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

### **Status of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto: protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies and easy-to-understand communication as an accessibility resource and tool for persons with disabilities**

**Report of the Secretary-General\*\***

#### *Summary*

Pursuant to the request by the General Assembly in its resolution [76/154](#), the present report provides: (a) an update on the status of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto, and (b) an overview of the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies, as outlined in article 11 of the Convention. In addition, pursuant to the request by the General Assembly in its resolution [77/240](#), the present report also contains a section on the development, use and implementation of easy-to-understand communication as an accessibility resource and tool for persons with disabilities. The report presents initiatives and progress made in these areas by Governments, entities of the United Nations system, other intergovernmental organizations and civil society organizations. It concludes with recommendations for action to implement article 11 of the Convention and to promote easy-to-understand communication.

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\* [A/78/150](#).

\*\* The present report was submitted for processing after the deadline for technical reasons beyond the control of the submitting office.



## I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution [76/154](#), requested the Secretary-General to submit, at its seventy-eighth session, a report on the rights of persons with disabilities, focused on their protection and safety in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies, as outlined in article 11 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, including a segment on the status of the Convention and its Optional Protocol.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the Assembly, in its resolution [77/240](#), requested the Secretary-General, within existing reporting obligations, to address and present recommendations on guidelines and best practices on the use of easy-to-understand communication as an accessibility resource and tool for persons with disabilities, also during the seventy-eighth session.

2. The report addresses the two topics in separate sections. Each section discusses international norms and standards, describes the current global status and efforts made, and assesses progress. The report concludes with recommendations for action in line with the Convention.

3. The report was informed by: (a) States parties' reports to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities submitted between July 2010 and April 2023 pursuant to article 35 of the Convention; (b) replies from Member States and United Nations system entities and intergovernmental organizations to a note verbale from the Secretariat disseminated in January 2023;<sup>2</sup> (c) replies from civil society organizations, including organizations of persons with disabilities, to a questionnaire from the Secretariat disseminated in January 2023; and (d) inputs from an expert group meeting held in May 2023. Information gathered from States parties' reports and responses to the note verbale reflects the input of a total of 145 Member States over the period from 2010 to 2023. For relevant Member States, a comparison of these results with data from the note verbale collected in 2023 is used to assess progress.

<sup>1</sup> Number of States parties to the Convention: 187; number of signatories: 164. Number of States parties to the Optional Protocol: 105, number of signatories: 94.

<sup>2</sup> Input was received from 44 Member States (Andorra, Angola, Armenia, Australia, Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, China, Colombia, Egypt, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Latvia, Liberia, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Mongolia, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Poland, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uruguay); 22 United Nations system entities (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 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, International Telecommunication Union, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, Department of Safety and Security, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), World Food Programme and World Health Organization); two intergovernmental organizations (the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and the European Union); and 173 civil society organizations. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility and the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on the rights of persons with disabilities were also consulted.

## II. Ensuring the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies

### A. International normative framework

4. Article 11 of the Convention calls upon States parties to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters. Implementing article 11 requires compliance with other provisions of the Convention, including on access to justice and freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse.

5. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes various targets that are relevant to the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk. The targets include building the resilience of those in vulnerable situations and reducing their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters (target 1.5); significantly reducing the number of deaths and the number of people affected by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting people in vulnerable situations (target 11.5); promoting mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in the least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on marginalized communities (target 13.b); significantly reducing all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere (target 16.1); and ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children (target 16.2).

6. The need for inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities and the realization of their rights are also embedded in other international instruments related to situations of risk, including the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway. Furthermore, the Security Council, in its resolution [2475 \(2019\)](#), called upon Member States to protect persons with disabilities in situations of armed conflict, including to prevent violence and abuse, and to ensure they have access to justice, basic services and unimpeded, accessible and inclusive humanitarian assistance, in particular for women and children with disabilities. The World Health Assembly, in its resolution 74.8, called upon Member States to protect persons with disabilities during health emergencies and to ensure comprehensive, accessible and affordable access to health systems and care for all persons with disabilities, particularly in situations of public health emergencies. Furthermore, at its sixty-fifth session, the Commission on the Status of Women in its agreed conclusions called for the mainstreaming of a gender and disability-inclusive perspective in mitigation and adaptation to climate change (see [E/2021/27](#), chap. I.A).

