Disability inclusion in the United Nations system

United Nations

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to resolution 78/195, in which the General Assembly requested that the Secretary-General submit to it a progress report on steps taken by the United Nations system towards mainstreaming disability inclusion, including the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy.

The report outlines the progress made in 2023, on the basis of an analysis of submissions by United Nations entities and country teams reporting under the Strategy's accountability framework and reflects on opportunities and challenges facing the Organization in relation to disability inclusion. The report shows that the Strategy is embedding disability inclusion in strategic planning processes, encouraging senior-level commitment to mainstreaming and laying the groundwork for efforts to improve accessibility, systematize consultation with persons with disabilities, recruit more persons with disabilities and build knowledge on disability inclusion.

Table of contents

1. Advancing disability inclusion in the United Nations system

The United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy embodies a vision of transformative change for persons with disabilities and an opportunity to reshape the United Nations into the agile, diverse and innovative Organization it must be to meet the challenges of our time.

This opportunity comes at a critical juncture, as overlapping crises threaten progress and stretch the world's resources to their limits. Without significant acceleration, the Sustainable Development Goals will not be achieved by 2030 – and persons with disabilities, at least 1.3 billion of the world's people, are being left behind.

To support Member States in surmounting barriers to progress, advance the Organization's core mandates amidst crises, and seize the opportunities that come with rapid technological change, the United Nations recognizes that it must deepen its own capacities and transform its culture. The United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy is a cornerstone of this United Nations of the future. Since 2019, it has provided the Organization with a comprehensive, system-wide framework and road map to achieve lasting change by mainstreaming disability inclusion across all pillars – development, human rights, peace and security, and humanitarian action.

Over the past five years, the Strategy has initiated significant system-wide changes and is strengthening the Organization's internal capacity and ability to support Governments in implementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Intersections with other priority initiatives, such as United Nations 2.0, can accelerate systemic shifts in upgrading skills and transforming organizational culture to enhance the impact of the United Nations in the world.

To realize the opportunity inherent in the Strategy's implementation, the Organization must build on the foundation it has created over the past five years, by enhancing system-wide support for, and prioritization of, disability inclusion. Only when disability inclusion becomes everyone's business – across all pillars of the Organization's work – will the United Nations become an institution in which persons with disabilities can participate on an equal basis with all others, and one that advances their rights and inclusion in everything that it does.

2. Building on leadership to drive structural change

The Strategy is a tool critical to building the institutional capacity of the United Nations to meet the needs of the people it serves, to face the challenges of ongoing crises, and to seize the opportunities that come with change and innovation. After five years of implementation, key foundational steps have been taken in many of the Strategy's areas – yet, progress is not at a satisfactory level.

As the present report shows, disability inclusion continues to be siloed, and this poses a serious challenge to efforts to accelerate progress across all areas of the Strategy. Actions to strengthen commitment and broaden accountability for disability inclusion, and make it a part of day-to-day work across programming and operations will be needed to build a disability-inclusive Organization.

Senior leadership remains critical to achieving this ambitious goal. As in previous years, senior-level commitment has been key to spurring entities and country teams to develop and operationalize disability inclusion policies, strategies and guidance. Moving forward, an intensified senior-level drive to mainstream disability inclusion is needed to maintain momentum and effect organizational change in other areas of the Strategy where requirements are not being adequately met. This will take systematic monitoring of disability inclusion at the highest levels of entities and country teams, alongside actions to integrate disability inclusion into budgeting processes for programming and operations and to improve the use of available resources by aligning them with strategic priorities.

As a precondition for the inclusion of persons with disabilities, accessibility is necessary for mainstreaming – and it demands greater prioritization. Thus far, accessibility is still considered in an ad hoc, reactive way rather than through the comprehensive, universal approach needed to make the Organization's infrastructure and processes accessible to all. In an era of digital transformation, digital accessibility is as critical as the accessibility of physical infrastructure – and more efforts are needed in this area. The ambitions of United Nations 2.0 to transform the Organization's technologies, skills and processes towards digitally enabled solutions opens a multitude of entry points for digital accessibility.

The Organization has an opportunity to embed accessibility as part of its culture and embody the imperative to leave no one behind, and thereby advance our collective ambition towards an inclusive and accessible digital future.

Those actions will support the United Nations to lead by example and will have a ripple effect beyond the Organization's immediate work. By building accessibility requirements into procurement practices, for example, the Organization can not only make its own operations more inclusive, but also influence markets to boost the availability of accessible goods and services worldwide, better serve persons with disabilities and create opportunities for a greater diversity of suppliers.

The participation of persons with disabilities is essential to ensure accountability and sustainability in all areas of the endeavour to make the Organization disability-inclusive. Consultation and partnerships with organizations of persons with disabilities ensure that programmes are responsive to the needs of communities and that operations create processes that sustain inclusion. As evidenced through reports of entities and country teams, the participation of organizations of persons with disabilities across all areas of the Strategy – from accessibility assessments to strategic planning – provides invaluable insights that help to accelerate progress in its implementation.

Above all, the United Nations system needs to make hiring more persons with disabilities a priority – and transform its infrastructure and workplace culture so that staff with disabilities can work on an equal basis with others. Reasonable accommodation remains an essential affirmative action and the Organization needs to invest in increasing awareness and developing a coherent approach together with accessibility measures, occupational health and medical services.

The Strategy has facilitated system-wide coordination on disability inclusion, and this must be leveraged to address key challenges. Forthcoming recommendations from the High-level Committee on Management sub-working group on disability inclusion, established in 2023, will guide the Organization towards a system-wide approach to address systemic bottlenecks in human resources, accessibility and reasonable accommodation, as well as other key factors for increasing the number of persons with disabilities working within the United Nations.

Looking ahead to achieving the goals set out in the Strategy and ensuring sustainable, long-term solutions, disability inclusion must be seen as a core human rights issue, rather than a non-essential add-on. The support and leadership of Member States for disability inclusion and the implementation of the Strategy remains vital – and the recognition of the Strategy in General Assembly resolutions **74/144**, **75/154**, **76/154** and **77/189**, as well as in resolution **75/233**, the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for the development of the United Nations system, reflects this ongoing commitment. The level of ambition of the Strategy will only be achieved when all stakeholders work together to demand accountability and accelerate action to achieve results for persons with disabilities worldwide. Together, we can achieve an inclusive, sustainable and accessible world for all.

3. Implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy

Eighty-one United Nations entities, the highest number thus far, and 132 country teams reported on progress for the 2023 programme year (1 January–31 December 2023) under the accountability framework of the Strategy.

As in previous years, progress was reported against the indicators of the entity accountability framework and the country team accountability scorecard on disability inclusion, using a self-assessed five-point grading system with the following ratings: missing requirements, approaching requirements, meeting requirements, exceeding requirements and not applicable.[1] At a minimum, entities and country teams should aspire to meet requirements, with the long-term goal of exceeding them.

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1   United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, p. 10 and the United Nations country team accountability scorecard on disability inclusion.
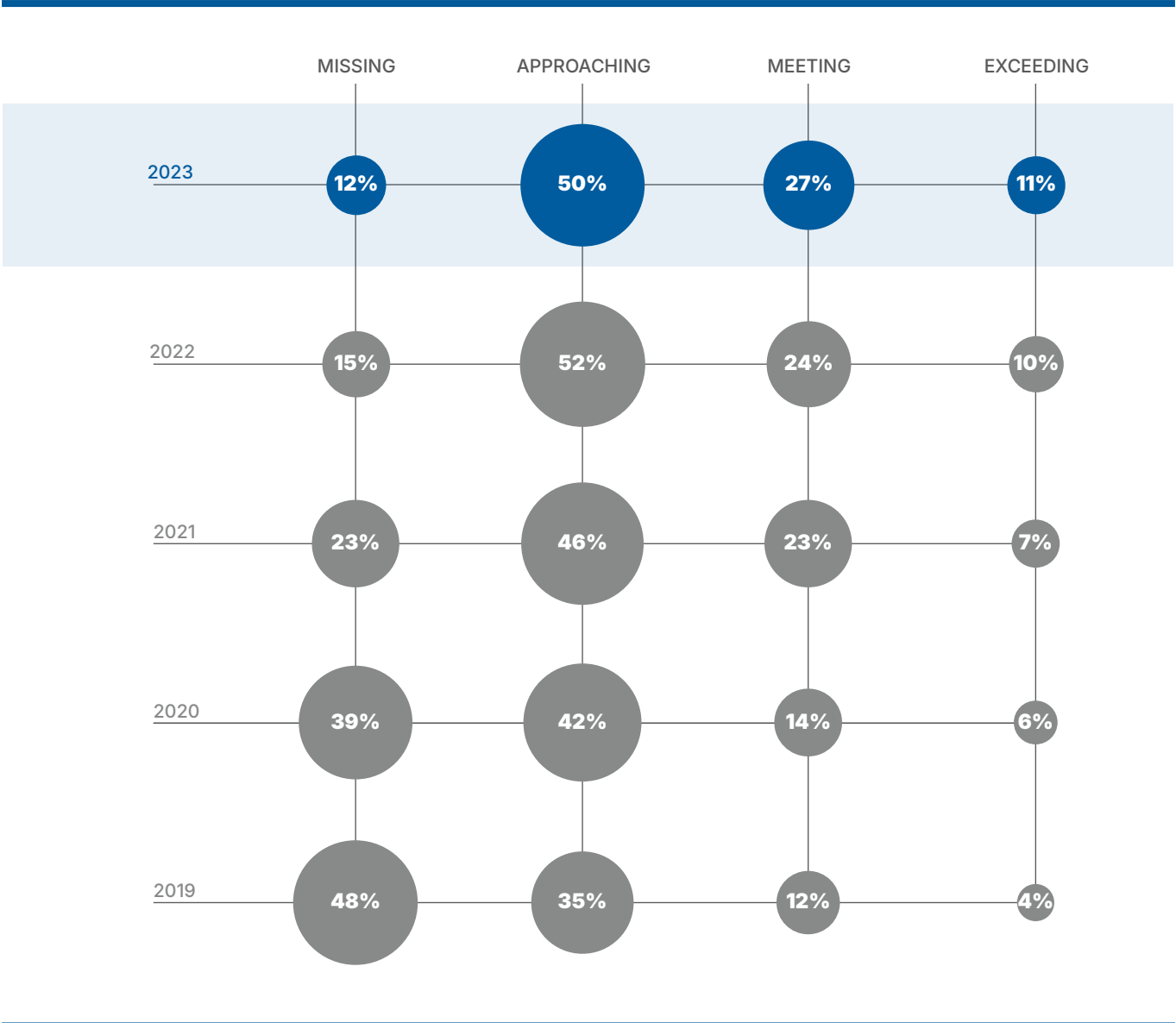
A   Accountability at the entity level

