

Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in Sri Lanka

This country profile on Sri Lanka was developed as part of the regional mapping study on disability-inclusive education commissioned by the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia. It aims to provide a snapshot of the key policies, practices and strategies implemented from 2010 to 2020 to ensure children with disabilities learn in inclusive settings in Sri Lanka. This profile focuses on the country's progress in four domains of an inclusive education system: (1) Enabling Environment, (2) Demand, (3) Service Delivery, and (4) Monitoring and Measuring Quality. Cross-cutting issues such as gender and humanitarian situations are also addressed in this document, although not in great depth. More information on the methodology and theoretical framework underpinning the mapping study can be found in the full mapping report, *Mapping of Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in South Asia*.

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# Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in Sri Lanka

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#### **ACRONYMS**

**CBM** Christian Blind Mission

**CBR** community-based rehabilitation

CFM Washington Group/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning

**CRPD** Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

**DSS** Department of Social Services

**ESDP** Education Sector Development Plan

**ESDFP** Education Sector Development Framework and Programme

MoE Ministry of Education

**NEMIS** National Education Management Information System

NIE National Institute of Education

**OPD** Organization of Persons with Disabilities

**REACH-SS** Project for Strengthening Education for Children with Special Needs through

Inclusive Education Approach in Sri Lanka

SEN Special Education Needs

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

UNIESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

**UNICEF** United Nations Children's Fund

**UNICEF ROSA**UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia

**UNOPS** United Nations Office for Project Services

WG Washington Group on Disability Statistics

WHO World Health Organization



Inclusion is anchored on the fundamental human right to education for all promulgated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

### 1

### INTRODUCTION

Inclusion is anchored on the fundamental human right to education for all promulgated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), specifically Article 24, strengthened the global shift towards inclusion by mandating States parties to improve education systems and undertake measures to fulfil the rights of persons with disabilities to quality inclusive education.<sup>2</sup>

Despite overall progress in education attainment globally, children with disabilities remain one of the most marginalized groups. They are less likely to participate in and complete their education compared to their peers without disabilities.<sup>3</sup>

In South Asia, an estimated 29 million children–12.5 million at primary level and 16.5 million at lower secondary level – were out of school in 2018.<sup>4</sup> Of these, a considerable proportion was estimated to be children with disabilities. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), it is not possible to generate statistics that

are regionally or globally representative of the status of persons with disabilities with regard to education because of the scarcity of national data.<sup>5</sup> This is true for the South Asia region as well.

The lack of disaggregated education data poses a significant challenge for policy and programme development and implementation. In this regard, the United Nations Children's Fund Regional Office for South Asia (UNICEF ROSA) commissioned a study to:

- map inclusive education policies, strategies and practices implemented at all levels of the education system in the South Asia region that are effective, or promise to be effective, in increasing access and/or learning outcomes of children with disabilities in education and have the potential for scaling up; and
- inform the development and strengthening of regional and country-level advocacy and programming for advancing disability-inclusive education across South Asia.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol, 2006.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> World Health Organization and The World Bank, World Report on Disability, World Health Organization, Geneva, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics database, 'Out-of-School rates and numbers by SDG region, 2018', n.d.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'Education and Disability: Analysis of Data from 49 Countries', Information Paper No. 49, 2018, http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/ip49-education-disability-2018-en.pdf, accessed 18 December 2020.

The mapping covered interventions towards establishing disability-inclusive education initiated at all levels of the education system in eight countries in the region: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

A theoretical framework was developed to guide the mapping exercise. The framework conceptualized inclusive education through four main domains: (1) Enabling Environment, (2) Demand, (3) Service Delivery, and (4) Measuring and Monitoring Quality. Crosscutting issues, albeit brief, were included in the review to provide an overview of the

intersectionality between disability and gender, and disability and humanitarian issues.

This country profile on Sri Lanka was developed as part of this regional mapping study on disability-inclusive education. It aims to provide a snapshot of the key policies, practices and strategies implemented from 2010 to 2020 to ensure children with disabilities learn in inclusive settings in Sri Lanka. More information on the methodology and theoretical framework underpinning the mapping survey can be found in the full report, *Mapping of Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in South Asia*.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Grimes, P., et al., *Mapping of Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in South Asia*, United Nations Children's Fund Regional Office for South Asia, Kathmandu, 2021.



Sri Lanka has championed education for all children, endeavouring to afford equal educational opportunities for all children at all levels, irrespective of their backgrounds. 2

### **COUNTRY CONTEXT**

Sri Lanka has been championing education for all children since the introduction of the Universal Free Education Policy in 1945 and the Compulsory Education Policy in 1998 that endeavoured to afford equal educational opportunities for all children at all levels, irrespective of their backgrounds.

The nation's decades-long history of civil war between the State and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam resulted in multiple challenges in the education system, including unlawful recruitment of children in armed conflicts, safety and security considerations, child marriage, infrastructure and road network issues, and extreme poverty.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the negative impact of war on the education of children in many parts of the country,

Sri Lanka has made significant progress over the years. For instance, in 2014, the country recorded a 99.7 per cent net enrolment rate, with almost 100 per cent of pupils who start Grade 1 reaching Grade 5.8

The Ministry of Education (MoE) reports that many children with disabilities are mainstreamed in regular classrooms and special education units in schools. However, children with disabilities continue to face several barriers to access, participation and achievement in education. These barriers include many interrelated factors, particularly limited skills of teachers on inclusive teaching, lack of appropriate and accessible infrastructure in schools and limited scope in curricula, among others. <sup>10</sup>

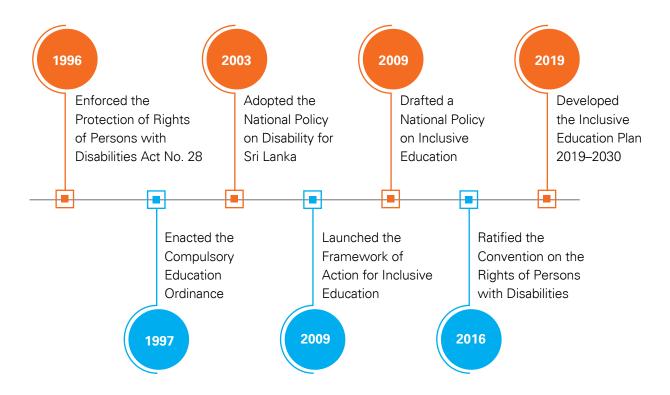
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> UNICEF, *Progress Evaluation of UNICEF's Education in Emergencies and Post-Crisis Transition Programme: Sri Lanka Case Study,* United Nations Children's Fund, New York, 2010, <a href="https://evaluationreports.unicef.org/GetDocument?fileID=167">https://evaluationreports.unicef.org/GetDocument?fileID=167</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals, Country Report 2014*, United Nations, Sri Lanka, 2015, <a href="http://lk.one.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Millennium-Development-Goals-Country-Report-2014.pdf">http://lk.one.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Millennium-Development-Goals-Country-Report-2014.pdf</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Ministry of Education, Education Sector Development Framework and Programme (ESDFP) 2013–2017, Ministry of Education Policy and Planning Branch, Battaramulla, 2012.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> For more information on the rights to education for children with disabilities in Sri Lanka, see UNICEF, 'Every Mind: Equal rights to education for children with learning disabilities in Sri Lanka', n.d., <a href="https://www.unicef.org/srilanka/every-mind">www.unicef.org/srilanka/every-mind</a>.

#### Milestones in disability-inclusive education





The Education Sector Development Plan articulates the government's commitment to promote inclusive education through implementing inclusive education programmes and emphasizing learner-centred approaches in schools.

# 3 ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

The enabling environment includes interrelated conditions that enable or facilitate the development of a disability-inclusive education system, including policies, disability data, plans, leadership, coordination and financing.

### 3.1 POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

International conventions have shaped Sri Lanka's legislative framework governing inclusive education.

A signatory to both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Sri Lanka has enacted laws and policies over the last decades in keeping with the inclusion goals set out in these international instruments.

The Salamanca Conference in 1994 led to the government signing an agreement to implement inclusive education.<sup>11</sup> Sri Lanka followed through and enforced the Protection of Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act No. 28 in 1996, laying the foundation for non-discrimination in education and guaranteeing compulsory and free education

for all through the Compulsory Education Ordinance 1997.<sup>12</sup>

Although the 1978 Constitution (amended in 2015)<sup>13</sup> promotes education for all citizens and prohibits discrimination based on race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion and place of birth (Article 12.2), it does not explicitly articulate non-discrimination in education on the grounds of disability.

In pursuit of greater disability inclusion, the National Policy on Disability for Sri Lanka 2003<sup>14</sup> provides a comprehensive framework for persons with disabilities to be included in all aspects of society. Inclusive education was explicitly defined in the policy, demonstrating the country's commitment to include children with disabilities in general education through learner-centred teaching approaches.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Jayawardena, P., and M. Abeyawickrama, Barriers and Opportunities in the Provision of Education for Children with Learning Disabilities in Sri Lanka, Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Sri Lanka, Constitution of Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 2015.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Ministry of Social Welfare, National Policy on Disability for Sri Lanka, Battaramulla, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Table 1. Main laws, policies and plans on disability and education

Government's action on international policies	Ratification
Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)	1991
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)	2016
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Optional Protocol (2006)	No action
Domestic laws, policies and plans on disability and education	Adoption
Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act No. 28	1996
Compulsory Education Ordinance	1997
National Policy on Disability for Sri Lanka	2003
Framework of Action for Inclusive Education in Sri Lanka	2009
New Education Act	2009 (proposal)
National Policy on Inclusive Education	2009 (draft)
Education First: Education Sector Development Framework and Programme	2013–2017
Education Sector Development Plan	2018–2025
Inclusive Education Plan Sri Lanka	2019–2030

In 2009, the National Education Commission, National Institute of Education (NIE) and MoE jointly prepared a proposal for a New Education Act for General Education. The proposed act referred to a rights-based perspective of education and aimed to ensure the education system enables access, participation and achievement of children with disabilities in general education. Approval of the proposed act has not taken place to date. Moreover, both the National Policy on Disability and the proposed Education Act endorse education in special education units within mainstream schools, most especially for children with severe disabilities.

