

55th session of the Human Rights Council

Annual high-level panel discussion on human rights mainstreaming

Theme: Harnessing multilateral efforts to embed, amplify and realize the rights of persons with disabilities, with a focus on full and effective participation and inclusion in society

Concept note (as of 22 February 2024)

- Date and venue:** **Monday, 26 February 2024, 4 to 6 p.m.**
Room XX, Palais des Nations, Geneva
(broadcast live and archived at <https://webtv.un.org>)
- Objectives:** The annual high-level panel discussion will gather high-level representatives of United Nations agencies and funds, Member and observer States and other stakeholders.
- The panel discussion will focus on challenges to and progress made in the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS). It will set out next steps for strengthened implementation of the UNDIS and the promotion of the human rights of persons with disabilities in the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly. In particular, it will consider how to work in partnership with persons with disabilities at regional and country level to make the UNDIS a reality in technical cooperation. Speakers and panellists will share their views, good practices and challenges.
- Chair:** **H.E. Mr. Omar Zniber**, President of the Human Rights Council
- Opening statements:** **H.E. Mr. Dennis Francis**, President of the 78th session of the General Assembly
Mr. Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Panellists:**
- **Ms. Catherine Russell**, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (*video message*) and **Ms. Regina De Dominicis**, Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia of the United Nations Children's Fund (*concluding remarks*)
 - **Mr. Gilbert F. Hounbo**, Director-General of the International Labour Organization
 - **Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus**, Director-General of the World Health Organization
 - **Ms. Catalina Devandas**, Executive Director of the Disability Rights Fund and former Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities
- Statement by a representative from the disability rights movement:** **Ms. Zhang Haidi**, on behalf of the Chinese Federation of Persons with Disabilities
- Outcomes:** The panel discussion will contribute to the following outcomes:
- Increased understanding of the issues relevant to the human rights of persons with disabilities and mainstreaming of disability rights in the United Nations system;
 - Recognition of the role that persons with disabilities play as agents of development and the importance of counting with support systems that enable their participation;
 - Renewed commitment to support, promote and implement the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy;

- Increased awareness of the changes needed in culture and institutional frameworks for the United Nations to become an employer of choice;
- Identifying measures to encourage the active engagement of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations at the regional level and at the country level with United Nations country teams and field presences of United Nations entities;
- Strengthened coordination and collaboration between United Nations entities on disability rights, including through the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Multi Partner Trust Fund;
- Identify sustainable solutions to advance disability inclusion at country level, to achieve systemic and policy changes including cross sectorial intervention and participatory multi-stakeholder efforts;
- Presentation, through concrete examples, of the advancements and challenges faced by United Nations entities in the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy;
- Recognition of the value of investing in and empowering persons with disabilities of all ages, including women with disabilities, at regional and country level to defend and advance human rights;
- Increased awareness on the need to mobilize global political support on disability rights; and
- Increased understanding of the role of Member States in supporting the programmatic mainstreaming of disability rights across different sectors.

Mandate:

In paragraph 42 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21, the Human Rights Council decided to hold an annual panel discussion to interact with heads of governing bodies and secretariats of United Nations agencies and funds within their respective mandates on specific human rights themes with the objective of promoting the mainstreaming of human rights throughout the United Nations system.

At its organizational session, held on 8 December 2023, the Human Rights Council decided that the theme of the 2024 panel discussion would be *“Harnessing multilateral efforts to embed, amplify and realize the rights of persons with disabilities with a focus on full and effective participation and inclusion in society.”*

The annual high-level panel discussion will include a segment for a statement by a representative from the disability rights movement, in the spirit of the motto “nothing about us without us”, which resonates with the philosophy and history of the disability rights movement and relies on the principle of meaningful participation.

Format:

The panel discussion will be limited to two hours. The opening statements, initial presentations by the panellists and the statement by a representative from the disability rights movement will be followed by a two-part interactive discussion, and by conclusions from the panellists. A maximum of one hour will be set aside for the podium, including the opening statements, panellists’ presentations, their responses to questions and concluding remarks. The remaining hour will be reserved for two segments of interventions from the floor, with each segment consisting of interventions from 14 States or observers, 2 national human rights institutions and 4 non-governmental organizations. Each speaker will have 1.5 minutes to raise issues and to ask panellists questions. Panellists will respond to questions and comments during the remaining time available.

The list of speakers for the discussion will be established through the online inscription system and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups of States will be moved to the beginning of the list. Delegates who could not take the floor due

to time constraints will be able to upload their statements on the online system to be posted on the HRC Extranet. Interpretation will be provided in the six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish).

Accessibility:

In an effort to render the Human Rights Council more accessible to persons with disabilities and to promote their full participation in the work of the Council on an equal basis with others, the panel discussion will be webcast and made accessible. International sign interpretation and real-time captioning in English will be provided and webcast. Participants can access live English captioning on the StreamText web page (<https://www.streamtext.net/player?event=CFI-UNOG>) during the event itself. Hearing loops are available for collection from the Secretariat desk. Oral statements may be embossed in Braille from any of the six official languages of the United Nations, upon request and following the procedure described in the *Accessibility guide to the Human Rights Council for persons with disabilities* (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/accessibility>).

