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RESEARCH REPORT

Education Without Barriers:
Improving access to education for children with disabilities in Djibouti

UNICEF INNOCENTI – GLOBAL OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND FORESIGHT

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Contents

Abbreviations

ADHD	Attention Deficit Disorder with or without hyperactivity
ANPH	National Agency for People with Disabilities
CFEEF	Training Centre for Basic Education Teachers
CNSS	National Social Security Fund
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
ECDD	Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Djibouti
EDAM	Djibouti Household Survey
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ENPH	National Disability Prevalence Survey
LiFE	Learning is For Everyone
MENFOP	Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training
MFF	Ministry for Women and the Family
SDEF	Education and Training Master Plan
SDGS	Sustainable Development Goals
UDL	Universal Design for Learning

Executive summary

The right to education is recognized worldwide as a fundamental human right and has been described as a 'multiplier' right, since it facilitates the realization of other rights. Despite this, access to education, particularly for children with disabilities, is far from universal. In Djibouti, the right to education for children with disabilities is recognized in policy and law, but barriers to access persist, meaning that there are still significant gaps between what is established in policy and what actually happens in schools and classrooms.

The education system is in the midst of a transition to full inclusion, so the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training (MENFOP) has opted to temporarily maintain special schools, in order to meet existing demand for education for children with disabilities. At present, the Djiboutian context does not allow all children with disabilities to be welcomed into an inclusive setting in schools alongside other children without disabilities. The education system faces capacity issues such as training for teachers to work with children with disabilities, as well as the accessibility of school infrastructure and teaching materials. Despite this, teachers in Djibouti are making remarkable efforts to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the best possible way.

This report describes the 'Learning is For Everyone' (LiFE) study in Djibouti, a collaborative research project carried out in partnership between UNICEF, MENFOP and the National

Agency for People with Disabilities (ANPH). The research method was determined in accordance with chapter 11, volume 3 of the *Education Sector Analysis Methodological Guidelines*.[1] The research was based on: policy analysis; quantitative and qualitative data collection with teachers, parents and children with and without disabilities, in and out of school; and in-depth discussions of the data collected with public decision-makers from MENFOP and the ANPH. Four main recommendations were formulated, divided into short-, medium- and long-term priority actions in recognition of the need for a progressive approach to implementing inclusive education reforms for children with disabilities in Djibouti. The rest of this report is structured around these recommendations:

1. Raise awareness of the vision of inclusive education adopted by MENFOP among the various actors in the education community, and of the role they play in realizing this vision.

Data from the online survey and interviews conducted as part of this study reveal that there are differences of opinion between head teachers and teachers on the definition of inclusive education and how it differs from special education. It is therefore important for MENFOP to focus on disseminating its vision of inclusive education for children with disabilities to help head teachers and teachers better understand the principles of inclusive education, how it differs from special education and the ways in which special schools can contribute to the process of a gradual transition to a more inclusive system. This will also help ensure that all actors in the education system are aligned in the realization of a common strategy.

In the short term, MENFOP's definition of a protocol specifying the roles and responsibilities of regional education inspectors, educational advisers, head teachers and teachers in supporting students with disabilities will help clarify how the various actors can contribute to a more inclusive education system. This will also help guarantee minimum conditions of inclusion and accessibility in all types of school and service offered. Similarly, parents will need to be informed to gain greater community support for inclusive education and to combat stereotypes about disability and prejudices around how children with disabilities can learn.

2. Strengthen teachers' ability to work with students with disabilities and to cultivate positive, cohesive learning environments in mainstream schools.

According to data from the online survey, the majority of teachers (61 per cent) consider the lack of training in pedagogy for children with disabilities to be the biggest challenge in implementing inclusive education. In the short term, targeting teachers who are already working with students with disabilities in their schools, and then gradually increasing the capacities of other teachers in all types of school, will enable more equitable deployment of in-service training programmes in inclusive education. This approach will ensure that support reaches the areas and individuals most in need first. This process of gradual growth will also help MENFOP to identify difficulties and barriers in implementing continuing education programmes and to develop solutions early on, so that more robust scale-up can eventually be achieved. With regard to pre-service training, incorporating a module on inclusive education, focused on teaching methodologies for different types of disability in the medium term, will

allow trainee teachers to strengthen their core skills, enabling them to confidently support a growing number of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools.

3. Consider the role of special schools in Djibouti, so that the education system as a whole can benefit from their vast experience and expertise in teaching children with disabilities and adapt resources to the needs of such children, while ensuring such schools continue to evolve as an integral part of an expanding system.

The parents of children with disabilities who were interviewed praised the support provided by teachers at the special school in Djibouti. Although, ideally, children with disabilities should increasingly be included in mainstream schools, special schools can support the transition process by helping mainstream schools develop their physical infrastructure and didactic tools, as well as the teaching methodologies used by their teachers. As the Djiboutian education system evolves and becomes more inclusive in the long term, the experience and expertise of teachers and other professionals at the special school should be recognized and mobilized to support mainstream schools.

4. Improve the availability and quality of educational, administrative and financial data on children with disabilities in Djibouti.

Although policies and legislation have been developed to support the inclusion of children with disabilities in Djiboutian schools, monitoring and managing their implementation is difficult without proper data collection

and analysis. Data are collected from schools through an annual census, but the data-collection form contains no information on the disability status of students, making it difficult to determine progress and areas requiring further attention.

This will require a step-by-step process that encompasses the design and development of an education management information system (EMIS), including defining the variables to be collected, and clarifying when and by whom these data will be gathered. In the short term, an initial mapping of the education system will enable MENFOP to collect data on student disabilities at the school level, and to identify schools and teachers to be supported as a priority. In the medium term, all educational data-collection and management systems will need to be tested – initially in a number of schools and then progressively in the target regions – to ensure that they work at the central, regional and school levels. This will enable such systems to be gradually integrated into the normal operation of the entire education system.

CHAPTER 1

Context

Nearly 240 million children worldwide have some form of disability.[2] The lives of children with disabilities have always been marked by exclusion from the education system. This exclusion persists to this day, with many children with disabilities not attending school or not having access to educational services adapted to their specific needs.[3] Compared with their peers without disabilities, children with disabilities are 49 per cent less likely to have attended school and 42 per cent less likely to have mastered basic reading and numeracy skills.[4] Inclusive education has therefore become a global priority to support some of the most marginalized children and provide them with a high-quality education that will enable them to acquire the skills they need to participate actively in society. The ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) by most countries around the world and the adoption of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – in particular Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which is aimed at providing quality education for all children – have fostered this transition towards more disability-inclusive

education systems.[5] SDG target 4.5 is specifically aimed at eliminating discrimination in education and guaranteeing equal access to all levels of education for the most vulnerable, including people with disabilities.

The Middle East and North Africa region has the second-largest population of children aged under 17 years with disabilities (13.1 per cent) in the world, just behind West and Central Africa (14.9 per cent).[6] The region continues to face many challenges in providing inclusive education for this growing young population. Although all countries in the region have ratified the CRPD, international legislation and local policies are not aligned. For example, special education is still considered the most effective approach for children with disabilities, despite global advocacy for their inclusion in mainstream schools.[7] These children are also underrepresented in household surveys and educational data in countries in the region owing to the flawed definition of disability, which prevents initiatives being implemented where they are most needed.[8]

The most recent estimates for people with disabilities in Djibouti date from 2019 and show that 8.5 per cent of the population have a disability. These are usually physical (5.2 per cent) or visual (4.8 per cent) disabilities. Among the school-age population, 4.9 per cent of children aged 5–17 years have a disability.[9]

However, progress has been made: over the last 10 years, more children with disabilities have been enrolled in school. This figure could rise further thanks to the efforts of MENFOP to promote a more inclusive education system.[10] According to data from the 2019 National Disability Prevalence Survey (ENPH in French), the percentage of people who have not attended school is much higher among people with disabilities (67 per cent) than among those without (44 per cent).[11] The Djibouti Household Survey (EDAM in French) carried out in 2017 revealed a similar situation. The proportion of adults whose highest level of educational attainment is below primary school is considerably higher among people with multiple functional difficulties (67 per cent) than among those with none (47 per cent).[i]

i See the EDAM 2017 data on the Disability Data Initiative (DDI) Djibouti profile at: https://disabilitydata.ace.fordham.edu/country-briefs/dj.

The Government of Djibouti has taken action on several fronts to expand learning opportunities for children with disabilities. The ANPH was created in 2018 as the coordinating body for all national initiatives to promote and advocate for the rights of people with disabilities. These rights include the right to quality education.[12] The ANPH has drawn up a national disability strategy, which includes concrete measures to remove the barriers that exclude people with disabilities from the economic and social sphere.[13]

MENFOP, as the main education policy-setting body in Djibouti, has prioritized improving access to education and retaining all the country's children in the education system. It has included specific objectives in the Schéma directeur de l'éducation et de la formation (Education and Training Master Plan – SDEF) that focus on schooling for all children with disabilities, as part of a gradual inclusion approach. At the same time, it aims to improve the quality of care they receive in mainstream schools.[14] During this period of transition to full inclusion, MENFOP has opted to temporarily maintain special schools to meet existing demand for education for children with disabilities. MENFOP has also drawn up a sector strategy for the period 2022–2032, accompanied by a costed five-year action plan aimed at reforming the quality of educational services for these children. This strategy includes building accessible school infrastructure, distributing teaching materials adapted to different types of disability, improving the availability and quality of educational data that include children with disabilities and creating training modules in inclusive education for teachers.[15]

The situation of children with disabilities in Djiboutian schools

There are limited data on children with disabilities in Djibouti, the types of school in which they are enrolled and the teaching resources available to schools to accommodate them. Although data are collected from schools through an annual census, no information on students' disability status is included in the data-collection form. The system for recording the administrative data collected as part of this census also needs to be improved to enable more effective management, analysis and use of the information.

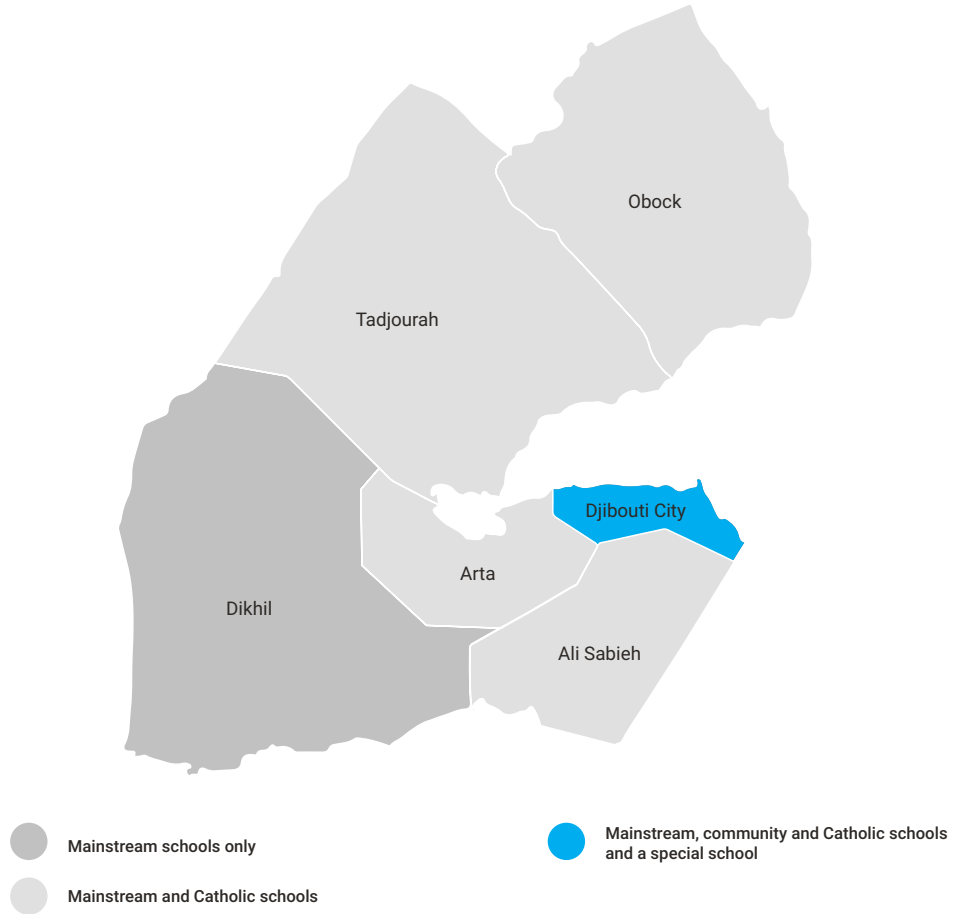
Although there are household survey data on people with disabilities in Djibouti, very few studies have been carried out specifically targeting children with disabilities in different regions. The latest study was carried out in 2015 by UNICEF and the Ministry for Women and the Family (MFF in French) among 211 families with children with disabilities, who were identified through local associations. The survey revealed that 40 per cent of the families surveyed did not send their children to school.[16] More than half of the children who attended school were enrolled in mainstream schools, and only 5 per cent reported receiving special support at school. While the study found children with disabilities enrolled in schools in all regions, it highlighted the disparities between children with disabilities in Djibouti City and those further inland. Children with disabilities in the capital were relatively more likely to attend school, as the range of educational services was more diversified, albeit inadequate. Overall, the study also highlighted regional differences in prevalence by type of disability, with a higher proportion of children with physical disabilities in Dikhil and Tadjourah, and sensory disabilities in Tadjourah.[17]

Mainstream public and private schools in Djibouti are required to accommodate children with disabilities, as education is recognized as a universal right in Act No. 96, governing the Djiboutian education system, and Act No. 151, repealing and replacing the provisions of Act No. 207 on the promotion and protection of the rights of people with special needs.[18,19] Nevertheless, some of these children still encounter obstacles from management and teaching teams when enrolling in school.