In 2023, 81 entities reported under the entity accountability framework, up from 77 in 2022. The total comprises (a) 52 Secretariat entities, including 20 peace and political missions and 5 regional economic commissions; (b) 6 funds and programmes; (c) 13 specialized agencies; and (d) 10 other and related entities.[2]
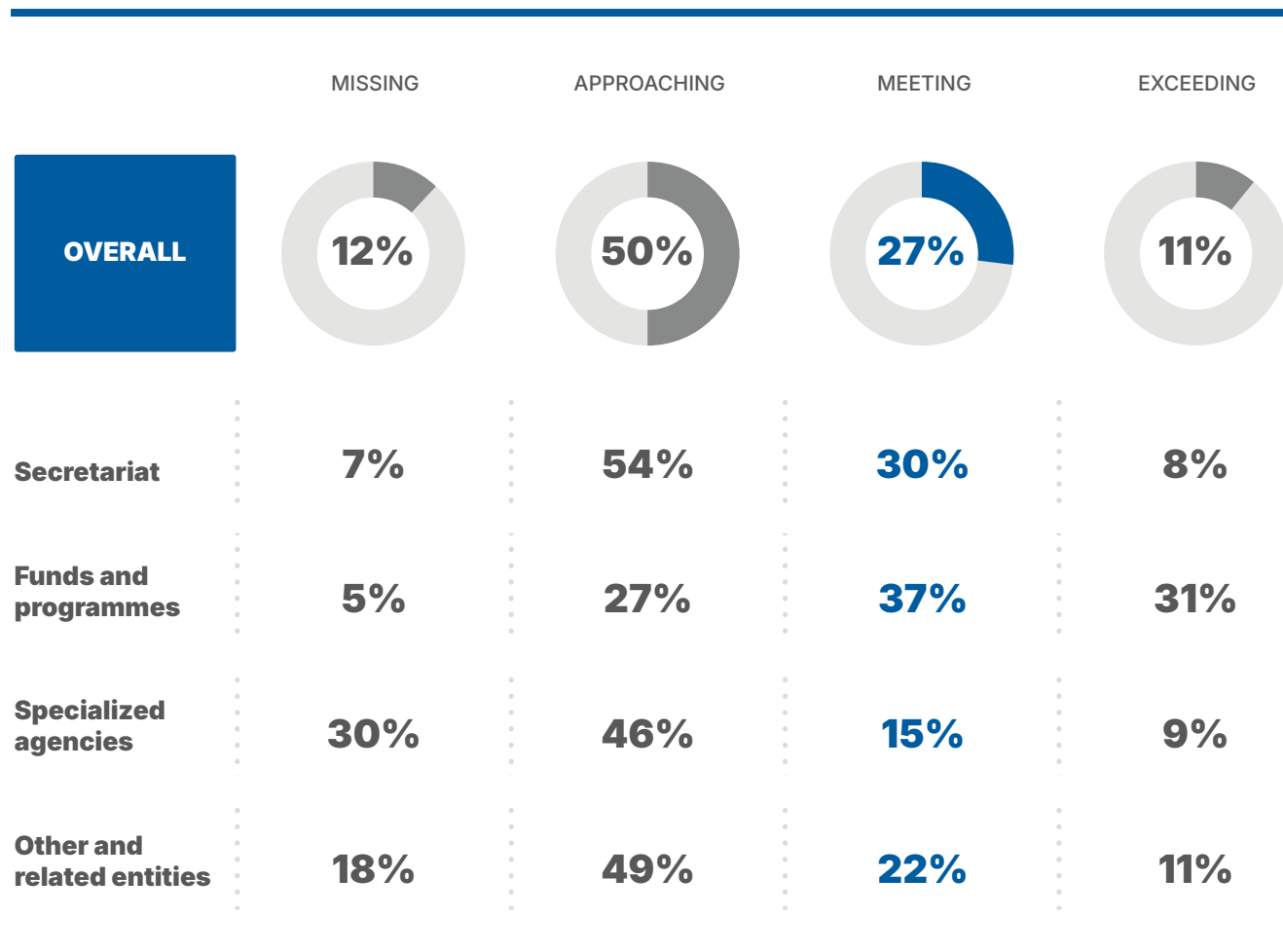
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2   The reporting entities, organized into the four categories under which the analysis was carried out, are as follows: (a) Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, Department of Global Communications, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, Department of Operational Support, Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs/Department of Peace Operations, Department of Safety and Security, Development Coordination Office, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, Economic Commission for Africa, Economic Commission for Europe, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Office for Disarmament Affairs, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Office of Counter-Terrorism, Office of Internal Oversight Services, Office of Legal Affairs, Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Africa, Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus, Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia/United Nations Support Office in Somalia, United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei, United Nations Mission in South Sudan, United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement, United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund, United Nations Office at Geneva, United Nations Office at Nairobi, United Nations Office at Vienna/United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, Office for Outer Space Affairs, United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus, United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, United Nations Truce Supervision Organization/Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia and United Nations Environment Programme; (b) United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Human Settlements Programme, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Volunteers and World Food Programme; (c) Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Civil Aviation Organization, International Fund for Agricultural Development, International Labour Organization, International Maritime Organization, International Telecommunication Union, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Industrial Development Organization, Universal Postal Union, World Health Organization, World Intellectual Property Organization, World Meteorological Organization and World Tourism Organization; and (d) International Organization for Migration, International Trade Centre, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, United Nations Office for Project Services, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, United Nations System Staff College and United Nations University.

Figure I
Overall rating comparison for United Nations entities, 2019–2023

	MISSING	APPROACHING	MEETING	EXCEEDING
2023	12%	50%	27%	11%
2022	15%	52%	24%	10%
2021	23%	46%	23%	7%
2020	39%	42%	14%	6%
2019	48%	35%	12%	4%

Entities continued to make progress in implementing the Strategy, meeting or exceeding requirements for 38 per cent of the indicators, up from 34 per cent in 2022. The percentage of indicators for which entities missed requirements continued to fall, to 12 per cent down from 15 per cent in 2022.

Figure II
2023 rating for the United Nations system, by entity type

	MISSING	APPROACHING	MEETING	EXCEEDING
OVERALL	12%	50%	27%	11%
Secretariat	7%	54%	30%	8%
Funds and programmes	5%	27%	37%	31%
Specialized agencies	30%	46%	15%	9%
Other and related entities	18%	49%	22%	11%

Funds and programmes continued to demonstrate the strongest rates of progress among all entity types, meeting or exceeding requirements for 68 per cent of the indicators in 2023, compared with 59 per cent in 2022.

This significant shift from approaching to meeting requirements demonstrates that they are building on initial actions – for instance, moving from developing guidance to operationalizing it, and from assessing accessibility to implementing action plans to improve it.

Secretariat entities demonstrated encouraging progress, but still met or exceeded requirements for only 38 per cent of indicators, compared with 34 per cent in 2022. Among them, peace operations – just over half of which are implementing the Strategy – met or exceeded requirements for 32 per cent of the indicators, a notable increase from 18 per cent in 2022. Specialized agencies, and other and related entities remained relatively consistent. All entity groups demonstrated a decline in missing requirements, although the rate remains high for some and remains highest for specialized agencies, which missed requirements for 30 per cent of indicators.
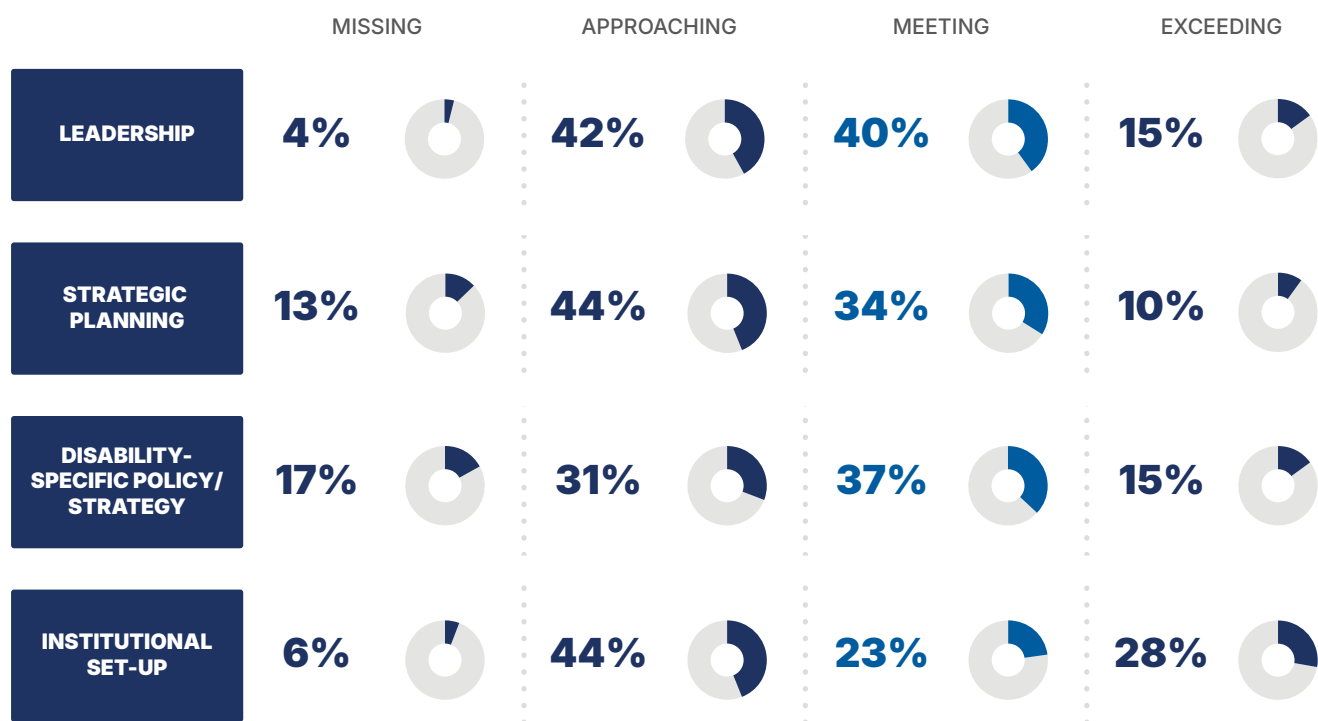
Core area 1
Leadership, strategic planning and management

Figure III
2023 rating for United Nations entities in core area 1, by performance indicator

	MISSING	APPROACHING	MEETING	EXCEEDING
LEADERSHIP	4%	42%	40%	15%
STRATEGIC PLANNING	13%	44%	34%	10%
DISABILITY-SPECIFIC POLICY/ STRATEGY	17%	31%	37%	15%
INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP	6%	44%	23%	28%

Entities have made great strides in embedding disability inclusion in their leadership, strategic planning and management practices, fostering a coherent approach to mainstreaming across programmes and operations.

