

inclusive education policy

january 2013

© United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 2013.

All rights reserved. The contents of this publication shall not be quoted or reproduced or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of UNRWA. For enquiries about use or reproduction of the text or other parts of this publication, please contact UNRWA Department of Education info.education@unrwa.org. Where use or reproduction of this material is authorized by UNRWA, credit shall be given to UNRWA and a copy of the publication containing the reproduced materials will be sent to UNRWA Department of Education, info.education@unrwa.org. For copying or reproduction for commercial purposes, a fee may be charged by UNRWA.



united nations relief and works agency
for palestine refugees in the near east

introduction

The UNRWA Inclusive Education Policy reaffirms the Agency's commitment to the realization of the universal right to Education For All. Similarly it is a response to the UN General Assembly's resolutions encouraging UNRWA to continue making progress in addressing the needs and rights of children, women and persons with disabilities in its operations.

Inclusion is a central tenet of the UNRWA Education Reform, recognizing the need to address specific challenges of equity and relevance, in order to ensure that the potential of all children is realized. The Education Reform highlights the importance of an UNRWA Inclusive Education Policy in order to ensure there is a shared understanding and commitment to inclusive education. The Policy and its supporting documents¹ thus serve to provide a framework for UNRWAs approach to teaching and learning of all Palestine refugee children, reflecting its commitment as an UN Agency and in line with international conventions.

The Inclusive Education Policy is an Agency statement of intent, laying out the principles and approach for the development of a more responsive and supportive education system. The Policy promotes an approach of mainstreaming inclusion into all aspects of UNRWAs Education Programme, one of gradual steps towards its achievement within the available resources.

The definition of UNRWAs inclusive approach referred to throughout this Policy has three dimensions, one refers to more child centered and child friendly practices in classrooms and schools wherein all children are engaged, supported and their potential harnessed; the second dimension aspires to a more coherent model of ongoing support for children who have some additional needs. The Policy and practices underpinning it strive to ensure that additional school based support is appropriate, timely and cost efficient and the identification of needs is meaningful. The third dimension of inclusion in this Policy is towards more effective, coherent, and cost efficient management of the provision of support to the small percentage of children with more extensive needs. The Policy and practices embedded therein will aspire to strengthen existing support systems, the capacity of teachers to make better use of referral mechanisms and draw on the support of partners who operate in the Field through a more coherent approach.

The Policy was developed with participation from all UNRWA Fields of operation, UNESCO and Host Governments through a series of discussions, review and analysis of practices in place.

1. rationale

Inclusive education is a right-based approach to education, one which appreciates the diversity of all learners and caters for their needs placing particular emphasis on the needs of children vulnerable to exclusion and marginalization.

Inclusive education requires improving education systems to become more responsive to the needs of all students. Consequently inclusive education requires a shift from a medical model, that focuses on individual students' deficits' assuming special services and staff, are required, towards a social model that addresses attitudinal and environmental barriers to learning and participation, acknowledging that meeting students' needs is a shared responsibility.

- 1.1 UNRWAs commitment to inclusive education is grounded in the Agency's mandate to provide relief, human development and protection to Palestine refugees. In line with its mandate, UNRWA is committed to promoting and protecting the human rights of Palestine refugees, including the right to Education for All. That right is articulated in a number of human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), the World Declaration on Education for All (1990), the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) and the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) , which is based on the principles of non-discrimination and protection of the integrity of the human being. The

¹ *Inclusive Education Strategy, School Health Strategy, Conceptual Framework for Psychosocial Support*



General Assembly has specifically encouraged UNRWA to continue making progress in addressing the needs and rights of children, women and persons with disabilities in its operations in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, respectively². While all instruments referred to contain provisions regarding the right to education, Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is of particular relevance as it sets out a variety of means to realize the right of persons with disabilities to education, including an inclusive education system.

- 1.2 An inclusive approach to education is crucial to achieving UNRWA's overall vision, as stated in the Medium Term Strategy: *"For every Palestine refugee to enjoy the best possible standards of human development especially attaining his or her full potential individually and as a family and community member: being an active and productive participant in socio-economic and cultural life and feeling assured that his or her rights are being defended, protected and preserved."*(Medium Term Strategy 2010:9). UNRWA is committed to give priority to address the needs of vulnerable groups and to enhance refugee participation. The Inclusive Education Policy addresses these needs and contributes towards the achievement of Agency wide strategic objectives: ensuring universal access to and coverage of basic education; enhancing education quality and outcomes against set standards and improving access to education opportunities for learners with special educational needs.
- 1.3 Inclusive education is an explicit area in the UNRWA Education Reform (2011-2015) towards an effective, efficient and quality education programme, which develops the full potential of Palestine refugees. It is a response to the specific challenges of access, equity and relevance identified in the Education Reform Strategy. Inclusive education, for UNRWA, means addressing the learning, health and psychosocial needs of all students with emphasis to the needs of children particularly vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion such as children with disabilities and special educational needs. Indeed equal access for all children to quality education is one of the Education Reform outcomes.
- 1.4 The Inclusive Education Policy aims to support and complement other UNRWA policies as well as align with Host Governments' efforts towards inclusive education. It addresses the cross cutting issues of gender, youth, disability, and protection, which are integral parts of inclusive education. In line with the UNRWA Human Rights Education and Conflict Resolution Policy, Gender Equality Policy, Education Gender Mainstreaming Strategy, Disability Policy, Protection Policy and Standards; the Inclusive Education Policy will contribute towards quality educational delivery that is safe, accessible and of relevance to all children.