The provision of educational programmes for children with disabilities has increased in Djibouti over the past decade with the construction of the special school, a non-inclusive school environment inaugurated by MENFOP in 2022. It is located exclusively in the capital (s*ee Figure 1)*. Moreover, provision for children with disabilities at the school appears to be inadequate in relation to existing demand. Although data on these children and their schooling are limited, only just under 200 students were accommodated in the special school between 2020 and 2021, which is far from covering needs.[20]

Non-governmental and religious organizations have continued to provide educational services for children from vulnerable groups, including those with disabilities, but these initiatives have remained isolated and only benefited a minority. The Sounah Al Haya association, for example, has opened three private community schools and began to accommodate a maximum of two children with disabilities per class in 2013. However, these schools are only located in Djibouti City.[21] The Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Djibouti (ECDD in French) have also long contributed to the education of out-of-school children and school dropouts through their 'Read, Write and Count' (Lire, écrire, compter - LEC in French) non-formal education programme. The programme was initially reserved for girls, then opened up to all children aged 9–20 years, including those with disabilities. However, it operates in only one centre per region, and not all regions are covered (*see Figure 1*).[22]

Figure 1: Differences in educational provision for children with disabilities in Djibouti



Disclaimer: This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers.

Source: Illustration by the authors.

CHAPTER 2

Research overview

The LiFE study focuses on the key components of a disability-inclusive education system, as defined in chapter 11, volume 3 of the *Education Sector Analysis Methodological Guidelines*.[23] It analyses elements relating to the provision of educational services for learners with disabilities, including school infrastructure and teacher training. It also examines certain aspects of the quality of these services, such as teaching methods and in-class learning support. The study also addresses elements relating to demand for education, such as perceptions of inclusive education among parents, teachers and children.

The research in Djibouti was carried out in partnership with UNICEF, MENFOP and the ANPH. MENFOP and the ANPH actively participated in the research design stage, collected qualitative data in schools and contributed to the development of system-level policy recommendations to ensure learning opportunities take the needs of all students into account.

Research questions

The following questions informed the development of the data-collection tools, the analysis of the data collected and the formulation of the policy recommendations presented in this report:

1. What is inclusive education for children with disabilities?

2. Is the Djiboutian education system sufficiently inclusive?

3. What actions should be taken and what resources should be allocated to make the education system more disability-inclusive?

Methodological approach

A hybrid approach was adopted to examine the extent to which the education system in Djibouti takes disability into account. It consisted of two distinct stages:

1. **Qualitative analysis of policies and context:** This stage involved careful consultation of the legislation and policy documents governing the Djiboutian education system. A total of 15 documents were analysed, including general decrees on the inclusion of people with disabilities, general educational guidelines and others specific to inclusive education for children with disabilities (*see Appendix A*). This analysis provided an overview of inclusive education in Djibouti and a basis for examining whether policies make provision for teachers, accessibility in schools, and pedagogy.

2. **In-depth research:** This stage involved administering online surveys, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with various stakeholders. All the data-collection tools used were based on the questionnaires in volume 3 of the *Education Sector Analysis Methodological Guidelines*, and were contextualized and validated with MENFOP and the ANPH, then approved by an institutional review committee. The results of the online surveys, and the interview and focus group discussion guides used, were tested prior to data collection.

- **Quantitative tools:** Surveys were developed in digital format and administered between February and March 2024 via an online platform. Respondents included head teachers (145), teachers (723) and regional education inspectors (9) from pre-primary, primary and secondary schools in the capital Djibouti City and five regions (*see Appendix B*).

- **Qualitative tools:** Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in March 2024 with children with disabilities both in and out of school, as well as with their parents and teachers. Focus group discussions were held with in-school children without disabilities and their parents. A total of 72 interviews were conducted with a sample of 8 primary schools and 10 households. Data collection was carried out by a team of researchers from MENFOP and the ANPH, with support from UNICEF. All interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in French, Somali or Afar, according to the participants' preference. The children were aged 10–16 years, and the sample included several types of disability (*see Appendix B*). Children who used sign language were accompanied by a parent or teacher to interpret for them during the interview. Parental consent for all the children was sought before the interviews and focus group discussions took place. The children also gave their consent.

3. **Co-creation of policy recommendations:** Workshops were held with key stakeholders from MENFOP and the ANPH to discuss the research findings and develop the recommendations set out in this report, which are based on them. These discussions also enabled the joint development of short-, medium- and long-term strategies for implementing the proposed recommendations.

Limitations

Although the online survey in schools succeeded in gathering responses from a large sample of head teachers and teachers, most of the respondents came from urban areas, notably from mainstream schools in Djibouti City. Furthermore, although the survey collected data from all regional education inspectors, it did not reach educational advisers, who could have provided a more comprehensive picture of the education system at the regional level. It would be wise to involve them in future studies.

Interviews and focus group discussions were mainly conducted in French, but those conducted in Somali or Afar were translated into French by the interviewers. However, some of the nuances of the dialogue may not have been fully reflected in the translations produced. In addition, the sample for the qualitative analysis could not include children with advanced functional disorders, most of whom are not in school, owing to difficulties in obtaining their consent or to their limited ability to answer interview questions. As a result, our observations of these children are mainly drawn from interviews with their parents, which potentially introduced bias and omitted a lack of direct perspectives.

CHAPTER 3

Policy recommendations

The research findings formed the basis for the four recommendations presented in this section, which were developed in collaboration with MENFOP and ANPH stakeholders.

1. Raise awareness of the vision of inclusive education adopted by MENFOP among the various actors in the education community, and of the role they play in realizing this vision.

1.1. Disseminate the national vision for educating children with disabilities to head teachers and teachers.

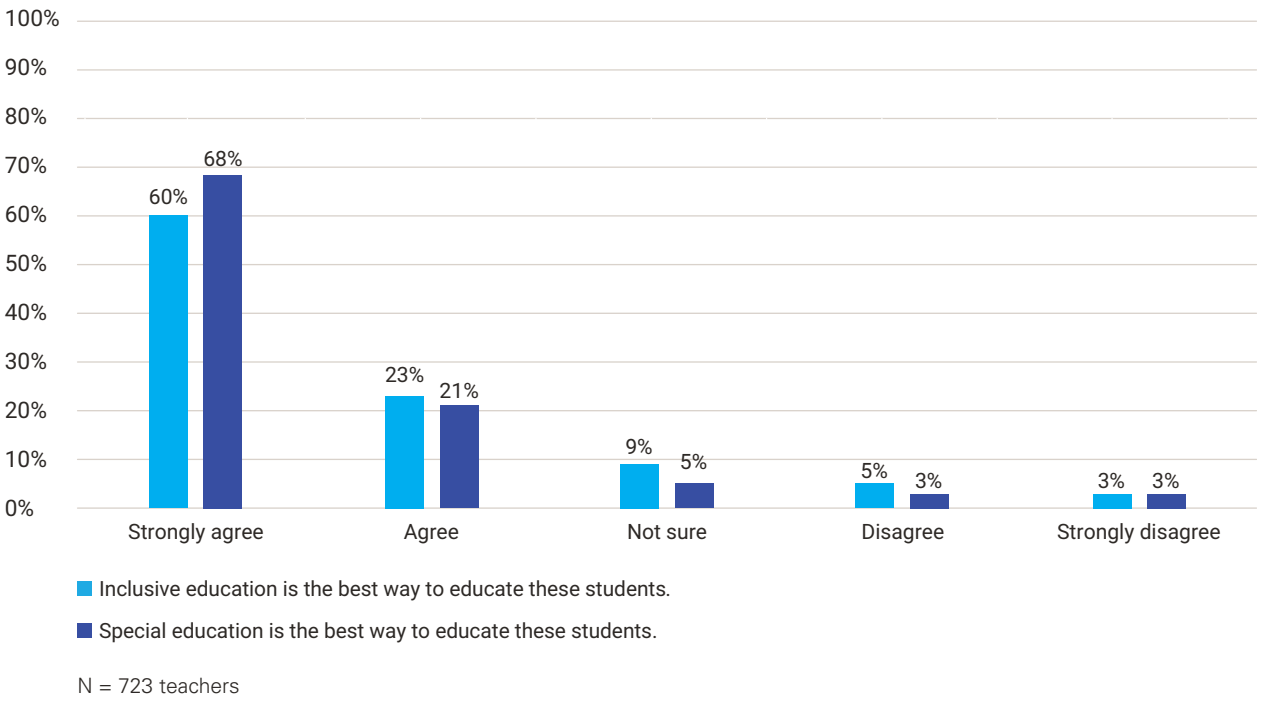
Education policies in Djibouti provide information on inclusive education and how it is conceptualized by MENFOP. In the SDEF 2021–2035, MENFOP conceptualizes an education policy for children with disabilities in which the provision of inclusive educational services will be progressively increased. Special schools will be maintained

and strengthened during the transition period, as the Djiboutian context does not currently allow for all children with disabilities to be accommodated in an inclusive setting.[24] MENFOP states that special classes will be created within mainstream schools for students with the same type of disability to enable them to receive care adapted to their needs and to be integrated with other children, and that inclusive classes with students who do not have a disability will also be established.[25] This shows that the Government of Djibouti is adopting a diversified approach that includes both inclusive and special education in the support system for children with disabilities. This approach has been adopted as a medium-term solution that strengthens the capacity of the education system to include all children with disabilities in mainstream schools in the long term. However, for effective implementation, children with disabilities must be adequately identified and registered so that they can be directed to the appropriate services.[26]

Although policies provide a clear vision for educating children with disabilities in Djibouti, knowledge of this subject differs vastly between the main actors in the education system at the central, regional and school levels. More than 80 per cent (eight out of nine) of the regional education inspectors who took part in the online survey said they perceived a degree of consideration for inclusion and accessibility issues in policies and sectoral plans relating to general education, such as the Ten-year strategy for the education of children with disabilities in Djibouti. Accessibility is an essential feature of inclusive schools, and aims to ensure that physical environments, school infrastructure and learning resources can be used by all individuals in their daily lives.[27] Among teachers, 40 per cent said they were unfamiliar with the strategy, despite it being the main guidance document for educating children with disabilities. The vision of education for children with disabilities adopted by the country is therefore better established at the central level among MENFOP officials, and at the regional level among regional education inspectors. It has been less successful in reaching the key people responsible for its implementation in schools. It is crucial that all actors are aligned with this vision to ensure that education policies are implemented coherently and effectively.

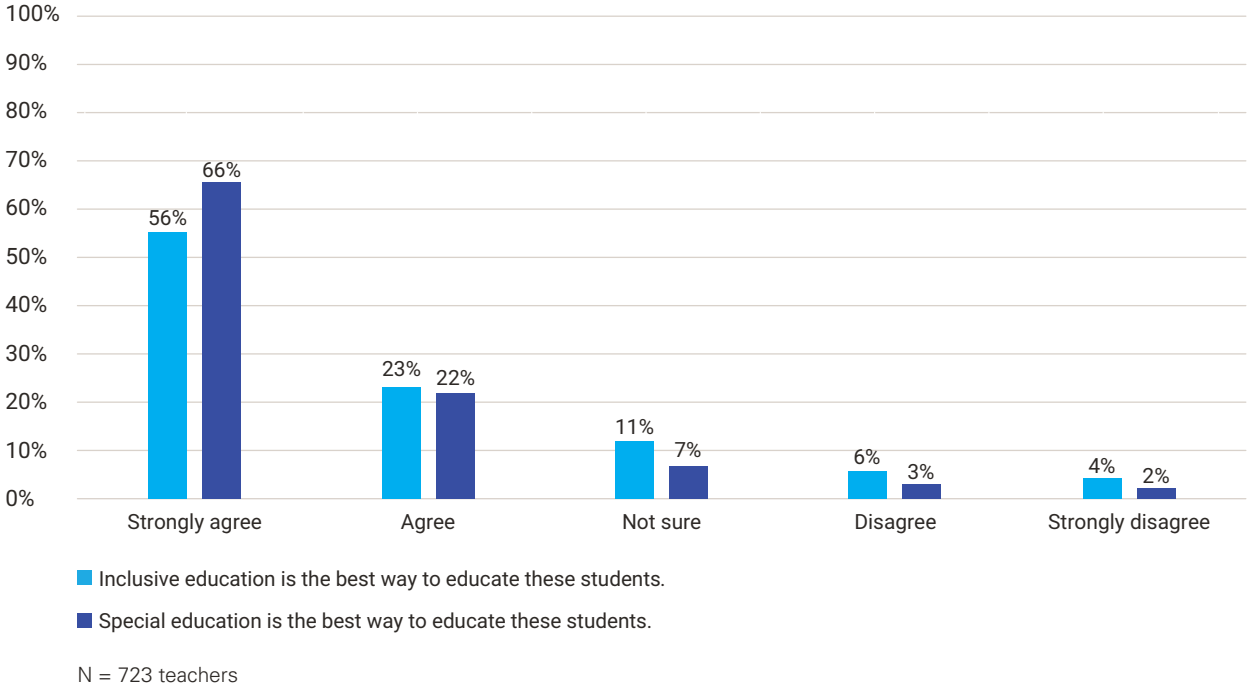
Data from the online survey of teachers indicate that there are differences of opinion over the best approach to educating children with disabilities. Teachers were asked to express their level of agreement with statements such as "inclusive education is the best way to educate children with disabilities" or "teaching in special schools is the best way to educate children with disabilities". In total, 8 out of 10 teachers said they strongly agreed or agreed that inclusive education was the best way to educate children with physical or sensory disabilities. An equivalent proportion also strongly agreed or agreed that special education was the best option for these types of disability (*see Figure 2)*. The trend is similar for intellectual disabilities, with more than 7 out of 10 teachers in favour of inclusive education and more than 8 out of 10 in favour of special education (*see Figure 3*).

