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Accessibility and the status of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 72/162, gives a global overview of accessibility for persons with disabilities and presents ongoing efforts and progress made by Governments, the entities of the United Nations system and civil society organizations in advancing accessibility. The report also provides an update on the status of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto. It concludes with recommendations to enhance accessibility for persons with disabilities in the implementation of the Convention and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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I. Introduction

1. Accessibility refers to the provision of flexible facilities and environments, either virtual or physical, to accommodate each user's needs and preferences. This may be any place, space, item or service that is easily approached, reached, entered, exited, interacted with, understood or otherwise used.[1] Accessibility is access on an equal basis with others. To achieve that goal, in addition to providing access, a place, space, item or service needs to be usable by persons with disabilities. As recognized in the preamble to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, accessibility is a precondition for an inclusive society for all and for persons with disabilities to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Providing accessibility requires the removal of environmental and attitudinal barriers to provision and usage.

2. In its resolution 72/162, the General Assembly requested that Secretary-General submit, at its seventy-fourth session, a report on the rights of persons with disabilities with a focus on the issue of accessibility and related challenges to the implementation of the Convention, including a segment on the status of the Convention and its Optional Protocol. The present report provides an overview of the status of accessibility, in line with the principles of the Convention and with a view to the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It outlines international norms and standards relating to accessibility and draws on existing evidence and research to describe the global status of accessibility for persons with disabilities of physical and virtual environments. Building on the reports submitted by States parties pursuant to article 35 of the Convention, as well as on additional inputs from Member States, United Nations entities and regional and civil society organizations,[2] the report provides insights into efforts undertaken and progress made towards improving accessibility. The report also contains information on the opportunities for and challenges in monitoring and evaluating accessibility and concludes with recommendations for action to promote an accessible environment for persons with disabilities, in line with the Convention and for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

II. International norms and standards relating to accessibility

3. While the rights of persons with disabilities were established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention, adopted in 2006, represents the first

[1] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Accessibility and development: mainstreaming disability in the post-2015 development agenda", ST/ESA/350.

[2] In response to a note verbale sent by the Secretariat, inputs were received from 34 Member States (Australia, Bahrain, Burkina Faso, China (including Hong Kong, China, and Macao, China), Colombia, Congo, El Salvador, Finland, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Israel, Jordan, Latvia, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Oman, Peru, Republic of Korea, Romania, Senegal, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine, Uruguay and Zimbabwe); the European Union; the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility; 14 United Nations entities (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; International Civil Aviation Organization; International Telecommunication Union; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; United Nations Population Fund; the United Nations Children's Fund; United Nations Industrial Development Organization; Universal Postal Union; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; World Health Organization; United Nations Volunteers programme; World Food Programme and World Intellectual Property Organization); and four civil society organizations (Rehabilitation International, World Federation of the Deaf, World Disability Union and Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs).

legally binding instrument that includes an article on accessibility (art. 9) requiring States parties to take measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, and to identify and eliminate obstacles and barriers to accessibility.

4. In 2013, in the outcome document of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the realization of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals for persons with disabilities: the way forward, a disability-inclusive development agenda towards 2015 and beyond (General Assembly resolution 68/3), Member States stressed the importance of ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities in all aspects of development and humanitarian response, and committed to ensuring accessibility following the universal design approach. The outcome document represented a landmark on accessibility for the international community. Since then, accessibility has been progressively included in other development and humanitarian commitments, such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, adopted in 2015, in which the General Assembly called for persons with disabilities to lead and promote universally accessible response, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction approaches and for the use of the principles of universal design. The same year, in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, Heads of State and Government and High Representatives pledged to facilitate accessible technology for persons with disabilities. The World Humanitarian Summit, held in 2016, launched the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, in which its signatories called for accessible services and humanitarian response for persons with disabilities through universal design in programming, policies and in all post-emergency reconstruction. Subsequently, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee developed Guidelines on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. The commitments in the Charter also represent the foundations of resolution 2475 (2019) recently adopted by the Security Council and in which the Council recognized the importance of incorporating the views of persons with disabilities in humanitarian response plans, post-conflict recovery and reconstruction planning, including on accessibility and reasonable accommodation, and underlined the benefit of providing assistance to civilians with disabilities affected by armed conflict, in particular women and children. Furthermore, the New Urban Agenda contains a commitment to promoting measures in cities and human settlements that facilitate access for persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others.

