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THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICIES ON THE WELFARE OF PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS, PUNTLAND, SOMALIA

¹ Ahmed Mohamed Isse & ² Mustafe Mahamoud Abdillahi

^{1,2} College of Humanities and Social Science (CHSS), Kampala International University

Emails: ¹ Isse.ahmed.22267@studmc.kiu.ac.ug, ² (PhD), alkhaliili40@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-4743-3695>

Abstract

This study investigated the effect of social assistance policies on the welfare of persons with special needs in Puntland, Somalia. An embedded mixed-methods research design was employed, guided by Ecological Systems Theory. The quantitative component involved a survey of 298 persons with special needs randomly selected from a population of 1,210 registered individuals in Garowe district, while the qualitative component comprised semi-structured interviews with 10 purposively selected officials from the Ministry of Women Development and Family Affairs. Structured questionnaires and interview guides were used for data collection. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The regression analysis revealed a statistically significant positive effect of social assistance policies on welfare ($R = .732$, $R^2 = .536$, $p < .001$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Social assistance policies explained 53.6% of the variance in welfare outcomes. However, descriptive statistics indicated that policy implementation was perceived as only "fairly satisfactory" (mean = 3.16), and aggregate welfare remained at a "fair" level (mean = 2.82), with critical deficits in housing (very poor), healthcare access (poor), and food security (poor). Qualitative findings revealed that educational interventions had yielded tangible benefits for school-aged children, while health sector policies had failed to translate into accessible services. The study concluded that while social assistance policies demonstrated significant potential to positively influence welfare outcomes, implementation gaps, resource constraints, and systemic barriers at multiple ecological levels continued to limit their transformative impact. Recommendations were developed for government ministries, international donors, NGOs, Disabled Persons Organizations, and healthcare providers to strengthen disability-inclusive social protection in Puntland.

Keywords: Social assistance policies, Welfare, Persons with special needs, Disability inclusion, Social protection, Ecological Systems Theory, Puntland, Somalia

Introduction

In the fragile and evolving context of Puntland, Somalia, the pursuit of social welfare and equity faces profound challenges, particularly for persons with special needs. Defined broadly to include individuals with physical, sensory, intellectual, or psychosocial disabilities, this population frequently contends with intersecting barriers of poverty, stigma, limited infrastructure, and the residual impacts of protracted conflict and climate-induced displacement. Within this complex landscape, social assistance policies encompassing cash transfers, in-kind support, and service provision are promoted as critical instruments for poverty alleviation, social protection, and the fulfillment of fundamental human rights. However, the design, implementation, and ultimate efficacy of these policies in genuinely enhancing the welfare of persons with disabilities remain critically under-examined in the Somali regional context. This paper, therefore, seeks to investigate the effect of

existing social assistance frameworks on the welfare of persons with special needs in Puntland, analyzing both their transformative potential and their systemic limitations. The international discourse on disability-inclusive development, guided by frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly the imperative to “leave no one behind,” underscores the necessity of mainstreaming disability considerations into all social protection systems. Recent scholarship emphasizes that social assistance must transcend a mere charitable model to embrace a rights-based approach that guarantees dignity, autonomy, and full participation (Banks et al., 2021). In humanitarian and post-conflict settings like Somalia, the call for inclusive social protection is amplified, as persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected during crises yet are often excluded from emergency and recovery programming (Mizunoya et al., 2021). While global evidence suggests well-designed disability-inclusive cash transfers can improve education, health, and economic security, the mechanisms for achieving these outcomes such as accessible registration processes, adequate benefit levels, and linkages to complementary services are context-specific and often fraught with implementation gaps (Palmer et al., 2022). This global knowledge base forms a crucial backdrop for assessing Puntland’s unique policy environment.

Focusing specifically on Puntland, this analysis confronts a significant research vacuum. The nascent social assistance efforts, often led by a hybrid governance model involving the Puntland Ministry of Labour, Youth and Sports (MoLYS), local NGOs, and international humanitarian partners, operate within severe fiscal and institutional constraints. Preliminary assessments indicate that while policies may nominally target “vulnerable groups,” the explicit identification, consultation, and prioritization of persons with special needs are inconsistent, leading to potential exclusion (Puntland Disability Agency, 2023). This paper will critically evaluate the extent to which current policies address the multi-dimensional aspects of welfare including material well-being, physical and mental health, social inclusion, and personal security. It will argue that without deliberate, disability-sensitive design features such as data disaggregation by disability type, accessibility audits of distribution points, and the active inclusion of Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) in governance social assistance in Puntland risks perpetuating, rather than alleviating, the marginalization of persons with special needs. Ultimately, this study aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for forging a more inclusive and effective social protection system in Puntland, contributing to both regional policy debates and the broader literature on disability inclusion in fragile states.

Specific objective: To determine the effect of Social Assistance Policies on the welfare of persons with special needs, Puntland, Somalia

Research Hypothesis: There is no significant effect of Social Assistance Policies on the welfare of persons with special needs, Puntland, Somalia

Literature Review

Theoretical review

The ecological systems theory, pioneered by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), serves as the primary theoretical framework guiding this investigation into the effects of social assistance policies on persons with special needs in Puntland. This perspective posits that individual development and well-being are not isolated phenomena but are instead shaped by a complex, nested arrangement of environmental systems. These systems range from the immediate microsystem (e.g., family, peer groups, local service providers) to the overarching macrosystem (e.g., cultural norms, societal beliefs about disability, and formal legal and policy frameworks). For persons with disabilities in a context like Puntland, this theory is exceptionally pertinent, as their welfare is directly mediated by interactions within and between these systems. For instance, the effectiveness of a cash transfer (an exosystem-level policy intervention created by governmental and donor institutions) is contingent upon its integration with the family microsystem’s capacity and the community mesosystem’s accessibility and attitudes. The theory’s core premise that each system contains roles, norms, and rules which shape development compels the analysis to move beyond a simple assessment of policy design to scrutinize how these policies are interpreted, implemented, and experienced across different ecological layers. This allows for a holistic understanding of welfare as an outcome not

merely of resource provision but of the dynamic transaction between the individual and their multifaceted environment.

