



IEC/ISO/ITU Policy on Standardization and accessibility

Introduction

The importance of accessibility was recognized when United Nations member states adopted in 2006 the *United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD). The UNCRPD takes the view that persons with disabilities are "subjects" with rights, capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent as well as being active members of society¹.

Older persons are making up an increasing percentage in the population worldwide. While not all older persons have disabilities, the prevalence and risk of disability is highest amongst this demographic group, although age-related disabilities can begin to take hold early and are often progressive in severity.

The World Report on Disability², jointly published by the World Health Organization and the World Bank in June 2011, estimates that around 15 percent of the world population or more than one billion people live with some form of disability, the majority of whom in lower-income countries or lower-income segments of their societies³.

The increasing prevalence and complexity of technology in everyday life presents both opportunities and challenges. In order for older persons and persons with disabilities to participate in society on equal terms, it is necessary to improve the accessibility of products, services and environments. This applies in particular for access to buildings and the built environment, accessibility throughout the whole transport chain, to the design and usability of information and telecommunication systems, and to products and services used in everyday life.

Improved accessibility enhances the quality of life and can reduce discrimination. Products, services and environments that improve accessibility should be available to more persons, so economies of scale can be attained. This may generate an increase in trade, as products and services become easier to use for entire populations and, in turn, will benefit society as a whole.

Policy Statement

Standards contribute to accessibility

IEC, ISO and ITU encourage the development of standards that take account of the widest range of characteristics and abilities of persons, including in particular those of older persons, children and persons with disabilities.

There exists a continuum of human abilities. Standards should therefore aim to address needs throughout this continuum. It is also recognized that standards for everyday products and services cannot meet all needs, and that additional standardization for assistive products and assistive technologies may be necessary to meet certain requirements.

Considering the needs of persons with the widest range of characteristics and abilities at the outset can make it possible to design products, services and environments, which include virtual environments supported by information and communication technologies, that more people can use with little or no extra cost. For example, it is estimated that ensuring full compliance with accessibility standards in new public buildings adds generally very limited extra costs⁴, which are much less than adapting existing buildings later on.

Standardization can impact the design of products, services and environments and can therefore play an important role. Older persons and persons with disabilities are important user and consumer groups. Their needs should be systematically addressed when standards are developed or revised. Standards that take into account the needs of such users will have broader impact and greater market relevance, helping to make products, services and environments more accessible and usable for everybody.

To ensure standards contribute to accessibility, IEC, ISO and ITU emphasize the importance of the following four points:

1 Apply the principles of Accessible or Universal Design

The core objective of Accessible or Universal Design is to ensure that products, systems, services, environments and facilities can be used by persons from a population with the widest range of characteristics and abilities.

Standardization should ensure that products, services and environments are available, accessible, usable and safe for all users, including older persons and persons with disabilities. By following Accessible or Universal Design from the outset to introduce accessibility features, the likelihood of a need for expensive retrofitting can be significantly reduced.

2 Engage older persons and persons with disabilities in standards development

The representation of interests of older persons and persons with disabilities in relevant standardization projects should be supported. Guidance and training should be provided to such representatives to be effectively involved in the standardization process.

3 Train standards developers on the importance of accessibility

Standards developers need to consider accessibility in their work, especially key documents such as ISO/IEC Guide 71 *Guide for addressing accessibility in standards*, adopted by ITU as ITU-T Supplement 17 for the H-series, to support the mainstreaming of accessibility features into standards. Coordination should be strengthened between standards committees dealing with everyday products, services and environments and those with responsibility for assistive products and technologies. Awareness raising, training and the development of tools may also be required for standards developers to increase their understanding of accessibility and to promote its application in their own scope of expertise. Exchange of information and cooperation between standards developers addressing accessibility issues in different subject areas should be facilitated in order to encourage consistent approaches.

4 Improve accessibility of standardization secretariat support

IEC, ISO and ITU will endeavour, within their budget and financial limitations, to improve accessibility in standardization, including in secretariat support, their working environment, working methods and processes as well as in their products and services, taking into account the widest range of characteristics and abilities of persons, including and in particular those of older persons and persons with disabilities.

- (1) See: UN Enable - Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, at: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=150>, with the full text of the Convention
- (2) World Report on Disability 2011 published by the World Health Organization and The World Bank, and a Summary of the Report are available at: http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/en/index.html
- (3) World Report on Disability 2011, p. 29-31 and Summary of the report, p. 8.
- (4) World Report on Disability 2011, p. 173