



REGIONAL BUREAU FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Disability Inclusion in Asia and the Pacific

A Regional Overview, 2023

More than 700 million persons with disabilities are estimated to live in Asia and the Pacific Region.^[1] Persons with disabilities are more vulnerable to climate and conflict shocks, more likely to live in poverty, and more likely to be malnourished than persons without disabilities.^[2]

WFP is committed to the principle of leaving no one behind.

This means working to realize meaningful participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in its operations. As part of these efforts, WFP’s Executive Board approved the first [Disability Inclusion Road Map](#) in 2020, which defines how WFP aims to operationalize the [UN Disability Inclusion Strategy](#) across the organization.

In Asia and the Pacific, WFP is pioneering numerous new disability inclusion initiatives. WFP’s Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific (RBB) has volunteered to develop a series of pilot activities through its Asia-

Pacific Disability Inclusion Initiative. The aim is to begin demonstrating how disability considerations can be successfully integrated into all aspects of WFP’s work, including programme design, facilities management, procurement, partnerships, communication, human resource management, awareness-raising and skills development for staff and partners.

These initiatives are being rolled out with leadership support from a Regional Disability Inclusion Advisory Group, where WFP receives technical guidance from disability rights specialists in the region.

The initial focus is on four action areas:

- Engaging with organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs)
- Disability inclusion into data collection, analysis and programming
- Accessibility of WFP and programme delivery facilities and premises, and
- Communications, advocacy and technical support

1. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2022, “A three-decade journey towards inclusion: assessing the state of disability-inclusive development in Asia and the Pacific” <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/three-decade-journey-towards-inclusion-assessing-state-disability-inclusive-development>

2. Humanity & Inclusion, 2018, “Disability and Climate Change: How climate-related hazards increase vulnerabilities among the most at risk populations and the necessary convergence of inclusive disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation” https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/ClimateChange/Submissions/Disabilities/Humanity_and_Inclusion.pdf



Key Achievements

AN OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE



Engaging with organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs)

WFP takes proactive efforts to engage OPDs in the region, recognizing the critical role they play in disability inclusion. WFP has initially engaged representatives of OPDs including Asia Pacific Disability Forum and OHANA to provide strategic guidance on WFP's disability inclusion initiatives in the region as members of the Regional Disability Inclusion Advisory Group.

Furthermore, WFP developed partnerships with OPDs on the ground in several countries in 2022. For example, WFP is partnering with an OPD in Indonesia to meaningfully integrate disability inclusion into the next Country Strategic Plan. In Myanmar, WFP is partnering with multiple OPDs to better include persons with disabilities in targeting activities for the programme. In Sri Lanka, WFP is working hand-in-hand with OPDs to integrate the Washington Group Questions on disability data into the national-level census.



Disability-inclusion in data collection, analysis and programming

To inform country-level programmes, WFP has invested in generating evidence and developing operational guidance in two key regional programme areas: 1) disability inclusion in school-based programmes, and 2) disability inclusion in emergency preparedness and response. For school feeding, WFP is focusing research on Tajikistan, Bhutan and Laos, while for emergency preparedness and response, WFP is focusing on Indonesia and the Philippines. These research products are expected to be completed before the end of 2023, but initial findings have already identified multiple entry points to make programmes more inclusive. More broadly, country offices are piloting targeting and methods for data-informed programming, with guidance from research partner Trinity College Dublin.

WFP is also providing targeted support to persons with disabilities. For example, this started with the rollout of pilot activities in four selected focus countries initially:

Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. Soon, however, more countries demonstrated an interest in piloting disability inclusion-related initiatives, and by the beginning of 2023, WFP had begun such initiatives in six additional countries: Myanmar, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Philippines, Cambodia, Lao PDR and others (for more detail see the country section below).

In addition to targeted programmes, WFP is working on mainstreaming disability inclusion into existing programming. In 2022, more than seven Country Offices featuring disability-inclusive elements in their new Country Strategic Plans had their plans approved by the Executive Board.





