

# Potential and opportunities for launching in Belarusian regions the mechanisms of local planning to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities

Research report (abridged version)



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ПО ПРАВАМ ЛЮДЕЙ  
С ИНВАЛИДНОСТЬЮ

The research was initiated by Office  
for the Rights of People with Disabilities



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AGENDA





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# Potential and opportunities for launching in Belarusan regions the mechanisms of local planning to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities

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## Introduction

### Objectives

Belarus adhered to **the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (referred to hereinafter as “the UN Convention”)<sup>1</sup> on September, 24 2015 and ratified it on October, 3 2016. The comprehensive implementation of the UN Convention is connected with harmonization of the Belarusan legislation with the provisions of the UN Convention, and, what is no less important, with introduction of relevant changes in Belarusan law enforcement practice. The experience gained by the European countries during implementation of The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities<sup>2</sup> proved the utmost importance of starting promoting innovations first and foremost on the local communities level. Nevertheless these processes are attended with some difficulties, arising both at national level and at the level of concrete regions, which are unequally ready to implement the provisions of the UN Convention.

In this regards on the initiative of the **Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities**<sup>3</sup> in the framework of the **Agenda 50 Campaign**<sup>4</sup> **Centre for European Transformation**<sup>5</sup> undertook the study of readiness and real opportunities in Belarusan regions for launching the mechanisms of local planning to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities. The practical task of the study was relying on the positive experience of implementing such strategies on local level in the EU countries (notably, Sweden and Poland), to launch the local planning process in several Belarusan regions. This task implies continuation of work with urban environment and with subjects of urban development during 2016-2018 in range of municipalities, selected on the ground of the primary analysis of the study data\*.

<sup>1</sup> See: **The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**. It was adopted on 13 December 2006 during the sixty-first session of the UN General Assembly by resolution A/RES/61/106: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2.html>.

<sup>2</sup> See: **The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities**. Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 48/96, annex, of 20 December 1993: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/dissre00.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> **Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities**, see: <http://www.disright.org>.

<sup>4</sup> **Agenda 50** is the campaign of the Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The main purpose of the campaign is the implementation in Belarus of the basic principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the area of disability decision-making in local communities. The campaign was conceived and implemented jointly with the *EuroBelarus International Consortium*, *Centre for European Transformation*, TUS (Poland) and NGO *European House* (Denmark) with the support of the European Union, see (in Russian): <http://www.disright.org/ru/campaign/agenda-50>.

<sup>5</sup> **Center for European Transformation**, see: <https://cet.eurobelarus.info/en/>.

\* The full version of research report is available in Russian, see: [https://cet.eurobelarus.info/files/userfiles/5/CET/2017\\_Agenda-50\\_Research-RU.pdf](https://cet.eurobelarus.info/files/userfiles/5/CET/2017_Agenda-50_Research-RU.pdf).

## Methodology

Methodology of the study includes:

- 1) study of data in open sources and previous researches in order to choose the most appropriate regions from the point of view of their social and economic characteristics;
- 2) expert survey within national CSOs which have developed regional structures and within active regional organizations about the potential of social groups in particular regions;
- 3) exploratory visits and trips to the regions, selected during first two stages, to interview local interest groups and local authorities;
- 4) integration of information and formulation of recommendations regarding possible forms of engaging local groups and authorities in designing and implementing pilot local strategies that promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities.

The expeditions are premised on the **“action research” methodological principle**, which implies engagement in activity situation and acquirement of knowledge in course of interaction with the object of research. The expeditions were not intended to provide an exhaustive image of the municipalities. The meaning and purpose of the expeditions is to figure out what are the norms and principles that organize the life of persons with disabilities and the activity of relevant stakeholders in Belarusan municipalities. To what extent do they comply with the principles, proclaimed by the UN Convention? What efforts and resources are necessary to adjust the present material in accordance with norms of equal rights for persons with disabilities?

In order to realize this task the researches hold range of **interviews** in the municipalities, talking to all possible entities they could reach, from representatives of local authorities, employees of state-run institutions and members of CSOs to ordinary people in the streets (“snowball” method of search for respondents). Members of the expeditions explored both the places functionally linked with disability sphere (Departments of social protection, Territorial centers for social services for population, hospitals, special needs schools, organizations of persons with disabilities etc.) and “places of life” of locals (among such places could be museums, houses of culture, churches, recreation areas, ateliers, clubs and so on). Researchers also noticed externally observable factors of local environment: observable well-being, development of local infrastructure, manner of local inhabitants to spend their free time etc.

Doing so, over the course of the expedition the researchers, without going over the municipality with a fine-tooth comb (visiting all without distinction entities, meeting each and every potential stakeholder) get quite full image of level of openness of the municipality, of the parties potentially interested in the process of implementation of the UN Convention in their region, character of their commitment and degree of their motivation, of current partner and conflict relationships.

The field phase of the research (exploratory expeditions) took place during **November-February 2015** (pilot phase) and **March-June 2016** (core phase of the study).

## Study object and purpose

The **study object** was Belarusian municipalities located in different regions with varying population size, level of socio-economic development and of social activities. Doing so, the research team could get data for comparative analysis and find out essential distinctions and similarities of different types of Belarusian municipalities. The municipalities were chosen taking into account their:

- Geographic location;
- Population size;
- Basic socio-economic characteristics;
- Recommendations by organizations of persons with disabilities that indicated the municipalities with the highest potential (from their point of view) to launch mechanisms of local planning.