Figure 2: Teachers' perceptions of inclusive and special education for students with physical and sensory disabilities



Source: Authors' analysis based on LiFE online survey data.

Figure 3: Teachers' perceptions of inclusive and special education for students with intellectual disabilities



Source: Authors' analysis based on LiFE online survey data.

The fact that a similar number of teachers believe that inclusive education and special education are the best educational approach for children with disabilities may be indicative of a lack of clarity about what these approaches entail. This may also reflect the fact that these perceptions are based on the current reality of education for children with disabilities in Djibouti, where special schools remain the most accessible option. Other studies have shown the range of teachers' opinions on the definition of inclusive education. Some believe that simply enrolling children with disabilities in mainstream schools, without any additional support, is enough. Others consider the provision of individualized support services to be a better option, although they are sometimes more inclined to segregate than include.[28,29] It is therefore essential to disseminate the vision of education for children with disabilities that is set out in sectoral policies in Djibouti, to help head teachers and teachers better understand what inclusive education is, how it differs from special education, and how special schools can help with the gradual transition to a more inclusive system as mainstream schools are strengthened.

Qualitative data show that teachers' perceptions of the best way to educate children with disabilities can vary according to the child's degree of functional difficulty. The teachers interviewed were generally in favour of including children with disabilities in mainstream schools, while supporting the existence of special schools for those living with 'significant' disabilities. For example, a teacher at the special school in Djibouti commented: "It's good to send a child with a disability to school, but you have to take certain criteria into account. The first criterion is whether the child can move around. And the child must not be prone to fainting, as that would be very difficult to manage." This shows that some teachers believe that it is not up to the school to find ways to support children's needs, but for the children and their families to find another school that is able to help them. This belief runs counter to the key principles of inclusive education promoted by the CRPD, which state that inclusion involves a systemic reform process involving changes and modifications to content, teaching methods and the physical environment, in order to overcome barriers and provide all students with a learning experience best suited to their needs.[30,31]

Teachers' perceptions of the presence of children with disabilities in mainstream schools also seem to vary according to the type of disability involved. Indeed, 60 per cent of teachers are in favour of including children with intellectual disabilities in the same class as their peers without disabilities. However, this rate drops to 47 per cent for children who require assistive technologies or specialized communication methods, such as Braille or sign language. This reflects the current operation of the Djiboutian education system, where children with sensory disabilities are mainly educated in special schools. As a teacher at the special school in Djibouti put it: "Education is inclusive in Djibouti, but not totally. Deaf people are taught separately in this centre, as are people with a visual disability." Data from the online survey also show that most mainstream schoolteachers work less often with students with hearing and physical disabilities. Of those who have students with disabilities in their classrooms, 32 per cent said they had students with intellectual disabilities, while only 19 per cent and 11 per cent respectively said they had students with physical and hearing disabilities.

During interviews, parents of children with disabilities frequently reported being turned away by school management or by a member of the teaching staff when enrolling their child. This reflects the fact that inclusive education has not yet been adopted as regular practice by key actors at the school level. The parents of children with disabilities surveyed said they had been turned away at least once. They commented that most of the time they were unable to choose their child's school, since they had to convince head teachers or teachers to accept a child with a disability. This reluctance on the part of the school administration seems to have more to do with a lack of knowledge about how to teach children with disabilities than with a negative perception of inclusion or a lack of willingness to support these children. For example, 86 per cent of teachers who took part in the online survey expressed strong agreement or agreement with inclusive education. However, 79 per cent also said they believed that pre-service training in Djibouti was currently too weak to make significant improvements to inclusion for children with disabilities in mainstream schools. Without training in inclusive pedagogical practices that support inclusion and social cohesion, head teachers and teachers will not be able to offer a high-quality service to all learners.

QUOTE

All the schools rejected my child and I got discouraged. 'Come and take your child; we can't keep him,' they told me. Even the Koranic schools didn't want to keep him because he was a bit restless. In all, nine schools refused my child before this school accepted him.

Parent of a child with an intellectual disability, community school, Djibouti

To achieve MENFOP's vision of a gradual transition to inclusive education, it is necessary to ensure that those primarily responsible for its implementation at the school level are aware of this vision. Teachers can become change agents, advocating for children with disabilities to be educated in mainstream schools and promoting the necessary pedagogical adjustments, especially in cases where head teachers are reluctant to accept enrolment requests.[32] The role of regional education inspectors and educational advisers is

also essential to achieving this objective, given their proximity to head teachers and teachers. These regional actors can take advantage of their monitoring visits to schools to disseminate national education strategies and action plans for children with disabilities and to clarify the roles of head teachers and teachers in all types of school to support inclusive education.[33] Awareness-raising among these key actors about the vision for educating children with disabilities in Djibouti should be accompanied by initiatives to improve school conditions – including the accessibility of school infrastructure and the availability of adapted teaching resources – so that they can implement inclusive education.[34]

1.2. Raise awareness among parents, whether or not they have children with disabilities, of the benefits of inclusive education, as well as of MENFOP's efforts to guarantee high-quality services for all learners.

While most parents of children with disabilities recognize that it is preferable to send their children to school rather than keep them at home, many also expressed hesitation about enrolling them in mainstream schools. During interviews, they indicated that even if their children were accepted by head teachers and teachers, they had no confidence in the ability of the mainstream education system to meet their specific disability-related needs. The concerns most frequently raised by parents of children with disabilities were that their children did not understand the lessons in class, that the teacher failed to give them the attention they needed to learn and that they faced aggression from their peers without disabilities.

Raising awareness of the benefits of inclusive education, as well as of MENFOP's efforts to train teachers and make mainstream schools more accessible and welcoming, will help boost confidence among parents of children with disabilities and motivate them to send their children to school. It is also important to strengthen the role of parents in overseeing the quality of education and governance in schools. One way of doing this is through parents' associations. For example, parents of children with disabilities can play a crucial role in monitoring the condition and accessibility of school infrastructure, the teaching materials made available to their children, the quality of interactions between children and teachers, and the

use of school funds.[35] Even in cases where parents do not know their child's diagnosis, they often know what kind of environment makes them feel welcome and safe. Parents of children with disabilities know their children's needs at home, and are therefore in a position to become key agents in enlightening teachers on how to interact with their children and meet their children's needs more effectively in the classroom.

QUOTE

Once, I wanted to take her to a mainstream school, but I was afraid she'd end up in the middle of 50 students. She wants us to be close to her, to explain to her, 'Look, it's like this', in other words, to be by her side all the time so that she can work. I wondered if she'd be forgotten in the middle of 50 students.

Parent of a child with an intellectual disability, special school, Djibouti

During interviews, a few parents of children without a disability expressed concerns about the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools, suggesting that the presence of these children could have a negative impact on the learning of other students and on the running of the class. The parent of a child without a disability who attends a mainstream school in Dikhil said: "There are currently no children with disabilities in my child's class, but when children have a severe disability, it disturbs the other students and wears the teachers out." However, students with physical and sensory disabilities are better accepted by parents of children without a disability in mainstream schools, provided they can adapt to the standard requirements of the learning environment. Nevertheless, none of the parents of students without a disability noted any benefits to inclusive education for their own children. It is therefore important to make these parents aware of the potential of inclusive education to help students who do not have disabilities to acquire stronger socioemotional skills, and to create more cohesive and egalitarian societies in the long term.[36,37]

All parents, whether they have children with disabilities or not, should take part in awareness-raising programmes aimed at reducing the stigma associated with disabilities and combating prejudices about inclusive education, to gain greater public support for inclusion from the community. Parents of children with disabilities should be informed about their children's right to education and the benefits of sending them to school. Parents of children without a disability should also understand the importance of inclusive education in generating better social acceptance of disability in schools and fostering interactions between their children and those with disabilities. This can help them grow up to be positive role models.[38] There is also a need to strengthen the role of this group of parents in promoting inclusive education among families in their respective communities, as most of them mentioned knowing the parents of out-of-school children with disabilities living in their neighbourhoods. MENFOP could explore partnerships with organizations for people with disabilities and with parents' associations. This would help spread awareness-raising programmes on disability and inclusive education, thanks to their power to mobilize civil society and their ability to reach the most marginalized groups.[39] Partnerships with other sectors that are also in direct contact with the main beneficiaries, such as the MFF or the Ministry of Health, could help raise parents' awareness.

1.3. Define the roles and responsibilities of each actor at the school level in implementing education for children with disabilities, from student enrolment and throughout their schooling.

According to the qualitative data, teachers in the primary schools we visited adopt a wide variety of approaches to educating children with disabilities. These sometimes take the form of integration efforts, and at other times segregation. A few teachers interviewed in mainstream schools mentioned that they gave more individual time to children with disabilities or repeated explanations more often. Furthermore, adaptations to school curricula seem to come mainly from specialist teachers. For example, a teacher at the special school in Djibouti said: "The basic school curriculum is difficult for children with disabilities, so I've adapted it. I select the easiest activities and have them repeat them several times." However,

other teachers adopt teaching methods that may be more segregated, such as special classes for children with disabilities within Catholic and community schools, or the use of individual support assistants who work with children with disabilities in separate rooms.

QUOTE

She [the individual support assistant] works with him. I give the headings and the subjects she has to work on, but she looks after him separately; normally this room is reserved for these children. She works on a case-by-case basis: each child has an individual support assistant and all of these assistants get together but work individually.

Teacher, community school, Djibouti

The interviews reveal that the methods that some mainstream schoolteachers use with children with disabilities do not always involve curriculum reform or adaptations to teaching materials or to the way information is presented in the classroom. Given the lack of a curriculum and textbooks adapted for children with disabilities, in addition to limited training in educating these children, teachers have to resort to practical solutions to cope with student diversity and meet these children's needs in the best possible way. According to the interviews, these methods include the teacher raising their voice or sitting children with disabilities close to the blackboard. However, these solutions are not sufficient to cater for all types of disability or to ensure meaningful learning. They may work for children with hearing or visual disabilities, but they are less helpful for enabling students with an intellectual disability to access information provided in the classroom.

QUOTE

For students with a visual disability, I had to put them at the front of the class, in front of the blackboard, so they could write properly or see clearly what was being written on the blackboard.

Teacher, mainstream school, Dikhil

Although teachers in Djibouti already have a set of terms and conditions setting out their duties, it is essential that this includes a protocol laying down their specific responsibilities in supporting children with disabilities. This protocol should apply to mainstream schools with inclusive classes and special classes, as well as to special schools, regardless of their level of preparation for welcoming children with disabilities. The roles of head teachers, regional education inspectors and educational advisers in supporting children with disabilities should also be defined. It would be advisable to specify the responsibilities of each actor at the start of the school year and during the learning process throughout the school year (*see Figure 4*). For example, the role of head teachers is crucial during the enrolment period, as they are one of the first points of contact with families and can help collect data on the type of disability and degree of functional difficulty of each learner. The role of teachers should be to focus on the support they can provide during the learning process for children with disabilities throughout the year, notably by adapting the curriculum and arranging assessments according to the type of disability. Teachers should also promote the development of close relationships between all students, inside and outside the classroom.

Head teachers and teachers should communicate regularly with parents to keep them informed of their children's progress and the difficulties they face, and to promote closer cooperation between families and schools. During the interviews, the parents of children with disabilities expressed a desire for more regular communication with their children's teachers. At present, this communication only seems to occur in the case of specific events, such as when handing over school reports or when children argue with each other. The protocol should therefore provide for communication with parents as a routine task that is an integral part of the teacher's role, with greater attention paid to students with disabilities who need more in-depth support at home. Finally, regional education inspectors and educational advisers can monitor the quality of the education provided in schools that welcome children with disabilities, by monitoring quality standards and supporting teachers in adapting programmes and making adjustments.[40] They can also ensure that schools have adequate teaching materials and infrastructure for children with disabilities, and request what is needed from bodies such as MENFOP or the ANPH.

QUOTE

The teacher only gives me information on school report day. Otherwise, I'm the one asking for information about my child.

