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Enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities to conferences and meetings of the United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in response to General Assembly resolution [74/253](#), in which the Assembly urged the Secretary-General to implement the 10 recommendations contained in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities to conferences and meetings of the United Nations system ([JIU/REP/2018/6](#)) in all United Nations facilities, conferences and meetings. The Assembly also invited the executive heads and the legislative bodies of the United Nations system organizations to address the relevant recommendations in their organizations, without prejudice to the measures taken in the framework of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. The Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to submit to it, at the main part of its seventy-fifth session, a progress report on the implementation of the resolution. The preparation of the present report and reporting on the progress made were delayed significantly owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

The progress made in the implementation of recommendations contained in the report of the Unit is described in the present report.



I. Overview

1. Conferences and meetings are a central component of the deliberative and decision-making processes of the United Nations. However, persons with disabilities face numerous technical, physical and other barriers that have an impact on their full and equal participation in those events. In 2018, following a proposal by the Secretariat, the Joint Inspection Unit conducted a review of the status of accessibility for persons with disabilities to United Nations system conferences and meetings in order to assess the existing barriers and consider how they can be addressed.

2. In the note by the Secretary-General ([A/74/217/Add.1](#)), the organizations of the United Nations system welcomed the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities to conferences and meetings of the United Nations system ([JIU/REP/2018/6](#)) and provided comments on its findings and recommendations. In its resolution [74/253](#), the General Assembly, having considered the note on the report of the Unit, as well as the comments of the Secretary-General and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination thereon, urged the Secretary-General to implement all 10 recommendations contained in the report of the Unit in all United Nations facilities, conferences and meetings, as appropriate, in a timely manner, and invited the executive heads and the legislative bodies of the United Nations system organizations to address the relevant recommendations in their organizations, without prejudice to the measures taken in the framework of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. Furthermore, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it, at the main part of its seventy-fifth session, a progress report on the implementation of the resolution.

3. In the present report, the Secretary-General reviews the current state of accessibility of United Nations conferences and events, outlines the progress made by the Secretariat in implementing the 10 recommendations and describes the plans of the Secretariat for their full implementation. The preparation of the present report and reporting on the progress made were delayed significantly owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which also underscored the additional vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities and the need for tools to enable them to participate fully on an equal basis with others. Lessons learned in that regard will be beneficial in striving to ensure the equal participation of persons with disabilities in United Nations conferences and events.

II. Progress made in enhancing accessibility

4. Accessibility efforts by the Secretariat are guided by General Assembly resolutions [73/341](#) and [74/253](#), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, which has a dedicated indicator covering conferences and events (indicator 6.1). Under the Strategy, persons with disabilities must be provided with accessible and inclusive services, and access to physical spaces and to information. Along with the physical environment, digital spaces must also be designed to be accessible by all.

A. Headquarters

5. A significant proactive initiative at Headquarters was the procurement of the expert services of consultants in June 2018 to conduct a review of the accessibility of Headquarters premises and facilities, which coincided with the review conducted by the Joint Inspection Unit. The review by the consultants, together with feedback received from persons with disabilities who use the premises and facilities, and

consultations with the Steering Committee on Accessibility, served as the basis for a three-year plan for making accessibility improvements at Headquarters. The implementation of the plan started in 2020 and continued in 2021. Owing to delays caused by the pandemic, work is expected to be completed in 2023. To date, the improvements made include adjusting bathrooms to make them more accessible, installing power-assisted doors, creating a wheelchair-accessible entrance at street level and designing a wheelchair lift for access to the rostrum in the General Assembly Hall.

6. The pandemic has severely hindered accessibility efforts, while also throwing into stark relief the imperative for Headquarters to improve its operations, as the unexpected shift to remote working highlighted urgent changes that were needed to enable persons with disabilities to participate in conferences and meetings on an equal basis. The limitations of existing platforms and software created challenges in ensuring proper access for persons with disabilities to virtual meetings, in particular for users who are blind or visually impaired. Frequent adjustments and adaptations were made throughout 2020 and 2021 in order to meet requirements, respond to feedback and identify optimal ways of ensuring access.