Accessibility of WFP and programme delivery facilities and premises

WFP is investing in strengthening accessibility across facilities, travel policies, administrative functions, conferences, meetings, events and procurement functions across the region. This means making information, activities, and/or environments usable for as many people as possible – encompassing WFP’s role as both an employer and an implementer of programmes.

For example, in recent years, WFP has completed participatory accessibility audits at regional and country office level. A regional guidance manual on accessible travel is now available. Furthermore, WFP is developing a self-assessment tool for accessible conferences and events, and has conducted trainings for employees on how to improve accessibility across their work.

WFP is partnering with disability-owned social enterprise, Virtualahan, to roll out training and coaching on disability-inclusive talent acquisition and HR processes in the region. Furthermore, WFP launched its first employee resource group for employees who have disabilities, are caregivers, or have a connection to disability – and is providing global leadership for this group from the region.

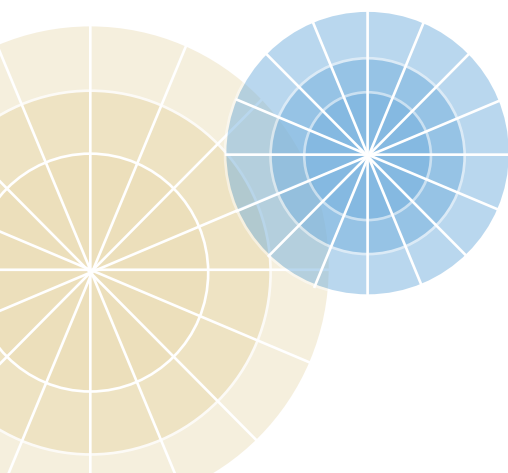
WFP replicated a corporate training on accessible and inclusive procurement for ten country offices in the region. This was complemented by an end-to-end review of WFP’s procurement processes in the region, which have now been updated for accessibility and disability inclusion by an accessibility expert. The goal is to improve the accessibility of systems, to enable increased procurement from disability-owned, and disability-inclusive vendors.



Communications, Advocacy and Technical Support

In 2021, RBB onboarded a Regional Disability Adviser, who has been the driving force behind disability inclusion initiatives in the region. The adviser has provided technical support (in-person and remote) on an ongoing basis to staff in the Regional Bureau and Country Offices. He has deployed on ten training and capacity strengthening missions since 2022 and has provided ongoing remote technical support across at least 12 country offices.

WFP has also placed a high emphasis on ensuring disability inclusion in communications. This encompasses everything from what language is used, to how stories are told and information is shared. WFP’s regional bureau is investing in capturing stories from across the disability inclusion regional pilot and sharing them using rights-based, respectful language and accessible formats. In addition, WFP has administered region-wide training for communications officers on disability-inclusive marketing and communications.



Country Stories

HIGHLIGHTED EXAMPLES FROM COUNTRY OFFICES



Afghanistan

Mainstreaming

Evidence

WFP is currently leading a disability study and cash top-up pilot project in Herat. This province was selected due to a high prevalence of disability amongst the population, high poverty levels, and strong partnerships with organizations of persons with disabilities in the area.

WFP is also conducting an accessibility assessment of its offices and providing training and sensitization for its staff and partners. WFP is investing in accessible and inclusive communication both internally amongst employees, and within community engagement activities. For example, WFP is partnering with local artists to visualize community-facing messages – improving accessibility for persons with disabilities, people with low literacy or people who speak varied languages.

In addition, WFP plays a leading interagency role in these efforts, by co-chairing the interagency Disability Inclusion Working Group to ensure more streamlined and coordinated response.



Bangladesh

Mainstreaming

Direct Programme

WFP is mainstreaming disability inclusion throughout its all-functional units through sensitization sessions for employees, using disability-inclusive data, and improving accessibility of WFP's facilities.

