

ITU-Proposal for a Workshop “Making Accessibility a Reality in Emerging Technologies”

1. Concise formulation for “Accessibility in Emerging Technologies”

Users of telecommunications and information technology have a varied capability of handling information and the controls for its presentation. The source of this variation lies in cultural and educational backgrounds as well as on age-related functional limitations, in disabilities, and in other natural causes. It makes sound business sense for the largest number of people to have access to ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies). With the emerging baby boomer market and a generally increased life expectancy, more and more people will find themselves with e.g. impaired hearing and sight, in particular in the developing world, so it becomes more and more important to take into account accessibility needs.

It is important for new emerging networks and services to consider accessibility from the very beginning. When planning, developing, designing and distributing telecommunications equipment and services, developers should consider people with special requirements to ensure that they can gain the same benefits from ICT as the wider population.

The importance of the theme this workshop is to educate that standardization and implementation must go together. Not only do standards have to be written but they have to be implemented in society on a world-wide interoperable basis.

2. Name of organizer and stakeholder groups

Organizer: ITU. ITU has a wide-reaching network and influence including the developing world. ITU’s global membership comprises both governments and the private sector. ITU has also strong links to many international organizations who work on accessibility issues and development of ICT accessibility for furthering education and eliminating poverty in those areas where disabilities cause extreme exclusion and deprivation in every day life.

3. Importance of Theme

Although new information and communication technologies have provided substantial benefits, there is a possibility that older persons and persons with disabilities cannot enjoy these benefits due to a lack of accessibility to consume those telecommunication services. This issue is becoming more serious with the increasing percentage of aging persons worldwide. People can be permanently or temporarily disabled due to physical, environmental (e.g. a phone call in a noisy environment, or not being able to read an emergency warning in a foreign language) or cultural (e.g. spoken language diversity) conditions. Moreover, we will all grow old and lose abilities that we take for granted now, thus enlarging the part of the population that would benefit from accessible communication.

In response, some nations started to develop their own guidelines for telecommunications accessibility. In today’s world, however, telecommunications equipment moves freely across national borders. Thus, in order to enhance telecommunications accessibility, guidelines are indispensable not only domestically but also internationally. Therefore, we must all work together.

A necessary ingredient towards “total accessibility” is standardization. Standardization makes it possible, on a global scale, to connect equipment and services from different manufacturers. The most important goal of ITU-T’s accessibility activities is to make sure that newly developed standards contain the necessary elements to make services and features usable for people with as broad range of capabilities as possible. Standards describe how equipment interacts and defines the quality necessary for media to be usable for all. Standards should also describe suitable methods of

media delivery for people with disabilities, and are therefore essential for the provision of services accessible for all.

But standardization is not sufficient. It must go together with implementation. The importance of this theme this workshop is to educate people that not only do standards have to be written but that they have to be implemented in society on a world-wide interoperable basis.

Making accessibility a reality in emerging technologies will increase employment, educate the young who would otherwise not be educate, allows so many more individuals to participate in a more fulfilling independent life.

4. Conformity with the Tunis Agenda and the mandate of the IGF

The workshop would be part of the theme “Diversity” - “Access for marginalized and vulnerable groups of society, including older persons and persons with disabilities.”

5. Names and affiliation of panellists

Dr. Gregg Vanderheiden, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Gunnar Hellstrom, Omnitour; Andrea Saks, Independent Accessibility Advisor to ITU and US Department of State; Hiroshi Kawamura, Department for Welfare of Persons with disabilities, Japan; A. Dembélé, SOTELMA, Mali; Gunnar Fagerberg, European Commission; P. R. Amarasiri, T.R.C., Sri Lanka; Clara Luz Alvares, Mexico; Edwige Pissaloux, Robotic Laboratory, University of Paris, France; Rochester Institute of Technology; Dr James DeCaro (all to be confirmed).

6. Main actors in the field

- [APT - Accessibility and Usability \(AU\) Expert Group](#)
- [ITU-T SG 2 Question 3/2](#) "Human factors related issues for improvement of the quality of life through international telecommunications"
- [ITU-D SG 1](#) Question 20/1 "Access to telecommunication services for people with disabilities"
- [G3ict - the Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs](#)
- [ISO/IEC JTC1 Special Working Group on Accessibility](#) (SWG-A)
- [Telecommunications for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#) (TDI)
- [United Nations Enable initiative](#)
- European Commission

7. Similar events organized in the past

- *Accessibility I: ITU Takes Deaf People's Accessibility Needs Into Account (July 2003)*
The workshop "Accessibility I: ITU Takes..." highlighted the benefits of standardization for the deaf community as well as for manufacturers and service providers. Speakers included representatives from the manufacturing, service providing and academic communities. This workshop, 14-16 July 2003 Las Vegas Nevada USA, took place within the Telecommunications for the Deaf (TDI) Conference. The [event homepage](#) has the presentations and the [final report](#). A transcription of the session can be read [here](#).
- *Accessibility II: Communication by all means: Accessibility for all in telecommunications enabled by multimedia standards (October 2003)*
The workshop "Accessibility II: Communication by...", 13-17 October 2003 Geneva, briefed attendees on the status of standardization for accessibility enabled by multimedia communication as well as on societal support and on practical results from the implementation of all-inclusive communications facilities. Speakers included representatives from the standards-making bodies as well as authorities and the user community. Please see the [event homepage](#) and the [workshop report](#) for more details.

- "[Accessibility in New Emerging Networks and Services](#)", Joint ITU-T Workshop and IMTC Forum 2006 on "[H.323, SIP: is H.325 next?](#)" (San Diego, USA, 9-11 May 2006)
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