

Recommendations for the draft National ICT Strategy 2021-2025 and the accompanying Action Plan related to accessibility by persons with disabilities

In the period from July 1 to July 12, 2021, a detailed analysis of the accessibility by persons with disabilities was conducted in the implementation of the strategies covered in the Draft National Strategy for ICT 2021-2025 and the Draft Action Plan of the National Strategy for ICT 2021-2025 by a person with a physical disability. The analysis lasted 8 working days where all the elements contained in the Draft National Strategy for ICT 2021-2025 and the Draft Action Plan of the National Strategy for ICT 2021-2025 were included.

The analysis covered several types of disabilities present in the population of the Republic of North Macedonia, including persons with partially or completely impaired hearing, persons with partially or completely impaired vision and persons with physical or mental disabilities.

During the analysis, several questions and remarks arose about the needs and opportunities of people with disabilities and addressing their specific needs.

In the part of "Strengthening ICT curricula in the education system", the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM) claims that it will direct its efforts to develop ICT events and career orientation fairs to attract as many students in the ICT sector as possible. However, the question arises whether the Government takes into account people with disabilities in the effort to attract students to the ICT sector?

If we take into account the current digital education system in the ICT sector, it can be said that it is not accessible enough for most people with disabilities and is a kind of discrimination because it deprives these people of the opportunity for progress and digitalization, especially in this sector.

To achieve the goal of the Government of RNM and to include people with disabilities in the strategy for attracting more students in the ICT sector, it is necessary to make fundamental changes in the digitalization of the education system for people with different types of disabilities to be able to independently access all digital tools, regardless of their specific needs.

In this regard, the initiative to "provide easy access to services for all categories of users, including the elderly and people with disabilities, as well as ongoing verification of compliance of the design of the public website with the guidelines and adaptive technologies of the ["Web Accessibility Initiative"](#) is in a good direction. Consequently, it is recommended to review the existing websites of state institutions and the e-services/digital tools they offer in all areas, as well as their adaptation to the needs of people with disabilities to actively enable their informed participation in social processes.

The previously mentioned issue was not explained at all in any aspect of the educational digitalization for persons with disabilities in the Draft National Strategy for ICT 2021-2025 and the Draft Action Plan of the National Strategy for ICT 2021-2025.

The **next question** that arose during the analysis was directed to the “Digital Agency of North Macedonia”. The Government of RNM announces that it will establish, through an official legal procedure, a central Digital Agency, which will be a new opportunity for job creation.

If the agency forms a highly qualified team from the private and public sector and offers a modern, attractive work environment and experience, the question is whether it will be adapted and made available to people with disabilities that would be qualified for a certain position in the Agency.

During the analysis, it was noticed that the Draft Strategy does not emphasize the possibility of implementing inclusiveness in the workplace where people with different types of disabilities would have the same opportunities for advancement and independent work as their co-workers.

After performing this analysis, it was determined that the needs of persons with disabilities are not sufficiently covered in the Draft National Strategy for ICT 2021-2025 and the Draft Action Plan of the National Strategy for ICT 2021-2025 of the Republic of North Macedonia. This leads to systematic discrimination and division and runs counter to the mutual principles and goals of the Government of the RNM.