### B. Overview of current situation, efforts and progress so far

7. Persons with disabilities tend to be among the worst affected in situations of risk and in humanitarian emergencies. They are more likely to be victims of violence, abuse, exploitation, natural and human-made disasters, humanitarian emergencies and conflict, and they tend to be overrepresented among forcibly displaced persons.<sup>3,4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with Persons with Disabilities 2018* (United Nations publication, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> *Disability and Development Report* (United Nations publication, forthcoming).

Persons with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty,<sup>5</sup> which heightens their vulnerability and exposure to hazards.<sup>6</sup> As such, during and after natural disasters, they experience greater human and material losses, at times suffering twice the death rate of persons without disabilities.<sup>7</sup>

8. Persons with disabilities also face barriers in accessing preparedness plans for disasters and receiving assistance to evacuate, a situation that has deteriorated globally since 2013.<sup>8</sup> In 2023, 84 per cent of persons with disabilities – up from 71 per cent in 2013 – had no personal preparedness plan for disasters; in 2023, 5 per cent would not be able to evacuate at all, compared with 4 per cent in 2013. In 2023, the lack of a personal preparedness plan among persons with disabilities was most common in Europe and Central Asia (91 per cent of persons with disabilities), sub-Saharan Africa (89 per cent) and in the Americas (89 per cent), whereas in Arab States and in the rest of Asia, 78 per cent and 79 per cent, respectively, of persons with disabilities lacked a personal preparedness plan, and in the Pacific, 60 per cent of persons with disabilities lacked such a plan.<sup>9</sup> Among stateless individuals with disabilities, 92 per cent did not have a personal preparedness plan for disasters. Internally displaced persons with disabilities are less likely to gain access to education, find employment and have access to basic services than internally displaced persons without disabilities.<sup>10</sup>

9. Persons with disabilities are also often excluded from relief measures to address emergencies. For example, only 44 per cent of countries that announced social protection relief measures in relation to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic included provisions for persons with disabilities.<sup>11</sup>

10. Persons with disabilities are often left behind during armed conflict, at times abandoned in institutions. Their perspectives and needs are often disregarded during conflict and not adequately considered in military operations<sup>12</sup> nor in the post-conflict phase. For example, the rights of persons with disabilities were only mentioned in 118 of 1,789 peace agreements from 1990 to 2018.<sup>13</sup>

11. The dire reality is confirmed by civil society organizations working on the ground. Most civil society organizations that provided input for the current report<sup>2</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Disability and Development Report* (2019).

<sup>6</sup> Sébastien Jodoin, Katherine Lofts and Amanda Bowie-Edwards, *Disability Rights in National Climate Policies: Status Report* (Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism (McGill University, Canada) and International Disability Alliance, June 2022).

<sup>7</sup> *Disability and Development Report* (2019).

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, *Global Survey Report on Persons with Disabilities and Disasters* (forthcoming, preliminary findings).

<sup>9</sup> The designation “Pacific” is used by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction in this context; in the remainder of the present report, the designation “Oceania” is used. The designation “rest of Asia” refers to all countries in Asia other than those in Central Asia and Arab countries located in Asia. For more information on the regions referred to in the report, please see <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/>.

<sup>10</sup> See the overview of disability prevalence and impact as reported by the Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme for the Syrian Arab Republic (2020). Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/humanitarian-needs-assessment-programme-hnap-i-syria-summer-2020-report>.

<sup>11</sup> International Labour Organization and United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with the United Nations Children’s Fund, *Social protection measures for persons with disabilities and their families in response to the COVID-19 crisis: an updated overview of trends – June 2021* (2021).

<sup>12</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, with a focus on the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of military operations (A/77/203).

<sup>13</sup> Sean Molloy, *Peace agreements and persons with disabilities* (PA-X Research Report) (Edinburgh, Global Justice Academy, University of Edinburgh, 2019).

(77 per cent) indicate that the lack of accessibility of information on emergency and disaster management remains a significant barrier; and about 70 per cent highlight that persons with disabilities are not included in national emergency and disaster management plans. Two thirds of those organizations underscore the lack of individual preparedness plans for persons with disabilities, including assistance for immediate evacuation.

