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INTERNATIONAL, EUROPE REGION AND EUROPEAN UNION VISION:  
POLICIES AND STRATEGIES, TARGETS AND KEY RESOURCES TO  
ADVANCE ICTs ACCESSIBILITY

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>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Ladies and gentlemen, good morning! Welcome to the Accessible Europe, this special celebration of the Digital Accessibility for the Europe Region consisting of the 46 countries.

Before we're starting the meeting, I have a great pleasure to invite our colleagues to provide the technical announcements. I invite the technical moderator to do so.

>> MODERATOR: Dear participants, I'm Luiza. I'll be the technical moderator. The session is live streamed and it will be archived and available on the ITU website. Also we'll be featuring captioning and international sign language. Throughout the session, the audience will be able to ask their questions by using the Q&A function in Zoom. I would like to remind the audience to put the view mode as side by side-view.

Thank you.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Thank you very much for this announcement.

Ladies and gentlemen, my great honor and privilege to welcome to you to this year's Accessible Europe. This

opening segment is joined by several leaders of the Europe region and it is my great pleasure to start the opening ceremony with an invitation to Her Excellency Alexandra Leitaó, Minister of Modernization of State and Public Administration of Portugal and to provide the key address from the Portugal Council of the European Union.

Your Excellency, the floor is yours.

>> ALEXANDRA LEITAO: Dear United Nations representatives, ITU, European Commission and all participants that will join this event for the next day, it is an honor to host the Accessible Europe: ICT for ALL forum. Portugal is a proud founding member of the International Telecommunication Union as we actively take part in all its sectors and strongly support the work being undertaken regarding accessibility and social inclusion.

Knowing that one billion people live with disabilities, 80% of those in developing nations, a global development agenda cannot ignore disabilities, a key driver of exclusion and poverty. That's why this forum is deeply rooted with the 2030 Agenda and its associated Sustainable Development Goals that engages all the Member States in fostering global development. We host this forum under the scope of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of European Union showing our commitment with this topic. Time to deliver, a fair, green and digital recovery is the motto of our presidency. Digital transition is not only a recovery catalyst, but also a keystone of the European pillar of social rights, as the digital transformation must be fair, inclusive, used as a service of citizens. This role of technology in the public sector will also be part of the agenda of the informal meeting of Ministers of Public Administration in the European Union's schedule for June 22. The Portuguese Presidency wants to foster cooperation towards more transparent, open, participatory, innovative and agile public administrations.

I have always defended that states should lead by example and, therefore, when it comes to public services digital inclusion cannot be thought of as abstract concept. This principle must be something concrete for citizens as we work every day to achieve this goal. Taking into consideration the social pillar within the Portuguese Presidency I draw your attention to the social summit held in June, it will focus on how to strengthen Europe's social dimension to meet the challenges of climate change and digital transition.

Mainstreaming accessibility and digital transition is a key policy tool for ensuring equal opportunities for all

and that no one is left behind, therefore I'm sure that some conclusions of the ICT for all forum will be of the utmost importance in feeding the social summit, outcomes as well.

As a country, we will also surely benefit with the knowledge and best practices to be shared in these days. Our commitment with accessibility, it is well-known among our European partner, in fact, Portugal was the first European country having W3C accessibility requirements for websites in legislation since 1999. This topic remains a priority in our political agenda being present in the main Portuguese public policy administration strategies, namely in the innovation and modernization strategy for the state and public administration 2020 to 2023, in the action plan for digital transition and in the incoming national strategy for the inclusion of People with Disabilities 2021 to 2025 that goes beyond digital accessibility and highlights a set of specific initiatives and measures that seek to promote autonomy, participation and self-determination of People with Disabilities.

We aim to make customer services spaces more inclusive whether physical or virtual, creating personalized service conditions for senior citizens, expanding the phone translation service and providing services that guarantee access to People with Disabilities. Our goal is ambitious. By 2023 we want 90% of digital services to have the seal of usability and accessibility. Plus, the accessibility portal launched last October provides information and tools to support public administration in making websites more inclusive for users with visual or hearing difficulties, as well as websites and mobile applications that guarantee a better digital experience for all citizens, including those with motor sensory or cognitive limitations.

At the same time, we have also launched a training programme in accessibility and digital usability, five months later, this programme already had more than 1600 registered trainees.

I truly believe that technology is an instrument to support the implementation of public policies and our recovery and resilience plan which provides an unparalleled investment in public administration and clearly reflects our commitment to digital transformation.

Digital is taking over not only online but also physical day-to-day conclusion. This is 9-1-1 for the development of societies and economic recovery across Europe. It is leaving no one behind. Portugal, as precedent of the council hopes to build political momentum

around the cornerstone of the European values from Portugal and Europe to the world and with all of our international partners, with all of you.

We believe this forum is an important contribution discuss and share perspectives to a more inclusive digital Europe, I wish you all an excellent journey.

Thank you very much for your participation.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Your Excellency, thank you very much for this strategic message and now It is my great pleasure to turn to the two speakers of our opening session, Ms. Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau of the International Telecommunication Union and Ms. Helena Dalli, commissioner for equality at the European Commission.

We start with Ms. Doreen Bogdan-Martin. IP.

The floor is yours.

>> DOREEN MARTIN-BOGDAN: Thank you very much, Jaroslaw.

Her Excellency, Alexandra Leitaó, Minister of modernization of state and public administration of Portugal, our host of the regional event, Her Excellency, Ana Brnabic, Prime Minister of Serbia, Madam Helena Dalli, European Commission, commissioner for equality, Director of the Disability Forum, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to this 3rd edition of the ITU Accessible Europe, International, Europe region and European Union vision: Policies and strategies, targets and key resources to advance ICTs Accessibility. Accessible Europe, it is our joint flagship initiative with the European Commission aimed at accelerating digital accessibility across Europe targeting both the European Union and non-European Union countries of the continent. It's held within the framework of the regional initiative for Europe on Digital Inclusion that was adopted at the ITU Development Conference, designed by European Member States who recognized the importance of digital accessibility as a top priority to ensure that no one is left behind. We have already heard from the Minister that it is an important milestone of the Portuguese Presidency of the E.U. Council, I thank the Government of Portugal for your commitment as well as your leadership in working towards a digital world built on equal opportunities.

Given that around 15% of the world's population or an estimated 1 billion people as the Minister has just noted live with disabilities, accessibility of ICTs has become more relevant and more necessary than ever. An estimated

80 million Persons with Disabilities live in Europe alone. Member States are an integral part of today's digital society, but they often encounter discrimination and exclusion. Unfortunately the COVID pandemic has had this exacerbated impact on Persons with Disabilities in terms of access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and it really has put the spotlight on the issue and the urgency around ensuring accessibility throughout.

Digital Accessibility constitutes one of ITU's top priorities and it is embedded in the Union's strategic goals targeting enabling environments ensuring accessible telecommunications and ICTs for Persons with Disabilities and that they be established in all countries, these policies and enabling frameworks, by 2023. Of course, 2023 is just around the corner. We at the ITU stand committed to support all countries to advance their efforts to make Digital Accessibility a reality.

I would really like to thank the Prime Minister of Serbia who has taken concrete steps in this direction and has been a great pleasure for us at the ITU to accompany Serbia in this endeavor. I think you can certainly count on us for future support. As part of our efforts to spotlight the importance of Digital Accessibility it brings me great pleasure to launch today the ICT Assessment for the European Region. This is the result of many months, several months of work with European administrations, as well as regional organizations and I do want to thank you all for your great cooperation.

Together we were able to get a clear picture of the status of Digital Accessibility across the region as well as to identify the gaps, the gaps that we still need to fill through concrete actions. For us in the ITU we are on our way to the World Telecommunications Development Conference, the WTDC, planned for later this year, where we anticipate a concrete digital development roadmap as an outcome. Of course, digital inclusion, in particular, Digital Accessibility will be a key pillar. I would like to encourage all of you to join the preparatory process, our Road to Addis, our regional discussions, I believe that the WTDC will be a landmark development conference. We held last week our event on digital inclusion and our expert participants were clear, we need to come up with accessibility solutions not for but with -- and I stress with the diverse groups of people that will use them. While we advance technological innovation we must keep in mind the users, the people, their diverse needs and this goes in line, of course, with Europe's human-centered

digital agenda and the European Commission President's apt description of the European way to digital innovation, one of which human beings are at the center. I'm glad to see that it is Accessible Europe initiative continues to engage all countries and all stakeholders throughout the region not only through events but also through direct assistance, through policy guidance, regional competitions to identify accessible solutions for all. I'm pleased to see many finalists of this year's innovation contest, I'm really looking forward to hearing their pitches in the coming hours. I invite you all to support these incredible innovators.

They are truly leading by example in their great work done by transforming the European accessibility ecosystem.

Before I close, I also want to acknowledge and thank our partners, the European Commission, of course, our host, the Government of Portugal, specifically the AMA, INR of Portugal, many others for their great commitment to working collectively and collaboratively so that we can -- so that we can make the vision of a Digitally Accessible Europe a reality.

I look forward to hearing your inputs, the discussions, and with that, ladies and gentlemen, I will conclude.

I hand back to you.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Thank you.

It is a great pleasure, honor to invite to take the floor Ms. Helena Dalli, Commissioner for Equality at the European Commission.

Helena Dalli, the floor is yours.

We are just checking to see if we have a technical glitch.

Let me one more time welcome Ms. Helena Dalli to make her intervention.

>> MODERATOR: I think Helena Dalli is joining us with the attendee link. If our IS moderator can kindly promote her to be our panelist.

Thank you so much for that.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Let's have a bit of patience before the message of the commissioner --

>> MODERATOR: Now we have her with us.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Welcome Ms. Helena Dalli with us. I'm handing over directly to you for the opening speech.

>> HELENA DALLI: Okay. Good morning!

We're talking about accessibility and I wasn't accessible! Thank you for inviting me to participate to this forum.