Core area 1 remains the strongest-performing area, with over 50 per cent of entities meeting or exceeding requirements for three of the four indicators, and a 9 per cent increase in entities meeting or exceeding requirements for strategic planning. These achievements are laying the groundwork for developments in other areas, including disability-inclusive programmes and projects, which showed a similar rate of improvement.

Entities continued to make strong progress in senior leadership commitment, which is vital to organizational change. Fifteen per cent incorporated commitments to disability inclusion in senior-level accountability mechanisms,

such as Senior Manager Compacts or milestone reviews. Fifty-five per cent conducted annual reviews of the implementation of their entity-specific disability inclusion policies and strategies and formulated plans to remedy shortfalls; it was reported that the senior management team's commitment of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement was instrumental in driving progress in implementing and reviewing its disability inclusion policy. Several entities appointed senior-level champions or advocates to create internal and public platforms to promote disability inclusion.

The percentage of entities incorporating disability inclusion in their strategic plans increased significantly in 2023, with 44 per cent of entities reflecting disability inclusion in their results statements and indicators, disaggregating data by disability and sex, and developing interventions to improve disability inclusion. Entities incorporated disability inclusion into results pertaining to both programming and operations. For example, the World Food Programme's corporate results framework includes a cross-cutting indicator for disaggregating data by programme beneficiaries with disabilities, alongside indicators on accessibility, consultation and employment for persons with disabilities. Several entities used or established markers or tagging systems to track mainstreaming and targeted actions on disability inclusion, including resource allocations.
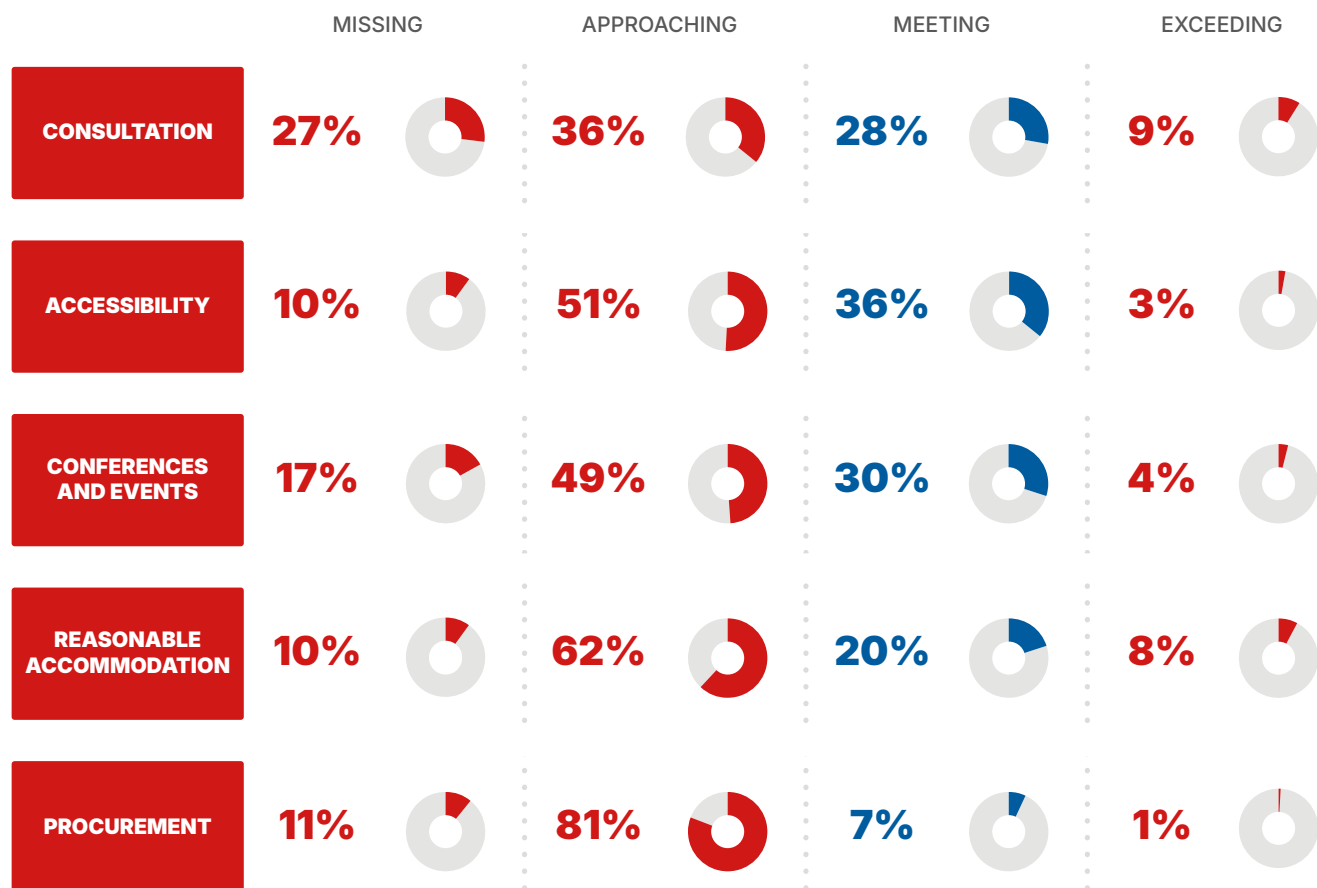
There has been a steady increase in the adoption and implementation of disability-specific policies and strategies, signalling long-term commitment to mainstreaming disability inclusion and enabling a cohesive approach across departments within entities. In the 2023 programme year, 52 per cent of entities had policies, strategies or action plans tailored to their own contexts to support the Strategy's implementation across programmes and operations. Increasing numbers of entities monitored the implementation of their policies or strategies and took action to address gaps in performance. For example, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees monitored its progress towards disability inclusion in its annual Age, Gender and Diversity Accountability Report, with follow-up through quarterly meetings with its Assistant High Commissioner for Protection.

Forty-four per cent of entities have established a unit or position to provide substantive expertise on disability inclusion, while 51 per cent have built on this by establishing active, entity-wide disability inclusion focal point networks that meet regularly. Those networks are instrumental in efforts to share knowledge and good practices, for instance by running help desks or disseminating regular organization-wide updates through communities of practice. The International Organization for Migration noted that its disability inclusion network has been critical to encouraging country offices to recruit staff with relevant expertise and initiate projects on disability inclusion.

Core area 2
Inclusiveness

Figure IV
2023 rating for United Nations entities in core area 2, by performance indicator

	MISSING	APPROACHING	MEETING	EXCEEDING
CONSULTATION	27%	36%	28%	9%
ACCESSIBILITY	10%	51%	36%	3%
CONFERENCES AND EVENTS	17%	49%	30%	4%
REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION	10%	62%	20%	8%
PROCUREMENT	11%	81%	7%	1%

Inclusiveness remains the lowest-performing of all core areas, which reflects the continued siloing of disability inclusion, despite the growing Organization-wide commitment evident from progress under core area 1.

Progress in the area of inclusiveness depends on an understanding of the barriers faced by persons with disabilities in the workplace and to programme implementation, and of the critical role of accessibility and consultation in surmounting these barriers. Many smaller entities, in particular Secretariat

entities and those hosted in United Nations premises or headquarters, rely on centralized guidance and directives in effecting structural changes, and require significant support in addressing and enhancing accessibility.

The meaningful participation of persons with disabilities is a cornerstone of disability inclusion. While the Strategy has had a significant impact in increasing consultations, this is largely limited to disability-specific issues. Many entities reported using or adapting the Guidelines on Consulting Persons with Disabilities, available since 2021, which were drafted as part of the Strategy. However, 52 per cent of entities still did not meet the requirements across all areas by consulting persons with disabilities on all issues.

Some entities made efforts towards more systematic consultations. For example, the World Health Organization undertook a mapping of organizations of persons with disabilities, to be shared throughout its headquarters, regional and country offices. A number of entities engaged with diverse populations of persons with disabilities, primarily youth and women with disabilities and their representative organizations, including through strategic alliances, memorandums of understanding and project cooperation agreements. Some partnerships went beyond disability-specific issues; for example, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Youth Office consulted their partners on the development of their entity's strategic plans.

While 90 per cent of entities have completed accessibility assessments, 61 per cent have yet to develop or implement policies or strategies on accessibility, indicating a lack of prioritization, often owing to a lack of knowledge on the scope of accessibility and how to address it. In entities where policies or strategies are in place, they have enabled a deeper assessment of accessibility, including in relation to safety measures. In some entities, robust institutional setups supported the coordination of assessments and the tracking of improvements; for example, the United Nations Children's Fund established a help desk in 2023 to support its offices and programmes on physical and digital accessibility. Funding mechanisms have been set up by several entities, including the United Nations Population Fund, which includes accessibility as a standard budget line in all capital projects.

Action to improve the accessibility of conferences and events remains largely ad hoc and voluntary, but some entities are investing in more systematic, long-term measures. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific developed an artificial intelligence-based real-time captioning tool, as a cost-effective solution for all intergovernmental meetings, while the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia uses an accessible meeting registration platform.

While 90 per cent of entities have developed policies or strategies on reasonable accommodation, only 28 per cent are implementing them and have established funding mechanisms to support provisioning. Entities' funds ranged in size from $30,000 for smaller entities, up to $400,000 for larger ones. In addition to maintaining its own fund, United Nations Volunteers encouraged United Nations partners to budget an additional $5,000 for every volunteer assignment for reasonable accommodation.

