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ITU WSIS FORUM 2022
SESSION 208 -- DIGITAL INCLUSION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
SIDE EVENT: UNECE REGIONAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
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>> NATALIA MOCHU: Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, we are happy to welcome you at today's event, which is dedicated to the inclusion of persons with disabilities. This is done within the framework of European Commission. These days, conducting these sessions in the United Nations in Geneva. And also, this is part of the WSIS. And before we start our discussion, I would like to invite all of you to watch a short video about WSIS, the sessions being carried out or conducted within the framework of the ITU. Please show the video.

(Video being played with no vocalization.)

>> NATALIA MOCHU: Thank you very much, indeed. As you can see, this Forum is an open international platform, so we would like to invite you to get familiar with the programme of the sessions and inscribe in the events you are interested in.

So on this note, we would like to start our event. This is a very important year for the ITU and ITU-D, and I am sure that in June

in Kigali, we are going to have an international conference on development of ICTs. We are getting ready for this conference, members, Sector Members, and interested parties. Apart from strategic review, setting strategic objectives and purposes for the future, we also have to approve the so-called Regional Initiatives, which are priorities for the countries of those regions for the next four years and the CIS countries within the framework of this preparatory process. One of the regional initiatives which were developed, that was the initiative on the needs, about the needs of persons with disabilities in order to make them totally inclusive in the digital world. We believe this is as very important area of work, and we can see that it is being supported by all the countries in the region. Social inclusion and equal opportunities for people with disabilities, this is one of the objectives in the UN Millennium Goals in terms of health, education, employment, and in that sense, digital technologies provide the people with disabilities excellent opportunities to overcome barriers in the area of communication, education. And because they are getting those skills and that access, people with disabilities, they do get additional opportunities to upgrade their skills, and they have the opportunities also to work in the ICT sector and thus provide self-realization for themselves.

But there are barriers in this area that are barriers that require our joint work. That's why one of the thematic areas is the digital access, and we pay a lot of attention to this particular subject matter. We decided to hold this event within the framework of Regional Forum for Sustainable Development and within the framework of the ITU as well so to discuss all the issues and provide people from the regions with the opportunity to tell us about the research, about the activities that are being carried out in the region in this particular area for achieving sustainable development, education, health sector, providing opportunities for the life learning, and also to discuss programmes and measures which should be implemented in the near future, within the next years, to provide our countries with the possibilities to provide for the social inclusiveness.

So we are going to review the measures being taken by the government, by the national parliaments. We are going to listen to the presentations from our colleagues in UNESCO, so how the ICT have positive impact on the people with disabilities, and also we'll talk to our specialists working in the countries of the region, working in specific centres, specific projects. They deal with people with disabilities on an everyday basis. So we will listen to them as well. And we would like to have an open, I would say sincere, discussion about our objectives, our aims, what you would like to see from the international community in terms of support, help, and assistance to your endeavors.

And our first presenter will be Anastasia Konukhova, who is deputy reporter on the issue of access of people with disabilities in the Development Sector of ITU. Anastasia takes part in the

research and studies that are being held in that sector, and she is going to provide this presentation about the results of our activities that were conducted last year. Anastasia.

>> ANASTASIA KONUKHOVA: Good morning, colleagues. Thank you very much for this introduction. This is a great honor for me to take part in this webinar and to tell you about the achievements, the results which we could manage to achieve last year, and also to provide brief information about the activities of the BD team.

As you know, digital and social inclusion for the people with disabilities, one of the major tasks in sustainable development, because without that, these people can be marginalized. And the problem specifically became a burning issue during the pandemic. Understanding and realizing the importance of their inclusion in the ICTs and to improve the normative bases in this area. And for the next steps, we wanted to assess the level of inclusivity in our region. So that was gathering statistics about digital access, especially with the view of the achievements in this area.

Well, you can see the link on the slide and you can get access to the complete information.

So we assessed the progress in the legislative area, in the politics and strategy in terms of ICTs in the region, mobile communications, TV content, and emergency communications. And all the other activities as government purchases training personnel in the area of ICTs and languages as well. This was provided to all the interested parties alongside with the recommendations.

