



September 16, 2024

Mr. Ali Ehsassi  
Chair,  
House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs  
and International Development  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Ehsassi:

Pursuant to the Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons, I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Government of Canada to the recommendations made in the twenty-fourth Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (FAAE): *“Including Every Child, Benefitting All: International Disability-Inclusive Education.”* Thank you for pursuing such an important study.

As stated in your report, approximately 240 million children worldwide live with disabilities. They often face barriers to accessing quality education. Traditional school systems and programs are not always designed with accessibility in mind or adapted to meet the diverse needs of people with disabilities. Disability-inclusive education is needed to ensure all learners can access a quality education as their human right.

The Government is steadfast in its leadership globally for inclusive, gender-responsive, safe, accessible and quality education. Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) uses a feminist, intersectional, human rights-based approach to education and lifelong learning that leads to improved outcomes among girls, women and those hardest to reach, including learners living with disabilities.

The Government’s international assistance to education has steadily increased, from \$410.94 million in FY 2019-20 to \$534.84 million in FY 2022-23. Over the last five years, 45% of bilateral aid for education targeted disability issues as a significant policy objective.

The Government of Canada’s support to education is delivering results globally. Our \$300 million support over 5 years (2021-25) to the Global Partnership for Education has helped reach 107 million students, train more than 675,000 teachers and distribute 56 million textbooks in 2022. In one example at the national level, our support has enabled 68,891 girls, including 12,033 with disabilities, to attend school in conflict affected regions of Nigeria.

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Within this context, the Government has carefully considered the recommendations presented in the report and has assessed initiatives that are ongoing or have been completed, as well as key considerations, in the Government's Response. We continue to identify where there is room for improvement in Canada's approach and look for additional opportunities to contribute to disability-inclusive education globally.

Please find enclosed a copy of the Government Response to the Report's 14 recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ahmed Hussien". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a period at the end.

The Honourable Ahmed Hussien, P.C, M.P.

**Government Response to the 24<sup>th</sup> Report of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, entitled “Child, Benefitting All: International Disability-Inclusive Education”**

**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.**

The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation.

The Government’s Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) guides all of Canada’s international assistance programming. It draws on global evidence and uses a feminist, intersectional, human rights-based approach to education and lifelong learning that leads to improved outcomes among girls, women and others in vulnerable situations, across all initiatives. This includes a Gender-based Analysis (GBA Plus) requirement for every Official Development Assistance (ODA) investment to assess if projects are addressing overlapping, intersectional barriers to education and provide recommendations for improvements. Additionally, education specialists support project planning and are trained in disability-inclusive education. The Action Area policies provide guidance on what the Government of Canada aims to achieve through the FIAP across all its international assistance initiatives. To address multiple and overlapping barriers the poorest and most marginalized face when accessing resources, the Government advances the achievement and upholding of ‘human dignity’ as an Action Area of the FIAP. The FIAP Action Area Policy: Human Dignity speaks to the importance of taking a gender-responsive and intersectional approach to the goal of “education for all” by addressing the various barriers students may face and encouraging data disaggregation where possible to ensure programming reflects the multiple and overlapping barriers that exist. The Action Area Policy highlights the different challenges faced by women and girls with disabilities. Furthermore, the Government convenes an interdepartmental Canadian Working Group on Disability chaired by Global Affairs Canada and made up of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), civil society and academia working in disability inclusion nationally and internationally. It meets quarterly to create a forum for open dialogue on the inclusion of persons with disabilities, with open exchanges regarding lived experiences to develop more effective policies and programs domestically and internationally. For example, the Government of Canada funds a project with UNICEF in Somalia which aims to remove barriers to girls’ education, particularly those with disabilities, by increasing their equitable access to safe, quality, inclusive education within an education system that recognizes their needs and provides innovative and quality gender-responsive formal and non-formal education.

**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.**

The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation.

As a founding member of the United Nations, Canada ratified seven principal human rights conventions and covenants, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2010) and the

Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991). The Government of Canada is committed to upholding its human rights obligations, including the right to education, both at home and abroad, with a view to realizing human rights without discrimination and based on equal opportunity.