This study specifically draws upon contemporary applications and extensions of Bronfenbrenner's model within disability and social protection research. Recent scholarship emphasizes the chronosystem the dimension of time and historical context as critical for understanding outcomes in fragile states. As noted by Tudge et al. (2022), a process-person-context-time (PPCT) model is essential for analyzing development in settings marked by conflict, displacement, and institutional flux, all characteristic of Puntland's recent history. Furthermore, the ecological systems theory aligns with the contemporary rights-based approach to disability, as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which recognizes that barriers are located not within the individual but within societal systems. Applying this lens, the study investigates how the macrosystem of Puntland's nascent disability-inclusive policy rhetoric interacts with the exosystem of implementing agencies and the microsystem of household dynamics. For example, stigmatizing norms (a macrosystem factor) can inhibit a family's (microsystem) willingness to enroll a member with a disability in a social program, thereby negating the intended effect of an exosystem policy (Banks & Polack, 2023). By anchoring the research in this theory, the analysis is structured to identify not just whether social assistance affects welfare, but how and why its impact is mediated or moderated by specific factors at different systemic levels, providing a nuanced roadmap for creating more effective and inclusive interventions.

Methodology

The study used an embedded mixed-methods research design to investigate the opinions, attitudes, preferences, and practices of a cross-section of the population regarding social assistance policies and their effect on welfare (Amin, 2005). In this design, qualitative and quantitative approaches were integrated, with the quantitative component supplementing the qualitative methods. The qualitative strand provided in-depth explanations and contextual understanding, while the quantitative methods supplied the numerical data required to meet objectives and test hypotheses (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Employing both methods was also a strategy to mitigate bias, as each method was used to check and validate the findings from the other. For instance, the potential subjectivity inherent in qualitative interviews was balanced by the objectivity of quantitative survey data. A cross-sectional survey was chosen as it enabled the efficient collection of data at a single point in time, which was suitable for capturing the prevailing conditions and perceptions within the study's timeframe (Sedgwick, 2014).

The target population was defined as the large collection of individuals or objects that formed the central focus of the scientific inquiry (Mohamed, 2015). This study targeted two primary groups within Puntland, Somalia. The first group comprised persons with special needs (specifically visual, hearing, and physical disabilities) residing in Garowe, the regional capital. The second group consisted of employees from the Ministry of Women Development and Family Affairs (MOWDFA) in Puntland, who were involved in policy formulation and implementation for vulnerable groups. These respondents were selected because they possessed sufficient and pertinent information on the state of social policies and their impact on welfare. The accessible population included an estimated 1,210 registered persons with special needs in Garowe district, drawn from various communities, and 18 employees from the relevant ministry department (Puntland Disability Agency, 2023).

Sample size determination involved selecting the number of observations to include in the statistical sample from the target population. An appropriate size was vital for making reliable inferences and improving the precision of the estimates (Dattalo, 2008). The sample size for the population of persons with special needs was calculated using Slovin's formula at a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of 0.05. The calculation was as follows: $n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$, where $N=1210$ and $e=0.05$, yielding a sample size of 301. The distribution of this sample across disability categories, based on population proportions from the Puntland Special Needs Persons Report (2023), is shown in Table For the qualitative component, a sample of 12 ministry employees was selected purposively from the population of 18, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Quantitative Population and Sample

Category	Population	Sample	Sampling Technique
Persons with Hearing Disabilities	341	85	Simple Random
Persons with Physical Disabilities	487	121	Simple Random
Persons with Visual Disabilities	382	95	Simple Random
Total	1,210	301	

Source: Researcher (2025)

Simple random sampling was used to select persons with special needs. This technique gave every member of the population an equal and known chance of being selected, thereby minimizing selection bias and enhancing the sample's representativeness (Taherdoost, 2016). In practice, individuals from community lists were assigned numbers, and a random number generator was used to select the required sample from each disability category. Purposive sampling was employed to select employees from the Ministry. This non-probability technique involved the deliberate choice of participants based on their specific knowledge and professional roles relevant to the research objectives (Campbell et al., 2020). This approach ensured that the qualitative data came from informants with direct experience in policy design and implementation, providing rich, expert insights.

The research attained data primarily through primary sources. Primary data, defined as information collected afresh and for the first time for a specific research purpose, was gathered using tailored instruments (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Secondary data, such as the Puntland Special Needs Persons Report (2023), was used for contextual understanding and sample framing.

According to Saunders et al. (2009), a questionnaire is an effective tool for collecting standardized information from many respondents. In this study, structured, self-administered questionnaires containing close-ended questions were used to collect quantitative data from persons with special needs. The questionnaire was divided into sections: demographic information (Section A), and sections measuring the independent variable (social policies) and the dependent variable (welfare). Items for social policies (social inclusion, assistance, and protection) were adapted from scales by Van den Broek & Gornick (2016) and Ferguson & Pashman (2013), while welfare items were based on scales by Gomez and Morency (2005) and Jones and Rios (2014). All items except demographics used a five-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree). The data from the questionnaires were cleaned, coded, and prepared for analysis using SPSS.

Semi-structured interview guides with open-ended questions were used to collect qualitative data from ministry employees. This method allowed for in-depth discussions, probing, and the exploration of unanticipated themes, which was essential given the small number of key informants and the complex nature of policy implementation (Kallio et al., 2016). Interviews were conducted at times and locations convenient for the respondents.

Validity refers to the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was evaluated by three experts in social policy and disability studies. They judged the relevance of each item. The Content Validity Index (CVI) was calculated for each expert and then averaged. The formula used was: $CVI = (\text{Number of questions declared valid}) / (\text{Total number of questions})$. The average CVI obtained was 0.883, which exceeded the accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating strong content validity (Polit & Beck, 2021).

Reliability concerns the consistency of an instrument. Internal consistency was measured using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient after a pilot test. The test-retest method was also applied with a sub-sample of 34 persons with special needs in Bosaso, with a one-week interval, to check stability (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). As shown in Table 2, all variables had Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70, confirming the instrument's reliability for the study.

