

# Tracking Inclusion in Norwegian Development Support to Global Education

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## Executive Summary

Disability affects all groups in society: girls and boys, rich and poor, of all races, religions, and ethnicities. For children belonging to marginalized or under-represented groups, having a disability can make them even more vulnerable. Thus, in White Paper 25, *Education for Development*, the Norwegian government promises to:

*include the needs of children with disabilities in its bilateral development cooperation, and be a driving force in ensuring that their needs are also addressed in multilateral and humanitarian efforts in the field of education; and help to ensure that the needs of children with disabilities are integrated into national education plans (White Paper 25, 2013-2014, 23).*

This report assesses Norway's progress on the commitments made in the White Paper. It finds that the verdict is decidedly mixed. While Norway has played an important normative role in advocating for disability inclusion in global education, it is nevertheless the case that these efforts have, thus far, resulted in few verifiable results. In particular, the report finds that:

- Norwegian government promises in relation to inclusive education and disability inclusion are broad, vague, and non-binding, making it difficult to hold the Norwegian government accountable – even though the Parliament has asked the government to devote more attention and development assistance to persons with disabilities, and to report more precisely and systematically on the allocation and use of resources for disability inclusive education
- While it is possible to trace specific Norwegian bi- and multi-lateral development funding flows down to a project level, it is extremely difficult to assess how much of this funding is used on inclusive education, much less on children with disabilities.

The report further finds a global “implementation gap” with respect to disability inclusive education. Disability inclusion is not (yet) an integral and necessary component of the global education agenda, as evidenced by the fact that disability inclusion is not mainstreamed at the programmatic, sectoral, or strategic levels in Norway, partner countries, or implementing agencies. There is also a troubling lack of decent data on the extent to which children with disabilities have access to education in developing countries. Meanwhile, donors – including donors who have adopted inclusive education as a priority focus, such as Norway – are unwilling to make a hard requirement of disability inclusion

in the programs, projects, sectoral plans, and reporting that they fund. There is also a lack of knowledge on, and capacity to implement, disability inclusive education in partner countries, donor countries, and implementing agencies alike.

Norway has the potential and resources to make a difference for disability inclusion in global education. Key recommendations for the Norwegian government are:

- Develop an Action Plan (*handlingsplan*) in support of White Paper 24 on the SDGs and Norwegian development policy and White Paper 25 on Education for Development, which includes specific action items, and appropriate tracking mechanisms, prioritizing disability inclusion.
- Work internally and with Norwegian, international, and local Disabled Persons organizations, researchers, and implementing agencies to develop more robust and adequate knowledge on sustainable ways to make a difference disabled children's lives, within the realistic economic realities of poor partner countries. Use this knowledge and these partnerships to develop specific targets, indicators, and metrics for disability inclusive education. There can be two levels of targets: a basic level applicable to all contexts, and a second level responsive to the specific local conditions and challenges. The guidelines on inclusive education being jointly developed by the GPE, World Bank, and UNICEF, are a good starting point, but should not be taken as the end point.
- Ensure that all Norwegian-funded education projects mainstream disability inclusion in planning, implementation, and reporting. Projects that do not include disability should be revised (or ultimately rejected) in the same way as projects that do not include gender or environmental perspectives.
- Work with the World Bank and other donors to establish a World Bank trust fund under the office of the Disability Advisor, dedicated to building and disseminating knowledge and experience on low-cost interventions that can make a substantial difference in the education for children living with a disability.
- Require that reporting on Norwegian education funding includes metrics relating to disability, including eventually for projects and funding streams not covered by Norad's results reporting framework. Work to integrate these metrics into common or pooled funding reporting systems at the country level.
- Require the use of disability tags for Norwegian education funding, in order to improve the trackability and accountability of Norwegian support to disability inclusive education.

A full list of recommendations is available in the conclusion.

## 1. Introduction

The right to education of all children is confirmed in numerous international conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 26), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (articles 13 and 14), and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (articles 28 and 29). The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (article 24) reiterates the right of children with disabilities to education, emphasizing the right to inclusive education at all levels, and prohibiting discrimination and exclusion on the basis of disability. Norway has affirmed the importance of inclusive education for all children, including children with disabilities. In White Paper 25, *Education for Development*, it states that the Norwegian government will:

*include the needs of children with disabilities in its bilateral development cooperation, and be a driving force in ensuring that their needs are also addressed in multilateral and humanitarian efforts in the field of education; and help to ensure that the needs of children with disabilities are integrated into national education plans (White Paper 25, 2013-2014, 23).*

This report is an attempt to gauge Norway's progress on the commitments made in the White Paper. It looks at whether, and how, Norway has used its role as an important donor in the global education sector to advocate for inclusive education and the rights and interests of children with disabilities. The report is based on interviews with donors, civil society, and partner government officials in Oslo, Washington, DC, Nepal, and Malawi (see section 1.1). It also draws on a review of relevant documents, including the statistics on Norwegian global education funding made available by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). Of total Norwegian development aid funding, approximately 10 percent – amounting to 3,4 billion Norwegian kroner in 2017 – is spent on education, channeled primarily through UNICEF, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as well as direct bilateral support to partner countries.

In terms of disability inclusive education, the results of this massive expenditure are difficult to trace. One picture that emerges is that Norway has indeed played an important normative role in advocating for disability inclusion in global education. It has used its position as a reliable and respected donor to push for inclusive education in global forums – such as the Oslo Summit on Education for Development (2015); the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity (“the Brown commission”); and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), where

Norway is an active member of the board – and in partner countries (as documented in this report with specific reference to Malawi and Nepal). It is working to integrate metrics on inclusion, including disability, into a results reporting framework for education projects where Norway is the sole or major donor. It has also signaled its continued commitment to improving access to education for children with disabilities in the recent White Paper 24 on the Sustainable Development Goals and Norwegian development policy (White Paper 24, 2017, 66).

But the assessment of Norway as a valuable supporter of inclusive education for children with disabilities should not obscure the fact that there remains a great deal of work to be done. For while it is true that Norway is at the forefront of donors pushing for inclusive education, it is also the case that these efforts have, thus far, resulted in few verifiable results. While there seems to be broad support for the idea of disability inclusion among a cross-section of donors and partner countries, that support is shallow. Disability inclusion is not (yet) an integral and necessary component of the global education agenda. This is evidenced by the fact that disability inclusion is not mainstreamed at the programmatic, sectoral, or strategic levels in Norway, partner countries, or implementing agencies. For example, while it would now be unthinkable to have an education sector plan, program, or project that did not include a gender perspective and, often, gender-specific components, it is regularly the case that disability is missing from such plans, programs, and projects – except for the occasional mention as a particularly marginalized group. The low status of disability inclusion on the global education agenda is also evidenced by the fact that, as this report shows, there is scant data on what has been done in this area, in terms of what resources have been disbursed and how they have been used. This is true for Norway's development funding to education, as well as for education funding disbursed by lending institutions such as the World Bank and multilateral initiatives such as GPE.

It is important to stress the cross-cutting nature of disability. Disability affects all groups in society: girls and boys, rich and poor, of all races, religions, and ethnicities. For children belonging to marginalized or under-represented groups, having a disability can make them even more vulnerable. More to the point, ignoring or excluding disability from education strategies, policies, and programs means that universal targets relating to access and inclusivity will never be achieved. For example, education interventions aimed at girls, which do not specifically include disabled girls, will leave many behind. Yet despite this, inclusive education, and especially disability inclusion, is by no means a consolidated agenda. Progress towards disability inclusion has been made globally, but there are still daunting challenges to the effective implementation of inclusive education. The data on children with disabilities' participation in and access to education is poor, complicating efforts to plan interventions, allocate resources, and measure progress. There is also a widespread lack of

knowledge and capacity relating to disability inclusion in education, in donor and partner countries as well as in implementing agencies. Norway alone cannot solve these challenges. However, it must continue to use its credibility and influence as an important donor to the education sector to strategically and consistently advocate for inclusive education for children with disabilities. It must ensure that it is mainstreaming disability inclusion in plans and policies at the macro (sectoral), meso (programmatic), and micro (project) levels, and pressure other donors and partner countries to do the same. It can also require that all projects and programs receiving Norwegian funding integrate children with disabilities as a prioritized group, and that results reporting include specific indicators pegged to disability inclusion.

