InSIDE - Including Students with Impairments in Distance Education

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Newsletter No. 1

Welcome to the first Newsletter of the InSIDE project. In this newsletter, we would like to inform you about the project "**Including Students with Impairments in Distance Education (InSIDE)**", the reasons why we initiated the project, who is involved, and what the project's activities are.

The **InSIDE** project is supported by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ Programme, Key Activity KA2: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices – Capacity Building in the field of Higher Education. Its duration is 36 months, from March 2019 until February 2022.

Project idea

InSIDE (**In**cluding **S**tudents with **I**mpairments in **D**istance **E**ducation) is a Capacity Building in Higher Education (Erasmus+) project that aims at developing accessible, inclusive, and educationally effective Distance Education (DE) programs for individuals with Visual, Hearing and Mobility (ViHeMo) impairments through user-centered design. DE programs will be structured on 3 axes: a) educational material, b) DE delivery system, and c) educational effectiveness / pedagogical approaches. Eleven universities from the Maghreb – 4 from Morocco, 4 from Algeria and 3 from Tunisia – will be trained by University of Macedonia (leading institution – Greece), National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Greece) and Johannes Kepler University (Austria), and will implement the DE programs at hand. These programs will deliver key competencies for vocational rehabilitation and will provide opportunities for lifelong learning, skills enhancement, and personal fulfillment with the ultimate aim of suggesting an intelligent solution against the problems of limited access or a high percentage of dropouts in Higher Education in individuals with impairments.

Aims and Objectives

- Develop and pilot new and innovative, accessible, and inclusive DE programs aiming to improve the quality in Higher Education for individuals with Visual, Hearing and Mobility (ViHeMo) impairments and offering flexible learning and virtual mobility.

- Reform the operation of Accessibility Units in Partner Countries from the Maghreb and equip them with advanced computer-based Assistive Technologies to support Students with Disabilities.

- Build capacity and professional development for administrative and academic staff to design accessible and inclusive DE programs and deliver novel services through the Accessibility Units for Students with Disabilities.

- Involve students with ViHeMo impairments in user-centered design so that accessibility and usability are achieved in conjunction, and the links between education and society are strengthened.

Implementation & Results

- State-of-the-art analysis on the accessibility of Distance Education (DE) programs, web-based platforms, and educational materials.

- Development of suitable digital formats of educational material for students with disabilities in terms of accessibility, usability, and educational efficacy through the study of end-user requirements.

- Adaptation and delivery of an open-source DE web-based platform that best serves the needs of students with disabilities.

- Reform the operation of the academic Accessibility Units to provide support services to students with disabilities in Partner Countries from the Maghreb.

- Training of trainers (administrative and academic staff) in Accessibility Units to train end-users (teaching staff and students with disabilities) in applying accessible and inclusive DE programs.

- Development of dissemination and exploitation of the InSIDE project deliverables **at an international level**.

Activities

The **InSIDE** project is divided into different phases:

Phase 1: State of the Art

> **TASK 1.1** Review of literature and other sources with reference to DE programs for individuals with impairments
> **TASK 1.2** Review of literature and other sources with reference to different kinds of educational material in all the possible types of information output both in printed and in digital form
> **TASK 1.3** Review of literature and other sources with reference to LMSs that could be used for DE of individuals with ViHeMo impairments, their advantages, drawbacks, and specific features

Phase 2: Adapted educational material

TASK 2.1 Design and development of educational material in a preliminary version based on the needs of students with ViHeMo impairments and the respective pedagogical approaches

TASK 2.2 Assessment of the adapted and the alternative materials with reference to their accessibility and usability adequacy as well as to the end-users' satisfaction

TASK 2.3 Final adaptations applied on the material to improve it over its accessibility, usability, and effectiveness

Phase 3: Distance Education (DE) Delivery System

TASK 3.1 Examination of the most widespread LMSs with reference to their accessibility and usability aspects with the purpose of proposing solutions

