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LET'S MAKE IT BETTER! GOOD PRACTICES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

ABSTRACT

Purpose: Meeting the basic needs of people with disabilities is a vital component of inclusive local social policy. The aim of this article is to analyze how local governments can use a local diagnosis of the needs of people with disabilities to design and implement measures that increase the accessibility of public services, autonomy, and quality of life for this group of residents. Good practices in this area are illustrated using the example of initiatives undertaken in Słupsk, a city in northern Poland.

Method: A total of 158 participants took part, including people with disabilities, their caregivers, and professionals working in the support sector. The survey examined eleven areas of life, including healthcare, education, employment, housing, and autonomy.

Results: The findings of the study showed that most areas did not fully meet the needs of residents with disabilities. Based on these findings, a set of recommendations was drawn up and submitted to the city authorities. A follow-up analysis conducted six months later showed that some of the measures taken by the local government were in line with the recommendations formulated on the basis of the needs assessment. Some initiatives were already being implemented, others had been implemented only partially at that stage, and further measures were planned for implementation by 2030. In this article, these measures are discussed as examples of efforts to shape a more inclusive local policy.

Conclusions: The study demonstrated significant gaps in meeting the needs of people with disabilities across key areas of daily functioning. However, the implementation of several recommendations by local authorities shows that evidence-based research can effectively shape inclusive municipal policy. The example of Słupsk illustrates how systematic evaluation and collaboration with stakeholders can contribute to the development of targeted initiatives that improve accessibility, autonomy, and overall quality of life for residents with disabilities.

KEYWORDS: disability, inclusion, quality of life, needs of people with disabilities, local social policy, needs assessment

INTRODUCTION

Disability is a significant global social problem, affecting around 16% of the world's population. According to the World Health Organization, in 2023 there were 1.3 billion people worldwide living with various forms of disability. Eurostat data shows that 90 million people in the European Union have disabilities (Disability in the UE..., 2024). Persons with disabilities are also a vital part of Polish society. Data from the Central Statistical Office (GUS, 2024) indicate that approximately 10,5% of Polish citizens live with a disability, which equates to approx. 3.9 million individuals. These individuals encounter ongoing challenges related to access in education, cultural participation, employment, healthcare, and rehabilitation services. The multitude of challenges faced by people with disabilities led to the creation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was adopted by the United Nations on 13 December 2006 and ratified by Poland six years later. This document comprehensively addresses the rights of persons with disabilities, including, amongst other things, their right to accessibility, independent living, education enabling the development of individual potential, the attainment of the highest possible standard of health, to work, social protection, and participation in culture (see Articles 9, 19, 24, 25, 27, 28 and 30 of the Convention). These areas constituted the main elements of the assessment, which has been briefly presented in this article. They also coincide with the key elements of the *Strategia na rzecz Osób z Niepełnosprawnościami 2021–2030*, which sets out the framework for Polish policy in this area.

It is essential to ensure that the needs and rights of people with disabilities are considered across all sectors of society and the economy. This is one of the requirements set by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for Poland, which should move away from a charitable model towards a human rights-based model. This will contribute to the development of effective support methods, which is fundamental to building a more just, open and accessible society. The Committee has recommended deinstitutionalisation in order to promote the greatest possible independence for persons with disabilities. This is crucial to ensuring dignity and the opportunity for self-determination to the fullest extent possible. Other important

recommendations include: the use of non-stigmatising language, enabling people with disabilities to participate in the drafting of new legislation, the abolition of institutions of legal incapacitation, and the inclusion of the perspective of women with disabilities (Rekomendacje dla Polski, 2018). These recommendations are due to be reviewed in 2026. However, evidence indicates that individuals with disabilities still face a range of significant obstacles (Szluz, 2007; World Health Organization, 2023).

One of the most significant challenges they face is the lack of suitably adapted infrastructure (World Health Organization, 2023). Numerous public buildings, offices, universities, and facilities including restaurants and shops are not yet completely accessible for people who use wheelchairs or have sensory disabilities. The absence of ramps, elevators, accessible toilets, tactile paths for the visually impaired, and assistive devices for the hearing impaired are daily obstacles. These barriers often lead people with disabilities to feel excluded from social and public life (Garbat, 2003).

