



# Inclusive Educational Communities

Piloting a community-based approach to inclusive education in Aleppo and Deir-Ez-Zor, Syria



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## 1. Introduction

WeWorld-GVC is an Italian NGO operating in Syria since 2011. Supported by many donors including ECHO, OCHA, UNICEF and AICS, WWGVC's intervention in education in Syria aims at ensuring access, quality and resilience of the Education system in the country and at linking education with early recovery. The programme includes: a) Education in Emergencies (EiE), providing quality education opportunities in safe and inclusive learning environments for the most vulnerable children and adolescents; b) support to access secondary education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), enhancing livelihood opportunities for the most vulnerable youth (including girls and Persons with Disabilities [PwDs]), by facilitating access to quality and inclusive secondary education and TVET.

The Education in Emergencies intervention includes: Non-Formal Education programmes (NFE) to promote access to and retention in education for out-of-school children (OoSC) and children at risk of dropping out; psychosocial support (PSS) and socio-emotional learning (SEL) activities mainstreamed in NFE programmes, to enhance children's well-being; renovation of schools, including the provision of inclusive and gender-sensitive WASH facilities; community awareness-raising, engagement and empowerment; distribution of school materials; continuous professional development of teachers and education personnel; and promotion of an inclusive education approach. WWGVC's efforts to promote inclusive education are underpinned by the assumption that inclusive education is essential to achieving quality education. It believes that ensuring inclusion means

identifying and overcoming a wide range of barriers that prevent vulnerable children from accessing their right to education. These barriers are related to gender, ethnicity, socio-economic conditions and displacement, among other factors, meaning that it is not only learners with a disability who face issues of inclusion. Based on the accepted premise that each individual has their own capacity to learn and the right to access to and participate meaningfully in a quality, relevant and inclusive education, a change in culture, practices and policies is required. This involves an ongoing process of change within education systems and communities.

This document systematises the piloting of an inclusive education approach within the framework of a project<sup>1</sup> funded by the Italian Cooperation and implemented between 2021 and 2023 in the Aleppo and Deir-Ez-Zor Governorates.

<sup>1</sup> "Inclusive education and income-generating opportunities for building-up resilient communities in underserved areas of Aleppo and Deir-Ez-Zor governorates" (AID/CS.11214.4.2)



## 2. Inclusive Education: an evolving concept

According to the Global Education Monitoring Report 2020 (UNESCO, 2020), an estimated 258 million children, adolescents and youth (17% of the global total) were not in school. In 2022, using a new methodology and data from a variety of sources, Education Cannot Wait (ECW, 2022) found that 222 million school-aged children globally are affected by crises and in need of educational support; among them, 78 million children (54% girls) are out of school and approximately 120 million are in school but not achieving the minimum proficiency in mathematics and reading.

The 2030 Agenda refers extensively to equity, inclusion, equal opportunities and non-discrimination. It calls for empowering vulnerable people and meeting their needs. Among several SDGs that refer to equity and inclusion, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which addresses education, clearly states the need to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Education was recognised as a human right in 1948, and in 1960 the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (UNESCO, 1960) outlined what governments must do to prevent “nullifying or impairing equality of treatment in education”. Article 1 of the Convention does not, however, include disability among the characteristics that can lead to exclusion in education<sup>2</sup>. In 1994, the Statement of the

World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca (UNESCO, 1994) made a clear case for inclusive education, recognising that “every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities, and learning needs” that should be taken into account by the education system, and affirming that children with special educational needs must have access to regular schools.

Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - CRPD (United Nations, 2006) aims at achieving the right to education of people with disabilities “without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunities” and commits countries to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning. The CRPD did not, however, include a precise definition of inclusion in education, giving governments a free hand to shape inclusive education.

In 2016, the ambiguities arising from different interpretations of Art. 24 of the CRPD led the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to issue general comment no. 4 on the above-mentioned Article, in which inclusion is defined as “a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structure and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all

or impairing equality of treatment in education and in particular:

a. Of depriving any person or group of persons of access to education of any type or at any level;

b. Of limiting any person or group of persons to education of an inferior standard;

c. Subject to the provisions of Article 2 of this Convention, of establishing or maintaining separate educational systems or institutions for persons or groups of persons; or

d. Of inflicting on any person or group of persons conditions which are in-compatible with the dignity of man.

<sup>2</sup> **Article 1** 1. For the purposes of this Convention, the term “discrimination” includes any distinction, exclusion, limitation or preference which, being based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, economic condition or birth, has the purpose or effect of nullifying

students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences” (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016, pg. 4). According to this vision, inclusive education encompasses “a transformation in culture, policy, and practice in all formal and informal educational environments to accommodate the different requirements and identities of individual students, together with a commitment to remove the barriers that impede that possibility. It involves strengthening the capacity of the education system to

reach out to all learners” (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016, p. 3).

As highlighted in the Global Education Monitoring Report 2020 (UNESCO, 2020, p. 14 and p. 18), the main take-aways from general comment no. 4 are that: a) inclusive education involves a process that contributes to social inclusion; b) inclusive education is broader in scope, as exclusion by discriminatory mechanisms not only affects learners with disabilities but is instead a global issue based on multiple factors including gender, disability, wealth,

remoteness, displacement, migration, ethnicity, sexual orientation, language, religion and other beliefs and attitudes, which deny students access to quality education. The progressive planning and provision of inclusive education can lead to some improvements in academic achievement, social and emotional development, self-esteem and peer acceptance, and are a necessary condition to achieving all the SDGs, and SDG 4 in particular.



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### 3. Access to education for vulnerable children in Syria

The most recent Humanitarian Needs Overview - HNO (OCHA, 2022) stated that in 2022, following 11 years of crisis, 15.3 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance, with children accounting for 46 per cent of that figure. Syria still has the highest number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the world at 6.8 million.

According to the Education Sector data and analyses included in the HNO, there are currently 6.5 million people – among whom children and education personnel – in need of emergency education services, 15 per cent of whom are living with a disability. Since the beginning of the crisis, 7,000 schools have been damaged or destroyed, thus limiting the ability of children to access educational services.

Overcrowding, damaged school buildings and classrooms, teacher shortages (particularly in rural schools), lack of school furniture and school supplies, insufficient lighting and heating within schools and classrooms, and inadequate availability and quality of WASH facilities are all factors that contribute to uncondusive learning spaces for Syrian children. Additionally, the HNO reported that schools have limited absorption and retention capacity, and little flexibility to accommodate learners with special educational needs across learning levels.

The above-mentioned factors are all detrimental to accessing and continuing in education and jeopardise the delivery of quality education, leaving approximately 2.4 million children out of school, and 1.6 million at risk of dropping out.

Negative coping mechanisms often adopted by families to deal with insecurity and the economic crisis give rise to other significant barriers to children's access to education: 96 per cent of children live in communities where child labour is reported and another 84 per cent of children live in communities where many girls (15 -17 years) are affected by forced marriage. For children with disabilities, the main barriers to education involve physical inaccessibility of schools, lack of school facilities, lack of specialised teaching and learning, and a non-inclusive culture within schools and communities.

All these factors contribute to these children being denied their basic right to education. Over 60 per cent of school-age children with severe mental or physical disabilities have never attended school or any other form of education. In addition, 30 per cent of households with members with disabilities reported a lack of specialised education services. Signs of psychological distress in boys and girls under the age of 18 are reported by more than 27 per cent of households.



### 4. Syrian education system

The Syrian basic and secondary education system includes 12 grades. Basic education is free and compulsory, lasts nine years (from grade 1 to grade 9), and is divided into two cycles (grades 1-6 for primary and grades 7-9 for preparatory education). Secondary education lasts 3 years (from grade 10 to grade 12). Secondary education and technical/vocational schools are also free of charge. In 2008, prior to the conflict, basic education enrolment was close to 93 per cent (UNICEF, 2019). However, as mentioned before, there are currently approximately 2.4 million children out of school. The Syrian Ministry of Education (MoE) directly supervises the curricula and learning materials for all basic and secondary education grades, and is also responsible for developing, implementing, and evaluating education policies, laws, and regulations. The MoE provides in-service teachers with training to improve their competences and foster their professional development.

According to UNESCO (2021), the MoE also continues its efforts in training teachers and managing training in areas such as learning difficulties, behavioural issues and inclusion of students with disabilities.



