

# Inclusive Early Childhood Development in Emergencies

*A Guidance Note for Sesame Workshop*



The LEGO Foundation



**A Note Before Reading:**

*This document was written as a guidance by Juliette Myers, PhD. for Sesame Workshop in April 2024. It been reviewed internally by staff at Sesame Workshop and undergone external review by independent disability inclusion experts. This document is intended to inform Sesame Workshop staff and partners and to be periodically updated to reflect new research and learnings from the field. Sesame Workshop also acknowledges and thanks the input and review of Suzanne Zuidema and Humanity & Inclusion, who contributed to another Introductory Guidance Note on Inclusion that was referenced for this resource.*

## Introduction

*Millions of people worldwide are affected by emergencies*

The United Nations estimates that at the end of 2022, 108.4 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing public order. This is an increase of 19 million people compared to the end of 2021 and the largest ever increase between years according to UNHCR's statistics on forced displacement ([UNHCR, 2023](#)). More than 1 in every 74 people worldwide has been displaced from their homes.

*Children are disproportionately affected*

Children aged 0 – 17 years old account for 40 per cent of all forcibly displaced people ([UNHCR, 2023](#)) and they are dramatically over-represented in migrant populations – children account for 1 in 3 of refugees (UNICEF). Globally at the end of 2022, around 43.3 million children were displaced as a result of violence and conflict (UNICEF).

*High numbers of children with disabilities live in emergency settings*

Accurate and up to date disaggregated data on numbers of **children with disabilities** within these displaced populations are not available. However, UNICEF estimates that nearly 240 million children – or one in 10 children worldwide – have disabilities, with indications that a significantly higher number of children with disabilities live in conflict situations ([UN, 2023](#)). In protracted (long lasting) conflicts, the number of children with disabilities is likely to be far higher. In Syria, for example, at least 25% of persons aged over 12 have a disability ([ReliefWeb, 2021](#)). One survey found that 17.3% of children aged 2-17 years in Afghanistan had a mild, moderate or severe disability (Asia Foundation, 2019). Another survey in 2017-2018 of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan found that 12.4% of children aged 0–9 years were living with disability ([HI & iMMAP: 2018](#)).

Children with disabilities are disproportionately excluded from learning opportunities, especially in emergency settings. Exclusion can then be compounded by intersecting marginalities such as a child's gender, race, ethnicity, refugee status, geographic location, socio-economic status and so on. The evidence base is clear that girls are routinely the most marginalised in education in emergencies. As one study has noted, 'girls with disabilities count among some of the world's most marginalised young people because of the "double disadvantage" they face from societal attitudes towards both women and people with disabilities, which often leads to inadequate educational support or resourcing' ([Singal et al., 2023](#)). It is essential to develop Early Childhood Development in Emergencies (ECDiE) programmes and learning tools that respond to the different needs of children in order to ensure that they are not excluded.

## What is inclusion?

[Inclusion is] the result of a process of continuing and proactive commitment to eliminating barriers impeding the right to education, together with changes to culture, policy and practice of regular schools to accommodate and effectively include all students (paragraph 10.d)

Inclusion involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and the environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences (paragraph 11)

Early childhood interventions can be particularly valuable for children with disabilities, serving to strengthen their capacity to benefit from education and promoting their enrolment and attendance. All such interventions must guarantee respect for the dignity and autonomy of the child ... If identified and supported early, young children with disabilities are more likely to transition smoothly into pre-primary and primary inclusive education setting (paragraph 67).

[\(General comment No. 4 on Article 24 - the right to inclusive education, 2016\)](#)

## Early childhood development in emergencies (ECDiE)

Early childhood development is a period of rapid and critical development - from conception to 8 years. Quality nurturing care during this period is vital for all children's physical, cognitive, linguistic and social-emotional development. To reach their full potential, all children need the five inter-related and inseparable components of nurturing care: good health, adequate nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving and opportunities for learning. Nurturing care reduces the negative effects of disadvantage (such as those disadvantages created by humanitarian emergencies) on brain function and structure, which then improves children's growth, health and development.

Participation in quality early learning or development (also known as preschool/pre-primary/kindergarten/nursery education) can be protective and brings significant and long-lasting benefits to all children. However, such early childhood care is not within reach for many children in humanitarian contexts, especially those with disabilities.



