



# **Mutual Learning Programme**

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

**Peer Country Comments Paper – Cyprus**

## **Disabilities and Public Employment Services**

**Peer Review on “Employer service delivery”**

**26-28 October 2020**



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Unit A1

Contact: Kim Henriksson

E-mail: [EMPL-A1-UNIT@ec.europa.eu](mailto:EMPL-A1-UNIT@ec.europa.eu)

Web site: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/mlp>

European Commission

B-1049 Brussels

# **Mutual Learning Programme**

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

*Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion*  
*Peer Review on "Employer service delivery"*  
*26-28 October 2020*

**Europe Direct is a service to help you find answers  
to your questions about the European Union.**

**Freephone number (\*):**

**00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11**

(\* ) The information given is free, as are most calls (though some operators, phone boxes or hotels may charge you).

#### **LEGAL NOTICE**

The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission

This document has received financial support from the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation "EaSI" (2014-2020). For further information, please consult: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi>

© European Union, **2020**

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

## Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
2	Situation in the peer country.....	1
3	National Policies and measures .....	1
3.1	The situation of PWD prior to the last decade.....	1
3.2	Strengthening the social safety network since 2010 and the PES.....	2
3.3	The role of the PES in implementing policies for PWD.....	3
4	Assessment of success factors and transferability .....	5
5	Questions .....	5
6	List of references.....	6
Annex 1	Summary table .....	7
Annex 2	Example of relevant practice.....	8
Annex 3	.....	9

## **1 Introduction**

This paper has been prepared for the Peer Review on "Employer service delivery" within the framework of the Mutual Learning Programme. It provides a comparative assessment of the policy example of the host country and the situation in Cyprus.<sup>1</sup> For information on the host country policy example, please refer to the Host Country Discussion Paper. Assessment and transferability issues are summarised in section 4. Annex 3 provides further details. This paper was written and submitted within deadlines determined prior to Covid-19; the ensuing pandemic and measures taken in Cyprus to cope with it affected all individuals and persons with disabilities in notable ways which are beyond the scope of this paper.

## **2 Situation in the peer country**

Policy initiatives for persons with disabilities (PWD) and the capacity of the Public Employment Services (PES) to implement them are influenced by the economic environment. The international crisis of 2008, which affected Cyprus mostly in 2009, contributed to the development of a serious, Cyprus-specific, crisis in 2012. The latter, led to a rescue package, known as the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), with the European Union, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. The MoU was in effect until April 2016, but the implementation of its provisions is still continuing.<sup>2</sup> This challenging period led to an increase in unemployment (from 3.7% in 2008 to 16.1% in 2014) and a substantial burden on the social safety network. Especially effected were the PES, whose officers were forced to handle a quadrupling of the unemployment rate and the provisions of new policies about persons with disabilities (PWD) and low-income households. During the crisis, the PES could devote little personal attention to the needs of the unemployed and PWD beyond ensuring that those already entitled to support continued to receive it.

The Cyprus crisis drove home the fragile conditions under which the unemployed, PWD and low-income households were called upon to survive. This realisation accelerated improvements in policy and their implementation. A national strategy and action plan for disabilities was adopted in 2018. A Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) programme for households, which also contains provision for PWD, was introduced in 2015, producing increased and novel responsibilities for the PES. Among other things, this necessitated careful determination of the work capacity of PWD and a professional programme to achieve this was introduced. As the crisis receded, beginning with positive GDP growth in 2015 (3.4%), 30 additional officers were made available to the PES, substantially improving their skillset and the quality of service that they could offer. These developments are explored in the next section.

## **3 National Policies and measures**

### **3.1 The situation of PWD prior to the last decade**

As late as 2010, the situation for PWD in Cyprus was challenging. In cities, whose basic layout was established before motorised vehicles became dominant, major accessibility challenges existed and society did not fully appreciate the needs and aspirations of PWD. They were generally looked after by members of their family, though exceptional charitable efforts ameliorated the situation for a small number of PWD. Government

---

<sup>1</sup> This review has benefited from discussions with PES and other officers at the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (MLWSI). Helpful comments were received from Marios Evgeniou, Lysandros Lysandrou, Elena Syvitanidou and Maria-Christina Tsioppourian. However, the views expressed here and any errors are my own.

