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| **European Semester 2016/2017 country fiche on disability** |
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| Report prepared by: Katerina Mavrou Anastasia Liasidou |
| With comparative data provided by the ANED core team |

The [Academic Network of European Disability experts](http://disability-europe.net/) (ANED) was established by the European Commission in 2008 to provide scientific support and advice for its disability policy Unit. In particular, the activities of the Network support the development of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 and practical implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People in the EU.

This country report has been prepared as input for the European Semester from a disability perspective.

*Note:*

*The statistics provided in October 2016 are based on the EU-SILC 2014. This is the most recent microdata available to researchers for analysis from Eurostat. This report may be updated as new data becomes available.*



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# Summary of the overall situation and challenges

Despite some progress in promoting disability rights in employment, social inclusion (reduction of poverty) and education there are many issues that need to be addressed if Cyprus is to meet its legal obligations as a signatory of the UNCRPD. An issue that raises significant concerns is the lack of national data on disability. This is a manifestation of the low priority given to disability issues in the Cypriot context, bearing in mind that many policy initiatives aimed at addressing the needs of vulnerable groups of people do not include or do not specifically refer to disabled people. Even in cases where there are some data available, these are based on a very limited sample and as a result the validity of the data is significantly undermined.

In terms of education, for example, there is patent lack of data on the quality of the learning support provided to students designated as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEN/D), along with the impact of this support on students’ progress. This kind of data is crucially important in order to promote accountability with regard to the educational outcomes of students with SEN/D[[1]](#footnote-2) and by implication, to reduce the numbers of early school leavers on the grounds of disability. It is imperative that national data on disability is improved, standardized and consistently reviewed so as to understand the barriers that disabled people experience in their daily lives, with a view to formulating/revising relevant policies and devising national action plans to address gaps in policy and provision. For instance, the national average poverty risk on the grounds of disability is higher than the EU average, hence it is necessary to address this discrepancy by formulating social policies to address issues of poverty and enhance social inclusion on the grounds of disability. Providing effective measures of support on the grounds of disability necessitates taking into consideration the idiomorphic nature of disability experience, along with the ways in which it is distinguished from, and intersects with, other sources of social disadvantage.[[2]](#footnote-3) Another significant issue that needs to be taken into consideration is the prevalence of discriminatory attitudes towards persons with disabilities who are denied access to work and employment both in the private and public sector.[[3]](#footnote-4) A considerable number of work-related discriminatory Incidences of people with disabilities in Cyprus have been investigated by the office of the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights (Ombudsman)[[4]](#footnote-5) implementation process and to address issues related to discriminatory attitudes and practices towards persons with disabilities. Given the above considerations, the EU should provide more detailed guidelines, harmonization criteria and should establish international and independent local monitoring bodies in order to enhance national accountability regimes on safeguarding disability rights in accordance with the stipulations of the UNCRPD.

# Assessment of the situation of disabled people with respect to the Europe 2020 headline targets

## Strategic targets

Table 1: Europe 2020 and agreed national targets for the general population

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Europe 2020 targets | National targets**[[5]](#footnote-6)** |
| Employment | 75 % of the 20-64 year-olds to be employed | 75-77 % |
| Education | Reducing the rates of early school leaving below 10 % | 10 % |
| At least 40 % of 30-34–year-olds completing third level education | 46 % |
| Fighting poverty and social exclusion | At least 20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion | 27,000 |

Relevant disability targets from national strategies or sources:

A large number of actions were detailed as policy objectives in the National Disability Action Plan (2013-2015)[[6]](#footnote-7) with respect to employment, education and fighting poverty and social exclusion but none of the documents refer to specific targets (precise and measurable) with respect to people with disabilities. No updated version for 2016 is available.

The 2016 documents on EU2020 strategy for Cyprus (NRP, 2016,[[7]](#footnote-8) SP,[[8]](#footnote-9) 2016-2019, CSW, 2016),[[9]](#footnote-10) do not make particular reference to disability related targets. In contrast to 2014 and 2015 the focus is less on the provisions for social protection for vulnerable groups (including people with disabilities) as a key priority of the Cyprus Government. Nevertheless, disability relevant targets are directly and indirectly mentioned in Social Welfare in relation to the new guaranteed minimum income (GMI). To this end, the Stability Programme 2016-2019 of the Ministry of Finance6 highlights that

“The social welfare reform was explicitly aimed at providing better protection of vulnerable groups with the introduction of a guaranteed minimum income (GMI) scheme and better targeting of benefits to ensure public support for those most in need, including the working poor while at the same time respecting the budgetary targets set.” (p. 8)

In addition a number of measures and targets are outlined, which however are not particularly specific in the documents. In the *Occasional Paper for The Economic Adjustment Programme for Cyprus Fourth Review – Summer 2014*, the following objectives are set out (it should be noted that the report does not explicitly refer to targets and measures for individuals with disabilities. Rather, there is reference to vulnerable groups, which include people with disabilities. As stated in the document:

“One of the objectives of the programme enshrined in the MoU is to minimise the impact of consolidation on vulnerable groups. To this end, reforms in the areas of pensions and social welfare have been undertaken, and the reform of health care system is under way. The social welfare reform was explicitly aimed at providing better protection of vulnerable groups with the introduction of a guaranteed minimum income (GMI) scheme and better targeting of benefits to ensure public support for those most in need, including the working poor.”

### A note on the use of EU data

Unless specified, the summary statistics presented in this report are drawn from 2014 EU-SILC micro data.[[10]](#footnote-11) The EU-SILC sample includes people living in private households and does not include people living in institutions. 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’.[[11]](#footnote-12) Responses to this question vary between countries and national data sources are added for comparison, where available.

**Table 2: Self-reported ‘activity limitations’ as a proxy for impairment/disability (EU-SILC 2014)**

*Source: EUSILC UDB 2014 – version 2 of August 2016*

*It is relevant to observe that Cypriot estimates of impairment prevalence fall slightly below the EU average, which may affect estimations of equality gaps.*

In subsequent tables, these data are used as a proxy to estimate ‘disability’ equality in the main target areas for EU2020 – employment, education and poverty risk.[[12]](#footnote-13) The tables are presented by disaggregating the estimated proportion of people who report and do not report limitations for each indicator (e.g. among those who are employed, unemployed, at risk of poverty, etc.).

## Employment data

**Table 3: Most recent employment data, aged 20-64**

*Source: EUSILC UDB 2014 – version 2 of August 2016*

**Table 4: Employment rate data, by age group**

*Source: EUSILC UDB 2014 – version 2 of August 2016*

**Table 5: Trends in employment by gender and disability (aged 20-64)**

*Source: EUSILC UDB 2014 – version 2 of August 2016 (and preceding UDBs)*

*\* There is some missing data in the trend for Cyprus*

The table above shows a comparison of national employment trends for disabled and non-disabled women and men, and compares this with the EU2020 headline indicator for the EU as a whole.

**Alternative data on disability and employment provided by the national expert:**

The following data concerns the number of beneficiaries enrolled in the various employment support programmes described in Section 4.

There is currently no alternative data available on general employment rates for people with disabilities in Cyprus that allow comparisons with data provided in Table 5, but data in Table 5.1 below provide an insight of the opportunities provided based on the number of beneficiaries of employment schemes.

**Table 5.1: Total numbers of employment of people with disabilities under the employment schemes in 2012 and 2014 (latest available)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Employment Scheme** | **Number of beneficiaries**  | **Total amount of funding** |
|  | **2012** | **2013** | **2014** | **2012** | **2013** | **2014** |
| Scheme for the creation and operation of small units for self-employment purposes of Persons with Disabilities | 8 | 2 | 6 | €43.569 | €25.529 | €20.541 |
| Vocational Training Scheme for people with disabilities | 10 | 3 | 8 | €8.500 | €10.200 | €12.359 |
| Supported Employment Scheme programmes | 22 with 236 persons employed  | 22 with 228 persons employed | 23 with 246 persons employed  | €297.000 | €289.800 | €293.582 |

*Source: The Department for Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities Annual Report (2012)[[13]](#footnote-14) and (2014)[[14]](#footnote-15)*

### Unemployment

National administrative rules and definitions of ‘unemployment’ vary, and these may affect the way in which disabled people are categorised in different countries. The following tables compare national data with the EU2020 headline indicator for the EU.

