

## REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

# Disability inclusion in the United Nations system

### Summary

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the States Members of the United Nations pledged to leave no one behind, including persons with disabilities. The United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy is my commitment to supporting Member States in their achievement of the 2030 Agenda and their implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

When launching the Strategy in June 2019, I stated that the United Nations would lead by example and raise its standards and performance on disability inclusion across all pillars of its work, from Headquarters to the field. The present report outlines the first steps on the path to achieving transformative and lasting change for persons with disabilities across the United Nations system.

In this context, the report reflects the discernible advances achieved by the United Nations since the launch of the Strategy. It draws on the progress reports submitted by United Nations entities under the Strategy's entity accountability framework and the United Nations country team accountability scorecard on disability inclusion, establishing the first comprehensive baseline upon which systemwide progress on disability inclusion can be assessed. The report also highlights challenges and opportunities in achieving disability inclusion, including those associated with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and disability-inclusive response and recovery efforts, and places a spotlight on key areas in which action and continued efforts, as well as support from Member States, are further required.

Given that the Strategy was launched only last year, in 2019, the present report represents the early efforts of the system in building a more inclusive United Nations for persons with disabilities, contributing to a more inclusive, accessible and sustainable world for all.

## Introduction

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution **74/144**, in which the Assembly invited me to submit to it at its twenty-fifth session a progress report on the steps taken by the United Nations system towards mainstreaming disability inclusion, including implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy.

The report is organized into seven sections. Following the introduction, an overview of the advances made in the United Nations on disability inclusion, including the adoption of the Strategy, is provided in section II; the first year of implementation of the Strategy at the entity and country levels is reported on in section III; coronavirus disease (COVID-19) response and recovery efforts are the focus of section IV; the overarching actions for implementation of the Strategy are considered in section V; challenges and opportunities are highlighted in section VI; and the conclusion and recommendations for consideration by the General Assembly are contained in section VII.

The report provides an analysis of information from **57 United Nations entities**<sup>1</sup> that reported under the Strategy's entity accountability framework and **seven United Nations country teams** that completed the accountability scorecard on disability inclusion as part of a targeted roll-out.

## Advancing disability inclusion in the United Nations system

Disability inclusion is an essential condition to upholding human rights, sustainable development, and peace and security. It is also central to the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind. The commitment to realizing the rights of persons with disabilities is not only a matter of justice; it is an investment in a common future.

However, persons with disabilities continue to be among those who are most excluded, including in gaining access to education, health services and employment and in participating in political decision-making. They represent a diverse group of people who have different impairments and support requirements and face significant barriers in exercising their rights throughout the life cycle. Some groups face even greater marginalization, for example women, children and older persons with disabilities, deafblind persons and persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, and are more likely to be excluded from services, to be placed in institutions and to experience higher rates of violence, neglect and abuse, including sexual and genderbased violence.

The global COVID-19 crisis has put a greater spotlight on the situation of persons with disabilities. As highlighted in my policy brief on a disabilityinclusive response to COVID-19, issued in May 2020,<sup>2</sup> persons with disabilities are among the hardest hit by the pandemic and experience higher rates of infection and death. The socio-economic and humanitarian repercussions of COVID-19 are deepening pre existing

<sup>1</sup> In the context of the present report, the term "entity" refers to major organizational units of the Secretariat, funds and programmes and other organizations of the United Nations system, including specialized agencies and related organizations.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.un.org/en/coronavirus/disability-inclusion](https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/disability-inclusion).

inequalities associated with disability and threatening to further exacerbate them. This is why I called, at the outset, for the design and implementation of disability-inclusive response and recovery measures to contribute to the development of more inclusive and accessible societies, in consultation with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations.

The present progress report comes at a critical time, when the world is facing multiple and unprecedented challenges and new opportunities. At the same time, the year 2020 marks 75 years of the United Nations and its Charter. It is also the year kickstarting the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals. From the first resolutions issued by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council in the 1950s to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in 2006, the United Nations system and Member States have repeatedly reaffirmed their commitment to the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities. The explicit inclusion of persons with disabilities throughout the 2030 Agenda, followed by the adoption, in 2019, of the first ever Security Council resolution on persons with disabilities in armed conflict (resolution **2475 (2019)**), reinforced the pledge to serve all peoples across all pillars of the Organization, as set out in the Charter. Moreover, Member States have consistently recognized the need for the United Nations to further enhance accessibility and mainstream disability inclusion.<sup>3</sup>

The heightened attention to persons with disabilities in the global agenda has galvanized the United Nations system and laid the groundwork for the adoption of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy.<sup>4</sup> The Strategy provides the foundation and necessary tools for meaningful, sustainable and transformative progress on disability inclusion across all pillars of the United Nations, across programmes and operations, and from Headquarters to the field. The Strategy is an essential instrument for enabling the United Nations to support Member States in their achievement of international human rights, development and humanitarian commitments. It is also a way to exemplify efforts to achieve disability inclusion across the world.

Launched in June 2019, the Strategy was the result of a review of the approach to disability mainstreaming across the Organization undertaken in April 2018. Its development was led by the sub-working group on system-wide action of the Inter Agency Support Group on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and involved the participation of nearly 60 United Nations entities, inter agency networks and civil society organizations, as well as consultations with Member States. The Strategy was further validated through piloting with 21 entities. It is modelled on the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

The Strategy is the first ever system-wide mechanism for disability inclusion in the United Nations and provides a concrete accountability framework for accelerat-

<sup>3</sup> See General Assembly resolutions **64/154**, **66/229**, **67/160**, **70/145**, **70/170**, **72/162**, **74/144** and **74/253**.

<sup>4</sup> See [www.un.org/en/content/disabilitystrategy/](http://www.un.org/en/content/disabilitystrategy/).

ing progress and measuring change. It embodies the vision of the United Nations for disability inclusion and is a reaffirmation of a common commitment at the highest levels of the Organization. It also sets out the areas and functions on which the United Nations will focus to achieve disability inclusion.

