

Making GDS 2025 count

Recommendations from the Pre-Global Disability Summit (GDS) Workshop

Cambridge, United Kingdom, 17-18 September 2024

Of the 240 million children with disabilities worldwide, many are denied the opportunity to benefit from the life-transformative power of quality, inclusive education. It has been [estimated](#) that children and youth with disabilities are 49 percent more likely to have never attended school and 42 percent less likely to have foundational reading and numeracy skills compared to their peers without disabilities. While some progress has been made in improving access to education for learners with disabilities, there has been limited attention paid to their learning outcomes or education quality.

Recent years also point to a decline in funding that prioritizes disability-inclusion in education, increasing the risks of ceding past gains. In addition, new challenges, such as food insecurity due to climate change, the rise in conflict and advancement in digital technologies, require concerted, systemwide, and disability-specific action to close the equity gap. There is an urgent need for renewed commitment, for new actors to join the action, and for accelerating change together.

The Global Disability Summit offers a unique opportunity to make impactful commitments and track progress toward achieving them. This statement summarizes outcomes from the workshop on disability-inclusive education held in preparation for the 2025 Global Disability Summit (GDS). Conducted September 17-18, 2024, at the University of Cambridge, the workshop hosted 48 attendees from 31 organizations.

This note reflects, to the greatest extent possible, the ideas and priorities that emerged from those discussions that, hopefully, will serve as a springboard for organizations to develop their own commitments to advance the rights of persons with disabilities in inclusive education. [An analysis of GDS commitments made in 2018 and 2022](#) showed that while the number of commitments submitted had increased, there had been little monitoring of their quality or implementation. Accordingly, below are some proposed actions for potential commitments that are aligned with international frameworks. As articulated in the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) [General Comment 4](#): "Inclusive education is central to achieving high-quality education for all learners, including learners with disabilities, and for the development of inclusive, peaceful, and fair societies."

Develop a policy roadmap or action plan for strengthening inclusion in education systems.

- Governments are encouraged to use a [twin-track approach](#) for all policy, planning and budgeting decisions, mainstreaming disability inclusion in sector-wide efforts and specifying targeted actions to support persons with different types of disabilities.
- Roadmaps or action plans should be **tailored to meet countries' needs**. For some, it may mean making the first-ever inclusive education policy or developing laws and regulations to ensure that key actors comply; for others, it may mean an action plan focusing on capacity building, designing curriculum and assessments that are fit for purpose, strengthening accountability mechanisms or identifying and scaling innovative solutions.
- Roadmaps should include **key activities, milestones, cost estimations and budget allocations**. Additionally, there should be an internal monitoring and evaluation framework and a clear articulation of the roles of different actors across education and other sectors, as well as organizations of persons with disabilities, communities, and the private sector.
- National and subnational governments should develop **intersectoral disability inclusion plans** and budgets for their implementation, outlining clear roles, responsibilities, and accountability mechanisms.

Increase investments in disability-inclusive education, including through consistent domestic and donor financing and innovative funding mechanisms.

- Funding categorized 'disability-inclusive' should be **aligned with the UN CRPD** and adopt a twin-track approach. A 2024 analysis of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee "Marker on Disability" found that only 14 percent of aid to education in 2022 aimed to be disability inclusive.¹
- Governments and donors should establish **robust, transparent systems to track and publicly report education expenditures** on disability inclusive initiatives. This transparency is critical to ensuring accountability and equity in education finance.
- Key players should explore and pursue **creative partnerships and innovative financing mechanisms**, bringing in new players to ensure an injection of increased funds in disability-inclusive education with an emphasis on empowering organizations of persons with disabilities.

Strengthen national education data systems, program monitoring, and the use of contextually relevant research evidence for decision-making.

- Robust data should drive program and policy design. The **Washington Group/UNICEF Child Functioning Model** tool should be used to collect disability prevalence data in census and programs in collaboration with organizations of persons with disabilities, and civil society organizations (CSOs).
- Ensure data systems capture all learners with disabilities, **both in school and out of school**, and ensure data can be **disaggregated** for gender, age, displacement/refugee status, and geography.
- Governments should integrate and harmonize data systems for **health, education, and social welfare** to help ensure the provision of early intervention as well as continuity of services and assistance to children with disabilities, debilitating health conditions, or at risk of disability.
- Disability inclusion in education indicators should be mainstreamed into **program monitoring and results frameworks**.
- Donors and the private sector can **commission and fund more research** focusing on issues that will help generate contextually relevant data including on urgent topics such as learning outcomes for students with disabilities, costing and cost-effectiveness, innovation in the development of inclusive systems, and the scaling of successful implementation models. They should support researchers in low- and middle-income countries to take the lead in framing the research agenda and conducting the research.

