Disability Inclusion Helpdesk, August 24

Evidence digest focus issue: Stigma and Disability Inclusion

Contents

Guest blog: Maria Zuurmond

Maria has a PhD in Disability and global health, and more than 30 years of experience working in research and programmes in the international development sector. Her work is focused on children and young people and families, and for 13 years she worked at the International Centre for Evidence in Disability at London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) as a qualitative researcher. She has been a lead author and contributor on a range of training materials for children with disabilities and caregivers with a particular emphasis on using participatory approaches, and qualitative research. She is a consultant now and works on a range of disability issues, including stigma.

Q: How would you define social stigma in the context of disability? Who are the most affected by it?

I find defining stigma is complicated because it is a complex concept! Put very simply, it is a social construct that leads to the labelling and marginalisation of an individual or group. There are lots of different frameworks that can help understand different dimensions of stigma. I have found that this simple categorisation is useful: 'external stigma' is what you could describe as 'social or public stigma'. This is when negative attitudes and prejudices can result in discriminatory behaviour. 'Internalised or self-stigma' can arise from internalising these views. In my work with children, it is also common to see 'stigma by association' whereby family members, most notably mothers, are stigmatised for having a disabled child, for example.

Understanding who is most affected by stigma depends very much on the context. For example, people with albinism are treated very differently in different contexts. I remember being in Northern Ghana and being taken to see the 'spirit hill' where in the past they took children with complex disabilities to die; driven by very deep-rooted cultural beliefs.

Generally, there are layers of stigma. We talk about the intersection of characteristics that can make stigma worse, i.e. having a disability; having a particular type of disability; living in poverty; being a woman with a disability and so on.

Q: Why is it important to address social stigma as part of a disability policy and programming? What impact does it have on individuals with disabilities and society as a whole?

If you don't address stigma and its different dimensions, then you are unlikely to have the impact or outcomes you are aiming for. For example, when recently reviewing an inclusive education programme, I found that children with disabilities were not being identified and brought out of their homes and adequately reached. Stigmatising beliefs around children with disabilities in education was one component of that. And then when they are in school, we know that bullying and violence occurs and can result in poorer quality education and may be a reason they drop out.

Let's take an example from health programming. You won't be able to achieve universal health coverage if you don't improve access to health for people with disabilities, and stigma can be one of several barriers experienced by people with disabilities in accessing healthcare.

Looking more widely at society, having an impairment impacts not only the individual but their families too. In some of the countries where I have worked, for example, thinking of a research project in Ghana, children with disabilities generally came from single female headed households. This is often because the father of the child left, with stigma associated with having a child with a disability as a key driving factor. Blame was nearly always put on the mother for having a child with a disability. This often resulted in a spiral of poverty as carers struggle to access livelihoods.

This is why stigma is an important part of taking a holistic view, and recognising adults and children with disabilities also have the same rights as everyone else to education/health, and to actively participate in society. There are also plenty of economic arguments which show that the costs of exclusion are far greater than the costs of inclusion.

I think it is also important to remember that the stigma element can seem very small, but its impact can be huge. For example, I remember one mum in Bangladesh telling me that her sister would not hold her child, and no-one in the family would sit on the chair that her child used. This was extremely painful to her, as well as having implications for early childhood development. Consider the difficulties experienced by this mother finding childcare while she seeks economic opportunities. So, stigma might seem like a small thing, but it can have a very far-reaching impact.

Q: What are some of the challenges you have encountered in addressing social stigma related to disability inclusion?

The complexity of the topic can prevent people from addressing stigma. It's often difficult to measure or quantify stigma; there is no single simple measure. We can measure attitudes in surveys, but the issue is more complicated than that. Despite difficulties in measuring or defining stigma, the issues and barriers related to stigma are often similar across different contexts and sectors.

Q: Can you share any successful strategies or programmes you have seen or implemented that effectively reduce social stigma and promote disability inclusion?

