



European Semester 2021-2022 country fiche on disability equality

Cyprus

March 2022

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Directorate D — Social Rights and Inclusion

Unit D3 — Disability & Inclusion

European Commission

B-1049 Brussels

European Semester 2021-2022 country fiche on disability equality

With comparative data Annex provided by EDE

Cyprus

Katerina Mavrou
Anastasia Liasidou
Maria Tsakiri

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.

This country report has been prepared as input for the European Semester in 2022.¹

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

LEGAL NOTICE

Manuscript completed in March 2022

The European Commission is not liable for any consequence stemming from the reuse of this publication.

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022

© European Union, 2022



The reuse policy of European Commission documents is implemented based on Commission Decision 2011/833/EU of 12 December 2011 on the reuse of Commission documents (OJ L 330, 14.12.2011, p. 39). Except otherwise noted, the reuse of this document is authorised under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC-BY 4.0) licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). This means that reuse is allowed provided appropriate credit is given and any changes are indicated.

Table of contents

1	Executive summary and recommendations	4
1.1	Key points and main challenges for Cyprus in 2022.....	4
1.2	Recommendations for Cyprus.....	5
2	Mainstreaming disability equality in the Semester documents.....	6
2.1	Recovery and Resilience Plan for Cyprus (RRP)	6
2.2	Semester links to CRPD and national disability action plans.....	8
3	Disability and the labour market - analysis of the situation and the effectiveness of policies.....	10
3.1	Summary of the labour market situation of persons with disabilities	10
3.2	Analysis of labour market policies relevant to the Semester	10
4	Disability, social policies and healthcare – analysis of the situation and the effectiveness of policies.....	13
4.1	Summary of the social situation of persons with disabilities	14
4.2	Analysis of social policies relevant to the Semester	14
5	Disability, education and skills – analysis of the situation and the effectiveness of policies.....	18
5.1	Summary of the educational situation of persons with disabilities	18
5.2	Analysis of education policies relevant to the Semester.....	19
6	Investment priorities in relation to disability.....	22
6.1	Updates on use of existing EU funds (up to 2021)	22
6.2	Priorities for future investment (after 2021)	24
7	Annex: disability data relevant to the Semester	26
7.1	Data relevant to disability and the labour market.....	27
7.1.1	Unemployment.....	28
7.1.2	Economic activity	29
7.1.3	Alternative sources of labour market data in Cyprus	30
7.2	EU data relevant to disability, social policies and healthcare (2019)	32
7.2.1	Alternative sources of poverty or health care data in Cyprus.....	33
7.3	EU data relevant to disability and education.....	34
7.2.2	Alternative sources of education data in Cyprus.....	34

1 Executive summary and recommendations

1.1 Key points and main challenges for Cyprus in 2022

Disability and the labour market

The economic activity of persons with disabilities in Cyprus remains lower than other groups of people, while unemployment rates seem to have increased in the last couple of years. Though employment and vocational training are among the priorities of Cyprus Disability Strategy and Action Plans, activities and schemes in place are not further reinforced with additional measures, such as employers' awareness/education as well as funding of accessibility and reasonable adaptations in the workplace, in order to enhance their effective implementation. In addition, the Labour Market component of the RRP 2021, does not include any disability specific reforms and investments, while the quota policies have not yet been extended to the private sector.

Disability, social policies and healthcare

There have been no new developments or amendments for the social benefit schemes for persons with disabilities since the report of previous semester. As acknowledged in the RRP 2021, allowances should be expanded, further supported and be more targeted. Alignment of disability policies with the CRPD is strongly recommended by the Ombudsman, while a body for the supervision of the quality levels of the social inclusion services is included in the draft Third Disability Action Plan, as well as the upgrade of health care and rehabilitation services. Deinstitutionalisation and supported living continuous as a priority, though there are still a number of challenges.

Disability, education and skills

In education, the concerns around the current special education reform towards inclusive education, still remain, and the progress is too slow, with a number of disability representatives and academics withdrawing their participation from the relevant working groups. Albeit the inclusive rhetoric of the reform, in the RRP 2021 investments are focused on Special Schools, rather than the reinforcement of inclusive education. In addition, increased disagreement is currently raised in relation to the needs and recruitment of special education support staff (escorts of children with special educational needs), as relevant resources have been reduced on behalf of the Ministry of Education, while parents' involvement in the process is also lessened.

Investment priorities for inclusion and accessibility

A number of investments included in the RRP 2021 are linked to disability. However, the connection is in general superficial and many of them do not involve specific and targeted actions. For example, in terms of accessibility, most investments are limited to basic physical accessibility of infrastructures and not on accessibility of communication and information, digital competencies and digital inclusion, especially when it comes to digital transformation. Additionally, important investments such as independent living and supported employment have been initiated, but criticised for lack of appropriate legal framework, that will ensure support staff qualifications and monitoring.

1.2 Recommendations for Cyprus

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

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

Rationale: Unemployment rates of persons with disabilities remain high and 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 which will also support issues of accessible digital transformation

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: Establishment of an accessibility monitoring mechanism (e.g. Independent Authority for the Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities)

Rationale: The authority will promote, coordinate, and monitor the design and implementation of accessibility policies across sectors, in a coherent way. This will also facilitate efforts to legislate accessibility in all levels, including communications, content, and information, in addition to physical infrastructures.

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.

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. Families' and children involvement in decision making should be further empowered.

2 Mainstreaming disability equality in the Semester documents

Country Reports and Country Specific Recommendation of direct relevance to disability policy were not published in this exceptional policy cycle. For a commentary on the last published documents please see our country fiche for the previous Semester 2020-21.

2.1 [Recovery and Resilience Plan](#) for Cyprus (RRP)

The following key points highlight where the situation of persons with disabilities or disability policies was considered in these plans. We address the most relevant of these and other issues arising from the RRP/NRP in the next chapters.

In the General overview of the RRP disability is addressed as follows:

- It is acknowledged that the percentage of social protection expenditure in Cyprus going to disability benefits, along with other social benefits, is limited (p. 29)
- Incentives for energy efficiency in households with special reference to households with persons with disabilities (p. 30, see below Component 2.1, Investment 2)
- Links to 2020 CSR2.1 refer to the enhancement of the Welfare Benefits Administration Service, home care services for persons with disabilities (p. 32)
- Promotion of equal opportunities examines harmonization of national legislation to EU directives, takes into consideration, among others, the Persons with Disabilities Law (antidiscrimination law) as well as issues of accessibility of persons with disabilities (p. 35)
- The plan claims to ensure respect for the rights of people with disabilities in conformity with the UNCRPD by including measures for inclusive reforms in education, the labour market and health sector, accessibility of buildings, services and websites as well as transition from institutional to community-based services.

In the detailed description of reforms, disability is included in the following measures and investments:

- Component 1.1. Resilient and effective health system, enhanced civil protection:
 - All projects within investment in building infrastructures and equipment of the healthcare have taken into consideration the accessibility for people with disabilities (p. 42)
 - Investment 5 (Enhancement, modernisation and upgrade of Cyprus State Hospitals) includes the construction of a new Mental Health Hospital, though it is highlighted that the Mental Health Services in Cyprus operate within a deinstitutionalisation environment and priority is given in investing in alternatives to residential care/hospitals facilities (pp 78-79)
- Component 2.1. Climate neutrality, energy efficiency and renewable energy penetration:
 - Investment 2: Promoting renewables and individual energy efficiency measures in dwellings and tackling energy poverty in households with persons with disabilities (p. 90), linked to European Green Deal. Grants will

provide for support services and energy guidance to vulnerable households, including persons with disabilities, involving small-scale renovations and aiming at affordable and safe energy consumption. The document acknowledges that 'persons with disability have a greater demand for energy as a result of the longer periods of time spent at home, the use of assistive technologies, and their increased needs for cooling and heating due to specific health conditions affecting the ability of the body to regulate its temperature' (p. 110), and the measures will provide funding for both NGO's that host persons with disabilities as well as individual households.

- Component 2.2. Sustainable transport:
 - Investment 1: Implementation of Sustainable Urban Mobility Projects (SUMP) and accessibility enhancing measures, includes necessary infrastructure for safe and accessible movement for persons with disabilities (p. 148). The document acknowledges the lack of accessible and inclusive infrastructure and the need to improve safety to this end in order to promote social inclusion.
- Component 2.3. Smart and sustainable water management
 - Investment 5: Anti-flood and water collection measures, for which technical standards include specifications for people with disabilities.
 - Investment 12: Waste Management towards circular economy, where the construction and operation of reuse and repair centre is linked to job openings and training for people who have difficulties in the labour market including persons with disabilities (p. 259)
- Component 5.2 Labour market, social protection, social welfare and inclusion
 - Investment 2: Establishment of Multifunctional Centres and Childcare Centres makes reference to relevant qualifications of staff as well as lower number of children in a group, when children with disabilities are included (p. 495)
 - Investment 3: Establishment of home structures for children, adolescent with conduct disorders, persons with disabilities and people in need of long-term care, having de-institutionalisation as a priority also linked to the National Disability Strategy (p. 496-497), acknowledging the challenge of finding proper houses in terms of accessibility in various aspects. For 2021-2027 the aim is to establish 5 additional houses
 - Investment 4: Child Centres in Municipalities, also refers to services that will include children with disabilities
 - Investment 5: Construction of Two Model Special Education Schools, is specific to children with disabilities aiming at the improvement of the buildings and infrastructure of two existing special schools, which will be re-located and co-located, in order to join services (p. 504-505). It is noted that Cyprus is currently under an educational reform calling for inclusive education and thus emphasis on special schooling seems contradicting, especially if this is not connected to a transformation of the role of the special schools into resource centres or other inclusive education support infrastructure.

The communication plan (pp. 531-532) refers to accessibility of communication channels and materials for different groups including persons with disabilities. These

include accessibility of the RRP website and social media, for online communication, and compatibility with WCAG is mentioned (p. 534).

In terms of gaps, firstly there is no reference to disability or accessibility in the RRP Component 5.1 Educational system modernisation, upskilling and retraining, which includes reforms and investments for matching education and the labour market, skilling and upskilling, digital skills development and digital transformation. The detailed description makes no reference to digital skills for students with disabilities and/or assistive technology users (e.g. see Reforms 4 and 5 and investment 2), or specific actions for the transition of students with disabilities from education to the labour market (e.g. see Reform 1 and Investment 1). This component seems to aim at enhancing the quality of education at all levels but does not include any professional development for inclusive education.

