EASPD

European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities

GOING ONLINE: SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS AND BEYOND

2020

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European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities

Going Online:
Services for people with disabilities during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond

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Executive Summary

The past one and a half years have been defined by the COVID-19 pandemic and the far-reaching restrictions that were imposed throughout Europe to contain the new virus. When nearly all forms of face-to-face interaction were cancelled in the beginning of 2020, people turned to the internet for ways to continue working, learning and interacting socially. EASPD member organisations too found a myriad of ways to stay in touch with their users and to continue providing services online. There were many challenges involved in creating and implementing these services, as most service providers had little or no experience in working online with their users.

However, the EASPD community rose to the occasion in many different ways. From training staff and users in the most basic internet competences, to creating completely new materials and methods from scratch, the EASPD member organisations were very resourceful and tireless in creating good online solutions for their users. And although service providers and users found that there are limitations to online services, there is no doubt that they also have enough important benefits that make it worthwhile to continue providing them - especially in combination with face-to-face services.

In order to learn from the experiences of the last one and a half years and to use the lessons learned for the further development and implementation of online services, the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) commissioned a study in the summer of 2021 to research the experiences of EASPD member organisations in implementing online solutions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study considered the whole of Europe while examining 10 countries more closely. Extensive online research was first conducted on the online activities of EASPD member organisations and other service providers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Then, in-depth interviews were conducted with 11 service providers and questionnaires were disseminated to all EASPD member organisations. 58 service providers and 95 users responded to this online survey.

The findings of the study are brought together in this report that takes the reader through the service providers' responses to the lockdowns, issues concerning internet connectivity, data protection and online security, a method for evaluating and building the competences of staff and users in using the internet and digital devices, considerations regarding the accessibility of video conferencing tools and the contents of online services, observations on the empowering effect of digital competence and on the role of users' parents, and finally, suggestions for procuring funding for digital projects.

The report brings forth the following recommendations for steps that should be taken by EASPD, its member organisations and policy makers in order to ensure that safe, accessible, empowering and sustainable online services of a high quality can be offered by EASPD member organisations in the future:

For EASPD

1. Create an open, curated database for collecting EASPD member organisations' online materials.
2. Create a database of funding opportunities (grants, subsidies, calls for tenders and proposals for digital projects)
3. Create consortiums within the EASPD community to apply for funding for EU- projects.
4. Provide training for staff of EASPD member organisations in
    1. Data protection, ethics and privacy
    2. Creating online content
    3. Digital accessibility
    4. Training users in digital competence
5. Create online formats for staff to collaborate with colleagues in other countries.
6. Create online formats for users to interact with users in other countries.
7. Collaborate with relevant EU-projects such as EU Digital Education Plan or Corona Virus: Online learning resources

For EASPD member organisations

1. Collect and evaluate the organisation's online materials and methods.
    1. Delegate this task to a person or team with the necessary competence.
    2. Involve interns, research students or volunteers to save costs and staff time.
2. Translate and adapt online materials created by EASPD member organisations in other countries.
3. Collect feedback from users regarding their online experiences and needs.
    1. Include users with different disabilities, digital skills and from various age groups.
    2. Include users who have not yet taken advantage of the organisation's online services.
4. Provide users with opportunities to create their own online content.
5. Collect feedback from the parents of users on their experiences with the online services provided for their children.
6. Evaluate the digital competence of staff and users.
7. Train staff and users (and parents / caretakers) in digital competence accordingly.
    1. Take their concerns and insecurity about using the new technologies seriously.
    2. Create a format that is user-friendly, hands-on, based on practical, real-life examples.
    3. Avoid purely theoretical instruction.
8. Train a person to be the organisation's expert in online accessibility.
9. Assess (and improve, if necessary) the data protection and privacy of the organisation's online presence.
10. Designate (and train, if necessary) a person to be organisation's expert on data protection, ethics and privacy.

11. Fundraise for the organisation's development of online services.
    1. Ask local companies to donate money, software or hardware.
    2. Create project partnerships with EASPD member organisations in other countries.
12. Make technological devices available to users.

For policy makers

1. Create EU funding opportunities that are less bureaucratic.
2. Make internet access available to everyone.
3. Create sustainable funding opportunities for projects that are already in existence.
4. Create a solid, comprehensive and understandable legal framework for online services.

Introduction

In the beginning of 2020, the world was taken by surprise by the new COVID-19 virus and people everywhere were thrown into a completely new, often frightening situation. The contact restrictions that were imposed in every country in Europe to contain the virus were far-reaching and demanded innovative solutions. Overnight, people turned to the internet for ways to carry on with their daily activities, be it for work, recreation, schooling, social interaction, therapies, medical appointments, or cultural and other activities. Although the digitalisation of Europe had been making great strides in the last years, the pandemic made clear how much work still needs to be done in this area. People often had little to work with and had to be very resourceful in finding and creating online solutions for themselves and others.

The service providers for persons with disabilities across Europe were no exception to this. From one day to the next they were prohibited from carrying out their regular services for their users and they quickly began working on online alternatives. Some already had certain materials, tools and expertise on hand, but the majority reacted to the new situation on the fly. Learning by doing became the norm and a very steep learning curve was often the result.

In order to learn from this shared experience of trial and error and to not repeat mistakes, to find out what still needs to be done, and to develop good practices for the future, the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) commissioned a study in the summer of 2021. The study was carried out by the non-profit organisation Sozialhelden e.V. (Social Heroes), a disability rights organisation based in Berlin. The study's purpose was to find out about the experiences of EASPD member organisations in implementing online solutions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to highlight good practices and policies, so as to formulate recommendations for different stakeholders in order to improve the design and delivery of online services in the future.

While the study considered the whole of Europe (and beyond), the countries that were examined more closely during the study were Spain, Netherlands, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Malta, Israel and Poland, countries in which EASPD has member or affiliated organisations. Extensive online research was conducted on the situation in these countries and on the activities of member and non-member organisations during the pandemic. In-depth interviews were conducted via video calls with 11 service providers, and surveys were disseminated to the EASPD member organisations to be relayed to their staff and users.

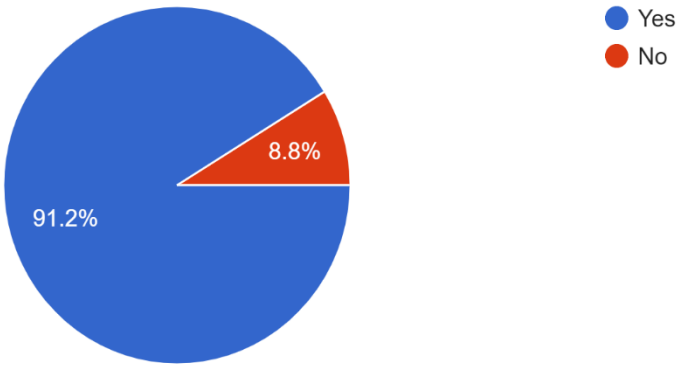
The survey for EASPD service users had 95 respondents from Germany, Spain, Greece, Finland, and Poland. The survey for EASPD service providers had 58 respondents from Albania, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Greece, Georgia, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, North Macedonia, Portugal, Slovenia, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, and Spain. By far the greatest number of these respondents were managers or team leaders. 72.1 % work with people with a cognitive or intellectual disability, 57.9% with a learning disability, 56.1 % with autism, 54.4% with a mental health condition, 54.4 % with a physical disability, 29.8 % with a hearing impairment or deaf, and 22.8 % with a visual impairment or blind.

The study focused on activities for people with disabilities in the areas of:

1. Education for children
2. Support services in areas such as social and cultural life, independent living, recreation and sports, occupational, music, art, speech and physical therapy, and job coaching
3. E-health including counselling and psychotherapy

The EASPD member organisations whom we interviewed and researched are particularly active in the area of online services and the variety of activities that they have created and are providing is overwhelming. But EASPD members in general seem to have been quite active online, as 91 % of the respondents in our survey stated that their organisations had provided online services during the pandemic.

Figure 1.1: Survey response on whether organisations provided online services during the pandemic.



Unfortunately, this is not typical of how people with disabilities were generally supported in this time of crisis. Instead, reports of how people with disabilities and their families were often forgotten throughout Europe predominated the news the last year and a half. One example of this is reflected in an online survey conducted in May 2020 by the Fraunhofer Institut and the Inclusion Tech Lab in Germany among more than 1700 parents of children with disabilities. Quite disconcerting is that among this group, online alternatives apparently did not play a role as families were left completely alone in compensating for the lack of schooling or other activities.

