



# Seen, Counted, Included

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

unicef   
for every child



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This version of the report has not been fully edited and has not been made fully accessible for readers with disabilities.

A fully edited and accessible version of the report will be available after 15 November 2021.







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## CHAPTER 1

# Every child has the right to be counted

Pacifique, 15, from Rwanda, was born with fragile bones and multiple impairments. “The tip is to have self-confidence,” he says. “I have not missed a single milestone in school. I am now in my third year of secondary school.” But he also knows that not all children like him are as fortunate. “I am thankful that I have supportive parents who did not hide me inside the house as some do when they have children like me. Although my body is disabled, my heart is not,” he says. “I know that I have value.”

Tung, 7, lives in central Viet Nam. Tung’s mother had heart disease and gave birth to him two months prematurely, which left him visually impaired. Since his birth, his parents have been doing everything in their power to nurture and support him. When Tung was 4, they enrolled him in an Inclusive Education Resource Centre, where he has been thriving ever since. He enjoys interacting with his teachers and classmates and participating in new activities. Tung has developed a keen sense of direction and can move about well, without support from others. He is now in grade 1, studying literature, math and music.

Kamilla, 16, is from Kazakhstan. In the autumn of 2018, she participated in a survey and admitted she had had thoughts of suicide within the previous two weeks. Kamilla was subsequently connected to a psychologist. Certain events in Kamilla’s life had led to her severe depression.

“After those events, I felt like everything was quiet. Like life was just passing, and it was not interesting. Then, little by little, I began to communicate with my mother, we became closer. I found friends. I entered college and had a lot of friends. Things became better and more interesting with time.”

Around the world there are nearly 240 million children like Pacifique, Tung and Kamilla. Like every other child in the world, each of them has the right to be nurtured and supported through responsive care and education, to receive adequate nutrition and social protection, and to enjoy play and leisure time. Too often, however, such rights are denied. The reasons vary: stigma, lack of accessible services, institutionalization, physical barriers. But the consequences are sadly consistent. When excluded from society, their chances to survive and thrive are diminished along with their prospects for a bright future.

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





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

This report is testimony to these efforts. It offers evidence crucial to decision-making to fulfil obligations, both moral and legal, to give every child an equal chance in life. The largest compilation of statistics on children with disabilities to date, it builds on data from more than 1,000 sources. It documents the scale and characteristics of children with disabilities and begins to shed light on the types of adversity they often face. It includes internationally comparable data from 42 countries and covers more than 60 indicators of child well-being – from nutrition and health, to access to water and sanitation, protection from violence and exploitation, education and life satisfaction. It also presents global and regional estimates of children with disabilities, drawn from data from over 100 countries.

The report's objective is to promote the use of these data to make children with disabilities more visible, bringing about a fuller understanding of their life experiences. While intensified efforts are still needed to improve data on this population, the findings presented here are a clear call for action.

## The stories behind the numbers

Behind every statistic is a story of a child – her hopes, his dreams, their ambitions. The data presented on the following pages offer a fleeting glimpse into the lives of children with disabilities around the world. Each number reminds us of the obstacles that too many of these children face and the rights we must uphold for all children.

However, numbers alone cannot tell the whole story. While they document the share of children with disabilities who have never attended school, for example, they are unable to tell us *why* – about the factors that prevented their participation. Numbers can tell us the proportion of children who feel discriminated against, but not about the forces that influence their life and happiness.

Numbers are a critical first step, but to go further we need to hear the voices and lived accounts of children with disabilities and their families. In other words, counting is not enough. Children with disabilities also need to be heard. While this report relies largely on quantitative data, it also hopes to encourage qualitative investigations and new research that will help us discern the stories behind the numbers.

## Understanding disability in children

Children with disabilities are a highly diverse population group. They include children who were born with a genetic condition that affects their physical, mental or social development; those who sustained a serious injury, nutritional deficiency or infection that resulted in long-term functional consequences; or those exposed to environmental toxins that resulted in developmental delays or learning disabilities. Children with disabilities also include those who developed anxiety or depression as a result of stressful life events.

Children with disabilities can have very different life experiences based on the interaction of their specific impairment(s) and the environment in which they live.

Children with similar conditions may experience different limitations depending on whether the environment provides accommodations that decrease – or eliminate – their impairments (see Box 1.1). Access to supportive devices, technology and services, as well as exposure to nurturing relationships and positive social norms and beliefs, are crucial to promoting the inclusion of all children, regardless of their impairments. For instance, children with myopia who do not have access to diagnostic services and glasses will have difficulty seeing, whereas those who have such access will not.

Children with disabilities often experience limitations in more than one domain. This can be due to the same impairment that manifests in a variety of functional domains or can be separate impairments resulting in multiple difficulties. For example, children who are visually impaired may also have difficulties with self-care. Children who have cognitive impairments are often more susceptible to emotional, interpersonal and behavioural difficulties.



Furthermore, different domains of difficulty often require different forms of support to help ensure the child's participation. For example, many of the challenges faced by a child who is visually impaired in accessing education

are different from those of a child with anxiety. These different needs further contribute to the diversity of the population of children with disabilities and call for dedicated responses.

### BOX 1.1 Defining disability

Disability is a complex and evolving concept, involving aspects of body function and structure (impairments), capacity (measured by the ability to carry out basic activities without the benefit of assistance in any form) and performance (measured by the individual's ability to carry out these same basic activities using available assistive technologies and assistance). As stated in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, disability stems from the interaction between certain conditions or impairments and an unaccommodating environment that hinders an individual's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

The framework of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) relies on a three-level model to describe the concept of disability. According to the ICF, disability can occur as:

- An impairment in body function or structure (for example, a cataract or opacity of the natural lens of

the eye, which prevents the passage of rays of light and impairs or destroys sight)

- A limitation in activity (for example, low vision or inability to see, read or engage in other activities)
- A restriction in participation (for example, exclusion from school or participation in other social, recreational or other events or roles).

The ICF framework defines disability within a biopsychosocial model, integrating both factors pertaining to the individual and his or her environment in defining disability. In contrast, the medical model defines disability as a problem resulting from a medical condition. Awareness of the important role of the social context in defining disability led to the development of the social model of disability, which defines disability not merely as a medical condition or diagnosis but rather as a failure of the policy, cultural and physical environments to accommodate differences in function.



## Counting children with disabilities

The availability of data on children with disabilities has been a longstanding challenge due to limitations related to the use of narrow definitions and the lack of a standardized data collection methodology.

While most countries have produced estimates of the number of persons with disabilities, the use of different measurement tools limits the validity and comparability of the data. The definition of disability that is used in any given data collection instrument determines who is identified as having a disability and included in the appraisal of evidence. Different conceptualizations and differences in operationalizing the concept of disability will directly impact the quality and utility of the gathered data. Historically, measures of disability have focused on domains related to physical and sensory functioning, while other domains, notably those related to psychosocial functioning, were largely overlooked. Language that was stigmatizing or judgemental was also commonly found in some of the questionnaires used to determine disability status.

An additional limitation to the production of high-quality data on children with disabilities relates to the protocols used to collect them. Non-inclusive data collection methods and analyses can lead to the generation of inaccurate, incomplete, irrelevant or misleading evidence (see Box 1.2). The absence of inclusiveness may result in severe underestimations and misidentification of

persons with disabilities, aggravating exclusion and preventing the implementation of efforts where they are most needed.

Further to the considerations on measuring disability in general, identifying children with disabilities presents additional challenges. The domains of functioning that may indicate that a young child has a disability are different from those in older children and adults. For example, asking about difficulties related to self-care is relevant among older children and adults but not young children. In addition, measuring functional difficulties is complex since children, especially at younger ages, develop at different rates. Therefore, the identification of functional difficulties in children needs to account for what is a normal variation in development versus a developmental delay or a consequence of a specific impairment. Measuring disability among children requires instruments that are specifically designed to reflect the breadth of functional domains that are relevant for children. During childhood, this implies accounting for all the domains of physical, psychosocial, sensory and cognitive functioning. Furthermore, a comprehensive measure of disability must include all sorts of individual and environmental factors that may prevent children from developing skills and building trustworthy relationships and that inhibit their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.





## BOX 1.2 Generating inclusive data

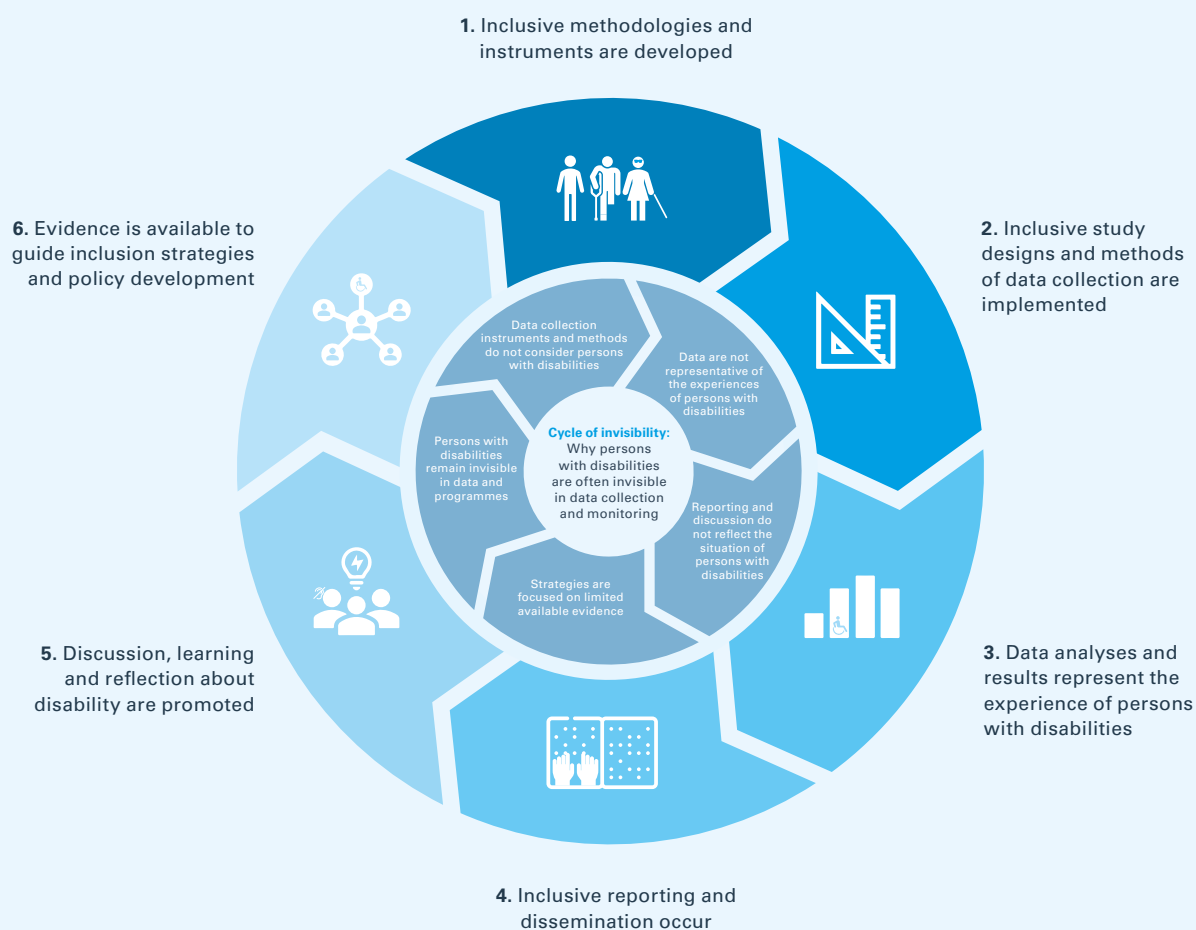
Inclusive data are key to eliminating discrimination on the basis of disability and accelerating global efforts towards inclusive programming.

Inclusivity needs to be considered at all stages of the data generation process – from the design of studies for the generation of country-level statistics to the methodological approaches used in the production of global estimates. This involves using data collection instruments and protocols that allow for the disaggregation of key indicators according to disability status and developing and implementing accommodation strategies to ensure that persons with

disabilities can participate in surveys, censuses and programme evaluation data collection. The production of inclusive data also demands the involvement of persons with disabilities in all data collection processes and outcomes. This will help ensure that their experiences and needs are adequately reflected in the evidence being generated.

For guidance on how to ensure inclusivity in data collection, see: United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Producing Disability-Inclusive Data: Why it matters and what it takes’, UNICEF, New York, 2020.

## Breaking the cycle of invisibility related to persons with disabilities



## A new way to measure disability in children

To address the paucity of data on the situation of children with disabilities globally, UNICEF and the Washington Group on Disability Statistics developed the Child Functioning Module for use in censuses and surveys. The module is intended to provide a population-level estimate of the number and proportion of children with functional difficulties.

The module covers children and adolescents between 2 and 17 years of age and assesses difficulties in various domains of functioning.<sup>1</sup> It conforms to the biopsychosocial model of disability, focusing on the presence and extent of functional difficulties rather than on body structure or conditions (that is, the causes of those difficulties). For example, a mobility limitation can be the result of cerebral palsy, loss of limbs, paralysis, muscular dystrophy or spinal cord injuries. Behavioural issues may result from autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or a mental health condition. Basing disability statistics on questions that ask about diagnosable conditions is problematic. Many caregivers may not know their children's diagnosis, particularly if this involves mental and psychosocial conditions; and knowledge about diagnoses is often correlated with education, socioeconomic status and access to health services, all of which may bias collected data. Questions that focus on basic actions such as those in the Child Functioning Module serve as a better basis for identifying disability. For the purposes of social participation and equalizing opportunities, functional status – and how that impacts someone's life – is of greater interest than the cause (medical or otherwise). Children with the same conditions or impairments may have very different degrees of difficulties. For example, a child with cerebral palsy might have a slight speech impairment but can easily be understood while another child with the same condition might not be able to speak at all, making communication challenging. Some of these difficulties are traditionally seen as a 'disability' while others are not.

The Child Functioning Module is comprised of two questionnaires, one with 16 questions for children aged 2 to 4 years and another with 24 questions for children aged 5 to 17 years. The questions are to be administered to the mother or primary caregiver of the child in question. They are designed to identify difficulties according to a range of severity in a number of domains. To better reflect the degree of functional difficulty, each area is assessed against a rating scale.

In addition to collecting data on domains related to physical, sensory and cognitive functioning, the Child Functioning Module includes questions on difficulties in psychosocial functioning during childhood. These questions identify children having difficulties expressing and managing emotions, accepting changes, controlling behaviour and making friends. While all children may sometimes manifest worry, sadness or anxiety, these emotions may be significant and frequent enough to place certain children at higher risk of dropping out of school, withdrawing from family or community life or harming themselves. As with other questions in the module, questions in the psychosocial domains are intended to collect information about difficulties across a spectrum of severity. This allows for the identification of children at risk of experiencing significant disruptions to their well-being and development due to such difficulties. For example, the question on difficulties in coping with change is not intended to identify children who may be stubborn at times or show resistance to some routine changes. Rather, it is intended to identify those who have major issues transitioning from one activity to another on a consistent basis and have difficulty with disruptions to their routine, including children who are on the autism spectrum – a group of conditions often characterized by the need for routines and rituals. These children can struggle with unexpected changes, causing upset and disruption to varying degrees, especially during periods of transition common to adolescents, such as changing schools, moving and taking on more mature roles as they age.<sup>2</sup>



**UNICEF/Washington Group Module on Child Functioning**

Children aged 2 to 4 years

<p><b>SEEING</b> Difficulty seeing</p> 	<p><b>HEARING</b> Difficulty hearing sounds like peoples' voices or music</p> 	<p><b>MOBILITY</b> Difficulty walking</p> 
<p><b>FINE MOTOR</b> Difficulty picking up small objects</p> 	<p><b>COMMUNICATION/COMPREHENSION</b> Difficulty understanding or being understood</p> 	<p><b>CONTROLLING BEHAVIOUR</b> Kicking, biting or hitting other children or adults</p> 
<p><b>LEARNING</b> Difficulty learning things</p> 	<p><b>PLAYING</b> Difficulty playing</p> 	

Children aged 5 to 17 years

<p><b>SEEING</b> Difficulty seeing</p> 	<p><b>HEARING</b> Difficulty hearing sounds like peoples' voices or music</p> 	<p><b>MOBILITY</b> Difficulty walking on level ground</p> 		
<p><b>SELF-CARE</b> Difficulty with feeding or dressing</p> 	<p><b>COMMUNICATION/COMPREHENSION</b> Difficulty being understood by people</p> 	<p><b>LEARNING</b> Difficulty learning things</p> 		
<p><b>REMEMBERING</b> Difficulty remembering things</p> 	<p><b>ATTENTION AND CONCENTRATING</b> Difficulty concentrating on an activity they enjoy doing</p> 	<p><b>RELATIONSHIPS</b> Difficulty making friends</p> 		
<p><b>COPING WITH CHANGE</b> Difficulty accepting change in their routine</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>AFFECT</b></p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td data-bbox="584 1606 1031 1749"> <p><b>ANXIETY</b> Seeming very anxious, nervous or worried on a daily basis</p>  </td> <td data-bbox="1031 1606 1443 1749"> <p><b>DEPRESSION</b> Seeming very sad or depressed on a daily basis</p>  </td> </tr> </table>		<p><b>ANXIETY</b> Seeming very anxious, nervous or worried on a daily basis</p> 	<p><b>DEPRESSION</b> Seeming very sad or depressed on a daily basis</p> 
<p><b>ANXIETY</b> Seeming very anxious, nervous or worried on a daily basis</p> 	<p><b>DEPRESSION</b> Seeming very sad or depressed on a daily basis</p> 			
<p><b>CONTROLLING BEHAVIOUR</b> Difficulty with controlling their behaviour</p> 				

Psychosocial functioning is also fundamental in facilitating positive engagement between a child and his or her environment and establishing positive relationships. For example, psychosocial difficulties can have repercussions in many areas; children who have such difficulties may face significant barriers in accessing education and other services without support and to build and maintain social interactions.

The Child Functioning Module was developed in consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities, among other stakeholder groups.<sup>3</sup> These organizations were instrumental in the design of the module, including through their engagement during its validation in the field.<sup>4</sup> The module underwent extensive review by other experts and was tested in several countries to determine the quality of questions being

asked and how well they are understood by people in diverse cultures.<sup>5</sup>

In March 2017, a joint statement issued by multiple UN agencies and Member States, organizations of persons with disabilities and other stakeholders recommended the module as the appropriate tool for SDG data disaggregation for children.<sup>6</sup> The development of the Child Functioning Module and its roll-out as part of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) (see Box 1.3) has led to the release, for the first time, of cross-nationally comparable data on children with disabilities. In addition, many countries have also included the module as part of their nationally representative surveys. Estimates from around 50 countries have been released as of November 2021, and data from 20 more surveys are expected to become available over the next couple of years.

**BOX 1.3****Collecting data on children with disabilities through Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys**

The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) is an international household survey programme designed to assist countries in collecting and analysing data on the situation of women and children. Since its inception in the mid-1990s, the MICS has enabled nearly 120 countries to collect nationally representative and internationally comparable data on more than 100 key indicators in areas such as nutrition, child health, mortality, education, water and sanitation, child protection, and HIV and AIDS. To date, six rounds of the MICS have been completed and a seventh round is currently under way.

The MICS tools, including core questionnaires and modules on specific topics, are developed by UNICEF in consultation with relevant experts from various UN organizations and interagency monitoring groups. The surveys are designed by country teams and implemented by local agencies, typically national statistical offices. The core questionnaires are a household questionnaire, a questionnaire for individual girls and women between the ages of 15 and 49, a questionnaire for individual boys and men aged 15 years and older, a questionnaire on children under age 5 (administered to mothers or primary caregivers), and a questionnaire on children aged 5 to 17 years (also administered to mothers or primary caregivers). The questionnaires are all modular in nature and can be adapted or customized to the needs of the country. In countries as diverse as Argentina, Bangladesh,

Côte d'Ivoire, Fiji, Qatar, Thailand and Turkmenistan, trained fieldwork teams conduct interviews with household members on a variety of topics – focusing mainly on those issues that directly affect the lives of children and women. The MICS is an integral part of the policies and plans of many governments around the world and a major data source for more than 30 SDG indicators.

Starting in 2016, the Child Functioning Module and the Washington Group Short Set on Functioning (WG-SS)<sup>7</sup> became part of the MICS and are used to collect data on children aged 2 to 17 and on adult women and men aged 18 and older, respectively. With the inclusion of these two tools, the MICS programme has become the largest source of internationally comparable data on children and adults with disabilities. The recent release of standardized and comparable data from more than 40 MICS represents an unprecedented opportunity to address the evidence gap on persons with disabilities. Furthermore, when analysed in conjunction with other MICS indicators, the data can be used to document the inequities experienced by children with functional difficulties aged 2 to 17 years at the global level for monitoring several SDG indicators and other key indicators across the main sectoral areas and relevant cross-cutting themes.

## Global and regional estimates

### Estimation challenges

Despite the recent increase in standardized data on children with disabilities, the availability of comparable data is still highly uneven within and across countries. Past estimates aimed at quantifying the number of children with disabilities have been largely based on data sources that rely on very different definitions and methods. Moreover, they have mostly been based on medical concepts of disability, which emphasize clinical conditions, sequelae and the presence of specific impairments. Typically, shortcomings in terms of data quality, comparability and coverage are addressed by adjusting and harmonizing data through different modelling techniques, with various limitations.<sup>8</sup>

In the context of disability measurement, such shortcomings have serious implications when attempting to produce global and regional estimates of the number of children with disabilities. While data adjustments and modelling are central to overcoming harmonization issues, they cannot address fundamental conceptual differences in what is being measured. Harmonizing data based on medically informed measurements into an estimate that more accurately reflects the breadth and severity of functional difficulties is a complex task. Data sources based on a medical definition of disability emphasize a subpopulation with more severe conditions and impairments in 'visible' domains of functioning. As a result, they under-identify children who may have less severe difficulties, or difficulties in domains that tend to be left out of measurement tools.

#### BOX 1.4

#### Previous efforts to estimate the number of children with disabilities

Until this report, no estimation of the global number of children with disabilities has been made that takes into account a full range of functional difficulties along with behavioural and mental health issues.

The only estimate available for many years indicated that 10 per cent of the world's population had some form of disability.<sup>9</sup> In 2011, this was updated to 15 per cent, and an estimate was produced on the number of children aged 14 or younger with a moderate or severe disability: 93 million children, or 5 per cent of children in that age group.<sup>10</sup> Such global estimates are affected by well-known limitations surrounding disability measurement.

The concept of disability described in the World Health Organization's (WHO's) *Global Burden of Disease 2004* (upon which WHO's 2011 estimate for children is based) refers to the perceived short- or long-term loss of health associated with a condition and is not aligned with the ICF definition of disability. This metric of disability has been criticized for its lack of consideration of core participatory and rights-based principles and for being discriminatory on the value of persons with disabilities.<sup>11</sup>

A critical limitation to this approach is that the weights attributed to each impairment do not account for the differential impact that an impairment may have on various individuals as a result of environmental

conditions.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the weights used by the *Global Burden of Disease* do not vary across geographic regions, disregarding the multiple contextual factors that can worsen functionality in persons with the same impairments.<sup>13</sup>

The use of medical concepts of disability also has implications for the quality of data. Reporting of these impairments usually depends on parents' awareness of symptoms and a pre-existing diagnosis. Therefore under-identification remains a problem since diagnosis depends on the availability of health-care facilities where children can be screened.

More recent estimates have introduced improvements, such as increasing the internal consistency of different sources of data by using a meta-analytic approach and adjusting estimates for comorbidity.<sup>14</sup> That said, these latest estimates are still largely focused on the burden of different impairments and medical conditions, rather than on the functional difficulties or restrictions to participation experienced by children with disabilities.



## Methodology

The technical work behind this report aimed to produce an estimate of the number of children with disabilities aligned with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and a biopsychosocial concept of disability. The regional and global estimates presented here rely mainly on information about functional difficulties or limitations among children gathered through sources with some degree of international comparability. These include MICS, Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), the European Health Interview Survey (EHIS) and the European Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). While most of the data sources included in the estimates refer to data collected from 2017 onwards, the data points used for some countries are not the most recent ones, but those most aligned with the notion of disability underlying the global estimate. Detailed technical information on the estimation work and the data sources is provided in the technical annex at the end of this report.

### How data were selected

UNICEF maintains a global database of disability data sources from 195 countries. The database includes more than 1,000 data points together with information on methodological aspects that can impact the number of children who are identified as having a disability. The selection of data sources involved an extensive process of data compilation and consultations with country-level experts to overcome limitations on data availability and comparability, and to ensure their views were reflected in

the data selection, harmonization and estimation process. After screening the disability global database, sources of data collected prior to 2005, as well as those not derived from censuses or household surveys, were excluded. Information selected for inclusion focused on identifying data aligned as closely as possible with the concept of disability described earlier. This meant selecting sources of data gathered through measurement tools that collect information on functional difficulties, rather than specific impairments or health conditions. Another selection criterion was the use of a rating scale to capture the severity of functional difficulties, rather than the use of 'yes' or 'no' questions.

On the basis of these considerations, and in consultation with experts, 104 data sources were selected (see Table 1.1). Collectively, these data sources represent 84 per cent of the world's population of children and at least 50 per cent of the population of children within each region.

### Technical consultations

Heterogeneity across data sources is a common concern when generating global estimates. While this can be dealt with using a strictly statistical approach, incorporating country-level expertise into the data selection and harmonization process was considered important.

The estimation work was part of an iterative process that included three technical consultations with experts in the field of data on children with disabilities. They included professionals from national statistical offices, organizations of persons with disabilities and academia.

**TABLE 1.1.** Data coverage

	Number of countries and areas	Number of countries and areas with available data that meet the inclusion criteria	Percentage of the child population covered by the available data
East Asia and the Pacific	33	16	80
Eastern and Southern Africa	25	13	74
Europe and Central Asia	55	31	59
Latin America and the Caribbean	37	14	74
Middle East and North Africa	19	10	73
North America	2	2	100
South Asia	8	6	97
West and Central Africa	24	12	74
<b>World</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>84</b>

Following a standard protocol, the consultation sought to obtain their views on the prevalence of children with functional difficulties in their countries. The initial part of the consultation was dedicated to building a common understanding of disability aligned with the ICF and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This was followed by in-depth discussion of the available country-level information, and the results of the data harmonization analyses and estimation work. For each consultation, UNICEF shared details on the process and methodology used for estimations as well as on the selected data sources for each region and country. Experts' inputs in relation to the data harmonization approach were incorporated and reflected in the regional and global estimates.

### Data harmonization and final estimates

Instruments that collect data based on a restricted number of functional domains tend to underestimate the percentage of children with disabilities in a given population. Results from several countries that have measured disability among children aged 5 to 17 years

using both the Child Functioning Module (involving 13 domains) and the Washington Group Short Set on Functioning (six domains) show that the number of children identified as having functional difficulties by the Short Set is substantively lower than that identified by the Child Functioning Module. This finding was considered in the final harmonization process. Data sources based on the Short Set were adjusted to approximate the expected prevalence that would have been obtained by the Child Functioning Module, accounting for a country's under-five mortality rate.

Despite screening, selecting and harmonizing data points prior to the estimation process, the resulting data still contained significant variability across countries and regions. For this reason, the estimation process was largely based on meta-analyses of proportions that were considered suitable to account for the variability of the data. The final estimates that follow should be regarded as the best possible on the basis of available data and should be seen as indicating orders of magnitude rather than precise figures (see technical annex for additional details).

#### BOX 1.5

#### Working together towards more robust and inclusive estimates

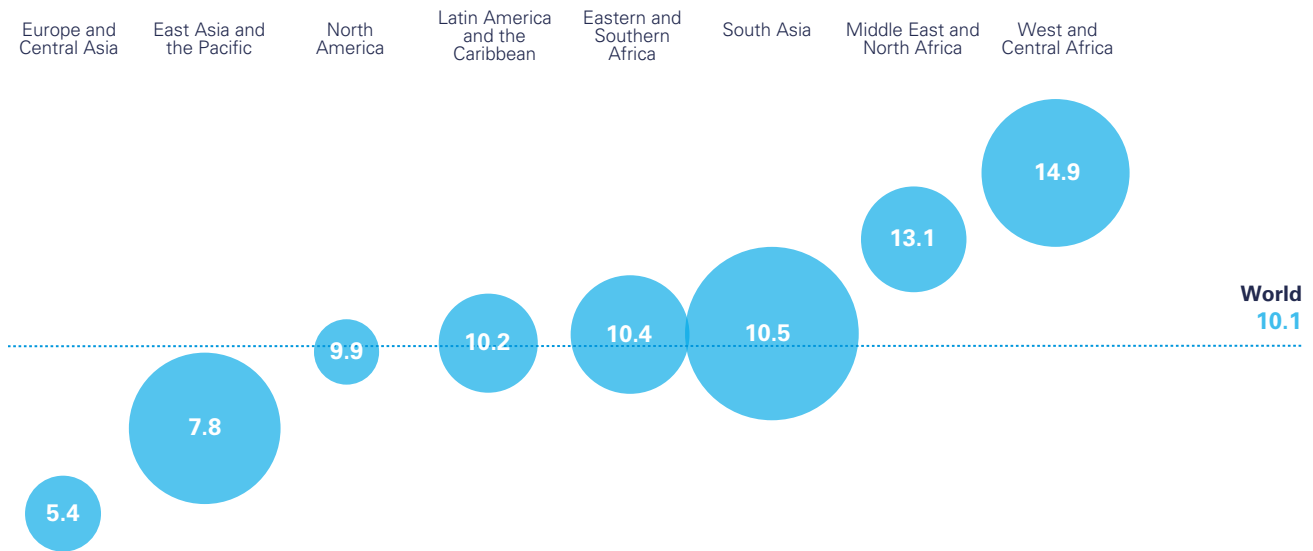
Global and regional estimates of the number of children with disabilities remain highly complex and will continue to depend on the availability of adequate and comparable population-level data. Committed efforts and stronger investment are required to nurture the principle of disability-inclusion at all stages of the data collection and statistics production cycle. The objective of making all children with disabilities visible in official statistics and in global estimates can only be achieved by promoting good-quality country data. This will require building capacities across the board to bring countries to a common standard of disability statistics. The reliance on sophisticated statistical approaches to overcome the shortage of data and mitigate its flaws and uncertainties will not be sufficient to make this objective a reality. Rather, countries need support to strengthen their capacities to collect, analyse and use disability data through effective technical support and the engagement – and empowerment – of stakeholders,

including persons with disabilities. Special consideration should be given to strengthening the availability and quality of data for the youngest children, particularly those under age 2, for which population-level data remain scarce.

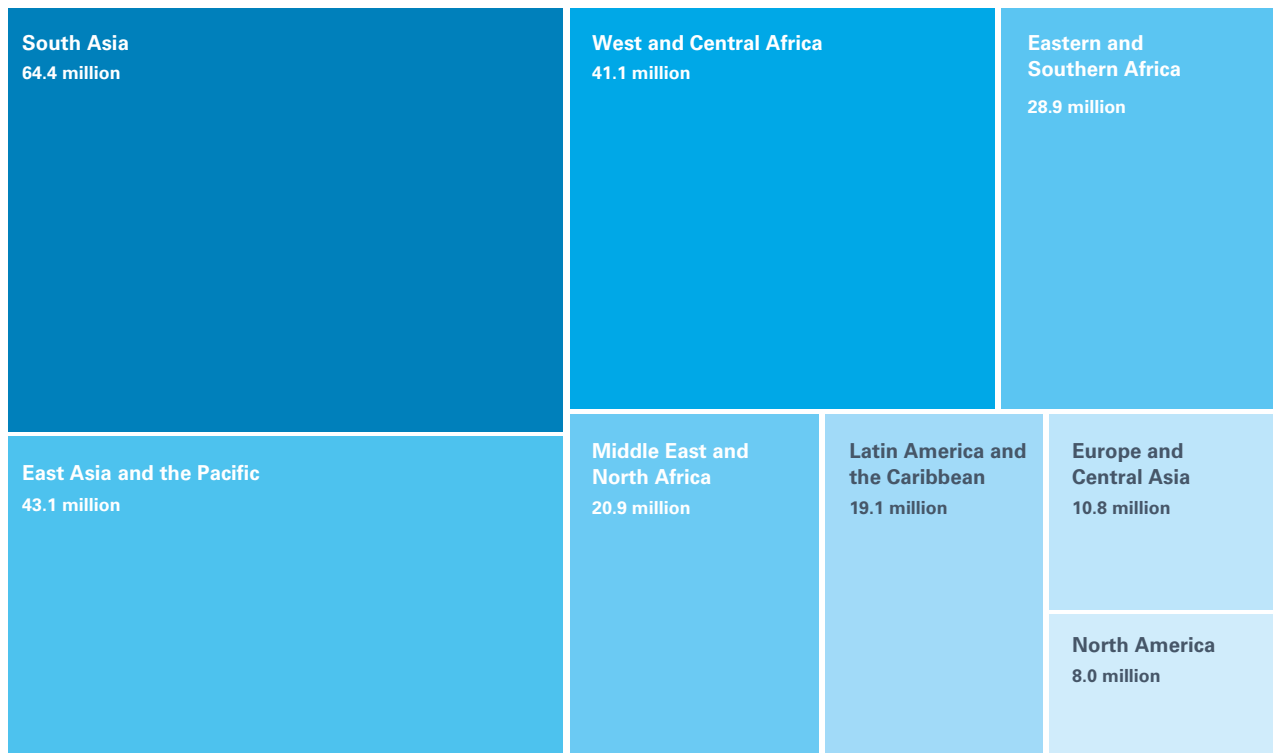
Finally, while mainstream surveys and censuses provide representative estimates of children living in households, these sources do not consider children in residential care or children who do not live in a household. While these children usually represent a small proportion of the child population, their under-identification could be significant in countries with high levels of institutionalization among children with disabilities and those with large 'floating' populations, such as those experiencing armed conflict or forced displacement. More comprehensive global estimates will need to include such children as well.

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

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

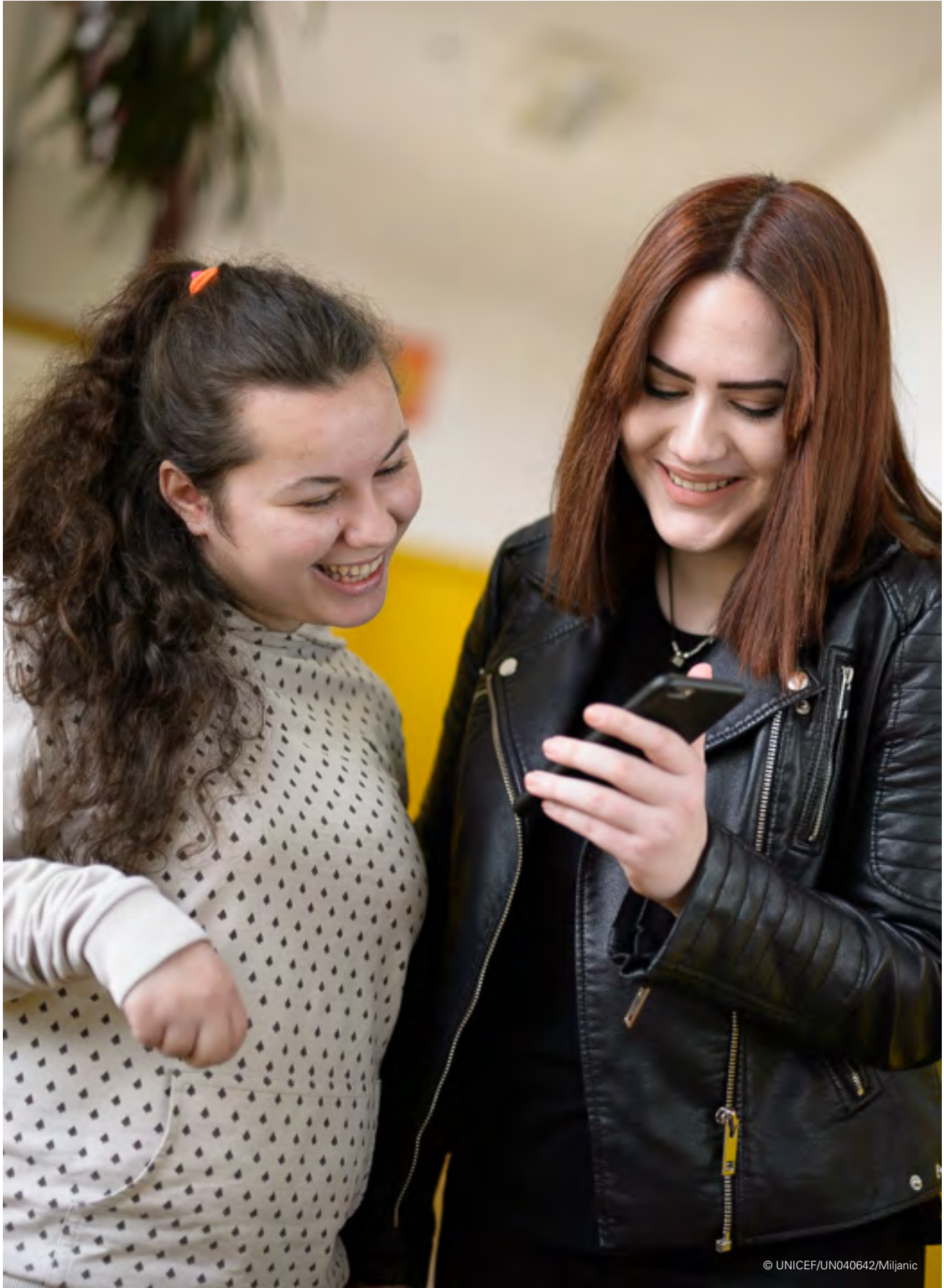


**FIGURE 1.2** Number of children aged 0 to 17 years with disabilities



Notes: The global estimate is based on a subset of 104 countries covering 84 per cent of the global population of children aged 0 to 17 years. Regional estimates represent data covering at least 50 per cent of the regional population.





## Country estimates

### Indicators used in this section

#### Children with one or more functional difficulties include the following:

- Children aged 2 to 4 years who reportedly kick, bite or hit other children or adults more than other children of the same age and/or who have 'a lot of difficulty' or 'cannot do at all' certain functions. These include:
  - Seeing, even if using glasses
  - Hearing, even if using a hearing aid
  - Walking, even if using equipment or assistance
  - Understanding others or being understood when speaking
  - Picking up small objects with their hands
  - Learning new things
  - Playing
  - Controlling their behaviour.
- Children aged 5 to 17 years who reportedly seem very anxious and/or sad or depressed on a daily basis and/or who have 'a lot of difficulty' or 'cannot do at all' certain functions compared with other children of the same age. These functions include:
  - Seeing, even if using glasses or contact lenses
  - Hearing, even if using a hearing aid
  - Walking 100 or 500 metres on level ground, even if using equipment or assistance
  - Performing self-care activities, such as feeding or dressing themselves

- Being understood when speaking to people inside or outside their household
- Learning new things
- Remembering things
- Concentrating on an activity they enjoy
- Accepting changes in their routine
- Controlling their behaviour
- Making friends.

**Children with more than one functional difficulty** include all children who have difficulties functioning in more than one of the domains listed above.

**Children with signs of anxiety or depression only** present signs of anxiety and/or depression daily but do not experience any functional difficulties.

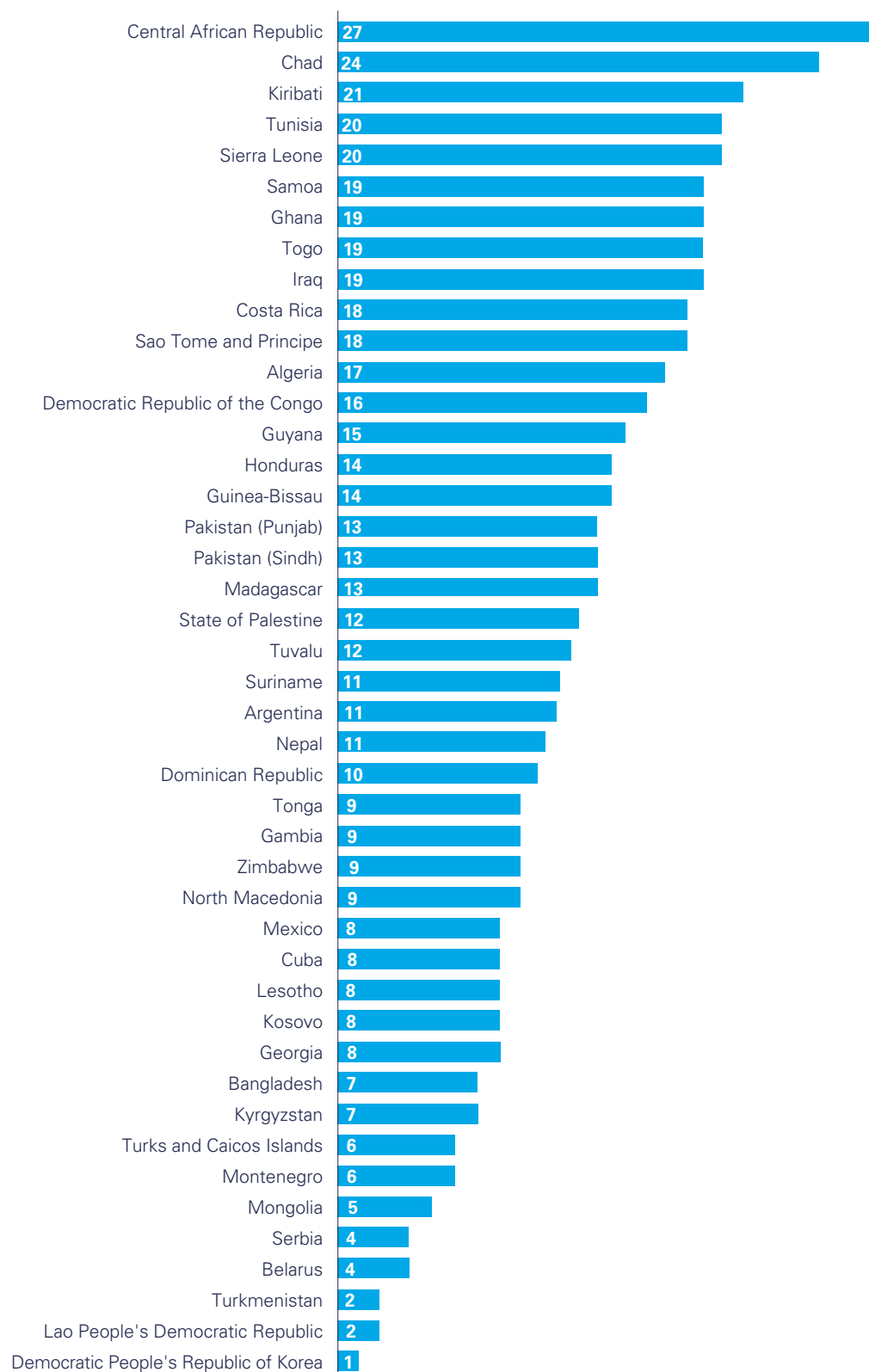
**Children with more than one severe functional difficulty, without signs of anxiety or depression,** reportedly cannot function at all in more than one of the domains listed above but do not show signs of anxiety or depression on a daily basis.

**Children with one or more severe functional difficulties** reportedly cannot function at all in one or more of the domains listed above and/or they show signs of anxiety and/or depression daily or 'a lot more' than other children of the same age.



### The proportion of children with disabilities varies significantly across countries and areas

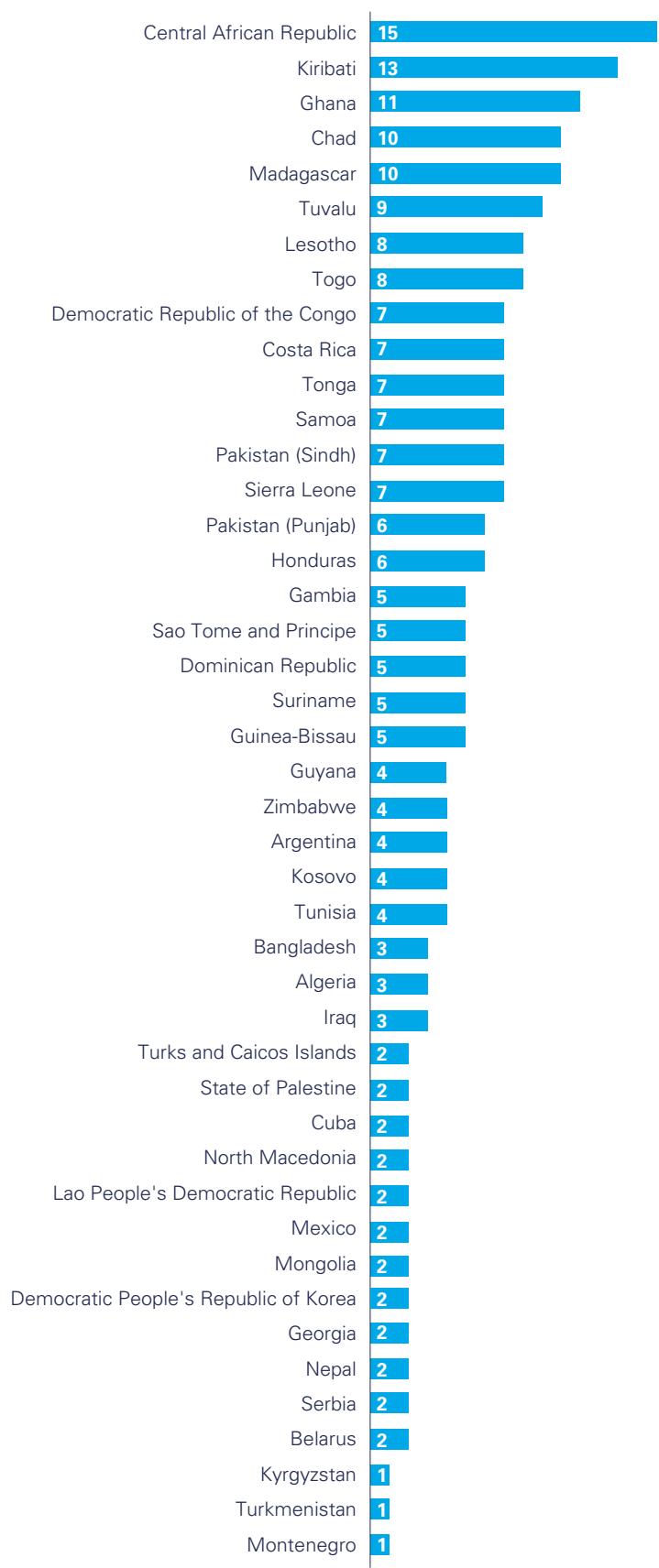
**FIGURE 1.3** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years with one or more functional difficulties

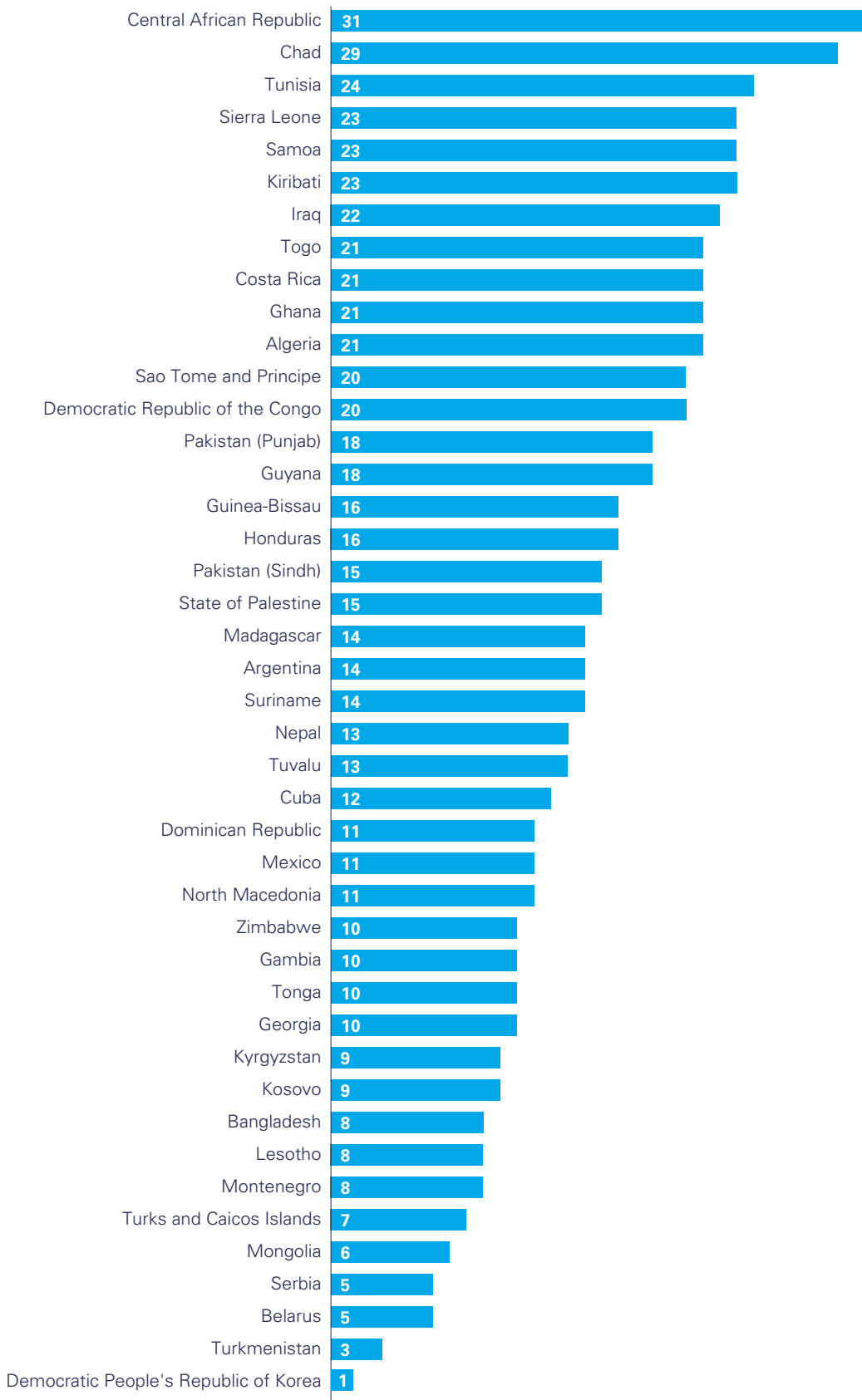


Notes: All references to Kosovo in this publication should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999). Results for the Lao People's Democratic Republic only refer to children 2 to 4 years old.



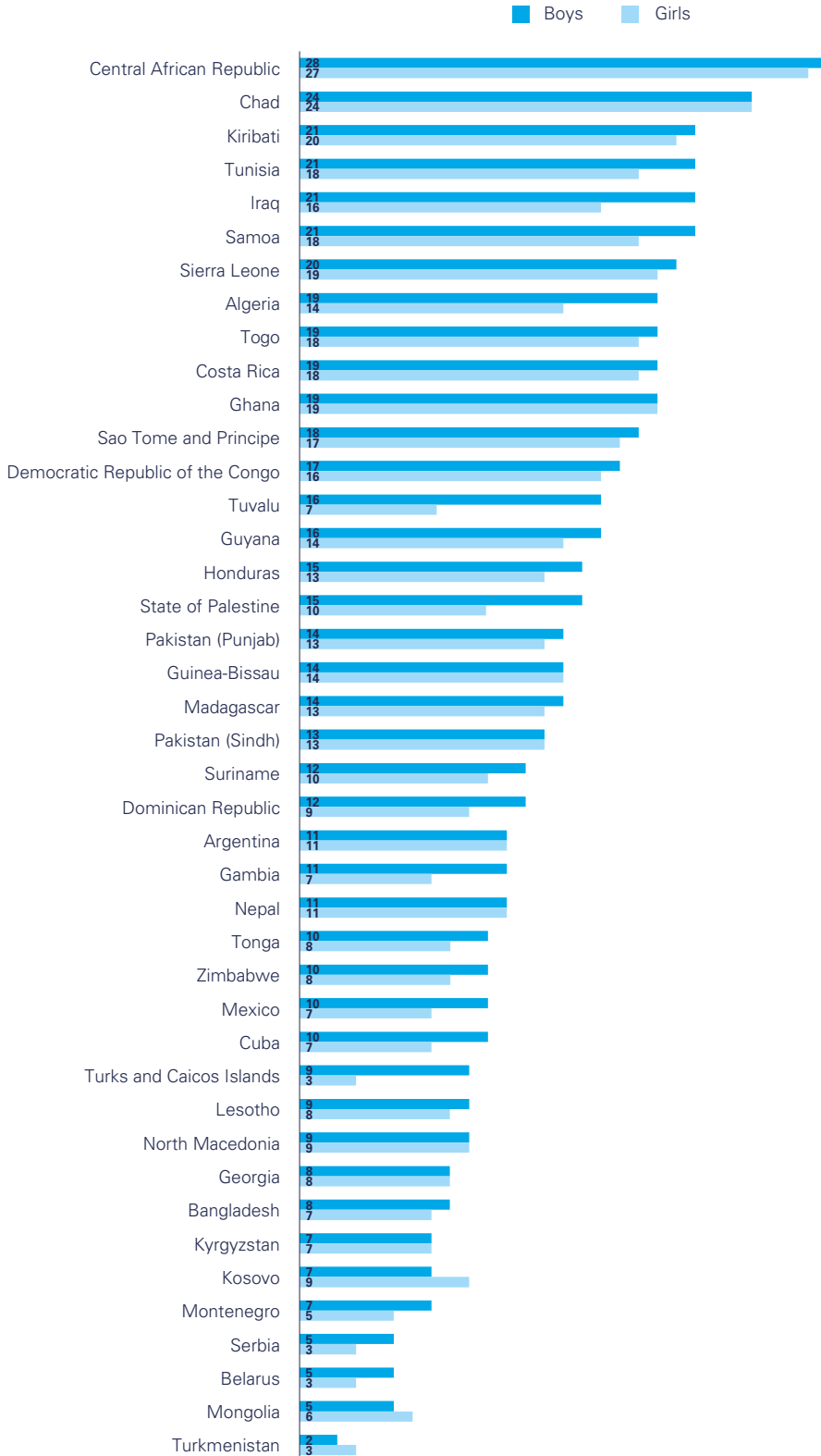
**FIGURE 1.4** Percentage of children aged 2 to 4 years with one or more functional difficulties



**FIGURE 1.5** Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years with one or more functional difficulties

**In most countries and areas, no statistically significant differences are found in the proportion of boys and girls with disabilities. However, in those places where a significant difference is found, a greater proportion of boys experience disability**

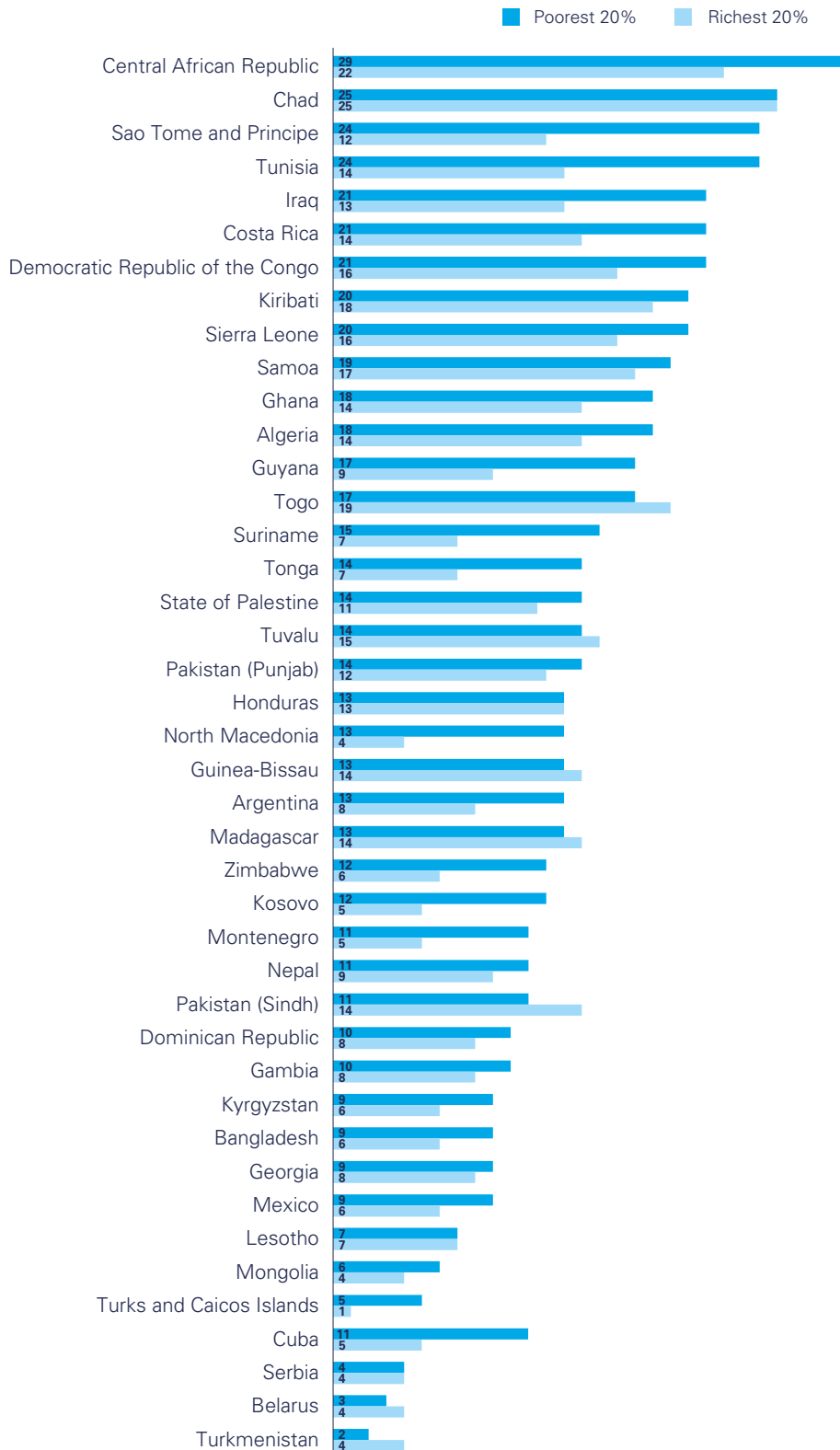
**FIGURE 1.6** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years with one or more functional difficulties





**In most countries and areas, no significant differences are found in the proportion of children with disabilities in the poorest and richest households. However, in those places where a significant difference is found, a greater proportion of children with disabilities live in the poorest households**