TASK 3.2 Detailed investigation of the most appropriate open-source LMS under the prism of accessibility, usability, and educational efficiency

TASK 3.3 Software adaptations on the selected LMS with the aim of accessibility, usability and educational efficiency improvement for both students with ViHeMo impairments and students without impairments

Phase 4: Training

TASK 4.1 Training of two accessibility advisors from each university on the use of assistive technology and the operation of the accessibility office in and beyond the context of DE programs

TASK 4.2 Training of the trainers – the 2 accessibility advisors and 4 representatives – from each participant university (Partner Countries) on a) the delivery of accessible and inclusive DE programs, and b) the training of the other teaching staff in their universities

TASK 4.3 Training of end-users – teaching staff and individuals with ViHeMo impairments – on the processes and stages of a DE programme

Phase 5: DE Pilot courses

TASK 5.1 DE pilot courses: two accessible DE programs per participant university (of Partner Countries)

TASK 5.2 Assessment of the results of the educational process (2 DE programs) in each participant university (of Partner Countries)

TASK 5.3 Examination of the quality of the pilot courses

Phase 6: Quality Assurance

Task 6.1 Planning of Quality Assurance activities
Task 6.2 Internal Quality Assurance evaluation and management activities
Task 6.3 External Quality Assurance evaluation activities

Phase 7: Dissemination and Exploitation

Task 7.1: Design and development of the multilingual project website
Task 7.2: Planning of dissemination and exploitation activities
Task 7.3: Implementation of dissemination and exploitation activities

Highlights of the first 6 months

- **Kick-off meeting at Thessaloniki**: Our kick-off meeting took place on March 14-15, 2019, at Thessaloniki, Greece. This was the first time that we got to know each other personally. It was a good opportunity to coordinate all the work which will take place during the first year.

Figure 1. Project members of the InSIDE consortium attended the kick-off-meeting at Thessaloniki, Greece

- **Project Flyer**: The project flyer (in English, French, German, and Greek) has been designed and produced. It is available for download in electronic form from our website under Promotional Material.

- **Project Poster**: The project poster (in English, French, German, and Greek) has been designed and produced. It is available for download in electronic form from our website under Promotional Material.
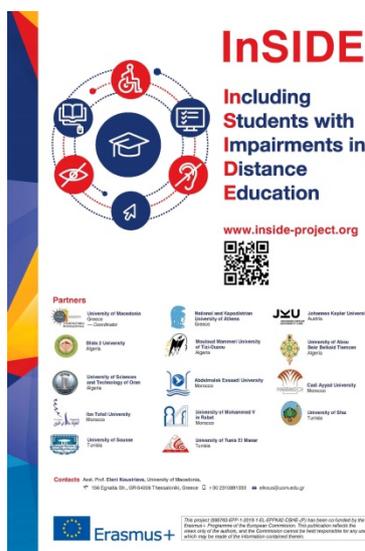
Who is involved?

There are eleven partner organizations from five countries working together in the **InSIDE** project. All of them bring a different perspective to the project according to their profile.

- University of Macedonia, Greece, *Coordinator*
- National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece
- Johannes Kepler University, Austria
- Blida 2 University, Algeria
- Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou, Algeria
- University of Abou Bekr Belkaid Tlemcen, Algeria
- University of Sciences and Technology of Oran, Algeria
- Abdelmalek Essaadi University, Morocco
- Cadi Ayyad University, Morocco
- Ibn Tofail university, Morocco
- University of Mohammed V in Rabat, Morocco
- University of Sfax, Tunisia
- University of Sousse, Tunisia
- University of Tunis El Manar, Tunisia

- **University of Macedonia (UOM),** Thessaloniki, Greece, as the project's leading partner, is in charge of the overall coordination and representation of the project. The Department of Educational and Social Policy of UOM was established in an effort to promote, among others, research in the fields of education of individuals with disabilities, training techniques, development, and evaluation of social policy regulations. In this context, extended research is conducted by the department on a range of vital subjects of visual impairment and blindness, such as spatial knowledge, cognitive maps, assistive technology, perception and comprehension of synthetic speech, tactile maps, orientation & mobility of the visually impaired, adaptive behavior, and social support. The Department has a dedicated laboratory for the accessibility and support of people with disabilities.

