USE OF WASHINGTON GROUP QUESTIONS IN MULTI-SECTOR NEEDS ASSESSMENTS (MSNAs)
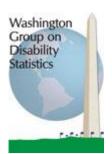
Purpose

This document aims to ensure consistency in how the Washington Group questions sets (WGQs) are applied in Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessments (MSNAs) in humanitarian settings to ensure reliability and accuracy of data on persons with disabilities to inform advocacy, programing and comparability of data across locations.

The intended audience for this guide is primarily REACH country teams conducting MSNAs. However, it may also be valuable for others planning, managing and conducting MSNAs, including cluster coordinators and information managers, OCHA and others humanitarian actors. Further, while the guide is specific to MSNAs, it may also be useful for other types of data collection exercises, such sectoral-specific assessments or multi-sector location assessments (MSLAs).

The scope of this guidance is limited to the integration of WGQs as a tool for disaggregation and for describing the functional status of populations across the domains covered by the WGQs. However, it is recognized that other data are needed to fully inform an inclusive programmatic approach (e.g., data on barriers faced by persons with disabilities). It is envisaged that more comprehensive guidance on collection and analysis of data on persons with disabilities in needs assessments will be produced at a later stage; disaggregation of data using WGQs was identified as an important initial focus for 2022.

What are the main Washington Group Question sets and what is their purpose in the context of MSNAs?

The WGQs can be integrated into MSNAs in order to estimate prevalence of disability, and to disaggregate survey data by disability, for the purpose of:

- Estimating persons in need (PIN) figures
- Describing the functional status of populations across key domains, sex, age and other demographic information
- Providing data on how persons with disabilities may be differently impacted by the crisis (i.e., comparing needs of persons with and without disabilities)
- Providing a baseline for monitoring

MSNAs will most commonly use the Washington Group Short Set on Functioning (WG-SS). However, it is important to remember that the Washington Group/UNICEF Child Functioning Module is more appropriate for use with children ages 2- 17 years. The main question sets, and their use, are outlined below, with more detailed descriptions (including a downloadable version of the full question sets) at- Question Sets - The Washington Group on Disability Statistics (washingtongroup-disability.com)

Question set	Number of questions	Use
Washington Group Short Set on Functioning (WG-SS) https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/question-sets/wg-short-set-on-functioning-wg-ss/	6	Used in surveys to identify the majority of people (aged 5 and over) most likely to face participation restrictions. Designed for population wide surveys where the focus is not disability. Information is collected on six functional domains[1]. Note that some children with disabilities (especially those with intellectual/developmental/psychosocial disabilities) will likely be missed as this question set does not cover all

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[1] Seeing, hearing, walking or climbing stairs, remembering or concentrating, self-care, and communication (expressive and receptive).

		domains relevant to children. This question set should therefore be used for children only when the Child Functioning Module (see below) is not feasible
Washington Group Short Set on Functioning-Enhanced (WG-SS Enhanced) https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/question-sets/wg-short-set-on-functioning-%e2%80%93-enhanced-wg-ss-enhanced/	12	Building on the WG-SS (information is collected on eight functional domains[2]) - can be used in surveys where more extensive information is collected from adults (including general population or disability-specific surveys)
Washington Group Extended Set on Functioning (WG-ES) https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/question-sets/wg-extended-set-on-functioning-wg-es/	34	Building on the WG-SS (information is collected on 10 functional domains[3] and functioning when using mobility assistive devices) - can be used in surveys where extensive information is collected from adults..
Washington Group/UNICEF Child Functioning Module https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/question-sets/wgunicef-child-functioning-module-cfm/	Age 2-4 years old - 16 Age 5-17 years old - 24	Designed to better identify all children with disabilities. Both are designed for administration to mothers or primary caregivers

Content and structure of questionnaires

Placement of the Washington Group questions will depend upon which question set is being administered. Key recommendations for implementation of Washington Group questions include:

- When using the WG-SS six questions, the recommendation is to add these at the beginning of the questionnaire, **in an upfront section, such as the demographic roster**.
- If not included in the demographic section, they should be included immediately after the demographic section and before any health related questions, regardless whether using the WG-SS or longer WG question sets. **The questions should never be included with or immediately following other health-related questions as this may introduce reporting biases**.
- Questionnaires should also include details on the respondent, including whether they are a proxy or direct respondent, their age and sex. If a proxy was interviewed, a response on why a proxy was used.
- Questionnaires should ideally also include an option for enumerators to add their sex, for evaluation purposes.

Where feasible, there is value in adding a section in questionnaires for enumerators to indicate where the interview was carried out, whether the respondent was familiar with the concepts in the questions and if they had any difficulty answering questions (and which questions). This will allow for future evaluation of the WG questions within that context.

Recommendations for using WGQs in household surveys[4]

The following are best practice recommendations for implementing Washington Group questions in household surveys, and apply for both telephone and face-to-face modalities:

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[2] Domains from the Short Set, plus upper body activities, and affect (depression and anxiety).
[3] Domains from the Enhanced Set, plus pain, fatigue and additional questions on mobility and use of equipment.
[4] Drawn from Humanity & Inclusion (2018) 2018-How-to-ask-the-WGQs-leaflet-Final.pdf (humanity-inclusion.org.uk) and The Washington Group Data Collection Tools and their Recommended Use (washingtongroup-disability.com)

Recommendation 1: When integrating the WGQs into household surveys, these questions must be asked at individual level (i.e., to each individual in the household). These questions are meant to capture an individual's experience, not that of a 'household' or a 'community'.

Recommendation 2: Questions should be directed to the individual about themselves (except when using the Child Functioning Module, in which case questions are asked to the mother or primary caregiver about the child or each child in the household). This may require consideration of communication accessibility (see below). Where it is absolutely not possible to communicate directly with the individual themselves, consider the following steps in order:

1. Can an interpreter be used? E.g., where the individual communicates using sign language.
2. Can the individual themselves identify a support person to assist with their communication?
3. A proxy should only be nominated by the household head or enumerator if the above 2 steps are not feasible. The proxy should be someone with close daily interaction with the individual who the questions are asked about (e.g., a family member or caregiver)

If none of the above can respond, then the head of household or another respondent can be asked the full question set for household member. I.e., 'does (name) have difficulty seeing….'. However, note that this approach is likely to result in underestimation when questions are asked about children, as mothers and primary caregivers (as opposed to other household respondents or the household head) are known to provide more accurate responses about their children.

Recommendation 3: Do not use any screening or filter question, particularly including any filter that uses the word 'disability' (e.g. "Does anyone in the household have a disability?"). Each of the WGQs are to be asked of every member of the household (see below) in full.

Recommendation 4: Recommendations 1-3 should apply regardless of modality, for both telephone and face to face interviews. However, there may be a greater need for additional accessibility considerations or proxies for respondents with hearing difficulties with telephone surveys.

Recommendation 5: Do not change the order of or skip questions.

Recommendation 6: Read the questions exactly as they are written, including the response options. It is important that survey tools include the wording of the questions without adaptations (see links above).

Recommendation 7: Do not use examples. Repeat the question if needed and move on to the next question if the person does not understand.

Recommendation 8: A transition or introductory statement may be used where the WGQs are not asked as part of the demographic roster or where the WGQs follow other questions that appear to be very unrelated. As above, do not use the word 'disability' in the introductory language such as 'The following questions are for any household member who has a disability'. If an introductory statement is needed to be used, you can state… 'The next questions ask about difficulties you may have in doing certain activities.'

Recommendation 9: Data should not be recorded based on observations or assumptions. However, data collectors can be sensitive to the situation. It may be necessary to acknowledge what you observe. For example, "I can see you are in a wheelchair, but can you tell me to what extent you have difficulty walking?"; "I can see you use a wheelchair, however I am required to ask all questions as they appear in the survey."; or "Can you tell me, in your own words, Do you have difficulty….?" (followed up with the response categories).

