Easy Read and Plain Language at the United Nations

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I. WHY IS ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION IMPORTANT?

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

"Communication" includes languages, display of text, Braille, tactile communication, large print, accessible multimedia as well as written, audio, **plain-language**, human-reader and augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, including **accessible information** and communication technology"
(art. 2)

II. SITUATION AT THE UN

1. Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities

➡ Gerard Quinn, since 2020

➡ Mandate to disseminate his reports in Easy Read

2. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights must also publish some Easy Read and plain language reports

3. United Nations Secretariat

➤ United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy

Available in Easy Read

It does not mention plain language or Easy Read
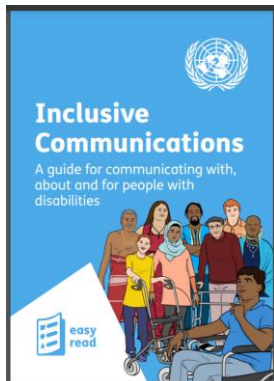
➤ Disability-Inclusive Communications Guidelines Available in Easy Read

It mentions plain language and includes a definition of Easy Read

4. Division of Conference Management (UN Geneva)

2017-2018: First pilot project to adapt core CRPD documents into plain English (outsourcing).

2018: One document adapted in-house as an ad hoc reasonable accommodation for a member of CRPD.

2018-2019: Second pilot project to adapt a few more CRPD documents into plain English (outsourcing).

III. CHALLENGES

1. Choosing your format / Identifying your audience

Plain language makes information accessible for a wide <u>audience</u>, including some persons with disabilities, but not all

Easy Read makes information accessible for persons with intellectual/learning/cognitive disabilities, among others

Other terminology: easy-to-understand; clear writing; Easy English

2. Multilingualism

- Multilingualism is of particular importance to the UN.

- The balance among the six official languages has been an ongoing concern of Member States.

The 6 Official Languages of the United Nations

English   Arabic   French

Chinese   Russian   Spanish

3. In-house capacity vs external providers dilemma

Consider this:

- Training on plain language/Easy Read

- High staff turnover

- Creating new mandates or job profiles

- Deciding on the validation process by end-users

- Deadline management

- Quality control mechanism: ensuring accuracy and usability

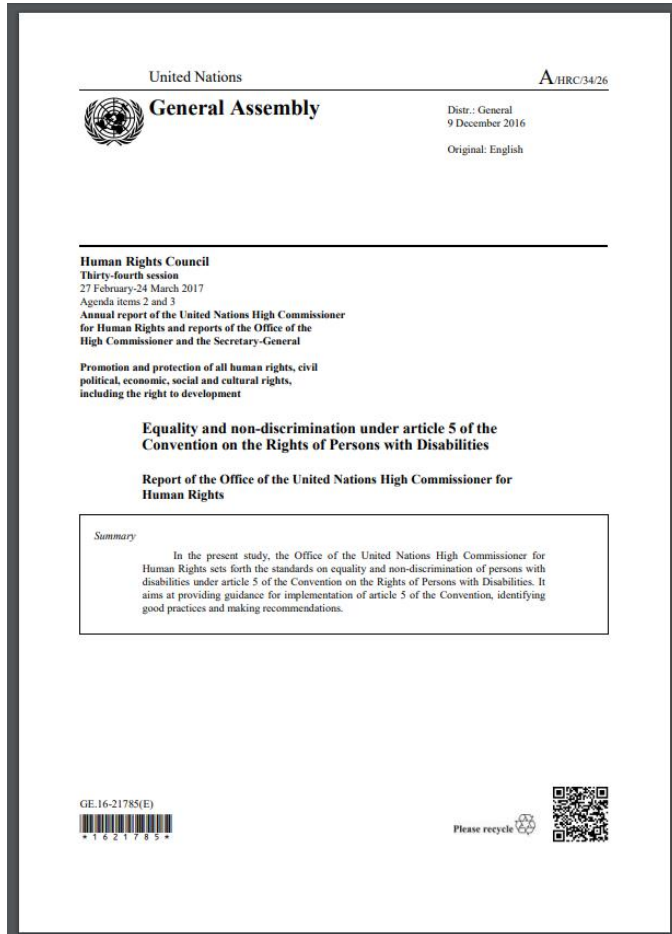- Guidelines and support for staff and external editors

4. Other challenges

- Document prioritization: Which documents first?

- Funding

- Storage & dissemination: easy-to-understand + easy to find

- Raising awareness among staff at all levels + sustainable approach to clear writing

5. Practical aspects: using templates

Most United Nations reports use a standard cover.

5. Practical aspects: using templates

UN Easy Read documents use different templates. This is confusing.

6. Practical aspects: images and definitions

➡ The images we use must be:

- culturally acceptable
- clear
- inclusive of all races, religions, ages, gender...
- well designed

➡ Definitions of difficult words should be clear, accurate and used consistently across documents and reports.