

ANDRE BITTNEROVA

To all the attendees, welcome. We are going to start in a few seconds.

Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the webinar on 'Making the Future of Work Inclusive of Persons with Disabilities', which is organised by CSR Europe. We are happy that you are joining us today, and, before we start with the speakers, there are a couple of technical points I should go through to make sure everything is clear and works for you. During the webinar, you will be on mute so we can minimise the audio noise. If you have trouble hearing or technical problems, it often helps to refresh the link or log in again. You can also write to me in the chat, which is the bubble symbol at the bottom of your screen. Or just drop me an email on the email address you see here. As you can see, at least most of you, the webinar provides live captioning and sign language interpretation. You can change the size of the multimedia with the captions and the interpreter's window. If you go to the top right corner, you should be able to see a button and switch the mode side-by-side. If needed, you can continue with a floating window. Then you can see the interpreters in a bigger size. To ask a question, you can write the question using the chat function, so it is this blue button symbol. You address a question to the host, because you have several options, to address it to all panellists, etc. but please address it to the host. You can send the question during the whole webinar, but we can only start to answer them after all of the speakers are done with the presentations. Also, further information can be found in the login guide I shared with you yesterday or Monday.

Now I would like to invite the first speaker, who is Jan Noterdaeme, senior adviser of CSR Europe.

JAN NOTERDAEME

Thank you, Andrea, and a strong welcome on behalf of CSR Europe. CSR Europe is extremely proud to do this presentation with Disability Hub Europe and Fundación ONCE. It is a long-standing collaboration, and it is always extremely rich, what is coming out of it. We have three major contexts, with the hub of activities on the future of work. We will also have the chance to set the goals or conclusions of the publication on 'Making the Future of Work Inclusive of Persons with Disabilities'. Then we will have a deeper dive on good practices on how to make the digital revolution inclusive of people with disabilities. Then there will be a Q&A that you can prepare in advance. That is on the menu as you can see, it is an all-inclusive menu, very rich, so I won't make it longer than it is, except that I would like also to put this topic in the wider perspective of activities that we are running at CSR Europe, especially on the future of work. We started six months ago four pilots in countries on upscaling for the future. We want to have HR readiness for workforce transitions, with a special focus on vulnerable groups. We won't get into the nitty-gritty of the approach, but we always have in mind what we can do to make sure that these processes and changes and transformations that are going to happen even more rapidly today – how do we make that really inclusive of people with vulnerabilities and disabilities? For those who might be more interested, that is also supplied as a follow-up by Andrea. The time has come for our first speaker, Carla Bonino.

CARLA BONINO

Hello, I would like to thank CSR Europe for hosting this webinar, to all the speakers and to all the attendees. Due to technical problems, I will participate by audio. Sorry for that.

My brief intervention will be aimed at briefly sharing the context of this webinar, introducing the European initiative, Disability Hub Europe. This initiative is led by the ONCE Foundation, the organization I represent, with the co-funding of the European Social Fund. Disability Hub Europe, in short version DHub, is a multi-stakeholder initiative focused on working around the binomial disability and sustainability in order to contribute to more sustainable and inclusive businesses. All this taking into account the more than 100 million people with disabilities living in the EU, making 1 billion people in the world. DHub was publicly presented in March of last year at the European Parliament in Brussels, and it was born in line with the 2030 Agenda and SDG, which specifically recognise people with

disabilities. DHub partnership is formed by CSR Europe, the ILO Global Business and Disability Network (ILO GBDN), the European Disability Forum, all taking part in this webinar, Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and L'Oréal and DOW multinationals. DHub also counts with collaborating entities such as the European Foundation Centre and Forética.

Very briefly, on the ONCE Foundation, DHub leader organization, we are a Foundation with headquarters in Madrid and our mission is to promote the quality of life of people with disabilities and their families, focusing on training, employment and universal accessibility. The ONCE Foundation is formed by a team of more than 500 women and men, almost 80% with disabilities. And Inserta Empleo, taking part later in the webinar, is Fundación ONCE's branch implementing training and employment programs in the field. To give you a broader picture, the ONCE Foundation is founded by ONCE the National Organization of the Spanish Blind as a solidarity action towards people with all types of disabilities.

