

The Zero Project Conference 2024 at the United Nations in Vienna: innovative solutions for a better tomorrow

VIENNA, 21 February (UN Information Service) – Innovative solutions and inclusive education for people with disabilities are the main topics of the Zero Project Conference 2024 which is taking place at the United Nations in Vienna for the 11th year. Since 2013, the United Nations in Vienna through the UN Office at Vienna (UNOV), the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Essl Foundation, have been working together to realize the United Nations' commitment to building a better world for people with disabilities.

This partnership is more critical and timely than ever, as the Summit of the Future to be held in September 2024 offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to enhance cooperation on critical challenges and address gaps in global governance, reaffirm existing commitments, including to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United Nations Charter, and move towards a reinvigorated multilateral system that is better positioned to positively impact the lives of everyone, including persons with disabilities.

Driven by its mission to advance the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the Zero Project – an initiative of the Essl Foundation – finds and shares innovative solutions that improve the daily lives and legal rights of all people with disabilities. Article 32 of the Convention “recognize[s] the importance of international cooperation and its promotion... for the realization of the purpose and objectives” of the Convention. In support of this, the Zero Project has identified and collected over 900 innovative proven-concept solutions from more than 120 countries since its creation. These solutions from all sectors of society have removed barriers for persons with disabilities and can be replicated in other regions or countries.

“Since the Zero Project was created in 2008, it has developed into a powerful force for change for the rights and lives of persons with disabilities worldwide,” said the Director-General of UNOV and Executive Director of UNODC, Ghada Waly. “The Zero Project connects thousands of experts, professionals and volunteers from more than 100 countries, to share their experiences from the global North and South, and work together for a world where all persons with disabilities can thrive and live with dignity,” she added. “I am proud to be part of this initiative and of our partnership with the Essl Foundation, as we celebrate the ground-breaking work of global disability inclusion champions. We are honoured to host these changemakers this year again as we look ahead to the Summit of the Future in September 2024.”

To further disseminate the spread of global good practices within the United Nations system, the Zero Project has actively contributed to publications such as the forthcoming UN Disability and Development Report of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. In addition, the research cycle of the Zero Project is directly aligned to the respective SDGs on education (SDG 4), employment (SDG 8), accessibility (SDG 10), information and communications technology (ICT) (SDG 17), and independent living and political participation (SDG 16).

The Founder and Initiator of the Essl Foundation, Martin Essl, said: "The Summit of the Future, as mandated, must deliver on transforming education for persons with and without disabilities. As a new vision for the creation of learning societies emerges, the Zero Project supports processes for innovative solutions to be replicated through collaboration with partners globally. Today, the Zero Project Conference on Inclusive Education, and ICT sees

innovators and multipliers from 100 countries put ideas into powerful practice, which will inform this vision for a better tomorrow."

Select United Nations projects will receive a Zero Project Award for their work this year:

UNICEF's programme for accessible digital textbooks for children with and without disabilities that has been implemented in Colombia: <https://zeroproject.org/view/project/1f74c6f9-9b7b-472d-9a74-79d8af4a5f2e>

A UNICEF-based technology project implemented in Serbia, which supports young people with communication impairments: <https://zeroproject.org/view/project/fc33da02-08a5-4689-b0e0-c81b98af26ca>

An emergency early childhood intervention programme that has been supported by the UNICEF regional offices in Geneva: <https://zeroproject.org/view/project/42394722-088c-457d-b404-d0517718ecd0>

The partnership between the UN in Vienna and the Essl Foundation has provided tangible support for the full inclusion of people with disabilities, made possible thanks to the full support of the United Nations System. Both Mr. Essl and Ms. Waly agreed that the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Zero Project are successes. They highlighted in particular that the majority of the Zero Project Awardees of 2024 are innovative solutions that stem from the global south: <https://zeroproject.org/research/zero-project-call-for-nominations-2024/zero-project-awardees-2024>

About the Zero Project

The Zero Project is an initiative by the non-profit Essl Foundation based in Vienna, Austria. Worldwide, the Zero Project finds and shares solutions that improve the daily lives and legal rights of all persons with disabilities.

The Zero Project's approach is research-driven and aims to identify, curate, and share inclusive solutions, as intended and encouraged by Article 32 of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). To achieve this objective, the Zero Project engages with a worldwide cross-sectoral network of innovators, decision-makers, and opinion leaders. <https://zeroproject.org/>

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