

Disabilities and education

A failure to address inequalities, stigmatization and discrimination linked to wealth, gender, ethnicity, language, location and disability is holding back progress towards Education for All.

As the 2015 deadline for the EFA goals approaches, it is disconcerting to note not only that too many countries are far from the goal, but also that data remain insufficient to assess progress in education goals by various population subgroups and have concealed wide inequality.

Ensuring that all people have an equal chance of education, regardless of their circumstances, must be at the heart of new goals post-2015. No person should be denied access to good quality education because of factors such as disability.

There is a lack of concrete data showing the true scale of disabilities worldwide

- A lack of data on people with disabilities is severely constraining the ability of the international community to monitor the situation of children, youth and adults with disabilities. Current data does not allow for in-depth understanding of the cross cutting disadvantages faced by girls and women with disabilities. There has been insufficient attention to the need to collect data on disabilities and link them to education outcomes.
- While globally comparable, reliable data are notoriously difficult to obtain, one estimate is that 93 million children under age 14, or 5.1% of the world's children, were living with a 'moderate or severe disability'. Of these, 13 million, or 0.7% of the world's children, experience severe disabilities. (GMR 2013/4)
- Around four in five children with disabilities are in developing countries. At all ages, levels of both moderate and severe disability are higher in low- and middle-income countries than in rich countries. They are highest in sub-Saharan Africa. (GMR 2010)
- The scale of disabilities is often under-reported: To take one example, a 2004 census in Sierra Leone reported only 3,300 cases of mental impairment, while a detailed national survey the year before had estimated the real figure to be ten times higher. (GMR 2010)

Children with disabilities are less likely to complete primary school

- According to the World Health Survey, in 14 of 15 low and middle income countries, people of working age with disabilities were about one-third less likely to have completed primary school. (GMR 2013/4)
- In Bangladesh, 30% of people with disabilities had completed primary school, compared with 48% of those with no disabilities. The corresponding shares were 43% and 57% in Zambia; 56% and 72% in

Paraguay. (GMR 2013/4)

- According to a World Bank analysis of India's 2002 National Sample Survey, children with disabilities are five and a half times more likely to be out of school. Almost three-quarters of children in India with severe impairments are out of school, compared with about 35% to 40% among children with mild or moderate impairments. The most likely to be excluded are children with mental illness (two-thirds of whom never enrol in school) or blindness (over half never enrol). (GMR 2010)
- In Malawi and the United Republic of Tanzania, having disabilities doubles the probability of children never having attended school, and in Burkina Faso it increases the risk of children being out of school by two and a half times. (GMR2010)
- In Bulgaria and Romania, net enrolment ratios for children aged 7 to 15 were over 90% in 2002 but only 58% for children with disabilities (GMR2010)

Having a parent with a disability can also affect a child's chances of going to school

- Children whose parents have disabilities often face tensions between schooling and care demands at home. Having a poor parent with a disability increases the likelihood of 7- to 16-year-olds never having been to school by twenty-five percentage points in the Philippines and thirteen points in Uganda – a reminder of how poverty, disability and education interact. (GMR 2010)

Those with disabilities are more likely to be illiterate

- In Uganda in 2011, around 60% of young people with no identified impairment were literate, compared with 47% of those with physical or hearing impairments and 38% of those with mental impairments.
- In the United States, an assessment found that those without basic literacy skills were more than twice as likely as an average adult to have multiple disabilities. (GMR 2012)
- In the United Republic of Tanzania, a survey found that the literacy rate for people with a disability was 52%, compared with 75% for people without a disability (GMR 2013/4)
- **Poverty is both a potential cause and a consequence of disability** In several countries, the probability of being in poverty rises in households headed by people with disabilities. In Uganda, evidence from the 1990s found that the probability was as much as 60% higher. (GMR 2010)
- Girls and women already facing gender barriers to education are also most likely to be affected by poverty. These disadvantages will be further compounded by disability when it comes to access to education. Better data and analysis is needed in order to address this inequality.

