



GUIDANCE NOTE ON REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

1. What is reasonable accommodation?

In line with the United Nations Disability Strategy (UNDIS)¹, UNDP is strongly committed to creating an inclusive workplace for all and, as such, stands ready to take appropriate measures to enable persons with disabilities to access employment opportunities and enjoy rewarding and diverse careers in the organization through the provision of reasonable accommodation. *“Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical and/or mental impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in the work of the Organization on an equal basis with other personnel”*².

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) defines reasonable accommodation as *“necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms”*³. The objective of reasonable accommodation in the workplace is to enable them to discharge their official functions, as well as enjoy a non-discriminatory and inclusive working environment.

It is important not to mistake ‘reasonable accommodation’ for, or limit it to, ‘accessibility’. Accessibility entails the *“identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to facilitating 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”*⁴. Accessibility relates to groups, implies progressive implementation and is not subject to a proportionality test. Instead, reasonable accommodation is individualized, applies immediately to all rights and can be limited if disproportional⁵.

The Organization is required to consider all requests for reasonable accommodation from any personnel (i.e. staff, consultants, interns, etc.) with disabilities from the recruitment stage throughout their entire employment cycle, taking into consideration all the circumstances of individual cases while ensuring that work continues to be delivered efficiently. The accommodation measures should always be designed, and the accommodation process should be undertaken in close consultation with the person with disabilities. Confidentiality throughout the process is key in order to avoid stigma and stereotyping that often hamper inclusion.

The concept of reasonable accommodation is not solely applicable to disability. Other personnel with special temporary or permanent conditions or circumstances may also require accommodation of their needs.

¹ https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/03/UNDIS_20-March-2019_for-HLCM.P.pdf

² UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Article 1

³ UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Article 2

⁴ UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Article 9

⁵ UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. General comment No. 6 (2018) on equality and non-discrimination (UN CRPD/C/GC/6)

2. When is accommodation reasonable?

Reasonable accommodation aims to remove or sufficiently mitigate the barriers that may be encountered by personnel with disabilities, thereby enabling them to join and stay in the Organization. It may (or may not) have cost implications.

While the organization strongly commits to exploring options for reasonable accommodation, the Organization reserves the right to decline to offer the requested accommodation when it considers that it may impose disproportionate or undue difficulties for the Organization, or its functioning. For example, modifications to premises will normally be restricted to the Organization's premises and it might not be feasible to implement them immediately in response to an individual request.

Some of the factors that are commonly taken into account in determining whether a requested accommodation would pose a disproportionate burden on the Organization include:

- cost of the accommodation;
- whether the accommodation cannot be implemented within a reasonable timeframe; whether the accommodation is required to enable an employee to perform in the Organization, rather than support their general ability to live and function with a disability outside of the Organization;
- whether the accommodation is likely to benefit more people than the individual making a request;
- availability of funding, which could cover partial or total cost of the accommodation;
- the impact of the accommodation on the operation of the office, including occupational safety and health requirements of the Organization (i.e. a person with disabilities that may need a personal support when travelling on mission may not get clearance to travel to a high security risk area); and,
- anticipated duration of the employment relationship. If the employee has been hired on a short, temporary basis, then the Organization may not be able to invest in major changes unless these would be of wider benefit to personnel.

3. Types of reasonable accommodation

a. Job design, recruitment/selection and on-boarding

For UNDP as an inclusive employer, it is important to ensure that candidates with disabilities are able to access vacancy announcements and can participate in all stages of the selection process. For example, in the case of persons with hearing disabilities, sign language interpretation will be needed for interviews. To enable persons in wheelchairs to participate, interviews will have to be held in accessible premises. It is key to confirm any special needs with short-listed candidates unless they have already communicated these in the application.

Once a person with disabilities is recruited, they have to be effectively on-boarded, with the on-boarding time potentially requiring some extra time and support. For example, a person with a visual disability may require an assistant to complete mandatory on-line courses that are not yet fully accessible.

To ensure that more persons with disabilities apply for UNDP jobs, hiring units should think about potential candidates with disabilities already at the job design stage. As such, it is essential to clearly distinguish between the essential and non-essential elements of a job and only reflect essential elements in the vacancy announcement (*e.g. while sound communication skills are useful,*

they may not be essential for some jobs). As a general principle, hiring units are expected to recruit an employee who can perform the essential functions of a job after reasonable accommodation is provided.

b. Flexible working arrangements

Personnel with disabilities working for UNDP may require adjusted working hours, or the opportunity to occasionally telecommute when their work duties allow it. Such arrangements are often explored as part of reasonable accommodation and should follow the [UNDP Policy on Flexible Working Arrangements](#).

c. Special office equipment

Some persons with disabilities may require assistive technology, such as Braille note takers, Braille input and output devices for standard computers, screen reading software, special screens or magnification software, sound amplifiers, captioning services, frequency modulation technology, adapted keyboards, touch screens or joysticks, and supportive office chairs, among many others. UNDP offices should first inquire if such equipment can be purchased at the duty station along with the installation and maintenance support. Alternatively, corporate LTAs can be leveraged to purchase such equipment⁶. Costs will depend on the type of equipment required. In deciding on the equipment to purchase, it is advisable to consult with the personnel with disabilities themselves and local organizations working with persons with disabilities.

d. Documents in an accessible format

Personnel with disabilities, especially those who are blind or have low vision, may require documents to be available in an accessible format (e.g. large font, readable by a screen reader, etc.). It is advisable to seek guidance on how to create documents that are accessible, so the office can adjust their templates, and personnel can be sensitized and trained in how to do it.

e. Sign language interpretation

Personnel that are deaf or hard of hearing may require sign language interpretation services on a daily or occasional basis, as well as outside of the office hours, especially at the beginning of the assignment while settling in. During the recruitment process it's important to understand what sign language is used by the candidate and whether local deaf community is using the same. It is also important to explore if sign language interpretation in the appropriate language is available locally. In addition, local or international availability of captioning services should be identified.

f. Personal assistant

Personnel with disabilities may require personal assistance on a daily or occasional basis in the office, during travel as well as outside of the office hours, especially at the beginning of the assignment while settling in. While funding a full-time assistance may be often difficult due to costs, an occasional support by an assistant is customary and could be accommodated.

g. Accessible premises

⁶ <https://intranet.undp.org/unit/oolt/oso/psu/Lists/UNDP%20and%20nonUNDP%20LTAs/default.aspx>

With regards to the accessibility of premises and facilities, UNDP operates under the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) *Performance-Based Guidelines for the Design and Construction of UNDG Common Premises Office Buildings*⁷. As such, Country Offices are guided to meet the requirement for all new premises to be constructed based on these Guidelines and the universal design principles.

In addition, UNDP encourages its offices to advance the *minimum levels of functional accessibility*, including ensuring access to the building itself, as well as to at least one accessible office, one accessible restroom, and one accessible meeting room.

To be able to accommodate the needs of personnel as well as partners and stakeholders with certain disabilities, further improvements may be required to office premises, such as ramps, wider doors, bathroom upgrades, flashing doorbells, modified emergency alarms, and the like. These are likely to have cost implications.

In many cases, however, meeting the premises and facilities accessibility needs does not require a significant investment. For instance, when organizing meetings, one can choose to avoid a meeting location with stairs, narrow passages, or heavy doors, which often represent barriers for persons using mobility devices (e.g. wheelchairs). Similarly, simple measures such as keeping the office well-organised and free from clutter, will allow both persons using mobility devices as well as persons with visual disabilities to navigate the space without facing physical obstacles.

For reasonable accommodation purposes, large-scale modifications to the office premises would be limited. Before confirming an assignment that requires accessibility of premises, UNDP offices should evaluate the feasibility and reasonableness of the modifications to be made. The latter would normally require inputs from the requestor, accommodation experts and/or local organizations of persons with disabilities.

In addition to that, there may be instances where accommodations may not be possible, such as in high security risk duty stations, where the [Minimum Operating Security Standards \(MOSS\)](#) requirements for premises may be particularly strict.

h. Accessible transportation

International travel to a duty station and mission travel. It may be possible that an employee with disabilities will not be able to travel on an airplane. Alternative modes of transportation (e.g. train or car) may need to be considered, as appropriate, as a reasonable accommodation measure. Another possible reasonable accommodation could include allowing the person with a disability to travel with an assistant. Related costs should be estimated and budgeted for before the assignment (in the case of new personnel) or a mission travel is confirmed.

Local transportation. If an employee requires help with transportation to and from the office, UNDP offices should consider and confirm if the office can provide it or if it can contract such service from a service provider. Alternative working arrangements, like telecommuting, could also be considered to limit the need to travel.

Other reasonable accommodation measures could include covering additional customs fees that may apply if a person needs to travel with special equipment of significant value. Also, an arriving person with a disability may need to be met at the point of entry by a UN personnel or a contractor

⁷ <https://undg.org/document/building-performance-manual-for-the-design-and-construction-of-undg-common-premises-office-buildings/>

engaged for this purpose. Related costs should be estimated and budgeted for before the assignment (in the case of new personnel) or a mission travel is confirmed.

i. Accessible housing

For requests regarding accessible housing, the employee's specific needs should be communicated to the organization/office. It may be useful for an office to do a review of the availability of accessible housing in the duty station, applying international standards (e.g. ISO 21542) and national standards, before the assignment of an international personnel with a disability is confirmed.

j. Medical needs

Personnel with disabilities or even those who do not formally have a disability may have specific medical needs, including medication. In case of international personnel, before accepting the assignment, such personnel should be encouraged to find out if they can obtain sufficient medication at a duty station in advance. While the person is responsible for making its own arrangements to obtain medication, the office can support the candidate by providing the contacts for him/her to confirm with the appropriate authorities if the required medication is available locally. The office can also provide support regarding if availability of medical facilities/services (e.g. therapy) in the duty station. If not, it is important to confirm if specific medical services outside of the duty station or virtually could be covered by the medical insurance plan.

