

---

## CHINA COUNTRY SPOTLIGHT

**In this Spotlight, the main focus is on children with disabilities.**

### INTRODUCTION

---

Children with disabilities are amongst the most deprived in China and face particular challenges in accessing and completing a quality education. According to government data, about a third of special needs children do not complete nine years of compulsory education. Save the Children's China campaign will focus on:

- Enabling access to education for out-of-school children with disabilities (who mostly reside in rural areas).
- Improving the quality of education for children with disabilities already attending school.

It will do so by addressing the policy and social barriers to the implementation of the right to education for children with disabilities, by:

- Ensuring that national policies create an environment conducive to the implementation of the right to education of children with disabilities.
- Challenging discriminatory social norms and beliefs and galvanizing public support for the right of all children to access quality education, regardless of their abilities.

### OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

---

Today, data from the China Disabled Persons' Federation indicates that only 72% of children with disabilities complete nine years of basic education as required by law.<sup>1</sup> 80% of children with disabilities live in rural areas. Given that attendance rates among the general population during the ages of 6-14 years is nearly 100%, a gap of this magnitude is astounding. Data from the same organization reveals that 36% of the estimated 85 million people living with disabilities in China are illiterate and that the per capita income of families with persons with disabilities is only 56% of the national average,<sup>2</sup> highlighting the enduring consequences of a lack of access to education. Additionally, grasping an understanding of the realities these children face is challenging, as data regarding children with disabilities in China is limited, largely due to conflicting official statistics

---

<sup>1</sup> China Disabled Persons' Federation, *The Status Analysis and Strategies Study of Children With Disability in China*, CDPF, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> China Disabled Persons Federation, *Monitoring Report on the Situation and Living Standards of People with Disabilities in China* 2013

---

from different government agencies.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, staggering enrolment rates among children with disabilities can be traced not only to a weak policy framework, but also to a persistent gap in policy implementation regarding inclusive education, due to a lack of capacity of mainstream schools as well as damaging social stigmas.

## **ADDRESSING POLICY BARRIERS**

---

China is a state party to two international conventions protecting the right to education of children with disabilities: the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. China has also signed the Sustainable Development Goals and their underlying principles that no goal will be attained unless they are realized for all – including for all children with disabilities.

International legal commitments have been translated into national legislations: the 1986 Law on Compulsory Education (amended in 2006) states that all children have a right to an education, while Chapter 3 of the 2008 Law on the Protection of Persons with Disabilities includes references to access to mainstream education and special education, modalities for financial support (for e.g. free text books, boarding school fees, subsidies for special education teachers), as well as specific provisions on teachers' training.

China's central government has also underscored a specific commitment to inclusive education in several national level policies. In early 2014, the State Council published the Plan for the Promotion of Special Education (2014-2016). This is the first policy document making explicit reference to the concept of inclusive education. It promises the enrolment of hearing-impaired and visually impaired children, as well as children with intellectual disabilities and also sets a minimum annual budget for the education of children with disabilities. The National Child Development Plan for Poverty Areas (2014-2020) has also specifically highlighted the importance of inclusive education. Lastly, the Chinese government has designated 37 national-level 'Education for Children with Disabilities Pilot Areas'.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> "As Long as they let us Stay in Class: Barriers to Education for Persons with Disabilities in China". HRW. 2013. [http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/china0713\\_ForUpload.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/china0713_ForUpload.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> The 37 pilots areas are: Beichen District and Dongli District (Tianjin municipality); Shijiazhuang City, Fengnan District of Tangshan City (Hebei Province); Taigu County (Shanxi Province); Chifeng City (Inner Mongolia municipality); Ganjingzi District of Dalian City and Tiexi District of Shenyang City (Liaoning Province); Kuancheng District of Changchun City (Jilin Province); Baoshan District and Changning District (Shanghai municipality); Nanjing City and Chong'an District of Wuxi City (Shanghai municipality); Huzhou City and Jiaying City (Zhejiang Province); Maanshan City (Anhui Province); Quanzhou City and Tong'an District of Xiamen City (Fujian province); Xihu District of Nanchang City and Xinfeng County (Jiangxi Province); Qingdao City and Weifang City (Shandong Province); Zhengzhou City (Henan Province); Hongshan District of Wuhan City and Songzi City (Hubei Province); Taojiang County and Changsha City (Hunan Province); Foshan City and Jiangmen City (Guangdong Province); Haikou City (Hainan Province); Yuzhong District (Chongqing Municipality); Shuangliu County and Qionglai City

