



**IN IUSTITIA**

**Nikdo nesmí být napadán pro to, kým je.  
No one should be attacked for whom they are.**

# Violence and bias violence against people living with disabilities from the perspective of organizations working with this target group

REPORT ON RESEARCH

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## INTRODUCTION

As we were completing this report, a bus driver working for the Brno Municipal Transit Authority, Josef Prokeš, refused to drive a bus featuring a sign that read “For healthy schools without inclusion”. The sign was on the rear of the bus as part of the campaign of Senate candidate Tomáš Anderle, who was running for the “Freedom and Direct Democracy” party, which has long rejected educating pupils with special needs together with others in mainstream education. Prokeš considered the slogan an attack on a broader group of children living with disabilities, including his daughters, who have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders and who attend a mainstream primary school. When his superiors did not comprehend his protest, he considered giving notice. He said that if he were forced to drive the bus, he would not be able to “look his daughters in the eyes” (Grim 2020) and would feel like a “person silently agreeing with segregation” (Svobodová 2020).

The case of Prokeš demonstrates that people living with disabilities<sup>1</sup> and their loved ones must constantly overcome many obstacles during the most ordinary of activities in Czech society. Just like other social groups, people living with disabilities grapple with prejudices and stereotypes that can result in their discrimination. Such discrimination contributes significantly to lowering the standard of living enjoyed by people living with disabilities. It is a grave violation of the equal treatment principle, which is one of our fundamental human rights. According to a recent survey focused on the Czech environment, 62 % of respondents living with disabilities have encountered discrimination. They most frequently encountered it at local authorities, on public transportation, when seeking employment, when accessing health care services, and from the general public (Krhutová & Sochor 2012: 21).

The unjustifiably different treatment of persons living with disabilities also involves incidences of violence. Many studies have pointed out that people living with disabilities are highly likely to experience violent victimization (see below). We do not yet know very much about the violence committed against people living with disabilities in the Czech Republic (see Novosad 2001; APERIO 2011; Kodymová & Vlčko 2014; FRA 2015b). That especially applies to bias violence against people living with disabilities, an area to which researchers here have not paid attention even though the number of publications on this subject abroad is growing.

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<sup>1</sup> This report consistently sticks to the term “people living with disabilities”, as it is intended for the broader public and in Czech public debate that is the concept that is used most frequently. We are aware of the political meanings that make it impossible for phrases such as “disabled” or “handicapped” to be comprehended as neutral descriptions of reality. We identify with the social model of disability, which considers the disadvantage and oppression of people considered incompetent to be more related to the constructs of society and its normative systems than they are to the bodies of the individuals concerned. For the sake of clarity, we have decided not to pursue these political aspects further here. For those interested, we recommend the study by Kateřina Kolářová (2012b), which locates the relevant concepts in the broader theoretical framework of the field of disability studies and discusses opportunities for translating its conceptual apparatus.

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In order to ameliorate this lack of information, we at In IUSTITIA decided to investigate this issue among the organizations that bring together people living with disabilities and/or provide them with aid. The outcome of our investigation is this report on our research, which has the following structure: After acknowledging those who contributed to the investigation and an overview of the main findings, there are three separate chapters.

The first chapter delineates our research subject: Violence against people living with disabilities and, specifically, bias violence motivated by actual or perceived disability<sup>2</sup>. The second chapter presents the methodology of our research. The sampling of organizations surveyed is described, as is the character of the questionnaire. The final chapter presents the research findings in detail and is divided into nine sub-chapters covering the main research subjects.

Above all, we concentrated on how serious organizations perceive the problem of violence and bias violence committed against people living with disabilities to be, what experiences victims have with incidences of violence and reporting them, and how they assess protections for people living with disabilities during criminal proceedings. Furthermore, we were interested in information about the organizations that work with people living with disabilities. Besides the characteristics of the organizations participating and an assessment of the most important organizations in this area, we asked respondents about their own experiences, or those of their colleagues, with assaults motivated by bias against activities benefiting people living with disabilities.

Our survey suggests that violence against people living with disabilities does happen in Czech society. That includes bias violence, which more than one-third of the organizations surveyed reported they had encountered during the last three years. In light of these conclusions, it appears barely sustainable to take just a minimal interest in this social problem. We believe the number of studies of violence committed against people living with disabilities will increase in the Czech Republic as well, including research into its causes, character, impacts and prevalence. This report is just a small contribution that may inspire future researchers. At the same time, we hope this work will not just remain at the level of research. The prevention of violence committed against people living with disabilities deserves no less attention. General attempts to eliminate disadvantages flowing from dominant notions of the normative state of an abled body and mind go hand-in-hand with awareness-raising and support for people living with disabilities to access legal and social services.

Specifically, it is necessary to strengthen legal protections against bias violence. While ethnicity, nationality, political convictions, race and religion can be, in certain cases, used

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<sup>2</sup> In this report, bias violence is seen as a subset of violence. If we ask about violence against people living with disabilities, we ask about violence regardless of the motive.

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as qualified substantive merit that increase the severity of criminal charges, this is not the case for disability. The Criminal Code does not, therefore, provide the same degree of protection to all groups threatened by bias violence. We and the vast majority of the respondents we surveyed are of the opinion that it would be desirable to eliminate this inequality, however limited such a step might be, in order to arrange for redress for people living with disabilities who have suffered this treatment.

We at In IUSTITIA will do our best to advocate for this legislative change. Those interested in collaborating with us are welcome to contact us through our website, [www.in-ius.cz](http://www.in-ius.cz).

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank everybody who contributed to implementing our survey and preparing this report. Above all we would like to thank all the respondents who shared their experiences from the organizations where they work and their opinions with us.

We would also like to thank Ms. Lenka Folkeová and Mgr. Václav Krása of the National Council of Persons Living with Disabilities in the Czech Republic for collaborating with us on reaching their member organizations. We thank Mgr. Erik Čípera of the Assistance organization for his advice on how to plan this investigation.

We thank Doc. Mgr. Lenka Krhutová, Ph.D., of the Department of Health and Social Studies at the Faculty of Social Studies, Ostrava University, and Mgr. Hana Pokertová, Ph.D., from the Institute of Law and the Humanities, Faculty of Business and Economics, Mendel University in Brno, for their consultations about the questionnaire.

## About this project

The aim of the project “Using the law against bias” (Právem proti předsudkům), implemented by the In IUSTITIA non-governmental organization from 2020 to 2024, is to draft a bill to strengthen the position and protection of victims of bias crime, among other matters. Special attention is dedicated in this project to groups that the criminal law statutes currently in effect do not sufficiently protect. People living with disabilities are one such group.

An important component of the project is involving people living with disabilities in it. As part of our research activities we will ask people living with disabilities about their experiences with bias attacks, the impact of such assaults on the lives of the injured parties, whether they report such attacks to police, and what options there are for improving the position of such victims. We will use semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire for this purpose.

Should you be interested in participating in such an interview to discuss your experience with bias attacks on the basis of living with disability in the Czech Republic, please write to us at the following e-mail addresses: [vaclav.walach@in-ius.cz](mailto:vaclav.walach@in-ius.cz) and [benjamin.petruselka@in-ius.cz](mailto:benjamin.petruselka@in-ius.cz).

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## MAIN FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

- A total of **335 organizations participated**, 324 of which had people living with disabilities as their target group. Most had people living with disabilities as one of their target groups, although other groups may have predominated, or had people living with disabilities as their sole target group.
- The organizational representatives reported a relatively high level of experience with physical, sexual, verbal and other violence being committed against people living with disabilities. During the last three years, **52 % of these organizations had encountered at least one case of violence against people living with disabilities**. During that same period, **more than one-third of these organizations recorded bias violence against people living with disabilities**.
- **One example of a bias attack** against people living with disabilities that was reported by the organizational representatives is the following: “An adult man with mild learning difficulties and visual impairment, conditions that cause him difficulties with expressing himself and spatially orienting himself, was assaulted by another man at a train station. The aggressor verbally assailed the injured party, insulting him by calling him a ‘mental case’, ‘moron’, ‘incompetent social case’ and ‘blind’ [in a derogatory way of speaking, the authors’ comment]. The aggressor filmed himself with his mobile phone while committing the attack. He also said that people like the injured party ‘shouldn’t walk around without being on a leash, they are incompetent and a burden on society’. Ever since this attack the injured party does not trust people whom he does not know and is ashamed to go shopping or to travel. He also ended a long-distance relationship because he was afraid something might happen to his partner.”
- **Employees of organizations working with people living with disabilities also become victims of bias violence**; 18 % of respondents or their colleagues have been assaulted in the past on the basis of prejudice against the activity of an organization benefiting that target group.
- Violence against groups at risk tends to be characterized by a higher degree of not being reported to police. **Just 1.5 % of respondents said attacks against people living with disabilities are reported quite frequently or rather frequently**. Just 7 % of the most recent cases of bias violence against people living with disabilities had been reported. From this it is apparent that it will be necessary to beef up the ability and willingness of people living with disabilities to contact police. Organiza-

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tional representatives mentioned different solutions to this problem, from increasing confidence in the police among people living with disabilities to supportively accompanying people living with disabilities to police stations and to court during criminal proceedings.

- **79 % of respondents agree that those who commit violence against persons living with disabilities should be punished more strictly than those who commit violence against non-disabled persons.**
- Most organizational representatives also supported amending legislation; **82 % of respondents agreed with introducing “disability” as a protected characteristic in the Criminal Code.**
- **Most respondents did not know whether police had investigated the perpetrator’s bias motivation when they reported an attack against a person living with disabilities.** According to the other 31 % of respondents, motivation of that kind was not investigated at all.

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## VIOLENCE AND BIAS VIOLENCE AGAINST PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES

There is a long history of violence being perpetrated against people living with disabilities. The murder of allegedly “defective” newborns in ancient Sparta is an infamous example, but similar cases have also been recorded elsewhere (Barnes 2010). In traditional societies, violence against people living with disabilities has been rationalized in three ways: As a practical requirement for the society’s survival; as part of a system of values based on preference for beauty, intelligence and strength; and through a belief in supernatural phenomena, through which disabilities were comprehended as divine punishment. According to Barbara Faye Waxman (1991) we find these reasons in modern societies also, and the eugenics movement disseminated and legitimized them on a pseudo-scientific basis. The prejudices holding that people living with disabilities constitute a burden, financially, to society, or that they live lives of less value, or that their very existence threatens others, were demonstrated most violently during Nazi Germany. As part of the what was called Aktion T4, people living with disabilities were murdered on a massive scale (see Michalík 2005).

Violence against people living with disabilities also happens today, although not in the form it took at the close of the 1930s and start of the 1940s. Of the studies pointing out the high prevalence of violence committed against people living with disabilities, what are most frequently cited are the analyses that systematically explore and map the research done so far in this area (Hughes et al. 2012; Jones et al. 2012). According to these, people living with disabilities are at a higher risk of being assaulted than are non-disabled people, although that conclusion must cope with many limitations of a methodological nature<sup>3</sup>. Subsequent to these, studies were published confirming that violent victimization was a common experience among people living with disabilities (e.g. Krnjacki et al. 2016; Liassidou & Andros 2019; Codina, Pereda & Guilera 2020), including bias attacks (Emerson & Roulstone 2014).

Comprehending some of the violence that has been committed against people living with disabilities as motivated by bias is a rather recent approach. This approach appeared during the 1990s in association with laws against hate crimes in the United States of America. In 1991, Waxman published a study in which she claimed that disability should be taken into consideration as a legally protected characteristic in the same way that race, religion and sexual orientation are. The United States did not

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<sup>3</sup> These are: the small number of studies performed, the lack of standard tools for measuring both disability and violence, the unclear direction of causality between disability and violence, the fact that such studies have been limited to countries with high GDP, etc.

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do so until 2009. Most European Union Member States do not yet recognize living with disability as such a characteristic within the framework of their laws against hate crimes, and for that reason it is not part of the hate crime statistics (see FRA 2015a: 3).

The hate crime approach gradually found support in the academic community as well. Mark Sherry, one of the first social scientists to study disability hate crimes, recalled that during a decade of work on a book about this subject, he was most frequently asked: “Does anyone really hate disabled people?” (Sherry 2010: 26). The experience of Tom Shakespeare, a leading researcher in disability studies<sup>4</sup>, is also telling. In 2010, after the death of Richard Askew and several other persons living with disabilities who were either killed as a consequence of being assaulted or who took their own lives after being attacked<sup>5</sup>, Shakespeare published a statement in the British daily *The Guardian* in which he described his previous skepticism about the possibility of hateful attacks being committed against people living with disabilities:

“Looking again at the evidence, and thinking more deeply about the problem, I realise how mistaken I was to trivialise hate crime. It’s not just a matter of bullying. It’s not something that people can just ignore or laugh off. It is a scourge on our society. We are members of a community where the most vulnerable people live in fear of their lives [...] I think my mental block arose because I did not want to believe that human beings could be so vile. I was wrong” (Shakespeare 2010).<sup>6</sup>

The term “hate crime” is, nevertheless, misleading in the sense that hatred, as an emotion, is not actually what distinguishes this kind of criminal activity from other crimes. The difference is that of bias motivation. If the attack by a perpetrator is entirely or partially motivated by prejudices against a certain group, that is a hate crime. The term “hate” as used in the concept of “hate crime” means “bias”<sup>7</sup>. For that reason we prefer to use the term “bias”. At the same time we will not limit our discussion just to criminal activity, but we will focus on all violent incidents, i.e., not merely on what police might qualify as criminal activity. We define bias violence committed against people living with disabilities as meaning physical, sexual, verbal or other attacks against persons who are chosen by the perpetrator because of their actual or apparent disability. It does not matter, therefore, whether the victim actually is disabled or whether the attacker has adequately assessed

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4 This field studies constructions of social ideas about disability and their ramifications for people associated with disability, or rather the “forms, structures and dynamics of the systematic disadvantaging of people living with disabilities” (Kolářová & Herza 2019: 549). For a more detailed description of disability studies in Czech, see Kolářová (2012a) and Krhutová (2013)

5 These cases were described in a report on research into violence committed against people living with disabilities that was submitted to the British Government (EHCR 2011).