The sample was adjusted on the ground of results of the pilot phase of the research that took place in November-February 2015 and included exploratory visits to three small cities: Valožyn, Rahačoŭ, Uzda. In the beginning it was planned to limit the study to small cities with population size up to 50.000 inhabitants. However, as the result of the pilot study, we arrived to the conclusion that the small cities have limited potential to execute local planning tasks in the sphere of rights of persons with disabilities. Therefore, we extended the scope of the research and included 3 big cities with population over 50.000 (Pinsk, Kobryn, Babrujsk) in order to collect supplemental material for comparison of the cities' potential. In the last analysis, 14 small and big municipalities from different regions (*voblasć*) of Belarus were selected (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** List of the explored cities

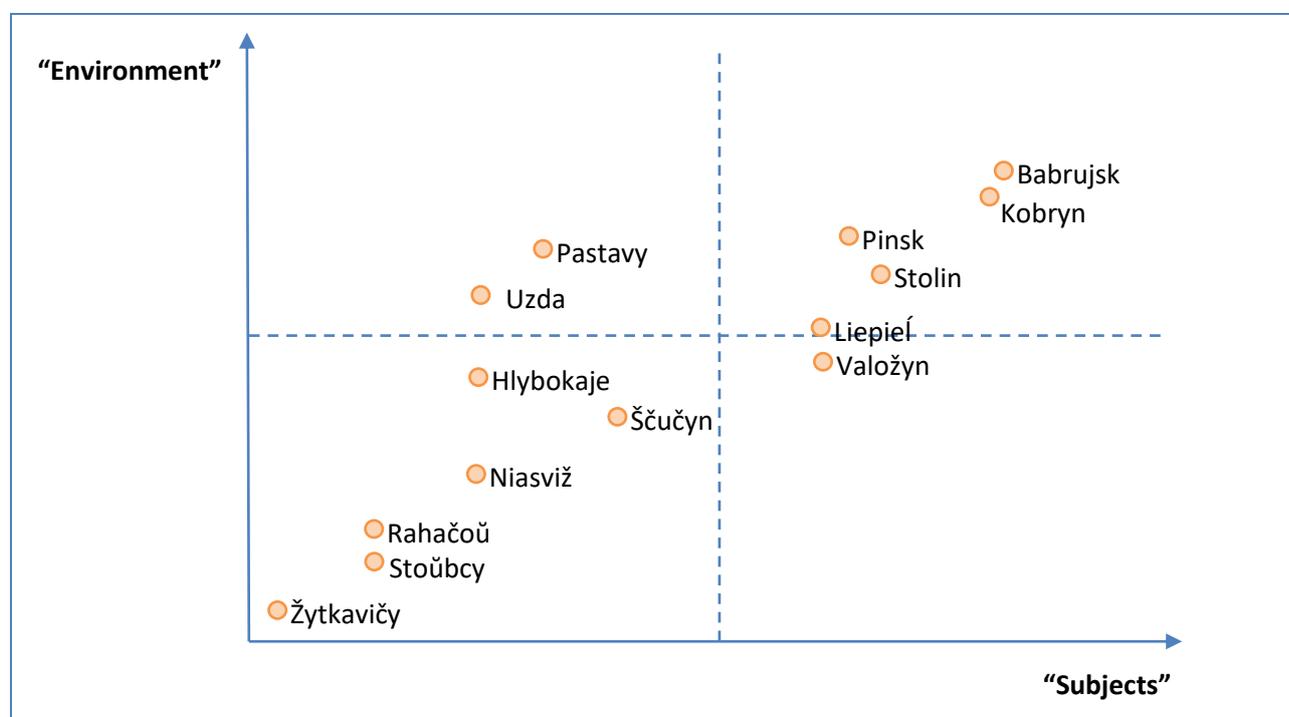
	Municipality	Region ( <i>voblasć</i> )	Population size, people
<b>Pilot phase</b>			
1.	Valožyn	Minsk Region	9.286
2.	Rahačoŭ	Homieĺ Region	34.828
3.	Uzda	Minsk Region	10.102
<b>Core phase</b>			
4.	Stolin	Brest Region	12.951
5.	Pinsk	Brest Region	138.392
6.	Kobryn	Brest Region	52.655
7.	Pastavy	Viciebsk Region	20.039
8.	Liepieĺ	Viciebsk Region	17.690
9.	Hlybokaje	Viciebsk Region	20.352
10.	Žytkavičy	Homieĺ Region	15.933
11.	Ščučyn	Hrodna Region	15.538
12.	Niasviž	Minsk Region	15.434
13.	Stoŭbcy	Minsk Region	16.839
14.	Babrujsk	Mahilioŭ Region	218.043

The purpose of the research was the identification of 5 municipalities with the highest potential to develop local strategies. In this regard after accomplishing the field phase there were held the research seminars to evaluate and rank the explored municipalities using set of parameters. In order to rank the cities according to their general development level, we organized two groups of parameters:

- 1) General conditions of development and state of urban environment (axis “Environment”);
- 2) State of city’s subjects (axis “Subjects”).

By placing the cities in coordinate space between these two axes, the research team got the following image (see. Picture 1).

Picture 1. General development of the cities



From there, taking into account this ranking as well as geographical location in different regions and basic readiness of local subjects to cooperate for launching local planning, it was decided to choose for further activities Babrujsk, Ščučyn, Valożyn, Stolin and Liepieĺ.

