

Thank you for the invitation to this seminar. I am very happy that the Danish government has chosen to focus on equal rights for persons with disabilities. Not least what lies behind discrimination and prejudice: lack of knowledge and fear of the unknown and what is perceived as different. Prejudice towards persons with disabilities is both well-known and documented. The Danish National Centre for Social Research has re-confirmed that some persons with disabilities are more prone to discrimination than others and persons with psycho-social disabilities are among those who experience the most prejudiced actions by fellow citizens.

Our overall aim is to establish equal rights and opportunities as stated by the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In the strive to do that it is most fruitful to focus on how, and what methods to be used in the combat against prejudice than on prejudice itself. In the afore mentioned Convention, Article 8 enshrines a specific obligation of awareness raising, combatting prejudice and creating an environment where skills, merits and abilities of persons with disabilities are recognized and promoted. This is in line with the foundation of the Sustainable Development goals, where the principle "to leave no one behind" is strongly emphasized, and elements to realize the principle are part of the goals and the targets and indicators to be used to measure progress and fulfilment. Several of the Goals are relevant, goal no. 10 on reduced inequalities is one and has both a target and an indicator underlining the need to include persons with disabilities in decision making, social life and economic development. That is key in acknowledging persons with disabilities as competent and contributing citizens – that is what we can be, and most of all strive to become. We want to make that happen in education, in the workplace, in sport clubs, in cultural activities and in community and society. All is part of both the Convention and the Sustainable Development goals, because when world leaders are pointing at where the world needs to develop, they point in the right directions. After that the important thing is about how we go about it in everyday life. That is where we need substantial change in approach and action.

Accessibility, reasonable accommodation provision of special devices, personal assistants, sign language interpreters and other kinds of disability specific support has to be in place.

Previous Danish studies points as childhood as the period of life where perceptions and viewpoints about persons with disabilities are formed. If viewpoints and perceptions are to be positive, persons with disabilities need to be present, but not only is presence important, the interaction between children with and without disabilities need to be supported to ensure as equal and free interaction as possible. Also children have to see adults with and without disabilities working together as respectful colleagues. It is such kinds of effortless partnerships that need to be shown, promoted and part of daily life.

We need a two pronged strategy, because media and campaigning in general is also part of changing perceptions and eliminating prejudice and discrimination. We have seen how persons from the LGBTQI-community have gained more and more attention and have come a long way in successfully combatting prejudice. I believe that this gain is a result of more attention, more people getting out of the closet and influential persons supporting the cause regardless of their own preferences. That can also be done in relation to persons with disabilities, but then acknowledgement is needed, that society and approaches have previously been highly paternalistic and about charity. That must be changed. The approach must be of rights, respect and empowerment, and campaigns and actual provisions and services must go hand in hand, showing persons with disabilities as equal and empowered.

Thank you