**United Nations system-wide policy on inclusion of persons with disabilities and their human rights, well-being and perspectives**

**Preamble**

Through this policy, we, the leaders of the entities of the United Nations system, commit to accelerating our efforts to support achievement of inclusion of persons with disabilities and their human rights through practical implementation of the globally agreed commitments contained in the United Nations treaties, conferences and summits and their follow-up, in particular: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction; the Addis Ababa Action Agenda; the third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development; the multiple resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council; and the World Humanitarian Summit; as well as other agreements that may be adopted in the future.

We reaffirm through this policy that the full and complete realization of the human rights of all persons with disabilities, is an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. This is consistent with principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments, in particular the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and is essential for the advancement of development, peace and security.

We recognize that human rights, peace and security and sustainable development for all can only be enjoyed if persons with disabilities are included in society on an equal basis with others, and as both agents of change and beneficiaries of the outcomes of the work of the United Nations system.

**Policy statement**

We state our intention and commitment to continue to pursue the goals of inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities and their human rights, well-being and perspectives, paying special attention to those who face multiple and intersecting discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age and other grounds of discrimination; both collectively within the United Nations system and individually within our specific organizations. We will build trust and confidence with persons with disabilities to ensure that they are valued and respected in their dignity and rights and that they find in our entities an enabling environment to fully and effectively participate on an equal basis with others.

We commit ourselves, following the United Nations system leadership framework,[[1]](#footnote-2) to providing strong leadership within our organizations to ensure that the human rights-based approach to disability is reflected in all our organizational policies, programmes, practices and results.

We are determined to raise awareness, and advance the agenda of inclusion and mainstreaming of persons with disabilities and their human rights through the utilization of knowledge, expertise and experience available throughout the United Nations, through building new capacities, closely consulting with and actively involving persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations.

We are committed to use the complementary and comparative advantages of each United Nations entity, including through appropriate coordination mechanisms and joint programmes, to create an enabling environment, empower persons with disabilities and address exclusion and discrimination on the basis of disability in any form, including multiple and intersecting discrimination, and discrimination by association. We will also leverage the technical competences of each United Nations’ entity to promote their full and effective participation and inclusion in society, and respect for their inherent dignity and individual autonomy, including the freedom to make their own choices, and independence of persons.

We will accelerate our efforts to achieve the goal of empowered, progressive and substantively increased representation of persons with disabilities among all categories of United Nations employees, in particular at decision-making levels.

We will employ, share and learn from the diversity of our experiences, expertise and cultures within the United Nations system as a source of inspiration and creativity, to achieve a strong partnership among our organizations in a collective endeavour to advance our common objective of promoting and ensuring the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities and their human rights in our work.

**Strategy**

Mainstreaming in combination with targeted measures is the key strategy for achieving inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities and their human rights and will guide all initiatives. Mainstreaming the human rights-based approach to disability is the process of assessing the implications for persons with disabilities of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels. It is a way to make the concerns and experiences of persons with disabilities an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that persons with disabilities benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve equality.

A United Nations system-wide accountability framework for implementation of this policy, on which the entire system will report, is essential to make the strategy of inclusion of persons with disabilities and their human rights operational. The system-wide accountability framework will include indicators, timetables, technical guidance, allocation of responsibilities, and resources required for full implementation of this policy. This will facilitate: system-wide planning to determine the comparative advantages of the United Nations and individual entities, and reduce duplication; assessment of progress and gaps at all levels of the Organization’s work on inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities and their human rights, well-being and perspectives, both in policy areas and at the country level; and tracking of individual entity and system-wide results. Through this accountability framework all United Nations staff will have a full understanding of their role in promoting inclusion of persons with disabilities and their human rights, well-being and perspectives, across the organisation, and be empowered to fulfil these roles.

United Nations inter-agency networks[[2]](#footnote-3)**,** and internal networks of the different entities such as disability and accessibility focal points networks, inter-departmental taskforces, and future bodies, will proactively support implementation of this policy.

The main elements of the strategy include:

(a) *Strategic planning on inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities and their human rights*. Strategic planning on inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities and their human rights will be further strengthened throughout the United Nations system. United Nations entities will include reflection on inclusion of persons with disabilities and their human rights, related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in their main strategic planning documents, in relation to their mandates. The United Nations system will plan, implement and report at the system-wide level on its contributions to inclusion of persons with disabilities and their human rights in relation to full implementation of the SDGs, including at the country level. The results-based focus will be on both processes, how these processes lead to desired results, and after the mainstreaming elements of the accountability framework has been institutionalized, actual results achieved.

(b) *Participation*. The United Nations, in the development and implementation of normative frameworks and policies, and in other decision-making processes concerning issues relating to persons with disabilities and beyond, will closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities, including women and children with disabilities, through their representative organizations. Staff members with disabilities and families with members with disabilities themselves or through their representative organizations will also be consulted and involved, particularly on matters involving their career advancement, well-being, social benefits, and health coverage.

(c) *Data.* The lack of disability-disaggregated data is one of the major barriers to the accurate assessment of how policies and programmes to promote inclusion of persons with disabilities and their human rights should be refined, designed and implemented. This policy and accountability framework will address this gap. Entities commit to abide by the Personal Data Protection and Privacy Principles of this board or by other instruments that meet equal or higher standards, and will ensure the confidentiality of personal data.[[3]](#footnote-4) Data collected and administered to fulfil the purpose of this policy is considered fair and legitimate processing.

