**DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

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

The mission of the Department is to undertake, as a central agent, the formulation, coordination and implementation of social policies for persons with disabilities, in cooperation with the co-responsible Ministries and Services as well as the Pancyprian Confederation of the Organisations of Persons with Disabilities. The vision of the Department is the improvement of the quality of life of persons with disabilities and its strategic goal is the formulation and implementation of such reforms, which will create new prospects for social inclusion.

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

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

The design and implementation of a new system of assessing disability and functioning in Cyprus is an important project, which aims to establish a scientific, reliable and credible basis for the assessment of disability and functioning, commonly accepted and used by state services and thus minimising the efforts of persons with disabilities to follow multiple bureaucratic procedures to be assessed in order to fulfill their rights. The project is co-financed by the European Social Fund and concerns the establishment of a Disability Assessment Centre, the issue of Assessment Manuals based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health of the World Health Organisation, special training and services rendering of doctors and other health and rehabilitation professionals who take the role of the assessors etc.

The New system will provide credible and reliable comprehensive reports on disability and functioning through professional multidisciplinary and modern assessment procedures. By the end of the assessment, a person will know and have a report not only on special needs for care, technical equipment, facilities, support, but also on capabilities and new prospects for training, employment, inclusion.

In December 2013 the Disability Assessment Centre in Nicosia started its operation, having been equipped with the necessary medical and rehabilitating equipment and the scientific base of assessment protocols and manuals.

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

**2.1. UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

The Republic of Cyprus has ratified and incorporated into national legislation, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in 2011, by the approval of The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Related Issues (Ratification) Law of 2011, L. 8(III)/2011.

Article 35 of the Convention provides that each state party shall submit to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities a comprehensive report on measures taken to give effect to its obligations under the Convention and the progress made in that regard, within two years after the entry into force of the Convention for the state concerned. On the basis of this article, the Republic of Cyprus submitted its first national report on 29th of July 2013 in accordance with the guidelines of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as the guidelines of the annual Work Forums that were organized by the European Union in October of 2010, 2011 and 2012.

This Report was the result of a collective effort of the responsible public services, coordinated by the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities that serves as the Focal Point in Cyprus for the implementation of the Convention. For the preparation of the Report data and information was collected from all relevant sources, discussions and consultations took place with representatives of the public services, of the Cyprus Confederation of Organisations of the Disabled and observers from the Office of the Ombudsman and Human Rights, as the Independent Mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the Convention. Furthermore the Report was adopted by the Pancyprian Council for Persons with Disabilities as the Coordinating Mechanism to facilitate the actions of the Convention and was approved by the Council of Ministers Decision no 75.537 dated 26.7.2013

**2.2. National Disability Action Plan 2013 - 2015**

The purpose of the first National Disability Action Plan in Cyprus is to promote the realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all persons with disabilities without discrimination of any kind on the basis of disability.

The first National Action Plan on Disability 2013-2015 was approved by the Decision of the Council of Ministers no 75.537 dated 26.7.2013 and is a result of collective effort under eight Thematic Technical Committees, which are composed by representatives of all relevant public services, representatives from the Cyprus Confederation of Organizations of the Disabled and, as observers, representatives from the Ombudsman and National Human Rights Institution, under the coordination of the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities.

The eight Thematic Technical Committees which worked with terms of reference approved by the Pancyprian Council for Persons with Disabilities are the following:

• Technical Committee on Equality, Non-Discrimination, Awareness and Statistics (Articles 5,8,31)

• Technical Committee on Accessibility of the Physical and Building Environment (Articles 9,30)

• Technical Committee on Accessibility of Transportation (Article 9)

• Technical Committee on Information Accessibility (Articles 9, 21)

• Technical Committee on Independent Living, Social Inclusion, Mobility and Social Protection (Articles 19, 20, 28, 30).

• Technical Committee on Education and Vocational Training (Articles 24, 26).

• Technical Committee on Health and Rehabilitation (Articles 25, 26).

• Technical Committee on Employment (Articles 27).

In order to formulate the Action Plan, the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities coordinated the nomination of 81 Contact Points in 65 relevant for disability issues public services, completed the composition of the Thematic Technical Committees with the nomination of 10 representatives by the Cyprus Confederation of Organizations of the Disabled 7 representatives as observers by the Ombudsman and National Human Rights Institution. Also the Department considered action plans of other State Parties to the Convention, as good practices, convened 12 meetings of the 8 Thematic Technical Committees during the period February - July 2013, whose members submitted suggestions and discussed the proposed actions for the next three years, along with the discussion of the current situation and preparation of the National Report of Cyprus for the Convention and reassured the consent of the services responsible for the implementation of the actions.

