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THE ROLE OF SELF-ADVOCACY IN THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

541.02. Social structure, social institutions and processes

Abstract of the PhD Thesis in Sociology

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CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

Relevance and importance of the topic addressed. People with disabilities represent a significant segment of the population in the Republic of Moldova – 104.3 thousand in 2023 (NBS 2023, p.242), which represents about 6% compared to the number of the population with usual residence. 17.1% experience memory and/or concentration difficulties (Generații și gen 2022).

Despite the fact that individuals with intellectual disabilities have the right to actively participate in society, their actual involvement remains limited. Marginalization, restricted access to services, and exclusion from decision-making processes persist (Malcoci & Munteanu, 2017; Ivașcu et al., 2021).

Self-advocacy defined as the ability of individuals with intellectual disabilities to express their needs, desires, and rights, plays a pivotal role in promoting social inclusion. However, systemic and societal barriers continue to reinforce isolation and dependence, underscoring the urgent need for further research and action in this area.

The research of self-advocacy is highly relevant because it meets a real and urgent need of persons with intellectual disabilities to be heard, recognized, and involved in their own decisions. Exploring of this topic, responds to an urgent need for social transformation an d alignment with the principles of an inclusive society, centered on participation, equity and respect for human rights.

The growing interest of civil society and organizations of persons with disabilities in strengthening self-advocacy highlights the increasing relevance of this topic. In recent years, Moldova has seen the rise of local initiatives and pilot projects aimed at fostering the direct participation of individuals with intellectual disabilities in decision-making — whether through public consultations, advocacy networks, or initiative groups. Non-governmental organizations are playing a crucial role in creating spaces for training and expression, equipping individuals with essential communication, leadership, and civic engagement skills. These efforts mark a fundamental shift from an assisted model to one focused on autonomy, empowering persons with disabilities as active contributors to society.

However, these initiatives remain isolated and insufficiently documented, and the lack of theoretical and empirical grounding limits their ability to be scaled up and strengthened in national strategies. In this sense, the research becomes not only timely but essential, providing a rigorous analytical framework that can support the scaling and sustainability of the emerging practices of self-advocacy.

The relevance of this theme is further reinforced by international and national legal and political frameworks that promote the active participation of individuals with disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities. The Republic of Moldova has ratified fundamental international instruments, including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2010) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention (2021), which enshrine the right to expression and participation, summarized in the principle "Nothing for us, without us". These commitments are also reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which promotes the principle of "leaving no one behind". Internally, Law no. 60/2012 on Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, along with the National Programme for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (2017–2022) and the National Program for the Deinstitutionalization of Persons with Intellectual and Psychosocial Disabilities (2018–2026), provide the legal and strategic foundation for the active participation of individuals with disabilities in community life.

Despite existing legal frameworks, a significant gap remains between policy commitments and lived experiences. Self-advocacy is not yet systematically embedded in services and decision-making processes, leaving the voices of individuals with intellectual disabilities largely unheard. This research is not only timely but also deeply relevant, as it seeks to translate formal commitments into concrete, effective practices that ensure their meaningful and dignified participation. By strengthening an

inclusive approach, the study reinforces the idea that people with intellectual disabilities should not just be policy beneficiaries, but active co-authors in shaping the decisions that affect their lives.

From a scientific standpoint, self-advocacy among individuals with intellectual disabilities remains an underexplored field. While the concept emerged in the 1980s and has been extensively developed in Western literature — particularly in the USA, Canada, UK, and Australia — research in Central and Eastern Europe remains scarce and fragmented. In Moldova, academic studies on self-advocacy are virtually nonexistent, leaving the voices of individuals with intellectual disabilities largely absent from scholarly discussions. Though existing research addresses inclusion from educational, occupational, and social perspectives, the role of self-advocacy as a mechanism for asserting one's own voice remains significantly overlooked.

This PhD thesis seeks to bridge the existing gap by establishing a conceptual framework that places self-advocacy at the core of social inclusion and as a vital tool for empowering individuals with intellectual disabilities. Its significance extends beyond theoretical exploration, offering practical applications that can inform and strengthen public policies, ensuring they are more effectively aligned with the lived realities and needs of people with intellectual disabilities.

Furthermore, the impact of self-advocacy is often examined in a superficial manner or limited to short-term effects, without considering long-term developments or incorporating innovative tools like digital technologies that could enhance expression and participation for persons with intellectual disabilities. The absence of systematic and participatory approaches underscores a significant gap in the literature, reinforcing the need for research that is deeply rooted in local contexts and informed by the firsthand experiences of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

The relevance of the theme is further reinforced by its interdisciplinary nature, drowing insights from sociology, social work, psychology, education and law. This comprehensive approach fosters a deeper understanding of self-advocacy and contributes to the development of intervention models that promote sustainable inclusion.

The research problem stems from the lack of a theoretical and empirical framework to explain the role of self-advocacy in the social inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities in Moldova. Without such a foundation, self-advocacy remains underexplored, poorly understood, and insufficiently integrated into existing social policies and practices.

This thesis seeks to address that gap by establishing a strong conceptual and practical basis for recognizing self-advocacy as a crucial mechanism for fostering active participation, autonomy, and inclusion. Through this research, key obstacles faced in self-advocacy processes have been identified, along with success factors and the necessary support mechanisms to strengthen advocacy efforts within Moldova's specific context.

The study underscores the significant impact of self-advocacy at both the personal and societal levels — enhancing individuals' quality of life while driving policy improvements, shifting community perceptions, and advancing human rights on a broader scale.

The purpose of the PhD thesis. The PhD thesis aims to examine the complex, multidimensional nature of self-advocacy among individuals with intellectual disabilities and assesses its impact on their social inclusion in the Republic of Moldova.

Objectives of the PhD thesis: (a) analyzing the historiography and conceptual-theoretical foundations of self-advocacy among persons with disabilities in the context of social inclusion; (b) establishing conceptual approaches to self-advocacy and social inclusion of persons with disabilities; (c) determining the methodology for the complex research of the phenomenon of self-advocacy of persons with intellectual disabilities in the context of social inclusion; (d) examining how persons with intellectual disabilities construct and express their own identity in the Moldova's social context; (e) exploring international and national models, as well as best practices, in self-advocacy for

individuals with intellectual disabilities and its role in fostering social inclusion; (f) identifying the barriers faced by persons with intellectual disabilities and the success factors in self-advocacy processes to enhance social inclusion; (g) assessing the impact of self-advocacy on the social inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities in the Republic of Moldova; (h) providing recommendations to national social actors on advancing self-advocacy efforts and maximizing their impact on promoting social inclusion.

General hypothesis of the PhD thesis: the self-advocacy skills and efforts of people with intellectual disabilities support their social inclusion and contribute to an increased level of well-being.

Working hypotheses: (1) the self-advocacy and advocacy actions on behalf of people with intellectual disabilities contribute to the development of a legal and public policy framework that integrates their rights; (2) individual, attitudinal and systemic barriers faced by persons with intellectual disabilities significantly influence the effectiveness of their self-advocacy and social inclusion efforts; (3) empowering individuals with intellectual disabilities strengthens their engagement in self-advocacy, fostering a greater social inclusion and participation.

Research methodology. The PhD thesis employs a mixed-methods approach, with a strong emphasis on qualitative research, which is particularly suited for studying self-advocacy among individuals with intellectual disabilities. Qualitative methods facilitate adaptive communication, foster a climate of trust, and enable the exploration of sensitive ethical issues. The applied qualitative methods include participatory observation, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, case studies, and desk reviews. To complement these methods, a questionnaire-based sociological survey serves as a quantitative tool for assessing the broader context and impact of initiatives and programs supporting self-advocacy in Moldova, led by civil society organizations (CSOs) active in the disability sector. The integration of multiple research methods ensures data triangulation, strengthening the validity of the findings.

Grounded in the principles of inclusive research, the PhD thesis prioritizes the active participation of individuals with intellectual disabilities, recognizing them as central contributors to the research process. This approach is essential for fostering a deep and respectful understanding of their experiences with self-advocacy and social inclusion.