Component 1.1 (measures for civil protection and public safety especially in emergency and disaster) does not include actions specific for persons with disabilities, other than investment in Mental Health Hospitals, despite recent focus on de-institutionalization and the difficulties observed during the COVID-19 pandemic response (see our EDE COVID-19 country report). This is in line with the acknowledgment of limited expenditures for social protection in relation to disability.

In Component 2.2 accessibility of urban infrastructure is accounted (investment 1, thematic category 2) but there is no reference to digital accessibility for persons with disabilities and relevant apps in Reform 1 (Intelligent Transportation System) of thematic category 2 (see also our previous Semester 2020-2021 country fiche).

Component 3.4, which includes actions to further enhance the 'ease of doing business' there is no reference to address persons with disabilities (e.g. whether flexible working arrangements will provide assistive and accessible technologies for persons with disabilities to work from home, or how employee performance evaluation processes maybe differentiate but just for persons with disabilities).

Finally, in Component 4.2 on e-Government (digital public services) the issue of accessibility for persons with disabilities is not addressed in any other way apart from the accessibility of websites, which is presented elsewhere in the RRP (see country digitalization report for further comments and suggestions).

2.2 Semester links to CRPD and national disability action plans

Relevant recommendations and issues arising from participation in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) are highlighted in each chapter. It is also important that Semester plans align with national disability strategy too. In Cyprus, this refers to the First Cyprus Disability Strategy 2018-2028² and Action the Second 2018-2020 and Third 2021-2023 (draft)³ Disability Action Plans. The Department of Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities, coordinated the First

² First National Disability Strategy 2018-2028 and Second National Disability Action Plan 2018-2020: <https://tinyurl.com/CYstrategy2028>.

³ Draft of the Third National Disability Action Plan 2021-2023: <https://tinyurl.com/yv3vn9yv>.

National Strategy for Disability 2018-2028 and reports published on the preceding period 2018-2020.⁴

⁴ Analytical Report on the Implementation of the Second National Disability Action Plan 2018-2020: <https://tinyurl.com/65ak6nf>.

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.'

A new List of Issues and State Party response was due in July 2021 but were not yet available on the UN treaty bodies website at the time of writing.⁵

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 52.4 % in 2019, compared to 77.4 % for other persons against a national employment target of 75 % and approximately 1.1 points above the EU27 average. This results in an estimated disability employment gap of approximately 25 percentage points (EU27 average gap 24.2, see Tables 2-4) or an employment chances ratio of 0.7.

The same data indicate unemployment rates of 20.7 % and 9.3 %, respectively in 2019 (see Tables 5-7) and the economic activity rate for persons with disabilities in Cyprus was 66.1 %, compared to 85.3 % for other persons (see Tables 8-10). These indications are broken down by gender and age in the respective tables in annex.

According to this data, the disability employment gap is wider among younger workers than older workers. Inactivity is also higher in the younger adult age group than among older workers. It is concerning that the overall disability employment gap widened in the years before the COVID crisis. The unemployment gap also widened as, during 2013-2016 the unemployment of persons with disabilities continued to rise while general unemployment fell. Unemployment is a challenge among younger persons with disabilities.

3.2 Analysis of labour market policies relevant to the Semester

For reference, see also the 2021 [Recovery and Resilience Plan](#) for Cyprus and the First Cyprus Disability Strategy 2018-2028 and The Third Disability Action Plan 2021-23.

It is notable that the RRP 2021, component 5.2 Labour market, social protection, social welfare and inclusion, does not include any disability specific reforms and investments

⁵ 021 Deadlines for the submission of documentation for Cyprus: CRPD/C/CYP/2-3 https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/MasterCalendar.aspx.

linked to equal opportunities in the labour market or the employment of persons with disabilities.

As indicated in our country fiche for the previous Semester 2020-21 employment and vocational training were among the priorities of The First Cyprus Disability Strategy 2018-2028 and the Action Plans. In the Third Disability Action Plan 2021-2023 (draft),⁶ the relevant strategy objective is defined under the following new action (under the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance): *Action 5: Increase of equal employment opportunities for persons with disabilities through social enterprises* and continuation of existing actions: *Action 9: Scheme for the provision of incentives to employers for the employment of people with disabilities, with expected outcome of 100 unemployed persons with disabilities to enter the labour market* (p. 8), *Action 12: Professional Rehabilitation Services (with existing schemes)* (p.9). In addition *Action 20 (under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth) provides upgrading of the pre-vocational programmes organised by the Ministry.*

In general, the National Disability Strategy and Action Plans have been criticised for presenting existing policies and practices as new, while others that have not been completed are discontinued, as well actions that are generic and vague, and actions that do not comply with the UNCRPD and relevant disability rights. In respect to labour market policies, the Cyprus Confederation of Organisations of the Disabled (CCOD) and Pancyprian Disability Alliance⁷ highlight that relevant actions do not specify provisions for accessibility in employment and training settings or training and education of employers (e.g. incentive schemes and professional rehabilitation schemes), or provisions for compensatory contribution by employers to a Fund to cover the additional needs of persons with disabilities linked to the quota system.

Even though existing disability schemes are implemented (outcomes for 2020⁸ are summarized in the Table A, annex 7.1.3) the concern that these need 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 still prevails. Similarly, previous concerns about implementation of the employment quota and reasonable adaptations are still very relevant, and the relevant Law does not yet apply to the private sector,⁹ despite the 2017 UN recommendation.

Though the *Incentives for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities* (and similar scheme for persons with Chronic Diseases)¹⁰ are still in place, there are still no measures in place for their effective implementation (as we highlighted in 2020). Such

⁶ The First Cyprus Disability Strategy 2018-2028, <https://tinyurl.com/CYstrategy2028>.

⁷ CCOD letter to the Director of the Department for Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities as a response to the call for public consultation for the 3rd Disability Action Plan (letter dated 25.05.2021).

⁸ Annual Reports. Department for Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities 2014-2020, available at: http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29_gr/dsipd29_gr?OpenDocument (Report 2020).

⁹ Submission to the List of Issues of the CRPD Committee in relation to the initial report of Cyprus, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2fC%2fCYP%2fQ%2f1&Lang=en.

¹⁰ Scheme Providing Incentives for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities: <http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/dl.nsf/All/FB8120273E2F050C22581CB00412586?OpenDocument>.

measures should have included awareness as well as additional funding to employers for reasonable adaptations, in order to enable and facilitate persons with disabilities' participation in the workplace. This is also highlighted by the positions of disability representatives in the press,¹¹ especially in the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for access to tele-work. In a relevant press release, the CCDO requested a specific action plan for the employment of persons with disabilities to take into concern and in an organised way all relevant activities for ensuring equal opportunities in the labour market.¹²

The legislation on the social enterprises (N.146(I)/2009), another measure anticipated to promote opportunities for people with disabilities in the labour market has been published in 2020.¹³ However, there are no indications or evidence yet of its implementation for the benefit of persons with disabilities.

In relation to vocational development and preparation, including digital competence, the situation seems unchanged, and no further actions have been taken (see also our EDE report on digitalisation). The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth has recently informed the Special Education District Committees (which are responsible for students with disability assessment and placement in education), that in cases of placement in Technical and Vocational Secondary Education Schools, parents should be informed about the risks and difficulties students may face in technical labs, to help them deciding whether this setting is appropriate for their children.¹⁴ The circular includes a number of clauses that may be considered discriminatory (e.g. students should not have any severe mobility difficulties that inhibit safe use tools and other means essential for the classes). This seems to disregard universal design for learning, and the imperative for reasonable adjustment before considering any educational option appropriate for a student. The CCOD has arraigned the Ministry's position and requested immediate withdrawal of the decision (which they consider a violation of human rights for report to UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).¹⁵ This is further discussed in section 5.2 on education, as the circular was commented by other stakeholders as well. In general, what is observed here, especially when analysing the Ministry's announcement in terms of discourse but also content is that there is no visible effort to include reasonable adaptations or alternative options in these kind of labs in the educational settings. It is acknowledged that tools and equipment may be genuinely essential for the successful completion of the learners' studies, and at the same time unsafe tools. However, no other options are provided for learners with disabilities in order to attend and participate equally, by maybe be excluded from the use of the particular tools but not the courses.

¹¹ Position of the President of the '[Neofytos' Disability Organisation](https://www.philenews.com/f-me-apopsi/paremvaseis-ston-f/article/1284089/) in relation to the reasonable adaptations in employment: <https://www.philenews.com/f-me-apopsi/paremvaseis-ston-f/article/1284089/>.

¹² Cyprus Confederation of Disability Organisations, Disability Employment Action Plan: <https://www.brief.com.cy/oikonomia/kypros/shedio-drasis-gia-apasholisi-atomon-me-anapiries-zita-o-kysoa>.

¹³ The Social Enterprises Law (N.207(I)/2020): http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/arith/2020_1_207.pdf. Ministry of Education circular to Special Education District Committees: <https://enimerosi.moec.gov.cy/archeia/1/ypp12236a>.

¹⁵ Cyprus Confederation of Disability Organisations to the Minister of Education (dated 09.09.2021).

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

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

A new List of Issues and State Party response was due in July 2021 but were not yet available on the UN treaty bodies website at the time of writing.¹⁶

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁶ 021 Deadlines for the submission of documentation for Cyprus: CRPD/C/CYP/2-3
https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/MasterCalendar.aspx.

4.1 Summary of the social situation of persons with disabilities

Data from EU-SILC 2019 indicate the poverty risk rate for working age persons with disabilities in Cyprus was 17.2 % in 2019, compared to 11.0 % for other persons of similar age - an estimated disability poverty gap of approximately 6 percentage points (see Table 14). For people aged over 65, the disability poverty gap was 13.9 points (30.2 % for older persons with disabilities and 16.3 % for other persons of similar age). The tables in annex also indicate the respective rates of risk of poverty or social exclusion and break these down by gender as well age. Overall, the disability risks are higher for people with more severe impairments and for men.

For persons with disabilities of working age in Cyprus (age 16-64) the risk of poverty before social transfers was 41.8 % and 17.2 % after transfers. The in-work poverty rate for persons with disabilities aged under 60 was 8.9 %. The risks for older people are notably higher than the EU average and the financial poverty risk for this group was rising before the COVID-19 crisis and the disability gap widened (while the risk for working age adults declined and narrowed).

