



Report on the social inclusion and social protection of disabled people in European countries

Country: CYPRUS
Author: SIMONI SYMEONIDOU

Background:

The [Academic Network of European Disability experts](#) (ANED) was established by the European Commission in 2008 to provide scientific support and advice for its disability policy Unit. In particular, the activities of the Network will support the future development of the EU Disability Action Plan and practical implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People.

This country report has been prepared as input for the *Thematic report on the implementation of EU Social Inclusion and Social Protection Strategies in European countries with reference to equality for disabled people*.

The purpose of the report ([Terms of Reference](#)) is to review national implementation of the open method of coordination in Social inclusion and social protection, and in particular the National Strategic Reports of member states from a disability equality perspective, and to provide the Commission with useful evidence in supporting disability policy mainstreaming.



PART ONE: SOCIAL INCLUSION PLANS (GENERAL)

1.1: Please describe how and where disabled people are included in your country's published plans for social inclusion and protection?

According to the National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2006), the priorities of the 2006-2008 Strategy for Social Inclusion are:

- Reducing the risk of poverty in general and especially for the population aged 65 years or more
- Integrating vulnerable groups into the labour market
- Preventing the social exclusion of children

Disabled people's social inclusion falls within all the priorities of the 2006-2008 Strategy for Social Inclusion. However, in the 2006 National Report, only the last two priorities are further elaborated with regard to disabled people.

According to the 2006 National Report, measures aiming at integrating vulnerable groups into the labour market focus on increasing the participation of older persons (55-64), women, disabled people, public assistance recipients and unemployed in general. The 2006 National Report lists the existing employment schemes run by the state (Disabled People's Self-Employment Scheme, Disabled People's Vocational Rehabilitation Scheme in Areas not offered in the Centre for the Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled People, Supported Employment Scheme and Establishment and Functioning of Small Business Units for the Self-Employment of Disabled People Scheme). It also notes that measures are being undertaken to improve access of disabled people to public buildings, sidewalks and public transport. In particular, it is noted that accessibility for disabled people will be promoted by improving their access to buildings, streets and public transport, as well as by promoting their integration into the labour market and by improving their financial assistance benefits. The targets for improving accessibility include the increase of the ergonomic arrangements for physical access to public buildings, sidewalks and public transport by 10% in 2006. According to the 2006 National Report, by 2010, the number of public vehicles that will be accessible to persons with disabilities will be increased by 50%.

According to the 2006 National Report, preventing social exclusion for children is also one of the main objectives of the Social Inclusion Strategy 2006-2008. Measures include programmes that aim at reducing inequalities among children attending schools in run-down areas, programmes for supportive teaching, support to pupils with special needs, promotion of "e-literacy", implementation of compulsory pre-school education for children, expansion of the institution of the voluntary all-day primary schooling, introduction of the institution of voluntary all-day kindergarten and pilot implementation of the joint compulsory all-day primary schooling. With regard to children with special needs, the 2006 National Report also notes that during the school year 2005-2006, 2,941 pupils with special needs were attending public primary education schools, supported by 495 specially trained teachers. Another 1,019 pupils with special needs attended state Secondary Education Schools and were supported by 211 teachers. As from the school year 2006-2007, pilot Special Units for pupils with special needs will be established in Lyceums and Technical Schools (upper secondary school) for pre-vocational and vocational training. At the same time, the programme for upgrading the material and technological infrastructure of schools receiving children with special needs will continue (creation of special class-rooms, access facilities, equipment of rooms, personal equipment for children etc). Moreover, 17 support programmes for children with special needs are provided by voluntary organisations.



Although the stated political intention is the inclusion of disabled people in the labour market and in the built environment, and the prevention of social exclusion of children with special needs from the education system, in reality, these issues are not being mainstreamed in the overall plans for inclusion.

On the one hand, disabled people are treated as a separate group which is supported in employment through specific schemes. On the other hand, children with special needs are expected to be educated in the mainstream school, but in special units by special teachers. This medically oriented approach promotes segregation, regardless the stated intention to promote integration. Thus, social inclusion seems to be a concept that is understood differently by state officials who promote social, educational and vocational segregation instead.

1.2: In reality, what major actions has your country taken and what are the positive or negative effects on disabled people? (policy or practical examples)

Following the priorities stated in the 2006-2008 Social Inclusion Strategy, it should be expected that Cyprus has established the political background to promote its targets or that more political decisions are on the way. Indeed, the legislative framework is already there, although it may be argued that it needs to be improved.

