

Zero Project Conference 2016 – A retrospective

With **516 participants from more than 70 countries** and with 35 sessions, engaging 198 speakers, the Zero Project Conference 2016 on “Inclusive Education and ICT” was a great success and the climax of 5 years of collective efforts. Moreover, the event was hosted once again by the United Nations Office in Vienna from 10 till 12 February 2016 – our special thanks therefore go to UNOV and the Austrian Ministry of European and International Affairs for their great support.

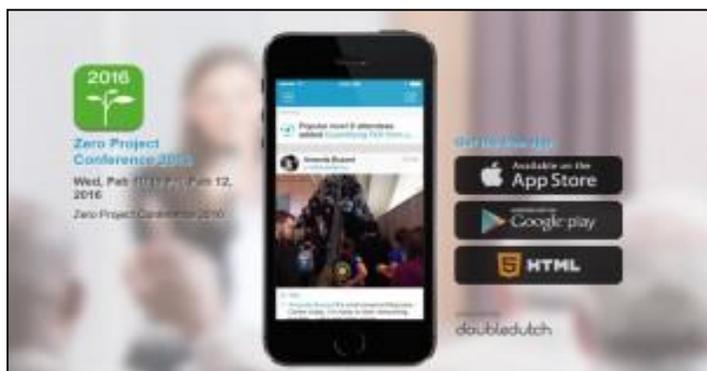


One of the highlights was as usual the Zero Project Award Ceremony, which celebrated all **98 Innovative Practices and Innovative Policies** with an official award certificate from Martin Essl, Founder and Chairman of the Essl Foundation, and Jakob von Uexkull, Founder and Chairman of the World Future Council.

For the occasion we produced a **video clip telling success stories from our past practices and policies**, and how things changed for them since they received the Zero Project Award. Have a look at our YouTube channel!

Around the world, people could follow the conference via our **captioned live web stream**, provided by Verbavoice, a Zero Project Innovative Practice of 2014.

We also created a **special networking smartphone app** for all participants:



Everyone could send personal messages, post comments and pictures in a common activity feed, take notes, browse the programme, the presentations and the speakers, and much more! With 240 active users, more than 5,000 visits in 3 days, close to 70 pictures and comments posted, and 3 times more messages sent, it was a great success and add-on!

In terms of accessibility, we provided for instance for **International Sign Interpretation**, as well as **Captioning** in English – to name a few of the excellent access features of this year’s conference.

With the social media hashtag #ZeroCon16, participants could share their news and highlights of the conference with all others on Facebook and Twitter, like this one from Charlotte McClain Nhlapo from the World Bank, for example:

"We need stronger links between sustainable design & universal design." @McNhlapo
#ZeroCon16



We also grabbed the attention of the Austrian daily newspaper *Der Standard* (on the left). And German actor Samuel Koch delivered a wonderful and very personal speech (on the right), which was widely shared and viewed. Also Judith Heumann’s keynote speech inspired everyone and moved many of us. Have a look at her interview on our YouTube channel!



The numerous sessions covered a broad range of topics concerning **Inclusive education and ICT**, from access to early childhood intervention, inclusive primary, secondary and tertiary education, inclusive education in emergencies, inclusive vocational training to anti-bullying, making learning materials accessible, to non-formal education, e-accessibility standards and e-learning tools, amongst others. **Presentations** can be found in our website’s Download section.

[Reports & key messages from selected sessions](#)

Official Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony was transformed into an energizing welcome by moderator Caroline Casey (Ability Awards, Ireland). Welcome speeches were delivered by H.E. Christine Stix-Hackl, Permanent Representative of Austria at the UN in Vienna, and H.E. Manfred Pallinger, Austrian Vice Minister, Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Consumer Protection. Thereafter, **Martin Essl**, the founder of the Essl Foundation and **Jakob von Uexkull**, the founder of the World Future Council, welcomed everyone. Thereafter **a moving opening keynote speech was delivered by Judy Heumann**, who is currently the Special Advisor for International Disability Rights at the U.S Department of State. Her powerful message as well as her own personal experience underlined once again the importance of an inclusive education system.



