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# European Semester 2022-2023 country fiche on disability equality

With comparative data Annex provided by EDE

## Cyprus

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European Disability Expertise (EDE) provides independent scientific support to the Commission's policy unit responsible for disability issues. It aims to mainstream disability equality in EU policy processes, including implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

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<sup>1</sup> For an introduction to the Semester process, see:  
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-semester/how-european-semester-works/>.

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## **1 Executive summary and recommendations**

### **1.1 Key points and main challenges for Cyprus in 2022**

#### **Disability and the labour market**

The economic activity of persons with disabilities in Cyprus remains lower than other groups of people. The Cyprus Disability Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2023 includes priorities and schemes to address employment and vocational training, the implementation of which is not, however, further reinforced with additional actions, such as employers' awareness and funding of accessibility and reasonable adaptations in the workplace. The quota policies have not yet been extended to the private sector and the Cyprus National Plan on Access covering social protection for workers and the self-employed does not include any disability-specific references.

#### **Disability, social policies and healthcare**

In 2021 the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare was established, under which the Department of Management of Social Welfare Benefits provides for the Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) and disability pensions. The Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (DSIPD) responsible for the rest of the disability-relevant benefits remained under the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion. In social policies, schemes on renewables and individual energy efficiency measures give priority to the households of persons with disabilities. In healthcare, physiotherapy sessions for persons with disabilities within the General Healthcare System have been reduced, triggering reaction from the beneficiaries. The supported living projects received extended funding for 2021-2027, but there is still no provision for families' and carers' respite, nor for private housing accessibility.

#### **Disability, education and skills**

There was no progress on educational reform towards inclusive education. Lack of consensus between stakeholders is still evident. The Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) 2021 investments are focused on special schools and the discourse of educational policy maintains a strong deficit perspective, rather than focusing on the reinforcement of inclusive education. The Minister of Education recently announced the establishment of an 'Assessment Centre for Special Education' linked to enhancement of special units and special schools. In addition, challenges in relation to the recruitment of additional special education support staff (escorts) are still in place.

#### **Investment priorities for inclusion and accessibility**

Investment priorities include Early Childhood Education and Care, where adaptation of materials and facilities for children with disabilities is mentioned, as well as the employment of school assistants. The establishment of day care centres for children with disabilities is foreseen in the National Reform Programme (NRP) 2022 and an early intervention centre for autism was established. Investment priorities also include promoting renewables and energy efficiency, where disabled households have some priority. Though a legislative framework for accessibility is anticipated, no further investments are foreseen towards its implementation.

## 1.2 Recommendations for Cyprus

These recommendations are based on the evidence and analysis presented in the following sections of our report.

**Recommendation:** Introduce an employment quota system for the private sector, as it exists for the public and wider public sector and provide investment opportunities and incentives for reasonable accommodations in workplaces.

**Rationale:** Unemployment rates of persons with disabilities remain high and there is no strong evidence for the success and sustainability of employment based on the existing incentive schemes. In addition, there are no incentives or guidelines provided to employers for reasonable accommodations and other disability-relevant issues.

**Recommendation:** Re-start the educational reform for inclusive education in order to promote inclusive discourses and inclusive pedagogical practices.

**Rationale:** The relevant reform anticipated to be completed in 2019-2020 did not progress. New efforts and actions by the Ministry of Education maintain a strong special education and medical perspective, despite the parents' associations and reactions from academia. Families' and children's involvement in decision-making should be further empowered.

**Recommendation:** Invest in the establishment of a coherent assistive technology (AT) and accessibility service delivery system which will also support digital and assistive technology competence development for persons with disabilities.

**Rationale:** Assistive technology services and accessibility consultancy are not provided in any formal way, resulting in abandonment of available AT as well as digital exclusion of persons with disabilities.

**Recommendation:** Invest in the establishment of an accessibility implementation and monitoring mechanism (e.g. Independent Authority on Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities).

**Rationale:** The National Disability Action Plan foresaw a legislative framework on the accessibility of products and services, plus there is the existing websites accessibility law. However, there is no provision or anticipated action for training and education, guidelines, awareness and quality assurance for the implementation of the laws.

**Recommendation:** Develop community-based independent living structures with smart and Active Assisted Living (AAL) technologies and qualified support staff.

**Rationale:** Existing deinstitutionalisation efforts continue to be fragmented and isolated actions, which maintain smaller scale institutionalisation.

**Recommendation:** Develop advocacy mechanisms for people with disabilities who are users of social services, particularly those in supported living settings. A scrutiny body should also be in place, working closely with advocacy groups, to supervise the implementation of supported and independent living projects.

**Rationale:** Large groups of persons with disabilities are not appropriately represented in order support the rights of people with intellectual disabilities and autism in all cases.

## 2 Mainstreaming disability equality in the 2022 Semester documents

### 2.1 Country Report (CR) and Country Specific Recommendation (CSR)

The following key points highlight where a disability perspective was considered, or should be considered, in the CR/CSR. We address the most relevant of these in the next sections.

The CR for Cyprus discusses the emphasis and progress of the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP)<sup>2</sup> and disability is specifically mentioned in relation to the following:

- In key reforms and investments for a fair green transition it is mentioned that the plan includes targeted investments to improve living conditions and energy efficiency in the households of people living in poverty, as well as for persons with disabilities (p. 32). In the same point, it is also highlighted that investments are expected to strengthen the digital skills of vulnerable groups, a term often used in policy documents as inclusive of persons with disabilities.
- Higher risk and percentage of early school leaving rate is also identified for people with disabilities. However, as compulsory education in Cyprus is until the age of 15 and almost all learners complete the secondary education cycle, even those attending special schools, early school leaving and limited opportunities in education are linked to tertiary education. Nevertheless, the challenges for the inclusion of learners with disabilities earlier in education are huge and are discussed in Section 4 of this report.
- People with disabilities are identified among the groups at higher risk of poverty and social inclusion, with a rate of 33.3 % vs EU 28.9 % in 2020. On fostering equal opportunities and social inclusion it is mentioned that the European Social Funds (ESF+) will support measures to restructure social welfare services in Cyprus and to establish a new network of social inclusion for persons with disabilities (p. 47). At this point, it is also important to mention that, within the framework of the Restructuring of the Social Welfare Services Plan,<sup>3</sup> the Deputy Ministry of Welfare was recently established,<sup>4</sup> which now includes welfare-related departments and services that had been operating under the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (MLWS). These are the Social Welfare Service and the Welfare Benefits Administration Service, but not the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (which remains within the MLWS).
- As healthcare staff shortages are identified, it is anticipated that the 'Cyprus RRP and the ESF+ will help address this problem by supporting long-term care for older people and people with disabilities' (p. 47).
- In two other sections of the CR there is reference to vulnerable groups which, as mentioned above, in social policy documents often includes persons with disabilities. One (p. 2) is related measures for special discounts in relation to

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<sup>2</sup> Cyprus Recovery and Resilience Plan, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility/cyprus-recovery-and-resilience-plan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility/cyprus-recovery-and-resilience-plan_en).

<sup>3</sup> Announcement by the Minister of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance in relation to the Deputy Ministry of Welfare (9 July 2021), available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ye26svjd> (retrieved 3 August 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Law of 2021 on the Establishment of the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare and Related Matters (L. 89(I)/2021), available at: [http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/indexes/2021\\_1\\_89.html](http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/indexes/2021_1_89.html).



energy poverty and inflation, which is indeed a measure in place also for persons with disabilities. The second refers to the development of digital skills, noting the fact that ‘in December 2021, Cyprus adopted a National Action Plan for Digital Skills 2021-2025 (‘e-skills Action Plan’) to improve the digital skills of all, including for vulnerable groups’. However, it is noted that the Plan<sup>5</sup> does not make any specific reference to people with disabilities or skills in relation to the use of assistive technology, and/or accessibility and neither does the general National Digital Strategy (please see Country report on digitalisation and digital transformation, 2021).<sup>6</sup>

There is no direct and specific reference to disability in the CSR for Cyprus, unlike in 2020. Nevertheless, references to vulnerable groups might also indirectly suggest targeting disability relevant issues, especially if considered in relation to references in the CR. These include, firstly, higher energy and food prices that weigh particularly on vulnerable groups experiencing or at risk of poverty, and hence it is recommended that Cyprus should ensure that the nationally-financed current expenditure takes into account support of affected and at-risk households and to people fleeing Ukraine (Recommendation 1, p. 9).

In addition, the CSR is based on considerations of the worsening economic outlook in general and recommendations highlight the need to expand fiscal response to investment for the green and digital transition (Paragraph 8, p. 3). These recommendations in relation to the implementation of the RRP (Recommendation 2, p. 9) actually entail earlier recommendations on digital literacy, e-health and long-term care, as well as social and affordable housing and improvement of the legislative framework.

As suggested in the EDE Semester Country report 2020,<sup>7</sup> the issue of digital and physical accessibility is very relevant to the CSR on green and digital transition. While digital accessibility of particular websites and accessibility of public buildings and physical infrastructures is currently put into law with specific guidelines, access and accessibility at other levels is not. Hence, a broader range of digital as well as transportation and built environment accessibility and availability of assistive technology should be directly referenced in CSRs, as well as connections to digital transformation in education, which again disregards digitally inclusive education.

Similarly, this Semester’s CSRs do not include any new recommendations on addressing labour market or social policy issues. Reference to previous ones seems to suggest attention to strengthening the capacity of the public employment services (CSR 2021, Paragraph 18), for which the same observations are noted in relation to lack of disability-related training and awareness through a human rights perspective, lack of information and guidelines for possible employers and lack of specific references and guidelines for reasonable accommodations, accessibility and flexible

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<sup>5</sup> E-Skills (Digital Skills) *Action Plan 2021-2025*, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yt8n54cs> (accessed 3 August 2022).

<sup>6</sup> Mavrou, K., Tsakiri, M. & Liasidou, A. (2021). *Exploring the action of EU countries to harness the potential and address challenges of digitalisation and digital transformation to advance the rights of persons with disabilities*, Cyprus Country Report.

<sup>7</sup> Mavrou, K., Liasidou, A. & Tsakiri, M. (2020). *European Semester 2020-2021 country fiche on disability equality*, Cyprus Country Report.

working terms for persons with disabilities (see Section 3, in relation to CSR additional recommendations of 2020 CSR, Paragraph 2).

## 2.2 National Reform Programme (NRP) and Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP)

The following key points highlight where the situation of people with disabilities or disability policies is relevant to the NRP/RRP. We analyse the most relevant of these in the next sections.

The Cyprus NRP 2022 is aligned with the RRP and the CSR of 2019 and 2020 and contains information on the implementation of relevant priorities and national policies. It is noted that disability issues as presented in the RRP are discussed in detail in the 2021 EDE Cyprus report on the European Semester 2021-2022 country fiche,<sup>8</sup> but also briefly outlined here in relation to the NRP 2022.

- In education, disability is mentioned more specifically in reforms and measures for early childhood education (ECE). In particular, in key policy response to major economic, employment and social developments and challenges, regarding addressing labour market, education and skills and social challenges, disability is specifically mentioned in measures outside the RRP referring to education and particularly early childhood education (ECE). These include 'adapted facilities and educational materials of ECE in order to respond to the specific needs of children with special educational needs and of children with disabilities, using inclusive teaching and learning methods. It allocates funds for building adaptations to facilitate pupils with special needs. To meet children's needs, school assistants are employed, responsible for their safety and self-care. Most of the children with special needs attend the mainstream classes and receive accommodations to meet their special educational needs'. In addition, the establishment of day care centres for children with disabilities is also mentioned (p. 47). As discussed in Section 5 of this report, to date these measures do not seem to satisfy organised parents or other stakeholders and they have been highly criticised as not complying with the UN CRPD by the competent monitoring national bodies. In the NRP the School Network for the Support of Antiracist Policy Implementation is also mentioned, which has been supported by the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute (CPI) since 2018. Though the action does not directly refer to disability (p. 55), in May 2022 a teachers' professional development seminar series organised by CPI under the network's activities, also included a webinar on Disablism (4 May 2022).<sup>9</sup>
- In social inclusion and support services, the third National Disability Action Plan 2021-2023 was approved by the Council of Ministries, as a product of consultation of the competent Department<sup>10</sup> with other Ministries and

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<sup>8</sup> Mavrou, K., Liasidou, A. & Tsakiri, M. (2021). *European Semester 2021-2022 country fiche on disability equality*, Cyprus Country Report.

<sup>9</sup> Webinar Series 'Addressing violence, racism and disablism', May 2022, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/4xfchfsw>, programme available at: [https://www.pi.ac.cy/pi/files/anakoinoseis/2021\\_2022/seminars\\_poster.pdf](https://www.pi.ac.cy/pi/files/anakoinoseis/2021_2022/seminars_poster.pdf) (accessed 18 August 2022).

<sup>10</sup> Department for the Social Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities: [http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/index\\_gr/index\\_gr?opendocument](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/index_gr/index_gr?opendocument).

organisations of persons with disabilities. The plan includes several actions and measures continuing from previous Semesters, as well as a few new actions. The NRP specifically mentions the upgrading of the existing system for disability assessment first introduced in 2007. In addition, the provision of specialised escort services for persons with disabilities in state institutions (among other groups, i.e. children and older persons) is foreseen (p. 52) and a centre for family intervention and support for autism was launched in 2021. Existing disability benefit schemes through the Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) also continue (NRP Table 3, pp. 21 & 24).

