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**Social development: social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, persons with disabilities and the family**

## Disability inclusion in the United Nations system

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report is submitted pursuant to resolution [75/154](#), in which the General Assembly requested a progress report on steps taken by the United Nations system towards mainstreaming disability inclusion, including implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy.

The present report outlines the progress made in 2020 based on an analysis of reports submitted by 66 United Nations entities and 130 country teams reporting under the Strategy's accountability framework. Given the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on persons with disabilities, the report also contains a brief reflection on disability-inclusive COVID-19 response and recovery, following the release of a dedicated policy brief on the topic in May 2020.

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\* [A/76/150](#).



## I. Introduction

1. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has affected all nations. No one has been spared the impact of the pandemic. More than just a health crisis, it is a crisis with socioeconomic, humanitarian, security, and human rights dimensions. Persons with disabilities are among the most marginalized in any crisis-affected community,<sup>1</sup> and the COVID-19 crisis has been no different, disproportionately affecting women, men, boys and girls with disabilities. The success of our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic will be measured by the extent to which people, particularly those who are most excluded, are placed at the centre of recovery efforts, and to which the central promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – to leave no one behind – is answered.

2. Realizing the rights of persons with disabilities should not remain an aspiration, therefore, but become our pathway to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis should be transformed into an opportunity to build a world that is more equal and inclusive and to ensure that our societies are more resilient and agile. The United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, launched two years ago, in 2019, provides a robust framework for decisive action across the system to include persons with disabilities in the programmes and operations of our Organization, and in any plans for COVID-19 response and recovery. The Strategy has been instrumental throughout this pandemic in coordinating our efforts on disability inclusion,<sup>2</sup> and will remain our compass towards inclusive recovery.

3. This year's report reflects on the discernible advancement at all levels of the system, as well as gaps in the mainstreaming of disability inclusion. It also reflects on the continuing challenges and opportunities, in relation both to the pandemic and to the transformation still required to achieve lasting change for persons with disabilities. The progress made despite the pandemic demonstrates the commitment throughout the United Nations system to prioritizing disability inclusion, even at a challenging time. We must therefore maintain our focus in order to realize greater change for persons with disabilities.

4. I welcome the continued support demonstrated by Member States for the Strategy, including as expressed in General Assembly resolution [75/154](#) and Human Rights Council resolution [43/23](#). I also welcome the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (General Assembly resolution [75/233](#)), in which Member States have taken greater steps to call on entities of the United Nations development system, as well as United Nations country teams, to continue to work collaboratively to accelerate the full and effective mainstreaming of disability inclusion into the United Nations system and implement and report on the Strategy.

5. An inclusive and accessible organization is critical to supporting Member States to implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. I am therefore more resolved than ever to ensure that persons with disabilities are included in the COVID-19 recovery

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<sup>1</sup> See [A/70/709](#).

<sup>2</sup> The term “disability inclusion” refers to the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in all their diversity, the promotion and mainstreaming of their rights into the work of the Organization, the development of disability-specific programmes and consideration of disability-related perspectives, in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This requires the development and implementation of a consistent and systematic approach to disability inclusion in all areas of operations and programming, both internally and externally.

process and encourage all entities and country teams to redouble their efforts to mainstream disability inclusion throughout the United Nations system.

## II. Implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy

6. Since its launch in 2019, the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy has galvanized our Organization into action, providing the foundation for meaningful, sustainable and transformative progress on disability inclusion from Headquarters to the field and in all areas of our work. In 2020, the first progress report submitted to the General Assembly (A/75/314) contained the baseline results of reporting by 57 entities under the entity accountability framework. The report also included a snapshot of the country level from seven country teams participating in a targeted roll-out of the United Nations country team accountability scorecard on disability inclusion.<sup>3</sup>

7. In the present report, an even more robust picture is established, with 66 entities and 130 country teams reporting on the implementation of the Strategy. As in the first report, progress is reported against the indicators of the entity accountability framework and the accountability scorecard, using a self-assessed five-point grading system with the following ratings: missing requirements, approaching requirements, meeting requirements, exceeding requirements and not applicable. At a minimum, all entities and country teams should aspire to meeting requirements, with the long-term goal of committing themselves to exceeding requirements. Justification of self-assessed ratings is requested from entities and country teams, as well as information on action planned to improve performance moving forward.

8. Given that leadership remains crucial in driving the success of the Strategy, my Senior Adviser on Policy within the Executive Office of the Secretary-General continues to provide high-level guidance and foster coordinated implementation of the Strategy across the system. She is supported by a dedicated team that provides coordination and technical assistance, as well as practical tools and resources to entities and country teams to implement and report on the Strategy.

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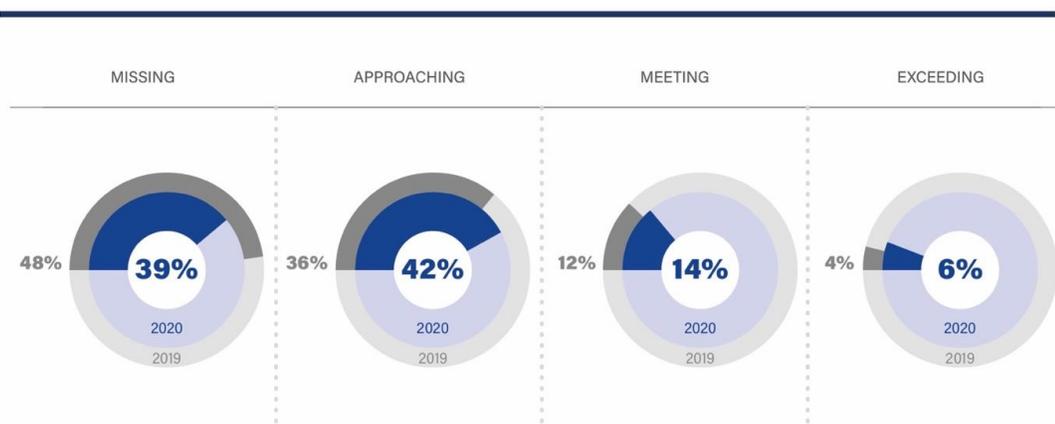
<sup>3</sup> The accountability framework tracks implementation of the Strategy across the system and is critical in driving change. It comprises two related components: an entity accountability framework and a United Nations country team accountability scorecard on disability inclusion. Each component includes a set of indicators focused on four core areas: leadership, strategic planning and management; inclusiveness; programming; and organizational culture. The accountability framework is an essential instrument to assess progress and gaps in the work of the United Nations, with a view to advancing system-wide planning and action, promoting synergies and reducing duplication.