12. Increased political commitments, partnerships and support have been used to try to address such gaps. In the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, which was developed in advance of the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, over 70 stakeholders from countries, United Nations entities, international civil society and global, regional and national organizations of persons with disabilities committed to rendering humanitarian action inclusive of persons with disabilities, by lifting the barriers persons with disabilities face in accessing relief, protection and recovery support and ensuring their participation in the development, planning and implementation of humanitarian programmes. More recently, several donors have made commitments to support the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in humanitarian contexts and emergencies: in 2021, \$1.4 billion in bilateral aid was committed to provide assistance that is inclusive of persons with disabilities in humanitarian contexts and emergencies (about 9 per cent of all bilateral aid provided to disability-inclusive projects).<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, improvements are needed to mainstream disability across the humanitarian response by coordinating the work in various sectors and among various stakeholders. Still too often, different stakeholders and sectors work in silos.

### C. Member States

13. In the period 2010–2023,<sup>15</sup> 52 per cent of countries referred to persons with disabilities, mostly as a marginalized group, in their laws, policies, plans and strategies on disaster risk reduction and management, recovery and climate change, including most of the countries in Oceania. Among countries that have such a framework, only 19 per cent refer to inclusive climate change legislation. Moreover, as at June 2022 only 35 of the 192 States parties to the Paris Agreement refer to persons with disabilities in their nationally determined contributions and intended nationally determined contributions.<sup>16</sup> More recent evidence, collected through responses to the note verbale circulated in 2023, highlights that 96 per cent of Member States consider persons with disabilities in their disaster risk frameworks and 67 per cent in their climate change frameworks, suggesting increased awareness in recent years.

14. In 2010–2023, only 33 per cent of countries consulted persons with disabilities in the development and implementation of national frameworks on disaster risk reduction and management, recovery and climate change, though by 2023 such consultations were more likely, with 91 per cent of Member States consulting persons with disabilities with regard to disaster risk reduction frameworks and 82 per cent doing so with regard to climate change frameworks.

15. Most Member States in 2023 (96 per cent) made their disaster risk reduction frameworks accessible, mainly by releasing them in accessible document/PDF format (77 per cent); 23 per cent in easy-to-read formats<sup>17</sup> and 5 per cent in Braille. In 2023,

<sup>14</sup> *Disability and Development Report* (forthcoming).

<sup>15</sup> For the sources of the information in each section, see para. 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Disability Rights in National Climate Policies: Status Report* (2022).

<sup>17</sup> “Easy-to-read” is a format of written text presenting information in a way that is accessible, especially for persons with intellectual and learning disabilities. It consists of concise and simple text alongside pictures helping explain the content of a document.

75 per cent of Member States disseminated climate change frameworks in accessible formats, mainly through accessible document/PDF format (78 per cent), while no country used easy-to-read format or Braille for such frameworks.

16. A third of Member States, most of them in Oceania, the Americas and Asia, undertook awareness-raising, knowledge generation and capacity-building activities, mainly on preparedness for situations of risk. Consultations with persons with disabilities in the development of these interventions were held only in a fifth of these countries. For example, Indonesia worked with organizations of persons with disabilities in capacity-building to enhance their participation in disaster preparedness and management. In Kiribati, one organization of persons with disabilities, Te Toa Matoa, held awareness-raising workshops for community members and government officers on climate change.

17. In 2010–2023, 40 per cent of Member States improved the accessibility of early warning systems. In 2023, 95 per cent of Member States with early warning systems made them accessible to persons with disabilities through the use of captioning (45 per cent) and sign language interpretation (50 per cent). Easy-to-read formats (27 per cent) and Braille (9 per cent) were the least used formats.

18. Regarding information provided to the public through broadcast, media, publicly available documents and/or websites on prevention, preparation and recovery from disaster and emergency situations, almost all countries produced this information in 2023 in formats that are accessible to persons with disabilities (96 per cent), including through the use of sign language (61 per cent), accessible document/PDF format (57 per cent), captioning (52 per cent), easy-to-read formats (48 per cent) and Braille (17 per cent). In 2010–2023, only a third of Member States consulted persons with disabilities on producing such information and early warning systems. In 2023, consultations were more of an established part of producing such information (75 per cent) and also in producing early warning systems (80 per cent). For example, Belgium worked with organizations of persons with disabilities with regard to providing warnings to persons who are deaf or hard of hearing through the use of text messages; and Ecuador and Japan implemented accessible early warnings through the use of digital television.

