New Avenues for Empowerment: Access to Information and Knowledge for Persons with Disabilities

Brief Information about UNESCO’s work

UNESCO is one of the UN agencies that promotes and supports the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in 2006.

As the UN Convention represents the universal framework, which reaffirms that all persons with all types of disabilities can enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms, UNESCO contributes to the implementation of the articles linked to its mandate.
Table of Content

- UNESCO approach promoting access to information and knowledge
- Accessible ICTs and Personalized Learning for Students with Disabilities
- Accessible Digital Office Documents
- Regional perspective: ICTs in education by Persons with Disabilities
- International consultations – WSIS
- Towards Disability-Inclusive Development Framework
- Upcoming events
- Development of model policy on Inclusive ICTs in Support of Education
- Website
UNESCO promotes the concept of knowledge societies that are inclusive, pluralistic, equitable, open and participatory

UNESCO promotes better understanding of issues related to disability and mobilizes support for the recognition of the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities, and of the benefits of their integration in society.

UNESCO recognizes the need to:

- Prepare **national policies** and strongly encourages local governments to introduce specific legislation to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities.
- Define government’s aspirations as to **services for persons with disabilities**, including equal access to information and knowledge, education and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).
- Develop **national standards for public goods** in terms of products and services, such as accessibility guidelines, recommendations, curriculum and other mechanisms to ensure that these standards are maintained.
- Build **capacity** of professional community and persons with disabilities to provide access to information and knowledge (hard and software developers, teachers, and other).
- Adapt and **personalize ICTs to the nature of disabilities**, particularly for learning and teaching purposes.
- Enhance **social and economic integration** through improved access to information and knowledge.
- Collect **statistical data**.
- Carry out **research**.
Accessible ICTs and Personalized Learning for Students with Disabilities

UNESCO, jointly with Microsoft, prepared and launched a report on Accessible ICTs and Personalized Learning for Students with Disabilities in March 2012.

Personalized learning requires attention to the unique needs of all students of all abilities, acknowledging that each have different learning styles including students with mild, moderate or severe disabilities. Technology plays a particularly vital role by enabling flexible curriculum development and assisting students with disabilities to participate as equals in the learning experience.

The report includes a number of successful case studies and recommendations on how educators and students could use existing technological solutions in classrooms, and how UNESCO’s ICT Competences Framework for Teachers could be applied for teachers’ capacity building on issues related to the accessibility. The key recommendations on practical solutions for the use of accessible ICTs contained in the report target teachers, policy makers and administrators.

The report is available at (English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Chinese versions):

Accessible Digital Office Documents for Persons with Disabilities

UNESCO and the Ontario Ministry of Social Services and Community (Canada) provided support to the Inclusive Design Institute (OCAD) for the development of a guidance to help ensuring the accessibility of office document and the office application with which they are created.

Digital documents, unlike their printed counterparts, have the potential to be accessible to the millions of individuals globally. This includes individuals who are blind, have compromised vision, have dyslexia, cannot turn pages or handle paper due to motor restrictions, or who face cognitive access or literacy barriers. The guidance provides instructions to make information accessible for persons with disabilities at educational, community and workplace levels. The accessible office documents are essential for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in employment market.

Using this guidance, UNESCO has organized internal capacity building trainings for the staff at its Headquarters in Paris (web masters, librarians and publication offices).

More information about the project and guidance is available (English):
http://adod.idrc.ocad.ca//wordperfectX5-review
Opening New Avenues for Empowerment: ICTs to Access Information and Knowledge for Persons with Disabilities

Fostering universal access to information and knowledge, particularly for persons with disabilities, UNESCO, together with international and regional partners, prepared five regional reports on use of ICTs in Education for Persons with Disabilities.

The analytical and evidence-based report provides a systematic and cross-regional overview as well as analysis of existing challenges, policies and practices on the use of ICTs which are accessible, affordable and adaptable, including Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) solutions and Open Educational Resources (OERs).

The recommendations provided for UNESCO’s Member States on accessible, adoptive and affordable ICTs in education for Persons with Disabilities include the following aspects:

- National education and information policies
- Linkages with other policies
- Existing Open Educational Resources
- Existing technical solutions (FOSS)
- Gender equality
- Open Document Formats
- Web accessibility standards
- Impact and sustainability issues
- Budgetary implications and funding sources
- Successful cases studies at grassroot level

The report (English) is available on UNESCO’s website.
http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002197/219767e.pdf

LAC region report is available on UNESCO’s website:
UNESCO World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) + 10 Review meeting – February 2013

This research report has been commissioned in the context of the approaching deadline of 2015 for the MDG (Millennium Development Goals) as defined by the United Nations General Assembly to assess the progress of actions initiated after the first and second WSIS (World Summit on Information Society) to promote the digital inclusion of persons with disabilities and to provide policy recommendations.

