

CONCEPT NOTE

Side event to the 36th Session of the Human Rights Council

"Empowering Children with Disabilities through Inclusive Education: Building on Diversity"

Wednesday, September 27th, 2017, 10:00 to 12:00

Room XXIV, Palais des Nations

Background

The Initiative is based on the acknowledgment that children with disabilities remain to be one of the most excluded and invisible groups. It is estimated that 15% of children have impairments. Children with disabilities are often targeted by the systems from the perspective of their restrictions. They are at greater risk of maltreatment, less likely to attend school, access medical services, receive proper nutrition or have their voices heard in society. Almost 50% of children with disabilities are out of school and within them, 85% have never been to school. In some countries 60% of institutionalized children have impairments. Children with disabilities are also the highest risk during emergencies and they are often excluded from humanitarian response operations. The Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities highlights the barriers that children with disabilities continue to face in accessing services and everyday life.

Inclusion of children with disabilities and particularly their inclusion through inclusive education, is high on the UN agenda, both from a human rights perspective and as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Goal 4, which aims at ensuring *“inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”*, has dedicated target about the inclusion of the most vulnerable: *“By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations”* and one of the proposed means of implementation is to *“upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.”*

Inclusive education benefits all children, including children with disabilities. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities contain several provisions that establish specific obligations related to the rights of children with disabilities. Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on the right to inclusive education, and especially the General Comment # 4 adopted in August 2016 by the Committee on the Rights of persons with Disabilities, are key milestones in the global efforts to advance the rights of persons with disabilities through education.

The focus of the Human Rights Council side event on inclusive education is based on the consensus that education is the most important avenue for the empowerment of children and persons with disabilities, and for the development of more inclusive societies. Inclusive education requires the enforcement of non-discrimination measures and additional goods and services such as support in school, assistive devices etc. At the same time effective inclusive

education is not possible without close cooperation between the educational system and the other social systems providing early identification and intervention, community-based health and rehabilitation services, integrated social and health services, cash benefits that enable families to cope with the extra-cost associated with disability. Although they are complimentary to the right to education they are key factors for addressing societal resistance and for providing inclusive society.

Bulgaria in a core group with Finland, Namibia, Mexico, Portugal, Singapore, Spain and Uruguay and is launching this initiative based on its strong commitment to inclusive reforms aimed at empowering children with disabilities to fully exercise their rights. The country recently completed a public care reform which successfully replaced institutional care with a new system of community based services in support of children and their families. There is progress, but also lessons learned and challenges that the Government of Bulgaria is willing to share as a contribution to the global debate on inclusion of children with disabilities.

The initiative will create a platform for exchange of views, for sharing of diverse countries' experiences, for naming both achievements and challenges worldwide. We believe that we could build on the diverse approaches to reach our goal: Empowering Children with Disabilities through Inclusive Education.

Purpose and objectives

The core group is convinced that the Human Rights Council shoulders a responsibility to contribute to the global efforts for the realization of the rights of children with disabilities. Therefore, the purpose of this side event is to continue the discussion on the right to inclusive education in the Human Right Council that would lead to a Joint Statement on the right to inclusive education and its impact on children with disabilities to be realised in September 2018. The topic will also be the focus of the annual Human Rights Council Resolution on the rights of the children which will be presented traditionally by EU and GRULAC in March 2019.

The discussion will aim to address the following questions:

1. What are the barriers that children with disabilities are facing in accessing education and participation in learning?
2. What are the challenges and lessons learned that states are facing in implementing inclusive education reforms, and what are some of the good practices in:
 - Eliminating barriers that restrict participation?
 - Changing culture, policy and practice of education systems and communities to accommodate the needs of all children, including those with impairments?
 - Shifting the focus from medical-disability-restricting approach to inclusive and enabling approach?
3. What can the United Nations, and the Human Rights Council do to ensure the realization of inclusive education based on the standards of the General Comment # 4 on Article 24 on the right to inclusive education, UNCRPD?

Modality

The side event will take the form of a panel followed by an interactive discussion. Introductory remarks by the panellists will form the basis for subsequent debates and interventions from the floor.

Agenda

Moderator: H. E. Ms. Deyana Kostadinova, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Bulgaria to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva, Switzerland (*3 minutes*)

Speakers: **Opening remarks-** Ms Catalina Devandas Aguilar, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (*7 minutes*)
Mr. Jorge Araya, Secretary of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (*7 minutes*)
Ms. Velina Todorova, Member of the Committee on the Rights of the Children (*7 minutes*)
Ms Silvia Quan, International Disability Alliance (*7 minutes*)
Denitza Georgieva, Parent of a child with disabilities, (*7 minutes*)

Discussion: Interventions will be made by the Ambassadors of the Co-sponsors Portugal, Uruguay, Singapore, Finland (3 minutes each)

Q & A session- (30 minutes)

Closing remarks – Ms. Afshan Khan, UNICEF Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia (*7 minutes*)

Organizers and co-sponsors

This event is organized by the Permanent Mission of Bulgaria, the Regional office of UNICEF, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, co-sponsored by Finland, Namibia, Mexico, Portugal, Singapore, Spain, Uruguay and the International Disability Alliance.