ALdia

62%
of students with disabilities consider that their inclusion **hinges upon training** their professors and VET trainers **on disability and assistive technologies.**

However, less than **16%** of the education professionals have followed a **course on disability assistive technologies.**

A **Massive Open Online Course on disability and assistive technology** will fulfil this knowledge gap.

Figure 1

Incluion os students with disabilities depends largey on Assistive Technologies
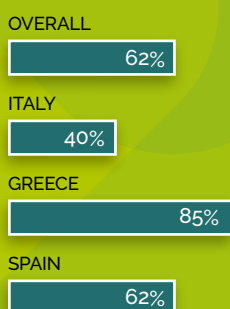
OVERALL
62%

ITALY
40%

GREECE
85%

SPAIN
62%

Assistive technologies are key to include students with disabilities but few education professionals know how to use them

What is at stake?

"Through adaptive, assistive and inclusive technology, persons with disabilities can make the most of their potential in their communities and in the workplace", the Secretary General of the UN. (UNSG, 2014). Thus, students with disabilities agree on pinpointing assistive technology as a crucial mean to achieve real inclusion in their education. Nevertheless, education professionals admit that few have received any training on how to implement assistive technologies on their teaching methodologies.

What did we find?

These findings emerge the study conducted within the framework of the ALdia project, co-funded by Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, to identify the needs of students with disabilities in the education sector. The ALdia project bridges theory and practice regarding equal access to education for persons with disabilities. As such, the main project task aims to develop an innovative and online training framework encapsulated in a Massive Open Online Course in disability, building up crucial skills for inclusive education among the professionals who teach students with disabilities.

The ALdia needs assessment analysis focused on the project target groups, inquiring students with disabilities, VET trainers and university professors. The research process achieved a very significant success, collecting 583 surveys and organising four design meetings analysis in the three participant countries of the project (Spain, Italy and Greece). The scale of these figures allows for a meaningful transposition and generalisation to the EU context.

The ALdia needs analysis prioritised assistive technologies as focus point of the research process. In fact, 62% of students with disabilities acknowledge that assistive technologies play a key role in including them during the teaching process (Fig. 1) However, in contrast with these statements, students with disabilities in Spain claim that 57% of education professionals do not consider assistive technology when planning for their individual learning needs. As such,

student with disabilities *"believed that assistive technologies (…) are not even available during the exams, and, when available, professors are often unfamiliar with such tools, thereby increasing the difficulties that students with disabilities have to face every day"* (ALdia, 2016, p. 92). In line with this trend, in Greece almost 43% of the students ranked the availability of assistive technologies in their education institutions from little to non-existent.

Figure 2
ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES AND EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS

Spain 57% / 42%
Greece 28% / 43%
Italy 69% / 57%
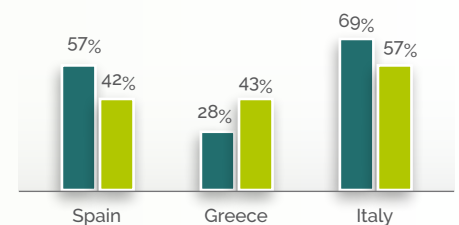
■ No AT in teaching methodology ■ Little to non-existent availability on AT

These figures are even higher in Italy where almost 69% criticise their professors for ignoring assistive technologies in teaching methodologies and nearly 57% graded the availability of these services from little to non-existent (Fig.2). An Italian student complained about the lack of assistive technology services during the design meeting by explaining how *"it would be very useful to be able to follow the lessons from home, if they were directly streamed on Internet. Several universities use this teaching method, which requires a very simple technology"* (ALdia, 2016, p. 95).

Figure 3
RECEIVED TRAINING ON ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

15,76%
84,24%
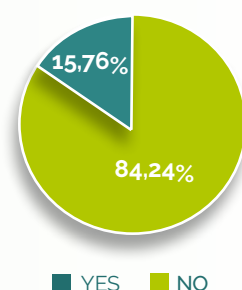
■ YES ■ NO

The analysis of the phenomenon from the education professionals' standpoint yields a similar picture. Hence, more than 84% of these professors have not received any training on assistive technologies. Despite that bleak panorama, there are optimistic findings, such as that almost 81% of the interviewed professors voiced a positive interest in taking courses to increase their knowledge and skills in this area. In fact, a university professor from Spain leaned towards an online course, as *"nowadays it is possible to receive any kind of training online in any place needed, which is preferable"* (ALdia, 2016, p. 96).

Why is this important?

The Aldia needs analysis evidences a huge gap in terms of skills and knowledge regarding the use of assistive technologies in higher education and VET trainers training settings. These phenomena set a serious challenge to achieve the implementation of the Objective 2 of WHO Global Disability Action Plan: *"To strengthen and extend rehabilitation, habilitation, assistive technology, assistance and support services, and community-based rehabilitation"* (WHO, 2015). The international community has put the issues of accessibility and technology for disabilities on top of the global agenda. As the SDG 4 exemplifies promoting inclusive education by *"guaranteeing equal and accessible education by building inclusive learning environments and providing the needed assistance for persons with disabilities"*(UNITED NATIONS, 2015).

Given the crucial value students place on the provision of these services and the professors' demand on the subject, the ALdia project pioneers an innovative, flexible and regular Massive Open Online Course, which comprehends modules on assistive technology. Thus, ALdia MOOC promotes accessibility and inclusion on the teaching methodologies deployed by the education professionals, aligning it with the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 ensuring *"accessibility to goods, services including public services and assistive devices for people with disabilities"* (European Comission, 2010).

Implications for Policymakers

This MOOC should provide training that complies with the following requirements:

- ◗ ALdia MOOC equips the education professionals with the right tools and skills to enhance the learning process of students with disabilities and make it more accessible for them.

- ◗ The dissemination of the ALdia MOOC course among university professors and VET trainers will empower students with disabilities, guaranteeing their right to education.

- ◗ Technology is key to include persons with disabilities in our education system.

Further Reading

ALdia. (2016). *R2.2: Supporting students with disability in HE and VET: a needs analysis. Erasmus+ Programme: Four Elements.* http://aldia-project.eu/2016/12/15/aldia-r2-2-supporting-students-with-disability-in-he-and-vet-a-needs-analysis/

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UNSG. (2014). *Message on the international day of persons with disabilities.* Geneva: United Nations.

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