**Table 6: Most recent unemployment data, aged 20-64**

*Source: EUSILC UDB 2014 – version 2 of August 2016*

**Table 7: Unemployment rate data, by age group**

*Source: EUSILC UDB 2014 – version 2 of August 2016*

**Table 8: Trends in unemployment by gender and disability (aged 20-64)**

*Source: EUSILC UDB 2014 – version 2 of August 2016 (and preceding UDBs)*

*\* There is some missing data in the trend for Cyprus*

Alternative data on disability and unemployment from national sources:

No alternative data on disability and unemployment were identified from the national sources accessed for this report. Some further discussion is provided in section 3 below.

### Economic activity

**Table 9: Most recent economic activty data, aged 20-64**

*Source: EUSILC UDB 2014 – version 2 of August 2016*

**Table 10: Activity rate data, by age group**

*Source: EUSILC UDB 2014 – version 2 of August 2016*

**Table 11: Trends in activity rates by gender and disability (aged 20-64)**

*Source: EUSILC UDB 2014 – version 2 of August 2016 (and preceding UDBs)*

*\* There is some missing data in the trend for Cyprus*

Alternative data on disability and economic activity provided by the national expert:

No alternative data on disability and unemployment were identified from the national sources accessed for this report.

## Education data

EU statistical comparisons are more limited concerning the education of young disabled women and men in the EU2020 target age groups. Data is available from EU-SILC (annually) as well as the Eurostat Labour Force Survey ad-hoc disability module (for 2011), but with low reliability for several countries on the key measures.[[15]](#footnote-16) Using a wider age range can improve reliability but estimations by gender remain indicative. EU trends are evident but administrative data may offer more reliable alternatives to identify national trends, where available.

### Early school leavers

The EU-SILC sample for the target age group (aged 18-24) includes the following number of people reporting activity ‘limitation’ (as a proxy for impairment/disability).

**Table 12: EU-SILC sample size in the target age group 18-24 versus 18-29**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Age 18-24 | Age 18-29 |
|  | No activity ‘limitation’ | Activity ‘limitation’ | No activity ‘limitation’ | Activity ‘limitation’ |
| EU sample | 33,905 | 2,608 | 56,110 | 4,738 |
| National sample | 1,165 | 58 | 1,938 | 111 |

*Source: EUSILC UDB 2014 – version 2 of August 2016*

**Table 13: Early school leavers aged 18-24 (indicative based on above sample size)**

*Source: EUSILC UDB 2014 – version 2 of August 2016*

Alternative data on disability and early school leavers provided by the national expert:

There are no alternative data specifically on disability and school leavers available from national sources. No such data are included in the Ministry of Education Annual Reports.

### Tertiary education

The EU-SILC sample for the target age group (aged 30-34) includes the following number of people reporting activity ‘limitation’ (a proxy for impairment/disability) although the number of missing observations is larger than the number of observations for activity limitation.

**Table 14: EU-SILC sample size for the target age group 30-34 versus 30-39**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Age 30-34 | Age 30-39 |
|  | No activity ‘limitation’ | Activity ‘limitation’ | No activity ‘limitation’ | Activity ‘limitation’ |
| EU sample | 23,851 | 2,866 | 50,496 | 6,732 |
| National sample | 23,740 | 2,744 | 50,243 | 6,572 |

*Source: EUSILC UDB 2014 – version 2 of August 2016*

**Table 15: Completion of tertiary or equivalent education (indicative based on above sample)**

*Source: EUSILC UDB 2014 – version 2 of August 2016*

The survey sample is not sufficient to provide robust trend data disaggregated by gender in the narrow EU2020 target age group. In only 12 out of 28 Member States are there more than 50 observations in the sample for both women and for men in aged 30-34 who also declare impairment/limitation. In 5 there are fewer than 20 observations for women or for men, which cannot be reported.

The following table is indicative at the EU level but gender trends at the national level should be treated with caution. In all Member States except Austria the achievement of tertiary education was higher for women than for men in both groups.

**Table 16: Trends in tertiary education by disability (aged 30-34)**

*Source: EUSILC UDB 2014 – version 2 of August 2016 (and preceding UDBs)*

*\* There is some missing data in the trend for Cyprus*

**Alternative data on disability and tertiary education provided by the national expert:**

According to the NRP (2016) the tertiary education attainment has increased and it has continued to exceed both the EU target (40 %) and the national target (46 %). The share of population of 30-34 year olds that have completed tertiary education increased to 54.2 % in 2015 (provisional data), despite the decreased household income due to the economic crisis but the report does not provide any data specific to disability and tertiary education. However, the following numbers of students have been recorded, for the academic years 2011-2015. All data in tables have been provided by the Students’ Support and Welfare Services of each University by email, after request from ANED CY Experts, and more recent data for 2016 were not available yet:

**Table 16a: Total numbers of students with disabilities[[16]](#footnote-17)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2011-2012** | **2012-2013** | **2013-2014** | **2014-2015** |
| University of Cyprus | 162 | 222 | 245 | 160 |
| Cyprus Technological University | 78 | 98 | 107 | Not provided |
| Open University Cyprus | 24 | 40 | 48 | 19 |
| European University Cyprus | 46 | 152 | 175 | 197 |
| University of Nicosia | 57 | 68 | 87 | 32 |
| Neapolis University | 1 | 3 | 6 | 5 |
| Frederick University | Not provided | Not provided | Not provided | Not provided |
| UCLAN | Not provided | Not provided | Not provided | Not provided |
| **Total** | **368** | **583** | **668** | **413** |

Detailed data on numbers of students per disability in each university can be found in Appendix I. These data provide evidence of a notable prevalence of students with learning disabilities (that are even specified to dyslexia in some universities) as well as higher number of students with Health and Psycho/Emotional Difficulties.

It should be noted that terminology and categorization used in the appendix tables is the exact terminology (or exact translation) of language used by each university’s student welfare service *per se* and may not be precisely comparable.

## Poverty and social exclusion data

EU SILC data provides indicators of the key risks for people with disabilities. In addition to household risks of low work intensity, there are risks of low income (after social transfers), and material deprivation. These three measures are combined in the overall estimate of risk. The risks for older people do not include work intensity (Eurostat refers to the age group 0-59 for this measure). The survey does not distinguish ‘activity limitation’ (the proxy for impairment/disability) for children under the age of 16. Relevant data provided by the national expert is added where available.

**Table 17: People living in household poverty and exclusion by disability and risk (aged 16-59)**

*Source: EUSILC UDB 2014 – version 2 of August 2016*

**Table 18: People living in household poverty and exclusion by disability and gender (aged 16+)**

*Source: EUSILC UDB 2014 – version 2 of August 2016*

**Table 19: Overall risk of household poverty or exclusion by disability and age (aged 16+)**

*Source: EUSILC UDB 2014 – version 2 of August 2016*

**Table 20: Trends in household risk of poverty and exclusion by disability and age (EU-SILC 2014)**

*Source: EUSILC UDB 2014 – version 2 of August 2016 (and previous UDB)*

*\* There is some missing data in the trend for Cyprus*

**Alternative data on disability and risk of poverty or social exclusion provided by the national expert:**

No alternative data specific to disability and poverty risk were identified from the national sources accessed for this report.

# Description of the situation and trends in relation to each target area

Disability is mentioned 21 times in the Cyprus national Partnership Agreements for the ESIF period 2014-2020, in the Greek:[[17]](#footnote-18)

* 7 in relation to Employment and Human Resources;
* 1 in the table of the assessment of expected results;
* 5 in the description of the thematic targets mainly under thematic target 9 – social inclusion;
* 7 under the section on the Non-Discrimination Authority mainly in relation to issues of accessibility;
* 1 under the description of areas of vulnerable groups.

Most of the above references are used as part of the terminology of the National Disability Actin Plan and National Disability Strategy, as well as the name of the Department or Social Inclusion for People with Disabilities.

For 2014-2020 the Operational Programme of “Sustainable Development and Competitiveness” does not make any specific reference to people with disabilities in the Beneficiaries List according to the various Priority Axes and Projects.[[18]](#footnote-19) On the other hand, the Operational Programme of “Employment, Human Capital and Social Cohesion” includes people with disabilities in the beneficiaries of Priority Axis 3: Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion in (a) Project: System for the Evaluation of Functionality and Disability), and (b) Project: Incentives to industry for new employment positions: for vulnerable groups including people with disabilities.