Of interest to health policy are the data on self-reported unmet needs for medical examination (too expensive or too far to travel or waiting list). Disability equality gaps are evident here too and, on this basis, the rate for persons with disabilities in Cyprus was 2.0 %, compared to 0.8 % for other persons, which is above the EU27 average of 1.7 %.

The Third Disability Action Plan 2021-2023 (draft)¹⁷ and the annual report of the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (DSIPD)¹⁸ draws attention to a new project in progress on de-institutionalisation and supported living for people with disabilities. The RRP¹⁹ highlights as a main objective the provision of accessible, family-type homes in the community to live with safety, dignity, and quality of life. The actions targeting people with disabilities and people in need of long-term care align with the National Disability Strategy 2018-2028 and Action Plans 2018-2020 and 2021-2023, the European Disability Strategy and the UN CRPD. The Cypriot state has been responding to this priority by funding the ongoing development of supported living.

4.2 Analysis of social policies relevant to the Semester

For reference, see also the 2021 [Recovery and Resilience Plan](#) for Cyprus and the First Cyprus Disability Strategy 2018-2028 and The Third Disability Action Plan 2021-23.

Cash benefit schemes

¹⁷ Third Disability Action Plan 2021-2023 (draft)
http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd8b_gr/dsipd8b_gr?OpenDocument.

¹⁸ Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (2020) *Annual Report 2020 DSID*. Retrieved from: http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29_en/dsipd29_en?OpenDocument.

¹⁹ [Cyprus RRP For Upload 20052021.pdf \(cyprus-tomorrow.gov.cy\)](#).

The main Social Benefit Schemes of persons with disabilities, as presented in the annual report for 2020 of the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, were as follows (with beneficiary data on 31 December 2020):

- Severe motor disability allowance: Persons with severe motor disabilities are entitled a monthly allowance of EUR 346.27 (2 186 persons were entitled to this allowance and the cost for 2020 was EUR 9 287 853).
- Care allowance for persons with paraplegia or tetraplegia of EUR 400 or EUR 500 monthly for persons with paraplegia and EUR 900 or EUR 1 100 monthly for persons with tetraplegia (1 059 beneficiaries with paraplegia at a cost of EUR 5 691 896 and 797 beneficiaries with tetraplegia with a cost of EUR 9 411 396).
- Special Allowance for Blind Persons of EUR 324.43 monthly (1 985 beneficiaries at a cost of EUR 8 142 165).
- Mobility Allowance of EUR 75 – EUR 150 monthly (3 938 beneficiaries at a cost of EUR 4 667 692).
- Financial Assistance for persons with disabilities in order to buy a car (392 beneficiaries at a cost of EUR 1 657 023).
- Financial assistance for the provision of technical aid (1 041 beneficiaries at a cost of EUR 1 359 357).
- Financial assistance for the provision of wheelchairs (431 beneficiaries at a cost of EUR 1 425 745).
- The scheme for providing the Blue Badge i.e. the card for facilitating parking for persons with disabilities continued to operate.
- The scheme for providing the European Disability Card, based on a European project with the participation of 8 EU Member States. The special website for the Card is www.eudisabilitycard.gov.cy (834 new beneficiaries of the Card).²⁰

There were no new developments or amendments. As indicated in our previous Semester country fiche, the allowances should be expanded to include people with more types of disability, for example users of mental health services are not eligible for receiving these social benefits.²¹

It has been unclear whether people with disabilities are eligible for the guaranteed minimum income (GMI) or if this is calculated based on their social benefits and status of employment. In April 2021, the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights published a report about this and highlighting a major issue concerning the definition of 'person with disability'. The report concluded with recommendations regarding the policy framework and the procedures adopted by the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. The Ombudsman strongly recommended that disability assessment policies and procedures should be aligned with the UN CRPD)²² In July 2021 the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights also intervened with recommendations after receiving a

²⁰ Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (2020) *Annual Report 2020 DSID*. Retrieved from: http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29_en/dsipd29_en?OpenDocument.

²¹ <https://24h.com.cy/2020/02/koinoniko-apokleismo-kataggelloyn-ta-amea/>.

²² Report by the Ombudsman for the definition of "person with disability": [http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/All/63FBFD0336E4B03AC22586B5003D8484/\\$file/SAA_orismos_anapirias2.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/All/63FBFD0336E4B03AC22586B5003D8484/$file/SAA_orismos_anapirias2.pdf?OpenElement).

high volume of complaints regarding delays in processing applications for the GMI.²³ In August 2021, the Cyprus Confederation of Disability Organisations reported that the government had submitted the draft GMI reform without consulting organisations and representatives of persons with disabilities. According to CCDO, the bill classifies disability as an illness that can be cured and treated by medical and rehabilitation professionals, rather than long-standing condition defined by interaction between impairments and societal and structural barriers. The exclusion of persons with disabilities from consultation stage is reported as a violation of their rights.²⁴

Supported living

De-institutionalisation and supported living are a priority in the National Disability Strategy and Action Plans, as well as the European Strategy. It also stands out in the 2020 annual report of the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. In this context, the project 'Creation of supported living homes in the community' received extended funding in January 2021 for the period 2021-2027. In 2020, seven homes started operation, including: 6 for people with learning disabilities (3 in Nicosia, 1 in Pafos, 1 in Limassol and 1 in Larnaca) and 1 for blind people (Nicosia). These accommodated 32 persons (18 men and 14 women). The initial call for public tender targeted development of ten home/programmes but three proposals had to be revised and upgraded after consultation with parents of persons with learning disabilities and autism. The outcome was 4 additional contracts for the development of 3 homes for people with autism and 1 home for people with learning disabilities to accommodate 13 persons by the first trimester of 2021.²⁵ The Third Disability Action Plan 2021-2023, mentions that the contracts of 8 officers were extended until 2023.

There is also in place the scheme for social assistants who support people with severe and complex disabilities. In 2020, two more services of social assistants were listed, bringing the total to 17 and supporting 1 160 persons with complex needs.

The RRP mentions that the supported living scheme of the National Disability Strategy and Action Plans was successfully implemented with the operation of homes in the community, positive change in persons' lives and positive impact on carers and families. The only aspect reported as a challenge is finding suitable houses in terms of size, location, accessibility, and adjustability.²⁶ A scrutiny body is needed to monitor these developments and services as well as a code of practice, professional training for support workers.

A new project planned in the Third Disability Action Plan 2021-2023, is the network of social inclusion services to expand and support the operation and services of the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. This network is meant to support the implementation and expansion of provisions such as personal assistant

²³ Position of the Ombudsman for the guaranteed minimum income:
[http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/All/6B08574F6BB604AAC225871F00344582/\\$file/ekthesi1.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/All/6B08574F6BB604AAC225871F00344582/$file/ekthesi1.pdf?OpenElement).

²⁴ «Ξέχασε» να κάνει διάλογο με την ΚΥΣΟΑ η κυβέρνηση - Έξω φρενών το αναπηρικό κίνημα (dialogos.com.cy).

²⁵ Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (2020) *Annual Report 2020 DSID*. Retrieved from: http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29_en/dsipd29_en?OpenDocument.

²⁶ [Cyprus RRP For Upload 20052021.pdf](http://www.cyprus-tomorrow.gov.cy/Cyprus_RRP_For_Upload_20052021.pdf) ([cyprus-tomorrow.gov.cy](http://www.cyprus-tomorrow.gov.cy)).

and advisor services.²⁷ It will also provide consultation for the development of new policies in relation to services and financial provisions for persons with disabilities. The forming of a body for quality assurance of the social inclusion services is also described as an expected outcome of this project.²⁸ This is a promising development, but it is unclear if this new body will have responsibility for supervising the development and effectiveness of supported living provision, such as supported living settings, which would be important. Ideally, this should be an independent mechanism working closely with the advocacy groups.

Healthcare

In relation to healthcare the issues previously reported remain the same, even after one year of the COVID-19 pandemic. One improvement that has potentially taken place is the recording of data on persons with disabilities in relation to COVID cases, which though happened during the hard times of the pandemic, was not consistent. The Third Disability Action Plan 2021-2023 includes actions related to training of healthcare professionals to better respond to the needs of patients with disabilities and act in line with their rights. The upgrade of healthcare and rehabilitation services is also one of the ongoing actions under the responsibilities of the ministry of Health.²⁹

The provision of specialised care, particularly access to therapy sessions such as physiotherapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, psychology, and dietetics, has been a great challenge due to scheduling times and the limited number of sessions covered by the public funds. In addition, the organisation of parents Agalia Elpidas addressed the Minister of Health on the matter of long delays in reimbursing the cover of fees for sessions of specialised care provided privately. The agreement reached does not appear to be fully implemented as persons with disabilities and their families were denied the cover of expenses.³⁰

²⁷ Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (2020) *Annual Report 2020 DSID*. Retrieved from: http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd29_en/dsipd29_en?OpenDocument.

²⁸ Third Disability Action Plan 2021-2023 (draft) http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd8b_gr/dsipd8b_gr?OpenDocument.

²⁹ Third Disability Action Plan 2021-2023 (draft) http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/dsipd8b_gr/dsipd8b_gr?OpenDocument.

³⁰ Agkalia Elpidas letter to Ministry of Health (09.02.2021): <https://tinyurl.com/5svj2ad6>.

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.'

A new List of Issues and State Party response was due in July 2021 but were not yet available on the UN treaty bodies website at the time of writing.³¹

5.1 Summary of the educational situation of persons with disabilities

The EU-SILC 2019 estimates concerning educational attainment should be treated with additional caution due to relatively wide confidence intervals, but they consistently indicate disability equality gaps (an average of 2-3 years provides a more stable indication). Table 16 indicates early school leaving rates disaggregated by disability status in Cyprus. Youth with disabilities (aged 18-24) tend to leave school significantly more than peers without disabilities of the same age groups (and this is reinforced by widening the sample size to age 18-29). 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 age range 30-39).

Notwithstanding the fact that students with disabilities are educationally disadvantaged across all educational levels, there are not any specific and detailed reform efforts that explicitly address these concerns. For instance, even though the RRP³² seeks to ensure that 'no child is left behind' (p.31), there are no specific references to disability equality gaps in education, although there is a separate policy pillar focused on gender equality in education and employment. The only related references to education, are concerned with development of special schools that will have access facilities for persons with disabilities such as ramps and elevators.

