

LEAVE NO GIRL WITH DISABILITIES BEHIND

Ensuring efforts to advance gender equality in education are disability-inclusive

Advocacy Brief | April 2021

GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES ARE STILL DENIED THEIR RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Every child has the right to quality education. This is a basic human right, enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). It is also a key component of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), our shared global blueprint to achieving a better, fairer, and more sustainable future for all. All children, regardless of gender, race, class, disability, and displacement status, should have equal opportunities and resources to learn. SDGs 4 and 5 lay out interconnected and specific goals to achieve gender parity and equality in and through education (see Figure 1).

However, nine out of ten children with disabilities in developing countries are excluded from formal education, and the majority of them are girls¹. Multi-country estimates show that girls with disabilities are more likely to be out of school than both boys with disabilities and girls without disabilities². Despite having the same rights to education as their male counterparts and non-disabled peers, girls with disabilities are the most excluded group of learners due to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination on the basis of gender and disability. Globally, the literacy rate for adults with disabilities is 3%, and for women with disabilities, just 1%³.

“School to me is good because I am able to learn and read. I am kindly asking that we are included in learning and not left out, and also that our friends who are unable to go to school are not left behind.”

Adridah, student, Tanzania (Leonard Cheshire’s GECT programme)

10%

Only 10% of children with disabilities in developing countries go to school

(UNICEF)

1%

Just 1% of women worldwide with disabilities are literate

(UNICEF)

Children with disabilities are less likely than their peers without disabilities to complete transitions through all levels of education. For example, enrolment figures by Plan International (2013) found that in Zimbabwe, only 10% of girls with disabilities supported by the organisation were in secondary or tertiary education, whilst 19% of girls without disabilities supported by the organisation were enrolled in secondary or tertiary education⁴. Yet, there is a scarcity of comprehensive data on gender and disability when it comes to trends such as school attendance and completion, the school to work transition, and experience of violence and discrimination in and around schools. The lack of measurement on the intersectionalities of gender and disability, and particularly the experiences of girls with disabilities in education, reflects their exclusion from policy and practice.

- 1 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Factsheet on Persons with Disabilities Global Partnership for Education (2018), Disability and Inclusion: A Stocktake of Education Sector Plans and GPE-Funded Grants
- 2 World Health Organization, World Bank (2011), World Report on Disability
- 3 Rousso, H. (2003), Education for All: A Gender and Disability Perspective
- 4 Plan International (2013), Include us! A study of disability among Plan International’s sponsored children

Figure 1. A global rights-based framework to achieve inclusive education and gender equality for all

<p>Sustainable Development Goal 4</p> <p>Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all.</p>		<p>Sustainable Development Goal 5</p> <p>Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.</p>	
<p>United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)</p> <p>Article 5: Equality and non-discrimination</p> <p>Article 24: Education, equal and inclusive access to lifelong learning</p> <p>General Comment 4 on the right to inclusive education</p>	<p>United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)</p> <p>Article 3: The best interests of the child</p> <p>Article 28: Right to education</p> <p>Article 29: Education should be directed to the development of children to their fullest potential</p>	<p>United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)</p> <p>Article 5: Equality and non-discrimination</p> <p>Article 6: Women with disabilities</p> <p>Article 16: Freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse</p> <p>Article 29: Participation in political and public life</p>	<p>United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)</p> <p>Article 2: Non-discrimination</p> <p>Article 3: The best interests of the child</p> <p>Article 34: Protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse</p>

A lack of intersectionality in education policy, funding and programming

Education policies and programmes often consider disability and gender separately, and therefore do not acknowledge and address the issue of intersectionality. Organisations and institutions committed to advancing gender equality in education often fail to take into account the additional and intersecting challenges faced by girls and women with disabilities, and those committed to disability inclusion in education often fail to apply a gender perspective⁵. At the same time, the systematic issues of discrimination and inequality go beyond the education sector. Girls with disabilities face significant barriers to other basic rights such as healthcare and decent work, and women with

“Education has helped me to realise my rights and dreams, without which I wouldn’t have been what I am today.”

Shruti, youth advocate, Commonwealth Children and Youth Disability Network (CCYDN)

disabilities are often less likely to reap the benefits of a formal education than men with disabilities⁶. A truly intersectional approach requires cross-sectoral collaboration to create a more empowering and supportive environment, enabling girls and boys to benefit equally from education, and ensuring gender equality and inclusivity is fostered in, to and through education.

