

39th Session of the Human Rights Council

Joint Statement entitled “Empowering children with disabilities through inclusive education”

Mr. President,

I have the honor to deliver this Joint Statement on behalf of a cross-regional core group of countries - Bulgaria, Brazil, Finland, Mexico, Namibia, New Zealand, Portugal, Singapore, Slovakia, Spain, Uruguay. Another 90 countries have joined this statement.

We would like to acknowledge that children with disabilities remain to be one of the most excluded groups in almost all societies. There are estimated 93 million children that live with disability¹ – or 1 in 20 of those aged 14 or younger – who require medium or high support needs, and many are excluded from education. Almost 50% of children with disabilities are out of school and 85% have never received any education².

The 2030 Agenda Goal N. 4 acknowledges the key importance of inclusive education so as to leave no-one behind, by ensuring an equitable, qualitative and inclusive education and promoting life-long learning opportunities for all, including children with disabilities as well as to “eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities”.

Article 28 of the CRC provides for the right to education without discrimination on the basis of equal opportunity for children with disabilities. Article 24 of the CRPD seeks to ensure that persons with disabilities are included in the general education system and that individual support and accommodations are provided to facilitate the development of their full potential.

Inclusive education involves a process of systemic reform and embraces the principle of schools adapting to enable and empower all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other characteristics. It requires a commitment to transforming the policy, culture and practice. Participatory mechanisms should be adapted to children with disabilities to enable their active participation in the reform.

This requires systemic reforms towards education systems that value and nourish the individual potentialities of their students, regardless of impairment or other characteristics. This requires also improvements in school infrastructure. Curricula must be attentive to the specific capabilities of

¹ UNICEF’s report on Children with Disabilities,
https://www.unicef.org/sowc2013/files/SWCR2013_ENG_Lo_res_24_Apr_2013.pdf

² UNICEF (2016) *Towards Inclusive Education: The impact of disability on school attendance in developing countries*, Office of Research- Innocenti Working Paper [<https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/845/>]

each student and learning materials must respond to the multiple ways of learning. Professional development opportunities including adapted training programs for teachers and other personnel involved in the educational system is essential, the educational system should operate in close collaboration with other community based social services and sectors to ensure adequate support and synergies. Working in partnerships with parents, school authorities and other members of the school community and the broader society is fundamental to achieve better educational life outcomes for children with disabilities.

The availability of reliable data is essential to understanding the contributions of the different factors that act as barriers to, or facilitators of the full participation of all children, including those with disabilities in the education system and for planning and implementing effective policies.

Social policies that enable children with disabilities to have access to inclusive education of quality, including the use of active technology and assistive devices, should be enhanced. There is also a need to prevent and protect children with disabilities from violence, exploitation and abuse. Mechanisms to seek redress when the right to inclusive education is denied of children with disabilities should also be established.

There is a need to increase awareness and strengthen advocacy for human rights based and outcomes-focused approach to disability as well as inclusive education, to challenge the negative attitudes and behaviors toward children with disabilities, and create enabling environments for inclusion. Teachers with disabilities have a crucial role to play here and can help to break down barriers against discrimination.

Finally, it is essential that we monitor progress of implementation and follow up on the progressive realization of the right of persons with disabilities to quality inclusive education.

Thank You!