We also analyzed normative documents in the CIS countries in terms of digital inclusiveness for the people with disabilities. You can see the table here and an exhaustive list of the activities. Table 6 reflects the level of maturity in terms of the access and the number of normative acts contributing to digital access.

As a result of these analyses, we arrived at certain conclusions, and we provided general recommendations about inclusiveness in the digital society as well as in terms of the individual items. We say CA countries are on the way to digital transformations, and like the development of Information Society, online government, research activities, and training of personnel.

There is normative basis in CAS countries to carry out these activities. In Belarus, there is a national plan to implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, we also have plan for training, providing digital skills to disabled individuals.

In all those documents, access to the information, to communication, as the basic element for the Information Society. In the concept papers, which are aimed at social integration of disabled individuals, special importance is given to communications and their access to communications as a way to include them in the society to shape the necessary environment to provide these opportunities.

Within the framework of legislative activities, CIS countries adopted laws which are the foundation of the corresponding policy. They are comprehensive in nature. They reflect objectives pursued

by the governments in education and health and also in the area of communications. And these laws, they recognize the right of disabled individuals to communications, and as such, they state that it is necessary to remove all the barriers in this area. And we also implement conceptual programmes which aim as building the digital society, and ICT is the key element in that.

The analysis documents show us that there is a possibility of including people with disabilities in the ICTs. As for the policy in television and communication, there is corresponding laws in that sense. Sometimes, however, they miss on disabled individuals. The exception here is the law of the Russian Federation, which embraces the needs of the disabled individuals. So we can say in general that there is quite a high level of the legislative basis, development of the legislative basis in CIS countries. Although there are problems and challenges which can be barriers on the way to provide this access. And more detailed information you can find in the tables, which reflect the results of this analysis. I mentioned them in my previous slide.

We also identified the most accessible areas of ICT access, audio/video programmes, subtitles, the sign language, national languages, et cetera, in terms of broadcasting.

The second, electronic resources of the Internet. Access to these resources is reflected by the access granted by the government to these resources and as well as they are in tune with the international standards that you can see here. Besides, many countries provide corresponding contemporary assisting technologies.

One of the major areas is to enhance the awareness of disabled individuals about their rights, and we also train specialists in informatics, in mass media, education, and ICTs so that they will be able to deal with inclusive technologies, corresponding content and services. And also we secure inter-agency structures which help to provide access to the individuals with disabilities. And the presence of such structures and units and agencies has a positive impact on development in this area.

Natalia has already highlighted the upcoming Development Conference of the ITU, World Development Conference, which is going to take place in June in Kigali, capital of Rwanda, and I am not going to provide details on this particular information, I mean, on this conference, and we'll move on to the next slide right away about the resources of the Development Sector of the ITU, which were created to provide for the access to the communications and ICTs and to provide for the inclusiveness. And primarily I would like to highlight that last year, with the support of the regional office in the CIS countries, we provided free classes and sessions which dealt with the issues of access and inclusiveness. They are totally free, these sessions, these webinars. And also, we developed materials, learning materials, educational materials which basically deal with the creation of the digital society and providing access to different groups of people.

You can see there are links. You can use these links to review our sources on this issue

In conclusion, I would like to briefly highlight the Study Question 7/1, access to the ICTs to individuals with special requirements. I am a reporter on this issue. We conducted studies in terms of the experience gained by the ITU members in this area. We also work in terms of access to the TV and video content, mobile phones, and other areas of our work which are basically priority areas for creating access. So we carried out a wide range of sessions, webinars and seminars on the issue of accessibility, and on the basis of that, we developed guidelines and recommendations in all these areas.

I would like to invite you to study our final report on all these issues, and you can see at the bottom of the slide the link to this report. The report was translated to six official ITU languages.

So that's it for me, and thank you very much for your attention.

>> NATALIA MOCHU: Thank you, Anastasia, for your presentation. Indeed, we are carrying out a lot of work within the ITU, and outside ITU, I mean, the studies that Anastasia mentioned in her presentation, I mean the CIS region, two major courses were developed within the Russian language. And I would like to invite you to familiarize yourselves with all these resources.

