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Cyprus

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

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

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1 Executive summary and recommendations

1.1 Key points and main challenges for the European Semester in 2021

Labour market

There are several legal barriers that undermine attempts to enhance the employability levels of persons with disabilities, while unemployment rates seem to have increased in the last couple of years. Barriers include extending the quota law to the private sector and reinforcing legal interpretation of reasonable accommodation in implementation. A wider recognition of alternative educational qualifications, or exemptions, is needed. In addition, there are very few targeted training programmes followed by employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Existing schemes are very specific, with limited evidence of their effectiveness (only numbers of participants) and no evidence on sustainability. The social enterprises innovation, though introduced, is not still in place. Although the above issues and recommendations have been discussed with the competent authorities by various stakeholders, they have not been incorporated yet, either in the development of the second National Disability Action Plan or discussed and evaluated in the NRP.

Social policies and healthcare

Overall social policies and healthcare sector in Cyprus still hold a number of challenges for persons with disabilities. De-institutionalisation efforts are not supportive to independent living and often still in a format of 'smaller scale institutionalisation'. Cyprus lacks specific legislation to regulate formal home and community care, with high fragmentation of services and lack of coordination. Social benefits schemes should further increase and expand covering the needs of people with disabilities. Most of the social protection expenditure goes to pensions and health care, with other functions of the social protection system receiving relatively less resources. Accessibility seems to be one of the main factors of social exclusion, as there is no coherent legal framework for accessibility in all aspects and neither any monitoring mechanisms are in place. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed non-existent or very limited e-health and telecare for persons with disabilities. It seems that the state interprets the term 'vulnerable groups' in different ways when it comes to the implementation of social policies and emergency schemes.

Education

The main concerns in the education of people with disabilities are expressed around the current education reform towards inclusive education, which raises a number of debates and disagreements. In addition, digital inclusion and assistive technology implementation is not satisfactory in Cyprus and online education and accommodations for children with disabilities proved problematic, especially in response to COVID-19. There are also great challenges for the transition and career planning of students with disabilities for postsecondary education, including issues of accessibility and disability support in Higher Education, while there is still a need to revise the validity and usability of the graduate certificate of learners with disabilities in the labour market.

1.2 Recommendations for Cyprus

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

- **Recommendation:** Legislate accessibility in all levels, including content and information, as well as built and services infrastructure beyond public sector, and provide monitoring of compliance with relevant regulations
Rationale: Analysis sections of this report highlight the large gaps in policies and practice in relation to accessibility at all levels in Cyprus.
- **Recommendation:** Introduce an employment quota system for the private sector, as it exists for the public and wider public sector and provide investment opportunities and incentives for reasonable accommodations in workplaces.
Rationale: Unemployment rates of persons with disabilities remain high and seem to have increased, and there is no strong evidence for the success and sustainability of employment based on the existing incentive schemes, while there is resistance by private industry representatives
- **Recommendation:** Establish a coherent assistive technology and accessibility service delivery system
Rationale: Assistive technology services and accessibility consultancy are not provided in any formal form, resulting to abandonment of available AT as well as to digital exclusion of persons with disabilities
- **Recommendation:** Revise current educational reform for Inclusive Education towards inclusive discourses and pedagogical practices
Rationale: The current process faces several challenges and criticism and maintains the special education and medical perspective
- **Recommendation:** Provide compulsory disability awareness training and education to various professionals and service providers.
Rationale: This should address health and medical professionals, officers of the public employment service, possible employers, all educators, large service providers such as banks, telecommunication, and utilities. Healthcare should especially target affordable healthcare services to women and young girls with disabilities for all the relevant provisions in relation to their sexual and reproductive health rights
- **Recommendation:** Develop community-based independent living structures with smart and AAL technologies, and qualified support staff.
Rationale: Existing efforts of de-institutionalisation are fragmented, and isolated actions included in the National Disability Plan, which maintain smaller scale institutionalisation.
- **Recommendation:** Develop advocacy mechanisms for people of disabilities who are users of social services, particularly those in supported living settings. A scrutiny body should also be in place, working closely with advocacy groups, for supervising the implementation of supported and independent living projects.
Rationale: Large groups of persons with disabilities are not appropriately represented in order support the rights of people with intellectual disabilities and autism in all cases.

2 Opportunities to mainstream disability equality in the Semester documents

2.1 [Country Report](#) for Cyprus (Staff Working Document)

The 2020 Country report highlights persisting challenges for people with disabilities in relation to increasing poverty risks and employment (pp. 12, 42 & 46). These challenges need to be matched with reference to suitable employment measures such as the extension of the quota policy to the private sector, and the amendment of the qualification criteria for persons with disabilities for both the public and the private sector (see analysis in following sections).

The Country Report refers to further information on the monitoring and evaluation tool (p. 42). However, the Monitoring Labour Market Mechanism that is currently in place does not include any disability related data neither in the reports or the data collection tools used. These issues are discussed in chapter 3 below, it would be important to specifically address these in CR and CSR, while consultations with the private sector as well as disability awareness programs should be initiated in 2021.

As indicated in the Country report (p. 51) long-term benefits are only in cash (GMI and benefit scheme for severe disability). Long term benefits, as well as other disability related benefits schemes were expected to be evaluated and revised under the social services reform that started in 2019, with the launch of the relevant consultation.² However, there is no available data on the progress of this, which would be expected in revisions of the National Disability Action Plan. Long-term benefits are also linked to de-institutionalisation and independent living which remains under-developed.

The reform of the education of children with disabilities policy, mentioned in the CR (p.19) has not yet been completed and faces a number of challenges, especially because of high criticism and disagreement on the process and the outcome. Reporting on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth (MoECSY) would be helpful. There is a swift shift of EU policies and projects to digitalisation, digital inclusion and assistive technology but issues are not included in the country report, or the country specific recommendations. The challenges are many and have been highlighted even more during the COVID-19 pandemic situation where inaccessibility of and lack of access to health, social and educational services revealed many difficulties. Mechanisms of inclusive eHealth and eLearning do not exist and whatever was applied was not effective. Hence, mainstreaming disability in policies for e-Health and e-Services, is very important in terms of accessibility, participation and representation in decision making.

2.2 [Country Specific Recommendation](#) for Cyprus (CSR)

In 2020, the Country Specific Recommendation for Cyprus included the following direct references to disability issues:

- '17. Policies that improve the hospital capacity, health workers' working conditions and ensure the use of personal protective equipment, testing, medicines and medical devices are vital. Integration with the long-term care and

² Link to still available. References in ANED 2018 Country Fiche report.

primary and community care is crucial in light of demographic change, and to support the most vulnerable, including people with disabilities.

- 18. Strengthening the capacity of the public employment services with permanent staff will be key, notably by safeguarding the continuation of services of the employment counsellors under temporary contracts expiring in the second half of 2020. This will avoid putting the services under further strain and to provide efficient support to the newly unemployed and other vulnerable groups, such as young people not in education, employment or training, long-term unemployed and persons with disabilities.'

Country specific recommendations refer to strengthening the capacity of the public employment services (CSR paragraph 18). Capacity of the public employment services from a disability perspective should also be strengthened through disability related training and awareness through a human rights perspective. In addition, awareness and information is important for possible employers, which should additionally include issues on reasonable accommodations, accessibility, and flexible work terms for persons with disabilities (see chapter 3, in relation to CSR additional recommendations of 2020 CSR paragraph 2). The 2020 CSR also emphasise the capacity of the health system (additional recommendation 1). This is very relevant to access of persons with disabilities and opportunities for e-health and telecare, which were heavily challenged during the COVID-19 pandemic. These are discussed in section 4 later in this report.

The issue of digital and physical accessibility is also relevant to CSR3 on green and digital transition, as well as sustainable transport. While digital accessibility of particular websites and accessibility of public buildings and physical infrastructures³ is currently legitimised with specific guidelines, access and accessibility in other levels is not (see chapters 4 & 5). Hence, a broader range of digital as well as transportation and built environment accessibility should be directly referenced in CSRs. Accessibility is closely related to availability and use of assistive technology (AT). Even if content and infrastructure were accessible, if persons with disabilities do not have access to AT and relevant competence development, accessibility is not enough. In general, what is not directly addressed in CSR as well as in efforts of social and educational services reforms, is the establishment of a coherent assistive technology and accessibility service delivery system (see chapter 4).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the public education sector failed to respond effectively to online learning, as there is no established learning management system, and no accessibility requirements were taken into consideration (see chapter 5). In CSR (paragraph 21) quality digital and distance education is highlighted. However, digital inclusive education with respect to accessible infrastructure and content is not included, though reference is also made to the educational reform, which again disregarded this issue.

³ The Roads and Buildings Regulations of 1999-2019 (Regulation 61H) http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/enop/non-ind/2004_1_112/full.html & http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/enop/non-ind/0_96/full.html.

3 Disability and the labour market - analysis of the situation and the effectiveness of policies

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

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

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

Employment and vocational training were among the priorities of The First Cyprus Disability Strategy 2018-2028 and The Second Disability Action Plan 2018-2020.⁴ The Strategy particularly mentions: *'integration to employment with the operation of vocational education programmes, employers and employees' incentives and provision for supportive mechanisms and incentives for self-employment'*. (p. 4, paragraph 4.7), whereas in the Second Disability Action Plan 2018-2020, the objective is defined more specifically as an expected outcome: *'incentives to employers for the employment of people with disabilities – expected outcome 100 unemployed persons with disabilities to enter the labour market with funded salary for 24 months'* (paragraph 12).

In general, the National Disability Strategy and Second Action Plan have been criticised for including existing policies and practices, that have been in place for years. Recommended actions by the disability organisations, through the Cyprus Confederation of Organisations of the Disabled (CCOD),⁵ as well as academic experts,⁶ have not been taken into consideration. There is not yet any announcement or consultation for the development of a third National Disability Action plan, as the second one was covering the period ending in December 2020.

3.1 Summary of the labour market situation of persons with disabilities

Data from EU-SILC indicate an employment rate for persons with disabilities in Cyprus of 49.7 % in 2018, compared to 75.2 % for other persons and approximately -1.1 points below the EU27 average - resulting in an estimated disability employment gap of approximately 25 percentage points (EU27 average gap 24.2, see Tables 2-4).

The same data indicate unemployment rates of 24.7 % and 11.3 %, respectively in 2018 (see Tables 5-7) and the economic activity rate for persons with disabilities in

⁴ The First Cyprus Disability Strategy 2018-2028, <https://tinyurl.com/CYstrategy2028>.

⁵ Cyprus Confederation of Organisations of the Disabled letter to the House of Representatives, 10 February 2020, available at http://www.kysoa.org.cy/kysoa/userfiles/file/Ypomnima%20K_E_Anthropinon20Dikaiomatwn.doc.

⁶ See ANED country reports, such as European Semester 2018/2019 country fiche on disability.

Cyprus was 66.0 %, compared to 84.7 % for other persons (see Tables 8-10). These indications are broken down by gender and age in the respective tables in annex.

The Observatory of the Labour Market, under the Department of Labour, holds statistical data⁷ on the labour market which are included in the Labour Force Study of the Cyprus Statistics Service, as well as published on the Ministry's website and Annual Report. However, these data do not include any disability related information, neither does the relevant questionnaire used during the survey, though In 2017, the UN CRPD Committee recommended '*that the State party collect data on the employment of persons with disabilities, disaggregated by gender, age and type of impairment*' (paragraph 54, on Article 27). Hence, the current situation on employment and unemployment of persons with disabilities in Cyprus cannot be described and summarised in this perspective.

3.2 Analysis of labour market policies relevant to the Semester

For reference, see also the 2020 [National Reform Programme](#) for Cyprus.

Labour Market Relevant Schemes

Two departments of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (MLWSI) offer schemes for the support of persons with disabilities in the labour market: The Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (DSIPD) and the Department of Labour. According to the DSIPD Annual Report 2019⁸ the employment outcomes in relation to the schemes and actions were as follows:

- *Outcomes of The Recruitment of Persons with Disabilities in the Wider Public Sector (Special Provisions) Law of 2009 (N.146(I)/2009):*⁹ In 2018, an additional number of 30 persons with disabilities have been employed, and the total number of employees with disabilities in the public and wider public sector reached 185 (140 in Education Service, 7 in Public Service, 6 in permanent hourly-paid Public Service, 19 in specified duration public service positions and 3 in the Semi-Public sector). Data for 2019 are not yet available.
- *Outcomes of disability schemes relevant to the labour market for the last 5 years* are summarised in Table A (see annex 7.1.3).¹⁰ Two more disability specific schemes related to the Labour Market are provided by DSIPD, addressed to Disability Organisations, for which no application was submitted in 2019. These include funding schemes for Disability related NGOs for training programs for persons with disabilities and for professionals that work with persons with disabilities.

⁷ Statistical data of the Labour Market Observatory, available at http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/dl.nsf/page9c_gr/page9c_gr?OpenDocument.

⁸ Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, Annual Report 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/yb97yw39>.

⁹ The Recruitment of Persons with Disabilities in the Wider Public Sector (Special Provisions) Law of 2009 (N.146(I)/2009), <https://tinyurl.com/y7may7vq>.

¹⁰ Annual Reports. Department for Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities 2014-2019, available at: http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29_gr/dsipd29_gr?OpenDocument.

