FACTSHEET 2026

Education Aid Cuts Are Jeopardizing the Future of Children with Disabilities

A call to action for donors



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Global education aid is declining, but aid to basic education is contracting even faster. At a time when millions of children with disabilities remain out of school, development assistance is not a luxury but a lifeline. Yet disability-inclusive basic education is increasingly being dropped from donors' priorities.

What gets protected is a choice, not an accident. Right now, donors are largely making these choices out of sight.

KEY NUMBERS[1]

–22.2%

Projected fall in net bilateral ODA for education, 2024–2026

–15.3%

Decrease in direct ODA to basic education, 2023–2024

Over 17 million

Children with disabilities counted amongst out-of-school children in crisis contexts

70.6%

of DAC members' bilateral education commitments with no recorded disability objective in 2024

–38.4%

Fall in DAC members' bilateral education commitments recorded with disability inclusion as the principal objective between 2023–2024 – reaching 0,5% in 2024

49%

more likely for children with disabilities to have never attended school, than children without disabilities

Education is increasingly sidelined in donor priorities

The latest wave of aid cuts is accelerating a longer-term erosion of education's place in donor priorities. Between 2010 and 2024, education's share of total aid fell from 14% to 9% for the World Bank, from 14% to 11% for France, from 10% to 3% for Germany, and from 8% to 3% for Japan. The European Union is a notable exception, with education's share increasing from around 5-6% in the mid-2010s to approximately 10% in recent years.[2]

The OECD projects that net bilateral education aid from DAC members will decline by 22.2% between 2024 and 2026.[3] Between 2023 and 2024 alone, the education's share of sector-allocable ODA fell from 8.4% to 7.5%, marking the lowest level recorded since 2010. Some of the

[1] Sources: OECD projections; calculation based on UNESCO GEM Report 2026 Aid Tables; Education Cannot Wait, Global Estimates 2025 Update; calculations based on OECD CRS, July 2026 release; UNICEF

[2] UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM) (2026), Financial Aid, GEM Report SCOPE, based on OECD-DAC Creditor Reporting System (CRS) data

3 OECD (2026), ODA Projections for 2026 and the Near Term

largest reductions came from major providers, including Germany (–USD 514 million, –45.6%), World Bank International Development Association (IDA) (–USD 368 million, –14.0%), and UNRWA (–USD 206 million, –29.8%). [4]

Education is increasingly competing with immediate humanitarian needs, geopolitical priorities and areas perceived to offer more direct strategic or commercial returns to donors. The growing emphasis on "mutual benefits" and national interest in development cooperation may further disadvantage education. Investments in public education systems generate primarily long-term benefits for people and economies in partner countries, rather than immediate or readily identifiable returns for donor countries.

This decline is particularly alarming given the extreme concentration of education aid among a handful of donors. Nearly half of all global education aid is provided by just five actors: Germany, the World Bank's IDA, France, the United States and EU institutions.[5] As a result, decisions taken by a small number of major donors can trigger system-wide shocks across education systems, especially in countries that remain highly dependent on external financing. ODA finances an average of 17% of public education expenditure in low-income countries, rising to 31% in Sierra Leone and as much as 40% in Rwanda.[6] In contexts where domestic resources are already insufficient to meet growing education needs, aid cuts threaten teacher recruitment and training, learning materials, school accessibility measures, and targeted support services that enable children with disabilities to attend and succeed in school.

The accountability gap of funding for education in emergency

Tracking financing for education in emergencies and protracted crises (EiEPC) remains a major challenge. Funding is spread across humanitarian and development channels and reported through separate systems, including OECD CRS, OCHA FTS and IATI, using different methodologies and levels of coverage. This fragmented data landscape makes it difficult to establish a clear picture of financing, compare trends, identify gaps and support coordinated donor planning. Despite these differences, available datasets point to a consistent trend: since 2021, EiEPC financing has declined by around 20%, even as its share of total education aid has increased, and meets only 29% of funding requirements.[7]

Inclusive education is more than schools with ramps

Under Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, States must ensure inclusive education at all levels, while articles 32 and 11 require donor States to ensure that international development cooperation and humanitarian assistance support, protect and include persons with disabilities. Shrinking aid budgets are making these obligations increasingly difficult to fulfil.

Children with disabilities were already left behind before the most recent aid cuts. They are 49% more likely than other children to have never attended school, and at least half of young people

4 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM) (2026)

5 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM) (2025), Sustaining Global Education Finance: Protecting Learning Amid Aid Cuts, Insight Note, based on OECD-DAC data

6 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM) (2026)

7 Id.

with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries are excluded from education entirely, rising to 90% in some contexts.[8] Exclusion therefore results from both attitudes and the way education systems are designed and financed.

These barriers explain why reductions in direct education funding, basic-education financing and system-strengthening support can create disproportionate risks for learners with disabilities.

Inclusion requires a broad approach encompassing accessible infrastructure, trained teachers with support, accessible teaching and learning materials, accessible transport, reasonable accommodation. When funding for these is cut, schools may remain open on paper, but they become less able to include the children with disabilities.

