The [International Disability Alliance](http://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/) (IDA) is a network of 14 global and regional organisations of persons with disabilities, advocating at the United Nations for a more inclusive global environment for everyone. We support organisations of persons with disabilities to hold their governments to account and advocate for change locally nationally and internationally having the UN [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf) (CRPD) as a cornerstone of our work.

The [International Disability and Development Consortium](https://www.iddcconsortium.net/) (IDDC) is a global consortium of disability and development related organisations. The aim of IDDC is to promote inclusive development internationally, with a special focus on promoting human rights for all persons with disabilities living in economically poor communities in lower and middle-income countries.

IDA and IDDC welcome the opportunity to submit information to contribute to the work of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education and in particular to her report on COVID-19 and the realization of the Right to Education to be presented at the 44th session of the Human Rights Council.

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[Article 24](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-24-education.html) of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) recognizes that persons with disabilities enjoy the right to education “without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity”; therefore, “States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning”.

As IDA-IDDC, we acknowledge that the universal implementation of the SDG 4 by 2030 must be aligned with the CRPD in order not to leave persons with disabilities behind, and we call for “an inclusive education system, (where) all learners with and without disabilities, are learning together in classes in their local community schools. All learners receive the support they need, from preschool to tertiary and vocational education, in inclusive and accessible schools and educational facilities, including sign language bilingual schools”.[[1]](#footnote-1)

However, access to education by children with disabilities continues to be a challenge in regular times; in particular, 50% of children with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries are out of the school.[[2]](#footnote-2) As stated on the [General Comment 4 on the Right to Inclusive Education by the CRPD Committee](https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/CRPD_General_Comment_4_Inclusive_Education_2016_En.pdf), “many millions of persons with disabilities continue to be denied a right to education, and for many more, education is available only in settings where they are isolated from their peers and receive an inferior quality of provision.”

Furthermore, in the current context where the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating pre-existent inequalities in the access to education and imposing new challenges for education systems across the world, learners with disabilities are seeing their right to education particularly affected and are often being neglected in alternative education strategies.

It is true that some characteristics of the alternative systems currently being implemented around the world could represent an opportunity to reach some learners and children with disabilities that did not have access to education before or to facilitate the education of those who were already in the system. For instance, remote education can be accessed by children with disabilities living in remote areas or inaccessible communities if the technology is available; and bringing technology and inclusive and accessible software to all learners can broaden the scope of teaching and learning materials and standardise the quality of education received throughout States. However, too many children and learners are being left behind when options of remote learning are reduced to only technology and internet connection.

**Issues**

The following issues have been found to hinder access to education by children and learners with disabilities in the COVID-19 context.

* When the only means for remote education available is radio transmission, learners who are deaf or hard of hearing cannot access education. In the same way, not all the web platforms offered for distance learning are accessible by learners who are blind.
* Children with intellectual disabilities are at higher risk of exclusion, including dropping out of school as parents or caregivers are not trained to support them in home-schooling and the content of remote learning is not always tailored to meet their requirements. For example, radio lessons could be hard to follow without relevant visual stimuli and they may need additional face to face support.
* Most teachers do not receive adequate training on inclusive education and do not have adequate tools to teach students with disabilities, especially those who are deaf, deafblind or have intellectual disabilities.
* States will most likely need to shortcut budgets due to the social and economic impacts of the pandemic; this could affect the budget oriented to inclusive education due to lack of awareness among policy-makers.
* Children, including children with disabilities, and especially girls with disabilities are more vulnerable to domestic violence during the restrictive measures taken by the governments to prevent the spreading of COVID-19. The lack of support usually provided by school can prevent them from seeking help.
* In many areas, children, including children with disabilities coming from poor families, count on access to food through the public education system; not going to school means lack of access to a good nutrition for many children with disabilities and puts at risk their health and exacerbates the fragile economic stability of the family. Moreover, the higher economic pressure on parents, might increase the possibility of domestic violence.
* In some areas, girls, including girls with disabilities, can only access sanitary products and sexual education through the public education system; restrictive measures might hinder their access to such services.
* Because of intersectionality with other characteristics such as gender, poverty, displaced status and use of minority language, the situation for children with disabilities can be worsened.

