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## The ILO's Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy (2022-23) Independent Final Evaluation

### QUICK FACTS

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**Administrative Office:** GEDI

**Technical Office:** GEDI

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**Key Words:** [Disability Inclusion](#)



## BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

### Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The importance of equal opportunities for persons with disabilities within the workplace is formalised in several ILO conventions, most notably the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention, 1983 (No. 159) and the supplementing recommendation (R168). The importance of non-discrimination is also recognised in the 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (FPRW), which includes Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), and disability is recognised as one of the most prevalent bases for discrimination globally.

The United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) was launched in June 2019. It aims to provide a foundation for advancing disability inclusion within the UN system, both in its external and internal activities. It is formulated around four core areas of responsibility, leadership, inclusiveness, programming, and organisational culture. Each core area has a series of indicators that are reported against by entities and UN Country Teams (UNCTs) on an annual basis.

Following the development of the UNDIS, which the ILO had played a significant role in supporting, the ILO Governing Body endorsed the development of a new Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy for 2020-23, and this was approved by the ILO Senior Management Team in 2021. The policy statement affirmed the ILO’s recognition that social justice and decent work for all will only be realised in persons with disabilities are meaningfully engaged in the world of work, and reinforced the ILO’s commitment to leading by example in its policies, programmes, and operations. The Strategy is structured in a similar manner to the UNDIS and lays out how the ILO plans to approach, meet, or exceed requirements the 15 UNDIS indicators. The ILO Strategy also includes specific actions and quantitative indicators to allow the ILO to achieve the UNDIS targets.

### Present situation of the project

The UNDIS requires entities to submit an annual report with a self-reported assessment of achievement on each indicator (missing, approaching, meets, and exceeds). The ILO also reports on a biannually to the Governing Body and publicly publishes the report.



	<p>In their first UNDIS report, the ILO assessed themselves to be missing on 8 indicators, approaches on 8, and exceeds on 1. The 2022 report showed missing on 2 indicators, approaches on 9, meets on 1, and exceeds on 4 indicators.</p> <p>The Disability Inclusion team within the Gender, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (GEDI) branch has taken coordination responsibilities for the Strategy. Responsibilities for implementation are shared by several ILO UNDIS custodian departments. During the development of the Strategy, GEDI and the custodian departments coordinated to understand what was required by the indicators and what targets were achievable. GEDI coordinates with the custodians to support progress on the indicators, as well as gather information for the annual report. GEDI also provides technical support where needed to the custodians.</p> <p>A Disability Champions Network (DCN) was launched during the Strategy period. This is a voluntary network of ILO staff who work on or have an interest in disability inclusion. It consists of staff based in headquarters, regional, and country offices, and operational and project and programme staff. It currently has 80 members.</p> <p>The Strategy also bolstered the launch of the Employees Resource Group (ERG) on Disability Inclusion. This is an independent and voluntary group of ILO staff who either have disabilities or have dependents with disabilities. The ERG on Disability Inclusion currently has about 20 members.</p>
<p><b>Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation</b></p>	<p>The purpose of the evaluation was to provide an independent assessment of progress towards the goals of the Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy, provide recommendations and lesson learning for the next multiannual Strategy, and to allow reflection and dialogue among key stakeholders within the ILO.</p> <p>The clients of the evaluation are the ILO, and in particular, although not exclusively, staff from the disability inclusion team in the GEDI branch, as well as other staff responsible for the implementation of the disability inclusion strategy, including the ILO UNDIS custodians and staff members who are members of the DCN, ILO staff with disabilities and with dependents with disabilities, including the ERG,</p>