Information and communication technology should be accessible to all. You have my full support in working to achieve this goal. This event shows the power of technology in breaking down barriers to inclusion and participation. During the COVID pandemic technology has played a critical role in allowing us to continue our work, to share our experiences and to communicate our expectations. When technology is accessible it is a powerful tool for Persons with Disabilities to participate as active members of society on an equal basis with others. It is with pleasure that I present the most recent commitments of the European Commission to improve the lives of Persons with Disabilities . earlier there month the Commission adopted the new strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for 2021 to 2030. The strategy is of paramount importance, as it will set the scene for E.U. disability policy for the coming decade. The strategy aligns E.U. disability policy with the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities . the convention is the compass which guides us in the elaboration of this text. The new strategy embrace as Human Rights approach to disability. The strategy reflects disability in all its diversity compromising long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which are often invisible. It also sets out measures to tackle the barriers Persons with Disabilities face. The strategy focuses on areas where E.U. action can bring the most added value, but at the same time, it strongly calls on Member States to work together, to implement the convention. The strategy covers a wide range of policy areas and today I will focus on the first of its priority areas which is accessibility.

Accessibility remains the key enabler of rights, autonomy, equality and will continue to have a prominent role. In 2019 I had the opportunity to participate to the second edition of Accessible Europe hosted in Malta, there I spoke about the recent adoption of a number of important E.U. legal instruments and in the area of information and communication technology. Those legal instruments includes significant provisions relating to accessibility in telecommunication, audiovisual media services, public sector websites and key products and services. This includes the user interface, the functioning, their websites. The newly adopted E.U. strategy confirms the Commission's attention to these issues.

We will continue to monitor the correct implementation of existing E.U. accessibility legislation. In the years

to come we'll evaluate its application and assess whether it should be revised to address any gaps and we will consider the need for further legislative action. We will also continue to mainstream accessibility in new legal and policy instruments for an inclusive digital transition. Member States are making efforts to recover from the pandemic and E.U. funds are there to support.

Member States are encouraged to mainstream accessibility in their resilience and recovery plans. The strategy for development of human-centric, user friendly digital public services across Europe. The services should respond to the needs and preferences of European citizens, including the needs of Persons with Disabilities . the strategy, the Commission announced the launch of a European resource center, accessible E.U. This flagship initiative will bring together relevant national authorities to increase access to knowledge and training. This will facilitate implementation and enforcement of E.U. accessibility rules. Accessible E.U. will be a place to share good practices and to inspire policy developments. It will support the development of tools and standards, to achieve a barrier-free Europe, the Commission counts on the active engagement of all stakeholders, including organizations for Persons with Disabilities, industry, public authorities, accessibility experts. Together we share a wealth of technical knowledge and expertise as you shall see in the coming days in the event we're coorganizing.

I thank the International Telecommunication Union and the Portuguese Presidency for sharing with us the efforts to build a Union of equality. I offer our word to contribute to this endeavor. Ten years have passed since the E.U. ratification of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we must scale up European action. It is our duty to ensure the enjoyment of equal rights and the full participation of Persons with Disabilities in our societies.

I thank you.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Thank you very much, Mr. Dalli for this speech.

It is my great pleasure, honor to move to our next special address of this opening ceremony, Her Excellency, Ana Brnabic, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia.

Your Excellency, the floor is yours.

>> ANA BRNABIC: Thank you very much.

Good day to all of you. Distinguished Minister, esteemed Commissioner Dalli and Director Bogdan,

representatives from the international community and European Commission, fellow guests, I'm honored to represent my country Serbia at this important gathering and to address all of you today.

Let me first congratulate our host Portugal for the Presidency of the European Union, also the International Telecommunications Union and the European Commission for organizing this forum and for bringing us together to discuss how to bridge the digital divide. This is a key pillar, digital transformation, of my government.

We perceive digitalization as a necessity, a way to offer better public services, higher quality education, more capacity job market and an attractive business environment. The coronavirus pandemic proved the decision to turn to innovation and digitalization was right and perhaps even crucial. Years of technology-driven reforms made us here in Serbia more resilient and more agile. In 2020 we had one of the best results in Europe in terms of GDP. Our GDP declined only by about 1%. Today we have the second highest vaccination rate in Europe, only after United Kingdom.

The innovative advances of the past allowed us to shape a rapid response to the COVID-19 crisis and were instrumental for the successful launch of our entire immunization campaign.

Today we are proud to have a country mobilized behind the digital agenda but we have a responsibility to ensure that all citizens can benefit from these efforts. With the rapid advancement of technologies, risks of social exclusion tend to multiply, impacting obviously the most vulnerable population. To ensure that no one is left behind we must guarantee two basic precondition, digital literacy and digital connectivity to all our citizens.

We started by reforming our education system through digitalizing schools. As of 2017 we have started connecting all schools to high-speed Internet access, introducing digital textbooks and digital classrooms. Our goal is to complete this effort and to fully digitalize our schools by the end of 2022. This landmark project has been replicated in several other European countries, allowing the students the opportunity to access information online and become themselves digital creators. We were also amongst the first countries in Europe to introduce coding and programming as mandatory subjects in primary schools. Many students continue specialized IT programmes in high schools as well. We're expanding the capacity of our technical facilitator cults by about 20% and plan to

further increase enrollment. We are also trying to utilize as much as possible informal education. In 2017 we have launched retraining programmes in IT, and we currently have over 2,000 people either employed or change their career as a result about this retraining. Our specific focus in terms of retraining is currently on Persons with Disabilities in order to empower them and increase their employability. COVID-19 pandemic further increased our reliance on the Internet, thanks in part to these programmes we were equipped to ensure life could continue online. Many of our citizens, even our seniors, were immediately able to resume their lives, even after the lockdown by communicating, shopping, conducting business online.

Our children prospered as well, but not by wasting even a single day of school. Students were able to plug in online education platforms the day after the State of emergency Serbia was declared.

In addition to literacy, we want to make sure that everyone is connected and our overarching goal is to provide broadband to 99% of households by 2025. We plan to reach this goal by incentivizing private sector investments that can fund the rural broadband programme. It is designed to deliver high speed and affordable communications to over a half million households in sparsely populated areas. We view access to basic broadband as a Human Rights, and see the parallel establishment of a universal service critical for the rights of citizens to a decent, affordable broadband connection.

As we work to strengthen our digital society, we continue to pay close attention to the most vulnerable social groups and those most likely to be excluded. With that in mind, last year we adopted national strategy for improving the status of Persons with Disabilities which focuses on ensuring access to communication and information, implementing accessibility standards and enhancing the use of assistive technologies. This year, with the support of International Telecommunication Union we conducted the national ICT accessibility study which will be published soon. The study laid out an overview on the status of ICT accessibility in Serbia, accompanied by principles, guideline, good practices and actions needed to support its implementation. This cooperation between our government and ITU lays the foundation for future steps to guarantee a fully inclusive society. The current technology revolution brings unprecedented change to how we

live and work and at an unprecedented pace. Despite continuous efforts there is still a long way to go to reach gender equality, fairness, inclusion and accessibility in the digital era and in our constantly evolving societies.

The best way to do this is through international cooperation. Cooperation between countries in the cross institutions as it must continue to ensure that we bridge the digital divide. I want to thank the Telecommunications Union and the European Commission for supporting Serbia along the way and to reiterate our commitment to making the world a better place where no one is left behind.

Thank you.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Excellency, thank you very much for this message. Thank you very much for joining us on this special occasion and in celebration of the Digital Accessibility at the European level.

Now let me move to the next strategic message, the message of the organization representing the Persons with Disabilities and I have a great pleasure to introduce the Director at the European Disability Foundation Catherine Naughton.

>> CATHERINE NAUGHTON: Good morning. Thank you very much for the invitation for us to address this conference, to the International Telecommunications Union, to the European Commission and of course to the European Council Presidency. I first apologize for the President of the Disability Forum that can't be here this morning.

We're a network of 100 organizations of Persons with Disabilities and we advocate for the Rights of 100 million Persons with Disabilities in the E.U. Our work aims for the full implementation of the convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the E.U. and Member States and, of course, we're members of the International Disability Alliance and we work on the promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities globally. We're an advocacy organization, we try to influence the work of the European Union and institutions through meaningful participation of Persons with Disabilities in policymaking.

We value very much the efforts made by the European Commission on ITU when it comes to developing and promoting standards, trainings, solutions in support of accessibility policies, to information and communication technologies for Persons with Disabilities. In the past year, much progress has finally been achieved in the E.U. when it comes to equal access to ICT. We know this progress goes beyond the E.U. as well, especially with the keynote address we have just heard from the Prime Minister of Serbia.

In the E.U. we ratified the Marrakech Treaty, adopted an important legislation on web accessibility for the public sector on electronic communications, on audiovisual media services, we finally succeeded in having a horizontal legislation on accessibility known as the European Accessibility Act which is a very strong ICT component. In our view, the accessibility act represents a turning point for accessibility in Europe, not only concerning current technology but also for the technology yet to come. To underpin these legislation, we also need technical standards suitable for industry, public administrations and users because these standards build a foundation from which inclusive innovation can emerge. This already happened when the U.S. introduced the first accessibility standard, legislation in the late 90s, we know it is happening in Europe.

The positive adoption of the ambitious European laws and standards was also possible thanks to the active involvement of disability organizations like EDF and our members, even though we still struggle to work on standards on an equal footing with other stakeholders. The Commission under the leading role of commissioner Dalli understood the importance of consulting with Persons with Disabilities and their representative organizations in all matters which concern them. The most recent example is the newly published European disability rights strategy already mentioned by the commissioner this morning in which accessibility remains as one of the core priority areas, organizations of Persons with Disabilities were consulted throughout the development of the strategy.

A flagship initiative of the disability strategy as mentioned by our quality commissioner this morning is the creation of knowledge-center known as accessible E.U. in which national and international experts will exchange information and conduct trainings on accessibility standards and conferences such as this one represent a great opportunity to build this network of experts and speed up the uptick of accessibility by a broader range of sectors. Now, this is needed more than ever.

In addition to the dreadful situation brought by COVID-19 to millions of Persons with Disabilities, the pandemic also catapulted our societies in a more digital life. In principle it should have meant also more equal access to Persons with Disabilities, unfortunately, due to the poor design of certain technologies and wrong choices of certain public authorities and companies, instead of benefiting from this digital opportunity, many Persons with

Disabilities still face barriers preventing them from studying, working remotely or communication with family and friends, accessing culture and leisure through ICT. Technology helped many people cope with the situation, but in still many cases, neglected Persons with Disabilities, we did not use the full opportunities, we talked early of technological evolution or revolution, of course we have been catapulted forward on this by the COVID-19 pandemic. Good news is that technologies evolve rapidly. They can be rapidly changed and replaced for more inclusive ones, with far more possibilities and functions. One of the key factors as with the preparation of the legal framework is to involve Persons with Disabilities and the development of these technologies usable by all.