One of the key activities carried out in the framework of DHub has been the publication, 'Making the Future of Work Inclusive of Persons with Disabilities', jointly produced by the ONCE Foundation and the ILO GBDN with the support of the European Social Fund. It also counted with the participation of more than 20 experts. The publication was first presented at the ILO GBDN Annual Assembly in ILO headquarters in Geneva with the participation of the World Bank, the World Economic Forum, the OECD, the International Organization of Employers and the European Commission, all making reflections on this topic. The publication was inspired on the idea that the future of work is still to be shaped and that we can all influence it to some extent. Its main objective is to draw the attention to the situation of people with disabilities and the need to take action urgently. The publication was a first exercise to connect different areas of debate, looking at the key trends of the future of work from a disability perspective. The trends overviewed in the publication are the technological transformation and the skills revolution, which will be a specific area of discussion today and very much affected by the COVID-19 crisis, and also other trends such as cultural, demographic and climate changes taking place currently. Before giving the floor to Stefan Tromel from the ILO GBDN, who will go more in depth on this topic I would like to conclude by saying that this publication was set as the beginning of a journey, a journey that requires the involvement and collaboration of all stakeholders to take concrete action to ensure a future of work that is inclusive for all, also for people with disabilities. Thank you.

ANDREA BITTNEROVA

Thank you, Carla, for your presentation. I would now like to invite Stefan Tromel, Senior Disability Specialist at the ILO Global Business and Disability Network.

STEFAN TROMEL

Hello and thank you for inviting me to the webinar. Congratulations for the initiative. Thank you, Carla, for the introduction to the publication. You can see the front page on the screen.

It was interesting to look again at the main recommendations of the publication which was elaborated in a pre-COVID-19 world. Apart from sharing the main recommendations coming out of the publication, I wanted to reflect on how the post COVID-19 world is affecting to that. Let me already say in advance that the main conclusions and recommendations coming out of the publication seem even more relevant in the post COVID-19 world, and I think that, of course, this is important. There were five overarching recommendations and a number of transversal issues that I will briefly mention, and I will make an attempt to connect them with our new normal or the upcoming new normal coming out of the COVID-19 crisis.

Carla has already hinted at some of them but let me repeat them. Recommendations are addressed to different stakeholders, including the private-sector, public authorities, academia, trade unions and to

disability NGOs. The first recommendation says, “new forms of employment and employment relations need to include disability”. Telework is not a new way of working, but I think we can all agree that the level of telework that we will be seeing once we go back to the new normal, will be much higher than before. Companies, organisations will just need to more proactively define telework and make it much more an option that is happening now. Of course, that means that, in the context of persons with disabilities, we need to make sure that telework is inclusive of persons with disabilities, that the provisions and adjustments that are usually available at the company premises are also available at home. There are issues around mental health and telework that need also to be addressed in a disability-inclusive way.

The second big recommendation was around skills. This message that the new future of work requires that we also keep improving and up-skilling our skills in order to be relevant for the labour market in this sort of lifelong learning process. That is particularly relevant for persons with disabilities. I would now highlight that one of the main consequences of the crisis will be the need for more people to have digital jobs and thus for more people to have much better digital skills. To promote the employment of persons with disabilities we need to ensure that all these efforts companies will make for this sort of digital revolution needs to be disability inclusive.

The third recommendation from the report was about Universal Design, to take into account disability inclusion from the outset. We are seeing that many of the companies that are part of ILO GBDN, some of them are on the call and will share their practices in a few minutes, have employee resource groups, focusing on persons with disabilities which seems to me relevant in any context but particularly relevant in the current context when companies have had to very quickly adapt the way of working to the new situation and how to ensure this design of work process includes people with disabilities. In that context, having staff with disabilities organized through these employee resource groups and providing a sounding board for companies to make sure these changes are disability inclusive is particularly important. Last week we had a webinar on looking at different platforms that are being used nowadays like the one we are using today and others. Some experts were helping us to make an analysis from a disability inclusion point of view trying to identify which of these platforms were easier to navigate for blind persons, to allow international sign language and closed captions. There has been a huge rise in the demand for these platforms and that rise needs to be accompanied by ensuring full accessibility for people with disabilities.

Fourth big recommendation from our report was about assistive technologies. And here I want to share a word of concern because we are seeing in the context of developed countries the reallocation of budgets to the COVID-19 that sometimes leads to an underfunding or funding being taken away from very much needed assistive technologies that people with disabilities need in their daily lives but of course without which they are not able to work. It is important that the investment in these technologies in developing country contexts and the assistance that needs to be provided for that is not negatively impacted by the crisis and the budget reallocations.

