Principles for Driving the Digital Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities

(the "Principles")

GSMA Assistive Tech

The GSMA represents the interests of mobile operators worldwide, uniting more than 750 operators with almost 400 companies in the broader mobile ecosystem, including handset and device makers, software companies, equipment providers and internet companies, as well as organisations in adjacent industry sectors. The GSMA also produces the industry-leading MWC events held annually in Barcelona, Los Angeles and Shanghai, as well as the Mobile 360 Series of regional conferences.

For more information, please visit the GSMA corporate website at **www.gsma.com**.

Follow the GSMA on Twitter: **@GSMA**

The GSMA Assistive Tech programme works to drive greater access and use of mobile technologies for persons with disabilities in emerging markets and maximise opportunities for social and economic inclusion. The programme works with the mobile industry and key disability and development stakeholders to address the digital inclusion gap of persons with disabilities, identify innovation opportunities and highlight the value of mobile-enabled assistive technologies.

The programme is supported by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO).

For more information, please visit **www.gsma.com/AssistiveTech**.

Follow GSMA Mobile for Development on Twitter: **@GSMAm4d**

CONTENTS

Background

Around **15 per cent of the world's population**, or an estimated one billion people are persons with disabilities.[1]

According to the 2018 Disability & Development Report[2] from the UN, "persons with disabilities are at a disadvantage regarding most Sustainable Development Goals", and "concrete action is needed to include the world's one billion persons with disabilities, as both agents and beneficiaries of development".

Barriers to inclusion and participation are exacerbated by the lack of access to affordable, relevant assistive technology. **Only one in 10 people** have access to the assistive technology they need to live independent and autonomous lives.

Digital accessibility is recognised as a key priority in several global commitments, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy, with the core aim to ensure "no one is left behind" in our increasingly digital world.

The mobile disability gap[3] prevents greater inclusion
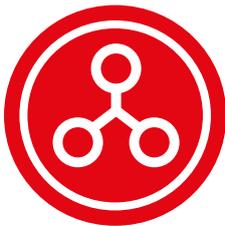
Connectivity is more important than ever and as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic the world's reliance on internet platforms to access critical information, services and opportunities has never been greater.

Mobile phones are cost effective tools for persons with disabilities, and are increasingly enabling greater inclusion by clustering together multiple assistive technologies in a single device.

Despite its importance, mobile access and use remains unequal. Evidence from GSMA research[4] shows that there is a significant gap in mobile phone ownership among persons with disabilities and that persons with disabilities are less likely to own smartphones and use mobile internet than persons without disabilities.

For mobile operators, there is an opportunity to reach more persons with disabilities, diversifying and extending their customer base. The provision of more accessible design and services will also likely benefit their existing customer base.

Ensuring digital inclusion is critical and requires informed action for all stakeholders to address the barriers faced by persons with disabilities and to meet their needs. Now is the time for the mobile industry to take action to ensure their products and services are accessible to persons with disabilities so that they can benefit from mobile services on an equal basis with others.

Introducing the Principles

The GSMA Assistive Tech programme continues to research the digital inclusion drivers and barriers of persons with disabilities. A stark realisation is that a global effort is needed to create a significant shift in how persons with disabilities are reached and included, if we want to reduce inequalities and realise this substantial opportunity. This shift needs to happen across the entire mobile value chain from how mobile services are inclusively designed, to how customers with disabilities are part of the operators' main strategy, and innovating for and with persons with disabilities.

In conjunction with mobile operators and disability and accessibility experts, the GSMA has developed a set of principles to advance the digital inclusion of persons with disabilities. These principles provide a framework for action for the industry along with a set of potential activities that can be carried out by mobile operators in order to reduce the gap in access and use of mobile-enabled products and services by persons with disabilities.