Recent education policy reforms direct the system into more inclusive perspectives and approaches. The Draft National Policy on Inclusive Education 2009 aims to create a positive environment for all learners through the process of inclusive education and provide equal access to quality and relevant education and training for

children with disabilities and special needs. <sup>16</sup> The policy focuses on identifying and eliminating barriers to education; enhancing early identification and intervention; providing and promoting the use of technology in teaching and learning, specialized facilities, services and assistive devices; and strengthening the capacity of teachers and essential service providers, among other objectives aligned to the vision of an inclusive education system.

In 2013, the Education First policy reaffirmed the inclusion of children with disabilities in education, and, to the extent possible, should be taught in regular classrooms.<sup>17</sup> More recently, MoE has drafted a circular to clearly articulate the definitions of special education and inclusive education, roles and responsibilities of the ministry, guidelines for inclusive education implementation, disability assessment, early childhood education, and implementation of awareness programmes and seminars for key government officials, including medical practitioners.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Ministry of Education, National Policy on Inclusive Education (Draft), Battaramulla, n.d.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> UNESCO, Global Education Monitoring Report, 'Profiles: Sri Lanka', United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris, 2020.

### Key definitions in disability inclusion need alignment with international normative frameworks.

CRPD defines persons with disabilities as "those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others" (Article 1).<sup>18</sup>

The CRPD definition shifts away from focusing only on physical characteristics and 'defects' or 'limitations' in persons with disabilities. It includes a consideration of the barriers and environmental factors that affect the full participation of persons with disabilities. In education, this means identifying and eliminating barriers that hinder children with disabilities to access and participate meaningfully in schools.

Sri Lanka conceptualizes disability through a narrow, medically oriented definition (see Table 2). The Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act No. 28 defines disability from such a perspective. This has to be aligned with the CRPD definition as it directs identification systems, design and implementation of programmes, provision of learning opportunities and other services.

### 3.2 DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE SECTOR PLAN

The Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) 2018–2025 promotes inclusive education in parallel with strengthening special education.

Inclusive education is a key programme of MoE.<sup>19</sup> ESDP, developed in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 targets, reiterates global goals pertaining to equitable access to education for all children, including

children with disabilities. Component 1.2.2 specifically focuses on strengthening special education, inclusive education and non-formal education.

A definition of inclusive education was not found in the document and neither were statistics on the education of children with disabilities referenced. This is indicative of the gaps in the availability of reliable data on children with disabilities. Improvements to the country's National Education Management Information System (NEMIS) are planned over the implementation period of the sector plan. ESDP does not indicate plans to include data on learners with disabilities.<sup>20</sup>

Nonetheless, ESDP sets out broad priorities contributing to advancing disability-inclusive education including:

- improving learning facilities and resources in all schools;
- strengthening special education, inclusive education and non-formal education;
- defining inclusive education programmes and services and gradually implementing the programmes, until implementation covers 100 per cent of all schools by 2025; and
- reducing the number of out-of-school children and increasing access to special education and non-formal education.

In general, increasing teacher quality is at the core of the plan. Teacher training programmes on inclusive education and multilevel teaching are priority areas articulated in the sector plan. No mention of parental engagement in disability-inclusive education was evident. Yet, in a broad sense, increasing participation and engagement of parents in the education process is a key objective of MoE.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol, 2006.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Ministry of Education, Inclusive Education Plan Sri Lanka, Battaramulla, n.d.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Ministry of Education, Education Sector Development Plan: General Education in Sri Lanka 2018–2025, Ministry of Education, Battaramulla, 2017.

Although funding for the sector plan implementation is illustrated in the document, funding specifically allocated for interventions concerning children with disabilities is not articulated.

ESDP is complemented by a monitoring and evaluation framework setting out key strategies, activities, targets, timeline and implementation arrangements. Provision of services and infrastructure that will benefit children with disabilities in special education settings are included in the framework.

#### A dedicated action plan for inclusive education is in place.

The Inclusive Education Plan 2019–2030 articulates five key areas in disability-inclusive education: policy, curriculum development, human resources development, infrastructure development and awareness of inclusive education. There is an apparent focus on ensuring children with disabilities are admitted in regular classrooms through the revision of existing admission policies.<sup>21</sup>

# The Framework of Action for Inclusive Education 2009 sets a foundation for inclusive education implementation, especially at the school and classroom level.

The framework provides a guideline for introducing changes in school cultures, classroom practices, learning environment and provision of appropriate support, supported by continuous monitoring, learning and improvement.<sup>22</sup>

It articulates a system that is facilitative of inclusion. It sets out how inclusive education can be practised in schools through parent and community participation; early identification; pre-service training for inclusion; continuous in-service training and school-based professional

development for teachers and principals, training that is participatory and reflective of inclusive principles; quality circles for teachers and principals; mentoring for teachers; and support personnel (in-service advisers, resource persons and focal point) for inclusion in schools.<sup>23</sup>

The framework also guides the development of an inclusive environment by providing directives on the accessibility of school buildings, access to basic facilities, appropriate furniture, ensuring schools are available within the children's own community and using resources to target barriers to access.

The framework also sets out standards for inclusive education, which include guidelines for teacher knowledge and skills in relation to inclusion and the development and provision of learning materials reflective of inclusive principles. A system is set out to adequately provide support for children who have difficulty learning. It would be interesting to do a further review of the extent to which the framework has been operationalized in schools over the last decade.

A system for inclusion has been planned with in-service advisers providing support to schools a focal person in the school with special training supporting classroom teachers, a system and process for providing in-classroom interventions, which include dialogue with parents, working with teachers and other specialists as necessary for assessment, diagnosis and planning and implementation of strategies. In-service advisers provide "support and diagnosis for a cluster of schools and train teachers within the cluster to develop their skills to provide meaningful learning experiences and meet the needs of all children". 25 They are supported by special needs units and special school teachers who provide additional support to teachers and school leaders as needed.26

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Inclusive Education Plan Sri Lanka.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Ministry of Education, Framework of Action for Inclusive Education in Sri Lanka, Battaramulla, 2009.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Ibid.

Table 2. Definitions related to disability inclusion based on national laws and policies and international definitions

Terminology	Definition based on national laws and policies	International definition
Disability	A "person with disability means any person who, as a result of any deficiency in his physical or mental capabilities, whether congenital or not, is unable by himself to ensure for himself, wholly or partly, the necessities of life."  - Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, No. 28, 1996	"Disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."  - Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006
Inclusive education	<ul> <li>Inclusive education:</li> <li>identifies and reduces the barriers that may lead to exclusion,</li> <li>ensures not only enrolment but full participation and achievement of all children in school,</li> <li>responds positively to diversity and differences, and</li> <li>aims to meet the needs of all learners through an ongoing process of quality improvement in teaching and learning.</li> <li>Framework of Action for Inclusive Education in Sri Lanka 2009, p.2</li> </ul>	"Inclusive education is the result of a process of continuing and proactive commitment to eliminate barriers impeding the right to education, together with changes to culture, policy and practice of regular schools to accommodate and effectively include all students."  - General Comment No. 4 (2016) to Article 24, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
Special educational needs	The Education First 2013 policy articulates 4 categories of children with special educational needs:  • Visually impaired  • Hearing-impaired  • Physically impaired  • Mentally impaired	"Broad group of persons for whom schools need to adapt their curriculum, teaching method and organization, in addition to providing additional human or material resources to stimulate efficient and effective learning."  – UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Data for the Sustainable Development Goals Glossary

### 3.3 DATA ON CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Information on children with disabilities and their education is scarce in Sri Lanka.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) estimates disability prevalence in the country at 2.1 per cent for the whole population and 0.7 per cent among children aged 0–14 years.<sup>27</sup> These figures are significantly lower than the World Health Organization (WHO) and World Bank estimates,<sup>28</sup> which state that 15 per cent of any population are living with a disability, and

among children aged 0–14 years, 5.1 per cent have moderate to severe disability and 0.7 per cent are experiencing severe disabilities. This points to persistent challenges in identifying and measuring disability, which could lead to a large population of children with disabilities being excluded in education and other social services.

A 2016 report commissioned by UNICEF on the situation of children with disabilities revealed that 23.5 per cent of children with disabilities aged 5–14 were excluded from mainstream education, while for those who attended mainstream schools, participation in educational activities declined with age.<sup>29</sup>

Table 3. Main sources of child disability data

Method/data type	Data collection activity	Responsible agency	Frequency	Latest report available	Includes data on children with disabilities	Adopted CFM or WG Questions
Administrative data	National Education Management Information System/ Annual School Census of Sri Lanka	Ministry of Education	Annual	2018	Yes	No
Census	Census of Population and Housing	Department of Census and Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Planning	Every 10 years	2012	Yes	Yes
Survey	Model Disability Survey 2015	World Health Organization and World Bank	No information available	No information available	No information available	No information available

CFM: WG/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning; WG: Washington Group on Disability Statistics

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> UNESCAP, Disability at a Glance 2012: Strengthening the evidence base in Asia and the Pacific, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, 2012.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> World Report on Disability.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Jayawardena and Abeyawickrama, *Barriers and Opportunities*.