19. In 2010–2023, a quarter of Member States reported initiatives on the evacuation of persons with disabilities, including legal provisions covering public and private entities, with these initiatives being most prevalent in Europe (40 per cent) and least prevalent in Oceania (11 per cent). Mauritius, for example, reported the testing of inclusive safe evacuation procedures. Only 41 per cent of these Member States consulted with persons with disabilities for the development of these measures. In 2023, a much higher percentage (85 per cent) of Member States had measures on safe evacuation of persons with disabilities from public institutions, and these measures were developed in consultation with persons with disabilities in 94 per cent of these countries. Furthermore, in 2023 most countries legally require public (78 per cent) and private (81 per cent) institutions to implement measures for the safe evacuation of persons with disabilities. These legal provisions were disseminated in accessible formats in about 80 per cent of Member States, mostly through accessible document/PDF format, while just a quarter of these countries used easy-to-read formats. Consultations with persons with disabilities in developing laws for the safe evacuation of persons with disabilities from public and private institutions happened, respectively, in 93 per cent and 65 per cent of countries.

20. In 2010–2023, 46 per cent of countries enhanced the accessibility of emergency phone numbers and, in 2023, 58 per cent of Member States had an emergency number accessible to persons with disabilities. For example, Lithuania launched an emergency call mobile application that enables persons with hearing impairments to

connect using real-time video with the help of on-call sign language interpreters and text communication.

21. In 2010–2023, only a third of Member States reported on accessibility of shelters while, by 2023, 59 per cent of Member States had made shelters accessible and 82 per cent of these consulted with persons with disabilities in developing these accessible shelters. Since 2010, only a third of Member States provided rehabilitation services in situations of risk. In 2023, rehabilitation services were more widely available (81 per cent) and in most cases (81 per cent) guided by consultations with persons with disabilities.

22. In 2010–2023, 25 per cent of all Member States providing services reported on mental health and psychosocial support to persons with disabilities and/or the provision of assistive devices, while only 19 per cent of the countries used social protection to finance the provision of services in situations of risk. For example, Sierra Leone reported that during the outbreak of Ebola virus disease (2014–2016) and the mudslide and flood disasters in 2017, persons with disabilities were among the affected populations and were provided with assistive devices, food and non-food items. In 2023, 74 per cent of Member States provided mental health and psychosocial support and in most cases (84 per cent) developed these services in consultation with persons with disabilities. About half of Member States distributed assistive devices and consulted with persons with disabilities in developing this service (87 per cent). Fewer countries (39 per cent), in 2023, had mechanisms to assist persons with disabilities using electrically powered assistive devices during a power cut; two thirds of these mechanisms were designed in consultation with persons with disabilities.

23. In 2010–2023, measures on disability inclusion in recovery and reconciliation were mentioned by 12 per cent of Member States, mainly in post-conflict contexts. For example, Nepal established a trust fund to support persons with disabilities affected by conflict and provided, among other measures, rehabilitation centres, a livelihood allowance and a monthly allowance. Few Member States (about 10 per cent) described disability-inclusive measures on violence against women and/or non-discrimination against persons with disabilities who were forced to flee, including through reasonable accommodation and accessibility of asylum procedures. Only three countries reported on disability inclusion in military operations.

24. Since 2010, a quarter of Member States committed to inclusive humanitarian action in foreign policies, assistance and bilateral cooperation. For example, bilateral aid supported Iraq in strengthening inclusive preparedness for situations of risk in primary health care. In 2023, most Member States established partnerships and networks in the disaster risk reduction and humanitarian domains, with the United Nations system (83 per cent), civil society (94 per cent) and the private sector (78 per cent).

25. Countries also spearheaded the Global Disability Summits in 2018 and 2022, which provided a platform to galvanize disability inclusion, including in situations of risk, by inviting commitments from national Governments, multilateral agencies, donors, foundations and private sector and civil society organizations. Across the two Summits, 283 commitments focused on situations of risk.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and International Disability Alliance, “Global Disability Summit +2 years: progress on implementation of commitments”, 2021.