The following disability related schemes are offered by the Department of Labour:

- *Incentives for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities*¹¹ Scheme: The Scheme is co-funded by the ESF (see chapter 6). Beneficiaries are persons with disabilities defined by the 2011 UNCRPD ratification Law, who are currently unemployed (registered to the Public Employment Services). The total budget of the Scheme is EUR 2m euros with the aim of 100 beneficiaries. Each employer needs to commit to a 24 months employment period, for a maximum 5 employees. The funding covers 75 % of employment cost to a maximum of EUR 20,000. Based on the [Annual Report of the Ministry of Labour 2018](#) (latest available,¹² 45 persons have been employed under the scheme, which was launched in 2017, expiring to exhaustion of budget. The scheme has been considered insufficient with respect to the maximum of EUR 20,000 per person. The implication is that the subsidy is more attractive to private employers offering lower paid jobs (under EUR 27,000), and sustainability of its implementation has not yet been assessed.
- *Incentives for the Employment of Persons with Chronic Diseases Scheme*:¹³ initially launched in 2017 and expired in Feb 2018. In May 2019, the scheme was re-launched and will be valid until later notice, or the exhaustion of the approved funding. No data is currently available on the impact of this scheme implementation.

Social Enterprises are another measure under development in Cyprus that is anticipated to promote opportunities for people with disabilities in the labour market. A draft legislative act¹⁴ was submitted to the Parliament in June 2019, expected to pass to a Law in 2020. No evidence is yet available on the progress of this policy measure.

The 2020 [NRP](#) (p. 39) makes reference to the first two targeted employment subsidy schemes described above. The schemes were also included in the First Cyprus Disability Strategy 2018-2028 and The Second Disability Action Plan 2018-202.¹⁵ Other than the Annual report of the MLWSI there is no available evidence on the number and types of employers that show interest in this schemes, or the sustainability of the initiated collaborations. Even though the availability of employment incentives for individuals with disabilities is hailed as a positive development, this needs to be pursued in tandem with specific schemes to facilitate the participation of individuals with disabilities in education and training, their upskilling and reskilling of low skilled and low paid individual with disabilities. For example, a recent communication of the Cyprus Confederation of Organisations for the Disabled (CCOD) to its member,¹⁶ indicates that a technology sector company has announced job opportunities, in which

¹¹ Scheme Providing Incentives for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities, available at <http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/dl.nsf/All/FB81120273E2F050C22581CB00412586OpenDocument>.

¹² MLWSI, *Annual Report 2018*, <https://tinyurl.com/y732mcm4>.

¹³ Scheme Providing Incentives for the Employment of Persons with Chronic Diseases, available at <http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/dl.nsf/All/BD9CDD9FE8DA4ED7C22583FC00289773?OpenDocument>.

¹⁴ White paper (Law Act) Creation and Maintenance of Registry for Social Enterprises Law of 2019, (submitted to the HoP 06.2019), <https://tinyurl.com/y8o3l5jo>.

¹⁵ First Cyprus Disability Strategy 2018-2028 and Second Disability Action Plan 2018-2020 <https://tinyurl.com/CYstrategy2028>.

¹⁶ CCOD email to members, dated 9 September 2020.

they are willing to employ persons with disabilities. However, there was no reference to this in the job vacancies announcement.¹⁷

Finally, the *Scheme for the training of the long-term unemployed in enterprises/organisations* is included in reforms aiming at increasing the effectiveness of the public employment services and reinforce outreach and activation support for young people. However, data of Table 7 (annex), show that unemployment rates have decreased for non-disabled people between 2017 and 2018 (by 3.4), whereas they have increased for disabled people during the same period (by 2.8). Though statistical data are not yet available for 2019, this deviation is interesting since the government has been implementing particular schemes targeting long-term unemployed, part of whom are possibly persons with disabilities.

Quota employment and reasonable adaptations legal framework

Implementation of the Recruitment of Persons with Disabilities in the Wider Public Sector (Special Provisions) Law 2009 (N.146(I)/2009)¹⁸ is not beneficial for a large number of people with disabilities and especially for those that do not obtain a recognised secondary education degree. Quota applicants are expected to hold all the necessary qualifications for the job, often including state-recognised secondary education graduation certificate and to pass any written or oral exams required. These provisions exclude many people with disabilities, as qualifications of graduation from special schools, special units or mainstream schools under the status of observer are not recognised. Even in cases where people with disabilities have the opportunity to apply for a vacancy in the wider public sector, they have to go through the assessment process of the System for the Assessment of Disability and Functioning¹⁹ that utilizes a conceptual framework informed by a medical approach to functionality.²⁰

The Law is problematic as it does not apply to the private sector. The UN Concluding Observations (2017) recommended that *'the private sector is also covered by a quota system'* (paragraph 54). However, during the European Economic and Social Committee Study Group Visit in 2019 in Cyprus²¹ the representatives of the private sector (i.e. Cyprus Employers and Industrialists Federation and Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry) were not favourable to this extension. Though no further explanation is provided in the relevant report, arguably the position of the private sector reflects lack of disability awareness and human rights perspectives, and concerns on limited or inappropriate financial and other incentives provided till now.

¹⁷ Job vacancies by specific company, at <https://www.logicom.net/careers/vacancies-list/?vc=0&vcnt=5033&vsnr=0>.

¹⁸ http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/indexes/2009_1_146.html.

¹⁹ System for the Assessment of Disability and Functioning, http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd06_gr/dsipd06_gr?OpenDocument.

²⁰ Demosthenous, M. (2013). *A Critique of the Assessment System of Disability and Functioning*. Nicosia: Parga. (in Greek); Symeonidou, S. (2014). New policies, old ideas: the question of disability assessment systems and social policy, *Disability & Society*, 29(8), 1260-127; Pancyprrian Alliance for Disability (2017).

²¹ European Economic and Social Committee (Section on Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship) Study Group on Disability Rights Report: *Country visit – Cyprus, Employment of persons with disabilities*, 18-20 November 2019.

The 'reasonable measures' caveat articulated in the Individuals with Disability Law (N. 127(I)/2000,²² is contingent on financial considerations, which give legal space to employers to evade their legal obligations towards disabled individuals.²³ The Law states that 'reasonable measures' can be implemented only to the extent to which they do not place disproportionate economic burden on the employer concerned. Existing also legitimise the options for charity and donations vs the State's obligation (see Article 5(c)72(I)2(d)). In their Submission to [the List of Issues of the UN Committee \(February 2017\)](#)²⁴ the Pancyprian Alliance for Disability, stated that the majority of DPOs had expressed their disappointment that practical implementation of the Law did not take into consideration legal obligations to provide reasonable accommodations to prospective employees with disabilities. The issue was also highlighted by almost all stakeholders during the Study Visit in November 2019. The Minister of Labour stated that no scheme to finance reasonable accommodation in the workplace is planned so far, which conflicts with principles of the [EU Social Pillar](#)²⁵ (i.e. active support to employment, secure and adaptable employment). In addition, as reported previously,²⁶ there are a number of official complaints and court cases filed by employees with disabilities. Private sector stakeholders' also positions reflect the concerns on the implementation of the Incentives Schemes and the issues of prejudice and attitudes emphasised by persons with disabilities in this report and elsewhere.²⁷

Digital skills, digital inclusion and accessibility

During the last decade, with the rapid advancement of digital technology and digitalisation of sectors and activities, digital inclusion and digital skills²⁸ development have been at the centre of discussions around the empowerment of people with disabilities (e.g. EU Digital Competence Framework,²⁹ Entelis Network,³⁰ The Bologna Declaration).³¹ Digital skills are also included in the main actions mentioned in the 2020 NRP (p.59) for promoting digital competence development, through which a number of training programs will be developed. It is therefore interesting to examine

²² The Individuals with Disability Law (N.127(I)/2000), http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/indexes/2000_1_127.html.

²³ Mavrou K, & Meletiou-Mavrotheris M. (2015). Views and considerations on ICT-AT competences development within the ENTELIS project: The Case of Cyprus. Studies in Health Technology Informatics, 217, 671-8. Available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26294546>.

²⁴ Submission to the List of Issues of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in relation to the initial report of Cyprus, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2fC%2fCYP%2fQ%2f1&Lang=en.

²⁵ The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles, <https://tinyurl.com/ycql563q>.

²⁶ European Semester 2018/2019 country fiche on disability & Social Pillar 2017 CY Country Reports

²⁷ Mavrou, K., Meletiou-Mavrotheris, M., Karki A., Sallinen, & Hoogerwerf, E.J., M. (2017). Opportunities and challenges related to ICT and ICT-AT use by people with disabilities: an explorative study into factors that impact on the digital divide. Technology and Disability, 29, 63-75

²⁸ Digital Skills & Jobs Policy, <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/policies/digital-skills>.

²⁹ EU Digital Competence Framework, <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/digcomp/digital-competence-framework>.

³⁰ Entelis Network and Projects, <https://www.entelis.net/>, and <https://entelisplus.entelis.net/homepage/>.

³¹ The Bologna Declaration (27.08.2019) Unlocking Human Potential: A Call for Action to Improve Access to Quality Assistive Technology for Realising Fundamental Human Rights and Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in a Fully Inclusive Manner, <https://aaate.net/the-bologna-declaration/>.

how such schemes consider or not disability in various aspects. For example, Cyprus Productivity Centre has launched a series of free training programmes on digital skills development.³² As observed by DPOs and the EDE Cyprus experts, the programmes disregard both the possibility for disabled participants, as well as the inclusion of a disability/accessibility perspective in their content. Specifically, the following have been communicated to the Centre:³³

- The announced programmes do not ensure access of persons with disabilities in the training, in terms of meeting accessibility requirements for possible disabled trainees, and/or use of own assistive technologies during training.
- The content of the training does not include issues of accessibility (e.g. creating accessible documents, principles of accessible design, etc.).
- There is no specific training programme on digital skills for persons with disabilities for the use of mainstream and/or assistive technology, especially for preparation and access to the labour market. There are however programmes specific to other groups, such as older adults.

Accessibility is another element of digital inclusion, relevant to access to the labour market. In the NRP 2020 (p. 24) under 3.1.5 *Other Reforms to support efficiency improvement in the Public Administration, (Paragraph c) Moving to the Digital era*, there is reference to accessibility in terms of harmonizing national legislation to the Directive (EU) 2016/2102 of the European Parliament and of the Council 26 October 2016 on the Accessibility of the Websites and Mobile Applications of Public Sector Bodies. This is also outlined as ‘*Digital Society for all, “in an effort to create a digital society equal to all”*’ (NRP, p. 27), which resulted to the Law (N.50(I)/2019).³⁴ Nevertheless, the Law, only refers to the accessibility of websites and mobile applications of the Public Sector, and no other relevant to [European Accessibility Act](#)³⁵ issues are included. No other innovation, or suggestion under the ‘Digital Society for all’ of the Deputy Ministry refers to access to assistive technology, and/or development of digital skills for persons with disabilities, and/or implementation of assistive technologies in employment or other sectors (e.g. education). The imperative of digital inclusion and digital competences development for people with disabilities is even more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. The shift to digitalisation of activities was immediate and rapid, expanding the digital divide for people that have been unprepared, and often already digitally excluded, resulting at increased inequalities.

COVID-19 Pandemic Response Measures relevant to Labour Market. In the initial measure,³⁶ disability is particularly mentioned in the Special Leave for Childcare allowance. Beneficiaries are parents of children to the age of 15 and/or parents of children with disabilities regardless age, who due to the nature of their work they

³² Cyprus Productivity Centre, digital skills training programmes, ([More details](#)).

http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/kepa/kepa_new.nsf/All/9F4D9A31402D607FC225819200374AAF.

³³ Email from Agkalia Elpidas, to Cyprus Productivity Centre, 3rd September 2020. Communication was copied to interested parties including Universities and the EDE team.

³⁴ The Web Accessibility and Mobile Devices Application for the Public Sector Organisations Law, of 2019 (N.50(I)/2019), available at http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/arith/2019_1_050.pdf.

³⁵ Directive (EU) 2019/882 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the accessibility requirements for products and services, <https://tinyurl.com/yaugtdcq>.

³⁶ Protection and Support Measures of the MLWSI for the COVID-19 Pandemic situation in Cyprus, Period 16/3 – 12/4, <https://www.coronavirus.mlsi.gov.cy/>.

cannot work remotely or with flexible time-schedule (see paragraph 3 of Articles 6 and 12 of the N27(I)/2020 Law).³⁷ However, additional measures and flexible working arrangements were not announced after 12 June 2020, and after August 2020, though opening of schools was delayed. Though the NRP 2020 mentions that *'in 2018, an amount of about EUR 2.7 million was provided for the funding of 131 programmes covering childcare needs (day care centres for pre-school and school age children and day care centres for children with disabilities)'* (p. 47), the same report states that *'at this stage nothing concrete was decided'* (p. 47). Indeed, policy on child-care centres for children with disabilities in Cyprus is non-existent, especially for children under 3 years, which are not also included in the provisions of the current educational Law (N113/1999).³⁸ Research evidence also indicates that parents of children with disabilities largely depend on grandparents for the childcare of their young children,^{39 40} which was obviously not possible during the pandemic, as older adults are on the top of the vulnerable and protected groups list.