<sup>2</sup> During the international crisis, Cyprus experienced a decline in real GDP in only one year, viz. 2009 (-2%). Cyprus applied for external financial assistance in 2012 and a formal MoU was signed in April 2013. During the crisis, real GDP declined in three consecutive years, viz. 2012 (-3.4%), 2013 (-6.6%), and 2014 (-1.9%).

programmes addressing the needs of the disabled were not extensive and did not have internal consistency. PWD were less likely to be active and, if they were, they were more likely to be unemployed, hence the need for PES interventions. For data on this claim, see Republic of Cyprus, Peer Review Comments (2018, p.1).

### **3.2 Strengthening the social safety network since 2010 and the PES**

During the last decade, important policy developments for PWD have occurred. Cyprus ratified the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its optional Protocol in 2011 [Law (N8(III)/2011)]. The Pancyprian Council for Persons with Disabilities (PCPD) has been coordinating the provisions of this Convention. The Department for the Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (DSIPWD), in the Ministry of Labour, Welfare, and Social Insurance (MLWSI), is responsible for the implementation of disability policies.<sup>3</sup> The *First National Strategy for Disabilities (2018-2028)* and the accompanying *Second National Action Plan for Disabilities (2018-2020)* appeared in 2018 – see MLWSI (2018). This joint document is in line with the *European Disability Strategy 2010-2020* and the *Council of Europe Disability Strategy 2017-2023*. A number of ministries are involved in executing the National Action Plan.<sup>4</sup>

The implementation of the *National Strategy* and *Second Action Plan* has led to modifications in existing legislation but also to new legislation, administrative decisions, budgetary provisions for certain measures and actions, and the commitment of personnel to particular units. Some programmes within the new strategy are co-funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). The DSIPWD is the focal point in the public service for matters relating to disability. The implementation of the *National Strategy* and *Action Plan* is also monitored by the PCPD and other governmental institutions. The PES reside within the Department of Labour, in the MLWSI and are organised along the six administrative Districts of Cyprus. They liaise with local employers, set up meetings with them to establish their needs, and arrange for interviews with evaluated, suitable, PWD seeking work; this is done singly, or in groups, when a number of positions are available by an employer. The PES liaise with the EU PES network and have benefited from their advice through the Mutual Assistance Project. The size of the island and the fact that most employers are small firms or single proprietorships limits the benefits from dedicating PES officers to sectors; it also ensures that a high degree of co-ordination exists among all the District Offices.

Another major social policy development affecting the work of the PES was the establishment, in 2015, of the GMI programme, which supplements the income of households in need but also takes on board the special needs of the disabled.<sup>5</sup> PWD who are entitled to the GMI are eligible, in addition to the generic GMI support, to a disability allowance and can also benefit from policies aiding their social inclusion, including help from the PES to find suitable employment – see MLWSI (2018, pp. 15-16). The new policies for PWD produced added responsibilities for the PES, among which was the assessment of the nature and degree of incapacity of PWD. When a partial ability to work is determined, the PES need to establish the type of suitable work. There is also the task of finding an employer who is willing and able to hire PWD, a challenge familiar to the readers of the Host Country Paper. In Cyprus, this is done by targeting employers, normally the larger ones, who have a variety of positions and can accommodate PWD with the needed credentials. Much is accomplished through direct, personal, contact with employers, establishing their needs, and attempting to offer solutions. PES officers have mentioned that, although large employers may offer more possibilities of

---

<sup>3</sup> Because of its central role in implementing the wide spectrum of policies available for PWD, its latest report (DSIPWD, 2018c) appears as Annex 3 to this study.

<sup>4</sup> Beyond MLWSI, these include the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Public Works, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Energy, Industry and Commerce.

<sup>5</sup> See also MLWSI (2018, points 9 and 15). It should be noted that Phase III of the GMI will force all recipients who are able to work to participate in the labour market.

employment, smaller employers or single proprietors have come forward and offered employment to PWD in an effort to be socially helpful.

