

Revision

A Put in mine, yours, hers, his, ours, theirs:

- 1 This is my pencil. It is mine
- 2 This is your pencil. It is yours
- 3 These are our rulers. They are ours
- 4 Those are his shoes. They are his
- 5 Those are her shoes. They are hers
- 6 This is our playground. It is ours
- 7 That is the girls' playground. It is theirs
- 8 That is the boys' playground. It is theirs

B Put in taller, bigger, more beautiful

- 1 My brother is tall but you are taller
- 2 Our classroom is big but hers is bigger
- 3 Her drawing was beautiful but mine was more beautiful
- 4 My writing is bad but his is better

Understanding Learning Differences Across Schools 2030 Contexts

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Afghanistan



Overview: Defining the concept and terminology of inclusive education

Afghanistan has experienced conflict over the past three decades and now finds itself in a situation of protracted crisis. The regime change in August of 2021 has precipitated uncertainty and a lack of a clear legal framework within which to operate. In the last twenty years, huge gains have been made in school enrolment, with a large focus placed on the enrolment of girls who were previously excluded from school. Between 2000 and 2019, participation in education increased from less than one million in school (less than ten per cent of whom were girls) to around 9.9 million (39 per cent of whom were girls).¹

The education system in Afghanistan allows access to education via schools and community-based education. In recent years, inclusive education has been understood as an 'approach to whole school improvement that will ensure that national strategies for Education for All are really for all', whilst an inclusive education system has been considered to be one that 'ensures that all children have equal access to quality education in their community schools regardless of their gender, abilities, disabilities, backgrounds, health conditions and circumstances.'²

Groups considered in need of special attention and/or resources include children with different language backgrounds, children with disabilities, gifted and talented students, girls and nomadic children, as specified in the 2004 Constitution and the 2008 Education Law.³

With this understanding of inclusive education, hundreds of children with disabilities have enrolled in regular community schools thanks to the provision of integrated education programmes, and Community Rehabilitation Development Centres were established throughout Afghanistan catering for children, youth and adults with disabilities.⁴

Sign language and braille translated curricula and teacher training materials have been developed and a small number of special education schools exist in Kabul.⁵

Despite these positive steps forward, faced with ongoing instability, high levels of poverty and stigmatising traditional beliefs, evidence suggests that children with disabilities, those in remote rural areas from poor families, girls and ethnic minorities have lower school enrolment rates and higher rates of repetition and drop out before finishing school.⁶

Views from teachers and programme staff

The teachers consulted as part of this study understood inclusive education to mean that all students regardless of gender, ethnicity, economic background, language or learning level could come to school and learn. They understood special education to be more targeted, and specifically for students with disabilities such as deafness or blindness. AKF staff reported that the most commonly used terms to describe students with disabilities were either '**child with disability**' (CWD), '**girl with disability**' (GWD), or '**person with disability**' (PWD). It was also reported that teachers would commonly use terms such as 'low' or 'late learner' to refer to those children who are behind in class, but that they would not use these in front of the child to whom they are referring.

Teachers commented that they sometimes use the term '**person in need**', but that they don't use the name of the disability in the class to avoid negatively impacting the students' self-esteem, which may lead to dropping out of school.

'I don't call students by the name of their disability because it weakens the student's morale and may even cause them to drop out of school.'

High school teacher, Baghlan

Sadly, the effects of ongoing conflict imply that Afghan children are at a high risk of either being born with or acquiring a primary or secondary disability.⁷ It is reported that statistics on the number of children with disabilities in Afghanistan are not reliable, however a recent estimate suggests up to 17 per cent of Afghanistan's children live with some form of disability.⁸ There is no data related to children with the specific learning needs ADHD/ADD or autism, nor related to developmental impairment or deaf-blindness.⁹

Estimates vary on the proportion of students with disabilities who are not attending school. However, the number is expected to be high with the Ministry of Education estimating that 75 per cent of school-aged children with disabilities have never accessed education.¹⁰

According to Accessibility Organizations for Afghan Disabled, 95% of children with disabilities in Afghanistan do not attend schools due to inaccessible environments.¹¹

A recent study found that even with the increase in the proportion of village schools, access to schooling for disabled children declined between 2005 and 2013.¹² Even so, it has been reported that children with physical disabilities are much more likely to attend school than children with mental and cognitive disabilities.¹³ Despite these reports, AKF staff stated that they see a relatively high number of children with disabilities enrolled and attending school in regular classes.

