

Association for the Visual Impaired

“MAGNITES TIFLI”

Magnesia, Greece

GREECE

FINAL REPORT

Introduction

The liable partner for implementing the research in Greece is "MAGNITES TIFLI", the Association of People with Vision Impairment in Magnesia, Greece. The Association was established in February 6, 2007 (no. Court Decision Volos: 201/2007), is managed by a five-member Board and checked by a three-member audit committee. Any individual actions of the Association are coordinated by a committee set up for this purpose.

Nowadays, the Association numbers 1048 members while maintains and runs services in the following fields: Informational, Social, Rehabilitation, Vocational training, Legal advice and consultation, Sports programs and Recreation activities through "*Maty Club*", Leisure (educational trips, entertainment), etc

Training in

- special methods (eg. orientation and mobility)
- use of electronic and other aids and means
- Braille
- talking book libraries

Our research project made an extensive reference to the Specific Services and Bodies who promote the participation of vulnerable groups in resources, goods, services and employment.

Survey Methodology and Tools

Qualitative and quantitative information were collected by the research using a Tool consisting of four different questionnaires and two Focus Group discussions.

Selected target groups

1. Civil Sector Services and Non – Governmental Bodies

Civil Sector Services and Non – Governmental Bodies configure promote and implement Social Policies for people with disabilities, in a direct and indirect way. The selection was made, considering that employees can reproduce stereotypes while as well they can change and reverse these stereotypes at the same time. Selected Bodies and Institutions are listed in the **Official State Guide for Services** provided in the social, medical and educational field as well as providing training and employment for the Disabled.

Taking under consideration the fact that the country endures an economic crisis for the last 7 years, guides that where published in 2011-13 have not be updated until now. Inevitably many changes have occurred in the meantime, in reference to Organizations' profiles. The study was addressed at **85 Bodies and Institutions** which provide services while as well formulate and implement social policy.

2. Non-disabled people

The questionnaire administered to Non – Disabled population consisted of four (4) sections including:

- Personal data of the respondent (gender, age, educational level, years of service, type of studies)
- Environment, attitudes and perceptions: Sources of attitudes and shaping of perceptions as well as their significance
- Definition and classification of disability
- Attitudes and perceptions addressed at the Disabled by the Non – Disabled

3. People with visual disabilities

The questionnaire administered to people with visual disabilities included questions about their:

- health condition
- experiences with public services and institutions
- integration in formal and non-formal learning
- feelings about their participation or engagement when they were integrated
- expectations for their training and their integration in society
- ways of communication with institutions and
- the factors that limit their access to various services

A detailed introductory letter was administered informing the target group for the purpose and value of the survey, regarding the Disabled's "quality of life". The questionnaires were multiplied and administered to all participants in various formats (delivered by hand in printed form, sent by fax, email, the post). Recipients were told that the questionnaire should be completed within 2 weeks and sent back (by e-mail, or by the post) as it actually happened.

Results

- 20 Institutions filled in the questionnaire and e-mail/post/fax it back
- 10 Institutions asked for further information about the collaborating institution. There was also signed a Collaboration Protocol (1/3/2016) between "MAGNITES TIFLI" and "KEKPA-DIEK" one of Volos' Municipality Enterprises for Health and Social Services
- 30 questionnaires were filled in via telephone interview. After finding information about the Institution's profile from their website, we conducted them and the person in charge shared our enthusiasm about the project while stating that they are eager to participate collaborating in further actions such as an e-platform exchanging experience, knowledge and best practices applied in the field of disability and especially visual impairment.
- All participating Bodies were interested in having feedback in order to collaborate in future programmes
- 60 people with vision impairment were conducted (age: 15-35 years old) and 48 filled in the questionnaire

- The desirable total number of filled in questionnaires was 250. There were collected 188 questionnaires in total, filled in by:
 - 48 young people with visual impairments
 - 56 young people without disabilities
 - 22 Public institutions
 - 62 NGOs offering services and activities to young people

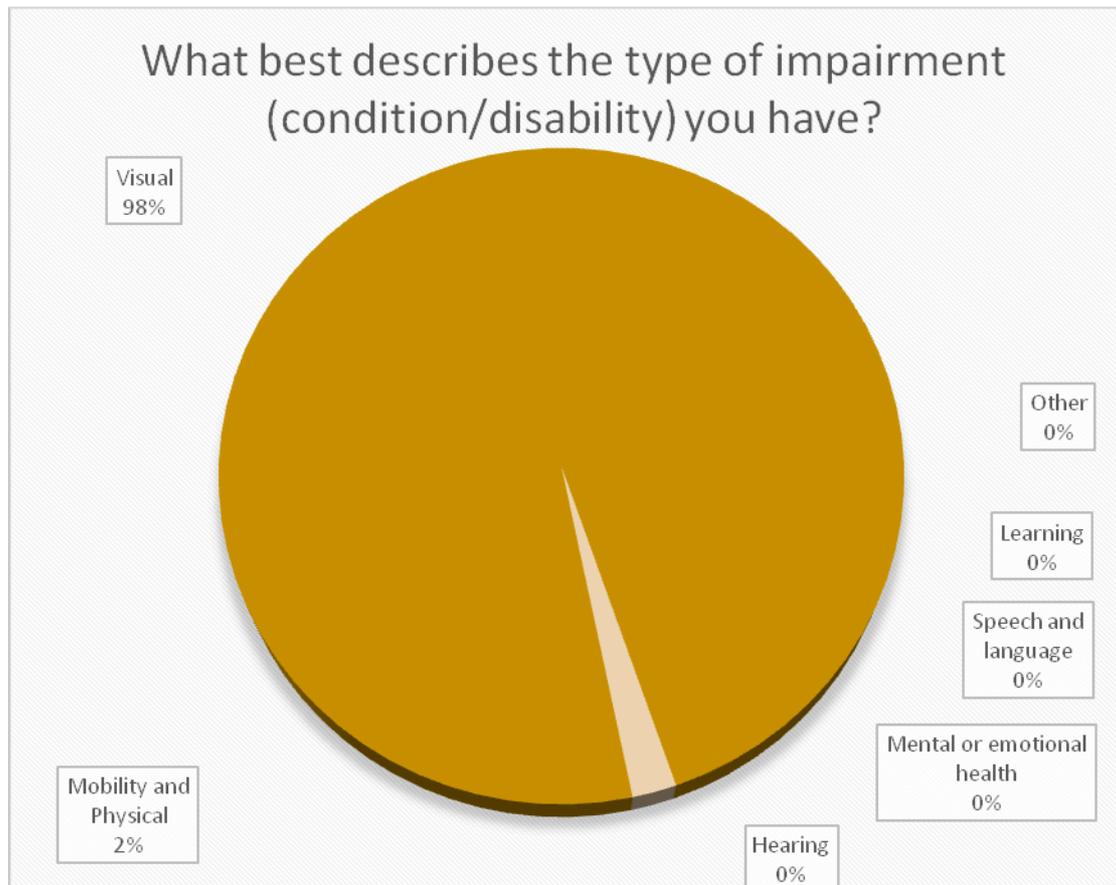
Two Focus Group Discussions (serving as a valuable tool for the development of the dialogue among the representatives of the 4 target groups) took place in June 2016, one at the premises of the Association of the Blind “*MAGNITES TIFLI*” in Volos, Greece and the other in KEKPA - DIEK premises one of the Municipality Enterprises for Health and Social Services in Volos, Greece. In the first FG there were 8 participants (young people with visual impairments ages 15 – 30 and Public Sector representatives) while in the second one 10 (representatives of NGOs offering services and projects for young people, public institutions and people without disabilities).

Survey Results

As it has already been mentioned, there were contacted 60 people with vision impairment (15-35 years old) and 48 agreed to fill in the questionnaire. This part of the survey gave us more information about their feelings, accessibility and it's limits such as: non-accessible infrastructure and equipment, insufficient information, lack of targeted programs adjusted to their disability, various types of communication problems, lack of concern for financial compensation, the ways of communication with institutions, their experience with the public institutions, their expectations for their training and their integration in society.

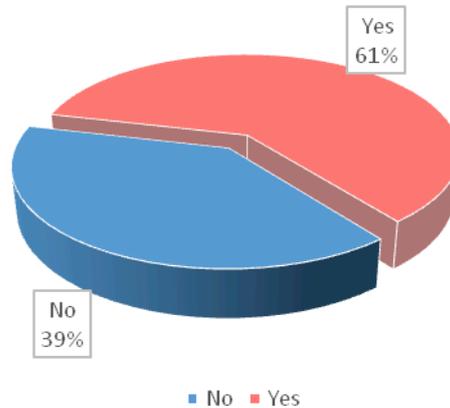
Section 1 - Opinion of people with visual impairments regarding Civil Services and local/international opportunities for learning or volunteering

- All 48 participants, apart from one, suffered from visual disability



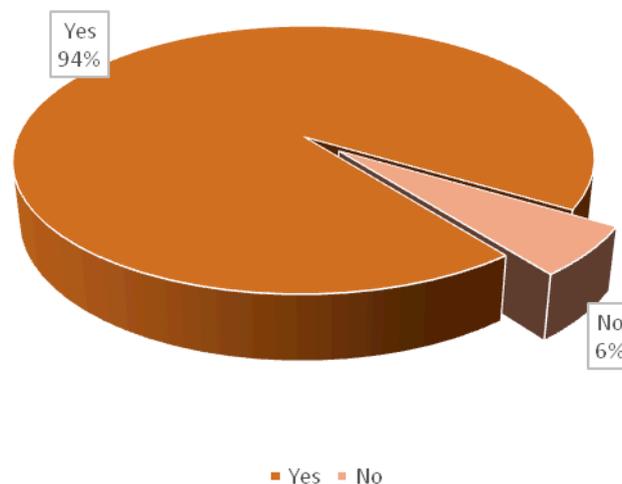
- **60.78%** believe that factors, such as their ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation or age may have had significant effect on your contact with Civil Services in the area

Do you consider that factors, such as your ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation or age may have had significant effect on your contact with Civil Services in the area?



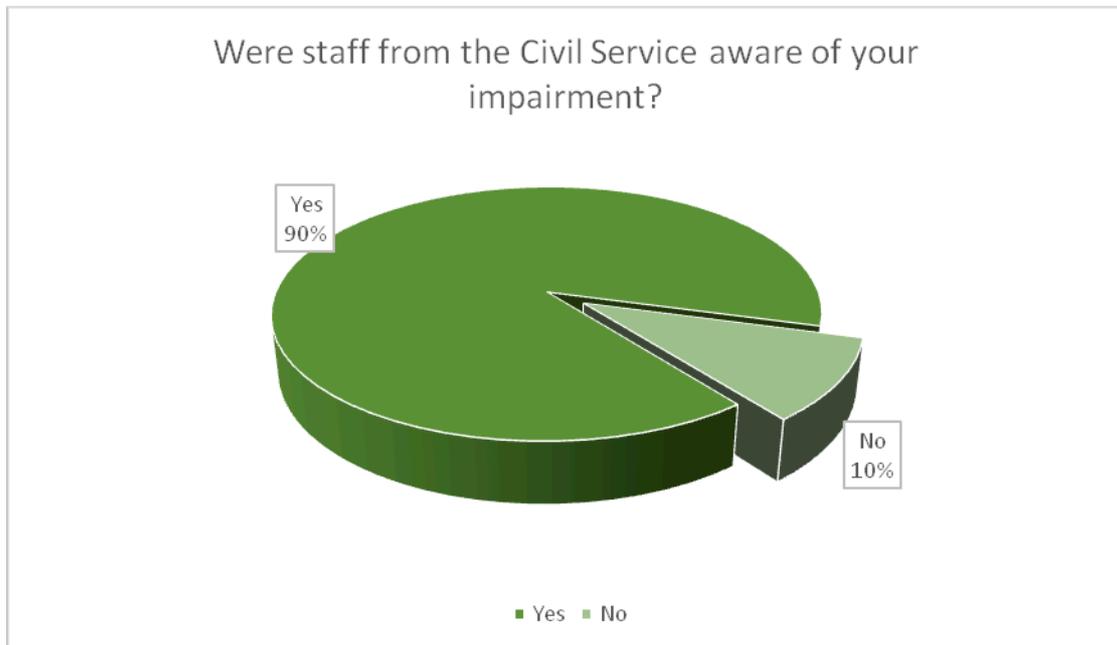
- 94.12 % of VIPs have been in contact with one of the Civil Services that were listed on the questionnaire.