Mention should also be made of the establishment of a National Health System in 2019. While this is a major new initiative which will impact PWD as well as the population generally, responsibility for this lies with the Ministry of Health. It does not involve the PES directly and will not be considered in this paper any further. No doubt new challenges and policies will materialise, but, fortunately, GDP growth has returned, facilitating improvements in the design and implementation of the social safety network. Given the aims of this Peer Review, attention is now focussed on issues that involve the PES and may be of interest to all Member States. Five such areas are considered.

### **3.3 The role of the PES in implementing policies for PWD**

#### **3.3.1 The assessment of disability**

The disability evaluation process in Cyprus establishes the extent of disability and the remaining capacity to work – see MLWSI (2018, point 1) and DSIPWD (2018b, p. 2). This new approach is based on the World Health Organisation's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). It involves 'polythematic committees' which utilize not only medical expertise but also that of ergonomists, speech and occupational therapists and psychologists. Their evaluation reports provide a continuous measure of work capacity which is accepted and sometimes required by government units as they consider the placement of PWD into the many government programmes – Annex 3 section 2.

PES officers find the reports issued by the assessment process extremely useful in assessing the labour market prospects of unemployed PWD and in helping them secure employment. This matching process takes a variety of forms, individual as well as group based, with employers who are looking for workers sometimes joining in. Group interviews are more likely to be useful when an employer has a number of positions suitable for PWD and when the PES have identified a number of suitable candidates. The disability assessment process in the Netherlands is not mentioned in the Host Country Paper. It would appear that a system like ICF can produce considerable equity and efficiency gains, while at the same time enhancing the ability of the PES to secure suitable employment for PWD. Officers in the MLWSI speak highly of this tool. Thus, a professional system of evaluation is likely to be a good investment for some Member States.

#### **3.3.2 Employer co-operation**

The Host Country Paper notes that, in response to the Jobs Agreement to create 125,000 new jobs for PWD, 3,320 have been created in the public sector, 41,864 in the private sector, and 10,718 in temporary agencies and secondments. The total, so far, falls short of the target. In addition, the record of placements in the public sector is surprising, particularly in view of the fact that it is the state, through the 2015 Participation Act, that is spearheading the policy of inclusiveness.

In Cyprus, as apparently in the Netherlands, the responsiveness of private sector employers is conditioned by firm size. In Cyprus, larger firms are more willing and able to engage PWD, though small employers have also been involved. However, the vast majority of firms is very small, often one-person establishments. Nevertheless, the PES work closely with all private sector employers in placing PWD; indeed, some small employers have, out of a sense of social responsibility, hired disabled individuals to give them a chance to show that a good match is possible. Targeted programmes to place PWD and individuals with chronic medical problems by subsidising their wage cost have been in existence and have aided this process – see section 3.3.4 and Annex 2. Some of these programmes have been judged to be very successful and have been offered repeatedly. In the public sector, which is a large and very sought-after employer, there is receptiveness to hiring PWD and, indeed, a hiring quota system has been in place for a decade (see section 3.3.3).



One issue that is relevant to the decision of employers to hire at all, is the prevailing System of Employment Protection. This is not draconian in Cyprus and, in the event that any new hire (whether a PWD or not) proves unsuitable, an employer can dismiss the new employee, following a pre-determined process. However, the stigma of so doing may be larger in the case of a PWD, especially in a small country like Cyprus.

The Netherlands<sup>6</sup> tackle this problem through some other, helpful, arrangements: 'Trial placement' lasts for up to two months, during which the benefit entitlement of an individual continues. However, the employer must expect to engage the PWD for at least six months. The 'No risk policy' covers the sickness benefit of PWD in the target group<sup>7</sup> if they become sick again. When lower productivity by a young disabled person can be documented and following an application by the employer, the system of 'Wage dispensation' can allow the employee to keep a fraction of any benefit entitlements, in addition to the salary that an employer is willing to pay. The three targeted Dutch policies are good supplements, or even solutions, to the reluctance of employers to hire more workers for fear that a bad match cannot be ended. This fear might be heightened in the case of PWD, particularly given that the previous 'sheltered employment' regime (Becker, 2020, p. 3) for PWD would have limited employer exposure to interacting and working with PWD.