- In terms of living support schemes, the establishment of home structures for persons and children with disabilities and people in need of long-term care is mentioned under main RRP investments (p. 52). In addition, the provision of housing within the GMI can be increased in cases of persons with disabilities, as well as the State Aid Scheme that is provided to NGOs and local authorities for, among others, home, residential or day care of persons with disabilities (see NRP Table 3, p. 23). The expansion of the network of supported living homes will also continue (investments, p. 102).
- In relation to infrastructure, built environment investments and energy, projects also refer to ‘critical infrastructures’ for various groups including persons with disabilities. In addition, the implementation of Sustainable Urban Mobility Projects (SUMP) and accessibility measures is mentioned, as well as measures for promoting energy efficiency and tackling energy poverty in households with persons with disabilities, in order to facilitate participation and efficient funding by the RRP (investments, p. 102, CSR 4 for 2019 and CSR 3 for 2020). See further discussion in Section 4 of this report.
- In employment and access to the labour market, the NRP refers to continuation of existing schemes on vocational training and employment incentives for young people not in employment or education (NEET), which indirectly may include people with disabilities. Employer incentive schemes (salary subsidy) specifically addressing persons with disabilities will continue (p. 102). Measures for supporting persons with care responsibilities take into account opportunities for flexible working arrangements that will improve work and family life balance and enhance employment, especially for women (CSR 3 of 2019 and CSR 2 of 2020). Though this does not directly refer to mothers of children with disabilities it might include parents with increased disability-relevant care responsibilities. During the suspension of schools’ and care centres in 2020 and 2021, a measure for a Special Leave Scheme for Parents working in the Private Sector for the Care of their Children less than 15 years of age or children with disabilities of any age was implemented (see NRP Table 1, entry 6, p. 15).

The summary of RRP measures published on the Commission webpage does not include any direct reference to disability, though a number of them, referring to public transport, digitalisation of public services, teacher training and upgrading of hospitals and schools, might be relevant. Nevertheless, the analysis of the RRP components by the EDE Cyprus experts in 2021<sup>11</sup> identified some specific reference to disability in some of the proposed measures and investments. In summary, those include accessibility of public infrastructures, public transport (linked to SDG on Sustainable

<sup>11</sup> Mavrou, K., Liasidou, A. & Tsakiri, M. (2021). *European Semester 2021-2022 country fiche on disability equality*, Cyprus Country Report.

Cities and Communities (see NRP table 4, p. 6) and public sector websites, deinstitutionalisation and disabled children and adult care services and housing, and energy efficiency measures for the benefit of persons with disabilities (see also Section 6 later in this report).

### **2.3 Semester links to CRPD and national disability action plans**

It is important that Semester plans align with national disability strategy. In Cyprus, this refers to the First Cyprus Disability Strategy 2018-2028<sup>12</sup> and the Third Disability Action Plan 2021-2023.<sup>13</sup> The First National Strategy for Disability 2018-2028 was linked to the UN CRPD Committee recommendations to Cyprus and the previous European Disability Strategy 2010-2020. A Third National Disability Action Plan 2021-2023 was approved by the Council of Ministers in February 2022, including legislative and institutional reforms.<sup>14</sup> This National Action Plan is mentioned in the 2022 NRP, under strengthening social services (p. 51).

Relevant recommendations arising from participation in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) are highlighted in the following sections. The last UN CRPD Committee recommendations to Cyprus were in 2017, the most recent submission by Cyprus was in 2016 and the most recent response from the Committee was the 2017 Concluding Observations.

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<sup>12</sup> First National Disability Strategy 2018-2028 and Second National Disability Action Plan 2018-2020, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/CYstrategy2028>.

<sup>13</sup> Third National Disability Action Plan 2021-2023, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/mumxhvj4>.

<sup>14</sup> National Disability Action Plan, Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, [http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipa80\\_gr/dsipa80\\_gr?OpenDocument](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipa80_gr/dsipa80_gr?OpenDocument).

### **3 Disability and the labour market – analysis of the situation and the effectiveness of policies**

In 2017, the UN CRPD Committee made the following recommendations to Cyprus:

[Article 27 UN CRPD](#) addresses 'Work and employment'.

'54. The Committee recommends that the State party ensure access to employment in the open labour market, including by ensuring that the private sector is also covered by a quota system and by ensuring equal pay for work of equal value in all settings for all persons with disabilities being guided by target 8.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals. It furthermore recommends that the State party collect data on the employment of persons with disabilities, disaggregated by gender, age and type of impairment.'

The most recent CRPD development is the 2017 Concluding Observations and the state's submission in 2016.

#### **3.1 Summary of the labour market situation of persons with disabilities**

According to the Social Scoreboard indicator, cited in the Semester package, the disability employment gap in Cyprus is considered 'Average'.

Data from EU-SILC indicate an employment rate for persons with disabilities in Cyprus of 52.3 % in 2020, compared to 76.8 % for other persons. This resulted in an estimated disability employment gap of approximately 24 percentage points (estimated EU27 average gap 24.5, see Tables 2-4 in the Annex) or an employment chances ratio of 0.7. Updated data from Eurostat estimate that this disability employment gap widened to 27 points in 2021.<sup>15</sup>

The same data indicate unemployment rates of 19.6 % and 10.1 %, for disabled and non-disabled persons respectively, in 2020 (see Tables 5-7) and the economic activity rate for persons with disabilities in Cyprus was 65.0 %, compared to 85.4 % for other persons (see Tables 8-10). These indications are broken down by gender and age in the respective tables in the Annex, but more recent estimates are not available.

Due to the impact on employment of the COVID-19 crisis in 2020-2021, some caution is needed when interpreting trend data.

The latest available national data on unemployment<sup>16</sup> do not include disability-specific data but indicate generally reduced percentages in unemployment for 2021 in comparison to 2020 and for 2021 in comparison to 2022 (same periods). Percentages are also lower for young people (aged 15-24). The monthly report (April 2022) also indicated that levels of employment among young people aged 15+ have risen which may be an effect of the re-start in some sectors after the pandemic control measures. The general percentage of people registered unemployed is also lower. However, it is highlighted that, due to the COVID-19 restriction measures, the unemployment

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<sup>15</sup> Eurostat: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/hlth\\_dlm200](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/hlth_dlm200).

<sup>16</sup> Department of Labour, statistics: [http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/dl.nsf/page9b\\_gr/page9b\\_gr?OpenDocument](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/dl.nsf/page9b_gr/page9b_gr?OpenDocument).



registration process was only online and hence the numbers of registered unemployed may not be completely reliable. It is also interesting to note that the disability record anticipated under the System for the Assessment of Disability and Functioning is not yet in place and therefore disability-relevant data are not available in Cyprus.

### 3.2 Analysis of labour market policies relevant to the Semester

For reference, see the 2022 National Reform Programme, the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Cyprus<sup>17</sup> and the the First Cyprus Disability Strategy 2018-2028<sup>18</sup> and the Third Disability Action Plan 2021-2023.<sup>19</sup>

It is notable that the RRP 2021, component 5.2 Labour market, social protection, social welfare and inclusion, does not include any disability-specific reforms and investments linked to equal opportunities in the labour market or the employment of persons with disabilities. The NRP 2022 includes measures to be implemented within the RRP components concerning access for NEET to the labour market, which however do not directly target persons with disabilities. On the other hand, as noted in Section 2.3 above, the National Disability Action Plan 2021-2023, which includes several actions in relation to the labour market, is mentioned in the NRP.

#### ***Labour market and employment actions in the National Disability Action Plan***

As indicated in our country fiche reports for the previous Semester for the 2020 and 2021 periods, employment and vocational training were among the priorities of the First Cyprus Disability Strategy 2018-2028<sup>20</sup> and the Action Plans. In the National Disability Action Plan 2021-2023<sup>21</sup> the relevant strategy objective is defined under the following new action (under the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance):

- Action 5: Increase of equal employment opportunities for persons with disabilities through social enterprises and continuation of existing actions;
- Action 9: Scheme for the provision of incentives to employers for the employment of people with disabilities, with expected outcome of 100 unemployed persons with disabilities to enter the labour market (pp. 17-18);
- Action 12: Professional Rehabilitation Services (with existing schemes) (p. 19);
- Action 19: Recruitment of 30 employment advisors in the Public Employment Service which will focus on vulnerable groups (p. 20).

In addition, Action 1, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth, concerns the *Provision of post-secondary education programmes* for learners graduating from Special Units in order to continue their education and vocational training in specific professions. Collaboration with tertiary education institutions will be investigated (p. 23), while Action 20 of the same Ministry refers to *upgrading of the pre-vocational programmes already offered by the Ministry of Education* (p. 27). The above actions, under the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social

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<sup>17</sup> Cyprus Recovery and Resilience Plan, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility/cyprus-recovery-and-resilience-plan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility/cyprus-recovery-and-resilience-plan_en).

<sup>18</sup> First National Disability Strategy 2018-2028 and Second National Disability Action Plan 2018-2020, <https://tinyurl.com/CYstrategy2028>.

<sup>19</sup> Third National Disability Action Plan 2021-2023, <https://tinyurl.com/mumxhvj4>.

<sup>20</sup> First Cyprus Disability Strategy 2018-2028, <https://tinyurl.com/CYstrategy2028>.

<sup>21</sup> National Disability Action Plan 2021-2023, <https://tinyurl.com/mumxhvj4>.

Insurance, plus the implementation of the quota legislation,<sup>22</sup> were announced in February 2022 by the competent ministry in an official press release<sup>23</sup> informing the public about the services and programmes for ‘Vocational Rehabilitation’ (see Action 12 above).<sup>24</sup> Upon this announcement, the Cyprus Confederation of Organisations of the Disabled (CCOD) was invited to participate in February 2022 at the meeting of the Parliamentary Committee for Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance to discuss the Special Fund of the Centre for Vocational Rehabilitation. In a letter to the Parliamentary Committee,<sup>25</sup> the CCOD provided some background information on the establishment and operation of the Fund and the Centre, and highlighted that the only programme that currently works under this Special Fund is the Scheme for Self-Employment Units, which is not attractive to beneficiaries and does not seem to be effective in increasing access to employment and the labour market. For example, in 2021 only 10 beneficiaries used the Scheme and most of these related to units operating since previous years (see Table A in Section 7.1.3 and previous EDE Semester reports for Cyprus).

In general, the National Disability Strategy and Action Plans have been criticised for presenting existing policies and practices as new, while others that have not been completed are discontinued, as well actions that are generic and vague, and actions that do not comply with the UN CRPD and relevant disability rights. In respect to labour market policies, the CCOD and the Pancyprian Disability Alliance<sup>26</sup> highlight that relevant actions do not specify provisions for accessibility in employment and training settings or training and education of employers (e.g. incentive schemes and professional rehabilitation schemes), or provisions for compensatory contribution by employers to a fund to cover the additional needs of persons with disabilities linked to the quota system.

In the introduction of the National Action Plan 2021-2023 (p. 12), it is highlighted that the final Plan approved by the Council of Ministers in December 2021 includes 125 (56 new and 69 continued) actions allocated accordingly to the eight corresponding ministries and three deputy ministries. The actions were finalised after taking into consideration the UN CRPD, the 2017 List of Observations and the recommendations submitted by the Pancyprian Disability Alliance in December 2020. Nevertheless, some significant recommendations concerning access to the labour market and employment do not seem to have been included in the current National Disability Action Plan.

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<sup>22</sup> Law on Recruitment of Persons with Disabilities in the Wider Public Sector (Special Provisions) of 2009 (N.146(I)/2009), <https://tinyurl.com/y7may7vq>.

<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (2023) Information on the services and programmes of vocational rehabilitation for people with disabilities, <https://tinyurl.com/44yj9b5j>.

<sup>24</sup> Terminology used by the Ministry in an older scheme by the Centre for Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities, which now exists only as a Special Fund, through which the Scheme for Self-employment Units is funded, under the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities.

<sup>25</sup> CCOD letter to the Parliament Committee for Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance on the operation of the Special Fund of the Centre of Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (letter dated 14 February 2022).

<sup>26</sup> CCOD letter to the Director of the Department for Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities as a response to the call for public consultation for the Third Disability Action Plan (letter dated 25 May 2021).

For example, even though existing disability schemes are implemented (outcomes for 2021<sup>27</sup> are summarised in Table A, Section 7.1.3), the concern still prevails that these need to be pursued in tandem with specific schemes to facilitate the participation of individuals with disabilities in education and training, as well as upskilling and reskilling of low-skilled and low-paid individuals with disabilities.

### ***Employment quotas and incentive schemes for the employment of persons with disabilities***

Even though not specified in the NRP 2022 or the RRP 2021 the *Incentives for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities* (and a similar scheme for persons with chronic diseases)<sup>28</sup> are still in place and intended to be continued, according to the National Disability Action Plan 2021-2023. However, there are still no additional measures for the effective implementation of these schemes that would empower employers and promote sustainability of employment (as we highlighted in 2020 and 2021), nor are these foreseen in the current National Disability Action Plan.

Such measures should have included awareness as well as additional funding and guidelines for employers for reasonable adaptations, in order to enable and facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities in the workplace. In the EDE Cyprus Country Report on Employment,<sup>29</sup> analysis provides evidence of non-existing measures and schemes for employers' empowerment and reasonable accommodations guidelines and provisions. This was also highlighted by the positions of disability representatives in the press,<sup>30</sup> especially in the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for access to tele-work. In a relevant press release, the CCOD requested a specific action plan for the employment of persons with disabilities to take into consideration and in an organised way all relevant activities for ensuring equal opportunities in the labour market.<sup>31</sup> It is noted that the Cyprus National Plan under the Council Recommendation on Access to social protection for workers and the self-employed<sup>32</sup> does not include any specific, direct or indirect reference to disability or workers with disabilities.

Similarly, in relation to employment quotas, though not specifically mentioned in the NRP 2022, the Law on the Recruitment of Persons with Disabilities in the Wider Public

<sup>27</sup> Department for Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities, Annual Reports 2014-2021, available at: [http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29\\_gr/dsipd29\\_gr?OpenDocument](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29_gr/dsipd29_gr?OpenDocument) (Report 2021).

<sup>28</sup> Scheme Providing Incentives for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities, <https://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/dl.nsf/All/FB81120273E2F050C22581CB00412586?OpenDocument>.

<sup>29</sup> Mavrou, K., Tsakiri, M. & Liasidou, A. (2021) *Actions to support and encourage employers to employ persons with disabilities, including reasonable accommodation*, EDE Cyprus Country Report.

<sup>30</sup> For example, in September 2021, Position of the President of the 'Neofytos' Disability Organisation in relation to reasonable adaptations in employment, <https://www.philenews.com/f-me-apopsi/paremvaseis-ston-f/article/1284089/>.

<sup>31</sup> Cyprus Confederation of Disability Organisations, Disability Employment Action Plan, <https://www.brief.com.cy/oikonomia/kypros/shedio-drasis-gia-apasholisi-atomon-me-anapiries-zita-o-kysoa>.

<sup>32</sup> Cyprus National Plan under the Council Recommendation on Access to social protection for workers and the self-employed, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=24770&langId=en>.



