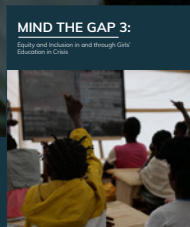




Summary Brief

GENDER-RESPONSIVE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Ensuring education access and quality for
girls' with disabilities



This brief was developed to support the dissemination of key messages in [Mind the Gap 3: Promoting Equity and Inclusion in and Through Girls' Education in Crisis](#). It provides an overview of evidence and gaps in education access and learning for girls with disabilities and recommends actions for gender-responsive planning and design of inclusive education policies and interventions.

Women and girls with disabilities face multiple and intersecting barriers to accessing school and learning.

An estimated 1.3 billion people globally are living with a disability.¹ Nearly 240 million children – one in every 10 – worldwide have disabilities,² and as many as 33 million children with disabilities in low and middle income countries are not in school.³ Girls with disabilities are at greater risk of being denied an education when their support systems are affected by crisis or conflict. Girls with disabilities often face multiple forms of discrimination and barriers to accessing education, including:

1 WHO. (2023). Disability fact sheet. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health>

2 UNICEF. (2021). Seen, counted, included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-with-disabilities-report-2021/>

3 Education Commission. (2016). The learning generation: Investing in education for a changing world. https://report.educationcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Learning_Generation_Full_Report.pdf

- **Stigma:** Women and girls with disabilities may also experience stigmatization and discrimination, which make accessing services and shelter harder and increase vulnerability to violence and exploitation. Girls with disabilities may face cultural bias related to rigid gender roles, which act as barriers to education; this may include the assumption that girls with disabilities are not expected to work or marry, meaning they do not need education.⁴
- **Gender-based violence (GBV):** Girls with disabilities are more likely to be bullied and harassed, and they experience higher rates of GBV than their peers. Parents and caregivers may resist sending their daughters with disabilities to school out of fear for their safety.⁵ Sexual abuse is even more prevalent among girls with intellectual disabilities, and the intersecting disadvantages that accompany disability and gender can mean they are less likely to be believed when reporting GBV.
- **Inaccessible infrastructure:** Lack of gender-responsive and inclusive infrastructure⁶ may impede girls' mobility and disrupt their access to learning spaces. For example, it may be difficult for girls with disabilities to access education if learning spaces do not have girl-friendly and accessible bathrooms. Additionally, a lack of assistive devices⁷ may impede girls' ability to learn while in school. There has been progress in the number of schools with some accessibility adaptations but more is needed to ensure adaptations meet the needs of girls within their communities.
- **Lack of supportive classroom environment:** When teachers are not trained to deliver gender- and disability-inclusive education, they may not feel confident or capable to support the specific learning needs of girls with disabilities. Relevant training can support teachers to adapt their teaching methods and to address negative attitudes and limited expectations for girls with disabilities.
- **Segregated learning:** In many crisis-affected contexts, children with disabilities are educated in segregated settings, further separating them from their peers and reducing educational access due to the longer distances to these "special schools," higher school fees and greater safety concerns around boarding facilities.⁸

4 See INEE (2023) Mind the Gap 3, Section 4.0

5 Leonard Cheshire Disability. (2017). Still left behind: Pathways to inclusive education for girls with disabilities. <https://www.leonardcheshire.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/still-left-behind.pdf>

6 Creating an accessible, disability-inclusive learning environment involves removing any barriers that impede participation, which could range from transportation to school, classroom furniture to flooring, signage to illumination and lighting. It also involves ensuring the accessibility of learning materials, information, and communication.

7 Assistive devices and technology are external products (devices, equipment, instruments, software), specially produced or generally available, that help to maintain or improve an individual's functioning and independence, participation, or overall well-being. They can also help prevent secondary impairments and health conditions. Examples of assistive devices and technologies include wheelchairs, prostheses, hearing aids, visual aids, and specialized computer software and hardware that improve mobility, hearing, vision, or the capacity to communicate.

8 UNICEF. (2021). Seen, counted, included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-with-disabilities-report-2021/>

While there has been some progress, there is still a long way to go

The [2022 Global Disability Summit](#) addressed the need to prioritize inclusive education in emergencies, with additional attention to how gender and disability intersect to further marginalize girls with disabilities. However, to ensure that these commitments lead to changes in educational access and quality for girls with disabilities in crisis-affected countries, investment and funding must increase. The declining percentage of humanitarian funding appeals being financed puts global goals to close the gender gap in the most challenging settings at risk.



Inclusive Play Days - Gaza - EQIE - NORAD 27.7.2021

Ensuring holistic support for girls with disabilities

In order to equitably engage girls with disabilities in education in emergencies programming, initiatives must take into account existing barriers these girls face accessing education and learning. A holistic approach to creating an inclusive school environment involves working with teachers, school management, communities, and girls themselves. Some promising approaches identified in *Mind the Gap 3* include:

- Providing gender-responsive, inclusive education training for teachers, which addresses the intersectional needs of girls with disabilities and includes instruction in gender-responsive, inclusive pedagogy.
- Using support personnel, such as teaching assistants and specialist education officials. These personnel are responsible for supporting learners with disabilities and are often an integral part of delivering inclusive teaching in schools and ensuring children with disabilities can attend mainstream schools.
- Working with existing community structures, families, and organizations of persons with disabilities to understand and address negative attitudes, beliefs, and practices around gender and disability and empower women and girls with disabilities to share and normalize their experiences.

Gaps

The *Mind the Gap 3* report highlights the following gaps in data, evidence, and actions for gender-responsive inclusive education:

- **Limited data on access and quality:** There has been some progress on data availability, due largely to the large scale adoption and adaption of the [Washington Group Questions](#). However, girls with disabilities are still often excluded from data collection, and many countries still do not collect, report, or use data on children with disabilities — let alone sex-disaggregated disability data. Additionally, the data that is available on girls with disabilities falls short of capturing all of the factors that impact a child's learning experience. Very little research focuses on the experience of girls with disabilities in education, which limits the ability to capture the barriers faced by these girls or other vulnerable groups with disabilities. Research and evidence are also lacking on whether the adaptations made to school environments are adequate, appropriate, and meeting the actual needs of girls with disabilities.
- **Limited evidence on GBV:** While evidence shows that girls with disabilities are more likely to experience GBV, there is a lack of nationally representative data on their experiences of violence. Studies which measure violence (including school-related GBV), such as the [Violence Against Children Surveys](#) and the [Global School-Based Student Health Surveys](#), do not include information on disability. We must be able to disaggregate data by sex, age, and disability in order to understand the prevalence of types of violence experienced by girls with disabilities, in order to plan how to prevent and respond.

- **Programming does not center the experiences of girls with disabilities:** Women and girls with disabilities are often excluded from humanitarian response efforts when humanitarian stakeholders fail to consult with women, girls, and organizations of persons with disabilities. Until their stories, experiences, and challenges are actively sought out, the education sector cannot be truly responsive to their needs.
- **Lack of intersectional approaches:** Girls with disabilities are a diverse group who experience a wide range of disabilities, and factors like age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and economic situation all affect their experiences in life. This means they carry different levels of stigma and require different types of accommodations.⁹ In order to be effective, humanitarian stakeholders must take a holistic and intersectional approach to supporting girls with disabilities to access education and learn, which requires coordinating with sectors such as health, protection, shelter, WASH, nutrition, etc.

Recommendations

The following actions are suggested in order to close the gap in access to and quality of education in emergencies for women and girls with disabilities:

Programming

- Governments and their partners should work with parents and caregivers to facilitate access to education for children with disabilities, including providing accessible learning facilities and transportation to and from learning facilities. This should include support for both schools and non-formal education providers to address parents, and caregivers' resistance and concerns around educational quality. Teachers and education personnel should work closely with parents and caregivers to ensure education meets the needs of their children with disabilities, increasing the likelihood that they will support their children to regularly attend school. Teachers and school leaders should inform parents and caregivers on how the safety of their children with disabilities is being prioritized within the classroom, as well as steps that schools are taking to address negative attitudes that could impede their learning.
- Governments and education partners should ensure that teachers have access to continuous professional development on gender- and disability-inclusive education and ongoing support from teaching assistants and inclusive education specialists to ensure they are equipped to support all learners in their classroom while addressing gender stereotypes and deep-rooted social norms.
- Civil society should support schools' and communities' ability to accurately identify children with disabilities and ensure the school has assistive devices as well as the knowledge and strategies to support individual learners. Working alongside schools, civil society can help ensure inclusive education training is prioritized and provide ongoing coaching for all teachers supporting learners with disabilities.

⁹ World Health Organization (WHO). (2023, March). Disability fact sheet. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health>

- Teachers and school leaders should work alongside education implementers to highlight the need for resources and assistive devices that will better equip them to support the diverse learning needs in their classrooms. Teachers should advocate for education leadership to prioritize budgets for equipment and support for children with disabilities.
- Teachers should work with boards of management to ensure school improvement plans are both gender- and disability-inclusive to enable girls and children with disabilities to learn in an environment free from discrimination and abuse, and that is both safe and pushes for gender equality.

Policy and planning

- Governments, collaborating with partners in local education clusters and working groups, should ensure that national inclusive education policies are, at a minimum, gender-responsive, have clear implementation plans, and are appropriately financed and resourced.

Funding

- Governments, with the support of the international donor community, should ensure there is sufficient and sustained funding for adaptive infrastructure, assistive devices, teaching assistants and specialist education officials, and continuous teacher professional development on gender- and disability-inclusive education.
- Donors should require fund recipients to disaggregate data at the outcome level by sex, age, and disability.
- Donors should provide support to civil society in crisis-affected countries to ensure they engage at the policy level. This should involve bringing forward the voices of girls and marginalized groups (including those with disabilities), as well as those of teachers, to ensure education responses are addressing the needs of the groups needing them most.
- Donors should support and fund organizations that are taking a truly intersectional approach to supporting the most marginalized and increase funding to support the safety and learning of girls with disabilities and girls facing multiple forms of discrimination.

Data collection, monitoring, and analysis

Inclusion should be considered at all stages of data generation: in the design of the data collection tools; ensuring children and persons with disabilities can participate in sufficient numbers; and involvement of persons with disabilities in the analysis and dissemination of findings to ensure their experiences are reflected.

- Governments should update Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) systems to include data on children with disabilities. EMIS questionnaires and data sources should be updated to accurately identify children with varying types and severities of disabilities.
- Disability data should be included in all major international surveys. The collectors and collators of data on violence against children should ensure that disability-related data is included in surveys such as the Violence Against Children and Youth Surveys (VACS) and the Global School-Based Student Health Surveys to understand how disability affects GBV.
- Governments and their partners should support schools in collecting and using sex-disaggregated data on children with disabilities including providing guidance on how to use the Washington Group Questions, providing training on identification, and ensuring this data is put into and stored in EMIS. This data must be consistent and useful to provide schools with information on the adaptations and accommodations needed to support these learners.
- Data collectors and collators should collaborate with local actors (including disability organizations, feminist organizations, women's rights groups, organizations working in refugee settings, and youth and girls themselves) to:
 - Ensure their voices and lived experiences are prioritized and complement quantitative data in crisis settings, in order to better understand their biggest challenges and barriers and tailor appropriate responses.
 - Review data collection protocols and identify the training needed to ensure people with disabilities are included at all stages of research design and data collection. Furthermore, all enumerator training should emphasize inclusive and gender-responsive data collection techniques.
 - Ensure that data on teachers in refugee settings is comprehensive, is sex-disaggregated, and includes information on teachers with disabilities within these settings.
- International data collectors who are focused on collecting and collating data on children with disabilities should work to build consensus and alignment around globally agreed standards for data collection in crisis countries to ensure consistency in the way data is collected and analyzed.

Further resources on gender-responsive inclusive education:

- **INEE (2023). Disability-Inclusive EIE Resources Mapping and Gap Analysis.** This resource provides insights into the availability of resources that address the needs of learners with disabilities in emergencies and crisis-affected contexts. It highlights key trends, and gaps, in the design, content, and accessibility of the resources collected.
- **INEE (2021). Educate Us! podcast, Episode 3: I Have A Disability, I'm Not Disabled.** In this podcast episode, disability advocates on the specific challenges girls with disabilities face in learning during crises and why inclusive education is important for all learners.
- **INEE (2010). INEE Pocket Guide to Supporting Learners with Disabilities.** This resource provides practical advice for educators on supporting learners with disabilities, including helping children get to/from the learning space, recognizing when children need more learning support, arranging learning spaces so they are more inclusive, adapting teaching and learning activities, and so on.
- **UNESCO (2019). Embracing Diversity: Toolkit for Creating Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environments.** This provides guidance on how to create an inclusive, learning-friendly environment (ILFE), which welcomes, nurtures, and educates all children regardless of their gender, physical, intellectual, social, economic, emotional, linguistic, or other characteristics.
- **Leonard Cheshire Disability (2017). Still left behind: Pathways to inclusive education for girls with disabilities.** This report provides a summary of barriers to education for girls with disabilities and provides examples of effective or promising approaches that address those barriers.

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