



years of UNCRPD

**BOOK OF ABSTRACTS
FROM THE INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE**

**20 YEARS OF THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS
OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

Editors:

Aleksandra Rabrenović

Helga Špadina



Belgrade, 2025

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FACULTY OF LAW, JOSIP
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Održavanje konferencije „20 Years of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities“ i izdavanje ove publikacije podržalo je Ministarstvo nauke, tehnološkog razvoja i inovacija Republike Srbije.

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PREFACE

It is with great honour that we present this Book of Abstracts for the international conference “20 Years of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”.

Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) marked a turning point in the global recognition of the dignity, autonomy, and rights of persons with disabilities. Over the past two decades, the CRPD has served not only as a legal instrument, but also as a catalyst for change—shaping national legislation, influencing public policy, and empowering countless individuals and communities worldwide.

This volume brings together a rich collection of abstracts that reflect the breadth and depth of research, policy analysis, and advocacy efforts inspired by the Convention. The contributions span a wide range of topics, including conceptual issues, equality and non-discrimination, women and children with disabilities, work and employment, living independently and being included in the community, adequate standard of living and social protection, political rights and multi-sectorial issues related to rights of persons with disabilities. Together, they provide valuable insight into both achievements and challenges in the implementation of the CRPD across diverse national and regional contexts.

As in 2026 we will mark twenty years since the adoption of this landmark treaty, this publication offers not only a reflection on progress made, but also a critical space for envisioning the future. It underscores the continuing importance of inclusive dialogue, cross-sectoral collaboration, and evidence-based policymaking in realizing the full potential of the Convention.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all contributors - researchers, practitioners and activists - whose work is featured in these pages. Your commitment to advancing the rights of persons with disabilities enriches this dialogue and drives us forward.

We hope this collection will inspire new conversations, foster collaboration, and contribute meaningfully to the shared goal of building a more just and inclusive world for all.

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PART I
CONCEPTUAL ISSUES,
EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION
AWARENESS RAISING

THE PROTECTION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN THE INTERNATIONAL AND THE EUROPEAN APPROACH

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is the first international legally binding instrument which specifically addresses the rights of persons with disabilities, establishing minimum standards of protection of their rights. This Convention has profoundly influenced both the international and European approaches to disability and has significantly contributed to the development of a social culture founded on non-discrimination, inclusion, and the protection of diversity.

Within the European framework, this international instrument is frequently cited by the European Court of Justice as well as by the European Court of Human Rights in their case-law. However, as has been observed, within the European system the protection of persons with disabilities appears to be closely linked to the broader need for the protection of vulnerable people. In so doing, vulnerability is regarded as an intrinsic condition of certain groups, among which persons with disabilities are commonly included. This paradigm entails the risk of perpetuating a paternalistic perspective, rather than promoting an approach grounded in the effective development of rights, autonomy, and empowerment.

By contrast, the CRPD rejects a stereotypical and vulnerability-based conceptualisation of disability. In the rare instances where the CRPD Committee refers to vulnerability, it does so in a purely descriptive and functional sense, for example, in the context of national risk management policies that exclude persons with disabilities, or when highlighting the lack of disaggregated data essential to understanding vulnerabilities.

In light of the foregoing considerations, and through a comparative analysis of international and European practice concerning the concept of disability and States' obligations to protect persons with disabilities, this paper will focus on the analysis of the approach adopted at the regional level and those embraced at the international stage.

Building upon the analytical and comparative framework outlined above, the paper aims to ascertain whether there are differences and commonalities between

the two approaches, and whether any best consolidated practices can be drawn from both systems, which may then be concretely applied to better safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities and to ensure their full inclusion within society across all levels.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION IN INTERNATIONAL DISABILITY LAW – COMPLEMENTARITY, TENSION, AND THE PROMISE OF EFFECTIVE EQUALITY

The research will investigate the relationship between affirmative action and reasonable accommodation within the framework of international disability law. The two mechanisms are complementary given that they are both aimed at advancing the effective equality of persons with disabilities; however, the preliminary literature review shows that the conceptual differentiation between them has not been enough explored in the legal theory. Even though they are distinct legal tools, with affirmative action aiming to correct systemic inequalities faced by historically marginalized groups, and reasonable accommodation focusing on individualized adjustments for persons with disabilities, sharing a common normative foundation rooted in the concept of effective equality, there are also several important differences between the two which have far-reaching consequences on their legal regulation and implementation.

The paper will engage in a critical analysis of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, international case law and scholarly literature, to investigate the conceptual similarities and differences between the two legal mechanisms as regulated in international disability law. It will focus in particular on the analysis of the interpretative material produced by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (hereinafter: CRPD), as well as on its case law, such as *H.M. v. Sweden*, *Nyusti and Takács v. Hungary*, *Marcos v. Austria* and *F. v. Austria*. The analysis will also reflect on the potential synergies of the two mechanisms in addressing the phenomenon of multiple discrimination as a potential route for more effective disability law.

Ultimately, the aim of the paper is to contribute not only to the doctrinal approach but also to the practical application of both concepts and assess the possibilities of their interaction that may further support the CRPD's broader goal of transformative equality.

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“DON’T THROW THE BABY OUT WITH THE BATHWATER” - POTENTIAL, LIMITATIONS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS IN RELATION TO ARTICLE 12 CRPD AND PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA

Article 12 is certainly one of the most hotly debated provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), especially in its radical interpretation provided by General Comment No. 1 by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. On the one hand, such principles have been saluted with favour by a number of scholars and disabled people’s organisations, including associations for the promotion of human rights and quality care for people with dementia. On the other hand, other scholars and organisations argue that it is indeed when applying such provisions to the case of people with dementia that a number of them appear unfeasible and utopian.

This paper argues that, contrarily to what the latter category of commentators argues, dementia care is one of the areas in which the potential for positive change of Article 12 CRPD and General Comment No. 1 is more significant, and that much of the criticism originated in this area may be coming from misunderstandings of relevant principles. In this regard, the paper seeks to clarify such misunderstandings in relation to the case of people with dementia by looking mainly at three crucial aspects emerging from Article 12 CRPD and General Comment No. 1: the legal nature and purpose of these two documents, the questioning of the capacity/incapacity divide and the idea of the ‘universal support model’.

PROTECTION FROM HATE SPEECH AGAINST PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES UNDER THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Hate speech is a complex sociological, political and legal phenomenon. In its genesis, we observe elements of stereotypes and prejudices that lead to the most negative human emotion - hatred. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities prescribes the obligation to respect the dignity of persons with disabilities and the right to a dignified life. The subject of the paper is the analysis of hate speech against persons with disabilities in the Republic of Serbia and the mechanisms for its suppression.

The first part of the paper will define hate speech from the perspective of various sciences and scientific disciplines. It will be particularly pointed out that there is no single definition of hate speech, which makes its qualification difficult. Special attention will be paid to the various forms of hate speech in everyday public discourse, with appropriate examples provided where necessary and possible, which will give the paper a practical character.

The central part of the paper will be dedicated to the legal qualification of hate speech against persons with disabilities. The criminal law aspect of hate speech will be analyzed in particular. The legislator in the Republic of Serbia has decided to give hate speech the importance of a special qualifying circumstance when determining the sentence (Article 54a of the Criminal Code). The paper will present a proposal to incriminate hate crime as a separate criminal offense. In this way, the criminal law protection of persons with disabilities would be significantly improved, which is the goal of this paper.