6 Similar statements were made by Dan Goodley and Katherine Runswick-Cole (2011), who researched disablist violence (a concept to which we will return) against children living with disabilities and their relatives.

7 This misunderstanding has been analyzed repeatedly as part of hate crime research (e.g., Hall 2013: 1–18).

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that disability. What is decisive for determining whether violence committed against people living with disabilities is bias violence is that the perpetrator assaulted that particular victim as if he or she were a person living with disabilities.<sup>8</sup>

Just as we speak of racism in association with biases against people of a different “race” or skin color, the expression “disablism” has been used for prejudices against people living with disabilities (Thomas 1999; Deal 2007). According to David Kocman (2008) this term “references abusive, discriminatory behavior that conceives of people living with disabilities as inferior and unequal in relation to ‘normal’ people. Abnormality and inequality are inferred from the disabilities of ‘those others’, which justifies that behavior.” Disablism and racism have more in common than just the same grammatical ending to these words – above all, they share the concept of a hierarchy among differently defined social groups. While one group is ascribed the status of normality or standardness, the “others” are made into deviations from the norm (or, deviants). The ideology that supports disablist behavior was then called “ableism”. This ideology structures people living with disabilities as inferior, thereby justifying their unequal treatment (Mallet & Runswick-Cole 2014: 27).

Bias violence motivated by disability can, therefore, be called “disablist violence”. The academic literature defines several characteristics distinguishing it from other types of bias violence (Tyson 2020; Sin 2015; Thorneycroft & Asquith 2015). First, the perpetrators are more likely to be people who have power over the victim, whether as caregivers, friends, or relatives. The idea that bias violence is committed exclusively by people who do not know the victim, or by political extremist, has previously been shown to be problematic (Mason 2005). In the case of disablist violence, however, this prejudice seems even more important. Because people living with mental disability have been robbed, sexually harassed or even killed by people whom they considered their friends, a different category for this has emerged – “mate crime”. This phrase obviously references “hate crime” and emphasizes this type of perpetrator (“mate” in British English means “friend”), and is meant to be specific to disablist violence (Doherty 2015).

The second characteristic is that disablist violence is reported to police to a lesser extent than is other violence. Bias attacks are generally reported significantly less often than are cases of common crime; nevertheless, disablist attacks are reported even less often than racist violence, sexist violence, or bias violence of other kinds. Reduced willingness to report may be associated with the fact that the categories of “powerful” perpetrators

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<sup>8</sup> Disability is, naturally, just one reason why people living with disabilities might be subjected to bias attacks. Other kinds of bias motivation to be considered involve the victim’s actual or assumed gender, political convictions, religion, skin color, or, as the respondents in this report mention, age, homelessness or sexual orientation. We have not included this doubtlessly important dimension of bias violence against people living with disabilities (intersectionality) in our investigation because we were concerned that doing so would complicate comprehension of the intention of our survey.

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described above are more prevalent in disablist attacks, but it may also be connected to reduced trust in the police among people living with disabilities or the victims' capacity to recognize a disablist attack as constituting violence. Research shows (e.g., Sin et al. 2009 vi–vii) that people living with disabilities have a tendency to perceive attacks against them as a normal part of life, or those around them may recommend that they either ignore the violence and/or take preventive measures against it. Likewise, Sherry (2010: 18) has pointed out there is a tendency to comprehend attacks against people living with disabilities more as abuse or bullying and less as crime, which results in many attacks not being reported to police – sometimes with the justification that it is more important to protect the victim than to punish the perpetrator (see Doherty 2015: 300). However well-intended, such an approach is problematic, as it unfairly transfers responsibility for this violence from the perpetrators to the members of the group at risk.

Barriers were also identified on the side of the police, whether physical (police stations that are not wheelchair accessible) or social (a lack of sign language interpreters, officers who do not know how to communicate with people living with disabilities or who consider them less believable, etc.). A specific problem is that of taking advantage of the idea that people living with disabilities are more vulnerable in order to refute the perpetrator's bias motivation. This is a fundamental misunderstanding of these concepts. The notion that all people living with disabilities are more vulnerable is part of the prejudices about such people. This is not to say that some people living with disabilities are not at a disadvantage compared to some attackers. If, however, a perpetrator assaults a person because he assumes the person will be an “easy target” because of his or her (actual or apparent) disability, that is still a discriminatory choice of the kind that defines bias violence (ODIHR 2017: 3). This is similar to perpetrators assaulting a man whom they believe to be gay because they are convinced that gay men are “womanish” and therefore will be easily overpowered.

We took all of the above into account when constructing the questionnaire used as our research tool. We assumed our respondents would not be familiar with the concept of disablist violence and its theoretical starting points, so we included in our introductory description a definition of bias violence and related it to prejudices about disability. We wrote that “a substantial portion [...] of this violence is committed because perpetrators consider people living with long-term disabilities of a mental, physical, psychiatric or sensory nature to be inferior.” That claim was augmented with three examples of “bias (also known as hate) violence”. We defined this violence through the bias motivation of the perpetrators, which consisted of their choosing victims because they were living with

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disabilities. We also explicitly mentioned that we consider it bias to believe that all people living with disabilities are more vulnerable than non-disabled people. The methodology and questionnaire will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

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## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted among organizations working with people living with disabilities. The organizations were asked to complete an online questionnaire created using the Google Forms application which asked 26 questions about the characteristics of the organization, about their experience with violence against persons living with disabilities and reporting it to police, about how they assess the state of protections for people living with disabilities during criminal proceedings, which organizations are important in aiding people living with disabilities, whether they themselves had experienced bias attacks associated with the organization's activities, and whether the organization was interested in being further involved in this project.

In addition to providing a definition of bias violence, part of the questionnaire provided information about the necessity for this research and its purpose, informed participants as to how the data acquired would be handled, and informed participants of the research ethos as well as a basic description of the project of which the research is a part.<sup>9</sup> The wording of the questionnaire was consulted with two researchers whose work is dedicated to the issue of the living conditions of persons living with disabilities. The questionnaire was adapted on the basis of the consultants' comments.

Outreach by email to respondents asking them to complete the questionnaire was undertaken in two different ways. First, the member organizations of the National Council of Persons Living with Disabilities (Národní rada osob se zdravotním postižením – NRZP) were contacted. These 94 organizations were sent a request to participate in the research on 23 June 2020, by an NRZP staffer. The same staffer reminded the organizations of the opportunity to complete the questionnaire on 21 July. A total of 32 organizations responded, or 34.04 % of the baseline set.

Also, on 2 July and on 6 July, In IUSTITIA staffers sent requests to the organizations listed (as of 10 April) as being providers of social services to people living with disabilities in the Registry of Providers of Social Services kept by the Labor and Social Affairs Ministry (Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí – MPSV). A total of 1 727 emails were sent to these organizations including their local branches or organizational units if they had a (relatively) independent scope of action. Of these, 83 email addresses turned out to be defunct. Replacement email addresses were found for them on the official websites of the service providers and were used. In nine cases it was not possible to find a replacement email address, and in one case the organization had ceased to exist in the meantime. Just as with the NRZP set, a reminder to complete the questionnaire was also submitted. However,

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<sup>9</sup> The questionnaire including the components described above is available at <https://forms.gle/5k22enkCnPghAG1o6>.

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it was only sent to those organizations that had not yet completed the questionnaire or had not informed the In IUSTITIA researchers that they were not interested. Of the MPSV set, 311 organizations (18.01 %) completed the questionnaire.

The sample set comprises 335 questionnaires. The baseline sets of the MPSV and NRZP overlap to a certain extent, as some of the organizations belonging to the NRZP are also registered providers of social services to people living with disabilities. Nevertheless, no organization or stand-alone unit is represented more than once in the sample set. The questionnaire was always completed by just one representative of the organization contacted.

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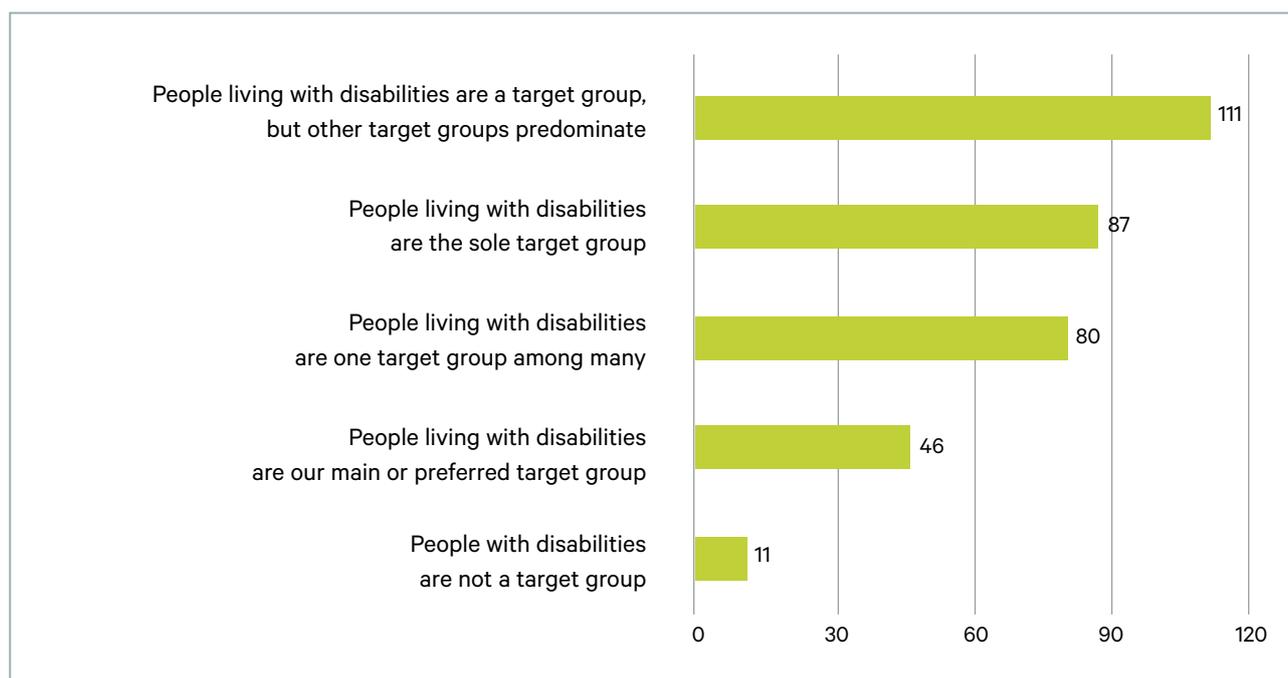
# RESEARCH FINDINGS

## Characteristics of the sample

The first part of the questionnaire asked respondents to characterize the individuals representing the organizations and the organizations themselves. We were interested in the degree to which people living with disabilities were a target group of the organization. From graph no. 1 it is apparent that different types of organizations are represented in the sample. For the largest proportion of the organizations, people living with disabilities are just one of several target groups and the other target groups predominate in practice. They are followed by organizations for which people living with disabilities are the sole target group. This finding corresponds to the character of the baseline set, in which there are more registered providers of social services. Eleven respondents said that people living with disabilities were not a target group for the organization even though they were listed in the Registry. Those organizations did not answer any of the other questions.<sup>10</sup>

### Graph 1

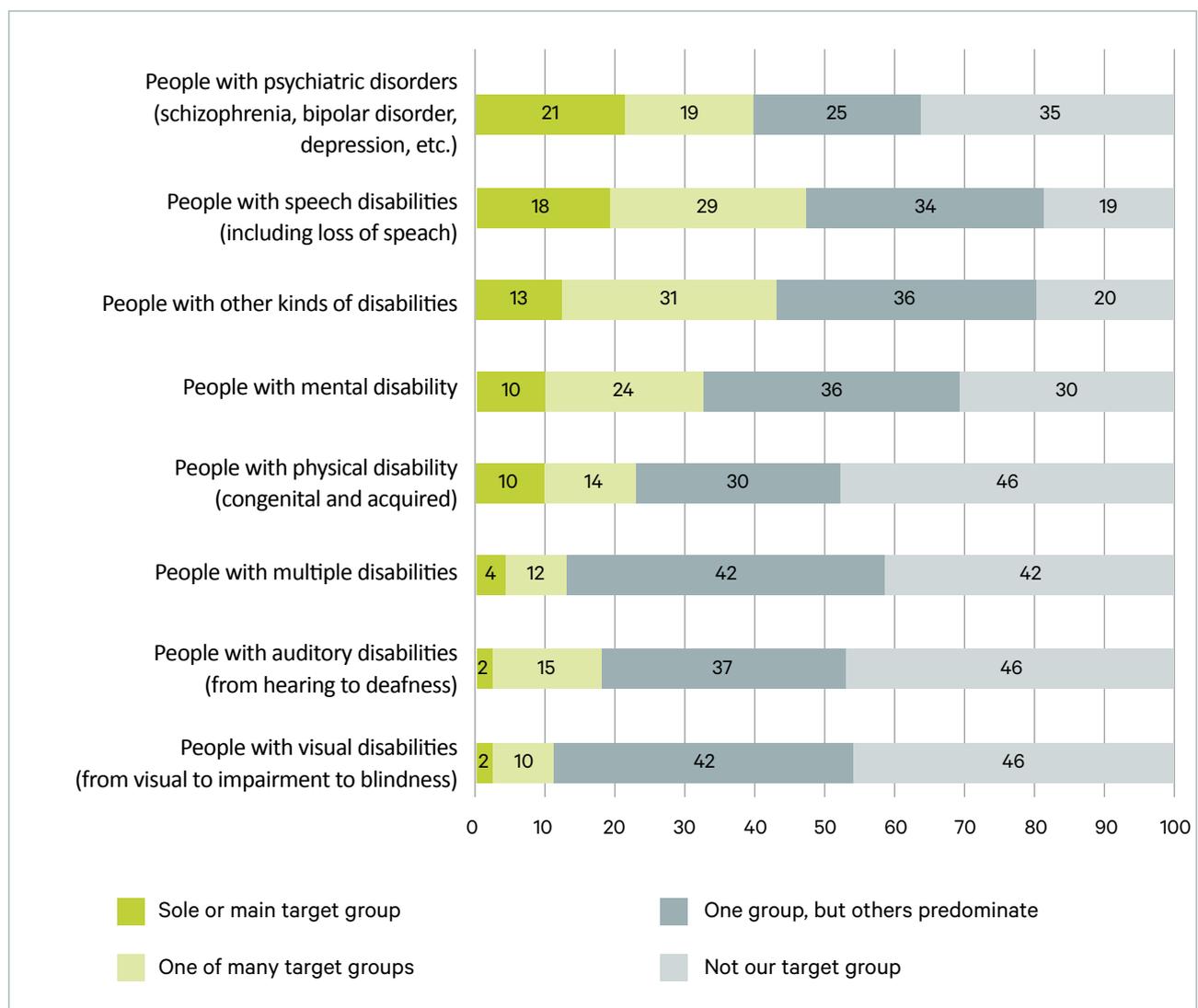
#### People living with disabilities as a target group of the organization (N = 335)



<sup>10</sup> This means all further findings were inferred from 324 questionnaires, not 335.