Have you had contact with one of the Civil Services listed below in the last 5 years?

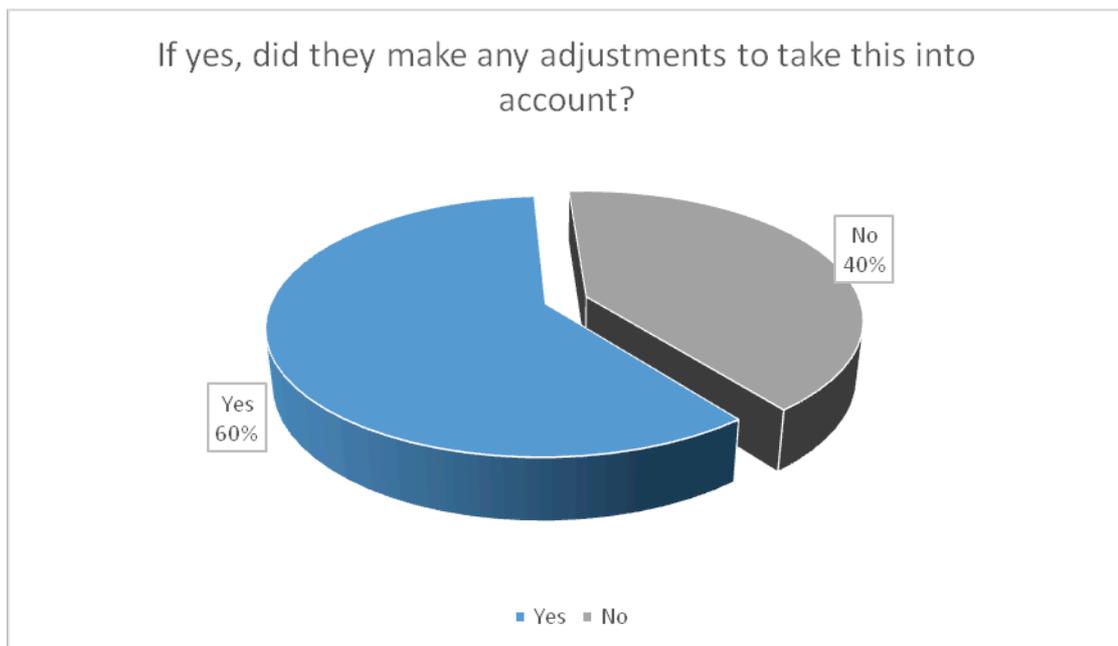


- The top 5 most accessed services included
 - Council Tax and Housing Benefits 28
 - Tourism 21
 - Leisure Facilities **13**
 - **Other 18**

- In regards to the interest of the staff of civil services to adjust their service to the disability of the people with visual impairment, **89,80%** of the responded replied that staff from the Civil Service were aware of their disability.

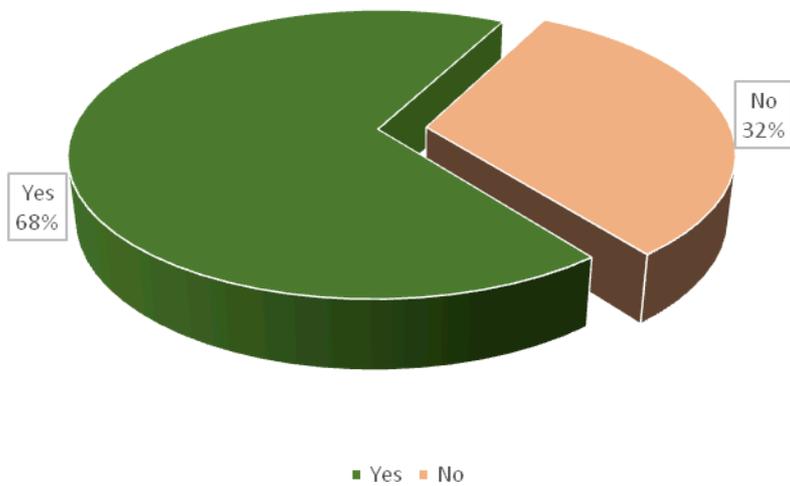


- **59,57%** made adjustments as to take the needs of the persons with visual impairments into account.



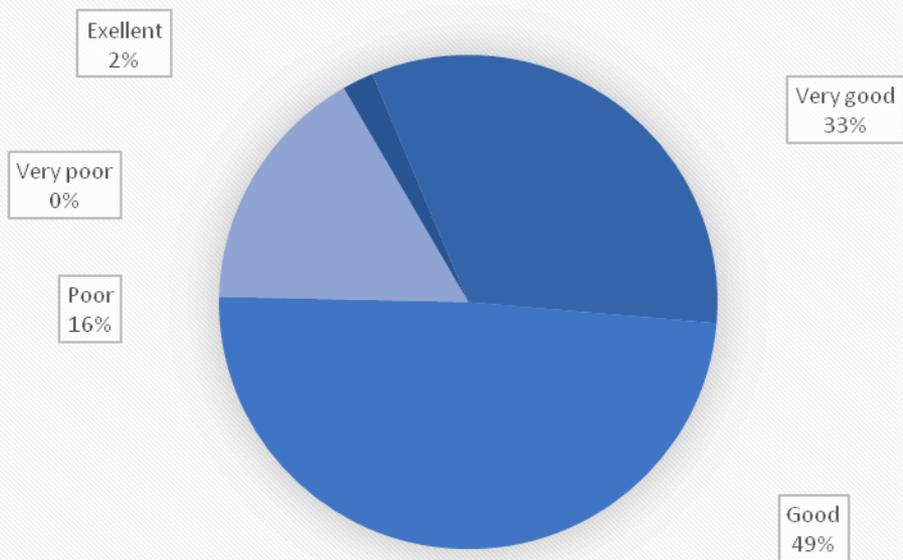
- In a percentage of **68.18%** adjustments were helpful/appropriate

Were the adjustments helpful/appropriate?



- In regards to evaluating their experience with the services they received from Civil Services, stated that these were Very Good 32,65%, Good, 48,98%

Please rate your experience of the services you received from Civil Services in your area.



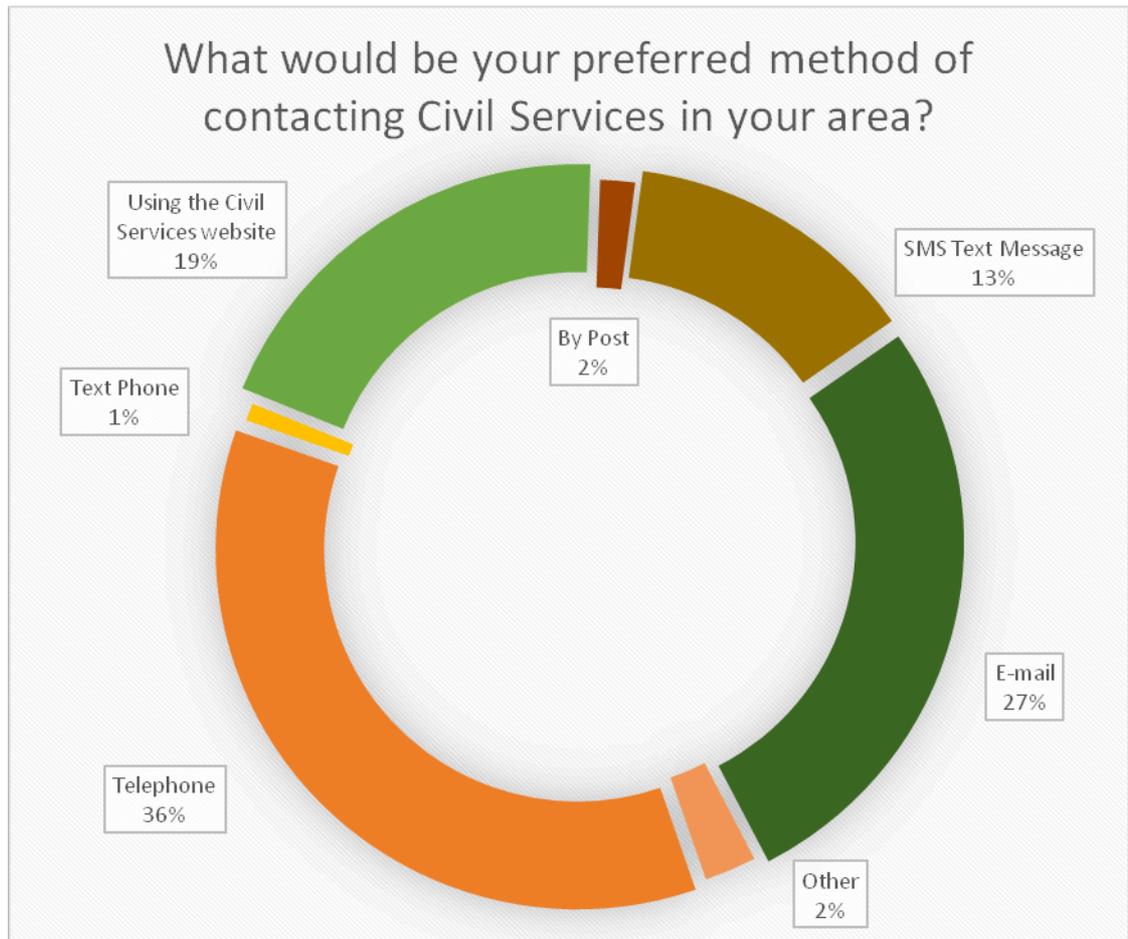
Remarks of people with visual impairment

In general, people with visual impairment feel disappointed by services received, especially health and rehabilitation services. There is no access in facilities for people in their condition, there is a lot of bureaucracy, no efficient cooperation between governmental services resulting in the assignment of the procedure to be carried out by relatives, lawyers or any other who can help. However there exists a very good cooperation with specially trained personnel in the field of disability, in the Civil Sector.

Their preferred methods of contacting Civil Services, in descending order are:

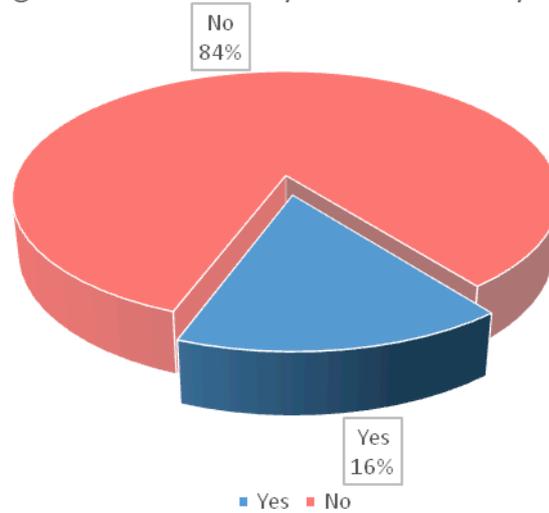
- **Telephone 46**
- **E-mail 35**
- Using the Civil Services website 25
- Meeting in person
- Interactive websites, provision of services online

What would be your preferred method of contacting Civil Services in your area?



