**Accessibility Insights Webinar: European Disability Forum**

**January 2021**

ANNIE: Hello, everyone, and welcome to

today's webinar.

 It's just gone 1 o'clock so I'm just going to give everyone

 a chance to join.

 Do feel free to drop into the Q&A box and

 say hi.

 We have disabled the chat feature as we have

 discovered it can cause problems for some people using screen readers.

 I can see the numbers going up, glad you could make

 it today.

 I'll just let a few more of you join.

 I can see most of you have joined now

, so we are going to make a start.

 So hi everyone and welcome to the

 seventh session now in our Accessibility Insight

 series where AbilityNet's Head of Digital

 inclusion, Robin Christopherson hosts

a monthly online chat with individuals each working to improve

 digital accessibility and digital inclusion.

 This month, he's chatting to Alejandro

 Moledo who is Policy Coordinator at the

 European disability forum, also known as EDF.

 I'm Annie Mannion,

 Digital Communication Manager at AbilityNet and I'll be running you

through today's session.

 So, just to go through a few bits of

 housekeeping.

 We have live captions provided today

by MyClearText and you can turn on the captions using the CC

 option on the control panel.

 We do have additional captions

available via stream

Streamtext.NET and slides at slideshare/abilityNET and /insights-EDF

 If you have any technical issues and need to leave early,

 don't worry, you will receive an e-mail in a couple of

days' time with the wording, the transcript and the slides

, and depending on how you joined the webinar, you will find a

 Q&A window so if you would like to ask

 Alejandro or Robin any questions,

please do drop those in the Q&A area for them to

 address and they'll do that after today's session on

 our website again at

 /insights-EDF.

 We have a feedback page you will be

directed to at the end which invites you to tell us about any future

 topics you would like us to cover.

 So please do let us know.

 So, now over to Robin and Alejandro

ROBIN: Thank you very much Annie and thank you Alejandro for

 joining us this month.

 Brilliant to have you.

 ALEJANDRO: Thank you very much, very

glad to be here.

 ROBIN: We always kick off with the

same question - what drink have you got to help you through the ordeal?

 I've got a nice cup of tea?

 ALEJANDRO: A nice cup of coffee!

 ROBIN: Fantastic.

 Got that out of the way!

 So, similarly a lot of the questions that we ask colleagues

 that come on are very similar as well and

 that's because everybody has brilliant observations and

it's really good to get people's different

 takes on where we are and where we are going, that's

 basically what the questions are about in

 these insight seminars.

 So what do you think have been the biggest changes

 in the last ten years in the landscape

 of accessibility and

 digital inclusion?

 ALEJANDRO: That is a very good

question.

 If we look at technology and

 how it has evolved for the past ten years

, we see that more and more are

 increasingly we are seeing tech convergence, so before

 technologies were developing kind of

 in isolation, so the web, the media, the

 telecommunications, but now

 we see, and we are used to it

, having all services in our smartphone,

 for example, we see the tech

 convergence is helping accessibility

 actually as well.

 Also, the fact that now accessibility

 is considered as a core aspect

 of ICT development, that makes it

 even more convenient for persons with disability

. Now we don't see that distinction any more for

 some of the previous legacy

 assistive technologies in the past, we are

 seeing now accessibility

 features are built in in the devices.

 That does mean that we'll stop using

assistive technologies, but it means that we have greater opportunities

 to take advantage of technologies and all the

 opportunities that this will

 bring us.

 ROBIN: Absolutely.

 Do you see assistive

 technology being...

 sorry you finish?

 ALEJANDRO: I was saying we are going

to discuss later about the developments on legislation, I think

 they also made a big difference.

 ROBIN: Absolutely.

 I do want

 to talk about that, it's one of my favourite areas.

 Do you think there'll always be a need

 for specialist technology,

 you know, we are obviously seeing huge strides in

what's built in as you were saying into

 iOS, into mainstream hardware

, the different sensors that are increasingly being

 corporated into smartphones say that can then be

 leveraged by the either the built-in accessibility features

 or by the third party or even first

 party apps.

 But do you see the AT market being

 flourishing in ten years' time, say?

 ALEJANDRO: I see

 the AT market changing and taking advantage also of

 new possibilities we merging

 technologies, already emerging technologies such as artificial

 intelligence for example.

 There is a huge potential there for the AT market

as well.

