

TIP SHEET:

School disaster preparedness and management

DISABILITY INCLUSION KEY MESSAGES

When thinking about comprehensive school safety and school disaster management, it is crucial to remember the full diversity of school-aged children, and ensure that:

- ✓ School **facilities** are safe and accessible for all children with disabilities.
- ✓ School **disaster management procedures**, including school disaster committees, school disaster response plans, school disaster drills/simulations, and educational continuity plans must consider and respond to the specific needs of children with disabilities.
- ✓ **Out-of-school children**, including children with disabilities who are more likely to be out of school due to the barriers they face, also receive disaster risk reduction and resilience information.

THINGS TO DO TO ENSURE SCHOOL FACILITIES ARE SAFE AND ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL CHILDREN

Lack of accessible school facilities is a child protection risk. It results in children with disabilities being unable to attend school or being reliant on other people to help them move around the school – placing them in a position of reliance and vulnerability, and at risk of violence or abuse – or at risk of being left behind or injured during an emergency or evacuation. School facilities must be accessible.

- School infrastructure must be accessible and designed in line with universal design principles. Consider the following:
 - **Information accessibility:** Signage around the school should use large dark print (letters at least 10cm in size for viewing from a 3m distance, and 20cm for 10m distance). Place information boards within the school at a level that can be seen from seated height (between 75-90cm above the ground and maximum 180cm high). Use simple language. Display a map of the school, including the location of the evacuation safe area. Use simple language and clear pictures.
 - **Paths:** Firm, non-slip pathways should be a minimum of 90cm wide and clear of obstructions.
 - **Doors:** Doorways should be a minimum of 90cm wide. Use outward-opening doors with lever-style or easy-to-grab handles located at a height of 90cm above the ground. The colour of the doors and/or the doorframes should contrast with the wall.
 - **Ramps:** Have smooth, non-slip ramps with a maximum gradient of 1:12, at least 90cm wide, and with handrails at heights of 70cm and 90cm from the ramp level. Provide landing areas at the top and the bottom of the ramp, with a minimum flat space of 140cm x 140cm.
 - **Stairs:** If stairs are present, ensure that each step is no more than 15cm high, at least 30cm deep and 90cm wide. The edges of each step should be marked in a contrasting colour to make them easily visible.
 - **WASH facilities:** At least 10% of children’s toilets should be accessible. This requires a toilet cubicle with a clear area of 1.5m² to provide wheelchair users with enough circulation space to complete a full turn. Have a non-slip floor and a large, easy-to-use lock 90cm from the ground. Tap and toilet height must be appropriate for people with mobility restrictions and have easy-to-hold transfer rails. Have an accessible waste bin for menstrual hygiene management. Have lever-style tap handles that are easy-to-use for a person with limited grip strength.

- Identify and implement the required adaptations and retrofitting to make school infrastructure accessible. Work with local OPDs to conduct an accessibility audit of the school facilities as part of the school risk assessment process and implement any recommendations to improve accessibility.

THINGS TO DO TO ENSURE SCHOOL DISASTER MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES CONSIDER AND RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

- ✓ Awareness: Raise the awareness of teachers and students on disability inclusion, to ensure everyone at the school is aware of the need to implement school disaster management processes in an inclusive and accessible way.
- ✓ Capacity: Train teachers and other school personnel on how to communicate with people with diverse impairment types including deaf children and children with learning difficulties; how to guide blind or low-vision children; and how to safely assist the evacuation of children with mobility limitations or who are wheelchair users.
- ✓ Active participation: Children with disabilities must be included in school disaster management committees. If there are currently no students with disabilities who attend the school, consider nominating one of the committee members as an “inclusion champion” who has responsibility for ensuring the committee considers these issues. Consider inviting local Organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDs) to present or train the committee on disability inclusion.
- ✓ Ensure school emergency warning systems are accessible for all and use multiple communication formats so that children with various impairments can receive and understand the warning signal. Do not just use audio signals as this will not be accessible for those who are deaf or hard of hearing. Consult students with disabilities and their families, or local OPDs for their thoughts on appropriate warning methods.
- ✓ Conduct risk assessments that identify the needs of both males and females with disabilities and use that information to develop inclusive evacuation plans for schools. Ensure the school evacuation plan considers how students, staff and visitors with various impairments will safely evacuate, including what additional assistance children with disabilities might need, and who is responsible for providing that support. All students and school personnel should be involved in developing the plan, with specific consultations with male and female students with disabilities and their families, or if there are no children with disabilities currently enrolled, consult local OPDs to consider the needs of future students. All students and school personnel should be aware of the plan and their role in it.
- ✓ Conduct drills or simulations to specifically check the accessibility of the processes. Consider also inviting local OPDs to observe a school evacuation drill or simulation, as they may have recommendations to improve the accessibility and inclusiveness of the warning system or evacuation procedures.
- ✓ Ensure education continuity efforts consider inclusion and accessibility to provide uninterrupted, high-quality, and inclusive learning opportunities for all children affected by disasters by considering the following:
 - Assessing the humanitarian assistance needs of children with disabilities and their families, including linking children to disability service providers to replace lost or damaged assistive devices.
 - Temporary learning spaces must be accessible for all.
 - School facility damage assessments are an opportunity to assess accessibility and make recommendations for adaptations to improve accessibility when the school is repaired/renovated or reconstructed.

THINGS TO DO TO ENSURE OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN RECEIVE DISASTER RISK REDUCTION INFORMATION AND PARTICIPATE IN DISASTER PREPAREDNESS ACTIVITIES

Children with disabilities are often not enrolled in or attending school due to financial, physical, communication, attitudinal or policy barriers. This means they will be excluded from school-based disaster preparedness lessons and activities. Alternative methods to ensure out-of-school children are also aware of what to do in a disaster, and are also included in disaster preparedness activities, must be implemented.

- ☑ Awareness raising: Ensure children with disabilities, their families, and communities, receive information on the possible hazards which might affect them, the importance of evacuating early, what to do if they receive information that a disaster is imminent, the location of evacuation shelters, and their right to access shelter etc.
- ☑ Identify children with disabilities within the school population and local community. Link with local OPDs or disability service providers to help find children with disabilities who live in the area. Undertake outreach to them and their families. Consider providing options for children with disabilities and their families to participate in extra-curriculum DRR activities like disaster preparedness clubs. Ensure such activities are accessible and provide any adaptations or reasonable accommodations these individuals need such as transport or sign language interpretation to ensure they can actively participate.