There is a broad intention to ensure 'disability (and otherwise) inclusive reforms in education...' 'and investments promoting respect for the rights and equal opportunities of under-represented groups' (p. 38) but without further information about the means to achieve this. This concern was one of the issues raised in a memo prepared by the

³¹ 021 Deadlines for the submission of documentation for Cyprus: CRPD/C/CYP/2-3 https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/MasterCalendar.aspx.

³² [Recovery and resilience plan for Cyprus | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#).

Cyprus Confederation of Organizations for the Disabled in May 2021,³³ according to which: 'Many of the proposed actions are general and vague, with no timetables, tangible and clear objectives, and / or costs required' (p. 5).

In terms of accessibility to schools, on 5 January 2021 the CCOD also raised concerns about the failure of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports to meet its legal obligations, as a consequence of which 'most schools in our country have not yet become accessible to people with disabilities resulting in the partial or complete exclusion of a number of children and teachers with disabilities from participating in the education system in general....' (p. 2).³⁴ The CCOD urged the Ministry 'to provide guidance on the proper and effective implementation of the above articles of the United Nations Convention ...and the implementation of the principles of accessibility and universal design in general' (p. 2).

Despite political rhetoric on the need to address the shortcomings of the 1999 special education legal framework, proposed legislation³⁵ does not provide a clear legislative framework for inclusive education.³⁶ The envisaged reform process is still 'work in progress' while various stakeholders (i.e. academics, parents groups, disability representatives),³⁷ who have been actively involved in the public consultation process, have criticized the new policy document as non-inclusive and disablist.

5.2 Analysis of education policies relevant to the Semester

For reference, see also the 2021 [Recovery and Resilience Plan](#) for Cyprus and the First Cyprus Disability Strategy 2018-2028 and The Third Disability Action Plan 2021-23.

RRP Component 5.2 Labour market, social protection, social welfare and inclusion includes investments linked to education. Specifically, the aim of investment 5 is to construct two Model Special Education Schools, which actually refer to re-location and co-location of two existing special schools (p. 504). In a period of Special Education Reform towards Inclusive Education, investing in segregative education settings seems contradictory. Upgrading of infrastructure, equipment and services is important but the objectives of this investment are not linked to the imperative of inclusive education, or objectives of the Inclusive Education white paper for the transformation

³³ CCOD letter to the Director of the Department for Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities as a response to the call for public consultation for the 3rd Disability Action Plan (letter dated 25.05.2021).

³⁴ CCOD letter to the Minister of Education (dated 05.01.2021) Access to Primary and Secondary Education Schools for students and educators with disabilities: <http://www.kysoa.org.cy/kysoa/userfiles/file/Allilografia/ekpaideusi/20210105-prosvasimotita-paidion-ekpaideutikon-sta-sxoleia.docx>.

³⁵ White Paper of Inclusive Education Law of 2019 «Ο περί Ενιαίας Εκπαίδευσης (Δομές Υποστήριξης) Νόμος του 2019» and the accompanying Explanatory Note («Επεξηγηματικό Σημείωμα»).

³⁶ Submission of the Pancyprian Alliance for Disability to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child-focus on Children with Disabilities: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CRC/Shared%20Documents/CYP/INT_CRC_NGO_CYP_358_81_E.pdf.

³⁷ Agkalia Elpidas Association: Position paper on the Special Education Reform: <http://agaliaelpidas.org/uploads/Draseis-Paideia/f01a9b5b94.docx>.

of special schools into resource centres or other inclusive education support infrastructures. This is also highlighted in the position of CCDO on the Third National Disability Action Plan (Draft).³⁸

The aim of the First Cyprus Disability Strategy 2018-2028³⁹ is to adopt a rights-based approach in light of UN CRPD but there is no clear articulation of inclusive education reform in line with Article 24 CRPD. The document refers to 'integration in education in schools across all educational levels' and focuses on 'provision of individualized educational and support services' (p. 7) rather than on a radical overhaul of schools to become more inclusive.

The Draft version of the Third Disability Action Plan 2021-23⁴⁰ was in public consultation until May 2021 and the final version was not published at the time of writing. There were several references to education and the need to leverage education reforms, although not always aligned with a social relational approach to disability. For instance, the reference to the 'readiness of principals and teachers to manage the diverse difficulties of children emanating from their disabilities' (p. 17) alludes to a deficit-oriented approach rather than the ways in which difficulties result from inadequate teaching methodologies and inaccessible learning environments.

The Plan was also replete with references to the role of 'Resource Units' that reinforce a bipolar system of education, which draws a demarcation line between students with and without disabilities. This is manifested, inter alia, in strategic plans to introduce a separate graduation certificate for students with disabilities (p. 13).

The new legislation is still work in progress but a new Law amending the Education of children with special needs Law from 1999 to 2014 was introduced in 2020.⁴¹ Despite the urgency of many problems in existing legislation, the amendments are solely concerned with planning in advance the needs of special education support staff (escorts of children with special educational needs) in each school, without addressing the longstanding problem of the recruitment and employment of special education support staff, who lack higher education qualifications in related subjects. This issue has been raised on several occasions in previous years but there has been no progress so far.⁴² An independent enquiry by the Cyprus Commissioner of Administration (Ombudsman), published in September 2021, criticized the fact that 'the qualifications of the school assistants / attendants are still limited to the possession of a high school diploma or five years of experience with children with special needs in a similar institution or school...'⁴³ It also raised several concerns related to the recruitment procedures and role specification of special education

³⁸ Position of the CCDO in relation to the Third National Disability Action Plan 2021-2023. Letter to the Director of the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (25.05.2021) and accompanying memorandum of the Pancyprian Disability Alliance (received in email by EDE CY).

³⁹ The First Cyprus Disability Strategy 2018-2028, <https://tinyurl.com/CYstrategy2028>.

⁴⁰ Draft of the Third National Disability Action Plan 2021-2023: <https://tinyurl.com/yv3vn9yv>.

⁴¹ Amending law for the existing Special Education Laws (1999-2014): http://archeia.moec.gov.cy/mc/654/peri_agogis_tropopoiitikos_nomos_166_1_2020.pdf.

⁴² Articles on the issue of school escorts for students with disabilities (Sept 2021): <https://tinyurl.com/rfsf9fwa>, <https://tinyurl.com/227yd54w> & <https://tinyurl.com/kyu4n5z4>.

⁴³ Ex officio Placement Commissioner of Administration and Human Protection Rights in relation to the provision of escorts to children with disabilities attending schools (08.09.2021): <https://tinyurl.com/ya4hwh8e>.

support staff, which lack clarity, transparency, specificity and are not aligned with the principles of an inclusive education reform agenda envisaged by the UN CRPD.

Finally, a circular sent to schools in May 2021⁴⁴ also sparked criticism from stakeholders, including the Commissioner of Children's Rights,⁴⁵ disability organizations^{46 47 48} professional bodies⁴⁹ and academics,⁵⁰ who characterized it as 'illegal' and 'discriminatory'. The circular adopts an individual pathology approach that may prevent some students with disabilities from attending technical schools (vocational education) and developing workforce skills to access paid employment (outlined earlier in chapter 3.2). In response, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth rejected these accusations suggesting that the placement of students with disabilities in special units, is a means of, allegedly, providing 'equal opportunities for participation' and a form of 'positive Discrimination', which runs counter to an inclusive approach.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Ministry of Education circular to Special Education District Committees: <https://enimerosi.moec.gov.cy/archeia/1/ypp12236a>.

⁴⁵ Position of the Ombudsman for the Rights of Children: <https://tinyurl.com/45k6hrx8>.

⁴⁶ Position of disability representatives: interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hums5NuvlrE>.

⁴⁷ Cyprus Confederation of Disability Organisations to the Minister of Education (dated 09.09.2021).

⁴⁸ Agkalia Elpidas letter to the General Director of the Ministry of Education General (02.09.09): <https://www.agaliaelpidas.org/uploads/2f7832b196.pdf>.

⁴⁹ Psychologists' Association Position: <https://tinyurl.com/va3pfeks>.

⁵⁰ Symeonidou, S (25.05.2021), Press article: <https://tinyurl.com/pvu4d96n>.

⁵¹ Response of the Ministry of the criticism for discrimination of students' with disabilities attendance in Technical Schools (MTEE): <https://tinyurl.com/ubr8r3dh>.

6 Investment priorities in relation to disability

As acknowledged in the RRP, spending on social protection is low in Cyprus, which spent 12.5 % GDP as opposed to an EU27 average of 19 %. The bulk goes to pensions and healthcare, followed by other benefits such as employment, disability and housing. This weakness is addressed in Policy axes 4 & 5, which include the restructuring of the Social Welfare Services, the enhancement of home care services for persons with disabilities, and provision of social support for various social groups. Investing in the development of reuse and repair centres is expected to create employment and training opportunities, including people with disabilities, who have difficulties in accessing the labour market. The employability of this group of people is also expected to be strengthened with the recruitment of 30 temporary Employment Counsellors.

Another pillar of investment opportunity focuses on attempts ‘to enhance the availability of quality care and social development infrastructure for children addressing the relevant CSR’ (p. 493)⁵² with a view to contributing to ‘gender equality...as well as the reduction of inequalities. Even though a disability equality dimension is missing from the overarching aim of the investment plan (and the document as a whole as opposed to gender equality that is explicitly referred to in the general objectives), the document states that if School Day Care Centres have children with disabilities, classes should have reduced numbers of students and a lower staff-student ratio. Moreover, the responsible person should be a graduate in accordance with the type of the Centre and needs of children.

Another disability-related investment priority is the construction of two special schools to replace existing special schools whose buildings are not fit for purpose. This is hailed as way of ‘promoting social cohesion and social justice for all children with special needs’ (p. 505); a statement that mirrors the ways in which special education discourses are still rife, despite rhetoric on the need to foster greater inclusive policies and practices in light of the stipulations of UN CRPD.