And now we are moving on to the next presenter, Mrs. Amelina, and she works on the ICTs in education. She represents the Institute for Information Technologies in Education of UNESCO, so the floor is years, Natalia.

>> NATALIA AMELINA: I am terribly sorry. Apologies.

Good afternoon, distinguished organizers, experts, and participants in this Regional Forum. Thank you very much, indeed, for your participation in this milestone event. On behalf of our institute, I would like to say that we maintain fruitful cooperation with the ITU and Regional Office of the ITU, and we would like to thank the Regional Office for this fruitful cooperation and collaboration. And today I am going to talk about remote education, inclusive technologies in education. And here I would like to say that UNESCO is one of the seven international institutions in the area of education, the only unique organization which deals with the issues of actually helping members of UNESCO in terms of integration of communication technologies.

The project -- by the way, the project which was developed in order to reflect --

>> Natalia, the picture is frozen, so you have to reboot or relaunch. Just one second, please.

>> NATALIA AMELINA: Now can you see it?

>> NATALIA MOCHU: Yes, indeed.

>> NATALIA AMELINA: Unfortunately, on my computer, the picture on my slides are still frozen. I don't know. Maybe you can help me here and guide us through my slide presentation.

The project I have been talking about is dedicated to the use of ICTs in education for persons with disabilities. And this project

has been in implementation, well, 15, maybe 20 years. And my today's presentation will be dedicated to the remote technologies which are being used in inclusive education, and in particular, I would like to highlight guidelines and recommendations related to the pandemic, COVID-19, when the majority of schools were basically closed. So we analyzed the situation last year in our institute, and we published our research and the results of our research. We can find it on the website of our institute. On the last slide of my presentation, you will have the necessary contact information and links which relate to different areas of our work.

More than 1 billion people, about 15% of the global population, they are the people with disabilities. That's why the difficulties today are increasing in terms of chronic diseases, pandemic, and children with disabilities are often the subject matter for social and psychological discrimination. And it turns out that they 0are neglected, marginalized, they have limits to their access to education, and don't get the recognition they deserve. About 25%, 2 billion kids on our planet. We missed one slide. About 25% of 2 billion children on our planet do not attend school, and at least 50% of such children are excluded from educational systems in countries with low and medium income. Ten countries show the following statistics. Actually, the possibility of children with disability of obtaining education is about 99% less likely to attain education.

UNESCO discovered inequalities at the national and global level. The UN data shows that 1 billion of people with disabilities in the world are among the most vulnerable population against the backdrop of COVID-19.

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Many countries use some new technology solutions to overcome some impediments, which include online and distance learning. At the same time, 40% of poorest countries lacked or failed to provide targeted support for such populations. And last year, our institute, together with the International Institute for Education, conducted research in some countries. Mauritius and Rwanda were among them. And the majority of schools in these countries reported inclusive measures for disabled students during the pandemic. However, only some schools tried to include some new learning environment that is for such students. And many schools still lack this capacity. At the same time, according to numerous research, distance learning perhaps is the only safe method of ensuring continuous education.

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Despite the current issues when it comes to ensuring inclusive development environment, platforms may provide solutions for such students, for students with disabilities, if they are developed with these people in mind. We all know about the digital divide, which is growing, especially during conflicts or during the pandemic, so the digital divide, when it comes to access to computer equipment,

to electricity and quality education, has been growing, and it's been exacerbating the educational gap, especially when it comes to disabled students. And as I have already said, distance learning may become a tool for ensuring real equality in education.

Next slide.

Many schools worldwide, especially in low-income countries, failed to implement new technological solutions due to undeveloped infrastructure, unstable connection to the Internet, and insufficient support from national and local authorities. Those schools that managed to do that, some of them were unable to help their teachers acquire digital knowledge that was required to support disabled students. Apart from school education, disruptions were faced by other areas. We are talking about consequences for disabled young people who already are facing big issues when it comes to gaining employment.

Next slide.

The strategy of open distance learning must be underpinned by ensuring equality and be centred around some targeted approach, continuous education, and prevention of losing students who will drop out of school, students with disabilities. And it's important to assist such students when it comes to realizing their potential and reduce risks of exacerbating of gaps. So we have some recommendations that can be divided into three categories: First, state support, civil society support, and educational community.

