



# disability inclusion annual report

2019



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disability inclusion  
annual report  
2019

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## About UNRWA

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and mandated to provide assistance and protection to some 5.5 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, and microfinance.

**Cover photo:** A Palestine refugee student in class at the UNRWA Budrus Secondary School. © 2008 UNRWA Photo by John Tordai.

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# chapter 1: introduction

## 1.1 Background

UNRWA currently has up to 5.5 million Palestine refugees registered in all its five fields of operation in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza. Going by the World Health Organization (WHO) and World Bank<sup>1</sup> disability report, approximately 15 per cent of the global population is living with a disability, which implies that, at least, 839,632 Palestine refugees with disabilities are under UNRWA programmes. However, this figure may go up in humanitarian contexts due to its associated vulnerabilities, as is the case with UNRWA beneficiaries. Therefore, disability inclusion is at the heart of UNRWA programmes and services.

Persons with disabilities are historically stigmatised and marginalised. This has limited their access to basic services, and participation in the mainstream of life on an equal basis with others. Disability is closely linked to poverty. Poor people are prone to acquiring permanent impairments due to inadequate access to good nutrition and health care; higher probability of being in risky/hazardous jobs and the likelihood of living in unhygienic or unsafe places. On the other hand, persons with disabilities face barriers to access employment, education, healthcare and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Disability is also a human rights issue because it is about inequality of opportunities. Therefore, disability inclusion is critical for human development and responding to humanitarian crisis and underscores the reason why disability is considered as a cross-cutting issue by UNRWA.

Palestine refugees with disabilities may be more vulnerable than other persons with disabilities because, in addition to widespread socio-economic exclusion and poverty, they are also more prone to neglect, abuse and violence, psychosocial distress, loss of assistive devices and decreased access to needed medications. The funding crisis that has hit UNRWA since 2018 has, in particular, led to a loss of services for persons with disabilities.

Furthermore, humanitarian settings make Palestine refugees prone to acquiring long-term impairments, particularly in Syria, Gaza and West Bank due to the ongoing use of live ammunition by the Israeli Security Forces in Gaza and West Bank and the explosive remnants of war and unexploded ordnance in Syria.

For example, a 2019 nationwide household survey in Syria indicated a disability prevalence of 27 per cent (aged 12 and above), using the Washington Group Short Set questions.<sup>2</sup> Among them are Palestine refugees with disabilities who are exposed to violence, inadequate medical assistance and limited access to livelihoods. The study findings also revealed that disability prevalence doubled from age 12-14 (15 per cent) to age 40-44 (32 per cent), which was linked to military engagement by men, displacement and migration.

In Gaza, the 'Great March of Return' (GMR), which started in March 2018, has also led to an increasing number of persons injured, including Palestine refugees. A significant proportion of the injured demonstrators have acquired permanent disabling conditions. From the beginning of the GMR on 30 March 2018 to 30 October 2019, the WHO has verified that 321 Palestinians had been killed and 31,338 people injured.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the permanent disabilities that had resulted from the GMR until 30 August 2019 from the injuries had included 149 amputations, including 30 children. Also, 24 patients were paralysed from spinal cord injuries and 15 people lost their sight as a result of the ISF use of force against the demonstrators. For its part, UNRWA health centres have treated 3,253 GMR cases from 30 March 2018 to 23 September 2019, 83 per cent (2,705) of which have been as a result of gunshot wounds. UNRWA focus is now on long-term needs of the GMR injured, such as physiotherapy, MHPSS. A project targeted at mapping and addressing the needs and serious protection concerns of UNRWA students injured in the GMR has just started with long-term disability inclusion needs a focus.

## 1.2 Disability Inclusion at UNRWA

UNRWA is committed to the protection of Palestine refugees with disabilities, as exemplified by its disability inclusion principles – non-discrimination, awareness, participation and accessibility – and in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In 2019, the Agency has continued to address the needs and concerns of Palestine refugees with disabilities in its programmes and services according to the Agency's [Disability Policy](#) (2010) and [Disability Inclusion Guidelines](#) (2017). It also provided disability

services and interventions through its Disability Programme which has been implemented by the Department of Relief and Social Services (RSS) since 1989.

