

## Relegating Education to the Sidelines Jeopardizes Our Global Future

*Statement by the International Disability Alliance (IDA), the International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC), and the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) to inform discussions within the Common Agenda processes*

The IDA, IDDC, and GCE call on the international community to ensure that disability-inclusive quality education is included in global efforts to Transform Education, the Pact for the Future and the Declaration for Future Generations (September 2024), and in discussions within the World Social Summit (September 2025).

The UN Secretary-General convened the Transforming Education Summit (TES) in recognition of the crisis in education. His vision statement called the need to transform education “an urgent political imperative for our collective future.” Despite the rhetoric and commitments by governments, UN agencies and civil society at TES, preparations for the Pact for the Future, the Declaration on Future Generations and the upcoming World Social Summit in 2025 omit a commitment to inclusive, quality and equitable education at our peril. This concern has been [shared by GCE](#) and others in civil society, as education is the foundation for sustainable development and must be prioritised.

Inclusive education is central to realizing other human rights and the primary means for the development of inclusive, peaceful and fair societies ([UNCRPD, Art24 GC4](#)). It is, therefore, essential to leaving no one behind, now and in the future.

Eighty-seven percent of the National Commitments to Transform Education made during the TES recognised the need for more inclusive education systems to realise the right to education of the most marginalised learners. Member States committed to “address barriers to girls’ education, gender and disability gaps (to) enable all learners to achieve their full potential and physical, mental and emotional well-being” ([SDG Summit Political Declaration](#), September 2023). We urge Member States to deliver on these commitments and invest in equitable, quality, inclusive education.

Allowing all children, youth, and future generations to reach their full potential is crucial to “delivering a better present and safeguarding the future” for all. Inclusive education, by focusing on the well-being and success of students with disabilities, achieves high-quality education and social inclusion for all children and young people ([UNCRPD, Art24 GC4](#)).

We urge all Member States to ensure persons with disabilities are consulted and meaningfully participate in all negotiations and events, including the Summit of the Future in 2024 and World Social Summit in 2025.

We attach recommendations on how to strengthen the current drafts of the Pact for the Future and the Declaration for Future Generations. We are ready to collaborate to ensure that inclusive education is at the centre of global plans for a peaceful, sustainable and inclusive future for all.

# Annex

## Inclusive Education in the Pact for the Future

An ambitious Pact for the Future is critical to securing a more prosperous future for all people. However, the challenges faced by humanity are not faced by all equally and some, like girls and learners with disabilities, are disproportionately impacted by compounding barriers. We are very concerned that, despite the many commitments mentioned above and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, people with disabilities are not mentioned in the zero draft of the Pact for the Future. Moreover, inclusive education is not receiving the attention it deserves in current Summit of the Future discussions.

There are approximately 240 million children with disabilities globally (10% of all children) and they are present in every community in every country. They also constitute one of the most likely groups to be excluded from school. Children with disabilities are 49% more likely to have never attended school and 42% less likely to have foundational reading and numeracy skills than their peers without disability ([UNICEF, 2021](#)).

Inclusive education should be recognised as a critical means of delivering sustainable development and delivering a better future for all under all five Pact for the Future headings, in particular the sections below:

- **Sustainable development and financing for development:** Despite the recognition of education as a precondition for the achievement of sustainable development, investments in education remain well below agreed international benchmarks and the funding needed to meet SDG4 in a way that leaves no one behind. Language used in the Pact for the Future should align with SDG language throughout, and in particular to that of SDG4 about 'equitable, inclusive quality education and life-long learning for all'. Member States should recommit to benchmarks from the Incheon Declaration, and "to take all measures necessary, including by making education a priority in their national budgets by granting sufficient budgetary allocations to education, to ensure accessible, inclusive, equitable and non-discriminatory quality education to all at all levels, and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, paying particular attention to women and girls, children in the most vulnerable and marginalized situations, older persons, persons with disabilities, persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and all persons in vulnerable and marginalized situations, including those affected by humanitarian emergencies and conflict situations" (Resolution A/HRC/RES/47/6, 2021, para 7).
- **International peace and security:** Equitable, inclusive, quality education is an essential ingredient in promoting, building and sustaining peace and this should be recognised in the Pact for the Future. Education has a key role in helping to prevent violence and promoting peaceful societies by teaching learners respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as for human diversity. The Pact for the future should recognise "the importance quality education plays in promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence to support peacebuilding efforts and sustaining peace" and "that the

protection of the child from violence is a key strategy for reducing and preventing all forms of violence in societies and for promoting freedom, justice and peace in the world” (Resolution A/HRC/RES/54/5, 2023).