The organizations in the sample are further characterized by the fact that they work with people living with different types of disability. Graph no. 2 shows that the biggest proportion comprises people living with speech disabilities, including speech loss. For 81 % of the organizations such people are a target group. The next most numerous groups are people with other disabilities, with mental disabilities and with psychiatric disorders. The least frequently represented organizations were those working with people who have auditory, physical and visual disabilities. People living with “another” type of disability were also included, but without further specification. The large share of such answers is something that should be explored in further detail by future research.

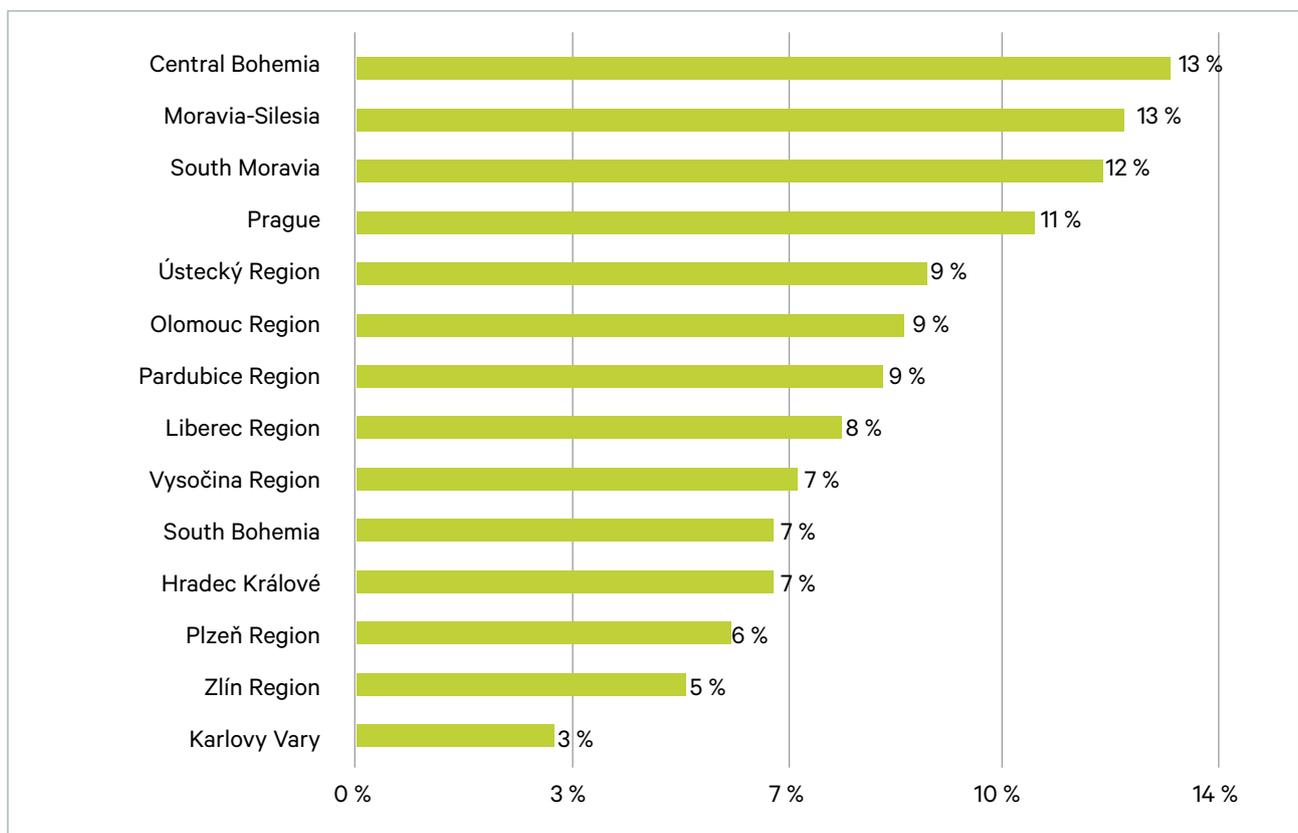
**Graph 2**  
**Organization target groups by type of disability**



From the standpoint of geographic scope, we can state that the sample set covers the entire territory of the Czech Republic; 14 % of the organizations said they cover the entire territory, while the rest covered one or more regions. The regional representation is depicted by graph no. 3. Certain differences exist among the regions. Almost half of the organizations said they work in the Central Bohemian, Moravian-Silesian and South Moravian Regions and in the Capital City of Prague. The regions least covered by such organizations are Karlovy Vary, Zlín and Plzeň. There is a 10 % difference between the organizations who stated they work in Central Bohemian and those who stated they work in the Karlovy Vary Region.

### Graph 3

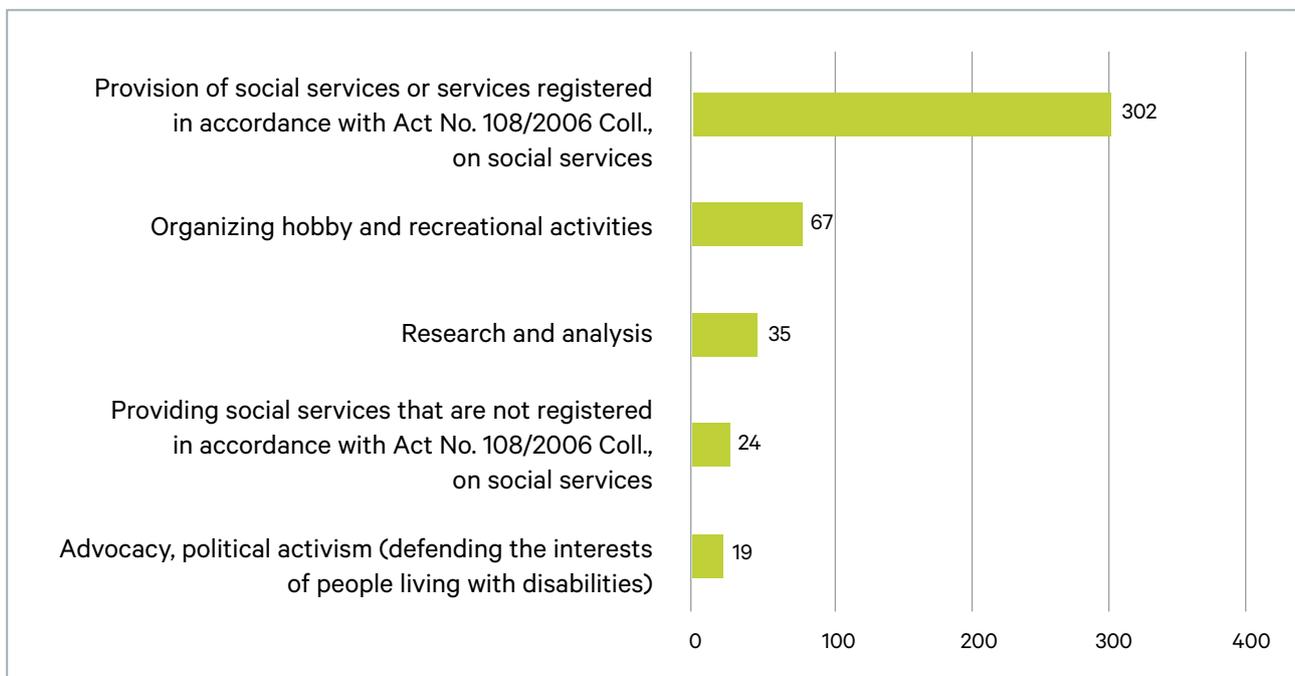
#### Regional scope of organizations not active nationwide (N = 280)



We then asked about the activities implemented by the organizations in relation to people living with disabilities. Respondents could choose multiple options. Given the nature of the baseline set it was possible to presume that a large part of the organizations would be involved in providing social services per Act No. 108/2006 on social services. That assumption was confirmed, 93 % of the organizations provided registered social services, while 21 % brought together people living with disabilities and organized hobby or recreational activities. The least-represented kind of activity was advocacy and political activism consisting of defending the interests of people living with disabilities locally or nationally – just 6 % of the organizations mentioned such activities. Graph no. 4 presents the absolute values of representation for these different activities.

## Graph 4

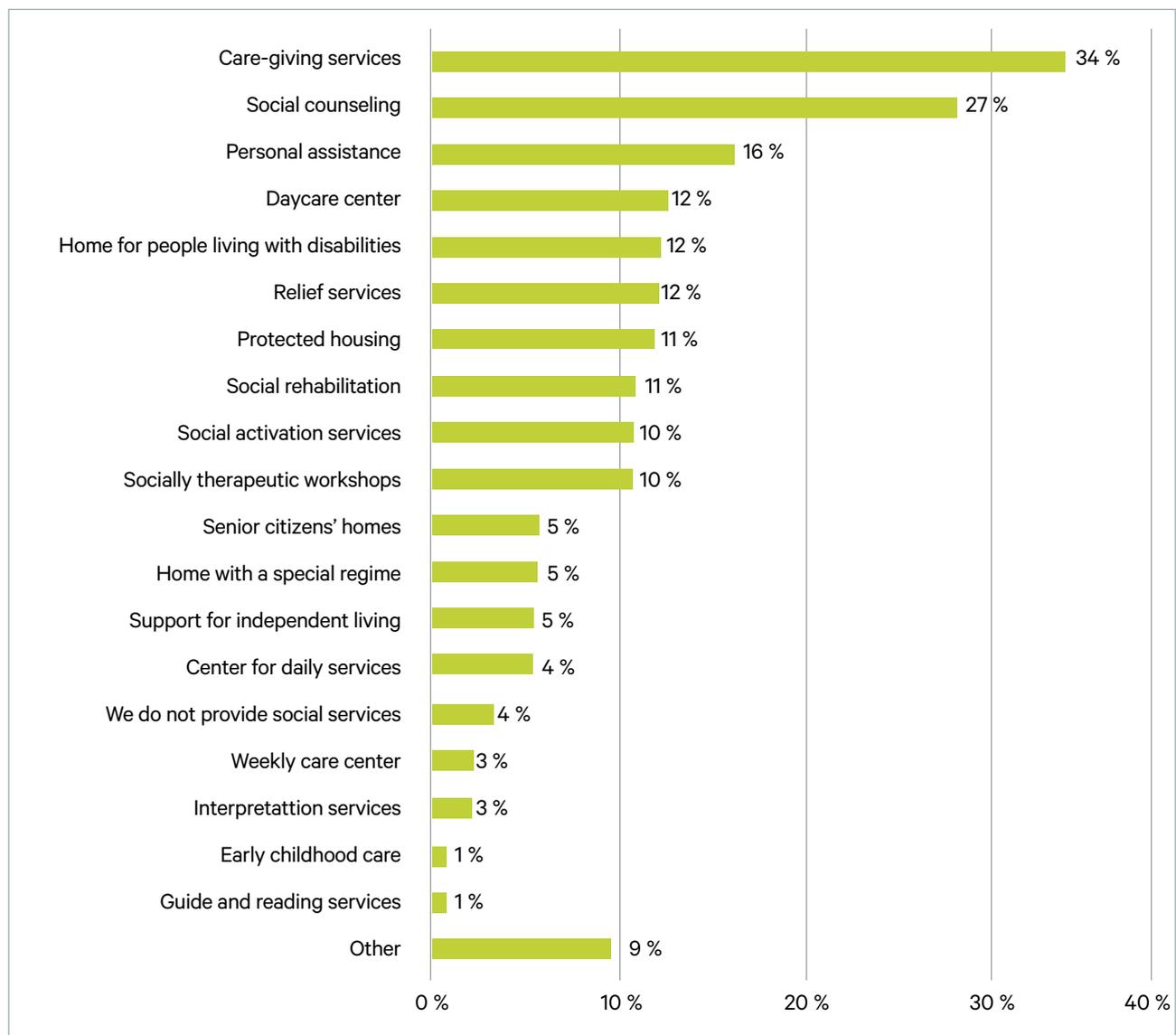
### Activities of organizations related to people living with disabilities (N = 486)



The kinds of social services being provided by the organizations is described in graph no. 5. The wording of the question emphasized that these could also be unregistered social services. For that reason, the number of organizations providing social services of any kind was increased. Just 12 of the 324 organizations said they provide no social services. Roughly one-third of the organizations providing some social services offer care-giving services. The next most frequent are social counseling and personal assistance. Respondents were able to choose more than one option here as well, and for that reason the sum of the values in the graph exceeds 100 %.