2. statement of commitment

"The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is committed to providing quality inclusive education which respects the rights and appreciates the diversity of all children. UNRWA aims to remove barriers to access and create equal opportunity for learning and participation in order to enable all Palestine refugee children to realize their full potential regardless of their gender, abilities, disabilities, socio-economic status, health and psychosocial needs."

3. policy purpose

The purpose of the Policy is to provide a statement of intent to ensure that all Palestine refugee children³ have equal access to quality education regardless of their gender, abilities, disabilities, socio-economic status, psychosocial and health needs. In order to achieve this purpose and reflecting UNRWAs Statement of Commitment, the Policy strives to establish principles and a unified approach for inclusive education in UNRWA.

² Para. 3, GA Res. 66/76 (UNRWA Operations), adopted 9 December 2011, UN-Doc. GA/RES/66/76

³ This Policy refers to Palestine Refugee Children. For exceptions to include other groups of Palestinian children and children living in the proximity of UNRWA schools refer to ETI on Access to UNRWA schools.



4. principles of inclusion

The following are the principles which underpin the Policy and reflect UNRWA's understanding of inclusive education:

- 4.1 Inclusive education is based on a belief in **each child's potential** for learning and valuing all children and their different ways of learning equally: *Not all students need to learn in the same way and not all students need to achieve the same things but all students need to be supported to achieve according to their fullest potential.*
- 4.2 Inclusive education is a human **rights-based approach**: *A human rights-based approach emphasizes that all children have the right to access free quality education and have a right to protection within education.*
- 4.3 Inclusive education is a continuous **process of improving the education system**: *It is about changing classroom practice and empowering schools and teachers to be more responsive and flexible to meet the needs of all children.*
- 4.4 Inclusive education is about meeting the needs of all children with a special emphasis on **children vulnerable to exclusion and marginalization**: *Inclusive education requires identifying and addressing discriminatory attitudes and practices in order to reduce barriers to learning and participation.*
- 4.5 Inclusive education reflects the **social model of disability**: *The social model holds that people may have impairments but it is society, through attitudinal and environmental barriers, which disables them.*
- 4.6 Inclusive education is about **recognizing individual needs and providing support** to meet these needs: *It is necessary that any learning, psychosocial and health needs of children are identified early on and that support is provided to prevent difficulties. UNRWA discourages the practice of class repetition and encourages continuous identification of needs and provision of support. Particular emphasis needs to be placed on identification of needs and support in the primary years of schooling.*
- 4.7 Inclusive schools contribute to the development of **inclusive communities**: *The inclusion of all children in the same schools and classrooms will enhance social inclusion and acceptance of diversity. In this regard, social inclusion may sometimes be more important than learning achievement.*

5. UNRWA inclusive approach

This section describes UNRWA's inclusive approach as reflected in the system and structures of UNRWA's education programme.