As a result, 40% of the respondents expressed a wish for some kind of online support services. This leads us to believe that the good practices and policies that EASPD member organisations have developed can play an important role for people with disabilities throughout Europe, far beyond the EASPD community.

The commissioned study involved research both into the experiences of service providers and users, as well as into a wide variety of aspects that should be considered when providing online services. These aspects included - amongst others - topics as varied as users' digital competence, data protection, accessibility, good practices, and the role of the users' parents. This report takes the reader through our findings with regard to these different aspects, culminating in a series of recommendations.

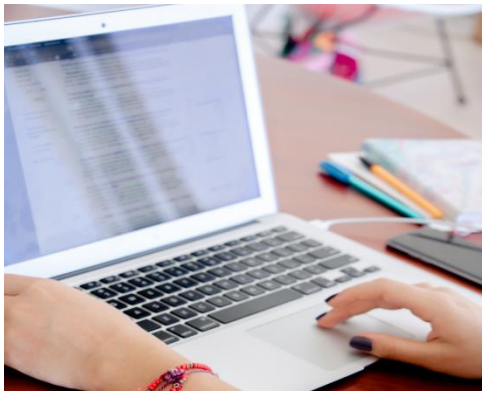
This report can only be a small window into what the EASPD community experienced, learned, and created throughout the first year and a half of the pandemic. The hope is that this report will create an impulse among EASPD members for much more sharing of experiences, inventarizing of contents and methods, collaboration on new projects, and Europe-wide support for each other's journeys into a more equal and accessible digital age.

In order to put the findings of this study into their proper context, it is important to have the exceptional situation that service providers and users found themselves in - and that made this study necessary in the first place - clearly in mind.

The service providers' response to COVID-19 restrictions

EASPD member organisations provide services to vulnerable communities who were especially affected by the strict COVID-19 measures that were implemented across Europe. As it became clear that face-to-face interactions would not be possible for a while, service providers quickly started looking towards the internet as a means to stay in touch and to continue to provide vital services.

Some organisations put a task force in charge of creating and maintaining online services. Other organisations used the new situation to involve their users actively in creating activities



and courses: the users were asked what kind of activities are important for them and which activities they themselves could offer to others. In one organisation we spoke to, users were given a decisive role in creating quality standards for online activities and in creating peer groups.

The staff members worked very hard, often too hard. They were struggling with stressful situations in their own personal lives, with partners also at home working and children in home schooling, while at the same time working overtime for their users.

"We have to be ready for the future. We do not know where to start."

The stress that staff went through was especially severe when they had young users or users with more severe intellectual disabilities because the user's parents were often confronted with overwhelming challenges and also needed a great deal of support.

Some of the staff were very hesitant about going online and even refused at first. They were uncomfortable about being seen online, nervous about privacy issues, and insecure about using the intimidating technology. But given time and experience many came around. Some of the loudest nay-sayers eventually became very positive proponents of online activities.

Online programmes, classes, therapies, activities and much more have been developed by the service providers. A great deal of creative energy had been unleashed as services providers began thinking completely out of the box. According to our survey among service providers, the types of services that were most frequently provided were activities for social interaction, education, occupational therapy and recreation. If one adds up the percentages for social interaction and recreation as services that cover very similar needs, this shows the enormous importance of the social component of online services during the pandemic.

"Now I can see my friends everyday."

Service providers encountered many problems in the way services for people with disabilities went online. There was little or no materials available, no established structures, and no time to analyse if what was being done was useful or if there were other, better solutions to be found. More than half of the respondents of our survey reported that there was little or no expertise within their organisation with regard to using online technology at the beginning of the pandemic.

"It was extremely stressful that the online solutions were created on the fly, in the middle of a crisis"

Staff turned to the channels of communication that were already in place. For many, WhatsApp messages and telephone calls were the channels that were often used at first. Using more sophisticated tools such as Zoom or Google Classroom required more preparation. Many users and parents of users had little or no experience in using the internet.


Email addresses had to be created, long-forgotten passwords retrieved, and step-by-step instructions relayed by telephone or WhatsApp messages. Social workers or other staff members in some countries went to the homes of the users to teach them to use tablets, laptops, and smartphones. Art supplies, cooking ingredients, and learning materials were delivered to the homes of users so that activities could then be carried out together online. Because the time spent online together was so much shorter than the rest of the day, flipped learning became a frequently used method: users would be provided with materials and assignments that they were to learn on their own or with support from their parents or caregivers. During the limited online sessions the teachers or therapists would then put into practice what had been learned or offer additional instruction where needed.

Many of the experiences encountered were very similar in the different countries we studied. But there were also stark differences, especially in the quality of the internet connection and the availability of the devices necessary for interacting online. In Finland, for example, the use of the internet and technological devices did not pose so much of a problem. On the other hand, in Poland and northern, rural Spain the lack of good internet service created a barrier for many. In such places telephone calls were used much more often, for instance to stay in touch and to counsel and comfort. There were often special challenges involved with users living in group homes because of a complete lack of internet service, because the residential staff did not feel it was their responsibility to help their residents gain access to online activities, or because sign language interpreters were not allowed on the premises because of COVID-19 restrictions.

Many of the problems service providers encountered were the same ones people all over the world were encountering in these completely new ways of interacting and working with one another. Feelings of unease prevailed about privacy and data protection, when using video conferencing tools for which new recommendations and privacy warnings were frequently

published. Many practices were initiated that were not compliant with privacy laws and data protection regulations because there was no time to learn about the risks or regulations or to find or create better alternatives. Having to teach staff and users about internet safety and netiquette while already navigating unfamiliar online tools and technical devices, left many feeling insecure. Especially in very sensitive areas such as counselling and eHealth the staff experienced considerable stress and uncertainty because online solutions were developed and immediately implemented, without alternatives, in the middle of a crisis. Personal privacy was an additional problem for many, as parents and caretakers could now listen in on everything in close quarters at home.

"Both sides still need more training, the recipients and the professionals"

The most frequent reasons for not providing services online were that certain services are not suitable for an online format and that the users were not able to use the necessary technical devices. In those cases, organisations sometimes moved activities outdoors when this was allowed by public authorities. The limitations of online interaction were more obvious in some types of services than in others. For instance, behaviouristic strategies need to be shown live, hands-on interaction is necessary for some therapies, assistive technology devices must be set up on location, etc. Some service providers reported that the lockdown had thrown their users back in their progress by as much as several years. It is vital that with all the emphasis on further developing online formats, just as much emphasis be placed on making up for lost time for those that were left behind on account of the COVID-19 restrictions.

When the basics such as a stable and affordable internet connection and laptops or tablets were provided for, the main ingredients for successfully going online with services seem to have been an openness to try new things, motivated staff, and a strong commitment to be there for the users and their families. This human component of the digitalisation process is especially striking and should not be forgotten when implementing digital strategies.

Connectivity

The most basic requirement for providing online services is that a reliable, affordable and stable internet service be available to providers and users. The pandemic made the extent of the connectivity divide in Europe very apparent. Of the many inequalities exposed by COVID-19, the digital divide is not only one of the most stark, but also among the most surprising. Even in developed countries, internet access is often lower than one might think. And consequently, a constant, and very fundamental problem for EASPD member organisations and their users during COVID-19 has been the lack of a quality internet connection.

Unfortunately, the existence or quality of an internet connection depends on many factors, many of which service providers themselves have little or no influence upon. While virtually all urban areas in Europe are covered by a mobile-broadband network, many gaps still exist in rural areas. While the percentage of households with computers and/or internet access at home in Europe is 88% in urban areas, it is only 78% in rural areas. In response, the EU's main goal in its digital strategy is for every European household to have access to high-speed internet coverage by 2025 and gigabit connectivity by 2030. This is encouraging but does not solve the problem of the connectivity divide in the short term.

An area in which EASPD member organisations can however play a role is in raising awareness for the right to internet access for all their users and clients. For example, residents in group homes sometimes do not have access to the internet out of a paternalistic standpoint that the residents are not capable of using it or out of the viewpoint that they need to be protected from the potential harms of the internet.

In Germany, a petition was started to change the law regulating group homes demanding that the residents in old-age homes or homes for people with disabilities be provided with internet service. The petition was not very successful, but it illustrates the problem that many vulnerable communities were completely cut off from the rest of the world during the lockdown periods on account of not having access to the internet.

