



# Regional ICT Accessibility Assessment Report for the Americas Region



## Background

From 12 to 14 November 2014, the participants in the **Accessible Americas: Information and Communication for ALL** regional conference, held in Sao Paulo, Brazil, shared challenges and best practices for promoting ICT accessibility. As a result of the discussions facilitated by ITU, a set of guidelines was developed including principles and actions needed to support implementation of ICT accessibility in the Americas Region, aiming at encouraging all relevant stakeholders to become leaders in promoting ICT accessibility within their respective working areas.

The following regional meeting on ICT accessibility, **Accessible Americas II**, held in Medellin, Colombia, from 4 to 6 November 2015, presented a milestone opportunity to deepen the regional commitment towards removing barriers faced by persons with disabilities and achieving an inclusive society through the development of concrete actions and changes on the ground, and the mainstreaming of accessible ICT in the regional telecommunication agenda framework.

In November 2016 **Accessible Americas III** was hosted by Mexico. Carried out in Mexico City, from 28 to 30 November 2016, the event focused on the importance of promoting accessibility policies by means of motivating policymakers, regulators, industry and academia of those policies. In addition to that, encouraging all the stakeholders concerned to work together with PwD in the expansion and inclusion of accessibility in all processes: legal framework; public access to ICTs; movable communications; television and video programming accessibility; web accessibility, mobile telephony, and public procurement of accessible ICTs. As a result, a compilation of “Good Practices and achievements in ICT Accessibility in the Americas Region” was prepared with the inputs attained from the questionnaire circulated in early 2016 and contributions from the participants of the event.

**Accessible Americas IV** presents a new format and a wider scope, embracing other groups with specific needs such as women and girls, youth and indigenous, on the third day of the event. After all, it is all about inclusion. As from 2018, this landmark event will blend all groups and will become **Accessible Americas: Information and Communication Technologies for ALL**. In addition to the stakeholders already involved, ITU hopes to host in **Accessible Americas V**, other organizations representing the newcomers groups.

This Assessment Report was prepared based on the inputs received from ITU Members and has the objective of picturing the scenario of ICT accessibility in the Americas. ITU wishes to thank all those who contributed or spared no effort in promoting our questionnaire and we hope this report, along with the updated document on good practices can be useful to us all.

***More than ever we must work together as to create a society  
that includes rather than divides!***



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## 1. GENERAL OVERVIEW

Persons with disabilities (PwD) face a range of barriers and challenges relating to access to information, education and employment, which can be relieved through equitable access to ICTs and, in this sense, the work of legislators, policy makers and regulators is decisive in the context of cost and availability of required conditions and equipment.

As a result of ITU-D efforts to raise visibility on ICT accessibility policies to its Members is the regional series of Accessible Americas events. The series began in 2014 with the realization of the first event in Brazil, followed by the 2015 and 2016 editions, carried out in Colombia and in Mexico, respectively. The Accessible Americas event became one of the main events in the Americas which deals with ICTs' accessibility for people with disabilities.

After three cycles of information gathering it is possible to notice that the countries are at different but consistent stages of advancement in the promotion of ICT accessibility when compared where we were back in 2014, when the first Accessible Americas took place.

The main objective of this report is to provide a regional summary on the policy commitments countries are undertaking in regard to ICT accessibility and therefore identify some of the major emerging trends and examples of commitments that add relevant values to make ICTs accessible.

This assessment may be used to also highlight good practices that can inspire other countries to tackle new challenges but, besides that, now we have the document that compiles the “**Good practices and achievements in ICT accessibility in the Americas Region**”, which we hope will not only inspire but encourage all stakeholders to a multilateral partnership and to play a leadership role in making ICTs accessible for all.

What we are looking for is to make the Americas region more inclusive through the use of Information and Communication Technologies. We all know that ICTs are a tool for inclusion.



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ICTs create new opportunities for social inclusion, improve human development, contribute to poverty reduction and influence and generate a positive impact when used in schools. ICTs are indispensable for citizen participation in society and an exercise of the rights to information and communication.

## 2. THE DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

It was decided to make use of a questionnaire as it is the most popular method of data collection. The use of a questionnaire is easier and a large number of respondents can be reached. Because we needed the participation of a large number of respondents it was sent electronically to all ITU Members in the Americas region. The use of a questionnaire was considered to be the best method for data collection in this case, mainly because it allows sufficient time for respondents to read, understand the questions and prepare their replies but regrettably, we generally end up with a very low rate of return. This year, ITU has sent **215** questionnaires to ITU Members in the 35 ITU Member States in the region and only eleven (11) administrations returned it dully filled. ITU believed that there would be some progress in the number of responses, but when we compare to last year, when 12 out of the 35 Member States contributed, this year's result shows that we need to work even harder to promote the questionnaire and increase the number of responses.

