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Erasmus 4 V.I.P.s

National Report of Cyprus

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Introduction

This report presents the outcome of activity two of the “Erasmus 4 VIP” project, a strategic partnership Erasmus plus Project. The aim of the activity was to carry out a study, research and survey regarding the participation of young people with visual impairments to social life. It was carried out from November 2015 to June 2016. The Activity was necessary for collecting proper information that will represent the basis for establishing the project's deliverables and also to help accomplish the technical part of the project in a proper way.

The main focus of the research was oriented:

- ▶ On the actual level of inclusion and participation of visually impaired youths in the learning mobilities,
- ▶ The participation of visually impaired youths in the community,
- ▶ The participation of visually impaired youth in the NGO environment,
- ▶ The available support for integration of visually impaired youth,
- ▶ The level of sharing information about European learning opportunities through NGO's, schools, info points to the target groups.

The research and survey collected qualitative and quantitative information using a questionnaire tool, composed of four different questionnaires, and two Focus Group discussions. The target group for the collection of the data included:

- ▶ Responsible institutions for education that include visually impaired
- ▶ Youngsters,
- ▶ Youth NGOs,
- ▶ Schools that are working with visually impaired,
- ▶ Local authorities responsible for assuring accessibility of visually impaired in the urban areas,
- ▶ Youth with visual impairments.

The responsible partner for implementing the activity in Cyprus was The Pancyprian organization of the Blind.

Survey Methodology

Four questionnaires were created and administrated to the selected target groups. Each questionnaire was oriented towards a different target group. More specifically:

- ▶ For young people with visual impairments,
- ▶ For young people without disabilities,
- ▶ For NGOs offering services and activities to young people,
- ▶ Public sector bodies, service providers.

A detailed letter was drafted informing the target group of the purpose of the study. The questionnaires were multiplied and circulated to all participants in various formats (delivered by hand in printed form, send by fax, by email, by post).

Completed questionnaires were returned to the Organisation either by hand, by fax, by email. Officers of the Organization completed a large number of questionnaires over the telephone.

Although the desirable and expected number of completed questionnaires was 100, at the end of the activity we manage to collect 85 completed questionnaires. This is mainly due to the small population of Cyprus, the small number of young people with visual impairments living in the country as well as the number of known NGOs offering services and projects for young people. More specifically, the following questionnaires were collected:

- ▶ 15 By young people with visual impairments,
- ▶ 33 by young people without disabilities,
- ▶ 22 by NGOs offering services and activities to young people,
- ▶ 15 by public institutions

Two Focus Group Discussions took place in July 2016 at the premises of the Pancyprian Organization of the Blind in Nicosia, Cyprus. The composition of the first FG was 12 young people with visual impairments ages 15 - 30 and the second one by 9 representatives of NGOs offering services and projects for young people.

Survey Results

Section 1 - Opinion of people with visual impairments regarding Civil Services and local/international opportunities for learning or volunteering

90.00 % of VIPs have been in contact with one of the Civil Services that were listed on the questionnaire.

The top 5 most accessed services included:

1. Amenities / Car Park management 72.22%
2. Revenues & Benefits / Including Council Tax and Housing Benefits 44.44%
3. Regeneration /Tourism 33.33%
4. Amenities /Leisure Facilities 27.78%
5. Planning/Disabled Facilities Grants 16.67%

The least 5 accessed services included:

1. Planning/Planning enforcement / Planning applications / Building
2. Regulation / Homeless
3. Environmental Health / Pest Control / Food Safety
4. Corporate Resources/Electoral Services
5. Environmental Health / Health and Safety Licensing and Registration.
6. Amenities / Waste Management (refuse and recycling service).

In regards to the interest of the staff of civil services to adjust their service to the disability of the persons, 50% of the responded replied that staff from the Civil Service was aware of their disability. Of these, 27.27% made adjustments as to take the needs of the persons with visual impairments into account. 75.00% stated that these adjustments were helpful and appropriate.

In regards to evaluating their experience with the services they received from Civil Services, 21.05% stated that these were excellent, 10.53% said were Very Good, 26.32% good, 36.84% poor and 5.26 % very poor.

Below are some of the remarks given for clarifying the choices of the answer?

- ▲ There are no access facilities for persons with visual disability,
- ▲ Delays, time consuming procedures, bureaucracy, and no efficient cooperation between government services
- ▲ Nothing special to remark, neither good nor bad,
- ▲ Excellent cooperation with and advice from experienced persons,
- ▲ Were very helpful,
- ▲ In general: disappointed by services received, especially by health services,
- ▲ Lack of consideration,

In regards to equal opportunities for accessing Civil Services, 30.00% of young people with visual impairments felt that the services provided by Civil Services in their area take into account their needs. The rest of the participants defined their answer by stating that:

- ▲ No ramps and no information in Braille,
- ▲ Not enough online services to the public, delays, time consuming and complicated procedures,
- ▲ There should be face-to-face contact, not only over the phone,
- ▲ Not enough accessible online services; civil servants not suitably trained,
- ▲ Persons with disabilities should be granted priority when they are accompanied by sighted persons,
- ▲ Persons with disabilities are not taken into account,
- ▲ Services need improvement,
- ▲ There is no well-trained staff available to assist persons with disabilities.
- ▲ Special technology is not available. Environment needs adaptation,

This comes to total agreement from the answers provided in the survey for public institutions regarding the services they offer to persons with visual impairments. Most of the adaptations made are oriented and limited towards the needs of persons with physical disabilities.