The latest available Annual Progress Report (June 2016),[[19]](#footnote-20) refers to disability in the Priority Axis on combating poverty and promoting social inclusion (p. 8) in the description of the new system for the assessment of functionality and disability. The system was funded by ESIF and 1140 individuals have been assessed till the end of 2015. Till 2023 the aim is 14500 persons with disabilities to be benefited under the ESIF for the priority of combating poverty and promoting social inclusion.[[20]](#footnote-21)

Τhe Evaluation Plan[[21]](#footnote-22) for both Operational Programmes – “Sustainable Development and Competitiveness” and “Employment, Human Capital and Social Cohesion” – for 2014-2020 includes issues of disability in objectives on Promotion of Social Inclusion and combating poverty and discrimination (p. 11), specifically referring to evaluation of the policy of the OPs for promoting gender equality, and equal opportunities for access of people with disabilities (p. 31). Specifically, for the evaluation of the impact of the interventions in the spectrum of both the OP indicative questions for evaluation include issues of impact on the opportunities provided for people with disabilities in relation to equal opportunities on access (p. 51), on education, on positive actions that included people with disabilities such as inclusion in the labour market, and examples of good and bad practices for including/excluding people with disabilities (p. 55). The evaluation plan with respect to the impact of the interventions within both OP on issues of people with disabilities is anticipated to begin in 2019 (table page 58 of the Plan document), with duration of about 8 months and the cost of € 70.000.

The Evaluation Report of the “Service Provision for the Estimation of the Interventions of the Common Support of the ESIF and the Youth Employment Initiative Including the Implementation of the “Guarantee for the Youth” regarding the Inclusion Young People in the Labour Market” (Operational Programme: Employment, Human Capital and Social Cohesion),[[22]](#footnote-23) has examined disability issues and showed that the Youth Employment Initiative does not make any specific reference to marginalised groups (including people with disability)

No Evaluation Reports for the Operational Programme: “Sustainable Development and Competitiveness for 2014-2020 are yet available on the website of the Cyprus Structural Funds.

The older evaluation reports (2007-2013) are not available any more. Information can be found on the 2015 ANED EU2020 country report.

## Employment

According to the SILC data presented earlier, the employment rates for disabled women and men in Cyprus fall slightly below the EU average, and across the life course, with the exception of estimates for those with severe limitations (impairments) although small numbers may affect the reliability of this data in Cyprus. There are some gaps in the national time series data but the employment trend for both disabled and non-disabled people has been downward during the period of the economic crisis. While economic activity rates track the EU average, unemployment is high, and has risen sharply for disabled people as it has for non-disabled people, notably for disabled men.

Data in table 5 in section 2.2, show a decrease in the employment trend rates between 2011 and 2014. At this point it may worth noting that according to data in Table 5.1 from national sources, in 2013 fewer people were benefited from the employment schemes, though with a similar average amount of funding as 2012 and 2014. Moreover, according to the macro figures from the Ministry of Finance 2005-2019,[[23]](#footnote-24) the general population employment rate was estimate to drop -2.3 % in 2014 and to increase 0.9 % in 2015, where an increase of 1.2 % was expected for 2016 and 1.5 % for 2017. The same data provide an indication of decrease in employment rates of previous years as well. According to the same figures, the general unemployment rate was estimated to increase by 16.1 % in 2014 and by 15 % in 2015, where an increase of 13.5 % was predicted for 2016 and 12.5 % for 2017. However these indicators are not specified to people with disabilities or other particular groups, but they support the high increase in employment and unemployment presented in Tables 5 and 8. This is especially true for the years after 2013 when Cyprus entered period of financial crisis.

In light of the data presented, particular emphasis needs to be given to enhancing disability access to the labour market. This can be achieved by providing more incentives along with training opportunities in order to enhance the access of disabled people in the labour market. The design and implementation of the **New system of assessing disability and functioning[[24]](#footnote-25)** can potentially provide new perspectives on training, employment and inclusion (see Hollenweger 2014).[[25]](#footnote-26) Such a prospect presupposes that the professionals involved in the assessment procedures become acquainted with social models of disability so as to transcend the overwhelming influence of individual pathology and medical discourse that have traditionally held sway over disability assessment procedures.

**Having signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD), Cyprus expected to abide by a number of stipulations aimed at educating doctors and other health professionals in order to understand the human rights dimension of disability as well as to get acquainted with the idiomorphic nature of disability experience alongside the associated health related needs of people with disabilities**

A number of professional bodies such as the Surgeon General, the Institute of Medicine and the Association of American Medical Colleges as well as have pointed to the necessity to educate physicians in more effective and comprehensive ways so as to better address the needs of persons with disabilities (Shapiro 2011).[[26]](#footnote-27) This involves a thorough (re) consideration of medical curricula with a view to providing disability-related training that is informed by a human rights discourse.

**In addition a recent research study**[[27]](#footnote-28) **provided evidence that issues of employment of people with disabilities in Cyprus are also connected to the acquisition of digital skills and the opportunities for further use of technology in the work place, as well as availability of (assistive) technology and support in its use.** All interviewees agreed that in modern, technology-based society, competence in using ICT is absolutely necessary, and that people with poor ICT skills are at a serious disadvantage**.**

At the same time, participants **highlighted that while funding and technology skills** strengthen PwD’s competencies and employment prospects, there are serious barriers to their employment, which ICT/AT training and experience would not overcome, including the very limited number of paid job opportunities and the negative attitudes and prejudice of employers towards disability. Such evidence is similar in other European Countries, as shown by the ENTELIS Project which currently investigates the challenges of the digital divide for people with disabilities of all ages in all sectors of life (including employment).[[28]](#footnote-29)

## Education

More data need to be collated in order to discuss trends and prospects in reliable ways. The estimation of early school leavers might be based on very little data and does not take into consideration the number of disabled students who might have never attended secondary education. The Monitoring Report for Education and Training in Cyprus (2015)[[29]](#footnote-30) contains no specific data on disability but comments that in Cyprus young men are almost four times more likely to leave school prematurely (11.2 %) than young women (2.9 %), and this gender gap is widening, and this may be due the fact that families encourage young men to find a job (or work with the family) easier than they would do for young women.

As far as tertiary education level is concerned, completion rates are quite high but nevertheless this kind of data might be misleading as there are a number of other issues that need to be attended to in order to implement a fully-ﬂedged social justice discourse in terms of enhancing participation in higher education. What should be examined first is the number of students with disability entering Higher Education, the institutions’ enrollment criteria and their support and provisions for disabled students.

Recent research on HE accessibility in Cyprus showed that accessibility and other provisions for students with disabilities are only in the very early stages at the Cyprus universities (both public and private)[[30]](#footnote-31) and this is something that seems to discourage disabled students towards HE or abet dropout. Another study[[31]](#footnote-32) investigating the experiences of students with disabilities in HE in Cyprus showed that students are disappointed because of lack of awareness on disability issues from university faculty as well as on procedures for learning material and content adaptations and competencies for differentiation and pedagogical approaches. Participants emphasized that they had more support from their peers, and highlighted the difficulty of the Cypriot culture to respect diversity and the still existing prejudice towards disability.

Based on unpublished data, the monitoring mechanism for the implementation of the UNCPRD[[32]](#footnote-33) in Cyprus, has in 2015-2016 started receiving complaints from university students regarding issues of human rights, accessibility and provisions relevant to their quality of education and access in HEI. The same authority has recently intervened for the withdrawal and revision of the regulations of the Medical School of the University of Cyprus, which excluded individuals with disabilities.[[33]](#footnote-34)

## Poverty and social inclusion

Risks of low work intensity are below the EU average for both disabled and non-disabled people in Cyprus, yet risks of material deprivation are high. While household risks of low income fall below the EU average for non-disabled people they are higher for disabled people. While overall risk has reduced for older people it has increased for those of working age, with a risk gap of more than 11 points compared to non-disabled people (aged 16-64). In general, it seems that the financial crisis of 2013 has had an impact on the poverty percentage (including people with disabilities) as based on the data of the NRP 2016 Cyprus report the poverty percentage (AROPE) (in general including people with disabilities) has decreased but not significantly to 27.4 % in 2014 compared to 27,8 % in 2013, while it had risen significantly from 23.3 % in 2008 to 27.8 % in 2013. Based on the data in the same report (p. 47) an increasing trend in people living in very low work intensity households (VLWI) is observed. In particular, the VLWI (quasi-jobless households) shows an increasing trend from 4.9 % in 2011, to 7.9 % in 2013 and to 9.7 % in 2014. This reflects the increase in unemployment rate in Cyprus mentioned earlier. In addition, a slight increase is noticed to the AROPE of the elderly (65+) from 26.1 % in 2013 to 27.2 % in 2014. On the contrary, the AROPE for children (aged 0-17) decreased by 3 percentage points (from 27.7 % in 2013 to 24.7 % in 2014). The at-risk-of poverty (after social transfers), i.e. monetary poverty, decreased from 15.3 % in 2013 to 14.4 % in 2014. The poverty threshold for 2014 was € 8,640 compared to € 9,524 in 2013 (a decrease of 9.3 %). Also, the severe material deprivation rate decreased from 16.1 % in 2013 to 15.3 % in 2014. Looking at the at-risk-of poverty by most frequent activity a decrease is noticed both for the working population and the unemployed (from 8.9 % in 2013 to 7.8 % in 2014, and from 33.6 % in 2013 to 32.6 % in 2014, respectively).

