

# Open Forum

**ALL TOGETHER NOW!**  
Collaborative Approaches in Accessibility

**6 MAY 2026 • ANTWERP • ONLINE**



**BOOK OF ABSTRACTS**

## **Part 1: DGT Multilingualism Workshops: Collaborative Approaches in Access and Training**

### **Welcome Address**

**Speaker: Sakis Maraslis, Director of Resources of the Directorate-General for Translation**

**Time: 9.15 – 9.30**

**Place: D013, building D, City Campus and online via Zoom**

**Language: English**

**Access: English live subtitles, Flemish Sign Language**



**Athanasios (Sakis) Maraslis** is the Director of Resources in DGT since October 2025. He is responsible for human resources, facilities, budget, finance, procurement and knowledge management. Prior to this assignment, Sakis has led teams in DIGIT and DG EMPL, notably in digital transformation and IT governance matters. He is also a founding author of the Project Management Methodology (PM<sup>2</sup>), an open standard from the EU Commission. Sakis holds a BSc in Computer Systems Engineering from UMIST (UK), an MSc in Management, a diploma in Finance from Boston University Brussels and an executive management certificate for Leadership for the 21st Century from Harvard Kennedy School.

**Title: Artificial Intelligence and Clear Language**  
**Speaker: Helen Dobby, Directorate-General for Translation**  
**Time: 9.30 – 10.00**  
**Place: D013, building D, City Campus and online via Zoom**  
**Language: English**  
**Access: English live subtitles, Flemish Sign Language**

**Summary:** How can artificial intelligence help us communicate more clearly with the audiences who need it most? In this session, Helen Dobby, IT Project Officer in DG Translation's AI-Based Services, will explore how prompt engineering is being used to make European Commission content more accessible across a range of writing styles.

The presentation introduces the Digital Europe AI-Based Multilingual Services platform, which offers task-specific AI tools designed to help with complex writing challenges. Helen will focus on services that support plain language and inclusion, with practical examples showing how AI can transform dense, formal content into something clearer and more accessible, whether for online readers, people with learning disabilities, or anyone who finds standard written information hard to follow. Along the way, Helen will share a glimpse of newer work in progress from the AI Lab, where prompts are co-created with accessibility experts, policy officers and communication professionals to develop the next generation of services.

The session will also unpack what prompt engineering actually involves, why it differs from chatting with a tool like ChatGPT, and how careful, iterative prompt design is what makes these services produce consistent, reliable results, with the human writer always providing the expert final polish.



**Helen Dobby** is an IT project officer for AI in the AI-Based Services team at DG Translation. She is also Joint Coordinator of the AI@EC network, the European Commission's community of over 3 800 people set up to identify and explore potential AI use cases and to build knowledge and awareness of AI. She previously worked as Web Accessibility Coordinator in DG Communication where she was responsible for drawing up and implementing the Commission's web accessibility action plan.

**Title: Writing in Easy Language from a Co-Design Perspective**

**Speaker: Sara Vecchiato, University of Udine**

**Time: 10.00 – 10.30**

**Place: D013, building D, City Campus and online via Zoom**

**Language: English**

**Access: English live subtitles, Flemish Sign Language**

**Summary:** The presentation will highlight the importance of an approach centred on experiential expertise—knowledge derived from direct lived experience. Drawing on research applied to the production of texts accessible to people with cognitive disabilities or reading difficulties, the talk will examine key principles of stakeholder involvement, from the early stages of drafting onwards, in order to enhance the accessibility and inclusiveness of information.



**Sara Vecchiato** is Associate Professor of French Language, Translation and Linguistics at the University of Udine, Italy. She holds a PhD in French Linguistics. Her research focuses on clear and accessible language for diverse audiences, medical and workplace communication, plurilingualism, and comparative French–Italian syntax. She coordinates the RECAP research group and the Laboratory of Writing and Translation Studies, and she co-edits the journal *Discourse & Writing / Rédactologie*.

