

**ENHANCING ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES TO CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS
OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM**

Prepared by

Gopinathan Achamkulangare

Joint Inspection Unit

Geneva 2018



United Nations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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JIU/REP/2018/6

I. Background and context

About 15 per cent of the world's population is estimated to live with some form of disability.¹ In almost all societies, persons with disabilities face more barriers than those without, with regard to participation in and access to deliberative processes, and are at greater risk of being left behind. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which currently guides the developmental activities of all United Nations system organizations, is aimed at addressing these inequities through the key pledge to “leave no one behind”. Indeed, the Sustainable Development Goals reference disability in seven targets across five goals, while another six goals have targets linked to disability-inclusive development.

A perspective relating to the inclusion of persons with disabilities and their rights, as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and particularly as relates to accessibility, must consequently be effectively incorporated into all facets of the work of the United Nations system organizations. Persons with disabilities should have a representative voice, chosen by persons with disabilities themselves, in every platform that has an impact on their interests, for they are best positioned to identify their own needs and the most suitable policies for meeting those needs. In the United Nations system, such deliberative platforms are the meetings and conferences convened.

Organizations of persons with disabilities follow the tenet of “nothing about us without us”. Their active inclusion sends a clear message to decision-makers and society at large that they are rights holders capable of participating and engaging meaningfully at all levels of society, and that they can themselves be agents, not merely beneficiaries, of change. Making conferences and meetings fully accessible therefore becomes a critical indicator of the willingness of United Nations system organizations to truly “walk the talk” when it comes to non-discrimination and inclusion.

The present review was included in the programme of work of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) for 2018, to assess the current status of accessibility for persons with disabilities to United Nations system conferences and meetings. The main findings and conclusions of the review and its 10 recommendations are outlined below.

II. Mandates for addressing accessibility

A mandate to enhance accessibility was first received with the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006, which has a dedicated section on accessibility (article 9). Article 9 has often been described as the “backbone” of the Convention. The Convention emphasizes the role of universal design to increase the accessibility of environments and enable full inclusion and participation in society, and it calls for the implementation of minimum standards and guidelines for the accessibility of facilities and services open or provided to the public.

To monitor the implementation of the Convention, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was established, which has focused further attention on accessibility through the adoption of general comment No. 2 (2014) on accessibility. In that general

¹ The World Health Organization and the World Bank, World Report on Disability, WHO/NMH/VIP/11.01.

comment, the Committee sets out the legal context for accessibility, defines barriers to participation as a form of discrimination and underscores the role of international cooperation in promoting accessibility. Building on the Convention, the Human Rights Council has adopted multiple resolutions focused on three key aspects of accessibility, namely, adopting standards and guidelines, undertaking upgrades and providing services and devices, and enhancing institutional capacity.

In terms of legislative mandates, the General Assembly has addressed accessibility through resolutions that cover the built environment, information and communications technology (ICT), services, transport, attitudes and sensitivity, universal design (“essential for some, useful for all”) and reasonable accommodation. Among the specialized agencies, only the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has a specific mandate on accessibility from its legislative body.

Given that most resolutions and decisions relating to disability are inspired by the Convention, in the present report, the Inspector calls for all organizations in the United Nations system to respect the spirit and letter of the Convention and voluntarily assume the obligations under article 9 on accessibility, including by incorporating its provisions into their policy on accessibility.

III. Policies, guidelines, standards and benchmarks on accessibility

A dedicated policy on accessibility should serve as the essential foundational document outlining the principles that should guide an organization’s work in that area. Only ITU and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) have a policy on accessibility; the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has a policy on reasonable accommodation, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has a disability policy targeted at its beneficiaries. Seven other organizations have policies on the employment of persons with disabilities that also include elements of accessibility.

The review identifies good practice elements in the existing policies, which organizations can take into consideration when developing their own policies. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), ITU and the World Health Organization (WHO) have issued highly instructive guidance documents to make their conferences and meetings more accessible, while the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Development Group, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and UNRWA have issued guidance on the mainstreaming of the Convention and the disability inclusion agenda in programmatic work (see annex I).

The findings of the review indicate that there are no international standards on accessibility that are accepted and used system-wide in the United Nations. Each organization simply attempts to conform to the accessibility standards outlined in the building codes and disability acts of the host country. The exception to this is UNICEF, which has established three levels of accessibility applicable to all its offices globally. This constitutes a best practice that should be reviewed and replicated by all organizations, adapting it to their own context.

Annex II to the present document lists documentation, including international standards, guidelines, recommendations and one technical paper, addressing the built environment and ICT for organizations to consider when developing aspirational benchmarks on accessibility. By utilizing good practice elements from the above-mentioned documentation, organizations can and should develop a comprehensive policy and guidelines on the accessibility of conferences and meetings (**recommendation 1**). Policy development should involve all relevant internal offices and include persons with disabilities. Once established,

the minimum criteria can serve as a baseline to develop aspirational standards for system-wide accessibility.

IV. Accessible facilities and services at headquarters, field and off-site locations and user satisfaction

To determine the existence of accessible facilities and services for conferences and meetings, the JIU questionnaire contained a checklist whereby organizations were requested to indicate whether they provided a given facility, service or tool. Sixteen organizations provided responses to the checklist (see annex III) in relation to facilities and services in their headquarters location only. Overall, the responses indicate that the vast majority of the organizations are not providing many of the essential ICT and other services that would make meetings and conferences more accessible for persons with disabilities.

With regard to field office accessibility, all organizations noted that they lagged considerably behind their headquarters counterparts due to factors that included: restrictions on physical modifications to rented or heritage status premises; resource limitations; remote locations; and short-term leases.

Most organizations acknowledged that, for meetings held at off-site locations, they did not adequately monitor accessibility provisions, nor did they set minimum accessibility requirements beyond asking for compliance with local accessibility regulations. As a recommended best practice, ITU includes provisions in host country agreements for the host to ensure accessible facilities within the conference premises (**recommendation 2**).

To ascertain the views of persons with disabilities, interviews were conducted with organizations of persons with disabilities and with United Nations system staff and officials with disabilities and those who address disability issues in their work. The responses highlighted the need to: address the lack of communication on accessibility before, during and after conferences and meetings; incorporate accessibility into all stages of event design and planning; address invisible disabilities; replicate all good internal practices on a system-wide basis; establish a focal point for disabilities; defray participation costs for persons with disabilities; and make greater use of assistive technological tools.

V. Measures to enhance internal capacity and coordination regarding accessibility and encourage greater participation

A. Measures to enhance internal capacity and coordination regarding accessibility

Establish a disability and accessibility focal point. Less than 50 per cent of JIU participating organizations have a designated focal point on disability inclusion and accessibility and/or a specific unit or specialist team on the subject matter. Of these, only one had terms of reference outlining duties and responsibilities. In organizations without a focal point, accessibility is addressed in an ad hoc manner by various units within the scope of their work. The Inspector recommends the appointment of a focal point on accessibility in each organization by 2021 (**recommendation 3**).

Develop standard operating procedures for accessibility-related activities. Establishing clear standard operating procedures and adhering to them can eliminate ad hoc and inconsistent responses to accessibility requests. In the report, the Inspector identifies 10 relevant actors or units, outlines the relevant standard operating procedures they should have in place and recommends that such actors or units develop, by 2021, standard operating procedures with regard to their operational responsibilities for accessibility-related matters (**recommendation 4**).

Better consider accessibility-related costs. None of the participating organizations have a specific and designated budget line that covers all aspects of accessibility-related costs for all conferences and meetings. Budgetary allocations for accessibility are typically limited to disability-related events or are addressed on a case-by-case basis when there is a specific request from a participant with a disability. Additionally, no organization has undertaken any estimations of all types of accessibility-related costs with regard to the entire spectrum of meetings and conferences that they organize.

Persons with disabilities also strongly emphasized the need to give consideration to the extra costs they encounter in travelling to conferences and meetings, such as the accommodation and travel costs of support persons. Given that non-coverage of such costs can effectively impede their participation, the Inspector urges legislative bodies to consider amendments to the travel rules to incorporate a reasonable accommodation policy that covers both the eligible participant with disabilities and his or her support person.

B. Measures to encourage the participation of persons with disabilities.

Organizations do not record the number of persons with disabilities attending conferences and meetings and make estimations based only on the number — typically low — of requests received for reasonable accommodation. They then use these low numbers to justify not proactively providing accessibility services as a default measure. Persons with disabilities have noted that the number of requests is low precisely because they do not know what accessibility services are available, whether they can make requests for reasonable accommodation and to whom they should make such a request.

Even when they do make a request, there are no published procedures in place to ascertain how the request will be dealt with, no established time frames for response, and no means for contesting a denial of their request. In the absence of such information, potential participants feel discouraged from attending meetings and conferences. The Inspector consequently highlights measures to address such information deficits.

Request and disseminate information and collect feedback. Only seven organizations proactively request information on participants' accessibility needs, while only two proactively disseminate information on available accessible facilities and services. Additionally, most organizations neither have fully accessible event registration processes for persons with visual impairments and intellectual disabilities nor seek participant feedback post-conference. The Inspector makes a recommendation to address these deficits (**recommendation 5**).

Establish and utilize accessibility centres. There are presently two accessibility centres, one at United Nations Headquarters (New York) and the other at ESCAP (Bangkok). These serve as a “one-stop shop” to provide ICT tools and other services on demand for persons with disabilities who are at those locations. To ensure their financial sustainability, the Inspector calls upon the Secretary-General to consider allocating dedicated financial resources to the accessibility centres to cover staff and equipment costs. The Inspector also recommends that all organizations assess the feasibility of establishing such a centre in their main conference-servicing duty stations. Additionally, he recommends that organizations consider establishing a trust fund to finance the centres and proactively approach Member States to contribute to the fund.

Enhance utilization of ICT tools. While a number of organizations highlighted a range of assistive ICT tools that could be acquired and utilized at modest or minimal costs, several entities were yet to adopt or utilize them as a standard practice for their conferences and meetings. Most promising among such tools are platforms that provide for remote, two-way active engagement. Given that allowing for remote participation can greatly ease, but not

eliminate, challenges for persons with disabilities, and ensure that their voice is represented in all forums, the Inspector recommends that all organizations provide such an option for all conferences and meetings (**recommendation 6**).

VI. Measures to proactively incorporate accessibility needs, share best practices, raise awareness and ensure accountability

A. Ensure that constructions and acquisitions do not create new barriers. This can be achieved by undertaking accessibility assessments to ascertain existing barriers and factoring the findings into the planning, design and implementation of upgrades and constructions. Similarly, to ensure that all new acquisitions are barrier-free, accessibility considerations must be factored into all relevant procurement activities.

Undertake an accessibility assessment. The purpose of an accessibility assessment is to establish how well a particular facility or service is performing in terms of access and ease of use by a wide range of potential users, including persons with disabilities, and to recommend improvements where necessary. The Inspector recommends that all organizations undertake periodic accessibility assessments of their facilities and services with the full engagement of persons with disabilities (**recommendation 7**).

Incorporate accessibility considerations into procurement processes. While it is essential for accessibility elements to be factored into procurement policies to ensure that acquisitions do not create new barriers, not a single organizational policy contains such provisions. The Inspector calls on organizations to address this deficit through the platform of the Procurement Network of the High-level Committee on Management and recommends that all organizations draft provisions for incorporating accessibility elements into procurement policies and guidelines for consideration and adoption by the authorities concerned (**recommendation 8**). Additionally, procurement of all assistive devices and services should be guided by prior consultations with persons with disabilities.

Leverage good practices. The Inspector highlights notable examples of incorporation of accessibility considerations into major projects of five United Nations system entities. The good practices highlighted demonstrate that sufficient scope and opportunity exist for organizations to feasibly incorporate accessibility considerations into the construction and acquisition of facilities and services.

B. Utilize inter- and intra-agency coordination mechanisms to share good practices.

Relevant offices were largely unaware of good practices regarding accessibility both outside and inside their organization. Such lack of awareness is striking, given that the Inspector identified eight inter-agency and eight intra-agency coordination mechanisms (see annex IV) addressing accessibility, either directly or indirectly. Twenty organizations participate in one or more of the eight inter-agency mechanisms. Five of the eight intra-agency mechanisms are within the United Nations Secretariat itself, and there is one each in ITU, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and WHO. Of the 16 mechanisms identified, only 7 have terms of reference outlining roles and responsibilities, and only 4 have a standing agenda. Given their potential, the Inspector recommends that such mechanisms have clearly established terms of reference, that members are technically versed in substantive and operational aspects of accessibility, and that meetings are documented and action points monitored.

C. Enhance staff awareness.

Ensuring a workplace that is consciously inclusive of persons with disabilities can go a long way towards ensuring that conferences and meetings are both inclusive and accessible.

There was a general acknowledgement by organizations that overall awareness of disability inclusion and accessibility-related matters was low. In several organizations, accessibility was seen as an add-on rather than a concept integrated into attitudes and practices. Measures to engender such awareness include training and surveys.

Incorporate accessibility-related questions into staff surveys. Through survey findings, organizations can better identify key attitudinal barriers and accessibility-related challenges, collect suggestions for improvement and prioritize remedial actions. Only five organizations and four United Nations Secretariat offices reported that they incorporated accessibility into staff surveys. The United Nations Staff Union conducted a global staff survey on disability awareness in 2018, whose results indicated that the majority of respondents were unaware of the organizational directive on disabilities. The Inspector urges organizations to conduct periodic staff surveys that include questions on the accessibility of facilities and services and on attitudes towards persons with disabilities, and to ensure that the survey findings are used to inform relevant organizational directives and activities.

Ensure staff training on disability inclusion and accessibility matters. Mandatory staff training on disability inclusion and accessibility is essential to raise staff awareness of the needs of persons with diverse disabilities attending conferences and meetings. None of the organizations have mandatory training for staff that is exclusively focused on disability inclusion and accessibility. In 14 organizations and 5 United Nations Secretariat offices, voluntary training related to disability inclusion and accessibility (annex V) is made available to staff. The Inspector recommends that all organizations develop and implement, by 2021, a common system-wide mandatory specialized training module on disability inclusion and accessibility for personnel involved in servicing conferences and meetings (**recommendation 9**).

D. Enhancing accountability

Improve data collection and establish key performance indicators. Most organizations acknowledged that they did not systematically collect data on accessibility, monitor it or have performance indicators to measure it. Hence, most could not furnish accessibility-related data. Additionally, none have an established methodology to estimate additional costs. Despite these limitations, a few good practices exist in ITU, the Division of Conference Management of the United Nations Office at Geneva and UNICEF. Organizations have suggested creating an accessibility database to gather and share information on the development and use of accessibility tools. Additionally, the Inspector urges all organizations to develop key performance indicators on accessibility and to identify appropriate modalities for data collection in order to measure them.

Ensure periodic reporting on the state of accessibility to legislative bodies. The Secretary-General's report (A/71/344 and Corr. 1), responding to a request in General Assembly resolution 70/170, was the first instance of a comprehensive stocktaking of accessibility in the United Nations system. To improve accountability, the Inspector recommends that legislative bodies include in their agendas the review of periodic reports on the state of accessibility of conferences and meetings for persons with disabilities (**recommendation 10**).

Ensure a role for oversight bodies in monitoring and evaluating the state of accessibility. Oversight bodies can provide organizations with an independent assessment of compliance with agreed-upon actions and mandates to further accessibility and of how effectively functions have supported accessibility initiatives. The Inspector urges oversight bodies to periodically review the organizational-level risk associated with the topic and report on the findings to the executive heads and legislative bodies.

VII. Towards mainstreaming disability inclusion and accessibility

The Inspector found that the pace of progress on furthering the accessibility of conferences and meetings has been slow when considering the fact that policies on accessibility and minimum levels of accessibility for persons with disabilities are missing in most organizations. Additionally, the system has not been dynamic enough to adapt and utilize advances in technology. Progress has been uneven. This is evidenced, for example, in the contrast between the prioritization given to the topic of accessibility by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Human Rights Council, and the limited engagement of some other organizations. There is no systematic focus on the topic of disability inclusion and accessibility in any of the legislative bodies, and no resolutions are adopted on the topic on a regular basis. This has led many interviewees to perceive the topic of disability inclusion and accessibility as an “institutional orphan”.

Consequently, many interviewees underscored the imperative of “mainstreaming” disability inclusion and accessibility across the work of all United Nations system organizations. Making disability inclusion and accessibility a cross-cutting issue will help secure a higher degree of institutional support. It will help make disability-related issues a part of the regular or core budget. Mainstreaming disability inclusion and accessibility will facilitate making disability-related training mandatory through scaled-up awareness-raising programmes for staff. Mainstreaming will also lead to a better understanding of the different types of disabilities and how to address them, particularly invisible disabilities such as intellectual and cognitive disabilities.

Since the topic is relatively “apolitical”, its mainstreaming could secure the buy-in and support of Member States for mobilizing greater political and institutional support and dedicating additional resources to improving accessibility. Equally vital is the support of the executive heads. Indeed, the principal agent in effecting attitudinal changes and furthering prioritization on any topic is the organizational leadership, and the same holds true for disability inclusion and accessibility. The Inspector urges the executive heads of all participating organizations to adopt a common position on disability inclusion and enhancing accessibility in the framework of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination.

To address the limited progress in the efforts of organizations to further accessibility, the Inspector highlights a number of thoughts for further consideration by different stakeholders. These include the following: organizations of persons with disabilities should actively promote and demand greater attention to the topic of accessibility before the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the high-level political forum on sustainable development and the legislative organs of other United Nations system organizations; organizational units engaged in studying technological advances for enhancing accessibility should establish a community of practice on technology adaptations; and each entity, within its mandate and sphere of competence, should look at what more it can do to enhance accessibility, both by itself and in cooperation with other entities, and should develop specific programmes and pursue them proactively.

VIII. Recommendations

Of the 10 formal recommendations for action contained in the report (see also annex VI), 9 are addressed to the executive heads of all JIU participating organizations. While only one recommendation is addressed to the legislative bodies (recommendation 10), the timely and effective implementation of the other nine recommendations will be greatly facilitated by the explicit support of the legislative bodies for these recommendations and their follow-up with the executive heads to verify implementation.

Recommendation 1

The executive heads of 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

The formal recommendations are complemented by 19 informal or “soft” recommendations, indicated in bold text, as additional suggestions to the legislative organs and the executive heads for effecting further improvements. The soft recommendations can be found in the following paragraphs: 38, 42, 81, 87, 112 (two soft recommendations), 131–133, 152, 158, 161, 179, 190, 201, 210, 215, 219 and 240.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	iii
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	xiv
<i>Chapter</i>	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
A. Context	1
B. Objectives and scope of the review	2
C. Approach and methodology	2
D. Limitations	4
E. Definitions	4
II. MANDATES FOR ADDRESSING ACCESSIBILITY	6
A. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	6
B. Human Rights Council resolutions and reports	7
C. General Assembly resolutions	9
D. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	10
E. Mandates from legislative bodies of other United Nations system entities	10
F. Other decisions	11
G. Looking forward: compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	12
III. POLICIES, GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS ON ACCESSIBILITY	13
A. Organizational policies on accessibility	13
B. Guidelines on accessibility	15
C. International standards for accessibility	17
D. Need for a policy on accessibility in all organizations	18
IV. ACCESSIBLE FACILITIES AND SERVICES AT HEADQUARTERS, FIELD AND OFF-SITE LOCATIONS AND USER SATISFACTION	20
A. Existing accessible facilities and services at headquarters locations and organizational self-assessment	20
B. Accessibility of field offices	24
C. Accessibility of meetings and conferences at off-site locations	25
D. User perspectives on the adequacy of the level of accessibility of facilities and services	26
V. MEASURES TO ENHANCE INTERNAL COORDINATION ON ACCESSIBILITY AND ENCOURAGE GREATER PARTICIPATION	29
A. Measures to enhance internal capacity and coordination regarding accessibility	29
B. Measures to encourage the participation of persons with disabilities	34
VI. MEASURES TO PROACTIVELY INCORPORATE ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS, SHARE BEST PRACTICES, RAISE AWARENESS AND ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY	40
A. Ensuring that constructions and acquisitions do not create new barriers	40
B. Enhancing the sharing of good practices within and among agencies	45
C. Enhancing staff awareness	47
D. Enhancing accountability	52

	<i>Page</i>
VII. A CASE FOR MAINSTREAMING DISABILITY INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY	56
A. Uneven and slow pace of progress on addressing accessibility .	56
B. Furthering universal design and an ecosystem for barrier-free access.....	57
C. Disability inclusion and accessibility: the need for a shift to system-wide mainstreaming.....	57
D. Concluding remarks	59

ANNEXES

I. Guidance documents on accessibility and on mainstreaming the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.....	60
II. Non-exhaustive list of international standards for accessibility.....	62
III. Provision of facilities and services for conferences and meetings and adequacy levels	65
IV. Coordination mechanisms addressing accessibility	66
V. Non-exhaustive list of training modules related to disability and accessibility	70
VI. Overview of actions to be taken by participating organizations on the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit.....	72

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CEB	United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination
DAISY	Digital Accessible Information System
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
ICT	information and communications technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMO	International Maritime Organization
ITC	International Trade Centre
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit
NGO	non-governmental organization
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNISDR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UN-Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNWTO	World Tourism Organization
UPU	Universal Postal Union
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization
WMO	World Meteorological Organization

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Context

1. Conferences and meetings are vital means of engaging in the decision-making processes of the United Nations system. In the four main duty stations of the United Nations Secretariat alone (New York, Geneva, Nairobi and Vienna), nearly 34,000 meetings were held in 2017.² Given that 1.5 billion people, or at least 15 per cent of the global population, have a disability, their full and equitable inclusion in public decision-making can have an enormous impact on government actions and the implementation of policies and programmes — including, but not limited to, those that directly affect them.³ Their participation can also serve as an eye-opener for other meeting participants, as they bring to the table valuable and diverse views by sharing stories and issues that only they can tell and by discussing issues from their unique perspective.

2. Since 1982, a series of conventions, resolutions, reports and programmes of action have clearly established the priority of the right of access for persons with disabilities in general, and of the right to access United Nations system conferences and meetings in particular. Foremost among these was the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in 2006, which brought to the forefront the obligation to ensure full, effective and meaningful participation for persons with disabilities.

3. More recently, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals have stressed the importance of inclusion of all people, including persons with disabilities. With the message of “leave no one behind”, the 2030 Agenda emphasizes mainstreaming inclusive policies and practices in the United Nations system, which encompasses organizations’ programmes of work as well as internal operations. The attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals requires that the voices of persons with disabilities be heard and their needs be met.

4. Despite these mandates, persons with disabilities face myriad technical, attitudinal and environmental barriers that limit their full and equal participation in society. These barriers are typically human-built, which suggests that inaccessible environments are most often the result of a lack of information and awareness by persons without disabilities who create the environment, rather than a conscious will to prevent persons with disabilities from accessing places or services meant for the general public.⁴

5. While the common understanding of accessibility is confined to physical environments, the Convention and related mandates underscore a broader conceptualization of accessibility that includes removing barriers related to information and communications technology (ICT), services, transportation and attitudes.⁵ The latter necessitates educational efforts, awareness-raising, cultural campaigns and communication. Where these barriers exist, they limit the full and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in United Nations system activities and processes, including its conferences and meetings.

6. To assess the existing barriers and how they can be addressed, the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) reviewed the status of accessibility for persons with disabilities to United Nations system conferences and meetings as part of its programme of work for 2018, following a proposal by the United Nations Secretariat.

² A/73/93, para. 9.

³ A/HRC/31/62, para. 31.

⁴ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, general comment No. 2 (2014) on accessibility, para. 3.

⁵ Ibid., para. 35.

B. Objectives and scope of the review

7. The aim of the review is to provide an overview and assessment of the current status of accessibility for persons with disabilities to United Nations system conferences and meetings, specifically those organized by the JIU participating organizations. To this end, the review is aimed at identifying obstacles and impediments as well as good practices to enhance accessibility for persons with disabilities so that they can participate effectively in conferences and meetings, and makes actionable recommendations to improve the current situation. The review is also aimed at encouraging a non-discriminatory, inclusive and accessible environment in the United Nations system. In the review, the Inspector addresses the topic both from the standpoint of physical facilities, services and related barriers, as well as from the perspective of ensuring the fundamental rights of persons with disabilities.

8. The scope of the review is system-wide, covering all JIU participating organizations. The accessibility of large-scale conferences and meetings (e.g., regular or periodic intergovernmental meetings and councils) as well as to those organized on a smaller scale (e.g., meetings that take place in staff offices or small meeting rooms, either at the headquarters or at field locations) is considered in the review. Events and meetings organized by United Nations system organizations off site are also considered.

9. The working conditions of employees with disabilities in United Nations system organizations are also addressed insofar as they relate to the accessibility of the work premises and the necessary level of sensitivity and awareness that staff at large should have regarding disability inclusion and accessibility. This follows from the logic that making the workspace more accessible would include meetings and conference rooms where staff members' work is also carried out. Also, a workforce that is trained and made aware about disability issues would be better placed to proactively factor in and address the requirements of persons with disabilities attending conferences and meetings. The Inspector addresses programmatic work on disabilities undertaken by various United Nations system organizations only insofar as it is related to accessibility.

C. Approach and methodology

10. The review starts with the basic premise and follows the approach that enhancing the accessibility of conferences and meetings is inherently linked to the inclusion of persons with disabilities; the two are inextricably interlinked and cannot be artificially segregated. A core component of the approach is the assessment of all relevant aspects that affect such accessibility, not just the physical rooms. This can include: assessing whether the procurement processes of goods and services for conferences and meetings include relevant accessibility checks; assessing whether periodic accessibility assessments of facilities and services for conferences and meetings are undertaken; assessing whether staff members have been trained on disability inclusion and accessibility; and assessing whether standard operating procedures have been put in place in different offices as regards their operational responsibilities concerning conferences and meetings. Through such an approach, the review is intended to comprehensively cover all relevant facets that have an impact on the accessibility of conferences and meetings, while leaving open the possibility that coverage of such topics can have a positive impact on other realms of accessibility beyond just conferences and meetings.

11. In terms of methodology, a mixed-method research approach was used, which consisted of:
- A desk review of current mandates, policies, guidelines, standards and other documents concerning disability and accessibility in general, and accessibility of conferences and meetings in particular.
 - A qualitative questionnaire disseminated to all 28 JIU participating organizations, and follow-up interviews with respondents from these organizations.
 - A corporate-level questionnaire distributed to all civil society organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, as well as an individual perceptions survey sent to the organizations to circulate among their membership to assess the accessibility of conferences and meetings organized by United Nations system entities.

- Interviews with representatives of three organizations of persons with disabilities, identified through purposive sampling based on their active engagement on the topic under review, as well as interviews with United Nations system staff and officials with disabilities or who work on disability to gain insight into potential users' perspectives on challenges and good practices pertaining to accessibility.
- Interviews with delegates from the permanent missions of three Member States (Bulgaria, Mexico and Tunisia) to the United Nations in New York, identified through purposive sampling based on their active leadership role in the Conference of States Parties to the Convention.
- Interviews with two comparator international organizations (the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), identified through convenience sampling based on the fact that they are headquartered in the same cities as JIU participating organizations, to gain insights into good practices regarding accessibility.