# Assessment of policies in place to meet the relevant headline targets

## Employment

Regarding employment, the National Disability Action Plan sets out the following actions, under the 8th Thematic Area (Employment, p. 20):

* **Action 35:** Modernization and upgrading of the vocational rehabilitation for people with disabilities sector, timetable 2013-2014, expected outcomes: increasing the vocational training, employment, and rehabilitation programs for people with disabilities
* **Action 36:** Implementation of the institution for "social enterprises and cooperatives", timetable 2013-2014, expected outcomes: introduction of social enterprises in Cyprus in order to create new jobs in economically sustainable enterprises and to promote the employment of persons with disabilities in cooperation and with the support of persons without disabilities
* **Action 37**: Upgrading of the "Supported Employment Scheme”, timeline 2013-2014, expected outcomes: Upgrading of the existing program “Supported Employment” in the new programming period 2014-2020 with extension of the programs in rural areas and increasing in urban areas, utilization of the Job Coaches Association, as an employer of Job Coaches, integration of increased number of persons with disabilities in the open labour market through supported employment.
* **Action 39**: Scheme for the placement of 1,000 unemployed young university graduates for the acquisition of work experience in companies / organizations, timeline 2013-2014, expected outcomes: increase employment opportunities of young unemployed university graduates with disabilities.

As stated in the 2016 NRP a number of schemes and measures have been implemented during last years in order to enhance employability, with the following progress reported:

1. National Action Plan for Youth Employment (NAP) for 2015-2017 with a total budget of € 47,2 mln. In 2015 four schemes were issues for the NAP which include a scheme for the employment and training of tertiary education graduates, a scheme for the employment and training of the long-term unemployed, a scheme for the job placement of unemployed young tertiary education graduates for the acquisition of work experience in enterprises/organisations, a scheme for the job placement of young unemployed graduates of lower secondary, upper secondary and post-secondary education of up to two years for acquisition of work experience in enterprises/organisations. The above are also included in the measures for the Long Term Unemployed. In addition in 2016 a subsidy scheme providing financial incentives to employers for the employment of the unemployed young people less than 25 years old, a measure for the improvement of the career guidance system, an advertising campaign for the activation of the youth, and development of an automated comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system of the Active Labour Market Policies with the participation and input of all stakeholders, are foreseen. Nevertheless no specific reference is made to young people with disabilities and how their employment can be enhanced by the above measures
2. Wage subsidies, which includes two schemes for helping employers hire unemployed people. However the first scheme - Target Group: Enterprises of the retail trade sector employing 1-4 employees, was only called once due to low interest from enterprises. The second scheme - Target Group: Long Term Unemployed (≥ 6 months), created 1176 new job positions with 946 enterprises. However there is no data on how many people with disabilities have been employed (if any) within these schemes. In addition to these schemes a number of others were foreseen in 2016 including three which directly or indirectly refer to people with disabilities. These are: Incentives for the Employment of Disabled People, Incentives for the Recruitment of People who belong to the Disadvantaged Social Groups, Scheme for the Employment of the Unemployed for Providing Care Services for Disabled Persons.
3. Other measures are also outlined in NRP 2016, including enhancement of public employment service, subsidy scheme to promote the creation of new jobs with flexible arrangements, entrepreneurship, active labour market policies and combating undeclared, which however do not seem to target specifically (or not) people with disabilities.

According to the Annual Report (2012)[[34]](#footnote-35) (p. 97) of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance (no new annual reports are available yet), in order to provide motivation for the employment of people with disabilities the government has implemented a Scheme for Motivation of Employment of People with Disabilities in the Private Sector, through which private companies are provided with 75 % of the annual employee cost, (max. € 15,000 annually) for the first 24 months of employment. The scheme has been available between 29.9.2009 and 30.6.2014, (application deadline 31.12.2010), with a total budget of € 1,000,000. The initial aim was the employment of 120 individuals with disabilities. Up to 31.12.2012, 90 unemployed individuals with disabilities had been employed, 73 of whom were approved for funding under the scheme, with the funding for private businesses amounting to € 899,634.

Employment of people with disability in the public sector has been enhanced under the provisions of The Recruitment of Persons with Disabilities in the Wider Public Sector (Special Provisions) Law of 2009 (N.146(I)/2009)[[35]](#footnote-36). According to the 2014 Annual Report[[36]](#footnote-37) of the Department for Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities, assessments for the eligibility for employment under this Law are performed since 2014 by the new system **of assessing disability and functioning, and during that year 82 assessment were performed and 26 individuals were considered eligible for appointment in the public sector, 9 of which were appointed to the Education Public Sector in 2014, in addition to those appointed in previous years for whom employment was renewed. In total, since 2009 that the Law was put in force 92 people with disabilities have been employed to the general public sector (78 in Education, 2 in Public Services, 9 in Public Services with a contract of specified duration, and 1 in the semi-public sector on the basis of specified duration.**

In addition to the above, three other employment schemes have been implemented, for which details on latest data are provided in section 2.2 (table 5.1). These are:

* **Scheme for employment with support**: under which individuals with severe disabilities are employed in the open market with the support of a carer/support staff
* **Scheme for the vocational training of people with disabilities:** which covers the cost of training up to € 1,708,60, providing opportunities to individuals with disabilities who face employment or advancement difficulties, with priority given to unemployed people with severe disabilities.
* **Scheme for the development of small units for self-employment of people with disabilities**: which aims to provide motivation to people with disabilities to create their own employment units and to be integrated in the labour market. It provides a total funding of up to € 8,543,01, to individuals with disabilities (16-63 years old) who cannot afford any type of self-employment, with priority given to severe disabilities and intellectual disabilities.

Nevertheless, in terms of the employment of disabled people, there are a number of legal barriers that undermine attempts to enhance the employability levels of disabled individuals. For instance, the ‘reasonable measures’ caveat articulated in the Individuals with Disability Law (Ν. 127(Ι)/2000),[[37]](#footnote-38) is contingent on economic considerations, which give legal space to employers to evade their legal obligations towards disabled individuals. According to the stipulations of the Law ‘Reasonable measures’ can be implemented only to the extent to which they do not place disproportionate economic burden on the employer concerned. As the following extracts from the legislative document suggest:

5 (c) 72 (I) (1A) Reasonable adjustments are provided in order to ensure compliance with the principle of equal treatment for persons with disabilities. The employer must take appropriate measures, in accordance with the needs that arise from a particular case in order for the individual with a disability can have access to work positions, to exercise their profession, to be promoted or to receive training, as long as these actions do not result in a disproportionate burden for the employer

Both evidence from experience and research (see reference to ENTELIS project in section 2.5, footnotes 28 &29) have shown that lack of adjustments and employers attitudes towards disability are a major barrier and consideration expressed by the people with disabilities themselves.

(2) For the purposes of this article ‘reasonable measures’ means those measures provided in any other Law or regulation and that should be taken in order to implement the above principles, taking into consideration the following:

1. The nature and the cost required the measures
2. The financial resources of the person who has the obligation to take the measures
3. The financial conditions and other obligations of the state when the obligation to take measures refers to the governmental sector
4. Donations from the public or other sources as a contribution to the total cost of these measures.

The fourth clause (d) not only raises significant legal barriers to maximizing the employability level of disabled individuals, but also corroborates the charity model of disability in terms of the ways in which disability rights and entitlements are presented as being contingent on the level of donations made to meet the cost of ‘reasonable measures’.

## Education

With regards to education, the actions of the National Disability Action Plan, are outlined under the 6th Thematic Area (Education and Vocational Training, p. 15):

* **Action 25:** Transition from school to vocational rehabilitation, timetable 2014-2015, expected outcomes: Completion of design procedures to be followed for the identification of needs and opportunities of children attending pre-vocational training programs, finding the appropriate employment program for each child
* **Action 26:** Pre-vocational training: Upgrade Pre-vocational Training Programs implemented by the Ministry of Education and Culture, timetable: 2014-2015, expected outcomes: Completion of the process in respect with the evaluation of existing structures and formulation of a proposal for upgrading pre-vocational programs.
* **Action 28:** Training of adults with disabilities, timetable 2015, expected outcomes: identification of inactive adult persons with disabilities, determination of training needs and planning of additional training programs.