This report begins a discussion on methods, followed by a short introduction to the basic elements of inclusive education, and on international and Norwegian commitments to inclusive education for children with disabilities. There is then a longer discussion on the findings of the research. These findings are divided into two separate sections. The first findings section (section 2) attempts to track how much of Norway's global education funding is used on inclusive education, and specifically children with disabilities. The key point in section 2 is twofold:

- Norwegian government promises in relation to inclusive education and disability inclusion are broad, vague, and non-binding, making it difficult to hold the Norwegian government accountable – even though the Parliament has asked the government to devote more attention and development assistance to persons with disabilities, and to report more precisely and systematically on the allocation and use of resources for disability inclusive education
- While it is possible to trace specific Norwegian bi- and multi-lateral development funding flows for education down to a project level, it is extremely difficult to assess how much of this funding is used on inclusive education, much less on children with disabilities.

The latter point is a function of the way the public reporting system is organized by Norad and the MFA. Education funding is coded into broad categories; there is varying and inconsistent use of tags for disaggregation; and – based on a review of all Norwegian-funded global education projects and programs currently being implemented or under agreement to implement – there is no tag for inclusion or disability (or if they exist, these tags are not currently in use).

Section 3, the second findings section, turns to a more broad-ranging discussion of the challenges and dilemmas facing donors and partner countries in more effectively implementing disability inclusion, based primarily on knowledge gained from stakeholder interviews. Five findings are examined in detail:

- *The implementation gap*
- *The mainstreaming paradox*
- *The donor dilemma*
- *The data deficiency*
- *The importance of advocacy*

The report finishes with a short conclusion and list of recommendations.

## 1.1 Methods and sources

This report is based on interviews with donors, policymakers, civil servants, and advocates in Norway, Malawi, Nepal, and Washington, DC. Sources were interviewed from headquarters and field-level from the World Bank, UNICEF, NORAD, Norwegian embassies, civil society, and partner country ministries, including ministries of education and special needs (Malawi). Malawi and Nepal were chosen as case countries because they have prioritized inclusive education in their own education sectors and thus are seen as examples of best practice, and also owing to the active donor role that Norway in these countries. Interviews varied somewhat in terms of content and time used, but there were overarching commonalities. Sources were asked to describe: what inclusive education means to them and to their organization; what their organization (embassy, ministry, headquarters or field office) is specifically doing with respect to inclusive education; the challenges to inclusive education in the country where they work (headquarters-level sources were asked to describe global and intra-organizational challenges); their perceptions of the extent to which inclusive education – specifically for children with disabilities – is prioritized in their organization and/or country of work, compared to other objectives; and their experiences with Norway as a donor, in terms of its support to inclusive education for children with disabilities. Sources were also asked questions that varied according to their position and organization, but that typically touched on issues such as data use; how donor relationships are structured in Malawi and Nepal, and the relationship between donors, civil society, and the partner governments; the role of inclusive education in organizational or sectoral strategies; reporting requirements, including whether or not specific metrics for disability are included; and process- or budgetary-related questions specific to their organizations. With the exception of the interviews in Oslo, all interviews were conducted by skype or telephone. Most (but not all) of the interviews were for-attribution, but sources have been anonymized here in keeping with normal academic practice.

The key sources for tracking Norwegian funding to global education are Norad's "Norsk bistand i tall" (Norwegian development funding in numbers) portal, and MFA's "tilskuddsportal" (grant portal).<sup>1</sup> Norad's portal covers development aid expenditures up to, but not including, the current year, while the MFA's is designed to cover ongoing and future (pledged) project-based and programmatic expenditures. While providing a significant degree of transparency to Norwegian development funding, these two portals also have serious limitations when it comes to tracking support to inclusive education for children with disabilities. This will be examined in greater detail in section two.

This report also draws on policy reports and web material relating to inclusive education; see section 5 for a list of references and useful resources.

## 1.2 What is Inclusive Education?

Inclusive education is a broadly encompassing term. When asked what inclusive education means to them, sources gave very similar replies: inclusive education is about education for all children. This means making education accessible for groups that have previously been – or still are – excluded from education for various reasons. This includes children with disabilities, but also encompasses (in different contexts) girls, religious and ethnic minorities, caste groups, language minorities, poor children, and other marginalized groups. This wide focus is not uncontroversial among disability activists, some of whom would prefer a narrower and explicit focus on children with disabilities, out of concern that disabled children's interests are easily overshadowed by those of other groups (Interview, 4 April 2017). In this respect, the report prepared by an expert group on disability for the 2015 Oslo Summit on Education for Development (the Sæbønes report) specifies "disability inclusive education" – although this seems to be a word choice made primarily for clarity than activism. This report also uses the terms "disability inclusive education" or "disability inclusion" in order to distinguish from the broader category of inclusive education.

Disability inclusive education means making education functionally accessible (infrastructure) and substantively accessible (content and curricula). This entails at a minimum:

- Ensuring that all school facilities are accessible for children with physical disabilities, including the toilet facilities

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<sup>1</sup> Links listed in the resource section.

- Putting adequate provisions in place to ensure that children with disabilities can be safely transported to and from school
- Ensuring that teachers are trained in inclusive education pedagogies, and in disability inclusion in particular
- Investing in assistive technologies and devices
- Providing learning material in accessible formats, and curricula that is adaptable to different needs
- Screening for disabilities, especially cognitive or other “invisible” disabilities
- Gathering disability-related data as part of data collection, monitoring, and reporting on education, in order to better allocate resources and track progress

Currently, most sources – especially those based in Malawi and Nepal – indicate that disability inclusion tends to be focused on functional accessibility. This, in turn, shows an association of disability primarily with visible physical disabilities, rather than “invisible” (primarily developmental or cognitive) disabilities. However, sources in both Malawi and Nepal also spoke of outreach efforts by partner governments, in cooperation with local civil society and citizen groups, which aim to destigmatize disability and persuade parents and educators that disabled children belong in school. This is important work, as it is suspected that many disabled children who are not in school are nevertheless missed by out-of-school (OOS) metrics, in part because they are not considered as appropriate for schooling in the first place. Communicating that all children deserve and are entitled to education thus lays crucial groundwork for disability inclusive education.

A common misunderstanding of disability inclusive education is that it is necessarily expensive and resource-intensive. Sources were keen to stress that disability inclusive education does not have to be costly or involve large-scale interventions. An example cited by several sources relates to a hypothetical child with a visual disability short of full blindness: the appropriate intervention is as simple as placing that child closer to the blackboard – but for this to happen, the child’s visual impairment must be detected and the teacher must take the child’s situation into account in organizing his or her classroom seating. That said, some disabilities require more resources and more specialized attention than others: a child who is legally blind and can only read braille text will not get very far by being moved to the front of the classroom. There is also the matter of the existing structure of special needs education in partner countries. In Nepal, for example, there are “special” schools, usually residential, for specific disabilities (deafness, blindness), as well as resource classes that are placed in, but not integrated to, regular schools, as well as “regular” classrooms where children with disabilities are (perhaps unknowingly) mainstreamed. Moving away from a system of

residential special schools to a system where children can live at home and still receive an appropriate and quality education is a more prolonged process. Similarly, setting up adequate, nationwide screening programs for children at pre-school and school age can be a longer-term objective in some partner countries.