In particular, the 2000 Disabled People's Act (N.127(I)/2000) is considered a landmark as it legitimizes disabled people's rights in different areas of life and alongside the amended legislation, the 2004 Disabled People's (Amended) Act (N.57(I)/2004), the issue of non-discrimination and equal opportunities is emphasized. However, disabled activists feel that not much was done to implement this law and thus, it remains 'framework legislation' (Symeonidou, 2005a). Disabled people pursue negotiations with the state, often prior the passing of legislation. However, the different priorities set by single-impairment groups urge disabled activists to liaise with the state as separate groups, rather as one collective group. As a result, disabled activists often manage to secure benefits or services for their impairment groups. The disability movement, although it is represented by one collective organization, has still a long way to go until it reaches a balance between the (impairment) group identity and the (disability) collective identity (Symeonidou, 2005a).

With regard to children with special needs, another important legislation is in force, the 1999 Education of Children with Special Needs Act (N.113(I)/1999). This law, quite similar to the 1981 Education Act which passed in the UK two decades earlier, introduced the concept of 'special educational needs' and legitimized the integration of children with special needs in the mainstream school without abolishing special schooling. However, most of the rhetoric for integration, or even inclusion, does not correspond to the existing practices. The dominant way of thinking is that of segregation, and thus, state officials often list the numbers of special units, special teachers and special programmes, in an effort to convince the public that 'special' attention is given to children with special needs and a considerable budget is allocated for their support (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2006). Moreover, special education is organisationally considered as a distinct educational service: Special Teachers are inspected by Inspectors of Special Education, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators liaise between Special Teachers and Inspectors of Special Educations, a Special Education Counsellor provides guidance to Special Teachers who need it and a Special Education Co-ordinator manages all programmes related to the education of children with special needs. Disability organisations, although they were involved in the negotiations prior to the passing of the law, they expressed no interest about the educational developments and practices that followed. Specific parents' organizations are more actively involved in this process, although frequently, they too pressure towards a segregating rather than an inclusive direction, driven by their belief that they can secure special treatment for their children group (Symeonidou, 2007).



1.3: What is the most recent research about disabled people's equality and social inclusion in your country?

Research about disabled people's equality and social inclusion in Cyprus is extremely limited. Disabled people's experiences in the Cypriot culture and in disability politics is recorded in a recent research project with a qualitative – historical character (Symeonidou, 2005a).

Documentary data and disabled activists' narratives indicate that disabled people experience segregation, disappointment, limited opportunities for education and employment, people's prejudice and the state's inertia. However, most disabled respondents admit that looking back, the situation for disabled people has improved, although this was the result of disability activism. All these developments should be placed in the context of a traditionally exclusionary culture towards disabled people described in detail elsewhere (Phtiaka, 2003; Symeonidou, forthcoming). However, more research data is needed in order to be able to form the whole picture of the inequalities or exclusionary practices experienced by different groups of disabled people.

An important area of research in Cyprus is that of special/inclusive education. Arguably, there are important research findings regarding the inclusion of children with special needs in the mainstream school (Phtiaka 2007; 2008), an area which is indirectly related to the general issue of equality and social inclusion. In particular, the evaluation of the implementation of the integration law prepared for the Ministry of Education and Culture (Phtiaka, Michaelidou, Tsouris and Vlami, 2005) provides research evidence to suggest that the infrastructure for the integration of children with special needs is still poor, there are gaps between policy and practice, parents of children with special needs experience frustration from the school system and special educational needs co-ordinators complain for workload and difficulties in fulfilling their obligations. Furthermore, other research papers report that the school culture or the 'hidden curriculum' promote charitable feelings towards disability (Symeonidou, 2005b). Teachers are trapped in the medical and charity ideas cultivated for many years in the Cypriot society (Symeonidou, forthcoming) and they transmit them to non-disabled children when they have the opportunity.



PART TWO: INCOMES, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

2.1 Research publications (key points)

Unfortunately, there is no recent research on poverty, income or pensions/benefits for different groups of disabled people. The only report that provides basic information on the issues of poverty and pensions is the National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2006). However, the 2006 National Report refers only to poverty rates about elderly people and gender differences among elderly people with regard to poverty. Furthermore, the 2006 National Report refers to pension rates with regard to the different age groups of the population, gender differences and the characteristics of households. Evidently, it is important to design and implement long-term research projects to record data about poverty, income or pensions/benefits for disabled people in Cyprus, including the poverty or income of different groups of disabled people, disabled women, ethnic minorities etc.