And finally, the fifth recommendation was about ensuring persons with disabilities are fully included in the growth areas of the economy. We are hearing a lot of messages that the way out of the crisis needs to be a climate change friendly process, what is in the ILO called just transition. We have produced a policy brief on just transition and persons with disabilities, which we think is even more relevant in the current context. So, we need to bring together climate change, just transition and disability inclusion, all as part of the recipe for the way out of the crisis.

The publication also identified a few crosscutting issues that we need to take into account when we look at these areas. Gender equality is important, we need to make sure that women with disabilities are particularly targeted in our measures and we are seeing in the ILO that gender equality is being negatively impacted by the crisis. We need to make sure we counterbalance that. The role of social protection will become even more relevant. We see in some countries that social protection systems have helped to compensate the impact of the crisis but in many countries that is not the situation. We need to think about new ways for social protection. And the publication insists very strongly on the need

for partnerships. The way out of the crisis needs our involvement from all these different stakeholders that I already mentioned before.

Let me finish with a final message, concern, opportunity. We need to make, those of us who are committed to disability inclusion, we cannot just sit back and say let's see whether the way out of the crisis is inclusive or not. It will depend on us, it will depend on our leaders, UN entities, corporate sector, different organizations. It will depend on the leaders whether the way out of the crisis will be inclusive or whether organisations go back in time and lose all the progress that has been made in the last 10 years.

We know what must be done, we have the tools, the resources, the know-how. Now the big question is are our organisations, are leaders going for a disability inclusive response or are we going back to old-fashioned less inclusive approaches. I will leave it there and thank you for letting me take part in this webinar.

ANDREA BITTNEROVA

Thank you very much, Stefan. I would like to invite Yves Veulliet, Global Disability and Inclusion Leader, in Human Resources at IBM.

YVES VEULLIET

Thank you very much. Thank you for inviting me today. I am very pleased to be with you. I will echo everything that Stefan just said and I would like to share with you some concrete examples of how we supported our employees with diverse abilities, as we referred to them in IBM.

Before I elaborate on how IBM supports our employees with diverse abilities in this crisis, I believe it would be necessary to contextualise the very notion of digital accessibility governance within large organisations, referring to Stefan's comment about that. Basically, accessibility and inclusive design are, I would say, integral aspects of all software applications and other technologies that employees and applicants with disabilities, need for success in the workforce. This is not an IT debate, an IT discussion, this is true for all sectors or activities. All employees whether they work in retail, in education, in government, in business, in IT, all sectors are using technology, are using software, Excel, Word and all of these must be accessible and must be compatible with assistive technologies. This is the only way for your employees with disabilities, with diverse abilities, in your workforce to be as productive as anyone else. If you do not take the appropriate steps to make sure that your applications, that your tools, that your software, that your IT infrastructure is accessible you will not succeed.

Many business leaders nowadays know that accessibility matters, throughout the employee life-cycle, from the recruitment application and hiring process to onboarding and training to tools needed to do the job and apply for employment opportunities and to all communication technologies. And today's business leaders know also that while disability is a core component of diversity, diversity exists within and among people with disabilities. Technology must serve the needs of the users, including people with physical, sensory and cognitive disabilities. What I mean by that is it is therefore essential, now more than ever, to make sure that digital tools, including software applications and other technologies, as I said and I am sorry, but I need to insist, are accessible to and usable by employees and applicants with diverse abilities.

They must also be compatible with assistive technologies, as screen readers, voice recording software and so on. Think about technology you use to do your job every day. If your business or organisation is like most, it probably comes from outside information communications technology providers, computer distributors, software companies, internet service providers, web development firms etc. While this makes you dependent on how well these vendors build accessibility into their products, it also gives you significant market power. If you communicate clearly about your accessibility goals for the products and services, your purchasing providers should be happy to help you with that. After all, you are the

client, you are the customer. The key to success is to address accessibility from the start by incorporating it into the procurement process and then making sure to evaluate with technology providers promising delivery. The procurement processes differ from company to company, there is no right way to do this.

