Inclusive Education in ASEAN:

Fostering Belonging for Students with Disabilities

By

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Executive Summary

In a world of diverse learners from diverse economic backgrounds, education systems hold a unique position. They not only provide students with the skills and training to enter the workforce but also offer students from various socioeconomic backgrounds an opportunity to come together and learn from one another. Education policies should, therefore, focus on best practices in the classroom in inclusive learning systems and create a learning environment where all students, including those with physical and intellectual disabilities, have the tools to flourish.

Before the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, students with disabilities faced barriers in accessing quality education, and many were excluded from education programmes altogether. During the pandemic, enrolment of students with disabilities fell. Of the nearly 240 million students with disabilities worldwide, 40% are more likely to have never attended school, 47% were more likely to be out of primary school, 33% out of lower-secondary school, and 27% out of upper-secondary school (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2022). The numbers are staggering and must be tackled if countries are to make an equitable and inclusive post–COVID-19 recovery.

'Disability' may be physical and/or intellectual, but children with intellectual disabilities are the most excluded. Early intervention and education programmes have shown positive learning outcomes for students with disabilities and developmental delays and yield higher returns on funding than later years of education and training. However, in much of Asia and the Pacific, children with disabilities continue to have limited or no access to early services (UNICEF, 1995).

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members and East Asian countries face a dual challenge: (i) many countries in the region are developing and their economic growth might be unable to support increased funding for education, and (ii) many countries continue to struggle to provide equitable opportunities to all students returning from school closures. However, the region must ensure that students with disabilities, who already face several barriers to accessing quality education, are not left behind.

Taking its foundations from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), ASEAN Community Vision 2025, and the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF), this report presents current practices of inclusive education in Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam from ASEAN, and in China and Mongolia.

The seven domains of inclusive education as described in UNICEF's (2020) *Education for Every Ability* anchor the country profiles. The domains are (i) a whole-system approach; (ii) curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment; (iii) supported teachers; (iv) a learning-friendly environment; (v) effective transitions; (vi) partnerships; and (vii) data and monitoring

(UNICEF, 2020). The country profiles cover information across several domains, but information on all domains and all countries remains limited.

Nevertheless, all 10 ASEAN countries and the 2 East Asian countries aspire to create inclusive education systems for students with disabilities. The countries have committed to international and regional documents and national and sub-national frameworks, laws, and policies that promote inclusion and the moral duty to uphold all rights of persons with disabilities. Progress on meeting the commitments can be slow, but it is being made across the region.

The report shares current practices in inclusive national and local education in schools. Whilst many countries are making a great effort to include students with disabilities, they also have many gaps and lack understanding of inclusion. The report provides cross-cutting recommendations that can be implemented before and after school reopening, and a framework for action specifically for schools, ministries, and ASEAN Member States (AMSs) to implement the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Last, whilst inclusion in education is vital in providing students with disabilities with the skills needed to fully integrate into society, inclusion is a cross-cutting theme, which implies the need for collaboration and coordination between education, health, and transport, amongst others. Students with disabilities not only can help the economy grow across ASEAN but also contribute to the diversity of work locations in the public and private sectors, and foster morale, creativity, and greater social cohesion.

Introduction

Everyone should have equal access to housing, healthcare, and social services, and be able to participate fully in public life – to enjoy self-respect and dignity (Sen, 1992). Denial of such rights precedes social exclusion (Evans et al., 2002), widening the gap between groups of people based on variables they did not necessarily choose. Development is inclusive when everyone is healthy, develops their potential, and has meaningful lives (Nussbaum, 2011). Robust health and education systems can strengthen human capital and equalise political capital that would otherwise be determined by inequalities within households.

Teaching methodologies, curriculums, education outcomes, and cultural influences, amongst others, however, vary, and can widen the differences between students with diverse backgrounds. Not all education systems are equal, not all students are the same type of learner, and education systems do not operate in silos as human development is multidimensional. Regardless of where a student attends school, which education policy the school follows, or how its culture impacts learning, every student has the right to receive a good education (UN, 1989) and a chance to contribute to society and develop his or her full social, political, and economic potential.

International efforts to use reliable data to inform policy specific to persons with disabilities were, therefore, distilled by the United Nations in 2008 in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Articles 24 and 31 call for the elimination of educational exclusion based on disability, and for reasonable accommodations and disability-specific data and reporting. Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights anchors inclusion in the fundamental human right to education (UN, 1948). The UNCRPD defines disabilities as 'long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder [a person's] full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others' (UN Enable, 2009). The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) describes disability as an interaction between a person's abilities and the environment, such as the national setting and cultural constructions of disability (World Health Organization, 2001), which impact the level of inclusion or exclusion in daily life.

The conventions and the ICF provide the foundation for policy action to include students with disabilities in schools. Inclusive education is intrinsically linked to the political security, economic, and socio-cultural domains. Contrary to the myth that it is more expensive than mainstream education, inclusive education is economically effective and efficient as it uses resources from the system to educate all students instead of taking them from other areas. Not only can no country afford a dual system of education such that there is a mainstream and segregated system, but a dual system is not compatible with Article 24 of the UNCRPD (UNCRPD, 2007). Whilst specialised assessment and specialist intervention may be necessary to assist inclusive education practices in the classroom, the long-term costs of poverty and poor health if students with disabilities are not educated could be much more severe.

Environmental and systemic factors that limit participation in society can lead to health and economic impoverishment. Such is often the case for persons with disabilities, who are disproportionally poorer than those without disability (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UNESCAP], 2018). Being poor and having a disability are linked as one increases the chance of the other (Sen, 2009). Children who have few resources are more cognitively and socio-emotionally impaired than children who have more resources (Dercon and Krishnan, 2009). Persons with disabilities are more excluded than those without disabilities from the labour market. The reasons might be the lack of accommodations and poor understanding in the job market, and unequal preparation and insufficient training of persons with disabilities.

People must be lifted out of poverty to achieve inclusive growth and sustainable development (UN, 1995). Equipping schools to be more inclusive benefits everyone, including students who do not have a disability. A common myth is that a student with a disability slows down learning in the classroom. However, exposure to neurodiverse learners provides all students with opportunities to strengthen their communication skills, develop empathy and compassion, and see different perspectives.

Students with disabilities and management of diversity in the classroom present a big challenge but can also improve social cohesion amongst all learners.

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Education

Estimates of the number of students with disabilities in ASEAN and East Asia are conservative, as families might experience stigma that prevents them from sharing information about their child's disability, and/or the disability can go undiagnosed if diagnostic services are not readily available or feasible. International reports suggest that about 43.1 million children with disabilities live in East Asia and the Pacific (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2021). They are 0–18 years old and have many forms of disability, physical and/or intellectual. Many children with disabilities do not attend school. In some countries, only 1%–2% of students with disabilities attended school in person before the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic (UNICEF EAPRO, 2003).

School closures because of the COVID-19 pandemic have affected 140 million students in Southeast Asia and 260 million students in East Asia (UNICEF, 2021). The longer students stay out of school, the less likely they are to return. Once schools fully reopen, UNESCO estimates that at least 2.7 million children will not return to school, in addition to the 35 million students in East Asia and the Pacific who have dropped out (Hulshof and Tapiola, no date). Dropping out and not returning to school can increase the risk of abuse and exploitation, including early entrance into the informal labour market and increased risk of child marriage and teen pregnancy.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many challenges to many education stakeholders, including students, administrators, and policymakers. Students are being asked to learn independently, which presumes they have the skills for independent learning. However,

many students need feedback from teachers, particularly students with intellectual disabilities. Students who use materials such as learning aids or equipment may not have these resources at home or support to troubleshoot them when they do not work.

The pandemic also brings opportunities as schools re-open. Long-term changes can be implemented at schools, in national policies, and across the region to foster inclusivity. Leadership is critical to enacting these changes, and the report calls on leaders to consider the short- and long-term implications of ensuring that all students, including those with disabilities, have the means to return to school and receive quality education.

Chapter 1

International Commitments and Frameworks

The following frameworks anchor and guide national policymakers in promoting sustainable and long-term development. The frameworks reveal a commitment to dialogue, strategic planning and goal setting, and accountability.

Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals

As part of Agenda 2030, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent areas of interrelated development that, combined, can lead to social, economic, and environmental accord. Five goals refer to persons with disabilities revealing cross-sectoral mechanisms of inclusive societies:

1. SDG 4: Quality Education
2. SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
3. SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities
4. SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
5. SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

SDG 4 is the clearest link to inclusive education: 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (UN General Assembly, 2015). To achieve SDG 4, UN member states must ensure that persons with disabilities must have access not only to educational facilities but also to public spaces, public transport, and information and communication technology (UNESCAP, 2018). Disaggregation of data by disability will help track progress in achieving the SDGs.

Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030

The Sendai Framework was adopted at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan, in March 2015. It outlines seven targets and four priorities for action to prevent new and limit existing disaster risks such as loss of life, health, and assets. The four priorities are (i) understand disaster risk, (ii) strengthen disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk, (iii) invest in disaster reduction for resilience, and (iv) enhance disaster preparedness for effective response. The Sendai Framework incorporates disability-related terms such as accessibility, inclusion. The use of the framework's language and recommendations to ensure a disability-accessible and inclusive environment is a significant step towards global understanding of inclusion (UNDRR, 2015).

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The UNCRPD describes the rights of persons with disabilities and establishes a code of implementation. The following articles are relevant to the report.

Figure 1.1: Three United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Articles Referring to Inclusive Education
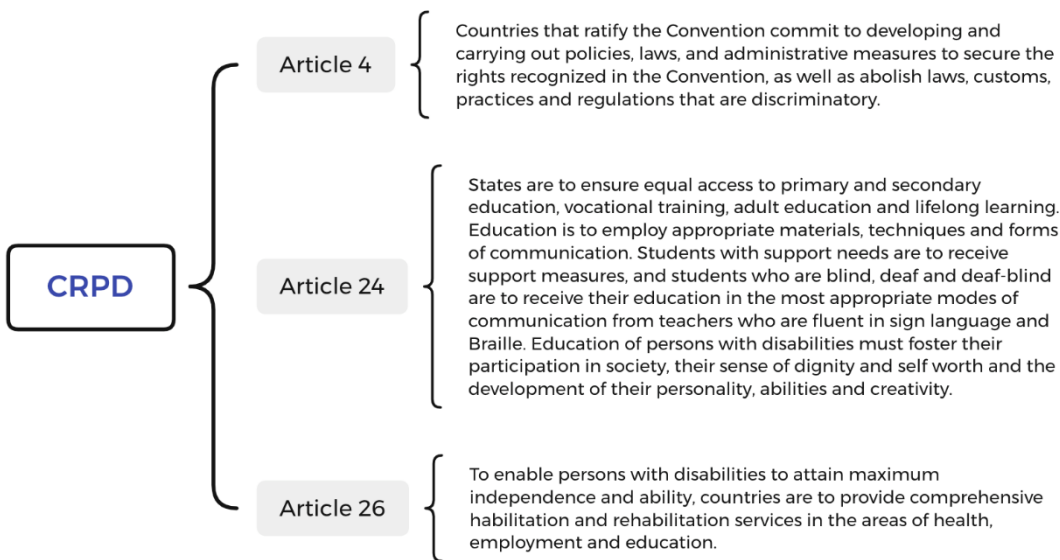
Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2006).

All 10 ASEAN countries have ratified the UNCRPD, as well as several countries in East Asia. The following table presents the year of ratification to this international human rights instrument.

Table 1.1. Countries in ASEAN and East Asia that Have Ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Ratification of Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities			
Region		**Country**	**Date Ratified**
ASEAN	1.	Brunei Darussalam	11 April 2016
	2.	Cambodia	20 December 2012
	3.	Indonesia	30 November 2011
	4.	Lao People's Democratic Republic	25 September 2009
	5.	Malaysia	19 July 2010
	6.	Myanmar	7 December 2011
	7.	Philippines	15 April 2008
	8.	Singapore	18 July 2013
	9.	Thailand	29 July 2008
	10.	Viet Nam	5 February 2015
Ratification of Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities			
Region		**Country**	**Year Ratified**
East Asia	1.	China	1 August 2008
	2.	Hong Kong	1 August 2008
	3.	Macau	1 August 2008
	4.	Japan	20 January 2014
	5.	Mongolia	13 May 2009
	6.	North Korea	6 December 2006
	7.	South Korea	11 December 2008
	8.	Taiwan[b]	2016[b]

[a] OHCHR, 2022.

[b] Government of Taiwan, Social and Family Affairs Administration, Ministry of Health and Welfare.