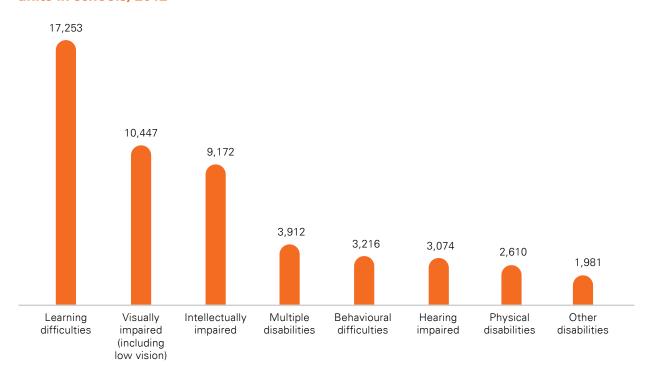


Figure 1. Number of children with disabilities enrolled in regular and special education units in schools, 2012

**Source:** Ministry of Education, Education Sector Development Framework and Programme (ESDFP) 2013–2017, Ministry of Education Policy and Planning Branch, Battaramulla, 2012.

Primarily, children with disabilities attend special schools and special education units within mainstream schools. According to the Education Sector Development Framework and Programme (ESDFP) 2013–2017, children with learning difficulties make up the largest group of children able to access education services (see Figure 1).

The Annual School Census of Sri Lanka 2018 reports a total of 2,451 students enrolled in special schools,<sup>30</sup> indicating that the majority of children with disabilities are learning in special education units within mainstream schools.

#### The NEMIS National Student Information System introduced a new data collection form that collects data on learners with disabilities.

In 2019, MoE implemented a new data collection form that collects students' basic profiles (see Table 4). Under 'Health Details', the class teacher is tasked to identify the 'special need' or a 'difficulty' the child has, following 17 categories of disabilities provided in the form.<sup>31</sup> Categories<sup>32</sup> include impairments and health conditions, such as visual and hearing impairment, epilepsy, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, among others. The use

<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Education, Annual School Census of Sri Lanka: Final report 2018, Battaramulla, 2018.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Ministry of Education, National Education Management Information System, National Student Information System – student data collection form, Battaramulla, 2019.

<sup>32</sup> The categories include blind, visual impairment, deaf, hearing impairment, speech disorder, intellectual disability, Down's syndrome, autism, hyperactive, multiple disorders, epilepsy, learning difficulty, cerebral palsy, physical handicapped, hydrocephaly, microcephaly, muscular dystrophy and spina bifida.

Table 4. Disability data in the National Education Management Information System (NEMIS)

Criteria <sup>a</sup>	Included in NEMIS <sup>b</sup>
Contains data on students with disabilities	Yes
Approach to identifying disability	
Use of Washington Group set of questions to identify disability	No
Identified only by 'disability' or 'special needs'	Yes
Level of data collection	
Pre-primary	No information available
Primary	Yes
Secondary	Yes
Data collected	
Participation (enrolment, dropout, completion)	Yes
Learning outcomes	No
Type of disability/functional difficulty	Yes
Degree of disability/functional difficulty	No
Barriers to education at the school level	Yes
Children with disabilities who are not in school	Yes
Disaggregation available	
Sex	Yes
By definition of disability/functional difficulty	Yes
Geographical location	Yes
Type of institution (government/private)	Yes

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>a</sup> Criteria adapted from UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'The Use of UIS Data and Education Management Information Systems to Monitor Inclusive Education', Information Paper No. 60, 2019.

of categories in identifying and measuring disability indicates a medical approach.

According to a MoE representative, barriers at school level and children with disabilities who are out of school are also collected in NEMIS.<sup>33</sup> The

initiative to include data on disability in schoollevel data collection can be a jumping-off point to introduce the use of tools and frameworks that promote the social model of disability, such as the Washington Group/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>b</sup> Ministry of Education, National Education Management Information System (NEMIS), National Student Information System – student data collection form, 2019.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Grimes, et al., Mapping of Disability-Inclusive Education Practices.

### 3.4 FUNDING AND FINANCING

Sri Lanka has not reached the benchmark set by the Incheon Declaration for education spending.

ESDP 2018–2025 indicates the government's intention to gradually raise the education budget in the next few years, aiming to reach 6 per cent of gross domestic product invested in the sector. Although ESDP does not articulate a specific line-item budget for inclusive education, programmes supportive of children with disabilities are outlined in the sector plan.

Nevertheless, the government of Sri Lanka ensures a free education policy and provides subsidies to cater to education needs, such as uniform, textbooks, scholarships, midday meals in disadvantaged schools, health insurance for all children, among other provisions. Based on the sector plan and action plans set forth by MoE, it can be inferred that the government prioritizes supporting the inclusion of children with disabilities in regular schools, while at the same time strengthening special education, which poses risks of exclusion.

### 3.5 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Policies supportive of the development of inclusive leadership across different levels of the system have been developed.

The Framework of Action for Inclusive Education 2009 provides a definition of inclusive education that guides educational leaders across the system to support its implementation.

Furthermore, the framework specifies guidelines educational leaders can use in planning strategies and programmes to support disability-inclusive education. In particular, it articulates that the roles of principals, teachers, parents and students in its implementation must be communicated to them; zonal officials are responsible for ensuring children with disabilities are in school; and schools must be able to identify children at risk of dropping out, taking steps to ensure retention, collaborating with the Ministry of Health in providing health screenings and identifying children who may have impairments and addressing these needs.

The framework further provides ways school leaders' capacity could be improved to be able to

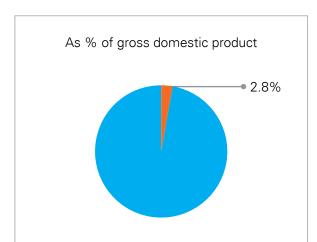
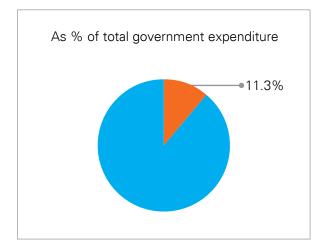


Figure 2. Government expenditure on education (%), 2017



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Sustainable Development Goal 4, Country Profiles: Sri Lanka, n.d.

support the development of disability-inclusive education at the school level. In particular, the framework commits the government to:

- train principals on principles of inclusion and child-centred approaches by integrating them into the content of training courses.
   Compulsory training and refresher courses would be integrated into the principal training programme;
- establish a system for principals to support others through mentoring and communities of practice;
- strengthen the instructional leadership role of principals; and
- revise the teacher and principal performancebased appraisal system to integrate inclusive education.

It provides guidelines for principals to develop their capacity for disability-inclusive leadership skills, such as:

- engaging parents and the school community in improving student learning;
- engaging the school community in governance and decision-making; and
- employing a school self-assessment method to inform school improvement planning and integrating inclusive education measures in evaluating their progress.

The Inclusive Education Plan 2019–2030 articulates strengthening vertical coordination for inclusive education through:

- the nomination of an inclusive education officer in MoE, Provincial Education Office and Zonal Education Office; and
- the nomination of an in-service adviser for special education for each division and a

Special Education Needs (SEN) Coordinator in each school.<sup>34</sup>

ESDP articulates the government's commitment to promote inclusive education through implementing inclusive education programmes and emphasizing learner-centred approaches in schools.

ESDP provides directives for strengthening education leadership through:

- school-based management, strengthening the autonomy of school leaders to develop contextualized programmes for responding to the needs of all children, including children with disabilities, in the school;
- strengthened implementation of community partnership programmes, which can increase community engagement to improve teaching and learning in schools;
- improving the leadership skill of school principals and education officers; and
- initiating the establishment of a Sri Lanka Education Supervision/Inspection Service along with a national system for school quality assurance.<sup>35</sup>

### Principals provide support to the enrolment of children with learning disabilities and ensure their participation in all school activities.

A study on barriers and opportunities in the provision of education for children with disabilities notes that principals played a key role in addressing discrimination and stigma against children with learning disabilities in mainstream schools. School leaders did this by facilitating the enrolment of children with learning disabilities, encouraging their participation in school programmes and activities and organizing awareness-raising programmes for students and parents.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Inclusive Education Plan Sri Lanka.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Education Sector Development Plan 2018–2025.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Jayawardena and Abeyawickrama, Barriers and Opportunities.

### School processes encourage the participation of parents and the school community to improve teaching and learning.

The guidelines for the school development planning process developed by MoE encourages a participatory approach to school development by engaging the school community as stakeholders in school development.<sup>37</sup>

Parents who participated in the study on barriers and opportunities in the provision of education for children with disabilities mentioned that schools that provide special education coordinate closely with parents to communicate their child's progress and provide tips on how to support the child's learning.<sup>38</sup>

Table 5. Government units responsible for disability-inclusive education

Sector	Government unit/organization and responsibility
Disability	National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities
(across sectors)	Provides financial assistance to students with disabilities from low socio- economic contexts.
	Ministry of Social Welfare and Empowerment
	Funds welfare programmes of the Department of Social Services.
	Department of Social Services
	Coordinates service delivery and implementation of programmes for persons with disabilities.
	Child Guidance Centres, Department of Social Services
	Centres in Colombo, Ratnapura and Gampaha Districts provide services to children with disabilities, such as:
	vocational training;
	employment assistance;
	early childhood care; and
	family counselling.
	Assistance in school admissions.
Education	Ministry of Education (MoE)
	Responsible for "designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating education policies, legislation, regulations and programmes for public school education in Sri Lanka" (ESDP 2018–2025), including teacher recruitment and student enrolment.
	Non-Formal and Special Education Branch, MoE
	Responsible for education policy implementation for persons with disabilities. Their role includes:
	<ul> <li>providing alternative learning opportunities for the education of children with disabilities; and</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>providing technical vocational education opportunities for out-of- school youth.</li> </ul>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Ministry of Education, Guidelines for School-level Planning, Battaramulla, 2013.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Jayawardena and Abeyawickrama, *Barriers and Opportunities*.