**Title: Blindness Gain, Co-Creation and the Workshop for Co-Created Inclusive Audio Description**

**Speaker: Hannah Thompson, Royal Holloway University**

**Time: 10.30 – 11.00**

**Place: D013, building D, City Campus, and online via Zoom**

**Language: English**

**Access: English live subtitles, Flemish Sign Language**

**Summary:** Inter-lingual translators are expected to be fluent in both their source and their target languages. But this is not the case for sighted audio describers who translate the visual into the non-visual for blind people. Given that no-one can be simultaneously blind and non-blind, how can we create audio descriptions that respect both the source and the target experiences without creating a power imbalance between the two? In this presentation, Hannah will explore how her notion of 'blindness gain' can transform the creation of audio description by foregrounding blind and partially blind experience within the co-creation of inclusive description.



**Hannah Thompson** is Professor of French and Critical Disability Studies at Royal Holloway, University of London and describes herself as a 'partially blind academic and activist'. Her most recent research focuses on the benefits of blindness ("blindness gain") in literature, culture and heritage and on audio description as a kind of creative, intermodal translation with a focus on museums, galleries and performance venues.

## Workshop 1

**Title: Co-creation and Collaboration in Media Access Training: Embracing the Wonderful Mess**

**Speakers: Pablo Romero Fresco (Universidade de Vigo) and Alba Saskia (Asociación Hope)**

**Time: 11.30 – 12.30**

**Place: Online only via Zoom**

**Language: English and Spanish**

**Access: Simultaneous interpreting from Spanish into English, English live subtitles**

**Summary:** This workshop presents the first TV and Film Access Coordination Course in Spain, created by UVigo's GALMA research group and the Spanish Film Academy. The aim of the course is to train professionals to implement strategies that ensure the equitable participation of disabled professionals in the filmmaking process, the authentic representation of disability on screen and the consideration of media access at all stages of production, distribution and exhibition through the collaboration between the creative team and the accessibility/translation team. Run and taken by trainers and students with and without disabilities, the course has become a hub that brings together access professionals, researchers and trainers of very different backgrounds, profiles and origins. It is a shared space where teachers become students, students take on lessons as teachers and classes are often, despite our best efforts, an access mess, albeit a wonderful one to which we keep returning as a way of transforming our practice and, most importantly, the way we see media access, ourselves and the others.



**Pablo Romero Fresco** is a Professor of Translation and Accessibility at Universidade de Vigo (Spain). He is the author of the books *Subtitling through Speech Recognition* (Routledge) and *Accessible Filmmaking* (Routledge) and the leader of the international research group GALMA, through which he is involved in projects with the European Parliament, Ofcom, Netflix or the Spanish Film Academy. In 2024 he was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award by the international subtitlers' association SUBTLE for his lifelong impact on the areas of audiovisual translation and media accessibility around the world.



**Alba Saskia** is a deaf screenwriter and activist, specialised in raising awareness about rare diseases, functional diversity and accessible audiovisual creation with social impact. She is the president of Asociación Hope, founded in 2015, where she promotes research and awareness of rare diseases, especially Brown-Vialetto-Van Laere Syndrome, which Alba was diagnosed with in 2012. She has just founded La Crip, a consultancy specializing in accessible audiovisual production, integrating inclusion from the earliest stages of development. She is currently in pre-production for his first two short films, *Hay una memoria* and *Un bocí*, as screenwriter and director.

**Workshop 2: Rethinking Collaborative Practices in Sign Language Projects**

**Speaker: Hannes De Durpel, Flemish Sign Language Centre (VGTC)**

**Time: 11.30 – 12.30**

**Place: D013, building D, City Campus and online via Zoom**

**Language: Flemish Sign Language**

**Access: English interpreting, English live subtitles**

**Summary:** This workshop critically examines how collaboration with deaf communities is structured and implemented within sign language and accessibility initiatives. Moving beyond participation as consultation, it explores principles of structural co-creation, power-sharing, and deaf-led expertise across research, media and cultural contexts. Drawing on concrete examples from collaborations with public broadcasters, sign language interpreters, deaf professionals, and European technology projects, participants will reflect on how to meaningfully embed deaf expertise throughout project design, governance, and evaluation.



**Hannes De Durpel** is coordinator of the Flemish Sign Language Centre (VGTC), a deaf-led expertise centre in Flanders working at the intersection of policy, media, research, and community engagement.

