**Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities HLPF Consultation Submission on Goal 4**

Education is a human right and an essential condition for individual development as well as for full and effective inclusion in society. Persons with disabilities continue to be denied their right to education as a result of complex and interlinking barriers including social norms, attitudes, infrastructure, environment, legislation, resources, and institutions. As a result, children with disabilities are 45 percent more likely to be out of primary school, according to a new study from UNICEF.[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. **What has changed since the last time this Goal was reviewed at the HLPF? Any deviations in progress from what was expected (including due to Covid-19)?**

The Covid-19 pandemic has challenged education systems in unprecedented ways. School closures and the disruption to learning have impacted all learners; however, learners with disabilities, have been disproportionately affected.[[2]](#footnote-2) In a survey conducted by the International Disability Alliance to assess the experiences of persons with disabilities adapting to the pandemic, one in five students with a disability had to drop out of their education programmes due to limited online access, loss of income, and inaccessible learning resources.[[3]](#footnote-3) The survey’s report also shed light on the experiences of parents with disabilities supporting their children in remote education. The report notes that “most parents lost their main source of income during the pandemic, and the cost of remote education was incredibly stressful for many parents.[[4]](#footnote-4)”

In 2021, girls with disabilities still made up the majority of out-of-school children and were denied their right to education. Before the pandemic, girls with disabilities were already less likely to enrol in education and have lower rates of attendance and completion[[5]](#footnote-5) and the pandemic has only exacerbated this trend.

**Digital Divide’s impact on achieving Goal 4**

Online learning interrupted many support strategies from which blind and partially sighted children and children with multiple disabilities benefit, creating unprecedented challenges for children, teachers, and parents to ensure learning continuity.[[6]](#footnote-6) Blind and partially sighted children and children with multiple disabilities experienced barriers in which many resources and learning content were not accessible even if supportive technology existed.

Stemming from structural inequalities, the impacts of the pandemic compounded the digital divide. This has been particularly challenging for students with disabilities. During the early months of the pandemic, some governments introduced distance learning for school children. The arrangement was to continue the education of children remotely using TV, radio, and other digital means. While this arrangement was welcomed, it was not inclusive of children with disabilities. Studies undertaken by the Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities found that persons with disabilities in Nigeria, Bangladesh, and Bolivia had difficulties accessing digital technologies and the internet and often lacked the financial means to obtain those resources.[[7]](#footnote-7) The findings further indicated that during the emergency school closures, children with disabilities, particularly deaf learners, were not included in any form of learning arrangements along with other children.

Learners’ access to equipment, electricity, the internet, and teacher quality is deepening the learning divide in every country – especially for learners with disabilities, who often face the additional barrier of inaccessible learning content.[[8]](#footnote-8) The Covid-19 pandemic has increased exclusion from education, causing an estimated 40 percent of disadvantaged learners in low- and lower-middle-income countries to be entirely unsupported in their education.[[9]](#footnote-9) The Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities researched the impact of Covid-19 on education in Bangladesh and found that the unavailability of smartphones, computers, the financial capacity to buy mobile data to use the internet as well as low network coverage of mobile phone operators and the lack of broadband connection or low bandwidth in rural and remote areas all contributed to the digital divide for persons with disabilities.[[10]](#footnote-10)

In addition, while more than 90% of countries offered forms of distance learning,[[11]](#footnote-11) at least 31% of school children worldwide were unable to benefit from it.[[12]](#footnote-12) Only 18% of parents of children with disabilities found radio and television learning resources accessible, and 29% found computer use accessible and useful for their children.[[13]](#footnote-13) Participants in one survey noted that educational platforms often lack features such as transcripts and closed captions, screen readers, and print magnifiers.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Remote learning options put in place during school closures have highlighted the potential good of information and communications technology (ICT) and digitalization, but exposed challenges. ICT cannot and should not replace other face-to-face methods and tools, or indeed replace the important focus on teacher training in inclusive pedagogy. Preconditions for ICT use in inclusive education include: adequate infrastructure (like electricity and Internet connection), good quality equipment (i.e., corresponding to the learners’ needs and available in multiple languages) and learners’, teachers’, and family members’ digital skills.

