

**Disability Inclusion  
Practice Note  
Working Draft**

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# **ICT & Digital Accessibility**

**Making the UN Accessible  
Through the Business Operations  
Strategy (BOS) 2.0**



UNITED NATIONS  
DEVELOPMENT  
COORDINATION  
OFFICE



DISABILITY  
INCLUSION  
STRATEGY



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## Executive Summary

The United Nations is committed to fostering diversity and inclusion, and is taking concrete steps to create a culture and environment that is open, inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities and staff with dependents with disabilities. This is being addressed in accordance with the general principles<sup>1</sup> of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) launched in 2019. UNDIS is a system-wide mechanism for sustainable and transformative progress on disability inclusion<sup>2</sup> through all pillars of the UN's work. Together, these efforts are also central to achieving the promise set forth in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind.

Persons with disabilities are the largest minority group in the world, representing an estimated 15 percent of the world's population, or approximately 1 billion people. About 80 per cent are of working age.<sup>3</sup> They are a diverse, heterogenous population that face discrimination and barriers that makes it more challenging for them to access equal opportunities.

Today we are in a period of accelerated digitalization and change that offers an opportunity to design and implement frameworks, environments and working arrangements inclusive of and universally designed for all.

The Business Operations Strategy 2.0 (BOS) provides a channel for UN Country Teams (UNCTs) to advance the inclusion of and access to persons with disabilities and put the measures in place to provide opportunities for decent and productive work.

**This Practice Note focuses on making ICT digital services accessible in the UN's 131 Country Teams through the BOS as a first step.** The timeline to incorporate these services is from January 2021 to December 2023.

The implementation of this practice note will contribute, be leading through example, to encourage transformation and the birth of this new inclusive reality that will equalize social and economic opportunities. Widespread telework will probably remain a permanent feature of the future working environment, accessible digital services are a fundamental to ensure participation for all in the labour market.

## Introduction & Background

ICT/Digital accessibility<sup>[GU1]</sup> is the key to ensuring respect for the right to communicate in this interconnected world, as it ensures digital inclusion and enables across-the-board discourse for all people, regardless of their gender, age, ability, or location.<sup>1</sup>

When working on inclusion topics, it is important to understand that ICT/Disability accessibility is a key and imperative factor. To achieve digital accessibility, ICTs should be not only available and affordable, but also accessible, meaning that they

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<sup>11</sup> [ITU ICT/Digital Accessibility](#)



are designed to meet the needs and abilities of as many people as possible, including persons with disabilities.

Novel platforms and new ways of meeting should be usable by all. By being accessible, they allow persons with disabilities to work from home, provide access to distance education, including e-learning portals and courses, and create increased opportunities to use public healthcare and assistance services, especially useful in disaster situations.

Accessible ICTs are the best way to increase opportunities for traditionally non-included and non-digital populations. They will ensure more inclusive, accessible, and agile systems capable of responding to complex situations, reaching between connected communities and those that are the furthest behind.

The BOS is a crucial component of the SG's efforts to reform business operations, also called the 'efficiency agenda.' It is a strategic framework for operational collaboration at the country level and plays a crucial role in integrating and scaling common services and practices across agencies to promote the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The BOS allows UNCTs to collaborate on joint operational requirements and scale services with high-efficiency impact. All 131 UNCTs are required to develop a BOS to engage in this collaborative agenda.

The UNDIS affirms that "the full and complete realization of the human rights of persons with disabilities is an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms."<sup>2</sup> The strategy resulted from a process launched by the SG to make the UN system more accessible to persons with disabilities and to mainstream their rights. It consists of a system-wide policy and accountability framework and covers operations and programmes. The policy establishes the highest levels of commitment and a vision for the UN system on disability inclusion. The UNCT Accountability Scorecard comprises 14 indicators within four core areas, and some specifically address internal operations (e.g., indicator 6, 7, 12, and 13).

