

## FINISHED FILE

The Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs  
Procurement for More Inclusive Workplaces

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>> JAMES THURSTON: Hello, and welcome. We're just getting started. In just one minute. We're letting people come into the room. We'll get started in a minute or two. Welcome. Good afternoon. Just another few seconds here and I think we'll get started. Thank you for joining us. Great, I think we'll get started now.

Welcome, everyone. I'm James Thurston. I'm the Vice President with G3ict, the Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs. I'm a white male. I wear glasses. I'm wearing a blue shirt, and I'm standing here today in my home office in Washington, D.C.

We're really pleased to be co-hosting this event, "Procurement for More Inclusive Workplaces," today with our partners, the European Disability Forum and Microsoft. This topic of employment and the role of government both as big employers and consumers of technology I think is really critical to supporting and promoting greater progress on inclusion of people with disabilities across Europe. We've been looking forward to this conversation.

I think we have a really interesting and important, and ultimately, impactful lineup of speakers. There will be a mix of short presentations and also panel discussions. This discussion today on employment and the role of procurement in an inclusive and accessible technology in employing people with disabilities in Europe is part of a series of events like this that we've been doing with EDF and with Microsoft. Really

focusing on the key role that governments can play in driving greater inclusion through the kinds of investments that they make in deployments of technology, making sure that accessibility is a part of their procurement process. Governments really at all levels and across the European Union.

So, with that, I absolutely want to thank our partners and invite each of them to say a few words of welcome as well. This really has been over the last year and a half or so a collaborative process of Microsoft, European Disability Forum and G3ict and a lot of other partners that you'll hear from today to shine a spotlight on this opportunity for greater inclusion and the key role of accessible technology.

Catherine, would you like to say a few words?

>> CATHERINE NAUGHTON: Thank you very much. Thanks very much, James, for the partnership on this event today. My name is Catherine Naughton, Director of the European Disability Forum. We're an umbrella organization representing persons with disabilities at the EU level. We know how important inclusive workplaces are for all people.

We have seen that despite we have legislation at the EU level, which has transposed many years at the level, we have low levels of employment of people with disabilities, resulting in social exclusion and poverty. We have many agreements also on the legislative side of the EU, like in public procurement and accessibility. And so, given that procurement is so important in our economy, it can be a huge lever and driver for improving accessibility.

Around 14% of GDP in Europe is spent in public procurement. So, if we can make accessible public procurement work in all fields and also in the workplace, it can make such a big difference in improving social participation and reducing discrimination in the workplace. So, we're really happy to be part of the event today, and you'll hear more from my colleague on the details of what we feel needs to be done in this field and what the situation is. Thank you, James.

>> JAMES THURSTON: Thank you for your partnership and leadership across Europe on not just this issue, but many other issues where we collaborate. Esa, would you like to say a few words on behalf of Microsoft?

>> ESA KAUNISTOLA: Absolutely. Thank you. Thank you, James. I'm delighted to be here, and I would like to thank you, G3ict and EDF, for organizing this event, which is such a timely and important event, and it also touches upon extremely important things concerning the procurement for more inclusive workplaces.

This partnership of ours with these two organizations has been longstanding, and this really is showing how important it is, how the private sector can play a role in driving forward a more accessible future.

The theme of today is to look at the role of procurement in digital transformation of workplace in Europe in particular, and this is something which is very close to the mission of Microsoft, to empower every person in every organization on the planet to achieve more. And this applies to all employees and the workplace they might occupy.

And this is also important in this context to realize there are billions of people who have different set of circumstances, abilities, and backgrounds that change their participation in the role. But our mission extends also beyond the products and services to the approach to inclusion in everything we do,

including our experience in ensuring that all employees and customers can participate in the transformation of the workplaces, both in person and online.

By taking a people-oriented approach, we can decide the future of work, building strategies that work for everyone. And actually, it's more than investing in digital tools, opening the door to the opportunity, but investing in digital culture, which is how this all can be realized. My colleague, Neil Barnett, will later work you through more closely on how the approach for disability and how we support employees once hired. Thank you very much, and I wish you a very nice event.

>> JAMES THURSTON: Thank you so much, Esa, for the remarks and also for the collaboration on this topic. It's really great in each of these events to have a technology leader that understands and is helping to support the digital transformation of our world, but also recognizes the importance of procurement, the way governments buy technology, and the importance of competing -- your company and others competing based on the accessibility of their products and services. So, we think that perspective is really important to have as part of these conversations and appreciate it.

Before we get into the discussions that we've lined up as part of this event today, I would like to ask my colleague, Yulia, to introduce herself and just give a few words about how we'll run the event today.

>> YULIA SARVIRO: Sure. Thank you, James. My name is Yulia Sarviro, Senior Project Manager with G3ict. I work in James' team. I am a white woman, blond hair, short, short blond hair. I wear the purple wrap today, and I am in my home in California.

I would like to walk you through a couple of practices that we find can be beneficial and helpful for all of the participants. First of all, this meeting is recorded and it will be made not only to the participants of the event, but also to the public through the G3ict website.

We have closed captions. They are available in English. You can switch them on by clicking on closed captions or subtitles in the menu, or check the chat for the link. We have auto translated captions that are available in French, German, and Spanish. And again, please check the chat for the links.

As you can see, we have international sign language interpretation. To be able to see the interpreters, please pin their video by right clicking on it. We will ask our panelists to keep their microphones muted, unless you are speaking. And for the attendees, I would propose you to, in case you would like to ask a question to panelists, to use the Q&A section instead of the chat. And if there are any technical issues or general comments that you would like to share with the rest of the group, feel free to use the chat.

A Q&A session is scheduled towards the end of the meeting today, of the webinar today. And you will be able to ask the questions live from our panelists today. And of course, if there are any questions left or any comments that you would like to make after this meeting, please send them to [info@smartcities4all.org](mailto:info@smartcities4all.org). Thank you.

>> JAMES THURSTON: Great. Thank you so much, Yulia. So, let's get started. As I mentioned, the focus today is on inclusive workplaces, employing people with disabilities, hiring them, supporting them throughout their careers in the role of technology in procuring technology, particularly in public

sector or government workplaces and how that all helps to support greater inclusion in the workplace.

To get us started, we're really fortunate to have a colleague from the ILO, Stefan Tromel, to give us sort of an overview and a summary of some of the important research and analysis that they've done that I think sets a good platform for us to begin with in this discussion. Stefan, would you like to begin with an introduction and then launch into your remarks?

>> ESTEBAN TROMEL: Sure, James. Thank you very much. And good afternoon, good morning to everybody. So, I'm Stefan Tromel, a Senior Disability Specialist in the ILO, where I had a small disability team that does both disability-specific work, but we also try to mainstream the rights of persons with disabilities throughout the work of the ILO.

I will not speak much about procurement as such. I think the next speakers are much more familiar with the topic. But James had asked me to give sort of a background, especially on persons with disabilities in the digital economy. And most of what I will be saying comes from two reports we produced. One was in 2019, pre-COVID, where the overall topic was making the future of work inclusive of persons with disabilities. We looked at the different trends of the future of work, where there is general agreement, and we tried to see, okay, what do these trends mean from a disability perspective? Of course, digitalization was already there, a big issue.

