

PUTTING DISABILITY INCLUSION POLICIES INTO PRACTICE

Policy brief

Insights from

The Evaluation of Norway's inclusion of persons with disabilities in development cooperation (2022)

Written by NIRAS Sweden, commissioned by the Department for Evaluation in Norad

KEY MESSAGES

Despite progress with political commitments and the formation of more relevant policies, disability inclusion is not yet well integrated into the norms and practices of Norwegian development cooperation. This is due to four main gaps:

- Common strategies for disability inclusion are lacking; this includes operational objectives, targets and guidelines for dialogue with partners, programme assessments and the design of projects and programmes.
- There is a view that the prioritisation of disability inclusion is optional.
- Systems are insufficient for monitoring real progress for persons with disabilities in partner practices and in their respective programme and sub-granting outcomes.

- Institutional structures, internal systems and general attitudes across the administration do not ensure that persons with disabilities are routinely considered; problems that are reinforced by insufficient human resource capacities.

This suggests lessons regarding the importance of clear operational frameworks outlining how to achieve disability inclusion commitments. Inclusion will not happen without explicit signals that disability inclusion is a priority. These signals need to be reinforced by relevant expertise, compliance indicators, earmarked budgets, and steady pressure and awareness raising from the disability community.



“ Disability inclusion is defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) as “the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in all their diversity, the promotion and mainstreaming of their rights into the work of the Organization, the development of disability-specific programmes and the consideration of disability-related perspectives...”. With regard to education, disability inclusion is further informed by Article 24 of the CRPD and the CRPD Committee’s General Comment 4, which both entrench State parties’ obligation to ensure that education systems at all levels are inclusive of people with disabilities and provide a framework for the design and delivery of inclusive education. Inclusive education is a progressive right that should be implemented gradually according to contexts. ”

The disability inclusion efforts of the Norwegian government and its partners have faced challenges in transforming good intentions into practice, as well as in monitoring progress. In most sectors, disability inclusion is virtually absent. The education sector stands out as having a stronger focus on disability inclusion. However, even with regard to education, despite substantial efforts and funding, results on the ground are limited. While good policies have been developed in Norway and partner countries, progress has been limited in

translating them into practice. Several factors stand in the way of turning policies into practice.

- There is a lack of concrete guidance on how to move towards disability inclusion as outlined in the policy commitments made. As a result, operational frameworks detailing a common approach to mainstreaming and embedding disability inclusion across Norway’s development cooperation are not in place.
- A reason for this is that there is limited data on children with disabilities upon which to develop concrete plans in most countries. This is related to a lack of agreed definitions, poor systems to identify and assess the needs of children with diverse disabilities, and insufficient common understandings across education programmes of the concept of inclusive education and what it entails.
- Pilot projects are rarely replicated. With significant funding it is possible to create success stories, and these are indeed needed to convince policy-makers, local authorities, teachers and parents that inclusive education is possible. But scaling-up requires efforts to address more systemic

constraints (e.g., changes in teacher training, ensuring that school construction follows guidelines for accessibility). There are no short-cuts for this in education systems that are severely resource deficient for all children. Programming needs to devote greater attention to how efforts will gradually contribute to changing societal norms and practices at scale, together with the design of step-by-step approaches, with concrete targets.

- Decisions and programme designs are not routinely based on analyses of the socio-economic and cultural factors that exclude marginalised populations in different contexts. These barriers (often attitudinal) in local communities, institutions/schools and families need to be carefully considered when designing the operational frameworks to allow for flexibility in solutions. Efforts need to focus on assessing what is doable and at what pace.
- Successful aspects of recent Norwegian efforts around disability inclusion have been reliant on strong political leadership. This suggests that further progress will be contingent on clear political commitments, together with individual champions drawing attention to these priorities.

- A lack of internal compliance and accountability systems (e.g., requirements for achieving goals, linked to monitoring indicators) stands in the way of disability inclusion being mainstreamed. This is true both within Norwegian aid, among partners and in education systems. Without these systems, inclusion risks continuing to be seen as just one of many ‘priorities’ and ‘options’, that can be ignored or deferred.
 - The implementation of programmes is the responsibility of a range of partners and their sub-grantees wherein limited understanding and capacity on disability inclusion are often major obstacles to carrying through with policy commitments. Experience from other efforts to put policies into practice shows that this can be overcome through concerted efforts. For example, Norway has managed rather well to explain its policy and enhance capacity of partners and sub-grantees on gender equality. The same consistent hard work, supported by conditions in agreements, dialogue, capacity development and earmarked budgets would be needed to ensure disability inclusion.
 - There is currently considerable ‘space’ for staff across Norway’s aid administration to make decisions that often do not align with the spirit of the CRPD. This can be partly attributed to the absence of a clear definition of what is meant by inclusion and insufficient systems to ensure routine consideration of disability. It also may be related to a decision-making culture that provides too much flexibility in adherence to key principles. This leads to inconsistency in interpretations of inclusion, and varied practices due to how disability is perceived. For example, some staff have a so-called ‘medical’ (rather than rights-based) perspective that equates disability with an impairment, whereas the CRPD emphasises that a disability stems from an impairment together with the barriers that infringe on an individual’s right to participate in society.
- Overall, the path from policy commitments to practice has been bumpy. Processes have been disrupted by insufficient ownership, imprecise priorities and weak attention to the institutional and human resource development factors that will determine whether pilot

projects lead to systemic change. There has been limited understanding and commitment to focus on the implications of disability inclusion as a key human right related to equality and non-discrimination. At the country level, progress is being made as learning and accountability are reinforced by direct contact with the realities of rolling out programming. Operations appear to be generally better aligned with local needs and priorities, and policies (where these exist). Partners and embassies are finding ways to adapt programming to reflect existing national trends and opportunities.

However, the understanding of what inclusive education should look like in different contexts and for different disability groups is still an area of contention – even within the disability movement. While lack of a strategy and of guidance has provided space for staff across Norway’s aid administration and at operational levels to make contextually relevant decisions, it has also meant that Norway’s disability inclusion efforts do not yet ‘speak with one voice’, which may dilute messages and stand in the way of greater influence.