Source: United Nations Human Rights Treaty Bodies (2022).

Chapter 2

Commitments and Frameworks in ASEAN and East Asia

ASEAN Community Vision 2025

ASEAN Community Vision 2025 was launched at the 27th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to help build an integrated, peaceful, and stable community of shared prosperity. It builds upon previous commitments such as the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, ASEAN Vision 2020, the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II, the ASEAN Charter, the Roadmap for an ASEAN Community (2009–2015), and the Bali Declaration on ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations (ASEAN Forging Ahead Together, 2015).

ASEAN Community Vision 2025 has three pillars (Figure 2.1). Disability inclusion measures intersect all of them. An integrated approach of the three pillars will ensure coordinated efforts occur between sectors, organs, and bodies.

All three pillars are interdependent and should incorporate disability inclusion.

Figure 2.1. Three Pillars of ASEAN Community

Three Pillars of ASEAN Community

Political-Security	Economic	Socio-cultural
ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) by 2025 aims to be a united, inclusive and resilient community, with regional peace and a fair, democratic, and cooperative environment.	ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) envisions by 2025 that the region to be a single market and product base, one that is competitive, cohesive, innovative, dynamic, equitable, inclusive, people-oriented and people-centred, and fully integrated into the global economy.	ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community by 2025 shall be one that engages and benefits the peoples, and brings out their full potential. It shall be inclusive, sustainable, resilient, and dynamic.

Source: ASEAN Community.

ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

This masterplan was developed at the 33rd ASEAN Summit to address the needs of persons with disabilities across the three pillars of ASEAN Community Vision 2025. The masterplan's purpose is to mainstream the rights of people with disability across the three pillars by providing a framework for integration of persons with disabilities across sectors, and by providing 25 action points to foster AMSs' commitment to an inclusive and resilient community. The masterplan is guided by three principles:

1. **Relevance.** Disability rights cross community pillars, the vision, and work plan to realise an inclusive community; specialised approaches should be considered only as a last resort.
2. **Complementarity**. The masterplan complements existing commitments of ASEAN leaders and AMSs to create an inclusive environment for persons with disabilities.
3. **Interrelatedness**. Human rights are interdependent and interconnected, requiring coordination between and participation of persons with disabilities across sector bodies.

As ASEAN is working towards the SDGs, the masterplan is a key instrument in guiding policy and programming for persons with disabilities.

The overall goal of the masterplan is to enhance the regional implementation of the UNCRPD by building an inclusive community where freedom of choice, independence, and full and effective participation of persons with disabilities can be realised and sustained. Attaining this goal can help achieve a high quality of life for persons with disabilities, their families, and caregivers, amongst others.

The masterplan is guided by the principles of the UNCRPD:

1. Respect for human dignity, autonomy to make choices
2. Non-discrimination
3. Full and effective participation of everyone in society
4. Acceptance and respect of people with disabilities as part of society
5. Equitable opportunities
6. Accessibility
7. Equality between men and women
8. Respect for capacities of children with disabilities and for their identities

The plan shows ASEAN's conviction and commitment to create inclusive communities. Several programmes have been initiated, including in schools. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many programmes were put on pause. As the pandemic ends, all communities must have the chance to engage economically, politically, and socially to recover together and equitably.

ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the recovery framework was developed at the 36th ASEAN Summit in June 2020. It serves as the main reference document for strategic direction, partnerships, areas of focus, and coordination of support for recovery for internal and external ASEAN stakeholders. Its members consider the framework to be a collective and long-term socioeconomic recovery strategy guided by key principles, a targeted approach, and a results-based plan. Figure 2.2 shares a summary of the objectives, key principles, and the approach of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ASEAN, 2020).

The guiding principles of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF) are:

1. **Focused**, by prioritising broad strategies and key priorities that are most relevant to support ASEAN's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. **Balanced** between saving lives and livelihoods. Economic recovery should not come at the expense of public health, equity, security, and long-term sustainability.
3. **Impactful** strategies and priorities that will go beyond high-level statements and that deliver sustainable results and meet stakeholders' expectations.
4. **Pragmatic,** by aligning with existing plans and leveraging existing ASEAN mechanisms, initiatives, cooperation programmes, and partners.
5. **Inclusive** in both the design and implementation of actions to decrease inequality, paying special attention to vulnerable groups and sectors, which are the worst affected by the pandemic. All segments of society should benefit, so no one is left behind in ASEAN recovery efforts.
6. **Measurable** implementation of ACRF should be ensured, and progress monitored and periodically assessed.

Figure 2.2. Summary of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework
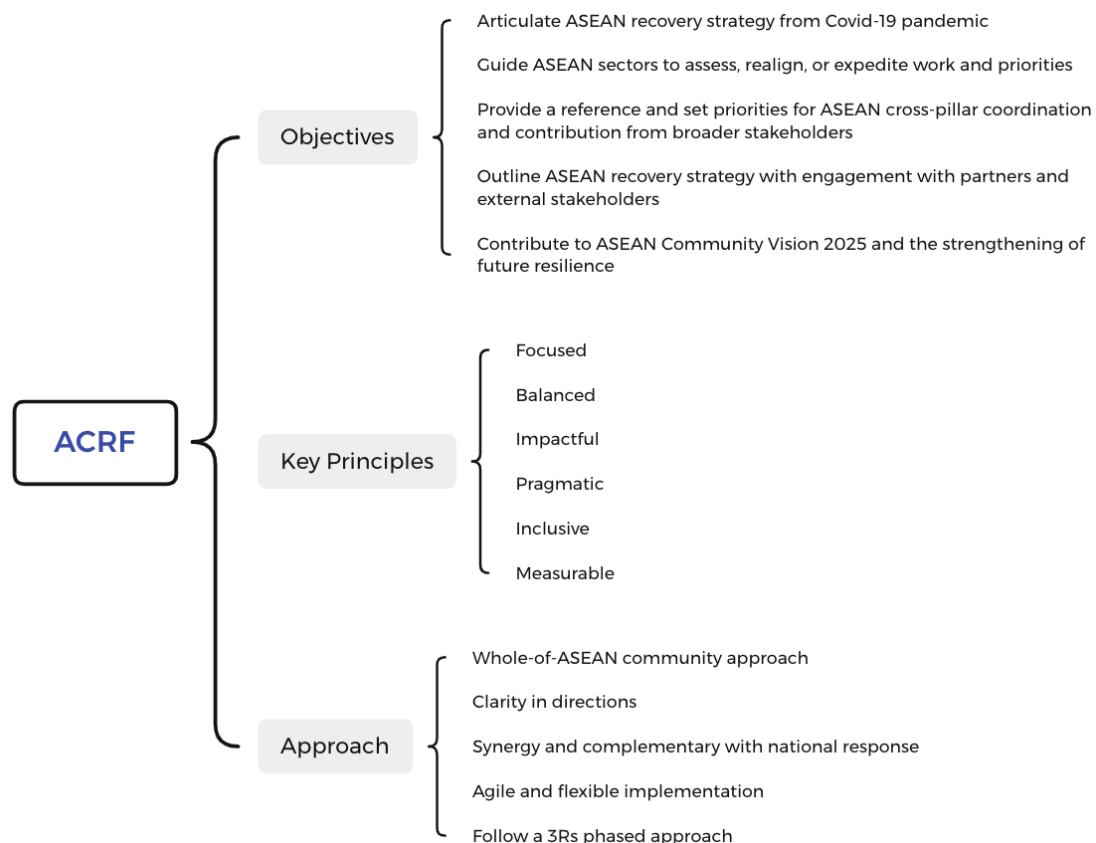
Source: ASEAN (2020).

ACRF takes a whole-of-ASEAN-community approach to outline the stages of recovery by offering targeted responses within sectors. ACRF ensures that recovery measures are aligned with sector and regional priorities and is a reference document for inter-sectoral communication and coordination across pillars and stakeholders.

ACRF pays special attention to vulnerable groups most affected by the pandemic to build an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient recovery in line with ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and beyond.

ACRF has five broad strategies: health, human security, intra-ASEAN market and broader economic integration, digital transformation, and a sustainable and resilient future as seen in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3. Broad Strategies of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework
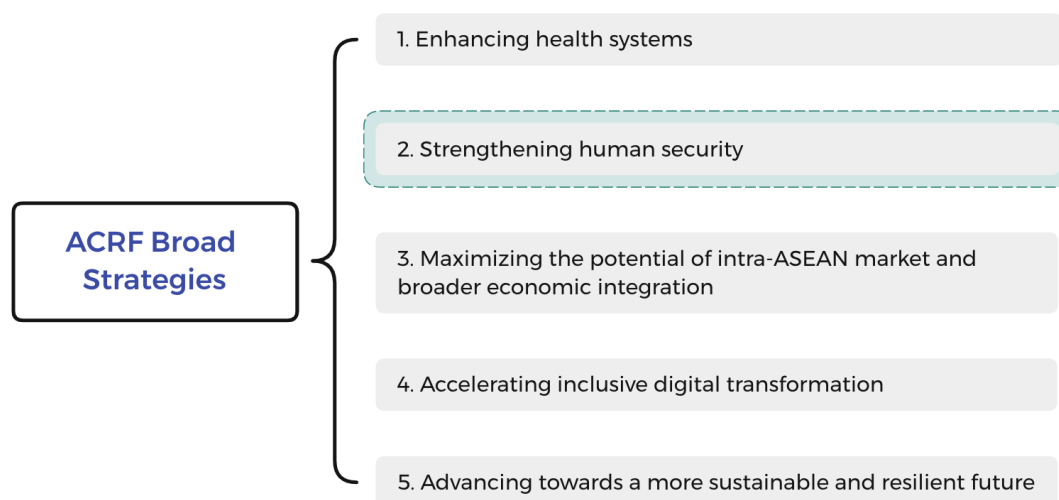
Source: ASEAN (2020).

ACRF Broad Strategy 2, strengthening human security, advocates inclusive education. Human security refers to people's safety from chronic threats and protection from hurtful disruptions in daily life, as defined by the UN Human Development Report (1994). The strategy places the welfare of people and their protection and empowerment at the core of ACRF in all communities during recovery and beyond.

The negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were unevenly experienced by the vulnerable, such as the poor, workers highly exposed to the public, informal workers, migrant workers, the elderly, women, children, and those with disabilities. Effects on livelihoods, education, and food security, amongst others might exacerbate poverty and increase the divide between the poor and the rich. If vulnerable groups' needs are not met, sustainable, economic, social, and environmental development might be further delayed. Therefore, social protection and welfare must be strengthened for everyone, particularly the vulnerable.

The implementation of the ACRF plan is key for all sectors and for the achievement of Broad Strategy 2 (ASEAN, 2020). The implementation report outlines the importance of specific initiatives and programmes that involve disability-inclusive resilience plans. The plans include risk assessments, emergency response plans, recovery and rehabilitation plans, specific

allocation of resources, and collaboration with persons with disabilities, children, women, youth, and the elderly.

Incheon Strategy to 'Make the Right Real' for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, 2013–2022

AMS, representatives of organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), and other civil society organisations in Asia and the Pacific agreed upon this historically important document in 2012, making it the world's first set of regionally agreed disability-inclusive development goals (UNESCAP, 2018). The strategy outlines 10 interrelated goals, with 27 targets and 62 indicators to measure changes across the targets. The strategy offers a time-bound and data-driven framework to implement the rights of the 650 million persons with disabilities in the Asia and Pacific region. (UNESCAP, 2018). Figure 2.4 shows all ten goals, and highlights Goal 5.

Figure 2.4. Goals of the Incheon Strategy

Source: UNESCAP (2018).

Goal 5 of the Incheon Strategy is inclusive education (UN, 1995). See Appendix A for a list of core and supplementary indicators for Goal 5 as well as Goal 5 targets.

The **Beijing Declaration and Action Plan** seeks to accelerate the implementation of the Incheon Strategy and was adopted by member states of the UN Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP, 2018) at the high-level intergovernmental meeting during the midpoint review of the Asian and the Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022 in December 2017, Beijing, China.

The Beijing Declaration and Action Plan provides governments, civil society stakeholders, and UNESCAP with policy actions for each of the 10 Incheon Strategy goals. Guided by the UNCRPD, the Beijing Declaration and Action Plan and the Incheon Strategy work together to achieve the Decade of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 1995). The relationship between these strategies, action plan and the UNCRPD is described in Figure 2.5.

Figure 2.5. Sustainable Development Goals, Beijing Declaration and Action Plan, Incheon Strategy, and United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Source: United Nations (1995).