Recommendation 10: Use official translations whenever possible (see below).

Accessibility considerations

When conducting interviews, the following accessibility considerations will contribute to the collection of reliable data[5]. It is recommended that these considerations be integrated into training for enumerators:

- Find a quiet, well-lit space for the interview.
- Face the person at all times when speaking. Do not cover your mouth or rest your chin on your hand when speaking. Do not turn away from the person when speaking - stop speaking when you turn to look at a screen or get information.
- Ensure that only one person is speaking at a time.
- Speak clearly at a normal volume (do not shout).
- Speak directly to the person you are collecting information about (if present) or the proxy respondent when using the CFM, not to the third person (caregiver, parents), the translator or the interpreter present.
- If you do not understand, do not pretend. Repeat as much as you do understand and use the person's reactions to guide you. Ask them to tell you again, if necessary. Resist the temptation to finish sentences
- Listen carefully to what the person is saying, not how it is said.
- If difficulties occur when you are speaking directly to a deaf person, you may want to use written notes or let them see the questions on the questionnaire.
- If the person is lip reading, make sure you are facing the light and that your lips are visible (keep hands, etc. away from your mouth) and speak slowly and clearly, at a steady rhythm.

Translations

Where possible, use translations that have been cognitively tested, which can be found at: Translations of WG Question Sets - The Washington Group on Disability Statistics (washingtongroup-disability.com). If your language is not available in the link above, contact REACH for further guidance (see below) on how to proceed, as there may be other partner organizations with tested translations, or some preparatory work may be needed before implementing the tool.

Questions must never be translated 'on the spot', even if enumerators have strong language skills. Enumerators must always be familiar with the question set, in the language in which it will be administered, before conducting interviews. If you see that data collection will involve a local language or dialect that has not been translated on the Washington Group website, please ensure you are including adequate time during enumerator training to include the module for group translation of the questions.

Minimum Training and Quality Control Standards

- ✓ Question inserted as part of demographic rosters.
- ✓ Training session for all enumerators on Washington Group questions being used, with minimum topics covered including the rationale and exact wording to be used, accessibility considerations, and respectful interviewing techniques.
- ✓ Essential data quality checks, including but not limited to assessing demographic profiles of respondents and survey subjects, irregular reporting patterns in disability by functional domain or by enumerator, potential skipping or shortcutting of questions.

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[5] Drawn from the following documents, where more guidance can be found on accessibility- Humanity & Inclusion (2018) 2018-How-to-ask-the-WGQs-leaflet-Final.pdf (humanity-inclusion.org.uk) and The Washington Group Data Collection Tools and their Recommended Use (washingtongroup-disability.com)

✓ Use only standard translations, if not cognitively tested and back-translated checks. If not possible, then ensure inclusion of an optional training session on local language translations of the Washington Group questions and key concepts.

✓ Particularly for children, training should incorporate child safeguarding and child protection and clear instructions on when and how children should be engaged with when implementing WGQ in households.

Data Processing and Analysis (WG-SS)

The WG-SS is intended to be used two ways:

1) Reporting X% of individuals have difficulty functioning (using a single dichotomous cut-off to determine disability) (e.g. 23% of individuals have a disability)
2) Disaggregating other indicators by disability status (88% of people with a disability have 'Very Severe' Household Hunger Scale (HHS) results…56% of people with disabilities were reported using unimproved sources as their main source of water…34% of people with disabilities had experienced a protection incident in the last 3 months…etc).

In order to assign a dichotomous value if an individual is considered having a disability or not. There are four cut-offs that can be used to identify the sub-population with disabilities likely to meet barriers in their social and physical environment, based on the responses to the six questions.