## Graph 5

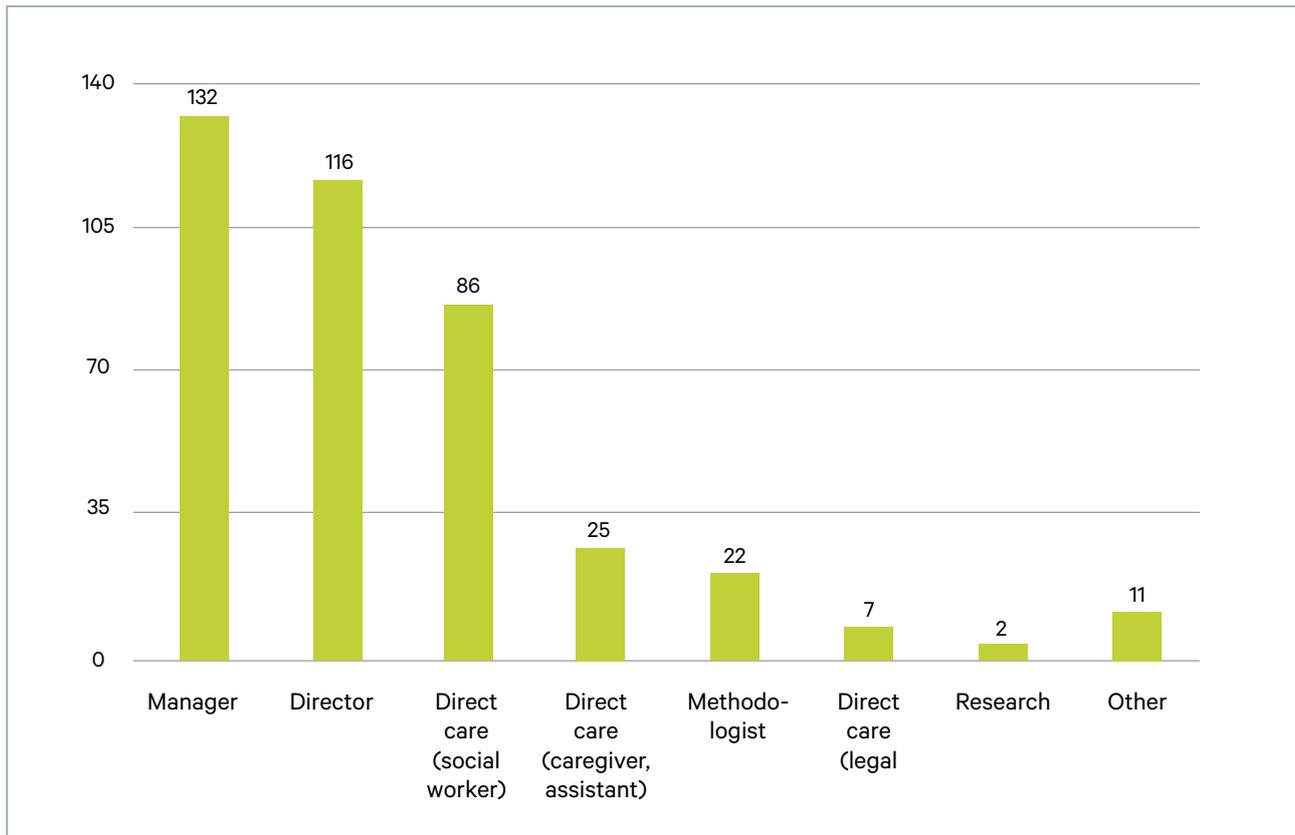
### Non-registered and registered social services provided by the organizations (N = 623)



Respondents could also choose more than one option when answering questions about their position in the organization they were representing during this research (see graph no. 6). Most respondents were involved in leadership of the organization, mainly as managers or directors. Staffers working in direct care and methodologists were also well-represented. The sample set therefore combines people who have direct experience with the target group and those whose experience is facilitated by their leadership of the organization.

## Graph 6

**Position of the respondent in the organization being represented (N = 401)**



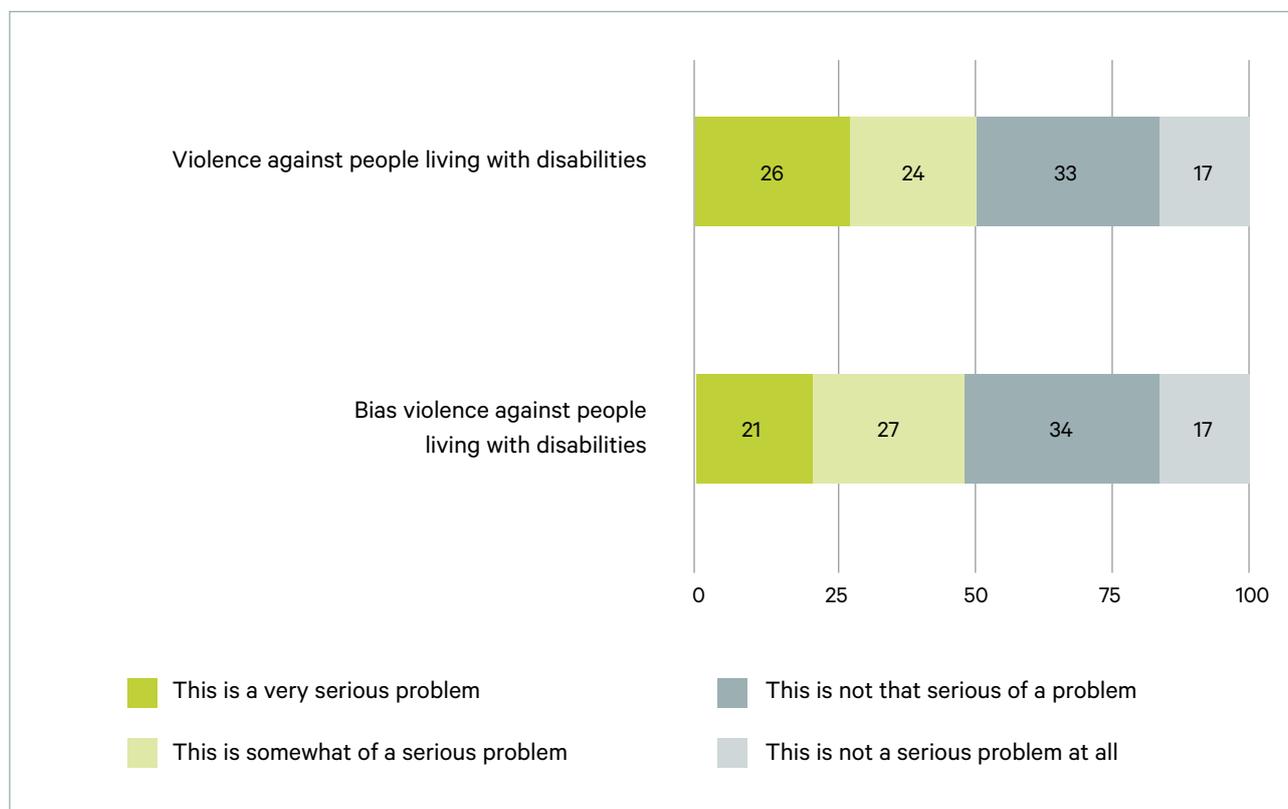
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## Assessing the severity of violence against people living with disabilities

Given the experiences in their organizations the respondents were asked to assess how serious of a problem they believe physical, sexual, or verbal violence against people living with disabilities is. We asked about violence and, specifically, about bias violence. Graph no. 7 presents the answers given. Half of the respondents assessed violence against people living with disabilities as a serious problem generally. The severity of bias violence was assessed as a bit more mild, but still, 48 % of respondents said it represents a serious problem.

### Graph 7

#### Assessing the severity of bias violence and other violence committed against people living with disabilities (%)



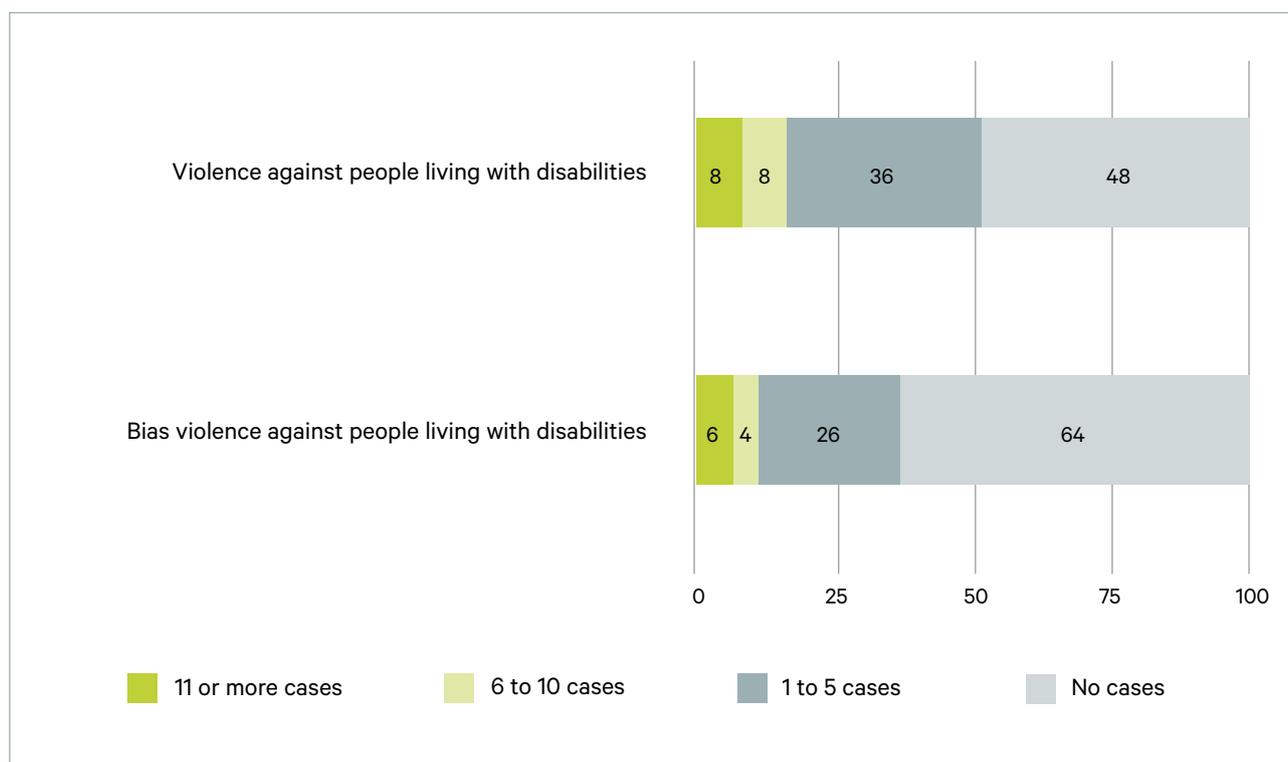
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## Assessment of the severity of violence against people living with disabilities

When ascertaining the prevalence of physical, sexual, verbal and other violence against people living with disabilities, respondents were asked to base their answers on their experiences from the organization they represented, whether they were acquired from performing direct work with clients or working on behalf of the target group. The prevalence of violence against people living with disabilities was again tracked on two levels: violence and bias violence. We assumed there would be more instances of violence than bias violence. The results of the questionnaire are depicted in graph no. 8 and confirmed that assumption. During the last three years, 52 % of the organizations encountered at least one case of violence committed against people living with disabilities. Bias violence during that period was recorded by more than one-third of the organizations, some of which stated they had encountered a greater number of cases – 6 % of the organizations had experience with 11 or more such cases during that time.

### Graph 8

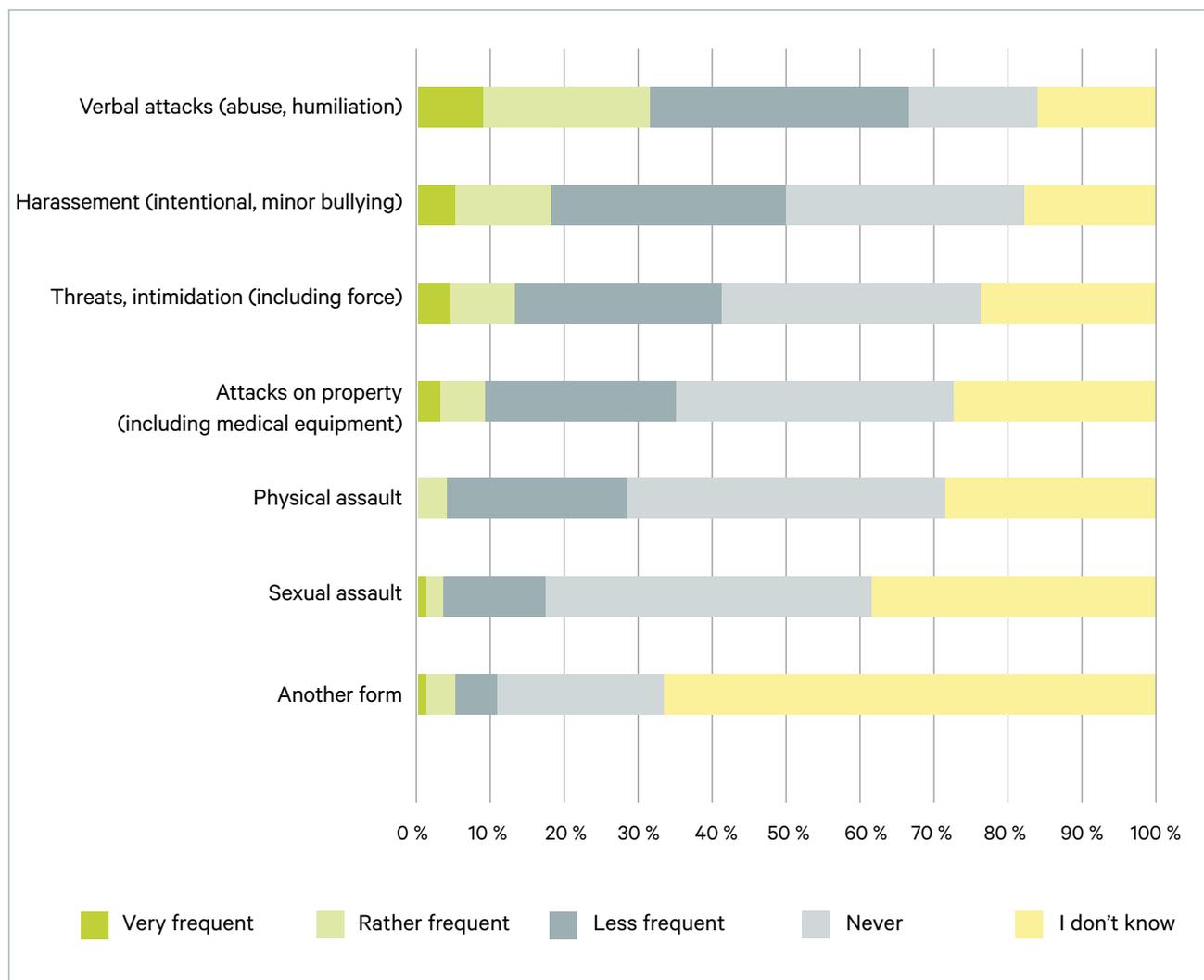
**Cases of violence and bias violence against people living with disabilities recorded during the last three years, from the perspective of motivation (%)**



On the basis of the experiences from their organizations, the respondents were also asked to report how frequently people living with disabilities encounter different forms of violence. We stuck to distinguishing between violence and bias violence in this case as well. The experiences with different forms of violence are depicted by graph no. 9. People living with disabilities are most frequently attacked verbally and harassed. The next most frequent kinds of violence are threats and intimidation, followed by attacks on property, physical assault, sexual assault and then “other” forms of violence. For bias violence, the order of the forms of violence is almost the same as for violence in general, the only difference is in the number of experiences recorded (see graph no. 10).