Sector (Special Provisions) 2009<sup>33</sup> has been implemented for about 13 years and is still highlighted as one of the access to labour market and employment measures in Cyprus. However, previous concerns about implementation of the employment quota and reasonable adaptations are still very relevant and this particular Law does not yet apply to the private sector,<sup>34</sup> despite the 2017 UN Recommendation as well as continued calls for this from civil society. Nevertheless, concerns and objections by representatives of the private sector (European Economic and Social Committee study group visit to Cyprus in 2019)<sup>35</sup> indicate the necessity for more targeted measures that would include long-term incentives for employers, as well as relevant awareness and education programmes and guidelines for implementing reasonable accommodations.

### **Social enterprises**

The legislation on social enterprises (N.146(I)/2009), another measure anticipated to promote opportunities for people with disabilities in the labour market, was published in 2020.<sup>36</sup> However, there are not yet any indications or evidence of its implementation for the benefit of persons with disabilities. In the National Disability Action Plan 2021-2023 Action 5 (Ministry of Labour) concerns the *increase of equal employment opportunities for persons with disabilities through social enterprises*. As indicated in the Action Plan, this action is anticipated to be funded and supported through the Fund for Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities mentioned above. The action can be considered as a response to the CCOD's recommendation of the use of the Fund in alternative ways. As implementation of this has not yet taken place, it is anticipated that in the next couple of years relevant evidence will be available in respect to the expected outcomes for the action. However, no specific measurable target is currently set in the National Disability Action Plan 2021-2023 regarding Action 5 (p. 17).

### **Vocational education and training**

In relation to vocational development and preparation, including digital competence, the situation seems unchanged and no further actions have been taken (see also our EDE report on digitalisation). Digital competence development for persons with disabilities and the use of assistive technology and accessibility in vocational education and employment are not specifically included in either basic education and/or vocational training (see also EDE Country Report on Employment, 2022).

There are also cases where upskilling of learners with disabilities is rather diminished or not considered as possible through technology or alternative means. For example, in June 2021 the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth informed the Special Education District Committees (which are responsible for the assessment and placement in education of students with disability) that in cases of placement in Technical and Vocational Secondary Education Schools, parents should be informed

<sup>33</sup> Law on the Recruitment of Persons with Disabilities in the Wider Public Sector (Special Provisions) 2009 (N.146(I)/2009), available at: [http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/indexes/2009\\_1\\_146.html](http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/indexes/2009_1_146.html).

<sup>34</sup> Submission to the List of Issues of the CRPD Committee in relation to the initial report of Cyprus, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2fC%2fCYP%2fQ%2f1&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2fC%2fCYP%2fQ%2f1&Lang=en).

<sup>35</sup> European Economic and Social Committee (Section on Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship) Study Group on Disability Rights Report (2019) *Country visit – Cyprus, Employment of persons with disabilities*, 18-20 November 2019.

<sup>36</sup> Law on Social Enterprises (N.207(I)/2020): [http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/arith/2020\\_1\\_207.pdf](http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/arith/2020_1_207.pdf).

about the risks and difficulties students may face in technical labs, to help them in deciding whether this setting is appropriate for their children<sup>37</sup> (e.g. students should not have any severe mobility difficulties that inhibit the safe use of tools and other means essential for the classes). The circular caused several reactions and criticism for being discriminatory, as instead of highlighting the need for reasonable accommodations and safety measures, it implied the exclusion of students. The CCOD arraigned the Ministry's position and requested immediate withdrawal of the decision (which it considers a violation of human rights for report to UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).<sup>38</sup>

The circular seems to disregard universal design for learning and the imperative for reasonable accommodation before considering any educational option appropriate for a student. In general, what is observed here, especially when analysing the Ministry's announcement in terms of discourse but also content, is that there is no visible effort to include reasonable accommodation or alternative options in these kind of labs in educational settings. It is acknowledged that tools and equipment may be genuinely essential for the successful completion of the learners' studies and at the same time that these tools may be unsafe. However, no other options are provided for learners with disabilities in order to attend and participate equally, for instance by being excluded from the use of the particular tools but not the courses.

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<sup>37</sup> Ministry of Education circular to Special Education District Committees:  
<https://enimerosi.moec.gov.cy/archeia/1/yp12236a>.

<sup>38</sup> Cyprus Confederation of Disability Organisations to the Minister of Education (dated 9 September 2021).

#### **4 Disability, social policies and healthcare – analysis of the situation and the effectiveness of policies**

In 2017, the UN CRPD Committee made the following recommendations to Cyprus:

[Article 28 UN CRPD](#) addresses ‘Adequate standard of living and social protection’.

‘56. The Committee recommends that the State party implement progressively measures to ensure adequate income of persons with disabilities in order to reduce significantly the pay gap between persons with and without disabilities, regardless of gender, ethnic origin or age, and that it abolish the requirement of user payment for social services and support and partial payment for disability-related expenses and assistive devices, being guided by target 10.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, the Committee recommends that the State party identify a social protection floor that is not affected by expenses for disability-related costs and assistive devices and user payments for social services and support, in order to alleviate the socioeconomic disadvantages that result from the exclusion experienced by persons with disabilities.’

[Article 19 UN CRPD](#) addresses ‘Living independently in the community’.

‘44. The Committee recommends that the State party, in close collaboration with representative organizations of persons with disabilities, and in line with article 4 (3) of the Convention: (a) Develop and implement safeguards securing the right to independent living; (b) Adopt and immediately implement an adequately funded deinstitutionalization strategy; (c) Redirect resources allocated to institutionalization and earmark and allocate them to community-based services and increase the budget enabling persons with disabilities to live independently across the State party with access to individually assessed and adequate services, including personal assistance, within the community.’

[Article 25 UN CRPD](#) addresses ‘Health’.

‘52. The Committee recommends that the State party, in close collaboration with representative organisations of persons with disabilities with a special focus on the collaboration with women and girls with disabilities, in line with article 4 (3) of the Convention, ensure accessibility to health services and -facilities, as well as to information and communication regarding sexual and reproductive health rights and services on an equal basis with others, and that the health personnel is educated and trained about the rights of persons with disabilities. The Committee also recommends that the State party strengthen and implement mechanisms to combat discrimination and stereotyping in line with General Comment No. 3 (2016) and targets 3.7; 3.8 and 5.6 of the Sustainable Development Goals in the field of access to health services. Furthermore, the Committee recommends that the State party apply a human rights-based approach to disability in the provision of health services to persons with disabilities.’

The most recent CRPD development is the 2017 Concluding Observations and the state’s submission in 2016.

## 4.1 Summary of the social situation of persons with disabilities

Data from EU-SILC indicate the poverty risk rate for working age persons with disabilities in Cyprus was 18.1 % in 2020, compared to 11.0 % for other persons of similar age – an estimated disability poverty gap of approximately 7 percentage points (see Annex, Table 14). For people aged over 65, the disability poverty gap was 12.8 points (26.8 % for older persons with disabilities and 14.0 % for other persons of similar age). The tables in the Annex also indicate the respective rates of risk of poverty or social exclusion and break these down by gender as well as age. Recently updated data from Eurostat indicates that this relative risk rose for the working age disabled population (18.8 %) but declined for the older age group (24.4 %) in 2021.<sup>39</sup>

For persons with disabilities of working age in Cyprus (age 18-64) the risk of poverty before social transfers was 46.5 % and 18.1 % after transfers in 2020. The in-work poverty rate for persons with disabilities in this age range was 11.1 % and 10.9 % in 2021.

Of interest in relation to health policy are the data on self-reported unmet needs for medical examination (too expensive or too far to travel or waiting list). Disability equality gaps are evident here too and, on this basis, the rate for persons with disabilities in Cyprus was 1.1 % in 2020, compared to 0.1 % for other persons.

In addition to this, according to the 2022 Country Report,<sup>40</sup> staff shortages (e.g. shortage of nurses and specialised staff) pose challenges for the healthcare and long-term care system. The very low public funding (0.3 % of GDP in 2019) combined with the lack of a relevant framework hinders long-term care provision in Cyprus.

## 4.2 Analysis of social policies relevant to the Semester

For reference, see the 2022 National Reform Programme, the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Cyprus and the First Cyprus Disability Strategy 2018-2028 and Third Disability Action Plan 2021-2023.

### **Provision of benefits**

According to the National Reform Programme 2022<sup>41</sup> the strengthening of social services and the creation of social care structures through the Cyprus Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026 is the highest priority of the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare (DMSW), established in 2021.<sup>42, 43</sup> The Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (DSIPD) under the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance<sup>44</sup> has the main responsibility for the implementation and coordination of the 'National Disability Action Plan for 2021-2023' which aims to facilitate the development of

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<sup>39</sup> Eurostat:

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/HLTH\\_DPE020\\_custom\\_3348056/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/HLTH_DPE020_custom_3348056/default/table?lang=en).

<sup>40</sup> Cyprus Country Report [2022-european-semester-country-report-cyprus\\_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#).

<sup>41</sup> Cyprus National Reform Programme [\\*nrp\\_cyprus\\_2022\\_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#).

<sup>42</sup> Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare, <http://www.dmsw.gov.cy/dmsw/socialwelfare.nsf/home/home?openform>.

<sup>43</sup> See: [Cyprus' recovery and resilience plan | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#).

<sup>44</sup> See: [http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipa8b\\_en/dsipa8b\\_en?Openform](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipa8b_en/dsipa8b_en?Openform).

policies and institutional frameworks that will enable the social inclusion of persons with disabilities and create sustainable opportunities for effective participation in the labour market and society (Principle 17 of the European Pillar of Social Rights). According to the Annual Report<sup>45</sup> of the DSIPD for 2021, the main social benefit schemes were as indicated below:

- Severe motor disability allowance: persons with severe motor disabilities are entitled to a monthly allowance of EUR 346.27 (31 December 2021: 2 231 persons were entitled to this allowance and the cost for 2021 was EUR 9 539 822);
- Care allowance for persons with paraplegia or tetraplegia of EUR 400 or EUR 500 monthly for persons with paraplegia and EUR 900 or EUR 1 100 monthly for persons with tetraplegia (31 December 2021: 1 129 beneficiaries with paraplegia at a cost of EUR 6 211 308 and 842 beneficiaries with tetraplegia at a cost of EUR 9 890 929);
- Special Allowance for Blind Persons of EUR 324.43 monthly (31 December 2021: 1 967 beneficiaries at a cost for 2021 of EUR 8 159 317);
- Mobility Allowance of EUR 75 – EUR 150 monthly (31 December 2021: 3 973 beneficiaries at a cost for 2021 of EUR 4 703 749);
- Financial assistance for persons with disabilities to buy a car (2021: 346 beneficiaries at a cost of 2021 at EUR 1 423 000);
- Financial assistance for the provision of technical aid (2021: 1 007 beneficiaries at a cost of 2021 at EUR 1 367 249);
- Financial assistance for the provision of wheelchairs (2021: 357 beneficiaries at a cost in 2021 of EUR 1 282 926).
- Blue Badge Scheme, i.e. the card to facilitate priority parking for persons with disabilities, continued to operate (2 214 new beneficiaries).

There has not been any change in the provision of benefits. The amounts have remained the same for the disability and mobility allowances. As mentioned in the previous Semester reports, these allowances should be expanded to include more types of disabilities (for example people with intellectual disabilities / users of mental health services are not eligible to receive these social benefits)<sup>46</sup> and probably they should be reviewed and be aligned with the increased cost of living due to the inflation. As a response to rising bills, the DSIPD introduced a one-off allowance of EUR 100 at the end of May 2022 which was paid to eligible benefits claimants at the end of June 2022.<sup>47</sup>

One of the main RRP investments that was set to tackle energy poverty in households with people with disabilities is the promotion of renewables and individual energy efficiency measures in dwellings (also included in the NRP 2022). The investment included two support schemes: thermal roof insulation and installation or replacement

<sup>45</sup> Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (2021), Annual Report 2021 DSIPD. Retrieved from [http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29\\_gr/dsipd29\\_gr?OpenDocument](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29_gr/dsipd29_gr?OpenDocument).

<sup>46</sup> Mavrou, K., Liasidou, A. & Tsakiri, M. (2020) *European Semester 2020-2021 country fiche on disability equality*, Cyprus Country Report.

<sup>47</sup> Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, new on lump-sum allowance, <http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/All/E8816EF0596B508AC2258869003EF276?OpenDocument>.

of solar water heating systems in existing dwellings. The calls for these schemes can be found on the websites of relevant ministries but not on the website of the DSIPD. Promotion of the schemes by the media is limited<sup>48</sup> and there is no report to indicate the number of households that made use of these two measures. There is also a current call, with a deadline of 20 December 2022,<sup>49</sup> by the Ministry of Energy, Commerce and Industry for a funding scheme covering costs of up to EUR 600 to replace electric appliances, such as air conditioning, fridges or washing machines, with energy efficient ones. This scheme also aims to support vulnerable groups including people who receive disability allowances and GMI. Applications for this scheme can only be submitted electronically, something that raises a concern regarding access as there is no further guidance provided by the DSIPD.

Residents in the Republic of Cyprus with insufficient income and financial resources can be supported with the Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) which also includes housing allowance and a childcare supplement. As stated in the NRP 2022, the GMI can be increased for persons with disabilities and/or persons with disabilities with increased needs for care and accessibility. Even though this provision is intended to tackle the risk of poverty that residents with disabilities face in Cyprus, in March 2022 the CCOD exposed lengthy delays in the processing of applications from people with disabilities due to complicated bureaucratic procedures.<sup>50</sup> The lack of organisation resulted in many applicants with disabilities being assessed as non-eligible and their applications rejected. In other cases, where residents with disabilities were eligible, the payments were halted without any warning or explanation. The CCOD has requested the procedures for receiving the GMI to be reviewed and improved.<sup>51</sup>

With the establishment of the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare,<sup>52</sup> the GMI and other social welfare schemes such as pensions were transferred<sup>53</sup> to the Deputy Ministry, the Department for Management of Welfare Benefits.<sup>54, 55</sup> It is interesting to note here that the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, which manages the other cash benefits for people with disabilities (like those listed at the beginning of this section), has not been transferred to the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare. The Deputy Ministry was specifically established to host departments dealing with social welfare and enhance coherence and consistency in the sector. This division and delegation may raise questions about mainstreaming the provisions for people with disabilities. It is also intriguing that the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare is not linked to the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, although that is also a social welfare service, which provides disability-relevant benefits, services and guidance.

