 telecommunication services.

7 Target audience

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

a) Target audience

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

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

b) Proposed methods for implementation of the results

As a result of the Question, Study Group 1 could, in close cooperation with ITU-T Study Group 16 (Question 26/16), draw up a report for distribution to Member States, Sector Members and relevant international, regional and civil-society organizations.

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 facing special difficulties.

8 Proposed methods of handling the Question or issue

Within Study Group 1, in close cooperation with ITU-T Study Group 16 (Question 26/16).

9 Coordination

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.

10 Other relevant information