## 5. Access to education for children with disabilities in Syria

With the release in 1994 of the Salamanca Statement and the Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, Syria began revising its educational policies to promote special education in mainstream schools. In 2009, Syria ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

UNESCO's Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER)<sup>3</sup> provide an overview of the legal and policy framework in Syria, as follows:

- "Article 9 of Law 34 of 2004 concerning people with disabilities in Syria outlines several sub-articles aiming to give children with disabilities equal opportunities from early childhood, whether within Syria's public schools or in special institutes if these children are unable to be integrated within the public school system. This law focused on offering children with physical disabilities the opportunity to be educated in the public school system and in specialised institutes, based on guidelines agreed upon in coordination between the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education.
- Ministerial Decree No. 515 of 2006 highlights the importance of integrating students with special needs with the other students in public schools. Further, the 2008–25 National Plan for Disability sets a priority to help integrate children with disabilities in schools. Based on that plan, the Ministry of Social

Affairs would continue to work to help integrate children with disabilities in schools through collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

- Article 2(d) of Law No. 7 of 2012 stipulates that students with severe cases of disability are to be referred to the Ministry of Social Affairs and students with less severe disabilities are to be integrated in public schools following the criteria for inclusion and integration produced by the Ministry of Education".

Children with Disabilities (CwDs) are evaluated by the Research Department, Inclusion Division within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MoSAL) in order to determine whether or not they are could be enrolled in regular schools. There is a division of responsibility between the MoE which supervises schools in general and the MoSAL which supervises special education institutes, with the general aim of supporting children with disabilities to join basic education schools on the basis of their mental and physical abilities and capabilities.

Special education programmes and services for PWDs have generally been funded through altruistic and charitable means (Hadidi & Alkhateeb, 2015). This may explain why special education services in Syria remain within the remit of the MoSAL instead of the MoE.

According to a comprehensive paper recently released (Wissam Mounzer and Stenhoff, 2022), prior to the beginning

of the conflict in Syria (2011), Syrian institutions and non-governmental organisations were committed to working to ensure CwDs the right to education (through the promulgation of special education laws, media awareness programmes concerning PwDs, the development of psycho-educational assessment tools, conferences on special education, etc.). However, as highlighted in the above-mentioned paper, there is no data available documenting the number of PWDs and CwDs who were educated or served by such programmes prior to the crisis.

As reported by UNESCO (2020), the **lack of quality data** on access to education for vulnerable children, and CwDs in particular, is a problem at the global level. Wissam Mounzer and Stenhoff confirm that, despite the adjustments made by Syria in order to adopt the main principles of the UNCRPD, the extent to which the number of PWDs in regular schools in Syria increased remains unknown. Indeed, they note that the International Rescue Committee (2018) reported that 84 per cent of Syrian CwDs were not attending school, and that four out of five were not receiving vital education with the potential to transform their lives. This statistic highlights that CwDs in Syria are often left behind and, consequently, are much more likely to experience adverse socio-economic outcomes such as lower education, poorer health outcomes, and higher poverty rates than peers who do not have disabilities.

According to Wissam Mounzer and Stenhoff (2022), the absence of reliable data and valid statistics on disabilities also has an impact on public



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policy development and research improvement. This applies to many countries worldwide, including Syria. Furthermore, according to UNESCO (UNESCO, 2021), Syria has no national mechanism for monitoring education. It is unclear from the existing laws and documents what types of monitoring and reporting mechanisms might be in place regarding inclusive education.

According to recent studies across the Arab world (Elhoweris & Efthymiou, 2021), there are incompatible and multi-faceted interpretations regarding the definitions of 'inclusion' and 'inclusive' education, meaning that the implementation of education based on these terms is complex.

**Social stigma** is one of the most significant factors preventing access to services for children and persons with disabilities, as well as participation in social life on an equal basis with others. Discriminatory attitudes have a

significant impact on children with disabilities (CwDs) and on their parents and caregivers. Syrian families are often ashamed to acknowledge that their child has a disability and, consequently, many choose to keep the child at home, preventing them from receiving any education or other services (Mounzer & Al Khateeb, 2009). This situation is often identified in needs assessments conducted by WWGVC, which include Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) at community level.

CwDs' **lack of physical access** to educational institutions is another significant challenge, as Syrian schools in general remain inadequately prepared to accommodate CwDs. Although public schools have some resource rooms, these are not always used in the most optimal manner and, due to school overcrowding, are often repurposed as regular classrooms.

According to Wissam Mounzer and Stenhoff (2022), Damascus University created a one-year diploma in special education in 1980, and has offered undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes in special education since 2009. Regarding university level, the Special Education Department offers a four-year education programme (214 credit hours) divided across eight semesters, which aims at providing special educators with appropriate training to teach students with special needs.

According to UNESCO (2021), the Syrian MoE continues its efforts in training teachers and managing training programmes in areas such as learning difficulties, behavioural issues, and inclusion of students with disabilities. In 2019, the MoE recruited more than 100 trainers specialised in these areas.

<sup>3</sup> <https://education-profiles.org/northern-africa-and-western-asia/syrian-arab-republic/-inclusion> (Peer UNESCO)



## 6. WeWorld's approach to inclusive education



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### 6.1 WWGVC'S EXPERIENCE IN PILOTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The Italian experience in practising and improving its inclusion model has served as a source of inspiration for other countries.

Since the 1980s, WWGVC has been cooperating with several partners in Palestine, Cuba, Romania, Vietnam and

most recently Lebanon, with the aim of piloting and adapting the model to the specificity of the different cultures and contexts.

For example, thanks to the financial support of the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs – General Direction for Development Cooperation, WWGVC has implemented a 3-year project in Lebanon, in partnership with the Youth Association of the Blind (YAB) and within the context of a cooperation

agreement with the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

The aim of the project was to pilot an operational model of school inclusion in 6 public schools and develop guidelines in collaboration with the relevant institutions.

### 6.2 WWGVC'S INCLUSIVE EDUCATION APPROACH

In addition to its Education Strategy, WWGVC developed several modalities intended as practical tools to guide quality implementation of its project. The Inclusive Education modalities provide a brief and systematic description of WWGVC's inclusive education model.

The **inclusive education approach** adopted by WWGVC is based on the assumption that all children should learn together in the same learning space, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education for all.

The above-mentioned model strongly sustains that supporting schools to become more inclusive fosters quality education for all students and strengthens the role of the school within the local community. WWGVC's inclusive education actions primarily target vulnerable children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), while some specific actions exclusively target children with disabilities. Targeted actions for CwDs are implemented in partnership with local Civil Society Organisations (CSO), Community Based Organisations (CBOs) working with PwD, and specialised organisations.

WWGVC embraces the definition of disability included in the CRPD, where disability is defined as *"an evolving concept [that] results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others"*. This definition, which reflects

the bio-psycho-social approach<sup>4</sup>, shifts the focus from the impairment to the barriers and biases that persons with disabilities face and that prevent their equal participation in social life.

WWGVC has adopted a strong **educational community approach**, according to which the educational community is understood to mean a group of actors (persons, organisations, institutions, etc.) that are somehow involved in and have responsibilities toward child and youth education. Therefore, in addition to families (parents and caregivers) and schools (teachers and other education personnel), the concept of the educational community also encompasses community organisations, local NGOs, religious organisations and, of course, children and youth themselves.

According to WWGVC, adopting an educational community approach means: a) recognising the role of each of the actors that constitute the educational community; b) designing and implementing actions/projects in education, by involving all members of the educational community (i.e., key informant in the needs assessment, who will be the target for tailored awareness and capacity-building activities, etc.).

