



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
20 July 2020

Original: English

---

## Seventy-fifth session

Item 26 (b) of the provisional agenda\*

**Social development: social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, persons with disabilities and the family**

## **Inclusive development for and with persons with disabilities**

### **Report of the Secretary-General**

#### *Summary*

The present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [73/142](#), provides an overview of the situation of persons with disabilities, including in the light of the global response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis, recovery and building back better towards an inclusive, accessible and sustainable world. The adverse impact of the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities, exposing the extent of exclusion experienced by persons with disabilities and the imperative that the disability inclusion should be an integral part of crisis response, recovery and building back better. In the report, the Secretary-General reflects on progress made by Member States, the United Nations system and other stakeholders in implementing and monitoring the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for persons with disabilities. He further discusses opportunities and challenges in advancing towards the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals for all, including persons with disabilities, and concludes with policy recommendations to further accelerate progress in realizing the 2030 Agenda by, for and with persons with disabilities.

---

\* [A/75/150](#).



## I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [73/142](#), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report, at the seventy-fifth session, on the implementation of the resolution and of the outcome document of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the realization of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals for persons with disabilities: the way forward, a disability-inclusive development agenda towards 2015 and beyond,<sup>1</sup> and to make appropriate recommendations to further strengthen their implementation.

2. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development explicitly refers to persons with disabilities under seven Goals, their targets and eleven indicators, embedding the importance of including persons with disabilities in the Sustainable Development Goals and pledging to leave no one behind. The importance of a disability-inclusive global development agenda is also highlighted in other major international normative frameworks and key instruments.<sup>2</sup> These key instruments are mutually reinforcing and constitute core international frameworks to advance inclusive development for and with persons with disabilities.

3. The ongoing global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities, exposing the extent of exclusion experienced by persons with disabilities and highlighting the imperative of disability inclusion in all aspects of crisis response and recovery. In his policy brief on a disability-inclusive United Nations response to COVID-19, the Secretary-General set out recommendations to build back better and implement the 2030 Agenda for and with persons with disabilities.

4. Taking into account the COVID-19 crisis, the present report provides an overview of the following: (a) the situation of persons with disabilities in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; (b) progress made by Member States, the United Nations system and other stakeholders to mainstream the issue of disability in the global development agenda; (c) opportunities and challenges in assessing progress for persons with disabilities towards the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals; and (d) concrete recommendations to accelerate the realization of the 2030 Agenda by, for and with persons with disabilities.

## II. Overview on the situation of persons with disabilities in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

5. Despite progress made in recent years, persons with disabilities continue to face barriers in many facets of life, undermining their full inclusion and participation in political, legal, economic, social and cultural spheres. Persons with disabilities face

<sup>1</sup> General Assembly resolution [68/3](#).

<sup>2</sup> The international normative framework on development and disability includes the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway (resolution [69/15](#), annex), the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (resolution [69/313](#), annex), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (resolution [69/283](#), annex II), the New Urban Agenda (resolution [71/256](#), annex), the Agenda for Humanity ([A/70/709](#), annex), Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development ([A/CONF.166/9](#)), the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons ([A/37/351/Add.1](#) and Corr.1, annex, sect. VIII, recommendation 1 (IV)), the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (resolution [48/96](#), annex), and the outcome document of the high-level meeting on the realization of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals for persons with disabilities: the way forward, a disability-inclusive development agenda towards 2015 and beyond (resolution [68/3](#)).

limited access to education and jobs, a lack of social protection, health care and nutrition, as well as inadequate access to water, sanitation, energy, information and justice.

6. Disability, a cross-cutting global issue, is a sustainable development and human rights issue which has a direct link to poverty. The data available shows that the world's more than 1 billion persons with disabilities are disproportionately likely to live in poverty. The proportion of persons with disabilities living below the international poverty line of \$1.90 a day is higher, and in some countries double, than that of persons without disabilities.<sup>3</sup>

7. Increasing numbers of countries have adopted social protection programmes for persons with disabilities to promote social inclusion and reduce the rates of poverty and extreme poverty: 183 countries now have cash disability benefit programmes. Notwithstanding such progress, access to social protection remains a challenge. Almost 80 per cent of persons with disabilities who need social services are not able to receive them.<sup>3</sup> The barriers to receiving such services include lack of accessible application processes for these services, absence of accessible documentation and lack of disability-sensitive training for social protection officers. In many countries, benefits only cover workers in the formal economy, leaving out persons with disabilities who work in informal sectors or those who did not have the opportunity to contribute for a long enough period of time to be eligible.

8. Discrimination is a driver of inequality for persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities continue to face laws that discriminate against them in a number of countries, particularly in relation to legal capacity and the rights to marry, to vote and to be elected to public office. For instance, 64 per cent of countries have legal restrictions preventing persons with disabilities from marrying and 87 per cent have restrictions preventing them from voting.<sup>3</sup> One of the main causes of discrimination is the lack of awareness and understanding about disability, the abilities of persons with disabilities and their specific needs.