The Disability Policy and Disability Inclusion Guidelines – along with international commitments such as the recently launched [United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy](#) (UNDIS) and the Agency's endorsement of the [Charter of Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action](#) – have informed the Agency's activities towards the inclusion of Palestine refugees with disabilities. The Agency's Disability Task Force has continued to meet to promote coordination, as well as exchange technical knowledge, expertise and resources between and within the headquarters (HQ) programme departments and field offices. The new HQ Disability Advisor was appointed in June 2019 to continue to coordinate, oversee and provide technical support to disability inclusion in the Agency.

Following the launch of the Disability Inclusion Guidelines in 2017, disability inclusion training sessions have continued to occur in all the five field offices of UNRWA. Overall, 988 UNRWA staff members had received the general disability inclusion training, conducted by the trained staff in the field offices, till June 2019. This has helped to raise awareness and to improve the understanding of disability inclusion principles and practices among staff members. While UNRWA continues to rollout the general disability inclusion training in its field offices, in 2019 the Agency has initiated the development and rollout of tailored training packages for individual programme staff to apply disability inclusion principles in their daily work.

Evaluations of the tailored training sessions by participants indicated that the participatory nature of the sessions through the involvement of beneficiaries with disabilities, as well as the interactive facilitation methods utilised was well received. Participants were challenged to re-think their understanding of disability and move away from a charity model of disability to a rights-based approach and to adopt correct disability terminology. Pre- and post-training scores showed the positive impact of the training on staff knowledge and skills, with an average increase of 33.7 per cent across the training sessions.

As a follow-up to the Agency-wide initiative in 2018 to improve the collection of disability-disaggregated data in UNRWA, discussions are ongoing with the HQ health programme and in Lebanon and Gaza to explore the use of Washington Group questions in the Agency's

e-health information management system. Similarly, the Gaza Field Office Disability Task Force members are considering the use of Washington Group questions in programme surveys and planning.

In early 2019, UNRWA and the non governmental organization (NGO) Humanity and Inclusion finalized and disseminated a lessons learned report on their partnership since 2014 in relation to strengthening disability inclusion in UNRWA. The report indicated significant changes at the organisational and programming levels in terms of disability inclusion in UNRWA. Based on the lessons learned the partnership agreement was renewed for a further year.

Furthermore, the Agency commenced actions towards the implementation of the first-ever [UNDIS](#), which the United Nations Secretary-General launched in June 2019. The UNDIS, comprising a policy and an accountability framework, provides a foundation for sustainable and transformative change towards disability inclusion throughout all areas of the United Nations work. Each United Nations entity is expected to develop an action plan to implement the UNDIS and to report annually against the 15 common-system indicators in the accountability framework. The indicators focus on four areas: leadership; strategic planning and management; inclusiveness, programming and organizational culture. The implementation of the UNDIS is an important opportunity for UNRWA to further align with international standards on disability inclusion. Therefore, efforts are ongoing to identify the current gaps, and to draw up an action plan towards its implementation.

The Agency disseminated an updated [Disability Factsheet in 2019](#) to highlight its current work in disability inclusion. The 2019 Disability Factsheet was disseminated internally and externally, including through the Representative Office in New York at the launch of the [Inter-Agency Standing Committee \(IASC\) Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action](#) in November 2019.

# chapter 2: main actions undertaken in 2019

UNRWA adopts a twin-track approach to ensure the full inclusion of Palestine refugees with disabilities. This entails ‘disability mainstreaming’, whereby all UNRWA programmes and services are universally designed to ensure that they are usable by and/or reach beneficiaries with disabilities, coupled with the provision of ‘targeted/tailored interventions’ to meet the individual disability-specific needs of Palestine refugees through the Disability Programme led by the RSS. During 2019, UNRWA implemented the following activities to address the specific needs of Palestine refugees with disabilities:

## 2.1. Direct Specialized Services for Persons with Disabilities

The UNRWA Disability Programme reaches over 25,000 Palestine refugees with disabilities directly every year, or in partnership with community based rehabilitation centres (CBRCs). These services include 1) provision of direct or indirect assistive devices to increase their access to services 2) support to Community Based Rehabilitation services for persons with visual and hearing impairments, children with cerebral palsy and intellectual disabilities, as well as refugees requiring speech and physical therapy; 3) community awareness-raising activities to promote positive attitudes within the community towards the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

For example, in Gaza, 5,819 persons with disabilities benefitted from UNRWA Disability Programme as of October 2019. Service provision included special education and integration services, provision of assistive devices and rehabilitation services, as well as vocational training. Seven CBRCs and a Rehabilitation Centre for Visually Impaired provided special education services to 1,105 children with disabilities whose needs cannot be met in UNRWA inclusive schools, or in preparation for integration into UNRWA and government schools.