We now have the legislation, we have key standards, but to really achieve accessibility by default we need to keep on raising awareness and developing the necessary tools so that public authorities, companies, innovator, future professionals consider accessibility as one of the core aspects of new technologies so that accessibility comes by default. I wish us all to achieve this goal soon. I wish you all fruitful discussions during the conference.

Thank you so much again for the invitation this morning. I give you back the floor.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Thank you very much for your message which we are very well taking note on. Dear ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for your attention, more importantly, I thank all leaders of Europe for contributing to the opening ceremony of Accessible Europe. With this we can declare Accessible Europe opened! Thank you very much for being with us.

Ladies and gentlemen, now after this very inspiring opening segment of the European Accessible Europe, let's move to the next agenda point.

Before starting with the first agenda point, the first session, we would like to bring to your attention the highlights of the convention, how the Accessible Europe Agenda has been constructed and what was our motivation, joint motivation of all partners in the forces in order to not only discuss and to implement at the European level. I would like to request my colleagues to share the slides which I will be using in order to set the regional context with these events.

Ladies and gentlemen, the accessibility is very high on the agenda of all Member States, there is no doubt on that, it has been ready for a long time.

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This is the reason why eight years ago, European countries, Member States of the development conference of the ITU brought accessibility to the level of the regional priority for Europe covering 46 countries and being the home for almost 700 million citizens.

Next slide.

This has been still reinforced later on making sure that accessibility is part of the digital inclusion target which has been set by the Member States, expecting and committing to establish an enabling environment ensuring accessible telecommunication ICT for Persons with Disabilities in countries, all countries by 2023. This is the reason why this year we have decided to carry out the regional assessment, the ICT accessibility assessment for Europe region.

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Which takes stock on what we have achieved as the region in terms of digital accessibility and where the gap still remains.

I would invite all of you to visit the website of the event and download the copy and take a look at the great achievements our region has noted, also taking a look at the areas where further efforts are needed. There is no doubt on this that Europe is leading by example in many areas, accessibility belongs to this and we're very proud of this. Still at the regional level we have a lot of work to be done.

Next slide, please.

Of course, let's start with the treaties, where the European region is proudly engaged and has ratified almost all countries. As we see, at the level of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 44 countries out of the 46 have ratified, and this international treaty.

The CRPD optional protocol, which is adding additional issues not covered under the CRPD, it has been ratified by 29 countries out of the 46. Also at the level of Marrakech Treaty, we have identified only 20 countries that have signed this document.

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Also at the level of the antidiscrimination, equality law, the majority of the countries have adopted antidiscrimination and equality laws and implemented the provisions of the CRPD in national laws, ensuring non-discrimination and equality for Persons with Disabilities. Definitions vary over national legislations and stand from Social Security legislation rather than antidiscrimination law. There are different methods

identified for the implementation or the transformation of the international or E.U. law.

According to the ITU data, sign language is recognized by 23 countries of which four, including Portugal, have recognized national sign language in their constitutions. Congratulations for this move. other countries have passed laws and it may make direct or indirect reference to the sign language.

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41 countries have adopted or plan to adopt web accessibility laws or statutory requirements. 237 E.U. Member States have agreed with the E.U. web accessibility directive, and three EEA countries and Switzerland are also expected to do so, although they're seeking longer transition periods. The five E.U. candidate countries, they are also expected to transpose E.U. accessibility directive and several other countries, they also closely follow the E.U. law.

Israel is the only country that requires private sector organizations to provide accessible web pages as well, which is very good example and to take a look. Also at the level of electronic communication, there is -- we cannot deny that in Europe, in the international comparison, in the European countries provide very good connectivity, but also at very low prices. Next slide, please.

Access to emergency services, SMS for Persons with Disabilities is provided in 22 E.U. Member States, U.K., three EEA countries and Switzerland. In most countries, access is provided by the single emergency number, 112 and in some countries, it is provided through alternative numbers.

According to the ITU survey, in 12 countries emergency services are accessible through an application. In some countries access through applications is offered regionally. In 10 countries emergency services are available through telecommunication relay services, text or video-relayed services. In ten countries there are text or video-relay services available for the deaf and hard of hearing.

Video relay services, it is usually not available 24/7 which is a serious limitation in several countries, and there are also video remote interpretation service available.

Next slide, please.

Let's take a look at the media services.

Media service providers may be required by law to make their programmes accessible so as you will see in the coming two slides, there are several developments in the countries, in terms of the subtitles, audio subtitles, the sign, live signing, website accessibility and obligations. I will not recall all of them. We see that there is still some way to go and to make sure that these services are everywhere available in all countries.

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In terms of the public procurement, we estimate that over 30 countries have looked to low accessibility requirements for public procurement of the ICT products and services, following the adoption of the European public procurement directives in 2014, some of non-E.U.EEA countries have also reported the application of these requirements at the national procurement laws. ITU estimates also that a third of the countries regulate specific aspects of accessibility requirements for products and services as far as accessibility -- as far as the European Accessibility Act. There is a lot of room for improvement in this area.

We estimates that more than half of the countries have laws and regulations in place defining accessibility requirements for ICT services and produced, developed, maintained, made available and used in public or private education institutions by administrations, teacher, students and staff.

Ladies and gentlemen, let's take a look at where we stand.

There is -- it is difficult to deny that Europe has made significant progress in terms of building the enabling environment for digital accessibility, these concerns are the adoption of laws, regulation, in the majority of countries we have already web accessibility and electronic communications covered. We have considerable number of countries which address the validity of the audiovisual media service, public procurement of ICT products and service, accessibility requirements for ICT accessibility and education and only a few countries were on the accessibility requirements for products and services.

Also there is a need for strong commitment and also a lot of work to be done in order to advance the remaining gaps. This is the reason, next slide, and the next slide, and the next.

This is the reason why we're so grateful to so many partners who joined Accessible Europe in order to advance

Digital Accessibility, not only talking about the policy, but also building the ecosystem to reviewing the policies and strategies and the implementation of the country and the regional level and also incorporating from the design point of view the standards for products and services while working on the innovation for the Accessible Europe and providing and supporting the development of the human capacity in this field which is still a challenge across our region.

With this, I would like to thank you very much for your attention and I hope that you will have some moments of reflection on this, where we stand as the European region. This brings me to the first panel of this event which is focusing on -- which is welcoming key distinguished guests and focused on the international European and E.U. Vision on Policies and Strategies, Targets and the Key Resources to Advance the ICTs Accessibility.

I have the great pleasure to welcome to join me Roxana Widmer-Iliescu, Senior Coordinator of Digital Inclusion of Telecommunication Development Bureau of the ITU, Inmaculada Placencia-Porrero, Senior Expert of Disability and Inclusion Unit at the DG for Employment Social Affairs and Inclusion at the European Commission, as well as Mr. Laszlo Lovaszy, Senior Research Fellow of the University of Public Service, Hungary, but formerly the member of the CRPD, and strong advocate for the ICTs.

This brings me to the first discussion and I would like to invite all the speakers to turn on your cameras to be visible for all of our audience. I request our technical support to do so and to spotlight our speakers.

Thank you for doing so.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, let's start with the first speakers.

We observe the strong commitment at the global and the U.N. level, they're in place to guarantee inclusion of all people, including those with disabilities in all aspects of life. What's the role of the ICTs in accelerating implementation of this global commitments?

>> ROXANA WIDMER-ILIESCU: Thank you very much.

Well leaving no one behind is a goal for everyone that works to continue and contribute to leave behind a more inclusive and better world for future generation. To achieve this commitment, we should keep in mind that our world is digital and therefore ICT play as key role for each of us and each of us is different. With this difference in mind we can say that ICTs are embedded in

almost all aspects of our life to receive information, to communicate, to interact with our families, loved ones, to receive education, to work, buy products and access vital services provided by governments and much more.

Since we're living in a digital world, the right to be able to access to and use of information to be able to communicate became a Human Rights. If this technology for information and communication developed and delivered to be accessed, understood, used by everyone, this is a fundamental question, and also which of the conditions to ensure that everyone can equally and equitably be empowered by technology. To be included in the digital eco assessment -- the ecosystem around us, and if it is even possible, if so, how? The good and short answer, yes, it is possible. The how, it is by developing technology with universal design in mind and by delivering the information and communication in accessible formats. What we call by fulfilling with ICT accessibility standards and requirements, we all know that digital accessibility is recognized as a key priority to ensure digital inclusion of all people and guarantee that no one is left behind. Not only in the convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but also in transforming the world 2030 Agenda in the Sustainable Development Goals, and more recently, reiterated in the U.N. Disability Inclusion Strategy, and all of the commitments are fully considered within our work in ITU as previously stated by our Director and as previously said by all speakers.

Why it is so important, ICT accessibility in the culture of digital inclusion, let's try to explain it simple.

If I continue to deliver this presentation in Romania, my mother tongue, how many people will understand what I'm talking about now? (Speaking in Romanian).

And from your side, you would further respond to me in polish could we pretend that this dialogue is inclusive? Well, it is technology. The common language of the digital is accessibility. Since technology is evolving in an expediential manner, if we don't take into account accessibility aspects as a catalytic driver to enable anyone to understand information and to communicate to use the ICT, rather than bridging the digital divide, we'll expand it. The world digital leaders understood this many years ago and adjusted their target priorities and businesses accordingly to avoid company names, I'll only say these were those who pioneered the development of smart technologies or the services that adds more features to the

traditional office softwares. I think you all identify the companies that I'm talking about, and the ones that are very much attached to accessibility.

Smart technology is the accessible technology because it can be equally used by person with or without disabilities, migrants, young, old people, because only one can communicate by using the accessibility features embedded in the devices. Sometimes without even realizing that we're using it.

