



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

INCLUDING EVERY CHILD, BENEFITTING ALL: INTERNATIONAL DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

**Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs
and International Development**

Ali Ehsassi, Chair

Subcommittee on International Human Rights

Fayçal El-Khoury, Chair

**APRIL 2024
44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION**

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Standing Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website
at the following address: www.ourcommons.ca

**INCLUDING EVERY CHILD, BENEFITTING ALL:
INTERNATIONAL DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE
EDUCATION**

**Report of the Standing Committee on
Foreign Affairs and International Development**

**Ali Ehsassi
Chair**

**Subcommittee on
International Human Rights**

**Fayçal El-Khoury
Chair**

APRIL 2024

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

NOTICE TO READER

Reports from committees presented to the House of Commons

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CHAIR

Ali Ehsassi

VICE-CHAIRS

Hon. Michael D. Chong

Stéphane Bergeron

MEMBERS

Ziad Aboultaif

Hon. Omar Alghabra

Sophie Chatel

Dave Epp

Hon. Hedy Fry

Randy Hoback

Heather McPherson

Hon. Robert Oliphant

Sameer Zuberi

CLERK OF THE COMMITTEE

Danielle Widmer

LIBRARY OF PARLIAMENT

Research and Education

Allison Goody, Analyst

Billy Joe Siekierski, Analyst

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS

CHAIR

Fayçal El-Khoury

VICE-CHAIRS

Hon. Mike Lake

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe

MEMBERS

Pam Damoff

Ali Ehsassi

Gord Johns

Shuvaloy Majumbar

Anita Vandenbeld

OTHER MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT WHO PARTICIPATED

Ziad Aboultaif

Charlie Angus

Alexandre Boulerice

Iqwinder Gaheer

Garnett Genuis

Jasraj Singh Hallan

Matt Jeneroux

Viviane Lapointe

Heather McPherson

Sonia Sidhu

Denis Trudel

Julie Vignola

John Williamson

Sameer Zuberi

CLERKS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE

Patrick Williams

Danielle Widmer

LIBRARY OF PARLIAMENT

Parliamentary Information, Education and Research Services

Laura Carter, Analyst

Brendan Naef, Analyst

THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

has the honour to present its

TWENTY-FOURTH REPORT

Pursuant to the motion adopted by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development on Monday, December 13, 2021, and the motion adopted by the Subcommittee on International Human Rights on Tuesday, October 17, 2023, the committee has studied international disability-inclusive education and has agreed to report the following:

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS	1
INCLUDING EVERY CHILD, BENEFITTING ALL: INTERNATIONAL DISABILITY- INCLUSIVE EDUCATION.....	5
Introduction.....	5
Contextualizing Disability and Education.....	6
Statistics.....	6
Complexity of Disability.....	7
What is Inclusive Education?.....	8
Intersectionality.....	9
Benefits of Inclusive Education.....	11
International Obligations and Aspirational Frameworks for Disability- Inclusive Education.....	14
International Obligations	14
United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	15
Aspirational Targets and Calls to Action	17
United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.....	17
Disability Inclusive Education: A Call to Action to Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education.....	19
Best Practices in Disability-Inclusive Education	21
Design.....	21
Universal Design for Learning.....	22
Twin-track Approach	23
Early Years Education.....	24
Collaboration and Community Involvement	24
Including People with Disabilities in Program Design	26
Sport and Play.....	27
Culturally Informed Approaches.....	27

Access to Assistive Technology	28
Using Improved Data Collection to Inform Policy	29
Barriers to Disability-Inclusive Education.....	32
Stigma and Attitudinal Barriers.....	32
Attitudinal Barriers for Girls.....	33
Cost of Inclusive Education.....	34
Education in Humanitarian Settings	36
Institutional Settings.....	37
Impact of Climate Change.....	39
Improving Disability-Inclusive Education	39
Providing Adequate Funding.....	40
Teacher Training	43
Access for Francophone Students.....	44
Conclusion	46
APPENDIX A.....	49
APPENDIX B: LIST OF WITNESSES	53
APPENDIX C: LIST OF BRIEFS.....	57
REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE	59

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.

Recommendation 1

That Global Affairs Canada ensure that its policies and programs in global education address multiple and overlapping barriers to access, including disability, poverty, gender, refugee status, psychosocial well-being and living in crisis situations..... 11

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada ensure that the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* are fully implemented into Canada’s international education policies. 17

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada ensure the inclusion of disability and education in all its contributions and initiatives aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. 19

Recommendation 4

That Global Affairs Canada conduct a comprehensive ongoing review of its international education activities, including bilateral investments, involvement in multilateral institutions, and the work of its staff and missions, to ensure alignment with inclusive education principles, including the Universal Design for Learning Framework. 21

Recommendation 5

That the Government of Canada endorse and actively promote the *Disability Inclusive Education: A Call to Action to Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education* and commit to achieving its objectives. 21

Recommendation 6

That Global Affairs Canada ensure that all education programs it funds use the twin-track approach, promoting the inclusion of all learners, as referenced in the Call to Action, and that it be a strong advocate for this approach globally. 23

Recommendation 7

That Global Affairs Canada ensure that its development assistance in education includes the collection and use of disaggregated data, along with setting specific targets to reach learners with disabilities through the programs it supports..... 32

Recommendation 8

That Global Affairs Canada ensure that all education programming it funds include approaches to combatting stigma against people with disabilities, particularly girls and women. 34

Recommendation 9

That Global Affairs Canada ensure that all humanitarian programming it funds includes accessibility plans in order to allow people with disabilities equitable access to humanitarian services..... 37

Recommendation 10

That the Global Affairs Canada commit to supporting countries to allocate 5% of their education funding specifically for disability-inclusive education. 43

Recommendation 11

That Global Affairs Canada integrate disability inclusion into all its international assistance, mirroring the approach taken for gender equality in its development policies and programs. 43

Recommendation 12

That Global Affairs Canada make its international assistance funding for education conditional upon meeting specific disability-inclusion criteria and targets within the recipient’s programming. 43

Recommendation 13

That Global Affairs Canada’s investments in global education include adequate funding of inclusive education training as part of teacher training programs and professional development. 44

Recommendation 14

That the Government of Canada leverage Canadian expertise in the area of disability-inclusive education to increase Canada’s influence in training educational professionals in francophone countries abroad..... 46



INCLUDING EVERY CHILD, BENEFITTING ALL: INTERNATIONAL DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

One in ten children worldwide, a total of nearly 240 million children, lives with disability. These children often face obstacles to accessing quality education. Traditional school systems and education programs are not always adapted to the diverse needs of people with disabilities, nor are they designed with accessibility in mind.¹ Disability-inclusive education is needed to ensure all learners can access a proper education, as their human right. Motion M-78, agreed to unanimously in the House of Commons on 27 September 2023, recognized the global need of children with disabilities to access education and stated the House’s opinion that where the federal government spends money on education, consideration must be given to the maximum inclusion of people with disabilities.²

In this context, the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs (the Subcommittee) agreed to conduct a study on disability-inclusive education internationally. Over the course of four meetings, the Subcommittee heard from 33 witnesses, including representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) responsible for funding, designing and delivering inclusive education worldwide, and persons with lived experience of disability. In keeping with the Subcommittee’s mandate to study international human rights issues, the study focused on the status of disability-inclusive education internationally; it did not address education provision within Canada.

The Subcommittee’s report begins with background information on disability-inclusive education, including key statistics, definitions, and benefits; then examines inclusive education from a human rights perspective, including Canada’s international obligations. Best practices in disability-inclusive education are examined, followed by the main barriers to these practices. Finally, the report highlights ways that education can be improved to be fully inclusive of students with disabilities worldwide. This report

1 Humanity and Inclusion, [Humanity & Inclusion Canada’s Written Submission on Disability Inclusive Education](#), Brief submitted to SDIR, 15 December 2023, p. 1.

2 House of Commons, [“M-78 Inclusion of People With Disabilities,”](#) Journals, 27 September 2023.



summarizes the Subcommittee’s findings and provides 14 recommendations for the Government of Canada to address when funding and supporting education programs and policies internationally.

CONTEXTUALIZING DISABILITY AND EDUCATION

Statistics

Many witnesses highlighted statistics related to persons with disabilities worldwide. Jennifer Rigg from Global Campaign for Education-United States highlighted that the number of children living with a disability worldwide is estimated to be 240 million.³ Yasmine Sherif of Education Cannot Wait noted that “the World Health Organization estimates that 16% of the world population is experiencing significant disability... 80% of them are in the global south.”⁴

Several witnesses emphasized the disadvantages faced by children with disabilities when compared to those without. Jennifer Rigg noted that “at the primary level, completion rates for children with disabilities are 15 to 18 points below their peers, [...] and that’s for the students who are lucky enough to make it into school.”⁵ Dorodi Sharma from International Disability Alliance, cited a 2022 UNICEF study “that shows that 49% of the world’s 240 million children with disabilities are likely to have never attended school.”⁶ Nafisa Baboo from Light for the World, cited the same UNICEF study, adding that 42% of children with disabilities worldwide are less likely to have basic reading and numeracy skills. She also explained that students with disabilities are “most often excluded from science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects, hindering their ability to be skilled for the 21st century and attain dignified work.”⁷ Maha Khochen from Education Cannot Wait noted that “only 5% of children with disabilities in emergency and protracted crises receive an education.”⁸ Going beyond basic teaching and learning, Anne Delorme of Humanity and Inclusion reminded the Subcommittee that, “Children

3 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1225 (Jennifer Rigg, Executive Director, Global Campaign for Education-United States).

4 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1115 (Yasmine Sherif, Executive Director, Education Cannot Wait).

5 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1120 (Jennifer Rigg, Executive Director, Global Campaign for Education).

6 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1125 (Dorodi Sharma, Senior Advisor, Advocacy and Engagement, International Disability Alliance).

7 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1120 (Nafisa Baboo, Director, Inclusive Education, Light for the World).

8 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1230 (Maha Khochen, Program Specialist Inclusive Education and Disability Inclusion, Education Cannot Wait).

with disabilities are also twice as likely to face sexual, physical or mental abuse, and they are much more likely to be bullied.”⁹

Some witnesses focused on statistics specifically related to students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. According to Tim Shriver, Chair of the Board of Special Olympics, “anywhere from 50% to 80% of children with intellectual development disabilities don’t go to school at all.”¹⁰ Julia McGeown from Humanity and Inclusion echoed this statement, calling children with developmental and intellectual disabilities “often the most neglected group of children, particularly in terms of the support that’s given.”¹¹ She also noted that people with developmental and intellectual disabilities are the most likely not to be enrolled in school, and “even if they are in schools, they might not be able to access a quality education even when there.”¹² Tim Shriver emphasized the challenges this group faces:

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities are in every country, every ethnicity, every geography and every community. However, today, despite their presence in our families and in our communities all over the world, they’re still more likely to be institutionalized, more likely not to go to school at all, more likely to die young from neglect and injustice in health care systems, and less likely than virtually any other group to have a job, have friends, have a home or have a full and complete life.¹³

Ruchi Kulbir Singh of the World Bank also highlighted the challenges faced by children with intellectual disabilities, noting they “are the most marginalized, overlooked and stigmatized amongst the disability groups.”¹⁴ She also stated, “research indicates that issues concerning intellectual disabilities often receive little to no policy support or financial investment as compared to other disability groups.”¹⁵

Complexity of Disability

Many witnesses drew the Subcommittee’s attention to the broad scope and complexity of disability. Michael Messenger of World Vision Canada, spoke plainly, stating “we can’t

9 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1115 (Anne Delorme, Executive Director, Humanity and Inclusion Canada).

10 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1135 (Tim Shriver, Chair, Board of Directors, Special Olympics).

11 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1145 (Julia McGeown, Director, Inclusive Education, Humanity and Inclusion).

12 Ibid.

13 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1135 (Tim Shriver, Chair, Board of Directors, Special Olympics).

14 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1245 (Ruchi Kulbir Singh, Disability Inclusion Specialist, World Bank).

