



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

*Inspector Gopinathan Achamkulangare*



### Background

About 15 per cent of the world's population is estimated to live with some form of disability, and face more barriers than those without, with regard to participation in and access to deliberative processes. Making conferences and meetings fully accessible therefore becomes a critical indicator of the willingness of United Nations system organizations to "walk the talk" when it comes to non-discrimination and inclusion. The review focuses on assessing the current status of accessibility for persons with disabilities to United Nations system conferences and meetings.



### Objectives and Purpose

The review was system-wide in scope, focusing on large-scale, small-scale and offsite conferences and meetings organized by United Nations system organizations. The objective was to identify obstacles, impediments and good practices to enhance accessibility for persons with disabilities so that they can participate effectively in conferences and meetings, and make actionable recommendations to improve the current situation.



### What the JIU found

#### 1. Formal policies on accessibility lacking but useful guidelines and international standards exist

Only three entities have a dedicated policy on accessibility or reasonable accommodation, while seven have policies on the employment of persons with disabilities that incorporate accessibility elements. Good practice elements in existing policies and highly instructive guidance documents can assist in policy formulation, while identified international standards can be considered for the development of aspirational benchmarks.

#### 2. Limited provision of accessible facilities and services in headquarters locations, even less in field locations and no consistent monitoring for off-site locations

In headquarters locations, most organizations are not providing many of the essential Information Communication Technology and other services that would make meetings and conferences more accessible. Field office accessibility lagged considerably behind their headquarters counterparts due to multiple factors. For meetings at off-site locations, most organizations neither adequately monitored accessibility provisions, nor set minimum accessibility requirements.

#### 3. Low levels of satisfaction of persons with disabilities with existing accessibility provisions

Through surveys and interviews, organizations of persons with disabilities and persons with disabilities 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.

#### 4. Deficits in measures that impact upon accessibility-related internal capacity and coordination, and the corresponding participation of persons with disabilities in conferences and meetings

Such measures include: a disability and accessibility focal point; standard operating procedures for accessibility-related activities; consideration of accessibility-related costs; proactively requesting information on participants' accessibility needs and disseminating information on available accessible facilities and services; accessible meeting registration processes; accessibility centers in major conference venues; and utilization of assistive ICT tools.

## 5. Deficits in measures to proactively incorporate accessibility considerations into organizational work, share good practices and knowledge and further accountability

Such measures include: undertaking accessibility assessments of organizational facilities and services; incorporating accessibility considerations into procurement processes; systematically collecting data on accessibility, monitoring it or have performance indicators to measure it; reporting periodically on the state of accessibility to legislative bodies; utilizing inter- and intra-agency coordination mechanisms to share good practices; incorporating accessibility-related questions into staff surveys; and ensuring staff training on disability inclusion and accessibility matters.

## 6. Limited progress towards mainstreaming disability inclusions and accessibility

The limited and uneven pace of progress in furthering accessibility, lack of dynamism in adapting and utilizing advances in technology, and the lack of systematic focus on the topic in legislative bodies has led stakeholders to perceive disability inclusion and accessibility as an "institutional orphan". Consequently, they have underscored the imperative of "mainstreaming" the topic in the work of all organizations as a cross-cutting issue to secure a higher degree of institutional support and scale-up awareness-raising.



## Methodology and Approach

The approach of the review was to go beyond physical meeting rooms to assess all relevant aspects that affect accessibility (e.g. staff training on disability inclusion, accessibility checks in procurement processes etc.), leaving open the possibility that coverage of such topics can have a positive impact on other realms of accessibility beyond just conferences and meetings.

A mixed-method research approach was utilized which consisted of:



Documentation review



Corporate questionnaire responses from 23 POs + 9 CSOs



Individual perceptions survey responses from persons with disabilities



Interviews with 250+ stakeholders from JIU POs in HQ & regional offices



Interviews with representatives from other IOs, organizations of persons with disabilities & permanent missions of Member States



## What JIU Recommends

### Executive Heads of United Nations system organizations are called on to:

1 Develop a draft policy on the accessibility of conferences and meetings for persons with disabilities as well as guidelines for policy implementation.

2 Ensure that accessibility requirements are clearly stipulated in individual agreements concluded with the hosting entity for specific conferences and meetings.

3 Appoint a focal point on accessibility under terms of reference that clearly define the focal point's role and responsibilities.

4 Develop standard operating procedures on the operational responsibilities of organizational actors that are engaged, directly or indirectly, in servicing conferences and meetings.

5 Ensure that meeting/conference registration processes are fully accessible, that registration forms include clauses to specifically query on accessibility requirements, that information on accessible facilities and services are disseminated to all potential participants, and that post-conference satisfaction surveys consistently include accessibility related questions.