Considering the number of our target-public, methods such as observation or interview would not be feasible and therefore the questionnaire was chosen as being more effective. ITU trusts that the number of respondents is surely to increase in the coming years in light of the published successful achievements by the countries.

In addition to the questionnaire, a strong effort was made using the Internet in search of related news that could help ITU to complement the information received and to prepare the document "***Good practices and achievements in ICT accessibility in the Americas Region***" and design a better and more reliable prospect in regards of ICT accessibility in the Americas. Only



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official governmental websites and those of well-known organizations were considered in the research, such as the Global Alliance on Accessible Technologies and Environments (GAATES), which is the leading international organization dedicated to the promotion of accessibility of the built and virtual environments.

### 3. THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The main questions of the questionnaire can be summarized as follows:

- ❖ What are your (organization/institution/company) major achievements in implementing ICT accessibility policies?
- ❖ What were your (organization/institution/company) major challenges faced in implementing ICT accessibility policies?
- ❖ What approaches, steps or specific measures have proven to be most successful in promoting ICT accessibility for your (organization/institution/company)?
- ❖ According to your experience which of these specific approaches, steps or actions should be a priority to facilitate and accelerate the goal of achieving an inclusive society in the Americas Region?
- ❖ What concrete actions have been implemented by your (organization/institution/company) to improve the quality and availability of accessible ICTs products and services for persons with disabilities?
- ❖ What has been done by your (organization/institution/company) to strengthen the awareness of national stakeholders to upgrade knowledge, develop their expertise and skills to promote ICT accessibility policies and programmes?
- ❖ In addition to the actions identified before, are there any other elements or actions in your (organization/institution/company) agenda as immediate next steps to contribute to the implementation of ICT Accessibility in Americas Region?



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- ❖ In your view, and according to your experience what more your company/institution/organization can do in order to promote the goal of ICT accessibility in your country?
- ❖ In your view and according to your experience what more other stakeholders (a. civil society including organizations of persons with disabilities and other NGOs; b. international organizations; c. telecommunication agencies and d. academic institutions) should/could do in order to promote the goal of ICT accessibility in your country/Americas region?
- ❖ Please indicate if there is any specific issue/suggestion that you would like to bring to the attention of the participants to Accessible Americas IV, which can help to promote and accelerate the implementation of ICT Accessibility in your country/region.

This year’s edition of the questionnaire brought a set of three specific questions addressed to Administrations and/or Managers of the Universal Services Funds for Telecommunications:

- ❖ What is the effective total amount of the assets of the Fund available for accessibility projects and programmes (in USD)?
- ❖ What percentage of the Fund’s assets, effective and available, is committed and in implementation of accessibility projects (planned and implemented)?
- ❖ How many projects include within the technical criteria, the explicit incorporation of attention/care to people in vulnerable condition? And what is the budget?

Group	Number of Projects	Budget in USD
Persons with Disabilities		
Elderly		
Indigenous People		
Gender (women and girls)		



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Respondents were requested to return the form in a PDF format as to ensure the accuracy of the information provided.

## 4. COUNTRIES THAT SUBMITTED CONTRIBUTIONS

The following countries have responded the questionnaire:

- Argentina
- Brazil
- Colombia
- Costa Rica
- Ecuador
- Grenada
- Mexico
- Panama
- Paraguay
- Peru
- Trinidad and Tobago

## 5. MAJOR CHALLENGES

The analysis of the gathered information offered a clear perspective of the major challenges faced by National Governmental Regulation Branches in dealing with the promotion of accessibility for ICTs and implementing an ICT accessibility agenda. Among those we can highlight:

- Logistic and economic challenges;
- Need to adjust existing regulation;
- National competition among projects seeking funding from the limited resources for Universal Service initiatives;
- Lack of up-to-date information regarding subjects bound by national Law on Accessibility to the information of the Web pages;