The accountability framework tracks the implementation of the policy for the entire system. It facilitates the assessment of progress and gaps in the work of the United Nations on mainstreaming disability inclusion with a view to advancing system-wide planning and action, promoting synergies and reducing duplication. The accountability framework 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 common system indicators focused on four core areas: leadership, strategic planning and management; inclusiveness; programming; and organizational culture (see figure I).



**Figure I. Core areas of the Strategy**

Given that leadership is crucial to the success of the Strategy, I designated a Senior Adviser on Policy within the Executive Office of the Secretary-General to provide high-level guidance and foster coordinated implementation of the Strategy across the system. She is supported by a small dedicated team.

I welcome the support expressed by Member States for the Strategy, including in General Assembly resolution **74/144** and Human Rights Council resolution **43/23**.

The Security Council, in its resolution **2475 (2019)**, also noted the relevance of the Strategy.

## Implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy

The implementation of the Strategy commenced following its launch in June 2019. As outlined in the Strategy:

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 the 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, internally and externally.

### A

#### Baseline reporting

United Nations entities were invited to report on progress towards implementation of the Strategy for 2019. The results provided in the present progress report represent the first comprehensive baseline on disability inclusion for the United Nations system and establish the foundation against which future performance of the Organization will be measured.

Given that entities are at different starting points on disability inclusion, the indicators of the entity accountability framework consist of benchmarks on a progressive scale, using a self-assessed five-point grading system with the following ratings: “missing”, “approaches requirements”, “meets requirements”, “exceeds requirements” and “not applicable”. The rating “meets requirements” is the minimum to which all entities should aspire; over time entities should commit themselves to exceeding requirements, consistent with the Organization’s aspiration to lead by example. Entities are expected to provide evidence to support the self-assessed rating and are requested to provide action plans setting out how they will make progress on disability inclusion and outlining areas for improvement, timelines and responsibilities within entities. While the entire United Nations system is expected to report against the framework, not every indicator is applicable to every entity given the variety of entity functions and structures.

A total of 57 entities reported under the framework for 2019, comprising: 36 Secretariat entities, including 4 regional commissions and 12 peacekeeping operations and special political missions; 7 funds and programmes; 7 specialized agencies;

and 7 other and related entities.<sup>5</sup> Reporting entities are encouraged to make their reports publicly available in accessible formats. Technical support was provided by the dedicated team in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General to entities to ensure accuracy and consistency across the ratings.

## B

### Accountability at the entity level

To facilitate the analysis of the performance of the system, entities were grouped into four categories on the basis of the standard United Nations organizational breakdown and analysed across the four core functional areas of the accountability framework and by performance indicator. Given their distinctive nature, peacekeeping operations and special political missions were analysed separately.

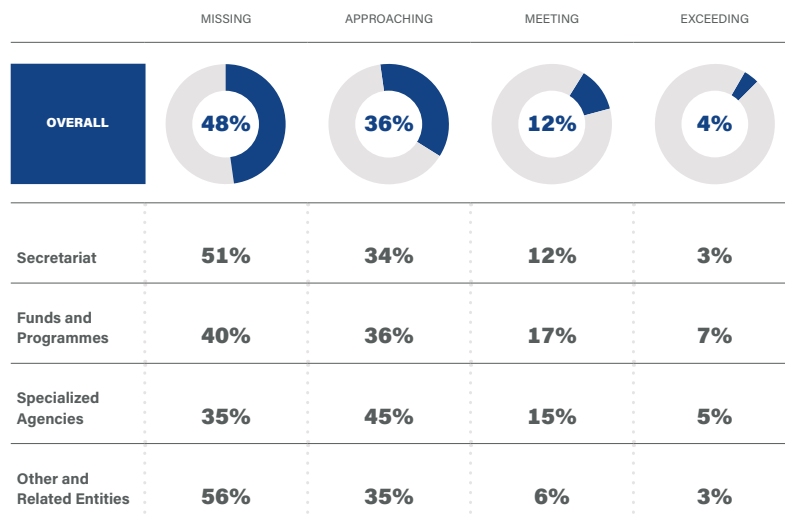
<sup>5</sup> The reporting entities, organized into the categories under which analysis was carried out, are as follows: (a) Secretariat: Development Coordination Office, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, Department of Global Communications, 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, 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 for Disarmament Affairs, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Office of Internal Oversight Services, Office of Legal Affairs, Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, United Nations Office at Geneva, United Nations Office at Vienna/United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, United Nations Mission in South Sudan, United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, United Nations Support Office in Somalia, United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia and United Nations Truce Supervision Organization/Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process; (b) funds and programmes: United Nations Human Settlements Programme, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Volunteers and World Food Programme; (c) specialized agencies: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Civil Aviation Organization, International Labour Organization, International Telecommunication Union, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Universal Postal Union and World Health Organization; and (d) other and related entities: International Trade Centre, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Office for Project Services, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, International Organization for Migration and Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS.

## 1. Overall United Nations system performance

The baseline results indicate that United Nations entities have begun to take action on disability inclusion. However, improvement is needed for the majority of entities to meet the performance indicators. Overall, the United Nations system misses the requirements across 48 per cent of the indicators, approaches them across 36 per cent, meets them across 12 per cent and exceeds them across only 4 per cent (see figure II).

It is promising that funds and programmes and specialized agencies meet or exceed requirements across 24 per cent and 20 per cent of the indicators, respectively, indicating that these entities are performing better on disability inclusion. Moreover, they are approaching requirements across 36 per cent and 45 per cent of the indicators, respectively, which signifies that they had already taken initial steps towards disability inclusion.

The Secretariat meets or exceeds requirements with respect to 15 per cent of the indicators and misses them with respect to 51 per cent. While progress is required in a number of areas, the Secretariat is approaching requirements across 34 per cent of the indicators. Within the Secretariat, some departments, offices and regional commissions are performing better by meeting or exceeding requirements across 17 per cent of the indicators and approaching them across 39 per cent. Other and related entities meet or exceed requirements across 9 per cent of the indicators and miss them across 56 per cent.



