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BRIDGE TO MIDDLE SCHOOL ACTIVITY

Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) Analysis and Action Plan

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ACRONYMS

AREF	Regional Education Academy
BMK	Beni Mellal–Khenifra
CCA	Curriculum and Capacity-Building Activity
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CLIS	Integrated Special Education Classrooms
COP	Chief of Party
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DCOP	Deputy Chief of Party
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GENIE	Generalization of Information Technologies and Communication in Education
GESI	Gender Equity and Social Inclusion
IDP	Inclusive Development Partners
IPP	Individual Pedagogical Program
IT	Information Technology
KII	Key Informant Interview
MCM	Mobilité Club Maroc
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MoE	Ministry of Education
MS	Marrakech–Safi
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OPD	Organization of Persons with Disabilities
PAGIS	Gender and Social Inclusion Action Plan
PASMT	Strategic Action Plan for the Institutionalization of Gender Equality
PD	Provincial Directorate
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
PNEA	National Program for Assessment of Students' Achievement
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
PYD	Positive Youth Development
SEL	Social Emotional Learning
SME	Subject Matter Expert
STEM	Science, Math, Engineering, and Technology
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
TAM	Test Administration Manual
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TLM	Teaching and Learning Material
TTH	Tangier–Tetouan–Al Houceima
UDA	Universal Design for Assessment
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WG	Working Group

GLOSSARY

Disability

As stated in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), disability is defined as “an evolving concept resulting from the interaction between individuals with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” This definition emphasizes the impact of societal barriers on individuals with impairments, highlighting the need to address the individual’s condition and the environmental and attitudinal factors that restrict their participation.

Equity

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2017) defines equity as “ensuring that there is a concern with fairness, such that the education of all learners is seen as being of equal importance.” This may require providing different supports to different students according to the unique barriers and challenges they face.

Gender

According to USAID ADS (Chapters 200–203), gender refers to “the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviors, values, and relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis.”

Inclusion

UNESCO (2005) considers inclusion “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures, and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.”

Inclusive Education

The inclusive education approach requires that children with disabilities be in the same schools and the same classrooms and provided the same educational opportunities as children without disabilities, and the contributions of all students—those with disabilities as well as those who are culturally and linguistically diverse and come from backgrounds that historically have been excluded from educational and career opportunities—are being valued and celebrated (USAID, 2021).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bridge to Middle School Activity (“*Bridge*”), funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), supports the Moroccan Ministry of National Education, Preschool, and Sports’ (MoE) ongoing reforms to link primary and middle school as part of basic education. This project devotes special attention to inclusion and equity, gender dynamics, the realities of education in a post-COVID-19 environment, and the growing need to respond to the challenges of climate change. Through *Bridge*, USAID partners with the MoE to improve learning outcomes in Arabic and selected science subjects (grades 4–9) and English (grades 7–9). In doing so, *Bridge* will better prepare the education system to scale up high-quality instruction in these key subject areas in the upper primary and middle school grades.

This Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) Analysis report seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the gender and social inclusion dynamics in Morocco to assist in implementing *Bridge*. Primary and secondary research was conducted with the MoE (including regional education academies [AREFs], provincial directorates [PDs], and national inclusion focal point representatives); non-governmental organizations (NGOs); and stakeholders such as school directors, teachers, parents, and students from January to May 2023, including field-based data collection focused on *Bridge* implementation regions. The GESI Analysis also examines gender and social inclusion dynamics using the USAID ADS domain framework (USAID, 2023). The subsequent paragraphs summarize the significant GESI Analysis findings.

Significant progress in student outcomes by gender and disability, yet disparities remain.

Morocco has made great strides in terms of gender equity; for example, boys and girls have similar enrollment rates and academic performance in urban areas. However, barriers still persist, such as a gender gap in enrollment in rural areas. Dropout rates for girls increase as they progress to middle school, pointing to challenges in their transition from primary to middle school. While once in middle school, boys are likelier than girls to drop out. Traditional gender roles, cultural norms, and school inaccessibility contribute to the gender gap. Disparities also exist in the representation of women in higher academia, affecting their participation in decision-making and education policy development.

This study also identifies significant stakeholder advocacy for and interest in disability inclusion in Morocco, which are strengths that can propel future action. In alignment with policy, the majority of children with disabilities attend mainstream schools, while others still receive specialized support or attend special schools. Yet, enrollment and completion rates for students with disabilities are lower than those without disabilities, especially in rural areas, and girls with disabilities experience higher exclusion rates compared to boys with disabilities.

Recommendations: To improve access to quality education for all students, ensure programming addresses cultural norms, promotes social supports, and enhances inclusive education implementation, school infrastructure accessibility, and capacity building for educators through training programs.

Laws and policies promote equity and inclusion, with a need for increased practical implementation. The laws, policies, and practices in Morocco demonstrate a strong commitment to promoting GESI in the educational system, a necessary foundation upon which further work can be built. To further advance this progress, the project should promote the enforcement of legal safeguards to protect children’s right to education, institute clear guidelines on practical implementation, monitor systems, and collaborate and consult with stakeholders. Policy implementation should aim to remove barriers to school enrollment and achievement by fostering a strong, common understanding of equity

and inclusion through capacity building, awareness raising, stakeholder collaboration, and the inclusion of women and people with disabilities in decision-making processes. Systems should be in place to monitor the access, participation, and achievement of all students.

Recommendations: Build upon existing policy foundation by linking to practical work plans and applied systems to foster a strong, common understanding of equity and inclusion through capacity building, awareness raising, stakeholder collaboration, and the inclusion of women and people with disabilities in decision-making processes.

There is an opportunity to align curriculum with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and integrate equity and inclusion principles. Findings show that gender and disability biases persist in the curriculum and teaching and learning materials (TLMs) and that the content does not fully align with the principles of UDL. Yet many teachers have used their own initiative to build strong foundations for further improvement by using student-centered and innovative methods. The curriculum also needs to address equity issues, including acceptance of difference, representation of gender and disability, social-emotional and safety principles, and gender-responsive and inclusive teaching strategies.

Recommendations: Ensure a thorough integration of UDL, diversity, social-emotional, and other inclusion principles into curriculum design, TLM development, educator training, and assessment design.

Cultural norms around gender and disability and gender roles and responsibilities are evolving but still affect student access to and equity through education. Cultural norms and beliefs shape attitudes and perceptions of educators, parents, and students. Gender biases limit girls' education due to patriarchal ideologies and stereotypes, including child marriage, traditional gender roles, and fear of girls traveling far away or to residential schools. Furthermore, societal stigmas affect perceptions of disability. Despite advocacy efforts, discrimination against persons with disabilities is widely reported; some school stakeholders report feeling unprepared to include these students, and some parents and students report both social and academic exclusion. These vulnerabilities of stigma and cultural norms for girls and students with disabilities are intersectional and amplified in rural areas.

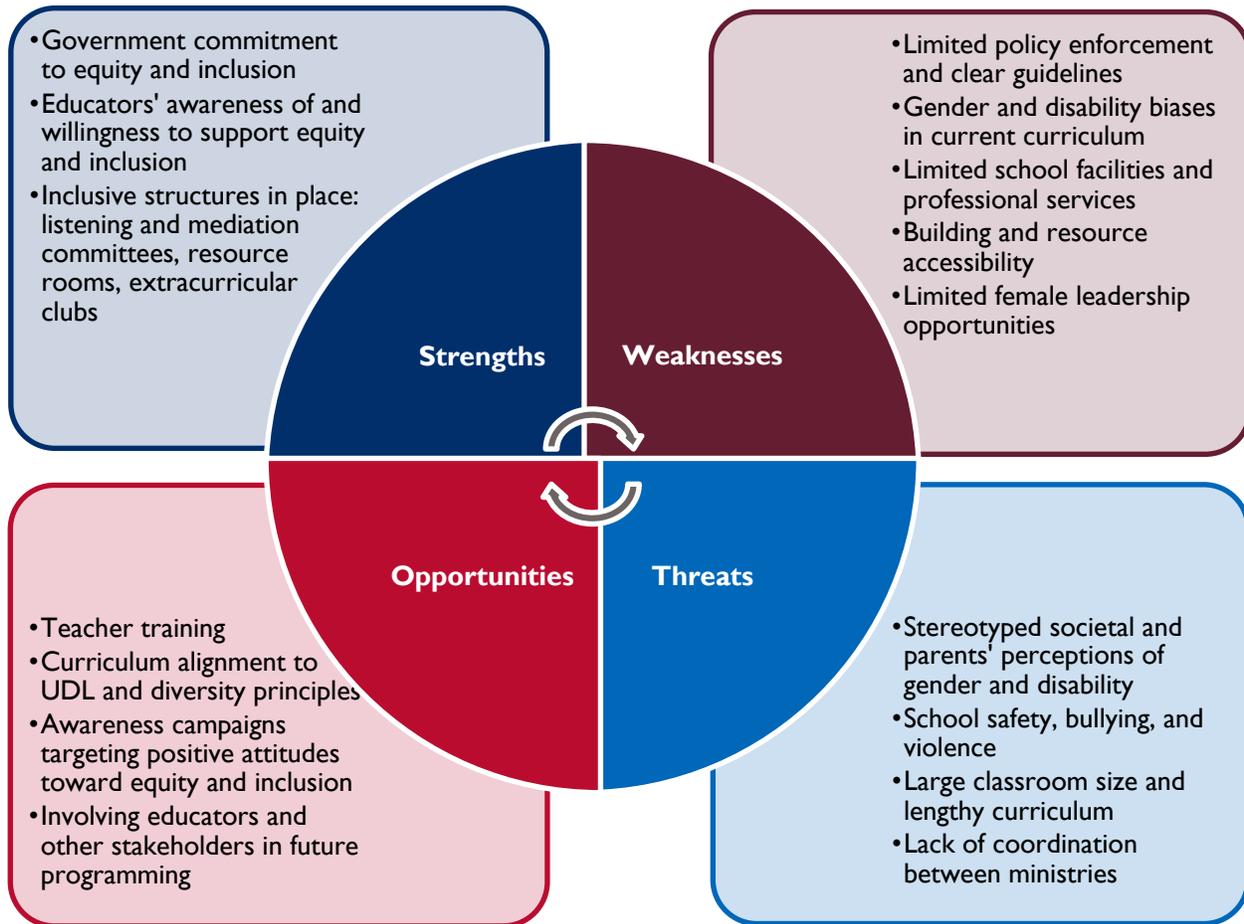
Recommendations: Conduct awareness-raising campaigns to challenge biased perceptions in the community and encourage parental engagement in schooling, while providing support to teachers and school leaders to challenge negative representations of disability, value students' strengths, and provide appropriate support.

Multiple barriers exist and resources are needed to effectively maintain the promotion of equity and inclusion. Barriers to equity and inclusion include insufficient teacher training, negative attitudes, lack of appropriate pedagogical methods and materials, architectural inaccessibility, transportation, classroom size and management, curriculum length, and family economic status, beliefs, and level of involvement. The lack of teacher training is a significant issue, with respondents providing recommendations for future training to improve inclusive education practices. School safety—including during students' commutes; the need for safe school environments, particularly for girls; and bullying in schools, particularly for students with disabilities—are significant issues hindering inclusive schooling. Creating a safe and inclusive learning environment while addressing these challenges is essential. Opportunity also exists to improve accessible resources and infrastructure in schools, such as libraries, labs, and sports facilities, as well as professional support and specialized services for marginalized students, including those with disabilities.

Recommendations: Map proposed programming at the school level to known constraints to ensure that new activities involving inspectors, school leadership, and teachers help to mitigate barriers for vulnerable students. Consult with a broad cross-section of educators, parents, women’s organizations, and organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) in implementing future interventions.

A strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis presented in Exhibit I helps to gain insights into the current situation, identify areas of strength and weakness, explore potential opportunities for growth, and anticipate and mitigate potential threats.

