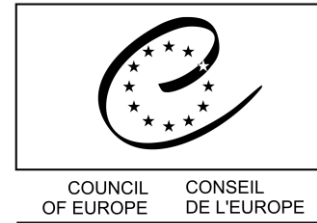




Ministry of Education, Science and Culture



Strasbourg, 15 April 2009

MCM(2009)017

**1st Council of Europe Conference of Ministers
responsible for Media and New Communication Services**
A new notion of media?
(28-29 May 2009, Reykjavik, Iceland)

Position Paper
adopted by European Co-ordination Forum for the
Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015
(CAHPAH)

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Trust in present and future media

Introduction

The term “media” is interpreted widely. It covers the radio, TV, the press, films, literature and music as well as communications and information services in general.

The challenges with the media and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) may concern both the use of the media themselves and their adaptation to various areas of life: politics (e.g. electronic voting), citizenship issues (e.g. e-governance services, electronic passports, online taxation ...), cultural life (TV subtitles, audio description of TV and theatre), instruction (reading material on electronic media), job opportunities, public life (trading via the internet, websites, telephone communication), public transport (e.g. information).

Basic principles and identification of the challenges

There is no unconditional trust in today’s high-tech developments in the media with regard to their contribution to increasing the integration into society of people with disabilities, so the Council of Europe has developed an action plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society, which includes a specific action line on Information and Communication.

The principles of this action plan are: full citizenship on the basis of non-discrimination, in other words equal opportunities/rights and full participation in society based on the right to self-determination.

The conditions required for the participation in society for people with disabilities are accessibility not only of the physical environment but also of transport and information and communication, financial capacity (affordability) and availability of technological solutions. In many European countries people with disabilities lack the purchasing power to keep up with high-tech developments as a result of the combination of poverty and their disabilities.

The basic principles are also set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (in Arts. 9 and 19).

The right to equal opportunities and participation is only a democratic right if the choices are available, if accessibility is ensured and does not have to be fought for.

This same democratic right combined with basic efficiency also assumes that problems are picked up as far as possible in the planning stage. Universal Design must be the motto in accordance with the following definition, in other words, it is better to anticipate barriers than having to remove them afterwards.

Universal Design is a strategy which aims to make the design and composition of different environments, products, communication, information technology and services accessible and understandable to, as well as usable by everyone, to the greatest extent in the most independent and natural manner possible, preferably without the need for adaptation or specialised solutions.

Need for monitoring of high-tech developments in the media? Trust must not be blind?

Thanks to the use of more new information and communications technologies in the media, the quality of life of people with functional disabilities is being improved and their participation in society supported. The opportunities for access (e.g. voice control) increase the opportunities for use, digitisation makes the media more multifunctional. This creates the expectation that people with disabilities are thereby in a

better position to independently search for, provide and receive information whenever they consider it necessary.

However, at the same time, these new opportunities also entail new challenges.

Rapid development and adaptation of new ICT can lead to social exclusion and the widening of the digital gulf. After all, not everyone has the same level of digital literacy. Digitisation increases multifunctionality, which can also lead to increased difficulty of use and handability.

Media are combined with each other more and more. This entails the obligation to make all media accessible. Missing the boat with one medium may mean that the global solution becomes inaccessible.

Electronic data transfer avoids the challenges with physical accessibility and mobility (with people having to move less) but for other target groups it can interfere with accessibility when communication is too visual.

Moreover, privacy must also be monitored in the use of media.

On top of this, training and the level of education of people with disabilities is also a central issue. People with disabilities are still often easily sidelined by lower-quality instruction.

Solutions

The requirement of the involvement of all the parties concerned (stakeholders), designers, the social sector, community facilities, the people with disabilities themselves, is applicable to all the following solutions.

Creating a coherent policy and legal framework

In line with Recommendation Rec (2006)5 of the Committee of Ministers to the member states on the Council of Europe action plan for the promotion of the rights and full participation in society of people with disabilities: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe: 2006-2015, mainstreaming will be necessary i.e. disability policies must be integrated into all sectors rather than come from a separate service for care for people with disabilities. This is certainly necessary in the area of the media given that the areas of adaptation occur in various areas of authority.

It is also important that the policy be appropriately adopted and managed from the highest possible level of authority.

Developments in relevant legislation

- introduction of anti-discrimination legislation
- protecting privacy;
- application of the Resolution ResAP (2001)3: "Towards full citizenship of persons with disabilities through inclusive new technologies";
- adaptation of public contracts for media and ICT (public procurement);
- imposing standards regarding compatibility and norms (e.g. quotas for subtitles).

Promoting Universal Design and application to the area of the media

Resolution ResAP(2007)3 on "achieving full participation through UD" may serve as a basis here.

Sensitisation, awareness

Becoming familiar with the barriers. Creating a different image in the press; the person with a disability as a citizen with options, human dignity, a right to freely express an opinion. Marketeers must be aware that they can expand their target groups and can avoid costs by the adoption of Universal Design.

Development of protocols, guidelines, recommendations

- Media incorporated into a rapidly expanding set of devices of all sizes and a variety of potential uses demand communication protocols for use with bandwidths, the internet, 3G, digital TV etc.
- Conditions must be formulated with regard to intellectual property rights.

Standardisation

The European Commission has given CEN and ETSI, two official European standardisation organisations, the task (Mandate M376) of developing a standard for the accessibility of software and electronic services that are purchased by public authorities.

Monitoring – benchmarking

Developing indicators in order to describe the extent to which the social impact of ICT excludes (minority) target groups, in particular people with disabilities and older people. These indicators will be in proportion to those of non-excluded groups. The target groups themselves must be directly contacted and involved here.

Research and development

- Must be proactive, directed towards the future (trying to assess problems in advance);
- with the involvement of the experience of experts; and
- use of assistive technology.

Empowerment of the user

- user training;
- accessibility of training courses: preferably inclusive, specific if necessary.

Coordinated approach – knowledge centre - databases

Sufficient, specific expertise must be organised that shows what stands in the way of achieving “ICT for all” and how obstacles can be removed and avoided.

Exchange of information, experience and good practice

Non-exhaustive list of examples:

- Audio newspaper (a talking newspaper available to anyone with reading difficulties);
- anysurfer (labelling of websites for all functional disabilities);
- audio description;
- subtitling (proposal of decrees);
- accessibility labels for travel;
- sign language interpretation on Internet (e.g. daily news);
- information, incl. daily news, in plain language on Internet;
- information in easy-to-read and easy-to-understand formats.

Enabling environment

Finally, it should be stressed that media and new communication services have the capacity and responsibility of contributing to an environment that is conducive to the full integration and active participation of people with disabilities in society, in particular people with sensorial or intellectual impairments and learning difficulties.