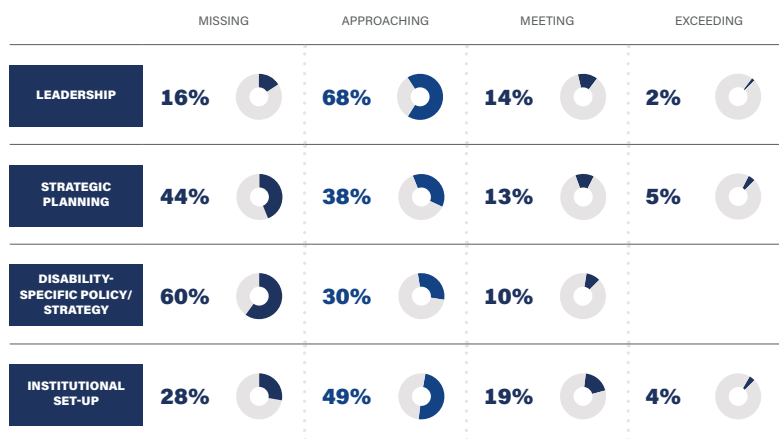
**Figure II. 2019 rating for the United Nations system by entity type**

The performance indicator with the strongest rating was “joint initiatives”, with 48 per cent of United Nations entities meeting or exceeding requirements, followed

by “institutional set-up” (23 per cent), “country programme documents” (22 per cent) and “accessibility” (21 per cent). The remaining indicators demonstrate significantly lower achievement, with the greatest number of ratings of missing requirements given for the indicators “procurement” (82 per cent), “communications” (72 per cent) and “consultation with persons with disabilities” (69 per cent). Priority attention is required in all these areas.

### Leadership, strategic planning and management

The commitment of senior leaders is vital to the successful implementation of the Strategy because it drives change across the Organization. To meet requirements for the leadership indicator, senior leaders must demonstrate commitment to disability inclusion through internal and external communications, the review and revision of entity policies and strategies, and the establishment of accountability mechanisms. While 14 per cent of entities meet the requirements for this indicator and only 2 per cent exceed them, the fact that 68 per cent of entities are approaching them suggests that the commitment of leadership to disability inclusion is increasing (see figure III). Specialized agencies, funds and programmes are performing better with respect to this indicator, with 29 per cent meeting the requirements.



**Figure III. Leadership, strategic planning and management  
2019 Rating for the United Nations system by performance indicator**

To meet the requirements for strategic planning, entities must incorporate disability inclusion in a meaningful way into their strategic planning documents, including through indicators that disaggregate data by disability and sex. While 18 per cent of entities have integrated disability inclusion into their strategic plans, 44 per cent miss the requirements for this indicator. More positively, 38 per cent of entities are approaching the requirements, which means that their commitment to



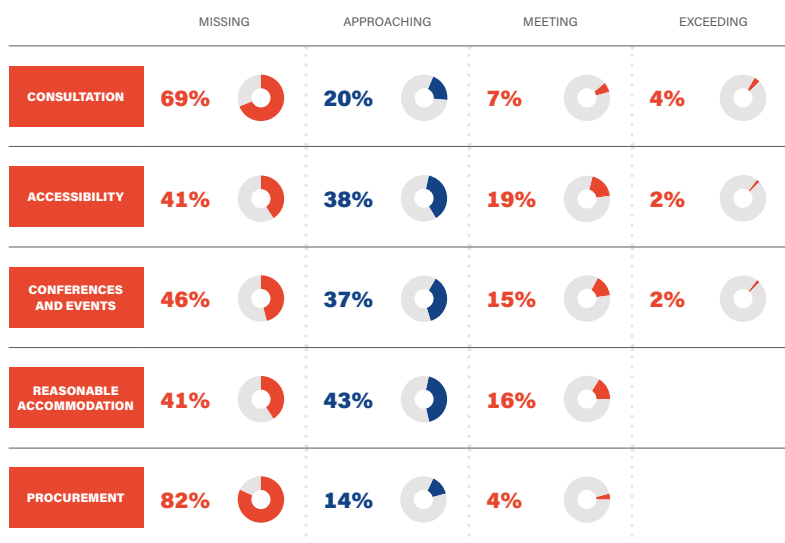
disability inclusion is stated explicitly in the overview of or preamble to their main strategic planning document. Significantly, 29 per cent of funds and programmes reported exceeding the requirements, and some entities specifically highlighted gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls with disabilities in their strategic documents.

Under the indicator regarding disability-specific policy and/or strategy, entities are required to have a policy and/or strategy on disability inclusion in place, to conduct evaluations of its implementation and to verify whether the entity's governing body is periodically provided with reports on its implementation. Entities miss these requirements in 60 per cent of cases and meet them in 10 per cent. It is encouraging that 30 per cent of entities are approaching the requirements, which means that they already have in place a specific policy and/or strategy on disability inclusion. Funds and programmes and other and related entities meet this requirement at a higher rate (29 per cent).

With respect to institutional set-up, entities are required to have a unit or individual in place with substantive expertise on the human rights-based approach to disability and a focal point network on disability inclusion that meets at least once a year. While 72 per cent of entities report having a unit or individual in place, only 23 per cent report having a focal point network and 28 per cent miss these requirements. Without a robust institutional set-up, entities are unlikely to successfully implement their policies or strategies on disability inclusion.

## **Inclusiveness**

Close consultation with persons with disabilities and partnerships with organizations of persons with disabilities are key to disability inclusion. While entities report consulting with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, including those facing greater marginalization, such as women with disabilities and persons with disabilities in humanitarian contexts, such consultations have not been undertaken in a systematic, inclusive and accessible manner. Therefore, 69 per cent of entities miss the requirements for this indicator, while 20 per cent are approaching them and 11 per cent meet or exceed them (see figure IV).