12. Twenty-three organizations and the United Nations Secretariat responded to the JIU questionnaire.⁶ From the United Nations Secretariat, 12 departments, offices and commissions provided separate responses to the questionnaire. Follow-up interviews were conducted with over 250 staff and officials from relevant offices (where existent) that deal directly or indirectly with accessibility issues in the responding organizations, including conference management, facilities management, human resources departments, procurement offices, legal offices, safety and security departments, public information departments, senior management and staff representatives.

13. Interviews were conducted with departments and offices in the United Nations Secretariat (the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)) and the World Health Organization (WHO) that deal substantively with disability matters. Relevant officials addressing disability and accessibility were also interviewed, including the members of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility, and the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities.

14. Representatives from three organizations of persons with disabilities (International Disability Alliance, Disabled Peoples' International and CBM (Christian Blind Mission)) responded positively to the request from JIU for interviews, and discussions subsequently took place in Geneva and New York. Nine disability representative organizations responded to the organizational questionnaire, and 44 individuals responded to the individual perceptions survey.

15. The report consequently reflects data gathered from the above-mentioned sources and through the channels indicated, allowing for relevant triangulation. All of the information and views received through questionnaire responses, interviews and the perceptions survey have been dealt with in accordance with the usual respect for confidentiality shown by JIU.

16. To facilitate the handling of the report and the implementation of its recommendations and monitoring thereof, annex VI contains a table indicating whether the report was submitted to the relevant organizations for action or for information. The table specifies whether the recommendations require action by the organizations' governing bodies or executive heads.

⁶ The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) requested to be excluded from the review on the basis that, as part of the United Nations Secretariat and a tenant of the Palais des Nations, it is bound by the regulations of the Secretariat, and all conference and meeting services are provided by the United Nations Office at Geneva, specifically the Division of Conference Management.

D. Limitations

17. There are limitations of the current study that warrant acknowledgement. Firstly, several organizations provided limited responses to the JIU questionnaire. Follow-up interviews did not always yield a great deal of additional value, as some of the interviewees identified by the organizations had limited experience in and knowledge of the subject matter. Consequently, many of the good practices and lessons learned highlighted in the present report tend to emanate from a limited number of organizations.

18. In terms of understanding a user's perspective, only a small number of organizations of persons with disabilities responded to the JIU questionnaire, while responses to the survey on the accessibility of conferences and meetings also yielded a limited number of responses. Nonetheless, the responses yielded very useful information on aspects of accessibility improvement that have been highlighted in the present report.

E. Definitions

19. The following key concepts are central to the review:

- (a) *Disability*. Disability is an evolving concept that results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.⁷ The impairments that persons with disabilities experience are diverse and include both visible impairments (e.g., physical impairments, including mobility, visual, speech and hearing impairments) and invisible impairments (e.g., intellectual, sensory, cognitive and psychosocial impairments).
- (b) *Accessibility*. Accessibility “is a precondition for persons with disabilities to live independently and achieve full and equal participation in society”.⁸ Central to the present review is the idea that, “without access to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communication, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, persons with disabilities would not have equal opportunities for participation in their respective societies”.⁹ Ensuring accessibility, therefore, is the act of breaking down attitudinal and environmental barriers that limit equal opportunities for participation.
- (c) *Reasonable accommodation*. Within the context of conferences and meetings, reasonable accommodation is aimed at ensuring that all persons have the requisite accommodations necessary for full and equal participation. The Convention defines reasonable accommodation as necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- (d) *Universal design*. According to the Convention, universal design — broadly deemed as “essential for some, useful for all” — is the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. A crucial component of this concept is that “the application of universal design makes society accessible for all human beings, not only persons with disabilities”.¹⁰

⁷ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, preambular paragraph (e).

⁸ CRPD/CSP/2017/4, para. 4.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ General comment No. 2.

- (e) *Meaningful participation.* Full access to information and communication is essential to meaningful participation in conferences and meetings and to serving as an agent of change. In this context, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities has stated that, “without accessible information and communication, a range of persons with different disabilities cannot effectively participate in law-making and policymaking”.¹¹

20. The Inspector wishes to express his appreciation to all the officials of the United Nations system organizations and representatives of other organizations who assisted in the preparation of the report, particularly those who participated in the interviews and so willingly shared their knowledge and expertise.

¹¹ A/HRC/31/62, para. 76.

II: MANDATES FOR ADDRESSING ACCESSIBILITY

A. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

21. The 1982 World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons first brought the issue of rights for persons with disabilities into mainstream conversation within the United Nations system. While it focused on the equalization of opportunities and human rights, it was the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006 that gave due recognition to the issue of disabilities in general and accessibility in particular, with a dedicated section on accessibility (article 9), often described as the “backbone” of the Convention.

22. The Convention clarifies and qualifies how all categories of rights apply to persons with disabilities and identifies areas where adaptations have to be made for them to enable them to effectively exercise their rights and where the protection of their rights must be reinforced. Central to its framework is the universal design of environments to enable full inclusion and participation in society. This makes it incumbent upon States parties to develop, promulgate and monitor the implementation of minimum standards and guidelines for the accessibility of facilities and services open or provided to the public.

23. To monitor the implementation of the Convention, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was established, which has further focused attention through the adoption of general comment No. 2. This comment sets out the legal context for accessibility, defines barriers to participation as a form of discrimination and explains the role of international cooperation in promoting accessibility, as highlighted below.

Key excerpts of general comment No. 2 (2014) on accessibility

Adopting standards and guidelines on accessibility

Minimum national standards for the accessibility of facilities and services should be in accordance with the standards of other States parties in order to ensure interoperability (para. 18 of general comment No. 2). Such standards must be developed in close consultation with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations (para. 30). Such standards should be mainstreamed in laws on the physical environment (construction and planning), transportation (aerial, railway, road and water transport), information and communication, and services open to the public. Denial of access should be clearly defined as a prohibited act of discrimination (para. 29).

Building capacity and awareness regarding disability issues and accessibility

Awareness-raising is one of the preconditions for the effective implementation of the Convention. It should promote the application of universal design and the idea that designing and building in an accessible way from the earliest stages is cost-effective and economical. Awareness-raising should be carried out in cooperation with persons with disabilities, their representative organizations and technical experts. Special attention should be paid to capacity-building for the application and monitoring of the implementation of accessibility standards (para. 35).

Enhancing institutional capacity to provide accessibility services at conferences and meetings

Training on accessibility should be provided not only to those designing goods, services and products, but also to those who actually produce them, as ultimately it is the builders on the construction site who make a building accessible or not (para. 19). Procurement procedures should incorporate accessibility requirements, and procurement processes should be used to implement affirmative action to ensure accessibility and de facto equality for persons with disabilities (para. 32).

All new investments made within the framework of international cooperation should encourage the removal of existing barriers and prevent the creation of new barriers. International cooperation should be used not merely to invest in accessible goods, products and services, but also to foster the exchange of know-how and information on good practice in achieving accessibility. Organizations of persons with disabilities must be supported so that they can participate in national and international processes to develop, implement and monitor accessibility standards (para. 47).

Undertaking upgrades and providing services and devices to enhance accessibility

All new objects, infrastructure, facilities, goods, products and services have to be designed in a way that makes them fully accessible for persons with disabilities, in accordance with the principles of universal design. States parties should establish definite time frames and allocate adequate resources for the removal of existing barriers (para. 24).

B. Human Rights Council resolutions and reports

24. Following the adoption of the Convention, the Human Rights Council, in various resolutions, has underscored the need to enhance the accessibility for persons with disabilities of the work of the United Nations system in general, and of the Council and its mechanisms in particular, in accordance with international standards on accessibility for persons with disabilities. These resolutions have focused on the following three key areas related to accessibility:

- *Adopting standards and guidelines on accessibility.* In its resolution 31/6, the Human Rights Council requested the Secretary-General, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and United Nations system entities to continue the progressive implementation of standards and guidelines for the accessibility of facilities and services of the United Nations system, taking into account relevant Convention provisions.
- *Undertaking upgrades and providing services and devices to enhance accessibility.* In its resolutions 16/21 and 31/6, the Human Rights Council highlighted the need to enhance the accessibility for persons with disabilities of the Council's work, including ICT, Internet resources and documents, in accordance with international standards on accessibility for persons with disabilities, and to explore the use of videoconferencing and video messaging. In its resolution 29/19, the Council requested the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner to provide all necessary services and facilities to make discussions of certain Council sessions fully accessible for persons with disabilities.
- *Enhancing institutional capacity to provide accessibility services at conferences and meetings.* In its resolution 16/21, the Council established the task force on secretariat services, accessibility for persons with disabilities and use of information technology, to study the issue in consultation with Member States, OHCHR, the United Nations Office at Geneva and all relevant stakeholders, and to submit concrete recommendations. In its resolution 26/20, the Council appointed the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, with the mandate to raise awareness and combat stereotypes, prejudices and harmful practices that hinder equal opportunity participation. In its resolution 35/6, it encouraged all United Nations system entities to fully cooperate with the Special Rapporteur and affirmed that his or her annual reporting to legislative bodies (the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council) should be in accessible formats, including Braille, Easy Read reports, sign language interpretation and closed captioning. To avoid duplication, the Special Rapporteur was tasked with working closely with relevant United Nations system entities, the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Disability and Accessibility.¹²

25. In addition, the Human Rights Council has considered a number of reports that highlight substantive aspects of disability and accessibility, define concepts and demonstrate their relevance to the accessibility of conferences and meetings. These reports provide a comprehensive view of the work

¹² Human Rights Council resolution 26/20.

of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities and the task force on secretariat services, accessibility for persons with disabilities and use of information technology, including recommendations to United Nations system entities on means to enhance accessibility. The reports can broadly be categorized into the following four areas as relates to accessibility:

- *Building capacity and awareness regarding disability issues and accessibility.* The task force has emphasized that training should be developed and organized for all staff members of the United Nations system on disability issues, particularly those addressing accreditation and interacting with conference participants. Mandatory training would ensure that staff members were acquainted with measures necessary to guarantee the full and equal participation of persons with disabilities in the work of such entities.¹³
- *Engaging and coordinating with relevant stakeholders.* The Special Rapporteur has recommended that the entire United Nations system promote the participation of persons with disabilities in all international decision-making processes,¹⁴ by proactively seeking their input, to ensure that their needs and demands are adequately mainstreamed and integrated, including in the development and monitoring of system-wide action plans, strategic planning and management. Their direct participation in international summits, high-level meetings, permanent forums and conferences of persons with disabilities must be ensured, as well as in the implementation and monitoring process of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.¹⁵
- *Enhancing institutional capacity to provide accessibility services at conferences and meetings.* The task force has sought to address means for remote participation in Council sessions (e.g., videoconferencing and video messaging) and enhanced access to physical meeting rooms, information and documentation.¹⁶
- *Undertaking upgrades and providing services and devices to enhance accessibility.* Measures proposed by the task force on secretariat services, accessibility for persons with disabilities and use of information technology include: making Human Rights Council-related documentation progressively available in an accessible format (e.g., main web pages in Easy Read versions, videos with captioning, documentation in Braille upon request);¹⁷ captioning all future Council sessions and providing sign language interpretation during those sessions,¹⁸ particularly for webcasts as a high priority;¹⁹ issuing a decision by the General Assembly on which sign language(s) to use; holding consultations between the Secretariat and organizations of persons with disabilities to determine the number of sessions requiring video captioning and/or sign languages;²⁰ issuing a legislative mandate from the Human Rights Council supported by a statement of programme budget implications on the provision of documents in Braille, simultaneous captioning and sign language interpretation during Council meetings and webcasts;²¹ progressively making all conference rooms at the United Nations Office at Geneva accessible (particularly Room XX) and equipping them in compliance with universal design principles;²² fully integrating the needs of persons with disabilities into planning at the United Nations Office at Geneva and widely disseminating information on existing accessibility measures on relevant websites; and, until accessible conference planning guidelines are developed, collecting information in advance at the United

¹³ Human Rights Council decision 19/119, annex.

¹⁴ A/HRC/31/62, paras. 101–102.

¹⁵ Ibid., para. 94.

¹⁶ Human Rights Council decision 19/119, para. 3.

¹⁷ Ibid., para. 21.

¹⁸ Ibid., para. 22.

¹⁹ Ibid., para. 23.

²⁰ Ibid., para. 22.

²¹ Ibid., para. 24.

²² Ibid., para. 25.

Nations Office at Geneva on the attendance of persons with disabilities at Council sessions through a revised registration form.²³

C. General Assembly resolutions

26. Building on the prioritization and impetus provided by the Convention and various Human Rights Council resolutions and reports, the General Assembly has, in several resolutions, broadly addressed the issue of accessibility within the United Nations system, covering the built environment, ICT, services, transport, attitudes and awareness, universal design and reasonable accommodation. It has emphasized the importance of the full participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities²⁴ and has requested the Secretary-General to continue to address the accessibility of conference facilities as a matter of priority.²⁵

27. The most significant among these is resolution 70/170 adopted on 17 December 2015, entitled “Towards the full realization of an inclusive and accessible United Nations for persons with disabilities”, in which the General Assembly affirms that the United Nations system has an important role to play in protecting and promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, including by taking all appropriate measures to ensure that it provides accessibility and reasonable accommodation.²⁶ In the resolution, the General Assembly requests the Secretary-General to improve relevant regulations, facilities and services within the United Nations system to create non-discriminatory and accessible environments for persons with disabilities, including staff members, delegates and visitors with disabilities.²⁷

28. Other relevant General Assembly resolutions on accessibility covering the United Nations system entities can broadly be categorized into four areas:

- *Developing standards and guidelines on accessibility.* The General Assembly has on multiple occasions requested the Secretary-General to progressively develop and implement relevant standards and guidelines for the accessibility of facilities and services of the United Nations system, particularly when undertaking renovations (e.g., the Strategic Heritage Plan of the United Nations Office at Geneva).²⁸
- *Upgrading or providing services and devices to enhance accessibility.* In several resolutions, the General Assembly has stressed the importance of eliminating physical, communication and technical barriers that persons with disabilities face²⁹ as regards conference facilities and has outlined actions to enhance the accessibility of the built environment through necessary renovations.³⁰ The Secretary-General has been requested to: further the utilization of sign language interpretation, captioning, Braille and easy-to-use texts; introduce a portable version of the Official Document System;³¹ and provide reasonable accommodation for human rights treaty body experts with disabilities.³² The General Assembly has also decided that the Department of Public Information will provide available, accessible, searchable and secure webcasts of public meetings of treaty bodies, as soon as feasible.³³
- *Building capacity, awareness and sensitivity on disability issues and accessibility.* The Secretary-General has been requested to promote awareness and understanding among United

²³ Ibid., para. 26.

²⁴ General Assembly resolution 65/186.

²⁵ General Assembly resolution 71/262.

²⁶ General Assembly resolution 70/170.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ General Assembly resolutions 61/106, 62/170, 67/170, 68/247 B, 68/268 and 69/142.

²⁹ General Assembly resolution 69/274.

³⁰ General Assembly resolutions 65/186, 69/262 and 70/248.

³¹ General Assembly resolutions 65/186, 71/262 and 72/19.

³² General Assembly resolution 68/268.

³³ Ibid.

Nations system staff members regarding persons with disabilities, including recognition of their full potential and their contribution to the work of the organization.³⁴ Emphasizing that sign languages are fully-fledged natural languages, the General Assembly has affirmed the promotion of rights relevant to language as a critical prerequisite to the full realization of human rights for deaf persons.³⁵

- *Promoting participation and representation in decision-making processes.* In addition to encouraging United Nations system entities to engage representative organizations of persons with disabilities in development processes and decision-making,³⁶ the General Assembly has requested the Secretary-General to prioritize their concerns by promoting their inclusion in both the development and the outcomes of policies, programmes and projects.³⁷

D. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

29. With the growing focus on the topic of disability over the past decade, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is understandably disability-inclusive. The Sustainable Development Goals reference disability in seven targets across five Goals,³⁸ while another six Goals³⁹ have targets linked to disability-inclusive development through terminology such as “inclusion”, “for all”, “accessibility” and “universal access”.⁴⁰ In addition, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the New Urban Agenda also address accessibility.

30. To expand inclusivity, the General Assembly has requested the Secretary-General to integrate the principles of accessibility and inclusion into the monitoring and evaluation of the Sustainable Development Goals.⁴¹ In a similar vein, the Committee has noted that accessibility must be an integral part of any sustainable development effort, especially in the context of the post-2015 development agenda,⁴² while the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities has recommended that the entire United Nations system continue its efforts to promote the participation of persons with disabilities in all international decision-making processes, especially in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.⁴³

E. Mandates from legislative bodies of other United Nations system entities

31. While resolutions of the General Assembly are fully applicable to the United Nations Secretariat⁴⁴ and all its funds and programmes, among the specialized agencies only the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) was given a specific mandate on accessibility by its legislative body. In questionnaire responses and interviews, none of the other specialized agencies indicated the existence of decisions from their respective legislative organs on accessibility. Organization-wide directions on accessibility, where they do exist, are largely contained within internal documents, such as policies, strategies, action plans, standards, memorandums, office instructions and administrative circulars.

³⁴ General Assembly resolution 70/170.

³⁵ General Assembly resolution 72/161.

³⁶ General Assembly resolution 69/142.

³⁷ General Assembly resolutions 69/142, 62/127, 65/186, 62/127 and 69/142.

³⁸ Sustainable Development Goals 4, 8, 10, 11 and 17 and targets 4.a, 4.5, 8.5, 10.2, 11.2, 11.7 and 17.18 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

³⁹ Sustainable Development Goals 1, 3, 5, 9, 13 and 16.

⁴⁰ See Leveraging the Incheon Strategy to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, E/ESCAP/APDDP(4)/INF/1.

⁴¹ General Assembly resolutions 69/142, 62/127, 65/186 and 69/142.

⁴² general comment No. 2, para. 47.

⁴³ A/HRC/31/62, paras. 101–102.

⁴⁴ The United Nations Secretariat includes: offices and departments at headquarters in New York, internal justice bodies, other offices, special advisers, representatives and envoys, offices outside the main headquarters and United Nations regional commissions.

32. The ITU governing body has adopted a number of pertinent resolutions on accessibility to benefit persons with disabilities and persons with specific needs, including age-related disabilities. These include: establishing the ITU Accessibility Trust Fund to expand ITU activities in the area of accessible ICT and to make ITU a more accessible organization;⁴⁵ ensuring efficient and accessible conferences, meetings, documentation, publications and information infrastructures;⁴⁶ conducting studies and research and issuing recommendations and guidelines on telecommunication and ICT accessibility;⁴⁷ prioritizing work on accessibility terms and definitions; considering aspects of universal design, including the drafting of non-discriminatory standards, service regulations and measures; and using a telecommunications accessibility checklist to incorporate the principles of universal design and accessibility.⁴⁸

F. Other decisions

33. On 20 April 2018, the Secretary-General issued decision 201/20 entitled “Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities”, in which he recommended:

- Reviewing the United Nations system's current approach to both accessibility and the mainstreaming of disability rights across operations, to develop a baseline through questionnaires sent to the United Nations Sustainable Development Group members and 40 United Nations country teams and interviews with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (estimated: October 2018).
- Developing a policy, action plan and accountability framework to strengthen system-wide accessibility and the mainstreaming of disability rights (estimated: January/February 2019).
- Issuing guidance to the United Nations system on issues relating to accessibility and the employment of persons with disabilities, including standards for United Nations Secretariat premises.

34. At the regional level, ESCAP and its member States have been at the forefront of furthering the disability and accessibility agenda through three consecutive Asia-Pacific specific disability decades, accompanied by a range of resolutions and concrete actions. ESCAP resolution 67/6 of 25 May 2011, entitled “Enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities at ESCAP”, mandated enhancing the accessibility of ESCAP, in response to which the Commission established an accessibility centre, undertook an accessibility assessment in 2017, developed guidelines on accessibility and established an internal ESCAP accessibility working group.

35. In November 2012, the ESCAP member States endorsed the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP resolution 69/13). The Strategy comprises 10 disability-inclusive goals and 27 targets for attainment by member States, with goal 3 focused on enhancing access to the physical environment, information and communication, among others. In November 2017, the Beijing Declaration, including the Action Plan to Accelerate the Implementation of the Incheon Strategy, was endorsed through ESCAP resolution 74/7. One of its operative paragraphs outlines the commitment by ESCAP to improve accessibility in a comprehensive manner and undertake an accessibility assessment.

36. At the system-wide level, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) has reiterated the importance of enhancing the accessibility of the United Nations system and the progressive implementation of standards and guidelines set out in General Assembly resolutions.⁴⁹ It established the Inter-Agency Support Group on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with

⁴⁵ ITU resolution 175, Busan, 2014.

⁴⁶ ITU resolution 71 (Rev. Busan, 2014).

⁴⁷ ITU-R resolution 67.

⁴⁸ ITU-T resolution 70.

⁴⁹ See CEB/2009/HLCM/30 and CEB/2009/HLCM/HR/2.

Disabilities in 2006, while its Human Resources Network established the Working Group on Employment of Persons with Disabilities (see annex IV).

G. Looking forward: compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

37. The present chapter has made clear the diversity of mandates that exist on accessibility, all of which are inspired by the Convention, which allows only States and regional integration organizations to become parties to it. In total, 177 countries and regional integration organizations have signed and ratified the Convention and have undertaken efforts to implement it. Many also advocate for its implementation through the United Nations system, as expressed through resolutions adopted by the legislative bodies.

38. Based on consultations with legal experts, two possible ways of filling the gap of the Convention not explicitly providing that international organizations can become party to it would be to amend it or adopt an optional protocol that would allow for such accession. However, such a course of action may prove to be excessively time-consuming and cumbersome. Instead, **the Inspector calls upon organizations of the United Nations system to respect the spirit and letter of the Convention and voluntarily assume obligations under it, especially under article 9 of the Convention, including by incorporating its provisions into their policy on accessibility.** In this context, the executive heads of United Nations system organizations, particularly within the framework of CEB, could take the lead in suggesting further measures for implementing the provisions of article 9 of the Convention.

III: POLICIES, GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS ON ACCESSIBILITY

A. Organizational policies on accessibility

39. A policy on disability inclusion and accessibility is a public document that demonstrates the commitment of an organization to the inclusion of persons with disabilities and accessibility for them in all aspects of its normative and operational work. This necessarily includes the forums through which deliberations on such work are carried out and decisions arrived at, namely conferences and meetings. A consistent policy that comprehensively addresses the physical and technological aspects of accessibility as well as the essentiality of inclusion that is embedded in the rights of persons with disabilities will help to create trust, both within and outside the organization, that it is willing to walk the talk when it comes to ensuring that persons with disabilities are fully engaged in all relevant stages of its work.

40. Among the JIU participating organizations, ITU⁵⁰ has a dedicated formal policy addressing accessibility, OHCHR (as part of the United Nations Secretariat) has a reasonable accommodation policy for staff with disabilities, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has a circumscribed policy on accessibility as it relates to programme-related construction activities, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has a disability policy⁵¹ focused on ensuring that Palestinian refugees with disabilities can participate in an active and meaningful way in the planning, implementation, management and review of UNRWA policies or interventions that affect them.

41. The OHCHR policy entitled "United Nations Human Rights Reasonable Accommodation Policy" (2018) is rooted in the rights of persons with disabilities and embodies principles that merit replication:

- OHCHR will provide reasonable accommodation to all persons with disabilities who request it and who are acting in any capacity under the financial or operational responsibility and control of OHCHR.
- The policy is applicable to anyone linked to OHCHR who requires its financial, administrative, logistical or technical support to participate in meetings, events, seminars, conferences, congresses or any other instance, in their official or individual capacity.
- OHCHR will allocate a budget for all specific programmes aimed at providing reasonable accommodation for expected activities. It will also allocate a budget to cover reasonable accommodation requests from its offices when unforeseen requests are received.
- All requests for reasonable accommodation will be followed up with an interactive dialogue between OHCHR and the person with disabilities concerned and an evaluation of the implementation of the accommodation requested. In cases where no agreement is reached, OHCHR must justify its denial of the request through an objective analysis to avoid discrimination.
- Non-employees with disabilities who are denied reasonable accommodation can bring claims to relevant focal points in OHCHR for review, the outcome of which will be reported to the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights.

42. The Inspector welcomes as a best practice for incorporation into all accessibility policies provisions on accountability (i.e., provisions requiring the organizer to evaluate the implementation of the accommodation requested and provide clear justifications for denial) and redress (i.e., provisions that the person who is denied reasonable accommodation can contest the decision before the organizational leadership). **Given the recent adoption of the OHCHR policy and its potential to serve as a guide for other entities, the Inspector calls upon OHCHR to periodically monitor and report on policy implementation, particularly as regards the components of accountability and redress.**

⁵⁰ ITU Accessibility Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2013.

⁵¹ UNRWA Disability Policy, Promoting the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, September 2010.

43. The ITU policy contains important commitments to accessibility principles that include:
- Addressing the barriers that limit the full participation of persons with disabilities in organizational activities, be it as staff members, meeting participants or members of the general public.
 - Applying the principle of universal design whenever a service is reviewed or introduced, so that it is usable by all persons without the need for adaptation or specialized design.
 - Utilizing accessible ICT and undertaking periodic information dissemination, awareness-raising and training activities.
 - Complying with and contributing to the development of system-wide policies and guidelines on accessibility, engaging in knowledge-sharing and enhancing the policy using available best practices.
 - Consulting with relevant organizations representing persons with disabilities that are experienced in accessibility policies and programmes in order to benefit from their insights and best practices.
44. As regards the UNICEF policy⁵² on incorporating accessibility considerations into construction activities, useful elements for replication include the following:
- Article 9 of the Convention on the accessibility of buildings, workplaces etc. is recognized.
 - The design and costing of construction projects should include accessibility provisions as an integral component and not as an add-on.
 - Accessibility should be clearly mentioned and budgeted for in project proposals.
 - In cases where national legislation on accessibility is absent or falls short of the International Standards for Building Construction set out in the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) Standard 21542:2011, the latter should be used as a reference while taking into consideration the local context.
 - The organization should document, share and exchange knowledge and good practices regarding accessible construction internally and with the United Nations common system.
45. Seven organizations (the United Nations Secretariat, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the International Trade Centre (ITC), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF and WHO) have policies on the employment of persons with disabilities and, in some cases, accessibility for them, with provisions that promote, directly or indirectly, the accessibility of conferences and meetings for persons with disabilities. Useful principles and provisions from the United Nations Secretariat's policy⁵³ (which is also applicable to all funds and programmes) include commitments to:
- Recognize denial of reasonable accommodation as discrimination on the basis of disability.⁵⁴
 - Take appropriate measures to ensure access to and the use of premises, facilities and equipment by all staff members with disabilities.
 - Establish and implement provisions concerning existing buildings and grounds for accessible routes, entry, exit and signage, as well as accessible audio and intuitive wayfinding, including in emergency situations.
 - Take appropriate measures to ensure access to information for staff members with disabilities as needed for the performance of their official functions.
 - Periodically disseminate accessible information relevant to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workplace and undertake awareness-raising on disability among staff.