Do we all know that by using voice or text messages or the text-to-speech or software to read our mails while doing something else or the speech-to-text to write quickly our mails are actually accessibility features. The system software that most of us are daily using, Siri, others to perform a task for us we want or set alarm, ask for help around me, tell me this, tell me that, they are accessible features and we all use it.

Also, how many digital communicators when delivered and posting information, reports, features, videos in the website, social networks, they do it in accessible formats. How many of communicators who use different digital platform view this new common language, common digital language which is about accessibility to guarantee that they informed messages are delivered and understood by everyone.

Accessibility of ICTs, therefore, plays an important role, not only across industries and private sector but also for governments. Many countries and regions as in the case of Europe's region, put in the agenda the priority the need to adapt policies, regulatory measures to the digital trends to make it inclusive. Digital Accessibility has become crucial to safeguard equally and equitably the life of all citizens, so in particular in times of crisis and emergencies such as COVID now when governments were called to ensure that everyone can access and understand and use the vital information and public services to save the life of everyone without any discrimination.

By doing so, governments can issue digital inclusion of citizen and increase also inclusion within the digital economic environment.

To conclude, accessible ICTs open pathways to an important, improvement in quality of life, greater social and economic inclusion and self-empowerment of all people, no doubt. ICTs are a major catalyst to ensure full participation of everyone without any discrimination in the digital economy, and therefore I will say that digital accessibility is instrumental in accelerating the

implementation of all related global commitments ensuring that inclusiveness of all people, regardless of their age, gender, ability in the digital society, in the digital world.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Thank you very much, Roxana Widmer-Iliescu, for this intervention. Let me pass now to our colleagues from the European Commission.

Today we're joined by Inmaculada Placencia-Porrero who is leading the ICT Accessibility of the European Commission level, and we have heard a lot from the commissioner already, the excellent announcement about the new strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2030 which has been just published by the European Commission. Could you share with us, Inma, what's for the ICT accessibility in there?

>> INMACULADA PLACENCIA-PORRERO: Hello. Good morning. Can you hear me?

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: We can hear you very well.

>> INMACULADA PLACENCIA-PORRERO: Okay. Good.

Let me start by apologizing because due to technical problems I'm only able to join you by phone. It is really -- it is really -- I have not been able to -- Zoom has blocked me now for half an hour, my account, because I tried too often. I would start by complementing the wise words that Roxana made, saying that technology only puts us in a very difficult situation when we're trying to connect when things really -- for whatever reason, settings, complexities, all working together, I think that this brings us to the wise let's Saree marks that technology needs to be accessible but it also needs to be really easy to use and sometimes things are really complicated.

Anyway, let me turn to our strategy, and we'll try to keep some general remarks on our strategy, our new strategy, it was adopted on the 3rd of March, and we have focused on elements related to accessibility.

First, I would try to -- I would like to share with you some of the key background elements of the strategy, that is really anchored on the values of the European treaty, including on non-discrimination, equality, into the European pillar of social rights principles, including the full participation of Persons with Disabilities in economy and society and of course on the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The strategy aims to cover and it covers in different ways all the rights addressed in the treaty, in the international treaty, in the convention. It really has a strong focus also on accessibility.

First, technologies: The difficulties that Persons with Disabilities have been facing because of limited accessibility in the times of the COVID pandemic. We see today, and I have seen today, we are depending on technology, and when technology is not fully accessible, Persons with Disabilities have experienced problems telecommunication conferencing, online shop, distance learning, teleworking and many more.

Accessibility is put in the strategy as an enabler of rights, as an enabler for participation and we really highlight the fact that a lot has been done in setting up a policy and legal framework for a ICT accessibility, we have in other area, transport, that work has been done, but in the area of ICT accessibility we have invested a lot in setting up new rules that cover products and services, public sector website, telecommunications and audiovisual media, some enabling types of legislation like copyright legislation to ensure that exceptions can be made so that copyrights would not be a barrier for Persons with Disabilities to access content. We have also put technology in the strategy, a lot of work in setting up standards and now we see that major policies are there to address the digital transformation, digital -- including in the digital public services that need to be inclusive and accessible for Persons with Disabilities as the strategy says.

We also have to address those situations where technology is used, access to emergency services, for example, for Persons with Disabilities, and it is essential to realize that technology more and more is being used in the context.

For example, yesterday, we were having an event on standards that we have been supporting the development and the build environment A complete chapter is dedicated to technology used in buildings, for example. This is really very important, that the technology is also made accessible. Now, when it comes to the strategy, beyond identifying also some gaps, the strategy proposes some concrete actions, and the idea is to implement, to create, for the implementation of the policies and regulations but the creation of a new resource center that's going to be called accessible E.U., in that center, it is aiming to increase coherence in accessibility policies and facilitate the access to the knowledge. It will be a kind of cooperation framework where we'll bring together national authorities responsible for implementing and enforcing accessibility rules with expert professionals from all

areas of accessibility, including, of course, ICT area and with also Persons with Disabilities and their organizations. The idea is to share good practices, inspiring policy developments and at national and E.U. level and to develop this set of tools and standards and facilitate training.

In addition, we will be soon publishing a guide to describe among other things how to buy accessible in public procurement with clear references to the area of ICT. I would like to refer to the actions of the E.U. governance strategy that needs to be human-centric, user friendly and to ensure that public services across the E.U. responds to the needs and preferences of Persons with Disabilities referring to the role and the work being done under the so-called Berlin declaration.

In the area of the web, we are working on assessing whether web accessibility directives need to be revised to address any gaps. Now that's being implemented, working, now we'll assess whether it needs to be -- there are gaps that require additional action. Let me say that we will link the strategy first to it, the digital transformation, different rights, different areas, for example, the area of justice where digital transition, the digital transition is happening, accessibility is also going to be really present there. This is just one example. I think -- I think just to finish I would like to say that the strategy uses or addresses all areas in the digital accessible technologies are essential, for example also the area of education, the area of employment, democratic participation where information needs to be provided in an accessible form. In the area of independent living and my last -- and many others. The last point is going to be to the commitment undertaken in the strategy for the Commission to lead by example where clear actions are spelled out to make the European Commission as an institution and not only for its employees, but also for the public to make it more accessible, making more accessible the website, the tools for example with the Commission itself and actions that we have got clear actions also to develop and a plan on accessibility to be shared, by the way W institutions and the other are aligned with the European standards.

With this I think we have the general overview of the contents of the strategy and I pass the floor to the Chair. Thank you.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Thank you for this overview.

It is a lot of expectation because you design so many things which our community was always thinking about and

we're so happy that these things are happening and I assumed that I'm speaking on behalf of many who are today with us who are just waiting for the implementation of the great commitments and the strategic moves of the European Commission.

Now let me turn to our next speaker, who is serving on the Committee of the CRPD for a few years already. We have a privilege of having him with us to bring a little bit more of the highlights of why the CRPD is so important for us and why we should really pay attention to this work of the -- to the work at the level of the United Nations and why we're working at the regional level.

Let me invite Laszlo Lovaszy to take the floor.

>> LASZLO LOVASZY: Thank you. First of all, I thank you for your kind invitation, it a great honor for me to be a part of this very important event.

Why the CRPD is so unique? Let me begin by referring that this is the 25th adoption of the U.N. CRPD, so as a former U.N. CRPD expert, let me further express my sincere gratitude to everyone who worked with the Commission since more than 180 countries have ratified it so far.

Therefore, in a way, the U.N. CRPD is not only -- if not the most popular -- but it is the first Human Rights greet in the 21st Century. I believe this convention has an even more important aspect, technology. It means that the Commission is the first Human Rights treaty dealing with technology in terms of Human Rights. You may already know that the U.N. CRPD convention supports and more attention should be paid to innovation, inventions, research.

If you happen to look at Article 4 in general obligation point, F in particular, I'm fully convinced that you cannot overestimate the impact since we're beginning to realize that solutions are coming out that no one could ever have thought of, even five years ago. The technology, science that's been developing at unprecedented speed and seemingly without any obstacle. It looks as if there are no limits at all in the next decades to come, but it is extremely outstanding.

Had when talking about whether there is an evolving concept of disability in terms of application of the convention, well, absolutely.

First, anyone can realize and recognize the evolution and importance of the devices, video games, even telephones included, I think in this topic, accessible had -- it is extremely crucial and fundamental in terms of the quality of health services and the improvement of the quality of

public healthcare. The promotion of artificial intelligence, the application, they are going to be an incredible use for persons with limited mobility and -- also for the blind, vicious impaired, as well as persons with mental disabilities and that's in the long run. I can't even imagine the vision assistance and other capacities, helping people in limited decision making situations which we create a modern society. Not to mention the possibility of intervention services for disabled children and homes.

The evolution of robotics in the ever changing world that are being built in with social changes. Independent living, inclusive education, we have an entirely different approach when it comes to robots and small toys as well as caregivers at home. I think COVID-19 has accelerated the application of these technologies and hopefully the better, more accessible solution will come much sooner and earlier.

Thank you.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Thank you for your contribution.

This gives us a good understanding of this, of how we should position our work in the future, in particular for the institutions like the specialized agencies of the U.N. like the ITU dealing with the standards but also with policies and strategies that's essential to make sure that there is the clear link between outcomes of the convention and what we're doing on a daily basis implementing Digital Accessibility.

Having said that, let me turn back to Roxana. I would like to ask you, you know, how is ITU contributing to the implementation in fact of the U.N. CRPD and the new created U.N. Disability Inclusion Strategy.

>> ROXANA WIDMER-ILIESCU: Thank you.

As stressed this morning by our Director and by yourself actually, ITU is fully engaged to support all countries in their efforts toward achieving ICT accessibility implementation globally. This commitment, it is also reflected by the Member States in the ITU Strategic Goal Number 2, inclusiveness and related to target 2.9 that was already mentioned which calls on members to ensure that by 2023 enabling environments ensuring accessible telecommunication ICT should be established in all countries. That means in less than three years, so with this in mind and as mentioned by our previous speaker, Mr. Laszlo Lovaszy, the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is a legally binding international Human Rights treaty addresses the Rights of Persons with Disabilities with a total of 50 Articles that

encompasses all aspects of life, while only two Articles, Article 9 and Article 3, particularly refers to ICT, there is a total consensus that ICT are key in improving the opportunities for Persons with Disabilities to lead an independent life and be valuable facilitators in the implementation of all Articles of the convention to ensure this full and equal enjoyment of all Human Rights and fundamental freedoms of Persons with Disabilities .