**Figure IV. Inclusiveness**  
**2019 Rating for the United Nations system by performance indicator**

To meet the requirements for the accessibility indicator, entities should have conducted a baseline assessment and have established and implemented an accessibility policy. For this indicator, 21 per cent of entities meet or exceed the requirements, while 41 per cent miss them, with a high concentration of “missing” ratings among other and related entities (72 per cent). For the accessibility of conferences and events, 37 per cent of entities are approaching the requirements, with 17 per cent meeting or exceeding them. These results corroborate the findings of the Joint Inspection Unit in its report on enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities to conferences and meetings of the United Nations system ([JIU/REP/2018/6](#)).

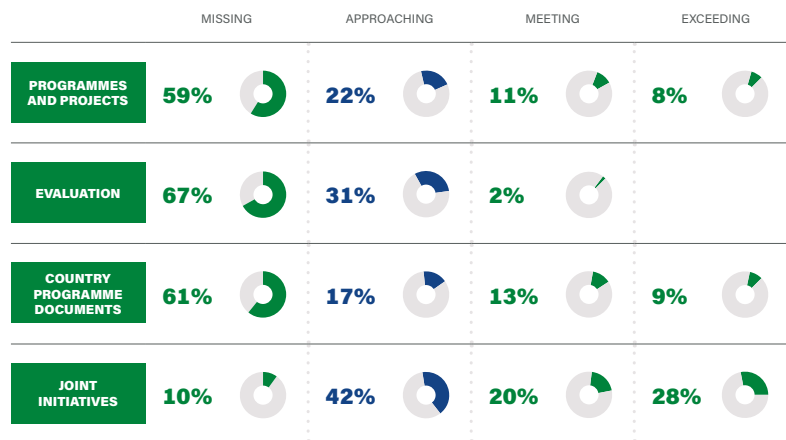
Reasonable accommodation enables individuals with disabilities to participate and exercise their rights on an equal basis with others in different contexts and venues, including office workspaces, capacity-building, travel, meetings and events. With regard to this indicator, 59 per cent of entities have either developed a reasonable accommodation policy and/or strategy (16 per cent) or a policy and/or strategy is under development (43 per cent). Notably, 57 per cent of funds and programmes have already met the requirements for this indicator. Four entities have created a reasonable accommodation fund, which is a good example that can be emulated by other entities.

The procurement indicator requires entities to ensure accessible and disability-inclusive procurement across programmes and operations. As a system, the United Nations will not be able to ensure that goods and services acquired are accessible or do not create new barriers, or that the process itself is not accessible, if it is not

working towards achieving this goal. For this indicator, 82 per cent of entities miss the requirements and 14 per cent are approaching them, while only 4 per cent meet them. The Secretariat has taken steps towards meeting this indicator by including accessibility features on the website of the United Nations Procurement Division, which will have a system-wide impact given the centralized nature of the United Nations procurement system. These measures provide persons with disabilities easier access to potential tender opportunities with the Secretariat.

## Programming

Under the indicator regarding programmes and projects, entities are required to adopt guidance on mainstreaming disability inclusion throughout the programme and project cycles and to undertake a minimum level of disability-inclusive programmes and projects. Among the entities that are implementing programmes and projects, 19 per cent meet or exceed the requirements and 22 per cent are approaching them (see figure V). Other and related entities are still behind on this indicator, with 86 per cent missing the requirements. Two entities have implemented disability markers to track resources allocated to disability, enabling greater accountability. In 2019, seven entities working on humanitarian action collaborated to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian response plans.



**Figure V. Programming**  
2019 Rating for the United Nations system by performance indicator

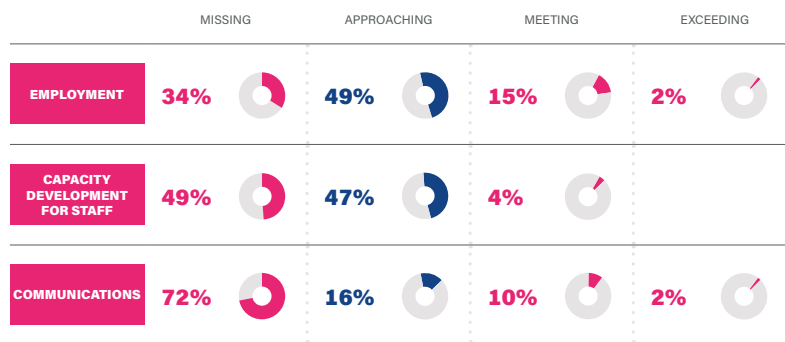
In relation to evaluation, entities are required to adopt disability-inclusive evaluation guidelines and to mainstream disability inclusion throughout their evaluation processes. For this indicator, 67 per cent of entities miss the requirements, while 31 per cent are approaching them. One entity has met the requirements for this indicator. Strengthening disability inclusion in evaluations will help the United Nations to promote institutional accountability and learning.

With regard to country programme documents, entities are required to make country programme documents disability-inclusive through guidance, mainstreaming and knowledge management. Of all the entities that reported on this indicator, 22 per cent meet or exceed the requirements and 17 per cent are already approaching them, which means that, at a minimum, their guidance on country programme documents mainstreams disability inclusion. Specialized agencies are further advanced, with 33 per cent meeting or exceeding the requirements.

To meet the joint initiatives indicator, an entity must be involved in at least one joint programme or initiative on disability inclusion and participate in inter-agency coordination mechanisms. This is the indicator with the highest achievement, with 20 per cent of entities meeting the requirements and 28 per cent exceeding them. The result reflects the positive role played by inter-agency mechanisms, such as the Inter Agency Support Group on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, as well as the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

### **Organizational culture**

The employment indicator measures disability inclusion in the area of human resources, including employment policies and strategies, the satisfaction of staff with disabilities and the number of persons with disabilities in the workforce. For this indicator, 15 per cent of entities meet the requirements and 2 per cent exceed them (see figure VI). While 66 per cent of entities have adopted employment policies or strategies in relation to employees with disabilities, a number have not conducted satisfaction surveys or, when they did, employees with disabilities reported lower satisfaction levels than those of the general staff body. For example, at the Secretariat level, the 2019 United Nations Staff Engagement Survey included a self-identification question on disability. The results indicated that staff who identified as having a disability were slightly less satisfied than other staff. For this indicator, 34 per cent of entities miss the requirements.