## Part 2: OPEN Forum: Collaborative Approaches in Research

### Panel: The Name and Nature of Accessibility Studies

**Panellists:** Nina Reviers, Anna Jankowska and Gert Vercauteren, University of Antwerp

**Time:** 14.00 – 14.30

**Place:** D013, building D, City Campus and online via Zoom

**Language:** English

**Access:** English live subtitles, Flemish Sign Language

**Summary:** Accessibility has become a key concern across domains such as media, education, policy, and technology. It is increasingly embedded in regulations and practices, yet it remains difficult to define in a shared and meaningful way. Often approached through tools, standards, or user experience, the underlying assumptions about what accessibility actually is tend to remain implicit. This talk explores how different, often unarticulated, conceptualisations of accessibility shape research and practice. Drawing on a literature study, we outline several accessibility paradigms, for instance framing accessibility as a technical requirement, a human right, or an experiential quality. While these perspectives coexist, they are rarely examined in relation to one another. We then turn to educational contexts, showing how students of media accessibility conceptualise accessibility differently, and how even limited training can broaden their understanding beyond compliance towards a more inclusive perspective. Finally, we reflect on what it would mean to approach accessibility as a field of study in its own right. We argue that making these conceptual differences explicit is key to enabling more meaningful interdisciplinary collaboration, and we consider how this could inform the development of Accessibility Studies.



**Nina Reviers** is an associate professor in Audiovisual Translation and Media Accessibility at the Department of Applied Linguistics, Translation and Interpreting Studies and member of the TricS research group. She holds a PhD in Translation Studies (University of Antwerp, 2018). Her research focuses on Media Accessibility, exploring the friction between accessibility, translation, technology and artistic creation. As co-founder of the OPEN Expertise Centre for Accessible Media and Culture, she values participatory approaches to access research. She is an editorial board member of JAT and member of the Languages and the Media Steering Committee.



**Anna Jankowska** is an associate research professor at the University of Antwerp where she also co-manages the OPEN Expertise Centre for Accessible Media and Culture. She also works at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. She has been active in media accessibility since 2010 and combines practice-led thinking with user-centred research. Anna enjoys looking at media accessibility from a broad perspective, not only as access to content but also as access to access, especially when creating accessible events and environments.



**Gert Vercauteren** is a tenure-track assistant professor in translation and interpreting studies at the University of Antwerp. He teaches translation technology and audiovisual translation, and his research focuses on media accessibility in general and audio description in particular. He was involved in various national and international research projects on access and currently conducts research on the impact of audio description on the cognitive effort invested by the target audience and on the effect of the language of audio description on their immersion.

**Title: Towards Design Justice: A Critical Reflection on Current Design Practices**

**Speaker: Kaat Kenis, University of Antwerp**

**Time: 14.30 – 15.00**

**Place: D013building D, City Campus and online via Zoom**

**Language: English**

**Access: English live subtitles, Flemish Sign Language**

**Summary:** For decades, several subfields of design have expressed their commitment to improving accessibility across infrastructure, products, and services. Yet in practice, accessibility is often reduced to technical fixes, compliance requirements, or solutions that adapt people to existing systems rather than questioning the systems that produce inaccessibility. These assumptions are reflected in the tools and methods commonly taught in design education and applied in practice. Drawing on examples from both contexts, this presentation reflects on the limitations of current approaches while exploring how starting from human diversity and lived experience can open new possibilities for designers, treating accessibility not as a constraint, but as a creative and collaborative way toward design justice.



**Kaat Kenis** (she/her) is a PhD researcher funded by FWO at the Faculty of Design Sciences, University of Antwerp. She holds an MSc in Product Development (University of Antwerp) and an MA in Gender and Diversity (Ghent University). Her doctoral research investigates how intersectional perspectives can reshape Inclusive Design theory and practice. Focusing on power dynamics within design processes, she studies how designers can engage human diversity to address systemic challenges of accessibility and inclusion.

