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ACCESSIBLE EUROPE: ICT 4 ALL "CELEBRATION OF THE  
 INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES"  
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(Captioner troubleshooting Zoom captions)  
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>> -- While millions of people connect daily for work, obtain and receive education and socialize, many others from vulnerable groups are being left behind. Digital inclusion is a foundation upon which digital communities can be built to bridge the gap.

Just as a person can communicate through a chat just as a person with a hearing disability would. A visually impaired person will send voice messages just as a person caring for a baby does or someone who cannot use their hands to write. A migrant or a person who does not master a language can access important information if it is provided in easy to read or intuitive formats which would also serve a person with cognitive disability.

Building blocks are needed to include digital inclusion for all. Access to digital infrastructure to ensure Internet connectivity is in place. Affordability so that users can afford internet accesses and buy devices to connect. Accessibility of ICTs which is key to fulfilling digital inclusiveness for all people and encompasses implementation of our ICT accessibility policy, regulations, and standards, develop accessible ICTs including devices, products, and

services. Appropriation and digital knowledge skills by all end users. Building inclusive digital communities is everyone's responsibility. Only through collective efforts will we successfully build the digitally inclusive world we want.

Join ITU's work in ICT digital accessibility. For more information, please visit our website and resources [www.itu.int](http://www.itu.int).

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: Many thanks for the video. Good afternoon, everyone. And welcome to the Accessible Europe: ICT 4 All event organized by the International Telecommunication Union, ITU. My name is Ecmel Aysu Sürmen. I'm a digital consultant at digital ITU office. I will be the moderator for today's event. I'm very excited to be with you all. So today's event is being held in celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, which is normally marked on December the 3rd. And we are honored to be able to celebrate this important day with all of you.

So we have three exciting sessions planned for today's meeting. The first session will focus on the importance of establishing a harmonized approach to ensure the full and equal participation of persons with disabilities. The second session will explore the role of digital tool and service in addressing the needs of persons with disabilities.

Lastly, as the Accessible European youth is coming to an end, we will have a special youth session to hear the perspectives of the youth with disabilities on a more Accessible Europe.

So the event will last approximately two hours and a half. And we are thrilled to have such a distinguished group of speakers and participants here with us today.

I would like to invite everyone to turn on their cameras momentarily to take a quick screenshot of this lovely bunch and keep a memory of this event. Let's wait for a few more people to join. You look great.

Thank you very much. Okay. So now I will leave the floor to our technical moderator to outline the housekeeping rules. Thank you. The floor is yours.

>> RAHIM: Dear participants, hello, thank you for joining. My name is Rahim, and I will be the technical moderator for this session. Before starting the meeting, I would like to give you some instructions on the Zoom platform and the meeting.

Please, audience, kindly keep your microphones switched off and the moderator of the session will address the speakers. And we will give you the floor when your turn comes. You may use the chat for any questions or comments. Please include your name for making it easier for the organizers. And when the floor is open to the audience, please raise your hand to request the floor. The raise hand function is located at the bottom of the participant window.

You can view and activate the captioning by clicking on closed caption in the bottom bar of the Zoom interface. As

well, I have to mention that this meeting provides international sign interpretation service. I remain available in the chat if you need any assistance. And thank you very much and have a pleasant event.

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: Thank you very much, Rahim. Now it is my pleasure to introduce Mr. Jaroslaw. He has experience in fostering ICT and across systems. He has held previously various positions in the public sector and has contributed to very legislative project with significant impact. In his current role as head of the ICT for Europe, Mr. Ponder lead's ICT's activities in Europe and promoting accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities in the digital world. Join me in welcoming Mr. Ponder to deliver the opening remarks for this event. Thank you.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Good afternoon. Everyone, I'm delighted to welcome you all today at this special event, Accessible Europe: ICT 4 All. We are all here to celebrate this special day, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and to discuss how we can create an accessible digital society for all in Europe and beyond.

Disability is part of being human. Almost everyone will temporarily or permanently experience disability at some point of their life. An estimated 1.3 billion people worldwide, one in six persons currently experience significant disability. And only in European Union we have over 87 million persons. So one in four persons in European Union have some form of disability. These numbers are increasing due in part to population aging due to the population aging and increased in the prevalence of noncommunicable diseases. It's not to deny that digital technologies when affordable and available can serve as critical enablers to allow persons with disabilities to realize full and effective opportunities to participate in all aspects of society and development. Therefore at the ITU, the UN agency for digital, how we place great importance to this work area. Acting at the global, regional, and national level. We have just concluded the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference 2022 and the strategic importance of the digital inclusion at the level of the ITU Strategic Goals meaning universal connectivity and sustainable digital transformation.

ITU through the efforts of its three sectors, standardisation, and development sectors as well as general Secretariats will aim at closing digital divides in the use of the ICTs in all countries and for all peoples, including persons with disabilities establishing of enabling environments, strategies, policies, and practices ensuring accessible ICTs for persons with disabilities developing international technical standards and fostering innovation of the these are a few among the other issues which we will be doing and do in order to foster the digital inclusion.

Also at the regional level the ITU regional initiatives

such as European one on accessibility, affordability, and skills development for all to ensure digital inclusion and sustainable development were approved at the recent development conference 2022. And it provides the viable framework for -- to advance the work at the impact at regional and national levels. Today we meet at the Accessible Europe celebrating the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. But more importantly, kicking of a new soil on the implementation of the regional initiative that requires engagement, dedication and commitment of all stakeholders to work together towards the joined cause of making Europe even more accessible thanks to the digital technologies.

Please let me use this opportunity to thank all stakeholders that have been passionately working with us so far, including the European Commission including the precedents of Portugal and today the Czech Republic as well as Austria, Malta, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Zero Project and many, many others. Apologies to those who I didn't name to make sure that the Accessible Europe is not only an event but it's the platform for learning, exchanging, partnering, inspiring and driving innovation and provision of the technical assistance to the countries.

This is important for us to make sure that those who have made already significant progress in this area shared the practices with others. Therefore we're embedding into the core of our strategy and also paying a lot of attention towards the programmes. I invite all stakeholders that are still not part of this initiative to join forces to the accessibility agenda at the regional and national levels across Europe.

As we know, Europe region consisting of four to six countries represent significant diversity in the EU Member States with the EU Member States following a harmonized approach and others being on their EU integration path. The regional assessments report released in 2020 provided a picture of the challenges and opportunities at the European level that require urgent action of all to ensure that no one is left behind.

Today we will be discussing how to establish a harmonized approach to ensure the full and equal participation of persons with disabilities in the digital world. We will also talk about digital tools and services standardisation and in line with the inclusion of European youth we will be having a special youth session to hear the perspectives of young people with disabilities on more Accessible Europe. I'm confident that together we can make a difference and create an inclusive digital society that is accessible to everyone.

Let us take this opportunity to celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and make sure that no one is left behind in digital work. Thank you very much for joining us today. And I look forward to an engaging and fruitful event. Thank you very much. And over to you.

>> ECME AYSU SÜRMEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Ponder.

Now I am very pleased to introduce you -- introduce Mr. Petr Ocko for the second opening remarks. Petr Ocko is the Deputy Minister of industry and trade of the Czech Republic. He can't join us today. But he has provided us with his video intervention for the opening remarks. Let me briefly introduce his work to you.

So Mr. Petr Ocko has a strong background in information management and European integration. He also holds a PhD in information economics. He previously has worked in both public and private sectors. And at the moment in the current role at the deputy Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic, his work has been instrumental in support for applied research, especially in key areas that relate to digital transformation and industry.

And we are more than honored to have his intervention at this event. And we look forward to hearing his insights. Rahim. If we can have the video. Thank you.

(Video Playing)

>> PETR OCKO: Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the Czech presidency of the EU Council, I would like to thank the ITU for organizing this event that focuses every year on how to better use new technologies to improvise (?) with disabilities. Ideas and new innovations and new technologies on a daily basis. This is a great opportunity to look at the ICT from a bit different point of view. On this December the 3rd we celebrated the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. This day which we commemorate all around the world is meant to symbolize the efforts of our society to integrate all the people.

We should be able to offer dignified to all and to the potential of every person. It is a matter of creating the conditions so that even disabled persons can use the potential to enrich the rest of us and play their role in society on an equal basis.

We should focus much more on abilities and not on a particular person's disability. European society is strong because of its diversity. Europe has already gone far in accessibility, the specific regulations are in place. And persons with disabilities like the whole society already benefit from innovations.

New technologies bring new challenges and also common approach based on cooperation and best practices.

Furthermore, I am convinced that the digitalisation should be also guided by persons with disabilities themselves.

In this respect, I appreciate that one of today's panels is focused on youth. We need to empower all the young people so that they can cease real opportunities, set their own priorities, participate in change, and take specific responsibility more easily.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me wish a successful meeting and a fruitful discussion.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Let me take the floor once again. I wanted to just officially thank very much to the Czech Republic and Minister Ocko for providing this material. Just today the administrations and tell communication administration of the 27 EU Member States are meeting together under the leadership of the EU presidency led by the Czech Republic in order to discuss the digitalisation, digital-related issues, including accessibility. And this meeting he's also welcoming this message from the Czech presidency as one of the very important symbol for all of us to make sure that the digital accessibility is really main stream across the whole region. And he's providing the inspiration for many others who are on the path towards the integration towards the European Union.

Over to you Ecmel. Thank you very much one more time to the Czech Republic.

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: Thank you very much. So I will now introduce Ms. Roxana Widmer-Iliescu who will be moderating the first session of our event. So Ms. Widmer Iliescu is the coordinator at the ITU. In her current role she works on inclusive policies and strategies, especially in ICT and digital accessibility to ensure that all individuals have access to and also can benefit from ICTs.

She has a background in law and holds master's degrees in international law and strategic management of telecommunications.

Today with over 25 years of experience in the development sector of ITU, Roxana Widmer-Iliescu brings a wealth of experience to this event. We're honored to have her as our moderator for the first session. Now I pass the floor to her to begin her session. Thank you.

>> ROXANA WIDMER-ILIESCU: Thank you very much, Ecmel. Thank you Jaroslav, thank you, everyone, who is joining us. Today's a great day for us here in the celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities within the Accessible Europe: ICT 4 All.

I will just set the scene with reminding that the global megatrends that influence each other, among other are the race of technology, the population aging, and urbanisation. And we all together with the efforts done by all Member States and stakeholders we would like to make this world inclusive for all, regardless of our age, regardless of our ability to use the technology, regardless of our disabilities, as my colleague said. Everyone -- we do experience sort of disabilities. But we really want to make this world inclusive. And our cities, communities to be inclusive.