Public transportation is also frequently insufficiently adapted, which makes it difficult for persons with disabilities to move freely within cities and towns (Popiel, 2016). Public spaces and transportation infrastructure ought to be designed to effectively serve the requirements of all users. This requires implementing and enforcing accessibility standards. Investments in features such as low-floor buses, audio announcements, and orientation apps can significantly enhance the mobility and independence of persons with disabilities (Poliński, 2008).

Access to education is a fundamental right for everyone, but it remains a challenge for persons with disabilities in Poland (Szumski & Firkowska-Mankiewicz, 2010; Garbat, 2015; Apanel, 2016; Lejzerowicz, 2016). According to data for European Union countries, one in five people with disabilities leave education early. Only 29% go on to post-secondary education, whereas 44% of people without disabilities reach this level (Disability in the EU..., 2024). Schools are often under-resourced to provide effective support for students with diverse types of disabilities. There is a lack of specialized staff such as support teachers, speech therapists, special educators, and psychologists who can provide personalized assistance. Many schools do not have sufficient equipment or educational aids designed for students who are blind, deaf,

or have learning disabilities (Pachowicz, 2020). Inclusive education should be based on individual approaches and full integration of students with disabilities among their peers. This not only supports the development of young people with disabilities but also contributes to building a more open and empathetic society (Jardzioch, 2017).

Financial independence is a key aspect of autonomy and self-worth for everyone, especially for individuals who face lifelong challenges due to disability (Bednarz, 2015; Żuchowska-Skiba, 2018). However, in Poland, persons with disabilities often struggle to enter the labour market. Despite existing regulations and incentives for employers – such as subsidies for hiring people with disabilities – too few companies are willing to adapt workplaces to their needs (Buchwald, 2015; Kościelska & Aouil, 2004). Employers fear additional costs and responsibilities, which often results in exclusion from employment. More comprehensive professional integration programs and promotional campaigns encouraging the employment of persons with disabilities could significantly improve the situation. Vocational courses, individualized career plans, and mentorship support could help people with disabilities develop and increase their competitiveness in the labour market (Kościelska & Aouil, 2004; Walusiak-Skorupa et al., 2011). Other key elements include those outlined in the *Strategia na rzecz Osób z Niepełnosprawnościami* (2021): creating a disability-friendly working environment and fostering a social environment that promotes the economic inclusion of this group. Healthcare and rehabilitation are among the most important needs for persons with disabilities. Access to these services in Poland is frequently constrained by extended waiting periods, a shortage of qualified specialists, and the considerable expense of private care. People with disabilities need not only basic healthcare but also access to specialized therapies such as physical rehabilitation, occupational therapy, psychotherapy, and speech therapy. Regular rehabilitation is essential for maintaining or improving physical and mental fitness, allowing people with disability to lead more active and independent lives (Kamusińska, 2008; Biel-Ziółek, 2016). Additional financial and structural support for healthcare facilities, as well as funding for therapies, would significantly improve service accessibility. Additionally, access to personal assistance for those requiring daily help could enhance their quality of life (Rutkowska, 2012).

Social exclusion remains one of the most difficult issues faced by persons with disabilities in Poland. Stereotypes and a lack of awareness about diverse types of disabilities result in social barriers that limit their opportunities for participation in society. Social inclusion should be based on building awareness and empathy and organizing initiatives that enable full participation by people with disabilities in various areas of life (Gąciarz, 2014; Mirewska, 2015). Social campaigns and educational programs on disability could help change public attitudes and reduce discrimination. It is essential that inclusive initiatives, such as meetings, workshops, sports, and cultural events, are accessible to everyone. Collaboration between NGOs, government institutions, and local communities could yield considerable progress in creating a more inclusive society (Marszałek, 2009).