The scientific novelty of the PhD thesis lies in introducing the concept of self-advocacy among individuals with intellectual disabilities into the academic discourse of Moldova, specifically within the context of social inclusion. A key contribution is the self-developed definition of self-advocacy, grounded in existing literature and adapted to Moldova's unique sociocultural landscape. *Self-advocacy is thus understood as the active and direct engagement of individuals with intellectual disabilities in decision-making at personal, community, and societal levels — expressing their voices and exercising their agency to foster authentic and sustainable social inclusion.*

In addition, a model of a logical framework of the self-advocacy of persons with disabilities was developed, with vast potential for practical applicability, presented in the next section of this paper.

Another innovative element of the PhD thesis refers to the application of principles and techniques used in the inclusive research process – an emerging approach in disability studies. Thus, people with intellectual disabilities participated in all stages of research, and their opinions constitute the empirical basis of the recommendations developed.

Theoretical importance and applicative value. The PhD thesis opens a new chapter in the study of disability in the Republic of Moldova, providing a solid theoretical basis for future research. By investigating the post-Soviet context, the PhD thesis brings valuable perspectives on supporting the self-advocacy of people with intellectual disabilities and social inclusion at the regional level. The development of a unique definition of self-advocacy helps to clarify the concept and eliminate ambiguities within the existing literature. Additionally, the proposed logical framework model serves

as a theoretical basis for advancing self-advocacy in Moldova, facilitating comparisons with international models while highlighting local specificities and integrating best practices. By exploring the intersection between self-advocacy and social inclusion, the PhD thesis presents a comprehensive theoretical approach that underscores the pivotal role of self-advocacy in fostering genuine and lasting inclusion.

The practical value of the research is evident in its application to the creation and support of self-advocacy groups across multiple districts in the country. Empowering individuals with intellectual disabilities has strengthened their active participation in advocacy initiatives, policy engagement, deinstitutionalization efforts, and shifts in public perception at both local and national levels. This experience informed the development of a logical framework model for self-advocacy within a social inclusion framework. The model has practical applicability in training programs for professionals in fields such as social work, healthcare, and education, enhancing service delivery and fostering greater community inclusion. Research findings have also contributed to training practitioners and families in supporting the self-advocacy skills of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

The PhD thesis provides recommendations for the development of national policies in the field of disability, emphasizing the importance of the direct participation of persons with disabilities, including intellectual ones, in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. Through the author's contributions, self-advocates have actively participated in public consultations and policy-making discussions, showcasing the tangible impact of research in promoting inclusion and civic engagement.

Notably, the self-advocacy initiatives developed with the author's involvement were internationally recognized as an innovative practice in the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities' competition in 2020 (KHS 2021). This acknowledgment underscores the success of the practice and represents a validation of the author's contribution to the development of self-advocacy in the Republic of Moldova, while elevating its visibility on the global stage. The findings and recommendations of the PhD thesis support the international exchange of knowledge and good practices in the field of rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities, including intellectual disabilities.

Ultimately, this research lays the groundwork for future studies and deeper exploration of self-advocacy and social inclusion for individuals with intellectual disabilities in Moldova.

The scientific results of this research have been presented at several national and international scientific-practical conferences. At the national level, they were discussed in the following events: "Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Multidisciplinary Approaches" (Chișinău, 2024), "Sociology and Social Work: Research and Professionalization" (Chișinău, 2022), and "Contemporary Research and Evaluation Methodologies" (Chișinău, 2021).

Internationally, the findings were featured at "New Challenges in the Socio-Human Sciences at the Beginning of the Third Millennium" (Sibiu, 2024), "Economic Growth in the Conditions of Globalization" (Chișinău, 2023), "Economic and Social Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Analyses, Forecasts, and Strategies to Mitigate the Consequences" (Chișinău, 2020), and "Political and Administrative Science: Global Challenges, Local Solutions" (Chișinău, 2020) conferences.

Contributions from the PhD dissertation have been published in 13 *scientific publications*, including 11 specialized literature from the Republic of Moldova and 2 in international publications.

The results of the research on self-advocacy and its role in the social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in the Republic of Moldova were discussed with and validated by the members of the self-advocacy groups and their support persons, assisted by I.P. Keystone Moldova.

The main results of the research on career guidance for people with disabilities in the Republic of Moldova were published in the sociological study "Policies and practices for career guidance of young people with disabilities in the Republic of Moldova", distributed both in the libraries of academic institutions and in the libraries of public authorities and CSOs in the Republic of Moldova. The results of this research were also presented at the public launch event of the study on 27.01.2022 (Privesceu ©2024), but also at the international workshop "*Because Neighbours Grow Up Together: Social inclusion in Central and Eastern neighbourhood CBC programmes and projects*", organized by the European Neighbourhood Instrument for Cross-Border Cooperation ENI CBC on 10.11.2022.

In addition, the results of the research on the role of self-advocacy in the social inclusion of persons with disabilities and of the research on career guidance policies and practices, were used in the development of 2 continuing professional training programs within I.P. Keystone Moldova for the occupations of "Counselor" and "Vocational Counselor", in accordance with the Classification of Occupations in the Republic of Moldova. In this regard, the author of the PhD thesis participated in the development *of the Curricula and Course Support on Intermediation of access to the labor market for people with disabilities* and the *Curriculum and Course Support on Career Counseling and Guidance for People with Disabilities.* The organisation has been authorised to provide the full-time lifelong learning service with 2 ECTS per programme. The career guidance program was authorized based on ANACEC Decision no. 68/22.12.2021 and the Decision of the Ministry of Education and Research no. 28/20.01.2022, and the work intermediation program was authorized based on ANACEC Decision no. 69/22.12.2021 and the Decision of the Ministry of Education and Research no. 28 of 20.01.2022.

Volume and structure of the PhD thesis: The PhD thesis includes the introduction, three chapters (which include 4 tables and 12 figures), general conclusions and recommendations. Annotations in Romanian, Russian and English, keywords, bibliography (209 sources), list of abbreviations and 11 annexes are presented.

Keywords: self-advocacy, people with intellectual disabilities, social inclusion

CONTENT OF THE THESIS

In the **INTRODUCTION**, the PhD thesis outlines the relevance and significance of the researched topic, defines the purpose, objectives, and hypotheses of the study, and presents the scientific novelty of the findings and the key research problem addressed. Additionally, it explains the theoretical importance and practical applicability of the results.

Chapter **1. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SELF-ADVOCACY AMONG PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL INCLUSION** provides an in-depth analysis of historiography and the current state of research in the field. It also explores the conceptualization of self-advocacy for individuals with disabilities within the framework of social inclusion.

Subchapter **1.1. The Evolution of Research on Self-Advocacy among Persons with Disabilities in the Context of Social Inclusion** examines the development of scientific investigations into self-advocacy for individuals with intellectual disabilities, offering a comprehensive and rigorous theoretical foundation for understanding this phenomenon.

The concept of self-advocacy was introduced into academic discourse in the 1980s through the work of European, American and Canadian researchers (Gray and Jackson, 2002). In Moldova, however, it only entered the scientific domain in 2020, following contributions from the author of this thesis. This delay highlights not only an epistemic gap but also the broader absence of a strong

academic tradition in disability research, particularly regarding the participation of individuals with disabilities in shaping knowledge about themselves.

The theoretical exploration of self-advocacy is approached interdisciplinarily, integrating perspectives from sociology, psychology, philosophy, and related fields. Key theoretical frameworks — such as structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism, social identity theory, social constructivism, and theory of power — are examined, each playing a vital role in deepening the understanding of self-advocacy. Additionally, theories of participation, self-determination, disability and social role valorization contribute complementary viewpoints essential for conceptualizing self-advocacy. In this framework, self-advocacy is not merely an individual expression but a relational and collective process, shaped through social interactions, fostering group identity, and contesting marginalization and exclusion.

Self-advocacy is further analyzed through the lens of disability paradigm shifts — moving from charitable and medical models centered on dependence and intervention to social and rights-based models that emphasize active participation and equal rights. This transition was fundamental in recognizing self-advocacy as a legitimate form of social and political engagement. Within these new conceptual frameworks, individuals with disabilities, intellectual in particular, are no longer perceived as passive beneficiaries of protection but as active rights-holders capable of influencing the course of their own social and civic trajectories. The subchapter also underscores that self-advocacy goes beyond merely voicing opinions; it requires profound systemic transformations at both institutional and societal levels to enable genuine participation and recognition of individuals with disabilities (Goodley, 2014).

