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# DIGITALISATION AND OPPORTUNITIES TO INCREASE INCLUSION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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Digitalization is an important and inevitable trend for the future of humanity: people use digital tools to communicate, learn, or exchange information, to relax and entertain, to value digital activities and the opportunities these activities can offer them. Digital tools can help them find creative solutions to the challenges they face in the digital age. However, digital technology does not bring the same benefits to everyone. People from disadvantaged groups have fewer opportunities due to social, economic or geographical conditions or due to obstacles in benefiting from the opportunities that digital technology offers. Therefore, appropriate policies and support programs are needed to eliminate this inequality.

## **THE CONCEPT OF DIGITALIZATION AND INCLUSION**

Social inclusion is a concept that is better understood than digitalization because it has long been used in social policies and programs related to employment, education, employability, health or participation in economic, social and political activities. Meanwhile, digitization, a relatively new topic, is of increasing importance in digital technology, mass media, as well as online spaces and communities. Digital tools are considered the solution to reach more people, especially those considered less accessible due to different social, geographical or economic conditions, people with disabilities, and people with physical limitations or language barriers. However, digital social inclusion is more than simply access to technology. It must be seen as a complex and multifaceted concept.

Inclusion is easier to understand when considered from the perspective of exclusion. We can say that inclusion means *ensuring that no one is excluded from access to education, health care, employment, participation in cultural, social, political activities and many other things. Inclusion is also linked to human rights* because human rights provide a list of minimum/basic rights to which any individual or group has the right to access. We can also say that *inclusion is tied to equality* because if some people have fundamentally less access to the world's resources than others, they are still excluded somehow.

A focus on social inclusion requires us to consider why disadvantaged groups have fewer opportunities to thrive than other groups. Social integration is the equal interaction of people from different classes or social conditions (diverse), so it needs to be considered multidimensionally.

## **DIGITALIZATION: OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

Digitalisation and the widespread adoption of digital technologies and applications can play a vital role by not leaving people with disabilities behind.

**Access to information and education:** The Internet serves as an enormous wealth of knowledge, making education, research, and information (online courses, e-books, and websites) accessible to anyone with Internet connection). This is especially beneficial for those who do not have access to traditional educational resources.

**Job opportunities:** The digital economy offers a plethora of job opportunities, many of such jobs can be done remotely regardless of their geographic location.

**Business and innovation:** Doing business online, building websites and marketing products or services on social media have become relatively inexpensive and simple. This creates a level playing field for those who lack access to capital or traditional business resources. Crowdfunding platforms also provide funding opportunities for people from disadvantaged backgrounds to turn their creative ideas into reality.

**Access to health care services:** People living in remote areas or with limited mobility can now consult with medical professionals through video calls and remote monitoring.

**Social inclusion:** Social media and online communities provide a platform for individuals to connect with others with similar interests, seek support and advocate for their rights, facilitating social inclusion for disadvantaged groups.

**Financial Inclusion:** Digital wallets and peer-to-peer payment platforms enable disadvantaged individuals, including those without access to traditional banks, to manage their finances, save money, and access credit services.

**E-Government Services:** Governments are increasingly providing e-government services, simplifying administrative procedures and reducing bureaucratic barriers. This makes it easier for disadvantaged groups to access social services, social benefits, and public information.

In short, digitalization is a potent force capable of narrowing the gap between privileged and disadvantaged groups in society, bringing new opportunities to those who have faced significant barriers like those with disabilities. However, digitalisation alone is not the solution to all disparities since digital transformation also poses a new set of challenges for people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups, who may face difficulties in approaching and adapting to fast-paced, technology-driven changes.

## **CHALLENGES**

The multifaceted nature of digital inclusion shows that many complex barriers still exist related to issues such as low income, high costs reducing accessibility, lack of digital knowledge and skills, and unsuitable living situation or location.

### **Incomplete accessibility**

Although the Internet has the potential to make the world more accessible, it often fails to meet the needs of disadvantaged groups, especially people with disabilities. There are still many people with disabilities who often lack access to basic digital technology, which is a prerequisite for making use of most technological and AI advances. Many websites and digital platforms lack essential accessibility features, such as screen readers, captions or alt text for images (for the visually impaired) thereby limiting the participation of people with disabilities in online education, job search and information inquiry.

### **Digital divide**

One of the most important challenges is digital divide. This gap is not only related to Internet access but also includes disparities in access quality, digital literacy and the availability of necessary devices. Disadvantaged groups, including rural residents, low-income families and the elderly, often lack Internet access, which leaves them further behind in the digital age. This lack of access limits their participation in various aspects of life, from education and employment to healthcare and social connections.

### **Digital literacy**

Even where marginalized groups have access to digital tools, many still lack the necessary digital knowledge to use them effectively and safely. For some people, the rapidly evolving nature of technology can be intimidating and overwhelming (low self-efficacy). This may limit the ability to effectively use online services, search for information, or engage in e-commerce and digital communications. It could exacerbate existing disadvantages, making it difficult for them to access services or employment opportunities that increasingly require digital skills.