**FIGURE 1.7** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years with one or more functional difficulties



**Most children with disabilities have functional difficulties in only one domain**

**FIGURE 1.8** Percentage of children aged 2 to 4 years with one or more functional difficulties

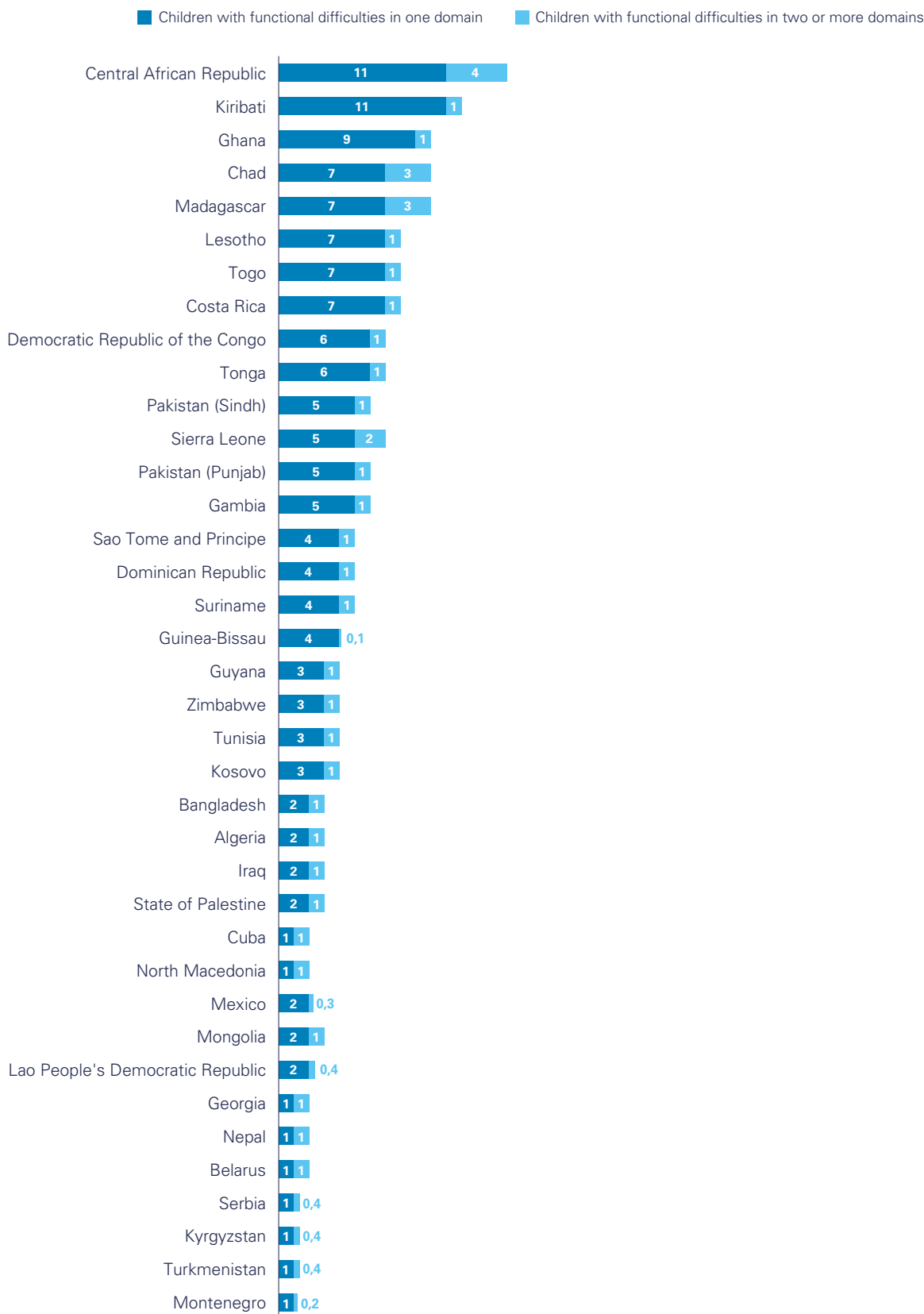
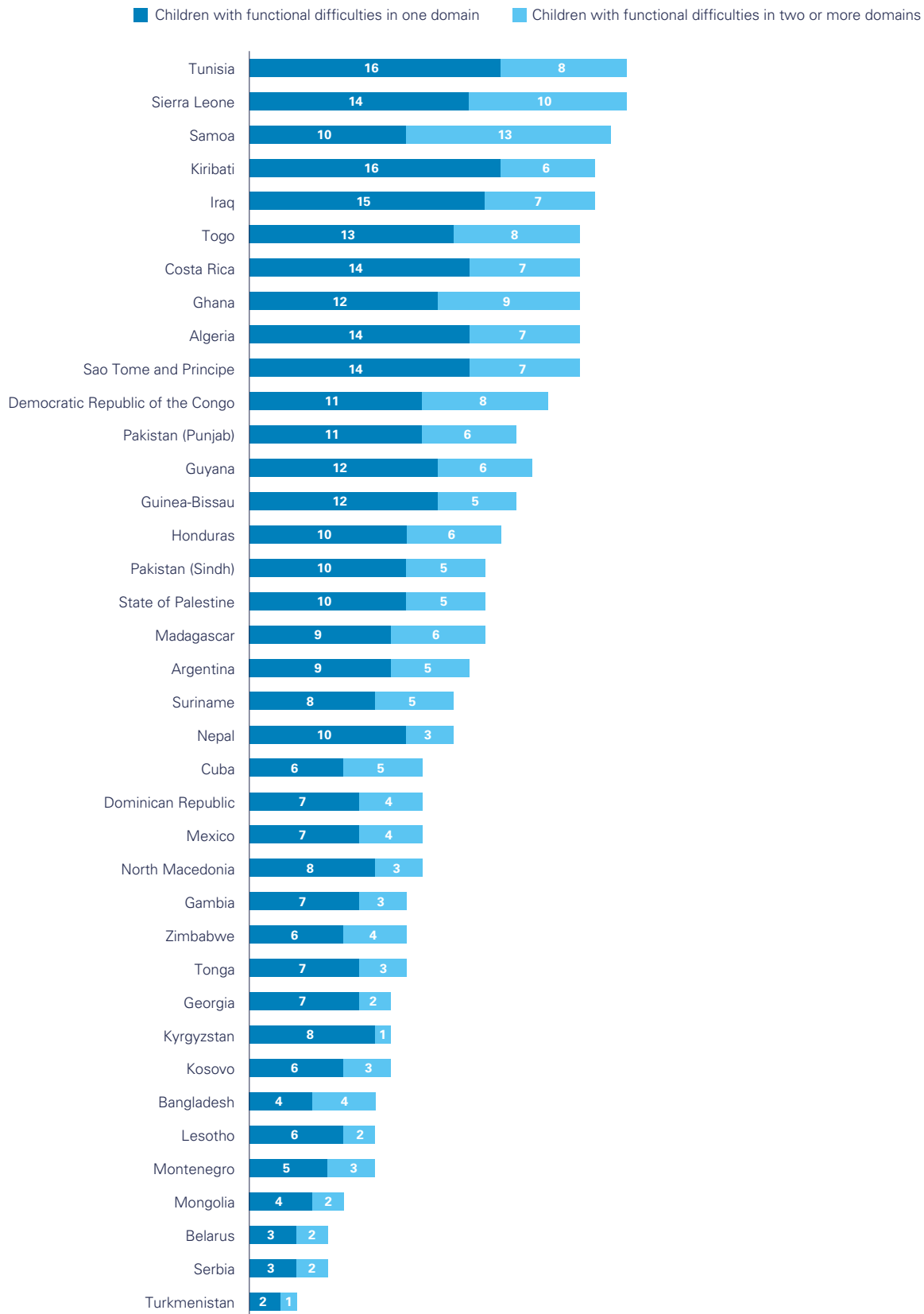


FIGURE 1.9 Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years with one or more functional difficulties

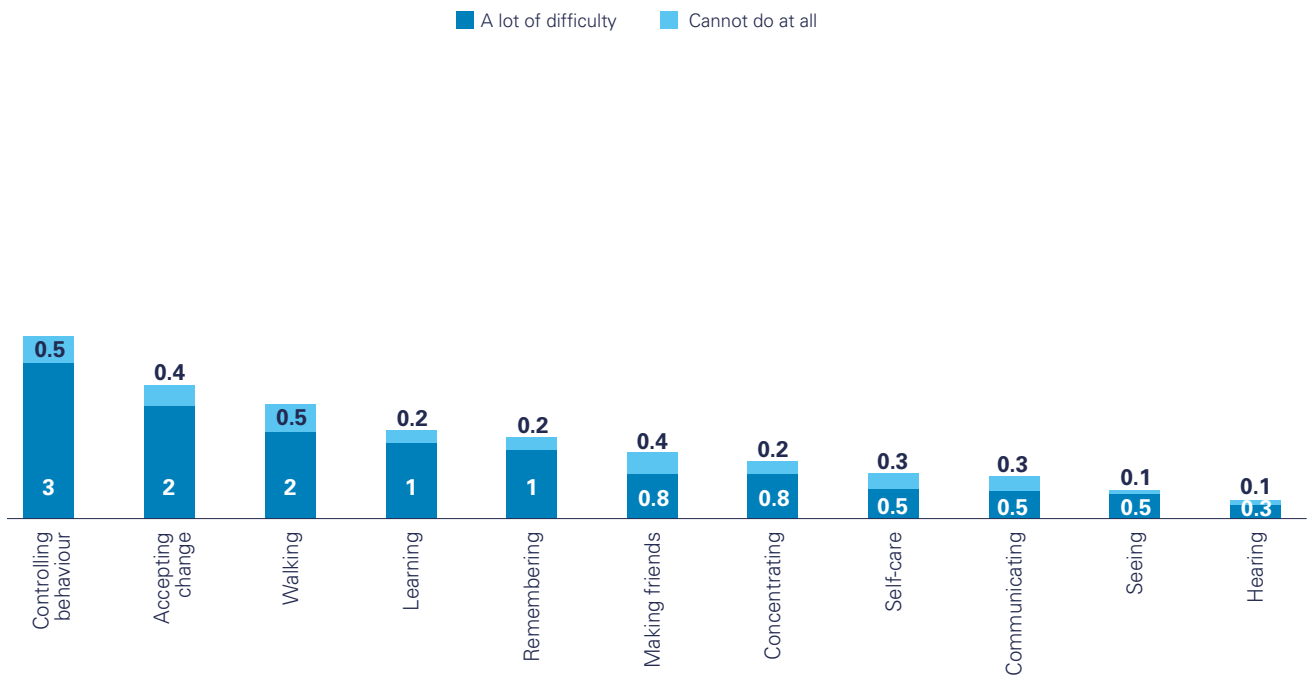


**For children with disabilities of all ages, more children experience moderate than severe levels of functional difficulties in all domains**

**FIGURE 1.10** Percentage of children aged 2 to 4 years with one or more functional difficulties



**FIGURE 1.11** Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years with one or more functional difficulties





The proportion of children with functional difficulties varies significantly by domain; however, psychosocial difficulties consistently affect the largest share of children

FIGURE 1.12 Percentage of children aged 2 to 4 years with one or more functional difficulties

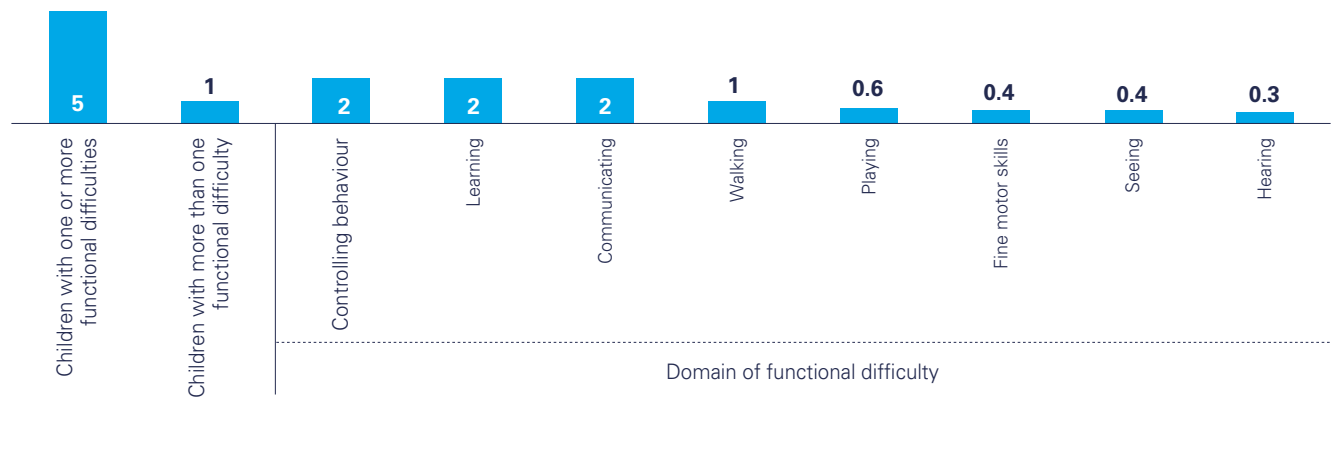
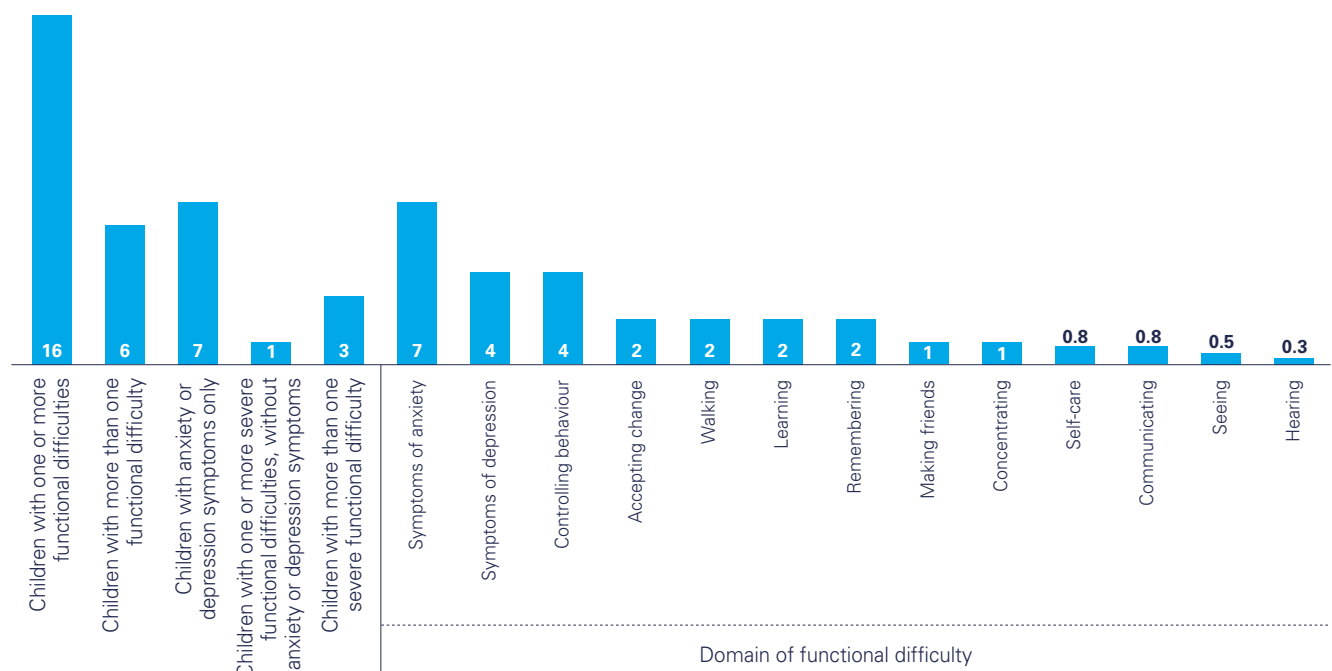
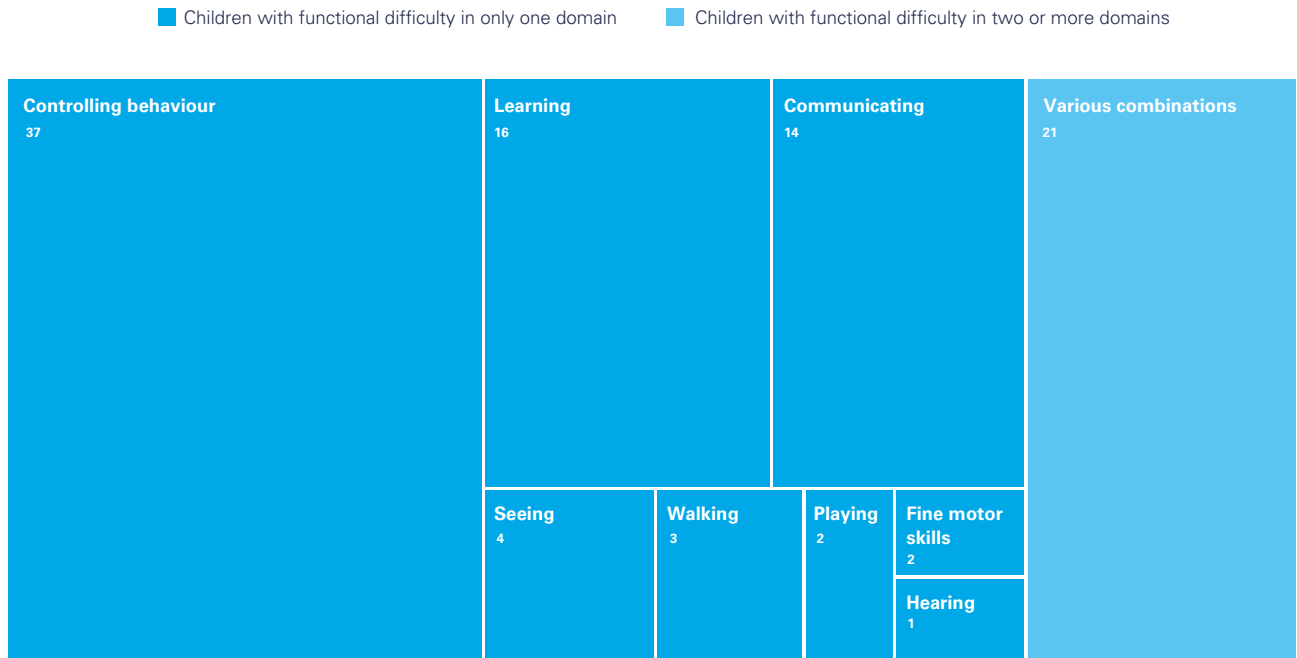


FIGURE 1.13 Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years with one or more functional difficulties

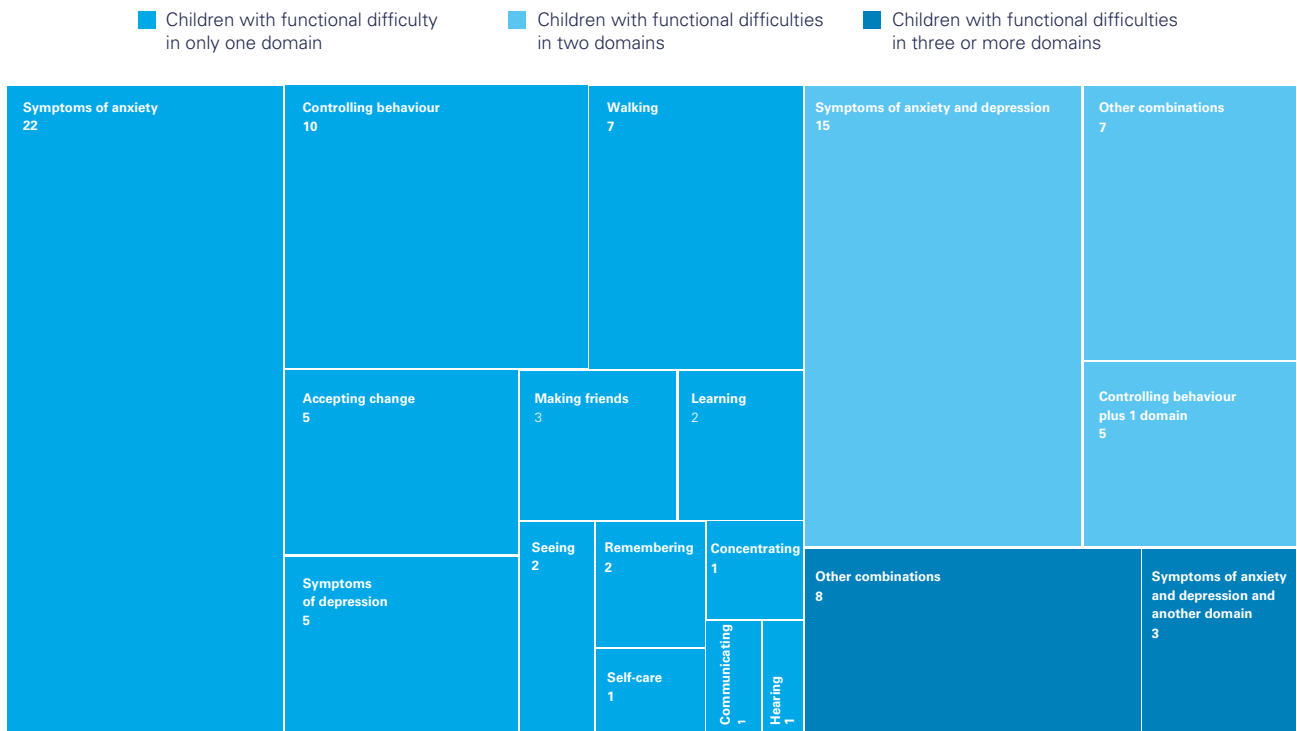


**The most frequently occurring functional difficulties vary according to the age of the child; however, psychosocial difficulties predominate across all ages**

**FIGURE 1.14** Percentage distribution of children aged 2 to 4 years with functional difficulties

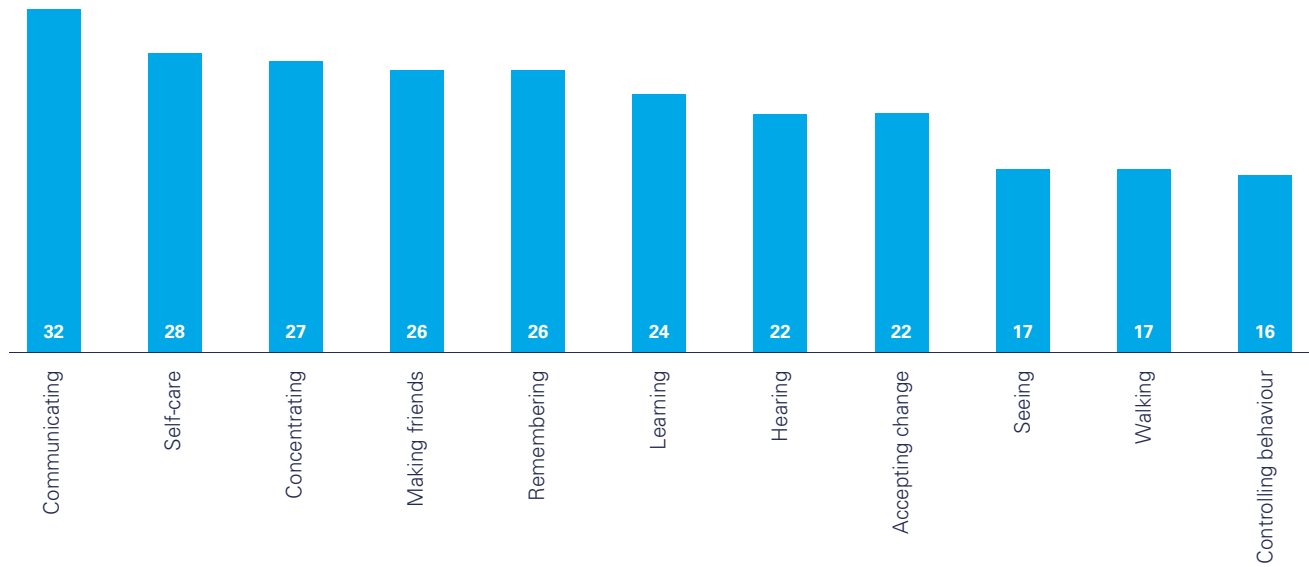


**FIGURE 1.15** Percentage distribution of children aged 5 to 17 years with functional difficulties



### Large proportions of children with various functional difficulties also have anxiety or depression symptoms

**FIGURE 1.16** Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years with anxiety or depression symptoms, among those with various functional difficulties



## How to read the charts

The statistical charts on the following pages show results for more than 60 indicators organized into seven thematic chapters. The report’s main goal is to illustrate inequities experienced by children with disabilities. Therefore, most of the analyses aim to quantify the differences between children with and without disabilities in relation to key indicators (see Tip 1). Throughout the report, results are presented at the county level as well as for a pooled sample of children from all countries and areas for which data are available (we refer to this in the charts as a ‘weighted average’). The total number of countries and areas with available data may change depending on the indicators.

The thematic chapters present two main types of charts. Chart 1 (see example) focuses on pooled sample analyses from the 31 countries with available data. It describes the overall difference between children with and without disabilities in a particular age group for a specific indicator (see Tip 2); it also provides a closer look at results for children with difficulties in various functional domains (see Tip 3). Chart 2 (see example) includes both pooled sample- and country-level analyses based on 42 countries with available data. This type of chart focuses on differences between children with and without disabilities of different socioeconomic backgrounds (see Tip 4).

**TIP 1: Throughout the report, grey bars are used to show results for children without disabilities and coloured bars for children with disabilities**

Chart 1 describes the proportion of children who read books at home, based on results from 31 countries. The grey bar indicates that among children without functional difficulties, 62% read books or are read to at home. Among children with one or more functional difficulties, the proportion drops to 48%, as indicated by the first blue bar. The remaining bars show the proportion of children who read books or are read to at home among other subgroups of children with disabilities (see Tip 3).

**TIP 2: Every chart includes a takeaway message and a technical title**

Technical titles describe the indicator being measured and the age group of children being represented.

**TIP 3: In Chart 1, the first coloured bar shows the overall result for children with disabilities. This is followed by coloured bars showing results for various subgroups, according to the domain or severity of the functional difficulty**

Charts on children aged 2 to 4 years, or 2 to 17 years, present the results for children without functional difficulties, with one or more functional difficulties, and with more than one functional difficulty. In addition to these subgroups, charts on children aged 5 to 17 years (or a subset) present results for three additional subgroups:

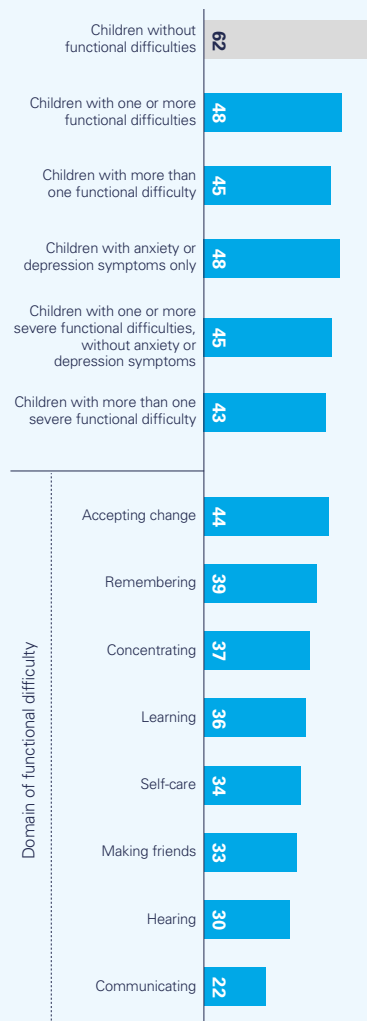
- **Children with anxiety or depression symptoms only:** children that present symptoms of anxiety and/or depression but no other functional difficulties
- **Children with one or more severe functional difficulties, without anxiety or depression symptoms:** children without daily symptoms of anxiety or depression, who cannot function at all in at least one domain
- **Children with more than one severe functional difficulty:** children who cannot function at all in more than one domain and/or who have daily symptoms of anxiety or depression.

The bottom of this chart shows results by domain of functional difficulty. Results are only shown for those domains with statistically significant differences in comparison to the overall result for children with one or more functional difficulties.

### Chart 1

**Children with multiple disabilities, especially those with difficulties hearing, remembering or caring for themselves, are least likely to read books or are read to at home**

Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years who read books or are read to at home





**TIP 4:** Chart 2 focuses on children with and without functional difficulties according to different background characteristics, such as the child’s sex, household wealth and country of residence.

The first two bars show pooled results (weighted average) for children based on results from 42 countries. *Weighted* means that results take into account the population size of each country relative to its sample size. The weighted average is followed by disaggregated results that provide a more detailed comparison among population subgroups with *different background characteristics*.

For example, the weighted results for this indicator show that children with disabilities are, on average, less likely than children without disabilities to attend an early childhood education programme.

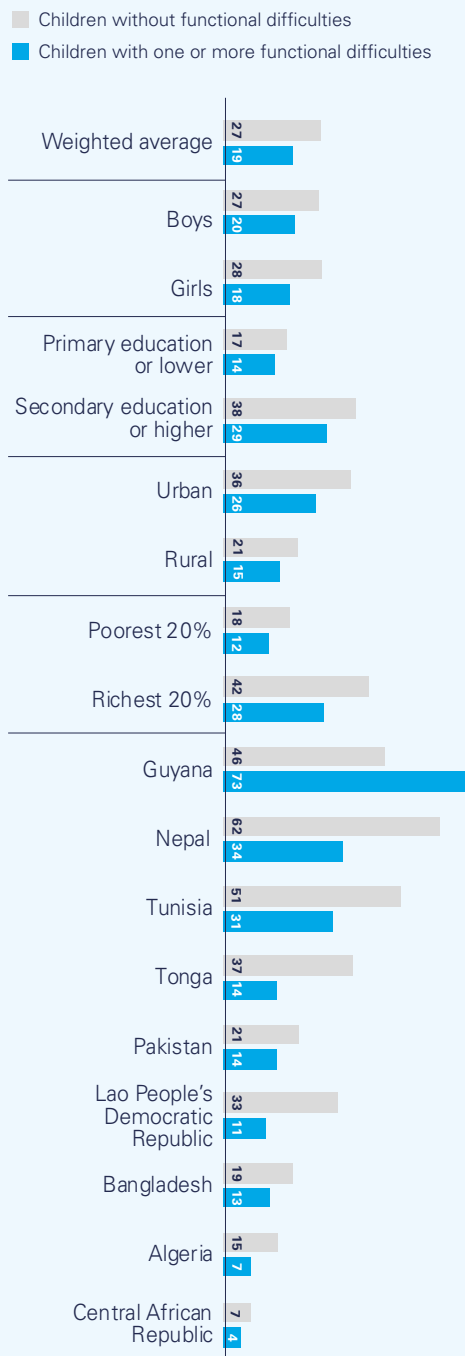
The bottom of the chart shows results for children with and without disabilities at the country level. Results are only shown for those countries where statistically significant differences were observed between children with and without disabilities.



### Chart 2

**Fewer children with disabilities attend early childhood education than their peers without disabilities; this disparity is slightly more pronounced among girls**

Percentage of children aged 3 to 4 years who are attending an early childhood education programme



## CHAPTER 2

# Every child has the right to survive and thrive

All children have the right to survive and develop, and to live a life free from disease, illness or other conditions that affect their well-being and future prospects.<sup>1</sup> Access to adequate nutrition and quality health care, including immunization, is paramount in making this right a reality for every child.

The SDGs include specific targets to ensure that children have the best start in life and can achieve their potential. Target 2.2 calls for an end to all forms of malnutrition by 2030, including achieving the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age by 2025. Various targets under Goal 3 seek to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being at all ages, including the expansion of health and vaccination coverage and an end to preventable deaths in children under 5. Although progress is being made, the lives of too many children continue to be lost, and children with disabilities remain among those likely to be left behind.

This chapter examines the current state of child health and nutrition and seeks to deepen understanding of specific vulnerabilities faced by children with disabilities. It provides important insights into areas that require the most urgent attention and response by governments, families and other stakeholders.







## Indicators used in this chapter

### **Immunization coverage for all basic vaccinations:**

Percentage of children aged 24 to 35 months who received all basic vaccinations at any time before the survey. Basic immunizations include one dose of BCG (the Bacillus Calmette–Guérin vaccine, primarily used against tuberculosis), three doses of vaccine for polio, three doses of vaccine for DTP (diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis, or whooping cough) and one dose of vaccine for measles.

**Prevalence of diarrhoea:** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months for whom the mother or other caretaker reported an episode of diarrhoea in the last two weeks.

### **Prevalence of acute respiratory infection (ARI) symptoms:**

Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months for whom the mother or other caretaker reported symptoms of ARI in the last two weeks.

**Prevalence of fever:** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months for whom the mother or other caretaker reported an episode of fever in the last two weeks.

**Care-seeking for ARI:** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who have had ARI symptoms in the last two weeks for whom advice or treatment was sought from a health facility or provider.

**Care-seeking for diarrhoea:** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who have had diarrhoea in the last two weeks for whom advice or treatment was sought from a health facility or provider.

### **Moderate and severe underweight prevalence:**

Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who fall below minus two standard deviations of the median weight-for-age of the World Health Organization (WHO) Child Growth Standards.

**Moderate and severe stunting prevalence:** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who fall below minus two standard deviations of the median height-for-age of the WHO Child Growth Standards.

**Moderate and severe wasting prevalence:** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who fall below minus two standard deviations of the median weight-for-height of the WHO Child Growth Standards.

**Overweight:** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who fall above two standard deviations of the median weight-for-height of the WHO Child Growth Standards.

## Definitions and data interpretation issues

Some of the findings in this chapter present limitations. Since the Child Functioning Module only captures information on children 2 years of age and older, some health and nutrition outcomes that may affect children with disabilities before this age are not reflected in the data. This is significant since it is before age 2 that many immunizations are administered, vulnerability to infection remains high and challenges arise in providing early nutrition (such as difficulties in breastfeeding).

Findings on disease symptoms and reported disease episodes also present limitations. Symptoms of ARI are collected to capture symptoms related to pneumonia, a leading cause of death in children under 5. In the data analysed, a child was considered to have had symptoms of ARI if the mother or caretaker reported that the child had, over the specified period, an illness with a cough and rapid or difficult breathing and whose symptoms were perceived to be due to a problem in the chest, or both a problem in the chest and a blocked or runny nose. While this approach is reasonable in the context of a multi-topic household survey, these simple case definitions must be kept in mind when interpreting the results and the potential for reporting and recall biases. Furthermore, diarrhoea, fever and ARI are seasonal and characterized by the often rapid spread of localized outbreaks from one area to another at different points in time. The timing of the survey and the location of the teams, therefore, might affect the results considerably. Thus, these results must be interpreted with caution and should not be used to assess the epidemiological characteristics of these diseases; rather, they provide an indication of the prevalence of such diseases over a short period of time.

Findings on nutritional status should also be interpreted with caution. Anthropometric measurements in MICS are carried out by trained measurers and under uniform conditions, which include the use of standardized digital scales and measurement boards.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, collecting data on the growth of children with disabilities presents additional challenges. Children with certain types of impairments may not grow in the same way as children who develop more typically. This may mean that their health and development cannot be properly measured by

standard tools used in the context of household surveys such as the MICS.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, measuring and weighing children with specific types of impairments may lead to larger measurement errors.<sup>4</sup> Finally, it should be noted that the WHO Child Growth Standards were calculated based on children without physical disabilities. Therefore, even when a child's height and weight can be collected, standard nutrition indicators (used to measure stunting, wasting and overweight) may be inappropriate to assess growth for certain children with disabilities,<sup>5</sup> making findings more difficult to interpret.

Table 2.1 shows that children with disabilities are overrepresented in the number of children with missing anthropometric data. The two main reasons given for missing data are that the child was not measured or that the data were collected but were implausible within the WHO growth standards reference z-scores. While the findings presented in this chapter do not specify the reason for missing data, they do provide some insights into the challenges around height and weight measurement of children with disabilities. These include: (1) difficulty measuring a child with an impairment (for example, if limbs are deformed due to polio and proper use of the measurement equipment is not possible), which may mean the measurement was not carried out at all; (2) the quality of the measurement may be poor due to the child's inability to stand properly, leading to inaccuracies; and (3) the growth standard used to generate the z score for each child may yield an implausible value. This may be due either to the way in which children with certain impairments grow or to errors in measurement exacerbated by the

child's condition, meaning that these children would not be included in the estimates at all. For all these reasons, the results presented may not accurately describe the nutritional status of children with disabilities.

## Sources of data

Unless otherwise noted, the pooled estimates in this chapter are drawn from the sixth round of MICS (MICS6) conducted in Algeria, Bangladesh, Belarus, Central African Republic, Chad, Costa Rica, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Iraq, Kiribati, Kosovo,<sup>6</sup> Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic (for children aged 2 to 4 years only), Lesotho, Madagascar, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro, Nepal, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Sao Tome and Principe, Serbia, Sierra Leone, State of Palestine, Suriname, Togo, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkmenistan and Zimbabwe. Data for Pakistan are pooled results from surveys conducted in the regions of Sindh and Punjab (for more details, see the technical annex).

Pooled results for indicators measuring immunization (Figure 2.1) do not include data from Bangladesh, Belarus, Georgia, Mexico, Montenegro, Nepal, Sierra Leone, Suriname or Turkmenistan since these were not available.

Pooled results for indicators measuring disease incidence and care-seeking behaviour (Figures 2.2 through 2.5) do not include data from Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkmenistan since these were not available.

**TABLE 2.1.** Missing anthropometric data among children aged 24 to 59 months

		Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months with missing data on height	Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months with missing data on weight
Children without functional difficulties		4	3
Children with one or more functional difficulties		6	4
Children with more than one functional difficulty		15	11
Domain of functional difficulty	Controlling behaviour	4	3
	Learning	9	7
	Communicating	9	7
	Hearing	14	9
	Seeing	16	11
	Playing	21	17
	Walking	24	17
	Fine motor	25	19



## Immunization

Immunization is key to protecting children from vaccine-preventable diseases. It remains one of the most successful and cost-effective interventions in the field of public health, leading to dramatic declines in the incidence of some of the world’s most deadly and debilitating diseases and contributing to sharp increases in life expectancy at birth and improved health outcomes. Immunization prevents diseases in children both with and without disabilities, enabling them to live fuller and healthier lives and resulting in social and economic gains.<sup>7</sup>

Children with disabilities are at greater risk of missing out on vaccinations than their peers without disabilities.<sup>9</sup> This is due, in part, to the fact that they tend to be more exposed to certain factors known to be associated with lower immunization rates, such as reduced access to mainstream health services.<sup>9</sup>

Children with certain conditions or impairments experience a significantly higher incidence of diarrhoea, acute respiratory infection (ARI) and fever.<sup>10</sup> They are also more vulnerable to the health effects of such diseases and face compounding risks by not being immunized.<sup>11</sup>

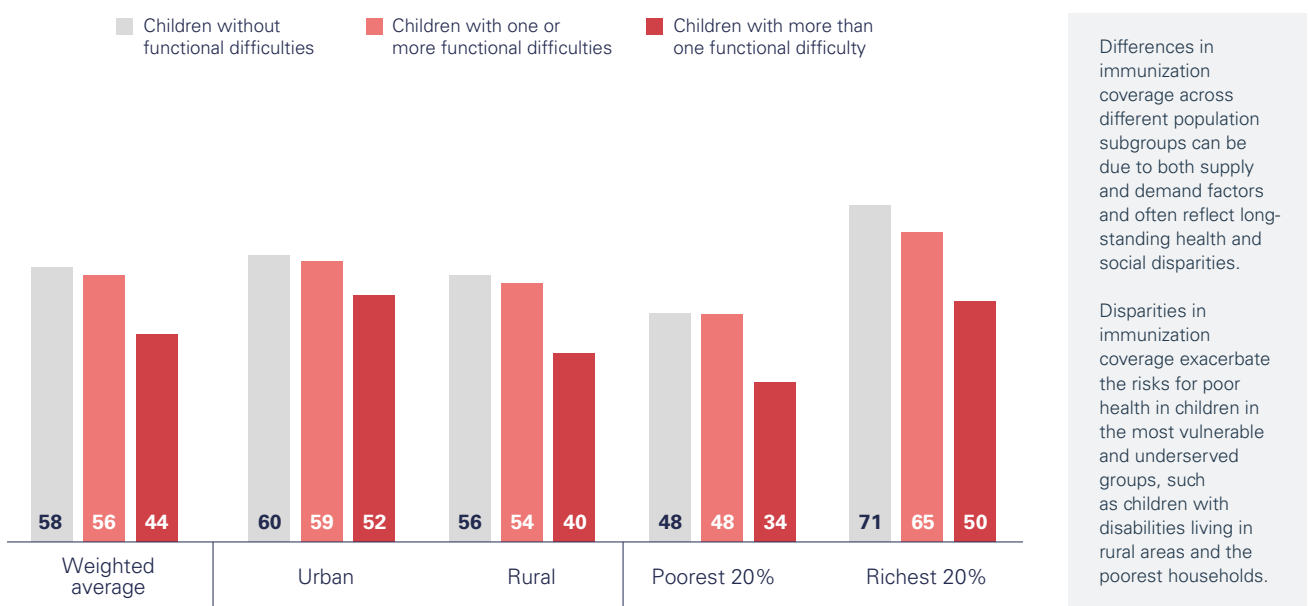
## Reported disease episodes and care-seeking

Despite a sustained decline in the incidence of childhood diseases over the last several decades, diarrhoea and ARI remain the leading causes of death and disease among children in low- and middle-income countries, responsible for around one third of deaths in children under 5 at the global level.<sup>12</sup> Though these deaths are mostly preventable, diarrhoea and ARI remain potent public health threats. They are deadliest for the most underserved population groups, including the poorest children and those living with disabilities. Children with disabilities who develop an illness or infection, including an ARI, are more susceptible to severe illness, poorer health outcomes and hospitalization than children without disabilities.<sup>13</sup>

This increased vulnerability stems from a combination of biological and social determinants of health. That said, disability can be both a cause and a consequence of certain diseases. For example, children with neurological impairments are more likely to have compromised immune systems, making them more susceptible than children without disabilities to ARIs.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand,

### Coverage of basic immunization against vaccine-preventable childhood diseases is significantly lower for children with multiple disabilities

**FIGURE 2.1** Percentage of children aged 24 to 35 months who received all basic vaccinations at any time prior to the survey



severe episodes of diarrhoea in early childhood can lead to malnutrition and impaired cognitive development, potentially resulting in disability.<sup>15</sup>

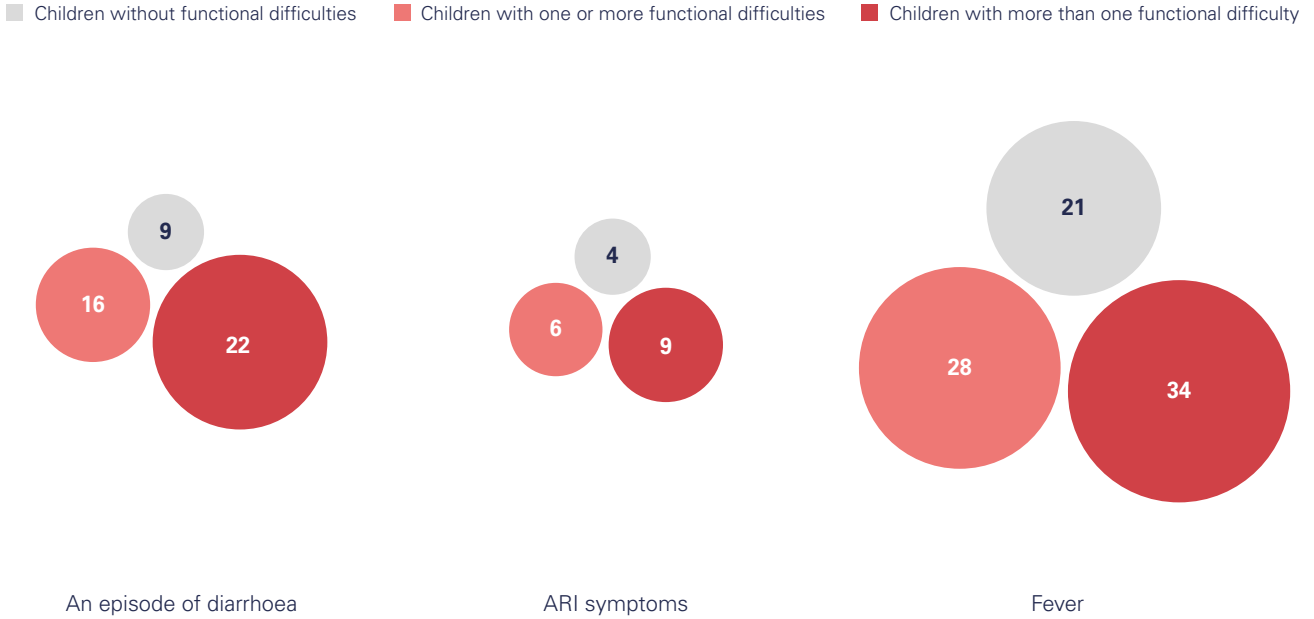
Timely recognition of ARI symptoms (which could indicate pneumonia), along with rapid care-seeking, can ensure appropriate treatment. Delays in care-seeking for children who might be sick due to diarrhoea or ARI can lead to further disease and even death. Limited evidence suggests that exclusion of children with disabilities from prompt and adequate care can be due to certain biological characteristics that can lead to delayed recognition of disease episodes.<sup>16</sup> However, this exclusion mostly results from failures to accommodate the needs of children with disabilities. These children face significant barriers in accessing care, including stigma,

lack of financial resources, inaccessible facilities, lack of transportation, an absence of privacy at care facilities and inadequately trained health-care staff.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, some research findings suggest that parents of children with intellectual and developmental disorders are more likely to delay seeking medical care.<sup>18</sup> Challenges surrounding communication and behavioural difficulties can lead to both a delay in the recognition of respiratory problems by caretakers and difficulty in establishing a precise diagnosis by health-care providers. Delays in care-seeking by parents of children with intellectual and development disabilities have been found to be associated with challenges in controlling the child's behaviour in public as well as accessing health facilities that are trusted by parents.<sup>19</sup>



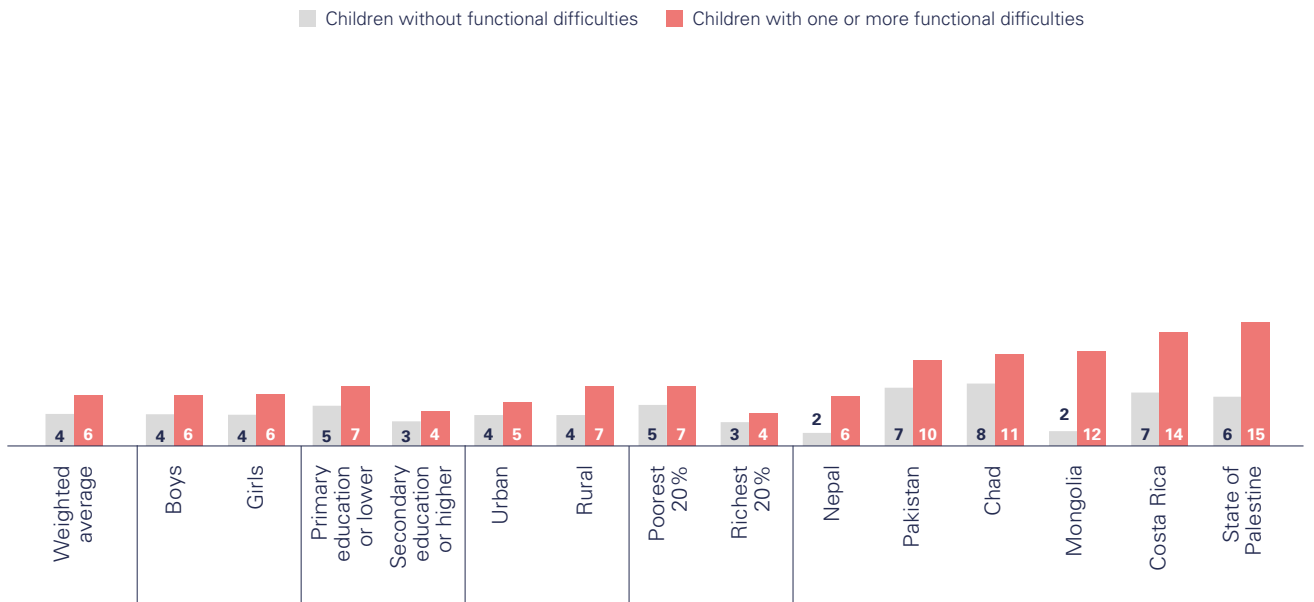
**Children with disabilities are more likely to have reported episodes of diarrhoea, ARI symptoms and fever than children without disabilities**

**FIGURE 2.2** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months with a reported episode of diarrhoea, symptoms of acute respiratory infection or fever in the previous two weeks



**In some countries and areas, children with disabilities are more likely to have ARI symptoms than their peers without disabilities; these disparities are most evident in children whose mothers have low levels of education and who are living in the poorest or rural households**

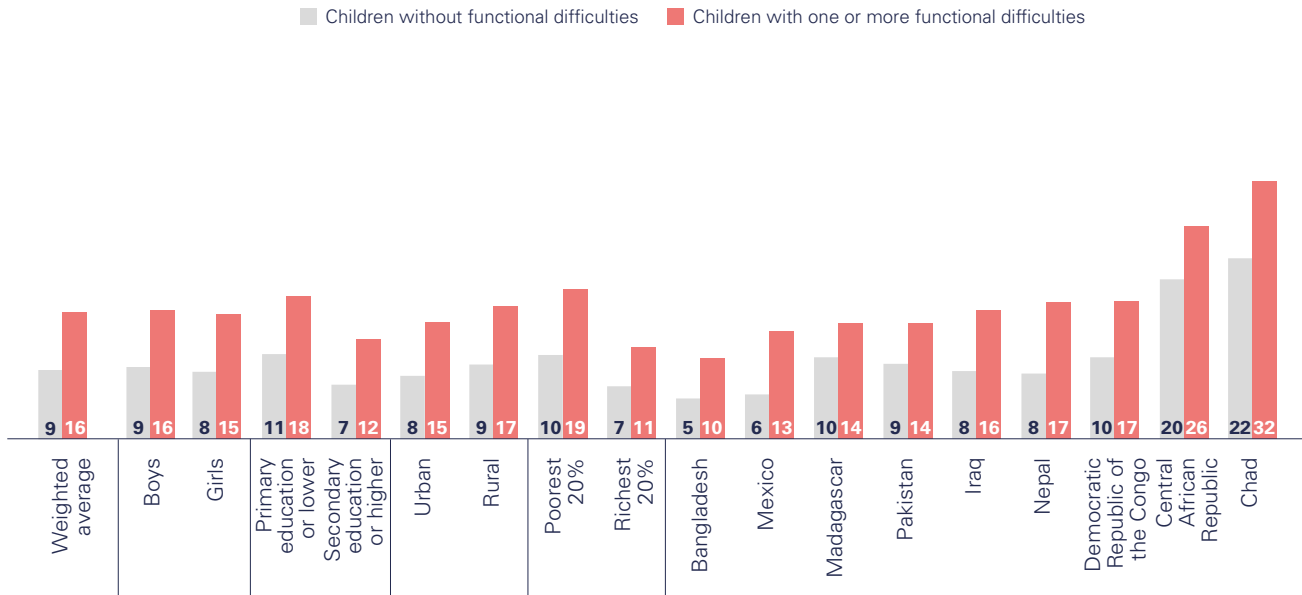
**FIGURE 2.3** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months with reported symptoms of acute respiratory infection in the previous two weeks



Note: Education refers to the education level of mothers.

In some countries, children with disabilities are far more likely to have diarrhoea than their peers without disabilities. Disparities are largest among children with disabilities whose mothers have little education or who live in the poorest or rural households

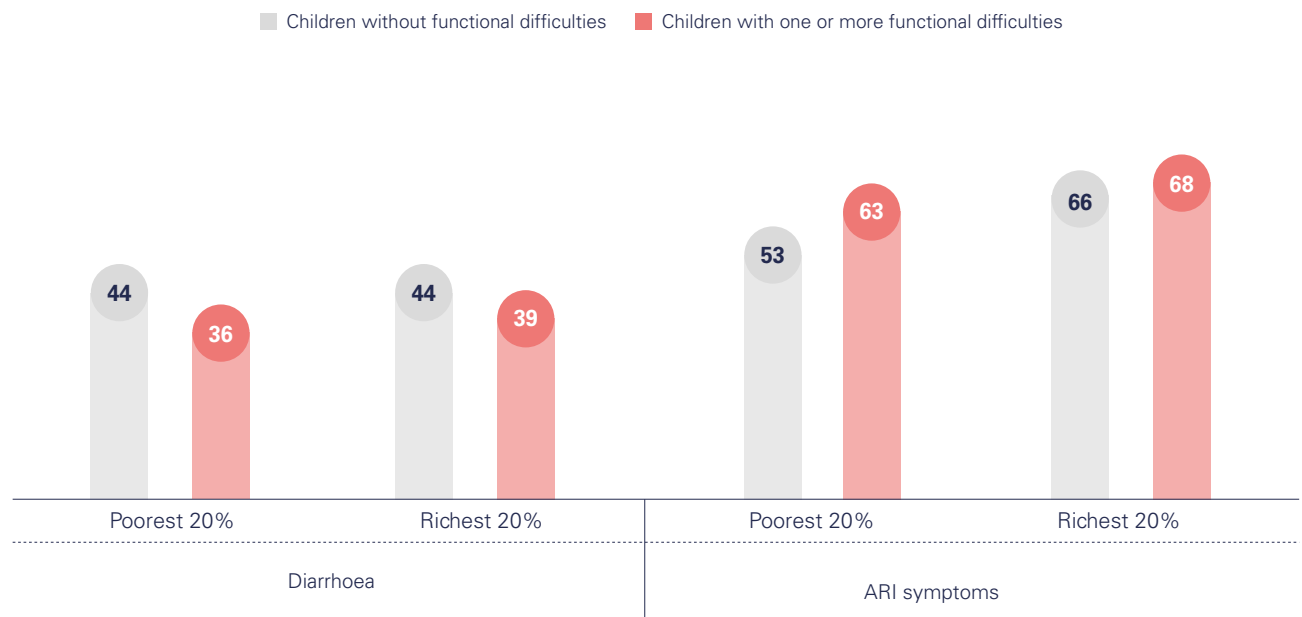
FIGURE 2.4 Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months with a reported episode of diarrhoea in the previous two weeks



Note: Education refers to the education level of mothers.

In the poorest households, caregivers of children with disabilities are less likely to seek care for children who have diarrhoea and more likely to seek care when such children have symptoms of ARI

FIGURE 2.5 Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who have had diarrhoea or symptoms of acute respiratory infection in the last two weeks, for whom advice or treatment was sought from a health facility or provider



## Nutritional status

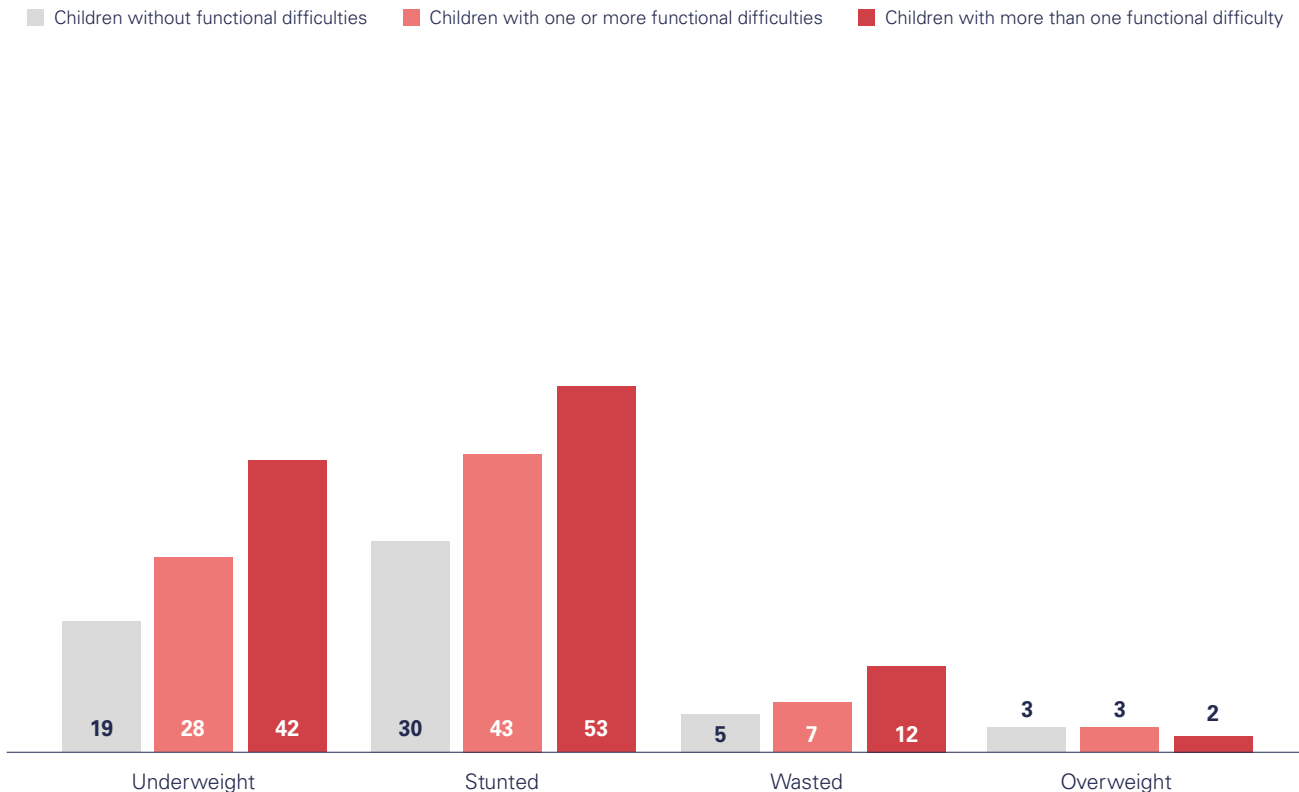
Access to food is a fundamental human right with profound implications for all children, including those with disabilities. Inadequate nutrition can have lifelong effects on physical growth and brain development and can hold children back from achieving a productive and fulfilling life. The interlinkages between nutrition and disability are complex and tend to be addressed in terms of the role of adequate nutrition in preventing certain impairments. Knowledge about the nutritional status of children with disabilities is limited, however, and subject to methodological challenges.