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ADDRESSING DISABILITY RIGHTS IN CIVIC AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION: A LOOK AT SERBIAN CURRICULUM

Article 8 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities urges countries to raise awareness of rights and promote inclusive attitudes toward persons with disabilities from an early age. Civic education as a subject area offers a valuable framework for achieving this aim among school-age children and youth. In the Republic of Serbia, Civic and Citizenship Education (CCE) was introduced as an elective subject in the 2001/2002 school year, aiming to promote understanding of citizenship rights and responsibilities, diversity, and democratic values. The CCE curriculum for secondary general education includes several topics that can be directly connected to the rights of persons with disabilities, such as Human Rights, Citizens and Democracy, and Diversity and Equality.

This paper aims to identify concrete subject areas that address the topic of the rights of persons with disabilities, conceptual frameworks used for introducing the topic, and suggested teaching methods in secondary general education. For this purpose, we analyzed the “Handbook for Teachers of Civic and Citizenship Education in Grammar Schools” as official guidelines for teachers of CCE subjects. The thematic analysis reveals that the rights of persons with disabilities, their needs, and the barriers they face are primarily addressed in two subject areas: All Different but All Equal (taught in 2nd grade) and Economic and Social Rights (taught in 4th grade). Within the first subject area, persons with disabilities are mentioned in the contexts of the following conceptual frameworks: Diversity, Legal Protection of Equality, Discrimination, the Relationship Between Identity, Beliefs, and Discrimination, Vulnerable Groups, Persons with Disabilities, and Inclusion. In the ‘Economic and Social Rights’ section, the chapter covers International Mechanisms for Monitoring Economic and Social Rights, the Right to Work, Discrimination in Employment and Education, and the Welfare State. Additionally, persons with disabilities are mentioned in a few other subject areas, but only tangentially: Media Coverage of Vulnerable Groups (2nd grade), Human

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Rights, Citizenship, and Democracy (3rd grade), and Peace and Threats to Peace (3rd grade). However, although PwD are mentioned when relevant concepts are introduced (e.g., Inclusion) and appropriate vocabulary and language are used, there is a lack of real-life examples, acknowledgment of students' previous experiences, and engaging research tasks, debating questions, and other methods that would motivate and engage students in this subject matter.

These results indicate that issues with the CCE curriculum previously identified in the research, i.e., students' perception of certain topics, including human rights, as less interesting and engaging, are not yet adequately addressed. The results suggest two main implications for educational practice: 1. There is a need to increase students' autonomy in choosing research projects of authentic interest, as at the moment these topics are mainly predefined; 2. There is untapped potential within the CCE subject to act as a bridge for building closer connections and establishing collaboration between schools and the local community, allowing students to experience, research, and understand the barriers and success stories of achieving human rights, as well as their role in supporting these efforts, as demonstrated in some other European educational systems.

PART II
WOMEN AND CHILDREN
WITH DISABILITIES

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LEFT BEHIND TWICE: THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

This paper will investigate how women and girls with disabilities experience compounded and intersecting forms of discrimination in humanitarian settings, despite existing international legal frameworks that recognize their specific rights and vulnerabilities. The research will be grounded in a critical legal and policy analysis that draws on primary sources, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), CEDAW General Recommendation No. 30, and the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, as well as the UN Security Council Resolution 1325. These frameworks affirm the rights of women and girls with disabilities, yet their practical implementation remains inconsistent across humanitarian contexts.

The paper will employ a qualitative methodology that combines desk-based legal analysis, policy review, and case study examination of recent humanitarian crises, including those in Syria, Ukraine and climate-related disasters. Through this lens, the paper will assess how international obligations under CRPD Articles 6, 7, 9, 11, and 25 are (or are not) reflected in field-based humanitarian practice. It will also rely on data and reports from international organizations such as UNHCR, UN Women, OHCHR, Handicap International, and Women Enabled International to identify recurring patterns and gaps.

The central argument is that women and girls with disabilities are systematically marginalized in humanitarian planning and response due to structural failures in accessibility, health care provision, protection from violence, and access to education. The analysis is structured around four key domains of exclusion: physical and information accessibility, healthcare and sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), exposure to gender-based violence (GBV), and access to education. In each of these domains, the paper will identify legal and operational shortcomings, including the lack of disaggregated data, inadequate funding, and minimal participation of women with disabilities in decision-making processes.

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In addition to identifying challenges, the paper will highlight good practices and innovative approaches, such as inclusive cash assistance, disability-led GBV protection programs, and the use of inter-agency toolkits for inclusive humanitarian action. These examples will underscore that inclusion is not only a legal obligation under international human rights law but a prerequisite for building equitable, resilient humanitarian systems.

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**THE SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIAL SECURITY AGENCY
SEGREGATORY DISBURSAL INSTRUMENTS:
PERSPECTIVS OF WOMEN DISABILITY GRANTEES
HOUSED IN SELECTED DISABILITY NON- PROFIT
ORGANISATIONS**

As one in three women who are disability grantees experience the grant disbursement segregations, understanding the impact of this paradox on their livelihood is more important than ever. This study sheds light on this critical link.

This research examined how the grant disbursement segregators affect the day-to-day needs of women disability grantees as opposed to those who are men. The researcher carried out 15 interviews with permanent disability grantees who are women, analysing their day-to-day experiences after receiving their disability grants.

This research discovered that about 80% of significant challenges related to daily needs experienced by woman who are disability grantees emanate from the disbursement instruments that are designed with a general-purpose to serve both men and women grantees whereas their needs are different. These findings provide actionable insights for the South African Social Security Agency to improve the efficiency of disability grant disbursement instruments through the integration of gender mainstreaming perspectives into policies, programmes and projects, for each disability grant.

SHELTERS AVAILABILITY FOR WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Persons with disabilities, especially women, participate in large percentage in total number of victims of violence against women and in family in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). BiH has ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which in Article 5 defines that all persons are equal before and under the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law. Women with disabilities are a particularly vulnerable group, thus they are subject to multiple discrimination. In terms of their protection, Bosnia and Herzegovina in the line with the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence has ensured shelters for victims. The availability of shelters for women with disabilities is ensured for certain categories of woman with a disability.

The paper will present the results of research on the availability of shelters and specialist services provided to women with disabilities victims of violence. These results are part of a larger study conducted to map the experiences in shelters operating in BiH. The data presented were collected by methods of observation and examination using techniques of focus groups discussion and individual interviews. Data analysis has shown that shelters are available only for certain categories of women with disabilities. All shelters in BiH can accommodate women who have movement difficulties, with sensory damage and intellectual interference. No shelters in BiH are accessible to victims of violence with wheelchairs because they have architectural barriers. Data analysis also showed lack of access to teaching materials for working with persons with disabilities, as well as the lack of access to assistive devices.

EXCLUDED IN THE NAME OF INCLUSION: WHEN EXPERTS CLAIM THAT IT IS CHILD'S BEST INTEREST TO BE EXCLUDED FROM EDUCATION

The Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) required from the State Parties to recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education, through an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning. The Convention explicitly stipulated that the access to education should be non-discriminatory and on the basis of equal opportunities, so that persons with disabilities can fully develop their human potential (personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities) and a sense of dignity and self-worth. By facilitating access to education and necessary individualized support to facilitate the effective education for persons with disabilities, we enable them to participate effectively in a free society and strengthen the respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity. Convention explicitly prohibits exclusion from education on the basis of disability.

Implementation of these CRPD provisions in the Republic of Croatia is somehow peculiar because admission of children to kindergartens and schools can be rejected on the grounds of the internal self-assessment that institution does not have sufficient expertise to deal with the disabled child. In these cases, justification is usually that it is in the best interest of a child with disability to be excluded from formal education.

In the paper we explore whether the standard of a best interest of a child can be linked to discriminatory practice that contravenes Article 24 of the CRPD. We analyze whether inclusive education under the CRPD can also assume exclusion on the basis of the claim that staff is insufficiently professional and trained to deal with children with special needs.