#### **Table 5 (continued)**

Sector	Government unit/organization and responsibility
Education	Provincial Education Office
	Provides in-service training to teachers on special and inclusive education through core teams established by the National Institute of Education.
	Zonal Education Office
	Responsible for the management of special education units and ensuring the provision of needed equipment and resources.
	Special Education Director
	Supports education delivery for children with disabilities in a province.
	In-Service Adviser for Special Education Needs
	Offers support for inclusive education and special education for a province. They are responsible for training teachers in developing learner-centred educational experiences and coordinating between special education units and schools, with the special education units as an additional resource for schools.
	Special Education Units/Special Schools
	Main providers of education for children with disabilities.  The Framework of Action for Inclusive Education articulates the function of special education units as a resource centre for mainstream schools with special educators providing technical assistance to mainstream teachers, helping them teach all children including children with disabilities.
Teacher education	National Colleges of Education
and development	Provides pre-service education to teachers and offers special education courses.
	National Institute of Education
	Develops in-service professional development courses for teachers and in- service advisers on inclusive and special education.
	Develops curriculum for children with hearing and visual impairments.
	Provides a course on special education for parents and caregivers.
	Teachers' College
	Delivers in-service teacher training courses.

**Source:** Ministry of Education, Education Sector Development Plan: General education in Sri Lanka 2018–2025, Battaramulla, 2017; Ministry of Education, Framework of Action for Inclusive Education in Sri Lanka, Battaramulla, 2009; Jayawardena, P., and M. Abeyawickrama, *Barriers and Opportunities in the Provision of Education for Children with Learning Disabilities in Sri Lanka*, Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka, 2016.



It is important to embed the full participation of children with disabilities, their families and representatives in decision-making-processes at all levels from school to national-level policymaking.

# 4 DEMAND

This domain focuses on initiatives supporting children with disabilities and their families to improve knowledge on their rights, demand for inclusive services, encourage changes in attitudes and behaviour, and increase participation in education. It includes involving the wider community, forging partnerships and putting in place systems and structures to facilitate meaningful engagement.

# 4.1 FAMILY, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

Education policies and plans promote the participation of families and communities in working towards more inclusive education programming at the school level.

Some features of an inclusive education system, such as collaboration with and participation of parents, children with disabilities and communities, can be found in some government plans and policies for improving learning outcomes for all children.

ESDP 2018–2025 identifies strategies to achieve better and more equitable levels of participation and engagement, better collaboration across all levels and more evidence-based decision-making

by students, teachers, parents, leaders, service providers and the government.

ESDFP 2013–2017 includes the participation of parents, students, teachers and the community in the school self-assessment, where they evaluate the school's effectiveness based on a child-friendly school framework. The school self-assessment includes identifying gaps and prioritizing improvements. Moreover, the whole school community is engaged in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of improvement plans.<sup>39</sup>

Strategies in the Framework of Action for Inclusive Education 2009 include increased decision-making power of parents in the education of their child. It states that parents and families must be involved in self-assessment, school development planning and attendance

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Education Sector Development Framework and Programme 2013–2017.

committees. Moreover, principals are mandated to develop a partnership between school and parents to include them in planning for classroom provisions and adaptations for their child. Parents shall also be regularly updated on their child's progress.

The framework further articulates that parents must be involved in determining the educational provision (e.g., special schools, special units, mainstreaming schools) for their child. While families are consulted at the school level, there is little evidence of their involvement in higher-level decision-making processes. It is important to embed the full participation of children with disabilities, their families and their representatives, such as Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), in decision-making processes at all levels from school to national-level policymaking.

While there is little evidence on cross-sector collaboration mechanisms, some initiatives have shown that such partnerships bring programmes that provide targeted support to children with disabilities.

A programme for teaching children with autism was launched in 2005 through the combined advocacy of the Association of Autistic Children's Parents and medical practitioners. 40 This initiative became the foundation for the development of the Autism Child Development Centre headed by MoE in collaboration with the Department of Psychological Medicine, Faculty of Medicine in the University of Colombo, Disability Unit of Kelaniya University, Department of Psychiatry and Faculty of Health Sciences in the University of Sri Jayawardanapura, Department of School Health Family Health Bureau and Autism and Asperger's Association.

The Autism Child Development Centre provides a 'model classroom setting' to 10–15 children diagnosed with autism at different levels of severity. The centre, located in the Maharagama Teacher Training College, is the only resource centre in Sri Lanka. It provides training for teachers throughout the country and aims to lead the establishment of resource centres for autism in the nine provinces of Sri Lanka.<sup>41</sup>

While collaboration between various sectors brings support programmes for children with disabilities, the lack of it poses additional barriers to inclusion. For instance, poor coordination between teaching institutions and government ministries<sup>42</sup> add to the lack of qualified special education teachers. Some degree and diploma programmes offered by teacher education and training institutions are not recognized by MoE. Other training credentials and distance learning options for in-service teachers are no longer recognized,<sup>43</sup> which affected the qualification status of many special education teachers.

The Framework of Action for Inclusive Education 2009 recognizes the relevance of collaboration of all stakeholders, such as OPDs, civil society organizations, education institutions and relevant ministries, such as the ministries of education, health, child services and social welfare, to harmonize plans, policies and intervention services.

### 4.2 AWARENESS, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

Studies provide insight into the attitudes and perception of parents and teachers towards disability and inclusive education.

Christian Blind Mission (CBM) Australia's disability information sheet in 2014<sup>44</sup> states how

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Hettiaarachi, S., et al., 'Including All? Perceptions of Mainstream Teachers on Inclusive Education in the Western Province of Sri Lanka', *International Journal of Special Education*, vol. 33, no.2, 2018, pp. 427–447.

<sup>41</sup> Ihid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Jayawardena and Abeyawickrama, Barriers and Opportunities.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> CBM Australia, 'Sri Lanka Disability Information Sheet', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia, 2014, https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource\_document/SriLanka-disability-factsheet.pdf.

persons with disabilities face discrimination and stigma from the community, resulting in poor attendance in schools. The report cites a 2003 survey showing 39 per cent of persons with disabilities had never attended school.<sup>45</sup>

According to the data gathered in the disability information sheet, persons with disabilities are seen as bad luck because disability is believed to be punishment from a past life. They are viewed by family and society as helpless or in need of help (cannot be independent). Girls are less likely to attend school because of the family's protectiveness towards them and the perception that girls need less education than boys. 46

In a 2013 study documenting experiences of children with disabilities, their parents and their teachers in three public schools in the Kandy District, <sup>47</sup> 15 out of 18 parents considered education as a way to counter the stigma attached to disability. Other parents saw education as an opportunity to provide a sense of normalcy through the interaction of children with disabilities with their peers and their participation in mainstream classes. Parents also equated education to a better future for their children.

In the same study, teachers interviewed tended to focus on the "inability of children with disabilities to cope with the pace and abilities" of their peers without disabilities. Five out of eight teachers interviewed emphasized the impairments as a barrier to learning in the regular classroom setting. 49 This perception can be attributed to the lack of support and training on inclusion provided to teachers.

A 2018 study<sup>50</sup> documenting teachers' perception of inclusive education and disability articulated that:

- Teachers lack a clear understanding of inclusive education and would sometimes attribute constructs contradictory to it.
- Children with disabilities need to be brought up to the "level of other children" (p. 432).
- Children with disabilities can only participate in some activities.
- Children with disabilities adapt to fit into the class and school environment rather than the school environment adapted for the child.
- The medical model of disability is the predominant approach towards individuals with disabilities. Children are treated with sympathy and the perspective that it is beneficial for them to be in the classroom with peers comes from one of sympathy rather than founded on a rights-based approach to education.
- Teachers have a negative attitude towards inclusion, contributing to the preference for special education.<sup>51</sup>
- Children with disabilities are labelled to have 'special needs' "to counter negative societal stereotypes within Sri Lankan society" (p. 435).
- Teachers think that inspectors from MoE will not understand if they explain that students are unable to achieve in class because of disabilities. Teachers have a fear of "being judged and ridiculed by personnel from the MoE" (p. 439).
- Teachers feel that teaching students with disabilities within mainstream classrooms require special training and is difficult, and that they would need incentives to teach children with disabilities.

In the earlier study on barriers and opportunities in providing education for children with learning

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> 'Sri Lanka Disability Information Sheet', p. 120.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Abeywickrama, S., I. Jayashinghe and S. Sumanasena, 'Excluded in inclusive schools: Experiences of children with disabilities, their families and teachers in Sri Lanka', *Disability, CBR and Inclusive Development*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2013, pp. 115–129, doi 10.5463/DCID.v24i1.172.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Hettiaarachi, et al., 'Including all?'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> National Institute of Education, 2000, as cited in Hettiaarachi, et al., 2018.

disabilities, teachers were found reluctant to teach children with disabilities in mainstream classes. <sup>52</sup> Special education teachers are also reported to be at the receiving end of discrimination as special education is looked down upon by teachers in other fields. <sup>53</sup> Increasing the standards and qualifications of teachers together with proper compensation and professional development can help address the stigma that teachers of children with disabilities face.

#### Policies and initiatives show efforts to develop an inclusive culture.

The Framework of Action for Inclusive Education 2009 includes the need for awareness and mass media campaigns directed towards creating a "culture of equality and acceptance of difference and diversity through all levels of society". <sup>54</sup> The goal of the information campaigns is to develop and sustain attitudes facilitative of inclusion, raise awareness on the rights of the child and

encourage parents to send their children to school, even those with disabilities.