Similarly, the Disability Programme in West Bank supported 1,498 persons with disabilities from January to October 2019. Among the services provided were vocational trainings for six persons (four males and two females) with disabilities in partnership with Women Programme Centres and private Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) centres, such as World

Technical Elite. Palestine refugees with disabilities also benefitted from assistive devices, speech therapy, special education support, inclusive summer camps and awareness-raising sessions.

### Vocational Training of a Beneficiary with Disability

*In West Bank, a 19 year-old, male Palestine refugee with hearing impairment, whose family is on the Social Safety Net Programme (SSNP), received a series of guidance and counseling sessions on vocational training. Subsequently, UNRWA enrolled him in a private vocational training centre, where he acquired skills in painting. After his training, he secured a temporary job in a painting company. With this breakthrough, he would be able to gain relevant work experience for a better employment in his chosen vocation in the future.*

In **Lebanon**, 677 Palestine refugees with disabilities benefitted from the Disability Programme from January to October 2019. In addition to the regular services of providing assistive devices, there were special education support in the form of covering the tuition fees of SSNP children with disabilities in contracted schools and facilitating scholarship for non-SSNP children. The Disability Programme also collaborated with 14 local Palestinian organizations under the Palestinian Disability Forum to update data on Palestine refugees in Lebanon. The database will provide information on 7,560 persons with disabilities to the members of the Palestinian Disability Forum.

In **Syria**, a total of 2,054 persons with disabilities received assistance from January to October 2019, including 1,105 who received assistive devices; 373 people who attended physiotherapy sessions; 361 individuals who attended awareness-raising sessions; 1,218 who attended psychosocial support



and recreational activities and 20 who attended vocational training courses. In addition, 158 children benefitted from support in speech evaluation, behavioural therapy and intellectual development sessions. Through the support of learning centres, children with disabilities, including children with learning needs received support and care to access education that is appropriate to their needs.

### Economic empowerment of persons with disabilities

*In West Bank, a male beneficiary with disability was renting his brother's kiosk. Through the support of the Agency's Poverty Alleviation Programme, he was able to buy the kiosk from his brother and was able to stock it with the necessary goods. As a result, he is making more profits from his business and he is more independent.*

## 2.2. Disability Inclusion through Programmes

**Education:** Inclusive education is central to the UNRWA Education Reform (2011) and this is further emphasized in the Agency Medium Term Strategy (2016-2021). The education programme measures and reports on the participation of students with additional needs in education in order to highlight the importance of being identified and supported. The indicators related to disability have helped to reinforce the importance of the participation of students with additional needs in all activities in classrooms and schools. In line with this, the education programme has worked with the Information Management and Technology Department to strengthen its Education Management Information System (EMIS) to be able to better capture this information.

In addition to the Indicators, the education programme measures issues of equity through three key studies, every three years. These are the Monitoring and Learning Achievement, to measure the equity of learning outcomes; the Perceptual Survey, which focuses on perceptions of children, teachers and parents about the implementation of inclusive education practices in schools and the annual Classroom Observation Study

that looks at what practices are in place in the classroom and how these might support inclusive education." The measurement of disability indicators through the EMIS UNRWA can determine the extent to which inclusive approaches are embedded in educational practices.

Using the direct support approach, Syria and Gaza Field Offices have improved learning outcomes for students with learning difficulty. For example, **Gaza Field Office's** 16 fieldwork teachers (from the Learning Support Centres teams in each education area) identified and responded to the needs of students with disabilities through visits to identified students, in order to evaluate and facilitate referrals. Furthermore, the teams worked with teachers and parents, as well as UNRWA programmes and the communities to improve access to quality education. In general, 61 per cent (3,199) of the identified students with disabilities (5,239) in Gaza Field Office in 2018/19 school year received various types of support.