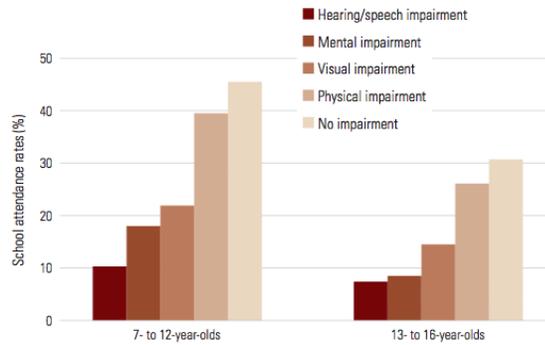
- Those with disabilities are much less likely to be working. Other family members may also be out of work (or school) to care for them. Inadequate treatment, along with poor families' inability to invest sufficiently in health and nutrition, reinforces the problems people with disabilities face. (GMR 2010)
- Very few young people in Kenya living with disabilities study beyond primary level. They face constraints in employment because of their low level of education, little or no adaptation of their workplaces, and limited expectations among families and employers. (GMR 2012)
- In Malawi and Swaziland, less than half of those aged 15 to 29 with disabilities had ever been to school, and employment rates among 15- to 29-year-olds were under 3% in Swaziland and 28% in Malawi. (GMR 2012)
- Kenya's 2008 National Survey on Persons with Disabilities found that 3.6% of youth aged 15 to 24 had disabilities. In the week preceding the survey, only 8% had worked for pay, and 14% had worked on the family business. Over 50% had not worked. (GMR 2012)
- A pilot survey conducted in 2009 in five urban areas of Sierra Leone found that 69% of people living with disabilities had no income at all, and 28% were living in households with no income. Youth aged 15 to 25 with disabilities were 8.5 times less likely to work than those without disabilities (GMR 2012)

Different disabilities create very different education-related challenges

- Impairments that affect the capacity to communicate and interact in ways common in mainstream schools can impose particularly high practical and social obstacles to participation in education. A closer look at national data often reveals markedly different consequences for various impairments:
 - In Uganda, dropout rates are lower among children with visual and physical impairments than among those with mental impairments (GMR 2010)
 - In Burkina Faso, children reported as deaf or mute, living with a mental impairment or blind were far less likely to be enrolled in school than those with a physical impairment. In 2006, just 10% of deaf or mute 7- to 12-year-olds were in school. (GMR 2010)

Burkina Faso's children with disabilities face deep but varied levels of disadvantage

% of children aged 7 to 12 and 13 to 16 attending school, by nature of impairment, Burkina Faso, 2006

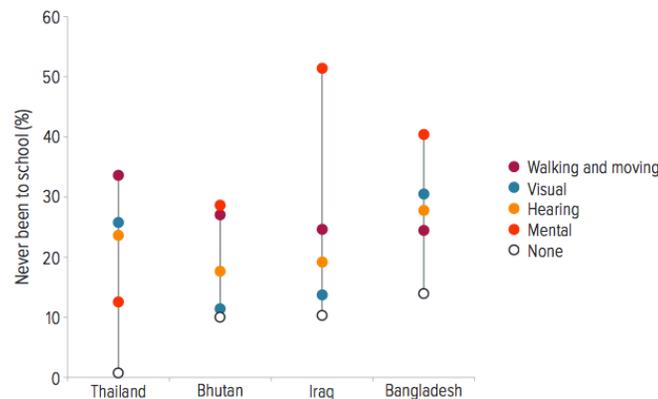


Source: Kobiané and Bougma (2009), based on data from the 2006 Burkina Faso census: Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat.

