REPORT 2023

Always Included

Uninterrupted education for children with disabilities before, during, and after a crisis

Acknowledgements

List of acronyms

AFD	French Development Agency
CRPD	UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DLR	Digital Learning Resource
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ECW	Education Cannot Wait
ESP	Education Sector Plan
EU	European Union
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
oPt	occupied Palestinian territory

HI	Humanity & Inclusion
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IEP	Individualised Education Plan
MYRP	Multi-Year Resilience Programme
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OPD	Organisation of Persons with Disabilities
PSS	Psychosocial Support
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
UNRWA	UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
WASH	Water, Hygiene and Sanitation
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit

Contents

Key messages

Globally, some 72 million children are out of school due to emergencies and protracted crises. Of these, 17% are children with disabilities.
- o In West and Central Africa, over 13,250 schools have closed, with 6,150 schools in Burkina Faso affected.
- o In Madagascar, floods and cyclones have had devastating effects on education continuity, destroying learning materials and infrastructure.
- o In 2022, most households in Gaza (90.4%) and the West Bank (70.1%) reported a need for catch-up classes for their children.

Children and young people with disabilities face significant obstacles to accessing and thriving in education. These obstacles are exacerbated when multiple, overlapping crises occur, such as the proliferation of violent, often protracted conflicts, the climate crisis, and outbreaks of disease. Securing uninterrupted access to inclusive education in all circumstances – and before, during, and after crises – is essential to empower these children and enhance both their ability to participate meaningfully in society and their future employability.

The risks that a child will experience learning disruptions during a crisis are magnified when multiple factors of discrimination intersect, such as gender, disability, age, socio-economic and migratory status.
In crisis-affected households, the educational needs of children with disabilities become an even lower priority – especially for girls. Girls are also disproportionately impacted by sexual and gender-based violence, including child marriage and early pregnancy, the risk of which increases in times of crisis. Many schools continue to lack appropriate gender-sensitive facilities, such as gender-separated toilets, as well as teaching practices that support girls' retention and learning.

When school closures are unavoidable, various steps can be taken to limit disruption and ensure all children can return to school as soon as possible. These steps include providing inclusive catch-up classes adapted to individual needs, measures to increase the affordability of school and associated services, and psychosocial support to accompany the return to school.

In crises, demand for services addressing children's underlying needs increases and requires cross-sector collaboration (I.e., education, health and rehabilitation, nutrition, shelter, protection etc.). Establishing in-school referral pathways is one way of ensuring children and young people receive appropriate support. However, when schools become inaccessible, community services provide a helpful entry point for access to these services.

Teachers and education staff are among the first responders in crisis settings, yet they too struggle to continue working in emergency situations. They have to overcome obstacles such as damaged facilities, insufficient teaching materials, intermittent school closures, and to adapt to delivering remote and hybrid classes. On the one hand, teachers need to be trained, equipped, and prepared to teach inclusively under changing and challenging circumstances. On the other hand,

they should be provided with good working conditions, professional development opportunities and support for their mental health and well-being.

Distance learning approaches, through television, radio, or the internet, are excellent tools for maintaining education continuity in crises. However, they are often neither accessible nor affordable. The best option to support all learners, including persons with disabilities, are blended approaches that use both inclusive digital learning and face-to-face methods.

Inclusive disaster risk reduction (DRR) policies and plans must take into account the vulnerabilities and capacities of all students and staff, including persons with disabilities. School communities play a pivotal role in this by connecting students and families with cross-sector support services, activating case management pathways, and even providing temporary shelter.

Global aid to education has levelled off over the past five years and nearly a quarter of governments had decreased public resources for education in 2022. The education sector only receives 2.9% of global humanitarian funding, compared to the UN target of 4%. In addition, education funding often fails to address the needs of learners with disabilities, while targeted funding remains limited.

In addition to increasing the volume of funding, education spending must prioritise equity and inclusion. **A twin-track approach to financing education is necessary along the learning recovery pathway.** Policymakers should allocate funds to both reinforcing inclusion in general education programming and implementing disability-targeted programming that caters to the specific support needs of learners with disabilities.

There can be significant challenges when humanitarian and development efforts are not properly synchronised. The end of emergency project funding can result in inclusive educational service provision being interrupted as domestic budgets struggle to cover the costs. This ultimately jeopardises the long-term sustainability of inclusive education outcomes. At the same time, the absence of stable, long-term investment mechanisms makes it difficult to sustain the progress made through emergency interventions and fostering local ownership.

Local stakeholders are often the primary means for identifying and reaching children in remote or high-risk areas. They also take ownership of education initiatives and play a pivotal role in their sustainability. **Prioritising funding to enhance the capacity and involvement of local stakeholders in decision-making processes is essential** for building resilient education systems capable of withstanding crises.

While we know that around 16% of all learners have disabilities, identify them can be challenging, in particular in conflict and natural disaster situations. **Quality, disaggregated data (at least by disability, gender, and age) form the foundation for informed decision-making and budget planning.**

Looking beyond education in emergency contexts, governments, donors, and civil society actors need to work together to bridge the gap between humanitarian and developmental interventions and ensure coherent financing along the nexus of response, recovery, and preparedness.

Disability-inclusive education: Preventing interruptions before, during, and after crises

Globally, some 72 million children are out of school due to emergencies and protracted crises. Of these, at least 17% are children with disabilities.[1] Yet, education in a crisis context can be a lifeline for children, providing psychosocial support, access to school feeding and health programmes, and a much-needed safe space where they can interact with peers and maintain the routine of learning. Securing uninterrupted access to inclusive education in all circumstances – before, during, and after crises – is essential to empower these children, enhancing their future employability and ability to participate meaningfully in society.

Everyone has a right to inclusive, equitable, quality education, regardless of their gender, nationality, ethnic or social origins, religion or political preference, age or disability. This right is protected by legally-binding international human rights conventions, including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and is re-stated in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

However, children and young people with disabilities face significant barriers to accessing and thriving in education. Within the education system, barriers include inaccessible infrastructure, non-adapted materials and technology, non-adapted curricula, lack of training so that teachers can teach in ways that suit different learning styles, safety and security issues, and the segregation of children with disabilities in separate settings. Outside of the education system, barriers include the persisting stigma and discrimination (including within families) against persons with disabilities, limited

access to quality health care, the lack of assistive technologies and devices, violence and insecurity, inaccessible or unsafe journeys to school, and household poverty.

These obstacles are exacerbated when multiple, overlapping crises occur.

The proliferation of **violent, often protracted conflicts** has led to a surge in school closures and displaced learners. For example, in West and Central Africa, over 13,250 schools have closed, with 6,150 schools in Burkina Faso affected.[2]

The **climate crisis** is another threat multiplier whose impacts on education are most profoundly felt by the poorest and most vulnerable groups.[3] In Madagascar, increasingly frequent extreme weather events – such as floods, cyclones and droughts – can damage schools, roads, transportation, hospitals, and other public services, threaten livelihoods, and heighten food insecurity.[4]

Disease outbreaks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, not only interfere with in-person learning but also put a strain on health systems by reducing the capacity and availability of health services for all children, including early intervention and rehabilitation. This reduced access to health services negatively affects children's ability to attend school regularly and actively participate in the learning process.

Access to quality education is already precarious for many children with disabilities, especially in low and middle-

income countries, where resources and services to assist learners with disabilities are often limited and unevenly distributed.[5] In 2021, UNICEF estimated that compared to their peers without disabilities, children with disabilities were 49% more likely to have never attended school and 42% less likely to have foundational reading and numeracy skills than their peers.[6] The challenges holding these children back vary greatly depending on their specific needs and the limitations of their environment.

Crises are often complex, with multiple types of overlapping instability. They can take different forms, ranging from sudden-onset crises such as cyclones or earthquakes, to more persistent situations such as protracted conflicts, insecurity or economic downturns. In crisis-affected communities, persons with disabilities are even further marginalised, experiencing higher rates of morbidity, violence and abuse, interruptions in or lack of access to services, social exclusion, and discrimination.[7]

Teachers and support staff are among the first responders in crisis settings, but they also struggle to continue working in emergency situations. Support is needed to ensure they are trained, equipped, and prepared to teach inclusively under changing and challenging circumstances. Moreover, in-school referral pathways are critical to ensuring the children at the greatest risk of marginalisation access the multi-sectoral services they need.