Analysis of influence of the socio-economic factors on the urban environment also was of interest for the researchers. The general conclusion that can be done from the comparison of objective socio-economic indices with the development level observed by the researchers (environment and subjects axes) is that the current state of development of the Belarusian cities cannot be explained exclusively by objective economic and demographic factors. Various humanitarian factors also matter and from our point of view their influence is more significant, from “liberal” or “restrictive” character of local authorities’ policies to the factor of presence or absence in the city of remarkable personalities (“freaks”, local activists, local cultural celebrities) who permanently actively care about their city.



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This short report presents the main conclusions about the environment for the implementation of the UN Convention in Belarus. The first part is a short overview of Belarusan legal framework from the perspective of the UN Convention approach. We consider it important since on the one hand, the national legislation reflects the conceptual attitude towards the issues of disability; on the other hand, it represents essential action condition. In the second part there is the analysis of city stakeholders and their role in the UN Convention implementation mechanisms at local level. This report did not aim to provide exhaustive description of the situation in each of the explored cities; we rather sought to define existing mechanisms, to identify pressure points and to highlight the best practices. Finally, the third part is the analysis of problems and perspectives of implementation of the UN Convention through the example of several spheres (access to physical space, communication accessibility and access to employment), in view of collected material about existing practices and approaches.

## The Belarusian national legislation from the perspective of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities approach

The purpose of **the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.

**The UN Convention sets the perspective of treating the disability phenomenon not as an attributive characteristic, but as an interactive one.** In other words, the disability is not integral feature of an organism, but an event that appears during interaction of an individual with the environment. According to the UN Convention, persons with disabilities include “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” **This approach implies that the disability can be ridden out not only through medical means (by reducing influence of negative factors connected with the individual’s health), but also through social means (by fitting the environment to the capacities of persons with disabilities).**

Therefore, **the UN Convention shifts focus of looking at disability** from object-based approach (persons with disabilities are seen as recipients of assistance, object of policies and decisions) **to intersubjective approach** (strengthening legal standing of persons with disabilities through involving them in decision-making processes, promoting inclusion of persons with disabilities in social practices on an equal basis with others). The States that adhered to the UN Convention accept this approach to the disability issue and accept the necessity to ensure opportunities of inclusion of persons with disabilities in different spheres of life.

In the legislation of Republic of Belarus, mainly two laws regulate the disability sphere: **Law “On social protection of persons with disabilities”** and **Law “On prevention of disability and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities”**. These two laws stipulate inalienable right of persons with disabilities to respect for their human dignity; prohibit discrimination; guarantee the conditions they need to access education and vocational training; set requirements for the infrastructure (it must be adapted to be accessed and used by persons with disabilities); set forms of possible participation of organizations of persons with disabilities in implementation of policies related to disability.

One more document that relates to the disability topic is **the State Programme on Social Protection and Employment Promotion for the years 2016-2020**. Since the State Programme sets main directions of implementation of current state policy in the fields of promoting employment of population, rehabilitation, creation of barrier-free environment and social integration of persons with disabilities, the analysis of this document allows highlighting the aspects that correlate with the UN Convention.

The purpose of the State Programme is enforcement of the constitutional citizens’ rights to work, to just and favorable conditions of work, to accessible environment and social security for seniors and in case of disability.

**The State Programme tackles the following issues through particular means:**

- Employment issue to be solved through development of the vocational education system for persons with disabilities and stimulation of job creation for persons with disabilities and support for employers.



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- The issue of social rehabilitation will be solved mainly through organization of educational programmes for persons with disabilities and cultural, sport and other events.
- Development of barrier-free environment is seen by the State Programme as development of regulatory standards for the elements, equipment of the physical space objects with such elements, equipment of public transport with the barrier lowering elements, increase of accessibility of media, awareness-raising campaigns aiming at setting positive attitude towards persons with disabilities.
- As for the issue of social integration, the State Programme seeks to solve it through procurement of persons with disabilities with technical means of adaptation and development of social protection system.

It is also worth paying attention to the system of effectiveness indices for the Programme implementation. The effectiveness indices mainly relate to two aspects of the disability policy: lowering barriers of local physical environment and broadening scope of social services. The current system does not contain parameters that would reflect strengthening of legal standing of persons with disabilities.

The State Programme also enshrines the state monopoly over disability policy implementation. Control over implementation of measures foreseen by the State Programme lies with public authorities alone.

Comparison of the approach of the Belarusian laws and the State Programme with that of the UN Convention, and overview of the possibilities to implement the UN Convention principles on the basis of the measures foreseen by the laws and the State Programme highlight several important points.

The State Programme is almost completely oriented on raising accessibility of different services, as well as means of rehabilitation and integration for persons with disabilities; only in the Sub-programme 4 some measures concern optimization of social interactions between persons with and without disabilities.

**The UN Convention foresees engagement of persons with disabilities in broader interactions, including elaboration and implementation of legislation and strategies, aiming at UN Convention implementation.**

According to the Belarusian laws, the organizations of persons with disabilities participate in elaboration and adoption of state and local programmes aimed at prevention of disability and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, but the control and monitoring of implementation of such programmes is performed by the government agencies. **As for the State Programme, the issue of broadening participation of persons with disabilities in taking decisions important for them (both local and strategic) remains marginal.**

In this situation, it should be noted that besides the measures of social inclusion of persons with disabilities that would be implemented by the state, other stakeholders as well could play important role in implementation of the UN Convention principles — organizations of persons with disabilities and other CSOs, for-profit organizations, cultural and educational institutions etc. On the one hand various entities are involved in implementation of the governmental policy. Their attitude can have positive or negative influence on the success of the measures foreseen by the State Programme. For example, the effect of stimulating the employers to create jobs for persons with disabilities depends directly on their appreciation of the stimuli. Moreover the non-state actors can mitigate the risks the state actors face in course of implementing the planned actions. On the other hand, local social stakeholders can initiate work on the aspects that are not in focus of the state framework document. In this context, the evaluation of motivation and potential of different social stakeholders to implement the UN Convention principles looks promising.

