

Transcript for Final UNDIS Presentation

This document contains the transcript of the presentation video on the Evaluation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy.

Introduction

Slide 1

This independent system-wide evaluation was conducted by the UNSDG System-Wide Evaluation Office. It provides a comprehensive assessment of the first five years of implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, or UNDIS.

Overview

Slide 2

Our evaluation had two main purposes: First, to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the UNDIS in advancing disability inclusion since its launch in 2019. Second, to capture lessons learned and provide recommendations for improvement.

This was an extensive undertaking. We conducted 15 country case studies across all regions. We examined 37 UN entities and 2 missions. In the process we interviewed 651 stakeholders. Importantly, 149 of those interviewed self-identified as persons with disabilities. We also surveyed 583 UN employees with disabilities and 242 members of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities, or OPDs.

Findings

Slide 3

Let me walk you through the key findings. The findings are set out in detail in the evaluation report. I will present a brief high-level overview.

Slide 4

Starting with design and relevance:

The UNDIS aligns well with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It appropriately emphasizes mainstreaming disability inclusion across all UN work rather than treating it as a separate issue.

However, we found critical gaps. The UNDIS lacks a theory of change – there is no clear roadmap showing how internal changes within the UN will lead to better outcomes for persons with disabilities globally. The relationship between making the UN more inclusive as an employer and delivering better programming is not well articulated.

Slide 5

The Accountability Framework has been useful as a guide, but it has limitations. It relies entirely on self-reporting, which raises reliability concerns. It also misses key areas – for example, financial resources are not tracked, data collection is limited, and intersectionality is not adequately captured.

While the strategy included initial consultation with persons with disabilities, there is no mechanism for their ongoing engagement in monitoring implementation. This is a missed opportunity for accountability.

Slide 6

Moving to effectiveness - what has UNDIS actually achieved?

There has been measurable progress. The percentage of indicators met or exceeded by entities increased from 16% in 2019 to 42% in 2024. For Country Teams, it rose from 24% to 44%. But this masks significant variation - 18% of entities have not reported at all, and progress differs dramatically across indicators.

We have seen the most improvement in institutional setup and leadership. However, critical operational areas lag behind - accessibility, reasonable accommodation, employment of persons with disabilities, and organizational culture change have seen limited progress.

A telling statistic is that less than one-third of UN employees with disabilities surveyed consider the UN inclusive and accessible. Many report denial of the adjustments they need to do their job well as well as persistent discrimination.

On programming, while disability is increasingly referenced in strategic documents, implementation remains uneven. We found limited evidence of how many persons with disabilities are actually reached by UN programmes or what resources are allocated to disability inclusion.

Slide 7

Progress in consulting OPDs has improved - 63% of OPDs report better engagement over the past five years. But meaningful participation remains inconsistent, with only 17% saying their input leads to concrete action.

Employee resource groups exist mainly in larger entities. They are often ad hoc, narrowly focused on employment issues, and critically under-resourced. While they play a positive role, lack of funding severely restricts their capacity to provide the comprehensive support employees need.

Systematic efforts to reach the most marginalized groups are limited. The UN often treats persons with disabilities as homogenous. Key barriers include missing disaggregated data, insufficient resources, poor understanding of intersectionality, and tension between universal versus targeted approaches.

Slide 8

Regarding efficiency of the implementation of the UNDIS:

Inter-agency cooperation has yielded some gains through specialization and knowledge sharing. Joint initiatives have increased. But system-wide policy development has been slow - only procurement has comprehensive system-wide guidance after five years.

There is strong demand for knowledge and tools, but the systems to share them are inadequate. The Disability Inclusion Team in the

Secretary-General's office operates with just two staff members - clearly insufficient for coordinating system-wide transformation.

Resources are a critical constraint. Most entities struggle with insufficient funding for implementation. Small seed funding has catalyzed initial progress but has not been sustained or scaled. There is no systematic tracking of disability inclusion expenditures across the system.

Slide 9

The disability inclusions focal point system, while essential, faces serious challenges with responsibilities typically added to existing duties without dedicated time or recognition in performance reviews. High staff turnover undermines continuity.

Slide 10

On the sustainability of UNDIS interventions and results:

The institutional framework is fragile. The coordinating team depends entirely on extra-budgetary funding. Leadership support varies significantly and often depends on individual champions rather than systematic commitment.

Integration into organizational processes shows gaps between policy and practice. While strategic documents include disability, operational implementation lags. Without sustainable financing and dedicated human resources, progress risks being reversed.

Conclusions

Slide 11

Let me now share our six overarching conclusions.

Slide 12

We concluded that the UNDIS has been an important catalyst for change, creating momentum from a low baseline. But implementation varies so much across the UN system that system-wide transformation has yet to be achieved. We found islands of excellence alongside areas of minimal progress.