**Lebanon Field Office** identified 3,046 students with disabilities across 65 UNRWA schools in the 2018/19 school year, out of which 97 per cent (2,962) received support internally at UNRWA school or health clinics. The remaining 198 students with disabilities were referred externally for support. For instance, 46 students were referred to specialized institutions for diagnoses and therapeutic consultations and 49 students were referred to the NGO Humanity and Inclusion for assistive and learning devices. Four shadow teachers supported four students with autism, quadriplegia and hyperactivity. The shadow teachers assisted with daily work at school. The supported students improved academically and in their communication skills. The school year also featured inclusive sports for 10 students with physical disabilities.

Additionally, the three Special Education Needs specialists in Lebanon Field Office raised awareness of UNRWA parents and students across all the five Area Offices on the right to education for all children, the importance of inclusive education, available services within UNRWA, as well as the importance of accessibility features in schools and how to interact with their peers with disabilities, including the appropriate disability terminology. The 19 awareness-raising sessions for each group reached 462 parents of Grades 1-2 students and 517 Grades 4-5 students in UNRWA schools.

In **Syria**, 13 students with disabilities participated in TVET courses which represented 2 per cent of the total number of students. Prior to the courses, the TVET staff received disability inclusion training. This made it easier to accommodate the students with disabilities in the TVET courses.

The Jordan Field Office and the West Bank Field Office produced educational materials in accessible formats. The **Jordan Field Office**, in collaboration with the Printing Unit of General Presidency, Jordan Region and

UNRWA HQ Production Unit, produced and distributed textbooks in large font size to 130 Grades 1-10 students with severe vision impairments in UNRWA schools. Similarly, in **West Bank Field Office**, students with severe vision impairments and students with dyslexia received iPads with software that allows them to listen to their textbooks in audio formats appropriate to their needs.

### Towards Inclusive Employment

*The portal of the Employment Service Centers in **Lebanon** was changed to improve the collection of data for advocacy and to address protection concerns. Among others, the new portal was modified to enhance the access to employability services for persons with disabilities.*

**Health:** The UNRWA health programme supports Palestine refugees with disabilities through the Family Health Team approach of health care, staff awareness-raising in disability inclusion, as well as improving the accessibility of health centres. Access to regular health care provision can play a vital role in the primary prevention of impairments, particularly for patients

diagnosed with non-communicable diseases, in addition to the early identification of impairments to provide timely interventions. In 2019, the health programme collaborated with the Protection Division in the development and rollout of inclusive health training for 90 UNRWA staff. The trained frontline health staff have started to rollout the training to their colleagues.

Beneficiaries in Gaza and Syria received rehabilitation supports such as prosthetic devices and MHPSS. Specifically, in Gaza Field Office (GFO), children with hearing and vision impairments received 134 hearing aids and 4,602 eye glasses, respectively. With the casualties of the GMR, UNRWA health centres in GFO have witnessed an increase in demands for rehabilitation/physiotherapy and psychosocial support, including psychotropic medications. Additionally, the health programme provided 702 medical prostheses and artificial limbs, as well as 3,128 orthopaedic shoes. **Syria Field Office** provided treatment to three children outside Syria, while 25 children received artificial limbs from UNRWA contract partners.



A beneficiary sewing at an UNRWA vocational training centre in Syria. © UNRWA Photo

The **Jordan Field Office** provided services for prevention of disabling conditions. During the year, children from 0-5 years accessed growth monitoring and immunization services for detection and prevention of impairments. Children in UNRWA schools got screened for hearing and vision impairments. Similarly, the programme collaborated to develop capacity of health staff to address the needs of Palestine refugees with disabilities in the provision of health services. Overall, 58 health staff from the four Area Offices received inclusive health training.

The **Lebanon Field Office** initiated an action to implement the 2018 Protection Audit recommendation on the collection of disability-disaggregated data in strengthening inclusion of persons with disabilities in health services. Lebanon Field Office health management staff also received training in identification of persons with disabilities as part of the inclusive health training.

