



Towards Disability Inclusive Humanitarian Action



People with disabilities are among the most marginalized people in crisis-affected communities and are disproportionately affected by conflict and emergency situations.¹ In disasters, their mortality rate is even two to four times higher than that of persons without disabilities.² Also, children with disabilities are facing higher risks of abuse and neglect, and women with disabilities are at higher risk of sexual violence. These risks exacerbate in times of conflict and disaster. Yet, at the same time persons with disabilities often experience barriers when accessing humanitarian response programmes.³ To make sure that no one is left behind, we need to take steps to reduce the risks and enhance the conditions for people with disabilities during times of insecurity and conflict.

In this guide we have gathered the most important things you need to know, to get started with disability inclusion in humanitarian action. You will learn which principles you need to keep in mind, and you will find practical tools and resources to take the right steps.

Who Is This Guide For

Programme managers, proposal developers and field coordinators who are involved in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian action programmes.

Table of Contents

- Key Concepts..... 2
- Legal and Policy Frameworks.....2
- Promote Meaningful Participation..... 3
- Remove Barriers..... 4
- Train Your Staff..... 5
- Monitor Inclusion..... 6
- Address Cross-Cutting Issues..... 7
- Take Sector Specific Steps..... 8



Key Concepts

What is disability?

What is inclusion?

What is the international standard for disability inclusion?

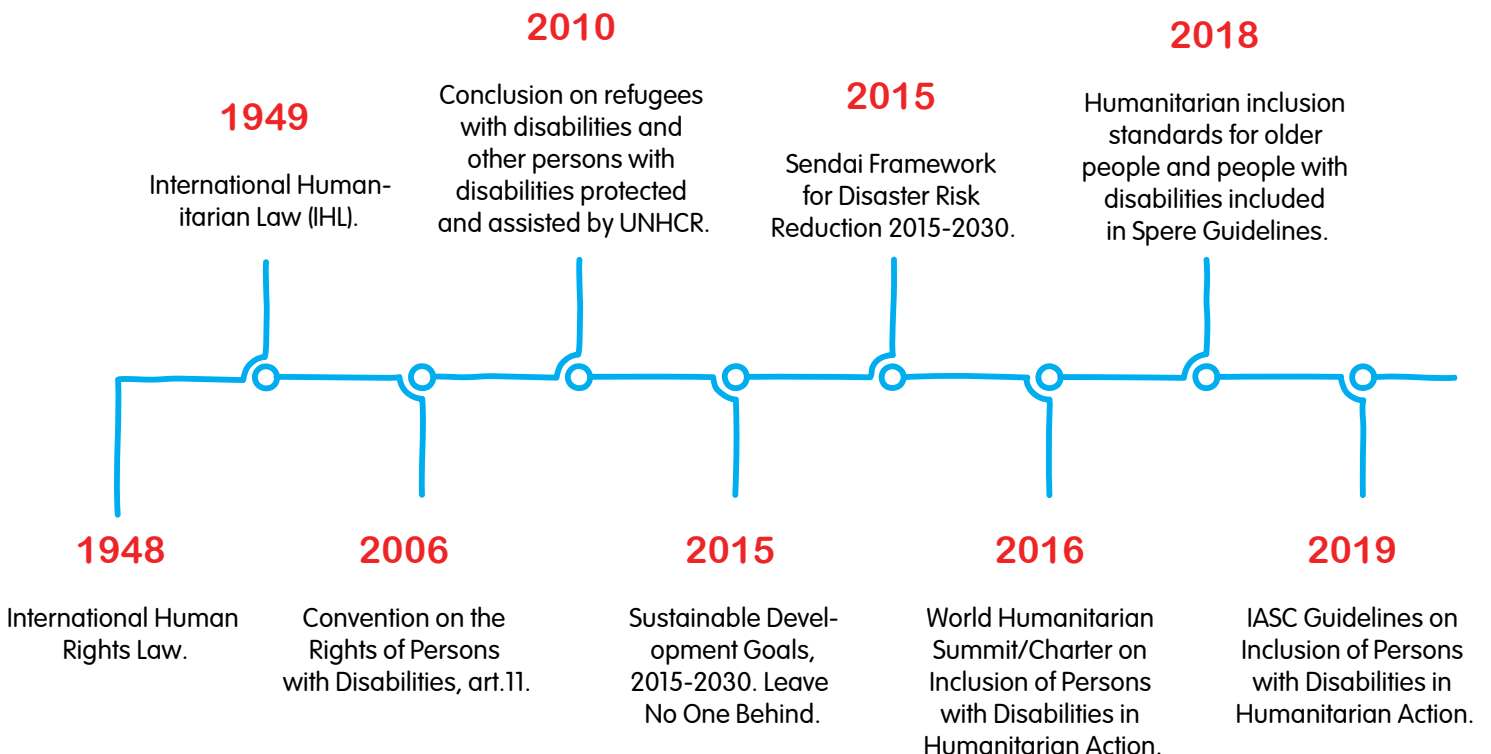
Disability is a long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which in interaction with various barriers may hinder someone's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.⁴