Malnutrition in children with disabilities can be attributed to many factors. These include physical problems in feeding such children, suboptimal feeding practices due to lack of knowledge or specific skills among caregivers, or attitudinal, social or cultural causes (such as the

exclusion or neglect of children with disabilities in feeding practices, socially or in the home).<sup>20</sup> The availability of food in the home is also a factor. In the United States, households that include children with disabilities are significantly more likely to report food insecurity of any kind.<sup>21</sup> When such children live in residential care or other institutions, their nutrition tends to suffer due to inadequate staffing and discriminatory practices.<sup>22</sup> Children with disabilities represent a disproportionate share of children in such facilities and are less likely to benefit from nutritional programmes, which are often not extended to institutions.<sup>23</sup> In humanitarian situations, children with disabilities are at risk of malnutrition because their particular needs are not usually taken into account. Moreover, they are less likely to be included in education in emergencies and to benefit from the nutrition programmes that operate through such channels.<sup>24</sup>

### Children with disabilities suffer disproportionately higher rates of malnutrition

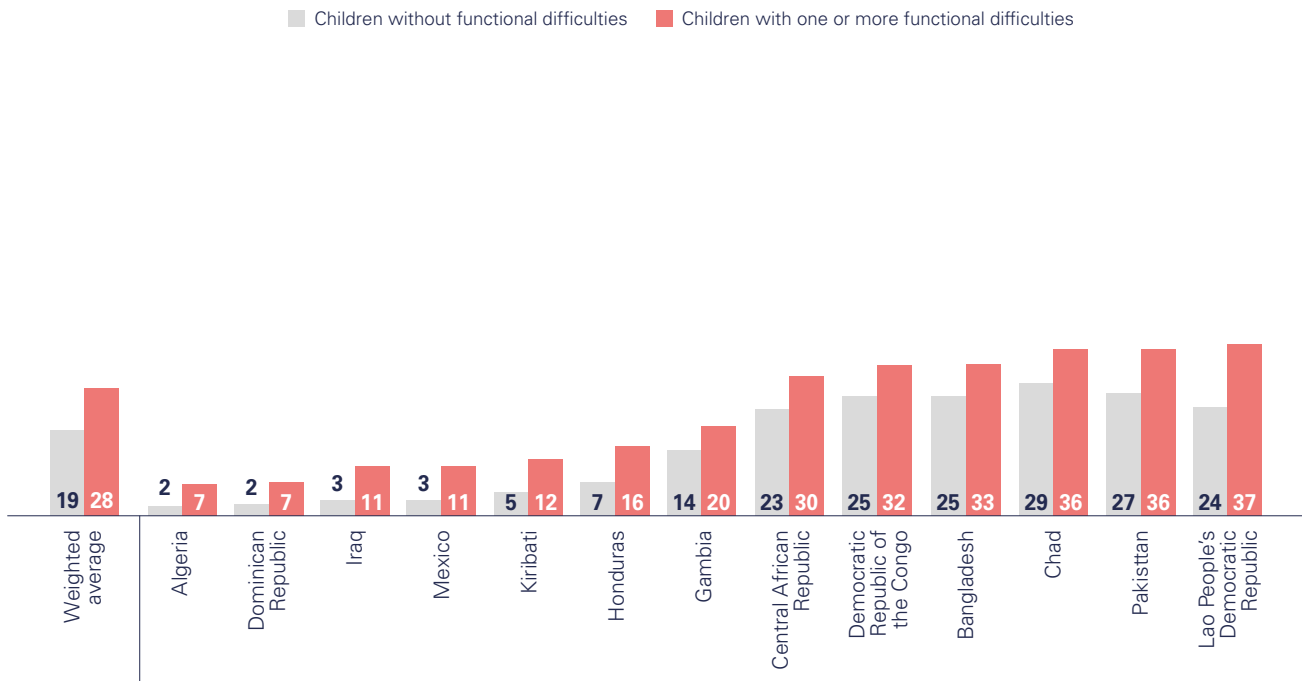
**FIGURE 2.6** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who are underweight, stunted, wasted or overweight





Across many countries, children with disabilities have a higher prevalence of underweight

FIGURE 2.7 Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who are underweight



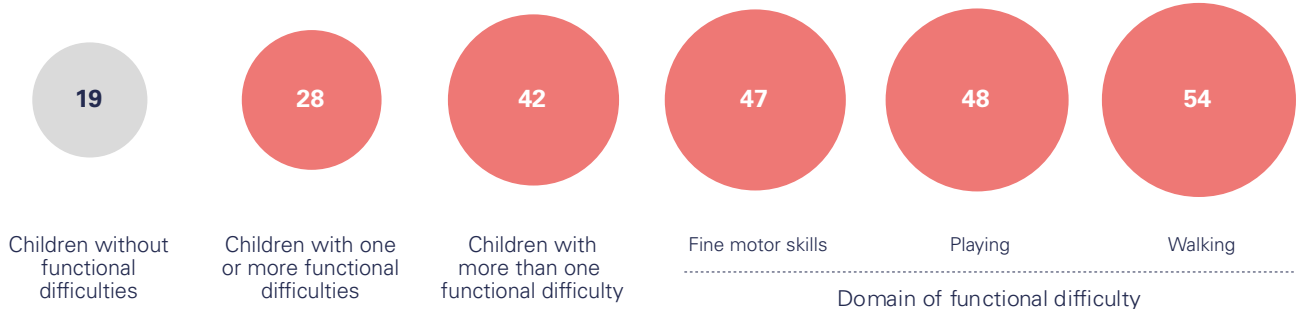
Children with disabilities also have a higher prevalence of stunting in many countries

FIGURE 2.8 Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who are stunted

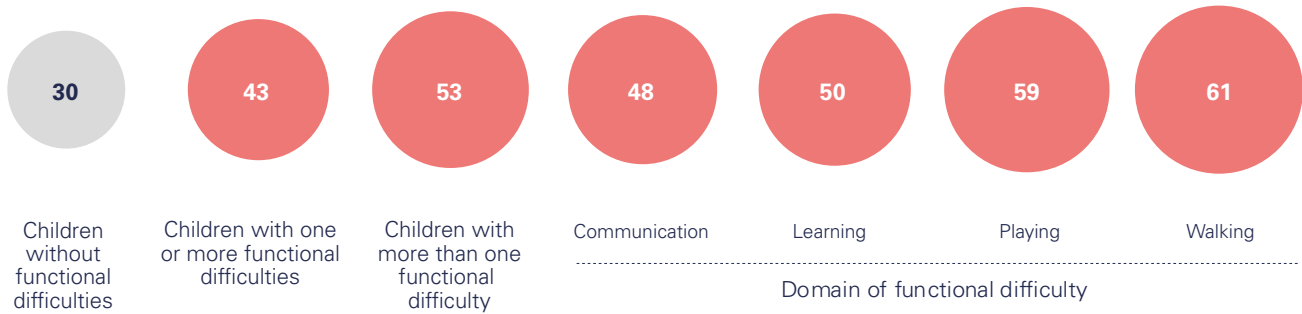


**Across the various domains of function, malnutrition is more common among children with difficulties playing and walking**

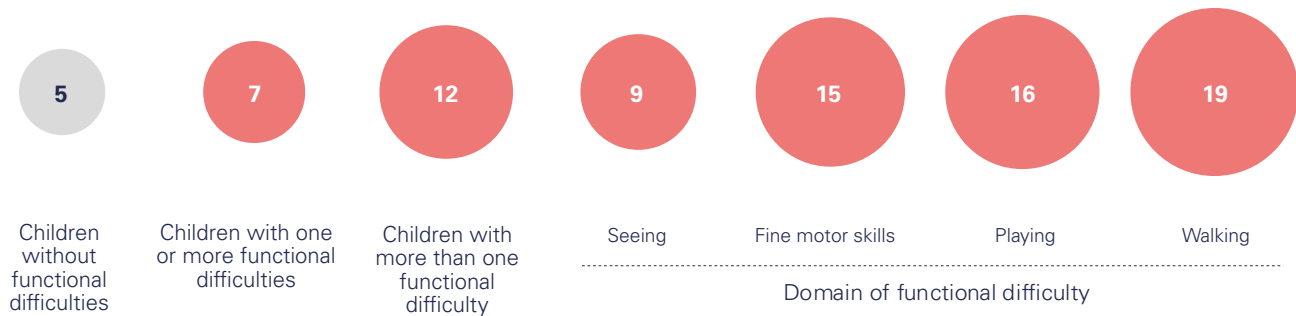
**FIGURE 2.9** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who are underweight



**FIGURE 2.10** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who are stunted



**FIGURE 2.11** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who are wasted



Note: Each chart presents domains of functional difficulty with the highest proportion of children who are underweight (Figure 2.9), stunted (Figure 2.10) and wasted (Figure 2.11).



### Stunting and underweight are more prevalent among children with disabilities living in the poorest and rural households

**TABLE 2.2** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who are underweight and stunted

<b>UNDERWEIGHT</b>				
	<b>Children without functional difficulties</b>		<b>Children with one or more functional difficulties</b>	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Richest	10	12	15	14
Middle	13	21	25	26
Poorest	17	28	28	37
<b>STUNTING</b>				
	<b>Children without functional difficulties</b>		<b>Children with one or more functional difficulties</b>	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Richest	17	18	25	21
Middle	24	35	38	43
Poorest	31	43	40	54

## Takeaways and programmatic implications

This chapter documents the diverse experiences of children with disabilities in realizing their right to a healthy start in life. It also lays out the clear and urgent need for interventions that address prevailing inequities and barriers that contribute to such disparities.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities clearly mandate that all children – with or without disabilities – have the right to accessible and affordable treatment for any disease, illness or health condition that infringes on their life and well-being. Children with disabilities, especially those in the poorest and rural households, are at elevated risk of experiencing diarrhoea, fever and symptoms of ARI. However, care-seeking to address episodes of diarrhoea is less commonly reported by caregivers of children with disabilities who live in the poorest households. Interventions should address the inequities within society that contribute to increased risks of illness and infection and exacerbate disparities in access to health services. This includes training and other support for caregivers of children with disabilities and the creation of more inclusive health-care facilities. Similarly, steps should be taken to reduce disparities in immunization coverage among the most vulnerable children, including those in rural areas and the poorest households. Strong national immunization campaigns, along with positive attitudes in the community towards the inclusion of children with disabilities, can contribute to reducing gaps in vaccination coverage.<sup>25</sup>

In terms of nutrition, the extent of disparities varies by country. However, children with disabilities frequently experience higher rates of underweight, stunting and wasting than their peers without disabilities. This is especially true among children with difficulties seeing, playing and walking as well as those from the poorest households. That said, a consideration of these findings must take into account the fact that indicators for stunting, wasting and underweight may not be appropriate for assessing the nutritional status of children with certain forms of disability. A possible approach to addressing these challenges is the integration of disability and nutrition programmes to ensure that the needs of all children are being met.<sup>26</sup> Such programmes should not only address the absence of nutritious food in households but also provide caregivers with the knowledge and skills

to ensure that children with different impairments are able to consume food easily.

Awareness and knowledge of the interlinkages between early health, nutrition, development and disability are urgently required. Twin-track approaches are needed that promote coverage of mainstream interventions to address poor outcomes in all children, including those with disabilities, along with tailored and differentiated strategies to meet the needs of children with specific impairments. Across relevant sectors, capacity development is required for appropriate care and support. All stakeholders, from families to educators and health-care workers, should have the knowledge, attitudes and skills to address the needs of all children, including those with disabilities, and deliver inclusive care. Given countries' divergent realities, interventions and programmes should be tailored to the specific context to target inequities and differences that are unique to each of them.

Likewise, children with certain disabilities have specific health needs and experience different barriers in accessing health care and other services. These challenges are not normally captured by standard health indicators. While current indicators may provide insights into overall coverage of key health interventions, they do not factor in quality aspects. From a monitoring point of view, metrics of coverage should provide a more nuanced picture of how well health systems are delivering services that effectively address the needs of children with disabilities. Effective coverage<sup>27</sup> indicators need to be generated in such a way that they account for the quality of services to produce health gains for all children, including those with disabilities.

Some cross-cutting approaches to make health-care services more inclusive hold the potential to improve health outcomes. These include, for example, increasing the availability of accessible health promotion information and facilitating communication during medical visits through adaptations that may include the use of sign language or explanations that can be understood by children with intellectual disabilities. These programmatic interventions can be facilitated by promoting public awareness of the challenges that children with disabilities can face in realizing their rights to health and adequate nutrition and by effective advocacy around the urgent need for inclusivity in all policies, programmes and day-to-day activities.







## CHAPTER 3

# Every child has the right to a nurturing family environment

All children have the right to grow up in a family environment that provides them with the love, nutrition, protection, opportunities for early learning and responsive care they require to survive, grow and thrive.<sup>1</sup> Both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities mandate children's right to a good start in life and to adequate care and development. A central aspect of this care is the engagement and stimulation provided by caregivers.<sup>2</sup> This right is further cemented as a global priority in the SDGs. Target 4.2 explicitly outlines the importance of quality early childhood development and care, in addition to primary education.

Starting even before they are born, children's development is heavily influenced by biological and environmental factors. Early childhood provides a window of opportunity to invest in actions that can enhance development and prevent or mitigate vulnerabilities that can seriously compromise long-term outcomes.<sup>3</sup> It is well known, for example, that adverse experiences during childhood can affect not only a child's mental and physical health and educational achievements but also his or her life prospects.

Children with disabilities risk missing out on the care and stimulation they need in the early years due to increased exposure to factors that make them more vulnerable. These include poverty, stigma and discrimination, exclusion from early learning opportunities, institutionalization, violence, abuse and neglect.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, children with disabilities may face high barriers in accessing mainstream programmes and services that support early childhood development,<sup>5</sup> and even if they do obtain access, their specific needs are often overlooked.

Stimulating home environments and nurturing relationships are key to fostering growth, learning and development in all children, and their lack can have worrisome effects. More frequent exclusion from such environments, for example, means that children with disabilities are at higher risk of struggling to acquire the skills associated with literacy.<sup>6</sup>







The knowledge, attitudes, expectations and skills of caregivers are key in determining the amount and quality of stimulation experienced by children. Parents of children with intellectual disabilities have been found to have lower expectations of their child's reading and writing abilities, which can contribute to lower exposure to early reading activities in the home.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, children with disabilities often require individualized approaches to make play accessible and engaging.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, the well-being and mental health of caregivers themselves also play a role in their ability to provide nurturing care. This is even more relevant for parents of children with disabilities, who often face multiple sources of stress (see Box 3.1 on page 59). As a result, children with disabilities are more likely to be neglected and lack supervision by a caregiver than their peers without disabilities.<sup>9</sup>



## Indicators used in this chapter

**Early stimulation and responsive care:** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who engaged in four or more activities to provide early stimulation and responsive care in the last three days with any adult household member. Activities include reading books or looking at picture books with the child; telling stories; singing songs to or with the child; taking the child outside the home; playing with the child; naming, counting or drawing things for or with the child.

**Availability of children's books:** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who have three or more children's books.

**Availability of playthings:** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who play with two or more types of playthings. Playthings include homemade toys, such as dolls, cars or other toys made at home; toys from a shop or manufactured toys; household objects, such as bowls or pots; or objects found outside, such as sticks, rocks, animal shells or leaves.

**Inadequate supervision:** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months left alone or under the supervision of another child younger than 10 years of age for more than one hour in the last week.

## Definitions and data interpretation issues

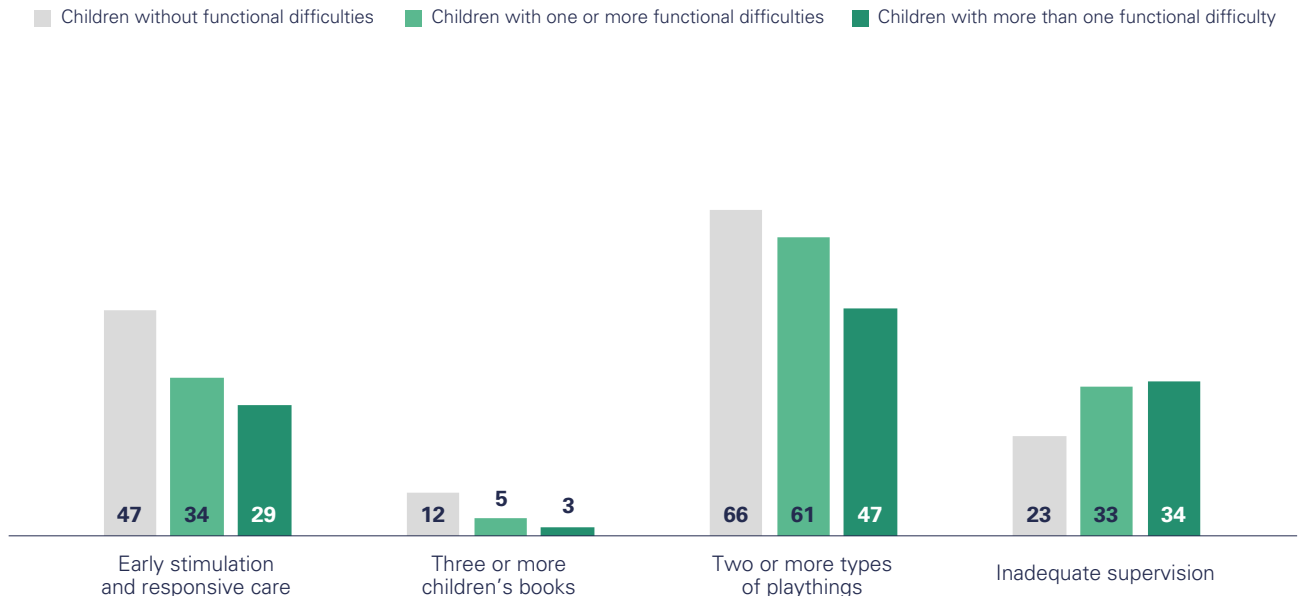
An overarching limitation that runs through several of the indicators regards the age of children measured. Early childhood development indicators that address the availability of children's books and playthings, along with inadequate supervision, all measure responses for children under the age of 5 years. However, since the Child Functioning Module only covers children who are at least 2 years old, children under age 2 are not represented in the data. The findings, therefore, do not reflect outcomes among younger children, for whom a lack of supervision or playthings is crucial.

## Sources of data

The pooled estimates in this chapter are drawn from MICS6 conducted in Algeria, Bangladesh, Belarus, Central African Republic, Chad, Costa Rica, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Iraq, Kiribati, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic (for children aged 2 to 4 years only), Lesotho, Madagascar, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro, Nepal, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Sao Tome and Principe, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Suriname, Togo, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkmenistan and Zimbabwe. Data for Pakistan are pooled results from surveys conducted in the regions of Sindh and Punjab (for more details, see the technical annex).

**Children with disabilities receive less early stimulation and responsive care, and have lower exposure to children’s books and playthings, than children without disabilities; they are also more likely to receive inadequate supervision**

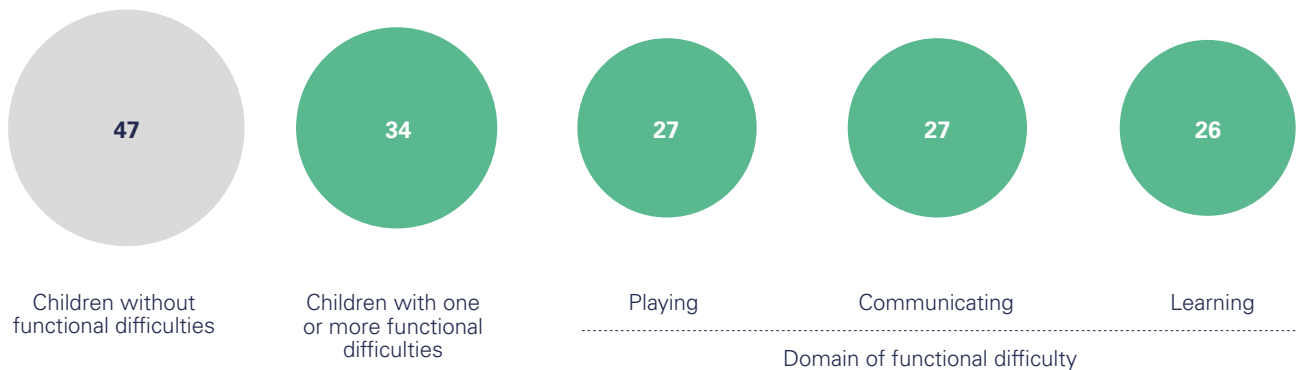
**FIGURE 3.1** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months engaged in four or more activities to provide early stimulation and responsive care in the last three days with any adult household member, who have three or more children’s books, who play with two or more types of playthings, and who were left alone or under the supervision of another child younger than 10 years of age for more than one hour in the last week



**Early stimulation and responsive care**

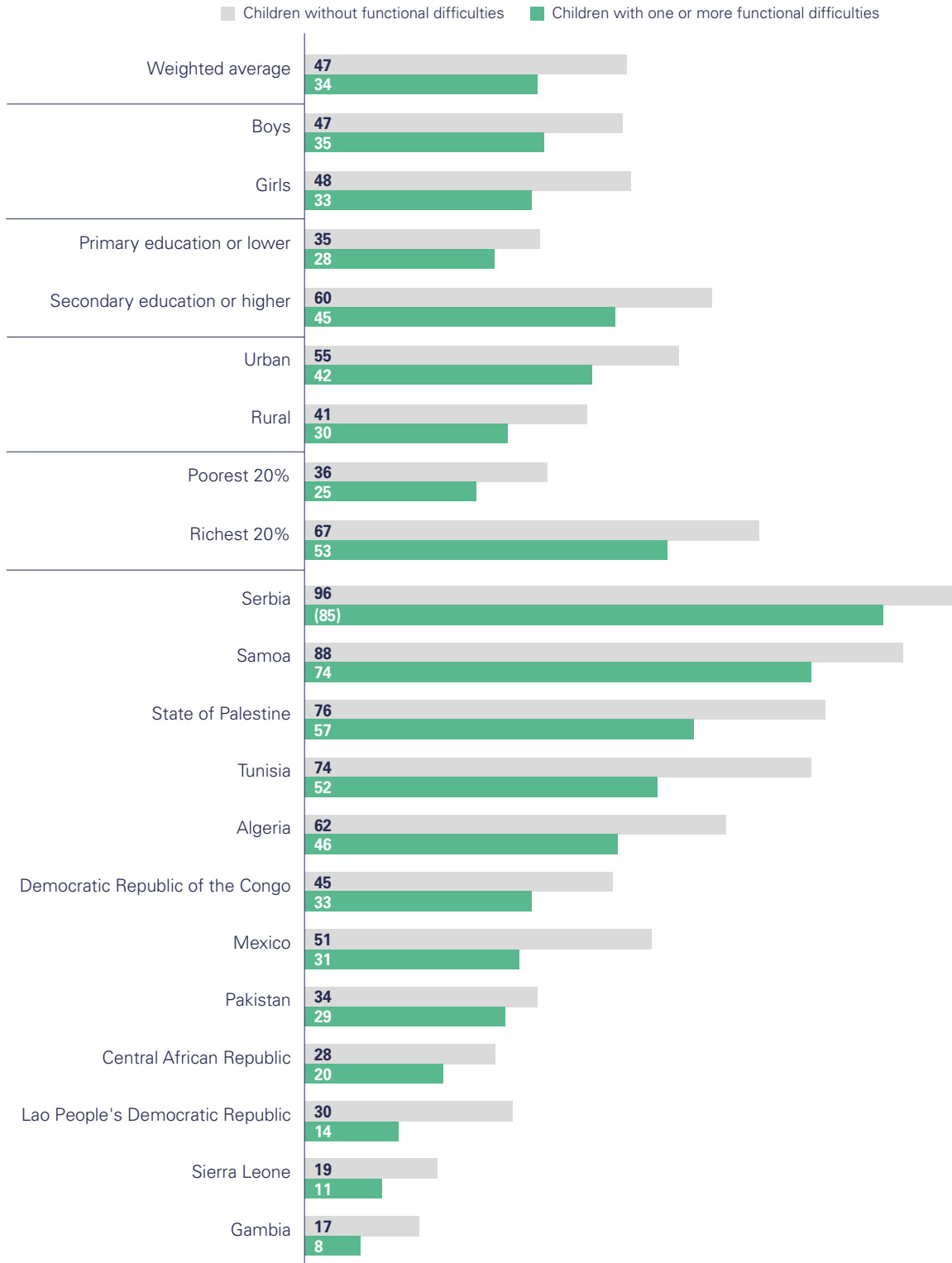
**Children with difficulties learning, communicating and playing have the least exposure to early stimulation and responsive care**

**FIGURE 3.2** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months engaged in four or more activities to provide early stimulation and responsive care in the last three days with any adult household member



**Children with disabilities of all socioeconomic backgrounds, and in many countries and areas, are significantly less likely to experience early stimulation and responsive care**

**FIGURE 3.3** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months engaged in four or more activities to provide early stimulation and responsive care in the last three days with any adult household member

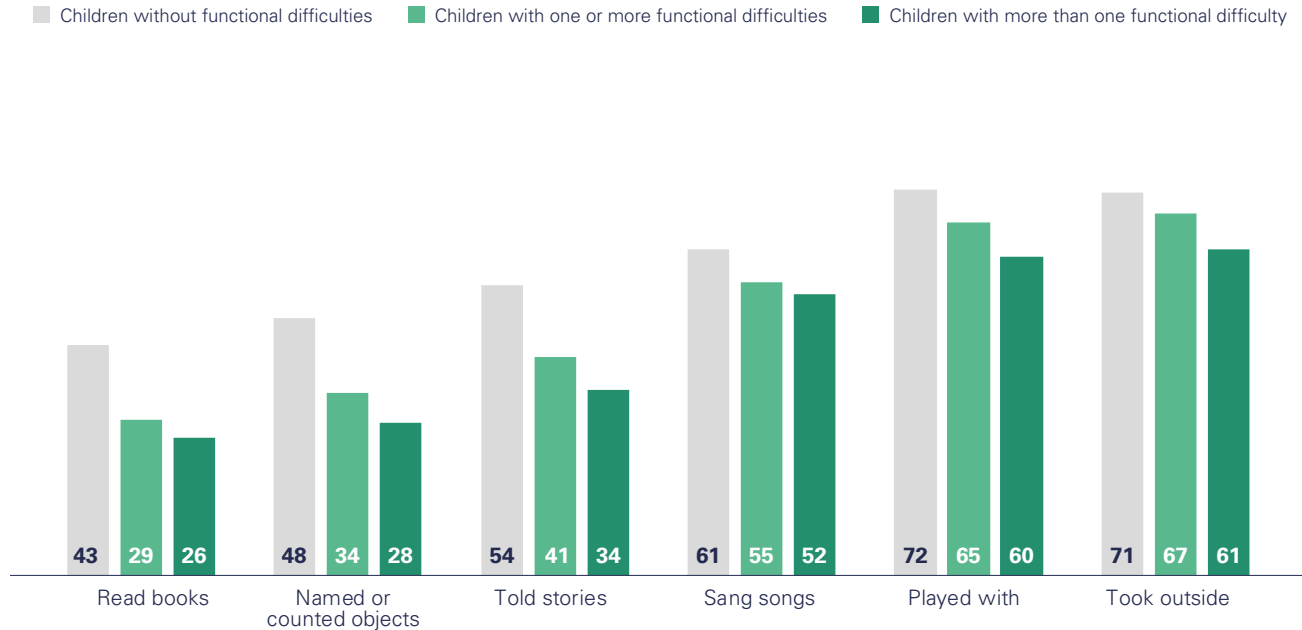


Note: Education refers to the education level of mothers.



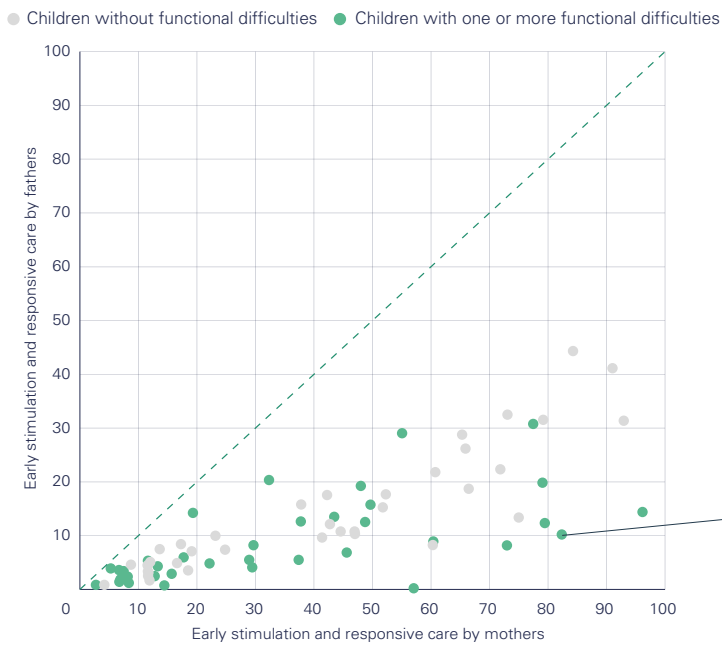
**For all children, being taken outside the home and engaged in play are the most common types of early stimulation activities; the largest disparities between children with and without disabilities are found in the proportion who are read to and engaged in naming or counting objects**

**FIGURE 3.4** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months engaged in specific activities to provide early stimulation and responsive care in the last three days with any adult household member



**Fathers generally engage less in early stimulation activities than mothers, but this disparity is more pronounced among parents of children with disabilities**

**FIGURE 3.5** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who have engaged in at least four early stimulation activities in the previous three days with mothers (x axis) and fathers (y axis)



Dots in this graph represent countries. Each country has two dots: a grey dot, showing the country-level proportion of children without disabilities who engage in early stimulation activities with mothers versus fathers, and a green dot showing the proportion of children with functional difficulties who engage in early stimulation activities with mothers versus fathers.

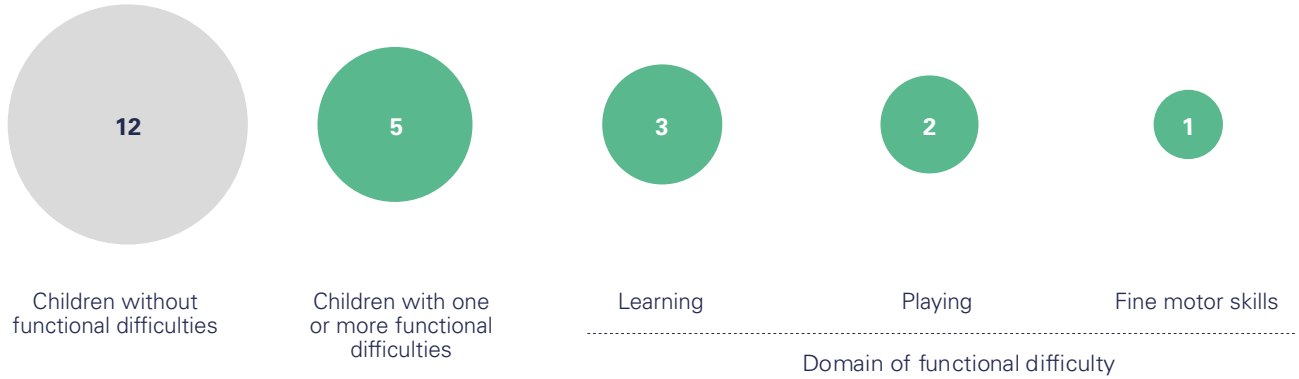
Dots falling close to the diagonal line represent countries where engagement with mothers is very similar to that with fathers.

**How to read this graph:** In this country, around 80 per cent of mothers of children with functional difficulties engage in early stimulation activities with them, compared to only 10 per cent of fathers.

### Availability of books and playthings

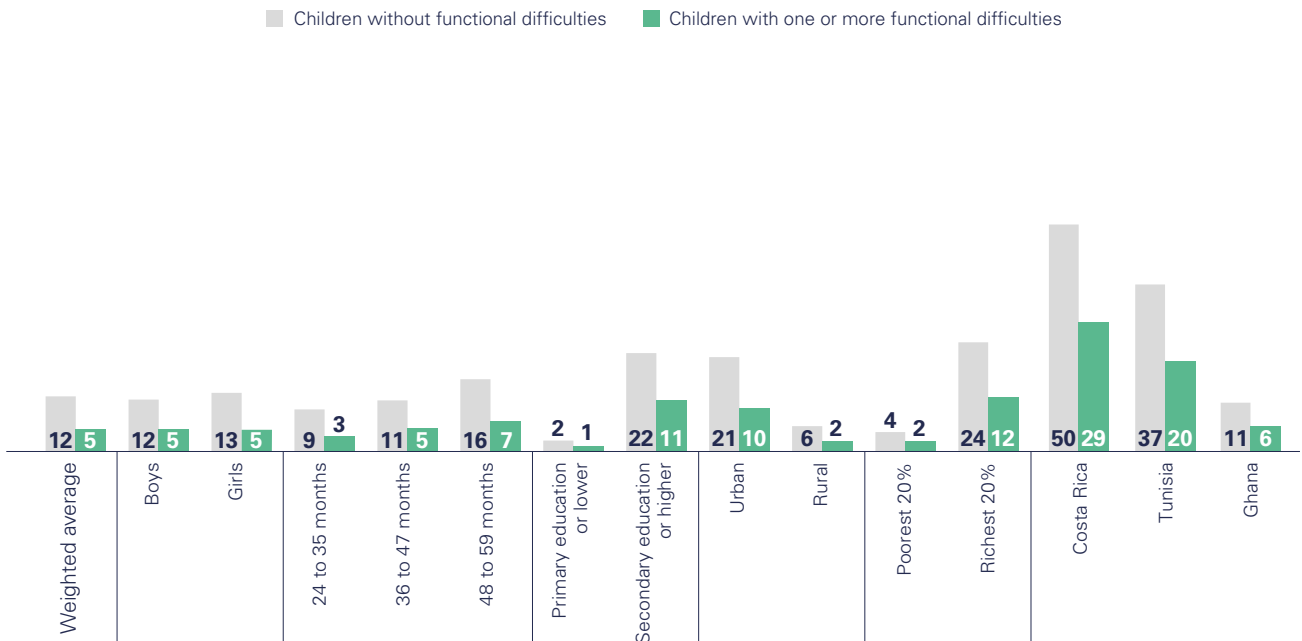
Children with disabilities in the domains of fine motor skills, playing and learning are least likely to have three or more children’s books

**FIGURE 3.6** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who have three or more children’s books



Children with disabilities, especially those in rural areas whose mothers have little education and are from the poorest households, have significantly lower access to children’s books

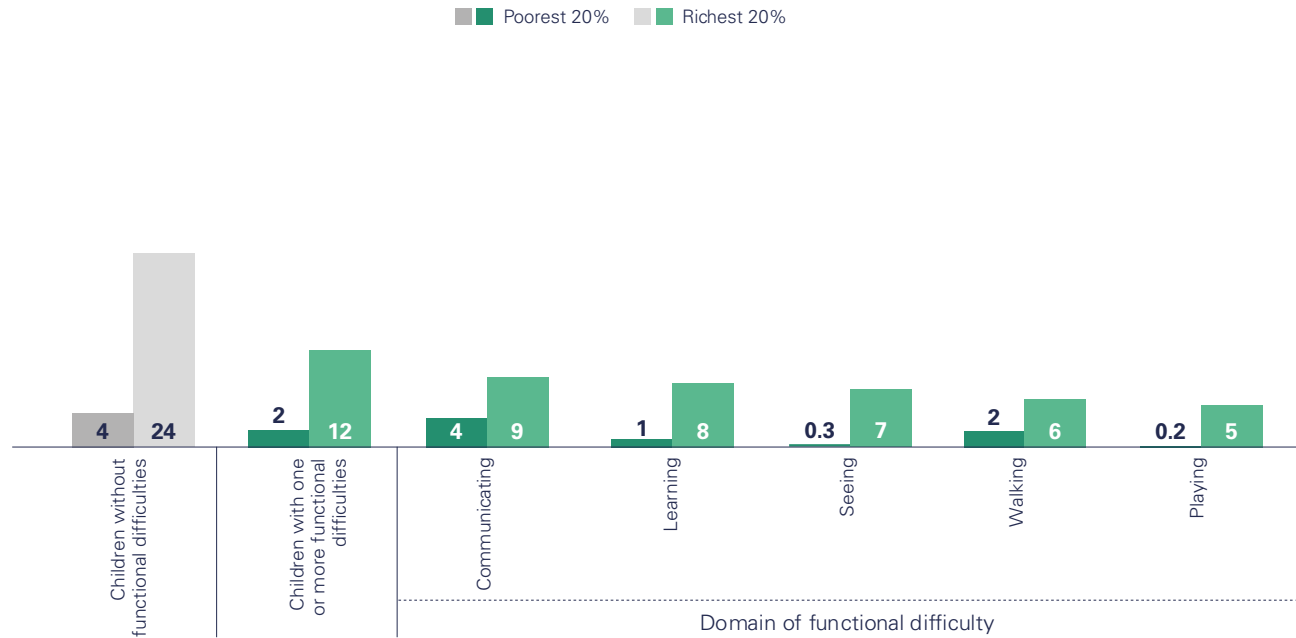
**FIGURE 3.7** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who have three or more children’s books



Note: Education refers to the education level of mothers.

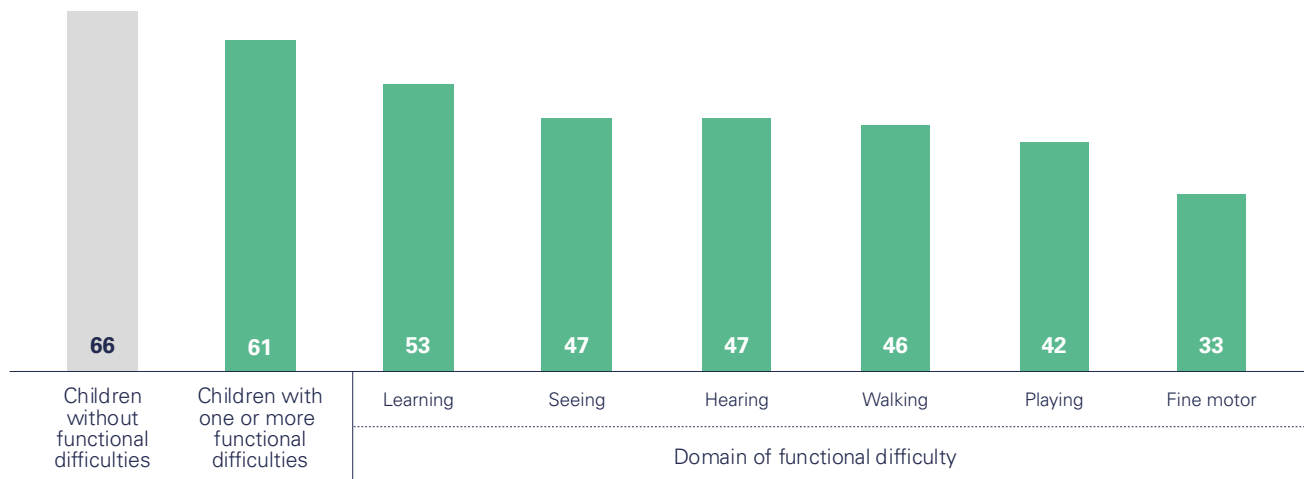
**Access to children’s books is strongly associated with household wealth; among children with the same level of wealth, however, access to books is substantially lower for children with disabilities, especially among those with difficulties learning, walking and playing**

**FIGURE 3.8** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who have three or more children’s books



**Children with difficulties using fine motor skills are less likely to have two or more playthings in their households**

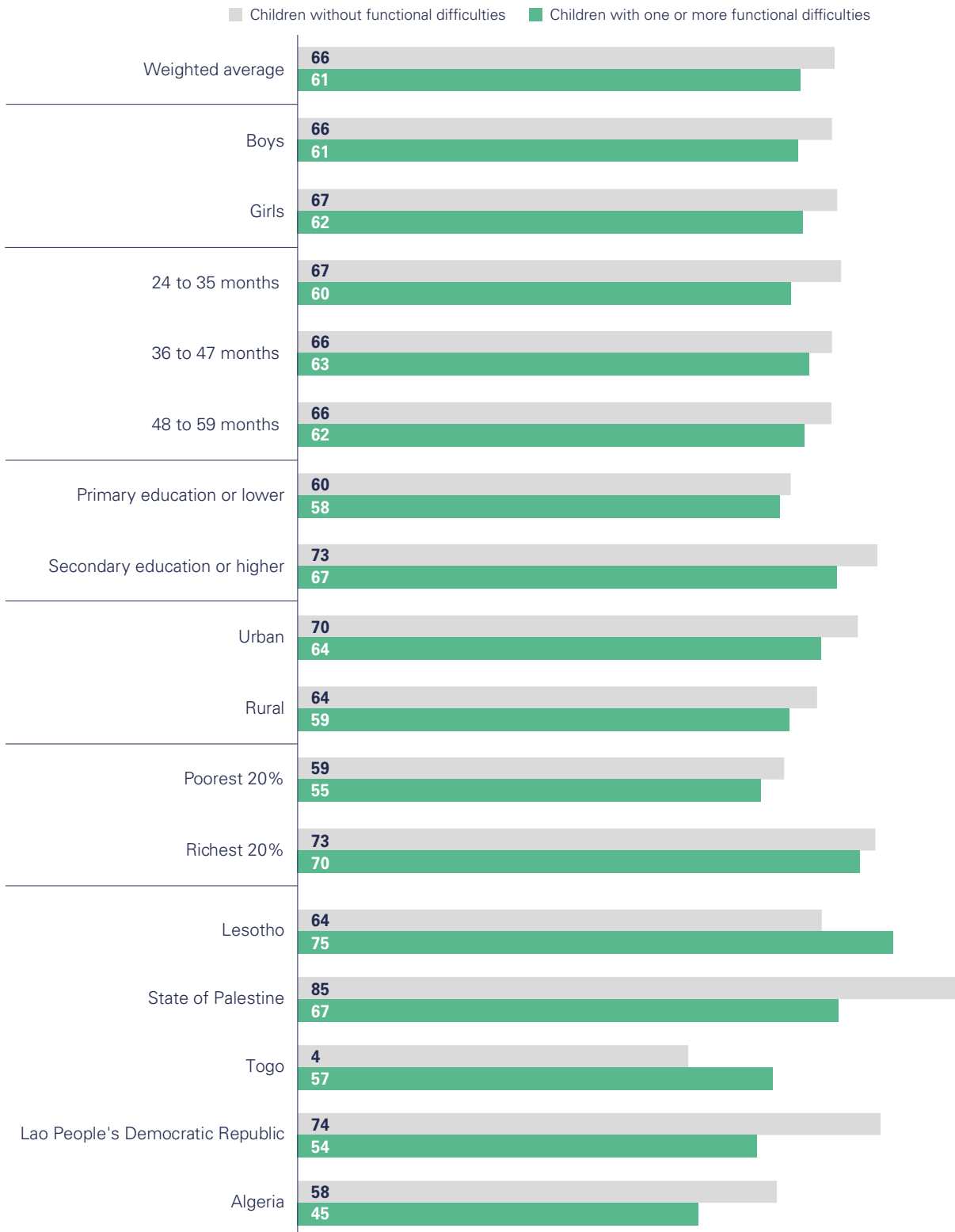
**FIGURE 3.9** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who play with two or more types of playthings



Note: Results are shown for domains with the lowest percentage of children who play with two or more types of playthings.

**Children with disabilities generally have less access to playthings than children without disabilities; this disparity is widest among younger children**

**FIGURE 3.10** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who play with two or more types of playthings



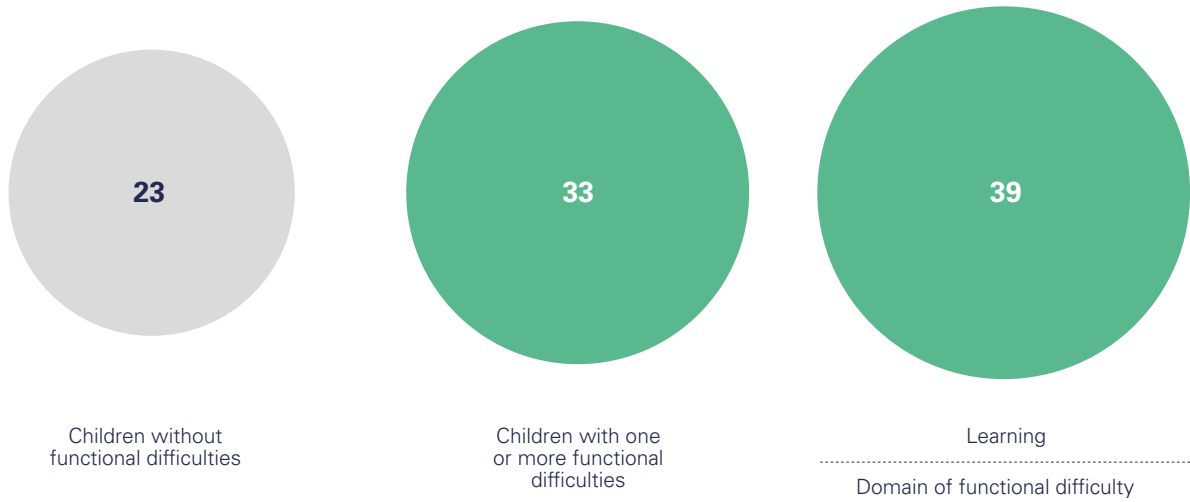
Note: Education refers to the education level of mothers.



### Inadequate supervision

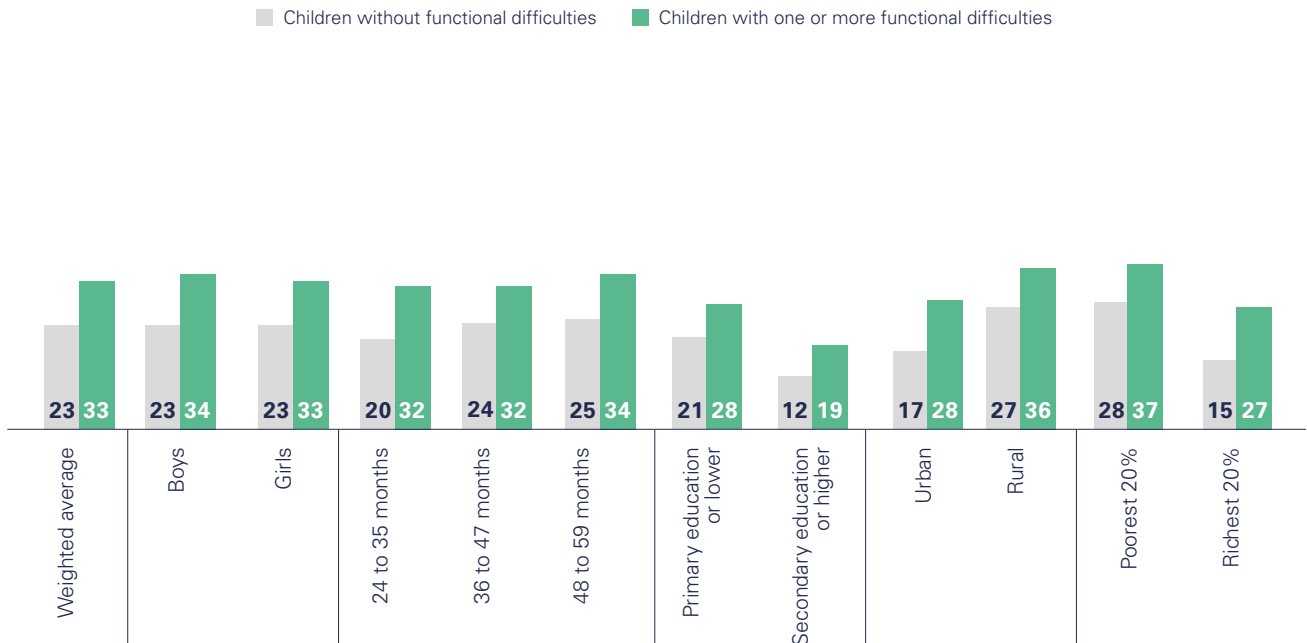
#### Children with difficulties learning are the most likely to experience inadequate supervision

**FIGURE 3.11** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months left alone or under the supervision of another child younger than 10 years of age for more than one hour in the last week



#### Children with disabilities of all backgrounds are more likely to lack adequate supervision

**FIGURE 3.12** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months left alone or under the supervision of another child younger than 10 years of age for more than one hour in the last week



Note: Education refers to the education level of mothers.



## BOX 3.1

## Caring for the caregivers of children with disabilities

**Expecting a baby with a disability:** Every family expecting a baby, whether planned or not, hopes for a healthy child. The prospect of giving birth to a child with disabilities often raises a host of negative feelings, fuelled by personal and familial expectations, societal norms, stigma and discriminatory attitudes, and the absence of inclusive mainstream services.

**Caring for small children:** Babies and other small children are heavily dependent on their caregivers to meet their basic needs, uphold their rights and provide them with the environment and care they need to grow and develop. Since parents or other caregivers play such a central role in this regard, their own mental well-being is also important and can affect children directly in a variety of ways. Caring for a baby or small child is a demanding task that can be stressful and exhausting for all caregivers, but particularly for those looking after children with functional difficulties and in contexts where they lack adequate support.

**Mental health of caregivers:** Parents or other caregivers who struggle with exhaustion and/or stress during the first months of a child's life are more likely to be unable to fully meet their own or their child's needs. Excessive stress and fatigue, along with other psychobiological factors during the first weeks or months after birth, can lead to depression, anxiety and other – often severe – mental health issues. When this occurs in the context of social vulnerabilities, the impact on a child's health and well-being can be devastating. This is especially true in situations where caregivers are experiencing added stressors, such as financial hardship, in addition to common childcare stressors.<sup>10</sup> These added sources of stress may also derive from uncertainty about a child's condition or diagnosis. When caregivers are overburdened and find themselves without the resources, skills or support they need to care for their child, it can result in abuse or neglect. These risks are particularly prevalent for children with impairments related to mental health, behaviour or communication and who may not respond or respond negatively to parental cues, placing further strain on caregivers and increasing the risk of violence.<sup>11</sup>

**Impacts:** Short-term impacts of perinatal mental health problems include poor nutrition for both mother and baby and a higher prevalence of disease. At times, the tremendous psychological vulnerability and burden faced by women in the post-partum period can have

shattering consequences, including a higher risk of death by maternal suicide or child infanticide. Caregivers struggling with mental health issues often face interpersonal challenges that can disrupt the quality of early interactions with the child, increasing the risk of impaired social-emotional and cognitive development. Children of caregivers struggling with mental health issues are also at greater risk of abuse,<sup>12</sup> neglect and accidents,<sup>13</sup> and the risks are heightened for children with disabilities.

**How parents cope:** Even for the most prepared families, caring for an infant with disabilities entails well-documented challenges. Some caregivers may become emotionally disconnected as a way of coping<sup>14</sup> or engage in neglectful or violent practices. As this report shows, children with disabilities experience far higher rates of neglect and violence than children without disabilities and are less likely to receive early stimulation or responsive care. Caregivers who find themselves overwhelmed by the time and energy required to care for a child with disabilities are less likely to engage the child in play or other stimulating activities.

**Institutionalization:** The challenges experienced by some caregivers in meeting the needs of their child may be overwhelming. Too often, the result can be institutionalization – usually to ensure that children have access to services and supports that are unavailable in their communities.<sup>15</sup> Sadly, however, this can leave children vulnerable to further violence within an institutional setting.

**The gender divide and the parenting of children with disabilities:** The gap between the time and energy that women, compared to men, spend in caring for children is well-documented.<sup>16</sup> Despite recent shifts in social norms among the younger generation and those with higher education, the burden of childcare still falls heavily on women. In addition, even when the fathers invest the same amount of time in parenting as mothers do, they often dedicate themselves to the more pleasurable aspects of parenting, such as play, rather than less enjoyable or intensive activities, such as teaching or care.<sup>17</sup> This disparity in time and energy has significant implications for the health and well-being of parents of children with and without disabilities. The burden associated with inequity in parenting care can result in poorer mental health<sup>18</sup> and tends to be heavier among caregivers of children with disabilities.<sup>19</sup>

## Takeaways and programmatic implications

Children with disabilities often face major challenges in realizing their right to optimal development, including early and responsive care. For every indicator and across every background characteristic measured in this chapter, such children experience worse overall outcomes than children without disabilities. However, nuances emerge. The data vary significantly among countries and by the domain of functional difficulty experienced by children. Children with difficulties learning, communicating and playing are much less likely to receive early stimulation and responsive care than children with difficulties in other domains. Similarly, children with difficulties in fine motor skills, playing, walking and learning are far less likely to have access to playthings than children with other challenges.

Children's backgrounds can also provide insights into the level of risk they are likely to experience. While children with disabilities of all backgrounds show worse outcomes for all indicators, the extent of the difference is closely linked to other characteristics that are risk factors for all children. For example, access to books is closely tied to wealth for all children; however, children with disabilities in the poorest households still face greater deprivation than children without disabilities. A similar result is found among children left with inadequate supervision. All children in rural areas whose mothers are under the age of 18, have a low level of education or are from the poorest households experience a high likelihood of being inadequately supervised. But children with disabilities with these same background characteristics face a disproportionately higher risk. These findings illustrate how existing inequalities can intersect with disability and compound risk.

Governments and organizations can take concrete steps to address the inequality in early care received by children with disabilities. Family-centred support, including family-friendly policies and services for children and parents with disabilities, can make a substantial difference in keeping families together and fostering emotional well-being in both caregivers and children. This can include appropriate policies on parental leave and breastfeeding support, services such as affordable, accessible, high-quality and inclusive childcare, and resources such as child benefits, which can help to create supportive environments for families.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, parents or other caregivers of children with disabilities need services that promote their own well-being and mental health.

Programmes that help parents provide the best possible care to their children, while mitigating potential sources of emotional stress, have had demonstrable success.<sup>21</sup> For instance, research has shown that training programmes for parents are effective in increasing self-efficacy in those who have children with certain disabilities.<sup>22</sup> However, such programmes need to be tailored to the child's specific impairments. Support for families of young children with disabilities can be facilitated through the promotion of public awareness of the risks faced by these children as well as advocacy at all levels of society to prioritize their needs and those of their families.<sup>23</sup> Finally, capacity must be built across different sectors to identify and support parents of young children with disabilities and refer them to specialized services as needed.





## CHAPTER 4

# Every child has the right to learn

Education provides children with the knowledge and skills they need to grow and prosper, creating well-being, pathways to future opportunities and healthier lives. Ensuring opportunities for all children to succeed in school requires equity and inclusion that guarantees access, participation, progress and achievement of key learning outcomes. This means addressing all aspects of a child's educational path and eliminating the disparities and barriers that begin early in life, accumulate during childhood and generate further disadvantages for the most marginalized children, including children with disabilities.

Education has long been recognized as a global priority. For years, governments and other national and international stakeholders have focused their attention on making sure that all children can attend school, and they have backed up that commitment with funding. The SDGs have built on this foundation through Goal 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Targets within the Goal call for universal completion of primary and secondary school (target 4.1), increasing the number of youths with relevant skills for life and employment (target 4.4), and ensuring their literacy and numeracy skills (target 4.6), among others. Target 4.5 calls for eliminating gender disparities and inequities in education, specifically highlighting the need to ensure access to education for persons with disabilities. Target 4.a calls for the upgrading of educational facilities so that they are child- and disability-sensitive and promote inclusive learning environments.

Despite widespread agreement on the importance of education, children with disabilities are still falling behind.<sup>1</sup> They are more likely to never attend school or to drop out due to multiple barriers, including stigma, lack of trained teachers, inadequate learning materials and inaccessible facilities.<sup>2</sup> A lack of inclusive policies by governments can contribute to these barriers. Only 68 per cent of countries in 2020 had definitions of inclusive education in their policies, leaving many schools and children without a national framework to facilitate this type of education.<sup>3</sup>

The impact of excluding children with disabilities from education goes far beyond diminished educational outcomes. They are also more likely to miss out on school-based health and nutrition programmes, such as school meals and immunization campaigns,<sup>4</sup> and face increased vulnerability to violence and exploitation while not at school.<sup>5</sup>









## Indicators used in this chapter

**Children that never attended school:** Percentage of children aged 10 to 17 years who have never attended school.

**Attendance of early childhood education:** Percentage of children aged 36 to 59 months who are attending an early childhood education programme.

**School readiness:** Percentage of children attending the first grade of primary school who attended an early childhood education programme during the previous school year.

**Out-of-school rate:** Percentage of children of:

- Primary-school age who are not attending early childhood education, primary school or higher
- Lower-secondary-school age who are not attending primary school, lower- or upper-secondary school or higher
- Upper-secondary-school age who are not attending primary school, lower- or upper-secondary school or higher.

**Disability education parity index:** Adjusted net attendance rate (ANAR) for children with disabilities divided by the ANAR for children without disabilities:

- One year before primary or pre-primary school
- Primary school
- Lower-secondary school
- Upper-secondary school.

**Overage for grade:** Percentage of students attending each grade who are two or more years older than the official age for that grade.

**Dropout rate in primary education:** Percentage of students who in the previous school year were enrolled in any grade in primary education (excluding the last grade), and who are no longer attending primary school in the current year.

**Repetition rate in primary education:** Percentage of students who attended any given grade in primary school in the previous year and are attending the same grade in the current year.

**Books and reading:**

- Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years who have three or more books to read at home

- Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years who read books or are read to at home.

**Parent involvement with school:**

- Discussion with teachers regarding progress: percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years attending school for whom an adult household member discussed progress with the teacher
- Report cards: percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years attending schools that provided student report cards to parents
- Support with homework: percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years attending school who have homework and received help with homework.

**Learning outcomes:**

- Foundational reading skills: Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years who demonstrate foundational reading skills by successfully completing three foundational reading tasks:
  - Word recognition (correctly reading 90 per cent of words in a story)
  - Literal questions (correctly answering three literal questions)
  - Inferential questions (correctly answering two inferential questions).

Only by correctly reading 90 per cent of words in a story and correctly answering the questions in all three categories of the module is a child considered to have foundational reading skills.

- Foundational numeracy skills: Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 who demonstrate foundational numeracy skills by successfully completing four foundational numeracy tasks:
  - Number reading
  - Number discrimination
  - Addition
  - Pattern recognition.

Each category has several questions, and the child must answer every question in every category correctly to be considered to have foundational numeracy skills.

**Use of Internet, computers and communication technologies:**

- Use of a computer: percentage of children aged 15 to 17 years who used a computer in the last three months
- Use of mobile phone: percentage of children aged 15 to 17 years who used a mobile phone in the last three months

- Use of the Internet: percentage of children aged 15 to 17 years who used the Internet in the last three months.

**School-related support:** Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years attending school who received any type of school-related support, either in the form of tuition or other support (such as provision of textbooks, supplies, uniforms, etc.) in the current or most recent academic year.

### Definitions and data interpretation issues

Several methodological issues need to be addressed to accurately interpret the findings in this chapter.

A relevant consideration is the limitation of the data in providing a comprehensive account of all factors affecting a child's learning experience. While the indicators used here measure education uptake and outcomes, they fall short in fully capturing the experiences of children with disabilities in obtaining an education and the barriers they face. Additional information and data sources are needed to gain such understanding. The extent and implications of this limitation and how data gaps can be addressed are discussed in Box 4.1 on page 95.

Another data limitation is the inability to distinguish between children who are in mainstream education and those who are in disability-specific educational settings. This is significant since many countries have highly segregated school systems for children with disabilities. For example, what is considered progression in a special education school may be significantly different from that in a mainstream school, fundamentally altering responses to what is considered 'at level' for the child. If this distinction could be captured, then the reported inequities between children with and without disabilities would likely be even greater.

Another constraint involves the indicator assessing educational support to students. While it measures whether a child receives such support, it does not provide any insights into whether that support is adequate in meeting a child's needs. This is particularly relevant in the case of children with disabilities for whom the support, especially non-monetary assistance in the form of supplies, uniforms, textbooks, etc., may not be adequate and therefore may have little or no bearing on their ability to benefit from it. While this indicator does provide information on access to support for children with and without disabilities, it should nevertheless be viewed with this limitation in mind.

**TABLE 4.1** Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years who did not complete the reading and numeracy tasks

		Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years who did not complete reading and numeracy tasks
Children without functional difficulties		2
Children with one or more functional difficulties		5
Domain of functional difficulty	Symptoms of anxiety	4
	Symptoms of depression	5
	Controlling behaviour	9
	Accepting changes	10
	Walking	12
	Seeing	14
	Learning	15
	Remembering	15
	Concentrating	21
	Making friends	22
	Self-care	27
	Hearing	33
Communicating	39	

Results related to upper-secondary-school attendance are based on children who were less than 18 years old at the time of the survey. These results should thus be interpreted carefully given that they do not include persons above the age of 18 who may still have been attending upper-secondary school.

A final consideration is the fact that the denominators used for some indicators do not capture the entire population of children represented by the sample. For example, school progression indicators only represent the situation of children who have ever attended school. It is well known that the most marginalized children in society, including those with disabilities, tend to be overrepresented among those who are out of school, either because they have never attended school or because they have dropped out. Therefore, the results that show disaggregated information on school progression for children with and without disabilities reflect the experiences of a subgroup of children that, in all likelihood, face lower barriers to education than those who have never been able to attend school.

A similar consideration applies to the results on foundational learning. In this case, the indicators for foundational reading and numeracy skills are only generated for children who can complete three reading tasks and four numeracy tasks. Non-completion observations include children who started but were unable to finish the assessment tasks, who refused to take the assessment (or whose mothers did not permit them to take the assessment) or who could not participate in the assessment due to illness or an impairment. Inaccessibility could thus be a barrier to participation for some children (for example, if a child is blind or requires assistive technology or reasonable accommodations to participate and these could not be provided). Therefore, the results that show differences in foundational learning skills for children with and without disabilities should be interpreted with the understanding that children with the highest degrees of difficulty are less likely to have been part of such an assessment, as shown in Table 4.1.

## Sources of data

Unless otherwise noted, the pooled estimates in this chapter are drawn from MICS6 conducted in Algeria, Bangladesh, Belarus, Central African Republic, Chad, Costa Rica, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Iraq, Kiribati, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro, Nepal, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Sao Tome and Principe, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Suriname, Togo, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkmenistan and Zimbabwe. Data for Pakistan are pooled results from surveys conducted in the regions of Sindh and Punjab (for more details, see the technical annex).

Pooled results for all indicators that refer to children aged 5 or above do not include data from the Lao People's Democratic Republic since that survey only captured information on children aged 2 to 4 years.

Pooled results for indicators measuring the number of books in a child's home (Figure 4.20) do not include data from Mexico since these were not available. Pooled results for indicators measuring whether a child is reading or being read to at home (Figures 4.21 and 4.22) do not include data from Algeria, Costa Rica, Cuba, Georgia, Iraq, Mexico, Montenegro, Serbia, Sierra Leone or Tonga since these were not available.

Pooled results for indicators measuring foundational reading and numeracy skills (Figures 4.25 through 4.29) do not include data from Algeria, Costa Rica, Cuba, Georgia, Iraq, Kosovo, Mexico, Montenegro, Serbia, Sierra Leone and Tonga since these were not available.

Pooled results for indicators measuring use of information and communication technology (ICT) (Figure 4.30) do not include data from Belarus, Costa Rica, Georgia, Kosovo, Mexico, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Tonga since these were not available.

Pooled results for indicators measuring education support (Figures 4.31 and 4.32) do not include data from Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Kosovo, Lesotho, Montenegro, Mexico, Togo and Turkmenistan since these were not available.

