United Nations | Department of Economic and Social Affairs

# Disability and Development Report 2024

## Accelerating the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities

Advance Unedited Version


Photo Credit: UNDP Afghanistan

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

# Disability and Development Report 2024

Accelerating the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities

United Nations

## Department of Economic and Social Affairs

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## Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education (Goal 4)

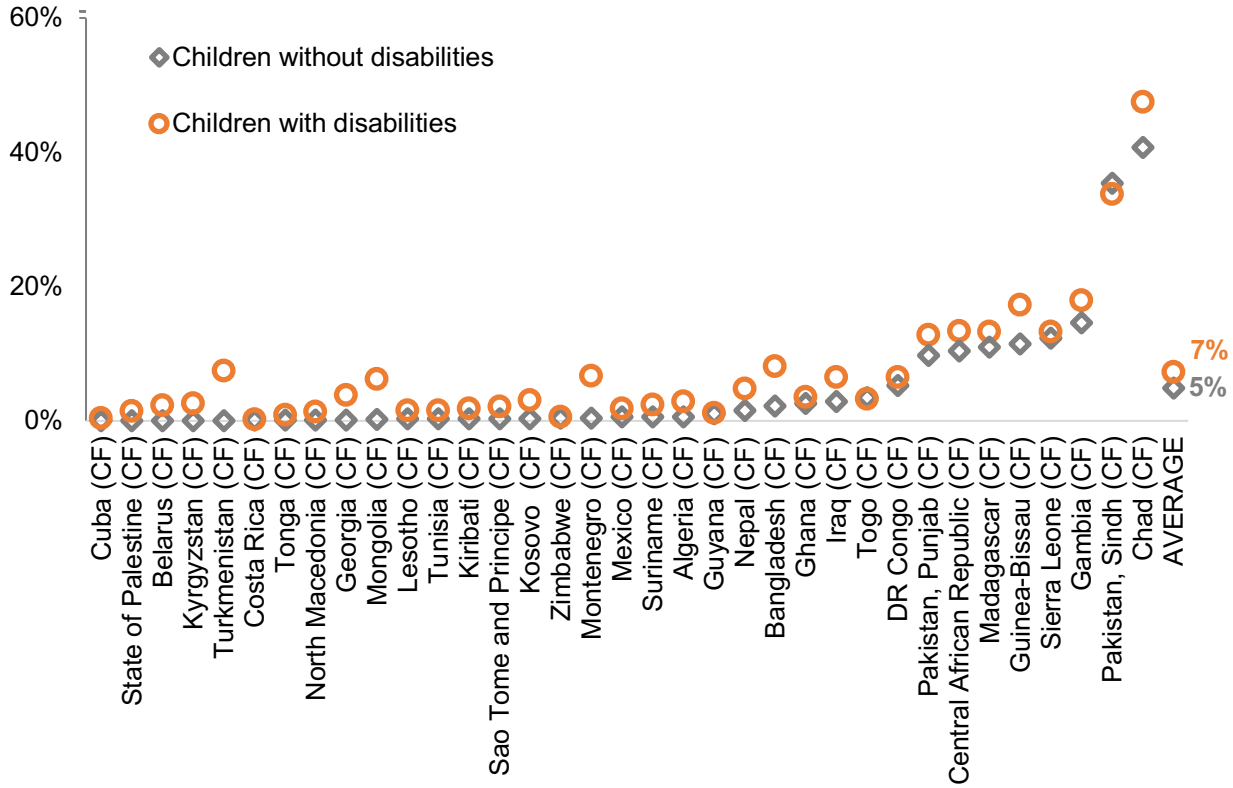
This chapter focuses on the realization of Goal 4 for persons with disabilities. Goal 4 calls for ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting life-long learning opportunities for all. While all targets of Goal 4 are crucial in achieving equal education for persons with disabilities, two targets explicitly mention disability, namely target 4.5, which aims inter alia at ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities; and target 4.a, which calls for building and upgrading education facilities that are disability sensitive and providing inclusive learning environments for all. Moreover, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that persons with disabilities should have access to life-long learning opportunities that help them acquire the knowledge and skills needed to participate fully in society.[226] The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provides a guiding framework for the implementation of Goal 4. It has an article devoted to education, article 24, which stipulates that States Parties should ensure access to inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others.

Since the first edition of the Disability and Development Report in 2018, advances in making national education systems inclusive have been adversely affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic. While there has been some progress in various countries in legislation, policies and practices addressing the needs of learners with disabilities, many children and youth with disabilities continue to be excluded from quality education – a situation that has been exacerbated by the pandemic. This chapter uses available evidence to provide an overview of the challenges that persons with disabilities still face in accessing and completing education. It also identifies recommendations to advance inclusive education and achieve Goal 4 for persons with disabilities.

### Current situation and progress so far

Many children with disabilities have never attended school. This was the case when the 2030 Agenda was adopted and remains the case today. Among 35 countries/areas, 7 per cent of children with disabilities aged 10 to 17 years have never attended school compared to 5 per cent of children without disabilities of the same age (Figure 48). The percentage of children with disabilities who have never attended school varies from 0.4 per cent in Cuba to 48 per cent in Chad. Countries in which more than 10 per cent of children with disabilities have never attended school include: Chad, Central African Republic, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Pakistan (Punjab and Sindh provinces) and Sierra Leone. In five countries, the gap between children with and without disabilities is more than five percentage points, with the largest gap in Chad (48 per cent of children with disabilities versus 41 per cent of children without disabilities). But there are already examples of countries that have successfully closed such gaps: in Cuba and the State of Palestine, the percentage of children with disabilities who never attended school is close to zero and the gaps between children with and without disabilities are minimal.

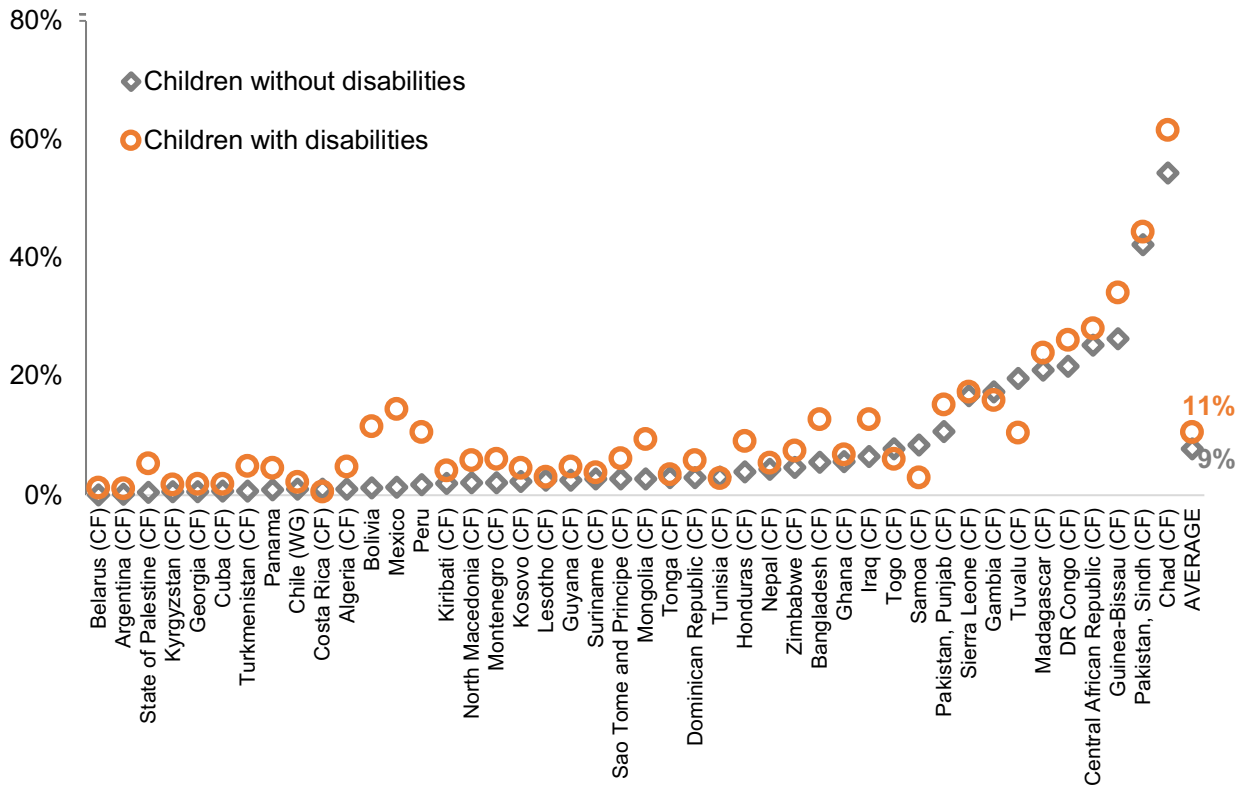
**Figure 48. Percentage of children aged 10 to 17 years who never attended school, by disability status, in 35 countries/areas, in 2020 or latest year available.**




*Note: (CF) identifies data produced using the Child Functioning Module. DR Congo refers to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. For Pakistan, the data refer to selected provinces in Pakistan. The data on children with disabilities from Turkmenistan is based on 25 to 49 observations and should be interpreted with caution. Source: MICS.*[227]

At all ages and levels of education, children with disabilities are more likely to be out of school than children without disabilities. The older the child with disabilities the more likely he/she is out of school (Figure 49, Figure 52 and Figure 55). Although only 11 per cent of primary school age children with disabilities are out of school, 16 per cent of lower-secondary school age and 32 per cent of upper secondary school age children with disabilities are out of school. Some of the children out of school may have formerly attended school but have dropped out, some may still enter school in the future, and some may never enrol in any school.

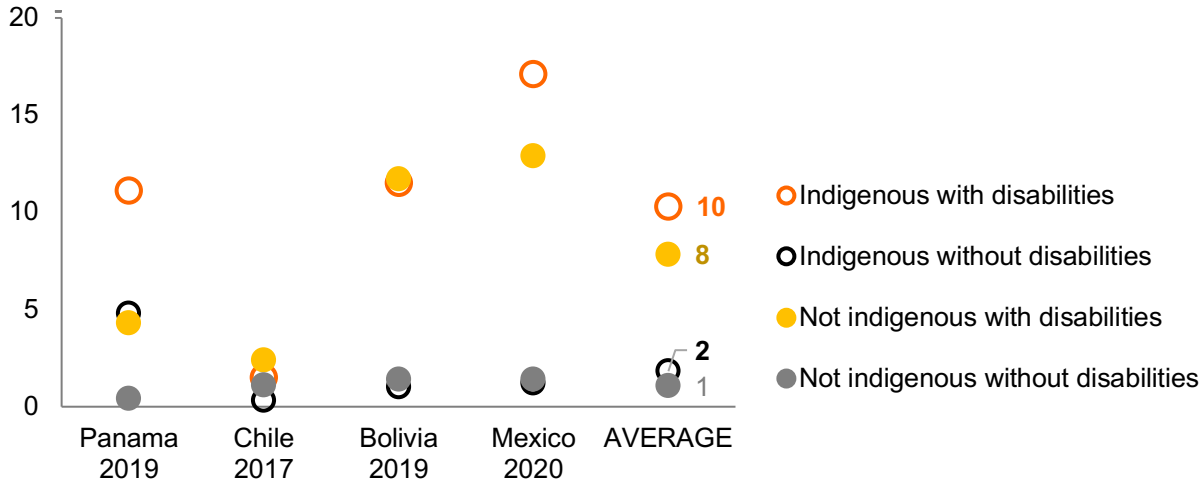
**Figure 49. Percentage of children of primary school age who are out of school, by disability status, in 40 countries/areas, in 2020 or latest year available.**




*Note: Primary school age children are about 6 to 11 years old in the majority of the countries. (CF) identifies data produced using the Child Functioning Module. (WG) identifies data produced using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions. Data on children with disabilities from Montenegro, Turkmenistan and Tuvalu are based on 25 to 49 observations and should be interpreted with caution.*
*Source: ECLAC[13] and MICS.* [227]

For children with disabilities of primary school age, the percentage who are out of school varies from 1 per cent in Belarus to 62 per cent in Chad. In Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar and Pakistan (Sindh), more than 20 per cent children with disabilities of primary school age are out of school. Children with disabilities of primary school age are more likely to be out of school compared to their peers without disabilities – 11 per cent versus 9 per cent (Figure 49). The widest gaps – more than 7 per cent – are observed in Bangladesh, Chad, Guinea-Bissau and Mongolia. A few countries have already successfully reached very low percentages of primary school aged children out of school (less than 2 per cent), such as Argentina, Belarus, Costa Rica, Cuba, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. Indigenous children with disabilities of primary school age are more likely to be out of school than their peers (Figure 50).

