

This statement, published on behalf of the Inclusive Education Task Group from the International Disability and Development Consortium (IDCC), and the International Disability Alliance (IDA) welcomes global efforts to kick start an international drive towards disability-inclusive quality education following the G7 Leaders' endorsement of the G7 Foreign and Development Ministers 'Declaration on girls' education: recovering from COVID-19 and unlocking agenda 2030'.

We welcome global commitments to put the most marginalised children at the forefront of global efforts to transform education, ensuring children with disabilities and girls are not left behind. However, this is only the start and there is much more still to be done. The [girls' education declaration](#) sets out important steps towards achieving SDG4 and demonstrates the strong commitments of the G7 towards inclusion by increasing targeted support for children with disabilities whilst strengthening and transforming education systems. Notably, the declaration includes a pledge to improve the availability of accessible learning materials, the supply of assistive technology, and build teachers capacity on disability-inclusive and gender-sensitive practices. However to make a sustainable impact, these commitments must be followed with clear, tangible actions and increased funding. Our global consortia of organisations is ready to work in partnership with governments, civil society, and other stakeholders to remove systemic barriers to education for children with disabilities and ensure schools are more equitable and inclusive.

It is imperative that governments go beyond their words and actively promote equity and equality, by underpinning promises with meaningful and targeted investments to education systems. With the global focus on education, leaders now have the opportunity to prioritise marginalised groups and ensure the voices of children with disabilities are at the heart of decision-making. Without such targeted investments, generations of children with disabilities will continue to be denied their right to education. Financial commitments should be equitably allocated, and equity-based approaches must be fully embedded within national education policies and programmes to ensure all children can access quality education. This is even more

critical in a year where COVID-19 has significantly impacted access to quality education for children with disabilities.

Globally, before the pandemic, an estimated one-third of children out-of-school were children with disabilities¹. COVID-19 continues to exacerbate the multiple barriers to learning. In many countries, children with disabilities are experiencing increased instances of exclusion, marginalisation, poverty, and vulnerability. The pandemic continues to significantly reduce their access to early childhood identification and intervention, rehabilitation, and support measures². Distance learning initiatives are also least likely to benefit children with disabilities, as they often live in some of the poorest households and in remote areas, which means access to technology is extremely limited. Those who do have access to the internet, TV, or radios, are still excluded as often remote learning tools are not adapted and therefore inaccessible. Even if children can return to school, they will disproportionately experience a reduced quality of learning.

Girls with disabilities are further marginalised, as they experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination based on gender and disability. Global estimates show that girls with disabilities are more likely to be out of school than both boys with disabilities and girls without disabilities³. Even if they enrol, they have lower rates of attendance and completion, making disability and gender two of the most prominent factors in educational marginalisation. It is imperative that global education efforts address the multiple and intersecting barriers faced by children with disabilities to ensure they do not continue to be left behind in a post-pandemic world.

The next 12 months present several key political moments for global leaders to build on the momentum and ensure inclusive quality education remains top of the G7 COVID-19 recovery agenda. 2021 is an opportunity for societies to build back better and more inclusively. Governments must seize all opportunities by taking action on gender equality and recognising disability inclusion and gender as cross-cutting issues at the Generation Equalities Forum (GEF). Strong government action beyond the G7 commitments are needed to ensure the right to education for all children, including children with disabilities, and to make the tracking of progress on inclusive

¹ The Education Commission (2016). "The Learning Generation: Investing in education for a changing world"

² Humanity & Inclusion (2020). "Let's break silos now! - Achieving disability-inclusive education in a post-COVID world."

³ UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2018) "Education and Disability: Analysis of Data from 49 Countries"

education a central component of G7 accountability reporting. Also required are strong financial and political pledges to equity and inclusion at the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Global Education Summit for a successful replenishment; use of COP26 to highlight girls education as a tool to combat climate change; and ensuring climate education initiatives are disability inclusive.

Progress on these commitments will influence the Global Disability Summit (GDS) 2022, as global actors meet once again to reflect and build on their pledges to advance disability rights. We want to ensure inclusive education remains a core part of disability commitments at GDS 2022, with a renewed focus on gender equality.

We call on governments and international development actors to make strong commitments on the following key issues:

Education Finance

- Donor governments to progressively increase the percentage of official development assistance (ODA) towards education, in line with global commitments to ensure the realisation of SDG4 of Agenda 2030. Increase aid transparency and accountability by using the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Disability marker and DAC Gender marker to track and monitor progress of ODA spend towards empowering people with disabilities, women and girls, and drive educational reform.
- Support the protection of national education budgets and equitable domestic resource allocation underpinned by equity targets. Developing countries must accelerate efforts to progressively meet the internationally recognised benchmark for public spending on education of at least 4-6% of GDP and 15-20% of public expenditure.
- Ensure finance for education in emergencies (EiE) and protracted crises and invest in disability-inclusive programmes that protect and educate children with disabilities in humanitarian settings.

Inclusion

- Champion gender and disability-responsive learning environments and support interventions that recognise the intersectional dimensions of gender,

disability and other social characteristics that inhibit access to learning for girls with disabilities.

- Ensure that no child is left behind, including all children with disabilities including those who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind as well as those from underrepresented groups, such as children with intellectual disabilities, children with deafblindness and children with multiple disabilities, whose reasonable accommodation might require additional educational funding.
- Support investment in teachers and train educational support staff in disability-inclusive and gender sensitive teaching practices.
- Use a multi-sectoral approach to collaborate with health, economic, social protection services to ensure children with disabilities benefit at every aspect of their development.

COVID-19 Recovery

- Protect learning and access to education for children with disabilities during and after the COVID-19 pandemic by ensuring recovery initiatives are equity-oriented, gender-responsive, inclusive and complementary to existing social protection mechanisms.
- Invest in inclusive, accessible and affordable digital learning and quality low-cost technologies to narrow the digital learning gap experienced by children with disabilities, exacerbated by the pandemic. Investment in digital technology should support children with different learning requirements in different learning environments, including for home-schooling and non-formal education.

Evidence

- Strengthen evidence on educating children with disabilities by ensuring data collection, analysis, and reporting is disaggregated by disability, gender and age. Use and integrate existing standardised methodologies and tools, including the Washington Group on Disability Statistics Sets of Questions, in population data and Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) to better inform and adapt education policies and programming.

In all of the above and for disability inclusion in education to truly happen, it is imperative to meaningfully consult with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, including children with disabilities, in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Persons with disabilities must be empowered to participate in all related decision-making processes, from planning to implementation, duly considering their views, valuing their expertise and lived experiences and recognizing them as equal partners in development.

This year is pivotal for education, with the potential for a transformative and foundational change to make it inclusive. We believe global leaders must unite and demonstrate political leadership across these forums by reaffirming their commitments to the full delivery of SDG4 for every child, ensuring disability inclusion and prioritising inclusive education. We believe inclusive education systems can, and should, be strengthened by ensuring the systems are fully inclusive, with provision of required disability specific interventions that maximise the academic and social learning of all children. This will ensure that all children with disabilities, including girls, can access quality education and reach their full potential.⁴

⁴ For more details on IDA's position on inclusive education, please click [here](#).