**Figure VI. Organizational culture**  
2019 Rating for the United Nations system by performance indicator

In relation to capacity development for staff, entities are required to ensure the availability of training opportunities, learning activities and resources on disability inclusion for staff at all levels. For this indicator, 4 per cent of entities meet the requirements, which means that the successful completion of learning activities on disability inclusion is mandatory for the staff of those entities. Meanwhile, 49 per cent miss the requirements, and 47 per cent provide learning and training opportunities on disability inclusion but their completion is not mandatory. Capacity-building is a prerequisite for the development and implementation of policies, strategies, programmes and operations that are inclusive of persons with disabilities.

To meet the requirements for the communication indicator, persons with disabilities must be reflected in mainstream internal and external communications, and entities must have guidelines or procedures in place to ensure that all communications are respectful of persons with disabilities. Entities have a considerable way to go in their communications, with 72 per cent of entities missing these requirements. Only 10 per cent meet the requirements and 2 per cent exceed them. Other and related entities are lagging behind on this indicator, with 71 per cent missing the requirements.

## 2. Peacekeeping operations and special political missions

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. In an institutional review conducted in preparation for the Strategy, two key areas in which clear gaps in disability inclusion exist were noted: peace and security, and the field.

For 2019, 12 peacekeeping operations and special political missions reported, representing 37.5 per cent of all field missions. With a few exceptions, the majority

of peacekeeping operations and special political missions indicated that they missed requirements across the performance indicators (67 per cent of ratings). These results reinforce the findings of the institutional review and reflect the critical need to provide greater technical support to and focus on the peace and security sector. Despite the lower ratings, the reporting illustrates that the Strategy has provided a clear impetus for missions to begin to address disability inclusion – for the first time in many cases. Several missions have developed concrete action plans to improve their performance on disability inclusion.

The Strategy has provided a clear impetus for missions to begin to address disability inclusion – for the first time in many cases.

In relation to leadership, strategic planning and management, while 62 per cent of field missions miss the requirements for the indicators in this area, 28 per cent are approaching them and 10 per cent meet or exceed them. Peacekeeping operations and special political missions performed best with respect to the leadership indicator, which demonstrates their growing commitment to promoting disability inclusion. Greater efforts are required to meet the requirements for the indicator regarding disability-specific policy and/or strategy, which peacekeeping and special political missions miss at a rate of 82 per cent.

With regard to inclusiveness, 9 per cent of field missions meet or exceed the requirements for the indicators in this area, 26 per cent are approaching them and 65 per cent miss them. In the area of programming, 12 per cent of field missions meet or exceed the requirements, 23 are approaching them and 65 per cent miss them. In relation to organizational culture, 12 per cent meet or exceed the requirements and 76 per cent miss them, which means that urgent action is needed to promote disability inclusion in employment, capacity development for staff and disability-inclusive communication.

### **3. Actions planned to strengthen disability inclusion**

Entities reported action plans for each indicator in almost all cases. This affirms the importance of the Strategy's accountability framework in triggering change and maintaining the momentum for continued transition towards disability inclusion. It also demonstrates the commitment among entities to improving their performance on disability inclusion.

Overall, the action plans put forward new foundational commitments for disability inclusion. Several entities are planning to develop or adopt disability-specific policies and/or strategies, in many cases for the first time; to create or expand their focal point networks and custodians for indicators; to conduct baseline assessments on accessibility; to integrate disability inclusion into their next evaluation cycle; and to update their communication guidelines to better reflect disability inclusion. In addition, various entities are planning to include references to persons with disabilities in their next strategic planning document. A number of entities provided infor-

mation on the work under way to ensure the accessibility of premises, information and communications technology and conferences and events both at Headquarters and at the country level. Some entities are considering making training on disability inclusion mandatory for all staff.

The Secretariat is formulating and implementing action plans in many areas that will have a system-wide impact. A Secretariat network has been established to support coordinated implementation across common themes. With regard to procurement, accessibility considerations, including ensuring, to the extent reasonably possible, that new acquisitions will not create new barriers, have been included in the revised United Nations Procurement Manual issued in June 2020. In addition, through the implementation of e-tendering, the Organization will work towards making procurement procedures and documents accessible for persons with disabilities to enable them to participate in such processes. The role of the Procurement Network of the High-level Committee on Management will be key for sustainable success on this indicator.

The action plans vary widely, and there is room for improvement. Greater efforts are necessary to ensure that the plans are specific and achieved within a stipulated time frame. More guidance is also required, in particular on how to frame action plans in relation to entities' disability-specific strategies, which should provide a blueprint for disability inclusion beyond the current budget cycle. For most peacekeeping operations and special political missions, it is the first time that they are considering disability inclusion in a systematic manner. Although their action plans were not extensive across the board, the fact that they have developed such plans illustrates the Strategy's positive impact in an area in which disability inclusion has traditionally not been considered.