**Figure 50. Percentage of children of primary school age who are out of school, by disability and indigenous status, in 4 countries, in 2020 or latest year available.**



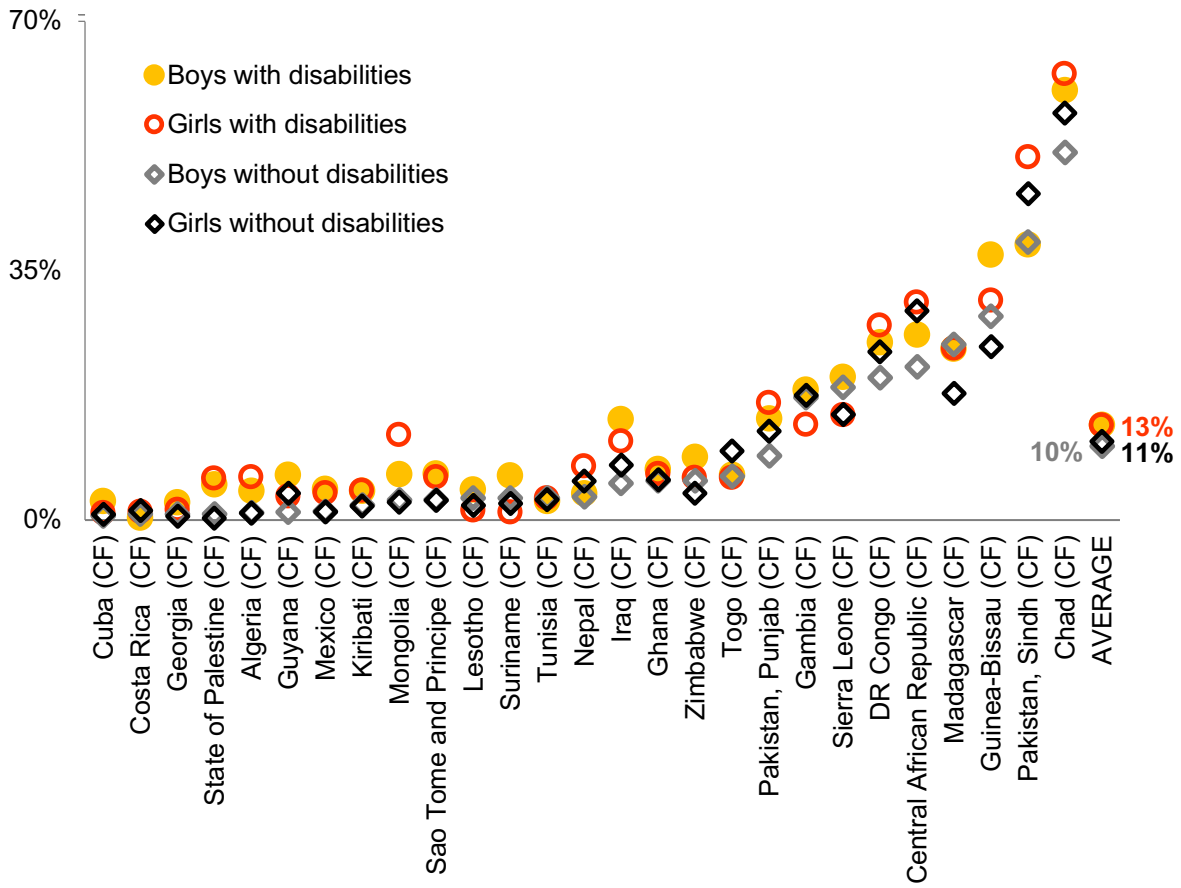

*Note: Primary school age children are about 6 to 11 years old in the majority of the countries.*
*Source: ECLAC.*[13]

Among 28 countries/areas, on average, 13 per cent of primary school age girls with disabilities are out of school, the same percentage as for boys with disabilities (Figure 51). For boys and girls of primary school age without disabilities, the levels are slightly lower (11 and 10 per cent). In 12 out of these 28 countries/areas, the percentage of out-of-school girls with disabilities is higher than out-of-school boys with disabilities. The Sindh province in Pakistan shows the largest gap, with 51 per cent of girls with disabilities out of school compared to 39 per cent of boys with disabilities. In Mongolia, the percentage for girls with disabilities is double the percentage for boys with disabilities (12 per cent versus 6 per cent). In Chad, more than 60 percent of both boys and girls with disabilities are out of school.

Similarly to children with disabilities of primary school age, adolescents with disabilities of lower secondary school age are more likely to be out of school than their peers without disabilities, in the majority of the countries. Across 38 countries/areas, for lower secondary school age adolescents, 16 per cent of adolescents with disabilities and 11 per cent of adolescents without disabilities are out of school (Figure 52), with the wider gaps in Bangladesh (22 versus 12 per cent), Gambia (36 versus 24 per cent), Kiribati (21 versus 8 per cent) and Sao Tome and Principe (12 versus 3 per cent). In nine countries/areas, more than a quarter of adolescents of lower secondary school age with disabilities are out of school: Central African Republic, Chad, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, Iraq, Madagascar, Pakistan (Sindh) and Zimbabwe. Low percentages of adolescents of lower secondary age who are out of school, less than 5 per cent, have already been achieved in Argentina, Belarus, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, Nepal, North Macedonia and Samoa. Indigenous adolescents with disabilities of lower secondary age are out of school at higher rates (19 per cent) than their peers without disabilities (6 per

cent) - Figure 53.

**Figure 51. Percentage of children of primary school age who are out of school, by disability status and sex, in 28 countries/areas, in 2020 or latest year available.**



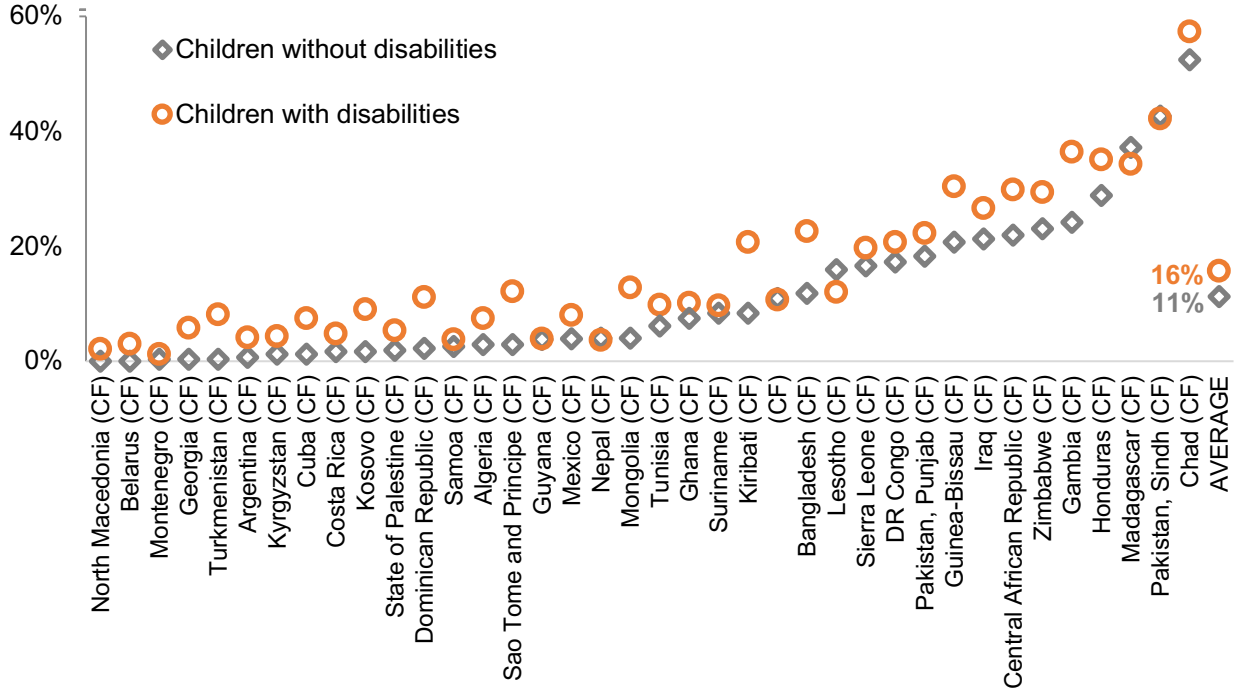

*Note: (CF) identifies data produced using the Child Functioning Module.*
*Source: MICS.* [227]

In 22 countries/areas, the average lower secondary out-of-school rate higher for girls with disabilities than for boys without disabilities (20 per cent versus 14 per cent) -- Figure 54. In 9 out of these 22 countries, this percentage is higher for girls with disabilities than for boys with disabilities. Pakistan's Sindh province shows the widest gap, with 52 per cent for girls with disabilities compared to 32 per cent for boys with disabilities. The gap is more than 10 percentage points in Chad, Guinea-Bissau, Central African Republic, Iraq and Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Although in some countries large percentages of children with disabilities of primary and lower secondary school age are out of school, it is among children with disabilities of upper secondary school age that the percentages of out of school are highest, and noticeably so: 32 per cent of adolescents with disabilities of

upper secondary school age are out of school (Figure 55). As seen in lower grades, adolescents with disabilities of upper secondary school age are more likely to be out of school compared to their peers without disabilities (32 versus 24 per cent). In 10 countries/areas, more than 40 per cent of adolescents of upper secondary school age with disabilities are out of school: Bangladesh, Central African Republic, Chad, Cuba, Honduras, Iraq, Kiribati, Madagascar, Pakistan (Sindh) and Zimbabwe. The largest gap between the percentage of out-of-school adolescents with and without disabilities is recorded in Cuba with a 24-percentage points difference (41 versus 17 per cent). This is followed by Kiribati and Tonga, where the gap is roughly 20 percentage points. In 12 countries, the gaps between the two groups are wider than 10 percentage points.

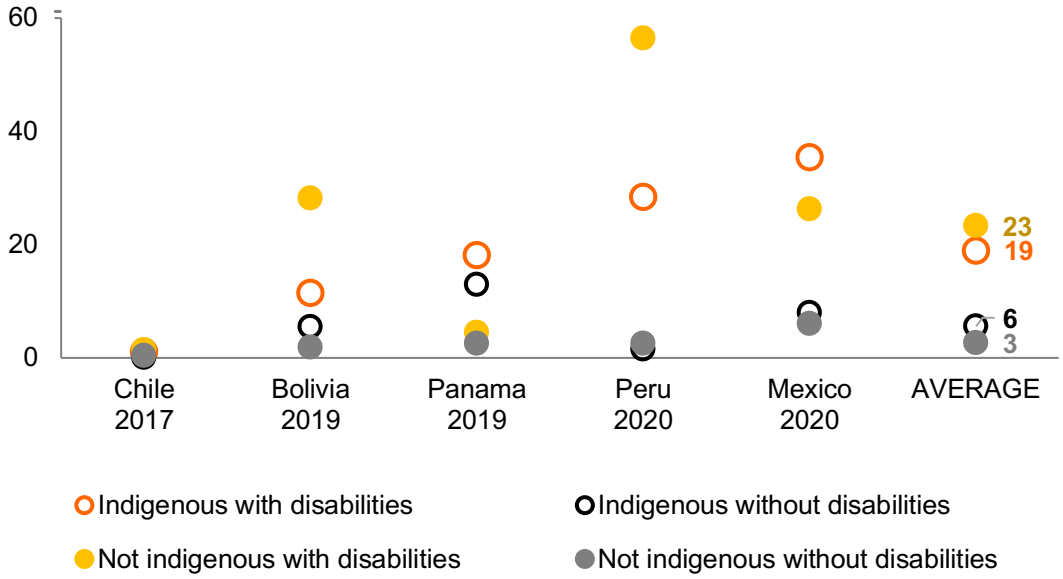
**Figure 52. Percentage of adolescents of lower secondary school age who are out of school, by disability status, in 38 countries/areas, in 2020 or latest year available.**