In **West Bank Field Office**, the health programme screened 68 beneficiaries with disabilities for MHPSS, while nine of the screened individuals screened positive and received appropriate MHPSS services. Also, 70 children with hearing impairments received hearing aids from January to October 2019. Additionally, 1,200 children received eye glasses during the same period.

**Infrastructure and Camp Improvement:** The UNRWA Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme (ICIP) has since 2018 been implementing the standards and guidelines for Physically Accessible Environment (PAE) to apply to all UNRWA premises. All new UNRWA schools and health centres in **Jordan, Gaza and West Bank** are being constructed in compliance with these guidelines. Subject to availability of funds, these guidelines were considered in the upgrade of existing UNRWA premises. In 2019, ICIP led the construction of seven new UNRWA premises in Jordan, West Bank and Gaza and the upgrade maintenance of 188 existing UNRWA premises across the five fields of operation to meet the minimum protection standards for improved safety, gender-sensitivity and physical accessibility. ICIP collaborated with the Protection Division to conduct trainings in 2019 for 71 engineers in Jordan, Lebanon, West Bank and Gaza fields on mainstreaming protection in the design, construction and maintenance of UNRWA premises. ICIP also ensures that shelters and public spaces are designed and implemented to be accessible for Palestine refugees with disabilities.

In 2019, Syria, Gaza, Lebanon and Jordan also reported upgrade maintenance works to improve the physical accessibility of buildings belonging to Palestine refugees with disabilities. For instance, 30 buildings

benefited from physical accessibility works in **Syria**.

**Gaza Field Office** implemented the PAE standards in five UNRWA premises (four schools and one health centre) and in 40 houses. In addition, ICIP conducted a field survey to assess 20 shelters for children with disabilities affected by the GMR. The shelters will be modified to address the identified gaps.

The **Jordan Field Office** undertook the upgrade maintenance of 39 schools across the field, including the construction of the one health centre in Aqaba and the maintenance of one shelter for a Palestine refugee with disability in Talbieh camp. All the maintenance works prioritized the physical accessibility of the premises.

In **Lebanon Field Office**, ICIP modified/upgraded UNRWA premises according to the PAE guidelines in Beddawi Camp Relief Office, as well as in Qastal, Tiberias and Shajara Schools. ICIP also implemented a shelter rehabilitation programme and implemented an accessible play space. Twenty-three families benefited from the shelter rehabilitation programme in different camps.

**West Bank Field Office** undertook the upgrade and maintenance of 26 schools, which prioritized the physical accessibility of the premises. In addition, West Bank Field Office implemented the PAE guidelines in all of its ongoing construction projects to make sure that these measures are implemented as designed during the construction phase.

**Microfinance:** The UNRWA microfinance programme provides inclusive financial services for those with low income including for Palestine refugees with disabilities, among other groups. Through a network of 23 branch offices, the programme provided nine different loan products targeting business development, consumption needs and house improvements. While the proportion of loans for persons with disabilities was quite low (21 loans out of 17,317 loans provided in the first half of 2019), the Agency is improving its data collection process to provide a more accurate picture and taking steps to improve the percentage.

**Protection:** UNRWA recognises the vulnerability of persons with disabilities, particularly women and girls with disabilities, in humanitarian contexts. Therefore, the Agency prioritises disability inclusion in its protection services and programmes. Enhancement of disability inclusion was part of the Protection Audit conducted with 14 recommendations dedicated to issues and are being implemented in 2019. Additionally, from January to October 2019, UNRWA staff provided services to a total of 624 persons with disabilities with protection



UNRWA frontline health staff during an inclusive health training session in Jordan. © UNRWA Photo

concerns related to gender-based violence, child protection or general protection issues such as, civil documentation issues.

In **Lebanon Field Office**, the Protection Audit recommendations for 2019-2020 have prioritized disability inclusion through four recommendations in Health, RSS, Education and ICIP. The Protection Unit ensured the prioritization of the specific vulnerabilities, needs and experiences of persons with disabilities in its Protection Emergency Cash Intervention. Two of the 13 beneficiaries for protection emergency cash were persons with disabilities. There was also an awareness-raising session on disability inclusion and disability terminology targeted at 14 Lebanon Field Office staff, including programme colleagues from Lebanon Field Office's Cross-Cutting Issues Platform. Furthermore, the Protection Unit has developed an action plan to enhance data collection on protection risks of persons with disabilities with regards to gender-based violence, child rights and linkages with community-based organisations and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities. This will improve the participation of persons with disabilities and disability-disaggregated data collection.