⁵² UNICEF Executive Directive CF/EXD/2017-004, Accessibility in UNICEF's Programme-Related Construction Activities, 11 December 2017.

⁵³ ST/SGB/2014/3.

⁵⁴ It may be noted that the High-level Committee on Management/Human Resources Network Policy Statement on Disability (2009) specifically recommends that all organizational disability policies include provisions for reasonable accommodation measures to eliminate physical, communications, technical, workplace and/or other barriers, including with regard to buildings, the office environment, meetings, conferences, workshops and access to information.

- Share knowledge and information about good practices regarding inclusive work environments system-wide, in consultation with, and with the involvement of, staff with disabilities.
- Appoint a focal point for disability and accessibility who will establish a monitoring and compliance mechanism to ensure implementation of the policy.

46. ILO,⁵⁵ IMO,⁵⁶ ITC,⁵⁷ UNHCR⁵⁸ and WHO⁵⁹ policies additionally contain specific commitments as regards making meeting and conference venues and services accessible. These commitments include:

- Taking all reasonable measures to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to participate fully in meetings, conferences, workshops, seminars and other forums.
- Making presentation aids and other media accessible as far as practicable to persons with physical and sensory disabilities, with relevant materials available in accessible formats.
- Paying specific attention to the accessibility of venues where events are held, to ensure that they are accessible to staff members with disabilities.

47. The ITC and WHO policies additionally outline a number of relevant measures regarding ICT accessibility, monitoring, surveys, the role of focal points and provisions for field offices. These measures include:

- Taking steps to ensure that information technology tools available to persons with disabilities, including intranet and Internet pages, applications and databases, are available in accessible formats where appropriate, where possible and based on demand (ITC).
- Conducting periodic reviews of the effectiveness of the measures undertaken pursuant to the policy and taking steps to improve the effectiveness of such measures (ITC and WHO).
- Including questions relevant to the implementation of the policy in staff surveys (ITC and WHO).
- Tasking the disability or accessibility focal point with advising on implementing mechanisms to address discrimination against persons with disabilities, raise awareness on the rights of persons with disabilities, engage in inter-agency collaboration activities and mainstream disability in organizational activities (ITC).
- Establishing that, for new constructions or improvements to existing buildings, in cases where relevant local national legislation is absent, provisions should be defined by headquarters or a regional office (WHO).

48. While a number of policies are in place that deal either directly or indirectly with accessibility, the organizations could not identify any reviews undertaken to assess the effectiveness of policy implementation. The issue of accountability in the realm of accessibility and the role oversight offices can play in this regard is discussed in chapter VI.

B. Guidelines on accessibility

49. While policies on accessibility are limited, several organizations have issued highly instructive guidance documents that outline concrete measures to make meetings and conferences more accessible for persons with disabilities. The present section highlights key elements of these guidance documents – elements that may inspire other organizations in the development of their own policies and guidelines.

50. **Disability Inclusive Meetings: An Operational Guide (ESCAP, 2015).** To ensure that all meetings are inclusive of disability perspectives at both the thematic and participatory levels, that is to

⁵⁵ ILO Circular No. 655, Policy on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities, 19 July 2005.

⁵⁶ IMO Internal Memorandum ADMIN/11/1, Policy on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities, 5 January 2011.

⁵⁷ ITC Executive Director's Bulletin ITC/EDB/201701, Employment and Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities at ITC, 22 December 2017.

⁵⁸ UNHCR Policy on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities, November 2008.

⁵⁹ WHO Policy on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities, 1 August 2010.

say, irrespective of whether a meeting's theme strictly refers to disability per se, the guide provides a framework for the planning of disability-inclusive meetings and focuses on three areas:

- (a) Key concepts of disability-inclusive meetings, namely: disability, diversity of disability, accessibility, universal design, and reasonable accommodation and the interrelationship among those concepts.
- (b) How to plan disability-inclusive meetings, namely: viewing themes from a disability perspective; sending invitations; formulating a programme; selecting an accessible venue; arranging accessible information and communication services (such as the provision of fonts, Braille, sign language interpreters, guides/interpreters, captioners, note-taking services and support assistants); arranging accessible transportation and budgeting.
- (c) How to conduct disability-inclusive meetings, namely: making final checks of the venue; raising awareness among personnel; using colour communication cards and evaluating meetings.

The guide also provides useful sample templates for replication, such as an accessibility request form, a meeting evaluation form, a meeting planning checklist and floor plans of a mobility-accessible corridor. It also lists appropriate terminology for referring to persons with disabilities.

51. General guidelines of accessibility for ESCAP conferences and meetings (draft version, 20 July 2018). These draft guidelines emanate from ESCAP resolution 67/6, in which the ESCAP Executive Secretary was requested to implement standards and guidelines to further improve the accessibility of facilities and services. The draft guidelines follow a four-step process (identify → prepare → deliver → evaluate) for the organization of accessible and disability-inclusive meetings with the following key components:

- Identification of pre-meeting arrangements, namely: disability focal points for the conference or meeting; budgetary allocation for accessible services; participants' reasonable accommodation requirements; and accessible service providers.
- Preparation of accessible information materials (screen readers, easy-to-understand content and files in epub format) with recommendations on the creation of both digital and print documents and PowerPoint presentations.
- Delivery of accessibility services with guidance on: real-time captioning (captioner selection, the materials to provide and the equipment software needed); re-speaking captioning; interpretation (interpreter selection, the materials to provide and the placement of lighting, audio and projection equipment); meeting assistants and guides; and the arrangement of accessible transportation.
- Evaluation of successes and challenges in creating accessibility by providing a sample accessibility evaluation form template.
- Provision of a template for a reasonable accommodation request form for persons with disabilities and guidelines for communicating with and referring to persons with disabilities.

52. Guidelines for Accessible Meetings (ITU, October 2015).⁶⁰ This technical paper includes:

- A list of accommodation services needed to make meetings accessible and steps to ensure that personnel organizing meetings are aware of end-user needs.
- Checks and measures to ensure that a meeting venue is accessible, particularly as regards the entrance and general areas, meeting rooms, technical accessibility, background noise, captioning, catering facilities and clear signage.
- Information to be provided on venue accessibility, hotel accommodation and meeting dates.
- Measures to ensure that the information provided is accessible, with guidance on presentations, videos, websites, sign language, the handling of different spoken languages and aids to listening.
- Staff training needed to assist persons with disabilities.
- Guidance on feedback collection, expert involvement and report preparation.

⁶⁰ Available at: www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-t/opb/tut/T-TUT-FSTP-2015-AM-PDF-E.pdf.

- Sample questions for registration forms and checklists for the meeting day.

53. **Toolkit on Disability for WHO offices in countries, areas and territories (2012).**⁶¹ The toolkit outlines:

- Practical steps and tools to remove barriers and ensure access as regards the premises, information technology, publications and communications.
- A checklist for office heads to use when assessing the level of accessibility and disability inclusion in their offices.
- Relevant questions about how to assess, and relevant actions to address, building and information accessibility, staff awareness and knowledge, disability mainstreaming in technical work and the engagement of persons with disabilities in the organization's work.

54. Other useful guidance documents that cover specific aspects of accessibility and how to mainstream the Convention and the disability agenda in programmatic work can be found in annex I.

C. International standards for accessibility

55. There are no international standards on accessibility that are accepted and used system-wide by United Nations system organizations. Depending on their physical location, almost all organizations simply attempt to conform to the accessibility standards outlined in the building codes and disability acts of the host country. The exception to this is UNICEF, which has established three levels of accessibility applicable to all its offices globally, as detailed in table 1. All UNICEF offices, new constructions and offices relocating to new premises or undergoing layout changes or structural modifications are expected to attain at least level 1 accessibility. Projects that contribute to improving office accessibility can further benefit from funding or co-funding through the UNICEF Greening and Accessibility Fund.⁶² In the Inspector's view, each United Nations system entity would benefit from assessing its existing facilities against the UNICEF levels and developing minimum accessibility levels for organization-wide application.

Table 1: Accessibility levels for UNICEF facilities

Level 1: Minimum	Level 2: Moderate	Level 3: High-level
1. Entrance to building is accessible (adequate doorway width; ramp for entrance with steps; accessible elevator if office on top floor). 2. One accessible work station with clear pathway from entrance, bathroom and meeting room; room should have sufficient space to maneuver; furniture should meet specific requirement of staff member with disability. 3. One accessible meeting room (accessible entrance, sufficient maneuvering space for person using assistive devices, easy reach to meeting and conferencing equipment, etc.) 4. One accessible unisex toilet (equipped with grab rails, maneuvering space and wash basin). 5. Accessible evacuation route for ground level and other levels where staff with disabilities work. 6. Adapted parking space close to building entrance following standards.	1. Attains level 1 accessibility. 2. More than one accessible work station, and additional ones made accessible upon request. 3. Two accessible meeting rooms. 4. Accessible toilet on more than one floor. 5. Easy circulation in most parts of the building: one vertical accessible circulation in building (lift, stairs and ramps) and horizontal circulation on each floor (level corridors with adequate width; floor ramps for differences in level). 6. Common areas (pantry, cafeteria, reception and recreation areas) are accessible (clear pathway, sufficient maneuvering space, sink taps reachable and easy to operate with one hand.) 6. One parking space with accessible pathway to entrance.	1. Attains level 1 and level 2 accessibility. 2. Accessible work stations on every level or floor. 3. All meeting rooms accessible. 4. 50 per cent of toilets accessible. 5. All common areas accessible. 6. At least 4 per cent of provided parking reserved for accessible-designated parking spaces. 7. Signage is displayed (e.g., indication of accessible toilets and parking spots). 8. Controls and switches can be operated safely and independently.

⁶¹ WHO/NMH/VIP/DAR/12.01.

⁶² In the UNICEF Procedure on Eco-Efficiency and Inclusive Access in UNICEF Premises and Operations (2018), the organization commits to improving the accessibility of its premises by applying universal design principles.

56. The lack of organization-wide standards for accessibility leads to variations in accessibility levels at headquarters and regional and country offices in the same organization. Similarly, the absence of system-wide standards gives rise to variations in accessibility among organizations in the United Nations system. While such variations make the task of measuring and reporting on accessibility even more challenging, they also provide United Nations system entities with the opportunity to demonstrate leadership in this field and undertake pioneering initiatives by establishing benchmarks based on existing international standards on accessibility. The only known internal initiative to compare various national standards on accessibility to arrive at benchmarks comes from the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in Addis Ababa (see chap. VI, sect. A).

57. On the basis of responses from participating organizations and the analysis by JIU, a non-exhaustive list of 12 accessibility-related international standards, one initiative and six good practice documents addressing the built environment and ICT were identified. These can be used to inform the development of compliance targets or measurement benchmarks. All six good practice documents on ICT accessibility have been developed and used by ITU. Eleven of the 12 standards emanate from the International Organization for Standardization, a worldwide federation of national standards bodies. Organizations also identified three national laws on accessibility standards⁶³ that can provide guidance.

58. These standards, recommendations and guidelines, accompanied by basic descriptive information, can be found in annex II. Given that assessing the technical merits of these standards is beyond the scope of the present review, their listing should not be considered as an endorsement by JIU. Rather, the technical personnel concerned in each United Nations system entity should assess them carefully for relevance and fit.

D. Need for a policy on accessibility in all organizations

59. It is clear from the good practices highlighted from existing policies, guidelines and standards on accessibility that the elements necessary for all organizations to develop a comprehensive policy on accessibility are already in place. In the cases where such policies and guidelines are missing, the Inspector found instances of insufficient understanding and appreciation of the importance of disability and accessibility, manifested in the form of limited interest in the topic and a tendency to view it narrowly as a provision of facilities and services, rather than from a holistic perspective of respect for and the upholding of human rights, non-discrimination and inclusion. What is needed is due reflection on existing good practices to assess how each organization can best adapt and adopt them to its realities to establish a policy that sets out minimum criteria for accessibility, as well as guidelines on how the policy can be implemented in practice to make conferences and meetings accessible.

60. The development of such policies and guidelines should involve stakeholders from all relevant units that are engaged directly or indirectly in servicing conferences and meetings. This includes building and facilities management, conference services, document management services, ICT services, safety and security departments, human resources management, health and medical services, procurement departments, legal offices, public information and outreach departments, substantive units organizing conferences and meetings, and disability focal points. To ensure that the user perspective is incorporated, the process must include input from persons with disabilities as well as experts on disability and accessibility. Collective buy-in for designing and implementing such policies and guidelines should be facilitated by enhanced awareness-raising rather than by force, fiat or shaming. To further a certain level of system-wide consistency in responses and standards, while taking into consideration their own specific realities, organizations should undertake consultations through relevant inter-agency forums dealing with accessibility, as part of the process of policy development.

61. The implementation of the following recommendations is expected to lead to greater organizational effectiveness in furthering the accessibility of conferences and meetings:

⁶³ Swiss Society of Engineers and Architects Standard 500; Americans with Disabilities Act Standards for Accessible Design (2010); and Italian Law No. 13 of 9 January 1989, arts. 77–79.

Recommendation 1

The executive heads of 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.

62. Once an organizational policy and guidelines have been endorsed, the legislative bodies should continue to undertake due diligence by mandating periodic reporting on policy implementation. The executive heads, for their part, should put in place clearly identifiable structures, arrangements and procedures for policy implementation, with delineated responsibilities for coordination and monitoring. Once each organization has identified and established its own minimum criteria for accessibility, along with good practices in the public and private sector, those criteria can serve as a baseline for the establishment of an aspirational set of minimum standards for accessibility system-wide. The executive heads can mandate their representatives in relevant networks and forums on conference management (such as the Inter-Agency Support Group on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) to undertake this task as a reflection of their commitment to accessibility, non-discrimination and inclusion.

IV. ACCESSIBLE FACILITIES AND SERVICES AT HEADQUARTERS, FIELD AND OFF-SITE LOCATIONS AND USER SATISFACTION

63. The preceding chapter highlighted how organizational policies on accessibility and minimum accessibility levels for facilities and services are largely missing in most JIU participating organizations, despite the existence of useful and instructive guidelines in a number of organizations for accessible conferences and meetings. The present chapter looks at practices to assess the existence of accessible facilities and services for conferences and meetings and their adequacy, based on the assessment of both the provider, that is, the organizations, and the user, that is, persons with disabilities and organizations of persons with disabilities. The chapter also highlights the situation regarding accessibility in regional and field offices and provisions for accessibility for conferences and meetings held at off-site locations.

A. Existing accessible facilities and services at headquarters locations and organizational self-assessment

64. To assess the existence of accessible facilities and services for conferences and meetings and their adequacy, the JIU questionnaire contained a checklist whereby organizations were requested to indicate whether a given facility, service or tool was provided using a two-point “yes” or “no” scale and to self-rate their corresponding adequacy on a four-point scale ranging from “fully meets” to “does not meet”. The checklist covered: (a) building facilities and services on organizational premises; (b) services for conferences and meetings; and (c) information technology services for conferences and meetings. The checklist was not meant to be exhaustive and did not cover all features of the accessibility of conferences and meetings, but rather many of the key elements that should be in place. The constituent features were selected on the basis of the JIU desk review of guidance documents on accessibility and were finalized following advice from the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management of the United Nations Secretariat.

65. While a total of 16 JIU participating organizations provided organizational-level responses to the checklist (see annex III), not all responded to every question. In the cases where responses were provided, they should be considered as reflective of facilities and services in the organization’s headquarters location only. It should be noted that JIU accepted the checklist responses as provided and did not undertake a physical verification. Accessibility in regional and country offices is likely to vary, due to the lack of enforced minimum levels of accessibility applicable organization-wide that extend to field presences.

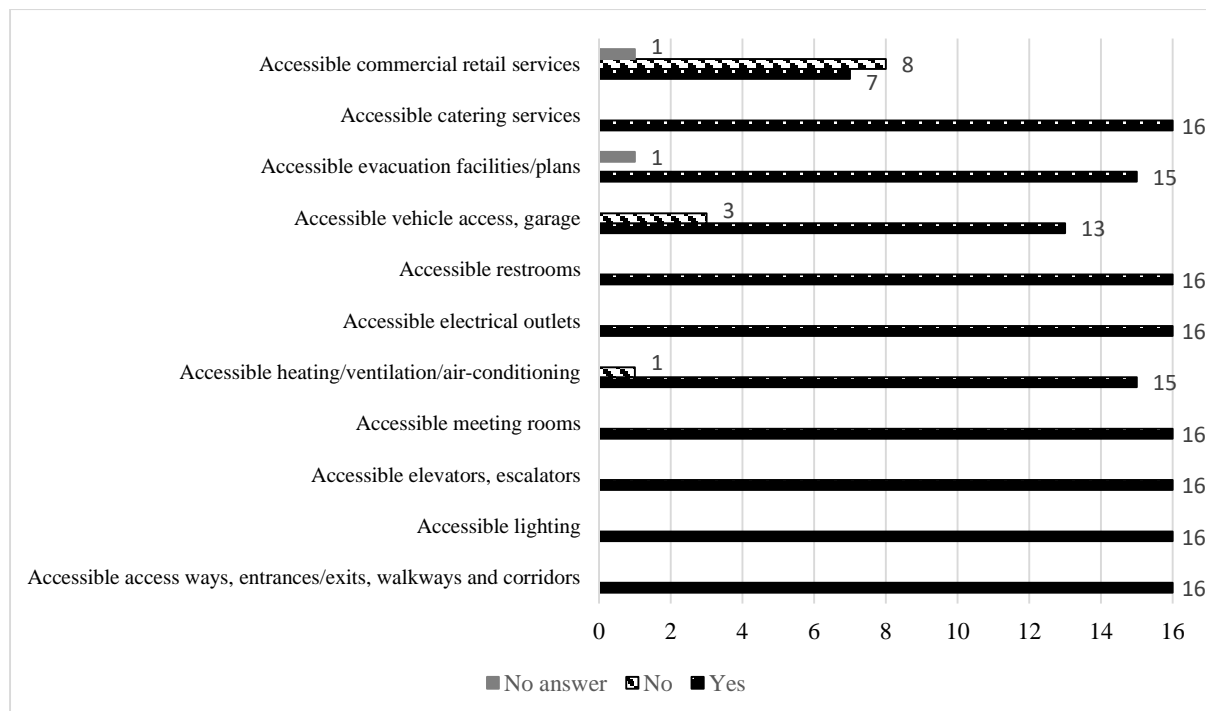
66. Accessibility provisions in other organizations that did not complete the checklist are highlighted throughout the report, as applicable, on the basis of information gathered from interviews and questionnaire responses. With regard to the United Nations Secretariat, while separate checklist responses were received from six entities based in Addis Ababa (ECA), Brindisi (the United Nations Global Service Centre), Entebbe (the United Nations Regional Service Centre in Entebbe), Geneva (OHCHR and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) and Vienna (the United Nations Office at Vienna), they cannot be considered as fully representative of the situation in the entire organization, given the significant number of meetings and conferences that are organized in locations for which no checklist responses have been provided, namely, United Nations Headquarters (New York), one office away from headquarters (in Nairobi) and three other regional commissions (in Bangkok, Beirut and Santiago).

67. This section does not provide a standard definition or constituent elements for the assessed features, as there are no definitions that are commonly accepted system-wide. Consequently, the ratings are likely to be subject to each organization’s own subjective criteria and standards.

1. Accessibility of buildings and facilities where conferences and meetings are held

68. The first section of the checklist covers the provision of building and facility features and how well these features meet accessibility demands. Eleven features were assessed for accessibility, namely: (a) access ways, entrances and exits, and walkways and corridors; (b) catering services; (c) commercial retail services; (d) electrical outlets; (e) elevators and escalators; (f) evacuation facilities and plans; (g) heating, ventilation and air conditioning; (h) lighting; (i) meeting rooms; (j) restrooms; and (k) vehicle access and garages. Nine of the 11 features outlined above are provided by almost all responding organizations (see figure I). The only two exceptions are commercial retail services, which are not provided by eight organizations, and accessible parking and garages, which are not provided by three organizations.

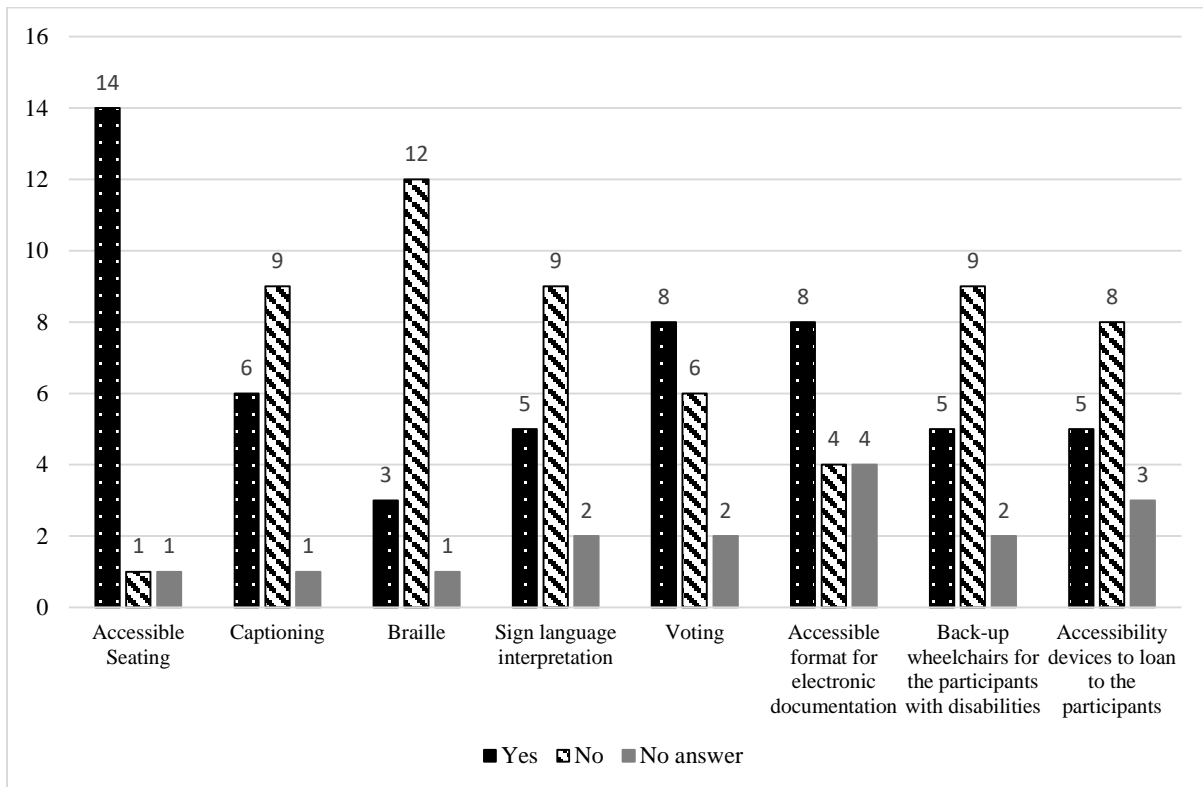
Figure I: Organizations' provision of buildings and facility features



2. Accessibility services for meetings and conferences

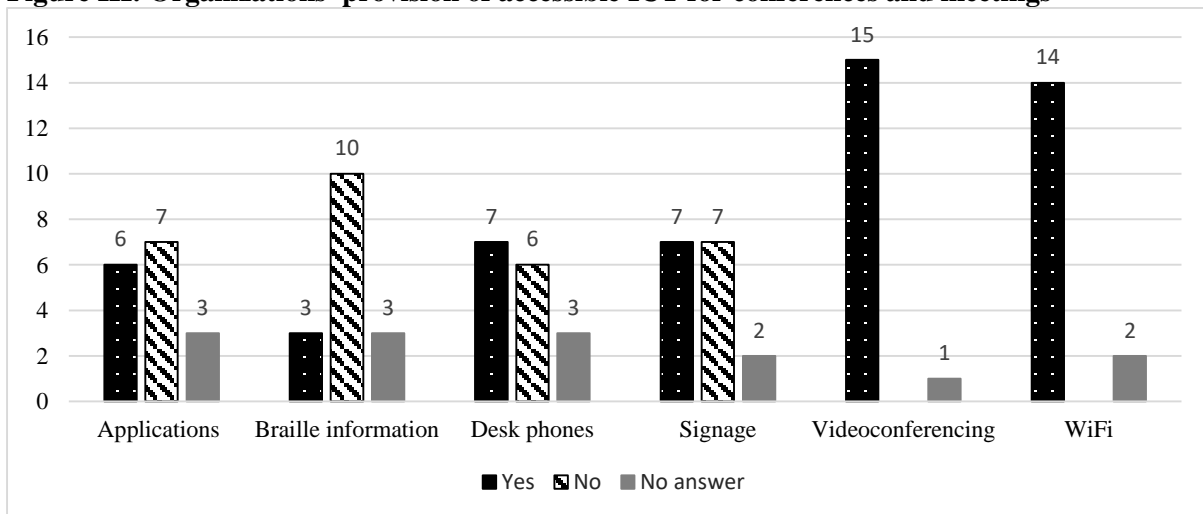
69. The second section of the checklist covers the provision of the following eight accessibility-related services for conferences and meetings and how well these services meet accessibility needs: (a) accessible seating; (b) captioning; (c) information in Braille; (d) sign language interpretation; (e) voting assistance; (f) accessible formats of electronic documentation; (g) backup wheelchairs for persons with disabilities; and (h) accessibility devices to loan to participants.

70. The responses indicate that services aimed at enhancing accessibility are largely lacking in all organizations except WHO, which provides all eight services (see figure II). UNHCR does not provide any of the eight services, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), ITC and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) provide only one of the services, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and IMO provide only two of the services, and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Universal Postal Union (UPU) provide only three of the services. The most prevalent service is accessible seating, which is offered by 14 organizations. The rest are offered by only a small number of responding organizations: only three offer material in Braille; only five offer accessibility devices on loan and backup wheelchairs; five offer sign language interpretation and captioning; eight offer electronic documentation in accessible formats; and eight offer accessible voting.