6.1 Updates on use of existing EU funds (up to 2021)

ESF+ already supports the establishment of structures of supported living for persons with disabilities in the community, including persons with mental health issues. With the support of ESF+ in the 2014-2020 programming period 7 structures for supporting living have been established. In the current programming period, ESF+ will continue to support the operation of the existing structures and in addition 5 more structures will be established. (RRP, p. 79 – Component 1 / Investment 5 - Loan)

The Draft version of the Third Disability Action Plan 2021-23 states that EU funding will be used to promote various actions to meet the needs of persons with disabilities and to promote their social inclusion. For example, EUR 21 million are expected to be used to provide supported community living. Supported living structures will be expanded with the creation of three new supported living houses, temporary accommodation for people with disabilities, and a transitional residence to meet the differing needs of a larger number of people with disabilities. Part of the funding will

⁵² [Recovery and resilience plan for Cyprus | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#).

be allocated to extend the employment (until 2023) of 8 Social Inclusion Officers, who supervise the services of contractors and the operation of the supported living Plan. In May 2021, the CCOD, issued a statement⁵³ outlining a string of observations regarding the draft plan. For instance, they expressed their concerns that the Creation of new Supported Living Homes initiative ‘lacks appropriate legal framework and places a special emphasis on the employment of supervisors without ensuring that they are properly trained, so that all supervision aims promote the principles of the Convention and the legal approach to disability it represents...’ (p. 1).

EUR 5.25 million are to be used for the operation of a new centre of Educational Intervention and Support for Autism, an investment plan that has also been criticized by CCOD as ‘it is not fully consistent with a human rights approach’ (p. 1).⁵⁴ The project has very recently recruited various professionals including for rehabilitation, social services, special education and speech and language therapy,⁵⁵ and it was established through a public procurement process under the responsibility of the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. In a recent job announcement, the names of the organizations involved were mentioned⁵⁶ but none of their websites includes any relevant information, neither does the website of the responsible Department. The staff recruitment as well as the tender documents (not available anymore) was very much focused on assessment and rehabilitation procedures and hence the disability representatives expressed their concerns about the lack of a more social and human rights approach. For instance, it is suggested that the ‘Supervision by unskilled staff may adversely affect the operation of the Centre’ while there is not ‘an integrated institutional framework, which includes all the necessary, specialized arrangements for the operation of Rehabilitation Centres and the provision of appropriate treatment frameworks and structures for comprehensive and integrated rehabilitation for all forms of disability, which are in line with European standards (quality, accessibility, safety issues, etc.)...’ (p. 1). They also suggest that ‘The creation of a ‘Multidisciplinary Assessment Center for Autism’ is not comprehensive nor fully aligned with a human rights approach’ (p. 1). Nevertheless, the organisations involved seem to provide a potential for a social justice and social cohesion approach, though there is not yet any evidence of the operation of the centre that may support or confront existing concerns.

EUR 30 million will enhance the social inclusion of people with disabilities through a number of actions informed by a needs-based rather than a rights-based approach to meet the needs of service users, thereby reinforcing discourses of dependency and not empowerment. Only a relatively meagre amount of money is planned to enhance and diversify employability and training opportunities for people with disabilities.

CCOD Memo: First Disability Strategy and Second Disability Action Plan:
<https://tinyurl.com/r48dyk74>.

⁵⁴ CCOD letter to the Director of the Department for Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities as a response to the call for public consultation for the 3rd Disability Action Plan (letter dated 25.05.2021).

⁵⁵ Job announcement was posted online but is not available anymore.

⁵⁶ Organisations involved in the establishment of the Centre: Social Element Center of Social & Human Development (<https://socialelementcy.org/>), CODECA, Centre for Social Cohesion, Development and Care (<https://www.codecacy.org/>), Speech and Hearing Clinic of the European University Cyprus, <https://euc.ac.cy/el/programs/bachelor-speech-and-language-therapy/>.

EUR 10.5 million will be directed to the New Disability and Functionality Assessment System, which has been subject also criticism by persons with disabilities and their organizations who repeatedly pointed out the ways in which the new System is not informed by a human rights perspective.⁵⁷

In addition, new projects included in the Third National Disability Plan supported by EU funds involve actions that promote accessibility such as: Development of webspace on the Examination Services website dedicated to information for students with disabilities regarding examinations and tests provided by the service (e.g. public sector exams), Public transportation accessibility with digital solutions, Accessible information and digital accessibility of some museums and cultural heritage sites through digital technologies and of course accessibility of public websites and training of the officers involved by implementation of the relevant recent legislation (see EDE digitalization Cyprus country report).

6.2 Priorities for future investment (after 2021)

One of the aims of the RRP, is to foster social resilience ‘by providing incentives to renovate the existing stock of buildings, social infrastructure and housing as well as alleviate energy poverty concerns in households with disabled people’ (pp. 29-30). The Plan has a distinct focus on Gender Equality, under a designated section, but this is not the case for Disability Equality. The latter is subsumed within ‘equality for all’ and referred to secondarily as part of social care initiatives ‘to ensure gender equality and the economic empowerment of women’ (p. 37). The explicit focus on gender equality in the plan to ‘enhance productivity, effectiveness and efficiency (e.g. by accelerating the digital transformation, improving the recruitment and promotion procedures and reforming of the performance appraisal system)’ (p. 37) is complemented by a reference to the rights and equal opportunities of other ‘underrepresented groups’ including people with disabilities (p. 38).

Within the aim of investments in healthcare services there is commitment to ensure that proposed reforms promote ‘accessibility for people with disabilities’ (p. 43) as well as their ability to choose where they want to live by ‘investing in creating alternatives to residential care facilities/Mental Hospitals’ (p. 79) and providing material and human resources to promote supported living in the community. Community living is also indirectly supported through investments ‘tackling energy poverty in households with people with disabilities’ (p. 107), something that will have a positive impact on encouraging the use of assistive and digital technologies to improve quality of life and access informal and formal education.

Component 5.2 of the RRP, the establishment of care centres (investment 3) calls for decreased occupancy of centres hosting children with disabilities. This practice is also endorsed for compulsory education by the existing legislation of special education and has been for years one of the main requests of parents of children with disabilities. However, this was not fully implemented as the Law does not define specific numbers

⁵⁷ Submission of the Pancyprrian Alliance for Disability to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child-focus on Children with Disabilities: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CRC/Shared%20Documents/CYP/INT_CRC_NGO_CYP_358_81_E.pdf.

of children, often resulting in conflicts and parents' interventions. Hence, as this is now included in the RRP as an Investment, it is recommended that specific directions and links in the relevant Law and the White Paper on Inclusive Education should be established, not only for the new suggested care centres and extension of compulsory education, but also for all existing education structures.

Investments in developing sustainable and smart modes of transport includes the aim to promote the social integration of persons with disabilities by addressing the 'Lack of continuous and functional road network with appropriate pavements and ramps suitable to safely accommodate active travelling' (p. 150). Initiatives also include the 'construction of disability inclusive infrastructure in urban centres', with a view to enhancing the social integration and safe transportation and accessibility of people with disabilities. These initiatives focus exclusively on urban centres and make no reference to rural and remote area service provision.

Disseminating information about the ways in which the Plan addresses the needs of underprivileged groups of people includes people with disabilities; The aim is for: 'the RRP website to be compatible with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines for the visually impaired, the content prepared for the social media to be friendly and accessible to people with disabilities as well as communicate the RRP via sign language for the deaf (sic)' (p. 532).

7 Annex: disability data relevant to the Semester

See also disability data published in the Eurostat database⁵⁸ and statistical reports.⁵⁹

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 6 months’ the respondent reports that they have been ‘limited because of a health problem in activities people usually do’.⁶⁰

Table 1: Self-reported ‘activity limitations’ as a proxy for impairment/disability (2019)



Source: EU-SILC 2019 Release 2021 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 not report ‘activity limitations’.⁶¹ National estimates for Cyprus are compared with

⁵⁸ Eurostat health Database, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

⁵⁹ Eurostat (2019) *Disability Statistics* https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Disability_statistics.

⁶⁰ 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)).

⁶¹ This methodology was developed in the annual statistical reports of ANED, available at <http://www.disability-europe.net/theme/statistical-indicators>.

EU27 mean averages for the most recent year.⁶² A larger proportion of older people report limitations in Cyprus than the EU average.

7.1 Data relevant to disability and the labour market

Table 2: EU and Cyprus employment rates, by disability and gender (aged 20-64) (2019)