Chapter 3

Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities

Inclusive education for all students, including those with disabilities, is high-quality education that not only teaches students valuable skills but also fosters a sense of belonging. Inclusive education is necessary at preschool, primary, secondary, and post-secondary school; technical and vocational training; lifelong learning; and extracurricular and social activities.

Students with disabilities who are included in school are healthier, can apply their skills to other settings, look forward to going to school, and are more likely to be civically engaged and employed later in life.

A root cause of exclusion in education is **discrimination**. It may be based on poor legislation, cultural stigma, or lack of training in the education system on the methods and value of inclusion. Therefore, inclusive education requires transformation of not just policy but also culture.

Inclusive education is not just for students with disabilities, as 'inclusive education is central to achieving high-quality education for all learners, including those with disabilities, and for the development of inclusive, peaceful and fair societies' (UNCPRD Committee, 2006). Figure 3.1 outlines the important differences between exclusion, segregation, integration, and inclusion.

Figure 3.1. Different Situations Students with Disabilities May Face in Education
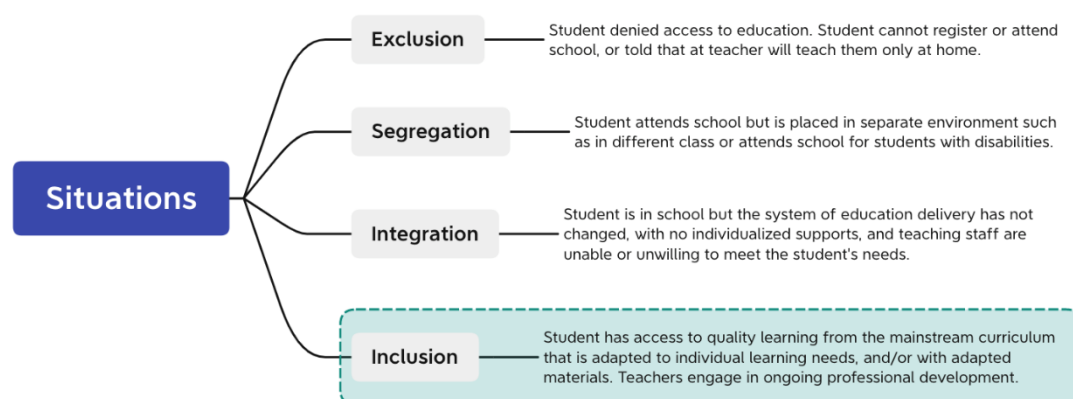
Source: Author's summary, from Catalyst for Inclusive Education, from Inclusion International, no date.

Placing students with disabilities in the classroom without support, providing separate classrooms for them, teaching them only at home, or denying them entry to the school system is not inclusion. An inclusive education system is a **long-term, national, or regional commitment** to uphold the rights of students with disabilities so they do not face

discrimination. Figure 3.2 shows the four interrelated features of inclusive education systems (UNCRPD, 2007) that can offer tangible changes in the classroom such as modifications in content and teaching methods.

Figure 3.2. Four A's of Inclusive Education

Inclusive Education System

| Availability | Accessibility | Acceptability | Adaptability |
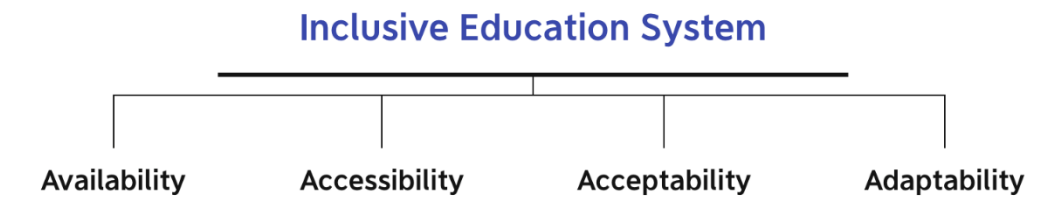
Source: Author's summary, from UNCRPD, Article 13 (2007).

Domains of Inclusive Education

Students with disabilities can be included in education through several entry points. Figure 3.3 shows interrelated domains that form a system of inclusive education. A comprehensive review of the domains and the metrics to measure a country's position and set goals for growth can be found in UNICEF's (2020) *Education for Every Ability*.

Figure 3.3. Domains of Inclusive Education in Practice

Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities

1. Whole System Approach
2. Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Assessment
3. Supported Teachers
4. Learning Friendly Environment
5. Effective Transitions
6. Partnerships
7. Data and Monitoring
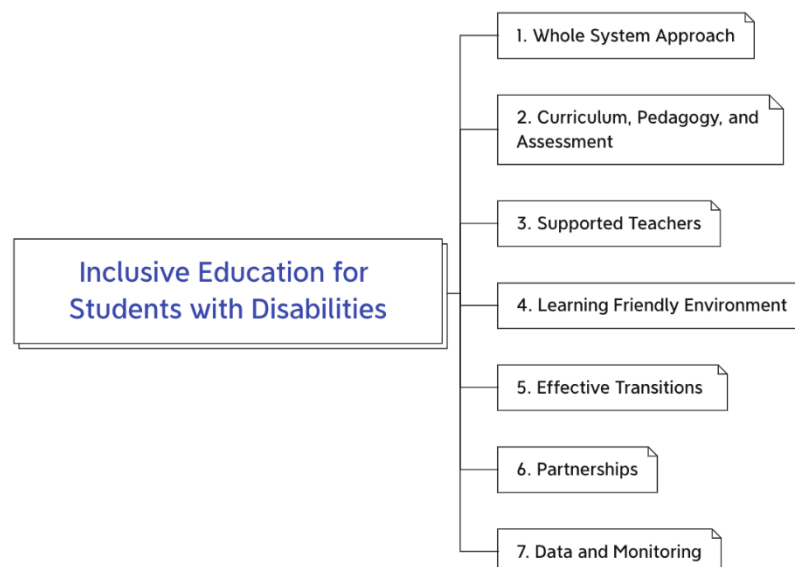
Source: UNICEF (2020).

Equitable education involves varying degrees of factors that allow students from different learning and cognitive backgrounds to learn together. Equitable does not mean equal or the same learning methods. Therefore, some level of individualisation of teaching may be

needed to teach all students effectively. Support can be used rarely, sometimes, or always for long-term intervention.

1.   Whole-Systems Approach

Article 4 of the UNCRPD calls on states to adopt a whole-systems approach to inclusive education, which refers to the responsibility and ownership of their role across stakeholders (UNICEF, 2020). The approach uses laws and policies that explicitly state that children with disabilities should receive quality education. The approach also involves inclusive leadership and culture at all levels of the education system, and a national plan that guides the implementation of goals and strategies to fully include students with disabilities. Resources should be properly allocated, and stakeholders can work together to shift attitudes, policies, and practices by tackling negative attitudes towards disability through institutional capacity-building and awareness programmes.

2.   Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Assessment

Good progress has been made in the physical environment and in information communication and technology (ICT) such as closed captioning on television shows or accessibility of public documents. Less effort, however, has gone into making education curriculums accessible to all (UNESCAP, 2018). Flexible curriculums, teaching methods adapted to the learner's style and needs, and increased use of formative assessment based on competencies rather than benchmark achievement can open the curriculum to students with disabilities with a fundamental paradigm shift: curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment should focus on a student's capacity and aspirations and not just on content. Assistive and adaptive technology along with reasonable accommodation can help students with disabilities gain access to curricular competencies (UNICEF, 2020).

UDL is a system of pedagogy and assessment, the curricular expectations of which apply to all students in the classroom, from the highest achieving to the one who needs the most support. UDL has been successfully modelled in various countries. It captures the **why** in learning through **engagement**, the **what** of learning through **representation**, and the **how** of learning through **action and expression** (CAST, 2018).

3.   Supported Teachers

Teachers are at the heart of learning in classrooms and crucial in implementing inclusive education. Their competency, motivation, and attitudes towards students with disabilities make a significant difference in learning outcomes and sense of belonging in schools. Whilst they can make a positive difference in the lives of students with disabilities, teacher training programmes do not always provide adequate knowledge about disabilities and ongoing professional development opportunities to use evidence-based methods in the classroom, even though the UNCRPD requires governments to train pre-service and in-service teachers and other support staff in inclusive values and competencies. Such training can help make teachers agents of change, as government policies can be vague at times.

4. Learning-friendly Environment

A safe and supportive learning environment can have positive effects on learning outcomes: the brain can receive and process information more productively than when it is in a state of extended stress. The government's role in ensuring a friendly environment is understated. The UNCRPD mandates governments to create environments that foster inclusive learning for students with disabilities. A school culture of inclusion can help open conversations, interactions, and collaborative problem solving (UNICEF, 2020).

5. Effective Transitions

Lifelong learning is fostered through effective transitions between school environments, from preschool to primary to secondary, and from secondary to vocational and tertiary education, and eventually to the job market. In creating a plan for inclusion, educators must consider student's views, goals, and interests; their protection and safety; and their right to education and health.

6. Partnerships

Education in school systems provides foundational skills to connect with other parts of society such as recreation centres, community libraries, and local transit systems, amongst others. Wherever a student with a disability is placed, in or out of school, is a learning environment. A multi-sectoral and multi-ministerial commitment and a system that holds governments accountable can ensure that legislation and policies are inclusive. Partnerships between governments and civil society organisations can encourage OPDs that can advocate making communities more inclusive. Partnerships can refer to home support through parent involvement in a student's learning plan and implementation.

7. Data and Monitoring

Reliable data on the number, type, and severity of students' disabilities can help governments, schools, and teachers prepare for successful inclusion. A medical model of collecting data may be helpful when congenital or developmental delays are detected. However, a holistic method of collecting data on disability type, limitations, and, importantly, strengths can help guide stakeholders positively and constructively in making curriculums, pedagogy, and assessments more inclusive, whilst shifting the view of students with disabilities from 'other' to 'belonging'. Monitoring and evaluation should be done regularly to ensure accountability of programming and government commitments.

One of the key components of data and monitoring includes asking the right question to gather data that captures metrics for reporting. Box 1 highlights the development of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, which aims to address this issue.

Box 1: Washington Group on Disability Statistics

The **Washington Group on Disability Statistics** is a City Group sponsored by the United Nations and, in 2001, commissioned to improve the quality of data on disability and its international comparability. The Washington Group promoted and coordinated international cooperation in health statistics, with a focus on disability measures appropriate for census and national surveys.

In 2016, the questions in the Washington Group/UNICEF Child Functioning Module were finalised for use in national household surveys and censuses. It assesses functional difficulties in children aged 2–17 across vision, hearing, communication and comprehension, mobility, emotions, and learning. The functionality of each is assessed by providing questions on a rating scale.

Questions are different for children 2–4 and 5–17 years of age and are in English, French, Spanish, Vietnamese, Russian, Chinese, Arabic, Portuguese standard, Portuguese Brazilian, and Khmer. The questions provide information that can be compared and analysed for factors affecting learning that are not otherwise captured in medical data.

The database can be used to understand reasons for limited participation in an unaccommodating environment and offer insights to improve opportunities for persons with disabilities, even if they have not been officially diagnosed (UNICEF, 2017). A few countries in this report use the Washington Group questions to collect data on persons with disabilities.

Source: (UNICEF, 2017).

Chapter 4

Country Reports

The country profiles summarise legislation, policies, good practices, and gaps in inclusive education for students with disabilities in primary and secondary school and are followed by recommendations for ASEAN and East Asia. H

Brunei Darussalam

In line with 2035 Vision, the Ministry of Education aims to provide holistic education to children to help them achieve their full potential through the SPN-21 or Sistem Pendidikan Negara Abad ke-21. Rooted in the vision of 'quality education, dynamic nation' (Ministry of Education, 2018) the 5-year Strategic Plan (2018–2022) prioritises human resource development.

Strategy 2 of the Strategic Plan provides equal and equitable access to quality education, which includes improving inclusion of disadvantaged and at-risk learners (Ministry of Education, 2018). Students with disabilities who cannot attend school, such as those in rural areas, may receive home-based education under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (UNESCO, no date). Under the Strategic Plan, the Ministry of Education has reaffirmed the importance of collecting data to drive education planning. An integrated and real-time educational data collection system is expected to be developed.

Students with disabilities are first mentioned in the 1994 Special Education Policy or the Inclusive Education Policy. Students with special needs are defined as learners with long-term physical, mental, intellectual, behavioural, sensory, communication, emotional, or communication impairments and would, therefore, benefit from individualised accommodations (Ministry of Education, 2009).

