In Pursuit of Education for All

What do the data tell us about children with disabilities in selected countries in Asia and the Pacific?

Akihiro Fushimi, Ed.D
UNICEF East Asia and Pacific
Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 6)

The countries and territories included in the report are:

- Mongolia
- Lao People’s Democratic Republic (only 2- to 4-year-olds), Viet Nam
- Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu
- Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan (Punjab), Pakistan (Sindh)
- Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan
Washington Group (WG)/UNICEF Child Functioning Module: A new module included in MICS6

**FUNCTIONAL DIFFICULTIES**
- The child has developed myopia and cannot see well

**UNACCOMMODATING ENVIRONMENT**
- Glasses are not available to the child who has difficulty seeing distant objects

**DISABILITY**
- The child is less likely to participate and his/her right to education may be compromised as a result of an unaccommodating environment

1. No difficulty
2. Some difficulty
3. A lot of difficulty
4. Cannot do at all

Source: United Nations Children’s Fund, *Do children with disabilities attend school? New findings from Sierra Leone*, UNICEF, New York, 2019. Figure 1
WG/UNICEF Child Functioning Module:

**Functional domains covered**

**Children under 5**
- **Seeing**: Difficulty seeing
- **Hearing**: Difficulty hearing sounds like people’s voices or music
- **Mobility**: Difficulty walking
- **Fine Motor**: Difficulty picking up small objects
- **Communication/Comprehension**: Difficulty understanding or being understood
- **Learning**: Difficulty learning things
- **Playing**: Difficulty playing
- **Controlling Behaviour**: Kicking, biting or hitting other children or adults

**Children aged 5 to 17 years**
- **Seeing**: Difficulty seeing
- **Hearing**: Difficulty hearing sounds like people’s voices or music
- **Mobility**: Difficulty walking on level ground
- **Self-Care**: Difficulty with feeding or dressing
- **Communication/Comprehension**: Difficulty being understood by people
- **Learning**: Difficulty learning things
- **Relationships**: Difficulty making friends
- **Remembering**: Difficulty remembering things
- **Attention and Concentrating**: Difficulty concentrating on an activity they enjoy doing
- **Coping with Change**: Difficulty accepting change in their routine
- **Anxiety**: Seeming very anxious, nervous or worried on a daily basis
- **Depression**: Seeming very sad or depressed on a daily basis
- **Controlling Behaviour**: Difficulty with controlling their behaviour
Context: The Asia and the Pacific region has the largest number of children with disabilities.

Estimated number of children aged 0 to 17 years with disabilities by UNICEF regions.

1 in 20 children aged 2 to 4 have at least one functional difficulty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functional difficulty domains</th>
<th>Children with</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any functional difficulties</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine motor skills</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling behaviour</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wide variation exists between functional difficulty domains. In fact, ten time more children aged 2 to 4 have difficulty controlling behaviour than difficulty hearing.
Children with any and multiple functional difficulties are less likely to attend ECE.

ECE attendance declines drastically for children with multiple functional difficulties. Children with difficulties associated with fine motor skills are least likely to be attending ECE.
Children with any and multiple functional difficulties are less able to do numeracy and literacy-related tasks.

Similar to ECE attendance, children with difficulties associated with fine motor skills are least likely to be able to do numeracy and literacy-related tasks.
1 in 10 children aged 5 to 17 have at least one functional difficulty

Share of children aged 5 to 17 with functional difficulties based on pooled data from 11 countries and 2 territories

1 in 20 children have multiple functional difficulties and 1 in 50 children have severe functional difficulties without signs of anxiety or signs of depression.
Among 5- to 17-year-olds, children with difficulties communicating and difficulties with hearing are most likely to not attend any school levels.

Share of children aged 5 to 17 currently attending school based on pooled data from 11 countries and 2 territories.

1 in 2 children with severe functional difficulties without sign of anxiety or depression are not attending any level of education.
Big gaps exist in attendance between children from **poorest** and richest wealth quintiles

While little statistically significant differences are not observed by gender and location, children from **poorest wealth quintile** face additional adversity in accessing **primary level** compared to their peers. Similar trends are observed at **lower secondary level** too.
Essentially, children with disabilities are **not in school** or **not progressing** in education at the same rate as their peers.

Simplified pathway analysis for lower secondary aged children based on pooled data from 11 countries and 2 territories.

compared to children without functional difficulties, lower secondary school aged children with any or multiple functional difficulties are **more likely to be out of school** or **not attending the expected level** of education.
In fact, many children with functional difficulties face initial barrier to access (i.e. never attended)

More than 40 per cent of children with difficulties making friends, hearing, concentrating, communication and selfcare have never attended school highlighting initial barrier to entry...
Children with functional difficulties are **not acquiring foundational reading skills** at the same rate as their peers.

Share of children aged 10 to 14 with foundational reading skills, by school attendance and functional difficulty based on pooled data from 11 countries and 2 territories.

Very few children not attending school have foundational reading skills across all categories of functional difficulties. This shows that **school attendance** is strongly **associated with gains in learning**.
Foundational **numeracy skills** are very low

Students with **severe functional difficulties** without signs of anxiety or depression are the least likely to have foundational numeracy skills.

The analysis shows that there is a **dire need to improve foundational learning** outcomes for all children.
Key Reflections

✓ Countries in the Asia Pacific region have unique education systems and are on a different stage in their journey towards inclusive education.

✓ While promoting inclusive education as an overarching conceptual framework, countries should assess unique educational and learning needs of children who have different types of disabilities and develop a mechanism to provide tailored learning support to them.

✓ Regardless of this variation, key principles of supporting the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream settings are important and should inform every stage of their efforts to transform the systems to meet the diversity of needs of all students.
Key Recommendations

• Adopt a **whole system approach** toward disability inclusion translated through all aspects of system strengthening

• Strengthen **early identification** to support inclusion in ECE – education sector analysis to identify and **remove barriers** to inclusive education

• Strengthen **national data systems** by incorporating the social model of disability

• Incorporate child-centered and inclusive **pedagogies** and flexible **assessment** frameworks + support DPOs and teachers

• Inclusive **budgeting** to implement a twin-track approach at the outset
Thank You

Akihiro Fushimi
Education Specialist,
UNICEF EAPRO (Bangkok)
afushimi@unicef.org