

**Disability Inclusion  
Practice Note  
Working Draft**

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# Physical Accessibility

**Making UN Premises &  
Facilities Accessible  
through the Business  
Operations Strategy  
(BOS)2.0**



UNITED NATIONS  
DEVELOPMENT  
COORDINATION  
OFFICE

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DISABILITY  
INCLUSION  
STRATEGY



## Contents

Acronyms.....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
Introduction & Background .....	5
Objectives of the Physical Accessibility Common Services .....	6
Key Stakeholders and partnerships .....	6
Implementation of the Physical Accessibility Common Services .....	7
Cost Factors .....	9
BOS Stages for implementing these Common Services .....	9
Enabling factors and constraints .....	12
Sustainability and replicability .....	13
Additional Resources.....	13
Conclusion .....	13



## 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
SG	Secretary-General
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDIS	United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WBG	World Bank Group



## Executive Summary

The United Nations is committed to fostering diversity and inclusion and is taking concrete steps to make its premises, offices, and meeting spaces inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities and staff with dependents with disabilities. These steps are 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 goals 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% 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, heterogeneous population that face discrimination and barriers that make it more challenging for them to access equal opportunities in the world of work. Including persons with disabilities into the workforce of UN operations and creating an inclusive environment through accessible premises has shown to provide numerous benefits. They include improvements in cost-effectiveness, turnover and retention, reliability and punctuality, staff loyalty, inclusive work culture, increased innovation, productivity, work ethic, safety, ability awareness, agency image, and diversity, loyalty, and satisfaction of beneficiaries.<sup>4</sup>

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

**This Practice Note focuses on how to make UN premises, facilities, & meeting spaces physically accessible to persons with disabilities through the Business Operations Strategy (BOS) 2.0 to advance implementation of UNDIS at the country level (i.e., UNCT Accountability Scorecard on Disability Inclusion indicator 6). The timeline to incorporate these services is from January 2021 to December 2023.**

Recognising this is only a part of fostering an inclusive and accessible work environment for persons with disabilities and staff with dependents with disabilities, BOS also has developed Practice notes on Inclusive HR and ICT/Digital Accessibility Common Services.

<sup>1</sup> [UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs, CRPD Guiding Principles](#)

<sup>2</sup> [United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, 2019](#)

<sup>3</sup> [International Labour Organization, Disability and Work](#)

<sup>4</sup> Lindsay, S., Cagliostro, E., Albarico, M., Mortaji, N., & Karon, L. (2018). A systematic review of the benefits of hiring people with disability. *Journal of occupational rehabilitation*, 1-22.



## Introduction & Background

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. In line with the rights-based approach to disability, the United Nations should take appropriate measures to ensure persons with disabilities have access, on an equal basis with others, to the UN premises to ensure their full and effective participation. Physical accessibility is referring to the extent to which a person can access buildings, public spaces, and any other place a person might need to go for work, play, education, business, services, etc. Physical access includes things like accessible routes, curb ramps, parking and passenger loading zones, elevators, signage, entrances, and restroom accommodations. A separate Practice Note looks at access to communication and information.

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 realisation of the human rights of persons with disabilities is an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms."<sup>5</sup> The Strategy was the result of 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).<sup>6</sup>

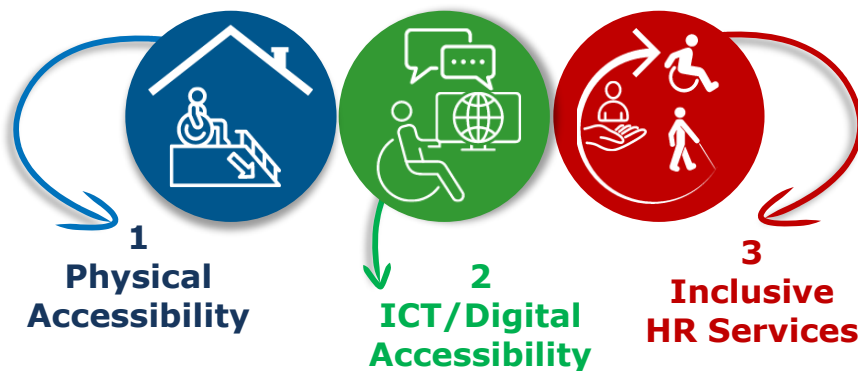
**BOS 2.0 is a critical enabling framework for UNCTs to promote the inclusion of and access to persons with disabilities across operations and implement UNDIS at the country level.**

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: Engagement and Recruitment of persons with disabilities

<sup>5</sup> [United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy](#)

<sup>6</sup>



The disability-inclusion common services of each of these areas complement one another (i.e., Physical Accessibility of Premises, complements inclusive HR Common Services complement, and ICT/Digital Accessibility 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 common services may start with just a few entities and expand over time to cover more.