	senior management, the Governing Body, the staff union, and the ILO's constituents.
<b>Methodology of evaluation</b>	The evaluation was mixed methods, using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. A desk review of key internal and external documents was conducted, initially during the inception period but ongoing throughout the data collection period. Key informant individual and group interviews were conducted. These were mainly with ILO Officials, but three external stakeholders also agreed to participate in interviews. A total of 51 interviews were held with 65 individuals (35 women and 30 men). This included 62 ILO Officials (34 women, 28 men) and 3 external stakeholders, (1 woman, 2 men). One of the ILO staff was from ILOITC. At least eight persons with disabilities (4 women, 4 men) and four persons with dependents with disabilities (2 women, 2 men) were interviewed. A survey was sent out to members of the DCN and ILO UNDIS custodians. The survey was sent to 86 staff, and 52 people (31 women and 21 men) responded. Three people who responded to the survey identified as having disabilities.
<b>MAIN FINDINGS &amp; CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>Relevance</b> Key Finding 1: The Policy and Strategy has been useful in helping the ILO advance its goals on disability inclusion through providing a structured approach for coordination and heightening awareness of disability inclusion. Key Finding 2: The Policy and Strategy aligns with the ILO's goals and mandate. However, references to disability inclusion in key ILO documents such as the Programme and Budget (P&B), Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs), and Country Programme Outcomes (CPOs) could be strengthened. Key Finding 3: The Disability Inclusion Team was proactive in engaging different departments in setting targets and implementing approaches to reach the goals of the strategy. Key Finding 4: There is limited attention to gender equality in the Strategy, partly as a consequence of the Strategy focusing on initial entry points for working on disability inclusion. As such, there is greater potential in the second phase of the Strategy to have more focus on gender equality.



The evaluation found the Policy and Strategy have been relevant to the ILO advancing its goals on disability inclusion and has helped improve awareness of disability inclusion within the ILO. The document has helped shape the ILO's approach and provided a structured approach to coordination. It is aligned with key ILO policy documents and statements, such as the Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work (2019). However, attention to disability inclusion in the P&B and country DWCPs and CPOs remains sporadic. This currently limits progress, particularly on the programmatic side. There was also limited attention to gender equality and the intersection of gender and disability in the Strategy.

#### **Coherence**

Key Finding 5: The ILO's Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy is closely aligned with the UNDIS, and its actions are focused on achieving the UNDIS indicators.

Key Finding 6: The ILO has made significant contributions to the delivery of the UNDIS by UN entities, both by developing joint training programmes and through setting good examples that can be shared by the UNDIS team with other entities.

Key Finding 7: There is evidence of mutual leveraging and complementarity with other departments and some programmes in the field, but this is ad hoc and not systematic. Although the Disability Inclusion team has utilised its resources to coordinate with other departments, mainstreaming remains a work in progress. The limited references to disability in the P&B, DWCPs and CPOs reduces opportunities for collaboration.

Key Finding 8: The intersectionality of different forms of discrimination has not been significantly addressed in the work on disability inclusion. The 2025-26 P&B has more significant references to intersectionality in the work done on the care economy and violence and harassment in the workplace but to date there has been limited interaction on the intersection of discrimination faced by different groups such as persons with disabilities, women, and other marginalised groups. Coordination within GEDI could be enhanced to address this.

There is strong coherence between the ILO's Strategy and the UNDIS, as the Strategy is built to allow the ILO to progress in its



commitments to the UNDIS. The ILO contributed to the design and roll-out of the UNDIS, providing significant support to initiatives by the UN, most notably through designing and administering a course for UNDIS focal points and the co-chairing of working groups.

Analysis of collaboration between departments found mixed results. There has been strong coordination between certain departments. The collaboration between GEDI and SOCPRO to further work on disability inclusive social protection systems is an example of this. However, this appears to be more ad hoc than systematic. Stronger references to disability inclusion in the P&B and greater attention to mainstreaming disability into DWCPs and CPOs would help this.

There could also be greater attention intersectional discrimination and the lived experiences of marginalised groups through stronger coordination within GEDI. There are opportunities available, particularly through the work on the care economy and on the prevention of violence and harassment in the workplace, where intersectional discrimination based on disability and gender could be addressed more.