Finally, we also consider case law and interpretative clauses of the Convention of the Rights of a Child in relation to the legal justification to exclude children – particularly children with disabilities – from schooling.

DISABLED CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN HEALTHCARE DECISION-MAKING IN ENGLAND AND SERBIA – QUALITATIVE DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

This paper draws on doctoral research which deployed socio-legal analysis to investigate disabled children's participation in healthcare decision-making. Being part of the broader doctoral study which investigated disabled children's 'right to be heard' enshrined in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Article 7 (3) of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the context of healthcare decisions, this paper focuses on the analysis of national laws in this field in England and Serbia and qualitative document analysis of professional guidance documents in this domain in two countries. The objectives of the paper are two-fold: 1) Undertaking a comparative analysis of legal frameworks in England and Serbia vis-à-vis disabled children's participation in medical decisions and 2) Conducting a qualitative document analysis of professional guidance documents issued by professional bodies or government agencies in Serbia, England and internationally.

The study deployed comparative legal analysis of sources of law that regulate children's participation in medical decision-making that including selected statutory laws in England and Serbia and a selection of relevant case-law as an important source of law in the common law legal tradition (England). The qualitative document analysis includes a sample of 10 documents from England, two documents at the international level and only one document from Serbia.

The data is treated as secondary qualitative data and thematic analysis is deployed to chart the findings.

The paper provides an insight into the gaps found in legal frameworks of England and Serbia vis-à-vis disabled children's right to be heard in the context of medical decisions, a right espoused by the UNCPRD and the UNCRC. Qualitative document analysis reveals three overarching themes as a common thread in the sample of documents: defining the forms of child participation; facilitators and barriers to child participation in medical decisions and; provisions for participation of disabled children.

While there is a growing body of professional guidance documents that aim to inform healthcare professionals on good practices of including children in medical decisions (including disabled children), there is only one document that tangentially touches upon the relationship between healthcare professionals and paediatric patients in Serbia. The lack of attention from professional bodies to child participation and in particular, disabled children's participation reveals deeply entrenched paternalism towards children in Serbian society in the health-care domain.

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN RESIDENTIAL INSTITUTIONS

The UN Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities emphasizes the responsibility of member states to undertake measures aimed at protecting and ensuring the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for persons with disabilities. The right to health care for children with disabilities was proclaimed for the first time by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, later incorporated into the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities through two provisions. These provisions indicate that the provision of health services to persons with disabilities implies the same scope and quality of health services as for other citizens and the provision of special services conditioned by disability, including early identification and intervention when appropriate, as well as services aimed at reducing and prevent further disability.

A child with disabilities as a subject of health care has the right to medical, psychological and functional treatment and services aimed at preserving or improving health, treatment of health care and rehabilitation. The health-related aspect of the rights of disabled child requires that such a child be provided with preferential treatment, that is, the special rights be recognized beyond the standard framework of children's rights to health protection.

Proceeding from the obligations of the contacting states to take effective and appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy the right to health care on an equal basis with others, it is obvious that the national legislator has sought to incorporate the standards from relevant international documents into the domestic legal system. This has resulted in the adoption of numerous laws and by-laws that regulate the health care of persons (children) with disabilities. However, despite these efforts, challenges in realizing the right to health care for children with disabilities at the national level remain evident. One such challenge is the continued practice of involuntary treatment of children with psychosocial, intellectual and other cognitive disabilities, which directly contradicts the best interests of the child. In this regard, it often happens in practice that decisions concerning a child's physical or mental integrity are not made on the basis of the child's free and informed consent, or on the basis of the consent of the child's legal representative.

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Furthermore, a persistent issue is the overrepresentation of the children with disabilities in residential institutions, including children under the age of three, in inadequate conditions which increases the risk of segregation and inappropriate medical treatment. Through a critical approach to the problem, the author highlights the necessity to initiate proactive mechanisms that would enable children with disabilities better and more adequate access to health care, i.e. the adoption of measures for community-based services and support.

PART III
ACCESSIBILITY, PERSONAL MOBILITY
AND HEALTH

ACCESSIBILITY AS THE KEY TO THE ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS BY PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Accessibility constitutes a fundamental prerequisite to the enjoyment of human rights of persons with disabilities and their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. In view of the data provided by the World Health Organization and the World Bank, indicating that over one billion people worldwide live with some form of disability, the issue of accessibility has acquired increasing significance in legal, political, and societal discourse. This paper seeks to explore the multidimensional nature of accessibility—not merely as a technical requirement concerning the adaptation of physical environments and technologies, but as an essential human right and a precondition for the effective enjoyment of a range of other rights, including the rights to education, employment, healthcare, and political participation.

The first part will seek to define the legal nature of accessibility, analyzing whether accessibility constitutes a standalone human right, a guiding principle, or merely a means for the realization of human rights. It will highlight the connection between accessibility and other rights guaranteed by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and highlights its role in advancing broader societal objectives such as equality, inclusion, and social justice. The second part focuses on the analysis of accessibility regulation in key international legal instruments adopted under the auspices of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the European Union. Special emphasis is placed on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the European Union's Web Accessibility Directive.

Furthermore, the paper identifies major challenges in the effective implementation of this right, including normative fragmentation, institutional inefficiencies, insufficient political commitment, technological constraints, and persistent societal prejudices. Drawing on comparative legal analysis, the paper presents examples of promising practices across different jurisdictions, demonstrating how innovative policy approaches can lead to tangible improvements in the lives of persons with disabilities. Particular attention is devoted to the issue of digital accessibility in the context of accelerated digital transformation. The analysis considers both the opportunities and risks posed by emerging technologies. In this regard,

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special focus is placed on the role of artificial intelligence as a potentially transformative tool for enabling personalized accessibility, while also emphasizing the need for robust ethical and legal safeguards to ensure that digital innovation does not exacerbate existing inequalities.

A separate section of the article summarizes the problem of accessibility in Serbia and assesses the country's progress in addressing it. The research uses conceptual analysis and comparative legal methodology to identify normative patterns and policy frameworks that support the effective realization of accessibility as a human right.

RIGHT TO ACCESSIBILITY (MOBILITY) OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: 20 YEARS AFTER

The right to accessibility, particularly in the context of mobility for persons with disabilities, is one of the fundamental rights confirmed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Article 9 of the Convention requires States Parties to adopt appropriate measures to ensure access to persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, transportation, information and communications. This emphasis on accessibility is intended to support independent living and full participation in all areas of life. Additionally, Article 20 addresses personal mobility, obliging States to take effective measures to ensure personal mobility by facilitating the personal mobility of persons with disabilities with the greatest possible independence.

However, the right to accessibility is not only about physical access to buildings or transportation systems but also about ensuring full participation, equality and inclusion. Measures to improve accessibility relate to roads, transportation, buildings, and other facilities. So, when mobility is restricted, persons with disabilities face significant barriers that limit their independence and intensify their social and economic inequalities.

The fundamental starting point when talking about persons with disabilities and persons with reduced mobility in the context of the European Union's passenger rights framework is the right to protect them against discrimination and to ensure that they receive assistance while traveling. Nevertheless, this right is not equally accessible to everyone. Persons with disabilities and those with reduced mobility often face significant challenges when trying to access transportation. Mobility-related accessibility requires comprehensive regulation, policies, urban planning, and the application of universal design principles. Except physical barriers, inadequate legal implementation and limited financing, further obstruct progress. The gap between rights and real-life situations remains wide. Investment in accessible public infrastructure, awareness campaigns, and community engagement are essential to solve barriers.