Additionally, the subchapter identifies key contributions while acknowledging existing limitations, particularly in the authentic representation of individuals with intellectual disabilities. One major concern is the risk of their voices being replaced or mediated by parents, specialists, or organizations which, despite good intentions, may not fully capture their lived experiences. This reinforces the urgent need for an inclusive and participatory approach, ensuring that individuals with disabilities are not merely consulted but actively involved as co-authors of their own narratives and decision-making processes.

A notable aspect of this subchapter is its emphasis on alternative empirical sources — especially reports from international organizations and Moldovan SCOs. These sources provide participatory, accessible, and contextually adapted data, often offering more accurate reflections of the everyday realities of individuals with intellectual disabilities than traditional academic literature.

In conclusion, the subchapter demonstrates that self-advocacy is neither an isolated nor a spontaneous phenomenon; rather, it is the outcome of a complex theoretical and historical evolution. Rooted in a web of scientific paradigms and the social realities of marginalization, self-advocacy is an essential condition for achieving authentic social inclusion for individuals with intellectual disabilities in Moldova.

Subchapter **1.2. Conceptual Approaches to Self-Advocacy and Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities** lays the theoretical foundation for two central concepts of the research — self-advocacy and social inclusion. Self-advocacy is defined as the process through which individuals with disabilities assert their voices, express their needs, claim their rights, and actively engage in community life. This subchapter integrates multiple theoretical perspectives, framing self-advocacy as resistance to oppression, the reconfiguration of social identity, a response to unequal power dynamics, and both a personal and collective form of activism (Petri et al. 2020; Carr 1994).

Self-advocacy is analyzed through both an individual lens — as a means of self-expression and self-determination — and a collective one, where organized action, advocacy groups, and social

movements seek to promote justice and equity by challenging power imbalances in society (Callus 2013; Gray and Jackson 2002).

A critical aspect explored in this subchapter is the strong association between self-advocacy and intellectual disabilities. Historically, individuals with intellectual disabilities have faced systemic barriers that have severely limited their ability to express themselves and influence decisions affecting their lives. Due to functional limitations and the need for specialized support, they have been disproportionately excluded from exercising their right to active participation and self-determination, compared to individuals with other types of disabilities (Buchanan and Walmsley 2006).

This subchapter also seeks to classify self-advocacy groups based on their level of autonomy and the type of organizational support they receive. These groups provide safe environments where individuals with intellectual disabilities can develop self-expression skills, assert their identity, engage in decision-making, and actively participate in shaping their futures. The structure and purpose of self-advocacy groups vary, ranging from informal local initiatives to large-scale international coalitions. While each model has strengths and limitations, all play a vital role in fostering empowerment and transforming social relationships (Callus 2013; Schoultz 1997).

Regarding social inclusion, the subchapter critically analyzes traditional approaches focused exclusively on access to resources and services. Instead, it advocates for the adoption of the ecological model of inclusion (Simplican et al. 2015 – Figure 1), which conceptualizes inclusion as an active process encompassing community participation, a sense of belonging, respect for diversity and equity. The model highlights the interplay between individual, relational, organizational, community, and political factors in shaping meaningful inclusion.

Self-advocacy is presented as a foundational element of genuine inclusion — shifting individuals from passive recipients of services to engaged actors who actively contribute to changing societal perceptions, influencing public policies, and creating new social identities.

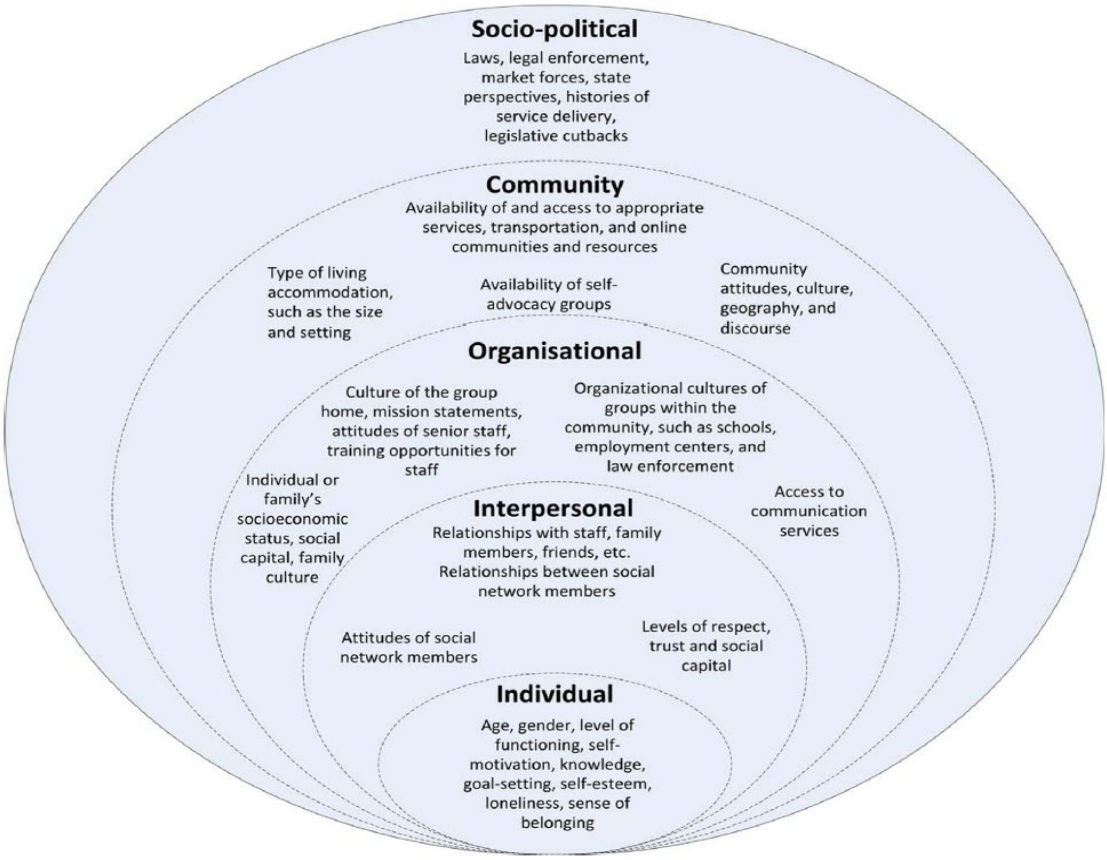


Fig. 1. The Ecological Model of Social Inclusion (adapted from Simplican et al. 2015, p. 25)

The conceptual analysis highlights the numerous benefits of self-advocacy for individuals with disabilities and their social inclusion. These include enhanced confidence and self-esteem, expanded social networks, the development of new social roles, and greater participation in community life.

A major contribution of the subchapter is the formulation of a unique definition of self-advocacy, presented in the Conceptual Framework above.

Subchapter **1.3. Methodologies of Sociological Research of the Self-Advocacy of Persons with Disabilities in the Context of Social Inclusion** explores the theoretical and methodological foundations of the sociological research of the self-advocacy of persons with disabilities, with a focus on the specifics of inclusive research. This subchapter presents key principles of inclusive research, which actively engage individuals with disabilities — including intellectual disabilities — throughout all stages of the research process (Research for ALL 2020; Atkinson 2002).

The analysis of methodologies employed in international studies informed the development of a robust methodological framework for investigating self-advocacy among individuals with intellectual disabilities within the Moldovan context. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, integrating qualitative methods, which are essential for gaining deep insights into self-advocacy, with quantitative methods. Samples included self-advocates, their families, support persons, and CSOs active in the disability sector in Moldova (Table 1).

The research process adhered to rigorous ethical standards, including informed consent, confidentiality, and validation with members of self-advocacy groups. This aligns with international best practices and represents a significant contribution to the advancement of inclusive research

methodologies in the Republic of Moldova (Cojocaru 2021; Bigby 2015; Callus 2013; Williams 2002).

