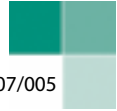


## **ANED country report on the implementation of policies supporting independent living for disabled people**

**Country:** Cyprus  
**Author(s):** Simoni Symeonidou

The information contained in this report was compiled by the Academic Network of European Disability experts (ANED) in May 2009.

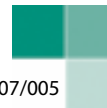


## **PART 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

In Cyprus, independent living is feasible for specific groups within the population of disabled people, whereas others, mainly people with learning difficulties, live in institutions or with their families. A small number live in 'houses in the community', a new trend which needs evaluation and improvement. Furthermore, the policies of independent or supported living for disabled people come under the same umbrella as policies for elder people, an approach which indicates the medicalized state view of disability. Generally speaking, the support services for independent living, direct payments towards this end and other measures (housing improvements, technical equipment etc.) are piecemeal and limited.

Disabled people's organizations have been active in campaigning for allowances for different impairment groups and they have succeeded in securing policies and schemes that facilitate their employment and mobility, factors which contribute to independent living. However, a general policy to legitimize disabled people's rights to independent living is still absent. In addition, the acknowledgement that all disabled people can have access to independent living is also not shared by the disability movement. The disability movement can be the key player in launching campaigns for independent living and it has the power to engage in consultation with the state to this end. However, it is a prerequisite that it resolves these issues internally first. The examples of other countries may be helpful to this end. For example, in other countries disabled people have undertaken a leading role in managing non-profit organizations for independent living and they promote policies that respect their right to self-determination, dignity and self-respect. They also offer assistance to disabled people who need to apply for different benefits and schemes. This is still absent from the context of Cyprus.

The choice of independent living is one of the fundamental human rights. Disabled people need to be supported in their pursuit for independent or supported living through policies, schemes and direct payments offered by the state. People with learning difficulties, who have traditionally been left to the margins of policies for independent living, should also be informed of their options in ways that they can understand. They should be supported to decide about their future and they should be entitled to support. However, considering the current context, it is still difficult to reach these goals.



## PART 2: LEGAL AND POLICY CONTEXT

The right of disabled people in independent living is generally addressed in the 2000 Disabled People's Act (N.127(I)/2000), which is the most important piece of legislation in Cyprus regarding disabled people's rights. It is in force together with the 2004 Disabled People's (Amended) Act (N.57(I)/2004). This legislation relies upon the principle of non-discrimination and it safeguards disabled people's right to independent living, inclusion in social-community life and employment. The 2000 Disabled People's Act (N.127(I)/2000) comprises four parts: Employment, Establishment of a Council for Disabled People, Establishment of a Special Fund for Disabled People and Other Arrangements. The basic rights of disabled people recorded in this Act (127(I)/2000) are: early identification and treatment, provision of personal support, accessibility of the built environment, educational integration, accessibility in information and communication, vocational training and rehabilitation, decent living conditions, establishment of personal and family life and participation in cultural, social, sports, religious and entertainment activities [article 4(2)].

Apart from this general piece of legislation, there is legislation that is specific to accommodation, housing and caring of disabled people or other vulnerable groups. One piece of legislation relevant to disabled people's accommodation is the 1991 Shelter for the Elder and Disabled People Act (N. 222/91 to N. 64(I)/1994). This law legitimizes the establishment and functioning of private settings for elder or disabled people. According to the law, these settings are expected to provide accommodation to more than five individuals and their functioning comes under the inspection of the state. Another piece of legislation is the 1997 Adult Centres Act (N. 38(I)/97), which legitimizes the establishment of day centres aiming to provide food, clothing, entertainment and access to other activities at any time during the day. These centres need to have more than five members aged 18 years or more. Another relevant legislation is the 2006 Social Assistance and Services Act (N. 95(I)/2006), which sets the criteria for individuals who are eligible for public assistance allowance and for those who are entitled to social services. Disabled people who receive the public assistance allowance are eligible for most of the schemes related to housing and caring.

A positive political step towards independent living is the Unified Plan for Accommodation<sup>1</sup>, which is part of the new housing policy initiated by the Ministry of the Interior. The Unified Plan for Accommodation entails financial support to disabled people when buying or building a house. The actual amount for each applicant depends on his/her salary and family status.