9. Among persons with disabilities, those groups with further vulnerabilities, including women with disabilities, indigenous persons with disabilities and persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, face multiple forms of discrimination. Compared with men with disabilities, women with disabilities are more likely to have unmet health-care needs and to be unemployed.<sup>3</sup> Persons with psychosocial disabilities are often denied the right to make decisions concerning their treatment and care. Adult literacy rates, waged employment and health coverage for indigenous persons with disabilities are even lower than that of non-indigenous persons with disabilities. Compared to persons without disabilities and non-indigenous people, indigenous persons with disabilities are less likely to complete university and to work in decision-making roles. Indigenous children with disabilities are more likely to be engaged in child labour, and indigenous youth with disabilities are more likely to be inactive, that is, not attending school and without a job.<sup>4</sup>

10. Achieving universal health coverage and access to quality essential health-care services and prevention treatment is key to achieving Sustainable Development Goal targets 3.4 and 3.8. However, in 2013, in 43 countries, 42 per cent of persons with disabilities perceived their health as poor or very poor, with women with disabilities reporting poorer health than men with disabilities.<sup>3</sup> There is also a higher proportion of persons with disabilities who report poor health in countries with lower gross domestic product per capita, suggesting that access to resources can make a difference. Accessibility of health-care facilities, availability and affordability of

---

<sup>3</sup> *Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.IV.4).

<sup>4</sup> Analysis by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on the basis of data from the Brazil, Mexico and United States of America 2010 censuses.

health care and health insurance, distance to access health-care services and attitudinal and communication barriers are some of the main factors contributing to poor health for persons with disabilities.

11. Inclusive education and lifelong learning are key in the fight against poverty, integration into the labour market and inclusion and full participation in society. Ensuring equal access to education for persons with disabilities is covered in Sustainable Development Goal target 4.5 and 4.a, yet children with disabilities are less likely to complete primary education than children without disabilities. Data from 36 countries demonstrates that persons with disabilities have lower literacy rates, with a 23 per cent gap compared to their peers without disabilities. Persons with disabilities are still being refused entry into school because of their disability, the non-accessibility of education facilities, lack of alternative means of communication and lack of inclusive education systems. Students with and without disabilities are taught in the same room in only 44 per cent of countries, and schools provide appropriate materials and communications for students with disabilities in only 41 per cent of 88 countries.<sup>3</sup> The current COVID-19 crisis is likely to exacerbate the exclusion of persons with disabilities from education. Distance learning programmes are often not accessible, leaving behind many persons with disabilities who lack access to information technology in their households.

12. Lack of access to quality education for persons with disabilities acts as a barrier to their full and productive employment and decent work (Sustainable Development Goal target 8.5). Magnified by other barriers such as discrimination and stigma, lack of accessible transportation to work, inaccessible workspaces and lack of labour laws protecting against discrimination on the grounds of disability, the percentage of persons with disabilities aged 15 years and over who are employed is on average 36 per cent, compared to 60 per cent for persons without disabilities.<sup>3</sup> This gap indicates the untapped potential of persons with disabilities in the labour market. Even for those who are employed, most lack reasonable accommodation in their workplaces, including access to assistive technology. As a result, persons with disabilities are more likely to be employed in the informal sector, be self-employed, engage in part-time employment and earn lower wages. While access to technology presents some issues, the COVID-19 response has increased remote work, which has the potential to open up job opportunities for persons with disabilities.

13. Progress towards all Sustainable Development Goals is intertwined with the use of digital technology. In its report, published in 2019, the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation brought to the fore the rapidly increasing role of digital technology in transforming society and called for special efforts to include marginalized groups in digital dividends.<sup>5</sup> Persons who lack safe and affordable access to digital technologies are disproportionately from marginalized groups. Persons with disabilities report lower usage of the Internet than those without disabilities, due to unaffordability and inaccessibility, as many websites do not configure fonts and colours, do not read content aloud, do require a mouse or have graphical elements without descriptions.<sup>6</sup> Affordability also remains an issue for the households of persons with disabilities in developing countries, as they are only half as likely to be able to afford Internet costs, radios, televisions or mobile phones. Addressing these gaps between persons with and without disabilities in opportunities and access to basic quality services will be key to realizing the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

---

<sup>5</sup> Report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation, "The age of digital interdependence".

<sup>6</sup> *United Nations E-Government Survey 2012: E-Government for the People* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.12.II.H.2).

### III. Progress made in inclusive development for and with persons with disabilities

14. The present section highlights examples of progress made by Member States, United Nations entities and other stakeholders in mainstreaming disability in development policies and programmes, as well as the challenges that remain. This review is based on 60 reports of States parties submitted to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities from January 2015 to February 2020,<sup>7</sup> 26 responses received from a note verbale sent in November 2019 by the Secretariat to Member States,<sup>8</sup> 15 responses from the United Nations system,<sup>9</sup> and 216 responses from an online survey to other stakeholders.<sup>10</sup> Overall, this review covers 41 per cent of the 193 Member States.

#### A. Member States and observers

15. The present subsection discusses three building blocks, or key elements, for addressing the root causes of inequality for persons with disabilities. The first building block highlights the importance of promoting equal access to opportunities, such as education, health and employment to reduce inequality. The second building block recognizes that fiscal and monetary policies have an impact on inequality through their role in mobilizing resources for social policies, including social protection. The last building block emphasizes the need to tackle prejudice and discrimination as a precondition to an enabling environment for reducing inequalities. The impact of the technological revolution, one of the 2020 megatrends, for persons with disabilities is addressed, as well as the role of international cooperation in reducing inequality in this increasingly interconnected world.