*Note: Lower secondary school age adolescents are about 12 to 14 years old in the majority of the countries. (CF) identifies data produced using the Child Functioning Module. Data on children with disabilities from Belarus, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Turkmenistan are based on 25 to 49 observations and should be interpreted with caution.*

*Source: MICS.* [227]

**Figure 53. Percentage of children of lower secondary school age who are out of school, by disability and indigenous status, in 5 countries, in 2020 or latest year available.**

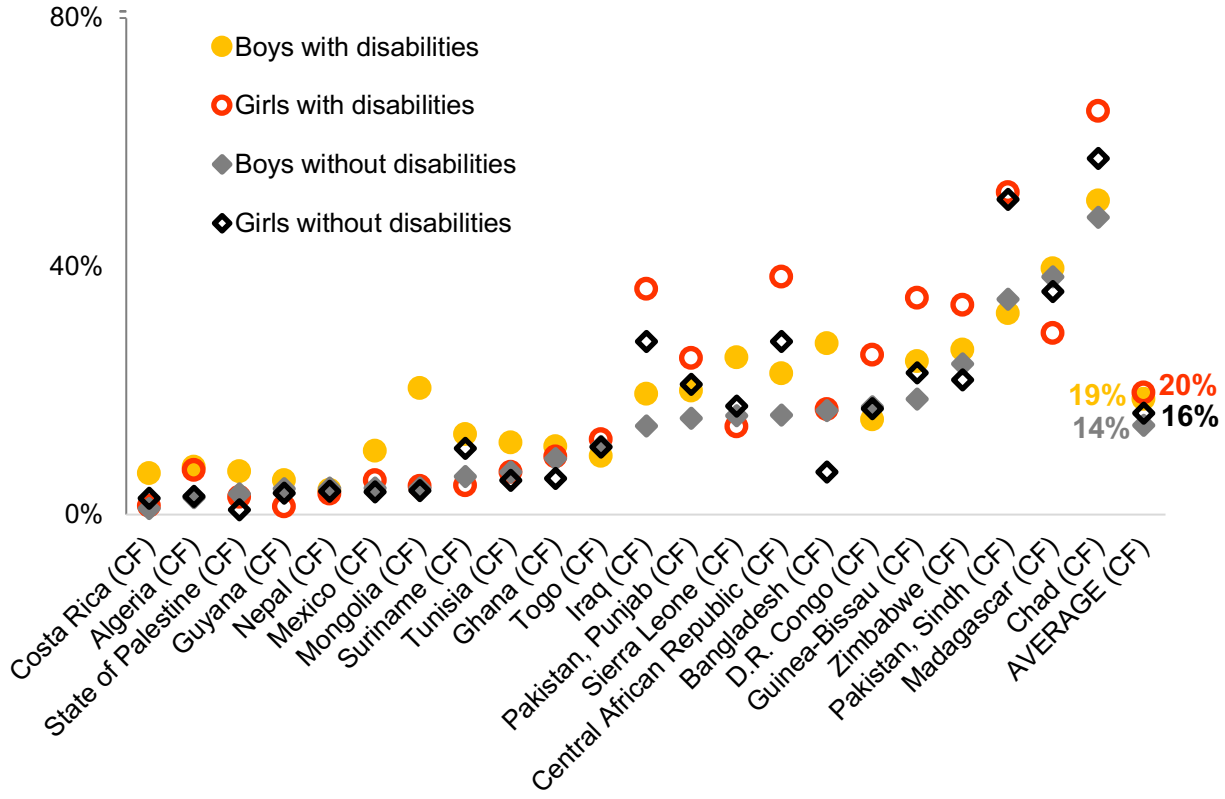



*Note: Lower secondary school age adolescents are about 12 to 14 years old in the majority of the countries.*
*Source: ECLAC.*[13]

In 15 countries/areas, on average, the out-of-school rate for both boys and girls with disabilities of upper secondary school age is the same (36 per cent) -- Figure 56. In 7 out of these 15 countries, girls with disabilities are more likely to be out of school compared to boys with disabilities. The largest gap is reported in Pakistan's Sindh province shows the largest gap between boys and girls with disabilities, with a 29 percentage points difference (37 per cent versus 66 per cent), followed by Chad (53 per cent versus 74 per cent). In Sierra Leone and Pakistan's Punjab province, the gap is more than 7 percentage points.

Persons with disabilities do not attend school due to many factors, including economic reasons, stigma, lack of accessibility of schools, lack of accessible transport to and from school and because of family pressure. In 6 countries or areas, among persons with disabilities who never attended school, 32 per cent did not attend because of economic reasons (Figure 57). In the Philippines and Sri Lanka, the majority did not attend for economic reasons, 66 per cent in the Philippines and 55 per cent in Sri Lanka. In 7 countries or areas, among persons with disabilities who never attended school, 18 per cent did not attend because of barriers linked to their disability and 18 per cent because their parents did not want them to attend school (Figure 58). In Georgia, most persons with disabilities who never attended school, 90 per cent, did not attend because of barriers linked to their disability. In Pakistan, 60 per cent did not attend school because their parents did not want them to attend.

**Figure 54. Percentage of children of lower secondary school age who are out of school, by disability status and sex, in 22 countries/areas, in 2020 or latest year available.**

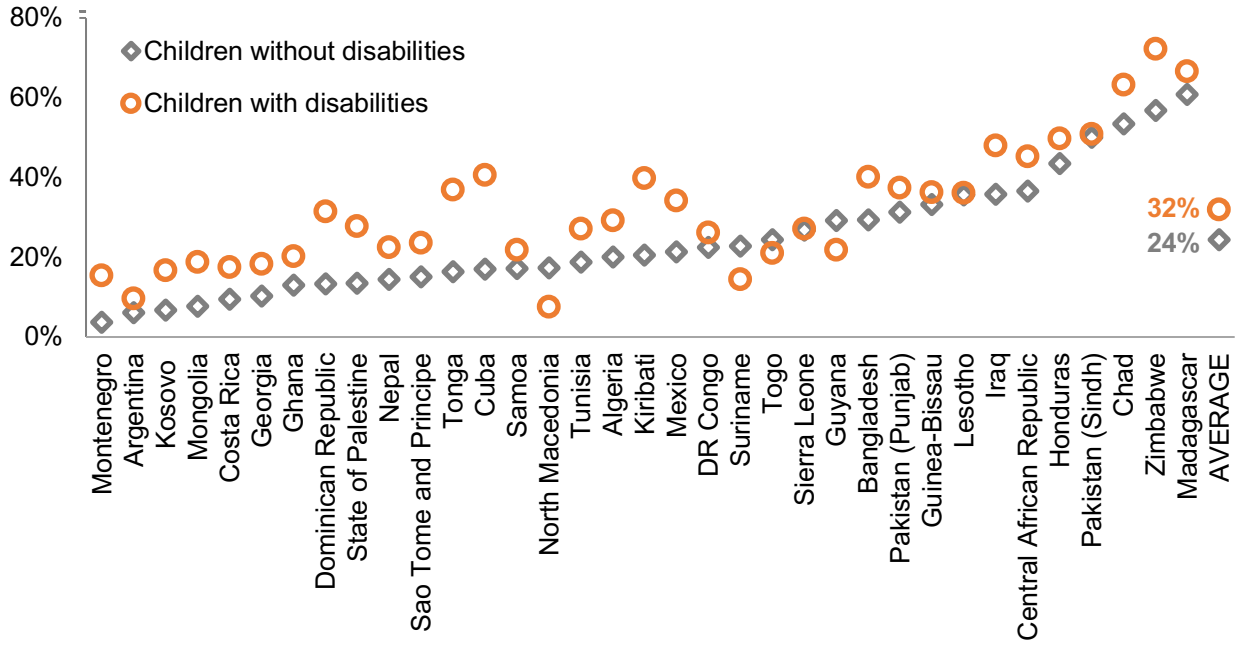



*Note: (CF) identifies data produced using the Child Functioning Module.*

*Source: MICS.* [227]

Attending school is only a part of the problem. Learners with disabilities who attend school also face barriers to completing their education. They are less likely to complete primary, secondary and tertiary education than persons without disabilities. Among 24 countries/areas, 69 per cent of children with disabilities compared to 75 per cent of children without disabilities completed primary education (Figure 59). The largest gap between children with and without disabilities in completing primary education is 17 percentage points, in Iraq (62 versus 79 per cent). In Bangladesh, Central African Republic, Madagascar and Zimbabwe, the gap in primary school completion rates between children with and without disabilities is more than 10 percentage points. Some countries have however already achieved primary completion rates close to 100 per cent for both students with and without disabilities, with similar rates among the two groups: this is the case in Cuba, Georgia and Guyana. Adolescent with disabilities living in rural areas are less likely to complete lower secondary education (37 per cent) than their peers without disabilities (52 per cent).

**Figure 55. Percentage of adolescents of upper secondary school age who are out of school, by disabilities status, in 35 countries/areas, in 2020 or latest year available.**

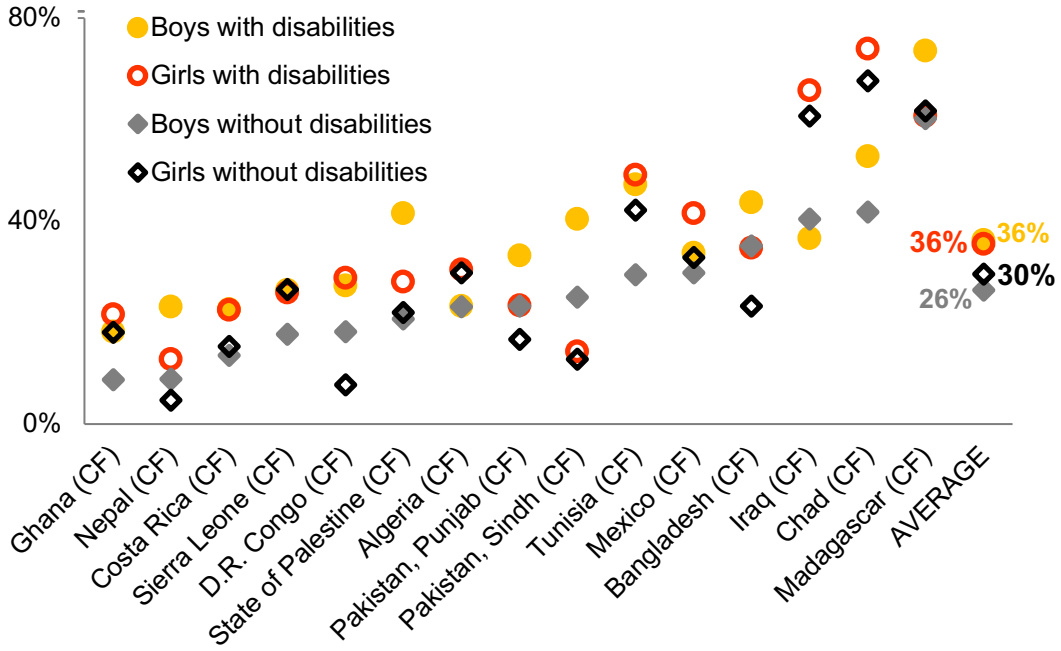



*Note: Upper secondary school age is about 14 to 17 years in the majority of the countries. Data on Children with disabilities from Kiribati, Kosovo, Lesotho, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Suriname, Tonga and Zimbabwe are based on 25 to 49 observations and should be interpreted with caution.*

*Source: MICS.* [227]

Girls and boys with disabilities are less likely to complete primary education than children without disabilities. In 18 countries/areas, boys and girls with disabilities are less likely to complete primary education than their peers without disabilities (Figure 60). Girls without disabilities have higher primary completion rates compared to boys with disabilities in the 12 of these countries/areas.

