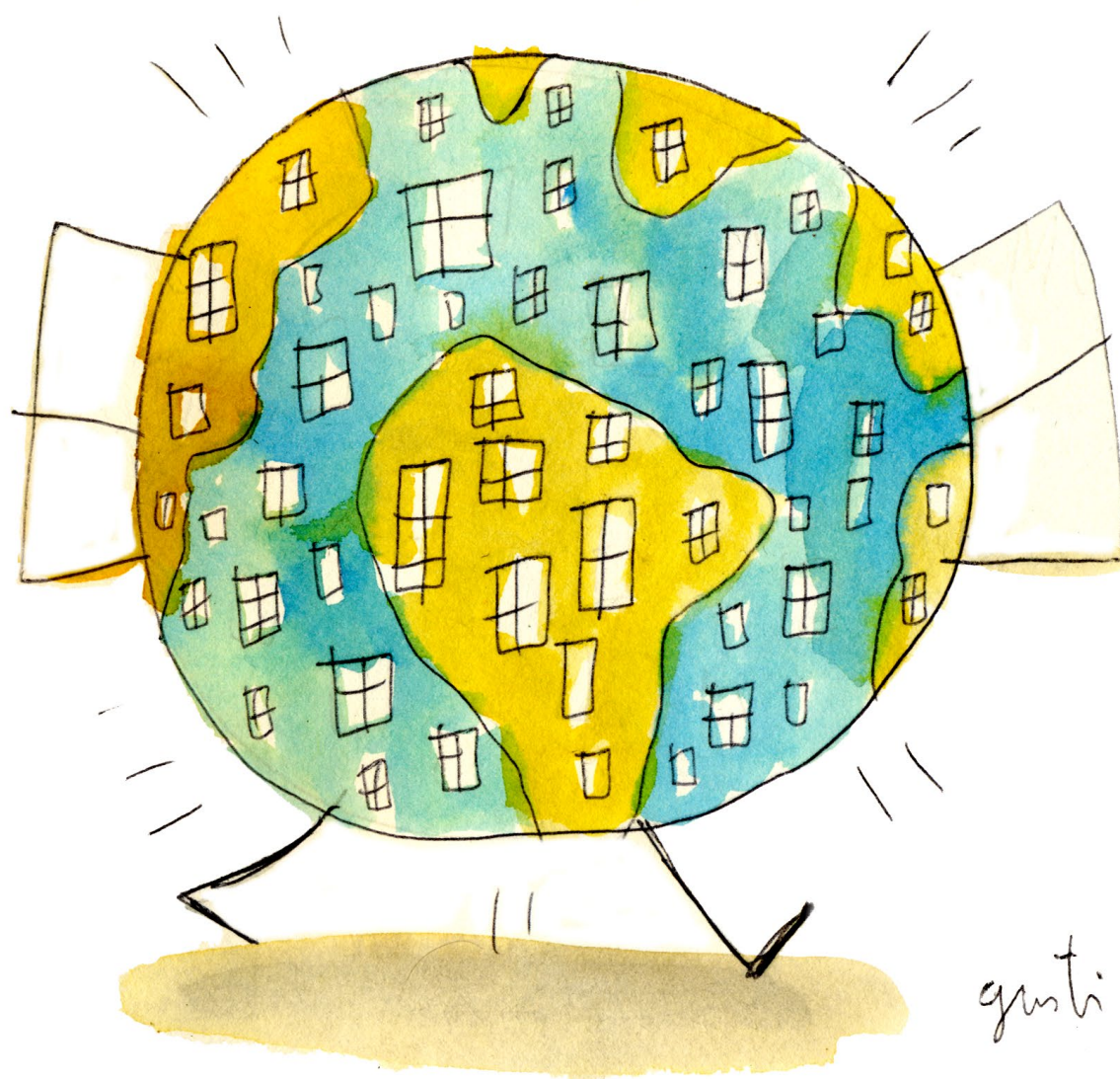


UNA CON MUCHAS VENTANAS



A House with Many Windows

A guide to organizing inclusive online meetings

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A House with Many Windows

A guide to organizing inclusive
online meetings



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Foreword

When COVID-19 burst into the lives of people around the globe, it brought many changes and led to the enforcement of various measures to control and prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus. As a result of the restrictions on movement, the closure of institutions and interruption to basic social services, and the need for physical distancing, children and adolescents face new challenges related to their comprehensive health care, development, well-being and education. These challenges particularly affect those children and adolescents who are excluded from society because of socio-economic circumstances, disability or migratory situation, or because they belong to an indigenous community or live in a rural area.

Furthermore, among these population groups, the pandemic context has most affected children and adolescents with disabilities and their families, who are facing increased isolation, vulnerability and stress. We identified the need to support these young people and families and explore new ways of reaching out to them in this time of COVID-19. Our aim was to encourage mutual help to mitigate the adverse effects of the pandemic on this population group, which is so often exposed to numerous restrictions, segregation and exclusion, even in normal circumstances.

To respond to this situation, UNICEF designed *A House with Many Windows*, an initiative that includes a series of inclusive virtual meetings to provide containment and help strengthen support networks for children and adolescents with disabilities and their families. Existing digital communication networks and platforms were used for these recreational meetings. Accessible formats based on universal design were used for activity instructions and materials shared with meeting participants to ensure inclusion for all.

This guide reflects on the experience of *A House with Many Windows* and identifies the lessons learned. It provides practical tools and suggests activities to promote communication, recreation, learning and participation. Moreover, it sets out a solid basis for planning and organizing participatory meetings that can include all people equally. We have attempted to include critical knowledge and teachings to strengthen the institutional and technical capacities required to mainstream inclusive approaches in programmes for children and adolescents. We have also sought to systematize experiences where simple and accessible activities such as drawing, singing, dance and movement can be used in a virtual environment – to both build bridges and deconstruct prejudices.

We hope that this guide will help to enhance the work of all those committed to fostering communities that value human diversity and offer all people equal access to shared spaces in which to meet and enjoy positive experiences.