> **Disability 1**: the level of inclusion is at least one domain/question is coded SOME DIFFICULTY or A LOT OF DIFFICULTY or CANNOT DO AT ALL.
> **Disability 2**: the level of inclusion is at least two domains/questions are coded SOME DIFFICULTY or any 1 domain/question is coded A LOT OF DIFFICULTY or CANNOT DO AT ALL.
> **Disability 3**: the level of inclusion is any one domain/question is coded A LOT OF DIFFICULTY or CANNOT DO AT ALL.
> **Disability 4**: the level of inclusion is any one domain is coded CANNOT DO AT ALL (4)

It is recommended to use just one cut-off in your analyses, and Disability 3 is the level generally recommended as the cut-off for defining persons with difficulties in functioning **by the Washington Group**, however in-country actors may want to consider which cut-off is most appropriate for their context. Additional guidance on analysis and coding of WG-SS assignments in SPSS, STATA, SAS, and CSPro can be found at the links below. REACH can provide scripts in R programming language for assignment as well.

- https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/analysis/analysis-overview/
- https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/analysis/wg-short-set-on-functioning-wg-ss-syntax/

For the WG-SS, results should primarily be used to estimate the prevalence of disability, as well as for disaggregation of other sectoral results to identify inequalities. Disaggregating results by functional domains may be possible with large sample sizes, but may be limited in its utility for program planning depending on the objectives of the program.

Data Quality Checks

A few high level checks you can perform to evaluate the quality of your WG-SS data include:

- **Demographics Checks** – Plot an age-sex pyramid of your demographic data and triangulate against other data sources to assess whether the household demographics are representative of the population. If the age pyramid for your survey data is very different than what is expected, or certain age groups are under- or over-represented, there may be an issue with the quality.

- **Demographics Checks for Population of Persons with Disabilities** – Typically we would expect that older populations have higher rates of difficulty functioning compared to younger populations. Plot an age pyramid for only those meeting disability3 criteria, and assess which age groups are the most represented. If younger age groups (teenagers, adults of working age) have a greater proportion of disability than the elderly, this may indicate some issue with the data quality.
- **Frequency Checks** – Calculate the frequencies and proportions of the different functional domains. If there are any specific domains that are over- or under-reported compared to what is expected, it may indicate a quality or translation issue. Check with local disability actors to better understand the contextual profile of what difficulties one would expect reported the most in that population.
- **Team Based Checks –** Disaggregating disability results by data collection team, and checking for any team that has results extremely different from the rest. This can be indicated by either much fewer or much greater reporting of disabilities than other teams.

Further resources

In addition to the links provided throughout this document, the following provide additional guidance and training:

- For all question sets, translations and guidance: [The Washington Group on Disability Statistics - Home (washingtongroup-disability.com)](#)
- For tip sheets and training resources on the use of the WGQs: [Disability Statistics in Humanitarian Action | Humanity & Inclusion UK (humanity-inclusion.org.uk)](#)
- For broader guidance on collecting and using disability data in the HPC: [Guidance on strengthening disability inclusion in Humanitarian Response Plans - World | ReliefWeb](#)
- For broader guidance on disability inclusive humanitarian action: [IASC Guidelines, Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, July 2019 - World | ReliefWeb](#)
- For data on children with disabilities: [Children with disabilities overview - UNICEF DATA](#)
- [For a training module on data on persons with disabilities in forced displacement contexts:](#) https://www.unhcr.org/60ec2cd64/working-persons-disabilities-forced-displacement-facilitators-guide

Contact

For any additional questions on this guidance, please contact Saeed Rahman- saeed.rahman@reach-initiative.org

Annex 1 - Washington Group Short Set on Functioning - recommended question set in full