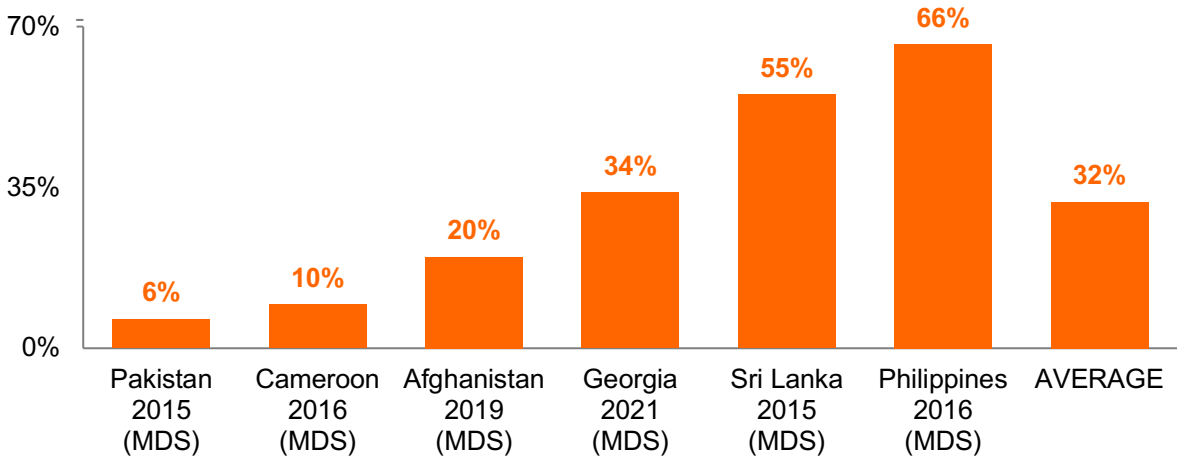
**Figure 56. Percentage of adolescents of upper secondary school age who are out of school, by difficulties status and sex, in 15 countries/areas, in 2020 or latest year available.**




*Note: (CF) identifies data produced using the Child Functioning Module.*

*Source: MICS.* [227]

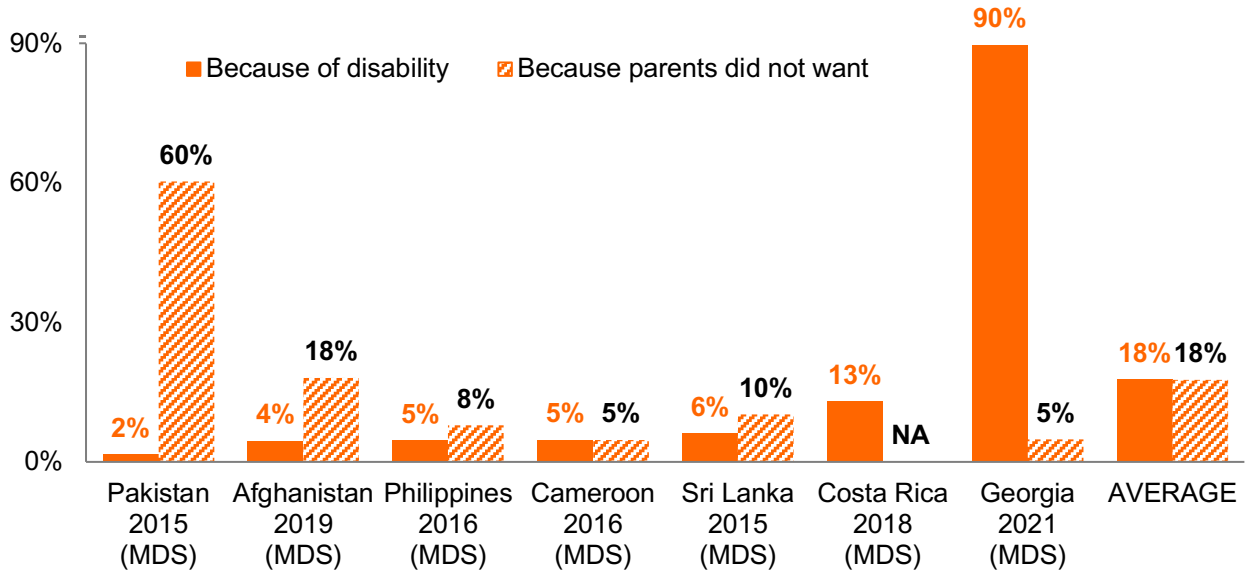
**Figure 57. Percentage of persons with disabilities who never attended school because of economic reasons, in 6 countries or areas, in 2021 or latest year available.**




*Note: (MDS) identifies data produced using the Model Disability Survey.*

*Source: WHO (on the basis of data from the Model Disability Surveys).*

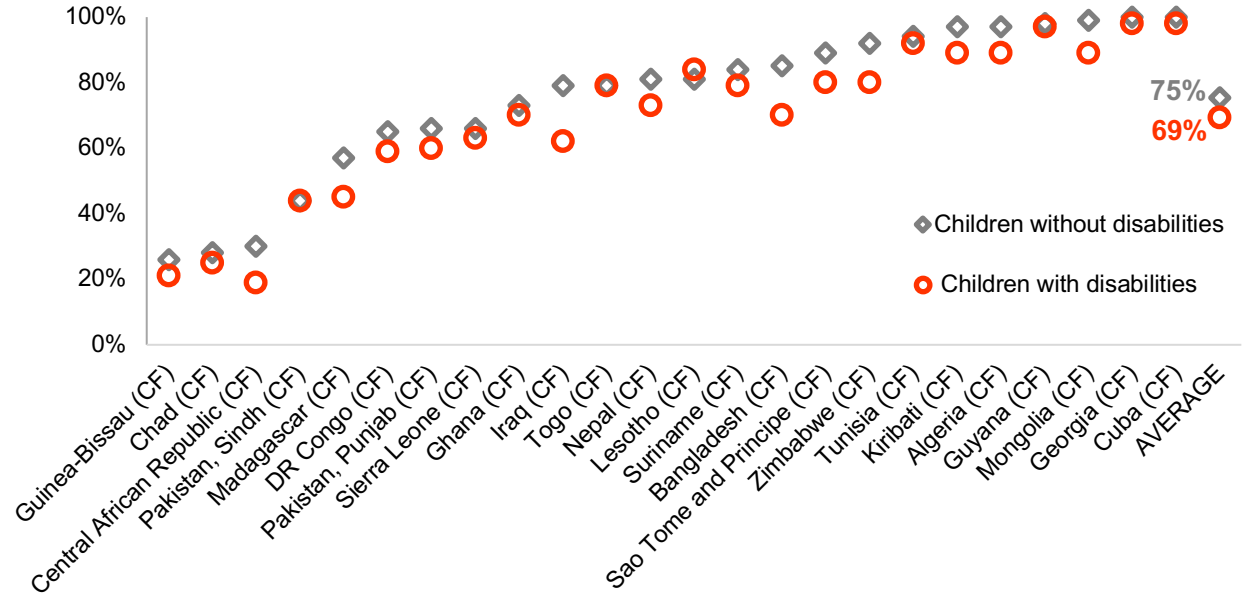
**Figure 58. Percentage of persons with disabilities who never attended school because of disability or because parents did not want them to attend school, in 7 countries or areas, in 2021 or latest year available.**




*Note: (MDS) identifies data produced using the Model Disability Survey. NA indicated data not available.*

*Source: WHO (on the basis of data from the Model Disability Surveys).*

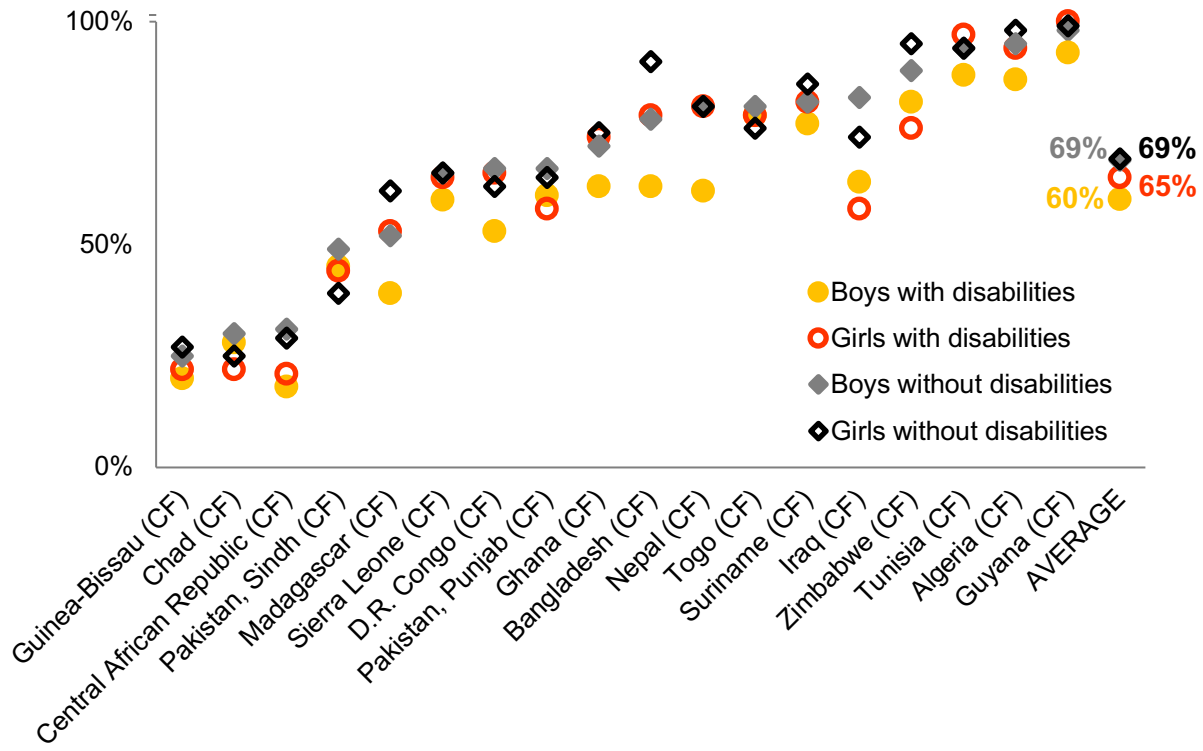
**Figure 59. Primary completion rate, by disability status, in 24 countries/areas, in 2020 or latest year available.**




*Note: (CF) identifies data produced using the Child Functioning Module.*

*Source: MICS.* [227]

**Figure 60. Primary completion rate, by disability status and sex, in 18 countries/areas, in 2020 or latest year available.**




*Note: (CF) identifies data produced using the Child Functioning Module.*

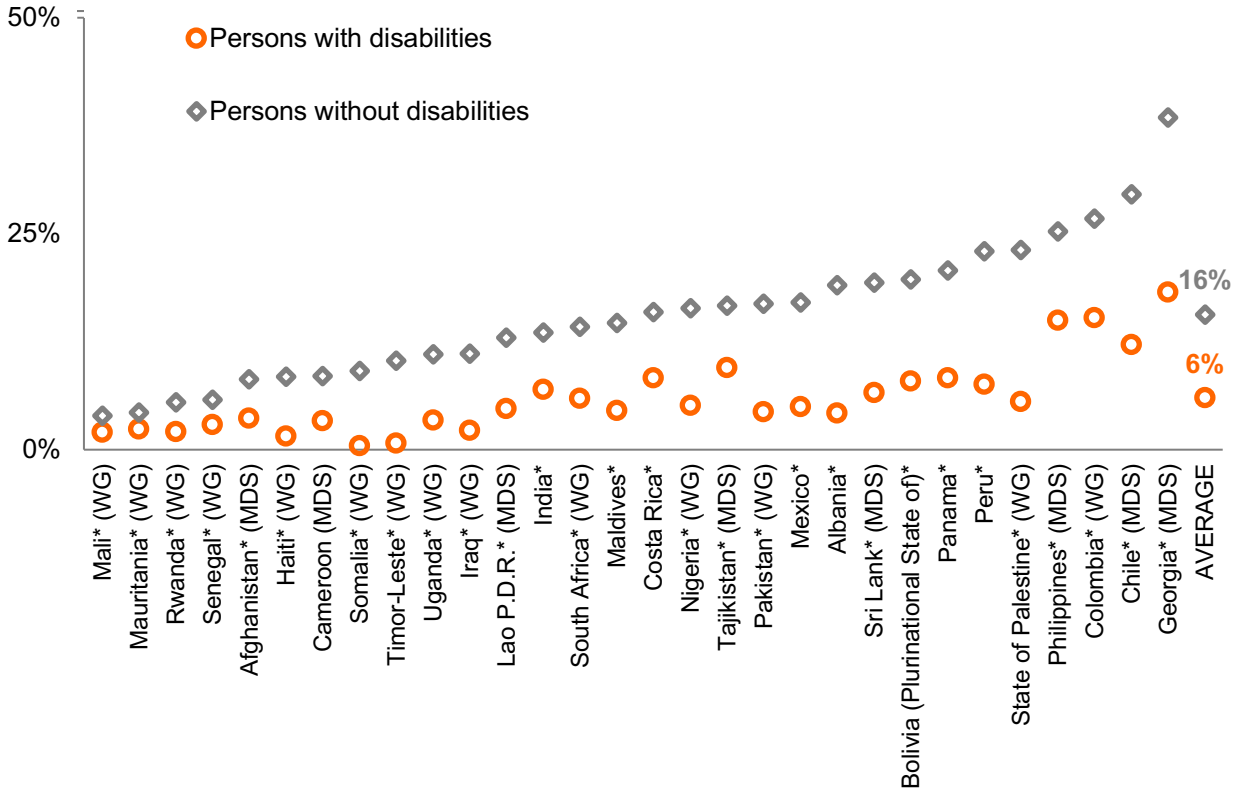
*Source: MICS.* [227]

Persons with disabilities are less likely to complete tertiary education (Figure 61). Among 30 countries or areas, 16 per cent of persons without disabilities versus 6 per cent with disabilities completed tertiary education. The highest gaps between persons with and without disabilities is observed in Georgia (20 percentage points), State of Palestine (18 percentage points) and Chile (17 percentage points). In another 11 of these countries, the gap is higher than 10 percentage points. The percentage of persons with disabilities who completed tertiary education ranges from 0 per cent in Somalia to 18 per cent in Georgia.