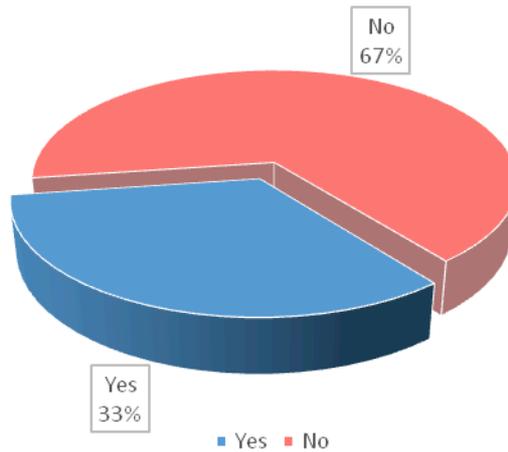
- In regards to equal opportunities for accessing Civil Services, 88.24% of the disabled do not feel they would have the same chances in accessing Civil Services in their area as anybody else.

Do you feel you would have the same chances in accessing Civil Services in your area as anybody else?



- In percentage of 66,67%, young people with visual impairments felt that the services provided by Civil Services in their area take into account their needs.

Do you feel as a disabled person that the services provided by Civil Services in your area takes in to account the needs of disabled people?



The rest of the participants defined their answer by stating that:

- There is no information in Braille.
- There are not enough online accessible services to the public

- Procedures are complicated, time consuming while there are delays
- Personnel in Civil Sector is not suitable trained to assist people with disabilities
- People with disabilities are not taken into account.

These findings, agree with the answers provided in the survey (public institutions questionnaires) regarding the services they offer to people with visual impairments. **Most of the adaptations made by them consider needs of people with physical disabilities.**

Civil Services – Proposals

- Accessibility problems should be solved, in order to enable independent indoor mobility in public buildings
- Suitable training of the civil servants regarding every specific kind of disability (specially in Medical Centers)
- Employment people with disabilities, in order to get more familiar with their needs.
- Offer people with disabilities equal opportunities in accessibility and treat them equally
- Raising Awareness Campaigns and Actions (further education, meetings with people with disabilities, production of informative materials deriving from Disabled Associations)

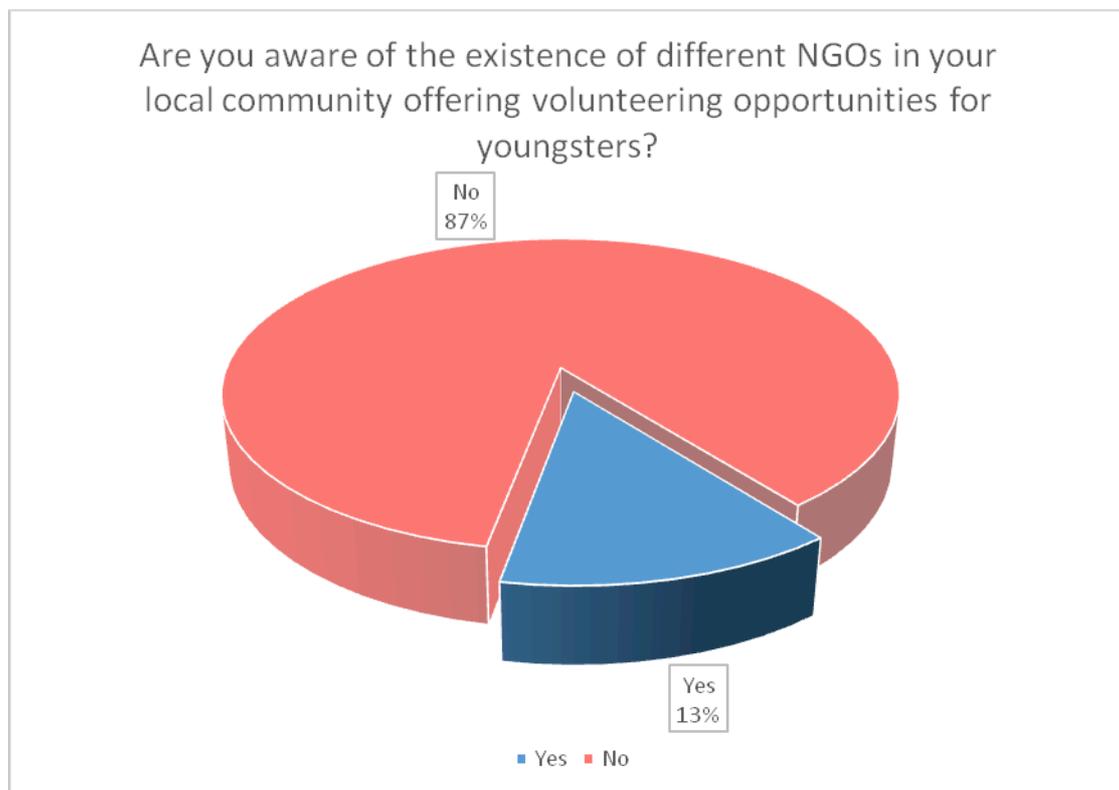
Accessibility for people with visual disability also includes:

- Loudspeaker announcement of next bus stop during traveling
- Lifts with Braille buttons and audio output
- Parking spaces for the disabled and access area free from physical obstacles.

- **Informative websites in appropriate format, offering updated online services**

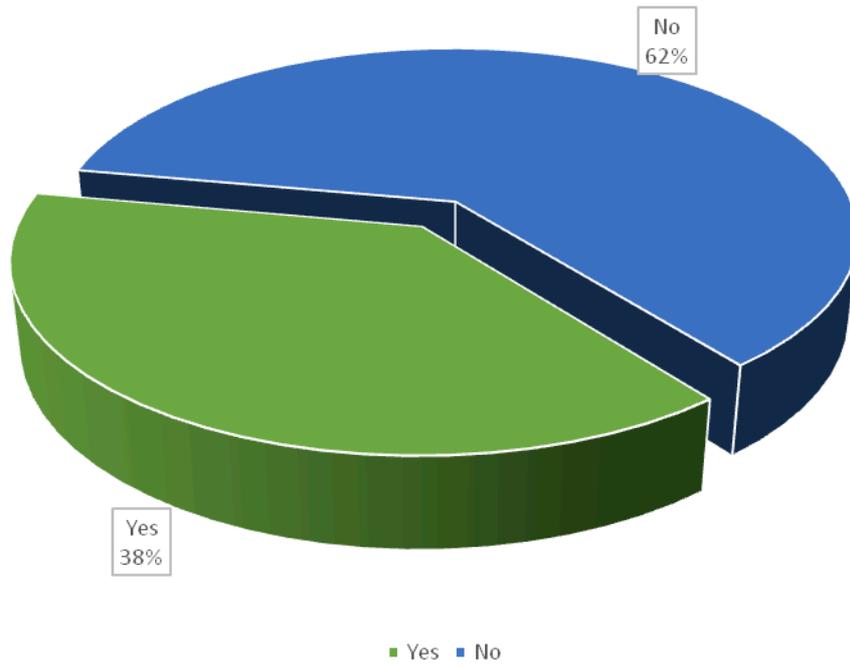
Regarding the experience of young people with visual impairments on the various learning and volunteering opportunities, data from the questionnaire showed that:

- **86.27 % are not aware** of the existence of different NGOs in their local community offering volunteering opportunities for youngsters



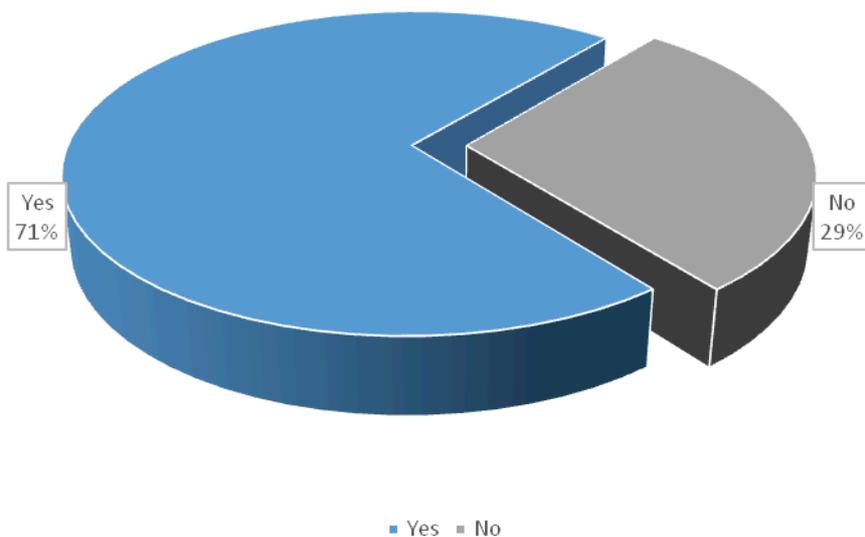
- **38.46 % have tried to volunteer** in such an NGO.

Have you ever tried to volunteer in such an NGO?



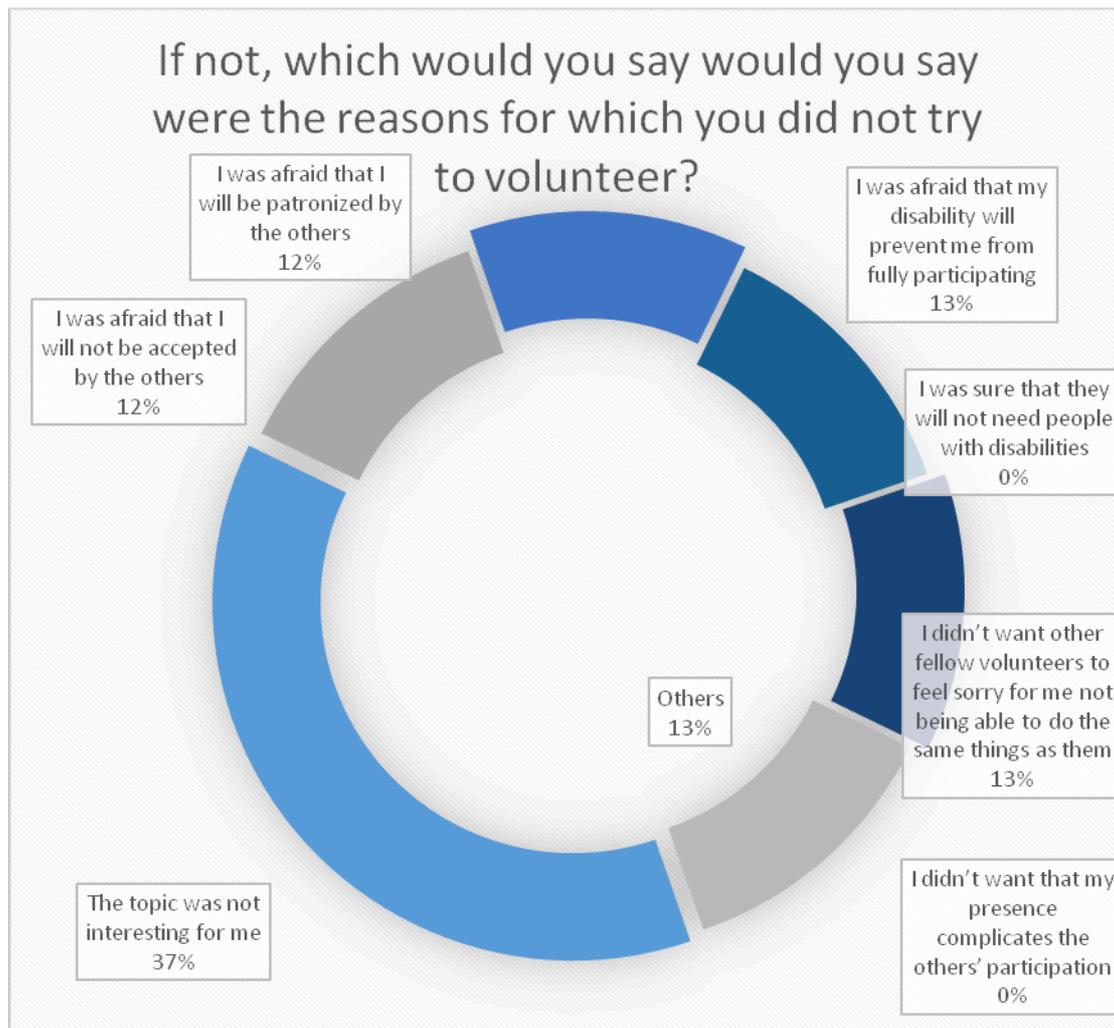
- 71.43 % succeeded in being a volunteer for an NGO in his/her local community

Did you succeeded in being a volunteer for an NGO in your local community?