Other than the special childcare leave and allowance, initial measures were not specific to employees with disabilities. In March 2020, the decision for the Special Sickness Allowance provided to specific groups (see NRP, p. 4 and Stability Programme) referred to employees with certain health issues listed by the Ministry of Health (MoH) (based on WHO), employees with mandatory absence from work following the restrictions plan and employees of ages 63-65, who do not receive a statutory pension, with no specific reference to disability, though provision for adequate income replacement is included in the CSR for 2020-2021. In April 2020 the Cyprus Confederation of Organisations of the Disabled (CCOD) had addressed a complaint to the President of the Republic in relation to lack of protection to disabled employee,⁴¹ with particular evidence of a public sector disabled employee hospitalised in the Intensive Care Unit due to COVID-19. Interestingly, the revised decision of the state on the Special Sickness Allowance (May 2020), included persons with disabilities employed under the Supported Employment Schemes in the categories of the allowance beneficiaries (see paragraph 3c(v) of [the N27\(I\)/2020 Law](#)). [The various schemes currently in place](#) (September 2020)⁴² relate to vocational and professional training programmes, as well as employment incentives for SME's employees, long-term unemployed, NEET, persons released from prison, starting October 2020.

³⁷ The on Extraordinary Measures Taken from MLWSI For tackling The COVID-19 Pandemic Law 27(I) of 2020, (Decision for Articles 6 and 12), <https://tinyurl.com/yaabe6yk>.

³⁸ The Education of Children with Special Needs Law (N. 113(I)/1999), http://www.moec.gov.cy/eidiki_ekpaidefsi/nomothesia.html.

³⁹ Preece, D. et al (2017) *Assessing parental perspectives to inform the development of parent training in autism in south-eastern Europe*, European Journal of Special Needs Education, 252-269. Kokkinos, A. (2020) *Unpublished PhD: Relationships of School and Families of Children with Disabilities in Cyprus: Investigative the Socio-economic background and disability axes*, European University Cyprus.

⁴⁰ Kokkinos, A. (2020) *Unpublished PhD: Relationships of School and Families of Children with Disabilities in Cyprus: Investigative the Socio-economic background and disability axes*, European University Cyprus.

⁴¹ CCOD letter to the House of Representatives, 2 April 2020, http://www.kysoa.org.cy/kysoa/userfiles/file/diekdikiseis/20200402_kysoa_%20proedro_%20corona%202020.doc.

⁴² Special schemes for the protection and support of the financial and labour market sector September 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/y8y39fnd>, and appendix <https://www.pio.gov.cy/assets/pdf/newsroom/2020/09/3.9.20parartima.pdf>.

Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that the employment incentives scheme for people with disabilities is still already running, though was not reinforced during this period.

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

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

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

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

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

‘44. The Committee recommends that the State party, in close collaboration with representative organisations of persons with disabilities, and in line with article 4 (3) of the Convention:

- (a) Develop and implement safeguards securing the right to independent living;
- (b) Adopt and immediately implement an adequately funded de-institutionalisation strategy;
- (c) Redirect resources allocated to institutionalisation and earmark and allocate them to community-based services and increase the budget enabling persons with disabilities to live independently across the State party with access to individually assessed and adequate services, including personal assistance, within the community.’

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

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

rights-based approach to disability in the provision of health services to persons with disabilities.'

The provision of health and rehabilitation services were among the priorities of The First Cyprus Disability Strategy 2018-2028 and The Second Disability Action Plan 2018-2020.

4.1 Summary of the social situation of persons with disabilities

Poverty and social exclusion remain the big challenges for people with disabilities, so financial inequalities need to be tackled. The state should work closely and in consultation with the organisations of people with disabilities and their representatives for designing and applying policies and schemes aiming at the inclusion of people with disabilities and the protection of their rights in all cases.

Data from EU-SILC indicate the poverty risk rate for working age persons with disabilities in Cyprus was 20.8 % in 2018, compared to 12.2 % for other persons of similar age - an estimated disability poverty gap of approximately 9 percentage points (see Table 14). For people aged over 65, the disability poverty gap was 9.7 points (25.3 % for older persons with disabilities and 15.6 % for other persons of similar age). The tables in annex also indicate the respective rates of AROPE and break these down by gender as well age.

According to the Country Report Cyprus 2020⁴³ 'strong economic growth and the introduction of a guaranteed minimum income have had a significant positive impact on poverty and inequality in Cyprus', (European Commission, 2019h). However, social protection is underfunded compared to the EU average. Specifically, disability benefits are included in the list of functions that receive relatively less resources. People with disabilities, children and non-EU born migrants face high risk of poverty and social exclusion. As a response, the government increased and expanded care and mobility benefits for people with disabilities, but still not for all types of disabilities (e.g. users of mental health services are excluded).

4.2 Analysis of social policies relevant to the Semester

Changes to benefit schemes

According to the annual report⁴⁴ of the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (DSIPD) the main new actions in relation to the Social Benefit Schemes for people with disabilities that were completed in 2019 were the increase of the existing care allowance for individuals with paraplegia or quadriplegia up to EUR 400 and EUR 900 respectively, and for those with additional needs for care, up to EUR 500 and EUR 1100 respectively. The Mobility Allowance was also raised up to EUR 75 and EUR 150 monthly. People with blindness and people with thalassaemia on a regular blood transfusion treatment became also eligible for receiving this allowance.

⁴³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1584543810241&uri=CELEX%3A52020SC0512>.

⁴⁴ Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (2019) *Annual Report 2019 DSID*. Retrieved from: http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsdpd29_en/dsdpd29_en?OpenDocument.

These allowances should be expanded including more types of disability, for example people with mental disability/users of mental health services are not eligible for receiving these social benefits.⁴⁵ It has also been unclear people with disabilities are eligible for the general minimum income or if this is calculated based on their social benefits and status of employment. The Cyprus Confederation of Organisations of the Disabled (CCOD) (2020)⁴⁶ states that 52 % of the people with disabilities in Cyprus are deprived of the financial means to support themselves and their families.

Support for independent living

Another recommendation to Cyprus by the UN CRPD Committee (2017) was related to the right to the independent living (Article 19), urging the state to develop safeguards securing the right to independent living by adopting and implementing an adequately funded de-institutionalisation strategy aiming to the development of community-based services. The Republic of Cyprus tried to respond to this recommendation by assessing 51 applications for the new Scheme for the Induction of Person with Disabilities into Supported Living Programs. The applications were received and assessed for a new project that was funded by the European Social Fund and begun to operate in 2019. According to the annual report of the DSIPD (2019), priority, for this project, was given to persons with intellectual disabilities living in care homes for the elderly. A national survey collected data from 116 care homes for the elderly and people with disabilities to record and assess the needs of people with disabilities that live in these care homes. The needs of 28 persons with intellectual disabilities under the age of 65 were assessed. In total, 30 persons with intellectual disabilities and 5 with visual disabilities were approved for induction to supported living settings.

Continuing with the action for the implementation of supported living projects, 7 new homes based in the community were developed and organised after a public tender that was completed in 2019 and contracts for these new projects were signed by NGOs and private sector companies. These new supported living settings were expected to be set in all cities of Cyprus by March 2020; 6 for persons with intellectual disabilities and 1 for people with visual disabilities in Nicosia. Another existing scheme that is meant to support the social inclusion of persons with severe disabilities is the scheme for the provision of grants for social assistants for adults with severe and/or complex disabilities. In 2019, 7 organisations received the grants for 15 projects from which 1.160 persons with severe/complex disabilities were benefited. This indicates a slight increase of the number of beneficiaries in comparison to the recorded number for 2018 (821 beneficiaries).⁴⁷

As the development of supported living is a new provision for the Cypriot socio-cultural context, and so far, initiative is taken by various groups and organisations, measures for the supervision of the implementation of these projects are required. It is important, firstly, for the safety and wellbeing of the people with intellectual disabilities, and secondly for the effectiveness of these projects that a scrutiny body takes the responsibility to monitor the developments and services provided at the supported living settings. All actions should comply with the rights of people with disabilities and a code of practice should set out the professional approach and values expected of

⁴⁵ <https://24h.com.cy/2020/02/koinoniko-apokleismo-kataggelloyn-ta-amea/>.

⁴⁶ <http://www.kysoa.org.cy/kysoa/page.php?pageID=25&mpath=/24>.

⁴⁷ http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29_en/dsipd29_en?OpenDocument.

social service workers and their employers. There is still the risk that some of these supported living settings might operate as smaller scale institutions. In that the education and support of the groups and their staff that are involved in the supported living projects is highly important. Advocacy for the service users should also be in place, to secure and support the rights of people with intellectual disabilities and autism in all cases. The scrutiny body should be working closely with the advocacy groups. As it has been mentioned, the state has in place the scheme for social assistants who support people with severe and complex disabilities. However, it is unclear: a) if social assistants are to be included in the staff of supported living projects, and b) the skills and level of vocational training of the social assistants, and the staff of supported living projects. Skilled support workers and supported living coordinators qualified with accredited training in social care should be employed at the supported living projects. The state should have in place a specific job criterion for these posts aiming at securing high standards of skills, values, and professionalism. Furthermore, as there is a significant qualitative difference between supported and independent living, the scheme of social assistants should be expanded including the profession of personal assistants for supporting people with other types of disabilities.

Health reforms

The first phase (outpatient services) of the General Healthcare System (GHS) was introduced in 2019 and the second phase (specialised care) in June 2020. However, issues with accessibility, disability awareness, changes, and cuts in the provisions for people with disabilities have been reported by DPOs and parents' representatives. According to the CR (2020)⁴⁸ the long-term care services are under-developed in Cyprus, as they receive low levels of funding (0.3 % of GDP). Most long-term care benefits are in the form of cash, available only to guaranteed minimum income recipients and people with severe disabilities, in that, only 21 % of the dependent population has access to long-term care services. Most of the programmes that cover long-term social care for elderly and people with disabilities, are operated by NGOs and local authorities that are subsidised. The NRP 2020 (p.47) refers to implementation of the State aid scheme for the development and operation of quality social care programmes and the continuation of the Scheme for the Subsidisation of Care Services. However, specific legislation is required to regulate formal home and community care, as some of the negative consequences are the high fragmentation of services, the lack of coordination and the limited number of skilled care workers. The accessibility to the health-care services by people with disabilities is also insufficient, the Cyprus Confederation of Organisations of the Disabled (CCOD) has reported⁴⁹ that many of medical centres and doctors' surgeries are inaccessible and there were cases where patients with disabilities had to be examined on the street. The fact the new GHS uses a digital platform where patients can have access makes some of their services more user friendly but still information has to be available to all forms and types to be fully accessible (e.g. easy-to-read, Braille, audio, sign language interpretation, applications of augmentative and alternative communication). In order to achieve this level of accessibility, once again the approach to disability and disabled people needs to change. The Cyprus Confederation of Organisations of the Disabled

⁴⁸ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1584543810241&uri=CELEX%3A52020SC0512>.

⁴⁹ <https://24h.com.cy/2020/02/koinoniko-apokleismo-kataggelloyn-ta-amea/>.

(CCOD) states that the medical staff and health workers at the public medical centres and hospitals undermine, offend and in some cases mistreat patients with disabilities. In that, it is important that students of medical schools and all medical staff should undergo disability awareness training to improve their understanding of disability, disability rights and politics, that seems to be missing from health related university curricula.⁵⁰ The state should also invest on introducing the profession of learning disability nurses that will provide specialist healthcare and support to people with a learning/intellectual disability, as well as their families and staff teams, to help them live a fulfilling life. The second National Action Plan 2018-2020⁵¹ mentions as action in progress a training on the rights and needs of patients with disabilities. The set target was that by 2020, 40 % of medical staff, nurses, and other health workers appointed by the MoH should have completed this. There is no up-to-date information about the progress of this action.

In addition to this, the development of 4 informative documents in Braille, audio format and easy-to read, was introduced as one of the new actions under the section of the MoH. However, there was no defined budget for this action and the documents were created by volunteers in the School for the Blind and universities in Collaboration to the Committee for the Protection of Persons with Intellectual disabilities.⁵² One of the recommendations by the UN Committee (2017) in relation to Health (Article 25) urged the state to collaborate with women and girls with disabilities in order to 'ensure accessibility to health services and facilities, and to information and communication regarding sexual and reproductive health rights and services on an equal basis with others.'⁵³ No relevant action is mentioned in the second National Action Plan, indicating that the health and the sexual health of women and girls with disabilities is not a priority for the Cypriot state and the MoH.

Another issue that has caused frustration to people with disabilities and their families is the **provision of specialised care**, particularly the access to therapy sessions such as physiotherapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, sessions with psychologists, and sessions with dietitians. Most of these specialised therapy sessions could be attended at the public medical centres and hospitals. However, they could only be scheduled daytime so the parents of children and young people with disabilities had to choose between missing days of schooling or opting the public health care services for costly private ones. Within the second phase of the GHS the Health Insurance Organisation (HIO) announced a new plan for the number of sessions covered by the public health care system, for example: an adult with paraplegia is eligible to receive maximum 12 sessions of physiotherapy per annum; an adult with rheumatoid arthritis up to 9 sessions per annum; a child with acquired cerebral palsy is eligible for receiving 24 physiotherapy sessions; 24 occupational therapy sessions, and 12 speech therapy sessions, and a child with diabetes can have up to 6 visits to a clinical dietitian.⁵⁴ It seems that the HIO decided to review the plan after interventions by the organisations of people with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities.

⁵⁰ Liasidou, A. & Mavrou, K. (2017). Disability Rights in Higher Education Programs: The case of medical schools and other health-related disciplines. *Sociology Science & Medicine*, 191, 143-150

⁵¹ <https://tinyurl.com/y3s6th9c>.

⁵² Email communication, 9 April 2020.

⁵³ <https://tinyurl.com/yypzd5y9>.