# Stakeholders and mechanisms of implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at the local level

## Local authorities and public institutions

### Local administrations

Local authorities manage wide range of spheres that influence the life of persons with disabilities: education, employment, social care, healthcare, culture and many others. However the activities in these spheres that address persons with disabilities are determined by the social protection framework and are limited mainly to the provision of different services. Despite the fact that the general framework is set by the nation-wide State Programmes, their implementation differs in explored cities, being influenced by such factors as budget, degree of motivation of local authorities, as well as presence of other local stakeholders (in most cases CSOs).

Let us consider the activities of local authorities in several fields.

**Departments of social protection of population** are in charge, besides of social payments, of work on barrier-free transformation of the urban environment and of work and employment of persons with disabilities. **Barrier-free transformation of the urban environment** is tightly connected with implementation of the states programmes<sup>6</sup>. The basic element of the local authorities' work on barrier-free environment transformation is building of wheelchair ramps, the researchers also noticed some measures for visually impaired persons, public buses with stairlifts, accessible toilets. The main problem in the sphere of barrier-free transformation of the urban environment is that multiple measures are implemented disconnectedly, so that their effect on accessibility of the environment appears quite limited.

**As for work and employment of persons with disabilities**, the Department's activities typically are limited to reservation of part of vacancies for persons with disabilities. However, there are no efficient efforts to stimulate interest for the employment among persons with disabilities; therefore, the reserved vacancies often remain unoccupied. It is of importance to notice such issues as inaccurate knowledge of legislation related to employment of persons with disabilities (very often the researchers met the opinion that persons in 1 and 2 disability categories do not have right to work), as well as negative stereotypes about persons with disabilities and their attitude towards work (a taste for parasitism [in Russian: *izhdivenchestvo*]).

**Department of ideology, culture and youth affairs** could be in charge of **work on changing the attitude of the society towards persons with disabilities**, yet typically, it does not have neither developed information strategy on the disability issue, nor focused work with the media in the spirit of bringing persons with and without disabilities closer to each other. There were observed sporadic exceptions, when the city culture and leisure establishments organized thematic events on the initiative of the department of ideology (most often, such events take form of exhibitions — books, kids' paintings etc.). The interdepartmental round table organized by

<sup>6</sup> Before 2015 — with the State Programme on creating barrier-free environment for physically handicapped persons for the years 2011-2015; since 2016 — with the State Programme on social protection and employment promotion.



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the department of ideology in Stoŭbcy on the Day of persons with disabilities [in Russian: *Den' Invalida*] should be noticed as well.

**Education departments (offices)** of local executive committees have wide range of functions in the field of education of persons with disabilities, but the national framework regulates all of them. Local policies aimed at promoting accessibility of education for persons with disabilities were not detected. During the interviews when the education of persons with disabilities was discussed, the interviewees talked mainly about material security: technical equipment of educational institutions (especially with wheelchair ramps), organization of New Year festivities for children with disabilities, provision of gifts for them.

**Cooperation of local authorities with persons with disabilities and their organizations** consists mainly of:

- Care assistance (grocery, transport, premises, gifts);
- Satisfying particular proposals/requests/demands (to provide medical staff, to install audible traffic lights etc.);
- Participation of representatives of organizations in the work of public councils, coordination councils on the issues of persons with disabilities, commissions controlling building regulatory compliance.

The agenda and the scope of the issues that are solved in such entities depends on both the openness of local authorities and the level of activeness of the community. Additionally, while talking about cooperation of local authorities with organizations of persons with disabilities, we could notice the mechanism of social service procurement that was enforced in Belarus in 2013, but it has not been used yet because of unclear procedures.

In summary, it could be said that **the state (through local executive committees) plays the crucial role in the issues where the financial assistance is needed.** However, **in what concerns non-financial participation of local authorities in ensuring the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, their role to date limits to: some measures to ensure employment, culture and leisure and control over the work on barrier-free environment.** It should be noted that there are significant gaps in many areas, lack of cooperation with organizations of persons with disabilities, incomprehensive perceptions of persons with disabilities and of their needs. Meanwhile, the activities initiated by local non-state stakeholders usually do not provoke negative reaction of local authorities.

### State-run organizations providing services for persons with disabilities

There are mainly two types of special state establishments that provide services for persons with disabilities in the explored cities: Territorial Centers for Social Services for Population and the Departments of Day Care for Persons with Disabilities affiliated to the Territorial centers.

The territorial centers are the specially established state entities to operate social policy in the municipality: providing public assistance and social services for vulnerable groups of population. In fact, the territorial centers concentrate substantially all socially oriented activities in the city. Territorial centers' activities towards persons with disabilities include keeping register of persons with disabilities living in the area and monitoring their life



conditions (via phone interviews and visits); assistance for recorded persons with disabilities (targeted aid of different kinds, employment assistance, psychological care, help in housekeeping etc.); organization of various study groups and clubs, musical, vocal and dancing ensembles, theatre ensembles, festivals and so on for persons with disabilities; organization of events (excursions, meetings on festive occasions etc.). Depending on the position of the territorial center's administration, the center can actively initiate contacts with its target groups or passively wait for recurrences.