## **D. United Nations system entities and other intergovernmental organizations**

26. In 2023, among United Nations system entities and intergovernmental organizations that reported on their work in situations of risk, 95 per cent of them include persons with disabilities in their work: 86 per cent through mainstreaming disability in their programmes and 9 per cent through targeted interventions focusing on persons with disabilities. Most of this disability-inclusive work involves producing guidelines (95 per cent), developing partnerships (83 per cent), producing publications (72 per cent) and building capacity (72 per cent), while a smaller number have field operations (55 per cent) and provide direct financial support (44 per cent). For instance, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action – the first system-wide operational guidelines – identify key actions across sectors that must be taken to ensure that persons with disabilities are not left behind in the planning, design, implementation and monitoring of humanitarian action and also establish the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in making humanitarian action more disability-inclusive.

27. Consultations with persons with disabilities as part of this work happens in most organizations (94 per cent). For example, the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities implemented a joint programme in Ukraine in 2022, in partnership with 19 organizations of persons with disabilities, to make humanitarian response plans more disability-inclusive, including for women and girls with disabilities.

28. In their work and activities, most United Nations entities and intergovernmental organizations (78 per cent) used accessible formats for persons with disabilities, including accessible document/PDF format (93 per cent), captioning (85 per cent), sign language interpretation (78 per cent) and easy-to-read formats (64 per cent), while Braille and ePub format were less common (36 per cent). For example, in Indonesia, the United Nations Development Programme is developing a prototype of an accessible, wearable early warning system supported by both text and voice communication channels.

29. Entities have also been promoting disability-inclusive humanitarian action by collecting data disaggregated by disability. Efforts on data include the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) integrating the Washington Group short set of questions on functioning<sup>19</sup> in the registration of forcibly displaced persons and the guidance of the International Organization for Migration on using the Washington Group questions in multisectoral needs assessments.

30. Half of the United Nations entities and intergovernmental organizations agreed that the lack of funding represents a critical barrier to expanding disability inclusion in situations of risk, followed by the lack of training for staff in disability-inclusive approaches (37 per cent) and the need to improve consultations with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations (31 per cent).

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<sup>19</sup> The Washington Group short set contains six questions for use on national censuses and surveys that were developed, tested and adopted by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, under the aegis of the Statistical Commission. The questions measure difficulty in functioning in six basic actions that, in an unaccommodating environment, would result in heightened risk of limited social participation. See <https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/question-sets/wg-short-set-on-functioning-wg-ss/>.



## **E. Civil society**

31. Organizations of persons with disabilities have been advocating the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and have been major players in increasingly established partnerships to address gaps in this field. Existing partnerships include the Reference Group on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action and the thematic group on disaster risk reduction and climate action of the Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities for Sustainable Development. These partnerships gather organizations of persons with disabilities, wider civil society organizations and United Nations entities. Moreover, the International Disability Alliance, jointly with the International Disability and Development Consortium and other partners, developed and launched a training module on article 11 of the Convention to exchange experiences and lessons learned, enhance capacities and build partnerships between organizations of persons with disabilities and humanitarian actors. The International Disability Alliance has also partnered with UNHCR and Education Cannot Wait to enhance the engagement of organizations of persons with disabilities in emergencies, while the Global Alliance for Disaster Resource Acceleration enhances direct funding to organizations of persons with disabilities to lead efforts before, during and after disasters, such as the earthquake in Türkiye and in the Syrian Arab Republic. At the country-level, the Age and Disability Working Group in Bangladesh promotes a disability-inclusive cross-sector humanitarian response to the Rohingya crisis.

32. Organizations of persons with disabilities and other civil society organizations face constraints in carrying out this work. In 2023, about 50 per cent of the civil society organizations indicated they would need more financial resources and capacity-building on disability-inclusive approaches in situations of risk. About a third highlighted the need for better data and statistics and the need to further strengthen partnerships with various stakeholders.

