European Disability Forum

Contribution to

Workshop on ICT and people with Disabilities
at the
World Summit on the Information Society
Kram Centre, Tunis, Tunisia
Wednesday 16th November 2005

European Disability Forum

- Umbrella Organisation of persons with disabilities in Europe.

- 17 national councils of disabled people's organisations

- One from each EU Member State plus Norway & Iceland.

- 86 European non-governmental organisations

- Voice of 50 million persons with disabilities and parents of disabled people unable to represent themselves

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Introduction

- People with disabilities can gain disproportionately from access to Information and Communication Technologies

- Often do not have access to alternatives

- ICT's can also become a disproportionate barrier

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UN Convention

- EDF commends the UN on this initiative and supports its aims

- Paradigm shift from a medical to a human rights based model

- Positive measures for the achievement of Human Rights

- Structured dialogue between public authorities and organisations of persons with disabilities.

- Mainstreaming the needs of people with disabilities into the information society

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Access is a right

- People with disabilities heavily affected by the digital divide

- Barriers experienced are not of their own making

- Particularly true for those with cognitive and intellectual impairments

- People with disabilities have a right to access public and private ICT products and services

- Positive actions required to vindicate this right

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Design for all

- Approach to design which includes the needs of the maximum number of users without modifying a product or service

- Supports the needs of people with disabilities, older people, people with low literacy and children

- Promotes consistency and ease of use

- Cheap to implement at design stage, but expensive to retrofit

- Taken into account from the earliest stages of the development of products and services

- Include potential users at design through testing phases

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Harmonisation of standards

- Key element of inclusion in the Information Society

- Standards Bodies are central

- EDF recognises and supports current actions of major European and World Standards Bodies

- Call on all stakeholders to promote work in this area

- Inclusion of our needs in standards also promotes mainstreaming and thus better affordability

- Products and services designed with the needs of people with disabilities in mind are typically easier to use by everyone

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Public Procurement

- Public bodies must serve all citizens
- Public bodies cannot choose their customers
- Savings can be achieved by using electronically delivered products and services rather than the more traditional and labour-intensive ones
- Manual services will never be totally eliminated
- Use of electronically delivered products and services will never be maximised if the needs of large sections of society such as people with disabilities are ignored
- Savings benefit public bodies, access benefits people with disabilities

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E-Government Products

- Web sites are the most frequently used tools in e-Government, particularly in large countries

- Worldwide Web Consortium and WAI Standards

- Public bodies should adhere to two sets of WAI guidelines:

  (a) Web content accessibility guidelines

  (b) Authoring Tools guidelines

- Toolkits on ICT accessibility should be developed by Public Bodies

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National Initiatives

- Legislation that outlaws discriminatory practices and Ensures access to ICTs
- Legislation should cover education, training and employment
- Should not ignore other areas of social inclusion such as places of entertainment and digital television
- e-Government and access to public information (see above)
- Adherence to standards as developed by Standards Bodies
- Ensure access to telephone emergency services (e.g. using text phones)
- Ensure that Regulators require network operators and terminal equipment manufacturers cooperate in order to facilitate access by disabled users to electronic communication services
- Ensure the inclusion of the needs of people with disabilities and older people in all publicly funded research
- Promote same in privately funded research

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Conclusion

- People with disabilities and older people are a large and growing part of society
- We have a right to full and equal inclusion in the Information Society
- World Summit Declaration of Principles on Building the Information Society recognises this
- Governments and public bodies have a key role to play
- Design for all benefits all users
- People with disabilities gain disproportionately, but all of society gains

European Disability Forum :

Useful Web Site References

- European Disability Forum http://www.edf-feph.org.
- Irish IT Accessibility guidelines http://www.accessit.nda.ie.
- British Disability Representative council http://www.drc-gb.org.
- U. S. ADA information centre http://www.ada.com.
- Trace Centre on Universal Design http://www.trace.wisc.edu.
- Stakes Centre, Finland http://www.stakes.fi.

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