



## Odessa, Ukraine: Equality, a strategy to integrate and enable disabled people<sup>1</sup>

**Name of the policy:** Equality, the disabled people integration strategy in Odessa

**Start date:** 1991

**Completion date:** Ongoing

### CONTEXT

#### GOVERNMENTAL CONTEXT

##### City context

Odessa is a city of 1,009,204 inhabitants within a metropolitan area population of about 2,386,000, and is the fifth largest city in the Ukraine (National Statistics Committee in Odessa Region). Odessa is one of Ukraine's largest sea ports and one of its important industrial centers, with large enterprises in the chemical, oil rig, and food industries, among other sectors. The city is also important for its recreational potential and historical heritage, which make it one of the biggest touristic attractions on the Northern Black Sea coast.

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<sup>1</sup> The **Inclusive Cities Observatory** is a space for analysis and reflection on local social inclusion policies. It contains over sixty case studies on innovative policies for community development, access to basic services, gender equality, environmental protection and the eradication of poverty, among others. The initiative has been developed with the scientific support of Prof. Yves Cabannes from the University College of London (15 case studies) and a team of researchers from the Centre for Social Studies (CES) at the University of Coimbra, which has worked under the supervision of Prof. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (50 study cases). This Observatory aims to identify and investigate successful experiences that might inspire other cities to design and implement their own social inclusion policies.

The **Inclusive Cities Observatory** has been created by the Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights of UCLG. United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is the global platform that represents and defends the interests of local governments before the international community and works to give cities more political influence on global governance. The **Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights** aims to contribute to building a common voice for the cities of UCLG in the areas of social inclusion, participatory democracy and human rights. It also aims to guide local governments in designing these policies and to that end, fosters political debates, the exchange of experiences and peer learning among cities around the world.

For more information: [www.uclg.org/cisdpo/observatory](http://www.uclg.org/cisdpo/observatory)





### **Governmental decentralization context**

In Ukraine, the fundamentals of local self-government were shaped by the Constitution of 1996 and by the law 'On Local Self-Government in Ukraine' (21 May 1997). The documents proclaim the principles of decentralization of public powers and the priority of territorial units or communities known as *gromada*, but these principles have not been fully implemented. Thus, a mixed system currently exists, combining local state government and local self-government on the levels of districts (*raion*) and regions (*oblast*). On one side, provincial and district councils are elements of local self-government, representing the interests of territorial *gromadas*; on the other side, there are state administrations of provinces and districts, which are local organs of state executive power vested with the executive functions of these councils. Such a combination of municipal and state structures actually derogates principles of local self-government, leaving it in the domain of state rule.

Reform projects have faltered because of political divisions and are still pending. In Ukraine, the administrative-territorial organization has a three-tier structure: the highest level includes the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, 26 regions, and two cities, Kiev and Sevastopol, both having a special status. The next level, the upper municipal level, embraces 490 districts and district cities. The lowest level includes city districts, cities of district subordination, towns, settlements, and villages.

Bodies of local self-government may establish, in accordance with the law, local taxes and duties, which are allocated to appropriate budgets. In Ukraine, health services, education, and social protection represent more than 80% of public expenditures at the local level. Furthermore, Ukrainian local authorities manage communal property and local finances, ensure development of appropriate territories, provide services to the population, ensure participation of the population in civic life, and protect public order.

**Institutional level of policy:** Municipal

### **SOCIAL CONTEXT**

There are more than 48,000 adults (approximately 5.5% of the total population, which corresponds to the Ukrainian average) and almost 3,000 children with different disabilities living in the city of Odessa today.<sup>2</sup>

### **COMPREHENSIVE NARRATIVE**

#### **Description of the policy**

The program for integrating disabled people in Odessa exists today as a municipal program called 'Equality', which aims to create a barrier-free city environment for people with limited physical abilities by remodelling the city's infrastructure, constructing special facilities, and establishing municipal services for disabled people.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.odessa.ua/ru/news/31222/>



The program is unique in Ukraine in two ways: first, the high level of its institutionalization (the existence of a specific political committee at City Hall) and, second, its participatory character, although rather weak, which is still very rare in Ukraine. Currently, Odessa is the only city in Ukraine running such a program and the most disabled-friendly city in the country.