Care for people with disabilities often falls on their families and caregivers. This requires tremendous emotional, physical, and financial commitment. Caregivers often must give up professional work or drastically adjust their lives to the needs of their dependents, resulting in numerous sacrifices (Kościelska & Aouil, 2004; Niedbalski, 2018). Support for families is therefore crucial so they can effectively fulfil their roles and ensure dignified living conditions for persons with disabilities (Szczepaniak, 2010; Niedbalski, 2023). Studies show that parental stress is driven by concerns about their child's future. Parents must plan for a future in which their child can live independently after their own passing. Financial difficulties, lack of access to information and limited institutional support make this task challenging. Many fear that the child will become a burden to their healthy siblings, and their anxiety grows with age. A sense of helplessness and lack of control leads to apathy, depression, and burnout (Pisula, 1998; Szczepaniak, 2013).

Financial and psychological support for families of people with disabilities is essential for them to provide high-quality care. Funding programs for personal assistants, home rehabilitation, and psychological support could relieve families burdened by daily caregiving demands (Kołaczek, 2014). Emotional support programs and peer support groups for families could also help them cope with stress and foster mutual assistance.

The responsibility for effectively meeting the needs of disabled residents' rests with local governments. Many cities and municipalities recognise the

need to continually improve conditions for people with disabilities. An example of good practices in identifying and continuously addressing these needs is the city of Słupsk in northern Poland. In this study, good practices are understood as proven and effective methods of action that address identified social needs, can be implemented at the local level, and are subject to monitoring and evaluation of outcomes. Good practices involve various stakeholders, increase the accessibility of services, and may serve as models for use in other social and organizational contexts (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). They are also understood as activities that produce concrete and positive results while containing a certain potential for innovation. Moreover, they are durable, repeatable, and capable of being implemented under similar conditions in other locations or by other entities (Bednarek, 2007, p. 161).

In this article, we present the findings of a local needs assessment, the resulting recommendations, and the actions undertaken by the city authorities to improve the lives of disabled residents. Conducting local research from the perspectives of citizens with disabilities, their caregivers, and professionals is essential to gain a comprehensive understanding of their challenges. These findings can support the creation of a more inclusive society through social campaigns, educational programs, and initiatives focused on the development of persons with disabilities.

METHOD

The purpose of this article is to identify best practices in collaboration between local government and research institutions by demonstrating how local governments can use a local assessment of the needs of people with disabilities to design and implement initiatives to improve the quality of life for this group of residents. The actions undertaken by Słupsk, a city of over 76,000 residents located in the Pomeranian Voivodeship in northern Poland, serve as an example. Approximately eight thousand of the residents registered in Słupsk are people with disabilities. The local government of Słupsk is actively working to identify and respond to residents' needs. A comprehensive survey was conducted as part of these initiatives to assess the extent to which the needs of residents with disabilities were being met.

The goal of the research was to diagnose the needs of people with disabilities from the perspective of the individuals themselves, their caregivers, and professionals employed in support services. Additionally, the study aimed to generate actionable recommendations for the city of Słupsk regarding support for people with disabilities. The level of satisfaction with the needs of Słupsk residents with disabilities was assessed through an online questionnaire. Three questionnaires were developed for the study (for people with disabilities, their caregivers, and specialists). Links to the questionnaires, prepared in Google Forms, were made available on the City Hall website. They were also distributed to support institutions – social welfare centers, occupational therapy workshops, health centers, and schools – with a request to share them with people with disabilities, their caregivers, and specialists working in the support sector. The research results were used to develop recommendations regarding actions that city authorities should take to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities. A reliable and thorough diagnosis of residents' needs is an essential element of effective social policy. Recommendations derived from the research can inform local policy, the planning of social services and support programs, and improve the alignment of those services with actual expectations. They also help municipal institutions make better-informed decisions that promote quality of life and social integration for residents with disabilities.

RESEARCH TOOLS

Three distinct questionnaires were developed for the study, with each tailored to address the needs of a specific participant group:

- a survey for adult residents of Słupsk with disabilities;
- a survey for parents/caregivers of people with disabilities;
- a survey for professionals employed in Słupsk-based institutions providing support to people with disabilities.

