

## **Background Note:**

# **Briefing to the UN-Women Executive Board, “UN-Women’s work on the empowerment of women and girls with disabilities”**

## **I. Introduction**

This present note provides the Board with an overview of UN-Women’s efforts to strengthen the inclusion of the rights of women and girls with disabilities as a means to achieve gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls, and the realization of their rights in line with its mandate and international norms and standards. The note aims to: (i) provide information on UN-Women’s corporate Strategy on the empowerment of women and girls with disabilities (ii) highlight how UN-Women translates its vision into action across all areas of work, including at country level and (iii) examine the way forward.

As part of UN-Women’s mandate to promote gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls<sup>1</sup>, UN-Women has increasingly worked with women and girls with disabilities, including for their empowerment and effective participation in all aspects of life. This is reflected in all aspects of UN-Women’s work across all its priority areas and in all regions, as set out in its Strategic Plan 2018-2021.

Recognizing that gender-neutral approaches to disability inclusion perpetuate discrimination and vulnerability, UN-Women has made concerted efforts to promote disability inclusion and gender equality, including by establishing and strengthening partnerships, and contributing to amplifying the voices of women and girls with disabilities, both at headquarters and in the field. Active participation of and consultations with women with disabilities and their representative organizations have informed gender equality and disability inclusive action at all levels. In 2017, to strengthen institutionalization of its work in this area, UN-Women established an internal Global Task Team on Disability

---

<sup>1</sup> Founding Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 2 July 2010 (A/Res/64/289\*), paragraph 51 (b) and 52. Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/executive-board/key-documents>

and Inclusion to support the development and implementation of UN-Women's corporate strategy on the issue.

To give voice to and enable equal representation of women with disabilities, UN-Women strives to ensure their active participation in intergovernmental meetings, and consultative meetings. The situation of women with disabilities is also included in UN flagship reports and reports of the Secretary-General. To become a more inclusive entity, UN-Women has also been looking at promising practices of sister entities. To this end, UN-Women developed and administered a human resources survey on inclusion of personnel with disabilities. Moreover, UN-Women engages in several inter-agency and multi-stakeholder mechanisms to promote the inclusion of the rights of women and girls with disabilities and has contributed to the development of the UN system-wide policy and accountability framework on disability inclusion.

## **II. UN-Women's Strategy on the Empowerment of Women and Girls with Disabilities: Towards Full and Effective Participation and Gender Equality**

[UN-Women's Strategy on the Empowerment of Women and Girls with Disabilities](#) was developed to ensure a more systematic and system-wide approach to strengthening the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in UN-Women's efforts to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. The Strategy builds on [UN-Women's work in this area](#) and its Strategic Plan 2018-2021.

The overarching objective is to support the full inclusion and meaningful participation of women and girls with disabilities across all UN-Women's priority areas through the implementation of its mandate, as well as through reviewing its accessibility as an organization. To this end, UN-Women will continue to invest and engage in three complimentary areas: (a) normative frameworks, policies and programmes; (b) strategic partnerships; and (c) inclusive management to enhance accessibility and operational responses.

The Strategy promotes an inclusive and intersectional approach, requiring a paradigm shift in which all women and girls with disabilities, in all their diversity and across their life course are included as equal partners across the humanitarian-development continuum, and their rights and agency are fully realized.

Consistent with the gender mainstreaming approach, UN-Women proposes the use of a multi-pronged approach in all areas of its work within UN-Women and

through its normative, coordination, and operational responses, including in collaboration with and support to partners. The approach consists of (a) mainstreaming gender perspectives and the rights of persons with disabilities of all ages, (b) initiatives targeting women and girls with disabilities, and (c) inclusion of women and girls with disabilities, ensuring that they have a seat at the table and agency.

Leveraging this approach, through the implementation of this Strategy, UN-Women will provide normative guidance, integrated policy advice, operational support and technical assistance for programme development and capacity development, including through inter-agency mechanisms, to ensure that all initiatives are gender-responsive and disability inclusive. At present, the East and Southern Africa Regional Office is developing its own strategy.

### **III. Translating commitments into actions and results**

#### **A. Inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in policies and programmes**

One of the guiding principles of UN-Women's Strategic Plan 2018-2021 is adopting a human rights-based approach to the needs and priorities of the poorest and most excluded women and girls, including those facing marginalization as well as multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. This includes women and girls with disabilities in all their diversity.

In this respect, UN-Women has strengthened its special relationship with organizations of persons with disabilities, in particular networks and organizations of women with disabilities. The entity strives to promote synergies between the gender equality and disability inclusion agendas, including in the outcome areas of the Strategic Plan. These include

- (a) women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems;
- (b) women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy;
- (c) all women and girls live a life free from violence; and
- (d) women and girls contribute to building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from crisis prevention and humanitarian action.

In 2018, close to 50 UN-Women offices reported some work related to the inclusion of persons with disabilities, an increase from 2016 and 2017 when close to 30 offices reported on this work.

In Egypt, through the Men and Women for Gender Equality Programme, UN-Women contributed to strengthening and promoting the engagement of rural girls with disabilities and their mothers to transform harmful beliefs, attitudes and stigma regarding disabilities, and to providing seed funding to community-based organizations. In Ukraine, UN-Women supported the establishment of the All-Ukrainian Women’s Council to join efforts with other women civil society organizations (CSOs) for timely and effective action to address barriers faced by women and girls with disabilities. They also advocated for increased access to and participation of women with disabilities in justice, security and recovery in conflict-affected areas of Ukraine.