5 UN Girls’ Education Initiative, Leonard Cheshire (2017) Still Left Behind: Pathways to Inclusion for Girls With Disabilities

6 UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2018) Education and Disability: Analysis of Data from 49 Countries

Women Enabled International (2019) Submission on the Rights of Women with Disabilities in the World of Work to the Working Group on the issue of Discrimination against Women in Law and in Practice

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have disproportionately affected women and girls⁷. Prolonged school closures have threatened to undermine years of progress made towards building gender-responsive and inclusive education systems. Education has been interrupted for many children, but especially girls with disabilities. Gender norms in several countries and cultures can further restrict girls' access to internet and technology, as parents fear online sexual harassment and violence and unsupervised interaction with boys. In addition, evidence from Leonard Cheshire's Disability Data Portal project found that compared to persons without disabilities, fewer persons with disabilities have access to a mobile phone and use the internet. This means many children with disabilities are left unable to access remote learning tools⁸. In particular, girls with disabilities living in villages, rural indigenous communities, households with no or very limited internet, or with a lack of access to digital devices with affordable data are at greater risk of being left behind through the pandemic, due to a lack of development support for remote learning, and inaccessible remote learning materials⁹.

“Education is very important because not having an education is also a form of disability... when you are educated, it gives courage to do whatever you want and whatever you like since you have the power of education.”

Hamidat, student, Nigeria (Sightsavers)

As schools reopen, there are concerns that education budgets will face significant cuts and constraints, with inclusive education - too often seen as an add-on - likely bearing the brunt of this financial pressure. Many girls with disabilities are therefore unlikely to ever return to school, and risk being even further left behind in future education planning. Whilst governments consider maintaining the distance learning tools made available during COVID-19 related school closures, including flexible learning options, it is critical that learning models remain inclusive, particularly for girls with disabilities.

Insufficient and inadequate data collection, evidence and statistics on girls with disabilities and education

Data on education systems has significantly improved in the past twenty years. However, many countries still do not collect, analyse or articulate comprehensive sex, age and disability disaggregated data to track progress towards inclusive education, especially for girls with disabilities. The UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) estimates that countries are reporting slightly less than half (49%) of the data needed to produce the SDG 4 global monitoring indicators¹⁰, and many children with disabilities, especially girls, remain invisible in data collection efforts¹¹.

Comparability of data across countries is also limited. Countries use different measurements, methods and definitions to classify disabilities, and surveys do not always capture the large numbers of children with disabilities who are out of school. For example, De and Singal (2016) indicate that official figures of enrolment of children with disabilities in education in India may not reveal the full picture, since likely low rates of identification of children with disabilities in the country mean that many children with disabilities may be invisible both in the classroom and the community¹². In addition, not all national surveys and censuses use a standard set of questions, with some countries collecting data disaggregated by sex, location, wealth and ethnicity, but not by disability, and vice versa.

7 Women Enabled International (2020) COVID-19 at the Intersection of Gender and Disability

8 Leonard Cheshire (2018), Disability Data Review

9 Commonwealth Children and Youth Disability Network (2020), COVID-19 Children and Young People with Disabilities Global Statement and Recommendations

10 UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2020) UIS Releases More Timely Country-Level Data for SDG 4 on Education

11 Women Enabled International, The Right to Education for Women and Girls with Disabilities

12 De, A., & Singal, N. (2016), The paradox of disability and education in India

The [Washington Group Question Sets \(WGQ\)](#) aim to address the need for robust, comparable disability data. They avoid directly using the term 'disability' or any other language that may lead to biases. Instead, the six questions use neutral language. They also ask about an individual's level of functioning in six areas of daily life (e.g. seeing, hearing). The methodology also acknowledges that disability is an interaction between impairment and environmental barriers. It is rapidly emerging as the preferred data collection methodology by national statistical offices for national data collection efforts on disability.

“When we say that girls with disabilities need to have an equal education, we say this because it helps us to become more independent, be a part of the society, and it helps us to break stereotypes.”

Ana Sikhashvili, university student,
Republic of Georgia

Figure 2. The six questions adapted from The Washington Group Short Set on Functioning (WG-SS)



Do you have difficulty seeing, even if wearing glasses?



Do you have difficulty hearing, even if using a hearing aid?



Do you have difficulty walking or climbing steps?



