Inclusive Education Country Profile

TONGA

This information was provided by government and civil society during a regional mapping of inclusive education undertaken in 2020–2021. Led by the Inclusive Education Taskforce, the mapping supports implementation of the Pacific Regional Inclusive Education Framework (PRIEF) and the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF).

Inclusive Education Policy Framework

Legislation: Education Act 2013

Inclusive Education Policy: Tonga Inclusive Education Policy 2007

Operationalizing Inclusive Education: Inclusive education priorities are included in the Ministry's annual plan

Inclusive Education Standards: Minimum Service Standards for Teachers

Inclusive Education in the Budget

What does the budget cover?

$	Assistive devices/technologies
$	Community awareness on disability and education
$	Infrastructure funding for accessibility modifications
$$	Training for school staff
$$	Outreach/itinerant support to schools by specialists
--	Transport assistance specifically for disadvantaged or disabled students
--	Teacher aide/assistant salaries

Legend: Extent to which inclusive education activities are covered in the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) budget:

$$$$ = A great extent

$$$ = A lot

$$ = A moderate amount

$ = A little

-- = Not at all

☑ **Special/inclusive education a mandatory part of teacher training**
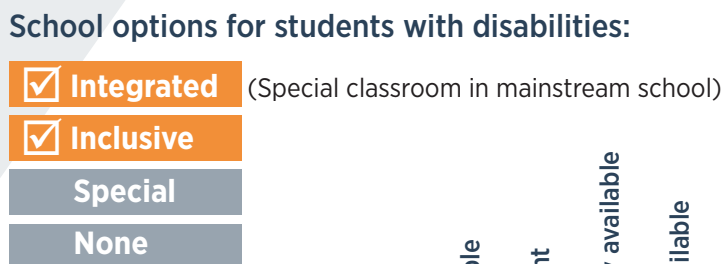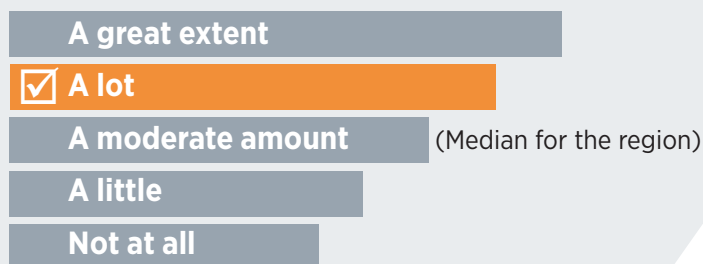
Frequency of teacher in-service training in inclusive education

☐ More than once a year
☑ Once a year
☐ Less than once a year
☐ Not sure

70% of primary school teachers have participated in in-service training on inclusive education

☒ **Teacher aides/assistants are part of the workforce**

To what extent are schools encouraged to implement strategies that support students to build a school environment that is positive for all?

A great extent	
☑ A lot	
A moderate amount	(Median for the region)
A little	
Not at all	

School options for students with disabilities:

☑ **Integrated** (Special classroom in mainstream school)
☑ **Inclusive**
Special
None

Use of Individual Education Plans? ☑

Availability of reasonable accommodations across the country:

	Not available	Small extent	Moderately available	Widely available
Student sits close to board or teacher				☑
Lessons are modified or reduced in complexity based on individual student			☑	
Enlarged printed materials are provided		☑		
Additional time is provided during assessments	☑			
Personal assistance is provided during assessments (e.g. note-taking)	☑			
Physical education activities are modified		☑		
Personal assistance is provided (e.g. assistance with note-taking, communication, managing behaviour)		☑		
Assistive technologies are provided (e.g. magnifier, electronic devices, computers, communication boards)	☑			

Culture of inclusion: To what extent is there a culture of inclusion at all levels (national, sub-national, schools)?

Far exceeds expectations	
Exceeds expectations	
Equals expectations	
☑ Short of expectations	(Median for the region)
Far short of expectations	

What proportion of schools have...

