UNESCO works to create the conditions for dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples, based upon respect for commonly shared values to achieve global visions of sustainable development encompassing observance of human rights, mutual respect and the alleviation of poverty in the fields of education, the sciences, culture and communication and information.

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) helps countries around the world to meet their economic, social and environmental goals under the UN development pillar. DESA's work addresses a range of cross-cutting issues that affect people's lives and livelihoods—from poverty reduction to governance to finance to the environment.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) represents the world's commitment to universal ideals of human dignity. OHCHR has a unique mandate from the international community to promote and protect all human rights.
The side event, organized jointly by UNESCO, UNDESA and OHCHR, will cover a wide range of issues around digital empowerment of persons with disabilities. Digital empowerment refers to an individual’s capacity to participate in society in the most meaningful and effective manner by exploiting the full advantages and benefits provided by digital solutions and resources.

Speakers will share concrete examples on how digital empowerment as a result of successful measures taken at national, regional and international level improved the quality of life of persons with disabilities, provided access to information and knowledge, facilitated learning and employment, as well as built an enabling environment and opportunities for self-realization.

The world is rapidly changing due to technological and scientific advancements, particularly in the internet, digital information and communication technologies fields. Mainstream technological solutions and services offer a variety of solutions not only to the general public, but also to those who live in remote areas, speak lesser-used languages or are differently abled.

For instance, around 40% of people in the developing world have subscribed to mobile services which include a range of accessibility features including for persons with disabilities. A growing sector of smart television includes Text-to-Speech engines, voice guide, a high contrast user interface and other features that are indispensable for visually impaired persons. E-banking introduces innovative accessible customer services for people living with dyslexia. The blended learning and education technology adopts the Universal Design principles which make education, particularly Open and Distance Learning, more inclusive and accessible for students and staff with disabilities. Information and memory institutions such as libraries and museums serve as good examples of accessible public architecture and cultural inclusion.

Those few examples indicate that digital solutions are designed taking into consideration the principles of Universal Design for All and made accessible, inclusive and affordable to the users with disabilities. This changes the way persons with disabilities access information, transfer it into knowledge and contribute to the socio-economic and political development at large. While policies promoting accessibility might be in place in some countries which ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD), much work still needs to be done to protect the rights of persons with disabilities and ensure access to information and knowledge using technological and scientific advancements.

Therefore, for full inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities in the present society, it is necessary to develop policies and strategies that take accessibility aspects of technology into consideration. The digital empowerment of persons with disabilities should be seen as one of the core requirements for making development inclusive.