

GAATO Organisational Brief July 2021

An estimated 5%-15% of the global population do not have access to the assistive products and services they need to live a full and independent life. That is in excess of 1 billion people who need at least one product like spectacles, wheelchairs, hearing aids, prosthetic limbs, digital tools for cognition and accessible environment tools. In order to provide these products appropriately and to maintain them to a good standard, it is necessary to have ongoing access to the services of optometrists, occupational therapists, prosthetists and other professionals who assess the users and help maintain their temporary or long-term product use.

At the Global Alliance of Assistive Technology Organizations (GAATO) we provide expert knowledge on all sectors of AT to external organizations and work alongside them to advance the systematic development of global provision in AT. We help build AT organisations around the world and support them to connect with each other and gain access to training opportunities and global initiatives like data collection. We also work together in consultation around global standards in areas like service provision and professional training in collaboration with UN specialized agencies.

GAATO is a non-profit Alliance established in Geneva, the global hub for international governance, multilateralism, humanitarian response and development. Since our founding in May 2020 we have united 12 AT membership organisations around the world, representing an estimated 15,000 assistive technology professionals; held sessions at three major international conferences and launched a Global Grand Challenge consultation initiative to inform the WHO-UNICEF Global Report on Assistive Technology (GReAT).

The challenge

The current global AT ecosystem is fractured and underdeveloped. There is a global need for well-trained assistive technology practitioners to provide the technical support services needed around assistive products. There is a near universal lack of awareness or understanding of the umbrella term assistive technology and therefore an uncoordinated and underdeveloped approach to policymaking in most countries.

With a rapidly ageing population the demand for assistive technology is growing. The global population aged over 60 was over 962 million in 2017 and this is expected to double to a projected 2.1 billion. As over 60% of current AT users are over the age of 60 we must act fast to meet this growing need.



Global Alliance of Assistive Technology Organizations

Additionally people who identify being as a person with disabilities are often the most marginalised in all societies and the most likely to live in poverty, with limited access to education, employment and healthcare.

GAATO is developing person-centred multilateral partnership initiatives to address regional and global challenges that tackle the vast existing unmet need and to create solutions to address the accelerating rate of demand.

The GAATO Alliance brings independent organisations together to address topics of global concern. National and regional organisations are central to our network building which connect the individual practitioners in local communities to information centres and services at regional, national and global levels.

The opportunity

With access to AT, people living with functional difficulties are able to gain access to education, employment, financial independence and participate in their communities – often raising themselves out of poverty.

Our work also supports young innovators and disabled youth to connect and drive solutions for the future and promotes inclusivity, gender equality and human rights, in particular the United Nations CRPD.

By advocating for the right to an inclusive life through AT we are supporting one of the most underdeveloped opportunities to impact the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Our mission and vision

Our mission is to advance the field of assistive technology (AT) and rehabilitation engineering (RE) to benefit people with disabilities and functional limitations of all ages. As global alliance members we are committed to working towards equitable and reliable access to assistive technology through collaborative research, policy advocacy, education and awareness raising.

GAATO is the only global membership organisation purely dedicated to the long-term systematic transformation of AT provision. Our members work with international bodies, governments, civil society and development partners and together we are harnessing this collaborative power to devise joint strategies and tools to address the most critical global need to provide good quality AT at scale.