

Accessible Americas: *Information and Communication for ALL*
12 – 14 November 2014
Sao Paulo, Brazil

**Guidelines for Promoting ICT Accessibility for
Persons with Disabilities in the Americas Region**

Preamble

We, the participants in the Accessible Americas: Information and Communication for ALL regional conference, held in Sao Paulo, Brazil from 12 – 14 November 2014, would like to thank the hosts, the Municipal Secretariat for People with Disabilities and Reduced Mobility, the organizers of **Accessible Americas: *Information and Communication for ALL***, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the representation in Brazil of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the National Secretariat for the Promotion of the Rights of People with Disabilities of the Human Rights Secretariat of the Presidential Cabinet of the Brazilian Republic (SDH) and the sponsors.

Every day, persons with disabilities face a range of barriers and challenges ranging from lack of access to information, to lack of access to education and employment— all of which can be alleviated through equitable access to ICTs. This regional conference recognizes that the promotion of ICT accessibility, across web, television, mobile and public access platforms, enables persons with disabilities to fully leverage ICTs for their social and economic empowerment and provides benefits for all members of society by improving the general usability of ICT products and services.

We recognize that accessible ICTs play a key role in promoting the social, cultural and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities. Inclusive and accessible ICTs can be used to address the needs of persons with different kinds of disabilities, to the extent that they encourage personalized lifelong learning, employment and social participation. To this end, we invite the hosts, the organizers, ITU, SDH and UNESCO, the sponsors and the participants of the conference to promote these guidelines and support their practical implementation.

We also call on the governments of the countries of the region, intergovernmental agencies, in particular the ITU, UNESCO, SDH, regional organizations, civil society, organizations representing persons with disabilities, and the private sector to become leaders in promoting ICT accessibility within their respective working areas.

As a result of the discussions held these past three days, we propose a set of guidelines including principles and actions needed to support implementation of ICT accessibility in the Americas Region.

Principles

We identify the following principles to guide all relevant stakeholders to support ICT accessibility for persons with disabilities to ensure more inclusive societies. There is need to:

1. Strengthen existing laws, policies and regulations, and where necessary develop new frameworks to take into account ICT accessibility and the rights of persons with disabilities, in close consultation and collaboration with persons with disabilities;
2. Promote accessible and affordable ICT products and services and support their on-going development;

3. Raise public awareness about ICT accessibility;
4. Use public procurement policies and practices to improve the lives of persons with disabilities;
5. Strengthen the use of ICTs for the education of persons with disabilities;
6. Use accessible ICTs and providing ICT skills and capacity building as a means to promote employment of persons with disabilities;
7. Encourage the use of accessible ICTs to promote human rights; and
8. Promote cross-sectorial collaboration to empower persons with disabilities.

Guidelines

We identify the following guidelines to support the practical application across the region of ICT accessibility for persons with disabilities to ensure more inclusive societies:

(1) Strengthen existing national and local laws, policies and regulations, and where necessary develop new frameworks to take into account ICT accessibility and the rights of persons with disabilities, in close consultation and collaboration with persons with disabilities by:

- Reviewing and updating policy, legal and regulatory measures, to promote accessible mobile services, public ICT access, television/video programming, government websites and public sector procurement policies;
- Including ICT accessibility as a goal of universal access and service frameworks;
- Encouraging the use of available public funding such as universal service funds for projects and initiative that improve ICT accessibility and benefit persons with disabilities;
- Ensuring that emergency communications are accessible for persons with disabilities, including through the ability to send texts and/or video relay, where technically feasible, and to receive public service notifications in accessible formats;
- Promoting standardization across the region to achieve economies of scale to lower cost and ensure interoperability; and
- Including persons with disabilities in all public consultations on ICT accessibility policies, legislation and regulations.