Persons with disabilities must be able to access humanitarian assistance and interventions on the same terms as other members of the population. This means that the barriers and risks they face must be identified and reduced. A rights-based inclusive approach also requires humanitarian actors to recognise the capacity of persons with disabilities to contribute to the humanitarian response as active participants.

In 2019 the IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action were published. They outline essential actions and sector specific advice on disability inclusion in any humanitarian setting. Following the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, humanitarian agencies and (representatives of) people with disabilities formed an IASC Task Team to translate existing quality standards into practical guidelines. The IASC guidelines are the first humanitarian guidelines to have been developed by persons with disabilities and their representative organizations together with traditional humanitarian stakeholders. Today the IASC guidelines are widely endorsed, also by the Dutch Government. We recommend that you download the IASC guideline and make use of its rich information and resources. This Quick Guide gives you a basic introduction into this topic.



Legal & Policy Frameworks





Promote Meaningful Participation

You do not need specialised disability knowledge to be able to take steps for inclusion. Collaboration is the key here. Whether your organisation has internal expertise on disability inclusion or not, it is a must to involve and collaborate with people with disabilities and their organisations, because they are entitled to participate in the decisions that affect them. They bring in experience-based knowledge and skills as well as a wide network of persons with disabilities in the communities where your programme is active.⁵ Moreover, they can help to make sure that your recruitment policies and referral systems are disability inclusive.

Toolbox

Checklist inclusive meetings

If you want to organise an accessible meeting: use the checklist on page 81 (Light for the World).

Disability Inclusive Development Toolkit

If you want to learn more about disability inclusion? This toolkit tells you everything you want to know (CBM).

Organisational Assessment Tool

This tool helps you (and your partners) to assess the inclusiveness of your organisation (Light for the World).

Checklist inclusion in the project cycle

If you want to make your programme cycle disability inclusive, the checklist on inclusion in the project cycle on page 85 of the Resource Book Disability Inclusion in Humanitarian Aid will be a great tool for you (Light for the World).

Roles and responsibilities of OPDs in humanitarian programmes

Do you want to learn more about the roles of OPDs and other stakeholders in humanitarian programmes? Check chapter 5 and 9 of the IASC Guidelines (IASC).

Concrete Action

- Seek advice and collaborate with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs).
- Involve persons with disabilities at all stages of your programmes to effectively assess and improve the inclusiveness of your programme. Make sure that meetings and events are accessible for them to participate.
- Recruit and include persons with disabilities in your organisation, at coordination level as well as field workers and community mobilizers.
- Map the services and disability organisations in your area to identify actors that already provide assistance for people with a disability, such as awareness trainings, treatments, rehabilitation, mobility aids and other assistive devices.
- Include services of disability organisations and rehabilitation centres in your referral points in your service delivery.
- Develop the capacities of persons with disabilities and their organisations in the field of humanitarian action. Equip them with the knowledge, skills and leadership skills they need to contribute to and benefit from humanitarian assistance and protection.