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- Achieve consensus with the sector of the digital ecosystem to provide programs, projects and regulations;
- Coordination of the different institutions that make up the digital ecosystem around the needs of the persons with disabilities;
- Lack of information regarding ICT accessibility and of an assessment study on the current accessibility status of telecom services and ICTs in the country;
- Lack of specialized professionals on accessible websites;
- Lack of knowledge on the accessibility features that a website should have;
- Lack of knowledge in regard to the universe of PwD in the country, as well as their needs and expectations in relation to the telecommunication services;
- Prepare a diagnosis on the accessibility needs for the premises of the regulator, considering its location in areas declared as historical heritage, a situation which hinders infrastructural changes;
- Public bodies and private institutions responsible for the subject matter (disability) have insufficient knowledge of public telecommunications services and consumer protection;
- Establish appropriate incentives for Operators to offer special rated plans for PwD;
- Establish a national policy framework to promote ICT accessibility;
- Identify and develop effective strategies;
- Implement accessible content and services;
- To monitor and assess the implementation of accessibility related projects and initiatives;
- To raise awareness of service operators/providers on the importance of investing in accessible ICTs;
- Limited resources for ICT projects on accessibility;
- Ensure continuity of projects initiated by former authorities;
- To raise awareness of the general public on the importance of ICT accessibility policies and on the rights of PwD;
- Innovation on accessibility technologies;
- Price and scale to acquire accessible solutions;
- To compile and update a manual of good practices, with specific examples of successful projects and initiatives;





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- To establish an exchange network to share relevant information relating to ICT accessibility;
- Build a shared vision on the use of Universal Service Funds to reduce the digital divide in vulnerable populations, such as persons with disabilities;
- Build a national information system on the access of persons with disabilities to telecommunication and ICT services;
- Establish financing mechanisms with financial and technical capacity to support policy initiatives and projects to promote accessible ICTs;
- Monitor/supervise the compliance of national regulations and guidelines;
- Carry out a complete assessment of the needs of the visually impaired people and structure a complete guide in regards to the educational and social benefits of ICTs and be able to reach different areas at national level.

## 6. MOST APPOINTED SUCCESSFUL APPROACHES OR SPECIFIC MEASURES

Among respondents the majority have highlighted the following approaches, steps or specific measures as the most successful, according to their specific case:

- Insert the country in the emerging international support Agenda, creating fair and equitable opportunities for the development and labor inclusion of PwD;
- Replicating successful experiences from other countries has been very useful;
- Reviewing policies in force;
- Using an experimental approach to raise awareness of the reality faced and lived by a PwD in our society in general;
- Capacity building programs: i) Assistive technologies tools; ii) Awareness raising, communication tools and information access to PwD; iii) Mobile classrooms project to bring ICT to unserved areas and raise public awareness – the project foresees hydraulic or electric lift for PwD, a work place with a basic kit for people with physical, intellectual and sensorial learning disabilities, “big keys” keyboard and mouse flexible support;
- Defining inclusive public policies in the telecommunication sector and the information society;
- Creating permanent working groups to build strategies for the implementation of accessible policies;



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- Using the rights approach: promoting access to information and knowledge of their rights as users of public services of telecommunications through workshops and informative talks, as well as circulation material in accessible formats;
- Preparing specific documentation, guidelines and recommendations to improve the accessibility of web sites and digital documents;
- Adjusting automatic evaluation of web accessibility tools;
- The institutionalization of the authority to apply the law on “accessibility of the information in web pages”;
- Adopting an Action Plan for the Attention of the Users with Disability of Public Telecom Services;
- Preparing and sharing guidelines and recommendations, documenting the experience of organizations that have implemented good practices so these good practices can be replicated by others;
- Elaborating and adopting ICT standards in regard to accessibility;
- Adopting the "Guidelines for Web Accessibility 2.0 (WCAG 2.0)" within the national public administration;
- Developing a first version of a tool to assess the accessibility of web sites;
- Discussing with relevant stakeholders to find out how to remove barriers in the use of telecommunication/ICT services;
- Increasing research on issues related to ICT accessibility and consulting with related organizations;
- Creating a database to exercise an effective control over those bounded by the national law;
- Strengthening the role of related NGOs;
- Capacity building on accessibility for public agents;
- Improving relationship among governmental entities and providing technical recommendations on the issue of ICT accessibility and establish minimum requirements that need to be complied by the public administration (such as accessible websites, accessible work-stations for PwD.
- Reviewing policies that restrict the promotion of accessibility and support to accessible ICTs;
- Public policies and long-term programs and projects;
- Public-private and public-public partnerships;
- Building solutions from the basis, beginning, involving target-population;



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- Providing information to persons with disabilities on their rights because they lack information and this generates a lack of interest of those users to access the benefits offered by ICTs;
- Using the Universal Service Funds to identify the gaps which exist in telecommunications and utilizing the fund to promote access;
- Implementing accessible social inclusion alternatives through government projects and initiatives and contribute in events on the different social aspects in order to change the collective imagination in relation to the disability thematic.
- Public-private partnership for the provision of the following accessible channels:
  - Web accessibility: free distribution of JAWS and MAGIC software to private companies to be used to make accessible their content and web sites;
  - Telephone accessibility: work with companies Call-Centers to ensure accessibility for deaf people;
  - Face-to-face accessibility: provision of adequate service for deaf and blind people, with availability of sign language and accessible information for the visually impaired, with understandable and easy navigation digital content.
- Training and socialization of entities and companies have achieved important results towards the universal accessibility of digital content for the access to information and communication;
- Launching of a “web accessibility stamp” for entities and companies that promote inclusion in their web sites.

