

Disabled Refugees Included and Visible in Education: A British Academy funded project



“I asked him [Social Worker] about schools for children with disabilities. He gave me phone numbers and he told me to call He said they would help me if I told them that I had a child with a disability. I called them. When I had gone to my hometown in Zimbabwe, they called and said I should bring the child to the school and then I came back and took the child to the school. They said my child was too old to be in that school, so they referred me to another school. The other school called and told me that they had reserved a place for my child, and I must pay a certain fee. Eish, I remembered that we (my husband and I) were not working so we don’t have money. We called them and told them that we want our child to attend school, but we don’t have money then they said we can come and negotiate with them. They told us that they want the child’s documentation for the child to be enrolled in the school. I have an asylum, but I don’t have a South African ID. They said my child won’t be accepted at the school because they need all his full details. So that was the problem”.

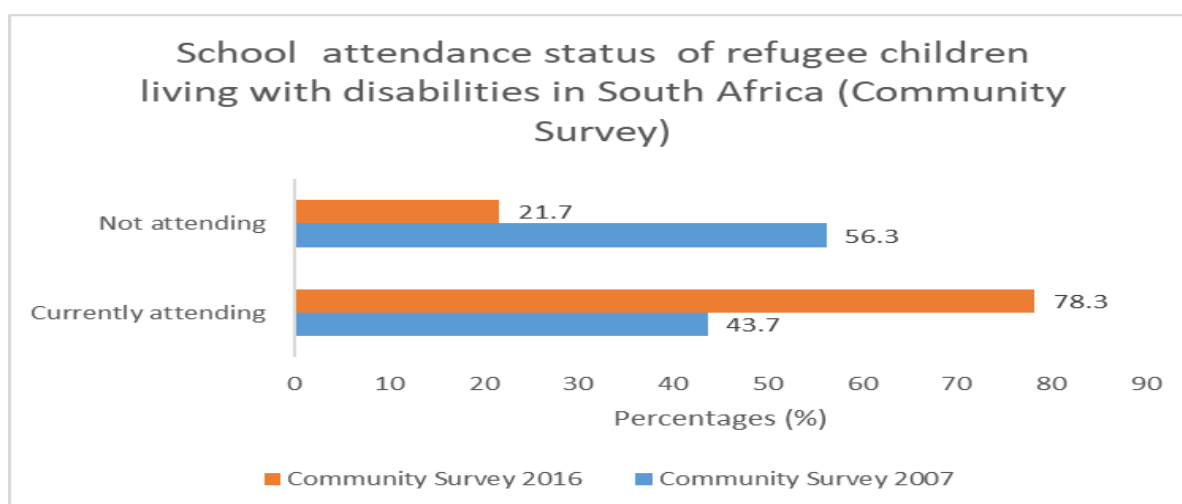
Current statistics show that South Africa hosts 240,148 refugees (21.9%).

Disability prevalence of refugees is 7.7%- the prevalence for women is 8.9% and is higher than that of men (6.5%).

At least 4 million refugee children aged 5-17 do not attend school.

Sources:

- UNHCR, Government 2022.
- Community Survey 2016, Statistical release P0301 / Statistics South Africa



<https://www.datafirst.uct.ac.za/dataportal/index.php/catalog/611>

The goal of this study to explore the experiences of refugee children living with disabilities and their families with respect to educational access and success in South Africa. We developed Stakeholder relationships with educational officials and NGO workers and interviewed refugee children living with disabilities and their caregivers in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Findings

- There is a **lack of national laws** for refugee children that foster the right to inclusive education.
- Most learning environments do not have the **necessary tools or guides** that meet the learning needs of all children with disabilities.
- Educational departments that are involved in the development and implementation of policies do not stipulate their **objectives and responsibilities** in their working relations with NGOs and schools.
- Most refugee children do not have the necessary **South African documentation** which enables them to qualify to register for enrolment in school.
- Poor enrolment rates in South African schools for refugee children living with disabilities is the direct result of **lack of funding and parental inability** to cover educational costs.
- There is a **shortage of rehabilitation personnel** in special schools and children do not receive right level of support.
- Refugee children are enrolled in **poor learning environments**.

Policy recommendations

The inconsistencies regarding non-fee paying schools needs to be addressed. The 'hidden costs' of education prevent refugee children with disabilities from access to education.

Parents, teachers, school officials need to be aware of the rights to education. More needs to be done to promote, synergise and educate these stakeholders, so access cannot be denied on the basis of missing documentation.

Enablers or champions of inclusive education need to be identified and supported to encourage community, parent and teacher support for refugee children with disabilities.

Promote meaningful participation of refugee children and their families in decision-making and community-based initiatives that focus on finding solutions that improve educational outcomes.

"We are guided by the Children's Act mostly, and then the Mental Health Care Act also guides us. Regarding refugees, we don't have any policies or anything like that"

"Their teaching doesn't accommodate each child's learning needs. They are not the same. Even their levels are not the same. And their learning needs are not the same".

"They are still working on the policies I think, because they will come with this and say no, we are supposed to work with these children but not this type of a child with such a disability. So, they are still in a very initial stage like still planning to implement and not implemented and putting it into practice".

"They then do not have birth certificates or IDs so it could almost be that that child stays at home again and there are challenges to get them the paperwork".

"My mother found another school for children with special needs. The problem now is that I can't go because my mom cannot afford the school fees there".

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