

# Digital Technologies for Disability Inclusion: All Learners on Equal Terms

4 December 2023



## International webinar

The webinar is organized by the [UNESCO Institute for Information Technology in Education \(UNESCO IITE\)](#) and the [International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa \(IICBA\)](#) on the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December).

The event is part of the UNESCO IITE flagship webinar series **“Harnessing Technology to Transform Education”**.

## Date and time

Monday, 4 December 2023, from 14:00 to 15:30 (CET/UTC +1)  
16:00 – 17:30 (GMT+3/UTC +3)

## Background and Rationale

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An ‘inclusive and equitable’ education lies at the core of the holistic SDG4. While the latter envisions inclusive education as encompassing all children, youth and adults, such education has historically been associated with, and often conceptualized as, education for persons with disabilities. The struggle of people with disabilities has therefore shaped the understanding of inclusion ([2020 GEM Report, UNESCO, 2020](#)).

Inclusion requires the recognition of all people as full members of society and the respect of their rights, regardless of impairment, age, gender, ethnicity, language, or welfare. The ability of persons with disabilities to participate in society is often frustrated because of physical environments, transportation, information, and communications systems are not appropriate and fully accessible.

In the context of education, inclusion means the creation of barrier-free and child-focused learning environments ([Promoting the Rights of Children with Disabilities, UNICEF, 2007](#)). Inclusive and equitable education involves all learners, giving non-disabled children the experience of growing up and developing in an environment where human diversity is the norm. Difficulties and misunderstanding arise when education systems fail to support and accommodate this diversity, thus leading to further exclusion and enhanced vulnerability of certain population groups.

UNESCO is convinced that ICTs can help mitigate the digital divide and foster the inclusion of persons with disabilities within an educational context as well as within society as a whole. Inclusive and accessible ICTs can be used to address the needs of persons with a variety of disabilities, to the extent that they encourage personalized lifelong learning, employment and social participation (From Exclusion to Empowerment: Role of ICTs for Persons with Disabilities, UNESCO, 2014/22).

With the prevalence of the use of technologies in all aspects of society, and specifically for educational purposes, new opportunities to overcome challenges to the inclusion of learners with disabilities in education become increasingly possible. Reasonable anticipatory accommodations - modifications or adjustments to the tasks, and the environment that enable individuals with disabilities to have an equal opportunity to participate in an academic program provide an opportunity for people with disabilities in educational settings to enjoy the access knowledge and develop skills ([Learning for All, UNESCO, 2016](#)).

Technology has considerable but also significantly unused potential to support inclusive education. In relation to the universal design for learning (UDL), it supports the focus on inclusive means to present information, express knowledge, and engage in learning and communication. Assistive devices help persons with disabilities overcome major barriers which hinder their full and beneficial participation in education. To realize its potential, technology requires simultaneous application of appropriate pedagogy. It also needs to be personalized to accommodate various learners’ needs. Yet differentiated learning supported by technology is rarely used, largely due to lack of relevant teacher education. In low- and middle-income countries, lack of infrastructure can exacerbate the challenges of using technology ([GEM Report, 2020](#)).

In Africa, as in other world regions, positive changes in social and economic development have been disparate. Today, many geographical locations and population groups remain left behind. Improvements in education are still concentrated in certain locations and for specific communities and digital technology is likely to leave those missing modern technologies and Internet connection even further behind. Little or no access to learning and development opportunities, in many cases, is reasoned by disability.

As in the rest of the world, in Africa persons with disabilities face discrimination, exclusion and formidable challenges to the enjoyment of their fundamental rights and equitable participation in social life and improvement. Too often across the continent people with disabilities do not have equal access to education and the majority of vital opportunities for social protection and engagement. Moreover, people with specific types of disabilities too often experience increased levels of exclusion on the basis of disability coupled with other aspects of their identities, including age (e.g., children, youth, and aged people), gender, race, ethnicity, indigenous or minority status, living community/point of residence, etc.

Social inclusion calls for the removal of barriers that might prevent the enjoyment of human rights and requires the creation of appropriate environments for dignified life, participation, and self-development. The provision of inclusive ICTs for learners with disabilities involves removing barriers and enabling all learners to access the same educational opportunities as their peers. Technology-based inclusive education aims to support diversity, encourage active participation and communication, and ultimately benefit all learners: peers with and without disabilities ([Model Policy for Inclusive ICTs in Education for Persons with Disabilities, UNESCO, 2014](#)).