## 7. SUGGESTED ACTIONS THAT STAKEHOLDERS SHOULD PRIORITIZE FOR ACHIEVING AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY IN THE AMERICAS REGION

The respondents have appointed several approaches/actions that stakeholders should prioritize in order to accelerate the goal of achieving an inclusive society in the Americas. The report highlights those that have been suggested by two or more respondents.

- ✓ Strong collaboration with members of the PwD community is deemed as a priority to facilitate and accelerate the goal of achieving an inclusive society as they know best what their needs are and what works bests for them.
- ✓ Long-term comprehensive and shared vision on the access, service, safe use with universally accessible content by means of policies, plans and specific projects;



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- ✓ Think actions and initiatives taking in consideration the target populations in accordance to their different conditions/needs: persons with disabilities, elderly, indigenous, women and girls;
- ✓ Elaboration and adoption of ICT standards in regard to accessibility and adoption of a monitoring system to control compliance by organizations;
- ✓ Rights and mainstreaming approaches should be applied: the first empowers PwD by knowing their rights they are better able to enforce them and the second implies that policies be designed considering the needs of all users;
- ✓ Open space for innovation through partnerships;
- ✓ Creation of a regional data-base where countries can update information related to their achievements and progress in relation to ICT accessibility;
- ✓ Coordination and joint work directly with PwD and related institutions, foundations and federations;
- ✓ Tailor-made projects and initiatives considering each specific group with disability, understanding that access and appropriation of technologies is differently achieved by each group;
- ✓ More financial resources for social investment;
- ✓ Dissemination of information is a key point not only to reach persons with disability but the entire telecommunication sector in order to create a culture and raise awareness on the importance of implementing ICT accessibility policies. Keep persons with disability aware of their rights and ICTs benefits for their lives should be a priority;
- ✓ Creation of national and regional statistics to account access and use of telecommunication and ICT services by PwD aiming at observing and measuring effectivity of implemented mechanisms;
- ✓ Raise awareness of the general public on the barriers faced by PwD;
- ✓ A permanent dialogue between government, people with disabilities and operators can accelerate the goal of achieving an inclusive society. This



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approach gives to all parts a chance to introduce difficulties and demands in accessibility. The creation of a Ranking of operators also helps to improve actions in regards to ICT accessibility.

## 8. CONCRETE ACTIONS IMPLEMENTED TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY AND AVAILABILITY OF ACCESSIBLE ICTs PRODUCTS AND SERVICES FOR PwD

The report highlights the most creative actions described by respondents that had good results improving the quality and availability of accessible ICTs products and services for PwD:

- ✓ Creation of technical teams for the development and implementation of software that comply with the regulations in regard to web accessibility;
- ✓ Acquired the relevant approvals to proceed with the initiative of subsidizing mobile handsets with assistive features to the visual or hearing impaired. It is anticipated that the first phase of this initiative will be rolled out by 2018;
- ✓ Advising public institutions and those of higher education in the use of assistive technology tools (TA) for access to services by PwD;
- ✓ Advising public institutions that provide information and services to citizens, for the implementation of web accessibility in their sites and applications;
- ✓ Progress is being made in the study of norms and standards which set out requirements for accessibility of products and services applicable to public procurement;
- ✓ A national web accessibility plan through a certifying entity;
- ✓ Regulation for users' rights protection;
- ✓ Increase use of the Universal Service Fund for the implementation of dedicated projects;
- ✓ National survey on digital divide and disability;
- ✓ Large-scale promotion of dedicated projects and initiatives being implemented, including capacity building;



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- ✓ Disclosure of general guidelines on telecommunication services accessibility for PwD;
- ✓ Personnel with adequate training to provide assistance to PwD on public access places;
- ✓ The implementation of a catalog on mobile accessible devices, which allows you to promote the offer of mobile equipment with accessibility features;
- ✓ Communication mechanisms to inform PwD on their rights and on the benefits ICTs can bring to their lives;
- ✓ Disclosure on the regulator's website of a working document on the needs and expectations of PwD users of telecommunication public services to be used as reference material by Operators;
- ✓ Disclose a comparative classification of Operators – Accessibility Performance Index - based on their actions for promoting accessibility;
- ✓ Review regulations in force as to ensure that service providers/operators are obliged to (i) provide, upon request, documents in Braille or other accessible format; (ii) maintain accessible websites; (iii) offer specific service plans for the hearing impaired; (iv) offer channels for accessible communication making use of interpreters and sign language; (v) disclose accessible functionalities, facilities and technologies; (vi) offer a free of charge 24/7 Communication Intermediation Channel (CIC) with sign language interpreters, able to receive video calls and message communications.
- ✓ Design and implement projects to allow PwD to be protagonist in the productive processes of the country, generating progress and development. Examples: (i) a bidirectional communication platform to allow deaf people to communicate through fixed and mobile phones; computers and tablets, with the help of sign-language interpreters; (ii) use and integration of technology that allow persons with visual, hearing and cognitive disability to enjoy movies; (iii) free software distribution to allow the independent use of a computer and its programs by the