### **3.3.3 A quota system?**

A quota of 10% of qualified new hires in the wider public sector was established in Cyprus in 2009. The DSIPWD monitors the application of this law: Units appointing disabled persons report to the DSIPWD on their experience, so that the ministry, social partners, and cooperating organisations for the disabled can be kept informed. Between 2010 and 2016, 125 PWD were hired under this quota policy. In 2017, 210 cases were examined and 46 PWD were hired under the quota system in the public and semi-public sectors and in public education. While the performance of these individuals is monitored, no mention is made of the experience with the quota in the DSIPWD reports (2018b and 2018c). However, the system does appear to be informed and to have memory; the upward time trend in the numbers hired (46 in one year) may suggest that the quota has not created insurmountable problems. It seems from the Host Country Paper that quotas are being considered in the Netherlands, though the current emphasis appears to be on implementing the Jobs Agreement and on wage subsidies.

High quota values are two-edged swords when a time limit for their achievement is also imposed: they secure better employment prospects immediately but increase the risk of poor matches, of turnover, and of inefficiency. On the other hand, a reasonable, or soft, quota which serves as a target, with a loose implementation deadline, can give the right signals, sensitise employers to social needs, and allow enough time for proper assessments and successful matches. This appears to be the experience in Cyprus; interviews with PES officials did not suggest any problems arising from this approach.

### **3.3.4 'Generic' or 'targeted' employment policies?**

'Generic' and 'targeted' (Becker, 2020, p.3) employment support for the disabled co-exist in Cyprus. The PES are often involved in planning and introducing such programmes. Many targeted programmes exist. One programme (MLWSI 2020a), co-funded by the ESF, is aimed at unemployed PWD, who are registered with the PES. It subsidises their employment for a period of 24 months. The subsidy can reach 75% of the payroll cost to the employer, to a maximum of EUR 20,000 over the two years. A number of restrictions apply, including the requirement that the employment of PWD must be additional to the current workforce and not a mechanism for replacing existing workers with subsidised labour. A very similar programme provides incentives for the

---

<sup>6</sup> The Host Country paper does not comment on whether the Dutch employment protection system would discourage employers from hiring at all and especially PWD.

<sup>7</sup> The target group includes individuals such as the chronically ill, those not normally able to work, and the long-term unemployed.

employment of individuals with chronic medical conditions – see MLWSI (2020b) and Annex 2. These programmes appear to provide some sustained employment, have been judged successful through *informal* evaluations and have been offered repeatedly. Thus, employers appear to have accepted them. Other specific programmes are also available. MLWSI (2018) and DSIPWD (2018b, 2018c) review these initiatives.<sup>8</sup>

A question raised in the Host Country Paper (p. 5) is which targeted interventions work best. This can be answered with *econometric*, rather than informal, evaluations which use the administrative data collected when social programmes are offered. Cyprus has no experience with administrative data in econometric programme evaluations.

### **3.3.5 Other challenges faced by the PES**

In Cyprus, an increase in the number of PWD has occurred over time, stressing the capacity of the PES to serve them. There is no information on the number of PWD who are looking for work but do not seek help from the PES.

## **4 Assessment of success factors and transferability**

The Host Country and Cyprus experiences provide some useful pointers for the role of the PES in policies for PWD. (i) A national PWD strategy and action plan, which involves the social partners and the PES in an essential way, is important in generating societal buy-in and support from employers. The documents that describe the Cypriot national strategy and action plan provide transparency and a record of performance. (ii) A professional system of disability assessment which determines the degree of disability and the remaining capacity to work, has been found by the PES in Cyprus to be very helpful in establishing and verifying eligibility. A trusted system of assessment reduces cynicism, encourages employer acceptance of the need and usefulness of employing PWD, and strengthens inclusion. (iii) Digitalisation of all records is at an early stage in Cyprus and data have not been used in econometric evaluations as yet, but this material is essential in many respects: It enables programme eligibility, it produces a global picture of the support provided to PWD, it permits study of the patterns of use, and it enables assessments of possible dependence. Based on these assessments, the system of supporting PWD can be improved. (iv) 'Generic' programmes of support can co-exist with 'targeted' programmes in a symbiotic relationship. (v) A soft quota for the hiring of PWD in the public service can serve as a beacon, as well as provide employment opportunities. (vi) The Dutch programmes which allow employers to ascertain the quality of matches involving PWD are useful means of reducing employer fears that they may be unable to fire unsuitable employees. In Cyprus this is achieved through loose employer protection and targeted programmes of finite duration. These features are all important building blocks of achieving access to the labour market by PWD.