Do you have difficulty remembering or concentrating?



Do you have difficulty (with self-care such as) washing all over or dressing?



Using your usual language, do you have difficulty communicating, for example understanding or being understood?

Systematic data collection on both gender and disability in the education space is therefore limited, hindering effective educational planning and resource allocation. However, there is enough data to demonstrate that girls with disabilities are one of the most marginalised groups when it comes to education. In Mali, for example, 17.6% of women with disabilities can read and write, compared to 21.4% of women without disabilities and 39.2% of men without disabilities¹³. Barriers to the full participation of girls with disabilities in school stem from a lack of focus on girls with disabilities in funding and policy decisions, as well as in data collection. Comprehensive and coherent data collection and measurement across education systems, alongside increased analysis and use of gender and disability disaggregated data within education planning and programming, will be critical to a greater understanding of the experiences of girls with disabilities in education. However, there is also a need for greater commitment to support research around the barriers to education and opportunities for transformative change for girls with disabilities. This research should include and be led by persons with disabilities, and girls with disabilities in particular¹⁴.

Stigma, discrimination and gender-based violence

Girls with disabilities experience heightened rates of bullying and harassment by their peers based on their disability and gender, and are more likely to experience bullying, violence and abuse both within and outside of school¹⁵. In general, girls with disabilities experience high rates of gender-based violence and may face communication and cultural barriers to reporting incidents and accessing referral services where they exist¹⁶. This can be compounded in special education institutions, where girls with disabilities are often more isolated from their support network¹⁷. This is likely to have significant ramifications for survivors' mental health, motivation and access to school, even if infrastructure and other accessibility requirements are fulfilled¹⁸. In response to the heightened risk of violence, parents may be reluctant to send their daughters to school at all¹⁹. Whilst borne out of safety concerns, this can lead to girls being isolated and excluded from opportunities to learn, gain their independence, and actively participate in society. Yet, these gender-related barriers are rarely addressed by education inclusion policies.

“Growing up with a disability can be challenging enough. But in many cultures, being a girl with a disability is seen as a taboo. My gender puts me at a disadvantage. I felt people looked at me differently, particularly in school.”

Maria Njeri, the Njeri Maria Foundation and Leonard Cheshire Global Youth Advocate, Kenya

13 Humanity & Inclusion, (2021) Education, girl, disability: an equation to solve

14 International Disability Alliance (2021), Global Disability Summit +2 Years. Progress on Implementation of Commitments

15 Rouso, H. (2003), Education for All: A Gender and Disability Perspective

Ortoleva, S., Lewis, H. (2012), Forgotten Sisters – A report on violence against women with Disabilities

16 Sightsavers (2020) Policy brief: Promoting inclusive education for girls and boys with disabilities in West and Central Africa

17 Rouso, H. (2003), Education for All: A Gender and Disability Perspective

Women Enabled International, The Right to Education for Women and Girls with Disabilities

18 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Factsheet on Persons with Disabilities

19 Humanity & Inclusion (2021) Education, girl, disability: an equation to solve

CASE STUDY: MALE MENTORS: REDUCING STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION TOWARDS GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

Leonard Cheshire, Kenya

Building inclusive education systems necessitates engendering positive community attitudes about educational provision for both children with disabilities and girls in particular. As part of Leonard Cheshire's inclusive education model, with funding from the [Girls' Education Challenge \(GEC\)](#), Leonard Cheshire teams in Kenya developed a project where fathers were trained as peer mentors. Working within the existing cultural norms, peer mentors aim to sensitise other men on the rights and needs of girls with disabilities to address patriarchal norms, and reduce stigma in the community.

The Leonard Cheshire teams faced some negative attitudes in the community when implementing their inclusive education programmes. While men were often the head of the household, almost all of those caring for children with disabilities were women. Women made up the majority of people attending meetings and training for the project. This was due to a common belief that disability always came from a mother's genes, and so caring for children with disabilities was often the mother's responsibility. Education was not seen as a priority, and many girls with disabilities were married off while very young.

The project identified a total of 250 male mentors: 5 from each of the 50 support groups. Moi is one of those male mentors. Moi comes from a community with high rates of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and gender inequality. Through Leonard Cheshire, Moi received training to become a male mentor, and Moi reported that being able to train several parents has given him the power to challenge discrimination amongst fellow tribesmen. Moi now campaigns for the education of all girls, with or without a disability. Reflecting on the impact he has had on friends and neighbours, Moi said: "It is the responsibility of those with our knowledge to help our communities. We must also practise what we preach. For with great power comes greater responsibility."