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visually impaired; (iv) training of people with cognitive and light psychosocial disability in the use of ICT's communicative tools aiming at becoming story tellers;

## 9. ACTIONS BY NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE AWARENESS OF NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS TO PROMOTE ICT ACCESSIBILITY POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

The respondents informed on the actions carried out by their institutions/organizations/companies to motivate other national stakeholders to upgrade knowledge, expertise and skills to promote ICT accessibility and programs. The report highlights those that have been suggested by two or more respondents.

- ✓ Signature of a cooperation agreement with other government entities to promote events and divulge the rights of PwD to telecommunication/ICT services;
- ✓ Organization of workshops and information sessions targeting public and private entities on the rights of PwD and the public telecommunication services;
- ✓ Involvement in many ICT Awareness Campaigns that seeks to educate the public and the PwD population on accessibility options. Specifics of the campaigns include the publication of advertisements on the newspapers and on social media, brochures that contain information on accessibility features on ICT devices and exhibition displays of same.
- ✓ Involvement of telecommunication services operating companies and disability related civil associations in government projects and initiatives;
- ✓ Provision of training on web accessibility for all public entities;
- ✓ Host international events on telecommunication/ICT accessibility;
- ✓ Promote the implementation of government projects and initiatives;
- ✓ Partnering with PwD associations to support and promote their work;
- ✓ Prepare and disseminate useful information on the use and benefits of ICTs for PwD that can be used by any stakeholder that wishes to apply it;





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- ✓ Active participation in a National Council for Disability with government and civil society entities that allows the coordination to develop actions to promote accessibility policies and programs;
- ✓ Develop annual national campaign to raise awareness within the public and private sectors in regards the permanent accessibility updates of the new technologies, providing free assistance and the necessary accessibility tools in benefit of PwD and facilitate communication processes among the sectors;
- ✓ Approval of an Awareness training on accessibility with 30 hours duration;

**10. SUGGESTED ACTIONS THAT NGOs, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, TELECOM SERVICE PROVIDERS, ACADEMIA AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS SHOULD TAKE TO PROMOTE THE GOAL OF ICT ACCESSIBILITY IN COUNTRIES/AMERICAS REGION**

The respondents presented several suggestions of actions that other stakeholders could do to facilitate the achievement of the goal of ICT accessibility at national and regional level. The report highlights those that have been suggested by two or more respondents.

ENTITY	ACTION
<b>ACADEMIA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Courses on content and digital services for target populations;</li> <li>• Include in the curricula topics or disciplines related to universal accessibility;</li> <li>• Continuous research by means of an observatory of telecommunications and technologies for PwD;</li> <li>• Promote and encourage national events on accessibility to deepen discussions and find the best consensual solutions;</li> <li>• Promote more accessibility related research projects;</li> <li>• Research and development of local apps that can assist persons with disabilities in their daily lives.</li> </ul>
<b>INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ITU to develop an information system on the access of PwD to telecommunication services and ICTs as to allow Members to contribute with indicators. This will allow the development</li> </ul>





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	<p>and implementation of public policies, since one of the elements to generate public policies is the analysis of the international context.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make an effort to present concrete efficient models that can be adapted or replicated so it can clearly be divulged around the world;</li> <li>• Continue to promote the exchange of experiences as to facilitate the development and implementation of accessibility policies in telecommunications/ICTs;</li> <li>• To facilitate the ease of implementation of PwD initiatives, international organizations can share the experiences of others and possibly establish best practices to guide those who are yet to implement their initiatives.</li> </ul>
<p><b>NGOs and other representatives of the Civil Society</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate more frequently in discussions with Operators and government and demand more actions to reduce barriers for PwD;</li> <li>• Continue to collaborate on the design, implementation and control of policies related to ICT accessibility;</li> <li>• Organizations of PwD must empower themselves with knowledge and on the existing technology and spread it with their associates, counting with the support of public and private entities;</li> <li>• Develop and deliver projects directly in the community with the triangulation NGO-business liability-government with the endorsement of international organizations;</li> <li>• It is important that organizations responsible for persons with disabilities to partner with government agencies to push the ICT accessibility agenda. In addition, outreach programs should be considered by these organizations to enlighten their members on the possibilities that ICT accessibility have created making it now possible for them to engage more fully in society.</li> </ul>
<p><b>TELECOM SERVICE PROVIDERS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessible content for any telecom device (e.g. TV, smartphones, among others);</li> <li>• Accessible telecommunication equipment and services;</li> <li>• Dedicated CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) programs;</li> <li>• Persons with disabilities usually fall within the low income bracket making it almost impossible for them to afford ICT devices with accessibility</li> </ul>