### **Background / Origins**

The origins of the current 'Equality' policy in Odessa are rooted in the commitment of OGOIN – an 'umbrella' Organization of Disabled People in the City of Odessa. This is a non-governmental and non-profit organization created by a group of disabled people in Odessa in May 1989 and registered at Odessa Municipal Councils on 20 July 1989. The main objectives of the organization are to promote the civil rights of disabled people and to help disabled people achieve an equal level of social participation as non-disabled people.

The need for such an organization emerged from the collapse of the USSR's employment and social model, where the state took all the responsibility for social care and the state's disabled people organizations provided guaranteed working places for disabled people. For example, almost all small electrical equipment, such as switches and sockets, was produced by the Blind Society workshops. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, these workshops suffered a lot within market economy conditions, losing profits in market competition, and many blind people have lost their jobs.

In order to study the experience, OGOIN contacted several disabled people's organizations in Odessa's sister cities and, at the end of 1990, organizational representatives participated in the Scandinavian Disabled People Congress in Oulu, Finland, one of Odessa's 28 sister cities. In Oulu they saw a city full of facilities for disabled people, ramparts, parking spaces, elevators, and lots of special techniques for building toilets and designing public spaces.

Since then, the guiding objective has been to find a way to approximate the living conditions of Odessa's disabled people to what were imagined as the 'existing European standards', and the idea of realizing a particular program on a municipal level arose.

### **Policy objectives**

Since the beginning, OGOIN's management has believed there were three main components necessary to change the system of relationships between the state and disabled people:

1. The development of documents regulating the relationship between disabled people and state and municipal authorities;
2. Involvement of all municipal services (including those in charge of education, employment, and health care) in the re-equipment of the city infrastructure; and
3. The creation of a Committee on disabled people's problems within the City Council.

### **Chronological development and implementation of the practice**

In order to achieve these goals, several subdivisions of the OGOIN organization in the Odessa districts were registered as separate organizations (due to the municipal elections law in force at that time). This strategy permitted the organization to present its candidates for in the elections of district councils and the city council in 1990. Three of the OGOIN candidates were elected at the district level, and one candidate was elected to the City Council. As members of

the district and City Councils, they were able to help solve several problems through fighting from 'inside' the public institutions.

On 3-5 October 1990, OGOIN organized the first Congress of Disabled People Organizations of Ukraine, and participated in elaborating the Ukrainian Law on disabled people's social protection.

Finally, OGOIN was a main contributor in elaborating the municipal program 'Equality', which was successfully approved during the City Council session on 14 March 1991. The realization of the program was slow and often incomplete, and the fight to see it concretely implemented still requires time and energies.

During the gas deficit in 1991, again on the initiative of OGOIN, the City Council created a 'mobile gas station for disabled people's cars'. Until the end of 1993 – thanks again to the pressure of various actions and mobilizations of OGOIN (including picketing in front of City Hall) – disabled people continued to get free gas through municipal gas cheques, even if the 'mobile gas station' had been dismantled by these later years.

In 1993, two specially equipped buses and 3 mini-buses were provided by City Hall in order to allow OGOIN to organize outdoor activities for disabled people, such as countryside excursions, theatre and exhibition visits, etc. On 1 July 1993, a municipal *Invataxi* service was created, which provides transportation services to hospitals and stations. The Assedo chess club was also created (it operated between 1989 and 1994 and closed because of mid-1990 economic difficulties in the country), as well as the Otrada music and poetry studio (operating since 1991) and the White Acacia arts studio (operating since 1993), which has already presented more than 25 exhibitions. Other new institutions opened under the 'Equality' program were: the Hope dating club (operating since 1995), the Lesia women's club (operating since 1995), the Dialogue youth club (operating since 1997), the Invapress Press Center (operating 1995-1996 and closed because of property redistribution within the city's media sector), and the Odessa-Basket wheelchair basketball club (operating since 2001). A national wheelchair basketball competition has been held since 2003.

In 1995 the first beach was equipped for disabled people's vehicles, with two additional equipped beaches established later on. This is an important accomplishment given that there normally is no shore-access for vehicles in Odessa, since traffic is prohibited in the beach zone.

In 1997, OGOIN won the Counterpart Consortium/Elwin Institute grant for 'Sustainable employment system creation' which enabled them to acquire computers and equipment in order to create professional courses on typing, accounting, advertising and design, and internet marketing which have been functioning until the present day. A significant proportion of the graduates have been employed. However, there is no continuous statistical data on course graduates and their future careers, so the overall impact of this activity cannot be estimated.

