



# Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in Maldives

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# ACRONYMS

<b>CBE</b>	community-based education
<b>CFBS</b>	Child-Friendly Barabaru Schools
<b>CFM</b>	Washington Group/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning
<b>CRPD</b>	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<b>CSG</b>	Community Social Group
<b>CSO</b>	civil society organization
<b>DHS</b>	Demographic and Health Survey
<b>ECCE</b>	early childhood care and education
<b>EII</b>	early identification and intervention
<b>ESA</b>	Education Sector Analysis
<b>ESP</b>	Education Sector Plan
<b>GDP</b>	gross domestic product
<b>HIES</b>	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
<b>ICT</b>	information and communication technology
<b>IE</b>	Inclusive Education
<b>IEP</b>	Individual Education Plan
<b>MEMIS</b>	Maldives Education Management Information System
<b>MFIE</b>	Monitoring Framework for Inclusive Education
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>NCF</b>	National Curriculum Framework
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>NIE</b>	National Institute of Education
<b>OPD</b>	Organization of Persons with Disabilities
<b>SEN</b>	Special Education Needs
<b>SIQAAF</b>	School Improvement, Quality Assurance and Accountability Framework
<b>TRC</b>	teacher resource centre
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNICEF ROSA</b>	UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>WG</b>	Washington Group on Disability Statistics





Inclusion is anchored on the fundamental human right to education for all promulgated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

# 1

# INTRODUCTION

Inclusion is anchored on the fundamental human right to education for all promulgated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), specifically Article 24, strengthened the global shift towards inclusion by mandating States parties to improve education systems and undertake measures to fulfil the rights of persons with disabilities to quality inclusive education.<sup>2</sup>

Despite overall progress in education attainment globally, children with disabilities remain one of the most marginalized groups. They are less likely to participate, achieve and complete education compared to their peers without disabilities.<sup>3</sup>

In South Asia, an estimated 29 million children – 12.5 million at primary level and 16.5 million at lower secondary level – were out of school in 2018.<sup>4</sup> Of these, a considerable proportion were estimated to be children with disabilities. According to the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO), it is not possible to generate statistics that

are regionally or globally representative of the status of persons with disabilities with regard to education because of the scarcity of national data.<sup>5</sup> This is true for the South Asia region as well.

The lack of disaggregated education data poses a significant challenge for policy and programme development and implementation. In this regard, the United Nations Children’s Fund Regional Office for South Asia (UNICEF ROSA) commissioned a consultancy to:

- map inclusive education policies, strategies and practices implemented at all levels of the education system in the South Asia region that are effective, or promise to be effective, in increasing access and/or learning outcomes of children with disabilities in education and have the potential for scaling up; and
- inform the development and strengthening of regional and country-level advocacy and programming for advancing disability-inclusive education across South Asia.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization and the World Bank, *World Report on Disability*, World Health Organization, Geneva, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics database, ‘Out-of-School rates and numbers by SDG region, 2018’, n.d.

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, ‘Education and Disability: Analysis of Data from 49 Countries’, Information Paper No. 49, March 2018, <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/ip49-education-disability-2018-en.pdf>, accessed 18 December 2020.



The mapping covered interventions towards establishing disability-inclusive education initiated at all levels of the education system in eight countries in the region: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

A theoretical framework was developed to guide the mapping exercise. The framework conceptualized inclusive education through four main domains: (1) Enabling Environment, (2) Demand, (3) Service Delivery, and (4) Measuring and Monitoring Quality. Cross-cutting issues, albeit not covered in great depth, were included in the review to provide an overview of the

intersectionality between disability and gender, and disability and humanitarian issues.

This country profile on Maldives was developed as part of this regional mapping study on disability-inclusive education. It aims to provide a snapshot of the key policies, practices and strategies implemented from 2010 to 2020 to ensure children with disabilities learn in inclusive settings in Maldives. More information on the methodology and theoretical framework underpinning the mapping survey can be found in the full report, *Mapping of Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in South Asia*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Grimes, P., et al., *Mapping of Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in South Asia*, United Nations Children's Fund Regional Office for South Asia, Kathmandu, 2021.



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The country's commitment to raising the quality of the education system has resulted in significant progress in recent years.

# 2

## COUNTRY CONTEXT

Maldives is a small archipelagic island country in South Asia with a population of around 515,696 dispersed across its 185 islands.<sup>7</sup> The nation's capital, Malé, is the single, most populous island housing more than 30 per cent of the total population.<sup>8</sup>

Enshrined in the Constitution of Maldives 2008 is the right to education of all citizens, including free primary and middle school education and access to tertiary education. The country's commitment to raising the quality of the education system has resulted in significant progress in recent years. Early childhood education was made free and compulsory, while adult literacy rate reached 98.4 per cent in 2012 – the highest in Maldives' history.<sup>9</sup>

Children with disabilities have also been provided utmost attention with the adoption of the Inclusive Education (IE) Policy in 2013 and establishment of the Department of Inclusive

Education in the Ministry of Education (MoE). Despite this progress, the Maldivian education system remains challenged by many factors. Its unique geography has placed the country in a vulnerable position as it has contributed to the growing disparity between the capital, Malé, and the atolls in primary health care and education infrastructure<sup>10</sup> and provision of education services, among other development issues.<sup>11</sup>

Raising the quality of learning has also been challenging due to the lack of qualified teachers and inconsistencies in education standards and practices.<sup>12</sup> The effective implementation of the IE Policy is hindered by many barriers including the limited capacity of teachers in teaching children with disabilities in mainstream settings, scarcity of resources and emerging concerns on the identification and diagnosis system. Albeit these challenges, the country continues to work towards ensuring that no child is left behind in education, including children with disabilities.

<sup>7</sup> The World Bank, 'The World Bank in Maldives', 2020, [www.worldbank.org/en/country/maldives/overview](http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/maldives/overview), accessed 26 November 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

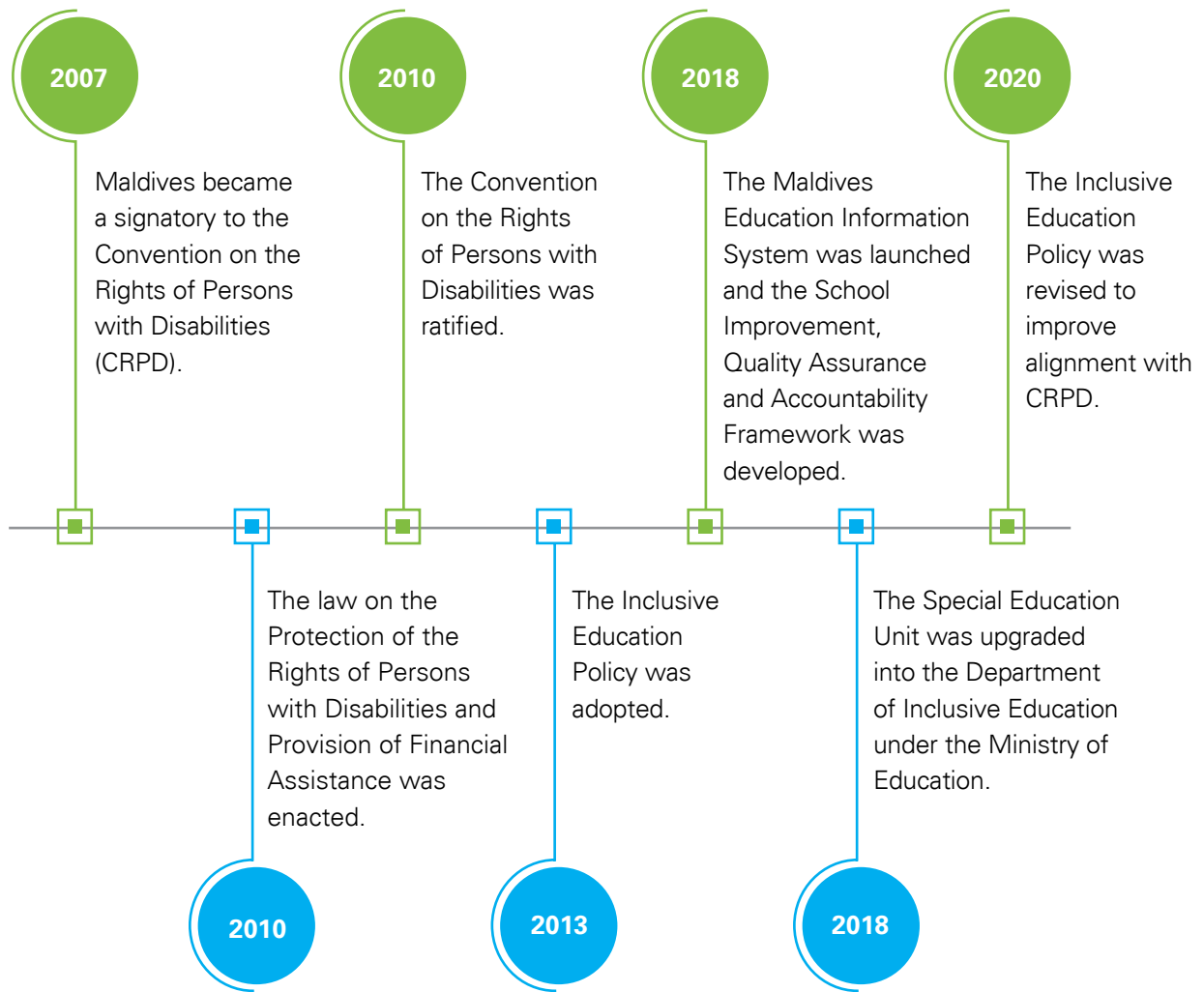
<sup>9</sup> Adam, A.S., *School Review Reports 2018: Analysis of Issues and Challenges*, Ministry of Education, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Ernst & Young India, 'Maldives Country Report: Developing skills in youth to succeed in the evolving South Asian economy', 2019, [www.unicef.org/maldives/reports/maldives-country-report](http://www.unicef.org/maldives/reports/maldives-country-report).

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Education, Policy Planning and Research Division, *Maldives Education Sector Analysis*, Malé, 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Adam, *School Review Reports 2018*.

## Milestones in disability-inclusive education







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The Inclusive Education Policy proposes the principles of inclusion and equity that require use of the language of student diversity and education for all learners.

# 3

# ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

The enabling environment includes interrelated conditions that enable or facilitate development of a disability-inclusive education system, including policies, disability data, plans, leadership, coordination and financing.

## 3.1 POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

### Maldives has been enacting reforms in pursuit of disability-inclusive education.

The ratification of CRPD in 2010 obligates the Government of Maldives to put in place measures that ensure education for children with disabilities are provided on an equal basis as their peers without disabilities and in their neighbourhood school.

In the 2008 Constitution, the government specifically prohibited discrimination on the basis of “mental and physical disability” (Article 7a).<sup>13</sup> The law on the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Provision of Financial Assistance was passed in 2010, providing a general framework for ensuring “full and effective participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in society” (Article 2.c).

The law subscribes to the definition of disability based on the social model and mandates the provision of education without discrimination and appropriate facilities and equipment to eliminate barriers to learning (Article 20).<sup>14</sup>

The IE Policy was adopted in 2013 to explicitly address the exclusion of vulnerable groups of children in education, including those with disabilities. It has rallied greater attention towards children with disabilities. The policy espouses education for all, however, it targets three groups of children particularly: (1) children who need additional learning support, (2) children with special needs, and (3) children under special circumstances (Article 4),<sup>15</sup> collectively referred to as ‘children requiring an Individual Education Plan’(IEP).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Maldives, Functional translation of the Constitution of Maldives (2008).

<sup>14</sup> Maldives, Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Provision of Financial Assistance (Law No: 8/2010) (2010).

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Education, Inclusive Education Policy, Malé, 2013, p.3, [www.nie.edu.mv/index.php/en/resources/inclusive-education/documents/296-inclusive-education-policy-translation-english-2013/file](http://www.nie.edu.mv/index.php/en/resources/inclusive-education/documents/296-inclusive-education-policy-translation-english-2013/file).



The IE Policy 2013 was revised and endorsed in 2020. The new policy proposes the principles of inclusion and equity that require use of the language of student diversity and education for all learners. The policy uses the term ‘students with complex learning profiles’ to define children with disabilities and aims to move away from the medical model.

**A shift from special needs education to inclusive education is imperative.**

Maldives adopted the definition of disability based on CRPD<sup>17</sup> and conceptualizes inclusive education as education for all (see Table 2). However, a gap analysis conducted in 2013 noted that policies in Maldives on disability and education placed great emphasis on special educational needs and segregated provisions, lacked a clear strategy for implementation and were unclear in basic terminology and principles.<sup>18</sup>

Children with special needs are afforded the opportunity to be included in regular classes, granted that they “have the potential for receiving education in mainstream classes” (Article 14.e).<sup>19</sup> In 2019, Carrington, et.al.,<sup>20</sup> reviewed the IE Policy and its corresponding strategic plan and found strengths, gaps, as well as opportunities on which further development could build on.

Overall, the notion of ‘special needs’ reinforcing the medical model of disability is endorsed in the IE Policy, however, alignment with not only the nomenclature but also general principles of equity and inclusion set out in CRPD is necessary. The revised policy in 2020 advocates a shift from special needs education to inclusive education. Students with complex learning profiles include students described as having a combination of impairments affecting communication, mobility, cognition, socio-emotional learning, emotional regulation, sensory processing and/or behaviour.

**Table 1. Main laws, policies and plans on disability and education**

<b>Government’s action on international policies</b>	<b>Ratification</b>
Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)	1991
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)	2010
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Optional Protocol (2006)	No action
<b>Domestic laws, policies and plans related to disability-inclusive education</b>	<b>Adoption</b>
Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Provision of Financial Assistance (Law No: 8/2010)	2010
National Disability Policy	2015
Inclusive Education Strategic Plan	2020–2025
Inclusive Education Policy	2020

<sup>16</sup> Maldives Education Sector Analysis.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, *Meeting the Educational Needs of Children with Disabilities in South Asia: A gap analysis covering Bhutan and Maldives*, United Nations Children’s Fund Regional Office for South Asia, Kathmandu, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Inclusive Education Policy 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Carrington, S.; et al., *Deliverable 1 The Existing Inclusive Education Policy and Inclusive Education Strategic Plan in the Republic of Maldives: Review and recommendations*, Queensland University of Technology, 2019.

**Table 2. Definitions of disability and inclusive education according to national laws and policies and international definitions**

Terminology	Definition based on national laws and policies	International definition
<b>Disability</b>	Persons with disabilities are persons who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.	<p>“Disability results 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.”</p> <p>– Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006</p>
<b>Inclusive education</b>	Education where all children are included.	<p>“Inclusive education is the result of a process of continuing and proactive commitment to eliminate barriers impeding the right to education, together with changes to culture, policy and practice of regular schools to accommodate and effectively include all students.”</p> <p>– General Comment No. 4 (2016) to Article 24, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</p>
<b>Students with complex learning profiles</b>	<p>Refers to learners in school contexts described as having a combination of impairments affecting communication, cognition, mobility, socio-emotional regulation, learning, sensory processing and challenging behaviour.</p> <p>They include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) children with different functional abilities/ impairments;</li> <li>(2) gifted and talented children;</li> <li>(3) children with learning difficulties; and</li> <li>(4) children with socio-emotional problems.</li> </ol>	

**Source:** Maldives, Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Provision of Financial Assistance (Law No: 8/2010) (2010); United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006; Ministry of Education, Inclusive Education Policy [revised], Malé, 2020; United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General Comment No. 4 (2016) to Article 24: Right to Inclusive Education, 2016; Carrington, S., G. Mann and S. Mavropoulou, *Deliverable 3 and 4 (combined) the Inclusive Education Capacity Needs Analysis and the Inclusive Education Capacity Development Plan*, Queensland University of Technology, 2019.

## 3.2 DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE SECTOR PLAN

**The Education Sector Analysis (ESA) 2019 is the first in Maldives in 25 years.**

With support from the Global Partnership for Education and UNICEF Maldives, an ESA was conducted in Maldives that informed the Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2019–2023. A section is dedicated to analysing the implementation of inclusive education, interchangeably referred to as ‘Special Education Needs (SEN) Programme’.

The analysis recognized the successes (e.g., the establishment of an IE policy and creation of the Department of Inclusive Education) and identified the remaining gaps and inequities in access to education for children with disabilities. The analysis found that children with disabilities continue to face marginalization. For example, in 2017, the number of schools catering to them was only a quarter of the total number of schools in Maldives.<sup>21</sup>

**ESP 2019–2023 explicitly addresses children with special educational needs including those with disabilities.**

ESA informed the development of the new ESP, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 outcome of an inclusive and equitable lifelong learning for all. ESP is complemented by a comprehensive results framework and monitoring and evaluation framework. It identified strategies to advance education for children with disabilities through:

- teacher training on early intervention to cater to children with special needs;
- expanding access to schools for children with disabilities, although it is not clear

whether the focus is to increase access to mainstream schools; and

- providing assistive technologies to regular and special schools.

## 3.3 DATA ON CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

**Availability of reliable, comprehensive and disaggregated data on children with disabilities remains a serious challenge even in a small country such as Maldives.**

A formal identification and intervention system for disability is in its early development stage. Identification of disability is particularly challenging due to limited specialist skills in the country.<sup>22</sup>

The National Institute of Education (NIE), wherein a special unit tasked to implement the SEN programme is housed, is attempting to deviate from the medical view of disability and has implemented a point scale system in which children with special needs are identified based on the functional ability of the child. Educational interventions and resource allocations are then planned around the needs of the child arising from the rating process.

Disability prevalence estimates from recent surveys vary, largely due to differences in methodology (see Table 3). The Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) in 2017 shows a disability prevalence of 4 per cent in the household population,<sup>23</sup> while an estimated 3 per cent of children under 15 years have disabilities. These figures seem to be below the World Health Organization (WHO) and World Bank estimates, which state that 15 per cent of any population live with a disability, and among children aged 0–14 years, 5.1 per cent have moderate to severe disabilities and 0.7 per cent have severe disabilities.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Maldives Education Sector Analysis*.

<sup>22</sup> *Meeting Educational Needs*.

<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Health (MOH) [Maldives] and ICF, *Maldives Demographic and Health Survey 2016–17*, MOH and ICF, Malé and Rockville, Maryland, 2018, p. 17, [www.dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR349/FR349.pdf](http://www.dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR349/FR349.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> *World Report on Disability*.

**Table 3. Main sources of data on child disability**

Method/data type	Data collection activity	Responsible agency	Frequency	Latest report available	Includes data on children with disabilities	Adopted CFM or WG questions
<b>Administrative data</b>	Maldives Education Information System	Ministry of Education	Ongoing	–	Yes	No
<b>Census</b>	Population Census	National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure	Every 8 years	Census 2014	No	No
<b>Survey</b>	Demographic and Health Survey (DHS)	Ministry of Health, DHS Programme, WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA	Every 5 years	DHS 2017	Yes	No
	Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES)	National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure	Every 3 years	HIES 2019	Yes	Yes

CFM: WG/UNICEF Child Functioning Module; UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund; UNICEF: United Nations Children’s Fund; WG: Washington Group on Disability Statistics; WHO: World Health Organization

The Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2019 used the Washington Group Short Set on Functioning to measure disability using functional domains such as seeing, hearing, walking, cognition, self-care and communication. The survey reports that 8 per cent of the population have a disability, while the prevalence among children under 15 years is 3 per cent, consistent with DHS.

Children with disabilities lag behind their peers without disabilities in access to and participation in education.

- In 2019, there were 3,762 children with disabilities enrolled in school. Only 89 of the total 213 schools (42 per cent) cater to children with disabilities.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> UNICEF Maldives, *Country Office Annual Report 2019*, Malé, 2019.

**Table 4. Disability data in the Maldives Education Management Information System (MEMIS)**

Criteria*	Included in MEMIS
<b>Contains data on students with disabilities</b>	Yes
<b>Approach to identifying disability</b>	
Use of Washington Group set of questions to identify disability	No
Identified only by 'disability' or 'special needs'	Yes
<b>Level of data collection</b>	
Pre-primary	Yes
Primary	Yes
Secondary	Yes
<b>Data collected</b>	
Participation (enrolment, dropout, completion, absenteeism)	Yes
Learning outcomes	No
Type of disability/functional difficulty	Yes
Degree of disability/functional difficulty	Yes
Barriers to education at the school level	No
Children with disabilities who are not in school	No
<b>Disaggregation available</b>	
Sex	Yes
By type of disability/functional difficulty	Yes
Geographical location	Yes
Type of institution (government/private)	Yes

**Source:** Grimes, P., et al., *Mapping of Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in South Asia*, United Nations Children's Fund Regional Office for South Asia, Kathmandu, 2021.

\*Criteria adapted from UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'The Use of UIS Data and Education Management Information Systems to Monitor Inclusive Education', Information Paper No. 60, 2019.

- The attendance rate in primary education is 85 per cent for children with disabilities, lower than the 94 per cent attendance rate among children without disabilities.<sup>26</sup>
- All public schools are mandated by law to cater to children with disabilities, but in actual practice, only some schools are able to do so. In recent years, Maldives has seen an increase in the number of schools with an SEN programme – from 52 of the 219 schools in 2014 to 185 of 212 schools in 2017.<sup>27</sup>
- In 2019, there were 3,796 learners identified who were categorized as requiring an IEP, two thirds of whom were from the capital.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Maldives Education Sector Analysis*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

### The Maldives Education Management Information System (MEMIS) includes tracking children with disabilities.

MoE, with support from UNICEF under the OpenEMIS<sup>29</sup> initiative, launched MEMIS in 2017 in an effort to create a centralized information system that would enable the collection, storage and retrieval of accurate and timely education data, crucial for evidence-based decision-making and programming. Every school in Maldives is now registered in the system, which collects certain data on learners with disabilities (see Table 4).

The system is at an early stage of implementation and, understandably, challenges exist, such as lack of technical skills and capacity of MoE and at the atoll level to use the system and limited connectivity in schools.<sup>30</sup> ESP as well as the revised IE Policy plan to strengthen MEMIS to track the progress of learners with disabilities based on IEP goals and curriculum outcomes. The Department of Inclusive Education is in the process of developing tools to collect data focused on the functional abilities of children with disabilities.

## 3.4 FUNDING AND FINANCING

The Education 2030 Incheon Declaration<sup>31</sup> urged governments to follow international benchmarks for budget appropriations for education:

- Allocating at least 4 per cent to 6 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) to education; and/or
- Allocating at least 15 per cent to 20 per cent of public expenditure to education.

According to 2016 data,<sup>32</sup> Maldives has met the required allocations (see Figure 1), however, it is encouraged to hit the upper limit of the benchmark to increase the likelihood that inequities in education, such as those experienced by children with disabilities, are addressed.

In the absence of a formal identification and intervention system, Maldives has adopted a point scale system, used by schools to rate the level of functionality of the child according to the learning domains. This approach aims to enable the government to appropriate limited resources based on the needs of the child.<sup>33</sup>

**Figure 1. Government expenditure on education, 2016**



**Source:** UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'Sustainable Development Goal 4 Country Profiles: Maldives', n.d.

<sup>29</sup> OpenEMIS is part of the UNESCO response to increase demand for support in the area of open source software solutions for education system planning and management. It supports the building of a robust and reliable EMIS and the strengthening of national capacities in the provision of reliable information for the planning, monitoring and evaluation of education systems. For more information: [openemis.org](http://openemis.org).

<sup>30</sup> *Maldives Education Sector Analysis*.

<sup>31</sup> UNESCO, Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4, United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization, 2015, [http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/education-2030-incheon-framework-for-action-implementation-of-sdg4-2016-en\\_2.pdf](http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/education-2030-incheon-framework-for-action-implementation-of-sdg4-2016-en_2.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'Sustainable Development Goal 4, Country Profiles: Maldives', n.d.

<sup>33</sup> *Maldives Education Sector Analysis*.



The costing model used by MoE for allocating resources is based on enrolment wherein children with special educational needs represent only 2.1 per cent of total enrolment. Consequently, SEN gets the second lowest proportion of the budget.<sup>34</sup> This could be problematic given that there may be more children with disabilities enrolled in school who remain unidentified due to poor identification and student tracking systems and the challenges posed by the geographical characteristics of the country.

Cost projections for funding the overall education sector plan indicate an increasing trend in the next decade. A separate budget line item referred to as 'SEN' is specified in the sector plan's costing model, outlining operational costs (e.g., salaries, equipment, teacher training). It is worth reviewing activities funded and implemented as well as determining the extent to which they are supportive of developing inclusive schools.

### 3.5 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

#### Government policies and plans support the development and strengthening of inclusive leadership.

The Inclusive Education Strategic Plan explicitly articulates the role of school leaders in establishing inclusive schools, examples of which are:

- having a comprehensive understanding of inclusion and policies supporting inclusion and developing school 'policies, values and practices' that are equitable and inclusive;
  - providing instructional leadership support to teachers to support inclusion in the classroom;
  - engaging with parents and the school community in supporting inclusion;
  - using evidence-based monitoring tools;
  - developing ways to monitor learning of all leaders and providing the support needed to improve student learning; and
- ensuring continuous professional development opportunities for teachers and support staff aligned to the principle that inclusive education is quality education for all students.<sup>35</sup>

The plan also articulates the role of various departments in the system, particularly MoE, to contribute to the process of inclusive education.<sup>36</sup> ESP 2019–2023 outlines actions towards building the capacity of school leaders in supporting learner-centred pedagogies.<sup>37</sup>

#### National policymakers show commitment to inclusive education through the development of policies that support the implementation of inclusive education throughout the education system.

- The IE Policy of 2013 promotes learning opportunities within the formal education system for all children.
- National policymakers have commissioned a review of the IE Policy.
- The national strategic plan 2019–2023 includes targets for promoting inclusive education.
- Capacity building of staff on training and assessment was emphasized after the process of the policy review. This includes additional training for inclusion coaches.
- There is a directive to increase the number of special education teachers.
- Funding is allocated for the inclusive education reform process.
- The strategic plan articulates the goal to strengthen the functions of key agencies, such as the Inclusive Education Division, through capacity building.
- Establishment of the Inclusive Education Division (formerly the Special Education Division) and the Working Committee on Inclusive Education.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education, Education Sector Plan 2019–2023, Malé, 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Carrington, S., et al., Deliverable 2 Inclusive Education: Every learner matters and matters equally, Strategic Plan 2020–2025, Ministry of Education, Malé, 2019.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Carrington, et al., *Deliverable 1 The Existing Inclusive Education Policy*.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

**The School Improvement, Quality Assurance and Accountability Framework (SIQAAF) is in place to help school communities identify and realize a shared vision.**

A process for engaging school communities in an iterative process of feedback, self-evaluation and evidence-based assessment of strategies has been put in place using SIQAAF. The school development planning process focuses on looking at indicators for improving curriculum, pedagogy as well as student learning outcomes and well-being.<sup>39</sup>

The framework allows school communities to determine school performance and provide recommendations for school improvement with a clear emphasis on assessing and improving student learning. The review can be done internally, through the participation of the school board, or externally, between school communities through a peer-review process. Opportunities for peer review between school communities and school leaders allow for collaboration and knowledge exchange between school leaders and schools.

SIQAAF is founded on key principles facilitative of disability-inclusive education, some of which are:<sup>40</sup>

- learning of all students “regardless of background and circumstance” is at the core of the accountability process;
- equity and inclusion are expected from all teachers, leaders, support staff and the school and education system;
- focus is on self-improvement and “compliance reporting should be minimised”;
- accountability is shared within the learning community;
- autonomy and accountability at the school level;
- support is provided to increase performance; and
- quality feedback is provided for learning across the system.

<sup>39</sup> *Maldives Education Sector Analysis.*

<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Education, School Improvement, Quality Assurance & Accountability Framework, Malé, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Ministry of Education, Leadership and Management Quality Indicators Child Friendly Baraabar Schools Maldives, UNICEF Maldives, Malé, 2010.

SIQAAF provides a framework for inclusive leadership at the school level, with teachers, students and parents being engaged as active participants in the school improvement process.

**The Quality Indicators for Child-Friendly Baraabar Schools (CFBS) provide guidelines for leadership and management.**

The quality indicators for leadership and management detailed in CFBS include those facilitative of inclusive leadership, such as:<sup>41</sup>

- providing instructional support to teachers;
- working in collaboration with school stakeholders and school community to improve teaching and learning;
- facilitating and encouraging teacher leadership;
- encouraging collaboration between teachers to improve teaching and learning; and
- emphasizing child-centred pedagogy and the development of competencies necessary for teachers to take a child-centred approach in teaching.

School leaders can use the guidelines as a way to support their school community in their practice of disability-inclusive education.

**A system for vertical coordination is in place and supported by policy documents.**

A vertical coordination system is articulated in the IE Policy at the national, atoll and school level, providing a strong foundation for its implementation. Table 5 shows the units and departments that are responsible for supporting disability-inclusive education and implementing the IE Policy. However, there is a need to assess the role of these units and how they are integrated or are supportive of current structures and systems for leadership and management (SIQAAF, CFBS), teacher development (pre-service programmes for teachers and in-service programmes offered by NIE, Centre for Continuing Education and Teacher Resource Centres) and monitoring and evaluation (MEMIS and Quality Assurance Department).

**Table 5. Government units responsible for disability-inclusive education**

Sector	Government unit/organization and responsibility
<b>Disability</b>	<p><b>National Social Protection Agency</b> Delivers social protection programmes for persons with disabilities as stated in the disability act.</p>
<b>Education</b>	<p><b>Ministry of Education (MoE)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible for service delivery of primary and secondary education.</li> <li>• Supervises implementation of the inclusive education programme.</li> <li>• Develops and establishes structures to ensure vertical coordination for disability-inclusive education within the education system.</li> </ul> <hr/> <p><b>National Institute of Education (NIE), MoE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible for teacher development, offering degree, diploma and certificate programmes for teachers.</li> <li>• A unit within NIE has been established to implement the special education needs programme of MoE.</li> <li>• Develops procedures and guidelines schools can use to inform their inclusive education practice.</li> <li>• Conducts training for pre-service teachers and school leaders.</li> </ul> <hr/> <p><b>Department of Inclusive Education (formerly Special Education Unit), MoE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible for inclusive education programmes at the national level.</li> <li>• Engages in monitoring inclusive education practices in schools.</li> </ul> <hr/> <p><b>Quality Assurance Department, MoE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established by MoE in 2017, the department is responsible for conducting school reviews and assessing the quality of education in schools through the School Improvement, Quality Assurance and Accountability Framework.</li> </ul> <hr/> <p><b>Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Division, MoE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Circular on IE Policy provides guidelines on the role of the division in data collection and monitoring progress of the implementation of the IE Policy.</li> </ul> <hr/> <p><b>Centre for Continuing Education, MoE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible for providing in-service training for teachers at the central level.</li> </ul> <hr/> <p><b>Teacher resource centres (TRCs)</b> Support capacity building of teachers in learner-centred approaches at the regional level. The centres have internet connectivity and equipment, which allow teachers to access online teacher training and courses.  TRCs develop in-service professional development programmes for teachers, including support for school-based professional development. Over the last 10 years, the function of TRCs has weakened and plans are being set up to revive them.</p>
<b>Education and disability inclusion – atoll level</b>	<p><b>Special Education Needs (SEN) Advisory Committee</b> Articulated in the Circular on IE Policy as an advisory committee for implementing policies related to disability-inclusive education. The committee is responsible for providing solutions to specific challenges that arise in policy implementation. The committee is composed of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a SEN teacher;</li> <li>• a parent of a child with disabilities;</li> </ul>

Table 5 (continued)

Sector	Government unit/organization and responsibility
Education and disability inclusion – atoll level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a representative from NIE;</li> <li>• a representative from a government institution protecting the rights of persons with disabilities;</li> <li>• a representative from MoE;</li> <li>• a school principal; and</li> <li>• a representative from a non-governmental organization working in protecting the rights of persons with disabilities.</li> </ul> <p>The SEN Advisory Committee has the following responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify barriers to education of children with disabilities and finding solutions.</li> <li>• Monitor programmes related to access of children with disabilities to education.</li> <li>• Provide a venue for sharing ideas and challenges in education delivery for children with disabilities.</li> </ul> <p><b>SEN Coordinator</b></p> <p>Articulated in the Circular on IE Policy as the primary person responsible for coordination on activities and matters concerning children with disabilities in the atoll. Supervises and provides technical input to the Individual Education Plans (IEPs) of students.</p> <p><b>Support Unit</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A unit providing assistance and resources for ‘children with special needs’, ‘children who need additional learning support’, and ‘children under special circumstances’.</li> <li>• Circular on IE Policy directs the establishment of one support unit in at least one school per atoll.</li> </ul>
Education – school level	<p><b>IEP Committee and Inclusive Education Ambassador</b></p> <p>The structure established in each school to support implementation of the SEN programme in the school.</p> <p><b>School Board</b></p> <p>Guides decision-making process in the school, particularly in strategic planning.</p>

**Source:** Ministry of Education, Policy Planning and Research Division, *Maldives Education Sector Analysis*, Malé, 2019; Ministry of Education, Inclusive Education Policy, Malé, 2013; UNICEF Maldives, *UNICEF Annual Report 2017 – Maldives*, Malé, 2017; Aturupane, H., and M. Shojo, ‘Enhancing the Quality of Education in the Maldives, Challenges and Prospects’, Discussion Paper Series, The World Bank, South Asia Human Development Sector, Report No. 51, 2012; UNICEF, ‘Teacher resource centres launched in the Maldives’, 26 November 2007, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2007/11/241172-unicef-launches-teacher-resource-centres-improve-education-maldives>; National Institute of Education, *Technology-Enabled Learning Environments*, 2017; Ministry of Education, School Improvement, Quality Assurance & Accountability Framework, Malé, 2017.





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There are provisions in existing policies that support the participation of parents and communities in the education of their children and the collaborative partnership-building between the larger community and school community.

# 4

# DEMAND

This domain focuses on initiatives supporting children with disabilities and their families to improve knowledge on their rights, demand for inclusive services, encourage changes in attitudes and behaviour, and increase participation in education. It includes involving the wider community, forging partnerships and putting in place systems and structures to facilitate meaningful engagement.

## 4.1 FAMILY, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

**Policies provide opportunities for participation, but fall short on implementation.**

There are provisions in existing policies that support the participation of parents and communities in the education of their children and the collaborative partnership-building between the larger community and school community. However, these provisions can be strengthened with clear implementation guidelines supported by the roles and accountabilities of each actor.

The Decentralization Act 2010<sup>42</sup> was an attempt at bringing equitable education services across all atolls through empowering local councils and communities. Based on the Act, local councils were responsible for preschool service delivery. Local councils managed community schools together with school administrators.

However, a study commissioned by UNICEF in 2013<sup>43</sup> identified gaps in the decentralization process that MoE tried to address. The quality of preschool education greatly varied between councils without a set of preschool education standards. This disparity in the quality of the service provision led MoE to implement the Preschool Administrative Act 2012,<sup>44</sup> which integrated community preschools into public

<sup>42</sup> *Maldives Education Sector Analysis.*

<sup>43</sup> *Meeting Educational Needs of Children with Disabilities.*

<sup>44</sup> *Maldives Education Sector Analysis.*



schools and led to fewer preschools managed by local communities.

The IE Policy 2013 provided a clearer coordination mechanism between school and family. The policy requires the appointment of a district focal person who would be responsible for the coordination of education-related services of children with disabilities.<sup>45</sup>

The policy also recommends the formation of an advisory committee composed of SEN teachers, parents of children with SEN, school principals and representatives from the Educational Development Centre, MoE, government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) advocating for the rights of children with disabilities.<sup>46</sup>

The key roles of the advisory committee are to identify barriers, create solutions and build collaborative partnerships with each other to ensure that children with disabilities can learn in school.<sup>47</sup>

More recently, SIQAAF has identified shared responsibility, partnerships and transparency in supporting quality education outcomes as its key principles. It highlights the partnership of the school with parents and the broader community in planning and developing school improvement plans. The iterative school improvement process begins with school self-evaluation and proceeds with a peer review of practices, then intervention planning, implementation and monitoring.

The school community, which includes students and parents/families, is to actively participate in the school improvement process through inputs and consultations. Although the school improvement plan does not explicitly focus on the promotion and development of disability-inclusive education, it still provides an opportunity for the school community to collaborate in improving the

education of children with disabilities, especially during school assessment and reviews for the school annual report,<sup>48</sup> which includes a detailed reporting of special classes provisions.

Building the capacity of schools and families is also needed to enable them to provide relevant disability-inclusive inputs and build effective partnerships. ESP 2019–2023 attempts to provide this kind of support in one of its key programmes, ‘Empowering schools for effective school leadership and management’. This involves the implementation of school-based management workshops for school administrators, teachers and parents. Again, central to this is providing relevant training on inclusive leadership and management for education stakeholders to gain a rights-based inclusive lens.

Teacher resource centres (TRCs) located in every atoll serve a key role in coordinating support services for children with disabilities. TRCs also function as a source of technical knowledge for schools and teachers in implementing the SEN programme.<sup>49</sup>

The Community Social Groups (CSGs) of the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services are continuously supported by UNICEF.<sup>50</sup> CSGs, composed of social workers, local council representatives, police, representatives from the health and education sector, and women’s development committees were formed on various islands<sup>51</sup> to help ensure a safer society for the most vulnerable groups, such as children with disabilities, the elderly and those at risk of domestic violence.<sup>52</sup> CSGs are expected to identify areas in social protection services needing support and, through their collaboration, be able to improve services, such as child protection of children with disabilities in schools and the larger community.

<sup>45</sup> Inclusive Education Policy.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> *Maldives Education Sector Analysis*.

<sup>50</sup> UNICEF *Country Office Annual Report 2019*.

<sup>51</sup> As of 2018, CSGs were established in Shaviyani Atoll, Baa Atoll, Kaafu Atoll, Gaafu Alif Atoll, Fuvahmulah City and Addu City.

<sup>52</sup> Maldives Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services, ‘Ministry conducts orientation programme for community social groups in Thaa Atoll’, Malé, 2018, <http://gender.gov.mv/en/?p=2140>.

## 4.2 AWARENESS, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

### The government commits to increasing awareness of disability-inclusive education.

A UNICEF-commissioned gap analysis of the education needs of children with disabilities in Bhutan and Maldives found that there were prevailing negative attitudes towards children with disabilities.<sup>53</sup> Due to the misconception that children with disabilities were uneducable and unemployable, children with disabilities were kept away from school and even remained invisible<sup>54</sup> in education data.

However, evidence suggests increasing acceptance and acknowledgement of the rights of children with disabilities in Maldives as a result of recent advocacy efforts from both the government and development partners. The IE Policy reflects the government's commitment to advocating for the right to education of all children including those with disabilities. The policy mandates the delivery of awareness programmes on the education of children with disabilities for parents and caregivers and the general community.<sup>55</sup>

The Monitoring Framework for Inclusive Education (MFIE) was developed as a mechanism to ensure the implementation of inclusive education and gather data on challenges in practice. The framework includes a dimension on building the awareness of all education stakeholders, including the senior management team, teachers, parents and children, on inclusive education. Efforts to build awareness on the inclusion of children with disabilities in education

among teachers and key decision-makers help better establish inclusion in schools.

### Civil society organizations (CSOs) and development partners help build awareness of disability and inclusion through various behaviour change communication strategies.

Together with NGO Care Society, UNICEF Maldives developed a behaviour change communication strategy<sup>56</sup> to raise awareness among island councils, school communities, parents and caregivers on the rights of children with disabilities to access equitable and quality education. The strategy also seeks to influence positive attitudinal and behavioural change towards children with disabilities.<sup>57</sup>

UNICEF employed various communication strategies, such as mainstream media, video spots, posters, social media engagement and direct community organizing.<sup>58</sup> These interventions led to an increase in school attendance and improved physical accessibility in schools and communal facilities, such as the installation of ramps in some public buildings.<sup>59</sup>

The strategy was implemented on six islands where communities were engaged to improve the inclusion of children with disabilities in education and address prevailing negative attitudes and behaviour towards them.<sup>60</sup>

With the popularity of social media across age groups, NIE has recently begun to utilize social media for community awareness and advocacy as well as capacity building for educators using short informational videos circulated online.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>53</sup> *Meeting Educational Needs of Children with Disabilities.*

<sup>54</sup> The gap analysis report noted a 2005 statistic that showed universal primary education at 100 per cent achievement, but children with disabilities were excluded from the data.

<sup>55</sup> Inclusive Education Policy.

<sup>56</sup> UNICEF Maldives, *UNICEF Annual Report 2016 – Maldives*, Malé, 2016.

<sup>57</sup> UNICEF Maldives, *UNICEF Annual Report 2017 – Maldives*, Malé, 2017.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Maldives Education Sector Analysis.*

**Improving data on children with disabilities significantly impact programme planning.**

UNICEF supported the national Population and Housing Census 2014 that enhanced national capacity on census implementation and data analysis. Particular focus was given to gathering data on vulnerable children including those with disabilities. Information gathered contributed to evidence-based planning and programming of interventions and social protection schemes.<sup>62</sup>

Shifting mindsets and changing practices towards disability inclusion in education can

be further strengthened through knowledge sharing and awareness building on international good practices in inclusive education. These practices are often founded on a rights-based education and utilize principles of universal design in disability-related programming. Giving education stakeholders and CSOs/Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) models that show how children with mild to severe disabilities learn in the same class as children without disabilities presents a possibility that they can advocate for and demand from the government.

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<sup>62</sup> UNICEF Maldives, *UNICEF Annual Report 2015 – Maldives*, Malé, 2015.



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Guidelines on adaptation and differentiation support teachers to improve the accessibility of the national curriculum for children with disabilities.

# 5

# SERVICE DELIVERY

This domain deals with the availability and access to various services for children with disabilities and initiatives to strengthen different aspects of the education system.

## 5.1 APPROACHES TO EDUCATING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

**The educational placement of children with disabilities depends on the severity of their disability.**

Children with disabilities are assessed and categorized according to the severity of their disability, from mild, moderate, severe to profound, using a growth monitoring card to determine the education provision suited for them.<sup>63</sup>

Children found with a disability and needing support, such as accessibility tools and IEPs, are recorded in a separate registry and submitted to the SEN coordinator. Children with disabilities

are then placed in appropriate special education provisions, such as SEN Units and pilot SEN schools (see Table 6).<sup>64</sup> Those who have mild to moderate disabilities and have 'potential' are placed in a special programme to prepare them for mainstream education.<sup>65</sup>

To cater for students with disabilities, special education units have been established within regular schools to prepare children with disabilities for mainstream education.<sup>66</sup> The special education programme was managed by the SEN Unit within NIE under MoE until the end of 2018.<sup>67</sup> The unit has since been renamed the Department of Inclusive Education.<sup>68</sup>

To support the programme, a technical committee and an IE committee were also formed. In every school, an IE ambassador was

<sup>63</sup> *Meeting Educational Needs of Children with Disabilities.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Maldives Education Sector Analysis.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*



appointed to coordinate the implementation of the special education programme.<sup>69</sup> SEN Units commonly have a dedicated SEN teacher and classroom space. As of 2017, there are 185 schools out of 212 government schools that cater to children with disabilities.<sup>70</sup>

There are three schools in Maldives that provide specialized education and support for children with specific disabilities like autism, visual impairment and hearing impairment. These schools, called pilot SEN schools, are supported by UNICEF and are being developed as disability-specific national hubs. However, the pilot schools being located in Malé poses access problems for children with disabilities from other islands.

One of the pilot schools, Imaadhuddin School, specializing in children with autism has become a source of technical knowledge for neighbouring schools. The lead SEN teacher has been supporting schools in neighbouring islands on pedagogical strategies in teaching children with autism and Down's syndrome.<sup>71</sup>

The current practice of assessing children with disabilities to determine which education provision is suited to the child risks further excluding children with disabilities and counters efforts towards inclusion. Identification and assessment of disability can be used instead to improve access to the curriculum. The difficulties faced by a child with a disability provide insights on how teaching processes and learning materials can be adapted or differentiated to help the child's learning process. This way, children with diverse needs can learn alongside each other under the same curriculum.

### **Community-based preschools, alternative pathways, vocational and apprenticeship training lack focus on the inclusion of children and youth with disabilities.**

Community-based education (CBE) is preschool education managed by local councils. This was brought about by the Decentralization Act 2010,<sup>72</sup> which sought to give local councils and communities more authority and autonomy. These preschools were later absorbed by nearby public schools as required by the Preschool Administrative Act 2012.<sup>73</sup>

Education in pre-primary school has been made compulsory and free by the government,<sup>74</sup> however, the lack of data on disability for this level suggests a lack of focus on bringing children with disabilities into early learning programmes.

Together with UNICEF, Maldives Red Crescent implemented an alternative education plan for marginalized children and adolescents in an atoll in 2019, which included programmes on basic literacy, life skills and skills development in areas such as water sports and trade.<sup>75</sup> Available data on this initiative, however, do not mention efforts to target out-of-school children with disabilities.

In technical and vocational education and training, Dhasvaaru and the Business and Technology Education Council offered internship and apprenticeship programmes,<sup>76</sup> but data on the participation of youth with disabilities are unclear. The government recognizes that there are limited available learning pathways for children and adolescents with disabilities. As such, there has been an emphasis on addressing this gap following reforms in the curriculum and commitment to inclusive education.

<sup>69</sup> *Maldives Education Sector Analysis*.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Meeting Educational Needs of Children with Disabilities*.

<sup>72</sup> *Maldives Education Sector Analysis*.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> UNICEF *Country Office Annual Report 2019*.

<sup>76</sup> *Maldives Education Sector Analysis*.

**Table 6. Approaches to educating children with disabilities**

Approaches to educating children with disabilities	Description and examples
<b>Regular/mainstream schools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gulhi School, Gulhi Island, Kaafu Atoll (no SEN Unit but children with disabilities are admitted and included in the regular class)</li> <li>• 70% of schools in the country are mainstream schools</li> </ul>
<b>Regular schools with SEN Units</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Muhyiddin School, Villimale, Malé (with SEN Unit and two SEN teachers)</li> <li>• Maafushi School, Maafushi Island, Kaafu Atoll (with one SEN teacher and a SEN class for children living in the local orphanage)</li> <li>• 30% of schools have SEN units</li> </ul>
<b>Pilot SEN schools*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imaadhuddin School (caters to children with all types of disabilities)</li> <li>• Jamaluddin School (for children with hearing and visual impairment)</li> <li>• Aminiyya School (for children with autism spectrum disorder)</li> </ul>
<b>Technical and vocational education and training</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dhasvaaru and Business and Technology Education Council offered internship and apprenticeship programmes, which ceased in 2021. Instead, there will be school technical and vocational education and training programmes. A framework for alternative learning pathways for children with disabilities is being developed.</li> </ul>

**Source:** UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, *Meeting the Educational Needs of Children with Disabilities in South Asia: A gap analysis covering Bhutan and Maldives*, United Nations Children’s Fund Regional Office for South Asia, Kathmandu, 2014; Ministry of Education, Policy Planning and Research Division, *Maldives Education Sector Analysis*, Malé, 2019.

\*From 2021, these schools are considered and developed as Hub Schools, which will serve as resource schools in inclusive education to other school clusters across the country.

The government’s Strategic Action Plan 2019–2023<sup>77</sup> identified the development of flexible pathways for students “with SEN, exceptionalities”,<sup>78</sup> at risk, out of school and living in hard-to-reach islands as among its key strategies to ensure equitable access to education.

**Despite challenges in access and equity in the education of children with disabilities, the country is persistent in moving towards a more inclusive education system.**

As inclusive education is a developing approach not only in Maldives but also worldwide, there are still existing segregative practices in education. Maldives, however, is continuously

exerting efforts to promote inclusion in the mainstream education system. In 2014, a school in Gulhi Island, Kaafu Atoll, was reported to have been supporting children with disabilities in regular classes despite the absence of a SEN Unit.<sup>79</sup> There are limited data on the number of children, their profiles and progress, but initiatives on inclusion such as this are present.

Recent data from the government revealed that there are 4,248 children<sup>80</sup> with ‘complex learning profiles’<sup>81</sup> enrolled in various government learning programmes. The majority of them are boys at 3,141, while 1,107 are girls. More than half of these children are in mainstream education settings, while 834 are in SEN Units (See Figure 2).

<sup>77</sup> Government of Maldives, Strategic Action Plan 2019–2023, Malé, 2019.

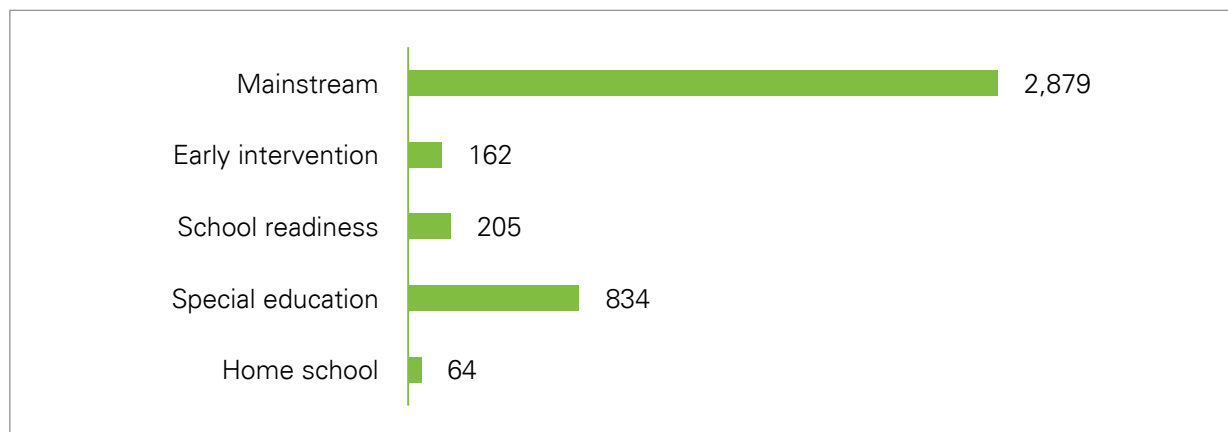
<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p.128.

<sup>79</sup> *Meeting Educational Needs of Children with Disabilities*.

<sup>80</sup> *Students with Complex Learning Profiles*.

<sup>81</sup> Children with complex learning profiles or CLP are defined by the *Students with Complex Learning Profiles* document as those who have diverse learning needs, such as those with disabilities and special education needs.

**Figure 2. Number of children with complex learning profiles attending learning programmes defined by Individual Education Plan**



**Source:** Ministry of Education, Department of Inclusive Education, *Students with Complex Learning Profiles: Statistics 2020*, Malé, 2020.

One of the action points in ESP 2019–2023 is the development of a guideline, with UNICEF technical support, to transition and integrate children with disabilities into mainstream education. Part of this is the provision and capacity building of teachers and schools, as well as revisions in existing policies. The guideline to be developed needs to articulate how MoE will support the transition of all SEN Units and specialized schools into fully inclusive schools.

Additionally, the Strategic Action Plan 2019–2023 includes action points on transitioning children in SEN programmes to mainstream education including those in specialized settings, such as children with visual impairments.

## 5.2 EDUCATION WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHER TRAINING

### Teachers need ongoing support to implement disability-inclusive classroom strategies.

Teachers lack the competency to teach diverse learners in mainstream settings. A 2012 study on quality of education in Maldives found that 23 per cent of primary schoolteachers had inadequate

training.<sup>82</sup> A great percentage of teachers need to build their competence in content and pedagogical knowledge. There is a need to strengthen teachers' capacity to support children with disabilities in mainstream settings.

Teachers focus more on delivering lessons according to the syllabus provided to them rather than adapting instruction according to the needs of learners. Teacher-centred methods are mostly used rather than learner-centred approaches. Training for teaching children with disabilities is mostly provided to special educators and not teachers of mainstream classes. Most of the documented training available for teachers are either focused on delivery of the new learner-centred curriculum and corresponding pedagogy or on early identification than on teaching children with disabilities in an inclusive classroom setting.

Teachers report a lack of confidence and motivation in teaching children with disabilities. Most teachers still widely hold the perspective that children with disabilities must be taught only by special educators and not mainstream classroom teachers. As a result, support provided by special educators is not seen as valuable by mainstream teachers.

<sup>82</sup> Aturupane, H., and M. Shojo, 'Enhancing the Quality of Education in the Maldives, Challenges and Prospects', Discussion Paper Series, World Bank, South Asia Human Development Sector, Report No. 51, 2012, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/17979/679180NWP00PUB07903B0Report00No.510.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

The incentive system for special educators would need to be evaluated as it may act more as a deterrent for mainstream teachers to teach children with disabilities. The incentive system for teaching children with disabilities only applies to special educators and not to teachers who teach children with disabilities in mainstream settings. This perpetuates the perspective that teaching children with disabilities is an extra responsibility delegated only to special education teachers instead of being a responsibility for all teachers. It also reinforces the belief that teaching children with disabilities requires specialized training and is more difficult than teaching children without disabilities, hence the need for incentives.

Methods for strengthening the social model of disability and inclusive education need to be built into teacher development programmes. Current sector analysis and policy recommendations do not provide for strengthening teacher capacity for inclusive education through whole-class strategies, such as the use of the Universal Design for Learning framework in designing activities.

Recommendations for teacher training still focus on specialized training based on the diagnosis of the child, which reinforces a medical model of disability. There needs to be greater focus on strengthening teachers' capacity for designing learning experiences and having an awareness of barriers to learning and ways to address them through the use of Universal Design for Learning.

### **Capacity building programmes for in-service and pre-service teachers on inclusive education are available.**

- In each atoll, inclusion coaches who are specifically trained on inclusive and special education are available for teachers to consult.<sup>83</sup>
- Along with a review of the inclusive education policy, an inclusive education

capacity needs analysis and an inclusive education capacity development plan were created to enhance the capacity of teachers, support staff, school leaders and education officials to support disability-inclusive education.<sup>84</sup>

- Training programmes are held for teachers to build their knowledge in supporting 'children with high support needs'. The Department of Inclusive Education provides workshops for pre-service teachers in teaching children with disabilities.
- The Circular on IE Policy provides a guide for teaching children with disabilities.

### **In-service professional development of teachers is also delivered through the use of technology.**

- UNICEF led the establishment of TRCs in 2007, which addressed challenges in in-service teacher training delivery given the geographic constraints in an island state such as Maldives. Teachers can access equipment and internet connectivity in the TRCs, which allow them to participate in online courses and training.<sup>85</sup> The TRCs develop in-service professional development programmes for teachers colla including support for school-based professional development.<sup>86</sup>
- To support the inclusive practice of teachers, NIE has been taking advantage of social media to share videos that can inform teachers' classroom practice.<sup>87</sup>
- UNICEF provided support for the development of an e-learning platform for teacher development. NIE was also trained on instructional design. These initiatives were geared towards improving teacher competency to teach the new curriculum; however, there was no mention of disability-inclusive education.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Carrington, et al., *Deliverable 1 Existing Inclusive Education Policy*.

<sup>84</sup> Carrington, S., G. Mann and S. Mavropoulou, *Deliverable 3 and 4 (combined) the Inclusive Education Capacity Needs Analysis and the Inclusive Education Capacity Development Plan*, Queensland University of Technology, 2019.

<sup>85</sup> 'Teacher resource centres launched'.

<sup>86</sup> *Technology-Enabled Learning Environments*.

<sup>87</sup> *Maldives Education Sector Analysis*.

<sup>88</sup> *UNICEF Annual Report 2017 – Maldives*.

### Capacity building initiatives are led by the government, with support from various development partners.

- From 2011–2015, UNICEF provided ongoing support for the capacity development of teachers in special education. In 2013, special education teachers participated in training on special education in Sri Lanka, which strengthened their knowledge on early identification and early intervention.<sup>89</sup>

In 2015, UNICEF supported special education teachers in attending the International Teachers Conference, which allowed them to exchange ideas and practices on special needs education across the country. This also allowed the participants to develop a three-year strategy in supporting inclusive education in schools that serves as a guide for NIE in developing programmes for special needs educators in improving inclusive education in schools.<sup>90</sup> Greater emphasis is given on capacity building and support for special educators for teaching children with disabilities and not mainstream teachers.

- In 2014, UNICEF provided support to the implementation of the new, learner-centred curriculum through organizing capacity building for preschool teachers on teaching the new curriculum and using learner-centred teaching and learning materials for teaching. The materials teachers made in the training were subsequently used in classrooms. The learner-centred curriculum and teaching approaches were found to contribute to advancing inclusion in schools by improving the engagement of all children to learning and through developmentally appropriate activities.<sup>91</sup>

- In 2014 and 2015, UNICEF, with Care Society Education, provided training to teachers on early identification, supporting them in better addressing the needs of children with disabilities.<sup>92</sup>
- To promote the integration of a rights-based approach to education, 25 curriculum developers of NIE and the Faculty of Education were trained in the integration of child rights in the national curriculum.<sup>93</sup>
- UNICEF provided a venue for teacher training institutes and NIE to share information and ideas on how to address the need for improving teacher quality.<sup>94</sup> Although there was no mention of inclusive education and inclusion, quality teaching and teacher competency do contribute to the capacity of teachers for disability-inclusive instruction.

## 5.3 SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

### The Enhancing Education Development Project 2013–2018<sup>95</sup> aimed to enhance and strengthen strategic dimensions of education access and quality.

One of the project's strategies was to enhance the learning environment of secondary schools, in which it was expected to support around 45 strategically selected schools through the provision of information and communication technology (ICT) and science equipment and the expansion of classroom facilities in overcrowded large schools.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>88</sup> UNICEF Annual Report 2017 – Maldives.

<sup>89</sup> UNICEF Maldives, *UNICEF Annual Report 2013 – Maldives*, Malé, 2013.

<sup>90</sup> UNICEF Annual Report 2015 – Maldives.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> UNICEF Maldives, *UNICEF Annual Report 2014 – Maldives*, Malé, 2014.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> UNICEF Maldives, *UNICEF Annual Report 2018 – Maldives*, Malé, 2018.

<sup>95</sup> Ministry of Education, 'Enhancing Education Development Project', Malé, 2018, <https://eedp.moe.gov.mv/#/project/9/view>, accessed 26 September 2020.

<sup>96</sup> The World Bank, *Enhancing Education Development Project: Implementation Completion Report*, 2019, The World Bank, Washington, D.C., <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/358341555103520796/pdf/Maldives-Enhancing-Education-Development-Project.pdf>.



The project resulted in:

- enhancement of learning environments in 53 secondary schools; and
- expansion of advanced-level education at atoll education centres with the following improvements:
  - o Construction of 42 new classrooms and 36 toilets.
  - o Purchase of new classroom furniture, computer systems, equipment for science laboratories and state-of-the-art video conference facilities.

Upgrading the physical facilities in the atolls has led to a substantial improvement in the enrolment rate in higher secondary education.<sup>97</sup> The construction of additional classrooms and purchase of ICT equipment benefit all students in the atolls including students with disabilities as these initiatives increase access to education for most children.

**Efforts to curb violence against children in schools are ongoing, but an explicit focus on children with disabilities is needed.**

A UNICEF report cited several studies showing evidence of school-based violence in the country.<sup>98</sup> One such study found that among 17,035 respondents from 2,500 households and 2,000 children in schools, 8 per cent of those in secondary school had experienced physical punishment in school. Another study<sup>99</sup> noted that 38.4 per cent of students experienced violence within the past year and 37.7 per cent mentioned being bullied in the past 30 days.

There are general provisions for the protection of children against violence in laws, such as the Child Rights Protection Act and Gender Equality Act. However, they are not yet fully implemented and the scope is limited as further regulations and protocols are still needed.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, there is currently no policy in the country that explicitly prohibits all forms and degrees of corporal punishment in education settings.<sup>101</sup>

The government's Strategic Action Plan 2019–2023 attempts to address these issues through these strategic action points, among others: revision and implementation of the anti-bullying policy; development of a psychosocial assistance policy; employment of school counsellors; development of programmes on gender equality, values and protection; capacity building of school staff on gender and values; and awareness campaigns on violence against children.

The plan also includes a review of current legislation on the protection of children and women against violence, such as the Social Protection Act, Domestic Violence Prevention Act, Disability Act, Gender Equality Act, Sexual Offences Act, Sexual Harassment Prevention Act, Special Measures Act, as well as the National Action Plan on Violence Against Children 2017–2019.

Despite these stipulations, there is no explicit articulation in these action points on ensuring the protection of children with disabilities. It is imperative that in the legislative review, revision and development processes, children with disabilities, women and girls with disabilities, their families and OPDs are actively involved to ensure meaningful provisions for their protection are put in place.

<sup>97</sup> *Enhancing Education Development Project: Implementation Completion Report.*

<sup>98</sup> UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, *Violence against Children in Education Settings in South Asia*, United Nations Children's Fund Regional Office for South Asia, Kathmandu, 2016.

<sup>99</sup> Global School-based Health Survey 2009 involving 3,227 Maldivian students in Grades 8, 9 and 10.

<sup>100</sup> *Maldives Education Sector Analysis.*

<sup>101</sup> *Violence against Children.*

## 5.4 CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT

**Curriculum adaptations for children with learning disabilities and giftedness support the implementation of the national curriculum.**<sup>102</sup>

MoE strongly recognizes students with exceptionalities and special educational needs in ESP 2019–2023, as well as in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2015. NCF Article 10.8 outlines the provisions for catering to students with special educational needs, whereby the curriculum should be adapted to respond to the students' needs. It further adds the need to prepare annual IEPs whenever necessary and to mainstream students with special needs when possible.<sup>103</sup>

To respond to these NCF provisions, a working document that introduces curriculum adaptations for children with learning disabilities and giftedness was drafted. The draft document includes information on the types of learning disabilities, general characteristics of gifted students, characteristics of a child with learning disabilities in various levels from preschool to adulthood, teaching strategies and accommodations/modifications. This information is expected to guide teachers and stakeholders in implementing the national curriculum given the context of students with special educational needs.

**Guidelines on adaptation and differentiation support teachers to improve the accessibility of the national curriculum for children with disabilities.**

Putting the national curriculum into actual use for students with exceptionalities and special educational needs entails a more elaborate

document that would provide directions for teachers and stakeholders. To establish clear and defined mechanisms to implement the national curriculum in this context, MoE developed the Inclusive Education Guidelines and Adaptations to Support the Implementation of the National Curriculum in 2018.<sup>104</sup>

The document highlights the pillars of inclusivity that are composed of eight key aspects:

- (1) Maintaining an inclusive learning environment
- (2) Multisensory approaches
- (3) Working with additional adults
- (4) Managing peer relationships
- (5) Adult–pupil communication
- (6) Formative assessment
- (7) Motivation
- (8) Memory consolidation

The Inclusive Education Guidelines include strategies to support teachers in implementing and adapting the national curriculum for students with exceptionalities and special educational needs in the areas of content, process and assessment. Adaptations specific to special educational needs include those in planning, teaching, assessment, environment and resources for students with physical and intellectual disabilities and autism.

**Reducing the contents of syllabi mitigate learning loss during COVID-19.**

Restrictions on movements, mass gatherings and closures of establishments as a means to curb the spread of the coronavirus have affected the continuity of learning of most students in the country. To mitigate learning loss and discontinuity of learning, MoE developed several strategies including rationalizing and reducing

<sup>102</sup> Ministry of Education, Curriculum Adaptations for Children with Learning Disabilities and Giftedness: Working Document, Malé, 2016.

<sup>103</sup> Ministry of Education, The National Curriculum Framework, National Institute of Education, Malé, 2015.

<sup>104</sup> Ministry of Education, Inclusive Education Guidelines and Adaptations to Support the Implementation of the National Curriculum, National Institute of Education, Malé, 2018.

contents of syllabi from key stage 1 to 3.<sup>105</sup> Teacher trainers were involved in the curriculum revision and guidelines for the retention or removal of outcomes were used to guide the revision. The revised syllabi will be used for the 2020–2021 school year.

## 5.5 LEARNING MATERIALS

### The Maldivian Sign Language dictionary was developed to facilitate learning for students with hearing impairment.

In 2009, the launch of the first Maldivian Sign Language dictionary that contains handshape and movement with descriptions of around 650 words supported in English and Dhivehi marked an important event for the deaf community.<sup>106</sup> The development of the dictionary provided support for parents and teachers in teaching children who are deaf and with hearing impairments.

### The launch of the Thaana Mallow app improves access to information for children with visual impairments.

In June 2020, Thaana Mallow, an app that can translate written Maldivian language

was launched.<sup>107</sup> The launching of this phone application will improve access to information for children who are blind or visually impaired as it enables the Maldivian language to be read aloud by screen readers.

The Thaana Mallow app was one of the winning ideas during a 2019 social innovation camp called Miyaheli supported by the Australian government and hosted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with various organizations. The app is envisioned to help blind and visually impaired students access information and learning materials during a pandemic when remote learning and independent study become the norm.

### The Dhivehi Braille code promises better accessibility for children with visual impairments.

In 2015, the unveiling of the Dhivehi Braille code was hailed as a milestone for the blind community.<sup>108</sup> The code was expected to be used for developing books that can be accessed by blind students. Advocates are calling for the government to make efforts to bring the Braille code in schools and print more books in Braille.

**Table 7. Milestones in the development of learning materials supporting children with disabilities**

Type of learning resource	Materials developed
Printed materials	Maldivian Sign Language dictionary (2009)
Assistive devices	Dhivehi Braille code (2015)
ICT tools	Thaana Mallow app (2020)

<sup>105</sup> Ministry of Education, Revised Syllabi During COVID-19 Pandemic Situation 2020, Malé, 2020, [www.nie.edu.mv/index.php/en/national-curriculum/revised-syllabi-during-covid-19-pandemic-situation-2020](http://www.nie.edu.mv/index.php/en/national-curriculum/revised-syllabi-during-covid-19-pandemic-situation-2020).

<sup>106</sup> Maldives President's Office, 'President launches Maldivian Sign Language Dictionary', Press release, 28 October 2009, <https://presidency.gov.mv/Press/Article/675#:~:text=President%20Mohamed%20Nasheed%20has%20today,the%20development%20of%20a%20nation>, accessed 23 September 2020.

<sup>107</sup> UNDP Maldives, 'New app – a Game Changer in Accessibility for the Blind', 15 June 2020, [www.mv.undp.org/content/maldives/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2020/ThaanaMallowAppLaunch.html](http://www.mv.undp.org/content/maldives/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2020/ThaanaMallowAppLaunch.html).

<sup>108</sup> 'Introducing Dhivehi braille is just the first step for blind literacy', *Maldives Independent*, 22 December 2015, <https://maldivesindependent.com/society/introducing-dhivehi-braille-is-just-the-first-step-for-blind-literacy-120907>, accessed 25 September 2020.

## 5.6 SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDENTS, PARENTS AND TEACHERS

There are few rehabilitation and intervention programmes in Maldives due to a lack of specialists. Social support schemes are accessed by only a few children with disabilities. A screening system is just beginning to be set up. Coordination mechanisms between various focal persons for inclusive education can be developed and strengthened.

**Coordination and collaboration mechanisms should be strengthened for enhanced delivery of services.**

The IE Policy identifies various key positions that assist the implementation of special education programmes. Some of these are the

SEN coordinator, TRC Coordinator and SEN Advisory Committee, which all work towards ensuring children with disabilities can access quality education and relevant disability-related services.<sup>109</sup> However, a well-defined charter and clear demarcation in roles and responsibilities of these offices are needed to ensure non-duplicity in efforts and efficient flow of knowledge between agencies.

Referral and coordination of intervention services between schools and health centres or service providers need to be strengthened. MoE introduced a decentralized approach<sup>110</sup> to the delivery of education services, but to be effective the capacity of education stakeholders at the atoll and island level should be developed along with a systematic horizontal and vertical coordination mechanism and implementation plan.

**Table 8. Examples of support services for students, parents and teachers**

Support services	Notable examples
Disability/child functioning screening, multidisciplinary assessment services including children with disabilities who are out of school	Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2019 used the Washington Group Short Set on Functioning to measure disability using functional domains such as seeing, hearing, walking, cognition, self-care and communication.
Early identification and intervention	Limited and available only for primary school age.
Early childhood development and early childhood care and education	Day care centres, baby nursery and nursery schools. Two-year pre-primary education in government schools or the foundation stage.
Therapy interventions and family support	In the islands or villages, 176 primary health centres include family health unit.
Collaboration mechanism and referral system between teachers and providers of specialized services	A hospital in Malé has referral services and includes a dedicated department for child growth monitoring services.
Financial support	Disability grant through the National Social Protection Agency of Maldives, however, only a third of the population of children with disabilities can access this.

**Source:** National Bureau of Statistics, *Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2019: Population*, Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, Malé, n.d.; Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education, *Education Sector Plan 2019–2023*, Malé, 2019; Ministry of Education, Policy Planning and Research Division, *Maldives Education Sector Analysis*, Malé, 2019; UNICEF Maldives, *Country Office Annual Report 2019*, Malé, 2019.

<sup>109</sup> Inclusive Education Policy 2013.

<sup>110</sup> Education Sector Plan 2019–2023.

### Early identification and intervention (EII) services are beginning to be implemented.

An early identification system in Maldives is in its early development stage.<sup>111</sup> There is developmental screening available but in a limited capacity and is usually provided by international NGOs or private service providers.<sup>112</sup> Children with disabilities who can access this usually receive a medical intervention (such as speech and occupational therapy) as a patient and little to no support to facilitate learning in school.

A non-clinical assessment process is present in schools and begins at the primary level but is not available for preschoolers.<sup>113</sup> The IE Policy requires children to be assessed prior to enrolment using a growth monitoring card and are categorized according to the severity of the disability. The child is then placed in an education provision suitable to their ability. Children found to have a special need or disability will be referred for further evaluations by other professionals,<sup>114</sup> however, the referral process is unclear.

With UNICEF support, MoE and the NGO Care Society developed an improved school-based EII system for children with special educational needs. An assessment tool for use in schools was developed to detect disabilities in young children.<sup>115</sup> Acknowledging the gaps in EII for children with disabilities, ESP 2019–2023 attempts to address them with specific strategies that include the provision of school-based therapy services and improved developmental screening for school-aged children and children aged 0–3 years.

### Plans to enhance early childhood care and education (ECCE) programmes are in place.

Provisions of care are available for children 0–3 years, including day care centres, baby nurseries and nursery schools. These are few and run by

private companies, individuals or community organizations. Some nursery schools are run by local councils. Pre-primary schools are available for children aged 4–6 years and are free and integrated into the formal school system.<sup>116</sup>

Most of these preschools were supported by UNICEF from 2003 to 2007 through its various early childhood development programmes and partnership with MoE.<sup>117</sup> UNICEF was the main funder of health services in island early childhood development community centres until the 2011 National Health Insurance Act, which instituted a universal health insurance programme for all citizens.<sup>118</sup>

There are limited data, however, on the number of children with disabilities who can attend pre-primary schooling and access disability-related health services. The dearth of data is reflective of the need to prioritize ECCE for children with disabilities. The government, in recognition of this gap, included the delivery of equitable and holistic pre-primary education in ESP 2019–2023. An early childhood care and development policy should be developed to ensure that planned actions on the delivery of equity-focused ECCE programmes are implemented.

### A clear transition plan for children with disabilities is needed.

There is no clear and explicit transition plan ensuring children with disabilities stay in school and finish their education. While there is some mention in policies and plans such as ESP, which states that a guideline should be developed for integrating children with SEN in mainstream education, it appears to be on a case-by-case basis. The IE Policy likewise requires schools to establish a system that ensures gifted children complete education, however, there is no focus or mention of children with disabilities.

<sup>111</sup> Grimes, P., et al., *Mapping of Disability-Inclusive Education Practices*.

<sup>112</sup> *Meeting Educational Need of Children with Disabilities*.

<sup>113</sup> Education Sector Plan 2019–2023.

<sup>114</sup> Inclusive Education Policy 2013.

<sup>115</sup> *UNICEF Annual Report 2015 – Maldives*.

<sup>116</sup> *Maldives Education Sector Analysis*.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.





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The monitoring system is designed to be multilevel with a standardized system for data gathering and monitoring from the school, regional and central/national level, with information designed to flow in both directions.

# 6

# MEASURING AND MONITORING QUALITY

This domain includes measures to ensure the quality of education and support services for children with disabilities.

## 6.1 STANDARDS AND INDICATORS FOR INCLUSION

**The School Improvement, Quality Assurance and Accountability Framework can facilitate creation of inclusive practices in schools.**

SIQAAF is a method for school improvement founded on the CFBS<sup>119</sup> framework, which guides teachers, school leaders, school community and MoE in assessing the extent to which school practices are within quality standards. The framework is used for self-evaluation and internal assessment of school practices but can also be used for external assessments.

SIQAAF articulates indicators, standards and dimensions against a quality framework. It integrates principles of inclusive education through five dimensions of a child-friendly quality school: (1) inclusivity, (2) child-centred teaching

and learning, (3) health and safety, (4) family and community partnership, and (5) leadership and management.

The standards are articulated as observable actions for schools to be able to implement “principles, policies and strategies of good practice”.<sup>120</sup> SIQAAF serves as a guide for the school to make decisions on its performance. The standards are not prescriptive and are not considered applicable for all schools, thus, allowing the school and community autonomy to make choices and decisions relevant to their context.

A revised method of self-rating for the school community has been developed, feeding into the school improvement cycle. The extent to which the standards has been implemented would need to be reviewed. Nevertheless, having been able to put in place a set of standards based on inclusive principles is a milestone in the Maldivian education system.

<sup>119</sup> CFBS was implemented as school quality standards in selected schools. The quality framework integrates principles of inclusive education through five dimensions of a child-friendly quality school: inclusivity; child-centred teaching and learning; health and safety; family and community partnership; and leadership and management. CFBS was revised and became SIQAAF.

<sup>120</sup> School Improvement, Quality Assurance & Accountability Framework, p. 19.

## 6.2 MONITORING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

**The Monitoring Framework for Inclusive Education was published in 2019 by the Department of Inclusive Education.**

MFIE is meant to be used across all levels of the system to monitor and inform inclusive education practices of schools in relation to the Inclusive Education Guidelines and Adaptations. The monitoring framework aims to provide a standardized toolkit for schools to assess their current IE practices and make adjustments to improve their inclusive practices; improve accountability of stakeholders of disability-inclusive programming; institutionalize a monitoring system for the school, regional and central level for provision of support; and develop a framework of monitoring at all levels of the system.<sup>121</sup>

MFIE monitors four dimensions:

- Capacity building and awareness – monitors school plans and programmes in building the capacity of teachers to teach children with disabilities and raise awareness of stakeholders.
- Teaching practices – monitors teaching and learning processes.
- Support system – monitors school environment, funding and resource allocation and referral systems available in the school.
- Managing information, records and documents – monitors records and documentation on students, staff allocation, IEPs and the IE Policy.

The monitoring system is designed to be multilevel with a standardized system for data gathering and monitoring from the school, regional and central/national level, with information designed to flow in both directions.

<sup>121</sup> Ministry of Education, Department of Inclusive Education, Monitoring Framework for Inclusive Education, Malé, 2019.





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Gender parity in primary and lower secondary education is close to being achieved, but access to pre-primary education for young girls is still a challenge.

# 7

# CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

## 7.1 GENDER

**Gender parity in primary and lower secondary education is close to being achieved, but access to pre-primary education for young girls is still a challenge.**

Statistics show that gender parity in education is close to being achieved<sup>122</sup> in Maldives for primary and lower secondary levels.<sup>123</sup> However, gender parity does not necessarily mean all girls can access quality education. Gender disparity is still prevalent in pre-primary education, to the disadvantage of girls.<sup>124</sup>

There is a high drop-out rate in higher secondary education for both boys and girls, with only 38 per cent net enrolment for boys and 50 per cent for girls.<sup>125</sup> There are no disaggregated data on children with disabilities in these statistics and neither are there for out-of-school girls,<sup>126</sup> with or without disabilities. Additionally, there is a lack of non-formal education pathways and skills

development programmes,<sup>127</sup> especially for girls with disabilities who cannot access formal schooling.

Efforts are being made by the government and development partners to widen the reach of education services for out-of-school children. However, the lack of disaggregated data on out-of-school children and adolescents, especially girls with and without disabilities, poses significant challenges for the planning and programming of initiatives.<sup>128</sup>

**General provisions for the protection of girls and women against violence are present, but an articulation of a focus on girls and boys with disabilities can strengthen implementation.**

There are limited recent studies on school-related gender-based violence in Maldives. A 2014 study commissioned by the World Bank reported that 8 per cent of respondents (161 males and 241 females) aged 15–24 experienced physical abuse

<sup>122</sup> The overall net enrolment rate (NER) in 2018 in primary school was 95.9%, with 96.3% for girls and 95.5% for boys. NER in lower secondary was 90.5%, with 87.8% for girls and 92.9% for boys.

<sup>123</sup> Education Sector Plan 2019–2023.

<sup>124</sup> *Maldives Education Sector Analysis*.

<sup>125</sup> Education Sector Plan 2019–2023.

<sup>126</sup> UNICEF *Country Office Annual Report 2019*.

<sup>127</sup> *Maldives Education Sector Analysis*.

<sup>128</sup> UNICEF *Country Office Annual Report 2019*.



in school, while 10 per cent of girls and 20 per cent of boys aged 13–15 experienced bullying in school.<sup>129</sup>

Similar results were found in the Global School-based Health Survey in 2009<sup>130</sup> with 3,277 respondents in Grades 8–10. Findings revealed 17.8 per cent of boys and 16.1 per cent of girls experienced sexual violence, abuse or harassment in school. An earlier survey by the United Nations Population Fund in 2005<sup>131</sup> recorded 64 per cent of over 4,000 respondents aged 15–24 considered bullying and discrimination based on gender and disability as a major problem in schools.

The responsibility for the protection and promotion of women’s rights and empowerment, gender equality, disability rights, children’s rights and social protection services along with elderly rights and family well-being falls under the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services.<sup>132</sup>

The Gender Equality Act 2016<sup>133</sup> provides blanket protection for all women against acts of physical, sexual or psychological harm and discrimination. The law promotes women’s empowerment and gender equality as it outlines the responsibilities of the state in upholding women’s rights.

The Gender Equality Action Plan 2017 developed together with UNDP intends to define the government’s strategies in fulfilling its obligations. Moreover, the country’s Strategic Action Plan 2019–2023 outlines ways to address gaps in legislation and implementation of prevention and protection initiatives. However, there is no categorical focus on girls and boys

with disabilities. Explicit articulation of boys and girls with disabilities in plans and policies should be advocated to ensure that programmes are designed for them.

## 7.2 HUMANITARIAN ISSUES

### Education response to COVID-19 targets children with disabilities.

The Maldives Education Response Plan for COVID-19 identified several impacts of the pandemic to the education sector, including the weakening support provided by MoE to children with disabilities. To be able to continue the support during school closures, the Department of Inclusive Education identified 150 children with very severe SEN, including children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and autism from four schools in Malé, to be provided with a learning and stimulus package.<sup>134</sup> Available learning materials for literacy and mathematics, and gross and fine motor and sensory activities from local bookshops were also identified to assist the parents in teaching their child.

Another initiative is the implementation of online classes and televised lessons called ‘Telikilaas’. These modes of delivery for instruction are means to reach out to students, deliver lessons and mitigate learning loss due to school closures. Online classes use various digital platforms to carry out lessons, while the televised lessons feature different subject areas in different timeslots. Parents were also provided with a handbook to guide them in preventing risks associated with technology, such as cyberbullying.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>129</sup> *Violence against Children.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Maldives Education Sector Analysis.*

<sup>133</sup> Maldives, Gender Equality Act 2016, unofficial translation, 2016, [https://maldives.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Gender%20Equality%20Act\\_0.pdf](https://maldives.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Gender%20Equality%20Act_0.pdf).

<sup>134</sup> Ministry of Education, Maldives Education Response Plan for COVID-19, Malé, 2020.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*



Actively engage children with disabilities, their families and OPDs in all levels of policy and programme planning, development and implementation processes.

# 8

# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

## 8.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

### 1. Review the IE Policy and support its implementation with an inclusive education framework.

- a. The ongoing review of the IE Policy is an opportunity to articulate principles of education without promoting segregated forms of education. This should include a strategy to transition special education provisions into inclusive mainstream settings and consideration of new roles for special schools and special teachers.

Articulate how MoE will support the transition of all SEN Units and specialized schools into fully inclusive schools. Outline the support that will be provided for schools and education stakeholders to move towards a more inclusive education system. Commit to abolish outdated segregative and discriminatory practices.

- b. The use of WG questions in identifying and measuring disability must also be stipulated to unify identification, data collection and monitoring of initiatives.

- c. A framework for inclusive education implementation can be developed to serve as the foundation for actual practice. The framework should not only articulate strategies but also the values that underpin inclusion. This can go hand in hand and provide an overarching framework to existing guidelines, such as the Inclusive Education Guidelines and Adaptations to Support the Implementation of the National Curriculum.

### 2. Strengthen coordination of disability-inclusive education.

There is a lack of strong collaboration between departments and ministries and across levels within the system. Even though the roles of agencies in the development of disability-inclusive education were clearly defined in policy documents, there was no articulated inter-ministerial body for cross-sectoral coordination on disability issues. Collaboration between different departments and ministries is weak and collaboration between different levels is challenging due to the topography of Maldives and limitations in technology. This makes the implementation of policy challenging.

Establish a cross-sectoral committee responsible for the implementation of inclusive education in the country. The committee should have members from agencies, departments and ministries responsible for education, health, social welfare and justice at the minimum. The committee can clarify the role of each ministry and department in meeting the goals of the country for disability-inclusive education and help integrate disability-inclusive programming into plans and budgets of relevant agencies. The committee can also serve as a coordinating body for planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and policies, as well as provide recommendations for policy development.

### 3. Build capacity of the teaching force.

Policy documents mention the need to enhance teacher competency on inclusive education but provide little input on the extent to which in-service teacher training and pre-service teacher education programmes are to support the government workforce, in particular teachers and school leaders, in strengthening knowledge, attitudes and practices critical for disability-inclusive education.

Assess the gaps in teacher education (both pre-service and in-service), including teacher education service providers and programmes, in teaching inclusive education across all subjects and develop a strategic plan to address the gaps identified.

### 4. Improve data on children with disabilities.

- a. Currently, there are no systems in place at the central or regional level to monitor children's learning progress and the professional development needs of teachers and requisite support services and equipment to respond to the learning needs of children with disabilities. Ensure these are integrated into MEMIS.

- b. Monitoring tools for data gathering, integrated into existing systems, on children with disabilities included in mainstream settings need to be developed to gather more information for policymaking and programming. Aside from gathering data on the functional ability of the child, it would be beneficial to gather information on the barriers children experience in schools and the resources available to manage these barriers.
- c. Assess how SIQAAF is being used in schools, the extent of its integration in school processes and its impact on improving access to high-quality education for all learners, including children with disabilities.
- d. Conduct capacity building activities for monitoring and evaluation within various levels of MoE.
- e. Align MFIE and corresponding data collection activities with existing data collection mechanisms such as SIQAAF and MEMIS, particularly if the goal is to mainstream inclusive education as part of the culture, policies and practices of all schools. Integrate the data collected for monitoring inclusive education programmes into MEMIS.
- f. Utilize information gathered from assessing children with disabilities to improve teaching and learning processes instead of using them as determinants of education provision.

### 5. Strengthen the coordination mechanism and improve support services.

- a. Coordination mechanisms remain a challenge especially with the geographical difficulties of island nations such as Maldives.

Develop a strong coordination mechanism between essential services such as education and health across atolls, local communities and



national government agencies. Define coordination processes, outline the flow of information and mutual support, and articulate roles and accountabilities in policies and implementation documents. An efficient coordination mechanism will improve referral systems, delivery of services and data collection processes that feed into programme planning, monitoring and assessment.

- b. Strengthen the function of CBE through building the capacity of CBE workers and teachers in screening for disability, referral of intervention services and inclusive teaching strategies for preschool children with disabilities. CBE centres are the first education institutions that cater to children with disabilities and should be maintained in all islands and atolls that have no public schools to keep them accessible to children with disabilities.

## **6. Build capacity of relevant stakeholders and increase participation of persons with disabilities.**

- a. The diminishing authority and disenfranchisement of local councils, likely due to the Decentralization Act 2010, affected community-based interventions and support for children with disabilities. Build the capacity of all education stakeholders at all levels (such as parents, teachers, school administrators, IE coordinators, local councils and policymakers) on inclusive principles and rights-based perspective of disability to improve education service planning and delivery.
- b. The responsibilities of policymakers and key leadership positions in the system identified in policy focus on their managerial role and not on their role in vision building and developing a shared understanding of inclusive education and reform that would lead to change in management.

- c. Regional capacity needs to be strengthened to be able to provide adequate support for disability inclusion in schools, particularly those far from the capital city. The reactivation of the teacher resource centre can be an opportunity to align its role as provider of technical support to schools.
- d. Principals still lack awareness of the IE Policy and inclusive leadership practices defined in the policy are not translated into action. Principals were reported to have refused admission of children with disabilities in their schools, referring them to another school. Principals do not think it is their responsibility to arrange for professional development activities in response to teachers' training needs.
- e. Actively engage children with disabilities, their families and OPDs in all levels of policy and programme planning, development and implementation processes. They should have active involvement in decision-making processes.

## **7. Apply the principles of universal design in building school facilities and infrastructure.**

Strengthen guidelines for accessibility and maintenance of newly constructed school buildings and facilities by ensuring the principles of universal design are embedded and incorporating accessible safety protocols for emergency preparedness.

## **8. Expand provision of accessible learning materials.**

In education planning and budgeting, articulate and prioritize the provision of accessible learning materials and adaptive tools to children with disabilities in hard-to-reach areas to ensure that they are not forgotten. Accessible learning materials and adaptive tools support delivery of the curriculum and their presence or absence



means inclusion or exclusion for many children with disabilities, especially in remote learning during school closures.

### 9. **Strengthen mechanisms for prevention and response to school-related gender-based violence.**

Advocate for explicit articulation in legislation of protection of children with disabilities against all forms and degree of violence and discrimination. Develop clear protocols for safe and accessible reporting of and response to school-related gender-based violence. Include children with disabilities, their families and OPDs in the development of these protocols. Embed awareness on school-related gender-based violence in the national curriculum, including pre-service and in-service training programmes.

## 8.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

### 1. **Advocate for full inclusion in education of children with disabilities regardless of the degree of disability.**

While shifting mindsets and changing practices towards disability inclusion in education can be difficult, sharing knowledge and building awareness on international good practices in inclusive education is a good start. These practices are often founded on rights-based education and utilize principles of universal design in disability-related programming. Provide evidence or models that demonstrate how children with mild to severe disabilities learn in the same class as children without disabilities to present a possibility that people can advocate for and demand from the government.

### 2. **Strengthen the capacity of all stakeholders.**

Strengthen the capacity of parents, community, school administrators, teachers,

OPDs and government leaders on disability-inclusive principles to be able to provide relevant technical inputs on identifying barriers and solutions that improve the learning experience of children with disabilities.

### 3. **Support the government in building coordination mechanisms.**

Support the government to improve support services for children with disabilities and their families.

## 8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

### 1. **Review how inclusive leadership can be leveraged in advancing disability-inclusive education.**

- Conduct further research on the practice of inclusive leadership within the education system. Identify challenges, successes and recommendations that can strengthen inclusive leadership in the system.
- Review the available professional development programmes for school leaders against the competencies they must have to be able to support the development of inclusive learning environments for all learners.
- Examine vertical coordination systems put in place to support inclusive education in schools, determine gaps and develop recommendations for improvement.

### 2. **Review the teacher education curriculum and training.**

Review the pre-service teacher education curriculum and in-service teacher training programmes to include competencies key to teaching in diverse environments in alignment to the social model of disability across all subjects.

**3. Evaluate the incentive system for special educators.**

Evaluate the special educator incentive system as this may perpetuate the perspective that teaching children with disabilities is an extra responsibility that needs to be rewarded. Incentivize school-based professional development and sharing knowledge between teachers and special educators.

**4. Review existing teacher training materials.**

Ensure existing teacher training materials include fundamental concepts of equitable inclusive education and practical strategies teachers can easily apply in their classrooms. Build the capacity of teachers on the use of adaptation and differentiation guidelines for children with complex learning profiles. Organize professional learning communities for teachers to develop a support mechanism in the implementation of the IE guidelines and adaptations.

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This country profile on Maldives was developed as part of a regional mapping study on disability-inclusive education commissioned by the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia. It aims to provide a snapshot of the key policies, practices and strategies implemented from 2010 to 2020 to ensure children with disabilities learn in inclusive settings in Maldives. This profile focuses on the country's progress in four domains of an inclusive education system: (1) Enabling Environment, (2) Demand, (3) Service Delivery, and (4) Monitoring and Measuring Quality. Cross-cutting issues such as gender and humanitarian situations are also addressed in this document, although not in great depth. More information on the methodology and theoretical framework underpinning the mapping study can be found in the full mapping report, *Mapping of Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in South Asia*.



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