School environments can often reproduce and reinforce the harmful stereotypes and attitudes towards children with disabilities that exist in wider societies. Stigma and discrimination around the abilities and potential of girls with disabilities - held by peers, parents and caregivers, and teachers - contribute to a perception that they are not worthy of an education, leading to low enrolment and completion rates of girls with disabilities in schools. Qualitative and participatory research undertaken by Humanity & Inclusion (HI) in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger highlights how widely-held negative perceptions and attitudes perpetuate girls with disabilities' exclusion from education, with disability often perceived as a "tragedy" or "punishment" inflicted on families, and girls' education seen as an economic loss rather than as a gain²⁰.

"Education is important for everyone, especially young girls with disabilities who should be able to participate in decision-making bodies on the same basis as men"

Mariama Dieng, student, Senegal
(Sightsavers' GEC programme)

20 Humanity & Inclusion (2021) Education, girl, disability: an equation to solve

In education settings, teachers and education support staff may not have the necessary skills or training on the core education techniques, values and competencies to accommodate inclusive learning environments and challenge stereotypes. Education and learning materials themselves can also perpetuate stereotypes regarding traditional female roles, and frequently exclude girls with disabilities completely²¹. This is why Leonard Cheshire developed an inclusive education model in four countries (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia) that builds on the Universal Design model and engages with stakeholders inside and outside the school to become drivers of change towards social and educational inclusion²². The model is based on a single holistic intervention, consisting of six clusters/components of interdependent activities within the classroom and the wider community (see Figure 3). It has been shown to improve access, participation, and learning achievements for children with disabilities, including for girls with disabilities, and is designed to be sustainable, scalable, and transferable to other geographies.

“An important factor in ensuring that no girl with disabilities is left behind is in recognising we are safer in schools and in controlled learning environments.”

Maria Njeri, the Njeri Maria Foundation and Leonard Cheshire Global Youth Advocate, Kenya

Figure 3. Leonard Cheshire’s Inclusive Education Model



21 de Silva de Alwis, R. (2008), Disability Rights, Gender, and Development: A Resource Tool for Action Women Enabled International, The Right to Education for Women and Girls with Disabilities

22 Leonard Cheshire (2020), Universal Design in Inclusive Education

CASE STUDY: TRANSFORMING ATTITUDES TOWARDS GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES IN SCHOOLS

Girls' Access to Education (GATE) project, Humanity & Inclusion, Sierra Leone

Humanity & Inclusion (HI) have been part of a consortium project, *Girls' Access to Education (GATE)* from 2017-2021 in Sierra Leone, funded by UK Aid through the Girls' Education Challenge. At the school level, the project focuses on transforming attitudes towards girls with disabilities, teacher training, and adapting the learning environment to improve accessibility. The project also includes activities to enhance girls' empowerment, such as inclusive girls' study groups, where girls with and without disabilities are encouraged to attend. Prior to COVID-19, girls were encouraged and empowered to use score cards to identify areas of improvement for inclusive education within the schools and be a part of the planning process. Since schools have reopened after a prolonged closure in Sierra Leone, the project has continued to engage girls with disabilities through accountability and feedback mechanisms. The project has also strengthened referral pathways and reporting mechanisms for gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, harassment and abuse, with a specific focus on children with disabilities.

Suggestion boxes are placed in every school, allowing learners to share their stories, complaints and experiences anonymously. This has allowed issues such as bullying, discrimination or intimidation based on disability or gender to be discussed openly, and for solutions to be raised through the school council mechanism. Because girls with and without disabilities are encouraged to be part of the school council, this also promotes self-esteem and confidence building as the girls are encouraged to have a voice and understand that their opinion is important, regardless of ability, position in the class or whether they have a disability. The suggestion boxes and accountability and feedback mechanisms have supported the project in identifying and addressing issues such as corporal punishment in schools, separate toilets for boys and girls, finding the best time of day for catch up classes, and encouraging girls to take up new sports, such as football. This participatory, inclusive and child-led approach has seen a real change to the ethos in many of the schools within the project, thereby making the school environment more gender-responsive and inclusive for girls with disabilities in particular.