## C

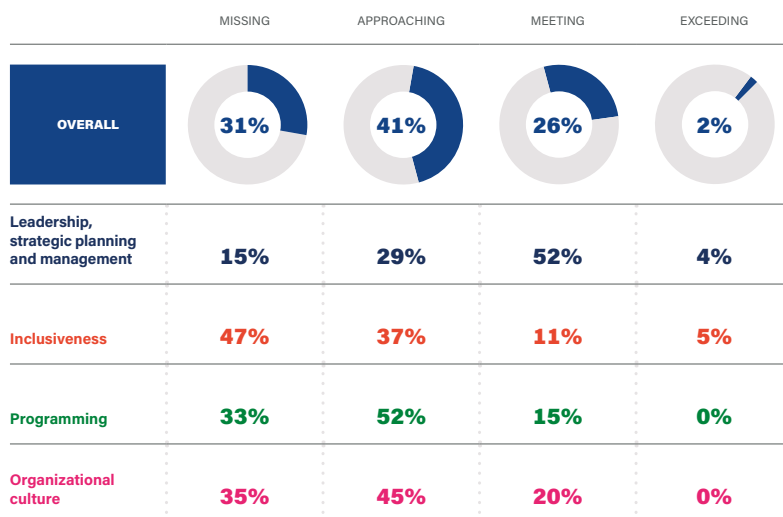
### **Accountability at the United Nations country team level**

The United Nations country team accountability scorecard on disability inclusion is a critical tool for implementing and reporting on the Strategy at the country level. It was developed through a consultative process, coordinated by the team in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and the Development Coordination Office, for which field validation exercises were carried out in Fiji, Guatemala, Malawi and Tajikistan, together with United Nations country teams, government representatives and local organizations of persons with disabilities. The scorecard was endorsed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, and technical guidance notes are under development to support the roll-out of the scorecard in 2020.

Owing to the fact that the scorecard was finalized in June 2020, reporting at the country level for 2019 is limited to seven country teams (Benin, Guatemala, Iraq, Malawi, Namibia, Nepal and Vietnam), which are among 10 country teams voluntarily participating in the targeted roll-out that began in July 2020. The country teams were selected for this exercise in view of their geographical representation and diverse contexts and needs. A larger number of country teams will participate in the reporting for 2021.

Reporting United Nations country teams demonstrated a high level of commitment to the Strategy. While the ratings may not be representative of all country teams, this first reporting exercise is a fairly positive starting point for the implementation of the Strategy at the country level. Overall, country teams meet or exceed requirements across 28 per cent of the indicators, approach them across 41 per cent and miss them across 31 per cent (see figure VII).

The area of leadership, strategic planning and management ranked highest, with country teams meeting or exceeding requirements in 56 per cent of cases across the four indicators in this area. Conversely, the area of inclusiveness had the lowest ratings, with country teams missing requirements in 47 per cent of cases. It is significant that country teams are taking action to mainstream disability inclusion in their cooperation frameworks, but there is still a need for more explicit consideration of persons with disabilities in outcome areas and indicators. Country teams are also taking steps to consult with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, including in humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery.



**Figure VII. 2019 Rating for United Nations country teams by core area**

While these early results are encouraging, technical support will be required for United Nations country teams with less experience in disability inclusion. Greater



attention has to be placed on the employment of persons with disabilities and capacity development for staff, which are key to ensuring a shift in culture and mindset for disability inclusion across all areas of the Strategy. For example, as the reporting by one country team demonstrated, the recruitment of a staff member with a disability led the country team to provide reasonable accommodation. Following the baseline assessment, country teams are expected to develop action plans to guide the systematic implementation of the Strategy that identify practical entry points and shortand long-term actions to achieve progress on disability inclusion.

## Coronavirus disease response and recovery efforts

As a result of the Strategy, the United Nations system was able to more swiftly coordinate and identify key entry points for and take action on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. Disability inclusion has been embedded in the three-point United Nations response: the health response; the humanitarian and socioeconomic response; and the recovery process. Entities reporting under the Strategy also provided information on disability-inclusive actions related to COVID-19, as well as on planned actions.

In the policy brief on a disability-inclusive response to COVID-19, key actions and recommendations were outlined to make the response and recovery inclusive of persons with disabilities. The policy brief was developed in collaboration with a number of entities and the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities and in consultation with the International Disability Alliance. It was launched in accessible formats, including international sign interpretation and ePub and easy-to-read formats. A joint statement in support of the policy brief was issued by 146 Member States and observers. United Nations entities have also developed their own policy briefs examining the diverse impacts of the pandemic on persons with disabilities and offering relevant information and advice in their areas of expertise.

Following the launch of the brief, my Senior Adviser on Policy established an emergency time-bound working group on disability-inclusive COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. It comprises more than 30 United Nations entities, the World Bank, my Special Envoy on Disability and Accessibility, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, the International Disability Alliance and the International Disability and Development Consortium. The working group is tasked with identifying priorities and entry points to strengthen disability inclusion in the mainstream COVID-19 response and recovery efforts at Headquarters and at the country level.

Four work streams have been defined: funding; health response and recovery; socioeconomic response and recovery; and humanitarian response and recovery. The work stream for funding is engaging with the multi-partner trust fund for COV-

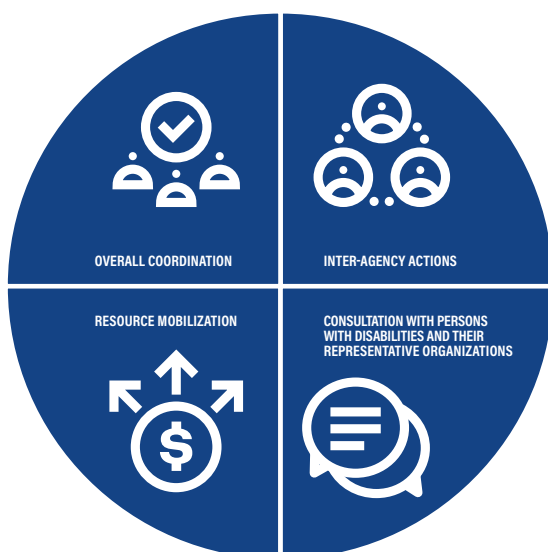
ID-19 to ensure that disability inclusion is mainstreamed in the initiatives supported by the fund. Other work streams have developed practical tools to monitor the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

The United Nations has also mobilized its supply chains, assets, expertise and capacities around the world to support a disability-inclusive COVID-19 response. Actions reported include online conferences and webinars, technical assistance, advocacy, awareness-raising activities, including through the development of accessible materials, and monitoring. The United Nations COVID-19 portal includes a **dedicated page for disability-inclusive response and recovery efforts** that hosts strategic resources developed by United Nations entities to support disability inclusion in such efforts.