In general, the community is an essential space where families (and specifically the most marginalised and excluded ones) are supported. The school system can find local resources and capacities within it to offset pedagogical approaches and delivery mechanisms, making it possible to overcome barriers to access school. In the community, rapid mechanisms can be put in place

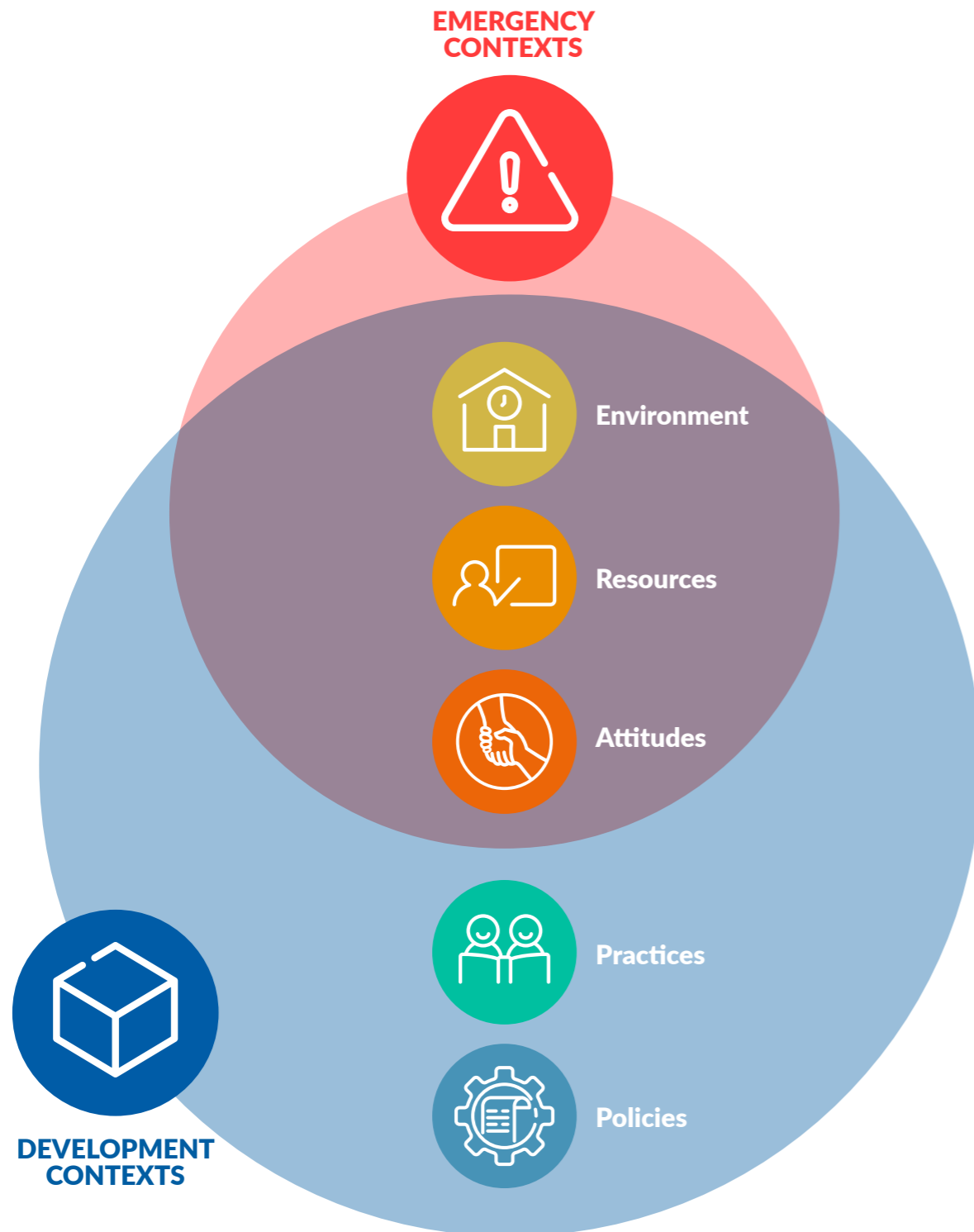
to leverage the coordinated efforts of different educational actors within it (civil society, individuals, sports centres, community services and others).






When promoting inclusive education and inclusion of vulnerable populations and groups in general, the combined efforts of families and community actors alongside schools are particularly important. Barriers to inclusion could be environmental (or physical), administrative, political, cultural, and/or attitudinal, making coordinated and integrated actions targeting all the educational community actors necessary to tackle them.

WWGVC recognises the primary role of national institutions and authorities in promoting inclusive education, both in emergency and protracted crises and in development contexts, and adopts an educational community approach.

It believes that in order to support education systems and educational communities to become more inclusive, significant changes must be made in five key areas: environment, resources, attitudes, practices and policies. Usually, actions at the "policies" and "practices" levels are more appropriate in a development context, as they require medium to long-term efforts.

<sup>4</sup> The bio-psycho-social approach was introduced by the International Classification of Functioning in Disability and Health (ICF), published in 2001 by the World Health Organisation and synthesising the medical and social model, highlighting the dynamic and reciprocal nature of the interaction between individuals and their context. According to this approach, disability is the result of physical and biological conditions and context-related factors (personal and environmental).



<p><b>Environment</b></p> 	<p>Focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Accessibility of schools and educational facilities</li> <li>&gt; Establishment and equipment of resource rooms</li> </ul> <p>Learning environments (school buildings and other educational, recreational and sanitation facilities) need to be accessible for CwDs and must be gender-sensitive.</p> <p>Moreover, school environments should be safe, free from violence, abuse, and bullying.</p>
<p><b>Resources</b></p> 	<p>Focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Capacity building and strengthening for teachers and other education personnel</li> </ul> <p>Across many of the countries where WWGVC operates, inclusive education is not part of teachers' pre-service and in-service training curricula. Therefore, teachers' knowledge and competences on key topics related to inclusion need to be strengthened in both emergency and development contexts. Teachers' capacity building is considered from a continuous professional development perspective. In addition to training, coaching and peer support on promoted practices should be provided to teachers and communities. School principals play a key role in promoting inclusive education; if a principal is not committed or fully engaged, the school is very unlikely to become inclusive. Therefore, school principals need to be sensitised and supported.</p> <p>All training activities should be organised in coordination with local institutions and authorities.</p>
<p><b>Attitudes</b></p> 	<p>Focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Awareness raising among educational communities</li> </ul> <p>Many of the barriers to education faced by vulnerable children are linked to cultural and attitudinal factors.</p> <p>Awareness raising and empowerment of educational communities are prerequisites to building inclusive schools and societies. Awareness activities should be conducted in an integrated way at a school (targeting both students and teachers) and community level.</p>
<p><b>Practices</b></p> 	<p>Focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; More inclusive teaching and learning (curriculum and instruction)</li> </ul> <p>An inclusive school adopts measures to make the curriculum and instructions appropriate to the capacities and educational needs of all students, including those with special educational needs. Teaching and learning strategies, materials and methodologies need to be adapted to ensure that the diverse learning needs of different learners are met. "Practice-level" interventions are strictly related to teachers' capacity building, described in the "resource" section.</p>
<p><b>Policies</b></p> 	<p>Focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Strengthening and disseminating national and school policies, to ensure access to quality education for all children.</li> </ul> <p>In some countries targeted by WWGVC, policies on quality education exist but implementation levels are low; others lack a specific national legal and policy framework. The development and application of legal and policy frameworks is a long-term process to which an organisation like WWGVC could contribute mainly through advocacy actions. Such efforts should be aimed at ensuring that these advocacy actions reflect the actual rights of persons with disabilities to education, eliminating discriminatory policies and laws, and improving the national collection and disaggregation of education data by disability. Indeed, data collection is key to allowing governments to make evidence-based plans for their education systems, and/or to changing attitudes towards CwDs.</p> <p>Supporting schools to develop and implement inclusive policies is a key action.</p>



## 7. Piloting the inclusive education approach in Syria

Since 2014, WWGVC has been providing educational assistance to the Syrian population, including the host community, returnees and IDPs in the Aleppo and Deir-Ez-Zor Governorates in close coordination with the MoE, the Directorates of Education (DoE) of Aleppo and Deir-Ez-Zor, and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC).

In 2019, WWGVC participated in the Conference on the Development of Education in the Syrian Arab Republic entitled *Future Perspectives for Education in the Twenty-First Century*, organised by the MoE, where it presented its approach and experience in promoting inclusive education. Contributing to the conference provided opportunity to reflect, together with the MoE, on the potential to adapt the inclusive education approach to the Syrian context, considering the specific country scenario, as it moved from a first emergency response to an early-recovery phase.

Based on the positive feedback received at the National Conference, WWGVC developed a project proposal in 2021 that was submitted to and approved by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS). The project is named *"Inclusive education and income-generating opportunities for building-up resilient communities in underserved areas of Aleppo and Deir-Ez-Zor governorates"* and involves the piloting of an inclusive education approach in 8 schools/educational communities.

The proposed inclusive education approach has been presented to and discussed with relevant stakeholders at the national and governorates levels,

and specifically the MoE in Damascus and the DoE in Aleppo and Deir-ez-Zor.

The project focuses on three of the five areas of intervention by WWGVC with its approach to inclusive education, integrating and interconnecting the actions implemented under each area and ensuring an impact at educational community level.

