



## Humanity & Inclusion Canada's Written Submission on Disability Inclusive Education

To the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs for consideration as part of its comprehensive study on Inclusive Education Globally  
November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023

### CANADA'S COMMITMENTS TO DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Canada is one of the top ten donors to education globally<sup>1</sup> and has also made significant commitments towards inclusive education, providing a strong voice within the Global Partnership for Education and ensuring that “the interests and priorities of girls with disabilities are taken into account.”<sup>2</sup>

These commitments to disability inclusion are also reflected within the Feminist International Assistance Policy's intersectional lens and in line with efforts under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to “leave no one behind”. In each of the Minister of International Development's Mandate Letters (2019, 2021), there are stated objectives for disability inclusive development programming, as well as the need for addressing systemic inequities such as barriers for persons with disabilities.<sup>3</sup>

But this is not enough. To truly implement these commitments, Canada can and must provide a more specific and targeted approach to ensure that international education programs are truly inclusive of children with disabilities. As highlighted in the Auditor General's 2023 report, a stronger intersectional and inclusive focus is required for Canada's feminist international assistance policy.<sup>4</sup>

### INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

The numbers are stark: While one in ten - nearly 240 million - children have disabilities, an astounding 49% are more likely than their peers to have never attended school. Children with disabilities face many **obstacles to** accessing quality education which include attitudinal, physical and institutional barriers. As education programs and school systems often do not consider these barriers and are not well adapted to a diversity of disabilities, attainment at school is generally much lower for children with disabilities, and indeed 42% are less likely to have adequate foundational reading and numeracy skills compared to their peers without disabilities.<sup>5</sup>

**Physical barriers** are often the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about what prevents children with disabilities from going to school, such as steps leading to classrooms or inaccessible toilets. Even if wheelchairs and ramps are available, children who are wheelchair users may face untarred roads which are rocky or difficult to navigate, routes that are washed away by rainfall, due to more persistent flooding or extreme weather events, a common feature in many countries now due to the impact of climate change.

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<sup>1</sup> 2018 G7 summit and then at the Global Education Summit of 2021

<sup>2</sup> Global Disability Summit Commitments, Canada (2018).

<sup>3</sup> Prime Minister of Canada (2021). Minister of International Development Supplementary Mandate Letter.

<sup>4</sup> International Assistance in Support of Gender Equality—Global Affairs Canada, Independent Auditor's Report, March, 2023

<sup>5</sup> [Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities - UNICEF DATA](#)

**But invisible barriers are often even more of a challenge to address.**

**Attitudinal barriers** include stigma around children with disabilities being in the same school as children without disabilities and beliefs that children with disabilities lack the capacity to learn. Children with disabilities are often shunned by community members because of gross misconceptions and fears that the disability may be “contagious” in some way, while families hide them away in shame. Children with disabilities also face increased violence. They are twice as likely to face sexual, physical or mental abuse than children with no disabilities and much more likely to be bullied. A recent global study reported that around one-third of young children and teenagers with disabilities face emotional and physical abuse, and shockingly, one in 10 experience sexual violence<sup>6</sup>.

Children with disabilities also face important **institutional barriers** such as a lack of inclusive education policies or teacher training modules on inclusive education at teacher training colleges for teacher trainees. There is a lack of knowledge amongst teachers on how to support learners with disabilities in the classroom. Children with communication difficulties or hearing impairments often face a barrier of access, as teachers are rarely communicating in a way that is accessible to them, and books are not adapted to their needs. For children who are deaf, this may mean that the teacher doesn’t use sign language or isn’t able to use strategies to make lip reading possible. For children with communication difficulties, it may mean that the teacher doesn’t communicate in a clear and concise way using short sentences and pictorial support, to allow children who have difficulties with understanding language to follow the class. The stark reality is that even if children with disabilities are able to access the classroom, they may not achieve their full learning potential, due to curriculums that are not adapted to their needs, with suitable accommodations.

**It is imperative that inclusive education initiatives understand that children with disabilities aren’t a homogenous group** and therefore the strategies for inclusive education must be adapted to suit the needs of children with various types of disabilities: physical, intellectual, developmental, sensory or communication difficulties, as well as considering the particular challenges faced by girls with disabilities.