The following ideas were documented in regards to what civil Services could do better to promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities:

- ▶ Efforts to solve accessibility problems,
- ▶ Suitable training and awareness-raising for civil servants,
- ▶ Employ persons with disabilities and so get more familiar with their needs,
- ▶ Better accessibility, to enable independent indoor mobility in public buildings,
- ▶ Offer them equal opportunities of access, treat them equally with others,
- ▶ Be courteous, polite, show interest and not show signs of pity,
- ▶ Medical centers - Staff should receive training regarding every specific kind of disability,
- ▶ Informational meetings, more employment opportunities, studies on the needs of people with disabilities on a local level,
- ▶ Further education through informational meetings, with the participation of people with disabilities,
- ▶ Accessibility for persons with visual disability, e.g. loudspeaker announcement of next bus stop,
- ▶ Public transport should be accessible, bus stops should be announced,
- ▶ All material given out by Services should be accessible,
- ▶ Offer equal opportunities; avoid discrimination and debasing behavior.

The following opinions were stated on how Civil Services could improve access to services and information for people with disabilities:

- ▶ Parking spaces for the disabled and access area free from obstacles.
- ▶ Accessible public websites,
- ▶ Increase and improve online services,
- ▶ Faster updating of online information and better contact possibilities through websites,
- ▶ They should be better informed about persons with disabilities and their needs,
- ▶ Provide information in an accessible and preferred format such as email, doc or txt, Braille or large print,
- ▶ Make available staff to assist and inform persons with disabilities,
- ▶ Lifts with Braille buttons and audio output,
- ▶ Develop social welfare policy, staff training,

The following are the preferred methods of contacting Civil Services, as persons with visual impairments, in descending order, stated these:

- ▶ Telephone
- ▶ E-mail
- ▶ Using the Civil Services website
- ▶ By Post

- ▶ SMS Text Message

Other:

- ▶ A personal visit and discussion of various topics is more effective,
- ▶ Interactive websites, provision of services online.

In regards to the experience of young people with visual impairments on the various learning and volunteering opportunities, data from the questionnaire showed that 61.90 % stated that they were aware of the existence of European/international learning opportunities that are addressing youth. Below is a list of the ones identified:

- ▶ Youth exchanges
- ▶ Language learning websites
- ▶ Youth entrepreneurship programs
- ▶ Educational excursions
- ▶ Euro scholar (visit to the European Parliament)
- ▶ Erasmus Plus

25.00 % of respondents stated that they have tried to participate in European learning opportunities that addressed youth.

Those that did not try to participate in such activities, listed a number of reasons including:

- ▶ The topic was not interesting for me,
- ▶ I was afraid that my disability will prevent me from fully participating
- ▶ I did not have time.
- ▶ I must always be accompanied, due to medical problems.

As for the ones that attempted to participate, their participation was successful. They found the experience to be:

- ▶ Good for personal development
- ▶ A life lesson,
- ▶ Discovering unknown personal potential,
- ▶ Knowledge of new cultures and ways of life,
- ▶ Very useful, important and helpful.

They considered the accessibility issues to be satisfactory and oftentimes much better for the disabled in other countries of rope; as there are services to make them really independent.

As for the relationship with the others (organizers, fellow participants, and local community) these varied from quite constructive to very good and simply good.

50.00 % of respondents stated that they were aware of the existence of different NGOs in their local community offering volunteering opportunities for youngsters.

Comments regarding the experience of those participating in voluntary activities included:

For Personal development:

- ▶ Helping a fellow human in difficulty always contributes to your personal development
- ▶ Pleasant experience, helping other people with problems different from mine
- ▶ Strengthened self-confidence
- ▶ Very good
- ▶ Helpful
- ▶ Enriching

For Accessibility

- ▶ I needed somebody to accompany me to the place where I volunteered
- ▶ No problem because I was accompanied by a person who knew my needs
- ▶ Support available
- ▶ Did not meet any problems
- ▶ Not accessible until I got familiar with the place
- ▶ Many problems, especially during the first visits
- ▶ Very good
- ▶ Accessible enough

For Relationship with the others (organizers, fellow participants, local community)

- ▶ Quite satisfying
- ▶ Pleasant, with humor, enthusiasm and a common purpose to support our fellow human beings
- ▶ Became friends
- ▶ Excellent and interesting
- ▶ Great collaboration

In the discussion that took place at the focus group, participants talked about their involvement in socio-educational activities organized by NGOs. The majority of youth that stated that

participated in activities, was mainly through the involvement of the organization of the Blind and/or the School for the Blind. NGOs usually approach the institution and the organization and asked for a collaboration, to involve in their activities youth with visual impairments. It was therefore a kind of smooth involvement of the youth with VI in the activities as they either had as guides / assistants from the Organisation or the School or the staff of the NGO involved in the activities had already received an awareness workshop on the needs of the youth with visual impairments how to guide them, how to help them, how to adapt their activities to meet their needs.

Only a small number of youth with visual impairments (mostly those with low vision) said that they took part in such activities on their own initiative (just because they were informed of such event). Even then, they participated knowing that there was a friend, another classmate or a relative who also took part in the activity. For all of them, these activities were characterized as great and unique experiences.

For those youth that never participated in such activities, the explanation given was the presence of the visual impairment. They felt that the staff and other member would not have been familiar with their needs. Also, they felt that they were going to be rejected due to their disability and have to deal with various stereotypes. Another excuse given was the fact that they were anxious on dealing with some practicalities involved in the activity such as how to get to the venue of the activity, dealing with any printed or other information that they would not have been able to access, participating in hands on experiences that demanded good eyesight etc.