The National Action Plan 2013-2015 includes 39 actions in total. Each action includes specific sub-actions and for each the purpose, content, the competent implementing entity, timetable, financing and expected results are described. Also, each action reflects the spirit, philosophy and principles of the Convention and complies with the provisions of the Convention as well as the guidelines of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020.

The National Disability Action Plan was prepared at a period of time extremely crucial for the Cypriot economy. Therefore, taking into account the available financial and human resources of the state for the period 2013 - 2015, all actions included in the Action Plan will be implemented without additional cost and in the framework of the ordinary available funds that are approved for each service through the annual state budgets.

**2.3. Enlightening Activities**

In 2013 the Department, re-issued informative material about the Social Benefits Schemes it provides, [the Recruitment of Persons with Disabilities in the Wider Public Sector (Special Provisions) Law of 2009](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dsid/dsid.nsf/All/F6F04D1FF1A1ED8BC2257AA30026FB41?OpenDocument) and the Vocational Training and Rehabilitation Schemes. The informative material was distributed through Citizen Service Centres, public hospitals, specific governmental departments and in all institutions and organisations of Persons with Disabilities in Cyprus. Moreover, the Department enriched its website with the relevant information in Greek and English, about the Department’ s mission, vision and activities, the Social Benefits Schemes, as well as about the legislation regarding the rights of persons with disabilities, the staff and other information, in order to be more friendly to the user. The Department´s website can be found at [www.mlsi.gov.cy/dsid](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/dsid).

**3. Social Benefit Schemes for Persons with Disabilities**

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

* Severe motor disability allowance: Persons with severe motor disabilities are entitled a monthly allowance of €337,66 (At 31.12.2013, 1637 persons were entitled to this allowance and the cost for 2013 was €6.698.563)
* Care allowance for persons with paraplegia of €350 monthly (At 31/12/2013: 559 beneficiaries with a cost for 2013 at €2.499.754)
* Care allowance for persons with tetraplegia of €854,30 monthly (At 31/12/2013: 579 beneficiaries with a cost for 2013 at €6.173.934)
* Special Allowance for Blind Persons of €316,37 monthly (At 31/12/2013: 2625 beneficiaries with a cost for 2013 at €10.386.596)
* Mobility Allowance of €51- €102 monthly (At 31/12/2013: 527 beneficiaries with a cost for 2013 at €631.170)
* Financial Assistance for persons with disabilities in order to buy a car (In 2013: 44 beneficiaries with a cost for 2013 at €553.465)
* Financial assistance for the provision of technical aid (In 2013: 694 beneficiaries with a cost for 2013 at €688.388)
* Financial assistance for the provision of wheel chairs (In 2013: 200 beneficiaries with a cost for 2013 at €599.973).

Additional social services schemes are the following:

* Financial assistance to the organisations of persons with disabilities for coverage of their running expenses and the operation of social programmes. 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.

**4. Vocational Training and Rehabilitation**

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

* Scheme for the creation and operation of small units for self-employment purposes of Persons with Disabilities. The Scheme provides a grant up to €8.543 to persons with disabilities who do not have the financial means for self-employment through the Special Fund of the Vocational Rehabilitation Centre for Person with Disabilities. In 2013, there were two beneficiaries and the cost for 2013 was €25.529
* The Vocational Training Scheme which funds persons with disabilities with an amount of up to €1.708,60 in order to get training courses of their own choice, which will increase their employment possibilities. In 2013 there were 3 beneficiaries and the total cost was €10.200
* The Supported Employment Scheme, which funds Organisations for persons with disabilities with an amount of up to €13.500 yearly for each supported employment programme, which intends to help groups of 5-10 persons with disabilities (mainly intellectual disability) to get and maintain a job position in the open labour market, by a special job coach. In 2013 22 programmes operated with 228 persons with disabilities in the open labour market, with a cost of €289.800.

Moreover, the Centre for the Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities operates under the Department. In 2013, a supporting programme of independent living and social inclusion was implemented and the persons decided to move into their own houses in the community. The Government, by a Council of Ministers Decision in 2009, has decided the reorganisation of the vocational training and employment sector through the merging of the Centre and the Christos Steliou Ioannou Foundation into a new organisation. The Department prepared in this framework a bill of law for the establishment of the new organization and begun consultation with the involved parties.

Also, in 2013 the Department prepared a new proposal for the de-institutionalisation of eight people with severe intellectual disability and mental disorders from Unit 14 in Athalassa Hospital. The project is in progress with the cooperation of DSID and the Mental Health Services and also the purchase of care services through public procurement and will be implemented at proper houses near the community to be rented by DSID. This important project with the cooperation of public services and the private sector is expected to be a pilot project for further de-institutionalisation projects for persons with severe disabilities.