**Title: Mapping Accessible Experiences: An Interdisciplinary Research Network in the Making**

**Speakers: Melanie Schaur (Johannes Kepler University Linz),  
Anna Tsakalaki (European University Cyprus)**

**Time: 15.00 – 15.45**

**Place: D013, building D, City Campus and online via Zoom**

**Language: English**

**Access: English live subtitles, Flemish Sign Language**

**Summary:** For more than half a century, access and inclusion have been operating as pivotal forces that are fundamentally reshaping a wide spectrum of aspects of our daily lives, ranging from transportation and education to cultural life and personal health. But despite the fact that access is being studied in a myriad of fields, using different conceptualisations, paradigms and methodologies, accessibility is still most often defined indirectly through lists of barriers caused by different disabilities, and material solutions to overcome them. The fundamental question of what accessibility means to different people and why they need and use it, i.e. the question of what key aspects determine what constitutes an accessible experience, regardless of the person, context or domain in which access is experienced, has yet to be answered. In this panel we want to start unravelling this complex yet intriguing question by taking a look at two different interdisciplinary projects focused on access and inclusion.

## **Presentation 1: DyslexiaLab@JKU: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Assessment and Support for University Students and Staff**

**Speaker: Melanie Schaur, Johannes Kepler University Linz**

**Time: 15.00 - 15.20**

**Summary:** The project DyslexiaLab, funded by the Federal State of Upper Austria and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, is a multidisciplinary initiative involving the Institute Integriert Studieren, the Institute of Sociology and the Research Institute for Developmental Medicine. The project aims to systematically assess and investigate the situation of students and staff at Johannes Kepler University Linz (JKU) who are affected by dyslexia, also referred to as reading and spelling difficulties. Based on empirical findings, the project seeks to develop and implement effective concepts for a comprehensive service and support infrastructure within the university context.

To achieve these objectives, the project relies on the participation of a sufficiently large sample of individuals with either diagnosed or suspected dyslexia. Participation is open to all JKU students and employees and is free of charge, including all assessments and related activities.

The research design comprises three core components: (1) a developmental medical assessment conducted by the Research Institute for Developmental Medicine to determine the presence and severity of dyslexia; (2) biographical research, including qualitative interviews led by the Institute of Sociology focusing on participants' educational trajectories, experienced barriers, and supportive structures; and (3) a technical evaluation by the Institut Integriert Studieren to identify effective assistive tools and to inform the development of future services tailored to academic and workplace needs. Each component includes detailed feedback sessions to discuss findings with participants. For students, outcomes may lead to the formal implementation of individualized examination accommodations across the university. For staff members, the project provides insights into optimizing workplace conditions and organizational structures. DyslexiaLab contributes to evidence-based policy development and promotes inclusive practices in higher education and employment environments.



**Melanie Schaur** has a background in comparative social policy and welfare and social economics. Since 2022, she has worked as a researcher at the Institute Integriert Studieren at Johannes Kepler University Linz in Austria. Her research focuses on disability policy, inclusion, accessibility, assistive technologies, long-term care and social policy. She contributes to projects on neurodiversity, (digital) inclusion in education, inclusion in the labour market, long-term care, and the use of digital technologies in care. She also teaches Disability Policy, Comparative Social Policy, and Project Management. Furthermore, she is a board member of the International Camp on Communication and Computers (ICC) in Austria and the International Conference on Computers Helping People with Special Needs (ICCHP).

**Presentation 2: Transferable Vocabulary Project: A Cross-disciplinary Collaborative Approach to Learning Maths Vocabulary for Upper Primary School Children of a Diverse Background in the UK**

**Speaker: Anna Tsakalaki, European University Cyprus**

**Time: 15.20 – 15.40**

**Summary:** This presentation discusses a research project focused on innovative, cross-curricular approaches to teaching mathematics-specific vocabulary, with a particular emphasis on fostering inclusion and creativity in linguistically diverse classrooms. The project, inspired by the difficulties faced by children—especially those with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and those with language-related disabilities—in word-based mathematical problem-solving, aims to bridge the gap between mathematical concepts and language comprehension.

Drawing on the findings of Trakulphadetkrai et al. (2020), which highlighted disparities in performance between EAL and non-EAL students in word-based mathematical tasks, the project explores the potential of cross-curricular activities, such as storytelling, drawing, and singing, to enhance vocabulary acquisition and problem-solving skills. The intervention was delivered through workshops to Year 4 and Year 5 students across five mainstream primary schools in the UK, involving all learners following the principles of Universal Design and a participatory approach to learning. Results suggest that integrating mathematical vocabulary into creative, inclusive, and multilingual activities boosts students' confidence and engagement in understanding key concepts in word-based mathematical problems. Qualitative feedback from students and teachers underscores the value of acknowledging diversity and promoting inclusive participatory practices in mainstream multi-ethnic, multilingual educational settings.