Jean Gough

Director

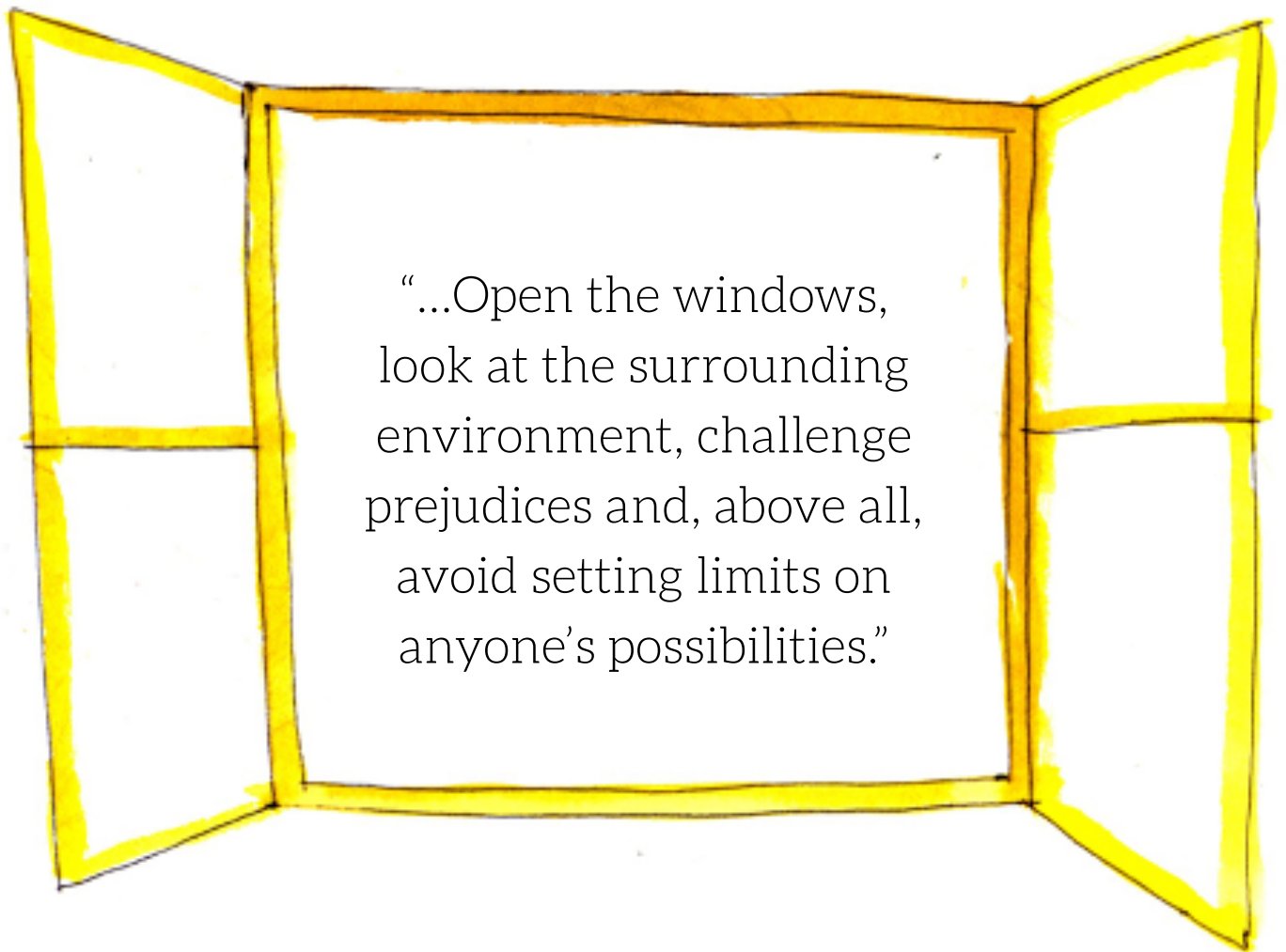
Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office

UNICEF

About this guide

This guide is aimed at national and subnational managers and technical personnel in the education, health and social protection sectors, and in early childhood care and development institutions, programmes and services.

The guide has four sections. Section 1 describes the human rights instruments and approaches that guide the design and organization of meetings that celebrate diversity. Section 2 provides a toolbox to organize inclusive online meetings, including some practical criteria and resources. Section 3 highlights the key steps required to achieve inclusive meetings, and offers related checklists. Section 4 concludes the guide, by reflecting on the process involved in developing *A House with Many Windows*, and collating key guiding elements to facilitate wider adoption of the initiative.



“...Open the windows,
look at the surrounding
environment, challenge
prejudices and, above all,
avoid setting limits on
anyone’s possibilities.”

“Inclusion processes based on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the human rights approach need to be driven by a fundamental faith that it is possible to reduce discrimination against disability if we succeed in fostering interactions between people with disabilities and people without disability. This faith is based on the idea of contact and integration between people with disabilities and without disabilities, in anticipation that this contact will reduce harmful attitudes and change social norms.” Harris (2019).

1. Inclusion is good for everyone

WE ARE ALL DIFFERENT



Individuals have very different ideas, customs, personalities, and ways of thinking and living, and these differences make the world a better place. Often, however, differences are not taken into account or respected and are even ignored or rejected. This is called discrimination.

Being different doesn't mean that we shouldn't have the same opportunities and rights. All children and adolescents, in all their diversity, should be able to develop, have fun, grow and learn together. Diversity only enhances our individual, social and cultural achievements as human beings.

A cultural and social change in attitudes needs to take place to reduce barriers as we learn to value the differences between people as part of our collective wealth. We all need to be part of this change and work to avoid negative attitudes that lead to situations of harassment, discrimination and intimidation. If we build a culture based on connection and solidarity, in which diversity is appreciated as a quality to be nurtured, we will all be able to express ourselves freely and develop to our full potential.

1.1. Change your perspective – open the windows

According to various United Nations documents, **inclusion is essential for human and social development, leading to more integrated, peaceful and just societies where no one is left behind.** Nowadays, we know that when a school, early childhood centre, health or social protection service, transport system or entire city takes steps to ensure that diverse people can live together and cooperate, we all prosper and benefit.

All Latin American and Caribbean countries adhere to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and to General Comment No. 9 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which interprets the Convention on the Rights of the Child from the perspective of children with disabilities. Adherence to these instruments provides the frame of reference for applying a rights-based approach for children with disabilities. Moreover, the region has made significant progress in several fundamental areas to support inclusion processes.

Such progress includes:

- the drafting of new national laws and creation of new institutions to promote the rights of children and adolescents with disabilities
- all countries' adherence to the [Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled](#), recognizing national sign languages and ensuring the treaty's implementation in various audio-visual media
- national and local government efforts in drafting national laws and subnational regulations on physical accessibility and accessible transport
- the gradual introduction of the Universal Design for Learning framework and the respective supports and reasonable accommodations required for inclusive education.

We must not forget, though, that the ultimate goal of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is for people with disabilities to live in the community, exercise control over their lives and the decisions affecting them, and have the necessary means to fully develop their life projects. In this sense, the challenges go beyond the scope of policy and require complementary actions and changes throughout society: sensitization of families; promotion of a rights-based approach; and ensuring the availability of support tools to protect the dignity of all people and prevent all forms of discrimination, stigmatization and rejection.

A cultural and social change in attitudes can help to reduce barriers as we learn to value the differences between people as part of our collective wealth. We all need to be part of this change and work to avoid negative attitudes that lead to situations of harassment, discrimination and intimidation. If we build a culture based on connection and solidarity, in which diversity is appreciated as a quality to be nurtured, we will all be able to express ourselves freely and fully develop our potential and talents. According to the inclusive development approach (Berman Bieler, 2011), it is necessary to develop change strategies in each community while involving families, community agents and local institutions and authorities.

In light of this new perspective on diversity, we need to question and transform traditionally discriminatory attitudes against children, adolescents and adults with disabilities. Very low expectations are set regarding the development and participation possibilities of children with disabilities, and all kinds of disadvantages and injustices go unchallenged. Discriminatory attitudes and views are thus deeply rooted in the family and reproduced in the community.

It is important to bear in mind that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities does not introduce new or special rights, since people with disabilities share the same rights as all other people. Therefore, if we want to turn this new vision of inclusive diversity into reality, we need to transform how we view disability. We can start to embrace differences *by opening our windows, looking at the surrounding environment, challenging prejudices and, above all, avoiding setting limits on other people's possibilities.*

Disabilities, limitations and barriers: Some pointers

People can have different types of limitations:

- physical limitations that affect walking or the moving parts of the body or the functioning of some organs
- psychosocial limitations that affect the capacity to connect with others and understand their realities
- intellectual limitations that affect the capacity to understand the meaning of some abstract concepts
- sensory limitations that affect sight or hearing, or both.

Often when people with disabilities want to engage in different activities or tasks, they find barriers in the environment that make it difficult or impossible for them to proceed. These barriers can be found in:

- the physical space, such as inaccessible stairs and toilet facilities
- communication, for example, because the words used are difficult or cannot be understood; there is no sign language interpreter; or information is not presented in Braille format
- other people's attitudes, such as when they show prejudice, fear and rejection.

Disability occurs when such barriers are not removed, preventing some people from enjoying the same rights as everyone else.