Figure II: Organizations' provision of accessible services for conferences and meetings

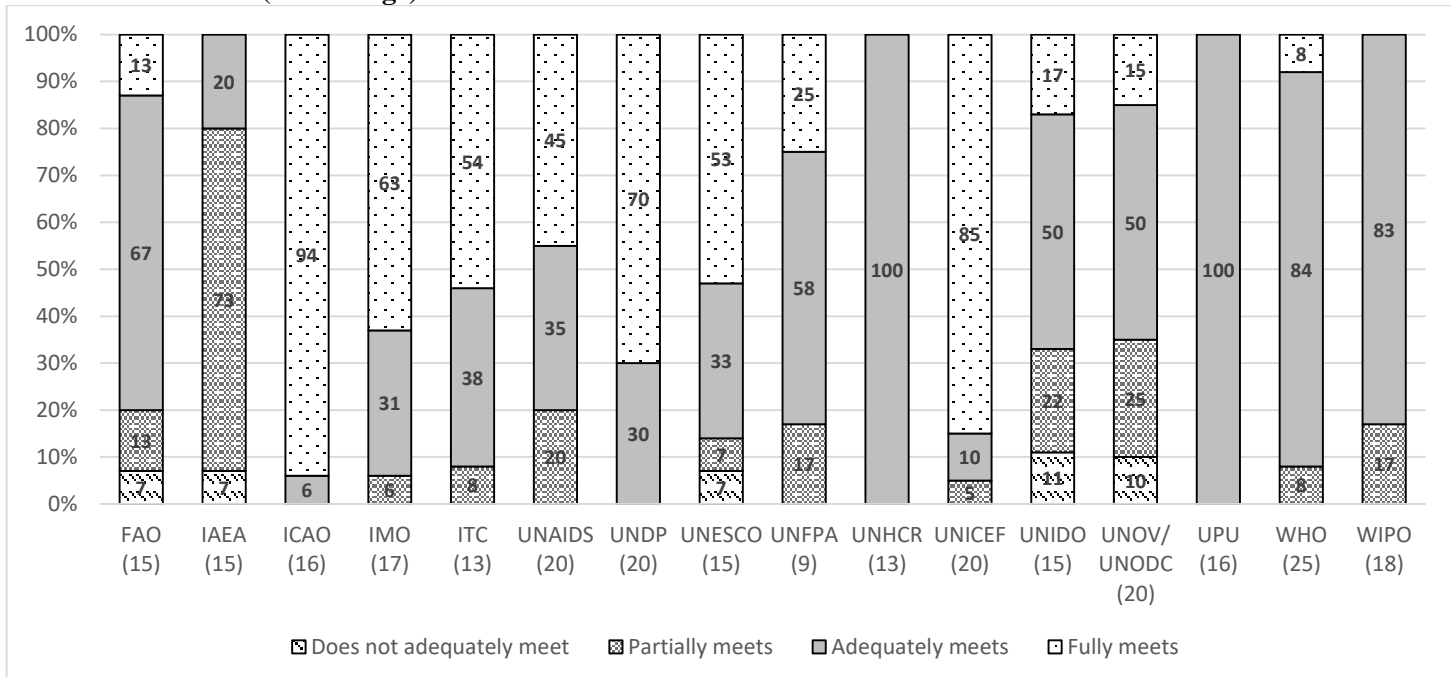
3. Accessibility of ICT

71. The third section of the checklist covers the provision of the following six ICT services for conferences and meetings and how well they meet accessibility needs: (a) applications; (b) information in Braille; (c) desk phones; (d) signage; (e) videoconferencing; and (f) Wi-Fi. The responses received show that, while all organizations offer videoconferencing and Wi-Fi, only three provide information in Braille, only six provide accessible web applications, and eight provide desk phones and accessible signs. Only UNICEF and WHO provide all six services (see figure III).

Figure III: Organizations' provision of accessible ICT for conferences and meetings

72. As regards organizations' self-rating of the accessibility of existing facilities and services, six organizations (ICAO, IMO, ITC, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNESCO and UNICEF) assessed a majority (53 to 94 per cent) of existing facilities and services as fully meeting accessibility needs, while eight others (FAO, UNFPA, UNHCR, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UPU, WHO and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)) rated a majority as adequately meeting accessibility needs. The only organization to rate the majority of its facilities and services as either partially or not adequately meeting accessibility needs was IAEA (80 per cent), while corresponding figure provided by UNIDO was 33 per cent, and the figure provided by UNODC and the United Nations Office at Vienna was 35 per cent. Given that all three are located in the same compound in Vienna, the discrepancy in ratings is likely indicative of the subjectivity applied when providing the ratings, in the absence of a common baseline of minimum acceptable standards.

Figure IV: Organizational self-assessment of the adequacy of accessibility of existing facilities and services (Percentage)



Note: Figures in parentheses below the organizational name in the horizontal axis denote the total number of facilities and services assessed.

73. The checklist also included questions on whether organizations had a dedicated accessibility centre — a “one-stop shop” on the premises to provide ICT tools and other services on demand for persons with disabilities. Only FAO responded in the affirmative, rating its accessibility centre as “adequately meeting” needs, though no supporting evidence as to its existence was provided during interviews or in the questionnaire response. On the question of gathering feedback from persons with disabilities through surveys and focus groups, only UNICEF and WHO confirmed that they had used both tools. While UNICEF rated both as “fully meeting” accessibility needs, WHO rated focus groups as “adequate” and surveys as only “partially meeting” needs.

74. Overall the responses indicate that the vast majority of the organizations are not providing many of the essential ICT and other services that would make meetings and conferences more accessible for persons with disabilities. In the cases where facilities and services are available, while organizations have tended to self-rate themselves as “adequately meeting” the needs, the acceptance of such ratings at face value should be balanced against the likelihood that each entity applies its own subjective criteria when making the assessments. This is because no common baseline exists of minimum acceptable standards against which the measurements are to be made.

75. The Inspector finds regrettable the lack of complete organizational-level responses to the checklist from 10 organizations,⁶⁴ particularly from ones that have undertaken considerable work in the field of disability and accessibility. Firstly, the lack of response does not help to promote the efforts of these entities when it comes to furthering accessibility in-house. Secondly, it has allowed for only a partial analysis of accessible facilities and services in the headquarters locations of the organizations.

B. Accessibility of field offices

76. All JIU participating organizations with a field presence acknowledged during interviews that field offices generally tended to lag considerably behind their headquarters counterparts in terms of the accessibility of their facilities and services for conferences and meetings. This was attributed to a number of factors, primary among which was that field offices were often located either on rented premises, on premises allocated by the host Government or on premises with heritage status. Thus modifications to the physical premises either were not allowed or required securing permits from local authorities, which was an elaborate and cumbersome bureaucratic process with no guarantee of success.

77. In cases where organizations rented their offices on a short-term basis, they questioned the cost-effectiveness of investing in structural improvements. In line with the “Delivering as one” initiative, whereby agencies were moving to common premises, it was noted that not all were willing or able to contribute to the costs of making the common premises accessible. It was also noted that, due to space constraints, field offices typically hosted meetings off site in local hotels, auditoriums or conference halls. The situation was even more challenging when it came to small project offices located in rural and provincial areas; they typically had little or no accessibility features due to funding limitations.

78. Despite these limitations, the Inspector found some good examples in terms of measures that could be implemented to guarantee a certain minimum level of accessibility for meetings and conferences at field offices. UNDP operates under the guidelines issued in 2012 by the former United Nations Development Group (now the United Nations Sustainable Development Group) titled “Performance-based guidelines for the design and construction of United Nations Development Group common premises office buildings”, which include a dedicated section on accessibility (sect. 6.2) that sets out recommended minimum levels of functional accessibility for offices. This includes access to the building itself and to at least one office, bathroom and meeting space or conference room. These guidelines are the result of the work of an inter-agency task force to improve standardization and harmonization across the United Nations system on common premises. All new premises have to be constructed in line with these guidelines, and country offices present to facilities management at headquarters their needs regarding size and accessibility. In the majority of cases, country offices take into consideration the guidelines given by headquarters.

79. However, given that UNDP is a decentralized organization with a presence in more than 170 countries and territories and more than 500 locations, it has noted that the extent of compliance with the guidelines may be uneven across the organization, due to resource challenges or the inability to make modifications in government buildings. In the case of leased buildings, offices are expected to take into consideration the guidelines on accessibility, the implementation of which is carefully reviewed during building inspections to ensure that at least the ground floor is fully accessible.

80. Similarly, ILO noted that, when it signed a lease for facilities in field locations, accessibility was part of the compliance criteria outlined in guidelines and standard procedures. The 2005 ILO publication “Making ILO offices accessible to persons with disabilities” outlines practical measures that headquarters, field and project staff can take to make premises and services accessible to persons with physical, sensory and learning disabilities. It provides guidance on making access reviews relevant and appropriate to local conditions and on taking into account locally established standards on

⁶⁴ ILO, ITU, the United Nations Secretariat, UNEP, UN-Habitat, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), UNRWA, UN-Women, UNWTO and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

accessibility. Good examples of practical application can be seen at the UNICEF and UNESCO regional offices in Bangkok. When undergoing renovations in recent years, both offices ensured that all meeting rooms were located on the ground floor, which in turn was made accessible through ramps and rails, accessible restrooms and accessible passageways.

81. To further the accessibility of field offices on a systematic and continual basis, and to ensure that no new barriers are created and that existing barriers are gradually removed, **the Inspector considers as a best practice for consideration and replication by all entities the establishment of a dedicated accessibility fund for single-occupancy (i.e., non-shared) country offices.** With the United Nations reform process aiming for 50 per cent of premises to be common or shared by 2021, the burden can also be lessened by pooling resources for accessibility. The work done by UNICEF through its Greening and Accessibility Fund, which supports country offices with efficiency and accessibility initiatives, offers a good example. For every air ticket purchased, UNICEF pays an additional 2 per cent of the ticket price for greening and 1 per cent for accessibility, and these amounts go into a pool for the Fund. Once applications outlining proposed accessibility upgrades or construction projects from country offices are reviewed and approved by a technical committee, the funding is allocated. To date, 25 to 26 UNICEF country offices have received funding to achieve “level one” accessibility (see chap. V, sect. C). The goal is for all offices to achieve “level one” accessibility and for all new constructions to achieve the maximum of “level three” accessibility.

C. Accessibility of meetings and conferences at off-site locations

82. Meetings and conferences of United Nations system entities have regularly been organized off site, that is, outside the physical premises of the organization, in addition to those held on organizational premises. Examples include major summits hosted by a Member State in a country different from the one where the organization’s headquarters is located (e.g., the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito and the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan) and the organization by a country office of a stakeholders’ meeting in a local hotel. Major conferences and summits hosted in third countries can present a win-win scenario whereby the host country benefits from the prestige of having its name permanently attached to a landmark global event or outcome (e.g., the Beijing Declaration, the Rio Earth Summit and the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development), while the organizing entity benefits from the costs being defrayed by the host Government and from the opportunity to advance its agenda in a country or region where its presence may be limited. For smaller meetings organized by country offices, off-site venues such as local hotels or conference centres are often selected for practical reasons, namely that their offices may not have suitable meeting space or services to host events.

83. In their questionnaire responses and during interviews, most organizations acknowledged that they did not adequately monitor accessibility provisions for off-site meetings, nor did they set minimum accessibility requirements beyond asking for compliance with local accessibility regulations. Not a single organization could provide information on: how many persons with disabilities the organization had been unable to accommodate for off-site meetings; specific disabilities for which accommodation measures could and could not be provided; or user satisfaction with regard to the accessibility of off-site meetings.

84. The Inspector is of the view that it is incumbent upon organizations to undertake due diligence to ensure that off-site venues can accommodate the accessibility requirements of participants with disabilities. As a good practice, when selecting conference facilities and during negotiations with the host entity, ECA, ICAO, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the United Nations Office at Geneva and WHO take into account accessibility requirements. This includes conducting pre-conference scoping missions that involve walk-throughs of venues to assess accessibility. ESCAP provides the host entity with a checklist of requirements that includes a paragraph on disability; it also lobbies regional Governments to ensure that all meetings accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities. For smaller meetings, a good practice comes from the ILO office in Bangkok, which noted that, when developing a list of 13 pre-cleared hotels in which to host meetings, accessibility in addition

to safety and security had served as a criterion for clearance. Some entities also make accessibility provisions on a case-by-case or needs basis for off-site meetings, such as the provision of on demand captioning (WHO) and live streaming (UNWTO).

85. As a best practice, ITU noted that, for its major events, it included specific provisions in the host country agreement requesting that the host country make the necessary provisions to ensure access to facilities within the conference premises for participants with disabilities, including access to the podium in the main meeting rooms. In addition, all major ITU events are webcast and include captioning in plenary meetings, the costs of which are covered by the host country. Conversely, a 1987 administrative instruction of the United Nations Secretariat⁶⁵ outlining guidelines for the preparation of host government agreements makes no reference to the need to incorporate accessibility provisions into such agreements. This instruction should be reviewed and revised by the Office of Legal Affairs to ensure that it adequately reflects present-day needs and priorities associated with hosting events.

86. Given the regular frequency with which United Nations system entities organize meetings and conferences outside their physical premises, the Inspector is of the view that the implementation of the following recommendation will enhance control and compliance of off-site meetings regarding accessibility considerations.

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.

87. **Where feasible, the Inspector also recommends that the signature of any agreements be subject to verification of conformity with the provisions outlined in the accessibility checklist, typically through follow-up pre-conference scoping missions.** Organizations may also consider incorporating accessibility clauses directly into host country agreements. While such agreements have typically tended to be limited to clauses on the obligations and responsibilities of each party, legal experts from various United Nations system entities have stated during interviews that this does not preclude including and insisting on accessibility clauses in the agreements. In this context, the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat noted that, if there was a request, it would be open to assisting relevant Secretariat offices to develop such clauses for inclusion in host country agreements.

D. User perspectives on the adequacy of the level of accessibility of facilities and services

88. Core to the understanding of the adequacy of the level of accessibility of conferences and meetings hosted by United Nations system organizations are the perspectives of persons with disabilities. Indeed, organizations of persons with disabilities have time and again stressed in multilateral forums the tenet of “nothing about us without us”. To ensure that the views of persons with disabilities are adequately reflected in the present review, three different means of information collection were used.

89. Firstly, the Inspector conducted interviews with representatives of three organizations of persons with disabilities⁶⁶ in Geneva and New York, members of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and staff members and officials with disabilities engaged in disability-related issues in the United Nations system entities. The interviews focused primarily on the specific areas in which United Nations system organizations needed the most urgent improvements with regard to enhancing accessibility, as well as any accessibility-related best practices or standards used externally that should be replicated.

⁶⁵ ST/AI/342.

⁶⁶ CBM, Disabled Peoples’ International and the International Disability Alliance.

90. It may be noted that the project team made multiple efforts to meet with a greater number of organizations of persons with disabilities during the thirty-eighth and thirty-ninth regular sessions of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, in June-July 2018 and September 2018 respectively. However, it proved challenging to attain the contact details of representatives of organizations of persons with disabilities who would attend the sessions. Additionally, the direct outreach by JIU to these organizations through their corporate contact emails did not yield any responses.

91. Secondly, a questionnaire was sent by email to all NGOs that held consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and were considered to be accredited to the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with responses received from nine organizations.⁶⁷ Lastly, an individual perceptions survey⁶⁸ administered through the online platform Survey Monkey was sent to the same list of organizations that received the questionnaire, with the request to circulate the survey among their members and constituents who had attended conferences and meetings hosted by United Nations system entities since 2012. A total of 44 individual responses to that survey were received.

92. The key challenges and recommendations emanating from the interviews and survey and questionnaire responses are highlighted below:

- (a) *Address invisible disabilities.* Both survey respondents and disability-related organizations highlighted the need to adequately accommodate invisible disabilities (e.g., intellectual, cognitive and psychosocial disabilities) through measures such as Easy Read documents, interpretation services in a simpler language, quiet rooms and accessible security procedures.
- (b) *Address accessibility before, during and after conferences and meetings.* One in three survey respondents had never received any information beforehand from organizers on accessible facilities or services in venues for any meetings attended. For those who had, only one in five agreed that the information was very clear. Disability-related organizations have called for information materials (e.g., documentation and signage) to be made available in accessible formats (Braille, Easy Read and large print) and for accessibility gaps in transportation, security, information services, printed materials, signage and displays, guides and sign language to be urgently addressed. Information on accessible services (e.g., accessible transportation) should be disseminated prior to the event through accessible websites.
- (c) *Incorporate accessibility into all stages of event design and planning.* This includes ensuring that accessibility is incorporated into the budget for all conferences and is reflected accordingly in tendering processes, contracts, procurements, evaluations and protocols. The survey responses indicate that, while two thirds of respondents had specific accessibility requirements that were communicated in advance to the organizers in 70 per cent of the cases, the majority did not express satisfaction with the extent to which their accessibility needs had been met. Additionally, the majority were dissatisfied or neutral regarding the accessibility of 17 out of the 25 facilities and services listed in annex III (plus accessible podiums).⁶⁹

⁶⁷ The Accessibility Organization for Afghan Disabled, CBM, the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (Bangladesh), Dementia Alliance International, Disabled Peoples Organizations Denmark, Enosh — The Israeli Mental Health Association, Pan Pacific and Southeast Asia Women's Association, the Potohar Mental Health Association (Pakistan) and UCP Wheels for Humanity.

⁶⁸ Through closed multiple-choice questions, the perceptions survey assessed: participant satisfaction with the provision of advance information by meeting organizers and feedback sought post-meeting; the extent to which accessibility requirements that participants had conveyed to organizers were adequately addressed; and the accessibility of 26 types of facilities and services. Three open-ended questions allowed respondents to elaborate on the primary challenges to accessibility and good practices internally and externally for replication. While the survey yielded a limited number of responses, and therefore due caution should be exercised in drawing inferences for the population as a whole and in interpreting the results, the findings were congruent with the responses that were received from organizations of persons with disabilities and staff and officials with disabilities.

⁶⁹ "Braille information" in table 2 was replaced with "Accessible logistical information" in the survey.

- (d) *Systematically replicate all good internal practices on a system-wide basis.* Presently, good practices regarding accessibility are not horizontally replicated. The guidelines on accessibility produced by UNICEF and ESCAP (see chap. III, sect. B) should be used by all entities, while conferences and meetings where the organizers have gone above the norm in providing for accessible services, such as the meetings of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,⁷⁰ the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction⁷¹ and the 2017 meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development,⁷² should serve as the benchmark for all events. In this regard, **developing and implementing a set of standards and commitments would enable uniform replication of good practices that are sustainable and less vulnerable to change.**
- (e) *Defray participation costs.* Organizations noted that participating in conferences and meetings, which often occur in high-cost headquarters locations (e.g., Geneva, New York, Paris, Rome and Vienna), was financially burdensome, and that United Nations system entities should consider covering part of the costs, particularly for conferences and meetings that addressed disability. Such financial support would allow persons with disabilities to share their work, contribute to awareness-building and effectively represent persons with disabilities.
- (f) *Utilize technological tools.* Examples include webcasting, remote participation and captioning. In addition, organizations should prepare reports with recommendations in accessible formats such as plain language versions and Easy Read versions. This would ensure that outcomes are accessible to a wider audience.

93. Despite the existence of mandates, useful guidelines, international standards and (in some instances) policies on accessibility, organizational assessments of existing facilities and services and of corresponding user satisfaction and recommendations make it clear that United Nations system organizations have considerable work to do to make their conferences and meetings accessible. In this context, the following two chapters outline concrete remedial measures to further accessibility.

⁷⁰ The Division of Conference Management of the United Nations Office at Geneva provides both international and national sign language interpretation during country reviews, real-time captioning (in English, French, Spanish and Russian), Braille documentation and Easy Read versions of some core documents.

⁷¹ The Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, held in Sendai, Japan in 2015 provided accessibility features such as real-time captioning (in English and Japanese) and international and Japanese sign language interpretation for various sessions. As a result, more than 200 individuals with disabilities actively participated as delegates, speakers, panellists and contributors.

⁷² The high-level political forum on sustainable development provided communication access real-time translation for deaf and hard of hearing participants, International Sign interpretation, portable audio translation devices and captioning for all plenary sessions.

V. MEASURES TO ENHANCE INTERNAL COORDINATION ON ACCESSIBILITY AND ENCOURAGE GREATER PARTICIPATION

94. To further the ability of persons with disabilities to access conferences and meetings organized by United Nations system entities, the present chapter outlines concrete remedial measures that can be undertaken by all organizations to enhance their internal capacity and coordination regarding accessibility issues and to encourage greater participation of persons with disabilities.

A. Measures to enhance internal capacity and coordination regarding accessibility

1. Improving internal coordination through a focal point on the accessibility of conferences and meetings

95. The existence of an organizational focal point on the accessibility of conferences and meetings can go a long way towards ensuring that, irrespective of the particularities of the organizational structure and the ways in which communication flows through that structure, a dedicated individual or entity exists to coordinate the work of offices with a relevant role to play in furthering the accessibility of conferences and meetings for persons with disabilities, and to inform staff about practices, policies, procedures and responsibilities related to enhancing accessibility.

96. Based on responses to interviews and the JIU questionnaire, 10 JIU participating organizations (ILO, ITU, the United Nations Secretariat, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNDP, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), UNICEF, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), UNWTO and WHO) and eight commissions, departments, divisions and offices of the United Nations Secretariat (the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, ECA, ESCAP, the Division of Conference Management of the United Nations Office at Geneva, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Office of Central Support Services, OHCHR, the United Nations Office at Geneva and the United Nations Regional Service Centre in Entebbe) either have a designated focal point on disabilities and accessibility or a specific unit or specialist team on the subject matter. WIPO has a gender and diversity specialist within its Human Resources Management Department, whose mandate includes accessibility for persons with disabilities.

97. Thus, a mechanism to ensure effective internal coordination on disability and accessibility organization-wide is absent in a majority of entities. In these entities, accessibility issues are addressed in an ad hoc manner by various units within the scope of their work. This constitutes a significant shortcoming, as there is no one with the delegated authority to provide guidance, effectively coordinate and make decisions. The result is that the units concerned, such as the safety and security, conference management, facilities management, human resources, procurement services, legal services, medical services, ICT services and public information units and the substantive meeting organizer often do not work together to cater to the requirements of persons with disabilities and may not even be aware of what others are doing to enhance accessibility.

98. Such fragmented efforts detract from the opportunity to address accessibility through a comprehensive approach, with a resultant prioritization only on the provision of physical facilities. For instance, a procurement unit may not recognize the need to ensure that accessibility considerations have been incorporated into all tendering processes so as to avoid creating new barriers by acquiring goods and services that are not accessible.

99. Where focal points do exist, organizations noted that their roles include: raising internal awareness of disability and accessibility through the development of relevant communication strategies; assisting in the integration of accessibility concepts into organizations' work programmes; providing guidance on disability-related training programmes; providing advice on accessibility and reasonable accommodation in the workplace; contributing to the construction or development and monitoring of internal policies for accessibility; and leading intra-agency mechanisms on accessibility and reporting

on progress. All these measures, if effectively undertaken, can greatly serve to enhance internal coordination on accessibility matters.

100. However, only the Office of Central Support Services of the United Nations Secretariat was able to provide written (draft) terms of reference outlining the duties and responsibilities of the focal point. The terms of reference contain the elements outlined above as well as skills and experiences needed for the role, including experience in developing and implementing accessibility and reasonable accommodation policies and knowledge of organizational practices regarding accessibility. It may be recalled that organizations of persons with disabilities highlighted as a good practice the role of the focal point for the National Tay-Sachs and Allied Diseases Association.⁷³ The focal point travels to conference venues to provide their staff with the requisite information and training and ensures that all the medical, dietary and spacing requirements of persons with disabilities are addressed.

101. Another important consideration highlighted was that, when offices have designated focal points in specific functional areas, their substantive roles are likely to shape how they understand and promote accessibility. For instance, as the Chief of the Office of Central Support Services serves as the focal point on accessibility in the United Nations Secretariat, he or she is more likely to be knowledgeable about facilities and the built environment than to have a substantive grounding on disability inclusion and accessibility issues. Similarly, a focal point on accessibility in the medical services unit of ECA is likely to view accessibility from a medically based perspective rather than a functional perspective.

102. To address this deficit, organizations of persons with disabilities have recommended that organizations should have multiple focal points on accessibility, with a clear division of responsibilities, to ensure that both the operational aspects of accessible meetings servicing and substantive knowledge about disability inclusion are encompassed. As a good practice, UNICEF has disability focal points both by location (at headquarters and regional offices) and thematically by programme area.

103. In practice, most focal points perform their role on a part-time basis in addition to other tasks, which places considerable constraints upon their availability and ability to effectively perform all the roles and responsibilities that are expected of them. Consequently, this function must be formally recognized and empowered with clear authority and resources. In addition, sufficient time must be duly allocated to their work as focal points, and any work performed in this realm must be duly credited. In cases where only one focal point is appointed, he or she should be from an office that has a direct role in conference and meeting servicing and management, which will make accountability clearer and allow for needed actions to be taken faster. The implementation of the following recommendation is expected to greatly enhance internal coordination and cooperation on accessibility matters through formally established focal points with clearly delineated responsibilities.

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.

2. Develop standard operating procedures for accessibility-related activities

104. Improving internal coordination to effectively service accessibility requirements necessitates not only a focal point to coordinate all relevant stakeholders but also standard operating procedures for each stakeholder, so that they are clear on what steps they are expected to follow each time an accessibility-related matter arises. Establishing clear standard operating procedures can assist organizations to shift

⁷³ Based in Boston, Massachusetts, the National Tay-Sachs and Allied Diseases Association is a non-profit patient advocacy group that focuses on funding research and raising awareness on genetic diseases that include Tay-Sachs, Canavan, Sandhoff and GM1.

away from ad hoc responses to accessibility requests and address them in a transparent and accountable manner.

105. As outlined in the previous subsection, there are as many as 10 relevant actors or units with a role to play in furthering accessible conferences and meetings. Each of these should devise relevant standard operating procedures to cover the accessibility-related elements that are pertinent to its areas of competence. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- (a) *Substantive meeting organizer.* As the principal office in charge of organizing a meeting or conference and the first point of contact with participants, the organizer should have standard operating procedures that cover: (i) requesting participants' accessibility requirements in registration forms, recording requirements, conveying them to relevant offices, following up with these offices to verify whether requirements will be met and updating participants accordingly; (ii) ensuring that conference or meeting information notes and websites provide details on all accessible facilities and services; (iii) conducting post-conference or post-meeting participant surveys that include questions on user satisfaction with regard to accessibility services, and conveying such feedback to the relevant offices; and (iv) budgeting for the cost of accessibility services, including a budget management workflow on how to plan in advance and secure funding for accessibility-related services.
- (b) *Conference management unit.* As the primary entity responsible for providing the physical and deliberative framework of conferences and meetings through technical support and advice, meetings management and documentation management, this unit should have standard operating procedures that cover: (i) measures to coordinate with meeting organizers and other relevant units to assess and communicate accessibility requirements and information; (ii) measures to contract and deliver accessible services (e.g., interpretation, closed captioning, remote participation, sign language interpretation, etc.) and documentation (Easy Read, plain English, Braille, etc.); and (iii) making conference staff aware of how to adequately and appropriately interact with and service the requirements of conference or meeting participants with disabilities.
- (c) *Facilities management unit.* As the entity entrusted with the management of the physical infrastructure and equipment on organizational premises, including conference and meeting rooms, this unit should have standard operating procedures that cover measures to contract and deliver accessibility-related physical upgrades or adjustments (e.g., making entrances, access ways, elevators, toilets and meeting rooms accessible) and equipment (e.g., purchasing or renting accessible furniture and devices such as hearing loops, assistive wheelchairs, etc.).
- (d) *Human resources management unit.* As the primary entity entrusted with establishing the policy framework for an inclusive and accessible workplace where there is awareness of the needs of persons with disabilities, this unit should have standard operating procedures that cover: (i) measures to ensure that accessibility considerations are incorporated into all relevant policies (e.g., diversity and inclusion policies, travel policies, etc.); (ii) measures to incorporate accessibility into staff training, staff surveys and awareness campaigns; and (iii) redress measures for cases where an organization is unable to meet participants' reasonable accommodation requirements.
- (e) *ICT services unit.* As the office responsible for defining the organization's strategic direction regarding ICT and providing oversight of ICT programmes, budgets and decision-making, this unit should have standard operating procedures that cover: (i) measures to ensure that all organizational web pages are fully accessible; and (ii) measures to ensure that the organization is contracting and utilizing ICT-related equipment and services that are on the cutting edge of accessibility when it comes to servicing conferences and meetings.

