inclusive education factsheet

What is Inclusive Education?
Inclusive education at UNRWA is about ensuring that all Palestine refugee children, regardless of their gender, abilities, disabilities, social-economic status, health and psychosocial needs, have equal opportunity to learn in UNRWA schools and be supported to develop their full potential.

Inclusive education is about changing the way teachers teach, and how School Principals, support staff and administrators work. It is also about changing attitudes.

Inclusive Education Policy and Strategy

- A belief in each child’s potential.
- A right-based approach.
- A process of improving the education system, school and classroom practices.
- Meeting the needs of all children with emphasis on those vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion.
- Reflecting the diverse needs of persons with disabilities.
- Recognising individual needs and providing support.
- Developing inclusive communities.

Inclusive Education as a strategic approach
The UNRWA Inclusive Education Policy and the Inclusive Education Strategy provide an Agency wide, unified framework and strategic approach, which supports UNRWA schools in all five Fields of operation in moving further towards inclusive education. The Inclusive Education Strategy seeks to mainstream inclusive education practices into the existing structures and systems of the Education programme.

A strategic approach means recognising and removing any barriers that can hinder students’ access, learning, development and participation. It is about asking questions, such as: is our school a safe and violence-free environment? Are all students feeling welcome in my classroom? Can I do something to improve my teaching methods to make learning easier?

The approach further promotes inclusive, child friendly, healthy, safe and stimulating school environments where practices in classrooms are more responsive to the diverse needs of students. Teachers are expected to carry out ongoing informal assessments, observation and information gathering to identify the learning, psychosocial and health needs of a student. It also
means utilising data, which are generated from the Education Management and Information System (EMIS) for responsive plans that are applicable to different levels.

Teacher’s toolkit for identifying and responding to students’ diverse needs
The toolkit is a comprehensive and accessible resource for UNRWA teachers, School Principals, Education Specialists and School Counsellors. The toolkit consists of a Teacher’s Guide and 19 practical tools for identifying and responding to the learning, health and psychosocial needs of all students including those with disabilities. It is a resource to be used for information, and as a reference for planning and for identifying a more practical way to apply the inclusive approach in education. The 19 practical tools are captured in EMIS, and education staff use the data for decision making and to develop plans.

Psychosocial Support Framework
A Conceptual Framework for Psychosocial Support for UNRWA schools was developed to further establish a shared understanding of how the education system can support the psychosocial well-being of students. The Psychosocial Support Framework emphasises how schools can provide child-friendly environments that foster psychosocial well-being and meet the psychosocial needs of Palestine refugee children. The Framework aims to guide Counsellors and educators to apply the inclusive approach to holistic, comprehensive, rights-based, child-centered and enabling psychosocial support, within the UNRWA education system, which is aligned with the Agency’s Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Framework.

The UNRWA School Health Strategy (SHS)
Developed in close collaboration with the Health Department and all Fields, the School Health Strategy (SHS) https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2013060563212_2.pdf addresses four core areas to promote the healthy development of a student: comprehensive health services; a child-friendly, safe and healthy environment; health education; and healthy nutrition and canteens. The Strategy offers guidance on how to provide students with the necessary skills and knowledge to reduce health risks associated with poverty, high population density and poor living conditions and malnutrition.

Towards gender-sensitive classrooms: guide for teachers
The purpose of the guide is to improve teachers’ understanding of gender issues and provide them with activities to address practices and attitudes that may lead to gender bias and discrimination. This guide seeks to strengthen the awareness most specifically of UNRWA teachers on gender issues and to highlight how classroom practices can help address gender biases towards gender-equitable teaching.

Making a positive difference
Inclusive education practices contribute to a better education system for all children, while ensuring that children with additional and extensive needs are identified and supported appropriately, so they can reach their full potential. In summary:

- All students benefit from more child-friendly school environments and child-centered teaching practices.
- Children vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion from education benefit from the removal of barriers that may hinder their access, learning, development and participation.
- Students who need additional and extensive support to learn have school-based support.
- Addressing the diverse health and psychological needs of students with disabilities will be beneficial and will be reflected positively on their wellbeing.
- Teachers and education staff benefit by being empowered to improve their professional practices, creating positive connections with their students and getting to know them better.
- The school community will benefit from increased health and wellbeing of staff and students.

For more information
Please contact your Chief Field Education Programme or UNRWA HQ Education Department on: info.education@unrwa.org.