Then, in '21, early '21, we launched a report where we zoomed in on the disability-inclusive digital economy, and that was definitely a result or a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, where we saw this exponentially increased speed towards digitalization. And that is what led us to zoom in on that. And just to say that both reports were produced in collaboration with (?). We have a speaker with them later on the panel and then the European Commission had an expert that contributed to that report.

So, let me first generally speak about the trends towards digitalization. I start with a focus on digital skills. When we think about digital skills, we have to differentiate two issues. One is, it's clear right now that for almost all jobs, and in the near future, I would say almost every job will require digital skills. So, people without having digital skills will find it very difficult to find a job in the future.

At the same time, there is also a need for ICT-specific professionals, top-level experts where all their work is around digital skills. Then you find both high-level IT jobs like cybersecurity, blockchain, artificial intelligence, website accessibility, also as a growing issue, but you find also more, let's say low-level IT jobs. And it's fair to say right now that there is a huge unmet demand of IT professionals in most countries, both in the public and the private sector.

So, what we were trying to say in both publications is, if we are able to come up with a concerted effort among all stakeholders, led by public authorities, but also supported by others, we could make something interesting out of this opportunity of this unmet demand for professionals. If we ensure, for instance, that persons with disabilities have the access to the required digital skills, at all these different levels, no?

And of course, the first responsibility always lies within public authorities, especially -- and that is also a message that we have been giving again and again during the

crisis -- especially in the response and the socioeconomic response to the pandemic, to the impact of the pandemic on the labor market. It's very important that that response takes into account front and center persons with disabilities. And one of the key messages that we hear in terms of what is the strategy out of the pandemic, of the crisis that has risen from the pandemic is definitely, it is digital and it's green. And we need to make sure that persons with disabilities get their fair share of the jobs that will be provided in the digital and green economies, and that requires as a first step to ensure that adequate access to the skills that are in demand.

And we need to remind ourselves that the starting position of persons with disabilities as an overall group is more negative than the general population. There is evidence about less access to basic digital tools, even in OECD countries, mostly in developing countries. There is also a digital skills gap, as I said, from the population in general. So, we need to pay particular attention to these gaps by overcoming those gaps, by ensuring better access to basic needs and goods.

And one thing more important, when I'm talking about all of these things, I'm thinking mostly about persons with disabilities, young persons with disabilities in particular, knocking on the door of the labor market. We also don't need -- we can't forget about people with disabilities that are already in the labor market. And I was recently looking at some interesting OECD statistics that have not yet been published where they clearly identify that persons with disabilities in the labor market are overrepresented among those whose jobs are more in risk of automation. So, if we are not carefully and proactively ensuring that those persons with disabilities that are already in the labor market benefit from upskilling and reskilling, we might see just an increase in the unemployment rate of people with disabilities, up to now were already working in the labor market.

So, there is a clear responsibility from the public sector and other stakeholders to contribute to these digital skills. But of course, there is a second very important responsibility, which is to promote IT systems that are accessible for persons with disabilities. And I start with accessible job platforms. I mean, more and more nowadays, people are finding their jobs through online job platforms, public and private. Those need to be fully accessible. Vocational training. I just mentioned the need for digital skills and reskilling. Vocational training plays a key role. And most of that is funded or directly delivered by public authorities. So, better job needs to be done in order to ensure, in particular, mainstream digital skills development, mainstream vocational training. Still too much we rely often on separate segregated training. Sometimes it makes sense to have some targeted training, but in general, we need to do just a much better job ensuring that all mainstream, in this case, digital skills training, is fully inclusive of persons with disabilities.

But I know public sector as an employer themselves. And we in the ILO, when we speak with the private sector, and we do a lot of work with the private sector, it is fair that we often see that the public sector is, with some exceptions, of course, is usually not leading by example in the context of employment of persons with disabilities. And let's say ensuring full digital accessibility within the public sector needs to be part of that catalog of actions to ensure not only that persons with

disabilities get into the public sector; we need to revise carefully all, for instance, online recruitment processes. In fact, the ILO is working with the Telecommunications Union, a sister agency, and are looking for guidance to be given to all organizations, including public employers, in how to make their online recruitment system fully accessible and inclusive for persons with disabilities. Because the evidence shows that that is not the case, and many persons with disabilities have different types of problems when accessing recruitment process, by whatever needs are being used. Just filling in normal forms are not often possible. Screen readers don't work well. When you have other issues, gaming, and when face recognition software and other issues come in, the barriers increase even more.

But it's not only about overcoming the problems in the recruitment process. Of course, we also need to ensure that once persons with disabilities are working in the public sector, all the internal processes need to be fully accessible. And again, that is not always the case.

Public sector, like the private sector, needs to ensure that whatever training is provided to their employees, whether it is upskilling obligation, whether that training is provided internally, directly by the public employer or through external providers, all that training needs to be fully accessible. And as you already see now with COVID, much more and more that training would be either fully online, either hybrid, still sometimes face-to-face, but in all of those contexts we need to ensure that the platforms that are being used for that training are fully accessible.

We have seen over this -- we are using it today -- we have seen over these last two years how online platforms, which we didn't even know before, did not use before, now we are all using them on a daily basis. And as we have seen over the last two years how these platforms have increasingly become more accessible.

And in general, and we've done a couple webinars with organizations. One of the messages from one of those webinars on digital accessibility stayed in my mind, which was basically saying, look, like in the past, cybersecurity and data privacy were issues, nice-to-have issues. They have now become must issues. The same is happening now with digital accessibility. It's moving from a nice-to-have to something that is a must. And organizations like Microsoft and others are leading on that issue. So, it's very important.

The good news is that the IT sector is aware of this obligation, of this competitive advantage, and also is aware of the fact that when we ensure accessible and inclusive IT systems, it is working better for everybody.

We need also to pay particular attention to the situation of remote work and the IT solutions that the public sector will need to provide to its employees that will be working probably on a part and full-time basis from home. And that will also include persons with disabilities as part of this new normal that we are all starting to get used to, where definitely remote work/telework will become more prevalent for all employees, including employees with disabilities.

We all know how relevant it is to provide individualized workplace adjustments, also relevant in the IT sector. But I think the real challenge and the real objective needs to be that IT systems need to be, from the outset, designed following

Universal Design principles, not requiring, usually only in exceptional circumstances, additional workplace adjustment.

I'm moving towards the end. Just to finish with something very obvious for me, which is -- and it's reflected in the UN Convention. Public sector needs to lead by example, also in terms of the employment of persons with disabilities, ensuring, as I said before, not only the recruitment, but also giving the same opportunities for career development, and ensuring through procurement in particular that all its IT systems are fully accessible is just a basic precondition for that. And that is why also one of the recommendations included in our Report on the Digital Economy clearly reminds us that public procurement plays a key role in ensuring digital products and services. James, I think I'll leave it there and give the floor back to you.

>> JAMES THURSTON: Fantastic. Thank you so much, Stefan. Maybe just a couple things. First of all, I really appreciate that you make the explicit point that if we're going to continue improving how we are employing people with disabilities in workplaces, including government workplaces, we really need to elevate digital accessibility/IT accessibility to the same level of importance as privacy and cybersecurity, in that those investments in technology by governments need to be thinking about accessibility with the same level of rigor that they do with privacy and security, which I think is a great point and advice.