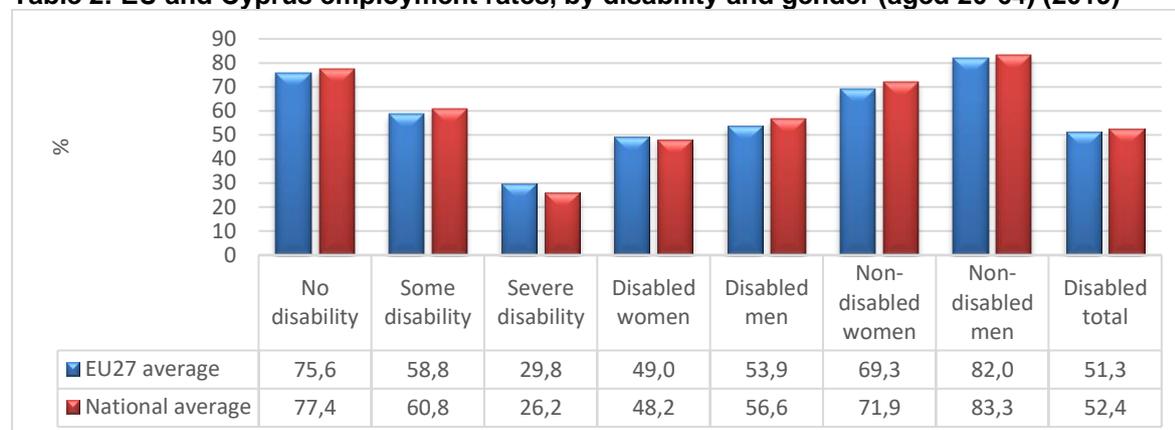
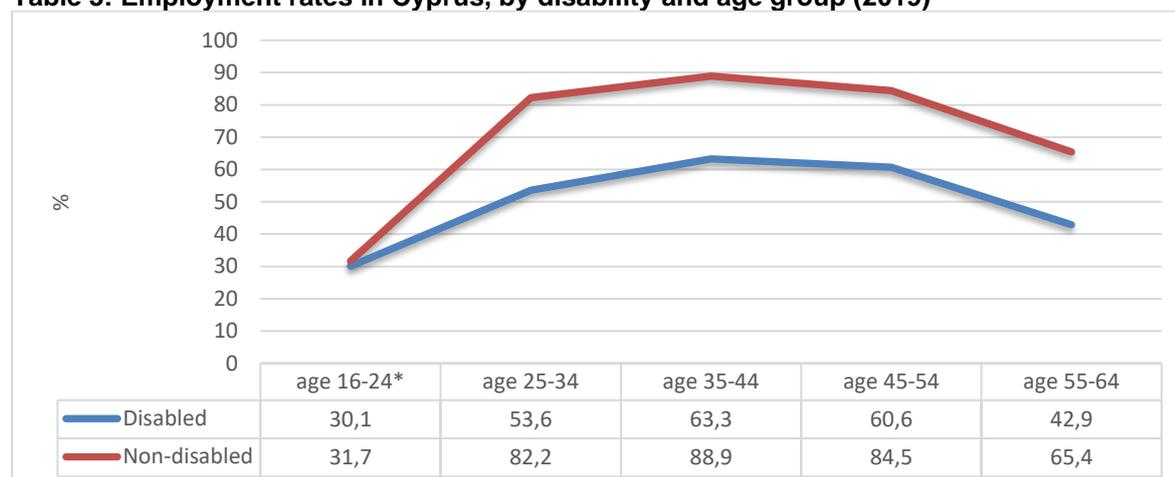
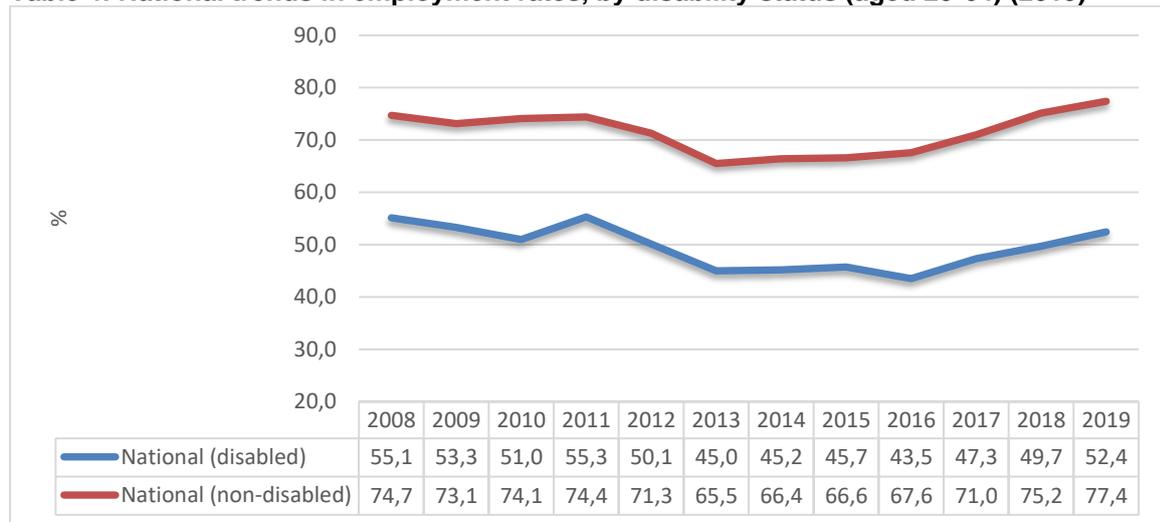


Table 3: Employment rates in Cyprus, by disability and age group (2019)



⁶² 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) (2019)



Source: EU-SILC 2019 Release 2021 version 1 (and preceding UDBs).

7.1.1 Unemployment

Table 5: Unemployment rates by disability and gender (aged 20-64) (2019)

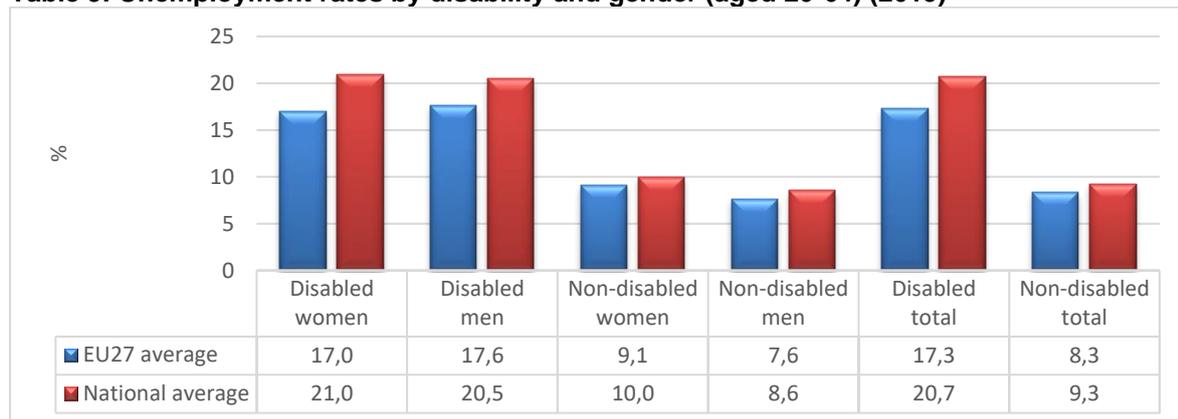


Table 6: Unemployment rates in Cyprus, by disability and age group (2019)

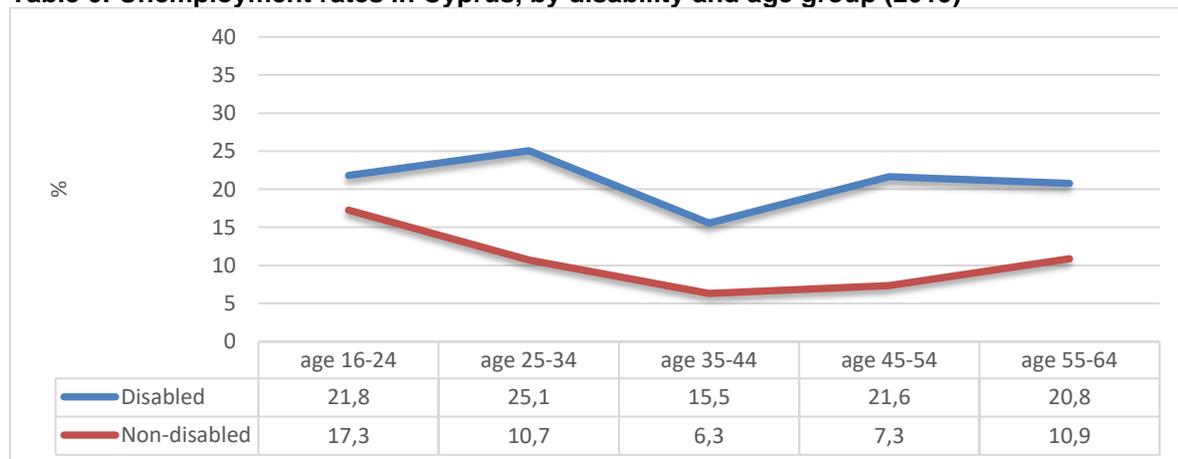
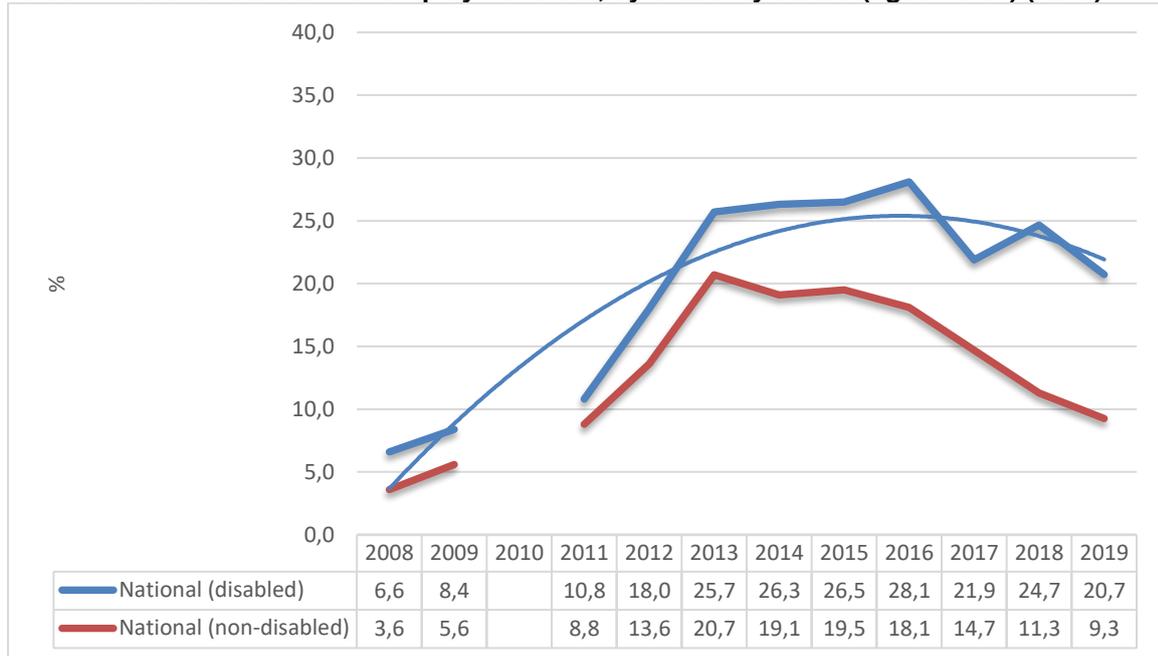


Table 7: National trends in unemployment rate, by disability status (aged 20-64) (2019)



Source: EU-SILC 2019 Release 2021 version 1 (and preceding UDBs).