The Government acknowledges that, according to UNICEF in 2021, one in ten children worldwide, or nearly 240 million children, live with disabilities and that these children have a right to education. The Government of Canada is upholding its international obligations with the principle of the right to education as specifically encompassing inclusive education. Since its ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Canada has participated in each session of the annual Conference of States Parties (COSP) to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities held at UN Headquarters in New York. COSP is the only major international forum to discuss implementation of the CRPD and disability and accessibility issues. Canada's participation provides an opportunity to consider matters related to the implementation of the CRPD, share best practices, and learn from other countries. Furthermore, Article 32 of the CRPD emphasizes the importance of international cooperation to support national efforts in implementing the Convention's objectives and includes support to persons with disabilities in international development programs. The Government is an active member of the Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network and its Working Group on Inclusive Education, and shares information and best practices through the GLAD network.

The Government of Canada's international assistance related to children is outlined in its FIAP and guided by the four general principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to survival and development, and respect for views of the child. Canada also supports the ratification and implementation of international standards that protect children from interference in their education, including the Safe Schools Declaration.

In addition, the Government of Canada will explore opportunities to use the Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) tool developed by Justice Canada in its international education work. The CRIA tool assists public officials in considering the impacts of a program or initiative on children and is grounded in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**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.**

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation.

To contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Government of Canada has adopted its FIAP, committing, amongst several key priorities, to support the access to safe, inclusive, quality education by all children and youth, including those hardest to reach.

As such, the Government remains committed to addressing barriers and ensuring improved access to safe and inclusive quality education and skills training for those left furthest behind by the global education crisis, including girls, children with disabilities, and refugee and displaced children and youth. To be effective and flexible, international assistance must respond to local needs and priorities, respecting the sovereignty of partner governments. As such, not all of Canada's international assistance

initiatives have an education component. Therefore, the Government of Canada will continue to ensure the inclusion of disability and education, and prioritize support to education globally, where appropriate.

Following the Global Disability Summit in 2018, the Government of Canada formally adopted the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Disability Marker to track and report ODA. This enables the Government of Canada to track how much of its international education funding supports disability inclusion. In fiscal year 2023-24, projects worth \$203.53 million targeted disability issues as a significant policy marker. A Disability Inclusion guide supports employees to ensure Canada's international assistance programming promotes and advances meaningful participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

The Government of Canada agrees with the proposal in the FAAE Committee Report "that the ongoing negotiations in New York [to define the post-SDG agenda] presents an opportunity for Canada to lead by advocating for the recognition of education, including early learning and child care, as a global priority within the framework of official development assistance, and that the inclusion of persons with disabilities should not be viewed as an additional expense, but rather as an opportunity to enhance the quality of education." This was demonstrated through Canada's engagement at the United Nations General Assembly Transforming Education Summit in 2022 with advocacy to highlight the importance of a quality education continuing in upcoming global moments.

**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.**

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation.

The Government of Canada is currently conducting a corporate evaluation of the G7 Charlevoix Initiative: Women and Girls' Education in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States. As part of its \$400 million commitment and 55 funded projects, the Government of Canada ensured that the interests and needs of girls, adolescents and women with disabilities were considered and embedded in the evaluation. This thematic evaluation is a focused review of a significant portion of Canada's bilateral investments, involvement in multilateral institutions and four country case studies of education programming in fragile and conflict-affected states, covering the years 2018 to 2023. One of the evaluation's key objectives is expanding and improving the provision of inclusive, gender-responsive, safe, accessible and equitable quality education. While the evaluation does not have an explicit focus on inclusion of learners, it examines best practices in inclusive education and undertakes an intersectional/GBA Plus analysis of project design and results. Rather than undertaking a new review at this time, the Government of Canada will use the findings from this evaluation to assess where possible improvements could be made to further strengthen Canada's support to disability education.