The following learning / volunteering opportunities can be listed, in dissenting order, as they were defined by respondents:

- ▶ Participating in leisure activities - activities of young people in the municipality, athletic activities, music, singing, activities in nature
- ▶ European Youth exchanges - disability-related issues, Erasmus placement, empowerment, team building.
- ▶ Local/international workshops - accessibility and assistive technology,
- ▶ Local/international trainings - language learning, the opportunity to work abroad to achieve personal development and to realize what is available in other countries.
- ▶ Local/international volunteering for a cause.

Section 2 - Correlation between the opinion of people with visual impairments and situation of Civil Services

The following is a list of the type of accessibility and the assistance offered by public institutions to persons with disabilities:

Mobility and Physical disabilities 93.33%

- ▶ Ramp for wheelchairs, toilets for persons with disabilities, parking for disabled visitors
- ▶ Access facilities for public buildings
- ▶ Lowered service counters
- ▶ Athletic activities
- ▶ Trained staff, mobility aids, infrastructure

Hearing disability 53.33%

- ▶ Extra time during exams
- ▶ Responsibility of school administration board
- ▶ Speech and language therapist and occupational therapists available
- ▶ Athletic activities
- ▶ Trained staff

Mental or emotional health 60.00%

- ▶ Programs offered by specific organizations
- ▶ Psychiatrist, psychologist and occupational therapist available
- ▶ Athletic activities
- ▶ Trained staff

Speech and language 53.33%

- ▶ Responsibility of the schools
- ▶ Speech and language therapist available
- ▶ Athletic activities
- ▶ Trained staff

Visual disability 78.57%

- ▶ Transcription services into Braille for students and professionals
- ▶ Enlargement of textbooks
- ▶ Extra time during exams

- ▶ Offer sighted guide assistance upon request
- ▶ Guides for the blind on the pavements
- ▶ Athletic activities
- ▶ Touch tours of theatrical plays
- ▶ Free entrance to cultural events
- ▶ Information printed in Braille and large print
- ▶ Trained staff

Below is a list of the type of assistance offered to people with visual impairments?

- ▶ Information material available in appropriate format (Braille, large print, etc.) 46.67%
- ▶ Appropriate lighting 53.33%
- ▶ A properly structured space (including signs in Braille, tactile floors, removing potential obstacles, etc.) 21.43%
- ▶ Electronic reading devices 13.33%
- ▶ Specialized staff ready to assist 46.67%
- ▶ Other: Training facilities and staff are available for athletic activities.

The following list shows the percentage of institutions having a policy for assisting people with disabilities:

- ▶ Mobility and Physical 86.67%
- ▶ Hearing 46.67%
- ▶ Learning 46.67%
- ▶ Mental or emotional health 46.67%
- ▶ Speech and language 40.00%
- ▶ Visual 60.00 %

86.67% of the public institutions stated that they have a policy for serving people with disabilities with priority.

33.33% stated that they have a policy for evaluating the efficacy and quality of the support offered to people with disabilities (i.e. programmes for athletic activities, Special Olympics and Paralympics, students enjoying support can apply to the competent office in case of difficulties).

20.00% of the institutions stated that they take measures/initiatives to combat staff's negative perceptions, stereotyping and prejudices of people with disabilities (i.e. interventions to secure parking for persons with restricted mobility, complaints officer, and part of the in service

training of the personnel). 33.33% stated that currently they do not have any measures but there is a plan for this in the future while 46.67% stated that they do not have any measures because there is no need for this.

93.33% of the institutions stated that persons with disabilities have the possibility to report when they are subject to discrimination, stereotyping and prejudices from the rest of the staff of the Organisation. The responsible staff for such issues can be the administration and Complaints Officer, human resource manager, personnel manager, and the career counselor. 0% had no plans to offer this possibility while 6.67% stated that they do not offer the possibility because there is no need for this.

Section 3 - Correlation between the opinion of people with visual impairments and organizations offering local/international opportunities for learning or volunteering

The following is a list of the percentage and of the type of accessibility and assistance available by NGOs to persons facing different disabilities:

Mobility and Physical disability:

- ▶ Yes - 45.45%
- ▶ No, but there are plans for this 36.36%
- ▶ No, there is no need 18.18%

Type - ramps, trained staff, toilets.

Hearing disability:

- ▶ Yes 40.00%
- ▶ No, but there are plans for this 15.00%
- ▶ No, there is no need 45.00%

Learning disability:

- ▶ Yes 71.43%
- ▶ No, but there are plans for this 14.29%
- ▶ No, there is no need 14.29%

Type - extra time for lessons, specialized teachers, mentors, student's welfare office.

Mental or emotional health:

- ▶ Yes 47.62%
- ▶ No, but there are plans for this 9.52%
- ▶ No, there is no need 42.86%

Type - training

Speech and language:

- ▶ Yes 61.90%
- ▶ No, but there are plans for this 4.76%

- ▶ No, there is no need 33.33%

Type - There is no cooperation for resolving such issues.