**Gaza Field Office** identified eight adults with disabilities and 17 children with disabilities experiencing a protection risk from January to October 2019 and assisted a total of 14. Those assisted included one

person with disability experiencing gender-based violence and nine children who sustained injuries that resulted in permanent disabilities during the GMR.

As of the end of October 2019, the Syria Field Office Protection Unit directly supported 482 persons with disabilities through 28 psychosocial support activities across the country. Also, 12 children with disabilities received support to attend two-month summer club free of charge. The summer classes, which targeted children with learning and speech difficulties, resulted into positive behavioural changes in the children. Additionally, the project motivated 30 volunteers, including persons with disabilities who supported the preparation and delivery of the summer camp. During the same period, the Syria Field Office provided services to 232 beneficiaries with disabilities with protection concerns related to gender-based violence, child protection or general protection issues.

The **Jordan Field Office** Protection Unit contributed to the development of ICIP training and inclusive health training contents and resources. This included the production of short videos on physical accessibility and inclusive health services.

In **West Bank Field Office**, the Protection Unit collaborated with other programmes such as ICIP and RSS to promote the inclusion of Palestine refugees with disabilities in services, including a comprehensive list of

protection priorities for maintenance, which has been integrated in the overall designs by ICIP. The Protection Unit also put together a document on inclusive WASH, highlighting the need for UNRWA to adapt accessibility standards and practices in this regard. Additionally, the Protection Department is working closely with RSS programme to fundraise for assistive devices for 36 beneficiaries. These collaborations have yielded a shift in the conversation around prioritization of protection issues, particularly disability inclusion.

**Good Practice: Participation of Persons with Disabilities**

*Beneficiaries with disabilities participated actively in the ICIP and inclusive health training sessions in Jordan, Lebanon, Gaza and West Bank. This provided opportunities for the representation of the perspectives of persons with disabilities in the training sessions, which positively impacted on the participants' understanding of disability issues and of persons with disabilities. Also, the participants with disabilities felt empowered to deliver such training in the future.*

**International Protection Advocacy**

In 2019, UNRWA was requested to engage with six international human rights mechanism reviews and inquiries through oral and written confidential submissions in accordance with the Agency's Framework for Effective Engagement with the International Human Rights System (2011). Many of these addressed situations of violence and related to possible violations of international law resulting in physical injury and psychological trauma potentially causing long term disabilities, as well as the impact on rights of Palestine refugees with disabilities.

In 2019, public and private advocacy on the impact of injuries (including disability) during the Great March of Return was among the core protection work done that also relates to persons with disabilities. In March 2019, UNRWA published the report 'Gaza's "Great March of Return", one year on', which provides an overview of the information collected by UNRWA through its operations, as well as testimonies of staff and beneficiaries, that demonstrated the impact of the GMR on Palestine refugees and on the Agency's services. The report showed that, as a result of the ISF responses to the Great March of Return, more than 2,729 patients had been treated in 22 UNRWA primary health facilities. The use of live ammunitions against the demonstrators

had resulted in serious injuries, some of which caused long-term disabilities and had life-changing implications. For example, the report included the testimony from a 13 year-old UNRWA student who was shot in the calf and permanently injured in the GMR, with significant psychosocial difficulties as a consequence of this.

**2.3 International Cooperation**

In 2019, UNRWA continued its engagement and networking with the international mechanisms for disability inclusion. The Agency actively participated in the IASC Task Team on Disability Inclusion, and in the Working Group for the launch and dissemination of the IASC Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. The latter involved collaboration with the Representative Office New York to participate in the launch of the Guidelines in New York on 12 November 2019.

Furthermore, UNRWA participated in the consultations towards the development of the UNDIS and the piloting in March 2019. The contributions made by the Agency, through the review of its disability inclusion works, enhanced the development of the document. UNRWA is set to use the UNDIS to further consolidate on its achievements towards disability inclusion.