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<sup>48</sup> Press release: How to benefit from energy schemes, <https://www.brief.com.cy/analyseis/pos-tha-epofelitheite-tis-horigias-gia-thermosifona-kai-thermomonosi>.

<sup>49</sup> Ministry of Energy, Commerce and Industry, schemes for replacing electrical appliances in homes of vulnerable consumers, <https://tinyurl.com/yc5p8bcj>.

<sup>50</sup> Position of the CCOD on GMI, 13 March 2022, <http://www.kysoa.org.cy/kysoa/page.php?pageID=85>.

<sup>51</sup> Press article, <https://dialogos.com.cy/aichmalota-aparadekton-politikon-ta-atoma-me-anapiries/>.

<sup>52</sup> Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare, <http://www.dmsw.gov.cy/>.

<sup>53</sup> Press and Information Office, [Ανακοινωθέντα Άρθρο - PIO](#).

<sup>54</sup> Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare, Departments, [http://www.dmsw.gov.cy/dmsw/socialwelfare.nsf/departments\\_el/departments\\_el?OpenDocument](http://www.dmsw.gov.cy/dmsw/socialwelfare.nsf/departments_el/departments_el?OpenDocument).

<sup>55</sup> Press and Information Office, [Ανακοινωθέντα Άρθρο - PIO](#).



According to the CCOD, delays in payments of pensions, benefits and other financial support seems to be an ongoing issue within the Department of Social Insurance Services. In September 2021,<sup>56</sup> the CCOD raised the issue of delays with the Parliamentary Committee on Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance, mentioning that complicated and time-consuming bureaucratic procedures, lack of access to the services of the Department of Social Insurance Services, as well as the badly designed and inaccessible website of the department, result in waiting times of up to 12 months for receiving first payments for pensions and benefits. It is imperative that the services and the website of the Department of Social Insurance Services are accessible, applicant-friendly and updated so all the relevant information can be retrieved in accessible formats.

### **Provision of specialised care**

The first phase (outpatient services) of the General Healthcare System (GHS) was introduced in 2019 and the second phase (specialised care) in June 2020. However, issues with accessibility, disability awareness, changes and cuts in the provisions for people with disabilities have been reported by disabled persons' organisations (DPOs) and parents' representatives. Very low public funding (0.3 % of GDP in 2019), lack of a relevant framework and the shortage of nurses and specialised care staff impede long-term care provision in Cyprus (Country Report 2022).

Access to therapy sessions such as physiotherapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, sessions with psychologists and sessions with dietitians, remains an ongoing issue for people with disabilities and their families. The Health Insurance Organisation (HIO) announced in February 2022 the reduction of physiotherapy sessions provided by the General Healthcare System to persons with disabilities. More specifically, adults with cerebral palsy aged 25 and above will no longer be eligible for physiotherapy sessions, while younger people and children will receive a limited number of sessions based on their age and the severity of their disability. According to this plan, the initial number of 48 sessions was reduced to 24 for persons with disabilities up to 18 years old and down to 12 for young people up to the age of 25.<sup>57</sup> Once again, the CCOD had to intervene by addressing a formal complain to the President and the Parliamentary Committee of the Republic of Cyprus, highlighting that this decision violated Article 25 of the UN CRPD, General Comment no. 7 of the UN Committee for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as the Law of 2006 on the Consultation Procedure of State and Other Services in Matters Concerning Persons with Disabilities (L. 143(I)/2006), since there was no consultation with representatives of the CCOD.<sup>58</sup> The issue remains unresolved and parents of disabled young people are taking the initiative by reporting the violation of this right in the national media.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> CCOD letter to Parliament Committee of Labour, Welfare and Social Inclusion (September 2021), <http://www.kysoa.org.cy/kysoa/page.php?pageID=25&mpath=/24>.

<sup>57</sup> CCOD Letter to Health Parliament Committee (30 March 2022), <http://www.kysoa.org.cy/kysoa/page.php?pageID=70>.

<sup>58</sup> «ΓεΣΥ: Τα άτομα με αναπηρία ζητούν μη μείωση φυσιοθεραπειών» (“GHS: Persons with disabilities are asking for no-reduction of physiotherapy sessions”), Philenews, 4 April 2020, <https://www.philenews.com/koinonia/eidiseis/article/1439423/gsy-ta-atoma-me-anapiria-zitoyn-mi-meiosi-fysiotherapeion>.

<sup>59</sup> «Αυτό που έκαναν με τις θεραπείες είναι εξευτελισμός της ανθρώπινης φύσης» (“What they did with the therapies is humiliation of the human nature”), Reporter, 3 August 2022, <https://www.reporter.com.cy/local-news/article/987037/?fbclid=IwAR3I->

### **Support for independent living**

Deinstitutionalisation and supported living have been a priority in the National Disability Strategy and Action Plans, as well as the European Strategy. It also stands out in the 2021 Annual Report of the DSIPD. In this context, the project ‘Creation of supported living homes in the community’ received extended funding in January 2021 for the period 2021-2027. The seven supported living facilities that started operations in March 2020 continued their services at full capacity. The outcome of the tender for 2021 led to the offer of four new contracts for the development of three supported services for eight persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and one service for five persons with learning disabilities. According to the information provided by the DSIPD, 11 supported living facilities offered their services to 48 persons with disabilities across all districts of Cyprus and the cost for 2021 was EUR 1 609 409.<sup>60</sup> The only aspect reported in the RRP as a challenge for the development of supported living in Cyprus is finding suitable houses in terms of size, location, accessibility and adaptability. An independent scrutiny body is needed to monitor these developments and services, as well as a code of practice and professional training for support workers to secure high quality provision of services in line with the rights and wishes of service users.

There is also in place a scheme for social assistants who support people with severe and complex disabilities. In 2021, 19 social assistance services were listed in the DSIPD report. The services were put in place by nine providers, supporting 900 persons with complex needs. Even though the number of the services has increased, the number of people with disabilities that receive the support has fallen (1 160 persons with complex needs were supported in 2020).<sup>61</sup> The cost of this scheme in 2021 was EUR 166 905.

Despite the ongoing development of the supported living project, parents claim that the needs of disabled children and young people and their families are not fully met, as there is no provision for families’ and carers’ respite. There is no organised professional service that families could rely on for a short break from caring for their children with disabilities.<sup>62</sup>

A new project planned in the Third Disability Action Plan 2021-2023 is a network of social inclusion services to expand and support the operation and services of the DSIPD. This network is intended to support the implementation and expansion of provisions such as personal assistants and advisor services.<sup>63</sup> It will also provide consultation for the development of new policies in relation to services and financial

[LAS5Wm6ddn24RtE00UVIfDOPc0cmj-5sOM\\_DZ00i6GXVIPBoq7pcmk#.YuqGXU9T0nY.facebook](https://www.facebook.com/5sOM_DZ00i6GXVIPBoq7pcmk#.YuqGXU9T0nY).

<sup>60</sup> Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (2021), Annual Report 2021 DSIPD. Retrieved from [http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29\\_gr/dsipd29\\_gr?OpenDocument](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29_gr/dsipd29_gr?OpenDocument).

<sup>61</sup> Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (2020), Annual Report 2020 DSIPD. Retrieved from [http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29\\_gr/dsipd29\\_gr?OpenDocument](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29_gr/dsipd29_gr?OpenDocument).

<sup>62</sup> «Αυτό που έκαναν με τις θεραπείες είναι εξευτελισμός της ανθρωπίνης φύσης» (“What they did with the therapies is humiliation of the human nature”), Reporter, 3 August 2022, [https://www.reporter.com.cy/local-news/article/987037/?fbclid=IwAR3I-LAS5Wm6ddn24RtE00UVIfDOPc0cmj-5sOM\\_DZ00i6GXVIPBoq7pcmk#.YuqGXU9T0nY.facebook](https://www.reporter.com.cy/local-news/article/987037/?fbclid=IwAR3I-LAS5Wm6ddn24RtE00UVIfDOPc0cmj-5sOM_DZ00i6GXVIPBoq7pcmk#.YuqGXU9T0nY.facebook).

<sup>63</sup> Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (2020), Annual Report 2020 DSIPD. Retrieved from [http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29\\_en/dsipd29\\_en?OpenDocument](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29_en/dsipd29_en?OpenDocument).



provisions for persons with disabilities. The forming of a body for quality assurance of social inclusion services is also described as an expected outcome of this project.<sup>64</sup> This is a promising development, but it is unclear if this new body will have responsibility for supervising the development and effectiveness of supported living provision, such as supported living settings, which would be important. Ideally, this should be an independent mechanism working closely with advocacy groups.

While the DSIPD focuses and promotes the development of supported living facilities, people with disabilities who do not require supported living services face a great challenge in transforming and maintaining accessible houses. According to the CCOD,<sup>65</sup> housing plans that were in place to support disabled people and their families to make their accommodation more accessible have gradually been replaced by other plans, such as the Housing Plan for the Revitalisation of Mountainous, Critical and Disadvantaged Areas, that do not comply with the needs and lifestyle of people with disabilities. The CCOD has on two different occasions requested a consultation meeting on this matter with the Minister of Interior. The request was initially ignored and then eventually rejected. However, the CCOD<sup>66</sup> contacted the Minister of Labour and Social Insurance in December 2021, asking the State once again to comply with General Comment No. 7 of the UN Committee for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Law of 2006 on the Consultation Procedure of State and Other Services in Matters Concerning Persons with Disabilities (L. 143(I)/2006), as well as Article 19 UN CRPD, and to consult with the DPOs about fair and accessible state housing plans.

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<sup>64</sup> Third Disability Action Plan 2021-2023 (draft),  
[http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd8b\\_gr/dsipd8b\\_gr?OpenDocument](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd8b_gr/dsipd8b_gr?OpenDocument).

<sup>65</sup> CCOD letter to Ministry of Internal Affairs, 30 January 2020,  
<http://www.kysoa.org.cy/kysoa/page.php?pageID=80>.

<sup>66</sup> CCOD letter to Ministry of Labour, 27 December 2021,  
<http://www.kysoa.org.cy/kysoa/page.php?pageID=80>.

## 5 Disability, education and skills – analysis of the situation and the effectiveness of policies

In 2017, the UN CRPD Committee made the following recommendations to Cyprus:

[Article 24 UN CRPD](#) addresses ‘Education’.

‘50. The Committee recommends that the State party: (a) Decide upon a clear legislative scope of inclusive education and monitor its implementation with a view to fully replacing segregated education by inclusive education; (b) Adopt a clear, targeted and adequately funded plan of action that includes access to reasonable accommodation and adequate teacher education and training, and progressively ensure that children and adult learners with disabilities are able to exercise their right to inclusive education; (c) Be guided by general comment No. 4 (2016) and targets 4.5 and 4 (a) of the Sustainable Development Goals in ensuring equal access to all levels and types of education, education facilities and vocational training by persons with disabilities.’

The most recent CRPD development is the 2017 Concluding Observations and the State’s submission in 2016.

### 5.1 Summary of the educational situation of persons with disabilities

The EU-SILC 2020 estimates concerning educational attainment should be treated with caution due to relatively wide confidence intervals, but they consistently indicate disability equality gaps (an average of 2-3 years provides a more stable indication). Table 16 indicates early school leaving rates disaggregated by disability status in Cyprus. Young people with disabilities (aged 18-24) tend to leave school early significantly more than their non-disabled peers in the same age groups (and this is reinforced by widening the sample size to age 18-29). Table 17 shows completion rates of tertiary education disaggregated by disability and age group. Persons with disabilities (aged 30-34) are less likely to complete tertiary education than their peers (and this is reinforced in the wider age range 30-39).

Despite evidence documenting the ways in which students with disabilities are educationally disadvantaged, there have not been any targeted reform efforts to address this issue. Even though the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Cyprus proclaims the necessity to ensure ‘disability (and otherwise) inclusive reforms in education’ (p. 38),<sup>67</sup> there is not an explicit focus on addressing disability equality gaps in education, even though there is an exclusive policy focus on gender equality in education and employment.

One recent indicative example of the dire educational situation of people with disabilities in Cyprus, is the struggle of a mother of a student with disabilities (cerebral palsy along with congenital quadriplegia and hearing loss) to ensure the unassailable right of her son to sit a differentiated examination paper in the Pancyprian examinations. Success in these examinations determines entry to Cyprus State Universities, and the initial reaction of the Ministry of Education (MoECSY) was to abdicate its responsibility to offer a differentiated exam paper to the student, and to

<sup>67</sup> Cyprus Recovery and Resilience Plan, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/nrp\\_cyprus\\_2022\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/nrp_cyprus_2022_en.pdf).

subsequently pass the responsibility to the University of Cyprus to arbitrate whether a differentiated exam paper was feasible. After lots of discussions and in response to the criticisms levelled against the initial reluctance to introduce ‘reasonable accommodations’ to the examination process, the MoECSY, in collaboration with the University of Cyprus, decided to carry out a special examination procedure, taking into account the required adjustments and reasonable accommodation in accordance with the characteristics and needs of the candidate with disabilities, in the context of the 2022 access procedures.<sup>68</sup>

Rather than being a ‘modus operandi’ across all levels of education and an entitlement for students with disabilities, differentiated instruction and assessment was something that had to be fought for by the mother of the candidate, who is also the president of Agalia Elpidas, a prominent disability organisation in Cyprus. This example is another testament to the failure of the government to fulfil its legal obligations that arise from Article 24 of the UN CRPD.

The student succeeded in the exams and secured a place to study Primary Education at the University of Cyprus. Despite his success, the mother of the student stated that they could not log into the examination results system to view his examination grades because he was not registered on the system due to his disability and the ‘special’ procedures that were in place to provide a differentiated examination process. This is another example of exclusionary and discriminatory practice that relegates students with disabilities to the margins of the educational process. As was very appositely stated by the mother of the student when referring to the ways in which the rights of her son were violated, ‘The only mistake is that he was born in a country that at every opportunity proves to him that he will always be left out...’.<sup>69</sup> This is a poignant statement that depicts the grim educational situation of persons with disabilities in Cyprus.

