10 Οctober 2022

**CYPRUS’ INPUT REGARDING HRC RES 44/10**

**Subject: Re-imagining services to give effect to the right to live independently and be included in the community for persons with disabilities**

Cyprus welcomes the efforts by the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities to document the issue and present a comprehensive report to the Human Rights Council. Herebelow please find the contribution of the Cyprus Department for Social inclusion of Persons with disabilities.

**Q1-3: Policy Goals and Principles**

The primary principle and goals that govern the provision of services to people with disabilities in Cyprus are set in the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2018-2028 and the three-yearly National Disability Action Plans (2013-2015, 2018- 2020 and 2021-2023). These principles and goals take account of Article 19 of the CRPD on the right to live independently and be included in community. These goals are linked directly to broader policy imperatives to ensure people with disabilities can take meaningful advantage of being in the community. More specifically, in the National Disability Action Plans, actions have been included, in order to be implemented by all the Ministries and their services. Also, our Disability Strategy and Action Plans are linked to the concluding observations made to the Republic of Cyprus by the UN Committee for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2017 and take into account the opinions and suggestions of the organisations representing persons with disabilities.

Some examples of actions that were or are being implemented and we consider as important because they add value and improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities in Cyprus are:

1. The provision of new social services in the community to support independent living of persons with intellectual disability or autism
2. The adoption of a new law for the creation of social enterprises and the design of tools and mechanisms to support persons with disabilities to become employees or owners of social enterprises in the open labour market
3. The expansion of the provision of rehabilitation services through the national health system in order to enhance early intervention for children with disabilities or rehabilitation interventions for all
4. Improvement measures in accessibility to beach facilities, archaelogical sites and museums, public websites, public transportation and public buildings
5. The preparation of a new law to substitute the existing law on special education towards a modern education system for all students.

The independent living in the community and the provision of the necessary support services are a primary right of people with disabilities. This right, as well as the obligation of States to safeguard it, is set out in Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The obligation of Cyprus to take action in this area is an important area of social policy, which serves the social protection and social inclusion of persons with disabilities.

**Q 4-15: Service Delivery**

Services to people with disabilities are delivered by all the relevant authorities, such as Ministries, deputy ministries, local government and organisations of persons with disabilities. After ratification of the UNCRPD in Cyprus, all the relevant authorities are coordinated by the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance. The government primarily delivers services to people with disabilities. Also, the representative organisations of persons with disabilities, through governmental grants, deliver services to people with disabilities. The principles and service goals are communicated to the service system through staff training and in laws.

Among the measures to ensure the right of persons with disabilities to live independently in the community, the following support services that are provided to persons with disabilities by the Department of Persons with Disabilities are mentioned:

* In September 2017 the Council of Ministers approved the implementation of the Supported Living Programmes Scheme via the Project “Operation of new houses/programmes for supported living in the community for persons with disabilities” which was funded by the European Social Fund for the programming period 2014-2020 with the amount of €2.8 million. The Scheme was later revised and upgraded by a new Council of Ministers’ decision in April 2020 in order for more specific and specialized needs for persons with disabilities who enter these programmes to be met. Via the project, 11 homes throughout Cyprus have been created and operated after public procurement procedures by contractors from the private sector like NGOs, companies or professionals. Each home accommodates 4-5 persons with disability and is situated within the community providing community based care and other support services to enhance communication, training in daily living skills, recreation and socialization. Furthermore, the project funded the operation of a home run by the state for the de-institutionalization of 9 persons with severe disabilities that used to live in a psychiatric ward. The project covered the funding of the first 2.5 years of its operation and ever since the home is funded by state funds. At this moment 9 homes in the community are funded by the project, which accommodate 42 persons with disabilities that used to live in disadvantaged conditions in various institutions and/or their homes with very limited means or access to adequate services according to their needs and choices. The expansion of the Project in the new programming period 2021-2027 has been approved by the Council of Ministers in January 2021 with a total budget of €20 m. This includes the expansion of programmes and services specifically designed and flexible enough to meet the particular needs of every person with intellectual disability and/or autism who are in need of supportive services in order to live independently within the community. Via the project, the Department inspires to create a new network of services and to ensure that each person with disability lives within their community, independently and with all the necessary means for the provision of such services which guarantee them high quality of life. The ultimate goal of the project is the empowerment of persons with disabilities in order for them to take control of their own lives and live their lives on equal basis with every other citizen.
* With the decision of the Council of Ministers no. 87,345 on 6th of May2019, the creation and operation of the Family Intervention and Support Center for Autism was approved as a project co-financed by the European Social Fund for the programming period 2014-2020. In 2020 a new public procurement competition was announced by the Department and the renovation of the buildings to house the Center was completed. The creation and operation of the Center aims at the timely provision of intervention and support services, so that children with autism participate in all aspects of social life. At the same time, the aim of the project is to maintain family cohesion, a necessary element both for the wider social cohesion and prosperity but also for the progress of the children themselves. The mission of the Center is to provide specialized services to children up to the age of compulsory education, who have been diagnosed with autism, as well as to their families, such as: (a) Psychological Support, Counseling and Psychoeducation Service, (b) Home Training and Support Service for the child and the family in the context of early childhood intervention specifically focused on children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, (c) Social Support Service. The Center will be able to serve and provide its services to about 300 children and their families annually across Cyprus.
* Financial assistance to the organisations of persons with disabilities for coverage the expenses of the operation of social programs. The Confederation of the Organisations of Disabled People also receives an annual grant for almost all its expenses.
* Subsidisation of organisations of persons with severe disabilities to recruit and manage Social Assistants for their members in order to support them at visiting state services, hospitals and doctors, banks, day care programmes, shopping, recreation activities etc.
* Provision of technical Aids to persons with disabilities, in order for them to have access to communication technologies, to cultural and leisure activities. With regards to the Scheme for Financial Assistance for the purchase of technical Aids the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities annually evaluates and updates, when necessary, the list of the aids that are subsidized for persons with disabilities. The list contains various technical means categorized according to the disability addressed and a maximum amount for each of them is marked according to market prices as examined by a committee consisted of physiotherapists and department officers and based on quotation submitted by applicants. The goal is to update the list on an annual basis to ensure that new aids and technologies are included and market price range changes are taken into consideration.

**Q17-29: Monitoring and Oversight/Re-Shaping/Process of Reform**

Among thenew actions that are expected to be implemented by the Ministry of Labor and Social Insurance are:

* The further expansion of the network of programmes to support independent living for adults, mainly with intellectual disabilities or autism, with co-financing from the European Social Fund with an expenditure of €20 million for the new programming period 2021-2027.
* The expansion of the operation of the first Center for Family Intervention and Support for Children with Autism, with co-financing from the European Social Fund with an expenditure of €5m. for the new programming period 2021-2027.
* The implementation of a new project for a "New Network of Social Inclusion Services for Persons with Disabilities" with the involvement in the implementation of the organizations of persons with disabilities and other economic entities, with co-financing from the European Social Fund with an expenditure of €30m. for the new programming period 2021-2027. This is in relation with the consultation and formulation of a new legislation for the introduction of new independent living support services, such as the personal assistant, the consultant, the trainer, in connection with the implementation of the "New Network of Social Inclusion Services" project.
* The provision of incentives and support for the creation of social enterprises by persons with disabilities, with the formulation and implementation of consulting and professional training tools in entrepreneurship.
* The harmonization with Directive (EU) 2019/882 on the accessibility of goods and services.
* The completion of the consultation and drafting of the new law to support people with disabilities in making their decisions and exercising legal capacity in accordance with Article 12 of UNCRPD.
* The implementation of the new pilot program "Decision Support Advisor Services for Persons with Disabilities" already assigned to Cyprus Confederation of Organisations of the Disabled (CCOD) for implementation, in collaboration with the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. The program was approved by a Decision of the Council of Ministers dated 22.3.2022 and within its framework CCOD will hire and train three Decision Support Consultants, who will provide free services to at least thirty adults with disabilities to support their decision-making in the areas of daily life their lives e.g. the management of their daily schedule in the areas of communication, education, living, employment, health, entertainment, free time, social relations, social activities, etc. The results of the program, which will initially be implemented as a pilot, will feed into the preparation of the new decision-making support bill. The total cost for the implementation of the new pilot program will amount to €50,000 for one year and will be financed by the Department of Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, in addition to the annual grant of €70,000 granted to cover the total operating costs of CCOD.

The actions of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance that are already implemented or planned to be implemented and the European resources that have already been secured for their implementation, upgrade the policy, the legislation and the practical results of the provided social services and social benefits for people with disabilities in Cyprus. However, one of the main challenges to reform the system of services and supports for people with disabilities is the workforce shortage and the unpredictable results of the COVID-19 pandemic.