Exhibit I. SWOT Analysis



1. INTRODUCTION

An inclusive education approach requires providing equal access and educational opportunities to students who have been historically marginalized, including girls, children with disabilities, indigenous populations and migrants, and children from low socioeconomic status. Inclusive education “acknowledges that all children can learn and that every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities, and learning needs” (UNESCO, 2023). To reach this goal, the Moroccan Ministry of National Education, Preschool, and Sports (MoE) has continuously supported educational system reform through a variety of legislation, described further in Annex 2. Most recently, a 2022–2026 Education Roadmap that specifically addresses learning difficulties and promotes equitable opportunities was established to support quality education for all students. This roadmap is a seminal resource that the Moroccan Bridge to Middle School (“Bridge”) aims to support.

In this context, *Bridge* is a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded activity that supports the MoE’s ongoing reforms to link primary and middle school as part of basic education, with particular attention to inclusion and equity, gender dynamics, the realities of education in a post-COVID-19 environment, and the growing need for responses to the challenges of climate change. Through *Bridge*, USAID partners with the MoE to improve learning outcomes in Arabic and select Science subjects (grades 4–9) and English (grades 7–9). In doing so, *Bridge* will better prepare the education system to scale up high-quality instruction in key subject areas in both the upper primary and middle school grades. The goal of the program is to improve the performance of MoE central directorates, regional education academies (AREFs) in three pilot regions, provincial directorates (PDs), and 90 pilot schools in employing evidence-based pedagogies that promote continuous learning in select content areas, emphasizing critical-thinking skills.

2. PURPOSE, METHODOLOGY, AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

2.1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) Analysis report is to provide a nuanced understanding of the gender and social inclusion dynamics in the Moroccan upper primary and middle school educational systems to assist in implementing the *Bridge* activity. The GESI team conducted the current exploratory study to examine barriers to GESI¹ among students, teachers, inspectors, principals, school supervisory personnel and existing opportunities/assets to advance gender equity/inclusion at upper primary and middle school levels. With the data from this analysis and in collaboration with the USAID management team, the project team can produce and implement a draft GESI Action Plan, ensuring the integration and inclusion of boys and girls and students with disabilities throughout *Bridge*’s interventions (see section 5).

This GESI analysis uses the USAID domain framework (USAID, 2023) to assess how and why different social groups participate in and benefit differently within their respective communities and how that experience impacts their involvement in the education system. These domains include: 1) laws, policies, regulations, institutional practices; 2) cultural norms and beliefs; 3) gender roles, responsibilities, and time use; 4) access to and control over assets and resources; and 5) patterns of

¹ Aligned with USAID’s 2018 Education Policy’s guiding principles for gender equality, ADS 205, and Additional Help for ADS 201 that advises GESI efforts to move beyond “simply presenting broad categorical differences between women and men, the Gender Analysis could also address the relationship between gender and other characteristics (i.e., age, disability status, caste, sexual orientation, and ethnic/religious affiliation). Although the analysis would still be focused on gender, it would provide valuable information on the inclusive development challenges and guide inclusion of marginalized groups in USAID programs and design processes” (p. 5).

power and decision-making.² Furthermore, this analysis addresses not only gender but also other marginalized social groups within the Moroccan education system, including persons with disabilities.

2.2 METHODOLOGY

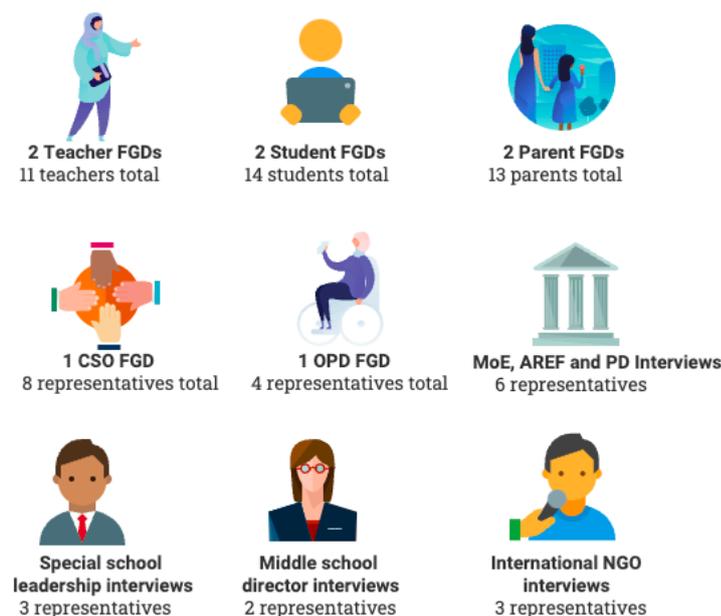
The findings of this report are based on a secondary data review and primary data collection conducted at the national and sub-national levels in three Moroccan regions (Tangier–Tetouan–Al Houceima [TTH], Beni Mellal–Khenifra [BMK], and Marrakech–Safi [MS]). All data collection, including desk research, fieldwork, and analysis, was conducted between January and May 2023. A set of research questions and sub-questions guided data collection and analysis based on the USAID gender domains and were developed with the USAID gender advisor.

2.2.1 SECONDARY DATA

The desk review aimed to identify significant GESI gaps, barriers, and opportunities related to access and equity in education in Morocco to help inform primary data collection tools. The research team conducted an extensive desk review of 75 secondary data sources, including government documents, non-governmental organization (NGO) reports, and academic and grey literature related to GESI in Morocco. This review focused on legal and policy frameworks, project documents, existing GESI analyses, and research study reports. Based on the desk review findings, the research team developed the field research methodology, including identifying relevant stakeholders, data collection tools, and data collection procedures.

2.2.2 PRIMARY DATA

Exhibit 2. Overview of Data Obtained



The research team collected data in three regions in two phases, with the first aligned with the project’s needs assessment data collection. The GESI team also used the middle school needs assessment fieldwork data to analyze stakeholders’ perceptions toward inclusive education, the curriculum alignment with Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and equity and inclusion challenges in the three regions. Exhibit 2 shows an overview of data obtained directly from the GESI data collection activities, including 14 key informant interviews (KIIs) and 8 focus group discussions (FGDs). Regional AREFs and schools were selected in close collaboration with the deputy chief of party (DCOP) in

consultation with the MoE and included urban and rural areas (see Annex 3 for a complete list). The research team obtained verbal informed consent from the MoE and from all participants.

The MoE proposed two middle schools with the highest number of students with disabilities (one rural and one urban) in Khouribga province in the BMK region. Researchers selected schools in the

² Although USAID does not mandate the use of one specific gender analysis methodology, ADS 205.3.2 defines gender analysis for USAID and lays out the domains to be assessed in the analysis process.

BMK region that had not previously been part of any pilot study, unlike the schools in the MS and TTH regions. Every school director invited Arabic, English, and Science (Life and Earth Sciences and Physics/Chemistry) teachers as well as students and parents from diverse populations regarding gender and disability to participate in the FGDs. With guidance from the MoE and AREF representatives, researchers contacted women’s Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), and international NGO representatives. Researchers contacted participants by email and phone to coordinate the meetings, and participants were offered accommodations (e.g., translator, sign language interpreter, questions in an accessible format, etc.).

Researchers synthesized qualitative data using rapid analysis techniques of thematic areas. First, researchers transcribed recorded KIs and FGDs and organized notes by topics based on the protocol questions. Next, researchers aligned these topics with the five analysis domains and selected emerging themes presented in the findings section below.

2.3 LIMITATIONS

This study has some limitations. First, for fieldwork, the sample size and timeframe were limited, potentially impacting the generalizability of the findings to a larger population. Also, the purposeful sampling of regions and schools was limited by individual perceptions and knowledge of the selected participants. Additionally, while researchers tried to seek diverse participants by gender and disability, researchers acknowledge that the intended level of diversity was not reached and could have been stronger. Lastly, the quotes presented in this report were translated by the multilingual team from Arabic or French to English, leading to potential alteration of nuances, context, or accuracy. This risk was mitigated by a peer review process within the multilingual team.

3. REVIEW OF THE MOROCCAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Inclusive education is “the most effective way to give all children a fair chance to go to school, learn, and develop the skills they need to thrive.” (USAID, 2021, p. 127). The Moroccan MoE views inclusive education as a community project that extends beyond the concept of disability to include gender, socio-economic, cultural, linguistic, and other differences in each school and community. To achieve this, Morocco has implemented several laws, policies, and institutional practices to promote the equity and inclusion of boys, girls, and students with disabilities in the educational system (see Annex 2). These laws and policies started with the Educational Charter of 2000 and the Moroccan Constitution of 2011 to guarantee equal access to education. Subsequently, the 2015–2030 educational reform strategic vision “towards a school of equity, quality, and promotion” devoted specific levers (1 to 4) to guarantee equal access to education for boys and girls and students with disabilities, including those from rural areas.

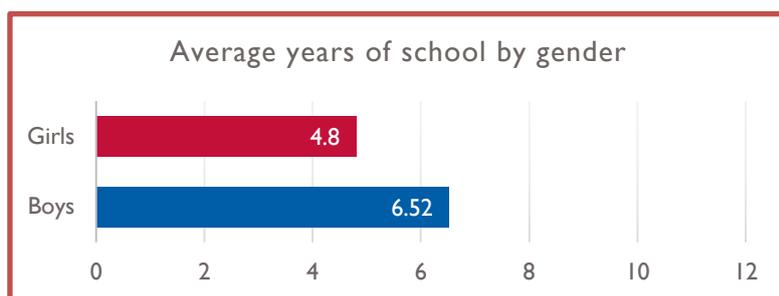
To apply this vision, various programs focused on reducing gender inequity, including implementing social support measures such as school dorms, school meals, transportation services, and scholarships to improve girls’ access to education. Additionally, in 2019, the MoE launched an extensive inclusive education program that aims to eliminate integrated classrooms, typically facilitated by public schools and managed by NGOs, and instead promote the inclusion of all children with disabilities in regular classrooms by providing resource rooms (MoE, 2019). Finally, a 2022–2026 roadmap aims to make concrete commitments in improving the education sector. Among these are adapting instructional approaches to student abilities, providing early intervention and personalized support to those with identified learning difficulties, and providing social support to improve access to schooling for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (MoE, 2022).

The educational system in Morocco has achieved noteworthy advances in implementing mandatory education and ensuring equal access to schooling for girls and boys and students with disabilities (CSEFRS, 2015). One such example is the government’s Tayssir program, a conditional scholarship system for vulnerable families that is based on children’s attendance in primary and secondary school; the program successfully helped reduce the number of learners who dropped out for financial

reasons and helped parents realize the importance of education (ONDH, ONDE, & UNICEF, 2019). Another government accomplishment is the “One Million Schoolbags” initiative to assist families in covering back-to-school expenses by distributing schoolbags, textbooks, and school supplies. This initiative targets students from all primary school grades (1–6) and all students in rural secondary education. However, socio-economic obstacles become more pronounced in secondary education as a considerable number of children engage in work, especially in rural areas. This is in addition to the limited availability of secondary schools, inadequate school infrastructure, and the deficient quality of educational facilities and environments that lead to the disproportionately low access to education for girls (UNICEF, 2015). Disparities in enrollment, achievement, and dropout rates by gender and disability (see below) reflect this, driving the need for enhancing equity and inclusion.

