



Admission to a Degree Program Exceptional Circumstances (Petition for “Härtefall”)

Many students with chronic illness and disabilities find out that their circumstances can be considered a hardship during their studies. However, this hardship can also be recognized at an earlier stage and have an impact on degree program admission if the applicant submits a special petition. Sometimes an immediate start to studies is required due to illness. This immediate admission can be obtained with the help of a **special petition** submitted during the admission process: Exceptional Circumstances (Petition for “Härtefall”).

The information below is aimed at prospective RWTH students who have a disability and/or a chronic illness.

In particular, it concerns the creation of equivalent admissions conditions for individuals who would be particularly disadvantaged by non-admission.

Approximately 11% of all students in Germany have a disability or chronic illness. These include, for example, physical disabilities, visual and hearing impairments, but also disabilities or illnesses that are less noticeable at first glance or not noticeable at all, such as mental illnesses (e.g., depression), chronic somatic illnesses, Autism Spectrum Disorder, or even disorders that partially impact performance, such as dyslexia (see the beeinträchtigt studieren – best2 study by Deutsches Studentenwerk).

Depending on the individual extent of the impairment and the associated social, family, or economic situation, a petition for exceptional circumstances in addition to the usual admission procedure for a place at the University may be recommended.



VORSCHUB – Representation for Students With Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses

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(Telephone only available during consultation hours)

You can find our current consultation hours here:

www.asta.rwth-aachen.de/beratung/behinderung-chronic-illness/



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Universities in Germany are legally required to ensure that students with disabilities and chronic illnesses are not disadvantaged in their studies or in the application process for a study place.

The University reserves 2% of the course of study contingent for students facing a particular hardship.

The quota for such cases is intended for students who would be exceptionally disadvantaged by an admission rejection.

They can submit a petition for a “Härtefall”, special case, at the same time as their regular application for admission for a study place.

IMPORTANT: As long as the applicant meets all the admission requirements – and only then – the petition can lead to immediate admission regardless of waiting periods and/or grades.

What Are Exceptional Circumstances (Petition for a “Härtefall”)?

In this case, it must be made clear with the help of a personal statement and corresponding evidence why the applicant’s circumstances are recognized as a “hardship case” and **non-admission to the desired course of study** would mean an **exceptional hardship**. Recognition of the hardship petition will result in immediate admission.

The **hardship quota in the admissions process** varies from two to five percent depending on the degree program. However, since the number of study places that can be awarded within the hardship quota is limited, not every prospective student who qualifies as a recognized hardship case will be admitted to their desired study place.



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What Circumstances May be Recognized as a Hardship Case?

You can find out about possible justifications for a hardship case at hochschulstart.de. For example, one possible justification is a **deteriorating illness**, so delaying the start of the individual's study would be unreasonable. However, other **special social or family reasons** may also make it necessary for the applicant to commence their studies straight away. According to the awarding regulations of North Rhine-Westphalia, exceptional circumstances apply if "the applicant's special social or family reasons render it essential for them to immediately commence their studies or change their place of study." Not every reason that the applicant considers relevant can be recognized as a "Härtefall" when awarding a study place.

The reasons stated must implicate a serious impairment.

With regard to a disability or chronic illness, the following situations may be classified as such:

1. A deteriorating illness
2. Applicants must be restricted in the choice or practice of a profession only facilitating certain occupational fields or requiring them to drop out from previous studies or professional work. As a rule, however, they must expect the intended course of study to lead to successful occupational inclusion. In this case, it would be unreasonably difficult or impossible for them to wait to start their studies.
3. The applicant cannot effectively use the waiting time before starting their studies, however, this reason is only possible in conjunction with other justifications.



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How Do I Submit a Petition?

Personal cover letter

The petition consists of a cover letter in which the applicants explain their situation. This **personal statement** explaining why a hardship petition is being submitted and why a waiting period for a study place would be unreasonable is then substantiated by a **medical expert report and, if necessary, further evidence** (e.g. severely disabled person's ID).

Medical expert opinion

Applicants will also need a medical expert report to support their statements. It should be **comprehensible to medical laypersons** and contain a **diagnosis**, an explanation of the **symptoms** and the **consequences** for the affected student, comprehensible statements about the **origin, severity, course, treatment options** for the impairment, and a **prognosis for the further course**. In this way, the extent of the hardship can be highlighted.

More detailed information can be found at the following links:

<https://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/djkz/lidx/1>

<https://www.studentenwerke.de/de/content/härtefallantrag-im-zulassungsverfahren>

<https://hochschulstart.de/epaper/hilfe2021/hilfe-zur-bewerbung-2021/index.html#p=16>



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