I can share some good practice but the available evidence on what works is not that strong and needs to be improved. So based on my own experience these are good strategies:

- Having **good research at the beginning** that helps inform your strategy.

- I have found, more recently, that a **social behaviour change approach** can have something to offer. No one model in particular, but having a framework helps you consider stigma in a systematic way at different levels, as well as thinking about what might work and how you will tailor interventions to the context.

- I have seen the **value of support groups** in providing valuable safe spaces for people with disabilities and carers. These can address issues of self-stigma and build self-confidence and self-esteem of people with disabilities.

- **Contact theory**; we know from evidence that having more contact with people with disabilities can change people's attitudes on disabilities in a positive way. So, addressing barriers to inclusion so that people with disabilities are more visible in society, as well as being important role models, is important to effect change. I saw the value of this recently in a project in Ghana.

- You need to **understand local power dynamics**. For example, who are the opinion leaders and decision makers? I have seen a good example of engagement with traditional leaders, faith leaders, and local government to utilise their power to effect change. The role of media can be important, such as community radio but this must be combined with interpersonal approaches and addressing structural drivers of stigma.

Q: Looking forward, what do you believe are the most critical steps or initiatives needed to further reduce social stigma and enhance inclusion for people with disabilities? What should donors like the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) consider?

- Centre adults and children with disabilities in the planning and delivery of programmes. Let them determine what is most relevant. For example, there is some interesting work being done in Uganda on disability inclusion using peer support in schools by Femke Bannick and the team at LSHTM– looking at indigenous interventions (https://researchonline.lshtm.ac.uk/id/eprint/4658715/).

- Address power dynamics within communities by engaging community gatekeepers as disability champions and ambassadors.

- Using social behaviour change frameworks to help take a systematic approach to addressing stigma at all levels.

Disability Inclusion Helpdesk Evidence Digest
August 2024

- Stigma can be difficult to measure, but as a donor, they should require explicit reporting on stigma as a cross-cutting issue. This could be done with good qualitative indicators, and other proxy measures such as participation and wellbeing, to help give a fuller picture.

The latest evidence and guidance on disability inclusion and stigma

Research

In October 2023, the Ghana Somubi Dwumadie programme **published a study on disability stigma reduction interventions**. The study aimed to evaluate the design, delivery, and monitoring of interventions targeting stigma against people with disabilities and mental health conditions. The research, involving diverse disability and mental health stakeholders in Ghana, aimed to fill critical gaps in understanding effective strategies and promoting a user-led approach. The study provides a set of actionable recommendations for the Ghanaian context as well as what can be replicated. Recommendations explore informing future programme level investments; national level actions; monitoring, learning and evaluation; and research.

In November 2023, a paper was published on '**Disability stereotyping is shaped by stigma characteristics**.' The research explores whether a stereotype of people with disabilities being "warm but incompetent" varies based on the visibility of the disability. Additionally, it investigates how the perception of controllability of the disability onset affects these stereotypes. The results consistently showed that stereotypes differ according to disability visibility: individuals with invisible disabilities are seen as less warm but more competent compared to those with visible disabilities. These findings underscore the significance of disability characteristics in understanding stigmatisation.

In January 2024, **a situational analysis** conducted in Zimbabwe as part of the International Labor Organisation (ILO) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) joint project underscored significant challenges faced by people with disabilities in both Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) institutions and workplaces, particularly concerning stigma. The analysis highlighted pervasive discriminatory attitudes rooted in a lack of disability awareness, absence of policy frameworks, and insufficient political will to enact change. Specific issues identified included the marginalisation of individuals with hearing impairments due to language barriers, inadequate provision of sign language interpreters, and the concealment of psychosocial disabilities for fear of stigmatisation. The findings underscored the urgent need for a collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach to not only implement robust guidelines for reasonable accommodations but also to address deep-seated stigma and discrimination effectively within these settings.