### **1.3 International and Norwegian commitments to disability inclusive education**

Inclusive education, including disability inclusive education, is an increasingly visible component of the global education and development agendas. As noted above, the right to disability inclusive education is contained in article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which 173 countries have ratified and to which 160 are signatories; article 32 of the Convention also calls on states parties to ensure that international cooperation, including international development programs, is inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. Children with disabilities are one of ten focus areas for the work of the GPE. It calls for mainstreaming disability inclusion in all education sector policies and plans. GPE is also developing guidelines for inclusive education, in partnership with the World Bank and UNICEF (at the time of report publication, the guidelines were awaiting final approval). Also relevant is that the GPE's funding modality incentivizes equity in education, where "equity" was understood by most sources as encompassing the goals of inclusive education, including (but not exclusively) disability inclusion. Specifically, 30 percent of GPE's funding allocation for Program Implementation Grants is variable, meaning that its release is only triggered if countries demonstrate "significant" results in the dimensions of equity, efficiency, and learning outcomes.

Meanwhile, Sustainable Development Goal 4 refers specifically to universal access to "inclusive and quality education", and two of its targets reference disability: one target 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, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations" by 2030; and another to "build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, nonviolent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all". SDG 4 is important not just on its own accord, but also because the SDGs have enormous influence in shaping donor countries' own development aid strategies – as seen, for example, in Norway's new White Paper 24 on the Sustainable Development Goals and Norwegian development policy (which in terms of education, largely echoes the commitments of the earlier White Paper 25 on *Education for Development*). Thus, having targets specifically referencing disability is important in mobilizing continued support to the issue of disability inclusion.

Also building off of SDG 4, and relevant to international efforts for inclusive education, is the work of the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity, generally known as the Brown commission. This commission has received critical support and funding from Norway. While the commission is concerned with leveraging funding and investment for education generally, the report of the Brown commission is notable for developing the concept of progressive universalism, which states that the greatest priority and resources must be given to the children that are most vulnerable and at-risk – a category that includes children with disabilities.

Finally, as noted above, Norway is an active supporter of inclusive education, and has forwarded this agenda through its own bilateral giving; through common funding modalities in partner countries; through support to civil society organizations; through the 2015 Oslo Summit on Education for Development, and subsequent processes and initiatives, including the Brown commission; through education support channeled via multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and UNICEF; and through its position as GPE board member. However, as the next two sections show, it is difficult to assess the extent to which Norway's normative and rhetorical support to disability inclusive education has had verifiable results. Determining resource allocation to disability inclusive education is nearly impossible; and implementation-wise, there remains a large gap between rhetoric and reality on disability-inclusive education.

## 2. Tracking Norwegian funding to inclusive education

As summarized in the introduction, Norway's commitment to inclusive education and disability inclusion is both visible – a “niche” area for Norwegian global development funding – and difficult to pin down. This is a function of two important dynamics:

- Commitments to inclusive education that are vague, non-binding, and typically do not specify children with disabilities except as one of several marginalized groups
- The way Norwegian development aid disbursements to the education sector are reported, with broad categories that make it exceedingly difficult to assess whether funding is used on projects or programs aimed at inclusive education, specifically disability inclusion

### 2.1 Broad commitments, few specifics – and parliamentary pressure

The intentions and objectives of Norwegian development policy on, and funding for, global education are articulated in the two White Papers referenced above: White Paper 25, *Education for Development* (2013-2014), and White Paper 24, *Sustainable Development Goals and Norwegian Development Policy* (2017). The education section of Norad's website also highlights the priorities for Norwegian funding to global education, and the scale of that support. White Papers are not of themselves binding – they are an expression of a government's intentions and priorities, lacking legal force – but they are potentially a tool for civil society, opposition parties, advocates, and other stakeholders to use in holding governments accountable. Furthermore, the comments (*innstillinger*) that the Parliament makes on the White Papers are, in fact, binding to the government, as will be elaborated on below.

In the case of disability inclusion, the accountability function is thwarted owing to the breadth and generality of the promises made, which – intentionally or not – pre-empts attempts to measure the government's actions against its intentions. Throughout the two White Papers and on Norad's website, one finds consistent rhetorical support for disability inclusive education. Children with disabilities are highlighted as a group that is particularly marginalized, and that requires greater attention in terms of resources, programming, and knowledge – especially in terms of data collection. The following quotes are illustrative:

*The Government will ... reverse the trend of reducing the share of Norway's international development budget that is allocated to education. .... Particular priority will be given to*

*education for girls and for vulnerable groups of children, such as children with disabilities and children in crisis and conflict situations (White Paper 25, 2013-2014, p. 19).*

*The Government will ... include the needs of children with disabilities in its bilateral development cooperation, and be a driving force in ensuring that their needs are also addressed in multilateral and humanitarian efforts in the field of education; and help to ensure that the needs of children with disabilities are integrated into national education plans (White Paper 25, 2013-2014, 23).*

*The Government will ... maintain a close dialogue with UNICEF to ensure greater efforts in fields such as early childhood development, girls' education, education for vulnerable groups and education in crisis situations (White Paper 25, 2013-2014, p. 49).*

*In keeping with the principle that no one should be excluded, the Norwegian efforts on education are directed towards the poorest, and marginalized groups, including those with disabilities or other special needs .... This requires better knowledge and data on where and who the most marginalized are, new ways to work [on education], enhanced inter-sectoral cooperation, and use of new technology (White Paper 24, 2017, pp. 30-31).<sup>2</sup>*

*The Government will ... [work] for that the most marginalized groups of children and youth are offered education, including children with disabilities (White Paper 24, 2017, pp. 65-66).<sup>3</sup>*

*The Parliamentary Committee underlines the importance that development banks, both in their investments in schools and other programs, attend to people with disabilities' needs and ensure their rights (Parliamentary Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Instructions relating to the 2017 budget, Kap. 160, 2016).<sup>4</sup>*

Furthermore, in White Paper 24, it is written that one-third of all the education projects funded by the World Bank have components that are targeted to people with disabilities, children with special needs, and other under-represented and marginalized groups (p. 58). The purpose of this statement is seemingly to indicate that the Norwegian funding to global education disbursed by the World Bank is at least partly channeled into disability inclusion, as this is represented as an important component of World Bank-funded projects.

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<sup>2</sup> Translation by author.

<sup>3</sup> Translation by author.

<sup>4</sup> Translation by author.

The above quotes have in common that they are formulated in such a way that it is difficult to use them as an accountability mechanism. They are broadly stated and shorn of specifics. Committing to “work for” a goal is a promise that is extraordinarily difficult to break, as the threshold for what counts as “working for” something is subjective and can be very low. The same is true of the formulation that “particular priority” is given to children with disabilities: without attaching specific targets to the level of support given to different groups, it is hard to discern whether that promise is fulfilled. This is especially true in the case of disability, which cuts across all groups but is often made invisible within those groups. Thus, support to children with disabilities will benefit both girls and boys with disabilities; but support to girls’ education – a priority for Norway – will not necessarily benefit disabled girls, unless there is a specific and deliberate intent at disability inclusion.