### Objectives of the Physical Accessibility Common Services

This Physical Accessibility Practice Note's main objective is to provide guidance and support for UNCTs and OMTs **on how to make UN premises, facilities, and meeting spaces physically accessible for persons with disabilities, following the universal design approach.**<sup>7[OBJ]</sup>

Making UN premises physically accessible will require identifying and eliminating barriers and undertaking changes that will range from small, quick fixes to more significant or systematic changes that will require considerably more time and investment. UN premises and facilities covered by this Practice Note include common UN premises, offices of individual UN agencies, UN storage facilities, and UN meeting rooms and venues. If an agency is planning to relocate to a new site, the agency should ensure it has greater accessibility than the previous one, with or without new modifications.

### Key Stakeholders and partnerships

UNCTs must engage and consult with persons with disabilities, including staff with disabilities and staff with dependents with disabilities, their representative organisations (organisations of persons with disabilities or OPDs) and local experts to ensure these common services achieve the intended result to make UN premises

<sup>7</sup>UNCT Accountability Scorecard on Disability Inclusion indicators relevant to this Common Service include: Indicator 6 on Accessibility, Indicator 7 on Inclusive Procurement of Goods and Services, Indicator 5 on Consultation with OPDS. For more information on universal design visit here: <http://universaldesign.ie/Built-Environment/Building-for-Everyone/#figBfE10IndexAndTerminology>



more accessible for persons with disabilities. Engaging with OPDs and local experts (e.g. accessibility, planning and building officials) will help UNCTs understand applicable regulations and standards. They can also provide critical input with conducting the baseline assessment, prioritisation exercise, and design and implementation of modifications undertaken to enhance physical accessibility.

## Implementation of the Physical Accessibility Common Services

The following outlines three initial levels of accessibility for UNCTs to work towards. The criteria as presented are for each UN premise and have been adopted from UNICEF.<sup>8</sup>

### Level 1: Basic Accessibility

1. Entrance to the building is accessible
2. One workstation is accessible
3. One meeting room is accessible
4. One unisex toilet is accessible
5. Accessible evacuation path<sup>9</sup> required for the building's ground level and any other level where staff with disabilities work or access for meetings.
6. A parking space close to the building entrance should be adapted following the standards wherever parking space is available

(See UNICEF's Accessibility technical cards 1B, 2C, 2B, 4A, 4C, 4F in the BOS Digital Library)

### Level 2: Moderate Accessibility

1. Achieve Level 1 Basic Accessibility
2. All accessible facilities are marked with a logo on-site and in an external webpage provided by HQ
3. Signage is displayed (e.g., an indication of the floor map of the site, circulation pathways, accessible toilets and parking spots) and are also in Braille or raised text characters
4. The emergency warning system has hearing and visual cues
5. Two or more workstations are accessible (additional workstations should be made accessible upon the request of the staff member)
6. Two or more meeting rooms are accessible
7. More than one floor has an accessible toilet
8. Easy circulation in most parts of the building:

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<sup>8</sup> 's These have been adopted from UNICEF's "[Accessibility levels for UNICEF facilities](#)".

<sup>9</sup> For more information on accessible evacuation paths visit <https://accessibleexitsigns.com/evacuation-guide/>



9. Ensure one vertical accessible circulation in the building (e.g., provision of lift, stairs, and ramps) and horizontal circulation within each floor (e.g., corridors should have adequate width and be level, when there are differences in levels within a floor a ramp should be provided)
10. Common areas, such as the pantry, cafeteria, reception areas, and recreation areas, are accessible (e.g., ensure a clear pathway to the area, sufficient manoeuvring space, sink taps should be reachable and easy to operate with one hand.)
11. One parking space with an accessible pathway to the entrance is available

(See UNICEF's accessibility technical cards 1B, 1C, 2B, 2C, 3B, 4A, 4C, 4F, 4G in the BOS Digital Library for more guidance)

### Level 3: High-level Accessibility

1. Achieve Level 1 and Level 2 accessibility
2. Accessible workstations are available on every level/floor
3. All meeting rooms are accessible
4. 50% of toilets in the building are accessible
5. All common areas are accessible
6. Where parking is provided, at least 4% is reserved for accessible designated parking space (e.g., if the parking facility contains 50 lots/garages, 2 of them should be reserved for accessible parking).
7. Signage is displayed (e.g., an indication of accessible toilets, parking spots)
8. Control and switches can be operated safely and independently

(See all of UNICEF's technical cards in the BOS Library)

Table 1 below outlines the Inclusive Physical Accessibility Common Services and expected outputs.