Bilateral education financing commitments marking disability inclusion as the principal objective fell by 38.4% between 2023 and 2024, from USD 66.6 million to just USD 41 million.[9] Commitments marking disability as a "significant" objective rose, but this broader mainstreaming does not show whether inclusion is adequately financed or delivered, and – in any case - this cannot replace specific, dedicated financing.

2024: the disability-financing accountability gap

34.8% of bilateral education commitments were not screened against the disability marker at all. A further 35.8% were screened but recorded no disability objective. Together, 70.6% of bilateral education financing carries no recorded disability objective and just 0.5% has disability inclusion as its principal objective.[10]

Disproportionate cuts in basic education equal disproportionate impacts on children with disabilities

The current aid contraction is not affecting all parts of the education sector equally. Basic education (pre-primary, primary, and lower secondary education) has been losing ground within education aid for several years and is now experiencing some of the steepest reductions.

The share of direct education aid directed to basic education declined globally from 39% in 2016 to 27% in 2024, while funding increasingly shifted towards secondary and post-secondary education, including Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). Post-secondary education now accounts for nearly 40% of total education aid. However, this figure is partly inflated by the inclusion of imputed tuition costs for students from low- and middle-income countries studying in donor countries. While these costs are reported as ODA, they do not directly contribute to education outcomes in recipient countries.[11]

More recently, the contraction has accelerated, with direct ODA to basic education falling by 15.3% between 2023 and 2024, alone - almost twice the rate of decline in aid to education as a

[8] UNICEF (2021), Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities; World Bank (2025), Disability Inclusion in Education

[9] OECD, Creditor Reporting System, "Other Markers: Aid (ODA) activities targeting other policy objectives", disability policy marker, bilateral commitments in constant 2024 USD, 2023–2024, July 2026 release (v20260710), accessed August 2026

[10] id

11 Hares, S. and Rossiter, J. (2025), "The Precarity of Aid for Basic Education and What To Do About It", Center for Global Development, based on OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS) data

whole.[12] A striking example is the United Kingdom that reduced the share of their education aid dedicated to basic education, from 62% in 2016 to 47% in 2024. [13] There is a risk that the trend will worsen further if multilateral organizations also deprioritize basic education.

Basic education is particularly vulnerable to aid cuts because it depends on a limited group of donors and has received only a small share of the growth in overall aid over the past decade.[14]

This shift matters because basic education is the foundation of disability-inclusive education. If children with disabilities do not access and continue to receive quality basic education, they are less likely to progress to higher levels of education. In a context where children with disabilities are already among the most excluded learners, continued reductions in basic education aid threaten to turn existing inequalities into deeper and more permanent exclusion.

Donor	Total education ODA, 2023-2024	Direct basic-education ODA, 2023–2024
France	**+1.7%**	**–38.2%**
United Kingdom	**+107.4%**	**–18.0%**
United States	**+8.4%**	**–12.9%**
EU Institutions	**–6.0%**	**+101.3%***

Note: For France, the UK and the US, total education ODA figures appear positive (United States +8.4%, United Kingdom +107.4%, France +1.7%), driven mostly by multilateral and budget-support channels that mask cuts to the sub-sector of basic education that is so critical for disability inclusive education. The EU is a genuine exception: its direct basic-education ODA rose from USD 162.2 million to USD 326.5 million, even though its total education ODA fell by 6% overall, demonstrating a real reallocation towards basic education within a shrinking envelope.[15]

Girls with disabilities: intersectional discrimination

Only 41.7% of girls with disabilities complete primary school, compared with 50.6% of boys with disabilities and 52.9% of girls without disabilities. Adolescent girls with disabilities may also face intersecting barriers, including gender-based violence, child, early and forced marriage, disproportionate domestic responsibilities, inaccessible WASH and inadequate menstrual-health support that heighten the risk of interruption and dropout. This evidence predates the current aid cuts and does not quantify their gender-differentiated effects; it identifies the mechanisms through which reductions in teacher support, accessible WASH, protection and reasonable accommodation may deepen existing inequalities.[16]

12 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM) (2026)

13 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM) (2026)

14 id

15 Calculations based on OECD CRS, July 2026 release

16 Humanity & Inclusion (2025), Beyond Access: Ensuring the Continuity of Education for Adolescent Girls with Disabilities

How cuts are operationalized on the ground: five countries, five mechanisms

South Sudan. Disability-targeted support to school attendance is narrowing.[17]
The UK-funded Girls' Education South Sudan programme (GESS2), which provided nationwide cash transfers and school grants benefiting children with disabilities, is being replaced by the Education for All Support Scheme (EFASS), that targets a narrower group of children considered to be at the highest risk. FCDO has acknowledged in its own equality assessment that this transition will leave fewer girls and fewer children with disabilities receiving support.

