

**Statement on “Policies for persons with disabilities in the pandemic”  
by the Federal Republic of Germany on the occasion of the 13th Conference of  
States Parties to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

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Chair,

Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year, the COVID-19 pandemic is the issue that concerns and preoccupies everyone around the world. The pandemic is a global challenge that we all have to fight together with the help of adequate measures in our own countries, but also globally because the pandemic does not stop at national borders. We can only overcome this global crisis if we work together. Even if the positive developments in vaccine research are giving rise to the first glimmers of hope on the horizon, we must continue to fight the coronavirus pandemic with everything in our power, because it will continue to challenge us in the future. In this context we must keep in mind all those who are particularly susceptible to infection and its effects. These are above all persons with disabilities who are particularly vulnerable.

There must be no regression in inclusion. On the contrary: We must do better and faster.

And with regard to inclusion we can say that we have achieved a great deal already, but much remains to be done! Germany will not slacken its commitment to implementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities, but will continue to focus on the implementation of the Convention also in the coming years. This applies both to implementation at the national level, but also to international cooperation.

In these difficult times, we do not forget those who are particularly in need of help and support. We must not risk jeopardizing the positive results we have achieved together – we must not accept setbacks and leave no one behind. Here, the coronavirus-related restrictions currently in force in many countries are unavoidable. And yet – we must not allow persons with disabilities to be socially marginalized.

That's why Germany has initiated measures and laws in the policy area "COVID-19 and disability" in order to prevent in particular setbacks in inclusion caused by the pandemic.

Because the pandemic impacts all areas of society: The pandemic has not only caused a rise in unemployment, but the coronavirus crisis has also had an impact on the employment of persons with severe disabilities. The tense labour market situation affects in particular persons with disabilities and reduces their labour market participation opportunities. Therefore, Germany has developed some ideas for new legislation which are meant to prevent that institutions run by social service providers have to be closed. This new legislation is also intended to ensure that the unique landscape of social service providers, social benefit agencies as well as not-for-profit companies and organisations can continue to operate. The aim is that these institutions can continue to take care of the individual needs of persons with disabilities – even in the crisis and beyond – and that they can help to secure and improve social participation as well as mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

As the workshops for persons with disabilities – in Germany a particular type of employment opportunity for persons with disabilities – are currently in a difficult situation, we support them during the crisis. We also support their self-representation bodies and their participation by strengthening and securing the workshop staff councils financially and by guaranteeing their operability. Furthermore we will compensate the corona-related loss of remuneration in these workshops. In addition to providing financial support, we will give special consideration to institutions for persons with disabilities as regards the distribution of personal protective equipment.

At the moment there can be no doubt that specific COVID-19-related measures have priority. But the road to an inclusive society must continue – despite and precisely because of the pandemic. And we are doing just that – by continuing reforms already started, such as the reform of the 2016 Federal Participation Act, which is to facilitate more participation in working life on the general labour market and more autonomy, and we are doing this by starting new reforms, like the reform of guardianship law applicable to children and adults.

The draft law amending general guardianship law is another big step forward towards an inclusive German society because the reform will mean that this law will have to be adjusted to the requirements of the UNCRPD. In this context the results of the last country review will also be taken into account. The central norms regarding the prerequisites for the appointment of a legal guardian were for example thoroughly revised in order to enshrine the requirements of Article 12 of the UNCRPD more clearly in adult guardianship law.

In order to advance inclusion in Germany even better, we have launched this year the updating of the National Action Plan 2.0 to implement the UNCRPD. In order to implement the UNCRPD, Germany adopted the first National Action Plan as early as in 2011 with the aim to pool all disability policy measures of the Federal Government. We have thus given an important impulse towards enabling persons with disabilities to participate equally in political, social, economic and cultural life. In addition, the action plan is also meant to establish equal opportunities in education and the world of work, giving all citizens the chance to lead autonomous lives and participate in an accessible society. In 2016, it was followed by the National Action Plan 2.0, which has succeeded in strengthening disability mainstreaming across all policy areas even more than before.

The current update of this Action Plan primarily focuses on the thematic areas of “COVID-19” and “Digitalisation and Inclusion”. Digitalisation of the economy and society has made further progress in the last years and has received an additional boost through the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore it is all the more important that persons with disabilities can share in the opportunities offered by digitalisation. Accessibility of products and services is essential in this context. Therefore, Germany plans to implement the EU Directive 2019/882 on accessibility requirements for products and services (EAA) as required and to enshrine it in German law by 2022. The Directive is an important aspect regarding the further development of the European Strategy for Persons with Disabilities, which Germany welcomes very much and which we will also continue to work on in future.

In the framework of its inclusion strategy for international development cooperation adopted in 2019, Germany, together with its partner countries, aims to make the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development inclusive by addressing inclusion and its requirements on a more stringent and strategic level. The Federal Government has recently restructured its development resources to address urgent needs in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Generally, the total development cooperation budget of the Federal Government is used to stabilize the partner countries of German development cooperation, in particular in order to strengthen healthcare systems, provide for refugees’ needs, food security and crisis management. In a first step, Germany has already deployed its current programmes in a targeted manner to strengthen the supply structures and measures to fight the pandemic.

With regard to all measures ensuring more inclusion in our society, one thing is for sure: It is not sufficient to remove barriers on paper. Barriers need to be removed also from people’s minds. Let us therefore continue to work together to ensure that persons with disabilities can participate equally in these difficult times!

Thank you very much!