# **Barriers, enablers, and solutions for disability inclusive education during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

**Side Event at COSP-14 2021**

## **Background**

The Global Education Monitoring Report 2020 on inclusion and education showed that children with disabilities were 2.5 times more likely to have never been in school compared to children without disabilities. In fact, there was already a learning crisis before the COVID-19 pandemic caused more than 180 countries to mandate temporary school closures. The pandemic has created new challenges for persons with disabilities in accessing education and supports to learn on an equal basis.

With little to no evidence on disability-inclusive education solutions documented during past outbreaks, such as Ebola, several organizations set out to collect information on children with disabilities and their families as they pivoted to learning remotely while schools were closed.

A survey circulated among Inclusion International’s members has shown that delivery of classes through online platforms was the most common alternative lesson format reported by Inclusion International members. However, 44% of members surveyed said that learning options provided for school aged children during the pandemic were not accessible.

The World Bank’s Inclusive Education Initiative (IEI) circulated a survey, “Learners with Disabilities and COVID-19 School Closures” in May 2020 to support the finding in their issues paper, “Pivoting to Inclusion: Leveraging Lessons from the COVID-19 Crisis for Learners with Disabilities”. The survey set out to understand whether learners with disabilities and their families had access to the supports they needed to continue their learning while schools were closed due to COVID-19. With close to 4,000 responses from parents of children with disabilities, teachers of learners with disabilities, and persons with disabilities, the results overwhelmingly pointed to the lack of supports, whether they be financial, technological, socioemotional or health/hygiene related.

Human Rights Watch has documented how in some schools in Italy students with disabilities were able to attend school in person during Covid-19 lockdowns throughout the 2020/2021 school year. This was instrumental for many children with disabilities, for whom remote education was not accessible, to receive the accommodations and supports to ensure their effective education. Some schools created small inclusive groups to ensure students with disabilities could continue to learn with non-disabled peers.

During this event, we will explore the data collected and analyzed through the Inclusion International and World Bank IEI surveys as well as Human Rights Watch research on the solution adopted in some schools in Italy, and we will hear from civil society representatives about lived experiences of access to learning during the pandemic, in particular from Italy, Brazil, and the Regional Latin American and African perspectives, as well.

## **Meeting organizers**

The meeting is co-hosted by the UNESCO GEM Report, Inclusion International and its Catalyst for Inclusive Education Initiative, Human Rights Watch and the World Bank’s Inclusive Education Initiative. The event is also co-sponsored by the Italian Mission to the UN in New York and the Brazilian Coalition of Inclusive Education.

## **Objectives**

The objectives of this side-event will be to provide a platform to discuss the following themes:

* Exploring the new barriers and enablers related to inclusion in remote learning
* Share knowledge, good practices, and solutions to addressing new barriers to inclusion in education for learners with disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities, during the COVID-19 pandemic

## **Format**

The side-event will be held online, and it will take the form of a panel discussion. The side event will be held on

The one hour and 15-minute event will include panelist presentations and an interactive conversation/discussion with the audience. Live captioning and sign language interpretation will be provided (TBD). During the event, there will be English-Spanish interpretation.

## **Speakers:**

**Opening Remarks**: Representative from the Italian Mission to the UN in New York – 3/4 minutes

**Moderator**: - Sue Swenson, President, Inclusion International – 5 minutes

**Panelists:**

* **Gabriela Martinez,** Inclusion International Regional Representative (Latin America), 7 minutes
* **Stella Reicher**, Inclusion International / Instituto Jô Clemente (Brazil) 7 minutes
* **Self-advocate,** Inclusion International (Africa), 8 minutes
* **Karolina Kozik, Human Rights Watch** (Italy - inclusive education in practice during COVID-19 example), 7 minutes
* **Charlotte McClain-Nhalpo, World Bank** IEI Survey “Learners with Disabilities and COVID-19 School Closures”, 7 minutes
* Questions from the chat (10/15 minutes)

**Closing Remarks**: **Manos Antoninis**, UNESCO GEM Report – 4/5 minutes