15 Ibid.



assume that one size fits all. Individuals with disabilities are not a monolith.”¹⁶ Appearing as an individual, Mona Paré, professor at the University of Ottawa, referred to the United Nations (UN) *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, which lists physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, and concluded this definition “creates a heterogeneous group, which presents a major challenge for inclusive education.”¹⁷ She also noted that the needs of learners and the expectations of families will depend on the type of disability involved, giving as an example the common preference of families from the Deaf community for separate education for sign language users.¹⁸ Anne Delorme observed that “inclusive education initiatives tend to consider children with disabilities as a homogeneous group rather than offer adapted strategies to meet the needs associated with various types of disabilities, physical, intellectual or developmental.”¹⁹

Representing CARE Canada, Mohammed Emrul Hasan raised the issue of visible and invisible disability, saying “...whenever there is a disability you can see, people focus on that one. Quite often, you will see an educational program talking about ramps, school infrastructure and everything, but we forget developmental disabilities and disabilities you get from being in a very stressful conflict situation.” He then emphasized the importance of considering all types of disability when designing an inclusive education program.²⁰

Peter Simms of Plan International Canada suggested a change in perspective is needed when addressing disability-inclusive education, saying “I think the fact that there is such a range of different types of disabilities and the fact that diagnosis is very poor mean that the operative word when we’re talking about disability inclusion [should be] ‘inclusion’ rather than ‘disability.’”²¹

What is Inclusive Education?

Witnesses discussed what disability-inclusive education should ideally involve, what it can look like in practice, and what must be avoided. Mona Paré informed the Subcommittee that although there has been promotion of inclusive education

16 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1130 (Michael Messenger, President and CEO, World Vision Canada).

17 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1110 (Mona Paré, Full Professor, University of Ottawa, as an individual).

18 Ibid.

19 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1115 (Anne Delorme, Executive Director, Humanity and Inclusion Canada).

20 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1235 (Mohammed Emrul Hasan, Chief Programs Officer, CARE Canada).

21 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1240 (Peter Simms, Senior Education Advisor, Plan International Canada).

internationally for roughly thirty years, there remains no official definition or criteria. She raised the issue of integration versus inclusion, noting “integration isn’t necessarily part of [the] philosophy” of inclusive education, and that integration “involves the student in the regular classroom adapting to the school, rather than the other way around. The idea is to help the student adapt through reasonable accommodation.”²²

Professor Paré also noted the difference between the ideal and the practice of inclusive education, explaining that “many families prefer to keep their children in separate classrooms so that they can receive the appropriate services” when they have the choice, usually in cases of students with severe learning disabilities.²³ By contrast, she stated other families choose to integrate their children in regular classrooms, prioritizing the benefits of social participation over academic results; this choice is often made by parents of children with intellectual disabilities.²⁴

Eric Rosenthal of Disability Rights International, raised the issue of institutionalization of people with disabilities, and emphasized that when children and adults are segregated from society, “in orphanages, boarding schools, institutions, social care homes, adult psychiatric facilities and many places where they are swept away unseen, [they] experience terrible human rights conditions and do not have the opportunity for any form of education, much less inclusive education.”²⁵ This report examines institutions as barriers to inclusive education in more detail in a later section.

Intersectionality

Many witnesses mentioned the issue of intersectionality and its importance when addressing disability-inclusive education. Michael Messenger stressed that “achieving meaningful inclusion of children and youth with disabilities in education requires us to demonstrate empathy and acknowledge the intersecting and intersectoral challenges and realities they encounter.”²⁶ Lindsay Glassco of Plan International Canada, noted that “disability intersects, exacerbates and is itself a product of wider inequalities, most notably poverty, gender discrimination and the existence of conflict or crisis” and pointed out that understanding intersectionality “is central to ensuring that we are able

22 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1110 (Mona Paré, Full Professor, University of Ottawa, as an individual).

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1205 (Eric Rosenthal, Executive Director, Disability Rights International).

26 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1130 (Michael Messenger, President and CEO, World Vision Canada).



to bring about lasting change.”²⁷ Susan McIsaac of Right To Play International, defined an inclusive approach to education as “addressing the multiple and sometimes overlapping barriers to education faced by girls, refugees, children in need of psychosocial supports and, especially, children with disabilities.”²⁸ Julia McGeown stressed that “we need to think about all of the layers, the multiple layers and how that affects a child. A child is a child who’s also a refugee, who’s also a girl, who also has a disability. You need to account for all of those things, not separate things.”²⁹ Robert Jenkins of UNICEF stated that intersecting factors such as poverty, disability, gender, and crisis situations cause “the challenges children face [to be] compounded or become exponential,” leading to a “1% chance that those children can attend school or continue their learning.”³⁰

The intersectional impacts of gender and poverty were the factors raised most often by witnesses. Gender affects not only girls with disabilities and their access to education, but mothers as well: Mónica Cortés of Inclusion International observed that when children with disabilities are prevented from attending school, their mothers cannot join the paid workforce, as caregiving obligations usually fall to mothers. She also noted that in crisis and conflict situations, “education is often the only place where girls and women can be included.”³¹ The particular barriers to education faced by girls with disabilities is explored more fully in a later section of this report.

Poverty is another factor intersecting with disability that affects inclusive education, both at national and individual family levels. Robert Jenkins gave the example of poverty affecting literacy levels amongst 10-year-olds in low- and middle-income countries, stating that 70% of them cannot yet read, despite many of them having attended school for years; this situation is exacerbated when children also have disabilities.³² For families, poverty affects whether children with disabilities can attend school. Ola Abualghaib from the UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities explained that the additional costs associated with disability, such as specialized transportation and/or assistive devices, are often not considered or covered by social benefits systems, forcing

27 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1140 (Lindsay Glassco, President and CEO, Plan International Canada Inc.).

28 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1120 (Susan McIsaac, President and CEO, Right To Play International).

29 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1215 (Julia McGeown, Director, Inclusive Education, Humanity and Inclusion).

30 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1235 (Robert Jenkins, Global Director, Education and Adolescent Development, UNICEF).

31 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1130 (Mónica Cortés, Inclusion International).

32 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1235 (Robert Jenkins, Global Director, Education and Adolescent Development, UNICEF).

families to keep their children with disabilities out of school. The impacts of poverty are further affected by living in remote areas or in conflict situations.³³

The importance of designing programming and teaching for the whole child, not just one aspect of their identity, was emphasized by many witnesses. Robert Jenkins explained, “[w]e need to look at the whole child, where the child lives and the overall support needs of the child and their family, and provide comprehensive support in order for this to be effective. That includes social protection systems more broadly.”³⁴ Susan Mclsaac encouraged Canada to “raise the bar on quality, inclusive education for all” by addressing multiple barriers that can affect children accessing education.³⁵ Citing a lack of focus on children’s multiple and intersecting identities in Canada’s international development and education policy, Diane Richler of Inclusion International said, “[w]e need to be building systems for everybody.”³⁶ Dorodi Sharma reminded the Subcommittee that “human rights are indivisible, so we cannot really distinguish human rights among different identity groups... we have to look at intersectionality.”³⁷

As such, the Subcommittee recommends,

Recommendation 1

That Global Affairs Canada ensure that its policies and programs in global education address multiple and overlapping barriers to access, including disability, poverty, gender, refugee status, psychosocial well-being and living in crisis situations.

Benefits of Inclusive Education

Throughout its study, the Subcommittee heard of the many benefits of inclusive education for children with disabilities. Mónica Cortés explained that bringing all children together in an educational setting allows for those with disabilities to be recognized and valued by their peers, giving them the chance to build networks and become active members of their communities. Having access to inclusive education then

33 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1235 (Ola Abualghaib, Manager Technical Secretariat, United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

34 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1245 (Robert Jenkins, Global Director, Education and Adolescent Development, UNICEF).

35 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1120 (Susan Mclsaac, President and CEO, Right To Play International).

36 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1150 (Diane Richler, Co-Chair, Catalyst for Inclusive Education, Inclusion International).

37 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1205 (Dorodi Sharma, Senior Advisor, International Disability Alliance).



permits students with disabilities to continue their education in training programs, then gain employment in their communities.³⁸

However, inclusive education systems benefit all learners, not only students with disabilities.³⁹ Susan Mclsaac said that “[a]ddressing the learning needs of the most marginalized children improves the education quality and learning for all.”⁴⁰ These inclusive systems are “more effective at reaching children with disabilities and enabling them to realize their rights. They are also more effective in terms of learning outcomes for children already in school,” according to Robert Jenkins.⁴¹ When teachers and students are supported for inclusive foundational learning, it is easier for all students to learn and be successful.⁴² When children with disabilities are included, their peers experience social and emotional growth, increased empathy, and gain the ability to work and engage with different types of people, indicated Tracey Evans of Right To Play.⁴³ She further explained that an inclusive classroom can mirror what all students will “face when they go out into the wider world” while segregated education systems “are not reflective of the eventual reality that both individuals with disabilities and the rest of society are going to have to engage with.”⁴⁴ Julia McGeown advised, “it’s quite likely that whatever you do for children with disabilities is going to benefit all children, so don’t see it as a separate thing.”⁴⁵ Robert Jenkins echoed this statement, saying that “where you have large numbers of kids who require assistance in learning, we need to reach the most marginalized and work backwards. By doing so, that enables all children to benefit.”⁴⁶

Tim Shriver provided the Subcommittee with a list of improvements that inclusive education brings: “Pedagogy is improved. Access to building is improved. Instructional outcomes improve. Climate improves. Behaviour problems go down. Mental health

38 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1130 (Mónica Cortés, Inclusion International).

39 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1145 (Susan Liautaud, Vice-Chair, Global Partnership for Education).

40 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1120 (Susan Mclsaac, President and CEO, Right To Play International).

41 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1205 (Robert Jenkins, Global Director, Education and Adolescent Development, UNICEF).

42 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1120 (Jennifer Rigg, Executive Director, Global Campaign for Education-United States).

43 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1150 (Tracey Evans, Director Global Partnerships, Right To Play International).

44 Ibid.

45 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1150 (Julia McGeown, Director, Inclusive Education, Humanity and Inclusion).

46 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1210 (Robert Jenkins, Global Director, Education and Adolescent Development, UNICEF).

problems are reduced.”⁴⁷ Where multiple challenges to accessing education are present, such as in humanitarian settings, Robert Jenkins indicated that considering the needs of all children “then breaks open the entire learning process, meeting children where they are in their learning journeys, where they are in their physical journeys, where they are with their psychosocial needs, etc.”⁴⁸

Paola Jelonche shared the experience of the Argentinian organization, Fundación Visibilia, which designs accessible communication resources for people with intellectual disabilities. The organization observed that their easy-to-read materials not only helped students with disabilities, but also students with learning difficulties, those learning in a language other than their mother tongue, and those who had dropped out of school in the past.⁴⁹

Robert Jenkins also pointed out that including children with disabilities and other marginalized children in education provides a “huge return on investment” when viewed from an economic perspective, and simply “makes sense from an efficiency and effectiveness point of view.”⁵⁰ Jennifer Rigg made the link between school and economic and community benefits that come after graduation; when children with disabilities are marginalized from school, they are also prevented from accessing these benefits.⁵¹

Lindsay Glassco pointed out that when students with disabilities are excluded from the classroom, they are also prevented from accessing school meals and health campaigns, like vaccines. Thus, excluding children with disabilities from accessing education puts them at higher risk for health problems.⁵² By enabling some children to learn and not others, education providers “are running the risk of exacerbating disparities” and “doing harm.”⁵³ Tim Shriver described non-inclusive education as “robbing all children of the chance to actually have trust, faith and belief in themselves that they’re going to grow up in a world where everybody has a chance, which is what they want.”⁵⁴ He

47 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1145 (Tim Shriver, Chair, Board of Directors, Special Olympics).

48 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1220 (Robert Jenkins, Global Director, Education and Adolescent Development, UNICEF).

49 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1220 (Paola Jelonche, Lawyer, Fundación Visibilia).

50 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1205 (Robert Jenkins, Global Director, Education and Adolescent Development, UNICEF).

51 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1120 (Jennifer Rigg, Executive Director, Global Campaign for Education).