Statistics, Indicators and the Sustainable Development Goals

At this session various issues of disability-related data collection were discussed, with a view to the indicators measuring progress in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, including the results from the Zero Project Social Indicators 2016 from 129 countries. Visit our website for learning about the most important results!

Policymaker Forum on Inclusive Education and ICTs



With its broad and international scope and with policymakers coming from different countries and continents, this session was a forum for exchange of recent, innovative and successful approaches that advance inclusive education and accessible ICT, of the most serious bottlenecks that hamper progress, and of the value of international treaties and agenda, such as the CRPD and the SDGs, to that end. Jakob von Uexkull, World Future Council, reported the following key messages from participating policymakers:

- States should begin with fostering values and beliefs, mobilize civil society support (**Canada**), and then go all the way – inclusive education in Spain required a Supreme Court decision. They should include all stakeholders and focus on the individual (**San Marino**).
- States should do and learn from pilot projects, e.g. for textbooks for visually impaired in mainstream schools (**UK**), work across government departments and prioritize engagement and celebration over assessment (**Ireland**).
- States should recognize that good policies require investments in infrastructure and capacity-building and public understanding (**Jordan**).
- They should ensure that reforms can survive crisis situations and political changes by providing legally enforceable national rights (**Greece** and **USA**).
- They should include all ages and areas, and foster citizenship, making people proud of pioneering policies (**South Africa**). There is a need for continuous education about the benefits of zero barriers and diversity in order to make these values mainstream (**Serbia**).
- Discussions also pointed out 3 barriers: the world is becoming more intolerant, there is a lack of data to build indicators on, and there is the issue of ICT development in minority languages. Finally, the explicit inclusion of the rights of persons with disabilities to qualitative education in the UN Sustainable Development Goals was praised.

Plenary Session on Inclusive Education

This session was held after the official opening and the keynote by Judy Heumann. It leveled the field regarding the basics of Inclusive Education, by looking at its past, present and future. Moderated by Michael Fembek, it was held in the format of a **talk show**, on sofas.



Inclusive early childhood intervention and education

From this session that was dedicated to inclusive early childhood intervention and education, Luk Zelderloo, EASPD, reported the following key messages:

- All interventions should be based on a human rights approach. In many countries we still see a medical approach.
- Early childhood intervention is about the child, but should also empower the family, be flexible and work holistic, with a life-cycle approach: transition phases are crucial.
- All stakeholders at the table! Authorities, families, support providers, local community. Shared ownership leads to better strategies and interventions.
- Technology can contribute a lot to communication, it is key in early detection of problems.
- Listen to the children themselves and develop tools to do that in a meaningful way.

Inclusive and quality education models

This session presented 3 Innovative Policies from countries/regions that are in the lead of creating inclusive education systems (Italy, New Brunswick-Canada and Brazil) and 3 Innovative Practices 2016 that specifically were addressing the implementation gap. Klaus Lachwitz, Inclusion International, reported the following key messages:

- Pioneer countries can serve as examples for inclusive education, like **Italy** (less than 1% segregated disabled students) and **Canada's province New Brunswick** (where segregated education is illegal).
- Analysis of policy frameworks are needed and legally-binding policies should set out clear and easy to follow requirements for all public schools (**USA**).
- Comprehensive reports on pupils' individual needs, specifically by focusing on their strengths, should be provided to teachers (**Belgium**).
- Students should remain in their social environment and go to mainstream schools, provided with assistive technologies and specific support teams (**Spain**).
- Brazil set up a model policy that includes continuous cash benefits to help schools to locate out-of-school children with disabilities and to enroll them in school (**Brazil**).