Parent of a child with a physical disability, mainstream school, Tadjoura

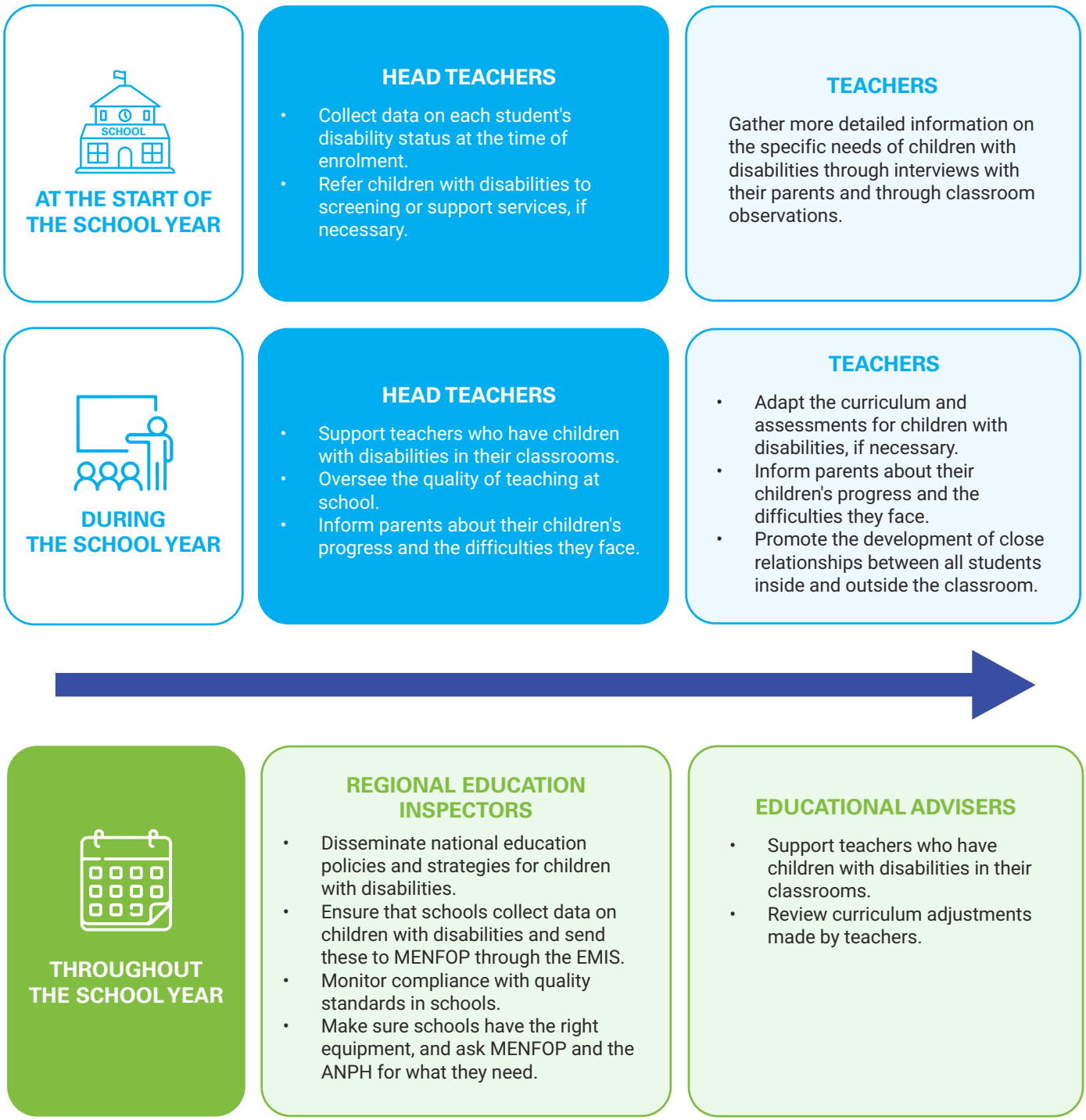
QUOTE

There's no regular communication with the teachers unless the children fall out. In this case, the head teacher is very responsive and sorts out all the problems.

Parent of a child with a visual disability, mainstream school, Dikhil

All the key actors in the education system must be involved in developing this protocol to support students with disabilities. It would be useful to involve representatives from mainstream, Catholic, community and special schools who work with children with disabilities in different ways. This would help to realize MENFOP's vision and build on cumulative experiences with children with disabilities in each of these learning environments.

Figure 4: Core responsibilities of key actors in providing education for children with disabilities at the school level



Source: Authors' own work based on discussions held during the workshop to co-create policy recommendations with MENFOP and ANPH representatives.

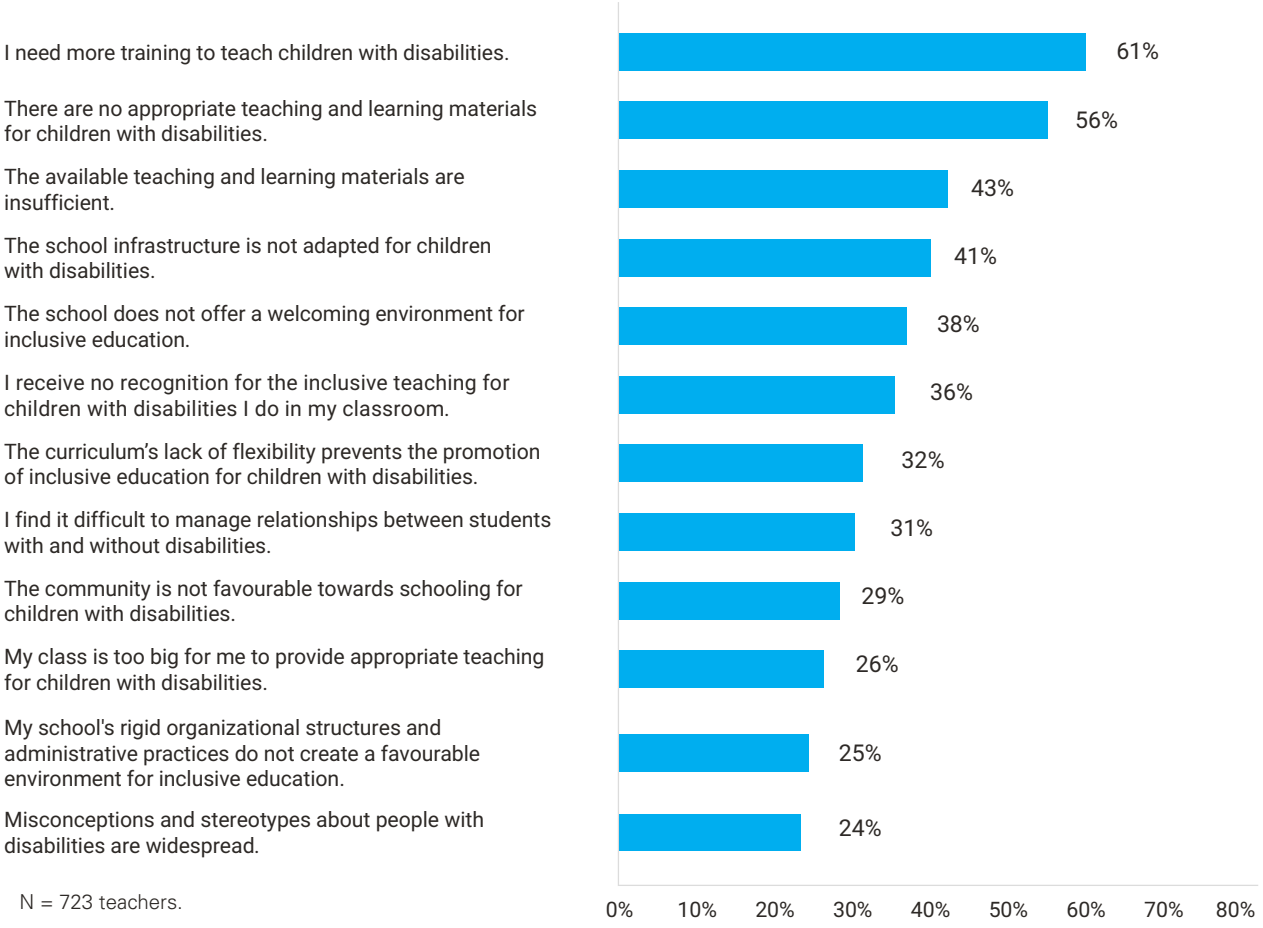
2. Strengthen teachers' ability to work with children with disabilities and to cultivate positive, cohesive learning environments in mainstream schools.

Policies in Djibouti refer to plans to strengthen pre-service and in-service teacher training in inclusive education strategies for children with disabilities.[41,42] However, fewer than 5 per cent of the teachers who took part in the online survey said they had received such training. Among this minority, most are teachers working in urban schools. Not surprisingly, teachers consider the main obstacle to implementing inclusive education to be the need for additional training in educating children with disabilities (61 per cent), followed by the lack of appropriate materials for teaching them (56 per cent) (*see Figure 5*). Class size is reported as a difficulty by only 26 per cent of teachers, which is not surprising, as the most recent average pupil–teacher ratio recorded in Djibouti was 29 in 2018.[ii]

Measures to improve teacher training should focus on short-term support for teachers already deployed in all types of school, including Catholic and community schools, as well as on strengthening pre-service training programmes in the long term. This two-pronged approach will provide immediate support for teachers already working with children with disabilities in schools, while gradually improving the ability of trainee teachers to work with learners with diverse needs.

ii See the latest data at World Bank Open Data: https://data.worldbank.org.

Figure 5: Main difficulties reported by teachers in implementing inclusive education



N = 723 teachers.

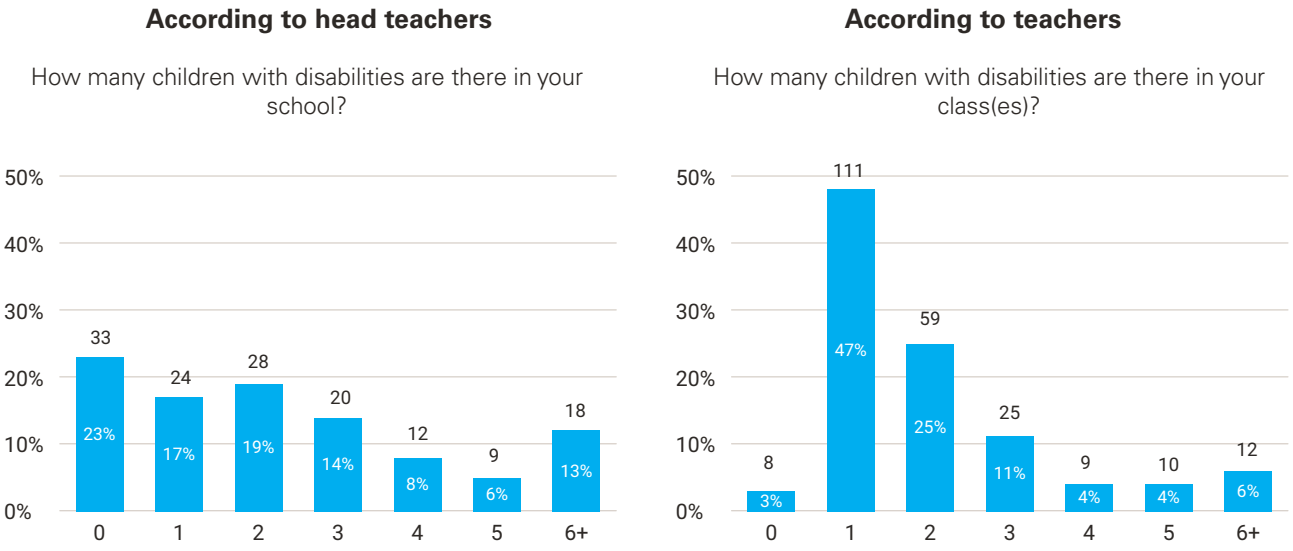
Source: Authors' analysis of LiFE online survey data.

2.1. Apply a 'responsive' training approach that prioritizes in-service training for teachers in schools where children with disabilities are enrolled, and gradually extend training to other teachers in all types of school.

The online survey indicates that a number of children with disabilities attend mainstream schools. Indeed, 72 per cent of teachers say they have one or two students with disabilities in their class (*see Figure 6*). The figures reported by teachers differ from those reported by head teachers. For example, 23 per cent of head teachers say there are no children with disabilities in their school, while only 3 per cent of teachers say there are no such children in their classroom. Although the rating scales are different for these two categories of respondent (the classroom for teachers and the school for head teachers), this shows that there may be differences in the way these

two groups define or identify children with disabilities, and that some children with disabilities enrolled in school appear not to be recorded as such by head teachers. These differences underline the importance of systematic data collection at the national level through the EMIS to better understand the enrolment of children with disabilities in schools and provide more targeted support.

Figure 6: Number of students with disabilities



N = 145 head teachers, 723 teachers.

Source: Authors' analysis based on data collected by the LiFE online survey.

Teachers in schools where children with disabilities are already enrolled should be given priority to benefit from in-service training modules in inclusive education. Indeed, enrolling children with disabilities in schools that cannot offer them the means to participate fully in the classes they attend could slow down their learning process and risk further excluding them from the education system. Regional education inspectors and educational advisers should therefore be tasked with carrying out an initial mapping of all schools at the national level and identifying where children with disabilities are enrolled. Once these schools have been identified, a 'responsive' training approach can be implemented, initially to support teachers who are already teaching learners with special

needs in inclusive and special schools. This first phase of in-service training will serve as a transition plan while MENFOP develops a more thorough reform of teacher training.

Nearly 8 out of 10 teachers feel that their workload might increase if they had children with disabilities in their classrooms. This is a realistic assumption, as most teachers in Djibouti have not been trained in inclusive education for children with disabilities and have limited resources. They therefore need targeted training and pedagogical guidance to adapt how they present information in class to students with different disabilities, without adding to their workload, so that all learners have access to the same information, in the format best suited to each individual's needs. Inclusive teaching will avoid the marginalization that can result from differentiation strategies designed solely on the basis of individual needs.[43] Interviews with teachers reveal that the use of differentiated teaching strategies is commonplace with children with disabilities in Djibouti, but these strategies do not always promote such children's access to learning according to their needs. Teachers are making great efforts with the resources and knowledge at their disposal to meet the needs of children with disabilities, but there is still a long way to go to ensure the principles of inclusive education are implemented. For example, teachers mentioned that, during learning assessments, they tended to spend more time on children with disabilities or to make abbreviated versions of the assessment used by their peers without disabilities. However, these modifications are not the same as adapting the assessment format or ways of answering according to the type of disability.

QUOTE

I assess them in a different way, not with the others. If we do a text, I divide it up, summarize it and shorten it as much as possible, otherwise they wouldn't have time to read it. Because his eyes are bad, he can't read the whole text. If a text is 10 lines long, I summarize it in 5 lines, and for the others I leave it as it is.

Teacher, mainstream school, Tadjourah

Although most (69 per cent) of the teachers with at least one child with a disability in their class reported no difficulties in managing relationships between these children and their peers without disabilities, the qualitative data reveal frequent conflicts in mainstream schools. The parents of children with disabilities surveyed commented that physical and psychological violence was one of the main difficulties their children faced at school, and one of their primary concerns. For example, the parent of a child with a hearing disability in a mainstream school in Djibouti confided: "Very often, he's stigmatized. A few nasty kids fling words at him that he wouldn't want to hear. Sometimes he's verbally abused and insulted." This stigmatization is also reported by parents of children with disabilities who are not in school, having been previously been enrolled in mainstream schools. Protecting their children from violence is one of the main reasons given by parents for taking their children out of school, despite teachers' efforts to control such situations.

