

Disability-Inclusive Communications Guidelines



The United Nations Disability-Inclusive Communications Guidelines were developed by the Department of Global Communications in collaboration with the Disability Team in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, members of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) focal point network, and in consultation with the International Disability Alliance.

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List of acronyms

AI	Artificial intelligence
Alt text	Alternative text
CART	Communication access real-time translation
CC	Closed captions
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DGC	Department of Global Communications
DRM	Digital rights management
EOSG	Executive Office of the Secretary-General
ePub	Electronic publication
ICT	Information communications technology
OPD	Organization of persons with disabilities
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDH	Subtitles for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing
UN	United Nations
UNCT	UN Country Team
UNDIS	UN Disability Inclusion Strategy
UN OICT	UN Office of Information and Communications Technology
VPAT	Voluntary Product Accessibility Template
W3C	World Wide Web Consortium
WAVE	Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool
WCAG	Web Content Accessibility Guidelines
WebAIM	Web Accessibility in Mind

Introduction

Why are disability-inclusive communications guidelines important?

In an ever-connected world, communications have grown into a must-have cross-cutting skill for every United Nations (UN) professional. Inclusive and accessible communications benefit everyone, both persons with disabilities and the general public. By practising disability-inclusive communications, we can reflect the true diversity of our societies.

Moreover, disability-inclusive communications will help to fulfill the promise of ‘leaving no one behind’, a key component of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Inclusive communications allow persons with disabilities to participate fully and equally in all spheres of society.

What are the Guidelines for?

The purpose of the Guidelines is to assist UN communications focal points and other UN staff to make all our communications disability-inclusive and accessible. Inclusive and accessible communications reduce bias and discrimination, and promote inclusion and participation.

Who are the Guidelines for?

The Guidelines are intended for all UN personnel, whether they work in human rights, sustainable development, humanitarian assistance, or peace and security. We hope the Guidelines will help staff to assess and develop their communications, and also drive broader cultural change in our organizations.

The [UN Disability Inclusion Strategy](#) (UNDIS), launched by the Secretary-General in 2019, aims to raise the standards and performance on disability inclusion across the UN’s work. The Strategy, which consists of a policy and an accountability framework, covers the entire UN system from headquarters to field level. Its overall implementation is coordinated by the Disability Team in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG).¹

The Strategy’s accountability framework comprises two aligned components: the Entity Accountability Framework and a UN Country Team (UNCT) Accountability Scorecard on Disability Inclusion. With indicators covering four core areas across programmes and operations,² the accountability framework

¹ United Nations, Disability Inclusion Strategy (2019). At: www.un.org/disabilitystrategy.

² The four core areas of the Strategy are: leadership, strategic planning and management; inclusiveness; programming; and organizational culture.

establishes specific benchmarks to support entities and UNCTs to achieve transformative and lasting change on disability inclusion.

Indicator 15 of the Entity Accountability Framework centres on substantive communications. Indicators 6 and 6.1 focus on accessibility.

These Guidelines support any UN entity that aims to approach, meet or exceed the requirements for disability-inclusive and accessible communications (indicators 15, 6 and 6.1 of the Entity Accountability Framework), and will also support UNCTs in their disability-inclusive communications (indicator 14 of the UNCT Accountability Scorecard on Disability Inclusion).

How were the Guidelines developed?

The Guidelines were developed by the United Nations Department of Global Communications (DGC), in collaboration with the Disability

Team in the EOSG and members of the UNDIS entity focal point network, and in consultation with the [International Disability Alliance](#).³

Contributors included organizations of persons with disabilities, communications specialists, and disability inclusion experts.

When and where can the Guidelines be applied?

The Guidelines can be used by UN personnel in all their communications, when they send emails and meeting notes, prepare documents, participate in community consultations, communicate through digital platforms, or run multi-channel campaigns that exploit a range of media. Supported by best practices and examples, they provide guidance on how to respect disability etiquette and create inclusive and accessible content.



In 2018, UNICEF opened the first fully inclusive playground for children with disabilities in Jordan in Za’atari Refugee Camp as part of national efforts to make education inclusive for all children. Photo Credit: Christopher Herwig (UNHCR).

³ The International Disability Alliance is a network of global and regional non-governmental organizations of persons with disabilities and their families. More information at: www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org.

Who are persons with disabilities?

Persons with disabilities include people who have long-term sensory, physical, psychosocial, intellectual, or other impairments that, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.⁴

Persons with disabilities are a diverse group, who have different impairments and varied identities (for example, as women, indigenous persons, young adults, or children). The rights of persons with disabilities have been largely disregarded and they confront social and environmental barriers as a result. The exclusion and marginalization persons with disabilities frequently experience can be further compounded because of discrimination due to their gender identity, age, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, origin, location, legal status, or on other grounds.

[The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#) embraces the differences between human beings and underlines the importance of taking the diversity of the human experience into account. To ensure persons with disabilities are accurately portrayed and can access information and communications on an equal basis with others, we must adopt an approach to disability-inclusive

communications that respects difference and recognizes persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity.

All UN staff should follow the CRPD to the best of their ability and ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Specifically, CRPD Articles 9 (Accessibility) and 21 (Freedom of expression and opinion and access to information) underline that it is important to take appropriate measures to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities, and their right to freedom of expression and opinion.

Consulting persons with disabilities and their representative organizations

The UN Disability Inclusion Strategy recognizes that persons with disabilities are actors of change and possess unique knowledge and lived experiences of disability that others do not. As a diverse, non-homogeneous population, persons with disabilities have the right to participate fully and effectively in decisions

⁴ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Article 1. The CRPD refers to 'mental' impairment. The CRPD Committee now uses the term 'psychosocial' impairment.

that affect their lives. Being able to do so is critical to the removal of systemic barriers to their full inclusion and participation in society.

It is critical to closely consult, and actively involve, persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in all areas of communications to make sure that disability-inclusive communications are responsive, appropriate for the audience, and useful to all. Persons with disabilities can provide unique perspectives and make positive contributions to the content and quality of communications and the ways in which we communicate.

Persons with disabilities are often represented by organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs). OPDs are global, regional, national, or local non-governmental organizations that are led, directed and governed by persons with disabilities, for persons with disabilities. They may have a cross-disability focus, or represent one type of impairment, or one specific group (for example, women with disabilities or indigenous persons with disabilities).

FIGURE 1: GLOBAL POPULATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



Global population of persons with disabilities (IASC Guidelines, 2019, Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action)

Getting started: what you need to know

To communicate in a disability-inclusive manner, we must appreciate that persons with disabilities are part of human diversity. Shift the focus to the person, rather than the impairment.

In communicating about persons with disabilities, we need also to recognize the overarching narratives that have been used to describe persons with disabilities, and how to model and shape narratives to ensure inclusion.

Address stereotypes

Implicit bias affects everyone and is compounded by mixed messaging in the media and entertainment industries. Disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.⁵ Stereotypes contribute to attitudinal barriers and foster conditions that encourage discrimination against persons with disabilities.

We therefore need to recognize and avoid common stereotypes that depict persons with disabilities as heroic, for example, or pitiable, or less than others. Such stereotypes influence our perception of persons with disabilities and frequently perpetuate their social exclusion.

This may result in a range of impacts. For example: children with disabilities may not be sent to school, or school buildings may not be built with accessibility in mind. Sexual and reproductive health information may not be provided in a range of accessible formats that ensure all youth with disabilities can access it. Employers may have a hiring bias against persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities may face higher rates of violence. And harmful practices such as the widespread use of forced sterilization and institutionalization may continue.

ACTION

Do not portray persons with disabilities as:

- ✓ Vulnerable or a burden on others.
- ✓ Living a life of less value or quality.
- ✓ Less than human.
- ✓ Dangerous.
- ✓ Extraordinary or superheroic.

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⁵ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Preamble, paragraph (e).

BOX 1. EXAMPLES OF COMMON STEREOTYPES⁶

“Persons with disabilities are incapable”

This stereotype suggests that persons with disabilities are vulnerable, a burden to society, family and friends, and in need of protection because it is assumed they cannot make decisions, work or learn.

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“The lives of persons with disabilities have less value”

This stereotype supposes that persons with disabilities have a lower quality of life because of their impairment(s) and as a result their lives are not worth living.

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“Persons with disabilities are less than human”

This stereotype asserts that persons with disabilities do not share human feelings and emotions and do not share a common human dignity. On these grounds, they may be dehumanized and objectified. These attitudes are often at the root of abusive practices such as shackling, medical experimentation, and other forms of violence and abuse.

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“Persons with disabilities are dangerous.”

Persons with disabilities are often presumed to be dangerous to themselves and others. This perception has frequently been the justification for the enforcement of mental health laws, forced medical treatment and deprivation of liberty.

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“Persons with disabilities are extraordinary / overachievers”

Persons with disabilities are considered to lead difficult lives and therefore any success they achieve is due to their courage and power – they have ‘overcome’ impairment. This is often referred to as the phenomenon of a “superhero”, a person who serves as an inspiration and role model for persons with disabilities and others alike.