# chapter 3: conclusion

## 3.1 Challenges

Although the Agency achieved a lot during the year under report, there were also some challenges experienced by UNRWA in the course of addressing the needs and concerns of Palestine refugees with disabilities in its programmes and services. In addition to the challenges identified in 2018 such as lack of unified criteria for identification of persons with disabilities, lack of human resources, lack of specialised skills/capacity and low participation of beneficiaries with disabilities, which are still existing, the Agency encountered the following challenges in 2019:

*Lack of financial resources:* The Agency is facing serious inadequate funding of specialized services for persons with disabilities including assistive devices and other support. This was compounded by lack of budget allocation to disability inclusion activities for the programmes. As a result, there was a significant drop in the provision of assistive devices, including eye glasses and hearing aids. For example, in the first six months of 2018 in Syria, 928 Palestine refugees with disabilities benefitted from assistive devices, while the figure for the same period in 2019 was 596. Some field offices prioritise children with disabilities, while adults or the older persons bear the brunt of non-availability of assistive devices. Despite project funds, maintenance budget for elevators in buildings is insufficient undermining the accessibility of the buildings.

*Inaccessible physical environment and communication:* UNRWA has made significant progress towards removal of physical and communication barriers that prevent the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in its programmes and services. However, disability inclusion is a gradual process. Gaps still remain in the accessibility of the built environment such as UNRWA premises, installations, and shelters. The Agency does not generally make information available in formats accessible to persons with different types of disabilities. The focus is still largely on physical accessibility, while accessible communication such as health information and education are seldom prioritised.

*Inadequate partnerships and community engagement:* Closely linked to the low participation of Palestine refugees with disabilities is the limited partnerships with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities and other disability-focussed organisations which is critical, particularly for referral purposes. UNRWA does not

necessarily need to provide all the services needed by Palestine refugees with disabilities and it is often more effective to establish networks/partnerships for referral purposes, as well as for exchange of expertise/resources on disability inclusion such as sign language interpretation services and Braille materials.

*Disability stigma and discrimination:* Disability is highly stigmatised at the community and household levels. Therefore, some parents, community members and staff still have negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities. Mental health conditions are usually more stigmatised, which may partly explain the observed low utilization of MHPSS services by beneficiaries. Consequently, stigma impacts on the quality of services available to persons with disabilities, service utilization, as well as the visibility and participation of persons with disabilities in the mainstream of life.

## 3.2 Opportunities

Disability inclusion is a gradual process. It does not happen overnight. However, relevant stakeholders must take appropriate actions to achieve progress. As disability is an evolving concept, ensuring inclusive programming and services requires constant research, capacity building, identification and sharing of innovative and good practices. At UNRWA, the policy level work and the emphasis on capacity building in the previous years have been laying the foundation for systematic promotion of disability inclusion in the Agency. The achievements, coupled with the challenges mentioned above, have opened opportunities for improvement on disability inclusion in the coming year.

*Unified method of identifying persons with disabilities:* There is a compelling need to commit to a uniform way of identifying persons with disabilities across the Agency. This would also allow for improved coordination and collaborations among programmes and Field Offices. Additionally, it would make it easier to design, implement and monitor initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life of Palestine refugees with disabilities, including accessing project funds.

*Attitudes and skills of staff and attitudes from communities:* Stigma reduction is key to disability inclusion, because stigma is one of the root causes of exclusion of persons with disabilities from the mainstream of life. In the past years, UNRWA has

been working to change negative attitudes towards Palestine refugees with disabilities. More work needs to be done in this regard at all levels – household, community and organisational. Activities such as awareness-raising on the causes and prevention of impairments, models/approaches of disability, rights of persons with disabilities, role modelling, engagement of religious, traditional and political leaders as champions of disability inclusion are useful in reducing the stigma around disability and persons with disabilities.

*Participation of persons with disabilities:* Participation of persons with disabilities is one of the four principles of UNRWA's disability inclusion to ensure that Palestine refugees with disabilities go beyond being passive recipients of the Agency's programmes and services to being part of the decision-making that impact on their lives. This could be done by ensuring that consultations and community engagements target persons with disabilities. Meetings must be held in accessible venues; invitations extended to persons with different types of disabilities; provisions made for accessible communication; meetings facilitated in an inclusive manner and participants with disabilities supported to

attend the meetings. It is also a good practice to assign responsibilities and leadership roles to persons with disabilities, and to give them opportunities to voice their opinions and/or contribute to decision-making.