However, the 1994 Regulations on the Education of Persons with Disabilities, which outline a complete framework for the realization of the right to education of children with disabilities, are very weak, giving in practice a lot of leeway to headmasters to decide whether a child should be accepted in a school or not. The draft revised 1994 Regulations on the Education of Persons with Disabilities are much stronger in promoting inclusive education as a way to improve access to education for children with disabilities. At the date of writing, however, it is still unclear when these draft regulations are going to come into force. In addition, children with disabilities are widely ignored as a group of children with specific needs in mainstream education policies.

Over the period 2016-2018, the campaign will therefore focus on promoting inclusive education to the government as a cost-effective solution<sup>5</sup> to enable access to education for children with disabilities. More specifically, it will seek to accelerate the coming into force of the Revised Regulations on the Education of Persons with Disabilities. It will also encourage the inclusion of specific references on children with disabilities in mainstream education policies to ensure that their needs are taken into account, starting with the Law on Child Protection in Schools, which is currently being drafted by the Ministry of Education.

## **SOCIAL STIGMAS AS A DRIVER OF EXCLUSION**

---

Save the Children started promoting inclusive education for children with disabilities in China in 1988 in Anhui province. Since 2009, it is supporting intensive pilot interventions in Sichuan and Yunnan provinces. Anecdotal evidence gathered from the field revealed that negative stigmas associated with children with disabilities attending mainstream schools were still pervasive in project sites. An opinion survey conducted across China, both in and outside of Save the Children's inclusive education project sites, verified this assumption. 894 families with children with disabilities as well as with children with mainstream abilities were surveyed in October and November 2015 in 11 provinces and municipalities.<sup>6</sup> Focus group discussions were conducted in Beijing, where inclusive schools were also visited.

### **Survey highlights**

The key preliminary findings show that while general support for inclusive education was found to

---

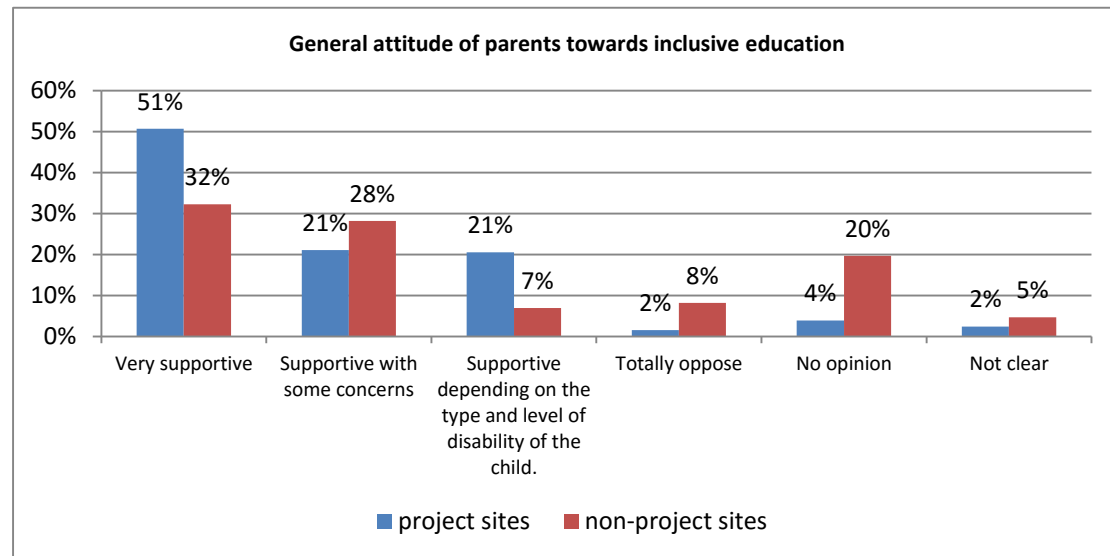
(Sichuan Province); Zunyi City and Qiandongnan Prefecture (Guizhou Province); Wuhua District, of Kunming City and Yuxi City (Yunnan Province).