2.2 Type and level of benefits (key points and examples)

The Service for the Care of Disabled People runs five benefit schemes (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2007) which are explained below:

- **Severe Mobility Impairment Benefit:** This scheme is in force since 1992 and it is addressed to paraplegic and quadriplegic persons. It is a monthly allowance, which at the end of 2007 was CY£ 172.92. This amount is subject to changes every six months, according to the cost-of-living index.
- **Financial Assistance for Disabled People's Special Needs Benefit and Sponsoring of Disability Organisations Benefit:** This scheme is in force since 1988 and it aims to facilitate the living conditions of disabled people, promote independent living and equal participation of disabled people in the society and economy. This is expected to be achieved through the provision of technical means and other equipment. In 2007, a total of CY£ 284.831,27 was allocated through this scheme to 454 individuals who required technical means and other equipment. A total of CY£ 64.900 was allocated to disability organizations to cover their expenses.
- **Holidays for Disabled People Benefit:** This scheme is in force since 1998 and it aims to sponsor the holidays of disabled people and their families in hotels around Cyprus. This benefit is allocated to disabled people who are not recipients of any other benefit. In 2007, 193 individuals applied for this benefit and a total of CY£ 72.621,74 was spent.
- **Financial Assistance for Wheelchairs Benefit for People with Severe Mobility Impairment:** This scheme is in force since 1999. In 2007, a total of CY£ 89.948,90 was spent to 128 individuals who applied for a wheelchair.
- **Wheelchair Distribution Scheme:** This scheme is about lending used wheelchairs to people who need them. The wheelchairs belong to the Service for the Care of Disabled People, which is responsible for completing the necessary procedures.

According to the 2007 Annual Report of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2007), in 2007, the following amounts were allocated to the stated numbers of individuals:

	Budget Approved CY£	Budget Allocated CY£	Recipients
Severe Mobility Impairment Benefit	2,386,754	2,754,850	1,253
Financial Assistance for Disabled People's Special Needs Benefit and Sponsoring of Disability Organisations Benefit	350,000	349,731	454
Holidays for Disabled People Benefit	80,000	72,622	518



Financial Assistance for Wheelchairs Benefit for People with Severe Mobility Impairment	190,000	89,949	128
Wheelchair Distribution Scheme	12,000	3,990	80

Importantly, there is also the Public Assistance Allowance which is allocated to specific groups of the population in an attempt to reduce the risk of poverty. According to the National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2006) the Public Assistance Allowance ensures the right to a decent standard of living through the provision of financial assistance and/or social services to persons, whose resources are not sufficient to meet their basic and special needs as determined by legislation. Basic needs include food, clothing and footwear, electricity, supply of water, healthy living conditions and pocket money allowance. Special needs include rent, special diet and disability allowances, as well as allowances for home care, day care and residential care. It is also possible to provide assistance for house repairs, mortgage interest, heating etc. The rates of public assistance allowances are indexed annually to a special consumer price index for selected goods and services that cover basic needs. Public Assistance Allowances increased by 6.6% between July 2003 and July 2005 and is expected to continue to be indexed under the existing arrangement.

The current annual rate of allowance for basic need is:

- for the recipient (head of household) CY£ 2.678
- for every dependant aged 14+ CY£ 1.339
- for every dependent aged <14 CY£ 709

Recipients who are not home owners receive a rent allowance equal to 50% of the total monthly allowance. In case of a disabled recipient, an additional disability allowance, equal to 50% the personal basic allowance, is payable.

