NEWSLETTER

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Project: 101049125 — RTCN — ERASMUS-EDU-2021-PCOOP-ENGO

RightToConnect

THE RightToConnect PROJECT

Digital inclusion for persons with intellectual disabilities

About the project

Contributing to bridging the digital divide by creating accessible digital tools for people with intellectual disabilities, the Erasmus+ funded project, RightTo Connect (RTCN) was launched in continuation of the ENTELIS and ENTELIS+ projects, RTCN, led by EASPD, will contribute to:

- The development of digital skills among persons with intellectual disabilities through a peer-to-peer education model;
- A universally valid framework for competence development of those supporting learners with intellectual disabilities in developing their digital skills;
- Implement an accessible version of an e-learning platform for persons with intellectual disabilities that is co-designed with them, along with guidelines for its use;

The main target groups include persons with intellectual disabilities and organisations of persons with disabilities; other service providers, specifically social care & support providers working on/in cooperation with education & training settings; education & training providers; policy makers, stakeholders.

The 24-months long project has 10 partners spanning across Belgium, Cyprus, Italy, Greece, Austria, Spain, and Ireland that all bring to the table various expertise to achieve the goals of this project.

Co-funded by the European Union

Fundación Juan Ciudad · Hermes interactiva · aaate Association for the Advancement of Assistive Technology in Europe · Margarita Vocational Training Centre · Saint John of God Community Services clg. Liffey Services

EASPD European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities · AIAS Bologna Onlus · JKU Johannes Kepler University Linz · European University Cyprus · atempo

Improving digital skills for the Right to connect!

Active participation in daily life, today, needs a comprehensive understanding of digital tools that we use to make our lives easier. As a society that has largely transitioned to a digital space, it is important to take into account the needs and requirements of people with disabilities to ensure they are not excluded. Contributing to bridging the digital divide by creating accessible digital tools for people with intellectual disabilities, the Erasmus+ funded project, Right To Connect Now (RTCN) was launched.

Project partners met on 16th-17th May, in their first transnational project meeting online to kick off the project. This co-designed e-learning project focuses on the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities via the development of their digital skills. Urging them to be more active in their participation in society.

Project partners will meet again in Brussels on February 8th-9th, 2023 for the second transnational project meeting to discuss the progress on the co-creation labs, and e-learning platform development.

The challenges and good practices of digital literacy and social media usage of persons with intellectual disabilities

Led by EUC, JKU, and EASPD, the project has conducted a systematic literature review regarding the challenges of digital literacy and social media use by persons with intellectual disabilities of different ages.

This systematic literature review has led to several valuable conclusions, one of which being that persons with intellectual disabilities have less access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as well as fewer opportunities to learn how to use ICT. Most of the research identified was associated with access issues, leaving aside components of managing, integrating, evaluating, and creating. Persons with intellectual disabilities were included in 90% of the research with human subjects. Perceptions and practices of persons with intellectual disabilities, carers, trainers, and staff within organizations were frequently included. On the other hand, designers and self-advocates were included less frequently. With regards to gender representation, when information about the gender of persons with intellectual disabilities participants was included in the literature reviewed, men and women were usually equally included. Relevant research was found to be conducted mostly in Australia, USA, United Kingdom, and Spain, whereas no reports of findings from research in African countries were identified. Also, issues of ICT use by persons with severe and profound intellectual disabilities were less often a subject of research.

Barriers and challenges for the use of ICT by persons with intellectual disabilities can be attributed to the government and other stakeholders. These include the cost of devices and different governmental definition of accessibility by different countries. These barriers and challenges became more acute during the COVID-19 pandemic. General societal and attitudinal level barriers include lack of full accessibility (digital, physical, social), less services in transitioning to adulthood and workplace, lack of community integration, and potential stigma for the use of non-mainstream technology. Barriers on service levels vary and concern assessment and training procedures regarding persons with intellectual disabilities and their carers. Technical parameters of the system are also important and can also lead to abandonment of technology.

It is reported that both persons with intellectual disabilities and their carers or trainers should have the digital competences to use ICT. Performing web searches and the use of emailing, use of social media and YouTube, as well as safety concerns were recurring issues, whereas the use of forums supported technically and emotionally parents who needed it.

Persons with intellectual disabilities are reported to use digital technology for social media and social networking, to a great extent. Use of social media is considered as an arena for formation of identity, and an opportunity for the person to remain anonymous. Nevertheless, this entails dangers, as perceived mainly by their parents, such as bullying or sexual exploitation. Regarding co-design methodology in particular, the literature reviewed acknowledged the importance of participatory research, observation and discussion, workshops, interviews, focus groups, the use of storyboards in the design process, and the integration of an advisory board. This is a process that is often described as iterative.

Inclusive digital education: What is the EU doing?