Figure 1. The five components of nurturing care ([WHO, 2020](#))

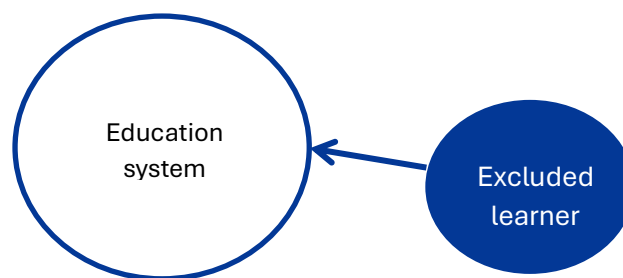
### Box 1: Understanding disability: different models<sup>1</sup>

Article 1 of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(UNCRPD\)](#) defines disability as follows:

**‘Persons with disabilities include 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.’**

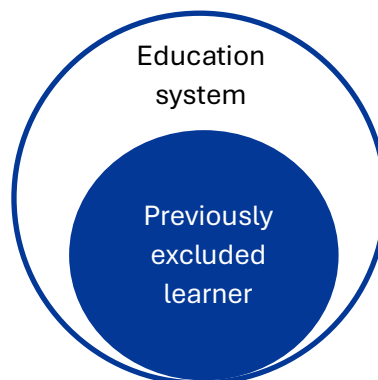
Historically, the **medical model** of disability has prevailed. This model sees the disabled person’s impairment or health condition as ‘the problem.’ The focus is therefore on ‘fixing’ or ‘curing’ the individual.

‘Medical model’  
Diagram 1



The **social model** of disability, endorsed by the UNCRPD, says that disability is caused by the way society is organised, rather than by a person’s impairment or difference. It looks at ways of removing barriers that restrict life choices for disabled people. When barriers are removed, disabled people can be independent and equal in society, with choice and control over their own lives. Broadly speaking, education systems around the world are striving towards the social model of disability, although in practice it is usually a ‘work in progress’ with some elements of the system retaining a medical approach, and other staking a social approach.

‘Social model’  
Diagram 2



<sup>1</sup> For a more extensive discussion of these models (along with ‘traditional’ and ‘human rights’ models of disability, please see: Sesame Workshop Introductory Note to Supporting all Learners: Disability, Diversity & Inclusion (2022).

*Children with disabilities are especially vulnerable in humanitarian contexts*

**Children with disabilities are especially vulnerable in humanitarian contexts** due to several key risk factors, including the ways they may be perceived. Inclusive approaches are essential to ensure their rights, wellbeing and safety:

- **Limited access to essential services** During emergencies, access to vital services like healthcare and education becomes even more challenging. This worsens existing barriers for children with disabilities, leaving them without crucial medical care, assistive devices, or specialized education and development opportunities. As well as emotional and physical stress, children with disabilities can experience new impairments, existing impairments can degenerate further, they can lose essential medications and devices and face increased reliance on caregivers.
- **Displacement and loss of support networks** Humanitarian crises often force families to flee, resulting in the loss of support networks such as extended family, community organizations, and local services. Without these networks, children with disabilities become more isolated and vulnerable.
- **Screening and identification** Children with disabilities or developmental delay often go undetected in humanitarian emergencies, making understanding of the nature and scale of challenges faced by these children and designing programmes that are responsive to their needs difficult.
- **Increased risk of exploitation and abuse** Children with disabilities are more susceptible to exploitation, abuse, and neglect during emergencies. They may struggle to communicate their needs or flee danger, making them targets for violence, trafficking, and other abuses.
- **Inaccessible environments** Humanitarian settings often lack infrastructure suitable for children with disabilities, such as accessible shelters, early childhood settings, schools, health centres and transportation. This leaves them unable to access basic necessities and services.
- **Stigmatisation and discrimination** Children with disabilities may face stigma and discrimination in humanitarian contexts, hindering their access to support, services and protection. Negative attitudes contribute to social exclusion, making it harder for them to access resources.
- **Psychosocial and mental health** Young children with disabilities are more vulnerable to higher rates of mental health issues and their impairments can be exacerbated by the humanitarian context.
- **Intersecting challenges.** As noted above, children with disabilities may also face intersecting barriers that compound their discrimination and hinder safe inclusion in quality humanitarian services. For example, gender, ethnicity, race, language (mother tongue) and socio-economic status can combine to create deep inequity and disadvantage.