According to the 2016 NRP the national target for education is to reduce the rate of early school leavers to 10 %. Related actions include the following measures. Some of them do not make any explicit reference to students with disabilities and/or special educational needs despite concerns about enhancing social and school inclusion, and others even if they refer to disability the approach has been criticised as ineffective and not consisted:

1. *A Bill amending the relevant legislation aiming at a new more effective system for the recruitment of teachers was adopted on 9 July 2015*.Through the new process, teachers will be appointed based on: examination results, extra qualifications and seniority.

(b) *New school timetables and reformed curricula started being implemented since September 2015*. The curricula were restructured based on adequacy and success indicators. The introduction of these indicators will support the teachers in implementing the curriculum in a more efficient way. However, research data assessing the new national curricula (NNC) in relation to disability showed that it does not consider disabled people at equal terms with non-disabled people (problems in the rhetoric and content of the NNC). In its current form, the NNC views disability as an individual problem, and constructs a passive group of learners who can be easily marginalized. It needs to be more precise in its understanding of diversity and disability, and more inclusive than it appears in its current form.[[38]](#footnote-39) In addition it also failed to integrate the principles of the universal design for learning to an extent that would enable teachers realize that they are expected to accommodate all students in their class.[[39]](#footnote-40) As a result, the NNC does not foster the participation of all learners in the ‘humane and democratic school’ (as it proclaims) and it cannot be characterized as inclusive.

(c) *An ongoing social dialogue is taking place between the Ministry of Education and Culture and all stakeholders*, regarding the submission of a final proposal, which will introduce a new Evaluation System for Teachers and School Work.

(d) *A New Professional Learning System for teachers and teaching processes,* in elementary and secondary education was approved by the Council of Ministers on 19 August 2015. The new Professional Learning System has been piloted in a number of schools, since September 2015 and will be reviewed at the end of the school year. The system will allow the professional development of the teachers based on their individual needs and their school’s needs. Nevertheless, the proposed training should include concerns about enhancing teachers’ knowledge and expertise in meeting the needs of students designated as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. This a significant issue that needs to be urgently addressed especially in light of the fact that teachers who provide learning support to students with SEN/D are not required to have any qualifications in Special Education (MoEC 2013, Circular 7.1.10.2/4). Even though the needs of this group of students do not essentially differ from other students, these students may need more intensive, direct or sometimes more specialist pedagogical practices (Norwich and Lewis 2007.),[[40]](#footnote-41) which require expert knowledge and skills to provide differentiated instruction and evidence-based pedagogical practices (e.g Mitchell 2009).[[41]](#footnote-42)

(d) *The continuation of the implementation of the “Zones of Educational Priority”* (ZEP), a project which tackled issues of low performance, delinquency and early school leaving, in primary and secondary education, through assertive actions, under the project “Actions for social and school inclusion” financed through ESF funding.

In addition to the above the restructuring of Upper Secondary and Secondary Technical and Vocational Education (STVE) and the Post-Secondary Institutes of Vocational Education and Training (PSITVE), continue to be implemented though ESF funding. Based on unpublished data from educators’ experiences the latter proved to be an effective option for learners with disabilities that seek to continue their studies after high school and acquire further skills for employment, often preferring programmes leading to hospitality and cooking industry.

Reducing the numbers of early school leavers and enhancing accessibility to Higher Education on the grounds of disability necessitates creating quality early years, primary and secondary school settings for learner diversity. The educational system in Cyprus is highly centralised and education is compulsory from early years (3 years old) and children attend either public or private nursery schools. Primary education is a 6-year school programme starting at the age of 5:8. Repetitions and extensions are given for a maximum of 2 years, including both pre-school and primary.[[42]](#footnote-43) Secondary education is provided in two cycles: the gymnasium, (ages 12–15) which is compulsory lower secondary education, and the lyceum or technical school (ages 15–18), which is not compulsory. Nevertheless, almost 100 % of the pupils in Cyprus continue their education in the lyceum or technical school, and the majority continue in further and higher education, in Cyprus and abroad. Identification and intervention for students with disabilities is taking place under the provisions of 1999 Education Act for the Education of Children with Special Needs.[[43]](#footnote-44) This legislation, which was formally implemented in 2001, has established formal procedures of identiﬁcation, assessment and provision of special education and support: every child has the right to attend his/her neighbourhood school and be supported within the mainstream school. Children with special needs over the age of 3 years are referred to the Committee of Special Education, which appoints a multidisciplinary team to carry out an assessment. Based on the reports, the Committee prepares a statement and the child is assigned appropriate support. Schools and the Ministry of Education are required to provide the child with all the resources and support necessary for a more inclusive education. The relevant regulations 185/2001 specifically refer to the Mechanism of Early Identification of Children with Disabilities,[[44]](#footnote-45) which clearly states that any individual is obliged to immediately refer to the Committee any case of child that is possible to have a disability (special needs) (art. 4). With respect to early identification and intervention, especially in relation to behavioural difficulties and school delinquency, the Ministry of Education has established an Immediate Intervention Group[[45]](#footnote-46) composed by four (4) educators and two (2) who support schools by developing action plans of immediate intervention in collaboration with the school staff. In addition, Services of Early Intervention for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities are offered by several state departments of the Ministries of Health, Education and Labour. However, all services of early/immediate intervention seem to lack coordination and universal evaluation processes (see recommendations section).[[46]](#footnote-47)

The recent report of the World Bank on Teacher Policies in the Republic of Cyprus (2014)[[47]](#footnote-48) points out that accountability regimes and evaluation of teachers in Cyprus do not take into account any measures of teachers’ effects on student outcomes (including learning). Even though the Report does not make any reference to students designated as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEN/D), these issues need to be addressed in subsequent education policy reform agendas, including measures of teachers’ effects on the outcomes of vulnerable groups of students. At the same time, the Report suggests that there are ‘no national-level data on student performance’ something that raises significant issues about the extent to which schools and teachers are held accountable for students’ learning, especially with reference to students with SEN/D. While acknowledging that it is necessary to strike ‘a balance between accountability measures which measure performance in traditional attainment-focused tests and other relevant assessments which are meaningful to the given students and/or SEN/D subgroup’, (Smith & Douglas 2014, 443),[[48]](#footnote-49) it is imperative to introduce new accountability regimes as well as indicators on effectiveness so as to create incentives and make schools and teachers accountable. As international literature suggests, there is also a need to focus resources on groups of students, who are entangled in a complex web of social and educational disadvantage, including students with SEN/D (Artiles et al 2006,[[49]](#footnote-50) Bringhouse 2009)[[50]](#footnote-51) This is a serious issue that needs to be carefully considered in light of legal mandates to promote the realization of an inclusive discourse.

As a signatory state, Cyprus is obliged to give full consideration to Article 24 of the UN CRPD whose overarching aim is to foster “an inclusive education system at all levels” so that “(p)ersons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability” (Article 24/a). Amongst other specifications, it is mandated that teachers “provide the assistance and services guaranteed by those rights”. This professional imperative should be reflected in evaluation criteria and accountability measures pertaining to teaching policies and professional praxis.[[51]](#footnote-52) More specifically, as far as teachers’ accountability and evaluation regimes are concerned, particular emphasis needs to be given to the meaningful participation and achievement of students designated as having SEN/D. Evaluation of teachers should focus on the extent and the quality of the learning support provided to this group of students, along with its impact on students’ progress. At the same time, as part of teachers’ accountability and evaluation procedures, teachers should use evidence-based interventions as part of a graduated approach, which includes review of the progress made by students designated as having SEN/D with a view to providing adaptations to existing support as required. The quality and effectiveness of the provision and its impact on this group of students should be regularly reviewed and monitored. Relevant data on students’ progress should be provided so as to meet quality effectiveness indicators in terms of teaching and learning.[[52]](#footnote-53) However, the recent study of Symeonidou (2015)[[53]](#footnote-54) (see table 2, p. 125) suggest that Cyprus has failed to comply with or take measures to implement the provisions 24, and it is unlikely that the country’s educational system showed any progress on this. Education of learners with disabilities still largely takes place in segregative settings and/or segregative practices, and curriculum, though recently reformed, fails to consider learners with disabilities both in its rhetoric and content.[[54]](#footnote-55)

## Poverty and social inclusion

Responding to issues of social exclusion, the 5th Thematic Area (Independent Living, Social Inclusion, Mobility and Social Protection, p. 13) the National Disability Action Plan (2013-2015)[[55]](#footnote-56) suggests the following actions:

* **Action 21:** Formulation of institutional framework for deinstitutionalization and independent / supported living, timetable: 2015 - expected outcomes: creation and operation of structures and services for deinstitutionalization and independent / supported living, mainly for people with severe disabilities.
* **Action 23:** Deinstitutionalisation of 8 persons from Chamber 14 of the Athalassa Mental Health Hospital, timetable 2014-2015 – expected outcomes: deinstitutionalisation of persons with intellectual disabilities and behavior disorders living for many years in a mental health hospital. Integration in protected homes for supported living and provision of treatment, care and support for gradual integration in the society.
* **Action 24:** Enhancing participation in leisure, sports, cultural and other events and activities, timetable: 2014-2015.