##### 1. Inclusive and equitable education and lifelong learning opportunities

16. More than 80 per cent of countries reported that they have taken positive steps in their policies, legislation or practices towards an inclusive education system for persons with disabilities, including by providing information in accessible and alternative communication formats and reasonable accommodation for students with

<sup>7</sup> Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Austria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, China, Djibouti, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Ghana, Greece, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Jamaica, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Liberia, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mexico, Monaco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Niger, Norway, Pakistan, Palau, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, Sri Lanka, State of Palestine, Sweden, Switzerland, Togo, Turkey, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Viet Nam.

<sup>8</sup> Submission received from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Cyprus, Ecuador, El Salvador, the Gambia, Georgia, Honduras, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, the Republic of Moldova, Nepal, Norway, Palau, Poland, Slovenia, Sri Lanka, Ukraine and Qatar.

<sup>9</sup> Submissions received from the Development Coordination Office, Department of Global Communications, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Labour Organization, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Mine Action Service, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, United Nations Office for Project Services, World Food Programme and World Health Organization.

<sup>10</sup> Organizations operating in 59 countries from all regions of the world, including non-governmental organizations, organizations of persons with disabilities, the private sector, academic and research institutions and the scientific and technological community.

disabilities. For instance, the National Action Plan on Disability 2012–2020 of Austria includes the development of an inclusive school system across the country. The number of students with disabilities who received an inclusive education at the general education system increased from 62 per cent in 2014/2015 to 64 per cent in 2015/2016. After completing school, students with disabilities are given the option of vocational training. In 2018, Cambodia adopted an inclusive education policy and action plan 2019–2023 with the purpose of providing quality, inclusive and equitable education and lifelong learning and increasing the enrolment of students with disabilities. In Georgia, inclusive education has now been implemented in 66 per cent of its public schools, reaching 8,500 students with disabilities by 2019.

17. About 50 per cent of countries reported progress in: (a) reducing physical accessibility barriers at educational facilities; (b) providing appropriate educational, teaching and learning materials and assistive technologies and devices to support learners and teachers; and (c) building the capacity of teachers to support students with disabilities. For example, on the issue of accessibility, Costa Rica has made progressive adaptations for physical accessibility in 66 per cent of its schools. In Israel, parents of children with disabilities are allowed to register their child a year prior to others in order to enable the school to install the required accessibility adjustments in advance of the child's arrival. The Law on General Education and National Curriculum in Georgia recognizes an alternative curriculum for students with disabilities, which includes innovative learning methods, flexible teaching strategies and smaller student-teacher ratios to accommodate learning for different types of disabilities. In Pakistan, further guidelines are provided for children with physical disabilities to improve their mobility and occupational skills. Palestine is providing as many assistive devices as possible, within available resources, such as Perkins Braille machines, laptops with screen-reading programs, specialized wheelchairs and curriculum in Braille free of charge. In Benin, 48 educational works were translated into Braille in 2014, and Colombia has disseminated 60 documents with educational content accessible to the deaf community.

18. On capacity-building for teachers, a university in the Netherlands offers training programmes on disability. Nicaragua has implemented an inclusive training strategy for all new teachers in eight of its training schools nationwide. It is also important that teachers are able to provide accessible and alternative communication formats and that these are incorporated in the teachers' training programme. For instance, in Mozambique, there are two modules on its continuous teachers' training programme, one on the Braille system and another on sign language. In Palestine, 224 teachers were trained on visual and hearing disabilities during the first semester of 2015–2016. Despite progress made by many countries on inclusive education, approximately 30 per cent of the countries reviewed still have special education systems in place. However, several countries are already progressively moving away from such systems.

## **2. Equitable and quality health-care services**

19. For persons with disabilities, habilitation and rehabilitation are an integral part of health-care services.<sup>11</sup> Promisingly, 65 per cent of countries have policies, legislation, plans or programmes that provide access to rehabilitation services. For example, Ukraine established 146 comprehensive rehabilitation centres for children with disabilities, supported by state funding. As a result, the number of children with disabilities who have accessed rehabilitation services quadrupled in 2018 compared to 2017. Similarly, Kazakhstan has 141 individual rehabilitation programme centres for persons with disabilities.

<sup>11</sup> World Health Organization, "Rehabilitation 2030: a call for action", meeting report, February 2017.

20. The physical accessibility of health services is not enough to guarantee access to quality health-care services; the services must also be available, adaptable and acceptable to persons with disabilities. Relevant measures in this regard can include: (a) providing facilities closer to persons with disabilities and their communities; and (b) investing in training health-care personnel and other service providers to reduce attitudinal barriers and stigma. There are increasingly more and more initiatives, such as hospital-at-home services and mobile health-care services, particularly in rural areas where transportation is difficult. For instance, in 2016, Kiribati opened a community wellness clinic that provides home visiting services and outpatient clinic. Mobile or home health services are being provided in Austria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Ecuador, Indonesia and Turkey. With respect to training health service providers, Colombia and Ecuador developed technical guidance and manuals to train health service providers to promote inclusion, combat discrimination and prevent gender-based violence. Trainings on mental illness for health professionals were provided in Liberia and Sri Lanka to reduce stigma.