So therefore, ITU is really doing all efforts jointly with our Member States to make this happen and we try to provide all the necessary resources so facilitate and to accelerate this implementation process.

So with this in mind, I would like to open this first

session in which for the rest of 45 minutes we'll try to share together with you challenges, our good practices, and our thoughts on how to accelerate this process.

I would ask my colleague, Ecmel, if she can put a short video to, let's say, share the ITU vision to ensure how the smart cities are smart for all. The video, please, Ecmel.

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: Rahim, could you share the video.

>> RAHIM: Sure.

(Video Playing)

>> Beyond smart cities equals smart for all. Towards building inclusive and digitally accessible environments and communities to meet the needs of present and future generations.

Cities and communities are increasingly influenced by the evolution of technology. The term smart is frequently used to reflect this technological progress. Additionally, the smart way to build our world is to ensure smart for all. In means being digitally inclusive and accessible for all people and empowering everyone through information and communication technologies or ICTs regardless of their gender, age, ability, or their context of use.

Many smart cities' responses to COVID-19 have demonstrated how ICTs can successfully manage emergency situations but also carry the risk of deepening the digital divide.

For example, digital platforms to book vaccination appointments were widely used across regions. However, not all digital platforms were accessible leaving some vulnerable groups behind such as blind persons who faced barriers to make appointments online. A universal design approach is commonly applied to physical environments. Nevertheless the universal design principles need to be considered in all technological products and solutions to make sure that all users can interact within a smart city environment or community.

Building smart sustainable cities, environments, and communities for all requires four main building blocks. One, access. To have the infrastructure enabling high speed access to networks and technologies which allows everyone to connect.

Two, analysis, data protection, and cybersecurity. To guarantee that raw data is analyzed and translated through applications and tools and to carefully protect the information.

Three, affordability, to ensure that all end users can afford both an internet connection and the technological devices to communicate.

Four, accessibility, to important digital accessibility requirements, standards, and universal design principles at all stages of technological developments thus creating human-centered digital environments. This ensures everyone's needs, abilities, or context of use of technology are guaranteed.

Smart cities change the way we interact with ICTs, the way we live and improve our quality of life, we must ensure we build

our cities, communities, and environments not only to be physically accessible but also digitally accessible for all.

This will ensure that we continuously meet the needs of present and future generations. Join our collective efforts to build inclusive and smart for all.

For more information on smart cities for all see our online self-paced training course as well as other useful resources please visit our ITU-D digital accessibility websites.

>> ROXANA WIDMER-ILIESCU: Thanks for this video. I think the framework of the session is set to ensure that we jointly achieve to have inclusive digital communities, cities, and societies. This is a global effort done by everyone.

Our next speaker it will be Ms. Rosemary Kayess. She's a lawyer and chairperson and United Nations committee on the rights of persons with disabilities. She will join us today through a video intervention in which she will share with us from the global perspective the UN CRPD requirements and goals.

I just want to remind that globally the UN CRPD is ratified by 85 countries by November. In fact, we all agree that we really want to have an inclusive work for all. With this, the video, please of our colleague Rosemary Kayess.

>> ROSEMARY KAYESS: I would like to thank the International Telecommunication Union organization for organizing this celebration of International Day of Persons with Disabilities and for us speak to you today on digital accessibility. Access to technology for people with disabilities on an equal basis with others is fundamental for the realization of all -- we live in a time of rapid technological advancement and change and this has the ability to either break the social isolation and exclusion of people with disabilities experience, or it can entrench inequality and discrimination.

Article 27 of the universal declaration of human rights it states that everyone has the right to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. This has been further elaborated in Article 15 of the international covenant on economic, social, and cultural rights, which requires recognition of the right of everyone to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications.

Although the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities doesn't explicitly incorporate the language of these human rights instruments. It does not mean that it limits the rights of people with disabilities to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress. The preamble to the Convention makes clear that everyone is entitled to all human rights and fundamental freedoms without discrimination of any kind.

And the purpose of the Convention is to promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities.

The Convention recognizes the right to enjoy the benefits



of scientific progress through its significant focus on technology as a facilitator of the realization of all other convention rights. Such as the right to live independently and be included in the community.

The right to freedom of expression and opinion and access to information, the right to employment, education, and health, and equality before the law. People with disabilities have a right to the benefits of digital technology. Digital technology is part of several of the cross-cutting articles of the Convention. These cross-cutting articles inform and provide guidance on how to interpret and implement the Convention.

They are not implemented in isolation but need to be considered when taking action to progress the rights of people with disabilities. The Convention requires that technology not only be accessible and affordable and add here to the principles of universal design, but it also requires technology to facilitate the achievement of rights of persons with disabilities.

For example, how this technology facilitates freedom of expression and opinion and access to information, which is Convention Article 21. People with disabilities already use a range of smart devices and alternative communication devices. They rely on accessible websites and screen reader and voice recognition technology. Automated captioning, screen in screen technology to provide sign language interpretation. This is the means for many people with disabilities to formulate, exchange, and express their opinions and to be able to obtain information.

In turn, the use of this technology and information is instrumental in enabling people with disabilities to participate in political and public life and to be able to form our own organizations, which are rights contained in Convention Article 29.

The critical role that this technology has had during the COVID pandemic period has facilitated the right to life, Convention Article 10, and the right to health, Convention Article 25.

The legal standard of nondiscrimination is an inherent element in all rights in the Convention. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of impairment.

So all digital and ICT technology needs to be accessible to people with disabilities. It's not just about assistive technology or technology to enhance the lives of people with disabilities.

It is a requirement for all technology to be inclusive and responsive to the needs of people with disabilities so that everyone can enjoy the benefits of technology.

In conclusion, technology facilitates the realization of all human rights for people with disabilities. It can be the means for them to participate in education, employment, and can give them access to justice, assist with living independently in

the community, and allow them to participate request equally in public discourse.

For this to be possible, it requires digital technology to be based on principles of universal design so that it's accessible for all.

Disability inclusive research is critical to accessible technology. Research that has equal involvement of people with disabilities allows our expertise to be built into the design, development, and end product so that technology can be used by all and benefit everyone.

Technology now plays a major role in everyday life in facilitating communication and transactions.

If that technology is accessible, then people with disabilities can be civic and political, economic, social, and cultural participants in all aspects of community life.

Thank you.

>> ROXANA WIDMER-ILIESCU: We thank you very much to Rosemary Kayess for this intervention. Indeed, I think we all agree that technology is part of our daily life. Whether we want it or not, a part of our activities is going through digital spaces. And therefore, it's very much important that access to information and communication be equal and equitable for all of us.

And with this in mind in considering that Europe through all the effort that were done in this region, it's actually leading the implementation of the accessibility. I would like to introduce our second speaker, Mrs. Inmaculada Placencia Porrero.

She's the senior expert in disability and inclusion at the Directorate-General employment social affairs and inclusion at the European Commission. Inmaculada holds a degree in physics and computer science and works in research and development before joining the European Commission in '91.

She was responsible for the task force for the preparation of the European Accessibility Act that we'll talk a little bit more in detail and remains responsible in its adoption in 2015.

Currently, under the Directorate-General of employment, social affairs, and inclusion, Inmaculada coordinates the development and implementation of the strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities that is taking place from 2021 to 2030.

So we know the European efforts done and the fact that Europe has quite a comprehensive accessibility legislation, could you please let us know what is now in the pipeline in terms of implementation, concrete implementation in the region? Ima, you have the floor.

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: The speaker is having technical difficulty. Would you like to continue the next person you have.

>> ROXANA WIDMER-ILIESCU: Sure. With pleasure. So our

second speaker, we try to ensure that we also have with us a country representative of member state of the ITU, we have the pleasure to have with us today Mrs. Amela Odobasic. Amela is the writer of broadcasting and the communication regulatory agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. And Amela has designated focal point with relation with International Telecommunication Union. Amela joined ITU work in ICT accessibility since 2014 as rapporteur for study group question 7, which is access to telecommunication ICT services by persons with disabilities and other person with specific needs.

And she continues her work in the area of ICT accessibility now as co-rapporteur for our next period of work that will -- is now from 2022 to 2025.

So Amela, I believe that by now we all know about the efforts that are done by the Member States on implementing ICT accessibility. Currently it's expecting the transposition of EU framework on ICT framework at the national level, can you share with us your experience regarding the transposition of European Accessibility Act and directives in practice to implement ICT accessibility at the national level?

>> AMELA ODOBASIC: Thank you very much, Roxanna. I would like to greet all the participants and thank in particular to you for moderating this panel and of course to Mr. Jaroslaw Ponder. All the efforts ITU is making to ensure there is a platform for the members where we can exchange experience and also gain knowledge, which is for us, for the developing countries of huge importance is really something that we commend on.

So, yes, the idea that I speak after Inma was really brilliantly designed, because I would follow up with the examples.

But, of course, I can answer the question and touch upon the implementation. First of all, I would like to say that Europe, as it was said in the opening remarks and mentioned a couple of times, has made significant progress when it comes to ensuring ICT accessibility, making sure that no one is left behind. However, there is a part of Europe -- and we're talking about the developed countries that are making huge progress, but also there is part of Europe that consists especially of the region that I come from, it's the region of the western Balkans and Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the countries that are really still unfortunately lagging behind when it comes to the -- when it comes to the implementation of ICT accessibility. However, the progress is being made. So in my intervention, initial intervention -- my intervention is going to be two fold. I am going to touch upon my role and what the significance of the involvement in the study group 1 question 7 that deals with ITU accessibility especially for people with disabilities. And then I will speak on behalf of the members.

To follow up on your question and that is the

implementation in light of the EU legislation framework, primarily the digital accessibility act and the division of the audiovisual media services.

The EU legislation framework is being applied not only for the members of the European Union but also the countries that are not members of the European Union, such as the countries of the western ball cans are also obliged to harmonize its legislation framework with the provisions that are contained in the EU legislation framework.

And that is a huge advantage. And that is really welcomed by us, the developing countries, because in that way we urge the governments to make extra steps because they are being watched by Brussels and make sure that the legislative framework is being harmonized.

On this occasion I would like to point out the part of the directive of the audiovisual media services that refers to accessibility. That's extremely important. For instance, Article 7 establishes, the directive establishes that TV channels, both public and commercial, as well as video demand platforms will have to make their services continuously and progressively more accessible to people with disabilities.

This means that there will be no more subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing, audio -- there will be more -- sorry. Audio description, sign language interpretation and spoken subtitles in for example TV programmes, documentaries, movies, and news.