6 Provide the option for remote participation in all meetings and conferences organized.

7 Undertake periodic accessibility assessments of organizational facilities and services for conferences and meetings, and ensure that organizations of persons with disabilities are adequately consulted at all stages of the process.

8 Draft provisions for incorporating accessibility checks and/or requirements into procurement policies and guidelines for consideration and adoption by the relevant decision-making authority.

9 Develop and implement, through relevant inter-agency mechanisms, 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.

### Legislative Bodies of United Nations system organization are called on to:

10 Include in their agendas the review of periodic reports on the state of accessibility of conferences and meetings for persons with disabilities.

### ABOUT THE JIU

The Joint Inspection Unit is the only independent external oversight body of the United Nations system mandated to conduct evaluations, inspections and investigations system-wide.

Visit the JIU website for more information at [unjiu.org](http://unjiu.org)



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**Easy read version**

**of the Executive Summary of the  
*Review on Enhancing Accessibility for  
Persons with Disabilities to  
Conferences and Meetings of the  
United Nations System***



**United Nations**

## **Making sure all United Nations meetings are easy for people with disabilities to take part in**



**Enhancing Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities to Conferences and Meetings of the United Nations System**



## About us



We are called the  
**Joint Inspection Unit.**



We give advice to the United Nations  
about how they can work in a  
better way.

The United Nations is a group of  
countries that work together to make  
the world a better and safer place.

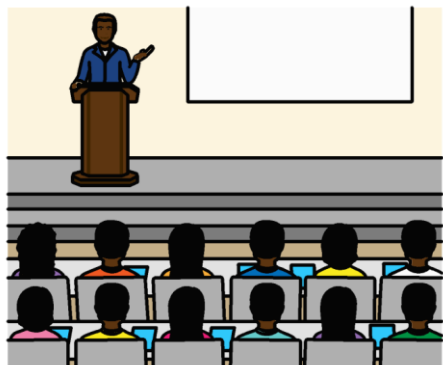
## About this report



The United Nations is a big  
organization. It is made up of  
many different organizations around  
the world.



This report is about what all parts of the United Nations should do to make meetings easy for people with disabilities to take part in.



This is very important.

United Nations meetings are when people can tell the United Nations what should happen and what is important to them.

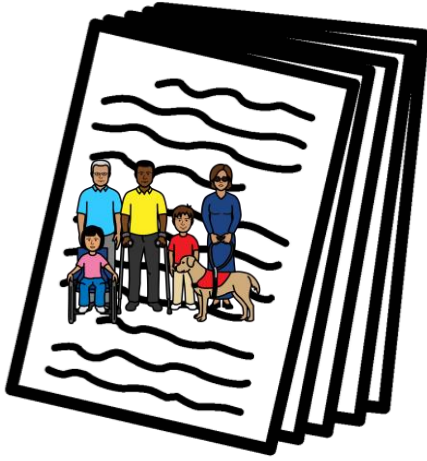
People with disabilities should not be left out.

They should be able to:

- Join in like everyone else
- Have their say about things that affect them
- Help to change things







There is an important agreement that many countries have made about the rights of people with disabilities.

The agreement is called the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**.



The agreement talks about making sure that everything is easy for people with disabilities to use and take part in.

We want all parts of the United Nations to do what the agreement says.



We looked at how easy United Nations meetings are for people with disabilities to take part in.



We got information from many different organizations.

This includes United Nations organizations and organizations of people with disabilities.



This report is about:

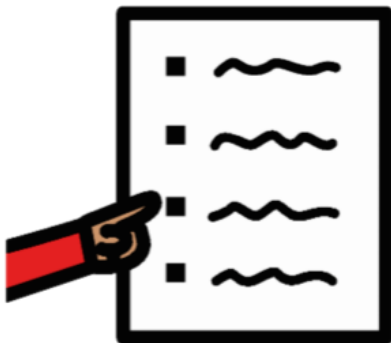
- What we found out
- What we want all parts of the United Nations to do next

## What we found out

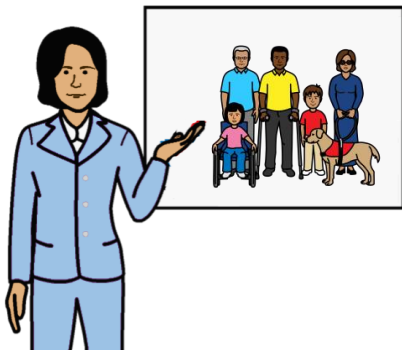


There are some good things happening across the United Nations.

For example, some United Nations organizations have:



- Documents about how to make meetings easy for people with disabilities to take part in



- Training that staff can do about people with disabilities





But United Nations organizations have not done enough to make all their meetings easy for people with disabilities to take part in.