## Seven Key Principles to Guide Programming

The importance of providing inclusive ECDiE has gained recognition in recent years (see for example, INEE's collection of [early childhood development resources](#)). UNICEF has produced a [humanitarian toolkit](#) (2022) for disability inclusion and the IASC has produced [guidance](#) (2019) to ensure people with disabilities are included in humanitarian action.

There have been large investments by The MacArthur Foundation, The Lego Foundation, and others to develop ECD programs across a variety of crises and low-resource settings (Sesame Workshop, May 2022). Sesame Workshop's own content for Ahlan Simsim and Play to Learn are notable examples of ECD-specific programming in humanitarian contexts.

There are, as yet no international minimum standards to guide programming in ECDiE, in spite of this welcome attention. However, there are some key recommendations in the literature which signpost best practice approaches. These have recently been organised into seven key principles for disability inclusive EiE by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies ([INEE, December 2023](#); see box below).

### **INEE Seven Principles for Disability Inclusive Education in Emergencies**

PRINCIPLE ONE: Encourage local ownership of inclusive education efforts by meaningfully engaging communities in education, OPDs in particular.

PRINCIPLE 2. Strengthen disability data collection tools and processes to enable more informed decision-making across all phases of an emergency.

PRINCIPLE 3. Support early interventions for learners with disabilities and ensure that they have access to basic services, including assistive devices and technologies, and specialized services.

PRINCIPLE 4. Remove barriers to education access and participation for learners with disabilities and create safe and inclusive teaching and learning environments.

PRINCIPLE 5. Provide reasonable accommodations in the curriculum, instruction, and assessments, and create accessible and inclusive TLM.

PRINCIPLE 6. Support the wellbeing and motivation of teachers, including those with disabilities, and help them meet their learners' diverse needs.

PRINCIPLE 7. Use a rights-based approach to disability-inclusive EiE, and mainstream disability inclusion into organizational and institutional culture.

[INEE, December 2023](#)

These key principles are not intended or to be treated as minimum standards of practice. They are aspirational behaviours to strive towards. Context is also a vital consideration, and each context will require a very different response and a different strategic prioritisation of actions to support inclusive ECDiE.

The complexities and challenges of humanitarian settings means that programmes may not or cannot demonstrate these principles in programming concurrently. The points below provide simple, suggested key actions, starting points and concrete steps to achieve the principle but are not intended to be comprehensive and cover all the steps necessary to achieve each principle.

Prioritization of the principles to put into action will differ according to context. For example, in an acute emergency, it may not be possible to consult with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities who may have been dispersed by conflict or disaster; screening and identification or understanding the full scale of need may not be immediately possible. However, it is usually possible to ensure engagement with parents and caregivers, as well as unaccompanied children, to create as inclusive programmes as possible until other interventions such as screening are up and running.



**PRINCIPLE 1: Encourage local ownership of inclusive education efforts by meaningfully engaging communities in education, OPDs in particular.**

Encourage local ownership and develop meaningful consultation and partnerships with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) in humanitarian contexts to support a range of areas, particularly strengthening disability inclusion in ECD programme design, delivery, monitoring, evaluation and learning. This should occur at the outset of any intervention - OPDs will also know which principles are likely to be most helpful to prioritise.

In emergency situations, contextualisation plays a vital role, especially when local actors are involved. These individuals possess invaluable knowledge of cultural nuances, community needs, and evolving circumstances. When community members, including caregivers of learners with disabilities, actively participate in decision-making processes, educational initiatives become more relevant and effective. OPDs and other local stakeholders such as faith-based organisations and national or regional NGOs can also engage effectively with community leaders to address stigma and discrimination. This involvement ensures that initiatives are aligned with local practices, making them sustainable over time.

In addition to working with OPDs and other local stakeholders, consult and/or work with parents or caregivers wherever possible. Parents and caregivers usually know their children best and can advise and guide on the kinds of barriers their child experiences to learning and play and some approaches to the removal of these barriers. Parents and caregivers may also need advice and guidance themselves. Support parents/caregivers to offer caregiving that is responsive to the needs of babies and young children with disabilities and developmental delay. For example, this could be via inclusive parenting programmes.