¹ Afghanistan Education Cluster, 2022 | ² Afghanistan - Inclusion chapter, Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER), <https://www.education-profiles.org>, Retrieved May 2022 (Hereafter: Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022) | ³ Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | ⁴ Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | ⁵ Afghanistan Education Cluster, 2022 | ⁶ Trani et al., 2019

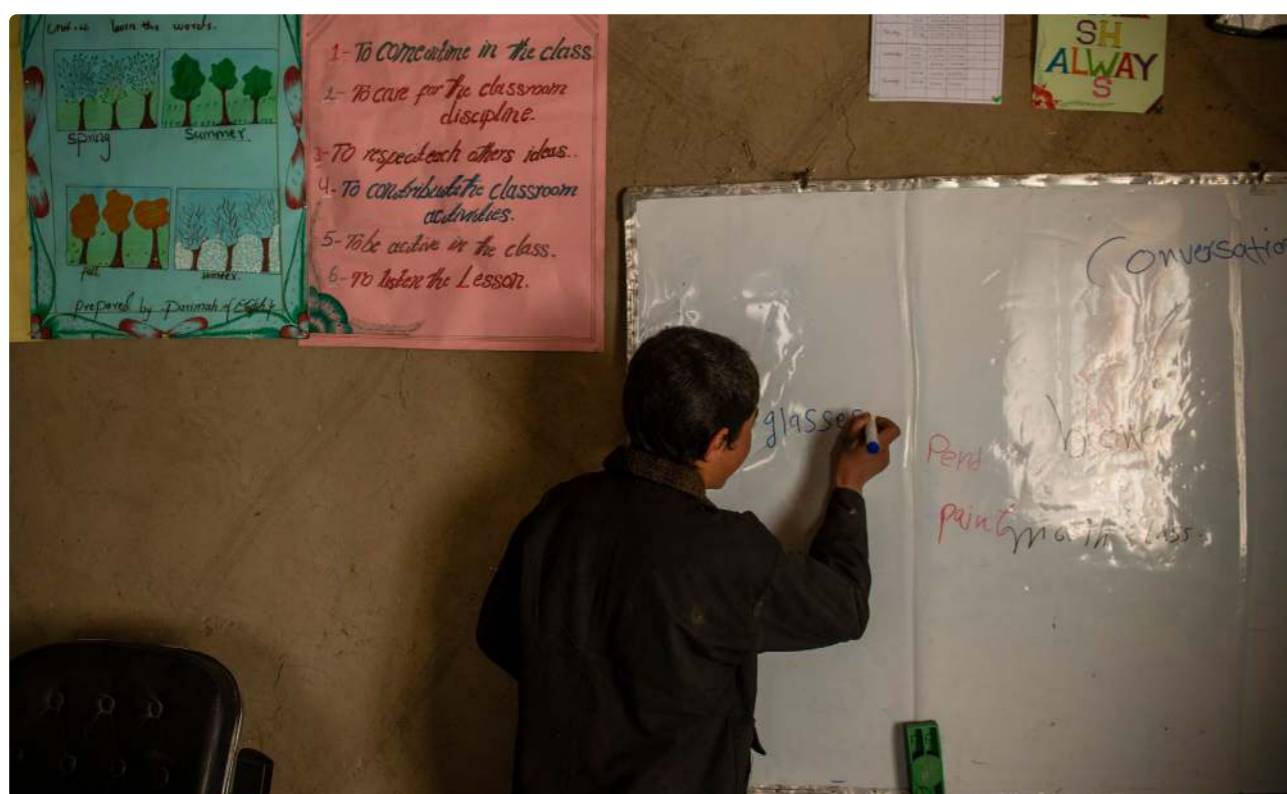
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Policy and legislative commitments