ATTITUDES	RESOURCES	ENVIRONMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Awareness campaigns at school level</li> <li>&gt; Awareness campaigns at community level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Development of the training package</li> <li>&gt; 5 days training with 200 teachers (100 in Aleppo and 100 in Deir-ez-Zor)</li> <li>&gt; Follow-up meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Renovation of 8 schools, 3 in Aleppo* and 5 in Deir-ez-Zor**, with a focus on ensuring accessibility for children with physical disabilities and providing gender-sensitive WASH facilities</li> <li>&gt; Establishment of resource rooms</li> </ul>

\* Al Hader Al Muhdatha, Ibn Al Nafis and Walid Ibn Abd Al Malik schools.

\*\* Bader Al-Deen Aifan and Ghanam Al-Torki schools in Deir-ez-Zor city and Sbeikhan Sharqi and Tishreen Al-Mohdatha school in Ashara sub-district.



### ENVIRONMENT

The first set of activities focuses on ensuring safe and accessible learning spaces for the targeted communities, providing for the renovation of eight schools with a focus on removing architectural barriers, providing accessible

toilets and distributing materials, such as stationery, learning tools for Early Childhood Education (ECE) and CwDs, and cleaning kits. The action targeted 8 schools, 3 in the Aleppo Governorate and 5 in the Deir-ez-Zor Governorate:

ALEPPO			DEIR-EZ-ZOR		
Village	Name of school	Type of school	Village	Name of school	Type of school
Iss	Industrial School	Professional school*	Tishreen	Ghornata	Secondary school
Haritan	Mazzra Al Ahmadia	Primary school	Sbeikhan	Sbeikhan Sharqi	Primary school
Jazraya	Jazraya Al Modhasa	Primary school	Ashara	Mohammed Al Saleh	Primary school
			Ashara	Al Basel	Primary school
			Ashara	Al Asad	Secondary school

\* The renovation of this school, which was not in operation, forms part of the activities aimed at supporting secondary education and TVET



JEZRAYA SCHOOL AFTER REHABILITATION, ALEPPO - 2022 ©WeWorld



A EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT ROOM (ECD) IN DEIR-EZ-ZOR - 2022 ©WeWorld



The project also includes establishing 7 Resource Rooms (RRs) where children with SEN enrolled in the school will receive additional support, based on their needs and provided by trained teachers and school counsellors. In the original proposal, the RRs were intended to be provided in the renovated schools. However, during the implementation phase and in light of the results of the consultation process carried out with the DoE, the decision was made to locate them in other schools (with the exception of Sbeikhan Sharqi, in Deir-Ez-Zor), with higher enrolment of students with disabilities.

The schools were also identified based on the availability of accessible WASH facilities and the overall accessibility of the structure. Teachers working in these schools were also given training on Inclusive Education to enable them

to make the best use of the tools available in the RRs.

WWGVC staff coordinated with the Office of the Director of the Research Department of MoE and the Inclusion Coordinator to identify and prioritise the most important materials required to support resource rooms' teachers in their efforts to develop children's skills. The RR materials delivered are in line with MOE and UNICEF standards.



SBEIKHAN SHARQI SCHOOL BEFORE REHABILITATION, DEIR-EZ-ZOR - 2022 ©WeWorld



SBEIKHAN SHARQI SCHOOL AFTER REHABILITATION, DEIR-EZ-ZOR - 2022 ©WeWorld



RESOURCES

To ensure access to quality and inclusive education for all children, teachers need to be trained and sensitised. As outlined by the Interagency Network for Education in Emergency (INEE 2009 and 2010), building teachers' confidence in their own capacity to tackle barriers to inclusion is vital. Teachers, particularly those who work in the context of emergency and protracted crises, often feel extremely challenged when providing support to children with SEN. It is crucial for teachers to believe that inclusion is possible, in other words that every child can learn, based on and according to their capacities. Therefore, the first step towards inclusion is to sensitise teachers. In an inclusive school, teachers are expected to recognise diversity and nurture learners with different backgrounds, abilities, and learning styles. Inclusion seeks to address a wide range of aspects and barriers that prevent children from accessing their right to education, and therefore does not focus solely on learners with disabilities. The changes needed to include these learners are often very similar to those required to ensure that everyone receives a quality education. Particularly when children with severe learning difficulties or intellectual and sensorial disabilities are present in their classroom, regular teachers require support from specialised teachers. It is, however, important that they do not consider inclusion to be the responsibility of specialised teachers solely.

To prevent frustration and overwhelming situations, teachers must be sensitised to the fact that inclusion is a process and not something that can be achieved from one day to the next. Inclusion requires change at all levels of the education system and takes time and effort to achieve. Another aspect

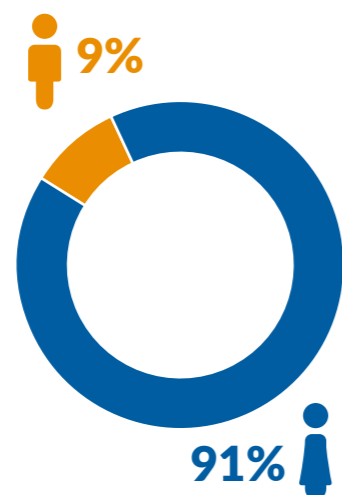
that must be strengthened is the teachers' capacity to share experiences and seek peer support, as exclusion cannot be addressed by working in isolation.

**CAPACITY-BUILDING CONTENT AND PARTICIPANTS**

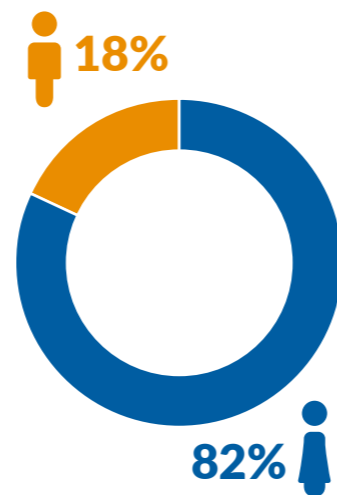
As part of this pilot, 5 days of inclusive education training were delivered to 200 teachers (100 in Aleppo and 100 in Deir-ez-Zor).

The 5 days of training was delivered between August and November 2022, and the 200 teachers were divided into groups of 25 participants, with 4 groups in Aleppo and 4 in Deir-ez-Zor. Most participants (86%) were women, although there was greater gender balance among participants in Deir-Ez-Zor than in Aleppo.

**PARTICIPANTS BY GENDER ALEPPO**



**PARTICIPANTS BY GENDER DEIR-EZ-ZOR**



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Participants in the training course were selected based on the following criteria: a) teachers working in targeted schools (both renovated schools and schools where resource rooms were provided); b) teachers with little professional experience; c) teachers lacking adequate training; d) teachers who expressed difficulties managing the class; e) teachers with CwDs in their classrooms.

The training was facilitated by DoE personnel, and particularly school counsellors already trained in inclusive education. Facilitators received an induction session on the materials by WWGVC education coordinators and education officers, who in some cases also co-facilitated the training. WWGVC education coordinators and education officers actively participated

in revising and contextualising the training materials, which were selected, adapted and complemented by a WWGVC education expert in the head office. Additionally, WWGVC staff participated in a 2-day induction session on the inclusive education materials, facilitated by a WWGVC education expert in March 2022 in Aleppo. The training programme, content and materials were developed in close coordination with Aleppo and Deir-ez-Zor DoEs. In fact, DoE materials were used on two of the five days.

Upon completion of the training, participating teachers should be able to: a) understand the basic principles underpinning inclusive education; b) identify barriers to inclusion and begin to address them (with particular focus on CwDs' needs); c) recognise when

children need more support to take part in learning; d) plan and deliver learning activities with an inclusive education approach; e) apply suggested good practices for inclusive education, systematise, share and discuss them with colleagues.

The table in the next page summarises the training structure and learning objectives of each day.



