Disability Inclusive
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Interagency coordination on disability inclusion at country level

Short guide

The purpose of this guidance note is to support UNICEF emergency staff to lead and participate in interagency coordination mechanisms for disability inclusion at the national/sub-national level. It complements the UNICEF Cluster Coordination Essential Actions on Disability Inclusion short guide*.

The IASC Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action highlights the need for coordination mechanisms to systematically address disability inclusion. Disability working groups and task forces have made significant contributions to the humanitarian response in several locations (see Annex 3). However, more systematic efforts are required to improve cross-sectoral coordination on disability inclusion and coherence with other cross-cutting issues such as gender equality and accountability to affected populations (AAP).

This guide describes two mechanisms to strengthen coordination on disability inclusion:

Disability working groups   **Disability focal points**

Disability working groups

Function

Disability Working Groups (DWGs) facilitate intersectoral and interagency coordination on disability inclusion to avoid duplication of efforts, organize joint action, and inform strategic decision making to ensure that assistance reaches those people who need it most.

The specific role of a DWG will depend on its mandate, membership, capacities, available resources, priorities, and the broader emergency context. Below are some common functions of a DWG, as they relate to each of the four must-do actions defined by the IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action:

1. Participation

   a. Provide a forum for persons with disabilities and their representative organizations to be supported to be actively involved in the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC), including in multisector needs assessments (MSNAs), and the development of Humanitarian Needs Overviews (HNOs) and Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs).

*Internal document

2. Addressing barriers

   a. Coordinate accessibility assessments or broader assessments of the situation of persons with disabilities, including of barriers they face in accessing assistance.

   b. Provide a forum for sharing technical resources and information among members and with the broader Humanitarian Country Team about persons with disabilities.

   c. Review and contribute to drafting of HNOs and HRPs to ensure responsiveness to the needs and priorities of persons with disabilities.

   d. Map the existing expertise, services and resources available for persons with disabilities.

   e. Establish intersectoral referral pathways that strengthen the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

3. Empowerment and capacity building

   a. Organize or support capacity building for organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and engage with other coordination mechanisms to ensure OPDs have an opportunity to participate in cross-sector or sector-specific capacity-building initiatives for local actors.

   b. Build the capacity of humanitarian actors on disability inclusion, including by facilitating training and/ or producing or disseminating context-specific resources to support the implementation of the IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, as well as other relevant standards and guidance.

   c. Act as an advisory body for other coordination structures and individual agencies on strategies to strengthen disability inclusion.

   d. Document good practices in inclusive and accessible programming and share them with all partners.

4. Data collection and monitoring

   a. Support the collection, analysis, and use of data on the needs and preferences of persons with disabilities in needs assessments and monitoring processes, and in response planning.

   b. Contribute to reporting about persons with disabilities, such as in cluster factsheets, OCHA humanitarian bulletin, snapshots, and dashboards.

Structure

DWGs should ideally be located within the structure of broader humanitarian coordination mechanisms. Where the cluster system is activated, they could, for example, be structured as part of the inter-cluster coordination group (ICCG). Where a DWG is established as part of a specific cluster or sector there should be mechanisms put in place to ensure that it able to function effectively across all clusters/sectors (e.g., through a standing agenda item in ICCG meetings).

The DWG should also seek to establish strong links with other intersectoral groups such as those coordinating on gender equality or AAP. Collaboration can help to streamline engagement with humanitarian leadership with respect to shared strategic objectives on people-centred programming.

Membership

DWG members should ideally comprise focal points from all sectors and agencies involved in the response, including national and local actors. It is important that OPDs can meaningfully participate even if they are not directly engaged as responders. OPDs can help to ensure that persons with disabilities are represented in decision making and provide valuable advice on inclusion.

The ToRs for the DWG should set out the specific level of commitment required of members and the obligations in terms of attendance, contribution to workplans, and participation in decision making.

Leadership and governance

DWGs should be coordinated by individuals or agencies with relevant knowledge and expertise on inclusion of persons with disabilities and humanitarian action. A dedicated position is advisable where resources allow. In contexts where OPDs are engaged in the humanitarian response, this role could be filled by an OPD with coordination experience. However, most OPDs haven't been given such opportunities so likely will require initial capacity building or coaching support.

The role of the coordinator (or co-coordinator) also requires a strong working knowledge of humanitarian coordination systems to fulfil their responsibilities, which commonly include:

- Facilitating agreement between members on objectives, priorities, and workplan of the group.
- Promoting OPD engagement, including ensuring accessibility of all processes.
- Ensuring alignment of all activities with a rights-based approach, as set out in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).
- Identifying and engaging outside sources of support where needed.

The ToRs for the DWG should outline how decisions are made about its strategic direction and priorities. As membership grows it may be necessary to establish a small steering committee. Annex 1 provides some examples of ToRs.