For those who didn't participate, the main reasons were

- **He/she didn't have the financial resources necessary for participation**
- **There was not accessibility**
- **There were not relevant assistive technologies**
- **My parents prevented me from participating being afraid that this experience might deteriorate physically and psychologically my condition**
- The topic was not interesting for me
- I was afraid that I will not be accepted by the others
- I was afraid that I will be patronized by the others
- I was afraid that my disability will prevent me from fully participating
- I didn't want other fellow volunteers to feel sorry for me not being able to do the same things as them
- I was afraid that I would make others feel uncomfortably having to face my disability



Comments regarding the experience of those participating in voluntary activities included: *“personal development”, “helping other people with problems different than mine”, “the opportunity to participate in an action that I never imagined I would ever have the chance to”*.

In the discussion that took place at the focus group, participants talked about their involvement in socio-educational activities organized by NGOs. A small number of youth with visual impairments (mostly those with low vision) said that they took part in such activities feeling safe participating while knowing that there was a friend, another classmate or a relative who participated at the same time. All of them, characterized these activities as *“unique experience”*.

As a result of the discussion in the two Focus Groups derives that the VIPs who have been involved in different activities organized by

NGOs found their experiences apart from interesting, useful as well. VIPs were offered the chance to further develop personally and socially, by being included in new and various activities, meeting many new and different people who do not belong to their family or their immediate social circle, **exercise responsibility and take on leadership roles.**

The most interesting and significant experience for them was getting involved in sports activities. Sharing their experience with us, **VIPs** point out that getting involved in **sports helps them increase their sense of inclusion and well-being mainly in the following ways by:**

- **changing what communities think and feel about people with disabilities.**

Getting involved in sports activities changes community's perceptions for people with disabilities **by focusing attention to their abilities** while moving their disability into the background. Through sports, people without disabilities have the chance to **encounter people with disabilities in a positive context, something that may happen** for the first time, and find out that they can accomplish things they had previously thought impossible.

- **changing what people with disabilities think and feel about themselves**

Getting involved in sports activities can help them **acknowledge their own potential and combat for changes** in society that will enable them fully accomplish their capacity.

The young people who never participated in such activities, explained that that was mostly due to their visual impairment since they felt that:

- staff and other member of the tem would not have been familiar with their needs

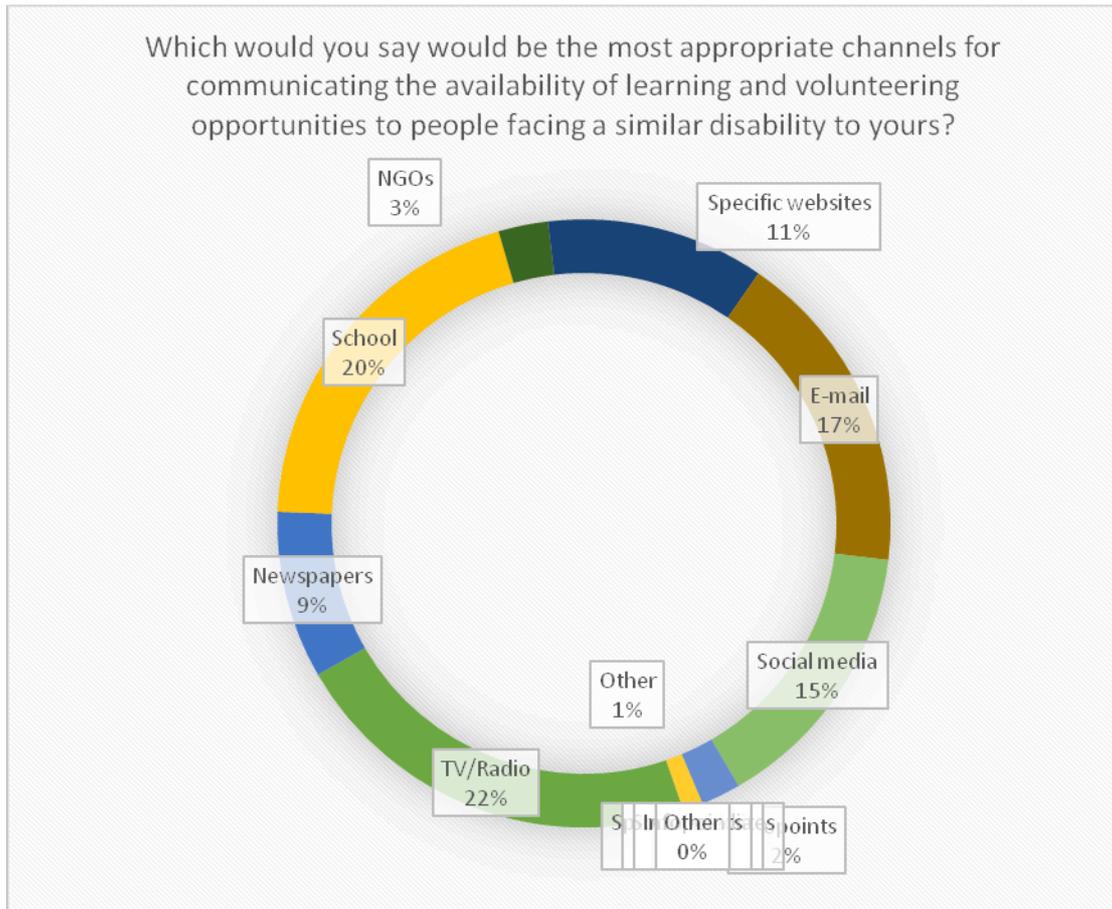
- they were going to be rejected due to their disability and have to deal with various stereotypes
- they were anxious on dealing with some practicalities involved in the activity such as how to get to the venue of the activity, dealing with any printed or other information that they would not have been able to access, participating in handing on experiences that demanded good eye sight etc. Also, results showed that:



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

- **TV/Radio 42**
- Newspapers 17
- **School 38**

- NGOs 5
- **Specific websites 22**
- **E-mail 33**
- **Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) 28**
- Infopoints 4
- Other 2



Furthermore, during the Focus Group, participants while discussing how should NGOs approach them in order to motivate them and feel secure to participate (way and attitude of using the media, useful information etc) it was stated that: through the Organizations and the School for the Blind, a personal letter, directly by a person in charge, e-mail, social media.

In regards of the announcement / information used for the approach, they said there should be included 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 reinsuring that participants with disabilities are welcomed and that efforts will be made to ensure their full inclusion in the activity.

While discussing how NGOs could support young visually impaired people in developing different skills (like the ones needed for daily living, autonomous living, **getting a job**, social interaction, effective communication skills, dealing with an emergency etc.) they mentioned that they should have a secure income in order to provide for their needs in a steady basis especially nowadays that we suffer an economical crisis and allowances, pensions and charities have been reduced. Such programs should be subsidized, maybe offered free transport and meals as well.

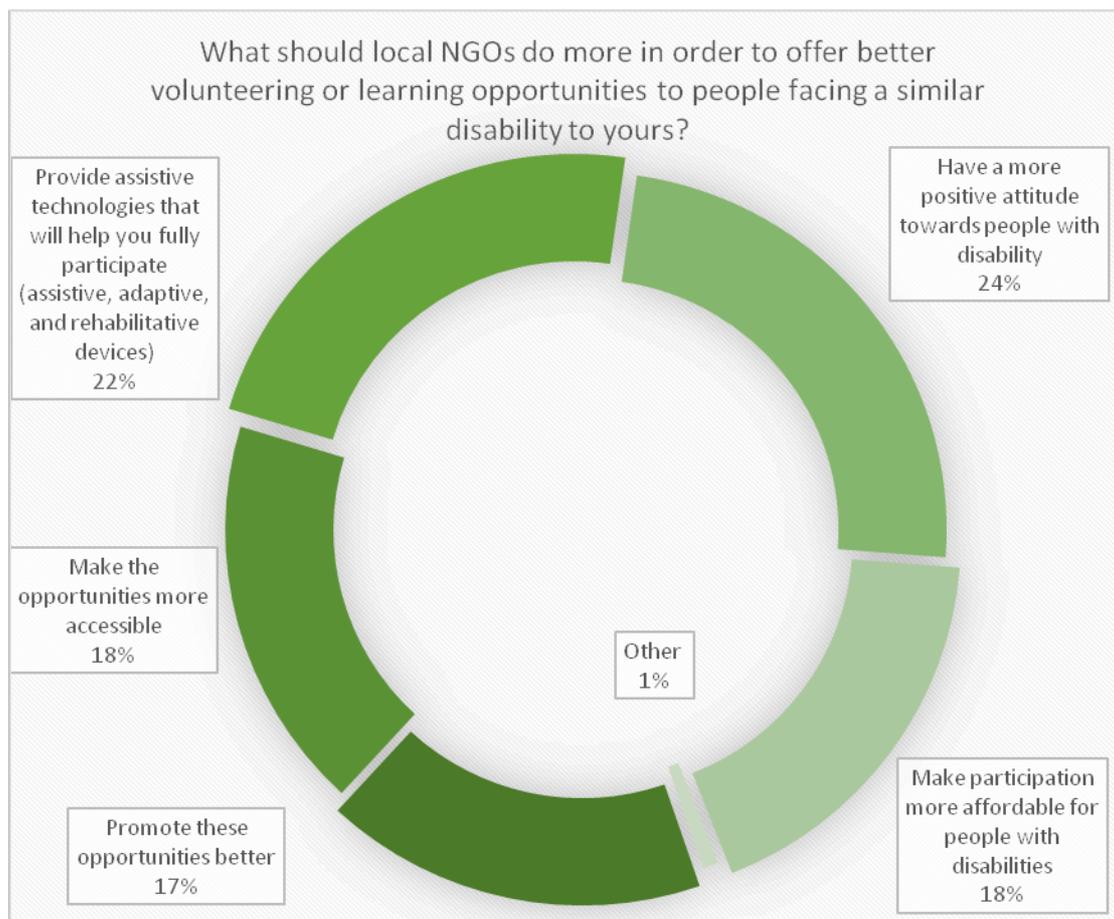
Workshops on subjects such as:

- **Daily living skills**
- **Skills for getting a job**
- Sport activities
- Recreational and leisure activities such as camping, hiking, rafting, tandem bikes, climbing,
- Educational trips
- Effective communication skills, dealing with any situation.
- Participating in cultural events (take part at a play, musical, play in a music group, dance)

What should local NGOs do more in order to offer better volunteering or learning opportunities to people facing a similar disability to theirs?

- **Promote these opportunities better 25**

- **Make the opportunities more accessible 26**
- **Provide assistive technologies that will help you fully participate (assistive, adaptive, and rehabilitative devices) 33**
- **Have a more positive attitude towards people with disability 35**
- **Make participation more affordable for people with disabilities 26**
- **Other 1**



In the discussion with the participants from NGO we found that :

- most of the institutions **83% have multidisciplinary team:** psychologist, social worker, speech-therapist, physiotherapist
- most of the **institutions use evaluation methods** for the Disabled and for the provided services and supervisions in therapeutic groups

- **80% of the NGO** (especially institutions who offer education for autonomous life, art and pet therapy, international camps for disabled) are interested to integrate in them educational/leisure activities young/persons with visual impairment.