Each questionnaire was developed based on international standards and established methodologies in social and medical research, such as the Care and Need Scale (CANS) (Tate, 2017) and the Scale for Assessing Support Needs of

Children and Adolescents with Intellectual Disabilities (Guillén et al., 2015). The scale was adapted to the local context and specific characteristics of Słupsk to ensure accuracy and relevance. The scale included a demographic section and questions relating to the following life areas: Rehabilitation and health-care needs; Education; Social integration; Employment; Communication and access to information; Housing; Independent living; Autonomy; Finances; Access to equipment, devices, and technology; Participation in culture.

Each item was evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale, reflecting the extent to which needs were fulfilled within each respective area: 1 – the need is almost entirely unmet; urgent and comprehensive intervention is required; 2 – the need is largely unmet; services exist but are insufficient in quality, availability, or effectiveness; 3 – the need is somewhat met; partial satisfaction exists, but improvements are needed; 4 – the need is generally met; service delivery is satisfactory but could still be improved; 5 – the need is fully met; services and support are rated as highly effective with no major gaps. In addition, respondents could provide open-ended comments to elaborate on unmet needs or individual experiences.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The main study run from 15 February to 30 June 2024. The survey was anonymous and administered online via a shared link. Each respondent had the opportunity to complete and submit the survey only once. Responses were independently analysed for each respondent group to ensure objectivity and to establish a robust foundation for informed disability policy decision-making.

The study followed ethical standards, respecting respondents' dignity, and autonomy in accordance with the Code of Ethics for Scientific Employees adopted by the General Assembly of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Resolution No. 2/2020, 5 June 2020). Participants were informed about the study's objectives and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. No participants were exposed to harmful or traumatic factors. The study was anonymous and did not collect personal or sensitive data. All respondents gave informed consent to participate.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDY GROUP

A total of 158 residents of Słupsk participated in the study: 97 adults with disabilities; 28 parents and caregivers; 33 professionals working in support institutions (teachers, psychologists, educators, physiotherapists, social workers, doctors). Of the total group, 50 were men and 108 were women.

Among respondents with disabilities, the largest group had chronic mental health disorders, and the smallest group had neurodevelopmental disorders. Breakdown by type of disability: chronic mental health disorders – 32 individuals; multiple disabilities – 21; mild intellectual disability – 16; motor disability – 14; visual impairment – 7; chronic somatic illnesses – 6; neurodevelopmental disorders – 1. Among parents and caregivers, the most common group cared for individuals with intellectual or multiple disabilities (6 people in each group); motor disabilities – 5; neurodevelopmental disorders – 5; chronic somatic illnesses – 4; chronic mental disorders – 1; visual impairment – 1.

Professionals reported experience across diverse types of disabilities in educational, healthcare, and social care settings. Most selected multiple disability categories. Experience breakdown: mental health disorders – 32; multiple disabilities – 21; intellectual disability – 16; motor disabilities – 14; visual impairments – 7; chronic somatic illnesses – 6 professionals.

FINDINGS

The size of this article does not allow us to present all the results, so we will focus on the most important ones. The full results, along with calculations and graphical representations, can be viewed on the Słupsk City Hall's Public Information Bulletin (BIP) (<https://bip.um.slupsk.pl/dokumenty/7651.html>).

The analysis of the responses from questionnaires completed by the three groups of respondents indicates that there are many unmet needs, the fulfilment of which could improve the psychological well-being of people with disabilities living in Słupsk and prevent their social exclusion. In the statements of adults with disabilities, parents and caregivers, as well as professionals, deficits in meeting needs were evident across all examined areas.