## **III. Promoting and mainstreaming easy-to-understand communication as an accessibility resource and tool for persons with disabilities**

### **A. International normative framework**

33. Easy-to-understand communication relies on easy and clear ways to make information, written and oral, accessible to everyone, especially persons with intellectual disabilities, ensuring that everyone can participate fully in society. Easy-to-understand communication often relies on linguistic cues (e.g. simpler words, shorter sentences and clearer structure) as well as non-linguistic cues (e.g. visual images). Despite its importance, few instruments of the international normative framework refer explicitly to easy-to-understand communication. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has references to easy-to-read formats to facilitate access to public buildings (article 9) and voting procedures, facilities and materials (article 29). In the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, States are called upon to encourage public media to use easy-to-understand communication to raise public awareness and understanding and in the dissemination of information on disaster risks and hazards (resolution [69/283](#), annex II, para. 36 (d)). The Human Rights Council, in its resolution [28/4](#) requested the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare and make available an easy-to-read version of its report. It also requested the Special Rapporteur on the rights of

persons with disabilities to report to the Council and the General Assembly in easy-to-read reports.<sup>20</sup>

34. Despite the limited explicit references, easy-to-understand communication is key for the implementation of many international agreements, including various articles in the Convention, such as promoting access to information and the sharing of ideas and knowledge (article 4), exercising the right to freedom of expression and opinion (article 21), accessing education (article 24) and making independent living possible (article 19). Easy-to-understand communication is also key for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, with target 16.10 relating to ensuring public access to information.

## **B. Overview of current situation, efforts and progress so far**

### **1. Member States**

35. In 2010–2023, a third of Member States developed laws and policies that require the production of documents and the dissemination of information using easy-to-understand communication. Consultations with persons with disabilities in producing these frameworks occurred in 78 per cent of countries. Europe had the highest share of Member States with such legal provisions (39 per cent) whereas Africa had the lowest (15 per cent).

36. In 2023, a much higher percentage of countries had laws and policies that require the use of easy-to-understand communication: 90 per cent. For example, the Marshall Islands mandate that election, campaign and voting materials be made available in easy-to-read format. Most of these countries developed these laws and policies in consultation with persons with disabilities (94 per cent). These laws and policies were disseminated in accessible formats (about 90 per cent), mainly through accessible document/PDF format (78 per cent). Easy-to-read format, ePub and Braille were used in a third of these Member States.

37. In 2010–2023, only about a third of all Member States had released documents using easy-to-understand communication: most of the Member States in Europe (61 per cent), just a fifth in Africa and Oceania and about a third in Asia and the Americas. By 2023, 92 per cent of countries responding to the note verbale of the Secretariat reported that they had released documents using easy-to-understand communication. For example, Mexico disseminated information through social media messages in easy-to-read format to raise awareness of situations of risk affecting persons with disabilities. Japan produced visual materials on global warming using easy-to-understand communication.

38. Consultations with persons with disabilities to produce easy-to-understand communication have also become more common in recent years. While in 2010–2023, 55 per cent consulted with persons with disabilities to produce documents using easy-to-understand communication, in 2023, consultations with persons with disabilities were held in 97 per cent of the countries. For example, in Ecuador, the National Federation of People with Intellectual Disabilities and their Families began, in 2018, a project to train educational institutions in using easy-to-read formats. Ireland worked with organizations of persons with disabilities and service users to develop information and materials to guide persons with intellectual disabilities in their decision-making with respect to informed consent to COVID-19 vaccination.

39. In 2023, countries indicated the lack of financial resources (64 per cent), the lack of services producing easy-to-understand communication in national languages

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<sup>20</sup> Adopted by the Human Rights Council in its resolutions [26/20](#), [35/6](#) and [44/10](#).

(60 per cent) and low levels of awareness (55 per cent) as the major barriers to the production of easy-to-understand communication at the country level.

## 2. United Nations system entities and other intergovernmental organizations

40. In 2023, many United Nations system entities and intergovernmental organizations (70 per cent), in their response to the note verbale from the Secretariat, reported that they had previously published documents using easy-to-understand communication and 94 per cent of them had done so in consultation with persons with disabilities. However, policy frameworks to support easy-to-understand communication are lacking: only two entities have a policy on the use of easy-to-understand communication – in both entities, the policies were developed in consultation with persons with disabilities.