	TITLE	LEARNING OBJECTIVES
DAY 1	<b>Introduction to Inclusive Education</b>	Understand the basic principles underpinning inclusive education  Understand the difference between special, integrated and inclusive education
DAY 2	<b>Definition of disability and how to identify and tackle barriers to inclusion</b>	Introduce participants to the current human rights approach to disability (UNCRPD)  Reflect with participants on the concept of discrimination and the strategies to tackle it  Define and identify the main barriers to inclusion for children with disabilities
DAY 3	<b>Training manual for RR teachers (DoE materials)</b>	Provide teachers with information on the RRs (objective, characteristics of RR teachers, referral mechanisms, definition of an Individualised Education Plan)  Understand the role of the counsellor in family counselling for CwDs  Introduce the Procedural Manual on the Admission Criteria for CwDs in Formal and Special Education
DAY 4	<b>Theoretical Manual of Learning Difficulties (DoE materials)</b>	Understand the learning difficulties and special educational requirements for the inclusion of students with learning difficulties.
DAY 5	<b>Tips for inclusive teachers</b>	Provide teachers with some practical tips for creating an inclusive learning environment, based on the 9 Golden Rules outlined by UNESCO
	<b>Awareness campaign</b>	Present the activity for awareness sessions for children, parents and communities

On the final day of training, participants also received an induction session on the activities designed by a WWGVC education expert and education staff in Syria for awareness raising sessions at school and community level, to be implemented by participants after the training.

The two days directly facilitated by the DoE were complementary to the other three days, and focused on providing practical examples on the activities and methodology that can be used in

RRs and within “regular” classrooms, based on the trainers’ experience. The methodology used for the training was based on active participatory learning methods.

**TRAINING OUTCOMES**

All participants took pre- and post-tests, consisting of 19 questions related to learning objectives. A comparison of the pre- and post-tests’ results showed the improvement in participants’ knowledge.

From a more qualitative perspective, the reports by WWGVC education staff and the satisfaction survey indicated that the training was very well received. It represented an opportunity to highlight the difficulties of including vulnerable children as active members in school. According to the feedback received, this was the first time that many participants had the opportunity to learn and reflect on inclusion. Some also noted that, before training, they had different perceptions of children with SEN.

Teachers acquired new knowledge, developed new skills and began reflecting on the changes needed, including in terms of attitudes, in order to effectively include and promote participation and achievement of all children in the learning spaces. Participants were involved in the discussion and shared their experiences, the constraints they face, and their concerns.

In terms of challenges, with the exception of certain aspects more related to logistical issues, WWGVC education officers noted that more experienced teachers were usually less keen to accept the idea of including CwDs but, following the work of the trainers, some changed their minds on the last day of training. Another point that emerged during the discussions is that, due to school overcrowding, principals prefer to use the RR spaces as regular classes. In general, not all participants were initially open to the idea of inclusion, but the effort and competence of the

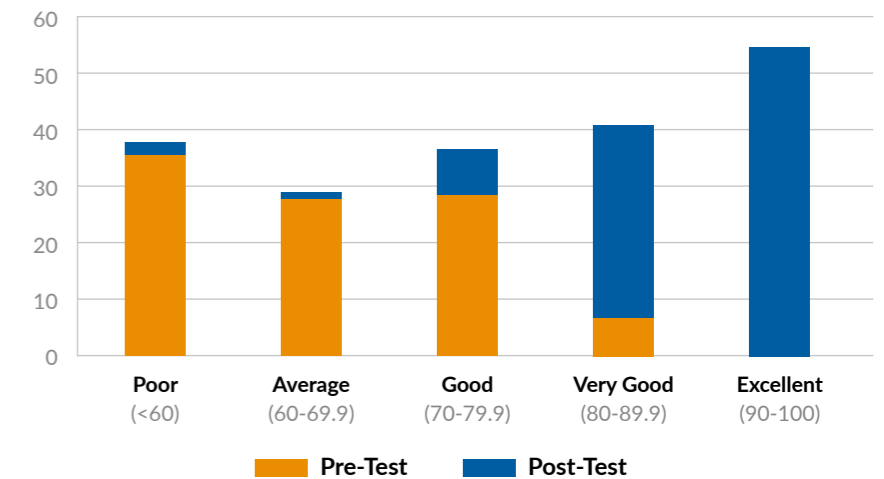
trainers played an essential role in seeking to change their perceptions.

**APPLICATION, PEER SUPPORT AND FOLLOW-UP SESSION**

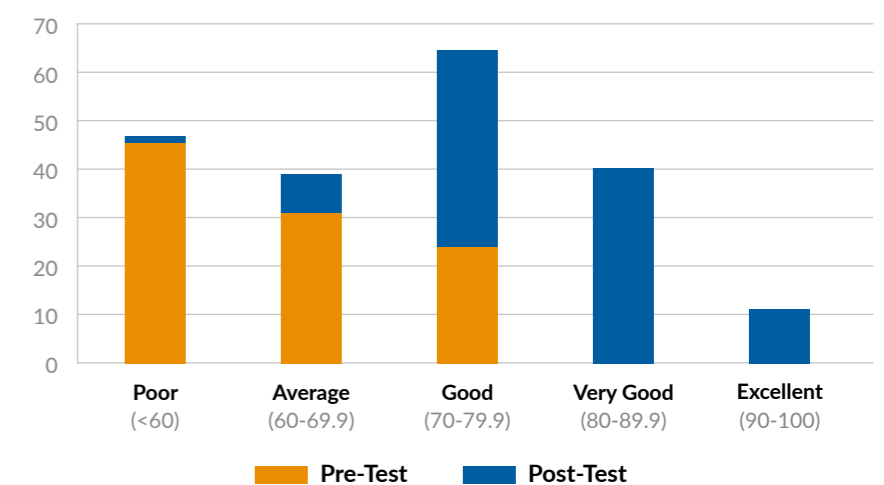
As mentioned above, inclusive education is an ongoing process for which there are no fixed solutions or “recipes” that work in every situation. As such, building teachers’ confidence, motivating them, and promoting teamwork and peer support are even more essential in this specific professional development

process. Specifically, at the end of the training process, teachers were motivated to apply some of the knowledge developed, to experiment with making changes to their teaching practices and to systematise such practices by using an action-research approach and a simple tool known as the systematisation tool (see Box).

**PRE-POST TEST RESULTS ALEPPO**



**PRE-POST TEST RESULTS DEIR-EZ-ZOR**





## SYSTEMATISATION TOOL



### STEP 1. IDENTIFY AND DESCRIBE THE SITUATION/ASPECT YOU WOULD LIKE TO CHANGE/IMPROVE

Based on what you learned during training, identify one aspect you would like to improve in order to promote inclusion. For example:

- > The learning environment is not welcoming for all students.
- > One of your students needs more support due to a learning difficulty and you would like to experiment with new pedagogical strategies.
- > Some of your students are isolated from the others.

Try to identify a situation that you will be able to tackle with practical actions in a relatively short time (2-3 months). You could identify a problematic situation in one of these three macro-categories:

1. Learning environments (classroom)
2. Teaching practices (materials, activities, etc.)
3. Culture (students' beliefs and attitudes related to inclusion)

Describe the situation.



### STEP 2. PLAN AND TEST A SOLUTION

After identifying and describing the situation you would like to change/improve, try to find a solution. Some of the questions that may guide you are the following:

- > What can I do?
- > Who can support me (with knowledge, resources, etc.)?

Develop a small action plan and implement it.

If possible, take photos.



### STEP 3. REFLECT ON YOUR EXPERIENCE

At the end of the process, reflect on your experience:

- > Were you able to implement your work plan?
- > If not, what were the main obstacles?
- > What works?
- > What does not work?
- > Is your experience replicable?

Approximately 3-4 months after training, a follow-up session was organised, during which participants presented the results of their action-research and had the opportunity to receive feedback from the other participants, share their experiences and challenges, and celebrate their achievements. The commitment to the feedback session motivated participants to effectively apply what they had learned during training in their everyday practice and systematise the experiences they conducted.

The one-day follow-up training session was held in April 2023 in both Aleppo and Deir-ez-Zor with all the teachers who participated in the 5-day training programme. They presented and discussed the experiences recorded using the “systematisation tool” and had the opportunity to reflect together on the advantages and challenges of adopting a more inclusive teaching approach, sharing achievements as well as difficulties. In terms of positive feedback, some reported that the training enabled them to realise they had abilities of which they were previously unaware. Other participants highlighted that they had begun focusing on and better valuing each student’s abilities and competences.

The introduction of the systematisation tool was a pilot within the pilot. Teachers are often creative in experimenting with new solutions and ideas but often, due to the lack of time and habit, they do not document and systematise them. The tool and the follow-up meeting were intended to motivate and guide this systematisation, as well as promote collaborative processes among teachers.