Disability focal points

Function

Focal points play a crucial role in enhancing coordination on disability inclusion. They can represent a sector or an agency, ensuring that sectoral/agency perspectives are brought into discussions on disability inclusion, and ensuring that discussions on disability inclusion are brought back to their respective sector/agency. In this way, focal points for disability inclusion within the UNICEF country office and clusters can have an important role in helping to maintain attention to disability inclusion.[1] This can include:

- Being familiar with available in-country information about children with disabilities to allow the focal point to act as a point of contact/resource person.
- Being familiar with key guidance documents and other resources to share with colleagues; and supporting the roll-out of guidance and tools on disability inclusion
- Flagging issues of disability inclusion in planning and review processes, to ensure that disability inclusion is addressed in needs assessments, strategic planning, implementation, and monitoring of a response (including in budgets).
- Contributing to reporting about children with disabilities and how they are being reached and impacted by UNICEF programmes.
- Identifying opportunities for training on disability inclusion.
- Acting as a point of contact for OPDs and other disability actors and identifying opportunities to strengthen collaboration with OPDs.
- Connecting with technical experts at country, regional or HQ level when necessary.
- Potentially representing the agency/sector in the DWG, where one is in place.

Resourcing

As reflected in the functions above, focal points do not need to be specialists on disability inclusion, but they do need some basic awareness and understanding, as well as connections with technical experts. Importantly, focal points are not responsible for all aspects of disability inclusion, as disability inclusion is a part of the work of all members of the agency/sector/cluster/country team.

In larger operations, and where resources are available, a dedicated disability inclusion in humanitarian response post could be created. In other settings, focal points for disability inclusion should be able to dedicate at least 20 per cent of their time to this role. They should also have the level of seniority required to participate in decision-making processes and have the capacity (mandate and experience) to influence across all UNICEF sectors of engagement.

The Office of the Resident Coordinator/ Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) should also have a designated Disability Focal Point to engage with local OPDs and other focal points (as stipulated in the RC/HC Handbook).

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[1] Example of UNICEF ToRs for disability focal points can be accessed here: Example 1*, Example 2*.

Role of UNICEF to support interagency coordination on disability inclusion

UNICEF can engage in strengthening coordination on disability inclusion in the following ways:

- Leading the establishment of a DWG by:
  - Identifying and engaging potential members.
  - Identifying and/or investing in skilled expertise to lead this coordination.
  - Engaging with the potential members to agree on the mandate, objectives, key priorities and responsibilities of members (e.g., through drafting TORs).
- Participating in the DWG to contribute knowledge and expertise on children with disabilities with a focus on sectors of expertise, including education, WASH, nutrition and child protection.
- Contributing to resourcing the DWG, for example, by hosting meetings, providing reasonable accommodations, and supporting capacity building of members.
- Facilitating linkages between relevant government counterparts and the DWG.
- As a cluster-lead agency, promote active engagement by the cluster system in the DWG.
- Ensure alignment and identify synergies between the DWG and other interagency initiatives engaged by UNICEF, such as those related to localization and AAP.
- In parallel, UNICEF can also strengthen the capacities of OPDs and persons with disabilities, including young people, to engage in the DWG, and provide resources if needed to support their active participation.

Annex 1: Example ToR of coordination groups for disability inclusion

Detailed Terms of Reference (ToR) provide a strong foundation for coordinating activities. Creating a ToR should be one of the first activities of the coordination mechanism to ensure that the nature, scope, and objectives of coordination activities are known and understood by all.

Ukraine: Draft ToR - Ageing and Disability Technical Group

Mozambique: ToR Disability Working Group

Syria: Inclusion Technical Working Group TORs April 2020

Afghanistan: Disability Inclusion Working Group

Annex 2: Learning from examples of coordination groups for disability inclusion

The following content is drawn directly from IDA, HI, CBM (2019), Case Studies Collection: Inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action.

Since 2010, coordination mechanisms dedicated to the inclusion of persons with disabilities have been established in a range of settings. They have commonly addressed both disability and older age inclusion under the title of Age and Disability Task Force or Working Group (ADTF/WG).

- Pakistan (2010): An ADTF was established within the Protection Cluster by Humanity & Inclusion and HelpAge International to coordinate humanitarian responses to monsoon rains and flooding (and subsequent crises).

- Jordan (2013): UNHCR and HI established a Disability Task Force under the Protection and Health Working Groups in response to humanitarian needs generated by the Syrian refugee crisis.

- Nepal (2014): An ADTF was set up by CBM together with the national OPD federation (NFDN), HI, HelpAge International as well as Older People's Associations (OPAs) and UN Agencies to coordinate humanitarian responses to a major earthquake.

- Philippines (2014): CBM collaborated with local and international partners, including HelpAge International, the national coalitions of OPAs (COSE) and OPDs (NCDA) to establish an ADTF to coordinate humanitarian responses to Typhoon Haiyan.

- Ukraine (2015): An ADWG was established by HelpAge International and HI within the Protection Cluster to coordinate humanitarian responses to the crisis in the east of the country.

