

## Terms of Reference

### Disability Inclusive Education in Asia-Pacific Working Group

The Terms of Reference for the Disability Inclusive Education in Asia-Pacific Working Group operates under the Asia-Pacific [Regional Thematic Working Group on Education 2030 + \(TWG on Education 2030+\)](#).

#### I. Background

The inclusion of children with disabilities in education is anchored in the fundamental human right to education as enshrined in Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>i</sup> Various international legal frameworks since then have endorsed inclusive education. The Convention against Discrimination in Education,<sup>ii</sup> the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)<sup>iii</sup> and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) reaffirmed the rights of all children to quality education without discrimination. The World Conference on Education for All (EFA)<sup>iv</sup> in 1990, reiterated by the World Education Forum: The Dakar Framework for Action in 2000 and Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all in 2015 acknowledged for the first time that a substantial number of children are excluded both from and in education and that an inclusive strategy is imperative to successfully respond to the ever-growing issue of marginalization. Articulated in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action<sup>v</sup> in 1994 is the first explicit commitment to guarantee inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools. The Statement recognized inclusion as the ‘most effective means to combating discrimination, building inclusive societies and achieving education for all’.<sup>vi</sup> Most importantly, children with disabilities are included explicitly in the Sustainable Development Goal 4. This signals a critical and urgent need to strengthen the inclusive education agenda to support the achievement of SDG 4.

The UNCRPD’s General Comment Number 4 and the Incheon Declaration make specific the right to education for children with disabilities and make recommendations on how they should be included in education, underlining that there is a need for systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences.

In addition, international research confirms the benefits of a broader definition of inclusive education in regard to the various barriers to the schooling and learning of all children. To mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Salamanca Statement, UNESCO organized a Conference – the International Forum on Inclusion and Equity in Education: Every Learner Matters – in September 2019 in Bogota, Columbia. The final Conference report recommends, among other things, strengthening dialogue and reflection within the international community, understanding of the fundamental challenges of our times, designing and implementing coherent education standards and policies, strengthening participation of educational stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies on inclusion and equity and making education a priority as the key to achieving the SDGs.

The [UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and Education](#) reinforces the conclusions of the Columbia Conference highlighting the following areas for urgent action:

- Discrimination
- Laws and policies
- Data
- Governance and finance
- Curricula, textbooks and assessments
- Teachers and education support personnel
- Schools
- Students, parents, and communities

At the Conference, governments and all other stakeholders re-affirmed their commitment to accelerate efforts in building and strengthening inclusive education that can accommodate all children to learn together - wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have.

According to government sources, national level official prevalence rates of persons with disabilities in the Asia Pacific region range from 1% to 18%<sup>vii</sup>; yet data is scarce, these numbers are often underestimated and based on different definitions and criteria of disability. Even with these low estimates, the region is home to about 100 million children with disabilities.<sup>viii</sup> In all countries, a huge gap exists in access to education between children with and without disabilities.<sup>ix</sup>

A global survey in 51 countries by the World Health Organisation reported that only 51% of boys with a disability complete primary school compared to 61% of boys without a disability<sup>x</sup>. Other global research shows that 'disability is a critical factor which influences school attendance, with its average marginal effect being -30% and the size of coefficients are larger than other individual and household factors on access to education such as sex, socio-economic status, or the place of residence' (UNICEF, 2016). Among girls without disabilities, a 53% completion rate for primary school is observed compared to 42% of girls with a disability.<sup>xi</sup> A study by UNESCO also revealed wide disparities in enrolment<sup>xii</sup>. The largest gap was seen in Cambodia where the proportion of children with disabilities out of school is much higher than their peers without a disability; 1 in every 14 children without disabilities is out of school compared to 1 in every 2 children with disabilities.<sup>i</sup>

Even enrolled children with disabilities often attend segregated 'special schools'. While many countries have made significant progress in transitioning to more inclusive systems,<sup>xiii</sup> the practice of segregated schooling for children with disabilities is driven by many interconnected factors, such as a lack of an integrated approach, lack of understanding of, and negative attitudes towards disability. In many countries, some children with disabilities are enrolled in the formal school system but often do not receive adequate educational support and remain isolated from the school community and excluded from learning.