Visual disability:

- ▶ Yes 42.86%
- ▶ No, but there are plans for this 14.29%
- ▶ No, there is no need 42.86%

The following assistance is offered to people with visual impairments:

- ▶ Information material available in appropriate format (Braille, large print, etc.) 28.57%
- ▶ Appropriate lighting 52.38%
- ▶ A properly structured space (including signs in Braille, tactile floors, removing potential obstacles, etc.) 25.00%
- ▶ Electronic reading devices 4.76%
- ▶ Specialized staff ready to assist 47.62%

Below is a list showing the percentage of the NGO's policies for assisting people with the given disabilities:

- ▶ Mobility and Physical 59.09%
- ▶ Hearing 54.55%
- ▶ Learning 63.64%
- ▶ Mental or emotional health 63.64%
- ▶ Speech and language 63.64%
- ▶ Visual 52.38%

52.38% of the NGOs stated that they have a policy for serving people with disabilities with priority.

40.91% stated that they have a policy for evaluating the efficacy and quality of the support offered to people with disabilities (i.e. evaluation form for our Programme, hosting persons with myopathy and receiving feedback at the end of the event, group discussions, evaluation form for various activities, the organization is an NGO for people with disabilities, feedback when events finish).

4.55% of the NGOs stated that they take measures/ initiatives to combat staff's negative perceptions, stereotyping and prejudices of people with disabilities while 95.45% stated that there is no need for doing this.

During the Focus Group, participants, members of NGOs were asked to express their opinion if their regular target groups would be comfortable with involving persons with visual impairments in their current activity and how they will react. Participants stated that overall they did not believe that their regular target groups would not be comfortable with involving youth with visual impairments in the current activities. They all agreed though that at first their groups might appear to be a bit skeptical and keep a distance from the youth with visual impairments mainly due to the unfamiliarity of working, collaborating or socializing with persons who are visually impaired and maybe with fear not to act in a manner that will might insult them. Organizations that work with young children as a target group, thought that it will be of benefit to carry out an awareness session prior to carrying out the activities with the youth with visual impairments. In other cases, they were not sure if the person with visual impairment might wish to inform the rest of the group his disability. It was agreed that the group would adjust to the new situation as they got to know the person. In no case though, they believed that their group would react in a negative manner to the presence of a youth with visual impairments in the group.

In regards to the possibility that persons with disabilities have to report when they are subject to discrimination, stereotyping and prejudices from the staff of the Organisation, 54.55% of the respondents said yes and 45.45% they said no because there is no need for this. These companies can often reach the Board of the NGO or the director or president.

80.95% of the NGOs responded that they offer formal or non-formal learning opportunities that are accessible to people with disabilities. The majority of the NGOs stated that all is welcome to their programmes without discriminating among participants, they have accessible infrastructures, are involved in European projects that are open to persons with disabilities, they offer customized programmes for persons with disabilities. A percentage of 19.05% stated that they do not have any activities because there is no need for this.

45.45% of the NGOs stated that they offer volunteering opportunities that are accessible to people with disabilities. 4.55% stated that currently they do not offer such service but plan to do so in the future. Finally 50.00 %stated that they do not offer such programmes because there is not a need to do so. Examples included the Organisation and arrangement of artistic charity events, first aid training, and music performances.

77.27% of the NGOs responded that they offer leisure/free time spending opportunities that are accessible to people with disabilities while 22.73% stated that they do not have as there is no need for this. Examples included artistic events, a physical training center, games that do not require moving around / handicraft, local events.

81.82% responded that they already involve people with disabilities in learning/volunteering/leisure activities while a percentage of 18.18% stated that they do not offer, as there is no need for this. Examples included artistic events (music and singing, two-day events / summer camp, local events / persons with myopathy, children with disabilities participating to field trips, weekly cycling routes, participation to workshops and performances, summer camps and events in the community for celebrating national and traditional events.

From the discussion during the Focus Group, NGOs were asked to state if they had experience in working with visually impaired people and if yes, how was it, if not what prevented them from doing so.

The organizations that had the experience of working with youth with visual impairments stated that this was an overall a great and unique experience and a very fulfilling one. Some organizations were approached by the educational institution for the visually impaired or the Organisation of the visually impaired in the country and were asked to offer their services to youth with visual impairments. For them it was a smooth process as they receive all necessary guidance and information they needed to offer their services, including the transcription of the material into accessible formats as well as the adaptation of some of the activities. In most cases there was also a person responsible from the School or the Organisation during the training to help out if needed. For some other organizations that had the experience, this was due to their own initiative. They came up with the idea of involving youth with visual impairments for a number of reasons. Still, even these organizations first contacted either the School or the Organisation to ask for this collaboration. In very few cases, organizations were first approached by youth with visual impairments themselves, asking to participate in their activities. In those cases, the organizations asked for more information either by the person on how to accommodate his/her needs, or the School or the Organisation mainly for their services to transcribe and adapt material. Overall, for all these organizations the experience added to the value of the Organisation mainly due to the fact that they went through the process of evaluating the ability of the Organisation to accommodate the needs of a participant who needed some extra adaptations and a small modification in the teaching, training process or the way activities were performed in the past.

Organizations that did not have any experience in working with youth with visual impairments stated that this was due to two factors. First, they were never approached by youth with visual impairments and secondly that they never thought the possibility of involving youth with visual impairments in their activities.

Participants were asked to give examples that they were aware of activities addressing persons with visual impairments and what information they had about them (success, persons/entities organizing them, etc. Some participants were familiar with a number of activities that were carried out in close collaboration with the School for the Blind or the Organisation of the Blind. These activities had either to do with leisure (such as bike events, small marathon running or city running), with participation to or access to various cultural events (joined music performances, touch tours in various theatrical plays, accessible exhibitions etc.) and participation to various trainings and workshops (such as First Aids, Awareness for various Health matters, various skills on building self-esteem, communication, empowerment). All participants to the FG had a very positive feeling about these events and their success. They were not at a position though to name the organizers of these activities besides the collaboration with the School and the Organisation.

