



# Zero Project

For a world with zero barriers

## Shaping the future development of disability innovations: ZeroCon23

11<sup>th</sup> Zero Project Conference starts on February 22<sup>nd</sup> in Vienna, Austria

**Vienna, Austria, February 2, 2023:** From February 22-24, 2023, Austria will be the global hub of innovation, hosting the 11<sup>th</sup> annual Zero Project Conference at the United Nations Office at Vienna. Independent Living & Political Participation, and ICT, is the theme of #ZeroCon23, highlighting solutions focused on topics ranging from voter education to deinstitutionalization. In 2023, there are 71 Zero Project Awardees from 42 countries, including for the first-time solutions implemented in Djibouti.

#ZeroCon23 will once again feature a stellar line up: over 800 people from 80 different countries, including **persons with disabilities and their organizations**; leading international foundations such as the World Bank, UNESCO, and WHO; high-ranking politicians such as Anne Rabbitte, the Minister of State at the Department of Health and at the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth from the Government of Ireland; and international corporations including UniCredit Bank Austria, Microsoft, Google, Nike, and McDonalds. Spanning three days and over 150 sessions, the Zero Project Conference 2023 is the largest global platform for advancing disability innovation and implementation.

### Three Key Criteria for Innovations

The Zero Project is supported by the Essl Foundation, founded by Martin Essl: "Zero means zero barriers for people with disabilities. With the annual Zero Project Conference, we make a decisive contribution **towards a world with zero barriers**." To this end, the Zero Project announces annually the worldwide Call for Nominations, seeking out and elevating innovative solutions – from technologies to laws – which have proven success in improving the lives for persons with disabilities.

"Three criteria are what we look for: Innovation, Impact, and Scalability," reveals Essl. "Since 2013, we've grown **a database of over 800 innovations** that can be used and scaled directly by decision-makers in politics, business and civil society." Each year, the Conference is dedicated to one of four central themes that directly support the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: accessibility, employment, education, and independent living and political participation.

### Focus on Technological and ICT Innovations

To accelerate the growth of innovative disability technology, #ZeroCon23 is launching the first-ever **Zero Project Technology Forum**, an all-day event dedicated to helping disability

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inclusion innovators scale their products and services. "The Zero Project Conference is a gathering of a global network of more than 6,000 experts from over 120 countries, where these selected innovations are first demonstrated to high-level decision-makers from politics, business, and investment, who can then implement them directly into their programs," explains Essl. "The Conference thus acts as the most important global platform for companies to get the first look at the newest and most exciting innovations."

## **New Opportunities at #ZeroCon23**

In addition to the Zero Project Technology Forum, there are several fantastic new opportunities at #ZeroCon23.

The first-ever **Zero Project Youth Delegation** includes 19 participants from four continents, encouraging its members throughout the week to use various media formats to express themselves and, in the process, to capture the global essence of #ZeroCon23. Through our outstanding partnership with Fundación Descúbreme, this year's **Zero Project Conference for the Spanish-speaking communities of the world (#ZeroConLatam23)** will occur jointly with the Zero Project Conference 2023 at the United Nations Office in Vienna. Two days of Spanish-speaking forums, sessions, and panels will be broadcast globally as we welcome a host of Awardees and special ambassadors to make international connections. Finally, the ground-breaking **Zero Project Policymaker Forum** convenes policy makers from around the world to address good practices through constructive dialogue on how legislation can empower persons with disabilities.

## **Celebrating 10 years of partnership**

The **United Nations in Vienna** and the Essl Foundation are proud to celebrate their 10-year partnership on disability inclusion. Since 2013, the United Nations in Vienna through the UN Office at Vienna (UNOV), the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Essl Foundation, have been working together to realize the United Nations' commitment to building a better world for people with disabilities.

The Zero Project Conference has been hosted at the UN in Vienna nine times since 2014, with more than 5,000 participants from over 100 countries, making ZeroCon one of the largest international disability inclusion gatherings in the world.

## **Zero Project: for a world with zero barriers**

The Zero Project Conference is organized by the Essl Foundation, which was founded in 2007 to identify, share, and support social innovation and projects that focus on the rights of people with disabilities. For more information, visit [zeroproject.org](http://zeroproject.org).

## **For all media and press enquiries, please contact:**

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- You are cordially invited to join our **Press Conference** on Friday, February 24 at 9:15 am CET at UniCredit Center Kaiserwasser, Eiswerkstrasse 20, 1220 Vienna.
- You are invited to **join #ZeroCon23 in person** and/or parts of it. Please send an e-mail to [office@zeroproject.org](mailto:office@zeroproject.org) and [press@zeroproject.org](mailto:press@zeroproject.org) with the subject line “#ZeroCon23 | Press Accreditation” if interested to ensure you receive United Nations ground passes and access to #ZeroCon23.
- The entire ZeroCon23 agenda and relevant live streams can be found here: <https://www.b2match.com/e/zero-project-conference-2023/components/23417>
- We provide you with **photographs/publication materials**.
- We will provide access to **Interview Partners**, such as:
  - **Wolfgang Sobotka**, President, Austrian National Council
  - **Members of Parliament:** Heike Grebien (Die Grünen), Fiona Fiedler (NEOS), Kira Grünberg (ÖVP), Christian Ragger (FPÖ), Christian Oxonitsch (SPÖ)
  - **Martin Essl**, Founder, Chairman of the Board, The Essl Foundation
  - **Robert Zadrazil**, CEO, UniCredit Bank Austria
  - **Charlotte V. McClain-Nhlapo**, Global Disability Advisor, World Bank Group
  - **Inmaculada Placencia Porrero**, Senior Expert in Disability and Inclusion, Directorate-General Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission.
  - **Anne Rabbitte**, Minister of State at the Department of Health and at the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Government of Ireland
  - **Katrin Langensiepen**, Member of the European Parliament, Die Grüne, Germany
  - **Nirat Bhatnagar**, Partner, Dalberg Advisors, India
  - **Rylin Rodgers**, Disability Policy Advisor, MS Accessibility, Microsoft,
  - **Christopher Patnoe**, Senior Program Manager, Google,
  - **Kathryn Townsend**, Senior Advisor, Disability Inclusion, Ford Foundation,
  - **Elaine Katz**, Senior Vice President, Grants and Communications, Kessler Foundation,
  - **Shani Dhanda**, Entrepreneur, Disability Specialist & Speaker, Ultraviolet Co-Chair, Virgin Media, United Kingdom
  - **Dr. Anthony Giannoumis**, **Associate Professor, Oslo Metropolitan University**
  - **Caroline Casey**, Founder, The Valuable 500