

 UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS			
 The Valuable 500	 Validity Foundation	 European Network on Independent Living	 International Disability Alliance
 Disability Rights Unit, Centre for Human Rights University of Pretoria	 International Disability and Development Consortium	 Disability Rights Fund / Disability Rights Advocacy Fund	 Disability Rights International

CSocD 59 Side Event: Overcoming the Digital Divide to Ensure Disability Inclusiveness

11 February 2021
11:30 – 12:45 EST (New York)

[Click here to register](#)

English captions and International Sign will be provided

Agenda

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| 11:30 – 11:38 | Welcome and Opening Remarks – Daniela Bas, UN DESA, Director, Division for Inclusive Social Development |
| 11:38 – 11:46 | The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on persons with disabilities: Setting the context – Steven Allen, Co-Executive Director, Validity Foundation |
| 11:46 – 11:54 | Overcoming the digital divide to ensure disability inclusiveness: An example from Bangladesh - Vashkar Bhattacharjee, Founder, Federation of DPOs, Sitakund and Focal person of Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) at Young Power in Social Action, Bangladesh, National Consultant of Accessibility, a2i, Government of Bangladesh |
| 11:54 – 12:02 | Inclusive leadership - the essential component for inclusive and accessible technology - Caroline Casey, Founder, The Valuable 500 |

- 12:02 – 12:10** **Accessibility insights to digital disability inclusiveness -**
Christopher Patnoe, Head of Accessibility Programs and
Disability Inclusion, Google
- 12:10 – 12:18** **Assistive technology and disability inclusiveness -** Dr.
Chapal Khasnabis, Access to Assistive Technology and Medical
Devices Unit, WHO
- 12:18 – 12:26** **Removing barriers to digital inclusion: Engaging**
stakeholders in rethinking policies and services - Evert-Jan
Hoogerwerf, Secretary-General of the Global Alliance of
Assistive Technology Organizations
- 12:26 - 12:45** **Q&A** – moderated by John O’Toole, UN DESA, Inter-Regional
Adviser, Division for Inclusive Social Development

Background information

As society learns to live with the COVID-19 pandemic and becomes increasingly reliant on technology to perform fundamental aspects of everyday life, in terms of how we work, communicate, learn, shop, and interact with our environment, the more imperative it is that people with disabilities have access to that same technology.

Digital technologies can be important facilitators of social inclusion for people with disabilities into society as technology can break traditional barriers to communication, interaction, and access to information for persons with disabilities. However, digital technologies are insufficient by themselves to bridge the significant gaps in the socio-economic inclusion of persons with disabilities. There are necessary preconditions to accessible technology that include the awareness and knowledge of the digital solutions available; inclusive policies and laws that acknowledge the inaccessible norms in society and built environments; and support for accessible and inclusive technology services. It is important to overcome the digital divide to ensure disability inclusiveness. While there are examples of Disabled Persons Organizations using digital technologies to advance the rights of persons with disabilities, there is a gap in knowledge of how digital technologies can advance disability rights, particularly in developing countries where access to technology is limited.

Digital technologies alone are not a silver bullet. Digital technologies can widen the gaps between persons with and without disabilities if they are not designed to be accessible and inclusive, especially when persons with disabilities and their families are expected to bridge this gap themselves and shoulder the costs of making inaccessible technology accessible. Indeed, person with disabilities face economic and social barriers to accessing technologies on the basis of disability. The COVID-19 global pandemic has exposed the ever-widening gap on the basic accessibility of modern life for persons with disabilities around the world.

The aim of the side event is to show how digital technologies can become a driving force for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. This event aims to initiate a conversation about how digital technologies can advance the rights of persons with disabilities at national and international levels. Distinguished speakers will share their own experience and expertise in describing the basic lack of access persons with disabilities face on a regular basis and discussing one modality of how to bridge the disability divide: digital technologies. Participants will share examples of success and challenges of different technologies that can be used to support different types of disabilities to enable persons with disabilities.

Panelists and the audience will seek answers to the following questions:

1. What impact is the COVID-19 pandemic having on persons with disabilities?
2. How can we overcome the digital divide to ensure disability inclusiveness?
3. What are the advantages of digital technologies for the inclusion of persons with disabilities?
4. What are practical examples of digital and assistive technologies to support digital inclusiveness?
5. How can the UN, the UN family, and multilateral organizations increase accessibility to digital solutions, and what can Member States do in this regard?
6. What can we learn from persons with disabilities and broader civil society and how to best include them in decision-making processes?

The working language of the launch event will be English, with captioning and International Sign.