In these fast-moving and complex contexts, international financial responses often struggle to deliver timely and sustainable inclusive education solutions. Looking beyond education in emergency settings, governments, donors, and civil society actors need to work together to bridge the gap between humanitarian and developmental interventions and ensure coherent financing along the response, recovery and preparedness nexus.[8]

That is why Humanity & Inclusion (HI) is calling on humanitarian and development actors to work together to continue teaching, learning, and financing so that all children and young people, especially those with disabilities, are always included in education – before, during, and after crises.

Inclusive education is a "transformative process that ensures full participation and access to quality learning opportunities for all children, young people, and adults, respecting and valuing diversity, and eliminating all forms of discrimination in and through education."[9]

Methods

This research used a qualitative method and involved conducting remote interviews with key stakeholders primarily in Burkina Faso, Madagascar, and the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). The study included 22 interviews with experts at different levels, including local education practitioners, organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), government officials, and international donors. Additionally, three testimonies were gathered from children with disabilities who shared their experience of accessing education. The goal of the study was to understand the challenges and opportunities for inclusive education available to children with disabilities in these difficult circumstances and crisis-prone settings. A comprehensive review of prevailing trends and

the literature on inclusive education in emergency and development settings was also conducted to provide context for the findings in relation to global policy and programming frameworks.

Disclaimer: All data and evidence were collected between June and September 2023 and hence do not reflect the unprecedented humanitarian crisis that has developed following the attacks by Hamas and Israel since October 2023.

Donga, a10-year-old boy living in a suburban area in Analanjirofo, Madagascar. Here with his mother. ©Kalo Aristide Renaldo Debe/ HI

Continue...
LEARNING

Education is a human right even in crisis-affected settings, yet children with disabilities face major disruptions to their learning

Children are far more likely to experience disruption to their learning during crises when multiple factors of discrimination intersect, such as gender, disability, age, socio-economic and migratory status.

The availability of learning opportunities varies depending on the type and severity of a child's disabilities. Children with moderate to severe intellectual or sensory disabilities (such as children who are blind or deaf) and children with severe communication disabilities tend to face greater challenges attending school than children with physical disabilities. [10] In low and middle-income countries and crisis-prone settings, specialised support and facilities are often scarce and privatised, with limited options for distance learning.

"For children with sensory difficulties, whether visual or auditory, there are very few adapted facilities in place, and these are only available in specialised schools located in cities." (Donnie Zafindranto, HI, Inclusive Education Technical Officer, Madagascar)

In crisis-affected households, the educational needs of children with disabilities are often given even lower priority – especially for girls. Girls are also disproportionately impacted by sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including child marriage and early pregnancy, the risk of which increases in times of crisis. Many schools still lack gender-sensitive facilities, such as gender-separated toilets, and teaching practices that support girls' retention and learning. [11]

Forcibly displaced school-age children often live in areas where the educational infrastructure is fragile. Their ability to return to school in a new environment is affected by their migration status and the policies and mechanisms in their host communities to enable their continued attendance. The quality of education services varies in refugee or internally displaced persons (IDP) camp settings, including in terms of the support available for teaching in different languages, inclusive learning arrangements, and physical or communication accessibility challenges. Moreover, children and young people living in these settings are disproportionately exposed to violence, stigma, and exclusion. [12]

Urban-rural divides further hinder access. Children in rural settings face higher risks of exclusion as they have further to travel between their homes and schools– especially integrated and specialised schools – and therefore incur transportation costs. In Madagascar, many specialised schools and rehabilitation services are located in city centres and are difficult to reach for low-income rural households. Poverty can also place children at a disadvantage as regards learning interruptions. In the aftermath of cyclones, HI met households that could not pay school fees due to major property loss, with "education taking second place to survival." [13]

Common barriers to accessing education during a crisis

In crisis contexts, education systems that were already weak and fragile face additional challenges. In many cases, prior to the crisis only a small percentage of children have access to a local school with proper infrastructure and relevant health and rehabilitation services. During an emergency, children may no longer have access to even this limited provision, right when they need it the most.

Damage to infrastructure, such as roads, transportation services, and hospitals has lasting effects on learning by reducing access to essential services, including healthcare, early intervention services for children with developmental conditions and disabilities, and rehabilitation. Travelling to these services takes longer and is more expensive, causing   students with limited mobility to drop out.

In conflict zones, **schools may be attacked or used for military purposes** putting the lives of students and educators at risk. For example, in Burkina Faso in 2022, the UN verified 120 attacks on schools across the country, in addition to numerous cases of abduction or attacks on students, teachers, and other educational personnel.[14]

In areas with limited resources and precarious conditions, **inaccessible infrastructure** is a major concern. Many schools lack important accessibility features such as transportation, ramps, signage, and accessible Water, Hygiene, and Sanitation (WASH) facilities. A lack of gender-responsive facilities, such as gender-separated adapted toilets, especially for menstrual hygiene management, can also cause girls with disabilities to miss out on classes. Moreover, remote learning options are often limited and, where they do exist, are rarely disability inclusive.

Rehabilitation services and assistive technologies may become unavailable or inaccessible during a crisis. **The loss or destruction of assistive devices, such as wheelchairs or hearing aids,** is common in displacement situations, and accessing repair services can be challenging. Internally displaced children may lose essential school materials, identification, and assistive devices.

Crisis-affected children and young people experience various forms of **trauma and other health issues**, including new injuries and disabilities sustained during the crisis. Children with disabilities may become isolated and marginalised. Even when schools are available or reopened, children may be afraid and avoid returning, emphasising the need for psychosocial support (PSS) services to accompany their return to school. [15] [16]
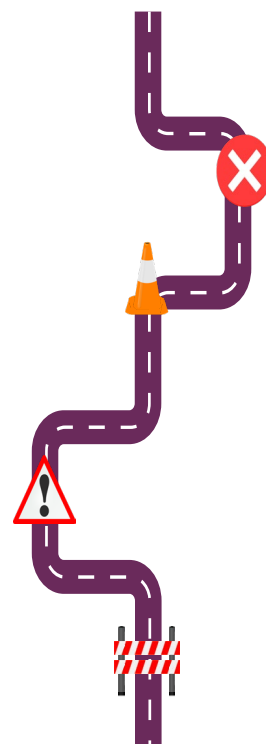
> "Some children even flee without their wheelchairs, without their tricycles, white canes, or tablets for lessons which they need for school." Bénédicte Lare, Inclusive Education Specialist, HI, Burkina Faso

Sadil's experience – Barriers to inclusion, rehabilitation and learning support, oPt

Sadil is an 8-year-old girl with autism living in the oPt. She has difficulty speaking and communicating verbally and relies primarily on body language and gestures. Her family finds it tough to understand her, leading to limited interactions, especially with her younger sisters. Sadil's hand muscles are also weak, hindering her ability to wash, dress, and use the bathroom by herself. Sadil finds immense joy in solving puzzles and building with Lego bricks. However, her ability to concentrate is limited, despite her good memory skills.

Sadil is out of school for several reasons. First of all, her parents found that mainstream schools are neither adapted for their daughter's needs nor willing to welcome her. In addition, Sadil's family should pay for a shadow teacher if she wants to be enrolled at the primary school – a cost her parents cannot afford. The family does not receive any support from the government, while their health insurance does not cover the cost of rehabilitation services. Furthermore, the family's low income, further affected by COVID-19 closures, is a major barrier to providing Sadil with the rehabilitation and learning support services she needs. Sadil's father, a refugee, has an unstable monthly income as a freelance plumber.

"The principal said they cannot accept Sadil without being accompanied and we can't afford a shadow teacher"

(Sadil's father)

Sadil's parents went to great lengths to seek out learning and rehabilitation support for her. Her parents took her to various private centres in the city. However, they found they couldn't afford the cost of sessions and transportation, and one session per week wasn't sufficient. Once her mother got a driver's license, she drove Sadil to a special centre for autism located outside of their village. Sadil's mother explained that the learning sessions didn't yield the results they had hoped for.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the centre shut down, abruptly cutting Sadil off from any form of learning. The situation was compounded by the frequent closures imposed by the Israeli armed forces in the areas surrounding the village, which severely impacted Sadil's ability to reach the centre. The unpredictability of these closures has also disrupted her access to fundamental learning sessions.

Despite these challenges, Sadil's mother put everything into home schooling her daughter, attempting to teach her numbers and writing. Sadil is still at an early stage of fine motor development, making it hard for her to hold a pen to write. Her mother resorted to using YouTube on her smartphone to support Sadil's learning. Recognising Sadil's need for specialised instruction and alternative methods such as using a tablet to teach literacy skills, Sadil's mother felt torn between meeting the family's essential needs with an irregular income and catering to Sadil's educational needs.