52 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1140 (Lindsay Glassco, President and CEO, Plan International Canada Inc.).

53 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1210 (Robert Jenkins, Global Director, Education and Adolescent Development, UNICEF).

54 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1145 (Tim Shriver, Chair, Board of Directors, Special Olympics).



summarized his position by emphasizing that, “[n]o child who learns and grows excluding other children has an adequate education.”⁵⁵

INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS AND ASPIRATIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

States have both legal obligations and aspirational commitments in relation to the provision of disability-inclusive education. The legal obligations come in the form of domestic laws and international treaties, to which states and states parties are required to adhere. In contrast, the aspirational commitments, which include various international guidelines and calls to action, are not mandatory but serve as important guidelines and objectives for states to aim for in their efforts to provide inclusive education. The following section briefly addresses state obligations under various conventions, followed by a discussion of selected aspirational commitments that were frequently cited during the study.

International Obligations

The right to education is a fundamental principle in international human rights law, first recognized in the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.⁵⁶ Various international instruments have since further codified the right, emphasizing non-discrimination based on gender, disability, ethnic background, or other identity factors.⁵⁷ More recently, the principle of the right to education has evolved to specifically encompass inclusive education, ensuring accessibility for all learners. Mona Paré informed the Subcommittee that Canada has obligations to provide inclusive education under both the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD).⁵⁸ While most conventions specifically address the right to education in the context of people with disabilities, and require states parties to provide equal

55 SDIR, *Evidence*, 21 November 2023, 1140 (Tim Shriver, Chair, Board of Directors, Special Olympics).

56 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 10 December 1948, Article 26.

57 For example, Articles 2 and 13 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, Articles 2 and 28 of the United Nations (UN) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and Article 10 of the UN *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*.

58 SDIR, *Evidence*, 5 December 2023, 1110 (Mona Paré, Full Professor, University of Ottawa).

opportunities to realize this right,⁵⁹ in 2006, the CRPD became the first legally binding instrument to explicitly refer to the concept of inclusive primary and secondary education.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

There are 187 states parties to the CRPD, including the European Union.⁶⁰ Under Article 24, states parties acknowledge the right of persons with disabilities to education, aiming to ensure disability-inclusive education systems at all levels and lifelong learning without discrimination. To realize the right, states parties commit to:

- not excluding persons with disabilities from the general education system;
- providing access to inclusive, quality, and free primary and secondary education in local communities;
- offering reasonable accommodation for individual needs;
- delivering necessary support within the general education system for effective education; and
- implementing individualized support measures for full academic and social inclusion.⁶¹

States parties must also employ and train qualified teachers, including those with disabilities, in sign language and Braille, and train education professionals in disability awareness and supportive educational techniques. Finally, states parties must ensure non-discriminatory access to postsecondary education, vocational training, adult

59 The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* is the most universally endorsed international human rights treaty globally. It is also the first UN convention to specifically acknowledge the rights of persons with disabilities, although it does not explicitly mention inclusive education.

60 SDIR, *Evidence*, 12 December 2023, 1210 (Joseph Nhan-O’Reilly, Executive Director, International Parliamentary Network for Education); See UN Treaty Collection, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Canadian representatives were significantly involved in its initial development and Canada ratified the Convention on 11 March 2010. For more information, see Robert Mason, Laura Munn-Rivard, Julian Walker, *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: An Overview*, Publication No. 2013-09-E, Library of Parliament, revised on 25 November 2021.

61 SDIR, *Evidence*, 5 December 2023, 1250 (Ola Abualghaib, Manager, Technical Secretariat, United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities); See UN, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, Article 24(2)(a-e).



education, and lifelong learning, providing reasonable accommodation to support persons with disabilities.⁶²

Diane Richler reminded the Subcommittee that, in accordance with the CRPD, inclusion through the steps detailed is not just a recommendation but a legal requirement. She highlighted the decisive stance of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which in its General Comment Number 4, interprets Article 24 of the CRPD as a mandate for inclusive education, categorically moving away from the concept of separate schooling for individuals with disabilities.⁶³

Nevertheless, Dorodi Sharma highlighted the gap between the growing recognition of disability-inclusive education rights, particularly following the adoption of the CRPD, and their “dismal” implementation, especially in developing countries.⁶⁴ She noted that her experience in India, and that of her director in Argentina, “speak to the immense challenges that still prevent millions of children with disabilities from even getting to a classroom, let alone getting any kind of education.”⁶⁵ Tim Shriver echoed this sentiment, noting a failure to fully implement international conventions, attributing this to timid policy-making, particularly concerning the needs of people with intellectual disabilities.⁶⁶

Joseph Nhan-O’Reilly, executive director of the International Parliamentary Network for Education, emphasized the important role of parliaments in advancing disability-inclusive education globally, highlighting the necessity of national legislation to effectively implement the CRPD. He emphasized the need for policies and legal frameworks that clearly define the rights and entitlements of individuals with disabilities in education and the obligations of those responsible for upholding these rights. While he acknowledged that laws alone may not change the situation, their absence “impedes progress significantly.”⁶⁷

62 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1250 (Ola Abualghaib, Manager, Technical Secretariat, United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities); UN, [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), Articles 24(4), 24(5).

63 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1200 (Diane Richler, Co-Chair, Catalyst for Inclusive Education, Inclusion International). See UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, [General comment No. 4 on Article 24 - the right to inclusive education](#), 25 November 2016.

64 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1125 (Dorodi Sharma, Senior Advisor, Advocacy and Engagement, International Disability Alliance).

65 Ibid.

66 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1135 (Tim Shriver, Chair, Board of Directors, Special Olympics).

67 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1210 (Joseph Nhan-O’Reilly, Executive Director, International Parliamentary Network for Education).

Joseph Nhan-O’Reilly also noted a scarcity of readily accessible resources, such as examples of good practices and toolkits for disability inclusion. He suggested that it is essential to support parliaments and parliamentarians worldwide in sharing effective practices and in defining what constitutes “good practice.”⁶⁸

While the CRPD’s obligations are primarily domestic in nature, Article 32 of the CRPD emphasizes the importance of international cooperation to support national efforts in implementing the Convention’s objectives. States parties are encouraged to include and support persons with disabilities in international development programs, share information and best practices, collaborate in research and provide technical and economic assistance, including accessible technologies.⁶⁹ In light of this, Mona Paré pointed out that Canada faces dual responsibilities. Firstly, Canada must ensure effective implementation of the Convention within its own borders. Secondly, Canada should assume a significant role in international cooperation. She emphasized that by fulfilling these obligations, Canada has the capacity to act as a key player in the realm of human rights.⁷⁰

As such, the Subcommittee recommends,

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada ensure that the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* are fully implemented into Canada’s international education policies.

Aspirational Targets and Calls to Action

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as part of its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.⁷¹ Among these goals, SDG 4 is specifically dedicated to education. The overarching aim of SDG 4 is to “ensure inclusive

68 SDIR, *Evidence*, 12 December 2023, 1300 (Joseph Nhan-O’Reilly, Executive Director, International Parliamentary Network for Education).

69 UN, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, Article 32.

70 SDIR, *Evidence*, 5 December 2023, 1200 (Mona Paré, Full Professor, University of Ottawa).

71 The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) comprise 17 interlinked global goals, designed to be a “blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.” See UN SDGs, *Goals*.



and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”⁷² While the SDGs are aspirational, they serve as an important guide for international and national efforts towards achieving sustainable development. Since 2016, Canada has been co-chairing the UN Group of Friends of SDG Financing. This group, comprising various countries and entities, is dedicated to developing and promoting ideas that are focused on mobilizing financial resources for development purposes.⁷³

While underscoring the importance of the SDGs in advancing disability-inclusive education, witnesses also emphasized the pressing need for renewed focus in this area. Joseph Nhan-O’Reilly stressed that the success of the SDGs hinges on their universal benefit, aligning with the core SDG principle of leaving no one behind. This principle asserts that the goals are not fully realized unless they benefit everyone. He pointed out that significant work is still needed in achieving educational goals, particularly for learners with disabilities. Mr. Nhan-O’Reilly underscored that supporting the inclusion of people with disabilities in education is not only essential for fulfilling the SDGs but is also crucial for upholding the rights of these children.⁷⁴

Building on Mr. Nhan-O’Reilly’s concerns, Diane Richler shed light on the gaps in the current approach to monitoring and implementing the SDGs, particularly noting that disability-inclusive education is being overlooked. As an example, she pointed out the lack of standard indicators for evaluating SDG 4 in UNESCO’s assessment of the SDGs, UNESCO being a key entity in global education.⁷⁵ She also stated that Canada’s contributions at international fora discussing the SDGs seldom mention education or disability. She voiced concern that that current plans for the follow up to the SDGs do not prioritize education, and that disability is given even less consideration. Consequently, she proposed that the ongoing negotiations in New York present an opportunity for Canada to lead by advocating for the recognition of education as a global priority within the framework of official development assistance, and that that the inclusion of persons with disabilities should not

72 UN SDGs, “[4 Quality Education](#),” *Goals*.

73 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1215 (Diane Richler, Co-Chair, Catalyst for Inclusive Education, Inclusion International). The Group of Friends of SDG Financing, based at the UN in New York and led by Canada and Jamaica, consists of members from more than 50 countries, along with representatives from the UN, the World Bank, and various private sector entities.

74 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1210 (Joseph Nhan-O’Reilly, Executive Director, International Parliamentary Network for Education).

75 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1255 (Diane Richler, Co-Chair, Catalyst for Inclusive Education, Inclusion International).

be viewed as an additional expense, but rather as an opportunity to enhance the quality of education.⁷⁶

Based on these considerations, the Subcommittee recommends,

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada ensure the inclusion of disability and education in all its contributions and initiatives aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Disability Inclusive Education: A Call to Action to Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education

Several witnesses spoke of the *Disability Inclusive Education: A Call to Action to Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education (Call to Action)*⁷⁷ launched by civil society organizations at the UN Transforming Education Summit, held in September 2022.⁷⁸ The Call to Action aims to close the educational gap for children with disabilities and improve education for everyone, contributing to the achievement of SDG 4. Endorsers of the Call to Action, which as of January 2024 included 220 organizations comprising civil society actors, governments, and multilateral institutions,⁷⁹ commit by 2030 to:

1. Progressively increase budgetary allocations for disability-inclusive education towards being at least 5% of education budgets.
2. Set a medium to long-term target to ensure all learners with disabilities are reached in all education programmes, recognising that at least 10% of learners in any country will be learners with disabilities.

76 SDIR, *Evidence*, 21 November 2023, 1215 (Diane Richler, Co-Chair, Catalyst for Inclusive Education, Inclusion International).

77 International Disability Alliance, International Disability and Development Consortium, and Global Campaign for Education, *Disability Inclusive Education: A Call to Action to Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education*, UNESCO Digital Library, 2023. The *Call to Action* is included as an appendix to this report.

78 The United Nations Transforming Education Summit was convened to address the global education crisis, focusing on equity, inclusion, quality, and relevance. With over 2,000 stakeholder participants, the Summit aimed to prioritize education globally and drive collective efforts to overcome the educational setbacks caused by the pandemic. See UN, *Transforming Education Summit* and UN, *Report on the 2022 Transforming Education Summit*, January 2023.

79 SDIR, *Evidence*, 21 November 2023, 1120 (Jennifer Rigg, Executive Director, Global Campaign for Education-United States). As examples of organizations that have endorsed the Call to Action, Jennifer Rigg noted Education Cannot Wait, Inclusion International, Special Olympics, and UNICEF.