1.2. Enabling inclusive meetings

FEAR

Meeting and engaging with children or adolescents with disabilities and ensuring their inclusion should not cause anxiety or fear. The exclusion and segregation of people with disabilities means, however, that some individuals feel unprepared for any such interaction or that many modifications will be needed to make it possible. In this case, three recommendations (adapted from Meresman, 2017) may prove useful:



De-pathologize. Disability is not a disease or a health deficit. While children and adolescents with disabilities may have a condition that makes them vulnerable or indicates specific health care needs, they are also capable of living a healthy and full life.

De-dramatize. Disability is not a drama but a challenging experience that offers the opportunity to learn new things and gain skills and strength. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), only 6 per cent of disabilities are severe and involve significant limitations (WHO,

2011). This implies, for example, that about 1 in every 16 people with a visual impairment is blind, while the other 15 individuals likely have a visual impairment that may cause a functional limitation that can be compensated for with supports or reasonable accommodations. In most cases, it is possible to interact with children or adolescents with disabilities by simply being sensitive to their needs, removing barriers and providing some support tools. It is important to avoid attitudes denoting sympathy or pity, especially when working with families, and to instead provide encouraging support. Although it is always better to seek help from people with more knowledge and experience, this does not mean that we will necessarily incur higher costs or face more complex challenges. In most cases, it is all about opening windows, escaping feelings of superiority, welcoming opportunities to learn, and not feeling frustrated at the first sign of difficulties.

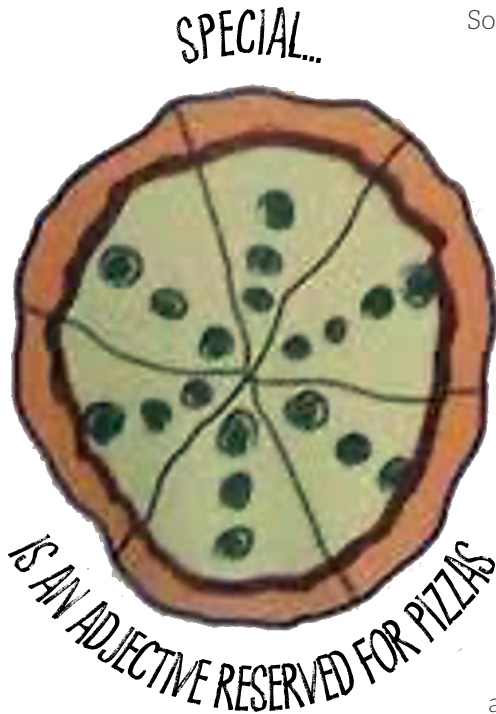
Remove labels. See the person, not the disability. In a world that loves to measure and classify, diagnoses can stereotype and stigmatize individuals and situations, creating low expectations of the development potential of people with disabilities and of their contribution to society. The most effective way to interact with someone with a disability is to rely on her or his strengths and abilities.

Summary

- **Disability is not a disease; it is part of human diversity.** We should not feel sorry for people with disabilities; we should open our windows to embrace differences.
- **Children and adolescents with disabilities have the same rights as their peers without disabilities.** Only by embracing this approach will we be able to imagine a world where no one is left behind and where everyone has the same opportunities to develop autonomously and freely.
- **Children and adolescents with disabilities have the same basic needs as any other person.** We all need an inclusive, nurturing, healthy and safe environment that provides us with stimulation and supports opportunities for us to grow, develop, learn, be happy and make those around us happy (PAHO/WHO, 2018).¹ This does not mean that children and adolescents with disabilities are the same as others – no two people are identical – but their differences are not necessarily a hindrance or limitation.
- **Disability only partially conditions how human beings function and interact.** Children and adolescents with disabilities need acceptance and support to perform to the best of their capacities.

¹For more detailed information on these components, see: [Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development](#) (WHO, UNICEF and World Bank 2018).

1.3. Special is an adjective reserved for pizzas



What is the correct way to refer to a child or adolescent with a disability?

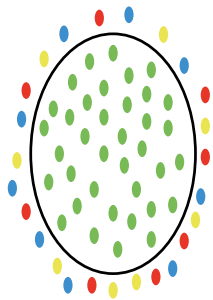
Sometimes we hear different terms used to refer to people with disabilities, such as 'deficient', 'impaired', 'disabled', 'people with different abilities' or 'people with special needs'. Or sometimes we even hear people using the terms 'handicapped', 'invalid', 'crippled', 'retarded', 'deaf-mute' or 'mongoloid'. But these expressions fail to recognize the individual and instead emphasize the disability.

To assert a human rights-based approach, it is important to always use the term person (or persons) 'with disabilities' (UNICEF, 2018). These series of [videos](#) introduce some of the correct terms to use to refer to people with disabilities.

Although it is important to learn the proper language to refer to people with disabilities, and how to treat them, this should not inhibit us or make us feel insecure. It is okay not to know. It is our actions and our efforts to interact that will lead us to connect with others and mobilize cultural change processes. It is best to admit when we don't know the answer. Rather than refrain from speaking or acting on this critical issue or inhibit ourselves out of fear of using an inappropriate term, we can respectfully ask the other person what terms to use and how she or he prefers to be treated.

It is impossible to learn about diversity without encountering it and living the experience. Once we understand this, we will feel the need to create inclusive meeting spaces that accommodate the essential recommendations to support coexistence among all people – with and without disabilities.

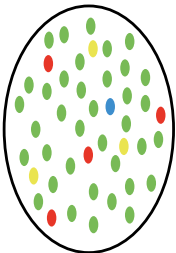
1.4. Exclusion, inclusion, segregation and integration: What is the difference?



Exclusion

Promoting a true cultural transformation requires an understanding of some specific terms and the differences between them (see Hehir et al., 2016).

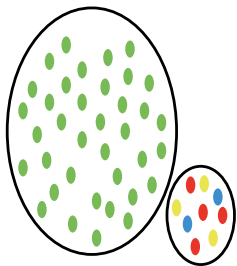
First, we speak of **exclusion** when someone is denied the right to be recognized as part of a group; when she or he is rejected, denied access or denied the opportunity to participate. Exclusion occurs when students with disabilities are prevented from enrolling in school, are told not to attend school or are told that they need to meet certain conditions to attend, or where their ability to participate is restricted through the use of excuses or medical arguments.



Inclusion

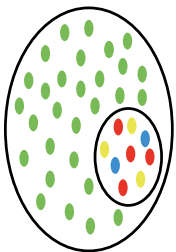
In contrast, **inclusion** involves cultural and attitudinal changes and modification of how the system works, to provide everyone with the same opportunities under equal conditions. Such changes are often simple and can be achieved gradually, as the process of inclusion progresses. In an inclusive system, there are resources to support everyone and, fundamentally, a commitment to human diversity.

An inclusive society is conceived to ensure that all people, with and without disabilities, can develop freely, participate and contribute – as citizens entitled to the same rights. The participation of children and adolescents with disabilities, and that of their families and representative organizations, is essential in designing inclusive systems.



Segregation

Segregation occurs when children and adolescents with disabilities must remain separate from their peers, in spaces designed for people with a particular disability. The most obvious form of segregation involves forcing individuals to use exclusive spaces for people with disabilities, as this prevents them from being received in a common space for all. It is therefore critical that students and their families can choose where the student wishes to learn, develop and engage in social interaction, depending on her or his needs.



Integration

Finally, **integration** implies that children and adolescents with disabilities are accepted in existing places available to their peers without disabilities – without the need to modify the operation of those spaces or make adjustments to ensure their participation under equal conditions. Integration means being in a shared space without support, often with people who do not want to, or do not know how to, respond to the needs of people with disabilities.

