

Save the Children Stands for Inclusive Education



Inclusive education is one dimension of a rights-based quality education which emphasizes equity in access and participation, and responds positively to the individual learning needs and competencies of all children. Inclusive education is child-centered and places the responsibility of adaptation on the education system rather than the individual child. Together with other sectors and the wider community, it actively works to ensure that every child, irrespective of gender, language, ability, religion, nationality or other characteristics, is supported to meaningfully participate and learn alongside his/her peers, and develop to his/her full potential.

Exclusion from and within education - A rights violation

Despite significant progress reducing the number of out-of-school children worldwide, recent data show that the number of children who are excluded from education is still 58 million¹. In addition, many more children face exclusion within the education system, learning in segregated institutions, discriminated against in their school environment, or taught by teachers who are unable or, in some cases, unwilling to meet their different learning needs. In these cases education systems prevent the most vulnerable children from accessing their human rights to education and non-discrimination.

The reasons behind exclusion from and within education are complex, innumerable and differ depending on the context. For example, children with disabilities are often unable to participate fully in mainstream schools due to cultural stigma, teachers who are not sufficiently prepared in supporting their learning, as well as basic infrastructural barriers. Children from minority

groups may have difficulty learning in a non-native language, while migrant children often lack identity documents, which prevent them from enrolling in school. Furthermore, the hidden costs of education are a serious obstacle for children from economically disadvantaged families. Across all of these categories, girls and children in emergency contexts remain especially vulnerable. These are only a few examples of the many different groups of children whose right to education has yet to be fulfilled.

Beyond denying children their fundamental rights to non-discrimination and a quality education, their exclusion from and within education undermines their opportunity to achieve their full potential, and has far reaching consequences for their future and for society as a whole. People who didn't get a chance to receive a quality education are more likely to experience socio-economic marginalization and lifelong poverty. Conversely, the promotion of an inclusive culture within the education setting contributes to the eradication of discriminatory attitudes and behaviors, further strengthening social cohesion and peace.

¹ UNESCO (2014). Progress in getting all children to school stalls but some countries show the way forward.

Inclusive education - Why it is important

Rationale for inclusion - Rights and research. The right to education for all has been identified in multiple binding international treaties, dating back to the 1966 UN Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. This principle was repeated in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as in specialized treaties protecting the rights of women, racial minorities, migrant workers, and children with disabilities. In 1994, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education also argued that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are “the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all”².

Ensuring that different children are able to learn together not only defends their individual rights to access education, but also protects their right to receive education that is directed to the “the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin”³. By working towards quality learning environments where all children are educated side by side, inclusive classrooms provide children with the chance to truly accept and learn from each other.

Studies show that inclusion is “more cost effective, and academically and socially effective, than segregated schooling”⁴. Enabling children to learn together benefits all children, not just those with special needs, and has been linked to better learning outcomes⁵.

Furthermore, while the most effective inclusive education systems and programs do require additional resources, this support is cost-effective and might be less than expected, since according to UNICEF “80-90 per cent [of children with special educational needs] can be educated with minor adaptations such as teaching strategy training, child-to-child support and environmental adaptations”⁶.

Quality and equity - Inclusive education in the post-2015 framework. Despite the significant advancement made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) for increasing access to education, its narrow focus left significant gaps. In recent years, progress in reducing the number of out-of-school children has stalled, largely because those who are still excluded are often the hardest to reach. Ensuring quality learning and equity will require better targeting of poor and marginalized groups and therefore the

post-2015 development agenda needs to focus on reorienting education systems to be inclusive. An inclusive approach promotes an equitable access to education opportunities and strengthens the quality of teaching, which benefits all children, not only the most vulnerable. In this way education systems can ensure that no child is left behind and all children realize their right to education, reaching their full potential in terms of cognitive, emotional, social and creative capacities⁷.

Creating enabling environments for inclusive education - Our approach

Save the Children is strongly committed to ensuring that all children have equal access to quality inclusive education. Our approach to inclusive education follows the Save the Children Theory of Change in order to achieve more for children – especially the most vulnerable – leverage our resources in a more efficient and sustainable way, and succeed in inspiring the global breakthroughs we want to see for children. Under this framework and according to our global experience, our inclusive education programs seek to:

Be the voice of children - Addressing attitudes This is a first priority in order to build an inclusive culture in education. It is of paramount importance to raise the awareness of children, parents, communities, policy makers, local and national authorities as well as other implementing agencies on inclusive principles and values. Through this effort, we enable and encourage the development of an education environment that respects and promotes the rights of all children.

Save the Children in Bosnia and Herzegovina engaged children, parents and school staff in the use of a participatory methodology, the Index for Inclusion, to assess and enhance the inclusiveness of their schools. This improved access and learning for marginalized and vulnerable children, in particular girls, children belonging to the Roma ethnic minority and children with disabilities, and contributed to creating an inclusive culture in their communities.

Be the innovator - Addressing barriers to access and learning. At the local level the most important strategy of intervention is to create inclusive learning environments, with particular attention to building the capacity of teachers and other education staff. Strong teachers are a central component of a quality education that allows all children to learn effectively, and it is crucial that they are adequately trained in inclusive methodologies and equipped with the necessary materials. Inclusive education programs must continue building

² UNESCO (1994). Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education.

³ Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 29.

⁴ UNICEF (2012). Position Paper on Education for Children with Disabilities.

⁵ Waldron, Cole, and Majd (2001) and Freeman and Alkin (2000).

⁶ UNICEF (2012). Position Paper on Education for Children with Disabilities.