It also, this Article also assures that the users will be able to lodge complaints concerning media accessibility to the contact the point that every country is obliged to des natal. They will also be able to receive more information about media accessibility throughout this contact point.

Article 7 also encouraging media providers to publish action plans with respect to accessibility and the regular reporting from each Member States to the commission regarding -- this is, of course, obligatory for the countries of the European Union. Now, I will just briefly illustrate on what we are doing, the non-EU members. So we also, as I said we were obliged to harmonize our legal framework with the directive and to, for example, where I work at communications regulatory agency, we have the audiovisual and telecommunications. But we were extremely pleased that we can finally put the accessibility provisions on the top of the agenda when it comes to including it in our rules and regulations.

So what we did, we've drafted our rules and regulations. We carried out two cycles of public consultation processes, and now we expect that the amended rules and regulations, including this very specific provisions on accessibility, will be enforced as of January next year.

So what is also I would like to share with you that as a developing country, we have years back -- and it's really

coincided with my personal involvement on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but my personal involvement and my somehow wish really to learn as much as I could about ICT accessibility and make sure that I make the most of all the available ITU resources and capacity building opportunities that were available.

So even before these obligations that now came out of the directive, we basically in short for public service broadcasters we introduced quotas for TV programmes that should be in accessible format.

Again, just to go back briefly to the -- just to go -- when I said that there was one part of Europe where ICT accessibility is really still in bad shape, should I say, and just to illustrate that, for example, in our country in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as other countries in the western Balkan regions around 10% of the populations represent persons with disabilities. For example, if we just compare it to the percentage of, let's say, accessible TV programmes or video programmes, then the percentage is around 2%, barely 2%. So you can now imagine this discrepancy in the availability of accessible is just for one case in accessible programmes. The situation is not better when it comes to accessibility of websites of state institutions. When it comes to mobile accessibility, the situation is better, because mobile telephones because they already contain the accessibility feature. But there's another problem that the persons with disabilities face and that is the availability and affordability of such devices.

So the overall feeling of, let's say licenses when we introduce this new provisions concerning the accessibility is that naturally they all complain, but we are very determined that we are not going to let go of our determination obligations that we have. So we are really hoping in the forthcoming period we will see the level of ICT accessibility increasing in the area that is prescribed by the EU legislation framework.

Roxanna, if you allow me, I would like to touch upon the work my engagement in the study group question 7 that deals with ICT accessibility. I would really like to invite all the members to join in, because that platform has been designed for us.

Roxanna, if you remember the last meeting we had which was last week -- it was unusual -- they look to the management team or look of the ITU-D and they request more deliverables so we made sure that we basically convey the message back, look, this is your platform. It's basically up to you, what are you going to do with the knowledge that you have, the resources, the tools, and what are you going to do when you go back home and take it back to the policy maker and see how you can make sure the implementation functions in practice.

I will stop here now. I will be very happy to answer any

more questions.

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: You are on mute. We can't hear you.

>> ROXANA WIDMER-ILIESCU: Thank you for this presentation and for a vision on how inconcrete all this activities are implemented at national level.

Now we have the pleasure to have with us Ima. She was already presented to you. Since I don't know exactly if Ima managed to hear my question, I will put it again, so considering the comprehensive accessibility legislation in Europe, we all know about it. So we'll not go details on this. But Ima let us know what is in the pipeline in terms of implementation.

Ima, you have the floor. I will kindly ask our presenter to keep to about five minutes to give also the possibilities to the participants to put us some questions. Thank you so much.

>> INMACULADA PLACENCIA PORRERO: Can you hear me? I'm sorry. I have a problem with my camera.

>> ROXANA WIDMER-ILIESCU: No worries.

>> INMACULADA PLACENCIA PORRERO: I'm trying to switch it off but it does not work. I was having technical problems. That's why I was late in joining. At least you can hear me.

So, well, what's in the pipeline? Yes, exciting times. I will share with you a number of the recent and most recent activities in which we are engaged. Amela referred extensively to our accessibility legislation.

So now what we are doing is really receiving the national transposition of the directives. So it's the national laws that implement the directives in the Member States. I have to say that the laws would have been sent to us on the 28th of June this year. Few Member States did so. All others are experiencing delays. So what we are doing is checking the legislations of those three Member States as submitted the legislations by 28 June this year.

This is a very important exercise, because for the other Member States, 24 Member States, the Commission issued what is called infringement procedures. Basically they didn't comply with obligations, so we are taking actions.

Lastly, those Member States are reacting. And they are advancing quick. So we hope really soon to able to say that more Member States have submitted the legislation. But this is a starting point of the new work cycle where we check the legislation for two things.

First, we check the legislation is complete. This is to say that all the provisions of the European Accessibility Act are in national law. And we do this in about six months.

Then we enter into the correctness check, as we call it. Basically we check not only that the provisions are there, but that they are translated into national law in a way that really conveys correctly all the obligations that the legislation has.

So this is one of the things we're doing now and we continue to work with the Member States in this area.

The other thing we are doing to facilitate implementation is trigger the development of harmonized standards. So we wrote -- I wrote a mandate last year. We consulted extensively with the stakeholders. And September this year, final version of the mandate was adopted as a Commission decision and sent to the European organizations.

They have already -- they have already accepted the standardisation request. And with that request we're going to do a number of things. Work on six standards.

One is we're going to revise the three existing European standards in the area of ICT is the E301509. We have another one on the sign for all and one on the built environment. I mention the ICT one because it's the most relevant here.

But we're also going -- we have asked already, so we're going to develop three new standards. One very important for the ICT domain because it's about emergency communications. The EN301509 contains what operators need to do and what devices needed to have in order to be accessible.

Now we're going to work with the authorities with the public points that answer the emergency communication so that those answers are also going to be accessible. In other words, we're going to be able to use realtime text, in addition to voice, and where video is provided, all those voice text -- realtime text and video put together in total conversation. This is one of the new standards.

Then we will have another standard for -- because the directive so requires. And the third one is about the accessibility of support services. That the directive refers to.

And those are, for example, Helpdesks, call centers, technical support. How can those be accessible? So this is the seconds area in which we are working in standardisation.

First, as I said, it was transposition of the directive, national legislation, second is standardisation. The third and final point is about practical implementation of the obligations of the directive.

We know that there are quite a number of challenges for implementing accessibility legislation. We have now a comprehensive framework as Amela also said, including procurement EU funds, electronic communications, but who is going to change the products and the services? Who is going to make the websites accessible? Who is going to do accessible phones, computers, services, electronic communications? And as well, we're launching an initiative called accessible EU, by the way, very similar to Accessible Europe. And with this initiative that will be signed off at the end of this year. We are ultimating the finalizing the formal work. I cannot say much about it, but we are going to launch it.

It will be -- it's about creating a resource center with activities in all the Member States. And I put the emphasis on

the activities at the member state level for raising awareness, creating -- facilitating a community of practice, changing knowledge, good practices to support and to create the necessary human resources, competent human resources to implement accessibility.

This is what I wanted to share with you. And thank you for your attention.

>> ROXANA WIDMER-ILIESCU: Thank you very much, Ima. I do hope there is room for partnership. Because as you know, ITU has over 65 resources by now, all free of charge. Most of them in digital accessible format that are to support implementation globally and also in EU. And we look very much forward to collaborate.

And our last speaker is Mr. Alejandro Moledo. Alejandro is a Deputy Director and head of policy, European Disability Forum. As you know, nothing for us without us. So the role of Alejandro is very much important in the implementation process. Alejandro leads and coordinates advocacy and policy work at EU level and supports the work of European parliamentary disability intergroup. Alejandro has also developed a policy position and recommendation regarding political participation of persons with disabilities, accessible information and communication technology, and assistive technology and different standardisation activities.

Alejandro, with this in mind, can you please share with us what has been the approach taken and the work carried out by the European disability movement in the development of the EU harmonized legislation on ICT accessibility?

>> ALEJANDRO MOLEDO: Thank you very much, Roxanna. Thank you ITU for inviting us to Accessible Europe Conference. Well, as you rightly mentioned the European Disability Forum, we've been very active in the development and the shaping of those policies that we've been discussing in the panel.

Obviously with, as you rightly said, Roxanna, with nothing about us without us, as Rosemary mentioned accessible technologies play a fundamental role in our everyday life, and they will keep on playing such a role. And persons with disabilities, as we often say, we are early adopters of technology, but the demand that we've been repeating over and over again when we talk about the potential and the opportunities that technologies bring to persons with disabilities is that these technologies need to be -- need to comply with kind of a triple A condition. Triple A because in order for these technologies to support our participation in all aspects of life and all the articles that Rosemary mentioned in her intervention, these technologies must be available, affordable, and accessible.

I've seen in the videos that you showed that ITU is very aware of this and are supporting this approach in European countries as well.



The problem was that in the past political commitments and the soft approach to accessibility did not work. We didn't get any result. Actually, we look at the most accessible pieces of technology we have in our disposal, many of them are accessible also because of legislation because of the US legislation.

So finally, with the adoption of the different pieces of legislation that we already mentioned, particularly the European Accessibility Act, Europe has finally catch up as for a strong legal framework concerning accessibility to ICT. In the past it was more assistive approach, more kind of like let's develop something for you, for persons with disabilities only. And now we realize that the potential of main stream technologies, which are accessible to us.

So the way in which EDF, we've been tackling this is kind of like a twin track approach. Obviously we've been working very intensively calling the European Union to realize the CRPD and adopt disability specific legislation, such as the European Accessibility Act or the web directive or the standards that I mentioned on accessible ICT or built environment for all. Also, one of the main disability organizations at the European level is main streaming accessibility in sectorial legislation.

Amela mentioned the directive, the electronic telecommunication rules in Europe are a very good and very relevant example. This is the European electronic communications code. But EDF we keep pushing accessibility in other key digital policies and digital service in the digital market sect, in the digital ID regulation, in the artificial intelligence act. So what we always try to -- since we have this very important piece of legislation, the European Accessibility Act, we are recommending policy makers to make use of this of the requirements we have in the Act to ensure that these new pieces of legislation in different sectors or in different domains will have, let's say, a common approach to accessibility.

So we will be ensuring legal certainty as for what accessibility means in practice. Because in the past, as I said, accessibility, everybody agrees accessibility is important. But then to implement it in practice is where the problems arise and different companies and public administration don't know how to implement it in practice. That's why we need the legislation to set the line what is legally binding and then the standards to underpin this legislation as a tool to prove that you are in line with the legislation. Standards are aligned with other international standards such as WCAG for web accessibility or the US Section 508, which is the main reference of standard in the US compared to the European standard EN301509 which is our favorite standard.