3.1 GENDER DISPARITIES

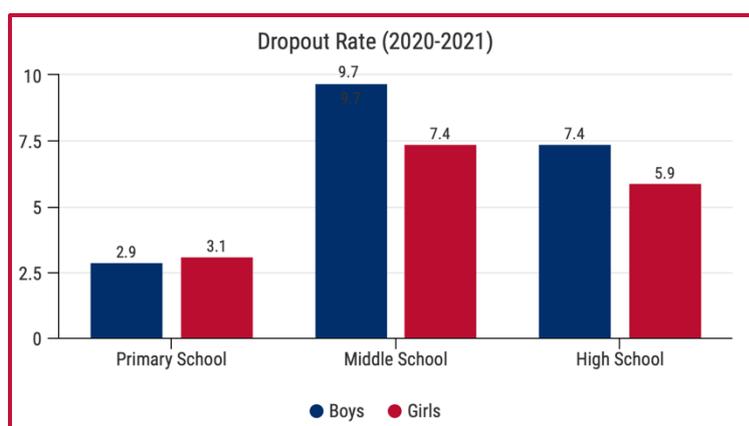
Exhibit 3. Average Years in School by Gender



Morocco has made significant progress in promoting gender equity in education. Challenges do persist, however, particularly in higher levels of education and specific regions. Statistics show that the average years of schooling for Moroccans is 6.52 for boys and does not exceed 4.8

years for girls (see Exhibit 3); girls are also less likely to be enrolled in school in rural areas (HCP, 2022). However, girls tend to have higher achievement rates in primary and middle school compared to boys. Dropout rates among girls are generally higher as they advance toward middle school but are lower than boys once in middle and secondary school (see Exhibit 4) (HCP, 2022; MoE, 2021). The disparity in dropout rates between genders during the transition from upper primary to middle school in rural areas can be attributed to several socio-economic, political, and institutional factors, discussed further in this report. In light of these problems, specific programs and policies of non-formal education, such as the Second Chance School and the “Forsa pour tous” program, have been implemented to reintegrate students who were excluded from the system, significantly reducing dropout rates (MoE, 2021).

Exhibit 4. Dropout Rates



As it pertains to *Bridge*, this means girls are statistically less likely to reach middle school than boys; although once in middle school, boys are less likely to continue than girls. Gendered inequalities that arise before students arrive in middle school persist with lifelong impacts. Girls are less likely than boys to complete primary education, less likely to be literate, less likely to reach higher education, and less likely to be

employed—concerns that could be missed if looking at middle school dropout rates and academic statistics alone (HCP, 2022; INE-CSEFRS, 2018; MoE, 2021). Addressing barriers such as cultural norms and limited access to and retention in quality education for girls in some areas is crucial. Further statistics on gender disparities are provided in Annex 2.

3.2 DISABILITY DISPARITIES

Morocco has made efforts to promote disability inclusion in education, although significant challenges remain. Despite the MoE's supportive policies and some programming to date, persons with disabilities are less likely to enroll in or complete education than those without disabilities, and this marginalization is greater for girls with disabilities than boys with disabilities. Girls with disabilities experience greater exclusion from education, with a rate of 29.1%, compared to boys with disabilities at 49.2% (INE-CSEFRS, 2019). Furthermore, as disability stigma particularly affects girls and young women, underreporting of exclusion is more common among this group (USAID, 2018).

In terms of enrollment disparities among children with known disabilities, a significant difference between urban and rural areas exists, similar to the case for statistics on gender. The enrollment rate of children with known disabilities in urban areas stands at 49.5%; in rural areas, it is notably lower at 32.9% (INE-CSEFRS, 2019).³ Furthermore, girls with disabilities residing in rural areas experience the lowest rates of school attendance, educational attainment, and literacy (ESCWA, 2018). This indicates additional barriers and factors at play, resulting in even greater marginalization and limited opportunities for education for girls and women with disabilities in rural areas. Further statistics on disability disparities are provided in Annex 2.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 LAWS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES

4.1.1 LAWS AND POLICIES RELATED TO EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Laws and Policies Promoting Equity and Inclusion

Effective education based on equal opportunities is a significant political and societal issue for achieving equity and inclusion in education, eradicating disparities, promoting an inclusive and supportive society, and considering the school as “a vector that produces social ties” (Bourqia, 2016, p. 3). Morocco has implemented several laws and policies to promote the equity and inclusion of boys, girls, and students with disabilities in the educational system (a complete list is in Annex 2). These foundational frameworks have improved access to and quality of education. However, significant challenges remain, such as low literacy rates, high dropout rates, and inadequate secondary and higher education (CSEFRS, 2015). In addition, limited budgets allocated for inclusive education and heavy reliance on NGOs and civil society to educate children with disabilities creates significant discrepancies in the quality of the services provided (Hayes & Bulat, 2017). Furthermore, the MoE for a long time delegated the responsibility of educating students with disabilities to associations, creating a lack of regulation and mediation and resulting in confusion regarding the roles and responsibilities of various actors, including NGOs and OPDs (INE-CSEFRS, 2019).

The MoE has spearheaded a variety of initiatives to promote equity and inclusion, such as Ministerial notes encouraging women to apply for leadership positions, the creation of communication tools and awareness campaigns on gender equality in the education system, and the establishment of the National Observatory for the Fight Against Violence in Schools in 2015 (ONDH, ONDE, & UNICEF, 2019). Also, the MoE has produced a handbook for educational officials at the regional and provincial levels to implement actions toward inclusive education, such as the concept of inclusive schools, resource rooms for qualification and support, the Individual Pedagogical Program (IPP), and the enrollment of children with disabilities, including the monitoring and evaluation of these children's educational journey (MoE, 2019). Stakeholders recognized the Government of Morocco's efforts toward equity and inclusion, including a school director stating, “We have received circulars

³ Another likely factor is the under-identification of disability in rural areas, given the relatively limited access to diagnostic services.

emphasizing the inclusion of students with disabilities, exam accommodations, and the setup of listening and mediation committees to establish equity for all.”

Overall, these policies and institutional practices demonstrate a robust legal framework and a government commitment to promoting GESI in the learning environment, ensuring that all students in Morocco have equal opportunities. However, the practical application of these laws to ensure equal access to school is limited (USAID, 2021). Based on the report from the Cour des Comptes (2022), the inclusive education program has faced significant shortcomings, including the lack of clear goals, timelines, and cost projections. In addition, the legislative texts do not include legal safeguards to protect the rights of children to education and do not mandate the adoption of pedagogical standards in all schools with strict law enforcement and due process. An AREF representative confirmed this saying, *“Inclusive education is still personalized more than institutionalized.”*

Gender and Disability Biases in Policies

Regarding gender, despite the enabling policy environment and the projects that reflect the desire to apply recommendations, challenges persist in the implementation process (Bourqia, 2016). Initiatives targeting equal opportunities mainly in rural areas were limited by inadequate coverage of needs, fragmented actors, unclear distribution of responsibilities, and fragile sources of funding (MoE, 2022). In addition, some policies interfere with gender-equitable access to education that is also linked to poverty. For example, when the state grants a limited number of Tayssir scholarships per family, anecdotal reports suggest that parents favor continuing their sons’ schooling over that of their daughters’, especially, for example, in nomadic households (ONDH, 2020).

Concerning disability, even if Morocco has ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and adopted some policies to mitigate systemic inequalities, bias can arise from implicit or explicit assumptions, stereotypes, or discriminatory practices, resulting in unequal access or treatment for some groups. The medical and charitable approach toward disability still prevails instead of the bio-psycho-social approach (INE-CSEFRS, 2019). Additionally, the framework for inclusive education does not explicitly address the least-restrictive environment concept. However, it entitles students to placement in a range of settings, including special schools and home-based or hospital settings, when there is a medical requirement (USAID, 2021). The right to education then is at risk of being denied by school directors and teachers, who possess the power of decision-making for school placement (INE-CSEFRS, 2019; ONDH, ONDE, & UNICEF, 2019).

Moreover, the cost in obtaining a medical certificate diagnosing a child’s disability can create barriers to educational access for low-income families who face financial constraints (Hayes & Bulat, 2017). A limited list of disability categories in the Moroccan inclusive education framework risks unintentionally discriminating against some disabilities not named (e.g., speech or emotional disabilities), and bias and discrimination can limit educational access for some groups, such as those with intellectual disability. In the Family Code of 2016, a person with an intellectual disability is designated as “feeble-minded,” having no capacity for legal representation (UNESCO, 2021). A middle school director said, *“We don’t get students with intellectual disabilities, maybe because they drop out at the primary level.”* Another director revealed his perception of intellectual disability by stating: *“Thank God we don’t have intellectual disabilities, which are the hardest to deal with!”*

In addition, stakeholders noted that without clear guidelines the decision-making processes in identifying and placing students with disabilities can be susceptible to biases, as personal opinions and subjective factors may influence decisions at the discretion of school directors and teachers without professional qualifications. An association representative shared, *“Inclusive education is related to people’s willingness rather than the system. Some school administrative staff are not engaged because they are not obligated.”* Respondents recommended promoting comprehensive policies and developing specialized guidelines combined with training for all staff as essential to ensure equal treatment in schools.

4.1.2 CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT WITH UDL

USAID conducted the Morocco Curriculum and Capacity-Building Activity (CCA) in collaboration with the Moroccan MoE to review and recommend best practices for aligning middle school curriculum with newly revised primary school curriculum and to improve inclusiveness and accessibility for all learners (USAID, 2021). The CCA prioritized three key analyses, including examining Arabic literacy teaching and learning materials (TLMs); investigating science, math, engineering, and technology (STEM) curriculum for coherence and continuity; and examining the extent to which the new curriculum aligns with accessibility and inclusivity standards. Findings show that the curriculum and TLMs do not fully align with UDL principles, a form of inclusive pedagogy, especially regarding representation and engagement. The study found that the presentation modes in the curriculum mainly focus on visual presentations, while other modes, such as auditory and hands-on activities, are neglected. The learning and assessment activities do not adequately cater to the diverse needs of learners, with limited opportunities for group or collaborative work. Engagement is also limited, with few practical and real-life experiences and peer learning and self-assessment opportunities. Finally, the available teacher guides offer limited support on how to accommodate the diverse needs of students.

Fieldwork revealed that most teachers were unfamiliar with UDL, although many use personal initiative to facilitate creative and engaging learning environments for their students. Teachers' perspectives on innovative teaching methods and the significance of UDL principles vary, underscoring the necessity for a pedagogical shift and flexibility to address students' diverse needs effectively. In focus groups, teachers shared the importance of using innovative and interactive teaching methods, such as dramatic play, videos, and pictures, to help students understand better. A science teacher said, "Teaching methods must be diversified according to students' needs. I try to explain the same lesson in different ways and adapt my teaching to motivate the students and keep them engaged." Others perceive UDL and differentiated instruction or pedagogy as synonymous;⁴ an inspector stated, "Sometimes things are unconsciously implemented, and all these principles of UDL can be part of the differentiated pedagogy that teachers must master."

"We need a pedagogical shift, moving away from traditional lecturing to using teaching strategies, technology, and activities."
– AREF respondent

However, teacher respondents also outlined some barriers to implementing a UDL-aligned curriculum. Students still are pressured to memorize lessons to understand them because "the exam questions are based on memorizing more than understanding," a science teacher said. A different science teacher recognized that students should be "learning by doing," but noted challenges with extensive content and pressure to complete the curriculum, which can result in teacher-centered instruction. An Arabic teacher shared that the textbook is dry and pointed to the need for teachers to "be diligent and supplement it with examples and models focusing on the quality rather than the quantity."

An AREF representative summed up the importance of UDL principles and diverse teaching methods stating, "We need to deal with the curriculum in different ways and make students love the subject areas by teaching it in a fun way. We need a pedagogical shift, moving away from traditional lecturing to using teaching strategies, technology, and activities." Another added, "We need to apply UDL in mentality and cultures," pointing to flexible and accommodating mindsets to address the needs of diverse students.

4.1.3 CURRICULUM EQUITY PROMOTION AND BIASES

The CCA review (USAID, 2021) showed that the current TLMs used in Moroccan schools do not adequately reflect the country's cultural, social, and language diversity. This lack of representation

⁴ UDL is not synonymous with differentiated pedagogy, despite common stakeholder perception. UDL is a strategy to support *all* students, while differentiation is intended to support *some* students.

“We need curriculum that considers universal learning, promotes accepting difference, and eliminates negative representations and charitable approaches. We need to stop showing images of perfect people.”

– MoE respondent

limits opportunities for students to learn about and respect different views and the historical and cultural achievements of different social and cultural groups. Additionally, the teacher guides do not provide guidance on supporting language learners. The study showed a limited representation of gender and disability. Although textbooks and TLMs include equal use of gendered pronouns, they perpetuate gender stereotypes in roles and contributions to society, as women were predominantly shown in traditional roles like mothers, teachers, and nurses while men were portrayed in positions of leadership and in high-profile careers such as doctors, engineers, and scientists (USAID, 2021). Moreover, curriculum and TLMs include

limited representation of disability and few references to people with disabilities and their roles and contributions to society (USAID, 2021). In another study, an analysis of Moroccan preschool textbooks showed that in images women appear in more domestic and leisure settings than in professional ones (Cobano-Delgado & Lorent-Bedmar, 2019).