## School participation

All children have the right to inclusive, accessible and high-quality education, which can be denied to children with disabilities. Children with certain impairments may be more likely to experience exclusion because schools may not be able to accommodate their needs. For many children with disabilities, education is only available in segregated settings, denying them the multiple benefits of inclusive education in a general environment.<sup>6</sup>

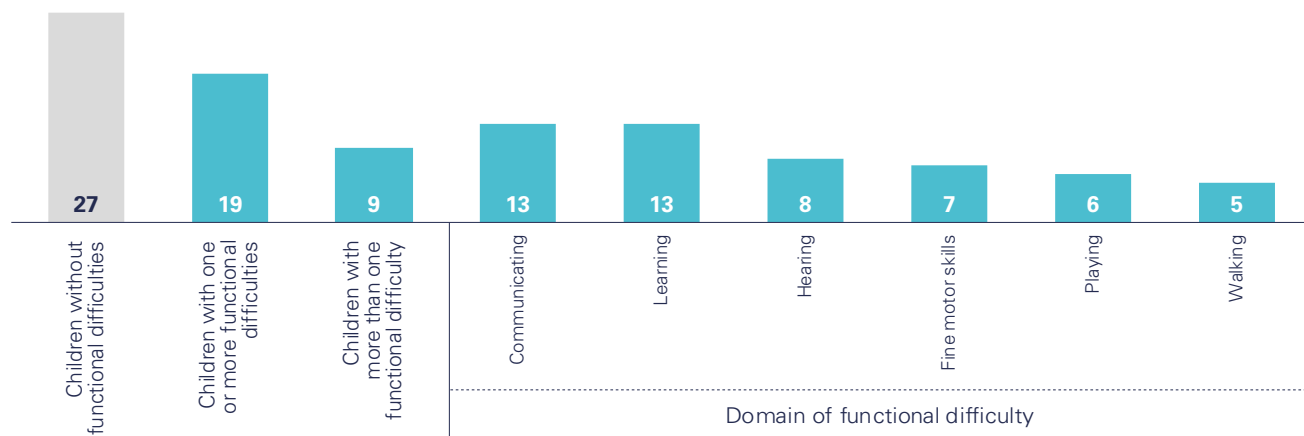
Other barriers to education, such as the gender of the household head or poverty, can also increase disparities in school participation.<sup>7</sup> The impact of poverty on the educational trajectories of children with disabilities tends to be magnified, as families struggle to meet the additional costs of keeping their children in school.<sup>8</sup> This can be compounded by negative beliefs about the capabilities of children with disabilities: Families of such children may refrain from enrolling them in school in the belief that there is limited benefit to doing so.<sup>9</sup>



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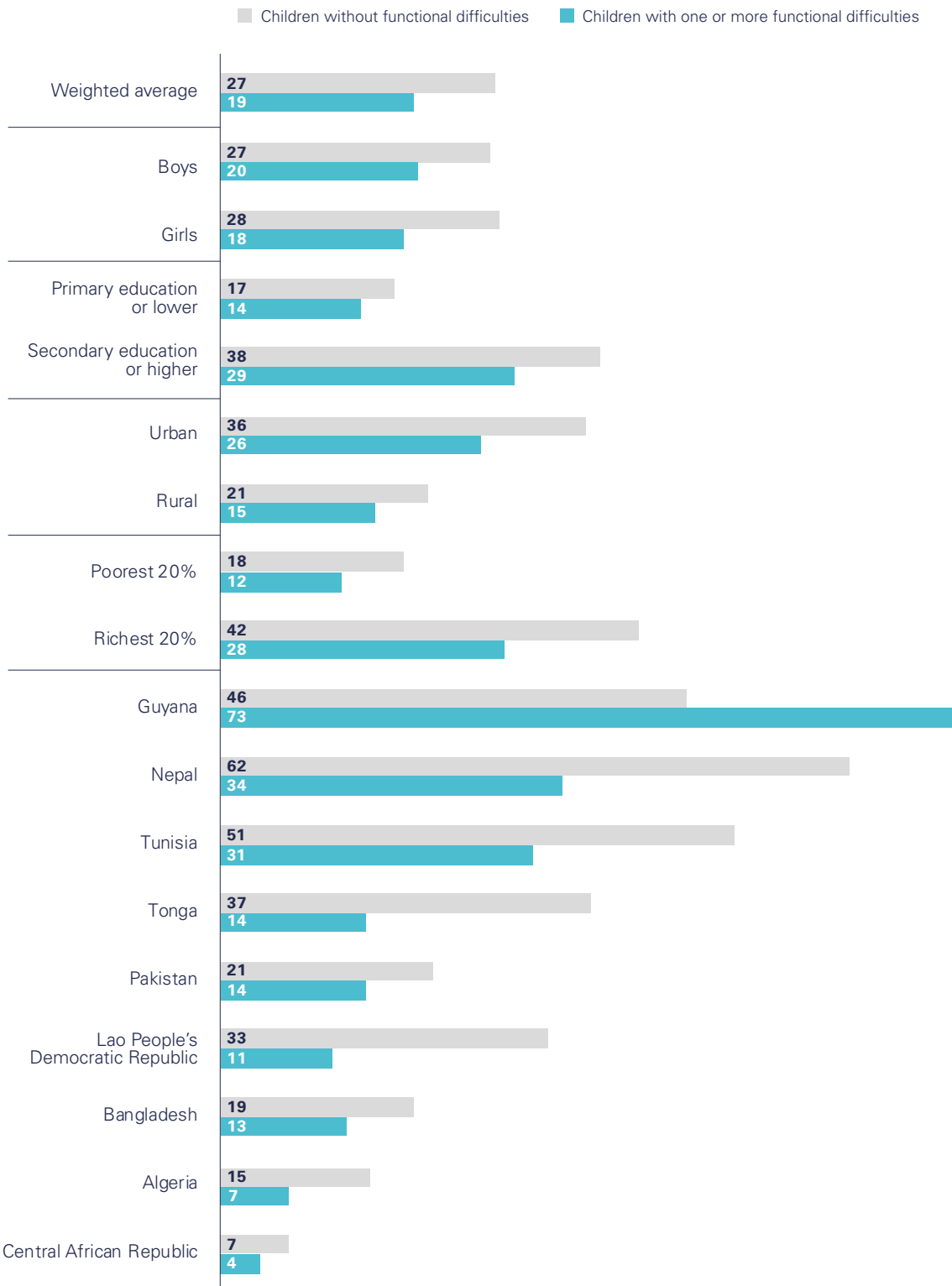
### Children with difficulties walking, playing or using fine motor skills are less likely to attend early childhood education programmes

**FIGURE 4.1** Percentage of children aged 3 and 4 years who are attending an early childhood education programme



**Fewer children with disabilities attend early childhood education than their peers without disabilities, and this disparity is more pronounced among girls**

**FIGURE 4.2** Percentage of children aged 3 and 4 years who are attending an early childhood education programme

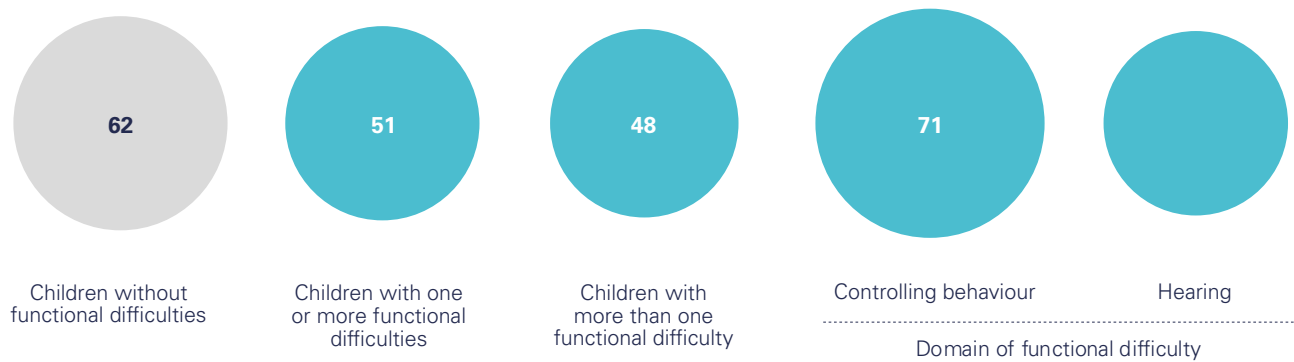


Note: Results for Nepal, Tonga and Tunisia are based on 25 to 49 unweighted cases. Education refers to the education level of mothers.



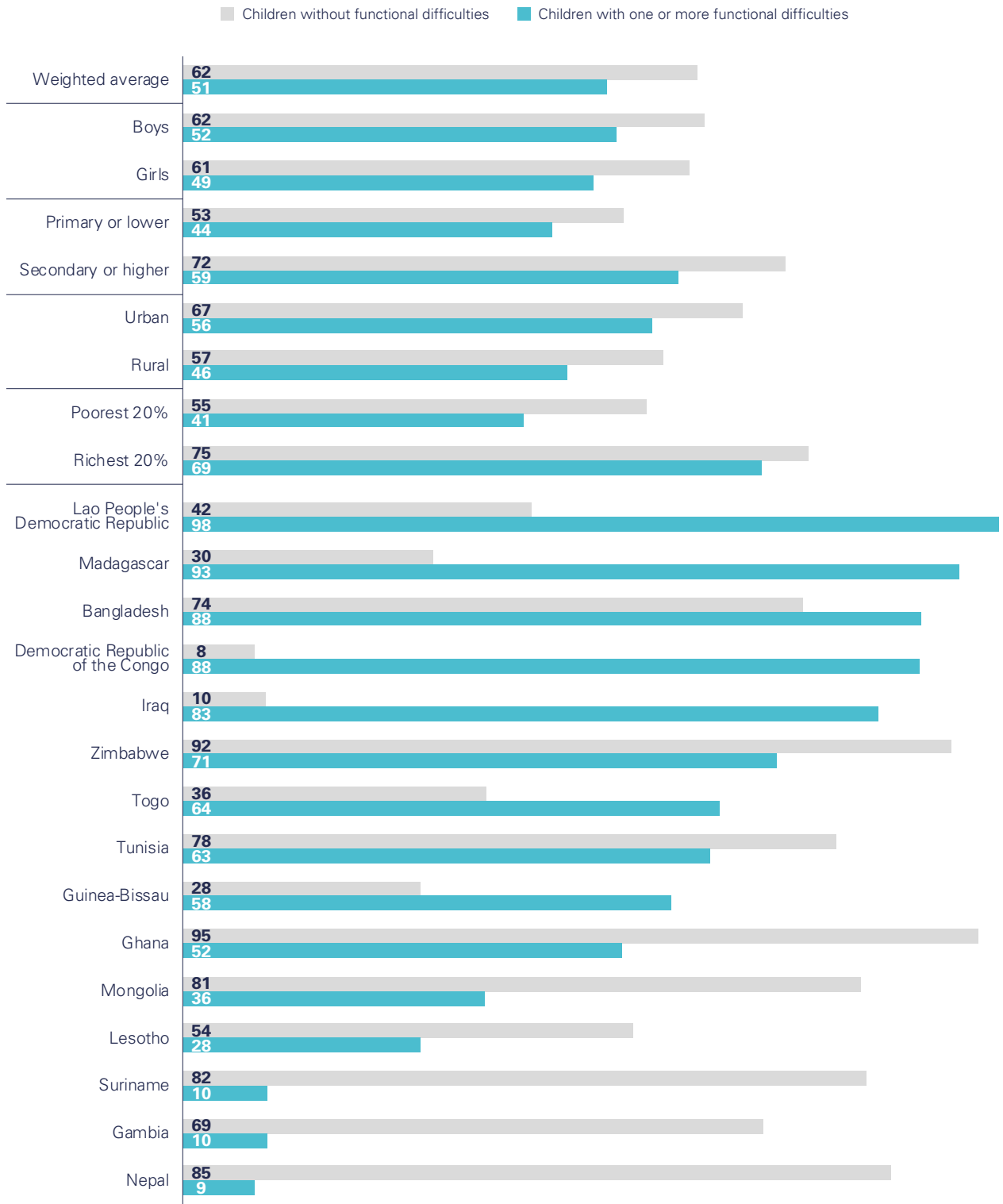
**Among children in the first grade of primary school, those with difficulties hearing are less likely to have attended early childhood education in the previous year, while children with difficulties controlling their behaviour are more likely to have attended**

**FIGURE 4.3** Percentage of children attending the first grade of primary school who attended an early childhood education programme during the previous school year



**Children with disabilities of almost every background have lower rates of primary school readiness than children without disabilities. Disparities are largest among urban children and those in the poorest households**

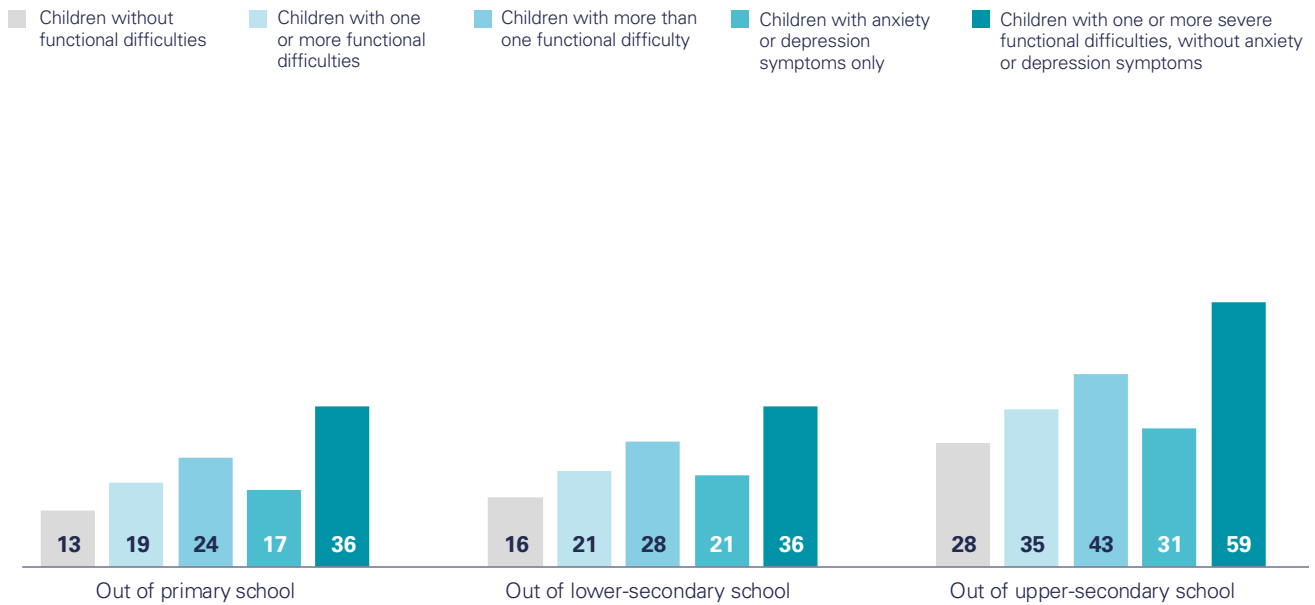
**FIGURE 4.4** Percentage of children attending the first grade of primary school who attended an early childhood education programme during the previous school year



Note: Education refers to the education level of mothers.

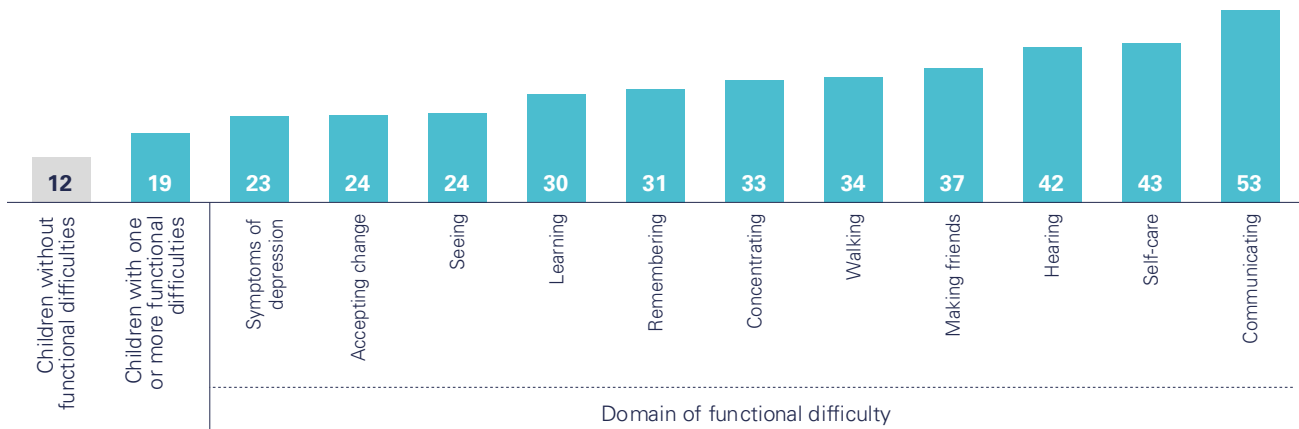
**Regardless of education level, children with disabilities are more likely to be out of school than children without disabilities. Out-of-school rates increase during secondary school and are higher among children with multiple disabilities; rates are highest among children with severe disabilities**

**FIGURE 4.5** Percentage of primary-, lower-secondary- and upper-secondary-school-aged children who are not attending primary or secondary school or higher



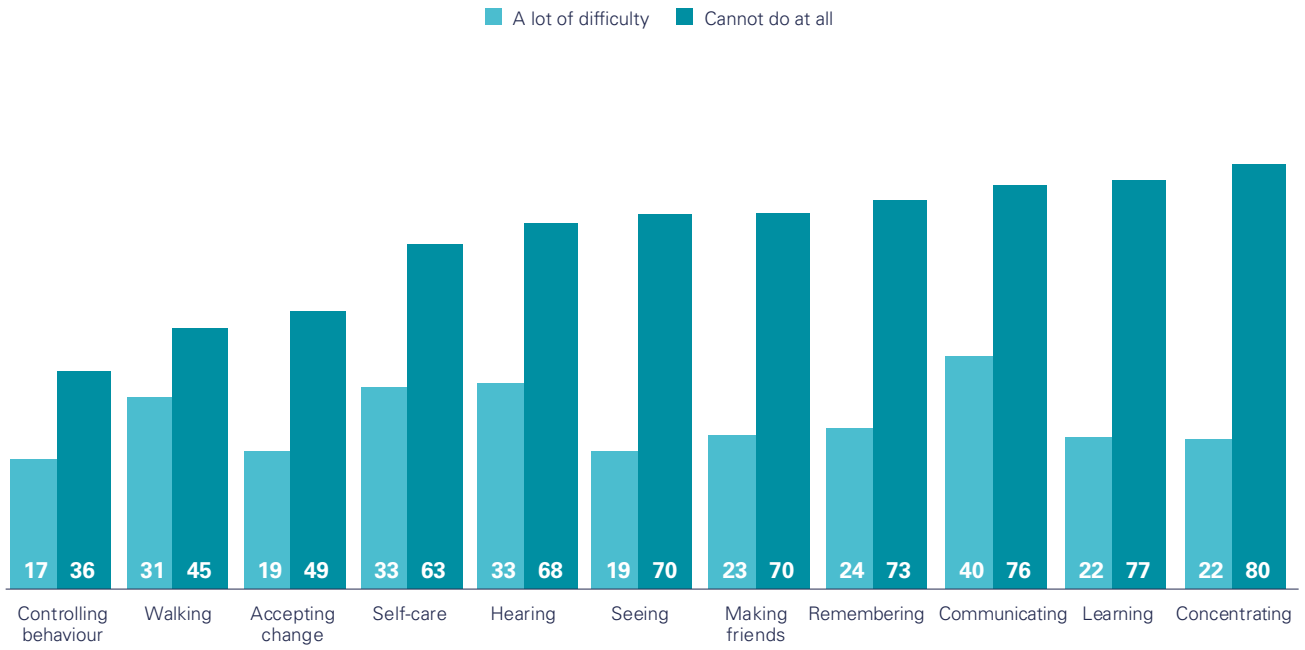
**Children with disabilities in most domains are disproportionately more likely to be out of primary school than children without disabilities**

**FIGURE 4.6** Percentage of children of primary-school age who are not attending primary school or higher



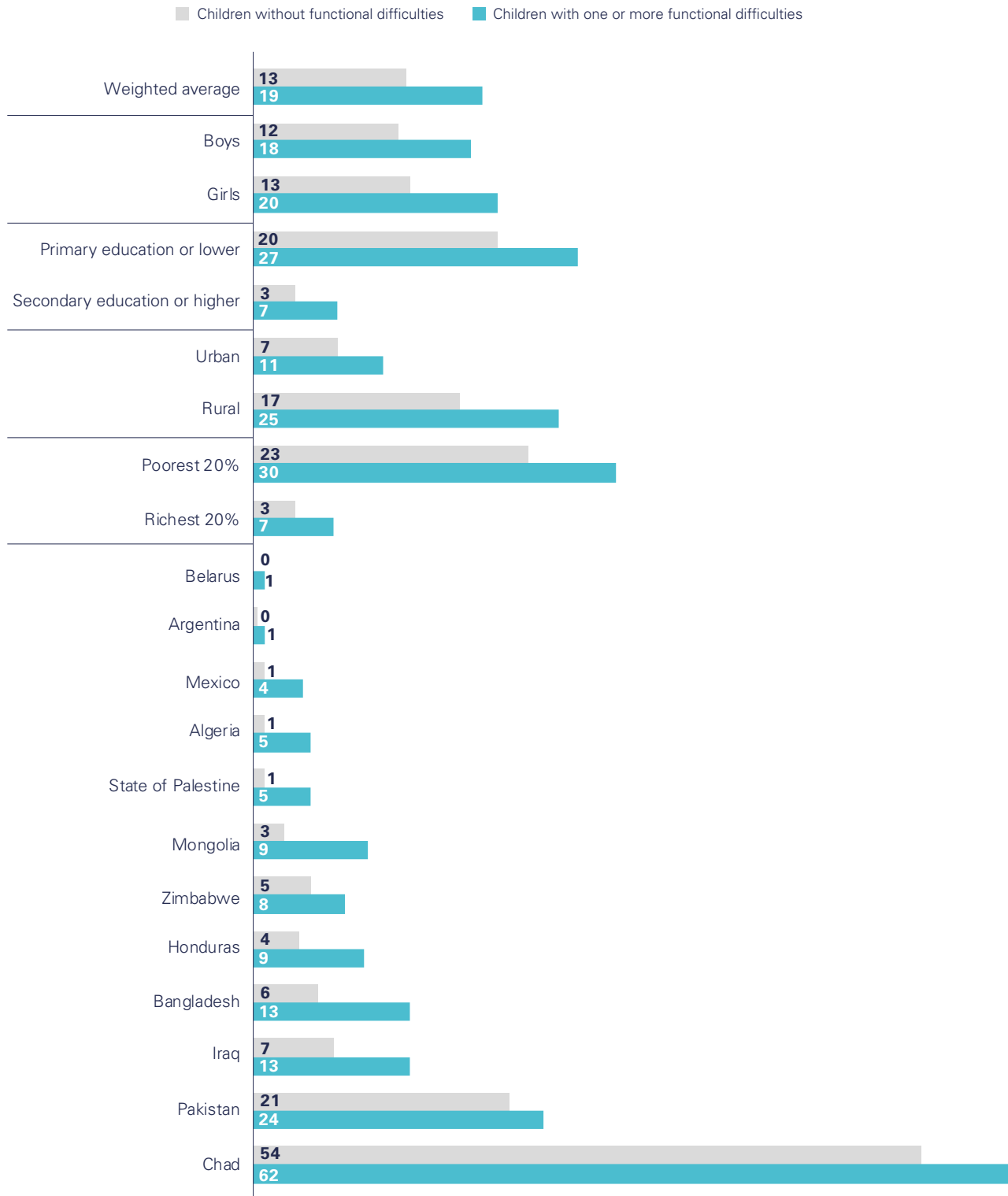
**Disparities in school participation become even greater when the severity of functional difficulties is taken into account**

**FIGURE 4.7** Percentage of children of primary-school age who are not attending primary school or higher



**In some countries and areas, children with disabilities are more likely to be out of primary school than children without disabilities. Lower maternal education and living in rural areas or in the poorest households are strongly associated with being out of school, for children with and without disabilities**

**FIGURE 4.8** Percentage of children of primary-school age who are not attending primary school or higher

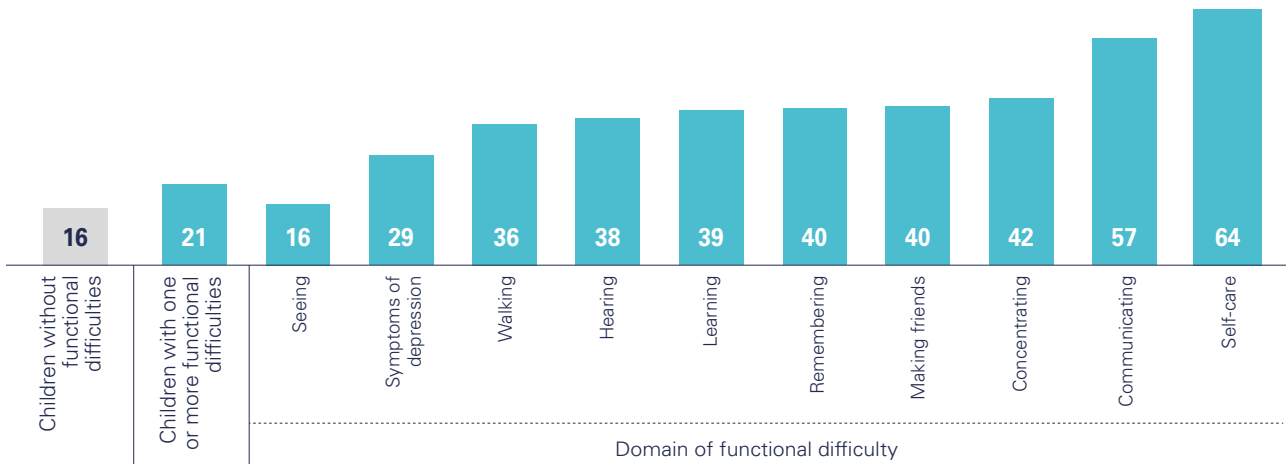


Note: Education refers to the education level of mothers.



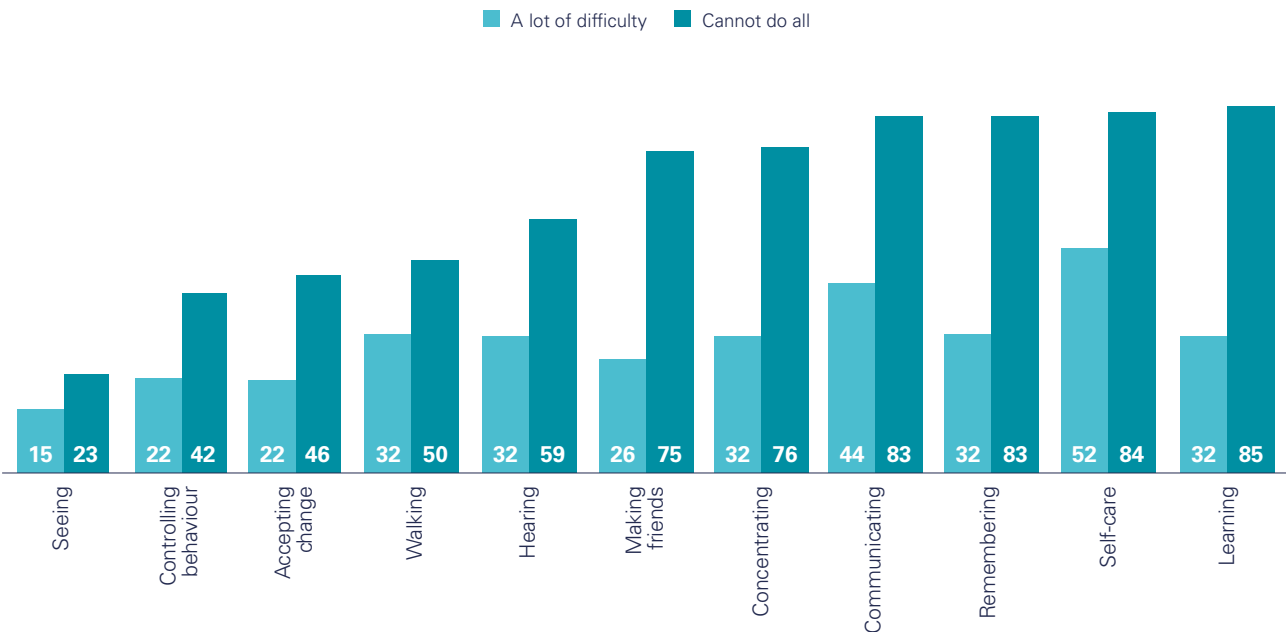
**Children with difficulties caring for themselves, communicating and concentrating are up to five times more likely to be out of lower-secondary school than children without disabilities**

**FIGURE 4.9** Percentage of children of lower-secondary-school age who are not attending lower-secondary school or higher



**Across nearly all functional domains, the majority of children with the most severe disabilities do not attend lower-secondary school**

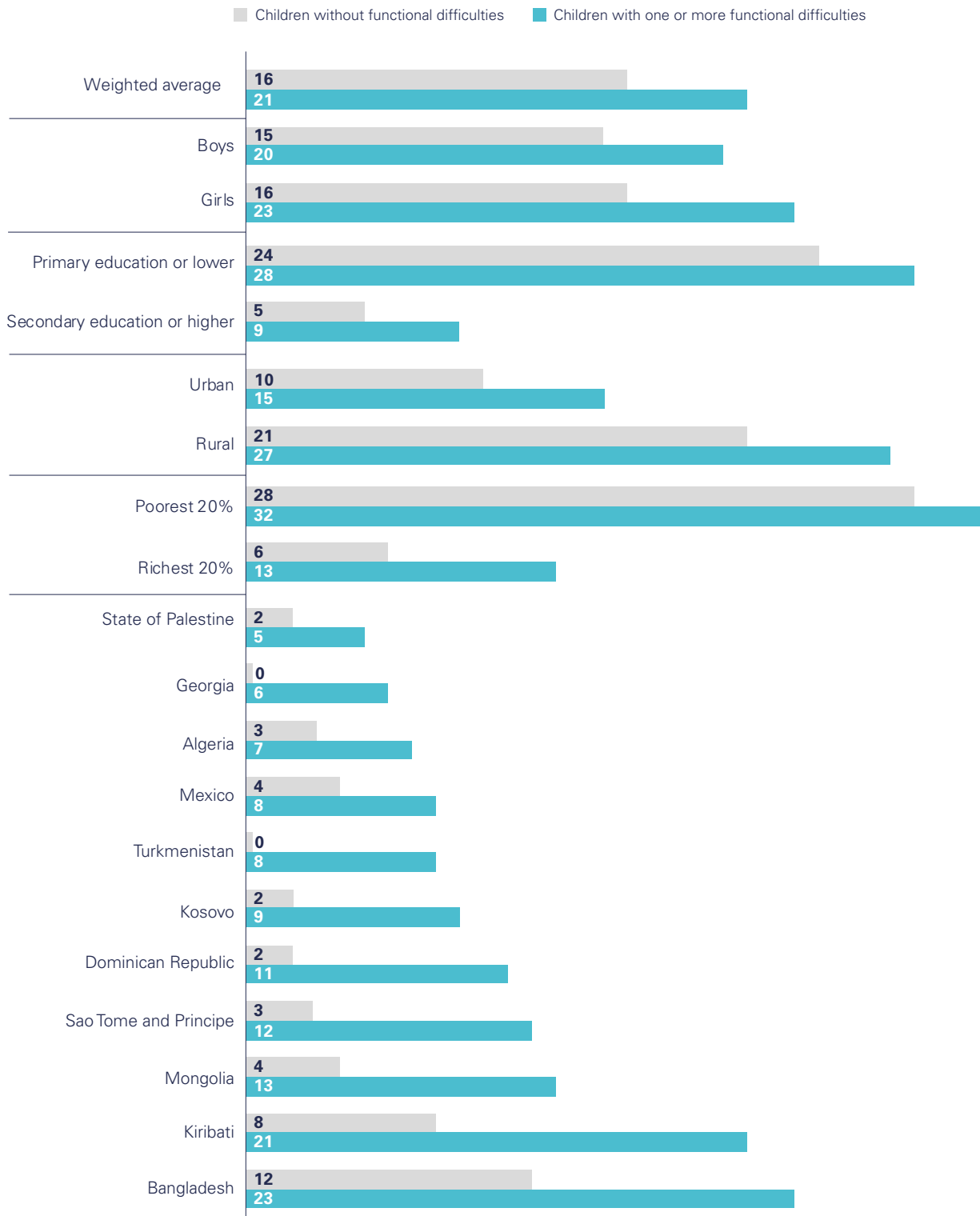
**FIGURE 4.10** Percentage of children of lower-secondary-school age who are not attending lower-secondary school or higher, by domain of functional difficulty and degree of severity



Note: Results for the domain of seeing are based on 25 to 49 unweighted cases.

**In many countries and areas and across all background characteristics, children with disabilities are also more likely to be out of lower-secondary school than children without disabilities**

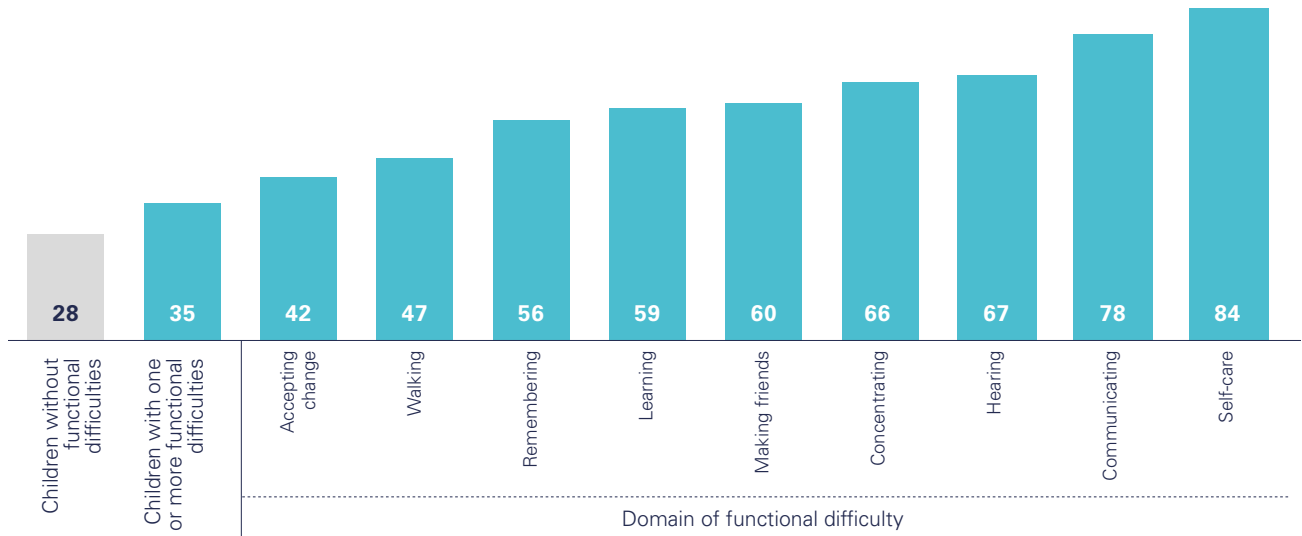
**FIGURE 4.11** Percentage of children of lower-secondary-school age who are not attending lower-secondary school or higher



Notes: Results for Turkmenistan are based on 25-49 unweighted cases. Education refers to the education level of mothers.

**Among children of upper-secondary-school age with disabilities who are out of school, 8 in 10 have difficulties communicating or caring for themselves**

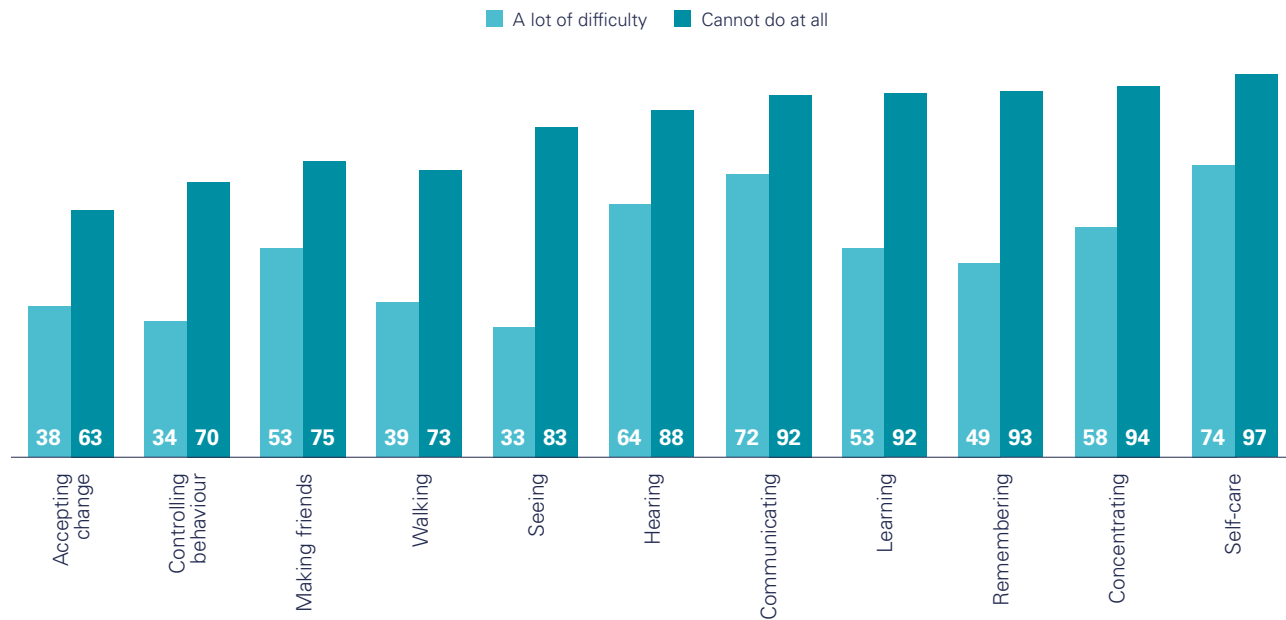
**FIGURE 4.12** Percentage of children of upper-secondary-school age who are not attending upper-secondary school or higher



Note: Upper-secondary-school-aged children who were 18 years old at the time of the survey were not included in the analysis.

**By the time they reach upper-secondary-school age, nearly all children with the most severe disabilities, across most functional domains, are out of school**

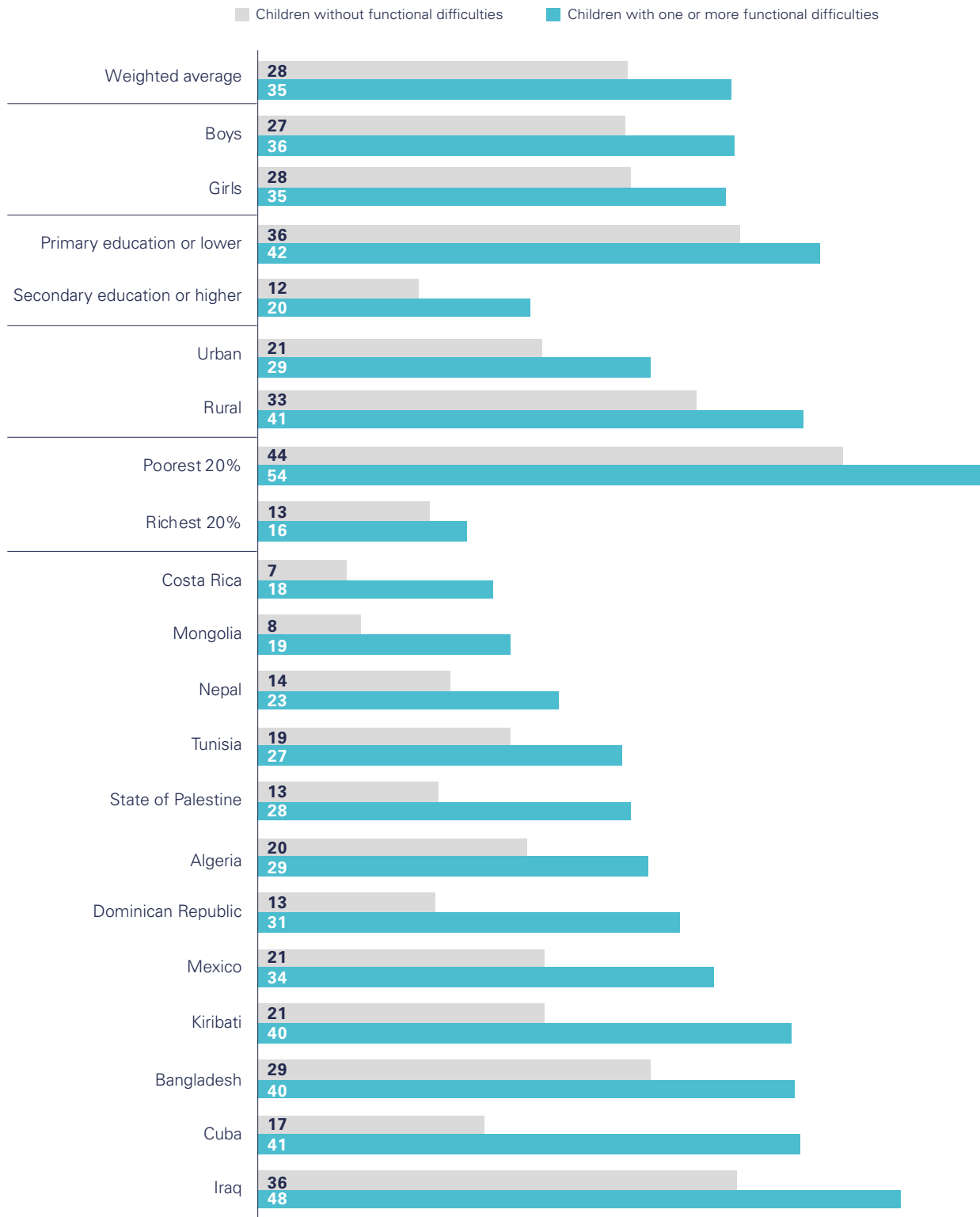
**FIGURE 4.13** Percentage of children of upper-secondary-school age who are not attending upper-secondary school or higher



Notes: Upper-secondary-school-aged children who were 18 years old at the time of the survey were not included in the analysis. Results for the domains of seeing and hearing are based on 25 to 49 unweighted cases.

**In many countries and areas and across all background characteristics, children of upper-secondary-school age with disabilities are more likely to be out of school than children without disabilities**

**FIGURE 4.14** Percentage of children of upper-secondary-school age who are not attending upper-secondary school or higher



Notes: Upper-secondary-school-aged children who were 18 years old at the time of the survey have not been included in the analysis. Results for Kiribati are based on 25 to 49 unweighted cases. Education refers to the education level of mothers.



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**Disparities affecting school attendance of children with and without disabilities tend to increase as children move into higher levels of education. However, children with difficulties in certain domains, such as those related to cognitive functioning, communication and self-care, show the largest disparities**

**TABLE 4.2** Adjusted net attendance rate (ANAR) for children with functional difficulties divided by the ANAR for children without functional difficulties

Domain of functional difficulty	Pre-primary school	Primary school	Lower-secondary school	Upper-secondary school
Children with one or more functional difficulties	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.7
Symptoms of anxiety	0.8	1.0	0.9	0.8
Seeing	0.6	0.9	1.0	0.9
Symptoms of depression	0.7	0.9	0.8	0.7
Controlling behaviour	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.7
Walking	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.5
Making friends	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.4
Hearing	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.4
Remembering	0.8	0.8	0.4	0.4
Concentrating	0.7	0.8	0.5	0.3
Learning	0.7	0.8	0.4	0.2
Communicating	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.2
Self-care	0.8	0.6	0.3	0.1

Notes: Upper-secondary-school-aged children who were 18 or older at the time of the survey were not included in the analysis. The numbers reflect the proportion of children with functional difficulties that attend a specific school level compared with children without functional difficulties at the same level. White cells represent equity between children with and without functional difficulties, or higher attendance for children with functional difficulties. Darker tones represent greater inequity in school attendance for children with functional difficulties

For example: The upper-secondary attendance rate for children with self-care difficulties is only 10 per cent of the upper-secondary attendance rate of children without self-care difficulties. In other words, children with self-care difficulties are 10 times less likely to attend upper secondary school compared with children without self-care difficulties.



### In most countries and areas, children with disabilities experience lower rates of school attendance at some point during their education

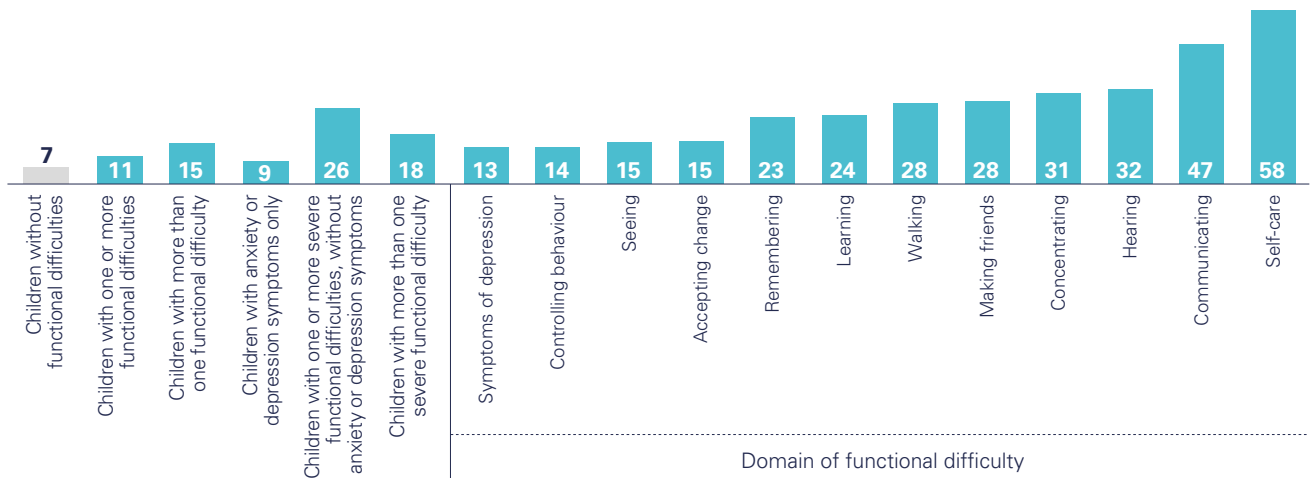
**TABLE 4.3** Adjusted net attendance rate (ANAR) for children with functional difficulties divided by the ANAR for children without functional difficulties, for pre-primary, primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary school

Countries and areas	Disability parity index for pre-primary school (ANAR)	Disability parity index for primary school (ANAR)	Disability parity index for lower-secondary school (ANAR)	Disability parity index for upper-secondary school (ANAR)
Algeria	1,0	1,0	0,9	0,9
Argentina	0,9	1,0	1,0	1,0
Bangladesh	1,0	0,9	0,9	0,8
Belarus	(*)	0,8	1,0	(*)
Central African Republic	0,9	1,0	0,7	(*)
Chad	(*)	0,8	0,9	0,5
Costa Rica	1,0	1,0	0,8	0,6
Cuba	1,0	1,0	0,9	0,6
Democratic Republic of the Congo	0,8	0,9	0,7	0,8
Dominican Republic	0,7	1,0	0,9	0,8
Gambia	0,9	1,0	0,7	(*)
Georgia	1,0	1,0	0,9	0,9
Ghana	1,0	1,0	0,8	0,7
Guinea-Bissau	0,7	0,9	1,1	1,0
Guyana	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,1
Honduras	0,6	1,0	0,9	0,9
Iraq	1,0	0,9	0,8	0,7
Kiribati	1,0	0,9	0,8	0,6
Kosovo	(*)	1,0	0,9	0,9
Kyrgyzstan	1,0	1,0	1,0	(*)
Lao People's Democratic Republic	na	na	na	na
Lesotho	0,9	1,0	0,8	1,3
Madagascar	1,0	1,0	1,1	0,6
Mexico	1,0	1,0	0,9	0,7
Mongolia	0,8	0,9	0,9	0,9
Montenegro	(*)	1,0	0,9	0,9
Nepal	1,0	1,0	1,0	0,8
North Macedonia	(*)	1,0	1,0	1,1
Pakistan	0,9	0,9	0,9	0,9
Sao Tome and Principe	1,1	0,9	0,6	0,7
Sierra Leone	1,0	1,0	0,8	0,8
State of Palestine	1,0	1,0	1,0	0,8
Suriname	0,9	1,0	0,8	1,1
Togo	1,1	1,0	1,0	0,7
Tonga	(*)	1,0	1,0	0,8
Tunisia	0,9	1,0	0,9	0,8
Turkmenistan	1,0	1,0	0,9	(*)
Tuvalu	(*)	(1,1)	(*)	(*)
Zimbabwe	0,9	1,0	0,9	0,7

Notes: Upper-secondary-school-aged children who were 18 years old at the time of the survey were not included in the analysis, thus these results do not represent the complete cohort of children attending that educational level. Numbers in parentheses ( ) are based on 25 to 49 unweighted cases; thus, caution is warranted when interpreting the results. An asterisk in parentheses (\*) indicates that the results are not shown because they are based on less than 25 unweighted cases. Data for Serbia and Turks and Caicos are not shown because all the values were based on less than 25 unweighted cases.

**Children with difficulties caring for themselves, communicating and hearing are most likely to have never attended school**

**FIGURE 4.15** Percentage of children aged 10 to 17 years who have never attended school



Note: The figure covers children at least 10 years old to avoid capturing late entries into primary school.

**School progression**

While children with disabilities have an equal right to education, they frequently face higher barriers in completing their schooling than children without disabilities. Schools and classrooms are often not accessible to children with disabilities, either physically or because they lack specialized teaching, contributing

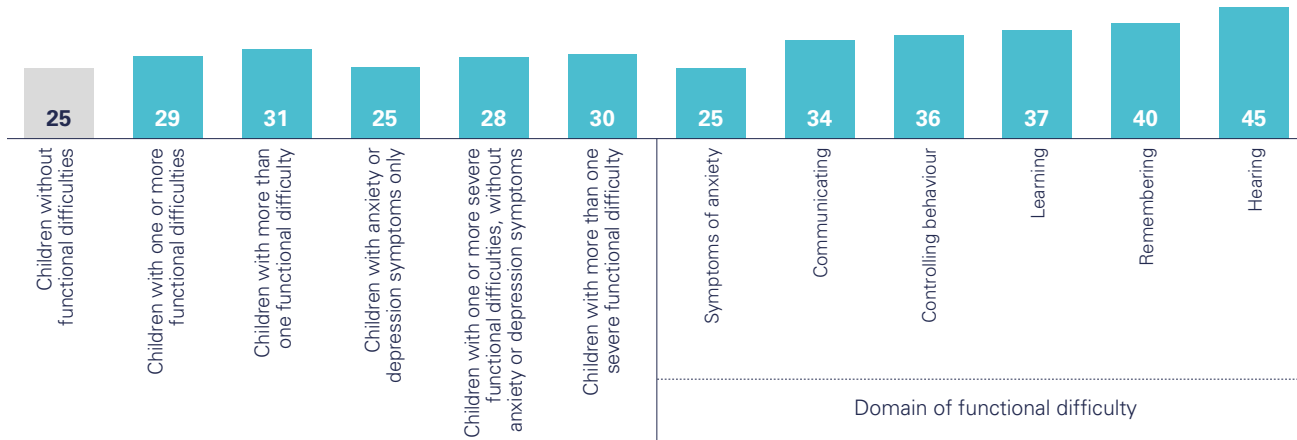
to lower academic achievement, including dropout and repetition of grades.<sup>10</sup> Dropping out of school limits the future educational and employment opportunities of these children, depriving them of the skills and knowledge they need to progress on their chosen career paths.<sup>11</sup>



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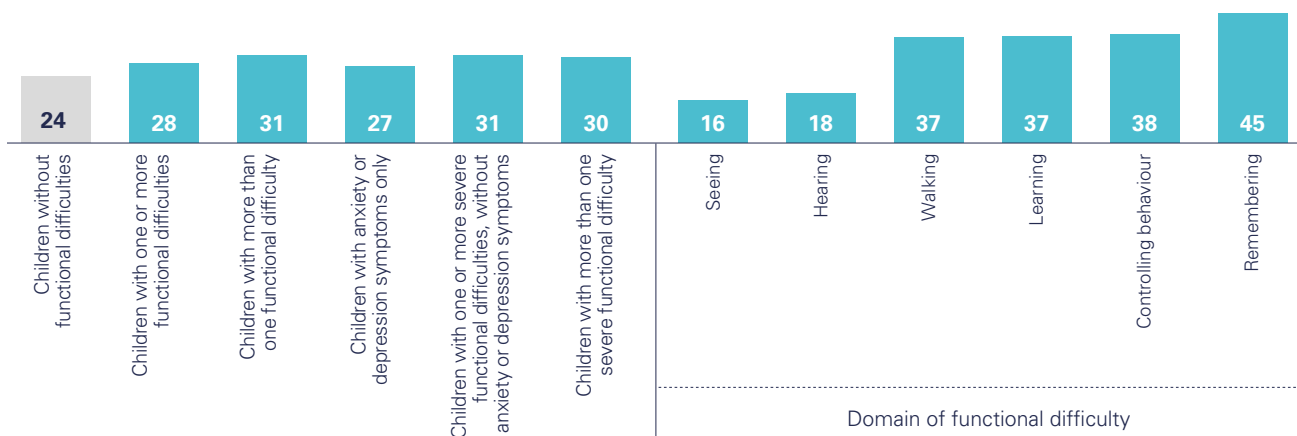
### Children with difficulties hearing, remembering and learning are most likely to be overage for their grade in primary school

**FIGURE 4.16** Percentage of children who are two or more years older than the official school age for their grade in primary school



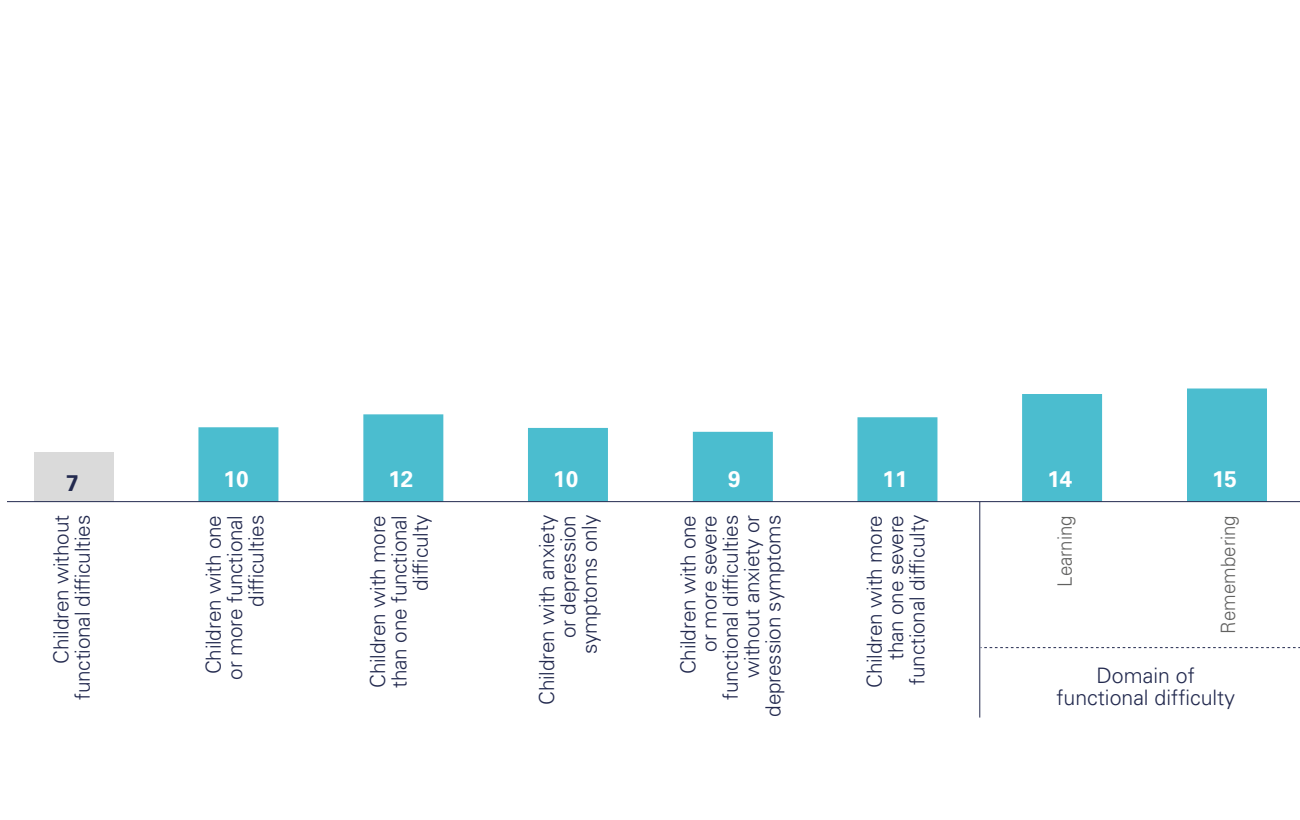
### Children with difficulties remembering, controlling their behaviour and learning are most likely to be overage for their grade in lower-secondary school

**FIGURE 4.17** Percentage of children who are 2 or more years older than the official school age for their grade in lower-secondary school

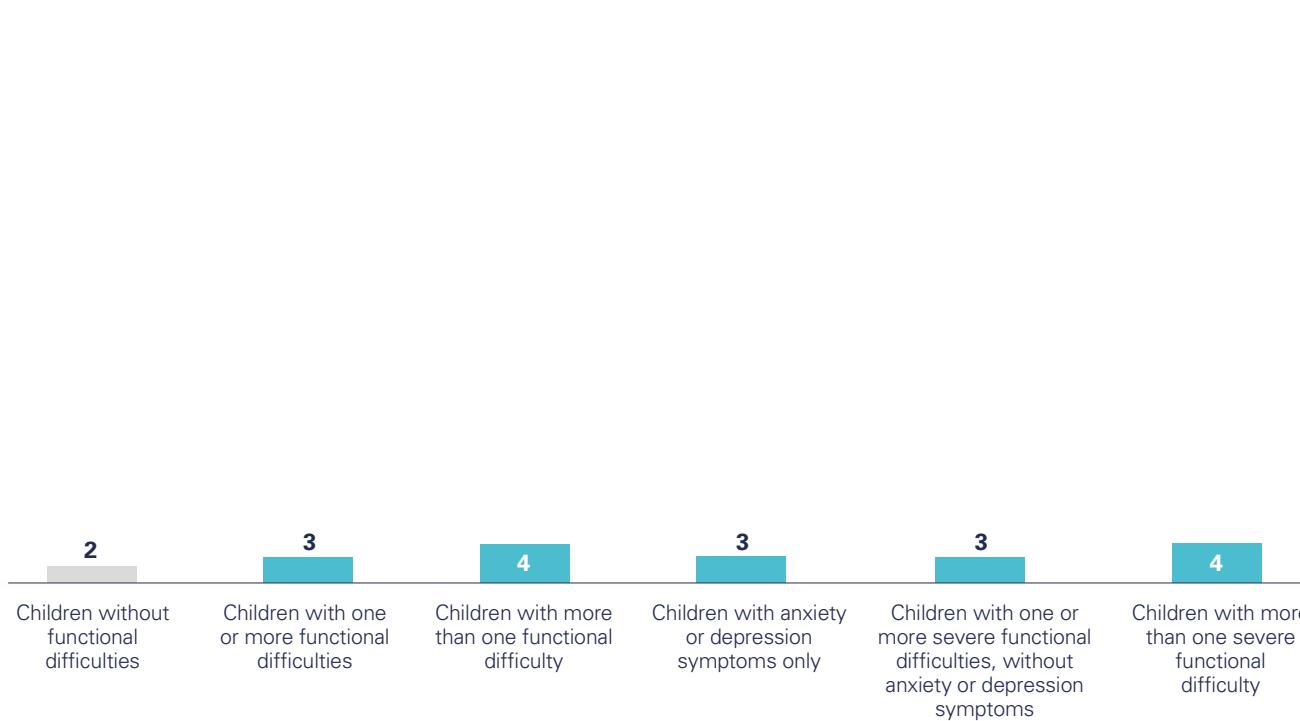


**Once within the educational system, children with disabilities face a higher risk of dropping out or repeating a grade during primary school**

**FIGURE 4.18** Percentage of children that repeated a year during primary school, among those who have ever been in school



**FIGURE 4.19** Percentage of children that dropped out during primary school, among those who have ever been in school



## Parental involvement in learning

Parents' involvement in their children's education and learning has been identified as a key and accurate predictor of academic achievement,<sup>12</sup> improving children's confidence, interest and performance at school. It not only improves children's education and learning outcomes but can also offset other social risks.<sup>13</sup> The benefits can be even greater for children with disabilities, who face significantly more obstacles in achieving an education.