**“When putting in practice what I learned in the training, I realised that I have abilities that I wasn’t aware of possessing”**

Teacher’s contribution during a follow-up meeting in Aleppo



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**RESULTS OF THE CONSULTATIONS**

Initially, teachers were not highly motivated to use the systematisation tool as they regarded the exercise as an additional task to their usual workload. However, thanks to the work of WWGVC education staff who conducted several visits in schools to further explain how to use the tool and to motivate teachers, approximately 50% of participants had a systematised experience to present during the follow-up meeting. This level of participation in the exercise should itself be considered a result.

Most teachers (49%) decided to focus their practices on solving situations related to the macro category of culture – meaning students’ and teachers’ beliefs and attitudes regarding inclusion – and fewer (33%) decided to focus on

students’ learning difficulties. In other cases, teachers used the tool to reflect on how to reduce infrastructural barriers or to report on the awareness sessions they implemented at the school level.

Regarding **cultural aspects**, what resulted from the analysis of the systematisation tools was that classrooms are not always a welcoming environment for all students, due to the attitudes of classmates and some teachers. Episodes of exclusion and bullying of children for several reasons were reported, including on the grounds of a physical disability or SEN, of being extremely quiet and silent (traumatised children) or, in some cases, of living in extreme poverty with reduced access to sanitation facilities with consequent hygiene problems. Indeed, lack of hygiene seems to be a big issue and appears many times as a cause of exclusion. Teachers

often reported cases of “isolated” children and tried to find solutions to overcome these situations. Some of the solutions proposed included the following actions, often used in combination: a) contacting the child’s parents/caregivers to gain more information on the situation of the child, b) talking to the child to build a closer relationship and improve communication; c) experimenting with solutions to enhance “isolated” children’s participation and engagement, such as involving them as leaders in group work, assigning them some easier tasks, and promoting peer support provided by other classmates; d) sensitising other students. The following tables present some of the experiences shared by teachers during the follow-up meetings, in their own words.

**EXAMPLE OF SYSTEMATISATION TOOL 1 reported by a RR teacher of Al-Lairamoun school**

Description of the situation	Proposed solution
<p><i>One of my students has difficulty in speaking and cannot speak clearly, so his fellow students made a mockery of him, which made him introvert and now he has a hard time getting along with the others.</i></p>	<p><i>In coordination with the classroom teacher, we decided to try to make him sociable through games and inclusion. Although he did not speak at the beginning, we made him love his friends by sharing food and games, and then we taught him how to pronounce correctly the different letters and he practised them. We also contacted his fellow students’ parents to ask for their support in motivating their children to interact with their classmates and not to convey messages like “don’t play with that child, don’t talk to him”. In fact, these kinds of attitudes affect all children, not only the children who have specific difficulties. This always promotes inclusion because it is a cooperative and social process as it is effective for all stakeholders.</i></p>

**EXAMPLE OF SYSTEMATISATION TOOL 2 reported by a teacher of Raked Al-Adas School**

Description of the situation	Proposed solution
<p><i>I am a 1st grade teacher. I have two isolated students. I noticed that at the beginning of the school year. This situation impacts on their educational achievement to some extent, as their participation was almost null, and they avoided playing and talking to their classmates.</i></p>	<p><i>I focused on paying more attention to them, to keep them motivated and to build trust within them and to make them feel self-confident. I asked their parents to do the same.</i></p>

**EXAMPLE OF SYSTEMATISATION TOOL 3 reported by a teacher of Hayan school for females**

Description of the situation	Proposed solution
<p><i>As a consequence of their life experiences (displacement, changing living place and school many times) some children are isolated in the classroom and don’t interact or participate with their peers in playing, activities and sports.</i></p>	<p><i>After noticing this situation, I tried to find a solution and to make these students play together and participate in activities and to learn from their peers. I decided to assign them some specific tasks, for instance to be a group leader during the lesson or go to the head teacher’s office to get document forms. I also asked him/her to help his/her peers with solving math problems, and to participate in sport lessons and to play in groups.</i></p>

Other teachers focused on improving **teaching practices** to support students with learning difficulties caused by speech problems, visual or hearing disabilities, hyperactivity, or language difficulties that were caused by forced migration, which resulted in children spending long periods of time abroad with consequent difficulties using the

Arabic language, etc. In these cases, teachers came up with several creative solutions, such as: a) adapting learning materials; b) motivating parents/caregivers to support their child with homework; c) asking for support from the RR teachers and/or increasing the time spent by the child in the RR; d) promoting peer support among

students; e) in some cases, supporting parents/caregivers to seek specialised support provided by national and international organisations; f) coordinating with and sensitising other teachers regarding the situation of the child.



**EXAMPLE OF SYSTEMATISATION TOOL 4 - reported by a classroom teacher at Borsaid School**

Description of the situation	Proposed solution
<i>I have a student with a hearing disability who is trying to learn, but the material and means are not suitable for his condition, in addition to neglect from the parents.</i>	<i>I decided to attract the student's attention with pictures and electronic programmes and by simplifying the material into small parts, in addition to communicating with the parents to secure hearing aids for the student and working to raise the student's self-confidence.</i>

**EXAMPLE OF SYSTEMATISATION TOOL 5 - reported by a RR teacher at Adnan Al-Madani school**

Description of the situation	Proposed solution
<i>Our student Ali suffers from a speech problem, which made him vulnerable to bullying by his classmates despite his clear intelligence.</i>	<i>After discussing with the class teacher and some friends to help Ali, a mathematics lesson was prepared in the class using the group method, which enabled Ali to express his opinion and participate in the lesson. Ali was very active, making it possible to shed light on him.</i>

**EXAMPLE OF SYSTEMATISATION TOOL 6 - reported by a classroom teacher at Al-Motanabbi Association school**

Description of the situation	Proposed solution
<i>I have a student who is always afraid of attending the Arabic class as he does not know Arabic letters and how to pronounce and write them. He had a problem with linking letters, as he lives in a foreign-rooted family that is uninterested in the Arabic language.</i>	<i>I started practising some activities outside the lessons using games and drawings to motivate his peers to interact with him. I allocated additional time for this student during school hours and motivated him by organising competitions and games. I also asked his friends to encourage him with every improvement he achieves. In addition, I involved his parents, asking them to encourage the student to watch children's TV channels that show jingles and educational experiences.</i>

**EXAMPLE OF SYSTEMATISATION TOOL 7 - reported by a classroom teacher at Mahmoud Al-Asaad school**

Description of the situation	Proposed solution
<i>I have a student with poor distance eyesight.</i>	<i>I asked him to sit closer to the blackboard: the student felt good and he was happy. I performed many activities and games to make him feel that he is not different from the others. He became more active, he started to love school and his teachers more. We performed activities and he was one of the students that participated the most.</i>

From an analysis of all the experiences and reflections shared by the teachers, the following recurring aspects emerged:

1. There is a connection between isolation and learning difficulties. Children with SEN and learning difficulties are often isolated in the classroom. Teachers focused on reducing isolation but, at the same time, they were aware that reducing isolation is not a comprehensive solution for learning problems, and other actions are necessary. In other words, teachers chose to focus on culture as a first step, but are aware that inclusion also requires changes at other levels (such as practice).
2. In the case of specific disabilities (visual and hearing), some solutions proposed for the related learning difficulties made it possible to overcome the isolation but not the learning difficulties themselves, as teachers need more specialised support, aids and training.
3. Engagement of parents and caregivers is vital in ensuring inclusion, but parents are often unaware of the situation and needs of their child and do not collaborate.
4. Collaboration among educational community actors (teachers/parents/students) is a key factor that guarantees good outcomes.
5. In many cases, an unwelcoming environment also prevents parents of CwDs from enrolling them in school. In fact, the connection between an unwelcoming environment and drop-out/absenteeism trends was mentioned many times, and was not limited to CwDs.



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6. Students with learning difficulties often experience bullying that leads to behavioural difficulties.
7. In the case of bullying and/or isolated children (which can be due to many factors), teachers adopt a twofold strategy, providing individual support to children who are bullied and organising awareness sessions with all the students. Teachers often stated that their practice requires time and patience to yield success, demonstrating that inclusion is a process.

Moreover, during the follow-up meeting, teachers exchanged perceptions and experiences on the awareness campaigns they implemented in schools (see next chapter), using the activities and methodology they received during the 5-day training programme. The feedback on the awareness campaigns focused on how students responded to these activities. According to teachers, these activities made the children happy and broke the teaching routine; these activities played a major role in

providing the children with a space to express their feelings, whether negative or positive. The students asked to continue this type of activity, demonstrating that it reinforces many positive values within them. Another aspect that emerged is that children usually easily accept the idea of inclusion.

