



# Seen, Counted, Included

Using data to shed light  
on the well-being of  
children with disabilities

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## Executive Summary

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for every child



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In 2015, the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was framed around the pledge of leaving no one behind. It calls for a commitment to ensure that all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), comprising 169 targets, are achieved for the benefit of all members of society. It emphasizes reaching those furthest behind first, which inevitably includes children with disabilities and their families.

Monitoring the inclusion of children with disabilities in development efforts has long been held back by the lack of reliable and comprehensive data. Recent years, however, have seen renewed efforts to fill data gaps. The development of new data collection tools has resulted in a substantial increase in the availability and quality of data on children with disabilities, fostering new analyses and contributing to increased knowledge generation.

This report is a testament to these efforts. It offers evidence crucial to decision-making to fulfill obligations, both moral and legal, to give every child an equal chance in life. The largest compilation of statistics on children with disabilities to date, it builds on data from more than 1,000 sources. It documents the scale and characteristics of children with disabilities and begins to shed light on the types of adversity they often face. It includes internationally comparable data from 43 countries and areas and covers more than 60 indicators of child well-being – from nutrition and health, to access to water and sanitation, protection from violence and exploitation, education and life satisfaction. It also presents global and regional estimates of children with disabilities, drawn from data from over 100 countries.

The report's objective is to promote the use of these data to make children with disabilities more visible, bringing about a fuller understanding of their life experiences.

## Key findings

Nearly 240 million children in the world today have some form of disability. This estimate is higher than previous figures and is based on a more meaningful and inclusive understanding of disability, which considers several domains of functioning, including those related to psychosocial well-being.

Most children with disabilities have difficulties in just one functional domain. Psychosocial issues predominate at every age, in some cases in combination with other functional difficulties.

The lives of many children with disabilities are marked by deep exclusion and deprivation. Compared with their peers without disabilities, children with disabilities are 34 per cent more likely to be stunted, 49 per cent more likely to have never attended school, 41 per cent more likely to feel discriminated against, 51 per cent more likely to consider themselves unhappy, and 20 per cent less likely to have expectations of a better life.

Children who have difficulties in more than one domain are even more deprived: 53 per cent are stunted; just 31 per cent receive early stimulation and responsive care in

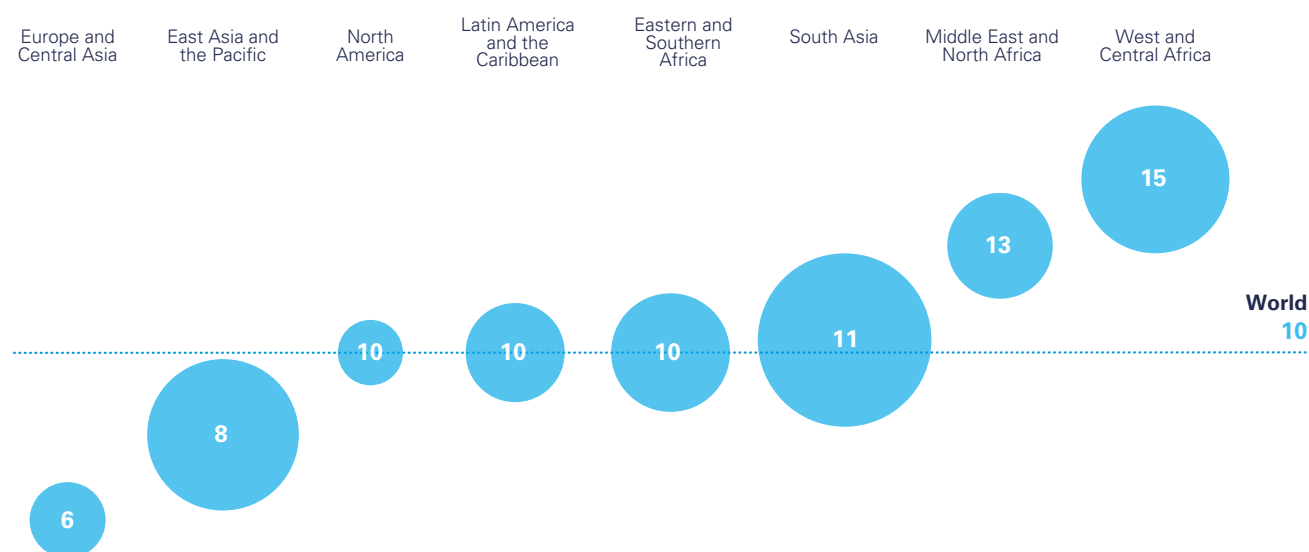
the first, most critical, years of life; and 43 per cent are out of school by upper-secondary-school age.

Children with certain functional difficulties may experience particularly high levels of exclusion. For instance, children with difficulties communicating or caring for themselves are several times less likely to attend school than children who do not have difficulties in these domains. In contrast, children who experience anxiety or depression attend school at similar rates as those without functional difficulties but appear to lag behind, especially in the acquisition of numeracy skills. The severity of these difficulties is another critical factor. By lower-secondary-school age, the majority of children with the most severe disabilities do not attend school. By upper-secondary-school age, very few do.

Meanwhile, children with disabilities from poor socioeconomic backgrounds experience compounded deprivations. Young children whose mothers have, at most, a primary education are significantly more likely to have had recent episodes of diarrhoea. Young children living in the poorest households are generally less likely to receive early stimulation and responsive care, but children with disabilities are at even greater disadvantage in this regard.

### Nearly 240 million children have disabilities – 1 in 10 of all children worldwide

**FIGURE 1.1** Percentage of children aged 0 to 17 years with disabilities

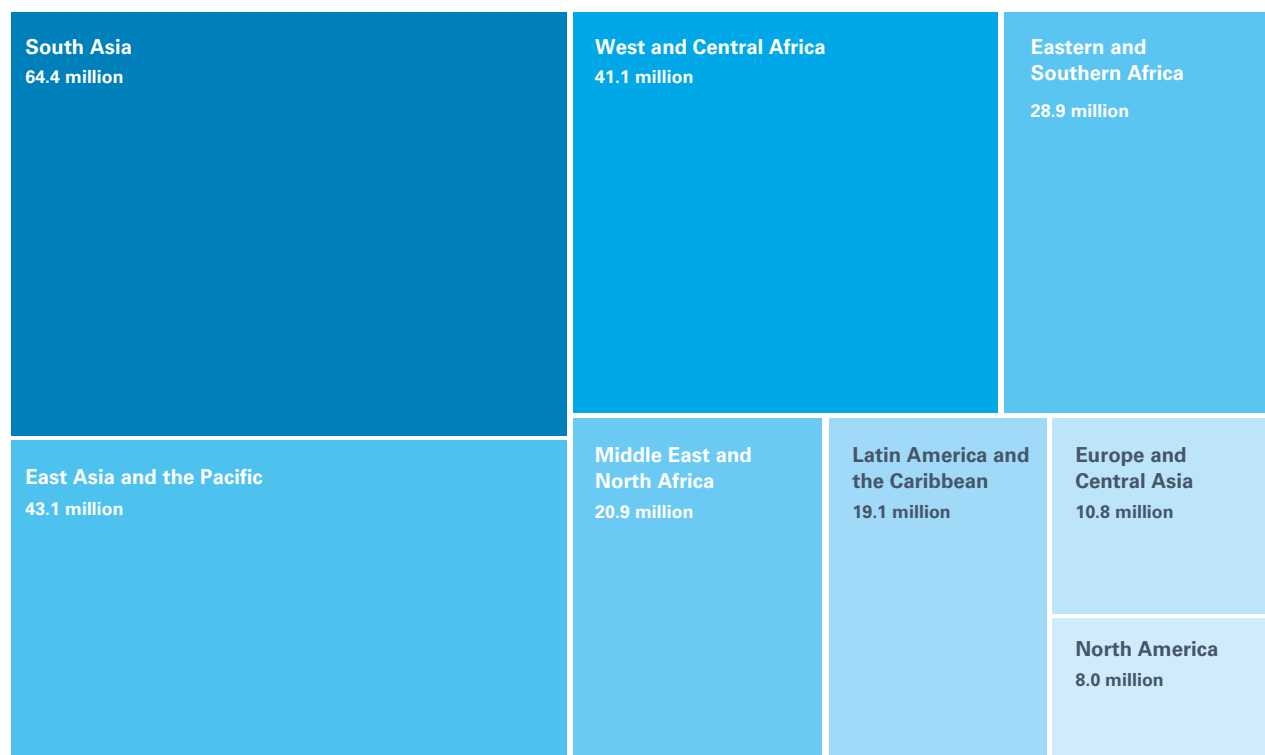


Note: The size of the circles reflects the number of children with disabilities in the respective regions.

**TABLE 1.1** Percentage of children aged 0 to 17 years with disabilities

	Children aged 0 to 4 years	Children aged 5 to 17 years	Children aged 0 to 17 years
East Asia and the Pacific	4	10	8
Eastern and Southern Africa	5	13	10
Europe and Central Asia	3	7	6
Latin America and the Caribbean	4	13	10
Middle East and North Africa	5	17	13
North America	4	12	10
South Asia	4	13	11
West and Central Africa	7	19	15
<b>World</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>10</b>

**FIGURE 1.2** Number of children aged 0 to 17 years with disabilities



Notes: The global estimate is based on a subset of 103 countries covering 84 per cent of the global population of children aged 0 to 17 years. Regional estimates represent data covering at least 50 per cent of the regional population of children.

## Compared with children without disabilities, children with disabilities are:

**34%**

more likely to be stunted

**25%**

more likely to be wasted

**53%**

more likely to have symptoms of acute respiratory infection

**25%**

less likely to receive early stimulation and responsive care

**25%**

less likely to attend early childhood education

**16%**

less likely to read or be read to at home

**42%**

less likely to have foundational reading and numeracy skills

**49%**

more likely to have never attended school

**47%**

more likely to be out of primary school

**33%**

more likely to be out of lower-secondary school

**27%**

more likely to be out of upper-secondary school

**32%**

more likely to experience severe physical punishment at home

**41%**

more likely to feel discriminated against

**51%**

more likely to consider themselves unhappy

**20%**

less likely to have expectations of a better life



## From knowledge to action

All children with disabilities deserve the opportunity to thrive. For this to become a reality, governments must consider the full range of needs of these children and their families in providing programmes and services. They need to work together with persons or associations of persons with disabilities to ensure that:

- All social services and environments are inclusive and accessible, so that community-based care and assistance, critical information and opportunities to play and engage are available to every child, in times of stability as well as in humanitarian emergencies.
- Education is inclusive and accessible, so that children with disabilities can go to school in their communities and learn alongside their peers without disabilities.
- Children with disabilities are protected against violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, are able to benefit from birth registration and family support, and can seek child-friendly, disability-inclusive support and justice when their rights are violated.
- Children with disabilities access psychosocial support, so that they are able to maintain their wellbeing and receive care for mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.
- Stigma and discrimination against children with disabilities and their families are eradicated, and the voices of children with disabilities are heard.
- Children with disabilities and their families are covered by adequate social protection that supports their individual needs, links them with critical services, and helps break the cycle of poverty, deprivation and exclusion.
- Parents and caregivers of children with disabilities receive support to raise their children

in the best way possible while maintaining their own mental health and well-being.

- Robust, relevant and inclusive data are generated at regular intervals. These data are used to raise awareness of rights violations and to design, implement and evaluate interventions aimed at preventing such violations.

## For every child, inclusion

Including children with disabilities in all aspects of life must be a priority. Every child, everywhere, has something to offer. His or her energy, talents and ideas can make a positive difference to families, communities and the world.

The extent to which children with disabilities are deprived, feel discriminated against and lack hope for the future makes it clear that societies are not doing enough to realize the most basic human rights of all children. As a result, the vicious cycle of exclusion and disadvantage that leaves children with disabilities behind continues. Knowing that the problem comes down to barriers that society creates – which are a matter of choice, not immutable realities – means that there is potential for change. Part of that change will involve celebrating children with disabilities and embracing diversity in all its forms.

It starts right here, right now. When children with disabilities are seen and counted, they are no longer invisible, and the promise of inclusion becomes a real possibility.

The steps in between depend upon every stakeholder. They involve shared responsibility, accountability and working together to ensure that all children, including children with disabilities, are able to achieve their inherent potential.



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