## A. Accountability at the entity level

### 1. Comparative analysis of overall entity performance in 2019 and 2020

Figure I

#### Overall ratings comparison for United Nations entities



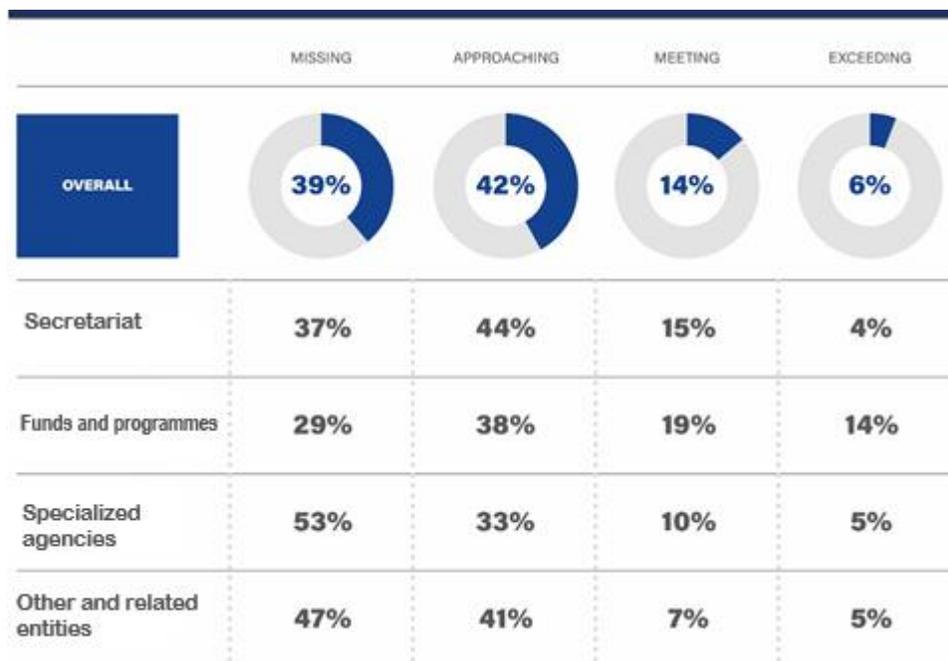
9. In 2020, 66 entities reported under the entity accountability framework, using the accessible online reporting platform developed for this purpose. The total number of entities comprised the following: (a) 43 Secretariat entities, including 16 peacekeeping operations and special political missions and 5 regional commissions; (b) 7 funds and programmes; (c) 8 specialized agencies; and (d) 8 other and related entities.<sup>4</sup>

10. Despite the pandemic, the number of entities reporting has increased by 16 per cent and, overall, entities continue to demonstrate progress on disability inclusion. In

<sup>4</sup> The reporting entities, organized into the four categories under which analysis was carried out, are as follows: (a) Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, Department of Global Communications, 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 Commission for Africa, Economic Commission for Europe, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Office of Counter-Terrorism, Office for Disarmament Affairs, Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, Office of Internal Oversight Services, 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 Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in 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 in Afghanistan, United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia/United Nations Support Office in Somalia, secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei, United Nations Mission in South Sudan, United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 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 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

comparison to 2019, there has been an increase in the percentage of entities that are approaching (from 36 to 42 per cent), meeting (from 12 to 14 per cent) and exceeding requirements (4 to 6 per cent). However, these figures also demonstrate that the greatest concentration of progress is among entities moving from missing requirements to approaching requirements. While this is to be expected as entities are in an initial phase of implementing the Strategy, considerable action, and at greater pace, is required to see a higher percentage of entities meeting requirements in the coming years.

Figure II  
2020 ratings for the United Nations system, by entity type



11. The 2019 report highlighted that the indicator requiring the most improvement was procurement, and it is with respect to this indicator that the most progress was achieved in 2020, with an increase from 14 to 67 per cent of entities approaching requirements. Similarly, considerable progress is also evident in evaluation, institutional set-up and employment of persons with disabilities. Significant gaps remain with regard to consultation with persons with disabilities and disability-

Diplomacy for Central Asia, United Nations Truce Supervision Organization/Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, and United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia; (b) United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment 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 Fund for Agricultural Development, International Labour Organization, International Telecommunication Union, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Industrial Development Organization, Universal Postal Union and World Health Organization; (d) International Organization for Migration, International Trade Centre, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 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 and United Nations System Staff College.

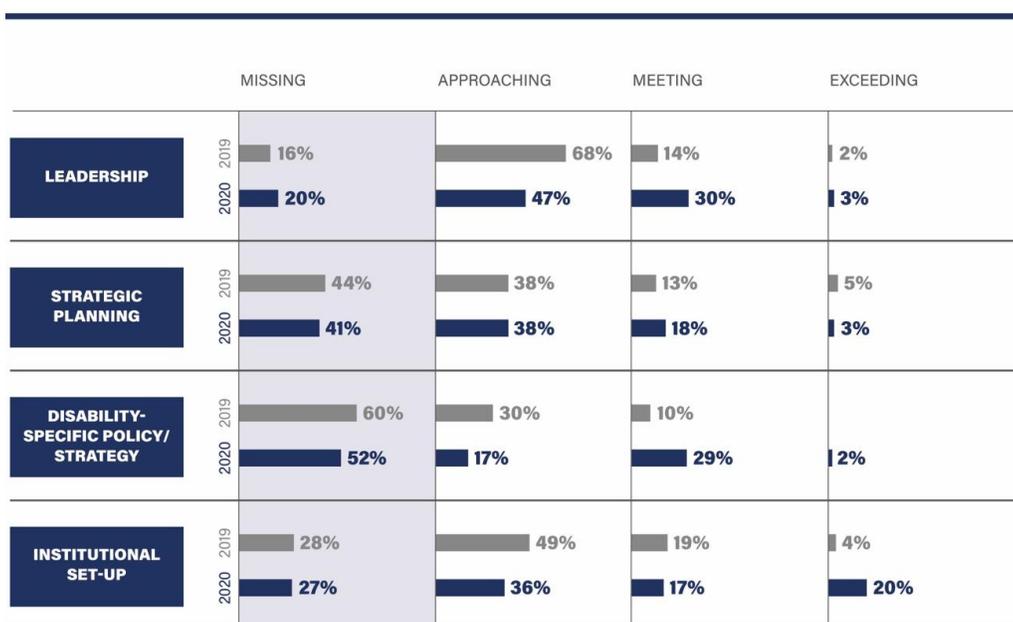
inclusive communications, and efforts have been undertaken in 2021 that will support entities to make strides in the coming year.

## 2. Comparative analysis by core area

### (a) Core area 1: leadership, strategic planning and management

12. Core area 1 focuses on indicators related to leadership, strategic planning and management. There is demonstrable progress in comparison to 2019, with an overall increase in entities meeting or exceeding requirements across the four indicators. At the same time, reporting illustrates that better tracking of resources and greater investment in dedicated human resources are needed.

Figure III  
2020 ratings for United Nations entities in core area 1, by performance indicator



13. As in 2019, entity leadership continues to demonstrate strong support for implementation of the Strategy. A total of 47 per cent of entities reported approaching requirements, with senior leadership championing disability inclusion, including with respect to COVID-19. In addition, 30 per cent of entities reported meeting requirements by reviewing the implementation of their disability-specific policies and strategies, an increase from 14 per cent in 2019. As leadership commitment drives organizational change, the continued engagement of senior leadership will be key to maintaining momentum for the overall success of the Strategy.

14. Performance on the strategic planning indicator is similar to 2019, with 59 per cent of entities explicitly referring to persons with disabilities in their strategic planning documents. Of those, 18 per cent are meeting requirements, as their strategic plans include results on disability inclusion, and data is disaggregated by disability. The number of entities exceeding requirements remains low (3 per cent), indicating that systems to track allocation of resources on disability inclusion are not yet in place. Given that many entities that are missing requirements indicated their intention to include persons with disabilities when their next strategic planning documents were developed, it is expected that progress on this indicator will continue steadily.

15. As laid out in the Strategy, for systematic and coherent implementation of disability inclusion, entities are required to have a disability-specific policy or strategy in place. The proportion of entities meeting or exceeding requirements under this indicator has increased from 10 to 31 per cent. While 52 per cent of entities are still missing requirements, over half have committed to developing a policy or strategy during the next two years. Entities are urged to update governing bodies on the implementation of their policies and strategies to ensure progress.