7.1.2 Economic activity

Table 8: Activity rates in Cyprus, by disability and gender (aged 20-64) (2019)

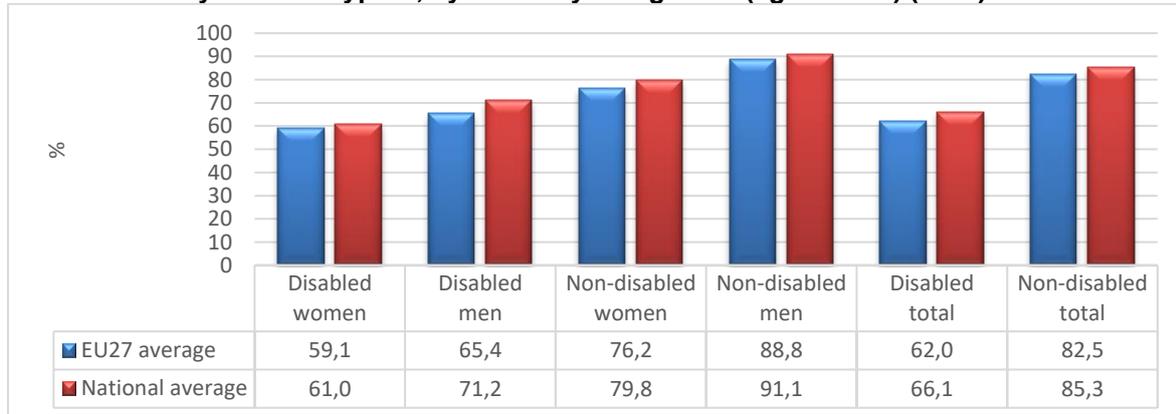
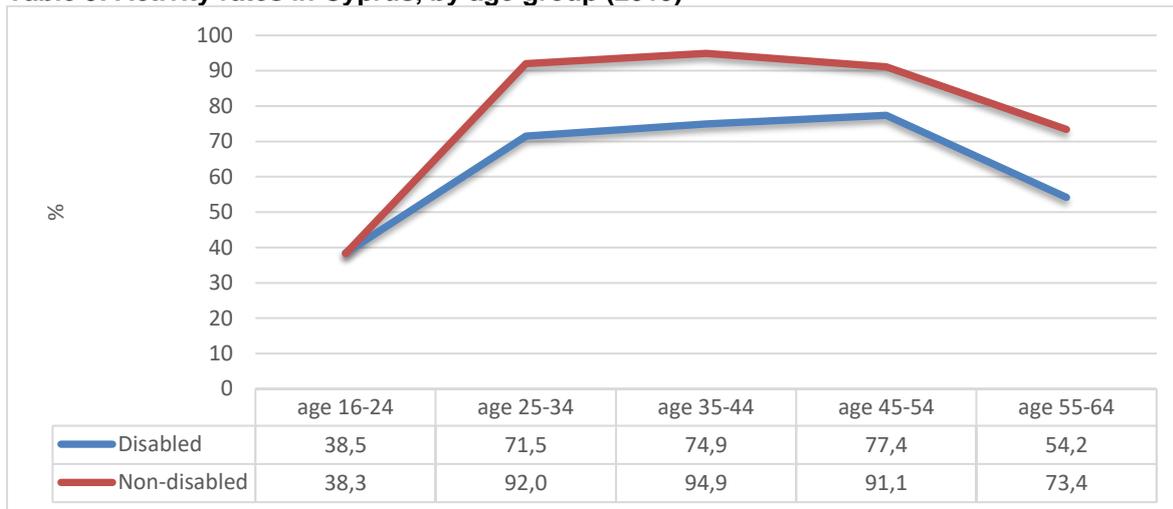
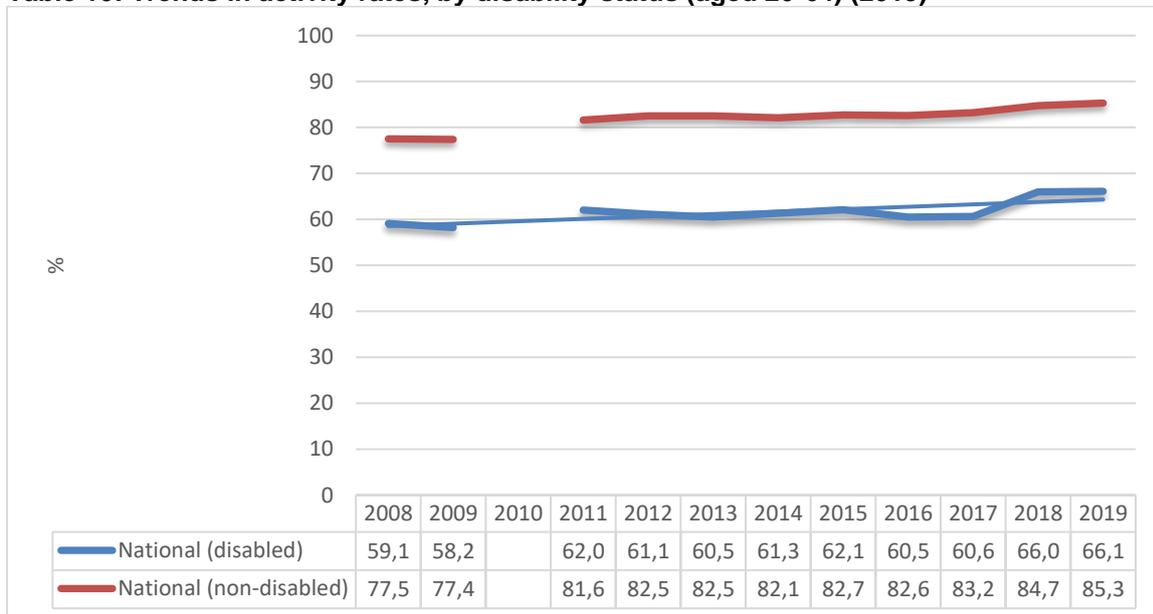


Table 9: Activity rates in Cyprus, by age group (2019)**Table 10: Trends in activity rates, by disability status (aged 20-64) (2019)**

Source: EU-SILC 2019 Release 2021 version 1 (and preceding UDBs).

7.1.3 Alternative sources of labour market data in Cyprus

Disability data is not yet available from the core European Labour Force Survey but labour market indicators for Cyprus were disaggregated from ad modules conducted in 2001 and 2011. These can be found in the Eurostat disability database.⁶³

The statistics⁶⁴ of the Department of Labour, of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance do not include and disability relevant data or refer to relevant analysis in relation to unemployment and other labour market issues. 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-

⁶³ Eurostat Health Database: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

⁶⁴ Department of Labour – Statistics: http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/dl.nsf/page9b_gr/page9b_gr?OpenDocument.

time employment, where 'incapability or disability' was reported as one of the reasons for part-time employment. In the latest LFS data of 2021 people with disabilities are not identified and no categories of people with disabilities are included in the Labour Force Survey data of the 2nd quarter 2021 currently available.⁶⁵

Table A: Labour Market Disability Schemes Outcomes for 2020

Scheme	Beneficiaries	Amount EUR
Persons with disabilities recruited in the Public Sector (2019) (<i>Law of 2009 (N.146(I)/2009</i>) ⁶⁶	18	-
Scheme for the creation and operation of small units for self-employment	14	60 050
Supported Employment Scheme programmes	370 (24 programmes)	356 000
Vocational Training Scheme	1	595

⁶⁵ Cyprus Statistical Service: Main data on labour force (Key figures)
https://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/labour_31main_gr/labour_31main_gr?OpenForm&sub=1&sel=2.

⁶⁶ The Recruitment of Persons with Disabilities in the Wider Public Sector (Special Provisions) Law of 2009 (N.146(I)/2009), <https://tinyurl.com/y7may7vq>.

7.2 EU data relevant to disability, social policies and healthcare (2019)

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

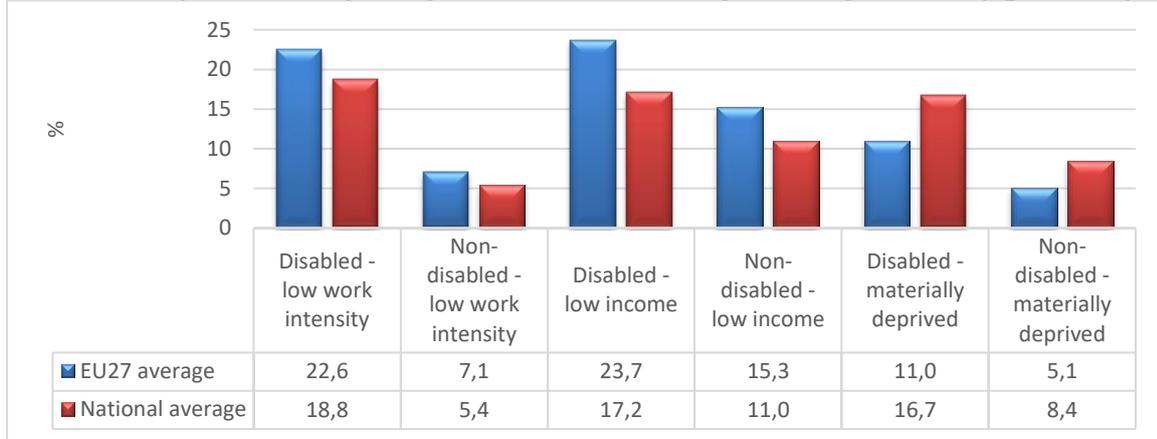


Table 12: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion, by disability and gender (aged 16+)