All participants (NGO's and Public Sector) need further training in

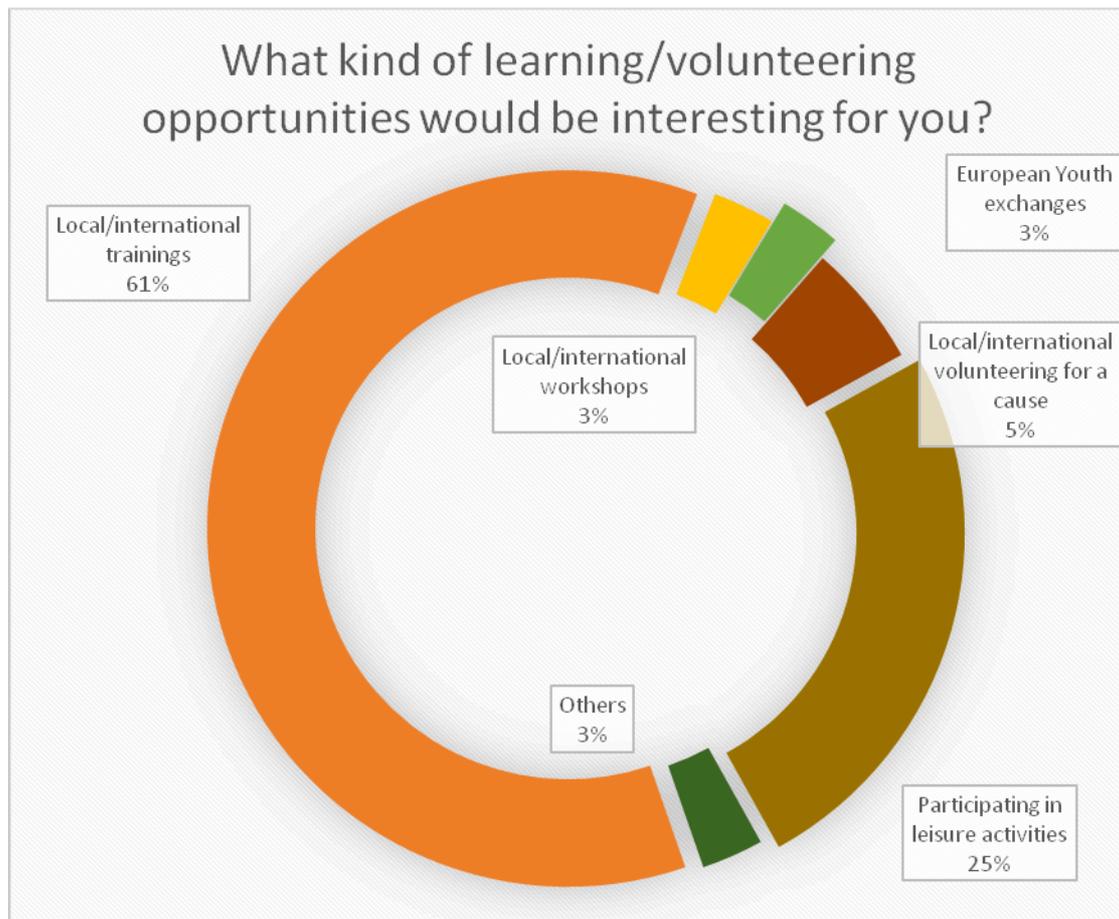
- the field of Disability especially for the characteristics of the visually impaired (how to offer help, sighted guide techniques, help with practicalities)
- special equipment / appropriate materials (written information in the preferred format, possibility to bring their own device for writing or accessing print information such as Braille typewriter, magnification devices, laptop computer, install in one of the computers a speech or magnification software for accessing the device, 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)
- Support
- Approaching
 - information ahead of time to prepare and to overcome any anxiety that is related to participating to an activity.
 - 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)
- allow the youth to go there earlier to familiarize with the venue and meet facilitators to speak about the needs
- characteristics, evaluation of the current situation, adjustments in the programs, tools, methodologies, appropriate materials)

The participants were asked to identify whether there should be trained one representative or the whole team in working with young people with visual impairments. The answers varied according to the type of the Organization and the services offered.

Overall it was agreed that all staff in the Organization should receive a **basic form of training** about visual impairments. **Trainer or person in charge in charge should receive a more in-depth knowledge and training.**

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 (22)
- European Youth exchanges - disability-related issues, Erasmus placement, empowerment, team building.(12)
- Local/international workshops – accessibility and assistive technology, (11)
- Local/international trainings - language learning, the opportunity to work abroad to achieve personal development and to realize what is available in other countries (4).



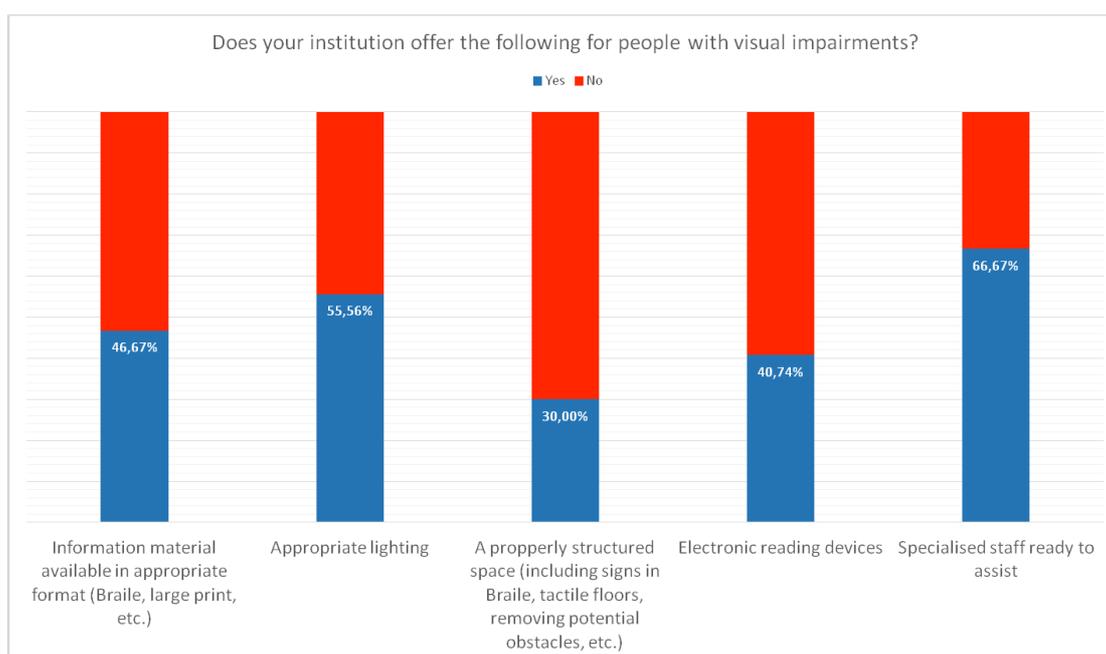
Section 2 – Correlation between the opinion of people with visual impairments and situation in Civil Services

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

- **Mobility and Physical Type: 77%**
- Hearing 52,38%
- Learning 52,89%
- Mental or emotional health: 57,89%
- **Speech and language: No, There is no need: 50%**
- **Visual 57.14 %**

Visual Impairment

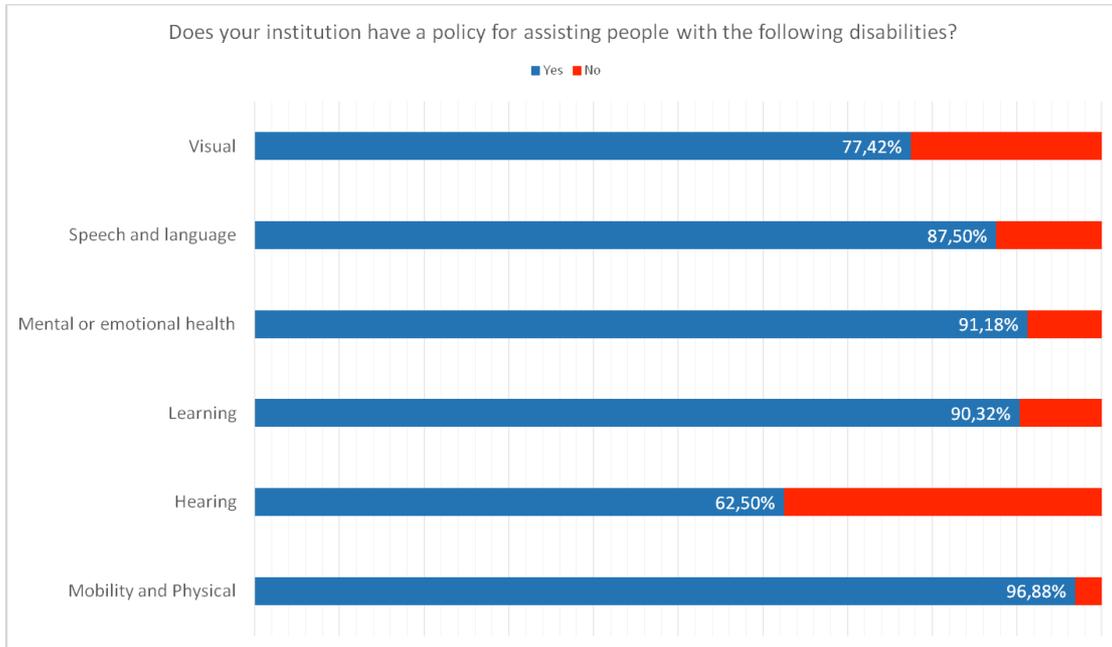
- 85,71% **Do not** provide information material available in appropriate format
- 72,73 % **Do not** provide properly structured space (including signs in Braille, tactile floors, removing potential obstacles, etc.)
- 90.48% **Do not** provided electronic reading devices
- **52.38% There is specialised staff ready to assist**
- Other: Training facilities and staff are available for athletic activities.



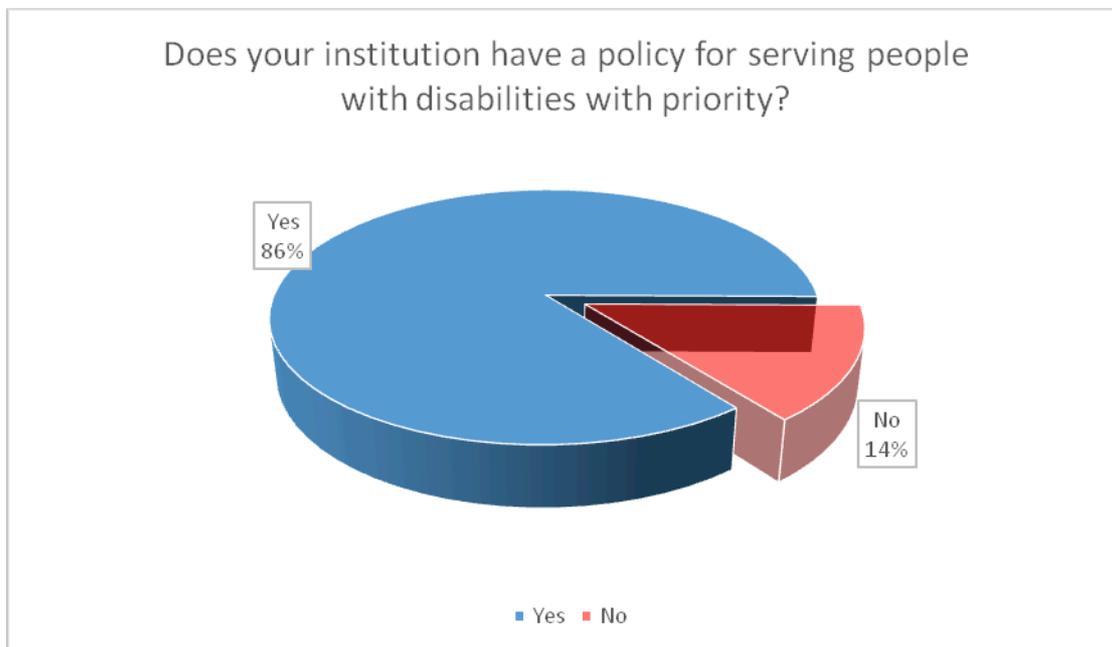
The following list shows the percentage of the policy for assisting people with disabilities:

- **Mobility and Physical Type: 77%**
- Hearing 52,38%
- Learning 52,89%

- Mental or emotional health: 57,89%
- **Speech and language: No, There is no need: 50%**
- **Visual 57.14 %**



Public institutions have a policy for serving people with disabilities with priority.