16. Furthermore, to successfully mainstream disability inclusion, an entity needs to have an institutional set-up under which responsibility is assigned for technical guidance, coordination and advocacy. This indicator was one of the highest scoring, with 20 per cent of entities exceeding requirements, an increase from 4 per cent in 2019. This means that entities have an individual or unit with substantive knowledge on disability inclusion, and a focal point network that meets regularly. A further 53 per cent are approaching or meeting requirements, and report that an individual or unit is in place. While several larger entities have personnel with dedicated expertise on disability inclusion, it is worth noting that focal points in smaller entities are often responsible for multiple portfolios and may not have substantive expertise on disability inclusion. It is therefore vital that entities empower their focal points and strengthen their knowledge and capacity.

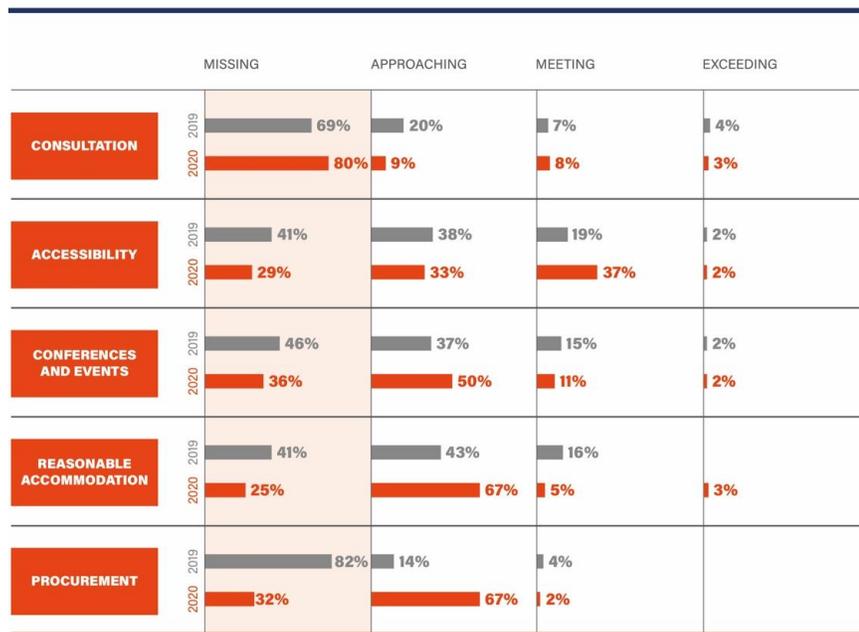
**(b) Core area 2: inclusiveness**

17. Core area 2 focuses on inclusiveness, and on strengthening the accessibility of physical premises, digital technologies, and goods and services, and deepening engagement with organizations of persons with disabilities. A significant proportion of entities have progressed from missing requirements to approaching requirements in this area, demonstrating that over the past two years, foundational elements such as policies and guidelines have been strengthened. Progress on these indicators will be reliant on entities now implementing such elements.

18. Many entities reported that they consulted organizations of persons with disabilities. However, as the majority of entities did not have consultation guidelines, a criterion for approaching the requirements of this indicator, 80 per cent of entities reported missing requirements. To ensure meaningful and systematic consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities, system-wide guidelines were developed and disseminated in 2021. It is therefore expected that performance on this indicator will improve considerably in the coming year.

19. Accessibility is a prerequisite for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of an entity's work. To make progress on this indicator, entities are required to undertake assessments of the accessibility of their physical and digital infrastructure and develop and implement policies and action plans to improve their performance. There has been clear improvement, with 39 per cent of entities meeting or exceeding requirements (compared to 21 per cent in 2019). With regard to the accessibility of conferences and events, 50 per cent of entities are approaching requirements, meaning they have undertaken baseline assessments of accessibility, many of which focused on the accessibility of digital platforms as a result of COVID-19.

Figure IV  
**2020 ratings for United Nations entities in core area 2, by performance indicator**



20. Reasonable accommodation remains key to disability inclusion as it enables persons with disabilities to exercise their rights on an equal basis with others. There has been an increase in the number of entities approaching requirements under this indicator, with 67 per cent reporting that they had or were developing a strategy on reasonable accommodation, compared to 43 per cent in 2019. However, knowledge and awareness on reasonable accommodation remains significantly low, with only 8 per cent of entities meeting or exceeding requirements. A working group on reasonable accommodation was established in 2020 to foster better understanding of the issue, and to consider how to operationalize practices on reasonable accommodation within entities.

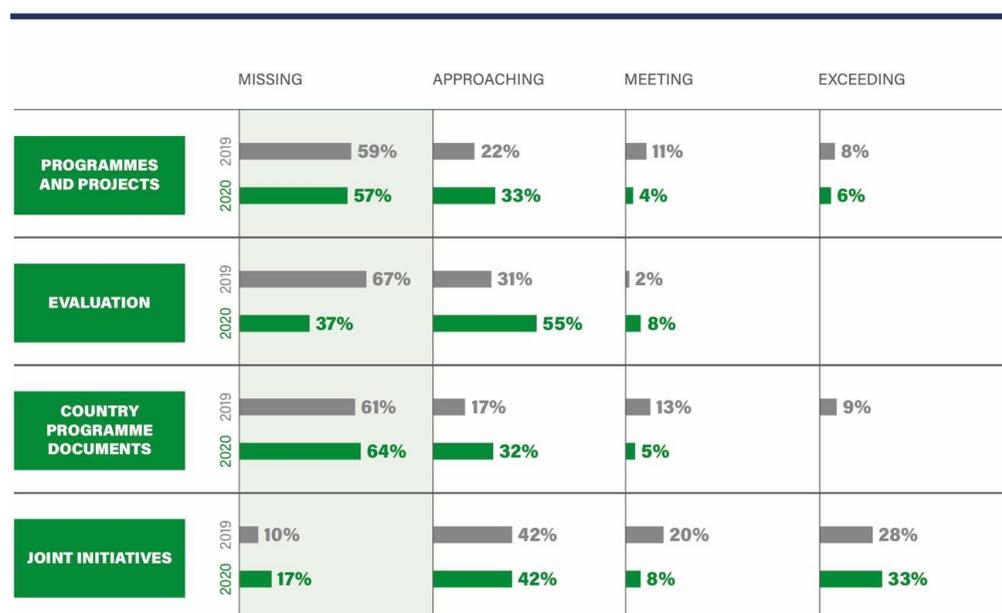
21. Disability-inclusive procurement can have transformational effects for persons with disabilities, and, as mentioned above, there has been significant improvement on this indicator after the 2019 baseline revealed it to be one of the lowest performing. The Procurement Network of the High-level Committee on Management developed and disseminated guidelines on disability-inclusive procurement in 2020 to guide entities' procurement policies and procedures. These guidelines contributed to an increase in entities approaching the requirements under the indicator, from 14 to 67 per cent. In some instances, entities are beginning to set and meet targets for the percentage of procurement documents that have accessibility as a requirement, though further consideration is required on how to undertake such work in a systematic manner.

**(c) Core area 3: programming**

22. Core area 3 focuses on disability inclusion in relation to programming. It is evident that a majority of entities recognize the value and importance of collaborating on disability inclusion through joint initiatives. With better understanding of the Strategy's indicators, in some instances entities have reassessed their ratings from 2019, resulting in a decrease of achievement that is particularly evident in this core area.