 So what I know is that we will

 keep using assistive technologies,

 even though this distinction that I mentioned before now

 is less and less clear but there'll be cases

 and people that will still need technologies

 which are specifically designed for them

. So I think what we need to

 stress is that these technologies, or assistive

 technologies and what we call mainstream technologies,

 they need to work hand in hand so we need to ensure in the legislation

 we need to ensure and talk about interoperability as well, a great

aspect to bear in mind .

 ROBIN: Absolutely.

 The legislation is key.

 So next month we are going to be talking to Apple and I really see

 them as a good example of where

 they have gone above and beyond.

 They really haven't done a half hearted

 attempt to accessibility, they have really kind of pushed the

 inclusion envelope on an off the shelf product and made it

 really very flexible.

 Many would say that's because of section 508

in the States.

 They had very large volume

 budgets available under the federal government, particularly in

 education for bulk purchases of

 devices.

 But they had to be accessible, had to be inclusive

because of the legislation.

 Maybe that's why Apple really kind

 of prioritised accessibility or maybe it's just

 because they always knew it was the right thing to do.

 I'm sure legislation helped and you've

been very active in this space in the EU

. So you can tell us what your take

 on how important having legislation in the mix

 is too?

 ALEJANDRO: Yes.

 Yes, definitely.

 I think legislation is obviously not the solution for absolutely

 everything but I believe that it's key.

 If you allow me to just take a step back or maybe a couple

 of steps back, I would also

 stress the importance which sometimes in these

 conversations ability accessibility we don't realise of the crucial role that

the disability movement played in calling for

 the right to make sure

 that these paradigm shifts towards a human

 rights-based approach towards

 disability was actually realised in the

 convention on the rights of persons with disabilities.

 This convention is actually the first

 international human rights treaty that

 recognises access explicitly, access

 to information on communication technology as one of the

 rights that should be protected and ensured for persons with

 disabilities because we realise that there's a

 movement with technology, with technology, it can open up

 a wide range of opportunities for us in our

 increasingly digitalised society

. For many countries, in particularly in the

 EU, I'm saying particularly in the EU because the US

 has not yet ratified the UN

 HCP...

 ROBIN: That may change!

 ALEJANDRO: Yes.

 But in Europe now it's ratified by the European Union

 as a whole and then by all member state so we have the

 universal ratification of this important

 human rights treaty which in the

 end OK is just a tool, it's a driver

for innovation in how the legislation treats

 persons with disabilities and thanks to the

 convention, we have seen great progress particularly in the

 area of accessibility in the EU.

 We have the web accessibility directive

 making public

 sector accessibility, we have the flagship accessibility act, which I

 is a European directive that has a very strong I

CT component and is kind of very much

aligned with what you mentioned with the

 section 508.

 We have for the first time the European

 standard on accessibility requirements for ICT products and services

 which is even, I dare to say,

 even more comprehensive and more ambitious than the

 current section 508.

 The thing is that in the US

, they have been legislating accessibility longer than us

 and that's why the

 US has been always

 leading on accessibility policies but I believe that with the

 accessibility act, if you want we can talk a bit

more about it, but with the

 Accessibility Act the EU and Europe, no matter Brexit

, no matter countries associated with the EU

, I think Europe as a continent has finally made the

 turning point of having accessibility as really as

 a core aspect of

 technologies.

 ROBIN: Absolutely.

 I can't wait to see the kind of impact that it's going

 to have.

 I was going to ask what you think,

over the last ten years has brought about this massive change

 and it sound like

 if you wind the links in the chain back to the root cause,

 it's disabled people.

 ALEJANDRO: Yes.

 Autobiography ROBIN: And them getting their voices

heard, getting the right legislation, having their rights

 realised and recognised or at least recognised.

 ALEJANDRO: Yes.

 ROBIN: And you wind that forward and

you have got something like the European Accessibility Act

 which has so much potential.

 tell us more about it?

 ALEJANDRO: Yes, European Commission

was very smart in the approach they took for this legislation because

 instead of proposing legislation based on

 anti-discrimination, which

 would require unanimity by member states and

 on a side note I can say that since 2008 we are

 waiting for an anti-discrimination legislation in the EU which we

 don't have because it's been blocked by member states.

 But the commission instead, they said OK we

are going to propose a market

 access legislation meaning

 that only those products and services

 respecting the accessibility requirements that they lay down in

 the legislation will be able to be solved

 and move really in the EU, imported

 and distributed and so forth.