Inclusive education in emergency and refugee situations

Laura Davison from INEE and Ingrid Lewis from the Enabling Education Network reported the following key messages from this crucial session:

- Education For All as set out in the Dakar Framework for Action has to be applied to the 65 million children (including those with disabilities), whose education has been disrupted by humanitarian crises.
- Education in emergencies requires more focus on ensuring access for persons with disabilities given that persons with disabilities are likely to face increased risks and suffer even more of a disadvantage in terms of access to aid (food, water and shelter).
- Emergencies provide an opportunity to build inclusive education systems from the beginning.
- Support and training for educators working is critical to the success of inclusive education interventions.
- Inclusive education is "democracy in action".

Inclusive education models in Asia

This session was dedicated to inclusive education in Asia and Mohammed Ali Loutfy, DPI Arab World, reported 5 recommendations therefrom:

- Governments, international organizations and DPOs must take substantial and systematic

measures for combating barriers, poverty, stigma, and the lack of governmental commitment.

- DPOs efforts and their significant role must be considered.
- Global North Organizations must maintain a strong partnership toward the Global South for insuring and promoting practices and standards of inclusive education in Asia.
- The systematization of inclusive regular and vocational education must be perceived as an essential step for ensuring socio-economic development for Asian countries.
- Inclusive education programmes should no longer face scarcity of resources for insuring their sustainability.

Anti-bullying and anti-violence strategies

From this session presenting successful anti-bullying and anti-violence strategies Artemi Sakellaridis, CSIE, and Richard Rieser, World of Inclusion, reported the following key points:

- Support should be provided to people with learning difficulties to make decisions about their own lives.
- Bullying has a lasting negative impact on a person's life (increased risk of mental health issues at age 18+).
- Myth, superstition, traditional views, stereotypes are still widespread in many countries and in the media.
- Bullying happens because some people find it hard to accept difference. Schools need to make time to promote understanding of diversity. Also, intersectionality is important.
- Disabled adults/teachers should take the lead in explaining the social history of the oppression of disabled people.

Changing attitudes: Successful advocacy

Successful advocacy is key to change attitudes. Jane Buchanan, Human Rights Watch, reported from this session the lessons learnt:

- A successful advocacy strategy requires knowing and thinking carefully about how to achieve change. Who are the agents of change? How do we reach them? What are our tools and messages?
- Each strategy requires flexibility, and different combinations of approaches and messaging.
- Advocacy through media campaigns laid the groundwork for meaningful implementation of inclusive education. It also empowers persons with disabilities, giving them the language and tools of human rights laws to advocate for their rights.
- Advocacy compels governments to fulfill their human rights obligations through strategic litigation.
- Solid partnerships are required for sustainability of advocacy.

Inclusive vocational training in low and middle income countries

From this session dedicated to inclusive vocational training in low and middle income countries Madai Linkimer, ILO/UNDP, reported 5 key messages:

- Education and vocational training are the more effective pathways to achieve quality jobs for persons with disabilities.
- Vocational training for persons with disabilities must be offered in an inclusive way.
- Vocational training courses must be aligned to labor market demand for being more successful on increasing the employability profile of persons with disabilities.
- Implementation of reasonable accommodation is a basic element for vocational training access for persons with disabilities.
- Vocational training strategies must include specific actions for reducing gender gaps on educational access for persons with disabilities, as well as gaps with other groups of disabled

persons.

In the session six Innovative Practices and Policies were presented that have created thousands of jobs for youth with disabilities, operating in countries with little public funding and overall high unemployment rates.

Inclusive vocational training on the job



The session explored the added value of company-based training of youth with disabilities and highlighted models that had successfully advanced the access of people with disabilities to mainstream company-based vocational education and training. Six Innovative Practices were presented that directly connect vocational education and employment in the open labor market.