Other EASPD users did not have internet access because they could not afford it. This is also an area where organisations such as EASPD can play an important role in lobbying for financing of internet access as a basic need and right for everyone in 2021.

Even in large cities with wide-spread internet access the stability of individual internet connections can be extremely variable, as stated by respondents who experienced outages, sometimes very brief, other times lasting for several hours. For many people this was a minor nuisance which involved having to log on again, calling in by phone instead, or using mobile data or a hotspot when the Wi-Fi at home failed. For others, who were nervous about using the internet in the first place, this was a considerable additional stress factor. It can make a significant difference in the willingness to use online services if the infrastructure consistently works and can be relied upon. If one goes into an online session with an insecure feeling that one is going to be presented with technical problems that one does not feel equipped to solve, then the actual quality of the online session itself becomes irrelevant. Teaching staff and users to deal with internet connectivity problems will raise their confidence and make them more open to using or providing services online, regardless of whether the internet connection sometimes fails or wavers.

Digital Devices

In order to make use of online services users must of course have access to a laptop, PC, tablet or smartphone. A recurring problem for service providers was that older users or people with a lower socioeconomic status did not always have access to a digital device.

In some families, one or two devices had to be shared among several siblings who were all at home at the same time, one attending online classes, another doing physical therapy, and the third wanting to interact with friends. In this respect there are still significant differences between European countries. Where for instance access to digital devices did not seem to be a problem in Finland, in Greece and Poland it was. Although the use of smartphones is very wide-spread throughout all of Europe, smartphones are not always sufficient for online services on account of their small screens, poor audio quality, and limited storage capacity.

Some organisations received donations of tablets from private companies, others lent their users devices that were previously only used on the premises of the organisations before the

pandemic. In planning the future of their online services, EASPD member organisations must make it a priority to ensure that their users have access to appropriate, user-friendly devices.

Digital Competence

One challenge that EASPD member organisations encountered when services suddenly went online was the extreme difference in the abilities of both staff and users in the use of digital technologies. It quickly became apparent that some people, especially users with learning or cognitive disabilities and older staff members or users, did not have even a basic knowledge of how to use the internet. Others had basic skills but were unsure about using the new tools and formats that organisations put into use. In order to effectively continue using online services in the future it is vital that users and providers gain a certain level of digital proficiency. In order to achieve this goal a digital strategy should be created at an organisational level.

As a first step organisations need to take a close look at the current digital competence of their staff and users. Not everyone needs the same level of expertise, but it is important for management in organisations to know how to evaluate what the current situation is with regard to digital skills and what should be strived for in the future. However, for many people "digital competence" is only a vague concept. Is it the ability to use apps on a smartphone, is it the knowledge of how to use the internet to find information, or is it the skill to create and implement online contents? Or is it much more?

In order to understand, evaluate, and teach digital competence the EU Commission has developed DigComp 2.1: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens with eight proficiency levels and examples of use. This is a very detailed tool that can be used to evaluate where an organisation's users and staff are in their digital competences and to aid in planning where they ideally need or want to be. The tool is based on the following competences, each with eight proficiency levels:

- 1) **Information and data literacy**: To articulate information needs, to locate and retrieve digital data, information and content. To judge the relevance of the source and its content. To store, manage, and organise digital data, information and content.
- 2) **Communication and collaboration**: To interact, communicate and collaborate through digital technologies while being aware of cultural and generational diversity. To participate in society through public and private digital services and participatory citizenship. To manage one's digital identity and reputation.
- 3) **Digital content creation**: To create and edit digital content. To improve and integrate information and content into an existing body of knowledge while understanding how copyright and licences are to be applied. To know how to give understandable instructions for a computer system.
- 4) **Safety**: To protect devices, content, personal data and privacy in digital environments. To protect physical and psychological health, and to be aware of digital technologies for social well-being and social inclusion. To be aware of the environmental impact of digital technologies and their use.
- 5) **Problem solving**: To identify needs and problems, and to resolve conceptual problems and problem situations in digital environments. To use digital tools to innovate processes and products. To keep up-to-date with the digital evolution.

To support organisations in the implementation of these competences an accompanying guide was created with case studies and tools: DigComp into Action: Get inspired, make it happen. A user guide to the European Digital Competence Framework.

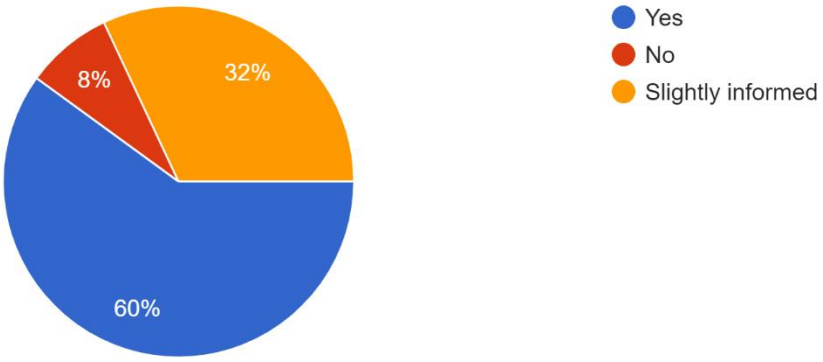
The assessment tool is quite elaborate and might be too intricate in all of its facets for every organisation. And not all of the aspects are necessarily pertinent to the work of EASPD member organisations.

Nevertheless, the tool and accompanying guide can be very useful to understand the different stages of digital competence, to have an understanding of the current levels of proficiency in the organisation and to lay out a strategy of how the organisation and its staff can improve in the future, including methods and targets.

Data Protection and online Safety

As soon as an organisation has an online presence it needs to concern itself with data protection and privacy regulations and measures. For many people this topic is a riddle wrapped up in an enigma. Only 60% of the respondents of our survey replied that their organisation is well informed about the legal aspects of providing services online. Every organisation in Europe that has an online presence must make itself familiar with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Figure 1.2: Survey response on if the organisation is well informed on legal aspects on providing services online



The GDPR is the strictest online privacy and security legal instrument in the world and it allows people in the European Union to control the use of the data that is collected about them online. Data is particularly valuable on the internet, as it can be used to analyse usage patterns, thereby making targeted advertising possible. This data can also be used to create profiles of people that reflect their personal preferences. This is very valuable for profit-oriented companies. However, information portals, advice sites or online forms of interaction,

such as eLearning or eHealth, should not use the data of their users for advertising or similar purposes.

Rather, data minimisation should be strived for in the types of online services covered by this report. Or in other words, the approach to be adopted by such services should be: collect as much personal data as necessary, as little as possible. Especially in the case of an organisation working with children, consent to process data must be obtained from a parent - for children under 16 this is mandatory.

The principles behind the GDPR can be summarized as follows: (Art. 5 - GDPR):

Lawfulness - Comply with legal requirements.

Transparency - Provide information on what is being done with the data.

Data minimisation - Do not store and process more data than necessary.

Accuracy - The data must be accurate; users have a right to correction otherwise.

Deletion - Delete data that is no longer needed.

Confidentiality and IT security - Keep data confidential and secure.

There are many products available to make websites GDPR-compliant, for example Consent Management Platforms (CMP). This is software that enables a website or app to comply with GDPR and other data privacy regulations. CMPs allow websites to inform visitors about the types of data they want to collect and ask users for consent for specific processing purposes. These enable the website to be designed in a legally compliant manner. In order to save costs, non profit organisations often resort to free products to make their website GDPR-compliant. However, these products are not necessarily the best choice, especially for users with disabilities. It is advisable to look primarily at the needs of an organisation and its users and not to shy away from paid and customised products when they prove more suitable.

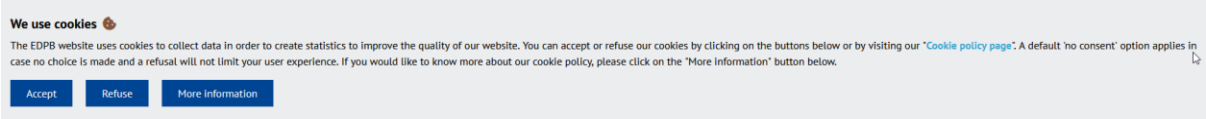
Particular attention must be paid to protecting the data of people with disabilities. Their self-determined choice of which data is to be processed is often denied because opting out of data collection can be made very difficult by website or app providers. The consent management platforms are often deliberately built in a confusing way and intentionally put up many barriers in order to increase the so-called opt-in rate. The opt-in rate indicates, in abbreviated form, whether users agree to cookies, including those intended for marketing. In virtually all cases, these are not barrier-free, described with complicated wording, and provided with non-intuitive colour codes and button sizes.