23. Entities implementing projects and programmes must ensure the mainstreaming of disability inclusion throughout the programme cycle. In all, 33 per cent of entities reported that they were approaching the requirements for this indicator, signifying that guidance on addressing disability inclusion in programming was in place. With 57 per cent of entities still missing requirements, considerable work is needed in this area. However, three entities reported exceeding requirements by establishing and exceeding targets for a minimum number of their projects to be disability-inclusive, and these practices could serve as good examples for others.

Figure V  
2020 ratings for United Nations entities in core area 3, by performance indicator



24. Strengthening disability inclusion in evaluations will enable entities to promote accountability and learning with respect to inclusion of persons with disabilities. After the launch of the Strategy, the United Nations Evaluation Group updated its guidance on addressing disability inclusion in evaluations. Some 55 per cent of entities are approaching the requirements of this indicator, meaning that their evaluation guidelines address disability inclusion. As the majority of entities follow the Evaluation Group's guidance, it is expected that disability inclusion in evaluations will be addressed further in the coming years.

25. Country programme documents are a key strategic planning tool for entities implementing programmes at the country level, and are important vehicles for ensuring that disability inclusion is mainstreamed into country-level programming. A total of 32 per cent of entities reported that they were approaching the requirements by mainstreaming disability inclusion into their guidance on country programme documents. An additional 5 per cent of entities are meeting requirements, by ensuring that their country programme documents include analysis and corresponding programming on disability inclusion. Many entities reported that this indicator was not applicable, as they had no programmes at the country level.

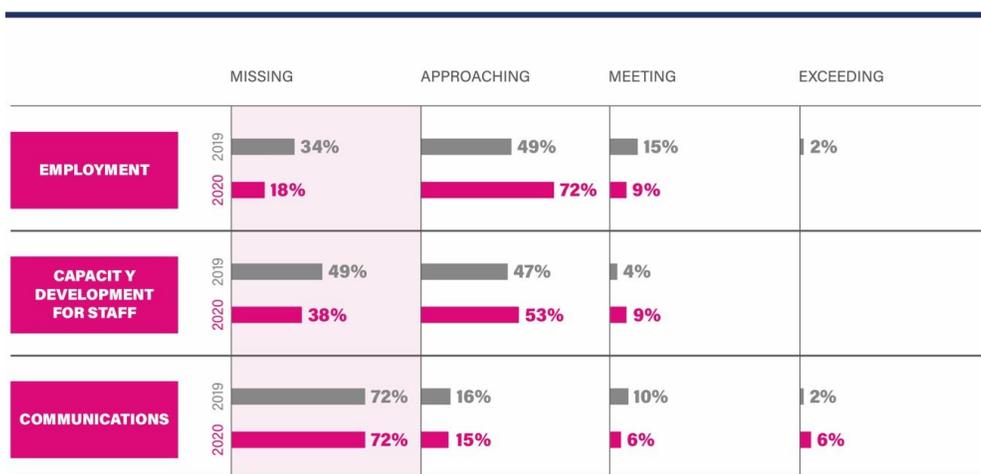
26. Joint initiatives continued to be one of the highest scoring indicators, with 41 per cent of entities meeting or exceeding requirements. Overall, 33 per cent of entities are exceeding requirements, meaning they participate in at least one inter-agency coordination mechanism and have more than one joint initiative in place on disability

inclusion. Many entities participated in joint programmes supported by the multi-partner trust fund of the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund.

**(d) Core area 4: organizational culture**

27. Core area 4 focuses on elements contributing to the organizational culture of the United Nations, including establishing a diverse workforce and strengthening the capacity of staff to promote and achieve the rights of persons with disabilities. Similarly to core area 2, it is clear that entities have progressed from missing requirements to approaching requirements, and have put in place foundational elements required to further progress. At the same time, a high level of focus on strengthening capacity is required to achieve successful implementation across all of the Strategy's indicators.

Figure VI  
2020 ratings for United Nations entities in core area 4, by performance indicator



28. As the United Nations aims to become an employer of choice for persons with disabilities, it is encouraging that 72 per cent of entities are approaching the requirements of this indicator compared to 49 per cent in 2019. This means that more entities have adopted strategies and policies on employment and human resources that are inclusive of persons with disabilities. In total, 9 per cent of entities that are meeting requirements demonstrated through surveys that the satisfaction level of staff members with disabilities matched that of all staff members. However, even with these entities, the number of individuals willing to disclose disability was low, suggesting that action is required to ensure an enabling environment in which staff feel comfortable disclosing their disability status.

29. The implementation of the Strategy across the Organization has spurred demand for capacity-building opportunities. As a result, there has been an improvement in performance on this indicator, with 53 per cent of entities approaching the requirements, meaning they are providing entity-wide learning opportunities on disability inclusion for their staff. Training is mandatory for the 9 per cent of entities meeting requirements. Several inter-agency training modules on different aspects of disability inclusion are under development to respond to the demand, and will be available system-wide in the coming year.

30. Communication can also play a positive role in significantly reducing the stigma and discrimination faced by persons with disabilities in our programmes as well as

our operations. The previous report indicated that very few entities had guidelines on disability-inclusive communications, a criterion for approaching the requirements of this indicator. To respond to this gap, system-wide communication guidelines were developed by the Department of Global Communications in 2021, which will support greater staff awareness and capacity on disability-inclusive communications. Pending the guidelines, the number of entities missing requirements remained high, at 72 per cent. However, many entities missing requirements reported that they included persons with disabilities in mainstream communications, and with the opportunity to adopt and implement the guidelines, there is considerable potential for improvement in 2021.

### **3. Performance of peacekeeping and special political missions**

31. Peacekeeping operations and special political missions are critical in the work of the United Nations to ensure disability inclusion in conflict and crisis zones. Persons with disabilities are often among those most adversely affected in situations of conflict and humanitarian crisis and are too often overlooked in recovery and reconciliation efforts. The work of the United Nations in this area offers an opportunity to further disability inclusion in complex settings and contribute to the implementation of Security Council resolution [2475 \(2019\)](#).

32. Overall, 50 per cent of peacekeeping operations and special political missions reported in 2020, an increase from 38 per cent in 2019. Although ratings were lower than entity ratings as a whole, there has been a noticeable improvement in comparison to 2019. This offers encouragement that the Strategy has provided traction for engagement and progress on disability inclusion.

33. In core area 1, on leadership, strategic planning and management, overall performance remained similar. Leadership and institutional set-up were the two strongest indicators, with 50 and 56 per cent of missions approaching or meeting requirements respectively. It is worth noting that the appointment of focal points has strengthened implementation of the Strategy and supported improved performance under both indicators.

34. In core area 2, on inclusiveness, the proportion of those reporting that they are approaching or meeting requirements has increased from 35 to 50 per cent. Improvements included conducting baseline accessibility assessments and identifying funds necessary for improvements. Although consultation with persons with disabilities remains low, two missions reported that COVID-19 had created an opportunity to consult organizations of persons with disabilities about the pandemic's impact and the effects of the recovery effort.

35. In core area 3, on programming, the proportion of missions approaching, meeting or exceeding requirements has increased from 35 to 43 per cent. A significant number of missions considered indicators in this area to be not applicable, particularly for evaluation and country programme documents, which is a reflection of their specialized work.

