

ICTA's Submission to "CWG-Internet: Online Open Consultation (October 2015- January 2016)"

Today, accessing information and communication technologies (ICT) services have been an indispensable need. ICTs provide very important facilities and these facilities must be equally accessible for persons with disabilities so that disabled persons can live a more independent life and fully benefit from their rights.

In the preamble of the "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" it is stated that "Disability is an evolving concept, and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others." According to this approach, environmental factors have significant impact on the presence or extend of disability. Therefore, in order to eliminate the barriers, the factors that cause disability need to be addressed and the necessary actions need to be taken.

The factors that persons with disabilities may face when using ICT services can be named, inter alia; the high prices of accessible devices or software, lack of availability or variety of accessible services in the areas that have low profitability, difficulties faced during subscribing processes or other processes regarding the subscription, literacy rate, educational status, other demographics of the disabled persons, inaccessible websites and lack of public awareness.

The governments should take the necessary measures to eliminate the barriers mentioned above. Funding mechanisms can be created in order to ensure that the disabled persons benefit from ICT services in equal basis. These funds can be used in the purpose of promoting availability and choice of accessible services.

To ensure the availability of accessible devices in the ICT sector, it is important that the policy makers/regulators lead and encourage adopting and use of the universal design principles. Additionally, taking into account of the accessibility features in the public procurement processes can have benefits in several aspects. Procurement of the accessible ICTs can create an accessible ICTs market. Thanks to the economies of scale and expected increase of R&D activities in this area, it is possible to reduce the costs of the accessible ICTs.

In order to facilitate the subscription-related processes for disabled persons, provision of customer care services in alternative ways for convenience of disabled persons and increasing the accessibility of the existing customer care services are very important

The literacy rate, educational status and other demographics of the disabled persons need to be considered in evaluating the measures for disabled persons. Otherwise -for example- a text based solution recommended for the speech/hearing disabled persons can be ineffective due to the low literacy rate among persons with speech/hearing disability.

Enhancing the use of internet for disabled persons, accessibility of web sites is very important factor. The governments can take some measures to ensure the availability of web accessibility for public services and widen the scope to the private companies that provides publicly available services.

It is also important that the information related to accessible products/services designed specifically for the persons with disabilities is accessible as well.

The statistical information regarding persons with disabilities can be shared as an "open data". Therefore, the private companies and other sector players can have precise information on this area and can offer well-targeted services and products for the benefit of disabled persons.

For the purpose of raising awareness on accessibility, it is important that accessibility issue can be considered as a part of educational system such as including the accessibility in the curricula and training courses.