Girls with disabilities are especially vulnerable to violence and gender norms contribute to reduced access to quality education. They too are expected to take on household duties, and are pressured to be married at a young age and abandon their studies at adolescence. For example, in HI’s report on education for girls with disabilities in West Africa, only 17.6% of women with disabilities can read and write in Mali, compared to 39.2% of men without disabilities. Furthermore, in Niger and Mali, more than half of girls with disabilities enrolled in primary school do not make the transition to secondary education.<sup>7</sup> A survey conducted by HI with parents in the West Bank and Gaza Strip revealed that 50% intended to pull their teenage daughters with disabilities from school and marry them off.<sup>8</sup>

## **OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO EDUCATION FOR Children with disabilities**

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<sup>6</sup> [The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health journal](#) 2020

<sup>7</sup> [Education, girl, disability: an equation to solve Ensuring the right to education for girls with disabilities in the Sahel Humanity & Inclusion 2021.](#)

<sup>8</sup> Always included: before during and after a crisis, Humanity & Inclusion 2023. (launched in December)

Humanity and Inclusion recommends a twin track approach to break down these barriers, which includes both mainstreaming inclusion in the education sector and focusing on targeted support for learners with disabilities.

**First, we will focus on mainstreaming disability which is essential to creating a culture of inclusion across the education sector.** Inclusive Education needs to be integrated fully within the national education sector plan, and not sidelined as a separate component.

Humanity & Inclusion is currently working in 27 countries on 45 inclusive education projects and a common theme in all those diverse contexts is system strengthening to help support this culture of inclusion. This involves working on the entire educational system, including policy, early school screening, formal teacher training programs, as well as school environments.

- For example, in Nepal we have been working to influence local and national government policy on inclusive education. HI has recently helped to establish the Student Assessment Technical Committee to support early screening efforts for new school enrolments. This is an essential first step for schools to be more aware of the needs of children in their classrooms.
- In Rwanda and Burkina Faso, HI developed teacher training modules on inclusive education which have now been included in the pre-service teacher training package for new teacher trainees, meaning that they are becoming part of the national education system. **Ongoing support, training and coaching for teachers** is paramount, particularly to support them with children with more complex needs such as children who have intellectual disabilities or Autism.
- In a more protracted crisis context, six detailed guidelines were designed with the Ministry of Education in Occupied Palestinian Territories to equip schoolteachers with the skills they need to deliver inclusive education. This covered a wide range of thematic areas, including referrals, school environment, inclusive learning assessment, inclusive teaching, and building parents' capacity.

A multisector approach is key to transforming the education sector, taking into account the differing needs from multiple contexts from rural conflict affected settings to urban slum environments with poor sanitation and hygiene. In Cox's Bazaar refugee camp in Bangladesh, which houses over a million Rohingya refugees, HI supports the local learning centers to be more inclusive. We also work with mobile health units who work in the camps, to support children with disabilities. And finally, we target interventions in the homes with a multi-disciplinary team, such as speech and language therapists and physiotherapists who can promote early learning both at home and in the centres. This approach has really benefitted young children with Autism, Down syndrome, and other developmental disabilities.<sup>9</sup>

**Mainstreaming is only half the solution for creating truly inclusive education systems. There must also be targeted support for learners with disabilities to achieve meaningful outcomes.**

Humanity & Inclusion has a wealth of experience demonstrating the efficacy of a **targeted approach** that focuses on disability specific supports and community-based services. In 2022, HI directly supported over 400,00 children and young people through its inclusive education projects. Providing adequate support systems to address learners' needs is essential to making sure learners with disabilities stay in school.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Always included: before during and after a crisis, Humanity & Inclusion 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Taken from the GLAD ( Global Action on Disability) Network note on Disability Inclusive Education for the SDG summit 2022. GAC is a member of the GLAD network.

Children with disabilities have diverse needs and each child needs to be provided with the right assistive devices, adapted personal support and accessible learning tools to enable them to achieve their learning potential, and increase learning outcomes. Disability specific supports include sign language interpreters, therapists or adapted learning tools. They also include working with specialists for unique assistive devices, such as hearing aids from audiologists, mobility aids from physiotherapists, communication devices from speech and language therapists and some specific learning materials such as braille typewriters, slates and styluses etc, or simpler items such as voice recorders.

