ITU assessment of ICT accessibility in the Asia-Pacific region

Executive Summary

The main purpose of this report is to support the efforts of all stakeholders in countries in the Asia-Pacific region, in particular policy-makers, jointly to fulfil global commitments and targets such as target 2.9 of the ITU Connect 2030 Agenda (by 2023, enabling environments ensuring accessible telecommunications/ICTs for persons with disabilities should be established in all countries), and thereby accelerate achievement of the SDGs. The report therefore provides a holistic overview of the status of ICT accessibility in the Asia-Pacific region, a comprehensive vision of ICT accessibility policies and strategies implemented by the region's countries, and good practices and recommendations enabling regional policy-makers and stakeholders to ensure that they incorporate the inclusiveness perspective in key domains such as e-government, education, employment and emergency communications. The report also presents background knowledge for future regional activities to promote ICT accessibility, as a mean of ensuring digital inclusion and building an "Accessible Asia – ICT for all".

Persons with disabilities face a range of obstacles when they try to access information, education, and employment. Those obstacles can be mitigated if the people facing them have equitable access to ICTs. The work of legislators, public policy-makers and regulators is thus decisive in terms of the development, production, cost and availability of certain requirements and equipment. They also have a role to play in mobilizing society, building its awareness and capacity, and monitoring policies.

This digital divide exists across age groups and genders, and in terms of accessibility it disproportionately affects persons with disabilities, who constitute approximately 15 per cent of the population in any country, amounting to more than 690 million people in Asia and the Pacific. ESCAP research indicates that only 40 per cent of government public websites in Asia-Pacific countries were reported to be available in accessible formats. The websites of some countries are in fact completely inaccessible for persons with visual impairments – despite the pledges of countries jointly to implement global and regional commitments to ensure that no one is left behind in the digital world.

The aim of this assessment is to make the Asia-Pacific region more inclusive of persons with disabilities by promoting ICT accessibility as a means of creating new opportunities for social inclusion, improving human development, reducing poverty and generating positive impact, especially when used in schools. ICTs are now critical for citizens to participate in society and exercise their right to information and communication.

To support policy makers and stakeholders efforts in implementing the Articles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities - CRPD relevant to ICTs and therefore support their efforts in building inclusive digital communities globally ITU developed "Towards building inclusive digital communities": an ITU toolkit and self-assessment for ICT accessibility implementation. This ITU resource also enables countries and organizations to run a self-assessment and obtain an immediate overview on the level of their ICT accessibility implementation. Based on the result, the toolkit delivers tailored guidelines to support development of appropriate policies, strategies and to replicate good practices and offers the tools to support evaluation and to monitor the advance in ICT/digital accessibility implementation, as a key component to ensure that everyone regardless of age gender or ability is included in the digital world.