For UNDIS 2.0, clarity on fundamentals is needed - what exactly is the UNDIS trying to achieve, by when, and how? The current strategy lacks these basic strategic elements.

Without stronger implementation mechanisms - including an adequately resourced coordination body and an accountability framework that captures outcomes, not just processes - UNDIS cannot reach its potential.

Slide 13

Resources remain a fundamental constraint. The UNDIS was launched without dedicated funding or resource tracking mechanisms. While creative approaches have emerged, the gap between needs and resources severely limits progress.

While there is strong appetite for learning, the United Nations lacks the expertise, training systems, and knowledge management infrastructure needed for transformation.

Finally, the United Nations is far from being an employer of choice for persons with disabilities. Despite some policy improvements, persistent discrimination and inadequate reasonable accommodation create substantial barriers.

Recommendations

Slide 14

Based on these findings and conclusions, the evaluation makes five main recommendations for strengthening the UNDIS.

Slide 15

Our first recommendation is to revise UNDIS by the second quarter of 2026. The United Nations needs UNDIS 2.0 with clear vision and time-bound goals. Most importantly, the organization needs a theory of change that shows exactly how UN actions lead to better outcomes for persons with disabilities.

The revision should strengthen the ambition for system-wide transformation and embed key principles—equity, intersectionality, and meaningful engagement with OPDs. The United Nations should maintain the twin-track approach, combining mainstreaming with strategic targeted interventions.

The United Nations should preserve flexibility for its diverse entities while providing better guidance. And critically, there is need for clear institutional architecture that defines who is responsible for what. This revision must connect internal transformation to how the United Nations supports Member States.

Slide 16

Recommendation two focuses on strengthening implementation through five concrete actions.

First, revise the Accountability Framework to capture actual outcomes, not just processes. It is also necessary to reach out to the 18% of entities not reporting and align the framework with Gender and Youth strategies to reduce the reporting burden.

Second, to strengthen the institutional arrangements, establish a properly resourced Disability Inclusion Office—with real capacity to convene. At the same time, ensure UNDIS focal points have clear terms of reference and dedicated time for this work.

Third, develop a system-wide action plan with measurable targets and timelines. Fourth, every entity head should create disability inclusion action plans, developed with employees with disabilities and OPDs. Fifth,

Resident Coordinators should convene the UNCT to develop, implement and monitor disability inclusion action plans.

Slide 17

Recommendation three addresses critical resources. The United Nations should track disability inclusion spending through a unified system—so that it knows exactly what it's investing in disability inclusion.

The Global Disability Fund shows what is possible with 100 million dollars mobilized across 100 countries. The UN needs to leverage this model systematically.

Partnerships are key. Strategic financing and implementation coalitions are essential with OPDs, the private sector, international financial institutions, civil society and academia. These partnerships should co-design, co-finance and implement inclusive solutions at scale, leveraging diverse expertise and resources.

Critically, it is essential to engage with OPDs as co-designers, not beneficiaries and to invest in building OPD capacity as strategic counterparts – with specific guidance for engaging underrepresented groups—persons with intellectual disabilities, psychosocial disabilities, and deaf blindness who often remain excluded even from disability initiatives.

Slide 18

Recommendation four tackles knowledge and capacity gaps. The United Nations has expertise within its system that's not being shared—for example ILO knows workplace accommodation, WHO understands assistive technology, UNICEF leads on inclusive education. The United Nations should leverage this.

The United Nations create accessible platforms for sharing what works. Make disability training mandatory for all staff, especially senior leadership—currently only about 6% of United Nations personnel have completed the available disability inclusion training.

Focal points need proper support—induction packages, peer learning, ongoing guidance. Build communities of practice around specific challenges and foster partnerships.

And ensure that knowledge systems make full use of evaluation evidence to identify what works, for whom and in what contexts.

Slide 19

Our final recommendation: make the UN a genuine employer of choice for persons with disabilities.

The Secretary-General should request the High-Level Committee on Management to develop system-wide approaches for three areas: First, recruitment and retention—including tracking how many employees have disabilities and supporting the leadership of persons with disabilities in senior roles. Second, reasonable accommodation—with clear policies, portable accommodations across entities, and enhanced funding to support needs. Third, inclusive workplaces—accessible buildings, platforms, and culture.

Dedicated entry programmes like a Young Professionals Programme should be created for persons with disabilities. Stigma should be challenged through employee resource groups and disability inclusion champions.

The United Nations needs to make special efforts in Secretariat entities, where progress has lagged behind.

Slide 20

The evaluation report is available on the System-wide Evaluation Office website. Please take the opportunity to read the full report or at least the summary report.