21. The COVID-19 pandemic introduced new challenges for persons with disabilities in terms of access to health care. Persons with disabilities do not have equal access to COVID-19 testing owing to the lack of accessibility of testing sites and health-care facilities. Information on COVID-19 is often not available in formats accessible to persons with disabilities. Emerging evidence suggests that persons with disabilities in institutional settings are experiencing the highest rates of infection and mortality from COVID-19.<sup>12</sup> The full impact of the pandemic on persons with disabilities remains unknown owing to a lack of disaggregated data, preventing the design of evidence-based policies. Initiatives to address these issues have been put in place in a few countries. For example, in the United States of America, some organizations offer COVID-19 testing at home for persons with disabilities. In Sweden, governmental agencies are making more information accessible, such as through text- and sign-interpreted press conferences and information posted in easy-to-read formats. The pandemic also increased other health risks for persons with disabilities, as lockdowns and social distancing measures pose challenges in obtaining health services and assistance in a regular manner.

### 3. Universal coverage of social protection system

22. Universal access to effective social protection is key to reducing poverty and inequality, and 70 per cent of the countries reviewed have disability-inclusive social protection schemes. Most countries have implemented disability-specific measures through the provision of cash or in-kind transfers. These include disability allowances, tax benefits or relief and social insurance for work loss caused by disability, among many others. For example, monthly financial allowances for persons with disabilities have been provided in Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Cyprus, Indonesia, Iraq, Kuwait, Maldives, Palau and Sri Lanka. Some countries tailor their social protection system to meet the additional costs associated with disability.

23. Although progress has been made by countries to ensure assistive products are available and affordable for persons with disabilities, only 30 per cent of countries do so. Examples include the Honduras for All programmes, which, in 2017, delivered 17,000 technical aids, including wheelchairs, walkers, canes and crutches. El Salvador has a programme for technical aids for travel and wheelchairs, hearing prosthetics and cochlear implants.

24. Lack of awareness about the availability of social protection systems and lack of understanding by service providers regarding how to provide disability-sensitive services creates obstacles for persons with disabilities in accessing social protection

<sup>12</sup> United Nations, policy brief, *A Disability-Inclusive Response to COVID-19*, May 2020.

services. In Malawi, there is noticeable inclusion of persons with disabilities in places in which awareness training has been provided for social protection officials. Sri Lanka launched a programme to train government officials in sign language, Braille and mobility orientation, to ensure that social protection services can reach those most disadvantaged and with vulnerabilities. To address the impact of COVID-19, as of May 2020, at least 60 countries had referred to persons with disabilities when announcing their social protection relief measures.<sup>13</sup>

#### **4. Addressing the root causes of discrimination: structural reforms and changing social norms and behaviours**

25. Efforts to reduce inequality cannot be successful if they do not address the structural and institutional causes of discrimination, including through anti-discrimination provisions in laws and policies. More than 50 per cent of countries reviewed have specific laws, policies and action plans that prohibit discrimination. For instance, the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of physical, mental or psychological disability is explicitly mentioned in the Constitution of Switzerland, and the Persons with Disabilities Discrimination Elimination Act of Japan prohibits unfair discriminatory treatment based on disability by administrative organizations and private businesses.

26. Several countries enacted laws and policies to protect the rights of persons with disabilities who are subject to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination: women and girls, children, youth, older persons, indigenous people, persons with albinism and refugees. For instance, the Disability Act in Maldives guarantees special assistance and protection for women and children with disabilities. The National Children Policy 2011 and Children Act 2013 of Bangladesh provides an emphasis on the education and overall development of children with autism. The Lower Austrian Basic Care Act requires primary care facilities to be accessible for refugees with disabilities. Yet these examples are few and far between, and it should be noted that, too often, the intersecting and multiple forms of discrimination have yet to be addressed by national and local authorities.

27. Beyond repealing discriminatory provisions in national laws and policies and enforcing anti-discrimination laws, ending stigma, stereotyping, prejudice and violence entails a transformation in existing social norms and behaviours. Some countries have undertaken initiatives aimed at changing mindsets and attitudes in schools and communities through public education campaigns, media campaigns and other means. For instance, in 2019, Mexico offered online courses on disability for a wide range of stakeholders, reaching 27,531 people that year. It also provided face-to-face training on access to justice, human rights, dignity, autonomy and the needs of persons with disabilities to 3,500 government officials. Austria trained their front-line health staff and provided training materials on the needs of persons with disabilities for professionals in counselling, teaching and medical services as part of a sexual and reproductive health programme. El Salvador held 55 days of advocacy for the rights of persons with disabilities for officials, police and administrative personnel from 2014 to 2017.