WSIS Action Line 3 “Access to Information and Knowledge” and other relevant lines, include action points on inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, mainly focusing on improving access to information and knowledge.

Within the framework of these action points, the objective of this report is to review the current status, analyze trends and emerging innovations in connection to the use by persons with disabilities of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to access information and knowledge, and to formulate recommendations that will help UNESCO and other partners in shaping its strategy.

The report (English) is available on UNESCO’s website.
Synthesis report for the disability inclusive development framework

This report is the result of an extensive expert consultation organized by ITU, Broadband Commission for Digital Development, the Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs (G3ict), the International Disability Alliance (IDA), Telecentre.org Foundation and UNESCO. The consultation gathered over 150 expert inputs from relevant organizations and key individuals representing multiple categories of stakeholders, including governments, academic institutions, organizations of persons with disabilities, civil society organizations, the private sector and regional and international organizations. Furthermore, these inputs stem from over 55 countries on the 6 major continents, encompassing diverse areas of development.

This report aims to complement previous work on the use of ICT as an enabler of the economic, social and political inclusion of persons with disabilities by further studying the specific contribution that ICT can bring to achieve a disability-inclusive development agenda, challenges to be overcome and actions to be undertaken. It synthesizes a descriptive data analysis conducted following the collection of survey responses and interviews of prominent experts in the fields of ICT, disability and development.

The report (English) is available on UNESCO’s website.
Building on the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and its unique mandate to education, communication and information within the United Nations system, UNESCO, in close cooperation with international, regional and national partners is considering to organize an international conference entitled “From Exclusion to Empowerment: The Role of Information and Communication Technologies for Persons with Disabilities” in New Delhi, India (December 2014).

The major objective of this international conference is to promote the human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities and encourage all stakeholders to take concrete measures for the empowerment of persons with disabilities through the use of ICTs.
Development of Model Policy for Inclusive ICT and Assistive Technologies in Support of Inclusive Education

The model policy initiative is a collaborative venture between UNESCO, G3ict, European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, and Microsoft in which a number of model policies will be developed in relation to the implementation of the UNCRPD. The issues of web accessibility and also inclusive education have been identified as the initial areas of focus in the work.

The agreed aim for the work relating to inclusive education has been to develop a model policy document to be used as a template to assist UNESCO’s Member States in promoting the accessibility of ICTs and Assistive Technologies for learners with disabilities in all sectors of inclusive education.

Within the work, policy has been understood to refer to the rules, regulations and standards established by local, regional, national and international government or other recognised authorities. Policies govern, or regulate systems that direct services, programmes and other infrastructural activities in different sectors of a society.

The intended audience for the model policy is key decision makers, responsible for policy formulation within national education institutions such as ministries of education, communication and information technology, social affairs etc.

The document (English, French) will be published in December 2013.
Access for people with disabilities

Over 10% of the world’s population suffers from a variety of disabilities. However, information and communication technologies (ICT) have the potential for making significant improvements in the lives of these persons. ICTs offer individuals the ability to compensate for physical or functional limitations, thus allowing them to enhance their social and economic integration in communities by enlarging the scope of activities available to them.

UNESCO works with its partners to promote the use of ICT for access to information and knowledge for all persons, including those with disabilities.

UNESCO and People with disabilities

In building inclusive knowledge societies, access to knowledge and information is of vital importance to ensure that all persons are able to participate as creative and productive members of the society. International Day of Persons with Disabilities is celebrated annually since 1981 on 3 December to promote an understanding of disability issues and to mobilise support for the dignity and well-being of persons with disabilities. It also seeks to increase awareness of gains to be derived from the inclusion of persons with disabilities in every aspect of life.

UNESCO is one of the UN agencies that promotes and supports the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in 2006. The UN Convention represents the universal framework, which reaffirms that all persons with all types of disabilities can enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Meetings

-WSIS Forum 2011 Action Line C3 - Access: Interactive session on

English version:
http://www.unesco.org/webworld/en/access-people-disabilities

French version:
http://www.unesco.org/webworld/fr/access-people-disabilities

Spanish version:
http://www.unesco.org/webworld/es/access-people-disabilities

Contact person:
Ms Irmgarda Kasinskaite-Buddeberg
Knowledge Societies Division
Communication and Information Sector
UNESCO

1 rue Miollis 75732
Paris cedex 15 France
E-mail: i.kasinskaite@unesco.org
Phone: +33 (0) 1 45 68 40 74