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6 Adapted from OHCHR, [Awareness-raising under article 8 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (2019).

Models of disability: charity, medical and social

The experience of persons with disabilities in society has been explained using different models of disability, which

illustrate why societies have given certain roles to persons with disabilities at a given time and in a given context.

BOX 2. THREE MODELS OF DISABILITY

- “The **charity model** of disability considers persons with disabilities as passive objects of kind (charitable) acts or welfare recipients only, rather than as empowered individuals with equal rights. Under this model, disability is an individual’s problem and persons with disabilities are not considered capable of providing for themselves on account of their impairments; rather, they are considered as a burden on society, which bestows its benevolence on them. Persons with disabilities, under this perspective, are considered the objects of pity, dependent on the goodwill of others, and are thereby disempowered and not in control of their own lives, participating little or not at all in society. The effect of this model is that society’s responses are limited to care and assistance, with individuals being reduced to recipients of charity and welfare only, instead of its guaranteeing them the enjoyment of their rights.”⁷
- “The **medical model** of disability considers persons with disabilities as objects of treatment, as patients to be cured, and disability as a medical problem that needs to be solved or an illness that needs to be treated. Under this model, disability resides in the individual and doctors know best how to correct and manage any impairment, regardless of the consent, will and preferences of the individual. Persons with disabilities, under this model, are considered as deviating from the physical and mental norms and their behaviours and attitudes are pathologized. The effect of this model is that society’s responses seek to normalize and diminish impairments as a means to enabling participation, instead of removing barriers.”⁸
- “The **social model** frames disability as the consequence of the interaction of the individual with an environment that does not accommodate that individual’s differences. This lack of accommodation impedes the individual’s participation in society. Inequality is not due to the impairment, but to the inability of society to eliminate barriers challenging persons with disabilities. This model puts the person at the centre, not his/her impairment, recognizing the values and rights of persons with disabilities as part of society. This paradigm shifts disability as not a “mistake” of society but an element of its diversity. Disability is a social construct—the result of the interaction in society between personal factors and environmental factors. Disability is not an individual problem but the outcome of a wrong organization of society.”⁹

7 OHCHR, [Awareness-raising under article 8 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (2019).

8 Ibid.

9 OHCHR, [The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Training Guide](#) (2014).

The **human rights-based approach** builds on the social model. “The CRPD signaled a ‘paradigm shift’ from traditional charity-oriented, medical-based approaches to disability to one based on human rights. It calls for the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities across the human rights, development, and humanitarian agendas.”¹⁰ This is the approach to be used in all UN disability-inclusive communications.

Ableism

“In a similar manner to racism, sexism or ageism, ‘ableism’ is commonly described as the belief system that underlies the negative attitudes, stereotypes and stigma that devalue persons with disabilities on the basis of their actual or perceived impairments. Ableism considers persons with disabilities

as being less worthy of respect and consideration, less able to contribute and participate, and of less inherent value than others.”¹¹

Whereas many discriminatory discourses are increasingly challenged by public opinion, ableism continues to legitimize discriminatory forms of expression and behaviour. It may be conscious or unconscious, and may be entrenched in institutions, systems, and the broader culture of society. It limits the opportunities of persons with disabilities and reduces their inclusion in community life.¹²

Communications play a key role in changing norms and shifting from a charity or medical model to a social model or to the human rights-based approach that should guide all UN communications.



“When people see me teaching, they understand that I’m not defined by my disability.” Ehsan Al Khalili, 45, teaches a music class for young refugees at Azraq camp in Jordan. Originally from Damascus, Ehsan has been blind since he was a child. Photo Credit: Christopher Herwig (UNHCR).

¹⁰ UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in OHCHR, [About the human rights of persons with disabilities](#).

¹¹ OHCHR, [Awareness-raising under article 8 of Awareness-raising and persons with disabilities](#) (2019).

¹² Ibid.



Sebastián (right), age 9, and Mateo, 4, walk and talk during recess at Colegio y Liceo Ceni, an inclusive school in Montevideo, Uruguay.
Photo Credit: Giacomo Pirozzi (UNICEF 2013).

Developing Inclusive Content



Developing Inclusive Content

All communications should include persons with disabilities. Targeted communications should also specifically promote or highlight their rights. This is the starting point. We should make the same effort to mainstream disability inclusion that we make to mainstream gender, and for the same reason - to accurately portray the diversity of our society.

Communications about any issue, for example, humanitarian emergencies, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), peace and security, human rights, or recruitment or employment conditions, need to include persons with disabilities.

Affirmative and solution-oriented storytelling

Leverage the power of storytelling to make audiences aware and imagine solutions, but be honest about the many barriers that persons with disabilities face.

Stories that centre on persons with disabilities should be balanced and affirmative, in the same way that the UN affirms the agency of women, children, indigenous peoples and other groups. Stories should show persons with disabilities in active roles, rather than passive. Recognize their diversity and experiences by including the voices of children, adults, siblings, authority figures, and older persons with disabilities.

When you create stories about persons with disabilities, it is always best practice to consult and include them. Make sure that stories show the lived experiences of persons with disabilities from their perspective.

ACTION

- ✓ **Craft factual and affirmative stories about persons with disabilities. Emphasize solutions. Include people of all ages.**
- ✓ **When you create stories, consult persons with disabilities and actively include them.**

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Social context and roles

When you portray persons with disabilities, you do not need to distinguish persons with disabilities from the general population. All people can be independent, productive and sociable, living their lives as well as they can.

Persons with disabilities belong to families and have families of their own. They have friends and social circles that are diverse.

Like everyone else, they have different personalities and social skills. Stories should portray them in their everyday roles, as professionals or students or factory workers, and in every phase of life, as children, young adults, parents, and ageing members of society.

ACTION

- ✓ Make your descriptions authentic.
- ✓ Give attention to the roles that persons with disabilities play in society.

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Intersectionality

Persons with disabilities are not a homogeneous group and this should be reflected in our communications by considering intersectionality—the intersection of disability together with other factors, such as gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, refugee, migrant or asylum seeker status. For example, a person with disability also has a gender identity, may come from an indigenous group and be young, old, a migrant or live in poverty.

Persons with disabilities may face heightened barriers and discrimination as a result of their intersecting identities. A person with disability belonging to an ethnic minority, for example, may be overlooked for a job due to stigma about both their disability and ethnicity.

Adopting an intersectional approach to our storytelling enables us to more accurately convey the true diversity of our societies, and also enables us to bring greater attention to

the heightened discrimination and increased barriers faced by persons with disabilities as a result of these intersecting factors.

ACTION

- ✓ Be conscious of intersectional discrimination. Harness it to explain the diversity of persons with disabilities and their experiences.

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Accurate portrayal

Allow persons with disabilities to express their emotions, to be funny or serious, optimistic or fearful. Always endeavour to portray persons with disabilities with a range of emotions. Focus on the person, the human emotion, and the purpose of the story. Do not focus on a person's impairment or devices (wheelchair, white cane, etc.).

Persons with disabilities are diverse and they may have different impairments, including impairments that are not apparent or visible. To reflect this, leverage creative, non-visual elements of storytelling, such as narratives and scripts. Find creative ways to tell their stories.

ACTION

- ✓ Let persons with disabilities display a range of emotions and be themselves - like anyone else.

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BOX 3. MATCHING MEDIUM AND AUDIENCE

Pick the medium carefully.

- Though many people can hear messages communicated via the radio and microphones, these channels exclude persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing and may not reach persons with intellectual disabilities. Flyers with key messages, written in plain language or with drawings, may reach these audiences better.
- SMS via mobile phone (excluding smart phones) are accessible for persons who are deaf and hard-of-hearing, but such messages may not reach people who are blind. Use texts accompanied by audio recordings, or communicate face-to-face.
- Illustrations or animations can creatively capture the diversity of persons with disabilities. However, they need to portray persons with disabilities accurately. Always check with OPDs that visual representations of persons with disabilities are acceptable.

Choosing the right medium – audience and subject considerations

When communicating, pick the medium you use carefully. Will it be accessible to everyone? Will it exclude anyone? Is it the best medium for delivering your message effectively to the target audience you have in mind? Often, more than one type of medium is required to reach the wider population.

The content of your message and its target audience should together determine your choice of medium. In other words, if you are making a video don't shy away from interviewing a person who is blind. If you are preparing a radio interview, don't avoid interviewing a person who is deaf.

ACTION

- ✓ Choose a medium that is appropriate for your target audience.

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Accessibility and reasonable accommodation

When you engage persons with disabilities in your communications work, ensure that the medium you are working in will allow them to participate fully and actively. Consider accessibility and reasonable accommodation.

In the context of disability inclusion, “‘reasonable accommodation’ is an anti-discrimination measure that enables persons with disabilities to exercise their rights on an equal basis with others. A reasonable accommodation is a measure that benefits a specific individual, that may modify, or complement standard policies and services, that may be provided in specific circumstances, and that may be offered immediately”.¹³

It is important to offer and provide reasonable accommodation to any persons with disabilities that attend in-person or online meetings or events, even if measures have been taken to ensure a meeting or event is accessible.

13 United Nations, [Disability Inclusion Strategy Entity Accountability Framework - Technical Notes](#) (2019), p. 55.

BOX 4. EXAMPLES OF REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION MEASURES

- If you are interviewing a person who is deaf, you may need to recruit a sign interpreter.
- If you are interviewing a person with an intellectual disability, ask in advance what support they would like or require. Does the interviewee want to receive briefing documents in an easy-to-read format, for example, or to be accompanied by a support person of their choice?
- To increase the accessibility of information, offer real-time captioning via communication access real-time translation (CART), or provide documents in multiple formats.

It is important to calculate the costs of reasonable accommodation and accessibility in advance, when you plan budgets. Costs might include the fees of sign language interpreters and real-time captioners for CART, or the cost of producing Braille documents. Other expenses might include costs of travel, workspace, transport, hiring of equipment, and the organization of meetings and events.¹⁴

Always ask persons with disabilities with whom you work to tell you in advance about any reasonable accommodations they require, keeping in mind that it will often vary from person to person.

It is equally important to collect feedback from persons with disabilities after an event or interview. Was the event accessible?



Necelatte (right) and Jean-Claude (left), from Burundi, in conversation at university.
Photo Credit: UNICEF/2019/Kharkiv/Anna Markel.

¹⁴ United Nations, [Disability Inclusion Strategy Entity Accountability Framework - Technical Notes](#) (2019).

Was reasonable accommodation offered? In communications as in other fields, disability inclusion is a process. It can always be improved and requires continuous feedback and learning.

ACTION

- ✓ Provide accessibility and reasonable accommodation to ensure equal and full participation.
- ✓ Include budgets for reasonable accommodation and accessibility in all projects.
- ✓ Gather feedback: continue to improve and learn.

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Disability disclosure and consent

If a person's impairment has not been made public, do not disclose the impairment. Only include reference to a person's impairment if it is relevant to the content and purpose of the story you are telling and if the person has volunteered the information, or is not identified.

Photo/video release forms that document and record consent should be provided in accessible formats to any persons with disabilities who require them. In some instances, for example children with disabilities, the release forms should be provided to parents, an appointed guardian or representative.



SUMMARY SHEET: FRAMING THE NARRATIVE

ACTION

- ✓ Never disclose a person's impairment unless the person has agreed to do so and doing so is relevant to the content and purpose of the story you are telling.

- ✓ Ensure consent forms are accessible.

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Visual storytelling

Used well, visual storytelling can be a powerful tool to promote and strengthen disability inclusion. The best practices in the box on page 15 apply to all visual storytelling media, including film, photography, images, and animations.



CHECKLIST: VISUAL AND AUDIO PRODUCTION

ACTION

- ✓ Show the diversity of persons with disabilities.
- ✓ Focus on the person, not the sign language interpreter or assistive device.
- ✓ Show persons with disabilities in their everyday contexts, fulfilling a variety of roles.
- ✓ Ensure the camera's focus is the same for everyone.
- ✓ Avoid dim or dark lighting, flashing lights or images, or sudden or loud sounds.

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BOX 5. VISUAL STORYTELLING – BEST PRACTICES

People

- Engage persons with disabilities whenever you depict persons with disabilities in any visual storytelling.
- Show the diversity of persons with disabilities. In the mass media, persons with disabilities are often portrayed as wheelchair users, rather than persons with different impairments. Remember that not all persons with disabilities have visible impairments. (See the section on [Getting started: what you need to know](#).)
- Picture persons with disabilities in different roles, as managers, skilled workers, teachers, parents or siblings.

Environment

- Focus on the person with disability, not on the sign language interpreter, assistant, wheelchair or assistive device.
- Where appropriate, highlight accommodations and/or accessible technology. Show accessibility ‘in action’ and what society can do to enable persons with disabilities to participate more fully. For example, show persons with disabilities participating in a meeting with CART transcriptions, or working in a room with wheelchair accessible tables, or utilizing sign language interpreters at an event.

Location

- Select images that show persons with disabilities in everyday work or social environments. A common error is to show persons with disabilities in medical facilities, even if that is irrelevant to the story. If a medical facility is relevant, try to include persons with disabilities in a variety of roles, not only as patients.

Camera work

- Compose and frame your images and subjects carefully to ensure the effect promotes equality. For example, if you use a medium close-up shot on one subject, do the same when the subject is a person with a height difference (such as a wheelchair user or little person). When filming an establishing or master shot, persons with disabilities should be portrayed in the natural environment, not one that has been artificially created.
- Explore ‘point of view’ shots from the perspective of persons with disabilities. Whenever appropriate, use material that they have filmed themselves, to show their perspective authentically.
- Ensure camera angles do not reinforce stereotypes by over- or de-emphasizing persons with disabilities. For example, do not focus on assistive devices such as crutches.

Sound and lighting

- Lighting is important. Avoid low or dim lighting which can evoke negative stereotypes, for example, that persons with disabilities are ‘harmful’ or ‘victims’.
- Remember that flashing lights, alternating images and loud or sudden sounds may be triggers for certain persons with disabilities. Consider carefully whether these are necessary and whether a warning is required.

Written storytelling

Written stories should also be disability-inclusive, whether they are interviews, articles, blog posts, or reports.

Use person-first language

Person-first language puts ‘person’ before ‘disability’: it speaks of ‘persons with disabilities’ or ‘children with disabilities’, so reinforcing the person’s agency and autonomy.

Identity-first language, by contrast, switches word position: it speaks of ‘disabled persons’ or ‘disabled children’, thereby making disability part of the person’s identity.

Note. Not all multilingual environments and translations by national OPDs use person-first language. Some OPDs may also choose not to use person-first language, a choice the UN would respect and not contest.

In line with the CRPD, the UN uses person-first language. UN personnel should do so too.

ACTION

- ✓ Use person-first language in UN communications.

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Avoid pejorative language

Removing pejorative language from our speech will reduce the stigma persons with disabilities face. We need to cease to use descriptive terms that have negative connotations or are hurtful. We also need to avoid euphemisms such as ‘special needs’ or ‘differently abled’,

which attempt to hide or gloss over a person’s identity. ‘Persons with disabilities’ is the correct term, which does not need to be modified.

ACTION

- ✓ Never use euphemisms or pejorative terms that stigmatize persons with disabilities.

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Ableism in language

Pejorative language dehumanizes and marginalizes persons with disabilities. Ableist language shows up in metaphors, jokes and euphemisms. Ableism can also be found in structures and policies. The words we use reveal how we think and the attitudes we hold to people around us.¹⁵

In context, “Are you blind!” is an ‘ableist’ phrase. Such phrases often reinforce negative stereotypes and stigmas, whether or not they are addressed to a person with disability.

Similarly, using mental health terminology to highlight everyday characteristics disparages persons with psychosocial disabilities. For example, describing someone who is fastidious as “OCD” reinforces an ableist expectation of persons with disabilities.

ACTION

- ✓ Avoid ableist language. Do not use terms associated with persons with disabilities as adjectives.

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15 Ravishankar, R. A, ‘[Why You Need to Stop Using These Words and Phrases](#)’, Harvard Business Review, December 2020.

TABLE 1. APPROPRIATE AND PEJORATIVE LANGUAGE

Recommended terms	Terms to avoid
Person with disability. Person with [type of impairment]. Persons with disabilities. People with disabilities (only in easy-to-read documents, informal text, and oral speech).	Disabled person, handicapped, person with special needs, handicapable, atypical, person living with a disability, differently abled, people of all abilities, people of determination, those with disabilities.
Person(s) without impairment. Broader population.	Normal, healthy, able-bodied, typical, whole, of sound body/mind.
With disability/impairment/condition.	Suffer from, afflicted by, stricken by, troubled with, affected by.
Person with an intellectual disability. Person with an intellectual impairment.	Retarded, simple, slow, afflicted, brain-damaged, intellectually challenged, subnormal, of unsound mind, feeble-minded, mentally handicapped, mentally retarded.
Person with a psychosocial disability.	Insane, crazy, maniac, psycho, hypersensitive, lunatic, demented, panicked, agitated, mentally deranged, mentally ill, person with mental health problems.
Deaf person. Person who is deaf. Person with a hearing disability. Person with a hearing impairment. Person with hearing loss. Hard-of-hearing person. Deafblind person.	The deaf, hearing impaired, deaf and dumb, deaf and mute.
Blind person. Person who is blind. Person with a vision/visual disability. Person with a vision/visual impairment. Person with low vision. Deafblind person.	The blind, partially sighted.
Person with a physical disability. Person with a physical impairment.	Crippled, invalid, deformed, lame, handicapped, physically challenged, person with physical limitations, limp, person with physical difficulty, home-bound, bedridden.
Wheelchair user. Person who uses a wheelchair. person with a mobility disability person with a mobility impairment person using a mobility device	Confined/restricted to a wheelchair; wheelchair-bound.



Recommended terms

Terms to avoid

Person of short stature. Little person. Person with achondroplasia (only if the person has this condition).	Midget, dwarf, stunted.
Person with Down syndrome. Person with trisomy-21.	Mongoloid, special person, Down.
Person with albinism.	Albino.
Person affected by leprosy	Leper, leprosy patient.
Person who uses a communication device. Person who uses an alternative method of communication.	Non-verbal, cannot talk.
Accessible parking. Parking reserved for persons with disabilities. Accessible bathroom.	Disabled/handicapped parking. Handicapped bathroom. Handicapped friendly building.
Source: UN Office at Geneva, Disability-Inclusive Language Guidelines .	

Multilingual environments and translation

As always, give priority to the preferred language of your audience or platform. Just as you might need language interpreters, you may need to interpret or translate your story into sign language, Braille, large print, easy-to-read format, or other accessible formats for persons with disabilities.

Keep in mind that sign languages vary significantly. International Sign is commonly used at UN Headquarters and in global meetings. Ask OPDs to help you find the right interpretation system to use at regional events.

The table on page 19 lists common disability-inclusive terms, translated into the six official UN languages.

Note. Language is not fixed and changes as society evolves. For the most up-to-date terminology on disability inclusion, check the [UN Terminology Database](#).

TABLE 2. DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE TERMS

English	French	Spanish	Russian	Chinese ⁶	Arabic
Accessibility	Accessibilité	accesibilidad	Доступность	N/A	إمكانية الوصول
Disability	Handicap	discapacidad	Инвалидность	残疾	إعاقة
Person who is blind / blind person	Personne aveugle	persona ciega	Слепой ; незрячий	盲人	شخص مكفوف ;
Person who is deaf / deaf person	Personne sourde	persona sorda	Глухой	失聰者	شخص أصم
Person who is hard-of-hearing	Personne malentendante	persona con audición reducida		重听者	شخص ضعيف السمع
Person with albinism	Personne atteinte d'albinisme	persona con albinismo	человек с альбинизмом	白化病患者	شخص مصاب بالَمَقَّق
Person with deafblindness	Personne sourde-aveugle	persona sordociega	Слепоглухой	盲聾人士	شخص أصم ومكفوف
Person with a disability	Personne handicapée	Persona con discapacidad	человек с ОВЗ	残疾人	شخص ذو إعاقة
Person with dwarfism / person of very short stature	Unavailable	persona con enanismo / persona de estatura muy baja	человек с дварфизмом / человек с нарушениями роста	侏儒症患者	شخص ذو قزامة / شخص ذو قامة قصيرة جدا
Person with an intellectual disability	Personne présentant un handicap intellectuel	persona con discapacidad intelectual	человек с	智力残疾者	شخص ذو إعاقة ذهنية



¹⁶ Since 2020, proposals to update Chinese disability-related terms have been discussed. No language has been finalized. Check the [UN Terminology Database](#) for updates.

English	French	Spanish	Russian	Chinese	Arabic
Person with a psychosocial disability	Personne présentant un handicap psycho-social / personne ayant un handicap psychosocial	persona con problemas de salud mental	человек с	有精神健康问题的人	الأشخاص ذوو مشاكل الصحة العقلية
Multiple disabilities	Multihandicap / pluri-handicap	discapacidades múltiples		多重残疾	إعاقة متعدّدة
Physical disability	Handicap physique	discapacidad física	физическая	身体伤残	إعاقة بدنية
Reasonable accommodation	Aménagement raisonnable	ajustes razonables	разумное	合理便利	ترتيب تيسيري معقول
Wheelchair user	Utilisateur de fauteuil roulant	usuario de silla de ruedas	человек,	轮椅使用者	مستعمل الكرسي المتحرك ; قابع في كرسي متحرك

ACTION

- ✓ Use a variety of accessible formats, as appropriate: sign language interpretation, Braille, large print, easy-to-read, CART transcriptions, etc.
- ✓ Make sure that translations describe persons with disabilities accurately.

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SUMMARY SHEET: VISUAL AND WRITTEN STORYTELLING



CHECKLIST: LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Disability etiquette: interacting respectfully

Considering the diversity of our societies, we may sometimes find ourselves in a situation where we're unsure about what to say or do, and don't want to do the wrong thing. Below are some common Do's and Don'ts

for interacting respectfully with persons with disabilities. Remember: if you want to understand what to do or how to do it, it's acceptable to ask the person with disability directly.

BOX 6. INTERACTING RESPECTFULLY - BEST PRACTICES

Do

- **Do** ask persons with disabilities directly what their accessibility preferences are.
- **Do** treat all adults as adults.
- **Do** speak directly to the person, not to their sign interpreter, personal assistant, etc.
- **Do** ask questions when you are unsure of what to do.
- **Do** wait for persons with disabilities to ask for assistance. If they ask, follow their instructions.
- **Do** verbally greet and identify yourself before extending your hand to greet a person who is blind or has low vision. Use the same courtesy when entering or leaving a room or saying goodbye when ending a conversation. Do not just walk away when talking to a person who is blind or has low vision.
- **Do** ask persons who are blind or have low vision if they would like to take your arm or elbow. Do not simply take their arm.
- **Do** provide information in advance, as much as possible, about programme agendas, schedules, interview questions, meeting materials, etc. Make them available in accessible formats.

Don't

- **Don't** ask questions about a person's impairment unless the person raises it.
- **Don't** distract or pet service animals, including guide dogs. They are working.
- **Don't** assume that persons with disabilities experience their disability the same way you do.
- **Don't** make assumptions about what persons with disabilities can and cannot do.
- **Don't** remove a person's cane or guide dog, or lean on someone's wheelchair, or move a person's mobility device. Treat wheelchairs and mobility aids as extensions of the owner's personal space.

A participant using his Braille keyboard during the special event "The Art of the Possible," on the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities at United Nations Headquarters.
Photo Credit: UN Photo/Manuel Elías.



Creating Accessible Content



Creating Accessible Content

Although the field of accessibility, including digital accessibility, continues to evolve, the good news is that you do not need a technical background to apply best practices in your communications. Everyone can do it. We recommend a progressive approach. In this section we provide a baseline. You can add other resources and tools as you advance further.

Note. Most of the best practices described here, notably those that concern accessible images and writing, are drawn from the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1](#), international guidelines prepared by the World Wide Consortium (W3C).¹⁷

Multimodal information

You are more likely to reach persons with disabilities if you use a range of mediums. If you add visually textured patterns to pie charts, for example, or underline colour-coded hyperlinks, persons with colour blindness will receive the same information as others. Persons who are deaf may find information more accessible when it is provided in a video format with sign language, rather than in a text format. If you make Braille and large-print versions of your handouts, or provide accessible electronic versions in advance, persons who are blind or have low vision will have the same information as everyone else in advance.

Note. It can be helpful to ask persons with disabilities, in advance, what their preferred format is.

ACTION

- ✓ Whenever you can, use a range of media to convey information.
- ✓ Never rely only on colour to communicate data or actions.

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Making images accessible

Simple improvements can help persons who are blind or have low vision, or who have colour blindness or a cognitive disability, to receive your information as you intend.

Alternative text and image descriptions

Alternative text ('alt text') tells people what is in an image, such as text or basic essential details. Search engines index alt text information and consider it when they determine search engine ratings. Alt text is read by screen readers and other assistive devices.

¹⁷ At: <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/>.

and is displayed in place of the image/ graphic if the file cannot be loaded (due to internet connectivity or for other reasons).¹⁸

An image description provides more detail than alt text. For example, where alt text might say there is a puddle on the floor, an image description might say where the puddle is and that it is orange juice.¹⁹

Note. Not everything requires an image description or alt text. Items are considered 'decorative images' if they don't add information to the content of a page. Decorative images may:

- Be visual styling (borders, spacers, corners).
- Supplement linked text, to improve its appearance or increase the clickable area.
- Illustrate adjacent text without contributing information.
- Identify and describe surrounding text.²⁰

Logos and other relevant brand elements require alt text.

Alt text is enabled on most social media platforms and should be used for posts. Alt text should be:

- **Concise.** Communicate the content and purpose of the image concisely and unambiguously. Alt text should not be longer than one or two sentences.
- **Non-repeating.** Do not describe the format because the assistive technology will identify it. Phrases such as "a graphic of" or "an image of" are redundant.
- **Informative.** Try to convey what the diagram, flow chart, or other form of image would communicate to someone who is sighted. Focus on the main point(s).

Technology constantly evolves. The [Microsoft alt text webpage](#) describes how to insert alt text in the suite of Microsoft products. Also see the alt text guides of social media platforms such as [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Instagram](#).

ACTION

- ✓ Include image descriptions and/or alt text for images and graphics.
- ✓ Include alt text in all social media postings.

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Colour contrast

Colour contrast assists persons with colour blindness or low vision or who do not have prescriptive lenses. They can read text more easily when the text and background contrast well. The contrast should increase as the text font becomes smaller.

The table below provides colour contrasts recommended in [WCAG 2.1](#). Adjust for the font size.

Font size

- Large text (14 pt. bold / 18 pt.+ regular)
- Small text

Colour contrast ratio²¹

- 3:1 contrast with the background.
Small text
- 4.5:1 contrast with the background.

¹⁸ Perkins School for the Blind, [How to Write Alt Text and Image Descriptions](#) (2018).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ W3C Web Accessibility Initiative, [Web Accessibility Tutorials, Decorative Images](#) (2019).

²¹ For these ratios, see [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1 \(w3.org\)](#)

ACTION

- ✓ Select design colours that provide sufficient contrast, taking account of font size.

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ACCESSIBLE TOOLS: COLOUR CONTRAST

Accessible writing

Small adjustments to language ensure that persons with learning disabilities can extract information more easily. For example, persons with dyslexia say that text 'swims together', merging and distorting on the page. Writing in short paragraphs that each express one idea can help comprehension and reduce reading fatigue.

Information may also be provided in Easy-to-Read format. Easy-to-Read (also known as Easy Read) is a format with information designed specifically for the particular literacy

needs of persons with intellectual disabilities. It may include plain language and diagrams, and follows a particular set of rules.

Read the [Easy-to-Read](#) version of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy.

ACTION

- ✓ Use simple language. Avoid jargon and idioms.
- ✓ Hyperlink. Avoid long URL strings.
- ✓ Organize information in a logical structure.
- ✓ Use sans serif fonts.
- ✓ Never justify text. Align text to the left and allow ample white spacing.

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SUMMARY SHEET: ACCESSIBLE CONTENT

BOX 7. ACCESSIBLE WRITING – KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- **Use simple language.** Avoid jargon and idioms. Avoid metaphors that might be interpreted literally. Whenever possible, provide a basic summary. Commission Easy-to-Read documents as appropriate.
- **Be logical.** Organize your information in a logical structure. Use built-in styles and headings (H1, H2, H3) to establish a clear hierarchy of sections and sub-sections. When text is so formatted, someone using an assistive device such as a screen reader can jump quickly to sections that are relevant.
- **Select appropriate fonts.** Choose fonts that are sans serif, such as Arial and Calibri. It is easier to read and distinguish letters that do not have a serif.
- **Text justification and spacing.** Align text to the left. Do not justify text because this can make it more difficult to read. Allow generous line breaks to add white space to dense texts.

Closed captions, transcripts, and sign language interpretation

When you need to present information, do not employ audio alone. Use written texts or interpreters. Several interpretation options are open to you.

- **Closed captions (CC).** These provide a text version of spoken/audio multimedia and assume the viewer cannot hear. Closed captions are often visually accessible. For example, they may place white text on a black background to heighten contrast.
- **Subtitles.** These are designed for viewers who hear audio but are unfamiliar with the language being spoken. They will not describe background sounds (a fire alarm, a storm, footsteps) because it is assumed the viewer will hear them. Subtitle formatting can vary in quality and may not apply colour contrast.
- **Subtitles for the deaf and hard-of-hearing (SDH).** These combine captions and subtitles, and are suitable for persons with hearing impairments as well as multilingual audiences.
- **Assistive listening, such as hearing/audio induction loops.** This sound system is designed for use by persons with hearing aids and/or cochlear implants. A hearing loop provides a magnetic wireless signal that the hearing aid picks up. The sound system must be pre-installed physically.

Note. Several shared platforms (including Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, and Zoom) can create captions using artificial intelligence (AI). However, AI technology, while free and convenient, still needs improvement. Human translators continue to offer the most reliable interpretation and transcription. You may

prefer to use communication access real-time translation (CART). Certified CART providers instantaneously transcribe all speech to text.

- **Transcripts.** A CART provider can deliver transcripts after an event, which may be useful for the audience or others and as a record. Other low-cost online services will transcribe audio or video files into text files.
- **Sign language interpretation.** Sign language interpretation should be part of any mass communication strategy and some countries require it for official messages. Remember that many sign languages are in use. (See multilingual environments and translation considerations.)
- **Visibility.** Remember to position the interpreter close to the person speaking, and in front of a dark background. A good example is the [video message by the UN Secretary-General](#) on the UN's Disability Inclusion Strategy.

Note. Captions are not suitable to replace sign language interpretation. For example, someone who uses International Sign may not be comfortable reading captions in English.

ACTION

- ✓ Always caption or subtitle videos for persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.
- ✓ Transcribe for the benefit of everyone, including the broader population.
- ✓ Position sign language interpreters close to the person speaking.

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Audio descriptions and sounds

Introduce accessibility features for persons who are blind or have low vision.

- **Audio description.** Sometimes referred to as 'video description' or 'description narration', audio description is added to a video soundtrack (a movie or public service announcement) and describes important visual content and information that the main soundtrack does not communicate.

Audio descriptions, like other accessibility features, benefit persons with visual impairment, or cognitive impairment, or who face language or cultural barriers.

Tip. Don't forget to add audio descriptions of URLs or fade-in or fade-out logos at the start or end of a video.

Remember that loud, sharp, or sudden sounds may be a trigger for some persons with disabilities, for example, persons with post-traumatic stress disorder or persons with autism.

In videos that portray persons with disabilities, avoid melancholy music; a sound track can reinforce negative stereotypes.

ACTION

- ✓ Add audio descriptions to videos.
- ✓ Remove sounds that may be cognitive triggers or reinforce negative stereotypes.

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For an example of an accessible video that includes SDH, sign language interpretation and audio descriptions, see [UNICEF's Voices of Children](#) (produced by its Disability Unit).



COMPARISON TABLE: ACCESSIBLE INTERPRETATIONS

Enterprise-wide and office technology

Commonly used Microsoft products (Outlook, Word, PowerPoint, Excel) include an 'accessibility checker'. (It is often located under 'File > Info' in MS Office for PC, and under the 'Review' tab in Mac.) Use it as you would a spell checker. It will scan for and identify inaccessible items and explain what needs to be done to make them accessible. For example, it will show where and how to insert alt text into a graphic.

Note. Current accessibility checkers may not find all accessibility issues. However, they are being improved all the time. Stay abreast of updates in Microsoft, SharePoint and Teams applications by checking Microsoft's [technical support websites](#).

Emails and documents

The same accessibility principles and best practices apply to emails and documents. You can also insert alt text into images and graphics in documents.

Presentations

The same accessibility principles also apply to presentations. Ensure each slide has a unique title so that persons using assistive technology can skip quickly to slides you refer to.

Tip. Check the reading order of your presentation. Screen readers will describe slides in the order in which they were added. This may differ from the order in which slides appear in your final presentation.



Ms. Montserrat Vilarrasa, Secretary of the Assembly of Human Rights Montserrat Trueta and Member for Intellectual Disability at the City Council of Barcelona, addresses the High-Level Meeting of Women with Disabilities in Political and Public Leadership at UN Women Headquarters, New York, June 2019. Photo Credit: UN Women/Ryan Brown.

Tables and spreadsheets

Accessible data tables need row and/or column headers. Do not nest tables inside larger tables. Make sure that tables contain no split or merged cells, because screen readers will be unable to read the rows and columns in which they occur.

Just as presentations should have unique slide titles, spreadsheet workbooks need unique tab names. Ensure all tabs are distinctively identified and remove any blank worksheets.



COMPARISON TABLE: TECHNOLOGY PLATFORM ACCESSIBILITY

ACTION

- ✓ Use the accessibility checker in Word, Outlook, PowerPoint, Excel and other Microsoft products. Check online support resources for updates.
- ✓ In presentations, ensure each slide has a unique title and check the reading order.
- ✓ In spreadsheets and tables, make sure rows and columns have headers. Eliminate any merged or split cells in spreadsheets.

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PDFs and electronic publications

To make longer documents accessible, you can create an accessible PDF or an electronic publication (EPUB). Both offer unique benefits, depending on the content developer and the end user.

Note. An accessible PDF differs from a standard PDF. An accessible PDF includes a reading order, structure tags and headings, and document settings (such as language). Each of these helps assistive devices to process the document correctly.

ACTION

- ✓ Evaluate publication formats for accessibility and other factors. When doing so, focus on the end-user.

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COMPARISON TABLE: PUBLICATION FORMATS

TABLE 3. ACCESSIBLE PDFS AND ACCESSIBLE EBOOKS

Format	Content	Responsive?	Compatibility	Security	Implementation
Accessible PDF	Text and images.	No.	Any PDF reader on any technology device. Not designed for eReaders.	Offers password protection only.	Requires an advanced version of Adobe and knowledge of accessibility remediation. Alternatively, there are remediation services for most inaccessible PDFs.
Accessible ebook (EPUB)	Text, images and multimedia.	Yes.	Requires specialized screen reader programmes.	Offers digital rights management (DRM) protection; restricts access; restricts modification and distribution.	Requires remediation services provided by specialist file conversion vendors.

Websites and social media

To make websites accessible, follow [web content accessibility guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1](#). For a comprehensive guide to creating accessible UN websites, see [Accessibility Guidelines for United Nations Websites](#).

The accessibility of social media depends on both the platforms and their content. To insert alt text, for example, each social media platform requires different steps. Check platforms for updates on accessibility features. If alt text cannot be attached to an image, include alt text in the caption or post details.

Note. Hashtags should use the ‘CamelCase’ style. The first letter of each word is capitalized, as in #NothingAboutUsWithoutUs or #LeaveNoOneBehind. This style helps screen readers to read the hashtag correctly.

ACTION

- ✓ To make UN websites accessible, follow the guidance of WCAG 2.1.
- ✓ To make social media accessible, refer to each specific platform for updated accessibility features.

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Digital / virtual meetings

Virtual meetings

Too many meetings are not inclusive. Small actions can help to make virtual meetings much more inclusive.

- Send materials out beforehand and ensure they’re accessible. Participants, including persons with disabilities, can familiarize themselves with the content of the meeting in advance.
- Before the meeting or webinar takes place, ask participants about any accessibility requirements. Prepare in advance for common accessibility needs or questions.
- Whether the meeting is large or small, evaluate the accessibility of the meeting platform. The platform’s website will usually provide information on this. If a platform operates in the US, it may be able to supply a Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT), which contains information on its accessibility capabilities. Work with your local ICT provider to select the best platform options.
- Several commonly used platforms, including Microsoft Live Events and Teams, offer captioning. Take a few moments at the beginning of each meeting to explain how participants can activate and use these features, or provide instructions in the meeting invitation.

Smaller virtual meetings. Ask individuals to announce themselves before they make their remarks. This helps people who cannot recognize voices easily, or who are using captions or sign language interpretation, to identify the speaker. Offer participants different ways to participate (raising questions in plenary, using the chat function, submitting documents, etc.).

Larger virtual meetings. Record the meeting and provide copies of documents or transcripts afterwards.

Tip. If a CART transcription service provided captions, it can supply a transcript.

ACTION

Before the event

- ✓ Send participants, captioners and interpreters the meeting materials, a list of participants, the agenda and other relevant information.
- ✓ Ask about accessibility needs and fulfill them. Evaluate the accessibility of the meeting platform.
- ✓ Book captioning services and sign language interpreters in good time. Ask providers to connect to calls at least 10 minutes early to test the arrangements.

During the event

- ✓ Always include regular breaks for interpreters and CART providers.
- ✓ Ask individuals to announce themselves before they make their remarks.
- ✓ Verbally describe or make available documents that are shared on screen.

After the event

- ✓ Make recorded materials and transcripts available to participants.
- ✓ Ask participants with disabilities to give feedback. Apply their advice in future events.



CHECKLIST: ACCESSIBILITY FOR DIGITAL/VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Physical / in-person meetings

Physical or in-person meetings and large-scale events should respect the principles and practices set out in these Guidelines. For example, always ensure that information is communicated in various formats. If you distribute handouts, consider providing them in Braille, large-print or accessible digital versions as well.

Presenters

- If you make a presentation, describe what is on the slides you show. This will help persons with visual impairment or persons with intellectual disabilities.

Co-ordinators and planners

- Ask participants to convey their accessibility needs beforehand. Fulfil them.
- Create a quiet space at the event for anyone who may want to take a break.
- Evaluate the physical accessibility of the meeting room. Consider the audience and speakers. Arrange the seating to make sure presenters are visible; if required, connect a video feed and monitors. Ensure speakers can access the platform or stage. Provide ramps, raised stands and adjustable microphone stands as necessary. Make sure that wireless presentation remotes, audience microphones and other forms of technological support are accessible.
- The venue should be accessible. Assess entrances, toilets, and emergency exits. Make sure that emergency procedures are appropriate and accessible to persons with disabilities.

- Place the sign language interpreter close to the speaker(s). The interpreter should wear non-distracting clothes and be visible to all participants.
- Ensure that technological devices or tools are accessible to the participants. Review, for instance, check-in facilities, microphones for speakers and the audience, and interactive galleries.

ACTION

Before the event

- ✓ Send relevant information to all participants: reading materials, a list of participants, the agenda, information on the venue, etc.
- ✓ Ask participants to convey their accessibility needs. Fulfil them. Review the meeting platform, meeting room, and meeting facilities for accessibility.

During the event

- ✓ Ask speakers to describe what is on their presentation slides.
- ✓ Always include regular breaks for interpreters and CART providers.

After the event

- ✓ Send recorded materials to the participants, including transcripts if these are available.
- ✓ Ask persons with disabilities to provide feedback. Apply their advice in future events.

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CHECKLIST: ACCESSIBILITY FOR PHYSICAL/IN-PERSON MEETINGS

Exhibitions and film screenings

The content of exhibitions, film screenings and other interactive displays should be inclusive and accessible.

Organizers

- Ensure the content is inclusive and in line with the best practices described in [Developing Inclusive Content](#). Make sure no content includes stereotypes about persons with disabilities.
- Ensure content is accessible and in line with the practices described in [Accessibility and reasonable accommodation](#).
- For guidance on closed captions and subtitles see [Creating Accessible Content](#).
- Evaluate the physical location for accessibility. Provide reasonable accommodation for participants if requested, for example sign language interpretation or additional seating space. Follow the practices listed in [Physical / in-person meetings](#).

ACTION

- ✓ Make sure that what is shown accords with best practices for disability inclusion and accessibility.
- ✓ Ensure the physical location is accessible and that event facilitators offer reasonable accommodation.

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Online surveys and online data collection

Information is increasingly collected remotely, but the digital divide often excludes persons with disabilities from online consultations and surveys. This is due to low access to the internet, the inaccessibility of online survey tools and apps, and lack of reasonable accommodation and adaptation for inclusive solutions. Online surveys present two particular challenges: how to give users flexible ways to respond; and how to centralize data collection in unique data sets.

Best practices for online surveys and questionnaires

Select the platform

- Review the digital accessibility options that platforms offer (apply WCAG 2.1 standards).
- Review the options that platforms offer for survey design. Can you upload questions in video format to provide sign language? Does the platform offer read aloud options? Does it provide flexible skip options, enabling respondents to select targeted questions? How easy is it to navigate the survey? Are Help facilities available, for example to define complex terms?

Design the questionnaire

- Make sure the survey has a clear structure and is easy to navigate. Don't use tabular formats for multiple questions.
- Ensure the questionnaire is in plain language that has been tested by end-users, for example, persons with intellectual disabilities.

- Limit the length of the survey. Test the time required to complete it. Most respondents should be able to complete the survey within 20 minutes. All respondents should be told to complete it at their own pace.
- If you plan to identify respondents' impairments, use standardized questions in order to permit comparison. For surveys targeting the general population, you might adopt the [Washington Group Short Set of Questions](#); for surveys that target persons with disabilities, you might ask respondents to self-identify using the categories in Article 1 of the CRPD.²²
- When the questions have been drafted, ask persons with disabilities to test whether the questions are (a) understandable, (b) relevant, and (c) cover what needs to be covered. Ideally, recruit a diverse group of testers - persons with different impairments, in different geographic locations, using different accessibility softwares.

Disseminate the survey and share the results

- Make available the purpose of the survey and a consent form (as well as terms of use where relevant). Write these texts in plain language.
- Make sure that data remain confidential in compliance with data protection rules.
- Where relevant, consider producing a short introductory video to explain the purpose of the survey and guide respondents on how to respond. Disseminate information about the survey in accessible formats.
- Encourage OPDs to disseminate the survey in their networks to enhance outreach to persons with disabilities.

²² "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." (CRPD, Article 1.)
Note: The CRPD refers to 'mental' impairment. The CRPD Committee now uses the term 'psychosocial' impairment.

- Offer alternatives to the online questionnaire. For example, allow respondents to download and submit a Word version. (Note that you will need to manually enter these entries into the dataset.)
- Plan the duration of the survey carefully. Allow enough time to make respondents aware of the survey and give them enough time to complete it.
- Consider alternative methods for collecting data. Certain groups may respond more readily in focus groups or webinar discussions.
- Make sure that respondents who complete the survey are informed of the results.

ACTION

- ✓ Make sure that surveys and other data collection initiatives are aligned with WCAG 2.1 accessibility standards. Formats should also be flexible.
- ✓ Make sure that surveys and other forms of data collection have a clear structure, are written in plain language, and do not take longer than 20 minutes to complete.
- ✓ Ask persons with disabilities to test drafts of questionnaires.

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CHECKLIST: ONLINE SURVEYS AND ONLINE DATA COLLECTION



Edwin Osundwa, Country Representative for Sense International from Kenya, co-chairs a meeting of the 13th Session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at United Nations Headquarters. Photo Credit: UN Photo/Loey Felipe.

A man stands proudly on his left leg, with his left arm balancing himself using a crutch, and his right arm holding up a right prosthetic.
Photo Credit: Amin Brenjkar (2015 UN Enable Photo Exhibition).



Checklist Tools and Tips



Checklist Tools and Tips

Summary Sheet. Framing the narrative

Do	Do Not
Follow the social model and human rights-based approach to disability, which requires society (rather than persons with disabilities) to take the steps necessary to ensure accessibility and inclusion.	Do not portray persons with disabilities as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Vulnerable or a burden on others.✓ Living a life of less value or quality.✓ Less than human.✓ Dangerous.✓ Extraordinary or superheroic.
Ensure consent forms are accessible.	Do not disclose a person's impairment unless the person has divulged it and the information is relevant to the story's content and purpose.
Adopt an intersectional approach, because it explains more and reveals the diversity of the experience of persons with disabilities.	Do not focus only on assistive devices, but on the person.
Make communication more inclusive by mainstreaming disability inclusion in all areas.	
Craft stories about persons with disabilities.	
They should cover every age in life and be factual, affirmative, and offer solutions.	
Consult persons with disabilities and their representative organizations. Actively include them when you create stories.	
Choose accessible media that are appropriate for your audience.	
Often more than one type of medium is required to reach the wider population.	
If the subject is a person with disability, take accessibility measures and provide reasonable accommodation where it is needed.	
Show persons with disabilities going about their daily lives. Let them show their emotions.	

Summary Sheet. Visual and written storytelling

Visual

Written

✓ Use photos and images that show the diversity of persons with disabilities.	✓ Always use person-first language. ('Persons with disabilities' not 'disabled persons'.)
✓ Focus on the person, not the sign language interpreter, impairment, or assistive device.	✓ Never use derogatory language or euphemisms that present persons with disabilities as objects of pity.
✓ Show persons with disabilities in everyday work and social situations, fulfilling various roles.	✓ Use a range of accessible translation formats (sign language interpretation, Braille, large print, easy-to-read format, CART transcription, etc.).
✓ Focus the camera, and frame images and subjects, in a manner that promotes equality.	✓ Use simple, concise language. Avoid jargon and idioms.
✓ Avoid dim or dark lighting and flashing lights or images.	✓ Make sure that translations describe persons with disabilities accurately.

Checklist. Language and style

(If you answer 'NO' to any of the questions below, refer to the Guidelines.)

- ☐ Does the text use person-first language (except as requested by a person with disability)?
- ☐ Is it free of pejorative language, euphemisms, and ableist language?
- ☐ Is the language simple and concise? Does it avoid jargon and idioms?
- ☐ Did you consider using various accessible formats (sign language interpretation, Braille, large print, easy-to-read, etc.)?
- ☐ Does the translation describe persons with disabilities accurately?

Checklist. Visual and audio production

(If you answer 'NO' to any of the questions below, refer to the Guidelines.)

- ☐ Have you provided consent forms in accessible formats?
- ☐ Did you choose a medium with accessibility in mind? Did you offer reasonable accommodation measures?
- ☐ Do the images portray real persons with disabilities?
- ☐ Do the images show the diversity of persons with disabilities?
- ☐ Do the images focus on the person, not the assistive device, support person or interpreter, or impairment?
- ☐ Do the composition and framing promote equality?
- ☐ Is the light bright enough? Do the images avoid flashing lights and alternating images?
- ☐ Have loud or sharp noises, or melancholic sounds been avoided?

Summary Sheet. Accessible content

Element	Action
Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Use a multimodal approach whenever possible.✓ Include short summaries.✓ Organize content in a logical structure, using built-in headings and styles.
Hyperlinks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Create hyperlinks; avoid URL strings
Fonts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Use sans serif fonts, such as Arial or Calibri.
Justification and spacing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Never justify text to the right. Align text to the left.✓ Adopt wide line breaks to create white space in dense text.
Colours, font size	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Never rely on colour alone to communicate information.✓ Adopt strong colour contrast and increase contrast as fonts become smaller.✓ Colour contrast ratios:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Large text (14 pt. bold / 18 pt.+ regular): 3:1 against background.- Small text: 4.5:1 against background.
Alt text	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Ensure that alt text is informative, concise, and avoids repetition.
Image description	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Image descriptions provide useful information that alt text does not.

Checklist. Accessibility for websites / social media

(If you answer 'NO' to any of the questions below, refer to the Guidelines.)

- ☐ **Web.** In your website development work, did you refer to version 2.1 of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)? Did you refer to the UN web accessibility standards?
- ☐ **Social Media.** Are you familiar with the accessibility capabilities of different social media platforms? Are you aware of best practices for alt text and other features?

Checklist. Accessibility for digital / virtual meetings

(If you answer 'NO' to any of the questions below, refer to the Guidelines.)

- ☐ **Meeting platform.** Did you evaluate the platform's accessibility options, using its capabilities document (website or via VPAT) or a third-party accessibility auditor?
- ☐ **Best Practices.** Are you following best practices for inclusion? Did you provide materials in advance, check accessibility requirements, and ask speakers to announce themselves before making their remarks?

Checklist. Accessibility for physical / in-person meetings

(If you answer 'NO' to any of the questions below, refer to the Guidelines.)

- ☐ Did you consider whether the meeting location is accessible to all participants? Did you ask participants in advance to signal reasonable accommodation requirements?
- ☐ Did you provide information in several formats (for example, large-print, Braille, digitally accessible versions, etc.)?
- ☐ Did you follow inclusive best practice for presentations? Did you describe the content of slides and make your presentation in an accessible format?
- ☐ Did you evaluate physical accessibility in terms of inclusion as well as compliance? Did you make a quiet space available?

Checklist. Online surveys and online data collection

(If you answer 'NO' to any of the questions below, refer to the Guidelines.)

- ☐ Did you examine the digital accessibility options that the platform you selected offers for surveys?
- ☐ Is your survey structure clear and logical?
- ☐ Do you have a plain language version? If the survey is available in other languages, do the translations also use plain language?

- ☐ Does the survey take less than 20 minutes to complete? Can respondents complete it at their pace?
- ☐ Have you used standard questions for disability disclosure?
- ☐ Did you offer alternatives to completing the questionnaire online? For example, can respondents submit Word versions of the questionnaire? Did you hold focus groups or use facilitators?
- ☐ Did you hold the survey open for long enough?
- ☐ Will you be able to send the survey results to those who have responded, and in an accessible format?
- ☐ Did you ask persons with disabilities for feedback? Did they test a draft of the survey? Did you invite them to suggest the best way to disseminate the survey and reach persons with disabilities?

Accessibility tools

Colour contrast.

[WebAIM \(Web Accessibility in Mind\) Contrast Checker.](#)

Enterprise-wide technology.

Microsoft products, such as Word, Outlook, Excel, and PowerPoint, offer accessibility capabilities. You can obtain more information from:

- [How to find and use the 'accessibility checker'.](#)
- [PowerPoint accessibility support.](#)
- [Disability answer desk.](#)

PDF accessibility.

Adobe Acrobat Pro has a [full check / accessibility check](#) feature that verifies whether a document conforms to accessibility standards such as PDF/UA and WCAG 2.

Website WCAG2.1 evaluation scans

[WAVE \(Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool\).](#)

Comparison Tables

Use the comparison tables that follow to determine what accessibility features you need.

Comparison Table. Accessible interpretations

Tool	Information conveyed	Assumptions	Style	Requirements
Audio description	Visual content that is otherwise not narrated.	Assumes the viewer is blind or has low vision.	Typically inserted in pauses in audio soundtrack. The audio describer's voice is distinct from that of video narrators.	Certified audio description narrator.
Closed captions (CC)	Spoken and audio information.	Assumes the viewer cannot hear.	Typically, white text against a black background.	Certified CART transcriber or artificial intelligence.
Easy-to-read	Essential information.	Assumes the reader is a person with intellectual disability.	Plain language and diagrams.	Writer specialized in easy-to-read formats.
Sign language interpretation	Spoken and audio information.	Assumes the viewer is deaf or hard-of-hearing.	A person interprets using sign language (international, American or other).	Certified sign language interpreter.
Subtitles	Spoken information only.	Assumes the viewer can hear but is unfamiliar with the language.	Can vary; does not require accessible formatting.	Language interpreters or artificial intelligence.
Subtitles for the deaf and hard-of-hearing (SDH)	Spoken and audio information.	Assumes the viewer cannot hear and is unfamiliar with the language.	Typically, a larger font with transparent background. Generally preferred to closed captions because closed captions block content.	Certified SDH transcribers.
Transcripts	User preference; spoken and audio information.	Assumes the viewer is unable to hear content.	Document.	Certified CART transcriber or artificial intelligence.

Comparison Table. Publication formats

Format	Content	Responsive?	Compatibility	Security	Implementation
Accessible PDF	Text and Images.	No.	Any PDF reader on any technology device. Not designed for eReaders.	Offers only password protection.	Requires advanced version of Adobe and accessibility remediation knowledge. Alternatively, low-cost accessibility remediation services are offered online.
Accessible ebook (EPUB)	Text, images, and multimedia.	Yes.	Requires specialized screen reader programmes.	Offers digital rights management (DRM) protection; restricts access; restricts modification and distribution.	Requires remediation services provided by specialist file conversion vendors.