During the Focus Group discussion participants were asked if they could foresee some services/projects that they could offer to people with visual impairments.

Taking for granted that there will be support available to the various organizations for including youth with visual impairments in their activities, participants identified a number of services/projects that they can offer to young people with visual impairments. These included among others:

- ▶ Leisure, sports and entertainment programs
- ▶ Professional training (formal learning opportunities)
- ▶ Informal learning opportunities such as participation to cultural workshops
- ▶ Youth exchanges and summer camps
- ▶ Field trips and tours
- ▶ Participation to various events organized by NGOs (music events, plays etc.

Participants were also asked if they can foresee some services/projects that could not be adapted to involved people with visual impairments. After discussing with participants possible services and projects that in their opinion could not be adapted to the needs of young people with visual impairments, it was agreed that the majority of them can easily be adapted by taking into consideration some basic principles for overcoming the challenges associated with the visual impairment. In some other cases, the need of a sighted assistant can allow the participant with a visual impairment to take part in the activity. However, there are some activities that have to be performed under specific rules, like it is the case with some sports that do not allow an adaptation, to include the participation of young people with visual impairments.

The following channels were identified by NGOs used for communicating the availability of learning/ volunteering/ leisure opportunities to people facing disabilities:

- ▶ Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) (90.91%)
- ▶ E-mail (68.18%)
- ▶ School (22.73%)
- ▶ Newspapers (18.18%)
- ▶ Specific websites (13.64%)
- ▶ TV/Radio (9.1%)
- ▶ NGOs (9.1%)
- ▶ Info points (9.1%)

Other (40.91%):

- ▶ Personal contacts
- ▶ Persons who are in contact with entities that are directly connected to persons with disabilities
- ▶ SMS
- ▶ Audio magazines
- ▶ Through people who collaborate with other organizations for people with disabilities.

To further support these, from the Focus Group discussion it was stated that NGOs were asked if they could address/contact/get in touch with this target group easily? What would be their methods? What would be the challenges? All participants to the FG stated that the way to get in touch with this group was to contact the two responsible sectors that offer support and services to the youth with visual impairments. They consider that by contacting the School for the Blind or the Organisation of the Blind was the only channel to reach out and contact the population. As for the methods to reach out to them these were unfamiliar as they were not aware of the means and devices youth with VI use to communicate. They felt that this was going to be left to the School or the Organisation to deal with

Section 4 - Perception of people related to disability

Respondents of the questionnaires listed, in descending order, the following sources of the information they receive about disability.

- ▶ My studies (62.96%)
- ▶ Media and the Internet (48.15%)
- ▶ My personal need for information (29.63%)
- ▶ Seminars on Disability (29.63%)
- ▶ Disabled friends or careers of people with disability/is (22.22%)
- ▶ Voluntary occupation (18.52%)
- ▶ Work environment (18.52%)
- ▶ A disabled member in my family (11.11%)
- ▶ Co-workers with disability/is (0%)
- ▶ I am disabled (0%)

In regards to their opinion of disabilities, respondents stated the following:

I would hang out with a disabled person

- ▶ Yes 100.00 %
- ▶ No 0.00 %

If necessary, I could provide care and accommodation overnight for a disabled child.

- ▶ Yes 96.30 %
- ▶ No 3.70 %

A disabled person is a punishment for his family

- ▶ Yes 0.00%
- ▶ No 100.00%

A disabled person is unbearable burden to his family

- ▶ Yes 8.00 %
- ▶ No 92.00 %

Disabled children should not be born

- ▶ Yes 0.00%

- ▶ No 100.00%

Further, respondents were asked to list in order which of the items below should be included in the terminology for disability:

- ▶ Lack of supportive environment (85.19%)
- ▶ Lack of accessibility (81.48%)
- ▶ Psychological issues (77.78%)
- ▶ Loss of bodily functions (77.78%)
- ▶ Loss of sensorial functions (74.07%)
- ▶ Loss of mental functions (74.07%)

Young people without disabilities then had to claim whether they feel uncomfortable and anxiety when they come across persons with disabilities.

Yes, because of:

- ▶ My lack of knowledge about disability (14.81%)
- ▶ Difficulty in interacting with them (14.81%)
- ▶ Their need for assistance (11.11%)
- ▶ Lack of accessible places for hanging out/interacting (7.41%)
- ▶ Different way of life 0 (0%)
- ▶ Their lack of competence (0%)
- ▶ Other: because I might unintentionally treat them in a different way and offend them.

No - 14 answers (51.86%)

Respondents then had to select the phrase they use when they refer to disability:

- ▶ He /she suffers from 11.11 %
- ▶ He /she is a person with 88.89 %

To the following statement, People with disability are individuals of common people with their own personality and abilities, respondents stated:

- ▶ I agree 96.30 %
- ▶ I partially agree 0.00 %
- ▶ I disagree 3.70 %

Respondents had to state what for them is equivalent to disability:

- ▶ Mobility problems (59.26%)
- ▶ Special skills (44.44%)
- ▶ Need for support (22.22%)
- ▶ Weakness (22.22%)
- ▶ Incompetence 6 (22.22%)
- ▶ Other (5%)
- ▶ I do not wish to answer (0%)

Youth without disabilities were then asked to reply with true or false to a list of statements listed below:

The disabled have less productive capacity

- ▶ True 11.11 %
- ▶ False 88.89 %

The disabled are heroes who exceed there physical as well as architectural obstacles

- ▶ True 53.85 %
- ▶ False 46.15 %

People with mobility disabilities can work

- ▶ True 96.30 %
- ▶ False 3.70 %

Below are the answers given by the youth for a number of statements regarding the support that should be offered to the people with disabilities?