Children with disabilities still face more barriers to achieve foundational reading and numeracy skills than children without disabilities. Among 24 countries/areas, children with disabilities have lower foundational reading skills compared to their peers without disabilities: 30 versus 37 per cent (Figure 62). The largest gaps in foundational reading skills between children with and without disabilities are 64 versus 82 per cent, in Turkmenistan, and 49 versus 67 per cent in North Macedonia. In the State of Palestine and Sao Tome and Principe, the gap also exceeds 15 percentage points. Less than 10 per cent of children 7 to 14 years old with disabilities in Chad, Central African Republic, DR Congo, and the Gambia have acquired

foundational reading skills.

**Figure 61. Percentage of persons 25 years and older who completed tertiary education, by disability status, in 30 countries or areas, in 2021 or latest year available.**

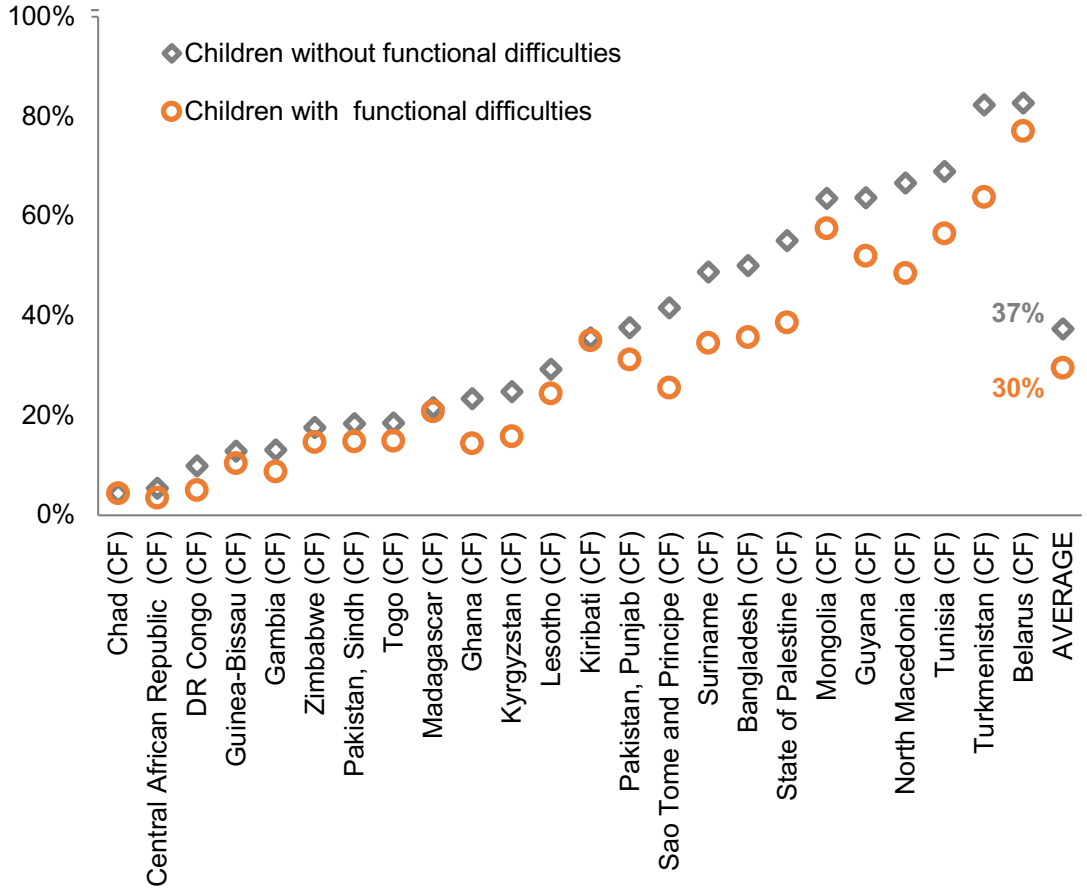



*Note: (MDS) identifies data produced using the Model Disability Survey; (WG) identifies data produced using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions. An asterisk (*) indicates that the difference between persons with and without disabilities is statistically significant at the level of 5%.*
*Source: ESCAP,[14] ESCWA, UNDESA (on the basis of data from DHS[6]) and WHO (on the basis of data from the Model Disability Surveys).*

Similarly, children with disabilities on average have lower foundational numeracy skills compared to their peers without disabilities: 23 versus 27 per cent (Figure 63). The Democratic Republic of Congo has the lowest percentage of children with disabilities acquiring foundational numeracy skills— only 0.2 per cent. Less than 5 per cent of children with disabilities in Guinea-Bissau, Central African Republic, Madagascar and Pakistan (Sindh), have foundational numeracy skills. The largest gap in foundational numeracy skills between children with and without disabilities is 25 versus 38 per cent in Sao Tome and Principe, followed 39 versus 53 per cent in Kyrgyzstan, 51 versus 62 per cent in Guyana and 37 versus 47 per cent

in the State of Palestine.

**Figure 62. Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years with foundational reading skills, by disability status, in 24 countries/areas, in 2020 or latest year available.**



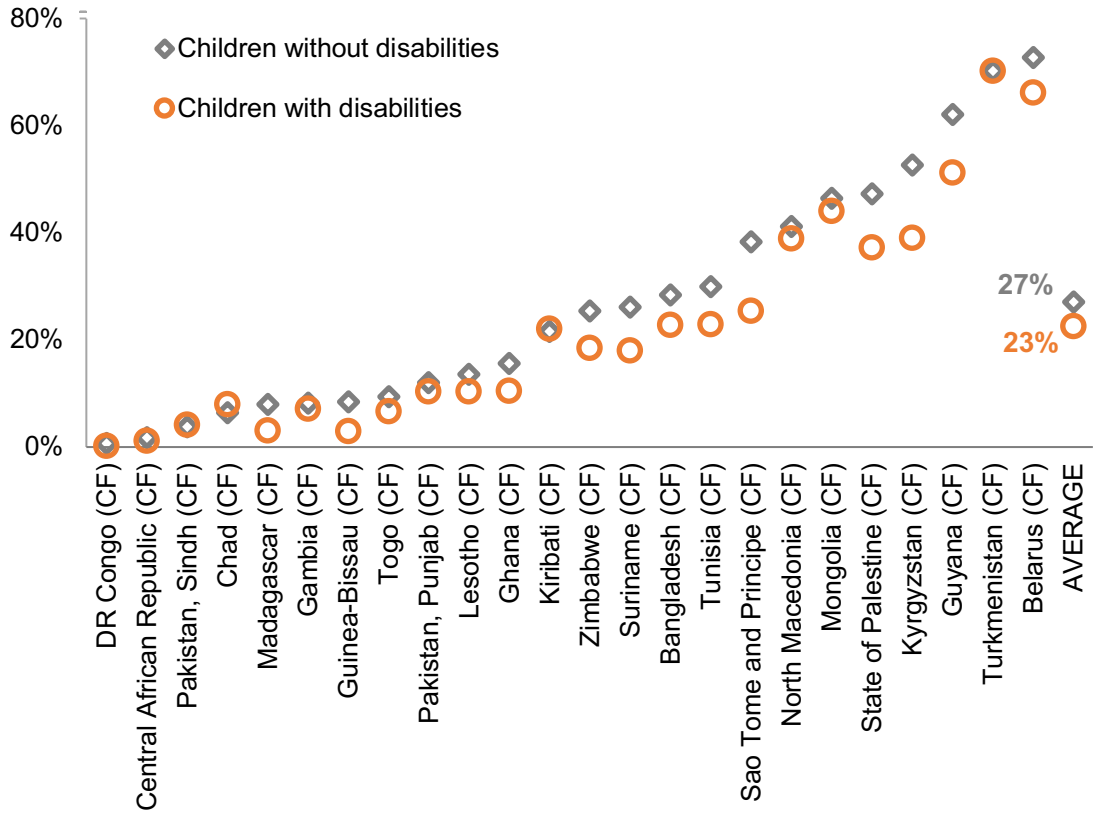

Note: Foundational reading skills are measured for grade 2/3 levels of education, covering both in-school and out-of-school children. (CF) identifies data produced using the Child Functioning Module. Data on children with disabilities from Turkmenistan is based on 25 to 49 observations and should be interpreted with caution.

*Source: MICS.* [227]

Boys with disabilities are slightly less likely to achieve foundational reading and numeracy skills than girls with disabilities. In 24 countries/areas, 23 per cent of girls with disabilities and 22 per cent of boys with disabilities, on average, have foundational reading skills (Figure 64). Depending on the country, girls have higher or lower foundational reading skills than boys, regardless of their disability status. In half of these countries, girls have lower foundational reading skills compared to boys; in the remaining countries girls with disabilities have higher foundational reading skills compared to boys with disabilities. The largest gaps between girls and boys with disabilities are observed in the Gambia (13 versus 2 per cent) followed

by Guinea-Bissau (13 versus 8 per cent).

**Figure 63. Percentage of children 7 to 14 years old with foundational numeracy skills, by disability status, in 24 countries/areas, in 2020 or latest year available.**



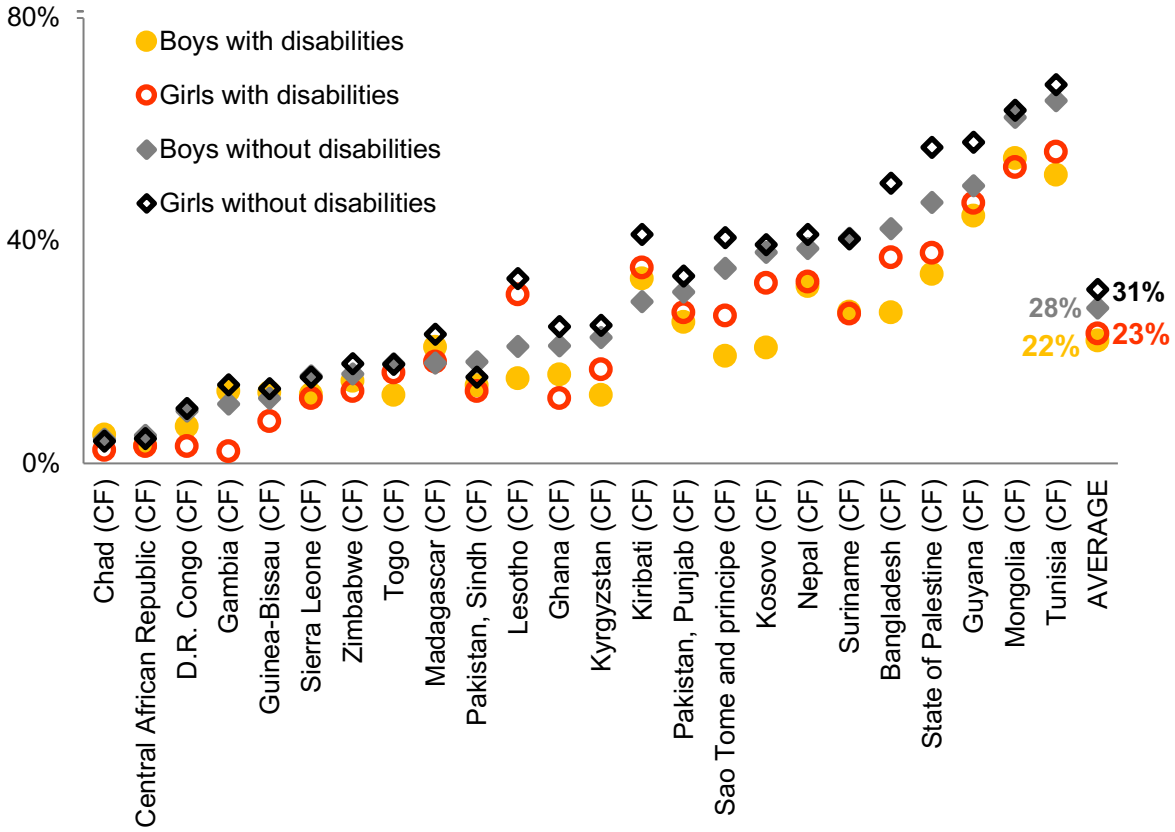

Note: Foundational numeracy skills are measured for grade 2/3 levels of education, covering both in-school and out-of-school children. (CF) identifies data produced using the Child Functioning Module. Data on children with disabilities from Turkmenistan is based on 25 to 49 observations and should be interpreted with caution.