Inclusive universities

Isabelle Turmaine from the International Association of Universities reported five key points made during this session dedicated to strategies to make universities inclusive and accessible:

- The session showcased great practices/policies, yet, there is still a long way to go before all persons with disabilities attend higher education, in the field of study and location of their choice.
- Both administrative and academic staff should be trained to address and respond to questions put by every student. This could be done with the help from trainers with a disability, including those having intellectual disabilities.
- There is a need for the inclusion of universal design and other tools that promote accessibility of scientific content, courses, and online platforms in all curricula.
- The cost for the support to students with disabilities varies by disability and country, but is high. At a time of less funding for universities, ways to minimize this cost through collaboration, networking should be sought.
- Definition of inclusive university and organizational developments leading toward it are needed.

Technology Show – Learn and Play!



A special Technology Show was organized on the eve of the second conference evening, in cooperation with Innovative Practices 2016 representatives who presented their innovative devices, apps, web and communication tools in an entertaining 60-minutes Technology Show.

<- A drone steered by the mouth in the Plenary Room was quite a sight!

Plenary Session on Accessible ICT and inclusive education

This plenary was an “eye-opener” designed to get everyone on the same page of accessible ICT and its relevance for inclusive education. And as you can see, we used once again the comfortable **talk show format**.

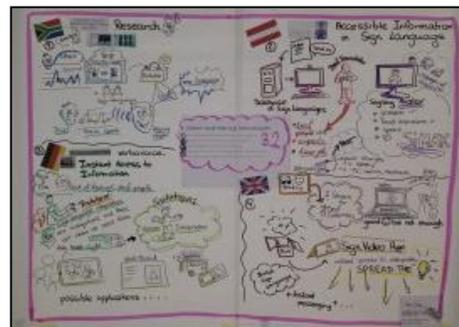


E-Accessibility standards as drivers of innovation

Dedicated to the role that e-accessibility standards can play in advancing access to information and communication technologies and presenting the Innovative Policy 2016 on **transatlantic e-Accessibility standards cooperation**, from the European Commission and the U.S. Access Board. Alejandro Moledo from the European Disability Forum reported the following 5 points:

- Given the increasing presence of ICT in our daily lives, e-accessibility standards are a key driver for the inclusion of persons with disabilities and the implementation of the UN CRPD.
- The structured standards collaboration between the US and the EU is opening up the global market of accessibility. It should be envisaged how to bring them to the international level.
- This model should lead to a global commitment of governments to legislate on accessibility (such as the European Accessibility Act), as well as to only buy accessible products and services.
- These standards must be functionality oriented (instead of too detailed), in order to allow creativeness and future innovation by the ICT industry.
- Other elements are necessary, such as political will, legislative framework, awareness raising campaigns, higher education curricula on accessibility, training, a harmonized monitoring approach (e.g. EIII project for web accessibility).

Drawings to facilitate understanding of sessions – here you see those from the sessions **Non-formal education and sports** and **Speech and hearing technologies** - were made in live.



Final Plenary: Zero Project 2016 & 2017 – The way forward



The final plenary brought together recommendations from the different sessions and provided an outlook on the way forward. After an inspiring keynote speech from Gopal Mitra (UNICEF), participants received a glimpse on what the Zero Project team will be working on in the coming months. In particular, the theme of our next report and conference in 2017 which will be employment – a new four-year cycle begins!

Some more impressions...

During the official opening ceremony Jakob von Uexkull praised Martin and Gerda Essl for their commitment for and support in enhancing the rights of person with disabilities – without their support the Zero Project would not have been set up.

And it has been 5 years since the Essl Foundation and the World Future Council have been cooperating on this project.



In recognition of the hard work the Zero Project team undertook in the past years, Her Highness Princess Latifa Bent Thinian Bin Mohamed Al-Saud handed over a beautiful award to the Zero Project for its accomplishments, in the name of the Saudi Association for People with a Disability.

We were much honoured!

Moreover, an Accessibility for All trail was set up at the entrance of the conference area and created awareness among participants on the barriers of the built environment that persons with different types with disabilities encounter.



In addition, our Innovative Practices 2016 related to technology presented their hardware and software in a wonderful exhibition.

The Zero Project Team is very grateful to all of you for this wonderful conference and looks very much forward to next year!

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