Holding Europe to account: Inclusion is a human right – embedding and implementing awareness-raising as a strategic priority

Celle Declaration
of the 71st Meeting of Federal and State Commissioners for People with Disabilities

The conference of Federal and State Commissioners for People with Disabilities (KBB) calls upon the institutions of the European Union (EU) to implement the following key demands in order to strengthen awareness-raising in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD):

1. Obligatory enforcement of the law

Set up a legal basis with the aim of ensuring that awareness-raising leads to effective change. In doing so, the EU needs to guarantee full legal validity of the UN CRPD within EU legislation by systematically examining all existing and future legal provisions, political strategies, and their practical development as to their compatibility with the UN CRPD and by strengthening the structure of monitoring mechanisms. In case of identified violations, infringement proceedings must be used as a consistent sanctioning instrument.

2. EU-wide strategy for raising awareness

Development of an independent EU strategy for raising awareness regarding the rights of people with disabilities. This should include measurable objectives, indicators and a binding time horizon within the strategy for the rights of people with disabilities 2021-2030 set by the EU Commission. Part of the strategy should be the establishment of a dedicated European Commissioner for people with disabilities in order give institutional strength to the policy for people with disabilities.

3. Integration of organisations of people with disabilities

Active and consistent consultation of organisations of people with disabilities regarding EU communication strategies and awareness-raising measures.

4. Funding programmes for awareness raising

Dismantling stereotypes and strengthening a convention-compliant understanding of disability by a targeted promotion of EU programmes such as Erasmus+, Creative Europe or by citizens programmes. Project funds used all over Europe are only to be used for such projects that are proven to be accessible and do not segregate. Moreover, to achieve the Horizontal Objective of "Equality of Opportunity and Non-Discrimination" specific measures to strengthen inclusion must be proven to be included.

5. Monitoring of societal attitudes

Establishment of an EU-wide monitoring on societal attitudes vis-à-vis people with disabilities, for example through regular Eurobarometer surveys and the systematic evaluation of progress in measures of awareness raising. This must include data collection on hate speech and hate crimes on the grounds of disability and support for Member States in raising awareness among the police and the judiciary.

6. Mandatory training in EU institutions

Introduction of mandatory training on the rights of people with disabilities and anti-discrimination for staff of the EU institutions, in particular the European Commission and the European Parliament. Training for EU staff involved in developing EU strategies for guidelines on the allocation of European funding must address inclusion and accessibility in line with the UN CRPD. People with disabilities must be actively involved as trainers, drawing on their own expertise.

Background

The reality of life for people with disabilities in the EU falls significantly short of the standards set by the UN CRPD[1]. Legal provisions within the EU and its Member States are still far removed from the human rights-based requirements of the UN CRPD. The EU and its Member States are therefore called upon to consistently enshrine the rights of people with disabilities in legislation and to ensure their implementation.

Many key inclusion policy regulations in EU Member States, including in Germany, are based on EU law[2]. Their consistent transposition is therefore not merely a theoretical requirement, but essential for the participation, self-determination, and accessibility of and for people with disabilities. Around 90 million people with disabilities live in the European Union, which corresponds to approximately a quarter of the adult population[3].

The EU sees itself as a community of democratic values. This is one of the reasons why it was among the first signatories of the UN CRPD and remains the only regional community of states to have ratified the Convention. This normative self-image entails an obligation to consistently take the provisions of the UN CRPD into account in its actions and legislation.

1 UN document CRPD/C/EU/CO/2-3 as of 17.04.2025
2 Example: German General Act on Equal Treatment (AGG) implements Council Directives 2000/78/EC and 2000/43/EC.
3 European Commission/ Eurostat – EU-SILC-Data (Statistics on Income and Living Conditions)

The 'Concluding Observations on the second and third periodic reports of the EU'[4], adopted following the EU's review by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, contain, among other things, critical references to persistent shortcomings in the areas of awareness-raising and sensitisation (Art. 8 UN CRPD).

The UN expert committee is particularly critical as regards the following developments:

- an increase in segregating structures (e.g., through EU funding channelled into institutions)[5]
- insufficient accessible communication within EU institutions
- project funding that is not designed to be inclusive and/or a lack of involvement of persons with disabilities

Against the backdrop of these developments, there is a risk that, without concrete measures and strategies aimed at raising awareness, existing discrimination will become entrenched rather than being eliminated. Studies show that experiences of discrimination among people with disabilities in the EU remain high[6]. For this reason, the Concluding Observations point to persistent shortcomings, partly as a result of insufficient awareness-raising (Art. 8 UN CRPD).

It is important to distinguish that the EU must both take sustainable measures to meet its own legal and policy requirements within the EU institutions and, at the same time, shape the legal and policy framework in such a way that Member States can effectively implement the provisions of the UN CRPD.

Against this background, raising awareness, as a key cross-cutting issue throughout the UN CRPD, must be a priority for the EU institutions. This serves to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities and to strengthen their participation in society.

Celle, May 8, 2026

4 UN document CRPD/C/EU/CO/2-3 as of 17.04.2025

5 In the last two funding periods, the EU spent at least EUR 105.54 million on the construction or renovation of 23 institutions. 03/2026 https://eucap.eu/statement-on-eu-multiannual-financial-framework/?utm_source=copilot.com.

6 54 % of people with disabilities feel discriminated against. 2023. Eurobarometer survey https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/disability-eu-facts-figures/?utm_source=copilot.com