Despite the clear benefits of parental involvement in education, children with disabilities do not always obtain the same level of support for learning as children without disabilities. Challenges in the home can be due to lowered expectations on the part of parents of children with certain disabilities, which can cause them

to be less invested in the child's learning.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, parents can struggle to adapt their communication and interaction style to accommodate the disability-specific needs of their child, resulting in feeling less able to engage in her or his education and even in withdrawing their support.<sup>15</sup>

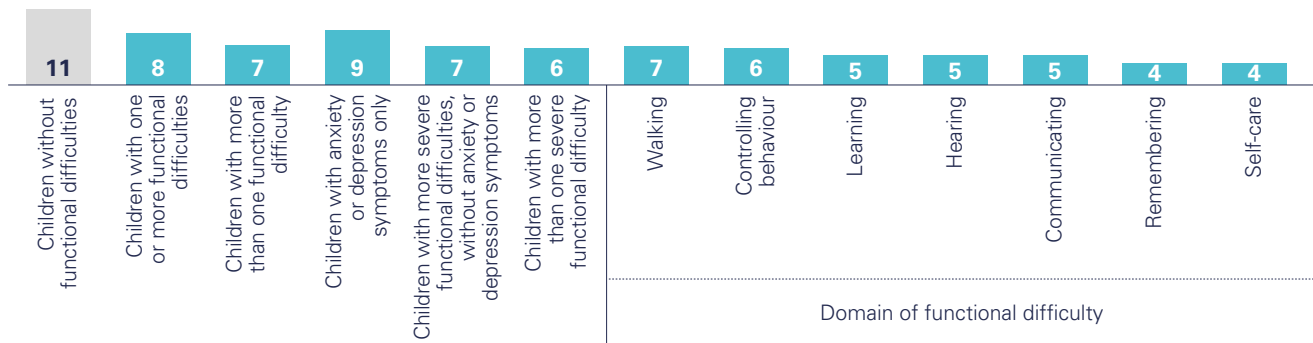
Parental involvement can help facilitate more effective and specialized learning plans, including the provision of adequate support for their child's education.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, parents often have limited involvement with schools due to factors that include insufficient knowledge, misguided attitudes about the importance of being involved in their child's education as well as a lack of skills on how to effectively engage with both the child and his or her teachers.<sup>17</sup>





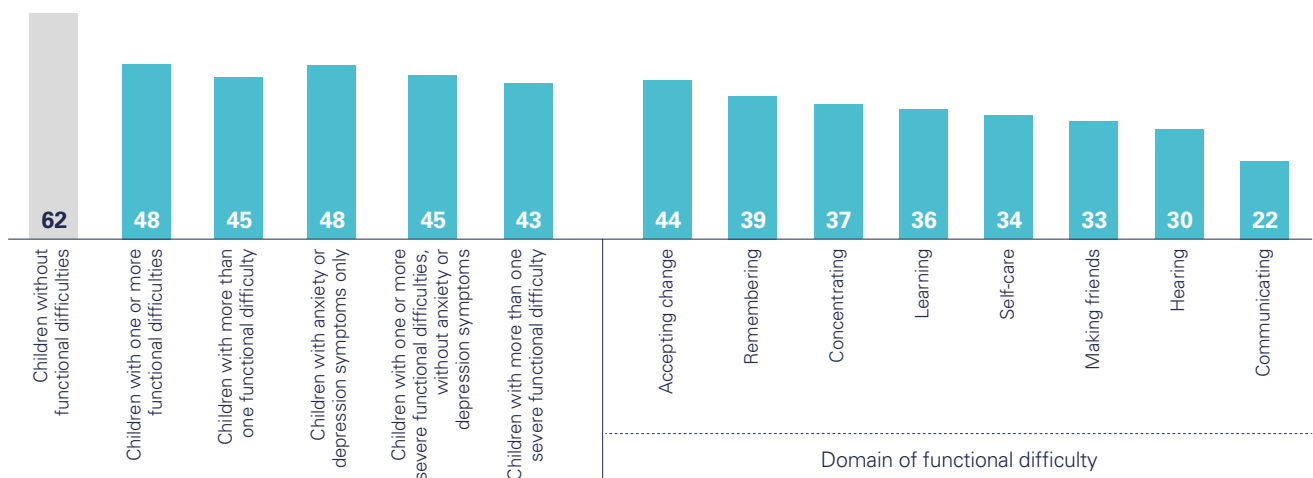
**Children with multiple disabilities, especially those with difficulties caring for themselves, remembering or communicating are least likely to have books at home**

**FIGURE 4.20** Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years who have three or more books to read at home



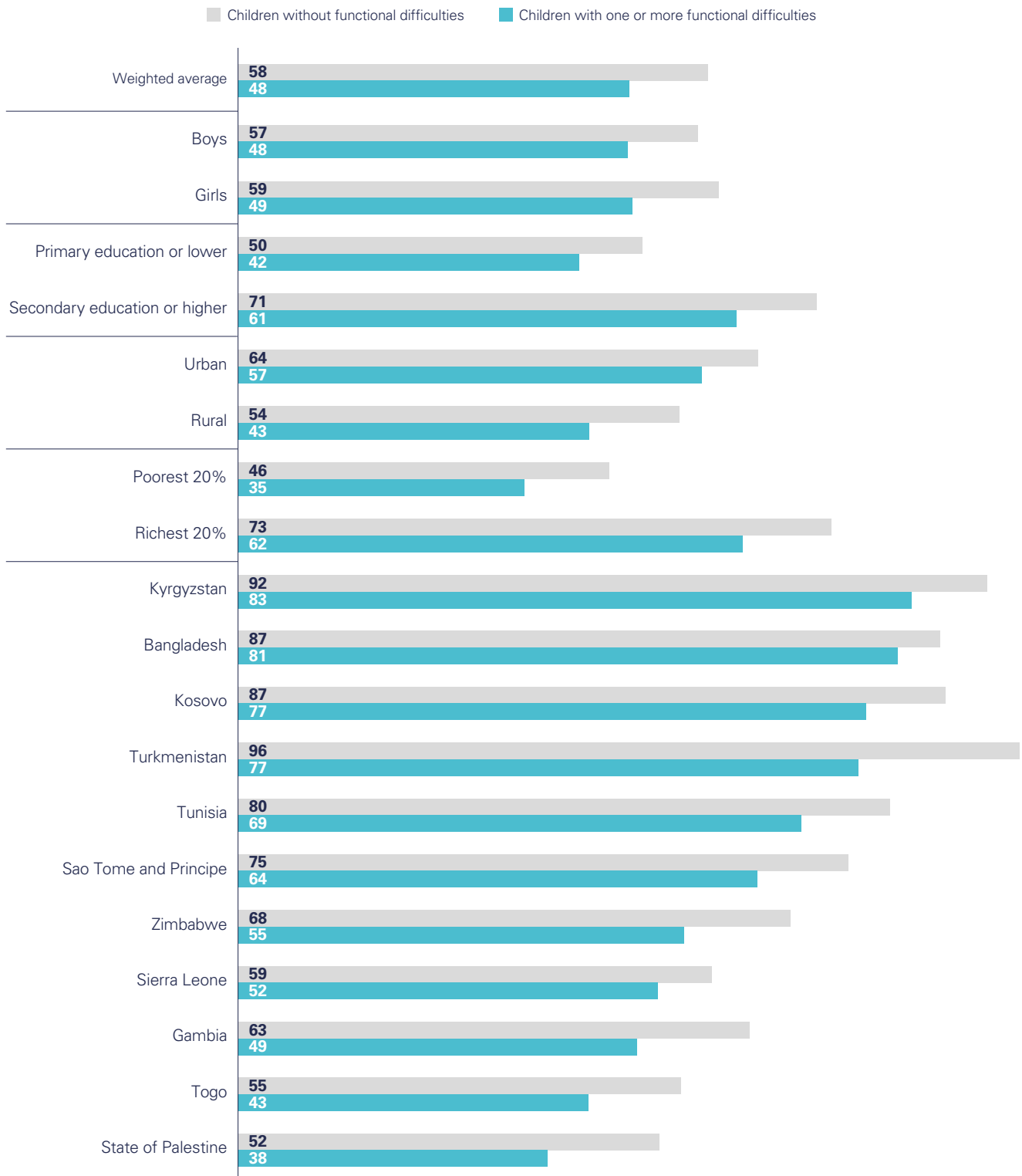
**Children with disabilities, especially those with difficulties communicating, hearing and making friends, are least likely to read or be read to at home**

**FIGURE 4.21** Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years who read books or are read to at home



### Children with disabilities, especially those whose mothers have little education and who live in the poorest or rural households, are less likely to read or be read to at home

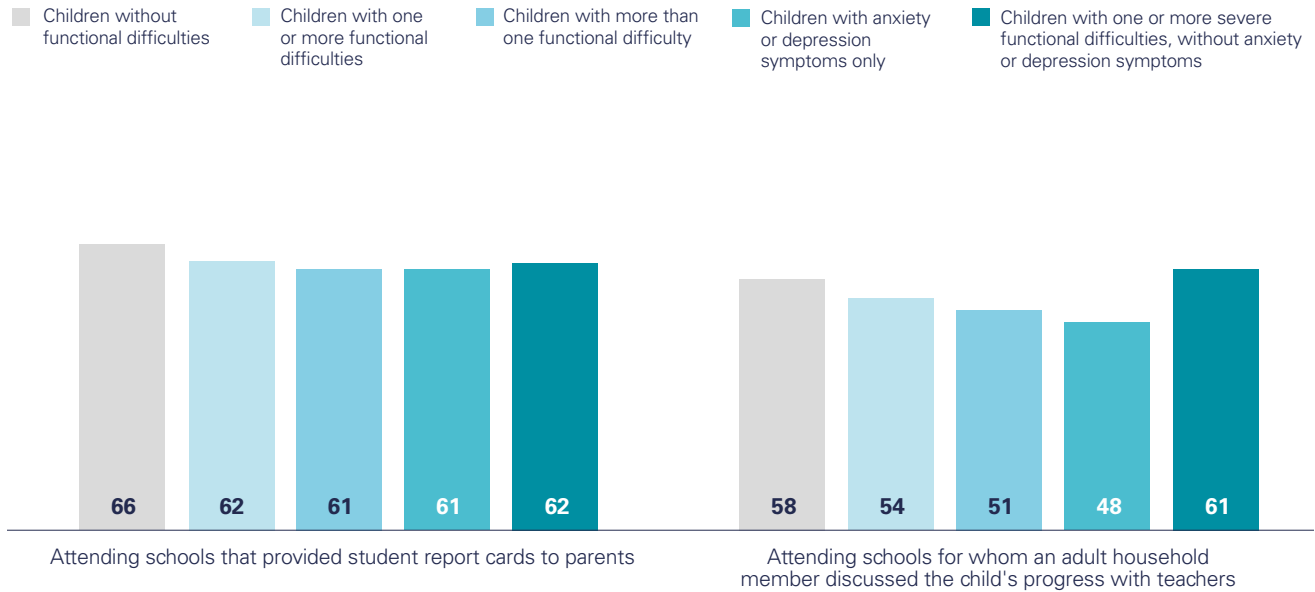
FIGURE 4.22 Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years who read books or are read to at home



Note: Education refers to the education level of mothers.

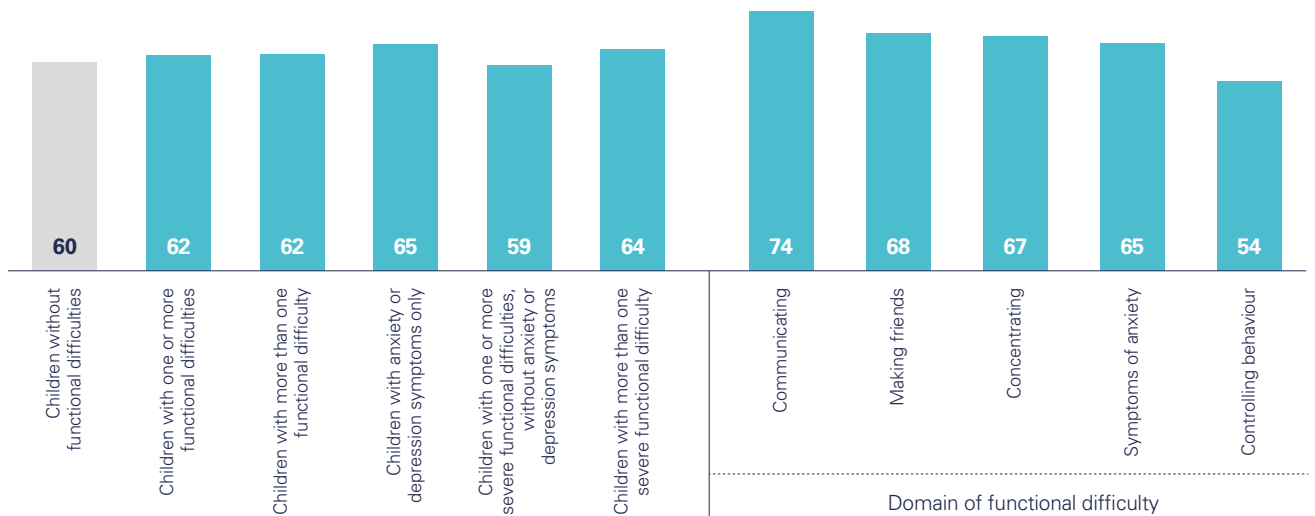
**Parents and caregivers of children with disabilities are slightly less involved in their child’s education; they are less likely to receive report cards from their child’s school and to discuss their child’s progress with teachers**

**FIGURE 4.23** Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years attending schools that provided student report cards to parents and percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years attending school for whom an adult household member discussed the child’s progress with teachers



**Children with difficulties controlling their behaviour are slightly less likely to receive help with homework, while children with difficulties communicating, making friends and concentrating and who experience symptoms of anxiety tend to receive more homework support**

**FIGURE 4.24** Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years attending school who have homework and have received help with homework



## Learning outcomes

The acquisition of basic reading and numeracy skills is fundamental to helping children thrive and prosper. Access to quality education that facilitates these outcomes is a right enshrined in both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

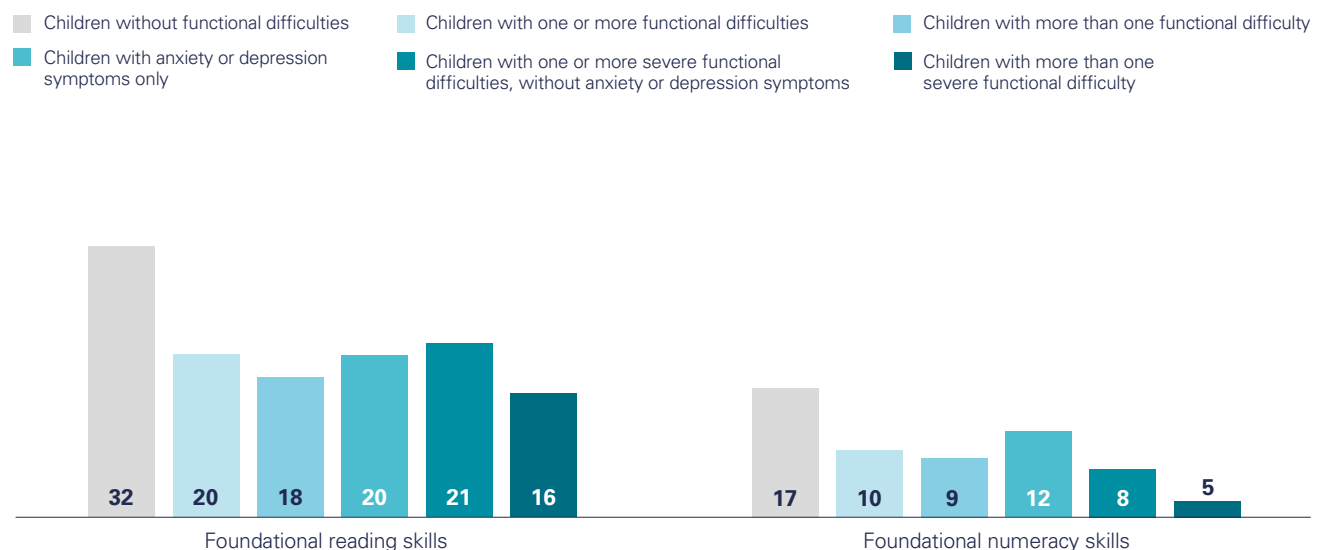
Poor learning outcomes stem from disadvantages that accumulate as children grow and that are common in children with and without disabilities. That said, children with disabilities typically face additional barriers that place them at higher risk of experiencing less than optimal educational trajectories. When families do search for educational opportunities for their children, they often find schools and classrooms that are not accessible, either physically or due to the lack of appropriate learning materials.<sup>18</sup> The needs of children with mild, or less visible, disabilities often go unidentified, which can mean that these children miss out on individualized attention and support. In addition, many students with disabilities are taught by teachers who do not have the necessary knowledge or skills to include and support them.<sup>19</sup>

Just like all other children, children with disabilities are a heterogeneous group with individual needs and challenges. The barriers they face in acquiring literacy and numeracy skills are also varied. Children with physical disabilities may have trouble physically accessing classrooms and learning materials. In contrast, children with learning disabilities can struggle to keep up with the rest of the class if accommodations are not made for their specific impairment.

Poor learning outcomes, specifically in literacy and numeracy skills, can have lifelong implications. A lack of reading skills severely limits future educational and job opportunities, making it exceedingly difficult for impoverished children with disabilities to ever break out of poverty. Literacy has also been associated with more positive health and nutrition rates throughout one's life, and lack of such skills could lead to poorer health outcomes for children with disabilities.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, numeracy skills are essential in daily life. While they have not been linked directly to poverty in the way literacy has, they nevertheless facilitate a broad range of career options that would be closed to children who lack these skills.<sup>21</sup>

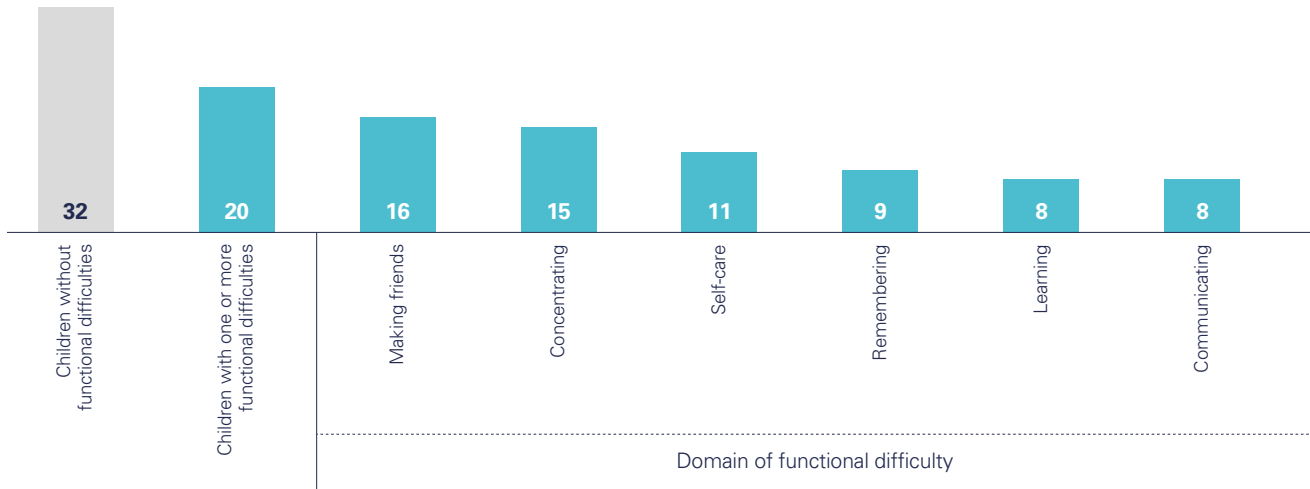
### Children with disabilities are substantially less likely to demonstrate foundational reading and numeracy skills than children without disabilities

**FIGURE 4.25** Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years who demonstrate foundational numeracy skills and percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years who demonstrate foundational reading skills



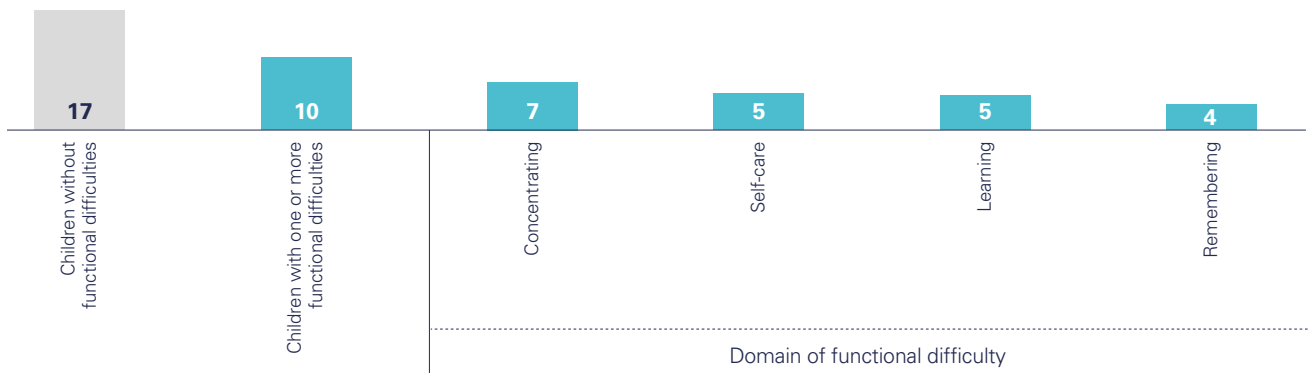
**Children with difficulties communicating, learning and remembering are least likely to have foundational reading skills**

**FIGURE 4.26** Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years who demonstrate foundational reading skills



**Children with difficulties remembering, learning and caring for themselves are least likely to demonstrate foundational numeracy skills**

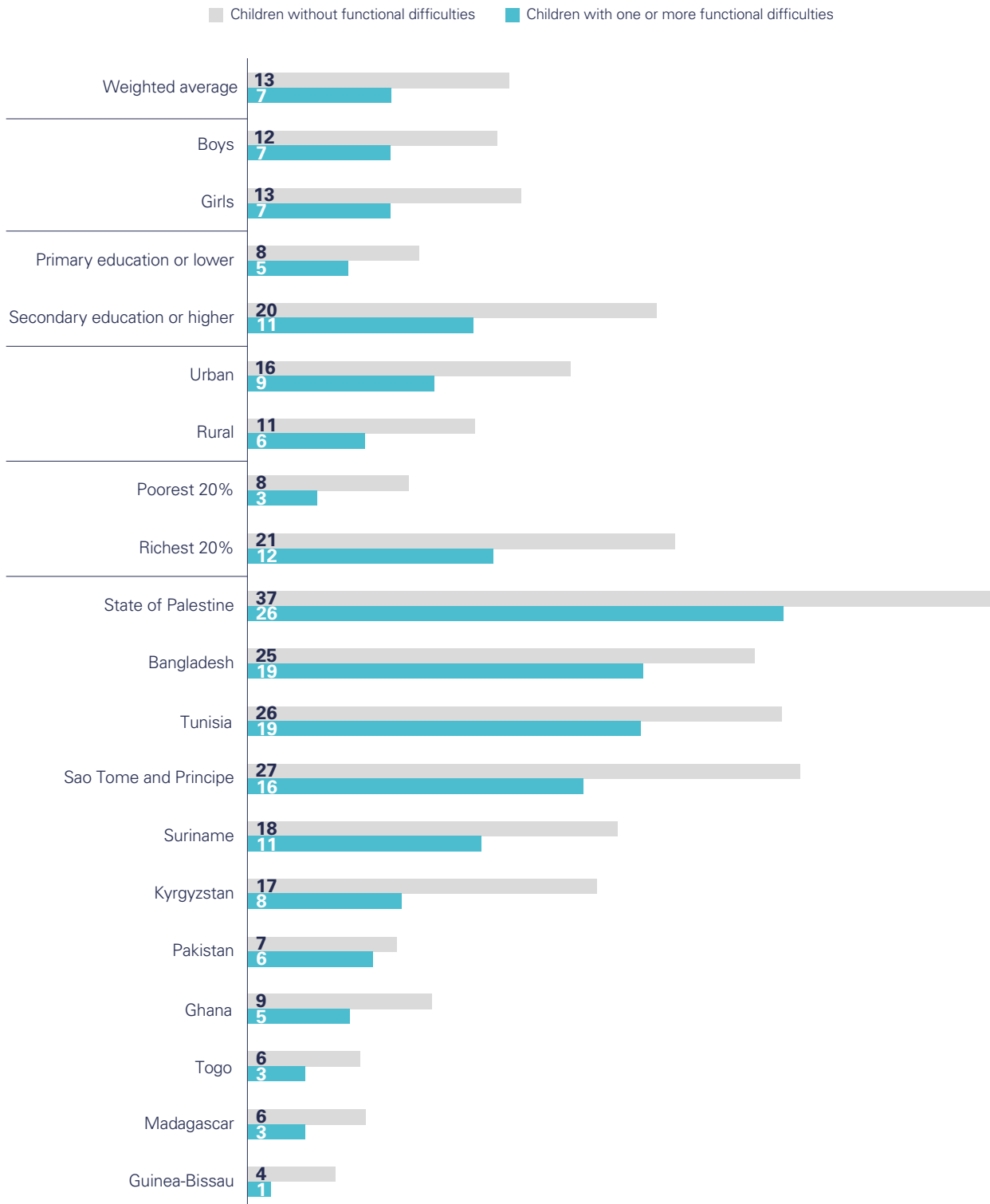
**FIGURE 4.27** Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years who demonstrate foundational numeracy skills





### Low maternal education and living in rural areas or in the poorest households are associated with the worst learning outcomes

**FIGURE 4.28** Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years who demonstrate foundational numeracy skills and foundational reading skills



Note: Education refers to the education level of mothers.



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**Disparities in the achievement of foundational skills increase as children grow older**

**FIGURE 4.29** Predictive probabilities for foundational reading and numeracy skills



Notes: These graphs show the probability of demonstrating foundational reading and numeracy skills according to age, for children with and without disabilities. The results were estimated using generalized linear regression models, with the foundational skills variable as a dependent variable, and the age and disability status of the child as independent variables. Both models were adjusted for child's sex, area of residence and wealth.

## Access to and use of information and communication technologies

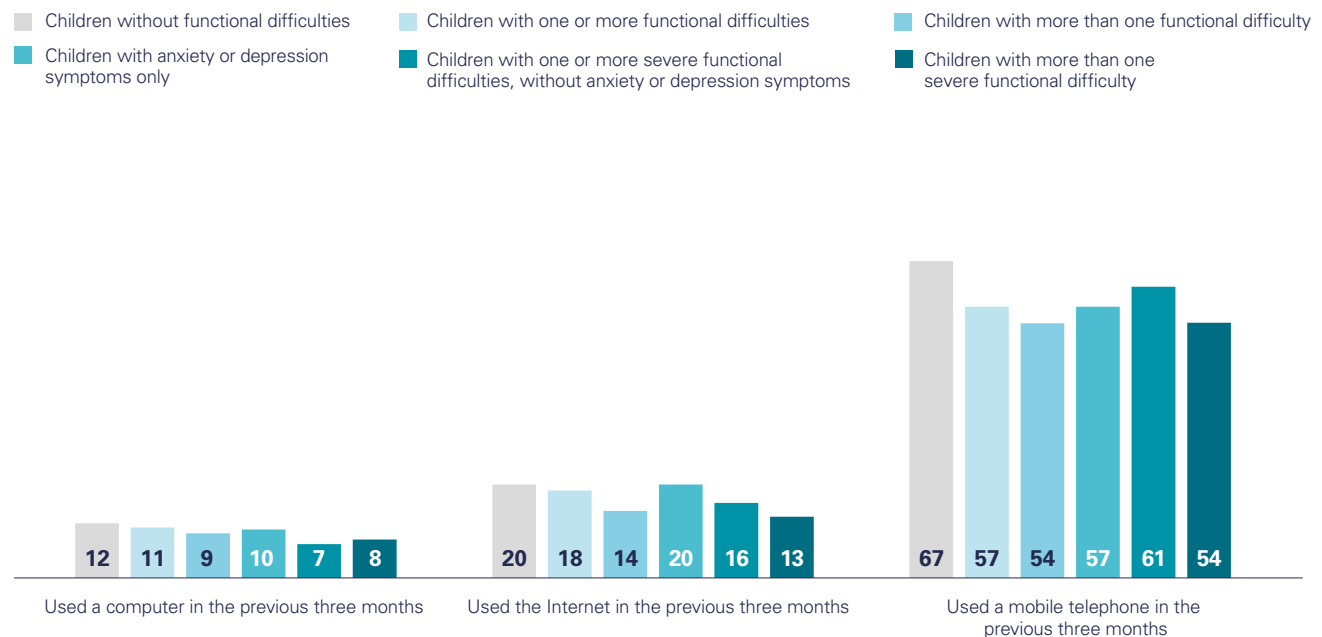
Information and communication technologies (ICT) have now become an integral part of everyday life. Children with disabilities need to obtain the skills necessary to use them as part of a complete and relevant education, as is their right under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.<sup>22</sup> Access to ICT can facilitate learning and strengthen the positive aspects of education, bringing with it the subsequent benefits that a good education can provide. And while all children can benefit from using ICT, the advantages for children with disabilities are even more pronounced. Access to ICT can facilitate communication and interaction, especially for play and education, supporting the child's social development. Substantial evidence suggests that using ICT can also help students with disabilities learn in more inclusive ways by enabling access to technologies and resources that are not otherwise available.<sup>23</sup> In addition to providing additional tools for learning, ICT can help children with disabilities to communicate with their teachers and peers more readily, building stronger social skills and networks.<sup>24</sup>



Most research lauds the opportunities that ICT provides to children with disabilities. But to achieve maximum education potential, teachers must be trained in the use of ICT for inclusion, which is not always the case.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, there is scant research into ICT access by children with disabilities in developing countries and the various ways in which this could impact their lives.<sup>26</sup>

### Adolescents with disabilities report lower use of mobile phones; no significant difference was found in their use of computers or the Internet when compared with adolescents without disabilities

**FIGURE 4.30** Percentage of children aged 15 to 17 years old who have used a computer, the Internet or a mobile phone during the previous three months



## Education support

Support for education is key to promoting the inclusion of vulnerable children – including those with disabilities – in school. This support can take many forms, such as financial assistance (scholarships, cash grants or other tuition aid) or the provision of educational materials (such as textbooks, uniforms and other school supplies). Support for education is often provided by governments, but it can also come from private, charitable, local or international organizations. Many programmes offer funding to a school on identification of a child’s disability to compensate for the additional resources required for their education. Such transfers can also be provided directly to the child and his or her family. These direct transfers are designed to give the family greater

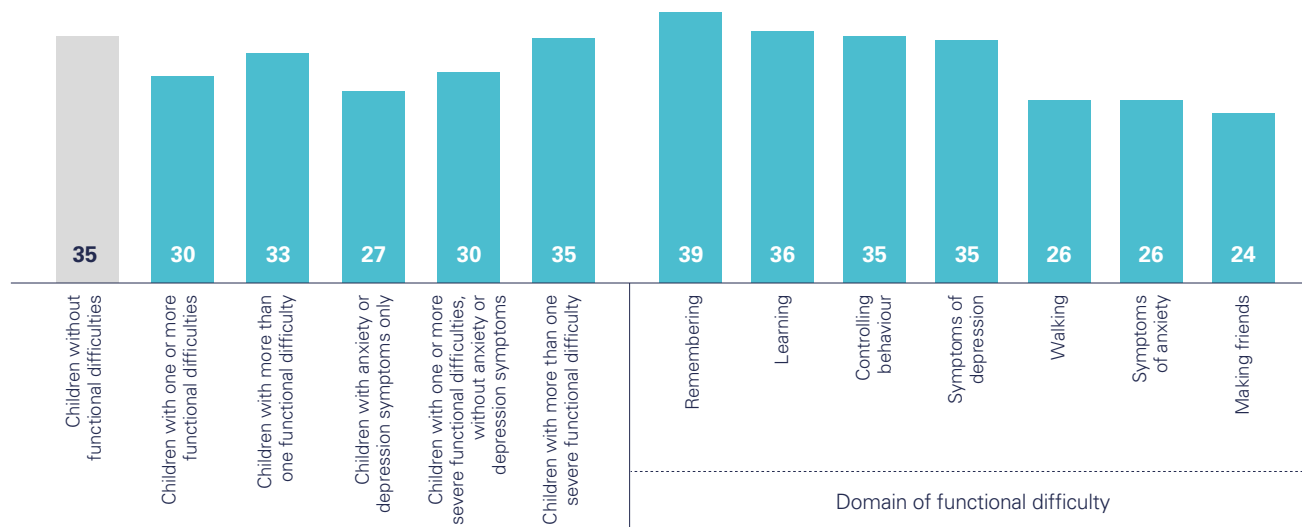
control in meeting a child’s specific educational needs, including assistive technologies.<sup>27</sup> Funds that are flexibly transferred enable families to adjust their spending as necessary. This was the case in Australia, for example, at the onset of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, when schooling was suddenly made remote. The educational support transfers were typically used to purchase assistive technologies and supplies that would allow for home learning.<sup>28</sup>

Despite progress in ensuring universally funded education for children, children with disabilities often have needs beyond this. Education support can address this gap and can be crucial for children in lower-income families.<sup>29</sup>



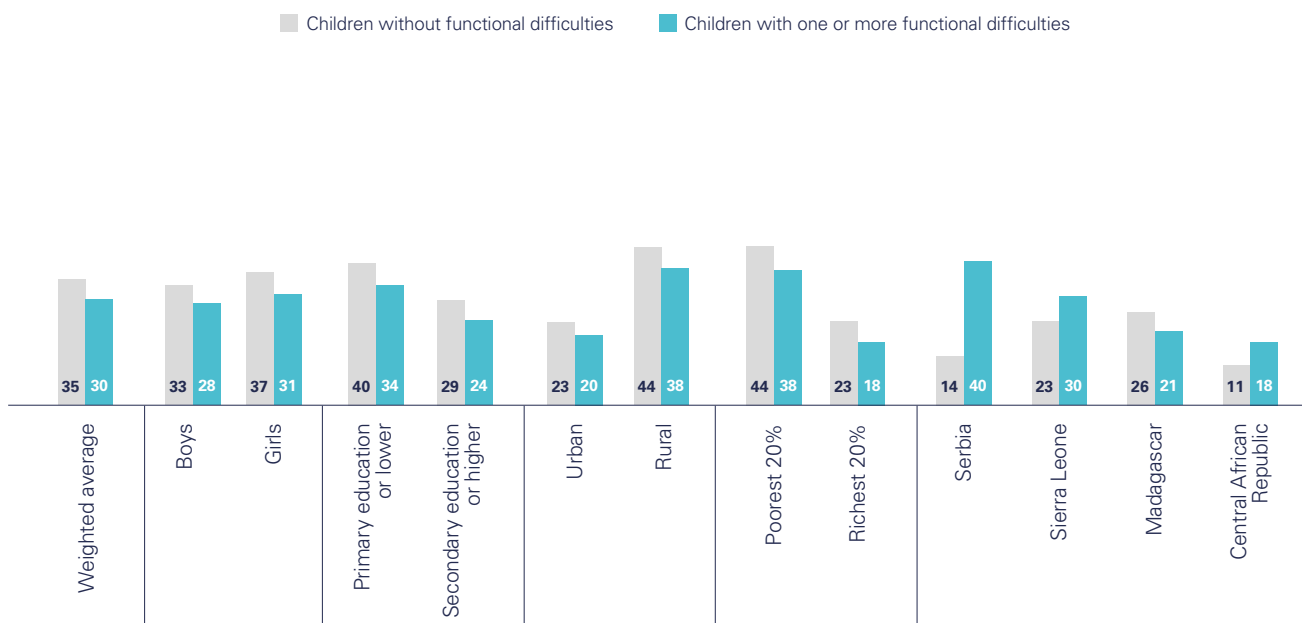
**Children with difficulties making friends and walking, or with symptoms of anxiety, are significantly less likely to receive school-related support**

**FIGURE 4.31** Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years currently attending school that received any type of school-related support in the current or most recent academic year



**Across all background characteristics, children with disabilities are less likely to receive school-related support than their peers without disabilities**

**FIGURE 4.32** Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years currently attending school that received any type of school-related support in the current or most recent academic year



Note: Education refers to the education level of mothers.



## Takeaways and programmatic implications

The data in this chapter highlight the significant disadvantages and inequities that many children with disabilities face in accessing, progressing in and benefiting from education. However, they also show that these challenges are not uniform: Outcomes and risks vary a great deal depending on a child's particular disability and background.

Many of the results regarding lower attendance and participation rates among children with disabilities are consistent with findings from the existing literature.<sup>30</sup> However, while the overall results show significant disparities between children with and without disabilities, they also indicate that the likelihood of a child never attending school can depend on her or his functional difficulty. These findings are further nuanced by the different participation rates of children based on their economic background. Children with disabilities from the poorest households are substantially more likely to have never attended school than their peers from the richest households. Furthermore, disparities in attendance and participation do not appear to be adequately addressed by education transfers. The provision of transfers in the form of school-related support, such as educational materials or tuition assistance, is less frequently reported for children with disabilities than for children without disabilities, even when controlling for household wealth.

A nuanced perspective can also be gleaned from the data in assessing the progression of children with disabilities through school. Among children in school, those with disabilities were most likely to be overage for their grade in both primary and secondary school. However, as with participation, this risk was not the same for children with difficulties in different domains. While pooled outcomes indicate substantially worse educational participation and progression for children with disabilities compared to those without, this masks the different challenges and risks for children with various types of functional difficulties. These findings add to the existing literature by providing a fuller picture of the impact of various types of disability on educational progression.<sup>31</sup>

Understanding the level of parental involvement in a child's education is important in identifying the needs of children with different types of disabilities. It also

helps in advocating for programmes that foster better support for such children and their families. The analysis found that children with disabilities in various domains experienced significantly different home learning environments, shaped by factors such as help with homework, parental engagement with teachers and home reading environments.

As might be expected, educational outcomes overall in foundational reading and numeracy skills are lower for children with disabilities. Among all children, disadvantages such as living in poor households or rural areas or having a mother with little education are strongly associated with lower levels of numeracy and literacy. But these disparities are magnified in the case of children with disabilities. Surprisingly, the disparities noted in other aspects of a child's education did not appear when looking at ICT skills and access to the Internet. No significant differences were found in this regard between children with and without disabilities with the same background characteristics.

Concrete steps can be taken to immediately address the inequities faced by children with disabilities. Closing the education gap for these children requires committed effort on the part of all parties and capacity development across many sectors.

Within families, parental involvement in a child's education is important for all children but even more so for those with disabilities. It can help facilitate more effective and inclusive learning plans and provide needed educational support. Empowering parents with the requisite knowledge, attitudes and skills to provide such support is essential. Likewise, programmes to educate parents about the right to education can encourage them to advocate on behalf of their children. Within schools, all staff must be trained, buildings must be refurbished, and accessible learning materials and curricula must be available to meet the needs of all students. At the community level, stigma and discrimination need to be addressed and awareness of the multiple benefits of inclusive education harnessed. At the governmental level, political commitment must be fostered so that laws and policies are aligned with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Such interventions must also account for the distinct barriers facing children with difficulties

in various functional domains and employ targeted approaches to ensure that all children's educational needs are met. These interventions need to address both specific barriers faced by children with disabilities and broader inequities in society among households of different backgrounds to ensure that every child is reached.

The complex interaction between a health condition or impairment and environmental and personal factors means that each child's experience of disability is unique. The diversity of results by background characteristics and domains of functional difficulty highlights the challenges in making broad statements about the barriers faced by children with disabilities in accessing education. However, the findings do suggest that, on top of any pre-existing vulnerabilities, many children with disabilities experience multiple barriers that compound one another.

Dismantling barriers to education for children with disabilities also requires the strengthening of data collection systems. Data need to be regularly collected to: (1) identify the number of children with disabilities in and out of school; (2) document the experiences of children with disabilities in the education system; and (3) identify the educational structures and resources required to deliver a school environment that is adequate and inclusive of all children.

Inclusive education, increased data collection and, ultimately, a lowering of barriers to education can be encouraged by greater public awareness of the multiple issues faced by children with disabilities. The evidence in this report can be used to as a tool for advocacy campaigns that call for the increased commitment of governments to address long-standing inequities in education and for the deployment of concrete actions that improve the education outlook for all children.

#### BOX 4.1 Closing information gaps around the education of children with disabilities

All children have the right to a quality education to realize their full potential. The data in this report can be used to address the inequities that prevent children with disabilities from participating in and benefiting from education. The findings point to the immediate actions required in response. However, other crucial information is also needed to gain a fuller understanding of the experience of such children in accessing inclusive quality education.

Inclusive education is a key strategy to achieve education for all. It involves the strengthening of conditions and capacities to enable the education system to cater to all learners, regardless of sex, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, nationality, place of residence and disability status, among other characteristics. It promotes meaningful and successful participation in the education system. It can include any aspect of community and school infrastructure, norms, attitudes and behaviours at the family, community and school level. It also includes the provision of adequate curricula and pedagogic approaches that accommodate the needs of all children, in line with the principles of the Universal Design for Learning.<sup>32</sup> Despite growing recognition of the importance of inclusive education, children with disabilities in nearly every corner of the world face

significant issues related to inclusion.<sup>33</sup> Often these involve underresourced schools and classrooms<sup>34</sup> and inaccessible water, sanitation and hygiene facilities.<sup>35</sup> Stigma, discrimination and negative perceptions about disability held by teachers, coupled with a lack of knowledge and skills on how to include children with disabilities, are other common barriers.

Ensuring inclusive education requires closing the information gap around the education of children with disabilities. UNICEF – in collaboration with key partners – has been working to address this gap. One ongoing project seeks to support countries in collecting and managing data on children with disabilities through Education Management Information Systems (EMIS). An EMIS is an important source of information that can meet the urgent need for data to inform policy development and evaluation. Another project involves the validation of the Inclusive Education Module, which is an extended set of questions on children with disabilities that focuses on environmental barriers and participation in school. The module, which is intended for use in household surveys, will generate information that can inform policy, provide a statistical summary of environmental influences on school participation, and identify key bottlenecks that require follow-up action.

## CHAPTER 5

# Every child has the right to protection from violence and exploitation

The right of children to live free from violence and exploitation is enshrined in both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The protection of children from violence and exploitation has been further highlighted as a global priority in the SDGs. Target 8.7 encourages countries to take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking, secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and end child labour in all its forms by 2025. Target 16.2 calls for an end to abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children. Target 16.9 aims for universal birth registration, ensuring children a legal identity and allowing them access to justice and social services.

This chapter seeks to shed light on the violence and exploitation faced by children with disabilities, which can take many forms and continue throughout a child's lifetime (see Box 5.1 on page 102). Children with disabilities living without family care and those associated with the street are especially vulnerable to these threats (see Box 5.2 on page 111). However, statistical evidence on their experiences remains scarce, and for this reason they are not included in this report. The data presented on the following pages provide an overview of violence against children in their home. Children's engagement in economic activities and in household chores for long hours, as well as work performed under hazardous conditions, are used to report on children's exploitation. Since the right to be recognized as a person before the law is key to ensuring lifelong protection, the chapter starts with an overview of birth registration levels.







## Indicators used in this chapter

**Birth registration:** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months whose births are registered with a civil authority.

**Psychological aggression:** Percentage of children aged 2 to 14 years who experienced any psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month.

**Physical punishment:** Percentage of children aged 2 to 14 years who experienced any physical punishment by caregivers in the past month.

**Severe physical punishment:** Percentage of children aged 2 to 14 years who experienced severe physical punishment by caregivers in the past month.

**Any violent discipline:** Percentage of children aged 2 to 14 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month.

**Attitudes towards physical punishment:** Percentage of mothers/caregivers of children aged 2 to 14 years who believe that physical punishment is needed to bring up, raise or educate a child properly.

**Economic activity:** Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years who are involved in economic activity above age-specific thresholds.

**Household chores:** Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years who are involved in household chores above age-specific thresholds.

**Child labour:** Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years who are involved in economic activities or household chores above age-specific thresholds.

**Hazardous working condition:** Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years who are involved in child labour under hazardous conditions.

## Definitions and data interpretation issues

Findings regarding violent methods of discipline should be interpreted with caution since, for a significant percentage of children with functional difficulties, no disciplinary method was reported (see Table 5.1). For children with difficulties in some domains of functioning, the finding of 'no discipline method reported' is more than five times greater than it is for

**TABLE 5.1** Percentage of children aged 2 to 14 years for whom no method of discipline was reported

Children without functional difficulties		7
Children with one or more functional difficulties		6
Domain of functional difficulty	Controlling behaviour	6
	Symptoms of anxiety	6
	Symptoms of depression	7
	Accepting change	8
	Remembering	12
	Learning	12
	Walking	13
	Making friends	16
	Concentrating	17
	Self-care	19
	Seeing	19
	Communicating	19
	Hearing	20
Playing	33	
Fine motor skills	38	

Note: Results for the domains of fine motor skills and playing refer to children aged 2 to 4 years only.





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children without disabilities, suggesting issues within this indicator that may have numerous explanations. Data for this indicator are collected by the interviewer asking whether a child is subjected to different disciplinary methods – both positive and negative. It is therefore possible that the methods used on children with disabilities vary significantly from those used on children without disabilities. However, as these are not mentioned in the survey, they have gone unrecorded. In this situation, the high number of ‘no discipline method reported’ findings could be attributed to a tool that is not accurately capturing the experiences of children with disabilities. Alternatively, it could be indicative of parents not engaging with their disabled children and putting time and energy into disciplining them, either positively or negatively.

A further limitation is that the definition of child labour used for statistical purposes does not include begging, since this activity does not imply an exchange of good or services. Since children with disabilities may be forced to beg,<sup>1</sup> the prevalence of child labour among such children may be underestimated in certain contexts.

### Sources of data

Unless otherwise noted, the pooled estimates in this chapter are drawn from MICS6 conducted in Algeria, Bangladesh, Belarus, Central African Republic, Chad, Costa Rica, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo,

Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Iraq, Kiribati, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People’s Democratic Republic (for children aged 2 to 4 years only), Lesotho, Madagascar, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro, Nepal, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Sao Tome and Principe, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Suriname, Togo, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkmenistan and Zimbabwe. Data for Pakistan are pooled results from surveys conducted in the regions of Sindh and Punjab (for more details, see the technical annex).

Pooled results for indicators measuring birth registration (Figures 5.1 and 5.2) do not include data from Belarus, Costa Rica, Georgia or Montenegro since these were not available.

Pooled results for some of the indicators on violent discipline (Figure 5.9) do not include data from the Lao People’s Democratic Republic since this figure presents data on children aged 5 to 14 years; that country only collected data on functional difficulties for children aged 2 to 4 years.

Pooled results for indicators measuring child labour (Figures 5.11 through 5.14) do not include data from Cuba, Nepal, Tunisia or Turkmenistan since these were not available. Also, since these figures present data on children aged 5 to 14 years, they do not include data from the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

## Birth registration

Birth registration is the first step in recognizing a child before the law and is fundamental to protecting the rights of all children.<sup>2</sup> Despite global progress in increasing birth registration levels, many children around the world are still denied their right to a legal identity.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, inequities in birth registration reflect other vulnerabilities: Unregistered children are predominantly from poorer households, live in rural areas and have mothers with lower levels of education.<sup>4</sup> Non-registration is driven by a combination of factors and circumstances, from both the demand and supply side. Barriers to effective birth registration can include long distances to registration facilities, lack of knowledge about how to register a child and fees associated with registration or obtaining a birth certificate. In most cases, these lead to delays in registration, with children being registered at older ages. The view that birth registration is of little value may also play a major role.

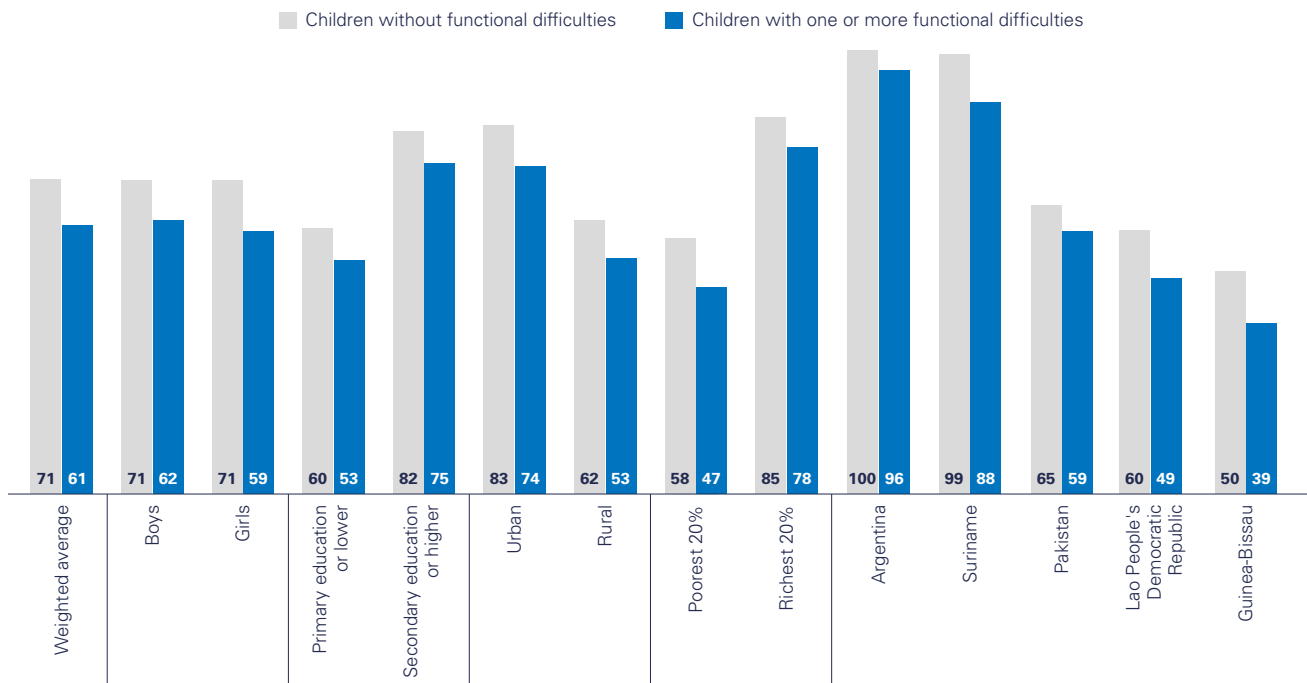
The right to birth registration is closely linked to the realization of many other rights. It has profound consequences for children's enjoyment of their rights to protection, nationality and access to health, social services and education. Disparities in birth registration rates may compound inequalities in access to basic services, heightening discrimination and vulnerability.

Evidence on access to birth registration among children with disabilities is non-existent. That said, the impact of being unregistered is likely greater among this group of children, placing them at even higher risk of human rights violations, including abuse and exploitation or the loss of social, political or economic rights throughout their lives.



**Children with disabilities are slightly more likely to be unregistered than children without disabilities; disparities in birth registration levels are especially evident among children living in urban areas and in the poorest households**

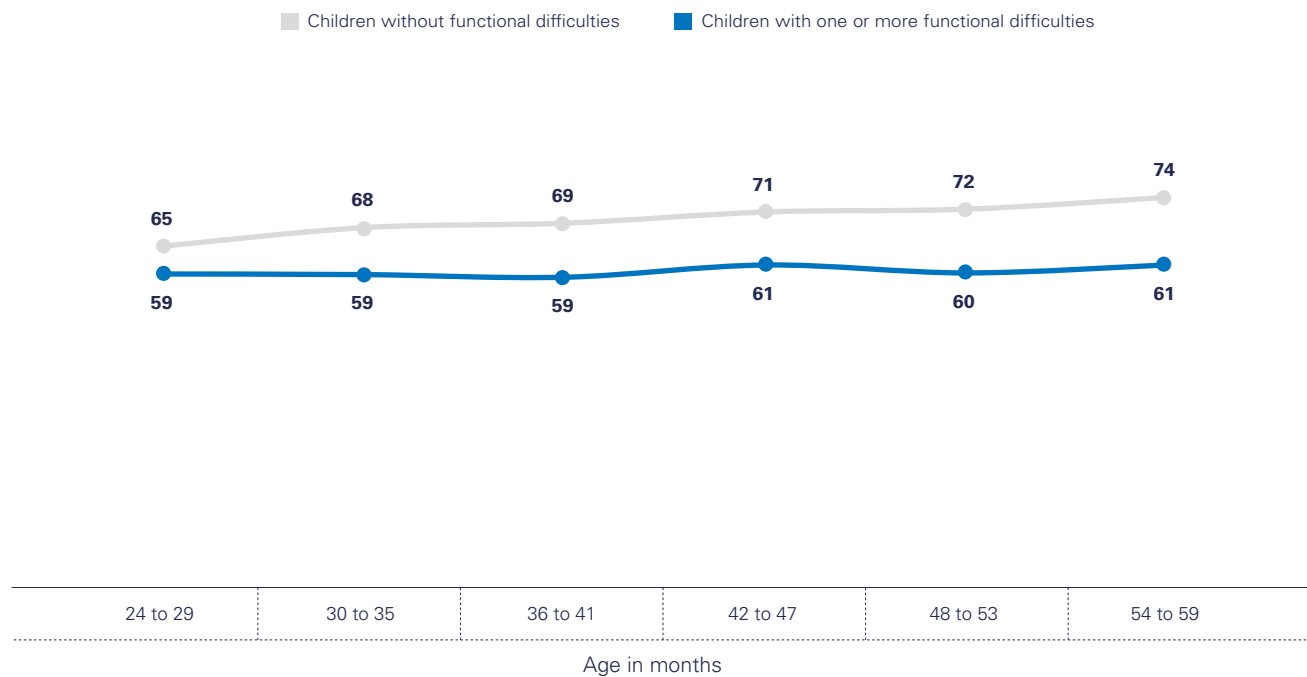
**FIGURE 5.1** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months whose birth has been registered with a civil authority



Note: Education refers to the education level of mothers.

**The likelihood that children with disabilities will be registered does not increase with age, in contrast with their peers without disabilities**

**FIGURE 5.2** Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months whose birth has been registered with a civil authority



## Violent discipline

Too often, parents resort to violent methods of discipline because they feel they lack other options to effectively teach their children self-control and acceptable behaviour. For parents of children with disabilities, these challenges can be compounded.<sup>5</sup> Parenting such children often requires a higher and more constant level of involvement, which can contribute to parental distress and an increased propensity to resort to violent disciplinary methods.<sup>6</sup> Violent forms of discipline can also be driven by prevailing attitudes towards the disability itself. Children with disabilities can face stigma along with negative attitudes and beliefs that place them

at increased risk of violence and neglect, sometimes resulting in their deaths.<sup>7</sup>

Factors that exacerbate the risk of exposure to violent disciplinary methods include background characteristics that are associated with children both with and without disabilities, such as poverty and parental education level.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, there is some indication that children with disabilities in certain domains of functioning – such as cognition, communication, seeing and hearing – are at increased risk of violent physical discipline compared with their peers with difficulties in other domains.<sup>9</sup>

### BOX 5.1

#### A lifetime of violence

Starting at birth, children with disabilities are exposed to multiple forms of violence that can continue throughout their lifetimes.

An infant born with a disability faces an increased risk of infanticide. This could be linked to the belief that disability makes a person ‘unfit’ or unworthy to live or superstition about the misfortune such a child might bring to the household.<sup>10</sup> Some parents have even described killing their child as an act of love, preventing him or her from having to live with what they perceive to be the burden of disability.<sup>11</sup> Negative and discriminatory attitudes and beliefs can fuel such notions. The increased stress often placed on parents caring for a child with disabilities can lead to heightened risks of abuse and violence, especially when parents do not have adequate resources and support.