### **Privacy and security concerns**

Disadvantaged groups are often more vulnerable to privacy and security breaches. They may not have the knowledge or resources to adequately protect themselves online. Fraud, identity theft and data breaches can have serious consequences, especially for those facing economic hardships. These challenges may prevent them from participating in online activities.

## **Job mobility**

While digitalization has created new job opportunities, it has also led to job displacement in some sectors. Disadvantaged groups may be affected by these changes, especially if their skills are not well suited to the digital job market. Workers in traditional, low-skilled industries may find it difficult to transition into new roles that require digital literacy and tech-savvy skills.

## **Discriminatory treatment**

Digitalization can also perpetuate existing biases and discrimination. For example, people with visual impairments have particular difficulty with online banking services.

In summary, although digitalization promises to bring many opportunities, it also poses significant challenges for disadvantaged groups. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach.

## **WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO MAKE SURE NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND?**

Ensuring inclusion and increasing digital capacity is a key responsibility of governments in the 21st century. To achieve this goal, governments can implement a number of important policies and programs to close the technology gap for all citizens, especially disadvantaged groups.

**Develop accessibility standards:** Enforce accessibility standards for digital content and services to ensure that they are accessible to people with disabilities. This includes web accessibility guidelines, captioning for video content, and accessible mobile applications.

**Invest in digital infrastructure:** Invest in building and expanding digital infrastructure, especially in rural or underserved areas. This ensures that everyone has access to high-speed Internet, a basic requirement for digital inclusion.

**Subsidize Internet access:** Subsidize or provide low-cost Internet options for low-income households. This can be done through direct sponsorship programs or partnerships with Internet service providers.

**Digital literacy program:** Develop and support digital literacy programs for citizens of all ages.

**Device and access support:** Provide digital devices such as laptops, tablets or smartphones to disadvantaged groups such as low-income families and students. Ensure that all schools and educational institutions have access to digital learning resources.

**Build Community Centers:** Build community digital hubs or hubs where people can access the Internet, receive digital literacy training, and access government services online. These centers are especially needed in areas with limited resources.

**Digital training and job placement:** Implement digital skills training programs and help individuals from disadvantaged groups find jobs in the digital economy. Partner with private sector employers to create job opportunities.

**Support digital entrepreneurship:** Build a supportive environment for digital entrepreneurs, especially for disadvantaged groups. This can include financial incentives, mentoring programs and access to business development resources.

**Promote Digital Health Services:** Facilitate the development and adoption of digital health services, including health information systems and telemedicine. These services can improve access and health care outcomes for remote communities and people with disabilities.

**Protect privacy and security:** Enact and enforce data protection and privacy laws to protect citizens from digital threats. Ensure that personal data of individuals is handled responsibly by both public and private entities.

**Partner with the private and nonprofit sectors:** Partner with private sector companies and nonprofits to leverage resources, knowledge and expertise to achieve digital inclusion goals.

**Data collection and reporting:** Collect and analyze data on community digital inclusion programs to track progress and identify areas for improvement. Report regularly on the impact of digital inclusion initiatives.

**Laws and regulations:** Enact laws and regulations to promote digital inclusion and protect the rights of digital citizens. This could include laws against digital discrimination, ensuring net neutrality, and enforcing accessibility standards.

By taking these steps, governments can make significant strides in ensuring digital inclusion and empowerment for all citizens. This not only promotes social justice but also economic growth and innovation in the digital age.

### **ACTIVITIES TO INCREASE INCLUSION OPPORTUNITIES AT DRD**

DRD's mission is to promote social inclusion for people with disabilities, so DRD always seeks to leverage all resources to increase opportunities for people with disabilities. More specifically, DRD:

1. Promote access through the development of a set of website standards to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities and advise VET institutions and stakeholders on accessible websites;
2. Eliminate digital illiteracy by developing the handbook “Digital technology applications to help people with disabilities access information, education and employment”;
3. Establish DHub with courses to enhance digital knowledge and skills as well as support people with disabilities to find jobs;
4. Develop Legal Aid Application (DLAW) and Access Map (D.MAP)
5. Cooperate with organizations and companies such as Mega Market, Diageo, Astra Zeneca Vietnam under laptop and tablet support programs; Cooperate with Google and Rayo to test, consult and deploy applications to support people with disabilities in accessing education and employment; Collaborate with Microsoft and RMIT to promote technology initiatives that help people with disabilities integrate.

In particular, DRD cooperates with Aus4Skills in the program to increase opportunities to access vocational education for people with disabilities through paradigm shift activities on disability issues and online training on universal design for VET trainers and staff, and organizations of people with disabilities. In addition, DRD also advises VET institutions on methods for developing documents, training, evaluating students with disabilities and standards for accessible websites, and applying digital technology to help people with disabilities learn effectively.

The beginnings of a small organization like DRD have made certain impacts in promoting digital inclusion for people with disabilities. This means if all agencies, organizations, businesses and individuals can recognize the challenges faced by people with disabilities and start working together, people with disabilities can have more opportunities to integrate and improve the living quality of their own and their beloved.