

Inclusive Education

**From
Policy to Action**



D20

SOUTH AFRICA 2025

DISABILITY

3rd International Disability Rights Conference, 4 June 2026

INTRODUCTION

- Fostering an inclusive education system is not merely a social expenditure, but a long-term economic investment that unlocks human potential.
- Despite international commitments and progressive national policies, a significant gap persists between the vision of inclusive education and its implementation.

INTRODUCTION

Participants in the 2025 South African D20 sessions highlighted that:

- While South Africa has a "beautiful policy document," it is often "not being enacted."
- Children with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, often begin accessing education far too late, and schools lack basic infrastructure and assistive devices.



INTRODUCTION

Participants in the 2025 South African D20 sessions highlighted that:

- Educators are overwhelmed and under-supported, with class sizes that make it impossible to attend to diverse learning needs.
- Attitudinal barriers persist, with some educators still believing that learners with disabilities belong in special schools.



INTRODUCTION

Participants in the 2025 South African D20 sessions highlighted that:

- There is currently "no law that prohibits exclusion of children with disabilities from schools."
- Persons with disabilities face a lack of support in higher education, and qualified persons with disabilities are excluded from teaching roles.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthening Educator Capacity for Inclusive Teaching

1.1 Mandate Compulsory Inclusive Pedagogy Training:

Integrate mandatory and practical training on inclusive pedagogy, disability awareness, and the use of assistive technology into all pre-service and in-service teacher training curricula.

1.2 Establish a National Mentorship Programme:

Create a national mentorship programme that pairs experienced inclusive educators with their colleagues, offering ongoing peer support and on-the-ground guidance for implementing inclusive practices in the classroom.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthening Educator Capacity for Inclusive Teaching

1.3 Fund and Deploy Dedicated Support Staff to schools:

Allocate specific budget to recruit and deploy specialised support staff, such as occupational therapists, sign language interpreters, and inclusive education specialists, to assist educators with diverse learning needs.

1.4 Develop a Digital Resource Hub:

In collaboration with disability rights organisations, create a national, accessible online platform that provides educators with free and readily available resources, lesson plans, and best practices for inclusive teaching.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthening Educator Capacity for Inclusive Teaching

1.5 Incentivise Inclusive Teaching:

Implement a system of incentives, such as specialised salary scales or professional development credits, for educators who obtain advanced qualifications and demonstrate excellence in inclusive education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. Improving Data Collection and Analysis

2.1 Mandate Disability-Disaggregated Data Collection:

Legally mandate all educational institutions to collect and report disability-disaggregated data on student enrolment, performance, retention, and access to support services.

2.2 Standardise Data Collection Protocols:

Develop and enforce a national standard for collecting disability data, ensuring that it is consistent, ethical, and respects the privacy and dignity of learners with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. Improving Data Collection and Analysis

2.3 Establish a National Inclusive Education Data Registry:

Create a secure, national data registry to centralise and analyse information from all schools, allowing policymakers to identify gaps, track progress, and allocate resources more effectively.

2.4 Collaborate with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs):

Partner with OPDs in the design, collection, and analysis of data to ensure that the process is rights-based and that the data reflects the lived experiences of persons with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. Improving Data Collection and Analysis

2.5 Regularly Publish Public Data Reports:

Mandate the Department of Basic Education to regularly publish and disseminate public reports on the state of inclusive education, using clear visuals and accessible formats to ensure transparency and accountability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. Fostering Accessible Digital and Physical Environments

3.1 Enforce Universal Design Principles:

Legally mandate that all new school infrastructure, including classrooms, restrooms, and recreational facilities, is built on universal design principles from the outset.

3.2 Develop Accessibility Benchmarks for Digital Tools:

Establish and enforce national accessibility benchmarks (e.g., based on WCAG standards) for all educational technology, learning platforms, and digital content used in schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. Fostering Accessible Digital and Physical Environments

3.3 Subsidise Accessible Assistive Technologies:

Implement a national subsidy programme or tax relief to make assistive technologies (e.g., screen readers, hearing aids, communication devices) affordable and readily available to all learners who need them.

3.4 Upgrade Existing Infrastructure:

Allocate a dedicated fund to assist schools in upgrading existing physical and digital infrastructure to meet current accessibility standards, with a focus on older and under-resourced institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. Fostering Accessible Digital and Physical Environments

3.5 Establish an “Inclusive-by-Design” Policy:

Enact policies that require all publicly funded educational technology projects to involve learners with disabilities and their representatives in the co-design and testing phases to ensure usability and relevance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Identifying Sustainable Financial Investment Models

4.1 Ring-Fence the Inclusive Education Budget:

Legally designate and ring-fence a specific portion of the national education budget for inclusive education initiatives, ensuring that these funds cannot be diverted to other priorities.

4.2 Establish a National Inclusive Education Fund:

Create a dedicated, multi-donor fund to attract contributions from government, the private sector, and philanthropic organisations to support inclusive education projects, teacher training, and assistive technology procurement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Identifying Sustainable Financial Investment Models

4.3 Incentivise Public-Private Partnerships:

Offer tax incentives and public recognition to private sector entities that invest in and support inclusive education initiatives, such as funding accessible infrastructure or sponsoring teacher training programmes.

4.4 Conduct a Fiscal Audit of Inclusive Spending:

Commission an independent, public audit of current spending on inclusive education to identify inefficiencies, reallocate resources, and ensure that funds reach intended beneficiaries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Identifying Sustainable Financial Investment Models

4.5 Prioritise Early Intervention Funding:

Increase budgetary allocations for early childhood development programmes and early intervention services to support children with disabilities before they enter the formal school system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Establishing System-wide Accountability and Cross-Sectoral Collaboration

5.1 Mandate Cross-Sectoral Collaboration:

Require all major educational policy and infrastructure projects to include formal collaboration with other relevant government departments (e.g., Health, Social Development) and civil society organisations to break down silos.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Establishing System-wide Accountability and Cross-Sectoral Collaboration

5.2 Create a National Oversight Body:

Establish a formal, multi-stakeholder body, including a majority of persons with disabilities, to oversee the implementation of inclusive education policies and hold various government departments accountable for their commitments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Establishing System-wide Accountability and Cross-Sectoral Collaboration

5.3 Enact a Law Prohibiting Exclusion:

Pass national legislation that explicitly prohibits the exclusion of children with disabilities from schools, providing a clear legal basis for action and recourse for families.

5.4 Fund Civil Society Advocacy:

Provide consistent and transparent funding to disability rights organisations to enable them to monitor policy implementation and advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities in education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Establishing System-wide Accountability and Cross-Sectoral Collaboration

5.5 Develop a Public Accountability Dashboard:

Create a public-facing dashboard that tracks progress on key inclusive education metrics, allowing citizens to monitor government performance and hold officials accountable for meeting their targets.

CONCLUSION

- Fostering an inclusive education system is not merely a social expenditure, but a **long-term economic investment** that unlocks human potential. This policy brief urges a paradigm shift: from viewing inclusive education as an add-on responsibility for educators, **to** recognising it as a **system-wide transformation** that requires coordinated effort and **dedicated resources**. By foregrounding the **lived experiences** of persons with disabilities, grounding our approach in a **comprehensive legal framework**, and adopting a **strategic fiscal lens**, we can dismantle the systemic barriers that perpetuate exclusion.

CONCLUSION

- The recommendations outlined here offer a clear pathway to a future where learners with disabilities are **not just passive recipients** of education, but full and **active participants** in an environment designed for their success. This is a call to action to move beyond well-intentioned policy and create a **system that truly leaves no learner behind.**

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