The presentation of the project will conclude with a call for educators to adopt similar cross-curricular strategies, emphasising the importance of collaboration, creativity, and inclusivity in enhancing mathematical learning outcomes for all students.



**Anna Tsakalaki** is an Assistant Professor at European University Cyprus. She specializes in Special and Inclusive Education, with a focus on dyslexia, multilingualism, and literacy development in diverse educational contexts. Previously, she has worked at the University of Reading, University of Oxford Brookes and University of Winchester in the UK. Her research explores reading difficulties, language acquisition, and inclusive pedagogical practices, particularly in multilingual and low-resource educational environments. She has led and contributed to numerous research projects, including those funded by the British Academy and Leverhulme Trust and the Arts and Humanities Research Council, focusing on literacy development, teacher training, and the integration of technology in education. She has led research networks in research centres such as the “Language and Literacy” theme of the Centre for Literacy and Multilingualism (CeLM) and the UKRN Reproducibility Local Network at the University of Reading (UK). She is also actively involved in policy-oriented research, collaborating with governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to improve educational outcomes for vulnerable learners.

**Title: Building Access Research Across Disciplines and Sectors: UAntwerp's Accessibility Hub**

**Panellists: Karolien Poels, Annelies Colliers, Pieter Cools,  
Michael G. Marcondes Smith and Caroline Masquillier**

**Time: 16.15 – 17.15**

**Place: D013, building D, City Campus and online via Zoom**

**Language: English**

**Access: English live subtitles, Flemish Sign Language**

**Summary:** This panel brings together researchers from different disciplines to explore how they approach questions often framed as access, equality, or inclusion. Rather than assuming a shared understanding, the discussion examines whether these concepts refer to the same issues across fields, and how different perspectives and methods shape what is seen as a problem. By focusing on concrete examples, the panel reflects on when access or inclusion works in practice, and when it does not. It also addresses tensions and limits, including situations where different needs or goals conflict. Finally, the discussion considers whether a shared framework around “access” is meaningful, and what a collaborative Accessibility Hub at the University of Antwerp could offer to support interdisciplinary work in this area.



**Karolien Poels** is a full professor of Strategic Communication and Persuasive Technologies at the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Antwerp. Her research focuses on the strategic communication of complex societal challenges that are (partly) shaped within social media and other technology-mediated environments. She is one of the founders and directors of the Antwerp Social Lab which focuses on psychophysiological and behavioural methods that capture human interactions in interpersonal and mediated contexts.



**Annelies Colliers** is a general practitioner working at DVC Zevenbergen, a residential care facility for children and adults with profound and multiple disabilities, and at PZ Multiversum, a psychiatric hospital. She holds a PhD in medical sciences and teaches in the Department of Family Medicine and population health. Her research focuses on qualitative methods in disability studies, with particular interest in inclusive primary healthcare and interprofessional care. She serves on the board of the Flemish organization of physicians working in disability care (VVAG).



**Pieter Cools** is a lecturer at the Master of Social Work (UA) and research coordinator of Stadskracht (AP University College). His research focuses on social inclusion and participation in urban contexts. He conducted and coordinated research on the accessibility of essential services in times of digitalisation and the accessibility of mobility solutions for older adults. Focusing predominantly on the user perspective, this research often adopts a participatory and/or action research approach.



**Michael Marcondes Smith** is a PhD Candidate (FWO fundamental research) at the Law and Development Research Group of the Law Faculty of the University of Antwerp. His research is centred on conceptual issues in international human rights law, particularly regarding issues of socio-economic and other forms of structural inequalities.



**Caroline Masquillier** is an Assistant Professor and teaches qualitative research in the Master's program in Nursing and Midwifery. As a postdoctoral researcher at the Faculties of Medicine and Health Sciences and Social Sciences, Caroline focuses on improving access to prevention and care for people living in socioeconomically vulnerable circumstances — with a specific interest in mutual learning between low-, middle-, and high-income countries (e.g., community health workers). In this work on access to care, she employs inclusive research methods to ensure that the perspectives of structurally disadvantaged groups are meaningfully integrated. She is also a member of the Young Academy (JA). For her efforts in research and science communication she received five awards.