QUOTE

Unfortunately, after a month, she couldn't adapt and the kids were laughing at her. Since she can't defend herself and I can't be with her all the time, I made her leave school for safety reasons. It breaks my heart when I see my daughter, who can't defend herself, being bullied by other children and getting into fits of anger.

Parent of a child with a disability not attending school, Djibouti

Incorporating guidelines to promote social cohesion within schools and classrooms into in-service training modules will benefit head teachers and teachers of children with disabilities. Teachers report that their main obstacle is regulating some of these students' behaviours and reactions, which sometimes prevent others from interacting with them. The same difficulty was also mentioned during the interviews by students who do not have a disability but recognize the importance of helping their peers with disabilities during classroom activities. However, they indicated that they did not understand their peers' modes of communication and preferred to remain at a distance. For example, a student without a disability from a mainstream school in Djibouti commented: "He hits me all the time;

he plays with us, I play with him, but he gets more and more carried away and that makes me uncomfortable. He insults me and when that happens, I don't know what to do." In addition, head teachers and teachers need guidance on mechanisms for identifying potential cases of violence at school, how to report them through official channels, measures to help students resolve conflicts and strategies for preventing violence.[44] School is one of the first places where children are confronted with diversity and learn to respect it. Teachers and head teachers have a key role to play in ensuring that school remains an environment in which all students feel welcome and protected.[45]

2.2. Revise pre-service teacher training programmes to include a module on inclusive education for children with disabilities, focusing on practical teaching strategies for different types of disability.

Data from the online survey indicate that teacher training programmes lack key content supporting the implementation of inclusive education for children with disabilities, such as teaching methodologies and practical strategies for managing learner diversity in the classroom. Of the teachers who had received training in inclusive education, 7 out of 10 indicated that this training had provided them with theoretical knowledge about the different types of disability and learning difficulty, but only 3 out of 10 had learned how to implement curriculum adjustments for children with disabilities who need them (*see Figure 7*). Even fewer teachers, 2 out of 10, mentioned that their training had included content on the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) inclusive pedagogy methodology or on promoting social cohesion among diverse learners. The qualitative data also confirmed that pre-service teacher training on teaching children with disabilities focused on the theoretical aspects of disability.

QUOTE

I was trained at the CFEEF [Centre de formation des enseignants de l'enseignement fondamental – training centre for basic education teachers]. It took a while for me to learn everything I needed to know to become a teacher. There was a module on special education. In this module, we learned that there are different types of disability and different types of DYS disorders,[iii] but I don't think the training I received equipped me to obtain in-depth information.

Teacher, mainstream school, Dikhil

Figure 7: Percentage of teachers who received inclusive education content during their training

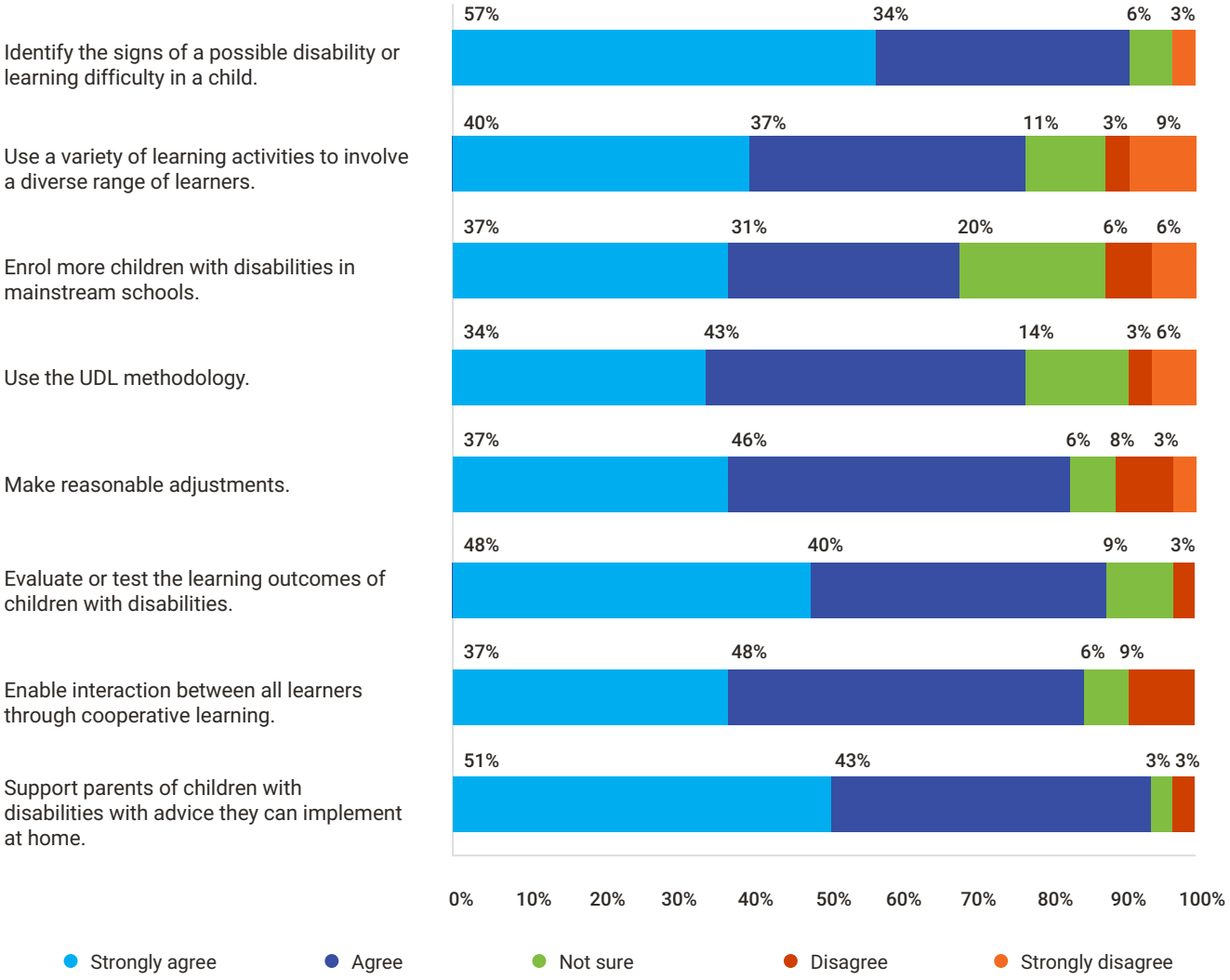
N = 34 teachers.

Source: Authors' analysis based on data collected by the LiFE online survey.

iii The term 'DYS disorders' refers to a group of neurodevelopmental disorders, including dyslexia, dysorthographia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, dysgraphia and dysphasia. This expression is commonly used by specialists. See 'Les troubles Dys', La Neurodiversité France, at: https://laneurodiversite-france.fr/dys.

Many teachers and head teachers who have received training in inclusive education lack confidence in their ability to implement it. Nearly one-third of teachers and head teachers said they felt unsure or were not confident in their ability to enrol more children with disabilities in mainstream schools, and 23 per cent doubted their ability to use varied learning activities to engage a diverse range of students (*see Figure 8*). Of the head teachers who had received training, 45 per cent doubted their ability to make reasonable adjustments to the curriculum and 39 per cent questioned their ability to use the UDL method (*see Figure 9*). While the number of head teachers and teachers trained in inclusive education in Djibouti is insufficient, these data suggest that content related to ways of teaching children with disabilities is lacking in pre-service training programmes. Creating training modules focused on the theoretical and practical knowledge needed by trainee teachers of children with disabilities, as envisaged by MENFOP in the ten-year strategy for schooling for these children, therefore meets an urgent need.[46] Capacity-building for teachers in inclusive education should be a priority when allocating internal resources, as well as when searching for external resources and funding methods to strengthen the Djiboutian education system.

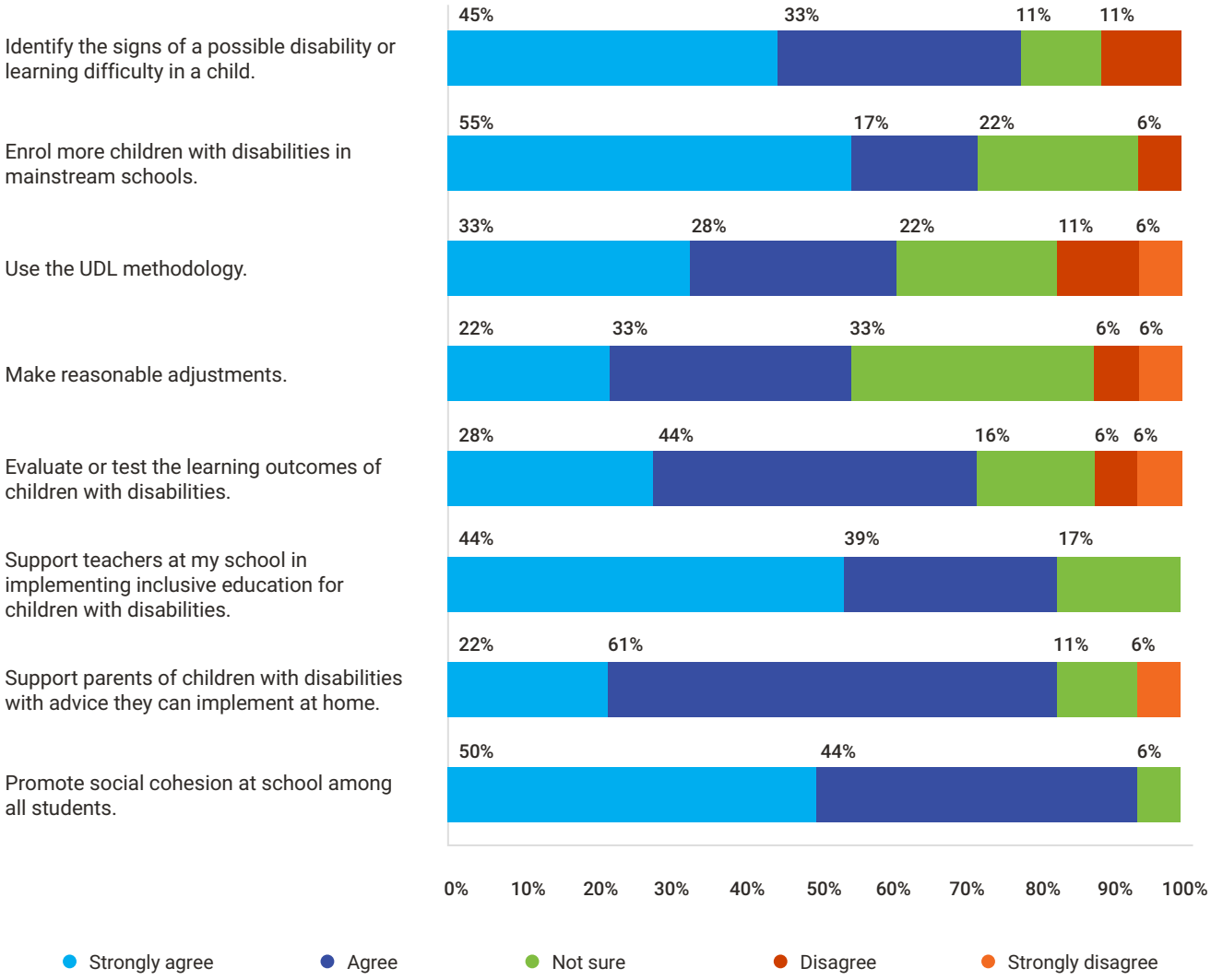
Figure 8: Perceptions of teachers who have been trained in inclusive education of their ability to perform certain tasks with confidence



N = 34 teachers.

Source: Authors' analysis based on data collected by the LiFE online survey.

Figure 9: Perceptions of head teachers who have been trained in inclusive education of their ability to perform certain tasks with confidence



N = 18 head teachers.

Source: Authors' analysis based on data collected by the LiFE online survey.

MENFOP is planning an in-depth review of pre-service training programmes, which will enable trainee teachers to strengthen the skills that are fundamental to the implementation of inclusive education for children with disabilities, and that they will be able to use with confidence in their classrooms. This review concerns all pre-service teacher training programmes, including general and special education. MENFOP will include theoretical information on the evolution of approaches used in educating children with disabilities and general recommendations for developing 'inclusive education projects' for each student, specifying their individual learning goals and the adaptations required.[47] In addition, training modules may

include methodological guidance for teachers on the use of the UDL method, to ensure that classroom activities, as well as the teaching resources and assessment methods used, meet the needs of all students, whether or not they have a disability. The modules could also provide guidance on strategies to foster positive interactions between all students and to support the families of children with disabilities.

3. Consider the role of special schools in Djibouti, so that the education system as a whole can benefit from their vast experience and expertise in teaching children with disabilities and adapt resources to the needs of such children, while ensuring such schools continue to evolve as an integral part of an expanding system.

For MENFOP, it is important that an idealized vision of inclusive education does not hold back progress towards a pragmatic and practical solution in the short and medium terms.[48] In particular, it is essential that any progressive reform of the education system recognizes the role played to date by the leaders and teachers of the special school in Djibouti. Although special schools are not compatible with a fully inclusive version of the education system, the teachers at these schools have dedicated their professional lives to supporting and educating children with disabilities in Djibouti. Their experience and expertise can make a valuable contribution to building a more inclusive education system.

3.1. Special schools can become centres of excellence and expertise in the use of accessible teaching strategies and approaches for children with disabilities.