Initiatives should be given by the State to encourage private enterprises to recruit people with disabilities:

- ▶ I agree 74.07 %
- ▶ I partly agree 25.93 %
- ▶ Undecided 0%
- ▶ I partly disagree 0%
- ▶ I disagree 0%

There should be introduced more flexible working conditions for persons who take care of a disabled person (e.g. Part time)

- ▶ I agree 34.62 %
- ▶ I partly agree 38.46 %
- ▶ Undecided 15.38 %
- ▶ I partly disagree 0.00 %
- ▶ I disagree 11.54 %

There must be established vocational training schools for people with disabilities

- ▶ I agree 77.78 %
- ▶ I partly agree 18.52 %
- ▶ Undecided 0.00 %
- ▶ I partly disagree 0.00 %
- ▶ I disagree 3.70 %

The table below summarizes respondents' beliefs on the kind of achievements considered to be possible for people with disabilities:

	Mental disability	Blindness	Deafness	Mobility Disability
Work	18 (66.67%)	27 (100%)	27 (100%)	27 (100%)
Study	7 (25.93%)	27 (100%)	27 (100%)	27 (100%)
Get married	19 (70.37%)	27 (100%)	27 (100%)	27 (100%)
Have children	13 (48.15%)	26 (96.30%)	26 (96.30%)	26 (96.30%)
Lead an autonomous life	0 (0%)	25 (92.6%)	26 (96.30%)	23 (85.19%)
Have a good time	25 (92.6%)	27 (100%)	27 (100%)	27 (100%)
Have social life	22 (81.48%)	27 (100%)	27 (100%)	27 (100%)
Travel	26 (96.30%)	27 (100%)	27 (100%)	27 (100%)
Elect	10 (37.04%)	27 (100%)	27 (100%)	27 (100%)
Be elected	8 (29.63%)	26 (96.30%)	25 (92.6%)	25 (92.6%)

Respondents were asked to state the kind of feeling they have when interacting with persons with disabilities causes to them:

Insecurity

- ▶ Yes 8.00%
- ▶ No 92.0%

Fear

- ▶ Yes 0%
- ▶ No 100.00%

Willingness

- ▶ Yes 80.0%
- ▶ No 20%

Embarrassment

- ▶ Yes 33.33 %
- ▶ No 66.67 %

What follows is the intension of respondents regarding offering support to people with disability along with some examples:

- ▶ Yes 77.78 %
- ▶ No 22.22 %

Examples of interactions:

- ▶ Craft workshop producing items for sale at events, or activities together with disabled persons
- ▶ Participation in marches, creation and sale of craft items
- ▶ Marches, charity events
- ▶ Centre for the Disabled, Thessalonica

Main setbacks when wishing to engage in supporting people with disabilities:

- ▶ Lack of time (55.56%)
- ▶ Lack of skills for offering support (25.93%)
- ▶ Did not know where I can offer my services (18.52%)

- ▶ The activities in which I can get involved are not interesting for me (3.70%)
- ▶ I am not comfortable in working with people with disability (0%)
- ▶ I find it difficult to work with people with disability (0%)

Conclusions / Recommendations

Overall, the completion of this study was a very useful one. Our Organisation had the opportunity to map the existing situation as well as document some very useful facts, figures, attitudes and ideas. The analysis of the questionnaires allowed us to take a close look on what needs to be done to increase the participation of young people with visual impairments to various projects and activities. Further, the two Focus Groups that took place was a wonderful opportunity to document very interesting and useful information on needs and challenges faced by young persons with visual impairments. The findings also assisted in designing some actions that can be implemented in order to empower young blind and partially sighted youth to participate in various formal and informal activities but at the same time strengthen the capacity of NGOs to accommodate the needs of these participants.

Specifically some of the main findings included:

1. Five years after the ratification of the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) by Cyprus, the percentage of youth with visual impairments that considers that they do not have equal access to public services, compared to people with no disability is still quite high (70%). They attribute this phenomenon to the limitations imposed by the disability itself, but also because of the perception of the civil servants. 50% of the people who have responded consider that civil services in general do not take their disability into consideration while designing and delivering the services they are supposed to offer, showing a need for improvement.
2. Young people with visual impairments feel rather unsatisfied with the civil services they interact with. 75% of the people with visual impairments declared that in their opinion the civil servants with whom they interacted did not make any adjustments to take their disability into account. 42% of them rated the public services as poor or very poor. In extent to this, almost none of the institutions questioned had a policy for evaluating the efficacy and quality of the support offered to people with disabilities, which could have in the long run targeted this problem.
3. On the other hand, a high percentage of public institutions (78%) consider that they offer assistance that visually impaired people can benefit from. However, in practice, when

looking into the type of assistance offered, this is translated into accessibility improvements to the build environment, targeting people in wheelchairs (i.e. creating ramps for access to a building, toilets for disable or allocating a parking space for the disable).

4. Public institutions in most cases (80%) do not consider the need for taking any measures/initiatives to combat staff's negative perceptions, stereotyping and prejudices of people with disabilities despite the fact that respondents with visual impairments identified a number of complaints. These complains mainly referred to problems such as coming in contact with civil servants who are unaware of the needs of persons with disabilities, long and time consuming procedures without granting priority to persons with disabilities, limited online services accessible to the visually impaired, lack of consideration and oftentimes questioning someone's disability. In an attempt to look further into this phenomenon, some public institutions replied by saying that this target group, of visually impaired people, is too small and there is no need to take further actions as they very rarely come in contact with them.