The developers of these systems want to enable a higher opt-in rate for market-oriented companies.

Some systems require hundreds of cookie services to be manually deselected - this is unreasonable and sometimes impossible with a screen reader. EASPD member organisations should clearly state that they will not store personal and personally identifiable data and emphasise this choice - in contrast to the market-oriented solutions.

The website of the European Data Protection Board is an example of a very user-friendly CMP because it grants privacy per design and default, as stated in their CMP-Message:

"A default 'no consent' option applies in case no choice is made and a refusal will not limit your user experience."



Particular caution and awareness are needed for special categories of personal data. This is data relating to ethnic origin, religious or ideological beliefs, trade union affiliations, genetic data, health data, biometric data, and information on sexuality or sexual orientation. These are common in eHealth and counselling and also often in eLearning modules. Such data may be processed on the grounds of specific consent only.

The following steps are a suggestion on how to implement data protection in organisations:

- In consultation with the developers of the organisation's website and other tools for digital interaction:
    - Check the integrity of the website - i.e. whether the website has been properly programmed, meets the latest standards and, in the case of services, has an appropriate level of trustworthiness.
    - Check which plugins are installed and whether they are are needed

- Check all services such as the web host, cloud services, databases, accounting, spreadsheets, docs, embedded videos, mail servers and so on, to see if a processing contract already exists under the General Terms and Conditions and if not, find an alternative that does provide for a processing contract or enter into a processing contract with the service provider.
- Build a directory that lists all data processing activities.
    - Article 30 of the GDPR can be used as a checklist for this
- Check compliance with the GDPR and local regulations for the organisation's data processing and storage.
- Raise awareness among those who interact with user data.
- Store and analyse as little as possible.
- Make extensive use of the information available. For example, the EU website on the GDPR contains a helpful checklist: https://gdpr.eu/checklist/

As a note of caution: data protection is not exclusively regulated by the GDPR. Many countries have other laws that govern the protection of the individuals behind the data. It is important that EASPD member organisations be informed as to which other regulations apply in their region.

COVID-19 has underscored the importance of keeping children safe online. For specific questions around child safety the ITU Child Online Protection programme launched a website in 2021 with information, guidelines and YouTube video lessons in different languages for children, parents and educators, industry and policy makers. Also, EUROPOL has collaborated with international partners to develop Online Safety Advice for Parents and Carers to help keep children safe online.

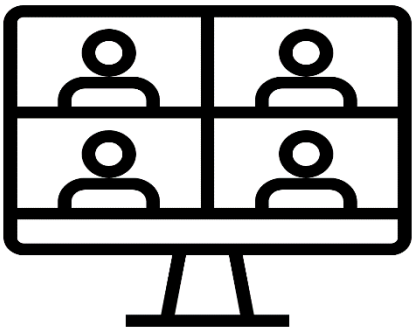
EASPD member organisations were especially active in the areas of remote monitoring, self-management, consultation and therapy services during the pandemic. These areas fall under the umbrella term "eHealth" which covers a wide range of health and care services delivered through information and communication technologies (ICTs). eHealth is a field in which questions of data protection, ethics and privacy play an especially important role.

During the COVID-19 crisis, the European Association for Psychotherapy published guidelines on providing psychotherapy online, which address ethics and privacy and that are also useful for other types of telehealth service providers.

Corresponding competences have been formulated by the Association for Counseling and Therapy Online in a very useful list of competences necessary to ensure safe, ethical and professional standards in online therapy, including the assessment of clients' suitability for online sessions, risk management and the psychological processes relevant to online therapy.

Video conferencing systems

Many forms of online interaction use video conferencing systems. They can be a wonderful tool with many advantages, when face-to-face interaction is not possible. But they also have problematic sides. Although some users and staff enjoyed the intimacy of virtually being in each other's homes, others felt uncomfortable about letting others see their living quarters, their families, and even their pets. One method to avoid unwanted views into private premises is to use another visual background or to use the blur function that many video conferencing systems offer. This function analyses the image and obscures everything in the background while focusing on the person in question.



Especially when using services such as video conferencing systems, compliance with the GDPR can become problematic. Particularly in the case of sensitive conversations, e.g., a consultation on health issues, special data economy is required. In the first months of the pandemic, it seemed that every few days there were new warnings about the dangers related to one video conferencing system or another. This caused a great deal of confusion and unease for service providers and users.

We have put together some points to consider and general advice when using a video conferencing system:

- It is best to use services from the European Economic Area. International data transfers complicate and increase the cost of ensuring legal compliance enormously. Services from "third countries" (countries outside the European Economic Area) must have standard protection clauses that comply with the GDPR or a processing contract must be in place. However, there are some countries that already meet the standards across the board, the "adequacy decisions".
- Alternatively, if practicable, it is worthwhile to host the services yourself, i.e. to make them available on your own servers.
- Privacy by default: Collect as little data as possible and set the basic settings of the consent management systems to be as data-saving as possible. Be particularly

careful with health data and other sensitive data - the safest way here is to obtain separate consent for sensitive data.

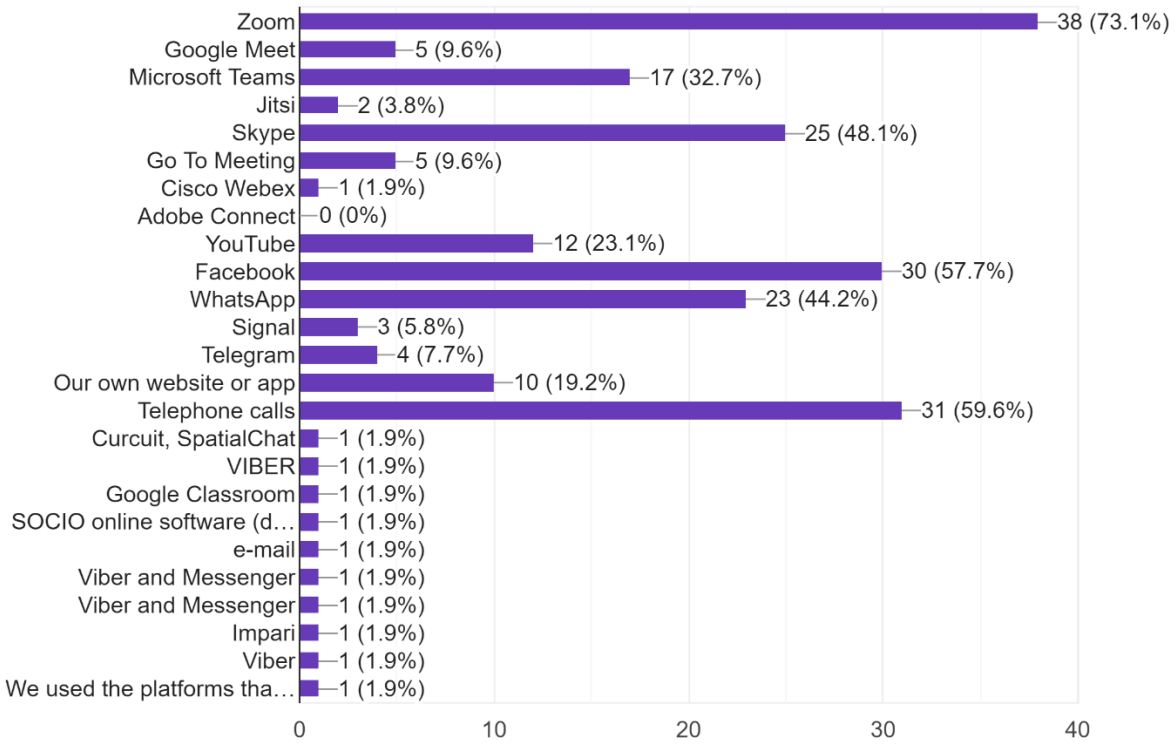
- Check with country-specific data protection authorities. Many offer assessments of services to see if they are compliant with the GDPR. Checklists for the GDPR can also provide security when implementing your own platform.
- Always know what data is collected, when, for what and where, and provide this information in your privacy policy. A register of processing activities is worthwhile here, in accordance with Art. 30 GDPR.
- Delete the data immediately if it is no longer needed.
- The safest way is to always obtain consent for any data processing you do.
- Always check the "technical-organisational measures", e.g. pseudonymisation, backup procedures, encryption, etc.
- Give as few people as necessary access to the collected data. Above a certain number of people who can access this data, many countries demand stricter measures. E.g. in Germany, a company or an association with 20 or more people who can access the data must in any case appoint a data protection officer whose expertise on the subject is necessary (not just any person can be appointed).
- Make your employees who work remotely aware that the provisions of the GDPR must also be observed when using private premises and devices. In the case of private devices, data security must be ensured and third-party access must be avoided.

