



REPORT 2023

Always Included

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

Key messages



Globally, some 72 million children are out of school due to emergencies and protracted crises. Of these, 17% are children with disabilities.

In West and Central Africa, over 13,250 schools have closed, with 6,150 schools in Burkina Faso affected.

In Madagascar, floods and cyclones have had devastating effects on education continuity, destroying learning materials and infrastructure.

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.