Table 1. Empirical basis of the PhD thesis

Name of the study	Methodologies	Year
The role of self-advocacy of persons with disabilities in the Republic of Moldova in their social inclusion (Sociological study)	• 3 focus group discussions (FGD), involving 18 participants, including self-advocates, their parents, and support persons from self-advocacy groups • 8 in-depth interviews (IDI) with self-advocates and experts representating CSOs active in the disability sector • A questionnaire-based survey, targeting 35 CSOs affiliated with AOPD • 2 case studies featuring individuals with intellectual disabilities who are members of self-advocacy groups • Participatory observation applied while engaging in direct interaaction with 150 people with disabilities, members of self-advocacy groups from 15 districts across the country	2021-2024
Policies and practices for career guidance of young people with disabilities in the Republic of Moldova (Sociological study)	• A questionnaire-based survey on a sample of 1111 young people with disabilities, with 33% representing individuals with intellectual disabilities • 31 IDIs with persons with disabilities with experience of self-advocacy, representatives of central public authorities, the education sector and CSOs active in the field of disability • 4 FGDs involving 30 people (young people with disabilities, parents of children and young people with disabilities)	2021
Access of the general population and vulnerable groups to health services during the pandemic period (Sociological study)	• Questionnaire-based sociological survey. Sub-sample: 200 people with disabilities (out of total sample 1805 adults) • 4 FGD with representatives of CSOs active in the field of disability • 20 IDIs with experts, representating central and local public authorities and health service providers • Content analysis of telephone calls received by the Free Helpline for Persons with Disabilities	2021
The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on people with disabilities (Sociological study)	• Questionnaire-based sociological survey. Sample 257 people with disabilities, their family members and social service staff • 2 FGDs involving 38 representatives of CSOs active in the field of disability • 20 IDIs with experts representating central and local public authorities, health service providers. • Content analysis of telephone calls received by the Free Helpline for Persons with Disabilities	2020
Political participation of persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities (Raport internațional)	• 2 FGDs involving 10 self-advocates	2021
Listen, Include, Respect International Guidelines for Inclusive Participation (Ghid internațional)	• 2 FGDs involving 12 self-advocates	2021

Chapter **2. INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL SOCIO-POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES IN PROMOTING THE SELF-ADVOCACY OF PERSONS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES** examines the global and local legal frameworks and commitments that safeguard the right of individuals with disabilities — including those with intellectual disabilities — to self-advocacy and active participation in society. It explores the role of public authorities in the Republic of Moldova in fostering and advancing self-advocacy initiatives for individuals with intellectual

disabilities. Additionally, the chapter traces the historical evolution of the self-advocacy movement for persons with intellectual disabilities, both globally and within Moldova, highlighting key developments and milestones in the field.

Subchapter **2.1. The International and National Legal Framework Supporting Self-Advocacy and Social Inclusion of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities** examines the alignment of Moldova's legal framework with international standards on the rights of persons with disabilities, assessing its capacity to enable meaningful and effective self-advocacy.

At the international level, Moldova has ratified key instruments that establish fundamental rights for persons with disabilities. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1990) enshrines the right to freedom of opinion and expression, laying the groundwork for self-advocacy. The country's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2010) introduced the principle of "Nothing for us without us," affirming the need for active participation of persons with disabilities in decision-making. Further strengthening self-advocacy mechanisms, the Optional Protocol to the Convention (2021) granted persons with disabilities the right to file complaints at the international level when their rights are violated. Additionally, Moldova's commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015) reinforced the principle of "Leaving no one behind," encouraging direct engagement of persons with disabilities in development efforts.

At the national level, Law No. 60/2012 on the Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities established the principle of effective participation, creating the legal foundation for self-advocacy in Moldova. The National Programme for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (2017–2022) formally incorporated consultation processes, enabling persons with disabilities to express their needs and perspectives in policy formulation. Furthermore, the National Program for the Deinstitutionalization of Persons with Intellectual and Psychosocial Disabilities (2018–2026) supports their direct involvement in planning, implementing, and monitoring transitions to community-based living.

A critical analysis of Moldova's legal framework reveals that while self-advocacy is embedded within broader disability rights legislation, it is not explicitly recognized as a distinct right. This legal ambiguity limits the state's obligations and constrains institutional support for developing self-advocates. Additional legislative gaps include the absence of representation quotas for individuals with intellectual disabilities, restricted access to accessible information tailored to their needs, and a lack of formal training programs for self-advocacy development. Moreover, although the existing legal framework provides favorable conditions, its impact is significantly hindered by weak implementation mechanisms. The full realization of self-advocacy requires further legislative reforms, increased investments in accessibility, and stronger oversight to ensure the protection of rights.

Subchapter **2.2 The Role of Public Institutions in the Republic of Moldova in Supporting and Promoting the Self-Advocacy of Persons with Disabilities** documents the measures implemented by the state authorities in order to support and strengthen the capacities of persons with intellectual disabilities to represent themselves, focusing on reforms, policies, partnerships and protection mechanisms.

Thus, several institutional reforms have had a direct impact on self-advocacy. Inclusive education reform has provided opportunities for self-expression and involvement in decision-making from an early age within the school environment. The reform of legal capacity replaced guardianship with decision-making support, affirming the individual's right to make personal choices. Deinstitutionalization efforts have created the conditions for independent living and greater community participation. These structural changes have strengthened the foundations for exercising self-advocacy.

Additionally, the subchapter shows that authorities have reinforced rights protection mechanisms, including the Office of the Ombudsman and the Equality Council, which serve as key channels for individuals with disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities, to report violations. Innovative services such as the Free Helpline have been established, facilitating the reporting of abuses and ensuring access to necessary support. Public consultations have also been organized, allowing persons with disabilities to engage in policymaking processes that directly affect their lives, enhancing their visibility and participation in public discourse.

At the same time, the subchapter challenges the practical application of these measures. Thus, the absence of prioritization of self-advocacy in public funding policies limits the development of initiatives that would allow people with disabilities, especially intellectuals, to express their opinions, influence decisions or participate in community life. It is pointed out that, although there are mechanisms to protect rights, they are not always accessible to people with intellectual disabilities. The insufficient training of civil servants in working with persons with intellectual disabilities constitutes an obstacle to their free expression and authentic participation in decision-making processes. In addition, public consultations often remain formal exercises rather than genuinely influencing policy outcomes.

Subchapter **2.3 The Evolution of the Self-Advocacy Movement of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities at Global and National Levels** explores the historical trajectory, key actors and the context in which this movement has evolved, both internationally and in the country.

The global self-advocacy movement for individuals with intellectual disabilities emerged in the late 1960s in Sweden as a response to paternalistic approaches that excluded these individuals from decision-making processes (Bengt Nirje 1996). This movement affirmed the right of people with disabilities to claim an active role in society, based on principles such as autonomy, self-determination and dignity of risk. Subsequently, the movement expanded internationally, with self-advocacy organizations and networks established in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and other European countries, significantly advancing the recognition of the rights and social inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities (Brunk 1991).

In the Republic of Moldova, the movement is still at an early stage. The first self-advocacy groups were established in 2014 with the support of Keystone Moldova SCO and development partners, as part of the broader deinstitutionalization reform for persons with disabilities. These groups continue to operate primarily with external assistance and lack a unified national structure to collectively represent their interests. Despite variations in organization and autonomy, they engage in meaningful activities such as human rights training, public awareness campaigns, and advocacy for the social inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities (Cojocaru and Malcoci 2024; Bulgaru and Bulgaru 2025).

However, in the absence of a collective voice at the national level, their impact on public policies remains limited. The subchapter presents the main obstacles to the development of the movement, including lack of financial resources, insufficient support from the authorities and dependence on support people. In order for the self-advocacy movement in the Republic of Moldova to achieve greater consolidation and impact, it requires strong institutional backing, greater societal awareness of disability rights, and investment in leadership training for individuals with intellectual disabilities (Cojocaru and Malcoci 2024).

Chapter **3. SELF-ADVOCACY OF PERSONS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIAL INCLUSION** provides a detailed perspective on the national context in which persons with disabilities exercise self-advocacy, exploring the challenges and solutions related to this phenomenon, the results and/or impact

of self-advocacy, as well as the directions needed to advance self-advocacy in the Republic of Moldova.

Subchapter **3.1. Perceptions of the Self-Advocacy of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Moldova in the Context of Social Inclusion** reveals how self-advocacy is understood both internationally and in the Republic of Moldova.

At a global level, self-advocacy is defined as the ability of the person to express their opinions, make decisions and control their own life, being closely related to the concepts of autonomy and self-determination (Mineaur et al. 2017).

In the national context, people with disabilities percieve self-advocacy as the ability to voice their opinions, claim their rights, solve problems, take responsibility, and actively participate in society. CSOs specializing in disability recognize three core dimensions of self-advocacy: expression of needs, decision-making, and promotion of rights.

However, knowledge of this concept remains limited in Moldovan society, and many people, including those with intellectual disabilities, learn about self-advocacy only through direct contact with specialized networks or programs.