This situation is also evidenced in the dramatic increase of students enrolled in special education. According to the Minister of Education,<sup>70</sup> while in 2014-2015 the number of students in special education was 7 400, this number increased to almost 13 000 in 2020-2021.<sup>71</sup> (See also Table B, in Section 7.3.1). The Minister attributed this increase to the existence of better ‘identification’ and ‘integration’ procedures and systems in special education. Rather than problematising the unfettered expansion of ‘special education’ and the ways in which the school system itself contributes to students’

<sup>68</sup> “ΥΠΠΑΝ: Αποφάσισε παροχή προσαρμογών στον Νικόλα για τις Παγκύπριες” (“MOEC: Decided the provision of adaptations for Nicolas in Pancyprian exams”, SigmaLive, 4 June 2022, <https://www.sigmalive.com/news/local/964022/yppan-apofasise-paroxi-prosarmogon-ston-nikola-gia-tis-pagkypries>).

<sup>69</sup> “Χθες, ο Νικόλας έγινε δεκτός στο Τμήμα Επιστημών της Αγωγής του Πανεπιστημίου Κύπρου” (“Yesterday Nicolas was accepted in the Department of Education Sciences of the University of Cyprus”, City, SigmaLive, 20 July 2022, <https://city.sigmalive.com/article/2022/7/20/khthes-o-nikolas-egine-dektos-sto-tmema-epistemou-tes-agoges-tou-panepistemiou-kyprou/>).

<sup>70</sup> “Βουνό τα προβλήματα για τους σχολικούς συνοδούς – Εκκλήση Επ. Παιδείας της Βουλής προς τον ΠτΔ να παρέμβει” (“Mountain the problems with the school assistants – Request of the Education Parliament Committee for the Intervention of the President of the Republic of Cyprus) (official position), Dialogos, 13 July 2022, <https://dialogos.com.cy/voyno-ta-provlimata-gia-toys-scholikoys-synodoys-ekklisi-ep-paideias-tis-voylis-pros-ton-ptd-na-paremvei/>.

<sup>71</sup> Ministry of Education, Annual reports, <http://www.moec.gov.cy/etisia-ekthesi/index.html>.

disablement,<sup>72</sup> he extolled the increase in the number of students in special education, while making no reference to the legal and ethical obligations of the Government to foster more inclusive policies and practices.

## 5.2 Analysis of education policies relevant to the Semester

For reference, see the 2022 National Reform Programme, the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Cyprus and the the First Cyprus Disability Strategy 2018-2028 and Third Disability Action Plan 2021-2023.

The stated policy priorities in education as articulated in the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Cyprus<sup>73</sup> relate to the expansion of ‘early childhood education’ for children below the age of three without making any reference to early intervention and support for vulnerable groups of children, including children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Another stated priority relates to the ‘modernisation of the educational system including the provision of quality education’ that is defined as being contingent on the extent to which ‘schools are connected with the labour market’. (p. 31). The modernisation efforts are therefore envisaged in relation to the ways in which the educational system contributes to the development of the economic system, without paying equal attention to the role of education in addressing educational inequalities linked to disabilities and their intersections with other minoritised statuses.

### ***Conceptualisations of inclusive education and current education policies and reforms***

The First National Disability Strategy 2018-2028 outlines the imperative to facilitate the ‘integration’ of people with disabilities ‘in schools of all phases with the provision of individualised educational and support services’ (p. 8).<sup>74</sup> The use of the notion of ‘integration’ instead of ‘inclusion’ highlights the muddled and anachronistic philosophy of governmental bodies, which have hitherto failed to align education policies and practices with the principles of inclusive education.

This anachronistic philosophy, which is grounded in deficit-oriented, pathologising and assimilationist perspectives on disability, is manifested across several Government documents and policies that undermine efforts to precipitate an inclusive education reform agenda. For example, even though the Cyprus National Reform Programme (2022)<sup>75</sup> highlights the efforts undertaken by the MoECSY to ‘reform the legislation regarding inclusive education’ (p. 46), the envisaged reform is predicated on a deficit-oriented perspective, the aim being to provide ‘support to children with learning difficulties to compensate for their linguistic, cognitive and educational gaps’ (p. 46). Rather than elaborating on the professed imperative of ‘using inclusive teaching and learning methods’, the document is limited to discussing the role of ‘school assistants’ in meeting children needs by being ‘responsible for their safety and self-care’ (p. 46).

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<sup>72</sup> Haug, P. (2017) ‘Understanding inclusive education: ideals and reality’, *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 19(3), pp. 206-217.

<sup>73</sup> Cyprus Recovery and Resilience Plan, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/nrp\\_cyprus\\_2022\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/nrp_cyprus_2022_en.pdf).

<sup>74</sup> First National Disability Strategy 2018-2028 and Second National Disability Action Plan 2018-2020, <https://tinyurl.com/CYstrategy2028>.

<sup>75</sup> NRP 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/nrp\\_cyprus\\_2022\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/nrp_cyprus_2022_en.pdf).

### **Resources for the support of the education of children with disabilities**

The academic needs of children are largely ignored, while the government is accused of refusing to employ an adequate number of ‘teaching assistants’ to cover current educational needs. As was recently pointed out by the President of the Educational Committee of the Parliament,<sup>76, 77</sup> they only managed to employ 50 teaching assistants and not the 200 that were required to cover current needs. The President of the Committee was explicit about the lack of political will to prioritise the needs of children with disabilities over other insignificant matters that unjustifiably received generous Government funding, one example being the fact that the government ‘gave EUR 500 000 to the young members of political parties to organise summer events’, while they refused to allocate EUR 1 million to cover the needs of children with disabilities who needed ‘teaching assistants’, due to alleged financial constraints. Another problem pertaining to the employment of ‘school assistants’ relates to the fact that they are still not required to have any relevant experience and qualifications,<sup>78, 79</sup> even though there have been longstanding criticisms of the role of teaching assistants and their lack of relevant experience and qualifications.<sup>80, 81</sup>

### **The latest political positions for the education of children with disabilities**

Notwithstanding widespread optimism that the introduction of the new Special Education Law could contribute to the development of a more inclusive education system, there has been a delay in the introduction of the new law, not only due to several problems that have been identified by academics, persons with disabilities and their organisations,<sup>82</sup> but also due to the lack of political will to proceed to a radical overhaul of special education.<sup>83</sup> Similar problems, in terms of the prevalence of an

<sup>76</sup> “Βουνό τα προβλήματα για τους σχολικούς συνοδούς – Έκκληση Επ. Παιδείας της Βουλής προς τον ΠτΔ να παρέμβει” (“Mountain the problems with the school assistants – Request of the Education Parliament Committee for the Intervention of the President of the Republic of Cyprus) (official position), Dialogos, 13 July 2022, <https://dialogos.com.cy/voyno-ta-provlimata-gia-toys-scholikoy-synodoys-ekklisi-ep-paideias-tis-voylis-pros-ton-ptd-na-paremvei/>.

<sup>77</sup> Education Parliament Committee – Research on School Assistants for Children with Disabilities (March 2021), <https://tinyurl.com/5bx39mkd>.

<sup>78</sup> “Το κάθε παιδί έχει θέση μέσα στις σχολικές τάξεις” (“Each child has a position in the school classrooms”, Dialogos, 14 August 2022, <https://dialogos.com.cy/to-paidi-thesi-mesa-stis-scholikes-taxeis/>.

<sup>79</sup> Ombudsperson position: Schools assistants for children with disabilities (8 September 2021), [http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/All/FAA8D158EFB58951C225874B003B8D78/\\$file/AYT\\_11\\_2021\\_.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/All/FAA8D158EFB58951C225874B003B8D78/$file/AYT_11_2021_.pdf?OpenElement).

<sup>80</sup> “Βουνό τα προβλήματα για τους σχολικούς συνοδούς – Έκκληση Επ. Παιδείας της Βουλής προς τον ΠτΔ να παρέμβει” (“Mountain the problems with the school assistants – Request of the Education Parliament Committee for the Intervention of the President of the Republic of Cyprus) (official position), Dialogos, 13 July 2022, <https://dialogos.com.cy/voyno-ta-provlimata-gia-toys-scholikoy-synodoys-ekklisi-ep-paideias-tis-voylis-pros-ton-ptd-na-paremvei/>.

<sup>81</sup> “Το κάθε παιδί έχει θέση μέσα στις σχολικές τάξεις” (“Each child has a position in the school classrooms”, Dialogos, 14 August 2022, <https://dialogos.com.cy/to-paidi-thesi-mesa-stis-scholikes-taxeis/>.

<sup>82</sup> Liasidou, A. & Mavrou, K. (2021) ‘Cross-cultural perspectives on the rise of special education policy discourses’ in J Tierney, F. Rizvi, K. Ercikan (eds) *International Encyclopaedia of Education (Fourth Edition)*, (pp 259-268), Elsevier.

<sup>83</sup> “Βουνό τα προβλήματα για τους σχολικούς συνοδούς – Έκκληση Επ. Παιδείας της Βουλής προς τον ΠτΔ να παρέμβει” (“Mountain the problems with the school assistants – Request of the Education Parliament Committee for the Intervention of the President of the Republic of Cyprus) (official position), Dialogos, 13 July 2022, <https://dialogos.com.cy/voyno-ta-provlimata-gia-toys-scholikoy-synodoys-ekklisi-ep-paideias-tis-voylis-pros-ton-ptd-na-paremvei/>.



anachronistic governmental ideology, are also manifested in political rhetoric as articulated by politicians and other figures such as the President of the Educational Committee. Even though he publicly levelled virulent criticism against the government and its failure to ‘resolve the problems in inclusive education’, the rationale for his criticism is driven by the charity model and personal tragedy theory of disability that are at odds with the rights-based orientations and foundations of inclusive education. As he put it in the same interview: ‘The ordeal and calvary of the families these children have, does not allow any of us to sleep peacefully at night’.

Similar concerns are raised in relation to other government statements and envisaged reform efforts that not only indicate a lack of political will, but also lack of knowledge and understanding of the philosophical, theoretical and practice-based underpinnings and implications of an inclusive education reform agenda. Another example of disabling rhetoric is a speech delivered by the Minister of Education at a conference jointly organised by the MoECSY and the Educational Committee of the Parliament on 1 August 2022. Even the title of the conference (referring to ‘special’ and not ‘inclusive’ education) is a semantic precursor of the paraphernalia of medicalised and deficit-oriented discourses adopted by the Minister of Education to articulate the Ministry’s vision for the education of children with disabilities. Despite briefly alluding to the rights-based dimensions of the UN CRPD<sup>84</sup> which Cyprus ratified in 2011, the ministerial speech was riddled with references to special education and its associated deficit-oriented and medicalised practices<sup>85</sup> which are antithetical to the rights-based and inclusive principles of the UN CRPD. For example, even though the UN CRPD adopts a social relational approach to define the ‘evolving’ nature of disability experience and the ways in which individual characteristics interact with social barriers, the Minister’s stated vision is limited to the need to ‘overcome the barriers of disability’, while silencing the social dimensions of disability experience and the ways in which social and educational inequalities contribute to the genesis, propagation and confoundment of special educational needs and disabilities.<sup>86</sup>

The ministerial vision for inclusive education is constricted to the development and expansion of special education with the employment of increasing numbers of ‘special teachers’, the creation of an ‘Assessment Centre for Special Education’ the ‘basic function’ of which ‘will be to adopt thorough scientific approach to adjudicate on the need for integration either in the special units that operate in schools either in mainstream classes or in a special school’. The presumed disability rights vision also includes ‘planning for the big project of building a modern Special School’ (p. 4),<sup>87</sup> as well as the employment of a psychologist in each special school, in addition to the employment of nursing staff who are currently employed in each special schools. The special education development ‘vision’ also includes the introduction of ‘monitoring of special schools from the educational medical service that is under the aegis of the Ministry of Health and not the MoECSY. The aim of the educational medical service is, inter alia, the ‘Prevention and investigation of infectious diseases’, ‘Inspection of

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<sup>84</sup> UN-United Nations, 2008. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. New York: United Nations.

<sup>85</sup> Speech by the Minister of Education, <https://enimerosi.moec.gov.cy/archeia/1/ypp14254a>.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas, C. (2013) ‘Disability and impairment’ in Swain, J. French, S. Barnes, C. and Thomas, C. (eds) *Disabling barriers - enabling environments*, Sage, London, pp. 9-16.

<sup>87</sup> Speech by the Minister of Education, <https://enimerosi.moec.gov.cy/archeia/1/ypp14254a>.

School Canteens and inspection of common areas’ and ‘Vaccination’.<sup>88</sup> Even though there is a pronounced emphasis on medicalised and individual pathology perspectives on disability, there is not a parallel emphasis on the need to precipitate inclusive education reforms in mainstream schools and to introduce monitoring and accountability regimes to ensure that the needs and rights of students with disabilities are met in effective and non-discriminatory ways in mainstream schools.<sup>89</sup>

The conference and ministerial speech received scathing criticism from persons with disabilities and their organisations, who left the conference in protest and expressed their opposition to the envisaged reforms that were characterised as ‘racist’ against children with disabilities and ‘anachronistic’.<sup>90</sup> The Ombudsperson for the Rights of Children has also connected the ‘anachronistic’ position in the Ministry of Education and the ministerial speech with the failure of the progress of the educational reform for inclusive education that started in 2019 and has not been concluded.<sup>91</sup> Despite the erroneous and obsolete philosophy underpinning the ‘vision’ articulated by the Minister and associated criticisms, the above-mentioned strategic plans were approved by the Ministerial Council Meeting that took place at the Presidential Summer Residence on 22 August 2022.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> School Health Services (Ministry of Health), <https://www.moh.gov.cy/Moh/MOH.nsf/All/51CAFB4831A36B57C225786C006E1719?OpenDocument>.

<sup>89</sup> Liasidou, A. and Symeou, L. (2018) ‘Neoliberal versus social justice reforms in education policy and practice: discourses, politics and disability rights in education’, in *Critical Studies in Education*, 59:2, 149-166, [doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2016.1186102](https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2016.1186102).

<sup>90</sup> “Το κάθε παιδί έχει θέση μέσα στις σχολικές τάξεις” (“Each child has a position in the school classrooms”, Dialogos, 14 August 2022, <https://dialogos.com.cy/to-paidi-thesi-mesa-stis-scholikes-taxeis/>).