**Recommendations**

* States should identify learners with disabilities and their learning requirements in order to provide them with reasonable accommodation, in this case alternative mechanisms to conventional education during the pandemic, such as remote education, delivery of packs, house-to-house teaching when feasible, so that learners with disabilities can access education in equal opportunities.
* States should provide guidance to families in order to support children with disabilities in home-schooling and provide them with adequate and adapted learning materials and strategies needed.
* States need to provide teachers with opportunities for capacity development related to inclusive education via accessible online platforms. State actors might work together with local and international NGOs and CSOs that are already working on inclusive education methodologies to build these platforms.
* States should train teachers on the use of “[Universal Design for Learning”](http://udlguidelines.cast.org/) (UDL) in curriculum development and in the classroom and also on how to ensure UDL in situations of risks, humanitarian action and in the occasion of a pandemic.
* Public budget shortcuts can severely affect the availability and the access to inclusive education by children with disabilities, as well as teacher trainings and support, individualized support for children with disabilities and their families and reasonable accommodation; adequate resources should be allocated to provide inclusive education within the COVID-19 settings.
* In cases where technological devices and software are provided to learners, these must be accessible and reach learners with disabilities living in remote areas; alternatives should be provided for those without access to the internet, or electricity such as satellite internet connection and solar energy.
* If necessary, teachers and facilitators should be prepared in cases where learners report domestic violence, acting as a contact point with competent authorities.
* Measures should be taken to ensure the return of children with disabilities to school after the pandemic, with special emphasis on girls with disabilities and children living in remote areas.
* Relevant stakeholders, including organizations of persons with disabilities and their families, civil society organizations, learners with disabilities and teachers should participate actively throughout the planning, implementation and monitoring of alternative education strategies during the pandemic.
* In cases where hygienic and sexual health products and information were provided by the education system, measures should be taken to continue the provision of these services in accessible manner despite the restrictions within countries.
* Where meals have been provided through schools, alternate means should be found to meet the nutritional needs of those with disabilities.
* The implementation of accessible alternative methods of education must be a requirement for the provision of resources through international cooperation or other means of aid oriented to education in the context of COVID-19.
* Work with local and national organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), parents, caregivers and communities to raise awareness on the right to and benefits of inclusive education, that should not stop during a pandemic as it would have a long-term impact on the inclusive education scenario at local and National level.

**Good practices[[3]](#footnote-3)**

1. In [Peru](https://noticia.educacionenred.pe/2020/05/aprendo-casa-estrategia-minedu-difundio-mas-700-programas-lenguas-originarias-199810.html), home-schooling is offered through 50 local radio stations in nine indigenous languages and through open TV in sign language, reaching more than 200 000 students in remote communities of the Andes and Amazon regions.
2. [UNESCO](https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/solutions) made a database on educational applications, platforms and resources that are recommended for distance learning, including tools accessible by students with disabilities.
3. A consortium of NGOs in Gaza is offering interactive lessons through a YouTube channel accessible from smartphones, including teachers using sign language and inclusive techniques. It is available for all children who subscribe.
4. Rwanda is developing radio and TV lessons with inclusive approaches. This is part of the education cluster plan.
5. Nepal’s education cluster response plan has an inclusive lens throughout, and a specific focus on supporting continuity of education for children with disabilities. E.g activities to develop parental awareness on how to support home-based learning.
6. Lebanon is promoting the use of free and accessible websites and accessible communication tools such as ZOOM.
7. In Egypt, teachers working with refugees and unaccompanied children are using short lessons and quizzes for students at home and are offering additional support through Whatsapp groups for those who require it. At the same time, inclusive learning packs are delivered to the students and monitored by teachers through phone.
8. In Kenya, classroom assistants are working together with teachers and community outreach workers in Kakuma refugee camp to assess the educational needs of the students and assist them with home-learning.
9. In Sierra Leone, Community based rehabilitation volunteers are working together with itinerant teachers to support home based learning in small groups of students.
10. In India, some resources centres are providing online training for mainstream teachers in Universal Design for Learning, supporting parent to parents training, and providing rehabilitation and speech and language therapy. One State is seeking support to make all their online teaching and learning materials accessible to all learners, including those with disabilities.
11. In several countries, there are examples of counselling services being provided for parents who are finding it stressful to manage work and supporting their child with a disability at home (Kenya, DRC, India, Vietnam, Guatemala, Bolivia). Likewise, helplines have been set up for children with disabilities experiencing any form of abuse.

IDA and some of its members are providing webinars to support their member Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and to support parents of children with disabilities. For instance, IDA Webinars are posted on the [IDA Facebook Channel](https://www.facebook.com/InternationalDisabilityAllianceIDA/), while the [Inclusion International webinars](https://inclusion-international.org/covid19-webinar-series/) (IDA members) are posted [at this link](https://inclusion-international.org/covid19-webinar-series/).

**Sources:**

* [IDA consensus paper on how to achieve SDG 4 in compliance with CRPD Article 24](http://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/resources/inclusive-education-ida-consensus-paper-how-achieve-sdg-4-compliance-crpd-article-24)
* [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf)
* [General Comment 4 on the Right to Inclusive Education by the CRPD Committee](https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/CRPD_General_Comment_4_Inclusive_Education_2016_En.pdf)
* [IDDC Inclusive Education Task Group response to COVID-19](https://www.iddcconsortium.net/our-work/covid-19-and-disability-inclusion/inclusive-education/)
* [Webinar on Inclusive Education and COVID-19 29 April 2020 from the Interagency network for education in emergencies](https://inee.org/system/files/resources/COVID-19%20Webinar%20Series%20-%20Webinar%206.pdf)
* [Global Action on Disability Network infographic on Inclusive Education](https://gladnetwork.net/search/resources/glad-infographic-inclusive-education)
* [General Statement of the GLAD INCLUSIVE EDUCATION WORKING GROUP in Response to the COVID-19 CRISIS](https://gladnetwork.net/search/resources/general-statement-glad-inclusive-education-working-group-response-covid-19-crisis)
1. See more:  [IDA consensus paper on how to achieve SDG 4 in compliance with CRPD Article 24](http://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/resources/inclusive-education-ida-consensus-paper-how-achieve-sdg-4-compliance-crpd-article-24) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Education Commission, Learning Generation [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Please consider that most of the initiatives listed here are at NGO level only, supported by Humanity&Inclusion (HI)’s (n. 3-9) or CBM’s projects (n. 10-11), and they are not necessarily whole country practices. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)