



Qualitative Assessment Approaches



THE IMPORTANCE OF QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

Children with disabilities are often excluded from child protection efforts because they are overlooked and not meaningfully engaged by the assessments and data collection processes that inform child protection strategies.¹ In order to overcome these barriers, a robust framework for understanding inclusion and accessibility is needed when assessing needs and collecting data in humanitarian contexts.

Qualitative approaches—including participatory methods, like direct interviews as well as direct observation—can allow children and adults with disabilities, as well as their families, to have their perspectives heard, ensuring the most relevant information *as deemed by them* is included within the assessment process.

ENSURE THE RIGHT ASSESSMENT TEAM

To effectively lead qualitative research, the first step is to assemble the team, which should include trained assessors.² When selecting assessors, it is important to consider context. Having facilitators who are of a similar demographic to the participants creates comfort for the participants to open up.³

There are also some universal qualities/skills that assessment team members should possess, including: fluency in the language of the participants; a non-judgemental and respectful demeanour; empathy and good listening skills as well as skills in accessible communication, **including with persons with disabilities**;⁴ and previous experience and training conducting qualitative research and/or needs assessments.





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CREATE A WELCOMING AND SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Although there are challenges to doing qualitative research in humanitarian settings, several ethical considerations and best practices can help ensure inclusion, as well as safety and respect, for all participants. This includes the concept of “do no harm” and safeguarding children from further harm; informed consent as well as confidentiality; accountability; and meaningful participation.⁵

To create a welcoming environment for meaningful participation, one that respects the rights, strengths, and dignity of children and adults with disabilities, all participating staff should be appropriately trained, including on respectful communication with persons with disabilities.⁶

CONSULT WITH KEY INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS

Before deciding on the exact qualitative approach(es), consult with people who have direct experience with the target population and the context at hand. Key informant interviews and/or focus group discussions can provide foundational information to guide the qualitative processes and tailor the approach to the area and humanitarian situation.

Some practical communication tips include:⁷

Use thoughtful terminology intended to empower children with disabilities

Support children with disabilities in their communication

Consider accessibility when adapting information

Depict children with disabilities in an empowering and inclusive way

FOCUS ON PARTICIPATION⁸

Meaningful participation can be challenging to achieve in an authentic and inclusive way. However, it is critical. Participation must be ensured for the most vulnerable and potentially marginalised, including, within the broader umbrella of children with disabilities.

Participation should include not only children with disabilities themselves but also their families (including representatives from households with children that include a person with a disability outside of the child), relevant organisations of persons with disabilities, and community-based organisations.⁹



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SELECT APPROPRIATE QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION TOOL(S)

Once the qualitative process has been refined using the insights of key individuals and organisations, another key preparatory step will be the selection of an appropriate data collection tool or tools, which will vary based on the qualitative methods selected.

It is important to note that regardless of the tool selected (and adapted), consistency is critical. The same tool(s) should be used for observations and notes, and the same analysis methods should be used throughout the entire process.¹⁰ As well as this, when refining questions to be asked via interviews, a questionnaire, or other qualitative approaches, the language used, and in particular language within context, is extremely important.



1. Interviewing Children with Disabilities

Direct conversations (interviews) with children with disabilities can be one of the most informative qualitative processes. They provide children the opportunity to describe their personal experiences, in their own words, which is an empowering process in and of itself.



2. Direct Observation

Direct observation strategies provide information that can round out findings from interviews. Direct observation can be particularly useful to gain insights into issues that might be too sensitive or challenging to ask about in interviews.¹¹



3. Focus Groups¹²

Focus groups with relevant stakeholders can be an extremely useful means to identify and assess protective and risk factors. Groups can and should include children with disabilities themselves, their families and caregivers, relevant community leaders, and other stakeholders.¹³ Beyond protective and risk factors, focus groups—as well as key informant interviews—can be effective settings to identify and assess barriers in place that might affect access, inclusion, and protection for children with disabilities.

1 United Nations Children's Fund, Including Children with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action: General Guidance (UNICEF, 2017).

2 The Global Protection Cluster, Child Protection Rapid Assessment Toolkit (The Global Protection Cluster, 2012).

3 The Global Protection Cluster, Protection Mainstreaming Toolkit (The Global Protection Cluster, 2017).

4 The Global Protection Cluster, Protection Mainstreaming Toolkit (The Global Protection Cluster, 2017).

5 The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, A Reflective Field Guide: Community-level Approaches to Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2020).

6 European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, The Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in EU-funded Humanitarian Aid Operations (European Commission, 2019).

7 Adapted and Excerpted from United Nations Children's Fund, Including Children with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action: General Guidance (UNICEF, 2017).

8 For additional guidance on participations see Save the Children, The Nine Basic Requirements for Meaningful and Ethical Children's Participation, 2021.

9 European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, The Inclusion of Persons With Disabilities in EU-funded Humanitarian Aid Operations (European Commission, 2019).

10 The Global Protection Cluster, Protection Mainstreaming Toolkit (The Global Protection Cluster, 2017).

11 The Global Protection Cluster, Child Protection Rapid Assessment Toolkit (The Global Protection Cluster, 2012).

12 Adapted from The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Identifying and Ranking Risk and Protective Factors: A Brief Guide (The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2021).

13 The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Identifying and Ranking Risk and Protective Factors: A Brief Guide (The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2021).

