# The Zero Project Conference 2021

## More than 10,000 global participants watched the conference on employment and technologies for people with disabilities.

### The Centennial Zero Project-Conference took place this year from February 10 to 12. Via web stream, a total of 85 hours of programming with nearly 500 speakers was offered on three dedicated channels over the three days. This year's theme centered around innovations in employment and technology for people with disabilities. The #ZeroCon21 counted 4,000 participants from 145 countries, the sessions were visited more than 10,000 times.

For the first time, the Zero Project Conference–the world conference on inclusion and accessibility–was held virtually. Over three days, the Conference highlighted innovative employment models and technologies for people with disabilities. 85 hours of unique content was broadcast, with more than half being organized under the auspice of a “Conference of Conferences“format. In effect, partners of the Zero Project organized Sessions–Partner Channel Sessions–that highlighted their work and contributions to disability inclusion. These Partner Channel Sessions were hosted among others by United Nations organizations such as the ITU (International Telecoms Union) or the ILO (International Labour Organization); international NGOs like Humanity & Inclusion from France; Leonard Cheshire; and Sightsavers from Great Britain; or Austrian-based organizations such as Licht-für-die-Welt; ORF; atempo; Lebenshilfe Tirol; equalizent; or MVG.

Around 4,000 people from 145 countries registered for the conference. The sessions were visited more than 10,000 times, which results in a remarkable average of more than 100 visitors per session.

### The Who is Who at #ZeroCon21

The #ZeroCon21 offered a wide array of backgrounds and diverse voices to hear from. The opening session featured the founder of the Essl Foundation and initiator of the Zero Project, Martin Essl, as well as the Director General of the United Nations in Vienna and Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Ghada Waly. To underline the need for mainstream acceptance, Wolfgang Sobotka, President of the Austrian National Council, sent an engaging video message for the Closing Ceremony, which underlined the need for a whole-of-society approach when it comes to disability inclusion.

Various keynotes accentuated this message and were delivered either on site, or remotely via video from EU Commissioner Nicolas Schmit; Caroline Casey (The Valuable 500); Steve Ingham (Pagegroup); Robert James (Adecco); Sofija Korać (US Mission to the UN); Charlotte V. McClain-Nhlapo (World Bank); Michael A. Stein (Harvard University); Stefan Trömel (ILO), Ashok Vaswani (Barclays Bank UK); and Robert Zadrazil (Unicredit Bank Austria) to name a few.

### Focus on inclusive employment and IT

Despite the impressive speaker lineup, the focus of the 2021 Zero Project Conference, remained squarely on the 82 “Innovative Practices and Policies“, which reigned from 49 countries and received a Zero Project Award for their effort on bolstering employment for people with disabilities.

Ten of these Awardees will also undergo a six-month Accelerator Program to help scale their innovation globally and network with international investors and partners. This year's participants in this Zero Project-[Impact Transfer Programm](http://impact-transfer.org/zero-project/)–organized by Zero Project, Ashoka and Fundación Descúbreme–are PFDA Vocational Training Center (Bangladesh), Egalitè (Brazil), JAMBA (Bulgaria), Seco Chile (Chile), EnAble India (India), Youth4Jobs Foundation (India), DeafTawk (Pakistan), I Love Coffee (South Africa), Helm (Egypt) and myAbility (Austria).

### Cutting-edge technology and other highlights

In total, 500 speakers from 100 nations around the globe–spanning all time zones–presented their ideas and solutions for an inclusive and accessible world. These included cutting-edge technologies such as 3D printing, augmented reality, gaming, green jobs, inclusion in art and museums, online recruiting; as well as forums and workshops from organizations and companies such as Discovering Hands; EASPD; EY; Fulbright Europe; IBM; Microsoft; Sabanci Foundation; and USAID.

For the third time already, the “Her Abilities Awards“was also awarded during the Zero Project Conference. The “Her Abilities Awards“ is the first global award launched by Light for the World that honors women with disabilities in three categories; (1) health & education; (2) rights and arts; and (3) culture & sports. This year’s awardees; Gamze Elibol (Turkey); Bernice Oyeleke (Nigeria); and Robbie Francis Watene (New Zealad) were chosen by an illustrious, independent all-women jury who judged 124 nominees from 48 countries.

Other highlights of #ZeroCon21 included the premiere of the TV documentary *Seeing AI* with parathriathlete Amy Dixon; video presentations of all 82 Awardees; interactive sessions on forward-thinking topics such as gaming or art; as well as the Zero Dance video, which [celebrated the human need to dance in all shapes and forms](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0z7YB6UkQm0).

### Accessibility taken seriously

Just like our awardees and speakers, the Zero Project Conference embraces inclusion and accessibility. Subsequently, the Conference live web stream was translated into International Sign language and captioned with subtitles. In addition to English–the conference language–more than 50 other languages were available for captioning via the Speechgear platform. Videos were audio annotated, partiallly live, and for people with intellectual disabilities or learning difficulties, select sessions were graphically facilitated and summarized in a visual manner.

### #ZeroCon21 remains available as a stream

In his closing remarks, Martin Essl drew an entirely positive summary and announced the next steps: “In a few weeks, the Zero Project will launch a streaming platform on which the entire conference will continue to be available free of charge as a stream - similar to Netflix, sorted by sessions, but also by topics. In addition, we are currently developing an online portal that will make it possible to search for innovations in our database. And we're also launching an Ambassador Circle, for diplomats interested in the issues of inclusion and accessibility. The Zero Project's next research topic, leading up to the 2022 conference, is accessibility.”

### Zero Project: For a world with zero barriers

The Zero Project Conference is organized by the Essl Foundation, which was founded in 2007 to support social innovations and projects focusing on people with disabilities. Founder Martin Essl: “Zero Project is now a network of more than 6,000 experts from over 180 countries and a global marketplace for social innovation that shares a common goal: a world without barriers.“

For more information, visit [zeroproject.org](https://zeroproject.org) and [conference.zeroproject.org](https://conference.zeroproject.org)

#ZeroCon21 #ZeroProject #zerobarriers

Inquiries & Contact:

Michael Fembek

Email: [m.fembek@esslfoundation.org](mailto:m.fembek@esslfoundation.org)