On 10 July 2014 the House of Representatives in Cyprus passed the bill introduced by the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance entitled "The Guaranteed Minimum Income and Social Benefits Act of 2014” concerning the implementation of a new system of welfare. The law entered into force on July 11, 2014 and safeguards a minimum living status for every family under particular criteria, including individuals with disabilities (to ensure a minimum standard of living for every family that meets specific criteria). The minimum guaranteed income is €480 per month for an applicant/beneficiary subject to certain criteria. It is worth noting that in the calculation for the allocation of the Guaranteed Minimum Income, (GMI) the first € 512 of earnings from employment are not taken into account as income if the applicant/beneficiary or the spouse is a disabled person. Moreover, the minimum guaranteed amount of € 480, is increased by € 240 for every member of the family aged 14 and over, including the spouse and by 144 for each member of the family aged under 14 unless the child has a disability in which case he/she is entitled to the whole amount of € 480. In addition, specifically to housing, according to the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, in relation to the GMI the maximum rent allowance for people with disabilities is as follows: Nicosia/Limassol/Famagusta (€ 2.80/m2) additional € 70. Larnaca (€ 2.45/m2) additional € 61.25 and Paphos (€ 1.75/m2) additional € 43.75. The Cyprus NRP of 2016 points out that the introduction of the GMI is one of the major reforms as regards to the Social Long Term Care programme in the country. As noted in the Commission Staff Working Document for Cyprus 2016,[[56]](#footnote-57) the GMI scheme has replaced the previous public assistance benefit with a top-up allowance required for eligible households to meet their basic needs. The GMI aims to provide assistance to individuals and families that cannot, despite their efforts, gain enough income to support themselves, including people with disabilities. Under the new scheme, basic needs are defined on the basis of a predetermined minimum consumption basket, with additional allowances for housing costs and taxes, and care services. In relation to disability, some special disability benefits are excluded as an income for the estimations of the GMI. These are: any disability allowance, the first €512 of any employment income in cases where the applicant or the husband/wife of the applicant is an individual with disabilities and disability pensions. More details for the GMI are reported in the ANED Country report on Social Protection and Article 28.

The inclusion of people with disabilities in the GMI program was criticised by Disability Organizations on the grounds that the design of the GMI adversely affected the rights and benefits of disabled people from deprived socio-economic backgrounds compared with the Public Assistance that people with disabilities were entitled to prior to the introduction of GMI (Lambrianides 2004).[[57]](#footnote-58) According to the stipulations of the GMI programme, a person who is entitled to receive GMI should have savings that do not exceed € 5000.[[58]](#footnote-59) Given the widespread criticism from Disability organizations and disability advocates (e.g parents of children with disabilities) the GMI Law was amended in order to exempt disabled people from the above-mentioned financial provision. As stated in article 13 of the amended Law (118(1)/2015), this provision is not taken into consideration if the financial resources concerned are necessary ‘for treatment or rehabilitation purposes or for dealing with health or other reasons which are justified on the grounds that the person is disabled’. Currently, the national average poverty risk on the grounds of disability is higher than the EU average, hence it is necessary to address this discrepancy by formulating social policies to address issues of poverty and enhance social inclusion on the grounds of disability. Providing effective measures of support on the grounds of disability necessitates taking into consideration the idiomorphic nature of disability experience, along with the ways in which it is distinguished from, and intersects with, other sources of social disadvantage (e.g Liasidou 2013).[[59]](#footnote-60)

## Synergies between developments in the different areas

Developments in different areas should be carefully considered and reviewed so as to provide a systemic approach to addressing the multifaceted and intersecting nature of social and educational inequalities experienced by disabled individuals.

Given the above considerations, the notion of ‘intersectionality’ (Davies 2008),[[60]](#footnote-61) which denotes the multiple, overlapping and reciprocally reinforcing forms of social disadvantage experienced by disabled individuals, needs to inform policy developments that are geared towards challenging simultaneous forms of discrimination experienced by disabled students (Liasidou, 2013).[[61]](#footnote-62) For instance, a discussion on the accessibility of higher education to disabled individuals should take into consideration the adverse effect of introducing tuition fees in higher education institutions and on prospective disabled students who come from low socio-economic backgrounds. Simultaneously, particular consideration should be given to issues such as disability and housing, and the formulation of social protection policies relevant to disabled people (Liasidou 2014a).[[62]](#footnote-63)

To this end, social and educational policy developments should be informed by an ‘intersectional problematic’ (Skjeie & Langvasbråten 2009, 513),[[63]](#footnote-64) so as to address the overlapping and cumulative ways in which the experience of disability intersects with other sources of social disadvantage. Even though the application of intersectionality in the legal field has been sporadic (Davis 2013),[[64]](#footnote-65) it should be noted that the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities embraces intersectionality by highlighting the ways in which women with disabilities (Article 6) and children with disabilities (Article 7) might experience multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination. At a national level, the Ontario Human Rights Commission has introduced an intersectional approach to discrimination (Davis 2013). According to Ontario Human Rights Commission Report (2001), the Supreme Court of Canada promotes an intersectional analysis of issues of discrimination and marginalisation of particular groups of students, in particular students designated as having SEBD (cited in Cassidy and Jackson 2005).[[65]](#footnote-66) Similarly, a number of court cases in the United States have addressed ‘questions about whether certain groups of children (behaviourally disordered ... learning disabled) are being appropriately identified’ (Rothstein and Johnson 2010, 90).[[66]](#footnote-67)

In spite of the fact that the UNCRPD alludes to the importance of adopting an intersectional approach, the First Report of Cyprus on the Implementation of the Rights of People with Disabilities (Department of Social Inclusion for People with Disabilities, 2013)[[67]](#footnote-68) fails to capture the theoretical, legislative, and policy implications of an intersectional perspective (see Liasidou 2014b).[[68]](#footnote-69)

# Follow up of the European Semester from a disability perspective

## Progress on disability-specific Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs)

There are no disability-specific CSRs for Cyprus.

## Progress on other CSRs from a disability perspective

There were no CSRs for Cyprus in 2015 and there are no specific references to disability in the CSRs for 2016. The references to the lack of capacity to meet demand, to deliver quality job-search assistance and counselling and to reach out to the non-registered unemployed, as well as to lack of universal healthcare system and low participation of the young people in vocational education and training are considerations that concern people with disabilities as well. Progress and assessment of the current situation are discussed in the previous section of this report. At this point it is worth to note that progress is needed (and not noted) regarding issues of independent living, transition to adulthood and employment/vocational training of particular groups of disabilities. Specifically, families of individuals with autism[[69]](#footnote-70) as well as people with intellectual disabilities[[70]](#footnote-71) often express their concern and turn their efforts in negotiating with the State and other stakeholders for provisions on the transition to adulthood.

## Assessment of disability issues in the Country Report (CR)

The Commission Staff Working Document (SWD 2016) discusses, amongst other things, the Cyprus welfare reform mostly focussing on the implementation of the GMI. It highlights that the streamlining and administrative consolidation of benefits outside the GMI, such as specific disability benefits, is proceeding, at a slow pace. The document also assesses that despite changes in the GMI legislation in 2015, which relaxed certain eligibility criteria, the introduction of GMI has led to a lower than expected number of beneficiaries. Prior to the reform, there were 61,500 families receiving social benefits in Cyprus, including pensioners. As of mid-March 2016, beneficiaries under GMI amounted to 25 508 families. The lower number of beneficiaries can be attributed to lower than expected applications by retirees, as well as to a relatively high rejection rate under the GMI criteria (63 % rejection rate), largely due to applicants having assets or deposits exceeding thresholds. Presently, about 27 % of family heads benefiting from GMI are unemployed, 16 % are working poor, 21 % are pensioners, and 36 % are inactive due to disability, domestic care responsibilities or other reasons (statistics provided by the Cyprus Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance).