36. Lastly, in core area 4, on organizational culture, there has been a significant improvement since 2019, with the proportion of missions approaching or meeting requirements increasing from 24 to 47 per cent. All three indicators in this area have shown progress in terms of approaching requirements. Examples of such progress include missions developing and implementing mandatory training on disability inclusion for all staff members.

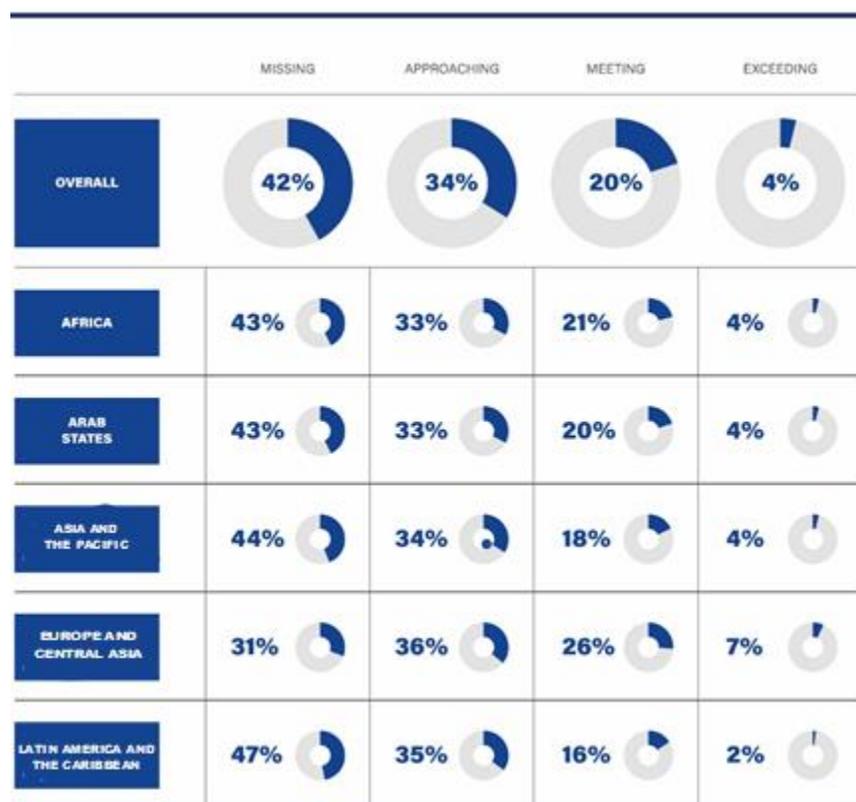
## B. Accountability at the United Nations country team level

### 1. Baseline reporting

37. The United Nations country team accountability scorecard on disability inclusion is the primary tool for implementing and reporting on the Strategy at the country level. In 2020, 130 country teams reported through the United Nations Sustainable Development Group's Information Management System, establishing the first comprehensive baseline on disability inclusion at the country level. Resident coordinators played a key role in championing disability inclusion and in dedicating staff time to support the implementation of the Strategy by country teams.

38. The results demonstrate that in the first year of implementation, country teams have started taking action on disability inclusion. Overall, country teams are approaching the requirements in 34 per cent of the indicators, meeting requirements in 20 per cent, and exceeding requirements in 4 per cent. Country teams are missing the requirements of 42 per cent of the indicators. Performance was fairly even across geographic regions: Europe and Central Asia had the strongest rating, either meeting or exceeding the requirements of 33 per cent of indicators, followed by Africa (25 per cent), Arab States (24 per cent), Asia and the Pacific (22 per cent) and Latin America and the Caribbean (18 per cent).

Figure VII  
2020 ratings for United Nations country teams, overall and by region



39. The highest performing indicator was strategic planning, with 52 per cent of country teams reporting that they were either meeting or exceeding requirements, followed by data (38 per cent) and cooperation framework (37 per cent). Several indicators demonstrate significantly lower performance, in particular accessibility of

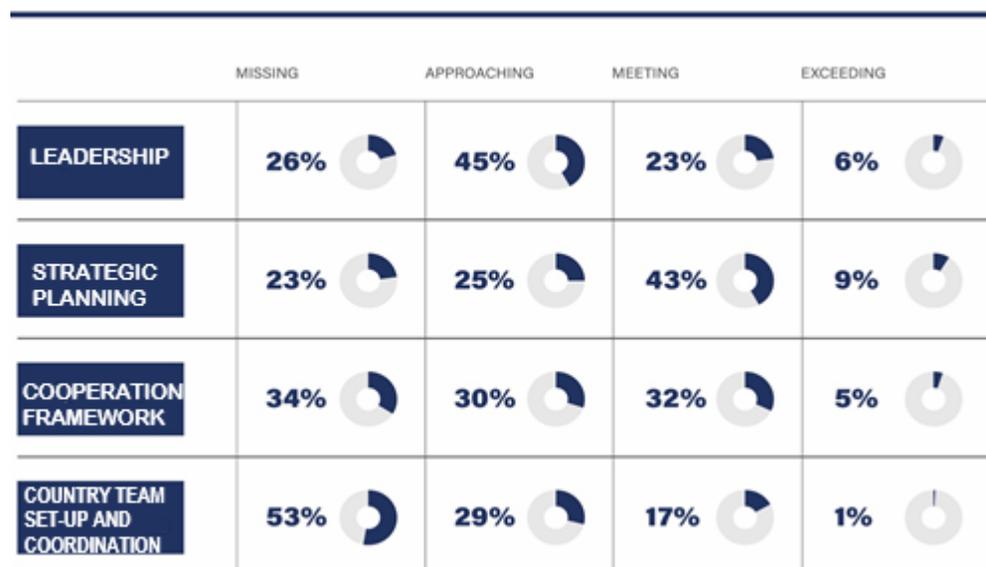
United Nations premises and accommodation, and inclusive procurement of goods and services, under which 65 per cent and 60 per cent of country teams, respectively, reported that they were missing the requirements.

## 2. United Nations country team performance by core area

### (a) Core area 1: leadership, strategic planning and management

Figure VIII

**2020 ratings for United Nations country teams in core area 1, by performance indicator**



40. Commitment from senior leadership at the country level is key to the success of the Strategy. A total of 74 per cent of country teams reported that their resident coordinators and heads of agencies were taking action on disability inclusion. Specifically, 45 per cent are approaching requirements, meaning that the country team leadership is championing disability inclusion internally and publicly; 23 per cent are meeting the requirements, by placing disability inclusion as a regular item on the agenda of meetings of the heads of agency; and 6 per cent are exceeding requirements, by reflecting disability inclusion in their workplans and performance appraisal systems.

41. Addressing disability inclusion in the common country analysis is critical for the inclusion of persons with disabilities, as it informs the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and thus outcomes at the country level. Overall, 25 per cent of country teams are approaching the requirements, indicating that the common country analysis explicitly addresses the situation of persons with disabilities, while 43 per cent are meeting requirements, by including analysis in at least one thematic area. A further 9 per cent are exceeding requirements, meaning that they include analysis on persons with disabilities in the majority of thematic areas. While this is the highest performing indicator overall, a lack of reliable data is reported by many as a barrier to conducting more in-depth analysis on the situation of persons with disabilities.