2. Toolbox to organize inclusive online meetings

TRABAJO EN GRUPOS

SHARING YOUR GROUP WORK
EXPERIENCE



with disabilities and their families to share artistic and recreational experiences that enable diversity in the team meetings.

Of course, efforts to achieve cultural and attitudinal changes do not result from isolated events. But if we start by organizing individual activities, which are then included as part of larger processes, we will be taking actual steps to ensure inclusion in everything that we do. Whether we are working in pilot initiatives with families and the community, or on a mid- or long-term strategy to enrich a programme's offer, it is possible to attract the support and commitment to diversity of many actors – including teachers, health workers, social service providers, community leaders and local authorities.

To take these first steps, we must consider some critical aspects that will facilitate our work, as outlined in the following section.

Encouraging inclusion requires more than a desire to do so. We must be prepared to address challenges, learn, and keep our windows and doors open despite the difficulties that we may encounter, as often occurs in change processes of all kinds.

All professionals and technical teams who work in early childhood care and development, health and education services and in community programmes for adolescents and families can include a diversity and inclusion approach in their activities. This will help to enrich and improve the quality and results of the various services and programmes.

We suggest that professionals and technicians engage in collaborative and interdisciplinary teamwork, inviting children and adolescents

2.1. Collaborative work



Drawing by 7-year-old Gonzalo Ian, created during the *A House with Many Windows* workshop for children, adolescents and families in Paraguay, 22 August 2020.

We often think of inclusion as a complex, challenging, expensive or specialized task that requires expert support and participation. We also tend to believe that involving people with disabilities can increase the cost of a certain event or service.

Using the social disability model, however, we can revisit these issues and consider collaborative work strategies. This allows us to address the inclusion of people with disabilities as an opportunity to learn and mobilize support to transform our environment in a way that serves us all. These efforts, which are often not difficult to implement, require us to abandon biases such as believing it is necessary to do something 'special', very complex or expensive to make a difference.

The creation of 'ramps' and the development of inclusive proposals – which often involve long-term processes and must be sustainable – should not rely solely on the work of professionals and technical teams. Often their role is to connect with local networks and organizations for families and for people with disabilities, develop collaborative strategies and create alliances that support cultural change and inclusive actions. Some of the most important issues are usually easy to access and consist of positive forms of mutual support, such as the following:

- **Children and adolescents can support and accompany their peers** in the most basic actions involving coexistence and interaction. As we have already mentioned, only a small proportion of people with disabilities are affected by complex challenges. Therefore, instead of dramatizing disability and putting even more barriers in the way by envisaging potential difficulties, we must prepare to learn and understand that inclusion is possible and positive for everyone. This will allow us to move towards inclusive meetings and interactions.
- **Families can help other families** to facilitate care and support strategies for those who need them most. More than the supports, adjustments and technical aids, families are the determining factor in any inclusion strategy. Families are the main actors and allies in the learning and development of children and adolescents with disabilities. Family members provide a healthy and nurturing environment, carry out early interventions, offer varied opportunities for interaction, and implement responsive and sensitive parenting practices

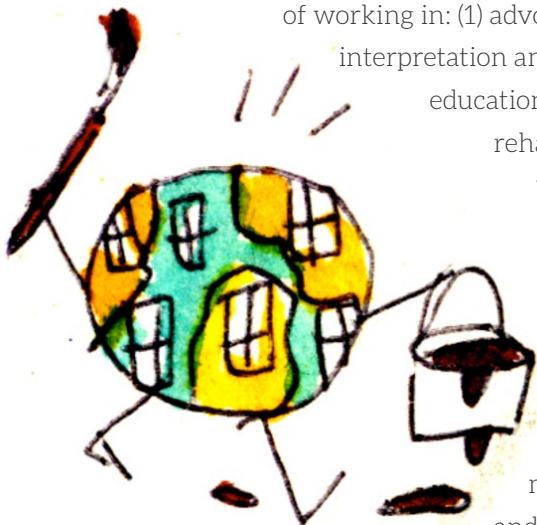
throughout the life cycle. In this sense, families working jointly with other families and with organizations for people with disabilities is one of the most decisive factors in ensuring that supports and reasonable accommodations work well.

Families have traditionally been excluded, however, and the approach to children and adolescents with disabilities has focused on their deficiencies. This has contributed to the fragmentation of collaboration strategies and families' failure to take advantage of all resources and opportunities for community-based support.

While supports and reasonable accommodations may be necessary, they are not sufficient conditions for inclusion. In fact, the driving force behind support tools and adjustments is a cultural change process that places the family and the community at centre stage in building alternatives to enable everyone to access, participate and belong.

By engaging with the disability organizations and networks in a country, we can access valuable social assets, including knowledge, accumulated experience and rallying power, as well as their capacities to bring people together and lead on articulating strategies in this field.

Many such organizations for families and for people with disabilities have a long history of working in: (1) advocacy; (2) service provision, including support services, sign language interpretation and personal assistance; (3) formulation and implementation of inclusive education and health care policies, including assistance, habilitation and rehabilitation; (4) employment, including training centres and sheltered workshops; and (5) social protection, including housing, independent living centres and foster care programmes, among other initiatives.



As a result of this experience, these organizations possess valuable knowledge and useful information. They are also a trusted reference source for families, making it easier to identify and increase the visibility of the most vulnerable situations and promote access to mutual support solutions, which are necessary for any inclusion process, and especially in crises or emergencies.

2.2. Our golden rule

From the perspective of participation, these disability organizations and networks empower individuals and groups to gain confidence in their abilities. This is essential if the life trajectories of children and adolescents with disabilities and their families are to change, such that they can overcome the narrative based on the notion that they always need assistance, which has led to a welfare approach that reinforces segregation and exclusion (Meresman, 2017).

This brings us to the golden rule regarding inclusion efforts, which – according to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – is to **involve people with disabilities and/or organizations of and for people with disabilities in designing, planning and implementing inclusive actions.**

Each country has a national commission or programme that encompasses relevant authorities and social leaders of the population with disabilities. This body or entity can be an important starting point for contacting national and local organizations to learn about available practical resources to provide support and generate collaboration and coordination opportunities. In many territories, these organizations have direct access to adapted transport options, portable ramps, accessible toilet facilities, sign language interpreters, personal assistants and numerous digital accessibility resources.

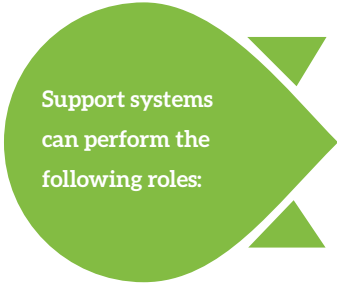
There are also several regional-level collaborative networks and agencies with many years of experience in inclusion strategies and promoting the rights of people with disabilities and their families. The Appendix lists some of the most important such organizations recognized in Latin America and the Caribbean. Many of them have members from most of the region's countries, opening up opportunities to create cross-border alliances and collaborative learning processes.

2.3. Criteria and basic resources

Promoting the rights of children and adolescents with disabilities and organizing inclusive meetings in the community both rest upon the assumption that it is possible to ensure adequate access and participation conditions to enable everyone to interact equally. For this purpose, the following criteria, provisions and work tools should be considered:

- Inclusive spaces are those that respect the dignity and autonomy of all people, without discrimination or segregation based on individual differences or conditions.
- Accessible spaces are those that have been arranged to avoid access barriers for anyone and to allow everyone to participate on equal terms. Accessibility can refer to the:
 - physical environment – linked to infrastructure, mobility, equipment and spatial layout, which can facilitate or hinder access and participation

- language environment – related to the availability of sign language interpreters or subtitles and the use of appropriate and simple language to prevent anyone from feeling excluded or inhibited from participating
- digital environment – related to the provision of various functionalities that allow people to access online messages, content, and opportunities to interact.