Returning to school after a crisis: lessons learned

When school closures are unavoidable, a number of steps can be taken to limit their disruptive effects and ensure all children return to school as soon as possible.

1. Provide inclusive catch-up classes adapted to individual needs

Whether in formal or alternative structures, during or after school hours, catch-up classes can help support all children who have fallen behind in their learning. For students with disabilities, it is critically important that their learning needs are assessed and any interventions deployed are tailored to their individual needs. In Madagascar, catch-up classes (*Cours de Remise à Niveau - CRAN*) have helped students recover from learning losses and prepare for the following year. They have also helped numerous out-of-school students, including students with disabilities, to resume learning after school closures.

In oPt, inclusive bridging courses, offered through summer schools for instance, have become a lifeline for students with and without disabilities who need to acquire foundational skills in core subjects and make up for the massive learning loss caused by school closures. This responds to an immense need: in 2022, most households in Gaza (90.4%) and the West Bank (70.1%) reported needing catch-up classes, with higher proportions observed for refugee households.[17] [18]

2. Improve the affordability of school and associated services

Emergencies put many families through financial turmoil, affecting employment and leading to material losses. Even when schools reopen, the most disadvantaged households may be unable to afford them. Implementing shock-responsive social protection systems, such as cash-transfer programmes and reliable health insurance schemes, can greatly alleviate education costs.

"We are running remedial education classes in area C and one 3rd grade child has dwarfism and couldn't join because he couldn't afford transport from the nearest village to his school." (Amal Barghouthy, Education Technical Officer, oPt)

3. Use a disability-inclusive and gender-responsive approach

For girls with disabilities, disruptions to education increase the likelihood of them being taken out of school permanently, while heightening exposure to SGBV, including early pregnancy and marriage.[19] A HI survey of parents in the West Bank and Gaza Strip revealed that 50% of the participants were open to the idea of arranging marriages for their daughters with disabilities. Many of them saw this as a way to alleviate poverty. Similarly, for boys, the pressure to provide for their families through paid work has been linked to school dropouts.[20] Return-to-school campaigns, such as those broadcast by radio and television in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic,[21] must consider the diversity of learner profiles and be gender-responsive, ensuring that all students are being reached both mainstream campaigns and targeted community sensitisation efforts.

"In a poor family, young girls are pushed into marriage even against their will. Girls with disabilities are pushed even harder." (Germaine Indianombomazava, AFHAM / Association des Femmes Handicapées de Madagascar)

4. Make schools safer and more inclusive for all students, teachers, and education personnel

Making schools safer, more inclusive places for all students, teachers, and education personnel begins with upholding their status as protected persons under international law. So far, 118 States have endorsed and are actively working to implement the Safe Schools Declaration,[22] which reaffirms the right for all students and teachers to have a safe learning environment, without fear of attack.[23] This Declaration also calls for conflict-sensitivity education systems, recognising the key role schools play in fostering social cohesion, tolerance of others and inclusiveness.

5. Promote positive social inclusion as a key factor in successful return and retention

Positive social inclusion in school significantly impacts long-term learning outcomes, highlighting the importance of reducing stigma, bullying, and marginalisation. In Madagascar, as seen in the case-study below, the roll-out of inclusive bridging classes has helped numerous children with disabilities to return to school while also focusing on reducing stigma and exclusion in the school setting.

Case Study: Inclusive bridging classes in Madagascar

The "BEA-ZO: Right to Education for All" project, set up in Madagascar in 2015 and funded by the French Development Agency (AFD) aimed to implement innovative actions to support vulnerable boys and girls, including those with disabilities, to return to, and remain in, school. Previously, children with severe intellectual disabilities had been attending segregated units in mainstream schools, which did not systematically consider their transition to regular or inclusive classes, although there were some exceptions to this.[24]

Building on this prior experience, in 2016 a second project, "Towards a universal access of vulnerable girls and boys to quality primary education" funded by the Educate a Child Foundation, introduced a number of innovations. Firstly, it extended its target group to include children with severe sensory impairments, such as children who are deaf or blind. Secondly, it implemented the "bridging" principle, which promotes a smoother and more inclusive approach to education. Finally, the project provided multisectoral support for students through synergies between school-based actors (health, education, community) and systems offering personalised educational services in the Analanjirofo, Diana, Boeny and Atsinanana regions.

"Here, he is with children the same age as him. He plays football with bigger kids. He plays goalkeeper and during playtime, the teacher gives him a whistle to play with. And I've noticed changes myself." (Mother of a child with disabilities, Amparatanàna public primary school)

Teachers received training on the basics of inclusive education, so that they could better adapt their teaching methods to each child's particular circumstances and needs. By setting up small classes for children with severe disabilities and learning difficulties, teachers help them acquire the prerequisite skills needed to join inclusive classes. The classes were widely found to be successful in reducing social exclusion and discrimination against children with disabilities, while also equipping teachers with resources and training in inclusive education.

Donga's experience – Inclusion through "bridging classes" in a public primary school, Madagascar

Donga is a 10-year-old boy living in a suburban area in Analanjirofo, Madagascar. He has a lot of difficulty concentrating, communicating, and making himself understood. He also has problems with his vision but doesn't wear glasses because his parents can't afford to buy them. He is not yet totally independent in his daily life, but since joining the bridging class in the village school, he has made progress in eating, getting dressed, and taking care of his personal hygiene.

Donga's parents first learned about inclusive bridging classes in 2019 through his older sister, thanks to announcements made in the school itself. The Amparatanàna public primary school's bridging class caters for 24 students with disabilities (10 girls, 14 boys) aged 6 to 19 years old. These students have various disabilities including mental, physical, visual, and auditory impairments, or a combination of these. Some have been diagnosed with specific conditions such as autism, cerebral palsy, and Down syndrome.

Donga had never been integrated into a mainstream class before when he joined a bridging class set up in his school. His teachers have noted his development and social integration, he enjoys helping his classmates and leading the class, but dislikes solitude.

On his way to school every morning, Donga has to cross a small, dangerous wooden footbridge with the help of an adult. This is not always possible in the rainy season and the cyclone season, or if there is no adult available to accompany him, as his parents must go to work. He therefore systematically misses class on these days.

Donga and his friends. ©Kalo Aristide Renaldo Debe/ HI

In addition, Donga's education was interrupted for several months during the COVID-19 pandemic and is sometimes interrupted for shorter periods during the cyclone season. Despite these challenges, he was able to continue his learning at home, supported by his teacher who dropped off his homework after school and his parents who helped him complete it. The continuous involvement of his teacher to support his individual learning was essential to avoid interrupting his education, and prevent his learning difficulties from causing further learning loss.

"During a crisis, teachers can pass on exercises to students at home. But if the students cannot understand the exercises, they have to wait several days for the

teacher's help." (Florent Magasin, Ampartanàna School Director)

During the pandemic, Donga's family situation changed when his parents lost their jobs. In this difficult economic context, Donga dropped out school as his parents were unable to pay the school fees and buy the necessary school supplies. Donga was only able to return to school when the family's economic situation improved.

With his sociable nature, Donga would like to become a car or motorcycle driver in the future. The support of his family who understand the obstacles he faces and of his teacher during the school closures, have enabled him to progress in his education and thrive.

Enhance multi-sectoral interventions, both in and out of school

In crises, demand for support across sectors rises, but accessing these services becomes more challenging.

Persons with disabilities often require additional healthcare services and products, including therapies, assistive technology, and medications. During emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic, disruptions to health systems disproportionately affect them, leading to delays in care and increased service costs.[25] School closures can adversely impact access to vital healthcare services, including school feeding programmes, psychosocial support, rehabilitation and other types of support that are often provided in or through schools and play a role in their learning, growth, and overall development.[26]

Effective multi-sectoral support addresses children's multiple underlying needs (e.g., health and nutrition, shelter, and WASH) and the circumstances within their households and environment that might contribute to their exclusion from education. Establishing in-school referral pathways is one way of ensuring students receive appropriate support from trained professionals. However, when schools become inaccessible, community services such as safe spaces (see insert) provide a helpful entry point for strengthening referral pathways and access to these services.

Good Practice: Safe Alternative Learning & Healing Spaces in oPt

Safe Spaces, such as those provided by the Tamer Institute for Community Education in the Gaza Strip, provide the opportunity for marginalised children, including children with disabilities to receive psychosocial support, take part in education activities as well as heal through expressive art. The activities also focus on promoting child protection and safeguarding, changing mentalities, and strengthening values for inclusion among caregivers, educators, and community members.