⁵⁴ <https://politis.com.cy/politis-news/kypros/vgainoy-n-mprosta-oi-astheneis-therapeies-entos-toy-gesyl/>.

Accessibility and mobility

The UN Committee (2017) had noted their concern about the lack of accessibility to environment, information and communication, products, and services in urban and rural areas, and to other goods. More specifically the Committee recommended that *'the State party strengthen its efforts to improve accessibility, including by increasing the allocation of human, technical and financial resources and applying internationally recognised standardisation with a view to ensure accessibility to public and private indoor and outdoor environments, information, communication and emergency services, as well as professional sign language interpretation, and augmentative and alternative communication in both rural and urban areas'*.⁵⁵ Cyprus should monitor the compliance with those regulations and systematically enforce sanctioning for non-compliance. According to the Annual report 2019 of DPSIP the department has the responsibility of coordinating the collaboration of various state services for adopting the European Accessibility Act⁵⁶ and including it in the national law system.

The introduction of the European Disability Card (EDC) Scheme was not well accepted by the disabled activists and its implementation holds a number of difficulties. The Cyprus Confederation of Organisations of the Disabled (CCOD) through a series of communication with the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (DSIPD) expressed their concerns and disagreement to the plan. These concerns mainly involve the loss of existing benefits to nationals with disabilities, especially in the case that EDC will operate as a national disability identity, the stigmatisation of persons with disabilities under a disability ID, the inaccessibility of the service providers that adhered to the EDC plan, but are actually unable to offer accessible services, the lack of monitoring on the capacity and training of service providers to respond to accessibility and other disability related requirements, and more.⁵⁷ Evidence of this, is the example of the 'Museums for all' initiative approved by the Council of Ministers (27 August 2020) which however in the proposed actions there is no reference to accessibility of museums and opportunities of relevant events that would promote diversity.⁵⁸ There is no indication that the 'Museums for all' initiative is linked to the EDC and it is not mentioned either in the initiative information or the EDC actions and services.

In relation to mobility, it is doubtful if the set amounts of the mobility allowance, particularly the lower one, are realistic considering the average rates for taxi rides. In addition to this, taxis are not accessible to all people with disabilities. Bus transport comes with discounted and lower monthly fees, but there are limitations in relation to accessibility, timetables, frequency, and customer service. The UN Committee (2017) had clearly recommended that all new means of public transport should be fully accessible and that taxis and/or other means of public transportation should not apply additional charges to people with disabilities when they are wheelchair users or they use other assistive equipment. The Cyprus Confederation of Organisations of the Disabled (CCOD) reported that the second National Action Plan 2018-2020 indicated

⁵⁵ <https://tinyurl.com/yypzd5y9>.

⁵⁶ [https://ec.europa.eu/social/The %20European %20accessibility %20act %20is%20leading %20to %20costs %20reduction](https://ec.europa.eu/social/The%20European%20accessibility%20act%20is%20leading%20to%20costs%20reduction).

⁵⁷ Series of correspondence letters between CCOD and DSIPD, July 2013 – September 2019.

⁵⁸ <https://www.kathimerini.com.cy/gr/politismos/eikastika/moyseia-gia-oloys-egkrisi-neas-politikis-gia-ayxisi-tis-episkepsimotitas-sta-moyseia>.

a budget of EUR 2.8 million for developments in public transport; a project that has not shown any progress.⁵⁹ The public transport remains inaccessible nationally, even though the Ministry of Transport, Communication and Works has a designated Design Bureau for the Accessibility of Persons with Disability that is meant to work in consultation with the CCOD.⁶⁰ In addition, there are no specific guidelines and legislation for accessible transport, other than a reference in the 2003 Bus and Pulman Decree.⁶¹ Notably, in summer 2020 public transportation in Cyprus has been enhanced with the presence of a newly established private transport company,⁶² that has won the latest tender for some areas in Cyprus. Accessibility and the use of new technologies for green and smart traveling are included in the commitment statements of this company.

While digital accessibility of public websites and buildings/physical infrastructures⁶³ is currently legitimised with specific guidelines, access and accessibility in other levels is not. For example, a number of important websites and services (e.g. internet and telecommunication service providers, banks, schools etc) are excluded from the new law,⁶⁴ and neither is a regulation/legislation on accessible information and other services in place. Accessibility is closely related to availability and use of assistive technology (AT). Lack of access to AT and competence development means limited use of accessible infrastructures. Issues of access to AT for people with disabilities for supporting employment, education and social protection, are reported in complaints and public positions of organised groups and parents. Though there are policies and schemes in place for the acquisition of AT in education⁶⁵ and from social service,⁶⁶ there is not a comprehensive and official AT and accessibility service delivery system in place and there are no qualified professionals. Hence, AT assessment and implementation are not successful, resulting to technology abandonment and dissatisfaction. A comprehensive AT service delivery system will also address accessibility issues beyond the ones recently legitimised (see section 3.1). Evidence of the implications of the lack of an AT and accessibly comprehensive service delivery system is provided by: (a) the references to the lack of reasonable accommodations and accessibility of the work environment (chapter 3), (b) the Inquiry on UNCPRD Article 24 (see chapter 5), which makes several reference to insufficient and inappropriate implementation of AT, (c) the challenges reported in the ANED Country report on Independent Living and the relevant recommendation,⁶⁷ and (d) the lack of

⁵⁹ <http://www.kysoa.org.cy/kysoa/page.php?pageID=25&mpath=/24>.

⁶⁰ <https://24h.com.cy/2020/02/koinoniko-apokleismo-kataggelloyn-ta-amea/>.

⁶¹ The 2003 Bus and Pulman Decree, issued under the 2000-2005 Laws on Vehicle Approval.

⁶² Cyprus Public Transport Ltd, <https://www.publictransport.com.cy/cms/page/our-commitment>.

⁶³ The Roads and Buildings Regulations of 1999-2019 (Regulation 61H),

http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/enop/non-ind/2004_1_112/full.html &

http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/enop/non-ind/0_96/full.html.

⁶⁴ Public web accessibility Law (Article 3(2)) does not apply to services of the Semi-Public Sector, TV and Radio providers, Learning agencies, NGOs, etc.

⁶⁵ Mavrou, K. (2011) *Assistive Technology as an Emerging Policy and Practice: Processes, Challenges and Future Directions*, Technology and Disability, 23(1), 41-52.

⁶⁶ DSIPD, *Financial assistance scheme for the provision of technical means, instruments and other aids*, available at:

http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd19_en/dsipd19_en?OpenDocument.

⁶⁷ ANED 2018-2019 *Cyprus Country Report, Living independently and being included in the community*.

accessibility in cultural and other sites, as well as to non as this was identified in not yet publicly available reports on the implementation of the European Disability Card.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Draft evaluation reports of the implementation of the European Disability Card in Cyprus, see indication in Assessment section, at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1139>.

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

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

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

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

Education was among the priorities of The First Cyprus Disability Strategy 2018-2028 and The Second Disability Action Plan 2018-2020.

5.1 Summary of the educational situation of persons with disabilities

The EU-SILC estimates concerning educational attainment should be treated with some caution due to variable confidence levels, but they consistently indicate disability quality gaps. Table 16 indicates early school leaving rates disaggregated by disability status. Youth with disabilities (aged 18-24) tend to leave school significantly more than non-disabled peers of the same age groups (and this is reinforced by widening the sample size to age 18-29). The indicated disability early leaving rate is twice that for other persons. Table 17 shows completion rate of tertiary education disaggregated by disability and age group. Persons with disabilities (age 30-34) are less likely to complete tertiary education than their peers (and this is reinforced in the wider sample for age 30-39). In general terms, Cyprus performs slightly better than the EU average on these two measures but there remains a significant gap between the outcomes for young disabled people and other young people.

The increasingly central role of Special Education, albeit rhetoric on an Inclusive and rights-based approach, is also manifested in the gradual increase of the number students who attend special schools. As indicated by the ‘Statistics of Primary Education Department’ in 2004-2005 there were 295 students who attended the nine special schools in Cyprus. There has been a gradual increase of this number and in 2019-20 there were 465 students, although the number of students in primary schools decreased during the same period (57,574 students in 2004-2005 and 52,768 students in 2019-2020).⁶⁹ The number of students who attend special schools does not include the number of students who attend other forms of segregated provision in mainstream schools (e.g. Resource Units). It is also interesting to note that the Ministry of

⁶⁹ http://www.moec.gov.cy/dde/pdf/statistika_el.pdf.

Transport, Communication and Works has recently (10 September 2020)⁷⁰ announced the purchase of four new small accessible shuttles for the transportation of students to special schools, with no reference to the use of this service by children with disabilities that attend the mainstream schools.

Cyprus is currently under a process of reforming the current state of Special Education in consultation with relevant stakeholders with a view to meeting its legal obligations that emanate from the UNCPRD as well as the recommendations of the incumbent UN committee (2017).⁷¹ Despite a stated policy focus on precipitating an inclusive education reforms, there are several dissenting voices that question the ideological and political underpinnings of the White Paper of Inclusive Education Law of 2019 ‘*Ο περί Ενιαίας Εκπαίδευσης (Δομές Υποστήριξης) Νόμος του 2019*’ – that is expected to become a Law by the end of the year (e.g. University of Cyprus 27 March 2019; European University of Cyprus 12 April 2019).⁷²

The rights of students with disabilities are abysmally violated by current education policies and procedures, and there is little evidence to signal any future changes that can reinstate their rights to have access to quality, non-discriminatory and equitable forms of educational provision.⁸³ Students with SEND are even deprived of their basic right to have access to qualified personal assistants, who can support the process of their learning and socialisation in mainstream schools and Universities.⁷³ This is an issue that was also raised by the Ombudsman, after undertaking an independent inquiry into this matter.⁷⁴

5.2 Analysis of education policies relevant to the Semester

Policy reform for the education of children with disabilities

Despite acknowledging the shortcomings of the current law, official rhetoric does not seem to have embraced an inclusive lexicon let alone an inclusive approach to meeting the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The latest version of the White Paper of Inclusive Education Law of 2019 ‘*Ο περί Ενιαίας Εκπαίδευσης (Δομές Υποστήριξης) Νόμος του 2019*’ has been criticized on many grounds. It is interesting to note that representatives of the academia and

⁷⁰ Announcement of the Ministry of Transport, Communication and Works, <http://www.mcw.gov.cy/mcw/mcw.nsf/All/36B3D633EE7B192EC22585DF0041AFB7?OpenDocument>.

⁷¹ UN committee Recommendations (2017), <http://www.mcw.gov.cy/mcw/mcw.nsf/All/36B3D633EE7B192EC22585DF0041AFB7?OpenDocument>.

⁷² Request to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for registration of an inquiry regarding the violation of Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities under the current education system as well as with respect to the ongoing reform for inclusive education in Cyprus.

⁷³ <https://www.philenews.com/eidiseis/paraskinio/article/1027416/dikaioma-oi-synodoi-se-oles-tis-bathmides>.

⁷⁴ Ombudsman Independent Inquiry (2018), [http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/All/09934225B81BB10FC22585F100338FEE/\\$file/AYT_%207_2018_.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/All/09934225B81BB10FC22585F100338FEE/$file/AYT_%207_2018_.pdf?OpenElement).

organisations of people with disabilities^{75 76} withdrew from the Working Groups established by invitation by the MoECSY, denoting their disagreement on the main principles and provisions of the suggested Law.⁷⁷ Notwithstanding efforts to address the shortcomings of the existing special education legal framework, the envisaged reforms constitute a political act of 'educational borrowing' that fails to provide 'a clear legislative scope of inclusive education' suggested by the UNCRPD Committee 2017. Even though a legal framework by itself does not constitute a panacea for promoting an inclusive discourse, it is nevertheless the first step to facilitate the process of transformative change towards inclusion. The dismal special education 'policy scape' has more recently resulted in an 'Inquiry regarding the violation of article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities under the current education system as well as with respect to the ongoing reform for inclusive education in Cyprus'⁷⁸ (September 2020). The Inquiry was commissioned by the CCOD and other disability organisations and was the outcome of the increasing concerns of the Applicants about the stance adopted by the MoECSY and its failure to exhibit 'political will in the direction of complying with the Convention and the aforesaid Concluding Observations with the adoption of a true inclusive education' (2020:7). The Inquiry provides multiple examples of the ways in which students with SEND are discriminated against, stigmatised, marginalised, and excluded in education. The Inquiry provides a rigorous and substantiated account of ways in which Cyprus fails to meet its legal obligations that derive from Article 24 of the UNCRPD.

It is interesting to note that the Inquiry, inter alia, raises serious concerns about the role of the Ombudsman in safeguarding the rights of children with disabilities relates. Even though the Commissioner for the Protection of the Rights of Children in Cyprus issued a report⁷⁹ to exemplify her position with regard to the current special education reform efforts in March 2019, her recommendations still fall short of the recommendations made by the UNRPD committee (see above). For instance, she highlights the need to promote the social model of disability- as opposed to the labelling of specific individuals- by introducing the notion of 'students with additional support needs' to 'remove environmental barriers' (p. 7).⁸⁰ Despite the change in nomenclature, the Commissioner consents to a 'minority rights' approach that is geared toward emphasising difference and deviance from the norm (e.g. students without additional support needs), rather than 'universalist approach' that focuses on

⁷⁵ <https://www.agaliaelpidas.org/>. Angalia Elpidas- Letter sent to the MoECSY to inform them about their Withdrawal from Working Groups as part of the second phase of special education reform, 28 September 2020.