A lack of accessible and gender-responsive school environments

Journeys to and from school can be challenging for all learners with disabilities, but girls face additional vulnerability to gender-based violence and harassment when travelling to and from school²³. Without safe and accessible transport options, girls with disabilities from families with limited resources can be prevented from attending mainstream schools. In addition, educational materials are not always available in alternative formats for learners with disabilities, especially in low-income settings.

“Education is very important because us young girls with disabilities need to feel welcomed wherever we are, and get support.”

**Passion Kamuhindja, youth advocate,
Commonwealth Children and Youth
Disability Network (CCYDN)**

²³ Plan International (2013), *A girl's right to learn without fear - Working to end gender-based violence at school*
UNFPA (2019), *Women and Girls with Disabilities: Needs of survivors of gender-based violence and services offered to them*

Research suggests that girls with disabilities are less likely to ask for assistance than their male counterparts²⁴. Therefore, a lack of accessible school infrastructure and learning materials, such as ramps, adaptive computer equipment, and Braille textbooks, can impact girls with disabilities to a greater extent. Inaccessible and unsegregated toilets can make it difficult for girls with disabilities to manage their menstrual hygiene with safety and dignity. In many countries, menstruation is a taboo topic, and girls with disabilities are often excluded from sexual and reproductive health and rights education altogether²⁵. A lack of hygiene products, education and assistance in Menstrual and Hygiene Management (MHM) can therefore lead to absenteeism during menstruation, and even dropping out of school.

CASE STUDY: REMOVING EDUCATIONAL BARRIERS FOR GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

Sightsavers, Cameroon

Sightsavers, with funding from Irish Aid, has worked with the Ministry of Education in Cameroon to develop an inclusive education policy and support the inclusion of children with disabilities in classrooms alongside their peers. One student who has benefited from these efforts is Stella, a teenage girl with physical and intellectual disabilities from Mbalmayo in central Cameroon. Stella, who lives with her grandparents, struggled to walk to school unaided and was often bullied. A neighbour of the family, Fouda Manga, is a teacher at the local school and was concerned about Stella missing out on her education. Fouda, who had been trained by Sightsavers on safeguarding in schools, spoke to Stella's grandparents to help them arrange motorbike transport to school. The school's inclusion champion developed an individual education plan for Stella, with a focus on improving her self-esteem, mobility and foundational skills. She is now thriving at school, and growing in confidence and independence. "I like school," she says. "Writing is my favourite subject. I have a best friend, Adora, and we play dodgeball together. I want to be a hairdresser."

Barriers including negative attitudes and a lack of skills and resources to support inclusion may lead to children with disabilities missing out on their right to education. Sightsavers' approach involves training teachers and inclusion champions, supporting individual education plans and peer-to-peer approaches. Improvements in facilities, hygiene kits and girls' clubs help address the additional barriers faced by girls with disabilities – along with advocacy in the community on the importance of access to education for girls.

"I like school. Writing is my favourite subject. I have a best friend, Adora, and we play dodgeball together. I want to be a hairdresser."

Stella, student, Cameroon (Sightsavers)

24 Rousso, H. (2003), Education for All: A Gender and Disability Perspective

25 Women Enabled International, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Women and Girls with Disabilities

2021: A YEAR OF OPPORTUNITY FOR GIRLS' EDUCATION

COVID-19 has exacerbated existing gender inequalities and issues around inclusive education systems, such as resources, access and teaching capacity. As the global community mobilises around strategies to “build back equal” following the pandemic, it is critical that girls with disabilities are fully accounted for in COVID-19 recovery strategies, and future education planning. 2021 will see countries make new commitments on education and gender equality to achieve SDG4 and SDG5. This year, it is urgent that countries mainstream disability in their education and gender equality strategies, budgets, and frameworks. Governments all over the world have a unique chance to rebuild better, fairer, and more inclusive education systems that support all learners, including girls with disabilities. 2021 presents a number of key advocacy opportunities to take steps towards delivering real change for girls with disabilities, and drive commitments on gender and disability for years to come.

“My recommendation is that I want the international bodies to help girls with disabilities have access to free, quality education. Girls with disabilities have an equal right to education.”