- (f) *Procurement office.* As the office responsible for ensuring the best value for money in the timely delivery of goods, services and capacity, it should have standard operating procedures that cover providing guidance and feedback to the acquisitioning office to ensure that it has duly reflected on and incorporated accessibility considerations into the development of its terms of reference and request for proposal.
- (g) *Legal office.* As the entity responsible for the provision of unified central legal services, this office's standard operating procedures should cover: (i) providing guidance and feedback to the substantive meeting organizer to ensure that accessibility requirements are clearly stipulated in host country agreements and other agreements concluded for specific conferences or meetings; and (ii) scrutinizing draft agreements with donors for earmarked contributions, with a view to ensuring that accessibility considerations are addressed with regard to events organized under the agreement.
- (h) *Safety and security services unit.* As the first point of contact for conference or meeting participants on the organizational premises and the primary entity responsible for managing security at major conferences, this unit should have standard operating procedures that cover: (i) raising the awareness of security personnel about how to adequately and appropriately interact with and service the requirements of conference or meeting participants with disabilities; (ii) ensuring that evacuation procedures cover the particular requirements of person with disabilities; and (iii) expediting the entry of persons with disabilities and their assistants, including entry by private accessible transport.
- (i) *Medical services unit.* As the entity responsible for advising on reasonable accommodation and on exemptions to standards of accommodation on medical grounds for travel purposes, this unit should have standard operating procedures that cover: (i) details of the specific support services participants with disabilities can receive from medical services; and (ii) how exemptions to standards of accommodation are determined for persons with disabilities.
- (j) *Public information unit.* As the entity responsible for promoting global awareness and understanding of the work of the organization through radio, television, print, Internet, videoconferencing and other media tools, this unit should have standard operating procedures that cover: (i) measures to disseminate information on accessible facilities and services available in the organization; (ii) measures to raise awareness on the importance of accessible meetings and conferences through relevant information campaigns; and (iii) measures to ensure that public information campaigns are accessible and that they have been developed with persons with disabilities.

106. Interviews and responses to the JIU questionnaire indicate that standard operating procedures for addressing accessibility-related matters are largely non-existent in the JIU participating organizations.⁷⁴ Only the ESCAP Department of Safety and Security noted that it had specific standard operating procedures that covered the security screening of persons with disabilities as well as procedures for persons needing assistance to evacuate. The Inspector finds regrettable the lack of attention to this vital component of internal coordination and is of the view that the implementation of the following recommendation will strengthen consistency and harmonization with regard to how each entity delivers on its accessibility-related responsibilities.

⁷⁴ WIPO has noted that it has an equivalent of a standard operating procedure in the form of two streamlined mechanisms: (a) a specialized architect under contract to assess and review physical accessibility, propose measures and update pre-existing proposals or measures on the basis of new host country regulations or other wider frameworks; and (b) the systematic integration of the physical accessibility criterion in its Capital Master Plan framework.

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.

3. Better consideration of accessibility-related costs

107. Interviews and responses to the JIU questionnaire indicate that not a single participating organization has a permanent (i.e., not one-off) dedicated budget line that covers all aspects of accessibility-related costs for conferences and meetings, including physical accessibility, ICT and other services, human resources and participant travel costs. In the few instances where budgetary allocations are made for accessibility-related costs, it is almost always for specific conferences and meetings that have a disability-related theme. For other conferences and meetings, most organizations rarely budget for accessibility services and only make allocations reactively on a case-by-case basis when there is a specific request from a participant with a disability.

108. The JIU participating organizations have not undertaken any estimation of all types of accessibility-related costs with regard to the entire spectrum of meetings and conferences that they organize. Cost estimations only exist for specific disability-related meetings (e.g., some meetings of the Human Rights Council),⁷⁵ one-off renovation and construction projects (e.g., at ECA)⁷⁶ and certain accessibility services.⁷⁷

109. Organizations must make more concerted efforts to improve data collection on accessibility-related costs (see chap. VI, sect. D) and actively consider such costs in budgeting processes. Organizations should also assess the effectiveness and relevance of services provided and accommodations, in relation to demand and cost. As a good practice that other organizations should consider for replication, the ITU Accessibility Trust Fund was established in 2012 to channel voluntary contributions to promote ICT accessibility for persons with disabilities. UNDP is also developing a disability accommodation fund to enable UNDP offices to provide reasonable accommodation through measures such as special office equipment, sign language interpretation, personal assistants or companions on missions and accessible documentation (e.g., Braille and large-print formats).

110. Another financing aspect extensively highlighted was the inadequate consideration given to the travel costs of persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities have various specific requirements that are not adequately factored into organizational travel policies. These include: travel costs of personal assistants, communicational support persons (e.g., sign language interpreters) and animal support; costs of extra luggage for assistive devices (e.g., wheelchairs); specific hotel accommodation costs, such as separate adjoining rooms for accompanying persons and the ability to select hotels that can accommodate accessibility requirements and are in close proximity to the meeting venue; and costs of accessible transportation to and from meeting venues.

111. Such costs can place considerable financial burdens on the participant, and when they are not covered they can become a practical impediment to participation and could be construed as being

⁷⁵ The United Nations Office at Geneva estimates the cost to make a Human Rights Council panel discussion accessible to be \$12,522 per day. This includes two three-hour meetings and covers International Sign interpreters, captioning in English, Braille embossing, an IT technician and an audiovisual technician. It does not include standard meeting and documentation services costs, indirect staff costs or the cost of temporary adaptations to conference rooms.

⁷⁶ The African Hall refurbishment, which incorporated accessibility improvements, was financed in-house through section 33 of the regular budget, amounting to \$6 million.

⁷⁷ Costs for remote captioning are estimated to be \$140 per hour; costs for sign language interpretation are estimated to be \$780 per interpreter per day plus a daily subsistence allowance and airfare.

discriminatory. It was also highlighted that travel rules do not include a provision for reasonable accommodation as an exception to general rules for higher standards of accommodation for travel. Consequently, the organization provides such exceptions only on health grounds on the basis of assessments by medical units. It was noted that addressing barriers faced by persons with disabilities only from a medical perspective and not from a functional one might be construed as discrimination and a violation of their rights.

112. In the light of the above-mentioned concerns, the **Inspector strongly urges the legislative bodies of all United Nations system organizations to request the executive heads to submit, for their consideration, proposed amendments to the travel rules to incorporate a reasonable accommodation policy that covers both the eligible participant with disabilities and his or her support requirement. Procedures for the provision of reasonable accommodation should include a disability assessment that is functionally based, with a medical evaluation when necessary. Additionally, executive heads should task relevant offices with developing security policies that ensure the access of personal assistants to the same areas as the persons with disabilities they are supporting.**

B. Measures to encourage the participation of persons with disabilities

113. Organizations have consistently noted that they do not record the number of persons with disabilities attending conferences and meetings, as to do so may infringe on their privacy and personal dignity and lead to unintended biases and discrimination emanating from differential treatment. Consequently, the only indicator they have to estimate such numbers is when persons with disabilities attending conferences and meetings proactively reach out to the organizations to convey their accessibility requirements.

114. Organizations then use the number of requests received to justify their decision not to proactively provide accessibility services as a default measure for all conferences and meetings. They argue that the number of requests received is so limited that it does not justify the significant financial outlays needed to provide (sometimes) costly services, which often have to be contracted out, such as sign language interpretation, webcasting, closed captioning and information in Braille.

115. The Inspector is of the view that such logic represents a perverse interpretation, as it masks the fact — duly noted by persons with disabilities, organizations of persons with disabilities and acknowledged by disability experts in several organizations — that the number of requests is low precisely because participants do not know what accessibility services are available, whether they can make requests for reasonable accommodation or to whom they should make such a request. Even when they do make a request, there are no published procedures in place that would assure participants that their requests will be duly considered in an objective and unbiased manner, no established time frames within which they can expect to receive a response, and no means for contesting a denial of their request for reasonable accommodation by the organization.

116. In the absence of information that would indicate to them whether or not their accessibility requirements will be met, potential participants may be deterred from attending such meetings and conferences, which in turn reduces the number of requests for accommodation that organizations receive. Consequently, intentionally or not, an insidious cycle is created whereby limited provision of accessibility information for meetings and conferences by organizers deters potential participants from attending meetings and making accessibility requests; organizations then use the low number of requests to justify their decision not to address accessibility on a proactive priority basis.

117. To address this information deficit, the present section outlines some concrete measures that can be taken to give persons with disabilities a better understanding of whether or not their accessibility requirements will be met. It also outlines some cost-effective measures to make conferences and meetings more accessible. Such measures, if implemented, can serve to encourage the participation of persons with disabilities in meetings and conferences.

1. Requesting and disseminating accessibility-related information and collecting user satisfaction feedback

118. The questionnaire and interview responses indicate that only seven organizations (FAO, ILO, ITU, the United Nations Secretariat (ECA, ESCAP, OHCHR and the United Nations Office at Nairobi), UNICEF, UNWTO and the World Food Programme (WFP)) proactively seek requests on participants' accessibility needs in notes verbales, invitations, information notes and registration forms, which serve as the initial point of entry for conferences and meetings. Registration forms (email or online) for conferences and meetings include a question about whether accommodation is needed and, if so, what type. Accommodation requests are subsequently shared with all parties involved in facilitating the conference. In other organizations (WIPO), such provisions are typically limited to conferences and meetings with a disability-related theme.

119. In addition, only two organizations (FAO and the United Nations Secretariat (the Human Rights Council and the Committee)) noted that they proactively disseminate information on available accessible facilities and services through an information note to all registered participants. Consequently, the vast majority of JIU participating organizations neither seek nor disseminate information that plays a vital role in the decisions of persons with disabilities on whether or not to attend meetings. This is also evidenced by the fact that 36 per cent of JIU survey respondents stated that they had not received accessibility-related information for any conference or meeting attended.

120. In interviews, this omission was attributed to a lack of awareness and training on disability and accessibility issues on the part of meeting organizers and other relevant offices, including a lack of clarity on how to appropriately enquire about accommodation requirements while respecting the privacy and dignity of the person. As a result, organizations tend to rely on individual participants to proactively reach out and request accommodation.

121. Without ascertaining participants' requirements, the entities will not be in a position to service them. The most convenient way would be to use channels for discreet disclosure in registration or accreditation procedures as the point of entry, as is already done in some organizations. Similarly, information on accessible facilities and services can be made available on general websites, on websites dedicated to conferences and special events and through information notes.

122. The responsibility to enquire about requirements and convey accessibility-related information should, and does, rest in practice with the substantive office convening the meeting. However, that office must be furnished with an up-to-date list of available accessible facilities and services by the relevant offices entrusted with their management and provision (conference management, facilities management, ICT management, etc.). This should include a clear breakdown of the standard cost of such services, so that the organizing entity can make a feasible assessment as to whether or not it can accommodate the request within existing resources.

123. For smaller, less formal meetings, where the organizer typically has little or no budgetary allocations to cover accessibility costs, reasonable accommodation measures can include selecting a physically accessible meeting room in terms of entrances, access ways, elevators, tables and restrooms.

124. Measures must be taken to ensure that the registration process itself is accessible for all persons with disabilities, as organizations of persons with disabilities have noted that this is not the case for many meetings and conferences. This is particularly true for individuals with intellectual disabilities who find the current forms and processes inaccessible, as well as individuals with visual impairments who end up having to rely on third parties to go through the registration process. It was lamented that the Committee was not consulted in the development of a common accreditation and registration portal (the Indico portal) for the United Nations Secretariat, which is presently not accessible to some persons with disabilities.

125. Feedback must be sought following meetings and conferences to assess the extent to which the participants' accessibility requirements were met by the organization — a practice that is presently absent in most organizations. For calendar meetings and large conferences, satisfaction surveys should be consistently undertaken and should encompass all participants and include specific questions on accessibility.

126. As a good practice, OHCHR seeks participant feedback (both in person and remotely) on the accessibility of sessions of the Human Rights Council and the Committee through questionnaires that allow for the self-identification of disability status. In their responses, participants rated positively the preparation of Easy Read versions of reports and the provision of live webcasting. UNWTO has also noted that it systematically administers an evaluation questionnaire after each conference and meeting, where participants can provide feedback on the accessibility of facilities.

127. To address the aforementioned deficits, the Inspector outlines four concrete measures in the following recommendation, which, if implemented, can serve to greatly encourage the participation of persons with disabilities in conferences and meetings by enhancing transparency and accountability in the way participants' requirements are proactively sought and effectively addressed.

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.**

2. Establishing and utilizing accessibility centres

128. Another key measure to encourage the participation of persons with disabilities in conferences and meetings is to set up a one-stop shop on premises for accessibility matters, such as an accessibility centre that provides ICT and other services on demand for persons with disabilities. In the United Nations Secretariat, two centres were established at headquarters (New York) in 2013 and in ESCAP (Bangkok) in 2015 through donations from the Republic of Korea. In the United Nations Office at Geneva, discussions are ongoing to establish an accessibility centre through donations.

129. In New York, the accessibility centre provides: Braille printing on demand; assistive tools and technologies for persons with visual, audio and mobility impairments; computer stations with assistive devices (desktop magnifiers, screen readers, Braille and other assistive keyboards, portable Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) players, hearing aids, bone conduction headsets, specialized computer mouse, Braille note-takers, etc.); wheelchair charging provisions; and walk-in assistance with regards to using the devices. During interviews, it was noted that utilization levels of the devices on offer were low. Interviewees with persons with disabilities highlighted the need for the centre to be more visibly located. They also recommended that provisions be made to allow participants to directly request documentation in Braille through the accessibility centre. Presently, such requests need to be conveyed to the meeting organizer, which can lead to considerable delays.

130. In Bangkok, the ESCAP accessibility centre provides 13 types of assistive devices to aid conference and meeting participants with physical, hearing, visual and intellectual disabilities. It is prominently located in the centre of the conference premises and displays a range of informational pamphlets and brochures on accessibility, which allows it to serve as a platform for information

dissemination and awareness-raising on accessible meetings. However, due to resource constraints, it is unstaffed, and services have to be requested by contacting the Conference Management Unit. Similar to New York, utilization levels of the devices on offer were low. This was not helped by the observation that the Facilities Management Unit, which manages the centre, lacked knowledge and training on how to operate the assistive devices.

131. Both the United Nations Headquarters and ESCAP should make more concerted outreach efforts, possibly through written provisions in conference and meeting registration forms, to systematically inform all participants of the existence of the accessibility centres and the specific services available, so that persons with disabilities can better understand whether their accessibility needs will be met. The two entities should also undertake periodic evaluations of the use of the centres.

132. To ensure their financial sustainability, the Inspector calls upon the Secretary-General to consider allocating dedicated financial resources to the accessibility centres, to cover staff and equipment costs. The Inspector also welcomes the establishment by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management of the United Nations Secretariat of a multipurpose trust fund that has accessibility as one of its main goals. **All organizations should consider the establishment of such a trust fund for developing an accessibility centre, where practicable, and proactively lobby Member States and other interested organizations for contributions.** Member States, for their part, when donating equipment to such centres, should factor in the cost of training relevant personnel in the recipient entity on how to use such equipment.

133. The Inspector is of the view that accessibility centres have the potential to serve as a major tool to assist persons with disabilities to participate effectively in conferences and meetings and recommends that **all United Nations system organizations assess the feasibility of establishing an accessibility centre in their main conference servicing duty stations.** The establishment of such centres should be guided by an assessment of the general accessibility requirements of participants with disabilities. The organizations should also take full account of lessons learned from the operations of existing accessibility centres.

3. Greater utilization of advances in technology

134. While organizations regularly raised concerns about the high cost of accessibility services, several also highlighted a range of technological tools, mainly in the realm of communications, that could be acquired and used with modest or minimal costs and could greatly facilitate the ability of persons with disabilities to engage effectively in conferences and meetings. However, it was clear from the interviews and questionnaire responses that most organizations were uninformed about many of those advances and, as a result, had yet to adopt or use those tools as a standard practice for their conferences and meetings. This is a missed opportunity that can be readily rectified.

135. One useful technological tool that has become standard practice in many organizations is the webcasting of conferences and meetings. While useful in that it allows individuals to remotely follow proceedings, it is limited by its inability to accommodate active engagement. To address this limitation, the Inspector welcomes the utilization of platforms that provide for two-way active engagement, such as Webex, Adobe Connect and BlueJeans for large conferences and Google Hangouts Meet and Skype for small, informal meetings. Organizations can purchase licences and hardware (where needed) to use such tools at relatively low cost, and most of the tools can readily be operated without the need to contract specialist technical personnel. At the participants' end, there are no costs involved, apart from access to a reliable Internet connection and a standard computer with microphone and speaker capabilities.

136. While allowing for remote participation may not eliminate all participation challenges for persons with disabilities,⁷⁸ it can help to ease them, particularly for individuals with mobility impairments. The importance of providing for remote participation becomes all the more apparent when one factors in two elements: the reality that physical facilities and services in United Nations system organizations are far from being fully accessible; and the additional cost implications and unique discomforts that persons with disabilities regularly face when travelling. However, the Inspector cautions that participation should be a person's right and that access — including access to information — should be equal and dignified. Consequently, organizations should not consider the use of remote participation as an excuse for not making their facilities and services fully accessible, which should be the end goal for all organizations.

137. To assist entities in organizing remote meetings, ITU has developed a technical paper entitled “Guidelines for supporting remote participation in meetings for all” (FSTP-ACC-RemPart), which should serve as a reference tool for all entities. Currently, four organizations (ITU, the United Nations Secretariat (OHCHR, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) and the United Nations Office at Geneva), UNFPA and WIPO) have indicated that they use remote participation for large meetings. UNISDR has gone even further by using remote-controlled telepresence robots. These are wheeled devices that have Wi-Fi connectivity and are fitted with tablets with audio-video capabilities. They allow remote participants to interact with anyone on the meeting floor.

138. As technology advances, organizations can also take advantage of other accessibility services that can be acquired remotely, such as remote captioning and remote sign language interpretation. In addition to significant savings in travel and daily subsistence allowance costs, they also expand the scope for the utilization of such services at field offices where sign language interpreters and captioners may not be available locally. Remote sign language interpretation has been used by ITU and the United Nations Headquarters, while remote captioning has been used by the Human Rights Council, the United Nations Headquarters and the United Nations Office at Geneva. Since 2016, the United Nations Office at Geneva has had contracts in place for the provision of remote captioning in four languages (English, French, Russian and Spanish) for up to five years. While these entities have noted that such technologies have some drawbacks (e.g., poor Internet connection leading to time lags in interpretation, and inaccuracies in the captioning text), they expect that these glitches will be rectified in the near future, given the rapid advances in ICT.

139. Other useful practices by entities regarding the use of technology tools include: ensuring captioning and voice-over for most videos produced (UNICEF); requiring all videos to be closed captioned in order to be shown (Human Rights Council); setting up an online documentation system that only accepts documents in Microsoft Word, which is accessible to the visually impaired (Human Rights Council); and establishing corporate long-term agreements on: assistive technologies such as sound amplifiers and screen reading software (UNICEF and UNDP); information technology accessibility services such as accessibility assessments, rapid accessibility remediation and training for content developers and information technology personnel (UNDP); and Braille embossing on business cards (UNDP).

140. Other useful recommendations provided by entities relating to the use of technology tools to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities include: consulting with persons with disabilities prior to acquiring assistive technologies to assess demand and suitability; acquiring adaptable hearing loops; publishing all official documents and meeting reports online in the Easy Read format and embedding Quick Response codes and tags for screen reader accessibility (OHCHR); and investing in small-scale technologies that link individuals' own technological devices to the facility's existing ICT,

⁷⁸ Some members of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities were of the view that webcasting and remote participation, while encouraging participation and inclusion, posed additional challenges. In particular, some members noted that they could not participate on an equal basis with their peers because of the quality of the sound, the quality of the captioning and the inability to communicate with speakers face-to-face.

such as jacks to connect personal tablets or smartphones to the facility's audiovisual equipment (the United Nations Office at Vienna/UNODC).

141. The Inspector also finds it pertinent to highlight the following three assistive technologies that the UNICEF ICT office has recommended to assist conference or meeting participants with disabilities:

- OrCam MyEye. A smart camera that sits on a pair of eyeglasses, recognizes texts and relays the message to the user through a mini earpiece. Using optical character recognition technology, the camera can read printed texts from almost any surface, greatly enhancing the accessibility of meetings for blind persons. This is available in English only at present.
- Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant. These are virtual assistants that can help visually impaired participants navigate through venues independently using relevant, pre-fed information.
- Be My Eyes. This application connects blind and low-vision people with a community of 150,000 sighted volunteers and company representatives for visual assistance through a live video call.

142. The Inspector calls upon the organizations to reflect upon the technological tools that are readily available to make conferences and meetings more accessible. In particular, the Inspector is of the view that the implementation of the following recommendation will lead to the dissemination of good practices by furthering the possibility of having a representative voice for persons with disabilities in all conferences and meetings, while taking into consideration the qualifier that such virtual participation may require specific accommodations depending on the participants' needs.

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.

VI. MEASURES TO PROACTIVELY INCORPORATE ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS, SHARE BEST PRACTICES, RAISE AWARENESS AND ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY

143. Continuing on the theme of the previous chapter of remedial measures to further the ability of persons with disabilities to access conferences and meetings, the present chapter outlines concrete measures that can be taken by all organizations in four discreet areas, namely: to ensure that new constructions and acquisitions do not create new barriers; to share best practices and lessons learned; to enhance staff awareness and sensitivity; and to enhance accountability.

A. Ensuring that constructions and acquisitions do not create new barriers

144. Construction, renovation and acquisition activities should be undertaken on the basis of the principle of universal design. To ensure that no new barriers are created that can impede both physical access of persons with disabilities to the organizational premises and its conference and meeting rooms,⁷⁹ as well as access to existing ICT services, a number of essential measures must be consistently implemented. The first is to undertake an accessibility assessment to ascertain the existing barriers that need to be addressed. The findings of the assessment must then be factored into the planning, design and implementation of upgrades, renovations and constructions of facilities and services. Similarly, to ensure that all new acquisitions, particularly as relates to conferences and meetings, are barrier free to the maximum extent feasible, accessibility considerations must be factored into relevant procurement activities. Throughout all these steps, the views of persons with disabilities must be incorporated through relevant consultations, be it in the assessment, planning, design or implementation stage.

1. Undertake an accessibility assessment

145. The purpose of an accessibility assessment is to establish how well a particular facility or service is performing in terms of access, determine the ease of use by a wide range of potential users, including persons with disabilities, and recommend improvements where necessary. This can be conducted either at an early stage of the facility or service design and planning, or after its conclusion, to verify whether implementation is consistent with the guidelines and standards used by the organization.

146. Accessibility assessments are typically undertaken by personnel with expertise in buildings and facilities management, including architects and structural engineers knowledgeable about issues of physical accessibility and ICT personnel versed in technological accessibility. The responses to the JIU questionnaire and interviews indicate that six JIU participating organizations (FAO, the United Nations Secretariat, UNDP, UNIDO, UNODC and WIPO), including four United Nations Secretariat entities (ECA, ESCAP, United Nations Headquarters and the United Nations Office at Geneva), have conducted an accessibility assessment of all or part of their existing facilities and services.

147. A best practice comes from ESCAP, which, pursuant to a mandate contained in ESCAP resolution 74/7, conducted an on-site accessibility assessment of its entire premises in Bangkok in 2017/18, addressing seismic risk, life cycle replacement and the modernization of office space. An on-site assessment (June–July 2017) was conducted by two accessibility experts — one on universal design focusing on the built environment and another on ICT services. In addition, persons with diverse abilities and accessibility requirements and familiarities (including both staff and visitors) came on-site for two days and went through various areas of the built environment and provided feedback.

⁷⁹ Participants in Committee meetings and Committee members have highlighted that modern constructions and renovations, such as all-glass walls and all-artificial lighting, make it difficult for persons with disabilities — particularly persons with visual impairments, persons with autism and persons with albinism and low vision — to navigate physical spaces.

148. ECA, as part of its Africa Hall refurbishment project (September 2017), conducted an accessibility assessment of its main conference venue through an external consultancy firm. At the time of the interview (July 2018), the consultancy firm was undertaking an accessibility assessment of the entire ECA premises and identifying needed improvements. According to ECA, once completed, an accessibility management plan would be drafted by the firm, outlining protocols, processes, existing deficiencies and methodologies to address them. ECA also intends to undertake an accessibility assessment of all five of its subregional offices once the assessment of the headquarters is completed.

149. Other notable initiatives include the following:

- FAO conducted a facility-wide accessibility assessment, which included the identification and prioritization of actions and the estimated associated costs. Identified actions include facility renovations (e.g., building ramps and podiums in conference halls) and actions to address attitudinal and organizational barriers (e.g., establishing a disability focal point).
- UNODC headquarters focal points, assisted by field office representatives, performed an assessment of local accessibility standards and existing coordination arrangements with United Nations country teams on accessibility matters.
- The Office of Central Support Services at United Nations Headquarters conducted a survey (July 2017 to January 2018) of users with disabilities on the accessibility of facilities at headquarters. In the light of the results, the Office will contract a disability-related organization to undertake a professional accessibility assessment.

150. The Inspector would like to highlight that organizations of persons with disabilities have emphasized that persons with disabilities must be included in the conduct of accessibility assessments, as they are better positioned to identify gaps in accessibility. This necessitates including persons with different types of disabilities, such as physical, intellectual, psychosocial and cognitive disabilities, in order to incorporate the full spectrum of disabilities in assessment, monitoring and evaluation efforts.

151. As most JIU participating organizations are yet to undertake an accessibility assessment, the implementation of the following recommendation can lead to enhanced control and compliance as regards the commitment to create a barrier-free environment for persons with disabilities attending conferences and meetings, through systematic checks to identify impediments to accessibility in the organizational premises.

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.

152. **The Inspector also strongly urges the executive heads to ensure that findings of the periodic accessibility assessments clearly identify recommendations for remedial action, the actors responsible for implementation and the suggested time frames for implementation.**

2. Incorporate accessibility considerations into procurement processes

153. Procurement policies are long-lasting statements of guidance that apply to and bind directors, managers and employees in any situation where they are involved in a purchasing process.⁸⁰ While it is essential for the criterion of accessibility to be factored into procurement policies so as to ensure that resources are not spent creating new barriers to conference and meeting facilities and services for

⁸⁰ KB Manage, “Standards and Policies in Procurement”, available at: www.kbmanage.com/concept/standards-and-policies-in-procurement.

persons with disabilities, presently, not a single JIU participating organization incorporates such a provision into its procurement policy.