The Inclusive Education Plan 2019–2030 includes the implementation of awareness programmes for school communities in 2020. The MoE Autism Child Development Centre conducts awareness-raising programmes for parents at the national and provincial level. It has a national resource centre catering to the needs of children with autism and a provincial centre in each of the nine provinces.<sup>55</sup>

These policy provisions and initiatives help raise awareness about inclusion. This can be further strengthened with a national communication strategy that focuses on a rights-based approach to education founded on CRPD commitments. This means that advocacy should clearly articulate the right of children with disabilities to learn alongside children without disabilities under the same curriculum and with appropriate and sufficient support.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Jayawardena and Abeyawickrama, *Barriers and Opportunities*.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

 $<sup>^{\</sup>bf 54}$  Framework of Action for Inclusive Education in Sri Lanka, p. 2

<sup>55</sup> Lakshman, H., 'Special education in Sri Lanka', National Institute of Special Needs Education, n.d., www.nise.go.jp/kenshuka/josa/kankobutsu/pub\_d/d-292/d-292\_21.pdf.



Policies support the capacity building of education officials and teachers in disability-inclusive education.

### 5

### **SERVICE DELIVERY**

This domain deals with the availability of and access to various services for children with disabilities and initiatives to strengthen different aspects of the education system.

## 5.1 APPROACHES TO EDUCATING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

#### Special education opportunities are made available for children with disabilities.

The government supports schools that provide specialized education to children with severe disabilities, while other children are mainstreamed in regular schools "wherever possible". 56 There are special education resource centres in some provinces whose main role is to spread awareness on special education to teachers, principals, MoE officers and parents, and to provide technical assistance to teachers who teach children with disabilities in special units or mainstream classrooms. 57

Significant changes in inclusive education were introduced by NIE, which has various initiatives promoting inclusive education. Some of these are inclusive education training, preparation of curricula and teaching materials, and provision of training and degrees in special education.<sup>58</sup>

#### Efforts to pilot inclusive education are present but it is still perceived as a separate education provision.

Pilot inclusive schools are being conducted in some parts of the country with the support of development partners. The Japan International Cooperation Agency Project for Strengthening Education for Children with Special Needs through Inclusive Education Approach in Sri Lanka (REACH-SS)<sup>59</sup> is being implemented in 12 schools with special education units in Kurunegala and Colombo Districts.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Education Sector Development Framework and Programme 2013–2017, p. 20.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58 &#</sup>x27;Sri Lanka Disability Information Sheet'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> International Development Center of Japan, 'Toward "Sri Lankan model" of inclusive schools where all students learn together with school-wide support', Newsletter No. 1, March 2020, <a href="https://www.jica.go.jp/project/english/srilanka/009/newsletter/c8h0vm0000f9y4bk-att/newsletter\_01.pdf">www.jica.go.jp/project/english/srilanka/009/newsletter/c8h0vm0000f9y4bk-att/newsletter\_01.pdf</a>.

Table 6. Approaches to educating children with disabilities

Approaches to educating children with disabilities	Description and examples	
Special education	<ul> <li>Offered as an "alternative only for those students whose needs cannot be met in the mainstream schools" (Framework of Action for Inclusive Education in Sri Lanka 2009, p.8).</li> <li>Classes are structured according to disability and competency level.</li> <li>The decision to have the child attend a special school is made in collaboration with parents, health officials and other support agencies.</li> <li>As of 2014, there are 25 special schools with 2,795 students.</li> </ul>	
Integration (special units)	<ul> <li>Articulated in the Framework of Action for Inclusive Education in Sri Lanka as 'separate units attached to mainstream schools' for students with visual or hearing impairment. Mainstream schools and special units are to work together for students to attend mainstream class.</li> <li>As of 2014, there are 525 special units, 78 in national schools and 447 in provisional schools.</li> </ul>	
Integration/ mainstreaming	<ul> <li>Placement of children who have a disability in ordinary school settings with perhaps special adaptations to meet the needs of particular disability groups, for example, the Braille system for those with loss of sight.</li> <li>Students with disabilities are mainstreamed in inclusive classrooms.</li> <li>As of 2014, a total of 5,088 students with disabilities are mainstreamed in government schools (data are not disaggregated and also include numbers of those who are in special units attached to mainstream schools).</li> </ul>	
Inclusive education (pilots)	<ul> <li>The Japan International Cooperation Agency Project for Strengthening Education for Children with Special Needs through Inclusive Education Approach in Sri Lanka involved teacher training on inclusive pedagogy in mainstream classes, awareness-raising workshops for parents and students on inclusive education, developing an inclusive enrolment system and evidence collection of good practices.</li> <li>The pilot project was conducted in 12 pilot schools with special education units in Kurunegala and Colombo Districts.</li> </ul>	
Vocational training	Vocational training centres established by the Department of Social Services prepare students with disabilities to become productive members of society.	
Non-formal education	Community Learning Centres, Functional Learning Centres, Vocational Training Centres.	
Apprenticeships	Sarvodaya Movement, Navajeevana.	
Child Guidance Centres	<ul> <li>Established by the Department of Social Services to prepare pre-primary children with disabilities for formal schooling.</li> <li>Also provides early identification and intervention (started in one district, piloted in three other districts as of 2014).</li> <li>Provides training to pre-school teachers in inclusion and special education.</li> </ul>	

**Source:** Ministry of Education, Framework of Action for Inclusive Education in Sri Lanka, Battaramulla, 2009; Jayawardena, P., and M. Abeyawickrama, *Barriers and Opportunities in the Provision of Education for Children with Learning Disabilities in Sri Lanka*, Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka, 2016; Ekanayake, S.B., et al., *Study on Development of Special Education and Non-Formal Education*, National Education Commission, Nugegoda, 2014; Ministry of Social Welfare, National Policy on Disability for Sri Lanka, Battaramulla, 2003; International Development Center of Japan, 'Toward "Sri Lankan model" of inclusive schools where all students learn together with school-wide support', Newsletter No. 1, March 2020.

The project includes training teachers on inclusive approaches to teaching children with disabilities in mainstream classes, workshops for parents and students to build their awareness on inclusive education, improvements in the enrolment system, and documentation of good practices.

Initiatives such as REACH-SS contribute to the country's progress on disability inclusion in education. However, these kinds of initiatives should be scaled up and a national strategy to gradually discontinue segregated models of education should be developed.

ESDP 2018–2025 considers inclusive education as a separate education provision, like integration or special education, instead of a framework for delivering quality education for all children.

# 5.2 EDUCATION WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHER TRAINING

Policies support the capacity building of education officials and teachers in disability-inclusive education.

The Framework of Action for Inclusive Education 2009 articulates that an introductory training in inclusive education is "to be developed and provided to all teachers, principals, trainers and officials in the system" (p.4). The framework also articulates that inclusive education and learner-centred pedagogy must be integrated into all training courses to be developed in the future.

The Inclusive Education Plan 2019–2030 recognizes the need to establish structures for inclusive education within the system. Hence,

MoE will identify and build the capacity of inclusive education officers, in-service advisers and SEN coordinators at the central and local levels. Special education teachers will also be recruited and deployed. Furthermore, the preservice curriculum will be revised in 2022 to add inclusive education as a mandatory subject by then. 61

### There have been efforts to strengthen the capacity of the system to support disability-inclusive education.

The MoE Primary Education Branch developed guidelines for the identification of children with disabilities. In-service advisers were trained on the use of the guidelines, who in turn, provided support and training to teachers on early identification. Moreover, the Open University provides training for master teachers and educational directors on special education. 63

Pre-service special education programmes are offered in Sri Lankan universities.<sup>64</sup> The National Colleges of Education offer special education courses for pre-service teachers. The Department for Special Needs Education at the Open University of Sri Lanka was established in 2003. Currently, disability-inclusive education is not a mandatory part of pre-service teacher training.<sup>65</sup>

#### A programme for teaching children with autism was launched in 2005.66

As noted in section 4.1, the Autism Child Development Centre was established as an institution where children diagnosed with moderate to severe autism are taught in a classroom setting. The centre in the Maharagama Teacher Training College is headed by MoE and offers a training programme for teachers throughout the country in educating children with autism.

<sup>60</sup> Inclusive Education Plan Sri Lanka.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Jayawardena and Abeyawickrama, Barriers and Opportunities.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Ekanayake, S.B., et al., *Study on Development of Special Education and Non-Formal Education*, National Education Commission, Nugegoda, 2014.

<sup>66</sup> Hettiaarachi, et al., 'Including All?'.

# Policy documents on inclusive education include directives on continuous professional development for teachers on disability-inclusive education.

The Framework of Action for Inclusive Education 2009 aims to develop a systemic approach to continuing in-service training and professional development. This includes school-based professional development for all teachers to support continuous professional learning. In-service advisers are to provide training opportunities focused on helping teachers reflect on and improve their practice. Teacher resource centres and teacher educators are to be activated to support this system.

ESDP 2018–2025 articulates its commitment to disability-inclusive education aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4. The plan recognizes the importance of strengthening the capacity of teachers in inclusive teaching and learning as a means to achieve equitable access to education for children with disabilities.

### Government institutions offer in-service training for teachers on special education and disability-inclusive education.

A 2014 research articulates that teacher colleges offer in-service teachers training for special education.<sup>67</sup>

#### NIE carries out:

- inclusive education training; and
- development of curricula, teacher materials and tertiary degrees in special education.<sup>68</sup>

Programmes at the Autism Child Development Centre include:

 a national-level programme for professionals in special education;

- training and awareness-raising programmes for education officers and in-service advisers in primary education; and
- teacher training at the provincial level.<sup>69</sup>

NIE and the MoE Primary Education Branch organize regular two- to three-day training programmes for primary school teachers on teaching children with learning disabilities. The trainings are conducted in different zones and include teaching techniques in mainstream settings, identification and responding to the needs of children with learning disabilities. Monthly training programmes are also provided for teachers teaching in special units and schools.<sup>70</sup>

However, there is still need to assess the extent to which these trainings are aligned with CRPD and the social model of disability and how they support teachers to adapt instruction and address barriers to education experienced by children with disabilities.

### 5.3 SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

New school buildings in Mannar District were constructed to improve the learning environment.

