



ITU and UNESCO Regional ICT Accessibility Week

Concept Note

Overview

ITU and UNESCO will be organizing a Regional ICT Accessibility Week in the Arab States during the period 24-28 September 2017. This week seeks to raise awareness across the Region of the critical role played by information in supporting holistic and sustainable national development.

In particular, the week will draw attention to the information needs of persons with disabilities and highlight the role that information and communication technologies (ICT) can play in overcoming various information challenges and societal barriers persons with disabilities face.

This week also marks the celebration on 28 September of UNESCO's ["International Day for Universal Access to Information \(IDUAI\)"](#), which for 2017 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 persons with disabilities 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, thereby catalyzing and expanding the impact of ongoing regional initiatives that promote the use of ICT by persons with disabilities to enhance their livelihoods and participate in the social and economic development of their communities.

Background

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) persons with disabilities represent about 15% of the population, with an estimated 1 billion persons around the world living with at least one disability. Despite challenges such as social stigma, the sheer number of citizens impacted directly and indirectly by disabilities has led to a variety of initiatives from the international to level aimed at ensuring the equitable, just, dignified and full social participation of persons with disabilities.

The 2003 Declaration and Action Plan of [the World Summit on the Information Society \(WSIS\)](#) acknowledged and promoted measures aimed at ensuring that persons with disabilities could fully benefit and participate in the digital revolution and emerging information society. More than a decade and a half later, these challenges are still relevant and the WSIS Process has continued to support ICT accessibility. With a much broader scope and force of international law, [the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (UNCRPWD, 2006) stands as the most important international instrument advocating for the rights of people with disabilities. At least 18 Arab States have acceded to this Convention with some 8 or more adopting its optional protocols.

Arab States continued to demonstrate considerable concern for the plight of persons with disabilities. The 2004 Arab Summit convened by the Economic and Social Commission of Western Africa (ESCWA) and the League of Arab States (LAS) declared the period from 2004 to 2013 as the Arab Decade for Persons with Disabilities. A study by ESCWA and LAS, [Disability in the Arab Region: An overview](#), launched in 2014 at the end of this decade provided a first glimpse into the situation of persons with disabilities across the region. The study pointed to significant disability risk factors such as “consanguinity, communicable and chronic diseases, road traffic accidents and armed conflict”. At the national level, various states are actively engaged in the development of programmes aimed at mitigating these risks as well as addressing the needs of persons currently living with one or more disabilities. However, the large number of persons affected, the challenges of stigma and under-reporting point to the need for continued and concerted efforts at the awareness raising, research, programmatic and policy levels.

The [2030 SDGs](#) represent another front where the international community has recognized and States have agreed to address the needs of persons with disabilities and ensure their full social

participation. Furthermore, five of these SDG Targets – Goals 4, 8, 10, 11 and 17 – make explicit reference to the needs of persons with disabilities. Without addressing the needs of this major population segment, we cannot hope to eradicate poverty or meet the SDG targets.

The Regional ICT Accessibility Week as a joint ITU-UNESCO Response to their Mandate from Member States

As key organizers of the WSIS Processes, both ITU and UNESCO, in concert with diverse stakeholders have been advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities and promoting ICT as an important lever for overcoming societal barriers and the digital information divide. In addition to the WSIS process, disability-focused initiatives form part of ITU's and UNESCO's core programme. These initiatives span the gamut of expert groups and national consultations, project implementation, research, as well as policy development at the national, regional and international levels.

This ICT Accessibility Week is a joint response by ITU and UNESCO to the foregoing challenges and their respective institutional commitments and strategies. It further seeks to enhance regional cooperation, solidarity and sharing of knowledge to effect change. In the case of ITU this week represents a response to [the World Telecommunication Development Conference's \(WTDC\) 2014 Arab Regional Initiative](#) entitled "*Ensuring access to telecommunications/ICTs, in particular for persons with disabilities*". Similarly, for UNESCO the week is part of its commemoration of the International Day for Universal Access to information, furthermore it serves to build on the outcomes of the 2015 Consultation of Arab States on [UNESCO's 2014 New Delhi Declaration - From Exclusion to Empowerment: Role of ICT for persons with Disabilities](#).

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 accessibility efforts and promoting sustainable development. The Regional ICT Accessibility 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

ICT Accessibility in the Arab region. The online form on the event [website](#) can be used to make your submissions, which should be received before 28 July, 2017.

We invite you to follow us on social media under the hashtag #ICTAccessibilityWeek, Further information can be found on our website <http://bit.ly/2uN26rC>

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