The basic allowance in 2003 (CY£ 2.522) was equal to 57% of the relative risk of poverty threshold (CY£ 4.389). For a recipient who was not a home owner, this percentage reached 84% of the relative risk of poverty threshold. For single parent families, 50% of the net income from employment, subject to a maximum of CY£ 150 per month, is not taken into account when determining the right to and the amount of public assistance. Child benefit is also not taken into account. It is noted that under the revised Public Assistance and Services Act (N. 95(I)/2006), the following changes were made that increased the incomes of public assistance recipients and encouraged their integration into the labour market:

- Public assistance continues during the first 12 months of taking up employment (full benefit for the first four months, two thirds for the subsequent four months and one third for the remaining four months)
- In addition, monthly income from work, which is not taken into account in calculating the amount of public assistance, increased as follows:
 - For the recipient, from CY£ 20 to CY£ 50
 - For a disabled recipient, from CY£ 100 to CY£ 300
 - For a recipient aged 63+, from CY£ 40 to CY£ 10016
 - For a single parent, from CY£ 100 to CY£ 150

In the case of a person who is in an urgent need of assistance as a result of special personal circumstances or of an emergency situation, a lump sum of up to CY£ 400 may be granted even if that person does not meet eligibility criteria for public assistance. Public assistance recipients or persons who would become public assistance recipients, if rent were added to their special needs, are entitled to financial assistance up to CY£ 7.000



According to the 2007 Annual Report (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2007) the Social Welfare Service which belongs to the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance runs two schemes for elderly and disabled people:

- Reinforcement of Families Scheme for Caring about the Elderly or/and Disabled Members of the Family: This scheme allocates up to CY£ 7,000 for changes in buildings so that they become accessible for their elderly or disabled members. In 2007, eleven families received this allowance.
- Sponsoring of Holidays Schemes for Elderly People and for Disabled People who are also Recipients of the Public Assistance Allowance: This scheme sponsors holidays in Cyprus for elderly people (63+) and disabled people who are also recipients of the Public Assistance Allowance. The allowance is CY£ 150 for holidays with duration of six days. When necessary the amount of CY£ 150 is also allocated for an assistant.

It should be noted that the allowances and benefits described above are available through different departments of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, which makes it quite difficult for disabled people to claim them.

2.3 Policy and practice (summary)

Please tell us about the current state of laws or policies that affect the poverty and financial income of disabled people in your country.

The financial income of disabled people is not an important political question at this time. Although disabled people are not satisfied with the allowances and the procedures followed in order to be eligible to benefits, it seems that the present condition is generally accepted. The existing pensions and benefits are quite low and disabled people frequently face the dilemma to pursue paid employment or to live on the public allowance. The case is that when a disabled person is in paid employment, s/he cannot receive public allowances. Another issue that causes the frustration of disabled people with severe mobility impairments (paraplegic and quadriplegic people) is that they are obliged to appear in front of a doctors' committee year by year to confirm the persistence of their impairment in order to be eligible for the relevant benefit. This is humiliating for this group of disabled people who are aware that their condition is irreversible.



SECTION THREE: CARE AND SUPPORT

3.1 Recent research publications (key points)

There is no recent research on long term care and independent living in Cyprus. Research in these areas is important and it should be one of the priorities of academics and state services.

3.2 Types of care and support (key points and examples)

In Cyprus, care for disabled people takes three forms: Institutionalized care, care provided in the 'houses in the community' and care provided at home. To begin with, institutionalized care was considered the best solution for adults with mental impairments. Historically, parents of children with mental impairments pursued this form of care as they believed that it would offer a safe place for their children to live while at the same time the rest of the family could go on with their lives (Symeonidou, 2005; 2007). Today, there are state institutions and private institutions; the latter are sponsored by charitable events or donations from wealthy people. According to the 2007 Annual Report (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2007), in 2007, there were 8 state institutions for disabled adults supervised by the Social Welfare Services which belongs to the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance. The 'houses in the community' is a relatively new way of care for disabled people. The general idea behind these houses is that adults with mental impairments should be de-institutionalized and they should have the opportunity to have a better standard of living compared to the one offered in institutions. The case is that a house is found in a neighbourhood and 4-5 people with mental impairments are 'chosen' to live together with the support of specialized staff. In this case, individuals are encouraged to develop social skills, enrol in everyday life activities (employment, shopping, social visits) and are supported in developing personal relationships where possible. There are a few 'houses in the community' run by the state. Most of the 'houses in the community' are sponsored by charities or, in some cases, by the parents of people with mental impairments. Last but not least, there is the option of care provided at home which is preferred by people with severe mobility problems or chronic illnesses. In this case, disabled people are expected to make use of the public allowance they receive or the severe mobility impairment benefit in order to hire a personal assistant. There is no availability of temporary care services.