Marie Bangura, student, Sierra Leone (Sightsavers)

The Generation Equality Forum

The [Generation Equality Forum](#) (GEF) launched in Mexico City, Mexico on 29–31 March 2021 and will culminate in Paris, France, in June 2021. It is a civil society-centred, global gathering for gender equality, convened by UN Women and co-hosted by the governments of Mexico and France. The GEF brings together governments, activists, corporations, feminist organisations, youth and allies to strengthen commitments and action for gender equality, focusing on six Action Coalition thematic areas.

Call to action: Pledges to accelerate progress towards gender equality must include girls with disabilities, whilst disability inclusion should become a cross-cutting theme in the Generation Equality [Action Coalitions](#).

G7 Summit

The [2021 G7 Summit](#), taking place in the UK from 11–13th June 2021, will be the first G7 since 2019 and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The UK's G7 Presidency will call on leaders to build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on health, climate change and global girls' education. G7 countries have an opportunity to commit to policy and financial pledges that are fully inclusive of girls with disabilities, and are clearly referenced in a girls' education declaration.

Call to action: The G7 Leaders' Communique should refer to ensuring the right to education for all girls, including girls with disabilities. G7 countries' policy and financial commitments on girls' education should contain clear sub-targets on equity and disability. A girls' education declaration should set clear targets for girls with disabilities to meet the SDGs, reach the most marginalised girls, and leave no one behind.

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Replenishment Summit

The [GPE Replenishment](#), hosted by the UK and the Government of Kenya, aims to bring together countries and donors to pledge a total of US \$5 billion to support the implementation of GPE's 2021-2025 strategy. Gender equality is hardwired across this strategy, and it is estimated that a fully-funded GPE would help ensure an additional 46 million girls enrol in school in the next five years. Funding for girls' education, however, does not always mean that girls with disabilities will benefit. Specific commitments to increase enrolment and completion for girls with disabilities will be crucial.

Call to action: A fully funded GPE will help support millions of children to have quality education, and it is critical that robust financial pledges are made at the GPE Replenishment Summit. GPE statements should indicate a strengthened commitment to equity and inclusion by increasing education finance and ensuring targeted and equitable allocation of funds to reach girls with disabilities. Equity targets on disability and gender, and disaggregated data, should be agreed, with sufficient measures and commitments in place to ensure transparency and accountability.

UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26)

The UK will host the [26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties \(COP26\)](#) in Glasgow on 1–12 November 2021. There is increasing evidence and recognition that closing gender gaps in education can help countries better adapt to the effects of climate change and decrease the rate and impact of global warming²⁶. At the same time, a failure to connect climate strategies with local or indigenous knowledge and apply a gender and disability lens will limit the impact of climate change mitigation and prevention plans. Persons with disabilities face increased exposure to climate change related-risk due to issues such as inaccessibility and discrimination. This risk is compounded by intersecting factors, such as gender and age. Women and girls with disabilities are also agents for change in responding and adapting to climate impacts. Governments must commit to gender- and disability-inclusive measures on climate justice, with education at the centre.

Call to action: Girls' education, including education for girls with disabilities, must be recognised as a critical tool to combat climate change and improve adaptation and resilience. Global, regional and national efforts on adaptation and resilience building must take into account the particular needs of the people and communities disproportionately affected by climate impacts, including women and girls with disabilities. It is important for climate education initiatives to be inclusive to ensure persons with disabilities can access information, skills and knowledge to deal with climate shocks. Investments in resilience infrastructure should respect Universal Design Principles.

²⁶ Malala Fund (2021), *A greener, fairer future: Why leaders need to invest in climate and girls' education*
Brookings Institute (2019), *Girls' education in climate strategies: Opportunities for improved policy and enhanced Nationally Determined Contributions*

2022 Global Disability Summit

The [Global Disability Summit 2022](#) will take place in Norway. The Global Disability Summit (GDS) in 2018 sought to raise global attention, mobilise new commitments, and showcase good practice, innovation and evidence on advancing disability rights²⁷. The UK has made significant progress on disability inclusion through, and since, co-hosting the 2018 GDS. The UK's progress has been made possible through the continued advice of persons with disabilities, and the high level commitment²⁸. Progress and commitments towards girls' education and inclusive education made throughout 2021 will inform and contribute to commitments for the 2022 GDS, which will impact the lives of millions of people with disabilities. It is critical that governments commit to putting gender equality and education at the forefront of pledges to advance the rights of people with disabilities, especially girls with disabilities.