(d) *Coherence, coordination and knowledge and information management*. Coherence and coordination of efforts in the implementation of the strategy for inclusion of persons with disabilities and their human rights are essential if there are to be meaningful results towards the achievement of the agreed goals. Notwithstanding the specific mandates of United Nations entities, the overall system must reinforce common goals and consistent working methods in promoting inclusion of persons with disabilities and their human rights. This is especially important at the country level in order to allow Member States to interact with a coherent United Nations team. Given the multi-sectoral nature of disability-inclusive policies, effective platforms for joint programming will be critical for coordination and to leverage the comparative advantages of individual United Nations entities. A knowledge management system that will include experiences,expertise and practices of various United Nations entities on the promotion of inclusion of persons with disabilities and their human rights will be established for use by United Nations entities themselves, country teams, Member States, and other partners. Such a coordinated effort, when managed well and made easily accessible, will form a powerful asset for technical and advisory services, including in-country training, designed to achieve results on inclusion of persons with disabilities and their human rights.

(e) *Capacity development*. Developing and/or strengthening staff capacity and competency in analysis under the human rights-based approach to disability is essential to the successful mainstreaming of a disability perspective into policies and programmes, and to bridge the current capacity gap. Staff members who are responsible for programme design and implementation, as well as those responsible for technical advisory services, require capacity development in order to ensure that a human rights-based approach to disability is reflected in their work at all times. These capacity gaps will be addressed comprehensively and systematically, including through awareness-raising campaigns and training, at the individual, entity and system-wide levels so that the United Nations system becomes fully capable of delivering results on inclusion of persons with disabilities and their human rights. Both system-wide and individual organizations’ approaches to capacity development for inclusion of persons with disabilities and their human rights will be used.

(f) *Awareness raising and trust building*. The United Nations will implement a system-wide communication strategy on inclusion of persons with disabilities and their rights, and for the dissemination of good practices within the system and beyond with the purpose of reducing and ultimately eliminating stigma and discrimination related to persons with disabilities. The strategy will be implemented in a participatory fashion which includes persons with disabilities.

(g) *Human and financial resources*. To achieve desired outcomes, adequate human and financial resources will be allocated to the implementation of inclusion of persons with disabilities and their human rights and empowerment in our Organisation. This will entail better utilization of current resources, the assignment of additional resources where required, and the alignment of resources with expected outcomes. At the same time, opportunities for joint programming, including with Member States through the United Nations country teams, will be created. Establishing a mechanism on the rights of persons with disabilities at the highest level with a defined role and dedicated capacity is crucial to ensure coordination, mainstreaming and strategic programming that is inclusive of persons with disabilities at all levels and in all areas.

(h) *Universal design, accessibility and reasonable accommodation*. The United Nations will aim to implement and apply the principles of universal design in all its policies and activities, and particularly in programmes, human resources, communication, construction, documentation, transportation and travel, work and employment, and procurement. Implementation of universal design at the onset of planning will reduce the possibility of building new barriers. Accessibility barriers should be properly identified, addressed and removed in order to facilitate effective and full participation of persons with disabilities in all areas and activities undertaken by the United Nations. Persons with disabilities engaging with the United Nations in any capacity will benefit from reasonable accommodation. Persons with disabilities will be closely consulted and actively involved, particularly when decision-making involves accessibility and reasonable accommodation.

(i) *Oversight through monitoring, evaluation, and audit*. Enhancing oversight through improved monitoring, evaluation, and audit procedures is critical to ensuring accountability of United Nations system agencies for their performance on inclusion of persons with disabilities and their human rights.

(j) *Accountability*. Individual entity and inter-agency accountability mechanisms will be strengthened and developed within the United Nations system in a coherent, coordinated and consistent manner. To ensure coherence, United Nations entities will develop policies on the rights of persons with disabilities aligned to the accountability framework, with senior managers held accountable for implementation of these policies. Accountability mechanisms will incorporate and build on those that have proven most effective in their use by United Nations entities and/or partner organizations. Internal and public championing by senior managers of inclusion of persons with disabilities and their rights will be a key element in the implementation of this policy. Individual United Nations entities will retain their ability to add or enhance their internal approaches to accountability and to take into account their specific mandates and roles. However, such efforts should not circumvent, diminish or otherwise compromise system-wide efforts.

Elements (b), (c), (f), and (h) of the strategy should be considered cross-cutting elements and should be equally considered on their own and as facilitators for the implementation of the strategy.

**Tracking implementation of this policy**

The United Nations Secretary General will establish a mechanism to review this policy and its accompanying accountability framework, evaluate its implementation every two years, and take remedial action when needed.

1. CEB/2017/1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Including the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, United Nations Evaluation Group, United Nations Representatives of Internal Audit Services, the Strategic Planning Network, the Human Resources Network, the Procurement Network, the Information and Communication Technology Network, the Finance and Budget Network, Inter-Agency Standing Committee, Interagency Network of Facility Managers, and the Communications Network, among others. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. https://www.unsystem.org/personal-data-protection-and-privacy-principles [↑](#footnote-ref-4)