Accessibility of video conferencing tools

As organisations turned to video conferencing tools for staying in contact with their users and for providing services, the accessibility of these tools was an important issue for many. Many tools were not accessible at all, others only improved their accessibility over time. A valuable resource on the accessibility of video conferencing tools was published by the Bundesfachstelle Barrierefreiheit (Federal Accessibility Center), a German federal agency that advises public authorities and institutions on implementing the Act on Equal Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities. The Bundesfachstelle compared nine of the most widely used video conference tools in 4 accessibility categories. Each category is divided further into 4 subcategories with more detailed accessibility features within that main category. (E.g. in the

category screen reader compatibility, a subcategory evaluates if it can be fully used with a touch screen). The full report (in German) can be viewed here.

Figure 1.3: ***Different types of tools used for video conferencing***



Each subcategory is rated as to whether that accessibility feature is implemented, not implemented or only partially implemented. Rather than referencing the entire report in full, we have aggregated the results by distributing points to each assessment of the subcategories (Implemented: 1, Not implemented: 0, Partially implemented: 0.5).

Table 1.1: Accessibility parameters of different software

	Screen reader compatibility	User interface	Collaborative features	Compatibility and security
Adobe Connect	1	2	4	2
BigBlue Button	4	3	3.5	3

Cisco Webex	3	3	2.5	4
Google Meet	4	3	2	2
GoTo Meeting	0	1.5	2	4
Jitsi Meet	1.5	0.5	2	3
Microsoft Teams	4	4	2	4
Skype	4	2	1.5	3
Zoom	4	4	3.5	4

The five best scoring tools with regard to accessibility are:

1. Zoom: 15.5
2. Microsoft Teams: 14
3. BigBlue Button: 13.5
4. Cisco Webex: 12.5
5. Google Meet: 11

These five video conferencing tools perform equally strong when looking at the screen reader compatibility and the user interface category. They all rate at the highest (4) or second highest (3) score. These categories are most important for most users with disabilities as they entail features such as using a programme without a computer mouse (keyboard controls), increasing the contrast settings, or being compatible with the latest screen readers to help blind users or users with visual impairments.

However, when taking into account the collaborative features, the differences between these five tools become apparent. All of them offer chat functions which are fully controllable by a keyboard and compatible with screen readers. But only Zoom and BigBlue Button offer live subtitles *and* allow for adding subtitles manually.

Of the five best scoring tools, only Zoom and BigBlue Button allow for adding an additional audio track. This is important as it allows for translations into other languages as well as a translation into Easy Language.

Technical features which make it possible to change the contrast settings or allow compatibility with screen readers help users with a visual impairment or blindness as well as physical (motor) disabilities. And making a conferencing tool available in Easy Language helps users with cognitive and learning disabilities to make use of these programmes, as well as non-native speakers.

However, technical features alone do not suffice in making a video conferencing tool fully accessible. This is reflected, for example, in Yale University's best practice guidelines to improve the accessibility of Zoom meetings. The guidelines recommend slowing down the pace of an online conversation, describing images and other content that is displayed and providing clear and easy to understand instructions on how to ask questions. All of these suggestions do not involve technical features but address the general behaviour of the meeting's participants. A screen reader user, for example, can enable the chat function to ask a question but then he or she may not be able to follow the conversation because there will be too much screen reader interference on account of the enabled chat. Slowing down the pace of a conversation greatly helps users with learning disabilities and users with speech impairments as their speech patterns may not be easy to understand or to properly translate into subtitles with the live subtitle feature.

Another overview assessing video conference tools as well as some of the other digital tools according to their digital accessibility can be found on BigHack, an organisation which aims to make the digital world more accessible for everyone.

Because of the shortcomings of various online tools with regard to data protection, accessibility and lack of specific features, some of the organisations we spoke to are planning on creating their own platforms for their online services. This dissatisfaction with the currently available tools is reflected in the 54.9 % of the respondents of our survey who expressed the need for a platform that fulfills the specific needs of users and providers.

Creating a safe and accessible interactive website or platform involves costs and a depth of expertise that many organisations do not have in house. It would thus seem very useful to pool resources with others in such a venture. One project that could be an example of such a collaborative effort is the open source consultancy website of Caritas, a large German welfare association, that also provides many services to people with disabilities. Caritas has published the open source code of the consultancy site on Github with the aim of making it into a collaborative project.

The concept behind this new platform is that other organisations can customize the platform according to their specific needs.

The website can be hosted by any organisation under their own label at no cost. Caritas is looking to create a community of volunteer developers to work on its continued, collaborative development. At this point the website enables contact in writing between users and Caritas counsellors all over Germany. The contact can be completely anonymous, if the user wishes. A video conferencing feature is in the works, as are translations into Easy Language and other languages. Accessibility is a priority of the makers of the platform.

Whether or not service providers choose to use this particular platform and to expand it according to their needs, it is nevertheless an example of how an open-source project can be used to collaborate on a European-wide scale.

Creating online services for people with disabilities

Users of online services have very different accessibility needs, depending on their specific disability. The accessibility of various online tools has already been discussed above.

But providing appropriate online services of course goes far beyond the accessibility of the online tool being used. In order to illustrate what kinds of aspects should be considered when tailoring online services in accordance with specific needs, we have chosen the subject of teaching deaf and hearing impaired children as an example:

A typical safety measure that was implemented for children during online classes or activities was to have them turn off the videos and only use the audio of the video conferencing tool. This safety measure however made it much more difficult or even impossible for deaf students

to participate in the online classes. In Greece, because the commercial online platforms were not considered appropriate for children, the national school department set up a School TV, but did not think to provide subtitles or sign language for deaf students. Through lobbying and advocating for the rights of deaf children the Hellenic Deaf Federation was able to enforce that all classes on School TV were translated into sign language. Very important was the fact that the interpreters themselves had diplomas in education since interpreting education is completely different from interpreting a meeting or a lecture. Deaf children must learn from a native speaker, someone who understands the child's experience. An unexpected, but very welcome, effect of this was that hearing children were suddenly exposed to a signing instructor, something that many enjoyed a great deal. This broadened their horizons to a world that they had had no access to before the pandemic.

An extremely informative webinar on what was learned about teaching deaf children during the COVID-19 pandemic can be followed here: https://www.eud.eu/news/webinar/past-webinars/covid-19-series-distance-education-during-pandemic/

The following list of requirements were taken from a detailed report about setting up remote teaching in the Italian school Scuola Audiofonetica, a private school for deaf and hearing students.

For deaf and hard of hearing students

- digital materials must have a clear audio without background music,
- be subtitled and/or translated into sign language,
- have a correct framing of the face (eyes and mouth always clearly visible)
- or of the signing space (that is, the area from head to waist where signs are articulated);
- contents should be accompanied by self-explanatory images so that the meaning can be grasped even without speech,
- contents should not contain unnecessary decorative details,
- a recorded video allows a student to see the lesson several times, until they understand everything
- for some pupils, auditory information is sufficient with minimal guidance,

- whereas for others, constant eye contact is necessary.
- the chat function is an accessible tool for communicating in writing, especially if the poor quality of the internet connection makes it difficult to read lips or see the sign language translation

People with other types of disabilities of course require different kinds of accommodations. For example, for students with low vision, things like the type of font and the level of contrast used on slides is important in making online learning accessible. The Perkins School for the Blind has created an informative video for working online, including many useful tips regarding accessible fonts, creating slides, working with lighting and contrast, and enlarging texts on the screen in the most effective way - amongst many other things. It goes beyond the scope of this report to include accessibility considerations for every type of disability. But the guides and good practices in the Annex to this report contain many very useful resources for creating accessible online services.

The online experience as an empowering experience

Online services that are accessible for everyone can have a very empowering effect on users. A frequent observation of our interviewees was that the unusual circumstances of having to move activities online brought out a previously undiscovered potential in users who had not used the internet in such a multitude of ways before. Some service providers we spoke to reflected on the way their own perspective with regard to their users had changed when they realized the capabilities that had not been used before. Users started using the internet to learn new things, to become more independent in other areas of their lives. The interaction and co-creation of activities often made the activities more meaningful and fun.

