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Accessible Europe: ICT for ALL ICT Accessibility: The Key to Inclusive Communications

Good morning, Good afternoon, good evening depending on where you are at this moment.

As ANACOM Chairman I am pleased to address some words to the participants of the Regional Forum which is jointly organized by ITU and the European Commission and Portugal.

ANACOM is proudly supporting and sponsoring this event as a demonstration of its commitment towards accessibility and inclusiveness of ICTs.

The ITU and The European Commission are two of the main partners of ANACOM, with which our services interact on a permanent if not daily basis.

Hence, we are particularly satisfied for this joint initiative and we hope we could witness more joint initiatives of this sort as a vehicle to address both European and Global challenges.

Let me start to mention that the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union is prioritizing initiatives that help accelerate the digital transition as a driver of economic recovery and promote European leadership in digital innovation and the digital economy.

In this context, we are paying attention to the universal development of digital skills, so that workers can adapt to new production processes (teleworking), to the digital transformation of businesses, to the areas of e-commerce, the promotion of health and disease prevention, and to distance learning in education and lifelong learning.

Digital inclusion is an absolute priority for us as a means to address current challenges.

Therefore, it makes sense to organize this forum on 'Accessible Europe – ICTs for All' as part of the Portuguese Presidency.

The European Union has a long tradition of developing innovative legislative approaches, setting best practices and examples that can inspire other regions of the world.

The field of Accessibility, in particular, is a good illustration of how EU approaches and examples can inspire other regions.

As we have heard before, Europe has recently adopted innovative and forward-looking legislation on accessibility that will benefit persons with disabilities and elderly people, allowing for more accessible products and services in the market and more competitive prices.

In addition, the EU adopted the new European Electronic Communications Code, which will soon be transposed to the Portuguese legislation, along with the rest of Europe.

The Code provides that obligations can be imposed on companies in the sector with a view to ensuring the accessibility of disabled end users to communication services, in a number of areas such as

- access to emergency services;
- provision of information concerning electronic communications products and services to users with special needs;
- provision of services specifically designed for disabled end-users, including the availability of handset amplifier equipment for the hearing impaired, luminous call warning and simple braille bill.

These are examples of how the EU has been working to facilitate Digital Inclusion in particular to citizens with special needs.

Let me take this opportunity to mention that ANACOM has been committed to promote accessibility and inclusiveness of communications in Portugal, and let me share some of our initiatives:

- On one side, as a sector regulator, ANACOM is enforcing the relevant legislation, namely imposing obligations on undertakings;
- Secondly, ANACOM is actively promoting accessibility in its own functioning and interaction with the stakeholders and citizens, for example via introducing new functionalities on our website

I will further explain these two lines of action.

As sector regulator, ANACOM has implemented offers and features that designated providers have an obligation to provide, including a set of requirements aimed at ensuring the accessibility of consumers with disabilities to the services that comprise the Universal Service.

I note in particular a 2019 decision on the conditions and specifications governing the universal service components: (i) connection to a public communications network at a fixed location and provision of a publicly available telephone service through that connection; and (ii) provision of public payphones.

Among the obligations that are imposed in this Decision, undertakings are requested to offer special rates to people with disabilities, such as to ensure equal access to publicly available telephone services by these customers, including access to emergency services and directory enquiry services.

In addition, providers are required to offer upon request a number of services, including

- Sound amplifier adequate to any terminal equipment for people with hearing loss;
- Visual call indicator, which consists of a device that activates a visual signal when a call is received;
- Simple invoices in Braille;
- Fixed-destination calls, in order to allow customers to automatically call a preconfigured number.

Additionally, there are specific provisions to guarantee the accessibility of public payphone to consumers with disabilities.

It is also relevant to note that ANACOM is recommending electronic communication providers to accommodate the World Wide Web Consortium<sup>1</sup> norms when designing their websites.

The second line of action relates to the efforts that this Authority is undertaking to guarantee the accessibility of its Website and its Consumer Portal, adding functionalities that make them more user friendly and accessible to every citizen. Among those functionalities, I note the audio function that provides the Reading of the published texts; and the introduction of interactive functions.

I am proud to share with you that our website has been submitted to a number of accessibility tests and the assessments have been extremely positive - the design, development and maintenance of our websites are contributing for those positive and encouraging results.

Let me finish by congratulating all the finalists in the regional Competition on Innovative Digital Solutions for an Accessible Europe 2021, that are about to do their pitching presentations, and in particular the winners.

ANACOM is very proud to support this competition and we eagerly look forward to contributing to the promotion and implementation of their solutions.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a continued successful event.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.w3.org>