The study uncovered similar findings and diverse perspectives regarding curriculum equity. Stakeholders were confusing the terms “equality” (providing the same to all) and “equity” (providing what each child needs). For instance, a school director stated, *“I don’t think the curriculum is inequitable as it is treating students in the same way,”* thus overlooking the concept of equity. On the other hand, others recognize the lack of equity, as expressed by an AREF representative who suggested the curriculum treats all students the same way.

Curriculum Representation of Gender and Disability

This study affirms the literature above that notes an imbalance in gender and disability representation in curriculum. About gender representation, an AREF representative said, *“Our curriculum still reinforces the stereotype of girls in Moroccan society.”* Many teachers expressed concerns regarding this representation, as they observed that textbook content continues to portray girls *“in the kitchen.”* At the same time, depictions of boys include them engaging with friends outside the home. One teacher confirmed, *“There are texts that have women but not necessarily under an equality lens.”* An inspector shared, *“I wouldn’t go as far as calling it discrimination, but there are issues of representation.”* Additionally, a women’s association representative proposed using texts and images that align with the values Morocco wants to transmit to students, considering the international human rights conventions adopted by the country.

Concerning cultural or ethnic backgrounds, an inspector indicated that textbooks primarily have pictures of white characters with no people of color. He said, *“When designing textbooks, we need to diversify the characters and the cultural elements that students are supposed to learn.”* Regarding disability inclusion, a student stated, *“There is no representation of people with disabilities in textbooks.”* An AREF representative indicated that the curriculum still shows students with disabilities as having their place in specialized centers rather than general education schools.

Acceptance of Difference in Curricular and Extracurricular Texts and Activities

Stakeholders recommended integrating concepts of social-emotional learning (SEL) that they called “value transmission” (respect of others, tolerance, accepting difference) in the curriculum and TLMs to achieve equity and inclusion. An association representative stated, *“The curriculum must provide purposeful texts that include value transmission.”* A school director highlighted that middle school competency standards encompass the value of accepting others, emphasizing the need for integration across all subject areas.

Additionally, a MoE representative said, *“We need curriculum that considers universal learning, promotes accepting difference, and eliminates negative representations and charitable approaches. We need to stop showing images of perfect people.”* Instead, she recommends that the curriculum targets peer support to improve acceptance, cooperation, support, and confidence skills and to guide students toward

excellence. Similarly, to encourage positive attitudes toward disability, a special school director said, “We need to create positive dynamics by raising awareness and positive energy by training youth in disability culture.”

Furthermore, numerous stakeholders emphasized the significance of continuous extracurricular activities as an essential component of the curriculum, enabling the achievement of objectives related to value transmission and the acquisition of life skills, particularly for students residing in rural areas. An AREF representative believes that “acceptance of difference starts from the textbooks and is reinforced in extracurricular activities.” Another representative confirmed the positive impact of these activities, emphasizing that “extracurricular activities also help mitigate the risk of school dropout and violence.”

Curriculum Integration of Gender Equity, Disability Inclusion, and Climate Change Topics

Efforts should be made to promote gender and disability inclusion in the curriculum by incorporating diverse perspectives, challenging stereotypes, and providing inclusive learning materials and activities. Teachers highlighted the lack of contextual culture and authenticity in the curriculum and TLMs, emphasizing the importance of integrating equity and inclusion principles into science subjects.

Teachers and inspectors also emphasized the connection between science curriculum, gender equity, and disability inclusion. A science teacher said, “The life and earth sciences should contribute to personal development as it includes medical and ecological education.” A school director shared that students are interested in subjects that include issues related to their teenage transitional period, such as relationships with their nuclear family. Another teacher pointed to science as helping students understand themselves and others, such as people with disabilities. A science teacher and an inspector addressed the indirect link between science units and gender equality, pointing out that the reproductive health and genetics units implicitly draw attention to the importance of roles and complementarity between both sexes. He indicated that genetics covers some syndromes, but the disability-inclusion side is absent. An AREF respondent said, “In middle school, sexual and reproductive education should not be taboo to help girls understand themselves and their needs. The curriculum needs to reinforce the social status of women and men.” However, a school director and an English teacher in an urban area indicated that gender equity remains taboo because of a perceived conflict with religion.

Moreover, inspectors recommended reviewing curriculum, considering the characteristics of youth middle schoolers’ development, and integrating concepts of equity, women’s rights, disability inclusion, and climate change: “Children with disabilities are particularly at risk of harm from natural disasters related to climate change, exacerbating existing inequalities, and affecting multiple rights and access to services” (UNICEF, 2022). The impact of climate change, including food and water shortages and risk of natural disasters, threatens children’s rights, affecting their access to food, water, sanitation, education, and health (ONDH, ONDE, & UNICEF, 2019). Furthermore, gender inequalities can intersect with climate change impacts, leading to disparities in educational opportunities for girls and women. One inspector said, “Global competencies such as gender equality and climate change are less frequent in middle school than in high school. There is a need to open up to global issues.” Inclusive and gender-responsive education policies and practices can ensure that all students, regardless of disability or gender, have equal access to quality education that prepares them to address climate change issues and contributes to sustainable development (UNICEF, 2022). Integrating climate change education into the curriculum can raise awareness about environmental challenges, promote sustainable practices, and empower students to become agents of change.

Gender and Disability in Accommodations and Testing

Efforts have been made to use gender-inclusive language in exams and assessments. “At the level of exams, we make a differentiation between boys and girls and use gender-inclusive language (male and female pronouns) in providing assessments and directions,” a school director stated. However, a science teacher revealed, “In the physics curriculum, the use of male pronouns is predominant.”

Regarding accommodations for national certification exams and continuous assessments, educators mentioned the implementation of national exam accommodations such as multiple-choice questions, extra time, and having an assistant. Although they indicated that they received directions for continuous assessment accommodations, they stated they need guidance and a reference framework for the more difficult and multiple subject areas in middle school. In addition, an OPD representative mentioned that adapted exams for 6th and 9th grades still have one version for all types of disabilities. He added that the Massar platform should specify the exam components that should be waived based on the abilities of each student with disabilities (e.g., writing for blind students). Other respondents recommended additional pedagogical guides that included guidelines for adapting exercises and assessments for students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Curriculum Alignment between Upper Primary and Middle Schools

Moroccan students' performance on international standardized assessments suggests that socioeconomic and geographic factors are more predictive of academic performance than is gender. Specifically, on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2019 test for 8th grade, both males and females had similar average scores across domains and higher performance in science than in math. However, boys and girls from rural school areas showed a disparity in performance from boys and girls in urban school areas and scored 15 to 35 points lower across each subdomain. As for the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 test for Moroccan 7th, 8th, and 9th grade students, girls outperformed boys in reading while gender differences in math and science were negligible. PISA data suggests that socioeconomic disadvantage and rural location are significant contributors to diminished performance on this assessment (OECD, 2019).

Of great concern—for both the above international tests as well as for national policies—is the significantly lower student performance than prescribed curriculum standards or benchmarks. For example, the 2022–2026 roadmap states that 30% of students in the public education system mastered the curriculum by the end of primary school while only 10% of students mastered the curriculum by the end of middle school in 2019, based on the National Program for Assessment of Students' Achievement (PNEA) targeting 6th and 9th grade students. These results emphasize the need to enhance the educational system's quality and to bridge the gap between elementary and middle school curriculum to align with international standards.

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of aligning the curriculum between upper primary and middle school levels to facilitate students' transition to middle school. An association representative said, “Middle school students have a lot of difficulties related to basic skills they were supposed to learn at the primary level.” A school director stated, “We have a 90% success rate in primary and only 60% in middle school because students don't acquire the competencies in primary [school] to get to middle school.” This alignment is also related the language used in teaching science classes. A science teacher shared, “The language change in science curriculum from Arabic in primary school to French in middle school is against equal opportunities and constitutes a language inequity for students who can be good in science but have a low level in French.”

“The language change in science curriculum from Arabic in primary school to French in middle school... constitutes a language inequity for students who can be good in science but have a low level in French.”
– Science teacher

Stakeholder recommendations:

- Promote accountability for policy implementation by designing activities that directly link to policy goals related to both gender and disability. Provide clear guidelines for multidisciplinary support for students with Individual Pedagogical Programs (IPPs), including training for teachers on pedagogy and accommodations.
- Design curriculum that illustrates diverse and equitable representations of gender, disability, and ethnicity, and align assessments and accommodations to value learner diversity. Integrate SEL “value transmission” and climate change themes throughout subjects, and ensure lower middle school curriculum provides academic and linguistic support for students transitioning from primary school.
- Design curriculum that presents content in multiple ways, uses interactive and UDL-aligned teaching methods, and prioritizes quality of content over quantity. Ensure assessment approaches are aligned to reduce the focus on memorization.

4.2 CULTURAL NORMS AND BELIEFS

4.2.1 PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER AND DISABILITY AND SUPPORT OF EDUCATION

Moroccan parents are increasingly advocating for their children’s rights, and growing awareness is crucial in driving positive change and promoting equal opportunities for all children to receive the education and healthcare they deserve (ONDH, ONDE, & UNICEF, 2019). Parents’ socioeconomic status, the rural/urban environment, ideologies, life experiences, cultural context, and educational background significantly shape their household roles and parenting quality. These factors can create inequities among students, affecting their access to knowledge, language exposure, and familiarity with the educational system and content areas. Recognizing and addressing these inequities is essential to promote educational equity and ensure all students have equal opportunities to succeed (INE-CSEFRS, 2018; ONDH, ONDE, & UNICEF, 2019). The analysis reveals that educational stakeholders know the importance of education in challenging negative cultural beliefs. An AREF representative stated, “We have negative manifestations in our society. We need to prepare society through education.”

Parents’ Perceptions of Gender

School dropout rates for boys alarmingly increase starting in middle school, with a dropout rate of 9.7% among middle school boys compared to only 7.4% among middle school girls (MoE, 2021). Possible reasons include boys’ early employment to sustain poor families, a desire to migrate to seek better social status and success, or widespread prevalence of addiction exacerbated by insufficient health interventions (ONDH, ONDE, & UNICEF, 2019). Interestingly, boys’ dropout rates or these possible reasons were not mentioned by any parent respondents, who generally focused more on the disadvantages faced by girls, even when prompted to discuss the situation of boys. For example, a mother pointed out that academic achievement is not the only marker of relative success or advantage, stating, “It is a matter of considering the special situation of girls, not a matter of academic excellence.”

Cultural and gender stereotypes, poverty, parents’ concern for their daughters’ reputation and security, as well as domestic

responsibilities can limit girls’ education at the primary or middle school levels (ONDH, ONDE, & UNICEF, 2019).

Despite the higher rate of dropout by boys on a national level, in rural areas, girls are less likely to be enrolled in middle school than boys (MoE, 2021), a phenomenon also observed by stakeholders. Parents sometimes prefer their daughters to stop their studies at the 6th grade due to financial or security issues, especially rural parents who need to

“When I contacted a girl’s parent due to misbehavior, he told me, ‘Leave her; we just want her to get married.’”
– Teacher

“Parents are afraid for their girls to live and study far from home.”
– Science teacher

send their daughters to another city to live in dorms (Dar Taliba) to continue their middle school studies. *“Parents are afraid for their girls to live and study far from home,”* a science teacher said. An association representative stated that there are some dangerous areas where girls are exposed to harassment in the streets on their way to school, which makes the family lose trust in provincial security. However, stakeholders do acknowledge that girls tend to perform better than boys when given the opportunity to continue their education.