Relevant Networks

International Disability Alliance

IDA brings together over 1,100 organisations of persons with disabilities and their families from across eight global and six regional networks. With member organisations around the world, IDA represents the estimated one billion people worldwide living with disabilities.

Want to get in touch with national/international and regional OPDs? On the IDA website you will find all the contact details.

IASC Reference Group

The Reference Group is a platform fostering cooperation between UN, International Agencies, NGOs and OPDs in promoting disability inclusive humanitarian response.

Please contact: rg.disabilityinclusion@gmail.com to join the reference group.

Dutch Coalition on Disability and Development

DCDD is a Dutch network for disability inclusion, whose participants are active in more than 70 countries around the world.

Are you looking for disability inclusion partners to work with? Contact us at dcdd@dcdd.nl. We will happily connect you to partners in our network.

International Disability and Development Consortium

IDDC is an international network of civil society organisations promoting inclusive development and humanitarian action.

Check the world map on the website to find out which IDDC member is active in which country.



Remove Barriers

To include persons with disabilities within your humanitarian aid and response programmes it is important to remove communication, physical and attitudinal and institutional barriers that may hinder the full participation of persons with disabilities.⁶

Concrete Action For

Communication Barriers

- Ensure that persons with disabilities can access all important information about their rights, entitlements, accommodation and protection services.
- To do so, offer a variety of communication tools to reach and include everyone in your key messages. Your means of communication must be accessible to people who have hearing, communication, mobility and literacy limitations and/or difficulties with processing information.
- Spread information through disability organisations, service providers and caregivers of persons with disabilities.
- Always ensure to involve and consult persons with disabilities in the creation of communication materials.

Physical Barriers

- Conduct accessibility audits to identify existing barriers that prevent persons with disabilities to adequately access your services. The audit will not only show which barriers are in place, but will also offer tangible measures that can be taken to enhance the accessibility and wellbeing of persons with disabilities (e.g., a ramp to a hygiene facility or food distribution).
- Involve disability organisations to conduct accessibility audits and to learn from their expertise.
- Include persons with disabilities in the decision making on how to address or remedy the barriers you identify. Together you can prioritise actions.

Attitudinal Barriers

- Raise awareness among your staff about barriers that people with disabilities may face as well as their rights.
- Organise joint activities among the community to overcome stigma of persons with disabilities that may impact their participation and access in the community.

Toolbox

[Tips for inclusive communication](#) [+ Inclusive Communication Poster](#)

Want to learn more on how to communicate with persons with different kinds of disabilities? Read the tips on page 71-79 and hang the inclusive communication poster on the wall to remind staff about inclusive communication (Light for the World).

[Guidance for making infrastructure accessible](#)

Do you want to make latrines, shelters or camp settings accessible? Use the accessibility audit on page 67 and the practical tips on page 110-118 (Light for the World).

[Humanitarian Hands-on Tool App for fieldworkers](#)

Do you want to support field workers with practical information about removing barriers? This app provides them with all they need to know and it also works without internet connection (CBM).

[IASC Guidelines on providing reasonable accommodation](#)

Want to learn more about providing individual adjustments for persons with disabilities? On page 189-191 you find guidance for making decisions regarding reasonable accommodation (IASC).



Train Your Staff

Programmes can only be made inclusive if all staff members are aware of the rights and capacities of persons with disabilities and know what they need to do to overcome barriers. For example, train your field staff to deliver assistance and to recognize factors that can result in potential vulnerabilities or reduced engagement of persons with disabilities. But it is equally important to also train managers and proposal writers on how they can design a disability inclusive programme. This way you can ensure that no one is overlooked or excluded by your program delivery.⁷

Toolbox

[Interactive online courses for humanitarian staff](#)

Looking for an online training course for yourself or for programme staff? Make a free account and start right away. Courses are available in English and Arabic (Disaster Ready).

[Inclusion of age & disability in humanitarian action - a two-day training course](#)

If you want to organise a training on inclusion of persons with disabilities and older people in humanitarian responses, this training handbook will be a great resource (Help Age International).

[Inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action](#)

Looking for good practices and examples? This collection of 39 learnings from 20 countries will be a great source of inspiration (CBM, IDA, Humanity & Inclusion).