By endorsing the Principles, showing leadership on disability inclusion and taking disability inclusive actions, mobile phone operators and digital stakeholders will support and advance a more inclusive society and amplify the voices of persons with disabilities through digital technology.
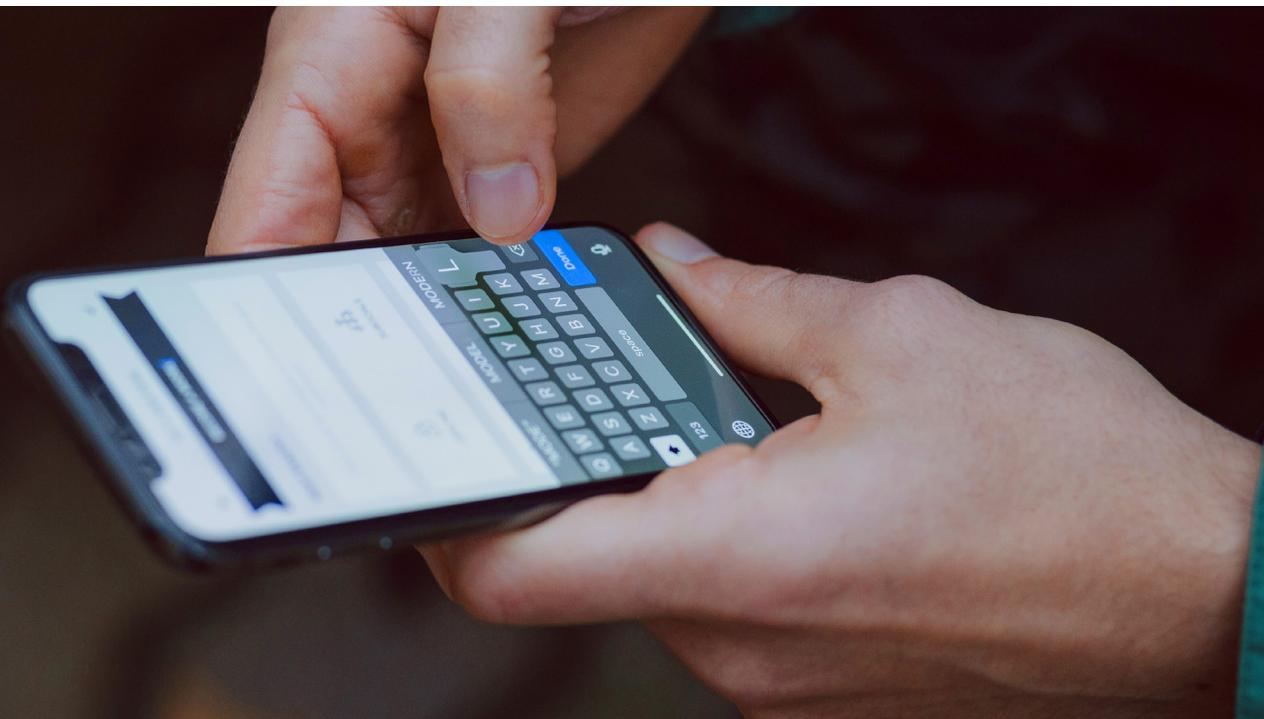
1

Embrace disability inclusion at every level of the organisation

Embrace disability inclusion at every level of the organisation

To drive digital inclusion and reach persons with disabilities with mobile-enabled products and services, it is critical to focus on disability at an organisational level, to ensure disability inclusion is embedded across the organisation, supported by relevant policies and strategies, and spearheaded by senior leadership. Moreover, persons with disabilities bring unique perspectives and skills to drive innovation and stimulate creativity within the workforce. Embracing diversity is a driver of commercial success.

Within this principle there are the following areas of action, focused on ensuring that:

The disability inclusion agenda is championed by leadership and embedded in all levels of the organisation

Recommended actions:

- Nominate a dedicated C-level sponsor who is responsible for driving the disability inclusion agenda

- Support and enable persons with disabilities within the organisation to own, steer and co-create the disability inclusion agenda, ensuring the voices of persons with disabilities are represented (e.g. via a 'disability expert group')

- Nominate champions across different parts of the business who advocate for disability inclusion and ensure collaboration across business lines

- Communicate your commitment internally to ensure the workforce understand why disability inclusion matters to the organisation

- Communicate your commitment externally to be part of a global movement and inspire others to take action on disability inclusion, accessibility and awareness

Disability inclusion is integrated in internal policies, strategies, business plans and KPIs

Recommended actions:

- Make disability inclusion part of the business strategy including setting targets and KPIs to ensure appropriate team focus on inclusion, accessibility and awareness, along with clear accountability structures to ensure targets are delivered

- Actively involve persons with disabilities and/or representative organisations in the design and development of business strategies, policies and plans to drive disability inclusion

- Assess and amend existing business strategies, policies, plans and budgets to ensure that disability inclusion and accessibility is sufficiently reflected and prioritised, and any gaps are noted transparently

Employees believe in disability inclusion as a core organisational value

Recommended actions:

- Provide training to staff, ideally through persons with first-hand experience, on (examples): disability inclusive practices; disability confidence; the various challenges and barriers faced by customers with different disabilities; the role and value of mobile as an assistive technology; and how to reach more and improve services for customers with different disabilities.

