

[Promoting Inclusive Environments for the Full Implementation of the CRPD](#)

[December 3, 2020 Roundtable 3](#)

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This presentation provides a business-oriented point of view regarding the importance of an inclusive digital environment and how implementing ICT accessibility improves access not just by persons with disabilities but by all.

It will be shown why the timing is right for the UN CRPD to take the lead in dialling up messaging to the public and private sectors and also to NGOs, academia and even business start-ups to make digital accessibility a priority. An authentic, inclusive environment will attract talent, expand business and, most importantly, will generate innovation – objectives that any organization will see as vital.

Technology is central to our lives. It underpins how we learn, how we work, how we play and how we socialize. This reality has been demonstrated and further intensified by the current coronavirus pandemic. Since March, 2020, every individual and organization has been impacted by the power of technology such as Zoom and can understand the benefit or barrier technology can create when access to the digital platform is available or is absent.

On the individual level, with social interaction limited during the pandemic we now have a direct incentive to use technology to connect and to communicate. At the organizational level, we now have to think about choosing the right technology so all people of different ages and abilities can participate. We virtually overnight have come to understand on an organic level how important and how relevant accessibility is to each individual and how it is on par with privacy and security in the digital domain.

Digital technology is now so ubiquitous and consumerized that we have to think about how it impacts each human being. Lack of access to digitally-based information and communications has greater implications for the welfare of individuals and the growth of businesses than it ever has. The digital divide means exclusions of many types, economic opportunity just being one. Responsible organizations now have to think “human first” as they consider which ICT solutions to implement.

Because the timing is very favourable to increase the visibility of digital accessibility as an essential part of promoting an inclusive environment for the full implementation of CRPD, we should take advantage of this unique opportunity and focus on two actions:

1. Broadening the messaging outreach to not just existing public and private sector entities but to business start-ups as well. This is important because the technology sector depends on start-ups to fuel innovation. The coronavirus pandemic and social justice movements like Black Lives Matter undoubtedly will encourage a new generation of start-ups to come up with new digital solutions with

new innovative technology. It is very important that inclusive technology or digital accessibility be introduced as an idea at the earliest stages of development of these start-ups.

2. Focusing on innovation through research of technology that puts “human first” should be promoted versus the traditional technology accommodation of product compliance approach. With new technology such as AI, XR, VR depending on human interaction and human input, this is the time we can really encourage people with disabilities to be part of the inclusive design, development and deployment process.

The coronavirus pandemic has particularly impacted the aging population. Never before have we been so challenged to think about using technology to help counter unprecedented levels of social isolation and limited availability of in-person resources for the aging as we have during this public health crisis. There has always been a natural affinity between people with disabilities and the aging, because as we age, we acquire disabilities.

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of technology to both population segments as they have tried to stay in remote contact with assistive resources. The intersectionality of their needs – and the fact that we all will eventually be part of the this “group” as we age -- should further encourage and motivate businesses and governments to take digital accessibility actions that are authentic and meaningful, as the size of the population segment that combines age and disability is already compelling and will only become more so.