⁷⁶ <https://www.nomisma.com.cy/index.php?id=117160>.

⁷⁷ Email communication, 13 August 2020.

⁷⁸ Request to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for registration of an inquiry regarding the violation of Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities under the current education system as well as with respect to the ongoing reform for inclusive education in Cyprus.

⁷⁹

<http://www.childcom.org.cy/ccr/ccr.nsf/All/C36480248387500BC22583D7001B65CC?OpenDocument>.

⁸⁰

<http://www.childcom.org.cy/ccr/ccr.nsf/All/C36480248387500BC22583D7001B65CC?OpenDocument>.

modifying the social norm with a view to accommodating learner diversity (Kayess and French 2008).⁸¹

Even though, minority rights ‘might protect key features of human identity’ they nevertheless ‘possess the capacity divide people’ (Maclem 2008:531).⁸² The minority rights approach is further manifested in the ways in which the Commissioner consents to the intention of the White Paper to ‘introduce three tiers of intervention in mainstream schools’ whereby ‘the general support is offered to ‘vulnerable groups’ without the need to have an ‘official decision’ (p. 7). Rather than raising the need to provide quality first teaching for all children through universally designed and evidence-based teaching pedagogies, the Commissioner fails to problematise the ways in which some students are a priori pathologised and imputed a ‘vulnerability’ status in the White Paper. This kind of approach downplays compelling research evidence documenting the significance of quality first teaching in ensuring that all students’ needs are met in effective and non-discriminatory ways. (e.g. Mitchell, 2008).⁸³

Moreover, the status of ‘vulnerability’ imputed to some groups of students is unproblematically presented as an endogenous characteristic of the child as there is no exploration of the intersection of exogenous factors and inequities that render some groups of students more vulnerable than other. Even though, there is a reference to the need to adopt ‘a cross-sectoral approach’ (Commissioner for the Rights of Children 2019:7)⁸⁴ this is not exemplified in relation to the need to acknowledge the role of social inequalities, as well as schools and the community in creating and exacerbating students ‘additional support needs’. Students’ vulnerability needs to be clarified, defined and gauged against the cumulative and reciprocal effects of their education, health and social care needs so as to promote a ‘joined up’ policy framework aimed at challenging the vicious circle of social disadvantage that is experienced by ‘vulnerable’ groups of students.⁸⁵ The Law should provide clear guidelines about the necessity and the ways in which policy interventions from health, counselling, nursing, social services, childcare can be promoted and coordinated to provide proactive forms of support at a community and school level.

At the same time, the Commissioner unproblematically adopts the White Paper’s all-encompassing definition of students with ‘additional support needs’, thereby promoting an indiscriminate and yet stigmatising approach which dissolves disability issues in

⁸¹ Kayess, R., & French, P. (2008) *Out of darkness into light? Introducing the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities*, Human Rights Law Review, 8(1), 1–34. doi:10.1093/hrlr/ngm044.

⁸² Patrick Macklem, Minority rights in international law, *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, Volume 6, Issue 3-4, July-October 2008, Pages 531–552, <https://doi.org/10.1093/icon/mon019>.

⁸³ Mitchell, D. (2008) *What Really Works in Special and Inclusive Education. Using Evidence-Based Teaching Strategies*, London: Routledge

⁸⁴

<http://www.childcom.org.cy/ccr/ccr.nsf/All/C36480248387500BC22583D7001B65CC?OpenDocument>.

⁸⁵ Bassard, A., Montminy, L., Bergeron, A. S., Sosa-Sanchez, I. A. (2015) *Application of intersectional analysis to data on domestic violence against aboriginal women living in remote communities in the province of Quebec*, Aboriginal Policy Studies, 4(1), 3-23. Retrieved from https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/aps/index.php/aps/article/view/20894/pdf_31.

education into a nebulous inclusive education bandwagon (see Norwich 2002).⁸⁶ Special educational needs and disabilities are thus subsumed within the bandwagon of students with additional support needs, thereby raising concerns about the effectiveness of these broader definitions to meet students' needs as discussed earlier. Hence, the notion of 'additional support needs' of each group of students needs to be clearly defined in the revised Law.

Another suggestion made by the Commissioner that falls short of the recommendations of the UNCRPD committee to foster an inclusive education system, concerns her acquiescence to a segregated system of education. Inclusion in this respect is conflated with and reduced to segregated educational arrangements and raises questions about the exact nature and scope of the so called 'Resource Centres for Inclusion' and how these can ensure, according to the UNCRPD recommendations.

COVID-19 response measures in relation to education

The special education reform efforts are part of a general education and skills reform and childhood care enhancement agenda as articulated in the 2020 National Reform Program.⁸⁷ As a general observation the Program does not make explicit references to issues related to disability rights in education, thereby failing to acknowledge the education, training, and counselling needs of individuals with SEND. This omission is indicative of the absence of a disability rights perspective in political and policy agendas. For example, one of the specific aims of the Program in view of the COVID-19 global pandemic was to introduce 'Measures to provide distance education for kindergarten, elementary, secondary and vocational school students' (p. 11). Rather than taking timely and effective measures aimed at ensuring 'that we all benefit from an inclusive rights-based approach during health emergencies' (Schariti 2020:10),⁸⁸ no reference is made to issues of digital accessibility for students with SEND as well as their overall accessibility and support during the pandemic. It is also interesting to note that other than providing information on procedural issues (Article 3(2)a), the new law on the accessibility of public websites and mobile applications (N.50(I)/2019) does not apply to school-based websites and mobile applications, neither to radio and television agencies and NGOs that do not directly support persons with disabilities. Arguably, accessibility of eLearning and learning in general is not stipulated in the specific legislation, neither in the proposed Law for inclusive education.

More specifically, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the public education sector failed to respond effectively to online learning, especially for primary and low secondary education. There is no established learning management system which educators could collectively use, and most efforts (individual educators) did not take into consideration accessibility requirements. In addition, educational material provided to learners in digital form was not accessible, and often not editable, which results in the need for parents to print hard copies or collect hard copies of materials from school. Hence, it is important that any effort for advancing eLearning in the Cyprus Educational

⁸⁶ Norwich, B (2002). 'Education, inclusion and individual differences: Recognizing and resolving dilemmas'. *British Educational Research Journal*, 50(40), 482–502.

⁸⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2020-european-semester-national-reform-programme-cyprus_en_0.pdf.

⁸⁸ Schariti, V. (2020). The human rights of children with disabilities during health emergencies: the challenge of COVID-19. *Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology*, 62(6), 661-661.

System should be an opportunity for mainstreaming disability related issues, especially in terms of accessibility

Evaluation of educational practice

Another issue of concern relates to 'Formation of a New System for the Evaluation of the Educational Practice and Teachers' published in 2019.⁸⁹ The document provides a detailed account of the development of a new assessment system for both schools and teachers. The quest for inclusive education does not seem to be part of the Ministry's vision to enhance the quality of education, and an inclusive education and disability-rights perspective is blatantly absent from concerns to enhancing the quality of the education provided. The document adopts a deterministic approach to referring to students 'special education needs' as it fails to acknowledge the dynamic and 'evolving' nature of disability and special educational needs (United Nations (UN), 2008, p. 1). The document conveys the presumption that students' special needs are endemic to their genetic and biological makeup and this conjecture is further reinforced by the recurrent use of the term 'special needs' rather than 'special educational needs'. The educational dimension is not only semantically absent from the document's reference to students' needs, but is also absent from the overall conceptualisation of the role of schools, teachers and pedagogy to create quality learning environments so as to effectively meet the needs of all students including students with SEND.

⁸⁹ <http://www.cna.org.cy/pdf/ant/06072019.pdf>.

6 Investment priorities in relation to disability

6.1 Updates on use of existing EU funds (to 2020)

European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) 2014-2020 include a few disability specific projects. The Operational Programme of 'Employment, Human Capital and Social Cohesion' [Annual Report 2019](#)⁹⁰ summarises the programmes and the status till 2019 as follows:

Incentives for the Employment of Persons with Chronic Diseases Scheme (in progress and new scheme launched in 2019)⁹¹ and Incentives for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities Scheme (in progress/extended,⁹² both under the Department of Labour (see chapter 3 for further information and progress).

Implementation of the New system for the Assessment of Disability and Functionality, (extension, DSIPD).⁹³ The system is the mechanism through which all people with disabilities are currently assessed with respect to eligibility for disability benefits, and has been highly criticised (see chapter 3, and ANED Cyprus country reports). The launch of the system was initially funded by ESIF, and it is now extended under the Operational Programmes for 'Employment, Human Capital and Social Cohesion' (Common Output Indicator 16: Participants with Disability). The budget of the programme is EUR 4,2 million, and assessment centres have been established in Limassol and Nicosia. Till the end of 2019, 11.829 disability assessment have been conducted in total (ESIF Cyprus Annual Report 2019).

Operation of Protected Living Residences (in progress, DSIPD). This project is implemented under two schemes of the DSIPD, the New Scheme for the Inclusion of the Persons with Severe Disabilities in Supported Living Programmes and the Project for the Development of Supported Living Residences, both approved by the Council of Ministers (No. 83.414, date 27 September 2017). During the current programmatic period, 10 new residences are planned to operate, that will accommodate 48 persons with disabilities.⁹⁴ Eight new staff members (social inclusion officers) of the Department have been employed to support the implementation of these two schemes, who assessed all 116 registered existing Disability and Elderly Houses (see section 4 and ANED 2018-2019 Independent Living report. In 2020 a tender has been announced by the DSIPD for the establishment of four (4) Supported Living Residences.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ [Operational Programme of 'Employment, Human Capital and Social Cohesion', Implementation Annual Report for 2019.](#)

⁹¹ Scheme Providing Incentives for the Employment of Persons with Chronic Diseases, Available at <http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/dl.nsf/All/BD9CDD9FE8DA4ED7C22583FC00289773?OpenDocument>.

⁹² Scheme Providing Incentives for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities, Available at <http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/dl.nsf/All/FB81120273E2F050C22581CB00412586?>

⁹³ ESIF - Extension of the Implementation of the New system for the Assessment of Disability and Functionality, available at <http://www.structuralfunds.org.cy/default.aspx?articleID=7359>.

⁹⁴ Department for Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities, Supported Living Residences, http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsdpd93b_gr/dsdpd93b_gr?OpenDocument.

⁹⁵ Tender of Public Procurement for the development of 4 Supported Living Residences in Limassol, Larnaca or Famagousta, announced at

Centre for family intervention and support for Autism (new project of 2019, DSIPD). This is a new scheme for which the Department is currently in consultation with interested parties and stakeholders.⁹⁶

Provision of supportive services persons with paraplegia/quadriplegia (in progress). The programme was run by the Cyprus Paraplegic Organisation⁹⁷ in collaboration to the Cyprus Human Resources Development Authority.⁹⁸ Until the end of 2019, 62 carers have been employed for the support of 60 persons with disabilities (see ESIF, Cyprus Annual Report 2019).

Actions for School and Social Inclusion (in progress), project DRASE⁹⁹ (MoECSY). The project includes free support teaching and creative activities and additional psycho-social support to students and parents. Initially the action focused on immigrants and the support of low socio-economical level families. It is gradually targeting students with disabilities that often face the same challenges, though the education of students with disabilities is regulated by a specific Law (N113/1999), currently under reform. The project under which 111 schools have been included till now, is a measure relevant to Education, specifically included in the actions for the prevention of early school leaving, also mentioned in the 2020 NRP.

6.2 Priorities for future investment (after 2020)

Based on the above analysis of the current situation in Cyprus the following are suggested as priorities for future investments:

Accessibility of information and content: While digital accessibility has been legitimised, the newly introduced law excludes school and other websites and digital applications, essential for inclusive education and digital inclusion and employment. Till now, there is no funded mechanism in place for the development of accessible information. In view of a Greener Europe (CSR3), digitalisation of information and activities should be able to reach persons with disabilities, though it is noted that broadband connection for persons with disabilities in Cyprus is free.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, issues of cost have been raised in relation to the provisions for accessible school

<http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/All/6D380648D54C1506C22585850028269C?OpenDocument>.

⁹⁶ Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, Centre for family intervention and support for Autism,

http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd93_gr/dsipd93_gr?OpenDocument.

⁹⁷ Basic Information of unemployed persons for the specialization of carers for supporting services to persons with paraplegia/quadriplegia, Cyprus Paraplegic Organisation, available at

<http://opak.org.cy/vasikes-pliories-gia-tin-katartisi-anergon-stin-eidikotita-tou-frontisti-gia-parochi-ypostiriktikon-ypiresion-pros-atoma-me-tetraplegia-paraplegia/>.

⁹⁸ The Cyprus Human Resources Development Authority, *Training programmes for unemployed persons on supportive care services*, available at

http://www.anad.org.cy/easyconsole.cfm/page/project/p_id/227/pc_id/17178#gallery2134.

⁹⁹ Actions for School and Social Inclusion, available at

<http://www.structuralfunds.org.cy/default.aspx?articleID=7358> &
http://www.moec.gov.cy/seayp/drasi_drase.html.

