

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

Country: Cyprus
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Background:

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

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

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

The first version of the report was published in 2008. This is the second version of the report updated with information available up to November 2009.



Summary of changes since 2008

Generally speaking, policies for the social protection and social inclusion of disabled people remain the same as those in previous years. According to the National Strategy Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008 – 2010 (Republic of Cyprus 2008), the national priorities for 2008-2010 are:

1. Reducing the risk of poverty and social exclusion
2. Promoting active integration of vulnerable groups of the population into the labour market
3. Preventing the social exclusion of children
4. Modernising institutions for strengthening procedures and policies for social cohesion

Despite an expressed commitment to maximizing the social inclusion of all vulnerable groups, no further measures were taken in 2009 and in 2010. Perhaps, the most important development is the establishment of the Department of Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities, which replaced another department known as the Service for the Care of Disabled People. This department aims to put disability issues under one umbrella and to facilitate disabled people's social inclusion in all areas of life. However, it is still early days to comment upon the possible impact of the policies and actions taken on behalf of this Department on disabled people's lives.

Housing and homelessness

Housing options for disabled people remain the same as those reported in the previous ANED report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. Homelessness is not an important issue in Cyprus as it is still a rare phenomenon. This explains why there is no official data regarding homelessness in general, or homelessness and disabled people.

New strategies and actions for the inclusion of disabled people

A new department has been set up, namely the Department of Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities¹, which aims to organize all services offered to disabled people under a new and more effective framework. This department replaced another, known as the Service for the Care of Disabled People. The area of social inclusion is a fundamental priority of the newly established department (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2009).

New changes in incomes, benefits and pensions

There have been no changes in incomes, benefits and pensions, except for the modification of all amounts in euros, which are reported in the updated detailed report.

New changes in long-term care and support

According to the 2009 Annual Report of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance (Republic of Cyprus, 2009), the Department of Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities works towards the development of a unified disability assessment plan, which is expected to facilitate disabled people's inclusion at different levels (society, education, employment). It is expected that this will contribute to disabled people's social inclusion as it will facilitate access to several benefits and schemes without having to go through bureaucratic processes as was the case until recently.

Implications of the economic crisis

Unfortunately, no specific information on disabled people's social inclusion in the light of the international economic crisis was found.

¹ www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf



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Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance (2008) *National Strategy Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008 – 2010.*

Websites

Department of Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities, www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf



PART ONE: SOCIAL INCLUSION PLANS (GENERAL)

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

According to the National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, (Republic of Cyprus 2008), the priorities of the National Strategy for Social Inclusion (NSSI) for 2008-2010 are:

5. Reducing the risk of poverty and social exclusion
6. Promoting active integration of vulnerable groups of the population into the labour market
7. Preventing the social exclusion of children
8. Modernising institutions for strengthening procedures and policies for social cohesion

As mentioned in this report, (Republic of Cyprus 2008: 14), 'during the period 2006-2008, all the measures/actions/operations that are mentioned in the NSSI 2006-2008 continued to be implemented, giving special emphasis to the achievement of the targets and priorities that had been set'.

According to the National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (Republic of Cyprus 2006), measures aiming at integrating vulnerable groups into the labour market focus on increasing the participation of older persons (aged 55-64), women, disabled people, public assistance recipients and unemployed people in general. The NSSI 2006-2008 lists the existing employment schemes run by the state (Disabled People's Self-Employment Scheme, Disabled People's Vocational Rehabilitation Scheme in Areas not offered in the Centre for the Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled People, Supported Employment Scheme and Establishment and Functioning of Small Business Units for the Self-Employment of Disabled People Scheme). It also notes that measures are being undertaken to improve access of disabled people to buildings, streets and public transport, as well as by promoting their integration into the labour market and by improving their financial assistance benefits.

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

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

Disabled people are treated as a separate group which is supported in employment through specific schemes. Children with special needs are expected to be educated in mainstream schools, but in special units by special teachers. This medically oriented approach promotes segregation, regardless the stated intention to promote integration.



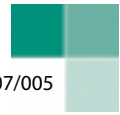
Thus, social inclusion seems to be a concept that is understood differently by state officials who promote social, educational and vocational segregation instead.

