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Joint Inspection Unit

Enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities to conferences and meetings of the United Nations system

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled “Enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities to conferences and meetings of the United Nations system” ([JIU/REP/2018/6](#)).

* [A/74/150](#).



Summary

In its report entitled “Enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities to conferences and meetings of the United Nations system” ([JIU/REP/2018/6](#)), the Joint Inspection Unit reviewed the current status of accessibility for persons with disabilities to United Nations system conferences and meetings.

The present note reflects the views of organizations of the United Nations system on the recommendations provided in the report. The views have been consolidated on the basis of input provided by organizations that are members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, which welcomed the report and supported many of its conclusions.

I. Introduction

1. In its report entitled “Enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities to conferences and meetings of the United Nations system” (JIU/REP/2018/6), the Joint Inspection Unit reviewed the status of accessibility for persons with disabilities to United Nations system conferences and meetings. The Unit addressed the topic both in relation to physical facilities, services and related barriers and from the perspective of ensuring the fundamental rights of persons with disabilities.

II. General comments

2. Organizations of the United Nations system welcome the report and its findings and recommendations. They appreciate its scope and support the idea that going beyond a dedicated policy on accessibility to conferences and meetings and establishing a comprehensive approach regarding persons with disabilities would be better suited to the goal of integrating the matter into attitudes and practices for the benefit of staff, visitors and beneficiaries with disabilities.

3. Organizations note that the country context should be taken into consideration when implementing the recommendations; for conferences held in field locations, organizations may need to consider the feasibility of and need for accessibility services on an as-needed basis, whereas it may be practical to provide such services by default for conferences at the headquarters duty stations.

4. Organizations note that the proposed recommendations should be considered and implemented in the context of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, currently being finalized.

5. Organizations mostly support the provisions of the proposed recommendations, underscoring that the implementation of some of them might have cost implications and may require an adequate time period.

III. Comments on specific recommendations

Recommendation 1

The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should task the relevant offices with developing, by the end of 2020, a draft policy on the accessibility of conferences and meetings for persons with disabilities, as well as guidelines for policy implementation, and present them to their respective legislative bodies, should the endorsement of those bodies be required for the policy to take effect.

6. Organizations support the recommendation, but would prefer developing a policy that is not distinct from policies on global access to facilities and services and is therefore aligned with or falls under a broader policy on accessibility in United Nations premises, to be implemented across all organizations to ensure coherent responses and standards.

Recommendation 2

For all major conferences that are hosted off the premises of United Nations system organizations, the executive heads of these organizations should ensure that accessibility requirements are clearly stipulated in individual agreements concluded with the hosting entity for specific conferences and meetings.

7. Organizations agree with the recommendation, but note that organizations with field operations that are renting premises in residential buildings adapted as office space may find it difficult to programme key investments to reduce obstacles to accessibility in such facilities.

Recommendation 3

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations that have not yet done so should appoint, by December 2021, a focal point on accessibility within their organization under terms of reference that clearly define the focal point's role and responsibilities as regards enhancing the accessibility of conferences and meetings for persons with disabilities.

8. Organizations support the recommendation and consider that it could be implemented under the indicator on institutional set-up of the entity accountability framework included in the Disability Inclusion Strategy.

9. However, organizations note that it is equally important to introduce accessibility requirements in the job descriptions of posts in departments more directly linked with the provision of services that could be used by persons with disabilities, such as conference services, publications or even human resources. Organizations consider that a central focal point working in isolation would have limited results, in particular at the country level, and would prefer having a focal point in each office, to ensure that the accessibility of conferences and meetings for people with disabilities is enhanced.

Recommendation 4

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should instruct relevant offices that address accessibility-related matters to develop, by December 2021, standard operating procedures with regard to their operational responsibilities to improve the accessibility of conferences and meetings for persons with disabilities.

