

Introduction

Over the centuries, in all communities, people with disabilities were stigmatised and excluded from the possibility of equal participation in social life or autonomy—erased from history, sometimes even in a physical way, or deprived of independence as the object of charity. In recent years, there has been a revolutionary global change in approach to close the protection gap and ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy the same standards of equality, rights and dignity as everyone else. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which entered into force in 2008, signalled a “paradigm shift” from traditional care-oriented, medical-based approaches to disability to one based on human rights.

The aim of the thematic volume of Białystok Legal Studies entitled “Disability and Law” was to identify the current barriers and solutions on the way to full-fledged active functioning of people with disabilities in society and to analyse actual implementation of the rights of people with disabilities in the context of international, regional and national law, as well as in a comparative perspective.

The wide thematic spectrum encouraged scientists to submit interdisciplinary papers based on findings from various fields of science and cultural, geographical and temporal realities, as well as from their personal experience. The authors from numerous universities and academic units worldwide prepared a fascinating and diverse set of papers on the legal, socio-economic and educational conditions of disability – including examination of attempts to define the value of human life and the phenomenon of disability in philosophy and law, implementation of fundamental and constitutional rights of people with disabilities – also regarding specific impairments, rights of groups with special needs in education, employment policies and access to culture for people with disabilities, lessons from the past for protection against violence.

The editors would like to express their deep gratitude to all of the authors for their invaluable contributions to this volume of the journal and to the general debate

on the issues connected with disability – and of course, to invite them as well as the readers to continue and inspire the dialogue in future.

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