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	<p>features. Telecommunications agencies can therefore ensure that these devices and special packages are affordable for persons with disabilities.</p>
<p><b>GOVERNMENT</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ICTs and disability national ranking;</li> <li>• Inclusive education programs since elementary school;</li> <li>• Collaborate on the design, implementation and control of policies related to ICT accessibility;</li> <li>• Promote inter-institutional interaction between PwD associations and Operators, in order to promote greater access to telecommunication services for this group;</li> <li>• Currently the development of materials for each of the professional careers do not include universal accessibility neither the importance of each of the disciplines for the building and development of inclusive projects;</li> <li>• Public entities should promote the compliance of the universal accessibility regulation in force;</li> </ul>
<p><b>NOT SPECIFIED</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote low-cost and easy-to-use solutions to the PwD community;</li> <li>• Integration in primary, secondary and university educational spaces for the understanding of the needs of PwD and the importance of citizen inclusion is essential for universal accessibility;</li> <li>• Promote technologies that cover the full user envelope inclusive of PwD;</li> <li>• Raise awareness to the importance of public and private entities having Accessible websites, accessible signage (add braille to building elevators, restrooms, directories and room numbers so blind visitors, customers and employees can navigate) and braille menu at restaurants.</li> </ul>

## 11. UNIVERSAL SERVICES FUNDS FOR TELECOMMUNICATIONS

The responses reflect a yet very low engagement of the Universal Services Funds in projects and initiatives addressed to the selected groups in the Americas region.

Of those countries that have responded, only 33% is committed to make use of the USF to implement projects and initiatives focusing the digital and social inclusion of persons with disabilities, elderly, indigenous people and women and girls.



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Among the respondents only three informed having ongoing projects on social/digital inclusion making use of financial resources from the Universal Services Funds and all have stated that the percentage of financial resources assigned to these projects are of 6% of the total amount available in the USF.

The analysis of the data received clearly indicates that seldom are the Universal Services Funds engaged with national social/digital inclusion projects and initiatives and when they are, priority is always given to projects addressing Persons with Disabilities and practically no projects in benefit of the other groups are considered for receiving financial support from the Funds.

Not all respondents have provided the information requested but Colombia, Costa Rica and Grenada have informed that resources from the Universal Service Fund is actually used for social/digital inclusion projects.

## **12. SUGGESTED ISSUES TO THE ATTENTION OF ACCESSIBLE AMERICAS IV**

Respondents suggested some issues to the attention of participants of the Accessible Americas IV. Below a non-exhaustive list of these issues.

- ✓ Pay particular attention to assistive technologies as a required add-on to equate accessibility to ICT opportunities and add this theme in other ICT and disability forums;
- ✓ IoT and its application to accessibility issues for PwD;
- ✓ Web accessibility, universal design in the curricula of the universities, as well as the use of technology in support of accessible content development;
- ✓ Development of assistive technologies and tools in Latin America;
- ✓ Development of accessible mobile applications to improve the quality of life of the PwD;
- ✓ Development of support technology for families and caretakers of PwD;



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- ✓ The study, development, adoption and dissemination of standards to comply with accessibility standards and generation of resources (software, documentation, guides, good practices, etc.). In both cases there should be a repository or referral center to allow the management and sharing of ICT accessibility knowledge;
- ✓ It would be very beneficial to pay special attention to the correct differentiation of accessibility tools, according to the content that you want to access. Not only with respect to platforms (mobile, tablet, TV, computer, etc.), but to the fact that Written Content provides a completely different group of Audiovisual Content accessibility tools.
- ✓ Digital and accessible TV for all;
- ✓ Production of accessible content for all;
- ✓ Technical standard (ISO or similar) concerning digital and accessible (all digital accessible!);
- ✓ Examples of existing Communication Intermediation Channels (CIC) in other countries;
- ✓ Government investments in accessibility of telecommunications/ICTs;
- ✓ Creation of international parameters to measure accessibility actions of Operators and countries;
- ✓ Availability of programs and equipment for PwD at affordable prices;
- ✓ Experiences on special tariff plans for PwD in other countries;
- ✓ Implementation of accessible interactive web sites;
- ✓ It is necessary to think about the sustainability of the social projects developed by the various governments and the participation of the private sector, creating strategies that allow the integration of the private sector in support to government projects in the long term;



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## 13. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Analyzing the challenges stated by those countries that have responded the questionnaire we can clearly identify common challenges that are for sure also being faced by those that have not responded. Based on the statements received we can even dare to select those that are most likely to be found in all developing countries of our region.

