



Centre of Excellence on Data for Children with Disabilities

Fostering inclusion through data

Who we are

The Centre of Excellence is hosted at UNICEF Headquarters in New York. Its work is guided by a Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) comprised of individuals from key stakeholder organizations who have the insight and expertise to forge practical and strategic collaborations. Strategic Advisory Group members steer the overall direction and focus of the Centre, while providing targeted and strategic advice to facilitate its activities. Given its central role in establishing the Centre and hosting its activities, UNICEF serves as the technical lead and secretariat.

Strategic Advisory Group



Matias Egeland

Matias Egeland is a Senior Adviser with the Norwegian Directorate for Education, Department of Welfare and Human Rights. He previously worked in the areas of education, social policy, development, trade and state-owned enterprises as a Policy Analyst with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). He holds a bachelor of science degree in government and a master's degree in political science and political economy from the London School of Economics.



Veronica Forcignanò

Veronica Forcignanò is an international human rights professional with a decade of experience in advocacy, child rights and participation. She has worked in the NGO and international development cooperation sectors dealing with child rights advocacy, gender equality, human rights education and participation in international human rights forums. One aspect of this work was ensuring that children's and young people's voices, including those of children with disabilities, are included in discussions and policies pertaining to their rights. With the UN Human Rights Office, she supported the Committee on the Rights of the Child as well as the Human Rights Council and its subsidiary bodies. Currently, she is helping carry out the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities at the Special Procedures Branch of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Ms. Forcignanò is passionate about ensuring that all people are able to realize their rights. This includes making documents, meetings and discussions accessible to all, and tirelessly promoting and advocating for participation and consultation. She holds a master's degree in human rights and multilevel governance from the University of Padua, Italy.



Elizabeth Lockwood

Elizabeth Lockwood works for CBM Global Disability Inclusion and is the CBM Representative to the United Nations in New York. She focuses on developing advocacy strategies to raise awareness, build capacity and lobby for the rights of persons with disabilities at the United Nations level. Her prime areas of interest include the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, disability data and statistics, financing for development, and accessibility. She is partially seconded to the United Nations Department for General Assembly and Conference Management at UN Headquarters, working on accessibility in meetings and conferences.

Ms. Lockwood is also Co-chair of the International Disability and Development Consortium's UN Task Group and an Expert Member of the World Federation of the Deaf Expert Group on Accessibility. She was raised by Dutch and American parents and has lived and worked in North, Central and South America, Asia, Europe and with the Navajo (Diné) Nation. She has a PhD in disability studies and a master's degree in public policy. She signs in five languages and in International Sign, speaks English and Spanish, and is learning French and Maghrebi Arabic.



Jennifer H. Madans

Jennifer H. Madans recently retired from the National Center for Health Statistics, the United States' principal statistical agency. Most recently, she served as the Center's Associate Director for Science and Acting Director. She has concentrated her research efforts on data collection methodology and the measurement of health and functioning. Currently, she is a disability statistics consultant and Senior Associate with the Center for Inclusive Policy (CIP). She also serves on the Board of Trustees of the Population Reference Bureau.

Ms. Madans is a founding member and has been the chair of the steering committees for three UN-sponsored initiatives to develop internationally comparable measures of disability and health, including the Washington Group on Disability Statistics. Since 2002, she has worked extensively with national statistical offices, government development agencies, NGOs and organizations of persons with disabilities to advance the availability and quality of disability statistics. She has conducted numerous training sessions, provided extensive technical assistance and carried out analyses of disability data at the country, regional and international level.

Ms. Madans is a graduate of Bard College and holds a master's degree and doctorate from the University of Michigan. She is an elected Fellow of the American Statistical Association and an elected member of the International Statistical Institute. She also served as Vice President of the International Association of Official Statistics. She received the 2015 Roger Herriot Award for Innovation in Federal Statistics from the American Statistical Association and the 2016 Excellence in Public Service Award from the Population Association of America.



Juan Ignacio Pérez Bello

Juan Ignacio Pérez Bello rejoined the International Disability Alliance (IDA) Secretariat in September 2020. He is a human rights lawyer from Argentina and holds an LLM degree from the American University, Washington College of Law. He began his work in the field of human rights in 2009 in Buenos Aires as part of the Civil Association for Equality and Justice, where he focused on the right to education, engaging in evidence-based collective litigation and community work. He served in the International Disability Alliance Treaty Bodies section between 2014 and 2018. He also worked as a consultant for the UN Human Rights Office on thematic reports to the Human Rights Council and on the Bridging the Gap I project. He is based in the IDA Geneva Office.



Elena Schmidt

Elena Schmidt has over 25 years' experience in health and international development at the national and international levels, including her work for the World Health Organization and the U.K. Department for International Development. She also held a range of academic posts teaching public health and epidemiology. Currently, she is Director of Evidence, Research and Innovations at Sightsavers, an international NGO working to eliminate avoidable blindness and promote equality of opportunity for people with disabilities. Her work includes a broad range of studies and evidence-uptake initiatives in eye health, inclusive education and social inclusion in Africa and Asia.

Ms. Schmidt has co-authored dozens of peer-reviewed publications on health, disability and inclusion and presents regularly at international scientific forums. She holds a bachelor's degree in education, a master's in public health and a doctorate in policy analysis.

To contact the Centre, please email: disabilitydatacentre@unicef.org



Julie D. Weeks

Julie D. Weeks serves as Chief of the Measures Research and Evaluation Research Branch at the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics. Her research focuses on all aspects of disability and functioning, including measurement development and analysis, incorporating standard measures into both national and international data collections, and population ageing. Ms. Weeks is a member of the following organizations: Secretariat, Washington Group on Disability Statistics; Titchfield Group on Ageing; Inter-Agency Subcommittee on ACS (American Community Survey) Disability Questions; Inter-Agency Committee on Disability Research, Executive Committee; and the American Statistical Association's Committee on Statistics and Disability.

Secretariat



Claudia Cappa

Claudia Cappa is a Senior Adviser and Unit Chief in the Data and Analytics Section, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, at UNICEF Headquarters in New York. She is the focal point for data collection, data analysis and methodological work on child disability, early childhood development and child protection from violence, exploitation and abuse. In this capacity she is responsible for the development of survey questionnaires and data collection tools; production of estimations; development of methodologies, indicators, protocols and normative guidelines; design and implementation of capacity-building initiatives; production of data-driven reports; and the delivery and dissemination of final results. She is also responsible for maintaining inter-agency collaborations and partnerships and has been chairing/contributing to several inter-agency technical working groups. She represents UNICEF in the Washington Group on Disability Statistics and is the founder of the Centre of Excellence on Data for Children with Disabilities. Prior to joining UNICEF, she worked at the University of Geneva and at the Institute for Social Studies of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Ms. Cappa has a master's degree and a PhD in development studies from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Switzerland.



Claire Thomson

Claire Thomson is a consultant working with UNICEF in the Data and Analytics Section, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, at UNICEF Headquarters. She is currently supporting UNICEF's work on children with disabilities as well as knowledge management for the Centre of Excellence on Data for Children with Disabilities. Ms. Thomson holds a master's degree in international development studies from the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands.