



# REMOVING BARRIERS TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES (EIE)

Accessibility Audit Toolkit for Organisations of  
Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and Humanitarian  
Actors working in partnership

Removing Barriers to Inclusive Education in Emergencies (EIE): Accessibility Audit Toolkit for Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and Humanitarian Actors working in partnership

Inclusion International and the International Disability Alliance's tool development to support the inclusion of children with disabilities in education in emergencies was funded by Education Cannot Wait, the global fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises in the United Nations.



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# Background

## Introduction

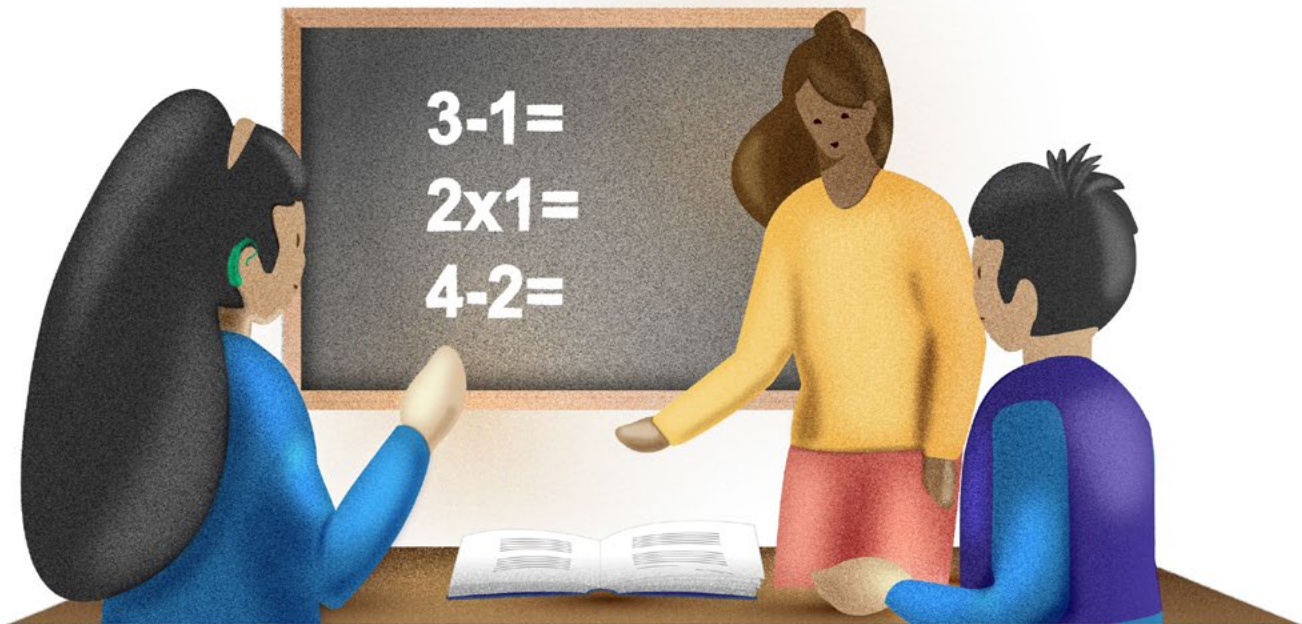
This toolkit supports Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and humanitarian actors to work together to remove barriers to education in emergencies (EiE).

This toolkit is a practical resource that organisations can use to audit accessibility and remove the barriers that exclude children with disabilities during a crisis.

The tools for partnership in this toolkit were developed in response to the needs of humanitarian actors and OPDs working together to respond to humanitarian crises in Colombia and Niger. OPDs and humanitarian actors working together in these contexts found that the first challenge they typically face is responding to barriers related to **physical inaccessibility and transportation issues and teacher knowledge** about inclusion. This resource focuses on these two themes, giving organisations the tools.

These tools walk the users through the assessment of the barriers step-by-step, and provide specific strategies and actions to take to remove those barriers.

The tools are designed to use the different but complementary knowledge and skills of both OPDs and humanitarian actors, working together to ensure a more comprehensive assessment and action plan.



## How do Emergencies Impact Children with Disabilities?

Populations around the world, including people with disabilities, face barriers created by upheaval, uncertainty and war. While in some cases this is due to political or social unrest or war, in other places it is due to climate change that can threaten physical safety and livelihoods.

## An emergency can be a result of:

- A natural disaster (i.e., floods, earthquakes).
- A humanitarian emergency (i.e., severe, and life-threatening situation where many people require urgent aid - like a famine or a war).
- A protracted crisis (i.e., characterized by their longevity (lasting 5+ years) and often involve deep-rooted issues like conflict, weak governance, and long-term displacement).

For children living through a crisis, education is often interrupted or prevented - and children with disabilities are even more likely to face heightened barriers to education in the face of an emergency. Even in an emergency situation, children with disabilities can (and do!) attend school, despite facing the following challenges that create additional barriers to education:

• **Insecurity and Conflict:** Insecurity in a territory, including armed conflict, attacks by armed groups, or the presence of mines, can make travel unsafe for students and teachers, force schools to close or force education systems to give preference to online classes (often inaccessible to children with disabilities).<sup>1</sup>

• **Displacement:** Humanitarian crises, such as migration and armed conflict, force families into constant movement, making consistent school attendance difficult for all children and especially for children<sup>2</sup> with disabilities.

• **Environmental Challenges:** Environmental issues like floods or extreme heat severely impact school access and attendance.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to note that the experience of education in emergencies will look different based on the context the emergency is occurring in. "School" as a physical space for a child with a disability living through an emergency could look like a purpose built school, a different community building, an outdoor classroom, or a tent. It could be in their home community, in a host community, in a camp setting, or in another setting unique to their context. Regardless of

1 Amaka Theresa Oriaku EMORDI PhD, Hope Amoge Ikedinma, & Ibukunoluwa Ruth Olufemi. (2024). School-Hedging and Out-of-School: Explaining the Role of Insecurity, and Terrorism in the Contemporary Nigeria. *Social Science Journal for Advanced Research*, 4(3), 58–67. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12158716>

2 Displacement and Education: The challenge of accessibility for IDP children worldwide, [https://researchinginternaldisplacement.org/short\\_pieces/displacement-and-education-the-challenge-of-accessibility-for-idp-children-worldwide/](https://researchinginternaldisplacement.org/short_pieces/displacement-and-education-the-challenge-of-accessibility-for-idp-children-worldwide/)

3 Kearney, C. A., Ellis, K., & Arcaina, V. J. (2024). Climate change injustice and school attendance and absenteeism: proximal and distal ecological links. *Frontiers in Education*. Vol 9 – 2024. <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/education/articles/10.3389/educ.2024.1455430>

where education happens during a crisis, the barriers that children with disabilities face trying to access school and trying to be included in the classroom are relatively similar regardless of context.

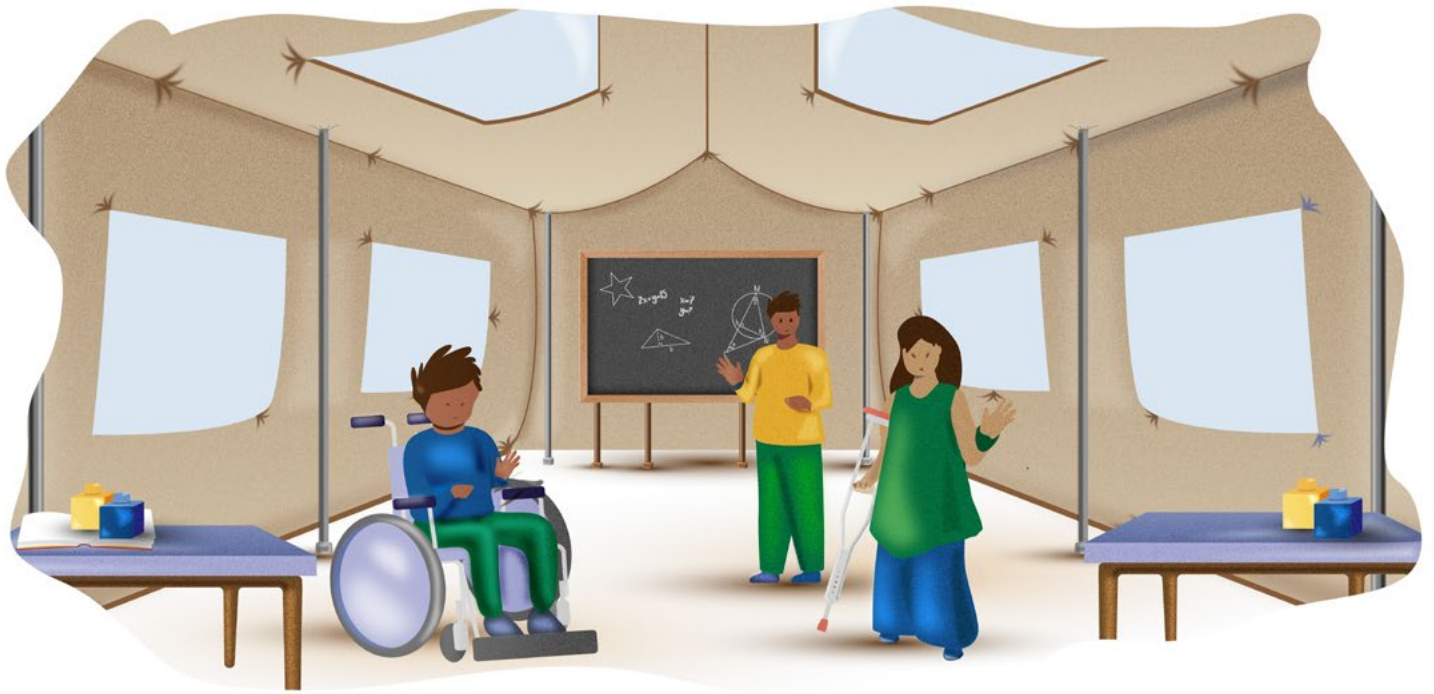
In any emergency setting, new realities both amplify existing barriers that exist for children with disabilities - for example, barriers to learning in the classroom as a result of a lack of knowledge about inclusive education among teachers - and also create new barriers that need to be overcome for children with disabilities to access their right to an inclusive education in emergency contexts.

Barriers for children with disabilities trying to access their right to inclusive education exist during all phases of an emergency, and it is important that humanitarian actors and OPDs work together from the earliest stages to identify and remove barriers.

Humanitarian actors and OPDs will work together in 3 key stages: before, during and after an emergency.

- **Before:** prevention and preparedness, where they take action to reduce the potential impact of a bad situation.
- **During:** disaster response and recovery.
- **After:** reconstruction.

OPDs, children with disabilities, and the families of children with disabilities are **always to be consulted**, at every stage, even if their roles and contributions might differ depending on the stage. Listening to their experiences is essential for identifying barriers and taking action to remove them.



# What should Education in Emergencies look like?

Governments and other stakeholders are obligated to guarantee formal and non-formal education, including early learning and skills development to all children, at all times - **emergency situations are not an exception.**

“All children” always includes children with disabilities, whose needs must be taken into consideration in education in all contexts - including education in emergencies.

Human rights obligations require that in all countries and in all contexts - emergency or otherwise - education must always be inclusive.

Inclusive education means that all children, whether they have a disability or not, learn together with peers in the same age group, in the same school, in their local community. This is a fundamental right guaranteed by international law, specifically by Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its General Comment N°4.<sup>4</sup>

“Local community” in this context refers to the area where the child is living at any given time. While in an emergency context this often won't be a child's home community, the right is fulfilled if they are accessing an inclusive education with peers of their age in the area where they are currently living.

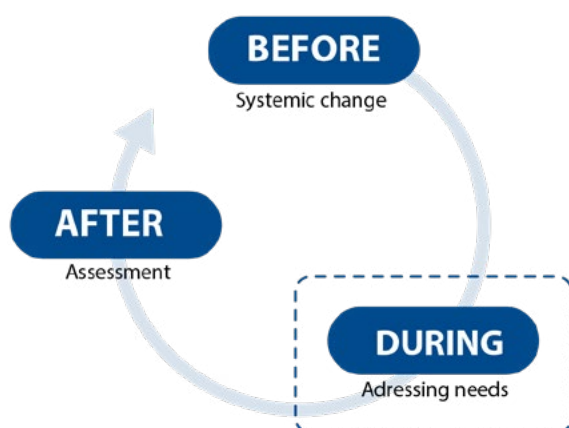
Too often, the word “inclusion” is confused with the idea of simply placing a child with a disability into a regular school; this is called **integration**. Placing a child in a regular school/class without making the necessary changes to support full inclusion often leads to failure and withdrawal from school. Inclusion is different. It means transforming the entire education system so that every child can experience full participation in learning and feel a sense of belonging. It is the only way to achieve quality education for all learners, no matter who they are or where they are located.

<sup>4</sup> General comment No. 4 on Article 24 - the right to inclusive education, Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-4-article-24-right-inclusive>

For children with disabilities living in an emergency context, they may be going to school in a system that was inclusive before new barriers were created by the emergency, or they may be trying to access school in a context where the school system was not inclusive to begin with.

Even in the case of school systems that were not delivering inclusive education prior to the crisis, there are still steps that can be taken during an emergency that will help that school system work towards delivering inclusive education.

While it will not be feasible for a school system facing an emergency to deliver on reforms to transform into a fully inclusive system while managing a crisis, OPDs and humanitarian actors supporting the delivery of education in emergencies can use their expertise to help schools advance towards inclusion through key actions spread across the 3 stages of an emergency:



## 1. BEFORE THE CRISIS

### Systemic Change

Inclusion requires transforming the education system so that all learners are well-supported to learn, advance, and achieve. This means guaranteeing that students can access education and receive the specific help they need, such as communication support or adapted learning materials. When humanitarian actors and OPDs begin engaging in education delivery prior to a crisis, the pre-planning and risk reduction stage can help lay the groundwork for including children with disabilities in education, even in an emergency.

### OPDs and Humanitarian Actors can work together before a crisis to:

- **Plan and implement:** Collaborate to strengthen inclusive education systems and develop contingency and disaster-risk reduction plans.
- **Identify Barriers:** Map physical, institutional, and attitudinal barriers in advance to ensure targeted resource allocation.
- **Prepare:** ensure assistive devices (e.g. wheelchairs, white canes) and accessible materials are pre-positioned in contingency plans.

## 2. DURING THE CRISIS:

### Addressing Emergencies

The rights of children with disabilities do not stop when a crisis occurs. In emergency contexts, accessibility is a precondition for all humanitarian response.

#### OPDs and Humanitarian Actors work together to:

- **Ensure access:** take immediate action to maintain educational continuity during displacement or insecurity.
- **Create safe spaces:** ensure temporary learning facilities and child-friendly spaces are safe, inclusive and accessible environments.
- **Provide Support:** ensure mental health and psychosocial support is provided to all children, including those with disabilities and their families.

## 3. AFTER THE CRISIS:

### Assessment and Planning to Rebuild

It is important to assess what worked well during the emergency response, what can be improved, and determine what are the opportunities and barriers to “build back better”, ensuring changes lead to more equitable, high quality, and inclusive systems.

#### OPDs and Humanitarian Actors work together to:

- **Evaluate:** assess the education provided during the emergency to determine what worked and what requires improvement.
- **Inform Decision-Making:** use gathered data (disaggregated by age, gender, and disability) to inform better decision-making for future responses.

The tools included in this resource guide OPDs and humanitarian actors through the partnership to identify and remove barriers across these three stages of crisis.





# Working Together for Inclusive Education in Emergencies

## Identifying barriers to inclusive Education in Emergencies

Despite all efforts, children with disabilities are still excluded or segregated from school in many emergency contexts.

Children with disabilities, OPDs, and humanitarian actors have identified a diverse range of barriers that prevent children from accessing inclusive education in emergencies - **Barriers to access, physical barriers, institutional barriers, and attitudinal barriers.**

### Barriers to access

These prevent a child from physically reaching the school or officially enrolling. This includes difficulties with the journey to school, or administrative exclusion (for example, when school staff prevent a child with a disability from registering).

### Physical barriers

Physical barriers are things like inaccessible infrastructure (for example, schools with steps and no access ramps) and communication methods (for example, when children who are blind or Deaf are not given

information in a format or language they understand). When environments or information are not accessible, they create barriers to learning, preventing the child from participating meaningfully or understanding the curriculum.

### Institutional barriers

These barriers stem from policy gaps, lack of resources (such as a lack of accessible materials), or weak political will. These systemic failures often create barriers to progression, leaving children without opportunities to advance through levels of education.

### Attitudinal barriers

These include stigma, discrimination, and the devaluation of education for learners with disabilities, which discourage families and communities from prioritizing their schooling. Attitudinal barriers can come from teachers, other students, school administrators, other people in the community, and even families.

These barriers are often present simultaneously and can amplify one another, making their identification and assessment difficult.

Here are some examples of what these barriers might look like in an emergency situation:



## Barriers to access

These barriers prevent a child from physically reaching the school or officially enrolling. In emergency contexts, these are often the first obstacles families face.

### Barriers related to the journey (getting to school)

Access is often made difficult by poor roads and complex routes, including river crossings, and other blockers that might be present due to the impact of political instability or war (presence of checkpoints, new borders, etc.) or a natural disaster. When it exists, there are high transportation costs, and children with disabilities are sometimes denied transportation, especially in remote areas or due to safety concerns.

### Barriers related to displacement

Humanitarian crises force families into movement. Displacement makes consistent school attendance difficult, and children with disabilities are often left behind during evacuation or resettlement. For example, they may be living in a new area where school is far away, or they may have lost identification documents that schools need for registration when they left their home.

### Barriers related to enrolment (getting in)

Even if a child reaches a school, they may face administrative exclusion. This includes discriminatory enrolment policies where schools refuse “places” to children with disabilities. Schools may also have rigid requirements for disability certificates that may be impossible to obtain during a crisis.



### Barriers related to information and communication

Information barriers also prevent meaningful participation. This type of barrier includes the lack of material in indigenous languages; and when information and learning materials are not disseminated in multiple formats such as augmentative and alternative formats, sign language, Braille, or easy-to-read/plain language. Emergency warning systems (like sirens) that are not accessible to children with sensory impairments are another example of a communication barrier.

## Physical barriers

Physical accessibility is a precondition for inclusion. When students cannot physically reach the classroom or essential facilities, they cannot participate. Even when a child has accessed the school, physical barriers within the environment and communication methods can prevent them from participating.

### Barriers related to inaccessible learning and play spaces

Barriers include physical inaccessibility of school environments, temporary learning spaces and infrastructure, such as the lack of accessible classrooms, playgrounds, specialized furniture, accessible signage, and toilets. There is often a lack of Universal Design in the school infrastructure - in emergencies, Temporary Learning Spaces (TLS) are often constructed without considering these accessibility standards, replicating exclusion.



## Institutional barriers

These barriers stem from the lack of inclusive policies, or the existence of policies and regulations that undermine inclusive education. This might look like:

### Barriers related to policy gaps and lack of commitment

Weak political will to fully implement inclusive education policies and/or poor knowledge of existing policies and international legal standards are the most common type of institutional barrier to inclusive education. Sometimes, a policy has been implemented but there is a lack of effective supervision and accountability by the Ministry of Education. During a crisis, fragile cross-ministerial coordination (e.g., between Health and Education ministries) often worsens these gaps.

### Barriers related to existing exclusion/segregation practices

The existing education system may be set up in a way that allows, perpetuates or encourages excluding/segregating practices, such as the denial of places in schools for children with disabilities (that results in the creation of discriminatory enrolment policies) or supporting special schools/ classes for children with disabilities. These create barriers to inclusive education both before, during and after an emergency, unless they are addressed. In cases where a disability certificate is required to access education services and that process is managed by the social affairs or health systems, it might become more difficult for a child to access the support they need in school during an emergency due to fragile or non-existing cross-ministerial coordinating channels.

### Barriers related to financial limitations

A major institutional barrier is the insufficient allocation of budget. This occurs when financial resources are used to maintain segregated systems (like special schools) rather than funding inclusion in mainstream education (budgeting for reasonable accommodations and support services, etc.).



stereotypes, many times embedded in cultural norms. Stigma is a barrier to education because it influences how any person in an education system will behave towards a child with a disability.

## Attitudinal and social barriers

Attitudinal barriers are often among the most difficult to overcome because of how deeply they are entrenched in communities. Social and cultural practices influence behaviours, and only by engaging in social and behaviour change can attitudinal and social barriers be dismantled. Some examples of attitudinal and social barriers include:

### Stigma

Stigma is when a person is seen in a negative way due to a characteristic they have. In the case of children with disabilities, the characteristic is the impairment, but it can also be race, ethnicity, mother tongue, gender, or a combination of any of those. Stigma is made up of negative beliefs, labels and

### Discrimination

Discrimination happens when stigma, or negative attitudes and beliefs result in unfair behaviour or treatment of a person or group of people. Excluding children with disabilities from education or paying less to a person with a disability for a job (as compared to a person without a disability) are some examples of discrimination. **In an emergency, a person with a negative view of children with disabilities (stigma) might not be proactive in ensuring a child with a disability's access to education is respected.**

### Devaluation of Education

Some community beliefs devalue education for children with disabilities based on the perception (stigma) that it does not lead to future income opportunities.

# Tools for Removing Barriers

This resource guides OPDs and humanitarian actors through joint exercise to audit, assess, and take action towards removing barriers to education in emergencies (EiE).

These tools are designed to be used primarily DURING an emergency response, they allow partners to conduct technical audits of the specific physical, logistical, and safety barriers on the trip to school, as well as the institutional and attitudinal barriers within the learning environment.

The toolkit is divided into two areas where humanitarian actors and OPDs will encounter barriers to be addressed - the Trip to School, and at the School.

Each set contains two tools to be used in that setting - an audit tool to conduct an on-the-ground accessibility assessment to map barriers, and an action planning tool with specific steps and actions to remove the barriers identified.

Using the first tool, OPDs and humanitarian actors will collaborate to identify and map physical, institutional and attitudinal barriers to accessing school environments, which is essential for targeted resource allocation and site planning of temporary learning spaces, as well as recovery planning. Using the second tool, they will directly tackle pervasive issues like restrictive physical inaccessibility, high transportation costs, institutional policies for inclusion, lack of support in the classroom, and others - removing barriers and working towards more inclusive systems.



## **Set 1: Barriers on the Trip to School**

These tools address the physical, safety, and logistical barriers children face when traveling to learning spaces - a frequently neglected area in emergency planning.

### **Tool 1A - Assessment:**

How safe is the trip to school?

- **What is it:** A checklist for identifying physical obstacles (e.g., poor road conditions), safety risks (e.g., conflict, checkpoints), and environmental hazards children with disabilities may face on the journey to school.
- **How to use it:** OPDs and humanitarian actors use this jointly to map barriers on the ground.
- **Outcome:** Barriers are identified, partners have information needed for targeted resource allocation and action.

### **Tool 1B - How To:**

Removing Barriers for a Safe Trip to School

- **What is it:** A planning matrix that connects the barriers identified in Tool 1A with specific goals and actionable steps. It merges what we should aim to and practical actions for implementation into a single action plan.
- **How to use it:** Partners use this to plan and design interventions, such as organizing community-based accompaniment systems or ensuring transport allowances are provided.
- **Outcome:** Barriers are removed, making the journey to school safer for children with disabilities.



## **Set 2: Barriers to Accessibility in School**

These tools focus on the learning environment itself, ensuring that once a child arrives, they can enter, move around, and participate meaningfully at school.

### **Tool 2A - Assessment:** Realizing School Accessibility for All

- **What is it:** A comprehensive checklist to assess barriers inside the school gates, including physical infrastructure (latrines, ramps), classroom layout, and school culture (attitudes).
- **How to use it:** Humanitarian actors and OPDs conduct site visits to temporary learning spaces or schools to identify accessibility barriers.
- **Outcome:** Barriers in school are identified, partners have information needed for targeted resource allocation and action.

### **Tool 2B - How To:** Removing Barriers for In-School Accessibility

- **What is it:** An action-oriented guide that helps partners translate assessment data into concrete improvements. It covers actions such as applying Universal Design to temporary shelters or ensuring

emergency plans include evacuation procedures for children with disabilities.

- **How to use it:** Partners use this action plan to plan renovations, influence the construction of temporary spaces, to advocate for school policy changes, and to train staff.
- **Outcome:** Barriers are removed, better including children with disabilities in the school and in the classroom.

All of the tools in this toolkit focus on accessibility barriers that may be in place on the journey to school and at school. Removing accessibility barriers are a first step towards including all children in school, but only removing accessibility barriers is not sufficient to ensure that all children are fully included.

Removing barriers to learning - for example, barriers related to the lack of inclusive teaching practices or lack of inclusive curriculum - are outside of the scope of this toolkit, but will be the next step for OPDs and humanitarian actors working together on EiE after accessibility barriers are removed.

# Summary of Tools and Strategic Goals:

Tool	Title	User	Strategic Goal
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## Set 1: Travelling to School

<b>1A</b>	<b>Assessment: How safe is the trip to school?</b>	OPDs & Humanitarian Actors	<b>Identification of barriers</b>
<b>1B</b>	<b>Practical Actions for a safe trip to school</b>	OPDs & Humanitarian Actors	<b>Removing Barriers &amp; Driving systemic change</b>

## Set 2: School Accessibility

<b>2A</b>	<b>Assessment: Realizing School Accessibility</b>	OPDs & Humanitarian Actors	<b>Identification of barriers</b>
<b>2B</b>	<b>Practical Actions for School Accessibility</b>	OPDs & Humanitarian Actors	<b>Removing Barriers &amp; Driving systemic change</b>

# Tool 1A - Assessment Tool: How safe is the trip to school?

Use this tool to assess barriers that exist on the journey to school, and the impact of those barriers.

## How to Use:

Make the journey that children take to school themselves. Travel the same path that children do on their trip to school, noting any barriers you encounter in the form below. Undertake this audit at the same time as children are travelling to school, so you can speak to children and parents on their journey and hear directly about barriers and challenges they face.

**Instructions:** The questions below are designed to help users identify barriers during the trip to school.

- **“Completely”** means that it is already full barrier-free. The barrier may not have existed to begin with, or many actions may have already been taken towards removing the barrier. **No action is needed.**
- **“Somewhat”** means that the barrier is partially addressed, but needs improvement. Action is required to fully remove the barrier.
- **“Not at all”** means that there is a significant barrier in place - the issue has not been addressed. This is a priority for action.

# Tool 1A - Assessment Tool: How safe is the trip to school?

Key Areas and Questions for Reflection		Completely	Somewhat	Not at all
<b>Road Conditions and Pathways</b>	Are the routes to school (both primary pathways and surrounding areas) free from physical obstacles that could impede movement for all children, including those using wheelchairs or other mobility aids?			
	Are the surfaces of pathways and roads leading to school smooth and stable (free from challenges such as uneven terrain or poor road conditions)?			
	Are there safe crossing points for major roads or other hazards?			

Key Areas and Questions for Reflection		Completely	Somewhat	Not at all
Safety and Security	Are the routes to school free from risks related to conflict or violence (e.g., armed groups, checkpoints, harassment, exploitation, abuse)?			
	Are there safe corridors or monitored routes in place for children to reach learning spaces?			
	Do community-based protection or accompaniment systems exist to support children with disabilities during their journey?			
Geographic and Environmental Barriers	<b>Are the routes free from obstacles</b> (such as difficult river crossings) that pose barriers to safe and consistent school attendance?			
	Are the routes protected from possible <b>environmental hazards</b> (e.g., floods, extreme heat, or insecure areas) that make the journey unsafe?			
	Are shaded or sheltered communal spaces, appropriate for various climatic conditions, available along the journey or at the school premises, and are they accessible to all children?			

Key Areas and Questions for Reflection		Completely	Somewhat	Not at all
<b>Geographic and Environmental Barriers</b>	Have any additional barriers caused by natural hazards (e.g., floods, earthquakes, extreme weather events) or other emergency situations (e.g., conflict, displacement) been cleaned up or otherwise addressed by the respective authorities?			
<b>Transportation Availability and Accessibility</b>	Are the <b>distances</b> that children need to travel on the route to school appropriate?			
	Are there <b>available transportation</b> options for children who cannot walk to school, or for whom the distance is too great?			
	Are existing transportation options (e.g., buses, school vehicles) <b>physically accessible</b> for children with diverse disabilities (e.g., ramps for wheelchairs, secure seating)?			
	<b>Is information</b> about available transportation routes and schedules provided in <b>multiple accessible formats</b> (e.g., oral, print, sign language, easy-to-read, Braille, large print, audio, digital formats)?			

Key Areas and Questions for Reflection		Completely	Somewhat	Not at all
Transportation Costs	Have authorities successfully addressed <b>high transportation costs</b> that can create a financial barrier for families?			
	Are there <b>provisions or allowances</b> to help cover these costs for vulnerable families?			
Preparedness	Are <b>temporary learning facilities</b> or child-friendly spaces established in locations that are physically accessible and safe for all children?			
	Are <b>assistive devices</b> (e.g., wheelchairs, white canes) pre-positioned or readily available in contingency plans for emergency use, including facilitating movement to and from school or alternative sites?			
	Are <b>clear and accessible communication systems</b> , including early warning systems, in place for emergencies?			

<b>Key Areas and Questions for Reflection</b>		<b>Completely</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Not at all</b>
<b>Monitoring and data collection</b>	Are maps or assessments of children's journeys to school conducted regularly?			
	Are OPDs and families actively involved in conducting these assessments and identifying barriers?			
	Are children themselves directly consulted about their experiences and needs on the journey to school?			
	Is data collected about experiences of children on the journey to school disaggregated by age, gender, and disability type, to inform planning and resource allocation?			

## Companion Resource:

While speaking to children with disabilities and their families during your audit, you may encounter families who want to make their voices heard and advocate for more inclusive education in emergencies.

Share the companion resource **Your Voice Matters!**, a standalone tool for families, to support them in their advocacy.

<https://inclusion-international.org/resource/asking-for-a-safe-trip-to-school-advocacy-resource-for-families/>



# Tool 1B - Action Plan for a safe trip to school

**Instructions:** Based on the barriers identified in Tool 1A, use this table to define your goals and plan practical actions to remove them.

Theme	What is the Barrier?	A barrier-free experience would look like...	Practical Actions to Remove Barriers
<p><b>Geographic and Environmental Barriers</b></p>	<p>Extreme heat, or adverse weather conditions, or natural obstacles makes it difficult for children to travel to school.</p>	<p>Children having access to accessible shelters or shaded communal spaces appropriate for various climatic conditions along the journey to school.</p>	<p><b>Conduct “Walk-along” Assessments:</b> Partner with school authorities and children with disabilities to walk the commonly used paths to identify specific hazards (e.g., river crossings, areas prone to flooding).</p> <p><b>Design Accessible Shelters:</b> Work with schools to construct waiting areas that are not just covered, but accessible. In the design process, make sure shelters have ramped entries, firm ground surfaces (not mud/gravel), easy to understand and accessible signage indicating the shelter, and seating at different heights.</p> <p><b>Advocate for “build back better”:</b> During post-emergency reconstruction, provide technical advice to authorities to ensure that repaired infrastructure prioritises accessible design (e.g., curb cuts on repaired sidewalks) rather than replicating old barriers.</p>

Theme	What is the Barrier?	A barrier-free experience would look like...	Practical Actions to Remove Barriers
<p><b>Transportation</b></p>	<p>Transportation options are not physically accessible, costs are too high, and/or information is not in a format the transportation school is not a format children and parents can easily access or understand.</p>	<p>Accessible transportation options are available to all children who need them.</p> <p>Transportation schedules are clear and accessible.</p> <p>Financial barriers are removed for families of persons with disabilities.</p>	<p><b>Establish Financial Support Mechanisms:</b> Go beyond gathering data; establish a transportation option for children who need it. Additionally, actively advocate for the inclusion of disability-related transport costs in existing cash transfer programs. Example: Petition the Social Welfare department to provide a specific “transport allowance” for families where the cost of a taxi is the only safe option.</p> <p><b>Diversify Information Formats:</b> Convert transportation schedules and route maps into alternative formats. Example: Distribute audio announcements via local radio, print schedules including in large font/Braille, and use “easy-to-read” images for pick-up points. Communicate information directly to families of schoolchildren using SMS or other direct outreach.</p> <p><b>Guidance on Vehicle Accessibility:</b> Provide specific technical guidance to transport providers on “Accessible Vehicles.” Example: Demonstrate how to secure seats for children with mobility aids or how to install temporary ramps for school buses.</p>

Theme	What is the Barrier?	A barrier-free experience would look like...	Practical Actions to Remove Barriers
<p><b>Road Conditions and Pathways</b></p>	<p>Routes to school are unsafe, uneven, or blocked by physical obstacles (e.g., debris, poor infrastructure).</p>	<p>Routes are assessed for barriers.</p> <p>New or renovated infrastructure adopts Universal Design principles.</p> <p>Pathways have even, safe surfaces.</p>	<p><b>Create a “Barrier Map”:</b> Inventory problem areas and create a visual map of the route. Present this to local authorities with a priority list for repairs.</p> <p><b>Promote Universal Design (UD):</b> Provide written expert advice on UD to infrastructure teams. Universal Design means making things such as roads, sidewalks, transports and buildings so everyone can use them, no matter their age, ability, or situation—without needing special changes. Example: Specify that paths must be free from obstacles, have stable surfaces, and include safe crossing points at busy intersections.</p> <p><b>Community Maintenance:</b> Organize community groups to clear debris or obstacles from primary pathways used by children with disabilities, ensuring the “clear path” standard is met.</p>

Theme	What is the Barrier?	A barrier-free experience would look like...	Practical Actions to Remove Barriers
<p><b>Safety and Security</b></p>	<p>Children are exposed to risks from conflict, violence, or lack of protection mechanisms during their journey.</p>	<p>Community-based protection or accompaniment systems support children with disabilities.</p> <p>Proactive protection measures are in place for children at heightened risk of abuse or neglect.</p>	<p><b>Establish “Walking Buses”:</b> Create a neighbourhood protection system where vetted adults or “protection teams” accompany groups of children, ensuring those with disabilities are not left behind or harassed.</p> <p><b>Training on Abuse Prevention:</b> Educate frontline professionals (teachers, drivers, security staff) on the heightened risk of abuse faced by children with disabilities and how to identify non-verbal signs of distress.</p> <p><b>Designate “Safe Corridors”:</b> Work with local leaders to agree on and monitor specific routes declared as “safe corridors” for students, ensuring these routes are physically accessible.</p>

Theme	What is the Barrier?	A barrier-free experience would look like...	Practical Actions to Remove Barriers
<b>Preparedness</b>	Emergency plans exclude the support needs of children with disabilities, or displacement / insecurity disrupts education.	<p>Accessibility is incorporated into all school emergency and evacuation plans.</p> <p>Early warning systems are accessible.</p> <p>Educational continuity strategies (e.g., virtual/mobile learning) ensure learners with disabilities are not left behind.</p>	<p><b>Inclusive Evacuation Planning:</b> Work with local schools to revise emergency plans. Example: Ensure evacuation routes are wheelchair accessible and that “assistive devices” (like white canes) are listed as essential items to be saved/transported during a crisis.</p> <p><b>Accessible Early Warning:</b> Ensure communication systems reach everyone. Example: Combine sirens (auditory) with flashing lights or flag systems (visual) and SMS alerts (text) so children with different impairments receive the warning. Ensure information is always using easy to understand language.</p> <p><b>Continuity of Learning:</b> When displacement occurs, ensure temporary learning spaces (TLS) are located in physically accessible areas (flat ground, near accessible latrines) and that virtual/radio learning options are accessible to blind or deaf students.</p>

Theme	What is the Barrier?	A barrier-free experience would look like...	Practical Actions to Remove Barriers
<b>Monitoring and Data Collection</b>	Lack of data on barriers prevents effective planning and resource allocation.	Up-to-date information on transportation requirements is available. Evidence is used to inform planning.	<p><b>Participatory Evidence Gathering:</b> Facilitate “photovoice” or testimony sessions where children and families document barriers themselves.</p> <p><b>Strategic Advocacy:</b> Present this evidence to the Education Cluster or Ministry planning sessions. Demand that all data collected on school journeys is disaggregated by age, gender, and disability type to reveal the true scale of exclusion.</p>



## Section 2

# SCHOOL ACCESSIBILITY

## Tool 2A - Assessment of In-School Accessibility

Use this tool to assess barriers that exist once the child has arrived at school, and the impact of those barriers.