To ensure uniform implementation across the Organization, in 2023 the Department of Management, Strategy Policy and Compliance launched the Reasonable Accommodation Guidelines for the Secretariat, accompanied by an explainer video and webinars for all personnel. This was an important step forward, but it remains unclear how Secretariat entities should establish funding mechanisms, leading to slower progress towards meeting or exceeding requirements. The World Food Programme and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean held training sessions and awareness-raising events on reasonable accommodation and several entities gathered data on reasonable accommodation requests and satisfaction with provision.

The progress made by entities in relation to procurement remains particularly challenging. Since the launch of the Strategy, the majority of entities have benefited from the guidelines on disability-inclusive procurement developed by the Procurement Network of the High-level Committee on Management and from centralized updates to the United Nations General Marketplace; as a result, 88 per cent reported some progress. However, only 8 per cent have established targets for including accessibility as a requirement in procurement documents.
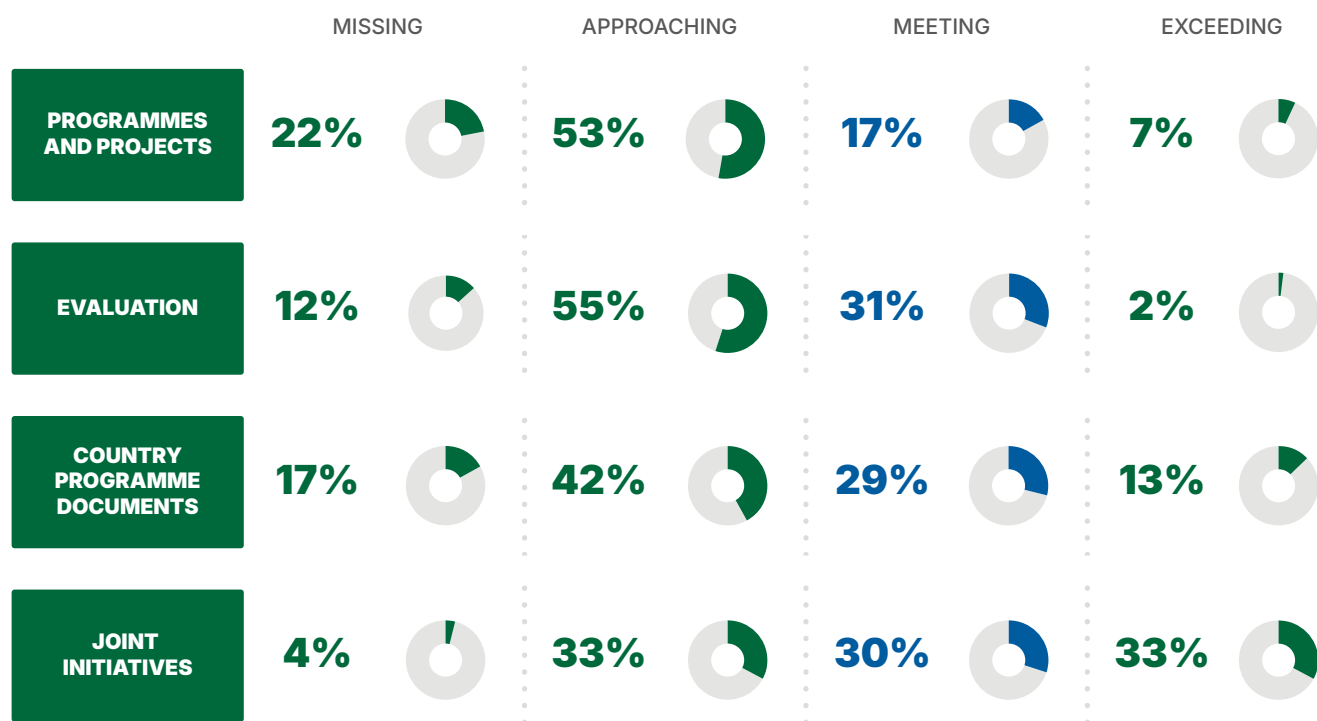
Initial efforts have focused on incorporating disability inclusion as a criterion in solicitations and identifying disability-inclusive suppliers. A standard operating procedure for Secretariat entities on vendor outreach, issued in 2023, adopted the Procurement Network's definition of disability-inclusive suppliers. The United Nations General Marketplace implemented a feature to enable entities to identify and track procurement from such suppliers, and its dashboard already shows a substantial increase in both invitations to bid and awards. Moving forward, greater knowledge of accessibility and its importance will be vital to meaningful progress in accessible procurement.
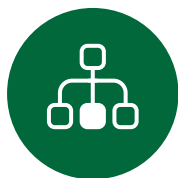
Core area 3
Programming

Figure V
2023 rating for United Nations entities in core area 3, by performance indicator

	MISSING	APPROACHING	MEETING	EXCEEDING
PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS	22%	53%	17%	7%
EVALUATION	12%	55%	31%	2%
COUNTRY PROGRAMME DOCUMENTS	17%	42%	29%	13%
JOINT INITIATIVES	4%	33%	30%	33%

Progress in mainstreaming disability inclusion in programming shows mixed results.

Inter-agency collaboration through joint initiatives remained the highest-performing indicator in 2023, while programmes and projects and country programme documents showed the greatest improvement, with 10 per cent more entities meeting or exceeding requirements compared with 2022. However, programmes and projects remained one of the lowest-performing areas for entities, with just 24 per cent meeting or exceeding requirements. Here, and in the case of evaluations, many entities have adopted guidance, but have not yet put it into practice systematically.

Many entities reported that a lack of capacity impacted their progress in this area. This gap cannot be filled by disability inclusion specialists alone. All staff involved in programme implementation and evaluation need to be equipped with an understanding of the importance of mainstreaming disability inclusion across these processes. Capacity-building efforts must cover the practical measures that implementation entails, including more systematic consultations with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations.

Seventy-seven per cent of entities have developed guidance on mainstreaming disability inclusion in programme and project cycles and several developed or rolled out new guidance in 2023. For example, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism worked on a new standard operating procedure with comprehensive measures to ensure disability inclusion throughout the programme or project cycle, in alignment with its forthcoming disability inclusion policy. It requires project managers to ensure that interventions are disability-inclusive and tagged with a disability inclusion marker and provides for technical and quality review to ensure mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues, including disability inclusion, prior to submission to the entity's Programme Review Board.

Overall, the adoption of guidance is not yet resulting in action. Only 24 per cent of entities have established minimum targets to track and measure progress. Some entities are leveraging markers or tags to support tracking of disability-inclusive programming. The International Labour Organization established a disability inclusion marker to track mainstreaming in programmes and projects, while the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) used its project review process to not only assess the extent to which disability inclusion is mainstreamed, but also recommend measures to improve its integration, as mandated by the entity's Strategic Plan Results Framework and Environmental and Social Safeguards System.

The Strategy has spurred entities to take important initial steps towards mainstreaming disability in evaluations, which is critical to promoting institutional accountability and learning to strengthen disability-inclusive programming. Eighty-eight per cent of entities have adopted guidance on addressing inclusion in evaluations, benefiting in part from the United Nations Evaluation Group Guidance on Integrating Disability Inclusion in Evaluations and Reporting, launched in 2022.

Still, commitments elaborated in strategic plans are yet to implemented. Only 33 per cent of entities have mainstreamed disability in their evaluation processes. For example, while all of the Office of Internal Oversight Services' evaluation reports for 2023 included disability in their terms of reference, just 55 per cent had conclusions on disability inclusion, owing to challenges in collecting enough data to analyse and to inform recommendations.

Entities are beginning to reflect disability inclusion in country programme documents, in some cases explicitly in alignment with cooperation frameworks. Eighty-four per cent of entities have mainstreamed disability inclusion in their guidance for country programme documents, but only 56 per cent included analysis and programming on disability inclusion in all such documents. A review of country strategic plans by the World Food Programme found that 83 per cent scored "average" or "above average" in mainstreaming disability inclusion in terms of data and evidence, partnerships with organizations of persons with
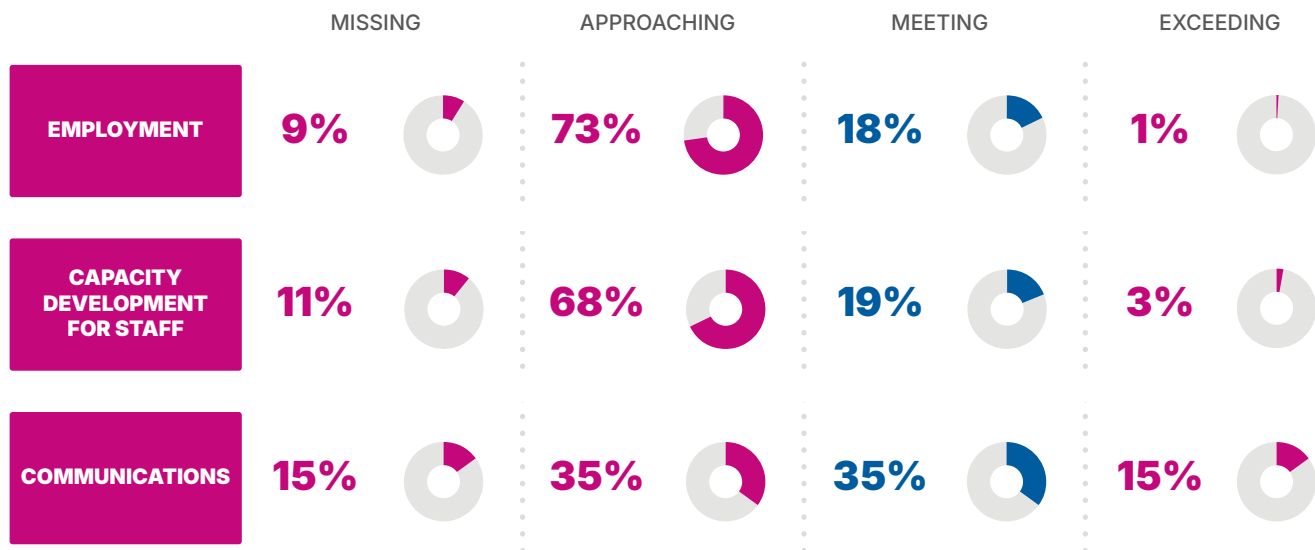
disabilities and strategy and results – a significant increase from 2020, when very few even mentioned disability. The improvement was attributed to greater awareness among data, programme management, monitoring and evaluation and country office staff. At the same time, the review noted room for improvement on data-informed programming and engagement with organizations of persons with disabilities.

