DARE-RC
DATA AND RESEARCH IN EDUCATION
RESEARCH CONSORTIUM
جرأتِ تحقیق ملے

Policy brief:
Disability inclusive data and systems

Integration of the Washington Group Questions on Disability into the Annual School Census in Pakistan

PIE
PAKISTAN INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

Sightsavers

Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Definitions
ASC	Annual School Census
DSF	Data Standardisation Framework
ESP	Education Sector Plan
FD	Functional Difficulty (A lot of difficulty, or cannot do at all)
PIE	Pakistan Institute of Education
PMIU	Programme Monitoring & Implementation Unit
RSU	Reform Support Unit
SIS	School Information System
WG-SS	Washington Group Short Set on Functioning

Introduction

In 2023, the Data Standardisation Framework (DSF) for the Pakistan Education Management Information System (EMIS) was prepared by the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training to support standardisation of data collected in the Annual School Census (ASC) across the provinces. In a significant demonstration of commitment to disability inclusion, the DSF stipulated the integration of four (of six) Washington Group Short Set (WG-SS) questions in Pakistan's school census. These questions measure difficulty functioning in four capabilities (seeing, hearing, walking and remembering or concentrating) among children attending mainstream public schools in Pakistan. The Washington Group questions are used to determine the prevalence of disability in a group of people and allow survey or census data to be disaggregated by disability, providing essential information to inform planning and provision of adequate support so children with disability can participate and benefit from education.

To support implementation of the Washington Group questions within the ASC, Sightsavers provided technical assistance at federal and provincial levels through development of data collection and analysis guidance and training of stakeholders. Subsequently, Sightsavers has conducted a research study to analyse the effectiveness of this initial experience.

The Data and Research in Education-Research Consortium (DARE-RC) aims to understand the challenges facing Pakistan's education system and explore potential solutions to these issues. The DARE-RC programme is funded with UK International Development from the UK government. This policy brief contributes to this by highlighting the value attributed to disability data by system stakeholders at all levels in Pakistan, and the importance of iterative work to strengthen collection and use of this disability data in future Annual School Censuses, as part of ongoing efforts to make the education system more inclusive of learners with disabilities.

Study Methodology

The study adopted a sequential, mixed methods design, to explore the nature and quality of the disability data collected by Pakistan's 2023/24 Annual School Census (ASC), and to understand the ways in which data collection processes, planning and implementation shaped the data collected. The study was conducted across Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), and all four provinces, with data collection in both urban and rural Lahore (Punjab), Karachi (Sindh), Peshawar (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), and Quetta (Balochistan).

Study methods included:

i) **Documentary analysis** of the DSF and ASC forms and reports and related documentation.
ii) **Quantitative analysis** of the WG-SS data collected in all public, mainstream schools in all four provinces and ICT, and comparison of the 2023/24 ASC data.
iii) **Key informant interviews (KII) and focus group discussions (FGDs)** with stakeholders at federal and provincial levels. Within each province, KIIs and FGDs were also conducted with headteachers and teachers at four different schools

Key Findings

Stakeholders value the collection of disability data:

Qualitative data highlights that inclusion of WG-SS questions in the 2023/24 ASC was a significant achievement, and the result of considerable cooperation by stakeholders at all levels. The value of the inclusion of these questions for the institutionalisation of inclusive education in Pakistan was acknowledged by respondents at federal and provincial levels, and to some extent by respondents in schools as well. For example, a stakeholder in Balochistan said "Previously, we only knew if a child was disabled, but now we have more detailed data on the type of disability. This helps us identify specific needs and provide better support for disabled students." The study shed a light on the enormous scale and scope of the undertaking – likely to be the largest- scale use of the WG-SS questions outside of a population census.

Good quality data requires greater preparation time and capacity:

Quantitative work examined reported prevalence of functional difficulty (FD), defined as those children who have a lot of difficulty or cannot do at all a particular activity. Analysis revealed that reported FD prevalence in the ASC was markedly below levels found in other datasets. The large majority of schools (90%) reported no children with any type of FD. These findings suggest substantial under-reporting of FD in the ASC.

The following table compares ASC results with other data sources.

Province	Data source	Children with functional difficulty per 10 000				
		Vision	Hearing	Walking	Remembering	Concentrating
Balochistan	ASC 2023/24	9	4	7		15
	MICS 2019/20	230	20	1 730	80	70
KPK	ASC 2023/24	--	1	1		0
	MICS 2018/19	30	30	320	100	80
Punjab	ASC 2023/24	4	3	3		38
	Singal et al, 2020	50	10	10		10
	MICS 2017/18	20	20	260	60	70
Sindh	ASC 2023/24	2	0	1		5
	Somani et al, 2020	105	66	158		350
	MICS 2018/19	40	10	660	50	30

Note: As MICS data is from CFM, remembering and concentrating are asked separately, using slightly different wording to the WG-SS.