Most of the challenges raised during the awareness sessions were related to the situation in Aleppo after the earthquakes of February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Some schools were turned into shelters, which made regular class attendance and implementation of awareness campaigns difficult, with many students absent due to the constant tremors. More details on implementation of the awareness campaigns are provided below.





AWARENESS CAMPAIGN IN SCHOOL, DEIR-EZ-ZOR - 2023 ©WeWorld



ATTITUDES

One of the main barriers that CwDs face is related to cultural aspects. For example, stereotypes and misconceptions reinforce the idea that CwDs are not able to learn, or that girls' education is not a priority. As such, raising awareness among the educational community is essential to the inclusive education approach proposed by WWGVC.

Awareness sessions must target all members of the educational communities. Therefore, the above-mentioned 5-day training programme for teachers involved sessions on how to conduct awareness activities. Subsequently, teachers that were trained as part of the project facilitated awareness sessions at school level, and trained DoE representatives to facilitate awareness sessions at community level. The campaign also involved the production of posters and other communication

materials on inclusion, which were distributed in targeted schools and communities.

Activities in the awareness sessions for primary school children focused on:

- Helping students get to know each other better, understand and value diversity;
- Sensitising students on the situation of CwDs and/or other children at risk of exclusion/discrimination;
- Identifying critical situations in school and sensitising students on bullying and other discriminatory attitudes to be avoided;
- Introducing the concept of helping and supporting one another and the importance of working together;
- Sensitising students on the importance of using a respectful language;
- Sensitising children on the condition of persons with visual and hearing impairments.
- Identifying students' opinion and stimulating debate on different topics;



AWARENESS CAMPAIGN IN COMMUNITIES, ALEPPO - 2023 ©WeWorld



### ACTIVITY: THE “GOOD AND BAD MOMENTS” BOXES

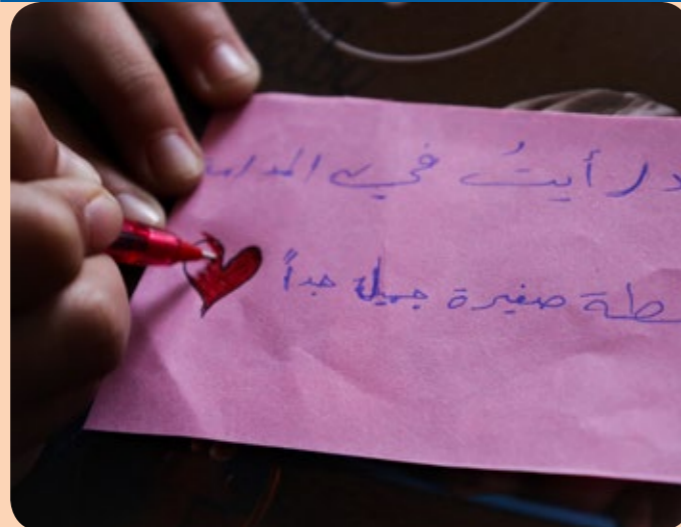
The scope of this activity is to identify critical situations in school and sensitise students to bullying and other discriminatory attitudes. Teachers prepare two boxes, using old shoe boxes or similar, one with a “good moment” sticker and the other with a “bad moment” sticker. Each student receives a piece of paper and a pen and is asked to: a) describe in a few words, or draw, a nice moment they had in school (something that makes them feel happy, something funny, something they really enjoyed at school) and to put it in the “good moments” box; b) to describe in a few words, or draw, a bad/difficult/uncomfortable moment they had in school (something that made them feel sad, excluded, afraid, etc.) and put it in the “bad moments” box.



THE GOOD AND BAD MOMENTS ACTIVITY, ALEPPO - 2023 ©WeWorld

Students are not required to write their names on the pieces of paper. Afterwards, the teacher opens the boxes and reads or shows the papers, trying to find similarities and differences, and debriefs with the groups using the following questions:

- What are the main situations that can turn school into an uncomfortable place?
- If these situations are related to how students behave (bullying, being violent, causing exclusion, etc.), what could we as students do to tackle it?
- What should teachers do to turn the school into a safer, inclusive environment for everyone?
- Are girls and boys experiencing different “bad moments”? Why?
- Are CwDs and children living without disabilities experiencing different “bad moments”?



During the discussion, the teacher should convey the following **key messages**: school should be a safe, happy and comfortable place for everyone, and therefore we need to avoid behaviours that hurt/exclude/discriminate others; if some of your fellow classmates are suffering from bullying, you should do something to support them (talk to the teachers, etc.) and not be a part of the silent audience.

Activities in the awareness session at community level focused on:

- Introducing parents to inclusion and disabilities.
- Giving CwDs' parents some practical tips on how to support their

children, depending on the type of disability.

- Introducing participants to different learning styles.
- Giving parents and caregivers of CwDs some tips on how to use daily activities as learning

opportunities for their children and how to support them in developing skills to conduct daily living activities independently. Overall, how to make use of everyday practices (daily activities/chores) as learning opportunities for their children.

### ACTIVITY: THE MAGIC CARPET

The scope of the activity is to introduce the concept of helping and supporting one another and the importance of working together. The teacher divides the participants into teams with the same number of children on each (up to a maximum of 5) and gives each team 3 pieces of paper. The entire team should move from one side of the room to the other, but they can only do so while stepping on the piece of paper, without touching the floor directly. If they touch the floor, they must go back to the beginning. Teachers may choose to assign several participants to serve as judges. Every team member should play a role in the game. Then the game begins.

After the game is over, they discuss what happened: Did any group prepare a strategy? What made the winning team successful? What made the other teams fall behind? What is the key learning point of this activity? During the discussion, the teacher may encourage recognition of the abilities of each team member and highlight the value of collaboration and teamwork.



THE MAGIC CARPET ACTIVITY, ALEPPO - 2023 ©WeWorld

School campaigns involved a total of 11,000 students, 5,653 girls (51%) and 5,357 boys (49%); 5% of the participants were CwDs.

Community campaigns involved a total of 400 parents and caregivers, 282 women (70%) and 118 men (30%).

Several tools were developed to monitor and evaluate the sessions.

Teachers implementing awareness sessions at school level were asked to fill out a monitoring template that included a section for feedback on: a) the activities and methodology used; b) the extent of what they learned; c) the extent to which what they learned in the training was useful for implementing the awareness sessions; d)

the participation of students and their response to the proposed content.

DoE staff implementing awareness sessions at community level were asked to fill out a monitoring template which included a section for feedback on: a) the activities and methodology used; b) the extent of what they learned; c) the extent to which what they learned in the training was useful for implementing the awareness sessions; d) the participation of parents and community members and their response to the proposed content.

In addition, WWGVC education staff who monitored both sessions used a checklist to record data on: a) how teachers and DoE staff implemented the activities, managed the group,

and applied the knowledge and skills acquired; b) the feedback of teachers and DoE personnel on the campaigns.

At the end of the campaigns, school sessions were evaluated through FGDs with students, using games and group works. KIIs (phone calls to community members) were used to evaluate the community sessions.



## MAIN FINDINGS: SCHOOL CAMPAIGN ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Within the school campaign on inclusive education, teachers were free to choose one or more activities from those presented during training. The two most popular activities were “The good and bad moments” and “The magic carpet”. The first activity aims to identify critical situations in school and sensitise students on bullying and other discriminatory attitudes that need to be avoided, while the second focuses on introducing the concept of helping and supporting one another and the importance of working together. In general, teachers provided positive feedback on the activity.

Most of the teachers considered that the skills acquired during training on inclusive education were useful for implementing sensitisation activities. As a result of the training, they were able to be more flexible in their teaching practices, taking into consideration the needs of children with special needs and adapting their language and attitudes to the students.

Teachers also reported that children participated actively in the activities. Many teachers described children’s participation as enthusiastic: children engaged in and enjoyed teamwork and asked for more similar activities. “Happiness” was one of the words teachers used the most in describing students’ responses.

Monitoring tools were designed to record information on students’ responses to the topics presented in the activities. In that sense, teachers reported constructive contributions from active students. Other frequently used words by teachers in describing students’ responses to the topics presented were ‘interaction’ and ‘cooperation’.

