

# Comprehensive eAccessibility Policy

Digital exclusion is widespread. In many countries accessible websites, digital content, kiosks, and emergency services are not available. One of the biggest challenges the Arab world faced was that Arabic did not feature in assistive technology. Qatar's eAccessibility Policy is well on the way to reducing a number of the most severe barriers.

## NATIONAL E-ACCESSIBILITY POLICY

<b>Year of existence:</b>	2011
<b>Country/region of origin:</b>	Qatar
<b>Beneficiaries targeted:</b>	Persons with disabilities
<b>Responsible body:</b>	Ministry of Information and Communications Technology
<b>Stakeholders:</b>	Public and private sector (ICT departments and industry, DPOs)

## FACTS & FIGURES

- 20 assistive technology solutions introduced in Arabic.
- 1,100 people with a disability supported, 950 professionals trained.
- 250 people used eLearning portal.
- Website accessibility support provided to over 60 sites.
- Telecoms providers offer 50% discount on tariffs.

## IN BRIEF

Qatar's National eAccessibility Policy addresses key issues around information and communication technologies. It lays the foundations for an accessible ICT ecosystem that enables persons with disabilities to take full advantage of ICTs. Its goals are to reduce the following barriers:

- Inaccessible websites and content
- Inaccessible telecommunications services and supporting technologies
- Inaccessible public access terminals/kiosks and ATMs
- Limited usage and access to assistive technologies
- Lack of accessible digital content, especially in Arabic.

## INNOVATIVE ASPECTS

### General Usability

The eAccessibility policy outlines an end-to-end approach which considers all elements of an ecosystem required to deliver accessible technology for people with a disability.

### Coherent approach

The policy addresses ICT within one scoping document and establishes a broad mandate for a single body to oversee eAccessibility, to offer collaboration and partnership with public, private and not-for-profit sectors to see access technologies fully implemented within Qatar.

### Cross-cutting

Mada is mandated to raise the level of accessibility across all digital platforms and to make digital content more accessible to all.

## HISTORY

In 2004, Qatar established ictQATAR to regulate the sectors of communication and information technology. In 2010, ictQatar supported the creation of Mada, Qatar's Assistive Technology Center, in order to deliver upon the commitment to accessible information and technology. Together, ictQatar and Mada developed the National eAccessibility Policy, which was officially released in 2011. The National eAccessibility Policy extended the mandate of Mada (Innovative Practice 2014) and committed Mada to raising the level of accessibility across all digital platforms and to making digital content more accessible to all. The policy supports the wider inclusive agenda in Qatar and the National Vision 2030, and ictQATAR's Strategy ICT2015 to develop an ICT-skilled population which especially prioritises women, retirees and citizens with special needs. It is also in line with the National Development Strategy 2011-2016 that supports the use of ICT for improving learning environments for children with special needs.

«Qatar's comprehensive eAccessibility Policy is a first but highly significant step on the road to promoting a digital world that is accessible for Arabic-speaking people with disabilities.»  
(David Banes, Mada Center, Qatar)



Welcome area of the Mada Centre in Doha (Qatar) (© Mada)

## KEY FEATURES

Qatar's National eAccessibility Policy addresses key issues around information and communication technologies: it requires all public domain websites to meet Level 'AA' of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 as well as W3C's Mobile Web Best Practices Guidelines 1.0 by 2013 for new websites and 2015 for existing websites. It requires telecommunications service providers to provide accessible handsets, user interfaces and special rate plans (all 2011); relay (from 2013); and emergency services (2012). It requests that government agencies and banking institutions provide at strategic locations at least one fully accessible and/or universally designed ATM by 2013 and Public Access Terminal/Kiosk by 2015. It establishes a fund to improve access to assistive technologies and services and to develop practical guidelines. All producers of digital content should strive to increase the amount of accessible content in both English and Arabic so that it represents 5% of their total digital content available. All distributors

of digital video programming in Qatar have to develop a plan that enables them to deliver digital video programming with either open or closed captioning. All materials produced are published under creative commons license.

## IMPLEMENTATION

In general, ictQATAR is charged with ensuring implementation and closely monitoring the progress of the policy. It maintains relationships with all parties responsible for implementing the policy's provisions. ictQATAR can also review, update and/or widen the policy's scope. As a minimum, the policy review takes place every five years. The key innovation within this policy is to address information and communications technology within a single scoping document and by establishing a wide mandate for a single body to oversee eAccessibility (Mada), so that issues are addressed in a coherent and consistent manner. Mada operates with a budget of 23 million QAR per year.

## FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

The policy has been of interest to other Gulf States and its replication in other countries is achieved via the establishment of a Gulf region assistive technology network, which draws upon services, researchers and policy makers across the region to discuss progress and to share resources. Mada continues to play an active role in contributing to global access efforts.

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**SOURCES** Qatar's National eAccessibility Policy, 2011: <http://bit.ly/18YpQwg>

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