Afghanistan has ratified various international documents, including the UN Convention against Discrimination in Education, and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The 2004 Constitution contains articles to uphold these conventions, such as Article 22, which states that ‘any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan is forbidden’, and Article 53 which affirms that the State shall ‘adopt necessary measures [...] for reintegration of the disabled and handicapped persons and their

active participation in society.’¹⁴ Until the recent regime change, the 2017–21 National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) formed the framework for implementation of the Education Law (2008). Equitable access was featured as one of three core objectives, and it included strategies directed at learners with special needs, internally displaced persons, returnees and other disadvantaged groups to promote inclusion.¹⁵ The former government laid plans in the Inclusive and Child-Friendly Education Policy to establish resource centres and



support units at provincial and district level to progressively implement inclusive education, as well as to increase literacy rates particularly for females and people with disabilities, through the 2013 National Literacy Strategy.¹⁶

The Education Act alludes to provision in public schools for outstanding, gifted and talented students and students with special needs, and the 2009 document Needs and Rights Assessment: Inclusive Education in Afghanistan called for children with and without disabilities to attend the same schools and follow the same curriculum.¹⁷

The [Afghanistan Education Sector Transitional Framework](#) (AESTF) is the current plan being used in place of the NESP being used by

education implementers (international donors and NGOs) in the country. Developed by the Development Partners Group and Education Cluster, this framework has amongst its aims to advance understanding of equity and inclusion challenges.

The main cross-cutting theme of the AESTF is equity and inclusion and Strategic Goal 1 is ‘Sustain or improve access to safe, inclusive learning environments for all learners’.¹⁸

AKF staff noted that whilst the new Minister of Education has announced that all policies previously developed would hold, it remains unclear if the new government will continue to implement these or if they will develop new policies.



Teacher training on inclusive education

A search of the literature found that a UNESCO developed course on creating inclusive learning environments had been translated into Dari and Pashto for operation in Afghanistan, and a new course was being developed in 2019 to be incorporated into the education plan as a compulsory credit course.¹⁹ The state also sought to make the teaching profession itself more inclusive, with ambitions outlined in the education strategic plan to increase the number of female teachers, and especially in rural areas.²⁰

However, AKF staff commented that no state implemented training had been conducted at the school, district or community level for government schools covering inclusive education.

Training may have been provided by NGOs on inclusive education in some districts. For example, AKF have run training on inclusive education in targeted areas for community-based teachers, covering the different types of disability and how to support children with disabilities.

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Teachers reported that they had received some training (for example, through attendance at workshops or seminars) on teaching learners with diverse needs, and those with disabilities such as hearing or visual impairments. Their opinions were mixed as to how useful this training had been.

‘This training is useful to support students without disabilities but not useful for special education or students with disabilities.’

High school teacher, Bamyan

‘I am more aware of the needs of disabled students because of these workshops. But I still need to be trained about this issue.’

High school teacher, Badakhshan

‘Yes, this workshop was very effective because we discussed and learned useful topics related to recognising the types of disabilities of students, how to deal with them in general classes, preparing teaching materials according to the needs of disabled students, and avoiding the negative label of disabled students.’

High school teacher, Baghlan



Current attitudes and awareness of inclusive practice and disability

AKF staff felt that the level of understanding of disability across the country is low among school principals and community members, given that inclusive education was a recent development in the country. However, community-based teachers in some targeted areas have some knowledge about different types of disability and how to support children with disabilities, as they have received training from AKF.

Nevertheless, regular public awareness campaigns were run under the previous government with the support of international organisations regarding disability rights and education, and public awareness was building, though these activities may have had limited reach to those living in rural and remote areas.

‘The awareness levels of teachers regarding the recognition of different types of disabilities, especially learning disorders, and their diagnosis is relatively low, but teachers can recognise students who have physical disabilities [...] it is very difficult to distinguish that the students are not slow learners, but have reading and writing disorders, which is why their knowledge is low.’

High school teacher, Baghlan

Similarly, teachers felt that there was low awareness of the different types of disabilities in the community, and especially learning disabilities because people don't have access to much information on the topic. However, some students and teachers have more knowledge about the needs and right of students with disabilities, and in areas where large proportions of the population are educated, there is higher awareness and more favourable attitudes towards those with disabilities.

‘Because in my town a large proportion of people are educated, there is higher awareness and more favourable attitudes towards those with disabilities – in education for example they believe special care must be given to these individuals.’

High school teacher, Badakhshan



Diagnosis of learning disabilities

In terms of diagnosis of learning disabilities, AKF staff stated that an assessment process doesn't exist in public schools, however some students may be referred to specialised institutions. Where NGOs have implemented projects for disabled students they may have conducted some kind of diagnostic assessment of the students. When it comes to identifying the needs of students in the classroom, teachers felt that even without diagnostic tools they can identify those with disabilities that are in need. On identifying these students, they try to spend more time with them, or nominate a student to support them if they do not have time themselves.