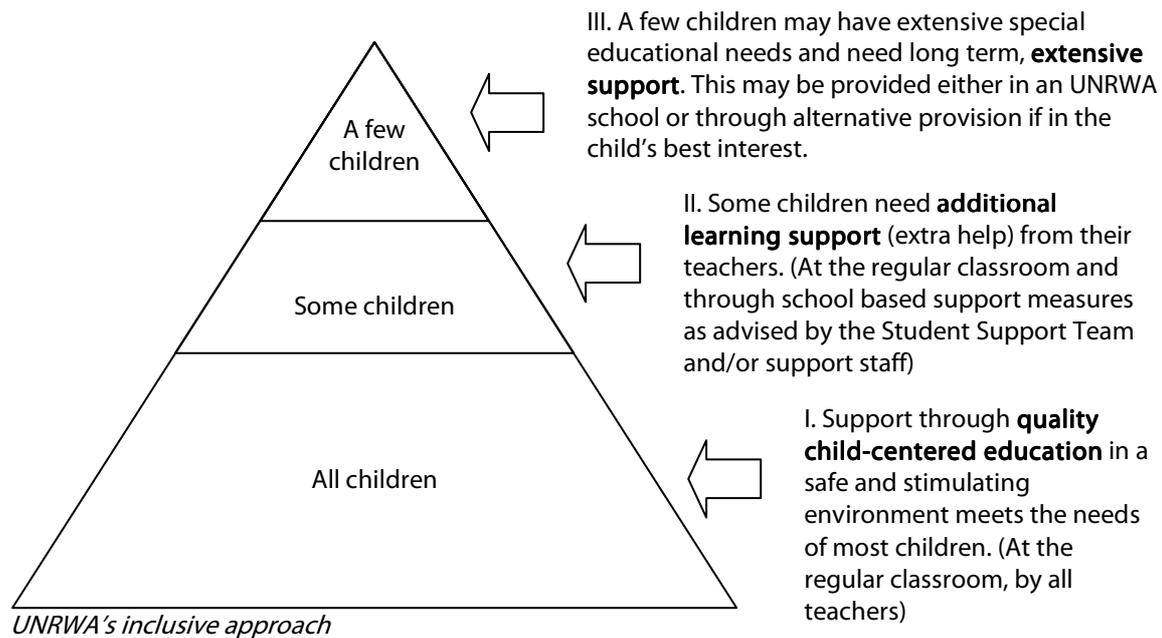
- 5.1 This Policy states that support for students will be provided on three levels:

I UNRWA aims to ensure that **quality child-centered education** in a safe and stimulating environment is provided in all schools and classrooms. This will benefit all children and meet the needs of the majority of children.

II Some children in regular classrooms may have additional learning, psychosocial and health needs. UNRWA aims to **strengthen school based support** to meet these needs. A school-based Student Support Team (SST) comprising of school staff at each school will plan for school-based health, psychosocial and learning support and provide advice to teachers on how best to support individual students with additional / extensive learning, psychosocial and health needs. Support may be provided by teachers as part of their lessons or through additional measures agreed upon by the school's Student Support Team and/or with other support staff. Where needed, the Student Support Team may develop an individual education plan for a student.

III A few children may have extensive special educational needs and need long term, **extensive support**. This support, based on the child's best interest, may be provided in UNRWA schools in collaboration with related UNRWA programmes and partners, or through other service providers such as host governments, private, community based and non governmental organisations. UNRWA Fields are encouraged to develop existing special education initiatives to better meet the extensive needs of students.





- 5.2 The Inclusive Education Policy and its supporting documents provide a framework to guide practice at all levels of the UNRWA education system. Inclusive education is to be considered in all education programming.
- 5.3 UNRWA aims to meet the needs of all refugee children through a progressive approach taking gradual steps towards inclusion within the available resources.
- 5.4 UNRWA Fields of operation will plan for the implementation of the inclusive approach based on their specific context and needs. There are many ways of organizing learning, health and psychosocial support and Fields may build on existing initiatives, aligning these with the inclusive approach.
- 5.5 Area Education Officers are responsible for ensuring that inclusive practices are implemented in their area. Education Specialists will promote learning support and inclusive education. A sufficient number of Education Specialists and/or other support staff at area level take responsibility for advising schools on additional and extensive learning, psychosocial and health needs of students and facilitating access of students in need to specialized services where available.
- 5.6 School principals are responsible for overall leadership in planning and implementation of inclusive school and classroom practices in their schools with the support of assigned staff members forming the school based Student Support Team.
- 5.7 The capacity of educators to support the inclusive approach in their classrooms, and with regards to additional support, needs strengthening. Inclusive education will be incorporated into UNRWA pre- and in-service teacher education and training programmes. In addition, specialized training on inclusive education and student support may be provided.
- 5.8 Referral mechanisms within the education programme, coordination with other UNRWA programmes as well as related services in the community will be strengthened to facilitate addressing students' needs.
- 5.9 Parental and community awareness, support and participation are essential elements of the UNRWA inclusive approach. Schools will enhance parental and community involvement, through awareness raising and encouraging parents' support and participation in their child's education.
- 5.10 Sex disaggregated data on disability, learning, health and psychosocial needs in school as well as information on support staff and services available will be collected and analyzed on regular basis. Information on available services will be shared among schools, Area Education Offices, Field Offices,

Headquarters, Health Centres, Community-Based Organizations, Governmental and Non-Governmental service providers.