I do want to just maybe quickly ask you, Stefan, based on your rich experience, what is the focus or the context of disability and procurement within the UN and ILO context?

>> ESTEBAN TROMEL: Yeah, thank you, James. When I started in the ILO nine years ago, one of the things I did in my first year, in my naive thinking, I went to the ILO Procurement Department and saying, "How much are you thinking about accessibility in procurement?" And they looked at me as if I was coming down from the moon. Now, things have evolved significantly since then, and mostly thanks to the United Nations Disability Inclusion, which includes a framework for all entities, including the ILO. We need to report each year to the UN in how we are including persons with disabilities in all areas of our work, especially trying to get our own house in order. And the interesting and important point is that one of the indicators against which we need to report is procurement, no?

And it's interesting to see how the procurement community in the UN has really embraced that issue. They all agree that the UN is still at the very early stages of development, but we have come up now -- or they have come up, in fact, because it's a very technical area -- they came up with their own detailed guidance document, looking at issues on how to make the procurement process, itself, accessible. So, if you have a procurement professional who uses a screen reader, he or she would not have been able until very recently, and probably still not fully, to navigate the different platforms that the UN uses to upload tenders and all that stuff.

So, it's the accessibility of the process in itself, then also the idea that entities need to identify the key products and services that they usually purchase through tender and identify those in which that should be bought in an accessible and inclusive way so that the relevant tenders include the accessibility criteria in that. And as the sort of cherry on

the cake, probably more challenging, see how procurement could be used also in promoting employment of persons with disabilities through the actual implementation of a tender, for example, a catering service or a cleaning service or an IT service, but also in terms of the actual employment within the supplier of that tender. So, very exciting to see how we have moved from almost no attention and no knowledge to a situation where we are, hopefully, quickly catching up with a rather good number of good practices that already exist in the private sector. Thank you.

>> JAMES THURSTON: That's kind of encouraging, which is great. And maybe a bit of a theme throughout the course of this event and conversation today of some progress, but always opportunity for even greater progress when it comes to procurement, accessible technology, and more inclusive workplaces. Thank you very much, Stefan. I think you laid out sort of a great current-state description of where we are today and some of the key themes around digital transformation and strategies around inclusion.

Next, we're going to move to three speakers that will help us dig a little bit deeper into some of these themes from very different perspectives and important perspectives and I think help us understand with more specificity the importance of accessibility in digital inclusion in workplaces when it comes to making more progress on employing people with disabilities, including in government workplaces.

So, what I'd like to do is maybe start with just a brief introduction by each of our speakers, and then we'll launch into some questions that I'll be asking each of you. Haydn, would you like to start with an introduction?

>> HAYDN HAMMERSLEY: Thank you very much. My name is Haydn Hammersley. I'm from the European Disability Forum. I am a white male wearing glasses, a little bit of facial hair and a red sweater. And I am joining you from my home in Brussels, Belgium.

>> JAMES THURSTON: Thank you so much, Haydn. And Virginia, would you like to do an introduction?

>> VIRGINIA CARCEDO YLLERA: Yeah, I'm Virginia Carcedo Yllera, General Secretary from Inserta Empleo, and Director of the Transformation and Excellency from Fundacion ONCE. I'm joining you from my home desk.

>> JAMES THURSTON: Thank you. Neil?

>> NEIL BARNETT: My name's Neil Barnett, white male with black hair, sitting in front of my Pacman machine in my basement this morning before I go to work. I lead our inclusive hiring of people with disabilities at Microsoft and work a lot on accessibility at Microsoft. And so, thanks for having me.

>> JAMES THURSTON: Sure. Thank you so much, Neil. I was trying to puzzle out what that object behind you was, and now we know, it's a Pacman game. Great.

Haydn, maybe let's start with you today. Can you talk to us a little bit, in a little bit more detail about EDF's interest and activity in this space of employment and inclusive workplaces and maybe what challenges and solutions you're seeing, including through the great work that you're doing with members across Europe?

>> HAYDN HAMMERSLEY: Yeah, absolutely. So, I mean, at the European Disability Forum, we do a lot of work on employment of persons with disabilities. The reason, very simply, is because, in general terms, the European employment rate of persons with



disabilities remains very low. So, at the European level, we see about 51% of persons with disabilities being employed, compared to around 75%-76% of persons without disabilities. So, there's a clear difference between employment possibilities for those with disabilities and those without.

These figures that I'm sharing with you are figures from before COVID, so we can only imagine how much the pandemic has impacted those rates, and we imagine that the very updated figures will be even worse. So, these are relatively optimistic figures, I would say.

Beyond that, particularly for women with disabilities, things are very difficult. So, on average, only around 48% of women with disabilities are in employment. And the figures are, of course, even lower when we look at full-time work. So, for women with disabilities, again, in full-time work, we see around 20% or 21% of women with disabilities in full-time work and around 28% or 29% of men with disabilities in full-time work.

You asked about some of the main issues that we see. There are many that I could talk about and I don't want to go on for too long. Maybe I'll mention two of the main things that we look at in our work. So, one of them is actually not something that's really linked so much with the actions of employers themselves or is not kind of specific to different work sectors, be it the public sector or the private sector, but it's something to do with national legislation. And it's about the compatibility between paid work and social protection systems. So, this is really one of the huge barriers that we see in Europe, the fact that somebody who's receiving a disability allowance or services linked to their disability assessment is likely to lose these as soon as they take up paid work. And this is a huge barrier, because as we, most of us in this meeting know the cost of living for somebody with a disability is much higher than it is for somebody without a disability, and usually, to get by and to make ends meet on one salary alone as a person with a disability is very difficult, especially now with the cost of living going up very fast. So, this is something that we work on a lot.

We are constantly pushing for the national governments to allow some kind of compatibility between disability allowance and services and employment in order to offset this extra cost and to reduce the risk of in-work poverty.

And then maybe just to come to one of the other barriers that we often work on -- although, again, as I mentioned, I could talk endlessly about the barriers that persons with disabilities face in employment -- is what we refer to as reasonable accommodation, which is to say the reasonable adjustments to a role, to the workplace, or to working arrangements to enable an employee with disabilities to work to their full potential and for the employer to get the best results out of their employee. And this is actually something that is covered by EU legislation, as our Director, Catherine, mentioned in the introduction, there is an EU Directive on Non-discrimination in the Workplace, and this covers the right to reasonable accommodation.

The problem currently is that, I mean, although this is legislation dating from the year 2000 and it's been transposed into -- so that means it's been adopted into national legislations. It's not really defined very clearly what is meant by "reasonable accommodation," and therefore, it's very difficult for people to prove that this right hasn't been

respected or that they face discrimination on this front.

So, yeah, I will end there for your first question, James, and then we can elaborate a little bit more on that later in the discussion.

>> JAMES THURSTON: Thank you so much for that, Haydn. Really sort of laying out in pretty stark terms, indeed, the challenges that we face, including some specific challenges that people with disabilities face in getting into the workplace and advancing in the workplace.