In March 2024, a blog was published on '**Navigating through stigma and ignorance - Collective efforts towards disability inclusion**.' The blog outlines Oswald's journey, beginning with his paralysis from polio and the challenges of societal exclusion and lack of

resources. It discusses his determination to pursue education despite non-inclusive environments and his advocacy for accessible facilities at university. The blog highlights the global prevalence of significant disabilities, referencing World Health Organisation (WHO) statistics, and focuses on Rwanda's disability inclusion challenges, citing the 2022 census. It also covers Oswald's founding of an inclusive school and his work with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Finally, the blog details a retreat in Musanze, Rwanda, where stakeholders committed to promoting disability rights, enforcing inclusive policies, and fostering collaboration, as part of the Joint Programme 'Strengthening Disability Inclusion Accountability and Coordination in Rwanda.'

In June 2024, a study was published on **the stigma faced by children with physical disabilities in northwest Ethiopia**. The study aimed to explore the lived experiences of stigma from the perspective of children with physical disabilities and their caregivers, addressing the scarcity of information on this topic in low-and middle-income countries like Ethiopia. Using a constructivist grounded theory approach, data was collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and key informant interviews, and analysed using inductive and iterative grounded theory techniques. The findings revealed that children with physical disabilities are often bullied, talked about, pitied, socially excluded, and held in contempt at home, in their neighbourhood, and at school. These experiences of stigma lead to fear, uncertainty, and struggles that impact their emotions, social relationships, and educational activities. The study provides valuable theoretical and practical insights into addressing disability stigma and suggests the need for inclusive education policies, school practices, and disability advocacy. It emphasises the importance of disability awareness programmes, empowerment interventions, and informed disability policy and practice.

A scoping review entitled '**Towards a More Inclusive Society: A Scoping Review of Interventions and Policies for Changing Attitudes Towards People with Disability**' was published on June 25, 2024. The review examines evidence of the effectiveness of interventions to change attitudes. It categorises studies based on Australia's Disability Strategy's six outcome areas, analysing interventions by their level (organisational, community, intrapersonal) and type (education, training, modelling), alongside related policies (service provision, legislation, guidelines). It highlights the scarcity of consistent evidence on the effectiveness of interventions. The authors conclude that an effective transformation in attitudes and behaviours regarding disability necessitates a multifaceted approach, integrating various intervention types, policy frameworks, and intervention levels.

Guidance, Training and Case Studies

The report '**Key Considerations: Disability-Inclusive Humanitarian Action and Emergency Response in South and Southeast Asia and Beyond,**' published in July 2023, highlights the disproportionate harm and exclusion faced by people with disabilities during emergencies due to environmental, societal, and structural barriers. It focuses on Nepal (including a case study) but offers universally relevant principles to enhance disability-inclusive emergency planning. One key consideration in the report emphasises the need to counteract stigma by avoiding negative stereotypes and images of disabilities, challenging views of

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disability as punishment, and addressing the heightened stigma faced by vulnerable groups, such as women and girls with cognitive or psychosocial disabilities and individuals from minority communities. It calls for greater awareness and preparedness to ensure inclusive humanitarian responses, drawing on examples of good practices and evidence from various sources.

In August 2023, a **policy dialogue was held in Pakistan** as part of the programme 'Addressing Stigma, Discrimination, and Violence against Women with Disabilities.' The blog post about the event presents a discussion on the significant issues faced by women with disabilities in Pakistan, highlighting their exclusion from education, employment, and digital communication, as well as experiences of verbal and physical abuse. The dialogue, organised by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN Women, and UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD), focused on streamlining policies, developing anti-discriminatory guidelines, enhancing access to justice, and promoting self-awareness and inclusion. Key insights included the need for improving policy compliance through incentives or penalties, standardising infrastructure accessibility, enhancing capacity building, and promoting financial inclusion. The importance of involving women with disabilities in decision-making and the creation of a job centre to support their employment opportunities were also emphasised. The event underscored the need for continued collaboration to empower women with disabilities and ensure their equal participation in society.