5. The 2030 Agenda includes three targets that address accessibility for persons with disabilities: target 4.A contains a call to build and upgrade disability-sensitive education facilities, target 11.2 is aimed at providing transport accessible to persons with disabilities and target 11.7 highlights the need to provide accessible public and green spaces for persons with disabilities. Although not explicit in the other targets, the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires a broader approach to accessibility in line with the Convention, across all relevant Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

6. For implementation, the concept of accessibility needs to be translated into practical requirements. The concept of universal design was introduced in the 1990s and defined in the Convention as the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. The Convention also provides that universal design shall not exclude assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities where this is needed. Another concept related to accessibility is reasonable accommodation, which is defined in the Convention as necessary and appropriate

modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Relevant international standards and guidelines have been adopted to put accessibility and the principles of universal design in practice. In 2011, the International Organization for Standardization set international standards for the built environment[3] to enable all persons, regardless of disability, to approach, enter, use, egress from and evacuate a building independently. The same organization has also produced international guidelines and standards for various forms of information and communications technology, (ICT) such as the web content accessibility guidelines 2.0, the accessibility guidelines for information/communication technology equipment and services, the guidance on software accessibility and the electronic document file format enhancement for accessibility. The International Digital Publishing Forum has also released accessibility guidelines for e-books.[4]

III. Overview of the status of accessibility of physical and virtual environments

7. Available data on the accessibility of physical and virtual environments indicates that accessibility is far from universal. Persons with disabilities in rural areas and individuals with disabilities from marginalized groups in particular face even greater barriers in terms of the accessibility of physical and virtual environments.

8. In developed countries, crowdsourced reviews[5,6] on accessibility for wheelchair users provide a picture of accessibility that reflects the direct experience of the users of certain services. These reviews, which cover over 1.2 million public places, mostly in developed countries, indicate that 53 per cent of educational facilities, 30 per cent of libraries and 48 per cent of leisure facilities are not considered accessible for persons using wheelchairs. The reviews also indicate that 31 per cent of public toilets are not accessible. Regarding health-care facilities, 20 per cent of hospitals, 32 per cent of pharmacies and 45 per cent of doctors' offices are not wheelchair accessible. Overall, 32 per cent of public transportation facilities are not wheelchair accessible, with subway stations being the least accessible: 61 per cent of them are not accessible. Among places open to the public, supermarkets and financial services are among the most accessible: 81 per cent of supermarkets, 72 per cent of banks and 88 per cent of automatic teller machines are accessible. Public services such as post offices are among the least accessible: 59 per cent of them are not accessible. Technology is crucial to the independent living of many persons with disabilities, but 43 per cent of stores that sell electronics are not accessible.

9. In developing countries, data collected in selected countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Asia[7] show that 30 per cent of persons with disabilities indicate that primary health-care clinics are not accessible, 24 per cent that hospitals are not accessible, 20 per cent that schools are not accessible, 17 per cent that the toilet at their home is not accessible, 32 per cent that their workplace is not accessible, 30 per cent that their dwelling would need modifications to make it fully accessible,

[3] ISO 21542:2011 standards.

[4] International Digital Publishing Forum, *EPUB 3.2*. Available at: https://www.w3.org/publishing/epub/epub-spec.html.

[5] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Disability and development report: realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities", 2018.

[6] Study commissioned by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on the basis of data from Socialhazen.

[7] Analyses carried out by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

36 per cent that transportation is not accessible, 31 per cent that magistrates' offices, courts and police stations are not accessible, and 33 per cent consider post offices not accessible.

10. Accessibility can be a matter of life and death in situations of evacuation during disasters. Globally, however, 73 per cent of persons with disabilities would face difficulties evacuating and 6 per cent would not be able to evacuate at all.[8]

11. With regard to virtual environments, limited information exists at the international level. However, an analysis of the national online portals of the 193 States Members of the United Nations illustrates their low degree of accessibility: in 2018, 61 per cent of them included features that were not accessible for persons with disabilities, showing little progress from 63 per cent in 2012.[9] The enhanced accessibility of mobile phones and services also remains a relatively underdeveloped segment of the ICT market, but the technology supporting accessibility is developing and the number of accessibility-related applications for smartphones is increasing.

12. One of the challenges that is often evoked when discussing enhancing accessibility is the financial cost of retrofitting existing infrastructure and facilities. However, evidence shows that the returns often offset the costs.[10] In particular, greater accessibility contributes to the higher participation of persons with disabilities in the workforce, enabling them to become equal and productive employees and business owners. Moreover, the application of universal design from the initial stages of any development could help to make building of accessible environments much less costly.

IV. Efforts and progress in advancing accessibility

13. The present section gives an overview of initiatives taken by Member States, United Nations entities and civil society toward the implementation of accessibility in physical and virtual environments, in line with article 9 of the Convention.

14. For Member States, this assessment is based on reports submitted to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by 119 Member States and the European Union under article 35 of the Convention, between July 2010 and April 2019, complemented with the responses from 34 Member States and the European Union to a note verbale sent by the Secretariat.[11] For those Member States that submitted more than one report or a report and a response to the note verbale, all sources have been considered in the analysis below. Altogether, these sources provide information for 126 Member States. The findings below are based on the response from those 126 Member States, unless otherwise stated.