If I could just briefly ask. Stefan had mentioned some -- I think as of yet unreleased data from the OECD about people with disabilities being disproportionately in at-risk jobs, jobs that are likely to be automated in the future. Has that come up in any of your work, or is that something that might be of interest looking at moving forward?

>> HAYDN HAMMERSLEY: Yeah, absolutely. We work very much alongside Stefan on this, and it's something we're looking more into now. I would say, with regards to the current advocacy work we're doing, it's not been the top of the agenda, but it's very much something that we're beginning to look at. We're doing research on it, in fact, this year, because it's going to be something in the coming years to the coming decades that we really, really have to fight against.

I don't think I can elaborate on it any, like, much more than what Stefan has already said because he was very complete in his answer, but yeah, I completely agree with that, and it's something that we need to be extremely cautious of going forward.

>> JAMES THURSTON: So, another additional challenge moving forward. Thank you so much, Haydn. Virginia, maybe we can move to you next. We'd love to hear from you and your perspective in the great work that ONCE and Inserta are doing in both the public and private sector around employment of people with disabilities. Maybe you could tell us a little bit about that work and how much progress is being made in Spain, in particular, when it comes to employing people with disabilities, and what some of that progress is or challenges are?

>> VIRGINIA CARCEDO YLLERA: Yeah. Thank you to invite us to share with you. I think, for after me, I think Microsoft is one of the companies I explain in a few moments that we are doing with them. But first of all, I would like to highlight, everybody I think knows ONCE groups is a foundation for blind people in Spain from 1938. But the most important question was that the creation of the ONCE Foundation in 1988 as a solidarity of blind people with the rest of disabilities.

So, for me, the most important question first to highlight is, Fundacion ONCE has two principles in their relation, general relation. First is general employment of people with disabilities. We don't distinguish between public and private sector. And after accessibility, universal accessibility and design for everybody, design for all, no?

So, in our mind, accessibility and design for all is the first step to granting qualified employment, qualified training for people with disabilities. If we don't be sure that one size or one desk is accessibility, we have a problem. Because the regulation in Spain is very advanced, you know, because we have the obligation for companies with more than 50 workers to have 2% of people with disabilities in the private sector. But if you didn't have accessibility -- if the companies don't establish the accessibility in the services and processes, it's

not possible to guarantee that.

So, other question for us, for Fundacion ONCE, it is important to highlight the value of people with disabilities. In Spain, we have, we can say, two levels for people with disabilities. We have the certification of disability, promoted by the administration. We can say a medical certification or healthy certification. But after I explain a little bit, we distinguish between this certification, obviously, to attend these people, we only work with people with disabilities with this certification. But after when we analyze the profile of these persons, we use the ICF classification of the welfare organization. It is important, because this classification focused on the capacity or the ability of people, the things that people can do, the difference from the people they couldn't do.

So, for us, for doing an example, take into account the medical certification, when a person, a total blind person is a total blind person and medically this person doesn't see. But if we analyze this person with this classification, is this person managed by a reasonable accommodation? We consider that this person can see. So, we focus on the positive aspects of disability.

And when we talk about the profile of a person with disabilities with the companies, it is very important because companies understand that people with disabilities are positive -- this positive approach helps a lot to sensitize.

Well, from Fundacion ONCE, and Inserta is the experts and we have people with disabilities working for people with disabilities. We are more than 80% of people with disabilities in our staff, and more than 75% are women with disabilities with very top profile. There are people from the universities, psychologists, economists.

And from a point of view, one of the most important questions for us is, we have the most important database in Spain from people with disabilities. We have more than 300,000 people with disabilities registered with different profiles. And this is more than the public employment agency in Spain.

So, we have collaborated with the public administration in two different aspects. Our system of analyzing people with disabilities are companies are focusing on the person we can do, I mentioned before, and we analyze with them the areas where they are strong. And we analyze the areas where they need training, for example. And with this, we establish a telemap with people with disabilities. And with companies, we work the same. We analyze within the recruitment of their job position, and we analyze with them the accessibility.

After the pandemic, we find that the company offered more digital jobs, which is very complicated, because before mentioned, Stefan and Haydn, they are not fully accessibility. Well, with this, we established an itinerary for companies and people with disabilities, and we make the link between them, the best candidate and the recruitment of the companies. This is important, because in private sector, companies understand well this. We have an agreement with Microsoft, for example. But in the public sector, administration, they are regulators. They establish their regulation. But, in fact, they incorporate people with disabilities slower than the private sector.

For example, now we are cooperating with a company who manages the air navigation in Spain. So, it's complicated for us to make them understand, for example, that people with

mental/social disabilities can work with them, because they say they want to have a person who doesn't have problems with stress, for example. So, it's important because the administration not only regulates, but also must understand that they must be a portrait of social society. So, we work with the administration to include people with disabilities in their staff. And also, we work with public administration with lobby or giving them our ideas.

Another question is we work with the European Social Fund. After we can explain more. But we are a body that manages the European Social Fund, the structure of funds, the European funds, and we are in Spain one of the five NGOs who work with the administration to be sure that the policy, to be sure that the funds are currently applicable for people with disabilities and to increase their rate of activity and reduce their rate of unemployed people.

And finally, to explain more, we launched, I think the last year, a program focused on digital talent. Because now we understand that there are people with disabilities must be able to accept the new job position that are created now by the labor market. But also, we know that there are people with disabilities at risk or losing their job because they need upskilling on their digital skills. So, this program is focused on persons. And we work very closely, for example, with Microsoft, because we must prepare people with disabilities, take into account the requirement of the labor market.

>> JAMES THURSTON: Thank you so much, Virginia, for some really important points that you raised, and I think some strategies that may be useful for replicating in other countries.

>> VIRGINIA CARCEDO YLLERA: Yeah.

>> JAMES THURSTON: I think it's -- the way that you work with your partners and employers to change the perspective to what can these people offer; what are the great skills that can be used in your workplace, and going in with that very positive approach is good.

And I think also an important point that you make that's a bit of a challenge to, I think, the rest of us, and Neil, sort of a good bridge to you, is the public sector is not doing as well as the private sector for working with people with disabilities. So, there are lessons to be learned for the public sector, which are good employers, but government's just not doing as good of a job, at least from your perspective, employing people with disabilities.

And with that, Neil, it would be great to hear from you about the Microsoft experience, how you approach hiring and supporting employees with disabilities, and maybe even teasing out some other good practices that could be replicated.

>> NEIL BARNETT: Awesome. Well, I think a few thoughts. At Microsoft, we start with the concept that disability is a strength. And if you think about accessibility, this is a great topic, because disability and accessibility go together. And if you think about your workforce, there's no better way to create accessible products, services, websites, you name it, than having people with disabilities at the core fabric DNA. Employers large and small need to hire people with disabilities for all their talents. The code that you are going to produce has to be accessible.

And as Stefan was talking about earlier, like many employees -- I talk a lot with employers outside of Microsoft.