### How to Use:

Begin your audit outside the school gates. Walk through the school and look at physical spaces, noting barriers that are in place. Complete this audit on a day that school is in session, so you can speak to children, teachers, and administrators about barriers that exist. Make a point to hear from children and school staff about attitudinal barriers, and from school staff and parents about institutional barriers.

Consider connecting with some families of children who are out of school, who can provide more information about the barriers that may be in place that keep their child from attending school.

**Instructions:** The questions below are designed to help users identify barriers at school.

- **“Completely”** means that the condition is already fully barrier-free. The barrier may not have existed to begin with, or many actions may have already been taken towards removing the barrier. No action is needed.
- **“Somewhat”** means that the barrier has been partially addressed, but needs improvement. Action is required to fully remove the barrier.
- **“Not at all”** means that there is a significant barrier in place - the issue has not been addressed. This is a priority for action.

Key Areas and Questions for Reflection		Completely	Somewhat	Not at all
<b>Physical Accessibility of the Built Environment (School Grounds and Facilities)</b>	Are all main pathways leading to and within the school clear of obstacles and evenly surfaced?			
	Are there ramps or alternative accessible routes for entrances, exits, and between different levels or buildings?			
	Are all doorways (into the school and into classrooms and other common spaces) wide enough for wheelchair access throughout the school?			
	Are corridors and common areas spacious enough to allow for easy movement and turning for wheelchair users?			
	Is adequate lighting provided in all areas, including pathways, classrooms, and common spaces?			
	Are floor surfaces non-slip and stable?			
	Are Universal Design principles used when building or changing school facilities to make them easy and comfortable for all learners to use (for example: classrooms, playgrounds, toilets, canteens, ramps and wide doors for wheelchair users, clear signs, good lighting, adjustable desks, and chairs suitable for both left- and right-handed learners)?			

<b>Key Areas and Questions for Reflection</b>		<b>Completely</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Not at all</b>
<b>Classrooms and Learning Spaces</b>	Are classrooms designed with sufficient space, flexible layouts and adjustable furniture to accommodate various learning needs, including wheelchair users?			
	Is the classroom environment optimised for sound clarity by reducing background noise and reverberations, including using sound-absorbing materials (e.g., curtains, carpets, wall panels) used to minimise echoes?			
	Are well-resourced support services available to help schools and teachers provide inclusive learning (for example: trained support staff, training for teachers, learning support materials, assistive technology, counselling services, and guidance for supporting learners with different needs)?			
	Are assistive technologies and devices (e.g., large print, Braille, tactile aids, audio resources, hearing aids, specialised computer software, augmentative and/or alternative communication tools) readily available and provided based on individualised educational plans?			

<b>Key Areas and Questions for Reflection</b>		<b>Completely</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Not at all</b>
<b>Inclusive Attitudes and Practices (School Culture)</b>	Do children with disabilities and children without disabilities work and play together at school?			
	Does the school actively work to challenge negative attitudes, stigma, and misconceptions about disability within the school community and wider society?			
	Is there a clear commitment to fostering a culture of respect, cooperation, and inclusion among all staff and students?			
	Are awareness campaigns conducted to promote a rights-based approach to disability and celebrate diversity?			
	Are families and students with disabilities themselves given an active role in the process of shaping the culture of the school?			
	Are informed consent procedures consistently respected for all students, especially those with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, when making decisions that affect them?			
	Are efforts made to recruit persons with disabilities as staff, including teachers, to serve as role models and experts?			
	Is peer support encouraged among students (both with and without disabilities)?			

Key Areas and Questions for Reflection		Completely	Somewhat	Not at all
<b>Institutional and Policy Framework</b>	Are there clear school level policies that prevent children (and specifically children with disabilities) from being turned away at enrollment? ("Zero rejection policies") Are there clear school level policies and practices that promote non-discrimination?			
	Does the school ensure that students who need reasonable accommodations receive them through clear, written support plans tailored to their individual needs (for example: extra time in assessments, modified learning materials, assistive technology, flexible seating, communication support, or physical access adjustments)?			
	Does the school review its policies to ensure they explicitly affirm the right to access and inclusion for all students?			
	Is adequate budget allocation dedicated to accessibility and inclusion, including universal design, reasonable accommodations, provision of support teachers/teaching assistants and assistive devices?			

Key Areas and Questions for Reflection		Completely	Somewhat	Not at all
<b>Institutional and Policy Framework</b>	Does the school work together with relevant external ministries (such as Health, Transport, and Social Services) and other partners to support students' learning, health, wellbeing, and access needs in a coordinated way (for example: medical support, mental health services, transport to school, and family or community support)?			
	Are OPDs, parents, and community members actively engaged in education planning, implementation, and monitoring?			
	Are accountability mechanisms in place for families to challenge discriminatory practices?			
<b>Emergency Settings and Temporary Facilities</b>	Are students, teachers, staff, and emergency responders trained on inclusive evacuation procedures?			
	Are accessibility needs considered and incorporated into school emergency and evacuation plans?			
	Are temporary learning facilities and child-friendly spaces designed and set up to be accessible to all children?			

Key Areas and Questions for Reflection		Completely	Somewhat	Not at all
<b>Emergency Settings and Temporary Facilities</b>	Are strategies in place for maintaining educational continuity for children with disabilities during displacement, insecurity, or environmental challenges (e.g., virtual learning, mobile support)?			
	Are assistive devices pre-positioned in contingency plans (e.g., wheelchairs, crutches, white canes, hearing aids) for emergency use?			

## Companion Resource:

While speaking to children with disabilities and their families during your audit, you may encounter families who want to make their voices heard and advocate for more inclusive education in emergencies.

Share the companion resource **Your Voice Matters!**, a standalone tool for families, to support them in their advocacy.



<https://inclusion-international.org/resource/asking-for-a-safe-trip-to-school-advocacy-resource-for-families/>

# Tool 2B - Action Plan for School Accessibility

**Instructions:** Based on the barriers identified in tool 2A, use this table to define your goals and plan practical actions to remove them.