7. The accessibility of documentation and meeting services at Headquarters has been improved, and consistent efforts have been made to mainstream accessibility and raise awareness of inclusion. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management used its own network of specific area focal points and continues to coordinate with other service providers and offices that have different areas of expertise and ownership of the systems and processes, such as the Office of Information and Communications Technology, the Facilities and Commercial Activities Service and the Procurement Division. Accessibility efforts included coordinating requirements, conducting outreach to users, making arrangements for accessible seating, operating the Accessibility Centre, working on raising awareness among technology providers, drafting accessible documentation and providing sign interpretation. For example, as part of the work to improve the accessibility of registration systems, an online request form was launched in 2020 to facilitate requests for services and accessibility requirements for meetings.

8. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management has also engaged in ongoing consultations with organizations representing or working for persons with disabilities, and other partners, to improve accessibility and address digital accessibility gaps that were exacerbated by the pandemic. During remote working, and even with a very limited on-site presence, Braille printing services continued to be provided and accessible seating arrangements in the meeting rooms remained operational.

9. Remote sign interpretation has been provided since 2019 using videoconference technology. The practice has evolved from early testing, at the request of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, into a standard process. The Department recruited and coordinated sign interpreters for meetings that have regular budget entitlements for sign interpretation or were funded from extrabudgetary sources. Using the above-mentioned combination of virtual meeting platforms and services, the Office of Information and Communications Technology, in cooperation with the Department, was able to offer integrated accessibility support.

10. The Office of Information and Communications Technology deployed three standard commercial platforms for virtual meetings depending on the requirements of the meeting or event: Microsoft Teams, Webex and Zoom. Each of these platforms incorporates elements aimed at meeting accessibility standards. A communication access real-time translation service is provided at United Nations calendar meetings upon request. The service is also provided, on a reimbursable basis, at non-calendar

meetings and special events upon request. Since the pandemic began, the service has been provided remotely and connected by videoconference. All platforms used can accommodate the service, through an application programming interface.

B. Geneva

11. The United Nations Office at Geneva has published a standard operating procedure on accessible meetings and conferences on United Nations premises, which provides mandatory guidance and establishes that organizing an accessible meeting requires the involvement and coordination of a number of different services and a proactive, whole-of-Office approach to meeting the specific requirements of conference participants. The procedure covers the management of requests for reasonable accommodation and establishes the principle that accessibility is a right of all participants in meetings and conferences and the responsibility of all departments and services. The procedure establishes clear roles and best practices for each service and contributes to raising awareness and promoting strong leadership on accessibility matters.

12. In terms of physical access, persons with disabilities are automatically granted priority access upon arrival at the United Nations Office at Geneva and are given a badge that allows them to open the dedicated accessible door. They are also given a map of the premises on which accessible doors, elevators and restrooms are indicated. If visitors choose to drive to the Palais des Nations, priority parking spaces for persons with disabilities have been allocated. For meetings, accessibility requirements are registered through the Indico tool, a meeting participants management system administered by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. The Office is working on making the registration process in Indico fully accessible. Services such as International Sign interpretation and captioning are provided on the basis of entitlements or, upon request, under extrabudgetary funding. The Division of Conference Management works continuously to improve procedures and services in response to user feedback and in consultation with organizations representing persons with disabilities. Good practices for reasonable accommodation are recorded and included in a disability inclusion toolkit on the intranet.

13. The website of the United Nations Office at Geneva is fully accessible to persons with disabilities and provides overall guidance and information regarding accessibility. It was created in accordance with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines of the Web Accessibility Initiative of the World Wide Web Consortium and with the United Nations web accessibility guidelines. The website is tested using screen readers, and further work is being conducted to find solutions to elements of the website that are not compatible with the readers.

C. Nairobi

14. Accessibility services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi are provided for meetings and conferences on the basis of budgetary entitlements and typically include webcasting and online live audio broadcast; real-time captioning; interpretation in International Sign and national sign languages; and embossing in Braille. Guided by General Assembly resolution [73/341](#), the Office provides accessible seating for representatives with disabilities at its official meetings. Developments of speech-to-text and machine-reading technologies in a multilingual environment are being closely monitored for potential use.

