IN Practice: Shaping the Future of Work, by Design

Practical insights on AI, accessibility and disability inclusion from the Disability:IN EMEA Summit

Disability:IN®

Intro

The Disability:IN EMEA Summit, hosted in partnership with Bloomberg at their offices in London, brought together representatives from 103 companies across 16 countries to explore one question: **how do we shape the future of work, technology and accessibility on purpose?**

This guide turns the summit's main themes, lessons and examples into practical next steps. This guide is built to help leaders and practitioners take what they learned and put it into immediate action.

Use This Guide To:

- Translate summit insights into practical next steps for your team, function or business unit
- Pressure-test how AI is being introduced across your employee lifecycle, from recruiting to advancement
- Spark conversations with HR, IT, procurement and business leaders about who owns accessibility outcomes

> **Tip:** Disability:IN's President & CEO Jill Houghton asked attendees to write down one idea they would act on when they got back to the office. Start there. Pick the one section that matches your current priority, try the tool with a single team, and expand once it works.

Get Started →

> **"The future isn't happening to us. We have an opportunity to be intentional and to design the future with accessibility in mind."**
>
> *– Jill Houghton, President & CEO, Disability:IN*

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Developed by Disability:IN

At a Glance: Where to Start, by Function

The summit's ideas land differently depending on where you sit. Find your function, start with the first action, and use the theme column to go deeper.

IF YOU LEAD...	START HERE THIS QUARTER	THEN	GO DEEPER
Executive team	Apply the "C-suite test": are the pathways to advancement accessible to every employee? If not, find where your talent lifecycle loses them.	Put the "So what?" test to every disability inclusion initiative- how does it route back to the business and drive retention, development, and advancement.	Themes 1, 7
HR and talent acquisition	Audit every AI screening or interview tool for accessibility barriers or disparate impact on disabled candidates before it touches a live role.	Offer a human-led interview route that is scored the same way.	Themes 2, 3
People managers	Learn the four-step disclosure response and open meetings with an access check-in.	Use AI to clear admin, and spend the time you get back on one-to-ones.	Themes 7, 8
Learning and development	Make AI fluency training accessible and teach people how to personalize their AI tools.	Measure adoption and behavior change, not completions. Turn training archives into an AI-searchable library.	Themes 1, 2
IT and digital workplace	Inventory the accessibility features in tools you already license and switch on the ones that are off.	Test major updates with assistive technology users. Test internal AI agents for disability bias or usability issues.	Themes 1, 3, 4
Legal, compliance and risk	Map your EAA exposure country by country, and name a trained local contact for inspections and demand letters.	Store conformity evidence and remediation logs centrally. Build human-at-the-helm checkpoints into AI governance.	Themes 4, 5
Procurement	Flag technology purchases at intake and add accessibility to RFP scoring and contracts.	Test shortlisted products with people with lived experience, and review suppliers every year.	Themes 4, 6
Product, design and customer experience	Walk one end-to-end customer journey with disabled customers and measure where people quietly drop off.	Make cognitive accessibility a requirement, and promote accessible features when you ship them.	Themes 4, 6
ERG and community leaders	Run an "AI hacks" exchange, or a small scalable idea like Bayer's "Adopt a Kitchen."	Feed what you learn directly to product, L&D, IT and leadership.	Themes 1, 7

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The Business Case in Numbers

These are the data points speakers used to make the case. Use this as a quick reference to open conversations with leaders around priority initiatives.

