

Technology and persons with disabilities

There are approximately 1.2 billion persons in the world living with disabilities, 85% living in developing countries and approximately 150 million in India alone. Attitudinal, social, physical and technological barriers affect their ability to carry out even simple essential day to day activities and results in their isolation and exclusion from society.

Technology plays a fundamental role in our lives today, with Finance, Education, Government services and other aspects of life being digitised and brought online.

Technology has the potential to allow all people, including persons with disabilities and seniors to access and contribute to the Information Society. However, unless technology can be accessed and used by all persons, we run the risk of leaving these groups behind as society moves forward.



What is Accessibility?

Accessibility is key to creating an equitable, inclusive and barrier free world. Accessibility refers to a state when a product, service or environment can be used as effectively and completely by a person with a disability as it can by a person without a disability. This can be ensured through compliance with globally recognised accessibility standards while designing and developing products or services. Persons with disabilities and seniors may need changes to a product or service in order to be able to benefit from and use it effectively.

Assistive technologies such as screen readers, captioning, voice-to-text software, visual aids and other information and communication technologies (ICTs) can mitigate the impact of disabilities. Accessible technologies also can benefit everyone, not just persons with disabilities. Accessibility is not only a legal imperative, but also makes great business sense. It is significantly more expensive to retrofit a product with accessibility, than making it accessible right from the start. Furthermore, compliance with accessibility and universal design standards also enables use of mainstream technologies by persons with disabilities, thereby creating an inclusive world.

Implementing Accessibility

Over the past decade there has been an increasing acknowledgment of the necessity of mandating electronic accessibility as part of national legislations and adopting technology relevant global standards such as EN 301 549 (Accessibility requirements for ICT products and services) to implement the same. India has also made it mandatory for both public and private organisations under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 to make facilities and services accessible. The RPD Rules specifically identify standards such as the Guidelines for Indian Government Web sites (GIGW) and require compliance. In 2018 these Guidelines were revised by the National Informatics Centre (NIC) to reflect updated accessibility requirements, including mobile app accessibility. Similarly, it is required that all documents and communication should be in accessible formats, such as accessible electronic publication (EPUB). We at BIF are committed to creating an accessible, inclusive and barrier free world.

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