Call to action: Girls' education needs to be a key focus of the 2022 GDS to mobilise progress and commitment to the right of girls with disabilities to safe, quality and inclusive education. Commitments focused on gender-responsive and inclusive education should address component areas, such as pre- and in-service teacher training. Long-term and high-level commitments to transforming harmful and entrenched social norms which serve as barriers to education for women and girls with disabilities should be prioritised.

“We girls with disabilities need education which is the key to success, so that we can be who we want to be in [the] future. Girls with disabilities have an equal right to education.”

Kamana Peter, youth advocate, Commonwealth Children and Youth Disability Network (CCYDN)

²⁷ International Disability Alliance (2021), Global Disability Summit +2 Years. Progress on Implementation of Commitments

²⁸ International Disability Alliance (2021), Global Disability Summit +2 Years. Progress on Implementation of Commitments

RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite strong global commitments and progress, girls with disabilities are still being denied their right to education. This brief draws attention to the main barriers to education for girls with disabilities, in the context of major opportunities for advocacy and tangible change in 2021. This is a pivotal year for girls' education in the global agenda, and we must commit to making safe, quality education a reality for all girls. The recommendations outlined below are targeted at world leaders, governments, ministries, UN agencies and NGOs. They offer a framework for rights-based action and principles towards gender-responsive and inclusive education, to ensure that no girls with disabilities are left behind. Especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, we cannot achieve gender equality and disability justice without putting girls with disabilities at the heart of education policy and financing efforts, which will require strong political will and commitment through significant targeted measures.

Strengthening education systems for gender equality and inclusion

- Education must be inclusive for all, fostering a greater understanding of intersecting identities and the individuals who hold these identities; and supporting every learner's individual rights, needs, development, communication, and agency.
- Disability inclusion and gender equality must be fully incorporated across education systems to deliver on commitments outlined in SDG4 and SDG5, the UNCRC and the UNCRPD.
- Education sector policies and plans should be gender-responsive and inclusive. Targets on attendance and learning must contain specific indicators disaggregated by gender and disability, with specific and time-sensitive sub-targets for girls with disabilities.
- Progress towards inclusive and gender-responsive education must be tracked by strengthening education tools for data collection and analysis, using the Washington Group Question Sets.

Fostering cross-sectoral collaboration

- Cross-sectoral collaboration must be strengthened in order to overcome the multi-layered barriers to education faced by girls with disabilities, including across health, child protection, and WASH sectors.

“[Inclusive education] means access to mainstream education for every child, with any extra support they may need. Each one of us is different but we all have an equal right to a good education.”

Angela Bettoni, writer and youth advocate, Malta

- Safeguarding children and young people with disabilities, particularly girls, from all forms of abuse, exploitation and harmful practices is essential. Girls with disabilities should have access to quality sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) education, have autonomy over their own bodies, and be able to manage menstruation with safety and dignity.
- To remove disability-related stigma and discrimination throughout education systems and societies, awareness-raising, training and education among communities and educators must be prioritised.

Targeting education financing for equity and inclusion

- Education financing models should prioritise intersectionality (gender and disability) and commit to supporting gender-responsive and inclusive education.
- Targets for equitable allocation of funds to reach girls with disabilities should be agreed, with commitments to transparency and accountability.
- Donor countries should increase development spending on education and track equitable spend of overseas development aid (ODA), with specific targets and commitments to equity and inclusion.
- Developing countries should increase domestic financing on education, whilst ensuring effective and equitable allocation of budgets towards gender and disability inclusion.

Building back equal following the COVID-19 pandemic

- Girls with disabilities must be recognised as a priority group for targeted education funding, programming and commitments.
- Re-enrolment strategies should include specific provisions for girls with disabilities, in recognition

of their heightened vulnerability to dropping out following COVID-19 related school closures.

- Girls with disabilities must be included in data collection efforts to measure the impact of COVID-19 on girls' education and inclusive education, with the aim of developing more inclusive crisis-preparedness response plans that accommodate learners with disabilities and girls in particular.
- Increase access to gender-responsive, inclusive and accessible digital learning and low-cost technologies for learners with disabilities, to narrow the digital learning gap exacerbated by the pandemic.

Nurturing youth leadership

- The principle of “nothing about us without us” must be applied to the establishment and strengthening of youth leadership in inclusive and gender-responsive education planning and dialogue.
- Increase partnership, meaningful engagement, and funding for youth- and girl-led networks and organisations, and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) working at the intersection of gender equality, education and disability rights.

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