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Standing Committee on  
Democracy and Human Rights

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27 February 2024

### **Debate on *Sustainable actions to improve the life conditions of people with disabilities, including their chances for education and work opportunities***

*Tuesday, 26 March 2024, 09:30 – 12:30*

#### **Concept note**

##### **Background**

Every day, everywhere and throughout their lives, people with disabilities face barriers that prevent them from participating in society on an equal basis with others. In both public and private spheres, spanning educational settings and employment, individuals with disabilities are commonly discriminated against. In particular, they are often denied access to mainstream education and are seldom integrated into workplaces.

Yet, by adopting the 2030 Agenda, States have committed to leaving no one behind. This promise was renewed at the most recent Sustainable Development Goals Summit in September 2023. On this occasion, States committed to “ensuring that persons with disabilities actively participate in and equally benefit from sustainable development efforts.”<sup>1</sup> Ahead of the Summit of the Future, a new Pact for the Future is being devised, with a focus on future generations and digital transformation. The zero draft of the Pact highlights the need for a human rights-centred approach to build inclusive societies and ensure “protection against marginalization and discrimination.”<sup>2</sup>

To fulfil this promise, the rights of children with disabilities require special attention. The number of children with disabilities worldwide is estimated at close to 240 million. They are at greater risk of being unregistered and uncoun­ted at birth, and of being denied education and equal opportunities in the community later on. Compared to other children, they are more likely to be placed in institutions and to be exposed to violence in those settings, as well as at home, at school and in the community at large.<sup>3</sup>

The right of children with disabilities to education is enshrined in both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). States parties to these Conventions are called upon to offer them inclusive, quality and free primary and secondary education in the community. This requires legally defining what inclusive education and protection from discrimination means, ensuring access to justice to claim rights, allocating resources to transform the educational system, training education professionals, deploying individual support to learners, providing accessible facilities, materials and technologies, raising awareness to address discriminatory norms and stereotypes, and the collection and analysis of data.

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<sup>1</sup> Political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly, UN Doc A/RES/78/1, 16 October 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Pact for the Future: zero draft, 26 January 2024. [www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sof-co-facilitators-zero-draft\\_pact-for-the-future.pdf](http://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sof-co-facilitators-zero-draft_pact-for-the-future.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Empowering children with disabilities for the enjoyment of their human rights, including through inclusive education”, UN Doc A/HRC/40/27, 22 January 2019.

Special attention should be paid to the rights of women and girls with disabilities, who often face additional barriers due to intersecting forms of discrimination and exclusion. Girls with disabilities are also particularly vulnerable to violence and abuse in educational settings, including sexual violence. In addition, some parents may refuse to send girls with disabilities to school: as a result, women with disabilities have markedly lower rates of literacy and employment when compared to both women and men in general, and even to men with disabilities.<sup>4</sup>

Many governments officially promote inclusive education, but in reality, children with disabilities – especially girls with disabilities – are either excluded or segregated in special schools, which negatively affects their enjoyment of the right to work and freely choose employment on an equal basis with others.<sup>5</sup>

Meaningful work and employment are essential to a person's economic security, physical and mental health, personal well-being and sense of identity. They are a key component of integration into the community. The right to work and employment for people with disabilities is protected under the CRPD. Persons with disabilities are more likely to earn lower wages than other persons and are more likely to be in vulnerable employment, including being employed in the informal sector, being self-employed or engaging in part-time employment. These disparities particularly impact persons with disabilities when factors such as age, gender, sex, ethnicity and place of residence come into play.

Incentives for employers, affirmative action and other measures can and should be promoted to ensure people with disabilities can fully participate in economic life without discrimination. Lifelong education is also a key component in ensuring and fostering the continued career development of persons with disabilities.

Evolving economic and labour market conditions create new challenges and opportunities for ensuring the right to work. New technologies like artificial intelligence and the shift to digital work can create new barriers or forms of discrimination, as well as new pathways into work and new forms of employment. This same dynamic applies to the right to education and lifelong learning.

## **Objectives**

Participants will discuss existing challenges and share good practices that can improve the life conditions of people with disabilities, in particular their chances for good quality education and work opportunities.

Following an exchange of views with experts, participants will be invited to consider the following questions:

- What lessons have been learned in efforts to integrate and retain children with disabilities in the general school system? What is the role of families and communities?
- How can access to higher education and regular work in the private and public sectors be ensured for persons with disabilities? Do quotas and financial incentives work?
- What is the role of digital technologies in expanding access to integrated, good quality education and employment opportunities for people with disabilities? What challenges remain in this area?
- What legal and policy measures have proven effective in preventing and providing redress in cases of abuse or discrimination against persons with disabilities in educational settings and workplaces, including gender-based abuse or discrimination?

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, para. 46.

<sup>5</sup> Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General comment No. 8 (2022) on the right of persons with disabilities to work and employment, UN Doc. CRPD/C/GC/8, 7 October 2022.