3. Ensure all education programmes and grants mainstream disability and include disability-inclusion criteria and targets.⁸⁰

While the Call to Action received endorsement from many witnesses,⁸¹ some pointed out that its success depends on increased engagement and participation from governments.⁸² Several witnesses called for Canada to support the goals in the Call to Action and encouraged Canadian parliamentarians to actively promote them.⁸³ Nafisa Baboo, Director, Inclusive Education, Light for the World, emphasized the importance for governments to include targets in their policy-making. She challenged the Government of Canada to “take that first bold step.”⁸⁴ She added that Canada endorsing the Call to Action would have an impact on the government’s education advisors based in other countries by giving them a better understanding of what disability inclusion is and how they can advise governments they are working with.⁸⁵

Based on what it has heard, the Subcommittee cautions against complacency in perceived progress in disability-inclusive education and highlights the necessity of including all types of disabilities in such initiatives. Diane Richler, who recognized the growing global support for inclusive education, nevertheless noted that mainstream development projects frequently overlook people with intellectual disabilities and “in many cases, promote segregation and other human rights violations.”⁸⁶ She also noted that data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicates that people with intellectual disabilities are excluded from nearly all projects funded through official development assistance in OECD countries. Moreover, she stated, “[w]ithin OECD country investments, 42% of the education programming is not compatible with the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*,”⁸⁷ and advised

80 International Disability Alliance, International Disability and Development Consortium, and Global Campaign for Education, *Disability Inclusive Education: A Call to Action to Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education*, UNESCO Digital Library, 2023.

81 SDIR, *Evidence*, 28 November 2023, 1130 (Michael Messenger, President and CEO, World Vision Canada); SDIR, *Evidence*, 28 November 2023, 1125 (Susan McIsaac, President and CEO, Right To Play International).

82 SDIR, *Evidence*, 21 November 2023, 1245 (Maha Khochen, Program Specialist, Inclusive Education and Disability Inclusion, Education Cannot Wait).

83 SDIR, *Evidence*, 5 December 2023, 1220 (Dorodi Sharma, Senior Advisor, Advocacy and Engagement, International Disability Alliance); SDIR, *Evidence*, 5 December 2023, 1225 (Nafisa Baboo, Director, Inclusive Education, Light for the World).

84 SDIR, *Evidence*, 5 December 2023, 1225 (Nafisa Baboo, Director, Inclusive Education, Light for the World).

85 SDIR, *Evidence*, 5 December 2023, 1245 (Nafisa Baboo, Director, Inclusive Education, Light for the World).

86 SDIR, *Evidence*, 21 November 2023, 1130 (Diane Richler, Co-Chair, Catalyst for Inclusive Education, Inclusion International).

87 Ibid.

that Global Affairs Canada conduct a comprehensive review of its international inclusive education activities to ensure they are fully aligned with principles of inclusive education.⁸⁸

For these reasons, the Subcommittee recommends,

Recommendation 4

That Global Affairs Canada conduct a comprehensive ongoing review of its international education activities, including bilateral investments, involvement in multilateral institutions, and the work of its staff and missions, to ensure alignment with inclusive education principles, including the Universal Design for Learning Framework.

Recommendation 5

That the Government of Canada endorse and actively promote the *Disability Inclusive Education: A Call to Action to Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education* and commit to achieving its objectives.

BEST PRACTICES IN DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Design

Witnesses approached the idea of designing disability-inclusive education from a few different perspectives. Diane Richler cautioned against focusing too much on one particular group or disability, explaining that when there is emphasis placed on one group, barriers are created for others – as has happened in the past for students with intellectual disabilities. Instead, she advises considering all elements required in a school and education system to ensure no one is left out.⁸⁹ Robert Jenkins shared his experience at UNICEF, explaining that national governments and all other stakeholders seeking to improve a country’s education system should perform a prioritization exercise, putting inclusive education “at the heart of that transformation” and taking care to build capacity for inclusive education at every level, from the ministry of education down to individual teachers.⁹⁰ Similarly, Julia McGeown stated that “the best way of including disability-inclusive education is literally at all levels, embedding it

88 Ibid.

89 SDIR, *Evidence*, 21 November 2023, 1150 (Diane Richler, Co-Chair, Catalyst for Inclusive Education, Inclusion International).

90 SDIR, *Evidence*, 21 November 2023, 1140 (Robert Jenkins, Global Director, Education and Adolescent Development, UNICEF).



everywhere. Until you do that, it's not going to be true disability inclusion."⁹¹ She also addressed the expense of making schools physically accessible – retrofitting a building is always more expensive than planning to build an inclusive school building that will be accessible to all students with various disabilities.⁹² Ms. McGeown also warned against the potential for “disability-washing” by labelling a program or system as ‘disability-inclusive’ while not ensuring inclusion is properly funded and fully implemented throughout a program or system.⁹³ Tiyahna Ridley-Padmore of World Vision Canada echoed this last point, stating that disability inclusion and reaching the most marginalized students cannot be considered an “add-on” but rather must be intentionally built into systems and the work that sustains them.⁹⁴

Universal Design for Learning

When considering how best to design disability-inclusive education at the school and classroom level, witnesses supported the application of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a framework created to help tailor and improve teaching and learning for all people.⁹⁵ Nafisa Baboo explained that the UDL’s focus on offering multiple ways of engaging learners and expressing learning can be used even with large numbers of students and in school systems with rigid curriculums. She highlighted that students with disabilities “really thrive when lessons follow those UDL principles and when their disability accommodations are met.”⁹⁶ Paola Jelonche emphasized the importance and effectiveness of “easy-to-read and easy-to-understand materials as a universal design for learning to promote inclusive education,” and reminded the Subcommittee that inclusive education “requires diversity in the classroom, and diversity benefits from universal design.”⁹⁷

91 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1150 (Julia McGeown, Director, Inclusive Education, Humanity and Inclusion).

92 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1215 (Julia McGeown, Director, Inclusive Education, Humanity and Inclusion).

93 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1150 (Julia McGeown, Director, Inclusive Education, Humanity and Inclusion).

94 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1225 (Tiyahna Ridley-Padmore, Policy Advisor, World Vision Canada).

95 For more information on Universal Design for Learning, see Centre for Applied Special Technology, [The UDL Guidelines](#), 2018.

96 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1120 (Nafisa Baboo, Director, Inclusive Education, Light for the World).

97 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1220 (Paola Jelonche, Lawyer, Fundación Visibilia).

Twin-track Approach

Witnesses agreed that true disability-inclusive education must adopt what is known as the ‘twin-track approach.’ Anne Delorme of Humanity and Inclusion defined this as combining mainstreaming – when learners with disabilities are fully included in regular education systems and national education plans – with specific and targeted support for students based on their individual needs. She noted that Humanity and Inclusion “strongly believe[s] that every learner can thrive in any education system” taking the twin-track approach.⁹⁸ Ms. Delorme was careful to emphasize that “mainstreaming is only half the solution” and must be accompanied by assistive devices, personal support, accessible learning tools, and other appropriate supports.⁹⁹ A written submission from Humanity and Inclusion further underlined the importance of the twin-track approach, adding that it transforms education systems towards the inclusion of all learners, in compliance with the CRPD.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, the twin-track approach is recommended as one of the methods education programs can use to achieve the commitments in the Call to Action.¹⁰¹ Dorodi Sharma confirmed that the twin-track approach requires investment in specialized services for students with disabilities, to enable these learners an equal access to education. She called on Canada to adopt and fund a twin-track approach in its international development assistance programs.¹⁰²

Therefore, the Subcommittee recommends,

Recommendation 6

That Global Affairs Canada ensure that all education programs it funds use the twin-track approach, promoting the inclusion of all learners, as referenced in the Call to Action, and that it be a strong advocate for this approach globally.

98 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1120 (Jennifer Rigg, Executive Director, Global Campaign for Education).

99 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1115 (Anne Delorme, Executive Director, Humanity and Inclusion Canada).

100 Humanity and Inclusion, [Humanity & Inclusion Canada’s Written Submission on Disability Inclusive Education](#), Brief submitted to the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights (SDIR), 15 December 2023, p. 4.

101 International Disability Alliance, International Disability and Development Consortium, and Global Campaign for Education, [Disability Inclusive Education: A Call to Action to Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education](#), UNESCO Digital Library, 2023, p. 2.

102 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1220 (Dorodi Sharma, Senior Advisor, Advocacy and Engagement, International Disability Alliance).



Early Years Education

Early years or preschool education is an important element of disability-inclusive education. Witnesses discussed how pre-primary education can be a way to identify and include children with disabilities early on, before they “fall through the cracks”¹⁰³ and are no longer tracked or supported, or miss out on early interventions that can help their development and can result in better and longer-term outcomes.¹⁰⁴ Inclusive early years education provides educators and other professionals with opportunities to support children with disabilities in their preparation for school and with the transition to primary education; supports that provide important benefits particularly for children with developmental disabilities, but that are also helpful for all children.¹⁰⁵ Inclusive early years education allows children with disabilities valuable opportunities to be prepared for school and engaged in learning.¹⁰⁶

Early years education is also helpful for promoting disability inclusion in society generally. Julia McGeown described how she has seen “children with and without disabilities merge really well together at that age group... They don’t notice that the child has different needs; they absolutely don’t bat an eyelid.” She explained that preschool groups can then be a model for older groups, where inclusivity and acceptance may pose greater challenges.¹⁰⁷

Collaboration and Community Involvement

The importance of collaboration and community involvement was an important theme for many witnesses. Representatives from Education Cannot Wait emphasized the importance of working with governments, local organizations, and international non-governmental organizations to ensure that work towards disability inclusion is sustainable, cost-effective,

103 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1115 (Naser Faruqui, Program Director, Education and Science, International Development Research Centre).

104 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1155 (Julia McGeown, Director, Inclusive Education, Humanity and Inclusion).

105 Ibid.

106 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1250 (Sarah Moorcroft, Senior Education Advisor, Save the Children Canada).

107 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1155 (Julia McGeown, Director, Inclusive Education, Humanity and Inclusion).

and transparent.¹⁰⁸ Several witnesses described the importance of coordinating between sectors, particularly connecting the work of ministries of education with those of health and social protection.¹⁰⁹ Peter Simms spoke specifically of the importance of linking child protection systems with education and health systems, since “children with disabilities are disproportionately affected by violence.” He also explained that “community-based child protection mechanisms are a central component of the multiple facets of an inclusive education system”¹¹⁰ and cautioned against seeing education as solely a classroom with students and teachers, as child protection systems are part of what allows students with disabilities to attend school properly. Shawna Novak, fellow in the Department of Global Health and Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School, echoed these statements, calling for “interdisciplinary collaborations involving health care, social service and community organizations” so that students with disabilities would be given “holistic support addressing their educational, social and health needs.”¹¹¹ She also spoke of the value of including community members and caregivers in the education process.

Susan McIsaac detailed the importance of community engagement for success in inclusive education programming, explaining that the play-based interventions offered by Right To Play “are most effective, however, when coupled with teacher training and engagement with community leaders and coaches.”¹¹² Anne Delorme of Humanity and Inclusion described the success of two community-based programs. Mobile teachers, who support individual children with disabilities in schools while also guiding and supporting their teachers, were found by Togo school inspectors to contribute to higher school participation and higher school exam success rates by children with disabilities. At Cox’s Bazaar refugee camp, multidisciplinary teams include mobile health units, education professionals, speech therapists, and physiotherapists; these teams promote

108 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1215 (Yasmine Sherif, Executive Director, Education Cannot Wait); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1245 (Maha Khochen, Program Specialist, Inclusive Education and Disability Inclusion, Education Cannot Wait).

109 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1120 (Anne Delorme, Executive Director, Humanity and Inclusion Canada); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1205 (Peter Simms, Senior Education Advisor, Plan International Canada).

110 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1250 (Peter Simms, Senior Education Advisor, Plan International Canada).

111 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1155 (Shawna Novak, Fellow, Department of Global Health and Social Medicine, Harvard Medicine School, as an individual).