Support systems
can perform the
following roles:

Help people to make decisions

Help to communicate these decisions

Assist in implementing these decisions

- Supports are forms of assistance that allow people with disabilities to receive information independently and act autonomously. Some examples of supports include a sign language interpreter, a personal assistant,

or a computer that translates text to audio or audio to text (closed-captioned or with subtitles). It is important to consult people about the type of support they require and prefer, to ensure that we don't reproduce limiting assumptions.

- Reasonable accommodations include necessary modifications and adaptations to the environment to eliminate, or significantly reduce, possible access or participation disadvantages faced by people with disabilities. Some examples include:
 - reading aloud written content to a person with a visual impairment when Braille, large print or another accessible format is unavailable
 - accepting nodding or other forms of non-verbal communication as a means for a person with a disability to indicate agreement or disagreement to express her/his will
 - using images, pictograms or other visual elements to reinforce verbal instructions so that a person with a disability can understand the information provided
 - providing adequate space and/or conditions to ensure that a sign language interpreter is always visible to the audience or participants.

3. From ideas to action

We need to follow a series of steps to help us plan our in-person or virtual meetings and move from ideas to action. This will enable us to put into practice the approaches outlined so far, taking care to be inclusive and participatory.

3.1. Are we prepared?

It is important to evaluate our institution, programme or service's capacity to apply an inclusive approach and to identify whether it is first necessary to arrange for technical training or to promote attitudinal change.

Recognizing when we lack the necessary experience or need to prepare ourselves by learning more can only help us to improve. It is also useful to revisit earlier experiences that have provided valuable lessons and can help us to avoid repeating previous mistakes.

The following checklist (adapted from Fondo de Población de las Naciones Unidas, 2019) can help to identify important aspects to determine our starting point and plan improvement actions.

It should be noted that this is not an exhaustive list of questions.

Checklist to plan an inclusive virtual meeting	Yes	No	Improvement proposal
Is our organization accessible?			
Is information about our institution, programme or service available in accessible formats?			
Do people with disabilities work in our organization?			
Has everyone who works in our organization received training on the inclusion of people with disabilities?			
Has everyone who works in our organization received training on the inclusion of people with disabilities?			

Checklist to plan an inclusive virtual meeting (continued)	Yes	No	Improvement proposal
Are most people who work in our organization familiar with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities?			
Do we know of any local organizations of and for people with disabilities?			
Does our institution, programme or service include a specific disability-related project or initiative?			
Have we included disability-related issues in our surveys or other research?			
Do we have an allocated budget for interpreters, accessible information, or other necessary adjustments for the inclusion of people with disabilities?			

3.2. How do we plan inclusive online meetings?

It is crucial to apply an inclusive approach from the start and to ensure that we don't create any new barriers when planning online meetings. We must consider the functionality of all meeting participants in relation to each aspect, including how we share our invitation and shape our proposals, content and work dynamics. For this, we must consult and involve people with disabilities and their representative organizations, as they will be able to provide the best advice.

3.2.1. Being inclusive and removing barriers in our invitation

Our invitation is inclusive when we take measures from the outset to ensure that our online meeting proposal includes formats that facilitate access for everyone, regardless of how they use a virtual environment.

These measures consist of:

- content and messages in clear and simple language
- interpreter of local sign language (or international sign language, if people from different countries are expected to participate)
- accessible text and/or audio formats
- iconographies
- description of images in text and/or audio.

If we use a digital invitation, or a digital medium to share the invitation (such as email, digital files available on the internet, or messaging applications), similar

MATERIALES



Have some materials to play with: paper, crayons, recycled materials, old magazines, a bed sheet. Cardboard boxes and coloured fabric or wool may also come in handy.

recommendations should be followed to ensure accessibility: use simple language and/or iconographies, use sign language interpreters when videos are included, and describe any images that are used.

Below is some of the text used on the invitation for an event held as part of *A House with Many Windows*. Its simple language and clear image description can be used as a reference:

“We invite you to share a meeting with other children and families to learn and have fun. We have prepared an inclusive meeting, so that everyone can play together and learn regardless of any physical, mental, social, linguistic and cultural differences. Our starting point will be the differences we all have, recognizing, understanding and respecting them so that they are not a limitation.”

Describing images in words is especially important for people with a visual impairment who use screen readers, as these technologies only identify text and cannot themselves describe images:



A House with Many Windows invitation image.

“The image is divided into three areas. The largest area, on the left, shows a man holding collage art in his hands for us to see. He is smiling and wears glasses. This section also reads ‘One pen plus one piece of paper’. On the right are two smaller areas, one on top of the other. The top section shows some coloured markers and reads ‘Drawing with markers’. The lower part shows some colourful pictures and reads ‘Workshop for the whole family.’

Checklist to plan an inclusive virtual meeting (continued)	Yes	No	Improvement proposal
Are the activity's dissemination materials accessible?			
Do activity facilitators plan to use simple, clear and concise language?			
Are sign language interpreters provided in videos included in the outreach materials and at the meeting or activity?			
Are there plans to use closed captions or subtitles for audio-visual content?			

3.2.1. Inclusive methodologies and dynamics of virtual work

It is essential to assess our activity instructions and work dynamics from the point of view of participants' functional diversity. To avoid the methodological proposal creating barriers to participation, we must be familiar with and pay attention to the differences between the participants throughout the planning process. We must also:

- carefully consider the participation modalities, making sure that the content to be addressed and the means to be used are accessible, adequate, and relevant for children and adolescents and their families
- prepare materials in text, audio, sign language, iconography and plain language formats – the more options we offer, the more people will feel able to participate
- provide resources (examples of other activities or materials adapted to people with different functional styles) to give everyone the opportunity to participate in some form or other at various times
- be prepared to make last-minute adaptations – since not all activities will be accessible at all times for all people – including attending to unforeseen issues related to the participation modalities.

Checklist to plan an inclusive virtual meeting (continued)	Yes	No	Improvement proposal
Are activity instructions accessible?			
Can everyone follow the instructions?			
Are any adaptations planned?			
Are there plans to include a verbal description of images when using Microsoft PowerPoint presentations or other visual formats?			
Are there plans to use various accessible materials in line with the participation methodology and dynamics?			
Are there plans to use audio description if videos are presented?			
Are the facilitators responsible for the activity familiar with the correct terms to use to refer to people with disabilities and with how to treat these individuals?			

Recommendations to ensure that people with and without disabilities treat each other properly

For many people, a meeting between individuals with and without disabilities can be a new, challenging experience, full of preconceptions, inhibitions and mutual ignorance. There are many guidelines and recommendations that can facilitate such interactions. We examine some of them below.

General pointers

- People with disabilities can work, study, enjoy leisure activities, have sexual relationships and be happy like anyone else.
- Let's not underestimate or prejudge people with disabilities. Nor should we infantilize them; they don't need us to impose overprotective attitudes.

Recommendations to ensure that people with and without disabilities treat each other properly (continued)

- Not all people with disabilities need help all the time. But cities especially can be very hostile environments for people who have temporary or permanent limitations. We should always ask what help a person needs, if any;
- we shouldn't take it upon ourselves to decide for her/him.
- People with disabilities' is the correct term. It is inappropriate to use terms such as 'people with different capacities', 'disabled', 'handicapped' or 'crippled'. It is offensive to use diminutives, or expressions such as 'crazy', 'lame', 'poor thing', 'retard' or 'mongoloid'.
- Let's try to adjust our behaviour by acting naturally in our interactions. We should talk directly with the person with disabilities rather than with her or his companion.