Use an education systems approach to ensure the inclusion of learners with disabilities is considered in all education planning, reform, and evaluation.

- Adopt **universal design principles** to make accessible infrastructure, digital learning content and applications, and develop teaching and learning materials and curricula that are flexible and fit for students' diverse needs.
- Ensure all **schools** can offer safe and inclusive learning environments for students with disabilities. Invest in schools, school leaders, parent teacher associations, and governing bodies, ensuring they are orientated on their responsibilities and developing action plans for capacity development, social behavioral change, or school infrastructure.
- Strengthen local systems of production and provision of affordable, assistive devices and inclusive and accessible **educational technologies** (including no-tech, low-tech, and high-tech options, and

¹ Analysis based on 32 DAC donor countries; conducted by Nafisa Baboo and Jo Walker, Christian Blind Mission. This analysis also found that although the DAC Marker is a helpful tool, it lacks quality control mechanisms to assess whether disability-inclusive education investments are aligned with the UN CRPD or the principles of 'do no harm.'

artificial intelligence) suited to local needs, and ensuring access to devices that aid in narrowing inequalities, fostering independence, and promoting learning among students with disabilities.

- Invest in the **teacher workforce**, enhancing pre-service teacher education and teacher competency frameworks, and providing ongoing training and support on inclusive pedagogies. The latter could include [Universal Design for Learning](#) and the use of technology and assistive devices. Investment also is needed to diversify teacher workforces, including by hiring and supporting teachers with disabilities.

Ensure disability inclusion is at the forefront of emerging issues, such as climate change, food insecurity, environmental and health disasters, or other humanitarian crises.

- Governments, donors, development partners, and CSOs should mainstream disability-inclusive strategies in all **emergency** preparedness, responses, and resilience frameworks, ensuring that the needs and rights of learners with disabilities are addressed at the outset.
- Governments should ensure **school-based water, sanitation, health, and nutrition programs**, including school feeding programmes, are disability-inclusive, and strengthen the early childhood care and education sector to provide early interventions for those learners in need.

Amplify the visibility of disability and the inclusive education agenda.

- Leverage the voices of **youth with disabilities** and their organizations, and develop targeted social media campaigns to advocate for disability-inclusive education. Provide training and platforms for youth with disabilities to share their experiences, enabling them to lead the conversation and influence policy at the national and international levels.
- Partner with **influencers, content creators, and media outlets** to reach wider and more diverse audiences and foster increased awareness and global dialogue around disability issues, including through the development of accessible digital content.

Foster intersectoral collaboration and recognize the roles of new stakeholders.

- Strengthen **collaboration and coordination amongst existing champions**, including national and local authorities, CSOs, and organizations of persons with disabilities, private sector actors, communities, families, and learners with disabilities.
- Recognize the important role of **higher education institutes**, including those in the low- and middle-income countries, in developing the next cadre of teachers and researchers, as well as supporting the basic education system and learners with disabilities as they transition to university and the world of work.
- Encourage **new actors**, to contribute to the disability inclusion agenda. The previously mentioned analysis of commitments submitted to the 2018 and 2022 GDS revealed a clear lack of engagement from private organizations and donors, as well as a reduction in the number of actors engaging in these issues over the last two summits.

Enhance the monitoring of global commitments, including those made at the Global Disability Summit.

- The GDS Secretariat should put into place mechanisms to help better **monitor and evaluate the commitments** made during GDS-2025 and subsequent GDS. This might involve integrating initial feedback when submitting commitments to the online portal or reconsidering how key actors and their commitments are classified for data analysis purposes.
- The GDS Secretariat should help ensure **persons with disabilities and their families** receive tools and resources to enable the monitoring of their country's commitments, and ensure results are reported transparently.

Logos of organizing committee:



Logos of workshop participants:

