

# Chapter 2.4

## CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

### MAIN OBJECTIVES

- **To ensure that children and youth with disabilities have equal access to quality education and learning opportunities in the context of conflict and emergencies.**
- **To include children with disabilities into the mainstream education system.**

### CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

Conflict and emergencies do not only lead to children becoming disabled, but they also increase the vulnerability of those children who are already disabled. The same prejudices which exist in communities in times of peace also exist in times of conflict. Sometimes conflict and emergency situations provide an opportunity to challenge prejudice and discrimination and to ‘build back better’ by ensuring the inclusion of children with disabilities in families, schools and communities.

“War, crisis and disruption of communities can significantly increase the number of adults and children with disabilities. Gunshot wounds, land mines, or violent acts of chopping off

limbs may cause disabilities. Inadequate health care and lack of access to nutritious food during times of extended conflict may result in the loss of sight or hearing” (INEE, 2002)

Responding to the diverse educational needs of learners with disabilities during emergencies can be challenging, especially during the acute phase. There is often an assumption that greater stability is needed before efforts to reach children with disabilities can be prioritised. Yet it could be argued that it is even more urgent to address the educational needs of children with disabilities during an emergency. Families are under greater stress and need support for those children who have recently become disabled, as well as those who have lived with a disability for some time. Enabling children with disabilities to attend school will relieve the stress on their families.

Principles of non-discrimination ([Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child \[CRC\], 1989](#)) and the right to education ([Articles 28 and 29 of the CRC](#), and [Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \[CRPD\], 2006](#)) provide a strong basis for the education of children with disabilities in conflict and emergency situations. Building on a long history of asserting the basic right of all people to education, Article 24 of the CRPD categorically reaffirms the right of persons with disabilities to access and participate in education. It emphasizes the need for governments to “ensure an inclusive education system at all levels” for the purposes of developing human potential, sense of dignity, mental and physical abilities, and to promote academic and social participation.

The following attitudes and assumptions need to be considered:

- It is not necessarily too difficult to include children with disabilities in education during an emergency or conflict situation.
- If children with disabilities have missed out at the beginning of an emergency response, it should not mean that they remain excluded.
- Planning and delivering an inclusive education emergency response does not need specialist or expert knowledge of special education, inclusion or disability issues – the key factor is the attitude of education practitioners.

It is less expensive to incorporate the education of children with disabilities at the outset of an emergency response than it is to change exclusionary school infrastructure and practices at a later date.

“Inclusive education starts from the belief that the right to education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just society. In order to realise this right, the Education for All movement has worked to make quality basic education available to all learners. Inclusive education takes the Education for All agenda forward by finding ways of enabling schools to serve *all* children in their communities, as part of an inclusive education system. Inclusive education is concerned with *all* learners, with a focus on those who have traditionally been excluded from educational opportunities – such as learners with special needs and disabilities, children from ethnic and linguistic minorities, and so on.”

Source: [UNESCO \(2001: 15\)](#)



## BHUTANESE REFUGEES, JHAPA, NEPAL

“In the Jhapa refugee programme in Nepal, disabled girls and boys were identified as a particularly vulnerable group whose needs were not being met. The manager appointed a full-time, disability coordinator, who piloted some participatory, action-based research to provide a basis for a programme. A disability advisor from Save the Children UK provided technical support, including access to key texts.

During the research, disabled children spoke about how they could help their families, but felt excluded because they were teased if they went outside their homes. Education was the first priority identified by both parents and children. After the first 18 months of the programme, over 700 children had been integrated into schools and sign language training had been carried out in all camps with both deaf and hearing children.

‘There is no reason why we could not have included the needs of disabled children and adults from the start ... It is not necessary to know “scientific names with classification and categorisation” in order to incorporate disabled people’s concerns into food distribution, health and education programmes.’”

*Bhutanese Refugee Camp Programme Officer, Jhapa, Nepal*

Source: adapted from [Save the Children \(2002: 37\)](#)

Every sector in an emergency response can play a part in supporting inclusive education. Inclusion in education is about participation and learning as well as about access to the place of education. It is important to be vigilant about children with disabilities who are in education, but who are experiencing difficulties with attending, enjoying or benefiting from learning and participation.

## KEY PRINCIPLES

- Every child has the right to quality education, and all children should have equal opportunity to access education.
- All children can learn and benefit from education: no child should be excluded from, or discriminated against within, education on the grounds of race, colour, sex, language, age, class or caste, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, poverty, disability, birth, or any other status.
- Individual differences between children are a resource not a problem.
- Education should be physically, socially, academically and economically accessible to children and adults with disabilities.
- Education stakeholders (parents, communities, teachers, and children with disabilities) have a key role to play in making education accessible.
- Inclusive education is part of a wider strategy to promote an inclusive society. The reform of mainstream education may be necessary to ensure that the needs of all children, including those with disabilities, can be met.

## SUGGESTED STRATEGIES

In emergencies and during early reconstruction, children with disabilities are even more likely to be excluded from educational opportunities. Some suggested strategies to prevent this are indicated below.



## **Summary of suggested strategies Children with disabilities**

- 1. Review government policy on education and ensure that it is inclusive of children with disabilities.**
- 2. Identify resources to support the education of children with disabilities.**
- 3. Enlist community support to promote schooling for disabled children.**
- 4. Ensure that all teachers receive training on how to include children with disabilities in their classes.**
- 5. Adapt school facilities and other educational settings to promote access for all children and consider strategies to help children and youth with disabilities physically get to school.**
- 6. Provide technical and vocational education/skills training opportunities for youth with disabilities.**

## Guidance notes

### 1. Review government policy on education and ensure that it is inclusive of children with disabilities.

It is important to review policy guidelines on promoting access to education for children with disabilities and on recruiting staff with disabilities, and to disseminate guidance to education providers for the emergency-affected population.

- Do existing policies specifically address the issue of access to education for all children, including those with disabilities? Are the policies based on an explicit notion of the rights of individuals to education?
- Who currently has limited access to education? Why?
- What barriers exist to the inclusion of children with disabilities in educational settings?
- Are there equal employment policies that encourage the hiring of teachers, administrators and other education workers with disabilities?
- Are these policies for students and staff known at provincial, district and school level, in emergency-affected areas? What support is given to education for children with disabilities in refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps?
- Should a policy be developed and disseminated to support the education of children with disabilities and inclusive staff recruitment for emergency-affected populations?



## INFLUENCING POLICY DEVELOPMENT, KENYA

In Kenya, after the election violence, Save the Children worked with the Ministry of Education at provincial and district level to develop training manuals on inclusive, quality education for volunteer, early childhood development, head and senior teachers, and school management committees. The team ran two 3-day writing workshops (for each of the manuals), attended by members of the Ministry of Education, from the three areas of operation most affected by the emergency, and Save the Children staff. These participatory workshops enabled Save the Children and the Ministry to have joint input into the development of the manuals, which were relevant to the local context as well as bringing new ideas about child rights, child protection, emergency education and inclusive education. The Ministry's involvement at the writing stage was very important as it was Ministry members who would deliver the training. Their involvement increased the capacity of the Ministry of Education and provided sustainability for passing on the training.

Source: [INEE \(2009: 31\)](#)

## 2. Identify resources to promote and support the education of children with disabilities.

Human resources are arguably the most valuable resources in supporting the development of inclusive education.

- Designate an individual responsible for monitoring, assessing and recording how well the education operation is meeting the needs of children with disabilities.
- Encourage all members of the emergency response team together (including staff from other sectors, such as logistics, protection and health) to think about exclusion, discrimination and diversity in the context within which they are working,



and how everyone can work towards a more inclusive emergency response.

- Set up a committee of key stakeholders who can adapt the curriculum so that it is relevant and inclusive to all children.

The greatest resources available in any school are the children themselves – yet they tend to be the most under-used.

- Encourage peer support by developing a ‘buddy system’. This involves children with disabilities pairing up with a peer for activities in and outside the classroom.
- Children are often very aware of which children are excluded from education and why. They can be powerful voices and advocates within communities, asking for other children to be included.
- What resources – specially trained teachers, volunteers, classroom aides, building modifications, special equipment – are required to enroll these children in school?



### LISTENING TO CHILDREN IN PAKISTAN

After the Pakistan earthquake in 2005, Save the Children Sweden’s team set up community education councils linked to each rehabilitated school. Each council had at least two children on board. Children would report who wasn’t in school and why they thought these children were absent. Often girls and children with disabilities were kept at home because their families thought going to school was not safe, or that they would not benefit from education. Once these children had been identified, the community education council was asked to come up with a plan for making it easier for them to get to school and to have a positive experience once there.