<sup>5</sup> See for example the report Provision for children with special educational needs in the Asia region, James Lynch, December 1994, World Bank, ISBN: 978-0-8213-3036-4. According to the report: "If segregated special education is to be provided for all children with special educational needs, the cost will be enormous and prohibitive for all developing countries. If integrated in-class provision with a support teacher system is envisaged for the vast majority of children with special education needs, then the additional costs can be marginal, if not negligible."

<sup>6</sup> Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou (Guangdong), Xi'an (Shaan'xi), Jinan (Shandong), Wuhan (Hubei), Kaifeng (Henan), Zhuzhou (Hunan), Ma'anshan (An'hui), Chengdu (Sichuan), Pixian (Sichuan), Pengzhou (Sichuan), Midu county (Yunnan), Nanjian county (Yunnan), Jingdong County (Yunnan), Weishan County (Yunnan).

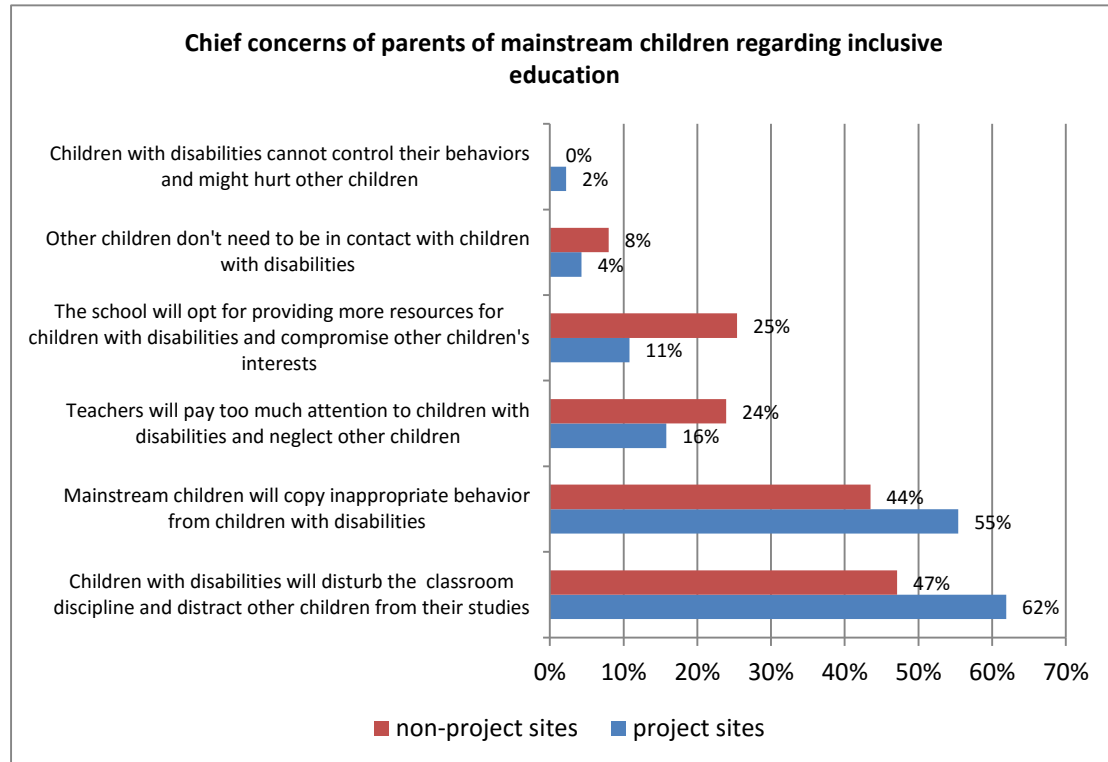
be relatively high across the board, families in project sites are overwhelmingly more supportive of inclusive education than families outside of project sites. Families in project sites have also developed a better understanding of inclusive education in practice: answers show that families in project sites understand that children’s needs vary depending on their disability. By contrast, 20% of families surveyed in non-project sites have no opinion on inclusive education, while 8% totally oppose it, revealing a lack of awareness on the issue (Fig 1).