The subchapter concludes by emphasizing the importance of ongoing information and education initiatives to promote self-advocacy as a fundamental practice for enhancing the social inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities.

Subchapter **3.2. Barriers to Self-advocacy of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities from Republic of Moldova** investigates the obstacles that hinder the ability of persons with intellectual disabilities in the country to engage in self-advocacy, while also presenting strategies for overcoming these challenges.

The identified barriers are both personal and external, reflecting factors related to the individual and the broader social, institutional, and legislative environment.

At a personal level, many self-advocates struggle with low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, limited awareness of their rights, and communication difficulties. These challenges often stem from a history of marginalization, dependence on family or institutions, and an education system that has failed to foster autonomy. Experiences of rejection and neglect have reinforced a fragile self-image, while the lack of genuine opportunities for participation has led to hesitation in asserting oneself or taking initiative (Cojocaru 2023; p. 242-244).

The external barriers to self-advocacy among individuals with intellectual disabilities include weak implementation of social inclusion laws, limited accessibility to services and information, and underrepresentation in decision-making structures. Negative societal attitudes often undermine their ability to express themselves, while financial constraints force them to prioritize basic survival over civic engagement. Additionally, participation in self-advocacy networks is hindered by a lack of resources, making involvement in national and international initiatives nearly impossible.

Additionally, overprotective support from parents or social protection staff often restricts autonomy instead of fostering free decision-making. While well-intentioned, this type of intervention keeps individuals in a state of dependency, reducing opportunities for authentic self-advocacy. In some cases, their involvement in advocacy activities is merely symbolic, with little real influence — an issue known as *tokenism* (Cojocaru 2023; p. 239-240; Beckwith 2016).

The subchapter highlights that these barriers raise serious concerns about the long-term sustainability of Moldova's self-advocacy movement. Without a systemic approach to strengthening both individual and institutional capacities, the movement risks remaining fragile and dependent on isolated initiatives, particularly those funded externally.

The subchapter highlights key factors for strengthening self-advocacy among individuals with intellectual disabilities. Regionalizing support structures ensures tailored assistance, while increased

local community engagement fosters inclusive advocacy efforts. Empowering leaders with disabilities promotes independent representation, and participation in UN Convention monitoring mechanisms enhances accountability and alignment with international standards. If properly supported, these measures can significantly change the current landscape, transforming self-advocacy into a sustainable and influential practice (Cojocaru 2023, p. 240-241).

Subchapter **3.3. Support Systems in the Self-advocacy of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities in the Republic of Moldova** examines the resources available to persons with intellectual disabilities in the country, intended to support them in their self-advocacy efforts.

Four main types of support were identified in the research: assistance from support persons, family involvement, peer networks, and institutional support provided by CSOs and public authorities. The subchapter explores how these resources contribute to self-advocacy development or, in some cases, hinder its progress, shaping the effectiveness and sustainability of self-advocacy within the Moldovan community.

Thus, the support person has an essential role in facilitating group processes, providing initial support for the formation and functioning of self-advocacy groups. The dissertation argues that this role must be balanced, encouraging autonomy, without exerting control. However, in Moldova, the absence of formal training means that support persons often rely on practical experience, facing difficulties in stepping away from a paternalistic approach. To strengthen their role, specialized training programs are needed to enhance ethical, relational, and effective support practices (Chapman 2005; Cone 2000).

Families also play a fundamental role in shaping communication, leadership, and self-awareness skills. However, their involvement can be ambivalent — while supportive, excessive control over decision-making or underestimation of abilities can obstruct autonomy. Parents require their own support in the form of services, information, and training programs that foster self-determination among persons with disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities (Racu and Munteanu 2024; Cojocaru 2022; Shogren and Raley 2022; Anderson and Bigby 2015).

Peer-to-peer support has emerged as another essential pillar, allowing individuals with intellectual disabilities to connect with others who share similar experiences. Within self-advocacy groups and broader community settings, this support enhances self-esteem, reduces isolation, and fosters mutual motivation among members. Though still in its early stages in Moldova, peer support has significant potential to strengthen the national self-advocacy movement (Cojocaru 2022; Cowie and Wallace 2000).

Institutional support, mainly provided by CSOs, plays a vital role in empowering individuals with disabilities through awareness campaigns and advocacy initiatives. However, only a fraction of CSOs actively incorporate self-advocacy into their work, and representation of persons with intellectual disabilities in organizational leadership remains limited. The absence of self-advocacy organizations and dependency on external funding undermine long-term sustainability (Cojocaru 2022; Cone 2000). Meanwhile, public institutions have yet to establish systemic support structures, adequate resources, or well-implemented policies for self-advocacy development.

The subchapter concludes that while existing support systems in Moldova offer a foundation for strengthening self-advocacy, they face considerable challenges. Achieving a more coherent and sustainable network requires a concerted effort from families, support persons, CSOs, and public institutions to ensure that individuals with intellectual disabilities can effectively claim their rights and actively participate in society.

Subchapter **3.4 The Impact of Self-advocacy on the Social Inclusion of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities in the Republic of Moldova** examines how the active participation of persons with intellectual disabilities in decision-making and advocacy processes influences their level

of inclusion in society (Gilmarting and Slevin, 2010). This section analyzes the impact of self-advocacy on the social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities through the lens of a six-level model: intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, community, national, and global (Yanicki 2022).

The data collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and participatory observation, indicate a significant positive influence at all levels. These results have been confirmed by people with intellectual disabilities, support persons, their family members and by national CSOs that support the self-advocacy of people with disabilities.

At the intrapersonal level, self-advocacy has strengthened self-confidence, self-esteem, and personal awareness, fostering greater autonomy and enhancing decision-making abilities among individuals with disabilities, as illustrated in Figure 2.

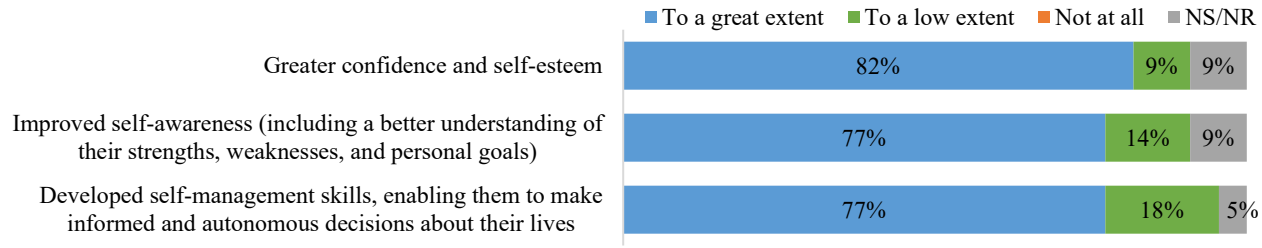


Fig. 2 Influence of self-advocacy at the intrapersonal level

At the interpersonal level, self-advocacy has helped group members strengthen their communication, relationship-building, and conflict resolution skills, fostering deeper social connections and reducing isolation, as illustrated in Figure 3.

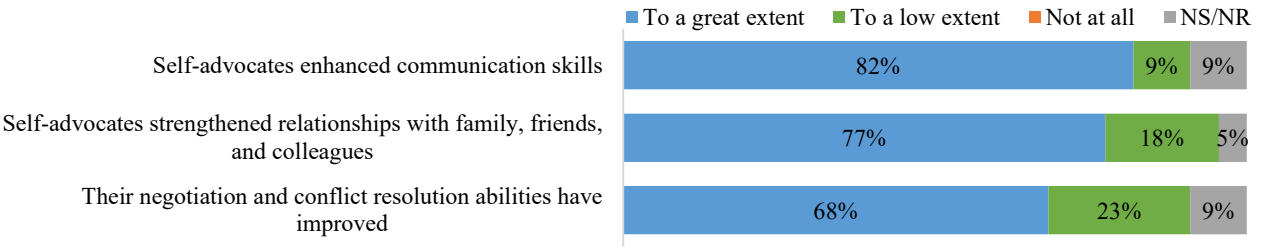


Fig. 3 The influence of self-advocacy at the interpersonal level

At the organizational level, CSOs that support self-advocacy have enhanced their organizational culture, refined their working methods, and strengthened the inclusion of persons with disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities, in decision-making processes, as illustrated in Figure 4.

