**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.