

NOTE: Webinar “Making the future of work inclusive of persons with disabilities”

The webinar “[Making the future of work inclusive of persons with disabilities](#)”, took place on the 1st of July 2020, and, was organized by [CSR Europe](#) and by [Fundación ONCE](#), with the collaboration of the [ILO Global Business and Disability Network](#) (ILO GBDN). This webinar was framed under [Disability Hub Europe](#), a European initiative led by Fundación ONCE and co-funded by the European Social Fund (ESF).

The participants of the webinar were representatives from companies, foundations, and global organizations such as Fundación ONCE, CSR Europe, the ILO GBDN, IBM, Accenture, Inserta Empleo, and the European Disability Forum. The webinar attracted around 100 attendees representing Sustainability platforms, international companies, academic institutions and other organizations committed to sustainability and disability of all around the world.

During the first part of the webinar the host and organizers spoke about COVID-19 impact in the future of work and their respective work on this matter, in the framework of DHub, as follows:

Jan Noterdaeme, Senior Advisor at CSR Europe, launched this webinar setting the scene of the topic of the future of work into the wider perspective of CSR Europe activities. Jan highlighted that the aim of the organization is to have the readiness from a human resources’ perspective for workforce transitions, particularly amongst vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities.

Carla Bonino, CSR and Sustainability Head of Unit at Fundación ONCE and Disability Hub Europe Coordinator, briefly introduced the publication “[Making the future of work inclusive of persons with disabilities](#)” and its framework. It was developed in 2019 by both Fundación ONCE and the ILO GBDN under DHub framework, in collaboration with the guidance and expertise of more than twenty experts in the field. Inspired by the idea that the future of work is still to be shaped and defined, the main objective of this publication is to both draw attention to the circumstances of people with disabilities and raise awareness to act urgently in consequence. One final quote that was mentioned at this webinar was as follows: “the publication was set as the beginning of a journey that requires the involvement of all stakeholders to ensure a future of work that is inclusive for all”.

Stefan Tromel, Senior Disability Specialist at the ILO GBDN, presented the main outcomes of the publication that “seem even more relevant in the post COVID-19 world”. He went through the five overarching recommendations of the publication and connected these at all instances with the “new normality” that is arising post COVID-19 crisis. He also briefly mentioned other transversal issues such as gender equality and stated that women with disabilities should be particularly targeted and considered when applying measures. Stefan also mentioned the social protection issue, a role that he believes will become increasingly relevant; and finally, the relevance of partnerships and of the importance of involving all stakeholders to ensure a landscape of inclusive work is procured in future. He concluded with a strong final message: “We know what must be done, we have the tools, the resources and the know-how. Now the big question is: are our organizations and our leaders going for a disability inclusive response or are we going back to old-fashioned, less inclusive approaches?”

The second and last part of the webinar was dedicated to **leading practices** on how to contribute to the technological revolution that has only accelerated post COVID-19 crisis, including those people with disabilities.

Yves Veulliet, Global Disability & Inclusion Leader of Human Resources at IBM, insisted on the need for accessibility and an inclusive design to be integral aspects of all software applications and technologies. He also reminded participants that diversity exists amongst people with disabilities. “Technology must serve the needs of the users, including people with physical, sensory and cognitive disabilities”, he stated.

Another key message he shared was the relevance of addressing accessibility from the beginning, by incorporating it into the procurement process. He believes that even though companies are dependent on their providers, they also have the market power to clearly communicate to providers their accessibility goals for products and services. “After all, you are the client, you are the customer”, he said.

Finally, Yves said that IBM supported their employees with disabilities during the COVID-19 crisis with a work from home policy, which is still in force today, and a temporary accommodation process in addition to their standard accommodation provision procedures to ensure that employees with disabilities could get the accommodations required.

Juana Galvez, Sustainability Senior Manager at Accenture, presented some of the initiatives carried out by the company to achieve their target of integrating people with disabilities into the company. She stated that one of the main challenges for vulnerable groups when trying to access the job market is their lack of knowledge in the use of digital technologies. This is why, Accenture created together with Fundación ONCE and Inserta Empleo the center of new technologies, which is driven by the principle that training can open new job opportunities for people with disabilities.

A few key messages were: collaboration between companies and social organizations is essential, the digital world is here to stay hence why everybody needs to have the chance to develop these skills.

Virginia Carcedo, Deputy Director for Training, Employment and Transformation at Fundación ONCE and General Secretariat at Inserta Empleo, explained how they shifted all their activity and services for jobseekers and companies remotely during the pandemic. “This process was smooth and agile thanks to the intensive digital transformation that Inserta began a year ago”, she said. She presented “Portamento” which is connected to a powerful data tool, where every interaction with a jobseeker or a company is automatically uploaded onto a codified database which enables Inserta professionals to use the information for headhunters and advise employers. She also presented Inserta Empleo two lines of action that comply with the current market landscape: tracking of emerging companies with hiring capacity due to digital transformation and scanning of traditional job positions including the impact of digitalization.

Haydn Hammersley, Social Policy Officer at the European Disability Forum, made the final reflection of the last session and gave a more political approach to the topic. He explained that the main issue with assistive technologies is to gain access to them since many of them are extremely expensive. He insisted in the need for governance by the different EU member states to ensure that resources are allocated towards supporting employers purchasing assistive technologies in order to avoid the risk of people with disabilities being turned down, even if they are entirely qualified for the job, simply because of the cost of the technology. Another issue in the EU, that he exposed, is the fact that assistive technologies are beyond reach of the EU Common Market which means some assistive devices that might be available in one member state are not available in the other. To resolve this, he believes that an EU Directive that covers the minimum standards might be helpful as well as addressing these issues in the next EU disability strategy meeting, which should begin next year.

Finally, during the Q&A session, it was raised that remote work can cost higher invisibility and isolation for people with disabilities and that if remote work is not 100% implemented at the company, maybe the first person to be told to work from home could be persons with disabilities so companies don't have to adapt the workplace. Speakers agreed that it is important to ensure telework is applied in a non-discriminatory way and that it has to be a choice of any employee.

In summary, the COVID-19 crisis is a loud wake-up call, pledging us to consider the recommendations of the publication in order to ensure an inclusive future of work. Trends such as the technological revolution, the demand of new skills, cultural and demographic changes and climate change are reflections that help us identify the challenges and opportunities that those can present for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the future of work.