As per the Inclusive Education Policy, students with special needs receive education in mainstream classes with the support of special education needs assistance teachers. After a needs assessment, a student may receive an individual education plan (IEP) to highlight strengths and weaknesses in the student's learning profile and match targets and activities to help the student achieve learning goals as set by a team of professionals. IEPs can be used in primary and secondary school. In secondary school, students with special needs can enter a 5-year pre-vocational programme to develop their work-related skills. Based on the IEP, the academic curriculum and learning strategies can be modified and/or adapted to the students' needs.

Under the Special Education Unit of the Ministry of Education, the Centres of Excellent Services for Children were started in primary and secondary schools. The centres are also known as the Model Inclusive Schools Project and made up of nine primary and secondary schools. However, the model schools are equipped with special rooms and other facilities to

help students with special needs practice life skills (Ministry of Education, 2022). Separate rooms may indicate that students with disabilities are segregated, which does not meet the UNCRPD's definition of inclusion.

Another feature of inclusive education systems is supported teachers trained to include students with disabilities in the classroom. The Brunei Darussalam Teacher Academy provides teacher training and continuous professional development to impart the skills to work with students with disabilities (Ministry of Education, 2014).

Recommendations

1. Review the inclusive education framework to fully include students in mainstream education programming. In partnership with the school staff, including support professionals and school administration, adapt the national curriculum to conduct competency and formative assessments of students to create entry points to the mainstream curriculum.
2. Continue to provide ongoing professional development opportunities for all teachers to equip them with the skills and training to include students with disabilities in classrooms, and to train teachers how to work with special education needs assistance teachers to keep the students in the classroom as much as possible. A student with a disability may need to learn self-regulation techniques outside the classroom, away from stimuli, but a carefully constructed plan to bring them back into the classroom should be developed as a part of IEPs.

Cambodia

The Education Law, Chapter 7, Articles 38 and 39 refer to children with disabilities and their right to learn in mainstream education settings with their peers, with support and additional teaching as needed, or to obtain special education through separate classes (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2007). Separate classes, however, are not aligned with fully inclusive practices in education under the UNCRPD.

In 1997, Cambodia developed an organisation model: the multi-sectoral Disability Action Council. Its aim is to help coordinate and promote private and public services for persons with disabilities and to bring together agencies, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), local communities, and businesses, amongst others, to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities (UNICEF EAPRO, 2003). Since the council's inception, Cambodia's policies have started to include students with disabilities in education programmes, from kindergarten to higher education.

In 2008, Cambodia introduced the Policy on Education for Children with Disabilities to identify children with a disability and provide training to school principals, village healthcare workers, and other support personnel (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2008).

In 2018, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport approved the Policy on Inclusive Education to provide students with disabilities with knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2018). The policy has several key strategies:

1. Develop a legal framework and mechanism for purposeful inclusion.
2. Develop inter-ministerial collaboration for early identification of disabilities.
3. Develop a robust data collection and information system.
4. Provide access to students to inclusive and equitable quality education.
5. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for girls and women with special needs.
6. Develop Universal Design Standards for buildings and sanitation.
7. Build teacher and school management capacity.
8. Raise awareness on the policy.
9. Strengthen all stakeholders' knowledge and action.

The policy suggests strong commitment to inclusive education for children with disabilities. However, UNICEF conducted a rapid analysis of the policy and found that it may still encourage specialised curriculum and conditional inclusion of students with disabilities, which contradict the principles of the UNCRPD. The policy, therefore, has room for improvement (UNICEF, 2020).

Overall enrolment in primary and secondary schools of students with and without disabilities remains low. Cambodia has the largest gap in education of students with and without disabilities in ASEAN: 1 in 14 children without disabilities could not attend primary and lower secondary school, and 1 in 2 children with disabilities was not enrolled in school (UNICEF, 2020).

The type of disability can affect the type of educational programming. Five special schools provide education for learners with visual and hearing impairments. Blind students are integrated progressively: from grade 3 to grade 6, they attend mainstream classes for half the day and special schools for the other half. Deaf students are included in schools starting in grade 5. Whilst there are integrated classes for students who are blind, deaf, and with a learning disability, remote areas do not have special needs schools or inclusive mainstream schools, which might exclude students with disabilities altogether. The nine integrated classes for deaf students are in Svay Rieng, Takeo, Prey Veng, and Preah Sihanuk provinces (UNESCO, 2021).

In 2018, Cambodia issued a guideline mandating schools to track students' profiles, including disabilities, to provide accessible education to all students. Despite these good intentions, however, without institutional structures or standards, implementing the mandate has been challenging. Identification and data collection tools do not align with the ICF, which considers the multidimensional and interactive nature of disability. Progress is being made with an inter-ministerial guideline on disability classification (UNICEF, Open Institute, NGO Education Partnership, and MISEREOR, 2018).

Recently, the government released the National Disability Strategic Plan for 2019–2023, which is a sign of great progress: the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport is including students with disabilities in education and other public services. Learner-centred pedagogy, however, remains largely unaddressed (UNICEF, 2021). Teacher training programmes and ongoing professional development opportunities to collaborate on and support inclusive teaching methods will help implement policies and strategic plans.

Cambodia intends to implement the plan. In 2017, a partnership between Cambodia and UNICEF led to the training of 62 representatives from teacher training colleges, NGOs, and the Ministry of Education's Special Education Department and Teacher Training Department on inclusive education for pre-service and in-service teacher training. UNICEF collaborated with Krousar Thmey to help develop specialised training curriculums to allow deaf and blind students to access education. The specialised curriculum is used by the national institute for special education (Pitt and Bohan-Jacquot, 2017).

Recommendations

1. Address the low enrolment numbers of students with disabilities. Investigate the barriers to access to education and implement strategies and incentives to increase enrolment. Students absent from school might miss valuable learning opportunities in formal education and are at further risk of falling behind in skills development for future employment.
2. Increase teacher training to include modules about disabilities to raise awareness of differences amongst learners. Teachers are valuable in creating an attitude of belonging, which might help increase enrolment.
3. Use ICF-aligned tools to collect data on students in the classroom and bring the information to the national government systematically to inform policy development and education planning.

Indonesia

Research from multiple partners, including UNESCO; the United States Agency for International Development; and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology formed a systematic and comprehensive plan to support inclusive education in the Grand Design for National Development of Inclusive Education 2019–2024. The plan gave rise to the 2019–2024 Master Plan on National Development of Inclusive Education, which uses the whole system of inclusive education, and refers to all stakeholders, including administrators, principals, teachers, students, parents, and community and education supervisors. The master plan emphasises their working together to develop a conducive educational environment for children, including those with disabilities, so they can develop their optimal potential (UNESCO, 2021).

The master plan aims to change the attitudes of parents, teachers, and other school members to be more open to inclusive learning. A positive step towards inclusive education is the increased number of pre-service teacher education trainings that have adopted an improved curriculum supporting diverse learners in the classroom (UNICEF, 2017). Another goal of the master plan is to improve collection of data on students with disabilities to assess stakeholders' ability to support inclusive education practices (UNESCO, 2021).

Article 3 of Regulation No. 70/2009 on Inclusive Education lists students with specific impairments who can benefit from inclusive education, including those who are blind, are deaf, have speech impairments, are mentally disabled or have learning difficulties, are

diagnosed with autism, have motor movement–related disabilities, or are affected by drug abuse or addictions (UNESCO, 2021).

Students with disabilities may either attend special education units or special schools. Indonesia has been shifting the number of students with disabilities from special to mainstream schools from preschool to higher education (UNESCO, 2021). Whilst schools are becoming more inclusive, by 2019, only 1,600 schools or 11% of all schools were providing inclusive education from kindergarten to higher education (UNESCO, 2021).

Madrasahs are Islamic schools and governed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. They have become significantly more inclusive, offering teacher trainings and creative teaching methods to provide learning and sports to students with disabilities (UNICEF, 2020).

Partnerships between organisations have been supportive of students with disabilities. OPDs are involved in policymaking, planning sessions for local development, and consultations on developing village regulations (UNICEF, 2021). A local OPD developed a more flexible and responsive assessment tool for students, which is being piloted. Another local OPD, Helen Keller International, has encouraged UDL by supporting the adaptation of individual learning assessment instruments and learning plans (UNICEF, 2021). To ensure that adaptations are inclusive and not segregated, plans to adapt an assessment instrument should be evaluated against UNCRPD principles of inclusion, particularly before the project is considered ready to scale up.

National and local authorities collect data on persons with disabilities based on Law No. 8/2016 on Persons with Disabilities (UNESCO, 2021). Disability has many definitions, but data collection methods have produced varied results. Indonesia is geographically unique as a collection of island provinces and cities. Data collection is more challenging in remote areas, where only 4% of persons with disabilities have access to medical rehabilitation services (Australia Indonesia Partnership for Economic Governance, 2017). The alignment of data collection with the ICF is mixed.

The data capture methodology is mixed. The Bureau of Statistics has adopted the Washington Group/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning in its National Disability Survey (UNICEF, 2020), which suggests that the data collection system is based on the ICF. However, the criteria for measuring and categorising disability form public schools that the Ministry of Education collects, differ from the ICF. A unified data collection methodology based on a common understanding of disability, a social modal of viewing disability as presented in the ICF, and access to remote areas of all 17,000 islands will help policymakers make decisions based on evidence of needs.

Recommendations

1. Increase the role of local government in delivering inclusive education by encouraging more partnerships with OPDs. This recommendation is aligned with a target from the master plan, which is to increase the role of provinces, districts, and cities in developing inclusive education and increasing the number of cross-sectoral inclusion working groups.

2. Improve data collection methods to reflect the needs of the community more accurately, given Indonesia's geography. Data collection should continue to reflect holistic measures of disability, and a systematic collection and sharing of data with government officials can help create a shared understanding of disability, one based on human rights principles.

Lao People's Democratic Republic

The National Policy on Inclusive Education 2011–2015 has encouraged students with disabilities to enrol in inclusive education schools, but there are still separate schools for complex disabilities (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2011). Under the Ministry of Health, three schools provide education to students with disabilities. They were established in 2016 in Luang Prabang province, Vientiane Capital, and Savannakhet (UNESCO, 2021).

The Education and Sports Sector Development Plan 2016–2020 (ESSDP) sets out strategies for better access to quality education, teacher capacity development, and development of teacher education institutions (Lao PDR, 2015). Lao PDR has started strategic plans to reform mainstream schools' curriculums to be more inclusive. To be effective, however, reforms should be complemented with learner-centred pedagogy in the classroom. To shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred learning, teachers must undergo professional development to encourage an inclusive mindset (UNICEF, 2020). ESSDP outlines a strategy of teacher education curriculums containing inclusive pedagogies (Lao PDR, 2015), to be continued in the forthcoming ESSDP 2021–2025.

The national action plans set priorities and programming for service providers, in addition to guidelines from government organisations. The Education Sector Development Plan has been a reference for NGOs, civil society organisations, and other levels of organisations to continue to advance the government's agenda (Lao PDR, 2015).

Many countries in the region, including Lao PDR, finance segregated education, which implies limited resources for national inclusive education reform (UNICEF, 2020). Partnerships between bilateral organisations and national and non-state actors continue to progress towards inclusive education. Australian AID (AusAID), the Global Partnership for Education, and the World Bank funded the Education for All Fast Track Initiative Programme, which can help implement the Education Sector Development Plan by giving it the ability to mobilise funding (UNESCO, 2021).

For partnerships to continue, awareness and understanding of disability are needed. The National Commission for Persons with Disabilities and the Inclusive Education Centre provide technical assistance such as teacher training materials and development of Lao sign language (Inclusive Education Centre, 2017). The Inclusive Education Centre was established by the Ministry of Education and Sports to reduce barriers to access to education for vulnerable groups such as girls and women, ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and those with socioeconomic difficulties (UNICEF, 2020). Its scholarship programme provides grants for students with disabilities to attend school (Inclusive Education Centre, 2017).

The director of the Inclusive Education Center and a development partner co-chaired the Gender, Inclusion, and Disability Technical Working Group (UNICEF, 2015) not only to advance the right to inclusive education of students with disabilities but also to address gender in strategy and inputs to governments for policymaking (UNICEF, 2020).

Disability identification in and out of school remains an issue, one that is being addressed by ESSDP (Lao PDR, 2018). Disability is detected amongst children up to 18 years of age through the Center for Medical Rehabilitation (UNESCO, 2021). However, the number, frequency, and type of disability are not recorded in the education management information system (UNESCO, 2021). Identifying children with intellectual and development disabilities remains a problem (UNICEF, 2020).

