ITU and UNESCO Regional Digital Inclusion Week
23-27 September 2018

Concept Note

Overview

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) will be organizing **a Regional Digital Inclusion Week for the Arab States** during the period 23-28 September 2018.

The 2018 ITU-UNESCO Regional Digital Inclusion Week for Arab States will build on the success of the earlier *ITU-UNESCO Regional Information Communication Technology (ICT) Accessibility Week for Arab States* organized by ITU and UNESCO from 24-28 September 2017.

You can find Information on last year's ICT Accessibility Week here.

Last year's event brought together nine partners who collaborated with ITU and UNESCO to organize activities in seven countries - Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Tunisia - across the Arab region. It is our expectation, that with the support and commitment of even more partners, the 2018 ITU-UNESCO Regional Digital Inclusion Week for Arab State will touch more countries, stimulate the organization of even more national events and help to unlock the transformational power of digital inclusion.

The 2018 Arab Digital Inclusion Week will raise awareness of the importance of digital inclusion and the contribution it can bring to realizing national sustainable development goals. Furthermore, by unpacking this concept and examining the three pillars that underpin digital inclusion - **access**, **adoption** and **application** of ICT – more effective, holistic policies and strategies can be developed. Digital Inclusion is essential for empowering people. By simultaneously addressing access, adoption and the application of ICT our efforts to leverage ICT to realize equitable social and economic development and advance the realization of the 2030 sustainable development goals can be more effective.

The Arab 2018 Digital Inclusion Week will close with the celebration on 28 September of UNESCO's ["International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAI)".](#) For 2018 IDUAI will focus on *transforming the digital divide into a digital dividend through universal access.* As noted universal access to information is one of the three pillars of digital inclusion.

Unpacking the three pillars of digital inclusion.

The *access* pillars focuses on barriers that may impede the ability of current and potential users to benefit from ICT. For example, availability not only of the equipment connections but importantly access to a reliable power supply. For persons with limited means, cost considerations and issues of affordability can be a significant challenge, the provision of free public access points and other innovative approaches can overcome this limitation. The World Health Organization estimates that around 15% of the global population, about 1 billion persons have at least one disability. Therefore, unless ICT designers consider the needs of this important sector of our society and incorporate universal design, costly barriers to a more just and equitable society are being created. Increasingly, information and knowledge are key determinants of wealth creation, social transformation and human development. Language is a primary vector for communicating information and knowledge, so the ability to use one's language in the digital environment is an important determinant of one's participation. Many languages are not present on the Internet so the development of linguistically diverse content and language tools becomes necessary for ensuring digital inclusion.

The *adoption* pillar considers those aspects that influence the readiness of people to use and benefit from ICTs and digital network. One of the most influential factors is whether people have the necessary skills to use ICT, or the means to acquire these skills. Possible adverse effects of using digital networks such as identity thefts, exposure to illicit content, hate speech, privacy concerns and others can serve as deterrents to adoption. Enhancing digital literacy of users is important in helping to enhance the positive impacts of using ICTs and participating in digital networks while mitigating potential risks. However, technical knowledge is not enough, users should also seek to acquire the intercultural understanding and enhance their ethical awareness.

The *application* pillar builds on the *access* and *adoption* pillars and serves to address real life challenges and enhance the effectiveness with which various tasks are performed. The application of ICT in areas such as health, education, finance and government are serving to reduce costs, overcome barriers of time and distance and provide a more level playing field and bring new opportunities and give voice to previously marginalized groups and persons.

Digital Inclusion week will mark the celebration on 28 September of UNESCO's ["International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAI)"](#), which for 2018 UNESCO has adopted the theme "*Overcoming Divides and Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)".* This International Day, established unanimously by UNESCO's Member States in 2015, recognizes the critical role of Information in the realization of fundamental freedoms and advancing humanities' development. In today's emerging knowledge society, the ability to effectively access and use information as well as information-based resources is increasingly a critical determinant of social participation. The information gap faced by marginalized groups is therefore a divide that societies must address and an impediment all nations must urgently address if they are to achieve the SDGs.

