

The Bologna Declaration

(27.08.2019)

Unlocking Human Potential:

A Call for Action to Improve Access to Quality Assistive Technology for Realising Fundamental Human Rights and Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in a Fully Inclusive Manner

In 2019, worldwide, millions of citizens are disabled by inaccessible environments, products or services and/or they lack access to appropriate assistive technology (AT). That is in sharp contrast with what is technically possible, and available, in many places. This contrast is not acceptable as AT represents a fundamental tool to support equal opportunities and full participation in all aspects of life; both essential ingredients for inclusive societies. The signatories of this declaration call upon all stakeholders who have an influence on policy and practice relating to assistive technology provision, to take measures to improve access to high quality assistive technology solutions, for everyone who might benefit from them, everywhere in the world and irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or cause of disability.

The **causes** of the discrepancy between need for and access to appropriate AT solutions are many: lack of sufficient information, of necessary skills, of resources, of well-developed health, social care or educational service delivery systems, of political priority, and of attention to fundamental human rights. The **effects** are massive: millions of unfulfilled lives, no or limited activity and participation at individual and community level by significant parts of the population, the endurance of poverty and restricted economic development, real difficulties to reach the global sustainable development goals in an inclusive way, that leaves no one behind. These are not problems in low- and middle-income countries only, but are truly global challenges that require action everywhere.

More collaborative effort is needed from all stakeholders to create equal opportunities and to bridge the “ability” gap for both citizens and societies: international organisations, national governments, regional and local authorities, service providers, professional bodies, non-governmental organisations, industry, organisations for persons with disabilities, education providers, researchers and teachers, and every individual citizen.

During a high level meeting in Bologna held on the 27th of August 2019, representatives of these stakeholders have identified the following **agenda for action**:

1. To **raise awareness** about assistive technology, universal design and accessibility as a matter of human rights, with technology being a significant and often determinative enabler for people to claim and to realize their rights.
2. To **further legislation with strong enforcement mechanisms** on accessibility and usability of goods and services and promote good practices at all levels and in all domains of public and private life.
3. To promote in all relevant disciplines **socially responsive and responsible research**, investigating barriers to full inclusion of all in society and developing strategies and solutions to enable participation, many of which may be technology-related.
4. To assure that technological innovation takes into account the greatest possible number of potential beneficiaries following a universal design approach and does not contribute to further exclusion by widening the gap between the haves and have-nots.
5. To foster **assistive technology provision systems** that are person-centered, independent from commercial interests, and able to provide, in a timely and affordable manner, personalised forward-looking solutions that are suitable for the environment of use and based on the abilities, preferences and expectations of the end user.
6. To **create appropriate and robust lifelong educational opportunities for end users of AT, the health and social care workforce and professional users of AT** involved in needs assessments, in implementation processes of assistive technology solutions and in supporting the effectiveness of these solutions in time.
7. To seek and require meaningful **collaboration between actors** at international, national, regional and local level, and to better define the obligations and levels of responsibility of each stakeholder, involving in all processes organisations of persons with disabilities and a wide range of AT users.
8. To **pursue and assure the quality of assistive technology solutions** for the equitable provision of assistive technology systems globally.
9. To **promote positive images, designs and initiatives** that counter the stigma that is sometimes associated with impairment and the use of assistive technology.
10. To **remove all other barriers of whatever nature** (e.g. financial, political, administrative, market, knowledge, cultural, gender, etc.) for assistive technology and accessibility adoption at all levels.

The signatories of this declaration not only call upon others to take action, but declare that they will do all that lies in their power to support the priorities mentioned above.

Bologna, August 27th, 2019.

This document remains open for endorsement on the AAATE website until the end of 2019.