*Source: MICS* [227]

Among 24 countries/areas, girls with disabilities on average have higher foundational numeracy skills compared to boys with disabilities (17 versus 16 per cent) -- Figure 65. Depending on the country, girls with disabilities have higher or lower foundational numeracy skills than boys with disabilities. In 14 out of 24 countries, girls with disabilities have higher foundational numeracy skills than boys with disabilities. The largest gaps in foundational numeracy skills between girls and boys with disabilities are observed in Nepal (37 versus 29 per cent), followed by Tunisia (25 versus 18 per cent) and Ghana (14 versus 7 per cent). In the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau,

Madagascar, Pakistan's Sindh province and Sierra Leone, less than 5 per cent of boys and girls with disabilities achieve foundational numeracy skills.

**Figure 64. Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 with foundational reading skills, by disabilities status and sex, in 24 countries/areas in 2020 or latest year available.**




*Note: (CF) identifies data produced using the Child Functioning Module.*
Source: MICS.[227]

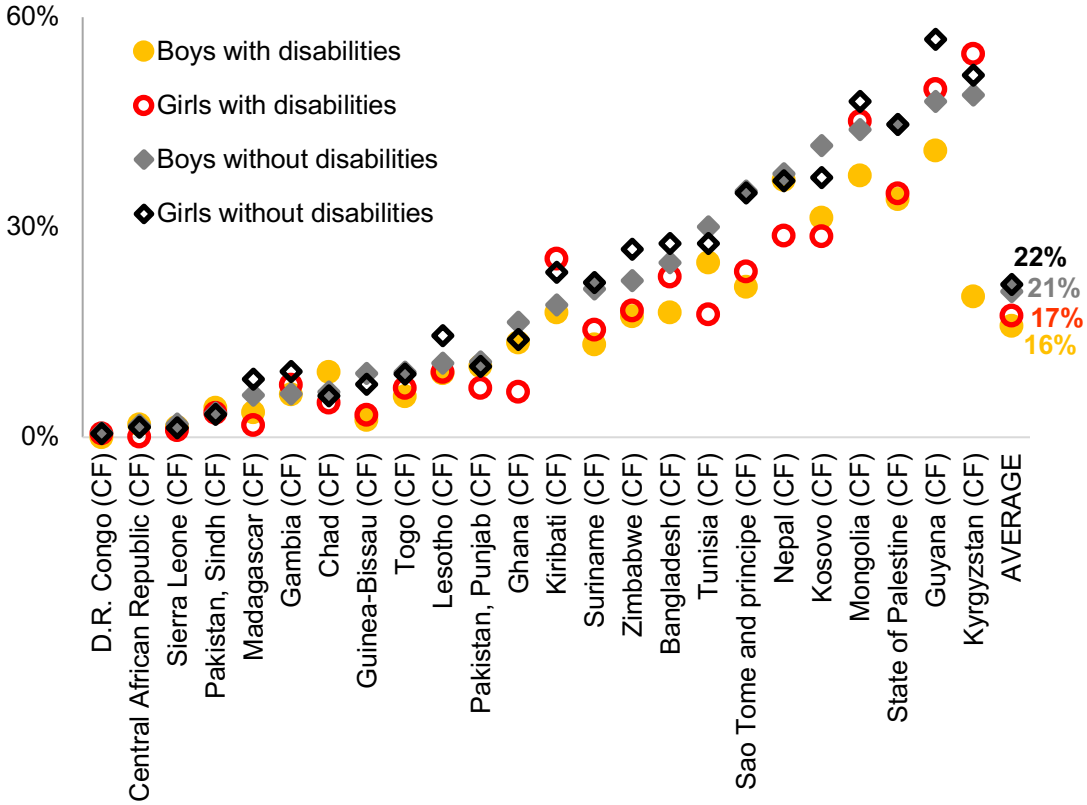
Youth and adults with disabilities tend to leave the educational system lower ICT skills than youth and adults without disabilities (see chapter on Goal 9.c), thus facing barriers for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

Physical and virtual barriers make it difficult for students with disabilities to participate. In 7 countries, on average 19 per cent of persons with disabilities reported that schools were not accessible or hindering (Figure 66). Percentages vary between 10 per cent in Nepal and 35 per cent in Zambia.

Countries have continued to formulate initiatives to make their educational systems more inclusive, eliminating obstacles and addressing discrimination against persons with disabilities. Since 2016, several countries have introduced laws and policies to protect the rights of persons with disabilities in line with the

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In total, 37 countries guarantee in their constitutions the right to education for children with disabilities or protect against discrimination in education based on disability; 90 countries guarantee in their constitutions the right to education without a specific reference to disabilities.[228]

**Figure 65. Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 with foundational numeracy skills by disabilities status and sex, in 24 countries/areas in 2020 or latest year available.**

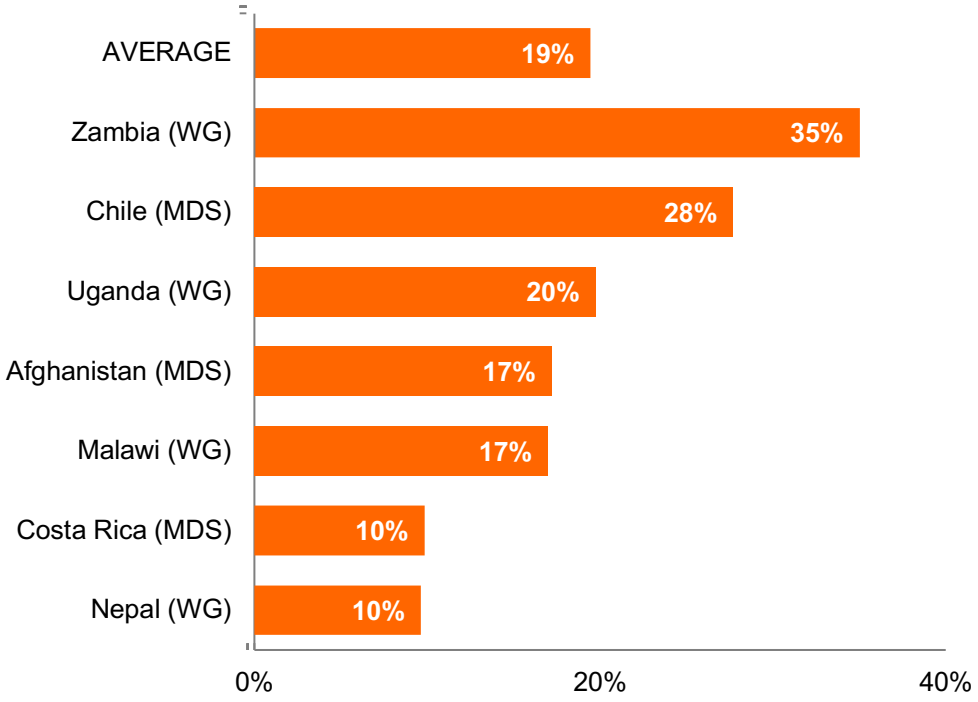



*Note: (CF) identifies data produced using the Child Functioning Module.*
*Source: MICS.*[227]

Apart from constitutions, there has been progress in other legal and policy measures to support inclusive education for persons with disabilities since 2016 (Figure 67). In 2021, 87 per cent of countries had laws or policies to support children with disabilities in education, up from 74 per cent in 2016. In 2021, a majority of countries, 74 per cent, were fostering positive attitudes from school staff in relation to children with disabilities as compared to 51 per cent in 2016. Countries also increased efforts to collect disability data through Education Management Information Systems (EMIS). In 2021, 61 per cent of 88 countries had a data collection system, up from 46 per cent in 2016, thus providing needed evidence for governments and policy makers to strengthen educational planning processes. In order to achieve inclusion in education, it is necessary to guarantee supportive and welcoming school environments for

children with disabilities. In 2021, only 47 per cent of countries provided appropriate materials necessary for learning in their schools, up from 34 percent in 2016. Similarly, only 38 percent of countries in 2021 provided physically accessible environments appropriate for learners with disabilities, up from 18 percent in 2016. Finally, in 2021, 41 percent of countries provided human resources to implement policies on inclusive education covering children with disabilities, up from 25 percent in 2016.

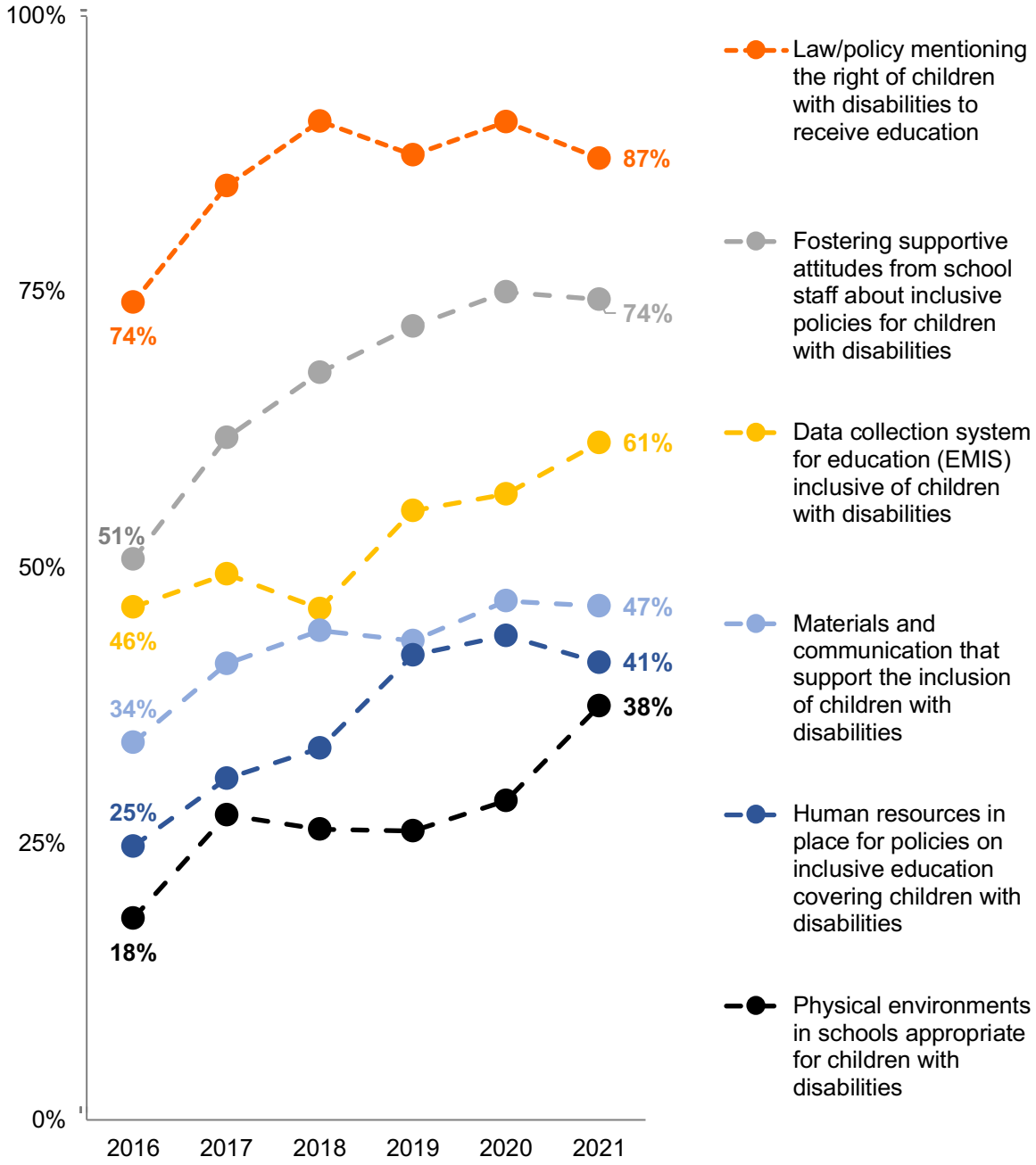
**Figure 66. Percentage of students with disabilities who found that schools were not accessible or hindering, in 7 countries, in 2019 or latest year available.**