DATA POINT	WHY IT MATTERS	SOURCE
EMEA companies average 51.4 out of 76 on the Disability Index, at the boundary between Established and Advanced	Strong foundations, but most have not yet built disability into core systems and technology	2026 Disability Index (83 EMEA submissions, 22 countries)
EMEA is strongest on Benefits, Career Development and Culture, and on public reporting and supplier disability inclusion commitments	The gaps are formal accommodation systems, accessible recruiting and customer-facing digital accessibility	2026 Disability Index
61% of about 100 of the largest Dutch online shops were not digitally accessible	Regulators are testing at scale and following up with inspections	Netherlands consumer authority, cited in the Disability:IN and White & Case EAA research
US disabled consumers' spending power: $675 billion	Disabled customers are a growth market, not a niche	Disability:IN consumer market research (2026)
Only 2% of employees moved into a bigger role with their current employer in a year, while 6.3% left to find one	Organizations are losing talent they could have promoted	***Momentum at Work***, Disability:IN and LinkedIn (10 million employees, 8 countries); 2026 Gold Anthem Award winner
76% of neurodivergent employees report a good relationship with their manager as critical to their success at work	Demonstrates the importance of managers who are trained on and informed about neuroinclusive work environments.	***Creativity Over Convention***, Disability:IN (2025)
99% of young disabled professionals were comfortable with a human interview; 56% would prefer not to do an AI interview	Candidates want a human route	Disability:IN NextGen Leaders survey (about 100 respondents)
Candidates with chronic, physical or sensory disabilities were screened out of one AI interview workflow at about 80%	Untested AI hiring tools can create disparate impact at scale	Disability:IN INsight Lab research conducted for a technology company

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THEME 1

Design Work That Adapts to Everyone

Accommodations have historically been reactive, retrofitted and dependent on someone needing to disclose that they are experiencing a barrier. Research from Everway found that 78% of young people with a hidden disability do not tell their work, because they see it as career-limiting. AI makes it possible to design work, tools and systems that adapt to people from the start, putting control and discretion in the employee's hands.

"For too long, our community has had to find its own accommodations. Even the word 'accommodation' implies something that needs to be added on."

– Future of Work leader

What Leading Companies Are Doing

- **Natively adaptive interfaces.** A global tech company is exploring AI agents that adjust a digital environment to the individual, either built into the software or set by the user. One of its leaders has trained his own AI assistant to always respond in large text, and suggested asking for a three-bullet audio summary of every answer by default. "These are two very basic examples that are available now."

- **Personal AI "skills" that spread.** One leader described an AI skill created by his neurodivergent daughter describing how she best processes information, so every response comes back in a format that works for them. Her friends then asked to use the same skill. Support built for one person regularly helps many.

- **Design with the community from the start.** Google's Reading Mode (built for people with dyslexia and low vision), Guided Frame on Pixel (audio and haptic cues to help blind and low-vision users take photos) and Conversation Mode (on-device AI that tunes out background noise) were all co-designed with disabled users. "Every time we develop those products, in the end, they are used by a lot more people than they were originally designed for."

- **Live support for meetings and images.** In Google Meet, anyone can ask for a summary of the discussion so far, turn on captions or scroll back, without having to interrupt a meeting full of stakeholders to ask for a repeat. A blind employee can run an image through AI, then keep asking follow-up questions ("Tell me about his jacket") to get far beyond the 20 or 30 words of a typical alt text, or query a large spreadsheet without losing their place.

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The Universal Support Menu

Speakers described concrete, low-cost AI supports that help specific groups and turn out to help almost everyone. Use this table to check which are available to all your employees today.

COMMON NEED	AI-ENABLED SUPPORT	WHO ELSE BENEFITS	AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE?
Reading and writing large volumes of text	Re-present content at lower cognitive load; text-to-speech and speech-to-text; AI-assisted drafting	Anyone facing “twice as much stuff to read” since AI made content easier to produce	○
Time, task and focus management	Break a big task into subtasks, estimate time, block calendar time, suppress notifications during focus	Anyone juggling 20 applications and constant alerts	○
Workplace communication	Check tone before sending; surface the subtext of a message	Anyone writing before coffee; Everway users call it “safe to send”	○
Following live conversation	Live captions, transcripts, in-meeting summaries	Global teams; a colleague who speaks “about 200 words per minute”	○
Visual content	Rich, conversational image description; plain-language queries of tables and charts	Anyone needing a quick read of a dense chart	○
Onboarding overload (everyone)	Role-based AI assistants; multimodal versions of long documents	Every new hire	○

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THEME 2

AI Across the Employment Lifecycle

Across the six stages of the employment lifecycle (recruit, hire, onboard, develop, advance and depart), AI can remove long-standing friction for disabled employees. Without intentional design and testing, it can also amplify bias and create barriers that would not otherwise exist. Panelists agreed on where to lean in (onboarding and learning) and where to slow down (hiring decisions).