"With Safe Spaces, children can be themselves regardless of their background, ability, or disability. We try to break down negative stereotypes about children with disabilities and show how they can be as active and productive as any other child." (Renad Qubbaj, Tamer Institute for Community Education, General Director, oPt)

Fatoumata's experience – Overcoming barriers to education through multi-sectoral support, Burkina Faso

Fatoumata is a 15-year-old girl who has shown an unwavering determination to pursue her studies despite the many obstacles she has faced. Living with a physical disability due to an illness she contracted at the age of 2, Fatoumata lives on an internally displaced persons (IDP) site in Burkina Faso, where she attends a public elementary school.

Fatoumata and her grandfather, in front of their shelter, in Windou. ©Dipama Yamba / HI

Fatoumata's family situation is highly precarious. Having lost her father at an early age, Fatoumata, her three younger brothers and her younger sister are looked after by her grandfather. Due to the security crisis in their home village, the whole family has been displaced and is currently living on an IDP site, in extremely difficult conditions.

The site where they live is not conducive to learning. As a young girl with disabilities, Fatoumata is exposed to various dangers, including sexual abuse. The lack of material and financial resources and the difficulties she has getting around in a context marked by poor accessibility and insecurity have been major barriers to her education. As part of a project implemented by HI, in 2022 Fatoumata received a bicycle adapted to her needs – which considerably improved her ability to get about and go to school – as well as food assistance, school supplies, and healthcare support. As a result, Fatoumata has overcome some of the challenges she faced and continues to pursue her education with determination.

Fatoumata currently attends the Windou public elementary school in CE1 class, where she is doing well academically. Despite the specific and additional challenges created by the crisis, her overall educational experience remains positive, thanks to HI's support, her family's encouragement, and her own efforts.

Fatoumata dreams of becoming a teacher. She aspires to her pupils calling her "*Miss*" and this project gives her the strength and motivation to overcome the obstacles in her way. Through education, Fatoumata is making her way towards realising her full potential, despite the very difficult circumstances.

Continue...
TEACHING

Teachers in crisis-prone settings play a vital role in sustaining quality, inclusive education and ensuring all students to thrive

Teachers – including itinerant teachers (mobile teachers with specialist skills in working with children with disabilities), classroom assistants or 'shadow' teachers, as well as unpaid community volunteers – must overcome enormous obstacles including damaged facilities, insufficient teaching materials, intermittent school closures, and adapt to remote and hybrid classes. Despite their invaluable contributions, teachers' needs are often overlooked and under-supported in education responses.

Teacher shortages continue to hamper progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4. In sub-Saharan Africa, 4.1 million more teachers are needed to achieve universal primary and secondary education.[27]

In displacement and refugee contexts, educators face specific challenges with overcrowded classrooms, diverse learning needs, languages, and education backgrounds.[28] Teachers who become refugees themselves face further obstacles, including limited access to professional development, certification, and recognition of their credentials, all while dealing with displacement, insecurity, violence, and safety threats.[29]

Financial strain during crises often disrupts the payment of teachers' salaries, impacting their motivation and retention.[30] For instance, in Madagascar, where many teachers are paid by children's families and communities,[31] service provision is directly affected by economic shocks and loss of household income.

Just like their students, education service providers require multi-level support in their working environments.[32] This includes financial and material resources, psychosocial and emotional support, as well as continuous professional development opportunities. Unfortunately, there is a lack of comprehensive teacher training for gender and disability inclusion in many countries. However, such training is needed to build teachers' skills, develop positive attitudes towards inclusive education and belief in its feasibility, even in emergency contexts.

"In many classrooms, there are now 45 students or more per teacher and there is a worry that next year this figure will be even higher. If you think in terms of inclusiveness, this affects the teachers' ability to intervene at the individual level. Most teachers continue to be sensitive to the needs of children with disabilities, but they struggle to give them the attention they need." (Shaher Yaghi, School Quality Assurance Coordinator, UNRWA)

Case Study: Addressing accessibility challenges for students with disabilities in the Cox's Bazaar refugee camp, Bangladesh

There are now over 1 million refugees in the Cox's Bazaar refugee camp, the largest refugee camp in the world, which is split into a number of different sites on the southeast coast of Bangladesh. The influx of refugees from Myanmar in 2017 has placed increased strain on the overall resources. Children with and without disabilities arrive seeking refuge, but also need the sanctuary and routine of a regular learning environment.

Children in a temporary learning centre in one of the Cox's bazaar refugee camp sites, learning about how to support peers with disabilities in an awareness-raising session. ©HI

During the COVID-19 outbreak in Bangladesh, the temporary learning centres in the refugee camp were closed for almost two years. Even prior to the pandemic, a much smaller percentage of children with disabilities were enrolled in formal and informal learning centres compared to children without disabilities.

Historically, there have been many challenges in identifying children with disabilities, creating accessible environments, providing teacher training on inclusive education, offering support systems or inclusive teaching skills and materials, and overcoming negative attitudes and stigma toward children with disabilities and their families. These issues are further compounded by the trauma experienced by families and the fact that children with disabilities may have left assistive devices behind along the way. The terrain of the camps is hilly, and the accommodation is crowded and close together, resulting in limited accessible routes and mostly pedestrian access.

Humanity & Inclusion (HI) and its partners are working at different levels to ensure that children with disabilities in the different camps in Cox's Bazaar are able to access appropriate and inclusive education services, with funding from Education Cannot Wait (ECW), UNICEF and Global Affairs Canada. Efforts at the individual and community levels include developing personalised education or rehabilitation plans, organising inclusive sports and recreational activities, and raising awareness about disability and inclusion among both adults and children in the community.

At the learning centre level, HI's work focuses on training education staff on inclusive education approaches such as how to make accessible low or no-cost education materials from everyday materials. Learning centre staff are also trained to identify children's needs and refer them to other services as necessary. For instance, HI provides additional sessions on speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, and physiotherapy to support children's overall development alongside their educational goals. Furthermore, learners with disabilities are included in assessments and monitoring activities. Through these efforts the centres are being made more accessible, along with the routes children make to go to the centres, so that more children with disabilities can attend.

Support teachers with ongoing, crisis-responsive inclusive education training and coaching

In low and middle-income countries, there is a shortage of inclusive education teachers trained and equipped to meet the needs of students with disabilities. A UNICEF study in Madagascar found that teachers in inclusive schools were specifically trained to teach children with hearing, visual or intellectual impairments but lacked the necessary resources to accommodate a wider range of disabilities.[33] One teacher we spoke with noted that, despite his colleagues receiving training in inclusive education approaches, his school is be equipped for a student needing sign language interpretation. Such resource gaps tend to be even more pronounced in remote, underserviced regions and displacement settings.[34]

Comprehensive, ongoing disability inclusion training is essential to enhance teachers' skills, foster positive attitudes toward diversity, and instil belief in the feasibility of inclusive education, even during emergencies. This training should be responsive to crises, recognising the need to quickly adjust teaching methods to changing circumstances.

> "During the training course, we talked abou whether and when teaching should be flexible, and when the teacher needs to practice pedagogical adaptation." (Florent Magasin, Director of Amparatanàna School, Madagascar).

Training and coaching should also incorporate inclusive psychosocial support, health, hygiene, safety, and child protection aspects. Teachers often serve as first responders, supporting students and families in need,[35] and encouraging referrals. Inclusive psychosocial support training helps educational personnel better address the social and emotional needs of diverse children, particularly those at risk of trauma, and connect them with cross-sector support systems. This is crucial for preventing dropout and enabling students to return to

school after an emergency.[36] Equally important, teachers themselves require support for their mental health and well-being. Many teachers grapple with fear, threats, and trauma during crises. A teacher in Burkina Faso remarked: *"It's fear that can prevent teachers from continuing their work during a crisis: fear of kidnapping, threats. We're traumatised ourselves, so it's really complicated."*

Good Practice: Psychosocial support (PSS) for teachers' and students' health and well-being in oPt

In the Gaza Strip and West Bank, Humanity & Inclusion (HI) provides ongoing PSS facilitated by school counsellors, benefiting teachers, parents/caregivers, and children with and without disabilities. This intervention uses peer-to-peer groups among teachers, enabling them to connect and share their experience. Teachers are also guided on how to facilitate inclusive PSS activities for both children with and without disabilities within their classrooms and schools.

To ensure sustainable progress, it is essential to establish the transfer of skills, knowledge, and best practices after interventions conclude. Follow-up training for teachers, especially those who are new or work in mainstream schools, is often lacking when projects come to an end.