112 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1120 (Susan McIsaac, President and CEO, Right To Play International).



early learning at home and in learning centres, and foster community acceptance of disability.¹¹³

Including People with Disabilities in Program Design

Witnesses emphasized the need to engage people with disabilities and organizations of people with disabilities when planning and designing disability-inclusive education programming. Nujeen Mustafa, a young woman with cerebral palsy, stated that “stable and continuous communication with people with disabilities and their representative organizations is crucial to achieving real, true and meaningful inclusion and integration.”¹¹⁴ Eric Rosenthal of Disability Rights International explained that creating links between education and the disability community is only possible when members of that community – children with disabilities, family members and organizations of people with disabilities—are engaged. He further described how “support for family organizations and disability-run organizations is essential” and reminded the Subcommittee that the “UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* recognizes that participation as a fundamental right.”¹¹⁵

Tiyahna Ridley-Padmore gave the example of the Refugee Education Council as a successful model for bringing together people with a particular lived experience “to ensure that nothing is done for them without them.” She also explained that, “especially when we’re talking about the most marginalized, we need to create space for different types of knowledge, and different types of data as well. Knowledge informed by lived experience in this scenario is the most valuable.”¹¹⁶ Her colleague Michael Messenger of World Vision Canada emphasized that “children and youth with disabilities possess invaluable expertise regarding their own experiences and needs, and we need to listen to them.”¹¹⁷ He advised that the international development sector should engage and collaborate with young people who are marginalized, in order to create programming that is relevant to their lived experience and reality.

Peter Simms explained that working with organizations of people with disabilities is key to ensuring that international best practices “are then adapted and developed for the

113 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1115 (Anne Delorme, Executive Director, Humanity and Inclusion Canada).

114 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1150 (Nujeen Mustafa, Disability and Refugee Rights Advocate).

115 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1205 (Eric Rosenthal, Executive Director, Disability Rights International).

116 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1215 (Tiyahna Ridley-Padmore, Policy Advisor, World Vision Canada).

117 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1130 (Michael Messenger, President and CEO, World Vision Canada).

specifics and the nuances of what works”¹¹⁸ in an individual, local community, as such organizations are usually community-based. He encouraged engaging with organizations of people with disabilities and ensuring they are properly funded.

Sport and Play

Sport and play have important benefits when included in the design of disability-inclusive education programming. Tim Shriver explained that when children with and without disabilities are given opportunities to play together, they learn how to interact together; their language and relationship skills improve, as does their emotional self-regulation. Sport can thus function as a social inclusion tool as well as a teaching and learning tool.¹¹⁹ Play allows children to learn “life skills in a way that makes sense to them” and fosters further classroom engagement for all learners, according to Tracey Evans.¹²⁰ Susan Mclsaac described how play can also “promote inclusion and dismantle stigma.”¹²¹

In addition to social skills, sport and play foster cognitive and neurological development through the use of gross and fine motor skills; this development can take place throughout the life cycle, not only in children, and can apply to all people regardless of disability status.¹²² Children’s academic performance can also be improved through game-based learning; a game-based program for refugee populations developed by the International Research Development Centre (IRDC) contributed to a 50% improvement in math scores for participants, and allowed for girls’ performance to match that of boys in five months. IRDC also found that game-based programming helped get refugee children participating in school again.¹²³

Culturally Informed Approaches

Several witnesses emphasized the importance of culturally informed approaches to inclusive education. Nafisa Baboo described how this goal can be achieved by co-

118 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1250 (Peter Simms, Senior Education Advisor, Plan International Canada).

119 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1220, 1225 (Tim Shriver, Chair, Board of Directors, Special Olympics).

120 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1150 (Tracey Evans, Director, Global Partnerships, Right To Play International).

121 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1120 (Susan Mclsaac, President and CEO, Right To Play International).

122 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1225 (Tim Shriver, Chair, Board of Directors, Special Olympics).

123 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1210 (Naser Faruqi, Program Director, Education and Science, International Development Research Centre).



designing programming with experts in each country to ensure that programming is culturally sensitive and avoids creating further barriers; this approach also ensures ownership and transfer of skills between NGOs and those running education programs.¹²⁴ Keeping local contexts in mind will “basically define what kind of programming you need to do” as well as affect cost structures,¹²⁵ and need not be a major challenge; as Naser Faruqi of IDRC explained, adapting to local and regional cultural differences is “more a matter of how we work.”¹²⁶

Julia McGeown raised an important point when considering disability-inclusive education in various cultural settings: programming will not always transfer well from one setting to another, and working with what a particular country has established is better than creating a separate program entirely. She advised that “it’s about meeting the countries where they are... If they have something in place, work with it,”¹²⁷ and encouraged ensuring that whatever education system is in place is made more disability-inclusive.

Access to Assistive Technology

Assistive and educational technologies can offer many opportunities to learners with disabilities. Nafisa Baboo stated:

Access to appropriate quality technologies can mean the difference between enabling and denying education for a child, enabling and denying participation in the workforce for a young adult, or enabling and denying self-reliance and social inclusion.¹²⁸

She also called technology “a real lifeline for millions of learners with disabilities,”¹²⁹ describing how barriers like inaccessible textbooks can be eliminated by technology and universal design. Anne Delorme described a 3D printing project in Uganda that is being developed by Humanity and Inclusion; the project creates prostheses and orthotics at community-based hospitals for children with physical disabilities. The 3D printing technology allows for affordable prosthetics to be created for constantly growing

124 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1300 (Nafisa Baboo, Director, Inclusive Education, Light for the World).

125 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1245 (Mohammed Emrul Hasan, Chief Programs Officer, CARE Canada).

126 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1250 (Naser Faruqi, Program Director, Education and Science, International Development Research Centre).

127 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1250 (Julia McGeown, Director, Inclusive Education, Humanity and Inclusion).

128 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1120 (Nafisa Baboo, Director, Inclusive Education, Light for the World).

129 Ibid.

children, which then gives them physical access to school and play. She called the project “an innovation that’s transformative for these children.”¹³⁰

However, witnesses also pointed out the limitations and drawbacks of technology in educational settings. Care must be taken to ensure that technology is inclusive for all learners, and that teachers know how to use and support the technology. Artificial intelligence has promising potential, but is not always available in local languages, or in all countries.¹³¹ Assistive technology is not always available or affordable; Dorodi Sharma pointed out that “only 5% to 15% of those who need assistive technology actually have it,”¹³² and that this is yet another factor preventing children with disabilities from going to school. Shawna Novak advised that “technology must be levered judiciously to bridge the educational divide... ensuring that technology serves as an enabler and not a barrier to learning.”¹³³

Using Improved Data Collection to Inform Policy

The importance of data collection to well-designed interventions and policies was raised by several witnesses. However, they noted organizations must go beyond data collection and ensure that data is analyzed, understood, and applied to program design for it to be useful. Data must also capture different experiences of disability so they may be reflected in strategies and programming and should be shared with communities to enable participatory program design.¹³⁴

In highlighting the importance of collecting data on the effectiveness of programming and policies, Mohammed Emrul Hasan mentioned the importance of collecting data not only to shape programs and strategies for disability-inclusive education, but also to “measure the progress and show the progress over the time of the commitment” of a program and its funding.¹³⁵ Nafisa Baboo added, “I think it’s also really important to

130 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1230 (Anne Delorme, Executive Director, Humanity and Inclusion Canada).

131 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1115 (Naser Faruqui, Program Director, Education and Science, International Development Research Centre).

132 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1240 (Dorodi Sharma, Senior Advisor, Advocacy and Engagement, International Disability Alliance).

133 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1155 (Shawna Novak, Fellow, Department of Global Health and Social Medicine, Harvard Medicine School, as an individual).

134 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1235 (Mohammed Emrul Hasan, Chief Programs Officer, CARE Canada); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1245 (Nafisa Baboo, Director, Inclusive Education, Light for the World).

135 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1220 (Mohammed Emrul Hasan, Chief Programs Officer, CARE Canada).



create data on what works and what’s not working in terms of practices and approaches to support students with disabilities,”¹³⁶ and Naser Faruqi highlighted “the critical importance of building evidence on what works to ensure that no one is left behind in education,” further explaining that “without clear data on disabilities, including baselines and gaps, we are unable to respond to all children’s needs.”¹³⁷

One data tool was specifically cited as being particularly helpful for disability-inclusive education. The Washington Group’s Child Functioning Model is a group of question sets that provides information on “difficulties that children are experiencing in certain domains of functioning, whether that’s seeing, hearing, mobility, fine motor skills, learning, playing, controlling emotions, anxiety or depression.”¹³⁸ This information can then be used in two ways: to differentiate children with disability from those without; and to identify “specific areas of functional difficulty so that any programs or efforts can be targeted to the particular type of difficulty.”¹³⁹ According to Julie Weeks of the Washington Group, “interest in the Child Functioning Module – Teacher Version [of the Washington Group question sets] has been great. Participating in evaluations of the tool are USAID, Save the Children, Humanity & Inclusion, Sightsavers, Education Cannot Wait and others.”¹⁴⁰ Ms. Weeks confirmed that if the Child Functioning Model were to be adopted worldwide, more children could be identified as having a disability, and then would have a better chance of being properly included in school systems. She further explained that harmonization of data, achieved by collecting data in the same way consistently, “is absolutely critical, whether it’s administrative data sources, programs or our usual national data collections.”¹⁴¹

Witnesses told the Subcommittee that improving data collection will allow for improved programming and interventions in disability-inclusive education. Julie Weeks of the Washington Group explained that “general household surveys and censuses often inadequately identify children with disabilities, especially those with developmental and

136 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1245 (Nafisa Baboo, Director, Inclusive Education, Light for the World).

137 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1115 (Naser Faruqi, Program Director, Education and Science, International Development Research Centre).

138 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1240 (Julie Weeks, Lead Health Statistician, The Washington Group on Disability Statistics).

139 Ibid.

140 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1215 (Julie Weeks, Lead Health Statistician, The Washington Group on Disability Statistics).

141 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1240 (Julie Weeks, Lead Health Statistician, The Washington Group on Disability Statistics).

intellectual disabilities,”¹⁴² thus making the case for specialized data collection. A root cause of inadequate interventions, Dorodi Sharma said, was a lack of reliable and comparable data on disability, as this information is the basis of policy design.¹⁴³ Witnesses also underlined the importance of collecting data disaggregated by disability, as well as sex, age, and other intersectional variables.¹⁴⁴

The Subcommittee heard that data needs to be collected at two levels. It needs to come at the national level, from national governments using Washington Group questions and from national censuses; it also needs to be collected at the school system level, including from special education schools. This school-level data would show what interventions are successful and what gaps are still present in terms of disability inclusion. However, this school-level data is often lacking in many countries, especially where special schools are concerned, leading Ola Abualghaib to call it “the biggest failure of the system.”¹⁴⁵

Naser Faruqi suggested that obstacles to data collection might include a lack of visibility for data projects, prioritizing funding to other areas, and a need for more efficient and integrated systems. However, he pointed out that a benefit of technological innovation is more affordable and effective data collection systems, which can decrease the cost of data collection and help ensure organizations get the information they need to improve their education programming.¹⁴⁶

Michael Messenger told the Subcommittee, “[w]hat gets measured, gets managed” and urged Canada “to set medium-term and long-term targets [for] improving the collection, monitoring and use of disaggregated social identity data in strategies to ensure that all children and young people can access quality, equitable and inclusive education and lifelong learning.”¹⁴⁷

As such, the Subcommittee recommends,

142 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1215 (Julie Weeks, Lead Health Statistician, The Washington Group on Disability Statistics).

143 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1220 (Dorodi Sharma, Senior Advisor, Advocacy and Engagement, International Disability Alliance).

144 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1105 (Mohammed Emrul Hasan, Chief Programs Officer, CARE Canada).

145 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1230 (Ola Abualghaib, Manager, Technical Secretariat, United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

146 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1230 (Naser Faruqi, Program Director, Education and Science, International Development Research Centre).

147 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1135 (Michael Messenger, President and CEO, World Vision Canada).



Recommendation 7

That Global Affairs Canada ensure that its development assistance in education includes the collection and use of disaggregated data, along with setting specific targets to reach learners with disabilities through the programs it supports.