If we meet someone with a physical disability

- Let's not treat a person who uses a wheelchair in a humiliating manner, for example, by stroking her/his head.
- To speak to a person in a wheelchair, we must stand in front of the individual and at her/his eye level, whenever possible.
- The wheelchair is part of the personal space of the individual who uses it. It is not a place upon which to rest children, other people, or objects.
- When the person with a disability leaves the wheelchair to go to the bathroom, bed or car, we do not move the wheelchair without permission.
- Let us offer our help to reach or lift objects, open doors or windows, etc.
- If we have questions about handling a wheelchair or walking frame, we can ask the person who uses the technical aid.
- Let's adjust our pace to accompany the person who walks slowly and/or with a technical aid (e.g., assistive or support cane, crutches, walking frame).
- We should refrain from removing a technical aid from a person without her/his permission.

If we meet someone with a hearing impairment

- A person with a hearing impairment may be deaf or have hearing loss (low hearing).
- Speech limitations are usually a consequence of a person's hearing impairment; it is neither correct nor appropriate to say that the person is 'deaf-mute'.
- Many people who are deaf do not speak or read the standard language. Instead, they communicate using sign language. Each country has its own sign language.

Recommendations to ensure that people with and without disabilities treat each other properly (continued)

- To communicate with a person who is deaf who uses sign language, we should try to have an interpreter present.
- Many, but not all, people who are deaf lip-read. If a person lip-reads, we should stand where she/he can see us clearly. It is advisable to stand close to and facing the person, at her/his eye level, making sure that our face is well illuminated.
- Let us speak to a person with a hearing impairment using our natural voice and avoid speaking too quickly or too slowly. We should enunciate clearly without exaggerating or yelling.
- We can also use gestures and/or written language to supplement spoken language.
- If we do not understand, or if we only pretend to understand, the other person may perceive that what she/he is saying is unimportant. Let's just ask her/him to repeat the phrase.

If we meet someone with an intellectual disability

- Let's treat a person with an intellectual disability according to her/his age.
- Let's speak naturally and clearly. When we give instructions, they should be clear and brief. Let us make sure that the person has understood.
- In a conversation, a person with an intellectual disability may need more time to answer. Let's be patient and flexible, showing support.
- We should only offer help when necessary, so that the person can develop her/his skills autonomously.

If we meet someone with a visual impairment

- A person with a visual impairment may be blind or have low vision. It is incorrect and inappropriate to refer to a 'blind person', as this emphasizes the limitation.
- Let's identify ourselves when speaking to a person with a visual impairment and make sure that the person knows that we are addressing her/him.
- Let's avoid moving away from the other person without letting her/him know in advance.
- We can offer help if we see the person hesitate or if we see an obstacle.
- When accompanying a person with a visual impairment, let us offer our arm. If possible, let's stand next to the person, leaving enough space for cane use.
- If we offer or show an object to the person, we should use words to describe what we are talking about. Let us explain exactly where the object in question is located. Let's use words like 'left', 'right', 'in front' and 'behind'. Let's avoid using words such as 'here' or 'there' and refrain from signalling.

Recomendaciones para un trato adecuado entre personas con y sin discapacidad (continuación)

- If we want to show a person with a visual impairment a place where she/he can sit, let's place her/his free hand on the back of the seat.
- Let's keep spaces tidy, avoiding partially open doors, out-of-place objects, and ropes or cables left lying around.
- Not all people with a visual impairment access information similarly. Some will require Braille, while others will use texts printed with large letters and good colour contrast, specialist computer software or other tools.
- Some people who are blind have a guide dog. Let's not treat such dogs as if they were simply pets. Let's avoid distracting guide dogs, as they fulfil a very important role.

Source: Adapted from the Uruguayan Ministry of Social Development (2018) *Manual de buenas prácticas en el trato y la atención de personas con discapacidad en el ámbito de la salud*, by PRONADIS.

3.2.2. Consulting and involving people with disabilities

As already mentioned, the golden rule for organizing inclusive meetings is to consult and involve people with disabilities and/or their representative organizations. This will allow us to 'test' the proposals we intend to develop, receive valuable suggestions, and reduce the likelihood of making mistakes, which are always possible.

Checklist to plan an inclusive virtual meeting (continued)	Yes	No	Improvement proposal
Have at least five local organizations of or for people with disabilities been consulted?			
Are groups of people with different disabilities represented?			
Have educators, health workers or personnel from social protection programmes been invited to participate as part of efforts to create connections that promote inclusive services?			

3.3. Inclusion in a digital context

Virtual tools enable new opportunities to participate involving fewer barriers. As such, they are considered a good option to plan and develop inclusive meetings that involve groups of children, adolescents or families, or entire communities.

Digital platforms have improved in terms of accessibility and continue to evolve constantly. So, it is often possible to find yet more new tools that enhance the participation of people with disabilities, by offering supports and adaptations that enable these individuals to enjoy equal opportunities. For meetings on digital platforms, however, we must first support users – especially people with disabilities – to understand and apply the initial steps and the basic functionality. This section covers some of the technical settings that must be considered to hold an inclusive meeting in a virtual environment.

To make it easier for all participants to access the digital platform and configure the accessibility features, we suggest sharing helpful tips alongside the invitation and hyperlink to join the meeting. These tips should be written in the most friendly and straightforward language possible. The Zoom platform is used as an example in the following text:

- If you don't have Zoom installed, you can [download and install Zoom now](#).
- If you already have Zoom, we recommend making sure that you have the most up-to-date version, as improvements are continually made to the platform. [Update Zoom now](#).
- Check that your internet connection is stable. Using a broadband internet connection is recommended wherever possible.
- For the meeting, find a quiet place where you have a strong internet signal.
- If possible, try to connect from a computer with a camera, rather than from a mobile phone.
- Use headphones with a microphone attached.
- Join the virtual meeting space a few minutes before the meeting is set to begin. If required, request telephone assistance before entering the meeting.
- After you log in to your account on the platform, go to Settings (in the left column) and change the following settings under Meeting (some settings may appear in English, even if listed in the Spanish section):

- Enable Chat to communicate in writing with all participants or with one participant in particular.
- Enable Annotation, Non-verbal feedback and Subtitles.
- In Settings, select the option to Pin or spotlight a video, to locate sign language interpreters.

Before hosting a meeting, it is important to become familiar with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). We should also make it easy for all participants to learn about these standards, which are applicable to all online tools. It is important to consult the WCAG standards prior to choosing, for example, the software or platform that will be used to hold the meeting.

Besides the technical aspects outlined in the WCAG standards, we must also be familiar with current guidelines for digital content. Following these will help to ensure that the materials we offer are accessible on the chosen platform (Rewa, 2019). This is critical for people with a visual impairment (people who are blind or have low vision) who use screen readers and programmes that translate digital content into audio (speech). Below is a series of basic principles that must be considered to facilitate access to the online content you wish to share:

- We recommend using large text (24-point or larger) in a sans serif font. If the text does not fit on the screen (without excessive scrolling), it is better to divide the content.
- To ensure maximum legibility of the text, we recommend a high contrast between the font colour and background colour. [WebAIM](#) and other online tools can be used to check the contrast ratio of the selected colours.

Don't use low-contrast colours, as in this example:



Do use high-contrast colours, like these:



- For buttons, it is important to use text as well as colour to express meaning. For example, a red button may look very similar to a green button to a person who is colour-blind, and a screen reader will be unable to distinguish between the two. So it is vital to add meaningful labels.