Theme	What is the Barrier?	What are we trying to achieve (goal)?	Practical actions towards the goal
<b>Physical Accessibility of the Built environment</b>	School grounds, facilities, and new construction projects lack Universal Design, making them inaccessible to children with physical disabilities.	<p>Universal Design principles are applied to all new construction and modifications.</p> <p>Accessibility applies to all facilities (canteens, WASH, playgrounds, temporary learning spaces)</p> <p>The journey to school and Temporary Learning Spaces are considered in the infrastructure planning.</p>	<p><b>Promote Universal Design:</b> Ensure infrastructure professionals are knowledgeable about Universal Design principles. If possible, ensure infrastructure teams and contractors are trained on UD principles before construction begins. Example: Require contractors to demonstrate how they will install ramps with correct gradients (not too steep) and accessible latrines before contracts are signed.</p> <p><b>Monitor accessibility:</b> Work with local authorities to ensure construction plans include all accessibility for all spaces, including Temporary Learning Spaces (TLS). Example: Conduct site visits with persons with disabilities and families to test accessibility.</p> <p><b>Address accessibility in both TLS and the journey to school:</b> Convene local government and transport representatives to discuss and resolve barriers regarding the journey to school and accessibility in the Temporary Learning Spaces.</p>

Theme	What is the Barrier?	What are we trying to achieve (goal)?	Practical actions towards the goal
<p><b>Classroom and learning spaces</b></p>	<p>Classrooms are rigid, crowded, or noisy, and furniture is not adaptable, preventing effective learning and participation.</p>	<p>Classrooms have sufficient space and flexible layouts for mobility devices.</p> <p>Furniture is adjustable and suitable for different needs (e.g., left-handed).</p> <p>Acoustic environments are optimized for sound clarity.</p> <p>In-class support is provided to children who need it.</p>	<p><b>Create flexible layouts:</b> Work with authorities to design flexible classroom layouts that support varying instructional strategies. Example: Leave wide aisles between desks for wheelchair users and create “quiet corners” with soft mats for children who may be overwhelmed by sensory stimulation.</p> <p><b>Procure Adaptable Furniture:</b> Instead of standard fixed chairs, procure or advocate for mixed furniture types that include adjustable furniture (desk/chairs) to suit different students.</p> <p><b>Explore Low-Cost Acoustic Improvements:</b> Implement measures to improve acoustics (e.g., sound-absorbing materials) to address sensory impairments. <b>Example:</b> In temporary shelters with tin roofs, install locally sourced reed mats or fabric ceilings to dampen the noise of rain and reduce echoes.</p>

Theme	What is the Barrier?	What are we trying to achieve (goal)?	Practical actions towards the goal
<p><b>Inclusive Attitudes and Practices (School Culture)</b></p>	<p>Stigma, misconceptions, and a lack of respect create an unwelcoming environment for children with disabilities.</p>	<p>The school actively challenges negative attitudes and stigma.</p> <p>A culture of respect, cooperation, and inclusion is visible.</p> <p>Staff are trained to support the evolving capacities of children with disabilities.</p> <p>Peer support systems are in place.</p>	<p><b>Rights-Based Staff Training:</b> Train teachers to recognise capacity and learning styles rather than disability.</p> <p><b>Strengthen peer support and informed decision making:</b> Support the school in establishing inclusive practices like peer support systems and informed decision-making processes. Example: Encourage practices where students without disabilities support peers with disabilities during breaks, play, and evacuation drills.</p> <p><b>Inclusive representation:</b> Encourage recruitment of staff with disabilities.</p>

Theme	What is the Barrier?	What are we trying to achieve (goal)?	Practical actions towards the goal
<b>Institutional and Policy Framework</b>	Policies allow for rejection or discrimination, budget for inclusion is insufficient, and OPDs are excluded from planning.	<p>School policies explicitly uphold non-discrimination and zero-rejection.</p> <p>Reasonable accommodations are enforced tailored to individual needs.</p> <p>Budgets are specifically allocated for accessibility and assistive devices.</p> <p>OPDs and parents are actively engaged in planning and monitoring.</p>	<p><b>Enforce non-discrimination:</b> Review education legislation and enforce school level non-discrimination policies and establish clear grievance mechanisms. Example: Create a safe, anonymous channel for parents to report if a school refuses enrollment based on disability.</p> <p><b>Accountability:</b> Use accountability mechanisms (including legal advice) to challenge discriminatory practices.</p> <p><b>Budgeting for accessibility:</b> Monitor budget allocations for Universal Design and assistive devices.</p> <p><b>Encourage Partnership and Active referral:</b> Ensure participation of OPDs and parents in Ministry and school-level planning. Refer families not currently in contact with the disability movement to local OPDs to reduce isolation.</p> <p><b>Disaggregated Data Collection:</b> Push for the collection of disability-disaggregated data to inform resource allocation.</p>

Theme	What is the Barrier?	What are we trying to achieve (goal)?	Practical actions towards the goal
<p><b>Emergency Settings and Temporary Facilities</b></p>	<p>Emergency plans exclude disability needs, temporary spaces are unsafe/inaccessible, and remote learning options leave children behind.</p>	<p>Emergency and evacuation plans incorporate specific accessibility requirements.</p> <p>Temporary Learning Spaces (TLS) and Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) are accessible.</p> <p>Educational continuity strategies (virtual/mobile) are accessible to all.</p> <p>Assistive devices are pre-positioned in contingency plans.</p>	<p><b>Inclusive Evacuation Drills:</b> Work with school authorities to revise emergency plans and train staff on inclusive evacuation procedures. <b>Example:</b> Ensure evacuation routes are flat and debris-free, and that teachers know how to support students with mobility aids or other impairments to evacuate the space safely.</p> <p><b>Continuity of Learning:</b> Ensure the design of temporary facilities allows access for all children and engage with Ministries to ensure virtual or mobile learning support meets accessibility requirements. <b>Example:</b> If radio lessons are used during displacement, ensure printed scripts or SMS summaries are delivered to students who are deaf or hard of hearing.</p> <p><b>Pre-position Assistive Devices:</b> Gather evidence and advocate for the inclusion of assistive devices (e.g., wheelchairs, white canes) in emergency stocks. <b>Example:</b> Ensure that replacement white canes, crutches, and hearing aid batteries are listed as essential items in the school’s disaster preparedness inventory.</p>