**BOS 2.0 is a critical enabling framework for UNCTs to promote the inclusion of and access to persons with disabilities across operations and implement UNDIS at the country level.**

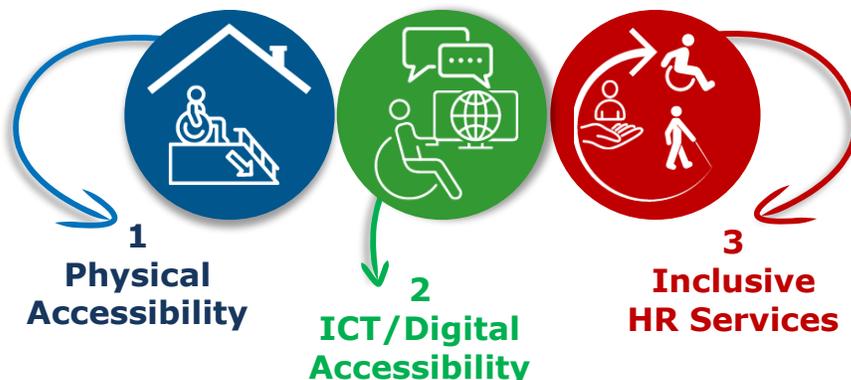
An initial three disability inclusion practice notes have been developed to drive implementation of UNDIS and promote disability inclusion in UN operations through the BOS in the following areas:

1. Physical Accessibility of Premises
2. ICT/Digital Accessibility
3. Inclusive HR Services

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<sup>2</sup> [United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy](#)





The disability-inclusion common services in each of these areas complements one another (i.e., ICT/Digital Common Services complement, Physical Accessibility, and Inclusive HR Common Services) and should be implemented together. It is envisioned that all entities at the country level will engage in these common services. However, the services may start with just a few entities and expand over time to cover more.

### Objectives of the ICT/Digital Accessibility Common Services

This ICT/Digital Accessibility Practice Note’s main objective is to provide guidance and support for UNCTs on how to make ICT, digital, and web tools and platforms accessible. This includes but is not limited to making web platforms, digital and general communications, ICT, online tools, software and hardware, digital documents, and virtual meeting tools more accessible for persons with disabilities.

Digital technology has changed how work is conducted, services are accessed, and information is shared, making it a crucial part of ensuring inclusion for all. ICT, digital, and web accessibility play a fundamental role in ensuring persons with disabilities are part of the UN workforce on an equal basis with others.

These Common Services build on existing guidelines, such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0)<sup>3</sup>. The ICT/Digital and web tools should satisfy the last version of the international standard for web accessibility, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines for a level AA of accessibility compliance. The digital content published on the websites should also be accessible to guarantee the human right to access information.

### Glossary and key principles related to ICT accessibility

It is essential for UNCTs to understand and use appropriate terms and principles related to ICT and digital accessibility in the context of the global digital ecosystem<sup>4</sup>:

**Accessibility:** Accessibility is the extent to which products, systems, services, environments, and facilities can be used by people from a population with the widest

<sup>3</sup> [Web Accessibility Initiative: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [International Telecommunication Union: Resources on ICT Accessibility](#)



range of characteristics and capabilities to achieve a specified goal in a specified context of use<sup>5</sup>.

**Accessible communication:** Accessible communication is defined in Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as including “any means and formats of communication, whether delivered aurally, visually or tactilely, including spoken and sign language, display of text, Braille, tactile communication, large print, accessible multimedia as well as written, audio, plain-language, human-reader and augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, including accessible information and communication technology.”<sup>6</sup>

**Accessible ICT:** The equipment or the service have embedded accessibility features from design/fabrication stage. As a result the ICT can be used by all users based on their own capabilities, needs and circumstances. Are compatible with assistive technologies. Accessibility requirements consider the extent to which information can be accessed, understood, and used by persons with the widest range of characteristics and capabilities.

**Digital communication:** Digital communication includes all types of information and communication made available through the Internet, broadband, online radio, digital television, mobile phones or tablets including available electronic form, readable and manipulable by computer.

**Web Accessibility:** Web accessibility means that websites, tools, and technologies are designed and developed so that persons with disabilities can use them. Web accessibility encompasses all disability that affect access to the web (auditory, cognitive, neurological, physical, speech and visual). An accessible website is [GU2][GU3][GU4]

### Key Stakeholders and partnerships

UNCTs must actively engage and consult with persons with disabilities, including staff with disabilities (with a diversity of impairments) and staff with dependents with disabilities, their representative organizations (organizations of persons with disabilities or OPDs), local organizations (e.g. companies specializing in digital accessibility) and experts to assess the accessibility of the digital content and ensure these common services achieve the intended result.