The Government of Japan funded the construction of new primary and secondary school buildings and teachers' quarters under the project Sustainable Resettlement through Community-Driven Improvement of the Learning Environment<sup>71</sup> in Mannar District. The project was in collaboration with MoE and implemented by UN-Habitat in 2016. To improve the learning environment in the schools, an auditorium, canteen with kitchen, storeroom, and water,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Ekanayake, et al., Study on Development of Special Education.

<sup>68 &#</sup>x27;Sri Lanka Disability Information Sheet'.

<sup>69</sup> Hettiaarachi, et al., 'Including All?'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Jayawardena and Abeyawickrama, *Barriers and Opportunities*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> UN-Habitat Sri Lanka, 'Construction of New School Buildings Underway in Mannar District with Funding from the Government of Japan', July 2016, <a href="http://unhabitat.lk/news/construction-of-new-school-buildings-underway-in-mannar-district-with-funding-from-the-government-of-japan">http://unhabitat.lk/news/construction-of-new-school-buildings-underway-in-mannar-district-with-funding-from-the-government-of-japan</a>.

Table 7. Legal provisions for enhancing the school environment for children with disabilities

Programme	Provision	
Education Sector Development Framework	Theme 1. Increase equitable access to primary and secondary education	
and Programme 2013–2017	T1.7 The National Programme of transforming 1,000 secondary schools and 5,000 primary schools to ensure the achievement of the objectives of knowledge-based development of future Sri Lanka, as envisaged in the Mahinda Chinthana Vision for the Future.  T1.7.2 Development of a network of 1,000 good quality secondary schools.	
National Plan of Action for Children in Sri Lanka 2016–2020	Section 2. Access, Quality and Relevance in Education Plan of Action for Improving Access and Quality Development of Primary Education	
	Provide satisfactory physical facilities and child-friendly learning environments that improve the psychosocial well-being of children and fulfil the equal right to educational opportunity.	

**Source:** Ministry of Education, Education Sector Development Framework and Programme 2013–2017, Battaramulla, 2013; Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, National Plan of Action for Children in Sri Lanka 2016–2020, Battaramulla, 2016.

sanitation and hygiene facilities were also constructed. The needs of over 25 schools were addressed and about 10,000 returnees including 5,500 schoolchildren benefited from the project.

# Renovations to develop child-friendly schools were conducted in Ampara and Batticaloa Districts.

MoE, the United Nations Office for Project Services and Korea International Cooperation Agency partnered for a project to improve access to education in 2011 by renovating 11 primary and secondary schools in Ampara and Batticaloa Districts. The project included construction of new buildings, additional classrooms and toilet facilities. The renovated schools were officially designated as child friendly by UNICEF and benefited around 7,000 children.

## School projects in Batticaloa and Trincomalee Districts were inaugurated.<sup>73</sup>

In 2019, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command inaugurated the renovation of two schools in Nintavur and Soodaikkudah and funded the construction of five new classrooms, among other facilities. The new classrooms incorporated an emergency shelter on the top floor, serving as a safe location for local families during a natural disaster. A new handicap-accessible toilet block with 10 stalls was also constructed under the project.

### A school building project for children with disabilities was initiated.<sup>74</sup>

The Government of Japan, in 2019, provided funding for the 'Project for Building for Children with Disabilities' in Ampara District. The project

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> UNOPS, 'Renovated schools boost sustainable development in Sri Lanka', n.d., <a href="https://www.unops.org/news-and-stories/stories/renovated-schools-boost-sustainable-development-in-sri-lanka">www.unops.org/news-and-stories/stories/renovated-schools-boost-sustainable-development-in-sri-lanka</a>, accessed 29 September 2020.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> U.S. Embassy in Sri Lanka, 'U.S. Embassy Inaugurates School Construction Projects, U.S. Embassy in Sri Lanka', 2019, <a href="https://lk.usembassy.gov/u-s-embassy-inaugurates-school-construction-projects">https://lk.usembassy.gov/u-s-embassy-inaugurates-school-construction-projects</a>, accessed 29 September 2020.

<sup>74</sup> Reliefweb, 'Japan to support school building for children with disabilities', 5 September 2019, <a href="https://reliefweb.int/report/sri-lanka/japan-support-school-building-children-disabilities">https://reliefweb.int/report/sri-lanka/japan-support-school-building-children-disabilities</a>.

targets the construction of a new building for the special education unit with three classrooms, a bathroom and furniture. The new school building is expected to benefit over 60 children with disabilities, providing them access to better educational facilities.

#### Laws and policies should address schoolrelated gender-based violence against children with disabilities.

Although country-level data on violence against children with disabilities in education settings is limited, global and regional data indicate children with disabilities, especially girls with cognitive disabilities, are at a higher risk of violence.<sup>75</sup>

The 2008 Global School-based Health Survey<sup>76</sup> among 2,611 students from Grades 8 to 10 revealed that 48 per cent of students aged 13–15 years had experienced physical violence in the past 12 months. Data showed a slightly higher percentage of boys (54.2 per cent) than girls (41.5 per cent) who experienced physical assault. Data on the prevalence of physical attacks on children with disabilities are not available.<sup>77</sup>

In a separate study, children with disabilities reported that they experienced bullying in schools and found the incidents disruptive to their learning. Teachers and parents, however, did not consider bullying as having an effect on the learning environment. The separate study of the separate study.

How authorities perceive violence is critical in the reporting of and response to school-related gender-based violence. Some forms of violence, such as bullying and corporal punishment, can become normalized<sup>80</sup> as an everyday part of the learning experience that they become unreported and unpunished. This can undermine the efforts towards inclusive education as violence in education settings can lead children with disabilities, especially girls, to drop out of school.<sup>81</sup>

National legislations and policies in Sri Lanka try to address violence against women and children. However, they fail to address the specific needs of different at-risk groups. For instance, the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act provides overarching protection for women, children and persons with disabilities without focusing on the individual needs of these groups.<sup>82</sup>

Some policies, however, are enabling inclusive and safe learning environments. The Framework of Action for Inclusive Education 2009 states that strategies for inclusion must be embedded in the school development plan. Part of the vision of the framework is to stop the practice of corporal punishment in schools and, instead, develop a positive learning environment for all children.

Studies should be conducted to explore the lived experience of different segments of the population, such as children with disabilities, in terms of how they experience violence in different settings at various points in their lives. Such information will help policymakers in developing targeted prevention, reporting and response mechanisms to end violence against children with and without disabilities in and out of school.

<sup>75</sup> UNICEF and University of Edinburgh, Violence against Children in South Asia: A systematic review of evidence since 2015, United Nations Children's Fund, 2020, <a href="https://www.unicef.org/rosa/documents/violence-against-children-south-asia">www.unicef.org/rosa/documents/violence-against-children-south-asia</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, Violence against Children in Education Settings in South Asia, United Nations Children's Fund Regional Office for South Asia, Kathmandu, 2016.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

 $<sup>^{78}\</sup>mbox{Abeywickrama, Jayashinghe}$  and Sumanasena, 'Excluded in Inclusive Schools'.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> UNESCO, Global Education Monitoring Report, *Gender Report: A new generation: 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education,* United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris, 2020.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> Solotaroff, J. L., and R. P. Pande, *Violence against Women and Girls: Lessons from South Asia, South Asia* Development Forum, The World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2014, doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-0171-6.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

# 5.4 CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT

# The Government of Sri Lanka intends to implement a curriculum reform.

The Education First 2013 policy presented a summary of ESDFP 2006–2010 and 2013–2017.83 In both development frameworks, the need for curriculum reform was consistently present, as well as in the National Plan of Action for Children in Sri Lanka 2016–2020 (see Table 8).

## Minimum standards were developed for teaching and learning during emergencies.

The Sri Lanka Minimum Standards for Education Handbook, 2013, was developed as an adaptation of the Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery, which is a relevant toolbox in the context of education in emergencies. The handbook considers marginalized populations such as girls and persons with disabilities in the document. The

minimum standards are stated under the teaching and learning domain (see Table 9).

#### 5.5 LEARNING MATERIALS

# Provision of assistive materials and equipment is key to accessibility of learning.

The Government of Sri Lanka provides free education including free textbooks for all children. Yet, the issue of availability of learning resources continues to be a concern, much more so is the availability of learning materials in accessible formats for children and youth with disabilities and special needs.

Several independent studies cited the lack of adapted materials and assistive equipment to support their learning needs. Although, ESDFP 2013–2017 reported that in 2012 the SEN Programme supplied spectacles to SEN students, consumable materials for conducting lessons and learning aids to special education classes. An autism centre and a Braille press were also established through the programme.

Table 8. Education Sector Development Framework and Programme 2006–2010 and 2013–2017, and National Plan of Action for Children in Sri Lanka 2016–2020: Themes and key strategies

Programme/plan	Theme/area	Related key strategy
Education Sector Development Framework and Programme 2006–2010	Theme 2: Improving the quality of primary and secondary education	<ul><li>Curriculum restructuring and upgrading</li><li>Quality improvements in subjects</li><li>Modernizing examinations and testing</li></ul>
Education Sector Development Framework and Programme 2013–2017	Theme 2: Improve the quality of primary and secondary education	T2.1.1 Curriculum revisions and upgrading for primary education T2.2 Curriculum revision for secondary education
National Plan of Action for Children in Sri Lanka 2016–2020	Area 2: Improving Quality, Relevance and Effectiveness of Secondary Education	2.1.3. Improve the present integrated curriculum

**Source:** Ministry of Education, Education First, Battaramulla, 2013; Ministry of Education, Education Sector Development Framework and Programme 2013–2017, Battaramulla, 2013; Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, National Plan of Action for Children in Sri Lanka 2016–2020, Battaramulla, 2016.

<sup>83</sup> Ministry of Education, Education First, Battaramulla, 2013.