The first important category is the state support or the government support. And the key issue for policymakers is basically raising resources to ensure open distance learning. Policymakers shall guarantee the accessibility of such educational materials, privacy issues, and provide support to teachers when they move to distance teaching.

Also, it's very important to use appropriate technologies. Policymakers should not forget that people with disabilities without assistive technologies may face serious issues when it comes to access to learning materials. Therefore, they may not be able to take part in the educational process in full.

So, what is recommended to policymakers is to follow the following recommendations. I will not dwell upon each category. You may find a detailed description in our publication if you go to the UNESCO Institute, IITE website. So we are talking about legal and political measures, ensuring diverse special enabling environment, ensuring access to assistive technologies and inclusive ICT, promoting research, providing educational materials, learning support, protecting privacy, supporting teachers, user friendliness.

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The next area which needs decision-making and which is very important for ensuring continuity of open distance learning is the civil society. Civil society organizations must play a key role in protecting the most vulnerable students and promoting effective response measures. Unfortunately, these are lacking in many

countries. It's important to involve local communities so they act as conduits for change, agents for change when it comes to all the societal issues and ensuring people with disabilities are treated fairly.

Another area is the educational community itself. The educational communities mean people or organizations that invest in ensuring the viability of educational institutions. They also develop or maintain educational platforms. And educational institutions must understand that their educational approach must be inclusive when it comes to people with disabilities. To this effect, certain political measures are needed and standards that would guarantee inclusiveness for all types of students. They cannot just look at types of disabilities itself. Some common issues and obstacles must be constantly identified, and the approaches to design and education must be applied.

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In conclusion, I would like to say is a few words about recommendations when it comes to transitioning, transitioning to the "new normal," so to speak. We all hope that the pandemic will end eventually. And we see some signs of that coming to an end. We would see the resumption of schools. They will welcome students. And despite some worrying statistics when it comes to losses of education, the pandemic most impacted, of course, the most vulnerable students, but the impact hasn't been measured yet. And we should look at the situation not only as an issue, as a problem, but also as an opportunity, an opportunity to close gaps in education, close existing gaps, and promote equality, equity, especially for the most vulnerable groups.

This slide shows recommendations and main requirements for reopening of schools after a prolonged closure during the pandemic.

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This concludes my presentation. And you may find all the details, the website of the Institute for Information Technologies in Education, and I welcome you to visit our site and learn about our research and our publications. They are available in several languages. Mostly we work in Russian and English. And we would be very happy to continue our cooperation with the International Telecommunication Union. Thank you.

>> NATALIA MOCHU: Thank you, Natalia. Indeed, ITU and IITE have been working together for a long time and very successfully. And you have mentioned a few pain points in your presentation when it comes to the necessity to upskill students' digital literacy that needs to be improved. Also, you mentioned teachers' digital skills, those teachers that teach such students. The teachers must teach young students, disabled students how to find themselves in the new Information Society.

You mentioned difficulties faced by students when it comes to accessing the Internet. Many regions still show insufficient access to quality Internet connection and the lack of educational resources, learning resources, especially including in accessible formats,

including sign language, subtitling, and it's very important. It's a very important component for preparing the relevant information among learning content. Devices that would be user friendly and accessible for teachers, for students, and also parents. Parents are a very important component of this solution and ensuring inclusion, inclusion of all children, including children with disabilities, and of course, the importance of multi-stakeholder cooperation involving the government, civil society, educational institutions, and international organizations. And you have demonstrated to us what is being done in other countries, on the government level.

And this brings us to the next part, the interactive discussion with experts from the industry, from the educational industry, representatives of the international organizations such as ITU and the UNESCO Institute. We will discuss difficulties faced at local communities, the local level, and also the vision for future development that will be shared by our colleagues from different countries of the region so that we could continue our work successfully.

And moving on to the discussion itself, I would like to introduce the panelists. First, of course, it is Natalia, and of course, we'll be very happy to hear from you again. Then we have Kristine Gyonjyan, who represents Armenia, who is the Director of the Union of Operators. Then we have Zhanna Barakova, representing the Academy of Digital Innovation in Kyrgyzstan, and she has a wealth of experience in many areas, including her experience in the Resource Certainty for People with Disabilities. Also, Apel Sarybaeva. I am not sure if she has joined us, also from Kyrgyzstan.

