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World Food Programme

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Summary Brief on Disability Inclusive School Feeding

A Practice Guide, 2023

This Brief presents key messages from [Disability Inclusive School Feeding: A Practice Guide](#), compiled by Impel Consultancy in collaboration with WFP's Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific between July 2022 and May 2023.

The Practice Guide is intended to enhance understanding of the links between school feeding and disability inclusion, and to identify entry points to help actors designing and implementing school feeding programmes address barriers experienced by children and young persons with disabilities (and their families) to school feeding programmes.



Making School Feeding Programmes Inclusive

There are at least 240 million children around the world with disabilities, 1 in 10 of all children.^[1] Current school feeding data regarding the number or proportion of all children receiving school meals fails to capture the level of inclusion and/ or exclusion of children and young people with disabilities.

Children with disabilities are at much greater risk than those without disabilities of malnutrition and food insecurity.^[2] Countries with high levels of malnutrition and nutrient deficiency often report higher rates of disability and developmental delays.^[3]

School-based health and nutrition programmes (including school feeding) are well placed to tackle poor nutritional status among children and young persons with disabilities, if appropriate access to school-based interventions is ensured.

1. Olusanya, B.O., Kancherla, V., Shaheen, A., Ogbo, F.A. & Davis, A.C. 2022. Global and regional prevalence of disabilities among children and adolescents: Analysis of findings from global health databases. *Front. Public Health* 10:977453. doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2022.977453.

2. Kuper, H. & Heydt, P. 2019. *The Missing Billion: Access to health services for 1 billion people with disabilities.*

3. United Nations Children's Fund, *Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities* (2021)

Barriers to School Feeding Programmes

Children with disabilities experience significant barriers to accessing schools where school feeding is offered and to school feeding programmes.

Children and young persons with disabilities constitute a significant proportion of those who are classified as being out of school. This may be because they have never enrolled or because they drop out early due to institutional, environmental and attitudinal barriers (see Box 1), including at school-, community- and household-level. These barriers disproportionately affect children and young persons with disabilities in rural areas and those in emergency settings.^[4]

Selected barriers to schools where school feeding is offered and to school feeding programmes are presented below, more barriers are presented in Disability Inclusive School Feeding: A Practice Guide.

Box 1: Categories of barriers to inclusion

- **Institutional barriers:**
Relate to legislation and policies that effectively exclude children with disabilities, including from accessing schools.
- **Environmental barriers:**
Relate to the accessibility of physical infrastructure, information and communication (e.g., undermining access to school, and/ or learning outcomes even when children with disabilities are in schools).
- **Attitudinal barriers:**
Are often the most significant barriers (which underpin many other barriers); negative attitudes may be so pervasive that children with disabilities internalize them, thus limiting their potential.

Table 1: Select barriers to schools where school feeding is offered

Institutional barriers	Environment barriers	Attitudinal barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited or no disability data collected, leading to 'invisibility' of children with disabilities in strategic planning. • Limited investment in service delivery capacity (including screening and early identification). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of and/or cost of accessible transport. • School buildings not built for universal access. • Noise levels and lighting not conducive or appropriate for children with various sensory and neuro-diverse impairments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents fear bullying, adding 'burden' to teachers, shame and/ or prioritise children without disabilities. • Parents resistant to inclusive classrooms. • Teachers' assumptions about the ability of children with disabilities

Table 2: Select barriers to school feeding programmes

Institutional barriers	Environmental barriers	Attitudinal barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of local control over the choice of food, reducing programmes' value in meeting the nutritional needs of children with disabilities. • Limited or no focus on building capacity or knowledge of appropriate menus for children with disabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inaccessible nutritional information and guidance. • Inaccessible water and sanitation facilities, posing challenges before and after eating. • Inaccessible dining spaces for children with disabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refusal by school staff to help children with disabilities who may require extra support with eating, often due to lack of time or resources. • Adapting or diversifying food provisions seen as an extra 'burden'.

4. See, UNICEF, Children with Disabilities in Situations of Armed Conflict (2018). Available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Children_with_disabilities_in_situations_of_armed_conflict.pdf. See also CBM Emergency Response Unit, 'Disability Inclusion in Drought and Food Crisis Emergency Response', CBM Australia (2011).