"Technology can be a barrier or a bridge to [disability] inclusion for people with disabilities, depending upon how it's developed and deployed."

– Accessibility leader, Disability:IN

What Leading Companies Are Doing

- **An AI assistant for every role.** Two years ago, an assistive technology company committed to a personal AI assistant tailored to each job role. New hires can say, "It's day one, my job title is X, I haven't a clue, help," and it explains the role, who to talk to and where resources are. Employees can tell it they're dyslexic or have ADHD, etc. and get answers and responses tailored to their thinking style and preferences.

- **An employee agent plus a human mentor.** At a global software company, an AI agent answers onboarding questions, from holidays to badge requests. Every new hire is also paired with a mentor for their first 120 days, so mentoring time goes on "the meaty things that really matter."

- **Multimodal onboarding.** Tools such as Google's NotebookLM turn hundreds of pages of onboarding material into a podcast, video or diagram, letting people take in information in the format that suits them.

- **Learning at your own pace.** One global bank sees learning as the area of biggest opportunity. AI coaching avatars let employees "ask the questions they won't ask in a big room… the questions they won't ask their manager." HR admin automation frees time for higher-quality people decisions.

- **Training archives and AI fluency.** One company has put years of accessibility champions' recordings, decks and one-pagers behind an AI agent, so people no longer need to attend a live session or book office hours to get answers. Another global software company runs a company-wide program that walks every employee through which AI assistants exist, how to set them up and how to create a first skill, making the tools accessible and understandable to all. "It's great to offer AI, but if we're not enabling employees to use it… it's not as useful."

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Disability:IN surveyed about 100 college students and recent graduates with disabilities from its NextGen Leaders program for a company introducing AI interview agents. **99%** were more comfortable with a human interview and **56%** preferred not to do an AI interview. Candidates with chronic, physical or sensory disabilities were unintentionally screened out of the AI workflow at about **80%**. Speakers named the signals an algorithm can misread:

- Gaps in employment history, common for people with chronic conditions
- Atypical speech patterns, including stuttering, cerebral palsy or autistic communication styles
- Not holding eye contact with the camera, for example a blind or neurodivergent candidate
- “Irregular” movement, such as reading notes in Braille
- Applications filtered at scale by tools trained on narrow “ideal” profiles

Before any AI hiring tool goes live

- [ ] Test it for disparate impact with candidates who have a range of disabilities.
- [ ] Offer a human-led alternative at every AI step, and confirm it is scored the same way.
- [ ] Make it easy to request an accommodation from a person, not just the system.
- [ ] Keep a human at the helm for every hiring decision.

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THEME 3

From Accommodations to Accessibility: Data, Trust and a Single Request Process

Leading companies are using workforce data to understand what employees actually experience. They make support easy to access and treat repeated accommodation requests as a sign of a barrier that could be removed for everyone.

What Leading Companies Are Doing

- **One place to ask for support.** A global asset manager replaced a maze of routes (manager, HR, occupational health, IT) with a single request form. Employees describe their needs and barriers, rather than sharing their diagnosis. A case manager coordinates assistive technology, schedules, coaching and health support into one package, and reviews are now light-touch for ongoing conditions instead of six-monthly checks people were afraid of or hesitant to use.

- **A central accommodation fund.** Since its accessibility office launched in 2019, a global software company has funded individual accommodations and programmatic improvements centrally, so support never depends on a manager's discretionary budget.

- **Support without the paperwork.** Because most employees won't go through a formal process, the same company offers "success enablers" such as accessibility consultations and neurodiversity job coaching without a formal accommodation request.

- **A needs-based global approach.** The asset manager first mapped the regulatory spectrum, from countries that mandate disability hiring to those where you can't ask. It then designed one needs-based employee journey across all of them, using personas from candidacy through promotion, and set a global building standard based on the highest regional requirement for every new build and refurbishment.

- **Safeguards and bias testing in AI-driven talent processes.** As promotion cycles become "agentic," a fairness check at the end of the process no longer works. One company's accessibility office works with its agentic talent team to build safeguards into the process itself. The asset manager built an AI agent to help employees write year-end reviews, found a bias affecting neurodivergent users, fixed it, and wrote disability awareness into the agent. Employees can describe their barriers privately, without sharing them with a manager.

