

**International telecommunication Union (ITU) Report to the 13<sup>th</sup> Session of the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD**  
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**on behalf of ITU Secretary General Mr. Houlin Zhao- presented by Roxana WIDMER-ILIESCU**  
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Covid19 pandemic has accelerated digital transformation and the use of technology globally. ICTs have been fundamental for people to continue having access to information and government services, buying vital products such as food and medicines, working, learning, and keeping in contact with loved ones.

In this context, we witnessed strong evidences on the critical need to develop and deliver digital information and communications services in accessible formats, to avoid the risk of increasing the digital divide and so, warrant that everyone, can benefit from its enabling power and not be left behind.

[ITU, the UN specialized agency for information and communication technologies](#), has turned this challenge into an opportunity by making available numerous resources to support Member States and stakeholders' efforts to develop and deliver inclusive vital digital information, services and products for all people. With our mission of connecting the world, ITU is deeply committed to enhancing the accessibility of ICTs for all people regardless of age, gender, ability, financial means, or location. Inclusiveness is one of ITU's 5 strategic goals, established by Member States at the last [Plenipotentiary Conference in 2018](#). Additionally, target 2.9 of this goal explicitly calls for *"enabling accessible environments for ALL people, including for persons with disabilities in ALL countries by 2023"*.

**I will highlight here just a few of the [resources](#) we have developed this year:**

1. In March, we issued [Covid Guidelines on how to develop inclusive digital information products and services](#) through different digital platforms, in all 6 UN official languages. These guidelines contain key messages and concrete actions to support policy makers and communicators ensure that the messages and vital digital information delivered are accessible to all people including Persons with Disabilities, during this global challenging crisis.
2. In the framework of the **UN joint COVID-19 response and recovery emergency working group on health workstream**, the ITU Guidelines were also globally disseminated and translated into 22 other languages. Within the work of this group, and based on concrete evidences showing that most of the telehealth approaches are not yet accessible for persons with disabilities, **ITU also contributed to the development of Terms of Reference** to serve as a basis for future ITU-WHO Accessibility Guidelines for Telehealth and e-Health Applications.
3. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the lack of an interoperable video remote interpretation (VRI) system for deaf and hard of hearing persons excludes them from important information and social services (e.g. medical consultation). Therefore, ITU developed the [\(2020\) - Guideline on web-based remote sign language interpretation or VRI system](#) which describes a real time communication (RTC) web-based VRI, and how it can be used, as well as harmonize the ways other remote services, such as online medical treatment and distance education, can interact with it.
4. ITU also published a **Report on "Accessibility to broadcasting services for persons with disabilities"** including: *"Personalization using object-based sound technology for visually or hearing-impaired persons"*; and the *"Haptic information presentation technology for visually or hearing-impaired persons"*.

5. Additionally, a series of **online, self-paced, certified-based trainings in digital accessibility were developed. All our trainings are provided through the ITU Academy in several UN languages, free of charge, and are delivered in accessible formats**, to ensure that persons with disabilities can also benefit from these trainings. Among the topics addressed are:

5.1. [“How to ensure inclusive digital communication during crises and emergency situations”](#), which provides holistic guidance on digital accessibility and identify the five digital modalities to ensure that everyone can understand information and communicate in time of emergency and crisis. The training is available in English, French and Spanish, along with a video tutorial on the topic.

5.2. A new version of [“ICT Accessibility – The key to inclusive communication”](#) , which includes the latest developments in accessibility and digital communication during crisis situations, is now available in English, French, Spanish.

5.3 The [“Web Accessibility -The Cornerstone on an inclusive digital society”](#) training was also redesigned to include evolutions of WCAG standards and the European Accessibility laws, which can serve as role model in advancing globally digital accessibility implementation. The training is available in English, French and Spanish.

6. ITU also developed **an interactive toolkit and self-assessment for ICT accessibility implementation** with localized content in English, French, and Spanish. The ITU toolkit **“Towards building inclusive digital communities”** assists policy makers and stakeholders understand and integrate principles of digital accessibility in their decision-making process to ensure inclusiveness. The resource will also facilitate development of self-assessments, provide valuable guidelines, good practices, and finally will also help to monitor implementation.

7. Aligned with the commitments made in the framework of the UNDIS to achieve sustainable and transformative progress on disability inclusion, **ITU has been also working with ILO on a project** planned to be implemented next year on **“Accessibility of Online Job Application and Recruitment Systems”** to provide guidance and develop the capacity of governments and UN agencies.

8. Finally, in response to the UN Secretary General’s Policy Brief on Disability Inclusion, ITU organized and/or actively participated in multiple virtual global and regional thematic webinars, meetings and events **raising awareness** of the need for inclusive digital communication. These included: within UNDIS, the [Word Summit on Information Society WSIS Forum 2020](#), the regional Inclusive Conference in Africa, in ASP with UNITAR, within [Accessible Americas 2020](#), in [Towards Digitally Accessible Europe](#), as well as within ITU Study Group meetings on ICT accessibility, to mention only few.

For all the impactful collaboration, **ITU wishes to thank all our valuable partners from the UN family** including UNDESA, WHO, ILO, WIPO, UNHCR, UNESCWA, the Disability team of the Executive Office of the UN Secretary-General and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, among others. We also recognize our partners from the European Commission for engaging with ITU in promoting the accessibility of ICT in the region, as well as to all our ITU members who participated in the Study Group Question 7 on ICT accessibility, working so hard to finalize a dedicated report which will be released next year at the World Telecommunication Development Conference, advancing the global agenda on ICT accessibility for persons with disabilities.

To make a digitally inclusive world a reality and not just a dream, will require collaboration, cooperation, and coordination. Together, we can make it happen!  
Thank you for your attention.