15. For United Nations entities and civil society organizations, the overview is based on responses to the note verbale from 14 United Nations entities and four civil society organizations, as well as on research conducted by the Secretariat.

[8] United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, "Living with disability and disasters: United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction 2013 Survey on living with disabilities and disasters – Key Findings", 2014.

[9] United Nations e-Government surveys of 2012 and 2018.

[10] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Global status report on disability and development", prototype 2015.

[11] Seven Member States, namely, the Congo, Finland, Monaco, Romania, Sierra Leone, Trinidad and Tobago and Zimbabwe, have not submitted a report under article 35 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities but have provided inputs in response to the note verbale.

A. Member States

1. National laws and acts

16. Many Member States have adopted disability laws or acts, which include either explicit accessibility provisions or provisions that implicitly require accessibility measures. About 92 per cent have adopted legislative initiatives in the form of laws or acts. A regional breakdown[12] shows that about 97 per cent of the Member States in Europe, 95 per cent in the Americas, 91 per cent in Asia, 86 per cent in Oceania and 84 per cent in Africa have adopted laws or acts focusing on persons with disabilities. An example of a disability act that includes explicit accessibility provisions comes from the Philippines, where section 25 of Republic Act 7277, known as the Magna Carta for disabled persons, stipulates that the State shall ensure the attainment of a barrier-free environment that will enable persons with disabilities to have access to public and private buildings and establishments and such other places as mentioned in the relevant accessibility law.

17. Those Member States that do not indicate the existence of a law or an act concerning persons with disabilities have other legislative provisions that include persons with disabilities as a group with equal rights or whose needs are acknowledged. For instance, Argentina approved Law 26.522 on audiovisual communication services, in which it is stated that, for all transmissions on broadcast television, the local signal produced for subscription systems and informational, educational, cultural and general interest programmes should include closed captioning, sign language and audio descriptions for persons with sensory disabilities, older persons and others who might have difficulty understanding the content.

18. Some countries have specific accessibility laws. Government decree on accessibility of buildings 241/2017 in Finland, for example, establishes the requirements for an accessible building. The Government of Angola approved a proposal for a law on accessibility, which is aimed at building a comprehensive, coherent and orderly system of accessibility for all.

2. National action plans and strategies

19. National disability plans and strategies may be focused specifically on accessibility or may promote it implicitly through their focus on the rights, needs and perspectives of persons with disabilities. In terms of accessibility, plans and strategies may be aimed at eliminating barriers in the built environment or at targeting obstacles impeding the accessibility of ICT. About two thirds of the 126 Member States (63 per cent) mentioned the existence of a national plan, a national strategy, or both, that addressed accessibility or the needs of persons with disabilities. However, a regional breakdown shows heterogeneity across regions: 77 per cent of the Member States in Europe thus have a plan or strategy, 71 per cent in Oceania, 64 per cent in the Americas and 61 per cent in Asia, whereas the rate in Africa is only 44 per cent.

20. In Honduras, for instance, the national plan for universal accessibility clarified the duty of public and private bodies to enable persons with disabilities to live independently and ensure appropriate accessibility to the physical environment and information technology. Similarly, the European Union launched the Digital Agenda, which includes actions to promote inclusive digital services and the systematic evaluation of accessibility, notably in the areas of e-commerce, e-identity and e-signature. Looking at the built environment, Singapore put in place a 10-year

[12] All regional analyses in the present report follow the geographical regions as defined in the United Nations standard country or area codes for statistical use (M49) (https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/).

barrier-free accessibility upgrading programme for the period 2007–2016 to support the improvement of existing buildings. In Slovenia, accessibility is addressed through the national guidelines to improve the accessibility of the built environment and information and communications for persons with disabilities, also known as the "accessible Slovenia strategy", with, among other objectives the elimination of physical obstructions or communicational hindrances and the provision of accessible workplaces, knowledge platforms and information. Similar objectives are also enshrined in the New Zealand disability strategy for the period 2016–2026.

3. Status of implementation of the provisions of article 9 of the Convention

21. The present section looks at the status of implementation of the various provisions of article 9 of the Convention (Accessibility). It provides an overview of the actions taken by Member States to comply with the provisions of paragraph 2 of that article.

(a) Buildings, roads, transportation and indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces (art. 9, para. 1 (a))

22. About 89 per cent of the 126 Member States described efforts and actions taken to enhance the accessibility of the built environment of one or more types of infrastructure or services. Seventy-six per cent of interventions conducted in that regard were aimed at public buildings, 57 per cent at education facilities, 54 per cent at transportation, 37 per cent at the upgrade of roads, 35 per cent at medical facilities, 30 per cent at housing and 23 per cent at sports facilities. Efforts to improve the accessibility of workplaces were rarer (4 per cent).