The European Union has made significant improvements toward promoting the rights of persons with disabilities and persons with reduced mobility, especially regarding accessibility and mobility in public transportation. However,

implementation across Member States differs, although there has been a significant improvement in the accessibility of public transport.

In line with the principles established by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, this paper examines key European and Croatian legal sources, highlights and compares their limitations, and offers recommendations to improve regulations. In light of the progress made in the two decades since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the paper also acknowledges several positive developments. Nevertheless, further efforts are needed to enhance accessibility/mobility and strengthen protections for persons with disabilities and those with reduced mobility within the transport sector.

Bridging the gap between legal frameworks and practical implementation remains a pressing challenge and an opportunity to build more just, inclusive, and resilient societies.

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THE RIGHT TO INCLUSIVE HEALTH: TAILORING SMOKING CESSATION SUPPORTS FOR ADULTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

Smoking tobacco poses a significant public health challenge, particularly for people in vulnerable situations, including those with intellectual disabilities (ID), who face additional obstacles in quitting or reducing their tobacco consumption. Tobacco use is highly prevalent among this population, yet existing smoking cessation strategies are often not adequately tailored to meet their specific needs. Furthermore, interventions for people with ID are scarce, as this group is frequently excluded from research initiatives, leading to healthcare disparities that can adversely affect their overall wellbeing and quality of life. This study is crucial in light of Article 25 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which asserts the right of people with disabilities to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination. By focusing on the unique experiences of people with ID in relation to tobacco use and their access to effective cessation treatments, this research seeks to highlight their healthcare needs and advocate for tailored interventions

A multiperspective qualitative study using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was conducted. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with eight participants: four people with ID who smoked daily and four professionals providing them with supports in two types of care settings: day centers and supported living centers. The interviews aimed to explore personal experiences with tobacco use, identify barriers to treatments, and gather professionals' perceptions of smoking. The interview process was adapted to enhance cognitive accessibility for participants, and the phenomenological analysis was further refined using NVivo software to ensure a thorough examination of the collected data.

The interview questions proved to be clear, capturing rich data and deeper insights into the participants' experiences, including their views on tobacco use in different contexts such as housing, day centers, and leisure activities. Four

themes emerged including reasons for smoking (related to feelings of well-being and pleasure, self-determination, and social context), approaches to smoking, motivation to quit, and accessibility and awareness of smoking cessation treatments.

This study can significantly contribute to the principles upheld in Articles 25 and 26 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by promoting an inclusive approach that centers on the specific needs of people with ID in the health sector. By providing a deeper understanding of the experiences and needs related to tobacco use among this group, it facilitates the development of tailored strategies that ensure their access to quality and accessible health services. Thus, the findings of this study not only reinforce the provisions of the Convention but also establish a framework for action that can influence future policies and practices in health care and rehabilitation support for people with ID. This comprehensive approach highlights the importance of enabling people with ID to actively engage in their health matters, thereby aligning with their rights, promoting their overall wellbeing, and facilitating improvements in health and quality of life outcomes.

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RE-ENGINEERING HEALTHCARE ACCESS: POLICY AND INNOVATION FOR DISABILITY INCLUSION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Human rights are applicable to all people and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 protects the rights of all people in South Africa (SA), including those that have disabilities. SA has made significant strides in integrating disability rights into health policies and service delivery by aligning interventions to national constitutional mandates and international human rights standards. Advancing inclusive healthcare for persons with disabilities requires a multi-faceted approach, combining progressive policy-making with innovative practices and technologies to ensure equitable access to health services. Interventions such as tele-medicine and community-based inclusive healthcare have ensured that SA health systems are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the needs of those that are disabled.

While legislative frameworks such as the Promotion of Equality, Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act and Strategy for Disability and Rehabilitation Services have strengthened protections, challenges remain in its implementation and accessibility. This study will therefore examine the facilitators and barriers within the SA healthcare system in ensuring equitable access for persons with disabilities. It will also discuss and explore the role that of community-based inclusive healthcare, inclusive health financing, integrated service delivery and innovative practices and technologies in bridging these gaps.

Moreover, the intersection of disability rights with SA's broader health equity and socio-economic transformation will be analysed, offering strategic pathways for inclusive, person-centered care. By reflecting on progress and lessons learned, this paper aims to demonstrate that advancing inclusive disability healthcare is not just a health issue, but a justice and human rights issue. Therefore, enabling factors such as responsive policy-making and targeted service designs, health systems can

transform services to become accessible, equitable, and empowering for all, ensuring no one is left behind. The paper will highlight the need for a multi-faceted approach to re-engineering health care access and promoting disability inclusion in South Africa's health care system.

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MINDFULNESS AS A THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH ASD AND THEIR FAMILIES

Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have challenges in the areas of communication and social interaction and often display maladaptive behaviors and emotional reactions due to sensory issues. All these difficulties that affect individuals with ASD increase stress and shame in their families. Therefore, programs and tools of mindfulness that help both individuals and their families are an obvious route for calibrating emotions and behavior, as well as an efficient intervention in ASD at any age.

Article 25 of the CRPD states that persons with disabilities have the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination on the basis of disability. While mindfulness teachings are slowly becoming more widespread and inclusive in many countries, people with autism and other kinds of neurodiversity are often left behind.

The paper shall provide a literature review on effectiveness of mindfulness in reducing anxiety, depression, aggression, stress, rumination and increasing positive state of well-being in children, adolescents and adults with ASD. The author argues that mindfulness programs and tools could provide real help for individuals with ASD and their families to reduce stress. It is proved that mindfulness technics and tools used on daily basis in general population could change brain's neuroplasticity and extend the consciousness. The studies in the ASD literature show that children, adolescents and individuals at any age did not report significant changes in mindful awareness, but their social communication problems decreased, and their emotional and behavioral functioning improved.

Mindfulness short term advantages are about calming down the nervous system, reducing stress, anxiety and focusing on its own attention using breathing exercises and a state of presence, while on long term exercises of meditation could change the electricity in the brain, the chemical interaction and the neuroplasticity - creating new experiences, so new neuronal routes, offering a better option in interacting with people in any social groups. For these reasons, the author argues for introduction of health programmes that include mindfulness techniques for children and adults with ASD and their families.

PART IV
WORK AND EMPLOYMENT

THE EMPLOYER'S OBLIGATION TO MAKE REASONABLE WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) stipulates that all persons with all types of disabilities must enjoy all human rights, including the right to work and employment, and the right to an adequate standard of living. Nevertheless, persons with disabilities in all contemporary legal systems in all parts of the world encounter significant obstacles in enjoying these rights, due to, among much else, the inadequacy of the recruitment process, workplace, work process, work equipment and working conditions for the needs of these workers. In this regard, we would like to examine the issue of reasonable workplace accommodation.

In the spirit of the social model of disability, contemporary law encourages employment of persons with disabilities in the open market. That includes cases in which it is necessary to make adjustment measures - from technical measures, such as providing auxiliary devices or adjusting the workplace, to organizational measures, which refer to the adjustment of working schedules (including reducing working hours, if working full time is painful and exhausting for the employee due to disability), reallocation of tasks, remote work, the right to leave and extended or additional vacation time, provision of assistance (e.g. a specialized personal assistant or mentor who will prepare the employee for daily duties), or transfer to another job, or another place of work. In the UNCRPD, failure of the employer to make necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden is expressly qualified as a form of discrimination. In that sense, we would like to examine what can be considered (un)reasonable accommodation, especially if the burden can be sufficiently remedied by subsidies or other measures that lower the costs of adjustment or help the employer in executing it.

