

Ljubljana action plan to help mainstream OER

Ljubljana, 20 September - The second UNESCO World Congress on Open Educational Resources (OER) drew to a close in Ljubljana on Wednesday as delegates adopted the Ljubljana OER Action Plan 2017, featuring recommendations for mainstreaming OER in support of the UN sustainable development goals on education. The congress was labelled a "big success and a big step forward".

The Ljubljana declaration calls for building the capacity of users to find, re-use, create and share OER and ensuring inclusive and equitable access to quality OER.

It states that OER should be available in diverse languages, particularly those that are less used, under-resourced or endangered, including indigenous languages, and adapted to the cultural context of users.

"There is a need to identify the full spectrum of possibilities for innovative sustainability models and the benefits they provide to government, institutions, educators, librarians and learners," the declaration reads.

It calls on governments to develop policy environments that will be supportive of effective OER practices.

Education Minister of Mauritius Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun said that mainstreaming OER would take time and that there were still challenges ahead.

"But this congress has played a pivotal role," she said, praising the "great spirit of cooperation and understanding" at the congress.

The recognition of the importance of OER and support to their mainstreaming will lead to local, national, regional and international repositories, she said.

Qian Tang, UNESCO assistant director general of education, agreed that the congress had been "very productive".

This kind of cooperation platforms can help push this important topic at the global level, he said.

The UN goal of sustainable development of education calls for a holistic approach to education, which means not only giving people access to education but to ensure quality, equality, life-long learning and informal education, Tang said.

This cannot be achieved through traditional education systems, so a new approach is needed that makes use of new technologies that are shaping our daily lives.

Tang stressed the importance of OER for developing countries, in particular in Africa, and the people living in remote areas. He also called for development of gender sensitive OER.

He stressed the need for collaboration and partnership, also outside education, with technological companies. According to him, UNESCO would also like to serve as a platform between education and new technology companies in bid to "push the technology and the content forward".

The importance of collaboration was also stressed by the host of the congress, Slovenian Education Minister Maja Makovec Brenčič.

She said the Ljubljana Action Plan stressed the importance of joint developing of strategies, measures and ways to overcome challenges concerning the quality of OER, copyright.

"We have also proposed the forming of the so-called dynamic coalitions," she said, presenting the initiative to create a regional roadmap in SE Europe to develop common standards and criteria for OER, and a regional repository of good practices.

The minister told the STA that talks were also under way for another coalition that is to become the core of a global coalition. She and her Maltese counterpart, Evarist Bartolo, agreed that countries with the most advanced OER policies such as Japan, Ireland and Canada should be included alongside countries that are very interested in promoting OER such as Croatia and Nigeria.

"UNESCO has recognised Slovenia as a leading country," she said, expressing hope for more cooperation also within the EU.

On Tuesday, a statement was adopted by the ministers or their representatives of Bangladesh, Barbados, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Costa Rica, Croatia, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lithuania, Malta, Mauritius, Mauritania, Mozambique, Palestine, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates.

With the statement, the ministers committed on the government level to continue developing the OER by empowering teachers, develop new quality-based contents, exchange best practices and form coalitions to make knowledge more accessible, inclusive and adjusted to individuals' needs, the Slovenian minister said.

The three-day congress, hosted by the Slovenian Education Ministry, the Jožef Stefan Institute and the Commonwealth of Learning under the auspices of UNESCO, was attended by some 500 participants from all over the world, including 15 ministers.