(2) Promote accessible and affordable ICT products and services and supporting their on-going development through:

(a) Mobile

- Taking into consideration the input of users through advocacy groups and the disability community in general in designing products and services
- Urging mobile operators and retailers to provide a range of accessible handsets and other devices for different types of disabilities;
- Encouraging operators and service providers to offer accessible points of sale and customer care services and to train sales and customer service staff to serve customers with disabilities;
- Promoting the introduction of special and/or discounted mobile rate plans for persons with disabilities, for example text only plans for consumers who are deaf and hard of hearing;
- Promoting voice recognition and text-to speech interfaces to ensure local relevance in the countries of the Americas region;

- Encourage the development of accessible mobile applications by academia, start ups and local entrepreneurs;

(b) Television/Video Broadcasting

- Promoting accessible broadcasting in preparation for the broadcasting of the 2016 Paralympic Games which will, for the first time, be hosted in the Americas region;
- Encouraging national regulatory authorities to set targets, by type of programme, for the percentage of video programming that offers closed captioning, signing and audio description, in particular for news, public, health and emergency broadcasts and children's programming;
- Advising persons with disabilities about the availability of accessible programming;
- Promoting fair and equitable representation of persons with disabilities in television programming;
- Encouraging the adoption of quality of service standards for broadcasting services;

(c) Government and Private Websites

- Promoting measures, to ensure that persons with disabilities have access, on an equal basis with others, to public and private websites, services, applications and content that are compliant with recognised standards,
- Setting targets to ensure that government and private sector websites are accessible for persons with different kinds of disabilities;
- Promoting the frequent evaluation and assessment of the accessibility of public sector websites across the region;
- Ensuring that government contracts for website development require websites to be accessible;
- Providing guidance and training for academic institutions and professional societies to develop courses for computer science students and information technology professionals about web accessibility;
- Providing training to government and private web developers on web accessibility, including on accessibility testing tools and procedures.

(3) Raising public awareness about ICT accessibility by:

- Ensuring that key information is published in accessible formats and made available for persons with disabilities whether in written or spoken form, or in sign language.
- Engaging in accessible public outreach programs;
- Encouraging collaborative work with industry and organisations of persons with disabilities to develop universally designed products;
- Supporting awareness campaigns and training stakeholders, including persons with disabilities, on the use of accessible ICT services and products; this involves awareness of new features as well as functionalities that are embedded in existing products;

(4) Strengthening the use of ICTs for the education of persons with disabilities through:

- Encouraging strategic and practical applications for use of accessible ICTs for social inclusion, improved education, communications, emergency services and in workplaces;
- Including ICT accessibility in the university curricula;

(5) Using accessible ICTs and providing ICT skills and capacity building as a means to promote employment by persons with disabilities by:

- Creating accessible employment environments;
- Establishing national policies to ensure that a portion of available vacancies are accessible to persons with disabilities;

(6) Encouraging the use of accessible ICTs to promote human rights by:

- Using accessible ICTs to promote access to information, culture and leisure thus enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively and equally in the information society;
- Using accessible ICTs to save lives though ensuring that emergency communications (equipment and services) are equipped with accessible tools and available in situations of risk.

(7) Using procurement policies and practices to ensure that public services are made accessible for persons with disabilities and create market demand for accessibility features in ICT products and services by leveraging the purchasing power of the public sector by:

- Encouraging the alignment of operators' procurement policies, and encouraging operators to provide a range of accessible handsets and other devices for different types of disabilities;
- Promoting accessible public procurement and including ICT accessibility requirements needs in government calls for tender and establishing procedures to confirm the accessibility of ICT products and services to be procured;

(8) Promoting cross-sectorial collaboration to empower persons with disabilities by:

- Making the implementation of ICT accessibility a regional priority;
- Advancing annual regional meetings and fora such as the **Accessible Americas: Information and Communication for ALL** regional conference and complement them with online meetings in between the annual meetings to measure progress and as a platform for sharing best practices and experiences;
- Ensuring that the **II Accessible Americas: Information and Communication for ALL** conference is held in 2015
- Collaborating at sub-regional level and supporting development of capacity building and training programs to promote ICT accessibility for persons with disabilities.

CONCLUSION

We recall the exchange of experiences that has taken place over the three-day ITU/SDH/UNESCO **Accessible Americas: Information and Communication for ALL** conference, and, in particular, the successful case studies and models shared by speakers from

across the region and the world. The collegiality, professionalism and commitment of fellow *Conference* participants and the atmosphere of goodwill expressed by all present have reinforced our belief that implementation of these guidelines will play a critical role in promoting ICT accessibility and inclusive societies in the Americas region.