The areas with the lowest level of need satisfaction, requiring immediate remedial action, include: rehabilitation and healthcare, professional activation, housing, finances. Slightly better – though still inadequate – was the satisfaction of needs related to integration, however none of the studied groups rated this area as functioning at a particularly proficient level. The main problems reported by respondents included:

- lack of a sufficient number of medical specialists, including in the field of mental health and dentistry, resulting in long wait times for appointments;
- lack of psychological support for parents and caregivers;
- a limited range of vocational education, which does not match the interests and abilities of persons with disabilities, nor the needs of the labour market;
- limited opportunities for employment aligned with one's education, interests, and needs, whether in public institutions, private companies, or sheltered workshops;
- lack of employment opportunities for parents and caregivers that would not interfere with caregiving responsibilities;
- inadequate knowledge among municipal institution employees about different types of disabilities and a lack of empathy from officials;
- inadequate adaptation of apartments and entire residential buildings to the needs of persons with disabilities;
- insufficient availability of social housing from municipal resources, as well as of training and supported housing;
- insufficient urban infrastructure, which prevents persons with disabilities from independently managing everyday tasks (e.g., using a wheelchair on uneven, narrow sidewalks; navigating curbs; withdrawing money from ATMs; taking a queue number at a health clinic, etc.);
- lack of sensitivity among support services staff to the needs of persons with disabilities.

A comparison of the responses from different groups showed that assessments of needs satisfaction varied by group. For example, in autonomy, differences emerged in the way parents and caregivers assessed the level of need

satisfaction compared to adults with disabilities. Adults with disabilities rated their opportunities to make decisions for themselves, spend financial resources, or choose how to spend their free time – as well as the respect for their right to privacy – much more positively than their parents and caregivers. On the other hand, the architectural accessibility of cultural institutions was rated relatively well (mostly at an average level) by professionals – an assessment not confirmed by the experiences of persons with disabilities and their caregivers, who continue to point out shortcomings in this area.

The problem areas highlighted in this report appear to be universal, not limited to the specific context of Słupsk. A similar level of unmet needs was reported in a 2024 report by the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (PFRON), based on nationwide survey research (PFRON, 2024). According to the PFRON findings, people with disabilities across Poland reported deficiencies in the following areas: access to rehabilitation services, psychological support, and personal assistants; access to various forms of education and adapted learning aids; opportunities for employment and suitably adapted workplaces; adaptation of public transport; access to information; adaptation of housing and elimination of architectural barriers; access to cultural institutions and infrastructure adapted to their needs. The PFRON report (2024) also indicated widespread dissatisfaction with the support provided by government officials. Unmet needs contribute to the gradual deterioration of mental and physical well-being, increased social isolation, low education levels and qualifications, poor labour market outcomes, and difficulties in daily functioning. This results in the continued dependence of persons with disabilities on family members and support institutions.

After a detailed analysis of the results, the research team developed recommendations for actions that will improve the well-being of residents with disabilities. These included among others:

- increase the accessibility of medical services for people with disabilities, creation of integrated health centres that offer comprehensive medical and rehabilitation services in one location;
- reducing bureaucracy, simplifying application procedures for financial aid and support, making them more accessible to persons with

- disabilities, shortening decision-making times by implementing more efficient administrative processes;
- introduction of diverse forms of education and training, adapted to the individual needs of persons with disabilities, ensuring a wide range of vocational courses and workshops that will increase the employability of persons with disabilities;
 - promoting employment of people with disabilities: conducting information campaigns for employers that highlight the benefits of hiring persons with disabilities; creating an online platform that enables persons with disabilities and their caregivers to post job-seeking ads and browse job offers tailored to their qualifications and needs, supporting the creation of new positions with flexible hours and remote work options, adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities and their caregivers;
 - improving infrastructural accessibility: modernizing public buildings and urban spaces to ensure full accessibility for persons with various types of disabilities, regular inspection and maintenance of assistive devices to ensure their continued functionality, ensuring the availability of translation services, such as sign language interpretation and AAC methods (Augmentative and Alternative Communication), in key public institutions;
 - investing in the construction and adaptation of social housing fully suited to the needs of persons with disabilities, increasing the number of training and supported apartments that offer assistance with daily functioning;
 - supporting personal assistance, increasing the number of personal assistants who provide everyday life support for persons with disabilities;
 - enhancing urban infrastructure: modernizing the city's infrastructure to make it more accessible for persons with disabilities (e.g., improving sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, and public transportation).

IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIONS TO IMPROVE THE SATISFACTION OF NEEDS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN ŚLĄPSK

The report assessing the fulfilment of the needs of residents with disabilities was published on the official website of the Ślupsk City Hall and reviewed by both City Hall employees and members of the City Council, including representatives of the Social Affairs Committee.

Six months after the publication of the report, local authorities were asked to provide information regarding activities undertaken in the area of support for people with disabilities and the implementation of selected recommendations. The analysis of the responses indicated a temporal and thematic relationship between some of the activities undertaken by the local government and the recommendations formulated on the basis of the needs assessment. For analytical purposes, the identified activities were divided into three categories: actions already implemented, partially implemented measures, and initiatives planned for implementation by 2030.

Among the measures already implemented was the development of personal assistance services. These services, implemented in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, aim to support people with disabilities in their daily functioning, including help with mobility, maintaining personal hygiene, handling official matters, and participating in social life. The main goal of the assistance is to increase the independence and self-reliance of the beneficiaries. The plan is to support 250 individuals by the end of 2025. Complementing these efforts is the development of respite care services addressed to caregivers of individuals requiring constant support. Two variants of this type of assistance are being implemented: daytime care provided at the place of residence of the person with a disability or at another designated location, and round-the-clock care offered in specialized centres. The purpose of these services is to provide temporary relief to caregivers, allowing them to rest, recuperate, and attend to personal matters. These solutions were intended to provide temporary relief to caregivers and support everyday functioning.

In the area of health, efforts have been undertaken to increase the accessibility of medical services for people with disabilities. Alternative forms of

registering for medical appointments have been introduced, such as via SMS messages and telephone contact, with the needs of individuals with difficulties in verbal communication in mind. Additionally, a document outlining patient rights has been made available in Braille. A significant step toward modern rehabilitation was the implementation of a model based on the use of Internet of Things (IoT) technology.

In response to needs in the area of professional activation, a supported employment program is being implemented in the city to help people with disabilities find and maintain employment in the open labour market. This model includes individual support in the form of career counselling, job placement services, and the presence of a job coach at the workplace. This initiative was consistent with previously identified barriers related to workplace adaptation and access to training. Additionally, the city has launched programs to support entrepreneurship among people with disabilities by providing grants to start businesses and reimbursing the costs of equipping workplaces. Although the scale of these activities remains limited, they indicate engagement in selected areas of support for people with disabilities.

In terms of public space accessibility, efforts are being made to eliminate architectural barriers and improve the mobility of people with disabilities. These include investments in modern public transportation and the modernization of key urban areas, which are significant in terms of Polish and European documents relating to people with disabilities (Enhancing the Strategy..., 2026; Union of Equity, 2021; Strategia na rzecz Osób z Niepełnosprawnościami, 2021). Public buildings have been equipped with Braille signage, improving their accessibility for people with visual impairments. At the same time, there has been no implementation of more advanced communication support solutions, such as sign language interpretation or augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems. There is also a lack of action in the area of modernizing traffic signals and adapting self-service devices, indicating only partial implementation of the recommendations.

Actions supporting social integration and cultural participation are being carried out continuously. Local events with the participation of people with disabilities are organized, and new public infrastructure is being designed in accordance with the principles of universal design. The elimination of

architectural barriers is progressing systematically. Nevertheless, technologies supporting access to culture such as audio description, subtitles, or sign language interpretation, have not yet been implemented. This area requires further development.

In the field of housing policy, no specific investments in supported or training housing were indicated. Despite the recommendations suggesting the simplification of administrative procedures, there is no information about their implementation. Similarly, no actions have been noted regarding the education of caregivers and institutional staff in respecting the privacy and autonomy rights of people with disabilities. There is also a lack of systemic financial counselling and informational campaigns about available forms of assistance.