The Departments of day care for persons with disabilities are the affiliated entities to the Territorial centers. Usually the Departments of day care host around 20-25 persons, what is miniscule part of all local persons with disabilities. The attenders are offered study groups and clubs, workshops, learning of self-care skills, computer class, fitness equipment, events on festive occasions. Moreover, at the premises of the Departments of day care there are projects on labour rehabilitation implemented.

The advantage of Territorial centers and Departments of day care is their inherent focus on disability sphere, availability of own resources, some degree of freedom in choosing type of activities and that they are more open (in comparison with local authorities), as well as the presence of highly motivated personnel.

However, there are some limits to the positive impact of the Territorial centers on the development of accessibility of small cities for persons with disabilities. First, they often provoke effect of isolation, "exclusion" — fixed space for persons with disabilities, their own world and their own events that do not cross with the space of other local inhabitants. Second point, and it is connected with the first one, there is a strong doubt that Territorial centers and the Departments of day care, taking into account their current approach, can effectively complete the mission of socialization of persons with disabilities. In addition from the point of view of developing accessibility strategies in small municipalities, the issue is the district level of the Territorial centers: they operate not exclusively in one given municipality but in the whole district (administrative unit (*rajon*)), they serve all persons with disabilities who live in this area and they have respective thinking patterns.

## Educational institutions

As for preschool and school (up to secondary level) education, the situation is as follows: the educational institutions usually have low motivation to integrate children with observable disabilities that affect their intellect and behavior (e.g. infantile cerebral paralysis, autism). Consequently, children with observable disabilities in most cases are excluded from the general educational practices: they study in special exclusive classes (called "classes with full integration"), or, what happens more frequently, attend special needs schools or are at homeschooling. Apart of motivation of educational institutions' administrations, the barrier for inclusive education is severe normative standards that constrain emerging inclusive initiatives. In "elitist" schools (such as gymnasia) the researchers often met the discriminatory attitude towards children with disabilities masked under the idea that children with disabilities are unable to pass the entrance exams, and also under the argument that the building is not equipped to receive such children.





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Children, who are not able to attend general kindergartens and schools, are sent to Centers of Correction and Development Training and Rehabilitation. Unlike in general educational institutions, in Centers of correction the researchers observed administrations showed high motivation for inclusion. The Centers of Correction and Development Training and Rehabilitation implement inclusion principles in their own work, they also cooperate with general schools (provide them with recommendations, define the educational programme and the following education itinerary for the children with disabilities) and engage with parents (consult them, guide them, in case if necessary the Centers can advise to try for diagnosis specification or change in order to get to general school). Apart of work with individual children, the Centers of correction can promote development of inclusive education at local level.

At the vocation training and higher education levels the main issue for persons with disabilities is the limited list of available specializations. The second important encumbrance is physical barriers of the environment, because of which the students have to opt for extramural form of study. Finally, there are social and infrastructure difficulties: issue of finding appropriate accommodation, issue of financing it, transportation issue etc. Nevertheless, the vocational education institutions visited by the researchers can be characterized as rather open for persons with disabilities: discriminatory attitude was not articulated, there are students with disabilities, some institutions grant discounts. Yet, despite of that, students with disabilities are very few. In some cities, there are customary itineraries of getting professions for children with disabilities (Babrujsk board school for hearing-impaired children and Mahilioŭ economic university; Pinsk Centre of Correction and Development Training and Rehabilitation, special needs school in Malatkovičy and vocation school in Ivacevičy).

### Cultural institutions

We consider cultural institutions in the explored cities the following: local cultural centers (“house of culture” [in Russian: *Dom kulury*]), art centers (Creative House [in Russian: *Dom tvorchestva*]), museums, exhibition halls, cinemas etc. The cultural institutions have many forms of interactions with persons with disabilities. Firstly, it is very frequent practice that persons with disabilities via public associations and Territorial centers and Departments of day care get free tickets. Secondly, the cultural institutions allow organizations of persons with disabilities and Departments of day care to use their premises free of charge. Thirdly, teachers of study groups and ateliers give master-classes and run regular workshops for persons with disabilities at the premises of Territorial centers and Departments of day care. The libraries often provide special services for persons with disabilities: bring them books, offer audiobooks, in some cases there is a special reading equipment. Finally, it could be noted that in some cases persons with disabilities are hired by the cultural institutions, more rarely as qualified workers — guideline developer, teacher of study group, more often — as non-qualified workers: cleaning person, concierge, and book sorter.



## Social activism (NGOs, activists, informal communities, churches)

### Organizations of persons with disabilities

In the explored Belarusian cities there are two types of CSOs working in the field of disability: offices of national organizations (Belarusian Society of Visually Impaired People, Belarusian Society of People with Disabilities, Belarusian association of assistance to children and young people with disabilities, Republican Association of Wheelchair Users, Belarusian Deaf People Society) and local initiatives.

The central element of national organizations' offices' work is assistance for their members (humanitarian aid and help for individuals in asserting their rights in relations with local authorities). Offices that are more active also organize meetings, excursions for their members; artistic circles are very frequent (chorus, theatre). Besides networking and entertainment, some organizations work in the field of employment (establish social enterprises; find work from home opportunities). The role of national organizations in barrier-free environment transformation work should be specially highlighted: the scope of engagement in this field varies from lobbying separate measures (e.g. installation of audible beaconing) to membership in commissions that approve barrier-free environment and strategic partnership with local authorities (discussion of the programme for barrier-free environment development, joint monitoring).