An infographic published by the Danish Refugee Council and Handicap International in August 2023 aims to tackle stigma surrounding people with disabilities in Ukraine. It outlines practical communication strategies, such as avoiding assumptions, using person-first language, and directly engaging individuals with disabilities. The content underscores the persistence of negative attitudes based on the medical model, emphasising dependency rather than independence. It calls for a rights-based approach to counter stigma, advocating for inclusive practices in organisational activities and narratives to promote societal acceptance and respect for diversity.

In November 2023, a project report was published on '**Ending stigma and discrimination in training institutions and workplaces in Tanzania.**' This initiative was part of a multi-country programme that ran from March 2021 to December 2023, funded by the UNPRPD and implemented by UNESCO in partnership with the ILO across Mozambique, Tanzania, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. The project aimed to combat stigma and discrimination against persons with disabilities in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions and workplaces, addressing the higher rates of unemployment and underemployment faced by people with disabilities. In Tanzania, the project collaborated with government ministries, employers, workers' associations, TVET institutions, human rights organisations, and the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, with organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) playing a key role. Key achievements included the development of three participatory disability inclusion audit tools, which were piloted in two TVET institutions, identifying areas for improvement in combating harmful prejudices and stereotypes. The project also established a National Dialogue Committee, developed a Participatory Audit Tool, and created guidelines for

reasonable accommodations (yet to be published), with the collaboration of various partners and ministries.

A blog published in November 2023 highlights how the UNDP Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme is addressing stigma against people with disabilities in Ghana by involving them in sustainable agriculture projects to boost community resilience to climate change. By partnering with local OPDs, the initiative has not only improved food security and increased incomes, but another outcome reported is reduced stigma and discrimination. The blog highlights how the active inclusion of people with disabilities in these projects has elevated their status within the community, leading to greater respect and recognition from local chiefs and community members. This has enhanced their role in decision-making processes, thereby fostering a sense of equality and reducing societal barriers.

In December 2023, the Women's Integrated Sexual Health (WISH) programme, MSI Reproductive Choices and partners **published learnings from a project on inclusive reproductive healthcare**, focusing on marginalised communities, including people with disabilities. This programme revealed that people with disabilities face substantial challenges in accessing healthcare due to physical barriers, discriminatory attitudes, and lack of inclusive policies. The programme emphasised non-discrimination, meaningful engagement, and accessibility by working closely with disability-focused organisations like Leonard Cheshire and Sightsavers. Key learnings highlighted the importance of community dialogue to combat stigma and the need for healthcare providers to undergo values clarification and attitudes transformation training to address their biases.

The report '**A Guide to Inclusive Education**,' published in December 2023, addresses the challenges faced by refugee and forcibly displaced children with disabilities in accessing education, particularly in conflict-affected settings. The report focuses on stigma as one of the significant barriers to inclusive education, noting how discrimination, prejudice, and physical barriers prevent children with disabilities from attending school and participating in social activities. To combat these issues, the guide outlines approaches that include community participation, raising awareness of disability rights, teacher training, curriculum adaptation, and the provision of specialised equipment.

In May 2024, UNICEF published a training module entitled '**Monitoring, Evaluating, and Measuring: Addressing Stigma and Discrimination Toward Children and Youth with Disabilities through Social and Behaviour Change (SBC).**' In this training module, UNICEF provides comprehensive approaches and tools for measuring the progress and effectiveness of social and behaviour change (SBC) initiatives aimed at promoting the inclusion of children with disabilities. As the seventh module in a broader toolkit, it builds on the foundational theory of change introduced in previous modules of the training package, presenting a structured monitoring and evaluation framework. The document includes specific indicators, tools, and verification methods to assess the impact of SBC activities, addressing the persistent issue of stigma and discrimination faced by children and youth with disabilities. This module serves as a practical guide for practitioners seeking to implement evidence-based interventions to foster inclusive social environments.