Persons with disabilities can and do thrive in the organisation

Recommended actions:

- Review HR policies and practices to ensure persons with disabilities are recruited and retained; are able to access training and personal development; and have opportunities to be promoted in the workforce, with the aim for persons with disabilities to be represented at every level of the organisation

- Assess whether the organisation is accessible for all, taking steps to address issues identified and be transparent on areas of inaccessibility. This includes ensuring the buildings, documents, websites/intranet, systems/software and ways of collaboration are accessible to all, and everyone has the assistive technologies and flexibility they require to do their work productively

- Create a 'reasonable adjustment'[5] policy, to effectively respond to requests from staff members with disabilities for adjustments to be made to their working environment

- Upskill IT personnel in web accessibility, with the aim to become certified in web accessibility

2

Understand how to reach and better serve persons with disabilities

Understand how to reach and better serve persons with disabilities

Actions to drive the digital inclusion of persons with disabilities must be informed by an understanding of the local issues and local contexts, and ensuring persons with disabilities' voices are heard: "nothing about us, without us". Disability inclusive data are key to eliminate discrimination and develop a better understanding of the requirements, views and barriers of persons with disabilities in order to better serve them. Examples of such evidence includes collecting information on the mobile disability gaps in different contexts; learning from persons with different disabilities; and evaluating the commercial opportunities for developing new or enhancing existing products and services.

Within this principle there are the following areas of action, focused on ensuring that:

Disability-disaggregated data is collected and analysed to understand the mobile disability gap

Recommended actions:

- At an organisational level, take steps to track and understand the disability gap in the customer base; understand how customers with disabilities are using mobile services and the impact of actions taken to reach more persons with disabilities

- At a project or initiative level, collect, analyse and track disability-disaggregated data related to access and use of specific mobile-enabled products and services on an ongoing basis to monitor progress, evaluate and iterate

- Segment and analyse customer data by disability along with other key factors (e.g. gender, location, age) where possible, to understand how adoption and use of mobile services differs and identify opportunities for reaching more persons with disabilities

- Adopt the Washington Group Questions when collecting new data on disability, to ensure comparability of data and consistent practices

- Ensure all disability-disaggregated data collected and stored is undertaken ethically, following national data protection policies

The commercial opportunity for reaching persons with disabilities with mobile-enabled products and services is established to ensure sustainability and scalability

Recommended actions:

- Establish the high level commercial opportunity for addressing the mobile disability gap at both an organisational and project level to ensure scalability and sustainability

- At a project or initiative level, evaluate the commercial opportunity in more detail (considering both direct and indirect revenue streams) to establish the business case for reaching persons with disabilities and identify opportunities for improving the commercial return on investment

The barriers and requirements of persons with disabilities in accessing and using mobile-enabled products and services are understood

Recommended actions:

- Conduct consumer insights research to better understand the requirements, circumstances and views of persons with disabilities and the barriers limiting their access to and use of the mobile-enabled products and services

- Explore the attitudinal and social barriers, such as stigma and discrimination, faced by persons with disabilities in addition to the physical or technological barriers

- Consult, involve and listen to persons with disabilities in the development and iteration of products and services, in line with the mantra "nothing about us without us"

- Consult with those who understand the experiences, requirements and barriers of persons with disabilities in the market (e.g. Disabled Peoples' Organisations (DPOs), relevant customer facing employees)

3

Deliver inclusive products and services that meet the diverse requirements of persons with disabilities

Deliver inclusive products and services that meet the diverse requirements of persons with disabilities

Persons with disabilities face a number of inter-related barriers that prevent them from accessing and using mobile-enabled products and services. For example, evidence from GSMA research[6] shows many persons with disabilities do not know about relevant accessible mobile products; and internet-enabled handsets, which are typically the most accessible, are often unaffordable to persons with disabilities. Action is required to address the barriers and requirements of persons with disabilities, drive innovation, place persons with disabilities at the heart of the design process and realise the social and commercial opportunity of reaching this underserved segment of the population.

