

RESEARCH REPORT

# Learning is For Everyone

## Paving the pathway for disability-inclusive education in Mozambique



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# Acronyms and abbreviations

<b>ASD</b>	Autism Spectrum Disorder
<b>CREIs</b>	Centres for Inclusive Education
<b>CRPD</b>	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<b>DHS</b>	Demographic and Health Survey
<b>EARC</b>	Education Assessment Resource Centres
<b>ECE</b>	Early Childhood Education
<b>EMIS</b>	Educational Management Information System
<b>ESA</b>	Education Sector Analysis
<b>IEPs</b>	Individualized Education Plans
<b>IFP</b>	Teacher Training Institute
<b>LiFE</b>	Learning is For Everyone
<b>MEC</b>	Ministry of Education and Culture
<b>MinEDH</b>	Ministry of Education and Human Development
<b>NES</b>	National Education System
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-Governmental Organizations
<b>OPDs</b>	Organizations of Persons with Disabilities
<b>SBC</b>	Social and Behavioural Change
<b>SEN</b>	Special Educational Needs
<b>UDL</b>	Universal Design for Learning

# Executive summary

Inclusive education is a rights-based approach that ensures all learners can access and participate in quality education by adapting systems to meet diverse needs. As defined in General comment 4 on Article 24 of the Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), it involves systemic reform across content, methods, structures and strategies to provide all students with equitable, participatory learning experiences tailored to their needs and preferences. This vision aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4, reinforcing the obligation to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities and promote inclusive, equitable education for all.

The Eastern and Southern Africa region has been increasingly committed to promoting the right to quality education for persons with disabilities through policy and practice. While not all constitutions explicitly mention persons with disabilities, they affirm the right to equal and quality education for all. Countries like Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe have shown strong legislative support for inclusive education. Yet nearly half of countries in the region mandate special education, so it persists as the dominant approach to education for children with disabilities.

Momentum toward inclusive education in Mozambique began in the late 1990s with pilot projects that eventually evolved into national programmes and policies, including the Strategy for Inclusive Education and Development of Children with Disabilities 2020–2029. While the country has made legislative and strategic commitments to inclusion, two in three children with disabilities remain out of school, with the education system facing challenges such as inaccessible infrastructure, inadequate teacher preparedness, gaps in data and monitoring systems, and a lack of intersectoral collaboration with health, protection and other relevant sectors.

This paper was developed as part of UNICEF’s Learning is For Everyone (LiFE) research implemented in Mozambique through a partnership between UNICEF and the Ministry of Education and

Culture (MEC, by its Portuguese acronym), formerly known as the Ministry of Education and Human Development (MinEDH, by its Portuguese acronym). The research explored challenges and promising practices in Mozambique's pursuit of inclusive education for children with disabilities. The key findings and recommendations of the paper are presented below.



## 1. Understanding disability: Social norms, beliefs and attitudes

### **Recommendation 1: Strengthen the social model of disability in Mozambique to remove attitudinal barriers and enhance participation of persons with disability in education and social life.**

The contemporary approach to disability – the social model – marks a shift from charity and medical models, which viewed persons with disabilities as objects of charity who had defects to be fixed. The social model recognizes persons with disabilities as rights holders and emphasizes that disability arises not from individual impairments, but from societal and environmental barriers. For the environment to truly act as a facilitator of equitable participation, it must provide all necessary accommodations to ensure full inclusion in all areas of life.

In Mozambique, public perceptions and policies still reflect medical and charity models of disability, viewing it as an individual issue or object of pity. However, rights-based and social model approaches are gradually gaining traction, especially with the passing of the 2024 law to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities (Lei n.º NR 10/2024: Lei de Promoção e Proteção dos Direitos da Pessoa com Deficiência) and growing support for inclusive education. Despite this progress, persistent misconceptions and negative attitudes continue to hinder the full implementation of inclusive education for children with disabilities.

Advancing rights-based and social perspectives on disability is critical to reducing stigma and empowering individuals with disabilities. To achieve this, in the short term, government authorities should review relevant policy documents (e.g., laws, strategies) and administrative

procedures (e.g., admissions to secondary schools and vocational training centres) to ensure alignment with rights-based approaches. Promoting inclusive attitudes also requires fostering accessibility and inclusion beyond schools in the broader community, including public spaces, workplaces and recreational areas. Since direct contact with persons with disabilities is key to shifting perceptions, mechanisms and initiatives to promote such contact are needed in the medium term. These efforts should be supported through intersectoral collaboration across health, education and protection sectors at all levels, with clearly defined roles and institutional frameworks. The Inclusive Education Network, led by MEC, offers a strong platform for this initiative and should actively involve parents, children with disabilities and organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) to ensure relevance and effectiveness. Finally, over the long term, quality assurance measures must be developed and implemented to evaluate and ensure the sustained effectiveness of laws and mechanisms aimed at reducing stigma and discrimination against persons with disabilities.



## 2. Modes of education: Inclusive versus special schools

### **Recommendation 2a: Reinforce the understanding that inclusive education means improving education for all students, not only those with disabilities.**

Evidence has shown inclusive education is beneficial for children with and without disabilities. Nonetheless, findings from the research show that district officers, head teachers and some parents believe special schools are more appropriate for children with disabilities. This may be due to resource constraints in mainstream schools that challenge their ability to make accommodations for children with different learning needs. There is also little awareness that inclusive teaching practices can benefit all children, as these practices include customizing learning to the diverse needs and backgrounds of students. As a short-term action to raise awareness of the broader benefits of inclusion, capacity building efforts should target district officers, head teachers, teachers and non-teaching education staff. These efforts should reinforce that

inclusive education is not only a right but also a pedagogically effective approach for all children. To enhance its impact, this action should be implemented alongside Recommendations 2b and 2c, which are designed for the medium to long term to build and sustain these efforts.

### **Recommendation 2b: Strengthen inclusive education in mainstream schools.**

Mozambique's education laws mandate special schools should be used for children with "severe special educational needs", while resource centres for inclusive education (CREIs) are meant to support inclusive education through research and teacher training. However, due to financial constraints, the three existing CREIs struggle to fulfil their mandate and sometimes serve as residential facilities for children with disabilities, contradicting inclusive education principles.

To advance towards a more inclusive education system, the following medium- to long-term actions are recommended to facilitate a gradual transition. This transition should ensure that CREIs are aligned with their intended mandates and enable special schools to progressively evolve into CREIs. These redefined CREIs should focus on supporting inclusive education in mainstream schools, particularly to expand access in remote areas. This process also involves guiding teachers and supporting families to better understand and respond to the needs, abilities and learning styles of children with disabilities.

To support this process, the MEC should increase funding and staffing for CREIs to enable them to:

- provide mobile, specialized support to teachers and students, including tailored interventions like Braille or sign language training;
- offer direct services such as counselling, therapy and family guidance through cross-sectoral collaboration;
- build capacity to support children with more intensive needs using individualized education plans (IEPs) and flexible teaching approaches; and

- facilitate access to inclusive vocational training with appropriate accommodations.

### **Recommendation 2c: Review the national curriculum to align it with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles.**

To embed UDL in the national education system, a key medium-term action is to conduct a system-wide review of curriculum, materials and assessments to identify barriers to inclusive education. This should build on efforts from the National Strategy of Inclusive Education and Development (2021), which does not explicitly reference UDL, but promotes its core principles.

The MEC, alongside curriculum developers, teacher training institutes, inclusive education experts and OPDs, should lead this collaborative effort. Based on this foundation, as a long-term action, UDL-aligned guidance and tools – such as IEP templates and differentiated lesson plans – should be developed and gradually integrated into the curriculum, teacher training and monitoring systems to support all learners.



## 3. Access to education

### **Recommendation 3a: Engage with communities to mobilize additional resources for inclusive education.**

To support the transition toward a more disability-inclusive education system, government funding must be increased and be better aligned with inclusive education priorities. A key short-term action is to engage the community more strategically to mobilize additional resources. Findings from the research highlight that this type of community support exists and is feasible to expand in Mozambique. Mobilizing support from families, local stakeholders and community structures can help address resource gaps and reinforce inclusive practices at the school level.

However, this is an initial step that must be complemented over the medium to long term by increasing government financial support for inclusive education, with a specific focus on boosting funding

for CREIs. Such funding should cover operation of the three existing CREIs and support the gradual transformation of special schools into CREIs over time.

### **Recommendation 3b: Enhance physical accessibility to and within schools.**

Physical accessibility to and within schools remains one of the major challenges preventing children with disabilities from accessing education. To address this challenge, actions should be implemented in the short, medium and long term.

In the short term, low-cost measures to enhance physical accessibility should be implemented. In the medium term, it is essential to implement UDL guidelines nationwide across all school infrastructures, accompanied by robust quality assurance measures to ensure their effective application. Finally, in the long term, efforts to improve accessibility must extend beyond school buildings. This requires coordinated collaboration among key ministries and agencies, including the Ministry of Public Works, Housing and Water Resources, the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the National Roads Administration and the National Public Works Administration. Their joint efforts should focus on ensuring that public transportation is accessible, allocating budgets to improve road conditions in rural areas, and fostering community collaboration, such as organizing carpool systems, to expand transportation options for children with disabilities.

It is important to emphasize that physical accessibility is only the first step towards ensuring educational access for children with disabilities. These improvements must be complemented by measures that guarantee meaningful learning and participation, such as implementing flexible curricula, as recommended in Recommendation 2c.



## **4. Quality of education**

### **Recommendation 4a: Train head teachers in inclusive school leadership and management.**

Head teachers set the tone for school culture and can promote policies that embrace diversity, work for and with the community, combat violence and discrimination, and find localized solutions to

challenges. Building their capacity for inclusive school management is an essential step in strengthening the inclusive education system. To this end, the existing school management training programme should include a mandatory module on disability-inclusive education. This module should cover key areas such as conceptual foundations on inclusion, inclusive leadership and management, needs assessment and improvement planning, budgeting for disability-inclusive education, disability data collection and use, family and community engagement, and advocacy for inclusive practices. An immediate short-term action for this would be to design and integrate an online module as part of the upcoming distance training on school management being developed by the MEC to help ensure all head teachers are equipped to lead inclusive schools. In the medium to long term, assessment mechanisms should be implemented to ensure the module's effectiveness and keep it up to date.

**Recommendation 4b: Have a unified training package for pre-service and in-service teacher training with a tiered approach.**

To strengthen inclusive education, it is essential that pre-service and in-service teachers receive effective training. A two-tiered approach is recommended:

- **Tier 1: Foundational training**

Targets all teachers and covers core principles of inclusive education, barriers to learning and inclusive teaching strategies, such as differentiated instruction and UDL. For in-service teachers, this should complement existing training.

- **Tier 2: Specialized training**

Provides hands-on methods focused on teaching and learning methodologies tailored to specific types of disability. Findings from the research point to the need for training on teaching methods for students with intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorder (ASD). However, this training should cover all types of disability, including physical, visual and hearing.

In the short term, meetings with key stakeholders should be held to reach agreement and begin developing the content for the Tier 1 and Tier 2 training modules. In the medium to long term, the full content of both modules should be finalized and professionals trained to ensure effective delivery.

The Teacher Training Institute (IFP by its Portuguese acronym) can develop and deliver the Tier 1 package, based on its own pre-service training and complemented by the support of MEC and the CREIs, universities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are part of Mozambique's inclusive education network. The modules for the Tier 2 package may be developed by universities, CREIs, NGOs or other entities that have relevant expertise, but for consistency and quality control they should be reviewed and approved by IFP. The package should be delivered either by IFP, if institutional capacity allows, or by other actors authorized by MEC. This training can be supplemented throughout the year by on-the-job support and mentoring programmes provided by CREIs or NGOs.

It is worth noting that the roll-out of Tier 2 should be progressive, starting with schools already serving students with disabilities, which would have the most urgent needs, then to all teachers to ensure they are equipped with foundational and specialized skills. The Tier 2 package should also include more specialized topics, such as using Braille and sign language, or methodologies to work with children with ASD or intellectual disabilities.



## 5. Child well-being: Safety and violence prevention

**Recommendation 5a: Include aspects of violence against children with disabilities in head teacher and teacher training on violence prevention.**

**Recommendation 5b: In schools and communities, conduct sensitization sessions with children and adolescents.**

### **Recommendation 5c: Ensure that reporting mechanisms for cases of violence are accessible to children with disabilities by incorporating reasonable accommodations.**

Bullying, discrimination and social exclusion are common, but not universal, experiences for children with disabilities in schools and communities in Mozambique. Some children find safe environments with teachers, peers and neighbours, while others face challenges with bullying and feeling protected. These experiences highlight the need for stronger safeguards and inclusive practices to ensure the well-being of children with disabilities.

Ensuring the safety of children in schools, especially those with disabilities, requires targeted measures to prevent and address violence. Disability-specific protocols should be integrated into existing violence prevention and reporting systems such as the Multisectoral Mechanism for the Prevention, Reporting, Referral and Response to Violence Against Children in School, approved in 2020. As an immediate short-term action, head teachers and teachers should receive disability-inclusive training on violence prevention. This should include understanding the heightened additional risks faced by children with disabilities, recognizing signs of abuse and improving reporting and redress mechanisms. In parallel, schools should organize sensitization sessions for children to foster respectful and supportive behavior towards their peers with and without disabilities. Once staff are adequately trained and a safe, inclusive environment has been established, the full implementation of effective redress mechanisms and protocols should follow as a medium- to long-term action. This will help ensure that violence is both prevented and appropriately reported and addressed.

## **Concluding remarks**

This report offers key insights and recommendations to progressively move towards a more inclusive education system, with actions for the short, medium and long term. These efforts can build on promising teaching practices identified in this research. Despite the challenges identified, the research highlighted inclusive practices that could be scaled in Mozambique. For example, teachers in resource-constrained

settings demonstrated creativity, collaboration and commitment to inclusion. Approaches including monthly peer meetings, co-creating teaching materials, the use of simple tools like egg crates for Braille instruction and differentiated lesson planning show the feasibility and impact of inclusive, child-centred teaching practices. Such practices highlight the importance of empowering and training teachers to foster collaboration as key drivers of inclusive education reform.

The implementation of these recommendations requires coordinated efforts across sectors. While the Government of Mozambique is the leading actor in these efforts, the support of development partners can strengthen and accelerate progress in key areas such as teacher training on disability-inclusive education, accessible teaching learning materials and disability awareness.



## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

Inclusive education responds to the diversity of all learners' needs by increasing access to, and participation in, education. It entails modifications in content, teaching and learning approaches, structures and strategies based on the principle that the education system must provide learning for all children.<sup>1</sup> The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), as noted in General comment 4 on Article 24, defines inclusive education as a “a systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education” to “provide all students of the relevant age with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences”.<sup>2</sup>

The CRPD has been instrumental in elevating the issue of disability to the domain of international law and reinforcing the rights of persons with disabilities. The principles of inclusive education have been reflected in UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities) and respective indicators and targets for 2015–2030.<sup>3</sup>

The Eastern and Southern Africa region has demonstrated an increasing commitment to protecting the right to education of persons with disabilities through policy and practice. While not all constitutions in the region specifically mention persons with disabilities, they do affirm the right of all citizens to equal and quality education. However, special education continues to be the primary approach for educating children with disabilities, as reflected in various laws and policies across the region. For example, 10 out of 21 Eastern and Southern Africa countries have laws and policies that specifically mandate special education for children with disabilities. Meanwhile, countries such as Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe have demonstrated strong support for inclusive education through their legislative frameworks.<sup>4</sup> Several countries have also set up decentralized systems to enhance teachers' professional development in inclusive education at the school level. Some examples of implementing disability-inclusive practices include establishing resource centres and providing in-school support through specialists and/or itinerant teachers (*see Box 1*).

#### BOX 1

### Practices in countries across Eastern and Southern Africa to promote capacity for establishing an inclusive education system

Several countries in the Eastern and Southern Africa region have initiatives aimed at strengthening system capacity to support children with disabilities in their learning. In Ethiopia, 7,000 resource centres have been set up to serve clusters of mainstream schools, with itinerant teachers assisting general educators and school leaders by sharing information, assessing students' educational needs and coordinating with other service providers and therapists. In Malawi, itinerant special education teachers support clusters of mainstream schools by raising awareness about inclusive education among students and engaging with guardians of children with and without disabilities. In Kenya, education assessment resource centres (EARCs) perform various functions, including early identification and assessment of children with disabilities, development and distribution of adapted learning materials and assistive devices, and the provision of disability-inclusive education training to teachers and EARC officers.<sup>5</sup>

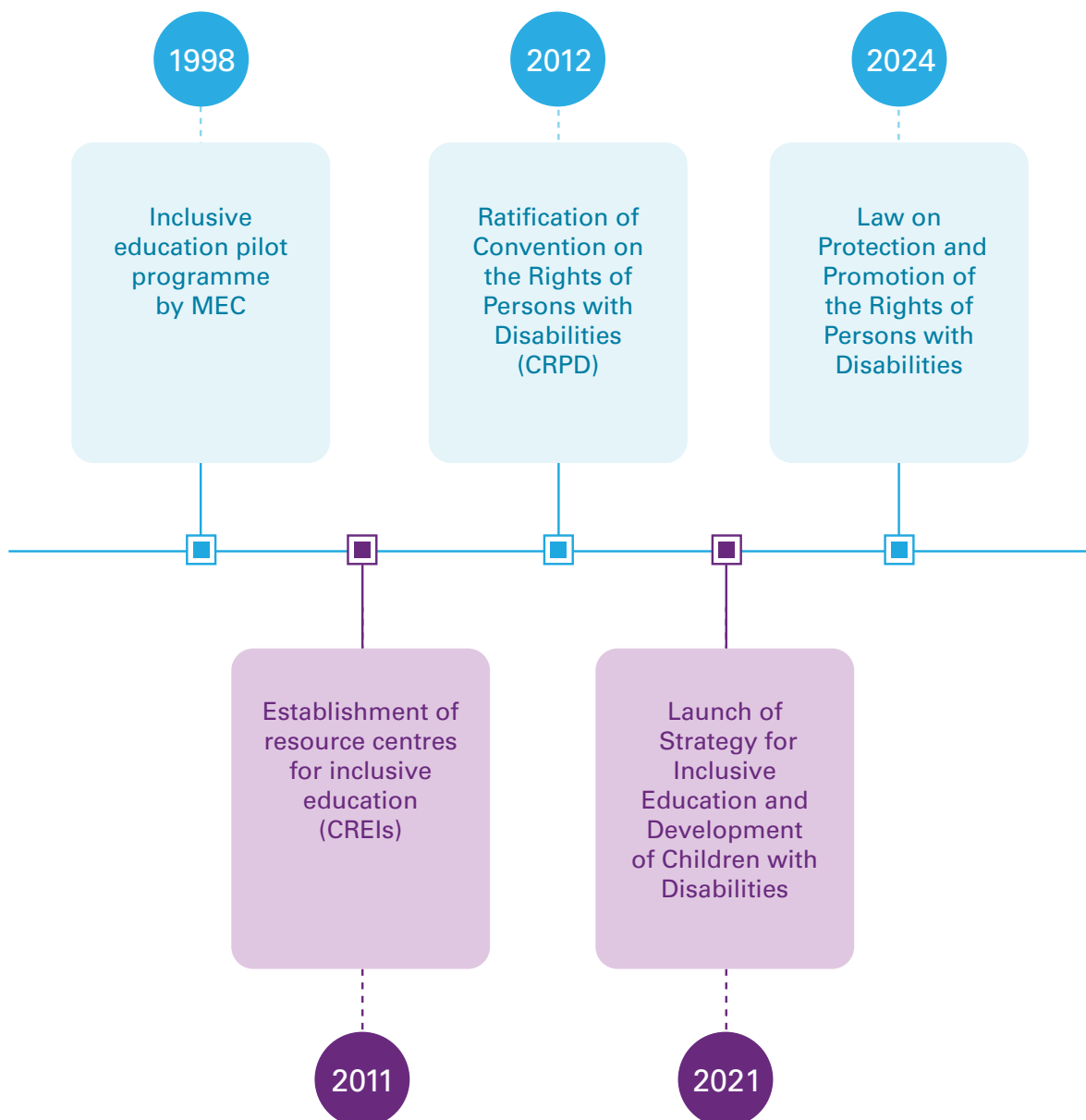
In Mozambique, momentum towards inclusive education began in the late 1990s. In 1998, a pilot project on inclusive education was implemented by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC, formerly MinEDH) in 11 schools in five provinces aiming to “generate experience with managing children with different backgrounds and learning potential, and at gradually disseminating and extending this experience to all the schools in the country”.<sup>6</sup> The pilot later transformed into a national inclusive education programme.<sup>7</sup> In 2011, three resource centres for inclusive education (CREIs) were established in three provinces to conduct research, train in-service teachers and produce materials to support inclusive education (see *Figure 1* for key milestones). Mozambique is also a signatory to several key international conventions and treaties, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2012 and the 2013 Marrakesh Treaty, which facilitates access to published works for persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print-disabled.<sup>8</sup>

Momentum towards inclusion has been formalized over the last three decades, with several laws, strategies and plans developed. These have served as the policy framework for the Government of Mozambique’s actions and approaches to fulfil the rights of persons with disabilities, and include:

- Education policy (1995)
- The Policy for Persons with Disabilities (1999)
- The National Plan for the Disability Area II (PNAD II; 2012–2019)
- The Social Welfare Policy and Implementation Strategy (2017)
- Law 18/2018 on the National Education System (Lei sobre o Sistema Nacional de Educação) (1992, revised 2018)
- The Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) II (2005–2009)
- The Education Strategic Plan (2020–2029)

- The Strategy for Inclusive Education and Development of Children with Disabilities 2020–2029 (*Estratégia da Educação Inclusiva e Desenvolvimento da Criança com Deficiência 2020–2029*)
- Law 10/2024 on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Lei de Promoção e Proteção dos Direitos da Pessoa com Deficiência)

**Figure 1: Key milestones of inclusive education in Mozambique**



Source: Authors' illustration of key milestones towards inclusive education

The cornerstone document that currently guides the MEC's actions is the Strategy for Inclusive Education and Development of Children with Disabilities 2020–2029. Launched in 2021, it reaffirms Mozambique's commitment to increasing access and retention of learners with disabilities in the education system. It has five pillars:<sup>9</sup>

1. Early inclusion and integral development of children with disabilities
2. Change of values and attitudes
3. Training and capacity building of teachers and other professionals
4. Access and retention of learners with disabilities and/or special educational needs (SEN)<sup>i</sup>
5. Specialized network responses

While the strategy is ambitious in its objectives, it is less detailed in its operationalization in a resource-constrained context. Beyond a lack of funding, several structural challenges remain for the implementation of the strategy, such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of teacher preparedness, high rates of absenteeism and lack of specialized services.<sup>10</sup>

The strategy was launched in a context where, despite government and civil society efforts, in 2019/20 an estimated two out of three children and young people with disabilities were out of school. This estimate is based on data from the national Education Management Information System (EMIS)<sup>ii</sup> and the 2017 population census.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, on average, EMIS data show slightly less than 1 per cent of children enrolled in schools are reported to require individualized educational support, often associated with disability.<sup>12</sup> This is roughly similar to the proportion of children with disabilities in the general population, estimated at 1.4 per cent.<sup>13</sup> This estimate is lower than

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i The term SEN is employed in alignment with Mozambique's education policy language and does not reflect UNICEF's terminology or approach to inclusive education.

ii EMIS categorizes special education needs into visual, hearing, psychomotor or intellectual disability, autism, a speech disorder, hyperactivity or multiple disabilities.

the actual proportion of children with disabilities, possibly due to methodological issues in data collection,<sup>14</sup> such as a narrow definition of disability,<sup>15</sup> Expanding the definition of disability, as was done in the 2022–2023 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), provides a more thorough understanding of disability. Indeed, the DHS found 5 per cent of children aged 2–4 years and 8 per cent of children aged 5–17 years had difficulty in at least one of the following functioning areas: hearing, seeing, walking, communicating, self-care, learning, remembering and concentrating, controlling behaviour, anxiety and depression.<sup>16</sup>

Despite an increasing recognition of the importance of data for policymaking, information on disability is still inconsistently collected. Administrative data often do not have disability disaggregation, making it difficult to assess whether children with disabilities are accessing services and how, and the main challenges they may face in the process.<sup>17</sup> While MEC collects administrative data on special needs, there are limited qualitative data to take stock of the progress and challenges of inclusive education in the country. As the desk review conducted for this report found, very few studies give voice to children with disabilities and their parents, reinforcing the cycle of invisibility and exclusion.

To address gaps in research and data on inclusive education, Mozambique was included in UNICEF’s multi-country research on inclusive education for children with disabilities, the Learning is For Everyone (LiFE) research. This paper explores the extent to which Mozambique’s education system is disability-inclusive and provides key policy recommendations to move towards a more inclusive system.



## CHAPTER 2

# Research methodology

This research project aimed to analyse Mozambique’s education system to identify how it supports and enables learning for children with disabilities. The research was conducted through a partnership between UNICEF and the MEC. Throughout the research, two workshops – one at the beginning of the research and another at its conclusion – were conducted in collaboration with local stakeholders to ensure their perspectives and expertise were meaningfully integrated.

The research in Mozambique explored the education system with an inclusive lens, as defined by the third volume of the education sector analysis (ESA) guidelines (see *Box 2*). This included analysing aspects relating to the provision of educational services for children with disabilities, the quality of these services and the demand for education for children with disabilities.

## Conceptual framework for disability-inclusive education

SUPPLY	QUALITY	DEMAND
<p><b>Teachers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Initial and in-service training</li> <li>- Pedagogical support</li> <li>- Classroom support</li> </ul>	<p><b>Curriculum</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relevance</li> <li>- Flexibility and adaptability</li> <li>- Exam accommodations</li> </ul>	<p><b>Attitudes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers and administrators</li> <li>- Parents and communities</li> <li>- Peers and other students</li> </ul>
<p><b>Infrastructure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Classrooms and playgrounds</li> <li>- Toilet and washing facilities</li> <li>- Transport to and from school</li> </ul>	<p><b>Student assessment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Screening</li> <li>- Referrals</li> <li>- Continuous learning assessment</li> </ul>	<p><b>Costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Direct and hidden costs</li> <li>- Additional support costs</li> <li>- Opportunity costs</li> </ul>
<p><b>Learning material</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Braille audiobooks</li> <li>- Sign language resources</li> <li>- Easy-read versions</li> </ul>	<p><b>Learning support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assistive products</li> <li>- Individual learning plans</li> <li>- Individual support</li> </ul>	<p><b>Benefits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Opportunities for progression</li> <li>- Social inclusion and citizenship</li> <li>- Economic empowerment</li> </ul>

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT			
<p><b>Laws and policies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Constitutional provisions</li> <li>- International conventions</li> <li>- Rules and regulations</li> <li>- National strategies</li> </ul>	<p><b>Data and evidence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Definition of disability</li> <li>- EMIS and other databases</li> <li>- Household surveys</li> <li>- Research studies</li> <li>- Monitoring, evaluation and inspection</li> </ul>	<p><b>Leadership and management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Management capacity at central, sub-national and school levels</li> <li>- Procedures and compliance</li> <li>- Cross-sectoral coordination</li> <li>- Partnerships, including with disabled persons organizations</li> </ul>	<p><b>Finance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Allocation to mainstream system</li> <li>- Allocation to targeted support</li> <li>- Resources from other sectors</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from Education Sector Analysis Methodological Guidelines: Volume 3.<sup>18</sup>

Through a co-creation approach with in-country stakeholders representing government ministries and institutions, universities and civil society organizations, teachers and parents, this study explored the following research questions:

1. Are children with disabilities accessing learning opportunities, and how?
2. What is disability-inclusive education and what does it mean for children with disabilities?
3. Is the current education system appropriate for the implementation of disability-inclusive education?
4. What needs to be done, and what resources need to be allocated, to enable the implementation of disability-inclusive education?

A mixed-method approach was adopted to explore the research questions in two phases:

1. **Desk review:** This included a review of inclusive education policies and relevant academic and institutional literature regarding Mozambique's education system, with a focus on disability inclusion.
2. **In-depth research:** This phase included the administration of quantitative surveys, interviews and focus group discussions. All tools used were based on the questionnaires in the third volume of the ESA guidelines. They were reviewed, adapted and validated with in-country stakeholders in a workshop with MEC in August 2023. The qualitative tools were piloted in February 2024 in Maputo. The research instruments and fieldwork protocols used were reviewed and approved by an international ethics review board and MEC.
  - A. **Quantitative surveys:** Three surveys were developed and administered with input from teachers, head teachers and district officers. Participating schools were selected using stratified random sampling by region, using EMIS data. The digital survey was sent by MEC to district officers and teachers and head teachers at the primary and secondary levels to participate and provide consent through the survey platform. The final number of respondents was 68 district officers, 357 head teachers and 254 teachers.

**B. Qualitative research:** Interviews with children with and without disabilities, their parents and teachers were conducted between February and April 2024 in three out of 10 provinces – Sofala, Nampula and Gaza. The provinces were selected to represent the central, northern and southern regions. In each province, one urban and two rural districts were selected from which MEC nominated two mainstream schools and one special school. Most of the selected schools were at the primary level, with a few at the secondary level. Within these schools, children aged 10–16 years were selected using convenience sampling, ensuring a balance of gender and disability type. To also capture the experience of children outside this age range, parents of younger and older children with disabilities were included in the study. In addition, out-of-school children with disabilities and their parents were identified through local organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs). CREIs were sampled in provinces where there were no special schools. Sign language interpreters provided support during interviews with children with hearing disabilities. Most interviews were conducted in Portuguese; however, local language translators were used in interviews with parents whose first language was not Portuguese. Consent was obtained from all participants before interviews. For children, this included both their consent and assent, in addition to their parents' consent. Annex 1 shows the total number of interviews conducted.

**C. Case studies:** Case studies included a more in-depth examination of three schools and entailed interviews with school management and lesson observations. The schools were selected based on nominations from MEC and UNICEF. The selection focused on the following categories:

- The entity/school has experience of the inclusion of specific disability type (e.g., autism spectrum disorder (ASD), intellectual disability).
- The entity/school is an innovative or experimental model that has not been studied or evaluated previously.

- The entity/school has had a collaboration with a disability organization.

The qualitative data were coded and analysed using thematic analysis. The tabulations of the digital survey results were triangulated against the qualitative data to identify and elaborate on the key themes.

## Limitations

**The representativeness of the survey:** The survey was disseminated by MEC through provincial and district officers to a representative sample of schools selected across the country. However, response rates were low, with more responses from two provinces compared with any other province.

**Difficulties of collecting data from children with certain types of disability:** While children with intellectual disabilities were asked the interview questions in a simplified manner, there were still challenges interviewing children with moderate or severe intellectual disabilities. Similarly, interviews were not conducted with children with hearing or speech disabilities who did not use sign language. In these instances, the children's caregivers were interviewed, and their voices were reflected in the research to the greatest extent possible.



## CHAPTER 3

# Findings and recommendations

The policy recommendations in this section were developed during a technical workshop held in Maputo, Mozambique, with the participation of key stakeholders. Drawing from the areas of analysis defined by the ESA guidelines, participants identified priority themes that reflect the local context. Each policy recommendation is supported by corresponding research findings.

Accordingly, this section is structured to first present the findings, followed by the related policy recommendations. The identified priority themes are: (1) Understanding of disability: social norms, beliefs and attitudes; (2) Modes of education: inclusive versus special schools; (3) Access to education; (4) Quality of education; and (5) Child well-being: safety and risk of violence.

## Theme 1: Understanding of disability: Social norms, beliefs and attitudes

Negative attitudes towards disability can create more barriers than physical obstacles to accessing education, which may only require financial investment to resolve.<sup>19</sup> Attitudes often vary based on the type and severity of the disability. For example, in many countries, there is less acceptance around the inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities compared with physical disabilities.<sup>20</sup> Gender also plays a role, with women and girls with disabilities facing more stigma and discrimination than boys and men.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, CRPD Article 8 mandates that States parties work to increase societal awareness and respect for the dignity of persons with disabilities, address harmful stereotypes and prejudices, and promote recognition of their capabilities and contributions.<sup>22</sup>

The CRPD defines disability as resulting from the “interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”.<sup>23</sup> This marks a shift from charity and medical models of disability, which view persons with disabilities as needing only medical treatment and protection, often in isolated settings, towards the social model, which emphasizes the role of the environment (infrastructure, attitudes, services and policies) as a disabling or enabling factor affecting the lived experience of persons with disabilities. Moreover, by making persons with disabilities rights holders, the CRPD obliges the duty-bearers (governments, service providers and parents) to improve the environment to increase the participation of persons with disabilities in society.<sup>24</sup>

While laws and policy documents in Mozambique affirm the rights of persons with disabilities to education and development, they represent a mix of approaches, ranging from segregation to inclusion. Article 18 of the Law on the National Education System (NES) states that “children with SEN” can study in mainstream or special schools, but children with multiple special education needs or with “severe SEN” should receive education adapted to their capacities in “appropriate schools”.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, the more recent Law 10/2024 on the

Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that persons with disabilities have the right to education in all institutions, both public and private. The Strategy for Inclusive Education and Development of Children with Disabilities 2020–2029 has an objective to: “Prioritise access to special schools for children, whose inclusion is, at present, very complicated due to their limitations or [the] school’s”,<sup>26</sup> a vague definition without clear criteria that can potentially allow exclusion on the grounds of a “school’s limitations”. Yet both the law on NES and the strategy have objectives to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society and the workforce.<sup>27,28</sup>

Similarly, different models of conceptualizing disability can be seen in Mozambique policy and administrative documents. For example, the National Census 2017 used categories such as ‘amputated limbs’ and ‘deaf/mute, which reflect a medical approach, alongside ‘difficulty remembering or concentrating’, which is based on the Washington Group on Disability Statistics questionnaire and reflects a rights-based, social model.<sup>29</sup> Such a mix of approaches indicates that while rights-based and social perspectives of disability are gradually becoming part of the policy discourse, charity-based and medical approaches to disability continue to exist.

Similarly, a medical view and negative perceptions around disability persist among community members. When participants were asked how they define disabilities, most respondents (teachers, parents and children without disabilities) described it as an abnormality, a defect, disease or limitation of functioning. These definitions often overlook environmental factors, viewing disability primarily as a problem in the person.

## QUOTE

Disability is the impairments that a person has, which prevent them from doing something that a normal person would do.



Teacher, mainstream school

At the same time, evidence indicates that societal perceptions in Mozambique reflect a coexistence of elements from both the charity and medical models, alongside a recognition of the rights of children with disabilities. Interviewed teachers emphasized that children with disabilities need help, attention, care and love. They also recognized the right of all children to education and opportunities. Nearly all district officers agreed that children with physical and intellectual disabilities have a right to education. Additionally, most disagreed that children with disabilities would not be accepted in mainstream classrooms; 66 per cent of teachers believed that children without disabilities would be accepting of children with disabilities, and 71 per cent believed that parents of children without disabilities would also be accepting.

## QUOTE

Because school is something we go to in order to learn for some benefit, right? They're better off here than staying at home... They're safer because here they will learn and know how to interact with the community.



Mother of a child with disabilities, special school

### **Recommendation 1: Strengthen social model of disability in Mozambique to remove attitudinal barriers and enhance participation of persons with disability in education and social life.**

To achieve this, in the short term government authorities should review policy documents (e.g., laws and strategies) and administrative procedures (e.g., school or university admissions) to ensure they are aligned with the CRPD and human rights-based approaches. At the

same time, the narrative around how persons with disabilities are viewed must shift from passive recipients to active agents of social change. This can be achieved in various short-, medium- and long-term actions.

### **Short-term actions:**

- Teacher and head teacher training should be based on the social model of disability. It must emphasize that by removing environmental barriers teachers can help children develop to their full potential, and that inclusive education is first and foremost a right.
- Empowerment programmes should include training and engaging children and young people with disabilities aimed at strengthening their agency to advocate for their own rights and be able to participate in making decisions that affect their lives. Initiatives promoting entrepreneurship for persons with disabilities or training them as journalists advocating for their rights, which have been successfully implemented by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and OPDs, should be scaled and supported by the government to enhance self-reliance and economic inclusion.

### **Medium-term actions:**

- Positive portrayal of persons with disabilities should be reflected in school textbooks, storybooks and mass media, including government-led content and advocacy campaigns on public and private television to counter negative or harmful stereotypes, highlighting the rights, potential and achievements of persons with disabilities.
- Since contact with persons with disabilities is the most effective way to influence ways of thinking about disability,<sup>30</sup> more emphasis should be placed on fostering accessibility and inclusion not only in schools but more broadly within the community. This includes public spaces, recreational facilities, educational institutions and workplaces. Achieving this requires intersectoral collaboration among the health, protection and education

sectors at central, provincial and district levels. The roles and responsibilities of stakeholders at each level should be clearly defined and institutionalized through frameworks and protocols for collaboration. Furthermore, ongoing assessment is essential to evaluate the impact of these initiatives. Data collected should be used to refine strategies, share success stories and continuously improve practices. The Inclusive Education Network, chaired by MEC, provides an ideal platform to launch this initiative. It should actively involve parents, children with disabilities and OPDs in both the planning and implementation phases, ensuring that the initiatives are accessible, relevant and grounded in lived experience.

### **Long-term actions:**

- Quality assurance mechanisms should be developed and implemented, aimed at evaluating and ensuring the effectiveness of laws, initiatives and mechanisms targeted at reducing stigma and discrimination against persons with disabilities.

## **Theme 2: Modes of education: Inclusive versus special schools**

Evidence has shown that inclusive education is beneficial for children with and without disabilities, for cognitive and emotional learning, and for fostering social cohesion. Inclusive methodologies are child-centred and allow children with different learning abilities and backgrounds to learn and develop together.<sup>31</sup> For children with disabilities, inclusive education contributes to a more stimulating learning environment, more self-efficacy and greater likelihood of making friends, whereas students without disabilities learn to accept differences and acquire life skills.<sup>32,33,34</sup> Research further indicates that inclusive settings help develop social and emotional skills among children without disabilities. These environments also improve academic outcomes, as differentiated instruction supports diverse learning needs. Additionally, peer interactions – such as explaining concepts to classmates with disabilities – enhance understanding for all students.<sup>35,36</sup> Since the Salamanca Statement in 1994, which highlighted the higher cost of special schools and encouraged inclusive

education,<sup>37</sup> global momentum has grown. The 2020 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report underscores that many countries have demonstrated the cost-effectiveness of inclusive education. By leveraging existing resources more efficiently, inclusive systems not only improve educational outcomes and social integration but also contribute to broader economic growth.<sup>38</sup> While in some countries special schools remain the main mode of education available to children with disabilities, others are gradually transforming special schools to support an inclusive education system. For example, in 2001, South Africa launched a national strategy to gradually transform special schools into resource centres that support inclusive education within mainstream settings.<sup>39</sup>

Laws and policy documents in Mozambique have provisions for the parallel existence of special and inclusive schools. The National Strategy on Inclusive Education and Development in Mozambique specifies objectives of harnessing “the competences of existing special schools to support the inclusion of children, young people and adults with disabilities in mainstream schools, including preparing the transition of this target group from primary to secondary education”, and to “prioritise access to special schools for children, whose inclusion is, at present, very complicated due to their limitations or [the] school’s [limitations]”.<sup>40</sup> These objectives are not yet operationalized, and no clear roadmap exists for their implementation. The transition of children from specialized primary education to mainstream secondary schools can be challenging, as children need to adapt to a significantly different learning environment after spending several formative years in a more tailored setting.



### BOX 3

## Progression from exclusion to inclusion in education

**Exclusion:** Students with disabilities are excluded from the educational system.

**Segregation:** Education for students with disabilities is provided in separate settings, in isolation from students without disabilities (i.e., special schools).

**Integration:** Placing students with disabilities in mainstream schools without making the necessary adaptations to (i.e., special classrooms in mainstream schools).

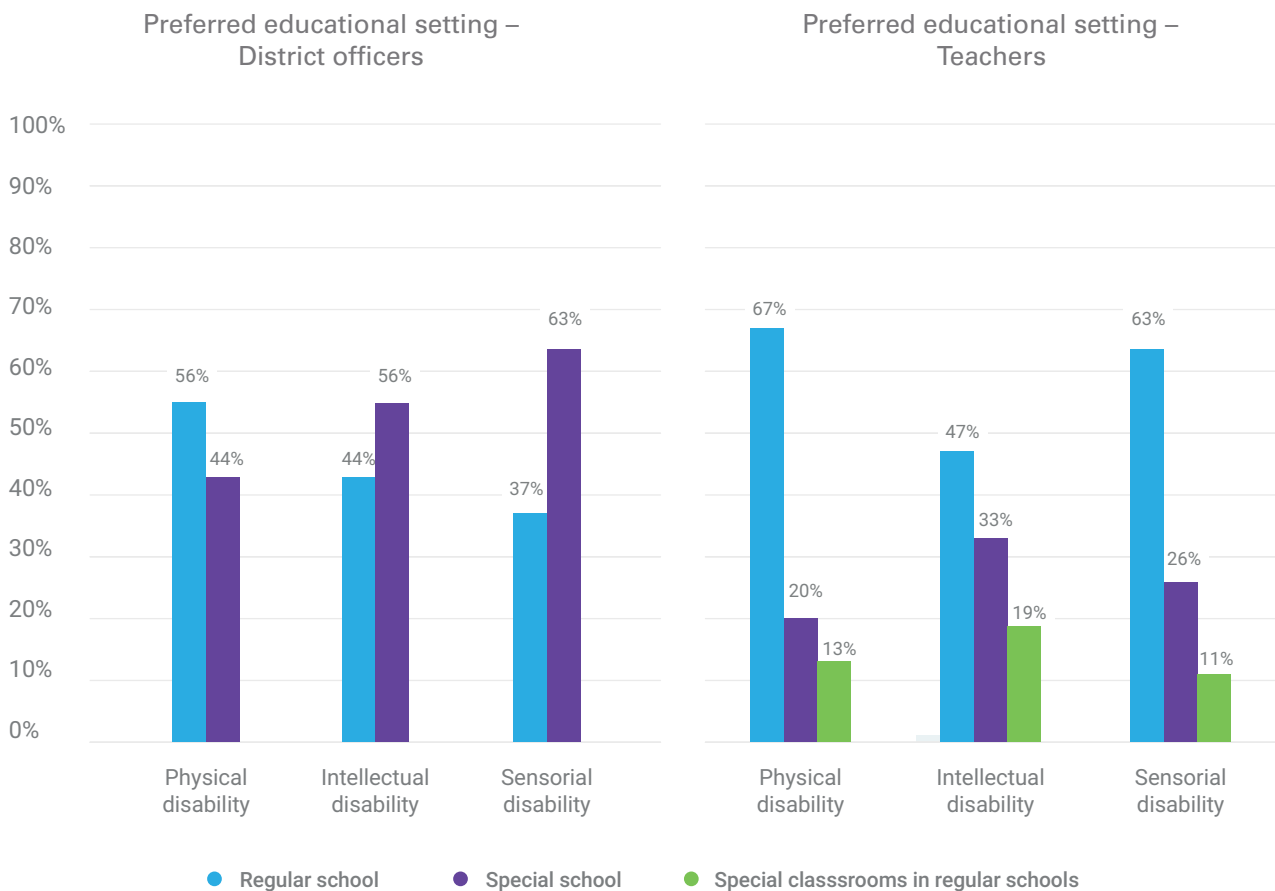
**Inclusion:** Education environments that are adapted and designed for students with disabilities to actively participate and learn. This includes adaptation in the school infrastructure, teaching methodologies, curriculum and school culture.

Source: Adapted from UNICEF (2017) Inclusive Education: Understanding Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.<sup>41</sup>

While the public and policymakers in Mozambique generally accept the educational rights of children with disabilities, interpretation and implementation of these rights varies. District officers tend to believe that children with sensorial disabilities – that is, hearing and visual impairments – should be enrolled in special schools. In contrast,

teachers show a stronger inclination toward inclusive settings, particularly for students with physical and sensorial disabilities. When it comes to intellectual disabilities, both groups exhibit more caution: district officers lean toward special schools, while teachers are more open to a mix of mainstream schools, special classrooms within mainstream schools, and special schools (see Figure 2 for findings from the digital surveys carried out as part of the research).

**Figure 2: Views on appropriate education settings for children with disabilities**



N = 68 district officers and 254 teachers

Source: author's analysis of survey data

Findings from the qualitative data and literature show respondents favour educating children with disabilities in special schools, though this is likely due to resource and capacity constraints in mainstream schools. Preference for special schools by some caregivers, the general public, policymakers or teachers was explained mostly in relation to large class sizes (average student to teacher ratio

in Mozambique is 65:1)<sup>42</sup> and lack of specialized resources and methodologies (e.g., Braille and sign language) in mainstream schools. Additionally, focus group discussions highlighted fears of bullying against children with disabilities in mainstream schools and the unpreparedness of teachers in mainstream schools.

#### QUOTE

The best school is the special school, because in the special school, at least they will have real professionals who can teach the student and help them understand what the teacher is saying. In a mainstream school, the teacher might not have the knowledge to teach the child in a way that helps them learn better.



Parent of a child without disabilities

Few respondents noted the benefits of inclusive education for all children, highlighting advantages of inclusion only for children with disabilities. In interviews and focus group discussions, respondents mentioned the importance of not excluding and discriminating against children with disabilities as a reason to advocate for inclusive schools. However, around half of responding teachers and head teachers disagreed or were unsure whether children without disabilities would benefit from inclusive education.

#### QUOTE

Do you think children with disabilities should go to school with others? Yes. Why? Because they are also people who deserve to study. They also want to learn and study to become doctors, teachers in the future.



Child without disabilities

**Recommendation 2a: Reinforce the understanding that inclusive education means improvement of education for all students, not only those with disabilities.**

Existing evidence highlights the benefits of inclusive education for children both with and without disabilities, for cognitive and emotional learning.<sup>43,44</sup> Inclusive education can also foster social cohesion among children. While CRPD General comment 4 on Article 24 states children with disabilities should not be segregated from the regular education system, district officers, head teachers and some parents believe special schools are more appropriate for children with disabilities. This may be due to resource constraints in mainstream schools that challenge their ability to make accommodations for children with different learning needs. This includes large class sizes, accessibility issues and a lack of specialized equipment and materials. Challenges also stem from inadequacy of teacher preparedness, and fear of bullying in mainstream schools.

There is also little awareness that inclusive teaching practices can benefit all children, as these practices include customizing learning to the diverse needs and backgrounds of students. To raise awareness about the broader benefits of inclusive education, targeted short-term capacity building initiatives should be directed at district officers, head teachers, teachers and non-teaching education staff. These efforts should go beyond basic training to foster a shared understanding that inclusive education is not only a fundamental human right but also a pedagogically sound and effective approach that benefits all learners. By highlighting its positive impact on academic achievement, classroom engagement and social cohesion, these initiatives can help shift mindsets and promote a more collaborative and supportive learning environment for all students.

To further promote a broader understanding of inclusive education, this action should be complemented by, and implemented alongside, Recommendations 2b and 2c, which are intended for medium- to long-term application to build and sustain these efforts.



### **Recommendation 2b: Strengthen inclusive education in mainstream schools.**

To reinforce the benefits of inclusive education for children both with and without disabilities, the roles of special schools and CREIs should be redefined to progressively strengthen inclusive education within mainstream schools in the long term.

The roles of these institutions are outlined in Mozambique’s Law on the National Education System (2018) and the 1995 Education Policy. According to these frameworks, special schools are intended to serve children with ‘severe SEN’ who require intensive and specialized support. Meanwhile, the three existing CREIs are mandated to provide inclusive classes, conduct research in inclusive education and offer teacher training (see *Box 4*).

## CREIs (Inclusive Resource Centers for Education)

CREIs were established by Ministerial Diploma No. 191/2011, issued by the Ministry of Education (MEC), to support inclusive education at the primary, secondary and vocational levels. Three CREIs were created and are currently located in:

- Gaza province, serving the southern region, including Maputo;
- Tete province, covering central region, including Zambézia, Sofala and Manica; and
- Nampula province, serving the northern region, including Niassa and Cabo Delgado.

Their main objectives include:

- promoting inclusive education across all levels of general education;
- supporting the identification, assessment and guidance of students with disabilities; and
- strengthening the capacity of in-service teachers through training in inclusive education.

CREIs' core functions are to:

- deliver inclusive and general education classes;
- provide specialized support for students with special educational needs;
- train in-service teachers in inclusive education practices;
- conduct research and develop inclusive teaching materials;
- facilitate the exchange of inclusive education practices with other institutions; and
- monitor and evaluate inclusive education initiatives.

Source: Adapted from Conselho de Ministros, Resolução n.º 40/2020 de 10 de Julho: Aprova a Estratégia da a Educação Inclusiva e Desenvolvimento da Criança com Deficiência 2020–2029 de 28 de Dezembro, Lei sobre o Sistema Nacional de Educação (2020).<sup>45</sup>

However, findings from this study reveal that the CREIs are serving other functions as well. Some CREIs are operating as residential schools, which is not aligned with inclusive education practices. For instance, the CREI visited during this research had a three-person team responsible for research and teacher training and faced significant budget constraints, limiting its capacity to support more than 10–12 schools per six-month semester (*see Box 5* for more details on the observed CREI).

Given these challenges, the operationalization of CREIs should be adjusted to align more closely with their intended mandate. This entails focusing on providing guidance to schools and teachers on how to better address the educational needs of children with and without disabilities in mainstream schools, and moving away from tasks that do not align with inclusive principles, such as operating as residential facilities. For this transition to be successful, support to families should also be provided. Additionally, this shift should aim to progressively transform special schools into CREIs, expanding the coverage of the CREIs and, in the long term, ensuring that all children, including those in remote areas, have access to nearby mainstream schools that support all their needs.

To support this transformation, the MEC should consider increasing financial and human resource allocations to CREIs, to carry out the following functions effectively:

- **Provide specialized, need-based support and mentorship services through an itinerant (mobile) team of specialists to teachers in schools across the district:** This support could include mentoring and on-the-job support for teachers. If a child with a visual, hearing or other disability is present in each school, tailored interventions (e.g., Braille or sign language instruction training) could be provided for their teachers, as well as materials being given to the school.

- **Provide support from specialists to children, their teachers and their families through an itinerant (mobile) team of professionals:** These services could include psychological counselling, speech therapy and physical and occupational therapy. As these positions are not currently part of the MEC payroll, their introduction will require the creation of new roles within the system. In the meantime, schools should collaborate with rehabilitation personnel from the health sector, where available. To ensure effective and sustainable service delivery, strong cross-sectoral coordination between education, health and social services is essential, enabling a multisectoral approach that leverages existing resources and expertise across sectors. The specialists should support the children directly, while also guiding their teachers on how to better assist them in mainstream classrooms to ensure meaningful learning. Additionally, they should advise families on how to support their children at home.
- **Build technical capacity to include children with disabilities who require more frequent and intensive support in education:** As identified in this research, this may include children with intellectual disabilities, ASD and/or multiple disabilities. This will include use of individualized education plans (IEPs) and differentiated instruction within the confines of the Mozambican curriculum – which several interviewed teachers noted as being rigid and lacking flexibility – as well as collaboration with therapists.
- **Provide support to students with disabilities to access vocational training:** This includes both offering guidance throughout the application and enrolment process and ensuring that vocational training institutes are accessible in all ways. Therefore, institutes should provide reasonable accommodations to enable students with disabilities to participate and learn in a barrier-free environment.

**BOX 5**

## Educational practices observed during case study visits to CREI

One CREI observed during the case study had nearly 100 students with disabilities, primarily hearing and visual, and some intellectual disabilities. Teachers were engaging with and drawing participation from students, more often in lower grades. In higher grades, lecturing and writing on the blackboard seemed to be the prevalent teaching strategies. They seemed to better accommodate the needs of students with sight impairments, using Braille instruction, equipment and other didactic materials. Teachers used sign language to explain the class materials to the students with hearing impairments – some were giving a summary in sign language while others were trying to speak and sign in parallel. At least one class had both blind and deaf students. The teachers did not seem to have approaches or strategies, such as differentiated instruction, for students with intellectual disabilities. The need for strategies for intellectual disability and ASD was also highlighted by school management. The main drawback of the CREI model is that children with disabilities were mostly from another district or province and had to stay in the residential facility, undermining their right to a family environment and isolating them from their local community and peers. As one child with disabilities living in a residential facility said: “I don’t feel good living here. I want to live at home.”

### **Recommendation 2c: Review the national curriculum to align it with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles**

To progressively introduce Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles into the national education system, a crucial medium-term action is to conduct a system-wide review of the existing curriculum, teaching and learning materials, and assessment standards to identify barriers to disability-inclusive education. This foundational step should be aligned with and build on the existing efforts of the National Strategy on Inclusive Education and Development (2020),<sup>46</sup> which, although it does not explicitly mention UDL guidelines, aligns with UDL principles to some extent. The strategy advocates for responding to the educational needs of children with disabilities through differentiated support and emphasizes recognizing and respecting their diverse learning rhythms and preferred learning methods. Furthermore, this process should be carried out collaboratively, involving the MEC,

curriculum developers, the Teacher Training Institute (IFP by its Portuguese acronym), inclusive education experts and representatives of OPDs. The goal is to ensure that inclusive principles are embedded from the outset.

Building on this foundation, as a long-term action, the education system should develop and disseminate centrally approved curriculum guidance and professional development resources grounded in UDL principles. These resources should support schools and teachers in adapting instruction and assessment to meet diverse learner needs while maintaining alignment with national standards. Practical tools – such as templates for IEPs, differentiated lesson plans and guidance on reasonable accommodations – will be essential. Over time, UDL should be institutionalized across all levels of the education system, including curriculum development, teacher training and monitoring frameworks. Embedding UDL principles into the curriculum will help improve and optimize teaching and learning for students both with and without disabilities.<sup>47</sup>

### Theme 3: Access to education

MEC estimates that two in three children with disabilities in Mozambique do not attend school. Different studies have documented several barriers on both the supply and demand side that impede the access of children with disabilities to in-school learning. These include distance from school and lack of transport, insufficient levels of teacher preparedness, lack of assistive devices and materials, inaccessible school infrastructure and negative attitudes.<sup>48,49</sup>

Interviews with parents of children with disabilities not in school showed that they value education and wanted to enrol their children in school should an opportunity arise. They mentioned its importance for the child's future – including integrating into society and finding employment. Yet many felt their children's disability was too severe, mainstream schools did not have capacity to accommodate their children and special schools were too far away. These challenges may have contributed to the fact that CREIs have been operating as residential facilities, aiming to provide an alternative. Another barrier

parents often cited was that their children were often sick and needed medical services. Some parents reported their child's school admission was rejected by the head teacher, while others said they had not even tried, assuming their children would not be admitted. Additionally, parents mentioned the lack of devices such as wheelchairs, infrastructure like ramps and accessible toilets, and transportation to schools as barriers to enrolment. Teacher data corroborated this finding, with 40 per cent mentioning the inadequacy of accessible infrastructure in their school.

#### QUOTE

I had arranged for a wheelchair, but I still couldn't drag him all the way to school – the school is far, and the path is sandy.



Father of a child with disabilities, CREI

### **Recommendation 3a: Engage with communities to mobilize additional resources for inclusive education.**

While government funding for inclusive education is currently allocated, it should be significantly strengthened and better aligned to support the implementation of the recommendations outlined above. To achieve this, a range of actions should be developed.

First, building on findings from this research that highlight the role of community support in enhancing inclusive education, communities can be engaged more strategically to mobilize additional resources. Involving parents and community members is essential for advocacy, resource mobilization and fostering collaboration.<sup>50</sup>

Head teachers from case study schools reported partnerships with local communities and international organizations that improved infrastructure and provided learning materials. For example, in one community school, a solidarity model enabled the most vulnerable children to attend without paying fees, while more affluent families contributed to school expenses. Schools can also engage places of worship, local businesses and OPDs to help acquire resources and address barriers to education.<sup>51</sup>

To complement these initial steps, funding for inclusive education should be expanded in the medium to long term. In particular, the budget currently allocated to CREIs should be increased. As previously mentioned, this would allow special schools to progressively evolve into CREIs and extend their geographic and functional coverage.

#### BOX 6

### Educational practices observed during case study visits to community schools

The community school visited in Inhambane province used a community solidarity approach to make inclusion possible. A third of the students from well-off families paid full tuition, a third paid half and the most vulnerable students attended for free. The teachers were selected based not only on subject matter knowledge but also their attitudes and openness to inclusion. All new teachers received training by the school and had to shadow the existing teachers to gain experience. The school used differentiated instruction for children with intellectual disabilities. A teaching assistant was present in classrooms that included children with ASD whose learning was based on an IEP. The teachers had regular meetings to exchange innovative methodologies and make low-cost materials by recycling items like egg crates and cupboard. The school management actively engaged in fundraising through donors and managed to get resources to build accessible toilets and playgrounds.

#### **Recommendation 3b: Enhance physical accessibility to and within schools.**

Physical accessibility to and within schools remains a significant barrier preventing many children with disabilities in Mozambique from accessing education. Addressing this challenge requires a comprehensive and systemic approach.

In the short term, low-cost and practical actions should be implemented to improve the accessibility of schools. During this research, various innovative low-cost solutions were observed, such as using local materials like wood or bamboo to build ramps and parallel bars. These measures have already been successfully implemented in some of the schools visited. Such initiatives can be further promoted and led by school management in collaboration with school councils and parents, leveraging local knowledge and resources.

As medium-term actions, the adoption and consistent application of UDL principles must be mandated and applied consistently across all school infrastructure projects nationwide. This includes not only the construction of new buildings but also adapting existing facilities to ensure they are fully accessible. To guarantee effectiveness, these efforts must be supported by robust quality assurance and monitoring mechanisms, ensuring that accessibility standards are not only met on paper but realized in practice.

However, improving physical access to education extends beyond the school premises. Accessible transportation is equally critical. In the long term, public transportation systems must be improved to accommodate children with disabilities. This includes upgrading transport infrastructure – particularly in rural and remote areas – and allocating dedicated budgets to ensure inclusivity. Coordinated collaboration is required among key ministries and agencies including the Ministry of Public Works, Housing and Water Resources, the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the National Roads Administration and the National Public Works Administration. In areas where public transport is limited, community-based solutions such as organized carpool systems or school transport cooperatives can play a vital role in bridging this gap.

It is also essential to recognize that physical accessibility is only the first step. Inclusive education requires that once children with disabilities are in school, they are able to participate and learn. This means also providing broader inclusive education strategies, such as implementing flexible and adaptive curricula, providing adequate learning materials and assistive technologies, and ensuring that teachers are trained to support diverse learning needs, as outlined in Recommendations 2c and 4b.

## Theme 4: Quality of education

Promoting inclusive education in Mozambique may seem challenging given its education system is facing several challenges overall in providing high-quality educational opportunities. This is indicated by high rates of student repetition and low performance on national and

international learning assessments.<sup>52</sup> Approximately 70 per cent of children repeat first grade, less than 5 per cent of children read at their age-appropriate level by the end of the third grade and fewer than half of students complete primary education.<sup>53</sup> Due to the limited coverage of early childhood education (ECE), many children start school unprepared and without prior knowledge of Portuguese, the primary language of instruction.<sup>54</sup> This underscores the need to develop and scale an inclusive ECE model that addresses the diverse learning needs of preschool children, including those with disabilities. This model should ensure that all children achieve school readiness, with a strong foundation in early literacy, numeracy and social-emotional skills. It should also adopt a linguistically responsive approach, helping children transition into Portuguese education while nurturing their mother tongue. Crucially, working towards inclusive education presents an opportunity to increase the quality of education overall by rethinking educational strategies and assessment approaches for all students. This includes adopting assessment methods that focus on identifying children's strengths, which can lead to improved learning outcomes and, ultimately, higher transition rates.

The Mozambican government has been working to enhance the quality of education by investing in its teaching workforce. This is done primarily through the IFP, which provides three years of pre-service pedagogical education training, so it is investing in one of the most important factors for improving education – teachers.<sup>55</sup> Since 1993, 25,000 teachers have been trained by the IFP.<sup>56</sup>

### **Head teachers, teachers and the school environment**

The role of teachers and head teachers is crucial in promoting high-quality, inclusive learning environments. Teacher quality is one of the most important factors determining student achievement as teachers directly deliver education programmes and manage classroom discipline and atmosphere and performance assessments.<sup>57</sup> Head teachers set the tone for the school culture, can promote policies that embrace diversity, combat discrimination and find localized solutions to challenges.<sup>58</sup> Their leadership in engaging with parents and the broader community helps build a strong support network around students. Additionally, by encouraging teachers and other staff to create a warm and welcoming environment, they can foster a supportive atmosphere.

Survey responses indicate that schools in Mozambique may not yet have inclusive environments; however, some positive practices among headteachers in fostering inclusion were observed. Only one in five head teachers reported having received training on inclusive education, which may limit their ability to create inclusive environments in schools. Additionally, one in every three teachers reported that their school does not have a welcoming environment for students with disabilities, and one in five reported that rigid structures and administrative processes in school were barriers to delivering inclusive education. However, some inclusive practices were observed in case study schools. For instance, one head teacher established the solidarity funding model described in Theme 3. School management also leveraged resources from various donors to renovate accessible toilets and build playgrounds. Furthermore, they implemented a rigorous teacher selection and training process and encouraged collaborative practices and teacher efforts towards innovation and inclusion.

#### **Recommendation 4a: Train head teachers on inclusive school leadership and management.**

Training head teachers in disability-inclusive education is an essential first step, particularly for efforts focusing on the removal of administrative, infrastructure and attitudinal barriers for children with disabilities, and on promoting inclusive environments. A key short-term action is to design and embed this training as a mandatory module in the existing school management training as well as in the new online distance training programme the MEC is developing. This will help ensure that all head teachers are adequately prepared to lead inclusive schools.

As per the definitions of inclusive school leadership by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2019),<sup>59</sup> such training should include, but not be limited to:

- 1. Inclusive leadership and management:** This would equip head teachers with conceptual foundations and skills to lead and manage their schools based on the values of inclusion and equity. This includes fostering a culture of inclusion, where the rights and needs of children with disabilities are prioritized, and ensuring that all staff align with this vision.
- 2. Strategic needs assessment and improvement planning:** This would enable head teachers to identify gaps in accessibility and inclusivity within their schools. This includes understanding the specific needs of children with diverse disabilities, assessing current resources and developing actionable plans and budgets to address barriers, such as modifying physical spaces, introducing assistive technologies, promoting professional development of teachers and supporting teachers to find innovative teaching methodologies and didactic materials.
- 3. Family and community engagement:** This will promote meaningful collaboration with families of children with and without disabilities, community stakeholders and relevant organizations, including OPDs. It involves equipping teachers and school leaders with strategies for effective engagement and resource mobilization within local communities. Practical actions may include: creating advisory panels that bring together parents, community leaders, OPD representatives and other stakeholders; organizing community forums and school-to-school experience-sharing events; and establishing partnerships with disability-focused organizations and donors to enhance support systems. Additionally, training should include skills for managing and resolving conflicts among parents, teachers and students to foster a more inclusive and cooperative school environment.
- 4. Advocacy:** This means head teachers learn to champion the rights of children with disabilities within their schools, communities and the education sector, as well as protection and health sectors. It includes advocating for policy changes, securing funding for inclusive initiatives and raising awareness to combat stigma and discrimination.

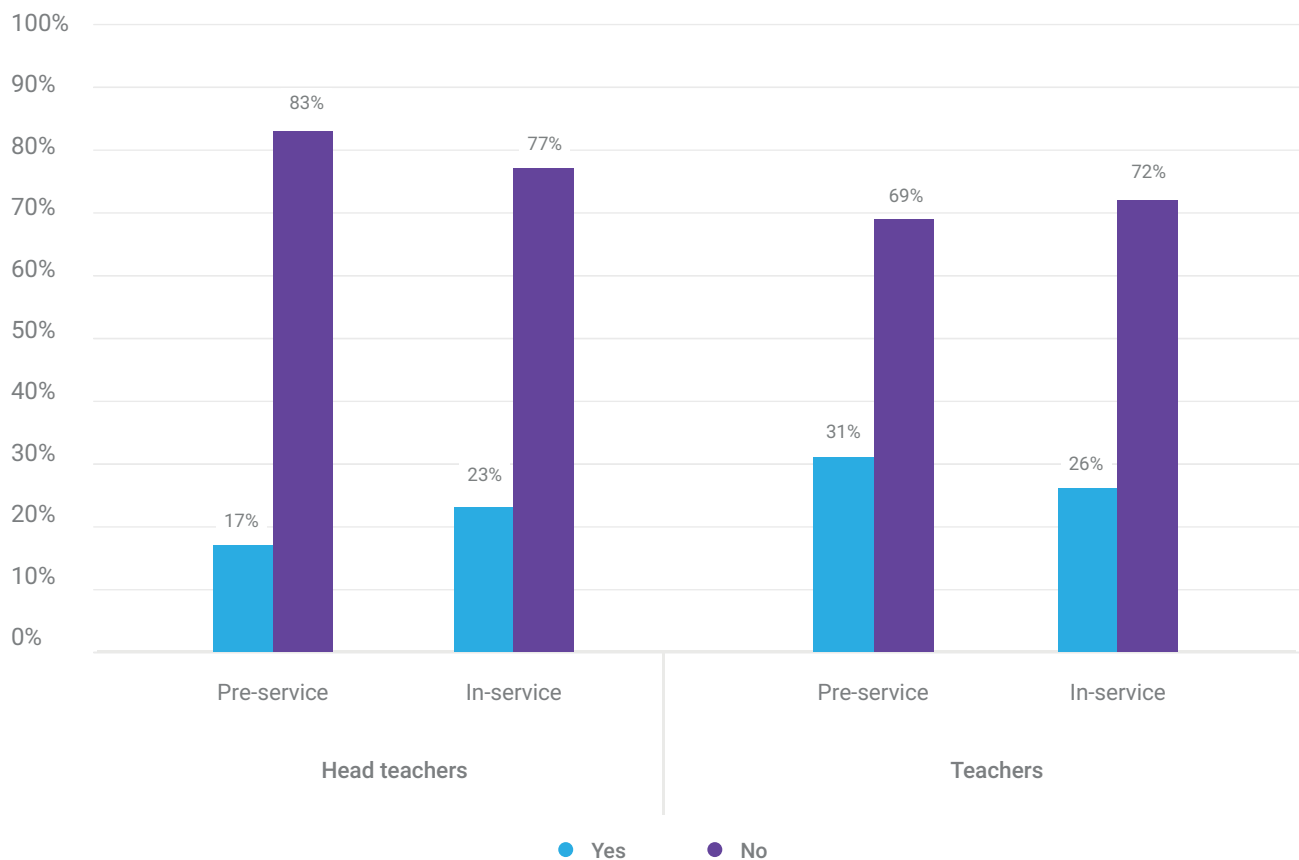
Furthermore, according to UNESCO (2020),<sup>60</sup> other key topics that should be included in head teacher training are data collection and resource allocation. Collecting accurate data is essential for identifying the needs and gaps in service provision, and for planning effective interventions to promote disability-inclusive education. Therefore, head teachers must be trained not only on what types of data to collect, but also how to collect them systematically. These data should then inform evidence-based resource allocation, ensuring that support is targeted where it is most needed.

To ensure the effectiveness of this training over the medium to long term, assessment mechanisms should be established to monitor its quality and keep its content up to date.

### **Teacher preparation**

Although some efforts have been made to promote teacher preparedness in supporting inclusive classrooms, teachers report feeling underprepared with many not having necessary training. A full module on inclusive education (in addition to Braille and Mozambican sign language instruction) was introduced in 2021 as part of the IFP, which is mandated to train all new teachers entering the school system. However, less than one in three surveyed teachers reported receiving pre-service or in-service training on inclusive education. The IFP was the most frequently mentioned training provider, with some other references made to universities, MEC's special education department, CREIs and NGOs. Unsurprisingly, two in every three teachers reported the need for more training as a challenge to delivering inclusive education. Interviewed teachers mentioned that even if the training was useful, it was not adequate to meet the daily challenges faced in the classroom. Most teachers expressed a desire for more in-depth knowledge and practical tools, particularly in specialized areas. These results may be explained by the fact that topics on special education needs and inclusive education represented only 13 per cent of the total time spent on IFP pre-service teacher training.<sup>61</sup> See *Figure 3* for findings from the LiFE research digital survey on participants' training.

**Figure 3: Training status of teachers and headteachers in disability-inclusive education (pre-service and in-service)**



N = 357 head teachers and 254 teachers

Source: author's analysis of survey data

### Teaching practices

The research found teachers in mainstream schools work within existing resources and capacities to try to accommodate learners' diverse needs. During interviews, teachers in mainstream schools mentioned assigning both individual and group work, as each had its own role in instruction. They did not mention using any specific inclusive pedagogical approaches, other than placing students with disabilities in front of the classroom.

## QUOTE

For example, how to deal with a child who is mute, a child with a speech impairment – we don't have training. It seems like the most covered topic is Braille, and we've never had Braille training. So, it's complicated to be in a classroom with a child who is mute. We can, as I said, use basic gestures, like 'come here', 'go there', I don't know. But I think having specific training for this type of speech impairment would be good, yes.



Teacher, mainstream school

Several positive teaching approaches were observed during lesson observations in case study schools. In one community school, teachers held monthly meetings that were used to share ideas, make didactic materials and discuss teaching methods. This strategy helps promote collaboration between teachers and encourages them to innovate and co-create methodologies and materials. In the case study CREI, didactic materials were used by some teachers – for example, an egg crate with six cells was used to teach Braille letters. Differentiated instruction was also used successfully in one of the case study community schools, with differentiated tasks being predefined in the lesson plan. Additionally, in all case study schools, a child-centred collaborative approach was observed in lower grade classrooms. Children would complete a task then ask classmates to confirm if their response was correct and help correct it if needed. This approach allows the teacher to not be the only authority in the classroom, enabling children to generate knowledge together and support each other.

### **Teacher attitudes, emotions and values**

Teachers that promote more effective inclusion practices believe that all children can learn, that they have a moral responsibility to teach them and can make a difference in their lives.<sup>62</sup>

Teachers' emotions (and how they affect their actions and decisions) also play a significant role in how individuals process information and adopt behaviours.<sup>63</sup> For example, compassion and empathy are positive emotions that can affect helpful prosocial behaviour.<sup>64</sup> Pity on the other hand, especially when it is not situational but long-term, can be disempowering and dehumanizing.<sup>65</sup> Feelings of joy, pleasure and pride from teaching and achieving results with children with disabilities can be a strong motivation for teachers.<sup>66</sup>

While many teachers emphasized the importance of love, patience and care when working with children with disabilities, some still reported facing emotional challenges. One third found it difficult to overcome initial shock when meeting a person with a disability, and 16 per cent felt uncomfortable making eye contact. Despite these difficulties, only 20 per cent reported feeling frustration, and many teachers highlighted their strong sense of empathy, underscoring the complexity of their emotional responses and their belief in the potential for students to succeed.

Despite facing some challenges, teachers reported feeling comfortable teaching children with disabilities and believing academic progress was possible. Over 70 per cent of teachers expressed comfort in teaching children with disabilities. However, 58 per cent reported feeling anxiety due to insufficient training and lack of didactic materials, with 60 per cent citing this as a barrier. Despite these challenges, 80 per cent of teachers were confident that academic progress is achievable for children with both physical and intellectual disabilities, which is essential as teacher expectations and belief in efficacy have shown to lead to better outcomes for students.<sup>67</sup>

#### QUOTE

But she is normal; she is just like us. She also feels what we feel, so we're not going to set her aside. We have to always include her in our world. That's how I've always managed to integrate her among the other children.



Teacher, mainstream school

### **Recommendation 4b: Have a unified training package for pre-service and in-service teacher training with a tiered approach.**

While prospective teachers are receiving pre-service training on inclusive education at the IFP, it is essential to first ensure that the current training effectively prepares teachers to address diversity and implement inclusive practices in mainstream classrooms. Equally important is the provision of similar training for in-service teachers, so that both new and experienced teachers share a common foundation and understanding of inclusive education.

In addition to this foundational training, more specific and in-depth professional development should be offered to in-service teachers. To achieve this, a two-tiered approach is recommended.

#### **Tier 1: Foundational training**

This tier targets both pre-service and in-service teachers and focuses on:

- understanding the foundations, benefits and principles of inclusive education;
- identifying barriers to learning and participation; and
- applying inclusive teaching methodologies, including differentiated instruction and UDL.

For pre-service teachers, this training should complement the existing curriculum to ensure they are fully equipped to implement inclusive practices effectively.

#### **Tier 2: Specialized training**

This tier offers more in-depth, hands-on training focused on teaching and learning methodologies tailored to specific types of disability.

Research findings highlight an urgent need for training in teaching methodologies for students with intellectual disabilities and ASD. Nonetheless, it is worth clarifying that the training should cover all types of disability, including physical, visual and hearing disabilities.

In the short term, it is important to hold meetings with key stakeholders to establish consensus and begin developing the content for the Tier 1 and Tier 2 training modules. Over the medium to long term, this content should be finalized and refined, and appropriate professionals should be trained to ensure the modules are delivered effectively and consistently.

The IFP is best positioned to develop and deliver the Tier 1 package, based on its own pre-service training and complemented by materials used by MEC, universities and NGOs that are part of the Inclusive Education Network.

Tier 2 should include specialized training and teaching methodologies tailored to the diverse types of disability. The modules for the Tier 2 package may be developed by IFP, universities, CREIs, NGOs or other entities that have relevant expertise, but for consistency and quality control they should be reviewed and approved by IFP. The package should be delivered either by IFP, if institutional capacity allows, or by other actors authorized by MEC.

This second tier should be introduced progressively, beginning with schools that serve children with disabilities. Initial training sessions should focus on the specific types of disability present in each school. Over time, all schools should have received all the content of this training, with the goal of ensuring every teacher receives foundational and specialized training.

The Inclusive Education Network, led by MEC's special education department, is an appropriate platform to operationalize this recommendation as it includes IFP, academia and CREIs as well as civil society organizations, all of which provide training to teachers as a part of different donor-funded projects. The stakeholders can hold technical meetings to agree on the main components of each tier, while the IFP can consolidate the packages into a unified one. This will also ensure that the training conducted by different stakeholders authorized by MEC has the same conceptual foundation and does not send contradictory messages to teachers. Another important planning step is to have a training plan for the year and each six-month semester, coordinated among all training providers, and to keep records of its implementation.



When developing teacher training packages, it is also important to take the emotional and value aspect into consideration. Before learning methods (the what and the how), teachers should understand and believe in the purpose (the why) – “apprenticeship of the heart” and “apprenticeship of the mind”.<sup>68</sup> It is also important for teachers to become conscious of their own emotions, prejudices and biases, reframe them and see the development potential in every child.

## Theme 5: Child well-being: Safety and violence prevention

Globally, children with disabilities face a higher risk of violence, abuse and discrimination than their peers without disabilities. In some cases, perpetrators may feel they have less risk of being reported, particularly in the case of children with intellectual or hearing disabilities and speech disorders.<sup>69</sup> Children living in residential facilities face a higher risk of neglect and violence.<sup>70</sup>

Interviews with children with disabilities and their parents in Mozambique revealed that bullying, social exclusion and violence are not uncommon, but they are not universal. These challenges occur not only in schools – both special and mainstream – but also in communities. Discrimination and social exclusion can occur, with some children avoiding interaction or playing with peers with disabilities. In some cases, parents choose not to send their children to mainstream schools due to concerns about bullying and discrimination. However,

there are also positive experiences. Some parents reported that their children were treated well by neighbours, teachers and classmates, and received support from the community. Likewise, some children shared that they had friends and felt supported by them.

Children do not always feel able to report cases of bullying and to ask to be protected. Those who experienced bullying often confided in their parents or teachers. However, others refrained from sharing their experiences, either because they were afraid or they felt that nothing would change.

#### QUOTE

He really suffers from bullying.



Mother of a child with disabilities, out of school

**Recommendation 5a: Include aspects of violence against children with disabilities in head teacher and teacher training on violence prevention.**

**Recommendation 5b: In schools and communities, conduct sensitization sessions with children and adolescents.**

**Recommendation 5c: Ensure that reporting mechanisms for cases of violence are accessible to children with disabilities by incorporating reasonable accommodations.**

Mozambique has an operational plan to combat violence against children in schools, but it does not suggest any measures to accommodate children with disabilities.<sup>71</sup> Tackling violence in schools and communities requires a holistic approach. Prevention includes sensitization and awareness-raising initiatives among teachers and students.

Teacher training on positive discipline, inclusive classroom management and the identification of violence – particularly forms of abuse that are underreported or invisible, such as those affecting children with disabilities – should be prioritized as a short-term action. Workshops led by teachers or school leadership can create spaces for dialogue on violence using storytelling, films or visual aids as conversation starters. These strategies align with UNICEF’s recommended social and behavioural change (SBC) approaches, which emphasize the importance of multilevel interventions, engagement of all stakeholders and fostering positive social norms around inclusion and child protection.<sup>72</sup>

In the medium to long term, it is essential to ensure that reporting and redress mechanisms are both effective and accessible to all children, including those with visual, hearing and physical disabilities. As outlined in UNICEF’s SBC guidance for disability-inclusive programming, addressing violence against children with disabilities requires dismantling stigma and discrimination through targeted communication and the active participation of children and families in programme design and monitoring.<sup>73</sup> When a case of violence has been identified, conversations should be conducted with both sides to determine the best course of action. Referral to other services should be considered in instances of high-risk cases and/or as prescribed by the laws and child-protection mechanisms of the country.



## CHAPTER 4

# Conclusion

The pursuit of inclusive education for children with disabilities in Mozambique is not only a moral and social imperative to fulfil their rights, but also an investment in strengthening the education system for all children in the country with their diverse learning needs. As this report has highlighted, while the country has made significant strides in adopting policies and strategies that promote inclusion, substantial challenges remain. These challenges are multifaceted, ranging from social norms and attitudes to systemic issues such as policy inconsistencies, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teacher training and gaps in data collection and monitoring.

The findings of this research underscore the importance of adopting a rights-based and social-environmental approach to disability in policies and programmes, which shifts the focus from viewing disability as an individual defect to recognizing the role of societal and environmental barriers in hindering participation. This shift is crucial for reducing stigma and empowering individuals with disabilities to fully participate in education and social life.

While the right to education is acknowledged by service providers and policymakers, there is no universal vision that inclusive education in mainstream schools is the most appropriate mode of education that benefits all children, not only those with disabilities. Therefore, continued efforts are needed to raise awareness about the benefits of inclusive education for the broader school community. At the same time, the role of CREIs should be fully aligned to their intended mandate and special schools should be progressively redefined to function primarily as support centres that strengthen inclusion in mainstream settings.

Additionally, it is essential to enhance collaboration with district education officers, equipping them to become active promoters of inclusive education and to champion this vision within their respective localities.

Improving access to inclusive learning is central to fulfilling the educational rights of children with disabilities. Increased government funding with an appropriate degree of flexibility and decentralization, supported by donor partnerships, is crucial for equipping schools with necessary assistive devices, didactic materials, transportation and infrastructure improvements. Community engagement initiatives to mobilize local resources and foster support for inclusive education at a grassroots level can help address challenges, especially in rural areas, as well as build community cohesion and improve social inclusion.

Teacher and head teacher training are key to enhancing educational quality for all students, particularly those with disabilities. A tiered training approach for teachers is recommended: foundational inclusive education training for all teachers and specialized modules for specific disabilities based on school demographics. Training head teachers in inclusive leadership and strategies for fostering a positive school climate is vital as they set the tone for the school culture.

Ensuring children's safety in school requires a robust focus on preventing and addressing violence, especially for children with disabilities, who are more vulnerable to abuse. Including disability-specific measures in violence prevention and reporting protocols is recommended, alongside sensitization sessions for both students and teachers on the importance of respectful and supportive behaviour.

Achieving inclusivity in Mozambique's education system requires a shared vision and collaborative action across different sectors of government, civil society and communities, including persons with disabilities themselves. Implementing these recommendations will move the country closer to a system that values and accommodates every child, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable society.

The successful implementation of the recommendations outlined in this report will require coordinated efforts across sectors. While the government remains the primary actor in leading inclusive education initiatives, there are strategic opportunities for development partners to complement these efforts. Targeted technical and financial support can help accelerate progress in key areas such as teacher training, community awareness and the development of accessible learning materials. By aligning with national priorities, donor engagement can play a key role in strengthening systems and ensuring the sustainability of inclusive education reforms.

# Annexes

## Annex 1

**Table A1: School-based sample in Nampula, Gaza and Sofala**

SAMPLE	MODE OF DATA COLLECTION	TYPE OF SCHOOL	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS PER SCHOOL	TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Children with disabilities in schools	Interviews	In each province: – Three public schools – One special school or CREI	12	5	60
Parents of children with disabilities	Interviews	In each province: – Three public schools – One special school or CREI	12	5	60
Children without disabilities	Focus groups	In each province: – Three public schools	9	5	45
Parents of children without disabilities	Focus groups	In each province: – Three public schools	9	5	45
Teachers	Focus groups	In each province: – Three public schools – One special school or CREI	9	3	27

**Table A2: Out-of-school children sample in Nampula, Gaza and Sofala**

SAMPLE	MODE OF DATA COLLECTION	TYPE OF SCHOOL	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS PER SCHOOL
Out-of-school children with disabilities	Interviews	3	5	15
Parents of children with disabilities who are out of school	Interviews	3	5	15

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