As children grow and expand their lives outside their immediate household, enter school and begin to develop peer relationships, the risk of exposure to interpersonal violence from their peers increases. Research has indicated that children with disabilities experience significantly higher rates of bullying than children without disabilities.<sup>12</sup> Bullying of such children is also associated with certain beliefs about the nature of disability: that it is a ‘curse’ from God for the transgressions of the child or his/her family, for example, or prejudiced beliefs and misconceptions regarding disability more generally.<sup>13</sup> Often, a lack of support within communities and schools to meet the needs of children with disabilities and ensure their

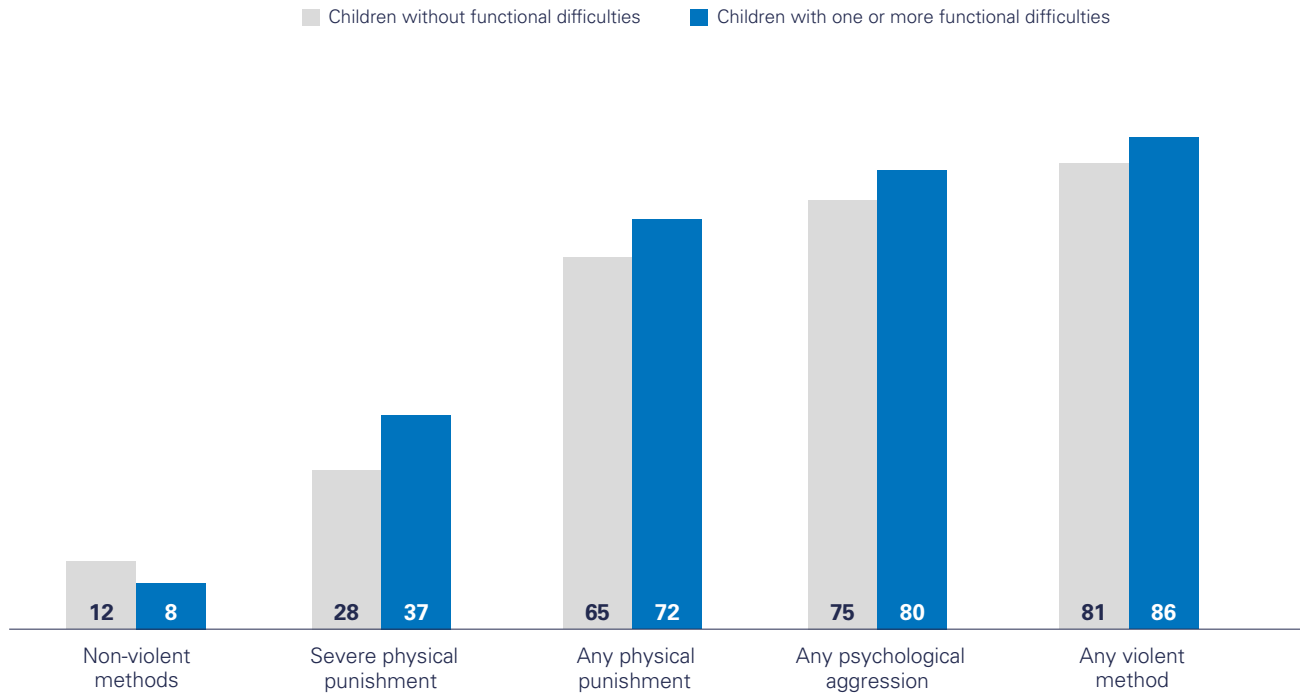
inclusion and participation can inadvertently encourage bullying.<sup>14</sup>

Such children may also face an increased risk of sexual violence,<sup>15</sup> with girls at higher risk than boys.<sup>16</sup> Children who have difficulties in the domain of self-care, or who live in institutions, are particularly vulnerable.<sup>17</sup> Children with disabilities, or their families, may choose not to report sexual abuse for fear of bringing additional shame to an already stigmatized child and family.<sup>18</sup> In addition, children with disabilities who experience sexual violence often face barriers in reporting the crime. They are frequently denied justice since their testimonies are often considered unreliable.<sup>19</sup> Exposure to sexual violence can be exacerbated by the lack of disability-sensitive education and protective mechanisms.<sup>20</sup>



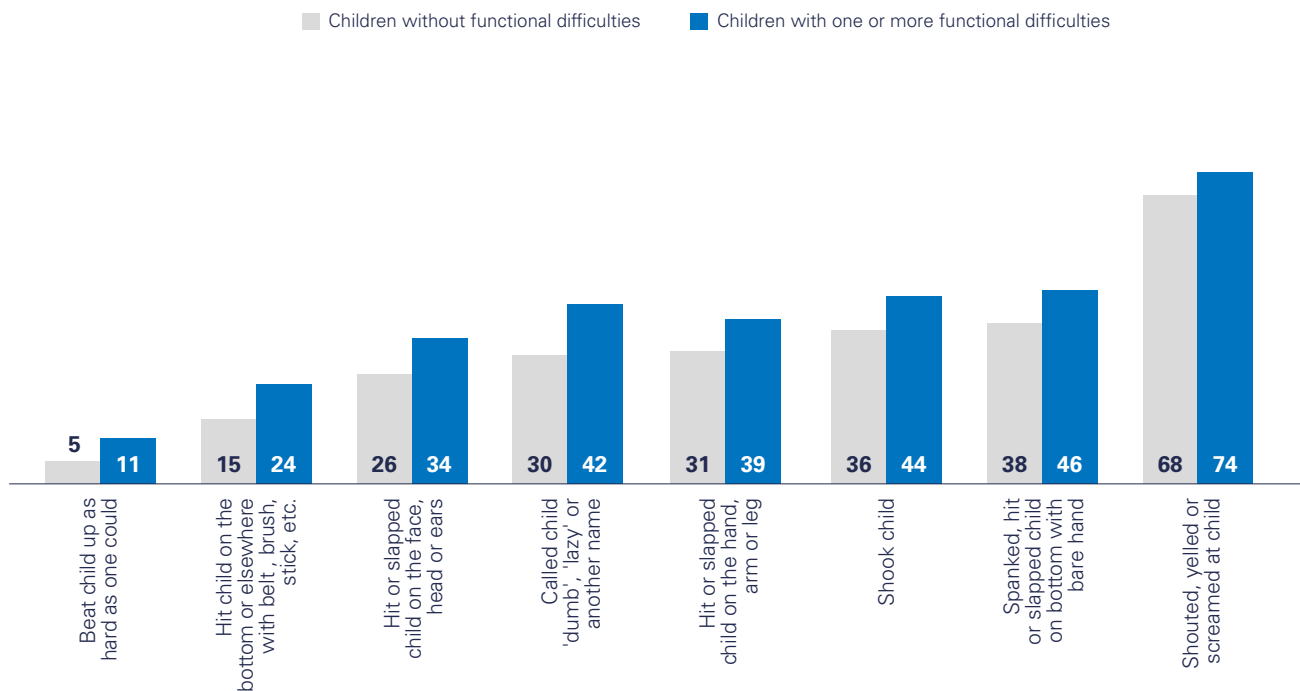
### Children with disabilities are more likely to experience violent discipline than their peers without disabilities

**FIGURE 5.3** Percentage of children aged 2 to 14 years exposed to violent and non-violent disciplinary methods



### Children with disabilities are twice as likely to be beaten up as children without disabilities

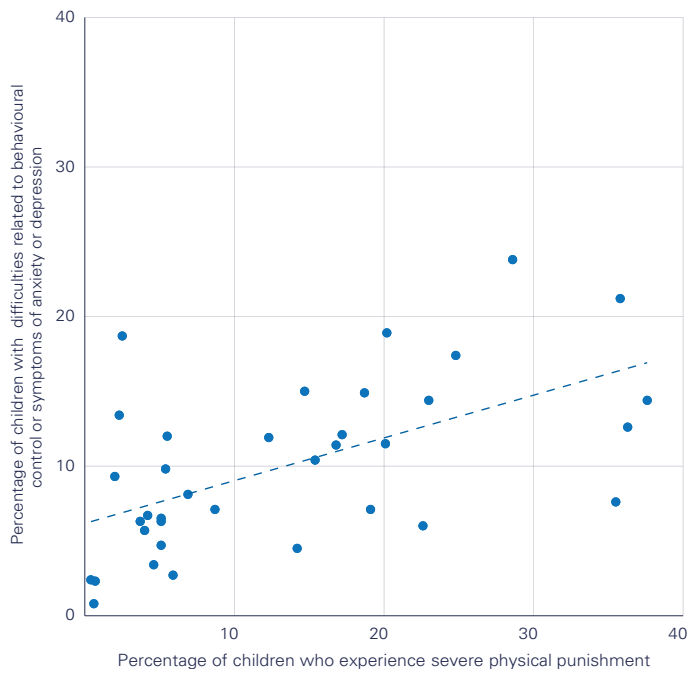
**FIGURE 5.4** Percentage of children aged 2 to 14 years exposed to various forms of violent discipline





**Exposure to severe physical punishment is associated with psychosocial difficulties**

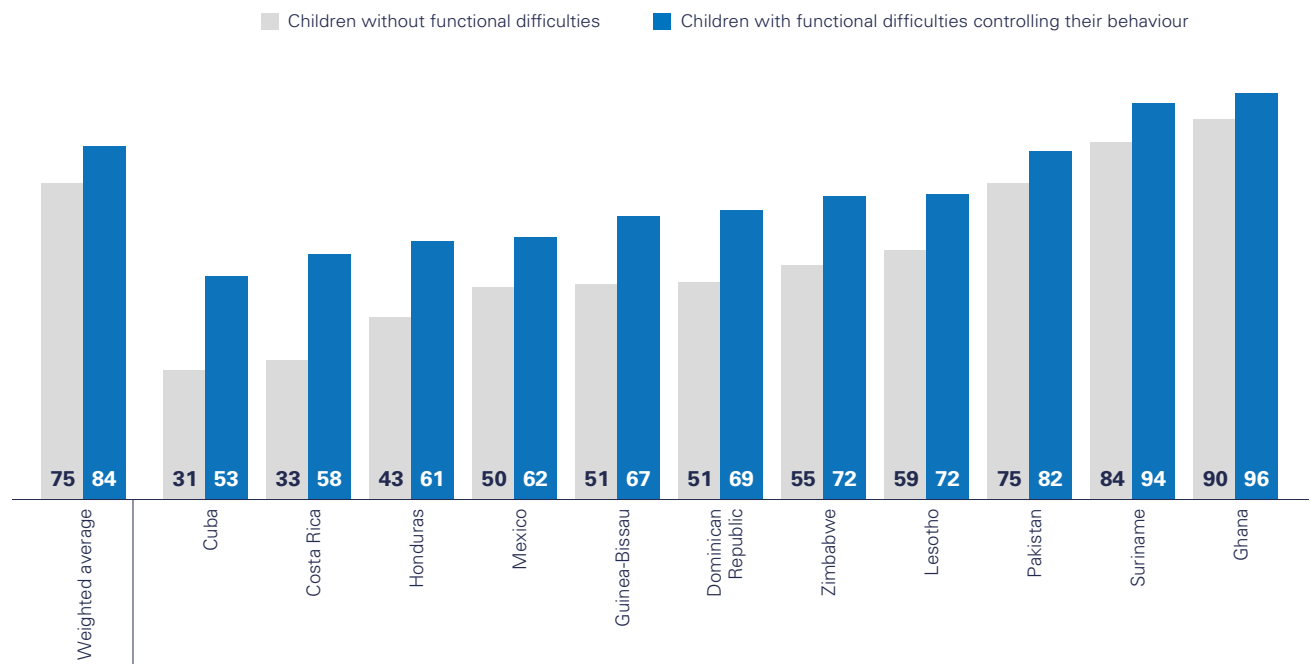
**FIGURE 5.5** Percentage of children aged 5 to 14 years exposed to severe physical punishment and percentage of children aged 5 to 14 years who have symptoms of anxiety or depression or difficulty controlling their behaviour



Notes: The chart shows the association between severe physical punishment and difficulties related to behavioural control or symptoms of anxiety or depression, across 36 countries. Each dot represents a country's proportion of children aged 5 to 14 years who experience severe physical punishment and the percentage of children of the same age group with difficulties in the domains of behavioural control or symptoms of anxiety or depression, in that same country. The results show a strong correlation between the two indicators, indicating that children who experience severe physical punishment are significantly more likely to experience difficulties related to behavioural control or symptoms of anxiety or depression.

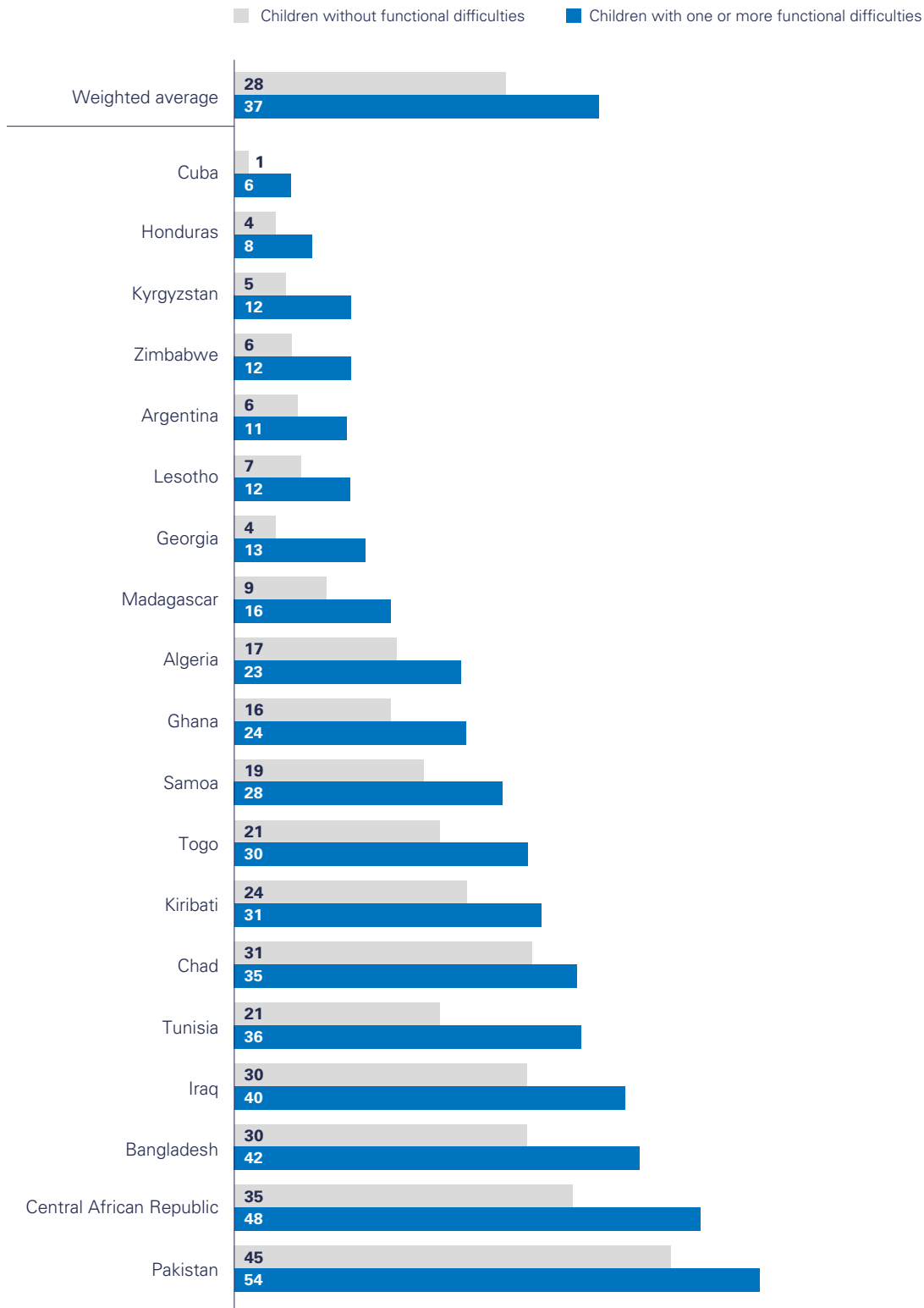
**Children with difficulties controlling their behaviour are more likely to experience psychological aggression as a form of discipline**

**FIGURE 5.6** Percentage of children aged 2 to 14 years who experience psychological aggression



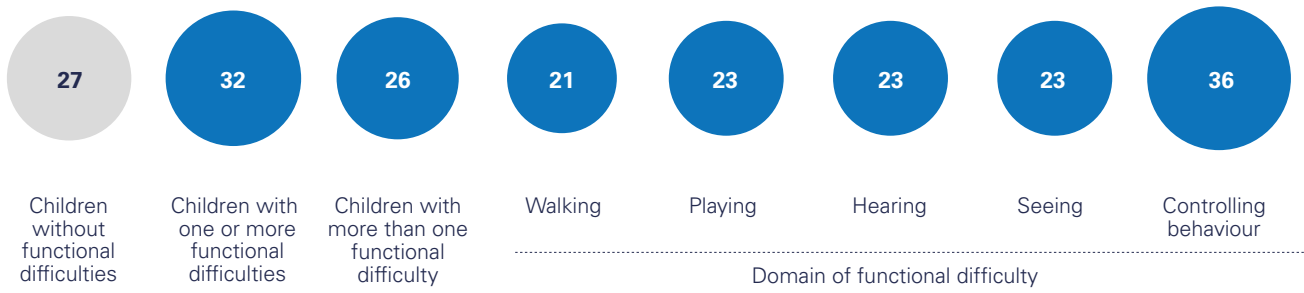
### In some countries, children with disabilities are significantly more likely to be exposed to severe physical punishment than children without disabilities

**FIGURE 5.7** Percentage of children aged 2 to 14 years exposed to severe physical punishment

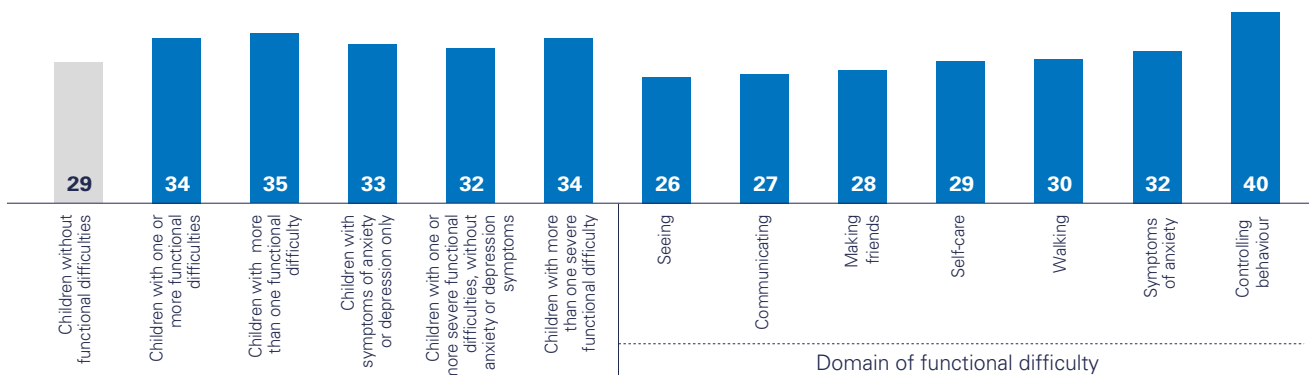


**Caregivers of children who have behavioural difficulties are more likely to believe in the need for physical punishment**

**FIGURE 5.8** Percentage of mothers or primary caregivers of children aged 2 to 4 years who believe physical punishment is needed to bring up, raise or educate a child properly

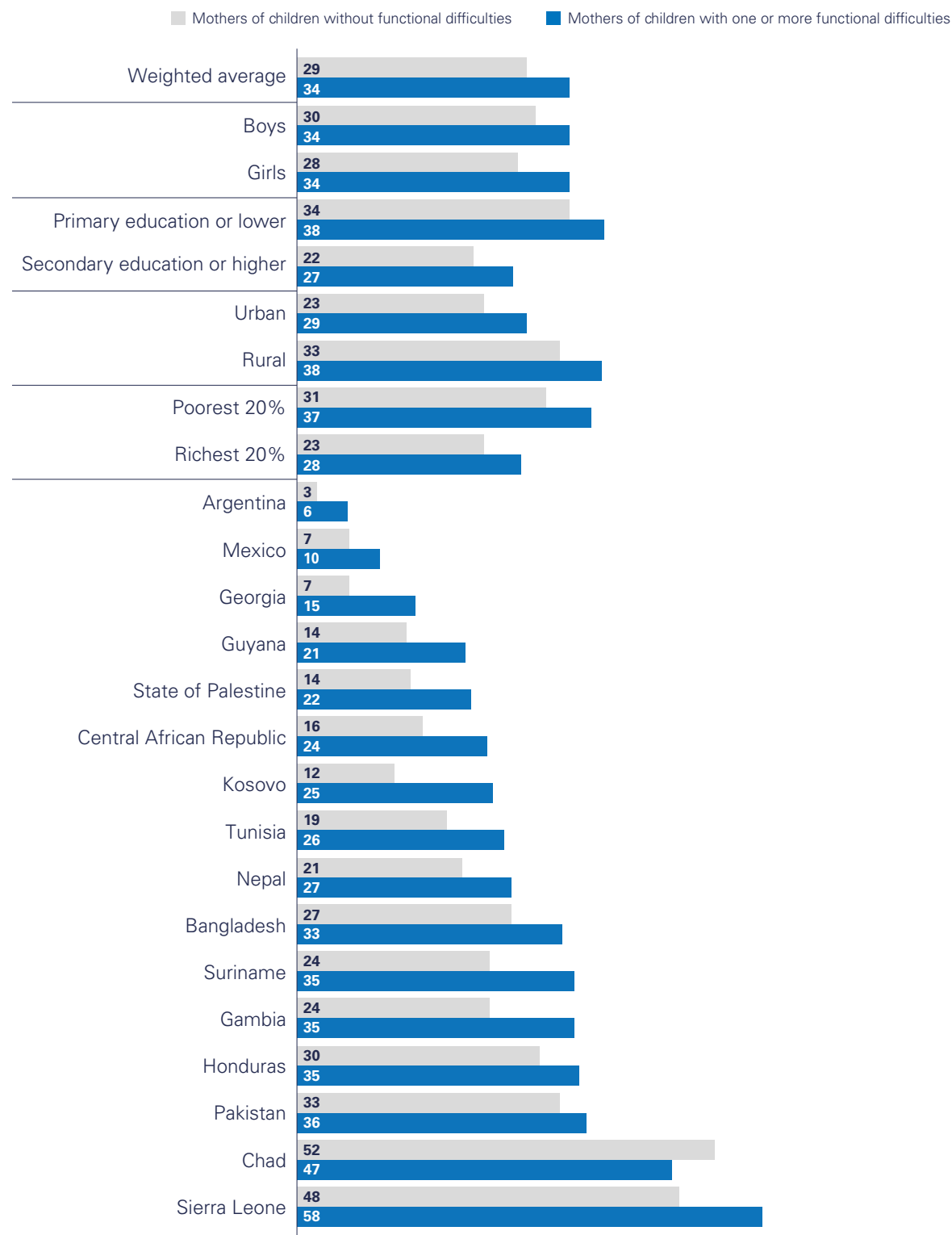


**FIGURE 5.9** Percentage of mothers or primary caregivers of children aged 5 to 14 years who believe physical punishment is needed to bring up, raise or educate a child properly



**Across many countries and areas, caregivers of children with disabilities are more likely to believe physical punishment is necessary to raise a child**

**FIGURE 5.10** Percentage of mothers or primary caregivers of children aged 2 to 14 years who believe physical punishment is needed to bring up, raise or educate a child properly



Note: Education refers to the education level of mothers.

## Child labour

Child labour is work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally harmful to children. It interferes with normal child development, deprives children of the opportunity to attend school or obliges them to leave school prematurely, and often implies excessive, heavy and dangerous forms of work.<sup>21</sup>

Some evidence suggests that children with disabilities are more likely to engage in child labour than children without disabilities,<sup>22</sup> and are at higher risk of exposure to hazardous forms of labour.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, limited evidence suggests that some children with disabilities, especially disabilities easily perceived by others, may be more likely to become involved in begging (see Box 5.2 on page 111). The rationale behind this is that the dual

vulnerabilities of childhood and disability will result in greater income generation.<sup>24</sup>

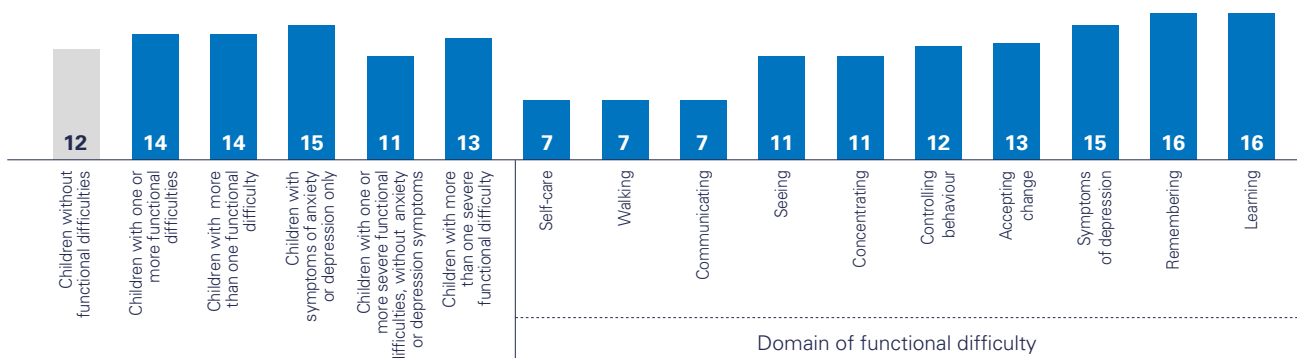
Child labour is intricately connected to poverty. Since children living with disabilities are often more likely to live in poverty, they are also at higher risk of child labour.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the dangers of child labour can cause children to develop disabilities or exacerbate existing impairments. Studies have consistently found that children engaged in child labour are at high risk of experiencing injuries that could cause disabilities.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, child labour can have strongly adverse impacts on the mental health of children, which can contribute to the development of psychosocial disabilities.<sup>27</sup>





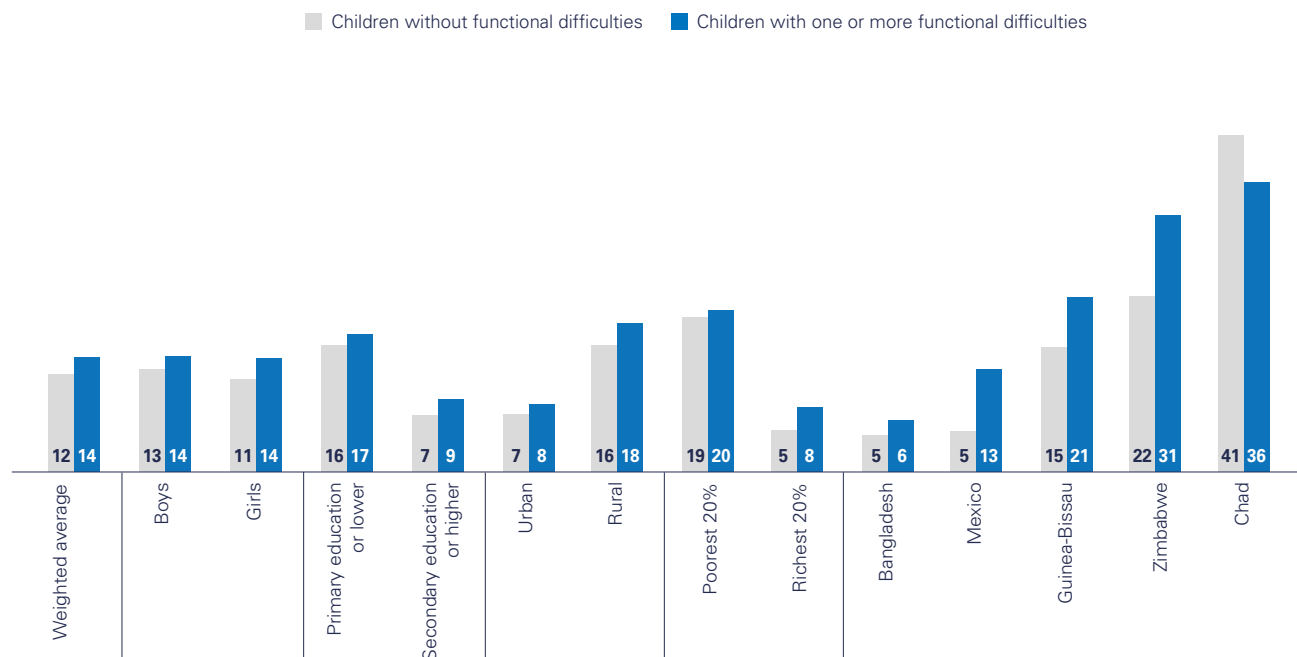
**The prevalence of child labour is higher among children with symptoms of depression and difficulties learning and remembering**

**FIGURE 5.11** Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years who are engaged in child labour



**Across all background characteristics, children with disabilities are more likely to be engaged in child labour than children without disabilities**

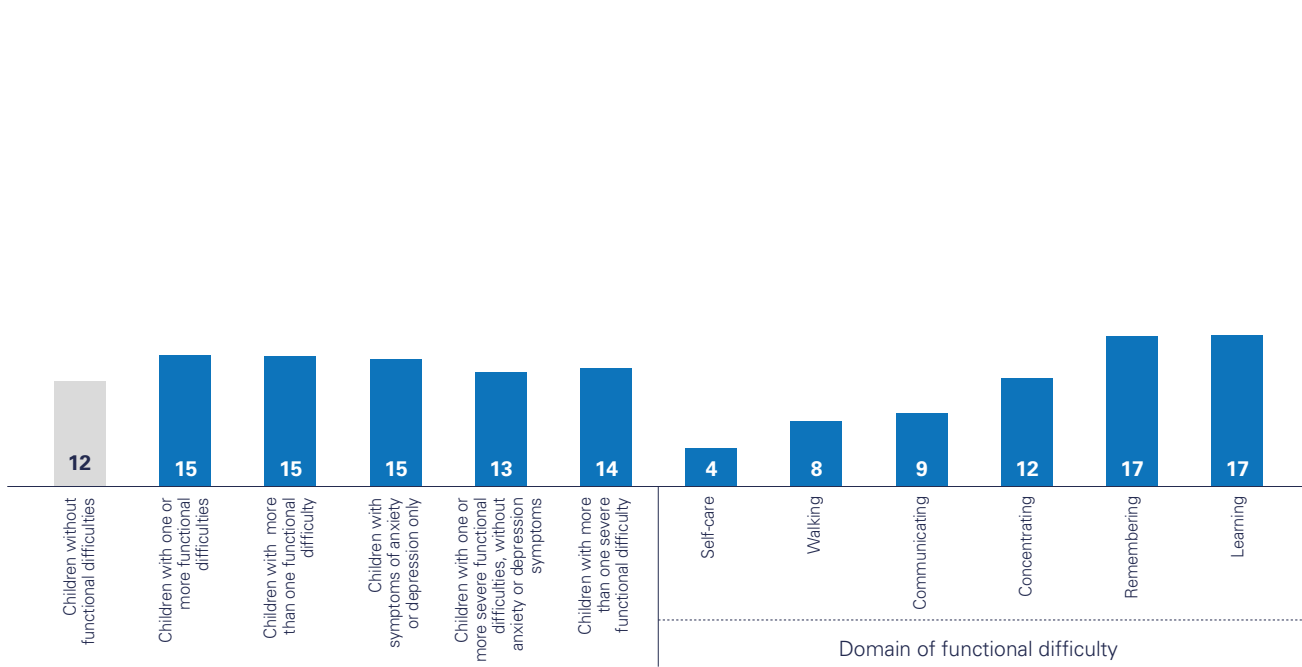
**FIGURE 5.12** Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years who are engaged in child labour



Note: Education refers to the education level of mothers.

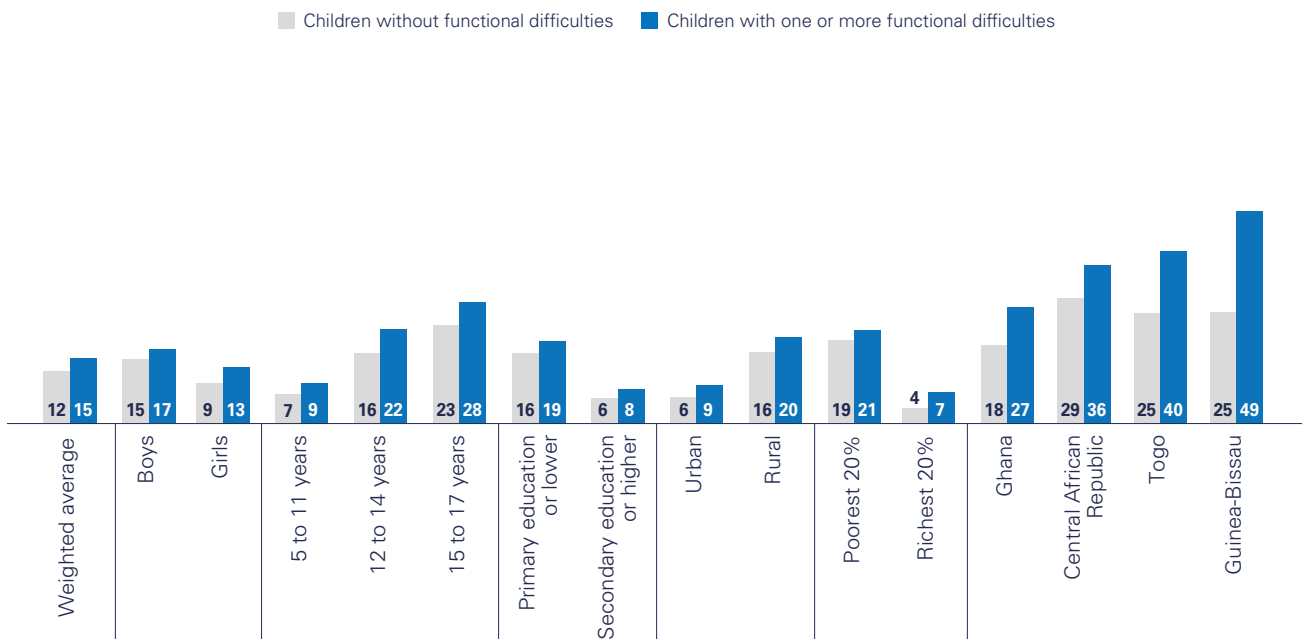
**The likelihood of exposure to hazardous working conditions is significantly higher among children with difficulties learning and remembering**

**FIGURE 5.13** Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years who work under hazardous conditions



**Children with disabilities are slightly more likely than children without disabilities to work in hazardous conditions, but in certain countries the gap is bigger**

**FIGURE 5.14** Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years who work under hazardous conditions



Note: Education refers to the education level of mothers.

**BOX 5.2 Children with disabilities in residential care or in street situations**

Children with disabilities are disproportionately represented in institutional care facilities.<sup>28</sup> One reason may be that caregivers become overwhelmed by the challenges of raising a child with disabilities, compounded by a lack of support within the community that would enable them to care for the child in the home.<sup>29</sup> Families may be unable to access disability-specific resources or services for their children, if these exist at all. Children with disabilities may also be institutionalized in the belief that such facilities can act as a form of protection – safeguarding both the child and his or her family from stigma and community violence.<sup>30</sup> What's more, institutions may actively recruit children for placement, promising a better situation, often incentivized by the resources provided by private donors or even government funding.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the best intentions of families, however, children with disabilities in institutional care often experience rights violations, abuse and other forms of violence.<sup>32</sup> These children are also the least likely to leave such care, since it is often more challenging to find foster or adoptive families willing to care for them due to perceptions of the added physical and psychological care they require,<sup>33</sup> along with limited community-based support and services. Some estimates suggest that as many as one in three children in institutions have a disability.<sup>34</sup> Children may also develop disabilities or have their impairments worsen due to institutionalization, in the midst of often deplorable conditions and substantial abuse and neglect from institutional caregivers.<sup>35</sup> Governments, donors, United Nations agencies and civil society must work together to move away from institutionalization. Instead, they need to prioritize programmes, support and resources at the community level to facilitate the care of children with disabilities by their families in the community, or in family-based alternative care, to help them realize their right to grow and develop within a family setting.<sup>36</sup>

Children with disabilities are also overrepresented among children in street situations.<sup>37</sup> Children can end up living and/or working on the street due to a combination of 'push and pull' factors.<sup>38</sup> While children can be pulled towards the street by the lure of economic prospects and greater independence, those with disabilities are more vulnerable to forces pushing them in that direction. Such children often possess weaker connections to their communities, are less likely to be enrolled in school, are more likely to have strained

relationships with their families (especially among children with behavioural or social disabilities), and are less likely to be adequately covered by child protection systems.<sup>39</sup> The greater vulnerability of children with disabilities also leaves them more likely to be exploited – often by parents or family members – into working or begging on the street in the belief that their disability will garner sympathy and thus greater earnings.<sup>40</sup> In fact, widespread anecdotal evidence suggests that children are sometimes deliberately harmed or injured to push them into earning money by begging on the street.<sup>41</sup> Once associated with the street, children with disabilities are increasingly vulnerable to a wide array of further rights violations, including violence, assault, victimization, child labour and trafficking.<sup>42</sup>

Children with disabilities who are in street situations or in institutional care are at greater risk of violence and exploitation than children without disabilities. The risks faced by these children can be mitigated through strengthened child protection and support systems within communities for children with disabilities and their families.



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## Takeaways and programmatic implications

The data in this chapter show that many children with disabilities are experiencing disproportionately more violence and exploitation than children without disabilities. However, the type and level of violence experienced by such children vary greatly among countries depending on the domains of functional difficulty experienced by the child.

On the whole, children with disabilities are more likely to experience violent discipline than their peers without disabilities, a finding consistent with existing literature.<sup>43</sup> That said, the forms and degrees of violence tend to vary considerably. Children with difficulties controlling their behaviour experience the highest rates of violent discipline of any type. By contrast, children with difficulties walking and playing face less violent discipline than children without disabilities. The specific types of violence suffered by children also vary according to the domain of disability, with children with difficulties in the psychosocial realm experiencing higher levels of physical punishment. Similarly, children with difficulties controlling their behaviour are subjected to the highest levels of psychological aggression. While these patterns were consistently found across many countries, the extent and differences still vary greatly.

Children with disabilities are also vulnerable to exploitation, with those who have difficulties learning or remembering experiencing the highest prevalence of child labour. By contrast, children with disabilities in the domains of self-care, walking or communicating experience a substantially lower risk of being engaged in child labour than children without disabilities; the same patterns are found among children engaged in hazardous child labour. It is important to note that for many of these indicators, but especially child labour, the risk factors for violence and exploitation are the same for children with and without disabilities. Children who are engaged in child labour are usually from the poorest households in rural areas, with mothers who have little education. Since children with disabilities are overrepresented in child labour generally, but especially when they come from these backgrounds, a combination of risk factors and pre-existing inequalities appear to be at work.

The violence and exploitation experienced by children with disabilities is compounded by their lower rates of birth registration. Campaigns to expand birth registration must be inclusive of children with disabilities and actively reach out to their families, including through awareness raising of the importance of registration for every child. Birth registration systems themselves must be flexible and responsive to the circumstances of children with disabilities and their parents and strive to reduce barriers, such as long distances to or the cost of registration. Suggested response strategies to address barriers include extending legally permissible registration periods, waiving associated fees and fines, deploying mobile registration units, and leveraging routine outreach programmes in health and social protection.

While children with disabilities are at increased risk of experiencing violence and exploitation, they are also at greater risk of falling through safety nets,<sup>44</sup> especially when protection systems are not accessible to and inclusive of them. These children may face significant challenges and barriers in reporting abuse or violence and in providing forensically relevant details. This is particularly true if they communicate in non-verbal ways (for example, if they use augmentative and alternative communication or sign language), have difficulty accurately conveying their thoughts and ideas or have other problems communicating.<sup>45</sup> For children with certain types of disabilities, signs of abuse can sometimes be attributed to their disability (for example, mistaking physical injuries for self-injurious behaviours). For professionals working with children with disabilities, a lack of training that is disability-sensitive, along with social stigma and discriminatory attitudes about disability, can prevent them from providing equitable services to such children and limit their ability to accurately identify, report and respond to their abuse.<sup>46</sup> Limited understanding of disability, along with stigma and discriminatory attitudes, also affect the ability of family members, caregivers and other community members to identify and report abuse.



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Professionals working with children, including teachers, social workers and health-care providers, should be trained to recognize and adequately respond to signs of abuse in children with disabilities and have the knowledge and skills necessary to support the child and his or her family. Governments and civil society organizations should be equipped to meet the needs of such children through the provision of inclusive mainstream services, specialized services where required, monetary payments and community-based support to families and caregivers. Such support to families can help lighten the burden of care when services are not tailored to children with disabilities. It can also reduce the 'push' factors driving the institutionalization of such children.

Similarly, justice systems must be made more accessible to children with disabilities, ensuring that their testimonies are heard and valued. This could involve training police, investigators and legal and judicial actors on the accessibility and inclusion needs of such children and how to work with them to improve access to justice. The right of every child to live a life free from violence and exploitation can be realized through raising public awareness and increasing the capacity of protection systems to support and protect children with disabilities. Moreover, since the factors that place children with disabilities at greater risk of child labour are the same for children with and without disabilities, steps should be taken to reduce social inequality more broadly and strengthen protective systems for *all* children.

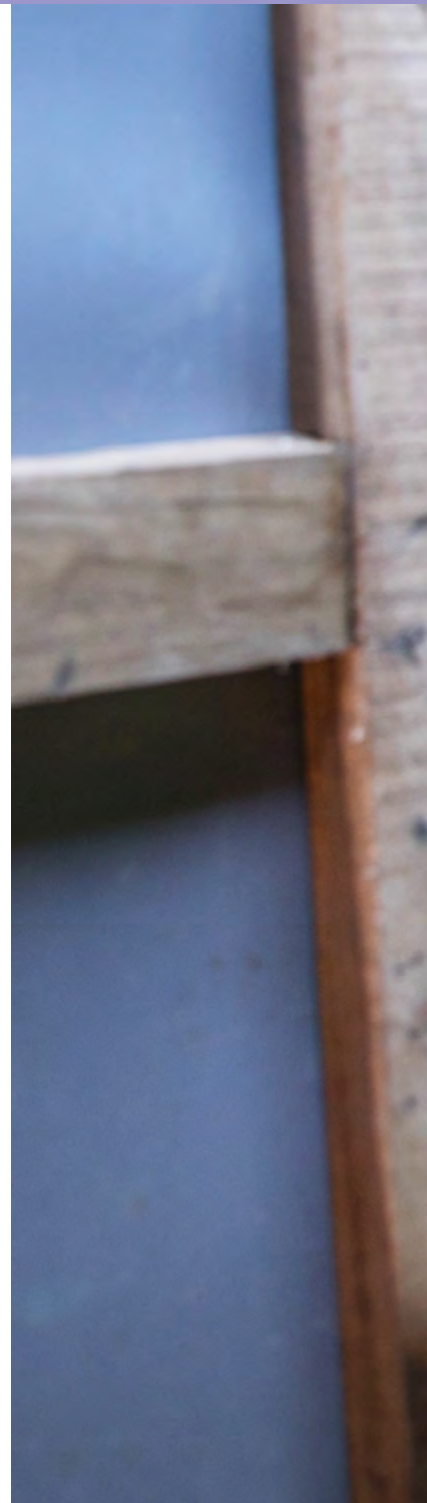


## CHAPTER 6

# Every child has the right to a safe and clean environment

The right to a safe and clean environment is a global priority identified in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. SDG target 6.1 calls for universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all, while target 6.2 calls for adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and an end to open defecation, with a special focus on the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.

Access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services is essential for preventing respiratory and diarrhoeal diseases, which remain leading causes of child deaths. Despite progress, billions of people around the world still lack basic WASH services.<sup>1</sup> Extending access is especially important for children with disabilities, but even a basic level of service may not be sufficient to meet their needs and ensure privacy, dignity and safety. Such children need drinking water, sanitation and handwashing facilities that are specially designed to meet their particular needs and protect their rights. In addition, menstruating girls<sup>2</sup> with disabilities need access to personal care products as well as a private place where they can wash themselves and change.







### Indicators used in this chapter

**Basic drinking water service:** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years who live in a household that uses an improved source of drinking water within a 30-minute round-trip collection time, including queuing.

**Basic drinking water service accessible on premises:** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years who live in a household that uses an improved source of drinking water on premises.

**Basic sanitation service:** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years living in a household with improved sanitation facilities not shared with other households.

**Basic sanitation service accessible on premises:** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years living in a household with improved sanitation facilities not shared with other households and located in their own dwelling or in their own yard/plot.

**Basic hygiene service:** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years living in a household with a place for handwashing, where water and soap or detergent are present.

**Menstrual hygiene management:** Percentage of girls aged 15 to 17 years reporting menstruating in the last 12 months and using menstrual hygiene products with a private place to wash and change while at home.

### Participation in activities during menstruation:

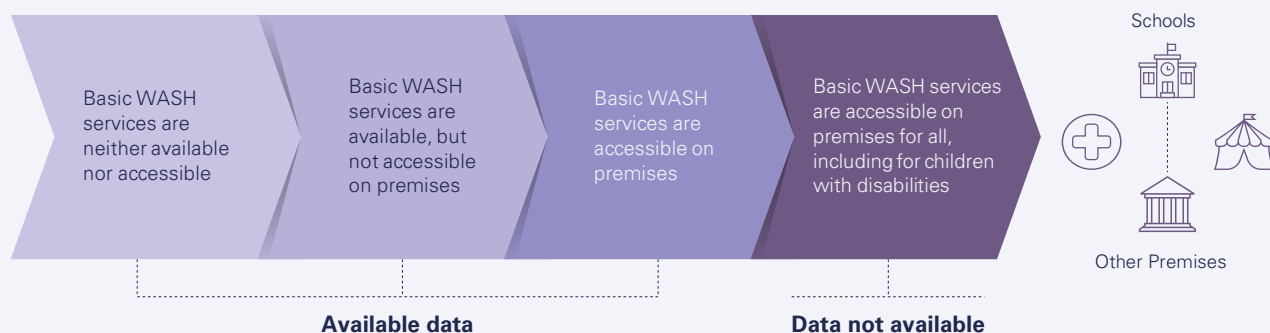
Percentage of girls aged 15 to 17 years who did not participate in social activities, school or work due to their last menstruation in the previous 12 months.

### Definitions and data interpretation

Indicators used in this chapter are based on definitions established by the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene, known as the JMP.<sup>3</sup> In assessing and measuring WASH services, it is important to consider not only the types of facilities available to households but also whether they are easily accessible and/or shared with other households. The distinction between availability and access is particularly significant for children with disabilities since they often face unique and disproportionate barriers to access even when services are available.<sup>4</sup>

The JMP defines improved drinking water sources as those that have the potential to deliver safe water due to the nature of their design and construction. They include piped water, boreholes or tube wells, protected dug wells, protected springs, rainwater and packaged or delivered water. ‘Basic drinking water service’ is defined as an improved drinking water source that involves a round-trip collection time of no more than 30 minutes, including queuing. If water is accessible on premises, however, this represents a higher level of service. A ‘safely managed drinking water service’ is defined as drinking water from an improved source that is located

### The accessibility of WASH services can be visualized as a continuum towards service meeting the needs of all children



While existing data on the type and location of household WASH facilities can be used to determine whether basic services are available on premises, such data do not shed light on whether children with disabilities are able to use such services, not only in their homes but also in other contexts, such as schools, health centres, public buildings and recreational spaces in general.

on premises, available when needed and free from faecal and certain chemical contaminants.

According to the JMP, improved sanitation facilities include flush or pour flush to piped sewer systems, septic tanks or pit latrines, ventilated improved pit latrines, pit latrines with slabs and composting toilets. To meet the criteria for a 'basic sanitation service', households must use an improved sanitation facility that is not shared with other households.<sup>5</sup> A 'safely managed sanitation service' is defined as an improved facility that is not shared with other households and where excreta are safely disposed of on-site or transported or treated off-site.<sup>6</sup>

Handwashing facilities can take many forms and may be fixed or mobile. They include a sink with tap water, buckets with taps, tippy taps and jugs or basins designated for handwashing. Soap includes bar soap, liquid soap, powder detergent and soapy water, but it does not include ash, soil, sand or other traditional handwashing agents. If a household has a handwashing facility on premises with soap and water available, then it meets the criteria for a 'basic hygiene service'.<sup>7</sup>

The most significant limitation that runs through the data presented in this chapter is the inability of current indicators to measure the accessibility of WASH services to individual children with disabilities. For indicators on these services, the key metric assessed is the type of facility used and whether it is in the household, shared with other households or a distance away from the household. However, while the data can demonstrate the availability of WASH services for households with children with disabilities, it is not possible from the current data to assess whether that translates into a useable facility and full accessibility for the children themselves. Further work is required to develop an international standard for measuring the accessibility of WASH facilities for children with disabilities.

Furthermore, this chapter only examines data on the accessibility of WASH services in household settings; it does not offer insights into non-household settings in which children with disabilities may find themselves (such as schools, residential care or health-care facilities and other public buildings). Additional tools are urgently needed to address the current data gap and to gain an understanding of the true extent of the disparities in WASH access affecting children with disabilities.

## Sources of data

Unless otherwise noted, the pooled estimates in this chapter are drawn from MICS6 conducted in Algeria, Bangladesh, Belarus, Central African Republic, Chad, Costa Rica, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Iraq, Kiribati, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic (for children aged 2 to 4 years only), Lesotho, Madagascar, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro, Nepal, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Sao Tome and Principe, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Suriname, Togo, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkmenistan and Zimbabwe.

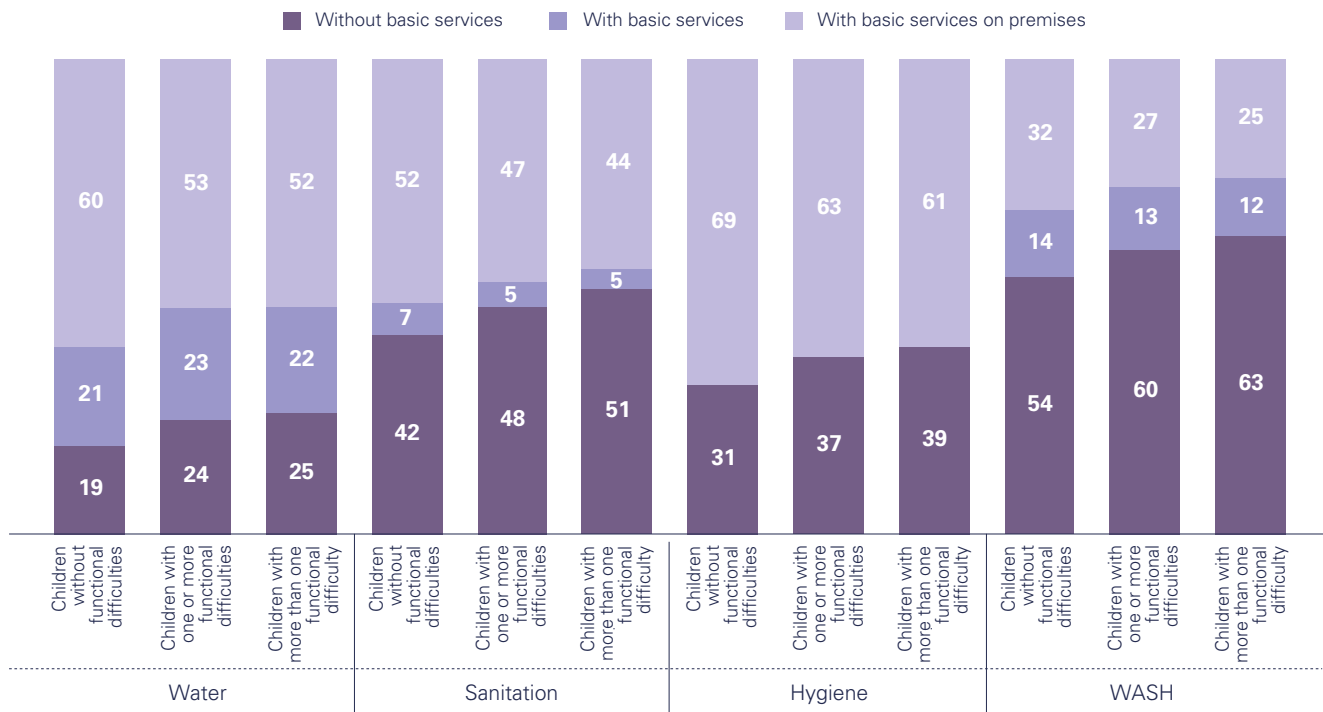
Pooled results for indicators measuring handwashing (Figures 6.1 and 6.4) do not include data from Belarus, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia or Turkmenistan since these were not available.

Pooled results for indicators measuring menstrual hygiene (Figures 6.5, 6.6 and 6.7) do not include data from Georgia or Mexico since these were not available. Additionally, since these figures present data on girls aged 15 to 17 years, they do not include data from the Lao People's Democratic Republic.



**Children with disabilities have lower access to basic drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services**

**FIGURE 6.1** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years living in households with basic WASH services on and off premises





## Drinking water services

Access to safe water is a basic human right for all children. That said, substantial and well-documented inequalities in access to drinking water services are found within and among countries. In general, urban households enjoy higher levels of service than rural households, and the more impoverished a household is, the less likely it is to have access to even a basic level of service.<sup>8</sup> Poverty and disability are inextricably linked, and persons with disabilities are disproportionately represented among impoverished households.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, they are less likely to have access to water services. Social barriers, such as community stigma against persons with disabilities and fear that they might 'contaminate' the water source, may limit access to communal water sources.<sup>10</sup>

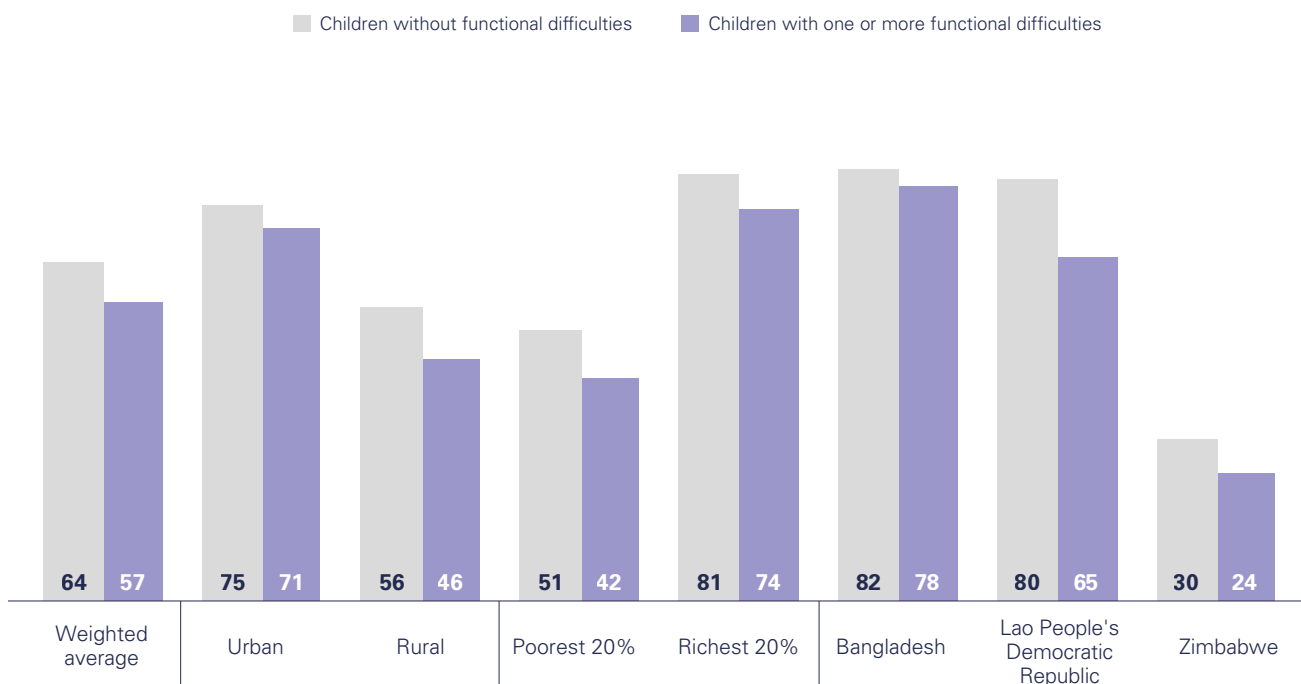
In the absence of an improved water source on premises, the burden of collecting water falls disproportionately on

women and children, especially girls.<sup>11</sup> Children charged with hauling water from a basic source often miss school due to time constraints and risk falling behind in their education. It can also increase their risk of violence, including assault, since they may have to travel to remote areas for water.<sup>12</sup> These risks are heightened among children with disabilities, since they tend to use these services at different times from others to avoid stigma; thus, they tend to experience further vulnerability due to their isolation.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, some children with disabilities may require assistance to perform daily tasks, such as dressing and using the toilet. When caregivers, especially mothers, must travel a long way to haul water, this creates an additional burden and reduces the time available for their children or for income generation.

### Children with disabilities, especially from the poorest households and living in rural areas, are less likely to have basic water service on premises

**FIGURE 6.2** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years who live in a household with an improved source of drinking water on premises



Note: Results for the Lao People's Democratic Republic only refer to children 2 to 4 years old.

## Sanitation services

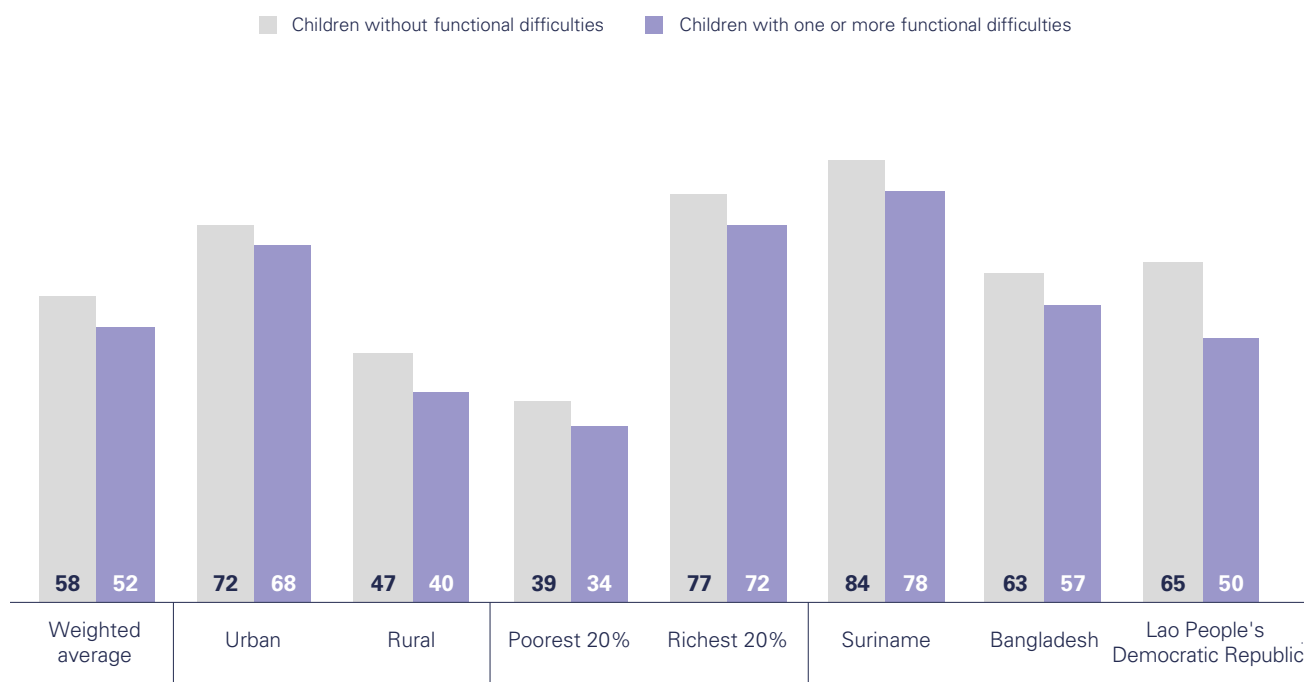
Inadequate sanitation can result in a variety of poor health outcomes, including the spread of diseases that can cause impairment or death, the brunt of which are borne by children under the age of 5.<sup>14</sup> And even when households have improved sanitation facilities, these are often not accessible or useable by individuals with disabilities. One substantial barrier facing children with disabilities is the location of toilets or latrines and whether they are on the premises or at a distance and shared with other households. Some barriers, such as structural issues in the design, or social factors, such as the inability to use sanitation facilities with independence and dignity, contribute to inaccessibility regardless of whether the facility is on the premises or not.<sup>15</sup> Other factors, such as the distance needed to access the facility, can generate additional challenges.<sup>16</sup> When using basic sanitation services that are not on the child’s premises, safety concerns contribute to limited

access due to stigma as well as concerns over privacy and violence. All these factors can cause children with disabilities to limit their visits as much as possible.<sup>17</sup> In some situations, children with disabilities may reduce food and water consumption to minimize their need to use the toilet, with potentially harmful consequences.<sup>18</sup>

A lack of accessible sanitation facilities can result in children with disabilities being dependent on others to use them. This can erode children’s self-esteem and cause them to be perceived as a burden by their family.<sup>19</sup> Challenges in accessing sanitation services can also limit a child’s attendance and participation in school, resulting in poor educational outcomes.<sup>20</sup> For children with visual and/or physical impairments, moving through areas of open defecation or crawling to use unclean and inaccessible facilities may harm their health, result in injuries, compromise their dignity and increase stigma.<sup>21</sup>

### Children with disabilities are less likely to have basic sanitation services on premises than children without disabilities

**FIGURE 6.3** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years living in a household with improved sanitation not shared with other households and located on premises



Note: Results for the Lao People's Democratic Republic refer to children 2 to 4 years old only.

## Handwashing facilities with water and soap

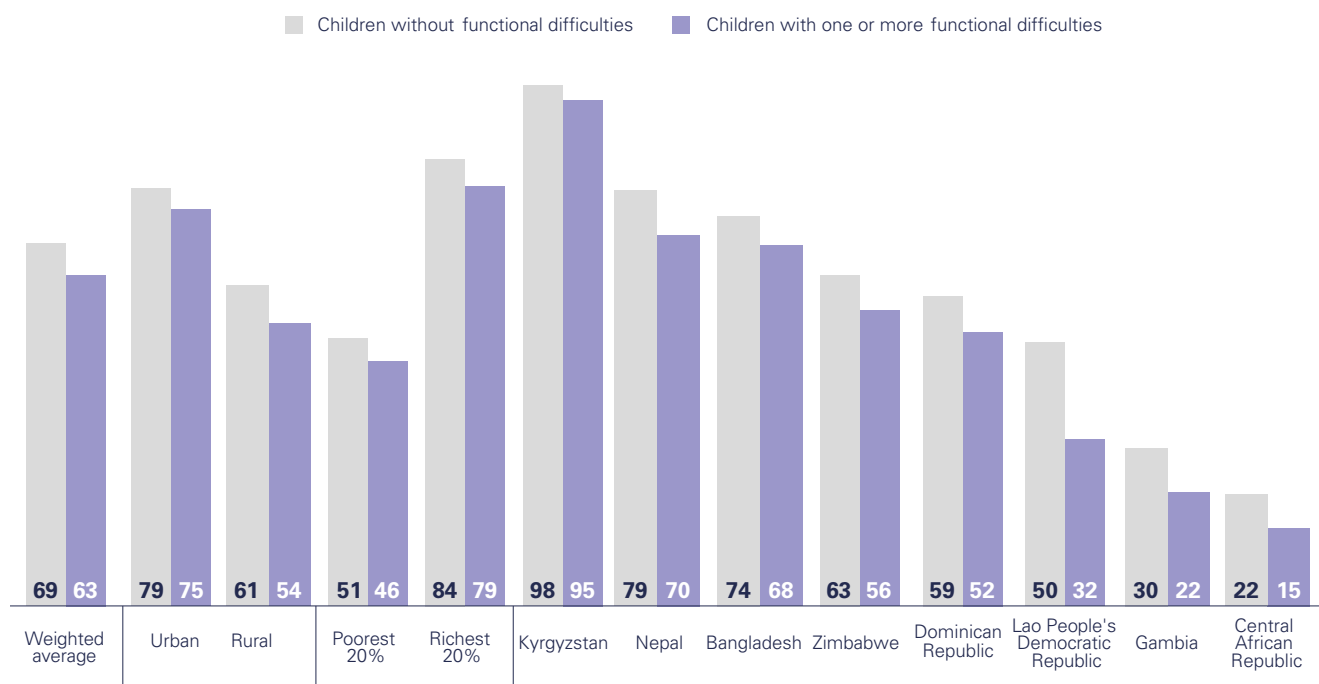
Washing hands with soap and water is fundamental to preventing disease and illness, such as diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections, and to promoting the health and well-being of individuals and communities. Children with disabilities are disproportionately affected by the lack of handwashing facilities since they are among those most susceptible to poor health outcomes from childhood illnesses.<sup>22</sup>

Little research has been undertaken to specifically address the accessibility of handwashing facilities for children with disabilities. Nevertheless, research on disability more generally has found that, despite the wide array of forms that handwashing facilities can take, persons with disabilities still face steep barriers in accessing them.<sup>23</sup> For example, such persons may be unable to physically operate pumps or taps on handwashing facilities or to locate the soap or water.<sup>24</sup>

They may also forego the positive hygiene benefits of handwashing if, after washing, they immediately put their hands on an assistive device – such as a wheelchair or crutches – that has not been cleaned.<sup>25</sup> Children with intellectual or developmental disabilities can struggle to understand the need to wash their hands or to fully comprehend the process that proper handwashing entails. This can necessitate more tailored handwashing education to ensure that available facilities are used correctly by children with disabilities to obtain maximum health benefits.<sup>26</sup>

### While results vary significantly by country, children with disabilities are slightly less likely to have basic handwashing facilities on premises

**FIGURE 6.4** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years living in a household with a place for handwashing where water and soap or detergent are present on premises



Note: Results for the Lao People's Democratic Republic refer to children aged 2 to 4 years only.