Joint initiatives on disability inclusion continue to be the strongest area of performance for entities, reflecting the Strategy's role in supporting the coordinated action needed to drive mainstreaming. In 2023, 63 per cent of entities had at least one disability-inclusive joint programme in place and were actively participating in inter-agency coordination mechanisms on disability inclusion, thereby meeting or exceeding requirements in this area. Joint initiatives covered a range of areas, including creating a methodology to engage persons with disabilities in the peace process in Colombia, developing and improving national policies on digital accessibility in the Arab States and protecting children with disabilities in armed conflict.

Core area 4
Organizational culture

Figure VI

2023 rating for United Nations entities in core area 4, by performance indicator

	MISSING	APPROACHING	MEETING	EXCEEDING
EMPLOYMENT	9%	73%	18%	1%
CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR STAFF	11%	68%	19%	3%
COMMUNICATIONS	15%	35%	35%	15%

While progress is evident in disability-inclusive communications, there is little evidence of an increase in the number of staff with disabilities working in the Organization and little effort to ensure that all staff build their knowledge on disability inclusion.

Along with senior leadership, these aspects of organizational culture play a vital role in shifting the mindsets of staff and building their understanding of the importance of disability inclusion. Hiring more persons with disabilities, expanding collective knowledge and ensuring that persons with disabilities are represented across mainstream communications will be essential to the success of the Strategy.

While 91 per cent of entities have a policy or strategy in place to attract, recruit, retain and promote the career development of employees with disabilities, a concerted effort is required to recruit more persons with disabilities and ensure that they enjoy an equal level of satisfaction and well-being compared with all staff. Long gaps in the timing of staff engagement surveys have limited the data available to assess progress on satisfaction.

Ultimately, it is not known how many staff with disabilities work in the United Nations system. Guidance for entities in assessing their progress towards the goal of increasing their numbers suggests setting aspirational targets. In 2023, the United Nations Children's Fund's new Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy committed to increasing the number of employees with disabilities to 7 per cent by 2030. Several entities conducted targeted outreach to recruit candidates with disabilities, holding career fairs and working with organizations of persons with disabilities to disseminate vacancies.

As a result of the Strategy, there are now myriad training opportunities available across the United Nations system to build the capacity of staff on disability inclusion, and 92 per cent of entities reported that training and learning resources are available to all staff. Several entities, including the International Fund for Agricultural Development, have made disability inclusion trainings mandatory for all staff or for certain categories, such as senior managers or human resources staff. Some entities, including the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, reported high completion rates, but others cited low uptake even after making trainings mandatory. A number of entities reported that low prioritization and awareness among managers, along with limited capacity to monitor training completion, impacted progress in this area.

Entities continued to make progress towards mainstreaming disability in their communications. In the 2023 programme year, 85 per cent of entities had guidelines or procedures for disability-inclusive internal and external communications and 50 per cent regularly reflected persons with disabilities in their mainstream communications. Some noted the need for further efforts to facilitate disability-inclusive communications – for instance, by providing more stock photos representing diverse persons with disabilities engaged in a range of activities. This suggests that entities across the system could benefit from disability inclusion expertise – and more persons with disabilities – within their communications functions.

B Accountability at the country level

The progress of United Nations country teams in implementing the Strategy has accelerated since 2022. In 2023, all 132 country teams reported under the accountability scorecard for the fourth consecutive year. Overall, they met or exceeded requirements for 41 per cent of the indicators, up from 29 per cent in 2022, with a 5 per cent increase of those exceeding requirements. Country teams missed requirements for 22 per cent of the indicators, a significant improvement over 35 per cent in 2022.

Figure VII
Overall rating comparison for United Nations country teams, 2020–2023
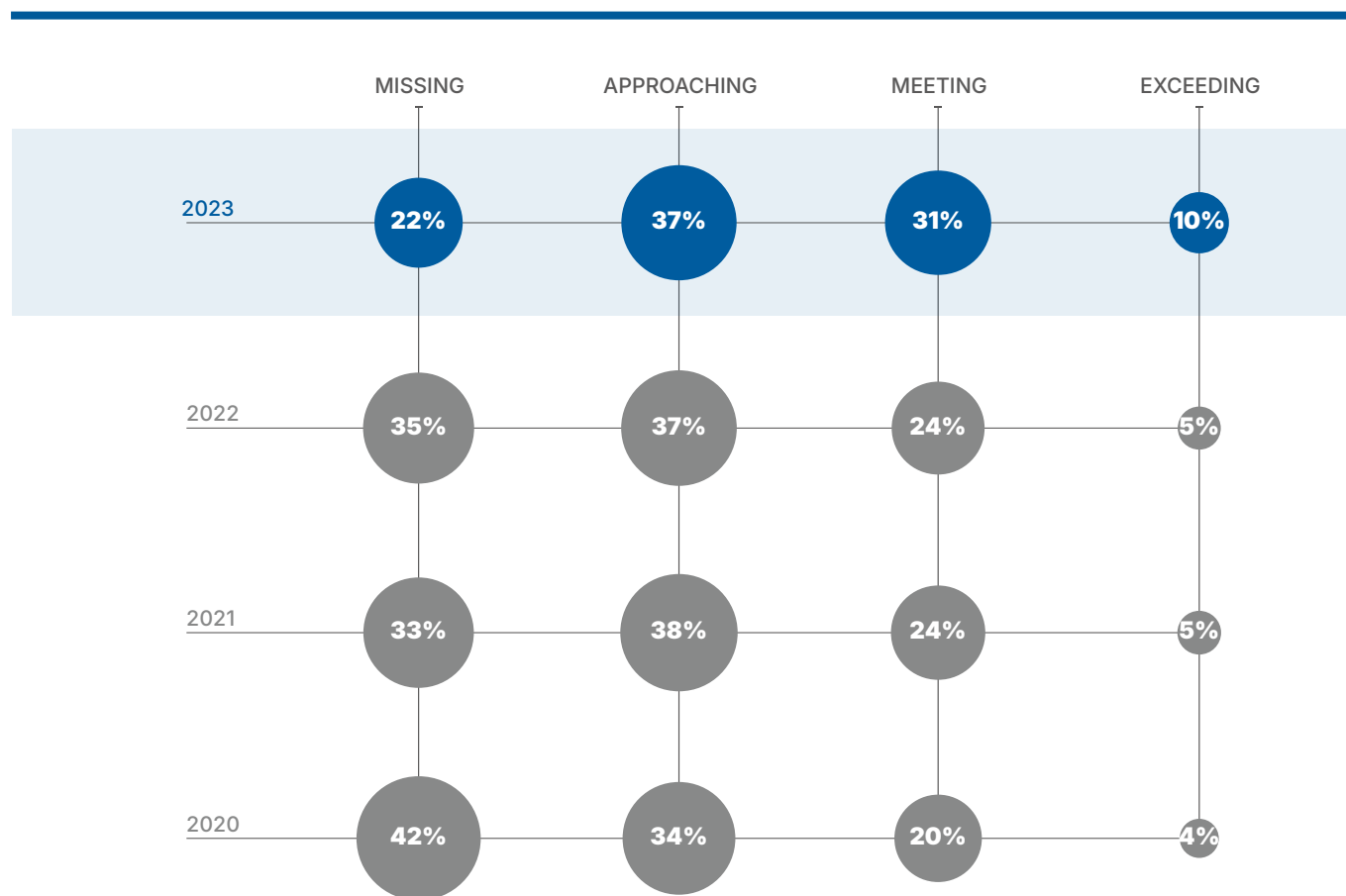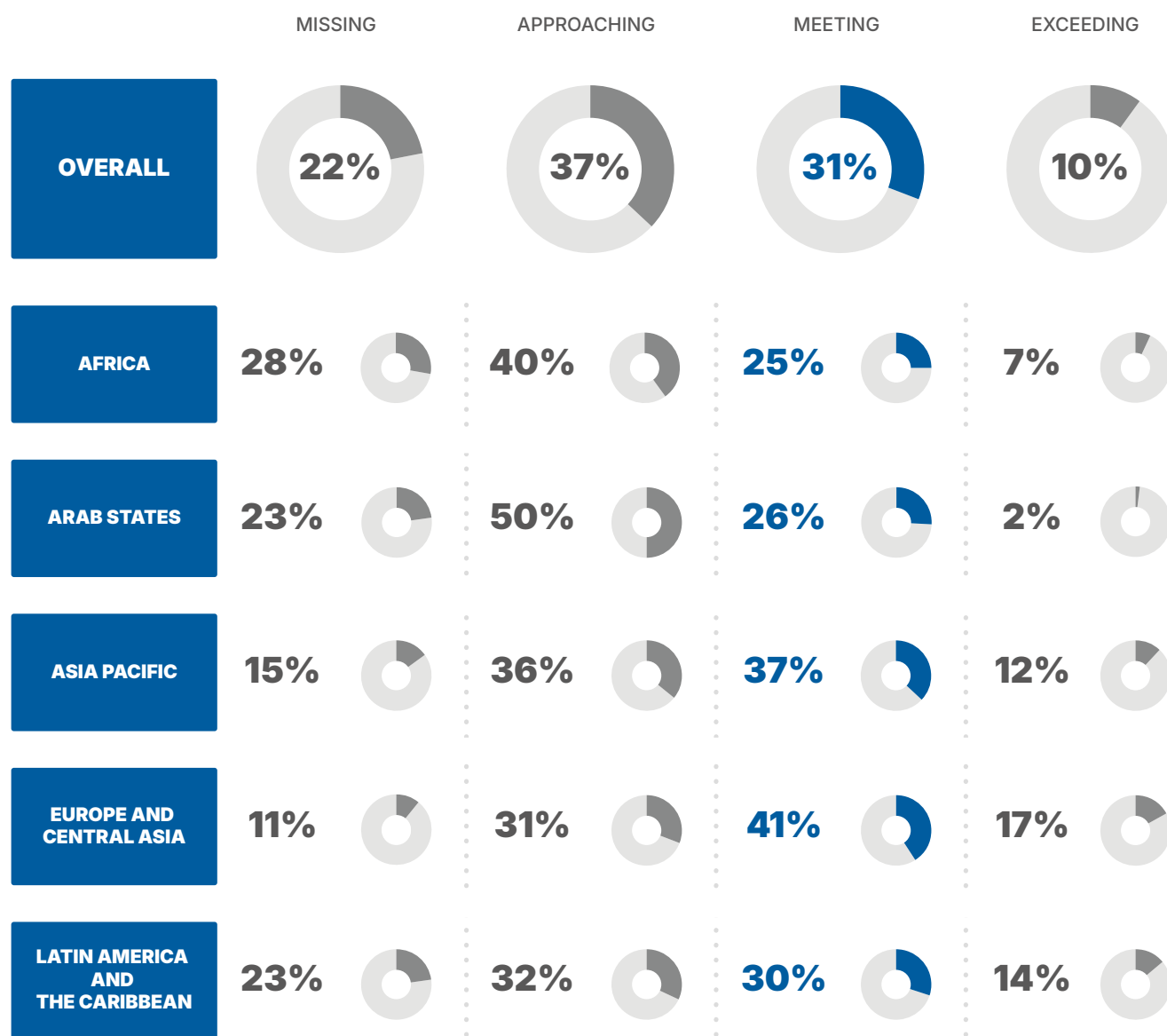
	MISSING	APPROACHING	MEETING	EXCEEDING
2023	22%	37%	31%	10%
2022	35%	37%	24%	5%
2021	33%	38%	24%	5%
2020	42%	34%	20%	4%