Through the sharing of experiences and solutions and by engaging a diverse range of international, regional and national stakeholders, this week will build partnerships and foster reflection. It is expected that this week could serve to enlarge the number of aware, engaged and concerned stakeholders, catalyzing and expanding the impact of ongoing regional initiatives that promote digital inclusion among all segments of society but particularly youth, women, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and other vulnerable and at risk groups. with the view to enhance their livelihoods and participate in the social and economic development of their communities.

Global efforts to advance digital inclusion

Digital Inclusion was affirmed as a priority by global stakeholders during the World Summit on the Information Society +10 (WSIS+10) Forum. Through their interventions they demonstrated "that there is a greater awareness of the importance of promoting digital inclusion for youth, age-related disabilities, women, the vulnerable and marginalized, indigenous peoples, local communities and persons with disabilities and special needs, while promoting the wealth and sustaining the diversity of the world's languages". It is important to note that the WSIS outcomes includes many aspects central to Digital Inclusion. Global leaders at WSIS+10 resoundingly echoed the conviction that "digital inclusion remains a cross-cutting priority, going beyond affordability and access to ICT networks, services and applications, including in rural and remote areas. The digital, technology and knowledge divides will be bridged to reap the benefits of ICT and broadband in transforming the lives of communities".

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) now form the backbone of today's digital economy. They also have enormous potential to accelerate progress on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and improve people's lives in fundamental ways.

Building the next generation of ICT infrastructure will power the evolution of smart, sustainable cities and communities worldwide. Making modern ICT access more widely available will also foster the local innovation needed to spur domestic economic growth. In turn as countries strive to achieve the SDGs using ICTs, marginalized and vulnerable groups are among those poised to reap the benefits. We must ensure that all users have the necessary competencies to not only consume but to also be producers of content. Furthermore, they need to be prepared to respond to the ethical challenges of these new environments.

There are still more than 2 billion "unbanked" people in the world. Now, thanks to digital financial services, many are participating in the digital economy for the first time; and access to financial services has proven to be a pivotal step in helping people leap out of poverty. In addition, timely and accurate information services will help ensure equal rights to economic resources and market insights that can benefit all.

According to UNDP, 103 million youth worldwide are lack basic literacy skills, and more than 60% of them are women. Women and girls comprise half of the world's population. ICTs can provide great opportunities for gender equality by enabling everyone to have access to the same online resources and opportunities. They enable women to gain a stronger voice in their communities, their government and at the global level. ICTs can also provide new opportunities for women's economic empowerment by creating business and employment opportunities for women as owners and managers of ICT-accessed projects, as well as employees of new business ventures. Yet, over 250 million fewer women are online than man. The gender gap in access to ICTs needs to be urgently addressed if the benefits of ICTs to gender equality and gender empowerment are to be achieved.

Youth and children with access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) are coming of age as digital natives, the early adopters of ICTs and better positioned than their parents to harness the power of digital technologies in new and imaginative ways. Youth can only leverage the transformative power of ICTs when they have access to ICTs and are equipped with a range of digital skills. ICTs can enhance education, reduce youth unemployment and promote social and economic development.

Digital Inclusion will ensure that PWDs are fully integrated into our societies and add value to economies. We cannot achieve sustainable development if we ignore 15% of our population.

How to get involved

The frameworks referred to in this document impart a responsibility not only to ITU and UNESCO but also to Governments, other UN and intergovernmental bodies, civil society, the private sector and citizens in advancing digital inclusion efforts. The Regional Digital Inclusion Week is an opportunity to raise awareness, strengthen collaboration amongst stakeholders and advance this shared commitment across the Arab region. ITU and UNESCO are therefore inviting stakeholders across the Arab region to organize at least one activity during this week, so as to shed light on their key activities in this domain, whether at the national or regional level. Stakeholders are free to design the nature, scope and location of activities and associate them to the Week, as long they reflect the theme of Digital Inclusion in the Arab region. The online form on the event website can be used to make your submissions, which should be received before 31 July, 2018.

We invite you to follow us on social media under the hashtag #Digitalinclusionweek, Further information can be found on our website (https://bit.ly/2JF5HyR).

For further information, please contact:

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