Consultative Meeting on

Advancing e-Accessibility Through New and Emerging Technologies

Amman, Jordan, 27 February 2024

Preliminary Information Note

Background

Although e-accessibility has advanced throughout the Arab region, the continuous and rapid development of new technologies, offer new opportunities and challenges in achieving digital inclusion for all. The use of emerging and new technologies – such as artificial intelligence, virtual and extended reality technologies, the metaverse, mobile video chat technologies, eye control technologies and robotics – in enhancing accessibility shows promise, but more efforts need to be made to deploy such technologies to improve the lives of older persons and persons with disabilities in the Arab region. The deployment of such technologies without considering e-accessibility and the digital needs of persons with disabilities and older persons, could further marginalize these already vulnerable populations.

Therefore, it is also necessary to understand the opportunities new and emerging technologies offer for enhancing e-accessibility, and, due to their complexity, to formulate policies on the accessible deployment of new technologies to ensure their inclusivity. The result of such an investigation can be used to formulate new or strengthen existing e-accessibility policies and guidelines regarding new and emerging technologies to enhance digital inclusion.

In 2020, ESCWA launched the Arab Digital Inclusion Platform (ADIP)[1] to support policymakers in developing and improving national policies and guidelines on e-accessibility in the hope to bridge the digital divide and enabling access for all. ESCWA efforts on promoting e-accessibility in the Arab region continue within the ADIP phase-II and in 2023 ESCWA developed a technical paper on advancing e-accessibility through new and emerging technologies to study the impact of such technologies on digital accessibility. This consultative meeting will serve as a peer-review of the technical paper.

Objectives

The main objective is to present and discuss "e-Accessibility through new and emerging technologies", a draft technical paper offering insight and recommendations on advancing e-accessibility through new technologies. Overall, the paper should ensure the digital accessibility of new and emerging technologies to provide services and applications. More importantly, it would provide guidance to Arab policymakers on how to develop/update their national policies to take advantage of such technologies.

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[1] ADIP supports the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), to which all ESCWA member States are signatories, and contributes to the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) to strengthen systemwide accessibility and mainstreaming of the rights of persons with disabilities. It is also closely linked to the Beirut Consensus on Technology for Sustainable development in the Arab region and the 2030 Agenda, by providing member States with quality guidance and specific support on technology and innovation for sustainable development.

Additionally, cases and initiatives from the Arab region and beyond will be showcased to share ideas, concerns and challenges and achievements related to e-accessibility and new and emerging technologies.

Expected accomplishments

- The collection of comments and suggestions that will be used to enhance and finalise the technical paper on advancing e-accessibility through new and emerging technologies.

- Share knowledge and network to fuel and open discussions on issues related to e-accessibility and new and emerging technologies.

- Identify additional and related themes and agree on recommendations on advancing e-accessibility through new and emerging technologies in the Arab region.

Discussion topics

- New and emerging technologies –uses, benefits and challenges – in the advancement of e-accessibility globally and in the Arab region.

- Existing technical e-accessibility guidelines and standards geared towards new and emerging technologies

- Regional and international case studies on technology use, e-accessibility and new technologies.

- Recommendations on the use and deployment of new technologies while ensuring its accessibility.

Format

The expert group meeting will be a one-day hybrid event, held in Amman, Jordan. It will take place on 27 February 2024. It will be conducted in Arabic and English, with simultaneous interpretation.

Partners and beneficiaries

Officials from ministries and public agencies working in information and communication technology, digital accessibility, social affairs, administrative reform, agencies focused on the development and deployment of new and emerging technologies and organizations for persons with disabilities as well as older persons. Experts in digital accessibility and new and emerging technologies from the United Nations, academia, international and regional organizations, private sector and non-governmental organizations will also be invited.

Event page

More details, including access to pre-workshop documents, can be found on the event page at https://www.unescwa.org/events/e-accessibility-through-emerging-technologies

Focal Points

Ms. Mirna El Hajj Barbar
Programme Management Officer
United Nations Economic Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA)
E-Mail: barbarm@un.org

Mr. Nawar Al-Awa,
Regional Adviser on Technology for Development
United Nations Economic Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA)
E-Mail: alawa@un.org

Ms. Lize Denner
Associate Programme Management Officer
United Nations Economic Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA)
E-Mail: denner@un.org