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for Study Variables

Study Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Social Inclusion Policies	0.806
Social Assistance Policies	0.801
Social Protection Policies	0.77
Welfare of Persons with Special Needs	0.73

Source: Researcher (2025)

The researcher first obtained permission from the relevant Puntland authorities and the institutional review board. Appointments were booked with ministry officials, and the purpose of the study was explained to all participants to secure informed consent. For the survey, the researcher, with the assistance of local facilitators fluent in the local language, administered the questionnaires in accessible community locations. For interviews, the researcher conducted sessions privately at ministry offices. All data collection occurred over a scheduled period to avoid conflicts and ensure thoroughness.

Data analysis involved bringing order and meaning to the collected information. Quantitative data from questionnaires were entered into SPSS version 22 for analysis. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) summarized the demographic data and respondent profiles. Inferential statistics, specifically simple linear regression analysis, were used to test the relationship and effect between social policies (IV) and welfare (DV) at a 0.05 significance level (Pallant, 2020). Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed thematically. This involved transcription, repeated reading to ensure familiarity, coding of key patterns, and categorization of emerging themes to provide nuanced explanations that complemented the quantitative findings (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The study adhered to strict ethical guidelines. Formal permission was obtained from the Puntland Ministry of Women Development and Family Affairs and relevant community leaders. Informed consent was secured from all participants, who were assured of voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality. Participants were informed that data would be used solely for academic purposes. Questionnaires did not require names, and interview data were anonymized during transcription. Data were stored securely, and the findings were interpreted with integrity, excluding any irrelevant or misleading information. These protocols align with standard research ethics for vulnerable populations (World Health Organization, 2022).

Results

Response rate

Table 3: Response Rate for the Respondents

Response	Sample	Response
Questionnaire	301	298(99%)
Interview	12	10 (83.3%)

Source: Filed Data, 2025

The data collection process yielded a very high response rate, which ensured the robustness and representativeness of the collected data. As presented in Table 3, for the quantitative component, 298 out of 301 distributed questionnaires were successfully completed and returned, constituting a 99% response rate. This exceptionally high level of participation minimized concerns regarding non-response bias and provided a strong foundation for statistical analysis (Smith, 2018). For the qualitative component, 10 out of 12 purposively selected ministry employees participated in the interviews, resulting in an 83.3% response rate. This rate was considered satisfactory for qualitative inquiry, as it secured in-depth insights from a substantial majority of the targeted key informants, thereby ensuring the richness and credibility of the qualitative data (Palinkas et al., 2015). The overall high compliance indicated effective fieldwork procedures and strong engagement from both community respondents and institutional participants.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 4: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=298)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	189	63.40%
	Female	109	36.60%
Age	20-29 years	84	28.20%
	30-39 years	67	22.50%
	40-49 years	85	28.50%
	50 years and above	62	20.80%
Education Level	Primary & Secondary	172	57.70%
	Certificate	28	9.40%
	Diploma	29	9.70%
	Bachelor's Degree	52	17.40%
	Post Graduate	17	5.70%
Marital Status	Single	100	33.60%
	Married	158	53.00%
	Separated	23	7.70%
	Widowed	17	5.70%

Source: Field data (2025)

The analysis of the respondents' gender, guided by the ecological systems theory's focus on societal roles and norms, revealed that males constituted a larger proportion (63.4%) of the sample compared to females (36.6%). This demographic profile was significant as it reflected the gendered social structures within the macrosystem of Puntland, where cultural norms and accessibility barriers often lead to the under-representation of women with disabilities in public and community spaces. Consequently, while the data provided a male-dominated perspective, the inclusion of female respondents ensured that insights into the effect of social policies incorporated diverse gendered experiences within the family microsystem and community mesosystem.

Regarding age, the distribution showed that the largest cohort was aged 40-49 years (28.5%), closely followed by those aged 20-29 years (28.2%). The sample included a substantial representation from all adult age groups, including those 50 years and above (20.8%). From the ecological systems perspective, particularly the chronosystem, this age diversity was crucial. It captured the varying life-course experiences of persons with disabilities, including differing historical exposures to policy changes, conflict, and shifting societal attitudes in Puntland. The inclusion of mature respondents ensured that the data reflected accumulated lived experiences, while younger participants provided perspectives on current barriers and aspirations.

The education level of respondents was a critical variable, as it directly influenced their capacity to engage with and provide informed feedback on policy implementation. The majority (57.7%) had a Primary and Secondary level of education, while 17.4% held a Bachelor's degree. This distribution confirmed that the respondents possessed the basic literacy required to comprehend the survey, aligning with the theory's emphasis on individual capacity within the microsystem. However, the relatively low percentage of respondents with higher education also highlighted potential systemic barriers within the exosystem (e.g., educational institutions and policies) that limit advanced educational attainment for persons with disabilities, which in turn can affect their interaction with and benefit from social assistance programs.

Finally, the marital status data indicated that a majority of respondents were married (53.0%), followed by those who were single (33.6%). This demographic had direct implications for the ecological systems analysis, as marital and family structures form a core part of the immediate microsystem. The high percentage of married respondents suggested that the welfare effects of

social policies were often mediated through household dynamics and shared family resources. The experiences of single, separated, or widowed individuals (collectively 47%) were equally important, as they likely faced distinct vulnerabilities and different levels of support from their immediate social networks, further illustrating how personal context within the microsystem shapes the ultimate impact of broader policy interventions.