But I think folks forget, after you hire someone, what is that employee experience like? All those things from, you know, you go to your career website at your government agency or your company, and you know, how accessible is that website? Many websites are through a third party. If you hire the applicant tracking system that was mentioned, just go through the whole employee experience, and you'll notice that most of it is procured. And if those services are not accessible, you know, your employees will not be as productive or successful. And it's just -- it's something that I think, you know, at Microsoft, we produce, and we're very focused on accessibility and you think about the stool.

Someone mentioned privacy and security. Think of a three-legged stool. It's privacy, it's security, and more and more, that third leg is accessibility. And at Microsoft, it is about accessibility, right? And so, more and more companies, I believe, are thinking about how to invest. Governments are thinking about accessibility with all the legislation. And it's something that as an employer at Microsoft, what I find exciting is that, you know, as someone mentioned, we have to take care of our own house, but we also can lead and help other employers and other governments think about this, and that's what we're very focused on.

>> JAMES THURSTON: Thank you, Neil. I think it's great to come back to the sort of three-legged stool that Stefan got us started on, in really elevating accessibility to the same level as IT privacy and IT security.

>> NEIL BARNETT: Right.

>> JAMES THURSTON: In your observations with -- and I know you do a lot of work both within your company, but also with other partners and customers, maybe. Certainly, governments are, hopefully, focused on IT security and privacy. Are you seeing any trends in the public sector in terms of elevating accessibility as a focus as well?

>> NEIL BARNETT: Yeah, I believe so. I see there's a lot of, outside the States, there's a lot of -- and you guys would be closer to it probably than me -- legislation. There's a lot of, you know, activity in Europe and Canada. I think, you know, when we work with government agencies here in the States, accessibility is top of mind, for sure. So, I think, you know, sometimes private sector leads public sector, but I think more and more, even if you just -- you know, one of the things when you think about accessibility. If you go out and just start looking for roles, like on LinkedIn. There's a lot of accessibility roles out there, way more than there was two or three years ago. And so, that kind of tells you something about what's happening.

>> JAMES THURSTON: Yeah, actually, that's a great metric. One of the parts of G3ict is the IAP, the International Accessibility Professional Society. And I think through their work, we're also seeing more and more employers asking for accessibility certification of their IT professionals, which is another indicator of progress.

Neil, you gave us a good bridge, I think, to our next speaker, Inmaculada Placencia Porrero, who will talk about these policy frameworks that really do drive greater progress both on employment of people with disabilities in Europe, but also on procurement, which is a key support to that employment in inclusive workplaces. Inma, would you like to speak?

>> INMACULADA PLACENCIA PORRERO: Yes. Thank you very much,

James, for the invitation and to be able to follow all this very interesting audience that we are discussing today. Previous speakers have already said what is the situation on the employment of persons with disabilities. And I have to say that getting that data on the gaps between persons with and without disabilities has been really a major step to illustrate the situation in which we are.

We started making indicators, publishing indicators, on an annual basis. And I'm really happy to see how much those are used by all kinds of stakeholders. But we need to go one step further.

And in terms of data collection, we need, of course, to look to the relation between employment/unemployment, activity rate, education levels. And in all those indicators that we have, we see that there is a considerable gap that is maintained since the ten years that we started publishing this information. And the key question here is, you know, how can our policy frames, but how can our practices implement the possibilities that the policy framework put forward?

In addition, I think we are going to see from next year an important development, which is that we will publish data. We will start publishing data not only on the gaps, you know, how many people with disabilities is employed or not employed or looking for jobs or not, but what types of jobs people have, what types of activities do they do, how much time they spend in training, so, about the quality of those jobs, about the characteristics of the work that they do. And this is going to be possible because with the introduction of a new question in what is called the Labor Force Survey. And I hope that that will also help to better understand, why is that employment rate -- why are those employment rates not really improving?

We see that it is a big challenge because we are in a situation which unemployment rates for the general population are increasing. And there is, in addition to all the practical issues, in relation, for example, to accessibility, there is an attitudinal issue. And while European legislation protects persons with disabilities or protect persons in the employment area, in the occupation, and in advancing in occupation, from discrimination, accessibility is not embedded in this legislative framework on discrimination.

And for the provision of equal treatment, it is essential to have accessibility and reasonable accommodations. They need to go hand in hand.

When we come to the, let's say, monitoring and the policy framework that we have, beyond the legal obligations, which I'll refer to in a minute, I would like to infer that we use those statistics to monitor the situation. We produce every year and during the employment report in which we identify, analyze the employment situation also of persons with disabilities and the link with social exclusion poverty and discrimination.

We also use the data to provide recommendations to the Member States in the context of the European semester, and there are country reports that elaborate, very detailed ones, describing, what is the situation in the countries and also addressing the situation of persons with disabilities in employment and produce recommendations and identify challenges.

For example, last year, we had 18 Member States that received specific recommendations in these areas.

Because of this now better-known challenge, or issue, the employment of persons with disabilities takes a prominent role

in our social policies. For example, in the European social rights, there is a specific principle dedicated to inclusion of persons with disabilities that explicitly refers to the right of persons with disabilities to participate in the labor market and in an environment that is adapted to their needs. It talks also about decent wages and salaries, but that cannot be seen in isolation. And we have done it in the pillar of social rights, in this policy initiative, mainstream disability in relation to education, training, and lifelong learning, equality of opportunities and many other areas.

Let me mention one element that has not been mentioned until now but for which we have also a legislative act. It is about the issue of work-life balance for parents. Because the improvement of the situation in relation to disability is also about parents or family, those that have good family members with disabilities. And that also will benefit from accessibility measures.

In relation to the Employment Equality Directive, it prohibits discrimination, but it obliges the provision of reasonable accommodation in employment. And we have been doing quite a lot of effort to identify or to support the implementation of reasonable accommodation. We have several networks of experts that have gone into detail on what is reasonable accommodation, what are those measures, and how are they being respected in the member states.

It is important to understand also that the job environment needs to be accessible to enable persons with disabilities to participate in the labor market. But as I said before, it needs to go hand in hand with issues of, or the provision of reasonable accommodation, and also assistive technologies in the workplace. To that end, hand in hand, accessibility with assistive technology is really essential, seamless interaction. And this is an element that we included in the European Accessibility Act, where those provider accessible technologies have to ensure also that it operates with assistive technology.

The accessibility legislation requires most technology use in the workplace to be accessible and we really hope it will have a good impact in the employment levels of persons with disabilities.

Let me also say, referring to the two important pieces of legislation, before I go a little bit more into procurement. And that is, the European state aid block extension regulations that allows for the provision of and financing or supporting private employees to provide support, financial support, for accommodating persons with disabilities into the workplace.

When it comes to public procurement, accessibility is an obligation. And it is also a possibility to give extra points for the more accessible, in this case, maybe, technologies. But it is also possible to reserve contracts where there are at least 30% of employees being with disabilities.

It is really important to realize that in addition, the public procurement directives can support the employment of persons with disabilities by requiring specific conditions to those providing the employment -- or sorry, the service, or providing the product to the contracting authorities.

For example, one could request that a particular service being purchased would be provided by a company that has got employees with disabilities, or when the issue is linked to the subject matter of the contract that has got an accessibility policy in place. So, if you're going to buy the development of

a website, you could not only say that the website must be accessible in the technical specifications; you could give extra points to the provider that makes the most accessible website or that offers the more accessible website. You could also identify that the company that you're going to select should have a certain experience on accessibility and that could employ persons with disabilities. So, we need to see all those features that the procurement legislation offers to advance on the employment of persons with disabilities.