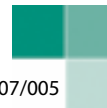
The policy framework on the legal capacity of disabled people is limited. Apart from the general statements recorded in the 2000 Disabled People's Act (N. 127(I)/2000) and the 2004 Disabled People's (Amended) Act (N. 57(I)/2004) described above, no other policies reflect the values of independence, choice and control of one's own life. Perhaps one piece of legislation which is indirectly linked to this idea is the Consultation Process on Behalf of the State and Other Services About Issues Related to People with Disabilities Act (N. 143(I)/2006). According to this law, the Cyprus Confederation of Organizations of Disabled People<sup>2</sup>, which is the umbrella group of disabled people's organizations, is legitimized as the official social partner of the state in any consultation process involving issues that are of interest to disabled people, such as independent living, employment, social inclusion, etc. In addition, the law legitimizes state funding for the functioning of the Confederation.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://moi.gov.cy/index.php?ac=53&l=2>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.kysoa.org.cy>

Disabled people's organizations have long been struggling to secure benefits that would facilitate independent living. However, due to the different priorities of different pressure groups, the benefits that have been secured promote independent living for certain groups of people (i.e. people with mobility impairments and people with visual problems). The Cyprus Confederation of Organizations of Disabled People needs to put the issue of independent living in a unified framework to secure policies addressed to all disabled people. However, research evidence suggests that due to the under-representation of people with learning difficulties from the movement (Symeonidou, 2005), it will be difficult to identify and promote this group's needs.



### PART 3: PROGRESS TOWARDS INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY LIVING

Currently, there are no statistical data regarding the percentage of disabled people who live independently in their own houses, those who live with their families, those who live in supported settings and those who live in institutions. More importantly, there is no research or any other data indicating factors related to living choices. For example, we are unaware of any official data on specific impairment groups that tend to live independently and other impairment groups that may tend to live with their families etc. We are also unaware of certain age groups or impairment groups that tend to live in institutions for elder and disabled people. Similarly, there is no research or data regarding state expenditure on institutions and on other initiatives promoting living in the community. Last but not least, there are no processes to safeguard that people leave institutions at a certain point in their lives, either because they want to or because they are prepared for another form of living.

According to the website of the Social Welfare Services of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance<sup>3</sup>, the state's response to calls for deinstitutionalization has been reflected in the gradual establishment of 'houses in the community'. These are houses providing accommodation for up to five disabled people. There are currently nine state 'houses in the community': seven houses in Nicosia, one in Limassol and one in Famagusta (Paralimni). According to the Social Welfare Services, institutional care for disabled people is 'the last step in the chain of social welfare'. Even though this is not the preferred state approach, there are currently six state institutions, known as 'shelters for the elder and people with disabilities': one in Nicosia (Latsia), two in Limassol ('Saint Panteleimonas' and 'Merimna'), two in Larnaca ('Saint George B' and 'Kokkines Block') and one in Paphos ('Nefeli Taliotis'). Finally, in Nicosia there is one institution for people with severe learning difficulties and bodily impairments called 'Nea Eleousa'. This institution was recently criticized by the media and parliament deputies, due to unacceptable behavior of the staff towards the tenants; some of whom are children. The Minister of Labour and Social Insurance responded to the accusations, announced the transfer of children to another setting and measures to safeguard the rights of all the tenants (Press and Information Office, 2009).

Apart from the state, other bodies run institutions and 'houses in the community'. Some of the older institutions in Cyprus are the Theotokos Foundation, established in 1969 in Limassol, Christou-Steliou Ioannou<sup>4</sup>, established in 1981 in Nicosia and the Margarita Liasidou Foundation<sup>5</sup>, established in 1985 in Paphos. In the 1990s, the trend for 'houses in the community' reached Cyprus and the first was established in 1990. This was a charity funded house called Elikas<sup>6</sup> and it is still functioning with the same status. Since then, similar houses have been established. One such example is the Integrated Group-Homes in Nicosia, established by the Association of Friends of Christou-Steliou Ioannou Foundation<sup>7</sup>. There are currently four houses with a total of thirteen tenants, aged between 22 and 51 years old. Most tenants were formerly living at Christou-Steliou Ioannou Foundation. In Limassol, there are three houses in the community maintained by Theotokos Foundation. Practice in these houses is discussed further later on in this report.