Descriptive Analysis of social assistance policies of persons with special needs, Puntland Somalia

Table 5: Descriptive Analysis of Social Assistance Policies of Persons with Special Needs, Puntland, Somalia

Code	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
SAP1	"There were appropriate policies for children benefits."	3.08	1.63	Fairly Satisfactory
SAP2	"There was a well-known procedural framework for children benefit provisions."	2.65	1.66	Fairly Satisfactory
SAP3	"There were policies that enabled persons with disability to attain grants from the government."	3.38	1.5	Fairly Satisfactory
SAP4	"NGOs and other grant providers had targeted their policies to special needs persons."	2.96	1.5	Fairly Satisfactory
SAP5	"There were special aid policies for social pension."	3.25	1.46	Fairly Satisfactory
SAP6	"The policies for public works on people with social needs were appropriately implemented."	3.61	1.32	Satisfactory
Average Mean		3.16	0.68	Fairly Satisfactory

Source: Field Data, 2025

SAP1: "There were appropriate policies for children benefits." Respondents perceived the existence of child benefit policies as moderately adequate, achieving a mean score of 3.08, which was interpreted as fairly satisfactory. From the perspective of Ecological Systems Theory, this finding reflected the perceived functionality of the exosystem, specifically the policy-making institutions designed to support vulnerable children. The fairly satisfactory rating suggested that while a policy framework nominally existed, its design or communication was not fully effective in meeting the needs within children's immediate microsystems, namely their families and households. The high standard deviation of 1.63 further indicated a wide divergence in opinion, implying that awareness or perceived appropriateness of these policies was not uniformly experienced across different communities or disability types in Puntland.

SAP2: "There was a well-known procedural framework for children benefit provisions." With the lowest mean in this category at 2.65, which was interpreted as fairly satisfactory, this item highlighted a critical implementation gap in the policy process. The perception of a poorly understood procedural framework directly implicated a disconnect between the exosystem (institutional rules) and the microsystem (individuals and families). The finding suggested that even if appropriate policies existed, as indicated in SAP1, the lack of a clear, well-known process for accessing them created a significant barrier to their effectiveness. The high standard deviation of 1.66 reinforced the inconsistency in this knowledge, which likely left many persons with special needs and their families unable to navigate the system, thereby negating the potential positive effects intended by the policies.

SAP3: "There were policies that enabled persons with disability to attain grants from the government." The mean of 3.38, interpreted as fairly satisfactory, indicated a moderately positive perception regarding the existence of government grant policies for persons with disabilities. This was seen as an acknowledgement of the macrosystem's intent to provide financial support through formal state mechanisms. However, the score, while the highest in this section, still fell short of "satisfactory," implying that these policies may not have been fully realized, accessible, or adequately funded. The effectiveness of such grant policies, it was understood, was ultimately mediated by how well they interacted with other systemic levels, such as the individual's microsystem (family support) and the mesosystem (community accessibility), which were necessary to enable their utilization.

SAP4: "NGOs and other grant providers had targeted their policies to special needs persons." Scoring a mean of 2.96, which was interpreted as fairly satisfactory, respondents perceived that NGOs and other non-state actors, which formed a significant part of Puntland's exosystem, were only moderately successful in targeting their policies and programs. This perception was considered crucial, as international and local NGOs often filled gaps left by the state in fragile contexts. The score suggested that while some targeting existed, it may not have been systematic or inclusive enough to reach all segments of the disability community. This could have been due to a lack of disaggregated data or meaningful consultation with Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs), leading to interventions that may not have aligned with the specific needs and contexts of different disability groups within their community mesosystems.

SAP5: "There were special aid policies for social pension." With a mean of 3.25, which was interpreted as fairly satisfactory, respondents showed a moderately positive awareness of social pension policies. This related to the macrosystem's role in establishing long-term social security mechanisms for vulnerable populations, such as the elderly with disabilities. The fairly satisfactory rating, however, was seen to reflect the nascent and potentially underfunded stage of such schemes in Puntland. The actual impact of these pension policies on an individual's welfare was understood to depend on their integration with the chronosystem, meaning their ability to provide consistent, long-term support and address the evolving needs of an aging person with a disability within their family microsystem.

SAP6: "The policies for public works on people with social needs were appropriately implemented." This item achieved the highest mean in this section at 3.61, crossing the threshold into the "Satisfactory" range. This was a positive finding, suggesting that when it came to public works or visible infrastructure projects, implementation for persons with special needs was perceived as more effective. This was interpreted as potentially reflecting that physical infrastructure (e.g., ramps, accessible buildings) was a more tangible and easier-to-implement aspect of policy compared to complex procedural or cash-transfer programs. From an ecological standpoint, this indicated a relatively successful intervention at the mesosystem level, where community spaces were made more accessible, potentially facilitating greater participation and mobility for persons with disabilities.

The overall average mean of 3.16, which was interpreted as fairly satisfactory, painted a picture of a social assistance system that was perceived as functioning at a basic, but not optimal, level. Through the lens of Ecological Systems Theory, this fairly satisfactory rating across multiple items suggested a persistent disconnect between the intent of policies formulated at the macrosystem and exosystem levels and their experienced reality within the microsystems and mesosystems of persons with special needs in Puntland. It pointed to a critical need for strengthening the linkages, communication, and feedback loops between these systems to ensure that policies were not just present on paper but were known, accessible, and effectively implemented to improve daily lives.

Qualitative data

When asked about the effects of social assistance policies on persons with special needs, respondents consistently highlighted educational interventions as a significant area of impact. One ministry official elaborated on the role of international partnerships in shaping these policies:

"Social assistance policies supported by the international community had led to the establishment of educational packages for the persons with special needs in Puntland Somalia, and this had ably been associated with the existence of and the need to evaluate and assess the substantial education needs, and these were provided to the schooling persons with special needs, especially those persons below the age of 18 years."

— Interview with Ministry of Women Development and Family Affairs Official, 04

This finding suggested that the exosystem—represented by international donors and their partnership with local ministries—had successfully influenced the microsystem by channeling resources directly to school-aged children with disabilities. The reference to "educational packages" implied a targeted intervention that acknowledged the specific learning needs of this population. Furthermore, this qualitative finding provided contextual depth to the quantitative results presented in Table 4.7, where respondents rated their educational attainment with a mean of 3.80 (Good), the highest among all welfare indicators. The conjunction between these data sources was evident: the qualitative accounts of targeted educational policies helped explain the relatively positive quantitative assessment of educational outcomes, thereby validating the statistical finding through lived experiences.

Another prominent theme emerging from the interviews concerned the role of social policies in facilitating access to health services and specialized equipment. A different ministry official provided insights into this area:

"Social policies in Puntland had supported the provision of health system facilities and tooling necessary for the determination and establishment of the health supporting devices and provision of some health specialized care services to persons with special care health needs."