Other families believe that girls only need to know basic skills like writing and reading to be able to help their future children with homework (ONDH, ONDE, & UNICEF, 2019). In addition, stakeholders mentioned child labor concerns, especially for girls from rural areas who are sent to the cities to be employed as maids. Others mentioned the cultural norm of early marriage for girls, as it impedes girls’ access to education. In fact, underage marriage is considered a cause for girls’ dropout with higher risks in rural areas and makes up 7.53% of total marriages in Morocco, without counting informal marriages not officially registered (ONDH, 2022). A teacher respondent gave an example of how these early marriage trends impact the education system, sharing, *“When I contacted a girl’s parent due to misbehavior, he told me, ‘Leave her; we just want her to get married.’”*

Parents’ Perceptions of Disability

Socio-cultural beliefs and representations of disability can fuel parents with feelings of shame and guilt regarding the situation and future of their children with disabilities. These lead to parents’ preference to enroll their children in special schools to protect them from bullying and to benefit from trained professionals (INE-CSEFRS, 2019). Educators shared that cultural beliefs and behaviors can lead some parents to hide their children’s disabilities for reasons of stigma and denial of disability, while others make these decisions to protect their children from the perceived dangers of discrimination and microaggressions by those at school. Cultural beliefs could also lead students to feel ashamed of having a sibling with disabilities, as mentioned by a school director. In addition, an AREF representative revealed, *“Parents of students without disabilities would refuse that their children get educated in the same classrooms with students with disabilities, fearing negative behavioral influence”* or *“wasting the time of other students without disabilities,”* as one parent mentioned. The stigma associated with disability can hinder effective communication between parents and schools, impacting schools’ abilities to provide necessary services (USAID, 2021). Educators and NGO representatives stressed the importance of family awareness campaigns to foster equity, inclusion, positive attitudes toward disability, and parental engagement in their children’s education.

Furthermore, the accessibility of disability diagnosis is a concern, particularly for families in rural areas who often face financial constraints in accessing expert evaluations and arranging transportation to other cities for diagnostic purposes. The father of a student with disabilities complained about the low quality of education. He shared, *“Talking to teachers about our children’s needs doesn’t change anything because they respond that they can’t do more.”* Therefore, *“Parents lose hope in their children’s learning capacity and decide to let them stay home,”* an NGO representative stated.

The study also affirms secondary data concluding that girls with disabilities are the most vulnerable student population. A special school director shared his perceptions about this population: girls with disabilities are less likely to be married due to stigma. He stated, *“Girls with disabilities are ashamed because of disability stigma and inferiority. They have difficulties understanding themselves, and they are deprived of reproduction and motherhood.”* He continued to share that girls can live with feelings of shame and a sense of inferiority and can suffer from excessive family protection that hinders their social integration. An NGO representative referred to girls with disabilities feeling insecure and that they risked harassment in schools and stated, *“Imagine how society will treat a girl with a disability who is pregnant!”* These findings, as well as the findings around gender, echo the importance of combatting stereotypical beliefs and promoting an inclusive school environment.

4.2.2 STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION AND CAREER

Students' perceptions of education and careers in Morocco vary significantly based on their experiences, cultural backgrounds, gender, disabilities, and socio-economic factors. High dropout rates from secondary education and high levels of youth unemployment (26.5% for 15–24-year-olds in 2017) are concerning (ETF, 2020; HCP, 2018). The absence of equal opportunities regarding social mobility; the lack of motivation, including frustration stemming from academic failures; and the lack of confidence in the educational system and its connection to success can be additional factors leading to students dropping out of school (ONDH, ONDE, & UNICEF, 2019). Additionally, the 2014 National Survey on Disability (MSFFD, 2015) showed 30.8% of students with disabilities felt their education was disrupted by hostility from peers, parents, teachers, and school administrators.

Data from interviews and focus groups show that students value education. They enjoy learning Arabic and English and benefit from effective communication and positive teacher-student relationships, cooperative learning, and advice to improve motivation and self-confidence. In addition, students shared their perceptions of education, highlighting its importance in terms of cultural exposure, language acquisition, employment opportunities, personal growth, and social status: *“Without education, we will be rejected people,”* a middle school boy said. Despite the fact that *“teachers use multiple teaching methods and activities to encourage student participation in all activities”* (according to a school director), students complained about lecturing and recommended interactive ways of learning, with increased ability to make choices and self-direct learning.

Additionally, students have raised concerns about certain teachers prioritizing high-performing students, unintentionally making others feel marginalized. Students with disabilities report feeling excluded and being segregated in the classroom, often due to teachers lacking the necessary skills to engage and inspire their love for learning. These issues are further exacerbated by teachers who demonstrate a lack of inclusivity, dividing students based on grades and participation levels. Students shared, *“Some teachers are not inclusive; they separate us according to grades and to the students who participate or not.”* Therefore, it is crucial to provide accommodations for students' needs and offer a broader range of activities to promote participation and engagement to address these challenges.

“Talk to us nicely, treat us well, don't make us feel different.”
– A student recommendation for teachers

Students also emphasized the importance of having good communication with their teachers, which enhances their interest in the subjects. An AREF representative stressed the same idea, giving the example of a girl who stutters by explaining that *“building relationships between teachers and students is crucial in developing their self-confidence.”* Students called for teachers to *“talk to us nicely, treat us well, don't make us feel different.”* They also pushed back on the traditional teaching approach and described valuing multiple teaching methods. One student said, *“Lecturing is boring, and we prefer to work in small groups that allow us to interact with friends.”* Similarly, an AREF representative recommended, *“We need to create different educational pathways for students based on strength-based approaches.”* Acknowledging students' unique differences and strengths is essential to provide effective support and guidance tailored to their needs, interests, and abilities.

Students further shared their need for advising and counseling and said, *“We need help with guidance in scientific and literary tracks.”* Aside from external supports, students have also succeeded in supporting each other academically. For example, a girl described her experience supporting a peer with a disability, saying, *“I helped him during the 9th-grade regional examination. I wrote his test answers for him. We had meetings together to get to know one another and understand how each one of us communicates. As a result, this student was later placed first in the region. We were very proud.”*

4.2.3 TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD GENDER AND DISABILITY

The analysis findings indicate that teachers generally believed that girls and boys have equal rights in terms of schooling, although they are aware of the cultural norms that hinder girls' participation. However, some educational stakeholders—more so than parent respondents—believe that gender

inequality is reversed, with boys currently being sidelined because girls are outnumbering and outsmarting boys in schools. “Girls are more present and more interested in learning, and their grades reflect that,” and “Currently, it’s boys who need support,” two different inspectors said. These perspectives suggest the need for a holistic and contextualized approach to gender inclusion. Certain supports and approaches may be needed to respond to boys’ dropout rates and academic performance in some subjects once at the middle school level, while other supports and approaches may alleviate the fact that girls are less likely to reach middle school and are more likely to face harmful cultural norms.

Educators had mixed perceptions regarding inclusive education and expressed different attitudes toward students with disabilities. Some teachers interviewed in the field think that students with disabilities need to be placed in special classes or schools because of their behaviors, as mainstream schools do not address their needs adequately. Others embraced inclusive education to prevent discriminatory isolation and exclusion of students, foster equal access to opportunities, and foster a sense of solidarity among all students. They recognized that it requires training, varied educational resources, assistive and accessible technology, extracurricular activities, accommodations, collaboration, and family communication. However, despite their enthusiasm, many educators expressed a lack of knowledge and understanding of implementing inclusive practices and effectively managing classrooms with diverse students. This data echoes a recent study showing teachers’ perceptions of inclusive education was influenced by many factors, including the type and severity of disabilities, inadequate training opportunities, lack of resources, the MoE’s limited funding and support, and teachers’ limited involvement in policy and curriculum development processes (Achamrah, 2022).

“We need positive attitudes and relationships with children with disabilities to gain their trust and believe in their abilities.”
– Special school director

Teachers perceived student behavior as a disruptive challenge in an inclusive classroom. An NGO respondent said that the lack of diagnosis puts students with invisible disabilities in the category of “bad/turbulent students,” which negatively affects their self-esteem and fails to adequately respond to their needs. Recognizing these challenges, a school director stated that teachers need to provide an educational environment characterized by empathy, flexibility, and openness to cater to the diverse needs of students. Yet, some teachers are unwilling or unable to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities. One inspector cited an example of a girl with a disability whose teacher did not assign any activities for her. He further said, “Students with disabilities need to be given the chance to engage with lessons and, therefore, access learning.” According to some teacher respondents, teachers who are more engaged with inclusive education have personal experience with disability, like being parents of children with disabilities.

Changing the negative representations of disability and valuing students’ strengths are crucial for their academic success. “Accepting students with disabilities constitutes half of the route of their schooling. We need to accept them as different but not unable to learn,” an AREF representative revealed. Another emphasized the importance of valuing students’ strengths stating, “These students are smart and can sense teachers’ attitudes that affect them psychologically.” Therefore, there is a need for greater awareness and acceptance of disability within the educational system and for training teachers in supporting and including students with disabilities.

Stakeholder recommendations:

- Use awareness-raising campaigns, school communications with families, and the curriculum itself to challenge harmful stereotypes about gender and disability, including cultural beliefs about child marriage, and stigmatization of vulnerable groups, and to encourage parental engagement in children's education.
- Encourage school cultures that value positive relationships, strengths-based approaches, effective communication, guidance and counseling, and peer support and build students' self-confidence.
- Provide educators with comprehensive training on gender-responsive pedagogy, classroom management, inclusive school management and leadership, and acceptance and inclusion of disability.

4.3 GENDER ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND TIME USE

4.3.1 GENDER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

The study shows mixed findings about gender-stereotyped tasks in classrooms. When asked about student responsibilities in classrooms, a girl denied that teachers assign any gendered tasks and said, *"Our responsibilities in the classroom are based on choice and volunteering."* However, a female association member said, *"Some teachers still give gender-stereotyped tasks to students: physical work for boys, paperwork for girls."* An inspector pointed out that boys are reluctant to volunteer in undertaking classroom responsibilities and said, *"When you observe a classroom, the girls are always the ones who take the lead and volunteer to conduct tasks towards the success of the lesson."* One interpretation of these statements points to girls' internalizing their traditional gender roles of being helpers, suggesting a need for educators to counter these perceptions and encourage boys' voluntary participation in classroom tasks.

Gendered roles extend to parents: for example, some teachers observed limited paternal involvement in their children's education, especially in rural areas. *"Most fathers do not support their children nor communicate with the school,"* a teacher said. *"The causes of students suffering are the family. The mother alone is present during the absence of the father. On the other hand, the mother does not have control like the father,"* a school director elaborated. These gendered roles extend to parents of children with disabilities, where an NGO representative observed that mothers are more involved in these children's education than the fathers.

4.3.2 GENDER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OUTSIDE OF SCHOOLS

The data shows that girls face challenges studying at home due to additional responsibilities not commonly held by boys. Teachers shared that girls must help their families with house and agricultural work and care for younger siblings, especially in rural areas. A female student confirmed that girls are responsible to help with chores. Parents often reinforce these gender stereotypes. *"Some parents tell their daughters: 'Go wash the dishes. Your brother is playing outside; he is a man,' and make them internalize this stereotype,"* a teacher shared.

Negative masculinity also affects mothers' support for their daughters' education, especially among mothers with low levels of education. A women's association representative pointed to negative masculinity and *machismo*, sometimes internalized by mothers who do not want their daughters to continue their studies. This shows the complex societal dynamics that can hinder girls' educational aspirations and the potential for education to challenge gender stereotypes that could otherwise be perpetuated over the generations.

4.3.3 TEACHER/PRINCIPAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Women are underrepresented in systems-level decision-making, as teachers in rural schools. Women accounted for only 26% at the research faculty level in the 2016–2017 academic year (Sabbar, 2021), and encounter obstacles and prejudices even as they reach these highest levels (Benmassoud & Larouz, 2018). This disparity can flow down to decision-making in the educational system and its development toward equity and social justice, where “policy remains male-dominated.” (Ennaji, 2018). At the school level, female teachers make up 42.9% of primary school teachers and only 34.6% of middle school teachers in rural areas, with 62% and 45.4% respectively in urban areas in 2018 (INE-CSEFRS, 2021). This points to the lower representation of women in the rural teaching workforce.