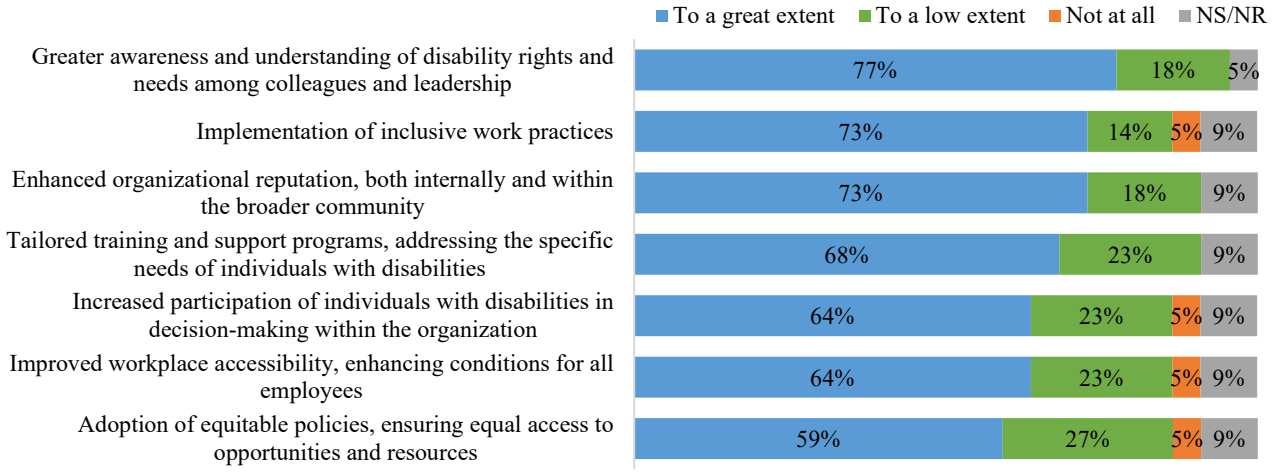


Fig. 4. The influence of self-advocacy at the organizational level

At the community level, people with intellectual disabilities actively participated in community life, in advocacy initiatives and electoral processes, contributing to the accessibility of public space, increasing social visibility and changing public opinion in relation to people with disabilities, including intellectual disabilities – Figure 5.

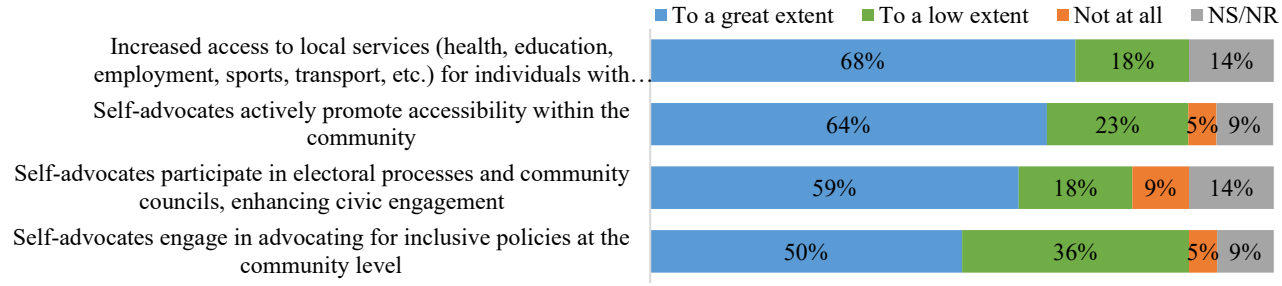


Fig. 5 Influence of self-advocacy at community level

At the national level, self-advocates have influenced public policies (including through contributions to the development of local and national reports and strategies), promoted deinstitutionalization, and contributed to changing social attitudes through public awareness-raising actions – Figure 6.

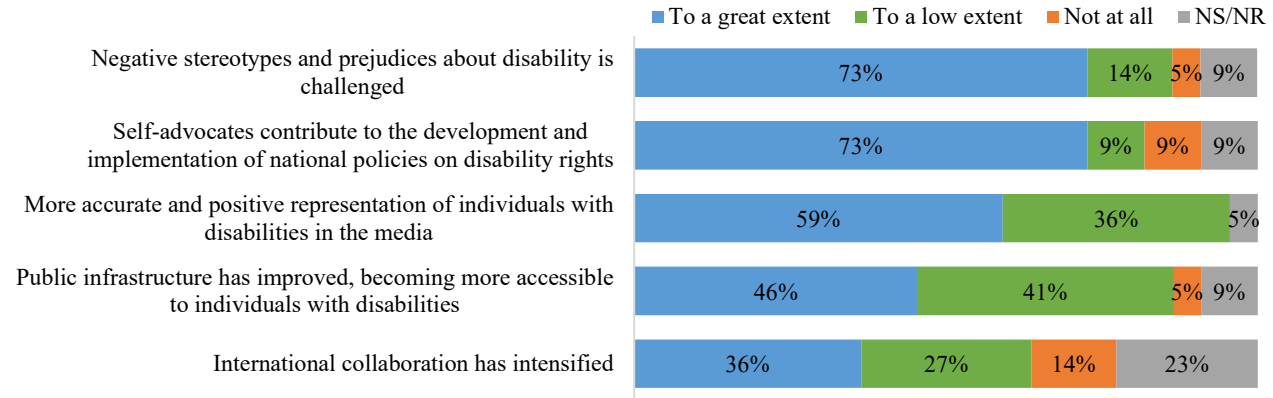


Fig. 6 Influence of self-advocacy at national level

Globally, self-advocates have participated in international networks and global events, contributing to the development of international guidelines and influencing global policies for the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities.

The sub-chapter highlights that self-advocacy is a continuous and dynamic process that enhances social inclusion and contributes to systemic change. It concludes with the presentation of the logical framework of self-advocacy from the perspective of social inclusion, specifically adapted to the Moldovan context and developed by the author throughout the doctoral research process – Table 2.

Table 2. The logical framework of self-advocacy from the perspective of social inclusion

Resource	Activities	Intermediate results	Impact	Assumptions
Training and mentoring programs Financial resources Support networks (including support persons, self-advocates) Equipment and technologies (computer, internet, etc.) Financial resources Partners	Training in the rights of persons with disabilities, self-advocacy, advocacy, personal development, communication, etc. Regular meetings for the exchange of knowledge and experiences, planning activities, etc. Public awareness campaigns Meetings with decision-makers Submitting petitions Participation in local, national, global events for the representation of people with disabilities Consultation of public policies Participation in working groups and advisory committees to provide expertise Monitoring the implementation of disability-related policies and identifying potential issues Assessing the accessibility of services and public spaces for persons	Intrapersonal level (increased self-esteem, improved level of self-awareness, increased self-management skills) Interpersonal level (developed communication skills, strengthened social relationships) Organisational level (more inclusive working practices, fairer internal policies, more inclusive organisational culture, etc.) Community level (increased community engagement of people with disabilities, more accessible public infrastructure, more inclusive policies, increased access to local services (health, education, work, sport, transport, etc.) by people with disabilities, etc.) National level (increased level of acceptance of people with disabilities, more inclusive national policies,	Self-advocates are an organized and strong group, they can influence public policies and public opinion in the direction of the social inclusion of people with disabilities Society is more inclusive, and diversity is respected and valued	• People with disabilities want and are motivated to participate more actively in society. • There is a supportive environment that encourages and supports self-advocacy efforts. • Society's attitudes are generally accepting towards people with disabilities • Access to resources is equitable, and there are no major financial barriers to participating in self-advocacy programs.

	with disabilities and identifying barriers	meaningful representation by media, more accessible public infrastructure, etc.) Global level (collaboration with self-advocates in other countries intensified, representation in global advocacy networks, more inclusive international policies, etc.).		

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The PhD thesis analyzed the essential role of self-advocacy in the social inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities in the Republic of Moldova. As a relatively new concept in international academic discourse, self-advocacy is increasingly studied within disability research. In Moldova's scientific landscape, this PhD dissertation marks the first comprehensive exploration of self-advocacy, introducing an innovative contribution to the field.

The research successfully addresses a significant scientific problem by providing a rigorous foundation for understanding self-advocacy in the Moldovan context. By investigating this emerging theme, the PhD thesis not only advances knowledge but also establishes a solid theoretical basis for future studies on disability.