As we had started working on this aspect of our global accessibility disability inclusion programs in IBM, prior to it becoming global, we could focus on the immediate actions that we had to take to mitigate the possible impact this crisis could cause to the productivity of our employees, especially those with diverse abilities. So, IBM globally put in place a work from home policy in most of the countries where we operate, which is still in force today. In this context we had to put in place an additional, temporary accommodation process in addition to our standard accommodation provision procedures to ensure that our employees with disabilities, who normally work at the office and who have worked this adjustment, could get the equivalent accommodations when working from home. It was an interesting and complex exercise, mainly because our local external accommodation service providers were also subject to mobility limitations due to pandemic. I am glad to share that once this process was implemented, we got very positive feedback from our employees with diverse abilities who were involved in this program, appreciating IBM's HR support during these tough times. This is an effective way for companies to show their inclusion support to the employees with diverse abilities and to conclude I will strongly recommend and encourage all of you to consider this approach to be very proactive and reactive during this crisis. Thank you.

ANDREA BITTNEROVA

Thank you very much Yves, for your presentation. Now, I would like to invite Juana Galvez, Senior Manager at Accenture.

JUANA GALVEZ

Hello, everyone. I hope that you and your families are well. Thank you very much to ONCE Foundation for inviting Accenture to participate in this session. It is a pleasure for us to share our experience with everybody.

From Corporate Citizenship in Accenture, the Accenture Foundation in Spain and the framework of Inclusion and Diversity Committee, we are in a coordinated way with the different areas of Accenture, human resources, legal, business, technology, medical services and others, with a single objective. This is integrating people with disabilities into Accenture and raising the awareness of all Accenture employees to make this possible. However, we are well aware that one of the challenges for the most vulnerable people in society, when trying to access the labour market, is a lack of knowledge in the use of digital technologies which are in high demand in different economic sectors.

Accenture is committed to helping close the gap between society and emerging technologies, especially for people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. For us, ONCE Foundation and Inserta Empleo is a partner of absolute trust and this is based on the relationship of almost 14 years. We signed the first insertion agreement in 2007, and it has been renewed until 2022. From Accenture and from the NGO consulting program, Accenture, created with ONCE Foundation and Inserta Empleo the centre of new technologies for people with disabilities. It is driven by the conviction that proper training can break down barriers and open new job opportunities for this group. This initiative was set up to increase the effectiveness of training. Adapting it to the disability group and linking participants with the business world so that they could be well-positioned to enter the labour market with a training that was relevant for market demands. Now it had become even more relevant as technology changed and with the advance of the digital age.

Finally, I would like to leave you with some conclusions. Firstly, companies generate jobs but we need social organizations like ONCE Foundation and Inserta Empleo to serve a talent pool of people so that we can prepare them together, define an adult competence profile, adjust the training of new technologies to the real demand of the company and also to motivate these people to participate.

Secondly, there is no choice. The digital world is here to stay and all people, no matter who they are, need to acquire these skills and together we have to help these people, so they do not fall behind. We have to help them to play an important role in our society.

Thirdly, our company's collaboration with some foundations and specifically with the ONCE Foundation and Inserta Empleo doesn't end when we have prepared people and hired them in our company or in another company. Accompanying by providing ongoing mentoring and support is fundamental for us. We have always had an excellent response, and this gives us security, guarantee and enthusiasm to continue to collaborate in the future in this initiative.

Lastly, the initiative portal for digital talent gives all companies the chance to grow and improve through talent which is ready for today challenges. It is a portal that opens opportunities for companies in particular and society in general by closing the talent gap, the diversity gap and the technology gap.

I want to be very respectful with the time, so only to say thank you for listening and thank you for counting on Accenture in this session. Thank you very much.

ANDREA BITTNEROVA

Thank you very much Juana. We know that you have to leave right after this session, so thank you so much and we hope to have you in future webinars soon. Now I would like to give the floor to Virginia Carcedo, Deputy Director for Training Employment and Transformation in ONCE Foundation and General Secretariat at Inserta Empleo.

VIRGINIA CARCEDO

Thank you, CSR Europe, for inviting us to participate in this important event. Thank you to the rest of the panellists and to the attendees. During my brief presentation, I would like to focus on two aspects of digitalisation. First technologies and second people. Without one of those two fields it is not possible for us to respond to the pandemic.