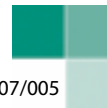
<sup>3</sup> [http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/sws/sws.nsf/dmlindex\\_en/dmlindex\\_en?OpenDocument](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/sws/sws.nsf/dmlindex_en/dmlindex_en?OpenDocument)

<sup>4</sup> [www.ioannoufoundation.org](http://www.ioannoufoundation.org)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.margaritafoundation.net>

<sup>6</sup> [www.elikasfoundation.blogspot.com](http://www.elikasfoundation.blogspot.com)

<sup>7</sup> [www.ioannoufoundation.org/main/15,0,13,167-3-The-Great-projects-of-the-Association-of-Friends.aspx](http://www.ioannoufoundation.org/main/15,0,13,167-3-The-Great-projects-of-the-Association-of-Friends.aspx)



#### **PART 4: TYPES OF SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY**

The range of support that is available to disabled people living in their own homes in the mainstream community is extremely limited. The policies and schemes available are addressed both to disabled people and elders, which indicates that the state views these two groups as one. Moreover, the state's intention to safeguard financial costs in relation to these groups is expressed by the limitation that the applicants should be recipients of the public assistance allowance. According to the National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2009) public assistance allowance ensures the right to a decent standard of living through the provision of financial assistance and/or social services to persons whose resources are not sufficient to meet their basic and special needs as determined by legislation. In 2009, the monthly rate of allowance for basic needs was:

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

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

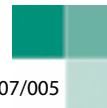
The state, via the Social Welfare Services of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, offers three types of support to elder and disabled people. These are home care, day care and institutional care. Home care is offered to people who have an extremely low income and thus, they are already recipients of the public allowance. It involves cleaning services and help for shopping or other activities. Day care is provided in day centres which are maintained by the Social Welfare Councils or by the municipalities and are often funded by the state. The people visiting the day centres are entitled to food and clothing and they participate in entertainment activities. State institutional care is co-ordinated by the Social Welfare Services and other institutions belong to the private sector.

There is one scheme that promotes independent living in individually owned houses, which is entitled Social Assistance for Improving Housing Conditions. According to this scheme, selected applicants are allocated a maximum of €12,000 to improve their housing conditions. However, there are several conditions that make this scheme problematic and not really helpful to disabled people. For example, to be eligible, applicants should have an extremely low income and be recipients of the public assistance allowance. Furthermore, if the applicants are not the owners of the house, there are many restricting conditions that need to be met in order to be eligible for the scheme.

There is one scheme that supports disabled people's parents in improving living conditions for their children. However, it is addressed to parents who wish to keep their children at home and rather than supporting their independent living in another house. This scheme is entitled 'Support of Families for Caring for their Elder and Disabled Members'<sup>8</sup> and it supports families who wish to build an extra room in their house or buy special equipment for their elder or disabled members.

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<sup>8</sup> [www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/sws/sws.nsf/All/AEE11F098131E4CEC2256E5F0038B46C?OpenDocument](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/sws/sws.nsf/All/AEE11F098131E4CEC2256E5F0038B46C?OpenDocument)



Decisions about how much support can be provided to persons or families are taken by the Social Welfare Services, which run all the schemes for supported or independent living. Decisions are not actually taken on the basis of the needs of the applicant. The applicant needs to meet specific criteria in order to receive a specific amount of money for a specific purpose. For example, most of the schemes require that the applicants should be recipients of the public assistance allowance. Thus, the Social Welfare Services checks whether this condition is met and then if all the relevant information about the applicant is clear, they proceed to allocate the money.

There is no indication of any mechanisms for measuring the quality of community based assistance and services and their impact on quality of life.

#### **4.1: PERSONAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES**

Generally speaking, personal assistance services for disabled people are limited. It has already been mentioned that home care is only available for the recipients of public assistance allowance. This is why the application procedure for home care is the same as the application for the public allowance benefit. All relevant documentation regarding the applicant's impairment is needed<sup>9</sup>. Details and the application form for the public assistance allowance can be found at: Home care assistants are trained by the Social Welfare Services and their duties involve house cleaning or individualized help. However, the assistants do not usually visit the individuals on a daily basis and this makes the support provided problematic.

Apart from this, there is the Care Benefit<sup>10</sup>, which is intended for paraplegics and quadriplegics who are in need of personal care due to wheelchair use and limited body functioning. According to the Annual Report of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance (Republic of Cyprus, 2009), in 2009, the care benefit for paraplegics was €350, €854.30 for quadriplegics and a total of € 6.068.900 was allocated to 613 individuals.