The experience of going online and the new possibilities for interacting, learning, and creating that were opened had an important empowering effect on many users. Having acquired new digital skills, they now recognize the internet as a resource for learning new things and for actively creating and participating in society. For instance, users who live independently reported that they were now using their new internet skills and confidence to learn about cooking or banking online. The social circles of many people with disabilities are very small, but by spending time online their scope of interaction was greatly widened. Some users were able to reconnect with friends and schoolmates from earlier in their lives on social media or found that friends who had moved away were able to take part in online activities offered by

their former service provider. One provider told the story of a girl who is non-verbal, who learned to use a tablet during the pandemic and who now uses this newly acquired skill to communicate offline also.

Another example of how the experiences made during the pandemic had a lasting influence is reflected in a new Finnish project that is being created upon the initiative of people with intellectual disabilities. They want to learn and teach each other about creating content and communities on social media. These online communities can offer peer support and meaningful activity in the lives of users.

A wish that was frequently expressed was to find ways for users across Europe to be in touch with each other, as there is a great deal of interest in interacting with people from other countries. Such online interaction would of course involve the challenge of overcoming language barriers but would create important new opportunities for users.

After the last one and a half years, there are countless stories to be told of the positive impact that digital competence has for people with disabilities. EASPD member organisations should share their users' positive online experiences in order to show the importance of closing the digital divide for marginalized communities. And to encourage others to use the internet as an empowering tool in a multitude of ways.

The families of service users

With most citizens confined to their home as part of lockdown measures during various stages of the pandemic, families played an immensely important role in the daily life of many service users. As schools, therapy services, social activities, and other services. were all suddenly interrupted, parents often took on the role of teachers, therapists, and counsellors. When these services then started going online, the parents were called upon to help their children use the internet, online tools, and technical devices.

For many, especially older parents this was often very difficult. Some had no or little experience with the internet and first needed to be trained themselves. Service providers in some areas helped parents with fundamental skills such as creating an email address, retrieving long lost passwords, understanding safety issues and using online tools and platforms. Parents and caretakers had to be trained in the use of assistive technology.

Some users did not have their assistive technology devices at home, because before COVID-19 these would have been in a centre during the day. For many parents this situation under lockdown conditions was extremely stressful, and they required a substantial amount of psychological support from their childrens' service providers.

One frequently mentioned benefit of everything taking place online, was that parents were suddenly taking part in meetings at a much higher rate than ever before. Many parents have heavy schedules and have great difficulties in freeing up time to go to meetings with teachers and therapists. For them online meetings were often a much better alternative to face-to-face meetings. Traveling time was no longer an issue and care for siblings did not need to be arranged for, if everyone just stayed at home. This is one area in which the online alternative has so many advantages that organisations should consider making it a standard part of their strategy of staying in touch with parents.

"Suddenly all the parents took part in meetings!"

Another side effect of services being provided online was that siblings without disabilities would be in the same room and would spontaneously take part in certain activities or classes.

Parents reported that this brought siblings closer together and helped them to gain a better understanding of each other.

"It was a window into their homes"

Going online had some other far-reaching effects. Providers reported that because parents were now able to see what the therapists, teachers, and other service providers were doing

with their children they had a better understanding of the work of the professionals. This was often combined with a greater appreciation of the work being done.

In order for online services to be used effectively and safely it is important to involve and train parents. One initiative that strives to accomplish this is the EUROPEAN SAFEONLINE INITIATIVE, a training programme that incorporates five interactive modules: internet and privacy, gaming, social media, cyberbullying, online relations and sexuality. The aim is to bridge the digital divide and to empower parents from disadvantaged backgrounds by strengthening their digital skills and, thus, those of their children. The European SafeOnline project focuses its efforts on countries where the greatest needs in the field of media literacy are. This kind of project could be a worthwhile partner for EASPD member organisations to collaborate with when involving parents.

While it is vital in certain situations to involve parents in the implementation of online services, it is also extremely important that the users' independence and free will be safeguarded in situations where parents might - inadvertently - take on too strong a role when online services are carried out in the home.

Funding

The majority of respondents of our questionnaire reported that their organisations did not receive funding for creating or maintaining their online services or for providing technological devices to staff or users. A few organisations reported that they had applied for COVID-19 relief funding, but that financing was insufficient or very slow in coming through. During the pandemic, organisations were dealing with a constantly changing situation and were reacting to it day-by-day. In most cases there was no time or staff available to take on the task of securing funding. The organisations made do with what they had and many hours of unpaid overtime went into setting up online services. Funding is a topic that needs a great deal of attention if EASPD service providers are to create, improve, and scale online formats for the future. The challenge however lies in finding sufficient funding to enable the development of online services. Luckily the topic of digitalisation is an area that is receiving a great deal of attention Europe-wide. Digitalisation is a clear priority for European countries and the European Union, even more so because of the COVID-19 crisis. Since the digital divide has become especially apparent during the pandemic, many new programmes are being created to bridge this gap for underserved communities. Furthermore, there are national and EU programmes available for funding this process. A key problem for individual organisations is finding relevant calls for proposals and tenders and then going through the often-complicated process of applying for funding. This is something that many smaller organisations are not equipped for.

Creating international consortiums and delivering the extensive reports required for many European funding opportunities are also barriers for many organisations. Organisations need long term financial security to be able to create sustainable programmes and hire staff, something that is often very difficult with project funding that sometimes is only granted for half a year.

While it goes beyond the scope of this report to list the huge array of funding opportunities throughout Europe, it would be greatly welcomed by EASPD member organisations, if a central database of grants, funding, subsidies, calls for tenders and proposals for digital projects were to be kept by an umbrella organisation such as EASPD, to be used as a collaborative resource by the member organisations.

An example of an EU funding opportunity that might be of interest for EASPD service providers is the Digital Europe Programme, an EU programme that aims to accelerate the recovery from the pandemic and to drive the digital transformation of Europe. Worth €7.6 billion the Programme is part of the next long-term EU budget, covering 2021 to 2027. It will provide funding for projects in five areas: supercomputing, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, advanced digital skills, and ensuring the wide use of digital technologies across the economy and society. The last two areas could be of interest to EASPD member organisations who need financial support in improving and establishing their online services.

An example of relevant funding within an EU Member State is the National Resilience and Recovery Plan of Greece which provides funding for "large investments in health, education and social inclusion of vulnerable groups" and "5G technology and development of innovative digital services". This could be a source of funding for Greek EASPD members' plans for improving online services. In a similar vein, other EU countries are creating funding programmes to drive the digital transformation and to bridge the digital divide.

Foundations are also important funders to look into. An example of a foundation that is providing relevant funding is Aktion Mensch in Germany. The foundation has just closed a call for German projects in the area "Internet for All" providing up to 10.000 Euros for digital projects for people with disabilities. Similarly, there are many other foundations that fund national and international projects

Many companies have made substantial profits during the pandemic, especially those that offer products and services online or equipment for accessing the internet. It is well worth it to ask multinational companies and local businesses for donations, whether it be in the form of money or technological devices. Often businesses are very interested in donating to a worthy and innovative cause and just need to be asked.

In Italy for instance, a tech company donated tablets for the students of an EASPD member organisation who did not have their own devices.

Outlook

Despite the many challenges that online formats present, and the undeniable benefits of face-to-face interaction, online services are here to stay. Over 90% of the respondents of our questionnaire answered that they would continue to provide services online even after the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions. The vast majority (80%) responded that they would use online formats in combination with offline formats. There is a general consensus that the positive aspects of working online should be kept and further developed while moving some of the daily work back to face-to-face formats. A recurring warning was that online formats should only be used when they really have an added benefit for the users and not as a cost saving measure or purely as a time saver.

"Now we know what to do with a child who is home for a month after surgery"

It is important that organisations take the time to evaluate the experiences of their staff and users during the last one and a half years before creating their own strategy for online services going forward. With this in mind, the Israeli organisation Beit Issie Shapiro carried out a study among more than 400 physical, speech, voice and language and occupational therapists, from 48 countries. The findings were published in a detailed report that contains many valuable insights for other online service providers. The main objective of the study was to learn about the advantages and challenges health professionals experienced in providing remote treatments during the COVID-19 crisis. The response to the survey was overwhelming as the professionals were eager to share their experiences in this very emotional and stressful time. They found themselves confused and lacking the knowledge on how to provide remote treatment in an effective manner to their clients. This, and the fact that they often felt they were providing mediocre treatment created a great deal of stress for them. Thus, an important recommendation resulting from the survey was that special attention needs to be paid to the emotional issues of therapists who provide services online.