This convention is signed by almost all countries in the world, we know that now we have I think in February was the last update with 182 countries and you do the math, what does it mean other 193 countries, so it is actually -- this makes us hear loud and clear the common global voice that calls for an inclusive world. In this context, willing to lead by example, ITU are in line with the global requirements established by the convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the united national inclusion strategy that you mentioned, ITU works closely with all of our members, Member States, sector members to raise awareness on the need to implement accessibility, to mainstream accessibility in the development of international telecommunication ICT policies, strategy, standards, and more particularly our work focusing on developing and providing relevant and we hope valuable resources including toolkits, reports, training to support our Member States, but also all stakeholders involved in their efforts to implement ICT accessibility globally.

Actually I take this opportunity to invite you all to participate in our session that will be offered by this regional event from 10:00 and while at this time, we're not able to deliver this training session face-to-face, as we used to do, I promise you all that will be a very informative session regardless of your respective area of work and expertise and I invite you all to attend.

Now, with regard to the second part of your question on the work within the U.N., among these activities, among others, I would like to mention in particular our work with WHO in the work stream on which ITU leads the development of Terms of Reference for accessibility guidelines for telehealth, eHealth application which have now been working with the development of the joined global standard for accessibility of telehealth services. That's what prove actually? It proves that while some sister agency, all of us, we really try to do good and to develop telehealth services and application to everyone if we do not consider the accessibility features we realize later on that this is

not accessible for everyone and then we have to turn back and readjust this requirement.

Also another key partner which is for our international organization, we are now developing a project with them that targets to provide guidelines and to develop the capacities of government and also U.N. agencies and other interesting partners while contributing to identify best practices to be considered in the design, development of accessible online job application or recruitment systems we want to ensure that that this is accessible to everyone, this is not the case, we have observed during COVID the trend on the labour part and the teleworking how important it became in this last year and perhaps will be for the next years.

This project, it is an important collaboration, aligned with the commitments made in the framework of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy to achieve sustainable and transformative progress on disability inclusion by ensuring the inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in all areas of U.N. work and to try to consider all actions that can actually impact also behavior with regards to governments and private sector.

I hope that I respond to the requirements, but I can continue on this, it's a subject that I think is very important for all of us to understand how to mainstream this in different areas of our activities as mentioned while providing accessibility application and job opportunities or education and this is also a topic that we look forward to work with our partners and to ensure that accessible education is also ensured globally.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Thank you very much. Thank you very much for mentioning the partnership because accessibility cannot be done by one institution. It requires the solid partnership with the good understanding of the needs of end users and congratulations for this.

Let me now turn to the colleagues from the European Commission and let's take a look at the European Accessibility Act and what's happening with this act. Would you be able to elaborate on that.

Just checking to see if Inma is connected with us.

>> INMACULADA PLACENCIA-PORRERO: Good. Good. Good. Technologies, it is not leaving us completely alone. Okay.

Yes, accessibility act, I would really like to share with you where we are now with the developments related to the act, and just to refresh your memories, the accessibility act will have to be transposed into national

legislation next year. The efforts that we are doing now is to support the -- the focus is to support the Member States so that in June of '22 they have the law, the regulations and they have the provisions to comply with the directive being adopted and published. It is important that they get published. They do so in a correct, coherent and ambitious way. We're really trying to facilitate that.

To that end, what we're doing, we're having an informal group of Member States, representatives that are responsible at national level to put implementation for the transposition of the directive.

We meet frequently and what we also do is to clarify, try to have a common understanding and a very informal way on the provisions of the directive. I will clarify that the European Commission does not in the treaty law, in the interpretation of the law with the courts, but nevertheless we facilitate and work together to understand the contents of the directive.

This is one thing that we're doing on the legal side and on the practical side also we are now working on the adoption or the preparation I would say first, the preparation of the standardization mandate. The mandate that is -- it is required by Article 15 of the directive, that's in accordance with the regulation, the European regulation and the standardization, we have to request one or more standardization mandate to just harmonize the standards, harmonize the standards, to provide conformity with the requirements of the directive and we have to do so by preparing a draft and -- a draft for -- a draft for products and accessibility of products by June of this year.

We're working on that and soon we're going to start the work of consultation, we're reaching out to stakeholders, to the European organizations and also to economic operators that have to comply with the directive as well as users that are effected by the directive because we would really like to set up a good working environment in order to adopt the mandates that contains traditions leading to a good result.

In parallel, what we are also doing, as I have said in my previous questions, to start working for setting up the resource center that would help with issues, as I said training, better understand, sharing of good practice, we need really to make sure that on the potential of the act, not only its formal obligations but all of the potential it has, it is really being utilized for the benefit of Europe.

This is where we're in the act, we're also reflecting

on what to do, how to address services and in the area of ICT it is difficult to separate some products and services and so the directive, it leaves the freedom to do the standardization mandate in relation to services and we're reflecting on that. If you are interested to participate please reach out to the national standardization organizations and to the European ones, because it is really important that there is a good, a wealth of representation of all of the stakeholders through the different governance bodies set up to the standardization.

By the way, tomorrow, we'll have a specific session on the standardization. The rest, we continue to discuss with Member States and I hoped that next year we will be able to have a successful standardization in all Member States.

Thank you for the kind attention.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: The technical standardization is extremely important for the accessibility to ensure that we can have the solutions which are working everywhere. Talking about everywhere, let me hand back to our distinguished colleague who I would like to invite to talk about CRPD and a special references to the ICTs in this convention and maybe if you might also tell us what are the main challenges to the Person with Disabilities in terms of the modern technologies which are captured in the process.

>> LASZLO LOVASZY: Thank you again.

We have a number of concrete differences and the Committee has jurisprudence and understanding on the importance of the ICT and the focused General Comments. According to Article 9 of the CRPD technology design should take into account accessibility and usability features in all points of the programmes. Therefore, this specific Article, Article 9, must be considered as the backbone of the convention. Apart from Article 9, Article 2 describes reasonable accommodation, it is a very important notion of the convention. In the case of information and communication technologies, since many accessibility solutions are already implemented, it follows that the CRPD, the positions on reasonable accommodation, it shall be applied in as many cases as possible. In addition to that, as I already mentioned, the Committee has also developed two important General Comments in the sphere, General Comment Number 2 on Article 9, accessibility, it was adopted in 2014 and General Comment Number 4 on Article 24, right to inclusive education adopted five years ago in particular. I personally recommend these General Comments for further consideration.

Furthermore, we can identify additional requirements

in terms of accessibility, when it comes to Article 21 dealing with the deliverables of essential access to information. Not to mention, voting procedures, kiosks, if you look at Article 29, to sum up, if you look at more relevant areas, you consider the following topics in terms of the Article, nondiscrimination in general, eGovernment, media, Internet, television, private sector services, issues of liberty and security, emergency services, in particular. Culture, leisure, so it practically means almost everything, that's why the convention is so unique. There is no -- some areas are even improving the levels of ICT in connection and services. Regarding what the main changes are for Persons with Disabilities in terms of modern technologies, as I before mentioned, these tools are going to be every day issue and experience and we have to scrutinize certain aspects like privacy, interoperability, affordability, others could be left out in the long run.

At this point in terms of interoperability, conformity -- I say conformity, we have to highlight that the party indeed had obligation to make sure that all customers can in essence in one way or another to those targets and strategies even in the interface programmes. But the most important message of the Convention when it comes to modern technology, let me very clear, the Convention provides dignity and Human Rights and the Convention clearly states we have to make more efforts in terms of innovation. However, as I always express, again, and at the same time, you have also to change the way you view competition and the technology development in order to find out, trial, experience, establish the services of reasonableness and evolution of technology overwhelms the reason for providing different reasons of very diversity. There is no -- there is no one-size-fits-all. We're talking of if not a billion with disabilities over the world. We must not shut the door on new things, even as unusual of a solution or innovation, it means that we must look at innovation and most importantly, motivational science, science and technology, they should serve the people themselves.

We cannot forget those this with special, even extreme needs, the problem could be yours in one sense, after an accident for example. And I'm fully convinced that in the future everybody might be somehow disabled in one way or another, the incorporation to E.I. and other software service, in this way we're talking the evolution of disabilities just to remember, you shouldn't worry about the future since in contrast to actual fear mongering,

humanity has been progressing and improving the standard of living and circumstances.

Finally, the U.N. Commission is not about maintaining a right to being disabled but ensuring choices and chances. Our job today is to seize the opportunity, to learn more about what the future has to offer. I look forward to learning, discussing, the mutual learning of the possibilities of evolving ICT solutions to come.

Thank you.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Thank you very much for this answer.

Dear ladies and gentlemen, in fact, we are arriving to the end of our session. I have still one question from the audience from Jen, thank you for the question, I would like to close this session without answering it, let's treat this as the concluding questions for our panelists.

So which is in your view the key element or consideration within the ICTs to ensure the inclusiveness of all people regardless of their age, gender, ability in the Europe region and globally? I will start with Roxana. Please be short of 1 to 1 and a half minute.

>> ROXANA WIDMER-ILIESCU: Thank you.

Thank you for this question. Definitely I think it is not accessibility. If I jointly have to build with all of you here together an accessible digital world, I would say that this accessibility should be built on other two very important pillar, first is infrastructure access, to be able to access further services of Internet. Then it is affordability. If we have the plug but we don't have the possibility to pay the Internet service, access is not actually useful. If we have Internet access and we can pay the service but we cannot pay the device that will help us to access the information, again this is not helpful.

Based on these two first pillars in my pyramid towards achieving this digital world accessibility is fundamental. Accessibility going through accessible device, so in order to be able to access the information that digital information, that the device is provided, so you have the accessibility features, also at the government level to ensure that policy or regulatory measures are in place in order for us all to be able to benefit from, in all circumstances and from all platform, TV, websites, so on, and this is the case in Europe now, and also very important under accessibility appropriation and digital skills.

Even if we have the Internet access, we have the money to pay for the device, the device is accessible, if we don't know how to use it, we still are not included.

With this in mind, I hope we can all put our efforts of building an inclusive digital world.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Thank you very much for this.