United Nations country teams have also been active in building the capacity of services and communities to prevent violence against persons with disabilities, in particular women and girls with disabilities, and to propose solutions to mitigate the increased risk of persons with disabilities of contracting COVID-19. The United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is supporting disability-inclusive COVID-19 response and recovery efforts through a global joint programme to support national efforts in more than 20 countries, and technical and financial assistance for more than 15 ongoing programmes.

## Overarching actions

While entities and country teams are reporting under the framework, the success of the Strategy depends also on the overall coordination and the synergies generated within inter-agency networks and mechanisms.



## Overall coordination

Coordinated implementation of the Strategy across the Organization has been facilitated by: mobilizing and sustaining the commitment of the leadership of entities; establishing a robust coordination mechanism across entities; providing technical assistance to entities and the field; and engaging in communication and outreach to raise awareness of the Strategy, both internally and externally.

Leadership commitment has been one of the fundamental drivers of the Strategy's momentum. To foster such commitment, I addressed a memorandum to all United Nations senior leaders in August 2019, in which I introduced the Strategy as an operational imperative to strengthen and modernize the Organization and make it inclusive for all. Two meetings with entity principals were convened, in September 2019 and in February 2020, to discuss the importance of adopting a common approach to the Strategy's implementation to overcome operational and resource challenges, leveraging each other's strengths and avoiding duplication of efforts. A dedicated session on the Strategy was also included in the global meeting of resident coordinators held in November 2019.

To support the roll-out of the Strategy, technical guidance notes on reporting under each indicator of the entity accountability framework were developed through a wide consultation process and have been disseminated among entities. Technical assistance has been provided directly to entities and country teams as required, and targeted webinars on elements of the Strategy have been held to build greater understanding and knowledge. A United Nations country team focal point network has also been established and is coordinated by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and the Development Coordination Office.

A dedicated accessible website on the Strategy has been created, on which the Strategy is available in all United Nations languages and in multiple accessible formats, including ePub and easy-to-read formats. Accessibility features, such as captioning and international sign interpretation, are increasingly included in United Nations video messages. The Deputy Secretary-General and I also endeavour to put the spotlight on the situation of persons with disabilities and raise the importance of disability inclusion.

Regular briefings and interactions were held with Member States and organizations of persons with disabilities at both the global and the national levels. During official missions to the field, I visit programmes for promoting disability inclusion. Throughout this engagement, the growing willingness among Member States, donors and civil society organizations to actively support disability inclusion and to contribute to delivering concrete results is evident.

## Inter-agency actions

A focal point network of more than 57 entities ensures coordinated implementation of the Strategy across the Organization, meeting on a quarterly basis to share

practical experience and expertise, in addition to holding ad hoc meetings on thematic issues and capacity development. The network played a key role in establishing swift and coordinated system-wide action to advance disability inclusion in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. The network also serves to support greater intersectionality with the gender and age agendas and to ensure the consideration of disability inclusion across the work of the United Nations, for example through a development as well as a humanitarian lens. The Development Coordination Office has also played a key coordination role, facilitating the engagement of and inputs from the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, resident coordinators and United Nations country teams on the implementation of the Strategy within the United Nations development system, and supporting the integration of the Strategy into relevant guidance, frameworks and systems of the Sustainable Development Group.

Engagement has continued with a range of inter-agency networks of the High-level Committee on Management, such as the Procurement Network, the United Nations Evaluation Group and the Human Resources Network, to mainstream disability inclusion into their inter-agency guidance and procedures. The Inter Agency Security Management Network has developed draft guidelines on security management and disability for the United Nations security management system.

The Inter Agency Support Group on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with the support of the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, played an important role in the development of the Strategy and will continue to serve as important partners in advocating, programming for and achieving disability inclusion. The Partnership is a multi partner trust fund that supports the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the realization of inclusive Sustainable Development Goals at the country, regional and global levels. To date the Partnership has funded 50 joint programmes in over 40 countries.

## **Resource mobilization**

The Strategy calls for the allocation of adequate financial resources for disability inclusion, which entails the allocation of current resources in accordance with expected outcomes and the assignment of additional resources as required. There are opportunities for actions to make budgeting, procurement and monitoring mechanisms more disability-inclusive that do not necessarily require additional financial resources; the absence of additional resources should not serve as a pretext for a lack of progress. Nevertheless, the reporting process revealed that more dedicated financial resources for disability inclusion are also needed, given that a significant number of entities reported being substantially underresourced to advance progress as set out in the Strategy, in particular in relation to accessibility, employment, reasonable accommodation and capacity development for staff.

At the overall coordination level, the extrabudgetary support provided for the first year of implementation of the Strategy enabled the establishment of a small disability team within the Executive Office of the Secretary-General to support implementation, which has been beneficial for overall implementation. The team continues to play an indispensable role in providing technical support to entities and driving implementation, which will require the renewal of resources. In this respect, I welcome the continued support and commitment of Member States to the Strategy, including across governing bodies of the United Nations system and through the allocation of budgetary and extrabudgetary funds.

## **Consultation with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations**

Central to the Strategy and its success are the meaningful participation of and partnerships with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations. In the Strategy, persons with disabilities are recognized as actors of change who possess unique knowledge and lived experience of disability. Close consultation with and the active involvement of persons with disabilities and organizations of persons with disabilities across all actions are key to ensuring disability inclusion, as well as improving effectiveness and accountability.

The development of the Strategy benefited greatly from the participation of representative organizations of persons with disabilities, including the International Disability Alliance. They also contributed to the development of technical guidance notes and the country team scorecard.

## **Challenges, opportunities and the way forward**

The adoption of the Strategy has been a catalyst for greater commitment by United Nations entities to disability inclusion and has brought some tangible early gains. For those already attentive to disability inclusion, the Strategy has provided a concrete framework for sustainable transformation. Entities with limited or no experience in disability inclusion have, for the first time in some cases, been prompted to consider how it should be addressed and have been able to take initial steps. At both ends of the spectrum, the Strategy provides a road map that is key to ensuring that disability inclusion measures and practices are embedded systemically in programmes and operations in a sustainable way.

