United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

A week-long celebration on the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities

25 November to 3 December 2020

CONCEPT NOTE

Building back better: towards an inclusive, accessible and sustainable post COVID-19 world by, for and with persons with disabilities

Introduction

UNESCO, together with other United Nations system organizations, invites you to celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3 December 2020. The International Day of Persons with Disabilities was proclaimed by the United Nations in 1992 to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in all spheres of society and development, and to increase awareness of the situation of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life. The International Day is an important opportunity to raise awareness of the complexity of disability issues and the challenges faced by people with disabilities around the world.

This year's theme is

"Building back better:
towards an inclusive, accessible and sustainable
post COVID-19 world by,
for and with persons with disabilities".

People with disabilities are disproportionately affected by the health, social and economic consequences of the global COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, this year's theme emphasizes the importance of strengthening our collective efforts for universal access to essential services, including immediate health and social protection, education, digital infrastructure, accessible information, employment and other socio-cultural opportunities in order to ensure that persons with disabilities are not left behind in times of crisis and beyond.

UNESCO will mark the day with a week-long programme from 25 November to 3 December 2020. Since the global outbreak of the COVID-19, UNESCO has been at the forefront of the response to the pandemic, encouraging education systems to remain open and accessible to all learners. Global school closures due to the pandemic represented an unprecedented risk to children's education, protection and wellbeing.

In addition, educational responses to the crisis have not always reached the most disadvantaged or been adapted to the needs of people with disabilities. The suspension of a face-to-face formal and non-formal education, including vocational, technical, cultural, sport and physical activities, has also been extremely rapid around the world.

In this context, the mobilization of resources in support of the application of digital technologies for the empowerment of learners with disabilities and capacity building for their teachers to adapt to new learning environments are of crucial importance.

UNESCO's action for persons with disabilities

On the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, UNESCO aims to draw the attention of the global community to the importance of continued application of existing normative instruments and principles inscribed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), the Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace (2003), the International Charter of Physical Education (2015), the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Educational Resources (2019), and other instruments and frameworks.

UNESCO's response is built around the following thematic areas:

Setting standards for inclusive education

- **Promoting inclusive education** is of paramount importance in order to meet the targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This is even more urgent in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is considerably hampering equal opportunities for educational progress and lifelong learning. Out of all vulnerable groups, persons with disabilities are most at risk of exclusion and marginalization, in particular in educational settings.

- **The Open Educational Resources (OER) Recommendation**, adopted by UNESCO General Conference at its 40th session in 2019, supports the creation, use and adaptation of inclusive and quality OER, facilitates international cooperation in this field, and is the fruit of over a decade of multi-stakeholder efforts in the area of OER.

  The OER Recommendation invites all Member States and stakeholders to take urgent measures to provide:

  "*Effective, inclusive and equitable access to quality OER: supporting the adoption of strategies and programmes including through relevant technology solutions that ensure OER in any medium are shared in open formats and standards to maximize equitable access, co-creation, curation, and searchability, including for those from vulnerable groups and persons with disabilities"* (Ref.: 9 iii); and

  "Fostering and facilitating international cooperation: supporting international cooperation between stakeholders to minimize unnecessary duplication in OER development investments and to develop a global pool of culturally diverse, locally relevant, gender-sensitive, accessible, educational materials in multiple languages and formats" (Ref.: 9 v).

Enabling information gathering for informed policy formulation - Laboratory of ideas

- **Informed policy formulation -** UNESCO works to reduce stigma and discrimination against persons with disabilities by improving disability awareness in society, changing negative attitudes and creating an environment of trust and respect. The online platform *"**Story4Development**",* supported by The Nippon Foundation (Japan), was created by UNESCO in that view, to collect stories about persons with disabilities around the world. This collection of stories constitutes an important set of case studies and data from which governments, disabled people organizations, civil society, as well as the private sector, can develop informed policies, community actions, and business plans. In this endeavor, UNESCO's goal is to identify and create an online registry of inspiring stories told by persons with disabilities, including artists, athletes and entrepreneurs, who are making an impact in the political, economic, academic and social spheres in their respective communities. This will demonstrate how empowered persons with disabilities contribute to the fulfillment of the human potential by overcoming multiple social, cultural and educational barriers.

Providing access to documentary heritage

- The United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and in particular its Articles 9 – "Accessibility", 21 – "Freedom of Expression and Access to Information", and 30 – "Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sports", invites all stakeholders to take appropriate measures to enable persons with disabilities to enjoy cultural and information materials, including documentary heritage. UNESCO, as one of the lead UN agencies with a mandate to promote access to information, urges all stakeholders to ensure inclusive access to documentary heritage (UNESCO's guidelines).

Building institutional capacities for inclusion of persons with disabilities

- Through its **International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities** (ICCAR), UNESCO will follow up on its global commitment to fight racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance against persons with disabilities. A targeted event will be organized to raise awareness among local governmental on the importance to protect their citizens with disabilities rights to learn, stay safe, active and educated during emergencies, as well as promote inclusive policy making processes at the local level within the COVID-19 context.

Promoting international cooperation and raising awareness

- On the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, UNESCO will organize a **Global Awareness Raising Campaign "Tell our stories, enable our rights"** on its official social media channels, focusing on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people living with disabilities and on the immediate response to the crisis through open, inclusive and innovative use of digital solutions, tools and resources.