Since Spain went on lockdown, Inserta shifted to do all its activity and services for jobseekers and companies remotely. This process was smooth and agile thanks to the intensive digital transformation that Inserta began a year ago. We had a successful experience because digitalization and technologies were important for us not only now but already before. The first impact of technology in Inserta, in our methodology, was in the first crisis in 2008, because we suffered the reduction of job offers for people with disabilities of the companies. We decided to carry out a restructuring plan. This anti-crisis strategy included an ambitious technology and innovation plan with several months of intensive and hard work and multiple testing with internal and external clients. The participation of stakeholders was key.

As a result of this, in 2014, was born Portalento. Portalento is not a simple web. Portalento is connected to a powerful data tool, where every interaction with a jobseeker or a company automatically uploads to a codified data base that enables Inserta professionals to exploit the information and thus to tutor the jobseekers and advise employers.

In the second semester of 2018, we launched a programme of digital transformation with specific measures targeting our employees. This project links Inserta Empleo with the transformation of the labour market. We consider that the centre of our strategy are people and that the labour market is changing rapidly so for us is essential to provide tools to our teams to enable them to adapt and grow professionally. Keeping our teams updated for us is critical because they need to advise the

candidate. The name of this program is A30 program and focuses on the training, on job position and personalization training. We look for, on one side the need of learning tools that facilitate the streamlining of timings in doing certain tasks through automatization; and on the other side learning how technologies can help us in providing new services or a better client experience. This program goal was the automatization of 30% of the process that we had in that moment and thanks to this we have well-prepared workers to the pandemic situation.

In addition, more than 20 years of experience in the field have allowed us to build up an important data base of additional relevant information from our clients, jobseekers and loyal companies. We have compiled intangible data such as hobbies, employing trends, jobseekers' interest and employers' culture. Thanks to artificial intelligence we have been able to act in advance of our clients' needs providing them the best talent of our jobseekers with disabilities.

Definitely, the sanitary crisis due to COVID-19 and its consequences in the labour market has forced us to potentiate the digital transformation process already begun, making necessary to accelerate the initiatives included in the working plan. However, it has shown that our steps were on the good direction; thanks to our advances, we have been able to guarantee during these months the continuity of our services to jobseekers with disabilities and employers. During lockdown, we have done more than 13.000 interviews, of which 3.600 were new jobseekers and more than 9.000 tutorization of different kind (capacities assessment, interview preparation, assistance in digital competences...). Also, we reorientated our training services from on-site to from-home with virtual classrooms, online webinars, tele training... The tele training channel was immediately enabled, at the beginning with transversal actions. One of the most important actions for us was our work with women with disabilities that suffered gendered violence. A specific supportive channel was set up and a site with information about urgent resources with the claim "For a society free of gender violence". During these months 123 women who suffered gender violence have been oriented, 69 have taken an active role in training initiatives and seven found a job. Also, a specific training from home program was designed, 5 editions took place in which 35 women with disabilities of all over the country participated. Contents were focus on the improvement of self-cognition and motivation, as well as emotional intelligence and assertiveness.

To finish, aware of the labour market situation, the unemployment risks and the job destruction that this sanitary situation it's going to bring, in Inserta we will focus next future and middle term basically in two action lines: tracking of emerging companies with job creation capacity due to digital transformation and scanning of traditional job positions including the impact of digitalization. With this employment tracking, we will keep providing training opportunities to improve competencies and technical knowledge to jobseekers with disabilities matched with their future opportunities, seeking lifelong learning that will keep them updated and competitive according to the labour market needs. All of these promotes an inclusive labour market leaving no one behind, as the UN Agenda establishes. To finish my presentation, digitalisation is important but more important are people. Thank you.

ANDREA BITTNEROVA

Thank you very much Virginia. I would like to invite our very last speaker for today, who is Haydn Hammersley, Social Policy Officer at the European Disability Forum.

HAYDN HAMMERSLEY

Hello, everybody. Thank you very much and thank you to all the other speakers. So much has already been said so all that is left for me is to reiterate a few things. As I am speaking on behalf of the European Disability Forum, we will be taking a more political approach. We will also look at what things can be done at the EU level for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in employment.

To begin with, the first thing to say is, of course, when talking about technology and assistive technology in employment it is a 'make-or-break' factor as to whether a person with disabilities is able to perform to their full capacity or not. This is something crucial and it is very important that we are discussing it today.