⁷ EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005.

on lessons learned and best practices, and piloting new inclusive activities tailored to the context in order to identify the most effective methods of inclusion.

A reading project launched in Sri Lanka in late 2012 worked with experts in the field of learning disabilities to design innovative assessment tools for teachers to identify children's specific needs and adjust teaching styles accordingly. A rigorous longitudinal study of reading skills has been designed to identify the outcomes of these tools and training, as well as identify key aspects of the project design that can be strengthened for future implementations.

Achieve results at scale - Addressing policies. At the Global, Regional, National, and local levels strong advocacy and policy work is needed to ensure that the voice of the most vulnerable is heard and their right to education and non-discrimination respected. Education authorities and institutions need to be encouraged and supported to take ownership in developing inclusive laws, policies and implementation strategies and, where necessary, adopting targeted measures to address specific groups of children particularly at risk of exclusion.

Save the Children in Ethiopia built the capacity of government sectors on disabilities and thanks to its advocacy efforts the government has now adopted a guideline to provide education to children with disabilities in inclusive settings. In countries like Vietnam and Bangladesh Save the Children is implementing bilingual and multilingual education programs and advocating at the national level to establish policies that promote the use of ethnic minority languages in school.

Build partnerships. In trying to achieve all of the above, Save the Children's inclusive education programs collaborate with children, civil society, communities, governments, other NGOs, UN agencies, universities and the private sector to share knowledge, influence others, raise funds and build capacity to ensure children's rights are met.

Save the Children in Georgia has supported the development of Georgian sign language and its use by teachers, caregivers and parents. To promote longer-term capacity building of education staff, the team worked with the Ministry of Education and Ilia State University to create a special education training program. Thanks to these efforts, Ilia State University now plans to offer a minor in deaf education under the Special Education major.

Achieving inclusion

Our pledge. Save the Children recognizes that all children, irrespective of gender, language, ability, religion, nationality or other characteristics, must be supported to meaningfully participate and learn alongside their peers. Our education programs seek to continually push learning environments towards full inclusion both in terms of access and learning, supporting this process according to the peculiarities of the different contexts.

Framework for the Future, Save the Children's Post-2015 strategy, sets out a clear target that by 2030 we will 'ensure all children have access to good-quality, safe and inclusive basic education, including in emergencies.' To help achieve this ambitious target, Save the Children will increase programming to support inclusive education following a twin track approach: mainstreaming inclusion and implementing targeted interventions. Key strategies in this process include:

1. Develop, prove and share evidence-based replicable approaches by employing targeted monitoring and evaluation systems.
2. Develop, adapt, and provide resources and training to global education staff to ensure that they have the tools needed to design, implement, monitor and evaluate inclusive education projects.
3. Incorporate inclusive education indicators into existing Save the Children reporting mechanisms and awareness raising to ensure that programs are required to confront their inclusivity.

Save the Children plans to continue building on internal experience and international best practices to ensure that the right to education is fulfilled for all children.

What we ask for. Targeting children who are most vulnerable and at risk of exclusion, making sure that they are in school and effectively learning, is the only way to reach Education for All goals and ensure that every child enjoys his/her right to education. The promotion of inclusive education cannot be realized through isolated initiatives, but instead is part of an ongoing process. In order to break the cycle of exclusion from and within education, continuous action needs to be undertaken at all levels. Specifically, we encourage the following:

Global level - UN and other international agencies as well as donors

- 1. Review their international development strategies and funding allocations, ensuring that they give adequate attention to education and prioritize equity and inclusion**, both as a cross-cutting issue and through targeted programs (twin track). Ensure that education interventions delivered as part of humanitarian responses are inclusive and specifically target children most at risk of being marginalized.
- Lobby local, national, and regional governments to give proper attention to the topic of inclusive education and to address the specific constraints faced by the most marginalized groups. Support them in implementing this process, building capacity of national and local authorities as needed.
- Advocate for increased attention to the aspect of inclusive education within international venues and in global level debates, particularly in relation to the Education for All initiative and the Post-2015 development agenda.

National level - Governments

- 1. Review education laws and policies to ensure that inclusion is prioritized.** Make sure that sufficient resources are allocated and sector plans are in place to effectively implement the following: i) remove barriers faced by vulnerable children in accessing education and proactively support their enrolment and retention; (ii) adapt curricula to make them more inclusive of children with different backgrounds, learning needs and languages; (iii) provide necessary materials, personnel and logistical arrangements to facilitate effective learning for all children; (iv) ensure that teachers at all levels of education are adequately trained on inclusive methodologies; (v) increase the

participation of children and communities, especially those most marginalized, in school life and management

2. Collect education data about access, quality and learning disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, nationality, income, disability and age, and any other relevant characteristic that might be a ground for discrimination and exclusion. Monitor and use the data to address inequalities, ensure equity in financing and measure progress.
3. Work with the civil society and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, religious affiliations and interest groups - including disabled persons organizations - to leverage resources and support for ensuring the rights of all children to education. Strengthen the cooperation between different sectors, in particular education, health and social services.

Local level - Local governments, education institutions, school staff, parents, communities and children

- 1. Create enabling environments for inclusive education, focusing in particular on developing inclusive attitudes and an understanding of children's rights.**
2. Work together with all stakeholders to identify key barriers that are excluding children, and to address them through inclusive school management and development.
3. Advocate at local and national level for additional material and policy support for inclusive education.

Together, we can do more! With support from stakeholders at all levels, and organizational commitment from Save the Children, the right to a quality inclusive education can be fulfilled for ALL children, not just those who are easiest to reach and teach.