## **5 Questions**

- How is disability established and measured in the Netherlands?
- Is the system of disability assessment in the Netherlands trusted by employers and used to gain access to the various government programmes for PWD?
- How strong is employment protection in the Netherlands?
- Why is the contribution of the public sector to the Jobs Agreement so limited?
- Do data on programme participation by PWD exist? Have they been used to evaluate patterns of use, establish 'what works', and improve the system?

---

<sup>8</sup> Examples include several avenues of financial support to PWD and to the NGOs that support them, schemes to rent or buy wheel-chairs and other means of support, and the issuance of special parking permits – see Annex 3, sections 2 and 3.

## 6 List of references

Bekker, S., 2020. Towards an inclusive labour market: ambitions of the Dutch Public Employment Service. Host Country Discussion Paper – the Netherlands. Peer Review on "Employer service delivery", Amsterdam, 26-27 March 2020.

DSIPWD, 2018a. "Law concerning the appointment of disabled persons in the wider public sector, N. 146(I)/2009" currently available in Greek at <http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/all/5e5f3ad92a3fa954c2257aa100466ba1?opendocument>

DSIPWD, 2018b. "Annual Report 2017", available (in Greek) at [www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29\\_gr/dsipd29\\_gr?OpenDocument](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29_gr/dsipd29_gr?OpenDocument)

DSIPWD, 2018c. "Annual Report 2018", available at [http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29\\_en/dsipd29\\_en?OpenDocument](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29_en/dsipd29_en?OpenDocument)

Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance, Department for the Social Inclusion of the Disabled (DSIPWD), their web page is available at [http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/mlsi.nsf/mlsi18\\_gr/mlsi18\\_gr?OpenDocument](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/mlsi.nsf/mlsi18_gr/mlsi18_gr?OpenDocument)

Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (MLWSI), 2018. First National Strategy for Disabilities "2018-2028, and Second National Action Plan for Disabilities 2018-2020, available in Greek at [http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd8b\\_gr/dsipd8b\\_gr?OpenDocument](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd8b_gr/dsipd8b_gr?OpenDocument)

MLWSI (2020a) Incentive scheme for the employment of persons with disability (in Greek) <http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/dl.nsf/All/FB81120273E2F050C22581CB00412586?OpenDocument>

MLWSI (2020b) New incentive scheme for the employment of individuals with chronic medical conditions. <http://www.kepa.gov.cy/em/BusinessDirectory/Company/CompanyProduct.aspx?CompanyId=0719d120-794d-4f66-ae22-27acd1649b60&ProductId=1f10850b-89e2-4c95-a926-6f6ba729e68a>.

Republic of Cyprus, Peer Review Comments (2018) Making hay while it rains; disability reform in the time of crisis. Peer country comments paper on 'Work capacity assessment and employment of persons of disability', Riga, Latvia, April 26-27.

## Annex 1 Summary table

The main points covered by the paper are summarised below.

### Situation in the peer country

- Prior to 2010, PWD did not receive adequate recognition and support.
- The UN Convention on the Rights of PWD was ratified in 2011.
- The Cyprus Crisis, which began in 2012 and lasted till at least 2016, raised unemployment and all but eliminated the capacity of the PES to aid PWD.
- With recovery, more resources have been assigned to the PES, increasing the quantity and quality of support to PWD that can be offered.
- In the last decade, major new policies have improved the social safety network and enhanced the responsibilities of the PES.

### National policies and measures

- A National Strategy and Action Plan for Disabilities (2018-2028) is now in place.
- A professional system of disability evaluation has been implemented.
- A Guaranteed Minimum Income programme which also recognises the special needs of the disabled was introduced in 2015.
- A hybrid system of generic support and employment subsidy programmes of finite duration exist. The PES have an important role to play in the enhanced system.
- In the public sector, a soft quota that 10% of new hires should be PWD exists.