Some female teachers face unique household responsibilities and commuting challenges, especially in rural areas. “*They either carpool or take taxis to get to school. They also have additional work at home,*” a school director shared. A male school director expressed concern about staff shortage during maternity leave, saying, “*There is a high number of women teachers, but if women make up the majority of teachers, there will be a risk of maternity leave that will affect schools due to a lack of staffing.*” Thus female teachers encounter unique challenges and stereotypes associated with their gender. To promote equity in the workforce, it is crucial to establish support mechanisms for female teachers, raise awareness about gender equity, and address staff shortages during maternity leave. Additionally, creating equitable, supportive environments that accommodate the needs of all teachers is essential.

Furthermore, cultural norms limit some women’s access to leadership roles in schools. A female teacher recognized that leadership positions are often given to men due to cultural and social norms. School directors alluded to women’s reluctance to pursue leadership positions as directors, citing the challenges associated with the transition. They noted that the required training and remote assignments often do not align with women who seek stability and have established families in a specific area. Yet some directors themselves may unknowingly perpetuate biases that limit women teachers’ potential, such as in the case of a school director who claimed to be gender-neutral in his decisions but assigned more male than female teachers to 9th grade because of the perception that in rural culture male students of this age do not like to receive orders from female teachers.

Perhaps in response to these gender biases among some administrators, female teachers seem more aware than male teachers of the importance of gender equity in their schools and describe feeling responsible for correcting gender stereotypes and promoting educational guidance for career development. For example, a female teacher recommended to “*focus on educational advising for females to encourage their career development and employment.*” Indeed, approaches that look at female teachers’ potential and contributions over deficit-based perspectives could promote increased equity for female teachers in the workforce.

Stakeholder recommendations: Support schools to become leaders modeling gender equity principles by supporting and promoting female teachers to positions of authority, recruiting and retaining dedicated female and male teachers, promoting both mothers’ and fathers’ school involvement, and assigning equal roles and responsibilities to male and female staff and students.

4.4 ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER ASSETS AND RESOURCES

4.4.1 BARRIERS TO EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Desire for More Teacher Training

Teachers need continuous professional development and support in implementing evidence-based inclusive approaches such as UDL (USAID, 2021) and gender-centric approaches (Ennaji, 2018). Since the inclusive education reform in 2019, training has been organized at the national level and focused on the acceptance of disability, definition of disability types, and principles of inclusive

education, as stated by a MoE representative. However, school directors, inspectors, and teachers perceive these trainings to be limited in duration (i.e., one day is not enough), scope, and content to be practical more than theoretical. In addition, gender-responsive approaches are limited by teachers' background knowledge and erroneous beliefs that gender problems no longer exist (Ennaji, 2018). Stakeholders complained that *"Teachers [are] left to themselves, and some of them made personal efforts to learn inclusive teaching methods, and others don't care."*

Stakeholders recommended training on:

- **Infusing inclusive culture and promoting positive attitudes:** Respondents suggested as a priority that school directors facilitate a culture of diversity and inclusion and to erase gender and disability stereotypes and deficit-based mindsets through training.
- **Pedagogical practices of equity and inclusion:** Some respondents suggested supporting teachers to integrate equity and inclusion principles in their instructional practices and using IPPs and responsive teaching methodologies to support learner needs.
- **SEL:** Respondents stated the importance of training that prepares educators to respond to middle schoolers' needs, including building healthy relationships, positive mindsets, and self-efficacy.
- **Specialist skills for students with disabilities:** Some suggested additional training on support to students with autism or using braille and sign language to support students with identified needs.

Stakeholders also emphasized the need for incentives to encourage the implementation of equity and inclusion. An NGO representative suggested training in stages (*formation en cascades*, in French) and providing incentives to inspectors as teacher trainers. *"We have competent but overwhelmed inspectors. We need to work on the quality and an accountability system for inspectors. We could offer them opportunities for empowerment and bonuses to encourage them to train teachers well,"* he said. A school director pointed to the already limited inspector visits to the school—once or twice a year—to observe and support teachers. He also shared, *"Communication between school directors, inspectors, teachers, and students is key to success."* Stakeholders recommended the involvement of civil society actors and regional committees, such as the Human Rights Council, to train teachers and school administrative staff on equity and inclusion.

Barriers Other than Training

Exhibit 5 provides a summary of other barriers beyond training.

Exhibit 5. Barriers to Equity and Inclusion

Barriers	Quotes
Theme: Access and Inclusion	
Limited availability of professionals and training to identify invisible learning disabilities.	<i>"Some parents don't admit their children's invisible disabilities while they look 'normal.'" – OPD representative</i>
Inaccessible school transportation and buildings.	<i>"School buses were not accessible for a student using a wheelchair." – NGO representative</i>
Large class sizes and lengthy curriculum hinder student participation and effective teaching methods.	<i>"Class size makes it difficult for me to organize work groups. Also, I can't allow all the students to make presentations due to their high number and the short time." – Science teacher</i>
Lack of parental involvement and cultural beliefs contribute to educational disparities.	<i>"The majority of parents aren't engaged and come only to school if there is an issue." – Parent association president</i>
Theme: Support and Resources	
Teachers use personal funds for materials in science experiments.	<i>"We use our own funds to get materials for experiments." – Teacher</i>

Barriers	Quotes
Limited library access and resources for students.	<i>“We have a library, but it is always closed, and we don’t access it. We do our research outside in internet shops.”</i> – Student
Provision of resources and training for parents.	<i>“We need to establish communication with, [do] awareness raising, and accompaniment of parents in their kids’ education.”</i> – NGO representative
Improving classroom management and discipline.	<i>“Even if the teachers explain the courses well, the lack of discipline in the classroom makes it difficult for students to learn.”</i> – Mother of a girl with disabilities
Theme: Socioeconomic Intersectional Challenges	
Intersection of gender, disability, and poverty creating vulnerabilities.	<i>“It’s not always a gender stereotype but also a poverty issue.”</i> – Women’s association representative

4.4.2 AVAILABLE AND NEEDED RESOURCES TO PROMOTE EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Schools and teachers must be equally equipped with materials and technology to accommodate students’ needs and interests, along with accessible infrastructure and resources, including both physical and digital access (ONDH, ONDE, & UNICEF, 2019). The findings highlight various challenges related to resources needed to promote equity and inclusion, including school building, accessibility and inadequate resources such as ill-equipped science labs and limited access to the library and physical education facilities. Resources are reportedly more limited in rural areas, which, as one inspector noted, impacts accessibility and inclusion: *“We have to do our best to provide learning as a human right, and students need to be provided with the proper infrastructure, so they are able to learn with their peers.”*

School Facilities and Activities

Teachers show remarkable dedication in their work despite the lack of resources, using personal funds to buy materials for science experiments due to ill-equipped labs. Students with limited library access also show initiative by using internet shops to conduct research. Moreover, schools lacked multimedia and accessible resources such as audiobooks, large print, and assistive technology.

Furthermore, both parents and NGO respondents raised concerns about the lack of equity in specific school policies, specifically regarding the participation of boys and girls with disabilities in sports. Some parents expressed, *“We need to change the assessment tools that do not accommodate students’ specific needs. An example is waiving physical education for students with limited mobility who...like to participate in sports, but our assessment tools are not adapted to their needs.”* Also, physical education facilities are monopolized by boys without disabilities and lack accommodations for students with disabilities. A teacher shared that *“students have the right to participate in sports, and we need to accommodate physical education for them.”*

“We should integrate students with disabilities through sports, which builds their self-esteem and confidence.”
– Special school director

Professional Support (Inside and Outside of Schools)

Some schools have listening and mediation committees mandated to help solve cases of bullying and discrimination. To comply with gender equity, these committees should encourage and include clear reporting mechanisms on sexual assault and menstrual health. Also, respondents suggested teachers who lead such school clubs or committees should be recognized for their efforts and incentivized to actively participate in these committees, as currently they are not.

Stakeholders indicated that schools provide pedagogical support, but students with disabilities must seek medical and rehabilitation support from specialized NGOs. Mothers of students with disabilities reported concerns about their ability to access specialized services for their children, including

speech and physical therapies, because of their financial situation. Stakeholders also highlighted the need to improve coordination between the MoE (educational stream), the Ministry of Health (medical stream), and the Ministry of Solidarity, Social Inclusion, and Family (social stream). They emphasized the need to collaborate on disability identification and service provision, recommending partnerships between schools, families, NGOs, and professionals in psycho-neurology, psychiatry, and social work. For now, stakeholders perceived NGO support of professional services to some families, although limited, was crucial in facilitating access to and participation in schools.

To avoid segregation, the MoE transitioned from integrated special education classrooms (CLIS) to inclusive classrooms with the support of resource rooms. *“We are moving from the unsuccessful CLIS that [NGOs] were totally in charge of, to the resource rooms that we are in charge of equipping,”* a MoE representative said. She explained that the resource room is not a classroom but rather a support room managed by a supervisor who coordinates the multidisciplinary team’s work (educational, medical, psychological, and social services). She emphasized the need to capitalize on the NGOs’ achievements to continuously provide services in the resource rooms. However, these rooms lack staffing and are still unavailable in middle schools because of management difficulties due to middle school teachers’ content specializations. An AREF representative called for technology, accessible materials, workshops with parents, and social and psychological support programs to be provided in these resource rooms. In addition, these rooms need to target all students with learning challenges, not only students with disabilities. *“If the resource room is allocated for students with disabilities only, then we face the risk of returning to the CLIS,”* an NGO representative said.

School Safety

School safety is a critical concern in Morocco, in terms of both safety in commuting and hygiene and sanitation at school. Other organizations have attempted to respond to these concerns, including Mobilité Club Maroc (MCM) and a father-led School Brigade initiated by USAID to promote safe school commuting (Child Health Initiative, 2018), along with initiatives to rehabilitate school water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities and promote hygiene awareness to support menstrual health and hygiene in schools (UNICEF, 2021).

In this study, girls expressed feeling unsafe. One girl stated, *“We don't feel safe in the restrooms and recess field.”* Safety concerns are due to threats of harassment, violence, and scams. One girl shared, *“Students arrive in class with weapons. We do not feel safe, especially at school dismissal.”* Another one reported feeling unsafe, saying, *“We have scammers and gamblers in the school, and we coexist with them but with fear and mistrust.”* An NGO representative noted girls’ challenges with unclean bathrooms in schools and recommended *“raising awareness about girls’ menstruation to facilitate understanding and cooperation between male and female students.”* It was also noted that the dorm initiative (Dar Taliba) is excellent but lacks adequate WASH and security.

Stakeholder recommendations: Equip schools with adequate resources to promote inclusive teaching and learning, including instructional materials and technologies for all, and adapted materials and infrastructure for some, including in resource rooms. Promote equity in extracurricular activities including sports, and support school hygiene and safety, especially for females.

4.5 PATTERNS OF POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

4.5.1 IN- AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL VIOLENCE

Based on school principals’ reporting, vandalism, fights, and intimidation are serious issues in Moroccan schools (Education Global Practice, 2019). In addition, 38% of adolescents aged 13 to 15 reported being bullied at school at least once in the past couple of months in different forms, mainly from schoolmates (UNICEF, 2018). The study shows that bullying is a concern for some students and even more for students with disabilities. Unfortunately, some parents said they prefer not to report these incidents for fear of retaliation.