<sup>91</sup> Letter from the Ombudsperson to Agalia Elpidas, 2 August 2022.

<sup>92</sup> “Τι αποφασίστηκε για την Ειδική Εκπαίδευση από Υπουργικό” (“What was decided for Special Education by the Council of Ministers”, Philenews, 22 August 2022, <https://www.philenews.com/koinonia/eidiseis/article/1537355/ti-apofasistike-ga-tin-eidiki-ekpaidefsi-apo-ypourgko>).

## 6 Investment priorities in relation to disability

One of the investments undertaken falls within the wider remit of early childhood education (ECE) and the imperative of widening participation in early years education settings, as well as establishing multifunctional centres and childcare centres, without, however, making any specific reference to children with disabilities. The only reference made to disability relates to the adaptations of ECE facilities and educational materials, as well as the allocation of funds to meet the needs of children with disabilities. Even though it is stated that the needs of these children are met by using 'inclusive teaching and learning methods', there is no further information about the ways in which this can be achieved. The only envisaged reform / investment is the employment of 'school assistants' to ensure the 'safety and self-care' of these children who are referred to as having 'special needs'. Another pillar of investment pertaining to disability outlined in the NRP of 2022<sup>93</sup> was the establishment of day-care centres for children with disabilities, along with day-care centres for preschool and school age children. EUR 3.5 million was allocated for the funding of 134 programmes covering childcare needs.

The NRP also envisages investing in the establishment of residential facilities structures for children, adolescents with behavioural disorders, persons with disabilities and people in need of long-term care. As part of the restructuring of social welfare services, there will be specialised escort services for vulnerable children, as well as persons with disabilities who are placed in the state institutions run by Social Welfare Services. State funding was also allocated for the development of social care services for vulnerable groups of people, including people with disabilities, as part of the State Aide Scheme.

Investment priorities include promoting renewables and individual energy efficiency measures in households of impoverished people, as well as people with disabilities. As part of investments for a more social and inclusive Europe (budget: EUR 424 million) there is homecare provision for people with disabilities along with the operation of an Autism Centre and creation of shelters, without providing any further details about the nature of these shelters and their role in the social inclusion process.<sup>94</sup>

The National Disability Action Plan 2021-2023 includes actions on accessibility legislation, building upon the EU Directives. Thus, following the Law on Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Applications of Public Sector Organisations of 2019 (50(I)/2019)<sup>95</sup> also mentioned in the RRP, the new National Disability Action Plan includes Action 4 for integrating the European Accessibility Act into the national legislative framework. However, there is no provision or anticipated action for training and education, guidelines, awareness and quality assurance for the implementation of the laws. Therefore, it seems that digital accessibility, as well as broader products and services relating to accessibility, are generally intended to be included in policy but there is no investment foreseen towards their implementation.

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<sup>93</sup> Cyprus NRP 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/nrp\\_cyprus\\_2022\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/nrp_cyprus_2022_en.pdf).

<sup>94</sup> Cyprus NRP 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/nrp\\_cyprus\\_2022\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/nrp_cyprus_2022_en.pdf).

<sup>95</sup> Law on Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Applications of Public Sector Organizations of 2019 (50(I)/2019), [http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/enop/non-ind/2019\\_1\\_50/full.html](http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/enop/non-ind/2019_1_50/full.html).

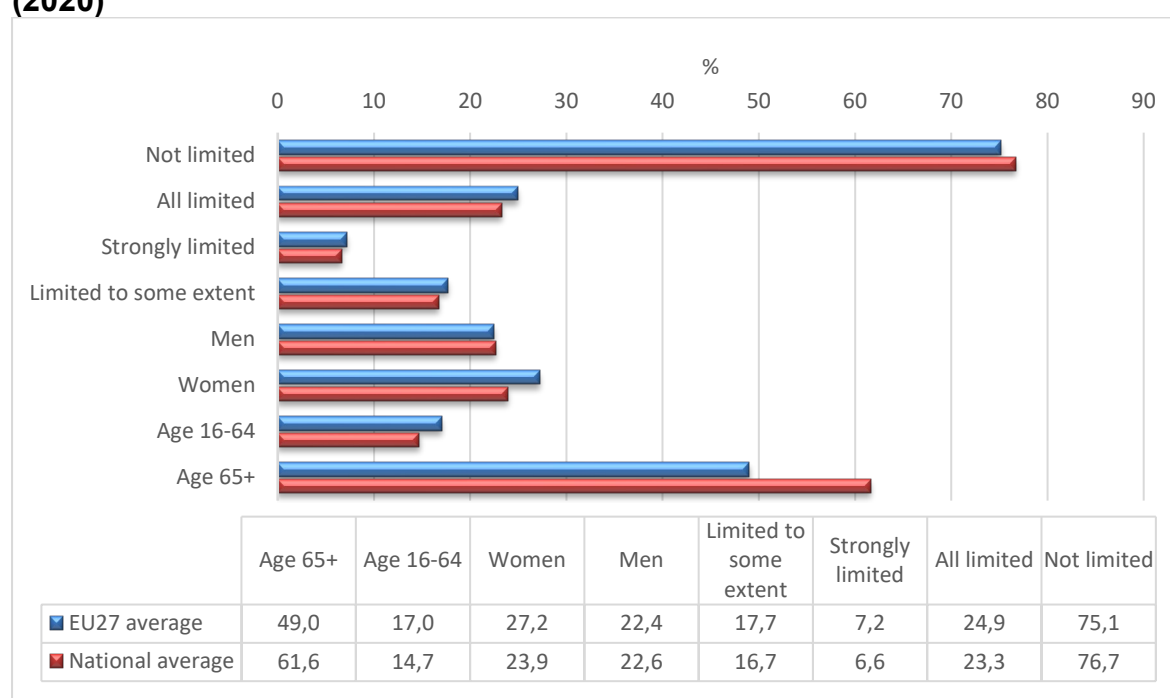


## 7 Annex: disability data relevant to the Semester

See also disability data published in the Eurostat database<sup>96</sup> and statistical reports.<sup>97</sup>

Unless specified, the summary statistics are drawn from the most recent EU-SILC microdata available to researchers from Eurostat. The EU-SILC sample includes people living in private households and does not include people living in institutions (congregative households). The sampling methods vary somewhat in each country. The proxy used to identify people with disabilities (impairments) is whether ‘for at least the past 6 months’ the respondent reports that they have been ‘limited because of a health problem in activities people usually do’.<sup>98</sup>

**Table 1: Self-reported ‘activity limitations’ as a proxy for impairment / disability (2020)**



Source: EU-SILC 2020 Release April 2022

In subsequent tables, these data are used to indicate ‘disability’ equality gaps and trends relevant to the analytical sections – for the labour market, social policies and healthcare, and education – by comparing outcomes for persons who report and do not report ‘activity limitations’.<sup>99</sup> National estimates for Cyprus are compared with EU27 mean averages for the most recent year.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Eurostat Health Database: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

<sup>97</sup> Eurostat (2019) Disability Statistics: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Disability\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Disability_statistics).

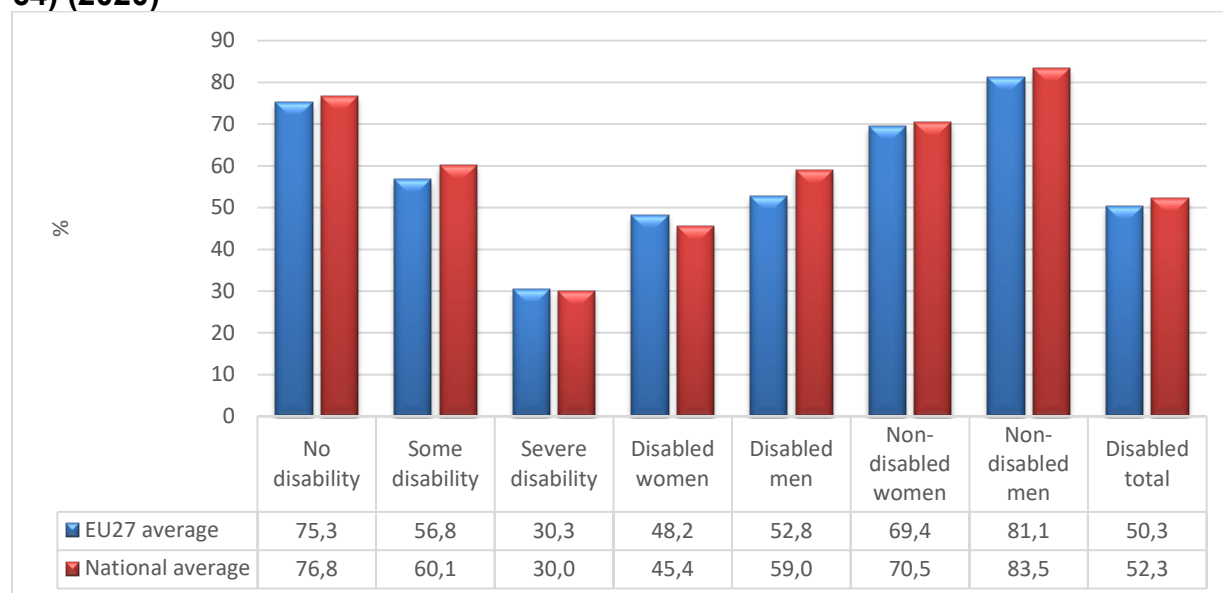
<sup>98</sup> The EU-SILC survey questions are contained in the Minimum European Health Module (MEHM), [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Special:WhatLinksHere/Glossary:Minimum\\_European\\_Health\\_Module\\_\(MEHM\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Special:WhatLinksHere/Glossary:Minimum_European_Health_Module_(MEHM)).

<sup>99</sup> This methodology was developed in the annual statistical reports of ANED, available at: <http://www.disability-europe.net/theme/statistical-indicators>.

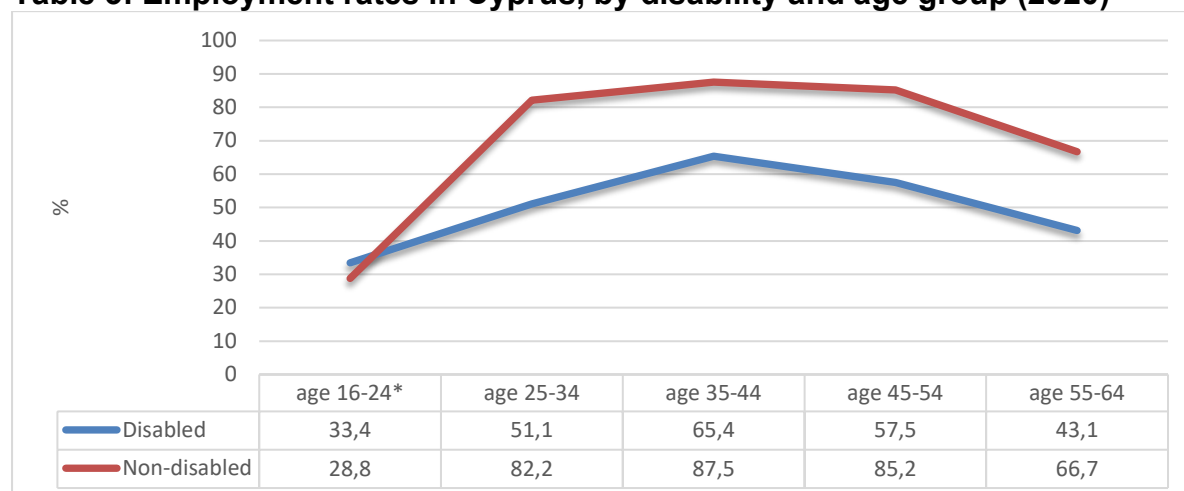
<sup>100</sup> The exit of the United Kingdom from the EU changed the EU average. EU27 averages have also been affected by time series breaks in other large countries, such as Germany.

## 7.1 Data relevant to disability and the labour market

**Table 2: EU and Cyprus employment rates, by disability and gender (aged 20-64) (2020)**



**Table 3: Employment rates in Cyprus, by disability and age group (2020)**

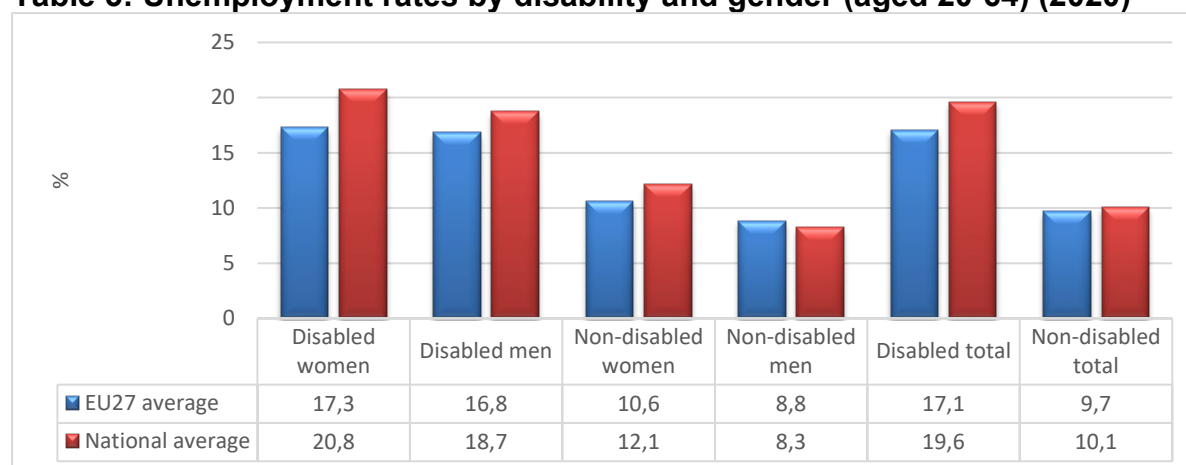


**Table 4: National trends in employment rates, by disability status (aged 20-64)**

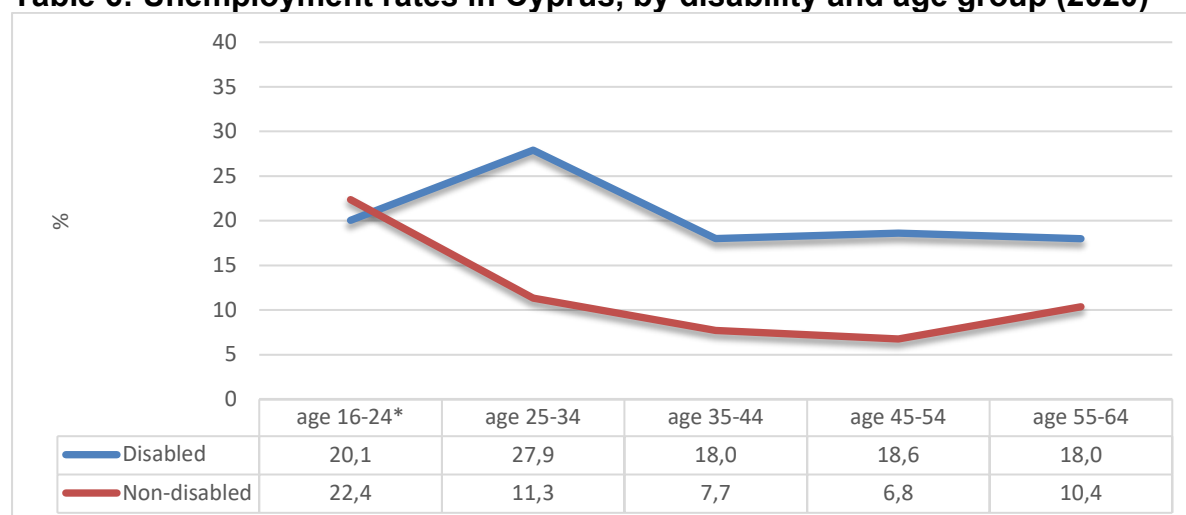

Source: EU-SILC 2020 Release April 2022 (and preceding UDBs)

Note: Microdata concerning employment status was not available for Germany and Italy in this data release, which affects the EU27 average (which is therefore estimated). There were fewer than 50 observations in the disabled group aged 16-24, which should be treated with caution.