Mozambique. Long-term system support is ending, not just a project.[18]

Finland ended its support to Mozambique's Education Sector Common Fund (FASE) after 2024, reducing financing for system-wide education reforms. The UK that has also been a longstanding supporter of education in Mozambique, including through system-level support and programmes targeting girls' education, is set to cut by 90% by 2029 its total bilateral aid to the country, across all sectors.

Tanzania. A results-based education reform is being cut short.[19]

Sweden decided in December 2025 to phase out aid to Tanzania, placing its Education Programme for Results II, an equity- and inclusion-relevant system-strengthening initiative running to mid-2027, on an early exit path.

Uzbekistan. The reform on inclusive education was interrupted before it could work.[20]

USAID's All Children Succeeding programme built accessible teaching materials and teacher practice with persons with disabilities. It was cancelled in February 2025 while still in its early implementation phase.

Kenya. Disability inclusion was stripped out of a national literacy reform.[21]

USAID's Kenya Primary Literacy Program trained over 680 teachers of learners with disabilities across more than 23,300 public schools. Its cancellation removed disability-inclusive measures embedded in system-wide reform, not a stand-alone disability project.

[17] Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), FCDO multi-year Official Development Assistance programme allocations 2026–2027 to 2028–2029: Equality Impact Assessment; FCDO Development Tracker, Girls' Education in South Sudan Phase II (GESS2); FCDO, Education for All South Sudan (EFASS).

[18] Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (2024), Austerity measures in development cooperation are specified, 18 January 2024; Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (2026), *FCDO Annual Report and Accounts 2025–2026*, HC 521, UK Government

19 Sida (2025), Swedish Government decides to phase out bilateral strategies and close embassies; Openaid/Sida, Education Program for Result EPforR II Mainland Tanzania, Contribution ID SE-0-SE-6-14876

20 European Training Foundation and Walls, E. (2025), Impact of USAID Withdrawal on Global Education and Skills Development

21 id

Five different mechanisms, one common outcome: reduced coverage, non-renewal, premature exit, abrupt cancellation, and the removal of disability inclusion from broader reform efforts. While none of these decisions explicitly targeted persons with disabilities, their likely consequences for persons with disabilities were rarely assessed, leaving a major blind spot in aid decision-making.

> *"The inclusion of persons with disabilities should never be a budgetary adjustment variable. Don't let these children become the invisible victims of your accounting decisions." A local association of parents of children with intellectual disabilities, Tunisia*[22]

What donors must commit to now

- **Protect and ring-fence financing for inclusive education**
  Maintain direct education ODA towards countries, systems and population groups facing the greatest exclusion. Within the education sector, rebalance strategically the share of aid amongst portfolios to support basic education and education in emergencies, including through funding the Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait.
  Protecting volume is not enough: financing must also be predictable, multi-year, accessible and disability-inclusive by design, and aligned with partner-country priorities, not donor-driven. ODA should strengthen national and public education systems, especially targeting low-income, and crisis-affected countries.

- **Finance disability-inclusive education through a twin-track approach**
  Systematically mainstream disability inclusion across all education funding while maintaining dedicated funding for disability-specific interventions. Require all education programmes, including education systems strengthening, teacher training, curriculum development, infrastructure, and emergency response, to identify and remove barriers for learners with disabilities. Ensure accessibility and reasonable accommodation is built into programme design, budgets and implementation from the outset.
  Financing must also respond to intersecting factors: gender, disability, displacement and extreme poverty, rather than treating disability as a single, undifferentiated category.
  No education investment should be considered successful unless it contributes to equitable, inclusive and quality education for all.

- **Prevent harmful aid exits and ensure responsible transitioning**
  Commit to protecting education ODA from cuts. Ensure that funding reductions do not disproportionately affect persons with disabilities and other marginalized populations. Any programme reductions should be preceded by impact assessments, stakeholder consultations and transition plans to sustain essential services. Strengthen domestic education financing while maintaining predictable ODA commitments, recognizing that domestic resource mobilization cannot replace external support where fiscal space is constrained by debt, economic shocks or conflict.

- **Strengthen financing accountability and disability data**
  Apply the OECD-DAC disability marker consistently across education ODA and publish data on allocations, disbursements and marker scores. Require disaggregation of financing

22 Humanity & Inclusion (2026), "Funding cuts turn inequalities into permanent exclusion"

data and education outcomes a *minima* by disability, sex and age, to identify inequalities and monitor whether investments are reaching and benefiting persons with disabilities. Harmonise the tracking of education financing across the humanitarian–development nexus to establish a comprehensive and comparable picture of resources reaching children and education systems affected by crises.

- **Sustain civil society capacity and OPD participation**
  Establish predictable, multi-year, flexible financing accessible to local organisations and OPDs. Ensure their meaningful participation in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of education programmes and education financing decisions

THE BOTTOM LINE

Aid cuts to education are not neutral. They are hitting a sector in which learners with disabilities were already disproportionately excluded, while deprioritizing an investment that unlocks individual potential and generates benefits across societies and economies. Donors and governments cannot claim to defend the right to inclusive education while allowing its financing to shrink unchecked, before more of what has already been lost becomes permanent.

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