15. The United Nations Office at Nairobi has a disability inclusion strategy action group, which is composed of staff from different services who work to identify gaps

and opportunities in order to transform the duty station into a more disability-inclusive environment. As part of its strategic capital review, the Office identified a number of shortcomings related to compliance with accessibility codes throughout its facilities. They are being addressed under the strategic capital maintenance programme, which includes plans for targeted large-scale capital investment in the offices, conference facilities and buildings across the complex. Taking into account the principles of universal design, the current conference facilities are not physically accessible and, given that they are distributed over multiple levels, can no longer be regarded as fit for purpose. While the new conference facilities will be expected to adhere to international standards and best practices in terms of accessibility, the design approach is not intended to simply follow code compliance; rather, an approach aimed at universal access will be adopted to provide a physical environment that promotes inclusion and the equitable needs of all persons regardless of their abilities.

16. As part of the strategic capital review, a detailed baseline accessibility condition assessment is being carried out to study existing facilities and identify the improvements required to ensure equitable physical access to the Nairobi complex for persons with disabilities. The process includes the use of information and communication technologies to support wayfinding and inclusion within meetings, activities and events. It is anticipated that the principles adopted for the works to ensure equitable physical access will set the design precedence for further works to be conducted across the campus as part of construction and improvement works planned for external areas, building links and other supporting facilities to realize universal access across the complex. To that end, the United Nations Office at Nairobi is also in the process of contracting professional services to carry out a baseline accessibility condition assessment of the existing complex as a whole in order to develop a far more comprehensive and robust plan for meeting acceptable standards of accessibility across the complex. Work began in 2021, and the plans will be implemented as a phased programme on an annual basis.

D. Vienna

17. Accessibility and universal design improvements at the Vienna International Centre are a collective effort across the Vienna-based organizations. A baseline analysis of the accessibility of the Centre to conference participants was conducted in 2019 with the Austrian Disability Council. The findings and recommendations were shared with common service providers at the Centre, including facilities management and security. An inventory of adaptive devices for conference participants has been prepared, and a list of additional items to be procured has been created with guidance from the Council.

18. The United Nations Office at Vienna has sought opportunities to acquire adaptive devices and retrofit conference room furniture in response to recommendations of external experts in order to meet the requirements of persons with disabilities. The frequent use of online meeting platforms during the pandemic, including for hybrid meetings with an in-person component, has resulted in the use of adaptive technologies such as automated closed captioning. Capacity-building activities include formal training for conference staff and tour guides in disability awareness.

19. Since the beginning of 2020, several improvements to the Vienna International Centre buildings have been made or are under way. Automatic sliding doors were installed at all ground-level main entrances, and the outside ramp was extended. Garage access points were equipped with sensors to alert people with disabilities that they are approaching the doors, and new railings, lighting and alarm systems were installed. Accessible elevators were installed in some buildings and are being installed

in the rest of the Centre. Renovations are planned to adapt the restroom facilities to meet Austrian accessibility standards.

E. Regional commissions

20. At the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), continuous efforts have been made to improve the accessibility of conferences and events. The ongoing project for modernizing the United Nations Conference Centre in Bangkok includes several accessibility enhancements, such as the installation of ramps, wheelchair-accessible seating arrangements, professional cameras for sign language interpretation and a closed-captioning system to support remote captioning. One conference room was reopened with these new features in 2019, and the renovation of the remaining conference rooms will be completed in 2022.

21. The ESCAP Accessibility Centre, which was established in 2015 thanks to extrabudgetary contributions, provides equipment for participants with disabilities to use while attending conferences and events at the Conference Centre. Discussions are being held to further improve the Accessibility Centre and to use it to raise awareness and promote the efforts of the United Nations and Member States to improve accessibility at the national, regional and global levels.