However, templates based on the Washington Group on Disability Statistics Child Functioning Module facilitate data collection and shift the type of data collected from medical to social functioning (Lao PDR, 2018). The Washington Group short set of questions has been used during population and housing census to identify persons with disabilities (UNICEF, 2020). The Ministry of Education and Sports is setting up a data collection system for children with disabilities in early childhood education (UNICEF, 2020), as well as working with AusAID, the World Bank, and UNICEF to collect data on children with disabilities in schools.

Recommendations

1. Continue to increase holistic data collection methods to enable disaggregation by disability and gender. Increased understanding of disability by type and frequency can help plan programming more accurately for students in and out of school.
2. Bullying can discourage students with disabilities and reduce the morale of all students. Therefore, continue to conduct awareness campaigns to reduce the social stigma of disability and encourage students with disabilities to advocate for themselves.

Malaysia

Malaysia has a broad legislative framework that not only fights discrimination against those with disabilities but also supports equitable access to healthcare, social protection, and education. Although Malaysia uses a social definition of disability, some provisions reflect a medical model of disability, such as the segregation of students based on severity of disability. The medical model of disability hinders implementation of the Zero Reject Policy. Whilst the policy supports all students regardless of legal or disability status to attend school, the loose definition of disability does not fully uphold the policy for all students with disabilities (UNICEF, 2018).

Social stigma can discourage voluntary disclosure of information about disability. The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education work with the Department of Social Welfare to initially detect a disability, whilst families can volunteer their registration of disability if they choose (UNICEF, 2017). Malaysia has reported that 1.4% of its population (including

adults) has a disability (UNESCAP, 2019), but because of the voluntary nature of disclosing information, the actual number could be higher.

The ministry is responsible for providing education to students with disabilities depends on the severity of disability. For students with severe disabilities, the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development is responsible. Students classified as having special education needs, including students with mild-moderate disability, receive education under the Ministry of Education (<UNESCO, 2014>). Students with special education needs include those with visual impairments, speech difficulties, hearing impairments, and physical and learning disabilities. Students with special needs are indigenous learners, have specific needs, belong to ethnic groups, or are in under-enrolled schools (Ministry of Education, 2013).

Students with special education needs can access the education system in three ways (UNESCO, 2014):

1. Special education schools receive students with hearing, visual, or learning disabilities. In 2015, the Ministry of Education broadened the definition of disability to include all disabilities regardless of type (Human Rights Commission of Malaysia, 2015).
2. The Special Education Integrated Programme serves students with special education needs in separate classrooms in urban and suburban mainstream schools. As of 2014, 1,315 primary and 738 secondary schools had employed the programme.
3. If teachers deem a student with a disability suitable for a mainstream classroom, the student may join the classroom by way of the Inclusive Education Programme. Joining a mainstream classroom relies heavily on the discretion of teachers, who may be limited by the quality and quantity of their special education training. A positive development is that mainstream and special education teachers receive training that involves tools and strategies for including students with disabilities (Government of Malaysia, 2018).

Teachers may train in special education in many ways. One is through the master trainer course, which trains teachers at the district level on holistic inclusive education programmes, thereby creating a pool of master trainers who can then teach other teachers inclusive education practices; 220 teachers from more than 44 pilot schools participated in the training (Government of Malaysia, 2018).

UNICEF has worked in Malaysia to increase awareness of the importance and benefits of including children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms with their peers, which has encouraged parents with children with disabilities to enrol them in the Inclusive Education Programme (Ministry of Education [Malaysia], 2018). To challenge stigma and discrimination against children with disabilities, Malaysia has used hashtags in social media campaigns, such as #ThisAbility, #StandTogether, and #LetterToMyPM (UNICEF, 2018), which help shift the definition of disability from a medical to a social and holistic model.

The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities and the National Plan of Action for Persons with Disabilities coordinate to regulate access of students to education. The National Policy for Children and Action Plan manages the development, participation, and advocacy of students with disabilities (UNICEF, 2017).

The 2013–2025 Education Blueprint under the Ministry of Education supports students with special education needs in accessing mainstream curriculums and assessments. The 15 special education service centres – *pusat perkhidmatan pendidikan khas* – provide services to learners with special education needs (Ministry of Education, 2013).

The Education Blueprint implements inclusive education in stages (Government of Malaysia, 2013):

1. Early identification of special needs (2013–2015)
2. Inclusive education programme (2016–2020)
3. Review of initiatives and progress (2021–2025)

The Ministry of Education allocates financing to schools to pilot inclusion programmes; the successful ones are scaled up and supported (Government of Malaysia, 2013).

Unlike some countries that have one curriculum with different entry points for students with disabilities, Malaysia has created a special education curriculum for blind students (Human Rights Commission of Malaysia, 2015). Students with disabilities should have the right to study the same national curriculum as other students, according to the UNCRPD. However, Malaysia is trying to make mainstream education accessible to learners with special education needs, as seen in the Inclusive Pedagogy Implementation Guide of 2016 (UNESCO, 2021).

Malaysia collects data about disabilities through a cross-departmental and ministerial network, through the Department of Social Welfare, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Education (UNICEF, 2017); and the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development developed the disability classification system (UNICEF, 2021). Data collection and maintenance of the database of students with disabilities are not, however, consistent; Malaysia is reviewing its identification systems, and a holistic model that has inter-operability between all sectors and ministries will, it is hoped, be developed.

Recommendations

1. Support teachers, support school staff, and administrators with strategies to adapt the national curriculum to make it accessible to students with disabilities, rather than create a separate curriculum for students with disabilities.
2. Make data collection holistic, systematic, and consistent in definition and understanding so that it can be used interchangeably between ministries to create holistic programming for students with disabilities. The bridge between education policy and policies in other sectors will help students with disabilities access other domains in an inclusive way.
3. As Malaysia has strong inclusive education policies and practices, it is encouraged to showcase them at regional conferences to promote cross-country collaboration and teacher networking to share inclusive education strategies.

Myanmar

Unlike other ASEAN members, Myanmar does not have an explicit definition of inclusive education, although the 2016–2021 National Education Strategic Plan refers to it (Ministry of Education, 2016). The education of students with disabilities falls under the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and not the Ministry of Education (Hauschild and Htet, 2015). A common understanding of inclusive education is needed. Pre-service and in-service training programmes must reflect a rights-based, social model of disability and not a medical model that can foster exclusion from education services.

Under Article 41b of the 2014 National Education Law, a student with a disability has access to special education programmes and services that use a special curriculum (ILO, 2014). A student with special education needs has a disability such as visual impairment, hearing impairment, or mental disability, or is a diverse learner.

The 2016–2021 National Education Strategic Plan is committed to helping students with disabilities transition towards inclusive education programmes (Ministry of Education, 2016). One way it has done this is by establishing the National Curriculum Framework in which reflective teaching practices and learner-centred pedagogy can enable students with diverse learning needs to learn under the same curriculum (UNICEF Myanmar, 2018). Myanmar has also started a child-centred kindergarten curriculum that has been rolled out nationally (UNICEF Myanmar, 2018).

The Strategic Plan emphasises the importance of pre-service and in-service teacher education (Government of Myanmar, 2016), and the government has developed the national framework for Continuous Professional Development (UNICEF Myanmar, 2018) and finalised the Teacher Competency Standard Framework (UNICEF, 2020). The Strategic Plan has specific targets:

1. '[D]evelopment of a specialist knowledge base including higher education specialisation and specialised teachers, through development of degree courses and inclusive education modules.
2. [I]dentification of a number of existing basic education schools to become resource schools for inclusive education.
3. [R]oll-out of a general training module on inclusive education (including for children with disabilities) for education colleges and in-service teacher training programmes' (Ministry of Education [Myanmar], 2016).

These developments are well positioned to strengthen teacher skills and training. However, teacher training colleges and education universities and the programmes do not include courses on inclusive education (Hauschild and Htet, 2015). Therefore, a shortage remains of teachers who have the knowledge and skills to teach students with disabilities, and, importantly, an open attitude towards them.

Teacher education is key to assess students' needs and to develop students' individual learning plans. Without teacher training and knowledge, children with disabilities might not be able to access the curriculum and opportunities to socialise with their peers, which is

necessary to develop socio-emotional skills. Students with disabilities might be excluded from formal education altogether.

To address the lack of teachers with knowledge of and training on special education, the Ministry of Education aims to develop resource schools to help teachers include children with disabilities (Hauschild and Htet, 2015), but support needs to be consistent, with ongoing professional development opportunities; students with disabilities are diverse, and successful inclusion requires ongoing teacher training. Resource schools are separate from mainstream schools, which does not meet the UNCRPD's definition of inclusion, although Myanmar has begun to incorporate inclusive education into national education frameworks.

Various partnerships between NGOs foster inclusive education; for example, Voluntary Services Overseas, Save the Children, and Catholic Relief Service train teachers to teach children with disabilities.

Myanmar plans to review its assessment system to be more inclusive of children with disabilities (UNICEF, 2020). To develop and sustain such changes, the country needs policy reform, a multi-sector and multi-disciplinary assessment system, and ongoing student support services. Awareness of the importance of such systems is lacking (UNICEF, 2020). Transitions from early childhood education to primary, and primary to secondary school are poor given that initial assessment and inclusive education practice lack policy support. Advocacy efforts are ongoing, however, for effective transition of students with disabilities from inclusive kindergarten to primary school (UNICEF, 2020).

Myanmar lacks a systematic data collection method that includes education outputs for students with disabilities. The country does not have a monitoring system to evaluate national educational programmes, or a central computer-based database to monitor the programmes' performance (Ministry of Education, 2016). Situational analysis reports provide information about children with disabilities, which does not support strong evidence-based decision-making (UNICEF, no date b).

Recommendations

1. Formally define inclusive education. The definition can guide policymaking and ensure that it is in line with UNCRPD commitments, and a common definition for the country and across countries can allow cross-country analysis of progress and goals to include students with disabilities in education.
2. Provide pre-service and in-service teacher training on disability, including types of disability, how learning is affected, and how learning can reach students with disabilities through differential instruction, UDL, and student-centred pedagogy.

Philippines

Much progress has been made to include students with disabilities in education programming. The Magna Carta for Disabled Persons of 1997 led to institutionalising special education programmes in all schools by way of resource centres inside mainstream schools to support students with special needs (Department of Education, 1997). The document was

amended in 2007 (National Council on Disability Affairs, 2007) to mandate the state to provide students with disabilities – including those with visual and/or hearing impairments, intellectual disabilities, and other exceptional needs – access to quality education.

In 2010, Strengthening Special Education Program at the Basic Education Level financed a programme to train secondary school educators to teach students with disabilities and provide teachers with adequate teaching material (Department of Education, 2010).

In 2013, the Early Years Act promoted inclusion of children with special needs by using Filipino sign language to teach the deaf community. In the same year, the Enhanced Basic Education Act encouraged use of the Alterative Learning System for deaf students.

In 2015, the Education Plan encouraged including learners with disabilities in existing mainstream classes (UNESCO, 2015), which was a step towards making schools fully inclusive.

By 2016, the Basic Education Research Agenda promoted an inclusive and learner-centred teaching and learning strategy (Department of Education, 2016). Inclusion covers special education, indigenous peoples' education, madrasah education, and the Alternative Learning System, which is a parallel learning system offered in community learning centres for those not in school (Ministry of Education, no date).

The Special Education Act of 2019 intends to set up the Bureau of Special Education to institutionalise special education and manage its delivery. The law aims to institutionalise at least one special education centre in each school division, and about three centres in larger divisions. The law aims to design a curriculum and adapt programming for children and youth with disabilities under the Department of Education (Office of the Secretary, 2019). A separate curriculum, however, would segregate students with disabilities from others and prevent access to the mainstream education curriculum.

The National Council on Disability Affairs manages the development of programmes and service delivery for students with disabilities, coordinates activities for public and private organisations that tackle disability issues and formulates policy (National Council on Disability Affairs, n.d.).

The country has created diverse activities and programmes to create knowledge systems, enhance skills, and improve attitudes in government and education institutions towards inclusive education, including through training of support teachers, heads of schools, and supervisors. Stakeholders are discussing the Inclusive Education Bill, which aims to make schools fully inclusive (Philippine Network for Inclusive Education, no date). The Department of Education is developing a national inclusive education framework to replace the traditional model of learning in the classroom with one that will include vulnerable children, including those with disabilities (UNICEF, 2020).