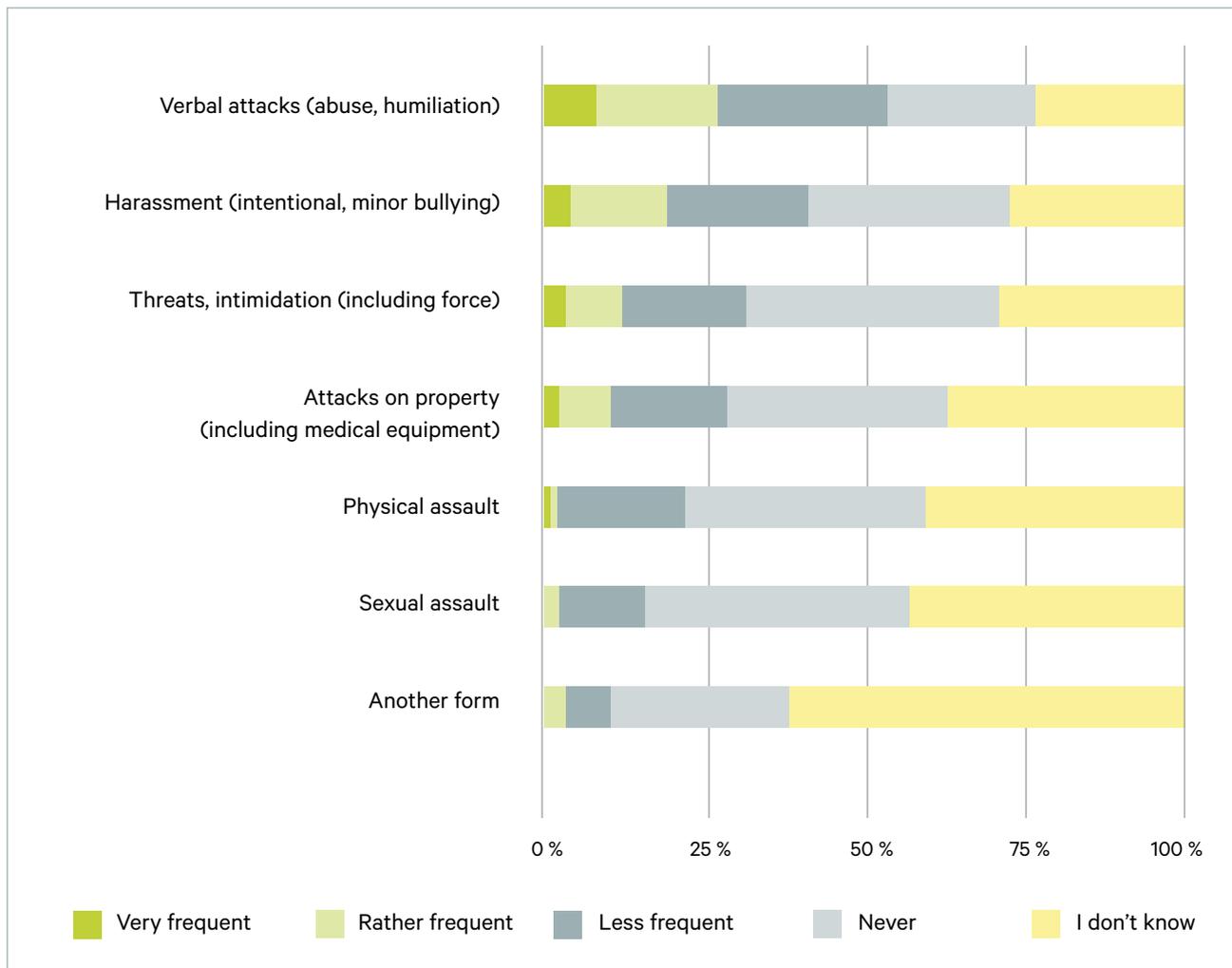
## Graph 9

### Forms of violence committed against people living with disabilities (%)



## Graph 10

### Forms of bias violence committed against people living with disabilities (%)



If we compare the values for these categories, we find the following when we combine the categories of “very frequent”, “rather frequent” and “less frequent”: People living with disabilities encounter verbal attacks according to 65 % of the organizations, and encounter verbal bias attacks according to 53 % of the organizations. They encounter harassment according to 50 % of the organizations, and biased harassment according to 40 % of the organizations. They encounter intimidation or threats according to 41 % of the organizations, and biased intimidation or threats according to 34 % of the organizations. Attacks on property are considered frequent by 35 % of the organizations, while 28 % of the organizations considered biased attacks on property to be frequent. Physical assault was reported by 28 % of the organizations, and biased physical assault by 19 % of the organizations. Sexual assault was prevalent among 17 % of the organizations, while biased sexual assault was reported by 14 % of the organizations. Lastly, “another form” of attack was said to be frequent by 10 % of the organizations, while “another form” of attack motivated by bias was said to be frequent by 9 % of the organizations.

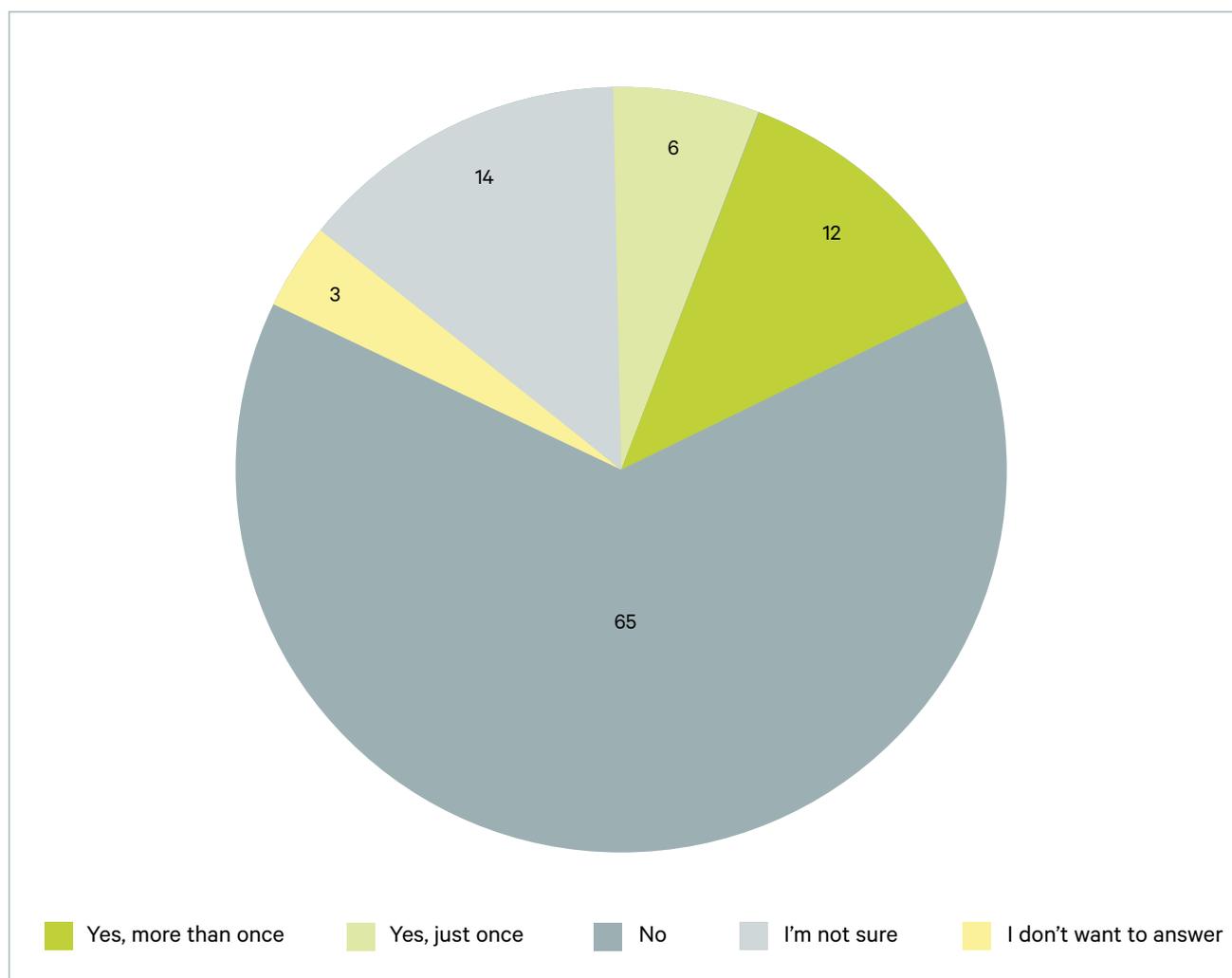
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## Violence against those working with people living with disabilities

Professionals who work with people who are more at risk of bias violence also become victims of bias violence (Houdek 2018). For that reason, we have included a question to determine how frequently this happens to the respondents or their colleagues due to the activities of their organizations. The question included examples of being subjected to abuse in association with a plan to build a facility for people living with disabilities; assaults committed online or in person, physically or verbally, when accompanying clients; and destruction to the property of a facility because it belongs to an organization working with people living with disabilities. Graph no. 11 shows that 18 % of respondents or their colleagues had been victimized by bias violence in the past in association with the activities of the organization working with people living with disabilities. Furthermore, 12 % of respondents said they or their colleagues had experienced that kind of assault more than once.

### Graph 11

**Bias violence against respondents or their colleagues in association with the activities of the organization (%)**



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## Selected cases of bias violence committed against people living with disabilities

Respondents were asked to describe in their own words the most recent case of bias violence against people living with disabilities that they had encountered as part of the activities of their organization during the last three years. The entire spectrum of bias violence was described, from strangers humiliating and insulting the victim in public, including public transportation; to bullying and harassment by neighbors at a place of residence or by others at school, while shopping, or at work; to extortion, physical assault, and robbery committed by family members or “friends”. Several of the cases described were also motivated sexually. Specifically, respondents referred to cases that could be considered bias violence committed by perpetrators such as nurses in care institutions, teachers at special schools and employees of the state bureaucracy, including the courts.

The violence captured by this survey will now be illustrated through selected cases. We would like to emphasize that these are cases the respondents themselves identified as involving bias motivation. Given the limited amount of information provided, it was not possible to verify bias motivation for the cases described. The descriptions of the incidents have been edited for style while retaining all of the relevant information.

1. An adult man with mild learning difficulties and visual impairment, conditions that cause him difficulties with expressing himself and spatially orienting himself, was assaulted by another man at a train station. The aggressor verbally assailed the man, insulting him by calling him a “mental case”, “moron”, “incompetent social case” and “blind” [in a derogatory way of speaking, the authors’ comment]. The aggressor filmed the incident with his mobile phone while committing the attack. He also said that people like the injured party “shouldn’t walk around without being on a leash, they are incompetent and a burden on society”. Ever since this attack the victim does not trust people whom he does not know and is ashamed to go shopping or to travel. He also ended a long-distance relationship because he was afraid something might happen to his partner.
2. A man put his penis into the hand of a blind woman without her consent.
3. A young couple was sitting on a bench at a bus stop holding hands. Other young people walking by verbally assaulted them, saying they should “knock it off” and that they “hoped to God they would not reproduce”. The victims’ disabilities are apparent from their appearance; they have both been diagnosed with Down syndrome. They were quite startled by the attacker’s words, which made them unhappy.