"Our challenge is to get housing units involved in online services. Housing services were well involved when our day and work centers were closed, but now when units are open, they don´t see online services as important."

A similar survey on the experiences of clients receiving remote treatment from healthcare professionals was carried out by the same organisation with about 100 children and their parents in Israel.

This study is in Hebrew and has not yet been translated into English. 10.2% of the children ended their use of telehealth services, mainly because they (or their parents) viewed it as

inefficient and ineffective. The aspects of telehealth that received the highest ratings were "ability to introduce the therapist to the child's natural environment", "enables the parent to be part of the treatment" and "gives the parent tools that can be used in the future".

A clear conclusion to the studies was that both sides, professionals and clients need training in order for telehealth to be useful in the future.

A common wish that was frequently expressed in our interviews for this study, was that informal, online opportunities should be created for service providers from different countries to be in contact with one another to share experiences, to ask questions, and to learn from each other. To accomplish this, staff members of EASPD member organisations could be invited to join online meetings for working groups on specific topics such as:

- Involving users in the creation of online services
- Learning from each other's good practices
- Creating online services for specific disabilities
- Collaborating for funding opportunities
- Brainstorming for innovative online solutions
- Sharing good and bad experiences of the last one and a half years

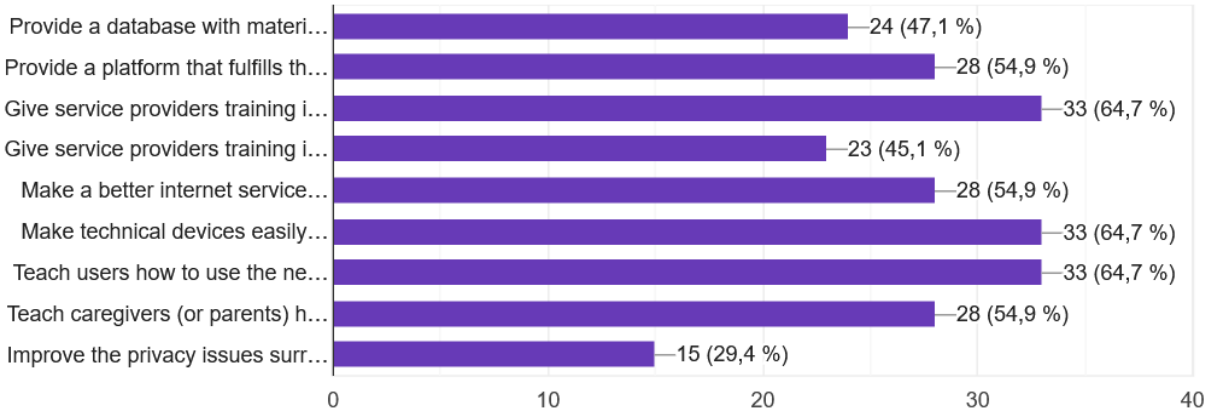
One frequently voiced concern among our respondents was that much of what has been learned and created will be forgotten as all organisations go back to business as usual. Many valuable materials, videos, and tutorials were created but not archived in an organized fashion. They are on private laptops, in year-old Facebook posts, or in WhatsApp chats from months ago. Well-staffed organisations have been able to incorporate and organize the new materials, but smaller organisations that do not have extra staff for content creation or social media management need support in inventorying and making their content available.

"It would be amazing to have access to good materials from other organisations."

The task at hand therefore is to collect and disseminate the vast amount of knowledge that has been accumulated in the last year and a half to create the best possible combination of online and offline services for people with disabilities. To support EASPD and its member organisations in this endeavour, we offer the following recommendations:

Recommendations

Figure 1.4: ***Recommendations for best possible combination of online and offline services for people with disabilities***



For EASPD

1. Create an open, curated database for collecting EASPD member organisations' online materials.
2. Create a database of funding opportunities (grants, subsidies, calls for tenders and proposals for digital projects)
3. Create consortiums within the EASPD community to apply for funding for EU- projects.
4. Provide training for staff of EASPD member organisations in
    1. Data protection, ethics and privacy
    2. Creating online content
    3. Digital accessibility
    4. Training users in digital competence
5. Create online formats for staff to collaborate with colleagues in other countries.
6. Create online formats for users to interact with users in other countries.

7. Collaborate with relevant EU-projects such as EU Digital Education Plan or Corona Virus: Online learning resources

For EASPD member organisations

1. Collect and evaluate the organisation's online materials and methods.
    1. Delegate this task to a person or team with the necessary competence.
    2. Involve interns, research students or volunteers to save costs and staff time.
2. Translate and adapt online materials created by EASPD member organisations in other countries.
3. Collect feedback from users regarding their online experiences and needs.
    1. Include users with different disabilities, digital skills and from various age groups.
    2. Include users who have not yet taken advantage of the organisation's online services.
4. Provide users with opportunities to create their own online content.
5. Collect feedback from the parents of users on their experiences with the online services provided for their children.
6. Evaluate the digital competence of staff and users.
7. Train staff and users (and parents / caretakers) in digital competence accordingly.
    1. Take their concerns and insecurity about using the new technologies seriously.
    2. Create a format that is user-friendly, hands-on, based on practical, real-life examples.
    3. Avoid purely theoretical instruction.
8. Train a person to be the organisation's expert in online accessibility.

9. Assess (and improve, if necessary) the data protection and privacy of the organisation's online presence.
10. Designate (and train, if necessary) a person to be the organisation's expert on data protection, ethics and privacy.
11. Fundraise for the organisation's development of online services.
    1. Ask local companies to donate money, software or hardware.
    2. Create project partnerships with EASPD member organisations in other countries.
12. Make technological devices available to users.

For policy makers

1. Create EU funding opportunities that are less bureaucratic.
2. Make internet access available to everyone.
3. Create sustainable funding opportunities for projects that are already in existence.
4. Create a solid, comprehensive and understandable legal framework for online services.

Resources

Reports and Studies

Autism Europe: Impact of COVID-19 on autistic people and their families across Europe

https://www.autismeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Impact-of-COVID-19_report-_Autism-Europe_December-2020.pdf

E-inclusion: online special education in Italy during the Covid-19 pandemic

https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1475939X.2020.1856714

EU Commission: eHealth in the EU: What's the Diagnosis? (2014)

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_14_302

eHealth Applications for Smart and Pervasive Healthcare in Greece. What Can We Expect? (2021) https://www.intechopen.com/online-first/74980

eHealth in Spain: evolution, current status and future prospects (2020)

https://www.scielo.br/j/sausoc/a/8gWJZLRdrnCGPYVcxPGkLTt/?lang=en

EnFORCE Telehealth program: "Italian parents welcomed a telehealth family-centred rehabilitation programme for children with disability during COVID-19 lockdown

https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/apa.15636

European Parliament: Resolution on the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities in the COVID-19 crisis (July 2020)

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2020-0204_EN.html

European Union of the Deaf: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the rights of deaf persons in Europe

https://www.eud.eu/about-us/eud-position-paper/impact-covid-19-pandemic-rights-deaf-persons-europe/

Fraunhofer Institut: Results of a survey among parents of children with disabilities about the effects of the pandemic (in German)

https://www.fit.fraunhofer.de/content/dam/fit/de/documents/2020-06-03_Corona-Umfrage-Fraunhofer-Tech-Inc-Lab.pdf

ICARE4EU Policy Brief: How can eHealth improve care for people with multimorbidity in Europe? (WHO 2016)

https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/337588/PB_25.pdf

Inclusion Europe: Neglect and discrimination. Multiplied

How COVID-19 affected the rights of people with intellectual disabilities and their families

https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/COVID-report-Final.pdf

International Conference on Cognitive Infocommunications:

Solutions, experiences in online education in Hungary and Serbia related to the situation caused by Covid-19

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344388708_Solutions_experiences_in_online_education_in_Hungary_and_Serbia_related_to_the_situation_caused_by_Covid-19

Scuola Audiofonetica: Remote Teaching for Deaf Students during the COVID-19 pandemic

https://www.elearning-conf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/04_202007C024_S069.pdf