*Empowerment of persons with disabilities:* There are great potentials in persons with disabilities that are yet to be explored and utilized. Empowerment of persons with disabilities will enhance their active participation and leadership in humanitarian action. Most persons with disabilities are coming from a history of marginalisation. It is, therefore, pertinent to develop their capacity for disability advocacy and in other endeavours, as well as to raise their awareness of their rights and how to exercise the same.

*Staff capacity development:* More investment in developing staff capacity for disability inclusion (general and tailored) and professional training is critical. This is capable of improving access of beneficiaries to needed specialized services. For example, disability inclusion (general) could be part of the mandatory e-learning for all staff. Similarly, engineers may need to upgrade their skills on physical accessibility, which may not necessarily



In Gaza's CBRC-Maghazi, an audiologist assesses a beneficiary's hearing.  
© UNRWA Photo

be part of their professional training. Participation of persons with disabilities is also important. For instance, persons with disabilities could be allowed to co-facilitate a training session. This has been shown to improve understanding of the needs of persons with disabilities in many contexts.

*Budget allocation:* Deliberate efforts should be made to improve budget allocation to disability inclusion activities including all programmes planning for disability inclusion, which will attract a higher budget allocation. However, the ongoing financial crisis in UNRWA is also a contributing factor to low budget allocation for such activities.

*Establishment of external partnerships:* Establishment of partnerships could advance disability inclusion for Palestine refugees in multiple ways. UNRWA could partner with mainstream organisations with the aim of influencing their approach to disability inclusion and thereby widening the referral pathway for some services; livelihood partners for example could be an important target in this respect. UNRWA could also partner with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities to strengthen them organisationally, with the resultant effects of increasing their participation, encouraging their outreach to Palestine refugee communities and increasing disability inclusion resources. It is recommended that UNRWA compiles a database of disability-specific and disability-related actors in its five field offices. The current RSS reform might also provide an opportunity for UNRWA to do that as an Agency. In a few fields, UNRWA could also leverage on available mapping of resources through the humanitarian coordination system (e.g., the Protection Cluster) to broaden its networking and referral pathways. As already recommended in 2018 report, UNRWA may need to assess the quality of its existing and future partnerships and invest in strengthening the capacity of some partners to improve sustainability, effectiveness and efficiency.

*Availability of a Disability Advisor:* The presence of a Disability Advisor to coordinate the Agency's disability inclusion efforts, and to provide technical supports to programmes and Field Offices is a good practice that should continue. The documentation of a lessons learned on the partnership between UNRWA and the NGO Humanity and Inclusion that produced the secondment of a Disability Advisor

revealed positive changes at both the organisational and programming levels.

*Implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy:* The launch of the Disability Inclusion Strategy by the United Nations presents an opportunity for UNRWA to improve on the previous achievements towards disability inclusion, particularly in regard to disability mainstreaming. By reviewing the Agency's progress towards the 15 indicators of the UNDIS, and by developing and implementing action plans to address the identified gaps, the Agency would improve its commitment to disability inclusion. This will also strengthen the Agency's accountability towards disability inclusion, as well as enhance the existing UNRWA Disability Policy through the mandatory annual report to the United Nations on the UNDIS, and by reviewing the Disability Policy (2010) to align with the UNDIS.



# footnotes

1 World Report on Disability, World Health Organization and World Bank, 2011

2 Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme for Syria (2019): Disability, prevalence and impact – a nationwide household survey using Washington Group Methodology, Syrian Arab Republic. Accessed from [http://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wp-content/uploads/Disability\\_Prevalence-and-Impact\\_FINAL-2.pdf](http://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wp-content/uploads/Disability_Prevalence-and-Impact_FINAL-2.pdf)

3 WHO Situation Report accessed at [http://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/palestine/documents/Special\\_Situation\\_Report\\_Nov\\_14\\_FINAL.pdf?ua=1](http://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/palestine/documents/Special_Situation_Report_Nov_14_FINAL.pdf?ua=1)



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