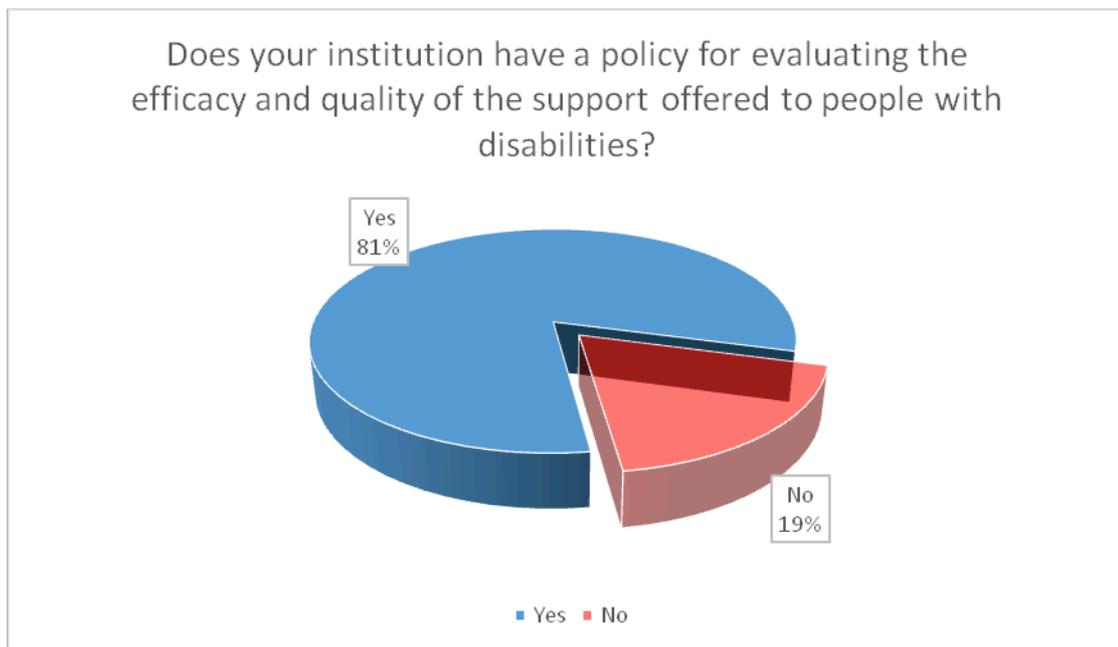


- **Mobility and Physical Yes:91.30%**
- Hearing No: 54.55 %

- Learning No:70.00%
- Mental or emotional health: No:55.56 %
- Speech and language No: 75.00 %
- **Visual Yes:59.09 %**

There is not a policy for evaluating the efficacy and quality of the support offered to people with disabilities (65.22 %)

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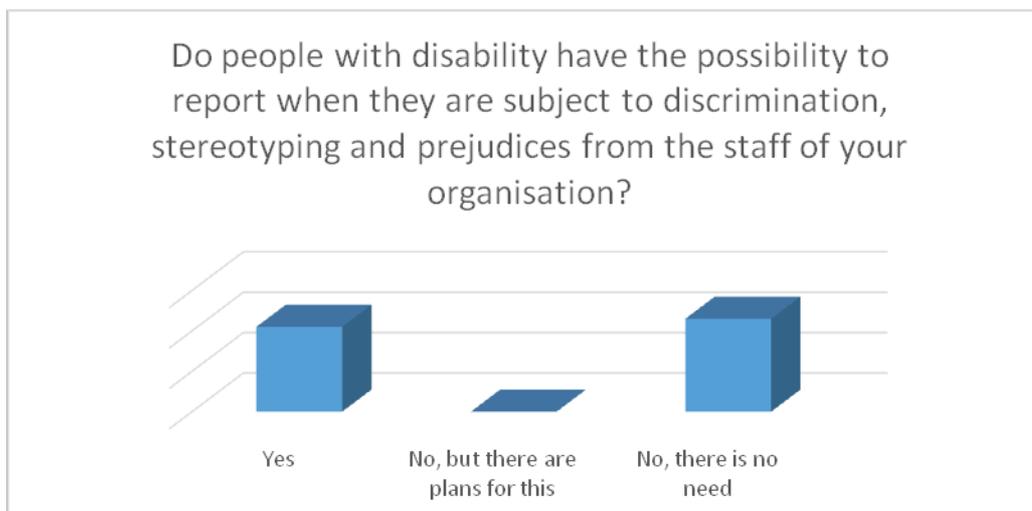


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Institutions **have not taken any measures/initiatives to combat staff's negative perceptions**, stereotyping and prejudices of people with disabilities **because *there is no need for this* (43.48 %)** The responsible staff for such issues can be the administration and Complaints' Officer, human resource manager, personnel manager, the career counselor.



- In regards to the opportunity that persons with disabilities have to report when they are subject to discrimination, stereotyping and prejudices from the staff of the Organization, **91,30 % of the respondents said yes** These companies can oftentimes reach the Board of the NGO or the director or president



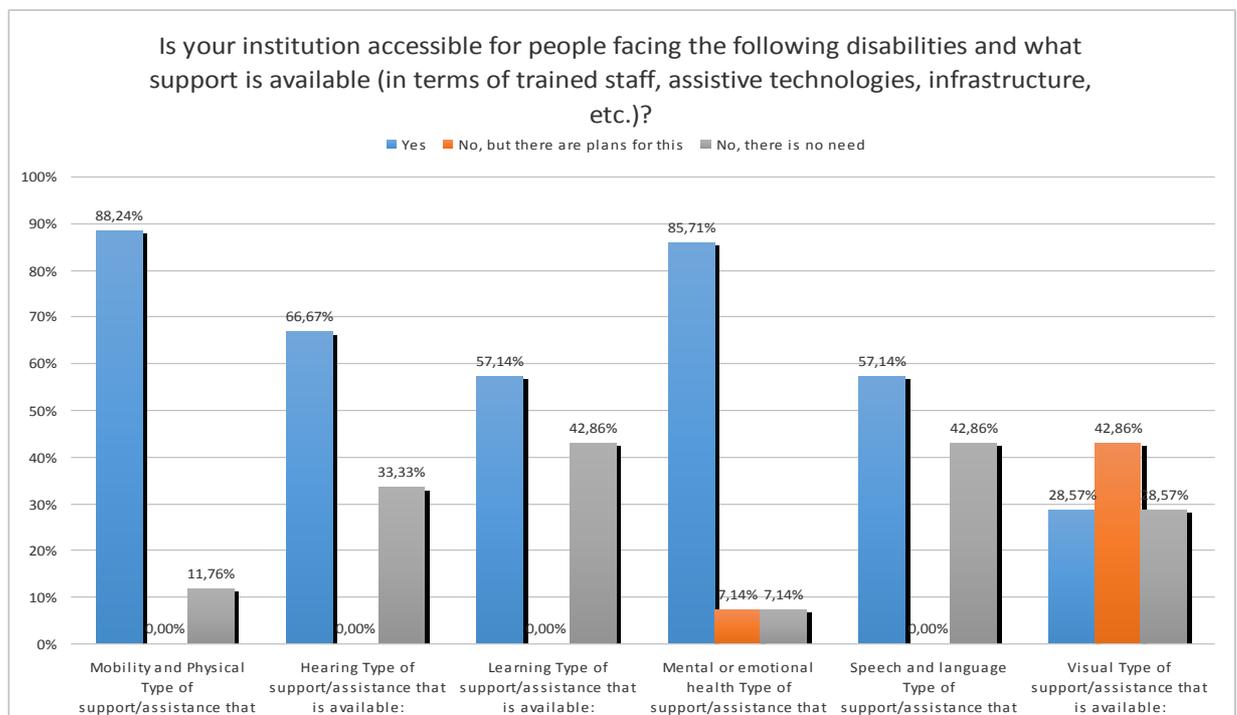
During the Focus Group, participants, members of NGOs were asked to express their opinion if their regular target groups would be comfortable with involving persons with visual impairments in their current activity and how they will react.

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.

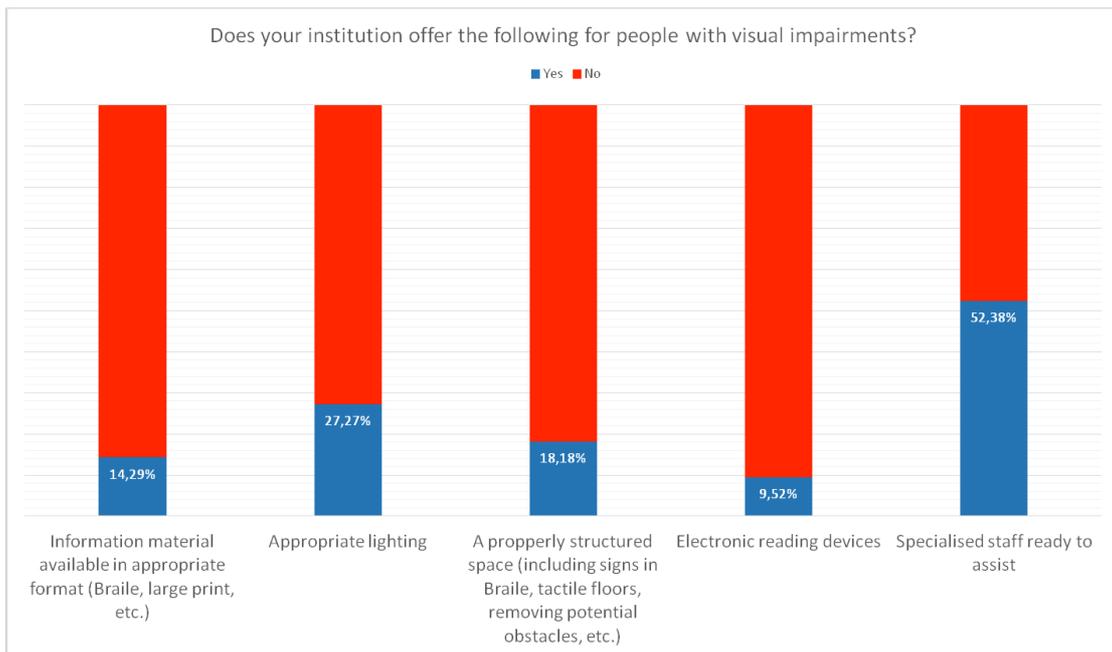
Organizations that work with young children as a target group specially organizations which offer non-formal education, camping with educational character, art and pet therapy **due to the subject they deal with**, believe that they can take the most in terms of benefit for their groups when there are **awareness sessions prior to carrying out the activities with the visually impaired.**