#### **5. Closing the digital divide: accessible information and communications technology**

28. The potential of new technologies to drive sustainable development is only possible when they are accessible and usable for everyone, including persons with disabilities. Countries have been investing in policies and regulations to promote

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, *Initial overview of specific social protection measures for persons with disabilities and their families in response to the COVID-19 crisis*, May 2020.



access to information and communication technology. For instance, the disability act in Nepal reinforces the right of persons with disabilities to obtain information from public communications, including sources such as the news, the Internet and telephones, in accessible formats and without any additional fees or charges. The Digital Future 2018–2022 policy in Colombia guarantees the right to information and communications for persons with disabilities. That policy has led to initiatives such as free downloads of screen-reader software, text-magnifying programmes, and a free telephone communication service for the deaf community. Countries such as Ecuador, the Netherlands and Turkey have adopted regulations to guarantee that websites and mobile applications of government bodies comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0.

29. However, in most cases, public procurement policies are not disability inclusive.<sup>14</sup> Promoting accessibility and universal design standards in the bidding process and taking these into account when selecting the most appropriate supplier can lessen the digital divide. Creative solutions are needed to ensure the benefits of technologies can be shared equally. For instance, Viet Nam has policies on tax exemption and reduction, preferential loans and other support for research and development to increase access by persons with disabilities to information technology and communication.

30. In policymaking, an emphasis on equality is needed so that the increase in technology usage does not widen the existing divide for persons with disabilities, especially those living in developing countries.<sup>15</sup> With the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries opted to move education and work to online platforms. Persons with disabilities are less likely to have access to Internet and communication technologies and risk being left further behind.

## 6. International cooperation

31. In an increasingly interconnected world, efforts to reduce inequalities will require even stronger cooperation among countries. Almost 70 per cent of countries reviewed have been engaged in promoting and strengthening international cooperation, either through capacity-building, technical cooperation or mobilizing additional financial resources for developing countries. Moreover, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development policy marker on the inclusion and empowerment of people with disabilities is a groundbreaking step towards measuring progress in disability-inclusive development assistance.<sup>16</sup>

32. International cooperation that supports national efforts to promote the rights of persons with disabilities include North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation. North-South cooperation remains one of the most common means of international cooperation. For example, the Bridge the Gap II project is being implemented by the development agencies of Austria, Italy and Spain, in conjunction with the International Disability and Development Consortium and the European Disability Forum to drive the disability inclusion agenda forward and support the inclusion of persons with disabilities in five partner countries: Burkina Faso, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Paraguay and the Sudan. In period from 2015 to 2020, the United States has contributed more than \$21 million dollars to promote the rights of persons with disabilities in Viet Nam through direct assistance, strengthening the capacity to provide rehabilitation and policy advocacy.

<sup>14</sup> Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, “Disability-inclusive public procurement: Promoting universal design and accessibility”, social development policy paper No. 2019/01.

<sup>15</sup> *World Social Report 2020: Inequality in a rapidly changing world* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.IV.1).

<sup>16</sup> Department for International Development, *Global Disability Summit: one year on*, 2019.

33. There are growing numbers of South-South and triangular cooperation efforts aimed at promoting the rights of persons with disabilities through knowledge, skills, expertise and resource exchanges. Colombia and El Salvador have been working on a project to strengthen Paralympic sport; China has pledged to donate \$5 million in 2016 to Rehabilitation International to carry out a disability assistance project over a four-year period in developing countries in Africa and other regions; and Kuwait has signed a memorandum of understanding with Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia to exchange knowledge and experience to improve the level of services offered to persons with disabilities. The provision of assistive devices is a major challenge; it often comes in the form of overseas donations, on an ad hoc basis. For example, Nicaragua relies on donations from national and international organizations for its annual supply of wheelchairs and other assistive devices.

## B. United Nations system

34. The United Nations system continues to advance the disability inclusion agenda in its work. The United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, adopted in June 2019, is now being implemented to accelerate these efforts. The Strategy contains a policy and accountability framework for ensuring that the United Nations system is fit for purpose in relation to disability inclusion. United Nations entities are now undertaking institutional reviews and active steps to implement the Strategy.

35. The Secretary-General issued a policy brief entitled “A disability-inclusive response to COVID-19”, and the recommendations contained in the brief<sup>17</sup> were supported by 146 Member States and observers in a letter addressed to the Secretary-General from them. United Nations entities also issued a number of specific policy briefs and guidance notes and organized webinars, providing recommendations for disability-inclusive actions. A dedicated web page has been set up on resources related to persons with disabilities and COVID-19.<sup>18</sup>

36. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs, as the focal point on disability for the United Nations system, continued to support intergovernmental processes and multi-stakeholder dialogues to strengthen the normative and operational frameworks for a disability-inclusive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The “UN Enable” website has served as the repository for information on the work of the United Nations system on disability. In response to the urgent need to address the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on persons with disabilities, the website has a dedicated space to provide the United Nations system and its partners with relevant information, including United Nations entities’ policy briefs, guidance and tools for a disability-inclusive COVID-19 response, recovery and “building back better”.<sup>19</sup>

37. The World Health Organization (WHO) has in the past few years developed technical tools and guidance to support Member States in implementing national priority lists on assistive products. WHO continued to facilitate the inclusion of rehabilitation in universal health coverage with the launch of a resource entitled “Rehabilitation in health systems: guide for action”.<sup>20</sup> The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) published a set of practical guidelines on inclusive and accessible

---

<sup>17</sup> The recommendations include: (a) mainstreaming of disability in all COVID-19 response and recovery together with targeted actions; (b) accessibility of information, facilities, services and programmes in the COVID-19 response and recovery; (c) meaningful consultation with and active participation of persons with disabilities in all stages of the COVID-19 response and recovery; and (d) the establishment of accountability mechanisms to ensure disability inclusion in the COVID-19 response.