Incorporating inclusive teaching practices into national pre-service and in-service training programmes is a critical success factor. Notable successes include harmonising in-service training modules with inclusive and gender-sensitive education, integrated into the teacher training curriculum. However, limited funding and investment may pose challenges, particularly

when projects rely on funding from international donors, with conditions and cycles that may not be receptive to changing needs. In Burkina Faso, several informants spoke of the financial challenges of ensuring ongoing teacher training after interventions end.

Beyond training, there is a broader need for crisis-sensitive teacher management policies. These policies should support good working conditions, professional development opportunities, and minimise risks to school communities during crises, including through

disaster risk reduction (DRR) and contingency planning.[37] Mapping existing teaching expertise, resources, and teacher training needs can help anticipate and address resource gaps during crises.[38] While the Ministry of Education must lead in developing such policies and training, consulting with inclusive education professionals can help identify gaps and facilitate skills transfer.[39] Furthermore, learners, their families, and OPDs need to be systematically involved at all stages of policymaking.

> "Our department does not have sufficient resources to guarantee ongoing training for teaching staff. Generally speaking, this training is made possible thanks to the support of partners. However, this assistance from partners is only available for a limited time, even in times of crisis." (Marie Nikiema, Department for the Promotion of Inclusive Education, Girls' Education and Gender, Burkina Faso)

How do we ensure inclusive disaster preparedness in school settings?

In the wake of a disaster, the vulnerabilities of the most at-risk groups, especially persons with disabilities, become more pronounced. For instance, during evacuations, persons with disabilities often struggle to access timely and inclusive early warning information and take appropriate steps to protect themselves.[40] School communities play a pivotal role in connecting students and families with cross-sector support services, activating case management pathways, and even providing temporary shelter. This means enabling policies and programming to optimise the response capabilities and ensure no one is left behind.

At policy level, inclusive disaster risk reduction (iDRR) and risk management policies aim to shift from ad-hoc responses to structured, comprehensive crisis-responsive planning that benefits everyone. For instance, Burkina Faso has adopted a national strategy for education in emergencies (2019-2024) which provides a holistic, multi-risk approach. This strategy seeks to ensure

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) means "identifying, assessing, and managing the causal factors of disasters." It emphasises risk reduction and being proactive rather than reactive. Humanity & Inclusion (HI) practices inclusive DRR through a twin-track approach that strengthens inclusive DRR systems and empowers at-risk groups, such as persons with disabilities to take part in DRR activities.[41]

continuity of education for all children, guarantee quality teaching and learning, and establish an operational mechanism for steering, coordinating, and monitoring/evaluating this national strategy.[42] In countries with decentralised government structures, it is crucial to prioritise and support local-level coordination

mechanisms and plans to ensure locally relevant preparedness and response. This can involve enabling the set up and capacity building of community DRR task forces, including most at risk groups, to input in the institutional Disaster Risk Management (DRM) policies and plans.[43]

At programming level, disaster risk reduction and preparedness plans must take into account the vulnerabilities and capacities of all students and staff, including those with disabilities. In local communities, this can involve forming volunteer groups to assist with taking children with disabilities to school, supporting the development of School DRR plans,[44] or pre-positioning educational kits and assistive devices to support their continued learning after or during a disaster.

Teacher training on the development and use of individualised education plans (IEPs) is particularly valuable for preparedness efforts. IEPs set specific objectives for a child's learning over a set period, detailing the materials and accommodations needed. Such training helps identify the physical or sensory needs of students with disabilities, pre-position material support, and involve parents in the preparation of School DRR plans and distance learning arrangements ahead of disasters.[45]

"Preparedness must not only be designed but implemented by training school staff and parents to support all children, but specifically children with disabilities." (Hala Saleh, HI, Project Manager for Inclusive Education in the West Bank, oPt)

Good Practice: A whole-of-school approach to inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), Madagascar

In Madagascar, floods and cyclones have devastating effects on the continuity of education, destroying learning materials and infrastructure, and creating dangerous conditions for persons with disabilities, while emergency shelters, often schools, are often ill-equipped to cater for them.

Since 2017, the CARE Madagascar and Humanity & Inclusion (HI) consortium has implemented three inclusive risk and disaster management projects to enhance the preparedness and response capacities of populations affected by natural disasters. One of these interventions, known as the MIARO project "Disaster Risk Management is everyone's business, even children's", financed by the European Union Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), used a whole-of-school approach to develop the capacities of students and school communities in inclusive DRR. The overall aim was to improve school safety and ensure all students could cope better with disasters.

The project assisted multiple schools in developing emergency preparedness plans and establishing school-level disaster and risk management committees. Additionally, it created inclusive DRR clubs to lead extracurricular awareness-raising activities for schoolchildren, ensuring gender balance and the participation of children with disabilities as part of the membership criteria. Each inclusive DRR club received a kit containing materials for conducting risk reduction activities, including an activity guide, posters, flags, and interactive games. Teachers were trained in inclusive DRR and how to use the resources in the kit.

This project achieved positive outcomes, including the rehabilitation of school infrastructure for improved inclusiveness, by fitting ramps and grab bars, for example. Refurbished buildings served

a dual purpose by contributing to better teaching and learning continuity while also providing safe and inclusive structures that can be used as shelters for people evacuated during floods or cyclones. Moreover, an inclusive alert system and evacuation plans have been created and made available to everyone, allowing for vulnerable students to be identified. This in turn has allowed local emergency teams and disaster risk management committees to respond more effectively. DRR clubs have been instrumental in organising awareness-raising activities for students in their schools, families and local communities, thus building their disaster resilience.

The national alerts issued for incoming tropical storms and floods in January 2021, and the COVID-19 crisis, provided an opportunity for the project to reinforce practices initiated with the disaster risk management commissions, by improving contingency planning and organisational structures and responses. However, these crises also highlighted the challenges of ensuring the sustainability of the initiative through government ownership and by finding relevant solutions with limited funds.

ICT for quality, inclusive teaching – key considerations

Distance learning approaches, through television, radio, or the Internet, are excellent tools for ensuring education continuity in crisis contexts. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, countries facing crises and emergencies relied on these methods when in-person learning was not an option. However, certain conditions need to be in place to ensure these learning methods are inclusive and do not exacerbate existing inequalities.

Effective implementation of these tools improves inclusion by offering students the flexibility to tailor their learning to their needs, pace of learning, and schedule. The widespread deployment of information and communication technology (ICT) and remote platforms has created opportunities for inclusive learning. A key informant in oPt noted: "*It used to be that we would replace courses with documents, and there was nothing for children with disabilities. With COVID-19, there has been a growing awareness of the need for digital alternatives.*" For instance, UNRWA in the oPt introduced a Digital Learning Platform as part of its COVID-19 response, so that students could access Self-Learning Materials for continued home-based learning.[46] This platform is designed for the inclusion of learners with disabilities and

uses attendance indicators to help monitor their participation on this platform.

Good Practice: Rapid Deployment of ICT for distance learning, Burkina Faso

The Multiannual Partnership Convention Phase 1 and 2 (*Convention de partenariat pluriannuelle*), implemented by Humanity & Inclusion (HI) in several African countries with funding from the French Development Agency (AFD), highlights the importance of preparing for remote learning during crises, including both health and security challenges. Measures previously taken by HI to ensure educational continuity during security-related school closures also served to mitigate disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, the project leveraged existing digitalised teaching resources, and the opportunity to acquire ICT. This therefore enabled the project to rapidly acquire and distribute essential ICT, including tablets with digital learning resources for visually and hearing-impaired learners, reader-recorders for learners with visual impairments, and radios (rechargeable and solar-powered) equipped with USB keys and/or memory cards containing learning resources.

However, the experience acquired during the pandemic highlights important risks and challenges that need to be taken into consideration:

1. Equity and inclusiveness concerns

Nearly 1 in 3 students from pre-school to upper secondary levels could not benefit from remote learning,[47] in particular girls, children and young people with disabilities, or with lower socio-economic status.

Distance learning arrangements did not always support assistive resources such as Braille texts, screen readers, print magnifiers, closed captioning and sign language interpretation,[48] making them accessible to learners with sensory impairments.

Girls, especially those with disabilities, disproportionately faced learning loss due to unequal access to technology (resulting from inequitable socio-cultural gender norms, lower digital literacy levels, and greater household chores and care burdens, amongst other factors).[49] In oPt, 64.9% of girls compared to 47% of boys could not complete any schoolwork during school closures.[50]

Partnerships with the private sector have been instrumental in enhancing digital learning infrastructure and adapting curricula to online platforms, although it has raised broader ethical concerns and the need to ensure transparency, accountability, data privacy, and cost regulation in agreements with private companies.[51]

2. Limited resources in some areas

In areas with limited internet connectivity, fully online learning is not feasible. In Madagascar, where only 20% of the population has internet access[52] and power disruptions during cyclones are frequent, distance learning through ICT can be problematic. We spoke with several teachers in Madagascar and Burkina Faso who continued to rely on in-person home visits to teach students during school closures.

