

EURECO FORUM 2021

30TH MARCH 2021

European research platform for inclusive community planning and service development for people with disabilities (EURECO)

4th EURECO Forum

Harnessing the digital momentum for persons with disabilities and support services post COVID-19: Opportunities, risks and research needs

Tuesday 30th of March 2021

10.00 – 17.00 CET

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What is EURECO and what are the objectives of the 4th EURECO-Forum?

EURECO is a European collaboration platform of academic researchers and service providers working on inclusive community planning and development of in the perspective of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The platform originated from a joint initiative of the European Association of Services Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) and the Centre for Planning and Evaluation of Social Services (ZPE), University of Siegen, Germany to foster European theory-practice cooperation in the disability services' sector. It was intended to develop a network of academic researchers and research affined service providers specifically interested in developing inclusive communities. Furthermore, regular meetings of platform members in format mixing elements of academic conferences and project development workshops were to be organised. In the following years, the partnership grew to include the International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IASSIDD) and ZonMW, The Netherlands.



Also during the 2021 EURECO Forum, we plan to discuss current trends and problems relevant for European research activities concerning disability, inclusive communities, and service delivery. The topic of this year, digital transformation and the impact of the COVID19 pandemic, is particularly relevant for many stakeholders involved in disability support services and inclusive community planning. By bringing together academics, service providers, and public authorities, the forum will help stress the key elements for the research agenda in these areas. In the following, key aspects that will be dealt with on the 4th EURECO Forum will be outlined.

MAIN TOPICS

What is meant by digital transformation processes in society and in the disability field?

Based on the development of digital means of communication in the past decades we have seen enormous technological progress in the production, storage, processing and dissemination of data. Digital technologies have already had a strong impact on people's lives and changed the way people communicate, inform themselves, consume, maintain social contacts, work or are mobile. A key feature of digital technologies is that many of the associated devices can be networked together and thus can create further options and applications. While it is apparent that the process of digital transformation in our societies has long started, it also seems that we are only at the beginning of wide and rapid developments providing potentials and risks for people. Obviously, with the use of digital technologies and the internet, new opportunities have been emerging also for people with disabilities to shape their everyday lives and participate in social life, provided that they can have access. The digital transformation process in many ways has also started to change disability service organisations in how they manage their functions, how they deliver services and reflect on new services models.

Has the COVID 19 pandemic created a momentum for more digitalization in day-to-day-life?

No doubt, the ongoing process of digital transformation has been sped up by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the past months. As movement of people was restricted in phases of lockdown, people had to find virtual ways to meet, to communicate, to learn, to work, to go shopping, or to consume services and manage their day-to-day needs. Moreover, important services, for instance from governments, transport organizations or private providers, but also cultural and social events have only become accessible via internet. The "platform economy" has, to a certain extent, replaced traditional forms of participation and consumption.



What is meant by 'digital divide' in the context of persons with disabilities and why can the momentum of the COVID 19 pandemic result in widening or closing it?

The differences in access to the internet and use of digital technologies that exist between different groups in European societies are referred to as the 'digital divide'. Even though empirical data is still weak, we know that, like other vulnerable groups, a significantly large proportion of persons with disabilities is excluded from the participation and opportunities of digital technologies. This disadvantage is not acceptable and discriminative. There are probably a number of factors causing this situation: e.g., false assumptions on general abilities of disabled people of using the internet, missing knowledge on forms of digital assistance, missing training and support options that really encourage disabled people to start building and improving their IT-literacy, and not or insufficiently adapted devices. Last but not least, of course the right for access to digital participation cannot be realized when adequate hardware and software and other prerequisites of Art. 9 UN CRPD are not available.

The effects of the lockdowns for persons with disabilities in many cases led to severe isolation and exclusion. Before the pandemic, the problem of the 'digital divide' was very often recognised but was not always given a high priority on the agendas of disability politics and service provisions. This might change in post-pandemic societies. The "digital momentum" that many people in society have realised, might open up possibilities for an effective agenda setting, that pushes the effective recognition of digital rights of persons with disabilities and their families. The challenge for research is to contribute with its results in supporting persons with disabilities to achieve digital sovereignty.

Why is there a need for a reviewed research agenda on the digital transformation of life-worlds of persons with disabilities and of support services?

The digital momentum created in the pandemic period has the potential to shift priorities of policy makers and decision makers in the disability sector towards tackling the digital divide. It also sheds new light on the research agenda of the sector as it has become obvious that empirical data and insights are urgently needed on three levels. Firstly, there is research needed on the training and digital competence building, use and effects of digital technologies on the disabled people's side and interaction level. Secondly, the rapid digital transformation raises the need for empirical research and development on the level of the service providing organisations regarding new types of services, hybrid services practices and their effects and outcomes, staff training or digital transformation management. Thirdly, on the macro-political level, decision makers need conceptual models and empirical data on developmental strategies and requirements of resources needed to overcome the digital divide with regard to vulnerable groups such as disabled people.

PROGRAMME

10:00 – 10:15	Welcome and Introduction
10:15 – 10:45	Keynote 1 (Individual level): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Towards digital sovereignty for persons with disabilities- digital practices and research needs in different life stages
10:45 – 11:45	Group session A: Individual needs and digital potential <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A1: Digital practices and family life in early childhood situations • A2: Digital practices in independent living and day-to-day life • A3: Digital practices for mobility • A4: Enhancing digital literacy of people with disabilities and low technical skills in participatory learning environments
11:45 – 12:00	Break
12:00 – 12:30	Plenary on insights of working groups for research initiatives
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch break
13:30 – 14:00	Keynote 2: (Organisational and institutional level): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From analog persistence to hybrid modes of performance – social and health care services for persons with disabilities in digital transformation
14:00 – 15:00	Group session B: Organizational challenges and digital potential <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • B1: Building digital competence in services: Staff training and organizational learning • B2: Building regional digital service networks • B3: Using the Digital Momentum to Engage Families in Early Childhood Intervention • B4: Digital potential for more effectiveness and efficiency of service organizations
15:00 – 15:30	Plenary on insights of working groups for research initiatives
15:30 – 15:45	Break
15:45 – 16:45	Panel discussion: National and European political level
16:45 – 17:00	Wrap up and EURECO-perspectives

