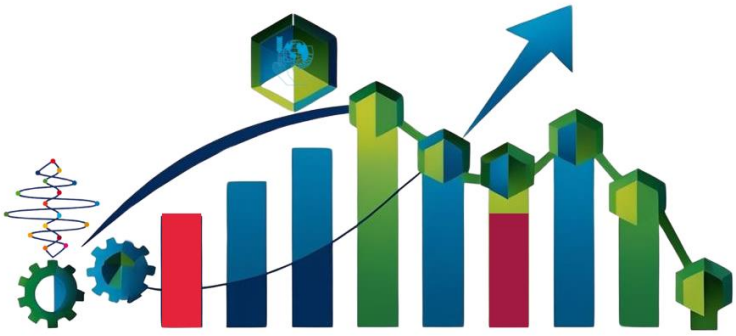
ROYAL ACADEMY
of Science International Trust



Reforming the Culture of Inclusion in Science for Sustainable Development: Bringing Everyone Forward

Side Event: 10th Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals

8 May 2025, UNHQ in Virtual Format

10.00 – 13.00 (US-EST)

@RASITHQ | #ScienceInBraille | #Bringing Everyone Forward | #Science4SDGs

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CONCEPT NOTE

Background:

The United Nations fact sheet estimates suggest that persons with disabilities comprise 15% of the global population, a figure that is expected to increase with global population growth. Unfortunately, the United Nations fact sheets lack comprehensive data on the percentage of people with disabilities who hold higher education qualifications and are employed, particularly in STEM fields. Equally, it appears that comprehensive data on the percentage of people with disabilities who hold higher education qualifications and are employed, particularly in STEM fields, remains sparse.

That data, for example, from high-income countries, such as the United States of America, suggests that persons with disabilities represent a very low percentage in STEM employment and academia. The latter data also shows that college-educated individuals with disabilities, who hold degrees in STEM fields, face higher unemployment rates than their peers without disabilities. Furthermore, persons with disabilities with STEM degrees are less likely to be employed in their specialties, whether in academia, the public, or the private sectors.

Even though the proportion of women employed in science and engineering has shown minimal growth over the past two decades. The disparity is even starker for persons with disabilities (UNESCO 2024). According to the Zero Project Report (2023), adolescents with disabilities are significantly less likely to complete primary or secondary education as compared to their non-disabled counterparts, with disparities increasing at higher levels of education.

Prioritizing Expanded Opportunities for All:

Expanding opportunities for individuals with disabilities is a main priority in the Royal Academy of Science International Trust's (RASIT) strategic plan for 2020-2030. The “Science in Braille” Global Initiative of RASIT aims to identify and address barriers to individuals with

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disabilities' access to STEM education and employment, promoting equitable and inclusive opportunities for individuals with disabilities as contributors to sustainable development. The Initiative further aims to support the United Nations and its Member States in developing strategic plans and action frameworks to ensure access and inclusion of individuals with disabilities in all fields of science and technology education and employment and increase their involvement in sustainable development programs and policymaking.

From high-level conversations with deaf and blind scientists and professionals at the United Nations to the groundbreaking Zero-Gravity Science Space Mission for blind and disabled individuals, RASIT continues to collaborate with UN Member States, Inter-Governmental Organizations, and the United Nations and its entities. Together, they strive to elevate disabled professionals as agents of change for Socio-Economic Sustainable Development.

The High-Level Panel:

Diversity in perspective enriches innovation, yet persons with disabilities face challenging barriers to accessing science and technology opportunities to join the science and technology workforce, thus limiting the diversity of perspectives that enrich the STI ecosystem and make significant contributions to the world's scientific innovation enterprise. Broadening the participation of disabled individuals in STI is crucial for socio-economic sustainable development through scientific discovery and innovation.

The Royal Academy of Science International Trust (RASIT) is organizing the first of its kind High-Level Panel focusing on "Reforming the Culture of Inclusion in Science for Sustainable Development: Bringing Everyone Forward".

The Panel will highlight the role of professionals with disabilities as key contributors to sustainable development goals, with a special focus on ***SDG 8 and its nexus***. Furthermore, the Panel will bring together disabled professionals and experts to discuss with policymakers and the international community:

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- Access to and engagement in science and technology, capacity-building, and employment for scientists, professionals, and experts with disabilities.
- Action plans and strategic frameworks to promote the recruitment and retention of professionals with disabilities in science and technology.
- Evaluation and consideration of strategies, if any, to assess variable gaps in participation, leadership, and fostering cultures of inclusion of people with disabilities in decision-making.

