Preface

This *Research Handbook* complements our textbook on *International and European Disability Law*, which was our first joint research endeavour, and which was published in 2019. By bringing together in this *Research Handbook* not only key authors in the disability field but also scholars from different backgrounds and at different stages of their careers, we have tried to offer a diverse, wide-ranging – and yet substantive – exploration of key topics and sub-domains in the field of European Union (EU) disability law. We have also striven to take into account the most recent developments brought about by the EU's accession to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Most of the contributions included in this *Research Handbook* were completed at the end of 2019. The *Research Handbook* on the whole was finalized in early 2020, just at the beginning of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has profoundly impacted not only on our own daily lives, but also on the EU law landscape. Since March 2020, the priority for the EU institutions and Member States alike has been to safeguard the health of European citizens, by reinforcing national healthcare systems and adopting a range of measures to contain the spread of the virus. Alongside those measures, the EU has also engaged in several short-term reforms to mitigate the detrimental socio-economic side effects of the pandemic. As a consequence, we are now experiencing fast-paced legal developments in several fields, such as State aid control, public services, public procurement, structural funds and free movement of people within the EU. Those unpredicted and unparalleled developments could not be included in this first edition of this *Research Handbook*. It would have been unfair to our esteemed authors to delay the publication and ask them to rework their chapters during these unprecedented and challenging times.

At the moment of writing this preface, it is quite unclear how the current crisis will pan out; neither is it clear for how long the pandemic will continue. It is, however, quite evident that people with disabilities run the risk of being affected most by the COVID-19 pandemic, in multiple ways. On 30 April 2020, Commissioner Helena Dalli, in her speech at the Disability Intergroup of the European Parliament, emphasized that the EU's implementation of the CRPD 'has been put to the test and becomes even more relevant in this crisis situation'. Against this background, we, as editors, feel that this *Research Handbook* has provided an up-to-date and comprehensive picture of the status of EU disability law and related developments up to the beginning of 2020. This, in itself, is essential to enable an understanding of the further steps that the EU needs to take in order to ensure that people with disabilities do not face discrimination and enjoy their right to the highest attainable standard of health during the COVID-19 pandemic. We will, however, be preparing for future editorial endeavours, to capture the *zeitgeist* of the current emergency. Such a period of profound crisis gives us a renewed opportunity for deep analysis and for further contextualizing our research on EU disability law. In the meantime, we hope that the readers will enjoy this *Research Handbook* and look forward to a second edition in due course.

Delia Ferri and Andrea Broderick
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