Table 1

Qualitative work highlighted that integration of the WG-SS questions into the ASC forms took place under considerable time pressure in provinces, and with relatively limited technical support. This resulted in challenges with form design. Data was not disaggregated by sex in Sindh and Balochistan, and a response category was omitted in KPK.

Schools and teachers must receive adequate training and guidance:

Time pressure led to limited development and distribution of training and guidance materials for teachers and schools, and limited cascading of training to school and teacher levels. Schools responded to this gap by developing their own approaches to responding to the questions, resulting in considerable variability in practice. In several schools which did not report any children with functional difficulty, the lack of clarity about the purpose of data collection, as well as the process to be followed, appeared to trigger disengagement from the questions, or even a decision simply not to report any children. A teacher from Sindh shared this reflection during an interview: "No, I didn't think they had any particular purpose. I assumed it was just a formality—something to complete and submit. The person who delivered the form didn't seem serious about it either." During another interview, a teacher in KPK spoke about the impact of the lack of training on the data: "We weren't trained, so we didn't know how deeply we needed to assess. If children could read and listen, we assumed they were fine and always reported as NIL (no disabilities)."

The implications of this are evident in the provincial plots of school-level prevalence, demonstrating that most schools simply did not report any children with disabilities, while the 'spikes' in the plots highlight that the minority of schools reporting any children at all reported a wide range of prevalences.

Stakeholders need capacity support to analyse and utilise the WG-SS data in their work: The research shows that respondents at federal and provincial levels did not have the opportunity to engage with the data effectively, hence hindering its strengthening. Also, teachers and schools felt frustration and disengagement when they did not receive feedback in response to their submission of data.

> **"It made me so happy when I saw this [inclusion of the WG-SS questions] as these poor kids, who couldn't afford a medical treatment, were maybe going to be facilitated by the government… Their conditions are still the same, when they have a problem we note it down but there isn't any benefit." (KII, Headteacher, Punjab)**

Use of WG-SS has potential to support increased awareness and understanding of disability and inclusive education:

The research has highlighted that there is still limited awareness of disability among many stakeholders, and a limited understanding of inclusive education. However, multiple respondents spoke about how their involvement in this process increased their awareness of the importance and challenges in relation to inclusive education. It also triggered an appetite for additional guidance and training in inclusive education among many headteachers and teachers. Consequently, in addition to generating valuable data, which is key for planning and delivery of inclusive education in Pakistan, it seems likely that the introduction of the tools has in some cases also contributed to shifting attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. This has set an important foundation for a potential policy shift towards improved disability inclusion.

Policy Implications

While the inclusion of WG-SS questions in the ASC was a welcome effort, aligned with broader inclusive education commitments, the study showed that inadequate preparation time, technical weaknesses in form finalisation and standardisation, and limited reach of guidance materials and training undermined the quality of data collected. Additionally, limited awareness and understanding of this data meant it was not meaningfully analysed or reported. Consequently, it could not achieve its full potential to inform planning, resource allocation, and monitoring.

In some ways, this is not unexpected: whenever new indicators are introduced into an ASC it takes time for all stakeholders to understand how best to collect and use this new data. Many years of data maturation are required before data is strong enough to be used to shape and inform policy.

As highlighted by the study, ongoing work to advance maturation of the WG-SS data is essential, through a focus on capacity development, tool refinement, and training and guidance for those collecting data in schools. Additionally, it must be supported by enhanced capacity for data analysis and interpretation. In this way, within a few years it will be possible for high quality WG-SS data in

the ASC to support wider national and provincial level policy decisions, through the following mechanisms:

Provincial Education Policies: Disability data from the ASC will help provinces identify inequalities in access and education progress linked to children's level of functional difficulty, helping address educational disparities, in line with the 2024 National Education Policy Development Framework (NEPDF).

Annual Education Budgeting and PSDP: According to the study, prevalence of functional difficulty based on the ASC data is low and likely underestimates actual prevalence of disability in mainstream public schools. Continuous improvements to the data accuracy will ensure that provincial governments make appropriate disability inclusive budgetary allocations to the school management committees (SMCs) and other educational stakeholders. Already Sindh and Punjab education departments have increased the school-level budgetary allocations for which schools need to be encouraged by Education Department to utilise the budget for inclusive education.

Education Sector Plans:

"Equity and inclusion" is a key principle guiding the provincial Education Sector Plans, which span 5 years. The ASC is among the key data sets that help identify the priority areas in ESPs and it is essential that it includes disability data to enable more appropriate responses to the needs of children with disabilities in each provincial ESP.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and UNCRPD Reporting:

The ASC is a key source of information for Pakistan's SDG 4 progress and a useful dataset for UNCRPD reporting. The inclusion of disability data in the ASC will enable the Government of Pakistan to report progress information that is disaggregated and in line with the commitment to 'leave no one behind'.