22. The ESCAP senior management team, led by the Executive Secretary, is working to improve the accessibility of all intergovernmental meetings. To support this effort, an artificial intelligence-based real-time captioning program was developed, which is cost-effective and efficient. The program has been used for intergovernmental and other meetings since 2020. International Sign interpretation has also been provided wherever possible, including during annual sessions of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, and the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development. ESCAP also encourages other United Nations entities that use the Conference Centre and/or the services of the Conference Management Unit to improve the accessibility of their meetings by offering the artificial intelligence-based real-time captioning service and International Sign interpretation.

23. ESCAP issued an internal guideline on accessible conferences and meetings in 2020, in order to provide practical support to staff in the preparation and delivery of disability-inclusive conferences and meetings. The guideline was based on a baseline assessment of accessibility and reasonable accommodation for conferences and events in 2017.

24. At the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), an accessibility centre was established in December 2019 to ensure the delivery of inclusive events and accommodate the needs of staff members, visitors and delegates with disabilities. The centre provides transportation services for persons with disabilities, as well as equipment such as video magnifiers for the visually impaired, a Braille embosser and manual, and motorized wheelchairs. In November 2020, the Commission adopted standard operating procedures for managing the accessibility requirements of persons with disabilities attending conferences and meetings at the United Nations Conference Centre in Addis Ababa.

25. The Publications and Conference Management Section has a focal point and alternates for accessibility, who are responsible for coordinating with other sections and departments to ensure that accessibility requirements are met in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. The in-house registration system used at ECA, iEvent, does not have accessible features, but a field has been added to the registration form in which attendees and event organizers can indicate whether they require any form of assistance. Once that information is received, all necessary support is provided to attendees from the time of their arrival,

including assistance with badge issuance, check-in at conference rooms and their exit from the compound. ECA is also working to deploy version 2 of the Indico registration system, which is expected to include some accessibility features. In addition, the client feedback questionnaire used at ECA includes questions relating to the accessibility of registration procedures, conference facilities, restrooms and catering areas. In response to the feedback received, the centre continues to improve the provision of reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities.

26. In March 2020, remote participation in all meetings and conferences held at ECA was enabled by means of a hybrid solution for conference production that included remote simultaneous interpretation. In addition, sign language and closed captioning services were provided for all major events. The Conference Centre is currently being upgraded with the installation of accessible podiums with adjustable lecterns for the two plenary rooms, and other accessibility improvements are planned.

27. ECA management is involved in the formulation of overall policies regarding accessibility, such as the finalization of an ECA disability inclusion strategy, communications guidelines on disability and a high-level policy document on disability inclusion. Conference staff are requested and encouraged to undergo online accessibility training as part of staff development plans. It is expected that 80 per cent of conference services staff will have received such training by the end of 2021.

28. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia has implemented standard operating procedures for accessibility and has achieved progress on an electronic workflow used for the submission of requests with related details, including accessibility requirements; the revamping of its website in line with minimum accessibility guidelines; the use of screens with sound in the elevators; and the increased use of the Indico tool for registering participants and their requirements. The Travel Unit has implemented accessibility guidelines for participants. In addition, accessibility measures have been put in place in the Main Hall and other conference rooms.

III. Status of implementation of the recommendations made by the Joint Inspection Unit

Recommendation 1

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should task the relevant offices with developing, by the end of 2020, a draft policy on the accessibility of conferences and meetings for persons with disabilities, as well as guidelines for policy implementation, and present them to their respective legislative bodies, should the endorsement of those bodies be required for the policy to take effect.

29. The Secretariat is developing guidelines on the accessibility of United Nations conferences and meetings for persons with disabilities, whether they are delegates, staff members, representatives of civil society or other participants, for Member State consideration. The guidelines will be aligned with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that relate to accessibility and the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. In the Convention, four key areas in which the concept of accessibility is vital are identified: the physical environment; transportation; information and communications; and other facilities and services open to the public.

30. In the context of United Nations conferences and events, persons with disabilities require equal access to meetings and events to be able to fully participate in decision-making on behalf of the Member States, organizations and groups that

they represent. To ensure such access, existing barriers to their participation need to be removed and a holistic approach based on universal design must be adopted.

31. In the guidelines on the accessibility of United Nations conferences and meetings, accessibility will be recognized as a fundamental human right and as the responsibility of everyone. That recognition is a prerequisite for ensuring that persons with disabilities are able to participate fully and effectively in meetings and conferences on an equal basis with all other persons. The guidelines will be drafted on the basis of the Convention, in particular articles 9 and 21, and in consultation with organizations representing persons with disabilities. The issuance of the guidelines will demonstrate the commitment of the Organization to ensuring and promoting the participation of persons with disabilities in United Nations meetings and conferences.

32. As will be established in the guidelines, accessibility should be fully incorporated into all renovation projects and the construction of new conference facilities in the United Nations conference hubs. The principles of universal design will be taken into account in the development of all new facilities, services and technologies relating to conferences and meetings, while existing facilities, services and technologies will be adapted to meet the requirements of persons with disabilities and, where this is not feasible, reasonable accommodations must be made.

33. The guidelines will also provide that accessibility checks should be carried out and requirements verified for conferences held outside Headquarters, and that all information and communications should be accessible to persons with disabilities. Such checks will be used to confirm that accessibility services, such as sign language interpretation and live captioning, are provided for all meetings entitled to receive them, including virtual and hybrid meetings. The guidelines will establish the principle that measures to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities and enable their equal participation in remote meetings on an equal basis with persons without disabilities should be implemented without prejudice to the requirement to ensure accessibility for their in-person participation. Also underscored in the guidelines will be the need for clear procedures for requesting reasonable accommodations and clearly defined criteria for approving or denying such requests, as well as the need to provide participants with access to focal points and accessibility centres.

34. Other key principles and standards will include the need to mainstream accessibility considerations in all workflows associated with planning, setting up and running accessible conference and events; and to establish a framework to consider feedback from persons with disabilities, in order to make recommendations on continuous improvements. The following elements will also be emphasized in the guidelines: the importance of consulting with persons with disabilities and their representatives, conducting regular walk-throughs and providing information on accessibility and accommodations in information notes, as well as establishing mechanisms to monitor the implementation of the standards established in the guidelines.

35. In order to implement the guidelines, various actions will need to be undertaken, including measures to ensure that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use. Statistical data and other appropriate information will need to be collected in order to identify and address the accessibility barriers faced by persons with disabilities and ensure accessibility for such persons. During such collection, data protection safeguards will need to be implemented to ensure confidentiality and respect for the privacy of persons with disabilities. In addition, internationally accepted norms to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms and ethical principles in the collection and use of statistics will need to be respected.

36. One or more focal points will need to be designated for matters relating to the implementation of the guidelines, and the Secretariat is considering the establishment or designation of a coordination mechanism to facilitate related action in different departments, divisions and sections.

37. On the basis of the above, the Secretariat will coordinate internally within its network of focal points and will consult with Member State steering committees and working groups on accessibility, individual delegates with disabilities, and representatives and organizations of persons with disabilities to further develop a comprehensive mission statement and guidelines on the accessibility of United Nations meetings and conferences.

Recommendation 2

For all major conferences that are hosted off the premises of United Nations system organizations, the executive heads of these organizations should ensure that accessibility requirements are clearly stipulated in individual agreements concluded with the hosting entity for specific conferences and meetings.

38. The Secretariat works with its host country counterparts to ensure that accessibility requirements are reflected in the host country agreement. These agreements stipulate the requirements for conference rooms, facilities and services, which include the provision of ramps for wheelchairs, accessible seating, assistive devices and related tools.

39. The Office of Legal Affairs provides advice and support to Secretariat offices and departments on host country and related agreements, including appropriate text for provisions on accessibility for inclusion by the United Nations and Member States that are hosting United Nations conferences and similar events held outside Headquarters. The venue in the host country is determined by the Government and the Secretariat office or department organizing the event.

Recommendation 3

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations that have not yet done so should appoint, by December 2021, a focal point on accessibility within their organization under terms of reference that clearly define the focal point's role and responsibilities as regards enhancing the accessibility of conferences and meetings for persons with disabilities.