The European Union and the United Nations “Spotlight Initiative – eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls,” in line with the principle of leaving no one behind, invites civil society organizations to play an active role during programme design, execution, and monitoring. Organizations of persons with disabilities and those working on the rights of persons with disabilities groups are being targeted in Spotlight participating countries. Lessons learned from a unique Toolkit on Eliminating Violence against Women and Girls with Disabilities in Fiji are driving ideas to develop similar approaches in other Pacific countries.

In Malawi, UN-Women supported the development and finalization of the National Action Plan on Persons with Albinism, and with other partners in creating awareness and advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities. In Bangladesh, the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Working Group produced a brief on the *Interconnectedness of Gender, Age and Disability Issues in Rohingya Refugee Response*.<sup>2</sup> In Nepal, UN-Women’s technical support in [Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Guidelines](#) for identifying and prioritizing vulnerable and marginalized populations for humanitarian response, recovery, preparedness and disaster risk reduction, include women and girls, and persons with disabilities.

UN-Women has also supported government initiatives, including in Cabo Verde, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Georgia, India, Kazakhstan, Rwanda, Uruguay and the Gaza Strip, in conducting studies or providing information on women and girls with disabilities to inform other policymaking processes, and the provision of services to women and girls. To support collection and compilation of

---

<sup>2</sup> Published on: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/bangladesh/document/giha-brief-no-4-interconnectedness-gender-age-and-disability-issues>

disability data and statistics, UN-Women published an [Issue Brief on Making the SDGs count for Women and Girls with Disabilities](#), and included a section on women with disabilities in its flagship report [Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

## **B. Strategic Partnerships and Collaboration**

In line with UN-Women Strategic Plan 2018-2021 and corporate Strategy on the Empowerment of Women and Girls with Disabilities, UN-Women continues to build and strengthen partnerships, and system-wide collaboration to enhance knowledge and capacities on inclusion and empowerment of women and girls with disabilities.

Through the Inter-Agency Support Group for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (IASG-CRPD), UN-Women supports the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities. The entity chaired the IASG-CRPD in 2018 and is currently the co-chair the sub-working group on women and girls with disabilities. In addition, UN-Women works towards the inclusion of the rights of women and girls with disabilities, including through various inter-agency mechanisms such as the Human Resources Network, the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, and the Inter-Agency Security Management Network.

Since 2018, UN-Women has been actively engaged in inter-agency efforts to roll out the Secretary-General's Executive Committee's Decision on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, including the development of the system-wide policy and accountability framework on the issue. Having developed the first-ever accountability framework for gender equality, the UN-SWAP, UN-Women has been uniquely placed to provide guidance and substantive inputs into this process to ensure the gender-responsive development and implementation of the policy and accountability framework.

At the global level, UN-Women works closely with organizations of persons with disabilities as well as their representative organizations, including Women Enabled International, SightSavers, Humanity and Inclusion, and the Women's Refugee Commission. To help strengthen its internal capacities for inclusion of persons with disabilities and promote gender equality and empowerment of women and girls with disabilities UN-Women signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the International Disability Alliance (IDA) in 2018.

Furthermore, UN-Women is a founding member of the Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network, a multi-stakeholder Network to enhance coordination for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in development and humanitarian action.

In addition, in 2015 UN-Women joined the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD), and contributed to the revised Strategic Operational Framework, in which gender equality is now one of three elements recognized for successful implementation of projects. Related to this, in 2017, six of UN-Women's project proposals were selected for funding in Macedonia, Malawi, Pakistan, Serbia, Timor Leste, and Uruguay respectively. Also through the UNPRPD, UN-Women is currently leading the development of a joint global initiative on intersectionality which hopes to support the development of a practical tool to help UNCTs effectively reduce compounded and intersecting inequalities that persons with disabilities in their diversity encounter.

### **C. Towards a more inclusive entity**

In 2016 UN-Women joined the [Human Resources Network](#)'s group working on the inclusion of persons with disabilities. In this context, in 2018, Human Resources launched a survey on inclusion of personnel with disabilities. The responses informed the development of UN-Women's action plan on Diversity and Inclusion, which is being finalized and will address disability inclusion. Additionally, Human Resources has appointed a focal point to coordinate actions related to this issue. UN-Women's Security team has developed a communications checklist and sample presentation formats to ensure inclusivity in all their communications products. Also, [UN-Women's implementation plan of system-wide strategy on gender parity](#) addresses inclusion of women with disabilities.

UN-Women has proactively committed to seeking and implementing cost-effective solutions to provide equitable access to information technologies, including its internal and external application services and platforms for persons with disabilities. There are consistent efforts being taken to address the accessibility requirements. UN-Women's corporate websites (Headquarters, Regional and Country offices) have some compliance with United Nations and W3C web accessibility standards. The Communications and Advocacy Section offers guidance to web producers to make content more accessible, including by providing text alternatives for non-text content and intelligible hypertext links. In

addition, web content on women and girls with disabilities, including through their voices has increased.

To facilitate tracking, the Results Management System (RMS) has a tag on disability. In addition, UN-Women's Annual Report 2016, and Strategic Plan 2018-2021 include references to women and girls with disabilities.

### **III. The Way Forward**

UN-Women remains committed to inclusion of the women and girls with disabilities in its work. It will also continue to strongly advocate for the inclusion of this issue in the work of other UN entities and external partners. UN-Women recognizes the progress made so far to mainstream women and girls with disabilities into its work, but also the challenges faced. In order to further strengthen our work in this area, it is crucial to overcome the gaps in alliances and siloed approaches to the work, which lead to ineffective and inefficient responses, and inadequacies in human and financial resources that undermine the normative, coordination and operational work in this area. It is only through predictable and dedicated funding, enhanced coordination and system-wide approaches, including through inter-agency mechanisms and the equal and effective participation of women and girls with disabilities in the work that leaving no one behind will be realized.