**Fig 1: General attitude of parents toward inclusive education:**



The survey also revealed that concerns and stigmas do not disappear, but rather evolve, when inclusive education is realized in practice. Parents of mainstream children in project sites, where more children with disabilities attend mainstream schools, were significantly more worried about children with disabilities distracting others from their studies, and influencing others by demonstrating inappropriate behavior. While both of these concerns were shared widely by parents in non-project sites, they were also much more likely to worry about school resources and teachers attention being diverted away from mainstream children (Fig 2).

**Fig2: Chief concerns of parents of mainstream children regarding inclusive education:**



Data collected on parents' perception on the obstacles faced by children with disabilities in mainstream schools (Fig 3.) also indicate that perceived obstacles do not disappear but are different in locations where inclusive education is more widely implemented in practice. Perceived obstacles also vary between families of children with disabilities and families of mainstream children. For example, significantly more parents of mainstream children believe that mainstream schools refuse to accept children with disabilities.

**Fig3: Parents' perception on the obstacles faced by children with disabilities in mainstream schools**

	project sites		non-project sites	
	Families with children with disabilities	Families with mainstream children	Families with children with disabilities	Families with mainstream children
children with disabilities have poor learning capacity	54.6%	52.1%	44.2%	37.3%
children with disabilities are at risk of being bullied by their peers	41.2%	49.1%	38.9%	32.9%
children with disabilities are psychologically and emotionally instable	35.3%	48.8%	40%	24.1%
School lack tailored coaching and support mechanisms for children with disabilities	31.9%	42.3%	48.4%	44.8%
children with disabilities face difficulties to proceed to a higher education	31.9	40.8%	28.4%	30.7%
Some teachers only agree to take in children with disabilities in their classroom on the condition that their performance review will not be affected by these students' performance	15.1%	24.4%	18.9%	20.1%
Teachers fail to pay enough attention to children with disabilities	13.4%	20.8%	36.8%	26.6%
Some schools and teachers tried to persuade children with disabilities to drop out.	12.6%	18.5%	22.1%	27.3%
Many mainstream schools refuse to accept children with disabilities	11.8%	39%	35.8%	72.4%

Some schools require parents with children with disabilities to get certificate for their children's disabilities	9.2%	26.2%	14.7%	21.6%
---	------	-------	-------	-------

Preliminary survey results highlighted above indicate that while support for inclusive education is relatively high in China, the concept is also not well understood. In practice, many negative stigmas and misperceptions remain associated with the idea of children with disabilities attending mainstream schools. Importantly, these stigmas do not completely disappear, but are rather transformed into different – but nevertheless still negative – beliefs in sites where inclusive education is implemented in practice. Based on a thorough analysis of survey findings, the campaign will seek to increase public support for the right to quality education for all children, regardless of their abilities. It will also promote inclusive education as a means to achieving this goal. Key campaign messages will focus on addressing common concerns of parents of children with disabilities as well as those of mainstream children to dispel negative stigmas.