It also needs noting that the Staff Working Document acknowledges that progress with regard to the healthcare reform is very limited and there is a lack of universal healthcare coverage; this is an issue that adversely affects people with disabilities who cannot access quality healthcare (also see ANED Cyprus reports on Access[[71]](#footnote-72) to and Accessibility of Healthcare).[[72]](#footnote-73) It is indicative, for instance, that people with rheumatic diseases have complained about the fact that their local hospital was scheduled to have a rheumatologist doctor one day per month and they had to wait for over six months in order to see a specialist doctor.[[73]](#footnote-74)

In terms of employment, the Staff Working document highlights that even though the employment rate is increasing, it remains largely below the values reached in the pre-crisis period, when Cyprus was already fulfilling its national target (SWD 2016: 78). Looking into statistics in previous sections as well as data from the Department of Social Inclusion for People with Disabilities Annual reports, it seems that the situation on the employment of people with disabilities employed does not present any improvement.

# Assessment of the structural funds ESIF 2014-2020 or other relevant funds in relation to disability challenges

Disability is mentioned 21 times in the Cyprus national Partnership Agreements for the ESIF period 2014-2020, in the Greek:[[74]](#footnote-75)

* 7 in relation to Employment and Human Resources;
* 1 in the table of the assessment of expected results;
* 5 in the description of the thematic targets mainly under thematic target 9 – social inclusion;
* 7 under the section on the Non-Discrimination Authority mainly in relation to issues of accessibility;
* 1 under the description of areas of vulnerable groups.

Most of the above references are used as part of the terminology of the National Disability Actin Plan and National Disability Strategy, as well as the name of the Department or Social Inclusion for People with Disabilities.

For 2014-2020 the Operational Programme of “Sustainable Development and Competitiveness” does not make any specific reference to people with disabilities in the Beneficiaries List according to the various Priority Axes and Projects.[[75]](#footnote-76) On the other hand, the Operational Programme of “Employment, Human Capital and Social Cohesion” includes people with disabilities in the beneficiaries of Priority Axis 3: Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion in (a) Project: System for the Evaluation of Functionality and Disability), and (b) Project: Incentives to industry for new employment positions: for vulnerable groups including people with disabilities.

The latest available Annual Progress Report (June 2016),[[76]](#footnote-77) refers to disability in the Priority Axis on combating poverty and promoting social inclusion (p. 8) in the description of the new system for the assessment of functionality and disability. The system was funded by ESIF and 1140 individuals have been assessed till the end of 2015. Till 2023 the aim is 14500 persons with disabilities to be benefited under the ESIF for the priority of combating poverty and promoting social inclusion.[[77]](#footnote-78)

Τhe Evaluation Plan[[78]](#footnote-79) for both Operational Programmes – “Sustainable Development and Competitiveness” and “Employment, Human Capital and Social Cohesion” – for 2014-2020 includes issues of disability in objectives on Promotion of Social Inclusion and combating poverty and discrimination (p. 11), specifically referring to evaluation of the policy of the OPs for promoting gender equality, and equal opportunities for access of people with disabilities (p. 31). Specifically, for the evaluation of the impact of the interventions in the spectrum of both the OP indicative questions for evaluation include issues of impact on the opportunities provided for people with disabilities in relation to equal opportunities on access (p. 51), on education, on positive actions that included people with disabilities such as inclusion in the labour market, and examples of good and bad practices for including/excluding people with disabilities (p. 55). The evaluation plan with respect to the impact of the interventions within both OP on issues of people with disabilities is anticipated to begin in 2019 (table page 58 of the Plan document), with duration of about 8 months and the cost of € 70.000.

The Evaluation Report of the “Service Provision for the Estimation of the Interventions of the Common Support of the ESIF and the Youth Employment Initiative Including the Implementation of the “Guarantee for the Youth” regarding the Inclusion Young People in the Labour Market” (Operational Programme: Employment, Human Capital and Social Cohesion),[[79]](#footnote-80) has examined disability issues and showed that the Youth Employment Initiative does not make any specific reference to marginalised groups (including people with disability)

No Evaluation Reports for the Operational Programme: “Sustainable Development and Competitiveness for 2014-2020 are yet available on the website of the Cyprus Structural Funds.

The older evaluation reports (2007-2013) are not available any more. Information can be found on the 2015 ANED EU2020 country report.

# Recommendations

## Employment

Despite the introduction of legislative mandates to enhance the inclusion of disabled people in labor market, there are still many issues that need to be addressed in order to facilitate access to the labor market especially in light of high levels of unemployment amongst the general population due to the recent fiscal crisis. Another significant issue that needs to be taken into consideration is the prevalence of discriminatory attitudes towards persons with disabilities who are denied access to work and employment both in the private and public sector (Damianidou and Phtiaka 2010).[[80]](#footnote-81)

A considerable number of work-related discriminatory Incidences of people with disabilities in Cyprus have been investigated by the office of the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights (Ombudsman).[[81]](#footnote-82) An indicative example is the case of a disabled employee of the Cyprus' public broadcasting service (CyBC)- who became disabled after a car accident four years ago. The CYBC refused to make reasonable accommodations so as to meet disability-related needs and as a result, the disabled employee had to resign (Fileleftheros 26 March 2015).[[82]](#footnote-83)

Understandably, legislative changes aimed at enhancing the employment of persons with disabilities need to be ushered in by a number of other measures and monitoring mechanisms so as to oversee the implementation process and to address issues related to discriminatory attitudes and practices towards persons with disabilities.

## Education

Reducing the numbers of early school leavers and enhancing accessibility to Higher Education on the grounds of disability necessitates creating quality early years, primary and secondary school settings for learner diversity. Early SEN/D identification and intervention should be mandated across early years’ and primary school providers. Early intervention should be applied through universal screening assessments so as to single out students at risk in terms of reading and behaviour. This approach necessitates establishing early childhood intervention (ECI) services that are necessary for children from birth to three or five years old who have developmental delays, disabilities, chronic illness as well as other biographical conditions that call for more intensive and focused forms of intervention and support ( see Vargas-Barόn 2014).[[83]](#footnote-84) Even though ECI services have been established in many countries across the globe, such a prospect has not even been discussed in the Cypriot context bearing in mind that the official special education legislation stipulates that the responsibility of the state in meeting the needs of children designated as having special educational needs and/or disabilities starts at the age of 3 and not earlier.

At the same time, an early intervention approach necessitates establishing high levels of school and teacher accountability regimes for disabled students’ learning in terms of providing quality and evidence-based instruction in general classrooms. This is again something that the Cypriot education system has been criticized for as there is patent lack of professional accountability not only in terms of disabled students’ learning but for all students’ learning.[[84]](#footnote-85)

Moreover, it is imperative that national data on disability is improved, standardized and consistently reviewed so as to understand the barriers that disabled people experience in their daily lives, with a view to formulating/revising relevant policies and devising national action plans to address gaps in policy and provision. At the same time, it is important to note that there is patent lack of data on the quality of the learning support provided to students designated as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEN/D), along with the impact of this support on students’ progress. This kind of data is crucially important in order to promote accountability with regard to the educational outcomes of students with SEN/D and by implication, to reduce the numbers of early school leavers on the grounds of disability.

As far as disability accessibility in Higher Education is concerned, even in cases whereby higher education institutions provide some kind of disability support services, these forms of support reﬂect an individual pathology approach that is focused on ‘caring for and compensating disabled students’ (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2013).[[85]](#footnote-86) Disability support services are thus largely seen as being distinct from the role of the academic tutor in embedding exclusionary regimes into the learning process and the student–tutor relationship. As a result, it is occasionally the case that disabled students are segregated from their nondisabled peers so as to have additional time during exams. In certain instances, segregation does not only result from the necessity of giving extra time during exams; rather the allocation of a ‘separate room’ is presented as an autonomous ‘exam access arrangement’ for disabled students. In so doing, disabled students are singled out as being ‘different’ and in need of compensatory measures of support (Madriaga, Hanson, Kay & Walker, 2011).[[86]](#footnote-87) These practices are antithetical to the principles of an inclusive discourse that is geared towards the necessity of responding to learner diversity without having recourse to segregating and stigmatising forms of provision.

