**Online Consultative Meeting on:**
*National Policies and Technical Guidelines Templates for Digital Accessibility*

**10-11 November 2020**

**Background**

Although Arab countries are increasingly committed to realizing the rights of persons with disabilities, those in the Arab region are still among the most marginalized population groups, facing multiple barriers which hinder their ability to participate in society on an equal basis with others. Research shows that in terms of literacy, education and employment, persons with disabilities remain disadvantaged. Women with disabilities in rural areas are particularly marginalized. For instance, they are more likely to have lower access to education, health and employment. Additionally, the demographic, socioeconomic, environmental and political changes and transitions that the region is witnessing, such as war and conflict, natural disasters and forced displacement are more likely to exacerbate vulnerability, risk of poverty and exclusion.

In parallel, it is worth mentioning the vital role that digital technologies can play for people's empowerment and in promoting better access for all towards building more inclusive societies. In the Arab region, the ICT sector has fortunately made some positive strides in development in the past few years and, as a result, can have a great impact in digital inclusion throughout the region. However, in many countries persons with disabilities face significant barriers in accessing information and communication technologies, including online media, websites and even TV. Thus, governments face the need to develop e-accessibility national policies to identify the vision, objectives and focus areas to enable persons with disability to use technology devices in their daily life and to ensure that the surrounding environment deploys technology and innovation efficiently to ease their access.

In this context, ESCWA has launched in 2020 the Arab Digital Inclusion Platform (ADIP) project to support policy makers in the Arab counties to develop/improve their national policies and guidelines for enhanced e-Accessibility. This would help to bridge the digital divide and enable all society members to access and use ICT.

Under the framework of the ADIP project, ESCWA has developed two draft templates that will be discussed during this online consultative meeting, namely:
-   **ESCWA template on national policy of e-Accessibility for the Arab region;**
-   **ESCWA template on technical guidelines of e-Accessibility for the Arab region.**

**Objectives**

The main objective of the online consultative meeting is to review, discuss and produce a set of recommendations for improving the **ESCWA templates on national policy and technical guidelines of e-accessibility for the Arab region.**

**Format**

The online consultative meeting on "National Policies and Technical Guidelines Templates for Digital Accessibility" will run over two days in two sessions of two hours and half each, during 10 and 11 November 2020 and will be conducted in English and Arabic.

Participants will include government officials and experts engaged in the disability and the ICT sector. Participants will contribute to the review and discussion of the draft documents proposed by ESCWA towards their improvement.

The recordings and the presentations will be posted on the website after the conclusion of the meeting. The follow-up actions, including key recommendations and knowledge products, will be disseminated through the ESCWA website.

**Targeted Audience**

The target audience of the meeting includes government officials and experts who are engaged in the ESCWA inter-governmental disability working group (IGED) and other government officials and experts from the ICT sector. The Meeting also intends to involve civil society organizations, the private sector, academia, and regional/international organizations dealing with digital government in the region.

**Expected Results**

The main outcome of the event will be an update of the two ESCWA templates that takes into consideration the recommendations proposed by participants.

**Discussion topics**

*National Policy Template*
- Digital accessibility plans and strategies in member states;
- Focus areas that need to be covered by digital accessibility policies;
- Comprehensiveness of the suggested national policy template;
- Suggestions to enhance the draft ESCWA template on national policy.

*Technical Guidelines Template*
- Current technical standards of digital accessibility used in member states;
- Applicability of international technical guidelines in the Arab region;
- Comprehensiveness of suggested templates for technical guidelines (i.e. websites, mobile apps, procurement);
- Suggestions to enhance the draft ESCWA template on Technical Guidelines.

**ESCWA Focal Points**

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