UNDRR
UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

UNDRR POLICY ON DISABILITY ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the frequency, intensity and duration of disasters grow at an alarming rate across the planet, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) is committed to implementing the Secretary-General's 2019 United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) and to protect and uphold the rights of persons with disabilities in disaster risk reduction. The UNDRR internal Policy on Disability Accessibility and Inclusion outlines the guiding principles, scope and areas of work to ensure that the organization's operations and programmes meet these commitments. An ambitious disability inclusion policy with accompanying implementation mechanisms offers a blueprint for UNDRR to put into practice the principles the organization promotes, leaving a positive legacy of accessibility and inclusion for each of the communities we serve. The implementation of this policy requires the active involvement of all UNDRR staff, contractors and vendors, including grant recipients, which is further detailed in the UNDRR Action Plan, Meeting Accessibility Guidance and related documents.

II. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Constituting 16 per cent of the world's population, persons with disabilities are more susceptible to risk factors such as poverty, exclusion from decision-making spaces and limited access to basic services, each of which compounds disaster risk. The United Nations is committed to improving its performance on disability inclusion across the system as part of a human rights-based approach that seeks to ensure equality, dignity and access to the benefits of sustainable development for everyone. In June 2019, the Secretary-General launched UNDIS to promote "sustainable and transformative progress on disability inclusion through all pillars of the work of the United Nations" informed by the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda for Humanity, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, adopted in March 2015, recognizes that not only are persons with disabilities disproportionately affected by disasters, but also crucially that their knowledge and leadership skills are essential for building resilient, inclusive and equitable societies. The Sendai Framework calls for a human rights-based approach that is inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities. It also requires all disaster risk reduction policies to integrate a disability perspective, universal design principles and promote inclusive and evidence-based decision-making based on solid data disaggregated by sex, age and disability.

1 This policy has been developed by an internal UNDRR Task Team, in consultation with a disability-led organization, namely the World Institute on Disability (WID).

Since 2012, UNDRR has demonstrated a growing commitment to disability inclusion in the context of organizing accessible conferences, such as the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (held in Sendai, Japan, 2015), and the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2017, 2019 and 2022. The regional and global platforms have seen a steady increase in the active participation, engagement and leadership of persons with disabilities. This commitment continues to progress because of UNDRR's efforts to engage with local, national, regional and global organizations led by persons with disabilities.

This includes investing in accessibility and universal design in meeting and conference design and providing reasonable modifications and accommodations to persons with disabilities in support of their participation in all aspects of the global platforms.

For UNDRR, disability inclusion in programmatic, policy, risk knowledge and advocacy DRR is both a commitment and a goal. This commitment is well reflected in the UNDRR Strategic Framework 2022-2025.

III. POLICY STATEMENT

UNDRR commits, through this policy, to making UNDRR an organization that prioritizes the inclusion, participation and leadership of persons with disabilities in all their diversity and their representative organizations, and systematically advocates for and integrates the rights of persons with disabilities and universal design principles in all policy, programme and operational areas to achieve the goals of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

UNDRR commits to the following:

- Providing an enabling environment and advocating for the full and active participation, representation and leadership of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in relevant processes, such as regional and global platforms and other key events organized or co-organized by UNDRR.

- Advocating for national and local disaster risk reduction strategies that promote the rights and effective participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations.

- Increasing awareness of disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction and ensuring the accessibility of UNDRR's websites and other essential digital and print information materials by upholding universal design principles and providing information in multiple formats to meet accessibility standards in alignment with the standards established or promoted by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

- Promoting the collection, analysis and use of disability disaggregated data and evidence generated for greater socioeconomic understanding and decision-making.

- Developing a plan and implementing positive measures to recruit and retain persons with disabilities as UNDRR's employees including establishing a guideline or procedure on requesting reasonable accommodation to support employees.

The above commitments will be reviewed and monitored annually by the senior management team.

IV. PRINCIPLES AND APPROACHES

a. Overarching approach

UNDRR is aiming to fully comply with UNDIS. The UNDIS accountability framework can only succeed with the commitment of UNDRR's senior management, supported by a robust institutional framework. This includes mainstreaming disability inclusion in strategic planning, policy and programming and corporate communications, establishing personnel structures and processes to promote and facilitate disability inclusion, including accommodations and modifications for disability inclusion in budgetary planning. The nominated focal point will track and monitor performance and report to the senior management team to ensure UNDRR is accountable for its performance on accessibility and the inclusion of persons with disabilities and that it communicates and reports both internally and externally accordingly. This includes the establishment and oversight of the UNDRR UNDIS Working Group, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of UNDIS, and reporting progress annually to the Secretary-General.