"I'm not gatekeeping this stuff. If it's really great for disabled employees- it might be great for everybody, let's universalize that."

– Accessibility leader

THEME 4

Building and Buying Accessible AI

Whether building custom AI products, buying AI tools or rolling them out internally, accessibility should be part of the requirements. Accessibility standards have not yet caught up with generative AI, so leading companies are setting their own bar. They co-design with disabled users, test before they buy, and treat cognitive accessibility as the next frontier.

"What we see time and time again is that the best insights that the product teams action on come from our users with disabilities."

– Product accessibility leader

What Leading Companies Are Doing

- **Disability Inclusive user research at scale.** One global software company's user research group has run more than 14 studies in nine months with hundreds of users with different disabilities and assistive technologies. Findings go straight back to product teams to change design patterns and code, including for voice AI. Research with disabled users runs alongside general-population studies, and the disability insights are often the ones product teams act on.

- **Co-design built into the operating rhythm**. A global technology company's product team works directly with the company's Disability employee group, so accessibility is "a core principle of the design philosophy," not a checkbox.

- **Requirements that include cognitive profiles.** One assistive technology company designs for how a dyslexic, ADHD or autistic person will take in and act on information. "Just because something can notify you doesn't mean that it's a good idea for it to notify you all the time."

- **Personalization without losing information**. Its users choose bullet points, skim-friendly or plain-language formats. But some content, such as a quarterly report, cannot safely be shortened, so the design keeps key information intact.

- **Getting ahead of the standards.** Current accessibility standards do not yet fully cover generative AI or "headless" interfaces, so one global software company is building its AI with disabled users informing patterns from day one.

- **User control over personal data.** One software company's research found that disabled users' trust in AI depends on controlling what it knows about them and how that is used. Disability:IN's research shows many would rather disclose a need to a person than to an AI.

THEME 5

Beyond Compliance: The European Accessibility Act in Practice

The European Accessibility Act (EAA) has applied since 28 June 2025. **New Disability:IN research with White & Case** shows that every EU country studied has written it into national law, but scope, timelines and enforcement vary widely. Formal regulator penalties have barely started; the real pressure so far comes from customers, competitors and civil society. Companies that build one governance model, document it well and test it with disabled people can turn it into trust.

Five things every leader should know

- **Location doesn't exempt you.** The EAA applies to any company offering covered products or services to consumers in the EU, wherever it is headquartered. B2B is generally out of scope, unless consumers end up using what you sell.
- **Enforcement is coming from more than regulators.** Private lawsuits, competitor complaints and civil society are already testing the law. Regulators are coordinating across borders and moving from monitoring to enforcement.
- **Paperwork is your defense.** Manufacturers need technical documentation, conformity assessments, an EU declaration of conformity and CE marking, kept for five years. Service providers must publish how they comply. Any "disproportionate burden" exemption needs a documented assessment.
- **AI doesn't change the standard.** The EAA is technology-neutral: AI-driven products must still be perceivable, operable, understandable and robust. AI-generated images, video and content need alt text and captions. How the EAA and the EU AI Act interact is still untested.
- **EMEA companies are uneven.** According to the 2026 Disability Index, respondents in EMEA were relatively strong on public reporting, governance disclosure and supplier disability inclusion commitments, but had more room to grow on formal accommodation systems, accessible recruiting and resources for customer-facing digital accessibility.

Put It into Practice — The Full EAA Research



Disability Inclusion in Europe, Disability:IN's research with White & Case, includes country-specific tables showing how France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Norway have implemented the EAA. Use it to map your obligations market by market. *This is general information, not legal advice; consult your legal counsel.*

THEME 6

Designing Accessible Growth: Customers, Places and Procurement

Disabled customers make decisions based on the whole journey, not one touchpoint. Friction experienced by disabled customers is rarely visible in complaint data, because people who hit a barrier quietly give up. Organizations that design for the full journey, involve disabled people early and use procurement as a lever win customers their competitors don't even know they're losing.

"If you have an environment that has accessibility gaps, you're not inviting people with disabilities into that environment."

