

Disability-Inclusive Education in Egypt

What is inclusive education?

UNESCO defines inclusive education as 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.¹ Inclusive education is an approach that promotes **child-friendly learning environments** for all children, including those with disabilities. This is achieved through respect for diversity, teaching adaptations, parental engagement, and modification of school policies and strategies.²



Figure 1 Through the Portage intervention, HI Egypt is able to support children with developmental delays and disabilities to access home-based stimulation and learning, March 2020 © HI Egypt

Situation in Egypt

How many children with disabilities live in Egypt?

According to the 2017 Population, Housing, and Establishments Census, **10.6% of the population in Egypt (an estimated 12 million people)** from five

years and above have disabilities.³ However, a Census conducted in 2006 estimated a disability prevalence rate of only 1.8%, which is very likely to be an underrepresentation due to the scope of questions used.

How many children with disabilities have access to education?

The education system in Egypt, from pre-primary to secondary schools, enrolls **around 25 million students**, with a net enrolment of 100% (primary) and 58% (secondary).⁴ Based on the Ministry of Education data, **7-10% of students enrolled in the education system in 2013 have disabilities**, ranging from intellectual disabilities to visual and hearing impairments. In 2016, however, the Ministry reported that **only 38,135 students with disabilities** were enrolled in the education system,⁵ corresponding to **less than 0.19%** of the overall number of students enrolled. This is a disproportionately low and shocking statistic, given the estimation that 15% of the world's population has a disability. Furthermore, UN ESCWA (2020) reports that the school attendance rate of children with disabilities aged 6-9 in Egypt is at 52%, compared to 39% of children with disabilities aged 10-14.⁶

On a more positive note, according to UNHCR,⁷ **86% of refugee children aged 6-17** were attending school (public, community, or private school). Attendance rates were highest among Sudanese, Syrian, South Sudanese, and Iraqi refugees. Information on access to schools for refugee children with disabilities is **not available** but is likely to be much lower. It is well known that restrictions to access and pursue education are more significant when multiple discrimination factors, like disability and migratory status intersect.

While there is no available data on out of school children with disabilities in Egypt, HI (2022) assumes that children with disabilities likely make **up a considerable proportion of the out of school population**; the global trend is that 1 in 3 children out of school have a disability.⁸

⁵ Ministry of Education, Statistical Yearbook, 2016. More information here: https://www.unicef.org/egypt/sites/unicef.org/egypt/files/2018-05/eg_Children_In_Egypt_2016_en%283%29.pdf.

⁶ More information here: [Disability-Dashboard-2020 - Egypt \(google.com\)](https://www.unicef.org/egypt/sites/unicef.org/egypt/files/2018-05/eg_Children_In_Egypt_2016_en%283%29.pdf).

⁷ Data from Vulnerability Assessment for Refugees in Egypt, 2018: <https://www.unhcr.org/eg/wp-content/uploads/sites/36/2020/09/EVAR18.pdf>.

⁸ From #CostingEquity: The case for disability-responsive education financing by IDDC and Light for the World. More information here: <https://www.iddcconsortium.net/blog/costing-equity-report-tens-of-millions->

¹ Definition adopted from the Cali Commitment, Outcome Document of the 2019 UNESCO International Forum on Inclusion and Equity in Education.

² Explicit definition of inclusive education from government in Egypt is not available. The definition provided is from UNICEF Egypt: [Education | UNICEF Egypt](https://www.unicef.org/egypt/sites/unicef.org/egypt/files/2018-05/eg_Children_In_Egypt_2016_en%283%29.pdf).

³ More details here: <https://www.capmas.gov.eg/party/party.html>.

⁴ UNICEF (2021). Spotlight on Children in the 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 Budget: [Spotlight on Children in the 2020-21 and 2021-22 Budget.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/egypt/sites/unicef.org/egypt/files/2021-12/Spotlight_on_Children_in_the_2020-21_and_2021-22_Budget.pdf) (unicef.org).

Which barriers restrict access to quality inclusive education for children with disabilities?⁹

System-wide barriers include the inadequate capacity of the education system to welcome and adequately support children with disabilities in mainstream public education and community schools; lack of teachers' preparation on inclusive education strategies; inaccessible and rigid curricula; and inaccessible physical and remote learning environments.

Limited data and evidence compound these barriers and hamper understanding of how gender, disability, and refugee status intersect. Data on out-of-school children with disabilities are scarce. As a result, although progress has been made towards inclusion, children with disabilities often remain invisible in the national education system.

Attitudinal barriers include the prevailing misconceptions and negative behavior of families and communities toward disability, resulting in poor recognition of the importance of education for children with disabilities. This is exacerbated by households' poverty, in particular amongst those from rural areas and those who are refugees. Moreover, stigma and discrimination perpetuate violence and bullying against children with disabilities and segregation of children with disabilities in the education system, where they often are educated in separated settings with low expectations and limited resources.

Recommendations

Building on the priorities set by the Strategic Plan for Pre-University Education 2014-2030 and Education 2.0 of the Ministry of Education and Technical Education, as well as considering the barriers faced by children with disabilities, HI calls on international cooperation donors, relevant governmental branches and other educational stakeholders in Egypt to prioritize disability-inclusive education:

- **At the policy level:** by enhancing the capacity of the Ministry of Education and Technical Education and other education stakeholders to generate evidence and to develop, review, and implement education policies and strategies (with allocated budget) that respond to the needs of children with disabilities. This includes a focus on inclusive formal and non-formal education (including community schools) at all stages, from pre-primary to secondary level.
- **At the family level:** by strengthening parental and family support, by raising awareness of parents and family members on the importance of education for children with disabilities and by providing opportunities for households' economic independence. This implies focusing on poorer households in rural areas and on refugees.

Disability-inclusive education policies and frameworks in Egypt

As a State Party to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Egypt commits to promoting disability-inclusive education (Article 24). Furthermore, the government commits to align with the targets set in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The government's commitments towards the CRPD and the SDG framework has been domesticated through the following national policy documents:

- **Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2018:**
 - This mandates public and private education institutions to promote equality between children with disabilities and other children.
- **Strategic Plan for Pre-University Education 2014-2030:**
 - This ensures providing learners with disabilities with high-quality and peer-equitable learning opportunities and to include these learners in all pre-university schools
- **Education 2.0 (EDU 2.0) 2018:**
 - This mandates the development of education curricula responsive to the needs of children with disabilities, including capacity building for teachers on inclusive education strategies.
- **Egypt Response Plan for Refugees and Asylum Seekers from Sub-Saharan Africa, Iraq, and Yemen 2020; 3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan in Response to the Syria Crisis 2020-2021**
 - These recognize the need for inclusive education for all refugees and asylum seekers living in Egypt including those with disabilities.

- **At the community level:** Enhance understanding and capacities of communities to promote disability-inclusive education in community schools¹⁰ through communication campaigns, advocacy, and awareness-raising activities.
- **At the service level:** Improve the capacity of mainstream public and community schools to adequately support children with disabilities through teacher training and coaching on inclusive education, development of flexible curricula, and improvement of infrastructure. At the same time, improve connected services like WASH facilities, transportation, health and rehabilitation, and protection.



Figure 2 HI Egypt works with Terre des hommes (Tdh) in providing psychosocial support sessions for children. In this photo, three girls participate in a play activity as a form of psychosocial support. © Tdh, August 2021

¹⁰ According to UNICEF (2016), community schools provide personalized education to children (especially girls) aged 6-14 years living in poor communities that are not reached by formal education.

They are established by community organizations and supervised by the Ministry of Education. More information: <https://www.unicef.org/egypt>