I would like to say that when we come to the issue of public versus private sector employment of persons with disabilities, I don't have the data on the shelf. So, I would be curious where are you getting the data? I think when we will have this survey, the Labor Force Survey, we will be able to say more about this situation in a regular basis. This is really important to monitor also that.

We have been doing an awareness-raising campaign about how to put reasonable accommodation into place. We have all the policy instruments, like the adoption of diversity charts at the workplace that also address the employment of persons with disabilities and includes accessibility. And Virginia mentioned already the European structure investment funds where there are about 43 billion allocated for employment coming from the social funds.

It is also another policy instrument that we have is the guarantee that was put in place in 2013, and it commits the Member States to ensure that all young people below 25 receive a good quality offers of employment or continue education or apprenticeship or trainingship. And here, of course, youth with disabilities is a priority, a priority population, because this initiative focuses on what they call needs, not in education and not in employment. And unfortunately, a lot of persons with disabilities are -- or young persons with disabilities -- are under that category.

So, let me also say that when it comes to the support of these measures, and in particular, to include accessibility in the workplace, we have the European standards that can be used for ICT, for the built environment, but also for describing how an organization can -- what they need to do in order to embrace a design-for-all approach, a diversity approach, resulting, then, on accessibility of whatever they are doing, whether it's product developing or providing a service. And if this process-oriented standard is adopted by the organization -- public organization, private organization -- the chances that the result is accessible are really very high.

To finish, let me refer about our new disability strategy. This disability strategy contains a specific chapter on employment as well as a specific chapter on accessibility, by the way, that I will talk in a minute to finish. But on the chapter of employment, we propose and are going to publish a flagship initiative to improve the labor market outcomes of persons with disabilities. And this package, a draft of this package was presented in March this year in the framework of a presidency conference on employment, a French presidency conference on employment and persons with disabilities. And what we are doing is work around six areas. We're going to strengthen the capacities of employment and integration services, so what is called Public Employment Services Network. And there is going to be a toolkit that is going to say how to do this. We're going to work on the promoting of hiring



perspective through affirmative actions and combatting stereotypes. And for that, we aim to have a catalog of positive actions.

We're also going to work on reasonable accommodation. And for that, the intention is to provide some guidelines for improving reasonable accommodation at work.

Also, within the context of the work, I heard several speakers refer to, what happens once you're in employment? We would like to work on securing health and safety at work and preventing disability. And for that, we will issue some manual to address chronic care diseases and preventing the risk of acquiring disabilities.

We are also going to work on securing vocational rehabilitation schemes, in the case of chronic diseases and accidents. So, there would be a guideline for effective vocation of rehabilitation, as they return to work after the accident.

And finally, we are going to be launching a study addressing sheltered employment, because quite a lot of the employment in Europe is about sheltered employment. And the intention is to see how they lead a pathway to the open labor market. Because at the end, what we would like is that every person with disabilities have a good, decent job in the open labor market. And the study is going to also look to the conditions of employment in those sheltered employment.

So, this is a big package of activities. And we are also, as I said, looking into the area of accessibility also as opportunities for employment of persons with disabilities. By the end of this year, we aim to launch what we call the Accessible EU Center, and it is going to be a place for getting training on accessibility, for exchanging good practices, and for fostering also the accessible jobs.

I would like to say that I have presented you with a lot of activities. And really, we are doing that. The sector is doing that. We are working together with the Member States. But I would like to end up with an element of concern.

We recently launched/finalized a study. I mean, our network of experts finalized a study about digital plans. I mean, several of the speakers referred to the importance of the inclusion of persons with disabilities and accessibility in the development of new technologies. I mean, you mentioned security and many other areas in which we see an expansion of digital work and digital development as well. This look at digital plans, what our members are saying to doing in terms of strategies, in terms of investments in the digital area. Seldom those plans refer to persons with disabilities and accessibility. So, we start with very little awareness and very little work on accessibility in mainstream development.

The second issue that this study looked at was the other way around, looking to disability and accessibility plans. And again, there, very seldom, digital technologies were highlighted. And this is also a big concern because this means also that in the social sector, in those responsible for the rights of persons with disabilities, digital technologies are not yet -- and the potential of digitalization is not yet on the table as an opportunity for employment and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

So, a lot needs to be done still. I hope -- I mean, actually, we will continue working on this, and I hope that when we will publish new statistics, we will be able to see that

there is an improvement. By the way, the strategy also calls on the established targets to reduce the gaps on employment between persons with and without disabilities. And I hope that in coming meetings, we will be able to report that we have been successful on that and that the statistics show some improvements. So, that's all from my side, and I thank you for your attention.

>> JAMES THURSTON: Inma, thank you very much. Every time you speak, I learn of a new activity that will be useful moving forward, and it's great to hear about this data that you'll be releasing next year. I think that will obviously be very helpful there in Europe, but I think there will be a lot of interest, at least in our work, with others around the world as well. So, congratulations on that.

So, next, we're going to move into a more specific conversation about government procurement of technology and of accessible technology. And I saw that Krisztina asked why we're not talking about the accessibility of software. And I would just make clear that when we're talking about accessibility and when we're talking about procurement of accessible technology, we are talking about hardware, software, and services, all of it. Absolutely, it's critically important. And please, anyone else that has questions, just put them in the Q&A section.

So, now we're going to move into a bit of a conversation about procurement specifically, how governments are buying and deploying accessible technology that would support inclusive workplaces. As we jump into that, we've met Inma, but I'd like to ask the other two panelists here to introduce themselves. Susanna, would you like to do a quick introduction?

>> SUSANNA LAURIN: Yes. Thank you, James. My name is Susanna Laurin. I am the Chief Research Innovation Officer at a small accessibility consultancy based in Sweden, Europe, but I am the G3ict representative to the EU, so do a lot of policy work, strategic work, and I am also one of the persons together with James and just a handful of others, I think, who really, really believes procurement is the new black, so, good to be here. Thank you for the invite.

>> JAMES THURSTON: Thank you, Susanna. Nice to have you. Our next speakers, Inma, and our next speaker, Susan, we're all absolutely strong believers in the great potential for procurement to be supporting inclusion. Susan, would you like to do an introduction?

>> SUSAN SCOTT-PARKER: Hello. I'm Susan Scott-Parker. I'm an advisor to the ILO's Global Business Disability Network to Valuable 500, to the German Government's Development Agency called GIZ. And my career has been spent looking at why it is so difficult looking at big organizations, business or private, to deliver the best practice that benefits the business and people with disabilities. So, I'm absolutely with Susanna, that procurement plays a huge role, an unrecognized role, has huge potential to transform business operations to the benefit of the business, as well as disabled people. And the question for us all is, how do we get them on board?