The small number of developmental paediatricians, who formally assess disability, hampers inclusion of students with disabilities in education. Without adequate information, policymakers and education professionals find it difficult to create inclusive environments or use ICF identification system tools or design and implement appropriate intervention programming for students with disabilities. While the formal assessment measures need

improvement, there are some initiatives such as the Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY), which is being used to help learners with visual impairments access learning materials in the classroom (Box 2).

Box 2: Digital Accessible Information System in the Philippines

To include learners with visual impairments in classrooms, the Department of Education distributed Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) audiobook readers and Swell Form Graphics Machines all over the country. To teach educators how to use the technologies, the department held capacity-building workshops where special education teachers, education specialists, and illustrators produced tactile materials for use in classrooms (Department of Foreign Affairs, 2019). A hands-on approach to building teachers' capacity can raise awareness of disability, but progress must be monitored regularly to ensure that materials and knowledge benefit the students.

Source: National Council on Disability Affairs (2003).

While taking courses on disability inclusion at university, teachers build their capacity through school and cluster groups or professional learning communities that are part of the Building Inclusive Education Champions Programme. Selected teachers undergo training and mentoring, including on inclusive attitudes and practice, challenges and success, and classroom strategies to include students with disabilities (UNICEF, 2020).

Whilst the Basic Education Information System (BEIS) collects data on students in the education system (Department of Education, no date), it could enhance its disability data collection methods by using Washington Group data questions.

Parents of children with disabilities are closely involved in helping implement government and NGO programmes. Strong advocacy for students with disabilities can have a lasting impact on their learning and sense of belonging in the classroom.

Recommendations

1. Change cultural attitudes towards disability through awareness campaigns that normalise disability and highlight strengths of persons with disabilities.
2. Adapt the curriculum to the needs of students in the classroom, even if a formal diagnosis of disability has not been made.
3. Ensure effective transitions between preschool, primary, and secondary education for students with disabilities.

Singapore

The third Enabling Masterplan 2017–2021 guides the country to becoming more inclusive, including in education (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2016). Singapore does

not have a formal definition of inclusive education, as it recognises that inclusion goes beyond the education system (UNESCO, 2021).

The 2018 Professional Practice Guidelines define students with special education needs as those with a disability; learning difficulties; or social, academic, physical, or sensory needs; or requiring different kinds of support than their same-aged peers (Ministry of Education, 2018). Developmental needs are those that are physical (e.g. cerebral palsy), sensory (e.g. hearing loss), cognitive (e.g. autism spectrum disorder), and learning (e.g. mild language delay).

Education for students with disabilities depends on the type and severity of disability. Students who have the cognitive abilities and adaptive skills to learn in large groups enter mainstream schools and access the curriculum in inclusive settings. Students with moderate-profound visual impairment and hearing loss receive resources and support from trained teachers in seven mainstream schools (Ministry of Education, no date). More than 80% of students with special education needs learn in inclusive classroom settings in mainstream schools (UNESCO, 2021). The rest, who require more intense programming or a lower student-to-adult ratio, learn in government-funded special education schools. Twelve social service agencies run a total of 19 special education schools across the country (Ministry of Education, 2018). Some special education schools provide opportunities for academic integration to students with disabilities. Entry into a special education school is permitted after a psycho-educational assessment evaluating the student's learning needs and capacity.

The Ministry of Education oversees training of teachers in special education and mainstream schools. The Disability Office at the Ministry of Social and Family Development works closely with the Ministry of Education to provide thought leadership and advice on policy issues that concern students with disabilities. As the Disability Office also provides services to inclusive preschools and to young adults with disabilities to prepare them to work, the groundwork has been laid for the transition between preschool, school, and adult intervention through a common advocacy organisation.

Special education teachers receive pre-service training, a diploma in special education from the National Institute of Education (NIE). Teachers may avail themselves of ongoing professional development through customised in-service courses by the NIE and other training institutions. Teachers in mainstream schools have special education training in their courses. Students with disabilities in mainstream schools may receive support from allied educators, who provide learning and behaviour support to students with special education needs. Teachers trained in special needs are able to use differential learning in the classroom to capture all students' learning. The Ministry of Education provides student support services such as educational psychologists to meet with the school team and support students' individual learning needs in the mainstream classroom. Cluster interest and applied training workshops are offered to increase collaboration and cooperation between mainstream and special education professionals and practitioners (UNESCO, 2021).

Through government agencies, Singapore collects data on students with disabilities if they use services. If they do not use services, they might not counted in overall data collection.

Therefore, the government is developing a method to collect accurate data on the needs of persons with disabilities and to contact them and/or their caregivers to provide holistic support such as access to schemes and services (UNESCO, 2021).

Recommendations

1. Ensure that students in special education schools have access to the mainstream education curriculum. Whilst it may be adapted to the learning needs of students, they must receive equitable access to the curriculum as per the UNCRPD.
2. Build in-school capacity for teachers to work alongside teaching assistants to form inclusive education programming that will shift students from special education back into mainstream schools. Segregated learning environments do not allow students with disabilities to interact with mainstream students, and students with disabilities miss out on academic and socio-emotional learning. An integrated setting also allows mainstream students to learn how to interact with their peers with disabilities, form social and pro-social behaviours, and create an open attitude towards learners with different needs.

Thailand

Providing education for students with disabilities falls under the Ministry of Education. The 2008 Education Act for Persons with Disabilities defines inclusive education as a process of 'providing persons with disabilities access to general education system, at any level and in various settings, including enabling education provision to enable schooling of all groups of persons, including persons with disabilities' (The Office of the Council of State, 2008: 3). The act includes access to assistive technologies and support services to meet students' needs. The 2017–2036 National Education Plan defines inclusive education more widely to include students at a socio-economic disadvantage, which is particularly helpful in Thailand, where low-income families whose children might drop out of school receive cash grants to keep them in school (UNICEF, no date). The plan defines students with special education needs as having a physical, mental, intellectual, social, emotional, communication, and/or learning impairments, and sets policy goals to meet the learning needs of these diverse students (Office the Education Council, 2017).

Thailand has several strong bodies of governance to support students with disabilities, such as the National Committee for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities and the Elimination of Unfair Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (UNESCO, 2021). The presence of these committees, the offices within the Ministry of Education, and laws protecting the rights of persons with disabilities shows strong national commitment to provide and support equitable access to quality education for all students and marks the political tone as inclusive.

Despite the intentions of the 2008 Education Act for Persons with Disabilities and the 2017–2036 National Education Plan policy goals, however, Thailand is still transitioning to fully including students with disabilities in education. The reasons include low staff training and lack of facilities, including infrastructure to support transport of students to school (Vorapanya and Dunlap, 2014).

Inadequate teacher education is a key factor in not fully achieving inclusive education standards. Whilst the 2003 Teacher and Educational Personnel Council Act regulates teacher recruitment and training, the Teachers Council of Thailand sets standards for the teaching profession and criteria for accreditation during pre-service teacher education. Standards still do not incorporate inclusive education practices (Siribanpitak, 2018). Whilst the 2008 Education Act for Persons with Disabilities mandates that special education teachers have university qualification in special education, they do not always have sufficient pre-service training in how to deal with students with special needs or receive adequate in-service training (Vorapanya and Dunlap, 2014), which affects not only teaching but also assessment.

Most assessment practices are inflexible and unresponsive to diverse learning needs (UNICEF, 2020). Thailand is, therefore, planning to review its assessment system so that it is becomes more inclusive. A rigid assessment and examination system can leave students with disabilities out of the data collection process, inadequately assess their skill set, and create a misleading benchmark of academic success that does not allow for individual learning styles and outcome.

Several initiatives, however, encourage formal education for students with disabilities, including 43 special schools, 76 provincial special education centres, and 13,786 inclusive schools. The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration provides inclusive education through 100 schools around the city (UNESCO, 2021). Schools could become more inclusive by recognising Thai sign language as an official language of deaf students. It is used in pre-primary and primary school curriculums in 17 schools for students with hearing impairments (CRPD, 2015).

Data on all students, including those with disabilities, in the education system are collected through the office of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education via annual educational statistics and the education management information system. However, only one mention of students with disabilities was in the latest report available online: 'physical education for the disabled' (Ministry of Education, 2016: 59). Students who are not in school are not captured in the data set because data are collected at schools (UNICEF, 2018). Data on all children with disabilities in and out of school must be collected to prioritise needs, provide social services, bridge gaps in knowledge, and guide education policy.

In 2018, the Child Functioning Module was included in the national disability survey (UNICEF, 2018), which informed policy and strategic planning for students with disabilities. The module provides questions that shift the thinking about persons with a disability from a medical to a social model.

Recommendations

1. Continue to provide pre-service training to teachers on special education needs, neurodiverse learning, and how to tailor learning to students.
2. Shift from standardised assessments, which can be rigid and exclude learners with disabilities, to formative assessments based on performance and competency metrics.

The 2010 Law on Persons with Disabilities states that inclusive education should be standard for students with disabilities unless they have needs that cannot be met in an inclusive environment, in which case an integrated approach may be taken (National Assembly, 2010). The Ministry of Education and Training leads the provision of education to students with disabilities, including planning of special education programmes and inclusive education support and development centres. The Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and Training implement special education programmes (National Assembly, 2010).

In Viet Nam, education for students with disabilities can take three forms (National Assembly, 2010):

1. Special education. Students with disabilities are taught in separate schools and classes. Article 63 of the 2005 Education Law supports them for 'disabled and handicapped people' (National Assembly, 2005: 28) and encourages prioritising the provision of state funding and infrastructure to specialised schools.
2. Semi-inclusive or integrated education. Students with disabilities attend special classes in mainstream schools. If a student has an individual education plan, the curriculum may be modified to support the student.
3. Inclusive education. If they meet the requirements, students with disabilities may attend mainstream schools.

Whilst 'inclusive' is used to describe the learning option for a student with a disability, education is not fully inclusive if only a special group of students with disabilities can attend a mainstream school and have a learning plan. Students with disabilities with stronger cognitive abilities will likely participate in mainstream schools, which implies a level of exclusion of other students with more significant disabilities.

The inter-ministerial Circular 58/2012 seeks to replace specialised schools with support centres that advocate and promote inclusive learning. Support centres in all provinces are being planned (UNESCO, 2021). As of 2019, 107 specialised education facilities and 12 education centres were operating the country. In 2019, various stages of inclusive education development were being supported in 20 provinces and cities (OHCHR, 2019).

The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, in compliance with the 2010 Law on Persons with Disabilities, provides early identification of disability (National Assembly, 2010). In schools, administrative staff and educators have the skills to screen for a disability (OHCHR 2018), but diagnosis needs formal assessment. Since Decision No. 23/2006 was issued, 'disabled and handicapped people' have had the right to an inclusive education whereby schools are responsible for admitting students with disabilities, promoting inclusive education through appropriate classes, and identifying students' needs. Articles 9.1 and 9.2 of the decision provide that inclusive education support and development centres are responsible for early identification of disability and provision of counselling on education approaches, including teaching methods and technical support (UNESCO, 2021). Assessing and labelling disability holistically are encouraged rather than defining it medically.

In 2016–2017, the Washington Group/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning was used in the national census survey (UNICEF, 2018). However, reported disability rates in children aged 2–17 were much lower than expected at 2.79%, which may indicate an issue in the data collection method (UNICEF, 2021).

The national curriculum is being revised to a competency-based model, which can offer flexibility in teaching methods and student assessment. Viet Nam engages in policy dialogue on reforming the Law on Education and has made specific plans for inclusive education (UNICEF, 2018). Local government units allocate resources for inclusive education (UNICEF, 2015) and have created guidelines for school districts and for schools on allocating funds to inclusive education, which has increased inclusive education in all districts and schools (UNICEF, 2015).

Teacher education still needs much improvement. Decision No. 9/2007 pushed for teachers and education management to receive training on inclusive education, and provincial training modules have been created in Ninh Thuan and Kon Tum (UNICEF, 2013). Universities such as the Hanoi Pedagogy University, Ho Chi Minh City Pedagogy University, National Pedagogy College, and the National Pedagogy Ho Chi Minh City have provided national training on special education (UNICEF, 2015). A pre-service curriculum that teaches teachers how to help students with disabilities transition from special to mainstream schools has been developed, piloted, and finalised (UNICEF, 2018). However, 65% of teachers have reported that they did not receive training on inclusive education, special education, or disability (UNICEF, 2015). Whilst the government is exerting good effort to create teaching modules and programmes, reaching teachers across the country to provide them with training remains difficult. If teachers are not well trained, a disability advisor in schools could help them work with students with disabilities. However, 86% of schools did not have a disability advisor as of 2015 (UNICEF, 2015). Despite the good intentions to create programmes for educators, the low level of teachers' awareness and knowledge will result in variable and insufficient teaching practices.

