

**Practical guidance note – Inclusion of persons with disabilities in livelihood activities during the COVID-19 response**

In line with the IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action,<sup>1</sup> persons with disabilities, when provided with individualised supports, should be able to engage in mainstream livelihood activities on an equal basis with others and this includes during the COVID-19 response. Therefore, humanitarian actors should avoid designing or prescribing livelihood activities based on assumptions about the capacities or incapacities of persons with disabilities, remaining cognisant of the extensive diversity of persons with disabilities and their different abilities. Prescribing specific activities for persons with disabilities without meaningful consultation and engagement, can significantly increase risks of harm and violates their right to freedom of choice and equal access to services. Therefore, inclusion of persons with disabilities in livelihood activities during the COVID-19 response is achieved by following the minimum key steps to programming, with protection principles being at the forefront of all activities. These are detailed below:

- 1. Identify and analyse the attitudinal, physical, and institutional barriers present in the area of planned intervention.**<sup>1</sup>
  - Attitudinal barriers refer to negative attitudes, thoughts, perceptions and misconceptions existing within the communities which we work and which we as staff members may hold. These attitudes are reported as one for the most significant barriers to participation for persons with disabilities.
  - Physical barriers exist within infrastructure, transport and services which impede access for persons with physical, sensory, hearing, visual and intellectual or cognitive difficulties. Common examples include steps impeding wheelchair access, small spaces in toilet facilities, broken or uneven roads and footpaths, lack of suitable transport options, poor lighting impeding vision, absence of sign language translation or visual descriptions for persons with hearing impairment and more.
  - Institutional barriers relate to lack of policies and procedures which exist in our own organisations. An example at the programmatic level would be the absence of a mechanism to identify persons with disabilities and provide reasonable accommodation<sup>2</sup> in order to ensure equal access and participation.
- 2. Identify the facilitators or the resources you have to enable participation of persons with disabilities in the communities which you work and within your own organisation.**<sup>1</sup>
  - For example, can you connect with organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) or where these don't exist, informal networks of persons with disabilities to consult on and strengthen your project? In the absence of OPDs or informal networks, have you consulted with individuals with disabilities and their families? Do you have financial resources to support the provision of reasonable accommodation in your project? Can you identify willing, existing staff who can receive training on inclusion in livelihood to function as case managers or inclusion workers to support individuals with difficulties?

**Once you are aware of the barriers and facilitators existing in your project and you are ready to include persons with disabilities, it is recommended that the following steps are put in place.**

- 3. Train staff as case managers or inclusion workers, who are willing to support individuals with disabilities on: the use of the Washington Group Questions (WGQs) in livelihood activities; the rights of persons with disabilities and their diverse functional capacities in livelihood activities; how to complete an individualised functional assessment and provide safe means of diverse reasonable accommodation modalities, ensuring the principle of 'Do no harm' is respected.**<sup>1</sup>
- 4. Identify persons with disabilities through your assessment/vulnerability criteria.**
  - You can embed the Washington Group Questions (WGQs) and weight the answers of 'a lot of difficulty and 'cannot do at all' heavily. This will ensure that persons with significant difficulty are captured.
  - It is important to note that the WGQs should not be used without staff having engaged in the training first. It is well understood that misuse of the WGQs can cause significant harm to individuals and communities. See Annex 1 for online training details.
- 5. Once persons with significant difficulties have been identified, the case manager or inclusion worker must prepare to adapt the environment and/or the task and tools to ensure that the individual is able to participate effectively.**

<sup>1</sup> IASC Guidelines, Inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> 'Reasonable accommodation' means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments, not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. (UNCRC, Article 2.)

- This process is referred to as the provision of reasonable accommodation.<sup>2</sup> In order to provide individually based accommodations, you should conduct an **individual functional assessment** of the person's abilities, understand how these abilities interact with the tasks of the livelihood activity and therefore identify where the adaptations or modifications must be made to bridge 'the gap'.
- Examples from the field include: adapting a shovel with a shoulder strap and additional forearm support to ensure that a person with one arm can dig with stability and reduced risk of lower back pain.
- Another example is placing tactile tape and high contrast markings along a cash box's edges to enable a person with low vision to identify where the notes (money) should be placed in the cash till.
- Accommodations can also include raising awareness amongst families and communities and field leaders and peers of the group to ensure you are mitigating any possibility of intentional or unintentional discrimination. A cash-for-work related example from the field includes training the project supervisor on the specific needs of the individual which included extra time to complete tasks and additional breaks during the day due to fatigue and pain issues. Training was necessary to ensure that the individual was not penalised for these needs.
- To avoid causing harm, training in the provision of diverse types of accommodations for persons with difficulties in all livelihood activities is recommended.

#### 6. Close follow up and monitoring of persons with disabilities.

- Case managers or inclusion workers should ensure the safety and effectiveness of accommodations. This should be done by close follow up of the individual when working in order to adapt the accommodations where needed. Case management also includes working with families and caregivers (when indicated) to ensure that they can provide ongoing safe support after the activity is complete.

#### 7. Monitoring and evaluation of effective inclusion modalities

- Ensure an accessible complaints and feedback mechanism is available to persons with disabilities and they feel comfortable to use it.
- It is important to keep in mind that participation of persons with disabilities should always be meaningful. That is, persons with disabilities should be supported to actively engage in the activity on an equal basis with others.
- An example of inclusion which did not result in meaningful participation from the field is that of a vocational training example. A person with intellectual difficulties was included in the vocational training; however, because the teaching materials and methods were not adapted, the individual completed the training without having developed the planned skills. Therefore, this participation was tokenistic rather than meaningful.
- Ways of measuring meaningful participation could be a qualitative based survey which assesses individual self-perceived performance and satisfaction related to one's own performance and engagement.

### Annex 1: Guidance on sourcing online training for the application of Washington Group Questions

1. Visit this site: <https://humanity-inclusion.org.uk/en/projects/disability-data-in-humanitarian-action>
2. Scroll down to this section:

#### Learning Toolkit

► E-Learning: Collecting Data for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action – The Application of the WGQs

(Available in 4 languages – English, French, Arabic, and Spanish.)

This 2-hour course has been designed to support humanitarian programme staff understand, plan for and use the WGQs to identify persons with disabilities in humanitarian action. With case studies, practical examples and a wealth of supporting resources, the e-learning is an essential entry point for all programme staff interested in understanding more about how to use the WGQs.

The e-learning is available on:

► [disasterready.org](https://disasterready.org) (you first need to [sign up for an account](#))  
[French] [Arabic] [Spanish]

► [kayaconnect.org](https://kayaconnect.org) (accessible for mobile phones and tablets)  
[French] [Arabic]

3. Select 'Arabic'
4. Follow the prompts which includes setting up a Disaster Ready or Kaya connect account
5. Field workers should complete the first two modules (1 hour maximum). Project officers, program managers and senior staff should complete all 4 modules (2 hours maximum)