42. Integrating disability inclusion into cooperation framework outcomes and result areas enhances the likelihood that the rights of persons with disabilities will be systematically addressed across programming and partnerships. In all, 37 per cent of country teams are meeting or exceeding requirements, by explicitly committing to the

inclusion of persons with disabilities in their cooperation framework, visibly mainstreaming disability into at least one of the outcome areas and joint workplans and ensuring that outcome indicators are disaggregated by disability, sex and age. Although 64 per cent are missing or approaching requirements, country teams expressed considerable intent to incorporate disability inclusion into their cooperation framework in the next update. The guidance from the United Nations Sustainable Development Group on cooperation frameworks and common country analysis can be utilized by country teams to progress under this indicator.<sup>5</sup>

43. Coordination is vital to ensuring that disability inclusion is mainstreamed across the country team. Some 47 per cent of country teams have established a coordination mechanism on disability inclusion, either as a stand-alone mechanism or as part of a broader existing coordination mechanism. Of these, 17 per cent are meeting requirements, signifying that input on disability inclusion has been made to strategic planning processes through the coordination mechanism. As 53 per cent of country teams reported missing requirements, significant efforts are required to strengthen coordination on disability inclusion.

**(b) Core area 2: inclusiveness**

44. As mentioned previously, consulting with organizations of persons with disabilities is a fundamental aspect of the Strategy. While 34 per cent of country teams are missing the requirements of this indicator, 31 per cent are approaching them, meaning they held at least one consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities in 2020. Meanwhile, 34 per cent of country teams are meeting or exceeding requirements, indicating that organizations of persons with disabilities are consulted throughout the Cooperation Framework cycle, as well as in relation to emergency risk preparedness and response.

45. Persons with disabilities cannot participate in the work of the country team if accessibility is not considered. Accessibility is the lowest scoring indicator, with 65 per cent of country teams missing the requirements. Some 28 per cent are approaching the requirements, meaning that they have conducted a baseline assessment of the accessibility of common premises and services. Among the country teams that reported that they were approaching, meeting (7 per cent) or exceeding (1 per cent) the requirements, very few reported on reasonable accommodation requests, which indicates that sufficient provisions are not in place, staff are not aware of them, or persons with disabilities requiring reasonable accommodation are not working or participating in the activities of the country team. Disability inclusion, including common services for accessibility, has been incorporated into the new country Business Operations Strategy, and it is expected that performance on this indicator will improve moving forward.

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<sup>5</sup> See [https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/UN-Cooperation-Framework-Internal-Guidance-Final-June-2019\\_1.pdf](https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/UN-Cooperation-Framework-Internal-Guidance-Final-June-2019_1.pdf).

Figure IX  
2020 ratings for United Nations country teams in core area 2, by performance indicator



46. On procurement, only 9 per cent of country teams are meeting the requirements, by considering accessibility in guidelines related to the procurement of venues, goods and services, and ensuring that accessibility is included in the periodic reviews of United Nations authorized external venues. With 30 per cent of country teams approaching and 60 per cent missing the requirements, considerable attention is still needed in this area. One challenge that country teams are reporting is that of identifying suppliers that are able to meet accessibility requirements. Working with host Governments and local business communities to raise awareness on this issue are best practices reported by country teams that can be replicated.

### (c) Core area 3: programming

47. Joint programming is an important mechanism that the United Nations uses to deliver on its mandate at country level. Overall, 23 per cent of country teams are meeting or exceeding the requirements of this indicator, meaning they have mainstreamed disability inclusion into existing joint programmes and projects, in addition to implementing a specific joint programme on disability inclusion. Of the 46 per cent of country teams that reported that they were missing requirements, just under half noted that disability inclusion had been mainstreamed into some, but not the majority, of their joint programmes, which is a criterion for approaching the requirements of this indicator.

48. The availability of high-quality data on persons with disabilities is also essential to ensure that programmes and projects are inclusive of persons with disabilities and that progress on inclusion and outcomes is tracked. Country teams are uniquely positioned to support Governments to increase the quality of available data, and reporting on this indicator demonstrates a good baseline. A total of 27 per cent of country teams are approaching the requirements, meaning that they map data and data gaps on persons with disabilities in national statistical sources. A further 38 per cent are meeting or exceeding requirements, meaning they are also working with at least one government partner on disability data.

49. When monitoring and evaluation processes consider persons with disabilities, they allow better tracking of progress on disability inclusion. Some 43 per cent of country teams are approaching the requirements of this indicator, by assessing progress against specific disability-inclusive results in the annual report under the

Cooperation Framework. In addition, 5 per cent are meeting the requirements, signifying that the country team's monitoring and evaluation group has received training on disability data. However, with more than half of country teams missing requirements, this area needs considerable focus.

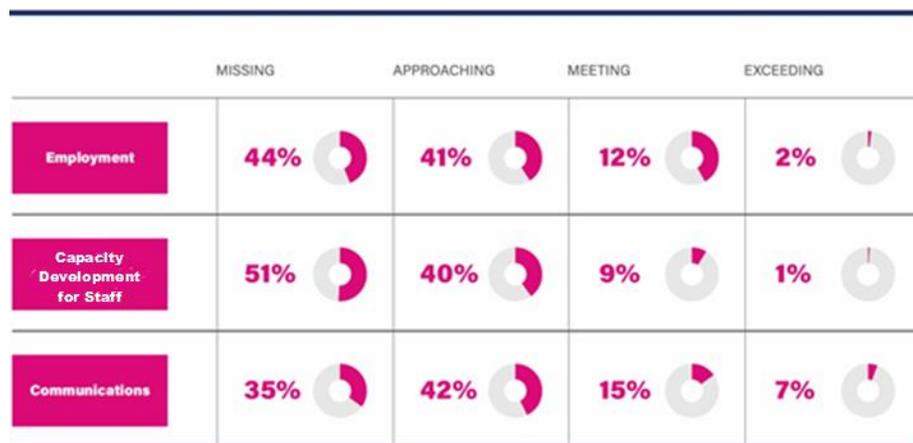
Figure X  
**2020 ratings for United Nations country teams in core area 3, by performance indicator**



50. Persons with disabilities face disproportionately higher risks in humanitarian crises, and, without disability-inclusive planning and response, are more likely to be left behind. A total of 26 per cent of country teams are meeting the requirements of this indicator, meaning that their emergency preparedness and response plan or humanitarian response plan spells out how any response will address specific risks faced by persons with disabilities and disaggregate data by disability to the extent possible. It is encouraging to note that 6 per cent of country teams are exceeding requirements, meaning that organizations of persons with disabilities are participating in humanitarian coordination mechanisms. For the 32 per cent that are missing requirements, greater awareness is required on the relevance of this indicator to all country teams, whether or not a humanitarian country team is in place.

**(d) Core area 4: organizational culture**

Figure XI  
**2020 ratings for United Nations country teams in core area 4, by performance indicator 4**



51. As mentioned previously, persons with disabilities should have equal opportunities to work in the United Nations at the country level. Only 14 per cent of country teams are meeting or exceeding the requirements of this indicator, by explicitly referring to persons with disabilities in statements on non-discrimination in employment and vacancy announcements and undertaking targeted outreach. With 44 per cent of country teams missing requirements, considerable attention needs to be paid to improving recruitment practices aimed at increasing the employment of persons with disabilities at the country level.

52. To support country teams to effectively mainstream disability inclusion into all programmes and operations, it is vital to improve staff capacity. Overall, 40 per cent of country teams make learning opportunities on disability inclusion available to staff, thus approaching the requirements of this indicator. A further 10 per cent are meeting or exceeding requirements, by organizing at least one inter-agency training on disability inclusion annually. Restrictions owing to the COVID-19 pandemic required the majority of training in 2020 to be conducted online, which provided an opportunity for country teams to engage a greater number of participants and partners.