*Note: (MDS) identifies data produced using the Model Disability Survey; (WG) identifies data produced using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions.*

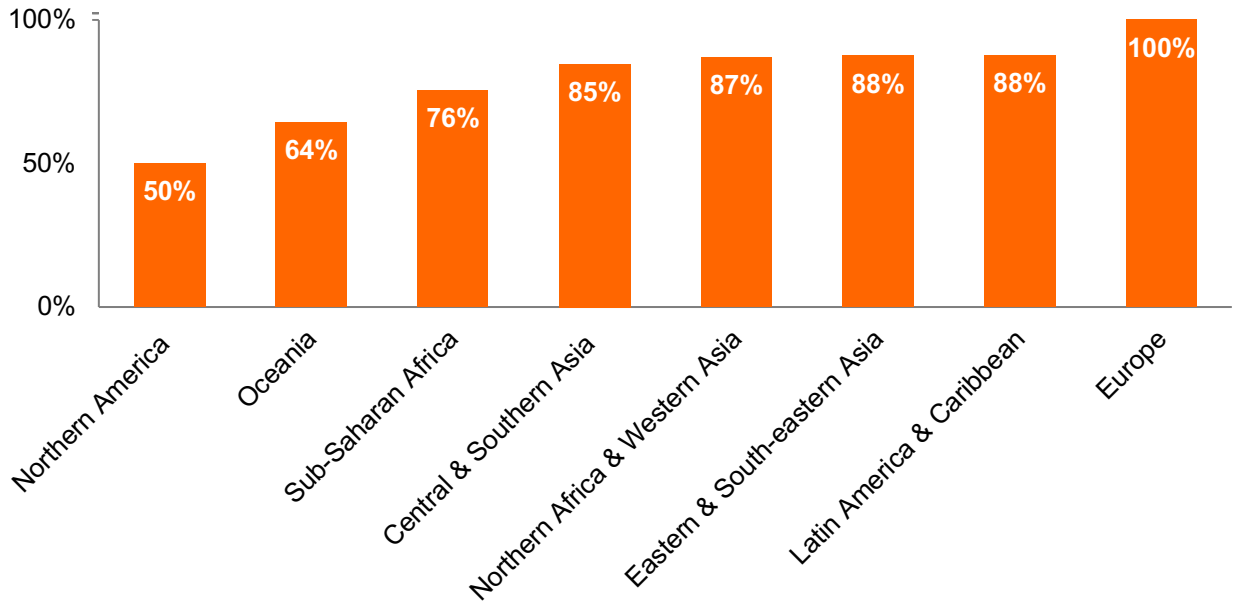
*Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from SINTEF[9]) and WHO (on the basis of data from Model Disability Surveys).*

**Figure 67. Percentage of countries that implemented measures for the promotion of equitable education systems, in 75 to 135 countries, from 2016 to 2021.**




*Source: UNICEF.*[229]

**Figure 68. Percentage of countries that guarantee education for persons with disabilities in their laws regulating education, for the world and by region, in 2018.**

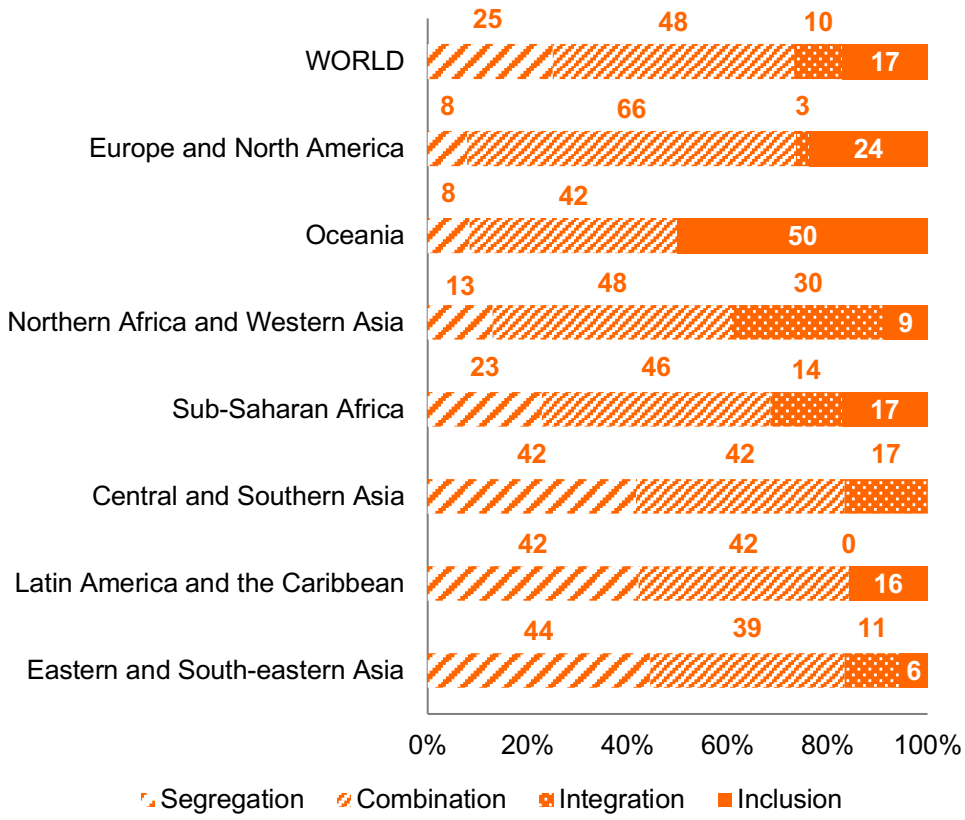



*Note: Based on 188 countries.*

*Source: World Policy Analysis Center (2022).*[230]

The legal guarantees for education for persons with disabilities vary among regions (Figure 68). The percentage of countries providing such a guarantee is lowest in North America, Oceania and sub-Saharan Africa, and highest in Europe, Latin America and Eastern and South-eastern Asia. Not all countries with a legal guarantee of education for persons with disabilities have provisions for ensuring inclusive education. Inclusive education involves teaching all students in the same age-appropriate general education classroom at their local school, but this is not yet the reality in many countries. The Legally, the guarantees for the inclusion of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools vary among countries and regions (Figure 68), ranging from segregated to integrated, combined and inclusive (Figure 69). Worldwide, 48 per cent of countries have laws that guarantee that learners with disabilities attend schools combining mainstreaming with separate settings, compared with 25 per cent of countries guaranteeing education in segregated schools and 17 per cent of countries in inclusive schools. The region with the highest percentage of countries providing legal guarantees of inclusive environments for learners with disabilities is Oceania, with 50 per cent of countries providing these legal guarantees; followed by Europe and North America, with 24 per cent of countries and Sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Southern Asia, with 17 per cent of countries. The region with the highest percentage of countries providing legal provisions for segregated environments for learners with disabilities is Eastern and South-eastern Asia with 44 per cent of countries, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean and Central and Southern Asia, both regions with 42 per cent of countries.

**Figure 69. Percentage of countries by type of school organization for students with disabilities, as defined in their laws, for the world and by region, in 2020.**



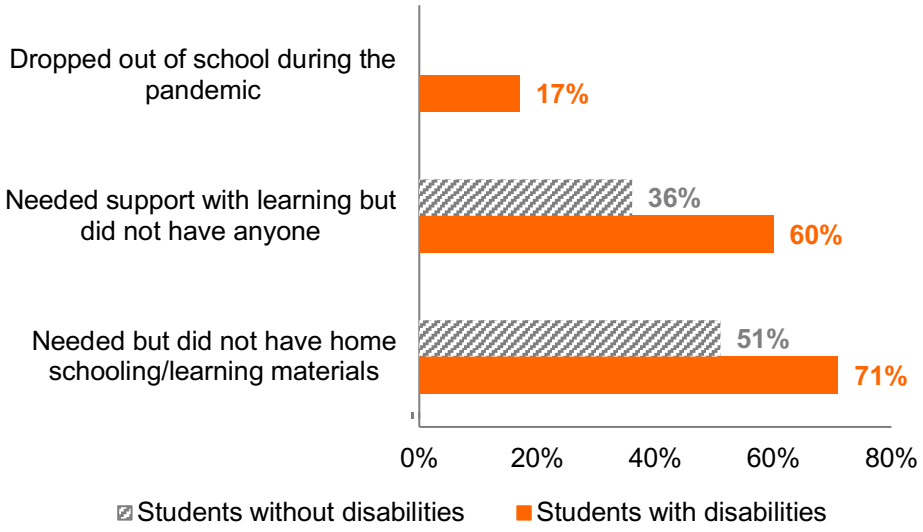

*Note: Segregation means that learners with disabilities have access to separate schools designed to respond to learners with a particular or various impairments. Combination means that learners with disabilities have access to schools combining mainstreaming with separate settings, i,e, to schools where they are taught at times in the same classroom as their peers without disabilities, and at other times they are taught in separate classrooms away from their peers without disabilities. Integration means that learners with disabilities have access to mainstream schools as long as the learners can adjust to the standardized requirements of such institutions because individualized support and accommodation are not guaranteed for learners with disabilities. Inclusion means that learners with disabilities have access to mainstream schools and are thought in the same age-appropriate education classroom as learners without disabilities, with individualized support and accommodations to support their education.*
*Source: UNESCO (2020).*[231]

## Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has created the worst crisis in education in recent years, disproportionally affecting children with disabilities. With school closures during the pandemic, many children and youth with disabilities fell behind, due to challenges in participating in online learning and lack of support (Figure

70). In developing countries, 17 per cent of respondents with disabilities who attended education before the pandemic, reported dropping out during the pandemic. Children with disabilities were also less likely than others to have access to learning materials and to receive learning support. A higher proportion of children with disabilities (71 per cent) needed and did not have home schooling/learning materials, compared to children without disabilities (51 per cent); 60 per cent of children with disabilities needed but did not have someone to help them with learning, compared to 36 per cent of children without disabilities.