<sup>18</sup> [www.un.org/en/coronavirus/disability-inclusion](http://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/disability-inclusion).

<sup>19</sup> See <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/covid-19.html>.

<sup>20</sup> World Health Organization, *Rehabilitation in health systems: guide for action*, 2019.

services relating to gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and the rights for women and young persons with disabilities,<sup>21</sup> in order to strengthen responses at the national and international level.

38. The United Nations system continues to promote inclusive education and employment for persons with disabilities. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia has partnered with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to support the development of inclusive education policies in the Sudan. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has worked in countries to accelerate reform of the childcare system to transition children with disabilities into family and community-based care. To maximize the potential of persons with disabilities in the future of work, the International Labour Organization's Global Business and Disability Network organized a conference on the theme "Making the future of work inclusive of persons with disabilities" in November 2019<sup>22</sup> and launched a communications campaign, #InvalidOpinions, to challenge negative perceptions of persons with disabilities in the labour market.

39. United Nations News has produced multimedia stories and videos in six official United Nations languages to promote equality and inclusion of persons with disabilities. UNICEF is making efforts to change negative perceptions and behaviours among youth through text-based games and artificial intelligence-based chat robots designed to engage users in a conversation about behaviour that could stigmatize children with disabilities.

40. Positive progress has been made in mainstreaming disability in humanitarian actions. The United Nations system has further contributed to the development of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action.<sup>23</sup> The Guidelines were developed through a consultation process involving more than 600 stakeholders, in order to assist humanitarian actors, Governments and affected communities in the full and effective participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian actions. The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction has continued to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in action for disaster risk reduction, including through advocating the need for sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. UNICEF is leading a multi-agency initiative to strengthen disability inclusion in humanitarian needs overviews and humanitarian response plans and has since published a guidance document to strengthen disability inclusion.<sup>24</sup> The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific rolled out self-paced e-learning materials on disaster risk reduction, while the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean has included the post-disaster needs of persons with disabilities in its damage and loss assessment methodology.

41. The United Nations system continued to produce major studies to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs continued to lead efforts in support of the disability-inclusive implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Building on the United Nations flagship report on disability and

<sup>21</sup> United Nations Population Fund, *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 Rights for Women and Young Persons with Disabilities*, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> See <http://www.businessanddisability.org/news/6th-annual-meeting-of-the-gbdn-21st-and-22nd-november-2019/>.

<sup>23</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee task team, *Guidelines: inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action* (2019).

<sup>24</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, *Guidance on strengthening disability inclusion in humanitarian response plans* (2019).

development of 2018, the United Nations system also continues to support Member States in the collection and compilation of statistics on persons with disabilities. Within the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Statistics Division has been coordinating efforts across United Nations entities in the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys to improve the quality and availability of disability statistics. It has developed a disability statistics data portal with data and metadata from 103 countries or areas,<sup>25</sup> on education, employment and water and sanitation. WHO promoted the model disability survey that enables the disaggregation of data by disability status and can identify areas that require interventions to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities. The survey has reached 70,000 respondents as at the date of publication of the present report. UNICEF supported 16 countries to incorporate the UNICEF Module on Child Functioning into national surveys to collect data on children with disabilities. Continuing efforts by the United Nations system in collecting disaggregated data is essential for better monitoring of the status of persons with disabilities vis-à-vis the 2030 Agenda and efforts to build back better in the post-COVID-19 context. UNFPA also published a technical brief to provide guidance on the Washington Group disability questions<sup>26</sup> to improve the quality and comparability of data on disability and international migration. Thus far, UNFPA has supported Colombia, Guatemala, Madagascar and Malawi in these efforts.

42. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean has been supporting national statistical offices and disability entities, particularly as countries in the region prepare for the 2020 census, providing technical support for the collection, analysis and dissemination of disability statistics.<sup>27</sup> The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia has also produced a regional report on the most recent disability statistics in the Arab region and recently published a disability framework with 115 indicators<sup>28</sup> to bridge the gap between policy and statistics. In the Asia and Pacific region, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific provided national consultation services to 17 countries to enhance the collection and compilation of national data and statistics for persons with disabilities.

43. Efforts have been made by the United Nations system to provide information in accessible and alternative communication formats. For instance, the Department of Global Communications produced accessibility guidelines and standards for United Nations websites and actively monitors un.org web pages on compliance. In 2019, the United Nations intranet (iSeek) conducted an accessibility and user experience audit and, as a result, has made changes to the website and taken measures to improve mobile accessibility. The global United Nations Sustainable Development Group website, which includes more than 30 United Nations country team websites, has been developed to meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0. Funded by the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UNICEF and UNESCO are implementing a multi-country project in Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda to promote inclusive education through accessible digital textbooks.<sup>29</sup>

44. Practical and technical guidance, knowledge tools and training, shaped within the relevant normative frameworks, have been instrumental in translating policies into actions at the country level. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs has

<sup>25</sup> See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/sconcerns/disability/statistics/#/home>.