Different perceptions toward bullying emerged. Some teachers indicated that bullying is rare in their classrooms, possibly due to the fear of disciplinary consequences imposed by teachers. However, many others recognized bullying as a major issue in schools. For example, a teacher declared, *“Bullying between girls is more verbal [and] it is physical between boys.”* Another teacher and member of the listening and mediation committee recognized that *“there are more bullying cases from teachers toward students.”* Another respondent shared the story of a student who committed suicide because of bullying. These statements highlight the urgent need to address bullying as a major school issue. Participants shared the following main reasons for bullying:

- **Gender stereotypes:** Female students report isolating themselves from boys to avoid harassment. High-performing girls also voiced concern about bullying and intimidation during lessons and exams if they refuse to let students cheat off them. Bullying among girls happens for showing off or in competition for academic success.
- **Disability stereotypes:** Respondents reported students with intellectual disability are particularly vulnerable, including being subject to verbal abuse through hurtful nicknames. Parents described vulnerabilities when students with disabilities come and go from school, in academic settings, in dormitories, and from impatient teachers. Some parents feel they must accompany their children to school to protect them from violence and bullying. One mother shared her daughter’s experience of being bullied by her female classmates who make fun of her disability because she does well in school. She shared that her daughter contemplated quitting school due to bullying, and her child prefers to commute from home, even if it means a longer journey, to avoid the harassment she faces in the dorms. Sadly, another girl cried while sharing that some students laugh at her because she stutters, and some teachers do not give her enough time to speak.
- **Single-parent households:** One respondent observed that students who live in single-parent households were bullied.
- **Family professions:** Children from rural areas and children from immigrant or divorced parents often face violence and verbal insults targeted at their parents’ (particularly their fathers’) professions.
- **Social status and poverty:** One respondent described vulnerabilities due to socioeconomic disadvantages that require schools to respond by providing safe and discrimination-free environments. This is corroborated by national assessment results, described above.
- **Physical safety:** A school director shared issues with the school schedule, stating, *“Because students leave home early and go home late, they can be prone to bullying or strangers’ intimidation.”* Stakeholders mentioned that girls are more vulnerable to sexual harassment, theft, and violence in the streets outside schools.

Stakeholders proposed to create educational clubs to fight behavioral issues. Discriminatory acts perpetuate harmful stereotypes and negatively impact the well-being of these children. It is crucial for educators and society to promote inclusivity, respect, and understanding and to address these instances of discrimination to create a safe and supportive environment for all students.

4.5.2 STUDENT REWARD AND PUNISHMENT SYSTEMS

A 2000 Ministerial directive prohibits corporal punishment in schools, yet reports show children are subjected to violent discipline at home, in childcare institutions, and in some schools. Furthermore, prohibiting corporal punishment in educational settings at all levels lacks practical implementation (End Corporal Punishment, 2023). Indeed, corporal punishment is culturally perceived as a powerful pedagogical tool within the family and in schools in Morocco (Save the Children Sweden, 2011).

In this study, an NGO member said some teachers punish female students by making them sit near male students. A student shared, *“Sometimes teachers are looking for the slightest excuse to get students out, and they are usually students who are not active in class or not good.”* Students also described the lack of discipline in the classroom. *“Teachers write reports to the administration about the students who are lacking discipline or they use physical punishment,”* a boy with a physical disability said. A female

student with a disability added that teachers also use other ways of punishment, like making the student stand facing the wall or by reducing grades. On the other hand, teachers expressed their frustrations regarding the prohibition of physical punishment and the limitation on dismissing students from classrooms as disciplinary measures. They highlighted that these restrictions make it challenging for them to manage student behavior effectively.

Fortunately, teachers also shared the positive methods they use to reward their students. One teacher offers students access to the mobile digital library and perceives that this initiative has created motivation and positive competition between students. *“I even offered rewards for the students who read the highest number of books,”* she said. A parent shared that some teachers use great methods to motivate students, such as offering dates (fruit). He suggested, *“Teachers should avoid violent methods of teaching and replace them with motivational ones.”* It is essential to recognize and address these concerns while simultaneously upholding the principles of positive discipline and creating a safe and respectful learning environment.

Stakeholder recommendations: Provide schools with training and resources to promote classroom management and positive discipline which facilitates safe, inclusive school environments free of bullying.

Concluding Recommendation

Despite laws and policies ensuring education for all, significant barriers still hinder total gender and disability inclusion. In light of these challenges, *Bridge* programming must implement a comprehensive and holistic approach to education that leaves no one behind. This approach should prioritize access and opportunities for all children, regardless of gender, ability, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. It requires curriculum and TLMs that are inclusive and reflective of diverse populations, along with extensive training to promote UDL principles, gender-responsive approaches, acceptance of differences, representation of diverse populations, accommodation strategies, and strength-based approaches to improve equity and inclusion in the school system. By embracing these measures reflected in the suggested GESI Action Plan below, *Bridge* can foster greater equity, meaningful participation, and inclusion of all children within the education system.

5. DRAFT GESI ACTION PLAN

OBJECTIVE 1. Enhance the Moroccan Education System’s Ability to Improve Learning Outcomes in Middle School (Grades 7–9) Arabic, English, Physics/Chemistry, and Life/Earth Sciences	Timeline⁵	Responsible Actors
Sub-Objective 1.1: Support Curricular Working Groups (WG)		
Ensure a minimum of 30% representation by women in WG candidate selection.	Y1, Q4	COP, DCOP
Invite women and persons with disabilities as WG guests, including from NGOs and OPDs, where relevant to technical scope, to ensure representation of diverse populations in curriculum development.	Y1, Q4	COP, DCOP
Sub-Objective 1.2: Promote Continuity and Integration of Curriculum		
Proposed Overarching Framework for Curriculum Development		
1.2.1 Review and Revise Curricular Frameworks		
Adapt USAID’s Equity and Inclusion Checklist for <i>Bridge</i> use. Consider Moroccan stakeholder requests for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporating value transmission/SEL • Integrating gender equity, disability inclusion, and climate change topics into curriculum • Including depiction of women and girls in active versus traditional gender roles • Providing positive and more frequent depictions of persons with disabilities • Reflecting geographic, cultural, and ethnic diversity in Morocco 	Y1, Q4	GESI Team (includes GESI Coordinator and IDP technical support)
Using the adapted checklist as a core resource for WG members and central MoE representatives, produce written guidance on curriculum development for UDL/GESI for all subject areas, with examples for each.	Y1, Q4	GESI Team
Train WGs on UDL, Universal Design for Assessment (UDA), GESI, adolescent development, and positive youth development (PYD).	Y1, Q4	GESI Team
Advocate for concise quantity/length of a realistic curriculum to be delivered in a school year, allowing time for exploration and adaptation for students with diverse needs and a review of key themes.	Y1, Q4	Technical Team
Ensure GESI is an ongoing agenda item in continuous support and online coaching to WGs.	Ongoing	COP, DCOP
1.2.2 Develop Grade 7 TLMs and a Teacher Professional Development Program for Middle School Teachers		
Infuse UDL methodologies into the curriculum during TLM workshops. Examples include the role of applied learning and experimentation in science curriculum, the use of concrete materials and group work in language curriculum, and strengths-based approaches that respond to student abilities.	Ongoing as curriculum is developed	GESI Coordinator, SMEs

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Infuse gender and disability inclusion content into TLM development. Examples include gender-responsive reproductive health content in life science curriculum, disability-inclusive science content related to genetics, or career education across subject areas focusing on female innovators/leaders/role models in various fields to highlight career options and encourage girls to aim high.	Y2 (English) Y3 (Arabic and science)	GESI Coordinator, SMEs
Ensure inclusive TLMs address climate change education with particular attention to the layered marginalization faced by women and persons with disabilities.	Ongoing	GESI Coord., SMEs
Support WGs to produce teacher professional development programs that explicitly focus on UDL.	Quarterly	GESI Team
Produce accessible written guidance on UDL, disability-inclusive curriculum adaptations, strengths-based approaches, and gender-responsive pedagogy to be incorporated in teacher's guides and professional development.	On demand as content is developed	IDP
Provide technical assistance to ensure textbooks are produced in digitally accessible formats and with basic accessibility features (contrast, font size, page numbers) in print versions.	Y1 and ongoing	GESI Team
Ensure GESI team is consistently provided with draft curriculum materials to review and feedback on the integration of above technical principles into all content developed (e.g., equity, UDL, and accessibility).	Ongoing	Technical Team gives GESI Team
1.2.3 Deliver Professional Development Programming		
Ensure a minimum of 30% representation by women among the population of trainers working with <i>Bridge</i> , with additional preference for trainers with disabilities, where possible.	Y1 and ongoing	COP/DCOP
Provide training and mentorship to school administrators on working with parents/caregivers to raise awareness about inclusive education and support enrollment and retention of marginalized student groups.	Year 2 (English) Year 3 (Arabic and science)	Technical Team and GESI Team
Provide training and mentorship to school administrators on facilitating an inclusive school environment, including opportunities for leadership, peer support, and promotion among female staff, fostering a culture of inclusion in classrooms, clubs, and committees and an infusion of inclusive pedagogies into instructional practices.	Year 2 (English) Year 3 (Arabic and science)	Technical Team and GESI Team
Engage NGOs/OPDs/human rights councils in community-level training delivery.	Year 2 (English) Year 3 (Arabic and science)	Technical Team
Support training of trainers and training delivery to ensure training has both embedded and explicit focus on disability and gender-responsive teaching, destigmatizing common social norms, linking with concrete instructional strategies, and promoting youth social-emotional development.	Year 2 (English) Year 3 (Arabic and science)	GESI Team
Produce on-demand content for professional learning communities on UDL, gender-responsive pedagogy, school safeguarding, inclusive classroom management practices and positive discipline, anti-bullying, climate change, etc.	Year 2 (English) Year 3 (Arabic and science)	GESI Team
Ensure professional learning communities emphasize professional equity and opportunities for growth and leadership among female staff.	Year 2 (English) Year 3 (Arabic and science)	Technical Team
1.2.4 Support Pilot School Implementation		

Provide guidance or support in integrating GESI into extracurricular activities. Examples include advocating for girls and persons with disabilities to be included in sports, drama, and arts or other extracurriculars; promoting youth-led girls' clubs; and promoting school safety and anti-bullying campaigns through clubs.	Ongoing ⁶	GESI Team
Engage local parent-teacher associations (PTAs), NGOs, and OPDs to map available wraparound services within geographic proximity to pilot schools (e.g., disability services, psychosocial support, women's health services).	Y2, Q1	GESI Coordinator
Identify opportunities to promote existing resources supporting inclusion in pilot schools (e.g., resource rooms, listening and mediation committees, advisory/counseling services, accessible resources like labs, libraries, or IT).	Y2, Q1	GESI Coordinator
Seek private sector or NGO partners to produce and distribute menstrual hygiene kits to middle school girls.	Y2	GESI Coordinator
Work with local community actors, including PTAs, to produce awareness-raising materials that combat bullying and harassment, promote inclusive and welcoming environments, and/or conduct anti-violence campaigns.	Y2	Technical Team, GESI Team
Sub-Objective 1.3: Incorporate Meaningful Assessment		
Provide WGs with training on UDA and the difference between adaptations and modifications.	Y1, Q4	GESI Team
Ensure GESI participation in workshops with WGs to infuse UDA principles into assessment design.	Y1–Y2	GESI Team
Review and provide feedback on pilot learning assessment tools from a GESI perspective.	Ongoing	IDP
Support development of Test Administration Manuals (TAMs) for infusion of GESI-responsive data collection practices. This includes reviewing and revising as necessary the language from current assessment guidance to ensure gender equity and removing gendered language.	Y1–Y2	GESI Team
Analyze baseline and subsequent data with respect to gender disaggregation.	Y2, Q1 (English) Y2, Q4 (Arabic and science)	AIR
Support developing or adapting classroom observation tools to ensure the infusion of GESI principles into school monitoring and support.	Y2	GESI Team
Sub-Objective 1.4: Improve Transition Rates between Upper Primary and Middle School		
Convene collaborative meetings between upper primary and middle school to identify strategies to support the effective transition, with a particular focus on girls, children with disabilities, and other marginalized populations.	Ongoing	Technical Team
Engage local <i>cellules de veille et d'écoute</i> , community women's groups, and OPDs to support vulnerable students and increase family engagement in the transition to middle school, with a focus on marginalized populations.	Ongoing	GESI Coordinator
Ensure peer mentorship or buddy systems incorporate social-emotional welfare and anti-bullying messaging.	Ongoing	Technical Team

⁶ At this stage, BMS doesn't yet have specific guidance on how much it will be involved in extracurricular activities. Subsequently, the timeline will depend on MoE guidance and planning.