UNDRR will actively participate in and/or support relevant inter-agency networks on disability inclusion. Persons with disabilities and their human rights must be reflected throughout the organization's main strategic planning documents (covering both programme and operations) and associated work programmes and result frameworks. UNDRR should also advocate for disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction, universal design and accessibility in United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and other country-level joint planning documents.

b. Consultation with persons with disabilities

Meaningful consultation and active engagement with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations is fundamental to UNDRR's disability inclusion and broader community inclusion approach. UNDRR will continue to build cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary partnerships under the UNDRR Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism, where persons with disabilities and their organizations are already recognized members, and to increase its engagement with the disability stakeholder groups at regional level. Through the regular organization of accessible global and regional platforms for disaster risk reduction, progress on the implementation of a disability-inclusive

Sendai Framework is assessed and discussed. Furthermore, the exchange of good practices and programmes for disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction is supported.

c. Streamlining the inclusion of persons with disabilities in corporate planning at all levels

UNDRR's corporate plans drive the organization's operations, allocation of resources and accountability mechanisms. UNDRR will incorporate inclusion and accessibility at the three levels of strategic, programme and project plans, including through associated cost plans, procurement and results frameworks. The UNDRR Action Plan will give further details and guidance on this.

d. Capacity development

All efforts to mainstream disability inclusion in the programming and operations of UNDRR can only be achieved and sustained when staff have the necessary technical knowledge, understanding, sensitivity, capacity and resources to do so. Priority should be given to:

- Identifying current knowledge, skills and capacities of UNDRR staff to support disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction and ensure disability inclusion and accessibility is mainstreamed across all aspects of the organization's work.

- Providing additional training, capacity development, awareness-raising and skill-building initiatives to improve knowledge and internal capabilities. UNDRR-wide training on disability inclusion should be increased, collaborating with and developing existing approaches of other United Nations entities (e.g. the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, United Nations Development Programme, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the United Nations Children's Fund).

- Identifying and bridging gaps in the technical knowledge and capacity of partners to implement disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction.

- Raising awareness of the importance and relevance of disability inclusion in disaster risk reduction across the organization and with partners.

- Conducting accessible global communication campaigns that promote UNDRR's commitment to upholding the rights of persons with disabilities.

- Capitalizing on UNDRR's knowledge-sharing platform/approach that allows for lessons learned, good practices and implementation strategies of disability inclusion to be easily disseminated across the organization and with external partners.

- Identifying budgetary and financial planning considerations necessary to ensure that disability inclusion modifications and accommodations are achievable.

e. Accessible information, communications and advocacy

This section includes both (1) making the information that UNDRR produces and shares accessible across our website, social media, emails, publications, etc. as well as (2) advocating for persons with disabilities on a policy and programmatic level.

In an ever-connected world, universal design and accessibility benefits everyone, both persons with disabilities and the public. Practising disability-inclusive communications reflects the true diversity of our societies. Moreover, disability-inclusive communications help to fulfil the promise of "leaving no one behind", a key component of the Sendai Framework and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Inclusive and accessible communications allow persons with disabilities to participate fully and equally in all spheres of society.

UNDRR will apply a twofold approach in this domain: it advocates for persons with disabilities on a policy level and makes information and processes accessible for persons with disabilities on a technical level.

i. Advocating for persons with disabilities in disaster risk reduction

In its advocacy work, UNDRR focuses on identifying and communicating success stories, the processes that bring change, and the benefits that accrue when governments and disability experts work together to put disability-inclusive prevention first. Advocacy work is based on two pillars: (1) delivering an ongoing education campaign highlighting factual and affirmative stories and information about the leadership and inclusion of persons with disabilities in disaster risk reduction that reach a large audience, and (2)

influencing UNDRR programmatic work to ensure it strengthens disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction and leaves no one behind.

UNDRR adopts a twin-track approach which combines the inclusion of persons with disabilities in general editorial scope with targeted interventions specifically for persons with disabilities.