Furthermore, we would like to analyze the requirement for effective accommodation, i.e. for adaptation that actually enables a person with disability to perform the entrusted tasks. In some legal systems, this criterion precedes, but also complements the requirement that the adjustment does not impose undue

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hardship, and clarifies the complex procedure of establishing the (non)existence of the obligation to adjust in each specific case. Also, the issue that needs addressing is from which moment in time does the employer's obligation to make reasonable accommodation start, since UNCRPD does not provide an explicit answer to this question.

Finally, a special part of the paper will be dedicated to the gender insensitivity of reasonable accommodation of working conditions to the needs of persons with disabilities, since it can cause feelings of humiliation and other serious consequences for the daily professional life of employees. The topic will be examined comparatively, focusing on the jurisprudence of the CRPD Committee and supervisory bodies of the ILO, Council of Europe, and EU.

THE CHALLENGES OF REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION IN EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITY IN SERBIA

Reasonable accommodation of work and working conditions is traditionally linked to the position of persons with disabilities, although the authors rightly point out that reasonable accommodation should be linked to the position of other categories in the employment relationship. Reasonable accommodation is a tool for achieving real equality, and can refer to the adjustment of working conditions, work equipment, and working hours. Reasonable accommodation arose as a need for those employees whose abilities to perform work differ.

When it comes to persons with disabilities, reasonable accommodation is an integral part of the right to work in the Republic of Serbia. Reasonable accommodation can include job adjustments and workplace adjustments. The aforementioned adjustments required by persons with disabilities are accompanied by the epithet reasonable, indicating that they are modifications that are necessary and minimal. From the above, we conclude that the request for accommodation is made for the purpose of individualization, that is, to discover the needs of a specific person with a disability, which must be met in order for them to be able to work. Since a person with a disability cannot work without meeting these needs, this means that reasonable accommodation is a type of condition for the employment of persons with disabilities.

Therefore, in this paper, we start from the hypothesis that this condition is the one without which the employment of persons with disabilities as a vulnerable group will not even exist, as a condition *sine qua non*. Furthermore, in the paper, we will consider whether the refusal of reasonable accommodation by an employer in the Republic of Serbia constitutes discrimination, taking into account the role of the state in establishing reasonable accommodation, as a financial aspect of that accommodation.

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TOTAL PERMANENT DISABILITY AND REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

This paper provides a general understanding of the employer's obligation to make or maintain reasonable accommodation when the worker, because of a disability occurred during the employment relationship which diminish or impair his capacity to work, is permanently unable to perform all or the essential tasks of his normal occupation. The starting point is the judgment of the CJEU of 18 January 2024 (Case C 631/22), interpreting Art. 5 of Directive 78/2000/EC read in the light of Article 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This judgment states that the aforementioned Art. 5 is contrary to a national legislation which provides that an employer may terminate the employment contract on the ground that the worker is permanently unable to perform the tasks assigned to him under that contract, due to a disability arising during the employment relationship. The employer must first make reasonable accommodation in order to enable that worker to keep his job, or to demonstrate, where appropriate, that such accommodation would constitute a disproportionate burden. The legislation in question is Spanish, which motivates us to analyse some issues from our perspective, in the expectation that they will also be of interest to other legal systems.

Firstly, we will consider the situation of “permanent disability” in the contributory Social Security system, understood as the loss or reduction of the worker's capacity to work as a consequence of accident or illness, and its assimilation to an incapacity acquired during work, in the sense of Art. 27 (1) of the UN Convention. Secondly, we will address the compatibility or otherwise of situations of permanent disability with work, depending on the degree of reduction in working capacity provided for in Spanish legislation.

Finally, focusing on “total permanent disability” for the usual profession, we will explain how to deal in practice with the implementation of reasonable adjustments for the worker affected by an acquired disability that makes him/her unable to carry out his/her usual activity. At this point, reassignment to another position will depend not only on the possibilities of the company and the worker's capacity and aptitudes, but also on other factors, such as the size of the company or its production structure. The paper will conclude by analysing other problems that may arise in the framework of the employment contract as a consequence of the actual relocation of the worker in practice.

THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN WORK CAPACITY ASSESSMENTS AND EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA 20 YEARS AFTER THE CRPD ADOPTION

This article critically explores the linkage between work capacity assessment practices and employment outcomes for persons with disabilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), two decades following the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Despite clear obligations under the CRPD to ensure inclusive employment practices, the current assessment systems in both entities – the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Srpska – remain significantly detached from these international standards. Predominantly medicalised, impairment-focused assessments are performed by single-discipline teams, typically physicians, which fail to adequately reflect the complex interplay between an individual's capabilities, environmental factors, and the labour market context. The article identifies critical shortcomings within both entities' existing frameworks, including fragmented institutional responsibilities, outdated assessment criteria, lack of multidisciplinary approaches, and a persistent inability to link the outcomes of assessments to meaningful employment support. In analysing these shortcomings, the article also draws insights from promising international practices to illustrate how holistic, multidisciplinary, and ability-oriented approaches can better align assessments with labour market integration objectives. These examples demonstrate the necessity of moving beyond purely medical or functional evaluations to incorporate social, vocational, and environmental dimensions, thus enabling assessments to support rather than hinder employment outcomes. Current assessment methodologies tend to emphasise limitations rather than strengths and potential capacities, creating systemic barriers to labour market entry and perpetuating social exclusion and dependency. The article argues that such practices stand in stark contradiction to the human rights-based approach prescribed by the CRPD, specifically Article 27, which emphasises non-discrimination, equal opportunity, and the provision of reasonable accommodation and tailored vocational support. The current approaches, which neglect individualised evaluations and do not integrate assessments within broader employment policy mechanisms, contribute significantly to low employment rates among persons with disabilities across

BiH. To address these structural and practical inadequacies, the article calls for comprehensive legislative and institutional reforms. Recommendations include the establishment of multidisciplinary assessment teams, adoption of holistic, ability-oriented methodologies, systematic inclusion of persons with disabilities in assessment processes, and enhanced integration of assessment outcomes with vocational rehabilitation and active labour market interventions. Without such fundamental shifts, work capacity assessments in both entities will continue to impede rather than facilitate the meaningful employment and social inclusion of persons with disabilities, ultimately undermining BiH's obligations under international human rights law.

REMOTE WORK FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES - ACCOMMODATION OR DISCRIMINATION?

The employment status of persons with disabilities, as a research issue, represents a complex matter that requires examination from multiple perspectives, with particular emphasis on identifying barriers to employment and the difficulties regarding the ability of exercising their labor rights. Remote work, which has been increasingly embraced in recent years, can represent a way of workplace accommodation for persons with disabilities. This type of employment modality can significantly enhance the employment opportunities of persons with disabilities. However, although remote work is intended to ease the performance of work tasks for persons with disabilities and, as such, contribute to the employment of a greater number of persons with disabilities, there remains the uncertainty of whether it represents a form of reasonable accommodation or disguised discrimination. Therefore, the aim of the research is not only to acknowledge the refusal of reasonable accommodation as a form of discrimination, but also to emphasize the fact that accommodation itself can be subject to misuse and, as such, may become a means of discriminating against persons with disabilities. In the course of the research, the normative, comparative, and axiological methods will primarily be used.

Considering the importance of positive legal regulations that serve as guarantees of rights and provide protection for persons with disabilities, the normative method is essential. Firstly, the existing regulations will be presented, followed by certain criticisms and *de lege ferenda* proposals for improving the legal framework. Additionally, the comparative legal method will be used to examine legal solutions in selected foreign countries. Namely, in order to fully assess the adequacy of the domestic regime, it is necessary to highlight both the advantages and disadvantages existing worldwide. The axiological method will be used to evaluate the existing positive legal solutions concerning the accommodation of job duties and the workplace to the needs of persons with disabilities, as well as the importance of recognizing (non)adaptation as a form of discrimination. Finally, the subject and aim of the research inevitably require an evaluation of the general perception of persons with disabilities, as well as the prevailing views in society regarding the employment of this vulnerable group.

