EVALUATIONS AT A GLANCE

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

System- Wide Evaluation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy

Period of assessment

June 2019 to April 2025

Evaluation timeline

June 2024 to July 2025

Purpose

To assesses the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of UNDIS to advance disability inclusion and facilitates learning by capturing good practices and lessons, for consideration by United Nations entities and United Nations country teams.

Scope

The evaluation is system-wide and global in scope, covering implementation of the UNDIS by all UN system entities and UNCTs at HQ, regional and country level in the period 2019 to April 2025. However, it does not assess the implementation of UNDIS and results by single entities or UNCTs. It focuses on conceptualization and design of UNDIS, alignment with international frameworks such as the CRPD, and its operationalization.

Role of OHCHR

OHCHR (SPECS) was a part of the evaluation management group, alongside SWEO, ILO, UNFPA, CTBTO, OIOS, WFP and UNICEF. OHCHR (Human Rights and Disability Unit) also participated in the Evaluation reference group alongside other UN agencies.

Evaluation background and objectives

- The purpose of the evaluation is to provide an independent assessment of the UNDIS after five years of implementation to present evidence of progress and results as well as gaps in achievement of the goals of UNDIS, identify good practices and lessons learned, and provide recommendations for possible revisions of UNDIS and implementation of disability inclusion in the UN system until 2030 and beyond.
- The specific objective is to assesses the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of UNDIS to advance disability inclusion and facilitates learning by capturing good practices and lessons, for consideration by United Nations entities and United Nations country teams.
- The evaluation is anticipated to be used by a variety of stakeholders, including all UN entities and UNCTs implementing UNDIS, persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, CSOs, Member States and donors, among others.

Evaluation methodology

- The evaluation was guided by the UNEG guidance on integrating disability inclusion in evaluations, and was in line with the UNEG Guidance on Integrating Gender Equality and Human Rights in Evaluation.
- It was conducted in a participatory manner, and consulted employees and persons with disabilities at global, regional and country levels to ensure that their inputs and perspectives were incorporated at relevant stages of the evaluation process.
- A mixed-method approach was utilized, integrating different evaluation methods and drawing on, and integrating qualitative and quantitative data.
- Primary and secondary data were gathered and analyzed across different stakeholder groups at country, regional and global levels of the United Nations development system.

Findings, conclusions and recommendations

Evaluation findings

The evaluation finds the UNDIS is relevant, well-aligned with and adequately translates the goals of the CRPD and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with regards to persons with disabilities. The Accountability Framework provides a useful guide for taking action and implementing the UNDIS, mainly including process-oriented indicators and emphasizing policy adoption and institutional readiness on disability inclusion. However, it does not capture the full scope of the UN disability inclusion support particularly in the areas of programming for persons with disabilities, culture shift, data on disability, intersectionality and resource allocation. The absence of an external accountability mechanism for engagement with OPDs on overall UNDIS implementation undermines the commitment to ensuring meaningful participation of persons with disabilities.

Progress has been made in creating the conditions for more inclusive operations through system-wide guidance in some areas, but while some good practices were identified there is limited coherence across the UN system, including within the UN Secretariat and its associated entities. Moreover, there are persisting negative experiences of employees with disabilities and efforts to challenge negative attitudes have not yet fully transformed the organizational culture.

The effectiveness of the UNDIS

In terms of progress towards change on disability inclusion, the evaluation finds there has been some overall improvement on reasonable accommodation, accessibility and policies over time both for UNCTs and United Nations entities, but performance varies substantially across entities and country teams and across indicators. For entities, the largest improvement in performance was related to institutional set up, while progress on leadership, strategic planning and disability policy/strategy has not been as strong. Challenges to UNDIS implementation that repeatedly cited include: financial constraints and lack of capacity, lack of authority or mandate, and lack of guidance.

The UNDIS has supported more systematic United Nations approaches to disability inclusion in programming but has not fully implemented the twin-trach approach. Its indicators focus more on mainstreaming than capturing the full scope of targeted disability inclusion work. The UNDIS has led to an increase in explicit references to persons with disabilities in United Nations system programming

The efficiency of UNDIS implementation

The evaluation confirmed there is strong demand for better sharing of knowledge, tools and good practices and significant appetite for learning generated by increased awareness of disability inclusion. Feedback loops and systems for capturing outputs, monitoring, evaluation and reporting have been established, however, reduced resources have affected the capacity to optimize the learning from these processes and to leverage the capacity development and solution-focused support function of the Disability Inclusion Team. The UNDIS has generated intersectoral collaboration and synergies with other cross-cutting issues, and more opportunities could be leveraged for better integration and efficiency.

In terms of resource allocations for implementing the UNDIS, the evaluation found these are largely insufficient and inconsistent across entities, significantly impacting timely and efficient implementation. While some positive examples exist, most entities struggle with resource constraints, which often leads to delays in implementation. Although there are specific training resources and a growing range of good practices and tools, investment in capacities, expertise and knowledge across the system does not meet the level required to yield the UNDIS potential as a transformative tool for the UN

The sustainability of the UNDIS and its results

The evaluation finds that there have been insufficient efforts to institutionalize adequate support for UNDIS implementation at Secretariat level, which significantly hinders progress that could drive meaningful and systemic change across the UN. The UNDIS coordination structure, especially the Disability Inclusion Team in the EOSG, is under-resourced both human and financially and as a result, important functions to support UNDIS implementation are not being carried out to the extent required. Budget tracking for disability inclusion spending is largely absent across which limits the ability to assess the level of investment in relation to results.