Moreover, even where there are specifics given – as in the text concerning the one-third of World Bank education projects having components targeting children with disabilities and other marginalized and under-represented groups – it is not always clear what is the factual basis for the claims being made. In this example, it is notable that the World Bank does not have a disability tag that can be used to identify projects by whether they have a disability focus or component; nor is there reference made in the White Paper to sources for the one-third claim, or to specific funding streams or projects that fulfill this requirement. It is also worth noting that the formulation in the White Paper is so broad – grouping together children with disabilities with other “under-represented” and “marginalized” groups – that, even taking the one-third claim at face value, it does not ensure that one-third of all World Bank-funded education projects have components dealing specifically with disability. This is thus a thin thread upon which to hang the contention that Norwegian funding to global education prioritizes children with disabilities. Finally, it is notable that the *tildelingsbrev* that instructs Norad on how to spend the resources allocated from the 2016 state budget does not mention disability or inclusion in the section on education. While it states that Norwegian development funding to education has as its principle goal that all children have access to education, it names the following priorities: girls’ education, quality and learning, education in crisis and conflict situations, results-based financing, IT/ innovation, and vocational training.<sup>5</sup>

Because White Papers are non-binding expressions of principles and intentions, it is not surprising that the promises made in them are broad and lack detail. However, the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee’s comments to White Paper 25, *Education for Development*, are considerably more concrete and detailed. This is important, because once these comments

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<sup>5</sup> This and other *tildelingsbrev* to Norad are available at: [https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dep/ud/org/virksomheter\\_ud/etater\\_ud/rapport\\_tildeling/id749659/](https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dep/ud/org/virksomheter_ud/etater_ud/rapport_tildeling/id749659/).

(*innstillinger*) are approved by Parliament, the government is required to act upon them. Three paragraphs in particular are important for disability inclusive education.

*The Parliamentary Committee believes that ... measures to include children with disabilities in school must be strengthened. Even though it is not always possible to differentiate costs for ensuring disabled children's access to school in more inclusive programs, the Committee believes that there must be systematic report, where possible, on the extent of Norwegian measures pursuant to this goal.*

*The Parliamentary Committee refers to a study conducted for Norad by the Nordic Consulting Group in 2012, which shows that development assistance to people with disabilities has been halved between the years of 2000 to 2010. This shows, according to the Committee, that the amount of development assistance that goes to people with disabilities must be increased, and this shows the need for a more precise reporting to the Parliament on the efforts for [made on behalf of] people with disabilities.*

*The Committee believes that Norway must be a driving force internationally in taking up the rights of persons with disabilities, including the right to education, in different multilateral fora. In Norway's cooperation with UNICEF, where Norway is one of the largest donors, the efforts for children with disabilities are extremely relevant. The same applies to the Global Partnership for Education (Parliamentary Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Comments to White Paper 25, 2014-2015).<sup>6</sup>*

These are important statements, because they indicate a willingness from the Parliament to push the government for more concrete and verifiable action on disability inclusive education. While they do not lay out specific targets – and while there is a recognition of the potential complexity of reporting resource flows to disability inclusion in education projects – the Committee's comments nevertheless express a clear desire and expectation for greater efforts and resources to be spent on behalf of children with disabilities. Crucially, the statements also indicate that the Parliamentary Committee expects the government to report more precisely and systematically on the allocation and use of resources for disability inclusive education. The next section examines whether this expectation has been met.

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<sup>6</sup> Available at: <https://www.stortinget.no/no/Saker-og-publikasjoner/Publikasjoner/Innstillinger/Stortinget/2014-2015/inns-201415-125/2/#a5>. Translated by author.

## 2.2 Tracking inclusion: mission impossible?

The vagary of Norwegian commitments to disability inclusion in global education, notwithstanding the expectations laid out by the Parliament, is one factor limiting accountability. Another is the way that development aid disbursements are categorized and reported.

### **Norway's funding to global education – 2016:**

*Total:* 3 172,7 million NOK

*To World Bank:* 134,4 million NOK

*To UNICEF:* 1 094,2 million NOK

*To "UN – Other":* 119 million NOK

*As Budget Support to Partner Countries:* 256,8 million NOK

*Source: Norsk bistand i tall: <https://www.norad.no/om-bistand/norsk-bistand-i-tall/?tab=geo>*

Here it should be emphasized that there is a high degree of transparency in Norwegian aid disbursement. Data is available via the portals hosted by Norad and the MFA (see introduction), and can be disaggregated by sector, receiving country or region, implementing partner or agency, and date. Further disaggregation is possible by budget line. Using the advanced search function, it is possible to access information down to the project level, including the amounts disbursed in Norwegian kroner and US dollars.<sup>7</sup>

The challenge comes in trying to disaggregate education funding to focus specifically on disability, inclusion, and other topics or issue areas. This is because the sectoral and thematic categories are too broad to enable that level of granularity. Thus, the Norad portal (*Norsk bistand i tall*) enables one to search by sector – education – and within the education heading, by the following sub-topics: all; education and research; education, unspecified; primary education; further education (*videre utdanning*); and higher education.<sup>8</sup> It does not, however, allow searching within or across these sub-topics by tags, such as disability, gender, inclusion, etc. Similarly, searching by implementing agency brings up a number of categories, including multilateral organizations, Norwegian civil society

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<sup>7</sup> Note that this information relates only to disbursements – how much and to whom. It does not give any information on outputs or outcomes of specific projects.

<sup>8</sup> Translation by author.

organizations, international and local civil society organizations, public sector in recipient countries, private sector, and public-private partnership. These in turn have additional sub-categories. For multilateral organizations, the choices are: all; the UN Development Program; UNICEF; UN-other; World Bank; regional development banks; and several others. Important for education purposes, the database does not separate out the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) or the Global Partnership for Education. It is possible that funding to the Global Partnership for Education is categorized as World Bank funding, but this is not specified and seems unlikely, given the scale of Norwegian funding to GPE in 2015 – amounting to 45 million USD (approximately 388 million NOK). Moreover, the results are presented as topline numbers; and while the advanced search function can be used to get a disaggregation by project, the classification of these projects remains broad. The MFA portal is similar to the Norad portal, except that specific projects include tags – which are not, however, searchable. Furthermore, the use of tags is inconsistent – some projects are tagged with multiple topics, other simply as “education” – and none of the projects in the MFA portal had tags relating to disability or inclusion.

Effectively, this means that the only way for people working with publicly available information to determine the amount of Norwegian global education funding going to disability inclusion (or inclusive education more broadly) is go project-by-project, deciding on the basis of the project title whether there seems to be a disability focus or component. Moreover, even this is not necessarily an effective way of levying accountability, given that there are not specific pledges or targets for resources to be allocated for disability inclusion in global education.

The new results reporting framework to be implemented by Norad could provide more information on disability components or content in projects receiving Norwegian aid. This framework, which is intended to apply to education projects at the educational institution/ community level where Norway is the sole or major donor, lists as 1 of 6 priority outcomes “education policies and plans promote equality and inclusion”, further specifying “inclusion of girls, children with disabilities, ethnic minorities, the poorest and other marginalized groups”.<sup>9</sup> Projects subject to this framework must take these goals into account in project planning and development, and must account for them in project reporting. If properly implemented, this should create a better knowledge base on what is concretely being done for disability inclusive education in Norwegian-supported projects. This is, however, only a first step, as the means through which disability is concretely accounted for in the indicators – and the extent of projects that will be subject to the

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<sup>9</sup> The goal hierarchy for Norway’s education for development efforts is available at: <https://www.norad.no/globalassets/filer-2015/utdanning/goalhierarchy.jpg>.

framework – remain unclear. Additionally, without changes to how aid disbursements are publicly reported – including greater possibilities for disaggregation by topic or theme, and more systematic and consistent use of tags for projects and funding streams – this knowledge base will be inaccessible to those outside of Norad and the MFA.

Finally, it is worth noting a discrepancy in the way that Norwegian priorities in the global education sector are presented on the Norad website, which does not relate to tracking of specific resource allocations and disbursements, but rather to the communication and visibility of Norad's efforts on education. The Norwegian-language version of the site highlights ten topics under the heading of education, one of which is *Utdanning for alle: hvem faller utenfor?* (Education for all: who is missing?). Within the education for all sub-head, there is a smaller section devoted to children with disabilities, as well as links to resources and programs on inclusive education. Conversely, the English-language version highlights only seven topics under the heading of education, and – somewhat ironically – the section on “who is missing” is, in fact, missing. The English version instead focuses on girls' education; quality in education; education in war, emergencies, and fragile situations; innovation and education; vocational training and entrepreneurship; and education results reporting system. In none of these sub-heads is there a specific disability focus. While this may seem like a minor issue, the symbolic effect is not insignificant. Norad's website is probably its most important channel for public profiling, information, and communication – and at present, children with disabilities are virtually invisible on the English version.