Following repeated efforts by OGOIN, in 1998 a Committee on Disabled People's Issues was created at City Hall. On the basis of the Equality program elaborated previously, the Committee presented its proposals to the City administration, and the municipal program was successfully approved (City Council Decision No. 556) on 16 August 2001. Currently, Odessa is the only city

in Ukraine with such a Committee and operating a municipal program for defending rights of access to the city for disabled people.

Today, representatives of several disabled people's organizations are regularly invited to the Committee's sessions in order to analyze the program's successes and failures, and in order to collect proposals for further actions, including creating a list of objects that need to be build or developed through the municipal budget.

In order to facilitate the life of people with limited physical abilities and to provide them access to different objects of the municipal infrastructure (i.e., public spaces, social uses, or housing), the Municipal Council of Odessa approved Resolution No. 2160-V on 22 January 2008, adopting a new edition of the 'Equality' municipal program for 2008-2011 (Odessa Municipal Equality Program).

Within the framework of this program, the City plans to:

- Create a public control system to supervise the design and construction of housing and social facilities, streets and motorways, small city infrastructure objects, and advertising items with regards to disabled people's accessibility requirements;
- Build ramparts, handrails, and lifts in public areas, social buildings, and appropriate housing through the municipal budget and funds obtained from other sources;
- Provide traffic lights with sound signals, etc.;
- Start a municipal service station for vehicles and other technical devices for disabled people;
- Provide municipal transportation services for disabled people;
- Equip recreation places for disabled people on the city beaches;
- Promote social rehabilitation and employment; and
- Study the city infrastructure in order to provide efficiency and transparency in the funds used in future.

### **Agents involved**

The Equality program was developed and implemented as a partnership between the City Council and several disabled people's NGOs, such as OGOIN and its institutional members (e.g., Society for the Blind, Society for the Deaf, Organization of Afghanistan War Veterans, etc.).

### **Beneficiaries**

Disabled habitants of Odessa and their families. Non-detailed annual reports can be found online at Odessa City Hall site<sup>3</sup> and The Report of Odessa Head Department on Labour and Social Protection (available online).

### **Participation processes implemented**

The program contains elements of 'indirect' participation. The disabled people of the city present

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.odessa.ua/ru/news/31744/>

their requirements of local arrangements to their NGOs. The NGOs choose priorities for the most desired works, facilities, or services, and their regular representatives in the Municipal Committee on Disabled People present them to be included into the Program's plan for the next year. Broader meetings with the NGO representatives are held quarterly in order to evaluate the program's implementation. Only NGO representatives can participate in these meetings, and people come to know about them through NGO representatives in specific places. Particular persons can address their requirements or complaints to the City Hall Committee; however, it mainly serves to specify particular failures of a program's implementation, or areas to pay special attention within the framework of the program already approved. No proceedings are publicly available for public consideration, which is a normal practice for municipal planning in Ukraine.

### **Institutionalization processes**

Since 1998, a Committee on Disabled People's Issues has functioned at City Hall. On the basis of the Equality program elaborated previously, the Committee presented its proposals to the City administration, and the municipal program was successfully approved (City Council Decision No. 556) on 16 August 2001. Currently, Odessa is the only city in Ukraine with such a Committee and operating a municipal program for defending rights of access to the city for disabled people.

Based on the Law 'On Local Self-Government in Ukraine', Article 42, Odessa City Council implements a specified City Program 'Equity', which is renewed every 3 years. The current edition was approved by City Council Resolution No. 2160-V on 22 January 2008.

### **Financing**

The program is financed by the municipal budget. The amounts planned initially were:

2009 – 1,373,865 hryvnias (approximately 139,478 euros<sup>4</sup>)  
2010 – 1,265,640 hryvnias (or approximately 111,706 euros)  
2011 – 1,271,140 hryvnias (or 117,807 euros)

In 2009, the program budget represented about 0.06% of total City budget expenses. In 2010, the allocation for the program dropped down significantly; however, in February 2010 the program received additional financing, doubling its overall costs to reach 2,600,000 hryvnias. At this level, the program costs came to represent about 0.06% of total municipal budget expenses again.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to estimate the value of private donations that surely exist. There is no public access to such information as long as NGOs don't want to make it public, and tax administrations aren't required to do so.