	No schools	Small proportion of schools	About half of all schools	Most schools	All schools
classrooms that are accessible and safe for all? (people with difficulties moving and seeing can get in and around)		☑			
handwashing facilities that are accessible and safe for all?				☑	
sanitation (toilet) facilities that are accessible and safe for all?		☑			
menstrual hygiene management facilities that are accessible and safe for all?	☑				
a disaster response plan in place that is inclusive of all students?					☑
measures to address bullying?				☑	

Encouraging retention

- The Truancy, Reconciliation and Enforcement Unit of the MOET tracks children who miss school without informing the school. They meet with children who are at risk of dropping out and their parents or guardians to discuss issues and offer support to enable students to return to and stay at school.

Supporting out-of-school children

- MOET has established the Ako Tu'uloa Programme for out-of-school students. The programme is open to students who left school before completing secondary school.

Supporting post-school pathways

- Secondary schools may offer a technical and vocational training and education (TVET) programme from Form 4 or 5, called the Certificate in Technical and Vocational Skills Level 2. This is a pathway from high school to the Tonga Institute of Science and Technology.

- Secondary students must successfully complete Form 5 level before leaving high school to enrol at a TVET institution. TVET programmes are inclusive, although this is constrained by limited resources, accessible facilities and trained teachers.

- Students who wish to pursue further studies at the tertiary level must complete and pass Form 7.

Partnerships for Inclusive Education

How much are school committees or working groups encouraged to support inclusive education (e.g. student associations, school boards, parent-teacher associations)?

- A great extent
- A lot
- A moderate amount
- ☑ A little
- Not at all

Inclusive education coordination mechanism

☒ Is there a national stakeholder group made up of government and civil society representatives that meets regularly to progress inclusive education commitments?

Monitoring Inclusive Education

Does the EMIS include data on the following:

YES
- Disability?
- Rural/remote?

NO
- Students who have dropped out?
- Socioeconomic status/ poverty?
- Cultural, linguistic or ethnic minorities?

Available almost everywhere in the country	
Available in most large towns	
Available in the capital all the time	
Available in the capital only sometimes	
Not available	

Available almost everywhere in the country
- Social protection/welfare services
- Medical/pharmaceutical services
- Counselling

Available in the capital all the time
- Vision services (screening and glasses)

Available in the capital only sometimes
- Vision services (Braille services and orientation & mobility training)
- Hearing services (screening)
- Hearing services (audiology and hearing aids)
- Sign language services
- Organizations of Persons with Disabilities
- Rehabilitation/therapy services
- Early intervention services
- Mobility device services

Looking Forward

ENABLERS:
- The political will of the Minister of Education enables progress in inclusive education.
- Available resources including funding are critical for inclusive education implementation.
- The MOET's Inclusive Education Unit is a member of the Disability Task Force. Coordinated by the Disability and Protection Unit of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Task Force members comprise government and civil society representatives, who work collaboratively to progress disability inclusion.
- The Ministry of Health supports diagnosis of children with disabilities prior to school enrolment.
- Organizations of Persons with Disabilities strongly advocate for inclusive education.

CHALLENGES:
- School buildings are not accessible for children with disabilities.
- Teachers still find inclusive education new and challenging, especially educating all children in the same classroom.

FUTURE PRIORITIES:
- The Inclusive Education Policy requires review. Any new policy should be accompanied by an implementation plan.
- Ongoing professional development is required for early childhood education, primary and secondary teachers in inclusive education approaches.
- Improved access to specialists is required, for example speech pathologists and sign language and Braille teachers.
- Teacher aides are required in schools to support teachers to enable the learning of students with disabilities.
- Strengthen transitioning of children with disabilities from primary schools to secondary schools.
- Develop learning pathways for children with disabilities who have limited ways of communicating.
- Improve approaches to learning and assessment for students with disabilities.