<sup>84</sup> Disability Organizations Joint Front, UN Universal Periodic Review – Sri Lanka 2017, Ratmalana, 2017, <a href="https://www.ohchr.org/">www.ohchr.org/</a> <a href="https://www.ohchr.org/">Documents/Issues/Disability/RightAccess/JusticeArticle13/CSO/DisabilityOrganizations/JointFrontSrilanka.pdf</a>; Abeywickrama, Jayasinghe and Sumanasena, 'Excluded in Inclusive Schools'; Disability Organizations Joint Front, The State of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Sri Lanka, Ratmalana, 2017, <a href="https://ices.lk/projects/sri-lanka-women-living-with-disabilities-report-submitted-by-the-ices">https://ices.lk/projects/sri-lanka-women-living-with-disabilities-report-submitted-by-the-ices</a>; Jayawardena and Abeyawickrama, <a href="https://www.ohchr.org/">Barriers and Opportunities</a>.

#### Table 9. Minimum standards for teaching and learning

#### Minimum standards

#### Standard 1: Curricula

Culturally, socially and linguistically relevant curricula are used to provide formal and non-formal education, appropriate to the particular context and needs of learners.

#### Standard 2: Training, Professional Development and Support

Teachers and other education personnel receive periodic, relevant structured training according to needs and circumstances.

#### **Standard 3: Instruction and Learning**

Instruction and learning processes are learner-centred, participatory and inclusive.

#### Standard 4: Assessment of Learning

Appropriate methods are used to evaluate and validate learning outcomes.

**Source:** International Network for Education in Emergencies, Sri Lanka Minimum Standards for Education, INEE and Sri Lanka Education Working Group, 2013.

ESDFP 2013–2017 also acknowledged the lack of resources in special education units, such as technical instruments for learning. Hence, Strategy 1 in ESDFP continues to support the implementation of free education policies, which includes the provision for free textbooks to all students in Grades 1–11 in government schools and Pirivenas (monastic colleges), and provision of special grants and learning resources to SEN students in government schools.

# 5.6 SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDENTS, PARENTS AND TEACHERS

While policies and frameworks encourage cooperation between ministries and sectors, a systematic mechanism for coordination is lacking.

The Framework of Action for Inclusive Education 2009 articulates the need for cooperation between different agencies (e.g., health, social welfare and education) for inclusive education to be implemented successfully. There are different

initiatives across key sectors of health, social services and education, however, available data indicate a lack of cross-sectoral mechanism harmonizing disability-related programmes and services.

The framework also articulates a system facilitative of inclusive education. This includes a system for supporting students who have difficulty learning in the classroom through dialogue with parents, planning with specialists, diagnosis and assessment, the use of individualized education plans and provision of assistant teachers and other in-classroom support as needed.<sup>85</sup> Although this is not institutionalized yet, there is evidence that such a system is in place in some schools.<sup>86</sup>

The Department of Social Services (DSS) is responsible for developing vocational skills and rehabilitation of disabled persons and early intervention for rehabilitation of children with disabilities, while the Ministry of Health has departments that work with children with disabilities.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Framework of Action for Inclusive Education in Sri Lanka, 2009.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> Jayawardena and Abeyawickrama, Barriers and Opportunities.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Ekanayake, et al., Study on Development of Special Education.

#### Centres currently provide early identification and intervention, but an institutionalized screening programme is underway.

While there is no institutionalized early identification system in place yet, there are government-initiated screening programmes and services. 88 These screening services are usually available in Child Guidance Centres. DSS supports these centres to provide screening services for children with disabilities. 89 A model project for early identification and intervention was also implemented through Child Guidance Centres in Nawinna, Maharagama and four other districts. 90

Plans are also underway for an institutionalized screening programme. The Framework of Action for Inclusive Education 2009 articulates the need for routine health screening of children in preschool providing early identification, while years later, the Inclusive Education Plan 2019–2030 includes the establishment of early identification mechanisms for students and development of individualized education plans in 2021.

# While there are no institutionalized transition programmes, Child Guidance Centres prepare children with disabilities for primary education.

Child Guidance Centres, 91 established by DSS, provide pre-primary education as well as prepare children with disabilities for formal primary school. DSS also established vocational training centres that cater to youth with disabilities and equip them with skills to help them transition into future employment. 92 While there are efforts to prepare children with disabilities to transition

from pre-primary to primary school, there are no mechanisms to ensure that children with and without disabilities stay in school and finish their education.

# Alternative learning provides more educational opportunities for children and youth with disabilities.

Non-formal education programmes are offered through community learning centres, functional learning centres and vocational training centres that provide basic literacy skills and vocational and technical training to children and adolescents who are not able to access the formal education system.<sup>93</sup>

#### Community-based initiatives bring disabilityrelated services closer to children with disabilities and their families.

A national programme on CBR was initiated following guidelines set by WHO. The CBR programme coordinates all community-level activities, including outreach, training, referrals and social action. Many persons with disabilities are still unable to access CBR programmes even after the programmes were decentralized to the divisional secretariat level.94

Rehab Lanka (Sri Lanka Foundation for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled) was established in 1988 by persons with disabilities. It focuses on the manufacturing of assistive devices, awareness-raising activities and provision of livelihood projects. CBM works with partners in Sri Lanka on programmes on inclusive education, psychosocial counselling services and school for the deaf.95

<sup>88</sup> Framework of Action for Inclusive Education in Sri Lanka 2009.

<sup>89</sup> Ekanayake, et al., Study on Development of Special Education.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> Ekanayake, et al., Study on Development of Special Education.

<sup>92</sup> Jayawardena and Abeyawickrama, Barriers and Opportunities.

<sup>93</sup> Education Sector Development Framework and Programme 2013–2017.

<sup>94 &#</sup>x27;Sri Lanka Disability Information Sheet'.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

Table 10. Available support services

Support services	Examples
Early identification and intervention	<ul> <li>There is no institutionalized assessment system for early detection and intervention, however, there are available screening services.</li> <li>The Department of Social Services (DSS) has centres that provide screening services for children with disabilities.</li> </ul>
Early childhood development and early childhood care and education	Child Guidance Centres under DSS cater to young children with disabilities.
Transition services from early childhood care and education to primary to secondary education	Child Guidance Centres prepare children with disabilities for primary education.
Therapy interventions and family support	<ul> <li>Community-based rehabilitation (CBR)</li> <li>Rehab Lanka (Sri Lanka Foundation for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled)</li> <li>Christian Blind Mission</li> </ul>
Community-based rehabilitation programmes	National Programme on CBR
Referral systems	CBR
Financial support	National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities provides financial aid for children with disabilities attending school from low-income families.

**Source:** Jayawardena, P., and M. Abeyawickrama, *Barriers and Opportunities in the Provision of Education for Children with Learning Disabilities in Sri Lanka*, Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka, 2016; Ekanayake, S.B., et al., *Study on Development of Special Education and Non-Formal Education*, National Education Commission, Nuegoda, 2014.



The standards, indicators and criteria for measuring progress have shifted from a largely quantitative focus to a more in-depth accounting of the quality of students' learning experiences.

# MEASURING AND MONITORING QUALITY

This domain includes measures to ensure the quality of education and support services for children with disabilities.

# 6.1 STANDARDS AND INDICATORS FOR INCLUSION

## Education plans and policies mandate the improvement of education standards.

The Framework of Action for Inclusive Education 2009 articulates the development of school standards for child-friendly schools with an emphasis on student-centred learning.

ESDP 2018–2025 aims for the improvement of education standards for primary and secondary education through systems strengthening activities. The plan targets the development of a framework for school community-based quality assurance with corresponding guidelines and protocols and the establishment of a Sri Lanka Education Supervision/Inspection Service.<sup>96</sup>

# 6.2 MONITORING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

# A school quality assurance framework has been established by MoE.

'Our school: How good is it?'97 is a national school evaluation and quality assurance framework launched by MoE in 2014. The document outlines an evaluation methodology following a common set of standards, criteria and indicators.

Its development process can be traced back to traditional practices since the 1950s, in which teachers and/or the schools were inspected either by an external evaluator or official from a higher position, highlighting how schools measure up against quantitative indicators. Over time, schools perceived this process somewhat as a fault-finding exercise, which was rather discouraging and did not accurately reflect their realities.

<sup>96</sup> Education Sector Development Plan 2018-2025.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> Ministry of Education, Process of Evaluation and Monitoring for Assuring the Quality in Education, Battaramulla, 2014.

A key philosophy, therefore, underpinning the design of the revised evaluation framework is the 'bottom-up approach', building the school's agency to self-evaluate and a strong focus on cultivating trust, finding areas for improvement and building on strengths, and celebrating achievements. The standards, indicators and criteria for measuring progress also shifted from a largely quantitative focus to a more in-depth accounting of the quality of students' learning experiences. The role of the external reviewers also changed into being facilitators rather than evaluators.

The framework consists of eight evaluation fields: (1) student achievement; (2) learning, teaching and assessment; (3) formal curriculum management; (4) co-curricular activities; (5) student welfare; (6) leadership and management; (7) physical resource management; and (8) school and community.

In some aspects of the framework, child-centred practices facilitative of effective inclusion of children with disabilities are required of teachers. Regard for different learning styles, abilities and other individual differences are considered in

the design of lessons, approach to instruction, provision of learning materials and assessment strategies. The actual application of such principles at the school level would need to be reviewed.

Indicators specific to "children with special needs and those who require special attention/ support" are concerned with the provision of accessible facilities for students in special education units. Teachers teaching children with disabilities in inclusive education programmes are expected to adjust the teaching and learning process to accommodate children's needs.

While it is important that such concerns are specifically addressed, mentioning children with disabilities in only 3 out of 210 indicators could be misinterpreted that all other indicators do not apply to educating children with disabilities. The framework could be improved by defining inclusive education as a process that aims to eliminate barriers to access and participation for all children. The inclusive classroom strategies articulated across the framework will benefit all children and this should be made more explicit.