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4. A woman was verbally assaulted by her employer after he learned she had been hospitalized in the past for psychiatric treatment. As a consequence of the attack, the victim stopped trusting her employer. She considered filing a criminal report and giving notice.
  5. A man decided to “punish” his physically disabled neighbors after they reported he had parked in a space for which he did not have a permit. The man then parked his car so as to block barrier-free entrance to the building, making it impossible for them to access their home. He also attacked them verbally. Police are investigating. The injured parties fear further attacks. For that reason, they now access their building using a different route that involves navigating barriers that exhaust them, physically.
  6. Neighbors bully people living with disabilities. A social services client was falsely accused of having smoked at a window, of bothering his neighbors with foul odors, and with playing music loudly. An investigation by the municipality found the complaints were false. Generally, the prejudice predominates that people living with disabilities are less credible than people living with no disabilities.
  7. A man who is infamous for living off of women drawing disability pensions moved in illegally with a woman living in supported housing. He takes her money, tries to convince her to make him her legal guardian, threatens her, and physically assaults her both at home and in public. Police have been called to the attacks and emergency medical services intervened twice. The woman is unable to defend herself effectively, submitting to the attacker and downplaying the severity of his violence. The perpetrator was expelled from the household once, but the woman let him back in two days later. She refused to file a criminal report against him.
  8. Elderly people and people living with disabilities are assaulted by their own relatives, who tell them they are worthless, that their existence is annoying, and that they should die, referencing the fact that the pensions they receive are paid for by the taxes of working people.
  9. A man attempted to take a relative’s money at the place where the relative receives social services. The assailant aggressively pressured a social worker not to get involved in the matter. During his attempt, he said the relative did not need spending money, that it was a waste of money to give it to him, and that it did not make any sense.

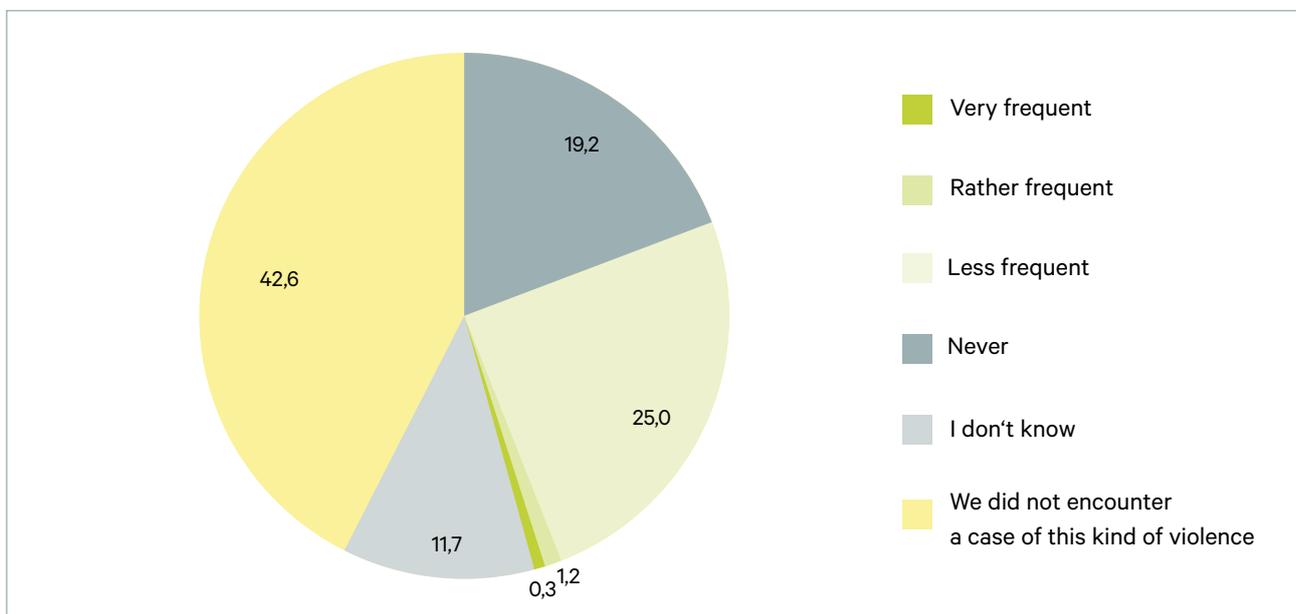
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## Reporting violence committed against people living with disabilities to the police and investigations of motivation

What is symptomatic of violence committed against the members of marginalized groups is that it is often unreported to police. Our questionnaire also tracked this underreporting. The answers in which respondents were meant to take into account the experiences of their organization demonstrate that people living with disabilities report becoming victims of physical, sexual, verbal and other violent assaults only minimally. Graph no. 12 shows 44 % of respondents believe such attacks are reported to police less frequently, or not at all. Just 1.5 % of respondents believe they are reported rather frequently or very frequently.

### Graph 12

#### Reporting assaults against people living with disabilities to the police (%)

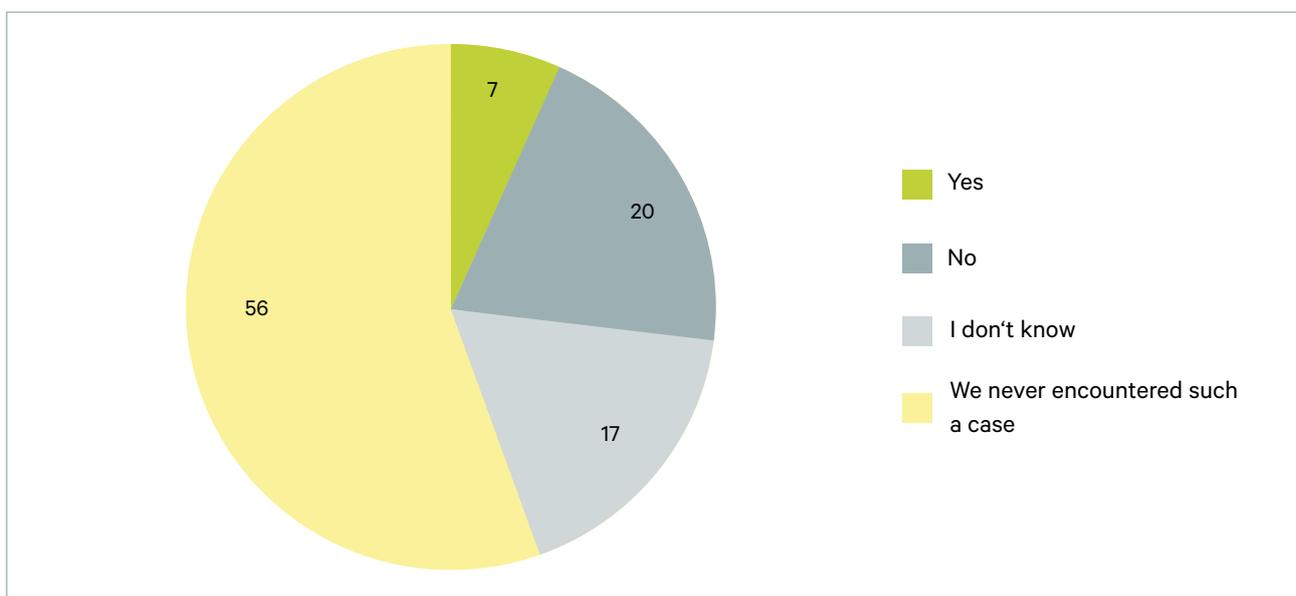


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We attempted to determine the degree of unreported incidents for bias violence committed against people living with disabilities. We asked specifically about the most recent such case encountered by the organization’s respondents in the last three years. Just 7 % of respondents answered that the assault had been reported to police. However, the share of positive answers to the question of whether the bias attack was reported grows to 15 % if we eliminate those respondents who never encountered such a case during the last three years – 56 % of respondents gave that answer (see graph no. 13).

### Graph 13

**Was the most recent incident of bias violence against a person living with disabilities during the last three years reported to the police? (%)**



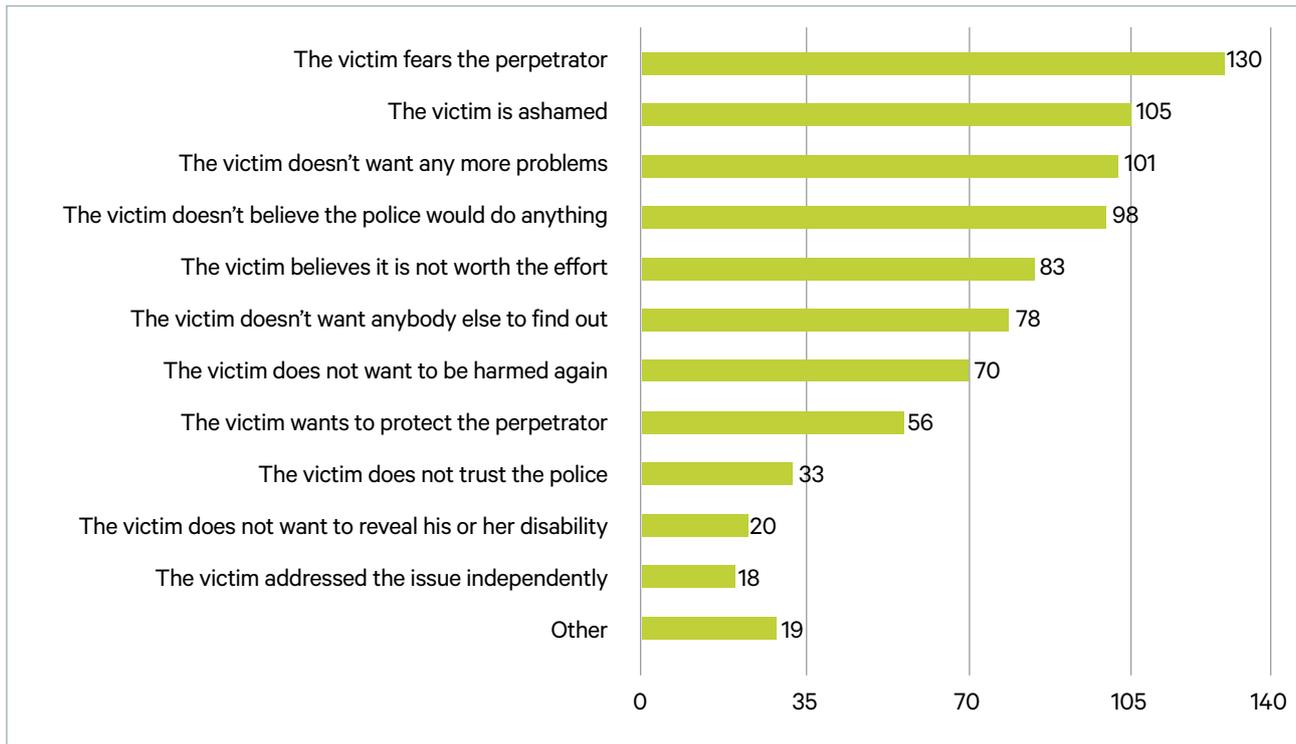
Where there is such a high degree of unreported incidents it is important to concentrate on the question of why victims living with disabilities do not turn to police. Respondents were asked to choose from 13 statements, including the answers “I don’t know” and “other”. They were allowed to choose more than one answer. The most frequently mentioned reason was the victim’s fear of the perpetrator, followed by shame and the fear that reporting the attack could cause other problems. The fourth most frequent answer was that victims were convinced the police would do nothing with the case (see graph no. 14).

The above-mentioned order of reasons may be associated with the high proportion of caretakers, “friends” and relatives among the perpetrators of bias violence against victims living with disabilities. The victims may fear a deterioration in their standard of living

if they actively complain about the people on whom they are frequently existentially dependent. Likewise, they may fear contact with police or may consider it ineffective. Both interpretations correspond to the findings presented above from the literature and should become an important starting point for the attempt to strengthen the position in society of people living with disabilities.

## Graph 14

### Reasons for not reporting violence committed against people living with disabilities to the police (N = 821)



This is related to the question of what might aid a bias violence victim living with disabilities with reporting assaults to police. Respondents were allowed to formulate proposals in their own words in response to this open-ended question; 150 respondents made no specific suggestions. The answers from the rest were analyzed as falling into seven categories. The answers were conceived of at different levels of abstraction, some very general recommendations and others specific. We decided to conserve these differences and therefore the various options are presented alongside each other in the graphs below.

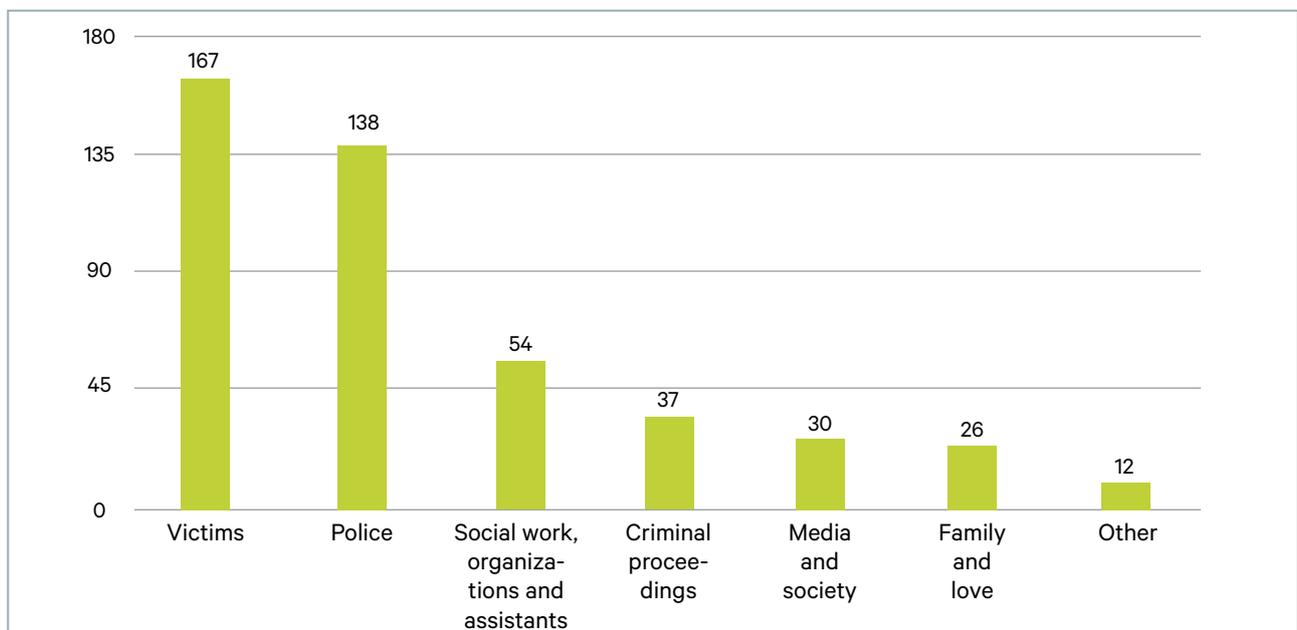
From graph no. 15 it is apparent that proposals targeting changes, either on the side of police or on the side of the victims, were the most frequent. We focus on those options in more detail

below. To a lesser degree the need was expressed for changes in the area of assistants, organizations and social work with persons living with disabilities; in the area of criminal proceedings; in the area of families and loved ones of persons living with disabilities; in the area of media and society and “other”.