NGO's

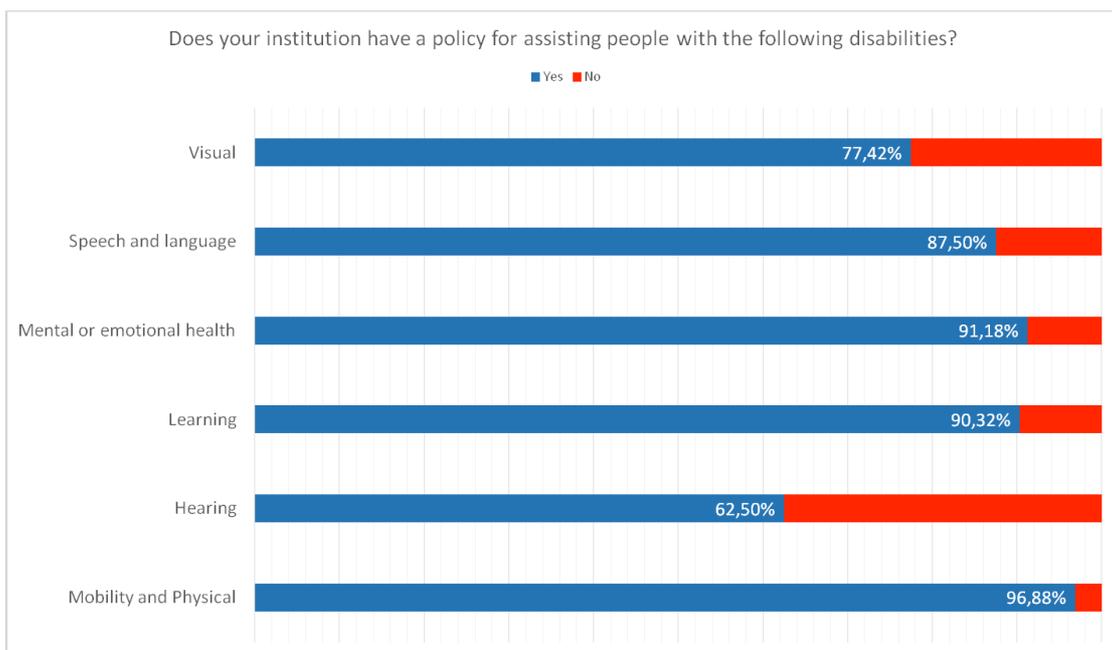
- Institutions are accessible for people facing *all types of disability in NGOs with the exception of Visual impairments where it is denoted that there are plans for this (42,6%)*
- Accessibility for Mobility: Yes 88.24%
- Hearing Type of support/assistance: Yes 66.67 %
- Learning Type of support/assistance: Yes 57.14 %
- Mental or emotional health: Yes 85.71 %
- Speech and language: Yes 57.14 %
- Visual Type: No, but there are plans for this 42.86 %



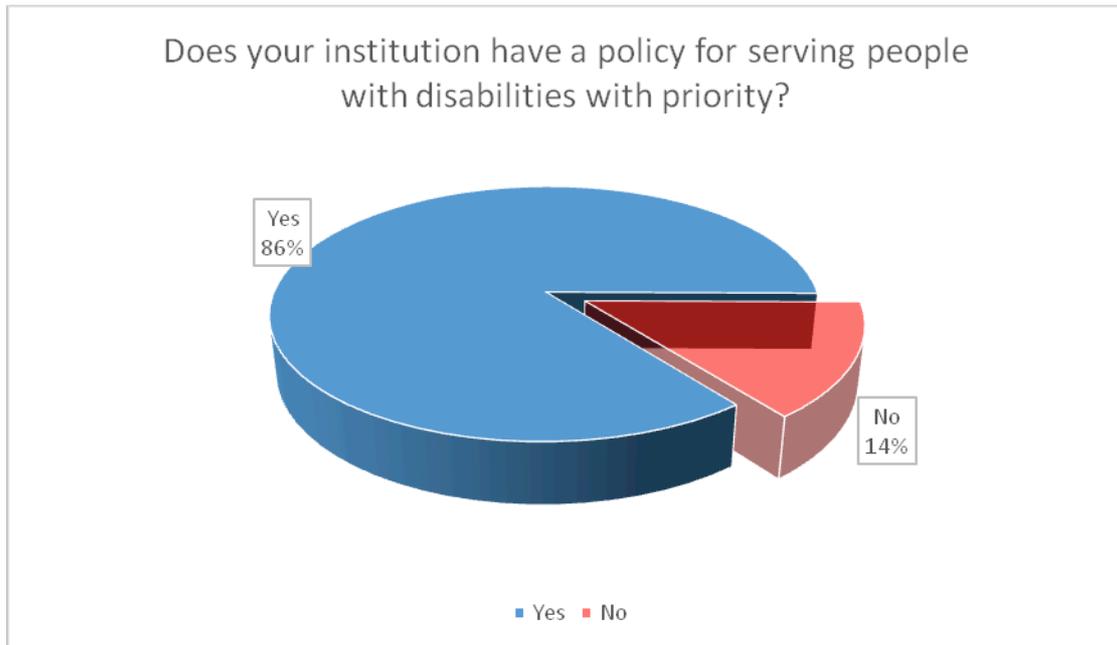
- *There is no Information material available in appropriate formation (Braille, Large Print, etc) (No 53.33%), properly structured space (including signs in Braille, tactile floors, removing potential obstacles (No 70.00 %)), electronic reading devices (No 59.26 %)*
- *However, there is appropriate lighting (Yes 55.56 %) and specialised staff ready to assist (Yes 66.67%)*



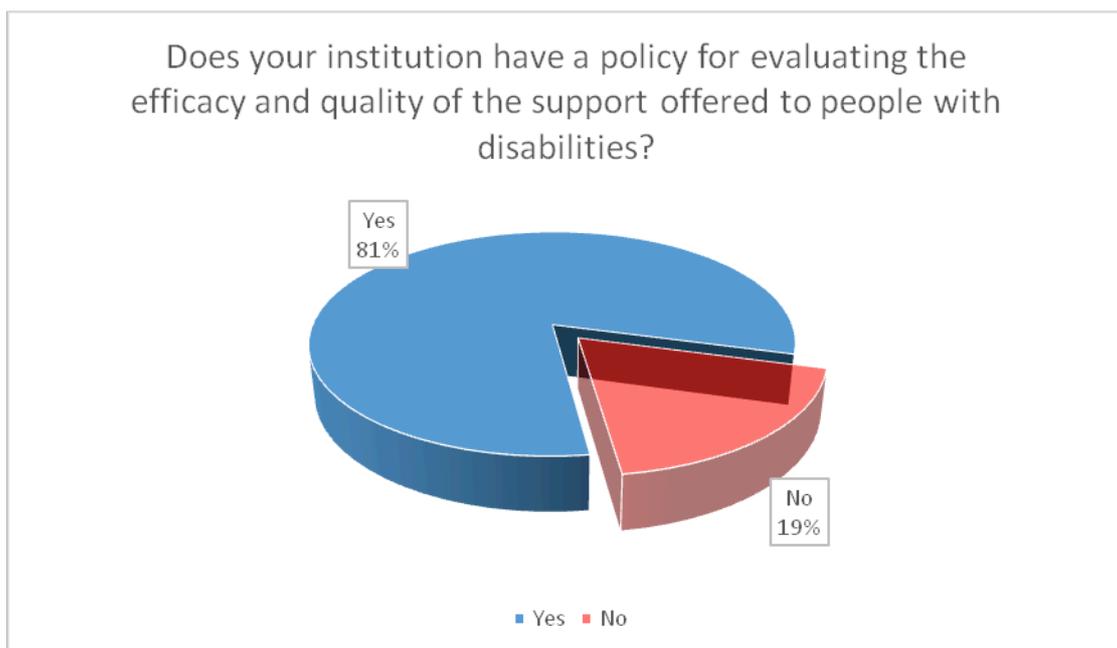
- *There is a policy in assisting people with all types of disabilities.*



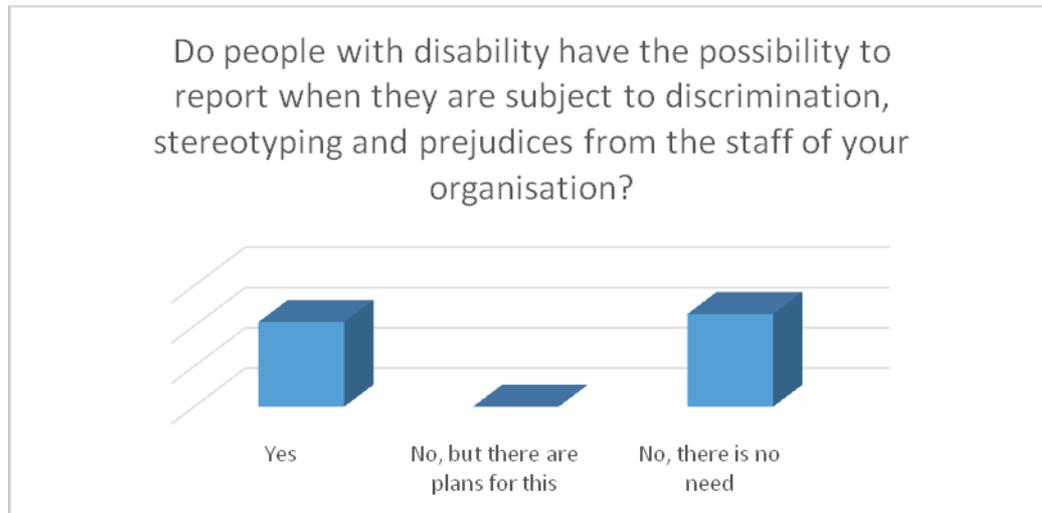
- *Largest percentage has Mobility and Physical (Yes 96.88 %) and smallest Hearing impairments (Yes 62.50 %)*
- *There is a policy for serving people with disabilities with priority (Yes 85.71 %)*



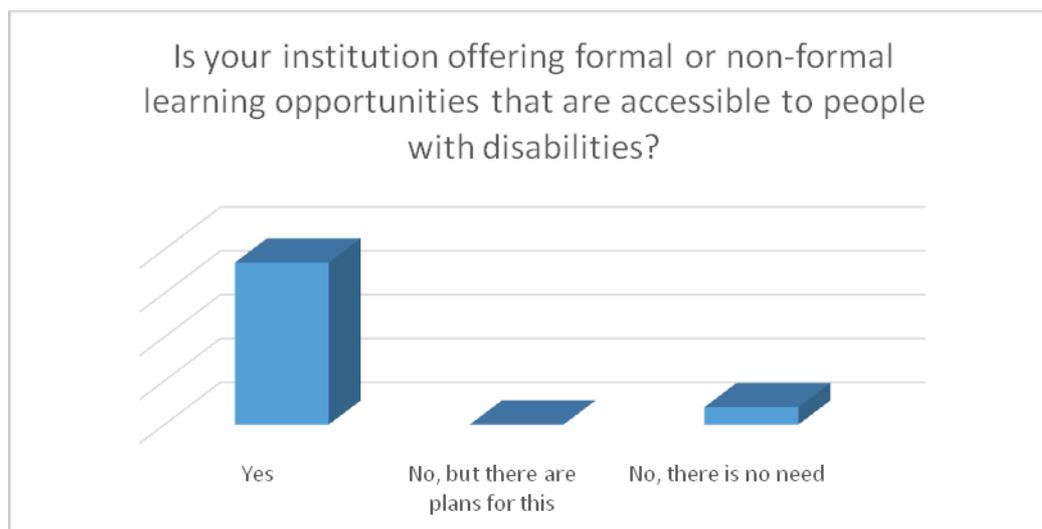
- *There is a policy for evaluating the efficacy and quality of the support offered to people with disabilities (Yes 81.40 %)*



- *People with disability have the opportunity to report when they are subject to discrimination, stereotyping and prejudices from the staff of the organisation, however there is no need for this (52.27 %).*

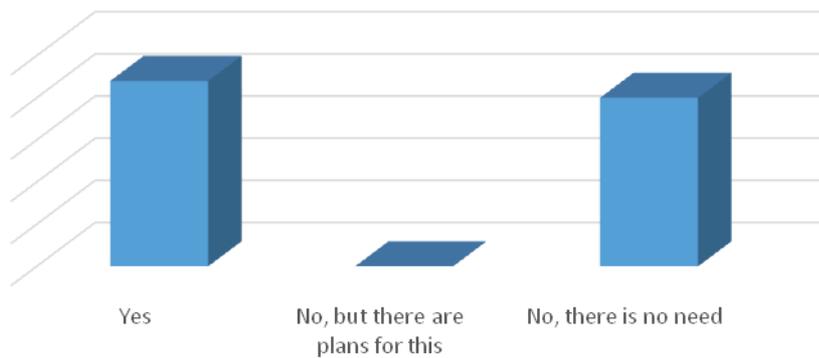


- *Institutions are offering formal or non-formal learning opportunities that are accessible to people with disabilities (90.24 %)*



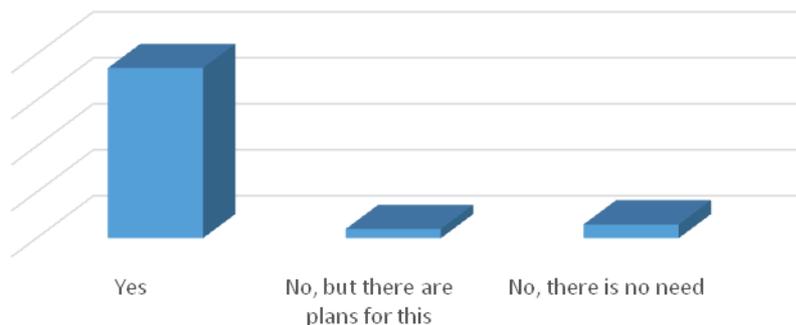
- *Institutions are also offering volunteering opportunities that are accessible to people with disabilities (52.38 %)*

Is your institution offering volunteering opportunities that are accessible to people with disabilities?