Low-tech options like radio, TV, and basic mobile phones, as well as no-tech interventions, are often the most cost-effective solutions because of problems with low bandwidth and connectivity in remote regions.[53] However, not all students can easily access these solutions, including persons who are blind or deaf.

"During COVID, we had to give lessons at home because the children and their parents couldn't travel. Even outside of the lessons, we came and talked to these children so that they could regain their confidence. We played games. It's all part of our efforts to minimise the impact on children." (Jacqueline Tindano, Ecole EX CEBNEF, Teacher, Burkina Faso)

In HI's experience, blended approaches that use both inclusive digital learning and face-to-face methods are the best option for supporting all learners. Distance and hybrid teaching are most effective when guided by the principles of **Universal Design for Learning** and a **learner-centred approach.** This approach accommodates diverse learner needs and preferences, taking into consideration factors like disability, gender, migration status, socio-economic background, and access to and familiarity with ICT.

Universal Design for Learning is a framework developed by the Center for Special Education Technology, for designing inclusive educational environments that reduce barriers and take a learner-centred approach. It involves proactively designing educational environments based on an understanding that "every individual has varied abilities, needs, strengths, and preferences," and that these can also vary according to the environment.[54]

By adopting gender-responsive digital pedagogies, we can better address the gender-based barriers that affect both boys and girls continuing their education remotely. For instance, girls are often less likely than boys to own a phone, to use the Internet, or to know how to safeguard information on digital media. Even when digital technology is available, girls might have less time for online learning due to domestic and care responsibilities in their households.[55]

> This UNICEF Guide to Gender-Responsive Digital Pedagogies (2022) offers guidance for educators on applying gender-responsive approaches to remote teaching.

3. The need for inclusive education teacher training

Teachers must also be adequately equipped and trained to use inclusive learning platforms and technologies which can be adapted to low-tech contexts. In oPt, HI has observed that teachers are sometimes prevented from conducting classes remotely because they are unfamiliar with remote teaching tools and techniques, or simply because they do not have a personal computer.

In emergency contexts, most remote learning projects continue to be run by non-state actors.[56] This raises sustainability concerns, as funding for these projects is not guaranteed in the long term. Going forward, it is important to consider how quality, inclusive distance learning arrangements can be integrated into mid- and long-term education planning and teacher training curricula. In oPt, this is exemplified by the Ministry of Education's adoption of teacher training booklets on inclusive education during school closures, as seen below.

Case Study: Preparing mainstream school teachers through blended capacity building approaches for inclusive teaching during emergencies, oPt

The interventions implemented under Framework Agreement n.5, by Humanity & Inclusion (HI) with funding from the Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, offer an example of how ICT and no-tech solutions can be blended for inclusive teacher training. As part of a cross-sector intervention strategy by HI to support inclusive education for children with disabilities in the Gaza Strip and West Bank over 36 months (2019-2022), the project employed a range of techniques for in-person and distance capacity-building for mainstream schoolteachers in inclusive education.

Six detailed guidance booklets were designed in collaboration between the Ministry of Education in oPt and HI to equip mainstream schoolteachers to ensure uninterrupted learning for children with disabilities, even during school closures due

to events such as escalating violence or school demolitions. The six booklets cover a

Children participating in catch-up classes in Gaza Strip_ photo by Tamer Institute for Community Education, 2023. ©HI

wide range of thematic areas, including referrals, school environment, inclusive learning assessments, inclusive teaching, and building parents' capacities. Building teachers' skills in these areas has helped

them to become more resilient in continuing teaching during disruptions.

Teachers also received training on using inclusive remote learning methods during the COVID-19 crisis, infrastructure permitting (e.g., how to use online learning portals, create YouTube videos or Zoom lessons,

etc.). The Ministry of Education in oPt is in the process of disseminating the booklets across oPt. Ongoing training and coaching sessions are being conducted in selected schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to help teachers understand and apply the inclusive techniques outlined in the booklets.

Education under attack in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) and Israel

The recent attacks by Hamas and retaliation by Israel have had a devastating impact on civilians and detrimental effects on education, teachers, and students, particularly in the Gaza Strip, but also in Israel and the West Bank.

In the Gaza Strip, as of 13 November 2023, according to the Education Cluster of the oPt[57], 300 school buildings have sustained damage, affecting 332,000 students and 13,000 teachers. 3,117 children and 183 teachers have been killed, while 4,613 children and 403 teachers have been injured. Furthermore, an estimated 625,000 students and 22,564 teachers have lost at least 38 learning days due to the hostilities. The Education Cluster also reported that an estimated 787,000 IDPs are being hosted in 154 UNRWA schools and 158,000 IDPs in 106 public schools.

In the West Bank including East Jerusalem, due to movement restrictions, military operations, and settlers' violence, at least 782,000 students face challenges in accessing safe education. As of 14 November 2023, out of 1,918 public schools, at least 172 schools hosting at least 40,000 students have not yet reopened.[58]

In Israel, at least 125,000 people have been displaced by the conflict[59]. This includes around 30,000 students that were evacuated from areas around Gaza and whose education has been disrupted by the

conflict[60]. Tens of thousands of students in schools in Tel Aviv and other areas of Central Israel have also lost many days of face-to-face education due to security restrictions or conscription of school staff.[61]

Humanity & Inclusion (HI), through the dedicated efforts of its staff and volunteers, has successfully identified and started to respond to critical needs for Psychosocial Support (PSS) and Psychological First Aid (PFA) for children and teachers hosted at UNRWA and public schools in the Gaza Strip. HI activities currently reach more than 28,800 children and caregivers, ensuring reasonable accommodations are in place for children with disabilities.

At strategic level, HI is closely engaging with the Education Cluster and other education actors to define interventions that ensure the continuity of learning and support for teachers. While the provision of PSS and PFA activities is an urgent priority, catch-up or bridging classes to address learning loss will be prioritized, as soon as the security situation allows.

HI is not providing assistance in Israel at the moment because Israel is a high-income country that responds to the needs of its affected civilians through its public services and national organisations. There has been no request for international humanitarian aid and our organisation has not been asked to intervene.

Continue...
FINANCING

Critical gaps in inclusive education financing before, during and after crises persist.

During crises, maintaining education budgets and commitments becomes challenging, leading to retroactive budget cuts and the redirection of funds, often with knock-on effects on funding for special education programmes and services. While the need to maintain education budgets and commitments during the post-pandemic recovery is widely acknowledged, current funding trends reveal a shortfall in meeting the growing demand in the sector.[62]

Global aid for education has levelled off over the past five years at approximately $15 billion.[63] While the full financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on education are still being studied, a UNICEF Pulse Survey in March 2022, conducted in 122 countries, showed that nearly a quarter of governments had decreased public resources for education. Furthermore, the proportion of education financing covered by official development assistance (ODA) and humanitarian aid also decreased during the pandemic.[64]

The suspension of ODA by donor countries due to aid conditionality – whether for economic, diplomatic, or political reasons – can have an impact on access to basic social services including education. This means the sections of the population who are already at a higher risk of exclusion end up paying the highest price.

The education sector only receives 2.9% of global humanitarian funding, compared to the UN target of 4% set during the Global Education First Initiative in 2012.[65] Overall, the annual financing gap required to achieve SDG 4 targets by 2030 is now estimated at $97 billion in low- and lower-middle income countries.[66]

Education funding often lacks the specificity needed to address the needs of learners with disabilities, while targeted funding remains limited.[67] Between 2014 and 2018, less than 2% of all international aid was directed toward individuals with disabilities and less than 0.5% targeted disability inclusion.[68]

In emergency situations, inflexible funding models can restrict the ability to quickly reallocate resources or adapt educational programmes to meet emerging needs, hindering effective responses to maintain education continuity for specific subgroups. Most humanitarian funding is still short-term, with programmes designed annually and is "result-based rather than transformative."[69]

There can be significant challenges when humanitarian and development efforts are not properly synchronised. The end of emergency project funding can result in inclusive educational service provision being interrupted as domestic budgets struggle to cover the costs. This ultimately jeopardises the long-term sustainability of inclusive education outcomes. At the same time, the absence of stable, long-term investment mechanisms makes it difficult to sustain the progress made through emergency interventions and fostering local ownership.