FORMAL EQUALITY AND REAL ACCESSIBILITY: EMPLOYMENT POLICIES AND THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, particularly through Articles 5 (equality and non-discrimination), 9 (accessibility), and 27 (work and employment), has set international standards for the realization of equal rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities. However, in the practice of post-transition societies, there is often a gap between formally guaranteed equality and actual accessibility of rights. This paper analyzes how employment policies in the Republic of Srpska reflect these norms, with a special emphasis on their social policy dimension and the institutional capacity for the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

The empirical basis of the paper is a study conducted in early 2025 through a structured questionnaire among employees of public employment services in the Republic of Srpska. The analysis focuses on responses related to the inclusion of vulnerable groups in employment measures, the existence of systemic barriers, perceptions of the effectiveness of active measures for persons with disabilities, and the level of institutional readiness and intersectoral cooperation. Based on these insights, the paper examines whether employment policies contribute to reducing social exclusion or, conversely, reproduce existing inequalities.

Research results indicate partial progress: although a formal basis for equal treatment exists, many institutional measures are not fully adapted to the specific needs of persons with disabilities. Identified obstacles include a lack of resources, limited partnerships with other stakeholders, and underdeveloped digital services. At the same time, certain good practices point to the potential of public employment services to act as important drivers of inclusive policies, provided that adequate support and coordination are ensured.

The paper offers a critical reflection on the role of employment policies as instruments for realizing the rights of persons with disabilities, and provides concrete recommendations for improving institutional accessibility, strengthening intersectoral cooperation, and developing measures that genuinely respond to users' needs.

TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE OF ARTICLE 27 OF THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

In accordance with the principles of equality and freedom, as well as based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was adopted. This paper focuses primarily on Article 27 – Work and Employment.

Article 27 of the CRPD represents a key instrument for the realization of the labor rights of persons with disabilities and their full inclusion in the labor market. This article addresses the right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others, promoting access to employment without discrimination, equal opportunities for professional development, and workplace accommodation. Fundamentally, this article is not only about the formal right to employment, but also involves active measures by the State Parties to remove systemic barriers and enable the realization of that right in practice.

The Convention emphasizes that disability must not be a ground for exclusion from employment and underlines the obligation of states to provide reasonable accommodation in the workplace and to promote employment in both the public and private sectors. Additionally, it stresses the importance of participation of persons with disabilities in vocational training and education programs, thereby enhancing their competitiveness in the labor market.

The importance of Article 27 is also reflected in its transformative role. Specifically, it marks a shift away from the medical and charitable models of disability towards an approach that respects human rights and the autonomy of the individual as well as society as a whole. With the adoption of this Convention, the international community has officially embraced the social model of disability. In this sense, Article 27 has the potential to influence a broader societal narrative in which persons with disabilities are increasingly recognized as active subjects with rights, rather than objects of protection or charity.

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Despite the clear guidelines of the CRPD, the implementation of Article 27 in practice faces numerous challenges – including high unemployment rates among persons with disabilities, a lack of accessible workplaces, employer prejudice, and insufficient support during the employment process. These challenges point to the need for stronger institutional mechanisms, more effective implementation of anti-discrimination laws, and greater support for inclusive employment policies.

This paper sheds light on Article 27 not only as a normative framework but also as a starting point for the development of concrete policies that will enable persons with disabilities to participate in the world of work in a dignified and productive manner. The paper also analyzes the significance of international standards in shaping national legislation and employment strategies, with a special focus on the Republic of Serbia and certain countries in the region. The research will apply normative-legal, comparative, analytical-synthetic, historical-legal, and descriptive methods.

Article 27 of the Convention provides the foundation for creating an inclusive labor market and a society that respects diversity and offers equal opportunities for all. Its full implementation requires cooperation between state institutions, employers, civil society, and persons with disabilities themselves.

TAX TREATMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

The position of persons with disabilities in the labor market is one of the more sensitive areas that the legislator must keep in mind when adopting normative acts. It is an area in which a number of factors must be taken into account, whereby persons with disabilities must not be placed in a disadvantageous position compared to other employees and the priority is to guarantee their equality in this field.

In the Republic of Croatia, persons with disabilities receive certain tax benefits in order to alleviate the living costs associated with disability and thus encourage their social inclusion. These benefits are regulated by the Income Tax Act, the Income Tax Ordinance and other related regulations.

One of the basic benefits for persons with disabilities is an increase in the personal allowance when calculating income tax, which results in a reduction in the tax base and therefore a lower amount of income tax. Also, parents or guardians of children with disabilities are entitled to an additional deduction for dependent family members with disabilities.

People with disabilities may also be exempt from paying certain local and state taxes, such as car sales tax when purchasing a vehicle adapted to their needs. They are also exempt from paying annual vehicle usage fees and are entitled to a refund of a portion of excise duties on energy (fuel) they use for their own transportation.

In addition to tax credits, the law provides certain benefits for employers who employ people with disabilities, including tax credits and subsidies.

Self-employment of persons with disabilities is an important form of inclusion in the labor market that promotes independence and social integration. Through grants and incentives, the state makes it possible to start one's own business adapted to the abilities and interests of the individual, which reduces the unemployment of people with disabilities.

The above-mentioned types of tax deductions, incentives and subsidies represent a step towards the financial and social equality of persons with disabilities in the Republic of Croatia.

This paper uses methods of analysis and deduction to analyze the tax treatment of people with disabilities and their position on the labor market.

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE SERBIAN LABOUR MARKET

The first anti-discrimination legislation which was passed in the Republic of Serbia (RS) in 2006 was the Law on Preventing Discrimination of Persons with Disabilities. Three years later the Serbian National Assembly adopted the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination, as an umbrella legislation, which provides protection from discrimination in different fields of social life based on diverse personal characteristics, including disability. The legal act which focuses exclusively on the employment of persons with disabilities in the RS is the Law on Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities. This law introduced quotas for the employment of persons with disabilities which require every employer with more than 20 employees to employ one person with disability. Although this kind of measure can improve the level of employment of persons with disabilities, they still face different obstacles to enter the labor market. One innovative way for the employment of these people is social entrepreneurship which combines classical economic side of the business, which aims to maximize its profit, with the objective of resolving different social challenges, such as employment of people with disabilities. The legislative framework of this kind of entrepreneurship in the RS was adopted in 2022, as the Law on Social Entrepreneurship, and is looking very promising.

The objective of this paper is to analyse employment of people with disabilities through the social entrepreneurship. The aim is to systematize current challenges and incentives for the implementation of the Law on Social Entrepreneurship regarding the improvement of the employability of persons with disabilities. The methodology framework includes doctrinal method which will support the analysis of the legislative framework on social entrepreneurship coupled with identification of concrete gaps which slow down its full implementation. The descriptive method will illustrate examples of social enterprises which employ people with disabilities in the RS, and emphasize their positive impact, and serve as a role model for the development of social entrepreneurship in the future.

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PART V
LIVING INDEPENDENTLY AND BEING
INCLUDED IN THE COMMUNITY
ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING
AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

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ENHANCING SERVICE QUALITY THROUGH THE QUALITY OF LIFE SUPPORTS MODEL (QOLSM): THE QOLAB PROJECT'S CONTRIBUTION TO RIGHTS-BASED DISABILITY SUPPORT

This paper presents the QoLABProject (Quality of Life Assessment system for Build up of support services of excellence), a European initiative funded by Erasmus+ KA2 ERASMUS-2023-PCOOP-ENGO. Proposal Number: 101133888, which seeks to transform disability support services by embedding the Quality of Life Supports Model (QoLSM) into their operational frameworks. This transformation aligns with the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), particularly Articles 9 (Accessibility), 19 (Living independently and being included in the community), and 28 (Adequate standard of living and social protection). The project addresses the critical gap in existing service inspection systems, which often focus narrowly on safety and compliance, neglecting the broader impact on individuals' quality of life.