Source: [INEE \(2009: 14\)](#)

- Prepare a budget.
- Advocate with the Ministry of Finance and other government officials for funds to be made available to ensure that children with disabilities have access to education.
- In situations of displacement where the government is requesting international assistance for educational needs, ensure that such requests include assistance for children and youth with disabilities.

### **3. Enlist community support to promote schooling for disabled children.**

(For more information on community involvement in education in emergencies, see the [Guidebook, Chapter 5.5, 'Community participation'](#).)

- Involve parents willing to support the education of their children with disabilities.
  - Can parents become resource people in the school and in the classroom?
- Stimulate positive recognition of children's skills, display disabled children's works, etc.



#### **POSITIVE PARENT ATTITUDES, SUDAN**

"I have now realised all children are the same and need to be appreciated. My encouragement to parents who have disabled children like mine is to appeal to them not to hold them in solitary confinement, but instead embrace reality and strive to give them the best in life."

(Father of a six-year-old who has been attending a World Vision funded school for two years in a camp for IDPs in Sudan.)

Source: [INEE \(2009: 27\)](#)



## OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION, PALESTINE

In the context of Israeli Occupation and ongoing unrest, the disability sector had been alienated from the mainstream community and continued to develop a segregated model of education and rehabilitation. Ironically, the Intifada (Palestinian uprising) brought with it a sudden explosion of interest in disability. . . . This explosion of interest in disability brought with it many positive changes that went beyond the institution-based rehabilitation. For example, community-based rehabilitation was introduced and the need to respond to disabled people's education within the community was felt.

Source: [Stubbs \(2002: 39\)](#)

- Challenge discriminatory attitudes towards children with disabilities and organize awareness raising and training sessions, where necessary, for teachers and students as well as community members about disability issues.
  - Identify adults with disabilities who can be employed as teachers and can act as role models for children with disabilities, especially if the children have recently acquired their disabilities as a result of the conflict or emergency.
  - Work with disabled people's organizations to set up links between the education response and any community-based rehabilitation services that are available.
- 4. Ensure that all teachers receive training on how to include children with disabilities in their classes.**
- Evaluate existing teacher training.

- Do teachers have any training in inclusive education?
- What messages have they received through the training?
- How well are they prepared to respond to children with disabilities?
- What opportunities are there to strengthen their training?
- What opportunities are there for teacher-training institutions to strengthen pre-service training and in-service training on the education of children with disabilities, and including them in mainstream settings?



### **CHALLENGING NEGATIVE TEACHER ATTITUDES, KENYA**

In the Rift Valley in Kenya, teachers in the community were reluctant to acknowledge that children were out of school, especially children with disabilities. It was discovered, through conversations with teachers and other community members, that this was because teachers were not aware of children's rights or aware of how to include children with disabilities, and were fearful of disability. As a result, Save the Children incorporated inclusion issues into the teacher training programme to raise awareness and give skills on how to include all children.

Source: [INEE \(2009: 17\)](#)

- Encourage teachers to share information with each other about their own learning about teaching children with disabilities – this will support teacher development through problem solving and support children with disabilities as they progress to the next grade.

- Train teachers to adapt seating arrangements based on students' disabilities (e.g. children with poor vision may be seated near the front of the classroom), limit background noise and ensure good lighting.
- If specially trained teachers are available, encourage them to raise awareness and provide support to the mainstream teachers so that they can teach inclusive classes. Volunteers and/or classroom aides (sometimes called 'teaching assistants') can be used to support children with severe disabilities in class.
- Consider giving introductory courses in sign language, Braille, physiotherapy, as appropriate.

### **5. Adapt school facilities and other educational settings to promote access for all children and consider strategies to help children and youth with disabilities physically get to school.**

(For more information on school facilities, see the [Guidebook, Chapter 2.6, 'Learning spaces and school facilities'](#).)

- Ask field staff to assess whether children with disabilities can physically access existing education facilities.
  - Are schools designed and constructed with wide doorways, ramps, no stairs, lowered blackboards, level floors, etc.)
  - Is there sufficient light in the classroom? Consider carefully the size of building windows.