[Audio Podcast: New Guidelines for more inclusive Humanitarian Action](#)

Want to learn more about how the IASC guidelines can be used in practice? Listen to this podcast (PHAP).

[Guidance: Including children with disabilities in humanitarian action](#)

Does your organisation work with children? These practical resources will help you address the needs of children with disabilities in different sectors (UNICEF).

Concrete Action

- Support your staff in learning more about inclusion and promote further dialogue around the topic. Use programme visits to engage into a conversation on inclusion with your staff and assess their training needs.
- Use the interactive free online courses that are available for humanitarian field staff to learn more about inclusive humanitarian response.
- Involve local disability organisations in training your staff and explore opportunities for exchange visits, so that they are exposed to inclusion and accessibility in real-life settings.



Monitor Inclusion

To create inclusive humanitarian programmes, it is important to know how many people face participation restrictions and/or are in need of assistance. We need to be able to verify that we are reaching persons with disabilities with our programmes. But how do we know that we have reached them? To give an answer on this question we need to disaggregate the data that we collect for disability. You can use The Washington Group Questions for this. It is a set of questions for identifying persons with disabilities in censuses and surveys. This tool is widely tested and used worldwide to disaggregate data for disability. The set of questions purposefully avoids using the term 'disability' as persons may be more reluctant to answer such questions e.g., due to fear of stigmatisation or exclusion. Consequently, the questions also do not require a yes or no answer but differ from: a. No – no difficulty b. Yes – some difficulty c. Yes – a lot of difficulty d. Cannot do at all. By adding a disability module, such as The Washington Group Questions, into existing data registration tools, it will effectively reduce the cost and extra effort of collecting disability data.



Do you have difficulty seeing, even if wearing glasses?



Do you have difficulty hearing, even if using a hearing aid?



Do you have difficulty walking or climbing steps?



Do you have difficulty remembering or concentrating?



Do you have difficulty (with self-care such as) washing all over or dressing?



Using your usual language, do you have difficulty communicating, for example understanding or being understood?

Toolbox

[The Washington Group Short Set of Questions on Disability](#)

If you want to disaggregate your data by disability, use this set of 6 questions that can be added to surveys (The Washington Group).

[Data Collection Training Videos for your team](#)

Use this video if you want to raise awareness about disability data collection (UNICEF).

[The Washington Group Extended Question Set on Functioning](#)

If you want to do a more detailed analysis you can use the Extended Set on Functioning to obtain specific information on the body functioning or psychological difficulties of a person (The Washington Group).

[Protection Mainstreaming Toolkit](#)

Use this toolkit if you are looking for practical guidance and tools to develop methodologies for interviews, data collection and protection in humanitarian aid (Global Protection Cluster).

[Module on Child Functioning](#)

Does your organisation work with children? This set of questions will help you to monitor children with disabilities between the ages of 2 to 17 (The Washington Group and UNICEF).

[E-LEARNING: Collecting Data for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action](#)

Want to start working with The Washington Group Questions? With this e-learning tool you will learn how to collect data and analyse them in a good way (Relief Web/ Humanity & Inclusion).

Concrete Action

- Include The Washington Group Short Set of Questions in your data collection system. This will enable you to disaggregate the data by disability and will allow you to develop targeted actions. Where needed you can also use the extended set of Functioning and/or the module on Child functioning.
- Using the short set questions in data collection is not difficult, but it is important to ask the questions correctly. So train your staff (remotely) on how to use and implement The Washington Group Sets Of Questions within existing surveys/registration forms.
- Use the data to assess the accessibility of your services and take corrective measures where needed. Include the data in your donor reporting and document and share lessons learned about disability inclusion.



Address Cross-Cutting Issues

○ Intersectionality of disability with age, gender and diversity.

Persons with disabilities are a diverse group of people, of which many experience different intersecting discrimination and/or marginalisation, which are often exacerbated by conflict and displacement. For example, it is important to note that the prevalence of disability is higher among women (19%) and elderly people (46% of persons aged 60 years and over) that face different intersectional barriers. Thus, it is vital to consider how e.g. age, gender and diversity when offering adequate protection and accessibility of services.