Alongside its promoting of a human rights-based approach to disability inclusion, UNDRR promotes the use of accurate and respectful terminology when referring to persons with disabilities.

ii. Bolstering accessibility for persons with disabilities

Pursuant to ST/AI/2022/2 on web publishing, UNDRR is committed to ensuring all its websites are accessible and meet the most current Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standard, following the guidelines of the Department of Global Communications.

iii. New websites

During the design and development phase, each new website undergoes several accessibility checks. The assessment process has been designed by a web accessibility expert and uses automated tools as well as manual checkpoints. UNDRR will also seek formal and informal feedback from persons with disabilities on their user experience navigating the site.

iv. Ongoing accessibility review

To ensure the accessibility of new content on existing websites, new web editors receive accessibility training as part of their web content management training. Content accessibility issues are flagged to editors as part of the content quality assurance.

In addition, high traffic pages are scheduled to be reviewed once a year to identify potential issues. Accessibility problems are addressed by the relevant team (technical or content) depending on the nature of the issue.

Users can email UNDRRcomms@un.org to flag accessibility issues or suggest improvements.

v. New publications

New electronic publications in PDF format are made accessible as per the recommendations of the United Nations Disability-Inclusive Communications Guidelines. An accessible PDF includes reading order, structure tags and headings and document settings utilizing current WCAG.

f. Accessible meetings and conferences

A barrier-free environment is fundamental to UNDRR becoming an organization that includes persons with disabilities. Barriers to participation can exist in the form of physical barriers of the built environment, virtual and social barriers to accessing information, communications and technologies, and services and assistance. These exist in the context of UNDRR's offices and facilities, its support to beneficiaries and its engagement of partners including through conferences and meetings, among other contexts and forums.

UNDRR aspires to break down these barriers, which fall under the responsibility of numerous areas of work, using a systematic and sustained whole-of-organization approach. The aim is to ensure that meetings organized by UNDRR allow for meaningful and active participation of persons with disabilities to the highest degree possible.

To implement this ambition in practice, it is important to mainstream accessibility across the organization. The policy is to seek the most physically accessible built environment and effective communication accessibility, and work with hosts to optimize accessibility to meet the requirements of attendees with disabilities. Further information is provided in the UNDRR Action Plan, Meeting Accessibility Guidance and related documents.

g. Recruitment and employment

The inclusivity of an organization is reflected in its workforce. In this regard, ensuring that staff members with disabilities can participate and advance equally in UNDRR is an imperative for becoming a disability-inclusive organization.

The Secretary-General's bulletin on employment and accessibility for staff members with disabilities in the United Nations Secretariat (ST/SGB/2014/3) has been promulgated for the purpose of implementing General Assembly resolutions towards the creation of a non-discriminatory and inclusive working environment for staff members with disabilities at the United Nations Secretariat. UNDRR is committed, within existing resources and depending on the specific requirements of the candidates, to (a) creating a non-discriminatory and inclusive workplace with non-discriminatory recruitment and employment conditions following universal design principles, as well as equitable access to continuous learning, professional training and career advancement opportunities, and (b) taking appropriate measures, where possible, to ensure that reasonable accommodations provided to staff members with disabilities.

UNDRR is committed to supporting employees with disabilities or with dependants with disabilities, to disclosing their disabilities and family support needs if accommodation or modification is needed, and to creating a pro-disability work culture that normalizes the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

During the employment cycle, employees may disclose their disability and/or may request reasonable accommodations. UNDRR would support these within existing resources and depending on the specific requirements of the staff member. The duty to accommodate is not about meeting employee preferences but rather removing discriminatory barriers for the productivity of qualified employees with disabilities. Disability disclosure is especially relevant for persons with invisible/unapparent disabilities. Confidentiality is of the utmost importance so that employees feel safe discussing in detail what their needs may be or how they function best. UNDRR staff members should be informed and aware that any information provided by a staff member regarding their disability shall remain confidential and shall not be shared unless prior authorization is obtained in writing from the staff member or unless the information is required by a United Nations oversight body or by the United Nations Dispute Tribunal or the United Nations Appeals Tribunal during their official functions.

UNDRR will apply a talent outreach strategy to identify, attract, engage and nurture prospective talent. At the test and interview stage of the recruitment cycle, UNDRR is committed to providing a process to applicants for requesting and receiving reasonable accommodations.