### 3. Challenges and dilemmas to implementing disability inclusion

The normative commitment by developing countries, donors, and the international community to the inclusion of children with disabilities in education is encouraging, but insufficient. The challenge is ensuring that the good intentions are not just words on paper, but instead are put into action – in planning, budgeting, and implementation; in data collection, monitoring, and reporting; at the strategic sectoral, programmatic, and project level. Without concerted attention to children with disabilities in education funding, policy, and reporting, the risk is that their interests and needs will be overshadowed, even where there is an inclusive education strategy in place.

This section will discuss key findings from interviews with donors, policymakers, civil servants, and advocates in Norway, Malawi, Nepal, and Washington, DC. As noted in the introduction, the interview findings speak to, but also go beyond, the issue of Norway's role in promoting disability inclusive education, to a more broad-ranging discussion of the challenges and dilemmas facing donors and partner countries in more effectively implementing disability inclusion. Five overlapping, and in many cases reinforcing, findings are highlighted:

- *The implementation gap*
- *The mainstreaming paradox*
- *The donor dilemma*
- *The data deficiency*
- *The importance of advocacy*

#### 3.1 The Implementation Gap

Ensuring the provision of education for children with disabilities requires that inclusive sectoral strategies and plans are in place. It also requires that the plans that are formulated are put into action.

Malawi and Nepal have both developed strategies for inclusive education for children with disabilities, either as part of or alongside their sectoral development plans and strategies (Malawi Ministry of Science, Education and Technology undated; Nepal Ministry of Education 2016). Implementation plans for these strategies are also being developed. The strategies for disability inclusion developed by Malawi and Nepal are thus relatively new, and as such they provide a good starting point for further action. Already, however, there are concerns about the gap between policy and practice – the implementation gap. As one source in Malawi said:

*There is interest. Good intentions are there, strategies are there, extensive interest and even push from HQ. But the issue is, what do we actually do to move from those statements to the practical? What is the plan? What does it cost? What does it mean [for the various levels] .... That is where it has never gone. .... [we] need to move a step further. Strategies and intentions are all there, but implementation, moving to the operational level, [is] not there. (Interview, 20 March 2017)*

When it comes to disability inclusion, the implementation gap exists not only in the area of education, but more broadly in society. For example, a source in Nepal highlighted a similar dynamic – in which the laws, strategies, and intentions are mostly in place, but implementation is lacking or otherwise problematic – in terms of access to public buildings. Noting the challenges that Nepal’s mountainous terrain causes for people with disabilities, she said:

*Nepal has lots of good policies, [for example] all public buildings are supposed to be accessible. But then you get ramps at a 30 degree angle! (Interview, 10 March 2017)*

She added that the transitional learning centers being constructed in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake (in order to provide temporary learning facilities until permanent schools are rebuilt) are all supposed to be equipped with ramps, but that:

*... often the response is that there are no children with disabilities here. So [we] always have to make the argument that we need this stuff. (Interview, 10 March 2017)*

While these two anecdotes are narrowly about ramps, they illustrate the wider obstacles facing the implementation of disability inclusive policies, which are reflected or amplified in the education sector. Laws and regulations exist on the books, but there is resistance against putting them into action – or they are implemented in ways that fulfil the letter of the law but provide questionable benefit, as in the case of the 30-degree ramp. The notion in the second anecdote that the required ramps are “unnecessary” because there are no children with disabilities in the school is particularly revealing, as it disregards the possibility that children with disabilities do not come to school precisely because the school building is inaccessible to them. This “invisibility” of children with disabilities – either because the child is not able or expected to access education, and is thus “unseen” by the system, or because the disability itself is invisible – is a major challenge to the implementation of inclusive education. Ensuring that school facilities are accessible and functional for all students is thus a necessary step towards disability inclusive education, but it is not itself sufficient – as it does not account for the needs and rights of children with invisible disabilities, nor does it say anything about the quality of the education disabled children receive once at school.

The sources in Malawi and Nepal were not the only ones to identify the gap between strategies, policies, intentions and their implementation as a problem, and the implementation gap is not unique to these two countries. Sources agreed that there are many reasons for the implementation gap, but lack of resources and lack of capacity – both in terms of teacher training, where the training modules and curriculum on inclusive education are inadequate; and in terms of ministerial capacity to manage the demands and priorities of donors – are the two reasons named most often. Developing countries with limited resources, insufficient infrastructure, and a long list of challenges and priorities for their education sector may have the intention and desire to pursue inclusive education strategies, but they are not given precedence by either the concerned country or the donor community. Despite the fact that, as one source noted, inclusive education initiatives and pedagogies improve education for *every* child – including those who are not members of marginalized or otherwise excluded groups – the implementation of these initiatives is still too often seen as being “in addition to” the necessary work that must be done to reform and improve education.

As one Washington, DC-based source noted, this will be the case until there are mechanisms in place to insist on accountability for disability inclusion at all levels: programmatically, strategically, and sectorally (Interview, 13 March 2017). Thus, while the implementation gap is not something that any one donor, partner country, or institution can fix on its own, all stakeholders can work towards accountability for disability inclusion in their sectoral and programmatic development, budgeting, monitoring, and reporting.

For Norway in particular, one tool that has been used in other issue areas to generate action around specific priorities is the formulation of an Action Plan (*handlingsplan*), which contains particular policy actions, targets, and indicators for all of the relevant ministries on that topic. One example is Norway’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, which has been updated multiple times since 2006, and in its current form contains dozens of goals and indicators to be coordinated among, and implemented by, four government ministries by 2018. Similar action plans have also been developed on the subjects of business and human rights; and on women’s rights and gender equality in foreign and development policy. Action plans both enable and require a greater degree of specificity in terms of a government’s policy, funding allocations, and intra-governmental processes. They are thus a valuable accountability mechanism for activists, watchdogs, opposition politicians – and policymakers themselves, who can leverage the action plan to their advantage in bureaucratic in-fighting and budgetary struggles. There is not presently a Norwegian action plan on global education equivalent to the action plans referenced above.

### 3.2 The mainstreaming paradox

In this report, “mainstreaming” is not used in the way that it is typically used in a disability and educational context, which is to describe the practice of educating students with special needs in “regular” classes, at least for specific periods of time on the basis of their skills and needs. Instead, mainstreaming is used to refer to a practice in development aid that is most commonly associated with gender. Gender mainstreaming is defined by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as follows:

*Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality. (ECOSOC 1997)*

According to this common understanding, mainstreaming children with disabilities in education policy means that any and all education strategies, programs, policies, or legislation assess the implications for children with disabilities, and make their concerns and experiences an integral part of any programmatic design and implementation.

It is worth noting that “mainstreaming”, at least as originally defined, does not exclude affirmative action-type programs or policies targeting specific groups. Instead, the aim of mainstreaming is that any programs or policies targeted to those groups are not “stand-alone” initiatives that are unconnected to broader processes and reforms. In other words, mainstreaming attempts to overturn the idea that children with disabilities, or other marginalized groups, can be segmented in discrete projects that are separate from the sector’s overarching strategic initiatives and programs. From a mainstreaming perspective, projects targeting children with disabilities (or girls, or religious minorities, etc) can exist, but the needs and interests of children with disabilities must also be diffused through all of the other programming being done. Indeed, because disability is a cross-cutting issue – it affects all groups in society, whether categorized according to gender, race, socioeconomic status, religion, or other variables – it is all the more important to mainstream disability inclusion in planning, policy, and practice.