Teachers and other education professionals who work or have worked in special schools represent an important pool of experience and expertise that it will be important to mobilize. Their experience is also recognized by the parents of children with disabilities, who appreciate some of these teachers' skills in building relationships and communicating better with their children.

QUOTE

In third year, he had a teacher who had a disability himself, and now he has a teacher who does not. Last year, the teacher was deaf and they understood each other by using sign language. This year, despite his skills, the teacher won't be able to. The ideal situation for these children would be to have a teacher like them.

Parent of a child with a hearing disability, special school, Djibouti

The majority of mainstream schoolteachers who took part in the online survey said they lacked knowledge in several areas related to educating children with disabilities (*see Figure 10*). As envisaged by MENFOP in the SDEF 2021–2035, the complete transition of children with disabilities from special schools to mainstream schools is not realistic, as the Djiboutian education system is currently undergoing a period of change.[49] While training programmes are being deployed to build the capacity of Djiboutian teachers in educating children with disabilities, mainstream schools can benefit from the expertise of teachers and other professionals in special schools to enrich their knowledge of teaching strategies relating to different types of disability. The way in which special-school teachers provide support and training will need to be carefully targeted to the most important needs. This support can take the form of formal training or more informal support and regular dialogue between colleagues through peer mentoring programmes, coaching or internship opportunities where special- and mainstream-school teachers can support each other.[50] Special schools, as centres of excellence, can invite teachers from mainstream schools to visit them so that they can learn about examples of good practice.

It is also essential to involve special-school teachers in the review of pre-service training programmes, to ensure that their significant expertise is taken into account in the content developed. In addition, representatives from mainstream, Catholic and community schools will be encouraged to participate in the review, to ensure that the new modules address current difficulties in their respective schools.

Figure 10: Teachers' perceptions of their own knowledge of inclusive education

TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION	EXTENSIVE OR SOME KNOWLEDGE OF THE SUBJECT	LITTLE OR NO KNOWLEDGE OF THE SUBJECT
Meet the needs of learners considered to have behavioural difficulties.	54%	46%
Meet the needs of learners with a physical disability.	47%	53%
Meet the needs of learners with a learning difficulty (e.g. dyslexia, ADHD).	45%	55%
Evaluate or test the learning outcomes of children with disabilities.	44%	56%
Meet the needs of learners with an intellectual disability.	44%	57%
Meet the needs of blind or visually impaired learners.	43%	57%
Meet the needs of learners with autism.	42%	58%
Meet the needs of learners with multiple disabilities (e.g. hearing-impaired and visually impaired at the same time).	40%	60%
Meet the needs of learners who are deaf or hearing-impaired.	39%	61%

N = 723 teachers.

Source: Authors' analysis based on data collected by the LiFE online survey.

As long as special schools continue to exist as part of the educational provision for children with disabilities in Djibouti, it is important that transition pathways for children from special schools to mainstream schools are developed and supported. Pathways from special classes in mainstream schools to inclusive classes in the same schools should also be created. To support this transition, it is important to put in place a transition protocol, whereby any formal transfer of a child from a special school to a mainstream school, or from a special class to an inclusive class, should be led by the child's original teacher. This process should include sharing all data and information concerning the child with a disability with the new school or teacher.

3.2. Special schools can help mainstream schools to strengthen their physical infrastructure and teaching resources.

No fewer than six out of nine regional education inspectors indicated that the goal of guaranteeing access to all schools for children with disabilities was still a long way off. This finding is corroborated by the results of the survey of head teachers, which indicate that the majority of schools in Djibouti do not have the physical infrastructure required for inclusive access for children with disabilities, and that very few schools have adapted teaching resources (*see Figure 11*). The qualitative data highlight barriers to access to learning for children with disabilities, as well as challenges for teachers, who must seek alternative solutions to support their students.

QUOTE

I'm not sure what's written in the books. I can see, but I can't read. I don't have any large-print books. I don't have any special equipment.

Student with a visual disability, mainstream school, Obock

QUOTE

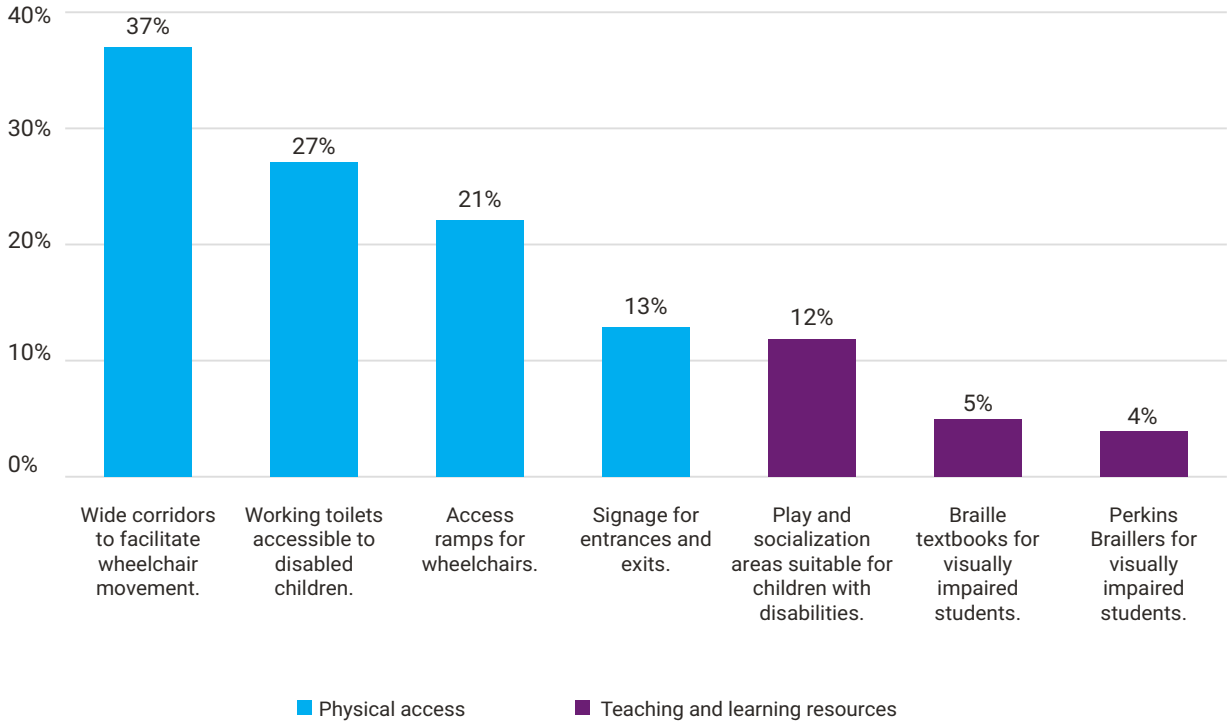
It's very difficult if we carry them in our arms. Because we use wheelchairs, it's very hard to get up the stairs. We bring them in ourselves, carrying them in our arms.

Teacher, Catholic school, Ali Sabieh

Head teachers and teachers from special schools can act as key advisers to mainstream schools in the gradual process of strengthening school infrastructure and teaching resources. A similar model has been implemented in Ethiopia, where resource centres for inclusive education have been set up with itinerant teachers to support mainstream schools. Itinerant teachers visit these schools to share teaching materials and resources with their colleagues, as well as providing training on inclusive pedagogy for children with disabilities.[51,52] MENFOP will open several special schools in the interior regions to diversify the educational offer for children

with disabilities in Djibouti. In the long term, as inclusive education for children with disabilities develops in Djibouti and the ecosystem required for its implementation is put in place, these special schools could be transformed into resource centres supporting mainstream schools. This support must be practical, targeted and adapted to the needs of the students. While new schools will be built and equipped to meet the new standards on quality, accessibility and organization of physical space developed by MENFOP, a targeted approach could be taken to renovating existing schools.[53] For example, MENFOP could give priority to those schools currently hosting the largest number of children with disabilities, and gradually roll out renovations to more mainstream schools as new resources become available.

Figure 11: Physical accessibility and teaching resources available, according to head teachers



N = 145 head teachers.

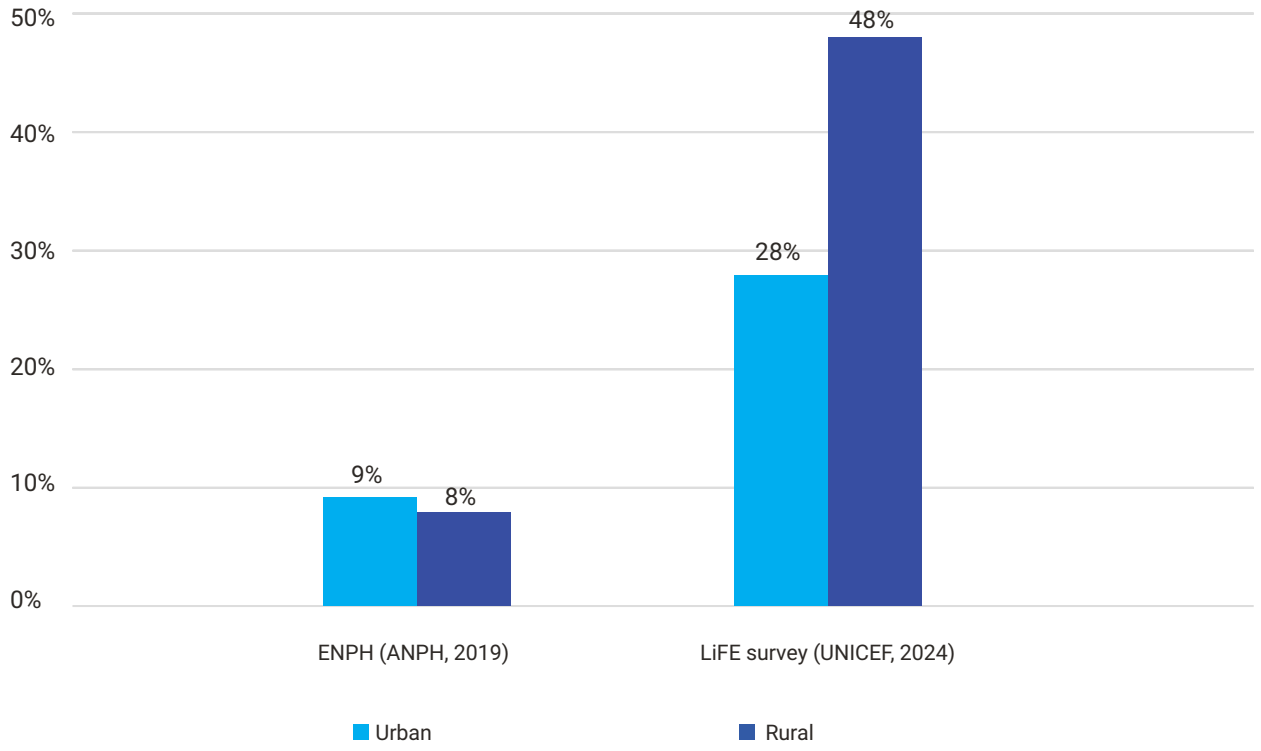
Source: Authors' analysis based on data collected by the LiFE online survey.

4. Improve the availability and quality of educational, administrative and financial data on children with disabilities in Djibouti.

Although policies and laws have been developed to support the inclusion of children with disabilities in Djiboutian schools, it is very difficult to monitor and manage their implementation without systematic data collection and analysis. There is currently no mechanism for collecting routine data on the participation of children with disabilities in the education system at the national level. This makes it difficult to determine the extent to which progress has been made in terms of including these children. The online survey conducted as part of this research revealed significant regional and rural trends. However, although the data collected through studies and surveys are representative, they do not always provide the comprehensive information needed for making policy decisions.

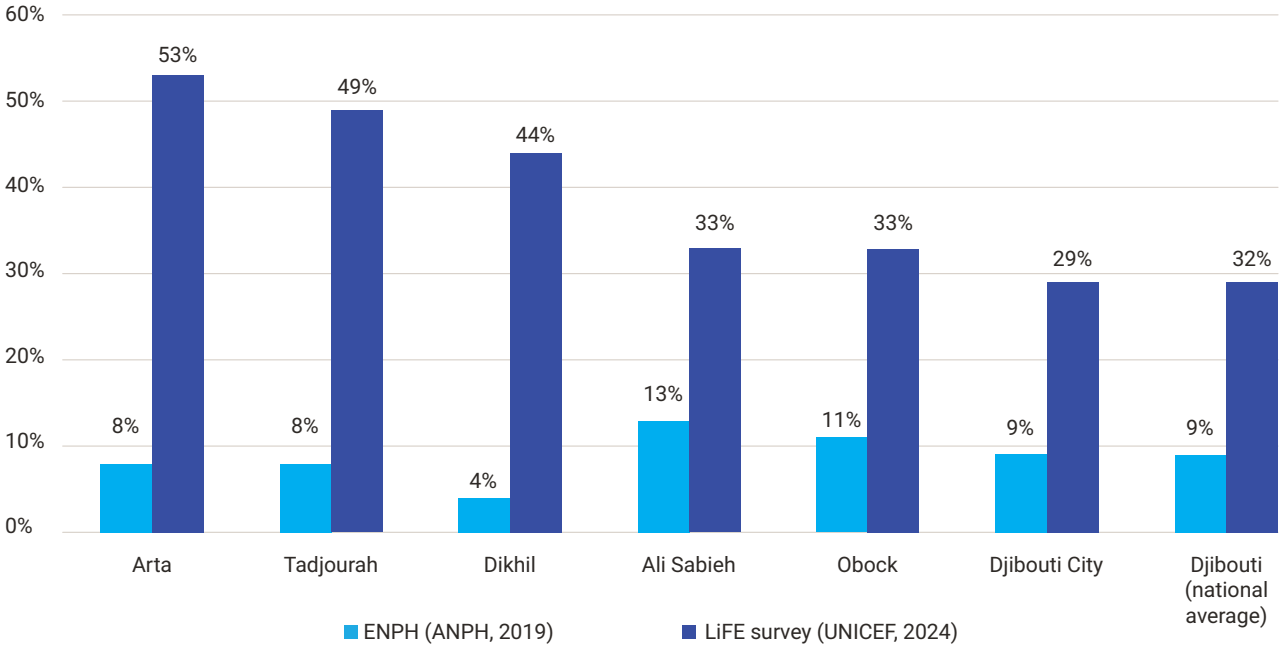
Comparing the differences between the online survey responses of teachers in urban and rural schools shows that disability is not defined consistently when collecting data on children with disabilities. This makes it difficult to draw conclusions for decision-making (*see Figure 12*). In the LiFE online survey, more teachers from rural schools reported having children with disabilities in the classroom. Conversely, the ENPH survey conducted in 2019 by the ANPH shows a higher prevalence of disability in urban areas. This difference merits further consideration, as it raises the question of whether children with disabilities in rural areas have easier access to schooling than their peers in urban areas. Differences are also observed between studies in terms of regional trends, which show wide disparities (*see Figure 13*).