Beyond the actions already being implemented, the city of Słupsk has presented a broad range of initiatives planned for completion by the end of 2030. These include comprehensive work on the modernization of medical and rehabilitation facilities, involving infrastructure expansion, acquisition of modern equipment, and adaptation of spaces to the needs of people with disabilities. The introduction of a multimedia information system for patients is also planned. In the area of education, the city intends to develop support programs for students, including those with special needs, through workshops, career counselling, and psychological assistance, while also adapting spaces and teaching methods to the principles of equal access. Integration infrastructure is planned to be expanded through the creation of new support centres in various districts and the expansion of existing facilities, such as Community Self-Help Homes and Occupational Therapy Workshops. A key initiative will be the establishment of a new support centre for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Efforts for professional activation include the introduction of flexible employment forms, adaptation of workplaces, anti-discrimination training, and psychological support. In Słupsk's public spaces, elevators have already been installed in selected public buildings, and this process will continue in other locations. Simultaneously, further modernization of pedestrian crossings with features improving orientation and the development of green areas conducive to integration will be carried out. In the housing sector, the development of supported and training apartments is planned, as well as the construction of new housing in accordance with

the principles of universal design and the adaptation of municipal housing. Additionally, the expansion of round-the-clock care, both in home and institutional or emergency settings, is foreseen. One particularly interesting idea is the construction of an integrated residential complex combining housing, rehabilitation, and social functions. In the area of culture and recreation, the city plans to modernize cultural institutions, build sports and recreational facilities, and carry out educational and community-activating projects, with particular attention to architectural and informational accessibility. These planned activities may support the development of a more inclusive and accessible local support system for people with disabilities.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the city authorities undertook activities in selected areas related to support for people with disabilities; however, the scope of implementation of the recommendations remains varied. Nevertheless, significant gaps remain in the implementation of system-level recommendations, the execution of which requires cross-sector cooperation, long-term planning, and coherent institutional and infrastructural solutions. Future actions should move toward a comprehensive, integrated approach to inclusive policy, considering the diverse needs of people with disabilities and the principle of equal access to all spheres of social life. Despite existing barriers, the initiatives observed in Słupsk may be viewed as examples of local activities aimed at strengthening inclusive social policy. Proper use of the potential of the initiated activities may support further efforts aimed at improving the quality of life and social inclusion of people with disabilities.

CONCLUSION

People with disabilities and their families face a broad range of challenges, including fear, frustration, and systemic obstacles that may go unnoticed by people without lived experience of disability. Recognizing and empathizing with these difficulties opens space for meaningful dialogue and action that can lead to long-term improvements in quality of life and greater social inclusion. A key element is also the shift from a policy of compassion to one based on the rights of persons with disabilities, which will ensure their real

participation and influence over the conditions of their functioning in social, political, professional, and private life (Convention on the Rights of Persons...; Enhancing the Strategy..., 2026). This will also contribute to an increased sense of autonomy and self-determination.

The city of Słupsk is not without challenges, but the approach adopted by its local government appears to offer a strong example of good practice. Commissioning a professional needs assessment was a decisive step demonstrating genuine concern and readiness for change. Within a span of six months, multiple actionable recommendations were integrated into policy and implemented, reflecting the administration's responsiveness and dedication to stakeholder engagement.

Introducing and sustaining the recommended actions can significantly improve the lives of persons with disabilities, ensuring they have better access to services, more autonomy, and greater opportunities for development. However, such progress requires continued engagement from local communities, public institutions, and civil society organizations. By working together, stakeholders in Słupsk, and beyond, can help build a more inclusive and equitable society for all residents, regardless of ability.

The diagnosis presented in this article was limited to residents of a single city, so its results cannot be generalized. Furthermore, the study's design excluded participation by people with intellectual disabilities, those with low digital literacy, or those without internet access. However, we wanted to demonstrate how collaboration between local government and a research institution can contribute to a better understanding of residents' problems and take action to improve their well-being. We hope this may inspire other local governments to leverage the potential of research institutions in their regions and collaborate to create optimal living conditions for people with disabilities that meet their actual needs.

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