- Bangladesh (2018): An ADWG was formally established within the Protection Working Group by CBM, HI, HelpAge International and a national NGO, the Centre for Disability in Development, to coordinate responses to the Rohingya crisis.

- Mozambique (2018): Light for the World and the national OPD forum (FAMOD) established a Disability Working Group to coordinate humanitarian responses to Cyclone Idai.

- Yemen (2020): UNCHR established an Inclusive Task Force within the Protection Cluster Syria; and HI and UNCHR established an Inclusion Technical Working Group (TWG) within the Protection Cluster for North-West Syria, to coordinate cross-border humanitarian responses from Turkey.

Common characteristics

Positioning: These ADWG/TFs are often affiliated with an existing humanitarian coordination structure, usually the Protection Cluster, but they adopt a deliberate intersectoral approach. For example, the Bangladesh ADWG contributes to the delivery of the Protection Sector's Protection Mainstreaming and Age, Gender, and Diversity (AGD) Strategy. The ADTF/WGs are commonly led by specialist NGOs, such as CBM Global or HI, together with national OPD or OPA federations where they are active.

Initial aims and activities: The ADTF/WGs also have commons aims. Most are established with a specific timebound purpose but then develop a broader set of objectives with a detailed workplan. For example, the Jordan Disability Task Force began with two objectives: the identification of persons with disabilities, and improved access to quality target services. Initial activities included service and referral mapping, particularly for physical rehabilitation, psychosocial support, and special education services which reflected the interests of the DTF members.

Further development: Later the Jordan DTF conducted outreach to broaden its membership and shifted its focus towards promoting inclusive services and mainstreaming disability inclusion in other inter-agency working groups through focal points. The DTF extended its service mapping; developed guidance with technical input from HI; and forged links with camp-level intersectoral coordination groups as well as government representatives. These approaches have also been adopted by other ADTF/WGs.

Influencing: The provision of advocacy, technical and learning materials is another common feature. For example, the Nepal ADTF used survey data to raise awareness within the Shelter Cluster about the situation of persons with disabilities which resulted in changes to prioritisation protocols. And the Pakistan ADTF published technical guidelines for health, WASH and shelter programmes, as well as a book of inclusive practices.

Data: ADTF/WGs also support the collection of data on the situations of persons with disabilities to inform needs assessments and strategic planning. In 2021, the Bangladesh ADWG collaborated with REACH to prepare tools and train enumerators for a joint needs assessment focusing on older persons and persons with disabilities. In Syria, the Inclusion TWG supporting the joint Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme on a range of data collection exercises, most recently on the intersectional impacts of the crisis on persons with disabilities.

Post-crisis: The role of ADTF/WGs evolve with the context. After the emergency phase of the response to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines the members of the ADTF formed a technical working group with government focal points to embed disability inclusion in the national manual for community-based disaster risk reduction and deliver a comprehensive training of trainers' programme.

Challenges and lessons

Common challenges for task forces relate to securing skilled leadership; mobilizing sufficient resources for planning and administration and encouraging sufficient time commitment from members and coordinators to provide more nuanced sector-specific support to humanitarian actors.

Resourcing and leadership: In Pakistan and Bangladesh, funds and office space for the coordinator were provided by a hosting organization, however, recruitment proved difficult. In Jordan, the coordination was shared between UNHCR and HI, following a common practice where cluster coordination responsibilities are shared by a UN agency and an NGO. In Nepal, OPDs and OPAs were resourced to provide vital technical expertise and leadership to equip the humanitarian actors with relevant tools and knowledge to ensure inclusive programmes.

OPD engagement: Some ADTF/WGs have faced challenges in facilitating the participation of OPDs and OPAs. In Jordan this was due to a lack of dedicated resources to support OPD engagement. In Cox's Bazaar there were no active OPDs or OPAs and it has taken considerable investment of

resources by ADWG members to support the establishment of self-help groups. In Nepal, OPDs were much more engaged in the ADTF. This was due to the size and strength of the existing OPD network as well as concerted efforts by CBM to engage with OPDs as partners before the crisis and encourage their participation in coordination mechanisms during the response phase.

Mandate and positioning: Experiences in all countries show that it is beneficial for task forces to be embedded into existing humanitarian coordination structures with a clear mandate and representation within specific sectors and at the intersectoral level. This can be aided by having a UN agency as a co-coordinator. Alignment with other intersectoral groups is also helpful as demonstrated in North-West Syria where the Inclusion TWG for North-West Syria is represented on a new Strategic Steering Committee for AAP, PSEA and Inclusion, established by OCHA, which reports directly to the Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator.

Impact: Task forces also need to dedicate significant time and resources to sensitize humanitarian actors on disability and inclusion. High staff turnover, a common issue in the field, continues to perpetuate this need. By combining efforts and capitalizing on each other's strengths and experience, these task forces can help provide a platform for coordinated advocacy efforts and technical assistance, adding legitimacy, and improving reach beyond what one organization could provide alone.