23. Interventions in public buildings covered various facilities and services. For instance, in courts in Australia now provide wheelchair access, hearing loops in court rooms and interpretation services. The Government of Japan has also been improving the accessibility of courts by eliminating uneven steps, establishing multifunctional lavatories and building elevators. In Czechia, gradual adjustments have been made in police stations, in particular by installing especially adapted entrance doors and additional entrance platforms, as well as signage indicating entrances for persons with disabilities. Benin intervened to improve the accessibility of voting centres by adding 40 ramps in three departments of the country.

24. With regard to transportation, in Azerbaijan, platforms have been modified to give step-free access to trains in the busiest railway stations, and kneeling buses have been introduced to facilitate the entry and exit of persons with disabilities. Similar interventions have been carried out in Algeria and Bahrain, where all public buses are equipped with accessible features for persons with disabilities. Similarly, in Estonia, the railways became accessible to persons with disabilities in 2014 after old vehicles were replaced and waiting platforms were rebuilt. In Norway, between 2010 and 2013, 473 bus stops and 26 hubs were upgraded to conform to the principles of universal design. Under the universal design action plan for the period 2009–2013, and as a part of the national transport plan, the focus has been on upgrading traffic hubs and bus stops along national highways. Mongolia installed devices that announce stops for blind persons and added to each bus stop the names and routes of the buses in written form for persons with hearing disabilities. The Government of Brazil purchased 2,600 buses in 2011 to provide accessible school transportation for 60,000 students with disabilities. The subway project in Copenhagen serves as an example in which accessibility policy was embedded from the outset. The project was realized in close consultation with Disabled People's Organisations Denmark, which helped to find the optimum and most accessible solutions to make the subway physically fully accessible.

25. Accessible schools and education facilities are pivotal to ensuring that children, young people and adults with disabilities have access to education. In Burkina Faso, a study on the status of schools carried out in 2015 and covering a total of 6,685 schools showed that 50 per cent were equipped with ramps. In 2009, the Swedish National Agency for Education presented an inventory of accessibility for school buildings in which it noted gaps but observed a positive trend in accessibility. In Mauritius, 148 schools have been retrofitted with ramps and 30 schools provided with adapted toilets. Mexico reported that 77 per cent of the target of making 11,085 schools accessible over six years had been achieved.

26. The enhanced accessibility of roads translates into greater security and independence for persons with disabilities. In Panama, accessible routes have been built in two provinces to facilitate access for persons with disabilities to hospitals, banks, official administrative offices and other places of interest. The Government of Qatar has ensured that parking spaces reserved for persons with disabilities are available in all public parking areas and car parks, as well as in shopping centres and on government premises. The Sudan has also taken various steps to facilitate personal mobility for persons with disabilities, including the use of signal indicators and street signs for improved road accessibility, pursuant to regulations issued in 2003 governing the movement of blind persons in public places.

27. With regard to housing, in Germany, private owners and tenants can apply for grants – regardless of income or age – to remove barriers to accessibility in residential buildings (€75 million per year are allocated to this programme). In Canada, initiatives and funding under the Investment in Affordable Housing framework for the period 2011–2014 were aimed at fostering safe independent living and supporting renovations, including for persons with disabilities. Similarly, in Seychelles, the Ile Perseverance project, which is the biggest housing project in the government social housing assistance programme and includes a plan for 2,056 housing units, has been designed to be friendly to persons with disabilities. The Government of the Republic of Korea provided financial assistance to the housing renovation project for persons with disabilities in rural areas to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities in farming and fishing communities.

28. With regard to medical facilities, in Ethiopia, the city administration bureau of design and construction in Addis Ababa has adopted the approach of addressing accessibility early on at the design stage, resulting in 28 of 75 health stations being accessible to persons with disabilities. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, under the project to improve the quality and management of health institutions, architectural barriers and other obstacles for persons with disabilities were removed in all centres for physiotherapy and rehabilitation and in all reconstructed health centres and family medical clinics. Similarly, in Costa Rica, the remodelling of the national rehabilitation centre and the construction of 34 new facilities for the Ministry of Health included the adaptation of sanitary facilities and the construction of ramps and the installation of signage and of elevators with assistive technology for persons with disabilities, as well as other facilities that enabled accessibility for persons with disabilities. In Kenya, most health-care centres are accessible to persons with disabilities and comply with section 21 of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2003, while health facilities that were constructed before the early 1980s have been undergoing renovations.