If modifications are required:

- How can these be funded?
- Can community members be enlisted to make the modifications?
- Evaluate the required modifications by the amount of resources and input required, and by whom.

- Modifications that require simple inputs, such as new seating arrangements.
  - Modifications that require modest material inputs, including inputs that can be provided by the school or the community, such as locally made crutches.
  - Modifications that require substantial external financial inputs, such as accessible toilets or computers.
- What special equipment and materials are needed to support learning for children with disabilities? When provided by outside organizations, ensure that these are technologically appropriate for the local setting and sustainable after the outside organizations have left.
  - Identify situations where education services can provide transport (e.g. buses) to school or where the community can assist with transport.
  - Make sure that play areas are accessible and safe (in terms of minimizing both physical hazards and child protection risks).
  - Work to make sure that toilets are accessible, safe, clean, private and separated by gender; and that there is safe drinking water easily accessible to all students and teachers.



### **EDUCATIONAL ACCESS FOR DEAF AND BLIND LEARNERS IN THAILAND**

In the Karen refugee camps in Thailand, a survey in 1999 by Consortium-Thailand showed that few blind and deaf children were included in education. Therefore, with cooperation from the Institute for the Blind and Deaf in Yangon, Consortium-Thailand prioritised the needs of these learners and developed the use of Karen Braille and Karen Sign Language in the camps. Videos were also made to demonstrate Karen Sign Language.

[INEE \(2009: 24\)](#)

- If separate classes have already been established for particular groups of children with disabilities, ensure that all children share the same school or educational facility and resources. Also organize joint sporting activities and other opportunities for them to socialize together.

## **6. Provide technical and vocational education/skills training opportunities for youth with disabilities.**

Vocational training is especially important to enable access to the labour market and to help young people with disabilities become more self-sufficient.

- Reserve a quota of study places in regular vocational training centres for students with disabilities.
- Organize training programmes and apprenticeships near to the homes of young people with disabilities.

(See the [Guidebook, Chapter 4.7, 'Vocational education and training'](#), for more information.)



### **SKILL TRAINING FOR AFGHAN REFUGEES WITH DISABILITIES**

Many Afghan refugees in Pakistan had severe injuries from war, landmines and disease or congenital conditions. Unlike other refugees, they were unable to go out for daily labouring work. In the early 1990s, UNHCR's Peshawar office structured its funding of NGO skills training programmes to help them gain employment. Policies adopted included:

1. Instructing vocational training centres to include refugees with disabilities as at least 5 per cent of their enrolment.
2. Restricting sponsored apprenticeships in the fields of tailoring and shoemaking to male students with disabilities, and women with disabilities or heading needy households.





3. Creating mobile training units that provided 4- to 6-month courses for refugees with disabilities in different refugee camps, to overcome problems of access.
4. Providing a special training centre for refugees with disabilities, where students acquired vocational skills and improved their literacy/numeracy abilities, followed by a 3-month apprenticeship in the workplace to gain experience and acceptance, with a monthly stipend to cover expenses.

Working with Save the Children Sweden, the office also sponsored community-based ‘child groups’ for children with disabilities in the camps, which provided a first step for some towards entering schooling or vocational training.

Source: Margaret Sinclair (personal communication)

## TOOLS AND RESOURCES

### 1. Advantages and disadvantages of special schools for children with disabilities

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Special schools can be developed as centres of excellence.	Special schools are usually not available in the child’s immediate environment.
Concentration of expertise on specific impairments is possible.	Expertise is only available for a small group of children.
Smaller student–teacher ratio enables each disabled child to have more attention.	System of teaching is very expensive. It is therefore not affordable, or sustainable, for all disabled children.
Children grow up with their peers and develop a common culture.	Children find it hard to re-adapt to life with their families, peers and communities.