The project's primary objective is to provide disability service providers with practical tools and methodologies to assess and improve service quality from a human rights perspective. By co-creating an Implementation Toolkit and delivering targeted capacity- building workshops, the QoLAB Project empowers professionals, managers, and—crucially—persons with disabilities and their support networks to collaboratively plan and evaluate support services. The project also fosters engagement with public authorities and inspection bodies to promote systemic change.

Methodologically, the project utilizes a participatory action research approach, integrating the lived experiences of persons with disabilities into the co-design and piloting of the QoLSM Toolkit across multiple European contexts.

Anticipated findings include increased stakeholder competence in rights-based service provision, improved service user autonomy and satisfaction, and policy recommendations for broader adoption of QoLSM.

Finally, the QoLAB Project exemplifies a scalable model for inclusive, person-centered support services that uphold the ethos of “Nothing About Us Without Us,” contributing to the realisation of the CRPD’s vision of dignity, autonomy, and community inclusion for all persons with disabilities.

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BRIDGING RIGHTS AND PRACTICE: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM THE QOLAB PROJECT ON IMPLEMENTING THE CRPD IN EUROPEAN SUPPORT SERVICES

This paper presents preliminary results from the European project QoLAB – Quality of Life Assessment System for Build up of Support Services of Excellence, funded by the Erasmus+ programme (2023–2026). The project aims to modernize support services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities through the practical implementation of the Quality of Life and Supports Model (QoLSM), fully aligned with the principles and rights enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The specific objective of this study is to analyze how CRPD principles—particularly equality, autonomy, community participation, access to personalized support, and supported decision-making—are interpreted, applied, and questioned by professionals, managers, and social service organizations across six European countries. The study seeks to identify legal, social, and organizational barriers, as well as inspiring practices that can promote real and sustainable implementation of the CRPD.

The research was conducted using a qualitative methodology based on structured focus groups, designed around the core components of the Quality of Life and Supports Model. More than 60 professionals, managers, and representatives of support provider organizations took part. Thematic analysis allowed us to identify both the conceptual appropriation of the model and the conditions that enable or hinder its integration into everyday organizational practices.

The main findings reveal a strong commitment among participants to the values of the model and the CRPD, but they also point to structural limitations to

full implementation: lack of trained personnel, regulatory rigidity, limited funding, and organizational resistance to change. A gap is evident between normative frameworks and the practical operationalization of rights-based support.

At the social and experiential level, narratives reflect a field marked by tension between traditional, assistance-based practices and emerging experiences that promote empowerment, autonomy, choice, and personal control. Notable initiatives include independent living trials, personalized supports, peer support networks, and participatory design of intervention plans.

As a preliminary conclusion, we argue that effective implementation of the CRPD requires deep organizational transformation, coherent public policies, appropriate training systems, accessible environments, and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities themselves. The QoLAB project contributes to this goal through the development of tools, training processes, and pilot organizational action plans aligned with the QoLSM, reaffirming the principle of “Nothing about us without us.”

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THE RIGHT TO INDEPENDENT LIVING FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by the Republic of Croatia in 2007 marked a significant milestone in the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities. However, despite legal obligations and notable progress, the practical implementation of the Convention continues to face numerous challenges.

Independent living is a vital component of inclusive policy and human rights, representing a fundamental right that enables every individual to live autonomously, make personal decisions, and participate fully in community life. Article 19 of the Convention guarantees the right to live independently and be included in the community, while Article 28 addresses an adequate standard of living and social protection—both essential for the realization of independent living. The Convention advocates for a social model of disability, highlighting that disability is not an individual problem but the result of environmental barriers and societal attitudes.

Although Croatia has established legal and institutional frameworks that recognize the importance of independent living, numerous obstacles persist in practice—from inaccessible infrastructure to insufficient community-based support services. To address these issues, Croatia adopted a strategic national document—the National Plan for the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 2021–2027—which aims to align disability policies with the Convention's provisions and modern international standards for the development of disability rights.

This paper analyses the legislative framework and current state of affairs in the Republic of Croatia and proposes potential improvements to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal opportunities for independent and dignified living and full inclusion in society.

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THE RIGHT OF PERSONS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES TO LIVE INDEPENDENTLY AND BE INCLUDED IN THE COMMUNITY IN SELECTED EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

The Article 19 of the UNCRPD guarantees to persons with disabilities the right to live independently and to be included in the community. This includes the opportunity to choose their place of residence and where and with whom they live on an equal basis with others; to have access to a range of in-home, residential and other community support services, including personal assistance necessary to support living and inclusion and to prevent isolation or segregation from the community. A general Comment No. 5 on living independently and being included in the community, adopted by the CRPD Committee in 2017, further elaborates on this right in order to support its implementation.

The objective of this paper is to examine the legal frameworks of selected European countries which have been adopted over the past two decades, as a response to UNCRPD, in order to exercise the right of the persons with disabilities, especially persons with intellectual disabilities, to living independently and to be included in the community. The paper shall include especially the legislation of “best practice” examples of the Nordic countries, especially Sweden and Denmark, and analyse them from the normative and sociological perspective.

Authors conclude that in all analysed countries there have been increasing efforts to provide persons with intellectual disabilities with social services necessary for independent living, which are based on newly adopted legislations founded on the UNCRPD provisions. However, there are still many issues which persons with intellectual disabilities face in order to realise their rights in practice. Even in developed welfare systems, such as the Nordic countries, there are organisational

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issue stemming from the need to combine several responsible parties which provide different support service. For persons with extensive needs this often leads to problems to exercise the right to independent living in practice. In order to improve the implementation of the reformed legislation in analysed countries and the countries all around the world, there should be change in broader social paradigm, from seeing persons with intellectual disabilities as subjects to charity to bearers of the right to a dignified life.

PART VI
POLITICAL RIGHTS
AND MULTI-SECTORAL ISSUES

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THE PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES DURING ELECTION PROCESS IN NORTH MACEDONIA: ANOTHER CASE OF TICKING THE BOXES

The Republic of North Macedonia is a State Party to all major international law instruments protecting the right of persons with disabilities to participate in the political life, notably the CRPD. The view on the implementation of this right on legislative and practical level, nevertheless, reveals patchy success.

The proposed research is focused on the participation of persons with disabilities in the election process. The research is based on a dual analysis – firstly, it compares the State's legislative framework with the obligations stemming from the international legal instruments, as well as the implementation of the relevant principles in practice. The analysis encompasses the accessibility of the election polls, election materials, election campaigns and the secrecy of vote, the State Election Commission's efforts to train the members of the election committees in the field and, crucially, the mechanisms of control of the effective implementation of these rights in practice.

The second level of analysis observes these findings in the context of the literature on the implementation of the international human rights obligations in North Macedonia (such as those stemming from the UN, Council of Europe or EU accession framework). The similarities are striking: although the legislation regulates the field, it is not sufficiently systematic and coherent to enable sufficient implementation in practice. Importantly, the legislation does not provide clarity with regard to the competences of the responsible institutions. Equally as in the case of other international legal instruments, the implementation of this right is not sufficiently monitored and, further, the transparency of the results of the existing monitoring is low. Finally, the implementation of this right is largely dependent on the international funding, training and the incentive of international actors, such as the EU and OSCE.