¹⁰⁰ Special telecommunication packages, CYTA, available at <https://www.cyta.com.cy/telephone-special-tariff>.

websites and e-learning platform,¹⁰¹ as well as health information and relevant portals (see section 4). An e-learning webpage was built by the MoECS,¹⁰² which however solely collates various existing resources of the public educational setting, and does not make any reference to disability issues or accessibility of the learning materials and content, and neither holds a learning management system that could be applied in schools. Hence, investment in e-learning infrastructures is necessary, that will prioritise digital inclusive education.¹⁰³

Assistive Technology and Accessibility Comprehensive Service Delivery System. The lack of assistive technology and accessibility support is also highlighted in several chapters of this report. Investment towards this priority is essential, for the success of disability related priorities in education, health, social and civil life, and employment as these are outlined in the European Pillar of Social Rights, and CRS3.

Investment on projects that will provide incentives to the private sector for the empowerment for the employment of people with disabilities. These should extend to funding implementation of reasonable accommodations and universal design at workplace, which are one of the main concerns during job-seeking for person with disabilities.¹⁰⁴ In addition, employment investment plans should include disability awareness training for the public employment (CR, annex D refers to job-search assistance to job seekers) service and employers (see section 3 above). Involvement of the private sector in the establishment of social enterprises that would provide employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, for sustainable and effective programs of vocational education should also be considered.

Investment on community-based support for independent living and deinstitutionalisation. The current projects on Supported Living Residences are heavily based on existing structures and experiences. A very interesting observation is the fact that only 5 of the 234 persons living in the existing Homes for the Disabled and the Elderly, are willing to move into Supported Living Residences. Arguably, incentives and innovation are needed that will attract persons and families in order to appreciate advantages. Emphasis of investment plans should be placed on Smart Homes and AAL innovations that would increase quality of life and provide space and opportunities for persons to get involved community activities, and explore employment possibilities, connected to Smarter and more Social Europe priorities.

¹⁰¹ Information provided in personal communication with disability representatives involved in the development of the Public websites' accessibility law, telephone communication 18 September 2020.

¹⁰² E-Learning, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth, available at <http://elearning.schools.ac.cy/index.php/el/>.

¹⁰³ Hoogerwerf, E.J., Mavrou K. and Traina, I. (Eds.) (2020). *The role of assistive technology in fostering inclusive education. Strategies and tools to support change*. Routledge.

¹⁰⁴ E.g. outcomes of the EU co-funded SIDE Project, Supporting Innovative Models of Deaf Youth Employment.

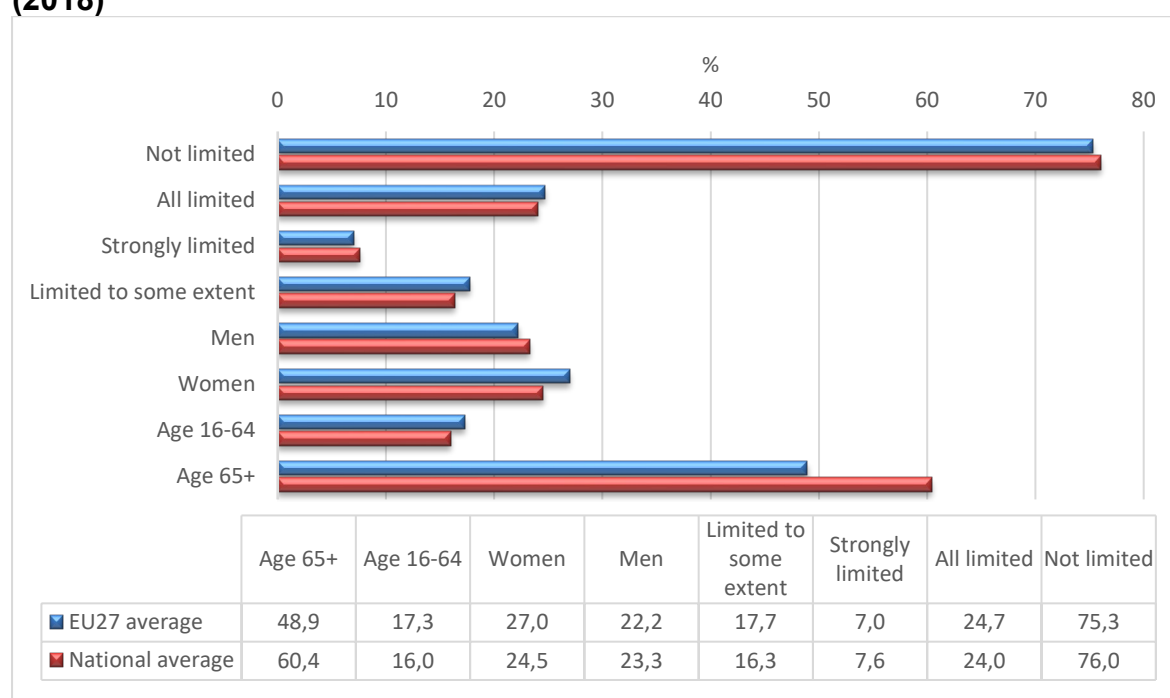
7 Annex: disability data relevant to the Semester

See also disability data published in the Eurostat database¹⁰⁵ and statistical reports.¹⁰⁶

Unless specified, the summary statistics are drawn from the most recent EU-SILC data available to researchers from Eurostat. The EU-SILC sample includes people living in private households and does not include people living in institutions (congregative households). The sampling methods vary somewhat in each country.

The proxy used to identify people with disabilities (impairments) is whether ‘for at least the past six months’ the respondent reports that they have been ‘limited because of a health problem in activities people usually do’.¹⁰⁷

Table 1: Self-reported ‘activity limitations’ as a proxy for impairment/disability (2018)



Source: EU-SILC 2018 Release 2020 version 1

In subsequent tables, these data are used to indicate ‘disability’ equality gaps and trends relevant to the analytical chapters – for the labour market, social policies and healthcare, and education – by comparing outcomes for persons who report and do

¹⁰⁵ Eurostat health Database, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

¹⁰⁶ Eurostat (2019) *Disability Statistics*, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Disability_statistics.

¹⁰⁷ The SILC survey questions are contained in the Minimum European Health Module (MEHM), [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Special:WhatLinksHere/Glossary:Minimum_European_Health_Module_\(MEHM\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Special:WhatLinksHere/Glossary:Minimum_European_Health_Module_(MEHM)).

not report 'activity limitations'.¹⁰⁸ National estimates for Cyprus are compared with EU27 mean averages for the most recent year.¹⁰⁹

7.1 EU data relevant to disability and the labour market (2018)

Table 2: Employment rates, by disability and gender (aged 20-64)

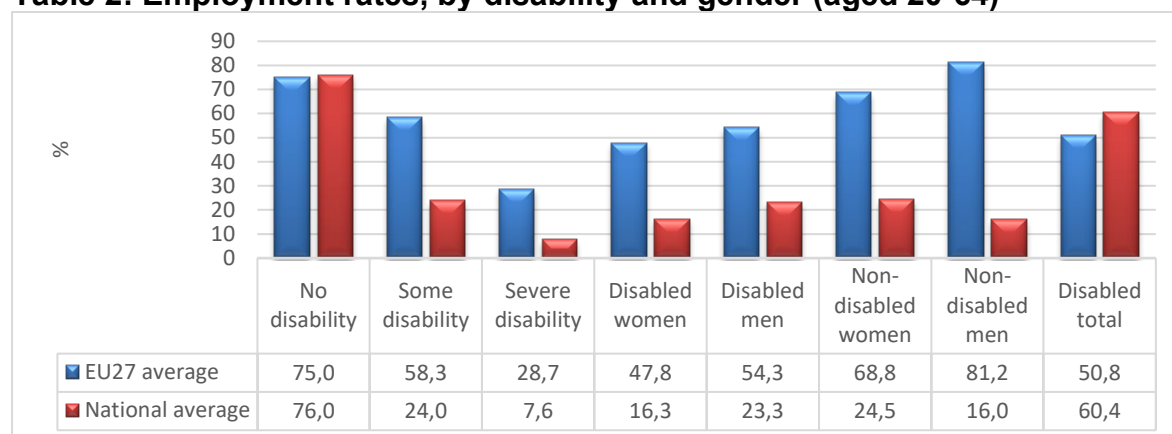
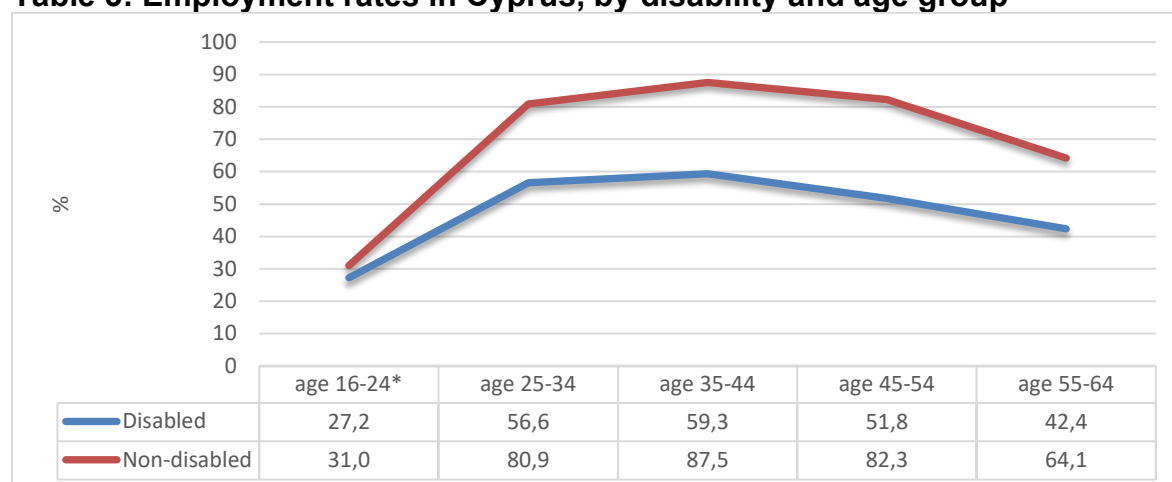
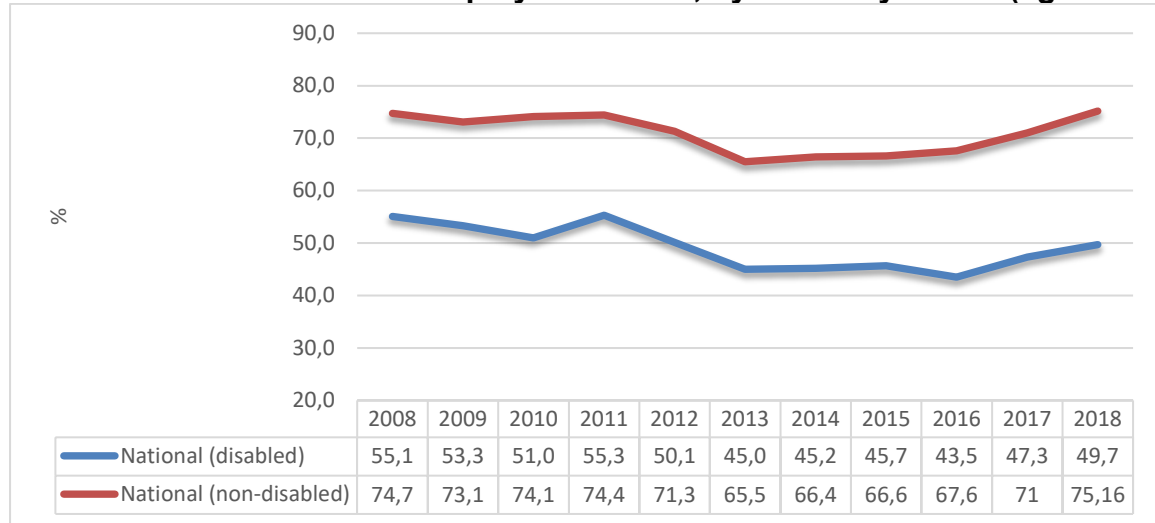


Table 3: Employment rates in Cyprus, by disability and age group



¹⁰⁸ This methodology was developed in the annual statistical reports of ANED, available at <http://www.disability-europe.net/theme/statistical-indicators>.

¹⁰⁹ The exit of the United Kingdom from the EU changes the EU average. Averages were also affected in 2015 by a discontinuity in the German disability data due to a definitional change.