Also we have with us today as a panelist Mr. Abdulahad Kuchkarov from IT Park in Kyrgyzstan, where they also work with people with disabilities. And one more panelist today is Inna Kovalenko from the Belarusian State Academy of telecommunication, which also has a resource centre for people with disabilities.

Dear colleagues, thank you for joining us today. And as part of our discussion, I would like to ask all of you several questions. I hope we will have sufficient time. And I hope after the first question, we will proceed to the second one.

Abdulahad, the first question is to you. You have been implementing many significant projects in Uzbekistan, IT Women and many others. You also work with startups. And last year we worked together on a project of creating a new centre for developing digital skills for children with disabilities. Good you please tell us about your experience? What difficulties do you face in implementing those projects? And do you think that teaching digital skills helps eliminate barriers when it comes to access of education to children with disabilities? Abdulahad, the floor is yours for a few minutes, if you could answer my question, please.

>> ABDULAHAD KUCHKAROV: Hello, Natalia. First of all, I would like to thank you for raising such important issues, important for the modern society.

Thanks to the ITU support, we have organized a centre for training, computer literacy, computer design for children, and we have already taught 20 children.

The main issues that we have identified, that we have experienced working with children with disabilities, is accessibility. Because in the capital city, we are the only educational institution apart from some specialized schools for children with disabilities. We are the only centre. And other cities just have no centres like that. Therefore, our students find it difficult to commute from the region or even from far-away regions of the city. But we will try to overcome such issue by opening more centres in other places.

Another point I would like to tell you about is that as of today, not all children -- mainly for financial reasons, not all children have computers at home. For that reason, they find it more difficult to do homework, homework that they receive at the centre or at school, and for that reason, it's more difficult to learn. But they find different solutions, such as they stay at school long after work, and they ask their computer science teachers who are asked to assist them in that just to use the computers to do homework. Plus children find themselves in a new environment in the Centre because they are so used to being at school all the time, and finally they find themselves at the Centre, they meet new people, new students, and we see that their eyes are basically shining because they are so excited about the new atmosphere, about meeting new people, and this is, perhaps, a huge bonus as well. Thank you.

>> NATALIA MOCHU: Abdulahad, thank you very much. It is, indeed, important to take difficulties and turn them into opportunities, and you have also mentioned that quite correctly. Thank you for sharing your experience.

Inna Kovalenko, I would like to ask you a similar question. In representing the Belarusian State Academy of telecommunications, and under the auspices of the Academy, there is a Resource Centre for teaching people with hearing impairments, and Inna is the principal of the Centre since last year. Inna, what difficulties do you face, and how important do you think it is to teach digital skills to your students? And can they expect to find decent employment later on or continue their education after receiving assistance and support from your Resource Centre? Inna, the floor is yours.

>> INNA KOVALENKO: Dear colleagues, good afternoon. I fully agree with what the previous speaker said. Our Resource Centre has faced numerous difficulties. When it comes to our students, the main difficulty is that they are school-aged children, and they come to us with different levels of knowledge, different levels of skills. Some schools in the city, of course, they have more hours of computer science, and there are some students that come from the regions, from villages, from rural areas, and of course, their level, their exposure to computers is probably much less. Some students -- or many of them -- do not have computers due to many, many reasons. And our teachers find it quite difficult to teach because each child needs

an individual approach, individual attention. Because practice shows that these children do not like to read. They want the teacher to show them what button to press. Even though our programmes are step by step, designed so that children, students, can figure out how to use them just by reading the instructions.

Also, we have classes once a week. It's like an additional class. And after this, sometimes they forget. It's more difficult to retain knowledge for them. Therefore, the teachers have to start fresh, and it requires some additional efforts on the part of teachers.

Also, our teachers, unfortunately, they do not speak sign language, and they can't use sign language, and to find a teacher who would know sign language and ICT, it's not easy, and it may be quite costly as well.