Within this principle there are the following areas of action, focused on ensuring that:

Handsets, content, products and services are accessible and affordable for persons with disabilities

Recommended actions:

Access and accessibility

- Ensure existing products and services are accessible to persons with disabilities (e.g. 'tell us once', voice activated passwords, or bespoke services such as using sign language), and all services are compatible with accessibility features and tools (such as screen readers, magnifiers etc.)

- Ensure new content, products and services are developed with and for persons with disabilities in mind (e.g. user-centred design and through inclusive or universal design practices) to improve accessibility and usability

- Ensure Know Your Customer (KYC) for SIM purchase is appropriate for the level of risk, and does not disproportionately exclude persons with disabilities who may lack formal identification

Affordability

- Design solutions to make internet enabled handsets more affordable to persons with disabilities (e.g. microloans, partnerships with low-priced handset manufacturers, instalment plans etc.)

- Introduce tailored packages, innovative pricing or business models that appeal to persons with disabilities' price-sensitivity (e.g. tariff plans, innovative data packages, bite-sized/on-demand data pricing)

- Roll out 'data-light' accessible versions of mobile apps/services

- Consider promotional deals to encourage trial of products and services by persons with disabilities

Content, products and services are relevant to persons with disabilities

Recommended actions:

- Develop and/or release products and services that appeal to persons with disabilities

- Enhance existing products or services to appeal to persons with disabilities

- Develop marketing campaigns to showcase how mobile services are relevant to persons with disabilities

- Develop marketing campaigns to increase awareness of accessibility features among persons with and without disabilities

- Ensure marketing and promotional campaigns, for bespoke and mainstream products, are inclusive and feature persons with disabilities; and do not perpetuate stereotypes about disability

- Explore opportunities to partner with DPOs or other relevant organisations to reach consumer segments who would most likely value the products/services

- Encourage diversity in sales staff and agent networks to be representative of and appeal to the customer base, including persons with disabilities

Customer engagement is designed with persons with disabilities in mind

Recommended actions:

- Ensure agents are able to guide customers with specific needs to a range of suitable handsets with appropriate accessibility features

- Ensure shops and agents are accessible (e.g. locations and stores are physically accessible, staff and agents are sensitised to disability and are able to communicate effectively with all persons)

- Customer services are able to provide support to all customers, including customers with disabilities (e.g. sign language interpreters)

- Customer services and agents have the right training to ensure persons with disabilities do not face stigma and attitudinal barriers when engaging with them

- Ensure marketing and communication material is accessible for persons with disabilities (e.g. captioned audio-visuals, braille printed materials, audio description in videos, sign language in shops etc.) and be transparent on areas of inaccessibility

Persons with disabilities have the digital skills and literacy to use mobile-enabled products and services, and are aware of and understand the benefits mobile can bring

Recommended actions:

- Ensure customer facing staff and agents are effectively trained and incentivised to teach customers (and their caregivers/relatives) how to use mobile to meet their needs (e.g. how to use accessibility features on mobile phones and how to use mobile services)

- Explore opportunities to partner with DPOs or other organisations to teach persons with disabilities how to access and use accessibility features and mobile-enabled products and services

Persons with disabilities feel safe and secure using mobile content, products and services

Recommended actions:

- Design mobile products and services that either minimise the risk of harassment and fraud or increase the safety of customers with disabilities (e.g. Interactive Voice Response (IVR) on mobile money services, voice activated passwords)

- Include in marketing and promotion activities how customers, including persons with disabilities, can protect themselves online

- Ensure customer facing staff and agents are effectively trained and incentivised to teach customers (and their caregivers/relatives) about online safety and how to avoid harassment and fraud

Endnotes

1. World Health Organisation. See: https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability

2. United Nations Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities (2018)

3. The mobile disability gap is defined as how much less likely persons with disabilities are than non-disabled persons to own or use a mobile phone. It is calculated as a percentage: non-disabled mobile phone owners/users minus person with disability mobile phone owners /users divided by non-disabled mobile phone owners/users.

4. Aranda-Jan, C and Boutard, A. (2019). Understanding the Mobile Disability Gap Report. GSMA

5. A reasonable adjustment is a change an employer makes to remove or reduce the effect of an employee's disability in order to allow them to do their job without disadvantage. E.g. providing specialist equipment, such as an ergonomic chair; or allowing a guide or hearing dog into the workplace etc.

6. Aranda-Jan, C and Boutard, A. (2019). Understanding the Mobile Disability Gap Report. GSMA

gsma.com