154. Most organizations readily acknowledge that accessibility is not consciously factored into procurement processes (with a few exceptions), while procurement offices assert that it is not necessary for them to police the matter, as accessibility is not a constituent element in procurement guidelines and policies. Consequently, while it is the primary responsibility of the requisitioning office to ensure that accessibility is factored into the terms of reference for a requisition, without any requirement for compliance or any conscious understanding of its importance, accessibility is consistently overlooked in procurement processes.

155. A notable exception and good practice comes from ITU, which, as a component of its accessibility plan, has implemented accessible procurement standards with a focus on ICT. Accessibility requirements are incorporated into technical specifications developed for procurement purposes, and an evaluation process has been developed to ensure that procured solutions claiming to support accessibility actually do so.

156. Another good practice comes from ESCAP, where, as part of an ongoing process of furniture procurement in which ergonomics and accessibility are prioritized, its Procurement Unit has asked interested shortlisted companies to set up demonstration spaces where a group of persons with different disabilities can test the furniture and provide feedback, on the basis of which a final decision will be taken.

157. UNICEF has noted that it will develop a policy guideline on accessibility in procurement, which will cover a variety of areas. It is currently promoting the procurement of accessible vehicles, and, as a good practice, it has concluded a long-term agreement with a vendor that maintains a catalogue of assistive devices. In UNDP, in the procurement process for premises at field locations, when inspections of buildings are conducted, accessibility is carefully reviewed to ensure that at least the ground floor is fully accessible.

158. Persons with disabilities are rarely consulted in the procurement of new products and services in general, and assistive technologies in particular, resulting in purchases of products that are incompatible or unnecessary. For instance, OHCHR has noted that hearing loops acquired by the United Nations Office at Geneva are not being used because they do not allow for customization to individual needs. Entities entrusted with management of the accessibility centres in New York and Bangkok acknowledged that most of their assistive devices were either not used or underused. The Inspector is of the view that **consultations with persons with disabilities on the types of technology and resources that they need are essential, in order to be responsive to needs and cost-effective and to guide the procurement of any assistive devices and services.**

159. The Inspector also welcomes the suggestion of ECA that the incorporation of accessibility provisions into procurement guidelines should be raised through the platform of the Procurement Network of the High-level Committee on Management, which brings together procurement directors from 40 organizations for biannual meetings. Particularly, accessibility can be dealt with by its Working Group on the Harmonization of UN Procurement Business Practices and Processes, which has created a common framework for the harmonization of procurement-related regulations, rules, policies, procedures and business practices.

160. While emphasizing that offices involved in the requisitioning of goods and services for conferences and meetings must play their part in ensuring that accessibility considerations are incorporated into terms of references for requisitions, the Inspector is of the view that the implementation of the following recommendation will further enhance control and compliance in this realm by incorporating accessibility considerations into procurement policies.

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.

161. The Inspector also strongly urges the executive heads to ensure that, once accessibility provisions have been incorporated into procurement policies and guidelines, compliance of all requisitions related to conferences and meetings with such provisions should be monitored and reported upon by the procurement offices.

3. Notable examples of incorporation of accessibility considerations into major projects

162. While organizations readily recognize that factoring in accessibility requirements during the initial construction stage is far more cost-effective than retrofitting post facto, many had their facilities constructed several decades ago, when accessibility was not deemed to be a priority consideration. Nonetheless, either to keep up with national legislation on accessibility, or to go a step forward and become a standard-bearer by making their premises truly accessible and inclusive, in recent years, organizations have, more often than not, tended to factor accessibility considerations into the construction and renovation of their facilities and services, with notable examples highlighted below.

United Nations Office at Geneva: Strategic Heritage Plan 2017–2023

The Strategic Heritage Plan will result in the complete renovation of the main Palais des Nations complex of buildings, the construction of a new permanent office building and the renovation of meeting rooms and office spaces. Its legal framework incorporates the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and will be in conformity with four specific local (national and municipal) laws and norms addressing accessibility. The Plan will also build upon the findings of an accessibility assessment of the Palais des Nations undertaken in 2008.

The Strategic Heritage Plan project team has developed an accessibility master plan through expert advice from and regular consultations with a working group of persons with disabilities, including staff members, delegates, representatives of organizations of persons with disabilities and volunteer architects with disabilities. The working group validated and verified the design elements from an accessibility point of view and suggested enhancements to enable persons with disabilities to independently navigate facilities and grounds on the premises.

When the project is completed, there will be 42 accessible conference rooms, including 18 with accessible interpretation booths. Other key accessibility-related upgrades include fully accessible main entrances and restrooms; fully equipped main halls and corridors; accessible elevators, stairs, amenities and offices; and accessible areas of refuge, including for persons with disabilities.

163. **United Nations Headquarters.** The improvement of accessibility as a core goal was factored into the major renovations made to the premises through the Capital Master Plan. The Secretary-General's report on accessibility highlights all related measures that were concretely implemented and notes that designs were developed that not only met or exceeded local building codes but also incorporated international best practices and addressed real-life accessibility requirements of delegates, staff and visitors.⁸¹ Some key improvements included: making one meeting room fully accessible, with improved partial accessibility for other rooms; accommodations allowing wheelchair users to sit anywhere in the room; accessible podiums; and adjustable desks.

⁸¹ A/71/344 and Corr. 1.

164. **IAEA, UNIDO, the United Nations Office at Vienna and UNODC.** The four Vienna-based organizations sharing a common premise regularly consult with Zero Project, a local NGO targeting the inclusion of persons with disabilities, which provides an annual review of the accessibility of the premises in exchange for conference facility use. Zero Project's reviews have informed facility renovations and have helped keep organizational staff abreast of current developments in disability access.

165. **ECA.** The main conference facility of ECA, the Africa Hall, is undergoing refurbishment, and accessibility improvements are one of the primary goals of this refurbishment. An architectural firm contracted for the purpose undertook a comparative study of four national standards and one International Organization for Standardization standard⁸² covering 14 categories of accessibility⁸³ for the built environment and selected the highest standards they found to serve as benchmarks for the renovations to be undertaken.⁸⁴ Presently, ESCAP and the United Nations Office at Nairobi are building upon the research undertaken to establish benchmarks for their own accessibility-related renovations of conference and meeting venues.

166. **United Nations Office at Nairobi.** Under the strategic capital review, an ongoing capital investment project will address all accessibility challenges on the western side of the United Nations Office at Nairobi complex. Accessibility issues concerning the complex's conference centre have been raised in the Report of the Committee on Conferences for 2018⁸⁵ and, if requested, the Secretary-General will submit a report to the General Assembly by the end of 2019 detailing proposals to address the findings of an accessibility review of the buildings. If approved, 90 per cent of all accessibility challenges would be addressed within the next five years. Near-term actions to address accessibility challenges include: a complex-wide signage (digital and physical) improvement project; a proposal to develop a mobile phone application accessed through a Quick Response code with a complex map indicating universal access points, routes and ramps; tactile ground finishes at uncontrolled crossings; ramp improvement (kerb to road); and furniture upgrades in conference rooms (subject to funding) to install adjustable tables to accommodate wheelchair users.

167. **WIPO.** A formal framework addressing physical accessibility initiatives and measures benefitting staff, delegates and visitors through the programme and budget mechanism has been in place since 2010. Since 2012, WIPO has mandated several physical accessibility reviews of its headquarters premises and has included physical accessibility as a main criterion when assessing candidate projects for the renovation or upgrading of its headquarters premises (e.g., the Capital Master Plan), resulting in the identification, prioritization and implementation of several accessibility-related measures.⁸⁶ The above-mentioned good practices clearly indicate that sufficient scope and opportunity exist for organizations to feasibly incorporate accessibility considerations into the construction and acquisition of facilities and services.

⁸² Australia, AS1428.1 (2009); the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, BS8300 (2010); the United States of America, Americans with Disabilities Act Standards (2010); Singapore, Code on Accessibility in the Built Environment (2013); and ISO 21542 (2011).

⁸³ Wheelchair footprint, car parking, access way, 180 degrees turning space, passing area, door opening width, door circulation, step ramp gradient, ramp gradient, ramp length, accessible toilet dimensions, ambulant toilet dimensions, lift dimensions and signage requirements.

⁸⁴ Conrad Gargett, Africa Hall Refurbishment: Equitable Access Report, September 2017.

⁸⁵ A/73/32.

⁸⁶ Accessibility-related physical improvements largely benefit persons in wheelchairs and include: lowered access badge readers; ramps with slow slopes; increased width and height of doorways; accessible restrooms and interpretation booths; an accessible medical unit; fully and partially accessible meeting rooms; fully accessible podiums; and adjustable desks and removable chairs in meeting rooms. Improvements that benefit visually-impaired persons include staircases with guardrails and with distinct markings on edges.

B. Enhancing the sharing of good practices within and among agencies

168. While the present review identifies a considerable number of useful guidelines and good practices across a range of JIU participating organizations on enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities to conferences and meetings, it became clear from the interviews that knowledge of such practices has not been adequately shared. There was a clear trend whereby relevant offices addressing various aspects of accessibility were largely unaware, not only of good practices in other organizations, but also of the work being carried out in other offices and duty stations within the same organization. In Geneva, for instance, where nine JIU participating organizations⁸⁷ are headquartered along with major offices of the United Nations Secretariat (the United Nations Office at Geneva and OHCHR), many interviewees had little or no knowledge of the innovative work undertaken by their colleagues in ITU, OHCHR, the United Nations Office at Geneva, WHO and WIPO relating to accessibility.

169. Such lack of awareness is all the more striking given that the review team identified as many as eight inter-agency and eight intra-agency coordination mechanisms addressing the topic of accessibility either directly or indirectly within the broader topic of disability. Detailed descriptions of each of the 16 inter- and intra-agency mechanisms (not an exhaustive list), including their constituent membership, the role of each mechanism and its specific relationship to the issue of accessibility, can be found in the table in annex IV.

170. Data collected through interviews and questionnaire responses indicate that 20 JIU participating organizations⁸⁸ currently participate in one or more of the eight inter-agency mechanisms (task teams and task forces, working groups, support groups, partnerships, networks and annual meetings) related to accessibility through broader themes, such as: the inclusion, the employment or the rights of persons with disabilities; diversity; facilities and documentation management; common premises; and duty of care.

171. As regards the eight intra-agency mechanisms (task forces and committees), five are within the United Nations Secretariat itself, and there is one each in ITU, UN-Women and WHO. Four of these task forces or working groups are dedicated to accessibility, while four others address it through broader themes such as disability and inclusion and common premises. These intra-agency mechanisms can be either duty-station specific (e.g., Addis Ababa, Bangkok and Vienna) or organization wide.

172. Of the 16 inter- and intra-agency mechanisms identified, only 7⁸⁹ have terms of reference outlining their roles and responsibilities, and only 4⁹⁰ have a standing agenda. The periodicity of meetings also varies considerably and can be monthly (the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action), quarterly (the Committee on Common Services and the Inter-Departmental Task Force on Accessibility), or annually (the Inter-Agency Support Group on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities). The responses received indicate that meeting records are kept for all mechanisms apart from the Inter-Departmental Task Force on Accessibility. In most cases, the records are internal and circulated only to members.

⁸⁷ ILO, ITC, ITU, UNAIDS, UNCTAD, UNHCR, WHO, WIPO and WMO.

⁸⁸ IAEA, ILO, IMO, FAO, the United Nations Secretariat, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UN-Habitat, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNODC/the United Nations Office at Vienna, UNOPS, UN-Women, UNWTO, WFP, WHO and WIPO.

⁸⁹ The Committee on Common Services, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team, the Inter-Agency Support Group on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Inter-Agency Network of Facilities Managers, the Inter-Departmental Task Force on Accessibility, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group Task Team on Common Premises and the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

⁹⁰ The ECA Accessibility Task Force; the International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications; the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team; and the Inter-Agency Support Group on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Only the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team publishes summary notes on its website after each meeting.

173. During interviews, participants in such mechanisms described them as useful platforms for experience-sharing and information exchange and for connecting accessibility professionals at a working level to develop solutions to small-scale accessibility issues. For instance, while not a formal mechanism, organizations described as highly useful a 2017 WIPO-hosted round table on physical disabilities, which brought together over 30 Geneva-based organizations to strengthen the local network of entities that manage premises and work on enhancing accessibility. Participants discussed the human rights framework of accessibility and practical ways to improve the accessibility of facilities.

174. Other initiatives that were described as particularly helpful included the establishment of a task force on accessibility within the International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications, which organized webcasted workshops on the provision of accessible services and reasonable accommodation during meetings and would undertake a study on the status of accessible conference services, such as communication access real-time translation services and sign language interpretation. Organizations also welcomed the establishment by the Inter-Agency Support Group on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2017 of a working group to develop a system-wide action plan on disability. At the time of data collection, a draft outline of the document had been developed, with accessibility being one of its indicators.

175. Also noteworthy within the United Nations Secretariat context were the Inter-Departmental Task Force on Accessibility's efforts to create new partnerships, such as with the Association of United Nations Staff with Disabilities, Staff with Family Members with Disabilities and their Supporters (UN(dis)ABILITIES) and other informal groups for and with persons with disabilities. Agencies also welcomed the organization and hosting by WIPO in June 2017 of an inter-agency round table on physical accessibility, which brought together 15 Geneva-based United Nations agencies and other international organizations as well as the host country.

176. Apart from the positive aspects, participants also lamented a general lack of concrete follow-up action in terms of the production of system-wide or entity-wide guidance, such as guidelines and standards on accessibility. One notable exception is the United Nations Sustainable Development Group Task Team on Common Premises, whose guidelines on the topic include a section on accessibility and safety. Another good example is the task force on secretariat services, accessibility for persons with disabilities and use of information technology, which developed and adopted an accessibility plan to address existing barriers that persons with disabilities face in accessing the Human Rights Council's work.

177. Other concerns and challenges with regard to the functioning of inter- and intra-agency mechanisms and recommendations for remedial measures highlighted by interviewees include:

- A perceived lack of leadership on the issue of disabilities in some organizations, resulting in uneven commitment to the issue across the United Nations system. To address this, it was suggested that the institutional setting of inter-agency coordination on accessibility should be formalized and co-chaired at the Assistant Secretary-General level, and that a full-time person with expertise in planning, managing and coordinating accessibility and disability issues should be assigned to it.
- Organizations leading the way on accessibility matters tend to benefit less from engagement in inter-agency mechanisms, due to the unidirectional nature of knowledge exchange.
- Task forces led by facilities management units tend to be overly oriented towards physical facilities; for conversations to also factor in substantive aspects of disability inclusion and accessibility, leadership is needed from offices that are substantively engaged in disability issues.

- Working groups and task forces are often too large to be functional, with lots of enthusiastic discussions but vague outputs; functionality could be improved by assigning a smaller group of three or four experts to study a specific topic and present recommendations to a larger group.
- Some task forces have been inactive for several years and need to be revived, such as the WHO Task Force on Disability and the Human Resources Network Working Group on Employment of Persons with Disabilities.

178. It is recognized that various factors contribute to the delays in action, including: the diversity of United Nations system organizations' mandates and capacities in duty stations; different definitions of disability and accessibility across organizations; minimal understanding and institutionalization of accessibility within some organizations; and limited staff capacity and budgetary constraints.

179. Nonetheless, given the clear potential that inter- and intra-agency coordination mechanisms hold, not only for knowledge sharing on good practices regarding the accessibility of conferences and meetings at the working level, but also for the development of concrete system-wide guidance on accessibility matters, **the Inspector calls upon the executive heads of United Nations system entities to instruct their relevant representatives participating in such mechanisms to:**

- **Establish clear terms of reference for all inter- and intra-agency coordination mechanisms addressing the accessibility of conferences and meetings**
- **Periodically review existing terms of reference for relevance**
- **Ensure that individuals nominated to serve as representatives to inter-agency mechanisms are technically versed in the substantive and operational aspects of the accessibility of conferences and meetings**
- **Ensure that meetings are held periodically and that summary records are prepared and circulated in a timely manner identifying the responsible entities for all action points.**

C. Enhancing staff awareness

180. Ensuring a workplace that is consciously inclusive of persons with disabilities can go a long way towards ensuring that the avenues through which work is carried out, such as conference and meetings, are accessible to them. This necessitates raising awareness among staff at large about the importance of understanding, appreciating and actively incorporating disability and accessibility considerations in their day-to-day work.

181. There was a general acknowledgement among most JIU participating organizations that overall awareness on disability and accessibility-related matters was low, both among staff at large and among offices entrusted with various aspects of servicing conferences and meetings. It was highlighted that staff tended to conceptualize accessibility almost exclusively in terms of the built environment and that few understood or considered the specific needs associated with diverse disabilities. Accessibility thus tends to be seen as an add-on, rather than a concept that is integrated in attitudes and practices.

182. To address this deficit, understanding must be advanced, both in terms of the human rights dimensions of disability and accessibility, as encompassed in the Convention, and in terms of the practical barriers that physical facilities and services can create for persons with differing disabilities attending conferences and meetings. In particular, key concepts such as universal design and reasonable accommodation and the ways in which such principles are implemented in practice need to be better disseminated and understood. Measures that can be taken to engender such awareness and understanding include the active incorporation of accessibility questions into staff surveys and mandatory training on disability and accessibility.

1. Ensure staff surveys include accessibility-related questions

183. The incorporation of accessibility-related questions into staff surveys can allow organizations, through the survey findings, to better identify what the key attitudinal barriers and accessibility-related challenges are with regard to the existing facilities and services for conferences and meetings, collect suggestions for improvement, and prioritize their responses in terms of remedial actions. The interviews and responses to the JIU questionnaire show that only five participating organizations (ILO, ITC, the United Nations Secretariat, UNDP and UNICEF), including four United Nations Secretariat departments, offices and commissions (the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, ESCAP and the Office of Central Support Services) incorporate accessibility-related questions into staff surveys. While these organizations are few, they follow several noteworthy practices that merit consideration for replication by all organizations in their staff survey initiatives.

184. In the United Nations Secretariat, the Office of Central Support Services conducted a survey (July 2017 to January 2018) of persons with disabilities at headquarters (New York) to inform the development of proposals to enhance and improve the accessibility of facilities and services. One of the main findings was the difficulty of using doors, with the recommendation to remove them to the extent possible. In the light of the results, the Office of Central Support Services is contracting a disability-related organization to undertake a professional review of the accessibility of United Nations Headquarters. In ESCAP, as part of its accessibility assessment, an internal inclusive workplace survey was conducted and received 400 responses (25 per cent response rate) from staff and tenants on premises in Bangkok. The survey findings showed that accessibility improvements were needed in wayfinding, online systems, exterior spaces (e.g., entrance ramps), event participation, the accessibility centre and knowledge of emergency evacuation procedures.

185. In responses to a survey of UNDP offices on accessibility and reasonable accommodation, 60 per cent of offices indicated that they were accessible for persons with disabilities. However, as regards ICT accessibility, 70 per cent of responding offices indicated that their websites were either inaccessible or that they were unaware of the level of accessibility.⁹¹ The results were shared with senior management and individual bureaux and informed the approach taken by UNDP to the inclusion of persons with disabilities. UNDP included disability-related questions in its 2016 global staff survey, the results of which showed that the 120 respondents who self-identified as having a disability had a more negative workplace experience compared with those who did not have a disability. In ILO, a staff survey on disability inclusion was conducted in early 2014, and the results showed that over 40 per cent of respondents did not consider meeting rooms at their duty stations to be physically accessible. The survey analysis concluded that a significant number of respondents, particularly those based in field offices, found physical and informational accessibility to be insufficient.

186. At the system-wide level, the United Nations Staff Union conducted a global staff survey on disability awareness within the United Nations common system from April to May 2018. The survey was sent to 80,000 staff and had 3,228 respondents, indicating a low level of interest and engagement on disability issues. The results revealed a number of findings of concern that demand attention. The majority of survey respondents (60 per cent) were not aware of the Secretary-General's bulletin on disabilities.

187. Of the 248 individuals who self-identified as having a disability, only a minority (46 per cent) received reasonable accommodation in the workplace, while one in four faced discrimination due to

⁹¹ UNDP follows the Accessibility Guidelines for United Nations Websites, and the global website is up to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 standards, including navigation with screen readers. UNDP provides training on managing country office level web pages, including on digital design, to emphasize that universal design principles should be adopted as part of content production in order to make the final product accessible. It is currently working to ensure that the UNDP eRecruit system and the UNDP job site are fully accessible.

their disability. Respondents with invisible disabilities (e.g., cognitive disabilities) noted that reactions from colleagues ranged from patronizing to a total lack of acknowledgement. Most respondents with disabilities wanted to see a change in attitude from colleagues and management. The survey results were reported to the International Civil Service Commission and facilities management, and the Staff Union will ask human resources departments to revisit the definition of disability.

188. As a good practice, the ITC Executive Director's Bulletin on employment and accessibility for persons with disabilities⁹² explicitly states that questions relevant to policy implementation will be added to staff engagement surveys. UN-Women noted that, as part of an ongoing process to develop an organizational policy on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce, it would conduct a survey to identify barriers to the effective participation of staff with disabilities in the workplace, which would include a specific section on accessibility.

189. The above-mentioned findings clearly indicate the potential value that surveys that incorporate disability and accessibility considerations carry in terms of identifying accessibility deficits with regard to facilities and services for conferences and meetings, among other aspects. They also allow for the assessment of attitudinal barriers that hinder the creation of an inclusive workplace, which in turn is an indicator of the ability of staff to effectively service conference and meeting participants with disabilities.

190. Consequently, the **Inspector strongly urges executive heads of United Nations system organizations to include questions in relevant global staff surveys on the accessibility of facilities and services for conferences and meetings and on attitudes towards persons with disabilities. The pertinent survey findings should be factored into the development or revision of organizational policies, procedures, practices and activities addressing accessibility.**

2. Ensure staff training on disability and accessibility matters

191. Mandatory staff training on disability and accessibility constitutes a fundamental necessity to raise staff awareness of the needs of persons with diverse disabilities attending conferences and meetings. A case in point is the institutionalization of mandatory training on gender, HIV/AIDS and safety and security, which has conceivably helped to raise staff awareness of the importance of these topics. The lack of effective mainstreaming of disability inclusion and accessibility in the work of most United Nations system organizations has meant that not a single organization has a training module that is exclusively focused on disability inclusion and accessibility and that is mandatory for all staff.

192. The questionnaire and interview responses show that 14 JIU participating organizations⁹³ and 5 commissions, departments and offices of the United Nations Secretariat⁹⁴ have organized training for staff that is related to disabilities and accessibility. Annex V provides a non-exhaustive list of training modules offered by United Nations system organizations, indicating (where available) the theme, periodicity, modality for delivery and organizing entity. It should be noted that the Inspector does not discount the probability that there may be other training modules that also address accessibility (directly or indirectly) that the organizations have not brought to the attention of the review team.

193. The dedicated disabilities and accessibility training modules in existence are offered either online or in person. Participation is voluntary for staff at large and mandatory for specific units or departments in a few instances. In many cases, disability and accessibility are only limited components of training

⁹² ITC/EDB/2017/01.

⁹³ ICAO, ILO, ITC, ITU, the United Nations Secretariat, UNHCR, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN-Habitat, UN-Women, UNWTO, WHO and WIPO.

⁹⁴ The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and the Division of Conference Management, ECA, ESCAP, OHCHR and the Office of Human Resources Management.

modules offered under broader themes such as human rights or diversity. In UNHCR⁹⁵ and UN-Women,⁹⁶ training is focused on their programmatic work on disability, rather than on raising staff awareness or on how to make facilities and services more accessible.

194. Good practices regarding training to raise staff awareness of the needs of persons with disabilities include the following:

- ILO provides a one-hour online training module on persons with disabilities, with advice on how to include such persons in the work of ILO as regards projects, meetings and staff. The ILO occupational health and safety coordinator also provides awareness training to usher guards and staff servicing the International Labour Conference.
- ECA is developing two specialized awareness training modules on accessibility, one for staff at large and one for offices dealing directly with accessibility issues (e.g., facilities management, safety and security services, conference management and ICT).
- The ESCAP medical service is developing a course on disability for managers based on best practices, the Beijing Declaration on Disability-inclusive Development and the Incheon Strategy. The course may become mandatory for focal points on disability, and content can be replicated by other duty stations.

195. Good practices regarding training on how to provide accessible facilities and services include the following:

- ITU conducts training for producers of content and documents and meeting organizers on ensuring that the needs of persons with disabilities are met through the provision of accessible services.
- WIPO provides training on accessible document preparation for editorial and design staff.

196. Good practices regarding training that both raises awareness and covers how to provide accessible facilities and services include:

- The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management of the United Nations Secretariat organized a disability awareness workshop for its own staff and other departments, covering universal design, reasonable accommodation and proper etiquette.
- The Social Development Division of ESCAP is presently developing training for staff and management on issues related to disability and accessibility.
- ILO and OHCHR trained 100 United Nations Office at Geneva staff members, including all human resources personnel, on reasonable accommodation.
- UNDP has an online course on including and working with persons with disabilities. The course includes elements of accessibility and universal design and is recommended for all managers and available to all staff. Webinars for managers and staff on accessibility issues are also envisaged. UNDP is also developing guidance notes that will cover disability etiquette and strategies for communicating and interacting with persons with disabilities, creating disability inclusive job descriptions and recruitment and selection processes, tips for managers, and accessible materials and websites.
- The ICT Division of UNICEF is planning a training session for ICT staff (including UNDP and the United Nations Department of Global Communications) to explain accessibility and how to address people with disabilities.

197. Good practices regarding training on substantive knowledge of disabilities include the following:

⁹⁵ UNHCR has developed online training on working with persons with disabilities in forced displacement.

⁹⁶ UN-Women, in collaboration with the International Disability Alliance, co-organized a workshop on the inclusion and empowerment of women and girls with disabilities (30 July 2018), which covered the issues of accessibility, reasonable accommodation and financing for inclusion.

- The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat has developed a toolkit (in English and French) on the Convention with 14 training modules, including one dedicated to accessibility issues that is targeted at governmental focal points and organizations of persons with disabilities. It has also developed a fully accessible newsletter entitled “Enable” that focuses on disability-related issues and has 14,250 subscribers.
- ECA launched an optional online training module on the Convention in December 2017, which it is considering making mandatory for all staff.
- The United Nations Institute for Training and Research issued an e-learning course entitled “Human rights-based approach to disability” in November 2017 targeted at new delegates.

198. In the light of the above-mentioned initiatives, the Inspector considers that sufficient content on disability and accessibility-related training exists for United Nations system entities to share with and learn from each other in order to develop robust training on the subject matter. Indeed, during interviews, most organizations seemed largely unaware of the training being provided by other entities. This is a missed opportunity that can be rectified through efforts to coordinate and share training materials and information through relevant inter-agency platforms.

199. Training initiatives on disability and accessibility that are offered only once⁹⁷ or over a short period of time⁹⁸ can constitute lost opportunities for awareness-raising; in such instances, adequate safeguards for knowledge management must be in place to allow for the possibility to repeat such training in the future, without having to develop content from scratch. Organizations may also explore opportunities to develop and enhance training content through collaboration with entities specialized in training design and delivery, such as the United Nations Institute for Training and Research and the United Nations System Staff College in Turin, Italy.