The self-reliance programme includes a disability-focused project to improve inclusion and accessibility within livelihood programming, ranging from conducting disability inclusion awareness raising for staff, to running sign language training in the Rohingya camps.

WFP also supported on inter-agency platform training. For example, WFP provided training on the Washington Group Questions for six targeted sectors (Health, Protection, WASH, GBV, Food Security and Child Protection), to a total of 155 persons including 12 persons with disabilities. WFP also supported transport for 30 persons with disabilities to participate in different meetings, trainings, workshops, and forums in Cox's Bazar as part of OPD engagement.



Bhutan

Mainstreaming

Direct Programme

WFP is mainstreaming disability inclusion through a pilot on social behavior change and healthy diets in schools. Recognizing that globally, persons with disabilities are more likely to experience poor nutritional outcomes than persons without disabilities, WFP is targeting the intervention in disability-inclusive schools (for example, schools with accessible buildings and learning materials, and teachers trained in supporting students with disabilities). This includes ensuring the representation of children with disabilities in education material, and encouraging students with disabilities to participate in healthy cooking clubs at schools.





India

Mainstreaming

Evidence

WFP, together with a new OPD partner, is conducting a study to better understand the barriers faced by persons with disabilities in accessing government safety nets. The recommendations coming from this study are expected to inform adaptations that will make it easier for persons with disabilities to receive their food entitlements.



Indonesia

Mainstreaming

WFP aims to mainstream disability inclusion across all its activities. This means working closely with the Government, who is WFP's main partner. To this aim, WFP partnered with OHANA, an organization of persons with disabilities, to provide recommendations across the entire country strategic plan.



Lao PDR

Mainstreaming

Evidence

WFP is partnering with Humanity & Inclusion and the Disability Mainstreaming Advisory Service Centre (DMAS), a local OPD, to assess organizational barriers and accessibility and sensitize all staff on disability inclusion. Accordingly, WFP has drafted a two-year action plan on disability inclusion for all programme and operational areas.

WFP is also generating evidence and implementing direct programmes. For example, WFP, together with the Government's inclusive education promotion centre hosted researchers from the Global Disability Inclusion and School Feeding Study. WFP also aims to collaborate

with the Lao Disabled People's Association to reach persons with disabilities and their families in the lean season with an emergency rice distribution.



Myanmar

Mainstreaming

Direct Programme

In 2022, WFP implemented a 6-month cash top-up pilot for persons with disabilities; combined with an assessment on food security and nutrition needs. In Myanmar, this is particularly critical as households including persons with disabilities have higher levels of food insecurity and malnutrition, rely more on negative coping strategies, have higher expenses, and have lower incomes than other households. WFP's top-up yielded positive outcomes, with 90 percent of respondents sharing that it brought a positive change to their household. WFP extended the duration of the cash top-up, and is expanding the pilot geographically to a third region in 2023.



Nepal

Mainstreaming

WFP has mainstreamed disability inclusion throughout its country strategic plan, and trained employees on improving accessibility across community engagement strategies and activities. WFP has also spearheaded operational research across multiple areas, including on food security and nutrition among indigenous persons with disabilities; as well as on school feeding and disability inclusion.

WFP is currently investing in disability inclusion through digital financial inclusion efforts, as well as school-based programming to ensure that children with disabilities have their nutritional needs met at school.





Pakistan

Mainstreaming

Direct Programme

WFP has started supporting disability-owned microenterprises, by providing technical and business training to entrepreneurs with disabilities. As a result, a large number of entrepreneurs have come up with new or expanded business plans since receiving training.

WFP is also investing in increasing accessibility throughout its own offices and within national health facilities. This is on top of disability-inclusive targeting that is already in practice, with WFP already prioritizing households with persons with disabilities for assistance.