## Objectives

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The webinar will provide a platform for concerned stakeholders: professional individuals and expert organizations, to highlight and discuss disability-inclusive and accessibility-driven technological improvements in education across Africa. During the online session the participants will

- introduce innovative and discuss existing (working) means to enhance and support inclusion through viable and sustainable use of digital technologies and pedagogical practices in education;
- Identify the urgent needs and both existing and untapped opportunities, and present well-informed, high-impact proposals related to the use of disability-sensitive technological solutions across diverse educational settings;
- share organizational best practices and personal professional contributions towards boosting inclusivity and quality of regional/national/local education through the meaningful use of available digital technology and application of innovative teaching practices;
- discuss the benefits and pitfalls of rapid technology integration in the education and socialization of persons with disabilities and special learning needs across various contexts.

The event will throw the limelight on the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to make significant progress in reaching truly accessible quality education for persons with various types of disabilities using viable learning technologies and new, in some areas groundbreaking, ICT-based pedagogical techniques.

## Key webinar themes

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- **Understanding the potential of ICT and AI for inclusive education**, including the consequences of underestimating, or neglecting the capacity of technology and innovation to ensure the learning and development needs of persons with various types of disabilities.
- **Eliminating exclusion of persons with disabilities from quality education**: addressing issues of limited or no access to technology-enabled educational environment, including accessible digital learning materials and duly trained educators to benefit learners with different types of disabilities.
- **Facilitating curriculum adaptation**: ensuring flexibility and contextualization with due and equal consideration of all learner groups; developing universally accessible and adapted digital resources for students with disabilities to enable and support their independence and self-fulfillment in learning and communication.
- **Ensuring appropriate and timely training, motivational incentives and support** for teachers, school community, and resource centres across the continent; equipping educators with the key skills and knowledge to practice teaching which is enabled and enriched by digital technology, accessible ICT solutions, and assistive devices.

## Participants' profiles

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**Primary target audience:** practicing educators and academia; line government officials (e.g., experts from MoEs), representatives of key development partners, international and local NGOs whose professional and personal concerns embrace issues of accessibility and equitable learning opportunities, inclusive and special needs education, teacher training and curriculum design, technological social responsibility, etc.

**Secondary audience:** experts from associated government institutions, representatives of welfare/charity organizations, private sector champions.

The participation of female professionals and persons with disabilities is highly encouraged and appraised.

## Date and Venue

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Date and time: **4 December 2023, 14:00 - 15:30 (CET/UTC +1) / 16:00 -17:30 (GMT+3/UTC +3)**

The online session will be Zoom-hosted and available in English.

[Register here](#)

## Tentative Agenda

16:00 – 16:05	<p>Opening remarks</p> <p><b>Mr Tao Zhan</b>, Director, UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education (UNESCO IITE)</p>
<b>KEYNOTE SPEECHES</b>	
16:05 – 16:15	<p><b>Mr Quentin Wodon</b>, Director, International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (UNESCO IICBA)</p>
16:15 – 16:25	<p><b>Ms Natalia Mochu</b>, Regional Director, Regional Office for CIS, International Telecommunications Union (ITU)</p>
16:25 – 16:35	<p><b>Ms Rachel Cooper</b>, Education Specialist, Skills and Digital Learning, United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF)</p>
16:35 – 16:45	<p><b>Mr Lorenzo Desideri</b>, Expert Consultant for the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education (UNESCO IITE)</p>
<b>PANEL DISCUSSION</b>	
16:45 – 17:25	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>‘Empowering Diversity and Inclusion: Unleashing the Potential of Technology and Digital Pedagogy for Education and Beyond’</b></p> <p>Moderator: <b>Ms Natalia Amelina</b>, Senior National Project Officer for Education, UNESCO IITE</p> <p>Expert Panel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Dr Mohamed Koutheair Khribi</b>, Head of Training Section, MADA – Qatar Assistive Technology Center</li> <li>• <b>Mr Chun Man Victor Wong</b>, Founder and CEO, BridgeAI, Hong Kong</li> <li>• <b>Mr Vashkar Bhattacharjee</b>, Inclusion Advisor, Program Manager &amp; Head, ICT &amp; Resource Center on Disabilities, Young Power in Social Action</li> <li>• <b>Mr Roberto Vitali</b>, Online and Live Event Executive, Anastasis Soc. Coop.</li> </ul>
17:25 – 17:30	<p>Closing words</p>

## Contacts

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