

Disability, Differences, and Diversity: Revisiting Inclusive Design and Access

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Abstract

Over 1.3 billion people worldwide live with long-term disabilities, yet many still face systemic exclusion despite advances in accessibility policy and technology. New regulations such as the EU Accessibility Act demand comprehensive transitions, but compliance risks

becoming a superficial “checklist” exercise rather than fostering meaningful inclusion. For the HCI community, this moment calls for rethinking our approaches to participation, technology, ethics, and policy. In this meetup, we bring together researchers, practitioners, and advocates to revisit inclusive design through four themes: rethinking inclusive methodologies, disentangling technological challenges, unpacking ethical implications, and navigating policy opportunities. Through interactive mapping activities, participants will share practices, identify collaboration opportunities, and co-develop future directions. Our goal is to build cross-disciplinary connections and create actionable approaches that move beyond



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compliance toward holistic inclusion, ensuring that accessibility remains central to HCI research and practice.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → **Accessibility**.

Keywords

Accessibility, Inclusive Design, Aging, Critical Computing, Social Justice

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1 Introduction

Over 1.3 billion people worldwide live with significant long-term disabilities [24]. Despite multi-faceted global efforts, many continue to face systemic discrimination and exclusion, leading to inequities such as lower life expectancy, higher risks of chronic health conditions, and greater economic burdens tied to stigma, poverty, and limited access to education and work [4, 5, 24]. The WHO’s 2022 Global Report on Health Equity [23] establishes that people with disabilities have “*the same, and equal, right to the highest attainable standard of health*”; a right enshrined in international and domestic law. Yet, the report concludes, for the vast majority of disabled people and the elderly, this right remains unrealized.

Existing international regulations that aim to realize the aforementioned rights, including the promotion of equal opportunities and protection against discrimination (e.g., USA [30], Canada [22], India [14], Japan [8], UK [29], and EU [25]) have driven progress, but their broader impact remains limited. Recently, frameworks like the EU Accessibility Act (EAA) [25], the proposed US Online Accessibility Act [6], and Japan’s legislation on information and communication accessibility [8] have further extended accessibility requirements to digital products and services. Yet enforcement remains inconsistent. In Japan, compliance is voluntary [8]. The EAA, in effect from June ’25, obliges organizations to ensure accessibility by 2030, yet many remain unprepared [25]. For example, the 2025 WebAIM report on the accessibility of the top 1 million webpages found that 94.8% fail Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) [32] standards [33]. The stark scale of non-compliance and unpreparedness among organizations, combined with the short timeframes for implementing accessibility measures, leads to risks of superficial compliance through “*checklist*” approaches [7] rather than a meaningful, holistic, and inclusive transition. True inclusion and accessibility extend beyond technology access. It requires examining the social context of design practices, fostering genuine collaborations with people with disabilities and other stakeholders, and scrutinizing biases and assumptions that create barriers [31].

The HCI community, particularly through the CHI *Accessibility & Aging*¹ and *Critical Computing, Sustainability and Social Justice*² subcommittees, and through the ASSETS³ conference, has driven innovation in accessible technologies, methodologies, and design tools. Nevertheless, as new policies demand comprehensive accessibility transitions, we need coordinated, cross-disciplinary efforts to move compliance toward holistic inclusion.

In this meetup, we aim to foster community engagement, facilitate cross-disciplinary and cross-regional collaboration, and reflect on the potential impacts of inclusive and accessible technologies for the broader HCI community. To ground the meetup discussions, we will focus on **four themes**, each framed by existing scholarship, current challenges, and open questions that invite attendees to share experiences and co-develop future directions.

1.1 Rethinking Inclusive Methodologies

Although HCI has long emphasized participation, disabled stakeholders are often still positioned as testers rather than co-designers [2, 10, 31]. Recent scholarship has also questioned the power imbalance between researchers and people with disabilities, which risks misrepresentation of contributions through normative, ableist biases and assumptions [2, 11, 18, 27]. *How might we create methods that align with disability justice principles of “leadership of the most affected”?* *What practical strategies (e.g., independent tools, shared vocabularies, and sufficient time for trust-building) can make participation meaningful?*

1.2 Disentangling Technological Challenges

Recent scholarship reveals critical gaps: accessible technologies remain siloed, unevenly distributed across disabilities, and lack cross-cutting solutions for diverse accessibility needs [3, 20]. AI systems, for instance, embody ableist assumptions and normative stereotypes due to biased datasets, inadequate evaluation frameworks, and gross negligence of the needs of disabled stakeholders among developers [9, 11–13, 17–19]. Compounding these challenges is the absence of validated instruments to assess technologies for inclusivity and accessibility, not merely usability [16]. *How can we collectively co-create metrics, best practices, and standards that embody inclusivity in addition to usability? How can researchers, designers, and disabled stakeholders collaborate on cross-cutting, holistic accessible technology development?*

1.3 Unpacking Ethical Implications

The ethical compliance of accessible technologies often manifests in “*checklist conformism*” rather than holistic consideration [7, 20]. Similarly, broader calls for ethical or responsible technologies within diverse communities currently lack the inclusion and representation of disabled stakeholders’ voices and values [1, 15, 28]. *How can HCI engage in broader discourses on ethics, justice, and autonomy that consolidate, but not exclude, the currently marginalized experiences and perspectives of disabled stakeholders? What role can*

¹Accessibility and Aging Subcommittee: https://chi2026.acm.org/authors/papers/selecting-a-subcommittee/#accessibility_and_aging (last accessed on 27/11/2025).

