

Summary of the Interactive session: Action Line C3 Internet Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities

Mr Abdul Waheed Khan, Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, UNESCO, opened the session. In his welcome speech, Mr Khan said that no group is as prone to exclusion and being marginalized as this particular group is. UNESCO has a great concern that about 62 million children of primary school age cope with disability. That means a huge portion of them do not have access to a school. This divide is the result of lack of access to appropriate learning environment, employment opportunities, healthcare facilities, relevant information, as well as other services and facilities to improve people's lives. The use of ICT in all the stages of education, training, human resource development was indicated as one of the most empowering methods of the tools to provide access to information and knowledge for people with disabilities.

Mr Faouzi Kardous, Director of Sindbad Mediterranean (France) emphasised that disability is not a priority for many low-income countries. One of the most challenges is social and economic rehabilitation and insertion for persons with disabilities. Telework provides opportunities for the employment of people with disabilities. People can work from home over the Internet or they can work as independent workers or for decentralized companies. This makes it possible to overcome many disabilities, reduced mobility or hearing disabilities. Sindbad Mediterranean, along with the governments, has been working to provide concrete responses to employment markets.

Ms Andrea Saks, International Telecommunications Specialist for the Deaf, Convener ITU JCA-AHF (Joint Coordinating Activity on Accessibility and Human Factors), Coordinator IGF DCAD (Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disability) highlighted that it is important to encourage standards writers and industry to use the principle of universal design. The universal design must be used at the beginning of all the creations of anything to do with any technology. Industry should stop making new technology that creates barriers and using only proprietary standards.

Mr. Lucien Stanzione, Mayor of Althen des Paluds (France) provided an overview of the main achievements of the Center for people suffering from multiple sclerosis. The main objectives of the town were to work on the issue of accessibility in an urban setting, make sure that these people have a social life.

Mr. Mokhtar Ben Ali, Center of Telework for Persons with Disabilities (Tunisia) provided a definition of a term "Telework" which is one of the ways for people with disabilities to continue to play a role in society and confirm their citizenship. He shared his experience with participants on how Center ensures social and professional reinsertion of people with disabilities. It works in close cooperation with the Training Department, the Social and Professional Insertion Department, and the Telework Department as well as unemployment agency and other regulatory authorities in Tunisia.

Mr Pierre Petit from Human Rights Association (France) stressed the fact that people with disabilities cannot have comfortable access to the content on Internet. The standards are extremely restrictive, very binding and very difficult to use. Only real professionals can take all of these issues into account. Those who are in charge of associations rarely having that level of knowledge, so the websites generally do not meet these standards.

Mr. Gilles Canet, Director of Association of People with Physical Disabilities (APAHM), (France) introduced his work, which is concentrated in the following areas: accommodation, housing, employment, support to family such as a child-minding service, medical advice, and telework. In France, the Association establishes new partnerships with companies and aims to convince managers of the companies that people with disabilities are just as productive as people without disabilities.

Ms Susan Schorr, Acting Head of the Special Initiatives Division, Development Sector, ITU highlighted that mobile phones and the Web content must be made accessible. She shared best practices implemented with various stakeholders at the national level within the framework of the Article 9, United Nations Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities. The speaker presented a number of good practices such as the e-Accessibility Toolkit prepared together with G3ict, projects at community level providing assistive technologies to community ICT centres, capacity-building workshops within the context of the initiative called Connect to School, Connect to Community.

In the second half of the thematic workshop dedicated to discussion and exchange between the panelists and participants. The participants have shared a number of good practices on telework and views on existing challenges and opportunities. The need to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to information and knowledge using ICTs was central issue. ICTs should be recognized as important tool to empower persons with disabilities. Another question included whether telework really provides means for integration or in opposite exclusion as teleworking is mainly done at home. Participants of the interactive session raised a number of questions related to challenges faced by various social groups such as people who became disabled of land mines and illiterate children. The question was raised and discussed by many speakers and participants on UNESCO's and other organizations involvement in C3 of the WSIS agenda.