

Accessibility in Education



Key Points

- More than 100 million children around the world live with a moderate to severe disability, according to some estimates.
- Accessible technologies are helping to expand access to education for children with disabilities as well as provide new learning and job training opportunities for adults with disabilities.
- Microsoft is dedicated to building accessibility into its products and providing accessibility resources for educators.

BACKGROUND

Of the more than 1 billion people worldwide who live with some form of disability, more than 100 million are children, according to a [World Health Organization report](#).

Barriers to education for children with disabilities contribute to high rates of unemployment and poverty among adults with disabilities.

Fortunately, accessible technologies are making it easier for all students—including those with vision, hearing, mobility, dexterity, language, and learning impairments—to gain equal access to education as well as acquire technology skills that are important in many jobs and careers. These technologies are also providing new job training opportunities for adults with disabilities.

For example, touch interfaces, word-prediction features, and speech recognition can help students who have dexterity challenges. Adjustable display settings and text-to-speech features can help those with low vision. Technology can also help students with disability-related social challenges by providing opportunities to communicate and collaborate with their peers in new ways.

MICROSOFT APPROACH

Microsoft has worked with government agencies, nonprofit organizations, advocacy groups, and industry leaders for more than two decades to advance inclusiveness in education. The company has identified five key priorities in helping to make education accessible to all:

- **Access to digital content**, including e-books, websites, and distance learning programs
- **Accessible technology** products and services, including tools for creating accessible content
- **Inclusive curricula** that consider the needs of all students and facilitate collaboration

- **Reasonable accommodation** for students through accessible technology
- **Training and information** for educators, students, and their families

Microsoft provides a number of [resources](#), including accessibility guides for educators, curriculum resources, teacher-training workshops on accessibility, and articles and videos about how students with disabilities are using technology to enhance their learning.

Microsoft also supports the development of model policies that can help guide governments in making education more inclusive. One example is the Model Policy for Inclusive Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Education, which was jointly developed by [UNESCO](#) and [G3ict](#) in 2013. This document supports educational practices that conform to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and includes policy guidance, strategic blueprints, and budgeting and funding advice.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Governments have an important role to play in advancing the use of accessible technologies in schools and promoting innovation in inclusive education. In particular, they should:

- **Update government policies.** National education authorities and ministries should work to update national and regional policies to promote the use of accessible technology in education.
- **Incorporate accessible technologies in classrooms.** This includes adopting procurement policies for technology in schools that reference international

technical accessibility standards, ensure technology neutrality, allow for flexibility in design, permit both built-in and third-party solutions, and consider the total cost of ownership.

- **Ensure full use of existing accessibility features.** Most mainstream technology tools that are used in schools—such as computers, tablets, and PCs—have a wealth of features and allow for personalized settings that can help students access curricula and collaborate with peers. Making full use of these features can vastly improve accessibility in education.
- **Improve teacher training and support.** Teachers need additional skills and knowledge to understand the value of accessible technology in the classroom. Educational authorities and ministries should provide awareness and skills training for all teachers.
- **Stay current with new technologies.** To help make education more engaging and inclusive, governments and educators should stay current with technology trends such as mobile learning, cloud-based solutions, touch screens, interactive user interfaces, and the use of game consoles for learning.



Helpful Resources

Microsoft Accessibility website
www.microsoft.com/enable

Microsoft Accessibility in Education webpage
www.microsoft.com/enable/education