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

Source: EU-SILC 2018 Release 2020 version 1 (and preceding UDBs)

7.1.1 Unemployment

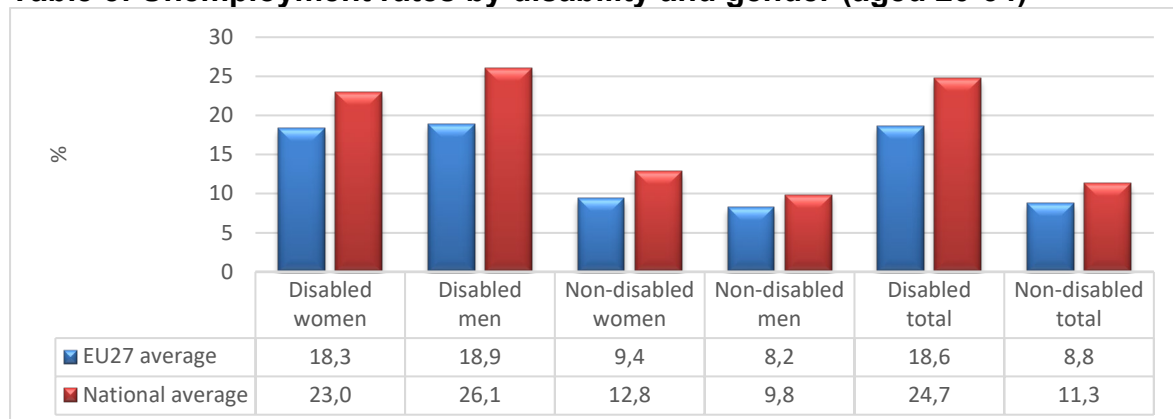
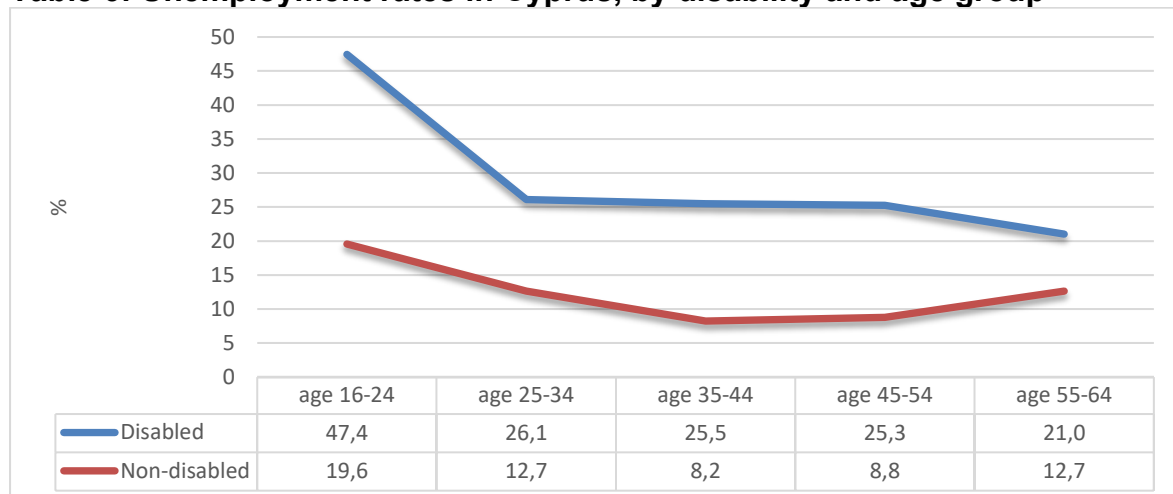
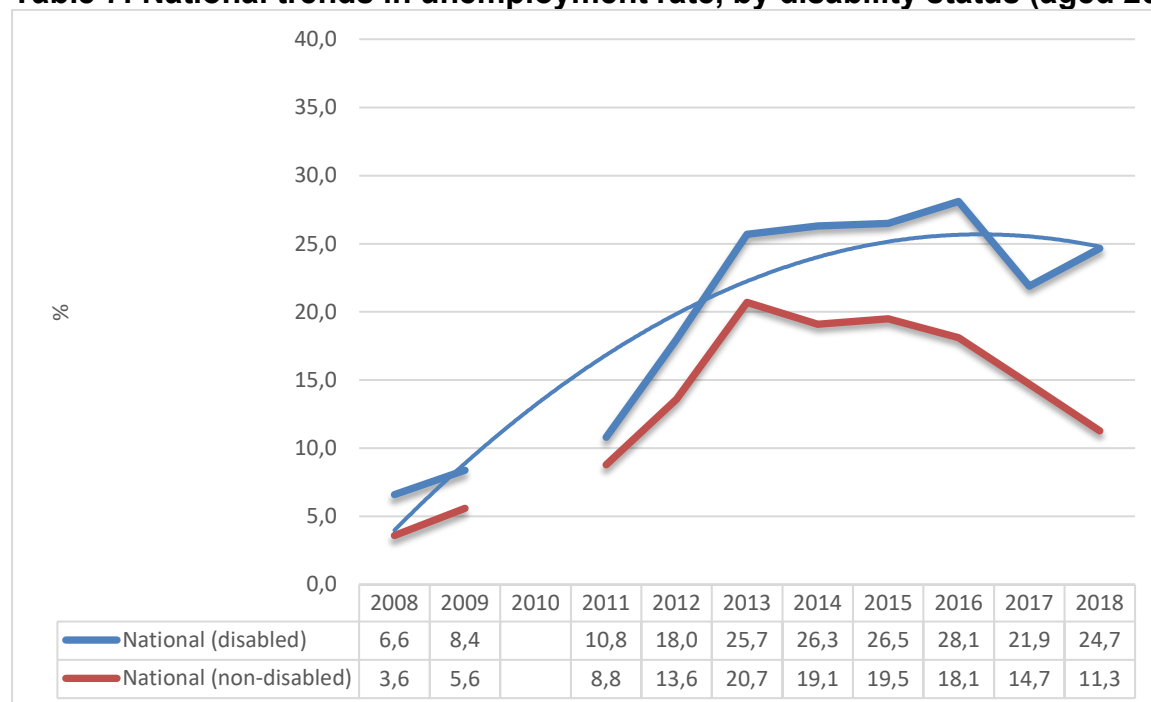
Table 5: Unemployment rates by disability and gender (aged 20-64)**Table 6: Unemployment rates in Cyprus, by disability and age group**

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

Source: EU-SILC 2018 Release 2020 version 1 (and preceding UDBs)

7.1.2 Economic activity

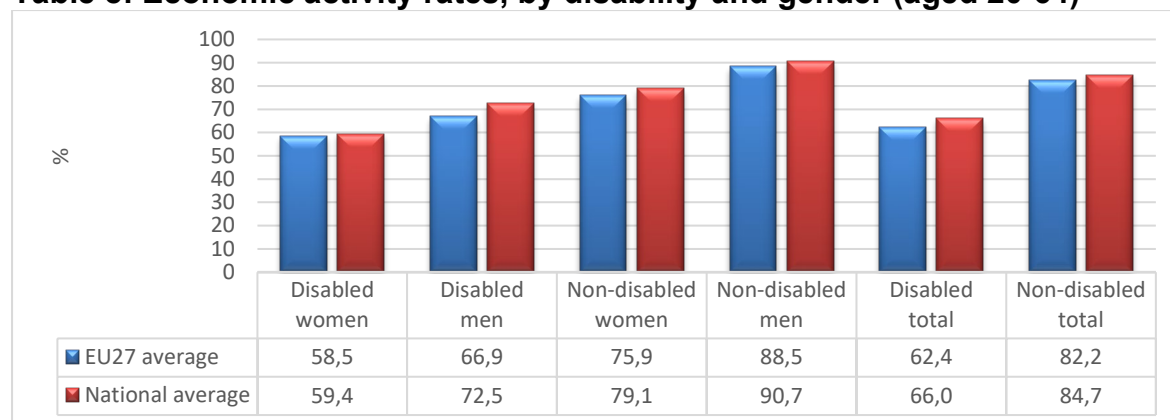
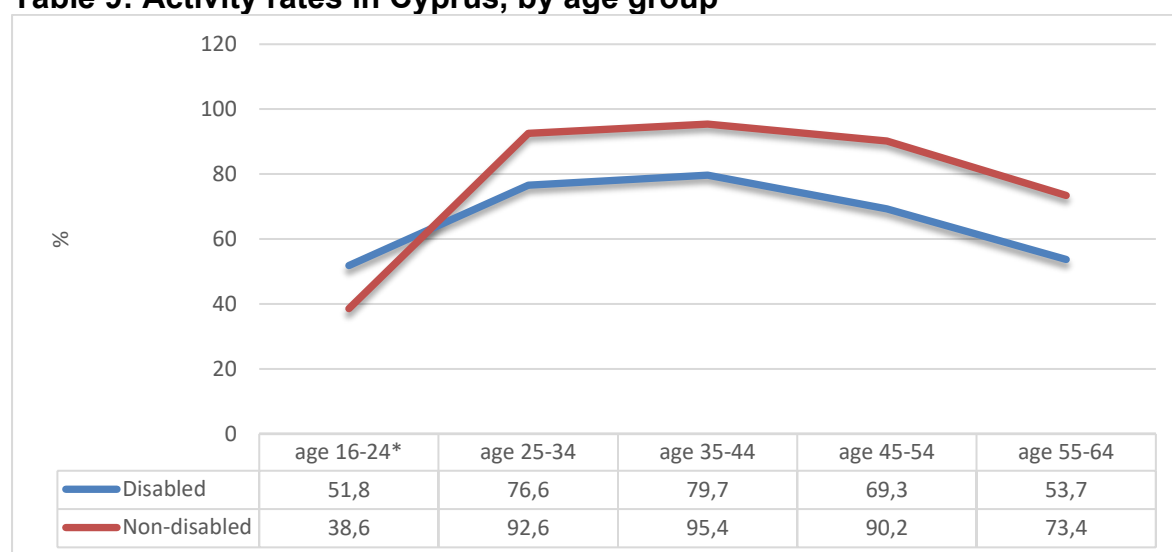
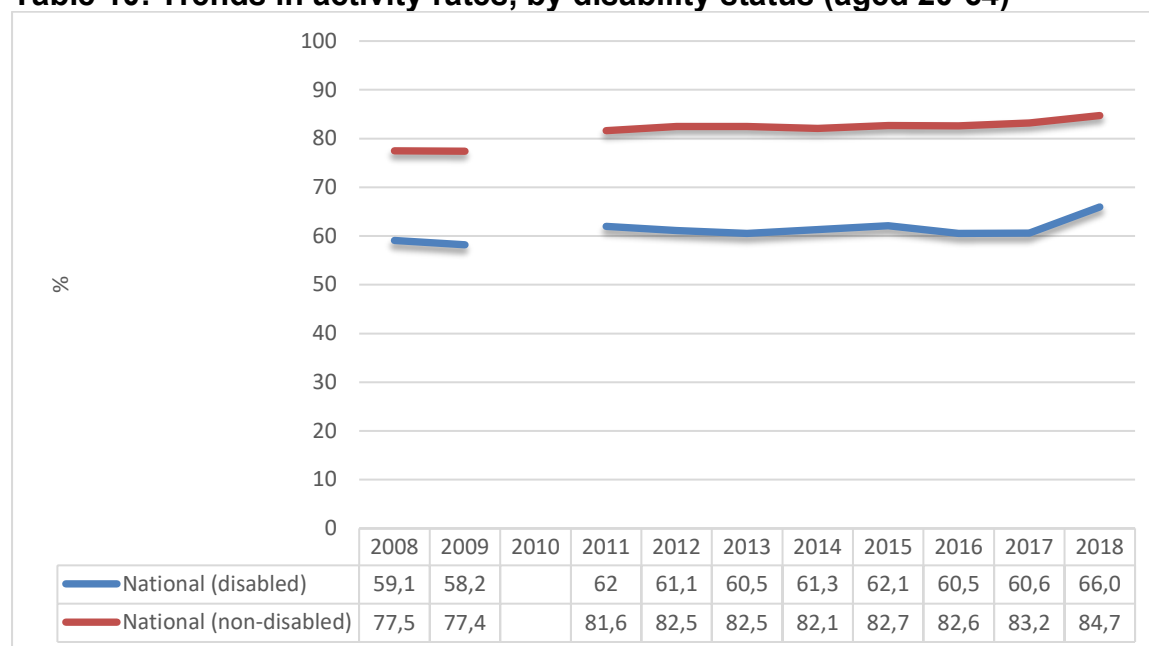
Table 8: Economic activity rates, by disability and gender (aged 20-64)

Table 9: Activity rates in Cyprus, by age group**Table 10: Trends in activity rates, by disability status (aged 20-64)**

Source: EU-SILC 2018 Release 2020 version 1 (and preceding UDBs)

7.1.3 Alternative sources of labour market data in Cyprus

Disability data is not included in the core European Labour Force Survey but labour market indicators for Cyprus were disaggregated from ad modules conducted in 2001 and 2011. These can be found in the Eurostat disability database.¹¹⁰

The annual Labour Force Surveys are prepared by the Cyprus Statistical Service. The Labour Force Survey of 2013 identified people with disabilities under the general groups of people with part-time employment, where 'incapability or disability' was reported as one of the reasons for part-time employment. In the latest LFS data of 2018 people with disabilities are not identified. and no categories of people with

¹¹⁰ Eurostat Health Database, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

disabilities are included in the Labour Force Survey data of the 4th quarter 2018 currently available.¹¹¹

Outcomes of the disability schemes relevant to labour market for the last five years are summarised below from administrative data.

Table A: Numbers of employment of people with disabilities under employment schemes 2014-2019

	Scheme for the creation and operation of small units for self-employment		Vocational Training Scheme		Supported Employment Scheme programmes	
	Beneficiaries	Total amount (EUR)	Beneficiaries	Total amount (EUR)	Beneficiaries	Total amount (EUR)
2014	6	20,541	8	12,359	23 with 246 employed	293,582
2015	9	32,175	8	11,730	23 with 248 employed	293,582
2016	3	56,099	7	10,834	22 with 275 employed	319,912
2017	3	35,428	4	5,760	19 with 267 employed	245,049
2018	5	20,227	1	1,500	23 with 300 employed	328,375
2019	7	10,500	12	4,097	24 with 350	294,225

¹¹¹ Cyprus Statistical Service: Main data on labour force (Key figures)
http://www.cystat.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/labour_31main_en/labour_31main_en?OpenForm&sub=1&sel=1.