## Menstrual health and hygiene

For many adolescents, the onset of menstruation can be upsetting and disruptive.<sup>27</sup> While research on this topic has been problematic due to the level of privacy surrounding menstruation, common themes have emerged in the challenges faced by adolescents with disabilities attempting to practise menstrual hygiene.<sup>28</sup>

These challenges include not only the lack of a private facility but also physical, cognitive or behavioural limitations.<sup>29</sup> Lack of basic and private WASH services that are accessible to adolescent girls with disabilities are a major barrier to adequate management of menstrual hygiene. In contexts of social and economic vulnerability, this barrier is often compounded by the struggle to access menstrual hygiene products. However, even when such products and services are available, girls with disabilities can still have problems using them, either physically or through lack of understanding of how to use them.<sup>30</sup>

When girls with disabilities are unable to manage menstruation hygiene, they face increased risks of

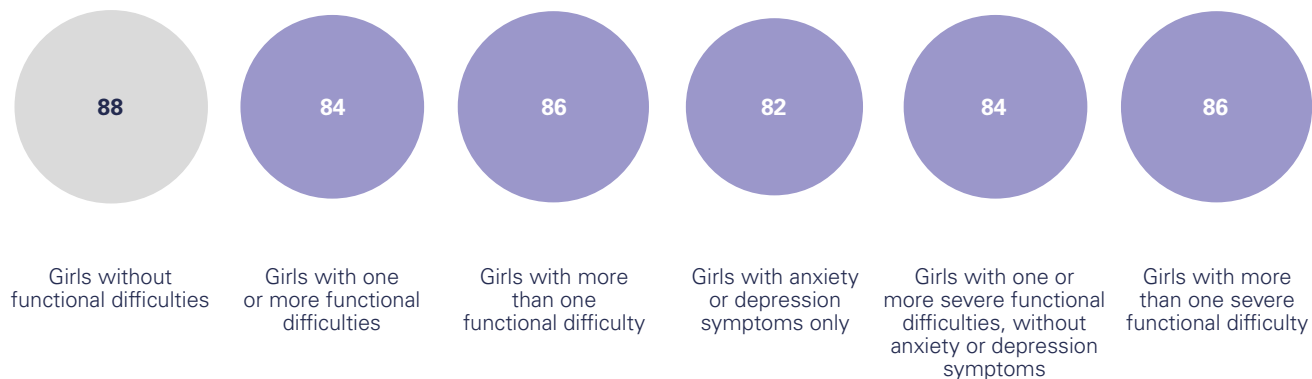
not participating in everyday activities and of feeling ashamed and socially isolated.<sup>31</sup> This can cause girls to miss school when school-based facilities are not accessible or when they are unable to physically manage their own menstrual hygiene and there is not a caregiver at the school who is able or willing to help.<sup>32</sup>



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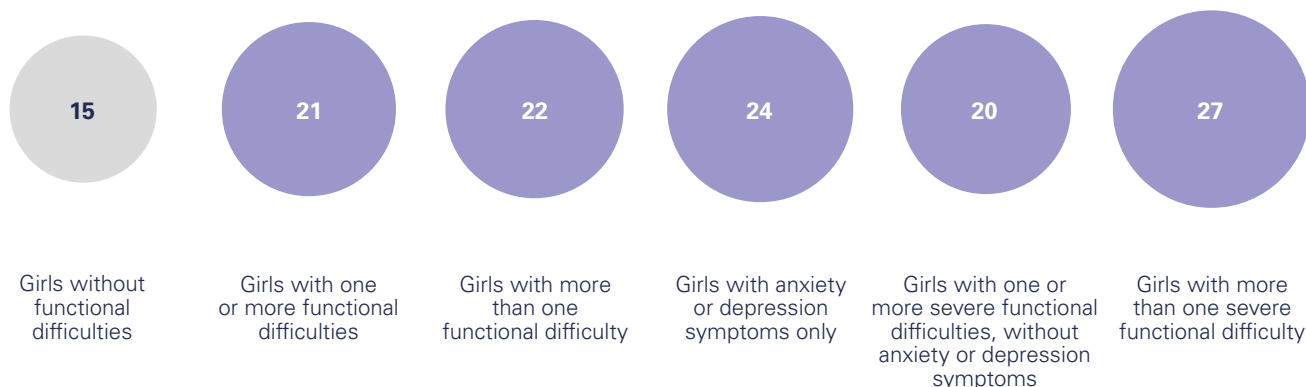
### Use of menstrual products and access to a private place to wash and change are similar for girls with and without disabilities

**FIGURE 6.5** Percentage of girls aged 15 to 17 years using menstrual hygiene products with a private place to wash and change



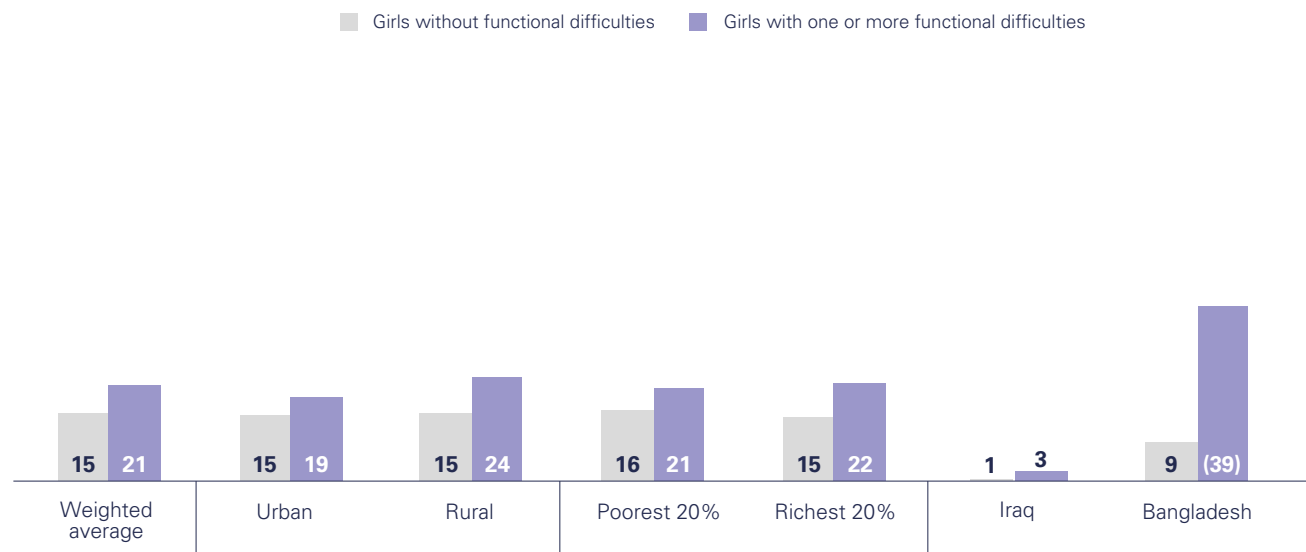
**Adolescent girls with disabilities are more likely to miss out on social activities, school or work due to difficulties managing menstruation**

**FIGURE 6.6** Percentage of girls aged 15 to 17 years who did not participate in social activities, school or work due to their last menstruation in the previous 12 months



**Living in rural areas increases the chances that adolescents with disabilities will miss out on social activities, school or work due to difficulties managing menstruation**

**FIGURE 6.7** Percentage of girls aged 15 to 17 years who did not participate in social activities, school or work due to their last menstruation in the previous 12 months



Notes: Results for Bangladesh are based on 25-49 unweighted observations. Responses from Bangladesh on this question contained a large number of 'Don't know' answers and therefore the interpretation of these results should take this into account.



## Takeaways and programmatic implications

Depriving children with disabilities of access to WASH services not only aggravates their risk for poor health and well-being but also has ramifications for their experience of social isolation, loss of dignity and exclusion from basic human rights.

The data in this chapter capture some of the challenges faced by children with disabilities when accessing WASH services. As a group, they are less likely to have drinking water and sanitation facilities on premises than children without disabilities. They are also slightly less likely to have basic handwashing facilities on premises. These differences are significantly more pronounced for adolescent girls who are managing menstruation. While a slight difference was found in the availability of a private place to wash and change (with girls with disabilities at a disadvantage), substantial differences were found in how this impacts their participation in society. Adolescent girls with disabilities are far more likely not to participate in social activities, school or work due to menstruation than girls without disabilities. For all indicators, significant variations were found among countries, both in the overall availability of WASH services as well as in their availability to children with disabilities.

When interpreting these findings, it must be reiterated that the data in this chapter present a far from complete picture of the WASH status of children with disabilities. Even in situations where a household has basic water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, children with disabilities may still encounter obstacles to using them.<sup>33</sup> Many of the challenges in accessing and using WASH services are dependent on the types of adaptations they provide to accommodate the needs of children with various impairments. Unfortunately, this information is not yet reflected in available data.

To address the challenges that children with disabilities experience in using WASH services, steps need to be taken at all levels of society. Governments need to invest in the development of national standards as well as programming to ensure that safe WASH facilities are available in all households, schools, health centres and public facilities and are constructed to be used by children with a wide array of impairments. COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of handwashing with

soap, and further investment is needed in accessible handwashing facilities. Moreover, disability-inclusive programmes need to be developed to remove barriers that prevent girls with disabilities from participating in society when they are menstruating. This means making affordable and suitable menstrual hygiene products available as well as ensuring that public buildings, including schools and health centres, have gender-sensitive and disability-accessible sanitation facilities. It is also critical to provide information on menstrual health and hygiene in various formats, including easy-to-read instructions for those with intellectual impairments, so that girls with different types of disabilities can understand them. Additionally, training is needed for parents of girls with disabilities to understand and support their daughters in managing menstruation.

Management of menstruation and of menstrual hygiene has important ethical and human rights implications, with profound impacts on the lives of young girls. In certain situations, adolescents with disabilities may be medicated to suppress or stop their menstruation or even forced to undergo hysterectomies.<sup>34</sup> These practices are not carried out in the best interest of the child<sup>35</sup> and can lead to irreversible damage. Young women with disabilities and their families need to be supported and empowered with relevant knowledge, attitudes and skills that can help them make informed decisions.

Increasing access to WASH services for children with disabilities can help reduce the barriers they face in realizing many other rights, including education and health. The SDG commitment to leave no one behind and to promote universal access means that targeting children with disabilities should be a priority for governments and all other stakeholders. This includes sustaining advocacy efforts and increasing investments to strengthen WASH sector programming, monitoring and reporting systems so that a disability-inclusive perspective is fully incorporated to address the needs of all children.



## CHAPTER 7

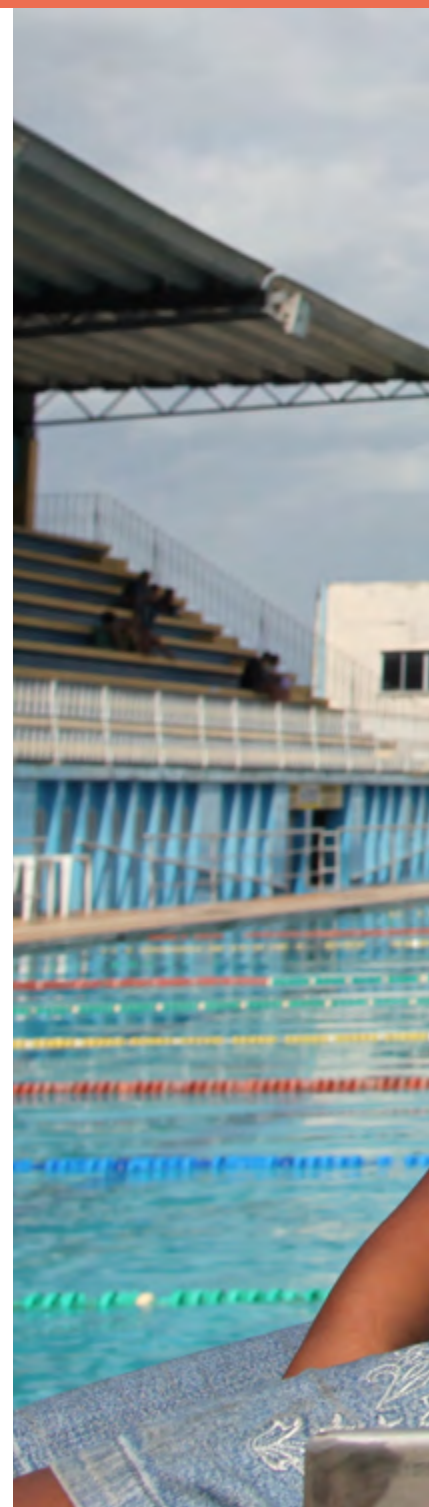
# Every child has the right to a fair chance in life

Addressing poverty and inequality is recognized internationally as a global priority. Goal 1 of the SDGs calls for an end to poverty everywhere, in all its forms, and acknowledges the need for a holistic view of poverty that extends beyond income levels. SDG target 1.2 seeks to reduce by at least half the proportion of women, men and children living in multidimensional poverty. The SDGs also recognize the importance of mechanisms such as health insurance and social protection to achieve this goal, and target 1.3 calls for the implementation of nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all. Goal 10 (target 10.3) acknowledges the need to ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities in accessing opportunities and achieving positive outcomes, including through the elimination of discriminatory laws, policies and practices and the promotion of appropriate legislation, policies and actions. Despite these global commitments, persistent inequalities are holding back the fulfilment of children's rights. And poverty, in all its forms, remains a potent threat to the achievement of the SDGs.

Understanding the multidimensional nature of poverty is particularly important during childhood. Indeed, child poverty is quite different from adult poverty, with unique cause-and-effect mechanisms and impacts that are, sadly, irreversible. By measuring the interrelated deprivations, exclusions and vulnerabilities experienced by children, their rights can be brought to the forefront of evidence-gathering, social policy and programming.

Children with disabilities are overrepresented among the most marginalized and underserved population groups worldwide. They are at higher risk of missing out on many aspects of life and of experiencing poor outcomes because of multiple disadvantages. Moreover, they are often deprived of opportunities that would enable them – and their future children – to break out of the cycle of deprivation and poverty.

This chapter seeks to illustrate some of the deprivations affecting children with disabilities and the barriers they face in benefiting from health insurance and social protection.







## Indicators used in this chapter

**Multidimensional child poverty:** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years who experience multidimensional poverty.

The multidimensional poverty indicator follows a two-step calculation. The first step identifies whether a child is deprived in any of the rights that contribute to poverty, namely education, health, housing, nutrition, sanitation and water. This information is gathered through surveys producing comparable data. If a child experiences deprivation in one or more of these areas, then she or he is identified as living in poverty (the second step), according to standards developed by UNICEF.

The indicators are assigned three thresholds: no deprivation, moderate deprivation and severe deprivation. For example, to assess nutrition in children under 5 years of age, stunting is measured in accordance with an international reference population. Deprivation is considered moderate when a child's height for age is two standard deviations below the WHO Child Growth Standards and is considered severe when falling below three standard deviations. Indicators also vary by the age of the child, since what is needed to fulfil the rights of an adolescent is different from what is needed for a small child. For example, moderate deprivation in education in children aged 6 to 14 years is defined as not currently attending school; severe deprivation is defined as never having been in school. Among children aged 15 to 17 years, moderate deprivation is defined as those who are not currently attending secondary school, and severe deprivation is defined as those who have not completed primary school.

**Health insurance coverage:** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years covered by health insurance.

**Social transfers:** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years living in a household that received any type of social transfers and benefits in the last three months.

**Social transfers among the poorest:** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years living in the poorest households that received any type of social transfers and benefits in the last three months.

## Definitions and data interpretation issues

As with other indicators in this report, certain issues need to be taken into account in the interpretation of results.

The multidimensional poverty indicator aggregates information from a variety of indicators in different areas of a child's life related to the core domains of housing, water and sanitation, health, nutrition and education. As discussed in previous chapters, some of these indicators present limitations since they do not consider the barriers that are specific to children with disabilities. For example, while WASH indicators convey information about the availability of services, they do not reveal whether children with disabilities are physically able to use such services. Similarly, nutrition status indicators are not calculated for a significant proportion of children with disabilities due to limitations in anthropometric measurement of children with certain impairments. Other limitations of the various indicators are expanded upon in their respective chapters. Therefore, the ability of the multidimensional poverty indicator to accurately capture the deprivations affecting children with disabilities is affected by all the limitations of each of the indicators of which it is comprised. As a result, the number of children experiencing multidimensional poverty is likely to be underestimated. For children with disabilities to realize the same rights as other children, they often require different material resources. In so far as these differences are not measured, underreporting occurs. Moreover, if the various indicators allowed for a more accurate measurement of inclusion, the reported disparities between children with and without disabilities would likely be much greater.

In addition to these challenges, it is also important to note that the multidimensional poverty indicator has different implications for children of different ages. In other words, the indicators that identify deprivations should vary depending on a child's age.

A further consideration in data interpretation concerns social transfers (in cash or in kind) as an indicator of social protection coverage. While social protection encompasses a host of interventions beyond social transfers, there is a dearth of internationally comparable data about many, if not most, non-cash interventions. Moreover, the MICS Social Transfers Module is designed to be customized at the country level and therefore the resulting data are not always perfectly comparable. While



four of the countries analysed in this chapter (Nepal, Suriname, Tonga and Turkmenistan) had options in the MICS module related to a disability allowance, the other countries did not or only listed disability in tandem with other eligibility criteria. So, for most countries, it is not possible to know whether the social transfer was in any way related to disability or was provided to the household based on other factors. Turkmenistan is a special case – in the opposite direction. Its MICS, which was used as the basis for this analysis, had a dedicated subsection of the Social Transfers Module for children that measured whether any child aged 0 to 17 years had ever received a state allowance for disability. This allowed data from Turkmenistan to be viewed specifically in the frame of social transfers for children with disabilities, which may make it less comparable to the results of other countries.

### Sources of data

Unless otherwise noted, the pooled estimates in this chapter are drawn from MICS6 conducted in Algeria, Bangladesh, Belarus, Central African Republic, Chad, Costa Rica, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Iraq, Kiribati, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic (for children aged 2 to 4 years only), Lesotho,

Madagascar, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro, Nepal, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Sao Tome and Principe, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Suriname, Togo, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkmenistan and Zimbabwe. Data for Pakistan are pooled results from surveys conducted in the regions of Sindh and Punjab (for more details, see the technical annex).

Pooled results for indicators measuring poverty (Figures 7.1 through 7.4) do not include data from Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Georgia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Nepal, North Macedonia, Pakistan (Punjab), Serbia, Togo, Tonga, Turkmenistan or Zimbabwe since these were not available.

Pooled results for indicators measuring health insurance (Figures 7.5 and 7.6) do not include data from Bangladesh, Belarus, Cuba, Iraq, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Mexico, Mongolia and Montenegro since these were not available.

Pooled results for indicators measuring social transfers (Figures 7.7 and 7.8) do not contain data from Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro or Togo since these were not available.



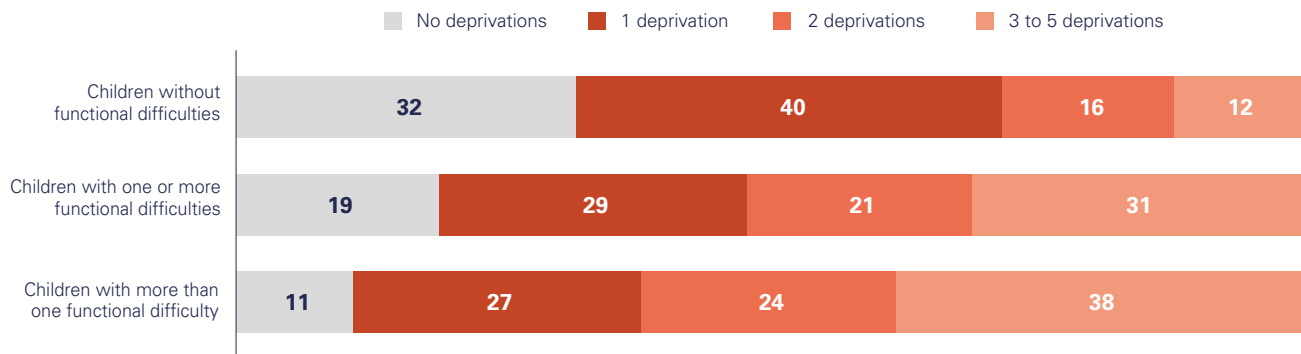
## Multidimensional poverty

All children living in monetary poverty face deprivations in many areas of life simultaneously and often lack necessities such as nutritious food, sanitation services, clean water, education and health care. The multidimensional nature of poverty has widespread implications that are of particular concern to children with disabilities. Material deprivation can put children with different types of impairment at risk and can severely affect the realization of their rights to health, education, protection and participation in society.<sup>1</sup> For example,

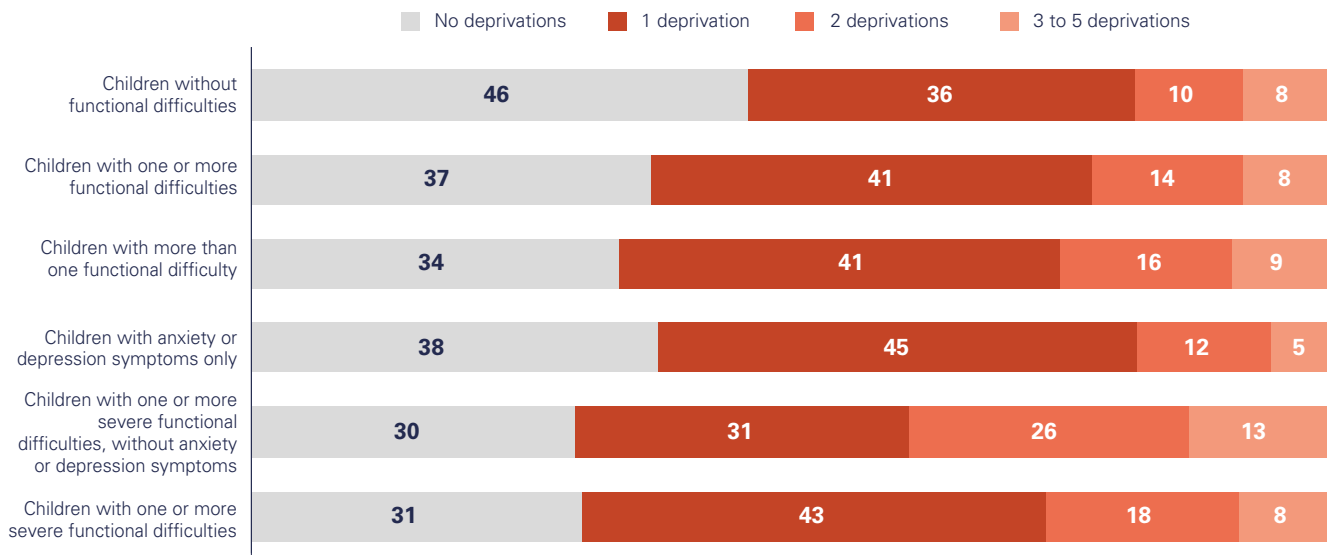
children with disabilities in monetarily poor households can experience worse health outcomes than those in richer households due to the greater financial burden of accessing care.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, children with disabilities who are unable to navigate school can be deprived of an education. The impacts of these deprivations can last throughout childhood and well into adulthood in a downward cycle that makes it difficult to ever break out of poverty.<sup>3</sup>

### Children with disabilities experience a greater number of deprivations than children without disabilities

**FIGURE 7.1** Percentage of children aged 2 to 4 years who experience moderate or severe levels of multidimensional poverty

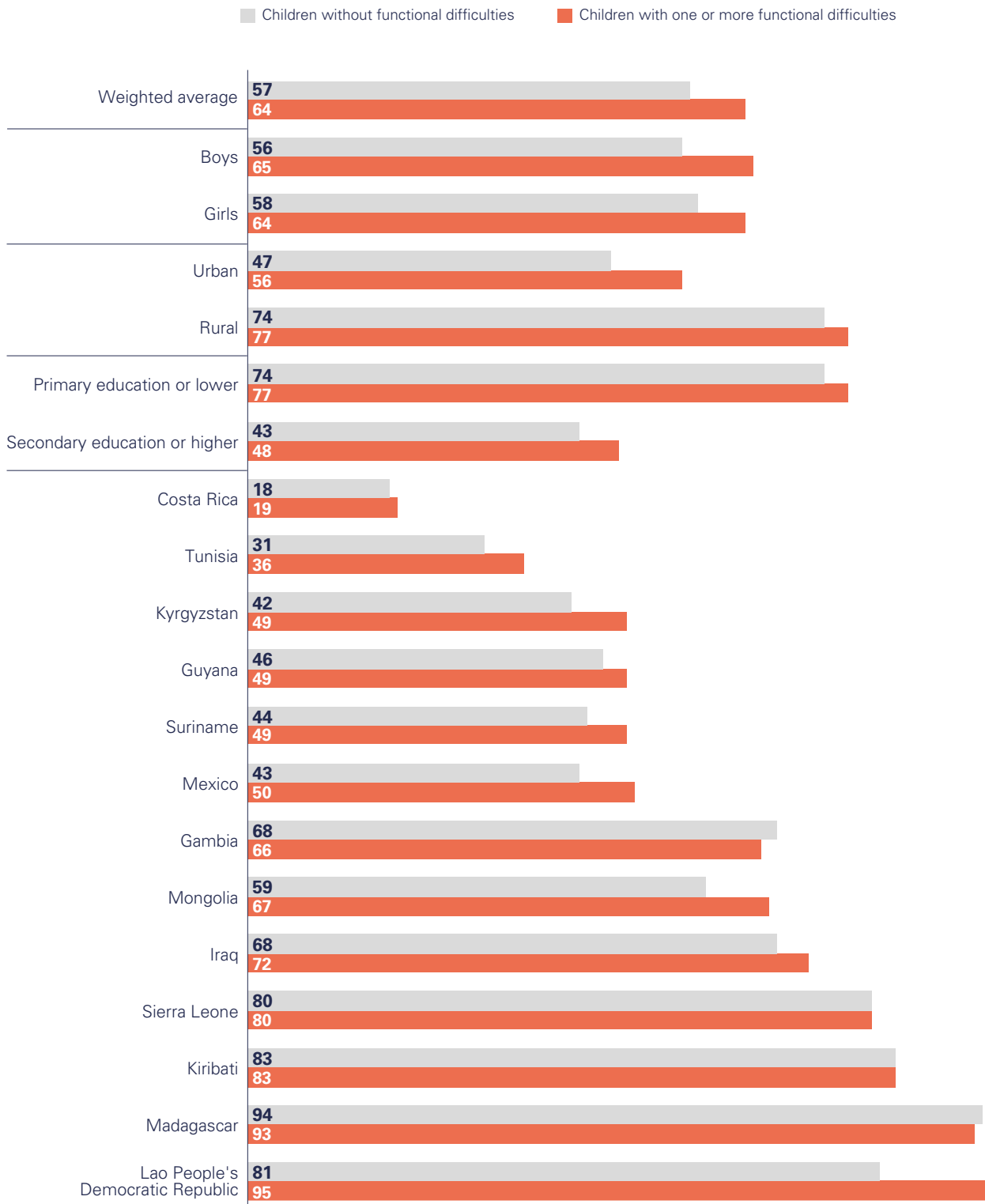


**FIGURE 7.2** Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years who experience moderate or severe levels of multidimensional poverty



**Children with disabilities, especially those in urban areas, are more likely to experience a moderate degree of multidimensional poverty than children without disabilities**

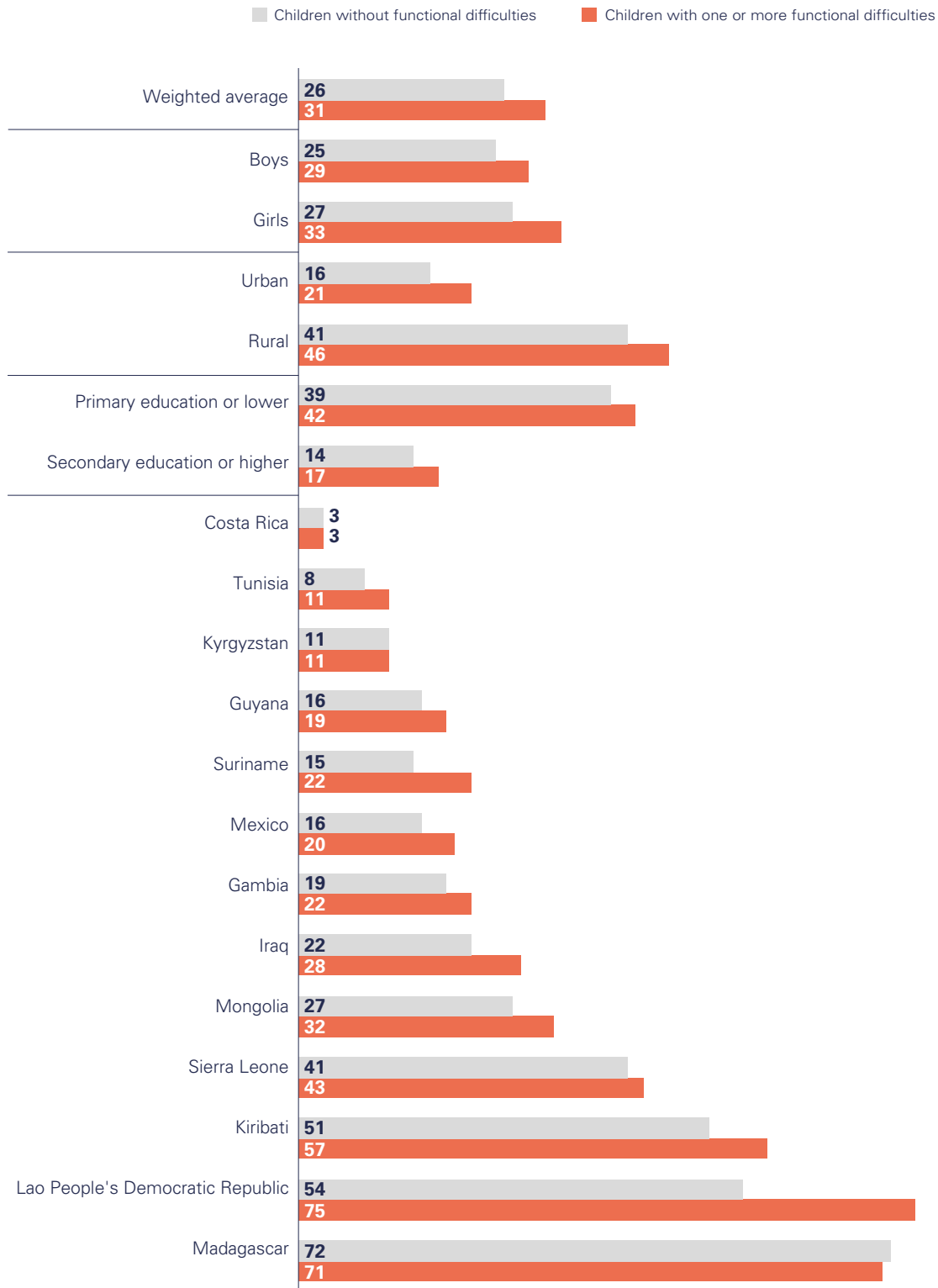
**FIGURE 7.3** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years who experience moderate multidimensional poverty



Notes: Results for the Lao People's Democratic Republic refer to children aged 2 to 4 years only. Education refers to the education level of mothers.

**Children with disabilities in both urban and rural settings are more likely to experience a severe level of multidimensional poverty**

**FIGURE 7.4** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years who experience severe multidimensional poverty



Notes: Results for the Lao People's Democratic Republic refer to children aged 2 to 4 years. Education refers to the education level of mothers.

## Health insurance and social transfers

The right to health and social security seeks to address and mitigate existing inequalities, including those that affect persons with disabilities. Children with disabilities often face disproportionately higher health-care costs due to their need for extra health care and specialized services, as well as assistive devices and transportation. The burden of these additional expenses often falls entirely on families<sup>4</sup> and can be exacerbated by a loss of income if one or both parents have to give up – or make major sacrifices in – their jobs to care for their child.<sup>5</sup> As a result, persons with disabilities and their families are among those who can benefit most from social transfers and health insurance policies. All too often, however, these do not reach those most in need.<sup>6</sup> Many social transfer programmes are underfunded, resulting in gaps in service. And, in some countries, they fail to explicitly include children.<sup>7</sup> Among low- and middle-income countries, only a few provide specific child-disability benefits.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, many children with disabilities do not have access to health insurance, or significant gaps in coverage mean that many disability-specific health needs are not adequately covered.<sup>9</sup>

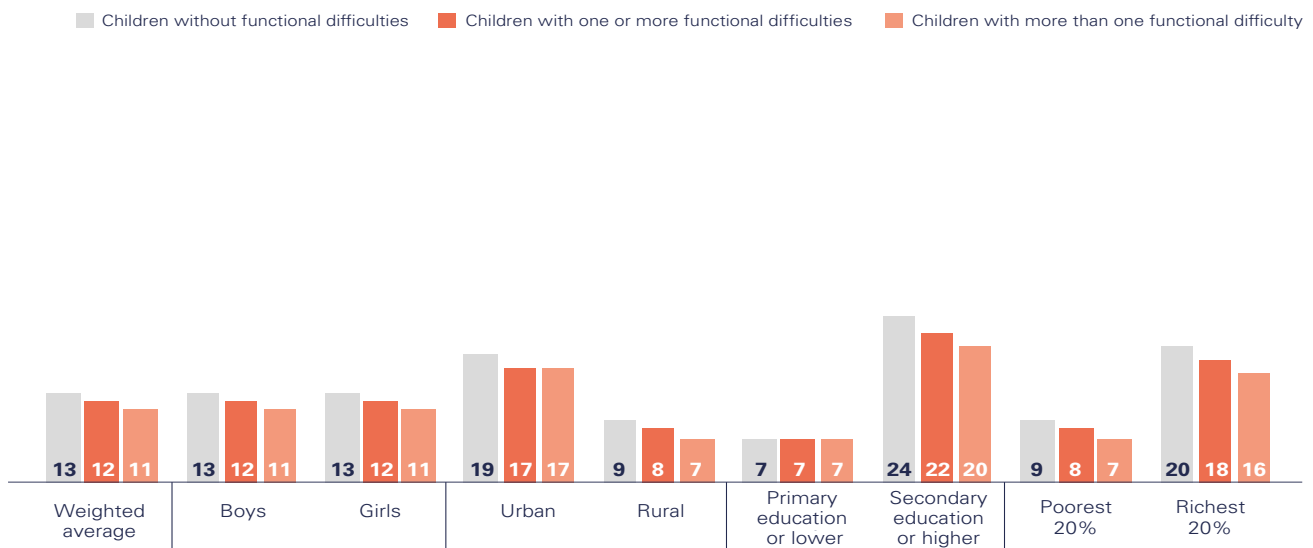
Realizing the right to social protection, including access to social transfers and health insurance, can be challenging

for families of children with disabilities due to lack of knowledge and understanding of available programmes, as well as stringent requirements and conditions for programme inclusion.<sup>10</sup> Long distances to service points can also present barriers.<sup>11</sup> In terms of health insurance, the cost for disability-specific coverage can be prohibitive and can vary dramatically depending on the type of disability.<sup>12</sup>

Significant benefits accrue from giving children with disabilities access to both health insurance and social transfers. Social transfers in the form of money, particularly unconditional cash transfers, for individuals with disabilities can reduce the burden of care on other family members, provide access to additional support services and bolster the independence of the individual with disabilities.<sup>13</sup> In addition, social transfers can help alleviate financial stress within families, especially in situations where parents have had to give up or limit their employment in order to care for a child with disabilities.<sup>14</sup> Access to health insurance helps remove financial barriers to health care, ensuring that children with disabilities can get the care they need without undue financial stress on their families, helping them live healthier lives.<sup>15</sup>

**Health-insurance coverage is insufficient for all children, but especially those with disabilities. Children who live in rural areas, in the poorest households and whose mothers have low levels of education are least likely to have health insurance**

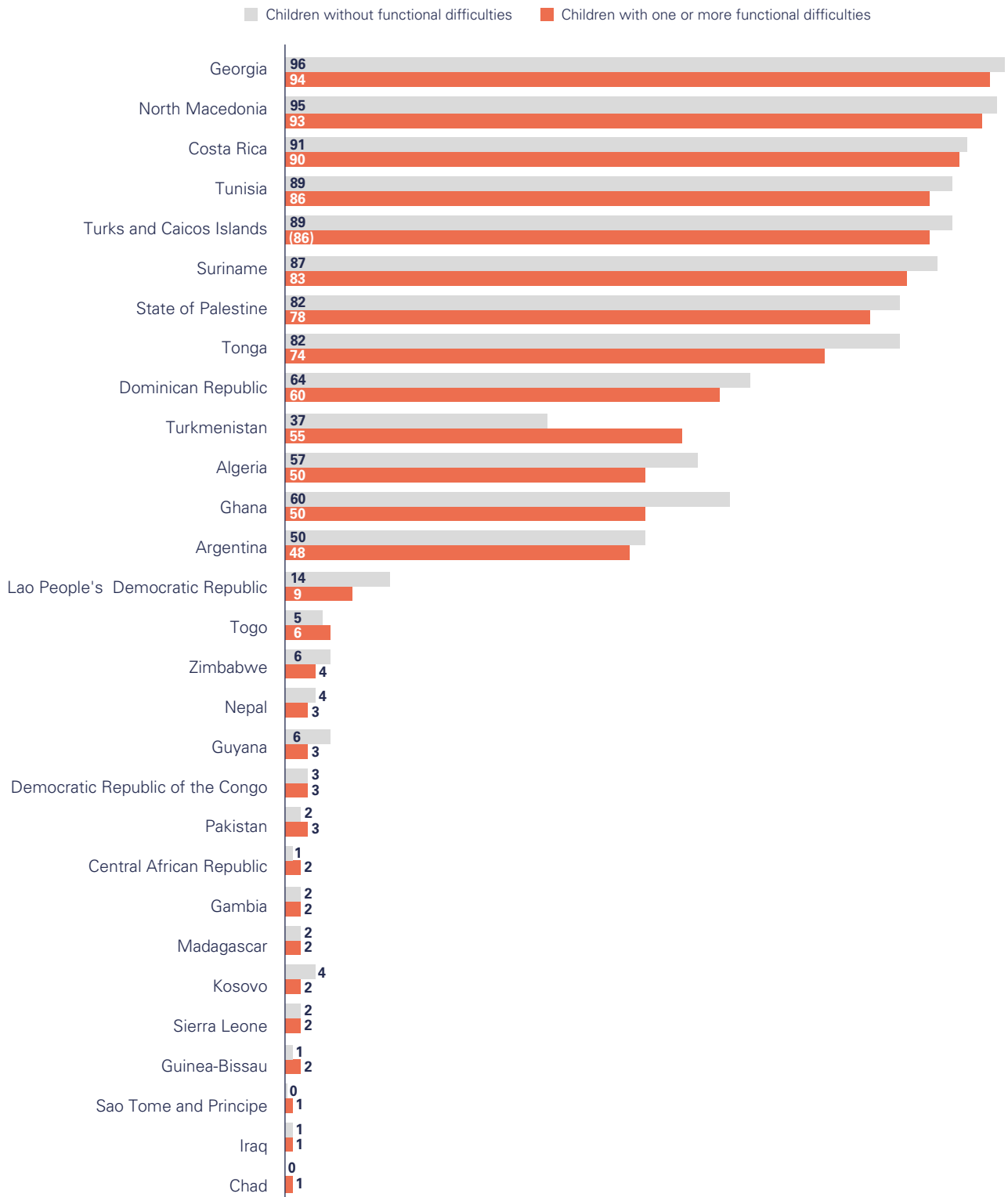
**FIGURE 7.5** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years covered by health insurance





**Health insurance coverage varies widely across countries and areas; in most of them, however, significant differences in coverage are not found between children with and without disabilities**

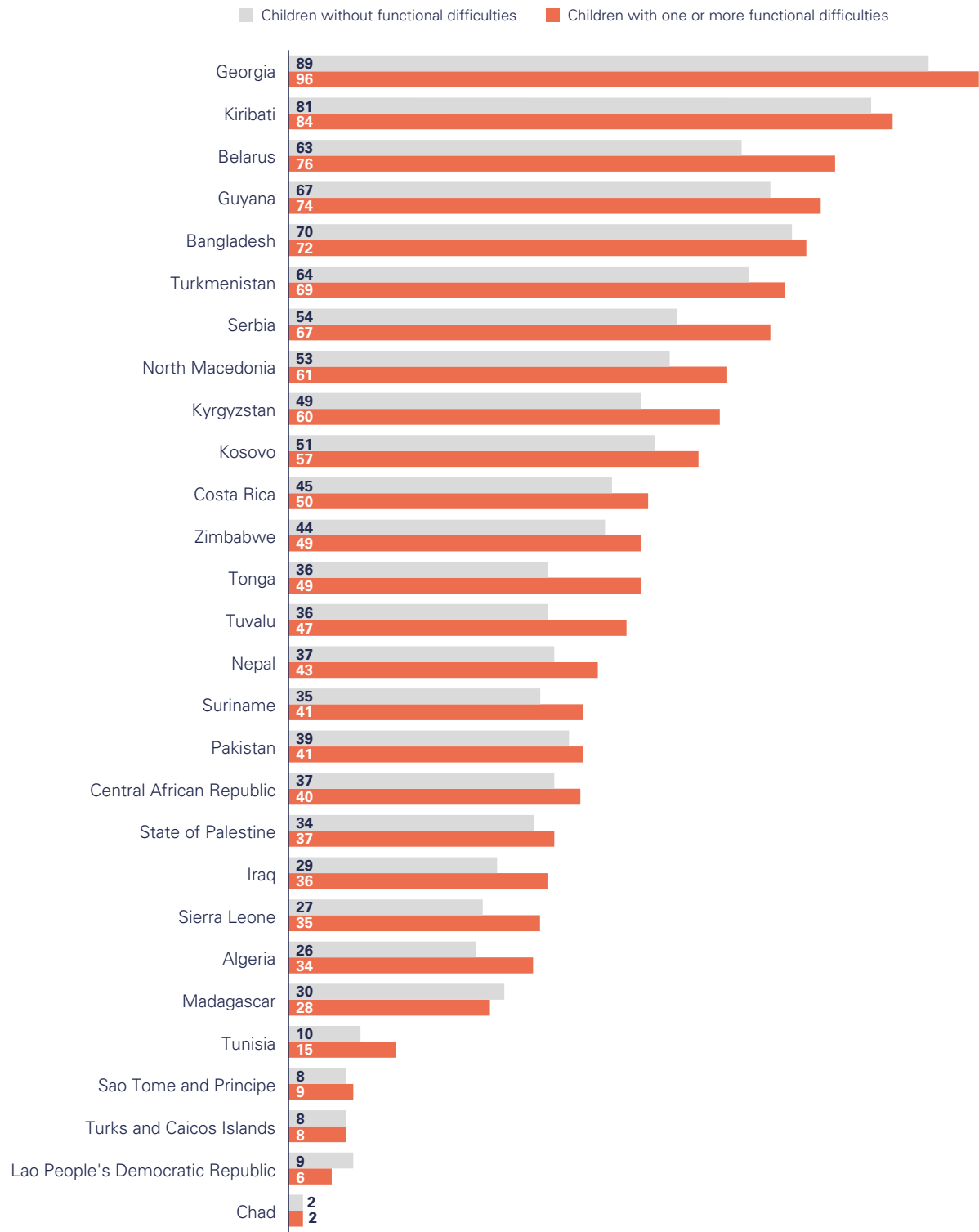
**FIGURE 7.6** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years covered by health insurance



Notes: Results for the Lao People's Democratic Republic refer to children aged 2 to 4 years only. Results for Turks and Caicos Islands are based on 25-49 unweighted observations. Education refers to the education level of mothers.

### Access to social transfers and benefits also varies widely; nevertheless, children with disabilities in most countries and areas are more likely to live in households that receive them than children without disabilities

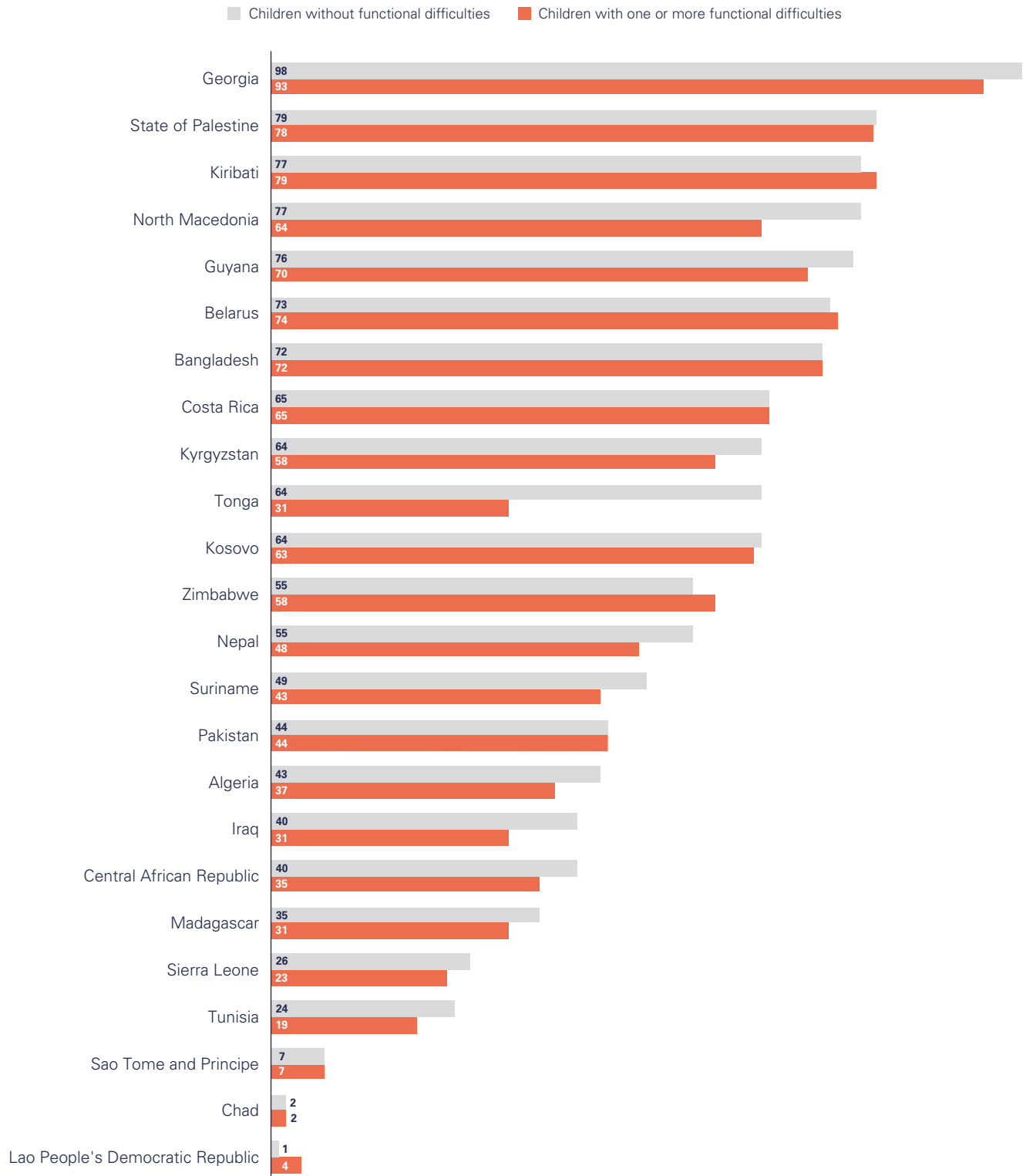
**FIGURE 7.7** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years living in households where any type of social transfers or benefits were received in the last three months



Notes: Results for the Lao People's Democratic Republic refer to children aged 2 to 4 years only. Results for Turks and Caicos Islands are based on 25-49 unweighted observations.

**In the poorest households, however, children without disabilities are just as likely to live in a household receiving social transfers and benefits as children with disabilities**

**FIGURE 7.8** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years living in the poorest households where any type of social transfers and benefits were received in the last three months



Note: Results for the Lao People's Democratic Republic refer to children aged 2 to 4 years only.

## Takeaways and programmatic implications

The findings in this chapter document some of the social inequities and interrelated deprivations faced by children with disabilities. While current indicators are not able to capture the unique deprivations of children with disabilities, the available data do confirm that these children face slightly higher levels of multidimensional poverty, both moderate and severe, than children without disabilities.

The multiple impacts of poverty are likely to be exacerbated by generally low access to social protection, such as health insurance and social transfers, which can help ease the financial burdens on families of children with disabilities and alleviate poverty. The data in this chapter suggest that while children with disabilities and their families face greater needs, they do not get significantly more support.

Concrete steps must be taken to address the deprivations confronted by children with disabilities and their families. Governments need to increase the capacity, funding, equity, efficiency and scope of social protection programmes. Barriers to accessing health insurance

need to be eliminated to ensure universal coverage. And services covered by health insurance need to be expanded to include disability-specific health care, such as rehabilitation and assistive devices. Similarly, social transfer programmes should be extended to all children with disabilities. Governments need to provide additional funding for such programmes and ensure universal social protection floors. Moreover, the eligibility requirements for such schemes need to be inclusive of children with a wide array of disabilities and to address disability-related costs. Finally, awareness of such programmes needs to be expanded and the application process simplified to encourage uptake.

Empowering stakeholders (service providers, in particular) with the knowledge and skills they need to reach children with disabilities living in multidimensional poverty is essential. The right of every child to a fair chance in life can be achieved by combining all these interventions with greater public awareness to eliminate discrimination and by designing poverty reduction policies and strategies that are inclusive of children with disabilities.



## CHAPTER 8

# Every child has the right to a happy life, free from discrimination

Subjective well-being is how individuals assess their situation in life and is influenced by both actual experiences and perceptions. More specifically, it is an individual's perceived happiness, whether he or she has positive expectations for the future and how satisfied he or she is in daily life. Children with high levels of subjective well-being often experience more positive personal, behavioural and social outcomes than children with lower levels; they also tend to be more resilient in stressful life situations.<sup>1</sup>

How individuals perceive their own well-being is based on a wide array of factors. Experiences of deprivation can result in lower levels of life satisfaction, whereas experiences of strong parental and familial relationships can result in higher life satisfaction.<sup>2</sup> Since children with disabilities frequently experience deprivations and barriers, it is reasonable to assume that these constraints have a negative impact on their subjective well-being compared with children without disabilities.

The specific challenges that children with disabilities face in their daily lives vary significantly based on the dynamic between their impairment(s) and their environment. Children who live in unaccommodating environments can be prevented from participating fully in their communities, and such exclusion is likely to affect both their current happiness and how they perceive their future.

One factor that can influence the subjective well-being of children with disabilities is discrimination. Children have the right to live free from discrimination in any form, including discrimination based on disability, as outlined in article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and article 5 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Nevertheless, many children with disabilities experience discrimination because of their impairments. Since discrimination can raise barriers in accessing services that these children need to realize their rights, it is likely that it negatively affects their subjective well-being.







### Indicators used in this chapter

**Discrimination:** Percentage of adolescents aged 15 to 17 years who report having personally felt discriminated against or harassed within the previous 12 months on the basis of disability or on one of the grounds for discrimination prohibited under international human rights law.

**Life satisfaction:** Average life satisfaction score for adolescents aged 15 to 17 years.

**Happiness:** Percentage of adolescents aged 15 to 17 years who are very or somewhat happy.

**Perception of a better life:** Percentage of adolescents aged 15 to 17 years whose life improved during the last 12 months and who expect that their life will be better one year later.

### Definitions and data interpretation

One limitation regarding discrimination is the challenge inherent in a perception-based question. While results for discrimination can measure whether adolescents perceive that they have been discriminated against, either because of their disability or for another reason, these results cannot definitively show whether discrimination actually occurred. For this reason, results involving discrimination should be understood as being based on perception.

To assist respondents in answering questions on happiness, they were shown a card with smiling faces (and not-so-smiling faces) that correspond to the response categories 'very happy', 'somewhat happy', 'neither happy nor unhappy', 'somewhat unhappy' and 'very unhappy'. They were then shown a picture of a ladder with steps numbered from 0 at the bottom to 10

**TABLE 8.1** Percentage of adolescent girls aged 15 to 17 years who did not answer questions on discrimination, and percentage who did not answer questions on subjective well-being

		Percentage who did not answer questions on discrimination	Percentage who did not answer questions on subjective well-being
Adolescent girls without functional difficulties		4	3
Adolescent girls with one or more functional difficulties		7	5
Domain of functional difficulty	Symptoms of depression	4	3
	Symptoms of anxiety	5	3
	Walking	11	8
	Seeing	11	11
	Controlling behaviour	14	13
	Accepting changes	20	16
	Remembering	21	18
	Making friends	23	19
	Hearing	31	22
	Concentrating	35	27
	Learning	39	27
	Communicating	53	28
Self-care	53	41	



at the top. They were subsequently asked to indicate at which step of the ladder they feel they are standing at the time of the survey, which is intended to indicate their level of life satisfaction. The resulting score has values ranging from 0 (lowest level of satisfaction) to 10 (highest level of satisfaction).

### Sources of data

Unless otherwise noted, the pooled estimates in this chapter are drawn from MICS6 conducted in Algeria, Bangladesh, Belarus, Central African Republic, Chad, Costa Rica, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Kiribati, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Iraq, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro, Nepal, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra

Leone, Suriname, Togo, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Serbia, State of Palestine and Zimbabwe. Data for Pakistan are pooled results from surveys conducted in the regions of Sindh and Punjab (for more details, see the technical annex).

Pooled results for indicators measuring discrimination (Figures 8.1, 8.2 and Table 8.2) do not include data from Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Mexico, Nepal, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone and Togo since these were not available.

Pooled results for indicators measuring subjective well-being (Figures 8.3 through 8.6 and Table 8.3) do not contain data from Cuba, Guyana, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Madagascar, Tunisia and Turkmenistan since these were not available.



## Discrimination

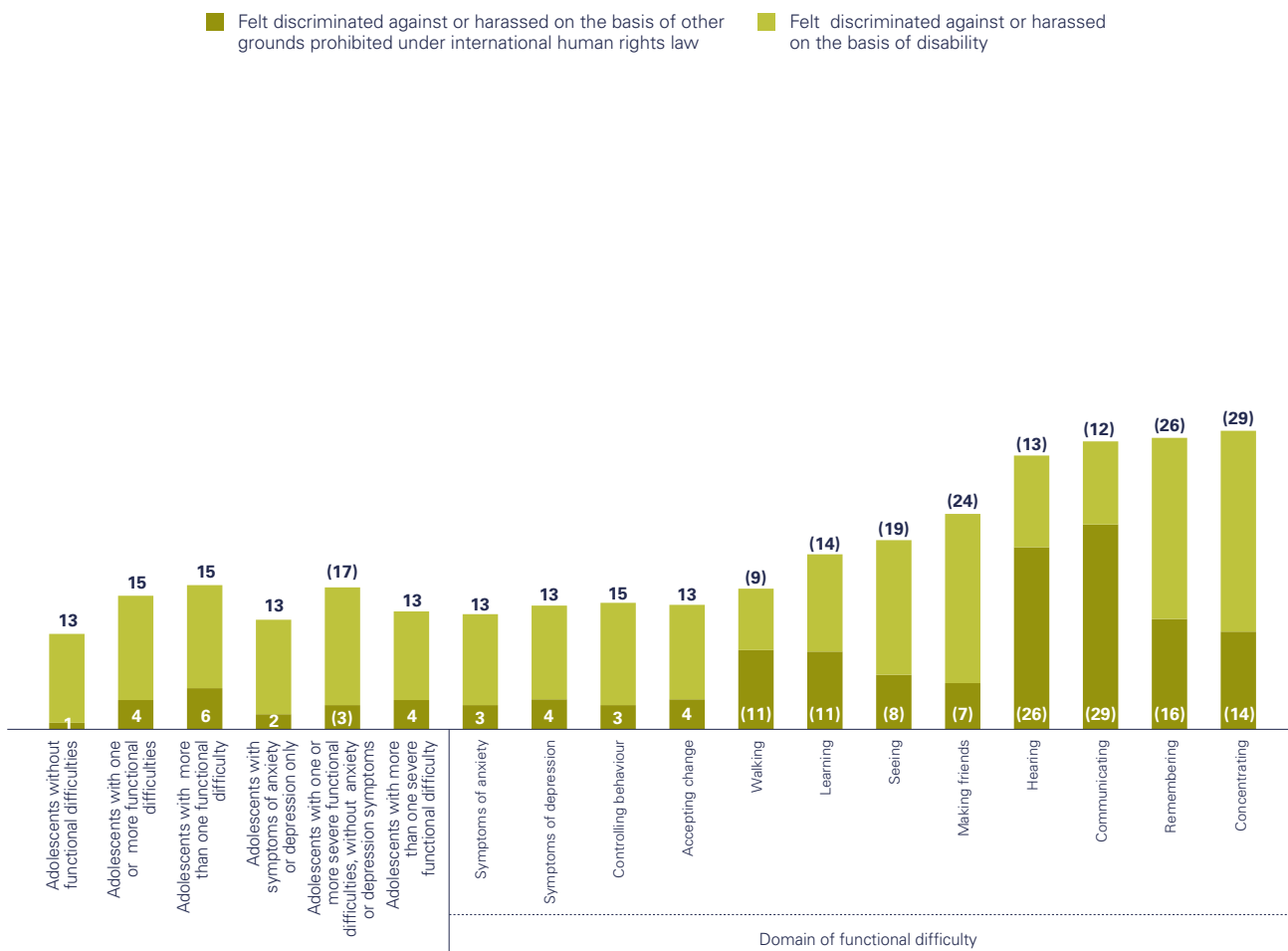
Inequalities and negative outcomes for children with disabilities often stem from discrimination, harassment, stigma and negative stereotypes.<sup>3</sup>

Discrimination against children with disabilities can be driven by a myriad of factors, such as the misguided belief that individuals with disabilities are less able or inferior to those without disabilities.<sup>4</sup> Discrimination can also be driven by cultural or religious beliefs about disability: that those with disabilities are ‘cursed’ or being punished for their – or their ancestors’ – failings, for example.<sup>5</sup>

Discrimination on the basis of disability can be compounded by additional layers of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion.<sup>6</sup> When these are at play simultaneously, children with disabilities can be exposed to multiple and intersecting discrimination,<sup>7</sup> which can lead to exclusion from education, health care and social protection, hindering their full participation and inclusion in society.<sup>8</sup>

### A large proportion of adolescents with disabilities have personally felt discriminated against or harassed because of their disability or for other reasons

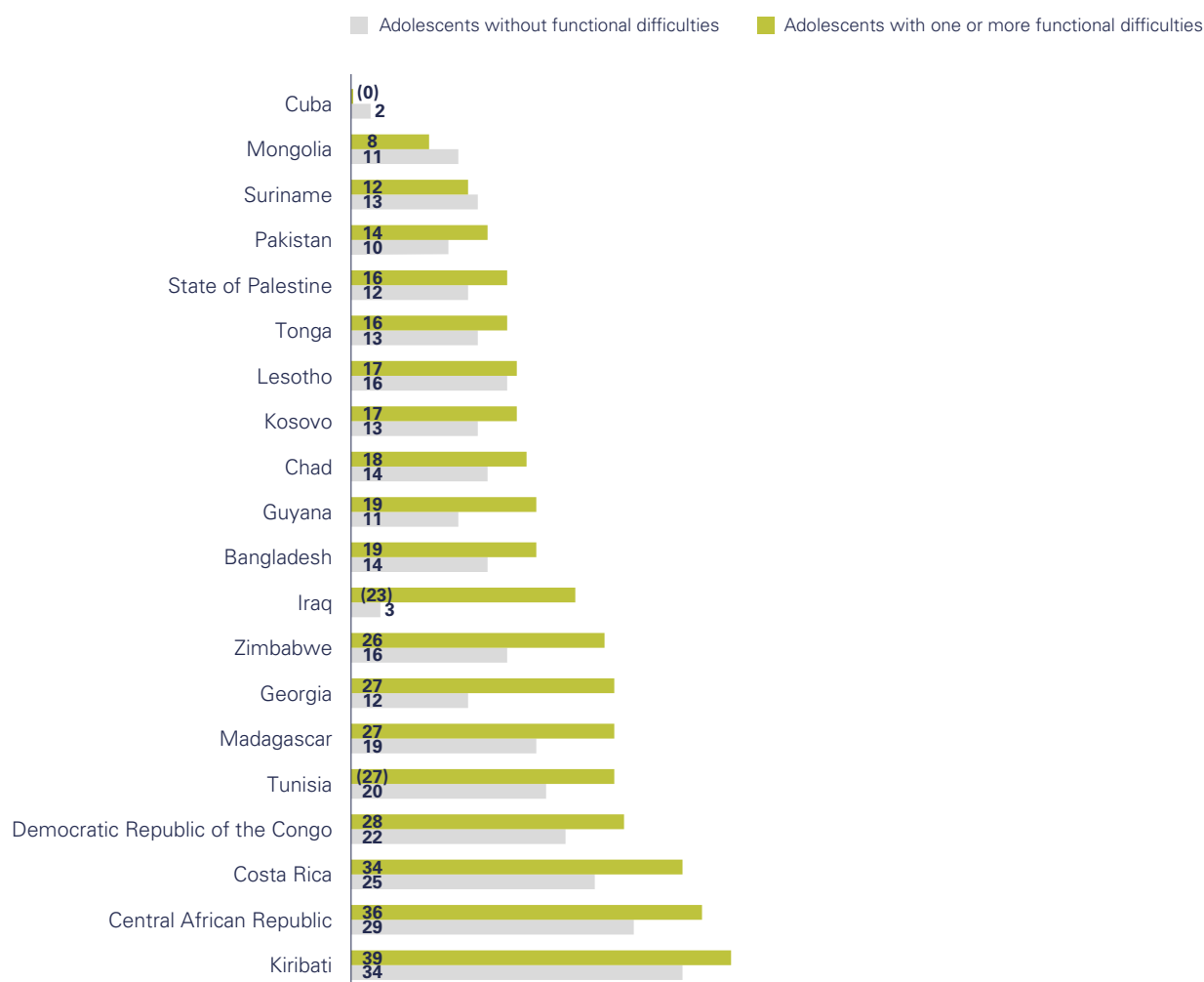
**FIGURE 8.1** Percentage of adolescents aged 15 to 17 years having personally felt discriminated against or harassed within the previous 12 months on the basis of disability or on one of the grounds for discrimination prohibited under international human rights law



Note: Results for adolescents with one or more functional difficulties in Cuba, Georgia and Tonga are based on 25-49 unweighted observations.