A call for renewed engagement in inclusive education financing, in all circumstances

Inclusive education systems are cost-effective and yield benefits for all children, not only those with disabilities, by enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. Therefore, it is critical that sustainable, inclusive education financing commitments are renewed and opportunities for more robust investment in education transformation are explored. Public-private partnerships can help drive this transformation, but they must go hand in hand with steps to ensure transparency and accountability.

In addition to increasing the volume of funding, education spending must prioritise equity and inclusion, ensuring the fair distribution of funding to meet the education needs of all children, so that no one is left behind.

A twin-track approach to financing education is necessary along the learning recovery pathway. Policymakers should allocate funds to both reinforcing inclusion in general education programming and implementing disability-targeted programming that caters to the specific support needs of learners with disabilities. This may include, for instance, budgeting for inclusive education teacher training, assistive technology, and adapted digital learning resources.

Empowering education ministries is a crucial part of this undertaking. In addition to allocating at least 4% to 6% of the national Gross Domestic Product to education expenditure,[70] national and sub-national budgets should specifically earmark and track inclusive education resources. This twin-track approach reinforces inclusion in education systems and addresses the intersectional needs of marginalised groups, including children with disabilities.

Reiterating the Disability Inclusive Education Call to Action, launched by civil society organisations at the 2022 Transforming Education Summit, HI is calling all stakeholders to:

1. **Gradually increase budget allocations for disability-inclusive education.**

2. **Establish medium and long-term targets to reach children with disabilities in all education programmes.**

3. **Integrate disability inclusion criteria and targets into grants and education programming.**[50]

Building better local partnerships & participatory approaches

Inclusive, community-centred crisis responses rely on active engagement with local stakeholders, who are often the primary means for identifying and reaching children in remote or high-risk areas.[71] Local actors also take ownership of education initiatives and play a pivotal role in their sustainability. Prioritising funding to enhance the capacity and involvement of both national and local stakeholders in decision-making processes is essential for building resilient education systems capable of withstanding crises.

Practical ways to engage and support local actors include:

1. Meaningful participation

In both policy – such as education sector plans – and programming decision-making, local actors should be involved at all stages, from design to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. This consultation should encompass a wide range of stakeholders, including local OPDs, children with disabilities, their families, teachers and educators, and communities. Particular attention should be paid to engaging with the most marginalised groups of children, including girls with disabilities and children from remote regions.[72] Sufficient time and an appropriate methodology should be devoted to this, and it should not be rushed through in a tokenistic way.

"For us, it goes without saying that people with disabilities must be involved in shaping educational policy, because they know best what works for them. If the people concerned aren't around the decision-making table, we may be missing the point." (Solange Akpo-Gnandi, ANCEFA Regional Coordinator)

2. Coordination mechanisms

Coordination mechanisms between central and sub-national levels of government to support service delivery, especially in decentralised contexts, should ensure that there are adequate resources, clear roles, and systems of accountability.[73] Using participatory budgeting approaches can help delegate responsibility for inclusive education while promoting transparency in budgeting decisions.

For example, in Madagascar, school management committees, which bring together parents, community and school representatives, have effectively promoted transparency in managing public school funds and raised awareness of the importance of inclusive education within their communities. These committees also contribute to fostering a culture of diversity and inclusion, facilitating local dialogue and support, and developing inclusive education response plans. With their knowledge of the community's needs and capacities, these committees play a vital role during a crisis in identifying at-risk children within the community, including children with disabilities, helping schools find solutions and building resilient school systems.

3. Partnerships

Collaboration with national and local actors, especially government, OPDs and other civil society organisations should increase their access to relevant funding. This can be achieved by setting funding eligibility criteria that allow them to directly access funding, and systematically ensuring they are directly involved in funding arrangements. Furthermore, multi-year investments should prioritise institutional capacity-building for local and national stakeholders and ensure their participation in coordination mechanisms. This approach is essential for sustaining inclusive education during and after crises.

Since 2015, Burkina Faso has been at the centre of a complex humanitarian crisis which has significantly disrupted access to education. Conflict and insecurity, fuelled by non-state armed groups and broader instability in the Sahel region, have led to the closure of a staggering 1 in 4 schools, particularly in the Boucle du Mouhoun, East and Sahel regions.[74] The country also hosts some 1.9 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), more than half of whom are children.[75]

In this difficult context, the inclusive education projects implemented by Humanity & Inclusion (HI) and financed by the French Development Agency (AFD) faced challenges commonly associated with development projects, including the constraints in implementing emergency actions and responding to emerging protection and psychosocial needs. However, HI was able to adapt its intervention strategies to take into account the difficulties accessing certain areas and to address the needs of internally displaced students.

In 2022, effective multi-stakeholder collaboration and coordination efforts were observed in response to the security situation in Burkina Faso. These efforts notably included a workshop held in Dori involving members of the provincial monitoring committee for inclusive education and other civil society actors in the education field. During the workshop, activities for inclusive education for internally displaced students were jointly designed and agreed on. In addition, a diagnostic workshop was held in Ouagadougou, involving institutional and civil society actors. This workshop focused on addressing the strategic challenges of inclusive education in a deteriorating security context. It provided an opportunity to take stock of existing activities in emergency situations and propose new activities to support inclusive education. Similarly, collaboration with local partners, particularly the commissions responsible for the school inclusion programme, and the mobilisation of existing community networks proved crucial in sustaining interventions.

Inclusive financing begins with improved data & information management systems

While we know that around 16% of all learners have disabilities,[76] identifying them can be challenging. In conflict and natural disaster situations – where the number of persons experiencing disabilities increases - limited resources and the dangers of accessing certain zones can hinder large-scale data collection.[77] Official statistics often underestimate the percentage of children with disabilities due to limited awareness, inadequate screening resources, social stigma and marginalisation.

Quality, disaggregated data form the foundation of resilient and inclusive education systems capable of withstanding crises and ensuring education continuity for all learners. Data also increase capacity to implement intersectional, human rights-based budgeting approaches.[78] When there is accurate, timely information available on the number of school-age children with disabilities in affected communities and the barriers they face, it promotes greater

equity and addresses disparities in financial allocations.[79]

Under the CRPD, States bear the primary responsibility for collecting disability-disaggregated data (Art. 31).[80] However,

where governments lack the capacity and financial resources to do so, it is also the role of the international community to support them in meeting these obligations.

"We need to ensure that we have disaggregated data on children with disabilities, especially by type of disability. If we don't have reliable data, budgeting becomes imprecise." (Tahirou Traoré, President of the National Coalition for Education for All in Burkina Faso)

Strategies for obtaining inclusive education data before, during and after a crisis

Start early. Begin data disaggregation at the crisis preparedness stage. In rapid-onset emergencies, having access to pre-crisis data can be extremely helpful for generating accurate flash appeals, conducting needs assessments, and developing tailored humanitarian response plans.[81]

This UNICEF & HI Guidance Booklet on Including Children with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action (2018) offers tips and tricks on collecting disability-disaggregated data and available data sources, as well as checklists for inclusive education preparedness.

Strengthen data systems. Invest in strengthening underlying data and monitoring systems, such as national census, household surveys, and education management information systems. These systems should be designed to accommodate disability disaggregation alongside other relevant factors.

Create clear targets to monitor. Systematically integrate disability and gender markers into education programmes and grants, to track and prioritise the allocation of funds for inclusive education during crises, strengthen coordination among stakeholders, and ensure that the specific

needs of learners with disabilities are addressed across all stages of a crisis, from onset to post-crisis recovery.

The OECD-DAC's disability policy marker, a tool to track and rank the level of disability inclusion in aid projects on a scale from 0 to 2, has been rapidly integrated into the screening of ODA projects by the European Commission. However, an analysis of EU funding by the European Disability Forum in 2020 found that despite an increase in reported disability-inclusive ODA projects a significant 84% of applicable projects still did not target the inclusion of persons with disabilities in any significant way, while the intersection between gender and disability was frequently overlooked.[82] This highlights the importance of taking an intersectional approach from the outset, and ensuring that inclusion is viewed not as a 'tick the box' exercise, but as a pillar of successful outcomes.

Disaggregate by different factors. Ensure data are disaggregated not only by disability (type and degree) but also by other factors linked with exclusion, such

as sex, age, and geographic location. This comprehensive disaggregation helps toanalyse data from an intersectional perspective and address different forms of diversity and exclusion.

Take a twin-track approach. When focusing on disability this involves collecting data on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in mainstream education interventions as well as educational initiatives specifically targeting persons with disabilities, to obtain a more holistic overview of the education landscape.

