

**Communication of the board of the
Association for the Advancement of Assistive Technology in Europe
in occasion of the
11th session of the Conference of States Parties on the CRPD.
UN, New York, June 12-14, 2018**

Key messages

- The AAATE strongly endorses the principles of the CRPD. The CRPD offers crucial guidance for States and organisations active in the field of disability to ensure access to support services including **assistive technology (AT)** for all persons with disabilities requiring it, including older people and people with a chronic disease. The AAATE considers it **a human right** that persons with disabilities have access to AT that is affordable and matched to their needs.
- Never before in history has there been a time in which technology has been developing as fast as it is today. This offers **huge potential for highly effective solutions** that may serve many people with disabilities. Harnessing that potential and making it available to everyone is a huge challenge, requiring research and development efforts as well as directed policies on national and international levels. Unfortunately AT related research for the benefit of people with disabilities is rarely the focus of research funding programmes.
- The fast development of new possibilities is fantastic on the one hand but also bears a huge risk of causing a societal ‘divide’ between those who have access to these possibilities and those who have not. There are **huge inequalities in access to AT** solutions. This is not only an issue at a global level between the global south and the north, but also between countries in Europe and other continents, and within high-income countries. It is an exciting challenge to use the technological possibilities in such a way that they help to bridge the gap described and to decrease inequalities instead of increasing them.
- Although many States have made great progress aligning their legislative frameworks with the principles of the CRPD, the daily reality for people with disabilities in large parts of the world is still far from the ideal. Fact is that only about 10-15% of people with disabilities worldwide have access to high quality affordable AT and related services. Most of the innovations and new possibilities technology offers do not reach the people who need them. There is **a need for effective and efficient AT provision policies and systems** to bridge the gap between what is possible and what is available to the people who need these solutions.

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- The **causes for the gap** described are complex and plural, ranging from financial and environmental to socio-cultural factors. Also lack of awareness and knowledge about the potential of AT and lack of expertise among health and social care professionals play a role, as well as a lack of available affordable and appropriate AT solutions. Tackling these causes and thus contributing to the inclusiveness of our societies requires explicit directed policies and actions alongside policies that safeguard individual rights and availability of assistive technology.
 - AT solutions are increasingly based on information technology using ‘standard’ human-computer interfacing techniques. As a result human-computer interaction has become a basic cultural technique like paper and pencil. If people with disabilities master this natively we have a universal access point for participation and inclusion. This is a key issue to achieve an inclusive society, which requires **professional support and systematic investment in the development of digital competencies of persons with disabilities and support workers**.
 - **e-Accessibility is a must:** participation and inclusion based on ATs only works if e-Accessibility is part of the mainstream e-Infrastructure. This is not yet the case in many places. Changing this requires professional services and support at all levels. Organisations like the AAATE and the EASPD have a responsibility to play an active role in developing such services and support.
 - The AAATE and its sister organisations in other parts of the world have a shared responsibility to actively **influence policies and research and innovation agendas** on global and national levels. The AAATE is strongly committed to this responsibility and will take an active role on both a European and a global level. On a global level the AAATE will play an active role in the Global Alliance of Assistive Technology Professional Organisations. Many of the AAATE members are further actively involved in the GATE community led by the WHO.

Meet the President of AAATE, Dr. Luc de Witte, at the side event:

“AT services enabling independent living and inclusion”

UN Headquarter - 13 June, 6:30 to 8:00pm, CF room 4

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AAATE is an independent non-for-profit association of assistive technology stakeholders in Europe and beyond. Both Institutions and Individuals can join the Association.

SAVE THE DATE

The 15th international AAATE conference will be held in Bologna, Italy, 27-30 August 2019 under the title “Global Challenges in Assistive Technology”. Don’t miss it!