Figure VIII
2023 rating for United Nations country teams, by region

	MISSING	APPROACHING	MEETING	EXCEEDING
OVERALL	22%	37%	31%	10%
AFRICA	28%	40%	25%	7%
ARAB STATES	23%	50%	26%	2%
ASIA PACIFIC	15%	36%	37%	12%
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA	11%	31%	41%	17%
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN	23%	32%	30%	14%

While most regions have seen stagnation or a slight regression from 2021 to 2022, the country team ratings for 2023 show a renewed upward trend in implementation across all regions.

Country teams in Europe and Central Asia met or exceeded requirements for the highest proportion of indicators. The greatest improvements were seen in the Asia-Pacific region and in Latin America and the Caribbean, with the latter seeing the greatest increase in country teams exceeding requirements. Country teams in Africa and the Arab States also made some progress. The number of indicators for which country teams missed requirements fell across all regions.

Regional commissions and country teams are increasingly collaborating to synergize efforts towards disability inclusion. For example, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia worked with the Lebanon country team to map disability-inclusive human resources practices and co-design an outreach strategy to recruit candidates with disabilities, together with three United Nations agencies and organizations of persons with disabilities.
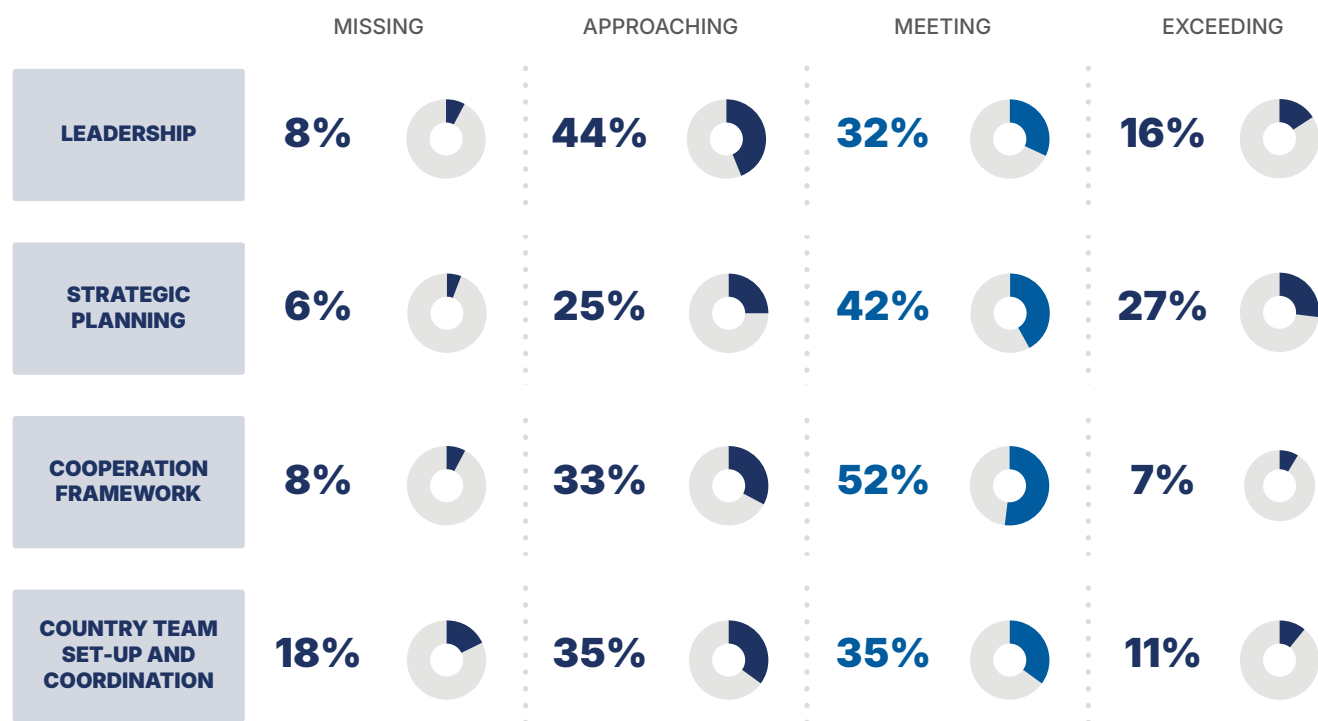
Leadership, strategic planning and management

Figure IX
2023 rating for United Nations country teams in core area 1, by performance indicator

	MISSING	APPROACHING	MEETING	EXCEEDING
LEADERSHIP	8%	44%	32%	16%
STRATEGIC PLANNING	6%	25%	42%	27%
COOPERATION FRAMEWORK	8%	33%	52%	7%
COUNTRY TEAM SET-UP AND COORDINATION	18%	35%	35%	11%

Country teams, like entities, performed most strongly in the area of leadership, strategic planning and management.

They have taken advantage of new cooperation framework cycles to mainstream disability inclusion throughout their strategic planning processes and this is building a foundation for progress in other areas.

Country teams' leadership made substantial progress in demonstrating their commitment to championing disability inclusion, with 48 per cent of country teams meeting or exceeding requirements in this area. Resident coordinators and heads of agencies in a growing number of country teams used both their internal and public communications to raise awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities and mobilize actions towards inclusion – especially around the

International Day of Persons with Disabilities. More country teams made disability inclusion a recurring or standing agenda item in meetings of heads of agencies, while a few incorporated it into the resident coordinator office workplan or performance appraisal system. Still, more systematic engagement is needed to drive implementation of the Strategy across country teams, along with a deeper embedding of disability inclusion in leadership actions.

Strategic planning remains the strongest area of performance for country teams, as mainstreaming of disability inclusion in common country analyses becomes more systematized and consistent. Ninety-two per cent of country teams included an analysis of the situation of persons with disabilities in their common country analyses, with some, such as Malawi and Tuvalu, examining the impact of factors such as age, gender, geographical location and ethnicity on the rights of persons with disabilities. Several country teams undertook their common country analyses in consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities. Twenty-seven per cent exceeded requirements by mainstreaming disability inclusion in the common country analysis updates.
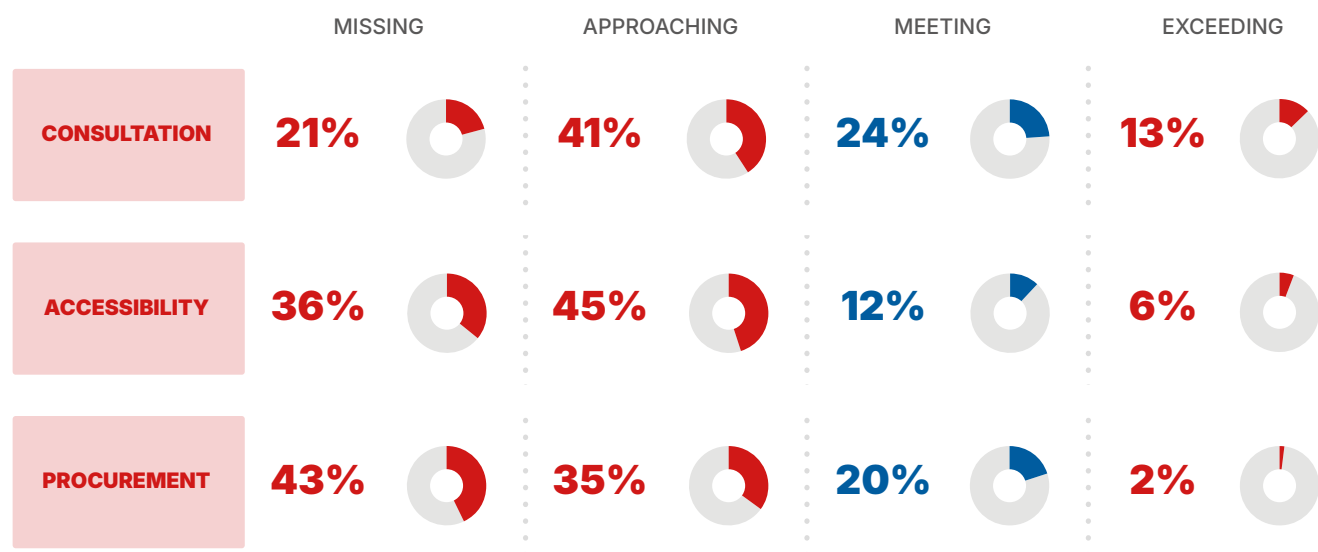
The mainstreaming of disability inclusion in common country analyses is driving its integration into cooperation frameworks with Governments. Ninety-two per cent of country teams included an explicit commitment to the rights of persons with disabilities in their cooperation frameworks, while 59 per cent mainstreamed disability inclusion in outcome areas and joint workplans. As more country teams incorporate disability inclusion across multiple thematic areas, many are disaggregating outcome or output indicators by disability, sex and age and incorporating a focus on persons with disabilities in outcomes targeting vulnerable populations. Several country teams consulted with organizations of persons with disabilities in the development of their cooperation frameworks; Honduras, Sri Lanka and Ukraine identified organizations of persons with disabilities as key partners in implementation.