>> JAMES THURSTON: Absolutely. Thank you, Susan and Susanna, for your introductions. And I'd like to jump in and ask each of you maybe to answer this. And Susanna, I'll start with you, then go to Susan and Inma. What's your sort of assessment of how we're doing, particularly in Europe -- we being governments in Europe -- are doing in including accessibility as part of their procurement? I'm going to assume

that you think they could be doing better. And if that's the case, maybe even add sort of why aren't we doing better? And if you think they're doing great at including accessibility in their procurements, you can maybe give us the reason why. But how are they doing, the governments in Europe in including accessibility? And if they're not doing as well as they could be, what are the barriers or challenges there? Susanna?

>> SUSANNA LAURIN: So, yeah, I don't have scientific data on all agencies on all procurement in all of Europe, so I can't say how everyone is doing, but we do some research. And actually, we did research on behalf of Microsoft a couple of years ago where we checked in the Nordic countries how public sector were including the ENC 01549 standard in their procurement, in their tenders. And we were looking everywhere, and we found very little trace of accessibility. That was just a couple of years ago. And I'm not sure if Microsoft or anyone else did a follow-up of that. That would be interesting. We didn't. And other studies also have been done, of course, by us and by others. And really, as far as I know, governments could do better.

I think one of the reasons that we find when we talk closely to our clients is that it seems to be -- procurers need to know many different things. They can't be experts in everything, so we need to also kind of understand that they have a difficult life and work. But in most governments, at least in northern and Western Europe, they know about accessibility and they know that they should be accessible because of the regulations now, if not earlier. But still, their procurers don't know accessibility, and the people in communication or IT or compliance, they do know accessibility, so why don't they talk to each other? It's something like silos within the governments that is absolutely fascinating to me in a negative way. So, I think there's some kind of internal go meet each other, handshake? I don't know if the communication people are afraid of the lawyers, if that is -- or if they use different languages, I don't know, but there seems to be a very huge gap somewhere there.

And then, I think we do have tools. I think it's, when they say it's difficult, that's not really good enough for me, because we do have loads of tools. And the EN Standard has a whole annex which helps them to do the procurement. So, it's -- I still haven't found the key to how do we get them on board. That's really what I think is most interesting, because somebody needs to make them aware. And then there are loads of good training on things. So, I don't know, really, exactly why this is still the case, because, yeah, the potential is great.

>> JAMES THURSTON: Thank you, Susanna. And Susan, we've heard today about this critical link between the digital transformation of society and workplaces and accessibility and inclusion. Susanna just mentioned a topic that I know you have some important and strong thoughts on, which is this maybe silos or lack of communication between business decision-makers, procurement, and IT professionals. How would you say we're doing in general when it comes to governments and procurement, and where are those challenges that could be addressed?

>> SUSAN SCOTT-PARKER: I don't think we're doing very well. I think that's why we're here. So, we needn't belabor that. There are a combination of factors. One, most of the tools developed that procurement are supposed to use did not involve procurement directly in their design. All too often, the

attempt to influence procurement isn't grounded in their lived reality. So, for example, if you talk to a recruitment director, they'll say it's up to their internal customers to tell them what they're supposed to go out to market to get. And the internal customers didn't say, make sure it's accessible, so why should they impose that on what their internal customers are telling them? They don't understand what their suppliers are telling them when they argue that, actually, it's too hard, it can't be done. Well, I forgot the most important one, which is the Chief Executive, or the equivalent in a government department, has to tell the procurement director, it has to happen. If that doesn't happen, why would he do it? Do we expect a procurement director to wake up in the morning and say, "I think I'll be the lone angel on this. I'll decide to pioneer this innovation"? No, no, no. So, the guy at the top says "You have to do it," then the guidance has to be guided by the reality, which is driven by their internal customers, driven by the fact that when an IT supplier says, "Well, actually, we can't" for all these reasons, they haven't gotten an institutional buddy in IT that helps them interpret the technical feedback they're getting from that supplier. Or if they're buying a facilities management service, they haven't gotten the property guys there as a buddy working with procurement to understand what their suppliers are proposing.

I think the final thing I'll say now is that we think it's just about what they buy, but actually, it's the legacy systems they've already got, and the contracts are coming up for renewal in three years. How do you build it into those contracts? Well, the only people who can tell you that are the heads of procurement sitting down in a problem-solving mode, coming together peer to peer with expert support from people like G3ict and Susanna and others. But it has to be driven by those individuals.

So, the good news I've seen recently is the Chief Procurement Officer for ANZ Bank in Australia -- he's a global lead but based in Australia, and he's creating a procurement task force to bring some procurement players to the table to say, "We've got a problem. How do we address it? What do we need to do? And what do we need from our suppliers and from the Board and from our internal customers?"

>> JAMES THURSTON: Thank you, Susan, for that, and for referencing the New Zealand example, or the ANZ example, which I think is exciting, and we'll get into sort of next steps and suggestions for improvement in just a second. And I know you all have good ideas on that.

Before we do that, Inma, when it comes to -- Susan has made clear, we don't really need to belabor the point of we're not doing as well as we should be doing when it comes to procurement by government agencies. What kind of challenges are you seeing from your perspective, having worked on this for, I won't say how long, but as long as I have been, which is a long time?

>> INMACULADA PLACENCIA PORRERO: Um, there are -- I agree, of course, with Susan and Susanna, that, first of all, we don't have comprehensive data. But the indications that we have are that it is not really very good, the situation, despite the obligations that we have and the tools that we have developed. We see some improvement, but we see that it's difficult to find examples, for example, when we really want to show, okay, where are they doing it fine, where it is, which country or which contracting authority is having a good practice is difficult to

find. There are some examples, but it is difficult to find.

The second thing is, I mean, we are strengthening some of the tools. For example, now that we are going digital for the digital procurement, there are some places we need to be filling, and we are asking to -- we did ask, in one of these templates, to put, across where the procurement was contemplating accessibility. Of course, what happened in the negotiations of these things is that that particular cross became voluntary. So, now I don't know if it will be used or not. But it would have given us a very good opportunity to know which procurements deal with accessibility and which don't, because still we don't really know well.

The second point is that we are developing -- my colleagues responsible for the procurement legislation are developing a set of trainings for procurers, what competencies they need to have, and we managed to put accessibility as one of the competencies. So, I hope that that is also going to bring a better development.

And finally, I mean, I think to add to the possible reasons why procurement is not taking -- accessible procurement is not taken up at the speed that we had hoped, despite all the instruments there. I think there is a matter of competencies and responsibilities. In other words, we are trying to find a way so that the contracting authority could relay on the information being provided by the bidder. In other words, but that information needs to be explicit enough, and the responsibility needs to be in the bidder more. Because, you know, as Susan was saying, the contracting authority cannot be an expert on energy efficiency, on green, on all kinds of equalities, on all those things. So, however, the way it is constructed now, whenever they buy accessible, they need to choose the accessibility of the most accessible, let's say, and the compliance with the accessibility requirements of the different bids, and they are not the experts. So, there is a fear to say, okay, if I say this one is compliant and that one is not compliant, I will have a problem because I really do not know. I'm not such an expert to differentiate on this. So, it would be really -- I think it could be helpful to have that responsibility into the bidder that they describe how it is accessible, but that they are liable for that, instead of having the liability on the public procurer, or at least some kind of shared liability.