40. The Disability Team in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General coordinates the system-wide focal point network for the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, which was established in June 2019, replacing the Interdepartmental Task Force on Accessibility. The network comprises focal points from across the United Nations system and covers accessibility as it is one of the key areas of the Strategy. The Department of Operational Support and the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance coordinate the network and have developed terms of reference for it. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management plays an active role given its lead on conference planning, documentation, interpretation, meetings support and the provision of technical secretariat services and the Accessibility Centre.

41. In 2019, a Disability Inclusion Team was established at the United Nations Office at Geneva, which includes representatives from every division, as well as staff members who bring personal experience of living with a disability. The Director of the Division of Conference Management is the Chair of the Team and the Geneva focal point for the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy.

42. Focal points for accessibility have also been appointed at the United Nations Offices at Vienna and Geneva and in the regional commissions to coordinate accessible services for meetings.

Recommendation 4

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should instruct relevant offices that address accessibility-related matters to develop, by December 2021, standard operating procedures with regard to their operational responsibilities to improve the accessibility of conferences and meetings for persons with disabilities.

43. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management reflects the subject of accessibility to conference services in the Compendium of Administrative Policies, Practices and Procedures of Technical Secretariat Services, Protocol and Liaison Services and Conference Services, which is subject to regular updates. The 2021 update of the Compendium covers access to conference facilities, seating arrangements, meetings, information, and electronic documentation. Coordination with all stakeholders, clear funding procedures and planning workflows, support provided through accessibility centres and awareness-raising are emphasized as means of assisting the delegates and participants with disabilities in contributing on equal terms to the work of the United Nations.

44. In 2019, the United Nations Office at Geneva developed and published on its website a comprehensive standard operating procedure on the organization of accessible meetings and conferences. The document constitutes best practice and a model for other duty stations and Headquarters. In addition, accessibility awareness training was arranged for staff of services who are in contact with persons with disabilities.

45. The standard operating procedure is applicable to the organization of accessible conferences and meetings held on the premises of the United Nations Office at Geneva, but it does not cover all the aspects relating to the organization of accessible conferences and meetings outside United Nations premises. The provisions of the document are applicable to the management of requests for reasonable accommodation from individuals who wish to attend and fully participate in a conference or meeting to be held on United Nations premises. The document provides guidance on the planning and organization of accessible meetings, with a view to enabling all individuals to attend and fully participate on an equal basis. The document is aimed at promoting a holistic, whole-of-Office approach to accessibility, based on the premise that accessibility is the right of all participants in meetings and conferences and the responsibility of all departments and services. It establishes clear guidelines regarding the role of each service concerned in enhancing accessibility and the inclusion of persons with disabilities and identifies best practices. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific also has an operational guide on disability-inclusive meetings.

46. The Office of Human Resources applies measures to ensure that disability inclusion considerations, including reasonable accommodation and accessibility, are incorporated into its issuances, especially since the launch of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. In addition to gathering expertise during the development of the Secretary-General's bulletin on employment and accessibility for staff members with disabilities in the United Nations Secretariat (ST/SGB/2014/3), the Office of Human Resources has contributed to the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy and other initiatives related to disability and accessibility, and its staff members have participated in specialized training on accessibility.

Recommendation 5

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should make it mandatory for organizers of meetings and conferences to ensure, by December 2021, that:

- (a) The participation of persons with disabilities is fully supported by registration processes that are accessible for persons with diverse disabilities;**
- (b) Clauses are included in accessible registration forms to ask specifically about accessibility requirements;**
- (c) Information on accessible facilities and services is disseminated to all potential participants through accessible websites and information notes;**
- (d) Accessible post-conference and post-meeting satisfaction surveys consistently include questions to assess satisfaction with the accessibility of facilities and services.**

47. At Headquarters, work is under way to ensure that registration processes are fully accessible to persons with disabilities. An online request form was launched in the first quarter of 2020 to facilitate requests for services and accessibility requirements for meetings, and there are plans to introduce post-meeting surveys to assess satisfaction with the accessibility of facilities and services. The introduction of an online request form proved particularly timely when in-person visits were precluded by the lockdown that forced the Accessibility Centre in New York to remain closed.