Background:

The United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy is the result of a process launched by the Secretary-General in April 2018 to strengthen system-wide accessibility for persons with disabilities and the mainstreaming of their rights. Its development was informed by an extensive institutional review led by the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities. The Strategy was adopted by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB/2019/1/Add.6) and launched by the Secretary-General in June 2019. The Secretary-General of the United Nations issued a call to the Organization, emphasizing the imperative to set a precedent and actively collaborate in the steadfast pursuit of the objectives outlined in the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. As the Organization approaches the five-year milestone since this pivotal summons, it is opportune to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the progress realized and to reaffirm the Organization's unwavering commitment to its guiding principles. Furthermore, it is essential to address the impediments that have hampered the expeditious implementation of the Strategy, marshal political support, both internally and externally, to integrate the human rights of persons with disabilities into intergovernmental processes, and reflect on how multilateralism can significantly contribute to the advancement of the human rights of persons with disabilities, both within the United Nations and on a global, regional, and national scale.

The United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy is a comprehensive framework designed to promote the full and meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities across the United Nations system. The strategy is guided by three overarching approaches:

1. **Twin-track approach:** This approach recognizes that disability is a cross-cutting issue that should be integrated into all aspects of United Nations work, representing the first track. Additionally, targeted programming specifically addressing disability issues forms the second track of this approach.
2. **Intersectionality:** Understanding that factors such as gender, age and location influence an individual's experiences, the strategy acknowledges that these factors also impact persons with disabilities and their life experiences.
3. **Coordination:** To accelerate progress and ensure effectiveness, a coherent and coordinated approach is deemed essential. This coordination facilitates building on each other's work and striving for inclusive outcomes.

The strategy outlines four core areas of responsibility:

1. **Leadership, strategic planning, and management:** This involves senior leadership actively championing disability inclusion, incorporating disability considerations into

strategic planning, developing disability-specific policies and strategies, and establishing teams or individuals with expertise in disability inclusion.

2. Inclusion: This area focuses on closely consulting and actively involving persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in all United Nations activities. It also emphasizes ensuring full accessibility to United Nations buildings, facilities, workspaces, information, communications, conferences and events through specific measures, equipment and services.

3. Programming: This core area emphasizes supporting disability-inclusive programming by providing practical guidance at both the field and headquarters levels. It involves the development of joint initiatives to leverage strengths and accelerate progress and undertaking evaluations to assess performance.

4. Organizational culture: The strategy aims to evolve internal systems to attract, recruit, retain and promote persons with disabilities within the United Nations workforce. It includes capacity-building efforts to enhance staff understanding of disability inclusion and the development of communication strategies to promote the rights of persons with disabilities and raise awareness on disability inclusion.

With these approaches and core responsibilities, the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy seeks to contribute to a more inclusive and equitable world. It is grounded in the understanding that disability rights are human rights and aligns with the commitment of the United Nations to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Sustainable Development Goals, which explicitly address the needs and rights of persons with disabilities.

Background documents:

United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy ([CEB/2019/1/Add.6](#))

Security Council resolutions

- [Security Council resolution 2475 \(2019\)](#) of 20 June 2019

General Assembly resolutions

- [General Assembly resolution 74/144](#) of 18 December 2019 on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto: accessibility
- [General Assembly resolution 74/253](#) of 27 December 2019 on enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities to conferences and meetings of the United Nations system
- [General Assembly resolution 75/154](#) of 16 December 2020 on inclusive development for and with persons with disabilities
- [General Assembly resolution 76/154](#) of 16 December 2021 on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto: participation
- [General Assembly resolution 76/273](#) of 29 June 2022 on enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities to conferences and meetings of the United Nations system
- [General Assembly resolution 77/189](#) of 15 December 2022 on inclusive development for and with persons with disabilities
- [General Assembly resolution 77/240](#) of 16 December 2022 on promoting and mainstreaming easy-to-understand communication for accessibility for persons with disabilities

Human Rights Council resolutions

- [Human Rights Council resolution 43/23](#) of 22 June 2020 on awareness-raising on the rights of persons with disabilities, and habilitation and rehabilitation

- [Human Rights Council resolution 49/12](#) of 31 March 2022 on participation of persons with disabilities in sport, and statistics and data collection

Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities

- [Human Rights Council resolution 44/10](#) of 16 July 2020 on the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities
- [Human Rights Council resolution 53/14](#) of 13 July 2023 on the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities
- Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, [A/75/186](#), 20 July 2020

Secretary-General's reports to the General Assembly

- Report of the Secretary-General on disability inclusion in the United Nations system, [A/75/314](#), 13 August 2020
- Report of the Secretary-General on disability inclusion in the United Nations system, [A/76/265](#), 2021
- Report of the Secretary-General on disability inclusion in the United Nations system, [A/77/344](#), 15 September 2022
- Report of the Secretary-General on disability inclusion in the United Nations system, [A/78/281](#), 3 August 2023

Reports of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

- Web page with reports: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/disabilities/reports>