Using only colours to convey meaning is not recommended



We can use text and colour to convey meaning



- Including alternative text is of great help when using images in documents and slides. Alternative text is used to describe images to people who use screen readers. To add alternative text to an image, we can search the help menu of the software we are using to prepare the document.
- If we plan to share a screen on a video conferencing platform, we must consider that screen readers will be unable to read the content of the presentation. It is therefore best to give people who use screen readers direct access to your documents, for example, by emailing the documents prior to the virtual meeting.
- To share a screen displaying a visual aid, such as a PowerPoint presentation, it is important to ensure that the shared screen is presented at the largest possible size. For this, we must:
 - share only (and at full size) the window that contains the presentation slides rather than the entire computer desktop
 - share the slides in presentation mode instead of edit mode wherever possible
 - hide speaker notes
 - show participants how they can zoom in to enlarge slides.
- When sharing important content on slides or in a chat, it is advisable to also mention the key points aloud (or via audio description) for better accessibility.
- We can also share visual aids before or after a meeting to give people more time to adjust the size to their preference and to process the information, among other benefits.

4. The lessons of A House with Many Windows

4.1. The opportunity to meet online

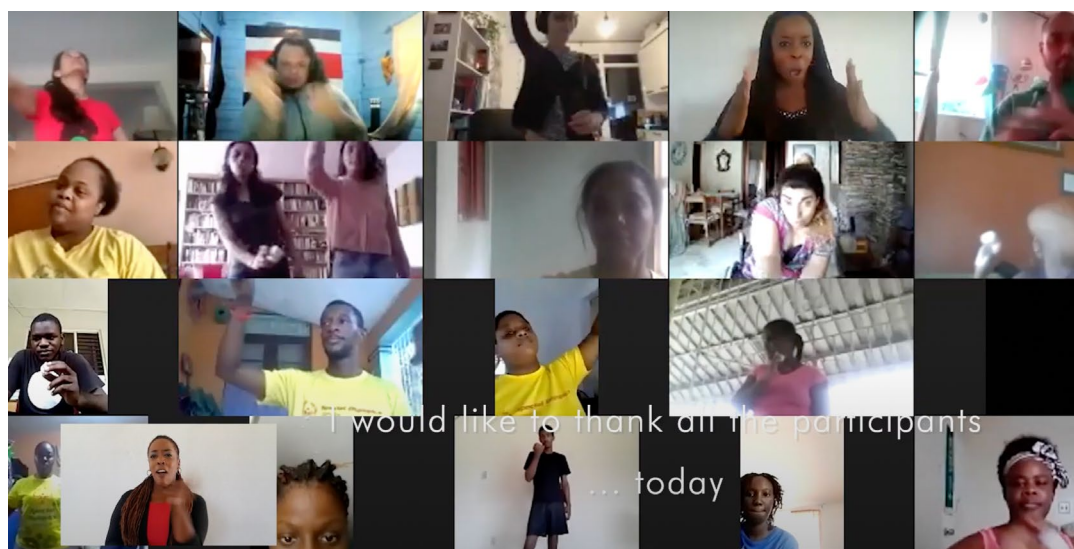
The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have put to the test the resilience and the adaptation capacity of all people, organizations, and coexistence strategies. While this has been a tremendously difficult time for humankind, the crisis has also taught us many lessons. These include the advances made in the use of communication and digital media as a means to come together and interact without the need to meet in person. Much remains to be done to achieve universal digital accessibility, and especially to close the digital divide that disadvantages the most vulnerable and excluded groups. Nonetheless, increasing numbers of people and households are able to access connectivity services and devices for digital communication.

The UNICEF Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO) convened its Inclusion Advisory Team at the start of the coronavirus pandemic. These experts identified the need to stimulate connections and coordination between UNICEF country offices and networks and organizations that promote the rights of people with disabilities in the region. For many UNICEF education, health, early childhood and social protection teams, the sudden need to use digital tools where this had not previously been necessary has also been a learning opportunity. It has provided opportunities not only to overcome fears and become familiar with technological solutions, but also to interact in diverse groups, including with children and adolescents with disabilities.

A House with Many Windows was designed to offer children and their families an opportunity to meet virtually with and receive support from UNICEF staff and local partners. At the same time, it aimed to strengthen the capacities of UNICEF staff and partners in planning and developing inclusive activities using digital media. This initiative has allowed the work teams to become familiar with new conceptual, technical and practical tools and include them in their work, in an effort to: (1) strengthen coordination between programmes and organizations of and for people with disabilities; and thereby (2) reach children and adolescents with and without disabilities and their families, through meetings focused on communication, recreation, learning and inclusive participation.

4.2. Call for inclusive artists and animators

In 2020, UNICEF LACRO held pilot workshops and virtual meetings jointly with UNICEF country offices in Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Colombia, Jamaica, Paraguay and Peru, with support from the local partners of ongoing programmes. We summoned artists and animators with a long history of implementing inclusive meetings and asked them to adapt and develop work proposals for the available online platforms. This implied making a series of adjustments to the content and methodologies, leading to new work modalities. The initial efforts allowed us to experience rewarding meeting opportunities with varying levels of diversity and sensitivity.



Screenshot of *A House with Many Windows* session. Jamaica, October 2020. [Available in YouTube.](#)

During the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF held a series of workshops using the Zoom platform to engage children aged 5–15 years and their families. These workshops aimed to help contain and mitigate the widespread feelings of isolation experienced in lockdown. To facilitate aspects of digital accessibility, we followed the Training for Change guidelines (Rewa, 2019), designed to promote access and participation for all people in digital contexts.

Through these recreational and play-based meetings, we were able to forge close ties with the children and their families, even those in remote rural areas. Likewise, we wanted the children to be able to enjoy and share these virtual spaces with their siblings, parents and friends, so that everyone could participate without facing inhibiting barriers.



Invitation to workshop for A House with Many Windows, Paraguay, August 2020.

Each workshop was an opportunity to open the windows, explore our differences and prove that it is possible to learn and play together. Using art, dance and other participatory dynamics, we encouraged families to express their emotions and expectations of a better world – one where all children and adolescents can enjoy their rights under equal conditions.

Gusti, the artist, facilitated the art sessions, which focused on promoting expression and fun through plastic expression (in this case, drawing) using various materials and methodologies. This use of non-verbal communication – in many and varied styles – enabled participants to recognize the value of diversity and see our differences as an invitation to meet other people.

All activity instructions were devised based on universal design. We tried to make them accessible to all participants, regardless of their individual functionality and pace (some people require more time than others) and each person's communication modalities.

As we used language to conjure imagery in participants' minds, it was necessary to make variations and adjustments for those with a visual limitation. For example, in response to the instruction 'What would you like to see when you open your house window? Draw it', children with a visual impairment could instead follow an instruction referring to an aroma or their relationship with the weather (hot or cold) and express it with a poem rather than a drawing.

The following are some more examples of instructions used in the workshops:

- What is your ideal house in which to spend quarantine? Draw it.
- Draw hugs. Can you draw 100 hugs?
- Imagine that your house is a school. What would it be like? Who would be the teacher? Where would the classes be held – in the kitchen, in the bedroom or on the patio?
- Do you own animals? Draw them.
- Make up a game to play with your family and draw it. Whoever wins gets hugs, and whoever loses also gets hugs.
- What would you like to see when you open your house window? Draw it.
- Team up with other household members and make a joint drawing. You start first, then you pass it on to mum, who passes it on to the next person, and so on until the end. Let's see what comes out.
- Draw something you dreamed about.
- How do you imagine the world when the pandemic ends? Draw it.
- Draw yourself. Draw a day in your life.
- Draw a funny picture about what is happening. Fears and viruses get scared when we laugh at them.
- Make a portrait or drawing of each of your family members.
- What do you feel you lack, and what do you have lots of?
- Make up a fantastic story and draw it in four squares.
- Make up a song and draw it.
- If you have lost a loved one, draw a picture of them.
- If you have a message for the Earth or Pachamama, draw a picture of it, add a phrase, and place it together with a planted seed so that a flower will grow.