The analysis, therefore, reveals a high level of dependence on the EU-accession monitoring mechanisms of the respect of human rights and a low level

of maturity of the State. The research concludes that North Macedonia needs to take a responsible approach, rather than rely on international funding and the approach of "ticking the boxes".

The employed methodology includes legal analysis of international instruments, the State legislation and by-laws. Further, it encompasses an analysis of the electoral materials and guides designed during the last national and local elections, as well as the materials on the web - site of the State Election Commission. Finally, it includes interviews with the State Election Commission's staff and State Election Committees' members, as well as the representatives of NGO-s working on the field. These findings are analysed through the prism of findings elaborated in the literature on the culture of implementation of the international law in the EU accession context.

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ASSESSING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: A QUALITY OF LIFE AND SUPPORTS-BASED APPROACH

Societal perceptions of the rights of persons with disabilities have changed significantly over the past decades. These changes have been reflected in national and international legislation that guides the development of social policies and professional practices. The most relevant milestone in this process is the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD; United Nations, 2006). While the CRPD represents a key step forward in the recognition and protection of rights, it does not specify how its articles should be operationalized, measured, or translated into actions that directly improve people's lives.

This study aims to present an applied model for evaluating and promoting the rights established in the CRPD, with a specific focus on persons with intellectual disabilities. We propose using the Quality of Life and Supports Model as a framework for assessing individual rights and designing personalized support strategies. The #Rights4MeToo Scale (Escala #YoTambiénTengoDerechos) will be introduced: an instrument specifically developed to assess the fulfilment of rights protected by the CRPD, structured around the eight core domains of quality of life.

A cross-sectional study was conducted, involving more than 1,200 respondents, including people with intellectual disabilities, their family members, and professionals from social and educational services. The presentation will describe the theoretical foundations of the tool, the development and validation process, and selected key findings related to several CRPD Articles.

The results highlight the value of this tool for raising awareness of the rights enshrined in the CRPD, supporting in identifying strengths and areas for im-

provement, and ultimately promoting better quality of life outcomes for people with intellectual disabilities. The findings also offer relevant insights for policy-making, the design of inclusive practices, and the development of rights-based support systems

THE CRPD IN ACTION – THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CRPD IN NATIONAL COURTS

This study examines the impact of the CRPD on the work of domestic courts in the Israeli legal system. Israel signed (2006) and ratified (2012) the CRPD, announcing its commitment to the principles and provisions of the international convention. However, like in most countries, the act of ratification did not make the convention legally binding document in a similar manner to domestic law. National courts are therefore not required to address the CRPD in their rulings, despite the state's formal commitment as evidenced by the ratification process.

Still, disability rights scholars and advocates expect the courts to utilize the CRPD in a way that upholds disability rights and establishes higher standards for national law, as the CRPD instructs. It is therefore essential to examine whether and how domestic courts apply the CRPD and how such applications impact their decisions regarding doctrine, rhetoric, and actual outcomes.

The paper will explore these questions through a quantitative and qualitative analysis of Israeli court decisions that mention the CRPD. So far, I have identified 30 such cases out of around 2000 cases that reference the local Equal Rights for Persons with Disabilities Law (ERPDL). Initial analysis reveals that the CRPD is most influential in labor law decisions, primarily concerning employment discrimination, as well as in social security-related litigation. It is also mentioned in various cases related to family law (such as custody and adoption), legal capacity, immigration, and private law, though rarely discussed in criminal law cases.

The discussion will analyze these results, contrast them with comparative examples drawn from leading doctrines and cases in other jurisdictions, and ultimately provide guiding principles for the doctrinal implementation of the CRPD in domestic case law, particularly in the absence of a binding status.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES FOR THE EU INTEGRATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is an international agreement that serves to protect, guarantee and promote the rights of people with disabilities in every segment of life and social everyday existence, and it's one of the nine core UN conventions dedicated to the protection of human rights. The CRPD, along with its Optional Protocol, entered into force on 3 May 2008.

The Republic of North Macedonia signed the Convention on 30 March 2007 and ratified it on 5 December 2011. In addition, the Macedonian Government signed the Optional Protocol to the CRPD on 29 July 2009 and ratified it on 5 December 2011. Thus, the country became part of the new international conventional promotion, encouragement and realization of the rights of its citizens with disabilities. On the path to the EU integration, the Republic of North Macedonia, together with all the countries from the Western Balkans, will have to harmonize its national law with the EU legislation, following the guidelines of the CRPD. Moreover, the countries, as well as the EU, are obliged to properly implement the new legislation.

This paper will provide an analysis of the intensity and speed of the implementation of the CRPD by the Republic of North Macedonia. According to the reports of the European Commission, Macedonian legislation today shows progress in harmonisation with the Convention, but challenges still exist. The latest EC Report from 2024 notes that in December 2023, the Macedonian Government adopted the National Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities for 2023 - 2030 and the Action Plan for 2023 - 2026, but implementation was still at its very beginning. In addition, it is also pointed out that the human resources of the competent bodies in charge of disability assessment (which determine if there is a disability and its extent) need to be strengthened. Furthermore, the general capacities of the authorities need to be strengthened in order to align their institutional and legislative framework on social protection and inclusion with the EU *acquis*, vis-à-vis CRPD.

The paper will argue that the Macedonian citizens with disabilities are still unable to fully enjoy their rights, as legislation and government policies are not in line with the Convention. Further reforms are recommended for full compliance, particularly with regard to accessibility, inclusion and the elimination of discrimination on the basis of disability. It highlights, for example, the need to improve access to public services and infrastructure, as well as to strengthen mechanisms for protection of the rights of these citizens.

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES FACING VULNERABLE CATEGORIES OF CITIZENS IN MUNICIPALITIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

The Republic of North Macedonia (RNM), by ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2011, has joined the efforts of the international community to create and implement national policies that promote the rights of persons with disabilities, combat all forms of discrimination and build an inclusive society.

European experiences show that although the rights of persons with disabilities are being promoted, especially in terms of accessibility, persons with disabilities still face significant barriers in accessing healthcare, education, employment and social needs and services. Persons with disabilities have a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion compared to persons without disabilities and are more likely to face the need for social services.

Hence, the paper focuses on analyzing the situation in the domain of social services for vulnerable categories of citizens in several municipalities in the Republic of North Macedonia (Stumica, Kocani, Kumanovo and Berovo), to determine the problems and challenges faced by these people. The general objective of the research is to contribute to the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups, improve the quality of life, as well as encourage social cohesion at the local level by promoting the localization of the 2030 Agenda and its goals, in particular, the principle of “Leaving No One Behind” - LNOB at the municipal level. The specific objectives of the research relate to identifying the problems and needs for social services and the inclusion in the social life of vulnerable groups of citizens, identifying their attitudes towards overcoming problems and improving the services they receive; identifying a database of existing measures and services; and developing recommendations for creating policies and measures.

The research methodology is field research conducted using a questionnaire, a focus group with representatives of vulnerable categories of citizens and institutions that are responsible for the protection and exercise of the rights of this category of citizens, as well as an analysis of legal and regulatory acts and other documents relevant to the research. The research sample is targeted, since it is a target group that is not approached randomly, but based on previously obtained

data about them. The results of the research showed that on average about 49.2% of people with disabilities need help in the implementation of certain activities. In addition, people with disabilities feel forgotten by the community and need to talk to a professional about their problems are more numerous among men. 1/3 of the respondents expressed a need for a personal assistant. A high percentage of the respondents are not familiar with the existence of day centers and social clubs for people with disabilities. One third of the respondents need rehabilitation and reintegration which indicates that the Municipalities and other competent institutions for the protection of persons with disabilities should focus on providing measures and funds for the improvement of social services and meeting social needs.

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