In relation to institutional set-up, 82 per cent of country teams have established an internal disability inclusion coordination mechanism. However, only 46 per cent ensured that these mechanisms made substantive inputs across the cooperation framework cycle in consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities. Disability coordination mechanisms made vital contributions by advocating for increased funding; ensuring disability inclusion in humanitarian planning; facilitating accessibility audits; organizing capacity development opportunities for staff; and engaging with organizations of persons with disabilities. Several country teams incorporated organizations of persons with disabilities into cooperation framework joint steering committees, to ensure that persons with disabilities have a consistent voice in decision-making.

Core area 2
Inclusiveness

Figure X
2023 rating for United Nations country teams in core area 2, by performance indicator

	MISSING	APPROACHING	MEETING	EXCEEDING
CONSULTATION	21%	41%	24%	13%
ACCESSIBILITY	36%	45%	12%	6%
PROCUREMENT	43%	35%	20%	2%

Consultation and accessibility are preconditions for disability inclusion, yet as in the case of entities, country teams are progressing slowly in this area.

While consultation has increased overall, it remains largely ad hoc and country teams do not often engage with organizations of persons with disabilities across all areas of their work. The areas of accessibility and procurement have remained challenging. System-wide guidelines at headquarters level, even where not specifically directed towards country teams, can provide support and the implementation of disability-inclusive common services under the business operations strategy 2.0 can facilitate efforts to provide disability-inclusive business operations.

Consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities increased in 2023, with 79 per cent of country teams reporting at least one annual consultation. Several country teams systematized their engagement by establishing advisory or consultative councils, as in Guatemala, or by including organizations of persons with disabilities in disability inclusion working groups or other coordination mechanisms. Country teams made significant progress in consulting these organizations across the cooperation framework cycle, with 47 per

cent expanding their engagement to address many areas of programming and operations, including in relation to humanitarian emergencies, while 13 per cent established partnerships with organizations of persons with disabilities. Efforts to engage with diverse organizations and persons with disabilities, mostly women- and youth-led organizations, were made in Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Jordan, Nepal, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uganda.
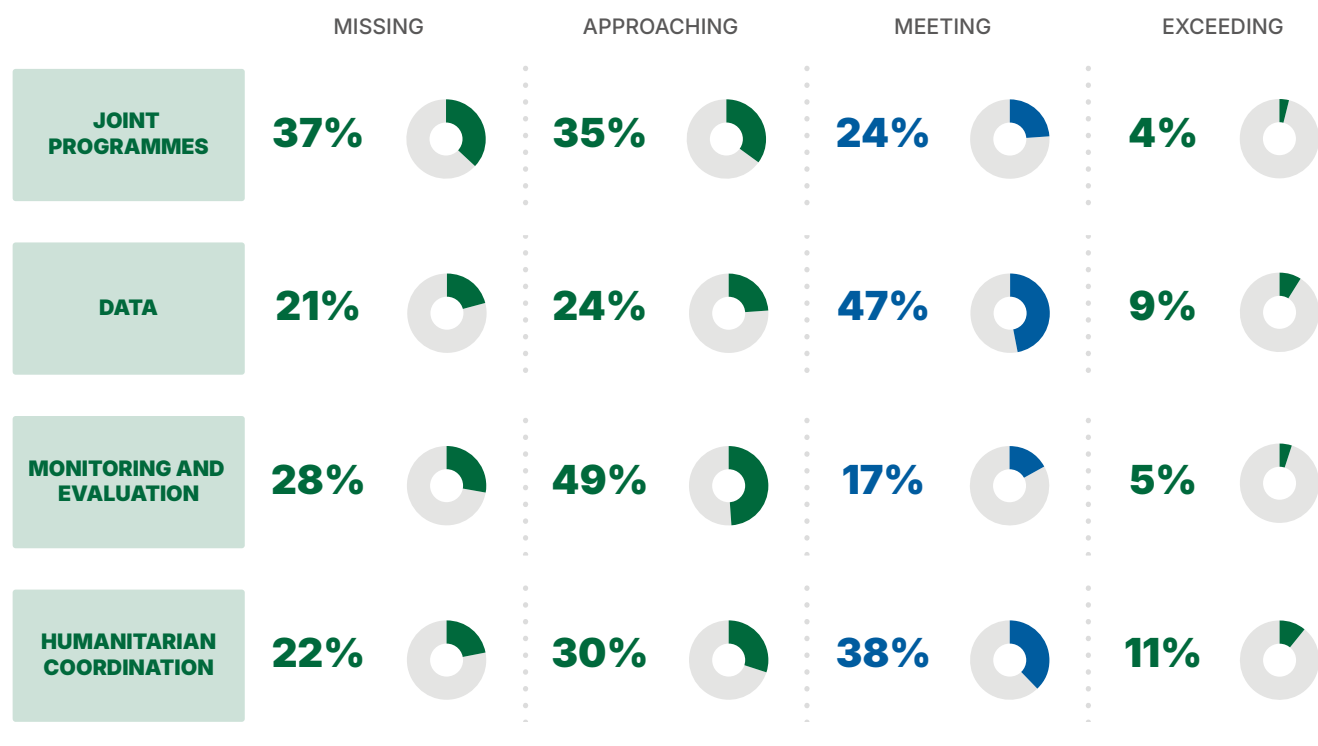
After three years of stagnation, some progress on accessibility was evident in 2023. Sixty-three per cent of country teams have undertaken baseline assessments of physical and digital accessibility, with some taking advantage of moves to new premises or expansion of existing premises to make progress on physical accessibility. Several consulted with organizations of persons with disabilities or staff with disabilities to facilitate accessibility assessments. Still, 45 per cent of country teams continued to face challenges in developing accessibility plans, while 36 per cent have not yet conducted holistic accessibility audits or begun to track reasonable accommodation requests.

Action to address disability inclusion in procurement practices is significantly lagging. Forty-three per cent of country teams have not yet taken initial actions by considering accessibility in the procurement of external goods and services. Country teams in Cambodia, Costa Rica, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan and Viet Nam developed accessibility checklists for procurement of goods, services or venues, while those in the Gambia, Guyana, North Macedonia and Turkmenistan worked with organizations of persons with disabilities to identify accessible venues or businesses owned and operated by persons with disabilities. Just 22 per cent of country teams included accessibility as a mandatory criterion in the periodic review of United Nations-authorized external venues.
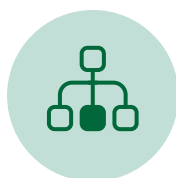
Core area 3
Programming

Figure XI
2023 rating for United Nations country teams in core area 3, by performance indicator

	MISSING	APPROACHING	MEETING	EXCEEDING
JOINT PROGRAMMES	37%	35%	24%	4%
DATA	21%	24%	47%	9%
MONITORING AND EVALUATION	28%	49%	17%	5%
HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION	22%	30%	38%	11%

Like entities, country teams have seen mixed results in mainstreaming disability inclusion in programming.

Advances in strategic planning have enabled country teams to make significant progress in disability-inclusive data, and promising gains in monitoring and evaluation. Inclusion in humanitarian planning has progressed as well. But disability inclusion in joint programming has proceeded slowly, with efforts largely limited to targeted programming. While targeted efforts are important for addressing the unique barriers faced by persons with disabilities, mainstreaming disability inclusion in all programming is essential to realize the commitment to leave no one behind.

Only 35 per cent of country teams addressed disability inclusion in their new joint programmes. In addition, 24 per cent took practical measures to mainstream disability inclusion in some of their existing joint programmes and had a targeted project on disability inclusion underway. A handful of country teams mainstreamed disability inclusion into joint programmes through the Peacebuilding Fund or the Spotlight Initiative, but most disability-related joint programming was implemented through the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. While these advances are to be acknowledged, 37 per cent of country teams missed requirements in this area, highlighting the urgent need to bolster efforts to mainstream disability inclusion in their new joint programmes.

Country teams made considerable progress in strengthening data on persons with disabilities. Fifty-five per cent have mapped available data and worked with government partners to fill data gaps, including through support for national Sustainable Development Goal databases. This represents an increase of 12 per cent over 2022. To improve the availability of data disaggregated by disability, sex, age, rural/urban residence and migration status, several country teams conducted capacity building for national statistical offices on the collection, analysis and dissemination of data; arranged consultations with organizations of persons with disabilities; and advocated with Governments to incorporate the Washington Group Questions[3] in censuses and national surveys. The country team in Iran used South-South and triangular cooperation exchanges as an entry point for including the Questions in the country's upcoming census. Country teams in China, Indonesia and Montenegro worked to advance the sharing of disability-inclusive data, both within the country team and with Government.

Country teams' achievements in mainstreaming disability inclusion into their cooperation frameworks are starting to enable progress towards disability-inclusive monitoring and evaluation. Seventy-two per cent of the country teams assessed progress towards disability-related results in their annual reports. In addition, 56 per cent provided training to their monitoring and evaluation groups, indicating that the adoption of indicators of disability inclusion is driving greater demand for such training. Evaluations of cooperation frameworks in Brazil, Colombia and India addressed progress on disability inclusion, with management responses endorsing actions to improve implementation. Rwanda engaged with organizations of persons with disabilities in the evaluation of its cooperation framework for 2018–2024.