Figure 12: Comparison of the relative percentages of children with disabilities in urban and rural areas in the ENPH (ANPH, 2019) and the LiFE survey (UNICEF, 2024)



Source: ENPH, 2019; LiFE online survey, 2024.

Figure 13: Percentage of teachers reporting having children with disabilities in their class(es)



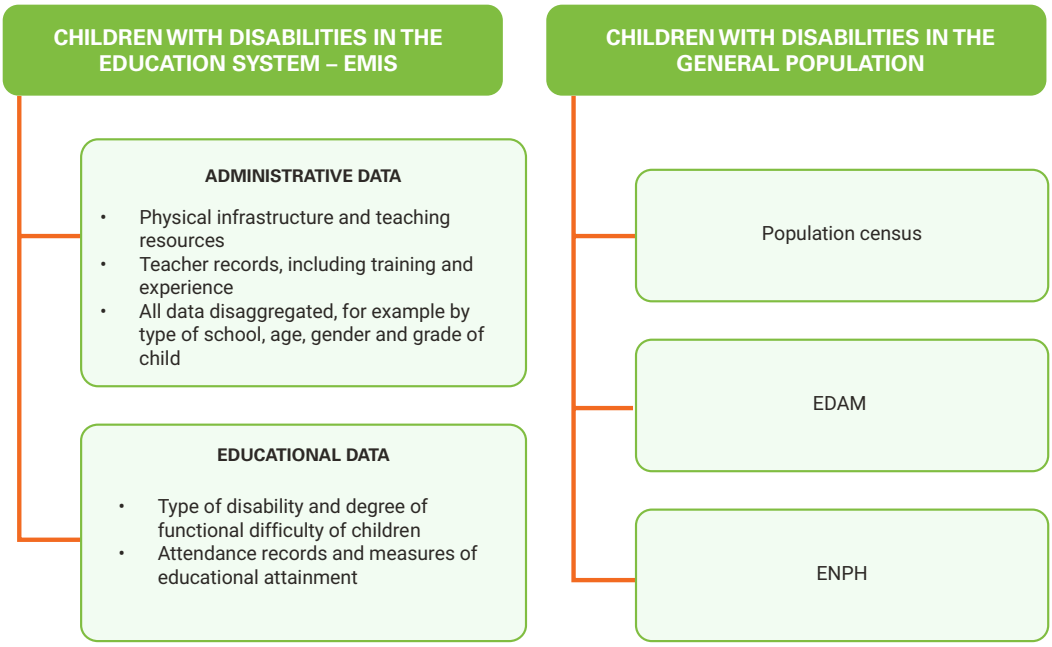
Source: ENPH, 2019; LiFE online survey, 2024.

Eight out of nine regional education inspectors agree that the right to education for all children, including those with disabilities, is enshrined in legislation. However, seven out of nine also feel that management and accountability systems are not sufficiently established to know the extent to which this right is respected. The lack of comprehensive and accurate data on children with disabilities and the absence of a systematic process for collecting such data at the national level pose challenges for developing effective policies and programmes. This also makes it difficult for the Government of Djibouti to monitor the implementation of policies and legislation that guarantee the right of all children to education. Improved data collection and management will enable public decision-makers, educators and stakeholders to understand the prevalence of disability and its different types, and to identify barriers to access to education. This will also enable the monitoring of regional and rural trends in the participation of children with disabilities in schools, to ensure that resources are allocated efficiently, where they are most needed.[54]

4.1. Specify the data required to analyse the inclusion of children with disabilities and who is responsible for collecting and managing these data.

Effective support for the inclusion of children with disabilities in the education system is reliant on monitoring the prevalence of disability and its various forms in the general population in the same way as in schools. In the short term, it is important to define the data ecosystem that will need to be built to effectively monitor and manage the fulfilment of all children's right to education, including children with disabilities. This means clarifying the different types and sources of data that could enable the effective development of an inclusive education system, and integrating them into an EMIS. It is also necessary to specify which data systems on disability in the general population would be needed to complement data from the education sector (*see Figure 14*). The education system in Djibouti is diverse, with public, private, mainstream, special, Catholic and community schools. It is important that all these schools are included in the data-collection and management system to ensure that an overall picture can be presented, in order to fully understand the educational provision for children with disabilities in Djibouti.

Figure 14: Data systems needed to study disability in Djibouti

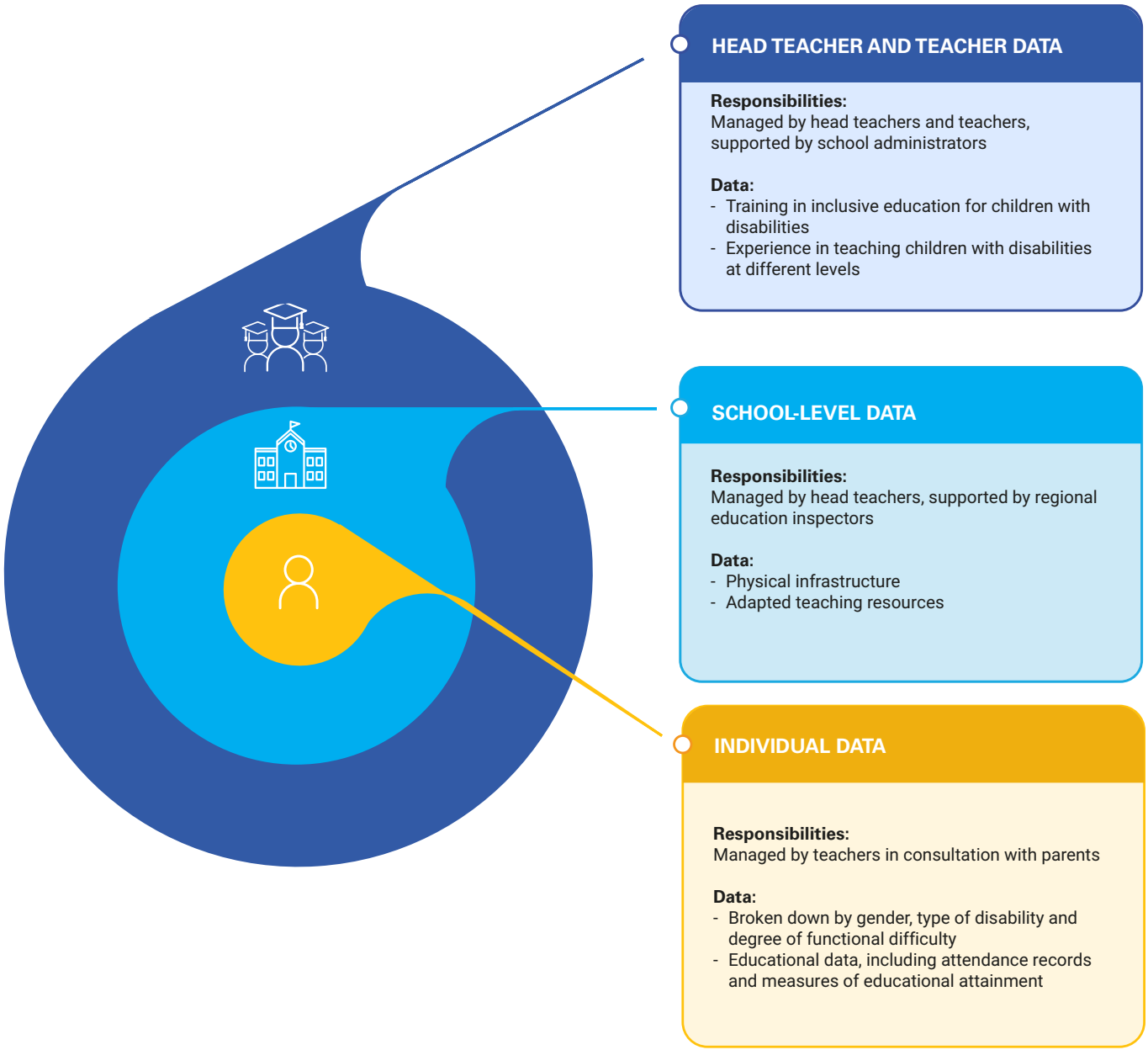


Source: Developed by the authors, based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) Information Paper No. 60 on EMIS for monitoring inclusive education.

4.1.1 Collecting data on children with disabilities in the education system

This section presents preliminary recommendations concerning the types of data that will be needed to effectively monitor and manage the fulfilment of every child's right to education. It may be useful to classify the data collected based on the following three levels: school-level data; head teacher- and teacher-level data; and individual data. For each of these levels, it is necessary to define not only the data that will be collected, but also who will be responsible for collecting these and entering them into the EMIS. Figure 15 shows an example of the initial structure of this EMIS, including some data and some key roles. The development of this structure and its integration into regular school operations is a key recommendation, as is investment in digital infrastructure to enable schools to enter data electronically. In the short term, therefore, it is important to test this inclusive system of data collection and management in a small number of schools, before moving on to how the education system operates as a whole.

Figure 15: Recommended EMIS structure and responsibilities of key stakeholders



Source: Developed by the authors, based on the UNICEF guide for including disability in education management information systems.

Figure 15 is intended as a guide only and should not be regarded as either exhaustive or restrictive. It is important that MENFOP, in collaboration with the ANPH and other stakeholders, develop a coherent strategy for the collection and management of these data. In other contexts, the use of teachers as data-collection agents has been welcomed, provided this is supported by adequate training.[57,58] Teachers interact regularly with their students and are therefore well-placed to identify suspected cases of disability and refer children for screening or specialist assessment. However, if teachers are to take on this role, they will need training on how to correctly detect signs of different types of disability, and how to record and communicate these data so that they can be thoroughly analysed at the central level.[59]

4.1.2 Collecting data on children with disabilities in the general population

It will be important to supplement data on children with disabilities in school with population-level data describing the prevalence of disabilities in the general population:

1. **Census data:** The last census in Djibouti took place in 2024, and the previous one in 2009. These are essential checkpoints for monitoring the prevalence and distribution of disability in the population as a whole. As the census also collects data on school attendance and educational qualifications, it will be possible to determine the general relationship between education and disability in Djibouti. However, full-population censuses are not frequent enough for routine monitoring, and they need to be supplemented by more regular surveys.

2. **Household surveys:** Household surveys such as the UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey or the World Bank's EDAM offer a valuable opportunity to triangulate data collected as part of regular system monitoring and management. Djibouti took part in EDAM4 in 2017, which showed a striking gap in the percentage of people with disabilities completing primary education compared with their peers without disabilities.

3. **National surveys:** National surveys should be carried out alongside household surveys as a regular opportunity to triangulate findings from other research. They promote ownership of the process, and can be more frequent and more targeted, in line with national needs. The most recent example is the 2019 ENPH, conducted by the ANPH. This survey improved on the data collected by the 2017 EDAM, both by collecting data for children aged 2 years and over (instead of 5 years and over for the EDAM) and by including all six categories of functional difficulty suggested by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics (rather than only five of the six categories included in the EDAM). These surveys are important for quick polls or to understand how disability is perceived. However, national data from an EMIS are generally more reliable for ascertaining the percentage of teachers with training in inclusive education, or the percentage of teachers with students with disabilities in their classrooms.