Here are a few examples of these challenges:

- ✓ Difficulties to adjust existing regulation and establish a national policy framework to promote ICT accessibility;
- ✓ Limited funds to implement accessibility and social/digital inclusion related projects and initiatives;
- ✓ Lack of knowledge on current accessibility status of telecom services and ICTs;
- ✓ Lack of specialized professionals on the many accessibility issues and absence of adequate training programs to address the problem;
- ✓ Raise awareness of service operators/providers on the importance of investing in accessible ICTs and of the general public on the importance of ICT accessibility policies and on the rights of PwD;
- ✓ Build a shared vision on the use of Universal Service Funds to reduce the digital divide in vulnerable populations;

There is not one that we can pick as the most crucial or important, we need to address all of them together in order to progress in regard to ICT accessibility. It is important to raise awareness and review public policies currently in place, but if we don't establish the necessary financial mechanisms and improve the technical capacity, they are bound to fail and we will not achieve the results we wish for.



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Therefore it is important to share the good practices and see how some countries have dealt with these challenges and how much they have progressed taking the necessary measures to overcome them.

As the most appointed successful approaches, respondents have highlighted the replication of successful experiences from other countries as very useful for implementing pro accessibility solutions and actions. The review of policies in force, capacity building programs, sharing information among the stakeholders and general public, as well as working in partnership have been the most cited among respondents. Just one mentioned the use of Universal Service Funds to identify existing gaps and implement projects and initiatives to promote social/digital inclusion to vulnerable groups, which is fully coherent with the number of respondents that stated the non-use of the USF for social/digital inclusion projects and initiatives.

When asked to recommend actions that stakeholders should prioritize for achieving an inclusive society in the Americas region, respondents once again highlighted the work in partnership, empowerment of PwD by sharing information on their rights, raise awareness of the general public on the barriers faced by PwD, increase availability of financial resources for social investments, the creation of national and regional statistics to account access and use of telecommunication and ICT services by PwD and also the creation of a regional data base where countries can update information related to their achievements and progress in regard to ICT accessibility.

When requested to provide concrete actions implemented to improve the quality and availability of accessible ICTs products and services for PwD, respondents mostly informed on policies review, information sharing, trainings provided and the increase on the use of USF for social/digital inclusion projects and initiatives. Although this last issue was not reflected in the specific questions on the use of the USF for this kind of projects.



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When informing on the actions carried out by national institutions to strengthen the awareness of national stakeholders to promote ICT accessibility policies and programs, most of the respondents provided inputs that are directly related to the development and sharing of information, just a few mentioned training provided.

Respondents were asked to suggest actions that different stakeholders should take to promote the goal of ICT accessibility in countries and in our region. Some interesting suggestions were provided and are highlighted below:

## **For the Academia**

- ✓ Courses on content and digital services for target populations;
- ✓ Include in the curricula topics or disciplines related to universal accessibility
- ✓ Promote more accessibility related research projects.

## **For International Organizations**

- ✓ ITU to develop an information system on the access of PwD to telecommunication services and ICTs as to allow Members to contribute with indicators. This will allow the development and implementation of public policies, since one of the elements to generate public policies is the analysis of the international context.
- ✓ To facilitate the ease of implementation of PwD initiatives, international organizations can share the experiences of others and possibly establish best practices to guide those who are yet to implement their initiatives.

## **NGOs and other representatives of the Civil Society**

- ✓ It is important that organizations responsible for persons with disabilities to partner with government agencies to push the ICT accessibility agenda. In addition, outreach programs should be considered by these organizations to



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enlighten their members on the possibilities that ICT accessibility have created making it now possible for them to engage more fully in society.

## **Telecom Service Provider**

- ✓ Persons with disabilities usually fall within the low income bracket making it almost impossible for them to afford ICT devices with accessibility features. Telecommunications agencies can therefore ensure that these devices and special packages are affordable for persons with disabilities.