Variable	Questions	Responses	Skip Logic
sex_enum	What is the sex of the enumerator?	Male Female	
Demographic Loop (repeated per person in the household)			
person_name	What is the name or nickname of the household member? (just so we know who we are talking about during the interview)	Text	
sex	What is the sex of [person_name]?	Male Female	
age_years	What is the age of [person_name] in completed years?	Integer	
direct_proxy	Is [person_name] available now to answer a few questions about their difficulties doing certain activities?	Yes [direct interview] Yes [but with an interpreter, assistant] No	age_years >= 5
caregiver	Is the person who usually cares for [person_name] available to answer a few questions about their difficulties doing certain activities?	Yes [interview with caregiver] No [interview with available survey respondent]	If **direct_proxy** = 'no' or age_years >= 5 and age_years <18
sex_proxy	What is the sex of the proxy respondent?	Male Female	If **direct_proxy** = 'yes, with interpreter/assistant' or 'no'
age_proxy	What is the age of the proxy respondent?	Integer	If **direct_proxy** = 'yes, with interpreter/assistant' or 'no'
vis_ss	[Do/Does] [you/[person_name]] have difficulty seeing, even if wearing glasses? Would you say… [Read response categories]	1. No difficulty 2. Some difficulty 3. A lot of difficulty 4. Cannot do at all 7. Refused; 9. Don't know*	
hear_ss	[Do/Does] [you/[person_name]] have difficulty hearing, even if using a hearing aid(s)? Would you say… [Read response categories]	1. No difficulty 2. Some difficulty 3. A lot of difficulty 4. Cannot do at all 7. Refused; 9. Don't know*	
mob_ss	[Do/Does] [you/[person_name]] have difficulty walking or climbing steps? Would you say… [Read response categories]	1. No difficulty 2. Some difficulty 3. A lot of difficulty 4. Cannot do at all 7. Refused; 9. Don't know*	
cog_ss	[Do/does] [you/[person_name]] have difficulty remembering or concentrating? Would you say… [Read response categories]	1. No difficulty 2. Some difficulty 3. A lot of difficulty 4. Cannot do at all 7. Refused; 9. Don't know*	
sc_ss	[Do/does] [you/[person_name]] have difficulty with self-care, such as washing all over or dressing? Would you say… [Read response categories]	1. No difficulty 2. Some difficulty 3. A lot of difficulty 4. Cannot do at all 7. Refused; 9. Don't know*	
com_ss	Using [your/[person_name]] usual language, [do/does] [you/he/she] have difficulty communicating, for example understanding or being understood? Would you say… [Read response categories]	1. No difficulty 2. Some difficulty 3. A lot of difficulty 4. Cannot do at all 7. Refused; 9. Don't know*	

Please note that refused and don't know should remain distinct and separate response options. Please do not merge.

Annex 2- Other supplementary disability questions

In addition to the Washington Group question sets, additional questions that may be included in MSNAs (or in supplementary assessments) include:

Questions on service access and barriers

Questions on how persons with disabilities are accessing services and any barriers they face can feed in to monitoring and can inform the design of actions to improve access.

See for example:

DTM MSLA for Disability Inclusion | Displacement (iom.int) This question guide is intended for key informants but could be adapted for household level surveys

WG/UNICEF Inclusive Education Module (IEM) - The Washington Group on Disability Statistics (washingtongroup-disability.com) This question set includes questions on access to and barriers to education

WG ILO Labor Force Survey Disability Module (LFS-DM) - The Washington Group on Disability Statistics (washingtongroup-disability.com) This question set includes questions on barriers to employment

UNHCR - Working with Persons with Disabilities in Forced Displacement Facilitator's Guide

Questions on specific risks

In certain contexts, it may be relevant to include questions to identify groups at heightened risk, such as persons with albinism. In this case, it is important to not confound these questions with the Washington Group set.

Questions on specific support needs

Questions on specific support needs can contribute to designing an inclusive response, particularly at a sectoral level.

WG ILO Labor Force Survey Disability Module (LFS-DM) - The Washington Group on Disability Statistics (washingtongroup-disability.com) This question set includes questions on accommodations necessary for employment