– CEO, Tech Company

What Leading Companies Are Doing

- **Measure the quiet drop-offs.** A cloud and AI leader at a global technology company urged leaders to look past complaints to where customers "are just quietly giving up," and to use AI to offer choices such as summaries, captions, voice and vision.
- **Think of the full cycle of use.** The summit's closing speaker praised a retailer's magnetic adaptive underwear, but it is hand-wash only, so many disabled people can't care for it. "They just hadn't thought about the whole journey of the product."
- **Test across disabilities.** When Disability:IN tested JanSport's adaptive backpack, designed for wheelchair users, it also worked for people of short stature, autistic users who valued the organizing pockets, and people managing medication. With **US disabled consumers' spending power at $675 billion**, designing for "wants, not just needs" is a growth strategy.
- **Watch for "unintended affordance."** One building accessibility assessor has found plants placed on lowered reception counters, and a lift installer who switched off audio cues because they were "noisy." Accessible features only work if people know what they're for.
- **Neuroinclusive buildings are open territory.** There is no comprehensive published standard for neuroinclusion in the built environment yet, a chance to lead rather than comply. One global life sciences company has had more than 200 buildings assessed, and a global financial data company is rolling out a building accessibility dashboard across its portfolio.

Accessible Procurement Playbook

Looking to go deeper? Explore Disability:IN's **Procure Access** toolkit for templates and frameworks your team can use to drive accessible procurement at your company.

THEME 7

Leading at Scale: Managers, Leaders and Shared Ownership

No AI tool replaces a good manager or a visible leader. Managers shape most of an employee's day-to-day experience, and leaders decide whether it feels safe to be open. AI can make managers better, by coaching them in difficult moments and giving them time back, but only if organizations invest in the people side too.

"Managers and leaders are no doubt one of the most important channels. They're like the secret sauce."

– People Experience leader

What Leading Companies Are Doing

- **A manager framework with community built in.** One global tech company holds managers accountable on three dimensions: delivering results, developing people and building community. Leadership programs cover empathetic goal-setting and coaching, and managers rehearse difficult conversations with AI "digital twins" before having them for real.
- **Accessibility prompt books for managers.** One global bank is building prompt books that help managers communicate inclusively and write reviews well, so they handle the everyday well and have more time for "the moment that matters." One of its leaders noted that heavy delivery demands once left managers spending only a small share of their time actually managing.
- **Meeting access check-ins.** Opening a meeting with "Does anyone have any access needs that we can support today?" makes adjustments and flexibility part of the routine.
- **One framework, many owners.** One global life sciences company's framework links nine dimensions, including digital accessibility, workplace accessibility, workforce diversity and responsible procurement, so progress in one area reinforces the others. Its global business resource group drives it country by country, and each country runs its own Disability Index assessment so local teams own their data.
- **Small ideas that scale**. One company's German BRG chapter started "Adopt a Kitchen": volunteers make sure some cups and glasses are always within reach of shorter people and wheelchair users. It takes ten seconds and has spread worldwide.

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- **Leaders accountable for everyday decisions.** At one global financial data company, executive sponsors bring the community's experience into leadership decisions, and treat their Disability Index result as "a milestone on the journey," a data point to learn from rather than a finish line.

- **Let people try before they ask.** One global professional services firm has 54 accessibility centers of excellence where employees can try assistive tools. Another company is working with a building accessibility partner on a similar touch-and-feel approach to accommodations.

Put It into Practice — Manager Moment Guide

Attendees asked how much managers can be expected to know. Panelists' answer: equip managers proactively with the basics and with where to go, and let specialists carry the rest.

EVERY MANAGER SHOULD KNOW PROACTIVELY

- ◯ **How to respond when someone shares their disability or access needs**
- ◯ **Where the accommodations process lives and who to call**
- ◯ **Which supportive tools are available to everyone by default and what paths are available for additional support**
- ◯ **How to run a disability inclusive meeting and check in on access needs**

> **"If you do not have employees with disabilities inside of your company today that you can envision being in the C-suite one day, then there are disability inclusion deficiencies in your employee lifecycle."**
>
> *– Accessibility leader*

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THEME 8

Human at the Helm: Protecting Connection and Critical Thinking

AI is a big boost to productivity, but it can quietly wear away connectivity. When answers are one prompt away, people check in with colleagues less, question outputs less, and lose the shared learning that makes teams, and disability inclusion, work. The aim is to decide which moments stay human.

