

Reporting Document

ITU Regional Roundtable on Digital Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities

11 December 2023 11:00-15:00, Moscow, Russian Federation

Context

Accessibility is key to enabling the 1.3 billion persons with disabilities worldwide to live independently, participate fully in society on an equal basis, and contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Without access to infrastructure, transport, information and communication, as well as other facilities and services, including public, educational, and health services, persons with disabilities will lack equal opportunities to participate in society.

Meanwhile, the benefits of digital transformation, powerful tools for inclusion, remain less accessible to persons with disabilities. However, new solutions in the areas of accessibility, assistive technologies, and artificial intelligence, which greatly enhance the universality of ICT services and applications, offer unprecedented opportunities for persons with disabilities to communicate, move, receive information, access education, work with dignity, and interact with their environment.

ITU supports the efforts of its members to implement ICT accessibility policies and strategies worldwide and to promote digital skills so that everyone is equally and equitably included in the digital society.

In 2022, the World Telecommunication Development Conference for the period 2023-2025 endorsed ITU CIS Regional Initiative 4, 'Digital skills and information and communication technology accessibility for the public, in particular for persons with disabilities.' This initiative aims to provide assistance to ITU Member States of the region in formulating recommendations for the development of the public's digital skills, paying particular attention to persons with disabilities.

Proceedings of the Roundtable

The Regional Roundtable was held on the occasion of the World Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December) and aimed to share experiences, trends, and results in shaping the digital accessibility of persons with disabilities in the CIS Region.

The event was attended by 39 participants from the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Belarus, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Uzbekistan, representatives of UN organizations (UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education and the Russian office of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), as well as representatives of telecom operators - RUE 'Beltelecom' and PJSC 'VimpelCom.'

The program of the event included three sessions.

The first session provided an overview of the ongoing work in the CIS Region regarding the formation of universal digital accessibility.

The following presentations were given:

- Digital accessibility: Paving the way for a digitally inclusive world for ALL - **Daria Kursa, ITU Regional Coordinator;**
- Presentation of ITU research on "Methodological foundations of teaching digital skills to persons with disabilities" - **Tatiana Chigir, Senior Lecturer of the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology of Inclusive Education, Institute of Inclusive Education, M. Tank State Pedagogical University;**
- Creating an inclusive digital environment in the formation of smart cities and communities - **Evgeny Solovyev, Head of the Department of International Cooperation and Exhibition Activities, OIPI NAS of Belarus;**
- Ensuring Equitable Access to Education: The Role of Resource Centres - **Natalia Amelina, Senior National Project Officer in Education, Chief of Unit of Teacher Professional Development and Networking, UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education.**

The second session was devoted to the activities of training centres for persons with disabilities, approaches to training, and challenges of the centres' achievements were presented.

The following presentations were heard:

- On the activities of IT centre for visually impaired persons (Yerevan) - **Kristine Gyonjyan, Director, Union of Operators, the Republic of Armenia.**
- On the activities of the Training Centre for the Hearing Impaired (in Minsk and Vitebsk) - **Svetlana Mikhnevich, Head of the Department of Infocommunication Technologies, Belarusian State Academy of Communications, Republic of Belarus.**
- On the activities of the Information and Training Centre for Persons with Disabilities "Iygilik" (Bishkek) - **Elvira Jenish kyzy, Deputy Director for Educational Work, Academy of Digital Innovations, Kyrgyz Republic.**
- On the activities of the Training Centre for hearing-impaired and deaf children in the field of information technologies (Tashkent) - **Shahzod Narzullaev, Head of Educational Projects Department, IT-Park, Republic of Uzbekistan.**

The third session was held in a discussion format. The participants presented their work on the formation of universal digital inclusion, gave recommendations, and outlined plans for further work in the countries of the CIS Region.

Conclusion

According to the results of the event and the discussion, the participants of the round table expressed the following conclusions and proposals:

- The accumulated valuable experience of ITU-facilitated resource and training centres for persons with disabilities should be disseminated, including in the contributions of ITU-D Q7/1 Study Group on access to telecommunication/ICT services for persons with disabilities and other persons with special needs.

- It is necessary to continue exchanging experience on the formation of digital accessibility for persons with disabilities at regional and international events and conferences, to share experience in ongoing studies and reports.
- It is advisable to accumulate and disseminate experience in the creation and development of resource and educational centres for persons with disabilities, including recommendations and advice from experts involved in the creation and equipping of centres, preparation of training programmes and direct training of students with disabilities.
- Partnerships with industry organisations and the private sector should be developed to attract funding and wider public attention to the need for digital inclusion of persons with disabilities. The development of digital skills among persons with disabilities will increase consumption of products and services of telecom operators and industry organisations, contribute to economic growth and labour market development in the countries of the CIS Region.
- It is important to encourage and develop volunteering and tutoring, which makes a huge contribution to training in digital education programmes for persons with disabilities.
- The study " Methodological foundations of teaching digital skills to persons with disabilities" should be supplemented with an analysis of what health limitations allow/not allow adaptation and integration of a person with a disability in traditional form of education. Such an analysis will facilitate the development of educational programmes for persons with disabilities in the countries of the CIS Region, which will take into account, inter alia, the form of disability, as well as its degree.
- It is necessary to promote the financing of the established network of training centres for persons with disabilities in terms of upgrading equipment, conducting trainings for teachers and students of the centres, as well as strive to expand the network of centres, creating new platforms for training, including rural areas and isolated regions of the countries.
- It is necessary to promote the affordability of ICTs and the acquisition of digital skills for persons with disabilities, who are often among the vulnerable segments of the population in the CIS region.
- It is important to consider the component of digital accessibility in the formation of smart cities and communities, and to monitor implementation and progress in this area.
- Continue to build up the bank of publications and research on digital inclusion and accessibility for persons with disabilities, including translation and localisation of materials and trainings developed by ITU at the global level.