**Growing Together in South East Asia**

Humanity and Inclusion (HI) implemented Growing Together, a five-year disability-inclusive Early Childhood Development (ECD) project from 2016 to 2020. The project operated in 11 refugee camps and 52 host communities across Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh, the Thai-Myanmar border, and Peshawar and Nowshera districts in Pakistan.

Through 147 parents' clubs engaging 3000 parents, the project focused on promoting child development through indoor and outdoor play activities and early learning initiatives. These clubs welcomed parents of children with and without disabilities, fostering inclusivity and reducing stigma. Growing Together aimed to safeguard children from cognitive impairments resulting from various risk factors such as malnutrition, prematurity, infection, extreme poverty, violence, forced displacement, and maternal mental health issues. Additionally, the project established 50 inclusive outdoor play spaces, aiming to enhance children's imagination, language, socio-emotional skills, cooperation, and problem-solving abilities ([Nguy and McGowan, 2020](#)).

**PRINCIPLE 2. Strengthen disability data collection tools and processes to enable more informed decision-making across all phases of an emergency.**

Understand the scale and nature of need by conducting needs analysis and introducing simple screening and identification procedures or advocating for their usage with partners/local and national stakeholders. Ideally use the [Washington Group short set of questions](#) or the [UNICEF Child Functioning Module](#) for ages 2 – 4 and 5 – 17 years, as appropriate, to identify individuals with functional limitations and understand the barriers they may face to engaging in ECDiE. Disaggregate data by sex, age, disability type and location to establish a baseline for monitoring access to and participation in inclusive ECDiE. This will enable more informed decision making across all phases of emergency.

**UNICEF Uganda's Identification of Disabilities in Early Childhood (IDEC)**

UNICEF Uganda's Identification of Disabilities in Early Childhood (IDEC) pilot program operates in five districts within host and refugee communities. This initiative is a comprehensive, cross-sector intervention aimed at building the capacity of caregivers and preschool teachers. It includes training on identifying children with disabilities, raising awareness about the importance of inclusion, tackling stigma, and promoting behavioural change.

Frontline workers have undergone training to identify children with disabilities during 9-month and 18-month health screenings. Recognizing the limited access to healthcare for many, UNICEF has established village health teams. These teams conduct basic tests to identify children with disabilities and developmental delays, facilitating their referral for support and further assessment at clinics and hospitals.

UNICEF's intervention has helped to improve access to ECD at the village level from 10-15% to 30%.

[\(INEE, 2022\)](#)

**PRINCIPLE 3. Support early interventions for learners with disabilities and ensure that they have access to basic services, including assistive devices and technologies, and specialized services.**

Connect and coordinate with sectors and services which can support young children with disabilities in emergency settings and provide necessary support, including assistive devices and technologies. As above, foster partnerships with OPDs, NGOs and faith-based organisations and engage community level stakeholders such as community-based rehabilitation services. Link to the local [Education Cluster](#) – find out if they have an early childhood development subgroup and understand what cross-sectoral engagement is taking place between education, health, protection and other relevant sectors. This will enable more effective referrals of individuals to support, where needed.

**Jordan coordination mechanism**

In 2015, a disability task force, co-chaired by UNHCR and Handicap International, was established in Jordan under the protection cluster (UNHCR, 2015). In task force meetings, agencies working on inclusive education present their work on inclusion of children with disabilities in schools, support for resource rooms, and challenges with both teachers and parents (UNHCR, 2017a). Additionally, the Jordan Education Sector Working Group has a focal point in the disability focal group that recognizes the Ministry of Education’s emphasis on enrolment of children with disabilities in education programming (UNHCR, 2017b). The focal point provides updates to working group members, including concerns for special education within Jordan (UNHCR, 2017c).

Cited in [UNICEF, 2017](#): 24

**PRINCIPLE 4. Remove barriers to education access and participation for learners with disabilities and create safe and inclusive teaching and learning environments.**

Ensure early learning centres and/or engagement hubs are accessible, safe, secure and nurturing for babies and young children with disabilities. Such measures should be responsive to intersectionality by recognising that different children will experience different barriers to accessing learning centres. Children themselves are often the best judges of the barriers that they face in their environment. For example, when given cameras to tell their own stories, girls with disabilities in Malawi demonstrated the importance of getting the basics right, such as good road access and clean WASH facilities ([GEC, 2023](#)).