To conclude, I want to highlight some ideas about harmonisation. Sometimes Member States or certain industry may take harmonisation as a means to just take the common minimum

denominator and that's it. So harmonisation shouldn't be a reason or an excuse to prevent progress. Harmonisation is a way to ensure this adequate level of accessibility but from the disability movement we encourage public administrations and ICT companies to go beyond the legal requirements, to innovate, to come up with new ideas. So harmonisation is not an end in itself. It's a means to greater accessibility and further innovation in that regard.

So I just want to leave you with that idea. And I hope that we can continue working on ensuring an ambitious harmonisation of accessibility policies, but also to go beyond that.

>> ROXANA WIDMER-ILIESCU: For sure, Alejandro. So, well, considering, let's say, to everything that was said up to now, I believe accessibility is now for everyone a clear way to go. We know that even in a space that currently is happening in every, let's say field, health, education, emergency, e-application, we all understood that the future is to be accessible. And we all know that the language of the future, at least in the digital space, is accessibility.

And with this in mind, I just want to ask -- so I asked for a few more minutes to wrap up properly this session. I don't know if Ecmel received any question from the floor.

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: We have not received any questions.

>> ROXANA WIDMER-ILIESCU: Otherwise, I will invite in one minute every speaker to share one advice, what would be in your -- your main advice to policy and decision makers from the EU to advance the implementation? And also, on your view what is a predicted time frame to ensure that all citizen in EU region will have access to digital information, products, and services, in an equal and equitable manner, which is our final goal for all. One minute, please. Ima or Amela or Alejandro.

>> AMELA ODOBASIC: Yes, I can go.

>> INMACULADA PLACENCIA PORRERO: Sorry.

>> AMELA ODOBASIC: Go ahead.

>> INMACULADA PLACENCIA PORRERO: I am here with listening ears because I am one of those policymakers this Europe. I think also I can share with you what I say to my internally, we need to work now on two things, on implementation and enforcement. We need to see how enforcement rules are reinforced. This is something that I really think that would be a key priority, because otherwise legislation and policies will just be white paper.

>> ROXANA WIDMER-ILIESCU: Okay. And do you have 'N idea when we'll have this fantastic inclusive equal and equitable EU region for all?

>> INMACULADA PLACENCIA PORRERO: 2025 will be a landmark is when the applicability of the -- starts. I'm looking forward for two more years to see -- to really -- two and a half years, June 2025. That would be really, I hope, a day to celebrate.

>> ROXANA WIDMER-ILIESCU: Excellent. Amela, what is your opinion?

>> AMELA ODOBASIC: Well, that is really -- Ima's prediction or expectation is music to my ears. Remind the developing countries in Europe and then bearing in mind the current state of affairs, I'm really afraid that 2030 is much more feasible for the developing countries. Also, I think generally speaking for developing countries in Europe training and capacity building opportunities are curable. That is what I hear from our regional colleagues. And this is something that really I think if you want to speed up in order to meet the deadlines and we should really intensify these activities and I know that ITU-D could help together with regional initiative for Europe. So I think there is going to be a lot of work for you guys.

>> ROXANA WIDMER-ILIESCU: All noted. Alejandro?

>> ALEJANDRO MOLEDO: Thank you, Roxanna. I very much support what Ima said, we need to focus on implementation and enforcement. In this regard, it's clear to us that this should be the focus. But first, we need the political will to actually implement the legislation. And we may have some good policymakers such as Ima or Amela here. But the reality is a bit more difficult in many places in Europe. In the end what I would recommend to all policymakers is to put all the stakeholders and right holders which are not the same, but they should all be put together in a room and discuss how to implement the legislation. Because if you take, for example, telecommunications like I mentioned before, we -- we have the accessible smart phones, but we also need the electronic communication networks, the infrastructure to support the realtime text, to support conversation, to support the accessible means of electronic communications. And we need to ensure it in a practicable way as well. If you don't put everyone in the same room and we don't leave the room until we agree and we have a clear roadmap on how to implement the legislation, it will never happen. That would be my recommendation.

Concerning the date, I wish it was tomorrow orthopedic yesterday. But I hope that as Ima said we can celebrate 2025 and all countries are ready to make real change in the lives of persons with disabilities.

>> ROXANA WIDMER-ILIESCU: Excellent. With this in mind, we hear we need a political will. We need the knowledge on how to do it. We need common efforts and all stakeholders to get together and to not leave the room, as Alejandro said, until we all agree on what to do and how to do to implement all these and to make an accessible region in Europe.

With this in mind, I thank you very much to all of you and, once again, in the celebration of this important day of persons with disabilities, I would like to congratulate all efforts that

are done in this region, to lead the accessibility implementation at a global level as Europe is at this point in time, at least from ITU, one of our role models. Thank you very much for all this. Thank you, colleagues. Thank you to all stakeholders and to our honorable and distinguished speakers. And with this, I would like to close this session. Thank you so much.

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: Thank you very much, Roxana Widmer-Iliescu for your amazing moderation and thank you to all our participants for their valuable insights.

After this very engaging session, we will have a very small video break to have a moment of relaxation. And we will also showcase the ITU's work on supporting accessibility ICTs for persons with disabilities. Rahim, if you could share the video, please. Thank you.

(Video Playing) accessibility ICTs for persons with disabilities and special needs. COVID-19 has broadened inequalities faced by persons with disabilities and special needs. Highlighting the need for a more inclusive digital world for all.

ICTs are a key factor in achieving the full participation of persons with disabilities and special needs in the digital economy.

ITU is working with its Member States to ensure accessible ICTs by 2023.

Equal and equitable access to public online information and products is important especially amid the pandemic and during the recovery process.

ITU has designed a toolkit to assess countries' progress towards accessible ICTs as well as guidelines in 22 languages to ensure inclusive digital communications.

ITU partnered with the international labor organization, ILO for online job application and recruitment systems so persons with disabilities and special needs can participate in all areas of UN work.

Join ITU to help deliver accessible ICTs to everyone.

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: Thank you very much. After this small video break, it is now my pleasure to introduce Kaoru Mizuno who will moderate the second event which will be on the standardisation of accessible tools and services. As an introduction, she works as a programme coordinator in the study groups department of the ITU telecommunications standardisation bureau. And in her role she contributes to accessibility work by providing service to groups working on accessibility in ITU-T such as the joint co-ordination activity on accessibility and human factors as well as intersector Rapporteur group in audiovisual media accessibility.

We are more than honored to have Ms. Mizuno for this section. The floor is yours.

(On mute)

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: You're on mute.

>> KAORU MIZUNO: Can you hear me now?

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: Perfectly. Thank you.

>> KAORU MIZUNO: Sorry for that. Thank you, Ecmel, for your kind introduction. Dear colleagues, participants, hello and welcome to session 2 on standardisation of services. It is my great honor to be the moderator for this session.

As already introduced, my name is Kaoru Mizuno. I am programme coordinator in the study group's department of the telecommunications standardisation Bureau of ITU's standardisation sector. I am working on accessibility co-ordination among others.

For those who are not familiar with ITU-T, it develops international standards known as ITU recommendations. Accessibility has started in the 1990s. These standards on accessibility have been -- have already been developed since then.

ITU-T is the group leading accessibility standardisation. And now other study groups are also working on this area. This is why a co-ordination work is necessary. So a group called ITU JCAAHF which stands for Joint Co-Ordination Activity of Accessibility and Human Factors is working on accessibility co-ordination.

I am the secretary to that group. Now, this session will focus on the importance of standardisation in facilitating access to these digital tools and services by persons with disabilities.

We have excellent panelists in this field for this session. I would like to briefly introduce each of them first.

Ms. Lidia Best is an accessibility expert and she is the president of European Federation of Hard of Hearing people. She's also a co-Vice Chair of ITU-T that I mentioned earlier.

Then Ms. Susanna Laurin is the chief of focus research and innovation department. She's an expert in standardisation, procurement, policy, and regulation. She's also the Chair of Joint working group on e-accessibility.

Next, Ms. Chiara Giovannini is the senior manager of policy and innovation on accessibility.

And deputy secretary -- sorry. Deputy Secretary-General of the European association for the co-ordination of consumerism representation in standardisation.

We have Gamze Sofuoglu from Turkcell. Sorry for my bad pronunciation. She is the manager in the field of mobile applications and accessibility solutions for persons with disabilities in Turkcell.

I am very excited to see such leading experts in accessibility standardisation and legislation.

Without further delay, I would like to ask the first question. The first question to all panelists is to open the discussion by understanding their focus work, activities,

experiences, and also the views. Explain the roles and activities being taken in terms of standardisation in legislation to ensure accessibility of technology for persons with disabilities.

What are the challenges that you have experienced in accomplishing your goals? Each panelist has around three or four minutes to speak around this question. So the first panelist is Ms. Lidia Best. Lidia, you have the floor, please.

>> LIDIA BEST: Thank you very much, Kaoru, for a great introduction of a new session. I'm looking forward to our exchange today with everyone.

For the European federation for hard of hearing people, we have concentrated most of the time in monitoring of accessibility across European Member States. For example, we have published two state subtitling reports. And the second one in 2015 and the first in 2011 looking at from the (?) point of view, what is actually happening. Because as we have heard previously from Ima and Alejandro we have great legislations and implementation which is so important. I'm very glad that we are going to focus on that more now.

In addition, we would have been involved here directly at ITU in the developing standards. For example, remote captioning, we were leading on that because many of the services providing captioning are not fully providing the quality key indicators which are required for good users' experience when we're using digital technologies.

And last we have also been participating in global standard which has been developed by -- jointly by organization at ITU in accessible telehealth. We know during the pandemic, persons with disabilities especially have been very badly -- finding ways to get systems.

This is it for me for now. Thank you.

>> KAORU MIZUNO: Thank you very much, Lidia, for your very good view.

Our next speaker is Susanna Laurin.

>> SUSANNA LAURIN: Thank you. Hello, everyone. And thanks for inviting me to this conference. And thanks for the introduction. So I am wearing many different hats. So it's a little bit difficult to be short in this. But in my role as the Chair of the joint working group, of course, that group is coordinating the work of the EN which is the work for web accessibility directive and will also be the basis or one of several standards in the accessibility act as we heard Ima explain.

In my work for G3ict and the international association of accessibility professionals where I am the representative to the EU standards are extremely important. We are a member organization. So it's more through or via our members that the standardisation work is happening.

And in my role as a research innovation at a small

disability consultancy we have been involved in all countries where we have offices and also at the EU level for more than 20 years in trying to make sure that the implementation of standards is kind of feasible from a technical perspective and among other things, our own website has been one of the pilot -- test piloting for W3C standards when the WCAG disability guidelines, when those guidelines are presented to the world and voted on by membership and so on, there is -- the new success criteria being actually implemented in real life. And we have been the test bed for that in all the different versions. So that is -- standards are important of all the pieces of work that I do.