Some of the biggest barriers to advancing disability-inclusive education include: negative attitudes and perceptions, prevalence of teacher-centered pedagogies, lack of coordination, lack of technical capacity at national level to design and implement inclusive education policies, prevalence of a medical approach to education for children with disabilities and lack of data and resources, as well as context-specific barriers in sub-regions.

In response to these challenges and the clear call of the SDGs for disability-inclusive education, many countries are taking progressive steps toward establishing more inclusive and better-quality education for children with disabilities. As a result, the region holds many promising practices. However, much remains

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF. 2020. Education for Every Ability: A Review and Roadmap of Disability Inclusive Education in EAP. Bangkok.

to be done in guaranteeing equitable access to, and meaningful participation in, education for all children through a progressive realization of inclusive education provision.

## II. Goals and objectives

The goal of the Disability Inclusive Education in Asia-Pacific Working Group is to realise the rights to inclusive and equitable quality education for children with disabilities across the Asia-Pacific region.

The objectives of the WG include:

- i) Providing technical and advocacy-based support that leads to the inclusion of all children, not least those with disabilities into education systems and ideally mainstream schools.
- ii) Promoting a human rights-based model, which includes both removing barriers in the environment, through the social model, and empowering of learners with disabilities to participate by addressing barriers to their education that are behavioral, cultural, social, institutional, and environmental;
- iii) Facilitating the coordination in order to promote collective and high quality course of action across a wide range of actors working in the Asia-Pacific in the field of education for children with disabilities, including academics, government institutions, civil society organizations, disability persons' organizations, faith-based organizations and other regional bodies;
- iv) Improving the technical capacity of actors working towards disability-inclusive education in the region, with special attention to
  - i. Enhancing commitments towards inclusive education through developing or implementing policies along with adequate budget allocations for inclusive education;
  - ii. Usage of technology and digital platforms or radio programmes or context specific and relevant technology which support to reach out to most marginalized during difficult time or emergencies; and
  - iii. Strengthening systems and structures to make state and private actors more involved and responsible for education of children with disabilities;
- v) Facilitate knowledge management, including the collection and exchange of good practices, disability-specific and disaggregated data, and resources and lessons learned on disability-inclusive education and learning;
- vi) Report on, and contribute to, the discussions and monitoring of SDG 4 led by the [Asia-Pacific Regional Thematic Working Group on Education 2030 + \(TWG on Education 2030+\)](#).

## III. Core Functions

### Coordination, communication and partnerships

- i. Organize regular coordination meetings of members of the WG (in person and online) and maintain regular, remote communication between members;
- ii. Promote linkages for those involved in disability-inclusive education at national, regional and international levels for the purpose of developing a "community of practice", sharing lessons learned, identifying innovative approaches, etc.
- iii. Provide support to multiple agencies to work together on joint projects relevant to the mandate of the WG;
- iv. Coordinate with other sub-groups of the TWG to contribute to the production of technical guidelines on the promotion of disability-inclusive education and monitor programmes of agencies under the UN system in the implementation of SDG 4;

- v. Conduct outreach and strengthen partnerships with regional organizations with relevant interest and/or expertise to become involved in disability-inclusive education;
- vi. Encourage and support the creation of national networks (or working groups) on disability-inclusive education in countries throughout the Asia-Pacific region, encouraging national-level capacity for coordination, advocacy and technical support.

#### Capacity development

- vii. Hold region-wide events, such as conferences, workshops and seminars (remotely and face-to-face) that build capacity and raise awareness on disability-inclusive education;
- viii. Undertake research, technical guidance and other studies to generate knowledge address misconceptions around disability-inclusive education;
- ix. Connect actors with experts in disability-inclusive education to promote capacity-building and collaboration;
- x. Support regional trainings around disability inclusive education.