Students actively participated in discussions on how to create a more welcoming environment for everyone in school, particularly for children with special needs. In one case, participants observed that changes are needed not only at a school level, but also at a community level. Students seem highly motivated to participate in these kinds of activities that are “unusual” in school, and that “rely on cooperation and trust”.

Teachers also contributed with several specific valuable suggestions. In general, they agreed on the need to implement these kinds of activities on a regular basis in school, as they are considered “constructive” and of benefit to the students. Additionally, these activities, give students the opportunity to “exchange opinions” and “become familiar with the idea of accepting other people’s opinions”.

Some teachers suggested including these kinds of activities in the curriculum while others observed that recreational materials, such as puppet theatre to perform role play, may be useful to implement more of these activities.

## STUDENT FEEDBACK

WWGVC staff conducted 12 FGDs (6 in Aleppo and 6 in DEZ) with 341 students (171 girls and 170 boys). The methodology adopted included one group work session in which participants were invited to creatively represent (through drawing, theatre, song, etc.) the most important thing they had learned during the awareness sessions. A second activity focused on understanding how students felt during the awareness sessions, and specifically whether they felt included, had fun, and were interested in participating in more similar activities. In this case, facilitators used a game in which children were invited to write some sentences



AWARENESS CAMPAIGN IN SCHOOLS, DEIR-EZ-ZOR - 2023 ©WeWorld

on colourful notes to stick on a poster, in order to indicate whether they agreed (green post-it), did not agree (red post-it), or did not know (orange post-it).

The findings highlighted that the main concepts children took from the awareness sessions were: a) the idea that all children, including CwDs, have the right to education; b) the importance of avoiding discriminatory language; c) the importance and power of using good-hearted and kind words; d) the need to respect children of all genders, conditions and ethnicities; e) the essential role all of them may play in promoting the inclusion of CwDs (by playing together, supporting them, etc.). Students especially enjoyed an activity called “the magic carpet”, that required teamwork and collaboration

in order to reach a common goal, valuing the capacity of each of the team members.

All children involved in the awareness sessions indicated that they enjoyed the activity, felt included, and were interested in participating in more activities like these, confirming the feedback provided by teachers.

Using an observation tool designed for the purpose, WWGVC staff reported that the facilitators met the expectations in terms of the methodology used and attitude demonstrated during the sessions. In very few isolated cases, teachers did not meet the expectations and, in their feedback, they stated that “some students were not ready for the activity” and “the time available for the activity was not enough”.

## MAIN FINDINGS: COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Community awareness sessions delivered by DoE personnel targeted students’ parents and teachers. All facilitators reported that the activities and methodologies proposed were useful and appropriate and that the skills they acquired during training on inclusive education were appropriate for implementing these kinds of activities. Facilitators also reported that parents and teachers involved in the sessions participated actively and that the content proposed was well received.

Facilitators suggested increasing the number and frequency of awareness sessions at a community level. They also provided more inputs on other activities that need to be implemented to

ensure inclusion, such as: to increase the safe areas for children with special needs; continuous awareness courses for teachers and assuring acceptance of diversity; establishing more “inclusive schools” and assuring the importance of inclusive education.





WORKSHOP IN DAMASCUS - May 2023, ©WeWorld



## 8. Dissemination of the results of the project (Damascus' Workshop in May 2023)

In May 2023, a workshop was conducted in Damascus to present the main results and lessons learned from the project to MoE and Education Sector partners. The workshop also provided the occasion to reflect collectively on the main challenges and needs relating to strengthening inclusive education in Syria, according to the MoE priorities and approach.

Participants consisted of representatives and technical personnel from the MoE, Aleppo and Deir-ez-Zor DoEs, AICS, as well as UNICEF and UNDP.

The group work performed during the workshop led to identification of the following challenges:

1. Lack of materials/tools, equipment and financial resources (this situation is worsening as a result of the continuous deterioration of the economic situation);
2. Lack of trained teaching staff;
3. Many schools are overcrowded, there is no space available for RRs, and teachers face many difficulties in implementing inclusive education practices;
4. The only inclusive schools operating in Syria are primary schools, meaning that CwDs have no access to pre-primary and secondary education services, and those living in remote and underserved areas do not have access to inclusive schools at all (in Deir-ez-Zor, no resource centres for CwDs are available, meaning that if a child does not pass the evaluation process for

attending regular school, he/she does not have access to any educational services);

5. Teacher selection policies and admission policies for pupils in inclusive education need to be updated;
6. Some participants identified the lack of a national plan to support inclusive education, which should involve the MoE, MOSAL and Ministry of Health (MoH);
7. Community and families are not sensitised. Some parents of children without disabilities do not accept the idea of a CwD being included in a regular school and parent's councils do not play an active role in facilitating inclusion;
8. The media play a weak role in disseminating and accepting the culture of inclusion.

Participants identified the following priority activities to be implemented and strengthened to ensure more inclusive learning environments:

1. Providing more training on inclusive education, involving not only inclusive teacherwvs, but also regular classroom teachers;
2. Bridging the gap between inclusive schools and public schools by preparing for a transition stage;
3. Raising awareness within educational communities on inclusion (sensitisation campaigns targeting teachers, parents and students, such as those implemented through

the project, have been considered good practices)

4. Create more centres for physical rehabilitation, speech therapy, etc.
5. Strengthen coordination among education sector partners and between them and the MoE; the UNICEF representative, in particular, insisted on the idea that Education Sector partners need to work under the "umbrella" of the MoE.

The reflections and inputs of the workshop participants provide valuable indications for future actions.





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## 9. Lessons learned

The piloting of an inclusive education approach conducted within the framework of the “Inclusive education and income-generating opportunities for building-up resilient communities in underserved areas of the Aleppo and Deir-Ez-Zor governorates” project has led to many lessons learned.

The effort to promote more inclusive learning environments and ensure access to education for the most vulnerable children, those living with a disability and those with SEN in particular, is a priority for the MoE and for the Education Sector partners.

**Teachers’ sensitisation, capacity building and strengthening** are key prerequisites to ensuring quality and inclusive education. Teachers and education personnel involved in the project demonstrated motivation and interest in acquiring skills and knowledge to improve participation and learning achievement for all children. Sensitisation and capacity building need to be fostered in parallel, given that a first step in the process involves teachers believing that inclusion is possible. In extremely challenging contexts like Syria, teachers may feel overwhelmed and believe that only inclusive teachers are responsible for CwD and children with SEN. In that sense, collaboration among classroom teachers and inclusive teachers in charge of the RR must be promoted. Teachers also requested more specialised training on how to adapt teaching strategies to respond to the needs of children with different types of disabilities.

Many teachers also agreed that there is a need for **sensitisation activities for students**, with some suggesting they should be conducted on a regular basis.

The awareness campaign carried out by trained teachers in school was well received by the students. They actively participated and provided constructive contributions to the discussion. As well as motivating students to reflect on discrimination and inclusion, these activities provided an opportunity to promote collaboration and teamwork, as well as reinforce communication skills and interaction. In the opinions of both students and teachers, these activities are necessary to ensure the most welcoming environment for children with special educational needs, but also for all students in general.

While reflecting on the experiences conducted following the training, to support students with SEN using what they learned in the training, teachers often reported **active collaboration between the school and the parents** as a successful aspect. On the one hand, active involvement by parents and caregivers of children with SEN is necessary to better understand the situation of the child and to define solutions that can be implemented and sustained both at school and at home in a coordinated way. On the other, raising awareness among parents and caregivers in general is necessary, especially in contexts where the social stigma towards CwDs and children with SEN is common. In that sense, as it emerged during the workshop conducted with the MoE and Education Sector partners, it is also important to engage the media in disseminating messages that can foster inclusion of vulnerable children.

Another key action point identified during the workshop was the need to **strengthen dialogue and collaboration between the Education Sector**

**partners and the MoE** in promoting an inclusive education approach, supporting the Ministry in its efforts, and contributing to the identification of potential strategies and actions.



## List of acronyms

CRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CBOs	Community Based Organisations
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CwDs	Children With Disabilities
DoE	Directorate of Education
ECW	Education Cannot Wait
ERL	Early Recovery Livelihoods
EiE	Education in Emergencies
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoSAL	Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour
OoSC	Out-of-School Children
PSS	Psychosocial Support
PwDs	Persons with Disabilities
RR	Resource Rooms
SEL	Socio-Emotional Learning
SEN	Special Educational Needs
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education Training
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
WWGVC	WeWorld-GVC

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