At the onboarding stage, UNDRR is committed to providing a process that ensures new employees receive the accommodations as per the United Nations Secretariat Reasonable Accommodation Guidelines. If an employee requests accommodations at any point

in their employment, UNDRR is committed to taking appropriate measures to ensure these accommodations are provided (such as assistive technology products, ensuring the accessibility of offices and workspaces, ensuring documents and processes are accessible, travel assistance is provided, etc.).

h. Disaggregated data

All collection of data by UNDRR should include internationally agreed protocols for collecting data that can be disaggregated by disability.

UNDRR is committed to fostering disability-differentiated risk knowledge and data collection from different constituent groups and information sources to strengthen the evidence base on the differentiated impact of disasters on persons with disabilities and their families and to making the business case that such compounded impact is the result of socially constructed exclusionary processes that can be corrected through more inclusive strategies, policies and processes.

UNDRR strives to enhance disaggregated data based on sex, age, disability and income in publications and events and to strengthen capacities for improved disaggregation in data collection, disaster loss and damage databases and in Sendai Framework Monitor reporting, with the ambition of more systematically demonstrating the correlation among compounding factors of vulnerability to disaster risk.

UNDRR will track the engagement of persons with disabilities in events organized or co-organized by UNDRR. UNDRR is committed to supporting training and providing technical support to enhance the collection, disaggregation and reporting of disability-related data.

ANNEX: GLOSSARY

Identity-first and person-first language

Language and definitions about disability are continually evolving. UNDRR is committed to supporting the leadership of persons with disabilities and disability-led organizations. "Disability" is a legally defined term that is tightly tied to rights, fundamental freedoms and the United Nations doctrine. The current evolution of terms includes the use of "person first" (for example "person with autism" or "person with visual impairment") and "identity first" for example, "autistic person" or "blind person" terms.

The driving principle to direct language is to follow "person directed" decision-making. Respecting that there is diversity within the disability community, using the language choices of persons and their method of self-identification supports their leadership.

Person-first and identity-first language are often used interchangeably, as these terms continue to evolve.

Organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) Also referred to as disability-led organizations (DLOs) and disabled persons organizations (DPOs)

OPDs are led, governed and staffed mostly by persons with disabilities and have persons with disabilities in decision-making positions. OPDs are considered the preferred subject matter experts for disability inclusion, universal design, and accessibility, modifications and accommodations consultation and direction.

Disaggregated data

Disaggregated data refers to data that is broken down into smaller units, subcategories or characteristics or, for the purposes at hand, focused on specific target populations, which can serve to elucidate underlying patterns and trends.

Modifications and accommodations

Modifications and accommodations refer to the changes made to the built environment, physical infrastructure, programme or communications to improve accessibility. Modifications may be made in response to a specific need or for overall accessibility where a reasonable accommodation is generally provided on a case-by-case basis as requested, usually in an employment context.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines "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 and exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms".

Multiple formats

Multiple formats are a strategy for utilizing universal design and accessibility in information sharing and distribution by providing materials in formats that include but are not limited to plain language, large print, easy read, pictograms, Braille, national or localized sign languages, International Sign, audio, transcripts and current WCAG standard compliant digital, web-based and electronic information.

Sign language

Whenever possible the localized or national sign language should be provided for accessibility. For international and regional meetings, or meetings without a national sign, International Sign interpretation, although not an official language, should be used to accommodate multiple diverse language needs. Multiple, simultaneous sign language interpretations may be necessary in some circumstances.

Universal design

Universal design is a concept in which products and environments are designed to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation, modification or specialized design and in which the needs of people with disabilities are specifically considered. Universal design does not necessarily eliminate the need to meet specific modification and accommodation requests, but universal design may significantly reduce additional requests for accommodations and modifications to be accessible to all.

Web content accessibility guidelines

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, or WCAG, are the typical benchmark for website accessibility. Created by the World Wide Web Consortium, the WCAG guidelines provide the best and easiest way to make your website usable for all your customers. There are four main guiding principles of accessibility on which WCAG has been built. These four principles are known by the acronym POUR: perceivable, operable, understandable and robust. Designing electronic information, messaging and websites to be accessible from the initial development is the recommended method for achieving electronic media accessibility.

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