#### Knowledge management

- xi. Manage a knowledge leadership role through supporting joint publications on disability-inclusive education with key partners;
- xii. Serve as a repository and hub for information sharing regarding trends, methodologies, and activity mapping throughout the region and serve as a platform for collection of documents and publications of good practices and resource materials on disability-inclusive education;
- xiii. Assist Member States to assess and report on the status of access to quality education for children with disabilities regarding SDG 4 indicators, particularly 4.5.1. – *“Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated”* and 4.a.1 – *“Proportion of schools with access to: (d) adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities.*

#### Advocacy

Advocate for disability-inclusive education at national and regional events, through social media presence, publications, documents, campaigns, etc.

### **IV. Organization**

- i. Specific efforts will be made to ensure that the WG is accessible to OPDs and led in an inclusive manner;
- ii. The WG will be co-chaired by the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (UNESCO Bangkok), United Nations Children's Fund Regional Office for East Asia and the Pacific (UNICEF EAPRO) and Leonard Cheshire, who also acts as the Secretariat. UNICEF South Asia (ROSA) will also play an active role;
- iii. The WG will meet on a quarterly basis (four times per year) with the venue rotating as per the agreement of the members. Sub-committees providing planning and implementation support may be created as needed in addition to the regular meetings;
- iv. The core members of the WG will include:
  1. Leonard Cheshire
  2. UNICEF
  3. UNESCO

4. Asian Development Bank
  5. ASEAN Disability Forum
  6. Aide et Action
  7. Beyond Education Consultancy
  8. CAMPE (Campaign for Popular Education)
  9. International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children (ICMEC)
  10. Leonard Cheshire Disability Philippines Foundation Inc. (LCDPFI)
  11. Ministry of Education (Bhutan)
  12. Ministry of Education (Bangladesh)
  13. Ministry of Education (Thailand)
  14. Pacific Disability Forum
  15. UNICEF ROSA
  16. SEAMEO SEN
  17. World Vision International
  18. VSO International
  19. Education International
- v. The WG will encourage participation of CSOs, OPDs; representatives of other governmental and inter-governmental bodies; local, national and international NGOs and think tanks; academic institutions; private sector enterprises; and bilateral and multilateral agencies and concerned UN agencies, as appropriate;
  - vi. Members will be selected based on their interest to participate and their geographic focus in the Asia-Pacific region however specific efforts will be made to ensure meaningful representation and participation of OPDs within the working group on an equal basis with others;
  - vii. The WG will submit technical documents and reports on activities to the TWG as often as necessary, in line with the agreed-upon timeline and calendar of events;
  - viii. Co-chairs may be re-elected by the group on a rotating basis

### Contact details:

Secretariat: Leonard Cheshire: Barkha Henry at [Secretariat.Diewg@leonardcheshire.org](mailto:Secretariat.Diewg@leonardcheshire.org)

Co-Chairs:

UNICEF East Asia Pacific: Erin Tanner at [etanner@unicef.org](mailto:etanner@unicef.org)

UNESCO Bangkok: Catherine Wilczek at [c.wilczek@unesco.org](mailto:c.wilczek@unesco.org)

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i United Nations (1948). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

ii UNESCO (1960). Convention against Discrimination in Education

iii United Nations (1989). Convention on the Rights of Children art 28 and 29

iv UNESCO. (1990). World Conference on Education for All.

v UNESCO (1994). The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education pp 17-18. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Salamanca, Spain.

vi Ibid. p.9

vii <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/publications/SDD-DAG-2019.pdf>

viii UNICEF. (2015). UNICEF East Asia and Pacific: Education, Early Childhood Development, Adolescents and Children with Disabilities. Retrieved from [https://www.unicef.org/UNICEF\\_EAPRO\\_Education\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/UNICEF_EAPRO_Education_FINAL.pdf).

ix UNICEF EAPRO. (2015). UNICEF East Asia and Pacific: Education, Early Childhood Development, Adolescents and Children with Disabilities. Retrieved from [https://www.unicef.org/UNICEF\\_EAPRO\\_Education\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/UNICEF_EAPRO_Education_FINAL.pdf)

x WHO and World Bank. 2011. World Disability Report. Retrieved from Geneva.

xi UNICEF, 'State of the World's Children' (2013).

xii UNESCO. (2018). Building Disability-Inclusive Societies in Asia and the Pacific. Bangkok: United Nations.