BARRIERS TO DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Stigma and Attitudinal Barriers

The Subcommittee heard that stigma and attitudinal barriers are a major factor preventing disability-inclusive education. Susan Mclsaac estimated that “as many as 33 million children with disabilities are out of school, largely due to stigma and fear” in lower and middle-income countries.¹⁴⁸

This stigma occurs both within families and at a systemic level, witnesses told the Subcommittee. Family and other adults who know children with disabilities “might consider them unable to learn, even with accommodations and supports, and they may be kept out of school,” Jennifer Rigg stated.¹⁴⁹ Anne Delorme added that in some countries, “children with disabilities are often shunned by community members or hidden by families because of gross misconceptions and fears.”¹⁵⁰ Michael Messenger described his conversation with a Zambian disability activist, who challenged him to explain how he planned to reach and include children with developmental and intellectual disabilities, since they were “hidden away from [World Vision’s] community workers” because of the level of stigma these children faced in their community.¹⁵¹ Some families hide children with disabilities because they are “not really aware that their kids have the right to go to school,”¹⁵² according to Nafisa Baboo, who added that it is not uncommon for her organization to see people with disabilities attending school for the first time at the age of 19 or 20, as the information that they could attend school earlier simply did not reach them or their families.

148 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1120 (Susan Mclsaac, President and CEO, Right To Play International).

149 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1120 (Jennifer Rigg, Executive Director, Global Campaign for Education).

150 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1115 (Anne Delorme, Executive Director, Humanity and Inclusion Canada).

151 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1130 (Michael Messenger, President and CEO, World Vision Canada).

152 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1140 (Nafisa Baboo, Director, Inclusive Education, Light for the World).

Nafisa Baboo also explained that when families manage to overcome stigma and send their children to school, many “schools are not very accepting of children who are different,”¹⁵³ and will reject children based on their additional needs for supports. Danny Glenwright of Save the Children Canada, explained that people with disabilities are “seen as a curse, misfortune, and cause of shame for their families and their communities. Teachers see them as a nuisance. Ministries see them as too expensive, with little return.”¹⁵⁴ Nujeen Mustafa spoke of her own experience as a person with disabilities:

Disability in general, and psychosocial disabilities especially, are surrounded by stigma. This was—and still sadly is—true for my country of Syria. People with disabilities were not seen as a group worth investing in, and this outlook resulted in their being excluded from education.¹⁵⁵

Witnesses were careful to emphasize that stigma is based in fear and is up to people without disabilities to solve. Tim Shriver spoke plainly: “Let me be very clear. The problem is not the disability. The problem is not intellectual and developmental disability. The problem is fear, neglect, indifference, and oversight.”¹⁵⁶ Nidhi Bansal of CARE Canada supported this position, saying “...the problem is with us. The problem is not with the people who are living with disability. It is our fear, our lack of belief in their ability to contribute and to be productive individuals that is stopping us.”¹⁵⁷ She and other witnesses described the need for organizations working on inclusive education to promote and create more community involvement as a means of combatting stigma.¹⁵⁸

Attitudinal Barriers for Girls

Girls with disabilities are less likely to complete education than boys with disabilities, if they go to school at all.¹⁵⁹ Even for those in school, girls with a disability are 10% less

153 Ibid.

154 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1125 (Danny Glenwright, President and CEO, Save the Children Canada).

155 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1150 (Nujeen Mustafa, Disability and Refugee Rights Advocate).

156 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1135 (Tim Shriver, Chair, Board of Directors, Special Olympics).

157 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1240 (Nidhi Bansal, Director, Program Quality and Impact, CARE Canada).

158 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1140 (Robert Jenkins, Global Director, Education and Adolescent Development, UNICEF); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1230 (Maha Khochen, Program Specialist Inclusive Education and Disability Inclusion, Education Cannot Wait).

159 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1105 (Mohammed Emrul Hasan, Chief Programs Officer, CARE Canada); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1150 (Lindsay Glassco, President and CEO, Plan International Canada Inc.).



likely to finish primary school than boys with a disability.¹⁶⁰ CARE Canada has found that while boys are more likely to experience a disability, girls are more disadvantaged by disability than their male peers; this situation is due to the intersection of gender and disability discrimination.¹⁶¹

Stigma, fear, and gender norms all contribute to families choosing not to provide education for their daughters. Lack of education then exposes girls to a greater risk of gender-based violence and early and forced marriage; girls with disabilities are especially vulnerable to violence generally.¹⁶² Mohammed Emrul Hasan told the Subcommittee that, “in particular, adolescent girls with intellectual impairment are at a higher risk of experiencing sexual violence.”¹⁶³ Furthermore, there are greater consequences of sexual and gender-based violence for women and girls with disabilities. If victimized, they face “communication and cultural barriers, due to stigma, in reporting incidents and accessing referral services where they do exist” and will likely experience “significant ramifications related to mental health, motivation and access to school,” Lindsay Glassco stated.¹⁶⁴

Therefore, the Subcommittee recommends,

Recommendation 8

That Global Affairs Canada ensure that all education programming it funds include approaches to combatting stigma against people with disabilities, particularly girls and women.

Cost of Inclusive Education

A further barrier to disability-inclusive education is the cost of providing equitable and accessible services. Dorodi Sharma described the experiences of families in northeastern India, where if they manage to break through other barriers, schools still ask that their

160 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1140 (Lindsay Glassco and CEO, President, Plan International Canada Inc.).

161 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1105 (Mohammed Emrul Hasan, Chief Programs Officer, CARE Canada).

162 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1140 (Lindsay Glassco, President and CEO, Plan International Canada Inc.); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1115 (Anne Delorme, Executive Director, Humanity and Inclusion Canada).

163 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1105 (Mohammed Emrul Hasan, Chief Programs Officer, CARE Canada).

164 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1150 (Lindsay Glassco, President and CEO, Plan International Canada Inc.).

children with disabilities not attend or require families to cover the additional costs of accessibility. As a result,

[f]amilies have lost income. Families have had to build ramps. Families have had to beg and plead to make sure the classrooms are never changed for children with disabilities. I'm not even talking about those with intellectual and development disabilities here, because children with those disabilities are not even accorded that opportunity.¹⁶⁵

Additional costs related to disability-inclusive education include those related to accessible transportation, personal support, assistive technology, adapted learning materials, and rehabilitation. Families are often required to cover these costs in many other regions of the world, which creates yet another barrier that prevents children with disabilities, especially those with high-support needs, from accessing education.¹⁶⁶

Mona Paré described disability-inclusive education as “an excellent philosophy if it can be implemented. The issue is the lack of services and resources to make it work.”¹⁶⁷ She gave the example of some students with intellectual disabilities who managed to be placed in regular classes, yet due to lack of resources for support services, spent their time in school hallways, or were assigned to do photocopying. She emphasized that these students “don’t receive the same quality of education, even though they’re in a regular class. This education is called ‘inclusive,’ but it isn’t.”¹⁶⁸ Ms. Paré explained that applying the principle of the child’s best interests is important when considering education for children with disabilities, and that from this perspective, if there is a lack of proper funding for supports in regular schools and classrooms, “it’s easy to say that segregated education serves the child’s best interests.”¹⁶⁹ However, she concluded “if the resources were available to meet the educational needs of all children, it would become clear that inclusion in the regular classroom serves the child’s best interests.”¹⁷⁰

165 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1140 (Dorodi Sharma, Senior Advisor, Advocacy and Engagement, International Disability Alliance).

166 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1125. (Dorodi Sharma, Senior Advisor, Advocacy and Engagement, International Disability Alliance).

167 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1200 (Mona Paré, Full Professor, University of Ottawa).

168 Ibid.

169 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1110 (Mona Paré, Full Professor, University of Ottawa).

170 Ibid.



Education in Humanitarian Settings

Humanitarian crises can both cause and exacerbate the impact of disabilities. Robert Jenkins of UNICEF described children with disabilities living through humanitarian crises as “exponentially disadvantaged” due to the double challenge of living with disability and crisis.¹⁷¹ Ola Abualghaib explained that after living through conflict, many children end up “with permanent disabilities that will impact their functionality, well-being and access to education.”¹⁷² Other witnesses described the specific impacts of conflict on children, examples of which included war injuries, abduction and ill health for children in northern Uganda, and psychological effects such as mutism and anxiety for children in Gaza. In both cases, the education outcomes for children are significantly and negatively affected.¹⁷³

Measures that are set up to help children with disabilities get back into education during or after a crisis are “critical” as they allow humanitarian workers to provide children with services such as psychosocial and mental health supports.¹⁷⁴ However, even when these measures are provided, families are not always able to access them. Ola Abualghaib gave the example of families fleeing Ukraine, then not being able to access education for their children with disabilities.¹⁷⁵ Nujeen Mustafa spoke of her own experience as a refugee with a disability. Part of her 3,500-mile journey from Syria to Germany included crossing the Mediterranean Sea in a small dinghy; she commented that “you might imagine that the situation would improve once you reached the other side, but this was sadly not the case.” She explained that in her experience, “nobody had thought of people with disabilities when establishing and setting up humanitarian action on the ground, from the lack of accessibility to basic services, such as restrooms, to the lack of accessibility to education and rehabilitation services.”¹⁷⁶ She did not receive what she labelled “a proper education” until she arrived in Germany at the age of 17. Ms. Mustafa concluded: “I

171 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1235 (Robert Jenkins, Global Director, Education and Adolescent Development, UNICEF).

172 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1145 (Ola Abualghaib, Manager, Technical Secretariat, United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

173 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1105 (Mohammed Emrul Hasan, Chief Programs Officer, CARE Canada); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1205 (Danny Glenwright, President and CEO, Save the Children Canada).

174 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1220 (Robert Jenkins, Global Director, Education and Adolescent Development, UNICEF).

175 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1145 (Ola Abualghaib, Manager, Technical Secretariat, United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

176 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1150 (Nujeen Mustafa, Disability and Refugee Rights Advocate).

always say that people with disabilities are forgotten in times of peace, let alone in times of war, in terms of access to education.”¹⁷⁷

Witnesses made several recommendations to the Subcommittee regarding inclusive education in humanitarian settings, with the common theme that the needs of people with disabilities must always be considered and planned for. Robert Jenkins said that in every crisis response, plans must start with “the children the most affected, the most marginalized, and work backwards. That will benefit all children.”¹⁷⁸ Nujeen Mustafa recommended training courses for humanitarian staff so they are better prepared to integrate people with disabilities in education initiatives in conflict areas.¹⁷⁹ She also highlighted that “meaningful inclusion and integration of people with disabilities in the efforts targeted towards education should be a prerequisite for the funding of humanitarian actors in a crisis.”¹⁸⁰

Therefore, the Subcommittee recommends,

Recommendation 9

That Global Affairs Canada ensure that all humanitarian programming it funds includes accessibility plans in order to allow people with disabilities equitable access to humanitarian services.

Institutional Settings

Perhaps the biggest barrier to disability-inclusive education mentioned by witnesses is the placement of people with disabilities in institutions. Joseph Nhan-O’Reilly said that “the de facto incarceration of disabled people in institutions”¹⁸¹ contributes to making disability invisible and spoke of the power of parliaments shining light on the issue. Lindsay Glassco highlighted that the intersectional challenges faced by girls with disabilities are further “compounded in special education institutions” due to the isolation of these settings, which prevent girls from benefitting from their home support

177 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1255 (Nujeen Mustafa, Disability and Refugee Rights Advocate).

178 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1235 (Robert Jenkins, Global Director, Education and Adolescent Development, UNICEF).

179 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1150 (Nujeen Mustafa, Disability and Refugee Rights Advocate).

180 Ibid.

181 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1210 (Joseph Nhan-O’Reilly, Executive Director, International Parliamentary Network for Education).



networks.¹⁸² Eric Rosenthal noted that unfortunately, international aid has “overlooked this population and... contributed to the problem by investing international resources” into institutional settings, despite the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities clearly stating “that inclusive education cannot happen in an institutional context, and that institutions both large and small, including what are called group homes, are essentially institutions.”¹⁸³

Eric Rosenthal stated that such institutions not only prevent inclusive education, but also cause disability, amongst other harms. He told the Subcommittee, “[w]hat we know is that institutional segregation creates impairment and leads to disability of all children, essentially. We are generating more and more impairment by placing children in institutions.”¹⁸⁴ He described his experience of visiting institutions in over three dozen countries, saying that universally, “these facilities are dangerous, and within them, not only do children generally not go to school at all; they receive essentially no education.”¹⁸⁵ He further emphasized that even if institutions did provide education, any current or future benefit is greatly undermined by “the dangers, the human rights violations, the emotional impact, the cognitive neglect and the impairments caused by the disability” within the institutional setting.¹⁸⁶ Creating inclusive societies for children with disabilities allows them to avoid segregation, while also protecting all children from the “forms of abuse we see in institutions.”¹⁸⁷ Mr. Rosenthal called for global inclusive education to address the needs of children in institutions, and that targeted efforts be made to return children to their families, so they may be fully included in society and obtain an education.¹⁸⁸

182 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1150 (Lindsay Glassco, President and CEO, Plan International Canada Inc.).