Reporting has also revealed disparities among entities and the need to accelerate progress across the system. The results reflect that a number of entities have been slow to begin investing in disability inclusion since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. While a number of entities are still missing the targets, there is a general commitment and ambition to make progress. The reporting has helped to identify areas in which gaps exist; areas in which capacity-building and

technical support are required to institutionalize inclusive and sustainable practices and procedures; and areas in which rapid progress needs to be made, for example consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities. Further guidance in this area is required through the development of clear guidelines for consultation on mainstream and disability-specific issues.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has represented a challenge for all, it has been an opportunity to establish synergies within the Organization and to build towards more equal, inclusive and sustainable societies. Efforts to implement the Strategy stand the risk of being hindered by the increased workload and reprioritization of tasks faced by each entity in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. However, entities are seizing the opportunity to reconfigure their approaches to undertake more effective action and planning to leave no one behind at the very outset of their response. This is contributing to a more inclusive recovery approach in the plans to build back better. It is of the utmost importance that these efforts continue to reflect and respond to the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by persons with disabilities to ensure that the most marginalized groups among them, for example women with disabilities, children with disabilities and persons with disabilities in institutions or humanitarian settings, are not left behind.

The Strategy is contributing to a change in mindset and values through the internalization of the commitment to persons with disabilities in all their diversity. The Strategy's call for strong leadership within entities to drive its implementation in a meaningful and sustainable manner is making this possible. The test will be how to retain this momentum, mainstream disability in projects, programmes and policies at the country level and ensure a collective commitment to make the United Nations an employer of choice for persons with disabilities.

The best way to achieve this commitment is to ensure greater coherence and alignment between the implementation of the Strategy and the 2030 Agenda across the United Nations system. The present progress report shows a growing awareness of disability inclusion and the imperative to integrate it throughout all programmes and operations and, more generally, across the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. The Organization is committed to further strengthening its efforts by ensuring better collection, analysis and dissemination of data, disaggregated by disability and sex, in a regular and systematic manner, to guide strategic and country programming, as well as to support robust accountability.

Targeted efforts will be pursued to better guide peacekeeping operations and special political missions in engaging with the Strategy and meeting requirements. Additional steps are envisaged towards enhanced awareness and capacity development on disability inclusion, as well as towards increased engagement with organizations of persons with disabilities in order to shape solutions at the local and international levels. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action can serve as an

important resource for these operations and missions to advance towards disability inclusion.

Through the reporting process and the technical assistance requested by entities, it is clear that fundamental aspects of the rights-based approach to disability – for example reasonable accommodation and accessibility, and mainstreaming disability inclusion in evaluation, communication and procurement processes – require further strengthening, including a better understanding of an intersectional approach. Entities with a more robust institutional set-up will be better placed to implement the Strategy.

The Strategy is contributing to a change in mindset and values through the internalization of the commitment to persons with disabilities in all their diversity.

Historically, very few resources have been invested in disability inclusion in the United Nations. While the first reporting exercise shows that some progress can be achieved within existing resources, it is high time to ensure resource allocations in an inclusive manner, as well as to consider the mobilization of additional resources. A system-wide disability marker to track financial allocations and expenditures for disability inclusion will be considered to enable the United Nations system to identify resource gaps and commit itself to specific targets.

This first reporting exercise provides valuable lessons and shows that the successes and challenges of individual entities belong to the wider system. For example, inter-agency networks are key to unlocking and paving the way for many entities and departments that are dependent on their policies and procedures. Furthermore, coordination among entities presents an opportunity to build on the collective experience of the United Nations, as well as to pool capacities and resources to ensure complementarity of actions and strengthen its support for national needs and priorities in a coherent and integrated manner. In addition, entities systematically reported the need for guidance and examples of good practices owing to the lack of internal capacities and expertise. This is particularly the case for the areas in which performance has been most lacking, namely, consultation, procurement and communications. Resources and good practices should be collected to help entities to avoid duplication of efforts and to enable them to share and learn from each other.

## Conclusion and recommendations

The United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy has provided the Organization with a unique blueprint for greater disability inclusion. It is encouraging that the present progress report demonstrates a high level of commitment across entities and advancement towards approaching requirements. The Strategy is serving its purpose of raising awareness, facilitating long-term strategic planning, providing a road map for system-wide actions, and creating a platform for coordination and knowledge-sharing on disability inclusion. In addition, this exercise has identified

good practices, which entities can take into consideration when implementing their own strategies and plans. The progress report has also identified areas in which improvement is required to ensure that the United Nations is fit for purpose to implement the 2030 Agenda and disability-inclusive COVID-19 recovery efforts.

The United Nations must continue to forge ahead and accelerate progress, and all entities must continue their efforts to implement the Strategy. I will continue to call on the leadership of the United Nations system to pursue the roll-out of the Strategy and to report annually on progress made in its implementation, including on specific action plans. The continued leadership of principals and resident coordinators will be essential for the success of the goals that have been set. I encourage them to allocate adequate human and financial resources for disability inclusion through better utilization of existing resources and the assignment of additional resources, in particular to tackle identified areas of weakness that threaten to impede progress.

The support of Member States is critical, and they have an important role to play in guiding the United Nations in fostering greater disability inclusion across its work, including across the governing bodies of the Organization. In this regard, I ask Member States to continue to support the system's engagement with and effective implementation of the Strategy, including financially. I will report regularly to the General Assembly on the progress made in the implementation of the Strategy.

**The Strategy was adopted with a view to translating into action the principles, values and commitments of the United Nations, including for persons with disabilities. The Organization will endeavour to raise the standards of its performance on disability inclusion and bring about unified, transformative and lasting change for persons with disabilities. The destination is clear: a world in which all persons, including persons with disabilities, have a full say in decision-making processes and truly benefit from economic, social, political and cultural life. When we secure the rights of persons with disabilities, we move closer to upholding the core values and principles of the Charter.**