Collection of data on children with disabilities is guided by provincial departments of the Ministry of Education and Training (UNICEF, 2015). The Washington Group/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning has been the focus of national and provincial policymakers. The work requires coordinated efforts of the Ministry of Education and Training, Health, Labour, and Social Affairs and of participating universities and development partners (UNICEF, 2017).

Recommendations

1. Increase teacher training courses on inclusive education. The infrastructure for the courses is strong as seen in the work in universities, but teachers must receive training to ensure that classroom practices reflect inclusive education.
2. Transition more students from separate to mainstream schools, with better support to help them integrate. The already improved competency-based curriculum is a strong step in this direction, and better teacher training can help shift more students to inclusive settings in mainstream schools.

Chapter 5

Key Findings, Challenges, and Opportunities

Economic, social, and political integration of persons with disabilities will depend on the bridge between learners and their communities. The connection requires openness and a positive attitude to neurodiverse learners in the classroom; learners must gain the skills and competencies to integrate into society fully and meaningfully.

All the ASEAN and East Asian countries covered in this report aspire to create inclusive education systems. The countries are committed to international and regional agreements, national and sub-national frameworks, laws, and policies that promote inclusion and the moral duty to uphold the human rights of persons with disabilities. Following through on these commitments is making slow but steady progress.

Eight of the 10 ASEAN countries have endorsed the Southeast Asia Teachers Competency Framework (SEA-TCF),[1] which showcases their commitment to incorporating competencies such as equity, respect for diversity, and learner-centred pedagogy into national standards for teachers, recruitment, and professional development. The SEA-TCF represents a set of 21st-century behaviours, skills, attributes, and knowledge with which teachers need to equip students to propel the region's economic growth. The SEA-TCF can connect the ASEAN community and expedite teacher exchange and teacher mobility within the region (Teacher's Council of Thailand, 2018).

Quality and consistent pre-service and in-service teacher education remain fundamental for inclusive education, as teachers have the capacity to not only teach students but also create a sense of belonging amongst them. The SEA-TCF seeks to improve teachers' skill sets and attitudes to students with disabilities.

Whilst Myanmar has endorsed the SEA-TCF, it is the only ASEAN member without a formal definition of inclusive education, which is an important step to using a common language in national and local frameworks and policies. Whilst all AMSs mention inclusive education in their policies and frameworks, the region lacks fully inclusive school systems. Many countries believe their educational systems are inclusive, but their education practices are either integrated or segregated.

Achieving the common vision of fully inclusive schools faces several challenges and opportunities. One challenge is the definition of disability. Whilst an apparent physical disability is more readily diagnosed and treated, meeting the needs of children with intellectual disabilities is more challenging and they can be excluded from the education system altogether, especially if the disability is mild and can be misunderstood and the child mislabelled as 'lazy' or unmotivated.

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[1] Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam (UNICEF, 2020).

The number of clinicians in urban centres and especially in rural areas is insufficient to diagnose children and recommend early intervention strategies to families. Access to services and knowledge of how to obtain a diagnosis and treatment is varied, and cultural stigma can prevent families from seeking support and lead to missing data on students with disabilities. Awareness campaigns such as those in Malaysia have reduced stigma and build communities that include those who are often unseen or unheard.

Collecting sufficient data on children with disabilities and the barriers they face remains a challenge. Children with disabilities need to be represented in the data to build inclusive systems. Attempts to strengthen data collection are numerous. Singapore is developing a method to collect more accurate data on the needs of persons with disabilities and to provide holistic support such as access to services to them and their caregivers. However, the data collected in schools miss children who are out of school. Household surveys may capture missing data to provide a more realistic quantitative understanding of disability.

If a student is diagnosed with a disability, a medical model diagnosis can be limited in its ability to present strengths and weaknesses in the learning process and foster a segregated approach to intervention and education planning. When children are identified through screening services, data collection groups might not use internationally accepted frameworks or have access to the UNCPRD definition of disability. The Washington Group questions can inform a social model of including students with disabilities to inform holistic policymaking that fosters coordination and collaboration. The Washington Group/UNICEF Child Functioning Module identifies more children who have difficulties that can hinder learning.

Underdiagnosis and medical model diagnosis of a disability prevent data-informed understanding of disability and influence policymakers' language and mindset. Robust data collection methods are needed to target students who require support and bring the information to policymakers. They must understand the culture of a person with a disability to ensure that policies not only provide access to services such as education but also demonstrate an understanding that a student with disability faces several barriers that hinder economic integration and political participation.

Whilst many teachers, parents, and policymakers think that inclusion is important, they might not be fully familiar with neurodiverse learning and principles of inclusion such as whole-system inclusion, the role of learning-friendly environment, how to adapt a curriculum to student needs, differential learning, and UDL, amongst others. The challenge presents an opportunity to think about community members as stakeholders, including those with disabilities, and to embed courses or modules on disabilities in teacher training curriculums.

A country's leadership has the power to set the tone for a cultural shift towards inclusion. Leaders must be inclusive themselves, publicly use inclusive language, and advocate for the human rights of all their constituents, including those with disabilities. Leaders can raise the public's awareness of not only social inclusion of students and persons with disabilities but also the political and economic barriers students with disabilities face later.

A common challenge across ASEAN members lies in the learner-centred versus teacher-centred approach to learning. A teacher-centred approach, where the teacher follows the

curriculum rigidly and 'gives' learning to students, is common in many countries. A learner-centred approach can not only increase student engagement in class but also support UDL and enhance students' critical and social thinking skills and collaborative problem solving, which can lead students to become socially responsible and civically engaged citizens. Whilst learning the academic curriculum is important, a competency-based curriculum can broaden the definition of success in schools and lead to better learning and social outcomes. A learner-centred approach has the added benefit of students learning how to advocate for their needs, including standing up for themselves against bullying. Viet Nam's national curriculum is being revised to a competency-based model, which can offer flexibility to educators in teaching methods and student assessment.

Many ASEAN countries might wait until they are developed before reforming education to include students with disabilities. But the countries can take many steps towards inclusivity now. One of the strongest catalysts for inclusive education is a shift in attitude: if education stakeholders believe that students with disabilities belong in the classroom, they can use creative ways to include them that do not always require expensive technology or hours of writing individual education plans. For example, if students have a vision impairment, seating them in front of the class is an effective strategy to include them in the classroom.

Chapter 6

Cross-Cutting Recommendations and Framework for Action

A significant risk during the COVID-19 pandemic is that children with disabilities will not return to school for various reasons, including parents' concern for their health. The learning gap has widened since the pandemic started, and persons with disabilities are often only afterthoughts at the end of programme planning. The challenges present opportunities to not just open schools again under the same system but to 'open better', with mechanisms to foster fully inclusive education. Ministry, school, and community practices can be evaluated.

Numerous challenges face students, administrators, and policymakers. Students are being asked to learn independently, which requires a baseline of skills development, such as impulse control, ability to stay focused on a task, and task initiation, amongst others, for independent learning, but the reality is many students with disabilities need feedback from teachers. Therefore, students may experience loss of learning as they are not in school. Teachers face many challenges as they are being asked to develop new protocols to assess students and use modalities that they might not have used before or might not have the competence to switch to quickly and effectively. As teachers work from home, they might not have the support and resources needed to develop new procedures to adapt to teaching.

When students return to school in person, administrators and teachers must not add anxiety related to student education assessments. The end-of-cycle assessments play a critical role in a student's future education pathway. School closures and assessments can increase anxiety in students with disabilities, causing other stresses and strains.

Cross-Cutting Recommendations

UNICEF has listed recommendations countries can adopt, based on the principles of inclusion.[2] Table 6.1 summarises the recommendations.

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[2] See *Education for UNICEF Every Ability 2020* (UNICEF, 2020), a comprehensive source of guidelines on how to use the principles of inclusion to assess current practices. The publication provides theories of change to address specific areas of need. Readers can use a comprehensive matrix to self-evaluate inclusive education systems through UNICEF (2015: 10–11).

Table 6.1. Cross-Cutting Recommendations Before and After Schools Reopen

	Before Schools Reopen	After Schools Reopen
Whole-system approach	Ensure information is in accessible formats, provide outreach to families, and ensure return of support services.	Strengthen parent–school committees or forums to increase outreach to households and increase efficiency of referral systems to include students with disabilities.
Curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment	School closures may have influenced the mental health of students; set realistic goals for their return. Focus on remedial learning in a competency-based model through formative assessment as students regain knowledge and skills.	Strengthen the role of families in their child's return to school, to support learning at home and help students regain knowledge and skills. Continue to adapt curricular expectations to match the current needs of students.
Support teachers	Ensure that teachers are in a positive mental health space to return to work. Provide training to ensure that their skills and training support the inclusive return of students with disabilities.	Promote guidelines and best practices to support students with disabilities whilst maintaining social distancing and personal protection, particularly for students who need physical support in using washroom facilities.
Learning-friendly environment	Create child protection and safeguarding policies to ensure clear reporting and referral mechanisms as children with disabilities return to interacting with adults after a long break.	Peer relationships may have changed during school closures; ensure that a friendly environment for students includes time to strengthen friendships, and address signs of bullying.
Effective transitions	Review guidelines and support mechanisms to help students with disabilities transition between grades and school settings.	Consider reducing number and intensity of high-stakes assessments that help students transition to next grades.
Partnerships	Continue to strengthen partnerships with parents, organisations of persons with	Continue to recognise the role various stakeholders play in the education of students with

	disabilities, self-help groups, and parent committees. Ensure that committees address disability inclusion.	disabilities and continue to strengthen these bonds.
Data and monitoring	Create or strengthen data collection methods to ensure that data are comprehensive, robust, and can be disaggregated into disability metrics. Consider using holistic survey questions about functionality to understand current needs and inform planning.	During data collection, expand the types of questions to better understand presentation of disability in the school, to provide targeted education programming. Monitor students throughout the school year, not just at the return to school.

Source: Author's summary, UNICEF (2020).

Framework for Action

Table 6.2 recommends ways that countries can support inclusive education for students with disabilities. The recommendations can be adopted in phases, focusing on local and provincial development before moving to national implementation. The recommendations in Table 6.2 are made in alignment with the principles of the ACRF, which are focused, balanced, impactful, pragmatic, inclusive, and measurable (ASEAN, 2020).

Implementation of the framework for action should be consistent with internationally recognised principles and commitments, such as what inclusion means according to the UNCRPD, and ASEAN's commitments to achieving the SDGs. The framework is the result of thorough desk research, expert interviews, and reports on inclusive education.