That said, the current practice of mainstreaming for children with disabilities in education falls well short of the mainstreaming ideal. There also seems to be a lack of understanding as to what a

mainstreaming approach entails, as several practitioner sources indicated that “mainstreaming” disallows disability from being targeted or lifted up as a distinct (if cross-cutting) issue. As one UNICEF source said:

*[It] sounds good to say that things are mainstreamed, but in reality, it means it’s not a priority ... [it] needs to be raised as its own issue. (Interview 10 March 2017).*

This and other sources argued that, in practice, the mainstreaming of children with disabilities means that their needs become obscured or subsumed by those of other marginalized groups also encompassed by the term “inclusive education”. Because inclusive education potentially refers to many vulnerable or marginalized groups, it is not necessarily the case that the interests of children with disabilities are foremost, even where inclusiveness is prioritized. As one source in Malawi noted, with specific reference to the GPE focus on “equity” (see section 1):

*Every project has equity, but equity is focused on gender [girls] and vulnerable children. But if you bury special needs kids under “vulnerable children”, you will miss them completely, because “vulnerable children” are so big and their needs are so diverse ... so special needs kids need to be separated out or [they will be] lost. (Interview, 10 March 2017).*

However, the danger with “separating out” children with disabilities in education policies and programming is that they will be treated as a homogenous and unitary group that does not belong with able-bodied children – the very opposite of what mainstreaming attempts to achieve. As with the implementation gap described above, in the non-mainstreaming scenario, programming and resources for children with disabilities thus remains “in addition to”, rather than a constituent part of, education policy in developing countries.

At the same time, practitioners’ frustration at the failure of disabilities mainstreaming should be taken seriously. One Washington, DC-based source identified the problem as a weak link between supporting “just” disability work and supporting disability mainstreaming (Interview, 13 March 2017) Supporting disability work – the current approach – means that support is primarily project-based, ad hoc, and often reactive, by which the source meant that components on disabilities were added at the last minute and in response to problems that arose. Conversely, if donors were deliberate about disability inclusion, they would insist on having disability components in every project from the planning phases onward. Returning to the example of gender mainstreaming, the source said, projects are flagged and, in the last instance, not approved if they are not underpinned by gender analysis and including gender components. This is not the case with disability inclusion, which is why disability mainstreaming cannot be said to have reached an institutionalized or consolidated level.

This is true both at the micro and the macro levels. At the micro level, donors may be funding projects dealing specifically with disability inclusion, but this varies depending on the context, assessed needs, country and donor priorities, and other factors. At the macro level – that is, at the level of funding a country’s education sector on the basis of its sectoral plan – there is no consistent demand that disability inclusion be an integral component. Instead, it is usually at best a separate section or chapter, whose perspective, analysis, and objectives may not be cohesively integrated with the rest of the plan. Yet the fact that disability mainstreaming is missing at the macro level is a significant obstacle for disability inclusion, because all of the various stakeholders take their cue from the sectoral plans – which are themselves collaborative documents that typically generate a great deal of buy-in from government officials, donors, and civil society.

There is thus a paradox: the needs of children with disabilities should be mainstreamed into all education policy, planning, and implementation; but until they are, the practice of mainstreaming – as opposed to having disability “separated out” – is potentially failing children with disabilities, by allowing their interests to be subsumed by those of the larger group of “vulnerable” children.

It seems that for mainstreaming to be successful, there needs to be buy-in by a critical mass comprised of stakeholders with the power to set priorities, allocate resources, and implement policy and programming. The nature of critical mass is that, once it is achieved, it is self-reinforcing: in other words, once enough powerful actors (donors, institutions, partner countries) get serious about mainstreaming disability inclusion at all levels, it is difficult to go back. Norway’s status as an important donor in the education field makes it well-placed to help achieve critical mass for disability mainstreaming at the micro and macro levels, both by setting an example in its own practices and by leveraging its status as a board member of the GPE and a key donor in many partner countries/ pooled funds. Other important donors and implementing agencies invested in inclusive education, such as UNICEF, Germany, Australia, Canada, and Japan, can be mobilized by/ along with Norway to create this critical mass for mainstreaming disability inclusion.

### **3.3 The donor dilemma**

While development literature sometimes presents donors and international organizations (especially the World Bank and UN agencies) as dominant, determinative factors in development trends and trajectories, donors themselves are cognizant of the need for local ownership. As one headquarters-based source said, “don’t overstate the role of donors”. By this, the source meant that partner countries are usually in control of their priorities and development agenda, and – when push comes

to shove – will not do something unless they want to do it. This is positive for the cause of locally-owned and sustainable development, but it also implies that top-down development agendas will get only limited traction. In terms of inclusive education, and specifically inclusion of children with disabilities, this means that there must be buy-in from partner countries.

In fact, both field- and headquarters-based sources testified to a general enthusiasm for disability inclusive education among partner countries. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that the two case countries, Malawi and Nepal, are generally held up as leading examples of inclusive education in developing countries. But other countries, such as Ethiopia, have also shown interest in instituting inclusive education in their own education sectors. While inclusiveness (in the form of “equity”) is a factor in accessing the 30 percent variable funding granted by the Global Partnership for Education, and is thus incentivized financially, there was a sentiment among sources that the interest in inclusive education is genuine.

Indeed, some partner country sources advocated for greater roles by donors in incentivizing or mandating inclusivity, including through the use of earmarking funds (in common or pooled funds), requiring disability inclusion in all projects, and integrating disability metrics into reporting (Interview, 20 March 2017). These government sources were advocates for inclusive education for children with disabilities in their own system, and felt that they would not make proper headway unless donors took a more active approach. The actions and requirements of donors can in this way strengthen governmental and civil society advocates for disability inclusion, vis-à-vis other local stakeholders that are pushing competing initiatives and claims for resources.

Interestingly, such proposals – especially relating to additional reporting requirements – were met with some skepticism from donors operating in the country. One donor, while saying that the ideas were good, nevertheless countered that they are concerned about the limited capacity that exists in the responsible government ministries (Interview, 21 March 2017). Particularly when it comes to financial and technical reporting, ministries are stretched by trying to report to multiple donors, all with different requirements and formats – a problem that is not necessarily resolved with even with a pooled funding mechanism. There was thus reluctance to add yet more reporting requirements, at least on partner governments (as opposed to Norwegian civil society organizations, who already must answer questions on inclusion in project applications, and in the future will be expected to report on education projects’ effects on inclusion according to the results reporting framework).

Another, headquarters-based donor noted that there is – in their view, surprisingly – little capacity and knowledge about inclusive education in partner country ministries. This can have the

effect of making ministries resistant to tackling disability inclusive education, on the presumption that it is too difficult or demanding; but even where ministries are willing, it backs up concerns about a lack of capacity undermining implementation and progress (Interview, 4 April 2017). Here it should be noted that donor agencies and donor countries themselves may lack capacity and knowledge in terms of disability inclusion, or such capacity may be concentrated in specific units rather than spread throughout the organization. The practical effect of this is to keep disability inclusion lower on donors' agenda, insofar as it is seen as a "specialized" field that requires extra knowledge, work, and resources to engage in.

Returning to the issue of donor skepticism to push harder on disability inclusive education, it is important not to discount the fact that, as noted in section 2.2, sectoral plans provide overall strategic and programmatic direction for a country's education sector – and that these are collaborative documents that generate commitment by donors and civil society as well as the partner government. This means that donors do not necessarily want to be too far out in front of the sectoral plan in terms of the issues that they fund. Inclusive education is an increasingly important component of sectoral plans, and has also become more visible and prioritized in the work of the Global Partnership for Education; but as argued in the sections above, disability inclusion is not always the main focus for inclusive education initiatives. While donors obviously have some latitude in channeling support to their key priority areas, the field-based sources also exhibited caution with respect to straying too far from what they perceived to be the core elements of the sectoral plan. This circles back to the point made in section 2.2 on mainstreaming: as long as disability inclusion is not effectively mainstreamed by partner governments and donors at the macro level – at the level of sectoral plans – then support to disability inclusion will continue to cluster at the micro level, in the form of ad hoc projects and initiatives.

