

UNICEF Executive Board Annual Session 2024

Item 3: Report on the midterm review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022-2025 and annual report for 2023 of the Executive Director of UNICEF

June 11, 2024

Mr. President,

I have the great honor to speak on behalf of Oman, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, El Salvador, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Kingdom of the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, the United States, the European Union as a donor – and my own country Finland.

For decades, UNICEF has been a pioneer for disability inclusion in the UN system. Through the adoption of the Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy last year, UNICEF has set up a bold vision and made crucial policy commitments to advance this important matter. These commitments are aligned with the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy.

The investments that UNICEF has put into mainstreaming disability inclusion are clearly paying off. The mid-term and annual reporting give evidence of important achievements. In 2023, UNICEF enhanced its focus on children with disabilities in humanitarian response, providing targeted support and safe access to humanitarian programs and services. It expanded the Integrated Social Protection Program for Children with Disabilities from 17 to 24 countries. It reached over 400 000 children with assistive products and inclusive supplies, advanced inclusive education for learners with disabilities, and it boosted assistive technology provisioning.

These achievements are fundamental in safeguarding children's rights, and should be celebrated, and also mainstreamed, in the annual reporting. They have to be brought to our attention in a coherent and systematic way. We propose UNICEF to include the implementation of the Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy across all

the goal areas of its strategic plan, and as a regular agenda item in the annual Executive Board sessions.

In 2023, UNICEF implementation of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy either met or exceeded the requirements against 88 per cent of the indicators, which is 13 percent more than two years ago. We encourage you to keep working on the remaining gaps and make the original version of the UNDIS reporting publicly available.

Mr. President,

Mainstreaming disability inclusion at country level is crucial. All country and regional offices should systematically assess the disability needs on the ground, and mainstream inclusion in all their activities. This is all the more important in humanitarian and fragile contexts.

Furthermore, we encourage UNICEF and Country Teams to continue to pay attention to the linkages between gender and disability. For instance, research shows that women and girls with disabilities are many times more likely to be sexually abused and exploited than women and girls without disabilities. All organizations, should pay close attention to the protection of women and girls with disabilities.

We stress the full involvement and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and their representative associations in strategic planning, decision-making and implementation of the programs. For that purpose, forming close partnerships with organizations representing persons with disabilities is critical.

Mr. President,

The potential of digital technologies in improving accessibility of services, such as healthcare or education, deserves to be emphasized. In addressing the digital divide, disability inclusion must be increasingly in our focus. Investing in Artificial Intelligence to provide quality services, state-of-the-art systems, and enabling environments for children with disabilities, needs to be a priority.

We are happy to see that assistive technologies are a key focus area for UNICEF's own innovation work. We welcome the Global Accessibility Helpdesk, and the

technical advice, training and knowledge resources it offers, to make programs, premises and digital platforms more inclusive.

Finally, Mr. President,

A key factor to the success of disability inclusion in UNICEF has been the commitment of its senior management. This has been and will remain critical in ensuring that the organization continues investing in technical capacity and relevant structures, and has sufficient human and financial resources to advance disability inclusion.

We would also like to commend the excellent work carried out by UNICEF's disability team and its leader Gopal Mitra. You are setting the model for other agencies on how to move ahead with disability inclusive development, and with leaving no one behind.

I thank you.