48. Since the resumption of on-site operations, information on accessible facilities and services is provided through the Accessibility Centre. In addition, efforts are being made to ensure that participants have access to focal points and to mainstream accessibility considerations in all aspects of meeting planning and organization. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management is working to continuously improve registration systems and ensure that participants are provided with adequate information on accessible facilities and services. Regular coordination meetings and walk-throughs are scheduled by the organizers of events that require accessible services in order to consult with persons with disabilities and their representatives and fine-tune requirements to actual needs.

49. In Geneva, the registration process in Indico is being improved to ensure that it is fully accessible. Organizing secretariats can already complete a form that includes questions relating to accessibility requirements. The website of the United Nations Office at Geneva is accessible to persons with disabilities and provides overall guidance and information regarding accessibility. The website is tested using screen readers, and further work is being conducted to find solutions to elements of the website that are not compatible with the readers.

50. An accessibility guide is provided as part of the efforts to make United Nations meetings and conferences in Geneva more accessible. There is also an evaluation survey that meeting participants can use to provide feedback. A new tool was created to generate seating charts showing the amenities and accessibility features in each meeting room. Seating charts can be printed in large format and displayed near conference room entrances to help delegates to find seating.

51. The Conference Management Service at the United Nations Office at Vienna has encouraged secretariats to request information on accessibility needs in conference registration forms to better understand the requirements of meeting attendees and encourage participation, and to provide information on accessibility in the information for conference participants. It has also provided input to a guide for

meeting organizers on accessibility to meetings and conferences at the Vienna International Centre, with a view to facilitating the participation of persons with disabilities.

Recommendation 6

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should, by December 2021, provide the option for remote participation in all meetings and conferences that they organize, with no prejudice to the efforts to make attendance at meetings and conferences accessible to persons with disabilities.

52. Since May 2020, the United Nations Secretariat at Headquarters, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi has implemented remote participation in meetings held during the COVID-19 pandemic (virtual and hybrid meetings) using remote simultaneous interpretation and platforms that are fully accessible to persons with disabilities as a business continuity measure. Challenges faced by persons with disabilities in accessing virtual meetings were reported and subsequently, the Secretariat worked on awareness-raising with platform providers and coordinated with the Office of Information and Communications Technology to find the best ways to remediate and improve access.

53. While remote participation in meetings through commercial remote simultaneous interpretation platforms has been enabled on an exceptional basis to ensure business continuity during the pandemic, if this were desired as a permanent feature, a specific mandate from Member States and the appropriation of the associated funding would be necessary to extend the remote simultaneous interpretation service beyond this exceptional period in the light of the significant operating costs and challenges involved in running virtual and hybrid meetings.

Recommendation 7

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should issue instructions to information and communications technology and facilities management offices to undertake periodic accessibility assessments of organizational facilities and services for conferences and meetings, and to ensure that organizations of persons with disabilities are adequately consulted at all stages of the process.

54. With respect to issuing instructions to undertake periodic accessibility assessments, Headquarters is in the process of implementing a three-year plan of accessibility improvements resulting from an assessment of the accessibility of the premises that was conducted in 2018. It is expected that the plan will be completed in 2023, following some delays resulting from the pandemic. A funding request to conduct an assessment of the accessibility of the Headquarters premises will be included in the regular budget submission for 2024.

55. The Disability Team in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General published guidelines on consultation with persons with disabilities in August 2021.

Recommendation 8

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should task procurement offices with drafting, by December 2021, provisions for incorporating accessibility checks and/or requirements into procurement policies and guidelines for consideration and adoption by the relevant decision-making authority.