Thus, donors are simultaneously powerful and constrained – as are partner governments. Our donor sources, whether field- or headquarters-based, were all aware of this fact, situating themselves sometimes as equal partners, sometimes as change agents, and sometimes as reactive. All of these are surely accurate representations of the power dynamics at play between donors and partner governments, donors and civil society, and – not least – within the donor community itself. The point is that donors' ability to set the agenda on education, including in terms of disability inclusion, is not straightforward. Donors rightly respond to the priorities and constraints of partner governments, but these are often themselves up for negotiation – and here there is potential for donors such as Norway to tip the scales in favor of advocates for disability inclusive education within partner countries. Donors must also navigate their own priorities and constraints: for example,

weighing the knowledge and accountability benefits of increased reporting requirements relating to children with disabilities, against the demands that such requirements place on local capacity and resources. The donor sources interviewed all expressed genuine commitment to disability inclusion, but were also extremely cognizant of the challenges and limitations to its implementation. The donor dilemma is that sometimes these challenges and limitations are, at least partly, self-imposed – based on donors’ perceptions of what partner countries can and want to accomplish, without giving due weight to their influence and role in this collaboration.

### 3.4 The data deficiency

A common lament among all sources concerned the state of existing data on access to education for children with disabilities – echoing a key finding of the expert group report prepared for the Oslo Summit on Education for Development in 2015 (Sæbønes et al 2015). There are several problems that arise: disabled children are not adequately accounted for in the data that exists on out-of-school (OOS) children, in part because they are not always expected to be educated (and thus are not considered “out of school”); where data is collected on disability, it tends to be of limited scope and unfit for further disaggregation; and not least, there is an unknown, but believed to be sizable, number of children with invisible disabilities who are undiagnosed, and thus not captured in the statistics on disability.

Improving the state of data on disabled children’s access to education is a priority – especially at headquarters level, as data-related initiatives are not country-specific. As one Washington, DC-based source said, “headquarters [versus field offices] looks at the sort of things that are of general benefit around the world .... headquarters makes a big difference in data” (Interview, 15 March 2017). Particularly important among ongoing initiatives is the work of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, which has developed a short set of questions designed to identify people with a disability in a survey or census. The Washington Group has also developed, with UNICEF, the Child Functioning Question Set, which is designed to identify children with developmental or psychosocial issues. Other initiatives mentioned were the Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MIC-6), which now has a module on child functioning and another on the school environment, which includes metrics on access and inclusivity; and an effort by UNICEF to integrate the Washington Group short set into the Education Management Information System (EMIS) that is used by national ministries to collect, analyze, and report on education-related data (Interview, 15 March 2017). Norway eagerly supports initiatives to improve data collection on children with disabilities and education. Additionally, as part of Norad’s new results reporting framework, information will be collected on education projects’ inclusivity

outcomes, including metrics relating to children with disabilities. This is primarily an accountability measure, but it can also provide useful knowledge about children with disabilities' access to education.

The focus on data is important because, as one source said, “You treasure what you measure” (Interview, 4 April 2017). If an issue is not visible in the metrics that inform strategic and programmatic planning, as well as the applicable metrics for benchmarking, monitoring, and reporting progress and outcomes, then it is more difficult to mobilize attention and resources to it. This is why collecting baseline data on the situation in education for children with disabilities is so important: without such data, it is impossible to know with any certainty the scope of the issue, the resources that are required, and the particular areas or interventions that should be prioritized. Associated with baseline data collection is also better screening for children with disabilities. As mentioned above, many children, particularly those with developmental or cognitive disabilities (“invisible” disabilities), are never included in disability statistics because they are not properly diagnosed; this leaves these children without proper support, and also under-counts, possibly dramatically, the number of children with disabilities, which in turn has impact on resource allocation. Finally, once solid baseline data is established, reporting on interventions and outcomes for children with disabilities becomes more reliable and informative.

There is another aspect of the discussion about data and “treasure what you measure”, and this has to do with the argumentation used for inclusive education. Improving children with disabilities' access to education is first and foremost a matter of rights: as noted in the introduction, disabled children's right to education is enshrined in several international conventions. Norway also uses the language of rights in articulating the importance of disabled children's access to education. White Paper 25 (Meld. St. 25), *Education for Development*, speaks strongly of a right to education for all children. It says:

*The obligation to fulfil the right to education means that states must implement measures that enable the population to realise this right. This means not only providing education services, but also providing conditions that enable people to make use of these services, and not least ensuring that the whole population has access to primary education on a non-discriminatory basis. (White Paper 25, 2013-2014, 10).*

But efficiency arguments are also used, by Norway and others, to make the case for prioritizing the provision of inclusive education to children with disabilities. These arguments are made to supplement rights-based arguments, and draw on the economic language of cost-benefit analysis

and return on investment. The thrust is that the cost to individuals, families, and societies of *not* educating children with disabilities exceeds the cost of educating them, where “cost” can be construed either broadly or narrowly. Thus, prioritizing a specific vulnerable or marginalized group is not “just” a matter of fulfilling promised rights, but brings with it demonstrable benefits that can be used to “sell” the initiative to skeptical donors or publics. As one source noted, “rights” can be hard to argue from because there are many competing rights, and they all create their own priorities (Interview, 4 April 2017); whereas data-driven efficiency arguments can be more convincing because they are tangible and promise a return on investment. However, as a diplomatic source pointed out, making these kinds of efficiency arguments is significantly easier if there is available data that indicates that they are true – not just in one instance, but in many cases (Interview, 21 March 2017).

A brief note on efficiency arguments for equality, which feature among other places in the Sæbønes report (Sæbønes et al 2015), and have similarly been made by the World Bank and others with respect to gender equality, under the tagline that “empowering women is smart economics” (World Bank 2006). These kinds of efficiency arguments can be empowering, by highlighting the ability, agency, and benefit to society of people who are often wrongly depicted as dependent, passive, or helpless. That said, they are not unproblematic: some disability activists, feminists, and others targeted as vectors of efficiency have criticized them as dismissing fundamental rights in favor of economic imperatives, and in that way instrumentalizing equality as something that can be earned, traded, or ultimately jettisoned (for a feminist critique of “smart economics”, see Roberts and Soederberg 2012). For if you take the efficiency argument seriously, the big concern is what happens if, or when, the economic argument for equality is shown to be unconvincing: are disabled persons’ rights no longer worth protecting if the societal “cost” is more than the benefit, economically speaking? While this provocative counter-argument is never articulated, it nevertheless casts a shadow over any argumentation that prioritizes efficiency over rights with respect to marginalized groups. That is why it is important to keep a rights-based focus even when using efficiency arguments. In this respect, the work of the Brown commission (see section 1) is particularly important in developing the principle of “progressive universalism”, which states that the greatest priority needs to be given to children most excluded and most at risk. To the extent that better data will help policymakers, practitioners, and advocates serve these children, then improving data collection and screening is a key priority that will further both rights and efficiency.

### 3.5 The importance of advocacy

A final theme that was stressed by almost all sources is the importance of advocacy. Here civil society plays a key role, but advocates for disability inclusion within partner governments, donors, and international organizations are also crucially important. Sources stressed the significance of advocacy in keeping disability issues on the education agenda, and in ensuring that the interests of children with disabilities do not get forgotten or overlooked. Activists play an important role in keeping donors accountable to their own promises relating to disability inclusion (Interview, 21 March 2017). Their efforts will also be necessary in moving towards the critical mass necessary for genuine disability inclusion mainstreaming (see section 3.2).