1. **What are the main obstacles to implementation of this Goal, including interlinkages with other Goals and connections to related processes?**

While the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the General Comment no. 4 of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities clearly elaborates the imperative to move to truly inclusive education systems and phase out special or segregated settings, in reality too many education systems are still segregating learners with disabilities. Inclusive education’s importance is underscored in the 2020 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report which states that diversity should be at the heart of education and by design, education should include all learners, including learners with disabilities among other groups that face high risks of marginalization.[[15]](#footnote-15) The IDA Global Report on Inclusive Education (2020) also reiterates that building truly inclusive education system is the only way to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for children and learners, whoever they are and wherever they are. Any segregated or special setting, therefore, does not conform to the mandate of Article 24 of the CRPD. Mainstreaming rights of persons with disabilities and using disability-specific targeted actions, also known as a twin- track approach, should be the standard when building policies and programming.[[16]](#footnote-16) Building a truly inclusive education is the only way to achieve SDG 4 for all.[[17]](#footnote-17) It is important to take note of [WFD’s position on inclusive education](https://wfdeaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/WFD-Position-Paper-on-Inclusive-Education-5-June-2018-FINAL-without-IS.pdf) in that “a growing number of countries are implementing a model of inclusive education that is far from meeting the specific language needs of deaf learners, so that they can participate fully, have effective access to the school curriculum, and achieve the expected learning outcomes.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

1. **What are new/promising openings and opportunities to implement this goal, including interlinkages with other Goals and connections related processes?**

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that education systems that are not built to be inclusive are ill-equipped to address exigencies, leading to further marginalisation and exclusion of some groups. Unless diversity and inclusion are at the heart of our efforts to rebuild education as learners get back to schools, those with high risks of marginalisation will continue to be excluded. Rebuilding and reopening efforts therefore should concentrate on creating system level changes from accessibility, to assistive devices, to support mechanisms, to curricula, to teacher training. This can be done by adopting a twin track method that promotes a culture of inclusion overall while also providing targeted support to learners with disabilities. In addition, more evidence needs to be generated on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and its role in realising inclusive education for all learners especially in the global south context.

1. **Can you share an example of an innovative policy, programme, project or partnership related to this Goal that could be scaled up and support accelerated implementation?**

Following the adoption of the [IDA position on Article 24](https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/blog/inclusive-education-ida-produces-consensus-paper-how-achieve-sdg-4-compliance-crpd-article-24), an OPD-led consensus position on the implementation of SDG 4 in line with the CRPD, there is a growing momentum to create more spaces for persons with disabilities, their families and OPDs to advocate for their right to education. There is also a growing demand for more evidence generation on the preconditions needed for learners with disabilities to be able to access education. This starts from access to early childhood education, rehabilitation to social protection support that enables learners with disabilities to meet the added disability related costs which often create an additional barrier, among others. The Global Disability Summit 2022 also saw commitments being made by states at the highest level. Greater investment is required to turn these commitments to reality. These efforts need to be centered around the CRPD, especially Article 24 and Article 4.3 (meaningful engagement of persons with disabilities).

1. # UNICEF, Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities, 2021,

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3. International Disability Alliance, 2021. *Survey on the Experience of Persons with Disabilities Adapting to the Covid-19 Global Pandemic.* Available at [https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/Covid-19\_survey\_report\_final.pdf](https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/covid-19_survey_report_final.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity (2016). The Learning Generation – Investing in education for a changing world. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. UNESCO. (2020) Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and education: All means all. Paris, France. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Studies by Irokaba, (2021); Mahbub & Mahmud, (2021); and Nóchez-McNutt, (2021), for the Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities for Sustainable Development: Irokaba, G. (2021): Key findings and recommendations on the impact of Covid-19 on persons with disabilities in Nigeria. New York: Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities for Sustainable Development; Mahbub, S. and Mahmud, M, I. (2021): An in-depth country-focused qualitative research study on the experience of persons with disabilities during and after the pandemic in Bangladesh. New York: Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities for Sustainable Development. McNutt, R. N. (2021): Key findings and recommendations on the impact of Covid-19 on persons with disabilities in Bolivia. New York: Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities for Sustainable Development [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
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9. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. # Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities, The Experiences of Persons with Disabilities in the Covid-19 Pandemic: Case Studies in Bangladesh, Bolivia and Nigeria, 2021,

    [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. UNICEF, (2020). Covid-19: Are children able to continue learning during school closures? A global analysis of the potential reach of remote learning policies using data from 100 countries. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. World Bank, Inclusive Education Initiative, (2020). Pivoting to Inclusion: Leveraging Lessons from the Covid-19 Crisis for Learners with Disabilities. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, (2021). No education, no protection. What school closures under Covid-19 mean for children and young people in crisis-affected contexts. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2020) <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/report/2020/inclusion> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. OHCHR, Policy guidelines for inclusive sustainable development goals: *Quality Education. 2020* <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disability/SDG-CRPD-Resource/policy-guideline-sdg4-education.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. https://wfdeaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/WFD-Position-Paper-on-Inclusive-Education-5-June-2018-FINAL-without-IS.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-18)