Source: [Save the Children UK \(2002: 11\)](#)



## 2. Inclusion of children with disabilities into the classroom

WARNING SIGNS	THINGS TO DO
<b>VISUAL DIFFICULTY</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eyes physically not well – red, swollen, watery eyes, crossed eyes, eyes that do not appear straight</li> <li>• Student rubbing eyes</li> <li>• Difficulty reading or doing visual work. Student may bring book or object close to the eyes, shuts or covers one eye when reading or tilts head</li> <li>• Student may have difficulty with written work</li> <li>• Student may avoid playground</li> <li>• Unusual incidence of squinting, blinking, frowning or facial distortions when reading</li> <li>• Unable to locate small objects</li> <li>• Sensitivity to light</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CLASSROOM ADAPTATIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find out from the student where the best place is for him/her to see the chalkboard i.e. the front of the class.</li> <li>• Light should not reflect on the board. Chalk should appear clearly on the board.</li> <li>• If student is sensitive to light, seat him/her away from the window or provide a cardboard screen to shade reading and writing.</li> <li>• Ensure that the child knows his/her way around the school and classroom. Teachers and sighted pupils can assist by walking slightly in front of visually impaired students or to one side/holding their elbow.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>TEACHING STRATEGIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use large writing on the chalkboard and visual aids. Coloured chalk is recommended. Let students come close to the board or to teaching aids to see more clearly.</li> <li>• Read aloud what is written on the chalkboard.</li> <li>• Prepare teaching aids that students can read easily or provide photocopies with large print.</li> <li>• Encourage students to use a pointer or their finger when reading.</li> <li>• Pair pupils with a seeing classmate to assist in organizing their work.</li> <li>• Use verbal praise or touch.</li> <li>• Use the names of pupils during class discussion so the student knows who is talking.</li> <li>• Depending upon student needs provide:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Paper with thicker lines on it to assist them in writing.</li> <li>- Magnifiers</li> <li>- Abacus for mathematics lessons</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

WARNING SIGNS	THINGS TO DO
<b>INTELLECTUAL DIFFICULTY</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student has not reached the same level of development as their age mates with regard to for example oral and understanding abilities, playing/moving, behaviour</li> <li>• Head injury or serious illness</li> </ul>	<p><b>CLASSROOM ADAPTATIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce distractions – keep desk clear.</li> <li>• With children who are inclined to run around, seat them by the wall with bigger children beside them. Tasks can be assigned that allow them to move without being disruptive such as distributing papers, notebooks or materials.</li> <li>• Recruit volunteers to come to class to provide one-on-one attention for the student.</li> </ul> <p><b>TEACHING STRATEGIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess whether the child’s reduced learning capacity may in fact relate to other factors. For example, the child may be trying to hide visual or hearing problems, or may be suffering from dyslexia. In addition, responsibilities at home may be hindering the child in committing fully to his or her studies. In some cases, behavioural problems have their source in abuse.</li> <li>• Show the child what you want him or her to do rather than simply telling.</li> <li>• Use simple words when giving instructions and check that the child has understood.</li> <li>• Use real objects that the child can feel and handle rather than doing paper and pencil work.</li> <li>• Do one activity at a time and complete it. Make clear when one is finished and a new one begins.</li> <li>• Break tasks down into small steps or learning objectives. Have child start with what they can do before moving to a harder step.</li> <li>• Give plenty of praise and encouragement to the student.</li> <li>• Give extra time for practice.</li> <li>• Pair the student with a peer who can focus their attention.</li> </ul>

WARNING SIGNS	THINGS TO DO
<b>HEARING DIFFICULTY</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor attention</li> <li>• Poor speech development or may talk in a very loud or soft voice</li> <li>• Difficulty following instructions</li> <li>• May turn or cock head when listening</li> <li>• May watch what other students are doing before starting his or her work</li> <li>• May give inappropriate answers</li> <li>• May be shy or appear stubborn and disobedient</li> <li>• Reluctant to participate in oral activities</li> <li>• May complain of earaches, colds, sore throat</li> </ul>	<p><b>CLASSROOM ADAPTATIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seat student as close as possible to teacher.</li> <li>• Instruct teachers to face their students and not to cover their faces or talk when writing on the chalkboard.</li> <li>• Make sure students can see teacher’s face, hands and lips.</li> <li>• Ensure that student can see both the teacher and other pupils at the same time to see how they are responding.</li> <li>• Minimize classroom noise, possibly using a quieter part of the school.</li> </ul> <p><b>TEACHING STRATEGIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speak clearly and loudly.</li> <li>• Make sure students’ hearing aids are switched on.</li> <li>• Use visual aids for teaching.</li> <li>• Pair the student with hearing students.</li> <li>• Check with student to ensure they have understood.</li> <li>• Take time to listen to what the student is saying.</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from [INEE \(2002\)](#)

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