

GAAD 2026

International Conference on
Digital Accessibility, Inclusion and Innovation

Global Conference Report and Strategic Recommendations

Prepared for: Governments, international organizations, policymakers, regulators, industry leaders, academic institutions, standards bodies, civil society organizations, accessibility professionals, and global stakeholders.

Prepared by: Internet Society Accessibility Standing Group (ASG)

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International Virtual Conference

21 May 2026 • 10:30 – 16:00 UTC

273 Registered Participants from Across the Globe

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Conference Highlights:

Organized by: Internet Society Accessibility Standing Group (ASG):

Occasion: Global Accessibility Awareness Day (GAAD) 2026

Conference Theme: Digital Accessibility, Inclusion and Innovation

Date: 21 May 2026

Format: International Virtual Conference

Duration: 10:30 – 16:00 UTC

Total Registered Participants: 273 participants from across the globe

Regions and Sectors Represented: Accessibility professionals, policymakers, industry leaders, educators, researchers, civil society organizations, innovators, and persons with disabilities, drawn from multiple regions and sectors.

Executive Summary

This report presents the key deliberations, strategic insights, recommendations, and proposed action frameworks emerging from the GAAD 2026 International Conference on Digital Accessibility, Inclusion and Innovation. It is intended to support governments, international organizations, policymakers, regulators, industry leaders, academic institutions, standards bodies, civil society organizations, accessibility professionals, and global stakeholders in strengthening digital accessibility governance, inclusive innovation, and equitable digital transformation.

Prepared under the leadership of the Internet Society Accessibility Standing Group (ASG), this report consolidates global perspectives, implementation challenges, emerging opportunities, and actionable recommendations aimed at accelerating the development of accessible, inclusive, secure, and human-centric digital ecosystems.

The conference brought together global experts, policymakers, technologists, accessibility professionals, researchers, educators, civil society representatives, innovators, industry leaders, and persons with disabilities to deliberate on the future of inclusive digital transformation.

Discussions emphasized that digital accessibility is not merely a compliance requirement but a fundamental human right and a critical enabler of equitable participation in modern society. As digital technologies increasingly shape education, healthcare, governance, employment, finance, communication, transportation, entertainment, and civic life, accessibility has become essential for sustainable and inclusive development.

The conference served as a global platform for knowledge exchange, policy dialogue, technical demonstrations, collaborative discussion, and strategic recommendations focused on accessibility-centred innovation.

Key discussion areas included:

- Accessibility as a human rights and development issue.
- The urgent need to integrate accessibility into digital policy and governance frameworks.
- The role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in advancing accessibility.
- Inclusive design and Universal Design principles.
- Accessibility implementation challenges and opportunities.
- The importance of involving persons with disabilities in decision-making.
- Accessibility beyond compliance — as a driver of innovation and competitive advantage.
- Accessible education, media, communication, and digital public infrastructure.
- The need for measurable accessibility metrics and accountability frameworks.

The conference concluded with a strong global consensus that accessibility must be embedded into every stage of digital transformation, innovation, procurement, governance, infrastructure, content creation, and service delivery.

Conference Background and Objectives

The GAAD 2026 International Conference on Digital Accessibility, Inclusion and Innovation was organized under the leadership of the Internet Society Accessibility Standing Group (ASG) as part of the global observance of Global Accessibility Awareness Day 2026.

The conference set out to:

- Promote global awareness of digital accessibility and inclusion.
- Encourage international collaboration on accessibility governance, standards, and policy.
- Showcase innovative accessibility technologies and practices.
- Share practical implementation models and governance frameworks.
- Strengthen accessibility capacity-building across sectors.
- Develop strategic recommendations for governments, industry, academia, and civil society.
- Advance inclusive digital ecosystems aligned with human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Participation from multiple countries and sectors reflected the growing international recognition that accessibility must be integrated into digital transformation initiatives from the outset.

Opening Remarks and Conference Vision

The conference opened with welcoming remarks emphasizing that digital accessibility is essential for ensuring equal participation in the digital world.

Dr. Ashutosh Pathak, Chair of the Accessibility Standing Group, highlighted that:

- Accessibility is an urgent need of our time and a fundamental human right. Collaboration among governments, civil society, industry, academia, and persons with disabilities is necessary for meaningful change.
- Digital systems must be designed inclusively, with accessibility built in by default, to ensure equal access and meaningful participation for everyone.
- Accessible digital ecosystems are essential for social justice, innovation, and sustainable development.

Inaugural Address

The conference received a special inaugural message from Ms. Sally Wentworth, President and CEO of the Internet Society.