**Table 1: Physical Accessibility Common Services**

Service Line	Category	Common Service	Description	Output
Admin	Premises Management	Assessment of Existing Premises	This Service helps UNCTs gain a deeper understanding of the current situation (e.g., Inaccessible areas) and where changes are needed.	Assessment of participating physical premises is completed





Admin	Premises Management	Level 1 Physical Accessibility	This Service is to reach Level 1 Accessibility with at least one accessible entrance, work station, meeting room, unisex toilet, evacuation, and parking space.	Entities achieve and are certified with Level 1 Accessibility
Admin	Premises Management	Level 2 Physical Accessibility	This Service is to reach Level 2 Accessibility as described above.	Entities achieve and are certified with Level 2 Accessibility
Admin	Premises Management	Level 3 Physical Accessibility	This Service is to reach Level 3 Accessibility as described above.	Entities achieve and are certified with Level 3 Accessibility

### Cost Factors

When factored in at the planning and design phase of new construction, accessibility features incur almost no additional, or very marginal, additional costs. Ensuring appropriate accessibility features are addressed at the early stages of the planning process guarantees that these services are fully accessible and usable throughout their lifespan.

**UNCTs implementing the Physical Accessibility common services may consider budgeting an initial amount of \$20,000 USD per premise to get started.** While costs will vary significantly from country to country, this amount is proposed as an initial minimum to begin this service. 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 implementing these Common Services staff from participating agencies working on these Common Services should watch the [UN System-wide Disability Orientation 101 video](#). It provides an introduction to the basic concepts and approaches to disability inclusion.

UNCTs should also review how the UNDIS UNCT Accountability Scorecard applies to operations at the country level. For example, UNCTs are asked to make UN premises and services accessible to all UN staff and constituents with disabilities, as outlined in indicator 6 on accessibility.



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 Physical Accessibility in the BOS Library and become familiar with the terms, benefits and intended outcomes and impact of disability inclusion and accessible premises.
- c. Know what accessibility legislation, regulations, and standards apply. Become familiar with ISO number 21542 Accessibility and Usability of the Built Environment. While the ISO is a primary reference for these services, it is important to cross-check national accessibility standards with the ISO standards.
- d. Become familiar with the contracts and owner or lease agreements for participating premises. These may affect how, when, and at what cost the physical accessibility changes can be made.
- e. Determine the participating agencies for this service.
- f. Determine the hosting agency for the service.
- g. Engage the OMT Admin Working Group and Common Premises Team to determine the baseline and opportunities for these common services.
- h. Engage in discussions with OMT groups on how to manage this service.
- i. Begin to identify and engage with persons with disabilities and their representative organisations, disability experts, CSOs.

### 2. Stock-take:

- a. Conduct a baseline assessment of the accessibility of participating premise(s). An 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 modified. Assessments must consider both institutional and attitudinal barriers (e.g., knowledge and practices) that can prevent individuals from accessing facilities (e.g., training of Security Personnel on accessibility awareness).
- b. Identify the complementary services within the BOS that could be linked to physical accessibility (i.e., ensuring a procurement process that addresses disability inclusion and procurement of disability-related products, such as signage, construction vendors and materials, and cafeteria vendors).

### 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.



#### **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 Physical Accessibility 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

Numerous factors will enable the realisation of the Physical 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 organisations and disability experts across all aspects.
- Working together across the UNCT and participating agencies to leverage existing knowledge, experience and resources.
- Implement the Physical Accessibility services together with the Inclusive HR and ICT/Digital accessibility common services.

Here are some potential constraints you may face with implementing the Physical Accessibility Common Services:

- Securing funding, particularly if the activities to reach level 1 compliance involve significant scale and resources.
- UNCTs are recommended to prioritise the approaches and practices that will make the most considerable impact in terms of increasing access for persons with disabilities.
- 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 Physical Accessibility 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

A portion of the actions that need to be taken by UNCTs to increase physical accessibility of UN premises will be one-time investments and could remain in place for many years,<sup>10</sup> while others will need to be updated on a more regular basis.

As the UNCT takes steps to improve physical accessibility services, it will become an example of what is possible and will have the potential to share knowledge and influence other local partners, including governmental, multilateral, and private sector organisations to take similar actions.

As UNCTs develop physical accessibility practices, other agencies, programmes, funds, and teams may replicate this service. UNCTs can set a precedent, high standard, 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. Some of the key resources for this Practice include:

1. Physical Accessibility Common Service Additional Resources Doc
2. Unicef Levels of Accessibility and Technical cards for implementation

## Conclusion

Implementation of the disability inclusion common service on Physical Accessibility will play a critical role in the UN becoming a more inclusive organisation and help realise 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 of inclusion and diversity and to leave no one behind.

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<sup>10</sup> They will still need ongoing maintenance.