One of the speakers already spoke about the different types of assistive technology, there are many types, from our experience within the European Disability Forum we typically use screen readers, a very common thing, they are extremely useful; screen magnification programs; refreshable braille displays; braille writing equipment. We have hearing aids with Bluetooth connectivity; speech recognition software, this is quite a common one. And then we have things like adapted mice; keyboards; eye-tracking devices and then there are other things which are not so much for doing a person's function itself or working itself but to make sure the workspace in general is accessible and safe. Fire alarms with a visual display or adapted doorbells for example. These are just few examples of the things we see outside. The issue with assistive technologies is not so much what is available because we see there are many things, but it is more been able to get access to them and the main issue is the fact that, not all of the ones mentioned, but many examples of assistive technology are extremely expensive. For example, the braille display is something incredibly expensive. This is not just something that persons with disabilities face in work, it is something they face in their everyday life, assistive devices are in general extremely expensive. So, what will be very important and something we always advocate for in the European Disability Forum is the need for governance in the different EU member states to ensure that resources are allocated towards supporting employers to purchase these assistive technologies. The concern is therefore that if all the costs have to be paid by the employer then a person with a disability applying for a job runs the risk of 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 is that assistive technologies do not fall within the regular EU Common Market which means that some assistive devices available in one member state are not available in another and also the costs change from one country to another. This is something that could be addressed in the new EU disability strategy which should begin next year and perhaps with an action for a directive covering minimum standards there.

And just two final things to keep this nice and short for you so we don't run over time. Regarding EU's research budget, which is a huge research budget, we would like to see more investment put into not only improving assistive technologies available but that this technology is available to more people.

The final thing which Stefan mentioned earlier which I wanted to reiterate is that we saw in this pandemic the danger of the digital gap. Those who are accustomed with using technology and those who are not and the fact that many people were cut off during the pandemic because of this. For many persons with disabilities we need to see more investment, possibly with EU funds, into training on digital skills. So, I will conclude therefore now, and I am happy to answer any questions.

ANDREA BITTNEROVA

Thank you, Haydn, and thank you to all our speakers very much. Now we are moving to the Q&A part. Just a couple of reminders, if you want to ask a question or comment on something please use the chat function. Not the Q&A function but the chat function. That is important otherwise I won't see it.

We have one comment plus question. I encourage you all to send questions if you have any. I will read the comment with the question and the panellists who want to reply, because the question is not addressed to anyone specifically but to all panellists, just send me a message if possible and I will unmute you. We are doing this so the interpreters are visible enough, so we don't have too many speakers at the same time.

The comment is:

"I am Laura Rosillo from Spain, it is a fact that remote work will be higher implemented all over the world. So, it is necessary to think about how this new way of work does not leave people with disabilities behind. Nevertheless, I would also highlight the fact that remote work can cost higher invisibility and isolation for people with disabilities. 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 nor even work in accessible buildings. How will you fight this also? Thank you so much."

Which of the panellists would like to take the question? If you are able to unmute yourself, go ahead, otherwise write me a message.

STEFAN TRÖMEL

Thank you for the question from Spain. I agree there is a risk, we saw some years ago, when telework was presented as the magical solution for the employment of persons with disabilities, you would not need to make the environment accessible nor public transport. That is not of course, the way forward. Having said that, telework will become much more frequent for everybody. I think what we need to ensure is that telework is applied in a non-discriminatory way, it needs to be a choice of any employee, there needs to be references to persons with disabilities in a telework policy. It can often be seen as a workplace adjustment but definitely telework should not be set on a full-time basis ideally unless the person and employer come to an agreement where telework on a permanent basis is an option. I agree that we need to be careful on how to apply it because it should not be imposed on persons with disabilities. It should not be done as a way of avoiding the adjustments needed. Thank you.

ANDREA BITTNEROVA

Perfect, Stefan, before I move to Haydn who wants to react as well we have a comment from Susana.

"As a person with a disability I personally find that remote working has given me a better quality of life and employment has been made accessible due to these adaptations. I fully agree there needs to be a discussion prior to workplace adjustments".

HAYDN HAMMERSLEY

Such an important comment, we could have a whole webinar about this. Remote working needs to be a choice. It is great that employers are able to do it. When it becomes an obligation it is not reasonable accommodation. There is a risk that workers with disabilities will be segregated and I think there is a real risk of employers using it as an excuse to not make the workplace accessible. There is no clear solution to this other than to say that there is an EU directive on non-discrimination in employment from the year 2000. And there is an article, article 5 that talks about reasonable accommodation. This has been normally transposed into national legislation, it is an obligation that reasonable accommodation in the workplace is offered. And pushing people to work from home if they don't want to is a clear violation of that.