— Interview with Ministry of Women Development and Family Affairs Official, 08

This statement illuminated the mechanisms through which macrosystem-level policies were translated into exosystem-level resource allocation, specifically in the health sector. The mention of "health supporting devices" and "specialized care services" indicated an awareness of the need for disability-inclusive health interventions. However, this qualitative finding stood in sharp contrast to the quantitative results presented in Table 4.7, where access to appropriate health facilities and personnel received a mean score of only 1.88 (Poor). The conjunction between these divergent findings revealed a critical implementation gap: while policies existed on paper and resources were ostensibly allocated, the actual accessibility and appropriateness of health services for persons with special needs remained severely limited. This disconnects between policy intent (exosystem) and lived experience (microsystem) underscored the complexity of achieving genuine welfare improvements through formal policy mechanisms alone.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Welfare of Persons with Special Needs, Puntland, Somalia

Code	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
WEL1	"The special needs persons had access to good sanitation and hygiene."	3.04	1.61	Fair
WEL2	"The health environment of the persons with special needs was good."	3.34	1.51	Fair

WEL3	"People with special needs had access to appropriate health facilities and health personnel."	1.88	1.37	Poor
WEL4	"There were affordable education services for the special needs persons in Puntland."	3.32	1.43	Fair
WEL5	"The people with special needs had attained a reasonable education level."	3.8	1.18	Good
WEL6	"Special needs persons attained affordable quality food."	2.57	1.62	Poor
WEL7	"The special needs persons had access to good housing facilities."	1.64	1.05	Very Poor
WEL8	"The special needs persons had access to appropriate clothes."	2.98	1.58	Fair
Average mean		2.82	0.57	Fair

Source: Field Data, 2025

Legend: 4.22-5.00=Very Good, 3.42-4.22=Good, 2.62-3.41=Fair, 1.81-2.61=Poor, 1.00-1.80=Very Poor*

WEL1: "The special needs persons had access to good sanitation and hygiene." The mean score of 3.04, which was interpreted as fair, for this fundamental welfare indicator suggested that access to sanitation and hygiene was perceived as only moderately adequate by the respondents. Within the Ecological Systems framework, this finding directly reflected the conditions of an individual's immediate environment, or microsystem. A "fair" rating was interpreted to mean that while basic facilities may have existed, they were likely not fully accessible or adapted to the needs of persons with various disabilities. For example, a communal latrine might have been present in a community (part of the mesosystem), but if it was not accessible to a person with a physical disability, their access remained "fair" at best, highlighting a persistent gap between service availability and true, inclusive accessibility.

WEL2: "The health environment of the persons with special needs was good." Scoring a mean of 3.34, which was interpreted as fair, respondents perceived the broader health environment including factors like air quality, disease prevalence, and safety as moderately good. This perception was understood to be shaped by interactions across multiple ecological systems: the macrosystem (e.g., national health policies and cultural norms), the exosystem (e.g., the presence and quality of local health clinics), and the mesosystem (e.g., community health practices and social support). A "fair" rating suggested that while the overall environment may not have been overtly hostile to health, it was likely not optimized for the specific vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities, who may have been more susceptible to environmental health risks.

WEL3: "People with special needs had access to appropriate health facilities and health personnel." With a low mean of 1.88, which was interpreted as poor, this item revealed a critical and systemic failure in the healthcare system's inclusivity. This was a stark indicator of poor integration between the exosystem (healthcare institutions and their policies) and the microsystem (the individual's direct need for care). The "poor" rating signified that even if health facilities existed, they were likely physically inaccessible, lacked appropriate diagnostic equipment and medicines, or had staff who were untrained in disability-inclusive care and communication. This finding directly contradicted the principles of a rights-based approach and represented a major barrier to welfare, as poor access to healthcare was understood to exacerbate existing disabilities and lead to secondary, preventable health conditions.

WEL4: "There were affordable education services for the special needs persons in Puntland." The mean of 3.32, interpreted as fair, indicated that the cost of education was perceived as a moderate, but not overwhelming, barrier for persons with special needs. This related to the existstem and the

policies of educational institutions and government regarding fees, subsidies, and scholarships. While affordability was rated as "fair," it was noted that this score did not speak to the quality, appropriateness, or physical accessibility of that education. A person might have been able to afford school fees, but if the school lacked inclusive teaching methods, materials, or physical access (a mesosystem and exosystem issue), the welfare benefit of that education was understood to be significantly diminished.

WEL5: "The people with special needs had attained a reasonable education level." Achieving the highest mean in this table at 3.80, which was interpreted as good, this was a notably positive and resilient finding. It suggested that despite numerous systemic barriers, persons with special needs in Puntland felt they had achieved a reasonable level of education. This may have reflected the resilience and resourcefulness within their microsystems (strong family support for learning) and the long-term (chronosystem) impact of past or ongoing educational interventions, however limited. It provided a crucial strengths-based perspective, indicating that investments in education, even if imperfect, had yielded some tangible positive results for this population.

WEL6: "Special needs persons attained affordable quality food." With a mean of 2.57, which was interpreted as poor, food security and nutritional quality emerged as a significant area of deprivation for persons with special needs. This finding directly impacted the individual's physical well-being at the most basic level of the microsystem daily nutrition and health. The "poor" rating suggested that households caring for persons with special needs faced substantial and persistent challenges in securing sufficient and nutritious food. This was likely linked to economic exclusion (e.g., lack of access to grants or employment, pointing to failures in the exosystem), high food prices, or physical and attitudinal barriers to accessing food distribution points within the community mesosystem.

WEL7: "The special needs persons had access to good housing facilities." The lowest score in the entire welfare table, a mean of 1.64, which was interpreted as very poor, highlighted a profound and urgent humanitarian crisis. Housing, as a fundamental component of the microsystem, provides shelter, safety, security, and a base for all other life activities. A "very poor" rating indicated that homes were likely structurally unsound, overcrowded, lacked any accessibility features (e.g., ramps, wide doorways, adapted sanitation), and may not have offered adequate protection from the harsh climate. This finding was a powerful indictment of the current state of welfare and suggested that macro-level policies and exosystem institutions had almost entirely failed to address the basic housing needs of persons with disabilities in Puntland.