Mainstreaming of disability inclusion in planning for humanitarian emergencies has progressed. Forty-eight per cent of country teams addressed specific risks faced by persons with disabilities in their emergency preparedness and response plans, a 14 per cent increase from 2022. Several country teams disaggregated data by disability in their humanitarian response plans – as is critical for assessing the scale of needs and implementing targeted interventions to address them – and mainstreamed disability inclusion in preparedness and response planning. In Ghana, the inter-agency rapid assessment checklist was revised to increase focus on persons with disabilities. Organizations of persons with disabilities participated in planning processes or coordination mechanisms in several country teams, including in Cameroon, the Fiji multi-country office, Mexico, Moldova, Mozambique and Myanmar.
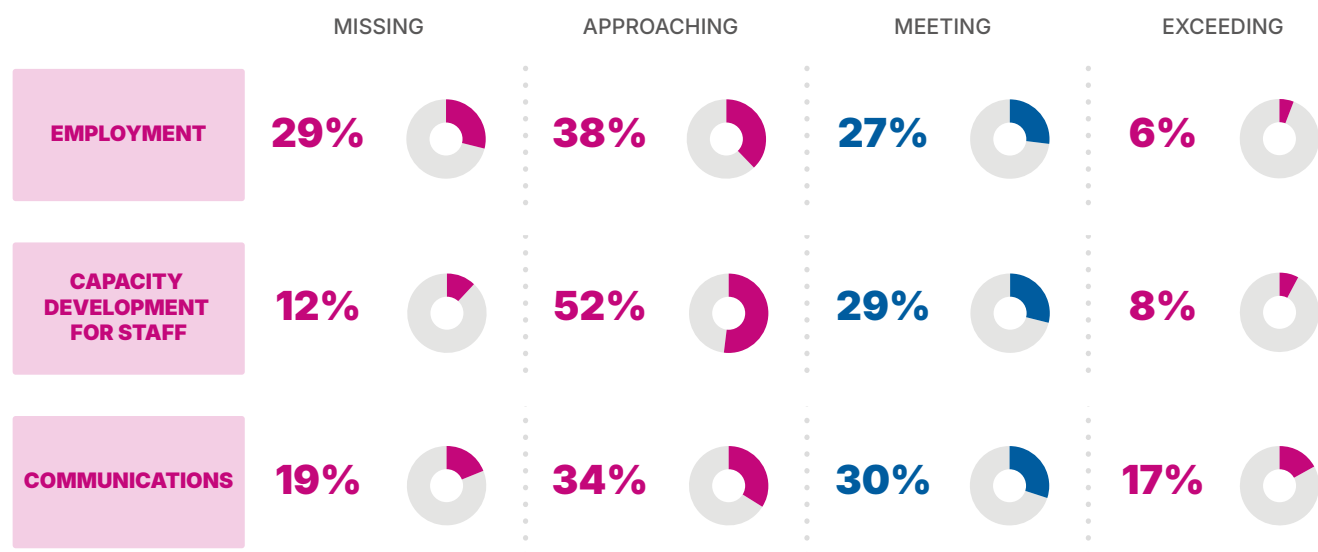
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3   The Washington Group on Disability Statistics question sets on functioning enable the collection of internationally comparable data on disability.
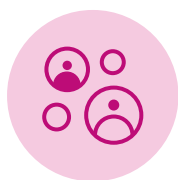
Core area 4
Organizational culture

Figure XII
2023 rating for United Nations country teams in core area 4, by performance indicator

	MISSING	APPROACHING	MEETING	EXCEEDING
EMPLOYMENT	29%	38%	27%	6%
CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR STAFF	12%	52%	29%	8%
COMMUNICATIONS	19%	34%	30%	17%

While more country teams are reflecting persons with disabilities in their communications, progress has been slower in the areas of employment and capacity development.

Employing more persons with disabilities is critical to ensuring that country teams reflect the diversity of the communities they serve, and building staff capacities on disability inclusion is a prerequisite for effective measures to recruit more persons with disabilities and ensure that they can participate in workplaces on an equal basis with others. Meanwhile, the mainstreaming of disability inclusion in communication supports heightened visibility and action across all areas of the Strategy.

Most country teams have not yet taken significant measures to support increasing numbers of employees with disabilities. While 71 per cent have adopted a disability-specific non-discrimination statement or included persons with disabilities in broader statements, 67 per cent have not yet undertaken targeted measures to ensure that vacancy announcements reach persons with disabilities.

Some country teams took promising, yet inconsistent actions to make their human resources practices disability-inclusive and recruit more persons with disabilities. Several country teams worked with organizations of persons with disabilities to disseminate vacancy announcements among persons with disabilities, some using databases of university graduates or professionals with disabilities. Country teams in Albania, Armenia, Costa Rica, Ghana, India and the United Republic of Tanzania undertook reviews of the disability status of their employees and consultants. Taking advantage of synergies with efforts to advance gender equality, Ghana adapted a United Nations Population Fund gender and disability tool to gather that data, while Costa Rica included disability status in its biannual gender parity mechanism.

While 89 per cent of country teams reported that training and learning materials are available for staff, only 37 per cent conducted inter-agency training sessions in collaboration with organizations of persons with disabilities, which are vital opportunities for peer-to-peer exchange and help to deepen country team-wide capacities to deliver as one on disability inclusion. Just 8 per cent of country teams reported that a majority of staff, including senior staff, have participated in a disability inclusion training at least once during the cooperation framework cycle. The country team in Kosovo[4] reported that all staff are required to attend training on the rights of persons with disabilities and working with persons with disabilities, while the country teams in Congo, Montenegro and Thailand reported that most of their staff participated in disability inclusion training sessions in 2023, with Thailand noting a substantial representation of senior staff. In the Philippines, a training session on mainstreaming disability inclusion was organized in collaboration with organizations of persons with disabilities and the country team plans for the next training to include a majority of senior staff.

More country teams addressed disability inclusion in their communications and advocacy. Forty-seven per cent integrated it in their inter-agency communication group's annual workplan, with some citing the United Nations Disability-Inclusive Communications Guidelines as facilitating their efforts. Seventeen per cent undertook public campaigns to increase the visibility of persons with disabilities and raise awareness of their rights, including through public photo exhibitions and social media. Country teams in Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Thailand, Uganda and Uzbekistan focused their communications and advocacy for the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence around the increased risks facing women and girls with disabilities, while the country team in the Central African Republic incorporated disability inclusion into its communications for the Secretary-General's campaign to End Violence against Women and Girls. At the same time, 19 per cent of country teams do not yet consider disability inclusion in their communications, or take a limited approach, most often only in activities around the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

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4   References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution **1244 (1999).**

C Inter-agency coordination

Since its launch, the Strategy has strengthened inter-agency coordination on disability inclusion, which has been a key driver of progress in mainstreaming disability inclusion in programming and operations. Participation in inter-agency mechanisms has been especially crucial in supporting focal points from smaller entities and country teams without their own networks. For example, Secretariat entities have benefited from a network co-chaired by the Department of Operational Support and the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, which provides guidance and support on a range of issues relevant to the Strategy's implementation.

Inter-agency collaboration has been key to mainstreaming disability inclusion within other priority areas, such as youth and gender, creating platforms for synergistic action to address intersectional drivers of discrimination and exclusion. The Youth2030 Task Team on Youth with Disabilities, which connects with networks on gender and other cross-cutting issues, has been instrumental in driving the participation of youth with disabilities in United Nations and other international forums. In 2023, it produced global research on the engagement of youth with disabilities in decision-making spaces, creating an important resource for the Organization's efforts to increase consultation with diverse populations of persons with disabilities.

The United Nations Inter-agency Group on Gender Equality and Disability Inclusion, convened by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, promotes an intersectional approach to disability inclusion. In 2023, it facilitated the development of an inter-agency statement on violence against girls with disabilities and is now identifying opportunities to build on promising practices for gender mainstreaming and intersectionality in the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy.

The United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities brings together 11 United Nations entities, Governments, organizations of persons with disabilities and broader civil society to support the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and disability-inclusive sustainable development. In 2023, the Partnership supported 50 national programmes and seven multi-country programmes, including disability-inclusive humanitarian responses, for example in Ukraine.

D

Building system-wide capacity

Under the leadership of the Deputy Secretary-General, the Disability Inclusion Team in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General continues to play a vital role in supporting and monitoring implementation of the Strategy across the system. The Team provides expertise, targeted technical support and training to disability focal points and staff at large.

With the Development Coordination Office, the Team provided targeted support to 13 country teams for implementation activities in 2022 and 2023. Country teams in this group, representing all regions, met or exceeded requirements for 61 per cent of the indicators, up from 53 per cent in 2022. In response to demand for dedicated training, a workshop was organized for disability focal points in 36 country teams and resident coordinator offices in Africa. Through peer-to-peer collaboration and support in developing action plans, the workshop contributed to progress among the region's country teams, which met or exceeded requirements for 32 per cent of indicators in 2023, up from 23 per cent in 2022.

In partnership with the International Labour Organization and organizations of persons with disabilities, the Disability Inclusion Team offered an in-depth course in 2023 to enhance knowledge of disability inclusion among disability focal points and others directly working to implement the Strategy. At the same time, the online course "United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy: putting words into action", designed to increase knowledge and awareness among staff at large, expanded its reach through increased enrolment and additional language versions. Participants in both trainings rated them highly in terms of relevance and applicability to their work.

These capacity- and knowledge-building efforts have facilitated a deeper understanding of disability inclusion and dissemination of practical knowledge on how to implement the Strategy. The upward trend in performance at both the country team and entity levels, along with increased engagement in the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy focal point networks and annual reporting on the Strategy's implementation, clearly demonstrate that they are yielding results and that the investments in capacity enhancement should be continued.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Fulfilling the commitment to leave no one behind requires the United Nations to embed disability inclusion at the core of its organizational culture and ensure its sustainability across the system, for the long-term. It requires Member States to include persons with disabilities in all efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda and realize their rights, in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The United Nations system has made noteworthy progress in many areas of the Strategy, some starting from a very low baseline. However, the system is not meeting requirements for over half of its indicators. Good practices across the Organization and initiatives such as United Nations 2.0 provide ample opportunity for acceleration to realize the Strategy's full potential and institutionalize disability inclusion.

In this regard, the following recommendations should guide the United Nations system to accelerate progress:

a.   Implement disability inclusion as a priority and regularly monitor progress in senior leadership meetings, including through the resident coordinator system;

b.   Explicitly integrate disability inclusion in strategic planning processes, including in strategic outcomes and indicators, with an associated budget;

c.   Require accessibility in new investments, conduct due diligence to avoid creating new barriers for persons with disabilities and systematically invest existing resources in a manner that contributes to disability inclusion and improves accessibility;

d.   Mainstream disability inclusion and accessibility in operations, across all pillars of the United Nations, set entity-specific targets to accelerate progress, and track resource allocations;

e. Mainstream disability inclusion across the programme and project cycle, utilizing disability data and the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities to ensure that interventions address barriers and realize the rights of persons with disabilities;

f. Establish diverse and intersectional representation in partnerships with organizations of persons with disabilities in civil society consultation mechanisms, both disability-targeted and mainstream, at all levels;

g. Leverage United Nations 2.0 and other system-wide organizational commitments to accelerate the implementation of the Strategy and embed disability inclusion and accessibility across the work of the Organization.

Lastly, the sustained support of Member States is critical to the success of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy and to fulfilling the 2030 Agenda's core promise to leave no one behind. In this regard, Member States are encouraged to formally endorse the Strategy, prioritize regular monitoring of disability inclusion in the Executive Boards of United Nations entities in which they are members and facilitate the provision of adequate resources for accessibility and disability inclusion.

United
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