

Education in Emergencies & Disability Inclusion



Education in emergencies (EiE) can offer an opportunity to promote the rights of children and young people with disabilities in humanitarian contexts. Disability-inclusive education is a critical dimension of EiE, particularly given that violence and disasters can cause physical and psychological injuries, and lead to or aggravate disabilities among children and young people. Globally, children and young people with disabilities have been among the most excluded from all levels of education – a situation that is compounded during emergencies and protracted crises. These children and young people are more likely to have never attended school or to drop out, as well as to be illiterate at the age of 15 or older,¹ compared to those without disabilities.

Multiple complex barriers, including segregation, discrimination, financial barriers, stigma, lack of trained teachers, inadequate learning materials, and inaccessible facilities prevent them from fully participating in education.

Ensuring a disability-inclusive education in emergency contexts is key to preventing or stopping the exclusion of children and young people with disabilities from their right to quality education. Through an emphasis on equity in access and participation, disability-inclusive education can improve the learning experiences and outcomes of all children and young people. It fosters diversity, agency and understanding. It protects children and young people with disabilities from discrimination and violence, and it helps them develop the skills to actively participate in society.

“Jannatul shows her thirst for education all the time. She is organised, attentive and very positive compared to her peers. I think inclusive education, teacher and peer support and the enabling environment have motivated her in this way”.

-Teacher of Jannatul, 12, adolescent girl born with a disability, Bangladesh.



What We Know

In and after a crisis, children and young people with disabilities have a right to quality education.

While inclusive education is for all, it is true that children and young people with disabilities are often excluded in humanitarian contexts. Through disability-inclusive education, they can exercise their right to education, participate in public life, have legal capacity, find work later in life, and avoid poverty. That is why including them in preparedness activities is crucial to establish capacities, resources and plans for an inclusive education response and recovery.

Social cohesion and peacebuilding after a crisis start with inclusive education.

When children and young people in humanitarian contexts learn in an environment that is respectful and open to diversity, they often replicate these values as adults. Disability-inclusive education can serve as a common ground for communities to work together towards equity for all children and young people, fostering a culture of acceptance of difference and diversity, and contributing to social cohesion and peace.

Learning for all can improve when children and young people with disabilities are kept in mind throughout an education response.

If disability-inclusive education was not in place before a crisis, emergency responses offer a chance to look at education provision with a fresh perspective and build a more inclusive system. As a result of improved standards, teacher training and more child-friendly learning spaces, learning outcomes can improve across the board for all learners.

Inclusion of children and young people with disabilities, from the start, creates capacities and resources for an inclusive education response and recovery.

Planning and budgeting for reasonable accommodation, training and resources addressing the needs of children and young people with disabilities, at all levels of education, can create the conditions to establish inclusivity principles throughout the response and in the long term.

Urgent Actions

Invest more in mainstreaming disability-inclusive education and in targeted interventions.

Governments and donors need to increase efforts to move away from parallel education structures for children and young people with disabilities, towards implementing a twin-track approach to disability-inclusive education. That is, investing in making sure that education responses and education systems are inclusive and accessible to all children and young people – including those with disabilities – while also investing in targeted interventions that directly address the disability-related needs of children and young people with disabilities.

Prepare and support teachers and the education community in running disability-inclusive schools.

Support teachers in obtaining specific skills based on frameworks such as the Universal Design for Learning and Socio-Emotional Learning, to effectively develop agency and resilience in children and young people with and without disabilities. Provide solutions to overcrowded classrooms and scarcity of teaching resources, while promoting teachers' own wellbeing. Support teachers, children and parents in making available low-cost teaching and learning materials suitable for a range of learners. Use communication, language and imagery that portrays diverse learning experiences.

Engage parents and communities to champion disability-inclusive education.

Inclusion cannot be enforced from above. Governments, donors, and schools should, together with communities, address stigmatisation, harmful stereotypes and misconceptions around disabilities. Schools should increase practices, such as training and information dissemination, to sensitise children, young people and adults without disabilities, within and outside of school walls, about the rights and needs of persons living with disabilities.

Invest in data on and for inclusion in education, and do it now.

Collecting quality comparable data on children and young people with disabilities is still challenging, despite progress. Data on inclusion can highlight gaps in educational opportunities and outcomes, as well as identify those at risk of being left behind and the severity of the barriers they face. On disability, the use of the Washington Group Short Set of Questions and the Child Functioning Module should be prioritised.

GET THE FACTS

Children and young people with disabilities face multiple compounded barriers to their right to education

Children and young people with disabilities are less likely to get an education

- Nearly 240 million children worldwide have disabilities – one tenth of all children.²
- In 2021, of the 78.2 million children and young people out of school in crisis-affected countries, 17% – or roughly 13.3 million – had functional difficulties.³
- Compared to children without disabilities, children with disabilities are⁴:
 - 25 % less likely to attend early childhood education,
 - 42 % less likely to have foundational reading and numeracy skills,
 - 49 % more likely to have never attended school.
- Teachers often lack the capacity and skills to teach children with disabilities and may be afraid to include them in their classes. Some 25% of teachers in 48 education systems report a high need for professional development in teaching students with special needs.⁵
- Segregation of children and young people with disabilities is still prevalent. According to UNESCO, laws in 25% of countries (but over 40% in Asia and in Latin America and the Caribbean) make provisions for education in separate settings.⁶
- Systemic barriers, such as inaccessible school infrastructures and inadequate materials, persist. Recent reports showed that no schools in Burundi, Niger or Samoa, for example, had adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities.⁷ In Slovakia, only 15% of primary and 21% of lower secondary schools did.⁸
- Girls with disabilities are less likely to get an education. Among 29 developing countries, on average only 69% of women with disabilities ever attended school, compared to 72% of men with disabilities, 79 % of women without disabilities and 86% of men without disabilities.⁹

In emergency contexts, the number of children and adolescents with disabilities often increases, but education responses keep excluding them - they are not attending schools

- In a 2018 study of Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, refugee children 13 years of age and above with disabilities were more likely to be illiterate and to have never been enrolled in school.¹⁰
- Parental shame or misconceptions about education for children and young people with disabilities may prevent them from getting an education. A study in the State of Palestine, for example, found that only 1 in 3 children with disabilities were supported by their families to go to school.¹¹
- Children and young people with disabilities can be bullied by their peers. In a 2016 study in Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya, girls with disabilities reported being teased and bullied both at and on the way to school.¹²
- There is a need for accessible roads, appropriate transportation, and additional support to make the journey. A study from the West Bank of Palestine on why children with disabilities stop education found that 49% reported inadequate transport as a cause.¹³

Further Reading

UNESCO (2020)

[Global Monitoring Report 2020 – Inclusion and Education: All Means All](#)

Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) (2010)

[INEE Pocket Guide to Inclusive Education](#)

Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) (2022)

[Inclusive Education Collection](#)

UNICEF (2022)

[Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities](#)

**The members of the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies contributed their knowledge and expertise to this document. [Contact us](#).*

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UNICEF (2018a). [Children with disabilities in situations of armed conflict: Discussion Paper](#).

UNICEF (2018b). [Guidance: Including children with disabilities in humanitarian action – Education](#).

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Additional Sources

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Education Links, USAID (2018). [The Case for Disability-inclusive Education \(Blog\)](#).

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UNICEF (2017). [Inclusive Education Including children with disabilities in quality learning: what needs to be done?](#)



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