 So they actually took

 this market approach which I believe is the key aspect of the

 accessibility act, they detailed down

 the specific accessibility requirements, functional

 accessibility requirements, they don't tell you exactly

 for example what format you need to use in your service, but they

 tell you that whatever format it is,

if it's digital information, it should comply

 with the usual accessibility guidelines that we

 all know, no.

 The scope is, as I said before,

 is very strong on new technologies, it

 covers computers,

 smartphone and tablet, covers

 telephone services, emergency services.

 I mean for the first time, finally, we are

going to have the possibility, and I mean persons with disabilities,

 to call the emergency numbers in an accessible manner.

 There are still countries in Europe that consider

 fax as an accessible way to contact an emergency number.

 That is not acceptable.

 There is also e-books which will be very, very important

 for inclusive education as well.

 So all e-books being sold in the EU will

 need to be accessible, no doubt about it.

 E readers as well.

 E-commerce, we always talk about the web accessibility directive because it

 affects the public sector and obvious thely the public

 sector and mobile apps must be accessible.

 The Act covers e-commerce and basically all the

 websites or mobile apps we use every day, they

 try to sell you something, so

 they will be included in the

 Accessibility Act.

 ATMs, banking machines, payment

 terminals

 that we use in the corner shops to pay with our

 credit card will be accessible which is always an

 issue for partially sighted anded blind people like

 myself, like us.

 ROBIN: Yes.

 A number of times I've given somebody

, the next person in the queue, here is my card, here is

 my pin, can I have £60

, please!

 (Laughter) sorry, I didn't want to cut you off.

 ROBIN:, no, no, no, what happened to

me as well!

 ROBIN: How important is enforcement

for government or local authorities or whoever the relevant

 bodies should be to proactively enforce this legislation because to me

 that's the missing link certainly here in the UK?

 ALEJANDRO: Yes, I know.

 I think enforcement is crucial and

 unfortunately when it comes to enforcement,

 I think that

 it's still lagging behind compared to the US.

 The Accessibility Act will strengthen that.

 As I explained, the legislation, the Accessibility Act is a market access

legislation therefore it will be the markets surveillance

 authorities in each country, that

 ones that will verify that the products will be compliant with

 the legislation and if they are not, they have the possibility even to

 withdraw the product from the internal

 market so they can force a company to stop

 selling their product.

 Imagine TVs are included, the most accessible TVs

 are always the most expensive.

 So in five years' time when the Act

 is finally implemented, if we see that

 there is a company that is trying to sell a TV set

 which is not accessible, then the

 markets can say, either you include the accessibility requirements

 or you cannot sell this product any more

. They have also the possibility to impose

 penalties, user organisations

 can also take economic operators to court in case they don't comply

 with the legislation.

 There are some possibilities that we will need to explore in the

 future but the most important and

 the most urgent issue at the moment is how

 countries will transpose, meaning

 how they take this European legislation and translate it

 into national legislation.

 This is now the moment that we are at and it's

important countries do this right otherwise we may lose some of

 the potential of this directive.

 ROBIN: Yes.

 Exciting times.

 And this, we need to be clear, is very different

 legislation than what we have had in the past.

 It's much clearer, the

 lines of responsibility and the way it's defined, as

you have said, being on the product or the service, is

 key I think.

 ALEJANDRO: Yes.

 ROBIN: It's going to be as co-er to

 the product as health and safety, is this smartphone going to catch

 fire, you know, is this chicken that I've bought from the supermarket safe

 to eat, that kind of thing.

 ALEJANDRO: Exactly and you mentioned

something which is very important which is for instance for those other

 aspects like safety, health issues,

 environmental aspects and so forth.

 We do have harm monised

 legislation, but -- harmonized standards.

 This is one of the things of the Accessibility Act, it

 provides the least accessibility requirements because the problem we

 always face, accessible yes but in practice what does

 it mean, what does accessible mean?

 Of course accessibility is not a black white issue,

 it's a huge range of

 things.

 The legislation helps to draw the line

 and with clear accessibility requirements that then

will be supported as in the health or in the safety or in the environmental

 sectors, with standards, then industry will

 also have a clear view on what they need to

do to make sure that at least an adequate

 level of accessibility is ensured.

 That is important.

 ROBIN: I wish we were still part of np!

 Anyway...

 the next question then to change

 gears -- Europe.

 Anyway, the next question then to change

 gears, we are still with COVID, who would have thought it

back in the summer?

 It's looking like it will be here for a while but it's really brought

 a lot of positives I think as

 well as huge negatives.

 Either you personally or the organisations that you work

for or with, what would you say have been the biggest

 take aways, the biggest learning points

 from either COVID or homeworking

 that you think has made a significant change for people with disabilities

 across Europe?

 ALEJANDRO:

disabilities across Europe?-working that you think has made a significant change for people with ALEJANDRO: Well in the past,

pre-COVID, we also worked with all our members across Europe and we developed webinars

 to kind of raise awareness of legislation, we have webinars explaining different legislation and initiatives.

 So first of all, we kind of did it before the COVID outbreak but it is true that now with all the meetings

 turning into webinars and video conference calls

, we learnt

 how to structure the

 Organisation of These before we were more organising

 in a more collaborative way but now we got

 used to checking with the audience.

 That's one of the main learnings in the

 registration form, making sure that

 all possible accessibility services

, live subtitling sign language interpretation

, presentation sent in advance

 are available and then of course allowing the audience to

 request any other reasonable accommodation

 they may need.

 We are teaching this those other organisations and I think that's

 very, very important when other

 organisations ask for our advice on which platform

 to use and obviously not, there is

 not a single really easy answer and there is not a

 perfect platform, but we have our tricks and

 we try to build the capacity for the organisations as well

. ROBIN: Have you found it fine?

 I mean, I'm loving it, this whole

 not having to travel half a day for an hour's

 meeting and back home again.

 I can fit six meetings in in a day ,

 although it's got its down sides as well but

...

 ALEJANDRO: I think I miss it.

 I miss the face-to-face

 meetings.

 It's not the same.

 But obviously it allows

 for more productivity.

 It also implies that what we know,

 you know, the webinar

 fatigue, zoom fatigue and so forth.

 So maybe sometimes we overdid it.

 So we overdid arranging video calls

 and webinars and stuff, but I think

 we need to find this balance and we are finding

 it step by step because it's true that

 this situation will continue in the near future.

 So we are trying to get the best out of it but also bearing

 in mind that people also need

 to rest from connecting and being with their

camera on and so forth.

 So we are very flexible with that and trying to find this balance

. ROBIN: I've come to some fantastic EDF

meetings and other European fantastic

 events.

 So I'm really pleased about that.

 But at the same time, with

 Zoom and Teams etc, Europe and the world is a very

small place when you can really harness that

 power to get people's

 voices heard and coordinated and that sort of thing

. ALEJANDRO: Yes.

 I mean it's great to reach out to more people because before you

 used to organise an event in Brussels and only the usual suspects could

 attend.

 But now, I remember when the

 COVID-19 outbreak hit, we organised a meeting

with the commissioner for equality, Eleanor D

all ie and the members of the European Parliament that

 follow disability issues, and we didn't

 expect but suddenly it was one of the first open

 webinars we organised and suddenly we got over 500

 people which is turning up for the discussion because it was the

 first high-level discussion about what is the role of the

EU in responding to the pandemic as for persons

 with disabilities are...

 as far as persons with

 disabilities were concerned.

 It's true you can reach out to more people and we should continue

. ROBIN: We have reaching out to people

and getting huge mum numbers of people attend

 our webinars.

 Let's look ahead then.

 Over the coming months and years, what is going to change or what

 needs to change going forward?

 ALEJANDRO: Exactly.

 ROBIN: That was a question.

 ALEJANDRO: Ah, OK!

 I wasn't sure so I just agree

 with you.

 So what is going to change or what can we

 expect...

 ROBIN: What would you like to change

or what do you think will change and what do you think the future

 will hold in regards to

 future, tech?

 ALEJANDRO: The future is uncertain

, right.

 If 2020 has shown us something, it's that future is

 always uncertain.

 But I would definitely

 like or wish to

 see a more

 inclusive approach to on the one hand the designing

 of products and services because it's true that we see that technologies

 are really on a good track in

 improving accessibility, but there is way, way more work to do when

 it comes to the built environment,

 to transport services, every day products that we

 use.