#### **4.2: ASSISTIVE EQUIPMENT AND ADAPTATIONS**

According to the National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2009), assistive equipment is supported by the following schemes:

- Financial Assistance for Technical Equipment Benefit<sup>11</sup>: This benefit is addressed to disabled people aiming to improve their quality of life by using technical means that contribute in their autonomy at the workplace and at home. In 2009 a total of €641.681 was spent on 396 recipients.
- Financial Assistance for Wheelchairs Benefit for People with Severe Mobility Impairment<sup>12</sup>: This scheme has been in force since 1999. In 2009, a total of € 213.343 was spent on 152 individuals who applied for a wheelchair.

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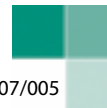
<sup>9</sup> [www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/sws/sws.nsf/All/936D7075B1297873C2256E6E0030605E?OpenDocument](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/sws/sws.nsf/All/936D7075B1297873C2256E6E0030605E?OpenDocument)

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## PART 5: EVIDENCE OF GOOD PRACTICE IN THE INVOLVEMENT OF DISABLED PEOPLE

Although disabled people are involved in policy developments influencing their group, independent living remains a neglected area. Apart from the piecemeal benefits secured for specific impairment groups, a coherent political framework for disabled people's independent living has not been followed. This is partly because some impairment groups hold more power than others and thus, they have managed to secure specific benefits regarding independent living for their group. In addition, people with learning difficulties are underrepresented in the disability movement and they are still considered unable to take decisions about their lives (Symeonidou, 2005; 2007). Thus, decision making regarding their lives remains in the hands of relatives and carers.

One example of good practice is the effort for deinstitutionalization recorded by the Theotokos Foundation, situated in Limassol, Cyprus. Theotokos Foundation runs 'three houses in the community'. These are houses functioning under the 1991 Shelter for the Elder and Disabled People Act. Each house is shared by five adults, either with learning difficulties or multiple impairments. Support staff consist of a social worker, who is the director of the house, and six carers of children. According to Katsonis (2009), the head of Theotokos foundation, the idea behind these houses is the right of individuals to have decent supported living that promotes autonomy and social inclusion. In this context, the goals of these houses are: (1) development and improvement of skills, (2) improvement of individuals' functioning, (3) quality of life and inclusion in the community, (4) quality of care. Although there is no recorded evidence of the level of disabled people's involvement in the running of these houses, or their level of autonomy and self-determination, it is reported that they are involved in different types of activities, such as housekeeping, vocational training or work in sheltered employment, shopping, hobbies (i.e. art, sports, gardening), entertainment etc. Although the 'houses in the community' are considered an important step towards deinstitutionalization, worries have been expressed about their future as the maintenance costs are constantly increasing. Apparently, the housemates' financial contribution (their public assistance allowance of about € 800) and the funding by the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance (maximum € 34,000) are not enough to cover annual costs of about € 150,000 for each house (Katsonis, 2010). This makes the houses dependent upon donations or funds raised from other activities organized to this end.

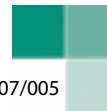
Recently, the project 'Moving to my home',<sup>13</sup> funded by the European Commission and implemented by Greek speaking organizations, focused on giving voice to people with learning difficulties regarding independent living issues. The project was co-ordinated by Estia, a vocational rehabilitation centre situated in Greece. Six foundations from Greece and Cyprus participated in its implementation. The foundations from Cyprus were the Theotokos Foundation, Christou-Steliou Ioannou Foundation and Ayios Lazaros Day Centre. A research report produced for this program provides important information about the desires of people with learning difficulties regarding independent living (Markomichali, Andreou and Baogolian, 2010). In particular, the research methodology involved interviewing 30 participants with learning difficulties from Cyprus and Greece (aged between 20 and 36; 23 lived with their families, 4 lived in supported living settings and 3 in institutions). After the qualitative analysis of the interviews, a questionnaire with 50 questions about independent living was developed and piloted. The questionnaire was completed by means of interview with 352 participants from Cyprus and Greece aged over 18 years. Both qualitative and quantitative research findings may be summarized as follows.

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<sup>13</sup> [www.moningtomyhome.blogspot.com](http://www.moningtomyhome.blogspot.com)



First, people with learning difficulties who had lived for a long time with their families did not wish to change setting. Second, many people with learning difficulties seemed to be thinking about the possibility of living independently, but they could not communicate any specific plans. Third, the people with learning difficulties who expressed the desire to change where they lived were those who felt that they were able to live independently and who were unhappy when forced to live with restrictions. Although the findings need to be further researched in more detail in the context of Cyprus, they are informative of the way people with learning difficulties are raised to believe that they are dependent upon their families or carers and that there is not much they can do on their own.



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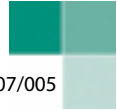
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