- **Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation:** Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can support the inclusion in education of learners with disabilities by enabling them to overcome some of the barriers causing their exclusion. However, ICT cannot replace teachers and a number of conditions must be met to enable the optimal use of ICT in inclusive education including school infrastructure and connectivity, affordability and accessibility of digital technology. The Pact for the Future should “Call upon all States to take appropriate measures to accelerate efforts to bridge the digital divide and technological gaps, including but not limited to those based on gender, age, disability and migration or refugee status, and not only to combat discrimination and bias in the development and use of new technologies, particularly in terms of access to products and services that are essential for the enjoyment of the right to education, but also to ensure accessible and quality education at all levels, in order to increase the digital competencies and innovation skills of all, including of women, girls and persons with disabilities, while ensuring the protection of personal data in the use of technology in education” (Resolution A/HRC/RES/47/6, 2021, para 11).
- **Youth and future generations:** Two thirds of the SDGs concerning children's rights and well-being are falling behind in their progress toward achieving their targets. If recent progress continues, only one in 6 countries will meet SDG4 and deliver universal access to quality, inclusive education for all by 2030 ([UNICEF, 2023](#)). Education has a role as an equaliser for future generations and the potential to break the cycle of intergenerational transmission of inequality. However, young persons with disabilities face discriminations that prevent social integration. The Pact for the Future should ensure consultation with a diverse range of children and youth and be explicit in how it plans to address barriers encountered by discriminated groups and ensure their access to education and lifelong learning. The Pact for the Future should encourage “Member States to promote equal opportunities for all, to eliminate all forms of discrimination against young people, (...) and to foster social integration for social groups such as young persons with disabilities” (Resolution A/RES/74/121, 2019, para.8). It should also urge “all States to strengthen their legal frameworks, to adopt adequate policies and programmes and to allocate sufficient resources, either individually or through international assistance and cooperation, to the full realization of the right to education and to expand educational opportunities for all, without discrimination” (Resolution A/HRC/RES/47/6, 2021).

## **Inclusive Education in the Declaration for Future Generations**

Children and youth with disabilities face marginalisation, exclusion and numerous barriers to realise their rights. They have the same concerns as other young people, but these are intensified by stigma, discrimination and barriers to accessing services, which limit their opportunities and chances to reach their full potential.

Young people with disabilities often have limited school education and face barriers accessing higher education institutions, despite the promise of SDG4 to ensure equal access to education at all levels. Inclusive, safe, and accessible schools are key conditions to promote the social

inclusion, acceptance, and equality of opportunities for persons with disabilities as gaps in education and skills development impact their ability to compete in the labour market. Youth with disabilities therefore face many obstacles in their daily lives, which undermine their rights and their chance to break the cycle of poverty and marginalisation.

When looking at the future, ensuring all children and youth can fulfil their potential and promote intergenerational equity should be core elements included in the Declaration for Future Generations. The Declaration for Future Generations should therefore commit to investing in equitable, inclusive quality education for current and future generations and ensuring equal opportunities for all children and youth, including those with disabilities. It should also recognise the importance of inclusive education to the empowerment of women and girls and be clear about the marginalised groups and communities that face discrimination, expressly listing persons with disabilities.

We recommend the zero draft is amended as suggested below:

- The Declaration on Future Generations should include a recommitment to, and be underpinned by, the promise to 'leave no one behind' in SDG implementation and beyond. This is essential for eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions. It should include a paragraph that recommits "to achieving sustainable development and shared prosperity for all by focusing our policies and actions on the poorest and most vulnerable. We will endeavour to identify those who are being left behind and reach those who are the furthest behind first. People who are vulnerable must be empowered. Those whose needs are reflected in the 2030 Agenda include all children, youth, persons with disabilities." (A/HLPF/2023/L.1, 2023, para.37)
- The Declaration should outline a definition of who is included within the term vulnerable the first time it is mentioned in the Declaration (Para. 18). Although we understand the challenges of consistently listing groups, it is critical that the document recognises those populations who are most likely to be vulnerable and excluded. This should be in line with the language in Agenda 2030.
  - Paragraph 18: "Promote peaceful, inclusive and just societies while taking into account inequalities within and between nations and the special needs of developing countries, as well as those of systemically marginalized communities and groups in vulnerable situations, namely *all children, youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants as well as people living in areas affected by complex humanitarian emergencies and in areas affected by terrorism.*"
- Paragraph 19: "Implement policies to eliminate gender discrimination in all its forms and promote women *and girls'* empowerment by providing *inclusive education*, equitable economic and leadership opportunities for all women and girls, ~~as appropriate~~, *in all their diversity*, in all spheres of society".
- Paragraph 20: "Eliminate all forms of persistent historical and structural inequalities, including racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, *discrimination on the basis of disability* and all other forms of discrimination"

- Paragraph 26: “Invest in inclusive, equitable and quality education for current *and future* generations, as well as opportunities for lifelong learning, allowing for the intergenerational acquisition and transfer of knowledge and skills to advance the prospects of future generations, *including for those with disabilities*”.