As the second statement said, for many people working from home can improve the work life balance and if that is the case it is brilliant. But it always has to be a choice and never imposed, never an excuse not to make the workplace accessible.

ANDREA BITTNEROVA

We have time for two more questions, which are here. If you have any questions, please send those in and I will see with the speakers if they can answer them later in a follow up email.

The question is: "Are you aware of any comprehensive report or an investigation regarding the privacy implication that need to be considered for the use of assistive technologies, e.g. speech recognition by google".

Anyone wants to take that question. OK. Maybe we can see later if we can investigate further and let you know. And then the last question that we have is from South Africa:

"Are there any specific technology that the EU is looking to invest in for disabled employees to fill the technology gap which has been identified during COVID-19?"

HAYDN HAMMERSLEY

Maybe I can jump in, on both last questions. The penultimate one on privacy, I did not answer simply because I don't know the answer to this. It is an extremely good question and worth looking into. And yes, it is certainly something to think about, I unfortunately don't have the answers, I would love to know.

And the last one on what the EU is investing on, this is also to be confirmed. We don't yet have any confirmation on what the research objectives in this field are. What I can say is that from the EDF, we are pushing for further investment more into the assistive technology that is currently available but is very expensive. Not so much into finding new things but rather more accessible in terms of price, more accessible versions of what already exists or cheaper versions of what exists so that more people can buy them, and no one is unable to purchase technology they need.

ANDREA BITTNEROVA

Thank you very much, Haydn, and thank you to the other participants for asking the questions. As I said, I will take them back to the speakers and we will try to give you an answer in one of the emails after the webinar.

Before we come to some conclusions for the main points of debate today, I would like to ask you, once you leave this event you will see a webpage with an exclamation mark. It is simply redirection to survey monkey, where we have a feedback form to tell us how you liked the webinar, what we could improve for the future, it would help us a lot if you could fill it in. The recording of this webinar and transcript will be sent in the next days in the follow-up email. Before I give the final word to Jan, I would like to thank all the speakers and participants for joining, our amazing interpreters and the captionist who provided the live captioning. Now I would like to give the floor to Jan for final words.

JAN NOTERDAEME

I would like to summarise what was a very rich exchange with three key words. The first is microwave, the second is inspiration and the third is Solidarity Europe.

What we heard very much from the different participants is that the pandemic and the way we have been managing and overcome all the difficulties of that and further in the recovery it is a loud wake-up call, asking us to put in the microwave not only the recommendations, which Stefan has presented, specially also his concern regarding underinvestment for assistive technology, not only that needs to be popularised in terms of recommendations for all of the actors as he said, but also the acceleration for the development of digital tools that must be accessible, usable, compatible. That is what Yves told us very clearly.

Also, the lifelong learning for all, including people with disabilities, should be the new normal together with personalized training opportunities at all stages and adapted to different disability groups. That is what we heard also through the sharing of some of the practices through different organisations.

Then, remote work is the new black, if I can say so, that needs additional accommodations and adjustments. It is so important to improve that new way of work. We heard in some of the questions that this is also contributing to the quality of life, so all the conditions that can enable that must be taken.

Then I also see the need for accelerating partnerships between business and social organisations to ensure that we provide a multidimensional response to some of the challenges being faced by people with disabilities. I think it was good to also listen to Haydn Hammersley telling us that a new action plan on disability is in the making within the EU institutions. He is also advocating for more use of Europe, for the Horizon Europe research and development programme. He was also pointing to the need for more investment in training in digital skills.

Last but not least – inspiration. We have all been quite focused and concentrated by listening to the examples. I will mention one. After this call, I will immediately go on the internet to visit the portal for digital talent. All of these initiatives are being put in place to match, on the one side the needs by companies but also the talent and the skilled people out there who can contribute to society.

That is what I took in a nutshell. Sorry it was short, but it is fresh enough to remember what was shared in this webinar. Thank you from my side, and Andrea, the floor is yours again.

ANDREA BITTNEROVA

Thank you, Jan, for the great and short conclusion. We hope you enjoyed the webinar. Please fill in the feedback form so we can improve our events for the future. Have a good day and take care. Goodbye.