○ Protection from (sexual) exploitation and abuse.

Women and children with disabilities are at higher risk of abuse, neglect and sexual violence than men with disabilities or women with no disabilities.

○ Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).

Adults and children affected by emergencies often experience mental health problems as a result of the great distress they have been going through. Providing mental health and psychosocial support is key to prevent long-term mental health problems. People with disabilities are often disproportionately affected by disasters and conflict and also need the same access as others to MHPSS services.

Toolbox

Gender

Disability and Gender Analysis Toolkit

Does your organisation want to strengthen its approach to disability and gender equality? This toolkit helps you in the right direction (CBM).

Age

Age and Disability Capacity Programme

This programme webpage has several useful resources about good practices and e-learning courses about age and disability inclusion (Help Age International).

Age, Gender & Diversity

Age, Gender, Diversity Essential Guidance and Tools

Looking for more resources on age, gender and diversity in humanitarian work? This website offers you a complete list (Global Protection Cluster).

Gender Based Violence

Building Capacity for Disability Inclusion in Gender-Based Violence Programming in Humanitarian Settings.

A toolkit for GBV practitioners. (Women's Refugee Commission International Rescue Committee).

Quality criteria for accountability to affected people and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

Want to know how to meet the commitments of the Core Humanitarian Standards by including persons with disabilities? In annex 7 you get practical tips for all CHS quality criteria (IASC).

Guidance on Disability Inclusion for GBV Partners in Lebanon

This guidance will help GBV staff to strengthen their case management for survivors and at-risk women, children and youth with disabilities (Save the Children).

mhGAP Humanitarian Intervention Guide (mhGAP-HIG)

The mhGAP Humanitarian Intervention Guide is a simple, practical tool that aims to support general health facilities in areas affected by humanitarian emergencies in assessing and managing mental, neurological and substance use conditions (mhGAP).

Mental Health & psychosocial support

Take Sector Specific Steps

Your programme may focus on a specific sector, such as education or livelihoods. Various chapters of the [IASC Guidelines](#) offer key advice and tools for these sectors. Please look into the chapters that are most relevant to your programme! You will also find links to sector specific standards and guidelines in these chapters.

- Chapter 11 – Camp coordination and camp management.
- Chapter 12 – Education.
- Chapter 13 – Food security and nutrition.
- Chapter 14 – Livelihoods.
- Chapter 15 – Health.
- Chapter 7 & 16 – Protection.
- Chapter 17 – Shelter and settlements.
- Chapter 18 – Water, sanitation and hygiene.

Toolbox

[Webinar making cash assistance disability inclusive](#)

Want to know how to make Cash assistance disability inclusive? Listen to this webinar and find out good practices (CBM).

[Examples and evidence for Inclusion in crisis response, recovery and resilience](#)

If you are looking for sector specific examples and good practices, this document will give you all the tips that you need (K4D).

Feel free to contact us at dcdd@dcdd.nl in case you have questions or if you have tips for tools to include in this guidance note!

This guidance note has been developed by the Dutch Coalition on Disability and Development in collaboration with Dorcas, Into Inclusion, SeeYou, ZOA and War Child. It aims to give managers and coordinators of humanitarian programmes a basic introduction into disability inclusive programming. Its content is primarily based on the IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. For more detailed information we recommend the use of the IASC Guidelines. Special thanks to Gerlinde Schmidt for the research and writing.



Endnotes:

1. Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Statement on disability inclusion for the World Humanitarian Summit, 2015: <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/WHs/Statement-of-the-on-disability-inclusion-for-WHS.pdf>
 2. Disability-inclusive Humanitarian Action, United Nations: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/issues/whs.html>
 3. Disability in humanitarian contexts, Handicap International, 2015: <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/WHs/Disability-in-humanitarian-contexts-HI.pdf>
 4. UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006
 5. IASC Guidelines page 20
 6. IASC Guidelines page 20
 7. IASC Guidelines page 20
- Cover image: SeeYou Foundation – IDP camp in South Sudan

Publication date: July 2021.