



Combating the Costs of Exclusion for Children with Disabilities and their Families

Daniel Mont
Prepared for UNICEF

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Summer of 2019, Maria Alexandrova in a park near her apartment in Dabnika district of Vratsa, Bulgaria. Vratsa has many architectural barriers and remains highly inaccessible for people in wheelchairs. Maria, 17 years old, living with cerebral palsy, is an advocate for other adolescents with disabilities in Bulgaria.

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A young girl being held by a UNICEF staff member at Aziz Abaza Primary School in Alexandria, Egypt is among 5,000 differently-abled children enrolled in 290 inclusive schools in seven governorates across the country. They all benefit from the interventions of the UNICEF-supported and European Union-funded Expanding Access to Education and Protection for At Risk Children in Egypt project.

Introduction

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children should be “fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of the UN Charter” as an equal member of the human family.¹ As the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) emphasizes in Article 7, this includes children with disabilities.² Unfortunately, many children with disabilities are not afforded this opportunity. Instead, they face many barriers that exclude them from society. Some barriers stem from inaccessible infrastructure and information, some from policies and institutions, and others from discrimination, attitudes and societal norms.

! These barriers impose many costs on the lives of children with disabilities. Compared with other children, children with disabilities are less likely to receive an education, less likely to be employed as adults, less likely to start their own families and participate in community events, and more likely to live in poverty.³ In many countries, the poverty gap between people with and without disabilities exceeds 20%.⁴ Further, when poverty is measured not merely by income but by multidimensional poverty measures

– including health, living conditions, assets, education, employment, and various forms of social engagement – the gap is even larger.⁵

The exclusion of children with disabilities imposes costs on the whole community. If these children lack the opportunity to be productive, society loses out on what they could have produced. In fact, the employment-to-population ratio of people with disabilities is almost half that of people without disabilities.⁶ When people with disabilities are employed, they are more likely to be self-employed or to work in the informal sector, and so receive a less reliable income.⁷ The barriers faced by people with disabilities can also create more responsibilities for their family members, who may then be forced to work more, possibly at the expense of their education.

The impact of exclusion extends beyond the economic cost. If people with disabilities are absent from public discourse, the community cannot benefit from their ideas. If they are excluded from political participation, the government cannot truly represent the interests of all citizens. People with disabilities are more likely to be the victims of

1 <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention>

2 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

3 World Health Organization and World Bank, *World Report on Disability*, WHO, Geneva, 2011.

4 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities*, DESA, New York, 2018.

5 Ibid.; Mitra, Sophie, Aleksandra Posarac and Brandon Vick. ‘Disability and Poverty in Developing Countries: A multidimensional study’, *World Development*, vol. 41, 2013; Trani, Jean Francois, et al., ‘Disability and poverty in Morocco and Tunisia: A multidimensional approach’, *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2015, pp. 518–548.

6 *Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities*.

7 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Disability at a Glance 2015: Strengthening employment prospects for persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific*, ESCAP, Bangkok, 2015. www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/publications/SDD%20Disability%20Glance%202015_Final_0.pdf

violence,⁸ especially sexual violence against women and girls, more likely to be injured or killed during natural disasters⁹ and more likely to be infected by HIV/AIDS.¹⁰

This paper addresses the costs of the exclusion of children with disabilities, with a focus on the economic impact. Some costs, however, cannot be monetized. For others,

while a dollar amount could be estimated, the data needed to do so is often unavailable.

A growing body of research suggests that the costs of exclusion are high. Fortunately, evidence also demonstrates that there are effective ways to ameliorate these costs.

A strong case can be made for the social and economic benefits of inclusion.¹¹

- 8 Hughes, Karen, et al. 'Prevalence and Risk of Violence against Adults with Disabilities: A systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies', *Lancet*, vol. 379, no. 9826, 2012, pp. 1621–1629; Ortoleva, Stephanie and Hope Lewis, 'Forgotten Sisters – A Report on Violence Against Women with Disabilities: An overview of its nature, scope, causes and consequences', *Northeastern Public Law and Theory Faculty Research Papers Series No. 104*, Northeastern University, Boston, Mass., 2012; United Nations Children's Fund, *The State of the World's Children 2013: Children with disabilities*, UNICEF, New York, 2013.
- 9 United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, *Living with Disability and Disasters: UNISDR 2013 Survey on Living with Disabilities and Disasters – Key findings*, 2014; Mitchell, David, and Valerie Karr, eds, *Crises, Conflict and Disability: Ensuring equality*, Routledge, New York, 2014; Women's Refugee Commission, *Disabilities among Refugees and Conflict Affected Populations*, Women's Refugee Commission, New York, 2008.
- 10 De Beaudrap, Pierre, et al., 'Prevalence of HIV Infection among People with Disabilities: A population-based observational study in Yaoundé, Cameroon (HandiVIH)', *Lancet HIV*, vol. 4, no. 4, 23 January 2017, pp. E161–E168.
- 11 Lukkien, Annet, 'A Social Business Case for Disability Inclusion in Development: Why disability inclusion is not only morally right, but also makes economic sense', Dutch Coalition on Disability and Development, December 2018, <https://www.dcd.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/DCDD-Article-Disability-Inclusion-in-Development.pdf>.



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