The latest evidence and guidance on disability inclusion: Other topics

General

In April 2024, the International Development Committee (IDC) **published a report** on the FCDO and its disability-inclusive development strategy. The inquiry assessed the effectiveness of the FCDO's Disability and Inclusion Rights Strategy, launched in February 2022, and the impact of reducing aid spending from 0.7% to 0.5% of Gross National Income (GNI) on disability-inclusive programmes. The report highlighted that consultations with OPDs are often arbitrary and lack obligation, leading to policy decisions made without their input. Additionally, disability inclusion has not been adequately integrated into the FCDO's policy-making processes, and the strategy is rarely mentioned in other departmental strategies. The IDC also found that the needs of people with disabilities are insufficiently considered in humanitarian responses and climate adaptation planning, risking their neglect in times of crisis.

In April 2024, civil society groups reacted to the IDC committee inquiry report on the FCDO's disability inclusion strategy. Dr Sunday Isiyaku, **Sightsavers'** Nigeria country director, welcomed the report and its recommendations, noting the potential to enhance the UK's role in disability inclusion. He stressed the need for a clear implementation plan and highlighted that only a third of the FCDO's aid focuses on disability inclusion. **CBM** praised the IDC for identifying both strengths and gaps in the FCDO's disability-inclusive programming. They supported the report's call for transparent targets and sufficient resources and emphasised the need for consultation with OPDs. **Able Child** acknowledged the report's attention to the FCDO's mixed performance, particularly in inclusive education. Co-Chief Executive Officer Lauren Watters highlighted the negative impact of funding cuts and endorsed the IDC's recommendations on disability mainstreaming and OPD participation. She expressed hope for a clear roadmap to support children and youth with disabilities. Parliament was dissolved for the 2024 general election before the Government responded to the report.

In June, the United Nations (UN) published a flagship report **'Disability and Development Report 2024: Accelerating the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities.'** The report examines progress on disability inclusion, particularly with regards to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It finds that people with disabilities are being left behind, with insufficient progress on 30% of SDG targets and regression or stagnation on 14%, particularly in access to financial resources, healthcare, water, Information Communication Technology, and disaster resilience. While some indicators, such as education laws and online services, show positive progress, significant gaps remain, especially in food insecurity, health, energy access, and multidimensional poverty, with even wider disparities for women, indigenous persons, and those with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues, as people with disabilities faced greater barriers to testing, healthcare, and essential services, and experienced higher job losses and income reductions. Despite an increase in data availability since the 2018 report, only half of the targets have sufficient data to assess progress, indicating

that much faster progress is required to meet the SDGs for people with disabilities by 2030. The report calls for accelerated efforts in accessibility, anti-discrimination legislation, social protection, and safety measures for persons with disabilities, emphasising the need for better crisis planning based on lessons from the pandemic.

In June, UNDESA published a blog entitled **'4 things you should know about rethinking disability inclusion.'** The blog highlights the importance of the upcoming UN conference on persons with disabilities, emphasising four key areas: technology and innovation, inclusive emergency preparedness, equal employment opportunities, and fostering a resilient, disability-inclusive world. It calls for international cooperation to develop and share inclusive technologies, implement inclusive disaster risk reduction plans, eliminate employment barriers through accessible job platforms and tailored skill development, and promote international efforts to recognise disability as a strength for a more resilient and equitable future.

In April, the UK Aid Match programme published a podcast on **'Organisational approaches to disability inclusion: Insights from MannionDaniels, Fund Manager for UK Aid Match.'** The episode discusses MannionDaniels' efforts in supporting disability inclusion and provides practical tips for grant holders aiming to enhance disability inclusion within their organisations.

In April, CBM published a blog titled **'Disability inclusive safeguarding must be the standard**,' stressing the importance of embedding disability-inclusive safeguarding practices in all programmes. Highlighting that people with disabilities, especially women, face significantly higher risks of sexual violence, the blog underscores the necessity for accessible and trusted reporting mechanisms. It emphasises the critical role of OPDs in building trust and designing safeguarding measures that resonate with their communities.