- **National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (UoA)** is the oldest and largest university in Greece, with 40 Departments, 2.100 members of the Academic Staff and more than 62.000 students. The research interests of the Speech and Accessibility Laboratory, Department of Informatics and Telecommunications (https://speech.di.uoa.gr) focuses on the area of Digital Accessibility and Voice User Interfaces, as a part of the major domain of Human-Computer Interaction. The Laboratory has strong relations with the Accessibility Unit for Students with Disabilities (https://access.uoa.gr), which serves annually more than 550 students with severe disabilities.

- **Johannes Kepler University (JKU)** is a modern university with extended research activities and participation in many national and international research programs, including H2020 and Erasmus+. JKU presents participation both as a leader and as a partner in projects concerning (web) accessibility/ training in web accessibility as well as ICT for/ with people with disabilities. The Institute Integriert Studieren was established in 1991 in an effort to serve and support blind and partially sighted people in their studies at Linz University as well as provide teaching and research activities in the area of Assistive Technologies (web) accessibility and accessibility

in its most comprehensive context. The Institute also planned, implemented, and held university courses on Assistive Technologies and Accessible web-design and is a partner in an extensive set of academic and vocational programs on (web)-accessibility.

- **Blida 2 University (UB2LA)**, Algeria, has been created as a result of a split that divided Saad Dahleb, (Blida 1), the first main university of the region, into two distinct universities. The Exact Sciences and Engineering remained in Blida 1, and specialties such as the Human and Social Sciences, Economics, Business and Management, Law, Political Sciences, Anthropology, History, Demography, communication, Human Resources, Letters and Foreign Languages have shifted to the huge brand new modern University Blida 2 few miles away from hometown Blida.

- **Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou (UMMTO)**, Algeria, founded in 1977 in Algeria. It is a multi-disciplinary higher education institution which hosts more than 60.000 students, distributed among 9 Faculties comprising a number of departments each. The departments provide disciplinarily and, sometimes, cross-disciplinary courses to undergraduate and postgraduate students. The Faculties of UMMTO are Biology and Agronomy, Construction Engineering, Economics and Management, Electric Engineering and Computers, Humanities and Social Sciences, Law and Political Sciences, Letters and Languages, Medicine and Sciences.

- **University of Abou Bekr Belkaid Tlemcen (UABT)**, Algeria, was established in 1974. Since then, it continues to grow to become the first university in western Algeria with more than 43.000 enrolled students, including 360 foreign students who come from 27 Arab and African countries. The teaching staff consists of 1.690 teachers, of which 37% are masterful rank. The multidisciplinary nature of the UABT is a great asset. More than eighty sections are currently performed. UABT has adopted the Bologna system since 2004 and delivers 8.000 degrees per year across all specialties. UABT is involved in several cooperation projects targeting the curricula modernization, the implementation of distance learning and quality assurance systems, the development of Lifelong Learning programs, and the organization of the university-industry relationship. UABT also implements a policy of exchange of students and teachers. It records every year more than 900 outgoing mobilities and around fifty incomings.

- **University of Sciences and Technology of Oran (USTO)**, Algeria, was established in 1971. It was designed by the famous Japanese architect Kenzo Tange. USTO is located on 2 sites IGCMO (Institute of Civil and Marine Engineering, Oran) and the main campus Bir El Djir which covers a surface area of 100 hectares. USTO shares many characteristics of universities all over the world. It is one of the largest institutions of knowledge and technological research in Algeria. USTO emphasizes equal opportunities and accessibility of the university for all, for this reason, and since its conception, infrastructure accessible to people with specific needs have been planned installed (ramps, lifts, parking spaces, etc.) but also support cells for all categories (students, teachers, and workers, etc.) are offered to help them during their presences at the university.