In addition, the Government supports projects that apply the principles of the Universal Design for Learning framework. For example, in a project in El Salvador, inclusion strategies were carried out at the community level with the support of local entities specialized in providing care to children and adolescents with disabilities and gender-diverse identities. These organizations identified 540 girls, boys

and adolescents with disabilities who were out of school. They supported their access to safe, quality, gender-responsive education through different strategies such as community sensitization campaigns to eliminate stigmas and the provision of specialized services such as health and psychosocial support, child protection, cash transfers and other social protection programs.

Additionally, the Government of Canada continues to promote alignment with inclusive education principles through its active involvement in multilateral institutions such as the G7, the G20, the United Nations, etc.

**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.***

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation.

The Call to Action commits parties 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; and 3. Ensure all education programmes and grants mainstream disability and include disability-inclusion criteria and targets.”

Aligned with its FIAP and the Minister of International Development’s Mandate Letter<sup>1</sup>, the Government of Canada is committed to supporting the hardest to reach learners, including those with disabilities, based on country needs.

The Government of Canada’s international assistance to education has increased from \$410.94 million in FY 2019-20 to \$534.84 million in FY 2022-23. Over these last five years, 45% of the Government’s bilateral aid for education targeted disability issues as a principal or significant policy objective, as per the OECD Disability Marker, surpassing the 5% target. However, the Government of Canada cannot commit to the 2nd and 3rd calls to action. As per the Government’s FIAP, it is a condition that all international assistance funding for education considers the needs of the hardest to reach, including those learners with disabilities. The FIAP also requires flexibility to ensure Canada’s international assistance responds to local needs and priorities. This means that programs may not all include disability-inclusion criteria and targets.

This Call-to-Action was launched by civil society organizations (CSOs) at the Transforming Education Summit in 2022 as an advocacy tool. While not endorsed by other bilateral donors, CSOs and multilateral organizations signed on, including several of the Government of Canada’s partners, namely Education Cannot Wait, Together for Girls, Humanity and Inclusion, UNICEF, UNGEI, UNESCO, the World Bank and World Vision. Through its own internal efforts and engagement with these partners, the Government is contributing to the achievement of the Call to Action’s objectives.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters/2021/12/16/minister-international-development-and-minister-responsible-pacific>

**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.**

The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation.

Inclusive education advocates support a twin-track approach to project design and implementation wherein disability inclusion is either targeted (Track 1) or integrated/mainstreamed (Track 2) in all projects to advance equality of human rights and opportunities. The Government of Canada supports projects that are designed using the twin-track approach, ensuring 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. A project with Humanity & Inclusion Canada in the West Bank and Gaza, which aims to promote the inclusion and access of girls and boys with disabilities to gender- and disability-responsive inclusive education, illustrates this approach.

An internal guide on inclusive education, based on international frameworks and standards, explicitly refers to the twin-track approach as a key consideration for inclusive education programming and mentions that it includes examining and addressing the attitudinal, organizational and environmental barriers that deny people with disabilities access to opportunities and hinder their ability to participate as equals in society.

The Government of Canada also recognizes the importance of including people with disabilities as a key element in the design of disability-inclusive projects. The internal guide provides specific guidance on project planning and presents a series of questions to conduct an assessment through consultations with relevant rights- and stake- holders, including government authorities and learners with disabilities and their parents, focus groups and data reviews to ensure they are part of the design of the project.

**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.**

The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation.

The Government of Canada prioritizes the collection and use of disaggregated data. For example, as mentioned in the FAAE Committee Report, the Government has adopted the model of the Refugee Education Council, bringing together people with a particular lived experience “to ensure nothing is done for them without them” and incorporated space for different types of knowledge and data.

An internal guide on inclusive education, based on internationally agreed standards for disability inclusion, provides specific guidance and examples of indicators that can be used to measure efforts to increase access to education for learners with disabilities. For example, the number of teachers who show increased understanding of, and practice in, inclusion of children with disabilities, disaggregated by gender and education level; and number of students who meet minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics, and/or demonstrate adequate progress in academic, vocational, and/or socioemotional learning skills, disaggregated by age, gender, level of education and disability.