29. The full participation and independent living of persons with disabilities also hinges on the opportunity to take part in recreational activities and events. For example, in the Cook Islands, the national Telecom Sports Arena indoor stadium was built and made fully accessible to persons with disabilities. Similarly, the Government of Morocco ensured that sports complexes built in 2009 and 2010 in three cities were designed to fulfil accessibility requirements, such as the provision of ramps and especially adapted sanitary facilities. In Malta, most sport facilities are accessible for

persons with disabilities, while in El Salvador, the National Sports Institute has adapted sports facilities. The Government of Saudi Arabia has launched a national project to modernize sports stadiums and halls throughout the country to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities. Accessible platforms are being installed in football stadiums to enable persons with disabilities to use spectator stands, while designated toilets and passageways have also been built.

(b) Information, communications and other services, including electronic services and emergency services (art. 9, para. 1 (b))

30. Among the 126 Members States, 75 per cent had made efforts, beyond legislative instruments, to improve the accessibility of information, communication and related services. However, these efforts showed evidence of regional heterogeneity: initiatives were conducted by 91 per cent of Member States in the Americas and 90 per cent in Europe, compared with 73 per cent in Asia, 56 per cent in Africa and 29 per cent in Oceania. Among Member States that have advanced the status of accessibility of information, communication and related services, 83 per cent carried out measures to improve the accessibility of information, 61 per cent to improve the accessibility of electronic devices, 59 per cent to improve the accessibility of communication and 34 per cent to improve the accessibility of emergency services.

31. Examples of initiatives to promote accessible information include the provision of simultaneous sign language interpretation during the main nightly news broadcasts on national television in Rwanda and the captioned broadcast of public health information on television in New Zealand. News programmes on public and private television channels in Mongolia increasingly include sign language announcers. The Government of Panama has installed “Infoplazas” across the country to provide free Internet service, 18 of which are accessible to persons with disabilities and have software accessible to persons with visual and severe motor disabilities.

32. In terms of State-led efforts toward accessible communication, the Government of the United Arab Emirates launched the “echo of silence” project to facilitate communication between various State institutions and persons with auditory or speech impairments. Under that project, customer service centres have been established in companies, providing telecommunication services to carry out interpretation in sign language and its conversion into written text, or vice versa. Similarly, in Portugal, the National Institute for Rehabilitation has a direct line to provide tailored support for persons with disabilities that can be used by email or telephone, or in person. The Government of Tunisia has established 24 media and communication units with disability-friendly equipment, with one located in each province. The units provide several long-distance services, including communications and electronic, Internet and media services on a range of social issues and for various services.

33. The provision of accessible electronic equipment for persons with disabilities represents an important means to promote equal opportunities and rights. In Guatemala, the Central Library of the University of San Carlos has three computers with screen reader programs. Between 2008 and 2011, computers with screen reader programs were also installed in public libraries in Lithuania.

34. With regard to emergency-related services, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands and Slovenia have listed interventions aimed at making such services more accessible. For example, the Government of Luxembourg has introduced text messaging services for persons with disabilities in emergency service call centres, and the Government of Slovenia has developed a technical solution for call transcription.

(c) Accessibility standards, training and other provisions (art. 9, para. 2)

35. Among the 126 Member States, 73 per cent have developed standards or guidelines on the accessibility of facilities and services open or provided to the public (art. 9, para. 2 (a)). Almost all Member States in Europe have developed such standards (95 per cent), as well as 73 per cent in Asia, 71 per cent in Oceania, 64 per cent in the Americas and 48 per cent in Africa. Only 23 per cent of Member States have taken measures to ensure that private entities offering facilities and services that are open or provided to the public take into account all aspects of accessibility for persons with disabilities (art. 9, para. 2 (b)), but 78 per cent have made efforts to provide training for stakeholders on accessibility issues faced by persons with disabilities (art. 9, para. 2 (c)). That training was often aimed at public officials, teachers and service providers, and its focus ranged from awareness-raising to the consideration of technical aspects to address the needs of persons with disabilities, as well as inclusive education and justice. Approximately one third of Member States (36 per cent) carried out interventions to provide in buildings and other facilities open to the public signage in Braille and in forms easy to read and understand (art. 9, para. 2 (d)).

36. About two thirds of the 126 Member States (61 per cent) took measures to provide forms of live assistance and intermediaries, including guides, readers and professional sign language interpreters, to facilitate accessibility to buildings and other facilities open to the public (art. 9, para. 2 (e)). The actions of Member States were concentrated on providing persons with disabilities with legal aids and interpreters to access the judicial system and social services. Apart from live assistance and intermediaries, the efforts of 60 per cent of Member States were focused on promoting other appropriate forms of assistance and support to persons with disabilities to ensure their access to information (art. 9, para. 2 (f)). Regarding new information and communications technology and systems, 33 per cent took measures to promote access for persons with disabilities to such technology (art. 9, para. 2 (g)), but only 13 per cent focused on measures to promote the design, development, production and distribution of accessible information and communications technology and systems at an early stage, so that these technology and systems become accessible at minimum cost (art. 9, para. 2 (h)).

B. United Nations system

1. Technical cooperation in support of Member States

37. United Nations entities have been supporting Member States worldwide to improve the accessibility of the built environment and ICT.

38. In 2016, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs launched a “Toolkit on Disability for Africa”,[13] developed in cooperation with Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa and Zambia, which includes a learning module on accessibility, highlighting the crucial importance of accessibility and providing practical tools, including international normative frameworks and information on the key concepts and principles of accessibility. The module was designed for people who have an interest in or a responsibility for addressing accessibility because of the nature of their work, including those in civil society, civil and public service, national human rights institutions, parliaments, development agencies, universities and the private sector. The Toolkit has been used to carry out numerous training sessions for policymakers

[13] Available at www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/news/dspd/toolkit-on-disability-for-africa.html.

and representatives of organizations of persons with disabilities at the regional, national and subnational levels in Africa.

39. The digital inclusion programme of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has developed key resources to support member States in accelerating their implementation of ICT accessibility, including the national programme on web accessibility entitled "Internet for @ll". This programme provides the necessary know-how to help countries to ensure that all citizens, including persons with disabilities, can have online access to information and communication services. In addition, ITU held thematic, regional and global events and meetings under its digital inclusion programme in 2018 to build capacities and raise awareness among more than 1,500 ITU members and stakeholders in ICT accessibility.

40. The World Health Organization (WHO) has developed a guidance note on disability and emergency risk management for health, which is focused on accessibility as a key component of emergency risk management.

41. United Nations entities have supported Member States in advancing accessibility with country-level interventions. In Algeria, the Ministry of Justice launched a pilot project with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the participation of other ministries, government agencies and a number of associations and organizations to provide better access to justice for vulnerable persons, including persons with disabilities, and to improve the advice, guidance and assistance given to them. In Somalia, provision was made for the incorporation of mandatory minimum requirements for persons with disabilities in the design and construction phase of the Mogadishu prison and court complex, a project headed by the Global Maritime Crime Programme of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), including for key public spaces on the ground floors, ramps, accessible spaces and accessible toilets at the gate, in cell blocks, in the court, in the medical wing and in offices.

42. Furthermore, the provision of inclusive water, sanitation and health services for persons with disabilities are part of all interventions by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in camps in Iraq, in which accessible latrines and showers are provided. In Jordan, sanitation facilities in refugee camps were fitted with ramps for wheelchair access and accessibility standards were implemented in spaces to provide learning opportunities, psychosocial support and life skills training for children and young people (known as "Makani centres"). As of 2017, UNICEF had supported 233 Makani centres in refugee camps and host communities, all of which had participated in a certification process to ensure that accessibility standards were met.

2. Improving the evidence base to guide accessibility policies

43. United Nations entities have been working on improving the evidence base to guide accessibility policies. WHO developed the Model Disability Survey, which includes self-reported assessments of accessibility in various spaces in an individual's environment (e.g., community services, dwelling, school and workplace). In 2018, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs conducted an analysis of self-reported information on the accessibility of schools, workplaces, courts, police stations, recreational places and other locations on the basis of data from disability surveys in developing countries and crowdsourced data, mostly from developed countries.[5] This study was produced using contributions from States members of the United Nations Voluntary Fund on Disability. In 2012, the Department carried out a survey of the 193 Member States on the accessibility of online national portals.[14]

[14] *United Nations E-Government Survey 2012: E-Government for the People* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.12.II.H.2).

3. Accessibility in United Nations entities

44. In 2010, the United Nations Interdepartmental Task Force on Accessibility was established jointly by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights with the objective of developing a Secretariat-wide policy and guidelines for improving accessibility and facilitating an enabling environment for the participation of persons with disabilities in the work of the United Nations. In 2014, the Secretary-General issued the first policy document on employment and accessibility for staff members with disabilities in the United Nations Secretariat (ST/SGB/2014/3), which contained a commitment to improving the accessibility of premises, facilities, conferences, services, equipment and information.

45. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 70/170, the Secretary-General released in 2016 a comprehensive report on the status of inclusion and accessibility for persons with disabilities at the United Nations (A/71/344). The report listed various improvements in accessibility in the premises, conference services and facilities, information and documentation in the United Nations and in organizations of the United Nations system.

46. In 2018, the Secretary-General called for a review of the United Nations operations on disability mainstreaming, including accessibility. The review showed that, despite significant progress, the consistent or systematic provision of accessibility remained limited. One of the recommendations of the review concerned the development of a strategic approach to accessibility and universal design to ensure that all United Nations services are accessible to persons with disabilities, including by addressing barriers in the built environment and ICT.