- 5.11 Equity and inclusiveness will be part of the criteria of monitoring education quality. Inclusive practices at schools will be monitored and evaluated on regular basis and indicators for inclusive education will be part of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and other quality assurance mechanisms.
- 5.12 UNRWA recognizes the multi-dimensional nature of barriers to inclusive education and, in addition to its commitment to provide access to quality education provision to all children, is committed to identifying and working to alleviate other barriers to education e.g. socio-economic and conflict related barriers.
- 5.13 UNRWA recognizes that the success of inclusive education will depend on the close cooperation of the Education Department with other Departments and staff in the Agency, in particular staff working with protection, disability and gender, the Department of Health, Department of Relief and Social Services and the Department of Camp Development and Infrastructure both at Head Quarters and Field level.
- 5.14 UNRWA recognizes the importance of close partnership with international, regional and local agencies as well as strong relationships with Host Governments as a key for a successful implementation of inclusive education. The support of development partners will be crucial to enable UNRWA to effectively addressing the needs of all students.

6. cross cutting issues for inclusive education

Disability, gender, protection and youth are considered cross cutting issues central to inclusive education. These issues provide a lens through which to ensure the implementation of quality inclusive approaches that meet the needs of Palestine refugees vulnerable to exclusion and marginalization.

- 6.1 **Disability:** The UNRWA Disability Policy uses the definition of disability from the UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006). This definition states, that “persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various attitudinal and environmental barriers, hinder their full participation in society on an equal basis with others” (UNRWA Disability Policy, 2010, p. 1). The UNRWA education programme will address disability through two approaches: examining and changing attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder access and participation of children with disabilities and through recognizing and addressing the individual needs of a child with disability. Each child with a disability has a right to quality education in any UNRWA school. However in a few cases the needs of a child with a disability may be better met through alternative special education provision, while improving support structures in UNRWA schools to meet the needs of children with disabilities in the long term. A decision to refer a child to alternative special education provision must be based in the child’s best interest and in ensuring that the alternative provision is available, accessible and affordable to the child.
- 6.2 **Gender:** The Inclusive Education Policy, in line with the UNRWA Policy on Gender Equality (2007) and the Education Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (2008), promotes equal opportunities for access to education, learning and participation for boys and girls, whilst recognizing the need to identify and address the diverse learning needs of boys and girls and support boys and girls equally to realize their full potential. Policies and practices, which discriminate on the basis of gender need to be recognized and addressed. In addition gender sensitive education involves being aware of, and addressing behaviors, attitudes, teaching practices and materials that enforce gender stereotypes and bias.
- 6.3 **Protection:** Protection refers to UNRWAs mandate of ensuring that the human rights of all Palestine refugees are promoted, protected and preserved. UNRWA is committed to protection throughout its service delivery. The UNRWA Protection Standards emphasize the Agency’s commitment to ensure that “all UNRWA services are accessible and delivered equitably and impartially, with the rights, needs and capacities of beneficiaries, with a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups, reflected in all stages of UNRWA’s programming” (UNRWA Protection Policy, UNRWA Protection Standards, Common Standard 3). Further, the Education specific Protection Standards state that “no individual is denied access to an UNRWA education and learning opportunity as a result of discrimination” and require that “UNRWA identifies barriers to accessing educational and vocational opportunities” and “designs responses to overcome barriers” (UNRWA



Protection Standards for Acquired Knowledge and Skills, Standard 1). While the right of all children to access education has to be promoted and protected, children also have a right to learn in a safe and stimulating environment without any discrimination and violation of their rights. UNRWA strives to ensure that the protection needs of the Palestine refugees are addressed through specific programming. The UNRWA Protection Standards require that “teachers and other education personnel employed by UNRWA are provided with the skills to give psychosocial support to promote learners’ well-being and to recognize instances of abuse” (UNWRA Protection Standards for Acquired Knowledge and Skills, Standard 3, UNRWA Protection Policy).

- 6.4 **Youth:** Inclusive education is based on a child-centered education approach emphasizing the rights of children and youth to actively participate in their own education. Inclusive schools involve students in decision-making and in developing safe and stimulating school environments. Children and youth have a right to be treated with respect, and all children and youth need encouragement and support from their teachers and parents. Inclusive education contributes to the development of more tolerant and inclusive communities and society. Inclusive education promotes equal opportunities for all Palestine refugee children and youth to become active members of their communities. Particular emphasis needs to be placed on the needs of youth and adolescents who may be vulnerable to exclusion and marginalization. This requires addressing youth drop out, providing career guidance and counseling and post preparatory educational options. Technical and Vocational Education will have a strong role to play in addressing the needs of youth who may be vulnerable to exclusion and marginalization.

7. concluding remarks

Moving towards inclusive education requires gradual progressive steps towards better meeting the needs of all students. Essential for taking these steps within the available resources is a shared commitment towards quality education that serves all Palestine refugee children including those most vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion.





department of education
unrwa HQ Amman
Bayader Wadi Seer
PO Box 140157

t: (+962) 580 8200 t: (+962) 580 8201
f: (+962) 580 8289

www.unrwa.org