



Because We Promised: Inclusive Quality Education for All Children with Disabilities

Twenty years ago, in June 1994 in Salamanca, Spain, representatives of 92 governments and 25 international organizations formed the World Conference on Special Needs Education. They agreed on a statement on the education of all children with disabilities, calling for inclusion to be the norm.

On the 20th anniversary of the Salamanca Framework For Action on Special Needs Education, we, as members of the Global Partnership for Education, reaffirm our commitment to protect and uphold all children and young people's right to an inclusive quality education, and call on all governments, donors, international organizations, civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, teachers and students to join in taking coordinated actions to deliver on commitments for children and young people with disabilities. These actions will aim to:

- End the invisibility and exclusion of children and young people with disabilities from education by improving data and evidence;
- Make education and learning accessible and relevant for all; and
- Work in partnership at local, national and international levels to champion inclusive education for all children and young people now and Post-2015.

The Global Partnership for Education is committed to delivering a quality education to all children, prioritizing the poorest and the most vulnerable.

Despite progress made in achieving Education for All goals, nearly half of the 57 million children currently out of primary school will never make it to school. The reasons vary, but usually include circumstances into which children are born: poverty, gender, ethnicity, living in a rural or socially disadvantaged area — all of which are circumstances that can lead to discrimination and disadvantage. One of the most neglected of these is disability.¹

The Global Partnership for Education, donors, international and private sector partners commit to

- Using the new GPE funding model to systematically promote inclusive education for children with disabilities through credible sector plans that address the educational needs of all excluded children, improved data on disability, and incentives for national equity strategies that ensure the access of children with disabilities to quality education;
- Investing in development of methodologies and capacity building to strengthen the evidence base on what works to identify and reach children with disabilities and improve their learning outcomes;
- Mobilizing financial and technical support to ensure countries are able to implement inclusive education for all, ensuring all externally financed education programs are inclusive of children and young people with disabilities;
- Sharing research, expertise and best practices on how to plan and deliver inclusive education that meets the needs of children with disabilities; and
- Championing inclusive, quality education for all as a measurable goal in the Post-2015 development framework, prioritizing the most marginalized with emphasis on children with disabilities.

Governments and local education groups commit to

- Ensuring that education sector plans and budgets are informed by comprehensive education sector analyses which include baselines and targets on the most marginalized, including children with disabilities;
- Ensuring that teachers receive appropriate training and support for the delivery of education in inclusive schools and learning opportunities and that learning environments, curricula, learning materials and assessment are accessible to learners with disabilities;
- Ensuring and facilitating the participation of parents, children and youth, communities, organizations of persons with disabilities and other disability groups in the education planning and decision making process at decentralized levels, as well as their representation in Local Education Groups; and
- Establishing cross-sector partnerships to support access to quality education for children with disabilities, including collaboration between education and health, transport, social protection and Community-Based Rehabilitation.

Non-governmental and civil society organizations commit to

- Supporting the processes for the identification of children with disabilities in order to collect robust data;
- Strengthening collaboration with official national bodies and their involvement in planning, implementation and evaluation of inclusive education for children with disabilities; and
- Ensuring all NGO-financed education programs are inclusive of children and young people with disabilities.

Reiterating the promises of Salamanca, we recall that

- Every child has a fundamental right to education and must be given the opportunity to learn and develop to his or her full potential.
- Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs. Every child has a right to an education that accommodates them and is capable of meeting their needs.
- Regular schools with an inclusive orientation and child-centered pedagogy are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building inclusive societies and achieving education for all; they provide an effective education for the majority of children and improve the cost-effectiveness of education systems.
- Education systems should be designed and educational programs implemented to respond to the wide diversity of children's characteristics and needs.
- Inclusive education systems must be seen as a central means to achieve a quality education for all learners.

Children and young people with disabilities have an equal right to education.

This right must be upheld and protected at all times.

We — all of us — are responsible.

Failed Promises

In many contexts, children with disabilities are more likely to be out of school than any other group. Even if they do attend school, children living with disabilities are often more likely to drop out and leave school early. Household survey data from 13 low and middle-income countries show that children with disabilities aged 6–17 years are significantly less likely to be enrolled in school than peers without disabilities. In some countries, having a disability can more than double the chance of a child not being in school, compared to their non-disabled peers. For those children with disabilities who actually manage to enter classrooms, the quality and form of schooling received – often in segregated schools – can act to powerfully compound exclusion from the mainstream and confirm pre-existing societal notions about disability.

This situation has endured despite the **commitments and resolutions** of the International Community:

- The 1994 Salamanca Statement declared that “The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, where possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have...The development of inclusive schools as the most effective means of achieving Education for All must be recognized as a key government policy and accorded a privileged place on the nation's development agenda.”
- In May 2008, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities entered force.² As of today, 145 parties have ratified the Convention, which among other rights guarantees the right to inclusive education for persons with disabilities. Article 24 states that persons with disabilities should be guaranteed the right to inclusive education at all levels, regardless of age, without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, and children with disabilities shall not be excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education on the basis of disability.

Inclusive policies are still lacking in many countries, and where they exist, gaps between policy and practice present enormous challenges. As a result, children with disabilities are still excluded from access to quality education.

Disability data limitations: Triggered by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the 2011 World Report on Disability stated that more than a billion people (or 15%) in the world experience disability. Estimates on the number of children (0–14 years) living with disabilities range from 93 million to 150 million.³ However, in most developing countries, the number of children with disabilities is grossly underestimated. Children with disabilities may not be reported due to stigma. Children with severe and moderate disabilities may be acknowledged, but children with mild or hidden disabilities are ignored. These children account for a large proportion of those who drop out or do not complete primary education.

Barriers to inclusion: Although exact figures are not available, it is clear that children with disabilities have very low rates of school enrolment and completion. Dropout and non-completion of primary education and failure to transfer to secondary schooling disproportionately impact children with disabilities.

Multiple barriers exclude children with disabilities from education, both in and outside of schools. They include:

- Negative attitudes, beliefs and ignorance concerning disabilities;
- Lack of clear policies and definitions of inclusive education and learning;
- Policies not implemented due to insufficient understanding and capacity;
- Insufficient and poor quality of teacher education;
- Inaccessible physical facilities and transportation;
- Inflexible curricula and exam systems combined with non-inclusive teaching methods and lack of adequate didactic materials; and
- Children with disabilities are left out when measuring results for access, equity, and quality.

Lack of a holistic approach: Although there are many good initiatives to promote inclusive education, actions in health, social services and education are often disconnected; civil society and community-based rehabilitation programs as well as screening and health interventions are often disconnected from education services. To achieve inclusive education for all, a concerted effort is needed to provide holistic services to children with disabilities.

Concrete, targeted actions from actors at all levels are needed to turn inclusion into reality, in particular, actions to collect data, increase access to schools and learning, and working in partnership to achieve results. **It's time to act.**

¹Filmer, Deon, 'Disability, Poverty, & Schooling in Developing Countries: Results from 14 household surveys', *World Bank Economic Review*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2008, pp. 141–163, as cited in *World Health Organization & the World Bank, World Report on Disability 2011*

²<http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>

³*World Report on Disability*. Geneva, WHO 2011