To say something about (Audio breaking up) mostly to get all the stakeholder views balanced, so obviously it's easier maybe for organizations and policymakers to get their view on this. But I always try to focus on to make sure we have the end user represented. (Audio breaking up) and the committees and groups and make sure that the standardisation process which is quite complicated and lengthy and complex for many people is also as accessible as possible.

I think that's somewhere there is, to me, the biggest challenge with the standardisation to be successful.

>> KAORU MIZUNO: Thank you very much, Susanna Laurin, for sharing your experience in this area.

So next speaker is Ms. Chiara Giovannini. So please take the floor.

>> CHIARA GIOVANNINI: Thank you very much to the meeting organizers for inviting me on behalf of ANEC to be with you here today. It is a pleasure and honor. ANEC has been contributing since 199 main streaming standards of accessibility of products and services for as many products as possible.

Since 2003 we have campaigned with the disability movement for European legislation and standards on web accessibility. As the organizations must ensure that citizens and consumers, all citizens and consumers have access to relevant information.

The technology is evolving. We also have a technological convergence. There's an urgent need to accessibility across several platforms and several products and services. This is why we have also joined forces again with the disability movement for the European Accessibility Act by using standards. In the previous panel standards can be used as a tool for implementation. We are going to start working soon on new standards or revised standards on e-accessibility as well as accessibility of support services related to products and services as well as other kinds of nondigital accessibility standards.

Standards can also be used as a tool for market surveillance. So the public authorities can use the standards to check whether the products and services are as accessible as they should be. Thank you very much.

>> KAORU MIZUNO: Thank you very much, Ms. Chiara Giovannini. So now, Ms. Gamze Sofuoglu, could you please take the floor.

>> GAMZE SOFUOGLU: Hello. First of all, can you hear and see me well? Everything is okay?

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: Perfectly.

>> GAMZE SOFUOGLU: Thank you so much. First of all, it you did great pronouncing my name. There's no problem. I'm glad to be here and thank you so much having me at this event. I'm the product manager for the applications for disabled people. I'm also leading the accessibility project all over Turkcell.

Actually, at Turkcell we always make contribution to standards and regulations for disabled people. For example, we have a governmental organization, ICT organization. And this organization has a division for the operators that has more than 200,000 customers. And this decision requires some responsibility for operators. For example, setting visual call center for deaf people or providing location-based services for the disabled people using feature phone, not smart phone. But actually, before these standards, Turkcell has already provided such services for disabled people.

And then this regulation came for disabled people. Of course, the efforts of Turkcell for accessibility is not limited with the standards and regulations. We have a lot of efforts on accessible on disability inclusion for many years. And we divided our all efforts in three categories.

The first one we are working on making accessibility more visible at Turkcell. And we add accessible to disability inclusion in all our principles, such as human principles, sustainable management principles, customer principles, et cetera.

And in the second category we are working on making accessible our old product and solutions because Turkcell has a lot of products, finance, messaging, cloud, music, TV, et cetera. And our disabled customers also want to use those products. So we are working to enhance their accessibility.

And for the last category, actually we believe that our blindness, deafness are not disadvantage situation actually. If there is a social barrier, then our -- such differences will be something disadvantaged actually. And Turkcell is working on removing those barriers with the power of technology.

For example, for five years we provided -- we have been providing audio description technology for blind people. For example, we made more than 400 popular movies audio description for blind people or technology for blind people. And now we are working on a new application for deaf people, another education platform for children with autism.

We believe an equal and accessible life for everyone. Thank you so much.



>> KAORU MIZUNO: Thank you very much for sharing with your extensive experience.

So now, we see all of you actively working on standardisation and implementation globally, regionally, and locally.

We have standards to ensure the current accessibility. But what kind of technical standards do you think will be needed to support the implementation of technologies to ensure future accessibility for persons with disabilities? Let's say in the next five years. So going ahead, what do you -- sorry. Going ahead, what do you envision as the most important steps to take?

So if you could respond to this question. Probably Ms. Lidia Best, could you please start?

>> LIDIA BEST: Thank you very much, Kaoru. From the perspective of hard of hearing people, we do need to expand remote captioning standard which we already have had since 2016 not just in English language as it currently is. So we do need all stakeholders support to develop that standard.

The second one is, again, related to captioning and the automated speech to text which requires standards which can be recognized everywhere. Because too often we have false claims really of how accurate and how good the captioning is being provided for the users. And actually it's not. So having an industry and uses and ITU especially recognized standard is important.

Of course, the standard needs to be available free. So users can use them as well to advocate when they are -- the organizations are trying to advocate at national level.

And the additional of assistive listening devices and the way we are including them, especially in accessible buildings infrastructure is important to us too. So those remain thoughts I have for now. Thank you.

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRME: You're on mute.

>> KAORU MIZUNO: Thank you very much, Lidia. So now I'll pass the floor to Ms. Susanna Laurin.

>> SUSANNA LAURIN: So my kind of -- what I see closest coming up is, of course, the standardisation request or the mandate which has to do with the European Accessibility Act. What Ima mentioned before the three EN standards we and two we're going to update and the two reports. That is connected to the legislation. What is needed, I think is to make sure all these standards cover cognitive accessibility in a better way. To me, that's the biggest gap in the current standards on -- it's very much focused on the technical parts, if you will, on accessibility. But the cognitive issues are lacking to a great extent.

We're also discussing a lot about realtime text where there's still a debate on the best way to move forward. So that will of course come. Five years is a long time. And I really hope that we will have more work on standards for the augmented

reality for XR, VR, AR, all of these fancy acronyms that I really think will be main it streamed more and more and where the accessibility aspects are extremely important.

So I don't see that happening tomorrow. But I really think within five years definitely we need to start working more on that. There's already work done on ISO level and also W3C. But in the EU level standards I think we really need to catch up on those emerging technologies as well.

>> KAORU MIZUNO: Thank you very much, Ms. Lauren. For your information, you may know that ITU-T is also working on the standardisation of accessibility for augmented reality. Well, we are not yet started, but we are discussing to start that. Thank you very much.

Now, Ms. Chiara Giovannini, the floor is yours.

>> CHIARA GIOVANNINI: Thank you very much. I would like to fully agree with Susanna. The accessibility for persons with learning disabilities, including de dementia and other cognitive disabilities is a new field of work that needs attention.

We need to focus indeed at European level on the standards that are going to be linked to the accessibility as it has been explained early on. But in our opinion this is what we already started in 2012 is that the identification and functional needs of persons with learning disabilities is lacking. We have worked on several recommendations for the design and development of device applications such as mobile phones, smart phones in order for people with learning cognitive disabilities to explore those new services.

In general, the new emerging technologies can be an obstacle but also can be a tool to increase accessibility for persons with cognitive disabilities. Let's think about artificial intelligence, AI systems are a key emerging technology. And they can be used to incorporate user interfaces that make interruption easier. But it also be a challenge if it's not done properly.

As it has been mentioned by Susanna virtual and augmented reality can recreate sensory information in a virtual world. It can be used for education purposes, for example. Example for people who struggle with reading, with spelling and -- smart environment including smart cities and smart phones. They're also the sectors where we think accessibility requirements are needed. Because those environments connect people and devices. And we need to make sure that the interface is accessible.

Again, it can be an obstacle, but it can also be a very useful tool for independent living if it is done properly in an accessible manner. Thank you very much.

>> KAORU MIZUNO: Thank you very much for your information. So as you mentioned, accessibility standardisation for smart city environment is necessary. And the ITU study group 20 is developing some requirements for accessibility for somatic city environment. Just for your information.

Thank you very much. And now Ms. Gamze Sofuoglu, please take the floor.

>> GAMZE SOFUOGLU: Sure. First of all, I agree all things that previous panelists mentioned. But I would like to add some new thing in those things. Actually I would like to answer this question as a blind person. I'm so excited about Metaverse actually, because you know it is so popular. And I think we will be mostly talking about Metaverse into five years. Actually it will be very useful for different type of disabilities.

But actually, I'm really wondering how as a blind person, how I can use everything in Metaverse. It is so exciting for me actually. And I think we need to catch up the improvement in Metaverse area and all disabled people will be able to use these new verse actually. If is so exciting for me. Thanks so much.

>> KAORU MIZUNO: Thank you very much. Actually regarding the Metaverse, this topic was discussed at the study group 60 meeting last October. And it is a very hot topic. So I would like to invite you to join our discussion probably JCAAHF group which is open to everybody. So you could be able to join to provide your views to the accessibility requirements to this area. So thank you very much.

>> GAMZE SOFUOGLU: Thank you so much. Thank you.

>> KAORU MIZUNO: Thank you. So we have -- with the time, I'm not sure if we can still continue. But before closing the session, to conclude the session, I would like to ask each panelist to respond very briefly first, do you wish to highlight as the most important issue to achieve an inclusive society through accessibility technology for persons with disabilities?

So please take the floor as you wish. Lidia, please, probably.

>> LIDIA BEST: Thank you so much. I think the most important thing is ITU says, disability is a precondition to participation, meaningful participation especially. And we see across Europe, not just in Europe, but across the world for persons with disabilities might be invited to consultation to be consulted, but actually most consultations are not accessible.

So please make sure assistive devices are provided in the room. Make sure there is captioning of the language. Make sure whatever people have their specific needs are being considered. That's one thing.

Another thing is something I find very important myself as someone who has been mentored and given opportunities to participate in the standardisation process. People with disabilities, many of them require mentoring as well and exposure to different areas of work to be able to participate. So what mentoring and enablement is very important.

Thank you.

>> KAORU MIZUNO: Thank you very much. Ms. Susanna Laurin do you have a view on this.

>> SUSANNA LAURIN: Yes. I would echo what Lidia just said. Because I think participation and inclusion of people with disabilities in standardisation and products, development and so on is key to make this work. That is already taken. I would say using the standards. So I think all of us who are active on the standardisation could do a better job that making sure that people are aware of the standards and that they are use understand a more -- in a better way. There are so many good resources out there. Many of them are also for free. But still if you go out in the street and talk to people, they don't know about the standards that we contribute to and spend so many hours of our lives to make sure that we get the text right and all of this. This is really an untapped resource, I think that would recalling -- if the standards were used in a more structured way and kind of built into the processes of developing products and services, I think we could reach a much better goal in an inclusive society.

>> KAORU MIZUNO: Thank you very much. Now Ms. Chiara Giovannini, the floor is yours.