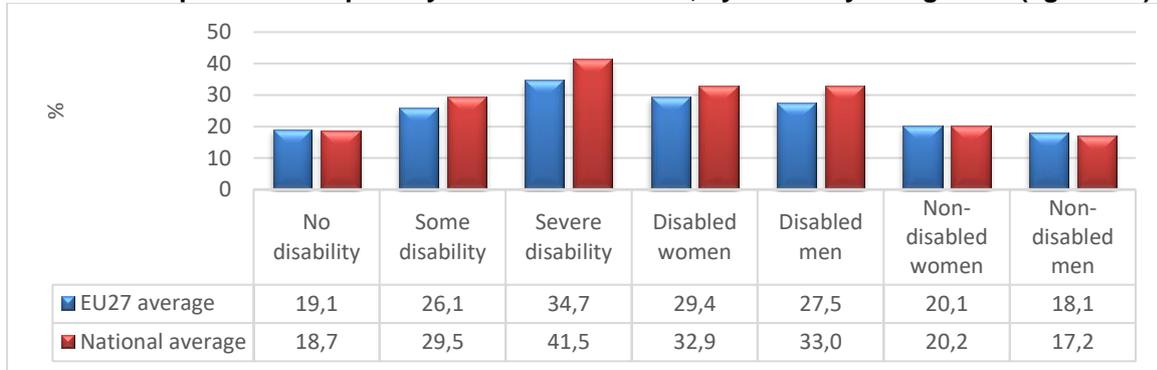
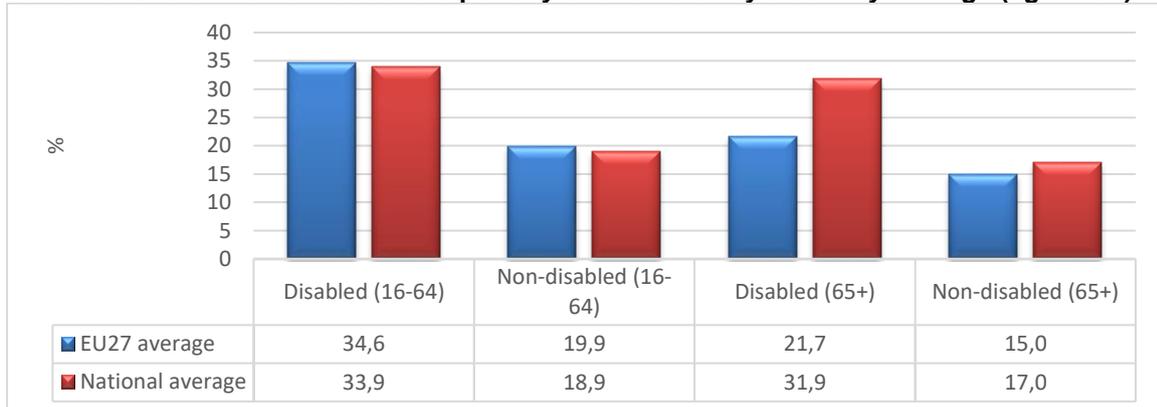
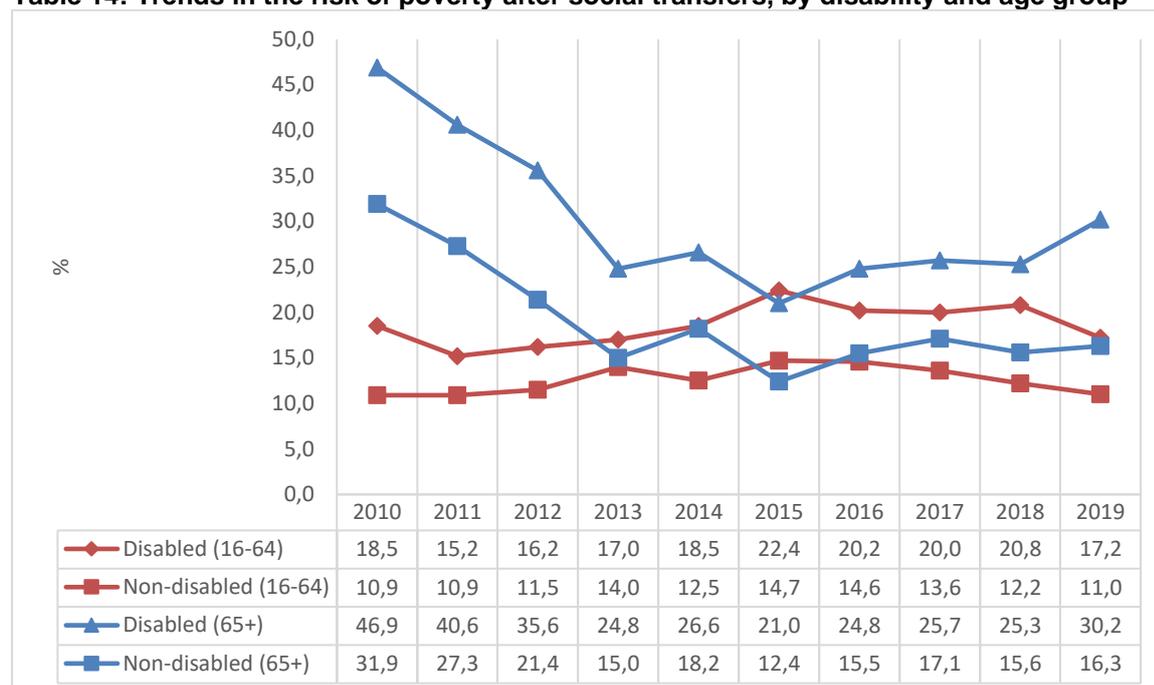


Table 13: Overall risk of household poverty or exclusion by disability and age (aged 16+)

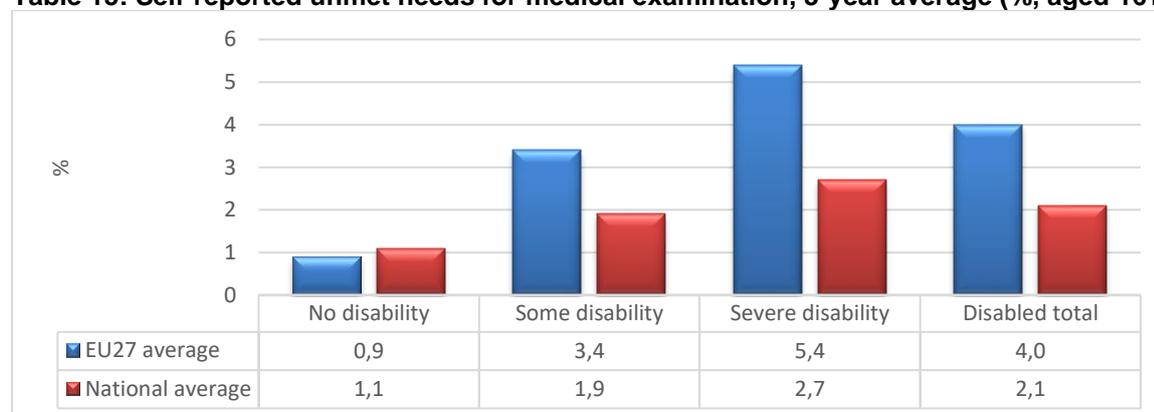


Source: EU-SILC 2019 Release 2021 version 1 (and previous UDB).

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 2019 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.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Eurostat Health Database, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

7.3 EU data relevant to disability and education

Table 24: Early school leaving rates, by disability status (aged 18-24 and 18-29)⁶⁸

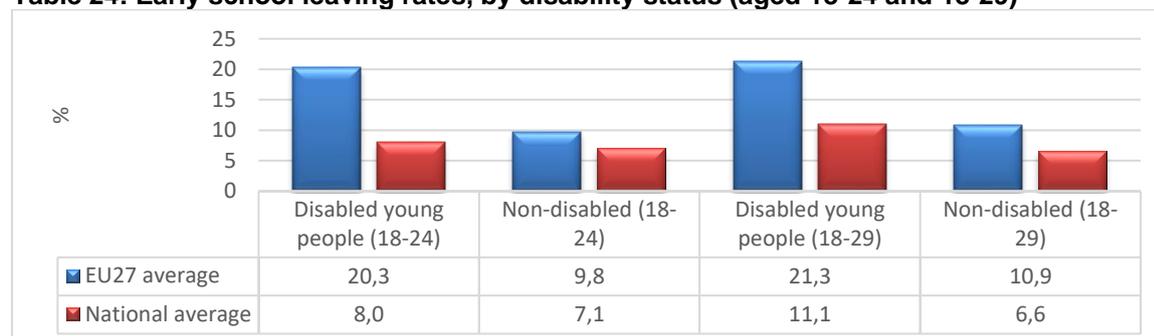
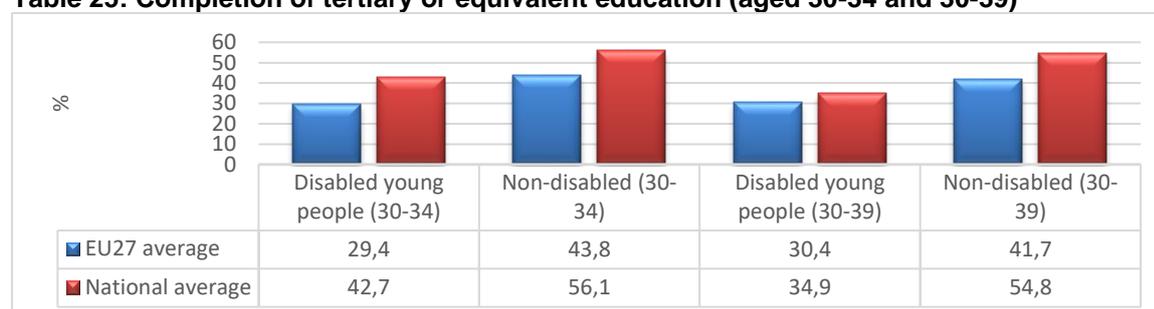


Table 25: Completion of tertiary or equivalent education (aged 30-34 and 30-39)



Source: EU-SILC 2019 Release 2021 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.

7.2.2 Alternative sources of education data in Cyprus

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.⁶⁹ In addition, Table B summarizes the number of students identified with disabilities and special educational needs, as reported in the Annual reports of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth from 2004 to 2021.

⁶⁸ 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.

⁶⁹ European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, *Statistics on Inclusive Education*, <https://www.european-agency.org/data/data-tables-background-information>.

Table B: Numbers of students in Primary Schools, Special Schools and Resource (Special) Units⁷⁰

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

Resources: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth, Annual Reports.
N/A = numbers not available. 2010-2021 number not yet published.

⁷⁰ Liasidou, A. & Mavrou, K. (2021). Cross-cultural perspectives on the rise of special education policy discourses. International Encyclopedia of Education, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.12002-0>.

GETTING IN TOUCH WITH THE EU

In person

All over the European Union there are hundreds of Europe Direct information centres. You can find the address of the centre nearest you at: https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en.

On the phone or by email

Europe Direct is a service that answers your questions about the European Union. You can contact this service:

- by freephone: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (certain operators may charge for these calls),
- at the following standard number: +32 22999696, or
- by email via: https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en.

FINDING INFORMATION ABOUT THE EU

Online

Information about the European Union in all the official languages of the [EU is available on the Europa website at: https://europa.eu/european-union/index_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/index_en).

EU publications

You can download or order free and priced EU publications from: <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publications>. Multiple copies of free publications may be obtained by contacting Europe Direct or your local information centre (see https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en).

EU law and related documents

For access to legal information from the EU, including all EU law since 1951 in all the official language versions, go to EUR-Lex at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu>.

Open data from the EU

The EU Open Data Portal (<http://data.europa.eu/euodp/en>) provides access to datasets from the EU. Data can be downloaded and reused for free, for both commercial and non-commercial purposes.

