



Digital Competence for Blind People as a Basis for Work and Vocational Education and Training.

Blind and visually impaired people face huge barriers to learning, vocational training as well as lack of promotion opportunities. Amongst other reasons for this, most work tasks are based around the use of the computer and assistive disability software has remained high cost and unaffordable to unemployed citizens.

The e-learning project DICOMP-S.NET empowers the visually impaired back into mainstream society and employment by making free screen reading.

Based on Europe-wide demand, the DICOMP-Transfer project has the following main objectives:

- The **DICOMP-Transfer project** will adapt the free tools package for picking up IT based content that has been developed in the DICOMP-S.NET project and transfer it into the newly defined target countries Spain, Greece, Turkey, Poland and Bulgaria.
- The tools package consists of screen reader software, a speech synthesizer, a tutor-training program, fully comprehensive user documentation as well as a web browser "Webbie" which resolves the many problems blind people experience when navigating web sites.
- Based on a detailed demand analysis in the new target countries, the existing software and documentation will be adapted to the needs of the new countries.

The expectations with regard to the project impacts include achieving improved accessibility to vocational education, training and work opportunities for blind people in the respective partner countries.

Type of transfer

The main focus of the intended innovation transfer in the DICOMP-Transfer project lies on a geographical transfer. The project transfers the results and products of the DICOMP-S.NET e-learning project - a free screen reader, a tutor training program, a speech synthesizer, and a comprehensive user manual - into those partner countries



that, at the moment, lack solutions for both screen reader software as well as implementation and utilization support for the labour market and for vocational education and training. The transferred results of the DICOMP-S.NET project can significantly improve the situation with regard to jobs and labour market policy in the innovation-importing countries since they will receive a free, ready-to-use solution that enables access to information technology as the basis for high-quality jobs and vocational education and training. The project aims at delivering an information campaign for enterprises to improve the current precarious job situation for blind people in Europe.

Aims and Impact

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The tools package consists of screen reader software, a speech synthesizer, a tutor-training program, fully comprehensive user documentation as well as a web browser “Webbie” which resolves the problem blind people experience when navigating web sites.

Based on a detailed specification analysis in the new target countries the existing contents and tools will be adapted to the new localized specifications.

Information campaigns towards enterprises and VET providers will be organized about the results and potentials of the project as well as to inform the visually impaired community in each target country of the free software available to them.

The expectations with regard to the project impacts include reaching improved accessibility regarding vocational education and training and also regarding the labour market for blind people in the respective partner countries.

Results

The project results are:

- a) A screen reader for all electronic learning contents.
- b) A speech synthesizer for the voiced output of the contents.
- c) A tutor-training program for tutors who are to support the implementation and use of the products within the target group.



d) A full user manual with explanations for using the results.

All products will be available in;

German

Spanish

English

Greek

Turkish

Polish

Bulgarian

Partners

Bfi Steiermark www.bfi.au

Assist Net, Bulgaria www.assist-net.eu

Lawton School, Spain www.lawtonschool.com

Harpo, Poland www.harpo.com.pl

Six Point Association, Turkey <http://www.ankaraaltinokta.org>

Sreenreader.net, UK www.screenreader.net

Recent Activities

DICOMP-Transfer in the U.K

The Thunder free talking software now has its place here in the UK alongside JAWS, Dolphin and just a few WindowEyes users. Of course our unique selling point is that Thunder is free and there are many low-income blind people in the UK as elsewhere.

In the autumn of 2009, we received a grant of just over 80,000 Euros to deliver 50 web-learning days round the country. We have three blind instructors, two of whom learned their Thunder trade as part of the previous EU project. Organizations such as colleges, libraries, local blind charities, agree to host a learning day. They recruit six blind and four seeing people to take part. The idea is that seeing people who are carers, teachers or volunteer trainers, learn alongside their blind colleagues. The fund provides all the costs. From each learning day a Thunder Champion is recruited who will endeavor to



grow local interest so that more and more blind people learn to get the best from the computer and the web.

Screenreader.net gets paid for organizing the whole thing.

The second big thing we are involved in this year is to tackle the problem of delivering training remotely to the majority who can't get to learning days and can't afford professional tuition fees. We are taking on this challenge in two ways. We are purchasing some accessible remote access software from Serotek Corporation in the States. It is quite normal for techies to be able to control and sort out a user's computer remotely over the Internet. This Serotek software called RIM and RAM enables skilled blind people to train users and sort out their computer problems via speech.

Obviously there are great savings and, efficiencies and flexibilities. We will report later in the year on how this all works out.

And lastly, we are setting up a website called www.help4-me which will deliver guides or straightforward instructions on how to get the best from a range of websites if you can't see. It will develop over the months and years but we shall launch the first version before the end of March.

We will never be rich at Screenreader.net, but we are beginning to find ways of generating income while at the same time offering a pretty good service to blind users. So be encouraged. There is a long-term plan here.

DICOMP-Transfer in Greece

On 16 December 2009, e-ISOTIS covered the DICOMP project in a presentation during the Workshop "Equal opportunities in the work environment" organized in Athens, Greece, where the participants received project objectives with enthusiasm. Overall, the responses received in Greece from potential end users during this presentation but also through the numerous people that have been contacted for the project's demand analysis, outline a warm welcoming environment for the availability of Thunder in Greek. End users are excited for the availability of a free screen reader for the Greek language and additionally focus on the ease of use and opportunity to run the screen reader through a flash drive, while no installation is needed. Several people have already expressed their interest to participate and validate the adaptation of Thunder in Greek. If you are interested in participating through this process, please send an email to screenreader@e-isotis.org.

Autonomia Expo 2010



e-ISOTIS will also be present in Autonomia Expo 2010 between 28 - 30 May in Athens. Autonomia Expo is a great celebration of disability, technology, aesthetics and culture and is organized by DISABILITY NOW on a yearly basis. Covering 6,000 m², Autonomia EXPO constitutes the largest exhibition of products and services for disability, health, rehabilitation, special education, technology and independent living in Greece, also attracting participation from European providers. It also encompasses disability seminars and cultural events. In reality, it is a celebration of disability as difference in living terms, of accessible ways of living, of aesthetics and culture. For more details, please visit www.autonomiaexpo.org

Interesting Blog

We recently came across a very interesting blog from the Greek blogging community with valuable resources for educators and parents of primary school students with visual impairments.

We would like to congratulate the creator for the initiative and also for continuously updating with very interesting content. If you can read Greek, we strongly encourage you to visit the blog <http://chiourea.blogspot.com/>

DICOMP-Transfer Presentation

DICOMP-Transfer in Bulgaria

December 2009 - Assist Net's team of experts attended the regular monthly meetings at the club of the Bulgarian association of the blind entrepreneurs. Five days in a row the company experts introduced the project DICOMP-Transfer and did the demand analysis tests with over 30 volunteers.

Mr. Nedko Nedev, president of the Bulgarian Association of the Blind Entrepreneurs welcomed the idea of the project and pointed out the importance of increased digital competence for people with visual impairments.

March 2010 – The DICOMP-Transfer project was presented at a meeting in the University for national and world economy in Sofia. The rector of the university was glad to learn about the planned end products and promised full assistance for the implementation of the Thunder screen reader at the university.

The University of national and world economy boasts a fully equipped laboratory with access to computers for blind and visually impaired students.



Ms Slavina Lozanova, Executive Manager of Assist Net said: “The Thunder screen reader is yet another opportunity for blind people in Bulgaria. It will definitely improve their general quality of life and provide them with better chances for a successful professional realization.”

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