Local initiatives are very few (researchers met only 5 initiatives, in 3 cities out of 14), however some of them are quite dynamic. So, Centre for support of young persons with disabilities (Stolin) has organized for 8 years already a 10-day theatre festival, "Helping hand" (Rahačoŭ) builds a center for wheelchair users.

From the point of view of cooperation and partnership of organizations of persons with disabilities with other city entities and with each other, the density of contacts depends on personal relations between leaders, on their priorities and intentions, availability or lack of infrastructure. In the explored cities, there were met cooperative relationships, parallel existence of organizations and even competitive and conflictual relations.

### Persons with disabilities

Among persons with disabilities, we could accentuate for our purpose three types of active and prominent personalities: local **artistic celebrities** (locals like them and are proud of them; they are well integrated in the local framework of cultural and leisure institutions); "trouble-makers" (they are known mainly because they do not match stereotypes about persons with disabilities: have active and independent lifestyle, do not want for pity); just **active persons** (they seek to live a full-fledged life, not focusing on their disabilities, yet they are not social activists promoting full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities). However, representatives of these three types are very few. Generally, it turns out that the overwhelming majority of persons with disabilities who live in small cities most of the time stay at home, many of them almost never go outside.



## CSOs of other profiles, informal communities, volunteering

There are quite few organized social activities in small cities. Usually there is the office of Belarusian republican youth union — BRYU (eventually it is active), and no or few independent NGOs. In the explored cities the researchers met organizations of entrepreneurs, filial branches of international charity organizations (Red Cross, Caritas), and some others.

The situation with informal communities is even worth. They are a few, but it is interesting to note that across several cities there are active biker clubs, what is more, they are socially active. Only Babrujsk could be positively distinguished, there are more groups, some are “branches” of initiatives from Minsk, some are local. Almost all initiatives in Babrujsk concentrate around the time-club “1387”.

Volunteer initiatives usually exist in general and vocation schools, on the premises of NGOs (BRYU, Red Cross) and churches. Mainly, volunteers collect humanitarian aid, visit single elderly people and persons with disabilities who live in special institutions and at their own, give gifts. In general, it could be said that the volunteering movement in the small cities is not massive or coherent.

## Churches and confessional organizations

In the explored cities, there are catholic, orthodox and protestant communities. Usually the activities of the religious communities in the field of disability includes charity for persons with disabilities and visits to special establishments. However, there are some cases of uncommon approach: in Niasviž, the catholic priest tried to create center for dog therapy; in Kobrin, the evangelical Christian Baptist church organizes Christian camp for persons with disabilities “Pearlet” [in Russian: “Zhemchuzhinka”]. In some municipalities, certain political weight of some religious organizations could be highlighted.

## Local media

In the small cities, with some minor exceptions, there is only one local media: state-owned weekly district newspaper, even in the bigger municipalities of Babrujsk and Pinsk the situation is almost the same. So far, the role of media in the sphere of disability is limited to regular publications, mainly informational (announcement for crowd-funding, shortwritings about events for persons with disabilities and on the Day of persons with disabilities, information about the services for persons with disabilities). It should be noted that people who work in the sphere of disability are satisfied with the current format of their cooperation with the media. Local newspapers can be considered as important resource, as far as they are massively read by locals and used to disseminate information, and the editors and journalists have wide networks of contacts and can potentially be intermediaries in relations between entities working with persons with disabilities, other stakeholder and general public.



## Business

Situation with business in small Belarusan cities is complicated, particularly recently. The entrepreneurs complain about economic crisis. Participation of business of all levels in the sphere of disability implies most often sporadic sponsor support for state-run and society's structures and for individual persons with disabilities. Almost unique interesting initiative of business stakeholders in the sphere of disability is hippotherapy for persons with disabilities in home for disabled people in Pastavy. Also the first private nursing home for elderly people and persons with disabilities in Valožyn could be noticed. Repeatedly the respondents drew attention of the researchers to the non-public character of help by the business stakeholders. Participation of local entrepreneurs in employment of persons with disabilities was not observed.





## Potential and opportunities for launching in Belarusian regions the mechanisms of local planning to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities

Research report (abridged version)

# Challenges and perspectives of implementing in Belarus the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities

With the purpose to identify the challenges and the perspectives of implementing the UN Convention in the small Belarusian cities we hold the analysis of cooperation of different actors that have important role in ensuring accessibility of physical and communication spaces and access to employment for persons with disabilities (among such actors are local authorities, state-run structures, CSOs, business etc.)<sup>7</sup>. This analysis allows uncovering barriers existing in this sphere and defining the ways to overcome them, including possibilities of meaningful cooperation of actors<sup>8</sup>.

From the point of view of subjectness, the existing practices of ensuring the accessibility of different resources for persons with disabilities are characterized by the dominant role of local authorities and limited participation of other actors (the second main stakeholder is CSOs). Herewith it should be noticed that the local authorities set the agenda align with the plans and budget developed by the superior bodies. The issue is that this approach significantly narrows the possibilities for participation of other actors. Still, the participation of persons with disabilities and their organizations in decision-making processes about policies and programmes, including those directly concerning them is foreseen by the UN Convention. Moreover, they have the fullest image of their needs and can offer innovative solutions. That's why it is important to pay attention to the best practices met in the explored cities of involving persons with disabilities and their organizations, and also other actors in development and implementation of local authorities' strategies and programmes and to tend to put them in practice. Among such best practices, joint audit of barrier-free environment and regular multiagency consultations could be mentioned.