**Creating inclusive and accessible ECDiE spaces**

Accessibility ensures every child can participate fully, fostering inclusivity. Physical accessibility includes features such as (but not limited to):

- ramps
- wide doorways
- adequate space for learners to move around with assistive devices such as wheelchairs.
- accessible latrines or toilets
- low shelves for easy access to materials.
- adaptive equipment
- safe and smooth floors
- clear pathways
- accessible outdoor play areas
- accessible transportation
- children with disabilities should not be separated from other children.
- staff trained to support different children's needs, including psychosocial support.

Safety is crucial to providing all children with a secure environment free from hazards and violence. Safety includes (but is not limited to):

- efforts to address stigma and discrimination.
- child protection measures
- childproofing
- supervision
- emergency preparedness
- hygiene practices
- secure outdoor play areas
- safe equipment
- clear communication
- inclusive practices
- positive discipline
- staff training on safety protocols.

Security, especially in humanitarian contexts, protects children from risks like conflict and disasters, ensuring stability. Such measures promote inclusion and protect well-being.

**PRINCIPLE 5. Provide reasonable accommodations in the curriculum, instruction, and assessments, and create accessible and inclusive TLM.**

Providing inclusive teaching and learning materials and opportunities creates equitable and inclusive learning environments. Play-based curricula should be adapted for children with disabilities to ensure that they can access learning activities. Inclusive teaching and learning materials and curricula ensure that all children, regardless of abilities or backgrounds, can fully engage with the learning process. This could involve, for example, making simple changes to session plans, the adaptation of existing play kits/boxes, the provision of safe play and learning spaces, as well as the use of low-cost locally available resources such as seeds/stones for counting games, used packaging for junk modelling and the use of sensory and tactile materials to support early learning.

**Universal Design for Learning**

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a way to create an inclusive learning environment that are flexible and accommodate the diverse needs of all learners. Developed by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), UDL emphasizes providing multiple means of **representation**, **engagement**, and **expression** to support individual learning differences.

In UDL, **representation** refers to presenting information and content in various formats to cater to different learning styles and preferences. This could include providing text, images, videos, audio, and interactive materials to ensure that learners can access information in ways that suit them best.

**Engagement** involves offering multiple pathways for children to become interested and motivated in learning. This might involve incorporating choice, relevance, and authentic tasks into the curriculum to increase student engagement and motivation.

**Expression** focuses on providing learners with various means to demonstrate their understanding and express themselves. This could involve offering different options for assignments, assessments, and projects, allowing children to showcase their knowledge and skills in ways that align with their strengths and preferences.

Overall, UDL aims to remove barriers to learning and promote inclusive education by providing everyone with equitable opportunities to succeed. It recognizes that learners have diverse needs and preferences and seeks to create environments that support their individual learning journeys.

*Using media to improve accessibility and inclusion.*

Using media to improve accessibility, inclusion and address stigma and discrimination can encourage behaviour change around the social inclusion of children with disabilities and their families. Media can be an effective way to open up access to learning for young children and influence behaviour change in those around them because it uses engaging storytelling, has a wide reach, counters stereotypes (see below), educates, raises awareness and influences social norms and attitudes. Media can also make learning more accessible for some children with particular learning needs, such as through the use of audio.

### **Sesame Workshop's Ahlan Simsim programme**

In the Middle East, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Sesame Workshop created *Ahlan Simsim*. *Ahlan Simsim* has reached over a million children through direct services in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria and 23 million children through *Ahlan Simsim*, the award-winning locally produced Arabic-language version of *Sesame Street* airing across the Middle East and North Africa. This initiative engages parents, caregivers, and children in disability-inclusive Early Childhood Development (ECD) and preschool settings across settlements and host communities in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria.

The Ahlan Simsim character of Ameera, a wheelchair user and enthusiastic scientist with a spinal cord injury. Ameera's character aims to dismantle stigma and discrimination while promoting inclusion among audiences. Sesame Workshop evidence shows that children were more inclusive of classmates in wheelchairs after watching episodes with Ameera.

IRC has integrated disability inclusion into the program, providing training to facilitators and teachers to enhance inclusion in these settings. Additionally, teaching and learning materials are provided with guidance on adapting them to meet the needs of children with various disabilities. In the future, training content will be made available online for use with partners throughout the Middle East.