7.2 EU data relevant to disability, social policies and healthcare (2018)

Table 11: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion, by disability and risk (aged 16-59)

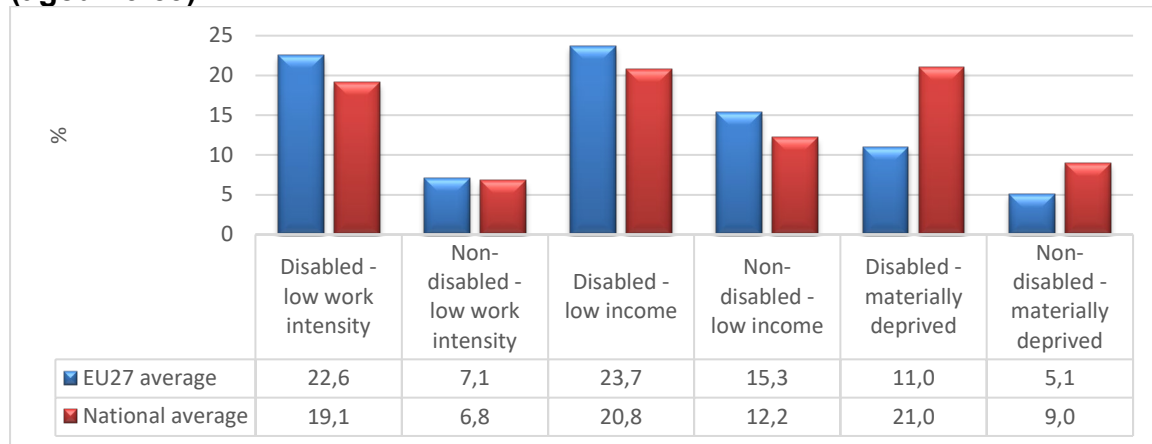


Table 12: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion, by disability and gender (aged 16+)

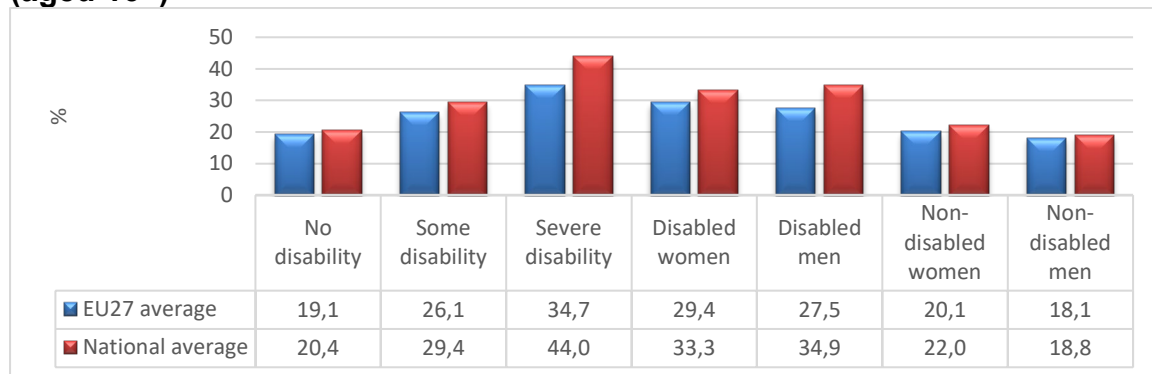
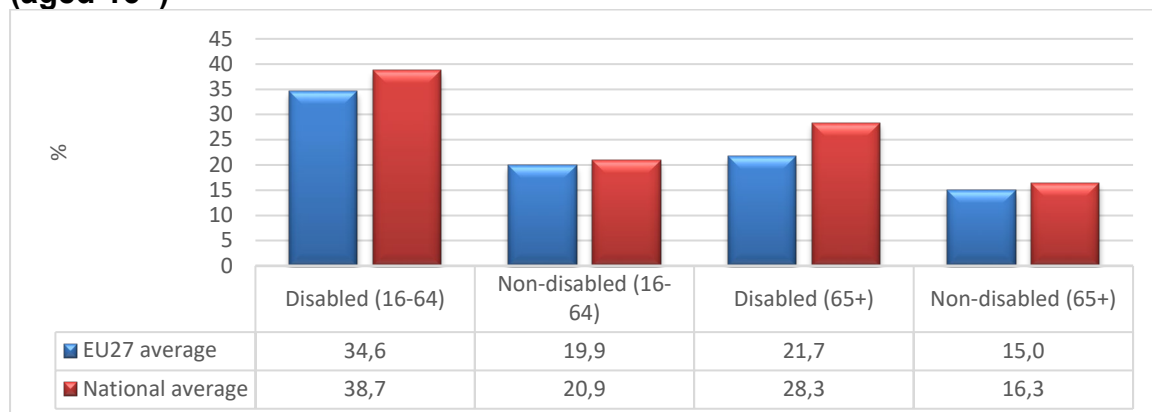
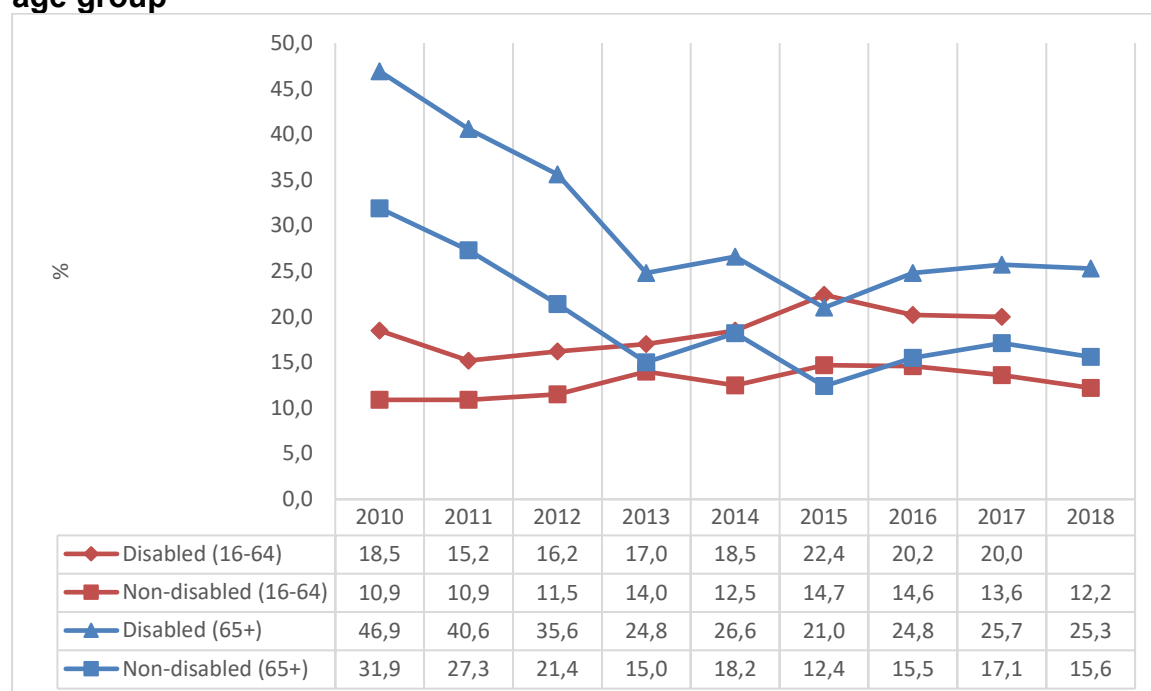


Table 13: Overall risk of household poverty or exclusion by disability and age (aged 16+)

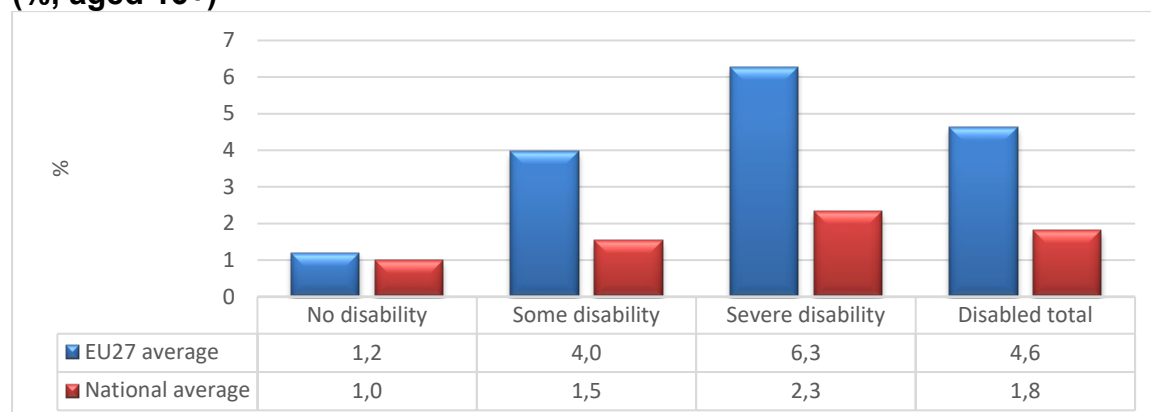


Source: EU-SILC 2018 Release 2020 version 1 (and previous UDB)

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

Source: Eurostat Health Database [[hlth_dpe020](#)] - People at risk of poverty

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

Table 15: Self-reported unmet needs for medical examination, 3-year average (% , aged 16+)

Source: Eurostat Health Database [[hlth_dh030](#)] – 'Too expensive or too far to travel or waiting list'

Note: due to large variations an average of three years is indicated. EU mean averages are also skewed by high values in a minority of countries within disability groups but median averages for the total disability and no disability groups in 2018 are consistent with the 3-year mean values.

7.2.1 Alternative sources of poverty or health care data in Cyprus

The EU-SILC data provides a comprehensive and reliable source concerning poverty or social exclusion rates. In addition to the summary tables presented so far, the Eurostat disability database also contains breakdowns concerning disability and poverty before and after social transfers, as well as in-work-poverty.¹¹²

There are no national surveys or studies that offer additional disability specific information, other than numbers of social schemes beneficiaries mentioned in analysis sections of this report.

7.3 EU data relevant to disability and education

Table 16: Early school leaving rates, by disability status (aged 18-24 and 18-29)¹¹³

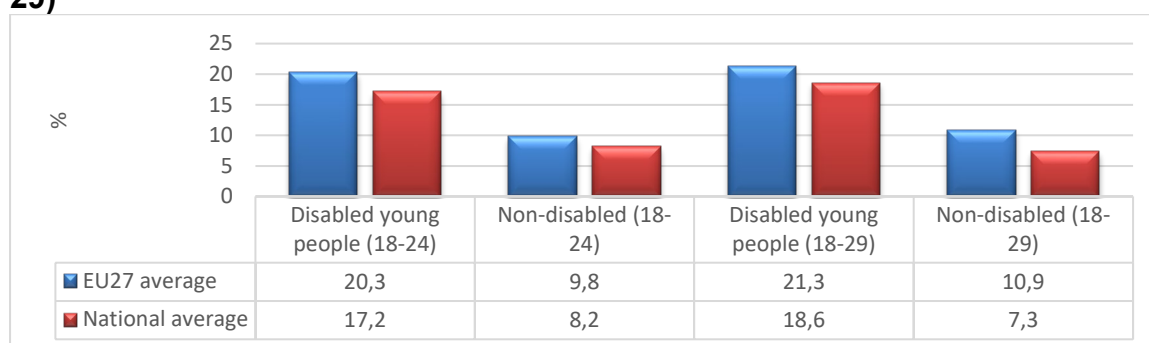
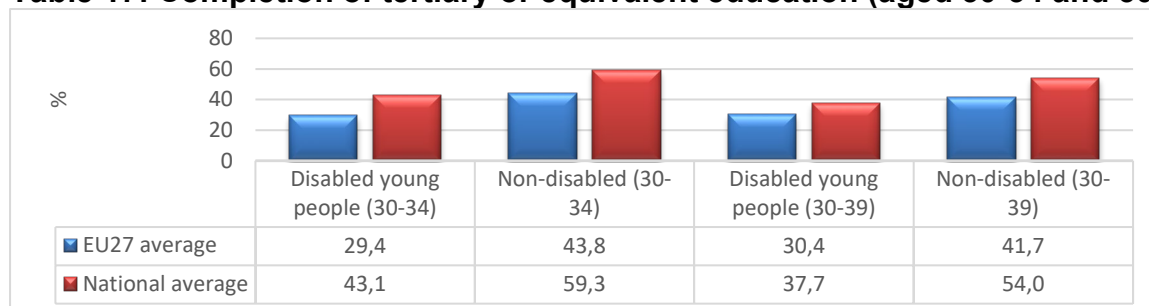


Table 17: Completion of tertiary or equivalent education (aged 30-34 and 30-39)



Source: EU-SILC 2018 Release 2020 version 1 (and preceding UDBs)

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

7.3.1 Alternative sources of education data in Cyprus

Disability data is not included in the core European Labour Force Survey, but education and training indicators were disaggregated from ad hoc modules conducted in 2001 and 2011. These can be found in the Eurostat disability database.¹¹⁴ Similar caution is needed with this data.

¹¹² Eurostat Health Database, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

¹¹³ There was a change from ISCED 1997 to ISCED 2011 qualification definitions in 2014 although some Member States continued to use the older definition after this time.

¹¹⁴ Eurostat Health Database, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

Some administrative data is also provided in the European Agency's Statistics on Inclusive Education (EASIE), concerning the population of enrolled students identified with special educational needs in Cyprus.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, *Statistics on Inclusive Education*, <https://www.european-agency.org/data/data-tables-background-information>.

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