Climate justice

In April 2024, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction - Regional Office for Europe & Central Asia published a special report titled **'Flames of Change - Special Report on Disability Inclusion in Disaster Risk Reduction and Prevention.'** This report, part of the Making Cities Resilient 2030 (MCR2030) initiative, examines disability inclusion in disaster risk reduction and prevention. It focuses on understanding the issue in relation to the rights of persons with disabilities, identifying factors and obstacles that amplify the consequences for disabled individuals during disasters, and mapping international and European frameworks that protect these rights, with an emphasis on disaster preparedness and response.

In April 2024, a report titled **'Advancing Disability-Inclusive Climate Research and Action, Climate Justice, and Climate-Resilient Development'** highlighted the disproportionate impact of the climate crisis on over 1 billion people with disabilities globally. Despite their heightened risk, there is a significant lack of climate policy, programming, and research addressing the intersection of disability and climate change. The report, produced by a global interdisciplinary group of experts, offers research recommendations and guidance to enhance disability-inclusive climate responses. It advocates for a climate-resilient development framework that incorporates a disability human rights approach, emphasising meaningful

participation, knowledge diversity, and co-design by people with disabilities to build collective climate resilience and advance planetary health.

Education

The **'UNRWA Education 2030: Baseline Report'** published in May 2024 by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), evaluates the agency's educational achievements and challenges in alignment with the Education 2030 Agenda based on SDG4 indicators. The report maps UNRWA's education targets against SDG4 and assesses its performance against ten targets (7+3), contrasting agency-wide achievements with those within its five Fields of operation: Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. Crucially, this baseline report serves as an opportunity for UNRWA to connect to the global monitoring of education, sharing its progress and challenges with the international community. By contributing its experience to the global evidence base, UNRWA aims to integrate its data into national systems and enhance its visibility in global education monitoring forums. The report also provides comparative analysis with regional and global benchmarks, highlighting both substantial progress towards some SDG4 targets and areas needing improvement.

Employment

The report '**Driving Disability Inclusion in Companies at Country Level,**' published in June 2024, examines the role of National Business and Disability Networks (NBDNs) in promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in employment. NBDNs offer employer-led platforms that enhance companies' confidence and capability to foster disability inclusion through support, guidance, and peer-to-peer learning. To gain insights into the work, success stories, challenges, and support needs of NBDNs in 2023, the ILO Global Business and Disability Network (GBDN) conducted a bilingual survey among 40 member NBDNs, receiving responses from 32. The report presents the findings, highlighting key achievements and challenges, plans for 2024, and recommendations for NBDNs to improve disability inclusion in corporate environments.

Over the past three months, the ILO has hosted **a series of webinars focused on disability inclusion**, covering essential aspects of integrating persons with disabilities into various sectors. These include 'Procurement Power: What About Disability?', which explores optimising procurement to benefit the global community of persons with disabilities; a Conference of States Parties (COSP17) side event on 'Businesses Driving a Sustainable Future: Disability-Inclusive Employment and ESG', showcasing corporate practices in disability-inclusive employment as part of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) strategies; and 'Unleashing Potential: Reasonable Accommodations at Work', emphasising the importance of reasonable adjustments in the workplace to provide equal opportunities and harness the full potential of employees with disabilities.

Health

In May 2024, a paper titled '**Building Disability Inclusive Health Systems**' was published in The Lancet. This review highlights how health systems often fail people with disabilities, contributing to their shorter life expectancy and poorer health outcomes compared to those without disabilities. It provides an overview of the health inequities faced by people with disabilities, such as lower levels of cancer screening, and documents 90 good practice examples aimed at reducing these inequalities. The review suggests that implementing these strategies could enable health systems to better serve people with disabilities, uphold their right to health, and achieve universal health coverage.