As far as work rehabilitation services are concerned, there is one state centre, the Centre for the Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled People, which offers training in specific areas which are now considered outdated: shoe making, furniture making, carpentry, sewing and embroidery making. According to the 2007 Annual Report (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2007), the Centre also employs disabled trainees who are able to participate in production and it allocates them a production allowance alongside a training allowance. Apart from the sheltered employment provided at the Centre for the Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled People, there are other sheltered employment workshops directed to people with specific types of impairments (for example sheltered employment for people with visual impairments who were trained to make items out of straw – baskets, bassinets etc. – and sheltered employment for people with hearing impairments who were trained in carpentry and furniture making). Last but not least, the Service for the Care of Disabled People, which belongs to the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, runs programmes that encourage the training and employment of disabled people.

Help with transport is another area which is of interest to disabled people. There are transportation allowances for certain groups of disabled people who, due to their impairment, are unable to use transportation means independently. There is also the option of buying a tax free car, a special benefit for certain groups of disabled people. As far as public transportation is concerned, this is an area not yet developed in Cyprus. Both disabled and non-disabled people have difficulties in using public transportation. Generally speaking, the basic standards to facilitate transportation are not met (i.e. absence of frequent and efficient coach services). With regard to disabled people, there is lack of accessible coaches and taxis and thus, the use of public transportation becomes difficult.



These difficulties are also reported in the website of the Design Bureau for the Accessibility of Persons with Disability (<http://www.mcw.gov.cy/mcw/dbpd/disabledaccess.nsf/index/index?opendocument>), which is one of the departments of the Ministry of Communications and Works. The Design Bureau is involved in pilot programmes and it takes important initiatives for the improvement of accessibility and transportation for disabled people. However, there is still a long way to go until all these initiatives are legitimized and implemented.



PART FOUR: SUMMARY INFORMATION

4.1 Conclusions and recommendations (summary)

In conclusion, there are important legislative decisions, benefits and allowances for Cypriot disabled people that promote social inclusion in principle. However, there is a long way to go until full social inclusion is achieved in terms of financial support, care, education and employment. Undoubtedly, the situation has improved considerably, especially if we consider that Cyprus became an independent republic in 1960 and a few years later, in 1974, it suffered the Turkish invasion and occupation of almost half of the island. Thus, the issue of legitimizing disabled people's social inclusion first appeared in the state's agenda in the 1980s and disability organisations had an important role to play in pursuing policies and benefits that would improve their living conditions. Cyprus became a member of the European Union in 2004 and thus, it is expected to follow European directives about improving the state of art of disabled people in the society. To this end, serious efforts for long-term research need to be made in order to record the existing situation regarding disabled people's social inclusion in Cyprus. Current policies and practices need to be evaluated and discussions among country experts are expected to lead Cypriot state officials to new decisions. Above all, the voice of disabled people should be heard, their complaints should be recorded and international trends should be taken into consideration if we want to make the transition towards more sufficient policies and practices for social inclusion.

4.2 One example of best practice (brief details)

One example of good practice is the pilot programme for accessibility run by the Ministry of Communications and Works through the Design Bureau for the Accessibility of Persons with Disability (<http://www.mcw.gov.cy/mcw/dbpd/disabledaccess.nsf/index/index?opendocument>). This programme was approved by the Council of Ministers in 2002, after the proposal of the Ministry of Communications and Works and the Technical Committee for Facilitating People's Access. Important public buildings were included in this pilot programme, such as the Nicosia Archaeological Museum, the Limassol Pattihion Municipality Theatre, the Nicosia Post Office Main Building, open organized areas, Makarios Avenue and the Cyprus Tourist Organization Beach in Larnaca. Taxis for disabled people was also one of the priorities of the pilot programme.

- Nicosia Archaeological Museum: It was re-innovated and it became accessible to a great extent. Access to the library and the temporary exhibitions room is now possible and ramps facilitate access to and inside the museum. This project cost CY£ 20,000.
- Limassol Pattihion Municipality Theatre: It was re-innovated and it became accessible. Access to the theatre and mobility within the theatre is now possible. A WC for disabled people was built on the ground floor and four parking places for disabled people were created. This project cost CY£ 15,000.
- Taxis for disabled people: The Department of Road Transportation announced 11 licenses for taxis specially made to facilitate disabled people's transportation. However, only 5 licenses were given at the end.

This initiative was extremely important as at least public buildings and main avenues should gradually become accessible to disabled people.



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