53. Similarly, disability-inclusive communications can play an important role in mainstreaming disability inclusion and reducing the stigma and discrimination faced by persons with disabilities. Performance with respect to this indicator constitutes a good starting point, with 42 per cent of country teams approaching the requirements, signifying that their mainstream communications positively reflect persons with disabilities. A further 15 per cent are meeting the requirements, meaning that the inter-agency communication group's annual workplan includes action on disability-inclusive communications, while 7 per cent are exceeding the requirements, having undertaken a campaign on persons with disabilities in the reporting year.

### **C. Action planned to strengthen disability inclusion**

54. Entities and country teams reported on action plans aimed at strengthening their work on disability inclusion across a range of areas. Key highlights include the following:

(a) **Embedding disability inclusion in strategic plans and establishing institutional ownership.** In 2020, this resulted in the adoption of disability-inclusive commitments in strategic planning documents, the drafting of disability-specific strategies, and capacity-strengthening on disability inclusion in the institutional set-up. In 2021, country teams should be able to match this progress by ensuring that when key strategic planning documents are renewed, they mainstream disability inclusion into them. Efforts are also planned to strengthen the focal point system for both entities and country teams, to provide the leadership with an effective system for directing and monitoring progress and harnessing synergies across the system;

(b) **Building the knowledge and capacities of staff on disability inclusion.** Awareness-raising and capacity-building training for United Nations staff is planned by many entities and country teams, including building awareness of how to mainstream disability inclusion and strengthening the capacity of focal points to fulfil their vital role;

(c) **Improving physical and digital accessibility.** Entities and country teams have pledged to improve the accessibility of both existing structures and new buildings and involving organizations of persons with disabilities in the process. In procurement, many entities report that they are planning to improve accessibility for suppliers with disabilities through the e-tendering process. Entities plan to continue to increase online accessibility for staff, ensure that accessible technology supports the inclusion of persons with disabilities in events and consultations, and respond to reasonable accommodation requests;

(d) **Supporting meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations.** The engagement of persons with disabilities needs to go beyond a few specific areas and into every aspect of our work. It must not be limited to disability-specific issues alone. Country teams and entities plan to improve their engagement with organizations of persons with disabilities by utilizing the centrally developed guidelines on consultation. Planned action includes conducting mapping exercises to identify potential partners, engaging with organizations of persons with disabilities through in-person and online meetings, surveys and consultations, and addressing intersectionality through the engagement of a broader range of representative organizations;

(e) **Responding to COVID-19.** Many entities and country teams have planned action to strengthen disability inclusion within the pandemic response and recovery, such as supporting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in vaccination campaigns and vaccine roll-out, and undertaking joint programming to address the stigma, discrimination and violence faced by women with disabilities as a result of the pandemic;

(f) **Mobilizing resources.** To implement these plans, entities and country teams need to be able to identify and mobilize resources. Resources to address disability inclusion remain a challenge, but it is encouraging that the call for proposals by the multi-partner trust fund of the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in late 2020 received 110 country team applications, demonstrating a clear demand from country teams for resources to implement joint programmes on disability inclusion.

### III. COVID-19 response and recovery

55. COVID-19 has caused unprecedented challenges for persons with disabilities. As discussed in the previous report, the policy brief on a disability-inclusive response to COVID-19 was issued in May 2020. Thereafter, a dedicated time-bound working

group was convened by the Senior Advisor on Policy to work on the recommendations outlined in the brief. The working group developed a number of resources to support entities, country teams and Governments in their achievement of disability-inclusive health, socioeconomic and humanitarian response and recovery, which are hosted on a dedicated COVID-19 portal.<sup>6</sup> Tele-health services were widely used during the pandemic, and, as a result, the development of guidelines on the accessibility of tele-health services was initiated.

56. Support was provided to ensure that the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 considered disability inclusion, and 54,000 persons with disabilities in six countries are being supported through the Central Emergency Response Fund. Targeted action has also been taken: for example, the multi-partner trust fund of the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities launched a global programme to support disability-inclusive response and recovery. This programme leveraged the experiences of entities and country teams, international organizations of persons with disabilities and civil society organizations to build better understanding and capacities with respect to disability-inclusive responses, provide support to organizations of persons with disabilities to engage in recovery efforts, and generate evidence, analysis and guidance to influence recovery plans.

57. At the national level, country teams have supported the development of response plans and dedicated measures to address the needs and rights of persons with disabilities. For example, in Papua New Guinea, the United Nations is supporting women with disabilities to run campaigns on ending violence against women in a pandemic. In Nepal, information on COVID-19 included accessibility features, including sign language, completed in collaboration with the umbrella organization of persons with disabilities. In Mozambique, the United Nations and stakeholders have started developing a national agenda for inclusion in the COVID-19 response, while Ecuador is using online learning sites to provide families with disability-inclusive resources for distance learning.

58. The report entitled *Early Lessons and Evaluability of the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF*, completed in April 2021, found that efforts had been made to strengthen disability inclusion in the response. It noted the importance of a coordinated, system-wide response for disability inclusion, and found that the structures put in place, such as the focal point system established under the Strategy, played a facilitative role in ensuring that the principles of leaving no one behind were embedded in the response. The report noted that data on the targeting of persons with disabilities were limited, meaning that there is a risk of missing an entry point for disability inclusion and better overall intersectional analysis during the recovery effort.

## **IV. Overarching action to implement the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy**

### **A. Overall coordination and facilitation**

59. High-level coordination remains critical to advancing the Strategy. My Senior Advisor on Policy convened two meetings of entity principals in 2020 to share reflections and lessons learned from the first year of implementation and to discuss operational and programmatic challenges and opportunities. Active outreach to all resident coordinators was also undertaken to urge leadership at the country level to

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<sup>6</sup> [www.un.org/en/coronavirus/disability-inclusion](http://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/disability-inclusion).

ensure implementation of the Strategy and disability-inclusive COVID-19 response and recovery.

60. Leadership has also been key to empowering the entity focal point network, which remains the primary system-wide coordination platform at the technical level. More than 74 entities participate in the network, and effective communication channels have been established to share knowledge, upcoming training, briefings and resources. To foster alignment with other corporate priorities, close coordination has also been established with the implementation of the System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and the United Nations Youth Strategy.

61. To ensure momentum at the country level, the Development Coordination Office, in collaboration with the dedicated team in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and with contributions from across the United Nations system, has provided ongoing technical support to country teams and continued to coordinate the country team focal point network. Regular webinars related to the Strategy's implementation were held throughout the year covering both programmes and operations. Disability inclusion has also been integrated into the country Business Operations Strategy 2.0, which will encourage the scaling-up of common services to improve the accessibility of premises and information and communications technology, and inclusive human resource services at the country level.

62. Leadership commitment within the United Nations system is matched by strong support from important external stakeholders, such as the Group of Friends on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Group of Friends on the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, the Global Action on Disability Network and organizations of persons with disabilities. These partnerships advance our common agenda to leave no one behind.