A paper titled '**Disability Inclusion and Pandemic Policymaking in South Africa: A Framework Analysis**' was published in May 2024. This study examines how the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected people with disabilities in South Africa, exacerbating existing healthcare inequities. By analysing health-related policies from 2020, the study reveals the limited consideration of disabilities in the country's pandemic response and the overall failure to accommodate people with disabilities in lockdown measures. While one government department made positive statements about disability-inclusive services, these were not actionable due to infrastructure and resource constraints. Despite South Africa's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the study highlights the insufficient commitment and capacity within the government to implement disability-inclusive policies effectively.

Humanitarian response

In May 2024, UNHCR published a factsheet titled '**Disability and women and girls in displacement from Myanmar: A factsheet on refugees and asylum seekers from Myanmar.**' This document examines disability data within forcibly displaced populations from Myanmar, focusing on gender disparities in disability prevalence, care provision, and protection needs. Key findings include differences in disability types between genders, with more women experiencing vision-related and emotional difficulties, while men often face impaired mobility. Rohingya refugees, predominant among displaced groups, generally have lower disability rates compared to those from southeast Myanmar. The factsheet underscores limited access to education hindering livelihood opportunities, particularly for women with disabilities, and highlights the increased care burdens borne by older women and single mothers in households with disabled members. Recommendations include enhancing protection from violence and exploitation, using the Washington Group Questions in asylum seeker registrations, improving sex-disaggregated data collection, tailoring care policies to humanitarian contexts, and increasing financing to address challenges faced by refugees with disabilities, particularly women, girls, and vulnerable groups.

A technical note published by WHO and Health Cluster in May 2024 focuses on the **critical issues surrounding Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) care in Gaza**, exacerbated by the ongoing destruction. It underscores the challenges in providing optimal SCI management, which includes pre-hospital care, specialized imaging, surgical interventions, and long-term rehabilitation, all severely hindered by current ongoing war, destruction, and disruption of health services in Gaza. The document emphasises the necessity for a coordinated,

multidisciplinary approach to rehabilitation efforts, urging for immediate support to damaged hospitals and the implementation of a cohesive SCI care pathway from injury to rehabilitation. It calls for prioritised medical evacuations for neurosurgery cases not treatable locally, ongoing reporting of new SCI cases, and the provision of essential medicines, equipment, and assistive technology to enhance patient care and rehabilitation outcomes in Gaza.

In June 2024, the Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development published an analysis examining the **impact of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on persons with disabilities.** The review aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how the conflict has specifically affected individuals with disabilities in Ukraine, offering policy recommendations to address their distinct needs and vulnerabilities. The report explores accessibility barriers post-invasion, influenced by demographic profiles and varying disability statuses. It investigates the mental well-being challenges faced by people with disabilities, assessing the effects of social isolation and heightened economic difficulties. The analysis also considers migration tendencies among persons with disabilities compared to the general population, along with their exposure to war-related adversities.

In May 2024, the UN Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) report titled '**Palestinians with disabilities subject to unbearable consequences of the ongoing hostilities and violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories**' addresses the severe impacts of the conflict on persons with disabilities in Gaza and the West Bank. It outlines data indicating the disproportionate killing of civilians in Gaza, including of people with disabilities, including widespread displacement, injuries, and deaths exacerbated by inaccessible humanitarian aid and essential services. It underscores the urgent need for accessible evacuation protocols, healthcare, and psychosocial support tailored to the specific needs of individuals with disabilities amid the ongoing destruction.

In May 2024, Handicap International and the World Food Programme (WFP) jointly published the report titled **'A Gradual Process of Transformation.'** This report documents the outcomes and lessons learned from their pilot project aimed at enhancing food security and livelihood opportunities for persons with disabilities in Western Equatoria, South Sudan, conducted between 2022 and 2023. Key findings include the effectiveness of the partnership in integrating disability inclusion into WFP's programming, supported by strong ownership and commitment from WFP leadership. The project successfully implemented the four "must do" actions outlined in the IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, emphasising meaningful participation of people with disabilities in project activities and capacity building for stakeholders. The report highlights sustained impacts on subsequent projects and provides recommendations for replicating and scaling inclusive practices across different contexts. It underscores the importance of data collection using the Washington Group Questions and barriers and enablers assessments, ensuring inclusive feedback mechanisms and tailored training to foster disability inclusion in food security and livelihood programming.