>> JAMES THURSTON: Sure, sure. Really great. And I think, Inma, a great sort of way to transition into being more positive and forward-looking. And Susanna, I know you wear, and for years have worn a lot of hats and had a lot of leadership roles on this topic of procurement and standards that support procurement in particular. But are there -- recognizing this critical link between digital inclusion and inclusive accessible workplaces and procurement, particularly by governments, are there any tools that you would point to or recommendations of good practices that could be or should be adopted?

>> SUSANNA LAURIN: Well, I think what we do -- when we do see requirements for accessibility in public procurement tenders, then that's always kind of external-facing, which is because, of course, before we had regulation and before we had software regulations. But kind of when we talk about the workplace and the staff, they don't seem to care at all, which is kind of bad.

But of course, the new generation of the accessibility

legislation in Europe will help, because the European Accessibility Act also covers computers and things like that. And my kind of takeaway is start now, because 2025 is coming soon.

And the good news, I think, is that the private sector is moving much faster than the public sector did. I mean, if you compared it to the same number of years before the Web Accessibility Directive went into force and now when we are waiting for the European Accessibility Act -- the banks, the eCommerce and all of this, the commercial sector, the companies, they are much more on their toes than the public sector ever -- they were asleep until the directive happened. So, that is kind of rewarding from my perspective.

The ENC 01549 is kind of my baby, but the Annex B is a good tool, very helpful, many trainings are based on it. Download it, use it, try it, because you really get a lot of help there and you don't need to be a standardization expert to read that piece of the standard. So, that would be kind of also one helpful thing.

And then, I think coming back to what Susan said about management, you know, we need to go top down, and I think that also goes for the member states. Because if the member states -- if, really, the Government, not government agencies, but the Government realized that framework contracts, really large framework contracts and procurement on the government level -- I mean, that's such an effective way of making sure that public sector is really complying to the regulations. That's the most. It's facilitating for public sector bodies and you save so much money. So, I think there are some countries doing a good job there. For example, the Netherlands, really, and some federal parts of Belgium also has been doing some really clever work. So, I think that is something that the Commission could kind of push for and encourage them to do more.

>> JAMES THURSTON: And spotlight, yeah. Susan, again, I know you've been leading the way on this topic for a long time. Any particular tools that either your organization has developed or that you know of with the companies you work with that would be good practices to adopt?

>> SUSAN SCOTT-PARKER: Well, we did bring some procurement professionals together, particularly those that looked at sustainable procurement, because I think we might find more allies, if you like, in that community, because they have been looking at so many ways in which they can influence their suppliers, but also build the capacity of those suppliers to deliver that which the suppliers don't think they can deliver, either to the quality or to the cost that we would want them to.

So, we have an IT tender tool that actually attempted to give a non-expert procurement professional the ten questions he should ask whenever he went out to tender for software, perhaps 12 questions on hardware, so on, distilled from all those detailed standards, including the European -- and I'm not an expert on the technical side for a second. And I was very pleased that, actually, this tool is the one that's being pioneered -- piloted is the better word -- by ANZ in the Asia-Pacific. They are now starting -- they have added to not just hardware, software and service provision, they have added the platforms that are managed by others that they're also using for things like collaborative working, and they're now applying it to their legacy systems as they're looking at the contracts that are coming up for renewal. And the fact that we don't

understand enough about the contractual relationships that they enter into, which impose ways of working and review process and systems and so on.

I do think, however, that if we were still talking about what's not happening that should be happening, I'm not one for beating organizations up with the law, but there is no sense of legal risk. There's no sense of risk out there. You can't capture the attention of a procurement director by saying, "You're going to get 25 lawsuits, and it's really going to make you look bad and cost money." Yeah? There's no risk. And we're not seeing many of the European disability organizations, you know, out there publicly, publicly saying, "Why does the Government of Greece continue to buy this stuff?" So, there's no agitation in the system, other than, you know, believers like us coming together to talk about it together. But there's nobody, I would guess, who's Head of Procurement for any Member State Government in our audience. I make this assumption. Am I wrong? Please, audience, tell me. Are we talking to procurement directors in Switzerland? No, Switzerland's a bad one. You're not in the EU. In -- pick a country -- Germany, France. Are you there?

>> JAMES THURSTON: Yeah. You make a good point, both about the agitation in the system, and then also the need to capture the attention of the procurement channel in governments.

We're at time. Inma, I'd like to maybe close with -- there's a couple questions that you may be interested in answering. They're both related to how is the EU working on internationalization of accessibility, and in what ways is the EU working to learn and partner with the U.S. and other countries outside the EU to apply accessible procurement? Any just quick thoughts on that before we close out?

>> INMACULADA PLACENCIA PORRERO: Let me start by saying that we have to look to the U.S. and Canada pioneering on this work. I mean, they were further -- they started much earlier than us looking to accessibility of ICT. We learned from them. We partnered with them. And we will continue doing so.

We are now into a processing which we are going to revise our standards so those standards can be used with the European Accessibility Act. And we need to modify the ENC 01549, writing yet another mandate. I mean, I wrote the first one when we didn't have any legislation, basically, to get those standards with the U.S. and partner with Canada to have a common reference of what is accessible ICT?

Now, an important thing is that in that process, I know already that U.S. accessibility is interested in that process. I see we have among the participants, Susan Masouri. I mean, some people from the U.S. would be here that would know that. So, yes, we are interested. And I would like to add two little things. I mean, we established that legal link between the procurement and accessibility legislation by making compulsory the accessibility requirements and by having the standards mentioned in the legislation, that the standards that provide for social conformity could provide the preassumption that you comply with regulations on public procurement. However, Susan, when you referred to the lawsuits, there is an issue, and that is that lawsuits, if you want to call it like that, or complaints on lack of accessibility, are regulated by something called the Remedies Directive. And from there, the ones that can challenge these are competitors. So, don't look to persons with disabilities only, because they complain when there is lack

of accessibility. But if you want to challenge, the ones that can challenge the lack of accessibility in procurement request of a public authority is a company that can say, listen, you have this ability. It has not been done. You have selected a competitor that is not accessible.

>> SUSAN SCOTT-PARKER: So, how many have complained, Inma?

>> INMACULADA PLACENCIA PORRERO: I don't know, but we have here some representatives, so I think maybe it is an idea for some of the private sector here involved to start raising those points in their beats. I haven't heard, as you said, much of it, but this is true. I mean, the legislation does not allow disabled people to say, I complain because of lack of accessibility. It allows a competitor to tell, that did not contain the accessibility requirements that you are obliged to put forward. It is written like that.

So, with that, I give you back the floor, James.

>> JAMES THURSTON: Thank you so much, Inma. And we're a few minutes over, so I want to thank all of the speakers for your generosity with your perspective and your experience. Clearly, there is work to be done here. We have another event coming up that will focus on procurement again. But in this discussion, it will be focused on the role of procurement and inclusive COVID recovery. So, we'll be sharing more information on that. I'd also like to thank our interpreters today and I'd really like to thank our partners, the European Disability Forum, and Microsoft, for their commitment and their partnership in keeping with us and pushing for better use of procurement as a tool for inclusion, including in the workplace. Thank you all very much and please do enjoy the rest of your day.

(Session concluded at 10:35 a.m. CT)

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