>> CHIARA GIOVANNINI: Thank you very much. In our opinion it is a basic consumer right to have access to products and services. And if the access is not there, we are in the presence of discrimination. Discrimination is there if consumers of all ages and abilities cannot use the mainstreamed consumer (?) we think the accessibility should be mainstreamed in everyday products and services so that all consumers can use them. Standards can be used to design accessible products and services in an inclusive manner in an open and inclusive manner and linking to what Lidia and Susanna said, we need to main stream the participation of persons with disabilities in the decision making process. But we also need to main stream accessibility and the use of standards into products and services that are mainstreamed products and services. Thank you very much.

>> KAORU MIZUNO: Thank you very much. And Ms. Sofuoglu, the floor is yours.

>> GAMZE SOFUOGLU: Yes. I would like to answer this question for developing countries actually. Because -- sorry. The answer depends where you are working for accessibility. For example, here accessibility and disability inclusion are more emotional topic unfortunately. Because people always want to help disabled people, because unfortunately there is a hierarchy between the disabled community and the others. And sometimes companies view accessibility under the social responsibility term actually.

Actually, accessibility is purely human rights. And we have to provide equal and accessible solutions to products and experiences for disabled people as well. I think we can solve all technical problems, regulation problems, et cetera. But we need to start to change perspective towards disability and

accessibility.

It is human right. It is not something actually social responsibility term. Thanks so much.

>> KAORU MIZUNO: Thank you very much. I would like to thank all the panelists for sharing their excellent views. In conclusion I think we can see how standardisation plays an important role in ensuring in the current and future accessibility to technology for persons with disabilities.

For the audience if you have any questions to the panelists, please get in touch with the organizer of in event so that we can respond to you in due course.

And I would like to thank you all for your kind attention. With that, this session is concluded. Thank you very much.

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: Thank you very much, Ms. Mizuno for your great moderation and we heard from various stakeholders and we've heard from also people with lived experience. So I believe that this session has been very much valuable to our participants and attendees. Thank you very much.

So before we move on to the final session of our event, we would like to take a moment to have another small video break. And since the last -- the session is going to be a very much youth focused, we will now highlight the work of ITU Generation Connect youth which is a youth initiative that was created by ITU. And in the Europe region it currently consists of 38 young individuals who are passionate about ICTs and digital development. And we have a short video where you will see and hear about the aspirations of the youth envoys.

Rahim, if you could please share the video. Thank you.

(Video Playing)

>> The creation of Generation Connect Europe youth group has brought together students and young professionals from all over Europe.

>> When it comes to digital development, we have reached a point where future developments in technology and politics are inseparable.

>> We are the generation most affect bid the digital transformation.

>> We have grown up in the information age, engaging with technology in more and more ways.

>> We are aware of the challenges and opportunities provided by the ICTs now and in the future.

>> We can take the lead in ensuring that digital transformation is safe, leaving no one behind and providing meaningful experiences to people in all aspects of their lives.

>> It is important for the youth to be recognized as stakeholders within the field of digital development to make sure that these processes are inclusive and representative.

>> We are now, more than everybody, ready to take action and be part of shaping our digital future.

>> The result of our common efforts is the youth

declaration, a representation of our hopes.

>> For a more inclusive, connected, and safer digital world.

>> For a digitally competent society and for better digital policies.

>> But we will not stop there.

>> This is the first step towards increasing youth engagement and giving the youth a voice in the field of digital development.

>> As the Generation Connect we're committed in an active role in shaping this new future together with ITU and its membership.

>> It is important to engage the youth of today to solve the questions of tomorrow.

>> Let's make it happen.

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: Thank you very much. Now we've started with the youth aspirations, we can directly go ahead and start our last session, which is on youth. So the exact name, the future of ICT and digital accessibility, what does youth aspire? So this session is particularly special as it also coincides with the conclusion of the European review. As you know this yearlong initiative has been dedicated to promoting the active participation of youth and society. And we are more than happy to continue this important conversation also today by focusing on the aspirations of young people for a more Accessible Europe.

So we have so many inspiring young leaders among us today. And we will learn about their perspectives on a more Accessible Europe and digital accessibility and to just give you some kind of information introduction about all of this. First of all, the session will be moderated by myself. You have already had the introduction to me. But I just want to highlight that I am also the Europe focal point for the Generation Connect youth group.

And we were going to have a youth representative here instead of me moderating the session, but we had a small urgency that came up for her. But I can assure you that I'm very close in age with her, so that this session is still youth led.

So we have -- let me introduce the speakers to you. We have Timothy Rowies with us today who is the Rapporteur on main streaming disability issues at the advisory Council in youth at the Council of Europe. He was also the former president of the European Union of deaf youth.

Next up we have Ivana Recmanová who is a disability activist, writer, translator, and communication advisor for LGBTQ and divergent people. And then we have Dr. Miro Griffiths who is a scholar in disability studies and who specifically focuses on activism, youth activism and youth with disabilities.

He is working at the University of Leeds. And we're more than happy to have him here today as well. And last but not

least, we have Jack Kavanagh who is a pharmacist and speaker and non-Executive Director, also the host of the Only Human Podcast. He also has an amazing inspiring documentary called "Breaking Boundaries."

So let's begin the discussion. So I will first start with a general question to understand your vision for Europe and what do you perceive as the most pressing issues.

So I will start with Mr. Timothy Rowies. I will ask what do you think are the most pressing issues in ICT and digital accessibility especially for young people with disabilities? And what would you envision for a more Accessible Europe? Thank you.

>> TIMOTHY ROWIES: Thank you, Ecmel. And just making sure you can hear my interpreter okay?

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: Perfect.

>> TIMOTHY ROWIES: Thanks for the invitation, first of all. I'm really happy to be here. The question is a huge one. So we have 46 Member States with the Council of Europe. And to look at what that means for every disabled person, I'm representing the deaf community, and I've been an advocate for many, many years. And I've seen the evolution, right.

And there's a real link to, you know, standardisation and legal requirements and the CRPD, Article 21. You have information. You have all of these things on paper. And you have a real sense of progress on an EU level. Obviously, we're not finished. There's a lot more work to do. And there's a lot more new developments, right? Social media is blowing up.

So at the same time we need to think about disabled youth and their access to new information. We don't need to start with, you know, what information they were lacking ten years ago. Because now they want different information. So European Accessibility Act is in the books. But we don't have people implementing. We don't have states implementing what's on paper.

So the WCAG has different levels, as we all know. So you have A, AA, and AAA. These different standards. Now, for example, deaf people with sign language, we would like obviously AAA service. But normally we get AAA or A or not any service at all. So that's quite frustrating. That's the biggest problem we have is information in sign language.

There's a lot of things focused too much on technology and not enough on information that's actually simple to give to people and doesn't need to go through technology. A lot of times even when we do get information, there's a lot of missing information. So technology sometimes actually condenses the information a bit too much. And we would like the details that everybody else has access to.

So we need to make sure to create things with disabled people and not have it to be an afterthought like we've seen it be so many times. So we've seen mistakes being made in the

past. And we need to make sure that these creations are done with disabled people as well.

So we need to become as youth leaders in these different sectors. For example, I will say a little bit afterwards about my own personal experience. But just to go back to the problem of lack of information, if I want to put out my own information, I'm not a professional social media person or I'm not a journalist, and the information that I get in order to create my own information is substandard. And therefore, it makes me look bad. So this is one issue in that if you don't trust the information that's coming to you, you don't know if it's okay to put out your own information. I think I'll stop there for now.

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: Thank you very much for this very interesting insight. And we love to hear your take on the technology, which I think is not very much brought up in general. So thank you very much for this unique intervention as well.

And we will dive more into your personal experience later on, which I'm really excited about.

For the time being, I would like to go ahead with Ivana Recmanová to hear more about her general vision and what she thinks are the most pressing issues for ICT and digital accessibility for young people with disabilities.

>> IVANA RECMANOVÁ: Hello. Thank you for having me here. It's an honor to speak at this event. And I will speak as someone who is autistic and who is neurodivergent in general who has a combined disability or co-occurring disabilities.

I would say that one of the most problematic conditions is that people like me don't have visible disabilities or to be more precise, disabilities that are detectable firsthand. I would say that -- my experience and I suppose that other neurodivergent people's as well is it's different from people who have, for example, physical disabilities that our needs are apparent to outsiders at first. And there is a lot of miscommunication and lots of misunderstandings. And we have to do really a different advocacy in this respect.

And I would say that from my point of view, it is such a great tool. It helps us to connect with other people. And I suppose that for people who are nonspeaking as well, it's a great tool where people can use typing in order to convey information that they want to get across. And it's also a great tool for people who are speaking as well in order to connect with each other and also to connect with nonspeaking people as well.

However, the internet was created by people who mostly were not autistic or neurodivergent in general. That means our needs were not taken into account and assessed really. And I see this a lot when I try to navigate the internet as someone who has had specific traumas in the past. For me it means that, for example, there are little or no content warnings. For example,



we don't have in writing specified sarcasm or irony. And these are things that are really hard to navigate.

Some people use specific markings to denote sarcasm or irony in the internet or writing settings. It's radically different to speaking. I would say that this is something really missing from the internet that we may easily access, you know, triggering material or some material that should exist on the internet but should also come with warnings of what it contains. Because it really may trigger some people's past traumas and some other conditions.

And we should be really mindful of that if we want to create a really inclusive and accessible space.

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: Thank you very much for your valuable insights. Going forward, you envision the fairness in invisible disabilities which is very important to bring up as this is also not mentioned very often. So we really -- we're in awe of all our presenters coming up with very important points.

And also, indeed, there's a lot of room for improvement for internet as a tool. Thank you very much for specifying how a certain needs can be accommodated in this environment.

Thank you very much. And now I would like to go ahead with Dr. Miro Griffiths. We have the same question for the first round. So what do you think are the most pressing issues in ICT and digital accessibility for young people with disabilities? And what would you envision for a more Accessible Europe?

>> MIRO GRIFFITHS: Thank you for the question and the invitation to be here. I suppose when thinking about this question, we have to reflect on how technology is used as a way to often bring up questions around productivity, bring up questions around which values -- which lives are valued and which lives are not valued. It also raises questions, I think about accepting even celebrating diversity and variance in human existence. Because there's been a worrying trend within technological advancements and progression within technologies. There's been a worrying trend to use technologies as a way to increase oppression and marginalisation of disabled people in the ways that have been identified by Ivana and Timothy and others today.