Coming together at the ICCHP/AAATE Lecco conference on Digital Inclusion, Assistive Technology & Accessibility this 13th of July 2022, the ENTELIS network held a workshop on the variety of projects being implemented to improve inclusive education in Europe in the midst of digitalisation

On behalf of the RTCN project consortium, Thomas Bignal, head of policy at EASPD presented a brief of the current policy landscape of EU toward ensuring an inclusive digital society. He also highlighted some of the current challenges that digitalisation brings to service providers for people with disabilities including in the field of education. Katerina Mavrou, Former President of the Association of the consortium partner Advancement of Assistive Technology in Europe (AAATE) and Associate Professor at European University Cyprus, presented an overview of the key common intersection areas of 4 projects that come out from the ENTELIS network

During the panel discussion, Omor Ahmed, project officer at EASPD highlighted the journey of how the RightToConnect project become a reality after a successful awareness raising campaign #RightToConnectNow during the Entelis+ project. He also presented the key outputs planned to be produced and the major challenges foreseen in the project in the coming months..

To further capture the benefits of digital tools for persons with intellectual disabilities, it is important to develop accessible and easy to use technical solutions and digital competencies. Even though digital competencies are acquired, there are many barriers that still exist that exclude person with intellectual disabilities to participate in a digital society.

The panelists agreed that to foster accessibility, co-design can become a viable solution as it allows including the end user in the design process and reduce the additional cost of redesign. During the question-and-answer session, the RTCN consortium partners discussed the potential challenges of implementing the design thinking workshops on a transnational scale.

Panel discussions eventually gave way to a project development workshop hosted by EASPD that gave the participants an opportunity to discuss how to develop follow-up projects in the future, under various EU funded project calls to mainstream inclusive education for people with disabilities. Sitting in different groups the participants discussed different country-specific challenges to mainstream inclusive education at local and national level. With exchange of ideas for potential solutions and current best practices, this session was interactive and stimulating.

WEBSITE LAUCH!

We have lauched our project website. Please visit www.righttotoconnect.entelis.net and stay tuned for more updates on our upcoming outputs

SJOG Liffey Zero Project Shortlist 2023 ENGAGE Co-Design Practices

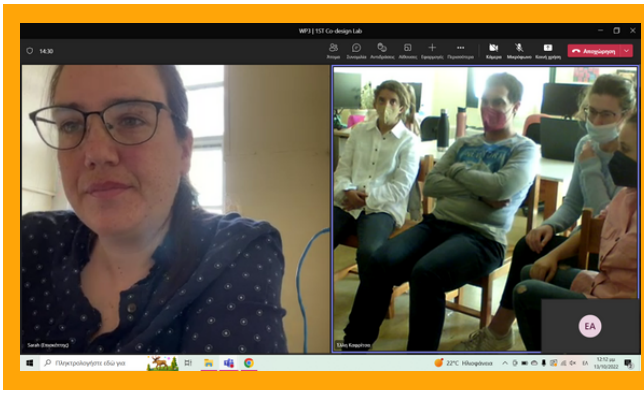
Saint John of God Liffey Services one of our RTCN partners is delighted to be shortlisted in the Zero Project nominations this year. Out of an impressive 319 nominations from 78 countries for #ZeroCall23 our Co-Design ENGAGE toolkit and practices is one of two Irish projects chosen that is centered on Innovative Practices and Policies in the field of Independent Living & Political Participation and ICT.

The Zero Project is committed to support the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) around the world. The global nominations are marked by quality and cover a wide variety of topics such as Supported Living, Self-Employment /Micro Finance or Early Childhood Intervention; those focusing on ICT had a focus on Community and Knowledge Platforms, Assistive Technology, and Translation/Conversation Tools. The international peer-review process of thoroughly screening, shortlisting, voting, and finally selecting the Awardees of the Zero Project has begun and will continue until September 2022. Civil society, public sector, business sector and ICT-based solutions. The initiation of this project was created on the basis of people with intellectual disabilities wanting to develop an app solution to challenges they were encountering. This started with a self-advocate approaching a Computer Scientist at a CHAT event (Community Hub for Assistive Technology -Freedomtech.ie) to assist in making this opportunity a reality. This led to further discussions between Assistive Technology Facilitator Sarah Boland and Dr John Gilligan from DIT now TU Dublin, who further explored the notion of collaboratively creating technological design solutions, to assist in the well-described difficulties PwID encounter with technology. The co-design project intends to holistically involve the PwID as co-designers, to design WITH them and not FOR them. Therefore, the PwID are placed at the heart of the project; they provide the project ideas, join the designers in building a technological app or solution to a problem, and engage in the designing process (being up-skilled separately and collectively along the way).

The co-designers heavily influence the final product, and practical solutions in their agreement is sought during each phase to make changes. The co-designers opinions and validation of the changes are required, and their user experience is highly regarded and guides the decision-making/ designing process. The teams evaluation depends on how well the project works for the PwID and how it makes them feel. If the solution alleviates the daily barriers, they encounter.

Co-creation labs kicked-off

SJOG Liffey, Ireland



VTC Margarita, Greece

We are delighted to kick off the training sessions with the Right to Connect (RTCN) participants at SJOG Liffey Services. This week we got to link with partner organization Margarita in Greece and run a workshop on Empathy together. The sessions will continue in the coming weeks where many exercises will be taking place both in-person and virtually.

stay tuned to know more about the training taking place in Austria, Italy and Spain

For any questions, please contact

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