The Government of Canada also has a specific inclusive education disaggregated indicator: number of schools (pre-primary, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and non-formal learning spaces) with access to adapted infrastructure, specially trained teachers and materials for students with disabilities. This indicator is related to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on Quality Education Target 4.a: to build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

Thematic specialists and project officers use this internal guide to shape project design and results frameworks. It also supports revisions of project proposals and informs project selection, monitoring and evaluation.

**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.**

The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation.

The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring access to safe, inclusive, quality education for all, with a focus on those hardest to reach, including people with disabilities, girls, and women. The Government has developed internal guidelines, based on agreed international standards related to inclusive education, to guide education programming decisions and implementation. This includes guidance on including approaches and strategies that combat stigma against learners with disabilities within the home environment, communities, schools and frameworks and policies. This work is supported by inclusion and education specialists, who review education proposals and provide ongoing support to project implementation.

For example, in host communities and refugee camps in Jordan, UNICEF and partners have established *Makani* centres (meaning “my space” in Arabic) with the Government of Canada’s support. Designed to be inclusive and non-discriminatory, they are safe spaces for Syrian refugee and host community children that provide learning, skills building and psychosocial interventions. Throughout the project, teachers were supported to implement disability-inclusive programs. Community-based actions supported better understanding of the human rights of refugees and children with disabilities to an education, including the identification and registration of out-of-school children. A referral system ensured children who needed specialized interventions had access to health care, mental health and child protection services. UNICEF and its community partners worked with parents to help them support their children’s development and enhance their chances of reaching their full potential. Safe opportunities were provided for girls and youth with disabilities to engage in volunteering opportunities that helped build their capacities, strengthened their personalities and provided them with necessary employability skills.

The Government of Canada uses its seats at the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and Education Cannot Wait (ECW) boards to not only ensure its own education investments combat stigma, but that global education funds also include approaches to combatting stigma against people with disabilities.



**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.**

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation.

The Government of Canada is already compliant with international principles and standards in its delivery of humanitarian assistance to ensure aid reaches those most in need, and this includes people with disabilities. Furthermore, in alignment with the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), and the Action Area Policy on Gender Equality in Humanitarian Action, the Government of Canada strongly encourages all humanitarian actors to incorporate inclusive practices for individuals with disabilities in all areas of humanitarian action. This aligns with the government's commitment to principled, lifesaving, humanitarian action that prioritizes the needs and human rights of the most vulnerable. Additionally, the Government of Canada requires humanitarian partners to adhere to humanitarian standards and guidelines, including those on the inclusion of people with disabilities at all steps of the Humanitarian Program Cycle. The Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, which Canada has endorsed, commits parties to make humanitarian action inclusive of persons with disabilities. Where possible, the Government will continue to encourage consultation with local Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) to inform accessibility plans.

In line with the Government of Canada's Good Humanitarian Donorship and Grand Bargain commitments, the majority of Canadian humanitarian funding in any given year is provided through multilateral partners with full flexibility given to partners to allocate and implement programming according to needs. As a leading humanitarian donor, the Government of Canada leverages this position to advocate for the continued application of, and improvements to, multilateral humanitarian agencies' capacity to deliver life-saving assistance for people with disabilities throughout the humanitarian program cycle. Accessibility plans are one component of these efforts, as per industry guidelines.

Given the policies and processes in place that prioritize the needs and human rights of the hardest to reach, including people with disabilities, the Government of Canada is committed to continue working within the existing and well-established humanitarian framework to support the agreed minimum standards for inclusion and protection of persons with disabilities.

**Recommendation 10: That Global Affairs Canada commit to supporting countries to allocate 5% of their education funding specifically for disability-inclusive education.**

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation.

The Government of Canada is committed to and advocates for building stronger, more resilient, and inclusive education systems, including promoting disability-specific education initiatives, in countries where it supports education programming and in multilateral fora, with a focus on the hardest to reach. Over the last five years, 45% of the Government of Canada's bilateral aid for education targeted disability issues as a principal or significant policy objective, as per the OECD Disability Marker, surpassing the 5% target.