At the same time, several sources stressed that advocates must also be cognizant of the practical challenges to inclusive education for children with disabilities. While not implying that activists should ease up on their advocacy, these sources noted that the enabling environment – schools, teachers, parents, other stakeholders, and appropriate curricula – must also be in place in order for effective change to take root (Interview, 10 March 2017; see also the stepped approach laid out in Handicap International Nepal 2015).

## 4. Recommendations

Norway has expressed a strong normative commitment to disability inclusive education, and has situated itself as an important actors and influencers in pushing this issue up the global education agenda. It is far from clear, however, what has resulted from this commitment, both in terms of resources pledged and disbursed, projects implemented, and – at a higher level – changes in how implementing agencies, partner countries, and other donors prioritize and work towards disability inclusion. In this concluding section, we put forth concrete recommendations for how Norway and other stakeholders can further the cause of disability inclusive education.

We are cognizant that policy recommendations must take into account the realities of the partners to Norwegian development assistance, which includes both partner governments – with their own political concerns, capacity and resources challenges, and publics to be accountable to – and implementing agencies, themselves restricted by their specific mandates, operating procedures, and political and resource constraints. The recommendations thus operate across levels, ranging from concrete suggestions with the potential for relatively quick implementation, to more ambitious and long-term recommendations. Some of the recommendations are targeted solely to Norwegian actors, and relate to processes and procedures under the remit of the MFA and Norad, while others apply to a wider range of actors, where Norway can play a mobilizing or advocacy role in pushing for their fulfilment.

*To the Norwegian government (MFA and Norad):*

- Develop an Action Plan (*handlingsplan*) in support of White Paper 24 on the SDGs and Norwegian development policy and White Paper 25 on Education for Development, which includes specific action items, and appropriate tracking mechanisms, prioritizing disability inclusion.
- Work internally and with Norwegian, international, and local Disabled Persons organizations, researchers, and implementing agencies to develop more robust and adequate knowledge on sustainable ways to make a difference disable children's lives, within the realistic economic realities of poor partner countries. Use this knowledge and these partnerships to develop specific targets, indicators, and metrics for disability inclusive education. There can be two levels of targets: a basic level applicable to all contexts, and a second level responsive to the specific local conditions and challenges. The guidelines on inclusive education being jointly developed by the GPE, World Bank, and UNICEF, are a good starting point, but should not be taken as the end point.

- Ensure that all Norwegian-funded education projects mainstream disability inclusion in planning, implementation, and reporting. Projects that do not include disability should be revised (or ultimately rejected) in the same way as projects that do not include gender or environmental perspectives.
- Require that reporting on Norwegian education funding includes metrics relating to disability, including eventually for projects and funding streams not covered by Norad's results reporting framework. Work to integrate these metrics into common or pooled funding reporting systems at the country level.
- Require the use of disability tags for Norwegian education funding, in order to improve the trackability and accountability of Norwegian support to disability inclusive education.
- Prioritize knowledge and capacity building on disability inclusion among Norwegian civil servants working in the MFA and Norad.
- At the embassy level: establish contact and work collaboratively with local civil society organizations dedicated to disability, and ensure that they have a place at the table in the development, implementation, and monitoring of sectoral plans and education programs and projects.
- Use Norway's position on the Board of the Global Partnership for Education to work systematically for disability inclusion in the sectoral plans and projects that GPE approves and provides funding for.

*To Norway and other donors and implementing agencies:*

- Establish a World Bank trust fund under the office of the Disability Advisor, dedicated to building and disseminating knowledge and experience on low-cost interventions that can make a substantial difference in the education for children living with a disability.
- Support research into low-cost mechanisms and technologies that are effective in poor countries with limited infrastructure, as well as research into localized (socio-political, economic, infrastructural) obstacles to education access for disabled children.
- Support efforts to improve data on children with disabilities in developing countries.
- Follow up recommendations on disability inclusive education and inclusive education financing from the Sæbønes report and Brown Commission.

## 5. References and Resources

### 5.1 Works cited

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International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity (“Brown Commission”). 2016. *The Learning Generation: Investing in Education for a Changing World.* Available at: <http://report.educationcommission.org/>.

Malawi Government, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. Undated. *Towards an Inclusive Education System: National Strategy on Inclusive Education.* Lilongwe, Malawi.

Roberts, Adrienne and Susanne Soederberg. 2012. “Gender Equality as Smart Economics? A critique of the 2012 World Development Report.” *Third World Quarterly*, 33 (5): 949-968, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2012.677310.

Sæbønes, Ann-Marit et al. 2015. *Towards a Disability Inclusive Education: Background Paper for the Oslo Summit on Education for Development.* Oslo. Available at: <http://atlas-alliansen.no/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/TOWARDS-A-DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE-EDUCATION.pdf>.

World Bank. 2006. *Gender Equality as Smart Economics: A World Bank Group Gender Action Plan (Fiscal Years 2007-10).* Washington, DC: World Bank.

### 5.2 Useful resources

#### White Papers and Parliamentary Comments

White Paper 25, *Utdanning for Utvikling* (2013-2014) – Norwegian:  
<https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/Meld-St-25--20132014/id762554/>

White Paper 25, *Education for Development* (2013-2014) – English:  
<https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/meld.-st.-25-2013-2014/id762554/>

White Paper 24, *Felles ansvar for felles framtid – Bærekraftsmålene og Norsk utviklingspolitikk* (2017) – Norwegian-only: <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/meld.-st.-24-20162017/id2547573/>

Parliamentary Comments (Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee) to White Paper 25 (2014-2015) – Norwegian-only: <https://www.stortinget.no/no/Saker-og-publikasjoner/Publikasjoner/Innstillinger/Stortinget/2014-2015/Inns-201415-125/>

Parliamentary Instructions (Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee) to 2016 National Budget -- Norwegian-only: <https://www.stortinget.no/no/Saker-og-publikasjoner/Publikasjoner/Innstillinger/Stortinget/2015-2016/Inns-201516-007/>

## Tracking Norwegian development assistance

Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Tilskuddsportal:

<http://udtilskudd.regjeringen.no/#/nb/country/details?partnerGroup=1&programArea=4&sectorGroup=2&year=2018>

NORAD – Bistand i tall: <https://www.norad.no/om-bistand/norsk-bistand-i-tall/?tab=geo>

NORAD – Education section, including Results-Reporting Framework – English:

<https://www.norad.no/en/front/thematic-areas/education/>

NORAD – Utdanning – Norwegian: <https://www.norad.no/tema/utdanning/>

Tildelingsbrev to Norad – Norwegian-only:

[https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dep/ud/org/virksomheter\\_ud/etater\\_ud/rapport\\_tildeling/id749659/](https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dep/ud/org/virksomheter_ud/etater_ud/rapport_tildeling/id749659/)

## International Conventions

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx>

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>

Universal Declaration of Human Rights: <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

## **Implementing Agencies and Other Useful Resources**

Global Partnership for Education: <http://www.globalpartnership.org/>

International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity:  
<http://educationcommission.org/>

Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Education:  
<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>

UNESCO – Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: <http://en.unesco.org/themes/education-21st-century>

UN High Commissioner for Refugees – Education: <http://www.unhcr.org/education.html>

UNICEF – Disabilities section: <https://www.unicef.org/disabilities/>

Washington Group on Disability Statistics: <http://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/>

World Bank – Repository of education projects:  
[http://projects.worldbank.org/search?lang=en&searchTerm=&mjsectorcode\\_exact=EX](http://projects.worldbank.org/search?lang=en&searchTerm=&mjsectorcode_exact=EX)