Resource mapping. Pinpoint the resources available to support inclusive education, such as speech and language therapists, rehabilitation professionals, interpreters, and psychologists, and other specialists. Data should also be collected on infrastructure, such as inclusive schools and providers of assistive devices, to prepare for unforeseen situations and bridge service gaps.

Coordinate, share, and compare disability data, especially across humanitarian and development education financing mechanisms, Education Clusters, the Global Partnership for Education, and Education Cannot Wait for example.[83] Links between mechanisms are often limited and reinforcing data sharing and harmonisation helps increase multi-stakeholder collaboration, ensuring priorities are based on a shared understanding of the "needs, risks, and vulnerabilities".[84] The Washington Group Short Set of Questions or the Child Functioning Module are the recommended tools for collecting comparable disability-disaggregated data.

> "We are collecting data, but we aren't coordinating it; there is fragmentation. We can't answer the basic question of how many kids per year we reach who are crisis-affected. We need to bring everyone together and capture this data in one place." (Chris Berry, Senior Education Advisor, FCDO)

Improving coordination along the nexus

In response to the increasingly complex and protracted crises we face today, we must move away from traditional siloed approaches that separate humanitarian and development efforts. Achieving safe, quality, inclusive education for all children requires prioritising cross-sector collaboration in education policies, programming, and financing.

Country-level coordination among government, humanitarian, and development actors helps to ensure coherence between different types of financing, promotes collective outcomes, and reduces gaps between the crisis response, longer-term recovery, and system strengthening.

Establishing platforms for discussion and consultation is an effective way to maintain coordination. In Madagascar, a multi-sectoral platform for inclusive education, comprising of OPDs, civil society organisations, international non-governmental organisations, and various ministerial departments, was officially recognised by the National Ministry of Education.[85]

In oPt, the Education Cluster has a permanent seat at the Education sector working group, alongside key Ministry of Education officials and education development sector actors, and is involved in consultations on various policymaking processes, including the development of the new Education Ministerial Plan (2024-2029).

What do we mean by humanitarian-development nexus?

At the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), stakeholders highlighted the importance of strengthening interventions along the humanitarian-development nexus. A New Way of Working was subsequently outlined in the Secretary-General's Report for the WHS and the Agenda for Humanity, helps to translate this ambition into action.[86]

Programming along the nexus can help to improve the continuity of disability-inclusive education service provision by integrating the principles outlined in this framework:

Collective outcomes, where diverse actors collectively agree upon measurable results.

Comparative advantage, allocating mandates based on capacity and expertise.

Multi-year timeframe, planning and financing over several years to achieve targets.

This framework should be understood as a "**contiguum**," where humanitarian and development intervention phases are not distinct, sequenced or timebound, but rather overlap. Education interventions are often operationalised and financed through simultaneous development and humanitarian interventions, with a variety of actors working together and at different levels.[87]

These principles are particularly relevant when assessing continuity of financing barriers and enablers. In order to address the urgent need for funding in the education sector in emergency settings, prioritise multi-year portfolios should be prioritised, as well as flexible emergency funding that can be mobilised in the event of a crisis.

Good Practice: Humanitarian-development coherence with multi-year funding

ECW's Multi-Year Resilience Programme (MYRP) funding approach is a good example of coherence along the nexus. It is designed to tackle both short-term humanitarian needs and longer-term education priorities in countries facing protracted conflicts and crises. MYRPs offer an alternative to traditional funding approaches which separate humanitarian and development aid. The programme operates on a three-year cycle, which allows time to engage governments and partners in overall system strengthening, but is also sufficiently flexible and agile to respond to changing circumstances.[88]

From 2019 to 2021, the ECW-facilitated MYRP worked across East Jerusalem, H2/Hebron, Area C, and Gaza to provide inclusive, quality, safe education to Palestinian students. The project aimed to support vulnerable children and children with disabilities by providing assistive devices and training teachers on inclusive education in government and UNRWA schools. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the MYRP re-allocated financial aid to support humanitarian response efforts in line with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and UNRWA's response plans. The Education Cluster and partners collectively mobilised close to $1 million for cross-sector programming in distance learning, psychosocial support, hygiene, and WASH.[89]

Internally Displaced Persons' location near Dori where Fatoumata lives with her family. ©DIPAMA Yamba - HI

Recommendations

The following steps help safeguard inclusive education before, during, and after a crisis.

To continue LEARNING

For governments:

Transform education systems to include all learners, in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Amongst other things this requires accessible infrastructure, ongoing support for teachers and learners, flexible curricula, as well as gender- and disability-responsive educational materials compliant with Universal Design for Learning principles. [90] [91]

Endorse and effectively implement the Safe Schools Declaration and adopt conflict-sensitive approaches in education programming.

Increase the affordability of schools and associated cross-sector services, including by implementing shock-responsive social protection programmes and extending health insurance coverage.

Ensure all education facilities are designed to be accessible for students with disabilities and include gender-responsive facilities (such as gender-separated toilets), including in crisis and displacement settings.

For all stakeholders:

Enhance cross-sector support, including through community-based approaches that foster greater resilience for children, parents, and educators alike.

Address the intersectional needs of children and young people in crisis preparedness, recovery and return-to-school campaigns, taking a gender-, disability-, age-, and migration-responsive approach.

Sensitise school communities, parents, and policymakers on the importance of the inclusion of children with disabilities in school

and challenge the social norms and stigma that contribute to their exclusion.

Target investment and response strategies to support the protection, well-being, and access to learning of children and young people affected by conflict and ongoing humanitarian crises.

To continue TEACHING

For governments:

Prioritise pre-service and in-service inclusive education training for all teachers and support staff. This will equip them with the skills, attitudes, and adaptability necessary to support vulnerable learners during and after a crisis (including viamodules on psychosocial support, child safeguarding, and gender-transformative pedagogies).

Address the shortage of teachers by enhancing recruitment and retention, including improved working conditions and opportunities for professional development.

For all stakeholders:

Better coordinate education responses by increasing the capacity and resources of sector coordination groups, Education Clusters, and UN refugee agencies (UNHCR and UNRWA) in refugee contexts. Strengthen their capacity to lead information management and joint assessments.[92]

Ensure that distance and hybrid learning models are guided by the principles of Universal Design for Learning, and train educators on inclusive distance teaching tools and techniques suited to low-resource environments. Support communities to address gaps in internet connectivity and reduce the digital divide.

Adopt Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) policies and programming responses, and train education communities (educators, support personnel, school management committees, students, and parents) to implement DRR plans effectively. This should be part of broader strategies to strengthen education systems for improved crisis resilience.

Monitor and follow-up on inclusive education teacher training to assess skills, identify gaps, and ask education service providers to share their experience and feedback.

Support students' and teachers' mental health and well-being, by implementing teacher training on inclusive psychosocial support and peer-to-peer support activities, whilst ensuring teachers directly benefit from these resources and services.

For donors:

Dedicate adequate funding to teacher training institutes and pre- and in-service programmes, to strengthening their inclusive education capacity.

To continue FINANCING

For governments:

Mobilise a larger proportion of domestic resources to provide free, quality, inclusive national education. National education budgets should represent at least 4% to 6% of national Gross Domestic Product and 20% of total budgets.[93]

For donors:

Ensure at least 10% of Official Development Assistance and 10% of humanitarian funding is allocated to education.

Increase the proportion of multi-year portfolios via bilateral and pooled funding, with a view to promoting flexibility and coherence between humanitarian and development actors as they work toward collective outcomes.

Invest in supporting national and local actors, including as direct recipients of funding, so that they can take ownership of, scale and sustain inclusive education interventions in the long term.

For governments and donors:

Prioritise education spending according to the principles of equity and inclusion and ensure the fair distribution of funding to meet the education needs of all children, so that no one is left behind.

Adopt a twin-track approach to financing education, with dedicated funding for disability inclusion in mainstream education and disability-targeted programming.

Coordinate and share data on children and young people with disabilities and other groups at higher risk of exclusion from education across departments and policy areas. This helps ensure coherent responses and adequate resource and funding distribution across education responses.

For all stakeholders:

Collect disaggregated data for informed decision-making and budget planning, starting at the crisis preparedness stage, and include the type and extent of the disability as well as other relevant factors such as gender, age, migratory status and location.

Integrate and systematically use disability and gender markers in education programming and grants, to ensure they are used in needs assessments, response plans, and for equitable funding allocation.

Meaningfully engage local stakeholders in budgeting decisions, improve their access to quality funding, and directly involve them in funding arrangements and consortia.

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