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation because national budgetary allocations are at the discretion of sovereign countries. In compliance with its commitment under Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) Article 32 to cooperate internationally to support national efforts in implementing the Convention's objectives, building on its already significant support to disability-inclusive education, the Government will continue to encourage and support countries to fund 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.**

The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation.

The FIAP institutes a feminist, intersectional, human rights-based approach to Canada's international assistance. This includes a Gender-based Analysis (GBA Plus) requirement for every ODA investment to assess if projects are addressing overlapping, intersectional barriers and provide recommendations for improvements. The Action Area policies provide guidance on what the Government of Canada aims to achieve through the FIAP across all its international assistance initiatives.

To address multiple and overlapping barriers the most marginalized face when accessing resources, the Government advances the achievement and upholding of 'human dignity' as an Action Area of the FIAP, adopting a gender-responsive and intersectional approach to all its international assistance programming, assessing the multiple intersecting barriers individuals with disabilities may face, such as ethnicity, language barriers, socioeconomic factors, religion, and gender and encouraging data disaggregation where possible to ensure programming reflects the multiple and overlapping barriers that exist. The Action Area Policy specifically highlights the different challenges faced by women and girls with disabilities. Additionally, thematic specialists support project planning and implementation of all international education assistance programming, ensuring an inclusive lens is applied.

Furthermore, the Government of Canada is prioritizing the establishment of a departmental working group on disability inclusion to facilitate integration of disability inclusion into its international assistance. The Government is committed to continuing to explore opportunities to advance the human rights of and opportunities for persons with disabilities, including through development assistance and policies.

**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.**

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation.

All of the Government's international assistance funding for education considers the needs of the most marginalized, including those with disabilities, but also requires flexibility to ensure it responds to local needs and priorities.

The Government of Canada has developed internal guidelines, based on agreed international standards related to inclusive education to guide education programming decisions and implementation and ensure that international assistance funding for education considers and facilitates the integration of disability-inclusion criteria. This is supported by thematic specialists who review education proposals and provide ongoing support to project monitoring and reporting to ensure that wherever possible, disability inclusion considerations are integrated.

For example, in 2023-24, the Government of Canada helped counteract the associated learning losses that can have long-lasting economic and social impacts by reducing barriers to education for girls and women in conflict affected areas of Nigeria. The department's contribution enabled 68,891 girls, including 12,033 with disabilities, to attend school and supported 63 schools to create gender-protective and inclusive learning environments.

**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.**

The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation.

The Government has developed an internal guide on inclusive education, which recognizes that children with disabilities are more likely to never attend school or to drop out, due to various persistent barriers, including lack of trained teachers, but in addition to cultural stigma, lack of physical or human resources, inadequate learning materials and inaccessible facilities. A lack of inclusive government policies exacerbates these barriers. For example, through the Government of Canada's funding to the Afghan Girls' Education project, BRAC conducts comprehensive basic teacher training, which includes supportive disability sessions, benefitting students with mild and moderate physical or mental disabilities.

**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.**

The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation.

Through its adoption of the FIAP and the OECD Marker for Disability Inclusion, the Government of Canada has demonstrated leadership among donors as one of the first countries to integrate inclusive education into its international assistance programming. The Government is an active member of the Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network and its Working Group on Inclusive Education.

The Government of Canada is supporting international assistance programming in several francophone countries which leverage Canadian expertise in disability-inclusive education. Over the past 5 years, Canada has provided \$174.05 million in bilateral aid to education targeting disability issues in francophone countries, including Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Côte-d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Ghana, Haiti, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Senegal and North Africa. For

example, a project with Right to Play in Mali aims to enhance equitable and inclusive literacy and life skills for internally displaced people and host community children, particularly children with disabilities. The project engages local education authorities (educational professionals), parents, community, and religious leaders to address the intersectional barriers preventing host and internally displaced children from accessing quality education.

Through its ongoing support and network of Canadian and global education partners, the Government of Canada is well-placed to continue to leverage Canadian expertise in supporting inclusive education and teacher training in francophone countries.