Negative attitudes are also prevalent among non-disabled students–something that is responsible for the social isolation of disabled students in higher education institutions. This parameter is occasionally omitted when discussing issues of enhancing one’s participation in higher education and raises signiﬁcant concerns about the necessity of placing a more pronounced emphasis on understanding the overall educational experiences of this group of students (Sachs and Schreuer 2011).[[87]](#footnote-88) At the same time, particular consideration should also be given to the fact that disabled individuals do not form a homogeneous group of students. The differing nature of disabilities necessitates transcending the dualistic logic of the disabled/non-disabled distinction so as to understand the ways in which different kinds of disability evoke different sociocultural responses as well as different experiential embodiments of disability. This point also relates to the different degrees of privilege afforded to certain disabled students in accessing existing disability-related support services and procedures. Riddell, Tinklin and Wilson (2005)[[88]](#footnote-89) explain the ways in which the latter tend to beneﬁt male, middle-class students with speciﬁc learning difﬁculties such as dyslexia, for example.

## Poverty and social inclusion

In general, beyond rhetorical statements, national targets and disability action plans, it is important that countries provide systematic and reliable evidence-based information on the ways in which disability rights initiatives are facilitated and implemented. Providing and constantly updating national data on disability needs to be pursued in more rigorous and consistent ways at European and national levels. Independent monitoring and reviewing of international and national bodies (e.g. academic institutions), additional to the Authority for the Promotion of the Rights of People with Disabilities (Ombudsman’s Office) should be established so as to oversee planning and implementation strategies under the UNCRPD, which actually requires the involvement of a wide range of actors. At present the competent focal point is the Department of Social Inclusion for People with Disabilities, which takes on any matters relevant to disability activity (e.g. ESF Monitoring and Evaluation). Nevertheless, the Department is also the policy maker and implementing body for disability related issues. As a result, no external feedback (and probably unbiased) is provided regarding issues of disability, other than the Authority for the Promotion of the Rights of People with Disabilities (Ombudsman’s Office), established in 2012. Individual academic research is performed sporadically, but rarely taken into consideration by the governmental bodies. Hence, it is recommended that Monitoring bodies should collaborate and empowered by the presence of academia where wide range data can be collected from scientific independent research.

For instance, National Reports on the Implementation of the Rights of People with Disabilities should provide evidence-based data on the progress achieved so far. In spite of the fact that the First Report of Cyprus on the Implementation of the UNCRPD (Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities/Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2013), suggests that one of the strengths of the Cypriot socio-political context in relation to promoting and safeguarding disability rights is the existence of “a modern and powerful legal framework … for the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities, including general and specific laws in every aspect” (p. 3), a critical overview of the existing legislative and policy context suggest quite the opposite (see Liasidou 2014b).[[89]](#footnote-90)

Greater transparency of data on disability necessitates establishing independent bodies in order to collect relevant data and monitor the formulation and implementation of disability action plans to give effect to national obligations under the UNCRPD. Even though The Republic of Cyprus ratified the UNCRPD in 2011 (Law of 2011, N.8 (III)/2011), progress has been questionable, despite instances of laudable rhetoric articulated in the First Report of Cyprus on the Implementation of the Rights of people with Disabilities (Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities/Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2013). Even though the professed intention of this Report is to document progress achieved so far in terms of the implementation of the CRPD, it has been criticised in relation to its promotion and safeguarding of disability rights (see Liasidou 2014).[[90]](#footnote-91)

Given the above considerations, the EU should provide more detailed guidelines, harmonization criteria and should establish international and independent local monitoring bodies in order to enhance national accountability regimes on safeguarding disability rights in accordance with the stipulations of the UNCRPD. Simultaneously, there should be a more pronounced emphasis on reviewing and monitoring the ways in which EU structural funds are utilized in order to mobilize and enact reforms in light of the principles of the UNCRPD.

# **Appendix I**

**Section 2.1.5: Alternative data on disability and tertiary education provided by the national expert**

**Detailed data on students with disabilities in Cyprus Universities for the period of 2011-2015**

**Table: Cyprus University of Technology – Students per disability**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2011-12** | **2012-13** | **2013-14** | **2014-15** |
| Hearing Impairment | 9 | 7 | 7 |  |
| Visual Impairment | 4 | 4 | 4 |  |
| Learning Disabilities | 31 | 33 | 37 |  |
| Epilepsy | 1 | 1 | 0 |  |
| Health Issues (incl diabetes, cardio, cancer, other pathological issues) | 20 | 28 | 33 |  |
| Muscular Disabilities | 2 | 3 | 2 |  |
| Physical Disabilities (incl orthopaedics & CP) | 8 | 15 | 12 |  |
| Psycho/Emotional difficulties | 3 | 7 | 12 |  |
| **Total** | **78** | **98** | **107** |  |

**Table: University of Cyprus – Students per disability**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2011-12** | **2012-13** | **2013-14** | **2014-15** |
| Visual Impairment | 15 | 14 | 12 | 10 |
| Hearing Impairment | 12 | 10 | 12 | 15 |
| Physical Disabilities | 21 | 16 | 20 | 17 |
| Learning Disabilities | 15 | 26 | 31 | Not available \* |
| Psychological-Emotional Difficulties |  51 | 48 | 51 | Not available |
| Health Problems (incl. epilepsy, mls, etc) | 99 | 108 | 119 | 118 |
| **Total** | **162** | **222** | **245** | **160** |
| *\*Not available yet: The university did not collect the data yet* |

**Table: Open University Cyprus – Students per disability**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2011-12** | **2012-13** | **2013-14** | **2014-15** |
| Hearing Impairment | 3 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| Visual Impairment | 6 | 4 | 5 | 2 |
| Physical Disabilities | 5 | 9 | 11 | 4 |
| Intellectual / Emotional Disabilities  | 0  | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Speech & Language Difficulties | 2 | 7 | 7 | 5 |
| Epilepsy  | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0  |
| MLS  | 0  | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| Other | 7 | 9 | 15 | 2 |
| **Total** | **24** | **40** | **48** | **19** |

**Table: European University Cyprus – Students per disability**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2011-12** | **2012-13** | **2013-14** | **2014-15** |
| Hearing Impairment | 9 | Not available | 15 | 17 |
| Visual Impairment | 6 | Not available | 8 | 5 |
| Physical Disabilities | 0 | Not available | 3 | 3 |
| Emotional / Behavioural Disabilities  | 9 | Not available | 20 | 20 |
| Down Syndrome | 0 | Not available | 1 | 1 |
| Autistic Spectrum Disorder | 0 | Not available | 1 | 1 |
| Learning Disabilities | 9 | Not available | 66 | 87 |
| Health Problems | 7 | Not available | 31 | 30 |
| Multiple Disabilities | 0 | Not available | 2 | 2 |
| ADHD | 5 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| Other | 1 | Not available | 28 | 31 |
| **Total** | **46** | **152** | **175** | **197** |

**Table: University of Nicosia – Students per disability**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2011-12** | **2012-13** | **2013-14** | **2014-15** |
| Anorexia Nevrosa | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Anxiety | 0 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Asperger Syndrome | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Dyspraxia | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Epilepsy | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Hearing Impaired | 5 | 4 | 5 | 3 |
| Hydrocephaly | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Multiple Sclerosis | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Neuroblastoma | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Panic Attacks | 3 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| Psychological Problems | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Transplantation | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Visually Impaired | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Dyslexia |  21 | 31 | 32 | Not available yet\* |
| Learning Difficulties | 5 | 0 | 8 | Not available yet |
| ADHD | 7 | 5 | 0 | Not available yet |
| Attention Difficulties | 3 | 2 | 8 | Not available yet |
| Hyperactivity | 0 | 1 | 1 | Not available yet |
| Tetraplegic | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| Thoracic Outlet Syndrome | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Allergic to insects | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Arthrogryphosis | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Congenital Heart Disease | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Developmental Delay | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Depression | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Juvenile Arthritis | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Hand Surgery | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Heart Problem | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Hodgkin’s Lyphoma | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Muscle Problems | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Diabetes | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Hypertension | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Ocher | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Phocomelia | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Scoptic Sensitivity Syndrome | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Sjogrens Syndrome | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Other | 9 | 9 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total** | **57** | **68** | **87** | **32** |
|  | ***\*****Not available yet: The university did not collect the data yet* |

**Table: Neapolis University – Students per disability**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2011-2012** | **2012-2013** | **2013-2014** | **2014-2015** |
| Hearing Impairment | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Learning Disabilities (Dyslexia) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Epilepsy | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| **Total** | **1** | **3** | **6** | **5** |

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