Philippines

Mainstreaming

Evidence

WFP is mainstreaming disability inclusion through anticipatory action (AA). For example, WFP worked with the Disability Inclusion Helpdesk and an organization of persons with disabilities that attended the AA Simulation Exercise to identify recommendations for strengthening WFP's disability inclusion efforts. These recommendations were integrated into the AA standard operating practices and mainstreamed throughout the programme. Through its partnership with OPDs, WFP will also strengthen its reach to persons with disabilities through future anticipatory action work.

In addition, WFP conducted focus group discussions with persons with disabilities in three regions as part of its "Leaving No One Behind" analysis to gain an in-depth understanding of the needs and preferences of people with disabilities.



Sri Lanka

Mainstreaming

Evidence

WFP is providing technical assistance to the Government on integrating the Washington Group Questions into the 2024 National Census. The purpose of the nationwide exercise is to capture the prevalence of persons with disabilities. Having accurate disability data at a national level would allow government policy makers to more accurately design policies and allocate resources to support persons with disabilities. WFP provided technical assistance to the Government in partnership with organizations of persons with disabilities, which provided support and constructive engagement about disability in the Sri Lankan context. In 2022 and 2023, WFP has also trained government officers from the Department of Census and Statistics on the methodology. As a result, the department will finalize the module and engage with WFP and OPDs to roll out the training among census personnel.



Tajikistan

Mainstreaming

Direct Programme

WFP is proactively including persons with disabilities in school feeding, food distribution, and nutrition programming. By the end of 2023, more than 2,000 children with disabilities studying in primary classes (1-4 grades) benefited from school feeding programmes. WFP's school feeding program also help children with disabilities and their families to remain connected to schools and reduce drop-out rates. This includes investing in disability inclusion on the supply side of school feeding programmes, with about 63 adults with disabilities working as cooks in school canteens or engaged within income generating schemes.

WFP is currently planning to provide unconditional food assistance to 165,000 acutely food insecure people to protect them from further shocks and sliding further into food insecurity. One of the key targeting selection criteria is persons with disabilities and their families who are dependent on outside care and support.

Finally, WFP is working on modules related to nutrition services for pregnant and breastfeeding women with children with disabilities. The modules are planned as part of nutrition sessions for health workers and beneficiaries in targeted areas. WFP is also investing in internal inclusion, such as improving the work environment for job seekers and employees with disabilities.

What's Next?

LOOKING AHEAD FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC REGION

WFP will continue to take decisive steps to progress on its disability inclusion efforts.

To this aim, RBB's Disability Inclusion Initiative will continue to take a whole-of-organization approach under the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy. The 2023 and 2024 activities are designed under three core organizational change themes:

- Moving from awareness raising to institutionalization of disability inclusion across our policies and practices
- Moving from pilots to streamlining inclusive programming across our interventions and in our technical assistance to governments
- Moving from data collection and analysis to action.

Moving forward, WFP will focus on transitioning from awareness raising to institutionalization of disability inclusion across policies and practices at both the regional and country office levels. This includes supporting seven country offices with disability inclusive country strategic plans that were approved by the Executive Board in 2022, to deliver programmes and services in an inclusive way. This also includes support in mainstreaming disability inclusion in the development of new country strategic plans in 2023.

Thematically, WFP is finalizing operational research on how school-based programmes, and emergency preparedness and response programming, can be more inclusive of persons with disabilities. This evidence will inform the creation of lessons learned and operational guidance. To this extent, WFP will onboard a Knowledge Management specialist for the region to ensure that the valuable knowledge built over these initial years will be captured. Building on the regional pilots, WFP plans to invest in evidence building on mainstreaming disability inclusion across social protection systems and other programmes run by either WFP or host governments.

From WFP's experience in the last two years in Asia and the Pacific region, it has become clear that there is both scope and appetite for WFP and its partners to continue disability inclusion work in the region. Lessons learned from the various pilots on what worked and what didn't, coupled with research and new partnerships, will inform the future direction of disability inclusion – ultimately investing in saving and changing the lives of persons with disabilities.



[Contact us to learn more:](#)

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