Strong and committed leadership support for UNDIS it is not consistent across all levels of United Nations leadership nor across all entities and UNCTs. The most successful examples of leadership demonstrate active engagement from senior management in establishing systems, allocating resources, and creating accountability mechanisms

Good practice: OHCHR approach to reasonable accommodation

OHCHR's policy on Reasonable Accommodation is grounded in the CRPD and its definition of Reasonable Accommodation. The process for making Reasonable Accommodation requests is now digitized which allows OHCHR to centrally coordinate, track and account for all related expenditures. Requests can be made for persons both inside (employees with disabilities) and outside the entity. In 2022, a dedicated budget line was created to charge reasonable accommodation requests, which do not impact the budget of the applicant's unit. The mechanism includes a satisfaction survey, with a database assessed annually together with the statistics database in the electronic system. In addition, OHCHR appointed focal points on reasonable accommodation at division/department level, who support applicants, evaluate the Reasonable Accommodation processed, identify why they were denied, and inform the challenges ahead to take remedial action.

Expenditures on reasonable accommodation were approximately USD 35,000 for 10 requests in 2023 and USD 75,000 for 2 requests in 2024, with no arbitrary rejections reported or identified. While the mechanism may not be fully known to all employees with disabilities, it is identified as clear progress, particularly in that denials have to be justified by the entity. OHCHR notes that complementary actions are needed at the UN system level to complement this Reasonable Accommodation process and prevent its overreliance (eg. preventing its use to cover temporary health conditions or ensure coverage of posts when extended leave is granted)

Other OHCHR case examples

- Among the entities that have established strong accountability mechanisms with their governing bodies.
- Has a peer support function for employees.
- Coordinated a range of initiatives on the development of community support and care systems for inclusion of persons with disabilities, together with other UN entities within the UNPAID care and support initiative.
- Provides substantial information related to the CRPD, its jurisprudence and resources to support its enforcement through disability inclusion in the SDGs.
- Moldova Office now earmarks funds in programme and project budgets to ensure disability inclusion.
- Coordinates the UNEG Gender Equality, Disability Inclusion and Human Rights Working group, and supported the development of the guidance on integrating disability inclusion in evaluations.
- Conducted a meta-synthesis on evaluation findings on Disability inclusion

Conclusions

- While UNDIS has enabled significant progress from a relatively low baseline in 2019, implementation has varied considerably across the complex UN landscape, and it has not succeeded in getting sufficient traction to be fully transformative across the entire system. Many entities with pre-existing disability inclusion initiatives have leveraged UNDIS to structure, systematize, and strengthen their efforts through whole-of-organization approaches.
- Senior leadership commitment has proven catalytic by securing institutional uptake, enabling whole-of-organization approaches, and elevating disability inclusion as a strategic priority. The technical expertise and commitment of focal points has played a critical brokering role—mobilising support with a solution-focused ethos, connecting actors to build capacities and a shared responsibility, and contributing to sustained momentum.
- The programmatic dimension of the UNDIS lacks a unifying system-wide vision for coordinated implementation. Further challenges include absence of sustainable institutional arrangements, insufficient mechanisms for system-wide accountability and learning and inadequate resource allocation.

Recommendations

1. UNDIS 2.0: Overall UNDIS vision and goals: Revise the UNDIS to clearly define the vision and time-bound goals, incorporate key guiding principles, approaches with a theory of change that reflects the goals, causal pathways, expected results at different levels, and the interconnectedness between its components. Focus the UNDIS on a higher level of ambition to advance and accelerate disability inclusion within the UN and in the countries that the UN serves.
2. UNDIS 2.0: Means of implementation: Strengthen the means of implementation through developing systemwide, entity, and UNCT action plans that translate the UNDIS 2.0 into action, strengthening the accountability framework as the key implementation tool of the UNDIS and establish a sustainable institutional framework to implement in an efficient and coordinated manner
3. Sustainable investment and resources for UNDIS implementation: Ensure adequate, sustainable and efficient investment in UNDIS implementation, building on the twin-track approach, leveraging partnerships with a view to taking inclusion to scale, and monitoring resource allocation to disability inclusion.
4. Knowledge management, learning and capacity strengthening: System-wide knowledge management, learning, and capacity for promoting disability inclusion should be further institutionalized and strengthened, to ensure more effective and efficient implementation of the UNDIS by UN entities and UNCTs. This should be achieved through partnerships, leveraging expertise, mapping good practices, supporting adaptive learning, and mandating disability inclusion training for all staff.
5. Inclusive organizational culture, accommodation and accessibility: The UN system should step up and strengthen efforts to foster an inclusive organizational culture and accessible workplace, positioning the UN as an employer of choice for persons with disabilities by developing and implementing comprehensive evidence based and data driven strategies to address accessibility, reasonable accommodation and organizational culture. Special efforts should be made in the UN Secretariat.

Follow up and Implementation

The issuance of the report initiated the period for the provision of the management response, which will be facilitated by DCO. OHCHR inputs to this response, including entity-level actions will be shared with the SET for endorsement to proceed to its implementation.