<sup>26</sup> United Nations Population Fund, *Measuring disability, migration, and marriage registration – recommended questions for inclusion in censuses*, technical brief, 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, *Planning for the 2020 round of population censuses in the Caribbean*, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, *Disability in the Arab region*, 2018; *ESCWA Disability Framework: 115 indicators to bridge the gap between policy and statistics*, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> See <https://www.accessibletextbooksforall.org/>.

promoted technical support and capacity-building activities in Latin America in conjunction with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and has provided small grants to catalytic and innovative projects in Argentina, Lesotho and Uganda in 2020 through the United Nations Voluntary Fund on Disability.<sup>30</sup> The Fund, which has been operating thanks to financial contributions from 42 countries<sup>31</sup> and other donors, supports capacity-building and institutional development for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and of the Sustainable Development Goals for persons with disabilities in developing countries, particularly in the least developed countries. Also, at the country level, the Development Coordination Office is making further efforts to strengthen the Resident Coordinator capacity to lead on disability-inclusive advocacy, operations and programming. In 2019, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group launched an operational guide on leaving no one behind for United Nations country teams, which explicitly refers to the disability inclusion in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation on the ground of the Sustainable Development Goals.

### C. Other stakeholders

45. To mainstream the rights of persons with disabilities in the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda, commitment and concerted efforts from all relevant stakeholders are pivotal. Many organizations are working towards empowering persons with disabilities to participate in the design and implementation of their country's policies. For example, Inclusion Ghana advocates for the participation of persons with intellectual and development disabilities in political processes. As a result of their advocacy, persons with disabilities became active participants in the development of the country's inclusive education policy. SIGAP Indonesia implemented a pilot project to make villages inclusive of persons with disabilities. They organized a forum, attended by thousands of participants, to share good practices, tools and resources towards achieving an inclusive Indonesia by 2030. As a result, these villages now have an allocated budget for disability issues, including for training of organizations of persons with disabilities and more accessible village offices, and persons with disabilities have been appointed as village government officials.

46. Fostering cooperation between the public and private sectors and civil society must be high in the agenda to mainstream disability. However, only 35 per cent of survey respondents have made some progress in this area. For example, Fundación Descúbreme in Chile, in one of its projects, entitled "Empresa inclusiva Antofagasta", entered a partnership with a mining company to promote the labour inclusion of persons with disabilities. This project resulted in 450 awareness talks held in different companies in the region, and 250 people with cognitive or mental disabilities trained in employment skills. Access Israel provides training to the public and private sectors to give service providers the tools to deliver accessible and inclusive services for persons with disabilities in the area of health and information and communications technology.

47. The use of innovation and technology is increasingly important to eliminate fundamental barriers faced by persons with disabilities. For example, Voice of Specially Abled People, in India created a mobile application to crowdsource solutions, share

<sup>30</sup> See <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/about-us/united-nations-voluntary-fund-on-disability.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Afghanistan, Andorra, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Cameroon, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Greece, the Holy See, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Lebanon, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, Morocco, Namibia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, the Philippines, Qatar, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

relevant issues with persons with disabilities, find accessible places, call for pledges and act as an information hub. More than 3,000 youth and 200 corporate leaders have taken the pledge to advance a disability-inclusive global development agenda.

#### **IV. Challenges and opportunities in advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

48. Even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Member States recognized that it was challenging for the world to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals within their timeframe. For this reason, in 2019, the Secretary-General declared a decade of action, from 2020 to 2030, for their realization. Now, the pandemic has introduced major new challenges, exacerbating pre-existing inequalities and discrimination, and aggravating the multidimensional challenges faced by persons with disabilities in access to health care and essential services, education, employment and participation in the community.

49. At the same time, the pandemic offers the opportunity to further advance the inclusion of persons with disabilities in responses to crises and humanitarian emergencies, including through social protection systems. The inclusion of persons with disabilities as both beneficiaries and agents of change in the COVID-19 response, recovery and building back better is central to the United Nations commitment to achieve transformative and lasting change to create an inclusive, accessible and sustainable world for all. To create an inclusive, accessible and sustainable world, efforts to address health, economic and social systems must be pursued through a twin-track approach of inclusion and of targeting the specific needs of persons with disabilities and members of other marginalized groups.

50. The COVID-19 situation has offered the opportunity to advance new approaches to work and learning. Owing to lockdowns, telecommuting and remote learning have become more prevalent, contributing to the adoption of measures to enable working or studying from home, which may be beneficial for those with psychosocial disabilities. Innovations emerging from the COVID-19 response and recovery should be pursued in a way that helps to advance social inclusion.