10. Organizations support the recommendation.

Recommendation 5

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should make it mandatory for organizers of meetings and conferences to ensure, by December 2021, that:

(a) **The participation of persons with disabilities is fully supported by registration processes that are accessible for persons with diverse disabilities;**

(b) **Clauses are included in accessible registration forms to ask specifically about accessibility requirements;**

(c) **Information on accessible facilities and services is disseminated to all potential participants through accessible websites and information notes;**

(d) **Accessible post-conference and post-meeting satisfaction surveys consistently include questions to assess satisfaction with the accessibility of facilities and services.**

11. Organizations support the recommendation and note it should be implemented under the subindicator on accessibility of conferences and events of the entity accountability framework included in the Disability Inclusion Strategy.

Recommendation 6

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should, by December 2021, provide the option for remote participation in all meetings and conferences that they organize, with no prejudice to the efforts to make attendance at meetings and conferences accessible to persons with disabilities.

12. Organizations partially support the recommendation, as some consider that remote participation should be presented as an option for all delegates and not only for the community of persons with disabilities. Other organizations note that the proposal is technically feasible, but that the cost should also be considered. Organizations further note the importance of conducting a proper assessment of remote participation tools and technologies and their broad implications, making the proposed timeline too short. Some organizations further note that, at the current stage, it is not possible to guarantee the identity of the persons joining remotely and therefore that caution should be exercised.

13. The new Agreement between the United Nations Common System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and the International Association of Conference Interpreters regulating the conditions of employment of short-term conference interpreters, valid from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2023, stipulates that organizations shall endeavour to provide facilities for meetings, whether at headquarters or elsewhere, compliant with the most recent International Organization for Standardization standards applicable to simultaneous interpretation facilities, such as those related to remote interpretation. The Agreement provides guidance for sign language interpretation. The parties to the agreement will individually review and continue to consult one another and other stakeholders on the issues of sign languages and remote/distance interpretation, as appropriate.

Recommendation 7

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should issue instructions to information and communications technology and facilities management offices to undertake periodic accessibility assessments of organizational facilities and services for conferences and meetings, and to ensure that organizations of persons with disabilities are adequately consulted at all stages of the process.

14. Organizations partially support the recommendation, noting that reliance on international standards for accessible facilities and software may be more efficient and effective than holding multistage consultations.

Recommendation 8

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should task procurement offices with drafting, by December 2021, provisions for incorporating accessibility checks and/or requirements into procurement policies and guidelines for consideration and adoption by the relevant decision-making authority.

15. Organizations support the recommendation, but seek clarification on whether the accessibility requirements should be incorporated only into the procurement process itself, or only into the technical specifications of goods and services being procured, or whether the recommendation is to require that vendors have fully mainstreamed the inclusion and the rights of persons with disabilities into the management of their operations.

Recommendation 9

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should develop and implement through relevant inter-agency mechanisms, by December 2021, a common system-wide mandatory specialized training module on disability inclusion and accessibility for personnel involved directly or indirectly in the servicing of conferences and meetings, including, but not limited to, staff in conference management, facilities and services management, human resources management, and procurement, legal, ICT, medical, public information and safety and security services.

16. Organizations partially support the recommendation as currently formulated, owing to its prescriptiveness. Organizations welcome, however, the opportunity to discuss, through relevant inter-agency mechanisms, the proposal for the development of core training material, including leveraging existing training material and lessons learned, which could be adapted and used by participating organizations in accordance with their respective business models and needs.

Recommendation 10

The legislative bodies of United Nations system organizations should include in their agendas the review of periodic reports submitted to them on the state of accessibility of conference and meeting facilities and services for persons with disabilities, including the state of progress of actions to address accessibility deficits.

17. Organizations note that the recommendation is addressed to their legislative bodies. Some note that their organizations' reporting on specific aspects of programme performance is done within the framework of their performance reporting cycle, rather than in the thematic reporting format as proposed. Others suggest making the distinction in the recommendation between conference and meeting facilities that are on United Nations premises and those that are off United Nations premises.
