



## Empowering Persons with Disabilities Through Arts: Concrete Experiences for Real Inclusion

12 June 2025 | 4:45 – 6 pm | Conference Room 12, UNHQ

### Background

Art can be a transformative tool for social inclusion when its structures and outputs align with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) - respect for dignity, accessibility, non-discrimination, participation, and equality of opportunity. Fully inclusive art practices both reflect and reinforce these principles, helping to build more equitable and expressive societies.

Article 30 of the CRPD specifically underscores the right of persons with disabilities to participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport, including the arts, by stating that *“States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life... [and] shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy access to cultural materials, television programmes, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats.”*

Art empowers persons with disabilities to tell their own stories, challenge stereotypes, and assert their identities. This aligns with Article 8 of the CRPD, which emphasizes awareness-raising and combating stereotypes, prejudice, and harmful practices *“States Parties undertake to... foster respect for the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities”*. Inclusive art initiatives allow persons with disabilities not only to participate but to lead creative processes, promoting dignity and agency.

Arts can also serve as tool for **breaking down social and physical barriers** by enabling persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life. Persons with disabilities should also have equal opportunities to pursue careers in the arts. Article 27 of CRPD on Work and Employment calls for enabling persons with disabilities to gain a living through work they freely choose or accept, which includes careers in artistic and cultural fields.

### **Objectives of the side event**

Through sharing of best practices and concrete examples of inclusion of persons with disabilities, the side event aims at exploring how the empowerment of persons with Disabilities is meaningful through arts and cultural life by addressing four main pillars of action:

1. Participation in Cultural Life and the Arts
2. Fostering Self-Expression and Representation
3. Removing barriers to access
4. Supporting Professional Development in the Arts

### **Examples of inclusion**

The Pathological Theater is a leading therapeutic institution in **Italy**, nationally and internationally, providing essential support to individuals—and their families—affected by severe physical and mental disabilities. Over its thirty-year history, participants in its Theater Therapy programme have experienced the transformative impact of the innovative theoretical and practical approach developed by founder Dario D'Ambrosi. His method highlights the profound value of theatre as a tool for advancing research on mental well-being, contributing to a vision of a more inclusive and evolved society.

In its commitment to offering students an educational experience comparable to that of leading university centres, Dario D'Ambrosi has also established the first Experimental University Course in Integrated Theater of Emotion, in collaboration with the University of Rome Tor Vergata. This initiative seeks to achieve formal scientific recognition of innovative theatre therapy methods.

Building on its research and initiatives, the Pathological Theater association is now embarking on a new project entitled "From Pain to Positive Emotion," which will be further presented during the event.

The **Portuguese government** has also implemented policies to support the inclusion of persons with disabilities through arts. As an examples, the initiative Art Without

Limits Initiative, a collaboration between the Directorate-General for the Arts (DGARTES) and *Acesso Cultura*, provides funding for projects that promote the professional practice of disabled and deaf artists and improve access for disabled audiences. This initiative is also aligned with the National Strategy for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities 2021–2025: Approved in July 2021, this strategy outlines measures to enhance the participation of persons with disabilities in various sectors, including culture, aligning with the CRPD's emphasis on inclusion and accessibility.

As concrete examples, the project *Dançando com a Diferença*, based in Madeira, is a dance company that integrates dancers with and without disabilities, producing performances that challenge conventional norms. Moreover, *Vo'Arte*, operating in Lisbon, collaborates with dancers with learning and physical disabilities, creating innovative dance theatre productions.

UNESCO, through its mandate in culture, education, and the sciences, is strongly committed to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and to promoting disability inclusion as a fundamental aspect of human rights, social justice, and sustainable development. Recognizing the multiple forms of marginalization faced by persons with disabilities, UNESCO emphasizes the empowering role of art in fostering accessibility and representation. Its annual Global Forum against Racism and Discrimination serves as a key platform to challenge systemic barriers and advance inclusive policies, with the latest edition focusing on actionable strategies to support persons with disabilities in education, employment, and public services.