#### **Effectiveness**

**Key Finding 9:** The ILO has made considerable progress in implementing the Strategy. However, as demonstrated by the self-reported scoring of the UNDIS indicators, this remains a work in progress and continued attention to disability mainstreaming is needed.

**Key Finding 10:** The ILO has implemented several innovative and good practices. Mostly notable of these include the launching of the ERG, the voluntary nature of the DCN, the UNDIS custodian system, and the development of various training courses, guides and manuals.

**Key Finding 11:** While senior leadership and the Governing Body has made several important commitments to disability inclusion, stronger leadership at different levels of the organisation is needed to encourage staff to prioritise disability inclusion in all aspects of their work.

**Key Finding 12:** The numbers of persons with disabilities recruited at all levels of the Office remains low.



Key Finding 13: Baselines for various indicators in the Strategy have not been identified. The lack of data makes it difficult to fully assess progress. Strengthening the M&E system is important for the next stage of the strategy.

Review of the ILO's self-reported achievements against the UNDIS indicators shows significant progress but also considerable work still to be done. Progress has been made in nine of sixteen UNDIS indicators, however, the ILO rated itself as meeting or exceed requirements in only five of the indicators by the end of 2022. ILO sets itself ambitious targets to achieve different levels of the UNDIS indicators and is rigorous in assessing when it has reached the target or not. In some cases, this does mask some of the progress that has been made in indicators that have not yet reached meeting or exceeds.

Successful achievements include the development of the DCN, the launch of the ERG, the development of the UNDIS training course, the improvements in digital and physical accessibility, and the development of various guides, policies, and manuals. Areas where attention is needed includes the recruitment and ongoing employment of persons with disabilities, completing the baseline for the accessibility of meetings, ensuring ownership of the Strategy and pushing for greater attention to disability inclusion programmatically and at the regional and country office level, and ensuring a stronger statement of disability inclusion in the introduction to the P&B. Additionally, strengthening leadership from Directors, HR officials and ILO Chiefs, Regional Administrative Services (CRAS), with a formal accountability mechanism developed to track implementation would help both the operational and programmatic parts of the Strategy. Monitoring of the progress the ILO is making on disability inclusion should be strengthened in the next multi-annual Strategy, with greater attention paid to performance on disability inclusion in evaluations.

#### **Efficiency**

Key Finding 14: The Strategy was not designed with a corresponding budget which to an extent has affected implementation.



Key Finding 15: The resources available for the Disability Inclusion team are limited and there is a corresponding lack of dedicated disability resources in the field. Although the Disability Inclusion team are regarded by their colleagues as being responsive to requests for support, the limited resources does impact the input they can have into the design of projects and programmes.

Key Finding 16: Despite the limited resources, the ILO has implemented the Strategy efficiently, using innovative approaches to try to strengthen staff capacity. The DCN is one example of trying to utilise existing human resources to strengthen the capacities in headquarters and the regional country and regional offices.

Key Finding 17: The Disability Inclusion team management of the ILO's UNDIS indicators means they are responsible for not only the traditional programme and project support provided by GEDI, but also for coordinating with operational departments on various indicators. This puts a further strain on resources.

The Strategy was not accompanied by a budget. This has impacted the overall efficiency of implementation. While the ILO has in general maximised its uses of resources as efficiently as possible, the lack of dedicate budget for custodian departments reduced the momentum towards implementation.

The limited resources for GEDI in headquarters and lack of disability experts in the field also reduces the quantity, although not quality, of the technical support that can be given. The Disability Inclusion Team in GEDI has the responsibility of managing the Strategy with operational and programmatic aspects, as well as providing technical support to colleagues and constituents on operations, programming, projects, and policy. Other departments also lack specific disability experts. Increasing existing staff capacity through additional training and by expanding the DCN, as well as hiring new staff that have disability expertise, where budget allows, is needed.

#### **Sustainability and Likelihood of Impact**

Key Finding 18: There have been several initiatives that are encouraging for long-term durability. These include the launch of the ERG, the development and expansion of the DCN, the improvements in office infrastructure, the launch of IGDS No.590,





the development of manuals, handbooks, and accessible on-line and printed materials, and the capacity training of staff.

Key Finding 19: Strengthening leadership at different levels of the Office is needed to ensure longer-term sustainability.

The ILO has set a strong base for continued work improving its disability inclusion across the organisation. Long-term commitment from the senior leadership and engagement of the regional and country offices it though crucial to ensure long-term impact and sustainability.

Several initiatives the ILO has undertaken offer the prospect of durability, including the ERG, the DCN, the improvements in accessibility, and the guidelines and handbooks. Attention is though needed to ensure the ILO improves in areas where it is not yet meeting requirements. A collaborative approach to designing the next strategy that meaningfully engages the ERG on Disability Inclusion, the departments that are not custodian departments, the regional and country offices, and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) would strengthen ownership of the next phase of the Strategy. Additionally, engaging the tripartite constituents are in the work the ILO is doing on disability inclusion is important. The recruitment of persons with disabilities and engagement of OPDs in a meaningful manner would strongly enhance sustainability, and financing of disability inclusion activities are critical in the future.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the evaluation found the ILO has leveraged the launch of the UNDIS to launch and implement a Policy and Strategy that has helped to further attention to disability inclusion within the Office. Progress has been made in several areas, but much remains to be done. The engagement of different departments to be ILO UNDIS custodians helped strengthen ownership of the strategy both in design and implementation. Collaboration with more departments, ensuring the input of the Regional and Country Offices, and strengthening the commitments from different levels of leadership with be critical for the next multi-annual strategy. Staff with disabilities, staff with dependants with disabilities, and persons with disabilities in Member States must be at the centre of all the ILO does on disability inclusion. High-level support for the ERG on



Disability Inclusion and the engagement of OPDs at the global and country level will therefore need to be a driving element of the next multi-annual strategy. The ILO has laid a strong foundation for continued improvements in its approach to disability inclusion and needs to harness this momentum moving forward.

## RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

### Main findings & Conclusions

1. Strengthen further the commitments from senior and middle management to disability inclusion. This should include target setting and action plans for Regional departments Offices and different key departments, including Directors, HR officials and ILO Chiefs, Regional Administrative Services (CRAS), with a formal accountability mechanism developed to track implementation, including disability inclusion as a recurrent discussion item for the Senior Management Team, identifying a member of the senior management to chair an annual meeting of the ILO UNDIS custodians, providing senior level sponsorship of the ERG on Disability Inclusion, and ensuring a statement on disability inclusion in the introduction of the 2026-27 P&B.
2. Develop targets and actions for the recruitment of persons with disabilities and the level of satisfaction of staff with disabilities in the ILO. This should include regular consultation with the ERG on Disability Inclusion, outreach to OPDs, increased training of HR and hiring managers, increased awareness of the Reasonable Accommodation Reserve, and greater flexibility in job/internship requirements.
3. Ensure the ILO's planned actions on disability inclusion are costed and accompanied by a budget. Develop a budget with the next multi-annual strategy and monitor its use, establish a central reserve for accessibility issues, increase attention on ensuring disability inclusive indicators in DWCPs and CPOs, launch an innovation fund for small grants for departments to bid for, and provide a budget for the ERG on Disability Inclusion.
4. Strengthen the monitoring of the new multi-annual Strategy. This should include finalising baselines, ensuring



evaluations pay more attention to disability inclusion, establishing a consultation mechanism with the ERG on Disability Inclusion, and negotiating with regional offices and policy departments on new indicators to measure their progress on mainstreaming disability.

5. Set more detailed targets in the programmes and projects indicators in the next strategy. Indicators on policy and work at the regional level should be included in the strategy to encourage more attention to disability inclusion in the ILO's policy work and work at the regional and country level.
6. Increase cooperation within and between departments, paying particular emphasis to the opportunities offered by focusing on intersectionality of lived experiences and affected groups. In particular, there are opportunities to strengthen disability inclusion within work on the care economy and violence and harassment in the world of work, as well as building collaboration between disability champions and gender focal points.
7. Strengthen the focus on engaging the tripartite constituents and introducing disability inclusion into social dialogue. This would require support from Regional and Country Offices, and regional-level application of the Strategy and the UNDIS.
8. Continue to expand training opportunities for staff on disability inclusion. More detailed technical support on how to ensure disability inclusion in different aspects of the strategy is needed.
9. Encourage the signing of MOUs of cooperation with OPDs at a regional and country office level. OPDs should be consulted in programming and operations of the regional and country offices.
10. A holistic approach to accessibility should be taken, including in terms of physical and digital accessibility, communications, and ways of working that addresses the barriers faced by persons with both visible and invisible disabilities. This should include accessibility audits, prioritising accessibility over aesthetics, and finalising the baseline for the accessibility of meetings indicator.



	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Continue to grow the DCN including identifying ways to recognise the contribution champions make through additional training or inclusion in performance reviews, hold more thematically focused meetings, and ensure rotating start times to accommodate staff in different time-zones.</li> <li>12. Consider if policy changes can be made to better support staff with dependents with disabilities who do not necessarily fit within the ILO’s current definition of dependents.</li> <li>13. To strengthen the ERG on Disability Inclusion further, continue to engage with other UN entities and, as the ERG expands, consider establishing regional groupings.</li> <li>14. Ensure the development of the next Strategy is collaborative, including fully consulting the ERG on Disability Inclusion, engaging the regional and country offices, coordinating with programme and policy departments who are not ILO UNDIS Custodians, soliciting input from OPDs, and ensuring the management response to the evaluation is jointly developed by all relevant departments.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Main lessons learned and good practices</b></p>	<p>Lessons Learned</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Leadership at all levels is required to further disability mainstreaming across the organisation.</li> </ol> <p>Although the commitments made by the senior leadership of the ILO have been important for the implementation of the strategy, ILO officials indicated they believe stronger leadership at different levels of the Office could be shown. Commitments to disability inclusion from senior management of regional and country offices and individual departments should be encouraged for the next phase of the Strategy. Without the involvement of this level of management, the accountability for achieving the goals of the strategy will be unclear and ultimately the resources not made available.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Resourcing is important to consider in developing and implementing strategies.</li> </ol> <p>The Disability Inclusion team has limited human resources and specific disability experts are not present in the field. There also is not a diversity and inclusion position in HRD. The Strategy did not</p>



have an accompanying budget, which impacted the work of various departments. Additionally, the challenges of ensuring disability inclusive DWCPs and CPOs limits the programmatic budget. While the ILO has made significant achievements on disability inclusion in this strategy period, the lack of a specified budget has limited progress in many ways.

#### Good Practices

1. ILO UNDIS Custodian approach and consultation with key departments

The development of the custodian approach that ensures individual departments have accountability for implementing particular areas of the Strategy was identified by both internal and external stakeholders as being an important good practice. ILO Officials compared this approach favourably to other strategies launched by the ILO that have not have the same level of ownership. Critical to this approach was the level of consultation between the Disability Inclusion team and the respective departments.

2. Disability Champions Network

The Disability Inclusion Strategy was able to employ lessons learned from the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy. In addition to strengthening of ownership through the custodian system, the also DCN built on lessons learned from previous strategies, particularly the gender focal point system to develop a voluntary network of individuals who are focused on disability inclusion. The voluntary nature of the network means individuals do not see membership as an additional burden on top of their other responsibilities, but as a peer network that can enhance their capacities to carry out their functions and/or allow them to support their peers to build their capacities.

3. Leadership among UN agencies

The ILO's involvement in supporting the development of the UNDIS and then subsequent support to its implementation helps ensure the ILO is seen as a leading agency on disability inclusion. This allows international labour standards to be a key element of the work the UN-wide system does on disability inclusion. It also positions the ILO in a favourable position to accessing funding for joint UN activities.