### Assessment of success factors and transferability

- The new developments look very promising but they have not been in place long enough to evaluate.
- Administrative data, if they exist, are not available to the public and an econometric evaluation culture for social programmes is not in place.
- Assessments of the 'generic' and 'targeted' features of support for PWD have not been carried out.
- It is not clear what patterns of use exist, 'what works', and whether reforms could improve the design and outcomes of programmes for PWD.

### Questions

- How is disability established and measured in the Netherlands?
- Is the system of disability assessment in the Netherlands trusted by employers and used to gain access to the various government programmes for PWD?
- How strong is employment protection in the NL?
- Why is the contribution of the public sector to the Jobs Agreement so limited?
- Do data on programme participation by PWD exist? Have they been used to evaluate patterns of use, establish 'what works', and improve the system?

## Annex 2 Example of relevant practice

Name of the practice:	'New incentive scheme for the employment of individuals with chronic medical conditions.' See MLWSI (2020b) in the References.
Year of implementation:	It is part of the programme period 2014-2020 for Employment, Human Resources and Social Inclusion.
Coordinating authority:	Department of Labour, Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance.
Objectives:	To encourage the employment and social inclusion of unemployed members of the target group. It is co-funded by the European Social Fund and the Republic of Cyprus.
Main activities:	Available to unemployed individuals, registered as members of the target group. Subsidises employers to the tune of 75% of the costs of hiring an individual, to a limit of EUR 20,000 over a period of 24 months. Must not be used to replace existing employees; it must generate new positions.
Results so far:	This 'targeted' programme has been judged useful enough to continue to offer it. No econometric programme evaluation has been conducted.

## **Annex 3**

### **Department for the Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (DSIPWD), 2018. Annual Report 2018. In its entirety and in quotation marks; typos have been corrected and the department is referred to as DSIPWD.**

"The Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (DSIPWD) has been established as from 1/1/2009, as a new Department of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance, according to Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 66.763 dated 6/2/2008 and the State Budget Law for 2009.

The aim of the Department is the promotion of social protection, social inclusion and employment of persons with disabilities. The vision of the Department is the improvement of quality of life of persons with disabilities and the creation of new prospects for social inclusion through the formulation, coordination and implementation of reforms.

The organisational structure of the Department is based on four sectors: a) Management of the System for the Assessment of Disability and Functioning, b) Social Benefits, c) Vocational Rehabilitation and other Support Services and d) Focal Point for the implementation of the UN Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In addition, the Department chairs the Special Fund of the Vocational Training and Rehabilitation Center and the Executive Board of the Christos Stelios Ioannou Foundation.

#### **1. Management of the System for the Assessment of Disability and Functioning**

The project "Expansion of the Implementation of the New System for the Assessment of Disability and Functioning" is implemented by (DSIPWD) in the programming period 2014-2020 through financing by the European Social Fund with a total budget of EUR 4.2 million. The project consists an expansion of the previous project implemented in the period 2007-2013 for the introduction of the new disability assessment system with a cost of EUR 1.8 million. As from December 2013 the first Disability Assessment Center operates in Nicosia and from May 2017 the second Center operated in Limassol. An additional Center is expected to operate in Larnaca in 2019. The objective is the performance of 19,500 assessments throughout the whole project.

Through the new system the disability and the needs of the applicant are assessed by multidisciplinary committees and the citizen receives a holistic report on the rights for social benefits and services that is entitled to. The assessment results are input in the national disability data base that is gradually created aiming to support the formulation of targeted policies of the state relating to disability.