Table 6.2. Framework for Action

Stakeholder	Recommendations
Schools	**Role of schools.** Schools are integral to the community. They are uniquely positioned to contribute to inclusive education as they can create as safe and welcoming learning environment and provide academic and social learning for current and future needs.
	1. As students return to school, reduce academic expectations of what students should have been learning whilst out of school. Schools should keep high-stakes assessments low. 2. Whilst learning should be monitored throughout the pandemic, measuring learning outcomes at a systemic level through nation-wide assessments is not necessary at this time. Instead,

	encourage monitoring and evaluation of learning through surveys at home, use of online platforms, or phone calls. In the classroom, a shift to formative assessments can provide meaningful learning insights in low-anxiety situations.
	3. Ensure that any temporary assessment procedures have a high level of quality and include students with disabilities. If students are not accustomed to online assessments, and all assessments are online, students who are not familiar with or able to use this format will be left out. Assessment systems created recently might not have been tested for quality. Therefore, formative assessments through various information-gathering methods might be more inclusive.
	4. Reschedule data collection for international, regional, and national large-scale assessment until students have regained routine and learning patterns at school.
	5. Provide in-service professional development opportunities for all school stakeholders such as teachers and special education assistants, amongst others, to form communities of practice.
	6. Move from teacher-centred to student-centred learning to engage students. Viewing learning from students' perspective can help in problem solving and make learning accessible and meaningful. Differentiated learning allows a classroom teacher to teach different groups of students in the classroom in ways that match students' capabilities and learning styles, ensuring that all students learn. Teachers must spend time to understand how their students learn best and their strengths and weaknesses.
	7. Involve parents of children with disabilities in their learning plans to increase parent participation and home programming.
	Good practices in the ASEAN region. In Singapore, more than 80% of students with special education needs learn in inclusive classroom settings in mainstream schools, which suggests a whole-school-system approach and attitude towards students with disabilities, including resource supports.
Stakeholder	**Recommendations**
Ministry	**Role of ministries.** Leadership that understands the culture of persons with disability and includes them in society can set a positive and holistic tone and support cross-ministerial integration of inclusive practices for students with disabilities. Persons with disabilities have different needs and speeds of learning, and their needs must be honoured. Ministries are uniquely positioned to help as they set the guidelines and polices for public and private schools and religious and

	secular schools, directly affecting the development of the seven domains of inclusive education.
	1. Eliminate laws or policies that exclude children with disabilities from school. Whilst several countries have adopted a 'zero reject policy', a loose definition of disability and inclusion can lead to students' exclusion. A consistent and well-defined policy to include students will ensure no student is excluded based on disability. 2. Ensure that one ministry is responsible for students of the same age and level of education, including students with and without disabilities. For example, the ministry responsible for early education of children without disabilities should be responsible for early education of children with disabilities; the ministry responsible for primary education of children without disabilities should be responsible for educating children with disabilities. Consistency will help promote inclusion and policymaking that covers all students. 3. In a phased approach, reallocate funds that support segregated programming to integrated systems that foster inclusion. 4. Review education policies and approaches to make them inclusive at the pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels. 5. Provide pre-service and in-service training to all members of the school system, taking a whole-system approach, to strengthen the understanding of neurodiversity in all its forms. Doing so is crucial to persuade stakeholders that students with disabilities have the right to be in mainstream classes as per UNCRPD commitments. 6. Strengthen national and local programmes to improve the knowledge and skills of families, caregivers, and service providers regarding typical and atypical child development. 7. Encourage early detection of and intervention for children with developmental delays and disabilities. 8. Create inter-ministerial dialogue and policy coherence to offer coordinated services to students with disabilities and their families in their own communities. 9. Conduct regular accessibility audits of school facilities to ensure that all students have access to water and sanitation and equitable access to education materials and teaching methods. 10. Develop and implement pre-service and in-service teaching programmes on inclusive education for education professionals and staff and encourage networking and knowledge management.

Stakeholder	Recommendations
	11. Make education data disability-inclusive, including in education management information systems. Pay particular attention to out-of-school children with disabilities who are missed in school data.
	12. Promote disability-inclusive and disability-specific sports and cultural programmes to integrate children with disabilities into community-based activities that promote their health and well-being. Enhance community awareness-raising activities to support disability-inclusive sports and cultural programmes.
	Good practice in the ASEAN region. Indonesia's 2019–2024 Master Plan on National Development of Inclusive Education aims to persuade parents, teachers, and other school members to be more open to inclusive learning. To this end, more pre-service teacher education trainings have adopted an improved curriculum that supports diverse learners in the classroom.
Stakeholder	**Recommendations**
ASEAN Member States	**Role of ASEAN Member States.** ASEAN members are able to implement recommendations to make primary and secondary schools more inclusive for students with disabilities. The ASEAN Secretariat can form a coalition to encourage collaboration in bringing a whole-of-community approach to post–COVID-19 recovery, promoting peer learning between countries, and sharing good practices.
	1. Revisit international commitments to inclusive education and incorporate them into regional frameworks that promote regional mechanisms and guidelines.
	2. Enhance monitoring and evaluation of the ACRF's goals for inclusive education and ensure mechanisms to implement recommendations, particularly Broad Strategy 2, which includes students with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.
	3. Encourage lead and other sector bodies to account for their actions.
	4. Ensure implementation of inclusive education goals across all ASEAN Community Pillars by discussing updates at the Coordinating Conference for the ASEAN Political-Security Community, the Committee of the Whole for the ASEAN Economic Community, and the Coordinating Conference on the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community.
	5. Create disability awareness programming and campaigns to reduce disability taboos. This cultural shift will help improve reporting and data collection and shift national and sub-

	national policies away from segregated to inclusive models of education.
	Good practice in the ASEAN region. The ACRF Implementation Plan outlines steps ASEAN Member States can take for strong recovery and provides guidance across policy measures and responses, financing and resource mobilisation, institutions and governance mechanisms, stakeholder engagement and partnerships, and effective monitoring.

Source: Author, based on expert interviews and United Nations (1995), UNESCAP (2016), UNICEF (2020), ASEAN (2020).

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Annex: Reports on East Asia

China

According to the 2017 Regulations on the Education of Persons with Disabilities, the Ministry of Education is responsible for the education of students with disabilities at the national level and local authorities at the local level (State Department, 2017). Inclusive education is defined as integration of students with disabilities into mainstream education systems to the greatest extent possible (State Department, 2017), and flexibility in applying the curriculum and using teaching materials to teach students with disabilities in mainstream schools. The education of deaf, blind, and mute students and 'handicapped citizens' is ensured by Article 45 of the Constitution (Government of China, 2004).

Under the 2006 Compulsory Education Law, students with disabilities receive education in several ways (Ministry of Education, 2009):

1. As per Article 9, in special classes and/or special schools created for students with visual, hearing, or language impairment, and/or an intellectual disability
2. In different classes within mainstream schools
3. Within mainstream classes
4. Through home-schooling or distance education, particularly for students with severe or multiple disabilities

Some provinces are working well to try and increase the number of students with disabilities in mainstream schools and to shift students from home schooling to local schools with specialised supports. In Guangxi Autonomous Region, the local government plan advocates for students with disabilities to shift to regular schools and for students with severe or multiple impairments to enter school and aims to strengthen the capacity of existing special schools (UNESCO, 2021).

The 2014–2016 National Special Education Promotion Plan refers to inclusive education as equitable and high-quality education for all children with disabilities. Students with disabilities enjoy high levels of inclusive education, according to Ministry of Education data. In 2001, 70% of students with disabilities were learning in inclusive settings (UNESCO, 2021). The 2017 Regulations on the Education of Persons with Disabilities have increased school capacities to teach students with disabilities through the construction of special education resource classrooms (State Department, 2017), including mainstream kindergarten and primary schools (UNICEF, no date a). In schools with special education resource classrooms, how much time students with disabilities spend in mainstream classes versus the special classrooms is unclear.

The 2017–2020 National Special Education Promotion Plan II aims to increase special education by increasing enrolment of students with disabilities and to increase financial and administrative support and improve cooperation between sectors to create a medical education approach.

China has shown considerable support for students with disabilities. It promotes alternative and augmentative methods of communication such as Braille and sign language (OHCHR, 2010). Teaching materials in Braille and large print are provided free, and the state subsidises Braille publications.

China continues to partner with organisations to promote inclusive education. UNICEF is assisting with disability and equality training for organisations of persons with disabilities, social workers, and community workers in central and western China. A disabled people's federation is assessing the country's education plan (People's Republic of China, 2015).
In partnership with UNICEF, China is expanding and refining the child-friendly school model, a multidimensional and holistic intervention. It promotes (i) inclusivity and equality; (ii) effective learning and teaching; (iii) a protective, safe, and healthy environment; and (iv) participation and harmonisation. The initiative is part of a 5-year plan in several cities (UNICEF China, 2017). If successful, the pilot model can be scaled up nationally.

Teacher training for students with disabilities appears to be improving in China. All teachers may take courses on special education. Special education teachers can receive a subsidy. They take a major in special education during their studies or must pass an exam that is issued by a local education authority. Teachers who are involved in inclusive education programmes have the option of attending professional development training on special education. The Guangxi special education teacher training centre provides teacher training for special education schools. It also provides support for special education policies (UNESCO, 2021).

China has identification systems for students with disabilities, but not all age brackets are covered. Reliable and easy-to-use screening tools for students aged 6 and above are lacking and so are data on primary school–level students (UNICEF, no date a). At birth, stigma and a lengthy registration process requiring complex diagnosis and certification may hinder families from registering their child with a disability.

Recommendations

1. To inform national decision-making, know how many students have disabilities, improve systems of data collection at birth, preschool, and primary education levels.
2. Whilst all teachers have access to special education courses, all teachers must receive training to make the curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment attainable for all learners in the classroom.

Mongolia

Mongolia does not have a reported definition of inclusive education or of special education needs, although both terms are used in their official education documents. Students with disabilities attend therapeutic pedagogic kindergartens and special schools, where exclusion and segregation, however, have been reported. Institutions are limited. The capital city, Ulaanbaatar, has six special schools: four for children with mental disabilities, one for children with visual impairments, and one for children with hearing impairments. Rural students with disabilities can attend the schools for blind and deaf students but the distance to school discourages attendance.

Mongolia does, however, have strong equity legislation against discrimination against persons with disabilities. It ensures equitable access to education and health and social protection (Government of Mongolia and JICA, 2017) and is the basis for policies to support access to education for students with disabilities. In 2004, the Child-Friendly School Policy was adopted to provide special support and assistance, including learning modules on equal opportunity and the importance of a learning-friendly environment in local schools and on national training (UNESCO, 2021). However, Mongolia lacks broader legislation that ensures students with disabilities receive education in inclusive settings (UNICEF, 2020).

Mongolia is reviewing and revising the assessment systems so that they include all learners (UNICEF, 2020). In 2018, the governments of Mongolia and Japan and Save the Children began a project to promote inclusive education, focusing on students often left behind. The project aims to bring inclusive education systems into mainstream schools, improve coordination mechanisms, and reach students who are out of school (UNESCO, 2021). To make curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment accessible and more inclusive, policy reform is necessary. Some progress has been made, such as improving programmes for inclusive kindergarten and helping students with disabilities better transition to primary school.

Mongolia has mixed reports on teacher training. The 2006–2015 education sector plan recognises the importance of training teachers to work with students with developmental disabilities. The main pre-service teacher training universities offer courses on inclusive education, but the training reportedly lacks quantity and quality (UNESCO, 2021). Most training programmes do not include training on sign language or sign language interpreters. Basic sign language is taught only in a few provinces, even though Mongolian sign language is recognised as the mother tongue of persons with hearing impairments and Braille is the standard writing system for those with visual impairments under the Law of Mongolia on Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities (OHCHR, 2018; UNICEF, 2018).

A partnership between UNICEF Mongolia and the Mongolian Association of Sign Language Interpreters has helped create an audio-visual dictionary, which is integrated into teacher training on inclusive education created by UNICEF Mongolia and Mongolian State University of Education (UNICEF Mongolia, 2018). Government-led training on inclusive education remains lacking. Braille resources are limited and produced only by the Mongolian National Federation of the Blind with the help of donations (UNESCO, 2021). Through partnership with UNICEF, the Asian Development Bank, and Save the Children UK, teachers have received training on special needs and inclusive education, specifically for learners with disabilities (UNESCO, 2021).

After the revision of the pre-service curriculum, a foundation was laid for a fully inclusive education system aligned with the UNCRPD (UNICEF, 2018). Before the revision, curriculums were separate according to type of disability.

Data tracking of students with disabilities depends on their grade. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sports is responsible for collecting data on students with disabilities in preschool and secondary school. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare is responsible for

data on persons with disabilities receiving education services by age cohort. Data on students with disabilities are limited and no systematic and coordinated body centralises data.

Recommendations

1. Create a standard definition of disability, inclusive education, and special education needs. Consistent language is needed for reliable and systematic data collection to create equity-based plans and programmes and to shape policy.
2. Pilot easy-to-use screening tools that use a functional or social approach to disability to understand barriers to learning in the classroom. Address the barriers by continuing to include courses on inclusive education in pre-service teaching programmes locally and nationally.

Appendix A

Targets and Core Indicators of Goal 5 of the Incheon Strategy

Target 5.A

> Enhance measures for early detection of and intervention for children with disabilities from birth to preschool age

Target 5.B

> Halve the gap between children with disabilities and children without disabilities in enrolment rates for primary and secondary education

Core indicators

> 5.1 Number of children with disabilities receiving early childhood intervention
>
> 5.2 Primary education enrolment rate of children with disabilities
>
> 5.3 Secondary education enrolment rate of children with disabilities

Supplementary Indicators

> 5.4 Proportion of pre- and antenatal care facilities that provide information and services regarding early detection of disability in children and protection of the rights of children with disabilities
>
> 5.5 Proportion of children who are deaf that receive instruction in sign language
>
> 5.6 Proportion of students with visual impairments that have educational materials in formats that are readily accessible
>
> 5.7 Proportion of students with intellectual disabilities, developmental disabilities, deaf, blindness, autism and other disabilities who have assistive devices, adapted curriculums, and appropriate learning materials

Source: United Nations (1995), *Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, Adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women*. (Accessed 3 March 2022)