The number of Azerbaijani children with disabilities enrolled in primary or secondary level education programmes is quite low. Government data indicates that only 14,638 such children are enrolled either in home-based learning programmes (almost 9,355) or in special or residential schools (about 2,725). For context, of the 72,000 children in Azerbaijan with registered disabilities, UNICEF estimates that approximately 54,000 are of primary and secondary school age. This means that a mere 20% of school-aged children with registered disabilities are actually receiving the education although none of them has an access to inclusive education as required by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

To enable all children – including those with disabilities – to access schooling within their own communities and be provided with the appropriate learning opportunities to achieve their full potential, the Government of Azerbaijan adopted the “State Programme on Development of Inclusive Education in Azerbaijan Republic for 2018-2024,” which aims to put into practice the principles of both the UNCRPD and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

1 Data source: Ministry of Education

Inclusive Education
WHAT IS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION? A relatively new concept for the Azerbaijani education system, inclusive education (IE) entails children of all abilities learning side-by-side in classroom settings. Providing such opportunities for children with disabilities and including them in quality educational programmes will have a long-term positive impact on national growth. By increasing the employment prospects and decreasing the dependence of educated adults with disabilities, improving social skills of children and adolescents with disabilities, and reducing discrimination towards people with disabilities, inclusive education can lead to greater social cohesion.

The successful national implementation of inclusive education programmes will require: relevant changes in legislation and policies addressing a definition of IE; all students to be able to secure inclusive learning opportunities; educational institutions to be physically accessible with appropriate technologies available, where possible, to assist children’s access to the existing curriculum; teachers in regular schools to have the capacity to support accessible learning; and data collection for registering children with disabilities and other relevant measures is improved. Another vital component of IE’s success will involve raising awareness of the topic among parents, teachers and society at large to address the opinions and assumptions that can reduce or prevent acceptance of the right of children with disabilities to pursue learning opportunities in general educational settings.

ACTION. To support the national priority of expanding inclusive education opportunities (as mentioned above), UNICEF, in partnership with the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan, will implement a new project in 2018-2020, funded by the European Union.

The project’s overall objective is to create an environment in which children with disabilities can increasingly access quality education in regular schools across the country, while simultaneously addressing public misperceptions and attitudes that create barriers to the societal inclusion of children with disabilities. The project builds teachers’ skills by incorporating inclusive educational modules into the national teacher training curriculum to improve the knowledge and capacity of current and future educators.

NINE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTRES WILL BE LOCATED IN:

- BAKU
- SUMGAYIT
- GANJA
- GUBA
- SHAKI
- AGJABADI
- GAZAKH

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

ARTICLE 24 § 2

States Parties shall ensure that: [...] Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live;

[...] Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education;

e) Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.

Comprehensive review and upgrades to the national teacher training system will help educators enhance their skills with regard to inclusive education and will contribute to a better quality of teaching in classrooms.

Nine inclusive education resource centres are being established in existing schools in the seven districts of Baku, Sumgayit, Ganja, Guba, Shaki, Agjabadi and Gagakh to provide local professional support and resources to teachers, school principals and parents. The centres will contain the necessary education materials and equipment to ensure their effective and efficient functionality. A library of IE materials will be organized in each centre and will help centre staff and communities study and learn better.
ACTION CONT. A public behavioural and social change campaign is also being initiated to raise awareness of the rights of children with disabilities, helping to increase engagement with, and to positively change attitudes towards, the social inclusion of children with disabilities in regular schools.

PROJECT IMPACT. The project will address the needs of the following groups:

**Children with disabilities:** The project aims to support the gradual expansion of Azerbaijan’s inclusive education programme and to create learning opportunities for up to 5,000 children with disabilities immediately and up to 20,000 children across the country in the next 5 years.

**Children without disabilities:** It is expected that children without disabilities will develop more insight into and understanding regarding issues pertaining to those with disabilities. This will have a longer-term positive impact on social interactions, mutual understanding and engagement between children of all physical abilities.

**Pre-service teacher training universities:** The new modules on inclusive education will be integrated into the training curriculum of the Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University in Baku and its branches in Guba and Shaki, as well as the Ganja and Sumgayit State Universities. As a result, the next generation of teachers will work to develop their skills even before entering the inclusive classroom. Over 1,300 future teachers in the teacher training universities will be trained between 2018 and 2020.

**Current teachers:** Over 10,000 teachers and school managers will be supported with in-service training on inclusive education.

**School managers and principals, education experts, teachers, families and parents in districts:** The project will support the establishment of nine local resource centres in seven districts, which have the potential to provide 44,000 school teachers, other education professionals and parents with guidance and methodological support.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

- **2006**
  - The United Nations drafts the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

- **2008**
  - The Government of Azerbaijan ratifies the UNCRPD, along with 161 other signatories

- **2018-2024**
  - The Government implements the “State Programme on Development of Inclusive Education in Azerbaijan Republic for 2018-2024”

- **2018-2020**

A boy and a girl reading a study book together at the pilot inclusive school No: 220 in Baku.

UNICEF, Azerbaijan/Pirozzi/2018