Terms of Reference for the Development of a Disability-Inclusive Notification System (Di-Notification System)

1. Background

In Albania, disaster risk reduction (DRR) systems have traditionally overlooked the specific needs of persons with disabilities (PWDs). This oversight has resulted in PWDs facing significant barriers during emergencies, such as inadequate access to timely and accessible information, which can severely compromise their safety and well-being. Recognizing this gap, the Di-Notification System project has been initiated to address these challenges and ensure that PWDs are adequately informed and prepared during emergencies.

The Di-Notification System is a comprehensive initiative designed to create an inclusive communication platform that caters to the diverse needs of PWDs across Albania. This system will initially be piloted in two municipalities—Shkodër and Librazhd—with the long-term goal of expanding its implementation across the country. By integrating accessible technologies and universal design principles, the Di-Notification System aims to provide critical information in a manner that is accessible to all, regardless of the type of disability.

2. Objective

The primary objective of this project is to develop and implement a fully operational, disability-inclusive notification system that can be scaled nationwide after successful piloting. This system is intended to ensure that all PWDs, including those with visual, hearing, mobility, and intellectual disabilities, receive timely, accurate, and actionable information during emergencies. The system will utilize a range of communication channels and formats, ensuring that alerts are accessible to the widest possible audience.

The project also aims to enhance the overall disaster preparedness and response capacity of municipalities and national bodies by integrating the Di-Notification System into existing DRR frameworks. Through this initiative, the project seeks to foster a more inclusive and resilient disaster response system in Albania.

3. Scope of Work

The development of the Di-Notification System will encompass the following key components:

3.1 System Development

- **Web-Based**: The core of the Di-Notification System will be a web-based platform designed to dispatch disaster alerts and notifications. This platform will be integrated with existing DRR systems and will serve as the primary interface for national and municipal authorities to manage and disseminate information. The platform will be designed with a user-friendly interface that accommodates various administrative roles, ensuring that authorized personnel can efficiently operate the system.
- **Mobile Application**: A mobile application will be developed to complement the web-based platform. This application will be compatible with iOS and Android operating systems. It will be designed with accessibility features such as adjustable font sizes, high-contrast color options, customizable notification settings, and support for assistive technologies like screen readers and alternative input devices. The application will

allow PWDs and their caregivers to receive alerts in formats that are most suitable for their needs.
- **Accessibility Features**: The system will be developed in accordance with the principles of universal design to ensure that it is accessible to PWDs with diverse disabilities. This includes providing multiple communication formats, such as:
  - **Audible Alerts**: Sirens, voice announcements, and audio messages.
  - **Visual Alerts**: Pre-recorded video messages (including sign language interpretation), SMS/text messages, and electronic signs.
  - **Pictorial Messages**: Graphical representations of alerts, particularly useful for individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- **Integration with Mobile Networks and SMS Gateways**: To maximize the reach of the notifications, the system will be integrated with mobile network operators and SMS gateways. This will enable the dispatch of bulk messages to registered PWDs, ensuring that the alerts are received even in areas with limited internet connectivity.

3.2 Participation in trainings

Municipal and relevant staff will receive hands-on training on the operation and usage of the Di-Notification System, ensuring they are equipped to manage alerts effectively and respond efficiently in emergency situations.

3.2 Pilot Testing and Evaluation

- **Pilot in Shkodër and Librazhd**: The Di-Notification System will be piloted in the municipalities of Shkodër and Librazhd. These municipalities have been selected based on their diverse population of PWDs and varying geographical characteristics, which will provide valuable insights into the system's effectiveness in different contexts.
- **Evaluation of Pilot Phase**: A comprehensive evaluation will be conducted following the pilot phase. This will involve collecting feedback from PWDs, caregivers, and local authorities to assess the system's usability, accessibility, and overall effectiveness. The evaluation will also include a review of the system's performance during real or simulated emergency scenarios, with particular attention to how well the alerts were received and acted upon by PWDs.
- **Practical drill exercises** will be conducted in both municipalities, Shkodër and Librazhd. The inclusion of key stakeholders and system users in these exercises will ensure that all participants are well-prepared to respond to real-life emergencies using the Di-Notification System.