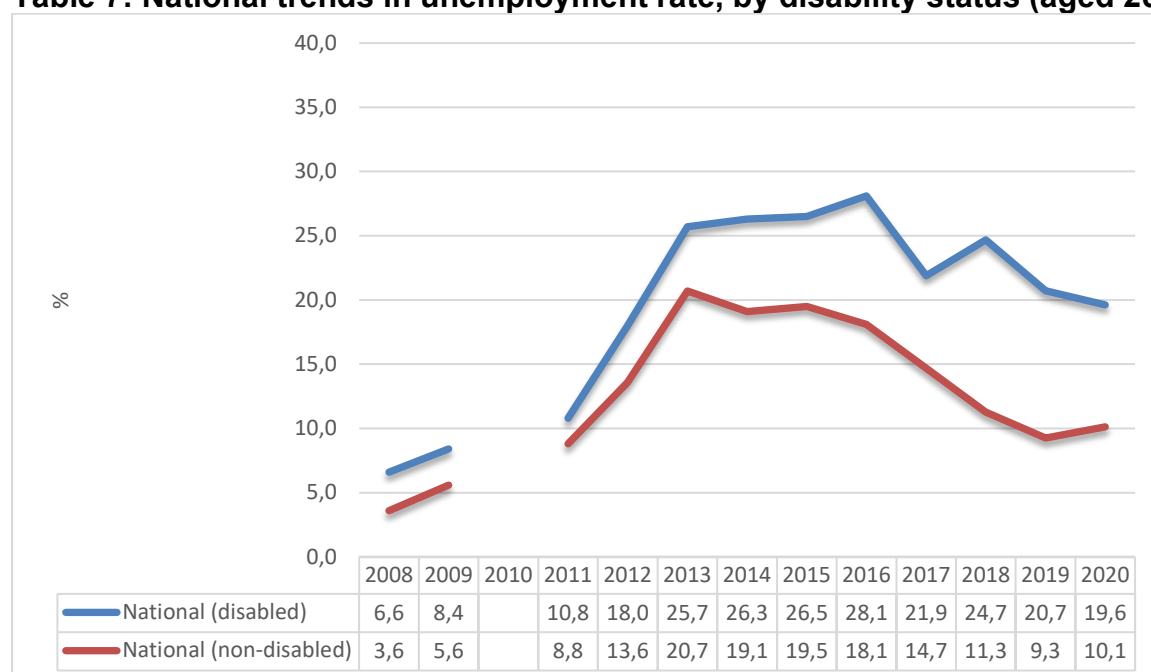
### 7.1.1 Unemployment

**Table 5: Unemployment rates by disability and gender (aged 20-64) (2020)**


**Table 6: Unemployment rates in Cyprus, by disability and age group (2020)**



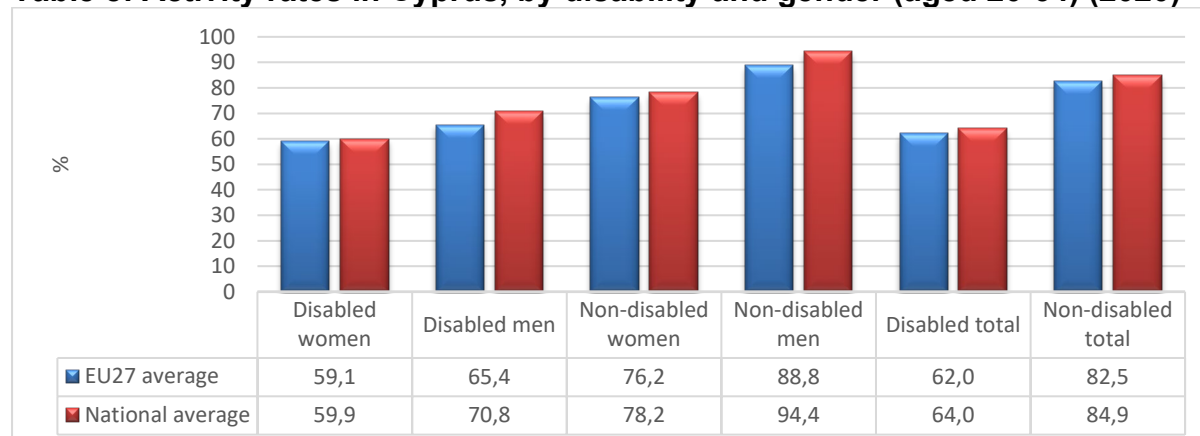
**Table 7: National trends in unemployment rate, by disability status (aged 20-64)**



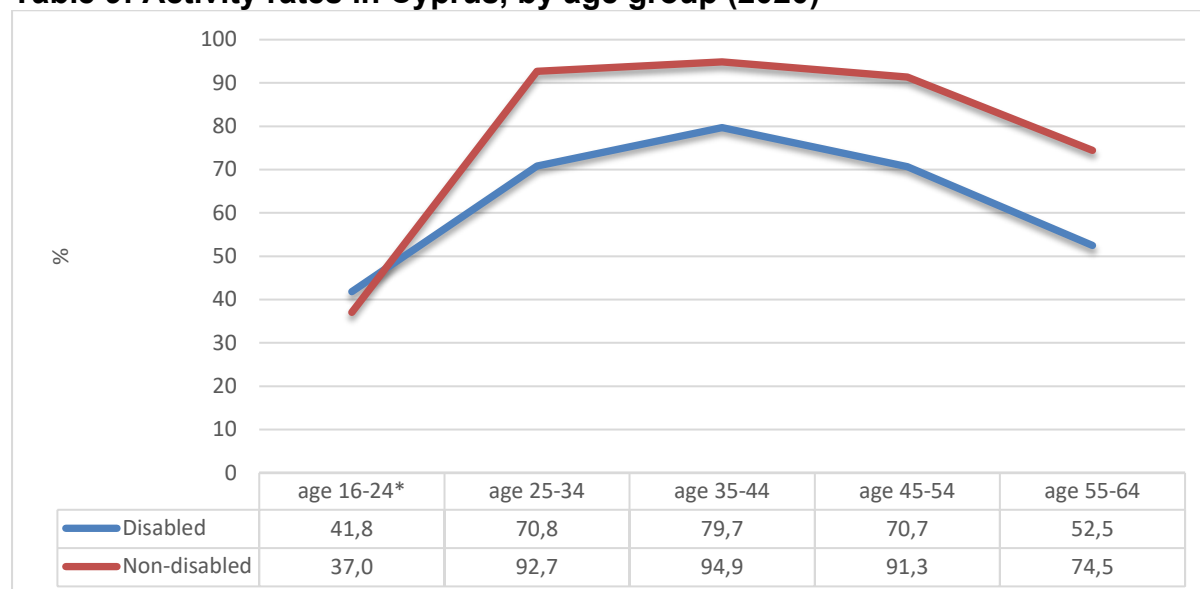
Source: EU-SILC 2020 Release April 2022 (and preceding UDBs)

## 7.1.2 Economic activity

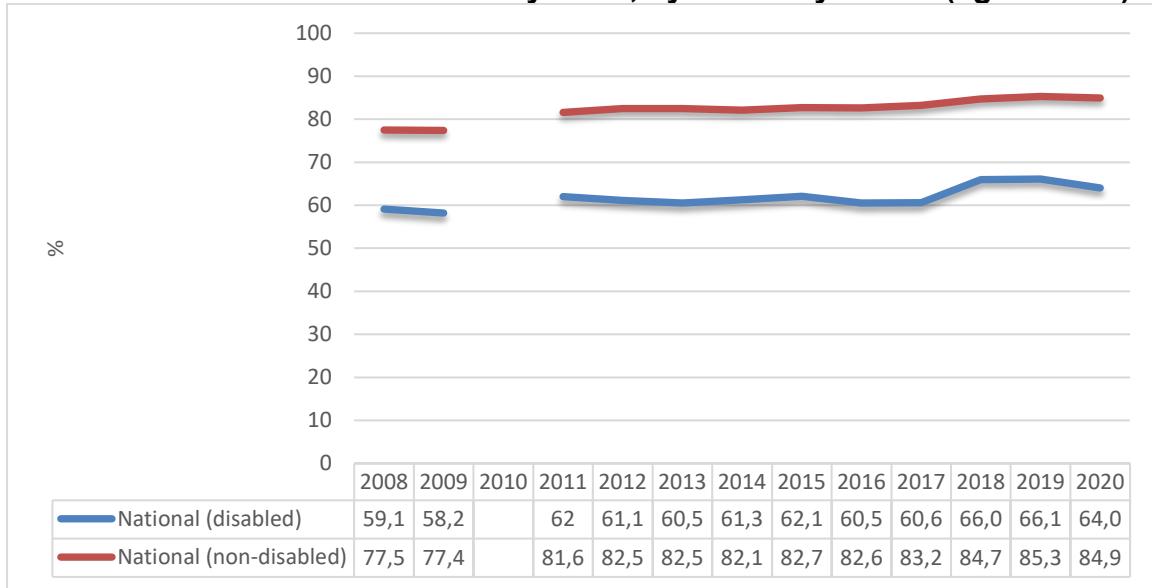
**Table 8: Activity rates in Cyprus, by disability and gender (aged 20-64) (2020)**



**Table 9: Activity rates in Cyprus, by age group (2020)**



**Table 10: National trends in activity rates, by disability status (aged 20-64)**



Source: EU-SILC 2020 Release April 2022 (and preceding UDBs)

### 7.1.3 Alternative sources of labour market data in Cyprus

Disability data is not yet available from the core European Labour Force Survey but labour market indicators for Cyprus were disaggregated from *ad hoc* modules conducted in 2001 and 2011. These can be found in the Eurostat disability database.<sup>101</sup>

The statistics<sup>102</sup> from the Department of Labour, part of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, do not include disaggregated disability data or refer to relevant analysis in relation to unemployment and other labour market issues. The annual Labour Force Surveys (LFS) are prepared by the Cyprus Statistical Service. The Labour Force Survey of 2013<sup>103</sup> identified people with disabilities under the general groups of people in part-time employment, where ‘incapacity or disability’ was reported as one of the reasons for part-time employment. In the latest LFS and Labour Market data<sup>104</sup> people with disabilities are not identified and no categories of people with disabilities are included in the Labour Force Survey data for the second quarter of 2022 currently available.<sup>105</sup>

**Table A: Labour market disability schemes outcomes for 2021**

Scheme	Beneficiaries	Amount €
Persons with disabilities recruited in the public sector (2020) ( <i>Law of 2009 (N.146(I)/2009</i> ) <sup>106</sup>	18	-
Scheme for the creation and operation of small units for self-employment	10	49 300
Supported Employment Scheme programmes	360 (24 programmes)	296 442
Vocational Training Scheme	2	5 500

Source: Annual Report 2021, Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities<sup>107</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Eurostat Health Database: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

<sup>102</sup> Department of Labour, Statistics: [http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/dl.nsf/page9b\\_gr/page9b\\_gr?OpenDocument](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/dl.nsf/page9b_gr/page9b_gr?OpenDocument).

<sup>103</sup> Labour Force Survey 2013: <https://library.cystat.gov.cy/Documents/Publication/LFS-2013-130614.pdf>.

<sup>104</sup> Cyprus Statistical Service: Labour market data, <https://www.cystat.gov.cy/en/SubthemeStatistics?s=43>.

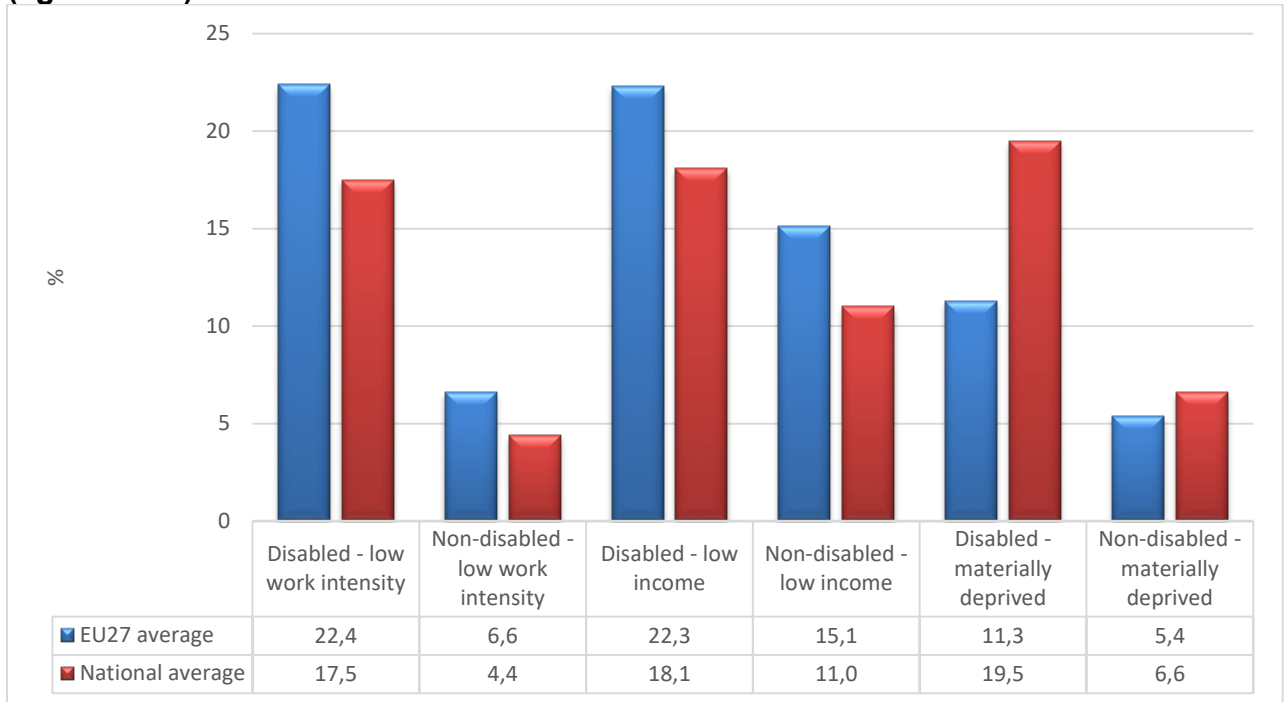
<sup>105</sup> Labour Force Survey (2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2022) press release, <https://www.cystat.gov.cy/en/PressRelease?id=65456>.

<sup>106</sup> Law on Recruitment of Persons with Disabilities in the Wider Public Sector (Special Provisions) of 2009 (N.146(I)/2009), <https://tinyurl.com/y7may7vq>.

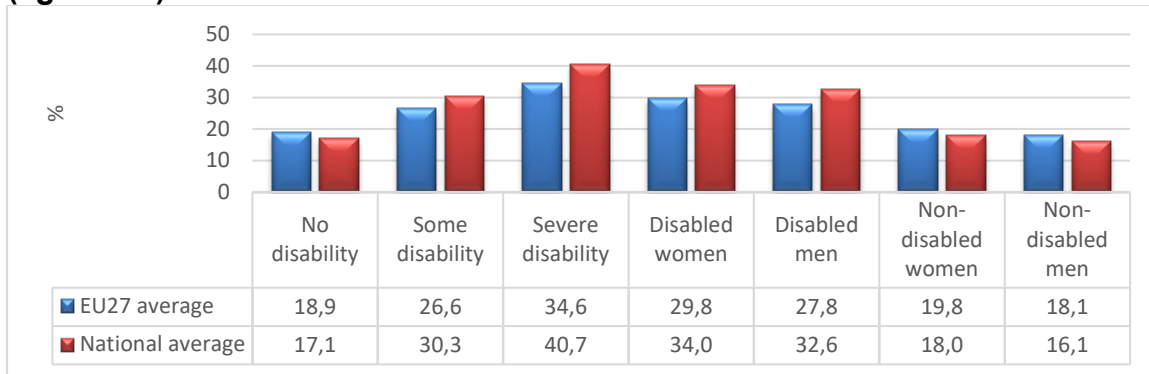
<sup>107</sup> Annual Report 2021, Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, [http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29\\_gr/dsipd29\\_gr?OpenDocument](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29_gr/dsipd29_gr?OpenDocument).

## 7.2 EU data relevant to disability, social policies and healthcare (2020)

**Table 11: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion, by disability and risk (aged 16-64)<sup>108</sup>**

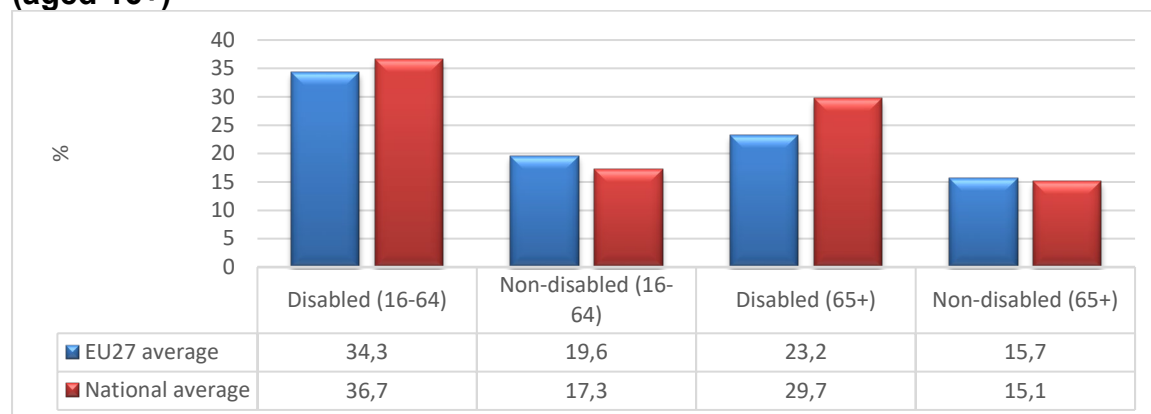


**Table 12: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion, by disability and gender (aged 16+)**



<sup>108</sup> Aged 16-59 for Low work intensity.



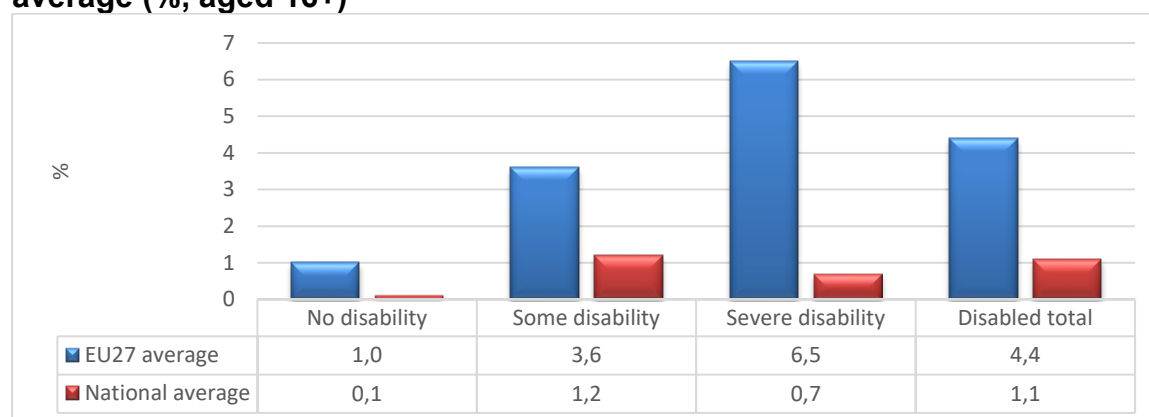
**Table 13: Overall risk of household poverty or exclusion by disability and age (aged 16+)**


Source: EU-SILC 2020 Release April 2022 (and previous UDB)

**Table 14: Trends in the risk of poverty after social transfers, by disability and age group**


Source: Eurostat Health Database [[hlth\\_dpe020](#)] – People at risk of poverty

Note: This table shows national trends in financial poverty risk, rather than the general AROPE indicator (which is not as comparable between age groups due to the effect of paid employment); the survey does not distinguish 'activity limitation' for children under 16.

**Table 15: Self-reported unmet needs for medical examination, three-year average (% , aged 16+)**

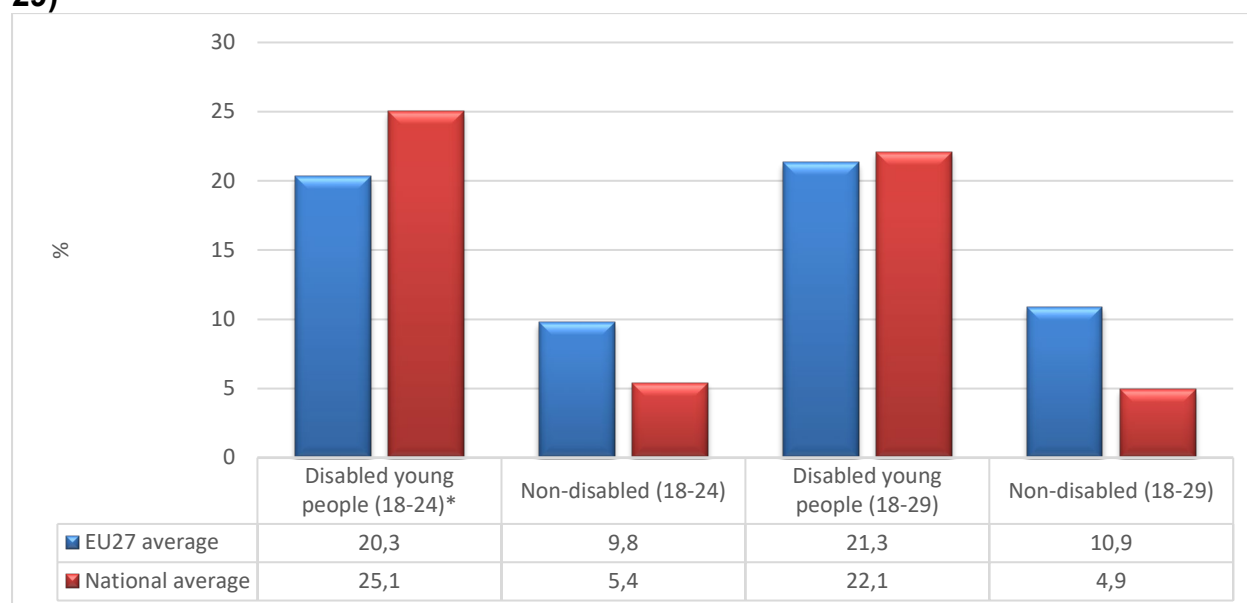
Source: Eurostat Health Database [[hlth\\_dh030](#)] – ‘Too expensive or too far to travel or waiting list’

Note: Due to large variations, an average of three years is indicated. EU mean averages are also skewed by high values in a minority of countries within disability groups but median averages for the total disability and no disability groups in 2020 are consistent with the three-year mean values.

### 7.2.1 Alternative sources of poverty or healthcare data in Cyprus

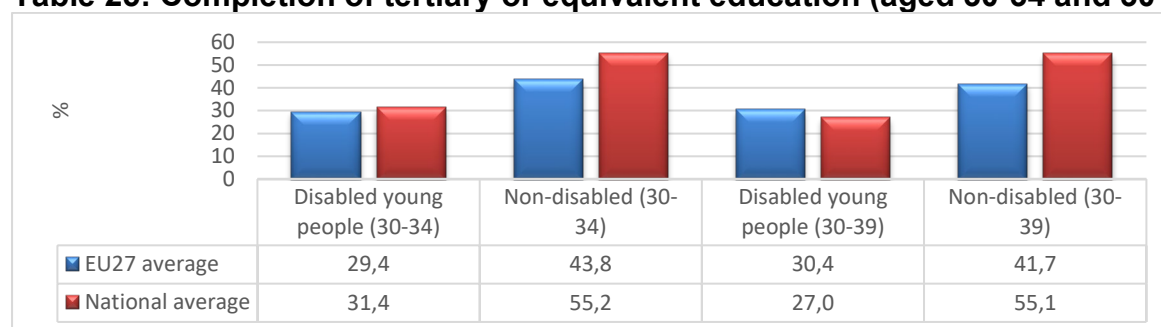
The EU-SILC data provide a comprehensive and reliable source concerning poverty and social exclusion rates. In addition to the summary tables presented so far, the Eurostat disability database also contains breakdowns concerning disability and poverty before and after social transfers, as well as in-work-poverty.<sup>109</sup> These statistics have recently been updated in the Eurostat database for 2021.

### 7.3 EU data relevant to disability and education

**Table 24: Early school leaving rates, by disability status (aged 18-24 and 18-29)<sup>110</sup>**

<sup>109</sup> Eurostat Health Database: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

<sup>110</sup> There was a change from ISCED 1997 to ISCED 2011 qualification definitions in 2014, although some Member States continued to use the older definition after this time.

**Table 25: Completion of tertiary or equivalent education (aged 30-34 and 30-39)**

Source: EU-SILC 2020 Release April 2022 (and preceding UDBs)

Note: Confidence intervals for the disability group are large and reliability low (due to the small sample size in the target age group). An average of several years may be needed to establish trends or to compare breakdowns by gender.

### 7.3.1 Alternative sources of education data in Cyprus

**Table B: Numbers of students in primary schools, special schools and resource (special) units<sup>111</sup>**

Academic year	Special schools		Resource (special) units in primary schools		Primary schools	
	Schools	Students	Units	Students	Schools	Students
2004-2005	9	295	N/A	N/A	346	57575
2010-2011	9	288	75	398	344	49889
2011-2012	9	311	78	413	342	49795
2012-2013	9	343	78	445	340	49612
2013-2014	9	365	79	442	338	48645
2014-2015	9	373	82	472	334	48796
2015-2016	9	385	92	519	334	49567
2016-2017	9	404	96	576	332	50423
2017-2018	9	406	102	582	332	51082
2018-2019	9	439	110	620	331	52042
2019-2020	9	465	N/A	N/A	331	52768
2020-2021	9	498	N/A	N/A	331	51541

Resources: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth, Annual Reports

N/A = numbers not available. 2010-2021 number not yet published.

<sup>111</sup> Liasidou, A. & Mavrou, K. (2021) 'Cross-cultural perspectives on the rise of special education policy discourses' in J Tierney, F. Rizvi, K. Ercikan (eds) *International Encyclopaedia of Education* (Fourth Edition), (pp 259-268), Elsevier.

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