In the workshops, we also asked the children the following question: How can we draw together if we see and perceive everything differently? Based on this question, we suggested that they draw pictures with their eyes closed, with the hand they seldom use, holding the pencil in their mouth, while dancing, and so on.

We learned that it was also possible to promote inclusion through dance and movement. We found that through sensitive and mobilizing body language – such as that expressed through rhythm, dance and play – we can connect, explore, get to know each other and interact from different places and perspectives.

Following this experience, we started to work with various dance companies: With Bodies (ConCuerpos), Dance Now! (Ya Danza!) and Dance without Borders (Danza sin Fronteras). This allowed us to invite children and their families to participate in virtual meetings involving dance sessions, to share a fun experience while learning about diversity and accessibility.



Screenshot of *A House with Many Windows* session. Jamaica, October 2020.

Inclusive dance uses unconventional forms of movement and dance to rediscover our bodies' characteristics as well as our differences and the similarities that we share with other people. Moreover, this type of workshop session facilitates the strengthening of trust, respect, care and affection between the participants. This helped participants to overcome their fears and to engage with others through music, movement, improvisation, games, massages, the written word, drawings and interactions with objects of various textures.

Touching, playing, dancing, moving, standing still, creating, resting, writing and drawing are just some of the activities that enabled all of the participants to express themselves in a friendly and welcoming space. All the while, they were learning to appreciate every aspect of human diversity, get rid of their fears and open up new possibilities for connecting with others and enjoying life.



Image of the invitation to the inclusive dance workshop conducted by With Bodies (ConCuerpos) in Jamaica, October 2020

It should be noted that the intergenerational approach was an essential aspect of the proposal. This made it easier for children and their families to experiment together, through various expressive languages and playful activities, without letting age differences become a separating barrier.

A House with Many Windows toured the Latin America and Caribbean region virtually for most of 2020. UNICEF held eight inclusive virtual meetings in six countries, collectively involving the participation of more than 150 children and adolescents aged 5–18 years and almost 100 mothers, fathers and caregivers.

We hope to continue to implement this initiative in future, emphasizing its innovative and inclusive characteristics and expanding and strengthening our invitation to other organizations to host similar virtual meetings in all countries of the region.

Glossary

Accessibility	When a person with a disability is able to access a physical or digital environment, transport, information and communications, or other public service or facility on equal terms as others (United Nations, 2016).
Accessible formats	These are ways of presenting content so that everyone can understand it. Accessible formats include text display; Braille; tactile communication; large print (materials that have a suitable typeface and a font size between 16 and 20 dots per inch, which is larger than ordinary text); easily accessible multimedia devices; written language; auditory systems; plain language; digitized voice media and other augmentative or alternative modes; and certain communication media and formats, including easily accessible information and communication technologies (United Nations, 2016).
Accessible spaces	Spaces that have been prepared in such a way as to remove access barriers and enable everyone to participate on equal terms.
Braille system	A tactile reading and writing method used by people who are blind.
Convention	An agreement between states, institutions or organizations regarding the fulfilment of certain rights or norms.
Disability	When a person has a condition that makes it more difficult carry out a function, such as seeing, hearing, moving or learning, and they are unable to participate in many activities because of barriers in the environment.
Discrimination	Any distinction, exclusion or restriction to a right or freedom, based on disability or another protected characteristic.
Human rights	Standards that recognize and protect the dignity of all human beings. Human rights govern how individual human beings live in society and with each other, as well as their relationships with the state and the obligations that the state has towards them (UNICEF, 2021).

Inclusive spaces	Physical and virtual spaces that everyone is able to access and in which they can interact without suffering discrimination.
Pictogram	A drawing or figure that represents something real, whether an object, action or feeling. People who cannot speak or communicate by other means can use pictograms instead, by pointing to the pictures to express themselves. Use of pictograms is an augmentative or alternative mode of communication.
Sign language	This is the natural language of people who are deaf, which involves movements of the hands, face and other parts of the body. Each country has its own sign language.
Technical supports	These are any external aids, such as devices, equipment, instruments or computer programmes, aimed at maintaining or improving people's autonomy and functioning, and promoting their well-being (Organización Mundial de la Salud, 2016).
Universal design	This refers to the design of products, physical and virtual environments, programmes and services to ensure that they are accessible and usable by all people without the need for special adaptations (United Nations, 2016).

Appendix: Regional organizations of and for people with disabilities

Below are some of the regional disability organizations that can offer knowledge and reference information, answer queries and provide advice on how to organize inclusive meetings.

The **Latin American Network of Non-governmental Organizations of People with Disabilities and their Families** (Red Latinoamericana de Organizaciones no Gubernamentales de Personas con Discapacidad y sus Familias; [RIADIS](#)) represents 56 organizations of people with disabilities from 19 countries of Latin America. Founded in 2002, the network has its headquarters in Quito, Ecuador. RIADIS promotes the rights of people with disabilities in Latin America and the Caribbean based on the principle of non-discrimination, and promotes a better quality of life and social inclusion for people with disabilities and their families.

ONCE Foundation Supporting Solidarity with Blind People in Latin America (Fundación ONCE para la Solidaridad con las Personas Ciegas de América Latina; [FOAL](#)) promotes the integration of people with visual disabilities in education, society and the job market in the region. FOAL was created in 1998 by the National Organization of Spanish Blind People (Organización Nacional de Ciegos Españoles; ONCE). Based on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, FOAL uses international cooperation for development instruments to promote personal autonomy, full social inclusion, citizenship and equal opportunities in 19 Spanish-speaking countries and Brazil. Its strength lies in its work on inclusion in education. FOAL also promotes sports and recreation activities.

The **Latin American Union of the Blind** (Unión Latinoamericana de Ciegos; [ULAC](#)) is an international non-governmental, non-profit organization, which has been representing people in Latin America who are blind or partially sighted since 1985. In many countries, ULAC has access to Braille printing presses and can develop accessible materials.

The **World Federation of the Deaf** ([WFD](#)) has delegates from 133 countries, who represent the 70 million people around the world who are deaf. In the Latin America and Caribbean region, WFD brings together the [Secretariat for Central America and Mexico](#) and the [Secretariat for South America](#). WFD is the registered contact for the World Organization for Deaf People and a very valuable resource for accessing sign language interpreters and other supports needed to engage the population who are deaf.

The Latin America and Caribbean chapter of the **World Association of Sign Language Interpreters** ([WASLI](#)) disseminates information about affiliated organizations of sign language translators and interpreters. These organizations act as a bridge to connect people who are deaf and those who hear, and contribute to the sharing of deaf culture and to raising awareness of deaf communities.

The **We Are All in Action Movement** (Movimiento Estamos Todxs en Acción; [META](#)) is a network of young people with and without disabilities from various Latin American countries. This movement contributes to a more inclusive society by promoting human rights, fighting discrimination and working in favour of development with equal opportunities for all. META is a very valuable resource for convening and mobilizing young leaders with and without disabilities in a number of countries in the region.

[Special Olympics](#) is an international non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life of people with intellectual disabilities through sports training and athletic competition. It is associated with organizations of people with disabilities in almost all of the region's countries. The strength of Special Olympics lies in its work with families and its efforts to promote values and role models among children, adolescents and young people.

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