An example of community-based services is the establishment of **itinerant (mobile) teachers**, whose role is to not only support individual children with disabilities in schools (such as children who are learning to use braille, sign language or who have intellectual disabilities or Autism) but also to support mainstream teachers and act as a coach towards them, on a weekly basis. HI supports Itinerant teachers in countries as diverse as Burkina Faso and Nepal. This approach works, as the rates of completion are higher<sup>11</sup>. A school inspector in Togo when interviewed about the approach of Itinerant teachers stated “The number of pupils with disabilities is increasing in junior and senior secondary school, and school exam success rates are rising. These pupils now feel valued and are much more confident.”

Humanity & Inclusion believe that a twin track approach is vital to tackle the learning crisis facing us today. Ensuring that children with disabilities can access education is directly correlated to increased opportunities for decent work and successful life outcomes. Inclusive education is cost effective and can ensure that all children, including those with disabilities, can access quality education and thrive in an inclusive environment, free from segregation and discrimination.<sup>12</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Ensure that all education programmes focus on the twin track approach, of transforming education systems** towards inclusion of all learners, in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and provide targeted support to children with disabilities.
- 2. Increase funding for education programmes that are focused on, or include a dedicated objective on inclusive education.** This entails stronger data collection methods (e.g. using the OECD DAC marker), tracking of budgets and spending on disability inclusion in education, as well as initiatives that strengthens the inclusivity of systems and ensuring disaggregated data collection that includes disability, to ensure greater accountability.
- 3. Ensure that education programmes with a focus on teacher training** have a mandate to include Inclusive Education training as a core part of the training curriculum as part of pre- and in-service teacher training programmes with sufficient budget.
- 4. Invest in supporting national and local actors**, including as direct recipients of funding, so that they can take ownership of inclusive education intervention, scale, and sustain them in the long term.
- 5. Support the design and implementation of coordinated cross-sectoral strategies** including Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Health Ministry of Gender. Cross sectoral

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<sup>11</sup> [Itinerant teachers – An innovative and personalized tutoring system. \(asksource.info\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Let's Break Silos now: Achieving Disability inclusive education in a post covid world Humanity & Inclusion \( 2020\)](#)

strategies should also include rehabilitation, nutrition, protection, transport, and the labour market inclusion.

## **ABOUT HUMANITY & INCLUSION CANADA**

Humanity & Inclusion Canada, formerly Handicap International, is part of an international federation working with persons with disabilities and vulnerable populations in more than 60 countries worldwide in development and humanitarian settings. We are a leading actor in disability inclusion in the health sector and in disability-inclusive Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). Humanity & Inclusion Canada provides annual disability inclusion training for Global Affairs Canada staff, as part of the regular departmental training course calendar.

Humanity & Inclusion has developed inclusive education projects in 27 countries, two of which are funded by Global Affairs Canada. Examples include:

- **Education Cannot Wait (ECW) has a Multi Year Resilience programme [in Bangladesh](#) refugee camps until 2024. HI is part of a consortium led by Save the Children.** Already the average attendance rate of children with disabilities has increased from 65% in June 2022 to 82% in December 2022 because of targeted interventions.
- **[Empowering a New Generation of Adolescent Girls with Education \(ENGAGE\)](#), funded by FCDO in Nepal.** Led by VSO, HI focused on aspects related to disability inclusion. Over 2500 Marginalized Out-of-School girls and girls with disabilities were empowered through education to make informed life choices, contribute to family decisions and confidently pursue their own economic opportunities.

## **SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY OF HI or HI & PARTNER GUIDELINES AND DOCUMENTS ON DISABILITY INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

- [Inclusive Education Policy Paper, HI 2012](#)
- [Inclusive education. For inclusive schools where all children can learn](#), HI 2020
- [Let's break silos now! Achieving disability-inclusive education in a post-COVID world](#), HI 2020
- [Education, girl, disability: an equation to solve. Ensuring the right to education for girls with disabilities in the Sahel](#), HI 2020
- [Experiences Implementing Inclusive Education in West Africa and Madagascar](#), HI 2020
- [Disability-Inclusive Education in the occupied Palestinian territory \(oPt\): West Bank & Gaza, Factsheet – 2021](#), HI

## **GLOBAL GUIDELINES AND REPORTS THAT HI HAS CO-AUTHORED, LINKED TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

- [Including Children with disabilities in humanitarian Action, Education Booklet, Unicef \(supported by HI\) 2019](#)
- [Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for older people and people with disabilities, ADCAP consortium 2018](#)

- [Pivoting to Inclusion: Leveraging Lessons from the COVID-19 Crisis for Learners with Disabilities](#), World Bank 2021