### Implementation of the ICT Digital and Web Accessibility Common Services

The following outlines the three areas where ICT/Digital accessibility must be taken into account by UNCTs.

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<sup>5</sup> [ISO: Information technology — Development of user interface accessibility — Part 1: Code of practice for creating accessible ICT products and services](#)

<sup>6</sup> [UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Disability, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)



- Mainstream software used in the day-to-day office work, including video conference platforms to ensure they are accessible and have embedded accessibility features (e.g. live closed captioning in video conference platforms, the possibility to put alternative texts in the images, etc.) to allow co-workers with disability to fully participate in the office tasks.
- Content created or procured in digital formats and published in the country website by the UNCT must be accessible (e.g. video content with closed captioning and available transcript, images charts and photos with alternative texts, complex images or infographics with descriptions, accessible PDF, etc).
- Country's websites developed or procured by the UNCT must be accessible and comply with the WCAG 2.1 for an AA compliance level.

The common services will be marked by indicators for success and measured as outlined below:

Level 1: Basic Accessibility<sup>[OBJ]</sup>

- A. Accessibility features are embedded in all mainstream software used
- B. UNCT members are trained (including available online trainings) on ICT accessibility and in the development and delivery of accessible digital content and information
- C. Customized accessibility guidelines are developed to ensure the accessibility of the digital information produced or procured according to the templates and formats used for each office

Level 2: Moderate Accessibility

- A. All new digital information for both internal use and for the general public are accessible in accessible formats
- B. Accessible formats of live content are available on the website for consultation after the events
- C. Participating entities ICT teams take available training on the development of accessible websites

Level 3: High-level Accessibility

- A. All live content is accessible including real-time closed captioning or interpretation in sign language
- B. The country website complies with a level AA of accessibility from the WCAG 2.1, all new websites developed or procured by the UNCT comply with a level AA of accessibility from the WCAG 2.1
- C. The needed assisting technology (hardware or software) is supplied for workers with disabilities

Table 1 outlines the ICT/Digital and web Accessibility Common Services and expected outputs.

**Table 1: ICT/Digital Accessibility Common Service**<sup>[GU5]</sup>



Service Line	Category	Common Service	Description	Output
ICT	In-house ICT Support and Accessibility	Mapping of ICT/Digital Accessibility for a WCAG2.1 A and AA level of compliance	This common service is for UNCT's to map the existing accessibility of ICT/Digital and web tools and platforms to reach WCAG2.1 and AA level of compliance.	Mapping of ICT and Digital accessibility completed
ICT	In-house ICT Support and Accessibility	Level 1: Basic Accessibility of ICT/Digital Services	See Table 1 for Description	Level 1 Accessibility is achieved
ICT	In-house ICT Support and Accessibility	Level 2: Moderate Accessibility of ICT/Digital Services	See Table 1 for Description	Level 2 Accessibility is achieved
ICT	In-house ICT Support and Accessibility	Level 3: High-Level Accessibility of ICT/Digital Services	See Table 1 for Description	Level 3 Accessibility is achieved

### Cost Factors [CPF6]

**UNCTs implementing ICT digital and web accessibility Services may consider budgeting an initial amount of \$10,000 USD to get started.** While costs will vary widely depending on factors such as the size of the UNCTs’ and the number of participating entities’ digital operations. Even a minor investment will achieve significant returns in social and economic benefits. DCO Country Business Strategy Team and the Disability Inclusion Support Team will learn from UNCTs that undertake this and develop a more detailed evidence-based estimate in the future. Country Teams shall initially seek the necessary resource mobilisation and cost-sharing for services and improvements. If the funding is not available locally, additional resource mobilisation sources will need to be identified.

### BOS Stages for Implementing these Common Services

Before starting to implement these Common Services, staff from participating agencies working on these Common Services should watch the [UN System-wide Disability Orientation 101 video](#), refer to CBM's [Digital Accessibility Toolkit](#), and review the [ILO’s Infostory on the ‘Win-win of disability inclusion.’](#) These materials provide an introduction to the basic concepts and approaches to disability inclusion.



UNCTs should also review how the UNDIS UNCT Accountability Scorecard applies to ICT and digital at the country level.

A self-assessment and digital accessibility audit (included as an Annex in the BOS 2.0 digital library) is the first step for implementation.

The following outlines the steps UNCTs shall take to implement these Services.

### 1. Kick-off:

- a. Understand key terminology and fundamental concepts and approaches to disability inclusion and accessibility.
- b. Review the documents on Digital and Web Accessibility in the BOS Library and become familiar with the terms, benefits and intended outcomes and impact of disability inclusion and accessible ICT.
- c. Determine the participating entities for the Common Services.
- d. Determine the hosting agency for each Common Service.
- e. Invite and engage persons with disabilities, including staff, and OPDs to participate in all stages of the service implementation
- f. Research the local and national legal requirements for digital and web accessibility in your country, if any exist
- g. Engage the OMT ICT Working Group and local ICT Teams to determine the baseline and opportunities for these common services.
- h. Engage in discussions with OMT groups on how to manage these common services.
- i. Begin to identify and engage with persons with disabilities and their representative organisations, disability experts, CSOs.
- j. Train UNCT in ICT/digital accessibility  
(e.g. **For everyone**[WIR7]: in particular for staff who are providing digital content (e.g. updating websites) or developing information (e.g. communication staff) should consider training (including online) in topics such as: ICT accessibility; How to enable inclusive communication during crisis and emergency situation: How to develop/create and remediate accessible digital content ;  
For web developers provision of trainings in how to develop and manage accessible websites; For procurers: in how to ensure the procurement of accessible ICTs and digital equipment.

### 2. Stock-take:

- a. Conduct a baseline assessment of the ICT accessibility of participating entities. An ICT Accessibility Assessment template (in Physical Accessibility Additional Resources) in the BOS Digital Library will help UNCTs undertake a process to establish a baseline to identify what needs to be prioritized and modified.
- b. Identify the complementary services within the BOS that could be linked to digital and web accessibility in your UNCT, i.e., procurement of inclusive hardware and software accessories such as accessible computers,



keyboards, monitors, screen readers, speech to text and reading and typing devices, and related digital products like meeting and conference room equipment.

### 3. Opportunity Analysis:

- a. Determine the changes required to reach Level 1 Accessibility.
- b. Identify the funding sources for the required changes.
- c. Identify stakeholders, partners, vendors, and OPDs that should participate in implementing this service.
- d.
- e.
- f. What benefits and outcomes are expected at the country level from these practices?**
- g. How will this Service affect programmatic or non-programmatic needs and services?**
- h. What other stakeholders, partners, and organizations could be engaged to find creative ways to implement this Service.**

### 4. Cost-Benefit Analysis:

- a. Calculate the one-time and recurring monetary and labour costs for the selected changes.
- b. Identify the main cost drivers.
- c. Determine how these services will be funded.
- d. Decide how these investments and costs will be shared.

### 5. Planning Framework:

- a. Prioritise the activities to implement for each common service with the highest reach, impact, and depth of implementation within a BOS cycle.
- b. Identify how the ICT/Digital Accessibility Common Services will be organised, implemented, monitored, evaluated, and reviewed.
- c. Establish the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that could be used as common measurement metrics.
- d. Create the baselines and targets for the service.
- e. Finalise how much funding is required in your country's context and the level of UNCTs engagement and costs needed.
- f. Identify existing and potential funding opportunities to leverage for the implementation of the proposed plan.

### 6. Implementation Plan:

- a. Establish a detailed list of activities that need to occur to implement this service.
- b. Define a roadmap, timeframe, and detailed timeline for implementation of inclusive HR practices.
- c. Establish time durations for each activity.
- d. Finalise the budget for each activity.



- e. Determine the risks and assumptions and propose risk mitigation approaches.
- f. Formalise your network and partnerships with experts (e.g., inclusive HR experts and groups (e.g., OPDs, CSOs, NGOs, and Ministries or government agencies)).

#### **7. Sign Off:**

- a. Review the details of the plan, ensuring there is an owner for each common service and action.
- b. Determine any final recommendations or suggestions for quality assurance before submission in consultation with disability experts and organisations.
- c. During the BOS sign-off, brief the UNCT on these particular common services, outlining how they contribute to the UNDIS, improve the UNCT's social impact, and advancement of the 2030 agenda.

#### **8. BOS reporting and review:**

- a. Review the targeted activities' implementation, timeframes, and report on efficiency gains, challenges, and lessons learned.
- b. Setting a minimum of bi-monthly or quarterly internal reviews are recommended to achieve the targets.

### **Enabling factors and constraints**

There are numerous factors that will enable realization of the ICT digital and web accessibility Common Services. They include:

- The UNCT's ability to garner support and buy-in from key stakeholders and decision-makers to participate in these Common Services.
- Working closely with persons with disabilities (including staff with disabilities and staff with dependents with disabilities), their representative organizations and disability experts across all aspects.
- Working together across the UNCT and participating agencies to leverage existing knowledge, experience and resources.
- Implement the ICT/Digital Accessibility Common Services together with the Physical Accessible and Inclusive HR common services.

Here are some potential constraints you may face with implementing the ICT/Digital Accessibility Common Services:

- Securing funding, particularly if the activities involve significant scale, and resources.
- UNCTs are recommended to prioritize the approaches and practices that will make the most considerable impact in terms of ICT web and digital accessibility common services. By implementing a gradual strategy, UNCTs



may generate greater awareness, prioritization, and thus more support with time.

- A lack of locally available expertise (including both persons with disabilities and those working in this sector) to guide the UNCT. In that case, the UNCT should refer to the technical guidance provided with this Practice Note and reach out to BOS in New York should you have further questions.

Other resources being developed to support UNCTs with implementation of the ICT web and digital Common Services by BOS in New York include a knowledge sharing platform, the establishment of an international network of colleagues working on the disability-inclusive Common Services and an expert group coordinated by New York. The platform will enable UNCTs to share resources and expertise. It will help capture and disseminate promising practices and success stories and ensure UNCTs have access to the most relevant and updated strategies, practices, and technical guidance available on disability inclusion in the applicable areas. The expert group will provide additional support and guidance. When seeking support, UNCT colleagues should first contact the Regional BOS coordinator responsible for your country.

### **Sustainability and replicability**

Many of the actions taken to enhance digital and web accessibility will require ongoing monitoring and updating to ensure their usefulness and sustainability. Some of the digital tools, like printers, computers, or keyboards, may have an initial investment with a specific life duration and will need to be replaced after a given period.

As the UNCT takes steps to improve ICT digital and web services, it will become an example of what is possible and will have the potential to share knowledge and influence with other local partners, including governmental, multilaterals, and the private sector to take similar actions. As country teams develop ICT digital and web practices, other agencies, programmes, funds, and teams could replicate this service. UNCTs can also set a precedent, high standards, and an example for local partners, governments, and other stakeholders to strengthen their work in this area and advance the inclusion of persons with disabilities leading by example.

Developed through a private-public partnership on disability inclusion, the resource and learning platform (mentioned above) will also enable UNCTs to share experiences that can foster replicability.

### **Additional Resources**

Additional resources related to this common service are available in the BOS 2.0 Digital Library. The key resource for this Practice include:

1. Additional Resources for ICT/Digital Common Services Additional Resources Doc



## Conclusion

Implementation of the disability inclusion common services on ICT/Digital Accessibility is fundamental for the UN to become an inclusive organization and realize the framework laid out by the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy, CRPD, and other guiding frameworks. Only by making the UN inclusive of and accessible to everyone will it live up to its commitment to inclusion and diversity and to leave no one behind.

## Acronyms

BOS	Business Operations Strategy
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organization
INGOs	International Governmental Organization
OMT	Operations Management Team
OPD	Organizations of Persons with Disabilities
PRODOC	Project Document
RFP	Request for Proposal
SG	Secretary-General
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDIS	United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WBG	World Bank Group