- Since 2005, Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys have used a tool with questions screening children aged 2 to 9 for the risk of various types of impairment.
 - In Iraq, 10% of 6- to 9-year-olds with no risk of disability had never been to school in 2006, but 19% of those at risk of having a hearing impairment and 51% of those who were at higher risk of mental disability had never been to school. (GMR 2013/4)
 - In Thailand, almost all 6- to 9-year-olds who had no disability had been to school in 2005/06, and yet 34% of those with walking or moving impairments had never been to school. (GMR 2013/4)

Children at risk of disability face major barriers in gaining access to school

Percentage of children aged 6 to 9 who have never been to school, by type of impairment, selected countries, 2005–2007



Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report team calculations (2013), based on Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys.

Reaching children with disabilities will require increased financing.

- Additional resources are needed to provide teachers with specialized training and children with specially designed learning materials to realize their potential. Families may also require additional financial support. One study in Bangladesh found that the parents of children with disabilities faced costs for aids, appliances and health care that were three times the average household budget for raising children (GMR 2010)

Education policies can counteract marginalization caused by disabilities:

1. Inclusive curriculum can help break down barriers faced by children with disabilities in the classroom.

- Integrating children with disabilities into the standard education system can break down the segregation that reinforces stereotypes. Moreover, special schools are often chronically underfunded and lack either skilled teaching staff or the equipment needed to deliver a good education. But integration is not a panacea. Children with severe disabilities may require highly specialized support. (GMR 2010)
- Research in Eastern Cape, one of South Africa's poorest provinces, found that inclusive education produced significant gains, ranging from improved physical access to support for specialized teaching practices and increased admission of learners with disabilities. (GMR 2010)
- In 2003, a Bangladeshi non-government organization, BRAC, established a pre-school and primary education programme aimed at increasing participation by children with mild special needs. Training teachers, providing equipment, adapting the curriculum and improving physical access, it had reached about 25,000 children by 2006. (GMR 2010)
- In Ethiopia, with the support of the non-government organization Handicap International, a school for deaf students operates as both a special school and a resource centre, supporting education for deaf learners in other schools and the development of sign language. (GMR 2010)
- In Canberra, Australia, curriculum reform aims to help teachers improve student attitudes regarding students with disabilities, improve the quality of interactions between students with and without disabilities, and enhance the well-being and academic achievement of students with disabilities. (GMR 2013/4)

2. Teachers need support to reach children with special needs:

- Some non-government organizations and governments, including those of Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, have supported 'itinerant teaching' approaches, which enable specialized teachers, experienced in teaching children with disabilities, to reach a larger group of pupils in satellite schools, and support and train teachers. (GMR 2010)

- Teachers need training in inclusive education to help break down barriers caused by disabilities. The Lao People’s Democratic Republic has a network of 539 schools that teach children with disabilities alongside their peers and provide specialized support. The schools give children with special needs opportunities to learn in an inclusive environment, partly through investment in specialized teacher training. (GMR 2010)
- 3. Hiring more teachers with disabilities can reduce marginalisation of children in the classroom**
 - Teaching often fails to recruit enough people with disabilities. Mozambique has been running teacher education programmes for visually impaired primary school teachers for more than ten years. Communities have become familiar with their children being taught by visually impaired teachers, resulting in a positive change of attitude and helping create a more welcoming environment for teachers and students with disabilities. (GMR 2013/4)
 - 4. Schools should be physically accessible for children with disabilities**
 - Many schools, particularly in remote rural areas or in slums, are physically inaccessible to some children with disabilities. In 2005, just 18% of India’s schools were accessible to children with disabilities in terms of facilities such as ramps, appropriately designed classrooms and toilets, and transport. (GMR 2010)
 - 5. Better monitoring of disabilities is necessary to assess the best way to address them**
 - A 2008 survey in the United Republic of Tanzania provided a detailed profile of impairments across the country. It found marked regional disparities and a higher incidence of disability in rural areas. (GMR2010)

Links:

[EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010: Reaching the marginalised](#)

[EFA Global Monitoring Report 2012: Youth and Skills: Putting education to work](#)

[EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/4: Teaching and Learning: achieving quality for all](#)

Figures (JPEG): [Children at risk of disabilities face major barriers in gaining access to school, EFA GMR 2013/4](#)