41. On a broader level, since 2019, the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy has been promoting sustainable and transformative progress on disability inclusion through all pillars of the work of the United Nations. Importantly, the Strategy's accountability framework includes a specific indicator on accessibility, including the accessibility of conferences and events, in order to support entities and country teams in assessing and enhancing physical and digital accessibility, including in relation to communications.

42. Multilingualism is generally lacking in the production of easy-to-understand communication across the United Nations system, as most documents using easy-to-understand communication are published in English only. Harmonization is also lacking. For United Nations documents that have harmonized templates (e.g. resolutions, reports of the Secretary-General, flagship publications), no template exists yet for producing these documents using easy-to-understand communication, resulting in a myriad of formats for easy-to-understand communication. Moreover, documents using easy-to-understand communication are often posted on websites that are not in easy-to-understand format, making it challenging for persons using these communication formats to effectively navigate and find them independently.

43. About 61 per cent of United Nations entities and intergovernmental organizations perceive the lack of financial resources as a key barrier to increasing the use of easy-to-understand communication; half of these organizations indicate that the lack of awareness among their staff of easy-to-understand communication is a key barrier; and 40 per cent highlight that the lack of an organizational policy on easy-to-understand communication slows down the promotion and use of easy-to-understand communication.

44. United Nations entities have also invested in producing guidelines for easy-to-understand communication. For example, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action and the World Health Organization, in *Communicating risk in public health emergencies: a WHO guideline for emergency risk communication policy and practice*, include provisions on producing easy-to-understand communication. The Disability-Inclusive Communications Guidelines,<sup>21</sup> which were developed by the Department of Global Communications in collaboration with the disability team in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, members of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy focal point network and in consultation with the International Disability Alliance, also provide guidance and information pertaining to easy-to-read and other accessible formats for the United Nations system.

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<sup>21</sup> United Nations, *Disability-Inclusive Communications Guidelines* (March 2022), available at <https://www.un.org/en/disabilitystrategy/resources>.

### 3. Civil society

45. As of 2023, most civil society organizations (58 per cent) had released documents using easy-to-understand communication and done so in consultation with persons with disabilities (85 per cent). For example, Special Olympics International developed its Global Strategic Plan 2021–2024 in an easy-to-read format highlighting the role of easy-to-understand communication to make organizational practices more inclusive.

46. Some organizations also produced guidelines in this regard. For instance, Inclusion International and Down Syndrome International developed, in consultation with over 3,000 self-advocates, the “Listen Include Respect” guidelines to provide guidance for organizations on how to engage persons with intellectual disabilities in their work and decision-making processes. The guidelines set standards for inclusive participation using easy-to-understand communication, in written reports, videos and in other communication.

47. About 70 per cent of civil society organizations highlight that the lack of financial resources is a key barrier to increasing the use of easy-to-understand communication, and 40 per cent underline the need to raise awareness among their staff on easy-to-understand communication.

## IV. Conclusions and recommendations

### A. Ensuring the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies

48. There has been increasing action in recent years by countries, United Nations system entities, intergovernmental organizations and civil society organizations to develop interventions to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including through partnerships of various stakeholders. Such action includes a larger number of legal and policy frameworks that are disability-inclusive, the increased availability and accessibility of premises, services and information, including shelters, early warning systems and emergency numbers, as well as services that provide assistive technology, rehabilitation and other support during emergencies. Moreover, an increasing number of Governments, United Nations system entities and other intergovernmental organizations now consult with persons with disabilities on measures related to the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk. Although considerable progress has been made, in particular by Member States, disability inclusion is more common in national disaster-related frameworks and less common in national climate change frameworks.

49. Despite these positive developments, persons with disabilities remain among the worst affected in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies. More efforts are needed to implement laws and policies to ensure that no one is left behind in these contexts. To guide future policy, it will be critical to invest in accessibility for all, expand consultations with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, and gather feedback from persons with disabilities on their experiences in situations of risk.