Key highlights from her message included:

- Accessibility and inclusion must remain central to the future of the Internet and digital innovation.
- Digital solutions must be designed collaboratively with persons with disabilities.
- Accessibility should be integrated from the very beginning of technology development, policymaking, and digital transformation initiatives.

Government Perspectives on Digital Accessibility

Address by Mr. S. Govindraj, Commissioner, Office of the CCPD, Government of India

Mr. S. Govindraj, Commissioner, Office of the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD), Government of India, highlighted the growing importance of digital accessibility within governance, public services, and inclusive digital transformation in India.

Key observations included:

- Digital accessibility is essential for ensuring equal participation, dignity, and empowerment of persons with disabilities.
- Accessibility implementation and monitoring mechanisms must be strengthened across digital platforms and public services.
- Accessibility should move beyond policy commitments toward measurable implementation outcomes.
- Inclusive design principles should be proactively integrated into digital systems and communication platforms.

- Collaboration among government, industry, academia, civil society, and accessibility experts is necessary for meaningful inclusion.
- Awareness, training, and capacity building are essential for sustainable accessibility implementation.

His address reinforced the Government of India's continuing commitment to promoting accessible, inclusive, and equitable digital environments for persons with disabilities across sectors.

Address by Mr. KVS Rao, Former Director, DEPwD, Government of India

Mr. KVS Rao presented important perspectives on advancing digital accessibility implementation within governance systems and public digital infrastructure.

Key highlights included:

- Accessibility must be integrated into governance and public digital systems from the design stage itself.
- Accessibility implementation should focus on practical outcomes and measurable impact.
- Inclusive governance requires stronger accessibility awareness and institutional capacity building.
- Accessibility should be treated as an essential component of inclusive development and good governance.
- Multi-stakeholder collaboration remains essential for strengthening accessibility implementation across sectors.

Key Themes and Major Discussions

1. Building a Culture of Accessibility

Mr. Dan York of the Internet Society discussed the importance of cultivating an organizational culture centred on accessibility.

Major observations included:

- Accessibility must become part of organizational DNA.
- Leadership commitment is essential for sustainable accessibility implementation.
- Accessibility should extend beyond websites to all systems, services, content, events, and communications.
- Accessibility frameworks must include both automated and human-centred testing.
- Implementation should actively involve people who use assistive technologies.

The Internet Society's accessibility operational framework was presented as an example of structured organizational accessibility governance.

2. Accessibility Governance and Leadership Frameworks

Dr. Sambhavi Chandrasekharan, Global Accessibility Leader, presented the “Shift Up Accessibility” governance framework, focused on embedding accessibility within organizational leadership and innovation.

The framework highlighted five critical pillars:

- Empathetic organizational culture.
- Compatible and inclusive technologies.
- Accessible content and communication.
- Inclusive service delivery.
- Collaborative accessibility communities.

The discussion emphasized that:

- Accessibility must move beyond compliance.
- Organizations should view accessibility as a strategic advantage embedded within the business model.
- Leadership commitment and ownership are critical.
- Accessibility maturity models and governance frameworks are needed globally.

Government representatives also highlighted the importance of aligning accessibility policies with effective implementation mechanisms.

3. Digital Accessibility as a Human Rights Issue

Speakers emphasized that digital accessibility directly affects citizenship, inclusion, and democratic participation.

Key concerns included:

- Inaccessible digital services create systemic exclusion.
- Accessibility barriers affect education, employment, governance, healthcare, and social participation.
- Digital accessibility must be integrated into public digital infrastructure.
- Accessibility should be recognized within broader digital rights frameworks.

Discussions referenced the evolving legal and policy recognition of digital accessibility as a fundamental right.

4. Media, Communication, and Accessibility Awareness

The role of media in shaping accessibility awareness was strongly highlighted.

Key recommendations included:

- Mainstream media should integrate accessibility into technology reporting.
- Accessibility issues should be covered consistently and responsibly.

- Persons with disabilities should be included as experts and leaders in media discussions.
- Media organizations should adopt accessibility audits and inclusive newsroom practices.

The conference recognized media as a powerful driver of social change and accessibility awareness.

5. Artificial Intelligence and Accessibility Innovation

Multiple sessions focused on the transformative potential of AI in advancing accessibility.

Presentations demonstrated:

- AI-powered accessibility remediation tools.
- Accessible PDF conversion systems.
- Voice accessibility technologies.
- Sign language and Braille conversion tools.
- AI-powered screen readers and visual assistance applications.
- Personalized adaptive interfaces.
- AI-enabled accessible education technologies.

Speakers also cautioned about:

- Bias in AI systems.
- Exclusionary training datasets.
- The need for inclusive AI governance.
- Ethical AI implementation.
- The importance of accessibility-centred AI design.

The conference strongly recommended that accessibility be embedded within AI policy frameworks globally.