The study validates the central hypothesis that self-advocacy skills and initiatives enhance social inclusion processes and contribute to an improved sense of well-being among individuals with intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, the findings confirm the working hypotheses, reinforcing the relevance and impact of self-advocacy as a transformative factor in disability inclusion.

Scientific results obtained within the research:

1. The research has made a significant contribution to defining self-advocacy in the Republic of Moldova, addressing an existing academic gap. Self-advocacy is conceptualized as the active and direct participation of individuals with intellectual disabilities in decision-making at personal, community, and societal levels, through self-expression and autonomous action, thus fostering authentic and sustainable social inclusion.
2. The refinement of the theoretical framework and the integration of new perspectives, shaped by an analysis of Moldova's historical and cultural context, led to the development of a logical framework model for self-advocacy. This model has been implemented and validated within self-advocacy groups across the country, demonstrating its effectiveness. It serves as a practical tool for designing and implementing initiatives that support the self-advocacy and social inclusion of persons with disabilities in Moldova.
3. By contextualizing self-advocacy, the study identified key barriers faced by individuals with intellectual disabilities. Personal obstacles include low self-confidence, fear of societal reactions, limited assertiveness, lack of awareness of rights and available resources, and insufficient experience with advocacy. Social barriers encompass the inaccessibility of physical and digital environments, restricted access to goods and services, societal stigmas, inadequate financial resources for skill development, and a lack of training for families and support persons in fostering self-advocacy. The findings underscore concerns regarding the sustainability of Moldova's self-advocacy movement, which — without a systemic approach — risks remaining fragile and dependent on isolated efforts, particularly those funded externally.
4. The study also assessed key success factors for self-advocacy. It identified personal attributes such as self-determination, education, and confidence; systemic elements including inclusive legislation, accessibility, and support networks; and attitudinal factors that shape effective self-advocacy among individuals with intellectual disabilities. Strengthening individual capabilities, optimizing systemic structures, and fostering positive societal attitudes are essential to advancing self-advocacy.
5. Ultimately, the research highlights the transformative impact of self-advocacy on individuals with disabilities, enhancing autonomy, improving quality of life, and reinforcing personal identity. At the societal level, self-advocacy drives policy changes, reshapes public perceptions, and promotes fundamental rights, facilitating greater inclusion and community participation.

Synthesizing the theoretical and empirical findings of this research, it can be affirmed that the proposed goal and objectives have been successfully achieved. The conclusions drawn provide a strong foundation for formulating practical **recommendations** that support the advancement of self-advocacy and social inclusion for individuals with intellectual disabilities in the Republic of Moldova.

Decision makers:

- Integrating social inclusion principles into national and local policy documents to ensure a comprehensive approach.
- Guaranteeing transparent consultation of individuals with disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, at all decision-making stages.
- Implementing supportive policies and programs across social, educational, and legal sectors to enhance self-advocacy.
- Establishing mechanisms for civil society participation, including self-advocates, in monitoring the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Developing frameworks for monitoring self-advocacy indicators, such as organizational leadership, program accessibility, and policy adaptation, ensuring transparency and sustainability.
- Ensuring universal accessibility to physical spaces, transport, information, and communications, removing barriers to participation.
- Creating personalized support services, tailored to individual needs, to promote active social engagement.
- Encouraging direct involvement of individuals with disabilities in evaluating service quality to ensure responsiveness to real needs.
- Providing continuous training for public institution staff on disability rights, diversity, and self-advocacy support.
- Establishing representation quotas in Parliament, Government, and local councils to ensure direct participation of self-advocates in decision-making.
- Allocating resources for capacity-building initiatives, empowering individuals with disabilities to advocate for their rights.
- Promoting a rights-based approach to disability, emphasizing social roles while combating stigma and discrimination.
- Creating self-advocacy support units within the Office of the Ombudsman to maintain the informal advocacy network supported by civil society.

Persons with disabilities and civil society organisations:

- Continuous development of self-advocacy skills through targeted programs and specialized training.
- Strengthening self-advocacy groups and establishing new entities across all districts to ensure diverse representation and a strong collective voice.
- Consistent advocacy for disability rights and social inclusion at both local and national levels.
- Active participation in public awareness initiatives to challenge discrimination and negative stereotypes surrounding individuals with disabilities.
- Meaningful engagement in policy and program development to influence decisions affecting their lives.
- Adapting and promoting best practices in self-advocacy, learning from international examples while showcasing Moldova's successes.

- Creating national platforms for individuals with disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, to share experiences, access resources, and collaborate in advocacy efforts.
- Joining regional and global self-advocacy networks to elevate disability issues on national and international agendas.

Parents and/or support persons of people with disabilities:

- Developing self-advocacy skills from childhood and fostering open communication among individuals with disabilities.
- Creating an empowering environment by equipping individuals with the knowledge to navigate support systems and services.
- Encouraging autonomy and independence, supporting individuals in managing their daily lives and taking responsibility.
- Facilitating access to tailored education and information, ensuring the removal of learning barriers.
- Promoting active community participation, strengthening social inclusion, and combating marginalization.

Mass-media:

- Implementing broad and strategic public awareness campaigns to challenge negative stereotypes and foster a positive societal perception of individuals with disabilities, including intellectual disabilities.
- Showcasing successful role models with disabilities across various social spheres, emphasizing their contributions and potential through self-advocacy efforts.
- Adapting informational content to meet the specific needs of individuals with disabilities, ensuring accessibility for all.

Scientific researchers:

- Developing and applying participatory research methodologies that actively involve individuals with disabilities, ensuring a person-centered approach in data collection and analysis.
- Utilizing accessible data collection methods to gather comprehensive insights from all disability categories.
- Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, collaborating with sociologists, psychologists, and legal experts for a holistic understanding of self-advocacy.
- Leveraging research findings for advocacy, driving reforms and improvements in disability rights and social inclusion policies.
- Expanding research on self-advocacy, exploring factors such as gender, socio-economic status, geography, disability type, family environment, and other influences on self-representation.
- Examining the role of technology in empowering individuals with disabilities and supporting their advocacy efforts.
- Assessing the impact of self-advocacy on the quality of life of persons with disabilities, informing future initiatives.

Development partners (donors):

- Providing financial and technical support to self-advocacy groups, disability organizations, and civil society initiatives that empower individuals with disabilities and strengthen advocacy efforts at national and international levels.
- Integrating a human rights-based approach and social inclusion into all development initiatives and supported projects, ensuring equitable and sustainable impact..

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ANNOTATION

Cojocaru Natalia, *"The Role of Self-Advocacy in the Social Inclusion of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities in the Republic of Moldova"*, PhD thesis in Sociology, Chișinău, 2025.

Thesis structure: introduction, three chapters, general conclusions and recommendations, 145 pages of main text, 209 sources of bibliography, 11 annexes, 13 figures, and 4 tables. The results were reflected in 13 scientific publications (11 in Moldova, 2 abroad) and were presented in 7 national and international conferences.

Keywords: self-advocacy, persons with intellectual disabilities, social inclusion.

Field of study: sociology.

Purpose of the thesis: to explore the phenomenon of self-advocacy among persons with intellectual disabilities in the Republic of Moldova through a multidimensional lens, and to evaluate its role in their social inclusion.

Research objectives: (a) to analyze the historiographical and theoretical foundations of self-advocacy within the context of social inclusion; (b) to conceptualize the core principles and frameworks of self-advocacy and social inclusion; (c) to develop a tailored methodology for studying self-advocacy among persons with intellectual disabilities; (d) to investigate how individuals with intellectual disabilities construct and express their identity within Moldovan society; (e) to examine both international and national models and best practices in self-advocacy and their contributions to inclusive processes; to identify barriers and enablers affecting self-advocacy efforts; (f) to assess the influence of self-advocacy on the social inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities in Moldova; (g) to propose actionable recommendations for national stakeholders to strengthen and sustain self-advocacy initiatives.

Scientific novelty and originality: The thesis introduces the concept of self-advocacy into sociological research in Moldova and provides a contextualized framework tailored to the national setting. It defines self-advocacy for persons with intellectual disabilities, develops an original logic model, and employs an inclusive research approach throughout all phases of the study.

Scientific problem solved: This thesis provides a rigorous conceptual and empirical foundation for understanding self-advocacy among persons with intellectual disabilities within Moldova's social inclusion framework. It identifies key structural and individual barriers, enabling conditions, and mechanisms of support that influence the effectiveness of self-advocacy efforts. The research demonstrates how self-advocacy can contribute both to improved individual well-being and to systemic advances in human rights and inclusive policy.