3.3 Stakeholder Engagement
- **Technical Working Group**: A Technical Working Group (TWG) will be established to oversee the development and implementation of the Di-Notification System. This group will include representatives from key disability organizations, government bodies, communication authorities, academic institutions, and other relevant stakeholders. The TWG will provide technical guidance and ensure that the system aligns with the needs of PWDs and the broader DRR framework.
- **User Training and Capacity Building**: Training programs will be developed and delivered to all relevant stakeholders, including PWDs, caregivers, local authorities, and disaster response teams. These programs will focus on how to use the Di-Notification System effectively, how to interpret and act upon alerts, and how to

provide   feedback   to   continually   improve   the   system.

- **Participation in Mapping/Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) Training**
  In both pilot municipalities, Shkodër and Librazhd, relevant staff and stakeholders will participate in Mapping/VCA training sessions. These sessions will enhance their understanding of local risks and vulnerabilities, crucial for effective emergency preparedness and response.

3.4 Regulatory Framework and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

- **Development of SOPs**: Detailed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) will be developed to guide the operation of the Di-Notification System. These SOPs will cover all aspects of the system's functionality, including the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders, procedures for issuing alerts, and protocols for maintaining and updating the system.
- **Regulatory Compliance**: The system will be developed in compliance with national and international regulations concerning disability inclusion and disaster response. This includes adherence to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and relevant national legislation.

3.5 System Maintenance and Continuous Improvement

- **Ongoing Maintenance**: The Di-Notification System will require regular maintenance to ensure its continued functionality and relevance. This will include software updates, security enhancements, and the incorporation of new accessibility features as technology evolves.
- **Feedback Mechanisms**: The system will incorporate mechanisms for collecting user feedback and suggestions. This feedback will be crucial for identifying areas for improvement and ensuring that the system remains responsive to the needs of PWDs.
- Following the system's implementation, **comprehensive support** will be provided through September 2027. This will include hosting, ongoing subscriptions, and any required maintenance work to ensure sustained functionality and responsiveness of the Di-Notification System

3.6 Dissemination of Accessible Information

- **Multimedia Materials**: Accessible multimedia materials will be developed to support the dissemination of alerts and other critical information. These materials will include videos with sign language interpretation, audio messages, large print texts, and high-contrast visual formats.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns**: The project will also include public awareness campaigns to educate the general population about the Di-Notification System and the importance of inclusive disaster preparedness. These campaigns will be conducted through various channels, including social media, community meetings, and partnerships with local media outlets.

4. Deliverables

The following deliverables are expected from the Di-Notification System project:

- **Operational Web-Based Platform**: A fully functional web-based platform for managing and dispatching disaster alerts.
- **Mobile Application**: A mobile application with comprehensive accessibility features, available for free download by PWDs and their caregivers.
- **Accessible Multimedia Materials**: A suite of accessible multimedia materials for alert dissemination.
- **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)**: Detailed SOPs governing the operation of the Di-Notification System.
- **Training Modules and Reports**: Training materials and reports documenting the training sessions conducted for various stakeholders.
- **Pilot Testing and Evaluation Reports**: Reports summarizing the outcomes of the pilot testing phase, including user feedback and recommendations for system improvements.
- **Stakeholder Engagement Reports**: Documentation of stakeholder engagement activities, including meetings, workshops, and consultations.

5. Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration

The successful development and implementation of the Di-Notification System will require close collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, including:

- **Disability Organizations and PWDs**: Engaging directly with PWDs and disability organizations to ensure that the system meets their specific needs and preferences.
- **Local and National Government Authorities**: Collaborating with government bodies at both the local and national levels to integrate the Di-Notification System into existing DRR frameworks and ensure regulatory compliance.
- **Communication Authorities and Service Providers**: Working with the Electronic and Postal Communications Authority (AKEP), mobile operators, and internet service providers to ensure the seamless operation of the system.
- **Academic and Research Institutions**: Partnering with universities and research institutes to leverage expertise in ICT, geospatial sciences, and disability studies.
- **Media and Public Information Services**: Collaborating with the Audiovisual Media Authority, national and local media outlets to support the dissemination of alerts and public awareness messages.

6. Timeline

The project is expected to be completed within 6 months, including the development, testing, and initial rollout phases.

7. Reporting and Evaluation

Regular progress reports will be submitted to the project team and relevant stakeholders, detailing the achievements, challenges, and next steps at each phase of the project. The final report will include a comprehensive evaluation of the pilot phase, lessons learned, and recommendations for scaling up the Di-Notification System nationwide.