‘The first step to help disabled children is to make both ourselves and [other] students understand that they should call the disabled child by their name and not over-emphasise their disability. We should also encourage students in the class activities and should have patience and tolerance for the disabled students during their activities in the class.’

High school teacher, Bamyan

Without the existence of diagnostic tools, teachers commented that they can only notice a child's needs through practice and student group work.

7 Whittaker & Wood, 2022 | 8 Whittaker & Wood, 2022 | 9 Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | 10 Ministry of Education, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan & UNICEF, 2018 | 11 Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | 12 Trani et al., 2019 | 13 Whittaker & Wood, 2022 | 14 Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | 15 Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | 16 Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | 17 Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | 18 Afghanistan Education Cluster, 2022 | 19 Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | 20 Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022

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Education provision, services and support for learners with disabilities

AKF staff stated that they see a relatively high number of children with disabilities attending school and learning in regular classes even though no inclusive education initiatives had yet been implemented by the Ministry of Education for government schools, though in remote areas disabled students may not attend in such high numbers. Additionally, there are specialist schools for learners with visual or hearing impairments supported by NGOs that some learners may be able to access. Nevertheless, it was reported that there is a tendency for those with more severe disabilities to drop out before entering secondary school. Sometimes this happens because of stigmatising attitudes and behaviours from other students and families.

Teachers, on the other hand, gave a more mixed response as to whether disabled students study in regular classrooms although did comment that they have students with disabilities in their classrooms. They identified speech, language and hearing impairments as the disabilities students in their classrooms have. One teacher commented that students with disabilities sometimes face ridicule from other students at school, which can put them off their studies. For this reason, one teacher thought that special education should be delivered in specific places away from regular classes, so that 'children with learning disabilities [can] be on their own and away from being annoyed by their classmates'. (High school teacher, Badakhshan)

One teacher alluded to the fact that they have limited time to give attention to disabled students, and that there is a lack of equipment and facilities in their school. This teacher called for specialised teachers to teach students with disabilities. Another teacher felt that engaging more closely with families would help to encourage more disabled children into school.

'The curriculum has some problems, dedicated time for teaching students with disabilities is very limited, those students need more time than other students and teachers should spend more time with students. Special equipment and facilities have been not considered for their needs. Professional teachers are needed for students with disabilities.'

High school teacher, Bamyan



Challenges & priorities

Against a backdrop of ongoing political instability and high numbers of out-of-school children, the country's limited infrastructure and stigmatising beliefs towards disability present challenges for the advancement of inclusive education. Covid lockdowns followed by the regime change in August 2021 have proved extremely disruptive to children's education. Complex sanctions introduced following this change has resulted in the suspension of much external cooperation that the education system depended on. Approximately four million school-age children remain out of school, many of whom are in remote and rural areas, and of which over two million are girls.²¹

Schools are not physically accessible for children with physical disabilities, and there is a lack of assistive devices and strategies that aid the inclusion of children with disabilities in learning.²² What's more, beliefs at the community level are still highly stigmatising of disability, with derogatory terms being used to refer to those with impairments or learning disabilities.²³ A recent report from UNICEF Innocenti calls for efforts seeking to improve provision for these learners to tackle such

negative attitudes which may be preventing students from enrolling in school in the first place.²⁴ Although guidelines for including children with disabilities have been developed by the Interagency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE), the literature points to a knowledge gap on how to promote inclusion of children with disabilities in conflict settings presents a wider obstacle to making meaningful advancements.²⁵

AKF staff and teachers highlighted a particular need for teacher capacity building, awareness raising and educational materials for disabled learners. They called for a needs assessment to be conducted to provide accurate data and felt that reviewing the policies and procedures on inclusive education developed thus far by NGOs for the Afghanistan context would be helpful to inform a negotiation with the new authorities on how to better support the different needs of children.

²¹ Afghanistan Education Cluster, 2022 | ²² Afghanistan Education Cluster, 2022 | ²³ Whittaker & Wood, 2022 | ²⁴ Whittaker & Wood, 2022 | ²⁵ Trani et al., 2019



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