## **Government:**

- ✓ ICTs and disability national ranking;
- ✓ Inclusive education programs since elementary school;
- ✓ Promote inter-institutional interaction between PwD associations and Operators, in order to promote greater access to telecommunication services for this group;

## **Not specified:**

- ✓ Promote low-cost and easy-to-use solutions to the PwD community;
- ✓ Integration in primary, secondary and university educational spaces for the understanding of the needs of PwD and the importance of citizen inclusion is essential for universal accessibility;
- ✓ Promote technologies that cover the full user envelope inclusive of PwD;

Of all respondents, just Colombia, Costa Rica and Grenada stated the use of USF to finance social/digital inclusion projects.

As for the suggested issues to be addressed by the Accessible Americas event, some are highlighted below, not all, since many of the other suggested issues have been already addressed by the mentioned Forum and can be found in the body of this Report:





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- ✓ IoT and its application to accessibility issues for PwD;
- ✓ Web accessibility, universal design in the curricula of the universities, as well as the use of technology in support of accessible content development;
- ✓ Development of assistive technologies and tools in Latin America;
- ✓ Development of support technology for families and caretakers of PwD;
- ✓ The study, development, adoption and dissemination of standards to comply with accessibility standards and generation of resources (software, documentation, guides, good practices, etc.). In both cases there should be a repository or referral center to allow the management and sharing of ICT accessibility knowledge;
- ✓ Technical standard (ISO or similar) concerning digital and accessible (all digital accessible!);
- ✓ Creation of international parameters to measure accessibility actions of Operators and countries;

Summarizing all information, it is clear that some important progress has been achieved in many areas but there is still a long path to go and many issues to solve. There is no magic recipe and some pillars are important for a continued progress and development of the ICT accessibility issue in the Americas:

- ✓ Partnership among national and regional stakeholders;
- ✓ Information sharing at all levels (to empower PwD; to replicate good practices; to raise awareness of the general public and public agents);
- ✓ Tailor-made training programs to build technical competencies on the many ICT accessibility issues;
- ✓ Identification of financial resources at national and regional level to invest on social/digital inclusion projects and initiatives.



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ITU's mandate embraces many of these issues and every year, through the Accessible Americas event, which has become a role model to other regions of the world, it will be possible to witness more and more progress and achievements. Undoubtedly, within the work of ITU, the Americas region has a leading role as far as ICT accessibility is concerned and citizens of the Americas can proudly say that their region has overwhelmed most of the challenges and continue to work hard towards a much more inclusive society.

## 14. THE WAY FORWARD

The Global Agenda 2030 covers the three dimensions of sustainability: economic, social and environmental. It is composed of 17 Sustainable Development Objectives (ODS), which will build on the progress made through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Considering the connection of those three dimensions as a parameter, it is a paramount necessity to achieve an inclusive society and promoting ICT accessibility can be considered a fundamental step on that path.

While there is no single agreed understanding of the key terminology, for the means of this report social inclusion is understood as a process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities for all, regardless of one's background, so that all can achieve their full potential in life. It is a multi-dimensional process aimed at creating conditions which enable full and active participation of every member of the society in all aspects of life, including civic, social, economic, and political activities.

The World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen 1995) defines an inclusive society as a "society for all in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play". Such an inclusive society must be based on the respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, cultural and religious diversity, social justice and the special needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. This inclusive society is promoted by policies that seek to reduce inequality and create flexible and tolerant societies that embrace all people.



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In order to encourage all-inclusive participation, there must be universal access to public infrastructure and facilities. Equal access to public information plays an important role in creating an inclusive society, as it will make popular participation possible with well-informed members of society. Education plays a critical role in this area, particularly for young people, education provides the opportunity to instill values of respect and appreciation of diversity.

With one billion persons living with disabilities, 80% of those in developing nations, a sound global development agenda cannot ignore disabilities, a key driver of exclusion and poverty. Among those accessibility issues, removing barriers to accessing Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) by persons with disabilities is of paramount importance.

No one should be excluded from using mobile phones, the Internet, televisions, computers, other electronic devices and their countless applications and services considering their vital importance for education, having a political life, and cultural activities or access to e-government or e-health, just to mention a few examples. Being excluded from these ICT-enabled applications implies being shut down not only from the information society, but also from accessing essential public services, as well as from the opportunity of living an independent life.

By working together across all sectors of society – public, private and civil society – at national and regional levels, some day we will finally ensure the inclusion of all persons with disabilities in the digital age. The Americas region is on the right path and has conquered many positive results. Let us continue to endorse the United Nations that through its Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities views disability as a pathology of society, not of the individual, as the result of society's failure to be inclusive and accommodate individual differences.

Working in partnership, sharing information and existing human and financial resources is a good recipe to move forward towards a much more inclusive Americas region.