The second issue identified in course of exploring the cities is insufficient coordination between actors, which leads to fragmentary results in ensuring accessibility. The bright example in the sphere of access of persons with disabilities to the employment could be cited. Departments of social protection of population reserve part of vacancies for persons with disabilities, while the enterprises are often not ready to hire a person with disabilities (because of, for example, lack of infrastructure) and the demand for employment among persons with disabilities is not high. Meanwhile the Territorial Centers for Social Services help persons with disabilities to find vocational training/retraining, but without analysis of employment perspectives (current vacancies) when choosing the specialization. Further, organizations of persons with disabilities offer employment on their social enterprises and (or) from home. In result, the reserved vacancies remain unoccupied, persons with disabilities who are interested in employment find jobs on their own and the important issue of inclusive employment remains unsolved.

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<sup>7</sup> We used the Customer Journey Map (CJM) instrument. This tool is actually used in marketing to analyse the process of cooperation between service provider and customer. The question is to understand how to make the customer's path towards the service maximally comfortable, thereby increasing his/her loyalty and engagement in the consumption of the service.

<sup>8</sup> Examples of the maps in the three analysed spheres, as well as description of channels of cooperation, barriers and ways to overcome them see in the **Annex**.



We could also mention the example of the social taxi service which is offered by the Territorial Centers for Social Services in many cities, but the target groups are not aware of it and, by consequence, do not use it. Therefore, in order to raise effectiveness of activities of different actors it is necessary to pay attention to overcoming the issue of insufficient communication and coordination.

The third challenge in the existing activities framework in the sphere of disability is that the major part of services offered to persons with disabilities by the public and social entities are exclusive: exclusive employment, exclusive leisure time activities, exclusive education etc. This contradicts the UN Convention, since such exclusive services do not enhance involvement of persons with disabilities in general city spaces and social practices but create for them the exclusive world that does not cross with the city. In order to overcome this tendency it is necessary to work both with perceptions of people (on the side of service providing structures and on the side of persons with disabilities and their families, what is also important), and with infrastructure gaps, from physical barriers to legislative norms and lack of competences.

We think important to draw attention to the innovative practices of traditional stakeholders in the sphere of disability, so as to encourage their development and dissemination, and also to the potential of non-conventional actors (local civic initiatives and informal communities, business, religious organizations, media).



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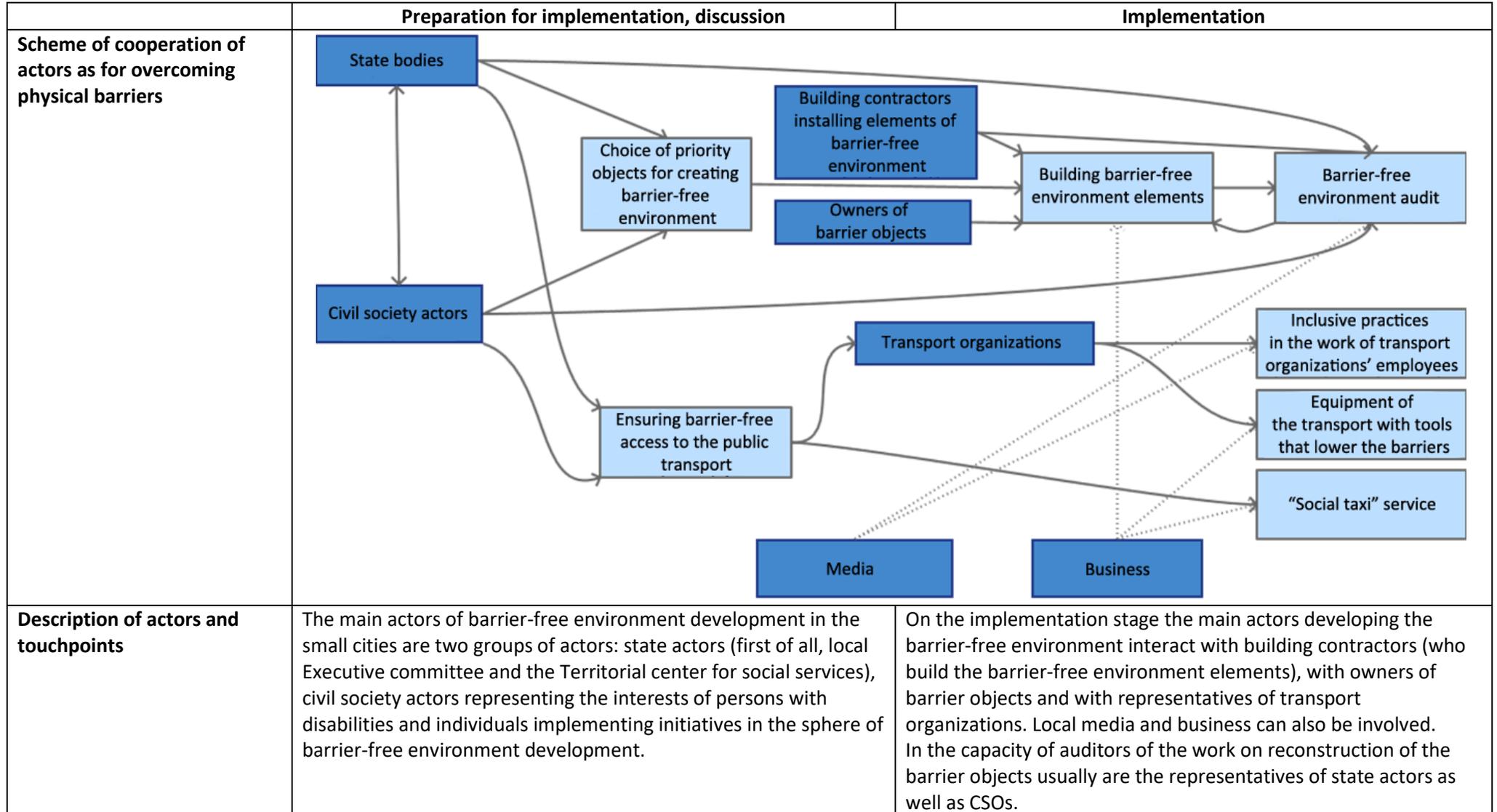
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# Annex