²Critical Computing, Sustainability and Social Justice Subcommittee: https://chi2026.acm.org/authors/papers/selecting-a-subcommittee/#critical_computing (last accessed on 27/11/2025).

³ASSETS’25 Webpage: <https://assets25.sigaccess.org> (last accessed on 27/11/2025).

researchers' reflexivity, positionality, and empathy play in critically re-evaluating existing design and research methods?

1.4 Navigating Policy Implications

Regulations such as EAA [25], set ambitious goals but risk remaining symbolic without mechanisms for accountability, assessment, and participation. Existing standards and guidelines largely remain ineffective [26, 33]. HCI can play a role in making these policies actionable by co-developing auditing tools, participatory standards, and inclusive governance models. *How might researchers, advocacy groups, and disabled communities collaborate to ensure policy is both enforceable and transformative? What lessons can be drawn from connecting accessibility debates with broader HCI agendas in critical computing, sustainability, and social justice?*

2 Activities

The 90-minute *in-person* meetup will be organized as an *interactive and discussion-driven* environment with two main **activity stations** running in parallel: *a) Map of Practices*, where participants will collectively create a visual map linking the topics outlined in the aforementioned themes, identifying patterns, gaps, and cross-cutting opportunities across these interconnected domains, and *b) Map of People*, where participants will document their research interests to identify overlapping expertise and potential collaborators across disciplines. Starting with a brief introduction (*15 minutes*) and open group discussions around the aforementioned activity stations (*35 minutes*), the session will conclude with a facilitated discussion to synthesize contributions (*30 minutes*), and discuss next steps (*10 minutes*). Finally, meetup discussions and contributions will be digitized and made accessible for the broader HCI community as a living document to foster continued community engagement. The format is intentionally flexible to accommodate attendees who want to drop-in briefly as well as those who wish to engage in sustained discussions.

3 Organizers

We are a group of HCI researchers with expertise in accessibility, disability studies, design, human–AI collaboration, immersive media and design, and socio-technical policy. **Alessandro Bozzon** leads research on Human-Centered AI and is the PI of the *TACIT* project [21]—a Dutch public-private partnership on inclusive co-design of AI/XR technologies. Alongside him, **Himanshu Verma** serves as the coordinator of *TACIT*, and his research focuses on inclusive human–AI collaboration, designing empathic mixed-initiative agents. **Pablo Cesar**, **Judith Good**, **Maartje de Meulder**, **Hamed Alavi**, and **Abdallah El Ali** bring diverse technical and methodological expertise to the *TACIT* project and to the theme of this meetup; particularly, their work focuses on human-centered multimedia computing, inclusive design & environments, learning technologies supporting children with autism, deaf and disability studies, language technologies, affective interfaces, and responsible AI. On the topics of *accessibility and disability studies*, **Kathrin Gerling's** research examines experiential accessibility and self-determination and has been recognized through various awards and an ERC Starting Grant. **Katta Spiel**, who has also been awarded

an ERC Starting Grant, examines marginalized perspectives in embodied computing and contributes to disability rights at the policy level. **Giulia Barbareschi** leads participatory approaches with marginalized individuals, **Monica Perusquia-Hernández** works on affective computing and accessibility for blind and partially sighted people, and **Maristella Matera** develops AI-driven multi-modal technologies for accessibility, recognized through the Google Inclusion Research Award. From the perspective of *design and interaction*, **Sophia Ppali** investigates the design of immersive technologies through human-centered approaches, focusing on inclusive experiences. **Marios Constantinides** contributes expertise in human-centered AI, mobile sensing, and responsible design. Finally, **Jatinder (Jat) Singh** brings expertise in *law, policy, and socio-technical systems*, leading cross-sector collaborations for inclusion and accessibility.

4 Community of Interest

This meetup brings together researchers and practitioners in inclusive design, accessibility, critical computing, disability studies, and social justice to identify challenges, propose solutions, and explore resources for advancing future research. The four themes in Section 1 represent ongoing challenges currently explored within CHI and ASSETS communities. We aim to use this meetup as a starting point for future workshops, grant proposals, position and policy papers, and educational programs that collectively develop actionable approaches to address these urgent challenges.

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