ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

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Tools for E-learning aimed at disabled, frail and vulnerable people

With a view to ensuring equal access to education and training pathways, eLearning practices should be a priority.

Some changes now taking place in our country's education system certainly impose a number of considerations on both national and EU priorities regarding the integration and inclusion of people with disabilities, fragile and vulnerable people and **equal opportunities for access to all education and training pathways**.
Both in schools, compulsory schools and universities, and in the world of work, the increase in the number of people with disabilities, fragile and vulnerable people enrolling in training courses is now well established. At the same time, we can see the increasing popularity of courses delivered in e-learning mode, offering interactive and collaborative activities to be conducted entirely online.

Until recently, and the pandemic at this juncture has been crucial, people with disabilities, frail or vulnerable people who wanted to undertake training were faced with a series of obstacles represented by architectural barriers, shortage or lack of aids and specialized support staff, and inadequate teaching aids.

As more and more universities, companies, are providing e-learning training, it seems necessary and, as also provided at the European level, mandatory to ensure access to courses and activities that take place on the platforms for all.
Integration and inclusion are fundamental values of social life.
This is also evident from the numerous studies that highlight the value of e-learning as a training modality that can contribute to the fortification of these two parameters, as it brings fundamental characteristics, such as overcoming obstacles and space-time constraints, the possibility of designing flexible paths, personalization and interactivity.

In fact, in several documents, the European Commission has emphasized that "*the potential of Information and Communication Technologies should be employed in favor of fragile, disabled or vulnerable people, facilitating the use of online services and content and removing obstacles that prevent their full availability: that is, working in the direction of accessibility, which consists of the ability of a device or resource to be usable with ease by any user*".

But who exactly are fragile and vulnerable people?
In the EC Regulation, a "disadvantaged worker" is anyone who falls into one of the following categories:

- Those who have not been in regular paid employment for at least 6 months (someone who has been out of work for at least 24 months is considered a "very disadvantaged" worker)
- Those who do not have a high school or vocational diploma
- Workers who are over 50 years of age
- Adults living alone with one or more dependents
- Workers employed in occupations or sectors characterized by a male-female disparity rate that exceeds the average male-female disparity by at least 25 percent
- Members of a national minority who need to consolidate their experiences in terms of language skills, vocational training or employment.

Workers defined as disadvantaged may also include people identified as weak, fragile, vulnerable, at risk of poverty, users who are beneficiaries of community-national-regional-local programs/projects of social inclusion work integration, active citizenship.

They include, by way of example, in this segment of the population

- Single mothers with minor dependent children
- Individuals with weak family-social network

- People with diversified demands for support/assistance (payment of utilities, rent advance, certification for priority access to childcare services, etc.)
- Immigrants with term jobs, inadequate skills, etc.

Having understood the categories of people we are addressing when we talk about fragility and vulnerability, we can analyze the various components of an e-learning course and the existing accessibility parameters.

We can identify three levels of accessibility: **platform access, content access, and activity access**.

At the platform access level, the user has the ability to access the system by logging in, then access the home page, navigate through the main sections, edit their profile, and read course information and notices posted on the bulletin board. Thus, technological accessibility is sufficient for this stage.

At the content access level, the user is able to access content, learning materials and consequently make downloads. This is where, in addition to technological accessibility, a participatory capability comes into play that enables the conversion of content into alternative formats. As we know well, an e-learning course, does not consist solely of a platform as it has content, materials, teaching resources and activities within it.

We can therefore conclude by saying that, clearly, technological accessibility is not enough to ensure a truly inclusive experience in which all those who approach e-learning can make the best use of the means and resources that an online course can offer them. Having the ability to use a computer, of course, is not synonymous with the ability to fully participate in an e-learning experience.

In fact, accessibility must be conceived in a way that encompasses the entire learning process and not just its technological side. It is clear that the entire training must be built around the needs of the person, a person who has special needs in these cases with a deeper focus on different parameters, such as accessibility, usability, learning outcomes, infrastructure and local contexts.

Building a digital, post-pandemic training that empowers and makes e-learning practices as standard, supporting innovation and implementing good inclusive practices available to all people, especially those most fragile and vulnerable, with a view to reducing inequality and marginalization, is the goal that training managers must always keep in mind.
Clearly, in such a scenario, there can be no room for the weaknesses that still accompany social, corporate and educational policies, which are still significantly behind in 'investing in the younger generation.

Regulatory provisions, programs and projects concerning people who may be considered "disadvantaged" subjects aim to regulate other areas, and in particular:

- Determining the subjects of social cooperation;
- Certifying state economic aid to enterprises;
- Putting in place specific programs and/or projects, which can range from community to local.

Based on what we have explained so far, we can encompass in a fairly broad area, and one that is increasingly expanding, the condition of disadvantage and vulnerability.

A precariousness that characterizes the lives of an increasing number of people and that gives sap to a new, perhaps more problematic user base, which needs more structured and consolidated interventions over time but still unprepared, as it lacks a connection between social-health and employment services.

Difficulties turn into vulnerabilities that tend to develop into an area that is difficult to place in a specific domain. A no man's land where all the critical issues for people emerge that cannot be included in the performance standards of training.

People, all the more so fragile, vulnerable and people with disabilities, must find adequate answers and maximum support for their training and, consequently, be able to be introduced and placed permanently in the world of work thanks precisely to a training offer, e-learning and in-presence, oriented to the effective change of problem situations.

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