 Then going more particularly

 on accessibility and the political, let's say

 future, we are expecting

 the commission to present the next disability

 strategy which will be hopefully

 released

 very soon and one demand that we had when it comes to accessibility has

been the creation of a new agency, a European agency

, similar to what they have in the US.

 We have talked about the progress in the US and I think that's

 been also because of the great agency they have

, the US access board.

 So we think that Europe could

 also set up a new agency for accessibility, the E

U Access Board that could support

 member states industry disability organisation in coming together,

 defining the accessibility policies, and the standards and

 monitoring whether they are used

 and to support harmonized, as they call it, a

 harmonized implementation of accessibility because it's

 very sometimes frustrating to see that

 countries or companies suddenly try to reinvent the wheel

again and come up with solutions, different solutions to

 make your website accessible.

 Yes, plug in to your website and click

here and it will be made magically accessible.

 Well that's no if the true.

 So I would like a focal point Centre for

 Accessibility with really high train

 professionals and the tools to

 implement accessibility.

 That would be my wish for the accessibility and all

 related to the discussions, policy discussions

 around artificial intelligence or a

 digital platform, digital services.

 I also think we need to be there to ensure that persons with

 disabilities on the one hand are not discriminated

 against and then accessibility is considered in

 other areas as a fundamental part of the

technology.

 ROBIN: Fantastic.

 And rather spookily you have answered the question that Marilyn

 put to you.

 I know you know Marli

n from the digital agency.

 She said that - what would you see as being the next step

 in EU legislation now we have got the

directive in place and the Accessibility Act

 on the way.

 Rob ALEJANDRO: Exactly.

 ROBIN: Thank you forethat.

 There's a minute left.

 Let's ask your question for the

 next guest then -

 so Sarah of

 Apple, main accessibility lady

 there is on next month, very happy to have her

 on next month so have you got a question?

 ALEJANDRO: I do, I do.

 My question would be - what is the most positive

 aspect that accessibility legislation has brought to Apple

's work?

 We discuss this before so I think it's a good

 follow-up question.

 So we hear from them on what they need to

 say.

 ROBIN: Brilliant.

 It's all very joined up today.

 We touched upon that earlier whether we thought that was

 their main driver or whether they are just good guys.

 So yes, we'll put that to

 Sarah, thank you very much indeed.

 ALEJANDRO: I just wanted to say, as

you mentioned, the UK not being part of the EU any more

, I think it's really a pity to

 lose UK because UK has been also leading when

 it comes to accessibility, for example, it's

 been also our role model when it comes to media

 accessibility, for example, and it's truly a

 pity to lose a great member state in this sense, in this

 domain, and in any case, I

 do believe that even though we talked about

European legislation today, I think this legislation will still have,

 or will in any case have an impact in the UK

's legislation on accessibility legislation.

 So I'm grateful to say see AbilityNet and

 other organisations in the UK being so active and

 vocal on accessibility and we need to make sure to keep the communication

flowing and make sure that the UK is aligned

 with the EU when it comes to having an ambitious

 legal framework for accessibility.

 So in that case, you know you can count on

 us to keep on this communication and this exchange of

 best practices.

 ROBIN: Fantastic!

 Really appreciate you coming on.

 Brilliant discussion, thank you so much.

 ALEJANDRO: Thank you for having me.

 ROBIN: Yes, thank you so much.

 In the last few second on the then I'll pass back to Annie

 to gallop through a bit of housekeeping to finish off, but

 Alejandro,

 thank you so much.

 ALEJANDRO: Thank you.

 ANNIE: Yes.

 Thank you so much Alejandro and robin.

 Just wanted to share some more

 information about AbilityNet

. We also run fantastic online training courses on

 digital accessibility, you can find out

more about that at

 the website and use the 10%

 discount code there.

 We have training courses coming up this quarter for roles

 including content creators and editors, designers

, developers, testers, project managers, leadership and

 we also have some new courses focused specifically on

 higher and further education

 professionals.

 You can also sign up to the newsletter for the latest

 announcements about digital accessibility.

 We also have a suite of accessibility services that you might be

 interested in too.

 Finally, don't forget about our next

 webinars.

 Coming soon, Accessibility Insights with

Apple on 16th February and before that

, tablets for seniors, keeping in touch with loved

 ones on 26th January.

 So once again, thank you Alejandro,

 Robin inand everyone that's joined us today and we'll

be in touch with you soon.

 Bye everyone.