<sup>98</sup> Process of Evaluation and Monitoring for Assuring Quality in Education, p. 21.



Girls with disabilities are far less likely to attend school than boys with disabilities.

# 1

# CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

#### 7.1 GENDER

## Girls with disabilities lag in access to and participation in education.

Girls with disabilities are far less likely to attend school than boys with disabilities. Only 41.7 per cent of girls complete primary education, compared to 50.6 per cent of boys with disabilities.<sup>99</sup>

A study on women with disabilities in Sri Lanka cites the following common issues affecting access and participation of girls and women with disabilities in education:<sup>100</sup>

- There is no woman with disability representation in the National Council on Persons with Disabilities.
- Education achievement of women with disabilities is lower than men with disabilities according to the 2001 census.
- Participation of girls in formal education is commonly up to Grade 5 only. Girls drop out due to discrimination in the classroom, the absence of trained teachers and ineffective methods of teaching.
- Girls' education is usually discontinued in areas of conflict and the lack of economic capacity and mobility issues prevent them from returning to formal schooling.

 Accessibility of schools including non-formal education is a barrier.

#### 7.2 HUMANITARIAN ISSUES

#### Standards for Education in Emergency Handbook for Sri Lanka

In 2013, the Sri Lanka Minimum Standards for Education was published by the Inter-Agency for Education in Emergencies and the Sri Lanka Education Working Group. The manual is an adaptation of the Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery, which is a global tool that articulates the minimum level of educational quality and access in emergencies through to recovery.<sup>101</sup>

The contextualized version for Sri Lanka includes minimum standards for the implementation of community participation, coordination, analysis, protection and well-being, access and learning environment, and teaching and learning, among others, with consideration of marginalized populations, such as girls and those with disabilities. In the context of emergencies, the minimum standards in the analysis domain are shown in Table 11.

<sup>99 &#</sup>x27;Sri Lanka Disability Information Sheet'.

<sup>100</sup> International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Sri Lanka Women Living with Disabilities, Sri Lanka, 2017, <a href="http://ices.lk/publications/reports/sri-lanka-women-living-with-disabilities-report-submitted-by-international-centre-for-ethnic-studies.">http://ices.lk/publications/reports/sri-lanka-women-living-with-disabilities-report-submitted-by-international-centre-for-ethnic-studies.</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Sri Lanka Minimum Standards for Education.

#### Table 11. Minimum standards for analysis in emergencies

#### Minimum standards for analysis

#### **Standard 1: Assessment**

Timely education assessments of the emergency are conducted in a holistic, transparent and participatory manner.

#### Standard 2: Response Strategy

Inclusive education response strategies include a clear description of barriers to the right to education in the country context and strategies to overcome those barriers.

#### **Standard 3: Monitoring**

Regular monitoring of education response activities and the evolving learning needs of the affected population is carried out.

#### **Standard 4: Evaluation**

Systematic and impartial evaluations improve education response activities and enhance accountability.

**Source:** International Network for Education in Emergencies, Sri Lanka Minimum Standards for Education, INEE and Sri Lanka Education Working Group, 2013.



Ensure inclusive education is understood as high-quality education.

# 8

# **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

# 8.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

1. Review legislative framework governing disability-inclusive education.

Conduct a comprehensive review of existing laws and policies to eliminate provisions that promote segregated forms of education. Provisions supportive of inclusive education are contradicted by stipulations endorsing learning in special schools, without a clear articulation of how inclusion can be facilitated.

Fully align provisions of main domestic policies concerning children with disabilities to General Comment No.4 (2016) to CRPD Article 24. Adopt the social model of disability in policy formulation, programming and service delivery. The review of the draft Inclusive Education Policy 2009 and its passage should be highly prioritized.

2. Improve disability data, identification systems, monitoring and evaluation of inclusive education.

The lack of reliable data on children with disabilities is a major concern in Sri Lanka. At the school level, the collection of information on children with disabilities is limited to

identifying whether the child has a 'special need' or otherwise, using medically oriented categories.

Adopting the WG/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning in identifying and measuring disability would yield a more realistic picture of the number of children in school who are experiencing difficulties in learning and the barriers they encounter. By doing so, teachers, parents and providers of specialized services (if needed) will be appropriately guided on interventions necessary to support the child's learning.

Adopting the same frameworks and methodologies in the conceptualization, identification and measurement of disabilities will facilitate the generation of robust and reliable data. Assess the monitoring and evaluation systems in place, from school level up to central government, regarding how data are being collected, utilized and disseminated to influence planning and implementation of programmes at all levels and policy development for disability-inclusive education.

Moreover, data on barriers children experience in learning, facilitating factors to learning, as well as the progress and achievement of children with disabilities need to be integrated into data collection systems for more responsive disability-inclusive programming and policymaking.

#### Direct investments in the education of children with disabilities towards inclusive settings.

While there are insufficient data on financing and funding disability-inclusive education, it is important to emphasize that resource allocation must be directed towards strengthening the whole system to implement inclusive education, rather than focusing all resources on supporting special schools. Providing specialized services must be accompanied by systems-strengthening efforts using a twin-track approach to financing.

## 4. Improve multisectoral coordination for disability inclusion.

There is no evidence of a strong coordination mechanism within and among ministries concerned with disability-inclusive education. The government supported by development partners should lead in establishing a cross-sectoral committee responsible for the implementation and monitoring of inclusive education in the country. The committee can serve as a coordinating body for planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and policies as well as provide recommendations for policy development.

The committee should be composed of members from agencies, departments and ministries responsible for education, health, social welfare and justice at the minimum, and representatives from development partners, non-governmental organizations and OPDs. The committee can clarify the role of each ministry and department in meeting the goals of the country for disability-inclusive education and help integrate disability-

inclusive programming into the plans and budgets of the relevant agencies.

#### Develop a teacher professional competency framework that reflects the knowledge, skills and attitudes for disability-inclusive education.

This can guide the content and delivery of pre-service and in-service professional development activities by the government and other stakeholders. Develop a professional development strategic plan that can improve synergy and coordination between organizations and departments delivering training to teachers and school leaders.

Link professional standards of teachers to teacher pre-service training and in-service continuous professional development programmes. This will entail coordinated reforms in teacher qualification standards, teacher education curriculum and in-service training programmes and will require close collaboration between MoE and teacher education institutions.

### 6. Strengthen the capacity of all teachers and school leaders on inclusive education.

Inclusive education must be part of inservice training programmes for all teachers. Facilitate learning and exchange of knowledge and expertise between mainstream and special schoolteachers through the establishment of professional learning communities.

#### 7. Implement planned curriculum reforms.

Curriculum reform should be anchored on the principles of Universal Design for Learning to guarantee that all learners, including those with disabilities, can learn under the same curriculum. Develop the capacity of curriculum developers on Universal Design for Learning principles.

# 8. Develop quality standards and processes for building infrastructure founded on universal design to ensure accessibility of new public facilities and spaces.

Collaborate with OPDs and children with disabilities in developing these quality standards.

#### Harness the potential of technology and expand the availability of accessible learning materials.

While the government provides free textbooks to all children, provision of accessible teaching and learning tools and materials for children with disabilities is an issue. The lack of assistive devices and equipment can deprive children with disabilities equal access to the teaching and learning process. This needs a strong focus across ongoing education reforms and especially so in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Develop the capacity of ministries, teachers, book developers and writers in developing flexible and adaptable learning materials founded on the principles of Universal Design for Learning. Creating flexible learning materials, adapting content and utilizing locally available teaching materials can be embedded in pre-service and in-service teacher training.

## 10. Ensure inclusive education is understood as high-quality education

Develop and integrate inclusive education standards into the school quality standards. The standards must articulate implementation guidelines that will provide the school community with a method to assess infrastructure, curriculum, pedagogy, learning equipment and materials, teacher development and support services, and to plan and act to better respond to the needs of all children, including children with disabilities.

#### 8.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

### Increase awareness and understanding of inclusive education.

Stigma and discrimination surrounding disability continue to be a major barrier to participation in education. Data suggest limited knowledge of inclusive education and low awareness of its benefits to children with disabilities. Advocacy and awareness-raising initiatives should reach vulnerable families and communities, such as those in rural and hard-to-reach areas and low-income families in both rural and urban communities. Advocacy should clearly articulate the right of children with disabilities to learn alongside children without disabilities under the same curriculum with appropriate and sufficient support.

## 2. Strengthen institutional capacity in relevant ministries.

Support key government units in developing inclusive values and an understanding of disability and inclusive education from a rights-based perspective through capacity building activities.

## 3. Facilitate the establishment of multisectoral coordination mechanisms.

Support the government in bringing together key stakeholders in disability-inclusive education to harmonize efforts, maximize resources and ensure sustainability.

# 8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

# 1. Evaluate the implementation of inclusive education in the country.

Review the implementation of policies and frameworks related to inclusive education and the extent to which they have been effective in facilitating the fulfilment of the right of children with disabilities to equal learning opportunities.

Various strategies in policies and action plans have been articulated. It would be important to establish what has been accomplished and the gaps between policies and actual practices, as well as how progress is monitored. The use of the 'Our school: How good is it?' self-evaluation tool and how it has facilitated inclusive school improvement is worth reviewing.

2. Review the pre-service teacher education curriculum and in-service teacher training programmes.

Ensure competencies key to teaching diverse environments in alignment to the social model of disability are embedded across all subjects and programmes. 3. Conduct further research on the practice of inclusive leadership within the education system.

Identify challenges, successes and recommendations that can strengthen inclusive leadership in the system. This can include a review of existing coordination mechanisms (as referenced above). Review the available professional development programmes for school leaders against competencies expected of them to be able to support development of inclusive learning environments for all learners.

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# Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in Sri Lanka



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