5. 93% of the institutions declared that people with disability have the possibility to report when they are subject to discrimination, stereotyping and prejudices from the staff. These methods included: interventions to secure parking for persons with disabilities, provide a complaints officer, include a disability awareness training as part of an in service training of the personnel. Still, these interventions are not always effective in meeting the true needs of persons with disabilities, as based on the perception of visually impaired young people regarding the quality of services that public institutions provide, a lot of improvements need to be done in order to overcome attitudes and misconceptions about blindness.

6. About half of the visually impaired young people (40%) are unaware of the existence of European/international learning opportunities that address youth.

7. Participation rates of the visually impaired to youth mobility or other youth projects are quite low. As much as 75% of the persons interviewed have not even tried to participate to such an experience.

8. Some of the reasons that were mentioned for not trying to participate to such events were: lack of interest in the topic, fear that the disability will prevent the full participation of the person, lack of time and additional medical reasons that require the presence of an assistant.

9. It seems that NGOs usually take into consideration the inclusion of people with disability, as a high percentage of 80% of the organizations that were questioned offer volunteering, learning or leisure opportunities that are open to people with visual impairments.

60% of them say that they do not have a policy for evaluating the efficacy and quality of the support offered to people with disabilities.

10. Just three persons with visual impairments of the fifteen initially questioned declared that they have managed to participate in an international project-addressing people with disability. Although this percentage is quite low, still when taking a look into the activities of the Organization of the Blind and the School for the Blind for the past two years there were various successful programmes that provided youth with visual impairments the opportunity to participate in international mobilities and activities. For some reasons, respondents did not document these attempts, probably due to the fact that respondents were not aware of the funding source of their experience and they perceived it as a trip offered by the School or the Organization. Even with this in mind, still the percentage of the participation is quite low and needs to be further examined.

11. Exactly half of the young people with visual impairments questioned said that they were not aware of any NGOs in their local community offering volunteering opportunities for youngsters. On the other hand, a high percentage of the NGOs that were questioned (80%) declared that their volunteering opportunities are open and rightly available to youth with visual impairments while only 18% stated that there is no need to do so.

12. A high percentage of 81% of all people questioned tried to volunteer in an NGO and succeeded. At a closer investigation though, it was observe that in the majority of the cases these experiences did not derive from a personal initiative but were the result of the collaboration of the Organisation of the Blind and the School for the Blind with various NGOs (i.e. singing or playing music at a fundraising event, taking part in a running marathon for fundraising).

13. One of the most positive and encouraging finding of the research is the fact that young people without disabilities have a very positive approach and attitude in interacting with persons with disabilities. All participants (100%) are willing to hang out with a person with disabilities while 75% are ready and willing to offer support when needed. What is also encouraging is their believes of what young people with visual impairments can achieve in life as they believe that these persons can study, work, marry and have children, travel, live a social life, elect and be elected. Their knowledge about disabilities mainly derives from resources such as their studies, the media and the Internet. Likewise, NGOs overall believe that their regular target groups would be comfortable with involving youth with visual impairments in the current activities of the organization and that such interactions will be proven beneficial for the other participants.

14. Only a small percentage of 25% of people interviewed did not consider offering support to people with disability, for reasons like lack of time, lack of skills for offering support and unaware of occasions that support might be needed.

Recommendations:

Overall, the mapping of the existing situation that was revealed from the analysis of the results of the four questionnaires shows that there are a lot of actions that need to be taken in Cyprus in order to apply in practice the full integration of young people with visual impairments to services and programmes. Public institutions and NGOs have to be informed of the true needs and challenges people with visual impairments face when they are to interact or participate in services and programmes. A number of measures and actions need to be taken to overcome these needs and challenges starting first by initiating awareness raising campaigns while educational settings and the community will have to include the disability perspective in all their programmes.

Young people with visual impairments on the other hand should be encouraged to be actively involved in inclusive formal and informal learning opportunities on an equal basis with their sighted peers. To achieve this, a number of capacity building programmes need to be in place to help with the acquisition of necessary skills and competencies. Such programmes will aim to promote resilience, empowerment and self-awareness amongst young people with visual impairments.

There are a number of socioeconomic factors that are responsible for the fact that the participation of young people in NGO's activities is low. These mainly include:

- ▶ Myths and misconceptions about visual impairments and stereotypes - Cyprus is a very small country with a very small number of youth who are blind or partially sighted. Oftentimes, the community is unaware of their needs and challenges they face due to the presence of their disability. A number of myths and misconceptions about visual impairments derive mainly due to this situation creating some stereotypes on what can visually impaired young people can really achieve and perform.
- ▶ The fact that the majority of public institutions as well as NGOs consider that disability is all about access to the physical environment that can be overcome by the creation of a ramp.

