Digitalisation and Digital Transformation in Europe: Implications for Persons with Disabilities

Reflections on EU and National Strategies and Plans

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Definitions

- Digitalisation and digital transformation: the shift by organisations, in both the private and public sector, and individuals, towards digital interactions and environments, using a range of digital technologies in all spheres of life.

- Digital technologies include, but are not limited to: ICT, AI, the internet of things, wireless data communication, biotechnologies, nanotechnologies and advanced robotics.

EU Strategies (1)

- Strategies on digitalisation in a broad sense, e.g. *Shaping Europe's digital future: A European strategy for data*

- Strategies focusing on digitalisation in specific areas, e.g. the *Digital Education Action Plan*

- Strategies in specific fields which address digitalisation amongst many other issues, e.g. the *New Consumer Agenda*

- The *European Disability Strategy 2021-2030*

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EU Strategies (2)

- Many of the principles and planned actions in the mainstream strategies are of potential relevance for people with disabilities, but this group is often not explicitly mentioned.

- Fundamental rights, social participation and digital inclusion are mentioned in many strategies, but also without a specific reference to persons with disabilities.

- Explicit references to persons with disabilities are often fairly general and not specific.

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EU Strategies (3)

- The European Disability Strategy pays attention to digitalisation in different areas: web accessibility, independent and community-based services, skills development, access to justice, legal protection, freedom and security, education and healthcare.

- To address the needs of persons with disabilities, mainstream instruments must also include a disability perspective, with this approach buttressed by the European Disability Strategy.

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National Strategies

- National digitalisation strategies

- Sector or issue specific digitalisation strategies

- Disability strategies

National Digitalisation Strategies (1)

- Not all national digitalisation strategies refer to persons with disabilities.

Those that do, do so in the following ways:

- Implicitly, as part of an overall commitment to inclusion or equality

- Implicitly or explicitly in terms of "vulnerable" or "disadvantaged" groups

- Explicitly, in relation to accessibility

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National Digitalisation Strategies (2)

- Where disability is mentioned, the emphasis is usually on ensuring that persons with disabilities are not excluded or left behind, rather than on harnessing digitalisation to remove barriers or address existing inequalities.

- Practical steps to address the situation of persons with disabilities are rarely elaborated.

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National Sector Specific Digitalisation Strategies

- These strategies address areas such as education, health, digital government including social welfare, digital skills, and the digital infrastructure.

- Some of these mainstream strategies do address persons with disabilities explicitly. However there is a lack of consistency.

- The rights and the situations of persons with disabilities are not routinely addressed, and OPDs have not been consulted when drawing up the strategies.

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National Disability Strategies

- Website accessibility seems to be the primary focus from the perspective of digitalisation.

- Beyond this, there is little reference to the need to ensure that digitalisation is disability-inclusive.

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Conclusion

- The situation of persons with disabilities has received only marginal attention in the elaboration of EU and national strategies concerning digitalisation.

- There is little evidence that people with disabilities or their representative organisations have been meaningfully involved in the development of such strategies.

- At the national level, digitalisation is also generally peripheral to disability strategies, aside from the important area of website accessibility.

- In contrast, the European Disability Strategy adopts a broader perspective to digitalisation.

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