### The proportion of adolescents experiencing discrimination varies among countries and areas, but in most of them, those with disabilities experience higher levels

**FIGURE 8.2** Percentage of adolescents aged 15 to 17 years having personally felt discriminated against or harassed within the previous 12 months on the basis of disability or on one of the grounds for discrimination prohibited under international human rights law



Note: Results for adolescents with one or more functional difficulties in Cuba, Georgia and Tonga are based on 25-49 unweighted observations.

### Adolescents with disabilities are more likely to feel discriminated against, especially if they are girls and live in the poorest households

**TABLE 8.2** Percentage of adolescents aged 15 to 17 years having personally felt discriminated against or harassed within the previous 12 months on the basis of disability or on one of the grounds for discrimination prohibited under international human rights law

	BOYS		GIRLS	
	Richest 20%	Poorest 20%	Richest 20%	Poorest 20%
Adolescents without functional difficulties	10	11	13	15
Adolescents with one or more functional difficulties	11	15	18	28
Adolescents with more than one functional difficulty	15	21	18	32



## Happiness, life satisfaction and expectations about the future

Having a disability – whether physical, cognitive or psychosocial – should not prevent a child from living a fulfilling and happy life.

Some disabilities are accompanied by significant pain and frustration, especially when they involve high levels of dependency on others or on assistive devices that may not always be available or functioning well. In fact, research suggests that, rather than the impairments themselves, the lack of an accommodating environment and social barriers are the major determinants of participation, happiness and well-being in persons with disabilities. In this regard, a few fundamental questions need to be asked:

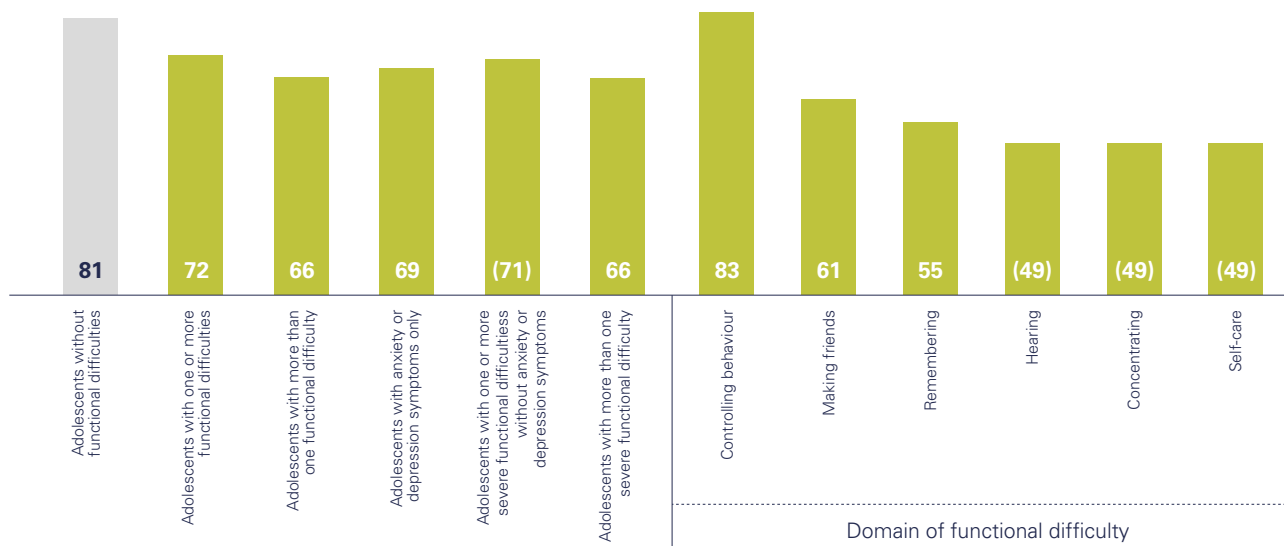
- *Do stigma and negative attitudes prevent children with disabilities from participating on equal terms with children without disabilities?*
- *Do inaccessible environments make it systematically difficult or even impossible for children with disabilities to enjoy recreational and cultural activities?*
- *Do access barriers prevent children from going to school?*

- *Do social welfare and protection systems meet or support the extra costs of having a disability?*
- *Do children with disabilities and their families have access to justice when their rights are violated?*

Too often, the answers to these questions indicate that governments, societies and communities are not doing enough to realize the fundamental human rights of children, perpetuating cycles of exclusion and disadvantage. Discrimination, marginalization and disempowerment take a heavy toll on the overall well-being of children with disabilities. And segregation is still a reality for far too many of these children. In all countries of the world, thousands of children with disabilities are still denied the right to attend mainstream education and too many spend their childhood – and sometimes their lives – in long-term residential care. Stigma and negative attitudes make it difficult for these children to cultivate or maintain peer group relationships and social networks.<sup>9</sup> These factors overlap to create situations in which children with disabilities experience significantly lower rates of subjective happiness and well-being than children without disabilities.

### Adolescents with difficulties caring for themselves, concentrating and hearing are least likely to describe themselves as very or somewhat happy

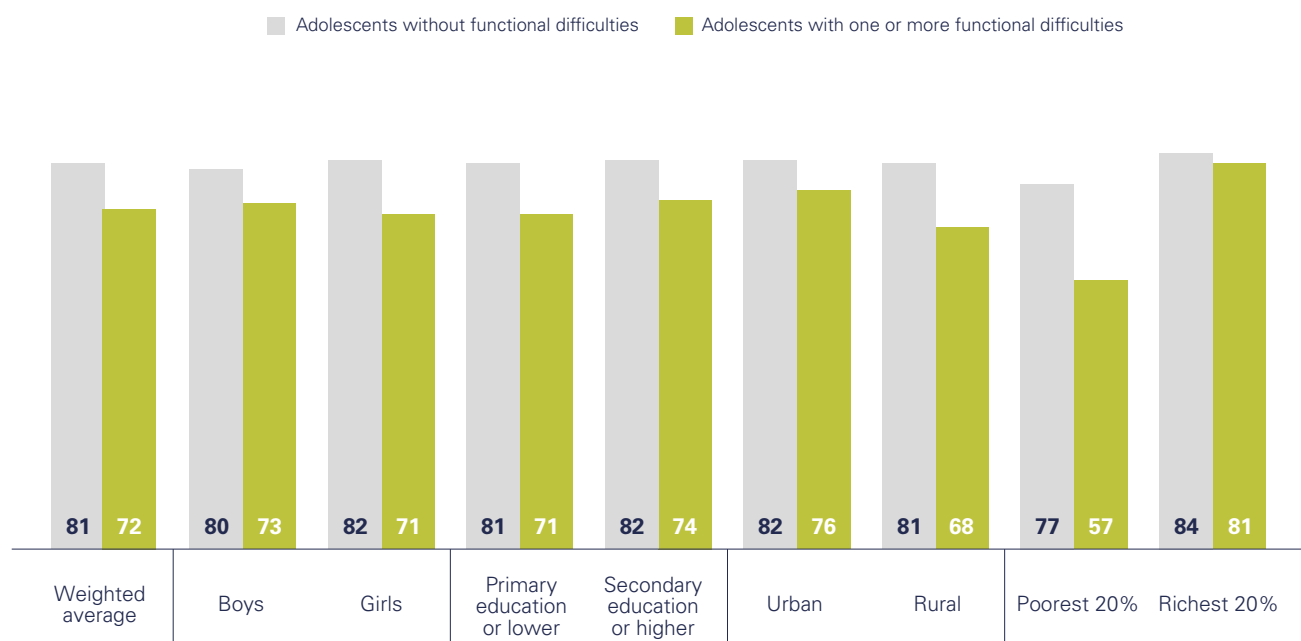
**FIGURE 8.3** Percentage of adolescents aged 15 to 17 years who say they are very or somewhat happy



Note: Results for adolescents with one or more severe functional difficulties, without anxiety or depression symptoms, and in the domains of self-care, concentrating and hearing are based on 25-49 unweighted cases.

### Adolescents with disabilities are less likely to describe themselves as happy, with girls and adolescents from the poorest households experiencing the lowest levels of happiness

**FIGURE 8.4** Percentage of adolescents aged 15 to 17 years who say they are very or somewhat happy



Note: Education refers to the education level of mothers.

### Adolescents with difficulties communicating and concentrating report the lowest levels of life satisfaction

**TABLE 8.3** Average life satisfaction score for adolescents aged 15 to 17 years

		Total	Poorest 20%	Richest 20%
Adolescents without functional difficulties		7	6	7
Adolescents with one or more functional difficulties		6	6	7
Adolescents with more than one functional difficulty		6	5	7
Adolescents with anxiety or depression symptoms only		6	5	6
Adolescents with one or more severe functional difficulties, without anxiety or depression symptoms		6	(6)	(8)
Adolescents with more than one severe functional difficulty		6	(5)	(6)
Domain of functional difficulty	Controlling behaviour	7	(6)	(8)
	Walking	7	(6)	(7)
	Symptoms of depression	6	5	6
	Seeing	(6)	(5)	(7)
	Making friends	6	(5)	(7)
	Symptoms of anxiety	6	6	7
	Accepting change	6	(5)	(7)
	Learning	5	(4)	(5)
	Remembering	5	(3)	(6)
	Communicating	4	(3)	(7)
	Concentrating	4	(3)	(7)

Notes: Values can range from 0 (lowest level of satisfaction) to 10 (highest level of satisfaction). Results within parentheses ( ) are based on 25-49 unweighted observations.

**Adolescents with difficulties remembering and hearing are significantly less likely to say their life has improved within the last year and that they expect it will be better in a year's time**

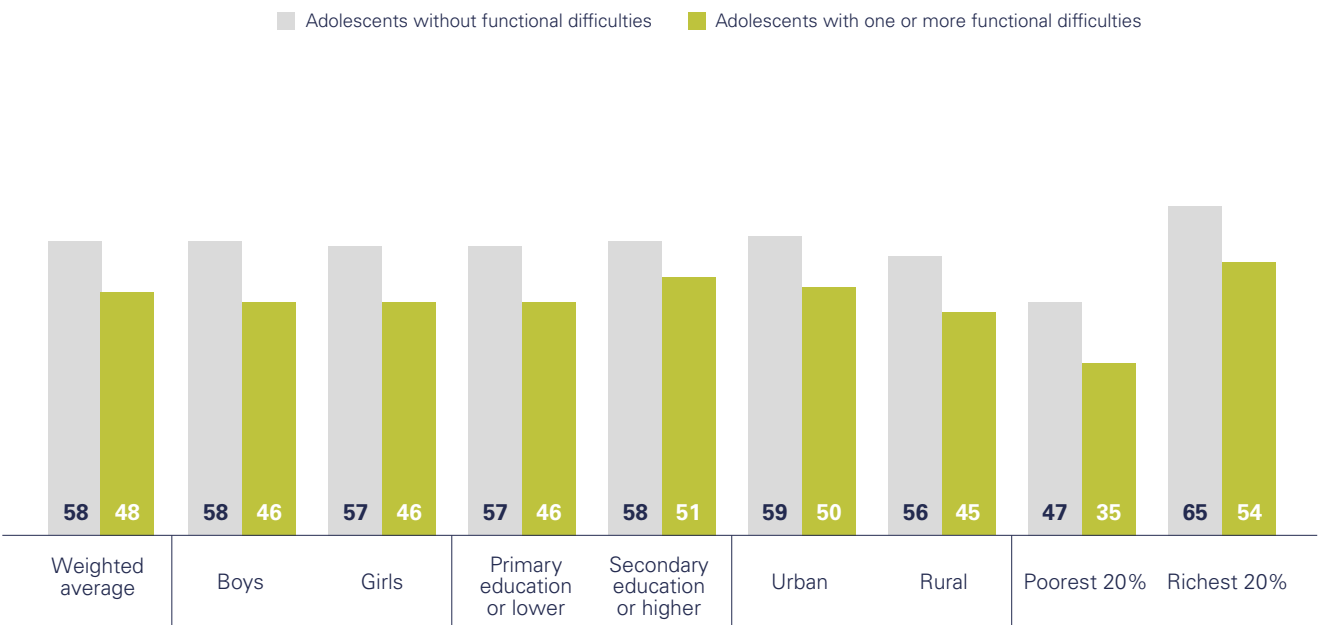
**FIGURE 8.5** Percentage of adolescents aged 15 to 17 years whose life improved during the last 12 months and who expect that their life will be better one year later



Note: Results for adolescents with anxiety or depression symptoms only, and for adolescents with difficulties hearing or remembering, are based on 25-49 unweighted cases.

**Positive perceptions of life are less common among adolescents with disabilities, especially among girls and adolescents from the poorest households**

**FIGURE 8.6** Percentage of adolescents aged 15 to 17 years whose life improved during the last 12 months and who expect that their life will be better one year later



Note: Education refers to the education level of mothers.

## Takeaways and programmatic implications

The evidence presented in previous chapters points to key inequalities and negative outcomes for children with disabilities in nearly all dimensions of their lives. This chapter highlights the perceptions of these children themselves, which are likely to be influenced by such experiences. The data show that children with disabilities perceive a significant amount of discrimination against them and experience generally lower levels of well-being than children without disabilities. The mechanisms that explain and drive these inequalities result from a complex set of interactions between specific disabilities and the environment that contributes to divergent experiences among children of different social and economic backgrounds and with difficulties in different functional domains. That said, a sense of inclusiveness can be key to removing barriers and ensuring that the child's experience is determined by the qualities of an accommodating environment rather than by the limitations resulting from various disabilities. Too often,

however, barriers, exclusion from full participation and a variety of poor outcomes are exacerbated by stigma and discrimination.

Discrimination against children with disabilities stems from a variety of structural, attitudinal and behavioural factors, many of which can be prevented through appropriate interventions. Eliminating all forms of discrimination requires profound changes and committed efforts from all sectors of society in both public and private spheres. Similarly, eliminating the barriers that deny children the right to participate is a moral obligation and a legal imperative that can bring immense gains to all parts of society. Fulfilling the rights of children with disabilities can trigger a cascade of positive impacts on the lives of children as well as their families and communities. It can bring immediate gains in terms of personal well-being and dignity and give children a fair chance to live happier lives and achieve their full potential.



## SPECIAL FOCUS: How sex and gender shape disability in children



While each child's experience of disability is unique, biological sex differences and socially constructed gender roles<sup>10</sup> can systematically influence girls' and boys' risks of impairment. Sex and gender can also play a role in determining children's access to the care and resources they need to thrive.<sup>11</sup>

From a strictly biological perspective, differences in anatomy, brain chemistry and hormonal balance – from the prenatal period onwards – can predispose boys and girls to different risks.<sup>12</sup> Evidence suggests, for example, that boys are more vulnerable than girls to disruptions in foetal and neonatal development that are associated with microcephaly, motor impairments and cerebral palsy.<sup>13</sup> Boys are also at higher risk for negative outcomes attributed to pre- and postnatal exposure to environmental toxins and maternal substance use, including central nervous system disorders that manifest in intellectual and motor impairments.<sup>14</sup>

Beyond biological predisposition, sex-based biological differences may also influence girls' and boys' presentation of disabilities, leading to differences in screening, diagnosis and treatment. For example, evidence shows that boys with learning difficulties are more likely than girls to show higher rates of impulsivity,

aggression and hyperactivity and, as a result, to be referred to special education. Girls, on the other hand, tend to manifest learning difficulties through other, less obvious behaviours, such as inattention, which is more likely to be misinterpreted as a lack of interest, and thus their impairment may go undiagnosed. This, in turn, can increase the risk of worse educational outcomes for girls.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, a significant body of evidence suggests that girls with psychosocial disorders are systematically underdiagnosed, largely due to the fact that their symptoms tend to be different from those of boys. Once again, this may mean girls are denied important opportunities for support.

Boys and girls with disabilities can also face different challenges depending on how gender-based discrimination and disability intersect. Compared to boys with disabilities, girls with disabilities are less likely to receive care and food in the home, to receive health care and assistive devices and to receive vocational training that would enable them to find employment.<sup>16</sup> Inaccessible water, sanitation and hygiene facilities at school can discourage any girl from getting an education, especially during menstruation, but the difficulties are usually compounded for girls with disabilities.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, while research suggests that all children with



disabilities experience narrower opportunities than their peers without disabilities, family expectations for girls with disabilities are often lower than those for boys with disabilities. They usually revolve around ensuring girls' safety by curbing their activities away from the home, with a focus on marriage and children. By contrast, boys

with disabilities face more expectations around getting a job and being able to live independently.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, boys with disabilities face a higher risk of physical violence than girls. Because of gender norms, such violence is often considered a 'normal' part of boyhood, which can contribute to its perpetuation.<sup>19</sup>

### Overall, boys are slightly more likely than girls to experience functional difficulties

**TABLE 8.4** Percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years with functional difficulties

		Boys	Girls
Children aged 2 to 17 years	One or more functional difficulties	<b>14.2</b>	<b>12.6</b>
	More than one functional difficulty	<b>5.4</b>	<b>4.6</b>
Children aged 2 to 4 years	One or more functional difficulties	<b>5.9</b>	<b>4.7</b>
	More than one functional difficulty	<b>1.2</b>	<b>1.0</b>
	Seeing	0.4	0.4
	Hearing	0.3	0.3
	Walking	<b>0.8</b>	<b>0.6</b>
	Communicating	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1.3</b>
	Controlling behaviour	<b>2.4</b>	<b>1.8</b>
	Learning	1.7	1.5
	Fine motor	0.5	0.4
	Playing	0.6	0.5
	Children aged 5 to 17 years	Children with one or more functional difficulties	<b>16.4</b>
Children with more than one functional difficulty		<b>6.4</b>	<b>5.6</b>
Children with anxiety or depression symptoms only		7.4	7.0
Children with one or more severe functional difficulties, without anxiety or depression symptoms		1.2	1.2
Children with more than one severe functional difficulty		3.4	3.4
Seeing		5.6	4.8
Hearing		0.4	0.3
Walking		2.0	2.2
Communicating		<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.7</b>
Controlling behaviour		<b>3.9</b>	<b>2.6</b>
Learning		<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.4</b>
Self-care		0.9	0.8
Concentrating		1.1	0.9
Remembering		<b>1.6</b>	<b>1.4</b>
Making friends		1.2	1.2
Accepting change		<b>2.7</b>	<b>2.1</b>
Symptoms of anxiety		<b>7.2</b>	<b>6.6</b>
Symptoms of depression	3.8	4.0	

Note: Numbers in bold indicate statistically significant differences between boys and girls at the 5 per cent level ( $p < .05$ ).

**Gender gaps, which only exist for some indicators of well-being, tend to be similar between boys and girls with disabilities and those without, except in the case of discrimination**

**TABLE 8.5** Selected indicators of well-being for boys and girls with and without functional difficulties

		Children without functional difficulties		Children with one or more functional difficulties		Children with more than one functional difficulty	
		Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Health and nutrition	Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months with reported symptoms of acute respiratory infection in the last two weeks	4.0	3.8	6.1	6.3	8.5	8.6
	Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months who are stunted	30.7	30.1	42.0	44.5	50.8	55.0
Parenting	Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months engaged in early stimulation and responsive care	46.6	47.8	35.0	33.3	30.5	27.7
Child protection	Percentage of children aged 24 to 59 months whose births are reportedly registered with a civil authority	71.1	70.6	61.6	59.0	59.2	55.6
	Percentage of children aged 2 to 14 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression in the past one month	<b>66.4</b>	<b>63.3</b>	<b>72.7</b>	<b>70.0</b>	84.3	83.5
Education	Percentage of children aged 10 to 17 years who have never attended school	6.1	7.9	9.1	12.2	13.4	13.4
	Percentage of children of primary-school age who are attending primary school or higher	77.4	77.8	72.7	70.1	24.3	24.2
	Percentage of children of lower-secondary-school age who are attending lower-secondary school or higher	<b>50.9</b>	<b>54.6</b>	<b>41.3</b>	<b>45.4</b>	25.8	30.5
	Percentage of children of upper-secondary-school age who are attending upper-secondary school or higher	<b>40.0</b>	<b>44.8</b>	<b>26.7</b>	<b>34.2</b>	44.1	42.4
Discrimination	Percentage of adolescents aged 15 to 17 years having personally felt discriminated against or harassed within the previous 12 months on at least one of the grounds for discrimination prohibited under international human rights law	12.5	13.8	<b>11.9</b>	<b>21.0</b>	<b>12.9</b>	<b>23.0</b>

Note: Numbers in bold indicate statistically significant differences between boys and girls at the 5 per cent level ( $p < .05$ ).

## Caring for children with disabilities

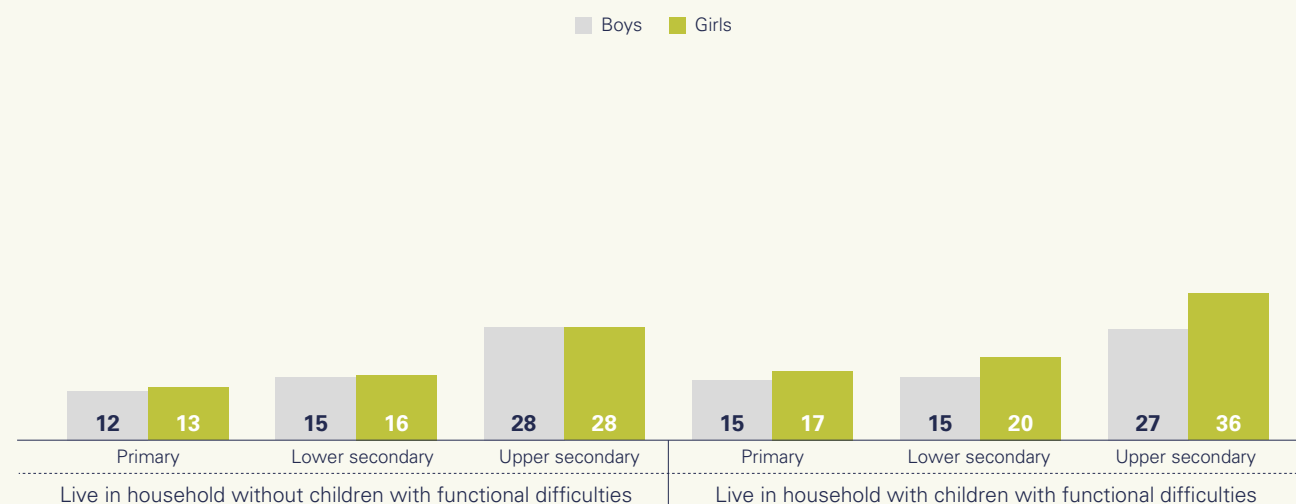
Caring for a child with disabilities can be more or less demanding depending on the level and quality of the public health infrastructure within a country. As with other care and domestic responsibilities, however, the burden is likely to fall disproportionately on women. The greater time and energy that women, versus men, spend caring for children is well documented.<sup>20</sup> Despite some shifting of social norms related to male involvement in caregiving among younger generations and those with higher education,<sup>21</sup> research shows that childcare is still mainly the responsibility of women. On an average day, women spend about three times as many hours as men do on unpaid domestic and care work.<sup>22</sup> This disparity has significant implications for women's health, well-being and employment opportunities<sup>23</sup> and can be particularly taxing for those with children with disabilities.<sup>24</sup>

The additional responsibilities usually entailed in caring for children with disabilities may also fall on other family members, including female siblings. Girls assume more caregiving tasks in households than boys,<sup>25</sup> and this also holds true in cases of households with children with disabilities, a situation that can have a negative impact on girls. Many girls, for example, become caregivers to their siblings with disabilities rather than attending school.<sup>26</sup>



**Girls from households that include children with disabilities are more likely to be out of school than boys from the same household; they are also more likely to be out of school than girls in households without children with disabilities**

**FIGURE 8.7** Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years without functional difficulties who are not attending primary, lower- or upper-secondary school



## CHAPTER 9

# Fulfilling the rights of every child

This report marks a pivot point. For the first time, rich, global data on children with disabilities offer a glimpse into their widely diverse experiences. The data provide the foundation for understanding who these children are and the scope and depth of the deprivation they face. When put to use through advocacy and in forging transformative policies and programmes, these data have the power to change lives.

### Documenting, measuring, understanding

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

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

The lives of many children with disabilities are marked by deep exclusion and deprivation. Compared with their peers without disabilities, children with disabilities are 34 per cent more likely to be stunted, 49 per cent more likely to

have never attended school, 41 per cent more likely to feel discriminated against, 51 per cent more likely to consider themselves unhappy, and 20 per cent less likely to have expectations of a better life.

Children who have difficulties in more than one domain are even more deprived: 53 per cent are stunted; just 29 per cent receive early stimulation and responsive care in the first, most critical, years of life; and 43 per cent are out of school by upper-secondary-school age.

Children with certain types of functional difficulties may experience particularly high levels of exclusion. For instance, children with difficulties communicating or caring for themselves are several times less likely to attend school than children who do not have difficulties in these domains. In contrast, children who experience anxiety or depression attend schools at similar rates as those without functional difficulties but appear to lag behind, especially in the acquisition of numeracy skills.

The severity of these difficulties is another critical factor. By lower-secondary-school age, the majority of children with the most severe disabilities do not attend school. By upper-secondary-school age, virtually none do.







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

## From knowledge to action

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

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

## Provide disability-inclusive services in every community

All children and their families, wherever they may live, have the right to easily accessible, high-quality, holistic services that respond to their specific needs as part of routine support across the life cycle. Moreover, they have the right to safe, inclusive and accessible environments for learning, play and civic and cultural engagement.

All services – including health, nutrition, early childhood development, mental health and psychosocial support, child protection, water, sanitation and hygiene, and social protection – should be well integrated. They must also be informed by a nuanced understanding of different types of childhood disability, the social barriers that children with disabilities face, and the impact of both of these factors on their well-being, development and inclusion in society.

Putting this into practice involves twin-track approaches that promote increased coverage of mainstream interventions to improve outcomes for all children, while incorporating tailored and differentiated strategies to meet the needs of children with specific impairments. Children with disabilities and their families should not have to travel long distances or wait for referrals to specialized facilities to obtain basic services and support.

All professionals working with children – including health-care workers, teachers, social workers, the police, judges and lawyers – need training to understand the full extent of childhood disability and to combat related stigma and discriminatory attitudes. Parents and caregivers, too, need knowledge and skills to provide responsive care specific to their child's unique challenges.

## Invest in inclusive education for all

Children with disabilities have the right to learn together with their peers without disabilities in accessible schools in their communities. Inclusive education means taking into account the distinct barriers facing children with

disabilities and employing targeted approaches to help them learn.

Within schools, all staff and administrators should be able to identify and respond to the needs of learners with a range of disabilities, and to counter stigma and discrimination. Buildings must be refurbished so that classrooms, facilities such as toilets and water taps, and spaces for play and recreation are accessible to all children, and appropriate forms of transportation must be provided to and from school. All new schools must be built to be fully accessible.

Learning materials and curricula need to be tailored to children's needs, assistive technologies secured for children who require them, and additional assistance provided in the classroom so that every child can learn and progress.

Finally, schools must provide accessible and inclusive structures for engagement, including feedback by students, families and communities, on the extent to which they provide an inclusive environment.

### Put mental health care and psychosocial support within easy reach of all children

Mental health is central to children's right to health. All children, including children with disabilities should have access to comprehensive and friendly primary health care that includes a psychosocial and family-centred approach. Primary health care providers or community health workers often provide the only safe space for many children struggling with mental health issues. When such spaces are available, accessible and effective, they constitute a critical and timely entry point for children requiring specialized care. Such support should also be available through schools, child protection and justice systems or any other social service with which children come into contact – wherever they may be, including in humanitarian crises.

Systematic efforts must also be made to address the social determinants that impact children's mental health and to tackle misconceptions and stigma. It is critical that families, communities, teachers and all professionals who work with children are equipped with



the knowledge and skills they need to promote mental well-being, recognize mental health issues and connect children to appropriate, community-based forms of support.

### **Protect children with disabilities from violence, abuse and exploitation**

Every child has the right to live free from violence, abuse and exploitation. For children with disabilities, this means increasing the capacity of protection and justice officials, enabling them to understand and respond to the vulnerabilities and challenges faced by these children.

All strategies to prevent and respond to violence, abuse and exploitation must take children with disabilities into account. Professionals working with children, including teachers, social workers and health-care providers, need training to recognize and adequately respond to signs of abuse in children with different types of disabilities. They need specific knowledge and skills to support children and families. Similarly, justice systems should listen to and value the testimonies of children with disabilities. This involves training police, investigators, and legal and judicial actors on the needs of children with disabilities and working with them to improve access to justice.

### **Register children with disabilities at birth**

Birth registration is a portal to a range of human rights, including health care and education. It is critical to preventing discrimination, abuse and other rights violations.

Campaigns to expand birth registration should make efforts to include children with disabilities by actively reaching out to their families and raising awareness about the importance of registration for every child.

Acknowledgement of their existence is the birthright of every child. For that reason, birth registration systems must be flexible and responsive to the circumstances of children with disabilities and their parents and work to reduce barriers, such as the cost of registration and long distances to registration facilities. Strategies to raise levels of birth registration include extending legally permissible registration periods, waiving associated

fees and fines, deploying mobile registration units, and leveraging routine outreach programmes in health and social protection.

### **Make water, sanitation and hygiene facilities accessible everywhere**

Increasing access to WASH services for children with disabilities can help reduce the barriers they face in realizing many other rights, including education and health. This entails the strengthening of WASH systems to ensure that related services, infrastructure, supplies and information are accessible to and usable by children with different types of impairments.

Governments need to invest in the development of national standards as well as programming to ensure that safe and accessible WASH facilities are available in all households, schools, health centres and other public facilities. COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of handwashing with soap. Further investment is needed to improve the accessibility of handwashing facilities. Disability-inclusive programmes should remove barriers that prevent girls with disabilities from participating in society when they are menstruating by ensuring inclusive access to WASH facilities, menstrual hygiene products and sensitive information.

### **Invest in robust social protection that takes disability into account**

Every child has the right to a life free from poverty and exclusion. To alleviate the deprivations confronted by children with disabilities and their families, governments need to increase the capacity, funding, equity, efficiency and scope of social protection programmes. Universal health coverage is essential, with services to include disability-specific health care, such as rehabilitation and assistive devices.

Social transfer programmes should also be extended to all children with disabilities. And governments need to provide additional funding to ensure universal social protection floors. Eligibility requirements should include children with a wide array of disabilities, recognizing the costs related to disability. Awareness of such programmes needs to be expanded and the application process simplified to encourage uptake.



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### Support parents and caregivers of children with disabilities

Family-friendly policies can go a long way towards helping children with disabilities realize their right to grow up in a nurturing family environment. Ideally, disability-inclusive parenting and family-support programmes should be integrated into health and early childhood development services. They should promote responsive caregiving practices; support caregivers' own well-being and mental health, including through respite services; and empower parents with the knowledge, attitudes and skills to provide educational support and advocate on behalf of their children.

Policies on breastfeeding and parental leave, child benefits and services such as affordable, accessible, high-quality and inclusive childcare are also critical to creating supportive environments for children with disabilities and their caregivers.

### Ensure access to assistive technology for all children who need it

Assistive technology can make a huge difference to the well-being, development, independence and participation of many children with disabilities, enabling them to more readily communicate, move about and care for themselves – opening up opportunities for them to learn, play and perform daily tasks.

Assistive technologies and disability-inclusive supplies are rapidly evolving. Ensuring access to them entails working with health and social service systems, businesses and organizations of persons with disabilities to promote quality standards, develop guidance, foster innovation, shape markets, and identify and address supply barriers. Increased access to these critical tools is key to creating an enabling environment.

### End institutionalization and prioritize family-based care

All too often, for a multitude of reasons, children with disabilities end up in residential care. Governments, donors, United Nations agencies and civil society must work together to move away from institutionalization. Rather, they should prioritize programmes, support and resources at the community level to enable families to care for their children with disabilities at home and in the community.

When remaining with their parents is not possible, children should be placed in family-based alternative care settings – through foster or kinship care, for example – to help them realize their right to grow and develop within a nurturing, supportive family setting.

### Counter stigma and discrimination

Eradicating stigma and discrimination implies systemic change in norms, attitudes and behaviours. This takes time,



investment and a range of integrated communications, programming, policy and advocacy interventions at many levels of society.

Promoting shifts of this magnitude will require awareness-raising and capacity building around disability among key stakeholders. It also demands advocating for and implementing policies and legislation that explicitly address stigma and discrimination against children with disabilities and their families and ensuring adequate financing, so that evidence-based strategies can be taken to scale.

Social and behaviour change communication interventions are another critical tool, engaging children, families, communities, service providers and decision-makers in identifying, understanding and addressing the complex, underlying sociocultural practices and norms that influence negative attitudes and discriminatory behaviours.

### **Include children with disabilities in COVID-19 prevention and response**

Governments must make explicit efforts to include children with disabilities and their families in COVID-19 prevention and response efforts, vaccination campaigns and reopening strategies and guidelines (see page 160). Measures must be adapted to the needs of children with a range of disabilities, taking into account the heightened health vulnerabilities of children with certain types of impairments, and formulating targeted strategies to reach children with limitations in mobility, who may require in-home care and vaccination. Forward-looking action is required to prevent children with disabilities from being excluded as societies reopen. And with the resumption of in-person learning, assistance should be given to those children whose disabilities make radical changes in routine especially difficult.

### **Close data gaps and build knowledge that can make a difference**

All countries should produce high-quality data on children with disabilities at regular intervals. An important first step is adopting data collection instruments that measure the breadth and depth of functional difficulties that children with disabilities experience. Data should also capture the extent of the restrictions they face in becoming active members of society. This means

collecting additional data about the context in which they live, the barriers in their environment, the extent of their participation in different spheres, and their access to core services and interventions. The collection of robust data on children and adults with disabilities needs to extend to humanitarian settings and also includes children who are institutionalized or in street situations.

Counting and including all children requires the building of capacity so that quality standards are adopted worldwide for official disability statistics. Countries need support in their efforts to collect, analyse and disseminate disability data. This should include the engagement – and empowerment – of all relevant stakeholders, including persons with disabilities.

## **For every child, inclusion**

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

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

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

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





## **EMERGING ISSUE: Including children with disabilities in the COVID-19 response**

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted life in every corner of the globe, creating a crisis that is unprecedented in its scale and scope. Though it is almost 2 years into the emergency, many unanswered questions remain about its impact and especially its long-range consequences. A growing body of evidence shows that both the virus itself, as well as the measures implemented by governments to contain its spread, disproportionately impact children with disabilities and their families.

Children with disabilities may face a heightened risk of exposure to the virus, along with complications and death due to underlying conditions and pre-existing vulnerabilities. They are at higher risk of contracting the virus because they are more likely to live in congregate care and to be unable to practise preventive measures, such as the wearing of masks, handwashing and physical distancing.<sup>1</sup> In addition, overwhelmed health systems have prompted concern that children and adults with disabilities will be discriminated against in triage and suffer worse health outcomes due to poor medical care.<sup>2</sup>

Parallel to concerns regarding the virus itself are the inadvertent and worrisome effects of lockdowns, including isolation, increased anxiety and depression and the exacerbation of pre-existing mental health issues, which can worsen in the absence of community support networks.<sup>3</sup> Changes to and the loss of structure and routines can take a heavy toll on children with disabilities, especially on those with intellectual and/or psychosocial difficulties. Such children may not understand or cope well with sudden and major disruptions or the need for certain preventive measures. Finally, quarantine constraints and the overall burden faced by families may also place children with disabilities at increased risk of violence at home.

A lack of access to services triggered by restrictions to control the spread of COVID-19 has major implications for children with disabilities. In general, such children have greater health-care needs and a higher dependency on community-based services – challenges that generally have gone unrecognized in pandemic response plans.<sup>4</sup>





In situations where services have been interrupted, social inequalities are magnified for children with disabilities since they are often most reliant on these services for their well-being.<sup>5</sup> For all children, school closures are likely to constitute a serious disruption to their daily lives. But for children with disabilities, remote home schooling may be exceptionally difficult since they may also need assistive devices or special curricula that allow for continued education at home.<sup>6</sup>

With the roll-out of vaccinations increasing rapidly in some parts of the world, many countries are slowly relaxing restrictions. But as governments, communities and families transition towards a 'new normal', further challenges are emerging. Without forward-looking action, children with disabilities face the risk of being excluded if they are not accounted for in national guidelines for reopening strategies. Similarly, with the resumption of in-person learning, certain children with disabilities may find it difficult to adapt to another abrupt change in routine and scheduling that accompanies a return to school and socializing after more than a year of dramatically reduced interaction.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, whether and how children with disabilities will access vaccinations remains a concern.

This will require not only the availability of vaccines but also the integration of features that can help make them accessible to children with disabilities and their families. These range from readily understood information and communication materials to navigable physical, social and sensory environments. Special efforts are required to provide and expand opportunities for inclusive care of children with disabilities at vaccination sites and to formulate targeted strategies to reach out to children who may require in-home vaccination.

While much has been learned about the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, far more remains uncertain. Research and data collection are needed to draw attention to the experiences of children with disabilities during the pandemic, to advocate for a range of services to be available now and in the future, and to inform the design of specific interventions. As societies reopen, collecting and reporting data disaggregated by disability status is more important than ever. It can provide evidence on the extent to which vaccination campaigns and reopening strategies are excluding children with disabilities, inform ongoing efforts to increase accessibility and shape a response that accounts for the needs of all children.

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

**22%**

less likely to have improved sanitation facilities in their households

**26%**

less likely to have improved drinking water sources in their households

**21%**

less likely to have water and soap for handwashing in their households

**1.9  
times**

more likely to have diarrhoea

**1.6  
times**

more likely to have symptoms of acute respiratory infection

**1.4  
times**

more likely to have a fever

**40%**

less likely to engage in early stimulation activities

**60%**

less likely to have children's books in their households

**30%**

less likely to read books or be read to at home.

Notes: The analysis above estimated adjusted odds ratios using logistic regressions, with each of the variables as a dependent variable and disability as an independent variable, all of which yielded significant associations at 1 per cent ( $p < .01$ ). Regressions were adjusted for location of residence and household wealth. Data on water, sanitation and handwashing refer to children aged 2 to 17 years. Data on health, children's books and early stimulation refer to children aged 2 to 4 years. Data on reading or being read to refer to children aged 7 to 14 years.

## Technical Annex

This report aims to generate evidence on children with disabilities aligned, to the greatest extent possible, with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the biopsychosocial model of disability. This intent guided the estimation of the global and regional estimates and is reflected in country-level data collected by the Child Functioning Module. In line with this approach, the expression ‘children with disabilities’ used throughout the report refers to ‘children with functional difficulties’.

### Regional and global estimates

The following strategy was used to arrive at regional and global estimates of children with disabilities:

#### 1. Data compilation

All available nationally representative data relevant to the estimation of disability among children were included in a database along with key metadata and information about methodologies and data quality.

#### 2. Data selection

This selection step focused on harmonizing broad methodological and conceptual issues with the aim of promoting data comparability prior to estimation. Exclusion criteria targeted mostly methodological aspects of the data source in general, while inclusion criteria targeted conceptual and methodological aspects of the measurement tools used to collect the data (Table 1).

- a. Sources of data collected before 2005 and those not based on population censuses and household surveys were excluded. Disability estimates are often reported for wide age groups that include both children and adults. Data sources that did not include a separate estimate for children were excluded.
- b. Classification of data sources was standardized in terms of methodological aspects that can affect the identification of children with disabilities:
  - Measurement tool used
  - Number of functional domains covered
  - Use of household-level or individual-level filter questions
  - Type of response scales employed
  - Eligibility of respondents.

- c. Internationally comparable data sources on functional difficulties or limitations that include a rating scale to measure the severity of the difficulties were selected.

**TABLE 1** Summary of inclusion and exclusion criteria guiding the selection of data sources

Exclusion criteria	Inclusion criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data not derived from household surveys or censuses</li> <li>• Data collected before 2005</li> <li>• Results not available for children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data about functional difficulties or limitations</li> <li>• Use of severity scale</li> <li>• Comparable data available for at least 15 countries</li> </ul>

Application of these criteria led to the identification of 99 sources of data meeting the inclusion criteria. These data were collected through three different instruments (Table 2):

- UNICEF/Washington Group Child Functioning Module (53 countries and areas)
- Washington Group Short Set on Functioning (26 countries)
- Global Activity Limitation Instrument (20 countries).

Most data were derived from Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, Demographic and Health Surveys, the European Health Interview Survey (EHIS) and the European Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). Censuses or independent household surveys represented a few of the data sources. Most of the data were collected from 2017 onwards. However, in some cases, earlier data points were used because they were considered most aligned with the notion of disability underlying the global estimate.

Because the initial 99 data sources did not provide sufficient regional coverage, five additional data sources were selected to ensure a minimum coverage of 50 per cent of the population of children within each region. Considering the addition of these further sources, 104 data points were considered for inclusion in the final regional and global estimates (Table 3).

**TABLE 2** Summary of inclusion and exclusion criteria guiding the selection of data sources

	Child Functioning Module		Washington Group Short Set	Global Activity Limitation Instrument
	8	13	6	na
Number of functional domains	8	13	6	na
Respondent	Mother/primary caregiver		Household head	Mother/household head
Severity scale used	Yes		Yes	Yes
Cut-score to identify children with disabilities	'a lot of difficulties' or 'cannot do at all'		'a lot of difficulties' or 'cannot do at all'	'Severely limited' or 'limited, but not severely'

**TABLE 3** Countries and areas, population coverage and types of instruments considered in the final estimate of child disability

Region	Countries and areas		Percentage of child population	Type of instrument			
	Universe	Included		Child Functioning Module	Washington Group Short Set	Global Activity Limitation Instrument	Other
East Asia and the Pacific	33	16	80.2	10	5	0	1
Eastern and Southern Africa	25	13	74.4	5	7	0	1
Europe and Central Asia	55	31	59.1	9	1	20	1
Latin America and the Caribbean	37	14	74.3	10	3	0	1
Middle East and North Africa	19	10	72.5	5	5	0	0
North America	2	2	100.0	2	0	0	0
South Asia	8	6	96.8	3	2	0	1
West and Central Africa	24	12	74.1	9	3	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>83.9</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>5</b>

### 3. Harmonization and adjustment of data points

- a. Harmonization of age groups: Results by age group were harmonized to match the Child Functioning Module's age groups (children aged 2 to 4 years and 5 to 17 years). For some data sources, prevalence for the harmonized age groups was calculated directly from empirical results available at the country level. For the remaining sources, the harmonized results by age group were obtained using weighted averages of the data points available.
- b. Adjustment of the Washington Group Short Set: Instruments that collect data based on a restricted number of functional domains tend to underestimate the proportion of children with disabilities. Results from several countries and areas that used both the Child Functioning Module and the Washington

Group Short Set show that the number of children aged 5 to 17 years who are identified as having disabilities by the six domains covered by the Short Set is substantially lower than the number identified by the 13 domains included in the Child Functioning Module. While this underestimation is mostly due to the larger number of domains in the Child Functioning Module, other sources of underestimation should be considered, given that the two instruments are typically implemented under different conditions. For example, while the Child Functioning Module is intended to be administered to the child's mother, the Short Set is typically administered to the household head. Table 4 shows the differences in the estimates generated by the two instruments in seven countries and areas.



**TABLE 4** Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years with functional difficulties measured by the six domains covered by the Short Set, by the same six domains in the Child Functioning Module and by the 13 domains covered in the Child Functioning Module

	Washington Group Short Set (6 domains)	Child Functioning Module (6 domains only)	Child Functioning Module (13 domains)
Costa Rica	4.0	7.1	21.1
Guyana	2.2	5.6	17.5
Mexico	1.5	4.1	11.2
Pakistan	2.5	5.0	17.9
State of Palestine	1.5	3.0	14.9
Tonga	1.4	2.7	9.8
Zimbabwe	4.7	4.9	10.1

To correct for the underestimation of the proportion of children with disabilities, the data points based on the Short Set were adjusted as follows: Considering: the conceptual closeness between the Short Set and the Child Functioning Module; that the 13 Child Functioning Module domains include the six Short Set domains; and that these six domains are operationalized in the two instruments using similar questions, it was assumed that the data points based on the Short Set could be used to approximate the results that would be obtained if the Child Functioning Module had been used to measure disability in the same population. Country-level under-five mortality rates were also used to inform the construction of the adjustment factor. To calculate the adjustment factor, we used microdata from 36 countries that used the Child Functioning Module. Using linear regressions, we predicted the prevalence of disability among children yielded by the Child Functioning Module from the prevalence of children with disabilities based on the six domains common to the Short Set and the Child Functioning Module, adjusted by the under-five mortality rate. Three separate models generated the adjustment factors for the three Child Functioning Module age groups. These models produced the following formulas considered to model the adjustment of data points based on the Short Set, for each age group:

- i. 2 to 4 years:  $CFM2-4 = (0.846 * SS) + (0.0005 * U5MR) - 0.0051$
- ii. 5 to 17 years:  $CFM5-17 = (1.79 * SS) + (0.0006 * U5MR) + 0.0466$
- iii. 2 to 17 years:  $CFM2-17 = (1.573 * SS) + (0.0006 * U5MR) + 0.0337$

Where SS is the score in the Short Set instrument and U5MR is the under-five mortality rate per 1,000 live births.

Table 5 summarizes the process of data selection, harmonization and adjustment.

#### 4. Confidence intervals

Because errors in data are inevitable, uncertainty will always exist around data and estimates, both nationally and internationally. To allow for added comparability, estimates of children with disabilities were generated with confidence intervals. Because 66 data sources did not include the standard errors for their data points, their confidence intervals needed to be imputed. In such cases, it was assumed that countries would have produced their data points with the average precision observed in their region. Western Europe was a special case, since we had point estimates but lacked confidence intervals for the whole region, with the exception of one country. Considering the development of the region, we assumed Western European countries would produce estimates with a similar precision to those of North America. Thus, Western Europe confidence intervals were informed by the average semi-amplitude of the North America region.

#### 5. Imputation of the estimate for children under 2 years of age

Data on disabilities among children under the age of 2 are scarce. To date, no questions on functional difficulties have been validated that could be implemented to collect data about very young children in surveys and generate results that are reliable and comparable cross-nationally. While most severe impairments manifest early, sometimes even before children are

**TABLE 5** Sources of data and adjustment procedures for country estimates

Sources of data and adjustment procedures		Adjustment	Number of countries and areas
<b>INCLUDED IN ESTIMATE</b>			
A	Data based on the Child Functioning Module	No	53
B	Data based on the Washington Group Short Set	Yes (a)	26
C	Data based on the Global Activity Limitation Indicator	Yes (b)	20
D	Data based on other instruments	Yes (c)	5
<b>NOT INCLUDED IN ESTIMATE</b>			
E	Estimates based on non-comparable data		28
F	No estimates available for children		37
G	Data older than 2005		12
H	Administrative data		5
I	No data available		16
A-D	<b>INCLUDED IN ESTIMATE</b>		104
E-I	<b>NOT INCLUDED IN ESTIMATE</b>		99
A-I	<b>ALL COUNTRIES AND AREAS</b>		203

a) Adjusted for the relative contribution of the six domains measured by the Washington Group Short Set compared to the overall prevalence yielded by the 13 domains measured by the Child Functioning Module, and for the country's under-five mortality rate.

b) Harmonization of age groups.

c) Technical consultation with experts in each country.

born, many functional difficulties only become evident as children grow up. Measuring functional difficulties in children under the age of 2, in the context of surveys or censuses, is thus complicated since mothers or primary caregivers might not be aware of such difficulties, especially if they are not severe.

Yet excluding children under this age would lead to a systematic underestimation of the number of children with disabilities. Estimates of major and severe impairments at birth among surviving children, and neurodevelopmental and cognitive impairments among babies born pre-term and full-term, range between 2.4 per cent and 2.8 per cent.<sup>1</sup> Even though these estimates are restricted to more severe impairments and conditions, they provide evidence that functional difficulties are to be expected from birth at a prevalence of at least that magnitude. Considering that the prevalence of children with functional difficulties at birth is at least the same as the prevalence of children with major impairments at birth, and that a higher proportion is to be expected should less severe, but still significant, functional difficulties be revealed as children grow up, it seemed reasonable to assume that the estimate for children under the age of 2 could be informed by the estimate for children aged 2 to 4 years in each country.

## Technical consultations

Table 6 shows country-level estimates that were adjusted on the basis of the consultation process with the 10 experts.

**TABLE 6** Data points on the percentage of children aged 2 to 17 years with disabilities for the seven countries participating in the technical consultation, and adjusted estimate

	Country estimate	Adjusted country estimate
Country 1	1.7	3.5
Country 2	2.4	10.8
Country 3	1.5	16.2
Country 4	2.4	9.0
Country 5	1.4	11.6
Country 6	1.6	12.0
Country 7	4.9	4.9

## 6. Estimation of the regional and global number of children with disabilities

The estimations use a meta-analytical approximation to calculate the regional and global number of children with disabilities. Meta-analysis was implemented

using the prevalence rates of children with disabilities for each country, 95 per cent confidence intervals and the child population for all age groups. Country-level prevalence rates were transformed into the number of cases using the child population and used as input for the *metaprop* command in Stata, version 16.0 (College Station, TX). To stabilize the variance, proportions were transformed using Freeman and Tukey's double arcsine transformation. Regional estimates were generated using random effects models considering that, despite harmonization efforts, the methods used to estimate the prevalence of disability were heterogeneous. This approach also assumed that prevalence estimates from countries that could not be included in the analysis were better informed by the random effects model. Random effects meta-analysis incorporates the heterogeneity of prevalence across countries rather than relying on the prevalence of larger countries, as assumed by the fixed effect model. The only exception was the North America region, where the two countries that constitute the region (Canada and the United States of America) used the same instrument and a fixed effect model was used. Therefore, for regional estimates, random effects were assumed a priori, to incorporate the within- and between-country variability. The regional estimates were then used to generate the population-averaged final global estimate (Table 7).

## Analyses using country-level microdata

### Child Functioning Module

The Child Functioning Module captures the perceptions of mothers or primary caretakers about a child's functional difficulties, including manifestations of behavioural difficulties, among children aged 2 to 4 years and of anxiety and depression among children aged 5 to 17 years. The report of daily signs of anxiety or depression should be interpreted as an indication of those conditions, rather than a clinical diagnosis. Results should not be used to assess the epidemiological characteristics of any disease or impairment; rather, they provide an indication of the prevalence of moderate to severe functional difficulties that, in interaction with various barriers, can place children at increased risk for non-participation and exclusion.

### Microdata preparation

All data were obtained from publicly available databases from MICS. MICS survey design follows a probabilistic, cluster, stratified and multi-stage sampling approach to generate population-level indicators that are representative at the national level, urban-rural and other domains (usually regions), according to the country-specific stratification strategy.

**TABLE 7** Regional and global estimates

	Children aged 0 to 4 years				Children aged 5 to 17 years				Children aged 0 to 17 years		
	%	Lower bound	Upper bound	Number of children with disabilities (in thousands)	%	Lower bound	Upper bound	Number of children with disabilities (in thousands)	%	Number of children with disabilities (in thousands)	
East Asia and the Pacific	3.5	3.2	3.8	5,333	9.5	7.5	11.6	37,788	7.8	43,121	
Eastern and Southern Africa	5.2	4.3	6.2	4,509	12.8	11.2	14.4	24,430	10.4	28,938	
Europe and Central Asia	2.7	2.3	3.2	1,515	6.5	5.6	7.4	9,299	5.4	10,814	
Latin America and the Caribbean	3.8	3.1	4.6	1,978	12.6	11.5	13.7	17,106	10.2	19,084	
Middle East and North Africa	4.5	2.9	6.5	2,246	16.9	13.5	20.5	18,694	13.1	20,940	
North America	4.4	3.7	5.0	943	12.0	11.3	12.7	7,073	9.9	8,016	
South Asia	3.7	2.5	5.0	6,254	13.0	10.2	16.1	58,174	10.5	64,428	
West and Central Africa	6.8	5.5	8.3	6,139	18.9	15.3	22.7	34,944	14.9	41,083	
									<b>World</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>236,424</b>

For a complete list of countries and areas in the regions, subregions and country categories, see <[data.unicef.org/regionalclassifications](https://data.unicef.org/regionalclassifications)>. Demographic data are from: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects 2020*, Rev. 1, 2020.

As of November 2021, data were available across 42 countries and areas, including data from two subnational surveys (Pakistan's Punjab and Sindh regions). Data processing was carried out to generate standard child functioning variables, more than 60 standard indicators, and disaggregation variables harmonized across countries (such as sex, residence and maternal education).

Throughout the report, country-level analyses are used whenever sample sizes allow for it. Pooled analyses are mostly used to show results at the domain level, for which country-level sample sizes tend to be insufficient. We also use pooled analyses to illustrate disaggregated results for key indicators at the pooled-sample level.

Country-level data were merged into a pooled dataset, together with the country's sample weights and sample design variables (primary sample units and strata). In this pooled dataset, we have kept the country-level sample weights for country-level analyses. First, a single stratum indicator was generated to reflect the complete multi-frame design and ensure that each stratum and PSU assumed a unique value across countries. Next, population scaling was carried out to recalibrate the country-specific weights, adjusting for country population size relative to sample sizes. Because the child population in Punjab and Sindh regions represent around 70 per cent of the total population of children in Pakistan, data from these two surveys were considered to be representative at the country level. Sample weights for both regions were thus recalibrated in a similar way to that of other countries.

There are a few assumptions beyond this approach that should be considered:

- The surveys are comparable with respect to aspects that could influence results, such as standardized survey questions and interviewing protocols.
- Each dataset contains nationally representative probabilistic samples with similar designs.
- In the resulting pooled dataset, the sample selection process for each of the finite populations for each country is assumed to be random.
- Each country dataset includes a calibrated sample weight that reflects the county-specific sample design parameters, including selection probabilities and non-response.
- In the pooled dataset, each country becomes like an additional stratum.
- Since country samples are independent, the variance for pooled estimations for a given indicator is equal to the sum of variance for that indicator in each country.

Standard errors for the pooled estimations can then be calculated from the resulting pooled variance.

- Estimations for a given indicator at the pooled level are expected to be more precise than at the country level because the aggregated sample size is greater than the sample size of individual countries.

### **Analytic approach**

The main goal of the report is to identify disparities and inequities affecting children with disabilities. Most of the analyses aim to illustrate differences between children with and without disabilities in relation to key indicators. To achieve this, the report analyses are heavily based on so-called statistical inference for finite populations and follow mostly a 'design-based' approach. In survey data, standard errors and confidence intervals can be used to describe the precision of estimates as described in the next section.

### **Confidence intervals**

Most analyses in the report draw on confidence intervals (CI) to make inferences about the different indicators under study. The CI is a central concept in statistical inference for finite populations, being a random interval that states the probability of containing the unknown value of the population parameter that has been estimated.

CIs reflect the precision of an indicator estimate. Several factors, including the sample design and sample size, as well as the expected prevalence and variability of an indicator, can influence the precision of any reported estimate. Indicators with lower prevalence typically require larger sample sizes to allow for precise estimations.

CIs can also be used to identify statistically significant differences between two results – that is, differences that are not due to chance. In the report, CIs were thus used to compare results for children with and without disabilities and other population subgroups of interest, such as boys versus girls or children living in rural versus urban areas.

Because the report draws on a large number of countries, country-level results only show countries with statistically significant differences at the 5 per cent level.

### **Technical note on estimates on the back cover**

The results were estimated using generalized linear regression models, with each of the outcomes as a dependent variable, and disability status of the child as independent variables. All models were adjusted for a child's sex, age, residence and wealth.

# Endnotes

## CHAPTER 1. Every child has the right to be counted

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## CHAPTER 2. Every child has the right to survive and thrive

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### CHAPTER 3. Every child has the right to a nurturing family environment

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## CHAPTER 6. Every child has the right to a safe and clean environment

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## CHAPTER 8. Every child has the right to a happy life, free from discrimination

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## CHAPTER 9. Fulfilling the rights of every child

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## Technical Annex

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## Key facts

Compared with children without disabilities, children with disabilities are:

**34%**

more likely to be stunted

**25%**

more likely to be wasted

**53%**

more likely to have symptoms of acute respiratory infection

**24%**

less likely to receive early stimulation and responsive care

**25%**

less likely to attend early childhood education

**16%**

less likely to read or be read to at home

**42%**

less likely to have foundational reading and numeracy skills

**49%**

more likely to have never attended school

**47%**

more likely to be out of primary school

**33%**

more likely to be out of lower-secondary school

**27%**

more likely to be out of upper-secondary school

**32%**

more likely to experience severe physical punishment at home

**41%**

more likely to feel discriminated against

**51%**

more likely to consider themselves unhappy

**20%**

less likely to have expectations of a better life