Some suggestions for improvement are:

- ▶ Offer suitable training and awareness-raising for civil servants
- ▶ Improve accessibility, to enable independent outdoor and indoor mobility of public buildings.
- ▶ Ensure that all public websites are accessible.
- ▶ Increase and improve online services,
- ▶ Faster updating of online information and better contact possibilities through websites
- ▶ Provide information in an accessible and preferred format such as email, doc or txt, Braille or large print.
- ▶ Make available staff to assist and inform persons with disabilities

There is a need for more volunteering/learning/leisure opportunities that address young people with visual impairments. NGOs can secure this by adopting a number of suggestions offered by young persons with visual impairments:

- ▶ Provide assistive technologies that will help you fully participate (assistive, adaptive, and rehabilitative devices)
- ▶ Have a more positive attitude towards people with disability
- ▶ Promote these opportunities better
- ▶ Make the opportunities more accessible
- ▶ Make participation more affordable for people with disabilities
- ▶ Other (inform the person with disabilities about all the details)

Furthermore, during the Focus Group participants discussed what kind of resources they would need for participating in such activities (in terms of materials, tools for accessibility, any other kind of support etc.). Their answers stated the following:

- ▶ To have, preferably ahead of time, all printed or displayed written information in the preferred format (i.e. large print, Braille, electronic etc.
- ▶ To be able to bring own device for writing or accessing print information such as Braille typewriter, magnification devices, laptop computer
- ▶ To be able to install in one of the computers a speech or magnification software for accessing the device
- ▶ To have assistive devices or equipment that will assist in the adaptation of activities (i.e. in case of sports to have balls with bells, tandem bikes, tactile diagrams of the area)
- ▶ If there is a group activity with flash cards, make these cards in Braille or large print, or if the activity foresees that there is writing, ensure that there is the appropriate and necessary devices for the youth to write.

- ▶ If you work in a group ensure that there is an assistant to help with moving around and understanding the activity (moving around the room etc.)
- ▶ Offer support during break and meals if needed.
- ▶ Allow the youth to go there earlier to familiarize with the venue and meet facilitators to speak about the needs.

While discussing with participants how NGOs can create a more comfortable environment for their participation in this kind of activities, participants stated:

- ▶ To receive an awareness training prior to the activity on the needs and challenges of the presence of the visual impairment. How to offer help, how to offer sighted guide techniques, to help with practicalities, to adapt the planned activities as to meet the needs of the visually impaired participants, to have designated assistants for the visually impaired participant (who will welcome participant upon arrival, introduce him/her to the rest of the group etc.).
- ▶ To be willing to resolve some practicalities such as getting to the venue (arrange for a lift by another participant in the area)
- ▶ Send any information ahead of time to prepare and to overcome any anxiety that is related to participating to an activity.
- ▶ Sending a detailed info pack with specific information prior to the activity
- ▶ Linking the youth with a visual impairment with a mentor (either a participant or a staff member who can be of help for some queries)
- ▶ Preparing in an accessible format all information that will be circulated to the group during the activity and if possible sending prior to the activity as to allow time to familiarize oneself.
- ▶ To offer any support to the participant who wishes to bring with him/her any assistive device for reading or writing such as a Braille typewriter, laptop computer, a portable magnifier by ensuring that the venue has a table to set on, an electricity socket near the table etc.

As for the most appropriate channels for communicating the availability of learning and volunteering opportunities respondents stated that they preferred:

- ▶ Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.,
- ▶ Email
- ▶ Specific websites

- ▶ The School (meaning the school for
- ▶ The Blind)
- ▶ In person by the social worker of the Organisation
- ▶ TV/Radio
- ▶ The audio or digital magazine of the Organisation.

Although it is well known to all that it is a human right to participate in all these activities, still the attitude of the announcement/ information plays a vital role in encouraging young visually impaired people to participate. A special note that participants with disabilities are welcome helps in making a quick decision for participation without worrying about stereotypes or rejections.

It would also be helpful if the announcement includes information such as practicalities of the activity, venue and how to reach it, special note for persons with disabilities (contact details of a person in charge who will deal with practicalities, logistics etc.). Overall a statement reassuring that participants with disabilities are welcome and that efforts will be made to ensure their full inclusion in the activity.)

NGOs can support young visually impaired persons in developing different skills by offering a variety of formal and informal learning opportunities.

These might include:

- ▶ To offer trainings on subjects such as:
 - How to write a CV,
 - How to have a successful interview,
 - Body language and especially non-verbal communication (many youth have to master this skills since they are unable to observe these visual behaviors),
 - How to dress for a special occasion (job interview, employment etc.).
- ▶ Workshops on subjects such as:
 - How to build self-esteem, empowerment, and resilience,
 - Team building and working in a group, learning to collaborate, effective communication skills, dealing with stressful situations,
 - Recreational and leisure activities such as camping, hiking, rafting, tandem bikes, climbing,
 - Participating in cultural events (take part at a play, musical, play in a music group, dance),
 - Sport activities such as yoga, Zumba dance, Pilates,

- ▶ Daily life workshops such as:
 - International cooking courses,
 - Applying Make-up

NGOs need to receive support in order to be able to involve youth with visual impairments in their programmes and activities. This support can be offered by The School for the Blind or the Organization of the Blind and can include:

Information on the needs of youth with visual impairments including:

- ▶ How they learn, how they move about, they carry on their daily routines at home and at work
- ▶ How to guide them and to offer appropriate help during the activities (such as traveling, field trips, exchanges, meals, group activities)

Special pedagogical methods for teaching youth with visual impairment:

- ▶ How to modify any teaching material including training material and assessment tools,
- ▶ How to overcome challenges such as presenting visual information i.e. (during a tour, a film presentation, a power point presentation).

It constitutes a good practice example if one or two persons within an NGO (mostly someone who is in charge and or a trainer) should receive a more in-depth knowledge and training about visual impairment. Still, an ideal situation is for all staff members of the Organisation to benefit by attending a short awareness workshop on visual impairments that might include information on who are these people, what and how they see, how they move about, how to guide and assist them.



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