For example, many United Nations organizations do not:

- Give people with disabilities the right equipment and support to take part in meetings



- Find out what people with disabilities need to take part
- Tell people with disabilities what support they can get to take part



- Check how easy it is for people with disabilities to take part in meetings
- Make sure that staff know about people with disabilities and what they need



People with disabilities may not know what support they can ask for and how to ask for it.

This can stop people with disabilities coming to meetings.

## What should happen next

There are 10 things that we want all United Nations organizations to do.

These things should happen by the end of 2021.

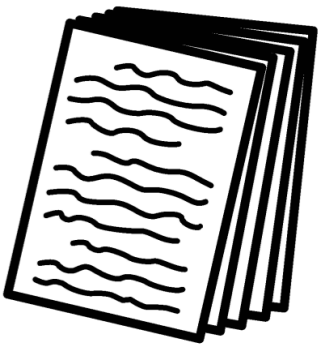
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Make some rules about making meetings easy for people with disabilities to take part in.

The rules should follow human rights laws in the world.

There should be information for staff to help them follow the rules.

People with disabilities should have a say in this work.



United Nations organizations should also:



2

Make sure all meetings are easy for people with disabilities to take part in.

This includes big United Nations meetings that happen in other places or countries.

3

Have someone in charge of making meetings easy for people with disabilities to take part in.

This could be a person or a team of people.

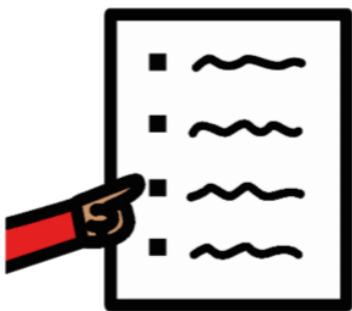
There should be information to say what the person or team must do.



4

Make a list of things to do to make meetings easy for people with disabilities to take part in.

This will help all staff know what to do. For example, if someone with a disability asks for extra support.



United Nations organizations should also:

5

Make sure that:



- It is easy for all people with disabilities to say they want to come to meetings and what they need to take part



- People with disabilities get information they understand about the support they can get to take part



- People with disabilities can answer questions after the meeting to say how easy it was to take part

United Nations organizations should also:

6

Make sure that people with disabilities can take part in meetings from home or other places if they want to.

For example, by using computers to help them join in the meeting.



7

Check if their equipment and services are helping people with disabilities to take part in meetings.

They should work with people with disabilities on this.



8

Change their rules about buying new things.

United Nations organizations should try not to buy things that will cause problems for people with disabilities.



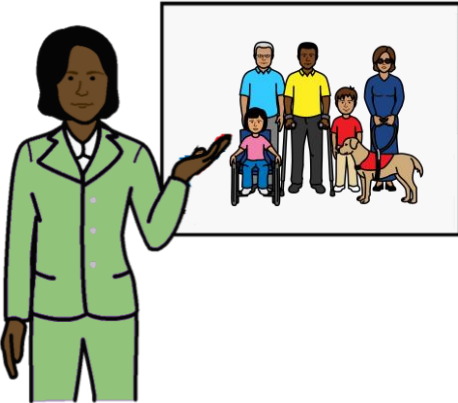
United Nations organizations should also:

9

Work together to start new training for all staff who need it.

The training should be about:

- How to include people with disabilities and their rights
- How to make everything easy for people with disabilities to use and take part in



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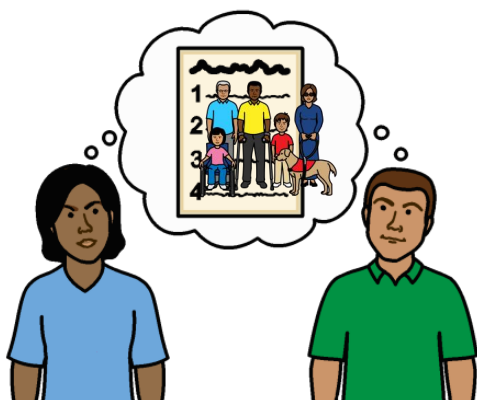
Write reports from time to time to say:

- How easy meetings are for people with disabilities to take part in
- How United Nations organizations are solving any problems with this



The reports should be checked by people who make the rules.

## Some other things for United Nations organizations to do



- Make sure people who plan meetings think about what people with disabilities need from the start



- Make sure there is money to spend on making all meetings easy to take part in
- Help people with disabilities with some of the costs of coming to meetings.

For example, travel costs



- Share information about how to make things easy for people with disabilities to use and take part in



It is important for all parts of the United Nations to include the rights of people with disabilities in all their work.