Making School Feeding Programmes Inclusive

Removing barriers to school feeding programmes experienced by children and young people with disabilities and improving disability inclusion routinely requires the application of key principles:

- **Intersectionality:** Disability, gender and gender identity, ethnicity/race, religion, indigeneity, age, sexuality, refugee and migrant status and class/ caste are all identities that can intersect and lead to discrimination and exclusion. Persons with disabilities are not a homogenous group, individuals have particular and specific needs and priorities. School feeding programmes must understand the local context and respond to barriers experienced by children and young people with disabilities.
- **Participation and meaningful engagement:** Disability inclusion requires input from persons with disabilities and their families. Family members can help school feeding programmes find solutions and develop strategies, because they understand the challenges faced by their children with disabilities. Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) can provide information on specific impairments and act as a conduit to persons with disabilities.
- **Accessibility, reasonable accommodation and universal design:** Accessibility helps to remove barriers to information, communication, services and participation. Universal design ensures activities, events and facilities are accessible for everyone. Reasonable accommodation focuses on removing barriers, but on a case-by-case basis. Reasonable accommodations can be temporary (e.g. a removable ramp or small steps for thresholds), they may also involve structuring school timetables differently (e.g. arranging for flexible school classes or break times for children with, for example, intellectual or neuro-diverse disabilities, or providing a quiet break or work room/space in a school).

The Disability Inclusive School Feeding: A Practice Guide includes more than 50 suggested actions and entry points to help strengthen disability inclusion (Table 3 presents select actions and entry points from the Practice Guide). Indicative actions are provided for each stage of the World Food Programme's programme cycle (programme analysis, design, planning, implementation and monitoring, and evaluation). Entry points are also provided for key issues deemed essential for sustainable national school feeding programmes: legislative and policy frameworks; institutional structures; supply chains; monitoring, data collection and evidence generation; accessible infrastructure, information and communication; inclusive feeding practices; budgeting; referral networks.



Table 3: Select actions and entry points for strengthening disability inclusion

Explicitly include children with disabilities as a named target population in school feeding strategies, plans and regulations to promote a consistent level of inclusion across the programme cycle



Where data gaps have become apparent through programme analysis, identify opportunities to improve disability data (including through the inclusion of the Washington Group Questions in government-generated data across sectors, but especially in education, health and nutrition programmes)



Ensure resourcing includes capacity development around disability inclusion (e.g., training for staff and partners and disability inclusion audits)



Support the representation of persons with disabilities in bodies responsible for school meals (e.g. School Management Committees, Village Education Development Committees, Disability Coordination Committees), monitoring the level of participation and decision making that persons with disabilities are afforded in such bodies



Provide feeding supplies and components (e.g. adapted utensils and corner chairs) designed to help children and young persons with disabilities feed themselves and provide meals that respond to the specific nutritional needs of children and young persons with disabilities, using disability status data to identify the most-needed adapted devices, according to the most prevalent impairments.



Engage OPDs (and children with disabilities and their families) in the design of school feeding programmes, including the type of transfer modalities for delivering assistance (e.g. cash transfer, take-home rations).



With country governments, undertake national-level social and behaviour change campaigns to strengthen understanding and attitudes towards disability in general, and nutritional outcomes for persons with disabilities in particular.

Conclusion

Action to strengthen disability inclusion across school feeding programmes is possible in multiple contexts. WFP is well positioned to champion disability inclusion in school feeding programmes and to evidence what works. With ongoing commitment to disability inclusion and internal systems and structures supportive of inclusion, the Disability Inclusive School Feeding: A Practice Guide will help WFP staff to realize positive change and have a lasting impact on children and young persons with disabilities.

Additional Resources

Below is a list of selected global resources that provide further guidance on disability, school feeding and nutrition:

- Groce, Nora E. et al. 2013. [Inclusive Nutrition for Children and Adults with Disabilities](#), The Lancet Global Health 1(4).
- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. 2020. [Policy Guidelines for Inclusive Sustainable Development Goals Food and Nutrition](#).
- Partnership for Child Development (PCD). 2015. [Inclusive School Health and Nutrition Programmes](#). PCD Working Papers Series No 1, Imperial College, London.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). 2022. [School feeding for inclusion: brief on inclusion in education](#).
- United States Agency for International Development (USAID). 2023. [Resources generated at the Virtual Convening on Improving Nutrition among Children with Feeding Difficulties and Children with Disabilities](#)

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