When it comes to developing digital skills for children with hearing impairment, first of all, we try to make them interested and excited about ICT, trying to explain it to them in very simple language, showcase the importance of ICT. To assist them in learning, our teachers have developed some electronic learning materials, and they have been signed with sign language, but not all children know sign language. And of course, for children, it's important to socialize, to find themselves in a new environment, especially for those who live in boarding schools who are not exposed normally to other people, so they find it very interesting and curious just to walk around the centre, and it means a lot to them. Also, the barrier-free environment for them makes them feel just normal, just like anyone else. I believe that the knowledge acquired at our Resource Centre for children is extremely important for their further development, for their lives in general, and we hope that they won't lose their interest.

We have one girl who asked us whether she could continue learning later on, even though her course was finished. And we said of course you can.

That's all I had to say. Thank you.

Oh, one more thing. Sorry. Upon completing our course, our graduates, two of them, have been admitted to the prestigious technical university in Moscow. And one has been admitted to the Belarusian State University of Radioelectronics. And also, we had a female student who came to us during the summer, and she shared her experience, her thoughts, and thanked us for teaching her so well.

When it comes to difficulties, yes, the difficulty in socializing for many students, many, they still segregate between people with normal hearing, people with hearing impairment, and this is a difficulty our graduates face, and we would like to help them to overcome that. Thank you.

>> NATALIA MOCHU: Thank you very much, Inna. This was a fine example you have cited of the children who manage to get admitted to universities. And these examples should be shown and shared as role models. Because the question of socialization is important. Children have to feel and know that they are full-fledged members

of the society. They should be able to find themselves professionally. And perhaps this is a more important task than getting some digital skills and acquiring them. Thank you very much for sharing your experience.

I can see that some of the difficulties you have mentioned are the same that Abdulahad shared with us, and I think there is plenty food for thought here. Thank you very much, Inna.

And now I would like to posit similar questions to Kristine Gyonjyan, who is the Director of Armenia's Operators Union. Under her leadership, the Union has been very proactive, contributing greatly to the development of telecom in Armenia and improving policies, regulation. Works a lot with digital skills, child protection online, child security in general, and issues of inclusive education have been raised as well as a role that the telecom industry plays in this respect cannot be ignored.

Kristine, could you tell us how do you see the digital skills acquisition process and challenges that you have in Armenia in particular? What sort of initiatives are you implementing in this respect? Do you think we are paying too much attention to digital skills and digital literacy? Kristine, please.

>> KRISTINE GYONJYAN: Thank you very much, Natalia. Thank you for your question. If you don't mind, will I switch to English.

>> NATALIA MOCHU: We do have interpretation online, so go ahead, please.

>> KRISTINE GYONJYAN: We are experiencing a huge digital transformation for our societies in real-time, and mainly it just bypasses the people with disabilities. They face lots of problems and challenges in their everyday life, like social inclusion, access to education, skills development, and of course, employment, which is also very, very much important.

During the pandemic, each of us felt a business these challenges in our life as well. I think everybody felt a bit not possible to go to access to education, and work during the pandemic, and it's continued until now.

Upon completion of school, sometimes people with disabilities don't have the opportunity to attend the school as well. They want to continue their education in universities, but they face lots of problems, starting with reaching the university with public transport, which is also impossible in Armenia, to lack of public infrastructure on the streets and inside buildings. And also, these problems, motivation of people with disabilities decreases from fear of unadapted environment, like special equipment in the universities, special software and accessible learning aids. I like to know the problem is twice more for the people living out of Tashkent, the capital city, in rural and remote areas. They practically don't have any opportunity. Digital inclusion can present an important opportunity for people with disabilities, since they are increasingly enabling to get access to education, skills development, and employment.

In Armenia, the number of people with disabilities has increased

considerably after war in 2020. Thousands of people with physical and psychosocial disabilities need to think about their future and learn to work in the new reality. Some of them have to start to think about new profession, as their main profession is not applicable to their new health status. Here the help can be reskilling and upskilling people with disabilities to ensure they can access new digital jobs.

Last year, Armenian Parliament adopted the new law on the rights of persons with disabilities. This is a long-awaited reform with the potential to change the lives of the roughly 200,000 people with disabilities in Armenia. There are different projects implemented by government and other public and private organizations to help the people with disabilities to integrate into society. But as I mentioned before, the barriers are quite more for the people with disabilities in the regions, especially in the remote areas.