Theoretical significance: the thesis opens a new chapter in the study of disability in the Republic of Moldova, providing a strong theoretical foundation for future research.

Applicative value: the findings of the thesis can be used to inform policies, professional training programs, and social interventions, supporting the promotion of self-advocacy and the social inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities.

Implementation of scientific results: the findings informed the development of a practical model to support self-advocacy for persons with intellectual disabilities; enabled the creation and support of self-advocacy groups in various regions of the country; facilitated the training of key professionals in the fields of social services, health, and education, alongside engaging families in supporting the self-advocacy journeys of individuals with intellectual disabilities. The self-advocacy model was acknowledged as an innovative practice during the 2020 international competition hosted by the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (KHS 2021).

ADNOTARE

Cojocaru Natalia, *„Rolul auto-reprezentării în incluziunea socială a persoanelor cu dizabilități intelectuale din Republica Moldova”*, teză de doctor în sociologie, Chișinău, 2025.

Structura tezei: introducere, trei capitole, concluzii generale și recomandări, 145 pagini text de bază, bibliografie cu 209 titluri, 11 anexe, 13 figuri și 4 tabele. Rezultatele cercetării sunt reflectate în 13 publicații științifice (11 în țară, 2 în străinătate) și au fost prezentate în cadrul a 7 conferințe naționale și internaționale.

Cuvinte-cheie: auto-reprezentare, persoane cu dizabilități intelectuale, incluziune socială.

Domeniul de studiu: sociologie

Scopul lucrării: analiza complexă, multidimensională a fenomenului auto-reprezentării persoanelor cu dizabilități intelectuale și evaluarea impactului său asupra incluziunii sociale a acestor persoane în Republica Moldova.

Obiectivele cercetării: (a) analiza istoriografiei și bazei conceptual-teoretice ale auto-reprezentării persoanelor cu dizabilități în contextul incluziunii sociale; (b) fundamentarea abordărilor conceptuale ale auto-reprezentării și incluziunii sociale a persoanelor cu dizabilități; (c) determinarea metodologiei pentru cercetarea auto-reprezentării; (d) evidențierea modului în care persoanele cu dizabilități intelectuale își construiesc și își exprimă propria identitate în contextul social moldovenesc; (e) explorarea modelelor și bunelor practici internaționale și naționale în materie de auto-reprezentare a persoanelor cu dizabilități intelectuale și rolul acesteia în incluziunea socială; (f) identificarea barierelor întâmpinate de persoanele cu dizabilități intelectuale și a factorilor de succes în procesele de auto-reprezentare în vederea incluziunii lor sociale; (g) evaluarea impactului auto-reprezentării asupra incluziunii sociale a persoanelor cu dizabilități intelectuale din Republica Moldova; (h) formularea de recomandări pentru diferiți actori sociali naționali privind avansarea eforturilor de auto-reprezentare și impactul acestora în asigurarea incluziunii sociale.

Noutatea și originalitatea științifică: introducerea și contextualizarea conceptului de auto-reprezentare în cercetarea sociologică din Republica Moldova; dezvoltarea unei definiții proprii a auto-reprezentării persoanelor cu dizabilități intelectuale; elaborarea unui model logic al auto-reprezentării; aplicarea metodologiei cercetării incluzive în toate etapele cercetării.

Problema științifică soluționată: fundamentarea conceptului de auto-reprezentare a persoanelor cu dizabilități intelectuale din Republica Moldova în contextul incluziunii sociale; identificarea obstacolelor întâlnite în procesele de auto-reprezentare, a factorilor care contribuie la succes și a mecanismelor de sprijin necesare pentru a consolida eforturile de auto-reprezentare în contextul specific al țării; demonstrarea impactului pozitiv al auto-reprezentării asupra calității vieții persoanelor cu dizabilități intelectuale și asupra promovării drepturilor omului la scară largă.

Semnificația teoretică: teza deschide un nou capitol în studiul dizabilității în Republica Moldova, oferind o bază teoretică solidă pentru cercetările viitoare.

Valoarea aplicativă: rezultatele tezei pot fi utilizate în dezvoltarea de politici, programe de formare profesională și intervenții sociale, contribuind la promovarea auto-reprezentării și incluziunii sociale a persoanelor cu dizabilități intelectuale.

Implementarea rezultatelor științifice: rezultatele cercetării au permis dezvoltarea unui model practic de susținere a auto-reprezentării persoanelor cu dizabilități intelectuale; crearea și susținerea grupurilor de auto-reprezentare în mai multe raioane ale țării; formarea profesioniștilor din domenii precum asistență socială, sănătate și educație, și instruirea familiilor în dezvoltarea și/sau susținerea auto-reprezentării persoanelor cu dizabilități intelectuale. Practica de auto-reprezentare a fost recunoscută și apreciată ca practică inovatoare în competiția internațională organizată de Asociația Europeană a Furnizorilor de Servicii pentru Persoanele cu Dizabilități în 2020 (KHS 2021).

АННОТАЦИЯ

Кожокару Наталия, «Роль самопредставительства в социальной инклюзии лиц с интеллектуальными нарушениями в Республике Молдова», диссертация на соискание ученой степени доктора социологических наук, Кишинев, 2025 г.

Структура диссертации: введение, три главы, общие выводы и рекомендации, основной текст – 145 страниц, список литературы — 209 источников, 11 приложений, 13 рисунков и 4 таблицы. Результаты исследования отражены в 13 научных публикациях (11 — в Молдове, 2 — за рубежом) и были представлены на 7 национальных и международных конференциях.

Ключевые слова: самопредставительство, лица с интеллектуальными нарушениями, социальная инклюзия.

Область исследования: социология.

Цель исследования: комплексный, многомерный анализ феномена самопредставительства лиц с интеллектуальными нарушениями и оценка его влияния на их социальную инклюзию в Республике Молдова.

Задачи исследования: (а) анализ историографии и концептуально-теоретической базы самопредставительства лиц с ограниченными возможностями в контексте социальной инклюзии; (б) обоснование концептуальных подходов к самопредставительству и социальной инклюзии лиц с ограниченными возможностями; (в) определение методологии исследования самопредставительства; (г) выявление способов формирования и выражения идентичности лиц с интеллектуальными нарушениями в молдавском социуме; (д) изучение международных и национальных моделей и лучших практик самопредставительства и их роли в социальной инклюзии; (е) выявление барьеров и факторов успеха самопредставительства; (ф) оценка влияния самопредставительства на социальную инклюзию; (ж) выработка рекомендаций для национальных акторов по продвижению самопредставительства.

Научная новизна и оригинальность: введение понятия самопредставительства лиц с ограниченными возможностями в социологическое исследование в Республике Молдова; разработка авторского определения самопредставительства лиц с интеллектуальными нарушениями; создание логической модели самопредставительства; применение инклюзивной методологии на всех этапах исследования.

Решённая научная проблема: научное обоснование концепции самопредставительства лиц с интеллектуальными нарушениями в контексте социальной инклюзии в Республике Молдова; выявление барьеров и факторов успеха, а также механизмов поддержки, способствующих укреплению самопредставительства; демонстрация положительного влияния самопредставительства на качество жизни лица с интеллектуальными нарушениями и продвижение прав человека.

Теоретическая значимость работы: диссертация открывает новое направление в исследовании вопросов, связанных с ограниченными возможностями и социальной инклюзией в Республике Молдова и предлагает прочную теоретическую основу для будущих исследований.

Практическая значимость работы: результаты диссертации могут быть использованы при разработке политик, программ профессионального обучения и социальных интервенций, способствующих продвижению самопредставительства и социальной инклюзии лиц с интеллектуальными нарушениями.

Внедрение научных результатов: результаты исследования легли в основу разработки практической модели поддержки самопредставительства лиц с интеллектуальными нарушениями; создания и сопровождения групп самопредставительства в различных районах страны; подготовки специалистов в сферах социальной помощи, здравоохранения и образования, а также обучения семей по вопросам поддержки самопредставительства. Практика самопредставительства была признана инновационной на международном конкурсе Европейской Ассоциации Поставщиков Услуг для Лиц с Ограниченными Возможностями в 2020 году (KHS 2021).

COJOCARU NATALIA

THE ROLE OF SELF-ADVOCACY IN THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

541.02. Social Structure, Institutions and Social Processes

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