56. The Procurement Network of the High-level Committee on Management, with support from the Disability Team in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, published guidelines on disability inclusion for procurement in November 2020. The

revised Procurement Manual reflects accessibility considerations in the procurement process and ensures, to the extent reasonably possible, that new acquisitions will not create new barriers. The following provisions of the Manual incorporate accessibility considerations:

- **Section 4.4.** “To provide an inclusive environment for persons with disabilities, the Requisitioner shall ensure, within reason, that accessibility considerations are factored into the requirements definition and that new acquisitions do not create new barriers”.
- **Section 5.2.** Furthermore, care should be taken to ensure that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), not-for-profit, minority-, women-owned businesses, and/or disability-inclusive suppliers are not excluded from the market research. Due consideration should be given to communication channels in the local language(s) to reach this specific audience and ensure effective international competition”.
- **Section 15.2.** “The social dimension of the sustainable agenda considers the promotion of human rights, elimination of child labour, fair labour conditions, gender equality, and wider ethical issues in the supply chain. For instance, to enable the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy calls for specific action to raise the standards of the United Nations performance on disability inclusion across its operations, such as the inclusion of accessibility considerations into relevant procurement activities”.

57. The Procurement Division’s external website has been upgraded to include new accessibility features, enabling access to valuable information to various stakeholders, including, for example, the business community seeking potential tender opportunities and Member States accessing procurement statistics.

58. The Secretariat has adopted the definition of disability-inclusive suppliers and included it in its outreach described in the Vendor Outreach Standard Operating Procedure issued in January 2021.

59. In order to ensure that all procurement colleagues across the Secretariat are aware of accessibility and disability-inclusion in the acquisition process, the Procurement Division held a dedicated session on this subject during the Chief Procurement Officer Virtual Conference in September 2020, which was attended by chiefs of procurement from over 35 Secretariat entities. The recorded presentation continues to be available to the Secretariat procurement community online.

60. In 2020, the Secretariat worked together with other United Nations system organizations in the Procurement Network of the High-level Committee on Management as part of a task force on the implementation of the Disability Inclusion Strategy in procurement, and contributed to the publication, in October 2020, of a guidance document that will help all United Nations system organizations to effectively and coherently implement the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy across all procurement functions in the United Nations system (www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2020_un_disability_inclusion_strategy_guidelines_indicator_8.pdf).

61. Furthermore, the updated version of the source selection plan is being reviewed and finalized in order to prompt the consideration of disability-inclusive suppliers in the sourcing of bidders and enable the recording of such assessments for the measurement of relevant key performance indicators.

62. Through the implementation of e-tendering, the Organization is working towards making the procurement procedures and documents accessible for persons

with disabilities. The extent to which the e-tendering system can be made accessible needs to be further discussed with the solution implementation team, as doing so will be a complex undertaking.

63. With regard to meeting the requirements under indicator 8 (“Target is established and met for number/percentage of relevant procurement documents that have accessibility as a mandatory requirement”), the approval of the General Assembly would be needed. The current procurement framework mandated by the General Assembly does not specifically allow for social considerations in the development of the procurement strategies under which disability-inclusive procurement practices would fall.

Recommendation 9

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should develop and implement through relevant inter-agency mechanisms, by December 2021, a common system-wide mandatory specialized training module on disability inclusion and accessibility for personnel involved directly or indirectly in the servicing of conferences and meetings, including, but not limited to, staff in conference management, facilities and services management, human resources management, and procurement, legal, information and communications technology, medical, public information and safety and security services.

64. The Office of Human Resources will shortly be rolling out a newly designed disability inclusion course in line with the commitment to “leave no one behind” to promote an inclusive development agenda that fosters equal opportunities for all. The objective of the training course “Disability inclusion: building an inclusive and accessible United Nations” is to contribute to building in the Secretariat a working environment that is inclusive of and welcoming for persons with disabilities by enhancing awareness and understanding among personnel of disability and working with persons with disabilities.

Recommendation 10

The legislative bodies of United Nations system organizations should include in their agendas the review of periodic reports submitted to them on the state of accessibility of conference and meeting facilities and services for persons with disabilities, including the state of progress of actions to address accessibility deficits.

65. This recommendation is addressed to the legislative bodies. In the case of the United Nations, the Secretary-General will be providing regular reporting as requested by the General Assembly.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

66. The Secretary-General has implemented a number of the recommendations and will continue to take action on others as outlined above.

67. The General Assembly may wish to take note of the present report.