47. In response to the findings of the review, the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy was developed and launched in June 2019. In that strategy, the Organization committed to implementing and applying the principles of universal design in all its policies and programmes, while also identifying, addressing and removing barriers to accessibility. The successful execution of the strategy will provide a foundation for lasting and transformative change in accessibility in the United Nations for persons with disabilities.

48. Even before the adoption of the Disability Inclusion Strategy, United Nations entities had sought to make the built environment and ICT at their organizations more accessible in order to enhance the participation and contribution of persons with disabilities.

49. The United Nations Office at Vienna and UNODC have taken steps to improve accessibility for attendees of conferences and meetings through the use of simultaneous close captioning that is subsequently uploaded online, thereby helping persons with disabilities who did not attend the meeting in person to access information. All staff also have access to the text-to-speech and speech-to-text capabilities of Microsoft Office tools and the text-to-speech capabilities of Adobe Acrobat.

50. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization has implemented the knowledge management and collaboration system on OpenText 16.2.6, which is compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to information.

51. The Global Book Service of the World Intellectual Property Organization Accessible Books Consortium is an online platform to support the implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are

Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled and meets the standards of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0. The catalogue includes a wide variety of file formats, including digital Braille, Digital Accessible Information System text and EPUB 3.2, and has a large collection of high-quality audio books narrated by real people.

52. At the Universal Postal Union, work has been undertaken to make its building, access road, meeting facilities, cafeteria and workplaces accessible to persons with disabilities, while the headquarters facilities of the World Food Programme were assessed in 2015 with the support of an engineering firm to identify gaps in accessibility for persons with disabilities.

53. At the headquarters of the United Nations Population Fund, signage in Braille has been installed in all conference rooms and offices and its entry doors, reception counter and lavatories are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

54. At the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, a location tracking system of persons with disabilities in the security service control room has been introduced to facilitate their evacuation in emergency situations.

55. At the regional and country levels, physical accessibility standards vary considerably across United Nations entities and, in some instances, the enhancement of accessibility may be hampered by the instability of the local contexts in which United Nations entities operate. The United Nations Volunteer programme (UNV) is working to increase institutional knowledge in order to advance the rights of persons with disabilities at the country level through volunteerism. Since 2017, the UNDP-UNV Talent Programme for Young Professionals with Disabilities have been deploying United Nations volunteers with disabilities to up to 10 UNDP country and regional offices and at headquarters to continue to build a talent pipeline of highly qualified professionals with disabilities who can contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals at the national and global levels.

C. Civil society organizations

56. Civil society organizations are pivotal players in the implementation of accessibility for persons with disabilities. For instance, the World Disability Union, on the basis of a survey of 500 persons with disabilities across Turkey to identify their difficulties in using ICT, prepared a city regulation on accessibility, which was subsequently adopted by municipal councils. The commissions and working groups on work and employment of Rehabilitation International have been working closely with private firms to ensure that work places are made accessible to persons with different types of disabilities. One such example is Deutsche Gesetzliche Unfallversicherung, a Rehabilitation International member organization based in Germany which has been instrumental in convincing private companies in Berlin to modify their work environments in accordance with accessibility requirements so that persons with disabilities, especially those who have gone through rehabilitation after work-related injuries, can get back to work as soon as rehabilitation has been completed.

57. To understand the current state of practice in accessibility of financial services, the Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs has gathered relevant data through two different studies. The first includes the work done to compile the third edition of the ICT accessibility progress report, which is focused on the implementation of the articles of the Convention related to ICT and assistive technology. The second includes a targeted and focused survey on financial inclusion for persons with disabilities and older adults.

V. Monitoring and evaluation of accessibility

58. While efforts have been made to strengthen data collection and information systems, Member States and international organizations need to step up their efforts to better monitor and evaluate accessibility. It is important to invest in collecting data and developing accessibility indicators to monitor and assess progress in the implementation of article 9 of the Convention. Monitoring accessibility can be done through official data sources, such as national assessments of accessibility of governmental buildings and national surveys of persons with disabilities about accessibility in schools, workplaces and other locations.

59. These sources can be complemented with alternative means of data collection, such as crowdsourcing applications to obtain bottom-up information on the accessibility of facilities, while ensuring the privacy of users. Several free online and smartphone applications allow users to publicly review the accessibility for wheelchair users of any facility in the world. The reviews from various applications have been combined in one freely accessible online database to facilitate use of this information for advocacy and policymaking.[15] Current information relates mainly to facilities in developed countries. However, mobile Internet access is increasing in developing countries, and these sources could be further promoted in developing countries. Future efforts could be focused on raising awareness among persons with disabilities in developing countries of the existence of these applications and on expanding the applications to capture information on accessibility for any type of disability (current applications focus mainly on wheelchair users). Crowdsourced information on accessibility has the advantage of reflecting the direct experience of users and of being frequently updated and virtually cost-free.