183 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1205 (Eric Rosenthal, Executive Director, Disability Rights International).

184 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1240 (Eric Rosenthal, Executive Director, Disability Rights International).

185 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1205 (Eric Rosenthal, Executive Director, Disability Rights International).

186 Ibid.

187 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1240 (Eric Rosenthal, Executive Director, Disability Rights International).

188 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 12 December 2023, 1205 (Eric Rosenthal, Executive Director, Disability Rights International).

Impact of Climate Change

Five different witnesses identified climate change as a barrier to disability-inclusive education.¹⁸⁹ Anne Delorme provided the Subcommittee with an effective visual of how students with physical disabilities can be affected: “[I]f you think about the pathways to school, we’re not talking about a nice, paved sidewalk; we’re talking about rocky roads that get washed out because of climate change and flooding.”¹⁹⁰ Ola Abualghaib explained that climate disasters damage schools and other education infrastructure, disrupting access to education; she stated that if “transformative change” is to be achieved, connections between climate action and education must be built. She also emphasized that people with disabilities “are usually impacted by climate change and the mitigation measures designed to minimize the impacts, so their rights must be prioritized within that space as well.”¹⁹¹

IMPROVING DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

While the sections above have addressed certain measures to enhance access to, and the quality of, disability-inclusive education, the following sections will focus on key initiatives that can be implemented to ensure the right to quality education for all learners. A common theme among all witnesses was the need for adequate funding. Additionally, witnesses brought attention to more specific concerns, including the necessity for teacher training, enhanced access to inclusive education for francophone students, and the need for more comprehensive and standardized data collection.

189 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1105 (Mohammed Emrul Hasan, Chief Programs Officer, CARE Canada); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1125 (Danny Glenwright, President and CEO, Save the Children Canada); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1120 (Nafisa Baboo, Director, Inclusive Education, Light for the World); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1240 (Anne Delorme, Executive Director, Humanity and Inclusion Canada); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1130 (Ola Abualghaib, Manager, Technical Secretariat, United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

190 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1240 (Anne Delorme, Executive Director, Humanity and Inclusion Canada).

191 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1130 (Ola Abualghaib, Manager, Technical Secretariat, United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).



Providing Adequate Funding

Witnesses characterized the process of adopting disability-inclusive education as gradual and ongoing, highlighting the importance of each advance and investment in the field.¹⁹² However, despite the increase in acceptance of disability rights since the CRPD was adopted in 2006, there has been a lack of corresponding financial support.¹⁹³ Insufficient funding prevents countries from meeting their obligations, impedes the realization of rights, and risks reversing existing progress. In Ola Abualghaib's words, "[s]ustained investment is required to achieve lasting change."¹⁹⁴ The following therefore addresses what witnesses told the Subcommittee about funding shortfalls and how strategic increases in funding can contribute to better disability-inclusive education.

While the cost of disability-inclusive education as a barrier was noted above, witnesses informed the Subcommittee that contributions towards inclusive education from donor countries for education has decreased of late.¹⁹⁵ Ola Abualghaib noted that this decrease reflects a broader pattern of persistent under-investment in disability and development. She referenced the OECD's Development Assistance Committee markers, noting that "90% of development aid does not consider persons with disabilities, and zero to 27% have disabilities as their main focus."¹⁹⁶ Anne Delorme, acknowledging her organization's difficult budget situation, spoke of a global pattern where programs for persons with disabilities, have been the first to face cuts due to their higher costs. She remarked, "[t]he most vulnerable individuals are exposed to risk, and they're the first ones to lose out when budget cuts are made. It's always the case."¹⁹⁷ Exacerbating the situation, these funding shortages are occurring while needs are growing. Tiyahna Ridley-Padmores of World Vision Canada highlighted the current global context of escalating conflicts and needs, coupled with constraints on available funding. She

192 See SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1105 (Mohammed Emrul Hasan, Chief Programs Officer, CARE Canada), SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December, 1135 (Ola Abualghaib, Manager, Technical Secretariat, United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

193 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December, 1135 (Ola Abualghaib, Manager, Technical Secretariat, United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

194 Ibid.

195 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1125 (Danny Glenwright, President and CEO, Save the Children Canada); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December, 1135 (Ola Abualghaib, Manager, Technical Secretariat, United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

196 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December, 1130 (Ola Abualghaib, Manager, Technical Secretariat, United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

197 Ibid.

pointed out that new global challenges require funding to cover both humanitarian and developmental aspects.¹⁹⁸

The immediate impact of underfunding includes overcrowded classrooms, which disproportionately impacts children with disabilities.¹⁹⁹ Yet, as described by Danny Glenwright, the repercussions extend beyond classroom environments unsuitable for learning:

Without proper resourcing, there are no effective systems to screen for children with disabilities. There's no support to families to provide rehabilitation and assistive learning devices, or to ensure strengthened and accessible school grounds, latrines and classrooms that support children's learning as well as their emotional, psychosocial and physical needs.²⁰⁰

Earlier sections in this report noted that witnesses broadly supported the Call to Action from the UN Transforming Education Summit, advocating for increasing education budgets to ensure at least 5% is allocated for disability-inclusive education; setting medium to long-term objectives to cover all learners with disabilities; and ensuring all education programs and grants include specific disability inclusion criteria and targets. While some witnesses recommended that Canada allocate 5% of its education budget to disability-inclusive education,²⁰¹ Jennifer Rigg stressed that the 5% allocation for disability-inclusive education should be seen as just the starting point, and mentioned that the twin-track approach suggests that the actual contribution should exceed 5% of education budgets.²⁰² She also stressed that achieving the medium- to long-term objectives should not be done in a segregated manner or be limited to special schools, but rather in a way that truly respects and addresses the diversity of disabilities and meets the individual needs of each learner.²⁰³

Several witnesses addressed the third point of the Call to Action and the need to “mainstream disability-inclusive criteria and targets” into all education programs and

198 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1200 (Tiyahna Ridley-Padmore, Policy Advisor, World Vision Canada).

199 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1125 (Danny Glenwright, President and CEO, Save the Children Canada).

200 Ibid.

201 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1135 (Michael Messenger, President and CEO, World Vision Canada); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1125 (Dorodi Sharma, Senior Advisor, Advocacy and Engagement, International Disability Alliance).

202 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1225 (Jennifer Rigg, Executive Director, Global Campaign for Education-United States).

203 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1200 (Jennifer Rigg, Executive Director, Global Campaign for Education-United States).



grants.²⁰⁴ For example, Ola Abualghaib suggested that there exists a significant opportunity for Canada to lead in defining investment in inclusive development and education. She observed that government investments in disability typically involve specific, limited funding. Ms. Abualghaib noted that, while crucial, these funds do not extend across broader investment areas. She recommended a more comprehensive approach where all investments are mainstreamed to be inclusive, noting that such an approach would be similar to Canada’s strategies on gender inclusivity.²⁰⁵

Witnesses also discussed the effectiveness of tying disability-inclusion criteria and targets to funding. Nafisa Baboo highlighted the importance of treating disability inclusion as a “a core criteria” for access to development assistance for any program, including education and health, and advocated for its formal implementation.²⁰⁶ Furthermore, she pointed out that mandating disability inclusion in all technology-inclusive education programs could profoundly affect the lives of millions of children with disabilities.²⁰⁷

Other witnesses provided further details regarding the types of investments needed to improve disability-inclusive education. From a high-level perspective, Tiyahna Ridley-Padmore emphasized the importance of funding that is “flexible, adaptive and responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable,”²⁰⁸ and commended Canada’s leadership in providing this type of funding. Tracey Evans of Right To Play also noted the importance of “flexible and responsive funding that enables us to pivot and to be agile to the ever-evolving needs of the situation and the children we’re trying to serve.”²⁰⁹

Mohammed Emrul Hasan of CARE Canada underlined the urgent need for investment in “strengthening systems to deliver disability-inclusive and gender-responsive education.”²¹⁰ He called for increased funding for programs creating inclusive learning environments for all types of disabilities, with particular attention to girls and those in conflict-affected areas. He also noted the importance of allocating funds for teacher training, making

204 Ibid.

205 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1205 (Ola Abualghaib, Manager, Technical Secretariat, United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

206 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1205 (Nafisa Baboo, Director, Inclusive Education, Light for the World).

207 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1120 (Nafisa Baboo, Director, Inclusive Education, Light for the World).

208 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1200 (Tiyahna Ridley-Padmore, Policy Advisor, World Vision Canada).

209 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1245 (Tracey Evans, Director, Global Partnerships, Right To Play International).

210 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1105 (Mohammed Emrul Hasan, Chief Programs Officer, CARE Canada).

schools accessible, implementing improved educational policies, and adopting new technologies.²¹¹

Considering what it has heard on funding for disability-inclusive education, the Subcommittee recommends,

Recommendation 10

That the Global Affairs Canada commit to supporting countries to allocate 5% of their education funding specifically for disability-inclusive education.

Recommendation 11

That Global Affairs Canada integrate disability inclusion into all its international assistance, mirroring the approach taken for gender equality in its development policies and programs.

Recommendation 12

That Global Affairs Canada make its international assistance funding for education conditional upon meeting specific disability-inclusion criteria and targets within the recipient’s programming.

Teacher Training

Since teachers are on the front lines of delivering disability-inclusive education, their training is essential to the process. Witnesses were clear that teacher training must be improved if disability-inclusive education is to improve. Mona Paré stated her belief that legislation alone does not ensure effective disability-inclusive education, citing Ontario as an example: the province has legislated disability-inclusive educational settings, but in practice she has observed this is not always the case, as teachers feel they are not properly trained or equipped to meet their increasing obligations.²¹² Naser Faruqui called teacher training “probably the single critical success factor for improving disability-inclusive education.”²¹³

211 Ibid.

212 SDIR, *Evidence*, 5 December 2023, 1215 (Mona Paré, Full Professor, University of Ottawa, as an individual).

213 SDIR, *Evidence*, 5 December 2023, 1215 (Naser Faruqui, Program Director, Education and Science, International Development Research Centre).



Improved teacher training would also better support other improvements to inclusive education. Children may have individual education plans, but these plans can only be successfully implemented if teachers have the training to do so. Providing children with technology is another solution requiring that teachers be educated and supported. As Naser Faruqi pointed out, “[y]ou can’t just give one laptop per child if you don’t teach the teachers how to teach it to the kids.” He highlighted that 62 million teachers worldwide lack sufficient training.²¹⁴

Nafisa Baboo explained that training teachers to be disability-inclusive educators needs to take place in their pre-service education at universities, then be supplemented by professional development throughout their careers. She suggested that some teacher training institutions are “still stuck in old ways of working”²¹⁵ because they still assign disability-inclusive education to a special needs department that expects students to be placed in special classes. Instead, she advocated for investing in a teacher training curriculum that addresses universal design for learning and helps teachers understand that they can teach all children, if they prepare accordingly.²¹⁶ She also suggested a model where specialized teachers could become coaches and provide support for general classroom teachers, particularly in developing countries.²¹⁷

As such, the Subcommittee recommends,

Recommendation 13

That Global Affairs Canada’s investments in global education include adequate funding of inclusive education training as part of teacher training programs and professional development.

Access for Francophone Students

Access to disability-inclusive education for francophone students worldwide is an issue that can also be improved, the Subcommittee heard. Anne Delorme explained that “generally speaking, the percentages of people who lack access to education in francophone communities such as those in West Africa are higher than elsewhere. There

214 Ibid.

215 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1215 (Nafisa Baboo, Director, Inclusive Education, Light for the World).