So the question really is, how do we look for ways for technologies to be used to -- to improve and enhance opportunities for inclusion and accessibility? I think the way to do that is to remember the histories of violence towards disabled people through technologies and how technologies have been used to either screen out disabled people. They've been used to articulate a certain way of being and living. And therefore technologies have been used to correct disabled people to fit into a certain way of existing in different environments and so on.

We have to be aware of that and think about how do we articulate our alternative pathway which is to think about how

do technologies open up opportunities for celebrating for different ways of participating. If we think about ways technology was used during the pandemic. They opened up new ways of having access to community spaces, to knowledge sites such as education, to places of work and so on.

So we've saw multiple different opportunities for people to take part, engage, relate to, communicate, and so on. So for me, the danger is that there is an emphasis placed on accessing certain types of technologies in order to have access to certain types of environments.

I think what you have with the disabled people's community is a way of saying, we're utilizing technologies for different purposes to achieve different things. And this is where the creativity and the experimentation need to continue. So if we think about the role of subtitling or captioning and so on. They are used for various different purposes, but they've also been allowed for in opening up of spaces where different communities can have access to the technologies for different purposes as well.

I think that's the beauty of technology is how to realize it in all various different ways rather than doing it for a very specific purpose. Because -- this is one of my central points in an attempt to answer your question. I am worried about how technology is often used as a way to improve productivity of individuals. You see a lot of discourse we're developing technologies to have people to have better access to the labor market. The concern is people are forced into an expectation that you access these technologies in order to achieve particular outcomes.

For me, again, you can say the same within education as well. For me, there's a question of how do we ensure that we don't intensify these particular traits of productivity and what we consider to be valuable in society. And then expect disabled people to be forced into participating technologies to achieve them.

What I want to do is to allow technologies to up new ways of being and existing. And whether that may be engaging in the labor market or education, that's absolutely fine. But it's also about making sure we're increasing participation that disabled people want to be part of those communities and spaces. That's why we have to have disabled people at the forefront of designing and developing new technologies but also being part of the discourse and the discussions about what these technologies are being used for.

Either they're brought in tokenistically where they're asked to give feedback and reflection on technology that has already been developed for a particular purpose. Rather than think about the ways in which disabled people are used to almost comment on the user interface of technologies, we have to go very much to the early initial stages of thinking about what are

the technologies that we're producing? What are the expectations we're producing them for? And how does this contribute or challenge the existing oppression that disabled people are facing?

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: Thank you very much. This has been -- for me, I took a lot of notes. This has been very much thought provoking and a very important contribution.

So as for the role regarding the persons with disabilities, especially young people with disabilities indeed, that the role should not be just commentary. We should be basically striving toward having participation in the design processes. And that's a very good point. And thank you very much.

And also, in the end for the technology point, I can't go over every comment, every note I've taken, but this is a great topic for discussion. Technology is a tool and going forward we should keep in mind this kind of decision to -- a decision to take about using the technology for good. So basically as a force for good and not just take our lessons from any practices that have been harmful this the past.

So thank you very much for your great contribution. And I would like to finally move to Jack Kavanagh for his remarks. Then we will have our second rounds with more special experience focus and hear more about your unique experiences. So we will continue there.

Jack, please. We would like to hear about your perspective on this question. Thank you.

>> JACK KAVANAGH: Thank you very much. It's been fantastic to hear from some of the other contributors and the ways in which they see this question and have articulated their visions.

I suppose each one of us are coming from different lived experiences and different exposures. And it's important from the outset for me to say I have a before and after story. I acquired a spinal cord injury at the age of 20.

For me when I think about the role of technology full stop in our lives as people, regardless of ability or perceived disability, technology is designed to be an enabler. It's designed to be fundamentally there to enhance and facilitate our human functioning.

I've certainly seen the way in which particularly technology of a digital nature has greatly enhanced my life over the last ten years since acquiring the spinal injury.

The ways I've really seen that is through Internet of Things. So being one example, so interconnectivity in terms of home controls it's given me the opportunity of flexibility with the way that I engage with some of the points which were raised by Miro by terms of how I engage with how and when I work and through my education as well.

I certainly allowed participation on a broader scale more internationally in the work on projects that I have been

involved in. But for me, really going forward, my vision would be centered around the use of universal design principles in the way that all technologies being developed are considered.

For those that aren't maybe too familiar with them, universal design principles, universal design is designing and considering the tallest, the smallest, those that are fully (Audio breaking up) and those without, those who have partial or no hearing as much as those with full hearing, the full gamut of physical, sensory, and neurodiversity that exists within the world.

And when we design not just physical spaces but policy and online and digital technologies with some of these parameters in mind, actually we design better for everybody else as well.

So I think designing with some of these principles with those of diverse backgrounds in mind, we actually design more inclusive technologies and interfaces for everybody to use.

If we come back to the original hypothesis of technology as being there to enable human functioning and to facilitate human functioning, I think from my perspective, that is a fantastic call to action for those that are developing on working with these technologies.

Final piece that I will say is that over the last couple of weeks I've been very fortunate to do some work with the World Health Organization. I'm from Ireland. And I suppose just getting exposed to the extent of availability and access to technologies and technologies that are considered (Audio breaking up) in many countries across just the European region. And there's huge disparities to the extent in which that happens.

So if technology's role is to facilitate and to level the playing field, I think looking at the way in which that is democratized across the region. I've said a lot and press pause and thank you for having me.

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: Thank you very much. These are all great points. Thank you very much also for sharing your personal experience and how it has enhanced your participation. Also, I would like to delve into the universal design principle while we're talking about your unique background and experience. You said this is the last note that I would like to say. You said leveling the playing field. It really stuck with me. It's a very fair way to describe how technology can be used as a force of good basically.

Thank you very much for your responses to this question. So the general vision question. I mean, as you can see, this was a very -- as I said, a very general question, but it really opened up a world of experiences. And we only have four participants here. And just think of all the possible needs that need to be accommodated going forward. This is just a field that needs the utmost attention and importance

I would like to dive a little more into your own experiences

and perspectives regarding specific needs that can be better met in the ICT and digital space.

So starting with Timothy Rowies, so we have already said that you're a reporter on main streaming disability issues. And you're also an expert with a lived experience. Would you like to maybe emphasize more your experience and represent the deaf and hard of hearing individuals in relation to ICT accessibility? Just dive further into the topic basically. Thank you very much.

>> TIMOTHY ROWIES: And thank you so much again. Like I started to say before, we have laws in place. And we have the principle of equality and inclusion and society. -- there are a lot of outliers out there that are not seen as equal and not have the right accessibility. So we have to lobby quite a bit for this to depend on other people and institutions good will.

So this isn't really sustainable. So we're lobbying for it to be sustainable. So with laws and statutes out there it's not only about disabled people. Inclusion means everyone. It means gender inclusion. It means all these other BIPOC communities. The diversity of humanity in general, not just the diversity within disability or the diversity of disabled people. So we need to take a wider lens and make sure that these structural laws follow suit. So we need new developments and we need to cooperate with other minority groups.

So just to give you an idea of my every day. So accessibility for me has to do with sign language and subtitles which you've provided for this event very well. But for emergency situations, for 112, deaf people don't have anywhere near the type of access they need. We don't have 112 in sign languages. We don't have 112 for deaf people at all in many European countries.

So if the deaf person -- if I'm walking on the street and I see someone who's badly injured, how am I even able to help them? It's not even for us. It's for us to help others as well.

So there have been projects looking into technologies and it's been proven that this is possible. And the thing is that the money is given to the innovation to develop the projects, but they're just not carried through. So we haven't seen these things being implemented. So, again, we see everything on paper. And even money being given to projects to innovate. But we don't see these wide spread in our societies. We need to be creative and patient, as always.

So this all goes back to nothing about us without us, right? It's not for us. It's for everyone. It's the kind of universal design of that. So for example, for the deaf community, for many, many years we've seen again and again these kind of gloves, so technology that's like we have gloves that can sign. We have gloves that can do the ABCs. And this is not -- this is a one-way communication. So these are not gloves

that understand what deaf people are signing and then can speak back to you.

So this really says a lot about what technology tends to put on to the deaf community and disabled people in general.

So we need to, again, bring deaf and disabled people into these types of technological innovations so that we can be a part of that from the get go, and they know the perspectives of us. And we can partnership with these innovations. And we can network with them.

We also have had terrorist attacks, you remember in 2015 in Paris. There were no interpreters to let deaf people in Paris and all over France to know what was happening. And everyone knows -- and everyone remembers where they were at those moments where there were those terrorist attacks in Europe.

There was a lot of information going around by volunteer interpreters or volunteer people who could sign. And there was a lot of misinformation, a lot of fake news going on. And the interpretation we got, the information we got was way later. In Brussels it was the same and also Malbeek in 2016, it was exactly the same problem. We were left out.

I remember that. I was president of the European Union for deaf youth at the time. And we were based in Brussels. And we were trying to get information so we could tell our team, don't come to the office. But we didn't have all the information. All we could do was look at a TV and lips moving. So we had to rely on other countries that had more information than we did, even though we were in Brussels where it was happening. So this is really, really -- it was a very scary situation. It made me realize -- it made all of us realize that accessibility from a lot of people's experience and a lot of people's perspective is really, really important to standardize.

So corona is another one. There were so many mistakes that we learned with corona. We made sure that we had accessibility. We made sure we worked with deaf interpreters in tandem to make sure it was clear. I mean, things are moving, but there's still a lot of work to do, even for people with corona cases now, we don't really know what the protocol is as a deaf person, because we don't have all the information in sign language. We still lag behind in terms of general information that people want. And technology wants to innovate and create and solve these problems, but they don't often do it with us. They need to do the research with us. And they need to not think we're doing this for you. They need to think, we're doing this with you.

So, again, what we've seen often is that there's funding that is project-based. Let's say it's five years. And then there's another group that comes in and gets another project. But the two projects don't have anything to do with each other. They don't even know the people involved. So there could probably be streamlining at projects aimed at innovation for accessibility for disabled people.

So we're talking about youth, right? So we can't forget this. Youth is used to technology. We're used to technology changing. We're using technology in our education, in our everyday lives. We are stakeholders. And it's important to involve us. And don't forget to not only involve disabled stakeholders but youth stakeholders as well, youth and disabled, youth and other minority identities.

I think I'll stop there. Thanks a lot.

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRME: Thank you very much. I just wish that this could go -- I really enjoyed this conversation. When you said inclusion means everyone, so basically every single person navigates this world with basically an intersection of various identities, so being young, being disabled, these are all categories that need to be taken into account. That's why also when we talked about universal design and also representation in the design stage, it really comes back to basically this component and you have given very striking examples especially around emergency situations. And in 2022, of course, this should not be the case and going forward, this should be very much tackled at the earliest possibility. We always say even today would be a great day to really -- to be able to provide. But we need to be patient, as you said. Thank you very much for your contribution.