Overview of the week-long celebration

25 – 27 NOVEMBER 2020

International Symposium on Ensuring the right to quality inclusive education for persons with disabilities: From commitment to action, 25 – 27 November 2020

UNESCO will co-organize the International Symposium “Ensuring the right to quality inclusive education for persons with disabilities: From commitment to action”, together with the Leonard Cheshire Disability, and the Ministry of Education of Portugal. It will serve as a unique opportunity to bring together stakeholders from across the globe to discuss progress achieved and challenges to ensure full participation and access to quality learning opportunities for all learners in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2 – 4 DECEMBER 2020

Global Awareness Raising Campaign “Tell our story – enable our rights”

On the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities UNESCO will organize between 2-4 December 2020 a Global Awareness Raising Campaign on its official social media channels, targeting people living with disabilities as it concerns the immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic. UNESCO supports the integration of innovative, creative and inclusive approaches in all socio-cultural, economic and political domains, considering the diverse needs of persons with disabilities, especially in the context of the global health crisis.

3 DECEMBER 2020

The one-day event will include the following programmatic parts:

Announcement of the Laureates of the UNESCO/Emir Jaber Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah Prize for Digital Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (2020-2021)

UNESCO biennially recognizes the outstanding contributions of individuals and organizations in promoting the inclusion; and enhancing the lives of persons with disabilities through the application of digital solutions, resources and technologies. The theme of the 2020 edition of the Prize is effective and innovative ideas targeting people living with disabilities, including for immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

3 DECEMBER 2020

WEBINAR "Disability inclusive response for COVID-19 through Open and Distance Learning"

15.00 p.m. - 16.00 p.m., 3 December 2020

(Central European Time – CET)

This webinar will provide a space for education specialists, IT solution providers and other specialists to share their experience delivering education through open and distance learning for their students with disabilities. "Leaving no one behind" is only possible if education is made fully inclusive, accessible and affordable for all students.

The speakers will also reflect on the further implementation of UNESCO Open Educational Resources (OER) Recommendation which was adopted by UNESCO General Conference at its 40th session in 2019. The OER Recommendation supports the creation, use and adaptation of inclusive and quality OER, facilitates international cooperation in this field, and is the fruit of over a decade of multi-stakeholder efforts in the area of OER. Targeted efforts should include all learners in formal and non-formal education contexts irrespective of, inter alia, age, gender, ability, and socio-economic status, as well as those in vulnerable situations, indigenous peoples, those in remote rural areas (including nomadic populations), people residing in areas affected by conflicts and natural disasters, ethnic minorities, migrants, refugees, and displaced persons. In all instances, gender equality should be ensured, and particular attention paid to equity and inclusion for learners who are especially disadvantaged due to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. The webinar will be organized online and interpretation services provided in French, English, Spanish.

Moderator	**Ms Melissa Chan**, Broadcast Journalist currently working at DW News Asia and collaborating with the Global Reporting Centre in Canada (USA)
Speakers	**Mayor Mr Hector Lopez Santillana,** Mayor of Léon (Mexico)
	Prof. Alan Tait, Director, International Development and Teacher Education, The Open University, UK, Executive Committee Member, International Council for Distance Education (ICDE) (UK)
	Prof. Jutta Treviranus, Professor and Director, Inclusive Design Research Centre, OCAD University (Canada)
	Dr Dianne Chambers, Associate Dean Research, School of Education; Coordinator of Special and Inclusive Education, University of Notre Dame Australia (Australia)
	Mr Vashkar Bhattachearje, Program Manager, Young Power in Social Action (YPSA) and Laureate of the UNESCO/Emir Jaber Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah Prize for Digital Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Bangladesh)
WEBINAR REGISTRATION	

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

THE NIPPON FOUNDATION

WEBINAR "Share your Story for Development"

17.00 p.m. - 18.00 p.m., 3 December 2020

(Central European Time – CET)

The event invites panellists to share their stories of empowerment. By sharing a story, persons with disabilities will motivate those who are in a similar position or face similar challenges to make their voices heard by wider audiences. Building on the analysis of 100 stories collected through the online platform "Story4Development" developed by UNESCO with support of The Nippon Foundation, by artists, sport athletes, entrepreneurs and others, the audience will learn about enabling factors which played an important role for the empowerment of person with disabilities. The webinar will be organized online and interpretation services provided in French, English, Spanish.

Moderator	**Ms Melissa Chan**, Broadcast Journalist currently working at DW News Asia and collaborating with the Global Reporting Centre in Canada (USA)
Speakers	**Ms Maria Soledad Cisternas Reyes**, Special Envoy of United Nations Secretary General on Disability and Accessibility for the United Nations; lawyer and disability rights activist (Chile)
	Ms Ludivine Munos, Head, Paralympic Integration and Multi-Paralympic Champion (France)
	Ms Zainab Chinikamwalla, Membership Head Bookshare - Asia and Africa, Bookshare (India)
	Mr Jeison Aristizabal, Director, Fundacion Asodisvalle (Columbia)
	Mr David Banes, Head, Access and Inclusion (UK)
WEBINAR REGISTRATION	

Useful links

- UNDESA website dedicated to the International Day of Persons with Disabilities
- UNESCO website dedicated to the International Day of Persons with Disabilities
- UNESCO online platform "Story4Development"
- UNESCO document "Learning for All: guidelines on the inclusion of learners with disabilities in open and distance learning"
- UNESCO document "Accessible Digital Documentary Heritage: Guidelines for the preparation of documentation heritage in accessible formats for persons with disabilities
- UNESCO website for the UNESCO/Emir Jaber Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah Prize for Digital Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities
- COVID-19 response – UNESCO website
- UNESCO Recommendation on Open Educational Resources (OER)
- International Symposium on Ensuring the right to quality inclusive education for persons with disabilities: From commitment to action, 25 – 27 November 2020