## **B. Inter-agency action**

63. Inter-agency networks also provide an opportunity to reiterate the importance of achieving the goals of the Strategy. In October 2020, the Procurement Network of the High-level Committee on Management endorsed and disseminated guidelines on implementing the procurement indicator of the entity accountability framework, which has informed an update of the Secretariat's procurement manual and the addition of a distinct indicator on disability inclusion in the sustainable procurement indicators framework. The United Nations Evaluation Group supported members on implementing and reporting on the entity evaluation indicator, and it plans to undertake a gap analysis and assessment on disability inclusion in evaluations in preparation of guidance on this area.

64. In 2020, the highest number of people in decades required humanitarian assistance, a situation further exacerbated by COVID-19. The focus of the Reference Group on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action in 2020 included engaging organizations of persons with disabilities, supporting the dissemination and implementation of the Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action and establishing linkages with other global processes and networks. The Reference Group also played a key role in ensuring that the humanitarian sector considered persons with disabilities in the COVID-19 response, developing key messages and hosting an online webinar to present practical examples of disability-inclusive response to COVID-19 in humanitarian settings.

65. The multi-partner trust fund of the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Inter-Agency Support Group on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities continued to play an important

role in mainstreaming disability inclusion at the entity and country team level and supporting the implementation of the Strategy. Collaboration through the Inter-Agency Support Group included a series of collective efforts in relation to COVID-19 to support disability-inclusive response and recovery. In 2020, the multi-partner trust fund of the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities supported 29 joint programmes, and tools were developed to advance the inclusion of persons with disabilities in laws, policies, systems and services.

## V. Existing gaps, opportunities and challenges

66. In its second year, the Strategy prompted entities and country teams with limited experience of disability inclusion to assess how they could begin to take action, and provided a framework for a systematic response for those more experienced in disability inclusion. Progress has been uneven, however, with certain areas showing more success than others. To fully realize the goals of the Strategy, it is necessary to draw lessons from the successes and focus on the areas and processes where progress has been delayed.

67. Reporting demonstrates that staff across entities have a much better understanding than in 2019 of the Strategy and its indicators. Enhanced understanding led to a reassessment of ratings compared to 2019, and overall the quality of reporting has improved. This improved reporting constitutes a more accurate reflection of the current state of disability inclusion within the system and the overarching action needed to improve, and helps entities and country teams understand which areas need to be strengthened and take action accordingly. Additionally, it helps improve recognition of the need to ensure continued attention to disability inclusion even among entities and country teams that are performing well.

68. It is clear from the reporting that the workforce of the United Nations system needs to be better equipped to lead on disability inclusion. Strengthening the capacities and technical expertise of staff should therefore continue to be a priority moving forward. It is hoped that entities and country teams will continue to consider pooling expertise and resources in this regard.

69. Similarly, the lack of data on persons with disabilities within national statistics and international development programmes remains a considerable challenge, and the United Nations system needs to lead by example and work with Member States to bridge this gap. It is therefore encouraging to see data being one of the higher scoring indicators in the first year of full reporting by country teams, and we should continue to develop this area of work.

70. Consultation with persons with disabilities is central to the implementation of the Strategy. Encouragingly, there have been several initiatives undertaken by individual entities and country teams to broaden the engagement of organizations of persons with disabilities, not just on disability-specific action. Moving forward, however, we have to consider how to ensure that persons with disabilities are systematically placed at the centre of the work of the United Nations and that the diversity of the population is reflected in all that we do.

71. The Strategy stresses the importance of this diversity and the need for an intersectional approach to respond to the multiple forms of discrimination that persons with disabilities face, and entities and country teams have taken steps in this direction. For example, the country team in Guatemala created a life-stories notebook of women and girls with disabilities to help document their situation before and after the pandemic. The peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic included youth with disabilities as part of an initiative with the National Youth Council to raise

awareness on COVID-19. However, intersectionality still needs to be addressed more consciously throughout the entire system's work.

72. COVID-19 has brought challenges to the mainstreaming of disability inclusion throughout the United Nations system. Many entities and country teams reported that their progress had slowed in the current year, for three main reasons: revision of priorities leading to the reduction of resources available for disability inclusion; intense workload linked to the COVID-19 response, meaning that staff did not have time to focus on this topic; and limited access to offices. The pandemic has also demonstrated the critical importance and transformative potential of embedding accessibility in programming, training and procurement and in the workplace, in terms of both digital infrastructure and physical accessibility, a point highlighted through the need for remote working and events in 2020. As the United Nations returns to working in physical offices, areas of success, such as improvements in digital accessibility, should be leveraged to re-energize momentum on disability inclusion.

73. One of the aims of the Strategy is to provide impetus to unlock more financial and human resources for the inclusion of persons with disabilities, by consistently applying a disability inclusion lens in the utilization of existing resources and by identifying new resources. In this regard, work has begun to establish a mechanism to track disability inclusion and associated expenditure in programmes and projects of Secretariat entities. The functionality, which will be integrated into the Secretariat's reporting system, will be rolled out in 2021.

74. It is encouraging that in 2020, mainstream funding mechanisms such as the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund, the Central Emergency Response Fund and the COVID-19 response and recovery multi-partner trust fund explicitly highlighted the inclusion of persons with disabilities in calls for proposals, in the evaluation of proposals for funding and in monitoring frameworks.

75. Indeed, while it is evident that more resources are being invested in disability inclusion than in the past, reporting continues to highlight the need for entities and country teams to dedicate further human and financial resources, particularly in the areas of accessibility, reasonable accommodation and staff capacity development. These needs were magnified by the strain placed across the system by the pandemic response. More investment is needed to address the institutional and internal capacity gaps and significant external work that remains to be done on the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

## **VI. Conclusion and recommendations**

76. In its second year of implementation, the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy has established a solid foundation on disability inclusion, which will pave the way for sustainable and transformative change. The reporting by entities demonstrates progress on disability inclusion across both programmes and operations. It is encouraging that all country teams also reported in the first year, demonstrating their commitment to disability inclusion and their intention to implement the Strategy. The quality of reporting has enabled the identification of bottlenecks and areas for focused efforts, some of which are being addressed already.

77. It is impossible to look back on the past year without reflecting on COVID-19 and the profound impact that it has had on the lives of persons with disabilities. Despite the pandemic, progress has been made towards realizing the goals of the Strategy. However, more work is required as an organization to put in place systems that support our communities and our societies to be more agile, accessible and

inclusive of everyone. As we build back better, I expect to see further improvements across the Organization in the next year. This also means ensuring that persons with disabilities and their representative organizations are actively involved in building and implementing the recovery effort.

78. Now, more than ever, is the time to redouble our efforts. The implementation of the Strategy remains a top priority, and I am committed to ensuring that the United Nations system answers the request by Member States in the quadrennial comprehensive policy review to advance disability inclusion, from our Headquarters to our field offices. I am encouraging United Nations entity and country team leadership to continue their efforts to implement the Strategy by building their capacities and allocating human and financial resources to advance disability inclusion.

79. However, achieving disability inclusion cannot be the responsibility of any one stakeholder alone. In this regard, I ask Member States to continue to hold our feet to the fire and support our efforts to implement the Strategy, including financially. I also urge Member States to share their best practices with us so that we can help each other in achieving meaningful and sustainable progress.

80. The Strategy is not just one of words; it is a pathway towards an inclusive and accessible future. It is our Organization's commitment to a world in which persons with disabilities participate fully and equally in civic, social, cultural and economic life. In less than two years, the United Nations system as a whole has shown that with strong resolve and commitment, we can transform words into action. The Strategy demonstrates the aspiration that the United Nations will lead by example on disability inclusion and achieve our common agenda of leaving no one behind.

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