200. One point on which there was nearly unanimous agreement among all organizations interviewed was that they would undoubtedly benefit from training on disability and accessibility. Most also agreed that such training should be mandatory for all personnel, with a general awareness training for staff at large and a longer, more specific training for personnel that have to deal regularly with disability and accessibility-related issues.

201. In the light of the findings and in line with these views, the Inspector **strongly urges the executive heads of United Nations system organizations to develop, through relevant inter-agency platforms, a generic online training module raising awareness about disability and accessibility that is based on the principles of the Convention and that can be used by all organizations and should be made mandatory for all staff.** The Inspector further proposes the following recommendation, which, if implemented, can further the dissemination of good practices by raising awareness among staff servicing conferences and meetings about the needs of persons with disabilities.

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

⁹⁷ One-off training modules include: a one-day ITU workshop on how to assist and interact with persons with disabilities; training by disability experts at United Nations Headquarters for security and conference management personnel at the United Nations Office at Nairobi on accessibility (2017); and a training session on understanding disability conducted by the ESCAP learning centre (2017).

⁹⁸ An interactive learning module on accessibility completed by 183 ECA staff members (2014, since discontinued).

resources management, and procurement, legal, ICT, medical, public information and safety and security services.

D. Enhancing accountability

1. Improving data collection and establishing key performance indicators

202. In order for an organization to assess its own performance in terms of the provision of accessible facilities and services for conferences and meetings for persons with disabilities, it must have relevant data in place to assess what has been requested and supplied and the resources utilized for the purpose. In the absence of such data, it will not be possible to assess trends in terms of projected future demand or to allocate resources accordingly to meet the demand. This will lead to a continuation in most organizations of a reactive approach, whereby resources are cobbled together on an ad hoc basis from different budget lines at the last minute to accommodate requests from participants.

203. Most JIU participating organizations acknowledged that they did not systematically collect data on accessibility, monitor it or have performance indicators to measure it. None have an established methodology to estimate additional costs. Four organizations (ILO, ITU, UNFPA and UNICEF) and ESCAP have performance indicators and targets related to their programmatic work on disability and accessibility, but not on internal accessibility.

204. These deficits became readily apparent when these organizations were unable to furnish accessibility-related data requested in the JIU questionnaire (and verified through follow-up interviews) in the following areas: (a) internal capacity, resources and performance indicators for addressing disability and accessibility; (b) on-site and off-site physical facilities and technological tools for access to conferences and meetings; and (c) estimated costs for improving accessibility.

205. For instance, when answering the question on how many persons with disabilities were accommodated in major conferences and meetings from 2012 to 2017, only UPU had figures for off-site meetings. For on-site meetings, only ITC had figures, while ILO, UPU and OHCHR provided estimates. When answering the question on how many persons could not be accommodated due to inadequate or non-existent facilities and tools for on-site and off-site meetings, none of the organizations could provide any data. When answering the question on the estimated additional cost to organizations for facilitating accessibility for persons with disabilities (see chap. V, sect. A), organizations had no comprehensive estimations that covered all meetings and conferences. The issue of how to collect such information in a sensitive manner while respecting the participants' privacy and confidentiality is discussed in chapter V.B.i.

206. Despite these limitations, a few good practices exist as regards monitoring and data collection on specific aspects of accessibility. For instance, ITU and the Division of Conference Management of the United Nations Office at Geneva keep track of the number of meetings with remote captioning and sign language interpretation. The WIPO 2010–11 programme and budget included improved physical access to the WIPO campus as a performance indicator and guard rails (where required) and badge readers at the required level for persons with disabilities as a target. The OHCHR Diversity Task Force has developed indicators for its strategy to provide reasonable accommodation.

207. As a best practice, the results framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018–2021 has two indicators related to accessibility and inclusion, namely: the percentage of offices meeting minimum standards for accessibility, with a baseline of 25 per cent and a target of 50 per cent by 2021; and the percentage of staff having full access to all relevant core UNICEF information systems, with those systems being mobile enabled, with a baseline of 83 per cent and target of 100 per cent by 2021.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ See E/ICEF/2017/18.

208. In terms of forthcoming initiatives, UN-Women noted that it might develop an action plan with indicators and targets to measure accessibility for its strategy entitled the Empowerment of Women and Girls with Disabilities. In the United Nations Secretariat, the Division of Conference Management and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management noted that they might track the viewership of webcasts with captioning and sign language interpretation, monitor the usage of services offered by the accessibility centre and track data on advance accommodation requests received.

209. As a way forward, a number of organizations have suggested that it might be useful to develop an accessibility database to gather and share information on the development and usages of accessibility tools. The Inspector welcomes this suggestion and calls upon all organizations to advance discussions in this realm through relevant inter- and intra-agency mechanisms on disability and accessibility.

210. To address deficits in the monitoring and collection of data on the accessibility of conferences and meetings, the **Inspector strongly urges all executive heads of United Nations system organizations to instruct relevant offices to develop key performance indicators on the accessibility of conferences and meetings and to identify appropriate modalities for data collection in order to measure such indicators.**

2. Ensuring regular reporting on the state of accessibility to legislative bodies

211. To further organizational accountability in terms of assessing where the organizations stand on addressing accessibility needs, what measures they have committed to take and have concretely taken and what measures they plan to take to address existing deficits, the legislative bodies need to play a proactive role by mandating the executive head to periodically report to them on the state of accessibility in the organization. The Inspector found only one instance of such a mandate, whereby the General Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to submit reports on the rights of persons with disabilities, regulations on reasonable accommodation and the status of facilities and services in the context of ensuring full accessibility, as well as recommendations on coordinated approaches to meet the needs of persons with disabilities in conferences and meetings at the United Nations.¹⁰⁰

212. In adherence to the request, in August 2016, the Secretary-General presented a report entitled “Towards the full realization of an inclusive and accessible United Nations for persons with disabilities”.¹⁰¹ The report represents the first instance of a dedicated comprehensive stocktaking of accessibility in the United Nations Secretariat. Of particular relevance is its coverage of concrete measures undertaken by the United Nations Headquarters to improve the accessibility of physical facilities on the premises, conference services and facilities, information and documentation. The report also provides a more limited snapshot of initiatives at the level of regional commissions, funds and programmes and specialized agencies.

213. The Secretary-General’s report outlines some vital recommendations and proposed actions, which the Inspector welcomes and calls upon all JIU participating organizations to actively reflect upon and implement, in order to make their own premises and services more accessible, namely:

- Reach out to accessibility experts to serve as resources for future work on the topic.
- Raise staff awareness about disabilities to develop an inclusive workplace culture.
- Catalogue practices and policies on accessibility and their coordination across duty stations, in order to harmonize planning and operating procedures with respect to accessibility in the provision of conference services, and to build metrics and performance indicators to measure their use and impact.
- Create a standard cost manual for accessible services available on reimbursement at duty stations.
- Conduct a practical test of remote participation on the basis of good practices of other entities.

¹⁰⁰ See General Assembly resolutions 70/170 and 72/162.

¹⁰¹ A/71/344 and Corr.1.

- Harmonize the working conditions and hiring of sign language interpreters across duty stations and undertake outreach activities to increase the available pool of International Sign interpreters.
- Establish contact with outside testers and developers with expertise in accessibility requirements to enhance the compatibility of electronic formats with accessibility requirements.
- Establish long-term arrangements with captioning companies that can be used across duty stations, and develop common standards for languages and quality control.
- Conduct awareness-raising among Member States and other potential contributors on the role of accessibility centres and opportunities to support accessibility projects at all duty stations.
- Partner with ICT offices to research and implement solutions in accessible documentation, voice recognition and remote participation to enhance quality and reduce accommodation costs.
- Offer more compatibility with DAISY using the .epub standard, which is based on XML.
- Actively pursue the adoption of standards and the implementation of the web accessibility guidelines issued by the Web Accessibility Initiative of the World Wide Web Consortium.
- Review all organizational websites to ensure their accessibility.

214. The Inspector welcomes the mandate given by the General Assembly to the Secretary-General to prepare such a report as an important accountability and stocktaking tool to assess the state of play in an organization as regards accessibility, and he is of the view that all United Nations system organizations should report periodically — at a minimum every five years — to their legislative bodies on the measures that they have taken to further accessibility. The implementation of the following recommendation is expected to lead to enhanced transparency and accountability as regards organizational initiatives to further the accessibility of their facilities and services for persons with disabilities.

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.

215. In respect of the United Nations Secretariat, the Inspector urges the Committee on Conferences to integrate disability inclusion and accessibility issues more fully into its work and calls upon the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Conferences on measures undertaken and progress achieved in the context of the annual reports on the pattern of conferences, thereby institutionalizing the integration of disability inclusion and accessibility issues and making this an ongoing feature of the legislative system's oversight of conference management.

3. Ensuring a role for oversight bodies in monitoring and evaluating the state of accessibility

216. An important accountability tool is the role that oversight offices can play in helping organizations to assess the extent to which they have complied with agreed-upon actions and mandates to further the accessibility of conferences and meetings and how effectively functions have supported accessibility initiatives. While no dedicated audit reports on the accessibility of conferences and meetings are issued by oversight bodies of JIU participating organizations, the topic has been addressed as part of broader reports.

217. Notably, the United Nations Board of Auditors has highlighted the absence of an assurance framework to monitor compliance with the United Nations Secretariat policy on accessibility

(ST/SGB/2014/3) and has emphasized the need to monitor policy implementation and appoint focal points to better monitor compliance with policy.¹⁰² In its audit report on UNODC, the Board highlighted the need for all United Nations Secretariat entities to comply with the policy on accessibility and recommended, for field offices, the appointment of focal points on disability and accessibility and the development of accessibility standards.¹⁰³ It has also recommended that UNFPA develop an accessibility policy, which is expected to be promulgated in 2019.¹⁰⁴

218. While there are no known evaluations of the accessibility of conferences and meetings, UNDP issued an evaluation of disability-inclusive development in 2016. While primarily focusing on that organization's programmatic work on disabilities, the evaluation also assessed compliance with the United Nations guidelines on the functional accessibility of common premises and found compliance to be uneven across country offices and other duty stations. It found that, although UNDP had taken some positive steps to create an enabling work environment, it was still not a welcoming organization for persons with disabilities.¹⁰⁵

219. The Inspector finds it regrettable that the accessibility of conferences and meetings has not received due attention in the work of oversight offices and urges them to periodically review the organizational-level risk associated with the topic, with due regard for the mandates, independence and charters of the oversight offices, and to report on the findings to the executive heads and legislative bodies.

¹⁰² A/70/5 (Vol. I) and Corr.1; A/72/5 (Vol. I) and Corr.1, paras. 141–154.

¹⁰³ A/72/5/Add.10, paras. 57, 60, 62 and 63.

¹⁰⁴ 2017 United Nations Board of Auditors Report on UNFPA Financial Statements.

¹⁰⁵ UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, Evaluation of Disability-Inclusive Development at UNDP, 2016.

VII. A CASE FOR MAINSTREAMING DISABILITY INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY

A. Uneven and slow pace of progress on addressing accessibility

220. The main theme that runs through the findings of this review on furthering the accessibility of conferences and meetings for persons with disabilities is that progress has not only occurred at a slow pace but has also been uneven across the organizations. The pace of progress has been slow, given that, while United Nations system organizations began addressing concerns of persons with disabilities as far back as 1982, most organizations have no policy on accessibility or minimum levels of accessibility for persons with disabilities. The United Nations system has not been dynamic enough to adapt and utilize advances in technology, particularly in areas such as artificial intelligence and robotics, which have made the provision of facilities and services less costly.

221. The uneven nature of the progress is manifested in the way that the Committee and the Human Rights Council on the one hand, and several other United Nations system entities on the other hand, have been addressing questions relating to accessibility, non-discrimination and inclusion. The due prioritization by the former is not surprising, given that article 9 of the Convention, which addresses accessibility, has been described as the “backbone of the Convention”. This is in marked contrast to the limited attention displayed by several (but not all) of the other entities, stemming perhaps from a lack of both appreciation and understanding of the human rights dimension of accessibility. Consequently, the focus on disability in such entities tends to be limited to mobility impairments, while invisible forms of disability, mainly intellectual and cognitive, appear to be considerably neglected. Similarly, adequate attention is not always paid to addressing disabilities of a temporary nature, such as those that arise from accidents or are age-related.

222. The foregoing observations should not obscure the genuine enthusiasm towards the topic that some organizations demonstrated during the course of the present review. Inspired by the JIU questionnaire, one of the specialized agencies (FAO) drew up an action plan within three months for enhancing accessibility in three phases: short-term, to be accomplished within three months and within existing resources; medium-term, where resources had to be identified for measures that could be undertaken; and long-term, which would involve significant financial outlays and discussions with the host government that owned the building complex, in order to undertake structural improvements that would take two to three years to accomplish.

223. Following discussions with the JIU project team on existing processes and procedures, a number of organizations voluntarily agreed to introduce changes in their conference and meeting registration procedures to proactively seek information from potential participants about their specific requirements relating to accessibility. Several entities agreed to include information about the availability of facilities and services in the conference and meeting information note for participants, while some agreed to include questions on accessibility in their global staff surveys, without waiting for the formal publication of the JIU review. This proactivity indicates that the primary challenge in addressing accessibility is one of an information deficit rather than an unwillingness to act.

224. Another pending challenge to accessibility emanates from the response of a specialized agency to the query from the JIU concerning the applicable legislative and regulatory frameworks relating to disability and accessibility. The organization averred that it was not bound by any resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, only by resolutions and decisions of its own legislative organs.

225. Such an attitude perhaps emanates from an inadequate appreciation and lack of understanding of the mandate and competence of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, particularly the provisions of Article 62 of the Charter of the United Nations, which clearly states that the Economic and Social Council can make recommendations with respect to international economic, social, cultural, educational, health, and related matters to the specialized agencies.

B. Furthering universal design and an ecosystem for barrier-free access

226. The absence of proactive efforts on the part of United Nations system organizations may result in reputational risks for them if they are seen as unable to keep the promise of “leaving no one behind”. Reliance on ad hoc practices rather than an adequate system-wide overview and a coordinated uniform approach could entail costly and unplanned expenses. As noted earlier, 5 out of the 17 goals contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development stress the need to pay particular attention to the rights of persons with disabilities and to take concerted action at the global and national levels in specific areas.

227. In this context, it is imperative for organizations to look beyond minimum national legislation on accessibility and establish organization-wide policies that set minimum levels of accessibility that aspire towards universal design and reasonable accommodation. Indeed, organizations of persons with disabilities have stressed time and again that universal design, while essential for some, is useful for all. Organizations should also recognize that most of the universal design and reasonable accommodation measures under discussion or implementation are, in essence, intermediate steps towards making all premises, conferences and meetings, including documentation and information, fully accessible and barrier-free.

228. Indeed, there is no better way of ensuring the full and equal inclusion of persons with disabilities than to create an ecosystem that assures full and barrier-free accessibility. Even in cases where the organizational premises may be state-of-the-art, obstacles in the surrounding environment, such as congested traffic, limited parking, inaccessible public transportation and unnavigable sidewalks and streets, may prevent participants from accessing conferences and meetings. As such, accessibility reaches beyond buildings and facilities and includes the broader ecosystem in which the organization is located. These challenges to the ecosystem are applicable to headquarters locations in both developed (London, New York, Rome, Paris and Vienna) and developing (Addis Ababa, Bangkok and Nairobi) countries, albeit to varying degrees.

229. While the Inspector fully recognizes that upgrades to the facilities and services in the cities where conferences and meetings are held are entirely beyond the control of the United Nations system entities, these entities can certainly take measures to mitigate challenges in reaching the organizational premises. For instance, organizations can prearrange accessible transportation between meeting sites and hotels, airports, bus and train stations for persons with disabilities. This may require contracting out accessible vehicles. Organizations can also disseminate information on accessible accommodations (e.g., hotels with disability accommodations) and transportation (e.g., wheelchair-friendly public transportation).

230. Member States have the responsibility when nominating persons with disabilities as delegates to United Nations system conferences and meetings to ensure that they are provided with all necessary assistance to facilitate their effective participation. Shared responsibility between the Member States and the United Nations system entities in this regard should be recognized and upheld.

C. Disability inclusion and accessibility: the need for a shift to system-wide mainstreaming

231. One measure suggested during the review to accord a higher profile for issues relating to disability inclusion and the accessibility of conferences and meetings was to set up a new system-wide entity to coordinate the activities of organizations for persons with disabilities and accessibility-related issues. A variant of the suggestion was to designate one of the existing entities as a lead agency for the purpose. While in the present review the Inspector has not critically deliberated upon or analysed these suggestions to arrive at a meaningful conclusion, organizations have cautioned that assigning responsibility for the subject matter to a particular unit could have the unintended effect of others evading any responsibility on the subject matter, irrespective of whether or not the topic falls within their competence or responsibility.

232. The Inspector is of the view that, while there should be a focal point on accessibility within every organization to coordinate actions among relevant units, accessibility should not be left solely to one unit or individual but should be the responsibility of the organization as a whole and of every unit and every individual in it. Consequently, the Inspector advocates the need for a consistent system-wide response to the challenge of accessibility.

233. This is particularly important given that there is no systematic focus on the topic of disability inclusion and accessibility in the United Nations Secretariat or in any of its legislative bodies, and that no resolutions are adopted on the topic on a regular basis. Discussions on accessibility are primarily limited to sessions of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Human Rights Council and disability-related events, such as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December), World Down Syndrome Day (21 March) and World Autism Awareness Day (2 April). This has led many interviewees to perceive the topic of disability and accessibility as an “institutional orphan”, in the light of the relative indifference of Member States and the limited and uneven progress achieved by United Nations system entities.

234. Consequently, many interviewees, particularly those from OHCHR and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but also from other streams such as human resources and legal offices, underscored the imperative of “mainstreaming” disability inclusion and accessibility across the work of all United Nations system organizations. Making disability inclusion and accessibility cross-cutting issues will help secure a higher degree of institutional support, facilitate their inclusion into the regular or core budget and further the development of mandatory awareness-raising programmes on the subject matter. Mainstreaming will also lead to better understanding of the different types of disabilities and how to address them, particularly invisible disabilities such as intellectual and cognitive disabilities.

235. Such mainstreaming can only be achieved with commitments at the political level. There was general consensus among interviewees from organizations and Member States that, since the topic is relatively “apolitical”, its mainstreaming could secure the buy-in and support of Member States, who could mobilize greater political and institutional support and dedicate additional resources to improving accessibility.

236. To further mainstreaming, organizations should use disability-related events such as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities to take stock of the progress achieved internally in promoting accessibility and to outline clear commitments for future remedial action. Organizations should also increase interactions with entities in the private sector and civil society organizations to identify opportunities for collaboration in promoting accessibility and pursue them vigorously. This would be especially so with civil society organizations that are active in the field of disability inclusion and accessibility. Likewise, private sector enterprises that are active in the field of assistive technologies and are utilizing advances in robotics, artificial intelligence and other frontier areas for improving accessibility might offer significant opportunities for collaboration.

237. Last but certainly not least, it must be highlighted that, in hierarchically-structured entities such as the United Nations system organizations, the principal agent in effecting attitudinal changes and furthering prioritization on any topic is the organizational leadership. This holds true equally with regard to disability inclusion and accessibility. In cases where the executive head has shown leadership and demonstrated his or her commitment to disability inclusion and accessibility, the entity has made noticeable strides. For instance, as a result of the WIPO leadership prioritizing accessibility, access for persons with disabilities became 1 of the 16 outcome indicators in the WIPO Strategic Realignment Program (2009). Since then, accessibility has been closely factored into extensive building works on WIPO premises. Commendable is the speed and leadership that WIPO has shown in successfully concluding the negotiation and adoption of the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled (2013).

238. The reverse can also hold true, with existing resources being removed from disability inclusion and accessibility efforts when the topic is no longer on the radar of organizational leadership. For

instance, one entity noted that the position of the disability adviser had been abolished when non-core funding for it had ceased after four years. No attempt had been made to either fund the post through core resources or approach any other contributor about continuing the position, even though the post had an estimated annual cost of only \$200,000.

239. The Inspector is of the view that executive heads must play their part in ensuring both that the issue of internal accessibility is prioritized in the work of the organization and that such prioritization is sustained. One way of achieving this would be to systematically include disability and accessibility-related topics in the organization's strategic framework or medium-term plan. Such a move would be greatly facilitated by a system-wide commitment to accessibility, non-discrimination and inclusion emanating from the highest level of the organization.

240. In this context, to enhance consistency and harmonization in the work of the United Nations system entities in the realm of accessibility, **the Inspector strongly urges the executive heads of United Nations system organizations to adopt, in the framework of CEB, a common position on the prioritization of disability inclusion and the accessibility of conferences and meetings in their operational and programmatic work.**

D. Concluding remarks

241. As reiterated on numerous occasions, the measures implemented by way of reasonable accommodation and universal design are only intermediate steps in the long journey of the United Nations system entities towards full and barrier-free accessibility. In other words, there is no room for any complacency. In this context, the Inspector would like to conclude by highlighting a few thoughts for further consideration by different stakeholders:

- Organizations of persons with disabilities versed in accessibility issues should look beyond the Committee and the Human Rights Council and actively promote and demand greater attention to the topic, in the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the high-level political forum on sustainable development and the legislative organs of other United Nations system organizations.
- As highlighted throughout the present report, the principle of “nothing about us without us” must be fully ingrained in the work of all United Nations system organizations as regards persons with disabilities. That is, organizations of persons with disabilities must be consulted at all relevant stages, and provisions must be made to allow for their full and effective participation in all conferences and meetings and in deciding on and implementing measures for enhancing accessibility.
- All but one of the recommendations in the present report are addressed to the executive heads, in recognition of the vital leadership role they can and must perform on the topic of accessibility.
- Member States and civil society organizations addressing disability-related issues should work with WIPO to consider how to extend exceptions and limitations to copyright treaties to disabilities beyond visual impairment, and how exceptions and limitations can be used to enhance the accessibility of documentation and services for persons with other disabilities.
- Organizational units engaged in studying technological advances for enhancing accessibility should establish a community of practice on technology adaptations.
- Each entity, within its mandate and sphere of competence, should look at what more it can do to enhance accessibility, both by itself and in cooperation with other entities, and should develop concrete programmes and pursue them proactively.

242. The United Nations system organizations can and should do much more, individually and collectively, to enhance accessibility: we owe it to persons with disabilities in our quest for greater inclusion, if we are to walk the talk to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Annex I: Guidance documents on accessibility and on mainstreaming the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Guidance documents that cover specific realms of accessibility:

- Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, general comment No. 2 (2014) on accessibility.
- Accessibility Guidelines for United Nations Websites, issued by the Department of Global Communications of the United Nations Secretariat.¹ Provides guidance on how to produce accessible websites in terms of context, design and technology.
- Guidelines for Supporting Remote Participation in Meetings for All (ITU-T Technical Paper).² Outlines requirements for ensuring that meetings are accessible to remote participants, including those with disabilities and those using assistive technologies.
- Guidelines for Accessible Meetings (ITU-T Technical Paper). Outlines how to organize accessible meetings.³
- Guidelines for Accessible Publishing at WHO. Provides guidance on making printed materials more accessible to persons with vision or visual impairments, particularly as regards: typeface (font type, type size and weight), design and layout (alignment, hyphens and spacing, margins and gutters, text placement, colour contrast and combinations), images (image placement, image description, tables, charts and graphs) and printing. Also provides a checklist for accessible design and print.
- Ask It Right: A Guide for Interviewing People with Disabilities (WHO). Provides suggestions that factor in accessibility needs, courtesy and etiquette, as well as specific tips for interviewing persons with different types of impairments (mobility, hearing, speech, visual and intellectual impairments).
- Promoting Diversity and Inclusion Through Workplace Adjustments: a Practical Guide (ILO, 2016). Explains the concept of reasonable accommodation and provides practical step-by-step guidance on how and when such accommodation should be provided in the workplace.
- Telecommunications Accessibility Checklist (ITU-T Technical Paper). Intends to ensure that specified services and features are usable by persons with disabilities, and should be applied to every work item before, during and upon the completion of the work.⁴
- Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled (WIPO). Creates a set of limitations and exceptions to copyright rules in order to allow for the reproduction, distribution and availability of published works in formats accessible to such persons.
- UNICEF Information Technology Services and Systems User Guide on How to Produce Accessible Web and Multimedia Content. Highlights, among others, the principles of accessible design and explains how to make websites accessible on mobile devices.
- UNICEF Information Technology Services and Systems Guideline Document for Standardization of Assistive Technology Products. Lists different types of such technologies, including by disability profiles, their technical specifications and the evaluation criteria for their procurement.
- Emergency Evacuation Planning Guide for People with Disabilities (UNDP).
- Guidance for Accessible Meetings and Events (UNHCR).
- Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Participatory Assessments (UNHCR).

¹ Available at: www.un.org/en/webaccessibility/index.shtml.

² Available at: www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-t/opb/tut/T-TUT-FSTP-2015-ACC-PDF-E.pdf.

³ Available at: www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-t/opb/tut/T-TUT-FSTP-2015-AM-PDF-E.pdf.

⁴ Available at: www.itu.int/pub/T-TUT-FSTP-2006-TACL/en.

Guidance documents on mainstreaming the Convention and disability agenda in programmatic work

- Guidance Note: Applying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in UNDP Programming (2012).⁵ Outlines why the Convention needs to be applied in UNDP programming, how to apply it and who needs to be involved.
- Business as Unusual: Making Workplaces Inclusive of People with Disabilities (ILO, 2014).⁶ Outlines the business case for employing persons with disabilities as well as good practices from the public and private sectors regarding disability inclusion in the workplace.
- Including the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in United Nations Programming at Country Level: A Guidance Note for United Nations Country Teams and Implementing Partners (UNDP, 2011).⁷ Outlines suggestions for mainstreaming the rights of persons with disabilities in the areas of: United Nations system cooperation at country level; country analysis (preceding the development of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework); strategic planning (development of the Framework and its results matrix); and monitoring and evaluation.
- Promoting the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Disability Toolkit (UNRWA, 2013)⁸ and Disability Inclusion Guidelines (UNRWA, 2017).⁹ Provides advice on how to mainstream disability inclusion in UNRWA programmes and services.
- The Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action.¹⁰ Outlines commitments to ensure the participation of such persons in the development, planning and implementation of humanitarian programmes.
- Women and Young Persons with Disabilities: Guidelines for Providing Rights-Based and Gender-Responsive Services to Address Gender-Based Violence and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (UNFPA, 2018).

⁵ Available at:

www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/Inclusive%20development/DisabilityGuidance_Web41pgs.pdf.

⁶ Available at: www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_316815.pdf.

⁷ Available at: www.un.org/disabilities/documents/iasg/undg_guidance_note_final.pdf.

⁸ Available at: www.unrwa.org/userfiles/file/disability%202/DISABILITY%20TOOLKIT%20English.pdf.

⁹ Available at: www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/disability_inclusion_guidelines.pdf.

¹⁰ Available at: <http://humanitariandisabilitycharter.org/>.