51. Against this backdrop, the lack of reliable, timely and comparable data related to persons with disabilities further challenges the ability to assess the progress or lack thereof in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Only about a quarter of available disability data is internationally comparable, and most data are not comparable across time; half of countries do not have data on employment indicators; and data on persons with disabilities experiencing discrimination was found in only three per cent of countries.<sup>3</sup>

52. Building on the efforts of an increasing number of countries and international agencies engaging in disability data collection, new innovative methodologies, such as crowdsourcing reviews collected through smartphone applications, can offer the opportunity to provide information on the accessibility of physical spaces worldwide. Based on the commitment made in the Inclusive Data Charter during the Global Disability Summit in 2018,<sup>32</sup> further efforts must be made to compile disability data on a systematic and regular basis globally, regionally and nationally to track progress, identify gaps and facilitate policymaking. National Governments, together with stakeholders and the direct involvement of persons with disabilities, could promote broader use of data collection based on Washington Group's disability questions.

---

<sup>32</sup> See [http://www.data4sdgs.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/IDC\\_onepager\\_Final.pdf](http://www.data4sdgs.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/IDC_onepager_Final.pdf).

53. Not only does technology offer the potential opportunity to improve data availability, but access to assistive technologies could also be further promoted to enable persons with disabilities to live independently and fully participate in all spheres of life. By promoting the accessibility and affordability of information and communications technologies for persons with disabilities, education, health care, information and other essential services would be made more inclusive.

54. Some positive global trends offer opportunities to further mainstream disability inclusion through multi-stakeholder partnerships and international cooperation. For example, voluntary national reviews during the high-level political forum on sustainable development have increasingly discussed the situation of persons with disabilities. Countries could be further encouraged to engage stakeholders in addressing disability inclusion in the context of accelerating actions towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in order to identify gaps and entry points for leveraging a multisectoral approach.

## V. Conclusions and recommendations

55. Persons with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty. The disadvantages experienced by persons with disabilities extend to many sectors, including education, employment, social protection, health care, nutrition and access to water, sanitation, energy, information and justice, and are currently exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The provision of and access to quality basic services for persons with disabilities is essential to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. This can only be achieved and sustained if there is an end to the legal, social and institutional discrimination faced by persons with disabilities, including those facing intersecting and multiple forms of discrimination.

56. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a global crisis, endangering the health of individuals and communities, disrupting their livelihoods and the well-being of societies. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic sets the world even further back on the path towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals for persons with disabilities by the 2030 deadline. Accelerated steps need to be taken to ensure no one is left behind in the COVID-19 response and to ensure recovery efforts will result in building back better for a disability-inclusive, accessible and sustainable world.

57. The General Assembly may wish to consider the following specific actions to mainstream disability and protect the rights of persons with disabilities in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the 2030 Agenda, in particular in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, recovery and efforts to build back better:

(a) **Member States and other stakeholders further strengthening national policies, strategies and action plans to mainstream the rights, well-being and perspectives of persons with disabilities in the current efforts to respond to and recover from the COVID-19 crisis and the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the 2030 Agenda and its follow-up and review, with the participation of persons with disabilities, including in the design and implementation of the national development policies and strategies;**

(b) **Member States and the United Nations continuing to build capacity in countries for the collection, analysis and dissemination of disability data; promoting innovative and cost-effective approaches to data collection and analysis; and investing in harmonizing methodologies for collection of data on persons with disabilities, to enable a comprehensive assessment on the progress on the situation of persons with disabilities vis-à-vis the Sustainable Development Goals;**



(c) Member States, the United Nations system and other stakeholders ensuring inclusive education at all levels and lifelong learning, including by removing barriers and ensuring accessibility at educational facilities, providing educational, teaching and learning materials in accessible and alternative formats, building the capacity of teachers to support learners with disabilities and providing reasonable accommodation and other support, as required;

(d) Member States, the United Nations system and other stakeholders improving the accessibility, availability and affordability of quality health-care services for persons with disabilities, including in the area of mental health, sexual and reproductive health, habilitation and rehabilitation, and contributing to more gender- and disability-responsive, equitable and universal health coverage;

(e) Member States and other stakeholders strengthening social protection policies and programmes that take into account the rights, participation, perspectives and needs of persons with disabilities and expanding coverage of social protection floors, including by raising awareness of the availability of such programmes, improving service delivery that is disability-sensitive, establishing a monitoring and evaluation system to periodically assess the inclusion and impact of social protection schemes for persons with disabilities and other support, as required;

(f) Member States, the United Nations system and other stakeholders making further efforts to combat discrimination against and negative stereotypes about persons with disabilities, including persons facing intersectional and multiple forms of discrimination, by eliminating discriminatory laws and adopting anti-discrimination laws, policies and practices, by raising awareness and ensuring access to justice;

(g) Member States and the United Nations system, international development institutions and other stakeholders, including the private sector, promoting the accessibility and affordability of information and communications technologies for persons with disabilities, including access to the Internet and the adoption of accessibility standards and the principles of universal design in the information and communication technology industry;

(h) Member States, the United Nations system, development agencies and other stakeholders further advancing multi-stakeholder partnerships to share knowledge, skills and expertise and mobilize public and private resources through international cooperation, including North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation, in support of national efforts to mainstream disability in development, inter alia, by providing international support, financial resources and targeted capacity-building to developing countries and facilitating access to and sharing of accessible, affordable and assistive technologies.