And I would like to go ahead with Ivana Recmanová. So you are a communication advisor for neurodivergent people, as we have said. So important steps would you like to see to ensure that the digital environment is more accessible and inclusive for all?

>> IVANA RECMANOVÁ: Yes. I would specify one thing. I advise -- I usually advise to nongovernmental organizations or freelancers or firms, et cetera. I'm not a person that teaches neurodivergent people to communicate. I'm actually functioning as a bridge between the government -- nongovernmental organizations as well as for profit organizations. So it's similar to being a native speaker who works as a language teacher. So I wouldn't teach people like myself how to communicate with for profit as well as not for profit sector, because I actually do not belong there. I think there are people who are more qualified and more knowledgeable of these environments but what I can do is doing it vice versa.

So what I would like to say, well, I think first and foremost we need a better representation of ourselves in not only telecommunications but also in decision making institutions related to the internet, online regulation, et cetera. We need diverse bodies and diverse decision making bodies and not just in terms of, you know, sitting on a specific committee and just being there. But also our needs and our opinions need to be taken into account, and we really need to hold leadership positions as well.

And I also think that an important thing to bear in mind is

that we are all not the same, you know. As I have said, you know, I have a combined disability, and some people have only one disability. Some people have multiple disabilities. Some people live in different areas. People are of different ages and different professions. And with that goes another important fact and that is we all have different knowledge and different skills. So, for example, with my education and with my expertise, I'm able to do different things than someone else. For example, I can't imagine myself being on a decision board for, I don't know, transportation, I have never studied transport. I have never worked in transportation. But there surely are neurodivergent people who are qualified to do this.

So I think one of the things that I often see in diversifying decision making bodies is that sometimes people maybe subconsciously think that we are all interchangeable, but we are not. So this is just one general thing that I would like to highlight.

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: I love interacting with you for time keeping purposes I would like to go ahead with Dr. Miro Griffiths and hear more about his insights.

>> MIRO GRIFFITHS: Thank you. I think for me there -- most of my research is within resistance practices. So how and why disabled people engage in protest and campaigning. I think there's a fascinating way of thinking about how technologies with open up opportunities for taking part in protesting and campaigning. After we think about length mate forms or better forms of protesting and campaigning is being on the streets and acting in civil disobedience which is an excellent way of creating attention and disruption. Many people can't participate in that for various different access requirements. Technologies can allow for a way of contributing and taking part in resistance. I think that's an area of technology that should be celebrated, how it allows for political participation in the enacting of politics, whether those are within localities or national agendas or even international agendas.

I think it's also recognizing how technologies open up ways of articulating one's own story as a way to lit size the personal. Disabled people using online technologies are a way to allow their stories to be told to law for commentary on different social justice issues and allows for building knowledge and relationships within different groups.

I think one thing that's quite evident within activism and resistance is how outside the disabled people's movement, many of the social movements don't prioritize and centralize disability. Again, a perfect example is if you think about climate change. Very rarely is there an emphasis placed on how disabled people's communities will be protected and supported in rethinking and re-imagining accessible worlds.



I think there's an opportunity to use technologies to bridge and intersect different social issues and to think about how to start. If we start with the principle of accessibility and participation, we can then reimagine ways for everybody to take part and everybody to be weekend rather than some of us only to be tolerated.

I'm conscious of the time. But what I would say, we ought not to romanticize technology. This is the point I was trying to make in my earlier point. If we think about how technologies are primarily understood within society, they are not prioritized on the basis of thinking about disabled people's participation.

Timothy raised an incredibly important point about emergencies and disasters and conflict and the way in which disabled people's protections are not prioritized on the basis of accessibility.

If we think about how much of the research, the discussions, the money that is spent on cure and rehabilitation, which some of us would argue is maybe important, but it doesn't address the existing conditions that disabled people find themselves in today. Naturally, we need to think about how do we protect and improve people's participation in the here and now, rather than think about how technologies are so often used as a way to improve. I say that in commas, improve aspects of functioning or human progression.

Another example, this is a reflection of a broader society, the way in which on the first day of Elon Musk taking over Twitter, it was to sack the entire disability team. That's a -stark example. But if you think of the various different organizations we have across the world, they may have accessibility teams although Twitter doesn't, they may have disability teams but they don't pump as much money into disability into as say, design of technologies on. How do we prioritize technology in the way we imagine technology and the way in which we develop technologies. Of course, this leads to a general point we've all been making which is about how to ensure we are at the forefront of the commentary and the discussions around this.

My final point is -- I'm conscious of the time -- my final point is we need to think about the relationship between purchase power technology. If we think about disability on a class issue, we know that for many disabled people who have purchase power and wealth, they can navigate many of the restrictions and barriers imposed upon them because they can buy technological solutions. Many disabled people in the community don't have wealth and access to -- if you have wealth you're more likely to be involved in the conversation about the products, the developments, the market will be able to respond to the needs and those who are engaging already in that relationship.

So the question is, how do we ensure that we are thinking about technology and the opportunity for technology by ensuring that all parts of the disabled people's community are part of the discourse and the conversations rather than those that are most readily available to be at the forefront of these discussions.

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: Thank you very much. These are all great points to discuss. But I would just like to continue with Jack Kavanagh and wrap up the session as we're a bit over time. You thru very much for your contributions. Jack, if you could briefly make your final remarks, thank you.

>> JACK KAVANAGH: You're looking for me to comment particularly on a question or to continue on?

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: We did -- so the question was basically the unique experiences and perspectives on how specific needs can be better met. So you can basically emphasize the highlights of your own journey on ICT and accessibility. You've already done that. Maybe like -- (Audio breaking up).

>> JACK KAVANAGH: No. I just was reverting back to the discussion notes. So in terms of my own experience, I think -- I feel very fortunate to be living in Ireland where, although there is huge work to be done, and progress is always necessary in all areas of life, but we have reasonable access to assistive technologies.

From my own lived experience, that has been the thing that has really, I suppose, moved the needle and levelled the playing field in terms of allowing me to be engaged in society. Apologies. About allowing me to be engaged with society and to reengage, I suppose, following a change in my functional abilities.

I would say the piece that I see as being particularly pertinent here is kind of timely access. Because very often, as the life course goes on, particularly for a young person that's living with a disability, over their life span in the younger years of their life span their need changes at a dramatic pace. That's not only true of their physical needs but also their learning, communication, those kinds of needs. And depending on the form of disability or difference in ability that they have, their functional capacity is changing at such a rate that it is actually a challenge to keep up and to continue and providing technologies that meet their growth demands.

So I think one of the big opportunities that's there actually is within the health services with individualized countries. This comes from a centralized European world, sort of world health levels that assistive technology -- there was an amazing report done called the great report, the global report on assistive technologies. And it shows that sort of timely and well-positioned assistive technologies.

For just the instance of today if we focus on digital

assistive technologies, that there is a nine-fold benefit in terms of societal impact, not just impact, on quality of life for the individual when assistive technologies are provided in a timely manner.

So from my perspective, that's probably the biggest thing that has played in to enabling me over the years, leveling the playing field. And that is the space in which I see and in the future for all assistive technologies, but particularly with the growing field that I have relied on, which is the Internet of Things and the interconnected nature of assistive supports and timely sort of provision of those, particularly for people as they're growing in their younger years and establishing themselves into their adult lives is really important for me.

In terms of enabling (?) to be realized.

>> ECMEL AYSU SÜRMEN: Thank you very much Jack. Thank you very much to all participants. I would like to pass the floor to Jaroslav Ponder to deliver his closing remarks and we will wrap up the session. Thank you very much.

>> JAROSLAW PONDER: Have you very much, Ecmel. I would like to thank you all for joining us today for this Accessible Europe event which is a special celebration. But it was definitely the source of a lot of inspiration and motivation to act upon digital accessibility for all of us who joined here, but also for those who are also watching this session which will be publicized later on social media.

I would like to thank to all participants for their contributions. We have explored the importance of harmonized approach to ensure the full and equal participation of persons with disabilities in the digital world. We have also looked into the importance of digital tools and service standardisation and answering the needs of persons with disabilities.

We have seen the progress that has been made in Europe throughout the accessible digital society. And I'm confident that with our combined efforts, we can create an even more Accessible Europe by continuing the work together, we can ensure that all persons with disabilities are able to access the same digital opportunities and services. And they're available to everyone else.

We can also ensure that digital tools and services are designed with accessibility in mind. So that everyone has an equal chance to benefit from the digital world. The Accessible Europe initiative will continue to engage all countries and stakeholders across Europe to foster the enabling environment, through regional events, policy guidance, capacity building programmes, and regional competitions to identify innovative accessible solutions and, of course, we will be continuing working together with countries, which will express the willingness to advance the journey and avenues of strengthening their capacities in the digital accessibility to really put this on the right track, accelerated track.

So, of course, we are encouraging all participants to continue their efforts in pursuing an accessible digital Europe and beyond.

Having said that, we are also encouraging all of you to take a closer look at the work ITU does on the accessibility and taking a look at the all programmes that are also the work of the study groups of development telecommunication and standardisation sector.

Just concluding, as you may know, with the aim of advancing digital and development and inclusion, ITU in cooperation with the envoy office launched the technical coalition calling across the worlds for massive commitment and towards the access, value creation, and acceleration of the connecting unconnected and making sure that the connectivity is a meaningful connectivity.

We have collected so far over 500 commitments with overall value of \$30 billion US, so those who are interested, please join us on site or online on the 8th of December. But also we call upon youth to also pledge and to make sure that your commitment is very visible in this area of commitments related to the digital accessibility is significant and growing.

Because we can scale up and we can make sure all efforts are going in the right direction.

I'm confident with our combined efforts we can make a real difference through the lives of persons with disabilities. And before concluding, let us continue to work together to overcome all barriers and create an accessible digital society for everyone.

I would like to thank my team which were working tirelessly on all features of this event and coordinating all necessary details of this event. Ecmel, thank you very much. Susanna, Kaoru, Andreea, Ivana, more of those who I didn't named. Special thanks to captioners and sign language interpreters for staying with us into these late hours and making this event accessible. Thank you to all of you for your commitment and to your participation and with this, we declare this event finished. And of course, we declare also the implementation of the new cycle of the ITU regional initiative for Europe on Accessible Europe as kicked off. Thank you very much. And we're looking forward to the other occasions on which we will be able to work together. Thank you very much. And we wish you a pleasant day. Thank you.

>> ROXANA WIDMER-ILIESCU: Thank you.

(Event concluded at 9:45 AM CT)

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