Annex II: Non-exhaustive list of international standards for accessibility

DA	Name of standard or guidelines	Entity	Description of standard or practice and aspects related to accessibility
BE	Building construction — Accessibility and usability of the built environment (ISO 21542:2011)	ISO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specifies a range of requirements and recommendations for elements of construction, assemblies, components and fittings that comprise the built environment. Requirements relate to the constructional aspects of access to buildings circulation within buildings, exiting from buildings in the normal course of events and evacuation in the event of an emergency. Also covers aspects of accessibility management in buildings.¹
BE/ ICT	Information technology — Accessibility considerations for people with disabilities (ISO/IEC TR 29138:2009)	ISO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies a collection of user needs of persons with disabilities for standards developers to take into consideration when developing or revising their standards. These user needs are also useful for developers of information technology products and services and for accessibility advocates to consider.²
BE/ ICT	Information technology — Office equipment accessibility guidelines for elderly persons and persons with disabilities (ISO/IEC 10779:2009)	ISO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specifies accessibility guidelines to be considered when planning, developing and designing electro-photographic copying machines, page printers and multifunctional devices. Guidelines are intended to improve accessibility primarily for older persons, persons with disabilities and persons with temporary disabilities when using office equipment.³
BE	Accessible design — Application of braille on signage, equipment and appliances (ISO 17049:2013)	ISO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specifies the fundamental requirements for Braille used on signage, equipment and appliances, including the dimensional parameters of Braille, characteristics of materials used and guidelines for practical implementation.⁴
BE	Assistive products for blind and vision-impaired persons — Tactile walking surface indicators (ISO 23599:2012)	ISO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides product specifications for tactile walking surface indicators and recommendations for their installation in order to assist in the safe and independent mobility of blind or vision-impaired persons.⁵
BE/ ICT	Assistive products for persons with vision impairments and persons with vision and hearing impairments — Acoustic and tactile signals for pedestrian traffic lights (ISO 23600:2007)	ISO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specifies requirements for acoustic and tactile signals for pedestrian traffic lights to assist in the safe and independent mobility of persons with vision impairments and persons with vision and hearing impairments. It is applicable to the design, installation and operation of acoustic and tactile signals for pedestrian traffic lights.⁶
ICT	Information technology — Interoperability with assistive technology — Part 3: IAccessible2 accessibility application programming interface (ISO/IEC TR 13066-3:2012)	ISO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specifies services provided in the Microsoft Windows platform to enable assistive technologies to interact with other software. Defines a set of application programming interfaces for allowing software applications to enable accessible technologies on the Microsoft Windows platform.⁷
ICT	Information technology — W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 (ISO/IEC 40500:2012)	ISO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Covers a wide range of recommendations for making web content more accessible. Following these guidelines will make content accessible to a wider range of persons with disabilities, including blindness and low vision, deafness and hearing loss, learning disabilities, cognitive limitations, limited movement, speech disabilities, photosensitivity and combinations of these.⁸

¹ Available at: www.iso.org/standard/50498.html.

² Available at: www.iso.org/standard/45161.html.

³ Available at: www.iso.org/standard/46086.html.

⁴ Available at: www.iso.org/standard/58086.html.

⁵ Available at: www.iso.org/obp/ui/#iso:std:iso:23599:ed-1:v1:en.

⁶ Available at: www.iso.org/standard/41683.html.

⁷ Available at: www.iso.org/standard/53998.html.

⁸ Available at: www.iso.org/standard/58625.html.

DA	Name of standard or guidelines	Entity	Description of standard or practice and aspects related to accessibility
ICT	Ergonomics of human-system interaction — Part 171: Guidance on software accessibility (ISO 9241-171:2008)	ISO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides ergonomics guidance and specifications for the design of accessible software for use at work, in the home, in education and in public places. Covers issues associated with designing accessible software for persons with the widest range of physical, sensory and cognitive abilities, including those who are temporarily disabled and the elderly.⁹
ICT	Information technology — User interfaces — Accessible user interface for accessibility settings (ISO/IEC 24786:2009)	ISO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specifies requirements and recommendations for making accessibility settings accessible. This will make information technologies more accessible by ensuring that persons with disabilities can adjust accessibility settings by themselves. It also specifies how to access and operate the accessibility setting mode and how to directly activate specific accessibility functions.¹⁰
ICT	Information technology — Individualized adaptability and accessibility in e-learning, education and training — Part 1: Framework and reference model (ISO/IEC 24751-1:2008)	ISO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is intended to meet the needs of learners with disabilities and anyone in a disabling context. Provides a common framework to describe and specify learner needs and preferences on the one hand and the corresponding description of the digital learning resources on the other hand, so that individual learner preferences and needs can be matched with the appropriate user interface tools and digital learning resources.¹¹
ICT	Web Accessibility Initiative	WAI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The W3C Web Accessibility Initiative develops strategies, standards and supporting materials to make the web more accessible to persons with disabilities.¹²
ICT	Multimedia telecommunication relay services (ITU-T F.930)	ITU-T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Telecommunications relay services enable persons who have hearing or speech disabilities, and who otherwise would be unable to engage in voice telecommunications, to make voice telephone calls to other persons. The recommendation provides a functional description of four common types of relay services currently in use: text relay, video relay, captioned telephone service relay and speech-to-speech relay. Additionally, it lays out specific functional requirements of relay services pertaining to equipment, call set-up, call experience, emergency communications and message retrieval.¹³
ICT	Audio-based network navigation system for persons with vision impairment (ITU-T F.921)	ITU-T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recommendation explains how audio-based network navigation systems can be designed to ensure that they are inclusive and meet the needs of persons with visual impairments. It explains how to accommodate users' experience of audio-based network navigation systems and ensure interoperability of those systems.¹⁴
ICT	Accessibility profiles for IPTV systems (ITU-T H.702)	ITU-T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recommendation defines three profiles for accessibility features in Internet protocol television systems, with increasing levels of support. Accessibility information is information such as captions, sign language streams and audio descriptions that are sent separately from video contents to Internet protocol television terminal devices. By defining the above profiles, persons with disabilities can choose more easily the terminal devices that have the functions they need.¹⁵
ICT	Multimedia conversational services (ITU-T F.703)	ITU-T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This specification provides the requirements for "total communication", which is a key principle for inclusive design using multimedia communications. It sets out the principles of combining simultaneous video, voice and text service in telecommunications to allow persons in two or more locations to: (a) see each other; (b) hear each other; and (c) conduct a text interaction (real-time text) with each other, or choose to communicate with any combination of those three modes and to do so in real time.
ICT	Telecommunications accessibility guidelines for older persons and persons with disabilities (ITU-T F.790)	ITU-T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This recommendation is intended to provide general guidelines for standardizing, planning, developing, designing and distributing all forms of telecommunications equipment and software and associated telecommunications services to ensure their accessibility for persons with the widest possible range of abilities. It gives

⁹ Available at: www.iso.org/standard/39080.html.

¹⁰ Available at: www.iso.org/standard/41556.html.

¹¹ Available at: www.iso.org/standard/41521.html.

¹² Available at: www.w3.org/WAI/.

¹³ Available at: www.itu.int/itu-t/recommendations/rec.aspx?rec=13571&lang=en.

¹⁴ Available at: www.itu.int/itu-t/recommendations/rec.aspx?rec=13185.

¹⁵ Available at: www.itu.int/rec/T-REC-H.702-201511-I/en.

DA	Name of standard or guidelines	Entity	Description of standard or practice and aspects related to accessibility
			guidance on understanding the topic of accessibility and the ways that accessibility may be incorporated into products and services. ¹⁶
ICT	Accessibility terms and definitions (ITU-T F.791)	ITU-T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standard writers are able to mainstream accessibility features into standards and to write specific standards for accessibility. To design products and services successfully, there needs to be a common language. This document is intended to provide definitions that will make it easier for industries to implement these accessibility features and accessibility standards if everyone is using the same language and vocabulary. It is also important that governments, government agencies, NGOs, the United Nations and its respective agencies be "normalized" in mainstream everyday language.
ICT	Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) standard	DAISY Consortium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DAISY is a means of creating digital talking books for persons who wish to hear and navigate written material presented in an audible format. Many such listeners have print disabilities, including blindness, impaired vision, dyslexia or other issues. Using DAISY, a talking book format is presented with enabled navigation within a sequential and hierarchical structure consisting of marked-up text synchronized with audio.

Abbreviations: BE, Built Environment; DA, Dimension Addressed; ISO, International Organization for Standardization; ITU-T, ITU Telecommunication Standardization Sector.

¹⁶ Available at: www.itu.int/rec/T-REC-F.790/en.

Annex III: Provision of facilities and services for conferences and meetings and adequacy levels

Entity	ITC		UNOV/ UNODC		UNHCR		UNDP		UNFPA		UNICEF		FAO		IAEA		ICAO		IMO		UNESCO		UNIDO		UPU		UNAIDS		WHO		WIPO	
Building facilities and services on organizational premises																																
Access ways, entrances/exits, walkways and corridors	Y	3	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2	Y	3	Y	3	Y	1	Y	3	Y	3	Y	3	Y	2	Y	2	Y	3	Y	3	Y	2
Lighting	Y	2	Y	3	Y	2	Y	3	Y	2	Y	3	Y	2	Y	1	Y	3	Y	3	Y	2	Y	3	Y	2	Y	3	Y	3	Y	2
Elevators, escalators	Y	2	Y	1	Y	2	Y	3	Y	3	Y	3	Y	2	Y	1	Y	3	Y	3	Y	3	Y	1	Y	2	Y	1	Y	2	Y	2
Meeting rooms	Y	3	Y	2	Y	2	Y	3	Y	1	Y	2	Y	2	Y	1	Y	3	Y	3	Y	1	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2
Heating/ventilation/air conditioning	Y	2	Y	3	Y	2	Y	3	Y	2	N	..	Y	2	Y	2	Y	3	Y	3	Y	0	Y	3	Y	2	Y	3	Y	2	Y	2
Electrical outlets	Y	3	Y	3	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2	Y	1	Y	2	Y	1	Y	3	Y	3	Y	2	Y	3	Y	2	Y	3	Y	2	Y	2
Restrooms	Y	3	Y	1	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2	Y	3	Y	2	Y	2	Y	3	Y	2	Y	3	Y	1	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2	Y	1
Vehicle access, garage	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2	N	..	N	..	N	..	Y	2	Y	1	Y	3	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2	Y	3	Y	2	Y	1
Evacuation facilities/plans	Y	1	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2	Y	3	Y	2	Y	1	Y	3	Y	2	Y	3	..	..	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2
Catering services	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2	Y	1	Y	2	Y	2	Y	1	Y	3	Y	3	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2
Commercial retail services	N	..	Y	1	N	..	N	..	N	..	N	..	Y	1	Y	1	Y	3	..	..	N	..	Y	1	N	..	Y	1	Y	2	N	..
Services for meetings and conferences																																
Accessible seating	Y	3	Y	1	N	..	Y	3	Y	2	Y	3	Y	0	..	..	Y	3	Y	3	Y	3	Y	1	Y	2	Y	3	Y	2	Y	2
Captioning	N	..	Y	0	N	..	Y	3	N	..	Y	3	N	..	..	..	N	..	N	..	N	..	Y	0	N	..	N	..	Y	2	N	2
Braille	N	..	N	..	N	..	Y	3	N	..	Y	3	N	..	..	..	N	..	N	..	N	..	N	..	N	..	N	..	Y	1	N	..
Sign language interpretation	N	..	Y	0	N	..	Y	3	..	..	Y	3	N	..	..	..	N	..	N	..	N	..	Y	0	N	..	N	..	Y	2	N	..
Voting	N	..	Y	2	N	..	N	..	..	..	Y	3	Y	1	..	..	Y	3	Y	3	N	..	Y	2	Y	2	N	..	Y	2	N	..
Accessible format for electronic documentation	.	..	N	..	N	..	Y	3	..	..	Y	3	N	..	..	..	Y	2	N	..	Y	2	..	..	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2
Backup wheelchairs for participants with disabilities	N	..	N	..	N	..	N	..	..	..	N	..	N	..	Y	0	N	..	N	..	Y	3	..	..	N	..	Y	3	Y	2	Y	2
Accessibility devices to loan to the participants	N	..	Y	1	N	..	Y	3	..	..	N	..	N	..	..	..	N	..	N	..	N	..	..	..	N	..	Y	2	Y	2	Y	1
Information technology services for meetings and conferences																																
Applications	N	..	N	..	N	..	N	..	..	..	Y	3	N	..	..	..	N	..	Y	2	N	..	..	..	Y	2	Y	1	Y	2	Y	2
Braille information	N	..	N	..	N	..	Y	3	..	..	Y	3	N	..	..	..	N	..	N	..	N	..	..	..	N	..	N	..	Y	1	N	..
Desk phones	N	..	Y	2	Y	2	Y	2	..	..	Y	3	N	..	..	..	N	..	Y	2	N	..	Y	2	N	..	Y	2	Y	2	N	..
Signage	N	..	Y	2	N	..	Y	3	..	..	Y	3	N	..	Y	1	N	..	Y	1	N	..	Y	2	N	..	Y	1	Y	2	N	..
Videoconferencing	Y	3	Y	2	Y	2	Y	3	Y	3	Y	3	Y	2	Y	1	Y	3	Y	2	Y	3	Y	2	Y	2	Y	3	Y	2	Y	2
Wi-Fi	Y	3	Y	2	Y	2	Y	3	Y	3	Y	3	Y	3	Y	2	Y	3	Y	3	Y	3	Y	2	Y	2	Y	3	Y	2	Y	2

Source: Responses of organizations to the JIU questionnaire on disability and accessibility.

Key: Y, Yes; N, No; (..), No response; 3, Fully meets; 2, Adequately meets; 1, Partially meets; 0, Does not adequately meet.

Annex IV: Coordination mechanisms addressing accessibility

I. Inter-agency coordination mechanisms	
High-level Committee on Management Cross-functional Task Force on Duty of Care	
Membership:	Participants from United Nations system technical networks and agency representatives, including representatives from human resources, finance and security units, staff counsellors, medical directors and facilities management.
Nature of work:	Established by the High-level Committee on Management in 2016, the objective of the Task Force is to enhance guidance and strengthen actions in the functional areas of psychosocial, health and medical services, human resources administration and safety and security during the preparatory, incumbency and post assignment phases of assignment or deployment. Interviewed agencies noted that disability and accessibility have been dealt with within the context of the work of the Task Force.
Human Resources Network Working Group on Employment of Persons with Disabilities	
Membership:	The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, UNHCR and UNICEF.
Nature of work:	The Working Group was convened to share good practices and review implementation issues concerning internal policies for the employment of persons with disabilities (including workplace accessibility) in United Nations system organizations, and to report back to the High-level Committee on Management. The working group is currently inactive.
Inter-Agency Network of Facilities Managers	
Membership:	The United Nations Secretariat (the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, the Facilities and Commercial Services Division, and the Office of Central Support Services), UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIDO and WIPO.
Nature of work:	The objective of the Network is to share best practices and experiences in several areas of facilities management, including the accessibility of buildings and conference rooms. It undertook a benchmarking exercise in 2011 to compare best practices in buildings and facilities management and considered 400 criteria for each organization, including space, technical equipment and budget management. Annual meetings have included presentations on: (a) considerations of universal design in construction projects; and (b) the comparison by ECA of national accessibility codes across multiple architectural features to determine benchmarks to be used for renovations of conference facilities.
Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action	
Membership:	Organizations of persons with disabilities; NGOs; United Nations system agencies (including UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and WHO); the International Committee of the Red Cross; IOM; Governments; the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations; the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Secretariat; and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings. Chairs: UNICEF, International Disability Alliance and Handicap International.
Nature of work:	The Task Team's objective (time bound from January 2017 to December 2018) is the creation and endorsement of Inter-Agency Standing Committee guidelines on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action. The guidelines will assist humanitarian actors, Governments and affected communities to coordinate, plan, implement, monitor and evaluate essential actions that foster the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action, resulting in the full and effective participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities and changing practice across all sectors and in all phases of humanitarian action.
Inter-Agency Support Group on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Global)	
Membership:	The United Nations Secretariat (the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance; the Department of Global Communications; the Department of Peace Operations; the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; the Office of Central Support Services; OHCHR and UNISDR); regional commissions (ECA, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, ESCAP, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and the Regional

Commissions New York Office); and funds and programmes (UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UN-Habitat, UNICEF, the Mine Action Service, UN-Women, United Nations Volunteers and the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention Implementation Support Unit); specialized agencies (ILO, ITU, UNESCO, UNIDO, UNWTO, WHO and WIPO). Observers: the World Bank, the International Development Association and the International Disability and Development Consortium. Co-Secretariat: the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and OHCHR. Rotating Chair: UN-Women.

Nature of work: Established by CEB in 2006, the Inter-Agency Support Group on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is tasked with promoting and increasing the scale and effectiveness of the United Nations system's involvement in disability issues and the effective implementation of the Convention. It has collaborated with the United Nations Sustainable Development Group to develop a guidance note on integrating the rights of persons with disabilities in United Nations programming at the country level. It has also prepared a compilation of resource materials and tools including guidelines, reference tools and other materials on disability from its members. Presently, it has a working group that is to develop a system-wide action plan by February 2019 for strengthening the work of the United Nations system on the rights of persons with disabilities. Created in 2017, the working group aims to identify challenges to the implementation of the Convention and mainstream disability in the United Nations system by way of developing clear, consolidated guidelines and standards on disability for the system. The working group is driven by disability experts from across the United Nations system, some of whom are persons with disabilities.

International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (Global)

Membership: 80 United Nations system and other international organizations. Chair: Department for General Assembly and Conference Management of the United Nations Secretariat.

Nature of work: Established in 1967, the International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications is an international forum and network that holds annual meetings that bring together conference and language service providers to share best practices in conference, language and publishing services. It has established a task force on accessibility that is tasked with carrying out a survey of services and resources in member organizations regarding methods to service conference participants with disabilities, analysing good practices and formulating guidelines for future cooperation in this field. It also conducts workshops on accessible services.

United Nations Sustainable Development Group Task Team on Common Premises

Membership: UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and WFP.

Nature of work: Co-chaired by WFP and UNHCR, the Task Team provides guidance and tools for United Nations country teams and agencies that intend to engage in renovation, construction or relocation projects on United Nations House or common premises. It also studies and recommends solutions to enhance efficiency and to increase the number of United Nations Houses and United Nations system common premises worldwide. It has developed international standards and guidelines for the design of common United Nations premises, which includes a section on accessibility and safety. It also provides technical assistance to country teams upon request, including on the matter of accessibility of the proposed location, offices and conference facilities.

United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Membership: ILO, the United Nations Secretariat (the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and OHCHR), UNDP, UNICEF and WHO.

Established as a multi-donor trust fund in 2011,¹ the goal of the Partnership is to develop the capacities of national stakeholders, particularly Governments and organizations of persons with disabilities, to effectively implement the Convention through coalition-building and capacity-development at the country level. It does not make funds available for internal practices.

¹ Multi-donor trust funds are funding instruments created by two or more United Nations agencies to promote work on a certain issue or in a certain country. Such funds allow for targeted funding contributions by States in complement to their contributions to the United Nations budget.

II. Intra-agency coordination mechanisms

Committee on Common Services (Vienna)

Membership: IAEA, UNIDO, the United Nations Office at Vienna and UNODC.

Nature of work: The Committee on Common Services is charged with directing all issues arising from the joint tenancy at the Vienna International Centre. It provides policy advice and coordination with regard to the overall management of the following common services: security, medical, commissary, buildings management and catering. It also provides policy advice and coordination in the following areas: arts and exhibits, the child care centre, the garage and the new conference building (M-building).

Human Rights Council task force on secretariat services, accessibility for persons with disabilities and use of information technology

Membership: The Human Rights Council Bureau, OHCHR and the United Nations Office at Geneva (representatives of Member States and other stakeholders also contribute).

Nature of work: Established in July 2011, the task force is mandated to study issues related to the improvement of secretariat services for the Council and its mechanisms, the accessibility of the Council's work for persons with disabilities and the feasibility of ICT use. It regularly holds consultations with States, national human rights institutions, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders to inform its work. In December 2017, the task force adopted an accessibility plan² that sets out priority areas and related actions to address existing barriers preventing persons with disabilities from participating in and accessing the work of the Council and its mechanisms. The plan is also aimed at identifying the resources needed, when possible, the timeline and the responsible entity. The implementation of the plan will be monitored by the task force with the involvement of persons with disabilities.

Inter-Departmental Task Force on Accessibility (Global)

Membership: the United Nations Secretariat (the Department of Economic and Social Affairs; the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management; the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance (the Office of Human Resources Management, the capital master plan and the Facilities Management Service); the Department of Global Communications; the Office of Information and Communications Technology and OHCHR). Invitees: UNICEF and UN-Women.

Nature of work: Established in 2006 and co-chaired by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Inter-Departmental Task Force on Accessibility serves as a voluntary (having no formal mandate), Secretariat-wide consultative network for focal points on accessibility and disability. As per its terms of reference, its objective is to develop a Secretariat-wide policy on accessibility to enable the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of the work of the organization. This includes meetings, conferences and services at all United Nations Secretariat premises through the provision of accessible interpretation and documentation, as well as employment and retention policies inclusive of persons with disabilities and accessible working conditions for staff members with disabilities. The Task Force has conducted a survey to collect information about barriers in terms of accessibility at the United Nations Headquarters.

ITU Inter-Sectoral Coordination Task Force (Global)

Membership: Three bureaux and the General Secretariat of ITU.

Nature of work: The Task Force was established in 2015 to enhance coordination and collaboration among the relevant offices to avoid duplication and optimize resource usage. It has deliberated on project proposals for funding by the ITU Accessibility Fund and has also reviewed the Fund's implementation. It encourages awareness of accessibility throughout all aspects of the work of ITU, which carries over to procurement processes.

² Available at: www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/APlan_15.12.2017_ADOPTED.DOCX.

ESCAP Working Group on Accessibility

Membership: Divisions and units of ESCAP (administration, conference management, security, facility management, and social development units; the environment division; the seismic mitigation project team; and the medical centre).

Nature of work: Established in 2016 following General Assembly resolution 70/170, the Working Group is tasked with providing technical feedback on current organizational procedures in the various accessibility target areas (the built environment, ICT and services) and with supporting the development and implementation of the Accessibility and Inclusivity Initiative, which was derived from an overall accessibility assessment conducted earlier.

ECA Task Force on Accessibility (Addis Ababa)

Membership: Departments and offices of ECA (the Information and Communications Technology Section; the health care centre; conference management, human resources, facilities management and safety and security departments; and the staff union) and four agencies housed on ECA premises (UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNDP).

Nature of work: Established in 2016 by the ECA Executive Secretary following General Assembly resolution 70/170, the Task Force works primarily on three main areas: assessing accessibility in the realms of the physical environment, electronic media ancruitment; awareness-raising on disability and accessibility; and monitoring and follow-up. It documents challenges regarding accessibility on the ECA premises as well as challenges in bringing accessibility-related materials and services into Ethiopia. The Task Force is chaired by the chief of the facilities management department and meets once a month. It is currently developing its terms of reference among other documents, including short- and long-term approaches.

UN-Women Internal Task Team on Disability and Inclusion (Global)

Membership: Focal points from various units at the headquarters and regional and country offices of UN-Women.

Nature of Work: No information provided except that it was established in 2017 and that a workshop will be organized at the end of December 2019, of which accessibility will be a core component.

WHO Task Force on Disability (Global)

Membership: Representatives from regional offices and the various clusters within WHO headquarters (active 2008-2011).

Nature of work: The Task Force was created to support the implementation of the Convention. Its goal was to ensure that WHO programs and projects are designed and implemented taking into account persons with disabilities. Its responsibilities included: carrying out a mapping of activities and initiatives, including resolutions adopted by the World Health Assembly and WHO regional committees, to identify gaps and opportunities; organizing seminars and training modules for staff to raise awareness and understanding of disability issues; and addressing the needs of staff and visitors with disabilities, particularly in terms of access to WHO information, employment and buildings. The Task Force made recommendations to the WHO Director-General for future disability policy across the Organization.

Annex V: Non-exhaustive list of training modules related to disability and accessibility

Training	Modality	Frequency	Focus	Organization
Disability awareness workshop	Workshop	Recurrent (on demand)	Disability / Accessibility	DGACM (New York) / DCM (Geneva)
Diversity Learning Programme (2017)	Face-to-face	One time	Diversity / Human rights	OHRM (New York)
Online course on the inclusion of persons with disabilities (in development)	Online/ E-learning	Unknown	Disability / Accessibility	
Disability Sensitivity (2009)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	OHCHR (Geneva, New York)
Reasonable Accommodation Training	Face-to-face	One time	Disability / Accessibility	
Training on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol	Face-to-face	Recurrent	Disability / Accessibility	
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol - LMS-2967 (2017)	Online/ E-learning	One time	Disability / Accessibility	ECA (Addis Ababa)
UN for All	Face-to-face	Recurrent	Diversity / Human rights	ITC
Disability Inclusion Training	Face-to-face	Recurrent	Disability / Accessibility	UNHCR
Working with persons with disabilities in forced displacement (in development)	Online/ E-learning	One time	Disability / Accessibility	
UN for All	Face-to-face	Recurrent	Diversity / Human rights	UN-Women, UNFPA
Persons with Disability, Ability, Capability, Employability (in development)	Online/E-learning	Recurrent	Disability / Accessibility	UNDP, UNFPA
Virtual training sessions on working with persons with disabilities (two hours) for offices participating in the UNDP-UNV Talent Programme for Young Professionals with Disabilities training	Online	One time	Disability / Accessibility	UNDP
UN for All	Face-to-face	Recurrent	Diversity / Human rights	UNFPA
Inclusive and Sustainable Operations Awareness Program (in development)	Unknown	Unknown	Diversity / Human rights	UNICEF
Human Rights Training for Staff	Face-to-face	Recurrent	Diversity / Human rights	UN-Habitat
Training for Security Staff	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	ICAO
Training for Meetings Staff (in development)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	
Online Training on Persons with Disabilities	Online/E-learning	Recurrent	Disability / Accessibility	ILO
Awareness training for ushers, guards and staff	Face-to-face	Recurrent	Disability / Accessibility	
Adding Disability Perspective in ITU's work	Unknown	Unknown	Disability / accessibility	ITU
Information and Sensitization Training Session for Staff	Face-to-face	One time	Unknown	UNWTO
Training on Accessible Document Publishing	Face-to-face	One time	Disability/ Accessibility	WIPO

Abbreviations: DCM, Division of Conference Management; DGACM, Department for General Assembly and Conference Management; OHRM, Office of Human Resources Management. For all other acronyms, please see the list of acronyms and abbreviations.

Annex VI
Overview of actions to be taken by participating organizations on the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit
JIU/REP/2018/6

		Intended impact		United Nations and its funds and programmes														Specialized agencies and IAEA																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																

Legend: **L:** Recommendation for decision by legislative organ or governing body; **E:** Recommendation for action by executive head; : Recommendation does not require action by this organization.

Intended impact: **a:** enhanced transparency and accountability; **b:** dissemination of good/best practices; **c:** enhanced coordination and cooperation; **d:** strengthened coherence and harmonization; **e:** enhanced control and compliance; **f:** enhanced effectiveness; **g:** significant financial savings; **h:** enhanced efficiency; **i:** other.

^a As listed in ST/SGB/2015/3.