(Sesame Workshop, 2024)

### **TIPSHEET: Using multimedia approaches in inclusive ECDiE**

Multimedia tools can play a crucial role in enhancing learning experiences for young children with disabilities. Multimedia can offer the potential to significantly improve the accessibility of the learning environment and, indeed, extending the learning environment to otherwise inaccessible places; for example, using video to enhance the accessibility of field-trip environments to children with physical disabilities.

#### **Visual and Auditory Learning:**

- **Visual aids**, such as images, videos, and animations, can help children grasp concepts more easily. For instance, interactive presentations can illustrate abstract ideas visually.
- **Auditory elements**, like audio clips or narrations, enhance comprehension and memory. Children can listen to instructions, stories, or explanations.

#### **Interactive Learning:**

- **Games and simulations** engage children actively. They can practice skills, solve problems, and explore concepts in an interactive environment.
- **Interactive quizzes** reinforce learning by providing immediate feedback.

#### **Customization and Adaptation:**

- Multimedia allows tailoring content to individual needs. Children with disabilities can access materials at their own pace and level.
- **Adaptive technologies** can modify content based on a child's abilities, ensuring an inclusive learning experience.

#### **Promoting Communication**

- **Communication boards** and **augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) apps** aid children with speech or language impairments.

- Multimedia tools facilitate communication through symbols, pictures, and text.

#### **Enhancing Memory and Attention:**

- **Visual cues** aid memory retention. Children can associate images with concepts.
- **Multisensory experiences** (combining visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic (movement) elements) improve attention and engagement.

#### **Creativity and Expression:**

- **Digital art tools** allow children to express themselves creatively. Drawing, painting, and animation can be therapeutic.
- Multimedia platforms enable children to create stories, videos, or music.

#### **Social Interaction**

- **Virtual classrooms** and **online collaboration tools** foster social interaction. Children can connect with peers and educators.
- Multimedia facilitates group activities, discussions, and joint projects.

#### **Assistive Technologies**

- **Screen readers, speech-to-text software, and captioning tools** make content accessible for children with visual or hearing impairments.
- Multimedia platforms integrate these assistive features seamlessly.

Every child's needs are unique, so approaches need to be tailored to the individual child. By harnessing the power of multimedia, educators can create an inclusive and engaging learning environment for young children with disabilities.

**PRINCIPLE 6. Support the wellbeing and motivation of teachers, including those with disabilities, and help them meet their learners' diverse needs.**

Support teachers and facilitators to deliver inclusive ECDiE, using simple and practical play-based strategies that enable the inclusion of all children. Supporting teachers and facilitators to deliver inclusive ECDiE is crucial because of their pivotal role in implementation and the creation of inclusive learning environments. Providing them with training and support ensures they have the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support children with diverse needs. Well-trained teachers and facilitators contribute to the quality of education, leading to better learning outcomes and overall program effectiveness. By adopting inclusive practices, such as creating accessible learning materials and fostering a supportive classroom environment, they benefit all children, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. Supporting teachers can also lead to longer term sustainability since trained educators can continue to support inclusive practices after external support ends, ensuring continued access to quality education for all children. Using disability-positive recruitment practices to encourage applications to positions from teachers or instructors with disabilities is also recommended as this not only fosters stability and resilience for individual teachers but helps to tackle stigma and discrimination through affirmative representation.

Educators themselves can face serious psychological and emotional challenges during emergencies and should be supported in the workplace. Ensuring that they are well remunerated, are given the chance to learn new skills and have their role as agents of change celebrated can help teachers build resilience and maintain motivation.

Integrate mental health and psychosocial support and social emotional learning into inclusive learning activities to support educators as well as children. Integrating mental health and psychosocial support into inclusive early childhood development in emergencies is essential for early intervention that mitigates long term impacts, supporting holistic child development, enhancing learning outcomes and providing support for parents.

**Little Ripples early childhood development**

[Little Ripples](#) is an early childhood development initiative designed to empower refugees and communities impacted by humanitarian crises by offering child-centered, high-quality pre-primary education. This program caters to children aged 3 to 5 and focuses on fostering their social-emotional, cognitive, and physical growth.

Through a teacher training program, both host community members and refugees receive guidance on implementing the Little Ripples curriculum and approach. Activities take place in various settings, including homes, child-friendly spaces, schools, and community centres, referred to as "Ponds."