To make sure all the people benefit from the advantages of technology and to help them, we are intending to create training centres in each region of Armenia upon a needs assessment, which will be tailored to the needs of people with disabilities. I think this will be a great opportunity for them to socialize, to learn, and be ready for the everyday changing needs of the labour market. The project will have several phases, like establishment of the training centre; assessing the beneficiary skills, interests, capabilities; developing special training programmes; and after successful completion of the course, help them with employment challenges as well.

First of all, we indebted to set up such centre in one of the regions in Armenia, pilot approaches, and in case of successful pilot, try to spread the model of the special training centres to other regions as well.

I know this is a quite hard and challenging project, and I learned that it's really challenging to work with people with disabilities from our previous speakers. But I am sure it's quite possible we support and partnership with different stakeholders, government, local and international organizations. This is the project that we are intending to run in Armenia, and this is supported by Union of Operators and government and other Nongovernmental Organizations, and we discuss these projects also with ITU, and we are very much thankful for them, for support from them as well.

Thanks, Natalia.

>> NATALIA MOCHU: Thank you very much, Kristina. Indeed, you have touched upon the problematic. Thank you for this open and sincere and interesting information which you have just shared with us. Everyone has talked about difficulties and challenges, especially for remote areas, and I think that this particular topic requires more attention.

Before I turn the floor over to our next speaker and before I ask Zhanna my questions, I would like to tell you that we are running slightly over time, but I think we can use ten minutes extra in addition to our allotted time so we can wrap up our discussion today.

Zhanna Barakova, Digital Innovation Academy in Kyrgyzstan. I mentioned earlier she has many years of experience. Zhanna, I am going to ask you the same question. I am not going to repeat, really. Could you share the experiences and challenges you see in Kyrgyzstan, and perhaps you can also tell us what do we need to do, what main objectives do we need to address so that we could take it on board for our work in the future? Zhanna, the floor is yours.

Zhanna froze on my screen. Zhanna, can you hear us? Is everything okay?

I think Zhanna is experiencing connectivity issues, and while we are addressing those, perhaps I can invite Natalia Amelina to comment on this from your perspective. I am referring to the aspects and I am referring to the presentations we've heard so far from our participants.

I think we still have some difficulties with the connectivity. Zhanna, can you hear us? Now I can hear you.

>> ZHANNA BARAKOVA: I am sorry. My Internet connection is very bad. Can I take the floor, please?

Good morning, good evening, good afternoon, colleagues. Thank you, Natalia, for giving me the floor so we can talk about these important issues.

As far as your question is concerned, by way of answering them, I will try to show our answers -- bear with me for a second, please.

Our Centre is a training centre for people with disabilities. We work with people who suffer from visual impairment. Unfortunately, it has disappeared.

So what sort of difficulties do we face? Most people with disabilities do not have basic digital skills, and I think Abdulahad -- unfortunately, the audio has disappeared.

>> NATALIA MOCHU: So we need to provide --

>> Interpreter: Unfortunately, the audio quality is not sufficient for interpretation.

>> NATALIA MOCHU: Zhanna, we lost you. I am afraid we can't hear you very well. Perhaps you can try and share your answers without any presentation. You can send us the presentation, and we can post it.

>> ZHANNA BARAKOVA: So I fully agree with Abdulahad. We offer computer literacy courses online. In June 2019, our centre took part in an LG Electronics contest. It's a global IT challenge for people with disabilities. Four of our students became finalists in November 2019, in Korea. They won awards.

The second problem, because all courses are free of charge, the online format would be the most beneficial approach for the students themselves because they would not have any transportation or other costs. But the online method is not fit for purpose when it comes to more dependent students. So we have raised investments to address the problems.

>> Interpreter: Unfortunately, the audio has been cut.

>> NATALIA MOCHU: Zhanna, I am afraid we lost you again, unfortunately. I don't think I am the only one who has this problem.

I can see Irina is nodding.