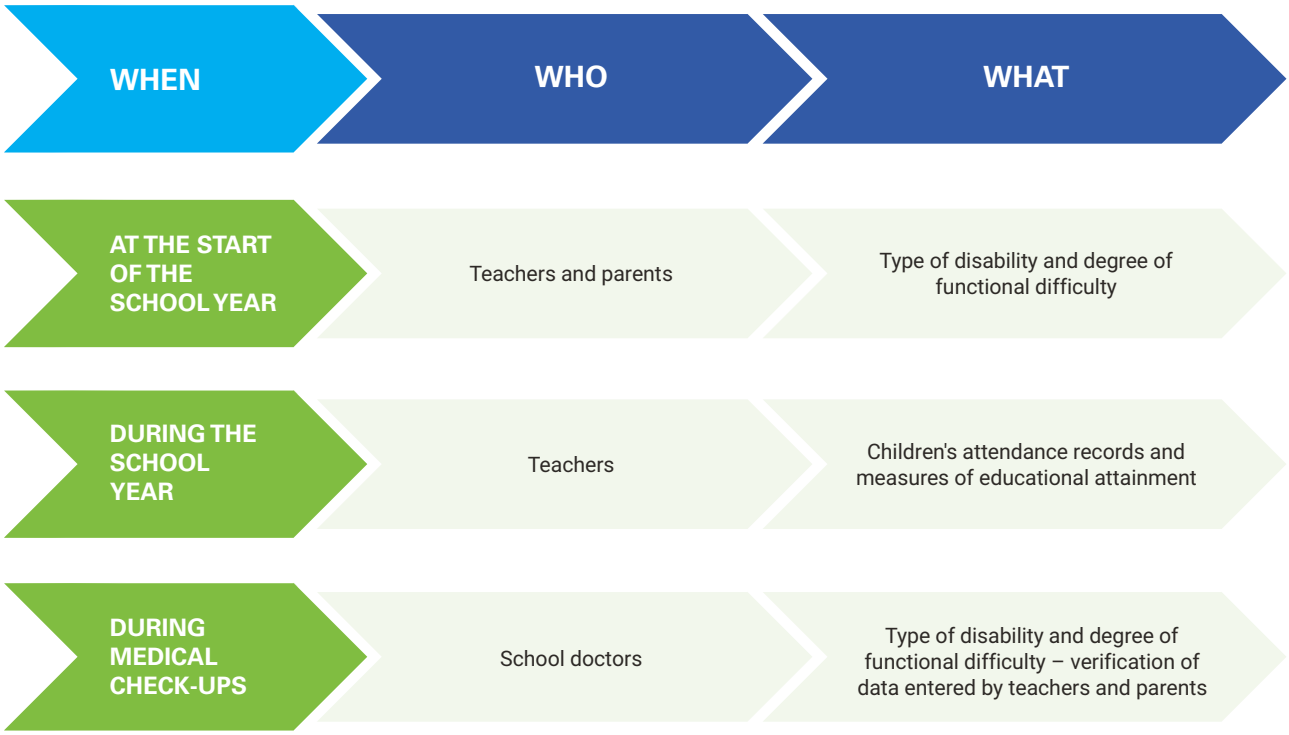
4.1.3 Key times and data collectors

It is imperative to define clear procedures for data collection, management and analysis to guarantee that the data collected are relevant and reliable. This involves determining which data need to be collected, how often and by what means, as well as the key times during the school year when data will be collected and entered into the EMIS. Furthermore, the individuals responsible for each stage of this process need to be properly trained to ensure the data are accurate, reliable and usable. Well-trained staff are essential for data management, since this minimizes errors and improves the quality of analyses.[60] By investing in training and capacity-building for MENFOP's data managers, particularly in the Planning and Data Department, it will be possible to ensure that decisions are based on robust, properly analysed information.

Figure 16 shows an example of the data that could be collected for each child. At each stage, it indicates the point at which data will be collected and entered into the EMIS (when), those responsible for data collection and entry (who), and which data will be collected at that stage (what). Teachers and parents are key actors in capturing data on children with disabilities at the start of the school year and

throughout it. Data on the type of disability and degree of functional difficulty can be completed and corroborated by experts during medical check-ups in schools. During interviews, some parents of children with disabilities mentioned that these check-ups took place in their children's schools, but that they were not regular. For example, the parent of a child with a physical disability at a Catholic school in Ali Sabieh said: "A doctor from the CNSS [Caisse nationale de la sécurité sociale – National Social Security Fund] has been here once in three years, when the school invited him. He examined the children's hands, ears, eyes and speech." Closer collaboration between MENFOP and the Ministry of Health will help ensure that these check-ups are carried out frequently in all schools, including private ones, and use established screening protocols. This is a key opportunity to identify disabilities at earlier stages, or to detect disabilities that are not apparent to parents or teachers.[61]

Figure 16: Key data-collection times and stakeholder responsibilities



Source: Developed by the authors, based on discussions held at the workshop to co-create policy recommendations with MENFOP and ANPH representatives.

Conclusions

The development of more inclusive education systems for children with disabilities is a gradual task that involves different components of the system. This is the vision adopted by MENFOP in its education sector plan for the period 2021–2035, which recognizes the current capacity of the education system in the midst of the transition to full inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools.[62]

The four policy recommendations presented in this research report have been translated into three strategies for the short, medium and long terms. These strategies address the implementation of recommendations on an integrated, continuous and sustained basis. Short-, medium- and long-term strategies have been created in collaboration with representatives from MENFOP and the ANPH, in order to develop a more precise approach towards establishing a more inclusive education system for children with disabilities in Djibouti. Transforming education systems is a long-term undertaking, and the strategy can be revised as progress is made in some of the system's components.

Short term: Clarify, define and map the education system.

The components of a favourable environment need to be put in place to develop and expand an inclusive education system for children with disabilities. These components will form the basis for future teacher training and data-collection initiatives.

- Disseminate the vision of education for children with disabilities set out in the regulatory framework and sectoral policies in Djibouti to help head teachers and teachers better understand what inclusive education is, how it differs from special education and how special schools can contribute to the gradual transition to full inclusion in mainstream schools.

- Raise awareness among parents, whether or not they have children with disabilities, of the importance of inclusive education and of MENFOP's efforts to improve the quality of educational provision for children with disabilities, in order to reduce the stigma associated with disability and gain greater community support for the integration of such children within mainstream schools. The partnership between MENFOP, the ANPH and civil society organizations, such as organizations of people with disabilities or parents' associations, and other ministries, such as the MFF and the Ministry of Health, will contribute to widening dissemination of these awareness-raising programmes.

- Define a protocol setting out the roles and responsibilities of head teachers, teachers, regional education inspectors and educational advisers in implementing education for children with disabilities, from the time students enrol and throughout their schooling. These guidelines should be applied and disseminated to stakeholders in all types of educational programme at the national level, including special schools, mainstream schools with inclusive classes and mainstream schools with special classes.

- Carry out initial mapping of the education system by collecting data at the school level on the disability status of all students, with the support of regional education inspectors and educational

advisers. This information will enable the schools and teachers that need priority support to be identified. The mapping should include data on the accessibility of school infrastructure and the availability of teaching aids adapted to different types of disability, such as Braille textbooks or assistive technologies

Medium term: Test strategies for promoting inclusive education.

It is important to revise and reorganize certain components of the education system, such as teacher training, the accessibility of school infrastructure and teaching tools, and as the process of collecting and managing educational data. These initiatives should first be piloted in a number of target schools with known needs, to determine how effective they are and the factors that support appropriate implementation, before being rolled out on a wider scale. Testing initiatives initially with a sample of schools and teachers with registered children with disabilities will also enable a more equitable roll-out, ensuring that support is prioritized where it is most needed.

- Prioritize in-service training in inclusive education for teachers in schools with children with disabilities enrolled in their classes, and test the effects of these training programmes before disseminating them to all teachers.

- Include a module on inclusive education for children with disabilities in pre-service teacher training programmes, drawing on the expertise of the special school. This module could include methodological guidelines on teaching students with different types of disability and strategies for promoting social cohesion in the classroom. It can be tested with small cohorts before being incorporated as an official reform of pre-service training in Djibouti.

- Continue to invest in developing school infrastructure and test the effectiveness of new teaching aids developed by MENFOP and designed for different types of disability, while incorporating the principles of the UDL inclusive teaching methodology.

- Develop an EMIS that collects data on the type of disability and degree of functional difficulty of each student, as well as administrative data, including school infrastructure, available

teaching aids and their accessibility, and teacher training in inclusive education for children with disabilities. The data-collection and transmission process and the clarity of the indicators can be tested first with a sample of schools and in certain regions.

Long term: Roll out initiatives on a larger scale and incorporate them into the normal operation of the education system.

Large-scale deployment of teacher training initiatives in inclusive education for children with disabilities, as well as of data-collection initiatives, can be iterative, in order to incorporate them gradually into the normal running of the education system.

- Expand in-service training programmes in inclusive education for all teachers, using a cascade approach involving regional education inspectors, educational advisers and head teachers.

- Roll out the new pre-service training module in inclusive education for children with disabilities as part of systemic reform. All future teachers starting their pre-service training, and those currently in training, must take this module.

- Increase the availability and quality of data on children with disabilities in Djibouti and on the accessibility of school infrastructure and teaching materials, by collecting data at the start of the school year and during it, and ensuring that are recorded in the EMIS. The collection of these data should be integrated into regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for the Djiboutian education system, and the data should be captured in time for use in MENFOP and ANPH decision-making processes.

Appendices

Appendix A: List of revised legislation and policy documents

SECTOR	DOCUMENT
General	Constitution of the Republic of Djibouti Djibouti Vision 2035 Legal Protection of Minors Code Act No. 151/AN/22/8th L of 18 July 2022 repealing and replacing the provisions of Act No. 207/AN/17/7th L on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with special needs
National Agency for People with Disabilities (ANPH)	Act No. 15/AN/18/8th L of 25 June 2018 creating the National Agency for People with Disabilities National Disability Strategy Decree No. 2020-306/PRE of 2 December 2020 establishing the Mobility Inclusion Card (CMI in French)
Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training (MENFOP)	Act No. 96/AN/00/4th L governing the Djiboutian education system Decree No. 2011-069/PR/MENESUP of 12 May 2011 creating a department for the education of children with special needs Education and Training Master Plan (SDEF) 2021–2035 Ten-year strategy for the education of children with disabilities in Djibouti Five-year action plan for the education of children with disabilities in Djibouti
Ministry for Women and the Family (MFF)	National Child Policy Djibouti National Strategic Plan for Childhood – integrated early childhood development and child protection (2022–2026)
Ministry of Health (MH)	Act No. 48/AN/99/4th L governing health policy

Note: Not all terminologies used in government policies and legislation are aligned with the views of UNICEF or the authors of the report.

Appendix B: In-depth research sample

Quantitative research

Appendix B provides an overview of sociodemographic information for participants in the online survey. These data include the education-related characteristics of regional education inspectors, head teachers and teachers. It should be noted that the data analysed in this survey have not been disaggregated at the regional level.

Table B1: Sociodemographic data for regional education inspectors, head teachers and teachers who took part in the online survey

PARTICIPANTS	N	GENDER			AREA	
		MALE	FEMALE	PREFER NOT TO SAY	RURAL	URBAN
Regional education inspectors	**9**	**5**	**3**	**1**	**-**	**-**
Head teachers	**145**	**115**	**30**	**0**	**80**	**65**
Ali Sabieh	20	15	5	0	14	6
Arta	6	5	1	0	6	0
Dikhil	22	21	1	0	17	5
Djibouti City	51	29	22	0	4	47
Obock	19	18	1	0	15	4
Tadjourah	27	27	0	0	24	3
Teachers	**723**	**410**	**311**	**2**	**148**	**575**
Ali Sabieh	55	34	21	0	12	43
Arta	36	17	19	0	23	13
Dikhil	45	35	10	0	18	27
Djibouti City	515	267	246	2	54	461
Obock	33	27	6	0	14	19
Tadjourah	39	30	9	0	27	12

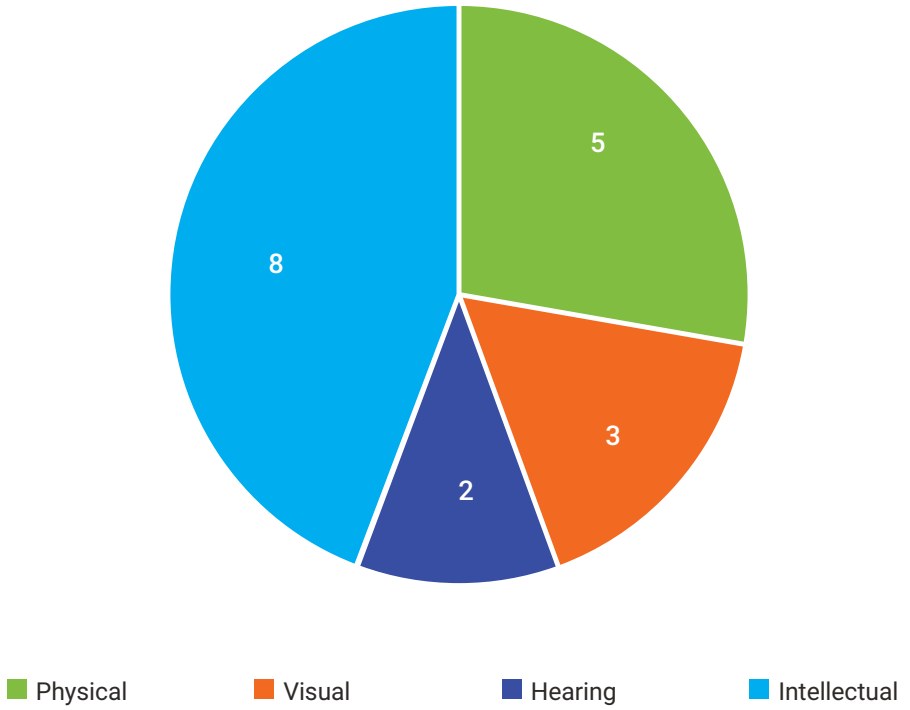
Qualitative research

Eight schools in the capital Djibouti City and five regions were targeted for qualitative research: five mainstream schools, one Catholic school, one community school and one special school. A total of 18 children with disabilities and 32 parents of children with disabilities were interviewed. Most of these children have an intellectual or physical disability. Fourteen focus group discussions were held: seven with children without disabilities and seven with their parents. In most cases, interviews were conducted with all students with disabilities enrolled at the school and their parents. However, if there were more than three children with disabilities enrolled in the same school, students were selected at random. Nine teachers also took part in the interviews, in order to obtain qualitative data to supplement the quantitative data from the online survey.

Table B2: Interview and focus group discussion participants

PARTICIPANTS	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Children with disabilities in school	16
Parents of children with disabilities in school	22
Children with disabilities not in school	2
Parents of children with disabilities not in school	10
Children without disabilities in school	30 (seven focus group discussions)
Parents of children without disabilities in school	29 (seven focus group discussions)
Teachers	8
Total	**117**

Figure B1: Type of disability of children in school who took part in the interviews



N = 18 children with disabilities (in and out of school).

Endnotes

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