I move now to European Commission, Inma. The floor is yours.

>> INMACULADA PLACENCIA-PORRERO: Yes. Well, I cannot agree more with Roxana, she made very -- she's raising very important points which we -- I fully agree.

I would like to add a couple more points to that, the list of elements that are necessary to ensure the inclusion, inclusive technologies and inclusive digital solutions for all. We need to work also on awareness and people need to know first of all that technology is accessible, but also those making the technologies need to know that they have to make it. For that, we think that having a clear legal and policy framework is specific enough to say what needs to be done in order to achieve accessible results, leaving of course the freedom for implementation but this is essential. We would like to highlight the skills and competencies at both sides from the users to be able to use the technology, the accessibility features of the technology and also from the professionals, the ICT professional, the digital professions to make sure that they know how to implement, how to implement accessibility and finally I think we need to have strong enforcement mechanisms so that when there are problems, and there will be problems because accessibility is not just a one-off, not something that's static, you need to really pay attention to it constantly, digital services change, they need to be -- they continue to be taken into account. We need a strong enforcement framework that would aim to remedy those bridges, those problems that remain because without corrective measures, we would not be able to cope with the dynamic aspects of accessibility and technologies.

These are issues to add on to what Rosana had -- that Roxana said.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Thank you for n a point on enforcement, very well noted.

Now let me turn for the final word to Laszlo Lovaszy.

>> LASZLO LOVASZY: Thank you.

From the 20th Century, thanks to the technology advancements, not only on medical devices but including the advanced ICT monitoring equipment, improved equality of health service and implants in the human body, such as cochlear implants, the most important thing about ICT in the future, it is the digitalization of the data, the

creation of increased artificial intelligence, further diagnostic as well as the application of everyday practical tools in an accessible way. In the same time, it means that the so-called communication based on ICT-based technology, mind control, artificial body parts have been developed that make the artificial part feelable, it follows that this kind of rehabilitation, it must mean an obligation of forced adaptation for Persons with Disabilities, but more people will be provided the option and access to a much more efficient support and opportunities based on smart and ICT technology, People with Disabilities including.

As I mentioned before, diversity is the key element of this approach. More innovations can be achieved in more diverse circumstances and you can see the solutions at the bottom of the ocean or the moon, the future, it is bright.

Thank you.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Thank you very much. I take this as the concluding statement of this session. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much to the panelists and thank you very much to the audience.

Thank you very much also to those who are brave to ask the question, first question of the access to European forum. Use this function of the platform, interact, ask the questions also to the experts being with us. We learned a lot during this session. We invite you to refer also to the report which we have presented at the beginning where you have also had the background information of many things which we address during this session, but not prolonging, one more time, thank you very much to all speakers for being with us and It is my great pleasure and honor before breaking for the break to introduce the video contribution from Ms. Maria Soledad Cisternas Reyes, Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility.

I would like to request for playing the video. After the playing the video, we will break for a break and we'll come back together back at 12:00.

Please, the video from my side, I'm saying already thank you!

(Video played.)

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Now we'll have a break of 2, 3 minutes before we're starting the next session.

Please be patient and use the time as needed. Thank you very much.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Ladies and gentlemen, this will be around the time to start the second session on accessible

Europe and it is my great pleasure to invite to take the floor Dusan Caf, ITU consultant of the ITU who will be moderating this session, but also who was instrumental in collaboration of the regional assessment.

Dr. Caf, I'm handing over to you the floor.

>> DUSAN CAF: Thank you.

Just a second.

I'm delighted to have the opportunity to participate in the conference and to moderate this session on the regional review of enabling environments ensuring accessible telecommunications and ICTs for Persons with Disabilities in the Europe region.

My name is Dusan Caf, I lead digital accessibility policy and research programmes and digital transformation platform that connects and helps stakeholders in creating a more inclusive digital society, and I'm also an ICT accessibility consultant as mentioned.

Let me now introduce our panelists, first Mr. Bengt G Molleryd, a senior analysist at a Swedish Post and Telecom agency here representing BEREC, body of European regulators for electronic communications and he's designated Chair for the Working Party on the infrastructure and service policy at the OECD.

Mr. Mark Wheatley, the Executive Director of the European Union of the deaf. Mark is also active in the World Federation of the Deaf and in various accessibility projects and initiatives.

Ms. Polonca Blaznik is an expert in Information Society and digital public service design. She is also head of the Information Society office at the Ministry of Public administration of Slovenia.

Finally, Mr. Seth Bravin, Director of Strategic Alliances at T-Mobile coming from industry but also has extensive experience in Digital Accessibility in education sector and in non-governmental organizations.

What we're going to speak about in this session, last year ITU held our regional review to assess how accessible information and communications are in the Europe region. We have mentioned some of the findings already, in 46 countries we investigated the commitments to ICT accessibility and the capacity to meet those commitments. Over 100 indicators were used to assess the ICT accessibility in the region. We cover the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the directives forming the accessibility framework that covers websites of public bodies, audiovisual media services, electronic

communications and products and services.

We also identified the plethora of good practices in ICT accessibility from all over the region, the ITU assessment provides a comprehensive overview of accessibility requirements and implementation of good practice implementation, good practices and recommendations for ITU Member States and stakeholders. There is no doubt that we found out and confirmed that Europe is a global leader in ICT accessibility. However, with its multidimensional diversity, Europe has developed a distinctive approach based on regulatory intervention and multistakeholder cooperation. This process may not always be efficient, but after all they're effective.

Several countries adopted advanced ICT accessibility requirements far ahead of the adoption of the E.U. accessibility framework. Overall Europe is doing fine, but there are still challenges ahead of us.

Let me just mention some of the key findings, 46 countries will adopt web accessibility laws or requirement, half of the countries require the public service media organizations to provide subtitles and signing, including live subtitles and signing around a third of the countries regulate specific aspects of accessibility requirements for products and services as included in the European Accessibility Act, and in electronic communications we focus on broadband Internet access to emergency services and on relay and other services.

Here we identified two critical areas, these two areas are equivalent to access to emergency services and availability of total conversation services. Now let's hear the perspectives of our panelists.

First, Mr. Bengt G Molleryd, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed electronic communications products and services are crucial for Persons with Disabilities to assess -- to access information and communications on an equal basis and without discrimination. What are better ways to overcome this discrimination and improve the quality of service and experience for Persons with Disabilities?

>> BENGT G MOLLERYD: Thank you, thank you for electing BEREC and me to this event today.

I would share with you some examples from BEREC, this is the organization that unites all of the regulators for electronic communication in Europe together with the European Commission. What I will do, I will share -- try to share the screen with the presentation.

I will that in presentation mode.

This specific is from the end user, a Working Group

within the BEREC. What we have done during the last year, in the joint effort together with the OCD, we organized -- OECD -- we organized an international workshop, webinars on quality of service and experience and just to investigate the status of quality of service and quality of experience, how the users perceive this and also to identify the gaps you can say and issues related to accessibility.

The other work that's ongoing, it is a study that we commissioned from Lithuania, and they have done quite an extensive consumer study on the behavior of digital platform for communication. In that study, specific analysis to what extent accessibility, this platform that's so widely used today and the level of accessibility, to what degree they comply with the current regulation and what could be said in short is that a lot of work remains to be done basically to provide accessibility for everyone. At the same time, it is complex to compare and I will share with you some thoughts on that.

As I said, the issue of quality of service, quality of experience, it is -- the quality of services, it is a technical aspect in that work but it is also a way to measure how networks are perceiving, how services are transmitted, BEREC is doing some work on this area and also due to the pandemic the initial workshop was done with webinars.

We have the end user Working Group which I represent in this case here. The co-Chairs were unable to participate in this conference today. Any questions could be forwarded to them. The group is working on guidelines, identifying the parameters and measurements in order to comply with existing regulation and to guide the regulatory authorities and to provide the services so that they comply with equality, quality aspects. We also have our colleagues working within the open Internet which is also various quality parameters and measurements regarding quality of service and this is also linked to enabling consumers and users to have perceiving services regardless of the source and to be prioritized.

If you look at quality of service, quality of -- what we have underscored during the webinars, it is really two countries that are showing very good examples, France, Korea this question of improving services, doing measurement on how these networks, what they perform, the equality aspects of them.

Korea you think they're ahead of Europe, they have very advanced technologies with 5G, et cetera, they are

also working consistently to improve accessibility but also to measure the different parameters of the networks. They are very advanced, and still they want to improve and they better.

What was experienced at the network, accessibility, how to harness communication technologies for Persons with Disabilities and quality of service levels. It is certainly a question here that the operators that provide services to networks, also the platform and other involved players, they have a lot to do up until 2025 in order to comply with the existing regulation.

We saw examples of the eHealth and significance of quality of service which is for example an organization, the DTM, sector organizations in the Netherlands working for healthcare and home care services and how this clearly is underscoring the importance of eHealth solutions growing and really -- this has been under scored now during the pandemic and the COVID crisis, and this is certainly a question of reliability and how the networks cope and the services, and how they could address weakness and whether this is a network breakdown.

This organization, it is an example of working together with the colleagues in France of how they -- how they need to push operators to provide services and also to address weaknesses in networks.

From the United States, the issue of improving quality of efficiency of digital relayed services, where this is right for everyone to have accessibility, so what FCC is doing, the regulatory authority in the United States, they implement and regulate telecommunication and relay service programmes and it is to ensure that relay service calls are functional and equivalent to telephone calls and that anybody that has disabilities could get support in order to be able to communicate. This could be done through special support persons if they're not able to dial themselves, but this is clearly a function that provides services making it possible for anybody to communicate despite whatever disabilities they have.

BEREC has published a report on the findings from the workshops, and they are also available from YouTube in video format. We have the consumer behavior set in the study on the digital platforms, the digital platforms today is where people are using the consumers to a large extent, they're using this for communication services. We have done a great -- a large study on roughly 20,000 consumers that have been interviewed over -- by web panels. This study, it will be published later on this spring after

going through all of the different final steps here and finalization.

We have a number of guidelines that's been reviewed within the BEREC that addresses different aspects of operability both on real text and voice communication and video communication which is work underway.

This is in short a highlight of the aspects from the BEREC working part of end users which is driving to work in order to improve the access of electronic communication services.