WEL8: "The special needs persons had access to appropriate clothes." Scoring a mean of 2.98, which was interpreted as fair and bordering on poor, access to clothing was perceived as only moderately adequate. This basic need, while not as immediately life-threatening as housing or food, was still considered essential for personal dignity, health (protection from weather and injury), and the ability to participate socially. The "fair" rating suggested that while clothing was generally available in markets, it may not have always been affordable or appropriate for specific disabilities (e.g., easy-to-wear designs for those with physical limitations), forcing households to prioritize other, more pressing survival needs.

The overall average mean of 2.82, which was interpreted as fair, presented a sobering and comprehensive picture of well-being. It indicated that, on aggregate, the welfare of persons with special needs in Puntland was only marginally above the "poor" threshold. Through the ecological systems lens, this "fair" average was understood to mask severe and unacceptable deficits in critical, fundamental areas like housing (very poor) and healthcare access (poor), while showing relative strength only in perceived educational attainment. This aggregate score powerfully demonstrated that while some progress may have been made in specific sectors, the multi-systemic failures in providing the foundational building blocks of welfare meant that the overall quality of life for persons with disabilities remained unacceptably low, confirming the study's hypothesis that current social assistance policies were not yet producing a "good" or "very good" level of welfare.

Qualitative data

When discussing the current welfare status of persons with special needs, respondents identified sanitation and hygiene as areas of particular concern. One official provided a sobering assessment: "Sanitation and hygiene for the persons with special needs in Puntland Somalia was fairly provided, and the people with the special needs had hence forth lived to communicate, and their sanitation and hygiene was quite limited."

— Interview with Ministry of Women Development and Family Affairs Official, 01

This statement revealed a paradox: the official described sanitation as "fairly provided" while simultaneously acknowledging it was "quite limited." This contradiction reflected the complexity of assessing welfare in resource-constrained environments. From an ecological perspective, this finding pointed to failures at multiple systemic levels. At the exosystem level, infrastructure development and sanitation programs may not have been designed with disability inclusion in mind. At the mesosystem level, community sanitation facilities may have been physically inaccessible. At the microsystem level, households may have lacked the resources to construct adapted sanitation facilities. This qualitative finding triangulated with the quantitative result for the same indicator in Table 4.7, where access to good sanitation and hygiene received a mean score of 3.04 (Fair), confirming the consistency between what ministry officials observed and what persons with special needs reported.

Effect of social assistance policies on welfare of persons with special needs, Puntland Somalia

Table7: Regression Analysis on the Effect of Social Assistance Policies on Welfare of Persons with Special Needs, Puntland, Somalia

C	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.732a	0.536	0.535		0.39309	
Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	52.862	1	52.862	342.1	.000b
	Residual	45.738	296	0.155		
	Total	98.6	297			
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.		
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	0.885	0.107		8.233	0
	Social Assistance Policies	0.615	0.033	0.732	18.496	0

a. Dependent Variable: Welfare of Persons with Special Needs

b. Predictors: (Constant), Social Assistance Policies

Source: Field Data, 2025

The regression analysis conducted to determine the effect of social assistance policies on the welfare of persons with special needs in Puntland, Somalia, yielded statistically significant results, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis which stated that there was no significant effect.

The model summary revealed a strong positive correlation between the independent variable (social assistance policies) and the dependent variable (welfare of persons with special needs), with an R value of .732. This indicated that there was a substantial linear relationship between the two variables under investigation. The R Square value of .536 demonstrated that social assistance policies alone explained 53.6% of the variance in the welfare of persons with special needs. Through the lens of Ecological Systems Theory, this finding suggested that interventions at the exosystem level specifically the policies formulated by governmental and non-governmental institutions had a considerable influence on outcomes experienced within the microsystems of individuals with

disabilities. The remaining 46.4% of the variance in welfare was attributable to other factors not examined in this model, which, according to the theoretical framework, would include elements from other systemic levels such as the mesosystem (community interactions), the macrosystem (cultural norms and beliefs about disability), and the chronosystem (life course experiences and historical context).

The ANOVA results confirmed the statistical significance of the regression model, with an F-statistic of 342.10 and a p-value of .000, which was well below the established significance threshold of 0.05. This indicated that the model was a good fit for the data and that social assistance policies were a significant predictor of welfare outcomes for persons with special needs in Puntland. The significance of this finding was interpreted within the context of the study's theoretical framework, which posited that the macrosystem (policy environment) and exosystem (implementing institutions) play critical roles in shaping individual well-being. The statistical significance provided empirical support for the argument that policy-level interventions, when properly designed and implemented, could have a measurable impact on the lived experiences of vulnerable populations. The coefficients table provided further insight into the nature of this relationship. The unstandardized coefficient (B) for social assistance policies was .615, meaning that for every one-unit increase in the perceived effectiveness of social assistance policies, the welfare of persons with special needs increased by .615 units, holding all other factors constant. This positive relationship was interpreted as evidence that improvements in policy design, awareness, and implementation at the exosystem level translated into tangible benefits for individuals and families at the microsystem level. The standardized coefficient (Beta) of .732 reinforced the strong relative contribution of social assistance policies to the prediction of welfare outcomes. The t-value of 18.496 and the associated p-value of .000 confirmed that this contribution was statistically significant.

From an Ecological Systems Theory perspective, this significant positive relationship was understood as evidence of the interconnectedness between the various systems shaping human development and well-being. The findings suggested that when the macrosystem (the overarching policy framework and societal values regarding disability) and the exosystem (the institutions responsible for implementing social assistance) functioned effectively, their influence permeated downward, positively affecting the mesosystem (community-level interactions and accessibility) and the microsystem (the immediate family and household environment). However, the descriptive statistics presented earlier in the study, which showed that welfare indicators such as housing (very poor) and healthcare access (poor) remained severely deficient, indicated that while the relationship was statistically significant and positive in theory, the actual level of policy implementation in Puntland was only "fairly satisfactory" (mean of 3.16), and thus the realized impact on welfare, while measurable, was not yet sufficient to lift persons with special needs to an acceptable standard of living.

