

Every learner matters

Disability inclusion and gender equality in education

4 December 2023

From 13:00 to 14:30 CET



This event is hosted by UNESCO in collaboration with Plan International on the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December).

Background

Eliminating barriers to education and creating accessible and inclusive learning environments has been further stressed by the [2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development](#).

While progress has been made in recent decades in expanding access to education for persons with disabilities and making education more diverse and inclusive, many children, adolescents and young people are still at risk of exclusion and marginalization in educational settings and in society more broadly.

Persons with disabilities face some of the most significant barriers in accessing quality education. [WIDE 2023 data](#) show that children with at least one sensory, physical, or intellectual difficulty are 7 percentage points less likely than the average child to complete primary school. These gaps may be underestimated, as poorer families are less likely to report that they have a child with disability.

The inclusion of learners with disabilities in education demands going beyond access to schooling and adequate infrastructure. It is also a matter of assuring their participation, learning, progression and attainment; providing accessible learning materials and resources; creating safe, friendly and accessible environments; ensuring teachers and other school staff are adequately trained and supported; and working with schools and communities to tackle bullying, stigma and discrimination.

We must recognize that experiences of discrimination and exclusion, which limit opportunities in education, are linked to the intersections of various characteristics and identities. These include, amongst others, poverty, gender, class, race, ethnicity, caste, language, migration or displacement status, HIV status, gender identity and/or sexual orientation.

The intersection of gender with disability acts as a magnifier, resulting in further education deprivation. It is fundamental to have an intentional focus on inclusion in education and to tackle the root causes of exclusion, including inequality in the distribution of resources and power and the social and gender norms that perpetuate marginalisation.

This means that to advance inclusion, achieving gender equality in and through education is also essential. As stated in the [UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring 2020 Gender Report](#):

'A comprehensive analysis of inclusion in education from a gender perspective must involve more than simply noting gender parity levels (that is, equality of participation or achievement rates in various education levels and strands). It also requires a review of potential sources of discrimination in education, such as those involving teaching and learning materials, water and sanitation facilities, and laws and policies. It necessitates examining other potential forms of disadvantage and discrimination, such as poverty, location, ethnicity and disability, which intersect with gender to leave some boys and girls, women and men behind in education'.

Furthermore, [2022 UNESCO's Strategy on education for health and well-being](#) names "Promoting accessible and inclusive school facilities that are child, disability and gender-sensitive" as one of the priority areas of focus and acknowledges the multiple forms of discrimination and barriers that learners with disabilities face.

Achieving gender equality in and through education, promoting gender justice, realizing girls' rights, addressing root causes and consequences of exclusion and inequality, and fostering an inclusive society are also fundamental commitments of Plan International. These are reflected in Plan's [organizational purpose and values](#), and global strategy [All Girls Standing Strong](#). Further, Plan International's commitment to [Gender Transformative Education](#) provides a framework for inclusive, equitable, quality education for children, adolescents and young people in all their diversity. Together with Transform Education, UNGEI and UNICEF, Plan [recognizes](#) the potential of all parts of the education system – from policies to pedagogies to community engagement – to transform stereotypes, norms and practices: 'gender norms and power relations must be dismantled to make any real difference to the opportunities for all children and young people in all their diversity.'

To ensure that the right to education is fully guaranteed, governments, civil society, schools, and communities need to prioritise and elevate a gender-transformative and disability-inclusive approach when designing, implementing, monitoring and resourcing educational policies and practices and build up an inclusive system that leaves no one behind. This means working at multiple levels to improve access to education for all by targeting the root causes of exclusion, strengthening the transformative nature of education systems and service provision, and creating an enabling environment to actively promote gender equality and inclusion, and transform unequal gender and social norms.

Countries of all income levels across the world lack data. Chronic data gaps hamper progress for those left behind. Education data for persons with disabilities, the picture is especially bleak, with less than half of low-and middle-income countries collecting enough education data about children with disabilities. To address this gap the Global Education Monitoring Report's [World Inequality Database on Education \(WIDE\)](#) has added disability to the list of characteristics it uses to disaggregate educational status. Providing more detailed, granular and disaggregated data on where gender and disability intersect to allow policy makers and advocates to build more inclusive education systems.

Purpose of the webinar

The purpose of the webinar is to:

- Share the latest data and monitoring tools for key education indicators examining disability and gender at the national, regional and global levels.
- Better understand the intersection between gender equality and disability inclusion in education.
- Share good practices and lessons that promote and ensure quality, inclusive and gender-transformative education.
- Identify challenges and recommendations to be addressed at different levels, including by governments, teachers and families.

The webinar will build on UNESCO's and Plan International's work and research to date on disability inclusion and gender equality in and through education. It will also profile academic experts, young people and people with lived experience of disability. It will also contribute to the generation of knowledge at both policy and practice levels, targeting particularly the education system.

Target audiences

Ministry of education staff, education practitioners and educators; researchers and experts; bilateral, multilateral and other development partners; private sector stakeholders; representatives of youth organizations; representatives of organizations of persons with disabilities; youth/learners with disabilities; representatives of parents and teachers; and representatives of inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations supporting inclusive education.

Technical platform and interpretation

The webinar will take place on the Zoom platform and will be available in English, French and Spanish with International Sign Language interpretation. Automatic closed captions will be provided through Zoom.

Key webinar themes

The webinar will engage participants to discuss the following:

Disability and gender inequality: intersecting challenges for education.

- How does disability interact with gender, and vice-versa? How are the experiences of learners with disabilities similar or different with regard also to their sexual orientation, gender identity, expression and sex characteristics?
- How do gender norms and expectations affect learners with disabilities in terms of access, learning, participation and completion of education?
- What are the gendered challenges for out-of-school children with disabilities?

Good practices and recommended actions: what measures can be taken in addressing the intersection between disability and gender inequality to ensure quality, inclusive and gender-transformative education?

- How can legal and policy frameworks be strengthened to ensure that the rights and needs of learners with disabilities, including their physical and mental health and well-being, are taken into account, from a lifelong learning and intersectional perspective? What policies and practices are in place to address exclusion and discrimination based on disability, that take a gender-transformative approach?
- What data are needed for better planning, implementation and monitoring of policies and practices that are disability-inclusive and gender-transformative?
- How do we translate and operationalize these frameworks into practice at the sub-national level so that disability-inclusive and gender-transformative pedagogies are put in place in safe and inclusive learning environments?
- What key recommendations can be shared to ensure that gender and disability are considered in an intersectional way in education planning, policymaking and delivery?

Draft Agenda	
13:00 – 13:15	Welcome and introductory remarks
13:15 – 13:50	<p>Panel discussion 1: Disability and gender inequality: intersecting challenges for education</p> <p><i>This panel will explore the intersections of disability and gender inequality and the challenges and opportunities this poses for access, participation and completion of education across the life course. Panelists will share thoughts about existing practice and policy environments, and how to address challenges related to disability and education through a gender transformative lens.</i></p>
13:50 – 14:25	<p>Panel discussion 2: Moving towards gender-transformative, safe and inclusive learning environments for learners with disabilities</p> <p><i>This panel will focus on how the intersections between gender inequality and disability are being addressed in specific areas of programming. Examples will be drawn from disability-inclusive comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), school nutrition programmes and initiatives to address school-based bullying and violence.</i></p>
14:25 -14:30	Key takeaways and closing remarks

Contact

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