

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

Let me start by quoting one of the most distinguished thinkers of our time:

*“Because of my disability, I need assistance. But I have always tried to overcome the limitations of my condition and lead as full a life as possible.”*

These are the words of Stephen Hawking, one of the greatest scientists of our time and most recognizable user of Assistive Technology in the world. It’s thanks to cutting-edge assistive products that Hawking could fully communicate his ground breaking ideas for the benefit of humanity.

But beyond Professor Hawking, it is said that as many as 1 billion people around the world need assistive technologies to make a positive difference to their lives. Even a modest improvement - such as wheelchairs adapted to different terrains - can have the most tremendous impact. Innovation in this field – ranging from smart glasses to health and emotion monitoring and assistive robots – is genuinely changing people’s lives by allowing them a chance at independent living and full participation in society. I only need mention Mr. Michael Haddad, who is the UNDP Goodwill Ambassador for Climate Change, and who uses an exoskeleton to help him engage all over the world on climate change issues.

This is why WIPO is pleased to release this report, which we hope will help policy makers, researchers, innovators and other stakeholders make more informed decisions around the development of assistive technologies.

This report is also the second in our flagship Technology Trends series. In these reports, we attempt to transmute the lead of patent data into the gold of

technology insights, providing solid, factual evidence about the global landscape in different areas of technology.

The findings of this report, which my colleagues will soon provide more detail on, give us a fascinating insight into the patterns of technological innovation, ranging from the improvement of existing products, such as hearing aids or prosthetics, to the development of new ones like brain-machine interface-based control of devices. The report describes the patent landscape, highlighting geographical trends in innovation in assistive technology, and the IP strategy and portfolios of key and emerging players.

But these innovations are nothing if they cannot reach the people who need them. We need this report to support conversations around the prioritization and funding of research on assistive technology. We identify ways that innovators – particularly start-ups, spin-offs and small and medium-sized enterprises – in the field of assistive technology can be supported in commercializing their inventions. We explored for the first time the closeness of the identified emerging assistive products to market through a technology readiness level assessment. Our findings show that 58% are minimum viable products before commercialization and only 18% commercially available products, which demonstrates the urgency for us to support innovators in this field to translate their ideas to the market.

At the broader level, this report shows that the assistive technology sector is a large, and well distributed market. It demonstrates that the IP system is used by numerous players, representing various innovator profiles. This is encouraging – it demonstrates that the innovation ecosystem for assistive technology is highly democratic, with the presence of large corporations, small and medium enterprises and individual inventors, which in turn encourages open innovation models. But it also means that it is a fragmented market. IP is therefore an important asset for innovators to attract investments, and create partnerships, which in turn would allow for the scaling up of the technology to reach the people that need to use it to change their lives.

All in all, we are gratified to see this nascent area beginning to attract attention and investments, but there is still much more to be done to support the commercialisation, availability and accessibility of assistive technology. Only 1 in 10 people in the world have access to the assistive products they need. Let us work together to change this.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the recognition of access to assistive technology as a human right under the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the work of the World Health Organization in leading efforts towards improving access to assistive technology, including the Global Cooperation on Assistive Technology (GATE).

Lastly, I would like to thank the many people who were involved in creating this report. The publication has been bolstered by continued support from the WHO, assistive technology partnerships and user associations. Numerous individual experts also provided valuable comments that truly enrich this report.

I hope this publication equips you all, innovators, policy makers, UN Agencies, Associations and users of Assistive Technology, with the knowledge you need to inform your conversations and deliver a positive outcome for all. Let's make one in ten become ten in ten.

Thank you very much.