6. Accessible Education and Inclusive Learning

Educators and accessibility experts discussed the importance of inclusive education ecosystems.

Key areas included:

- Universal Design for Learning (UDL).
- Accessible textbooks and educational content.
- AI-powered educational accessibility tools.
- Accessible classrooms and digital learning systems.
- Teacher empowerment and accessibility training.
- Multilingual accessible educational resources.

Participants emphasized that inclusive education is essential for long-term digital inclusion and equitable development.

7. Accessibility and Inclusive Innovation

The conference showcased several innovative accessibility technologies and platforms.

Examples included:

- Accessible social networking platforms.
- Inclusive OTT entertainment platforms.
- Accessible typing tutors for visually impaired users.
- Personalized adaptive user interfaces.
- Low-cost assistive technologies.
- Satellite connectivity solutions for underserved disability communities.

A recurring message throughout the conference was that accessibility drives innovation benefiting society as a whole.

8. Accessibility Metrics, Trust, and Accountability

Discussions explored accessibility measurement frameworks and trust models.

Recommendations included:

- Developing measurable accessibility indicators.
- Establishing accessibility reporting standards.
- Improving transparency in accessibility claims.
- Creating accessibility benchmarking mechanisms.
- Strengthening accountability systems.

Participants emphasized that reliable accessibility metrics are necessary for informed policymaking and effective implementation.

9. Document Accessibility and Remediation Frameworks

A dedicated session explored document accessibility, remediation frameworks, and associated trust models.

Highlights included:

- Comprehensive guidance to participants on technology adoption and compliance with W3C WCAG 2.2, alongside best practices for accessible document creation and remediation.
- A demonstration of the indigenous accessibility solution “AccessSure,” illustrating its capabilities in ensuring the accessibility compliance of digital documents, particularly PDF accessibility and remediation workflows.
- An explanation of AccessSure advanced features — including generation of fully compliant PDFs, automated remediation support, standards-conformance validation, and audit-ready accessibility reporting — to support regulatory and organizational compliance.

Key Outcomes and Strategic Observations

The conference generated several important outcomes and strategic directions.

Key Outcomes

1. Global Recognition of Accessibility as a Core Digital Priority

Participants strongly agreed that accessibility must be treated as a central pillar of digital transformation and digital public infrastructure.

2. Strengthened International Collaboration

The conference created opportunities for cross-sector and cross-country collaboration among governments, civil society, academia, industry, and accessibility experts.

3. Increased Focus on Accessibility Governance

The need for accessibility governance frameworks, organizational accountability, and leadership ownership was strongly reinforced.

4. Expansion of Accessibility Innovation Ecosystems

The conference showcased innovative accessibility tools and encouraged the collaborative development of accessible technologies.

5. Emphasis on Inclusion by Design

Participants stressed the importance of integrating accessibility from the design stage rather than retrofitting systems later.

6. Promotion of Accessibility Capacity Building

The conference recognized the urgent need for training, awareness, and skill development across sectors.

7. Reinforcement of the Principle “Nothing About Us Without Us”

The importance of involving persons with disabilities in all decision-making, policy development, product design, testing, and implementation was repeatedly emphasized.

Strategic Recommendations

Recommendations for Governments and Policymakers

- Develop comprehensive national digital accessibility policies and implementation frameworks.
- Integrate accessibility requirements into all public digital infrastructure initiatives.
- Mandate accessibility compliance in government procurement systems.
- Strengthen enforcement mechanisms and accessibility audits.

- Promote accessibility-centred innovation and research funding.
- Establish accessibility standards aligned with international best practices.
- Include persons with disabilities in policy formulation and governance structures.
- Promote accessible education systems and inclusive digital literacy programmes.
- Encourage accessible AI governance and ethical technology policies.
- Support affordable assistive technologies and inclusive innovation ecosystems.
- Embed inclusion of persons with disabilities, affordable assistive technologies, and inclusive digital innovation ecosystems within mainstream business models — enabling a self-sustaining economy in which individuals previously dependent on support become financially independent contributors and taxpayers.

Recommendations for Industry and Technology Organizations

- Integrate accessibility into the product design lifecycle.
- Adopt accessibility-by-design approaches.
- Implement WCAG 2.2 and other relevant accessibility standards.
- Conduct both automated and human-centred accessibility testing.
- Build internal accessibility governance frameworks.
- Train employees and leadership teams on accessibility.
- Invest in inclusive AI and assistive technology solutions.
- Ensure accessible customer support and communication channels.
- Improve accessibility transparency and reporting.
- Collaborate with disability communities during development and testing.