60. It is also crucial to develop and publish comparable data on the accessibility and use of ICT among persons with disabilities. The lack of such data constitutes a barrier to understanding the magnitude of the digital divide that affects this population and to devising effective policy solutions to eliminate that divide. Similarly, more data on the accessibility of workplaces need to be developed and made available. In order to serve persons with disabilities, all official data should be available in accessible formats, as requested under article 31 of the Convention.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

61. **As shown in the previous sections, many Member States have adopted specific legal provisions to promote accessibility for persons with disabilities. However, the findings indicate that greater efforts are needed to fill existing gaps in accessibility and ensure that persons with disabilities can live independently and participate in society, on an equal basis with others. More specifically, the current report highlights five main challenges.**

62. **The first challenge concerns the heterogeneous status of the implementation of article 9 of the Convention across regions, which underlines regional differences in capacities to pursue accessibility. In particular, there is a need to build capacity in Africa and Oceania.**

63. **The second challenge relates to the heterogeneous implementation of accessibility across various spheres of society. There is a remarkable lack of accessibility initiatives in the workplace and a lack of accessibility requirements for private actors.**

[15] www.accessibility.cloud/.

64. **The third challenge is moving from access to accessibility. Accessibility is more than access: it embodies access, as well as the availability and usability of products, programmes and services, in the physical and virtual environments. Many countries have passed laws or adopted programmes guaranteeing access to persons with disabilities to, inter alia, education, workplace, services and ICT. However, granting such access does not necessarily lead to accessibility if these environments have barriers for persons with disabilities.**

65. **The lack of focus on accessibility in the early stage of designing and developing ICT represents the fourth challenge. Accessibility remains a relatively underdeveloped segment of the ICT market, but there is increasing use of web and ICT standards. These standards need to be scaled up to enhance the development of accessibility technology.**

66. **The fifth challenge stems from the nature of national accessibility interventions and efforts, which often focus on mobility impairments. Persons with distinct types and degrees of severity of disabilities should be considered in the implementation of accessibility. Consulting persons with disabilities will be key to gathering perspectives from persons with different types of disabilities.**

67. **Accessibility is both a means and an end for the implementation of the Convention and the 2030 Agenda. The lack of accessibility is a fundamental barrier that causes persons with disabilities to be excluded, and it needs to be urgently addressed to promote the independent living of persons with disabilities and their participation in society and development.**

68. **In that regard, Member States may wish to consider the following recommendations:**

(a) **Establish and implement accessibility legislation, policies and strategies to eliminate the obstacles and barriers to accessibility faced by persons with disabilities, with special attention to transportation, health care, education, the justice system and ICT, as well as in recreational and cultural activities and sports;**

(b) **Undertake a comprehensive review of laws and policies related to accessibility, in close consultation with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations and other relevant stakeholders, in order to identify, monitor and address gaps in legislation and implementation;**

(c) **Promote the use of the principles of universal design and international standards on accessibility for both existing and new products, buildings and other physical environments, ICT and services, including research and development in those areas;**

(d) **Broaden the scope of international accessibility standards to cover all types of environments and ensure that accessibility is provided to persons of any gender and of all ages and types of disabilities;**

(e) **Ensure that disaster risk reduction efforts are accessible and disability-inclusive and that accessibility is incorporated as a priority in post-disaster reconstruction efforts;**

(f) **Systematically and continuously raise awareness about all aspects of accessibility, in cooperation with persons with disabilities, their representative organizations and technical experts;**

(g) **Collect data and explore alternative sources of evidence such as crowdsourcing to increase the availability of reliable data on accessibility for effective policy development, implementation and monitoring;**

(h) **Undertake continuous capacity-building of all stakeholders, including local authorities, for the application and monitoring of accessibility standards;**

(i) **Establish and strengthen coordination and accountability mechanisms on accessibility, including adequate capacity and appropriate mandates to make sure that plans, strategies and standardization are implemented and enforced;**

(j) **Share good practices on accessibility among key stakeholders, including through a global online knowledge platform on accessibility;**

(k) **Build partnerships among Governments, United Nations entities, intergovernmental organizations and civil society organizations, including organizations of persons with disabilities and the private sector, to catalyse work on accessibility.**

Annex

Status of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto

As of 31 July 2019, at the time of the submission of the present report, a total of 179 States parties had become parties and 162 States had become signatories to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities since its opening for signature, on 30 March 2007. The European Union, as a regional organization, has also ratified the Convention. In addition, there were 96 States parties and 94 signatories to the Optional Protocol to the Convention. The list of all signatories, ratifications and accessions to the Convention is available online from: https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-15&chapter=4&clang=_en. The list of all signatories, ratifications and accessions to the Optional Protocol is available online from: https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-15-a&chapter=4&lang=_en&clang=_en.