4. Reasonable Accommodation Process

a. Managing reasonable accommodation requests

A reasonable accommodation process starts when a candidate for a UNDP job or a member of the UNDP personnel submits a request for such accommodation, either verbally, or in writing. Applicants can submit their requests through UNDP recruitment system.

The expectation is that a person with disabilities should let the Organization know, as early as possible, that they need an adjustment pertaining to any aspect of the job, or any other support. The organization should also encourage candidates or personnel with disabilities to communicate such needs with their HR focal point or directly with the hiring manager. In either case, confidentiality must be ensured through the entire process.

While requests for reasonable accommodation may initially be informal, it is important to keep a written record of any agreed steps, especially if extra funding is involved.

Once a request for reasonable accommodation is received by a supervisor or an HR focal point, it should be individually assessed and submitted to the head of the office for assessment and approval.

Every request should be evaluated with the requestor to ensure that the person can fully perform the functions of the post, same as any personnel with no disability. In doing so, the following questions should be considered:

- What limitations/barriers is the person experiencing to fully perform at work?
- How do these limitations/barriers affect the person and their performance in the job?
- What specific job tasks are problematic to fully fulfil as a result of these limitations/barriers?
- What accommodations are available to mitigate or eliminate these barriers?
- Has the person been consulted on the existing and possible other accommodations?

- Does the supervisor and/or other personnel need training for the person with a disability to be able to properly use the provided accommodation?

It is important to remember that the only information that the Organization should require is functional limitation(s) experienced by the employee, and steps that could be taken to remove or mitigate any barriers connected to such limitation(s). There is no need for the Organization to be informed of the underlying diagnosis that causes the disability.

Where a UNDP personnel with disabilities has previously received, or been denied, an accommodation, this should not prevent them from making another request at a later time if their circumstances change and they believe that a reasonable accommodation is needed.

Once accommodations are in place, the focal point managing this process is required to regularly engage with the employee with a disability to evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodation and to determine whether additional or different accommodations are needed. Accommodations may need be removed when no longer needed and when they do not benefit any of the employees, with or without a disability.

b. Funding for reasonable accommodation

As a general practice, offices are encouraged to reflect provisions for reasonable accommodation in both their institutional and programme/project budgets. In addition, there are two centrally-managed mechanisms that could be used to cover the costs of necessary reasonable accommodation measures, as well as to enhance the overall accessibility of UNDP premises and offices. These include:

- A **Reasonable Accommodation Funding Facility** which aims to cover the cost of appropriate measures to enable personnel with disabilities to fully and effectively participate in the work of the organization. These accommodations aim to remove or mitigate any immediate barriers that may limit a person's ability to deliver at their full potential and discharge their official functions. These may include, for example, the purchase of Braille printers or notetakers, adjustable desks, screen reader licenses, sign language interpretation, captioning services, personal assistance, etc.

Requests for funding from this facility should be sent to reasonable.accommodation@undp.org, include a justification and a detailed description of the reasonable accommodation measure to be implemented, a cost estimate, as well as the approval of the head of the office.

- The **Capital Facility Fund** aims to cover significant cost centre capital expenditures, including permanent structural changes, that will enhance the accessibility of UNDP offices and facilities, as well as their sustainability, e.g. the installation of an elevator or adapting a bathroom to be accessible.

Requests for funding from this facility are to be submitted as part of the annual institutional budget submission and allocation process. Once approved, funds will be advanced to offices and will be expected to be recovered in subsequent budget periods.

5. References

- *Promoting diversity and inclusion through workplace adjustments: a practical guide, ILO, 2016*⁸

⁸ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_536630.pdf

- *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*⁹
- *United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS)*¹⁰
- *Employment and accessibility for staff members with disabilities in the United Nations Secretariat. Secretary-General's bulletin (ST/SGB/2014/311)*¹²
- *ISO 21542:2011 Building construction -- Accessibility and usability of the built environment*¹³

⁹ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.un.org/en/content/disabilitystrategy/>

¹¹ <https://www.undocs.org/ST/SGB/2014/3>

¹² [https://hr.un.org/sites/hr.un.org/files/1/documents_sources-english/08_secretary-general's_bulletins/2014/sgb_-_2014_-_3_\[employment_and_accessibility_for_staff_members_with_disabilities_in_the_un_secretariat\].doc](https://hr.un.org/sites/hr.un.org/files/1/documents_sources-english/08_secretary-general's_bulletins/2014/sgb_-_2014_-_3_[employment_and_accessibility_for_staff_members_with_disabilities_in_the_un_secretariat].doc)

¹³ <https://www.iso.org/standard/50498.html>