**50. Member States are encouraged to further demonstrate their political commitment to the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk by making humanitarian assistance and disaster prevention, response, recovery and reconstruction disability-inclusive. To this end, they may wish to:**

(a) **Develop and implement, in consultation with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, national and local disaster risk reduction strategies and plans and climate change adaptation plans that are in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and that include the perspectives and needs of persons with disabilities;**

(b) **Ensure access to information, services and assistance for all persons with disabilities by producing early warning systems and providing information and communications about situations of risk in accessible formats for persons with disabilities, by promoting access to basic services, as well as rehabilitation, assistive technologies and mental health and psychosocial support for all persons with disabilities in situations of risk, by strengthening the preparedness of persons with disabilities in emergency and disaster situations, and by ensuring non-discrimination in and equality of access to international protection of persons with disabilities fleeing from situations of conflict or persecution, providing reasonable accommodation and making related procedures and services accessible;**

(c) **Build capacity and sensitivity for disability inclusion among personnel involved in disaster and emergency response and humanitarian assistance, including emergency first responders, by raising awareness of the needs and perspectives of persons with disabilities, promoting consultations with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, and including provisions for disability inclusion in government protocols and procedures;**

(d) **Raise awareness and build capacity among military, peacebuilding and peacekeeping personnel regarding the needs and perspectives of civilians with disabilities, while ensuring the meaningful engagement of persons with disabilities in military operations and peacebuilding and strengthening the capacities of civil society organizations to participate in these processes;**

(e) **Promote the use of international standards and guidelines related to the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action;**

(f) **Enhance the collection, dissemination and use of data on persons with disabilities in situations of risk, disaggregated by age and gender, using internationally agreed methods such as the Washington Group tools, in consultation with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations;**

(g) **Increase public resources for disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction and encourage joint programming and multi-stakeholder partnerships with a cross-sectorial approach involving relevant stakeholders.**

## **B. Easy-to-understand communication**

51. Access to information is a fundamental human right and a precondition for full participation in society and independent living. Upholding this right requires that the format and the dissemination of information are accessible to persons with disabilities. With easy-to-understand communication, more persons with disabilities, including persons with intellectual disabilities, can access and deliver pertinent information. Promoting the use of easy-to-understand communication is critical given that the participation of persons with intellectual disabilities in international and national decision-making processes is often hindered by a lack of accessible means of communication.

52. Several countries have laws and policies requiring the use of easy-to-understand communication and have produced documents in this format. Most laws and policies were developed in consultation with persons with disabilities, which is a key principle for promoting easy-to-understand communication. Most United Nations entities and intergovernmental organizations have produced documents in this format, but explicit policies requiring the use of easy-to-understand communication are lacking. Moreover, most easy-to-understand documents in these entities are not available in multiple languages.

53. Among both countries and United Nations entities, easy-to-understand communication is one of the least available of the existing accessible formats, being used much less than accessible document and PDF formats, sign language or captioning. This suggests that the broad accessibility provisions in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which most countries have ratified, are not sufficient to promote the wider use of easy-to-understand communication. In order to improve accessibility, explicit requirements for easy-to-understand communication may be needed at the national level and within the United Nations system.

54. While many civil society organizations produce and use easy-to-understand communication, many others are not able to do so. A lack of financial resources is the main barrier limiting the ability of countries, United Nations entities, other intergovernmental organizations and civil society organizations to increase their use of easy-to-understand communication.

**55. Member States are encouraged to further demonstrate their political commitment to accessible communication by adopting comprehensive strategies to promote the development and use of easy-to-understand communication. To this end, they may wish to:**

(a) **Allocate funding and human resources to the production of easy-to-understand communication at the international, regional and national levels, including through voluntary contributions to the multi-partner trust fund of the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the United Nations Voluntary Fund on Disability;**

(b) **Request the production of key documents of international processes in easy-to-understand communication in all official languages of the United Nations, including for resolutions of the General Assembly related to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities or to other matters concerning persons with disabilities, for documents of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the general comments of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and for mandated summit-level meetings of the General Assembly and other intergovernmental processes and major United Nations conferences;**

(c) **Collaborate with representative organizations of persons with disabilities, particularly organizations led by persons with intellectual disabilities, to develop guidelines and policies, both for countries and for entities of the United Nations system, to promote the use of easy-to-understand communication;**

(d) **Invest in awareness-raising and capacity-building among civil servants, United Nations personnel and civil society on easy-to-understand communication;**

(e) **Regularly monitor the production of easy-to-understand communication to identify and address gaps and to guide future policies on the promotion and use of this form of communication.**