#### **2. Social Benefit Schemes for Persons with Disabilities**

The main Social Benefit Schemes of the Department are the following:

- Severe motor disability allowance: Persons with severe motor disabilities are entitled a monthly allowance of EUR 339.55 (At 31.12.2018, 2,033 persons were entitled to this allowance and the cost for 2018 was EUR 8,455,160)
- Care allowance for persons with paraplegia of EUR 350 monthly (At 31/12/2018: 923 beneficiaries with a cost for 2018 at EUR 4,209,382)
- Care allowance for persons with tetraplegia of EUR 854.30 monthly (At 31/12/2018: 741 beneficiaries with a cost for 2018 at EUR 8,048,558)
- Special Allowance for Blind Persons of EUR 318.14 monthly (At 31/12/2018: 2,026 beneficiaries with a cost for 2018 at EUR 8,079,667)
- Mobility Allowance of EUR 51 to 102 monthly (At 31/12/2018: 2,263 beneficiaries with a cost for 2018 at EUR 1,194,082)

- Financial Assistance for persons with disabilities in order to buy a car (In 2018: 427 beneficiaries with a cost for 2018 at EUR 1,737,900)
- Financial assistance for the provision of technical aid (In 2018: 1,000 beneficiaries with a cost for 2018 at EUR 1,282,837)
- Financial assistance for the provision of wheelchairs (In 2018: 476 beneficiaries with a cost for 2018 at EUR 1,231,190)
- The scheme for providing the Blue Badge i.e. the card for facilitating parking for persons with disabilities continued to operate.
- A new scheme started as from 2017, being the issue of the European Disability Card, based on a European project with the participation of 8 EU member states. The special website for the Card is [www.eudisabilitycard.gov.cy](http://www.eudisabilitycard.gov.cy)

### **3. Vocational Rehabilitation and other Support Services**

The main Vocational Rehabilitation Schemes provided by the Department are the following:

- Scheme for the creation and operation of small units for self-employment purposes of Persons with Disabilities. The Scheme provides a grant up to EUR 8,543 to persons with disabilities who do not have the financial means for self-employment through the Special Fund of the Vocational Rehabilitation Center for Person with Disabilities. In 2018, there were 5 beneficiaries and the cost for 2018 was EUR 20,227.
- The Supported Employment Scheme, which funds Organisations for persons with disabilities with an amount of up to EUR 13,500 yearly for each supported employment programme, which intends to help groups of 5-10 persons with disabilities (mainly intellectual disability) to get and maintain a job position in the open labour market, by a special job coach. In 2018, 23 programmes operated with 300 persons with disabilities in the open labour market, with a cost of EUR 328,375.

The Department is also responsible to support and monitor the implementation of the Recruitment of Persons with Disabilities in the Wider Public Sector Law which is a special law forcing all public services to recruit up to a quota of 10% of their vacant posts, persons with disabilities who fulfil specific objective criteria. The Department supports the authorities responsible for the recruitments by providing them independent reports by multidisciplinary committees assessing disability and capability for the duties of the specific posts. 125 persons with disabilities were recruited under the Law since 2010.

Additional social services schemes are the following:

- Financial assistance to the organisations of persons with disabilities for coverage of their running expenses and the operation of social programmes (20 organisations were subsidized with a cost in 2018 of EUR 71,840). The Confederation of the Organisations of Disabled People also receives an annual grant for almost all its expenses (EUR 70,000 for 2018).
- Subsidisation of organisations of persons with severe disabilities to recruit and manage Social Assistants for their members in order to support them at visiting state services, hospitals and doctors, banks, day care programmes, shopping, recreation activities etc. (6 organisations were subsidized for 821 beneficiaries with disabilities and a cost for 2018 of EUR 121,079).
- The home in the community "Ledra" continued its operation successfully supporting 8 persons with severe intellectual and mental disabilities who were deinstitutionalized from Ward 14 of the Mental Health Hospital (cost for 2018 EUR 252,852).

#### **4. Focal Point for the implementation of the UN Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

The monitoring and promotion of the implementation of the UN Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is coordinated by the Department which has been appointed by the Council of Ministers as the Focal Point in Cyprus. This is a collective effort in cooperation with all public services co responsible for disability issues (80 contact points in Ministries and Services), the Office of the Ombudsman and Human Rights Commissioner who has been defined as the Independent Mechanism for the Convention as well as the Pancyprian Confederation of the Organisations of the Disabled who have the right to participate in all mechanisms for the monitoring and implementation of the Convention.

The Council of Ministers in December 2017 approved the First National Disability Strategy 2018-2028 and the Second National Disability Action Plan 2018-2020. The Action Plan contains 86 actions for implementation by 8 Ministries (46 running actions and 40 new actions)."