- **Abdelmalek Essaadi University (UAE)**, was created in 1989 and covers three main areas: Science and Technology, Arts and Humanities, and Law, Economics,

and Management. The University Abdelmalek Essaâdi is a unique university in the Northern Region of Morocco "Tangiers-Tétouan Region". It enrolls almost 95.000 students and has 1.000 professors and 560 staff members. It is spread on seven campuses situates in three towns: Tangier, Tetouan, and Larache. Abdelmalek Essaâdi University has been involved in Tempus projects that focused on students with special needs. As part of these projects, UAE has equipped centers for students with disabilities.

- **Cadi Ayyad University** **(UCA)** Morocco was founded in 1978. It consists of 14 Faculties and Schools that cover all the scientific, technical, economic, legal, medical, and social sciences. UCA is present in 4 cities: Marrakech, Safi, Essaouira and Kelaa Sraghna. The University has about 102.000 students, 1.535 teachers and researchers, 850 administrative personnel, and more than 600 foreign students from 50 nationalities.

- **Ibn Tofaïl University** **(UIT)** is one of the twelve public universities in Morocco established in 1989. Its faculties include a total of 650 full-time professors and 324 persons as administrative staff for 52.660 students that are enrolled in the undergraduate and graduate courses. It offers training primarily structured around the new teaching architecture of higher education, which is itself based on three levels LMD. The training offered is organized into 3 areas (Science and Technology; Arts, Human Sciences, Humanities and Law, Economics, and Management).

- **University of Mohammed V in Rabat (UM5R)** was founded in 1957 at Rabat, and it is one of the oldest universities in Morocco. More than 85.000 students are enrolled in the UM5R, with 2.048 professors, 1.357 technical and administrative staff. The University of Rabat has 18 establishments (8 Faculties, 5 Schools, 5 Institutes). UM5R is a comprehensive University that covers all the disciplines (Law, Economics, Physics, Biology, Medicine, Dentistry, Engineering, Education, Humanities, Social sciences…), closely combining academic input and research. Its ICT research center has more than 100 professors and 300 Ph.D. students. Several members of this center are working for the accessibility and support of people with disabilities. Moreover, the ICT research center has a business incubator and aims to develop software solutions that can be used for people with disabilities.

- **University of Sfax (USFAX)**, Tunisia, was founded in 1986 as a step towards decentralizing higher education in Tunisia. According to News and World Report Best Arab Region Universities Rankings, the University of Sfax was classified as the second-best university in Tunisia. The third best university in the Arab region in Biological Science Subject and fourth in Computer Science. In 2011 the Moroccan Magazine "L'Economiste" ranked the University of Sfax as the best University in the Maghreb Region in terms of academic publications and research quality. University's demographics include 20 institutions, with 3.000 academic staff, 1500 administrative staff, and 32.985 students.

- **University of Sousse (US)**, Tunisia, is a "Multidisciplinary University" consisted of 17 institutions that host 27.000 students, 2.100 permanent teachers, and 1.000 administrative and technical staff. Since 2003, the US has a University Business Liaison Office (BLEU) involving academic and socio-economic actors from the region in the field of Innovation. A big innovation forum is organized every year. In 2012, it was signed with ANPR to install a Technology Transfer Office (BuTT). In

particular, regarding Online learning. The Sousse University has been piloting the Coselearn Project (Cooperation Suisse en Elearning) for six years, which aimed to train University teachers in using Online learning and Instructional Design technologies. At the Sousse University, there is a department of online learning, which is responsible for the coordination of technology-enhanced learning in the institutions related to Sousse University and on the training of trainers on topics related to Elearning such management of LMS (Learning Management systems, Instructional Design, MOOCs, ...)

- **University of Tunis El Manar (UTM)**, brings together the oldest and most prestigious institutions of higher education in Tunisia (Faculty of Law and Political Sciences, Faculties of Science, Faculty of Economics and Management, Faculty of Medicine, National School of Engineers, etc.), the oldest research centers (vegetation research center, Institute Pasteur), training and research…

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