People with psychosocial disabilities and mental health conditions

The May 2024 report by IOM titled '**Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Needs Assessment in West Ninewa (Baaj, Qairawan, Sinjar and Sinuni)**' provides an evaluation of the challenges and needs of internally displaced persons, returnees, and host communities in Iraq's West Ninewa region. Focused on Baaj, Qairawan, Sinjar, and Sinuni, the assessment aims to understand the complex factors impacting mental health and psychosocial wellbeing in a region marked by internal displacement and return phases. Quantitative data gathered through structured surveys and qualitative insights from interviews highlight the intersecting challenges faced by different demographic groups, including gender, disabilities, educational levels, and diverse ethnic and religious communities.

Women and girls with disabilities

The May 2024 publication '**Gender Equality and Disability Inclusion: Guidelines to Address the Specific Needs of Women and Girls with Disabilities**' by Asian Development Bank (ADB) focuses on the substantial barriers faced by women and girls with disabilities across Asia and the Pacific. It provides comprehensive guidance for inclusive project and program design, implementation, monitoring, and review processes. Developed through desk reviews and interviews with ADB staff and external stakeholders, including women with lived experiences of various disabilities, the guidelines aim to empower women with disabilities in their roles within society. The publication aligns with ADB's Strengthening Disability-Inclusive Development Road Map and highlights key international frameworks. It employs an intersectionality approach to address the unique challenges faced by diverse women and girls with disabilities, emphasising priorities such as economic empowerment, human development, leadership, time poverty, resilience, and alignment with SDG on gender equality. Sector-specific guidelines for infrastructure (water, sanitation, hygiene, urban development, transport) and social sectors (education, health, social protection) are provided, incorporating case studies and resources to enhance program effectiveness and inclusivity. The guidelines also include a checklist and indicators tailored to measure outcomes for women and girls with disabilities, ensuring their voices and experiences are integral to development interventions.

In May 2024, UNHCR and UN Women published '**Gender Alert II: Disability inclusion and gender dynamics of the Armenia refugee crisis.**' This 'alert' aims to illuminate the post-crisis situation faced by refugees with disabilities, drawing from insights gathered by civil society organisations (CSOs), OPDs, and refugee women with disabilities. This joint effort by UN Women and Disability Rights Agenda NGO and its network focuses on gender-specific challenges and barriers to humanitarian assistance encountered by women, men, girls, and boys with disabilities in the six months following displacement. The analysis, based on focus group discussions with five CSOs and OPDs, along with key informant interviews and a focus group discussion with refugee women with disabilities conducted in March 2024, seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current plight of refugees with disabilities, highlighting their status as one of the most marginalised groups in the crisis context.

In June 2024, UNFPA published a report on '**Silent Struggles: Voices of women overcoming obstetric fistula and disability.**' The report outlines the challenges faced by

women affected by obstetric fistula. This condition, affecting approximately 500,000 women globally, not only undermines women's health and dignity but also poses significant barriers to their full potential and participation in society. This publication explores the profound impact of obstetric fistula on the quality of life of affected women, emphasising its intersection with disability and examining its multifaceted effects on their physical, mental, social, and economic well-being. It highlights the complex linkages between pre-existing disabilities and the occurrence of obstetric fistula, advocating for inclusive approaches in sustainable development initiatives to address these intersecting challenges comprehensively.

About the Disability Inclusion Helpdesk:

The Disability Inclusion Helpdesk provides research and technical assistance on disability inclusion to the UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office as part of the Disability Inclusive Development Programme. All our published reports are available on **our website**. Contact us via: **enquiries@disabilityinclusion.org.uk**