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AGENDA:

10.00 – 10.30: Opening Segment:

Welcoming Remarks

Moderator:

- **H.E. Darja Bavdaz-Kuret**, *Ambassador at Large, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Republic of Slovenia*

Opening Statements

- **HRH Prince Prof. Adnan El-Hashemite**, *The Dean, Royal Academy of Science International Trust*
- **Drs. Alice Bouman-Dentener,** *co-founder, Cansu Global*

10.30 – 11.10: Conversation 1

"Scientists with Disabilities Overcoming Challenges and Stigma"

Through their personal experiences, professionals with disabilities will discuss and assess the various barriers to participation in STEM education and employment. In addition, RASIT Science in Braille team members will explore possible strategies for policymakers to consider enhancing participation and cultures of inclusion across diverse areas of education and employment in STEM fields.

- **Dr. Daniela Marghitu**, *Mobility-impaired Associate Director of NSF TAPD INTO STEM Alliance, Member of Alabama State Governor's Advisory Council Committee on Computer Science Education, USA*
- **Dr. Esraa Elbably,** *First Deaf Dentist, Secretary-General of the Cairo Dental Syndicate, Egypt-Bahrain*
- **Dr. Tamru Belay**, *Blind Braille Technology Stakeholder, Ethiopia*
- **Dr. Attorney Victor M. Rivera**, *Legal Counselor, State and Federal Forum on Special Education and Disability Law, Puerto Rico*

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11.10 – 11.45: Conversation 2

Professionals with Disabilities for Sustainable Development: SDG 8 and its nexus, sensory perception related to employment, and accessibility tools in the workplace."

This conversation will showcase professionals with disabilities as agents for the Sustainable Development Goals. The fellows with disabilities will further discuss with policymakers the necessity for including professionals and experts with disabilities in designing sustainable development programs, assessments, and agendas.

- **Dr. Kyle Keane**, *Partially-Sighted Senior Lecturer in Assistive Technologies, University of Bristol, United Kingdom*
- **Dr. Garry Foran**, *Blind Materials Physicist and Astronomer, Swinburne University of Technology, Australia*
- **Dr. Bonnielin Sweanor,** *Director, Johns Hopkins University Disability Health Research Center, Maryland, USA*
- **Ms. Eilidh Morrison**, *Blind Physicist, Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Royal National Institute for Blind People, United Kingdom*
- **Ms. Lisa Dundainas,** *Deaf Cognitive Scientist, Université Paris Cité, Sorbonne Université, Director and Founder of The Disability Handbook, France*

11.45 – 12.30: Conversation 3

Inclusion of Fellows with disabilities in the International Organizations"

This conversation will discuss the value of engaging professionals with disabilities in diplomacy and decision-making within international organizations, large science research infrastructure, the private sector, and other stakeholders.

- **Honorable Senator Ishumael Zhou**, *Member of Parliament, Zimbabwe*
- **Sir Dr. Tom Shakespeare, 3rd Baronet, CBE, FBA**, *Professor of Disability Research, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom*
- **Dr. Eng. Takao Watanabe**, *Retired Blind Engineer, Private sector, Japan*
- **Dr. Renee Horton**, *Hard-of-Hearing Aeronautical Engineer, NASA, Former President of the National Society of Physics, Trinidad and Tobago*
- **Ms. Irisaida Iriarte**, *CEO of Univision Foundation, USA*

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12.30 – 13.00: Closing

Remarks by UN Member States and entities, as well as Participants.

- **Prof. Robert Kamiński,** *Theoretical and Astroparticle Physicist, Institute of Nuclear Physics-Department of Theoretical Physics and the CREDO Project, The Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland.*
- **Dr. Luci Attalah,** *Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of Wales, Executive Director of the UNESCO-MOST BRIDGES Initiative, United Kingdom*

Respondent:

- **Mr. Thibaut de Martinprey**, *Director, Louise Braille Campus for Research and Innovation, France*

Motion Presenters:

- **Ms. Javiera Perez Reyes,** *Engineering Student, Universidad Tecnica Federico Santa María, Chile*
- **Mr. Jeffrey Aramouni,** *Junior Officer, World Youth League, Royal Academy of Science International Trust*

Launching RASIT Science in Braille World Center of Excellence

- **HRH Prince Prof. Adnan El-Hashemite**, *The Dean, Royal Academy of Science International Trust*

Closing Remarks

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