

ITU Regional Development Forum for Europe (RDF-EUR)

Information and Communication Technologies for Attaining Sustainable Development Goals

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CONTRIBUTION BY MALTA

TITLE: ACCESSIBLE EUROPE – MALTA 2019

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Europe Regional Initiative: EUR3: Accessibility, affordability and skills development for all to ensure digital inclusion and sustainable development

Year(s) of implementation: 2019

Background

The Government of Malta, through its appropriate entities working in both the accessibility and disability fields, will be delighted to host the next ‘Accessible Europe’ conference in Malta, between the 4th and 6th of December, 2019. This would involve the usual partnership between ITU and the European Commission, while bringing on board Malta’s experience as a fast-developing digital economy, prioritising ICT accessibility solutions.

Malta looks forward to using its infrastructure and human resource expertise in making this event another success for all involved, having allocated relevant budgets and obtained all necessary approvals from the very highest levels, for this event to go ahead.

While being guided by the requirements forwarded by ITU for the logistical component of the event, we are ready to partner with both ITU and the European Commission, in ensuring implementation of content developed by them, while also assisting with input and bringing on board ideas and persons that would give added value in this regard.

In particular, as of yesterday, Malta is now the proud host of the EU-Arab Cooperation Forum on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – the “Valletta Forum” – an initiative hosted by Malta, with the adherence of 20 governments from EU and Arab states, as well as the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN ESCWA) and the League of Arab States, and with the input of the European Commission’s DG-EMPL as a valued partner.

While maintaining the event’s main focus on Europe, involving the dimension and participation of key elements of the Valletta Forum in the process and in the proceedings themselves, would give further value to the event, and also serve as a possible launching pad for extended activities in this field in the EU-Arab region, further to initiatives in the Euro-Mediterranean/ MENA regions that are currently a priority matter for both the UN and the ITU on the one hand, and the EU on the other.



Proposal

It is being proposed that the event be organised in a fully accessible manner, in the same way as the EU-Arab High-Level Meeting on Disability Rights just hosted by Malta over the past 2 days was. The Government of Malta will provide an accessible conference venue, according to the specifications of the ITU, and in an environment that would ensure both physical and sensorial accessibility for all, at the venue itself, as well as during conference proceedings. Conference materials, and other logistical arrangements ex. accommodation and transport, will also be provided in an accessible manner, and according to the very highest standards.

It is understood that flights and accommodation will be at the expense of participants, however, we are able to assist with the sourcing of providers in both fields. It is also being understood that airport transfers will be arranged by participants themselves, although we are able to assist with sourcing transport providers, particularly vis-à-vis accessible transport solutions. Furthermore, it is also understood that no participation fee would be levied from the Maltese end. All other costs related to the organisation of the event would be borne by the Maltese end, unless otherwise indicated or agreed with ITU and the European Commission.

The Maltese side will also assist with any necessary visa procedures, provided that these are communicated to organisers in good time, by liaising with both the Central Visa Unit within the Parliamentary Secretariat for Reforms, Citizenship and Simplification of Administrative Processes – Office of the Prime Minister, and the Malta Immigration Police.

The event itself, using the usual format, would be organised over 3 days, with added value gained from its being organised during the period we are proposing, Disability Week. Participants will have the added possibility of joining the national conference organised by Malta's Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) the day before, on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, and the annual Premju Soċjetà Ġusta (Fair Society Prize), a gala event organised annually by Malta's Parliamentary Secretariat for Persons with Disability and Active Ageing, and that would take place on Friday 6th December in the evening, following the conclusion of the 'Accessible Europe' event.

However, we would like to emphasise that, just as accessibility is not merely a matter for persons with disabilities, so will the event not be merely focused on the nexus between accessibility and disabilities. As per guidance already received, the programme would remain the main prerogative of ITU and the European Commission, with Malta being consulted for input. However, the timing of the event would act as a strong pull factor, and work to place salient disability-related issues on the agenda, without detracting in any way from the overall goals the conference aims to achieve.

Furthermore, the added value that would be derived from including the EU-Arab dimension, through the involvement of the Valletta Forum, as earlier indicated, would be an additional selling point for the conference.