Recommendations

Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE), Provincial Education Departments, District level education officers need to ensure effective disability disaggregation throughout the ASC collection and reporting process. Some targeted recommendations in this regard are provided below:

I. **Strengthen mechanisms for collection and analysis of disability data in the ASC**
   A. **At federal and provincial level**, led by PIE and in close collaboration with provinces and technical experts, strengthen guidance on WG-SS data collection, analysis and reporting.

- Provide further support to Provinces in iterative refinement of their implementation of the WG-SS questions, ensuring that ASC forms, question wording and response options, and guidance materials are fully consistent with the DSF
- Develop guidance on quality assurance processes, at both federal and provincial levels
- Over time, ensure the two remaining WG-SS questions are integrated into the ASC
- Develop the Technical Working Groups on Inclusive Education, involving technical experts and OPDs, to guide disability data collection and reporting process for ASC at provincial EMIS and/or PIE

B. **At district and school level**, empower teachers to play a well-defined role in the collection of WG-SS data, through designing processes which include their unique knowledge about functional difficulties of the children they teach. This could include:

- Ensuring clear guidance on completion of WG-SS questions reaches relevant individuals at district and school level, including teachers. Teachers in many provinces expressed preferences for videos or app-based content.
- Developing and delivering quality training and guidance for teachers, which covers the identification of functional difficulties

II. **Support better utilisation of ASC data in the Education Sector:**

A. **Build stakeholders' capacity to interpret and use WG-SS data**, Led by PIE and in close collaboration with provinces and technical experts:

- Ensure that individuals involved in data analysis, interpretation and use receive relevant training and technical guidance on the WG-SS.
- Engage with Organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDS) to raise awareness of Inclusive Education and ensure they have appropriate access to disability data to engage in policy making processes.

B. **Develop mechanisms and processes** to ensure data can be used to inform policy development, allocation of resources and service delivery to meet needs of children with disabilities.

- Integrate disability data from ASC into Provincial Education Sector Plans and Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) to ensure disability inclusion is embedded across planning, budgeting, and monitoring systems.
- Improve inter-ministerial coordination and capacity-building to enhance education sector responsiveness to the rights of learners with disabilities.

III. **Ensure sustainability for the disability disaggregated Annual School Census**

A. **Sensitise stakeholders** at all levels, building awareness of disability, and an understanding of the value of disability inclusion and inclusive education.

- ✓ Provide pre-service and in-service training to teachers on inclusive education, as well as guidance on how to meet children's diverse learning needs. Information on clinical assessments and referral processes would also be valuable.

- ✓ Share examples, including from this study, of how teachers and schools have used WG- SS data to support learners.

- ✓ Engage with and collaborate with OPDs, learners with disabilities and their families to combat stigma and discrimination.

B. **Strengthen education data systems, including provincial Education Management Information Systems (EMIS)** to assure the quality and value of all data collected – including the WG-SS.

- ✓ Continue to promote standardisation and institutionalisation of disability-disaggregated
  data and disability data collection within the EMIS.
- ✓ Continue to invest in electronic data collection systems, with school-level tablet-based data entry and access, and establishment of individual learner level records.

- ✓ Ensure systems enable teachers and school-level stakeholders to access and use data to support their own delivery of equitable and quality education, which in turn will strengthen the commitment of teachers and schools to generate and capture of high-quality data.

C. **Develop and sustain mechanisms** within each province to ensure that schools, teachers, and district officials benefit from collection of the WG-SS data.,

- ✓ Provide guidance on data use and interpretation, as well as feedback to schools and teachers, so they can use disability data to inform their responses to children's needs.

D. **Ensure robust quality assurance mechanisms and monitoring systems are in place at federal and provincial levels** to continually refine data collection and monitoring processes including the WG-SS questions in ASC.

Conclusion

The integration of the WG-SS questions into Pakistan's Annual School Census (ASC) represents a pivotal step towards realizing the country's commitments under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and Sustainable Development Goal 4.5. As shared by a participant in a federal interview: "Notably, this framework aligns definitions and processes with SDG 4. Furthermore, for the first time, the Washington Group's questions were incorporated into the ASC questionnaire, a significant addition previously absent."

The use of a standardised tool, such as the Washington Group Short Set (WG-SS), along with teacher training and clear data collection guidance, will help to reduce underreporting of numbers of children with disabilities and support inclusive education planning. It is important to recognise the significant achievements attained in the institutionalisation of disability data in the ASC and broader EMIS, and in awareness creation in relation to disability inclusion and inclusive education.

However, on-going strengthening of ASC data collection processes, as well as capacity for data analysis, interpretation and use is still needed. This will improve generation of high-quality disability data, that can then be used for more effective policy and budgeting decisions by the federal and provincial governments.

This study has identified and highlighted key areas for attention in support of stronger and sustainable inclusion of disability data in Pakistan's education data systems. The commitment and dedication of education system stakeholders, especially federal and provincial level policy makers, will be the next important step in achieving a truly inclusive education system in Pakistan.

For more information

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Full report available at: **https://research.sightsavers.org/project/dare-disability-inclusive-data-and-systems-pakistan/**

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