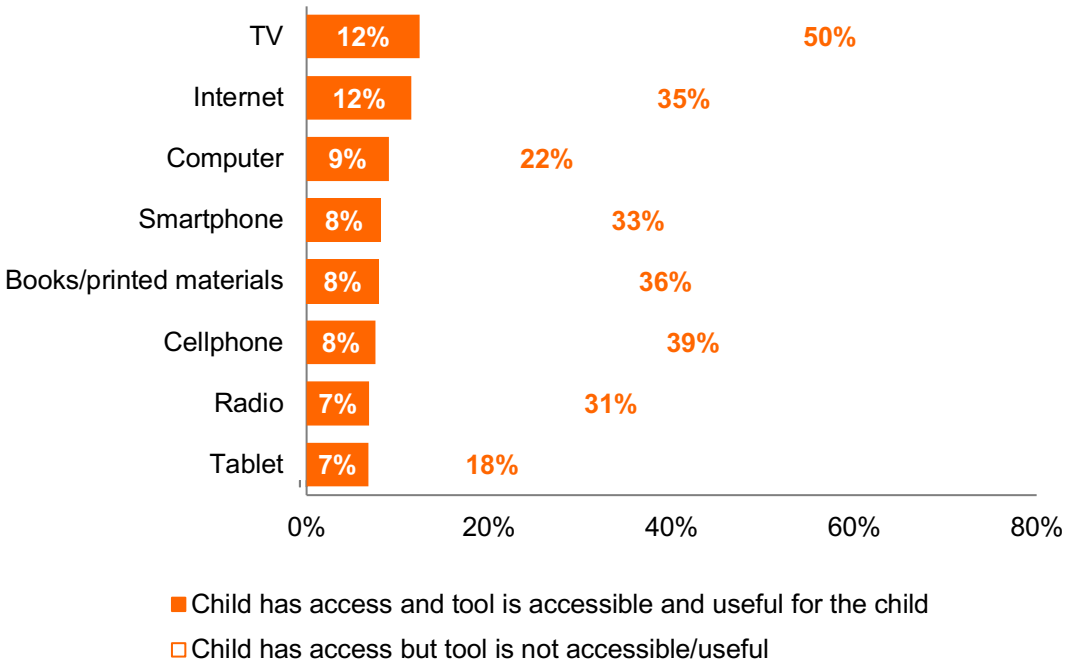
**Figure 70. Percentage of students who dropped out during the COVID-19 pandemic, and who had an unmet need for learning support and for home schooling/learning materials, by disability status, in developing countries, in 2020.**




*Source: Save the Children (2020).* [16]

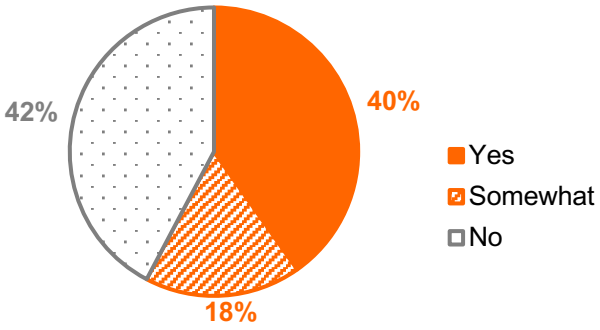
Students with disabilities faced additional challenges during the pandemic, including lack of access to internet and ICT for remote learning. During the school closures due to the pandemic, only 62 per cent of children with disabilities worldwide had access to a television in their household and only 47 per cent had access to the internet (Figure 71). Even among households with access to information and communication technologies, often these were not accessible and useful for the student with disabilities. Only 7-12 per cent of the students with disabilities had access to accessible and useful information and communication technologies, from 7 per cent for radio and tablets to 12 per cent for TV and internet.

**Figure 71. Percentage of children with disabilities with access to internet and other information and communication technology during school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020.**




*Source: World Bank and Inclusive Education Initiative 2020.*[232]

**Figure 72. Percentage of parents/caregivers of children with disabilities that had access to financial support during school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020.**




*Note: Data based on responses of parents/caregivers of children with disabilities.*
*Source: World Bank and Inclusive Education Initiative 2020.*[232]

Moreover, a large majority of families did not have access to financial support to cope with the cost of additional devices, internet and personal support that remote learning requires. During the school closures due to the pandemic, 42 per cent of parent/caregivers of children with disabilities did not have access to financial support (Figure 72).

Students who were deaf and students with hearing impairments encountered barriers when their teachers and peers were wearing face masks.[233] Opaque masks became a major impediment for these students during the pandemic, both during in person and online learning, as face masks inhibited lip reading, blocked muffling sound and interfered with audibility and intelligibility of speech. Although this barrier can be overcome by using transparent masks, research was not conducted on the efficacy of these masks to block the transmission of COVID-19 and thus prevented their wide usage during the pandemic.

To combat the unprecedented challenges to education for persons with disabilities, some countries developed approaches inclusive of all learners or targeting the needs of students with disabilities (Table 2). These approaches relied on inclusive guidelines for re-opening schools, partnering with organizations of persons with disabilities, investing in accessible learning platforms as well as low-tech distance learning solutions with accessibility features and conducting trials for remote learning materials for students with disabilities.

**Table 2. Initiatives to support the education of students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

| Initiative | Examples of countries |
|---|---|
| Guidelines on re-opening of schools in COVID-19 environment | Bangladesh, [234] Cambodia,[235] Kenya,[236] Kiribati,[237] Myanmar,[238] Nigeria,[239] Papua New Guinea,[240] and Eastern Caribbean States[241] |
| Partnering with organizations of persons with disabilities | Paraguay[242] |
| Investing in accessible online learning platforms | Uganda,[243] Mauritius,[244] Colombia[245] and Guatemala[246] |
| Investing in low-tech distance learning solutions, like education broadcasts on TV or radio that include accessibility features | Bangladesh,[247] Portugal,[248] Cambodia[249] and Rwanda[250] |
| Teachers trialled remote learning materials and modalities for learners with disabilities | Bahamas[251] and Kiribati[252] |
| Therapy or psychological support for learners with disabilities during school closures | Martinique[253] and Turks and Caicos Islands [254] |
| Provide parents and caregivers with advice on disability-inclusive learning environments | Ireland, [255] Mozambique[256] and Nepal[257] |

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, countries have been engaged in 'building back better'[258] and focusing on providing support to students with disabilities. Malawi and Ghana are expanding existing remedial learning programmes to help children catch up on lost learning[259] and school grants are provided for

similar programs in Rwanda.[260] In China, individualized learning plans help learning recovery among students with disabilities from disadvantaged backgrounds, while in the USA, emphasis is on accommodations, modifications, and assistance for children with disabilities.[261,262]

## Summary of findings and the way forward

Children with disabilities continue to face barriers in access, progression, completion and learning outcomes, particularly in higher levels of education. Most children with disabilities are able to access primary education but this access drops at lower secondary and even further for upper secondary education. While 11 per cent of children with disabilities of primary school age remain out of school, this percentages increases to 32 per cent for children with disabilities of upper secondary school age. Children with disabilities from vulnerable groups, such as indigenous people, are particularly at a disadvantage. Although these gaps are found in most countries, a few countries have already succeeded in lowering out of school rates for children with disabilities of primary school age to very low levels, at par with the levels for children without disabilities. Children with disabilities also face more barriers than children without disabilities to achieve reading skills (37 versus 30 per cent) and numeracy skills (27 versus 23 per cent).

Remarkable advances towards inclusion of persons with disabilities in legislation, policies and school environments have been made since 2015. Almost all countries have now laws or policies protecting the right of persons with disabilities to education. The percentage of countries with physical school environments accessible and inclusive of persons with disabilities doubled from 2016 to 2021. However, despite these advances, less than half of the countries have educational materials and school environments designed to be accessible and inclusive of persons with disabilities.

In 2020, progress in policy and practice was abruptly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. During this pandemic, education systems faced major challenges in providing continuous access to education for children and adolescents with disabilities. With nation-wide school closures in effect and remote instruction becoming the only way for many to continue education, many students found themselves at home without the necessary personal and technological support to make learning possible and effective. One in five students with disabilities dropped out during the pandemic; nine in ten students with disabilities did not have a computer at home that was accessible and useful for their learning. Many families did not have the financial security to make the needed investments in support and ICT. Almost half of households with children with disabilities did not receive financial support during school closures to cover these additional costs.

If the rates of progress observed so far continue, all countries are expected to have adequate legislation/policies guaranteeing disability inclusion in education by 2030. To keep this momentum, legal revisions are particularly urgent in countries in Oceania and in sub-Saharan Africa.

For target 4.a, which calls for education facilities that are disability sensitive, progress, though noticeable, has not been enough. At the rate of progress observed since 2015 in making physical environments in schools appropriate for students with disabilities, the disability-related provisions of target 4.a. will only be achieved in slightly over half of countries by 2030. The world needs to build and upgrade educational facilities appropriate for students with disabilities at a rate 3 times faster than the rates of progress observed so far, in order to achieve this target by 2030.

The following actions are recommended to achieve Goal 4 by, for and with persons with disabilities and to ensure that the right to an inclusive education for persons with disabilities is being upheld in legislation, policy and practice:

**1. Establish inclusive education for persons with disabilities in legislation and policies.** Governments should make sure national laws and policies are in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Sectoral and cross-sectoral policies and legal systems need to protect against discrimination of persons with disabilities and foster their right to receive equitable quality education, reasonable accommodation and individualized support, eliminating segregation and promoting diversity.

**2. Expand inclusion in education to all levels of education.** Adopting inclusive education practices to ensure quality education across all levels of education including pre-school, primary and secondary education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and higher education, with a lifelong learning perspective is crucial to ensure all learners have equal opportunities to realize their full potential. Expanding inclusive practices to pre-school is essential to ensure healthy growth and development of all children. Developing early years screening and referral programmes to determine services and support needs for quality education should be a key element of the expansion together with the development of transition pathways from school to work.

**3. Implement universal design principles and accessibility to ensure access to quality education for all.** To ensure equal learning opportunities for all, the adoption and implementation of the principles of universal design in schools and other learning environments is crucial. This should include attention to educational infrastructure, transport, teaching and learning materials and pedagogical practices. Universal design for learning principles also need to be applied in the context of distance learning with a focus on the availability of accessible infrastructure, connectivity and adapted content. Such initiatives should also include the development of flexible curricula that are adapted to the learning needs of all learners.

**4. Provide access to assistive technologies in education.** Ensure access points for assistive technologies in education, for both in person and distance learning in urban and rural areas, supported by a dedicated workforce and support networks involving key development sectors, particularly health, rehabilitation and labour sectors and social services. Also, ensure training on the use of assistive technologies for learners, teachers and families.

**5. Develop teacher capacities in inclusive education and build a diverse workforce in schools including teachers with disabilities.** Make inclusive education an essential element of teacher training (pre- and in-service). Prepare teachers to develop learners' cognitive, emotional, social and creative skills and build welcoming, free from violence and safe face-to-face and online learning environments for all learners. Value a diverse education workforce, provide sufficient staffing levels to allow children with disabilities to thrive in all types of environments and foster motivation and readiness among teachers to commit to inclusive education. Peer support for inclusive education at local levels can play an important role in building both skills and confidence to develop inclusive teaching practices.

**6. Engage multiple stakeholders to foster partnerships to advance inclusive policies and practices.** Partner with non-governmental organizations, including organizations of persons with disabilities, communities, parents, caregivers, youth and the education workforce -- including retired educators -- to shape inclusive policies and practices. Empowering these stakeholders to engage with monitoring and evaluation processes can accelerate progress in making school and other learning environments inclusive.

**7. Foster cross-sectoral approaches to education, including access to health and social protection.** Strengthen cross-sectoral approaches to education, including access to health, rehabilitation and social protection initiatives that address the additional costs learners with disabilities face in accessing education.

**8. Continue to improve national collection and disaggregation of education data by disability as well as data collection on the learning environment.** High-quality data is essential for planning, budgeting, and implementation of inclusive education. Improving the quality of education for students with disabilities requires reliable data on: (i) access, progression and learning outcomes of children with disabilities, (ii) data monitoring the accessibility and inclusion of the learning environment, including facilities, materials and human resources and (iii) data to monitor discrimination, exclusion, segregation, integration and inclusion of students with disabilities. In line with international guidelines for disability data collection, prioritize the standardization of data collection systems and foster collaboration among ministries and national agencies on the harmonization of administrative data collection processes.

**9.Accelerate the implementation of inclusive recovery strategies to ensure mitigation of learning losses caused by school closures during the global COVID-19 pandemic.** The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing education disparities. In many countries, school closures have negatively impacted basic and foundational skills, thereby exacerbating an already serious learning gap between students with and without disabilities. To address these learning gaps, it is crucial to implement inclusive learning recovery strategies at scale with a focus on ongoing support and adaptations of instruction to children's learning levels.

**10. Based on lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, review and strengthen policies and practices related to the quality of education to ensure the needs of learners with disabilities are part of**

**future crisis readiness and response planning.** It is important to take stock of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education system, in particular, on teachers, learners with disabilities and their families/caregivers. Developing mental health support for teachers, learners and their families together with measures that foster wellbeing and a sense of belonging at school can promote healthy development and resilience to face future crisis. Building positive learning environments that embrace diversity as a basic principle can play a key role in strengthening community resilience and address the adverse effects of crisis on the education of persons with disabilities. The pandemic has revealed that, in times of crisis and beyond, it is important to provide training and support to families of persons with disabilities to ensure a stable support network. It is also important to provide virtual and physical spaces for teachers, families and students to share their experiences and learn from each other**.**