The curriculum emphasizes play-based education, trauma-informed practices, and restorative approaches, integrating social-emotional learning, empathy building, positive behaviour management, peacebuilding, and mindfulness. The programme also integrates developmental monitoring for the early identification of developmental delays and disabilities.

Little Ripples operates in Chad (for Sudanese refugees), Tanzania (for Burundi refugees), Cameroon (for CAR refugees), and Greece.



**Principle 7. Use a rights-based approach to disability-inclusive EiE, and mainstream disability inclusion into organizational and institutional culture.**

A rights-based approach to disability inclusion is contingent on the adoption of the social model of disability inclusion described above. Rights-based approaches emphasise the fundamental human rights of individuals with disabilities and seeks to ensure their full and equal participation in all aspects of society, including education. This approach is grounded in the principles outlined in various international agreements and conventions, including the UNCRPD.

In order to progressively realise the rights of all children to education, including ECDiE, twin track approaches have historically been adopted as an effective approach. Twin track approaches should be used to specifically support and target young children with disabilities while simultaneously working to strengthen inclusion more broadly in mainstream services and interventions.

The twin-track approach in inclusive education (including ECDiE) involves making system-level changes that enable all learners to be included in mainstream settings and providing specific adaptations and support to meet the needs of individual learners. This approach, which is recognized by the UNCRPD, requires a commitment to the universal design of inclusive systems that remove all barriers (e.g., discriminatory laws or policies, inaccessible infrastructure, or financial) and reasonable accommodation for individual needs.

At a programme level, this would involve ensuring that individual children are provided with reasonable accommodations (e.g. ramps, accessible doorways) and assistive devices (e.g. wheelchairs, white canes, hearing aids etc), while making sure that play-based learning in ECDiE settings is accessible to all children. Ensuring that activities are inclusive improves the quality of engagement and learning for all children.

**Twin track approaches to supporting Rohingya refugee children with disabilities:** ‘Equitable Access and participation to Education for Children with Disabilities of Rohingya refugee and host community project’.

HI and UNICEF launched the project to address the right to education for children with disabilities in Bangladesh. They took a twin-track approach that combined the direct provision of specialized support to learners with disabilities with technical support to mainstream education service providers. In the first year of action, the direct delivery of specialized education supports had empowered children with disabilities to access mainstream education services, and ten implementing partners improved their understanding of the barriers affecting the participation of children with disabilities in the services of learning centers, as well as their duty to include children with disabilities in education services. Master trainers at each implementing partner have been trained to understand the use of UNICEF’s CFM, the specialized services available and the relevant referral pathways, and the concept of reasonable accommodations, including modifications to make classrooms accessible and the provision of accessible education materials.

[INEE, 2023: 63](#)

## Conclusion

The implementation of disability inclusive ECDiE is a matter of good educational practice as well as a fundamental commitment to human rights, equity, and social justice. Working towards meeting the needs of every child, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, helps to build inclusive societies where every individual can thrive. Inclusive ECDiE programs have the potential to transform lives, break down barriers, and pave the way for a more equitable future. Investments in good quality low- and high-tech inclusive teaching and learning materials and support for parents/caregivers and teachers is key to successful implementation of ECDiE. Recognising the barriers that different children with disabilities face enables programme managers to take a Universal Design approach to learning, while making specific adjustments according to need. These approaches help to create the contexts in which children with disabilities can recover from the trauma of emergencies, reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully to their communities and beyond.

## Learn More

In this section, you will find some suggested key background reading to support programming for inclusive ECDiE.

- IASC [Guidelines, Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action](#) (2019) – see education chapter
- INEE [Opportunities and Challenges for Disability-Inclusive Early Childhood Development in Emergencies](#) (2022)
- INEE [Disability-inclusive Education in Emergencies: Key concepts, approaches, and principles for practice](#) (2023)
- UN CRPD Committee [General comment No. 4 on Article 24 - the right to inclusive education](#) (2016), includes useful examples of reasonable accommodations and support for learners with disabilities and additional needs.
- UNICEF [Disability-Inclusive Humanitarian Action Toolkit: Operational guidance on including children with disabilities in humanitarian response](#) (2022)

## REFERENCES

For a full list of references, please contact Abby.Bucuvalas@sesame.org.