



**ECOSOC
YOUTH FORUM**

YOUTH2030

Economic and Social Council Youth Forum

**“Youth shaping sustainable and innovative solutions:
Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in
times of crises”**

SIDE EVENT AT THE 2024 ECOSOC YOUTH FORUM

**Supporting the Right to Higher Education of Students with
Disabilities**

**Organized by UNESCO IESALC, partnering with the Stakeholder
Group of Persons with Disabilities, the UNESCO SDG4 Youth &
Student Network, the Global Student Forum, Queen’s University
(Canada), and University of Gondar (Ethiopia)**

[April 18, 2024, 9:30 – 11:00 AM, NY Time/EST]

Hybrid:

- **In person: Doha CR, UNOSSC Office, 304 E 45th Street, FF-11th FL**
- **Online: On zoom**

1. Background

According to UNDESA (2019), persons with disabilities face a significantly higher risk of poverty compared to persons without

disabilities. This disparity stems from many societal barriers, including discriminatory practices, limited access to education and employment opportunities, and exclusion from social programs designed to support livelihoods and well-being. While comprehensive national data on income poverty disaggregated by disability status is scarce, existing evidence indicates that the proportion of individuals with disabilities living below the national or international poverty line is higher, even doubling that of their non-disabled counterparts in some countries (UNDESA, 2019).

On the other hand, there is wide proof that education, and particularly higher education attainment, can interrupt intergenerational cycles of poverty and increase income and general wellbeing (World Bank, 2021). Therefore, one priority for policymaking targeted at youth with disabilities is addressing the right to higher education for youth with disabilities as a fundamental stepstone to put an end to inequalities and poverty.

We stress the contribution of SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) 4 to achieving SDG 1, while counting on expanded collaboration by activating SDG 17 with partnerships targeted at youth with disabilities, the right to higher education. In that respect, this panel aims to address the critical issue of enhancing access for students with disabilities in higher education institutions across the world. Leveraging on a successful project implemented by the University of Gondar in Ethiopia, Queen's University in Canada, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation and experiences and good practices shared by the Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities and the Global Student Forum, we hope to drive systems and policy change towards greater inclusivity and innovation targeted at students with disabilities.

2. Objectives of the side event, including relation with the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) identified in the Guidelines

- Explore the interconnected role of SDGs 4 and 1 in combating poverty through the right to higher education for persons with disabilities.
- On the foundation of SDG17, promote multidisciplinary and intersectoral collaboration involving students, communities, universities, civil society, private sector, and governments to create meaningful partnerships to ensure inclusive, quality, relevant education for youth with disabilities and inclusive higher education ecosystems for all, through transformative participation.
- Create a conducive space for knowledge sharing, resource mobilization, data collection, and innovation in assistive technologies and innovative pedagogies and techniques catered for the diverse needs of students with disabilities.
- Discuss actionable ideas, effective strategies, and tools for improving higher education experiences and outcomes for persons with disabilities, following the principle of “nothing about us without us,” by building on recommendations, experiences, and self-advocacy of students with disabilities.

3. Programme and names of speakers/panelists

Welcome and Opening Remarks (10 minutes)

Round 1: Sharing good practices in supporting students with disabilities in Higher Education (15 minutes)

Round 2: Identifying the gaps and opportunities for inclusive higher education systems (20 minutes)

Round 3: The role of each stakeholder and meaningful partnerships among them for quality, inclusive and transformative higher education for all (10 minutes)

Round 4. Meaningful example of multistakeholder partnership for advancing the right of higher education for students with disabilities (10 min)

Round 5. Audience Interaction (20 min)

Closing Remarks (5 minutes)

Speakers

Mr. Francesc Pedró, Director, UNESCO IESALC

Mr. Rio Hada, Chief of Equality, Development and Rule of Law Section, OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights)

Ms. Heather Aldersey, Associate Professor, Queen's University, Canada & Co-Director, the University of Gondar/Queen's University Mastercard Foundation Scholars program.

Mr. Molalign Adugna, Assistant Professor, University of Gondar, Ethiopia & Co-Director, the University of Gondar/Queen's University Mastercard Foundation Scholars program.

Mr. Jacob Blasius, Executive Director of the Global Student Forum

Ms. Lydia Vlagsma, Policy officer, Disability Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities

Ms. Juliette Gudknecht, (Member, UNESCO SDG4 Youth & Student Network)

4. Guiding Questions for discussion/s

- What are some exemplary instances of innovative educational policies or projects that have proven successful in benefiting students with disabilities, and how can these strategies be implemented on a broader scale?
- To what extent can technology be leveraged to enhance accessibility and foster a supportive learning environment for

students with disabilities, and what challenges might arise in the process?

- What skills and competencies are needed from teachers to effectively support students with disabilities, and what measures can be implemented to ensure comprehensive training?
- What is the role of self-advocacy in inclusive higher education? How do youth with disabilities experience being self-advocates and how can other students and other partners deliver on shared responsibilities to be advocates for inclusion?
- What role do student representatives play in shaping policies and practices that promote inclusivity and accessibility for students with disabilities within academic settings?
- How can collaborative partnerships among youth with disabilities, educators, grassroots organizations, social services and other stakeholders contribute to creating a more inclusive and healthier educational environment for all?

5. Venue Address (if In-person) and/or Platform to be used for virtual side events including Registration link

- In person participation: Doha CR, UNOSSC Office, 304 E 45th Street, FF-11th FL. The link for the in-person registration can be found [here](#) . Please note that registration is required and is open until the 16th of April 2024 at 11h59 PM EST.
- Virtual Participation: The link for the Zoom Webinar can be found [here](#)