216 Ibid.

217 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 5 December 2023, 1220 (Nafisa Baboo, Director, Inclusive Education, Light for the World).

are problems in that area.”²¹⁸ Robert Jenkins of UNICEF described the challenge of providing mother tongue instruction in its program countries, since “in some countries you’re dealing with 45 to 50 languages” but added that “it’s absolutely critical for us to continue to strive for younger children, in particular, to learn in their mother tongue around the world.”²¹⁹ Anne Delorme also explained that in Humanity and Inclusion’s work in Africa, the organization has noticed that “organizations advocating for children’s rights, women’s rights and the rights of persons with disabilities aren’t as well funded in francophone countries and are much more isolated.”²²⁰ She further detailed that francophone organizations, particularly women’s organizations, have less funding and are less able to organize than their anglophone counterparts; consequently, they have less influence and impact on their local governments.²²¹

Nevertheless, Julia McGeown had particular praise for the efforts of two West African coalitions, Africa Network Campaign on Education for All and Forum for African Women Educationalists. As these groups support an ‘education for all’ movement, they include children with disabilities in their efforts, and work in francophone countries across the Sahel, including Burkina Faso, Niger, Senegal, and Togo. She noted that “quite a few of those countries are making strong strides on increasing education.”²²²

The Subcommittee heard that Canada has much to offer in the area of disability-inclusive education for francophone students. Diane Richler observed that New Brunswick’s education system “is recognized universally. It has been cited by UNESCO, by the OECD and by others as having one of the most progressive inclusive education systems in the world, and that’s true. It has two separate systems: the English system and the French system. They are both providing supports to learners with disabilities.”²²³ Ms. Richler highlighted that Canada has “some of the best francophone experts in inclusive education” but that unfortunately,

218 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1240 (Anne Delorme, Executive Director, Humanity and Inclusion Canada).

219 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1205 (Robert Jenkins, Global Director, Education and Adolescent Development, UNICEF).

220 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1225 (Anne Delorme, Executive Director, Executive Director, Humanity and Inclusion Canada).

221 Ibid.

222 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 November 2023, 1230 (Julia McGeown, Director, Inclusive Education, Humanity and Inclusion).

223 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 November 2023, 1210 (Diane Richler, Co-Chair, Catalyst for Inclusive Education, Inclusion International).



We're not taking advantage of them. We're not letting them share their expertise, neither the experts from Quebec nor the experts from New Brunswick, with other francophone countries around the world. Unfortunately, there are other French-speaking countries that are more active in that area but are not as progressive in the area of inclusive education. I see that as a real opening for Canada to play a special role in terms of promoting education for French-speaking children with disabilities, based on our expertise in Canada.²²⁴

Ms. Richler further explained that many francophone education professionals “come from countries that have a much more rigid approach to education” in contrast to Canada’s approach; these countries place children into various streams at a very early age and separate children with disabilities from their non-disabled peers, and these approaches form the basis for education professionals’ training. She emphasized that “Canada can change that if we play a role. Right now, we’re not there, so other people are taking the lead and we’re not influencing francophone countries.”²²⁵

Therefore, the Subcommittee recommends,

Recommendation 14

That the Government of Canada leverage Canadian expertise in the area of disability-inclusive education to increase Canada’s influence in training educational professionals in francophone countries abroad.

CONCLUSION

With the global prevalence of individuals living with disabilities, disability-inclusive education is necessary to ensure people with disabilities can fully participate in, and benefit from, the human right to education. Witnesses were clear that including people with disabilities in education benefits all learners, not only those with disabilities. It also provides benefits to society more generally, as people with disabilities who have received a proper education can then contribute more fully to their communities economically and socially. Disability-inclusive education is a legally binding obligation for states parties to the CRPD, but most countries are far from achieving full implementation due to numerous challenges. Overcoming barriers to inclusive education, particularly attitudinal ones, is crucial. The intersectionality of learners must be considered in program design, and adequate funding is essential. Implementing such education requires considerable effort

224 Ibid.

225 SDIR, *Evidence*, 21 November 2023, 1250 (Diane Richler, Co-Chair, Catalyst for Inclusive Education, Inclusion International).

and resources, but these costs are substantially outweighed by the long-term benefits of avoiding segregation and fostering a more inclusive society.

To help achieve fully inclusive education for disabled people internationally, the Subcommittee has made recommendations to the Government of Canada based on witnesses' experiences in the field. These recommendations emphasize necessary improvements, such as enhanced teacher training and data collection, and calls for more funding, specifically for education programming that follows the twin-track approach and that is tied to targets and achievements in furthering the inclusivity of education. As Susan Liataud at Global Partnership for Education reminded the Subcommittee, "inclusivity is still a fight. It's a fight for each of us. Inclusion is available to all of us and is a responsibility for each of us."²²⁶

226 SDIR, *Evidence*, 12 December 2023, 1145 (Susan Liataud, Vice-Chair, Board of Directors, Global Partnership for Education).

APPENDIX A

Transforming Education for Disability Inclusion: A Call to Action for All Children¹

The Transforming Education Summit is an opportunity for world leaders to commit to transforming education so that every child in the world can access quality, equitable, inclusive education and lifelong learning.

This includes the 240 million children with disabilities worldwide who, even before COVID-19 disruptions to education, experienced disparities in learning. Compared to children without disabilities, children with disabilities were 49% more likely to have never attended school and 42% less likely to have foundational reading and numeracy skills ([UNICEF, 2021](#)). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these discrepancies, compounding the learning crisis for the most marginalized learners.

Transforming education to reach all learners, including those with disabilities, is needed to ensure resilient and inclusive education systems. Solutions that support the inclusion of learners with disabilities, who are often those most at risk of neglect, stigma and abuse, are the same approaches that support the well-being and success of all learners.

Inclusive education, by focusing on the well-being and success of students with disabilities, is a means of achieving high-quality education for all children and young people ([UNCRPD, Art24 GC4](#)). Investment in inclusive education systems, with diversity at the core, is key to transforming education.

Recognising the power of inclusive education to transform education, we call on everyone to show that the 240 million children with disabilities matter and commit, by 2030, to:

- 1) Progressively increase budgetary allocations for disability-inclusive education towards being at least 5% of education budgets.

1 Global Campaign for Education, [Transforming Education for Disability Inclusion: A Call to Action for All Children](#), 2022.

- 2) Set a medium to long-term target to ensure all learners with disabilities are reached in all education programmes, recognising that at least 10% of learners in any country will be learners with disabilities.
- 3) Ensure all education programmes and grants mainstream disability and include disability-inclusion criteria and targets.

Achieving these three commitments would not only reverse the education gap for children with disabilities but would transform education systems in a way that will bring benefits to all and will help make greater, and more rapid, progress towards the achievement of SDG4.

How to meet the commitments?

Progressively increase budgetary allocations for disability-inclusive education towards being at least 5% of education budgets.

- Adopt a 'twin-track' approach to education budgeting that promotes system wide transformation to improve the quality of education for all, whilst also providing targeted support to learners with disabilities. This includes increasing the number of specialised teachers and support staff as well as accessible edtech and ensuring early identification and support for learners with disabilities.
- Fund the specific support needs of students with disabilities by budgeting for assistive technology, braille literacy, bilingual sign language education, and captioning, among others. Progressively phase out segregated schools and reinvest in delivering truly inclusive education.
- Invest in teacher training, including in teachers with disabilities, that enables and empowers teachers to create learning environments that accommodate diverse learning styles, such as applying Universal Design for Learning, and accessible assessments.
- Promote participatory budgeting and budget transparency that meaningfully engages learners with disabilities, organisations of and for persons with disabilities, and the teachers, parents, and carers of learners with disabilities.
- Strengthen inter-sectoral alignment of budgets to enable the provision of full support systems that respond to the interconnectedness of health,

social protection, transportation, education (and other related sectors) for children and youth with disabilities and their families, from birth onward.

For practical ideas on how this can be done, review and use the disability and gender responsive budgeting [toolkit](#).

Set a medium to long-term target to ensure all learners with disabilities are reached in all education programmes, recognising that at least 10% of learners in any country will be learners with disabilities.

- Ensure all education data, from early childhood through to tertiary and vocational education and training, is fully disaggregated by gender and disability.
- Integrate the Washington Group Questions on Disability into all education management information systems.
- Support education systems to use the [UNICEF/Washington Group Child Functioning Module](#) to track and reach children with disabilities who are in and out of school.

Ensure all education programmes and grants mainstream disability and include disability-inclusion criteria and targets.

- Develop clear criteria and targets on disability-inclusive education for all education programme grants.
- Ensure specific allocations and guidance on mainstreaming disability are included in all education funding programmes and grants.
- Track all donor investments in education at all levels using the OECD-DAC's policy marker on the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities.
- Actively involve organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) as well as other civil society organisations, in the design, development and implementation of education programmes.

This is an ambitious call to action.

We believe it will truly transform education and CAN ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. Will you join us in making this call a reality for all children?

Sign on to the call to action:

<https://bit.ly/TES-CTA>

APPENDIX B: LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee’s [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Education Cannot Wait Maha Khochen, Program Specialist, Inclusive Education and Disability Inclusion Yasmine Sherif, Executive Director	2023/11/21	39
Global Campaign for Education-United States Jennifer Rigg, Executive Director	2023/11/21	39
Inclusion International Mónica Cortés, Co-Chair, Catalyst for Inclusive Education Diane Richler, Co-Chair, Catalyst for Inclusive Education	2023/11/21	39
Special Olympics Gail Hamamoto, Chief Executive Officer, Canada Timothy Shriver, Chairman, Board of Directions	2023/11/21	39
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Robert Jenkins, Global Director, Education and Adolescent Development	2023/11/21	39
CARE Canada Nidhi Bansal, Director, Program Quality and Impact Mohammed Emrul Hasan, Chief Programs Officer	2023/11/28	40

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Humanity and Inclusion Canada Anne Delorme, Executive Director Julia McGeown, Director, Inclusive Education	2023/11/28	40
Plan International Canada Inc. Lindsay Glassco, President and Chief Executive Officer Peter Simms, Senior Education Advisor	2023/11/28	40
Right To Play International Tracey Evans, Director, Global Partnerships Susan McIsaac, President and Chief Executive Officer	2023/11/28	40
Save the Children Canada Danny Glenwright, President and Chief Executive Officer Sarah Moorcroft, Senior Education Advisor	2023/11/28	40
World Vision Canada Michael Messenger, President and Chief Executive Officer Tiyahna Ridley-Padmore, Policy Advisor	2023/11/28	40
As an individual Mona Paré, Full Professor, University of Ottawa	2023/12/05	41
International Development Research Centre Naser Faruqui, Program Director, Education and Science	2023/12/05	41
International Disability Alliance Dorodi Sharma, Senior Advisor, Advocacy and Engagement Jose Viera, Director, Advocacy	2023/12/05	41
Light for the World Nafisa Baboo, Director Inclusive Education	2023/12/05	41

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Ola Abualghaib, Manager, Technical Secretariat	2023/12/05	41
As an individual Nujeen Mustafa, Disability and Refugee Rights Advocate Shawna Novak, Fellow, Department of Global Health and Social Medicine, Harvard Medical School	2023/12/12	42
Disability Rights International Eric Rosenthal, Executive Director	2023/12/12	42
Global Partnership for Education Susan Liautaud, Vice-Chair	2023/12/12	42
International Parliamentary Network for Education Joseph Nhan-O'Reilly, Executive Director	2023/12/12	42
The Washington Group on Disability Statistics Julie Weeks, Lead Health Statistician	2023/12/12	42
Visibilia Foundation Paola Jelonche, Lawyer	2023/12/12	42
World Bank Group Charlotte McClain-Nhlapo, Global Disability Advisor Ruchi Kulbir Singh, Disability Inclusion Specialist	2023/12/12	42

APPENDIX C: LIST OF BRIEFS

The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

Humanity and Inclusion Canada

International Development Research Centre

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development ([Meeting No. 99](#)) is tabled, and a copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights ([Meetings Nos. 39 to 43, 45 and 46](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Ali Ehsassi
Chair