Objective 2: Enhance the Moroccan Education System’s Ability to Improve Learning Outcomes in Upper Primary (Grades 4–6) Arabic and Science

Training and curriculum activities above would serve as a basis for this planning once the timing is finalized.

Objective 3: Enhance the Moroccan Education System’s Preparedness to Scale up Successful Practices

Sub-Objective 3.1: Strengthen MoE Capacity

Hold semi-annual meetings between <i>Bridge</i> and MoE focal points for gender and inclusive education. Use meetings to share <i>Bridge</i> plans, obtain MoE feedback, ensure <i>Bridge</i> supports delivery of ongoing MoE GESI policy priorities.	Semi-Annually	COP, DCOP, GESI Coordinator
Provide technical assistance on UDA and accessible assessment, including in the MASSAR platform, if needed.	Y1, Q4 (English) Y2, Q2 (Arabic) Y2, Q3 (Science)	IDP
Provide on-demand technical training to sub-national government representatives, such as AREFs and PDs, on UDL and other areas as needed.	Annually	GESI Team
Advocate for synergies between the MoE (educational stream), the Ministry of Health (medical stream), and the Ministry of Solidarity, Social Inclusion, and Family (social stream) to promote disability inclusion.	Ongoing	GESI Team
Collaborate with MEL teams to ensure the monitoring of institutional capacity change resulting from <i>Bridge</i> also captures GESI themes.	Ongoing	GESI Team

Sub-Objective 3.2: Produce Policy Studies and Implementation Research

Collaborate on all policy agenda work to ensure it embeds GESI principles. Consider GESI-focused studies, such as factors supporting girls’ transition to middle school or the impact of UDL strategies on teacher performance.	Ongoing	GESI Team
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Sub-Objective 3.3: Strengthen Capacity in Non-Bridge Regions

Support strategies and plans with MoE to ensure GESI messaging reaches non- <i>Bridge</i> regions.	Ongoing	GESI Team
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Sub-Objective 3.4: Support MoE Distance Learning Plan

Ensure <i>Bridge</i> ’s distance learning support plan developed with MoE is responsive to gender and disability inclusion considerations. Examples include producing distance learning resources that are accessible to users with disabilities or ensuring women’s representation in distance learning videos.	Ongoing	GESI Team
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Note: The list of stakeholders mentioned in the above actions are purely recommendations. BMS will ultimately consult the MoE on the final list of approved stakeholders and the timeline of their engagement during the next stage.

ANNEX I: GESI RESEARCH QUESTIONS BY USAID DOMAIN

Laws, Policy, Regulations, and Institutional Practices	
Main research question	Sub-questions
1. What policies and institutional practices support or hinder the learning environment for boys and girls? And students with disabilities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What laws and policies exist in Morocco that promote gender and disability inclusion within educational contexts? • In the curriculum for upper primary and middle school grades, how do the TLMs, the learning/teaching strategies, learning content, activities, assessment, etc. align with the UDL framework? • In the curriculum for upper primary and middle school grades, how do the TLMs (that is, the learning/teaching strategies, learning content, activities, and assessment) promote gender equity for all students considering the diversity of the Moroccan student population (i.e., students with disabilities, female students, ethnic and cultural minorities, second language learners)? • What implicit or explicit gender/disability biases are in teaching and learning materials in upper primary and middle school levels in <i>Bridge's</i> targeted subjects? • What implicit or explicit positive or negative biases (both gender and inclusion) exist in policies and institutional practices at the national, regional, and school level?
Cultural Norms and Beliefs	
Main research question	Sub-questions
2. What cultural norms and beliefs support or hinder the learning environment for boys and girls? And students with disabilities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do parents perceive the importance of education and support the learning environment for boys and girls? Education for their children? • What are students' perceptions of the importance of education for themselves and others? • How do boy and girl students perceive the importance of English, Arabic, and science for themselves (i.e., their interests and possible career avenues)? • What are teachers' perceptions of different types of students' learning capacities/abilities? • To what extent do teachers equally promote Arabic, English, and science instruction for boys and girls? Students with disabilities?
Gender Roles, Responsibilities, and Time Use	
Main research question	Sub-questions
3. How do gender roles, responsibilities, and time use support or hinder the learning environment for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What roles and responsibilities do students have in school? • What roles and responsibilities do students have outside school that may hinder or advance their learning? • What are male and female teacher/principal roles and responsibilities within the school?

boys and girls? And students with disabilities?	
Access to and Control over Assets and Resources	
Main research question	Sub-questions
4. How does access to and control over assets and resources support or hinder the learning environment for boys and girls? And students with disabilities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What barriers do students encounter to attend and participate in school? (boys and girls/students with disabilities) • What resources do they need to attend and participate in school, and do they have them? (boys and girls/students with disabilities) • What barriers do male and female teachers/principals encounter to promote an inclusive teaching and learning environment for boys and girls/students with disabilities? • What resources do males and teachers/principals need to promote an inclusive/gender-sensitive teaching and learning environment? • What resources are students accessing inside and outside the school (e.g., library, technology, science lab, counseling)? • How safe and accessible is the physical environment for all students (e.g., classrooms, library, toilets)?
Patterns of Power and Decision-Making	
Main research question	Sub-questions
5. What patterns of power and decision-making support or hinder the learning environment for boys and girls? And students with disabilities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are students participating in the classroom, and does this differ across disaggregates? • How are male and female teachers participating and making decisions in school activities/projects? • Who holds student leadership and teachers' positions within the school? • What types of violence do students experience or witness in or out of school? • In what ways are students punished in schools? • In what ways are students rewarded in schools? • What system of reward/incentives/career development exists for male and female teachers/principals? How do male and female teachers/principals equally benefit from them?

ANNEX 2: GESI-RELATED LAWS, POLICIES, AND STATISTICS

Law/Policy/Program	Summary
The 2022–2026 Roadmap for a Quality Public School for All (2022)	Aims to establish a new model for managing education reform that offers concrete solutions and measures to enhance the quality of public schools with three strategic objectives aiming to ensure the quality of learning, promote personal development and civic engagement, and enforce compulsory education. It includes 12 commitments around three strategic intervention axes (the student, the teacher, and the school institution) and establishes three conditions for success: improving governance, promoting engagement and involvement of stakeholders, and rethinking financing.
The New Development Model (2021)	Aims to outline plans to create economic, social, and institutional value in Morocco, which is socially inclusive to all. Sets objectives of excellence in strategic areas such as quality education by ensuring gender equity, the recognition of the place and role of women in the economy and society, and an inclusive mode of value creation, which supports social and economic equality for all.
Gender and Social Inclusion Action Plan (PAGIS; 2021)	Action plan aimed at improving the quality of secondary education programs and ensuring equity of access to these programs.
The National Inclusive Education Plan (2019)	Plan adopted by the MoE in 2019 with the goal of generalizing inclusive education across all schools and levels over 10 years.
Framework Law 51-17 (2019)	Law on the system of education, teaching, and scientific research aimed at reforming the education system in Morocco.
Law 13/97 (2016)	Framework law on the protection of the rights of people with disabilities, guaranteeing their right to education without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity.
Law 26-16 (2016)	Amends and supplements Law 17-02, reinforcing the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities, particularly in education and access to appropriate services and support.
National Observatory for the Fight Against Violence in Schools (2015)	Establishment of the observatory to address violence in schools and promote safe and inclusive learning environments.
The Educational Reform Strategic Vision (2015–2030)	The ultimate goal of this strategic vision is to create a new school vision based on key principles, including providing equity and equal opportunities, providing quality education for all individuals, and fostering the development of both individuals and society.
The Social Cohesion Support Fund managed by the Ministry of Solidarity,	This fund aims to stimulate institutional contributions for the rights of people with disabilities by improving the conditions of schooling for children with

Law/Policy/Program	Summary
Women, Family, and Social Development (2012)	disabilities, the acquisition of specific devices and other technical aids, and the encouragement of professional integration and income-generating activities.
Moroccan Constitution (2011)	Guarantees the right to education for all citizens, emphasizing equal access and prohibiting discrimination based on gender or any other grounds.
Strategic Action Plan for the Institutionalization of Gender Equality (PASMT; 2009–2012)	Plan focused on institutionalizing gender equality in the education system, including capacity development, equitable access to education, and creating a school environment that promotes gender equality.
Najah Emergency Plan (2009–2012)	Implementation of a plan aimed at achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to promote women’s empowerment and institutionalize gender equality in education.
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD; 2009)	Ratification of the international convention to align local legislation on disability with international standards, promoting equality, autonomy, and inclusion.
Moudawana Family Code Reforms (2004)	Reforms addressing gender equality within the family and society, covering areas such as inheritance rights, polygamy, and minimum age of marriage to promote gender equity and empower women and girls.
Law 17-02 (2002)	Focuses on the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, including their inclusion in education, and calls for accessibility in public buildings and institutions.
Charter for Education and Training (2000)	Adoption of a charter outlining the principles and objectives of the Moroccan education system, including addressing the gender gap in education and encouraging schooling for girls in rural areas.
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW; 1993)	Ratification of the international convention to address discrimination against women and promote gender equality.

The following table summarizes the relevant statistics related to enrollment, achievement, and dropout rates for boys and girls in Morocco (HCP, 2022; MoE, 2021).

Education Indicator	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
Average years of schooling	6.52	4.8
Enrollment rate:		
- Enrollment rate in primary school (6–11 years old) in rural (2021)	110.6	110.3

Education Indicator	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
- Enrollment rate in primary school (6–11 years old) in urban (2021)	98.7	99.0
- Enrollment rate in middle school in rural areas (2021)	89.6	80.1
- Enrollment rate in middle school in urban areas (2021)	102.0	102.0
Achievement rate:		
- Achievement rate in primary school (2021)	89.3	91.4
- Achievement rate in middle school (2021)	56.8	68.4
Dropout rate:		
- Dropout rate in primary education (2020–2021)	2.9	3.1
- Dropout rate in middle school (2020–2021)	9.7	7.4
- Dropout rate in high school (2020–2021)	7.4	5.9

The following numbers reflect the enrollment status of persons with disabilities in Morocco (INE-CSEFRS, 2018).

Education Level	Enrollment Count	Percentage
No educational level	1,030,395	45.5%
Completed primary education	81,446	3.6%
Completed secondary education	56,579	2.5%
Reached higher education	40,735	1.8%

The below table summarizes the distribution of enrolled children with disabilities across different educational settings (INE-CSEFRS, 2018).

Educational Setting	Percentage
Regular mainstream schools	75%
Access to specialized support and services	5%
Specialized institutions (non-profit or private)	15%
Educated at home or in traditional preschool structures	5%

ANNEX 3: STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED

The following data collection took place between the dates of April 4 and May 4, 2023. Researchers used a combination of virtual and in-person data collection according to respondent preference and availability.

Key Informant Interview Stakeholders	Participants
MoE representatives; AREF representatives in BMK, TTH, and MS; and inclusive education PD focal point in Khouribga	6 (3F, 3M)
Integrated school leadership in BMK	3 (1F, 2M), of whom 2 (0F, 2M) with disabilities
Middle school directors in BMK (1 urban, 1 rural)	2 (0F, 2M)
International NGOs (2)	3 (1F, 2M)
TOTAL	14 (5F, 9M)
Focus Group Discussion Stakeholders	Participants
Parents/caretakers of youth with and without disabilities in communities in BMK (2 middle schools: 1 urban, 1 rural)	2 parent focus groups 13 parents total (7F, 6M)
Students with and without disabilities in BMK (2 middle schools)	2 student focus groups 14 students total (7F, 7M), of whom 9 (5F, 4M) students with disabilities
Teachers of Arabic, English, life science, and physics/chemistry (2 middle schools: 1 urban, 1 rural)	2 teacher focus groups 11 teachers total (4F, 7M)
Women's organizations from BMK, TTH, and MS	1 CSO 8 representatives total (5F, 3M) (disability status not disclosed on virtual meeting)
OPDs from BMK, TTH, and MS	1 OPD 4 representatives total (2F, 2M) (disability status not disclosed on virtual meeting)
TOTAL	50 participants (25F, 25M)

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