As I said, the platform issue, the study, it will be published later whereas I said this research, the investigation to where we have had the studies examining the level of how the platform is really living up to the standards in the existing regulation and that there is a lot of work to be done there.

Thank you very much. Over to you, Mr. Chair. Please.

>> DOREEN MARTIN-BOGDAN: Thank you, Bengt.

Let's move now to the next panelist, Mark Wheatley, we mentioned the key ideas that BEREC is working on, from the perspective of users, I think Mark is the right person to speak about this perspective in the regional ICT accessibility statement, we stressed the importance of the success to emergency communications, emergency services should be available to Persons with Disabilities not only in their perspective countries but while roaming abroad. When you're not able to place a call to 112, they have to rely on other measures. How do we ensure clear and access to emergency services.

Mark, the floor is yours.

>> MARK WHEATLEY: Thank you.

Can you just check that the audio, the interpreter's audio can be heard. Do we have sound? Lovely. Thank you.

Thank you very much for the invitation to join at this very important event on the subject of accessibility. Accessibility is at the heart of what we do.

First of all, I would like to take a moment and explain who the EUD and what we do. We are an NGO organization and we work with national associations of the deaf around Europe. We have 31 national association deaf members and we are the only organization representing deaf people, deaf sign language users around Europe at the European level. We take part at the E.U. level dialogues with various institutions and official personnel. We are a full member of the European Disability Forum, EDF, who are with us today and the World Federation of the Deaf, and the Council of Europe, COE. With that in mind, EUD advocates

on the issue of accessibility and how access can be transposed into law, we monitor and support national associations of the deaf so that they can lobby their governments on harmonization and the adoption of legislation. For example, what is stipulated in the EEA and the electronic communication code, making sure that the end user is considered. For example, with the telephone communication emergency services how that can be made accessible.

I'll talk about different parts of our work streams. The first is the European Accessibility Act which recently from the European Commission, has outlined and explained. What we bring to this discourse is our work with the EDF, the experience that deaf people have, and their specific issues in terms of what access means to them and also our role is to raise awareness within the deaf community about the work that's happening at E.U. level on the various acts and directives that are being developed.

We also support national associations of the deaf about how different parts of the directives can be transposed into legislation.

We have been working on the EEA, so EAA and the Electronic Communication Code.

The EUD has been advocating on a number of priorities, for example, the EECC, the electronic -- the European Electronic Communication Code. We have been following this legislated procedure since 2016. In 2017 we submitted a number of Amendments to Article 102, specifically on access to emergency services, EDF put forward some Amendments and we fed back into that process to make sure that emergency services were accessible through total conversation framework.

Using total conversation or third-party relay services, this is to ensure that the end user is able to access emergency services at any point at any time of need. Making sure that deaf people have the same access as any other end user. Total conversation, what's this? What does that refer to? It is a universal design feature which means that a deaf person can choose to speak, sign or read while engaged in the telephone interaction. This means by including those three functions, this opens the a -- (Zoom technical issue).

-- this includes the way that access to emergency services is made available. Let's say for example how will a deaf person know when they move from one European country to another what the roles of the terms of services are -- rules -- for a particular VRS or a national VRS

platform? It is important that deaf people have the same level of access to emergency services as anyone else despite where they are in Europe. This could happen to you, you could find yourself in a situation where you need support, what would you do if you find that that support, that service is not available to you. I look forward to the conversations that we have around how we make European's emergency services accessible. Thank you.

>> DUSAN CAF: Thank you for the interesting presentation. Let's hear the perspective of the operator set, we have heard the regulators and the user perspectives from your perspective from telecommunication service provider, the challenges to provide the access to the services for people that are deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind or have a speech disability.

The floor is yours.

>> SETH BRAVIN: This is Seth Bravin, I'm speaking to you through a sign language interpreter named Sarah.

Good afternoon, everyone.

As Mark mentioned, there are some countries in the world that have relay services, however, there are many that still do not have relay services at all. The countries that do currently have relay services, experience issues with quality such as the speed of answer, interpreter qualifications, as well as confidentiality and security. Also another consideration is the platform accessible for people that are blind, people that are speech disabled in order to utilize it? Of course, emergency services is a very important aspect of this. It really needs to be viewed as a need and not as a luxury. Some key considerations and key challenges that we see as the mechanism in which this type of service will be funded, will it be funded within a universal service fund, in another one? There are several moving parts with that aspect as well as the interoperability of different platforms.

The quality of service with relay providers, the ability to call emergency services, what we have seen with the COVID pandemic is the urgency to have these services in place. Deaf people, people that are hard of hearing, deafblind, speech disabled, they're even more isolated within their homes and unable to microphone calls out if there are no relay services available.

Europe has passed an important milestone with passing recent acts which is great to see, I think some future challenges we'll see is making international relay call, if you cross over a border into another corner, within Europe,

within Asia, within the Americas, how are you able to microphone calls to home or other areas.

It is important that we coordinate with the government and NGOs and the private sectors. We're seeing an international drive, especially with the U.N. CRPD, and with the ITU's commitment to accessibility so there is some momentum that we're seeing, and that's an exciting aspect of the provision of the types of services on an international level.

Thank you.

>> DUSAN CAF: Thank you.

Our electronic communication, it is very important for Persons with Disabilities and there is another important area, this is accessibility of information of public bodies. We have with us Ms. Polonca Blaznik, website accessibility has gained momentum, how has accessibility of websites improved in Slovenia in recent years? What are lessons learned.

The floor is yours.

>> POLONCA BLAZNIK: Thank you. Hello from Slovenia.

Thank you for inviting me to this conference.

Slovenia Ministry of Public administration is horizontal ministry, we're responsible for the development and coordination of digital government services. We started working on better accessibility several years ago first following the guidelines of web content accessibility, to be honest, not in a systematic equal way because there was no systematic monitoring of the implementation.

Based on our own good practices, the practices of other countries we prepare the guidance for the development of digital services and public administration and we pointed out the importance of inclusion and accessibility, what we understand is the digital services can be used by all indiscriminately and that adequate assistance is available. We started to promote the principles of user-centric approach in designing digital services, it means that we should put the user at the center and take into account his or her needs, not only when we're just planning a project but through the entire development process, designing, testing, and already before the adoption of web accessibility directive, we designed our eGovernment's state portal in a way that is appropriate for the use of the blind, visually impaired, the deaf, hard of hearing people, people with dyslexia, users with impaired understanding. Example, descriptions of the administrative procedures, they're now accompanied to a large extent by

short videos with interpretation of the text in Slovenia sign language.

Also when writing text we take care of understandable, simple facts.

You ask what are the key lessons learned maybe to share, it is that it is very important to start.

To start designing accessible pages, it demands certain skills.

It is important that we start with what we know and then gradually learn from others who know more than us.

We are talking about the users, they need inclusive services, so we think that it is -- that it is about getting -- it is about -- it is about getting it right, not just making quick adjustments to the web pages. Also our experience showed that while accessibility consultancy is important and may help highlighting certain issues, but they are not real users, it is -- that's why it is so important to test the services with real users.

As a consequence -- not us, but -- what we -- what we find out, it is that such web pages are more at the end more accessible and more friendly to all users, not just People with Disabilities.

>> DUSAN CAF: Thank you, Polonca.

Bengt, you mentioned online platforms, now when we discuss the accessibility of the web, what are lessons learned through the study commissioned by the BEREC on the online platforms? Can you tell us some source of reviews, some fundings.

>> BENGT G MOLLERYD: Thank you.

In order to say a few words on the study, it will be published later on during the spring. As I said, it was -- it has questionnaire that -- for 12,000 respondents and in 12 countries. What we have asked the consultants, it was to see how the different platforms comply with the different regulation and the accessibility, what they found from the studies, the finding, the users generate also content and this makes it complex to have the accessibility issue, it raises different perspectives, make it is more complex you can say. For example, users uploading content on YouTube, sending that to France, how to safeguard Persons with Disabilities to digest that in order to understand what is said.

They have worked through the different guidelines, the regulations, mapping them to their various platforms, and this is specifically for communication services like Messenger, WhatsApp, so that was the perspective. Then to see what extent the communication services provided the

platform, how they comply with it and what they said, it is not -- it is quite a negative -- a negative impression to see that the companies has a lot to do in order to make it accessible for everyone. In the same time, they are underscoring the complexity to evaluate to what extent it is, because of the different factors involved here because of the end user, the end rated content for example.

It is -- I assume -- I mean, it is challenging for a lot of people with disability to use some of the services if they don't comply and we have also because some of them, they're depending on the software in terminals and how they present the material when the services are used. It is a desktop work regarding accessibility evaluations, so they have elaborated the evaluation scheme when they have compared the services.

It is a little bit depressing in one way to say, but it is also quite complex to make the comparison.

>> DUSAN CAF: Thank you.

I think now it is good to ask, you come from a small language group country, what are the challenges of small English groups when it comes to accessibility online?

>> POLONCA BLAZNIK: Yeah. Just -- just what my predecessor was talking about, mat forms, yes, concerning emerging technologies like for example artificial intelligence can help address the challenges of accessibility and bring forward the solutions we need over the advancements of the use of artificial intelligence in language technologies and we're definitely getting better solutions to improve accessibility in digital space. However, solutions that exist and are developed by big tech companies and offered by online platforms are not adopted to users of small countries due to small markets, linguistic barriers, so small countries such as the case of Slovenia has to take care of themselves, get their own resources and knowledge and Slovenia has many years of experience in the development of digital language resources and technologies, and these activities have been supported by different measures by the government and right now there is a big project going on and as a result we will get more tools for speech recognition available as opensource. We believe also this experience will be improved.

On the other hand, we're still aware that the support of the government will be necessary also in the future. For example, that's in our national programme for artificial intelligence, we -- there is a special attention dedicated to promoting the use of artificial intelligence technologies in the development of language technologies.

Yes. There is a difference between being from a country, an English speaking country than from a small country that is really left to itself to improve the capabilities of the citizens.

>> DUSAN CAF: Okay. Thank you.

Mark, before you mentioned the implementation of emergency services and video relay services. You mentioned some challenges, but how should mega states implement total conversation services should they implement them through implementation of the electronic communication code or wait for the European Accessibility Act? What are your recommendations?