In the area of assistants, organizations and social work with this target group, the importance of the aid and support they are able to provide people living with disabilities when reporting incidents to police was emphasized. Respondents mentioned that it is necessary to support organizations financially to provide such aid. As far as criminal proceedings go, what was underscored above all was the importance of victims’ faith in the possibility of achieving justice through that route and strengthening victims’ trust in the criminal justice authorities and their approaches. The need was mentioned to provide accompaniment to victims living with disabilities during criminal proceedings, as well as for more legislative protection of them. In the area of media and society, the importance of raising public awareness and media work, i.e., educating and informing the public, was most frequently mentioned. Likewise, in the area of the families and loved ones of people living with disabilities, it was mentioned that support should be provided to such victims with reporting victimization by such parties.

## Graph 15

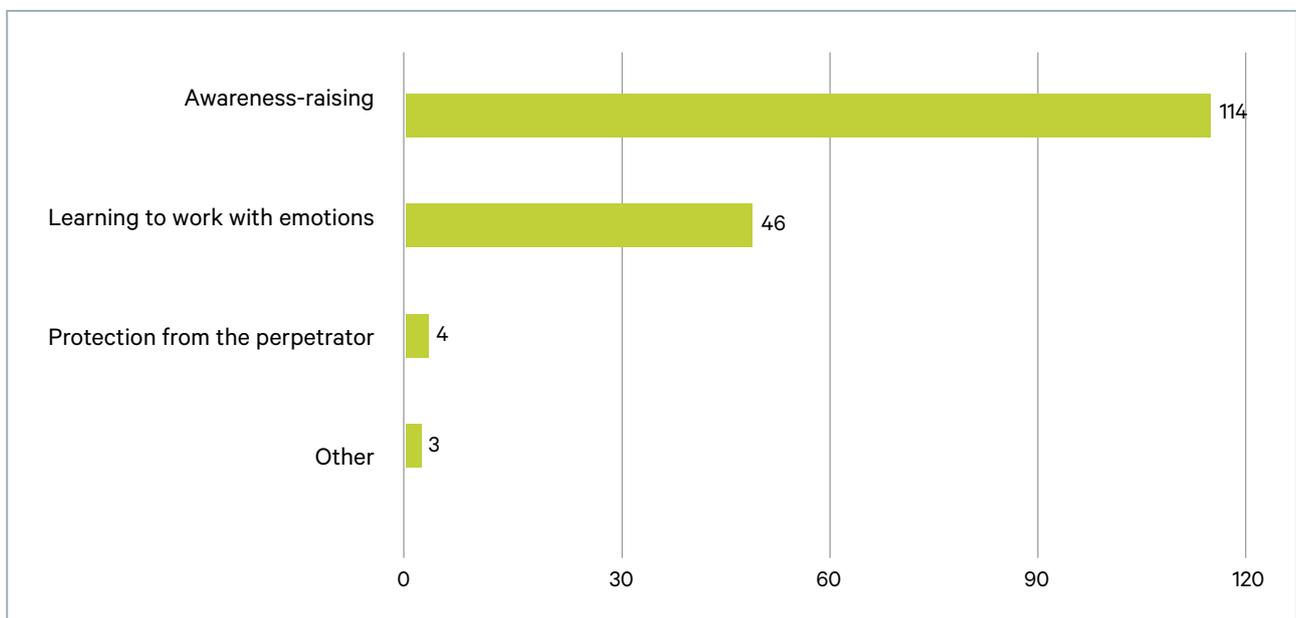
### Areas of aid to victims of bias violence living with disabilities when it comes to reporting assaults to police (N = 464)



The need to raise victims' awareness was most frequently emphasized (see graph no. 16). While that proposal was not often made in detail, we can say that this awareness especially involves the ability to recognize certain behavior as intolerable, or rather as: 1) violent, 2) motivated by bias, and 3) criminal. Increasing victims' faith in the police was also mentioned, which also was not usually specified further. Good examples of police work or of establishing special police units or experts on this group were mentioned as instruments. The importance of working with emotions concerns above all learning how to overcome fear and shame. It was repeatedly mentioned that an opportunity should be arranged for victims living with disabilities to speak with somebody about their feelings.

## Graph 16

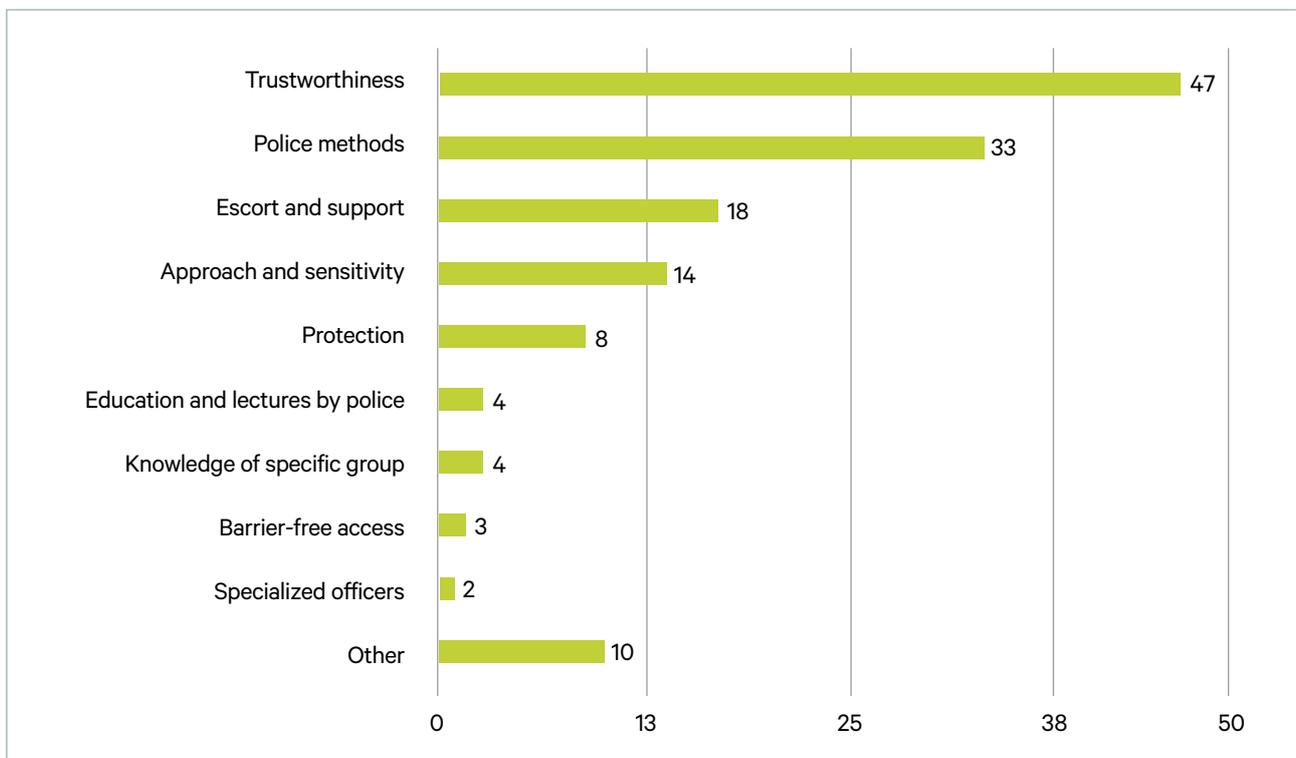
**What might aid victims with reporting cases to police  
(on the victims' side)? (N = 464)**



As far as the police were concerned, the answers involved different levels of detail. Generally, the most frequent change mentioned on the side of the police involved trustworthiness. From this we can infer that among people living with disabilities, trust in the police is apparently not high. The methods of the police are also mentioned and assessed as one reason victims are less willing to report assaults. This is associated, to a certain degree, with the approach and sensitivity of the police and their knowledge of the specifics of this target group. From the perspective of the respondents this is an important area that could improve the reporting of cases. Lastly, specific measures were mentioned such as escorting victims living with disabilities when contacting police and supporting them during the process (see graph no. 17).

## Graph 17

### What might aid victims with reporting cases on the police side (N = 143)

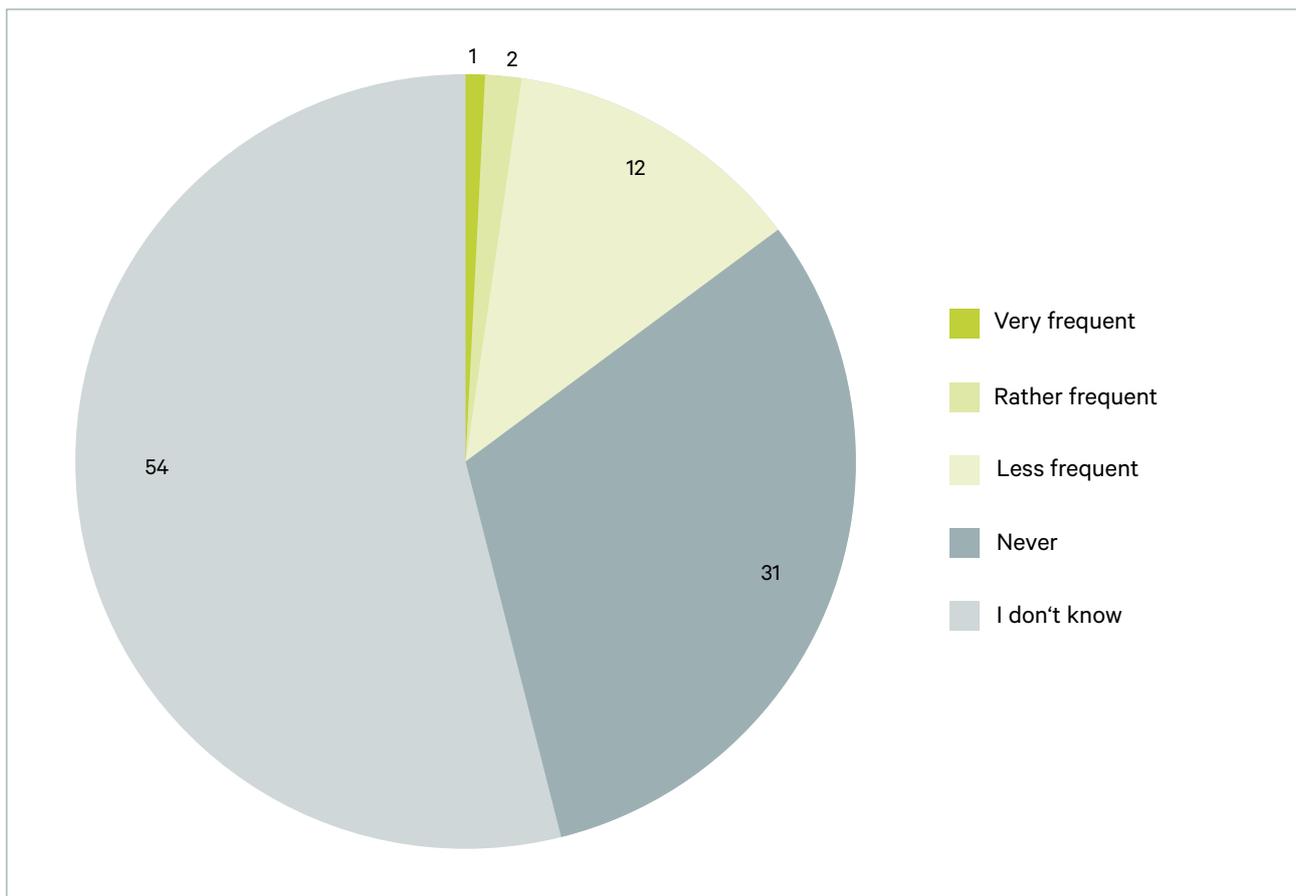


We also asked how frequently police investigate bias motivation in reported cases of attacks on persons living with disabilities, given the experiences of the organizations' respondents. More than half did not know how often bias motivation was investigated. Almost 31 % believed it was never investigated and just 3 % of respondents said they believed attention was paid to bias motivation rather frequently or very frequently (see graph no. 18).

We can interpret these findings in two ways. On the one hand, these organizations may not be informed about the course of these investigations by the injured parties or the police. On the other hand, it is possible police either did not take the motivation of the perpetrator into consideration at all, or did not take bias motivation into consideration at all. The police, nevertheless, should still ascertain evidence as to motive, because it can serve as a generally aggravating circumstance at trial that facilitates harsher sentencing.