Comparison Table. Technology platform accessibility²³

Platforms	Signing deaf participants are visible	Sign language interpreter is visible	Captions	Screen reader compatibility	Large meetings	Small meetings	Additional barriers
GoToMeeting		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Keyboard shortcuts only work in Windows.
Zoom	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Requires a good internet connection.
Skype	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	Video quality is inconsistent.
Skype for Business	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	Not accessible to blind facilitators.
Microsoft Teams	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ Supports up to 300; two-way communications.	✓	Challenging when signed and spoken languages are used with larger groups.
Microsoft 'Live Events'	Can be integrated with A/V production support.			✓	✓	✓ One-way communications.	
Google Hangouts	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	Meeting creators must have a G-Suite.
WhatsApp	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	Requires Wi-Fi or 4G connection.

²³ Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities (SGPwD), [Overview on Accessibility of Video Conferencing Apps and Services \(2020\)](#).

Resources

UN resources

International Labor Union (ILO). [COVID-19 and the World of Work: Ensuring the inclusion of persons with disabilities at all stages of the response.](#)

UN. [Policy Brief: A Disability-Inclusive Response to COVID-19.](#)

UN. [Accessible Guidelines for UN Websites.](#)

UN. [Disability Inclusion Strategy.](#)

UN. Disability Inclusion Strategy: [Technical Notes.](#)

UN. [Gender-Inclusive Language Guidelines.](#)

UN Division of Conference Management, UN Office in Geneva.
[Standard Operating Procedure for Accessible Meetings and Conferences.](#)

UNICEF. [Accessible Events Guide.](#)

UNICEF. [Disability Orientation.](#) The Orientation has two main modules, with each five lessons. The first module reviews the disability movement and the CRPD definition of disability.

The second focuses on how to mainstream disability.

UNICEF. [Inclusive Communication module.](#) A three-part video training for UNICEF staff and partners. Each part is 15 minutes long. Includes examples from over 30 country offices.

UNICEF. [Tips on Communicating with Children with Disabilities.](#)

UNICEF. [Tips on how to write about disability rights.](#)

UN Office at Geneva. [Disability-Inclusive Language Guidelines.](#)

UN OICT [website.](#) OICT holds accessibility labs and can provide additional resources on accessibility.

UNOHCR. [Training Package on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.](#)

UN Publications. [Alternative Text Guidelines.](#)

Other resources

CBM. [Digital Accessibility Toolkit](#).

Deque University. [Online Self-Paced Web Accessibility Classes](#).

Diagram Center. [Image Description Guidelines](#).

International and Ibero-American Foundation for Administration and Public Policies (FIIAPP). [“Another look: A celebration of humanity”](#). In this video, photographer Christian Tasso explains how to dismantle negative stereotypes and tell stories authentically.

Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities (SGPwD). [Checklist for making virtual meetings accessible](#).

SGPwD. [High-Level Political Forum Accessibility Recommendations](#) (2020).

SGPwD, [The experience of persons with disabilities with COVID-19](#).

SGPwD, [Overview on Accessibility of Video Conferencing Apps and Services](#) (2020).

VSO International. [Toolkit messages for persons with disabilities during Covid19 response](#).

[Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1](#).

World Federation of the Deaf. [Guidelines on Providing Access to Public Health Information in National Sign Languages during the Coronavirus Pandemic](#).

Glossary

Ableism

A value system that considers certain typical characteristics of body and mind are essential to living a life of value. Based on strict standards of appearance, functioning and behaviour, ableist ways of thinking consider the disability experience as a misfortune that leads to suffering and disadvantage and invariably devalues human life. (A/HRC/43/4.)

Accessibility

The condition of a facility or service that ensures that persons with disabilities have access, on an equal basis with others, to "the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public". (CRPD, Article 9.)

Alternative text (Alt Text)

Descriptive text which conveys the meaning and context of a visual item in a digital setting, such as on an app or web page. When screen readers such as Microsoft Narrator®, JAWS®, and NVDA® encounter digital content with alt text, they will read the alt text aloud, enabling people to understand more easily what is on the screen. Well-written, descriptive alt text dramatically reduces ambiguity and improves user experience. (Microsoft.)

Assistive technology

Any item, piece of equipment, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of persons with disabilities. (International Disability Alliance.)

Audio description

Additional commentary that describes body language, expressions, and movements, making a story understood through sound. It describes what might otherwise be missed by a person with sight loss. Audio description is also known as video description in some countries. (World Blind Union.)

Braille

A system of embossed characters for blind and partially sighted persons, formed by using a Braille cell, a combination of six dots consisting of two vertical columns of three dots each. Each simple Braille character is formed by one or more of these dots and occupies a full cell or space. Some forms of Braille use eight dots. (International Disability Alliance.)

Captions

On-screen text descriptions that display a video product's dialogue, identify speakers, and describe other relevant sounds that are otherwise inaccessible to persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. Captions are synchronized with the video image so that viewers have equivalent access to the content that is originally presented in sound, regardless of whether they receive that content via audio or text. Captions are either open or closed. Open captions are always in view and cannot be turned off, whereas closed captions (CC) can be turned on and off by the viewer. (University of Washington DO-IT.)

Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART)

A speech-to-text interpreting service for anyone who needs communication access. It can be used for any large audience, to obtain a record of proceedings, or for other purposes. CART also benefits persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, or who have language and learning needs. Even when used with other technologies, captioning benefits all persons in a group who can read (including those with hearing aids, implants, and loops). CART is also referred to as real-time captioning. (CCaptioning.org.)

Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) provider / captioner

A person, physically present in the room or connected remotely via the internet, who types word for word (verbatim), in real time, what is said during a meeting; similar to live subtitles on TV.

CRPD-compliant (compliant with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities)

Policies and practices that respect the general principles and obligations set out in the Convention, as well as the interpretation of its standards by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Disability inclusion

The meaningful participation of persons with disabilities, the promotion of their rights, and the consideration of disability-related perspectives in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (CRPD.)

Disability mainstreaming

A consistent and systematic approach to disability inclusion in all areas of operations and programming. (UNDIS.)

Easy-to-read

Information designed specifically for the particular literacy needs of persons with intellectual disabilities. It may include plain language and diagrams. (International Disability Alliance)

Intersectionality

The interaction of multiple factors, such as disability, age and gender, which can create multiple layers of discrimination, and, depending on the context, worsen legal, social or cultural barriers.

Multimodal communications

Communication that employs multiple semiotic modes, such as oral and written verbal language, static and moving images, sound, music, gesture, and sculpture, to represent meanings. (igi-global.com.)

Persons with disabilities

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments that in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. (CRPD, Article 1.)

Personal care assistant / personal assistant (PCA/PA)

Persons who provide assistance and support for persons with disabilities who live independently in the community. A qualified personal care assistant provides services in the person's own home or in the community. (ca.db101.org.)

Reasonable accommodation

Necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments, that do not impose a disproportionate or undue burden, needed in a particular case, that enable persons with disabilities to enjoy or exercise on an equal basis with others all human rights and fundamental freedoms. (CRPD, Article 2.)

Sign language

Sign languages are fully-fledged natural languages, structurally distinct from spoken languages. An international sign language is used by persons who are deaf at international meetings and informally when travelling and socializing. It is considered a pidgin form of sign language that is not as complex as natural sign languages and has a limited lexicon. (UNDESA.)

Sign language interpreter

A professional who is fluent in two or more (sign) languages and interprets between a source language and a target language and mediates across cultures. The interpreter's task is to facilitate communication in a neutral manner, ensuring equal access to information and participation. Sign language interpreters can be both deaf and hearing but should always carry appropriate sign language interpreter qualifications from the respective country. A sign language interpreter is bound by a code of ethics that ensures impartiality, confidentiality, linguistic and professional competence, and professional growth and development. (International Disability Alliance.)

Subtitles

Subtitles are synchronized with a sound track so that the text displays at the same time words are spoken. Non-speech elements are not typically included in subtitles, which are primarily designed for viewers who do not understand the language that is being spoken. (3PlayMedia.com.)

Subtitles for the deaf and hard-of-hearing (SDH)

SDH provides synchronized visual alternative text, containing the speech and non-speech audio information that must be understood to follow the media in question. (International Disability Alliance.)

Transcript

A text-only version of what has been said during a meeting or in a video. Transcripts are not produced in real time and are generally limited to speech only. They are not a recommended substitute for captions but can make it possible to revisit content later. (International Disability Alliance.)

Universal Design

The design of products, environments, programmes and services that, to the greatest extent possible, can be used by all people without any subsequent need to adapt or redesign them for specialized purposes. “Universal design’ shall not exclude assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities where this is needed.” (CRPD, Article 2.)