ITU: Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures (2020)

https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/FactsFigures2020.pdf

Lebenshilfe: A report on the digital participation of people with disabilities (in German) https://www.lebenshilfe-berlin.de/media/docs/Meldungen-2021/Ergebnisbericht-Digitale-Teilhabe-in-Berlin.pdf?sn=sn6099c3f08893018d8a7b0368490342

Online health services in Poland for people with disabilities.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311709116_Accessibility_of_e-health_services_for_people_with_disabilities (2010)

Robert Hollman Foundation: Distance support and online intervention to blind and visually impaired children during the pandemic COVID-19: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7682482/pdf/main.pdf

State of The Art in Adoption of E-Health Services in Italy in the Context of European Union E-Government Strategies (2015)

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282555450_State_of_The_Art_in_Adoption_of_E-Health_Services_in_Italy_in_The_Context_of_European_Union_E-Government_Strategies

The INCA eHealth program in the Netherlands http://www.icare4eu.org/pdf/INCA_Case_report.pdf

The use of online support by people with intellectual disabilities living independently during COVID-19 (Netherlands)

https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jir.12770

Well-Being in the Information Society. Fighting Inequalities: Digital Disability Divide in Finland (2018)

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326670000_Digital_Disability_Divide_in_Finland_7th_International_Conference_WIS_2018_Turku_Finland_August_27-29_2018_Proceedings

UNICEF: Learning at a distance: Italian children's experience remote schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/1182-learning-at-a-distance-childrens-remote-learning-experiences-in-italy-during-the-covid-19-pandemic.html

Guides

Accessibility of Video-Conferencing Tools

https://www.bundesfachstelle-barrierefreiheit.de/DE/Praxishilfen/Informationstechnik/Barrierefreie-Webkonferenzen/barrierefreie-webkonferenzen_node.html

ACTO: Counselling Online in a Pandemic World

https://acto-org.uk/counselling-online-in-a-pandemic-world-emma-west/

ACTO Guidance on Security and Privacy for Therapists Providing Online Therapy During the COVID-19 Crisis

https://acto-org.uk/acto-guidance-on-security-and-privacy-for-therapists-providing-online-therapy-during-the-covid-19-crisis/

ACTO: Maintaining boundaries when working online

https://acto-org.uk/maintaining-boundaries-when-working-online/

Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy Online (ACTO): Competences for online counseling

https://acto-org.uk/acto-recommended-competences-for-counselling-and-psychotherapy-online/

Athena Fund: Using Technology with Special Needs Students as a Tool for Education and Communication, and Integrating Technological Aids as Pedagogical Oxygen for Education Teams During COVID-19

https://en.beitissie.org.il/kb/item/special-needs-in-special-times/

Beit Issie Shapiro: Introductory Guide for the iPad User Basic technical assistance for users new to the iPad

https://en.beitissie.org.il/kb/item/introductory-guide-for-the-ipad-user-2/

COVID19 Global Online Safety Advice for Parents and Carers (April 2020)

https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-documents/covid-19-global-online-safety-advice-for-parents-and-carers

EASPD Webinar: Challenges for disability service provision in rural areas

https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=607018006591807&ref=watch_permalink

Ethical guidelines for digital support (in Finnish)

https://dvv.fi/digituen-eettinen-ohjeistus#

European Association of Psychotherapy: Interim Advice for Conducting Psychotherapy Online http://news.europsyche.org/eap_member_information_20_covid-19/EAPonlineGuidance.pdf

European Safe Online Initiative:

https://europeansafeonline.eu/

European Strategy for a better Internet for children (2012)

https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52012DC0196&from=EN

European Union of the Deaf webinar on distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic and lessons learned

https://www.eud.eu/news/webinar/past-webinars/covid-19-series-distance-education-during-pandemic/

EU Digital Education Plan 2021 - 2027

Learning from the COVID-19 crisis: teaching, learning and technology in a changing world

https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en

Hand in Hand Foundation Hungary: Internet Safety Training for people with a learning disability.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1F-hKC7J4hqD2kTeGyuKSXUb9hJ8TH9G-/edit

https://docs.google.com/document/d/199iBxnqAk5tYcLNVa64LRta28GBOPome/edit

How to set up and use video conferencing services safely and securely (April 2020)

https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/guidance/video-conferencing-services-using-them-securely

ITU Child online Protection

https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Cybersecurity/Pages/COP.aspx

Online Therapy Security, Ethics, and Legal Issues

https://www.verywellmind.com/online-therapy-ethics-2795227

Teaching with online platforms for students with special needs

https://educators4sc.org/classroom-practices/using-online-platforms-for-students-with-special-needs/

The Best Family Communication Platforms for Teachers and Schools

https://www.commonsense.org/education/articles/the-best-family-communication-platforms-for-teachers-and-schools

Tools for promoting digital access and inclusion (for online courses)

https://exploreaccess.org/accessible-online-%20course/

Video conferencing services: security guidance for organisations (April 2020)

https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/guidance/video-conferencing-services-security-guidance-organisations

W3C Web Accessibility Initiative: Diverse Abilities and Barriers in how People with Disabilities use the Web. Explains barriers that people commonly experience because of inaccessible websites and web tools.

https://www.w3.org/WAI/people-use-web/abilities-barriers/

W3C Web Accessibility Initiative: Tools and Techniques in How People with Disabilities use the Web

https://www.w3.org/WAI/people-use-web/tools-techniques/

WHO and ITU: National eHealth strategy toolkit (2012)

The Toolkit is a comprehensive, practical guide that all governments, their ministries, departments and agencies can adapt to suit their own circumstances and their own vision and goals.
https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/75211/9789241548465_eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Good Practices

A comprehensive website dedicated to topics around the Corona Virus in Easy Language

https://corona-leichte-sprache.de/page/6-startseite.html

with materials in other languages:

https://corona-leichte-sprache.de/page/2-material-sammlung.html

A Finnish project to develop digital competencies of people with disabilities including online activities and resources created for and with people with cognitive disabilities (in progress)

https://ihandigina.fi/

Beit Issie Shapiro YouTube channel:

https://www.youtube.com/user/beitissieshapiro0/videos

Bertelsmann Foundation: Digital Patient program

The project (partially) in English https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/our-projects/the-digital-patient

The full project in German https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/unsere-projekte/der-digitale-patient

Caritas: online consultation platform for people with disabilities

https://www.caritas.de/hilfeundberatung/onlineberatung/behinderung-und-psychische-erkrankung/start

Corona Virus: Online learning resources

A selection of online resources and tools for learners, teachers and educators during the outbreak of COVID-19.

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/coronavirus-online-learning-resources_en

DigiContact: A Dutch 24/7 support service using video calls

https://digicontact.nl/

Hand in Hand Foundation (Hungary): Erasmus Access Project: Internet Safety for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities

https://kezenfogva.hu/node/1796

Joining Forces! EASPD COVID-19 Support Space on Facebook

Webinars, conferences, discussions, best practices, reports, guidelines from EASPD and group members

https://www.facebook.com/groups/1440520556130791

KI.ASSIST - Assistance Services and Artificial Intelligence for People with Severe Disabilities in Vocational Rehabilitation. A project to test how AI-based assistance technologies can effectively support people with severe disabilities in vocational training and in the work place.

https://www.ki-assist.de/en/

Online Campus for Vocational Training of young people with disabilities

https://www.werraland.de/aktuelles/detail/start-fuer-ausbildung-40-in-eschwege

Online support desk for Italian families with people on the autism spectrum

https://www.facebook.com/OLTRELABIRINTO/photos/rpp.321817277520/10157890609147521/?type=3&theater

Papunet: accessible communication https://www.kehitysvammaliitto.fi/in-english/complex-communication-needs/

Perkins School for the Blind: Virtual Learning Tips for Visually Impaired Learners

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGXTAJydz4Y

Physical Therapy classes

https://www.treatsma.uk/physio-with-marion/

Support for everyday needs: Quality criteria for inclusion and employment activities in plain language created together with clients with disabilities (in Finnish)

https://storage.googleapis.com/tukiliitto-production/2017/09/tukea_arjen_tarpeisiin.pdf

The Robert Hollman Foundation: Distance Support Project for visually impaired children and their families during the lockdown.

Vision Australia: resources for children with visual impairments

https://www.visionaustralia.org/services/children/remote-learning-and-developing

EASPD is the European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities. We are a European not-for-profit organisation representing over 20,000 social services and disability organisations across Europe. The main objective of EASPD is to promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities through effective and high-quality service systems.

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