Discussions

The findings of this study revealed a statistically significant positive effect of social assistance policies on the welfare of persons with special needs in Puntland, Somalia, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis which stated that there was no significant effect. The regression analysis demonstrated that social assistance policies explained 53.6% of the variance in welfare outcomes ($R^2 = .536$, $p < .001$), indicating that these policy interventions played a substantial role in shaping the well-being of persons with disabilities in the region. This finding provided strong empirical validation for Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) within the context of disability-inclusive social protection in a fragile state. The significant relationship confirmed the theoretical proposition that interventions at the exosystem level specifically policies formulated by governmental and non-governmental institutions had a measurable influence on outcomes experienced within the microsystems of individuals with disabilities and their families. Furthermore, the descriptive statistics revealed that while the overall effect was positive and significant, the actual level of policy implementation was perceived as only "fairly satisfactory" (mean = 3.16), and aggregate welfare remained at a "fair" level (mean = 2.82), with critical deficits in housing (very poor) and healthcare access (poor). This

suggested that while the theoretical relationship was validated, the practical realization of welfare improvements through policy interventions remained constrained by implementation gaps, resource limitations, and systemic barriers at multiple ecological levels.

The positive relationship between social assistance policies and welfare outcomes documented in this study aligned with a growing body of empirical research examining disability-inclusive social protection in low-income and conflict-affected settings. Banks, Mearkle, and Mactaggart (2021), in their comprehensive study of cash transfer programs across sub-Saharan Africa, found that well-designed disability-inclusive social assistance schemes significantly improved educational enrollment and health-seeking behaviors among persons with disabilities, though they noted that accessibility barriers often limited the reach of such programs. Similarly, Palmer, Williams, and McPake (2022), in their evaluation of social protection programs in humanitarian contexts, reported that cash transfers accompanied by complementary services produced measurable improvements in the economic security and psychosocial well-being of persons with disabilities, reinforcing the importance of multi-component interventions. Mizunoya, Mitra, and Yap (2021), analyzing cross-national data from the United Nations, demonstrated that countries with explicit disability-inclusive social protection frameworks achieved better outcomes in terms of poverty reduction and healthcare access for persons with disabilities compared to those with generic, non-targeted approaches. In the East African context, Mactaggart, Banks, and Kuper (2023) found that social assistance programs in Kenya and Uganda that incorporated accessible registration processes and involved Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) in governance structures produced significantly higher levels of beneficiary satisfaction and welfare improvement. Finally, Rohwerder (2022), in a qualitative study of social protection in fragile states including Somalia, documented that while policy frameworks often existed on paper, implementation gaps related to inadequate funding, limited institutional capacity, and weak coordination between stakeholders consistently undermined the potential impact of these interventions, a finding that resonated strongly with the implementation challenges identified in the present study.

The convergence between the quantitative findings of this study and the existing empirical literature underscored the universal relevance of certain principles for effective disability-inclusive social assistance, while also highlighting the context-specific challenges facing Puntland. The significant positive relationship documented in the regression analysis provided empirical support for the argument that policy matters that deliberate, well-designed interventions at the institutional level can and do translate into improved welfare outcomes for persons with disabilities. However, the descriptive findings revealing severe deficits in fundamental welfare domains such as housing (mean = 1.64, very poor) and healthcare access (mean = 1.88, poor) suggested that the current level and quality of policy implementation in Puntland remained insufficient to address the multi-dimensional nature of deprivation experienced by persons with special needs. The qualitative data further illuminated this disconnect, with ministry officials acknowledging that while educational policies had produced tangible benefits through targeted packages for school-aged children, health sector interventions had failed to translate into accessible services at the community level. This pattern of uneven implementation across welfare domains was consistent with the ecological systems perspective, which posited that policy effectiveness was mediated by factors operating at multiple systemic levels, including the mesosystem (community accessibility and attitudes), the microsystem (household capacity and support), and the chronosystem (historical context and life course experiences). The findings thus validated the theoretical framework while simultaneously revealing the complexity of achieving systemic change in fragile, resource-constrained environments.

Conclusions

This study investigated the effect of social assistance policies on the welfare of persons with special needs in Puntland, Somalia, utilizing an embedded mixed-methods design guided by Ecological Systems Theory. The research successfully achieved its specific objective by determining that social assistance policies had a statistically significant positive effect on welfare outcomes, thereby rejecting the null hypothesis. The quantitative findings revealed that social assistance policies

explained 53.6% of the variance in welfare, with a strong positive correlation ($R = .732$) between the two variables. However, the descriptive statistics painted a nuanced picture: while policies were perceived as "fairly satisfactory" overall (mean = 3.16), the aggregate welfare of persons with special needs remained at only a "fair" level (mean = 2.82), with critical deficiencies in housing (very poor), healthcare access (poor), and food security (poor). The qualitative findings provided contextual depth, revealing that educational interventions had yielded tangible benefits for school-aged children with disabilities, while health sector policies had failed to translate into accessible services. Sanitation and hygiene emerged as areas of persistent challenge, with qualitative accounts corroborating the quantitative assessments. The study concluded that while social assistance policies in Puntland had demonstrated the potential to positively influence welfare outcomes, significant implementation gaps, resource constraints, and systemic barriers at multiple ecological levels continued to limit their transformative impact. The findings underscored the urgent need for more deliberate, disability-sensitive policy design, enhanced coordination among stakeholders, and strengthened linkages between policy intent and lived experience to ensure that persons with special needs in Puntland could realize their fundamental rights to dignity, inclusion, and well-being.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were developed for key stakeholders involved in the design, implementation, and oversight of social assistance policies for persons with special needs in Puntland, Somalia:

- 1) For the Puntland Ministry of Women Development and Family Affairs (MOWDFA): The Ministry should prioritize the development and dissemination of clear, accessible procedural frameworks for all social assistance programs, addressing the finding that knowledge of application processes was limited (SAP2 mean = 2.65). This should include the production of materials in multiple formats (braille, audio, simplified text) and the training of community-based workers to assist persons with disabilities in navigating application procedures. Furthermore, the Ministry should establish formal mechanisms for the meaningful participation of Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) in policy formulation, implementation monitoring, and evaluation processes, ensuring that the voices of persons with special needs directly shape the policies intended to serve them.
- 2) For International Donors and NGOs: International partners should adopt a more systematic approach to disability inclusion across all programs, addressing the finding that NGO targeting of persons with special needs was only "fairly satisfactory" (SAP4 mean = 2.96). This should include mandatory disability-disaggregated data collection in all monitoring and evaluation frameworks, accessibility audits of all program delivery points, and dedicated funding streams for disability-specific interventions. Donors should also provide multi-year, flexible funding to enable the Ministry and local partners to address the deep-seated structural barriers revealed in this study, particularly in the areas of housing (WEL7 mean = 1.64) and healthcare access (WEL3 mean = 1.88), which require sustained investment rather than short-term project-based approaches.
- 3) For Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) and Civil Society: DPOs should strengthen their advocacy efforts to demand accountability from both government and international actors regarding the implementation of disability-inclusive policies. The findings of this study provide empirical evidence that can be leveraged in advocacy campaigns, particularly the documented gaps between policy intent and lived experience. DPOs should also invest in building the capacity of their members to engage effectively in policy dialogue, including training in budget analysis, policy monitoring, and evidence-based advocacy. Additionally, DPOs should establish feedback mechanisms to systematically document implementation gaps and share this information with policymakers to inform iterative policy improvement.
- 4) For Healthcare Providers and Institutions: Health sector actors should urgently address the finding that access to appropriate health facilities and personnel was "poor" (WEL3 mean = 1.88). This should include conducting accessibility audits of all health facilities, training

healthcare workers in disability-inclusive care and communication, ensuring the availability of essential assistive devices and medicines, and establishing referral pathways between community-based rehabilitation programs and formal health facilities. Mobile health outreach programs should be expanded to reach persons with disabilities in remote areas who face mobility barriers to accessing facility-based services.

- 5) For the Puntland Ministry of Planning and International Development: The Ministry should ensure that disability inclusion is mainstreamed across all sectoral plans and budgets, moving beyond the current fragmented approach revealed in this study. This should include establishing a dedicated budget line for disability-inclusive programs, mandating disability-disaggregated data collection in all government surveys and administrative systems, and conducting regular policy impact assessments that specifically measure outcomes for persons with different types of disabilities. The Ministry should also coordinate a multi-sectoral task force on disability-inclusive development, bringing together health, education, social protection, housing, and infrastructure sectors to address the interconnected nature of the welfare deficits documented in this study.

Contribution To Knowledge

This study made several significant contributions to the existing body of knowledge on disability-inclusive social protection in fragile states. First, it addressed a critical research vacuum by providing the first empirically grounded analysis of the effect of social assistance policies on the welfare of persons with special needs in Puntland, Somalia, a context characterized by hybrid governance, protracted conflict, and severe institutional constraints. The study contributed robust quantitative evidence demonstrating that social assistance policies explained 53.6% of the variance in welfare outcomes, thereby establishing a statistically significant relationship that had previously been assumed but not empirically validated in this specific context. Second, the study contributed to the theoretical literature by demonstrating the applicability and utility of Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as a framework for analyzing disability-inclusive social protection in fragile states. The findings illustrated how policy interventions at the exosystem level were mediated by factors operating at the microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem levels, providing a nuanced understanding of the complex pathways through which policies translated or failed to translate into improved welfare outcomes. Third, the study contributed methodologically by demonstrating the value of embedded mixed-methods designs in disability research, showing how qualitative findings could provide contextual depth and explanatory power to quantitative results, and how the conjunction between data sources could validate and enrich understanding of complex social phenomena. Fourth, the study contributed empirical evidence on the multi-dimensional nature of welfare deprivation among persons with disabilities in Puntland, documenting severe deficits in housing, healthcare access, and food security that had not previously been systematically measured. Finally, the study contributed practically by generating evidence-based recommendations grounded in the lived experiences of persons with special needs and the professional insights of ministry officials, providing a roadmap for policymakers, donors, and practitioners seeking to forge more inclusive and effective social protection systems in fragile contexts.

Areas For Further Research

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, the following areas were identified as priorities for future research:

- 1) A longitudinal study should be conducted to examine the long-term effects of social assistance policies on the welfare trajectories of persons with special needs in Puntland, addressing the limitation of the cross-sectional design used in the present study which captured only a single point in time.
- 2) Comparative research should be undertaken across different regions of Somalia (Puntland, Somaliland, and South-Central Somalia) to examine how variations in governance structures,

- institutional capacity, and conflict dynamics influence the design, implementation, and effectiveness of disability-inclusive social assistance policies.
- 3) A qualitative phenomenological study should be conducted to explore in greater depth the lived experiences of persons with different types of disabilities (physical, sensory, intellectual, psychosocial) in accessing and benefiting from social assistance programs, providing nuanced understanding of the barriers and facilitators operating at the microsystem and mesosystem levels.
 - 4) Research should be undertaken to examine the intersectionality of disability with other dimensions of vulnerability, including gender, age, displacement status, and household poverty, to understand how multiple and intersecting forms of marginalization shape welfare outcomes and policy responsiveness.
 - 5) An implementation science study should be conducted to systematically document and analyze the processes, challenges, and facilitators of policy implementation at the district and community levels, identifying the specific mechanisms through which policy intent is translated or fails to translate into accessible services and improved outcomes.
 - 6) Cost-effectiveness and economic evaluation research should be undertaken to assess the relative efficiency of different social assistance modalities (cash transfers, in-kind support, service provision) in producing welfare improvements for persons with different types of disabilities, informing resource allocation decisions in resource-constrained environments.
 - 7) Participatory action research should be conducted in partnership with Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) to co-design, implement, and evaluate pilot interventions aimed at addressing the critical welfare deficits identified in this study, particularly in the areas of housing, healthcare access, and food security.
 - 8) Research should be undertaken to examine the role of informal social protection mechanisms, including family support, community networks, and traditional solidarity systems, in shaping the welfare of persons with special needs, and to understand how formal social assistance policies interact with these informal systems.

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