“In the world of human curiosity- I think we’re just embarking on a golden age.”

– Future of Work leader

What Leading Companies Are Doing

- **Balancing productivity and connectivity.** For one global bank, the biggest worry about AI is the loss of conversation. It runs a quarterly workplace experience meeting, and is considering making it more frequent, because “unless you have the actual conversation and you get the real experience… a lot gets missed.” An AI-generated accessibility checklist is no substitute.

- **Accessibility jam sessions**. One product accessibility team meets twice a week to work through new AI patterns together. The team also set explicit goals for when to collaborate and when to use AI.

- **Keeping skills in practice.** Like pilots who spend hours in simulators even though autopilot does most of the flying, organizations should decide which skills to protect, and create ways for people to keep practicing them.

- **Naming the dependency risk**. One AI program manager admitted that leaning on AI sometimes weakens his own critical thinking in live conversations where he can’t use notes or rephrase through AI. Teams should design training and culture with that risk in mind.

- **Protecting critical thinking and peer feedback.** Panelists pointed to deliberate in-office time for connection, standing team problem-solving sessions, and keeping the “critical thinking muscle” active as AI gets more convincing and less obviously wrong.

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Put It into Practice

Human-at-the-Helm Team Protocols

Spend 30 minutes with your team agreeing how you will use AI together. Write the answers down and revisit them every quarter. **Example:**

WE USE AI FOR	WE GO TO EACH OTHER FOR	ALWAYS A HUMAN DECISION
First drafts, summaries, finding information	Feedback on ideas and work in progress	Hiring, promotion and performance outcomes
Reformatting content to suit how each of us works best	Brainstorming and problem-solving on new challenges	Accommodation and access decisions
Routine onboarding and policy questions	Context, history and "how things really work here"	Anything we'd be uncomfortable explaining to the person affected

"Don't just assume what's come out of an AI model is the answer. It's got to be relevant to the teams and the groups that you're working in and the people that you're supporting."

– Learning leader

Rituals worth borrowing

- A standing twice-weekly working session where the team solves problems together, without AI first
- A regular workplace experience conversation with employees, not just a survey
- A human mentor for every new hire, with AI handling the routine questions
- An "AI hacks" exchange where colleagues demo how they use AI, so learning stays social

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Maintaining Momentum

Four themes connected every session. Use them as a quick test for any initiative you take forward.

Design it in	Build accessibility and adaptability into systems, buildings, products and processes from the start, instead of retrofitting accommodations or fixes after the fact.
Make it available to everyone	Most people will never ask, so switch supportive tools and settings on by default, and treat repeated requests as barriers to remove.
Prove it, don't claim it	Compliance is the floor. Trust comes from data, documentation and disabled people involved in testing, not from saying "we are fully compliant."
Keep humans at the helm	Use AI to remove friction, and protect the decisions, conversations and relationships that make disability inclusion real.

"This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to step away from accessibility being an add-on… and truly put the community right in the middle of that design, and see it as an engine for growth."

– People Experience leader

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Ways to Stay Engaged

- **Benchmark your progress with the Disability Index.** Take part each year to see where you stand against EMEA and global peers, and where to focus next.
- **Join the EMEA Council.** Connect quarterly with disability inclusion leaders across the region. Disability:IN partner companies can join through the Partner Portal.
- **Join IN for Global Accessibility Awareness Day.** Each May, Disability:IN brings partners together around the world for Global Accessibility Awareness Day. See upcoming Global Accessibility Awareness Day summits near you.

Research Referenced in This Guide

- 2026 Disability Index Report
- Disability Inclusion in Europe (with White & Case)
- *Momentum at Work* (with LinkedIn)
- *Creativity Over Convention*
- The Disability Consumer Market

About Disability:IN®

Disability:IN® partners with leading companies to build disability-inclusive and accessible workplaces, products and practices. Through data, research, advisory services and global networks, we help organizations move from intention to measurable impact.

Are You IN?