### Graph 18

**Investigations of the bias motivation of the perpetrator in case of bias attacks (%)**



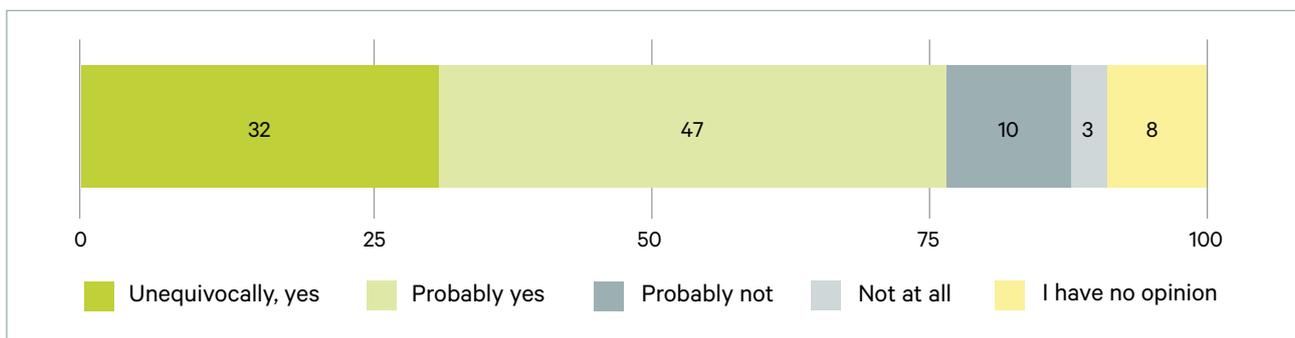
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## Assessing the state of protection for people living with disabilities during criminal proceedings

“Do you believe physical, sexual, verbal or other violence against people living with disabilities should be punished more severely than violence committed against people living with no disabilities?” From the answers to this question it is apparent that most respondents (79 %) identify with the idea of stricter punishment in such cases.

### Graph 19

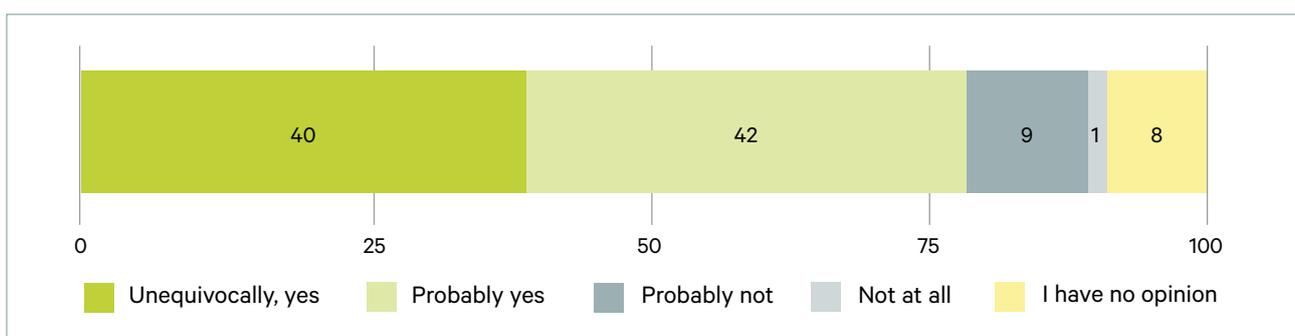
#### Opinions on stricter punishments for violence committed against people living with disabilities (%)



The essence of prosecuting bias crimes is to achieve stricter punishments for the incidents qualified as such. For example, it is possible to hand down a sentence that is longer (by half) if a crime was motivated by racism. This does not apply to crimes motivated by the victim’s actual or perceived disability because such protection is missing from the Criminal Code. The vast majority of respondents (about 82 %) agree with introducing disability among the protected characteristics to be taken into account for selected criminal offenses at the level of qualified substantive merit.

### Graph 20

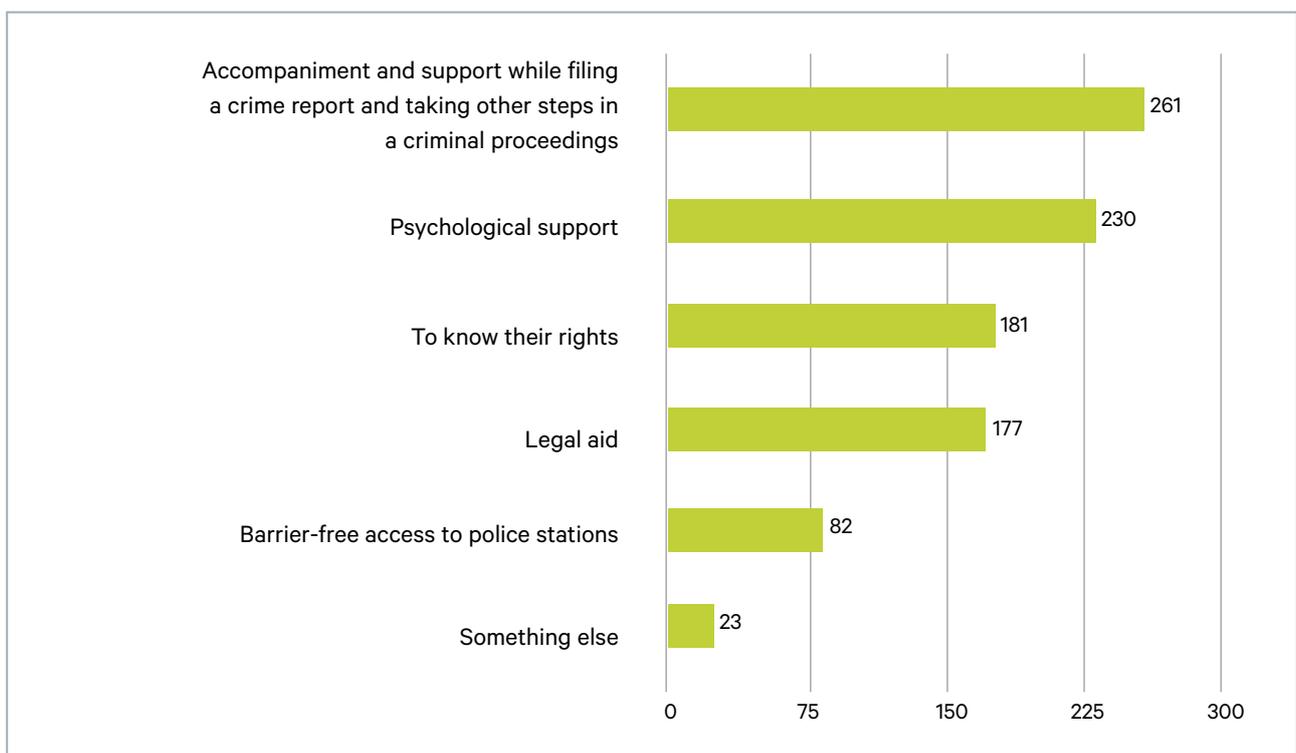
#### Opinion on introducing disability among the protected characteristics in the Criminal Code (%)



Given the experiences reported by the respondents' organizations, we also asked what would aid victims of bias violence living with disabilities in exercising their rights during criminal proceedings to the fullest extent. There were six options to choose from, including the answer "something else". Respondents were allowed to choose as many answers as they wanted. The answer most frequently accented by the respondents was the importance of accompanying and supporting victims during the filing of crime reports and other tasks of the criminal proceedings. The next most frequent answer was psychological support. Knowledge of the rights of a victim and legal aid were also mentioned relatively frequently. Wheelchair access to police stations was mentioned less frequently, which is a consequence of the characteristics of our sample set, which included different groups of people living with disabilities.

## Graph 21

### What bias attack victims need to exercise their rights fully during criminal proceedings (N = 954)



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## Important organizations working with people living with disabilities

Respondents were asked to list as many as five organizations bringing together people living with disabilities or aiding them whom they considered to be the most interesting or significant in the Czech Republic. We identified 226 such organizations total in the respondents' answers. In table no. 1 those that were mentioned at least 10 times in the respondents' answers are listed.

The leading position of the NRZP may reflect the nature of the sample set, as well as the fact that it is the only organization that brings together all types of organizations working with people living with disabilities in the country and it is active in the public sphere. It was followed by Caritas Czech Republic, the Union of People Living with Physical Disabilities in the Czech Republic, the Paraple Center, and others. Most of the organizations were represented in our sample (the NRZP by its member organizations). Those not represented in this sample were: The Association of Providers of Social Services in the Czech Republic, the White Circle of Safety, the Paraple Center, Helpnet.cz, and the Society for Support to People Living with Mental Disability.

**Table 1**

### **Important organizations working with people living with disabilities (mentioned 10 or more times)**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| National Council of People Living with Disabilities Czech Republic |    |
| Caritas Czech Republic   | 48 |
| Union of People Living with Physical Disabilities Czech Republic   | 26 |
| Paraple Center   | 25 |
| Diakonia, Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren                 | 22 |
| White Circle of Safety   | 21 |
| Focus Czech Republic   | 19 |
| Helpnet.cz   | 13 |
| The League of Wheelchair Users                                     | 11 |
| Association of Providers of Social Services Czech Republic         | 10 |
| Rhythm – From Client to Citizen                                    | 10 |
| Society for Support to People Living with Mental Disability        | 10 |
| Tyfloservis, o.p.s.  | 10 |

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## FINAL MESSAGES

At the end of any questionnaire there is usually room for respondents to leave messages for those implementing the survey. We also provided room for any commentaries, ideas or suggestions. More than one-fourth of respondents took advantage of this opportunity and expanded upon their experience with violence and bias violence, mentioned other problems experienced by people living with disabilities and the providers of social services to this target group, and expressed their opinion of how the questionnaire was worded or of the research itself. Below we present some such messages, adapted stylistically, as an illustration. We tried to choose answers reflecting the breadth of the subjects accented by respondents. One can see how the respondents approached contributing to this research and to what degree the subject of violence against people living with disabilities is relevant to them.

1. Bias violence will probably never be absolutely eliminated. However, I think the situation is a bit improved by the fact that people living with disabilities are not as isolated in residential facilities as they used to be. They are becoming part of everyday life as they once were, and the prejudices of people living with no disabilities against them are probably fewer (a big prejudice against people with mental disability is that people living with no disabilities believe they are all aggressive and feel threatened by them). It is necessary, however, to constantly educate people living with no disabilities, to hold open houses, to present social services at different events, etc.
2. I encountered bias from the media when, after an animal was killed in our municipality (a cat), a TV crew arrived and wanted to film a reportage about how a client of our facility must certainly have done it. We explained everything to them and after some time it came to light that a perpetrator unrelated to our facility had committed the crime.
3. There is no media campaign to de-stigmatize people living with psychiatric disorders. When there are plans to establish apartments or protected living arrangements for persons living with disabilities or psychiatric disorders, it is necessary to undertake long-term work with the neighbors of the planned project and with the public so they will not protest against it and act under pressure from the “gossips” who spread fear of such people in society and who would prefer to see them locked up behind the bars of institutions without any rights!
4. Bias violence against people living with disabilities is very serious and in many situations it is genuinely sad. In my experience, this is very frequently commi-

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tted within socially excluded or socially vulnerable families. Unfortunately, the inaccessibility of legal support, bad legislation on guardianship, the fact that social workers have too few powers, the fear of persons living with disabilities, their own lack of knowledge about their rights, etc., very often complicates the entire situation and makes it even more difficult.

5. I decidedly would be quite cautious about working with the concept of “bias”.
6. We rather encounter bias violence generally committed against homeless people irrespective of whether they are also living with disabilities. Violence committed against homeless persons by the general public is, in most cases, committed against people living with dementia or psychiatric disorders that of course we have not officially reported anywhere.
7. Bias violence committed by handicapped people among themselves is a big problem. Handicapped persons allow themselves to do more than we believe to similarly handicapped persons. I would begin with educating them about assertiveness, etc.
8. Fortunately, bias violence against people from our target group is not a big problem. The bigger problem is rather discrimination (whether intentional or not) on the housing market, on the labor market, systemic barriers, etc.
9. I do not directly encounter violence against persons living with disabilities (PLD) frequently. However, in practice there is a certain “pre-phase” of not accepting PLD into society or for services – for example, exactly in the failure to create barrier-free access. Barriers to accessing buildings and services persist and thus they become unavailable to PLD. It is impossible for them to choose from among accessible health care providers (they don’t seek out a doctor on the basis of expertise and references, but on the basis of whether there are no stairs and the WC is accessible), or school facilities (whether from the perspective of PLD children or PLD parents who are unable to accompany their non-disabled children into the school facility), or jobs (employers do not provide barrier-free access), or public transportation (from the perspective of the entire Czech Republic and all its public transit systems), and services do not have enough capacity (e.g., not enough field services for those in need)... etc., which continues to exclude PLD to the fringes of society.
10. In our organization the safety of senior citizens is a priority and nothing wrong has ever happened to them.

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11. More education about such people – others do not know what biased behavior is and who all it might affect.
  12. The appropriate legal designation of personal assistance as one of the activities of caregiver services – this has not yet been legislated. The building of facilities – daycare centers, apartment units with special designations – for persons living with disabilities, residential facilities for persons living with disabilities, and support for caregivers.
  13. Building greater awareness about the providers of social services that are non-governmental, non-profit organizations, about their demanding work, pointing out that nonprofits do not enjoy equal conditions from the state for providing social services. State-funded organizations are usually supported more.
  14. Improving the general awareness of mainstream society about people living with disabilities, familiarizing them with their life stories so people in mainstream society realize people living with disabilities belong among them and are valuable.
  15. No comment.
  16. Our answers might be very distorted given our aims and our lack of experience with this particular problem.
  17. Although we do not encounter this kind of behavior in care-giving services, we believe it exists and is not reported because of the vulnerability of the target group. We wish you a lot of strength with improving enforcement of rights when it comes to this target group.
  18. I would like to support you and your initiative more with my answers, but in association with performing this job I do not encounter such bias; outside of this workplace, I sometimes do encounter it.
  19. This questionnaire is too complex and in some cases it is not clear what the question means.
  20. Change stigmatization. This questionnaire will probably not aid that effort, but any step toward that goal is positive.
  21. Thank you for bringing up this subject. Recently it has bothered us greatly, above all with respect to the users of independent living arrangements. They are targeted by various people who abuse them, whether that be financial abuse, property-related abuse, or sexual abuse. We are glad this is beginning to be discussed.

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22. I wish you luck in pushing through legislative changes.
  23. This is an inspiring subject for awareness-raising.
  24. I look forward to learning about your results. Thank you.
  25. People living with disabilities are human beings just like you and you never know when such a person may turn up in your family or circle of friends.

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