### **Key results and achievements**

The overall results of the program can seem either quite modest or highly impressive, depending on one's base of comparison. Odessa is the only city in Ukraine with a political

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<sup>4</sup> According to the exchange rate for 2009 provided by the National Bank of Ukraine: <http://bank.gov.ua/Eng/default.htm>

committee on disabled people's Issues, the only city that continues to construct ramps in old buildings (where they were not constructed initially), the city with the highest number of traffic lights with sound signals in Ukraine (there are 58 traffic lights with sound signals in Odessa, while in Kiev there are only 30). According to a study by the Municipalities Institute conducted in February 2010, Odessa holds the top position in the 'life comfort level' ranking of Ukrainian cities. However, there are ongoing difficulties such as a lack of transparency in the use of funds (which is typical for Ukraine in general). As well, the municipal infrastructure is still extremely poor compared to most European cities, although in comparison to other large cities in Ukraine, Odessa enjoys the highest number of facilities for disabled people.

### **Main obstacles**

Apart from financial difficulties, several specific obstacles were faced. For example, the initial installation of traffic lights with sound signals failed because of a lack of certified equipment in Ukraine, and it took time to find the traffic lights abroad and to pass them through the certification process in Ukraine. Problems like this one can generally be explained as a result of the unpreparedness of local government institutions and local stakeholders to operate in a reformed environment, under conditions of a poor level of decentralization and a lack clearly defined responsibilities and competences for local governments and local communities. Together with high bureaucracy and corruption levels, these conditions create a large variety of formal bureaucratic obstacles for the implementation of any program.

### **Replicability or adaptation of policy elsewhere**

The particular interest of this policy lies in its uniqueness in Ukraine: so far, it is the only city with a disabled people integration program that is both highly institutionalized and participative at the same time. In part, it was able to achieve its level of institutionalization due to some 'luck' and the quick actions of OGOIN representatives in 1989, when they managed to obtain some seats as Council members. The particularity of the practice that may not be directly replicated in other Ukrainian cities is that the national legislation in Ukraine does not allow NGO representatives to become candidates in municipal elections. But the scheme of a Committee in charge of disabled people's issues with the participation of organizational representatives is a mechanism that can be implemented in other places.

## **SUMMARY**

### **Disabled people integration in Odessa**

OGOIN, an NGO of disabled people of Odessa, was created on 28 May 1989. In 1990, several members of OGOIN were elected as members of the municipal assembly, which led to the creation of the City Committee on Disabled People Issues – the only one in Ukraine – and to the adoption in 1991 of the municipal program named 'Equality' which is still operating. The main objective of the program is to facilitate the life of people with limited physical abilities and to provide them access to different objects of the municipal infrastructure (public spaces, social use, or housing), to create a barrier-free environment in the city.

The beneficiaries of the program are disabled people of Odessa and their families. Representatives of disabled people's organizations are regularly invited for the Committee's

sessions in order to analyze the program's successes and failures and to collect proposals for further actions, including the creation of a list of items that need to be developed through the municipal budget. The Committee on Disabled People's Issues was created at the City Hall in 1998. Currently, Odessa is the only city in Ukraine with this kind of Committee and operating a respective municipal program.

The program is financed through the municipal budget. The amounts planned initially were: 1,373,865 hryvnyas in 2009; 1,265,640 hryvnyas in 2010; and 1,271,140 hryvnyas in 2011. In 2009, this number represented about 0.06% of the city budgeted expenditures, while in 2010 the program allotment dropped down significantly. However, in February 2010 the program received additional financing, doubling its overall costs to reach 2,600,000 hryvnias and reaching the previous level of 0.06% of the budget again.

The overall results of the program can seem either quite modest or highly impressive, depending on one's base of comparison. Odessa is the only city in Ukraine with a political committee on disabled people's issues the only city that continues to construct ramparts in old buildings (where they were not constructed initially), the city with the highest number of traffic lights with sound signals in Ukraine (there are 58 traffic lights with sound signals in Odessa, while in Kiev there are only 30). According to a study by the Municipalities Institute conducted in February 2010, Odessa holds the top position in the 'life comfort level' ranking of Ukrainian cities. However, there are ongoing difficulties such as a lack of transparency in the use of funds (which is typical for Ukraine in general). As well, the municipal infrastructure is still extremely poor compared to most European cities, although in comparison to other large cities in Ukraine, Odessa enjoys the highest number of facilities for disabled people.

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**Acknowledgements / Credits**

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