



Permanent Mission of Italy
UN - Geneva



Permanent Mission
of Cyprus in Geneva



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER



Permanent
Mission of
Iraq to UNOG



México
Misión Permanente de México ante
los Organismos Internacionales
en Ginebra



Heritage
International
Institute

A New International Paradigm: Cultural Rights and Persons with Disabilities

Side event on the margins of the 59th session of the Human Rights Council

Date 20 June 2025, Time 13.00

Room XXIV, Palais des Nation

Background

Cultural rights are enshrined in many international human rights instruments, such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.¹ These rights include, among others, the rights to take part in cultural life, to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications, and to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which a person is the author.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) marks a pivotal development in this area, affirming the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, including access to cultural materials, television programmes, films, theatre, and heritage sites.² This provision calls for proactive measures to eliminate obstacles and ensure accessibility across all forms and expressions of cultural participation. The UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, emphasized that “considering access to and enjoyment of cultural heritage as a human right is a necessary and complementary approach to the preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage.”

In line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the principle of “*leaving no one behind*,” ensuring cultural rights for persons with disabilities is not only a matter of inclusion- it is a fundamental pillar of a just and equitable society.

¹ Many more human rights instruments refer to cultural rights, such as in [CEDAW](#) art. 13, [CRC](#) art. 31. 2, [CRPD](#) art. 30, [ICCPR](#) arts. 9(2) and 27, [CMW](#) art. 31, and [UNDRIP](#) arts. 5, 8 and 11.

² CRPD, Article 30

The recent MED9 Declaration on Cultural Rights³ reaffirms countries shared “commitment to substantive equality and commit to take the necessary positive measures to ensure [...] the realisation of cultural rights of all marginalised and vulnerable individuals [...] in particular/including of [...] persons with physical, psychosocial and/or intellectual disability [...].”

The impressive advances in digital technologies offer powerful tools to overcome physical, cognitive and perceptual barriers that hamper the enjoyment of and the access to cultural heritage by persons with disabilities.⁴ These include the creation of Virtual Museum on Cultural heritage.

The Human Rights Council in Resolution A/HRC/RES/58/4 recognises the importance of Virtual Museum on Cultural Heritage, which serves as an innovative platform for advancing cultural rights through digital means. It exemplifies a digital interpretative exegesis of cultural heritage, employing three distinct digitization models (360° digitization - digital animation 2.D - interactive 3D virtual reality). This multimodal approach highlights the transformative potential of digitization in the cultural sector, not only in enhancing access and preservation but also in reinforcing the cultural rights of all, including persons with disabilities.

Objectives of the side event

Building upon these developments, the Permanent Missions of Italy and Cyprus and the Heritage International Institute, in collaboration with the Permanent Missions of Iraq and Mexico, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, are pleased to convene a dedicated side event to discuss the opportunities and challenges for persons with disabilities and the enjoyment of their cultural rights. This event will serve as a platform for dialogue among governments, international organizations, civil society and cultural institutions to explore innovative and practical solutions that promote cultural rights of persons with disabilities. In particular, it will focus on ensuring their full access to and enjoyment of cultural heritage, including using digital technologies. Concretely, the side event will:

- Raise awareness among governments, United Nations agencies, civil society organisations and cultural institutions on the underlying challenges that persons with disabilities face in the enjoyment of cultural rights and opportunities that the use of digital technologies could provide in overcoming these challenges.
- Provide space for discussion on the advantages of using digital technologies to realise the right of persons with disabilities to take part in cultural life, including the ability to access to, enjoy and to participate.

³<https://www.gov.cy/en/other-topics/declaration-on-cultural-rights/#:~:text=We%2C%20MED9%20states%2C%20strive%20to,dialogue%2C%20equity%2C%20and%20inclusion.>

⁴ Report of the High Commissioner on the rights of persons with disabilities and digital technologies and devices, including assistive technologies- A/HRC/58/33

- Launch the exhibition of the Virtual Museum on Cultural Heritage in a dedicated event during the 60th Session of the Human Rights Council. The exhibition will provide an accessible platform through which everyone can enjoy and virtually access cultural heritage.
- Provide a platform to enhance academic collaboration and civil society engagement to contribute to a forward-looking analysis of CRPD and ICESCR. This exchange will lay the groundwork to foster accessibility of persons with disabilities to cultural heritage as a cultural and human right.
- Launch the preparation of the first Handbook on cultural rights and accessibility to digital and digitized cultural heritage for persons with disabilities, curated by the Heritage International Institute, in collaboration with Permanent Mission of Italy, the Permanent Mission of Cyprus. The Handbook will be grounded on the discussions that will take place during the present side event, while building on the ICESCR, CRPD and other relevant international conventions.
- Launch the preparation of the first International Guidelines: “*A New International Paradigm on Accessibility and Participation of Persons with Mental Disabilities in Cultural Heritage*” by the Heritage International Institute in collaboration with the National Council of Research of Italy and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. These Guidelines aim to establish an interdisciplinary framework, covering international law, neuroscience, and many other disciplines to explore and promote inclusive access to cultural heritage for persons with mental disabilities.

AGENDA

Welcoming remarks by:

- Permanent Representative of Cyprus, H.E. Olympia Neocleous
- Permanent Representative of Italy, H.E. Vincenzo Grassi
- Permanent Representative of Iraq, H.E. Abdul-Karim Hashim Mostafa
- Permanent Representative of Mexico, Francisca E. Méndez Escobar

PANELISTS

Moderator: Matteo Petrini – Head of the Human Right Office at the Italian MoFA

- Dimiter Chalev - Chief of Development and Economic and Social Issues Branch, OHCHR
- Alexandra Xanthaki, United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights
- Sergio Iovino, Presidente of Heritage International Institute
- Salvatore Capasso, Director of the Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, National Research Council of Italy

Organizers

Sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Italy, Cyprus, Iraq and Mexico to the UN Office and other international organizations in Geneva.

Co-organised by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Heritage International Institute.

**Signature of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Heritage International Institute and the National Council of Researches and with DARIAH-IT, introduced by
Emiliano Degl'Innocenti**