Recommendations for Academic and Research Institutions

- Integrate accessibility into academic curricula.
- Promote interdisciplinary accessibility research.
- Develop accessible digital learning platforms.
- Encourage innovation in assistive technologies.
- Support accessibility-focused research collaborations.
- Conduct evidence-based studies on accessibility implementation and impact.
- Promote accessibility skill development among educators.

Recommendations for Civil Society and International Organizations

- Strengthen advocacy for digital accessibility rights.
- Promote accessibility awareness campaigns globally.
- Facilitate multi-stakeholder collaborations.

- Support accessibility capacity-building initiatives.
- Develop global accessibility knowledge-sharing platforms.
- Encourage international accessibility cooperation and harmonization.
- Support grassroots accessibility innovation and community participation.

Proposed Global Strategic Action Plan

Short-Term Actions (0–1 Year)

- Conduct accessibility awareness and training programmes.
- Develop accessibility assessment frameworks.
- Improve accessibility of websites and digital services.
- Promote accessible event and communication practices.
- Establish accessibility working groups and advisory bodies.
- Share accessibility tools, resources, and best practices globally.

Medium-Term Actions (1–3 Years)

- Develop national accessibility roadmaps.
- Integrate accessibility into digital transformation programmes.
- Expand accessible education and digital literacy initiatives.
- Strengthen accessibility procurement requirements.
- Promote accessibility innovation ecosystems.
- Build accessibility testing and certification frameworks.

Long-Term Actions (3–5 Years)

- Establish globally harmonized accessibility governance frameworks.
- Mainstream accessibility across all sectors.
- Expand inclusive AI and emerging-technology governance.
- Achieve large-scale adoption of accessibility-by-design principles.
- Strengthen international accessibility cooperation and monitoring systems.

Importance of Global Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

The conference strongly emphasized that digital accessibility cannot be achieved through isolated efforts.

Meaningful progress requires collaboration among:

- Governments.
- International organizations.

- Industry leaders.
- Technology companies.
- Academic institutions.
- Standards bodies.
- Civil society organizations.
- Accessibility professionals.
- Researchers.
- Media organizations.
- Persons with disabilities and their representative organizations.

The conference reaffirmed that accessibility is a shared global responsibility and an essential component of equitable digital transformation.

Strategic Conclusion and Way Forward

The GAAD 2026 International Conference on Digital Accessibility, Inclusion and Innovation demonstrated the growing global commitment to embedding accessibility, inclusion, and innovation at the core of digital transformation agendas.

The conference underscored that accessibility is not solely a technological consideration, but a strategic, social, economic, developmental, and human rights imperative that directly affects equitable participation in the digital society.

The deliberations reinforced the urgent need for:

- Stronger accessibility governance and accountability frameworks.
- Accessibility-by-design approaches across technologies and services.
- Active participation of persons with disabilities in decision-making.
- Inclusive governance of Artificial Intelligence and emerging technologies.
- Capacity building, accessibility awareness, and digital literacy.
- International cooperation and multi-stakeholder collaboration.
- Measurable accessibility implementation and monitoring mechanisms.

The conference further established that inclusive digital ecosystems contribute significantly to innovation, economic growth, social inclusion, trust, resilience, and sustainable development.

The recommendations and action plans emerging from this conference are intended to support governments, regulators, international organizations, industry leaders, academia, civil society organizations, and policymakers worldwide in strengthening digital accessibility implementation and accelerating inclusive digital transformation.

The Internet Society Accessibility Standing Group (ASG) remains committed to continued global collaboration, advocacy, policy engagement, awareness initiatives, and capacity-building efforts to advance digital accessibility, inclusion, and innovation for all.

Acknowledgements

The organizers express sincere gratitude to all distinguished speakers, panellists, accessibility professionals, technical teams, interpreters, moderators, volunteers, partner organizations, and participants from across the globe for their valuable contributions and support.

Special appreciation is extended to:

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- Mr. S. Govindraj
- Mr. KVS Rao
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- Dr. Bharati Kaushik
- Dr. Chandni Agrawal
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- Ms. Shruti Pushkarna
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- Ms. Uma Badwe
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- Ms. Bhavya Mantoo
- Dr. Akashdeep Bansal
- Mr. Sridhar & Mr. Sunil Choudhary

Their expertise, insights, and commitment significantly enriched the conference discussions and outcomes. The organizers also extend gratitude to all other distinguished contributors whose participation made the conference a success.

Disclaimer

This report represents consolidated deliberations, strategic observations, recommendations, and proposed action frameworks emerging from the GAAD 2026 International Conference on Digital Accessibility, Inclusion and Innovation.

It is intended for policy dialogue, awareness generation, strategic reference, collaborative engagement, and accessibility advancement initiatives among governments, international organizations, industry leaders, academic institutions, civil society organizations, accessibility professionals, and global stakeholders.