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

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

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

There are two other important pieces of legislation that are indirectly related to the issue of disabled people's social inclusion. First, it is important to mention the law named 'Hiring People with Disabilities in the Greater Public Sector Law' (N. 146(I)/2009). The Law came into force on the 23rd of December 2009 and it aims to minimize the exclusion of disabled people from the workforce by introducing a hiring quota of 10% in the public sector. The passing of this Law was necessary as Cyprus had to be at par with international and European conventions and directions regarding the inclusion of disabled people in employment. Second, with regard to children with special needs, another important legislation is in force, the 1999 Education of Children with Special Needs Act (N.113(I)/1999). This law, quite similar to the 1981 Education Act which passed in the UK two decades earlier, introduced the concept of 'special educational needs' and legitimized the integration of children with special needs in the mainstream school system without abolishing special schooling. However, most of the rhetoric for integration, or even inclusion, does not correspond to existing practice. The dominant way of thinking is that of segregation, and thus, state officials often list the numbers of special units, special teachers and special programmes, in an effort to convince the public that 'special' attention is given to children with special needs and a considerable budget is allocated for their support. Moreover, special education is organisationally considered as a distinct educational service. Special Teachers are inspected by Inspectors of Special Education, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators liaise between Special Teachers and Inspectors of Special Educations, a Special Education Counsellor provides guidance to Special Teachers who need it and a Special Education Co-ordinator manages all programmes related to the education of children with special needs. Disability organisations, although they were involved in the negotiations prior to the passing of the law, expressed no interest in the educational developments and practices that followed. Specific parents' organizations are more actively involved in this process, although frequently, they too exert pressure towards segregation rather than inclusion direction, driven by their belief that they can secure special treatment for their groups of children (Symeonidou, 2007).

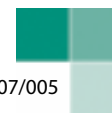


1.3: What is the most recent research about disabled people's equality and social inclusion in your country?

Research about disabled people's equality and social inclusion in Cyprus is extremely limited.

Disabled people's experiences in the Cypriot culture and in disability politics is recorded in a recent research project with a qualitative – historical character (Symeonidou, 2005a). Documentary data and disabled activists' narratives indicate that disabled people experience segregation, disappointment, limited opportunities for education and employment, societal prejudice and inertia from the state. However, most disabled respondents state that looking back, the situation for disabled people has improved, as a result of disability activism. All these developments should be placed in the context of a traditionally exclusionary culture towards disabled people described in detail elsewhere (Phtiaka, 2003; Symeonidou, forthcoming). However, more research data are needed in order to be able to form the whole picture of the inequalities or exclusionary practices experienced by different groups of disabled people.

An important area of research in Cyprus is that of special/inclusive education. Arguably, there are important research findings regarding the inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream schools (Phtiaka 2007; 2008), an area which is indirectly related to the general issue of equality and social inclusion. In particular, the evaluation of the implementation of the integration law prepared for the Ministry of Education and Culture (Phtiaka, Michaelidou, Tsouris and Vlami, 2005) provides research evidence to suggest that the infrastructure for the integration of children with special needs is still poor. There are gaps between policy and practice, parents of children with special needs experience frustration from the school system and special educational needs co-ordinators complain about workload and difficulties in fulfilling their obligations. Furthermore, other research papers report that school culture or the 'hidden curriculum' promote charitable feelings towards disabled people (Symeonidou, 2005b). Teachers are trapped in the medical and charity ideas cultivated for many years in Cypriot society (Symeonidou, 2009) and they transmit them to non-disabled children when they have the opportunity.



PART TWO: INCOMES, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

2.1 Research publications (key points)

Unfortunately, there is no recent research on poverty, income or pensions/benefits for different groups of disabled people. The only reports that provide basic information on the issues of poverty and pensions are the National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, (Republic of Cyprus, 2006; 2008). However, both reports refer only to poverty rates of elderly people and gender differences among elderly people with regard to poverty. The reports also refer to pension rates with regard to the different age groups of the population, gender differences and the characteristics of households. Evidently, it is important to design and implement long-term research projects to record data about poverty, income or pensions/benefits for disabled people in Cyprus, including the poverty or income of different groups of disabled people, disabled women, ethnic minorities etc.

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

The Department of Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities runs several benefit schemes (Republic of Cyprus, 2009) which are explained below:

- Severe Mobility Impairment Benefit: This scheme is addressed to paraplegic and quadriplegic persons. The monthly allowance for 2009 was €316,59. This amount is subject to changes every six months, according to the cost-of-living index.
- Care Benefit: This benefit is addressed to paraplegics and quadriplegics who are in need of personal care due to wheelchair use and limited body functioning. In 2009, the care benefit for paraplegics was €350 and for quadriplegics €854.30 per month.
- Financial Assistance for Technical Equipment Benefit: This benefit is addressed to disabled people, aiming to improve their quality of life by technical means that contribute to their autonomy at the workplace and at home. In 2009 a total of €641,681 was spent on 396 recipients.
- Financial Assistance for Wheelchairs Benefit for People with Severe Mobility Impairment: This scheme has been in force since 1999. In 2009, a total of € 213,343 was spent on 152 individuals who applied for a wheelchair.
- Holidays for Disabled People Benefit: This scheme sponsors the holidays of disabled people and their families in hotels around Cyprus. This benefit is allocated to disabled people who are not recipients of any other benefit. In 2009, 684 applications were approved and a total of €481,058 was spent.

According to the Annual Report of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance (Republic of Cyprus, 2009), the following amounts were allocated to the stated numbers of individuals in 2009:

	Recipients	Amount allocated €
Severe Mobility Impairment Benefit	1473	5,632,590
Care Benefit		6,068,900
a. for paraplegics	153	
b. for quadriplegics	460	
Financial Assistance for Technical Equipment Benefit	396	641,381
Financial Assistance for Wheelchairs Benefit for People with Severe Mobility Impairment	152	213,342
Wheelchair Distribution Scheme	684	481,058
Total	4,280	13,037,271

Importantly, there is also a Public Assistance Allowance which is allocated to specific groups of the population in an attempt to reduce the risk of poverty. According to the National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2009) the Public Assistance Allowance ensures the right to a decent standard of living through the provision of financial assistance and/or social services to persons whose resources are not sufficient to meet their basic and special needs as determined by legislation. Basic needs include food, clothing and footwear, electricity, supply of water, healthy living conditions and pocket money allowance. Special needs include rent, special diet and disability allowances, as well as allowances for home care, day care and residential care. It is also possible to provide assistance for house repairs, mortgage interest, heating etc. The rates of public assistance allowances are indexed annually to a special consumer price index for selected goods and services that cover basic needs. Public Assistance Allowances increased by 6.6% between July 2003 and July 2005 and is expected to continue to be indexed under the existing arrangement.

According to the National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2009), for 2009 the current monthly rate of allowance for basic need was:

- for the recipient (head of household), €452
- for every dependant aged 14+, €226
- for every dependent aged <14, €135.60

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

It may be noted that under the revised Public Assistance and Services Act (N. 95(I)/2006), several adaptations were made to increase the incomes of public assistance recipients and encourage their integration into the labour market.

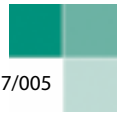
According to the 2009 Annual Report (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2009) there are two schemes for elderly and disabled people:

- Reinforcement of Families Scheme for Caring about the Elderly or/and Disabled Members of the Family: This scheme allocates up to €12,000 for changes in buildings so that they become accessible for elderly or disabled residents. In 2009, a total of €63,581 was allocated to 9 families.
- Sponsoring of Holidays Schemes for Elderly People and for Disabled People who are also Recipients of the Public Assistance Allowance: This scheme sponsors holidays in Cyprus for elderly people (aged 63+) and disabled people who are also recipients of the Public Assistance Allowance. In 2009, a total of €139,420 was allocated to 336 applicants.

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

2.3 Policy and practice (summary)

The financial income of disabled people is not an important political question at this time. Although disabled people are not satisfied with the allowances and the procedures that have to be followed in order to be eligible to benefits, it appears that the present situation is generally accepted. The current levels of pensions and benefits are quite low and disabled people frequently face the dilemma of whether to pursue paid employment or to live on the public allowance. When a disabled person is in paid employment, s/he cannot receive public allowances.



Another issue that causes frustration to disabled people with severe mobility impairments (paraplegic and quadriplegic people) is that they are obliged to appear annually in front of a doctors' committee to confirm the persistence of their impairment in order to be eligible for the relevant benefit. This is humiliating for this group of disabled people who are aware that their condition is irreversible.



PART THREE: CARE AND SUPPORT

3.1 Recent research publications (key points)

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

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

In Cyprus, care for disabled people takes three forms: institutionalized care, care provided in 'houses in the community' and care provided at home. Initially, institutionalized care was considered the best solution for adults with mental impairments. Historically, parents of children with mental impairments pursued this form of care as they believed that it would offer a safe place for their children to live while at the same time the rest of the family could go on with their lives (Symeonidou, 2005; 2007). Today, there are state institutions and private institutions; the latter are sponsored by charitable funds or donations from wealthy people. According to the 2009 Annual Report (Republic of Cyprus, 2009), in 2009, there were 5 state institutions for disabled adults supervised by the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance. Deinstitutionalization is now encouraged through the 'houses in the community': these represent a relatively new way of caring for disabled people. The general idea behind these houses is that adults with mental impairments should be de-institutionalized and they should have the opportunity to have a better standard of living compared to that offered in institutions. In practice, a house is found in a neighbourhood and 4-5 people with mental impairments are 'chosen' to live together with the support of specialized staff. Here, individuals are encouraged to develop social skills, enrol in everyday life activities (employment, shopping, social visits) and are supported in developing personal relationships where possible. There are currently 9 'houses in the community' sponsored by the state. Most of these are co-funded by charities or, in some cases, by the parents of people with mental impairments. Last but not least, there is the option of care provided at home, which is often preferred by people with severe mobility problems or chronic illnesses. In this case, disabled people are expected to make use of the public allowance they receive or severe mobility impairment benefit in order to hire a personal assistant. There is no availability of temporary care services.

As far as work rehabilitation services are concerned, there is one state centre, the Centre for the Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled People, which offers training in specific areas that are now considered outdated: shoe making, furniture making, carpentry, sewing and embroidery. According to the 2009 Annual Report (Republic of Cyprus, 2009), the Centre also employs disabled trainees who are able to participate in production and it allocates them a production allowance alongside a training allowance. Apart from the sheltered employment provided at the Centre for the Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled People, there are other sheltered employment workshops directed to people with specific types of impairments (for example sheltered employment for people with visual impairments who are trained to make items out of straw – baskets, etc. – and sheltered employment for people with hearing impairments who are trained in carpentry and furniture making). Last but not least, the Department of Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities, which belongs to the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, runs programmes that encourage the training and employment of disabled people.

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



These difficulties are also reported in the website of the Design Bureau for the Accessibility of Persons with Disability², which is one of the departments of the Ministry of Communications and Works. The Design Bureau is involved in pilot programmes and it undertakes important initiatives for the improvement of accessibility and transportation for disabled people. However, there is still a long way to go until all these initiatives are legitimized and implemented.

² <http://www.mcw.gov.cy/mcw/dbpd/disabledaccess.nsf/index/index?opendocument>



PART FOUR: SUMMARY INFORMATION

4.1 Conclusions and recommendations (summary)

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

4.2 One example of best practice (brief details)

One example of good practice is the pilot programme for accessibility run by the Ministry of Communications and Works through the Design Bureau for the Accessibility of Persons with Disability³. This programme was approved by the Council of Ministers in 2002, after a proposal by the Ministry of Communications and Works and the Technical Committee for Facilitating People's Access. Important public buildings were included in this pilot programme, such as the Nicosia Archaeological Museum, the Limassol Pattihiion Municipality Theatre, the Nicosia Post Office Main Building, open public areas, Makarios Avenue and the Cyprus Tourist Organization Beach in Larnaca. Taxi transport for disabled people was also one of the priorities of the pilot programme.

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

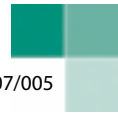
These initiatives were extremely important because as a minimum public buildings and main avenues should become accessible to disabled people.

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