## Development of accessibility of physical space



<p><b>Barriers</b></p>	<p>Non-crossing activities of different social and state actors, or the conflictual relationship between these actors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of involvement of persons with disabilities in the audit of the barrier-free environment.</li> <li>• Usual formal approach to the building of barrier-free environment.</li> <li>• Complexity of procedures of receiving assistance from international organizations and of participating in contracting out of social service.</li> <li>• Cases of opposition of the owners of the objects to the construction of barrier-free environment.</li> <li>• Discretion of business in its social activities.</li> <li>• Cases of ignorance of persons with disabilities of the possibilities and means of lowering barriers in their environment.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Means of barrier lowering</b></p>	<p>Increasing involvement of persons with disabilities and their organizations in the processes of developing the barrier-free environment standards and in identifying the priority objects for reconstruction.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of practice of joint audit of barrier-free environment with participation of persons with disabilities.</li> <li>• Stimulating involvement of local business-communities and media in the process of barrier-free environment development.</li> <li>• Put in practice of the “social taxi” service.</li> <li>• Raising attractiveness of charity within the business community or development of possibilities for anonymous donations.</li> <li>• Monitoring of barrier-free environment through interactive online maps.</li> </ul>

## Development of communication accessibility

	Exclusive communication	Inclusive communication
<b>Scheme of cooperation of actors</b>		
<b>Description of actors and touchpoints</b>	<p>Civic and state-run organizations are main actors developing communication accessibility. Families of persons with disabilities also play the crucial role in forming the communication space for persons with disabilities.</p>	<p>Conventional leisure organizations, churches and volunteers, business can be involved in the process of developing the communication space. The Internet can also be the tool to overcome communication barriers.</p>
<b>Barriers</b>	<p>Priority of exclusive and event-based approach in organization of leisure for persons with disabilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical barriers in the buildings of the conventional leisure organizations.</li> <li>• Cases of ignorance of persons with disabilities of existing possibilities to satisfy the wants for communication.</li> <li>• Issue of lack of competences in the area of work with persons with disabilities.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Means of barrier lowering</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moving from event-based approach to the inclusive approach in assessing the effectiveness of actors working in development of leisure activities of persons with disabilities.</li> <li>• Cooperation with relatives of the persons with disabilities. Involvement of not only persons of disabilities but of their families in the inclusive practices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization of consultation system aimed at awareness raising of persons with disabilities about possible difficulties of integration in social environment and possible solutions. Ensuring possibility to get such consultations in different formats appropriate for concrete groups of persons with disabilities (in person, by phone, online, guarantee of confidentiality in course of consultation).</li> <li>• Stimulating involvement of local business community and other influential actors in the development of inclusive leisure.</li> <li>• Identification and putting in practice of means to overcome occasional barriers (for example, organization of visiting service for library users).</li> </ul>
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## Access to employment

	Preparation for employment	Exclusive employment	Conditionally inclusive and inclusive employment
<b>Scheme of cooperation of actors</b>			
<b>Description of actors and touchpoints</b>	<p>Territorial center for social services is the main hub most of communication on the employment of persons with disabilities goes through. The Territorial center organizes adaptation for labour activity, and also enhances communication between persons with disabilities and external educational institutions.</p>	<p>Territorial center can play the role of specialized employer, providing opportunity for labour activities in terms of public works affiliated to the Centre, as well as possibility of specialized employment in the Centre. Organization of work from home is also possible.</p>	<p>Persons with disabilities employed inclusively are much fewer than those employed exclusively.</p>

<b>Barriers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical barriers.</li> <li>• Motivation barriers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation for non-demanded specializations occurs; it leads to necessity to go back to the stage of interaction with the system.</li> <li>• Situation is possible when persons with disabilities after retraining cannot find specialized employment.</li> </ul>	<p>Conversion of specialized employment to the inclusive employment is hampered and rarely occurs.</p>
<b>Means of barrier lowering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of remote communication with persons with disabilities could discharge logistics of Territorial centers and other organizations.</li> <li>• Organization of consultations aimed at awareness-raising of persons with disabilities about possibilities of distance learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stimulating involvement of local business community in the development of specialized employment.</li> <li>• Organization of consultations aimed at awareness-raising of persons with disabilities about possibilities of employment that allows work from home.</li> <li>• Media can accelerate decision-making related to training/retraining of persons with disabilities and possibly to other issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of relevant indices of transition towards inclusive employment, use of these indices in assessing the effectiveness of development measures.</li> <li>• Stimulating involvement of local business community in the development of inclusive employment.</li> <li>• Engagement of organizations providing education in IT to the professional training/retraining looks the promising way to develop inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour activities.</li> </ul>



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**Potential and opportunities for launching in Belarusan regions  
the mechanisms of local planning to promote, protect and ensure  
the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and  
fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities**

Research report (abridged version)

The research was initiated by  
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