So my dear colleagues, because the connectivity is not very stable, Zhanna, perhaps you can try and continue, but perhaps for another minute because we can't really hear you very well, and then we'll move on.

>> ZHANNA BARAKOVA: I'll try to be brief. So like I said, we raised investments to help the social development centre so that the lunches and transportation costs could be covered.

Another problem is that students have different acquisition levels, skill acquisition levels, and this is something that Inna and Abdulahad mentioned. Everyone requires an individual approach. We hold individual classes, and our teachers are fully free to change the curriculum depending on the student's profile.

The fourth problem is that many students are trying to acquire skills for remote work, so they are trying to attend courses that offer skills and Internet technologies, so we have mixed format, online and offline.

And the first problem is that we don't have other sources of funding to pay salaries of our teachers. We are still struggling with this, and we haven't found a solution as of yet. These are the problems I would like to add.

>> NATALIA MOCHU: Thank you very much, Zhanna. Thank you very much. Thank you for sharing your experience, Zhanna. And here again, you've said something that many other participants mentioned, the need for an individual approach. And in light of what Kristine mentioned about a project that is in the pipeline in Armenia, we need to adapt the content that we offer at such centres so that people could find jobs later on. Not just any jobs, but ICT jobs which would offer new opportunities for them to find themselves so that the digital skills could be acquired not just for the purposes of acquiring them, but these digital skills should be adapted for subsequent professional development of these students and persons with such various disabilities.

Esteemed colleagues, dear Abdulahad, Kristine, Inna, Natalia, again, because we have exceeded the allotted time already, I believe that you have already touched upon both questions that we wanted to discuss today, and I am referring to the difficulties that you see and how you are overcoming these difficulties and what specifically your countries are doing there. And partially, you have also touched upon the prospects and the objectives that need to be implemented in the future. And in particular, we are talking about expanding similar programmes so that they would cover remote areas, individualized or adaptive approach to people with disabilities, knowing full well that very often they cannot study remotely, that very often they face their own specific limitations and perhaps they require individual precision work. So this objective implies that we need to develop information and educational content that would be available and accessible to persons with disabilities. I am referring to the hardware, to computers. You mentioned that sometimes people in remote regions even don't have a computer to work

on. We need to think about the accessible format, video content, perhaps, or sign language interpretation. This is a great deal of work to be done that requires additional efforts on everyone's part.

You've also mentioned -- all of you mentioned -- the importance of making sure that when people acquire the skills, this is perhaps where you could help them, they should be able to find jobs. Or perhaps you can pump them in the right direction to help them find a profession that would be fit for purpose for them. And it's great to hear that your courses teach them how to do Web design, programme, 3D modeling, so the things that people can actually use in their professional activities.

Another important issue is raising additional investments from various foundations, donors, and in this respect, we have the same task, the same objective. We need to expand our partnerships and bring additional investments on board to address this particular challenge. So it's great that we managed to discuss all of these issues today and exchange experiences.

On the eve of the WTDC, the World Telecommunications Development Conference, this is particularly important. You know full well that we are engaged in this work with you, and you will become our partners in your respective countries in implementing future projects that the ITU would like to implement. You will become our reliable partners on the ground. Because only if we get truly involved in this process at the country level, and what you are doing in your countries gives us the hope, only this way can we address the problems and give people with disabilities the chance to integrate into the social and economic activities in our countries and the region. And I truly admire you for the work that you do in your countries. These burning eyes, Abdulahad, the sparkling eyes of the children who understand that they have not been abandoned, they have not been marginalized, they have a chance to acquire new skills and integrate into the society, and I think this is a fantastic objective that all of us, together, have to implement and address.

My dear colleagues, I am very grateful to all of you for finding the time to participate in this event. Thank you for your work. I wish you every success, and I hope that we will all continue to work together for the benefit of our country, the countries of our region, and the global community. This is a fine example of what can be done together through joint efforts, through partnerships, if there is a great desire and a lot of heart invested in it, in all of your countries. Thank you all very much, and I wish you all every success. And good luck. Thank you, colleagues.

(Chorus of thank yous.)

We have one final video, colleagues.

We have one final video. Our technical moderator asked us to turn the video on, so thank you all very much.

(Video with no vocalization)