>> MARK WHEATLEY: We're very excited about the European Accessibility Act. What it states, that each Member States has five years to change their laws so that it is in line with the European Accessibility Act and so that services like 112 are accessible. So 112 must be made accessible within five years, this means that we have a lot of work ahead of us.

How do we make 112 accessible across Europe? There are challenges. If the national country, it is their responsibility to make sure that their own competencies are in place, they must then campaign to normalize services across Europe. For example the RS services should be made available across borders. The issue is with some countries it is easier to bring the changes, so let's say for example one country, they have got one point of service for emergency services and that covers the whole of the country. That can then be made accessible for anyone regardless of where they are across Europe. In other countries, it is provided on a regional basis.

Let's take Germany as an example. How are we going to make a unified service when managed by different providers and that can become problematic, finding ways to harmonize that system. In terms of 112 we have a lot of work ahead of us in supporting different Member States in bringing about the changes within the timeframe that is set by the legislation. We tonight have time to waste. This is an opportunity for us to make sure that there is 112 made fully accessible.

We are now in 2021, what I find unbelievable is why are we still campaigning on these issues? These problems, they should have been resolved long ago. We're long off but we have legislation supporting our work and getting the message out there so that positive change can happen.

>> DUSAN CAF: Thank you, Mark. That's a question, why are we still campaigning.

Maybe Seth has the answer.

Seth, how is T-Mobile providing technology and services accessible for all People with Disabilities.

>> SETH BRAVIN: T-Mobile has a long history in the relay service industry, we have been in the business for more than 30 years and the implementation of the relay services has provided a lot of lessons learned and some best practices. We have a different version of relay services that we provide, we provide text service, video relay service, captioned telephones, speech to speech service, just to highlight a few.

We have learned over the years that every individual has their own unique preference of a service they want. For myself, for example, I use both text relay service and video relay service, another may have a different preference that's deaf or hard of hearing.

Some examples of best practice, we have a large number of People with Disabilities that work in our business unit. It really helps us to understand the end users' needs, their challenges, how we can best improve those services for Persons with Disabilities based on their participation in the workplace.

Also relay services provide a life transforming experience for People with Disabilities to help them find gainful employment and grow in the workplace. We have employee retention and people who can climb the corporate ladder based on the ability to access these types of services.

We believe it is important to build an ecosystem on an international, national, regional level, to build relationships and partnerships with NGOs as well as government entities. We also proactively reach out to end users and disability organizations to have a better understanding of what their needs are and what challenges they face. We participate in webinars and conferences as well. For example, before the pandemic in July of 2018 I attended the World Federation of the Deaf conference that was in Paris. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet deaf and hard of hearing people and deafblind people from all over the world to see what challenges they face and how the services can be provided.

A quick study is in New Zealand, we were providing relay service this New Zealand for 15 years working closely with a non-profit organization locally and the government to help build an ecosystem that allowed people to thrive. Looking ahead in the future, T-Mobile is very committed to and recognizes that our work in this area is not complete.

We're always looking at developing new technology and new services that could be provided and help build those pieces of the ecosystem. For example, including partnerships with universities in addition to NGOs and government organizations.

>> DUSAN CAF: Thank you, Seth.

We have covered now some of the topics that we covered, our assessment. Unfortunately the session is limited, we can't go in more details. Before we wrap up the session, we have two questions, they are both directed to BEREC.

The first one, it is on quality of services measures in networks. Bengt, could you -- could you have a look here. How do you approach the key network performance metrics and are networks aware, willing to deliver a sufficient end user experience, how do you think this can be reinforced?

>> BENGT G MOLLERYD: It is a question from --

>> DUSAN CAF: This is from Sergio.

>> BENGT G MOLLERYD: Okay. BEREC established a number of guidelines when it comes to quality of service measurement which is incorporating various standards.

These guideline, they're done for in order to give instructions or guidance you can say for the national regulator, the National Regulatory Authorities, NRAs through Europe, and what they can do, it is to use these guidelines in order to evaluate, to what extent the networks in the respective countries are fulfilling, these guidelines and what could be said, it is that today the communication networks are quite advanced, so in that respect, quality of service measures, they're already increased or integrated into the networks. I gave two examples of France and Korea where they do extensive work on measurement, evaluating, publishing what these networks -- how they're performing, what really the consumers are getting when buying the services. These are two lead examples, and in my own country, we're not doing it, they should, in order to help consumers to make more informed choices and also to really improve competition and to stimulate more investment, I think in these networks it has to be evaluated externally so you can say guidelines is one part, and implementing of the guidelines is second and the third, it is the NRAs take a very active part in -- together with various partners or by themselves to really measure and publish and to make it public in order to really -- to make it aware of how the networks are performing, and this could be also done in conjunction with

various quality assurance, quality of service parameters and also to comply with various rules and regulations as has been discussed here.

Some work is done, but I would say it could be more work could be done and also what's been referred to as the code previously, which also we're giving the mandate to national regulatory authorities to pursue a lot of work around this quality of service, to improve networks and to make it more available.

>> DUSAN CAF: Thank you, Bengt.

The second question, it is very broad, we cannot answer all sub questions, but perhaps we could have a question here for Seth first.

Seth, how is a Telecom operator providing affordability of universal services in your case? Do you have any measures, any -- do you receive money from the universal service fund? Any other measures that are there?

>> SETH BRAVIN: That's a very good question and there are several different models in place. One approach is to use the universal service fund where each citizen contributes a small amount to that fund -- contributes a small amount to that fund. Having a centralized fund is something that can be regulated by the federal government in its provision to ensure quality of service and also to ensure the sustainability of that service as well. It is a complex system, I can talk more to individual questions if you could ask one on one, you can feel free to contact me and I'll explain more in depth.

>> DUSAN CAF: Thank you.

The second part of this question here, it is for the meeting room set of services provided in the scope of the universal service to Persons with Disabilities, can you answer this, Bengt?

>> BENGT G MOLLERYD: I don't know. We can say like this, first we have access to Internet, it is a right to have access, then it is functional access and then you can say according to the law for example in my country, that anybody should have the possibility, should have the right to have access to basic communication services which implies them to over reach any kind of inabilities in the system to help the user basically.

As I said, there are different guidelines that BEREC published, it is really to pinpoint the compliance with the current regulation.

I cannot be more specific on that, I refer to the co-Chairs in the Working Party with the end user within BEREC.

>> DUSAN CAF: Thank you. I also suggest that they look to the communication code and they can find the services listed there. It is time to wrap up the session.

We still have 3, 4 minutes. What are the key messages from the session? Starting with Polonca.

>> POLONCA BLAZNIK: Thank you.

Well, we all want to live in a world where every single person feels included and can benefit fully from digital opportunities. Since it is likely that the pandemic will have a lasting impact on access to different services and opportunities like remote working, schooling, socializing, there is a collective responsibility for our organizations which work to challenge the digital inclusion gap in a way that it creates a long-term change, not just a quick fix and the responsibility to address the challenges cannot fall just to one group, private, public organization, they need to work with governments to create the global framework of cooperation to close the digital gap.

>> DUSAN CAF: Thank you.

>> BENGT G MOLLERYD: Thank you very much.

I also thank you for the invitation to be part of this conference, accessibility for everyone, I mean, regardless who we are, what you are, where you are, who you are, what your abilities are, it is a key factor for any country today with the digitalization meaning that -- our life is a combination of the physical and cyber world, that is a society that we have to live. The technology has to be accessible for all. It will not come without putting pressure on players and actors, the quality of service, the quality of experience has to be measured and put in context and this platform service, as I said, it is complex to evaluate because there's so many involved in the users and the content, this is on the agenda and the report, that BEREC publish, it is a continued policy discussion on this important items that we have discussed here today.

Thank you very much.

>> DUSAN CAF: Yes. Thank you.

I also have to mention that during our assessment we also started the BEREC documents.

So let's move on to Seth. What is your key message?

>> SETH BRAVIN: First of all, I want to say thank you, my hats are off to the ITU. You play a very important role with publishing the communication guidelines for relay services. That is an important tool for those who do not yet have services and those do. Key performance indicators are going to be focused on, and that is an important way to

make sure that regulations quality of service is in compliance for everyone.

>> DUSAN CAF: Thank you.

Mark.

What is your key message?

>> MARK WHEATLEY: I would also like to offer my thanks. As you now, our population is becoming older and older. We need to make sure that we work for everyone in society and accessibility for all. It is very effective concept, making sure that no one is left behind, it is not an easy task ahead of us and it is important that we put these measures in place now and that will help us to plan for the future in achieving accessibility for all.

Thank you.

>> DUSAN CAF: Thank you.

The key messages, we have come to the end of our panel. I would like to thank you to Bengt, Mark, Polonca, Seth, for your valuable discussions and sharing your thoughts with us.

I would also like to thank to the interpreters and technicians who made this session possible with supporting us and taking care of everything.

Let us now move to the special video message session.

>> PEDRO NUNO SANTOS: We thank you for the kind invitation to be with you today to address a few words sharing the vision of Portugal on this interesting topic, the pandemic crisis that the world is facing today has proved that digital inclusion is no more a long-term vision but a matter of urgency. Governments have to act to make sure we don't leave no one behind p in Portugal we're working in increasing the presentation of the population that's -- that has access to activity and also the economical vulnerabilities, they're not a barrier to certain segments of our families. The allowance of 5G with associated coverage obligations will increase the reach of Internet, especially our low density areas. The social Internet tariff that's planned to be in the market before summer will enable the most economical fragile sections of our society will access in most cases for the first time a proper Internet service. We all know that for these family, the Internet access will be a measure to promote inclusion, access to education, information, culture, entertainment, facilitated communication and at the end enhanced citizenship. Our vision is that Portugal will consolidate the position in Europe as a digital innovation hub with highly skilled talent.

>> Thank you for the session 2, thank you for the

discussion that we have had.

Now we're entering to the afternoon break before we enter the afternoon session. Now we will have one-hour break. We will start at 4:00. Please do reconnect with us at 4:00. We'll have a session 3 about response and recovery to the pandemic, how to be digitally accessible and we'll have the award ceremony of our 15 finalists now you can take the coffee, have a nice lunch break, and we will see you at 4:00! Thank you very much!

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