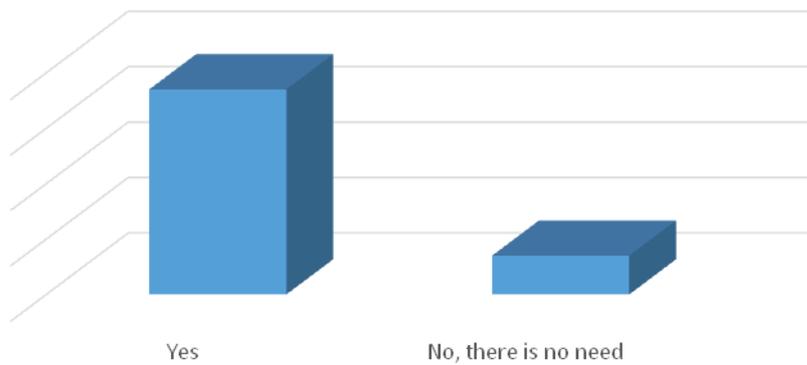
- *Institutions are also offering leisure/free time spending opportunities that are accessible to people with disabilities (88.10 %)*

Is your institution offering leisure/free time spending opportunities that are accessible to people with disabilities?



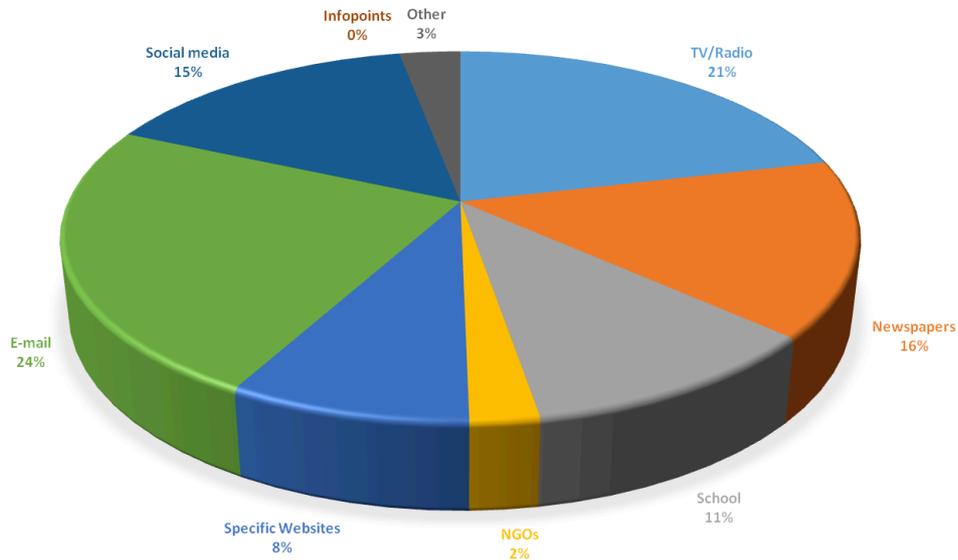
- *There have been involved people with disabilities in learning/volunteering/leisure activities (Yes 84.09 %)*

Has your institution already involved people with disabilities in learning/volunteering/leisure activities?



- *Channels used by NGO for communicating the availability of learning/volunteering/leisure opportunities to people facing disability*
 - *E-mail 40*
 - *TV/Radio 36*
 - *Newspapers 26*

Which channels do you use for communicating the availability of learning/volunteering/leisure opportunities to people facing disability?



- **42.6% 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 programs without discriminating among participants,
- they have accessible infrastructures,
- they are involved in European projects that are open to persons with disabilities
- 84.09 %) of the NGOs stated that they offer volunteering opportunities that are accessible to people with disabilities. Examples included the Organization and arrangement of artistic charity events, manufacture of jewelry, gardening.
- 88.10% of the NGOs responded that they offer leisure/free time spending opportunities that are accessible to people with disabilities while. Examples included educational trips (visits to productive units, walks in nature), organization and participation in artistic events, local events games that do not require moving around.
- 81.82% responded that they already involve people with disabilities in learning/volunteering/leisure activities (artistic events, educational camps ,local events / cycling routes, events in the community for celebrating national and traditional events.

As a result of 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 with experience in working with youth with visual impairments stated that this **was a unique experience**. These Organizations received 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) from the Local Blind's Organization. They ask collaboration

with the Organizations of Blind, with the Municipality Health Services, with Organizations who have experience in working with visually impaired people. (e.g. during this survey there was achieved a collaboration between the Association of The Blind “*Magnites Tifli*” and “*Municipality Enterprise for Health and Social Services*”)

For some other organizations that had the experience, this was due to their own initiative.

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 Organization (mainly for their services to transcribe and adapt material). Overall, for all these organizations the experience added to the value of the Organization mainly due to the fact that they went through the process of evaluating the ability of the Organization 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.

- They were never approached by youth with visual impairments and
- 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. Some participants were familiar with a number of activities that were carried out in close collaboration with the Organization 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** and participation to various trainings and workshops (informational programs, 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.

All staff members of the **Organization can benefit** by attending a short awareness workshop on visual impairments that includes information on who are these people, how they see, how they move about, how to guide and assist them.

The participants were asked if they could foresee some services/projects activities

The participants identified a number of services/projects that they can offer to young people with visual impairments included:

- Leisure, sports and entertainment programs
- Professional training (formal or non- formal learning opportunities)
- Youth exchanges and summer camps

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 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.

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

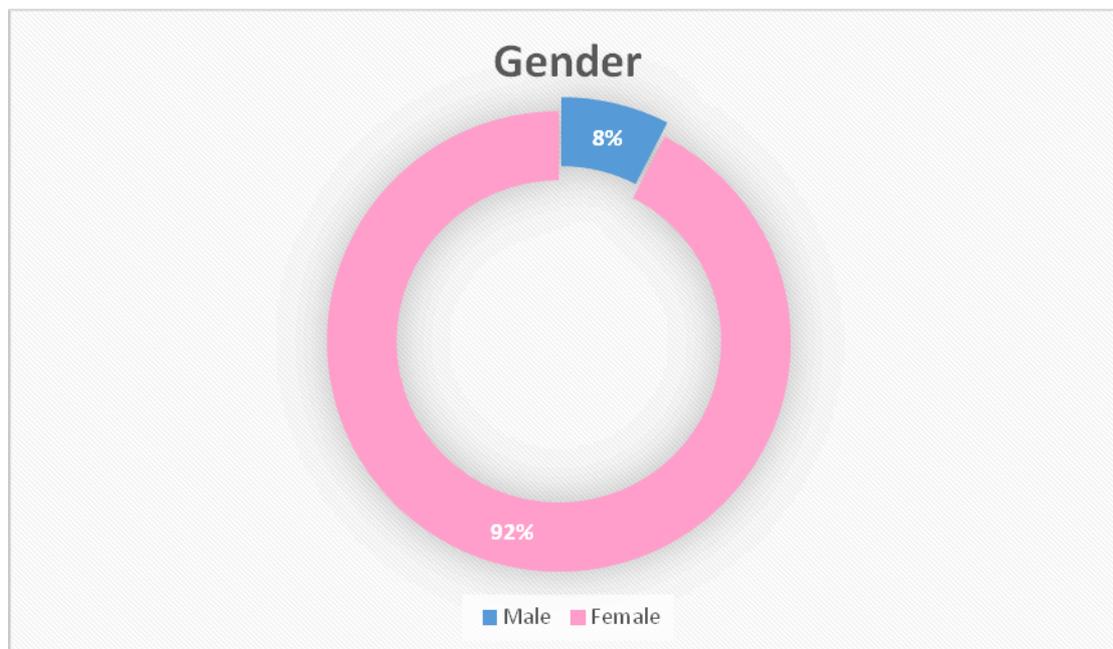
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) (90.91%)
- E-mail (68.18%)
- School (22.73%)
- Newspapers (18.18%)
- Specific websites (13.64%)
- TV/Radio (9.1%)
- NGOs (9.1%)
- Info points (9.1%)
- Other (40.91%)
- Personal contacts
- Persons who are in contact with entities that are directly connected to persons with disabilities
- SMS
- Audio magazines
- Through people who collaborate with other organizations for people with disabilities.

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?

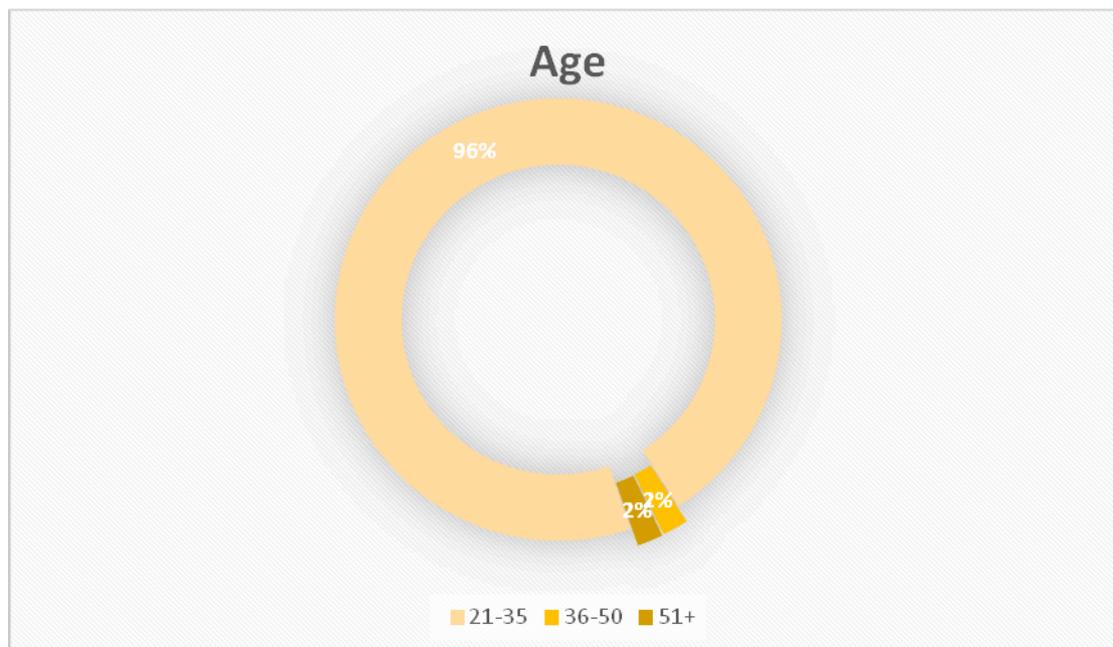
All participants to the FG stated that the way to get in touch with this group was to contact the responsible Organizations and Schools for Blind, that offer support and services to the youth with visual impairments.

Questionnaire 2 General Population (N=56)

- Gender: Female (92.45%)

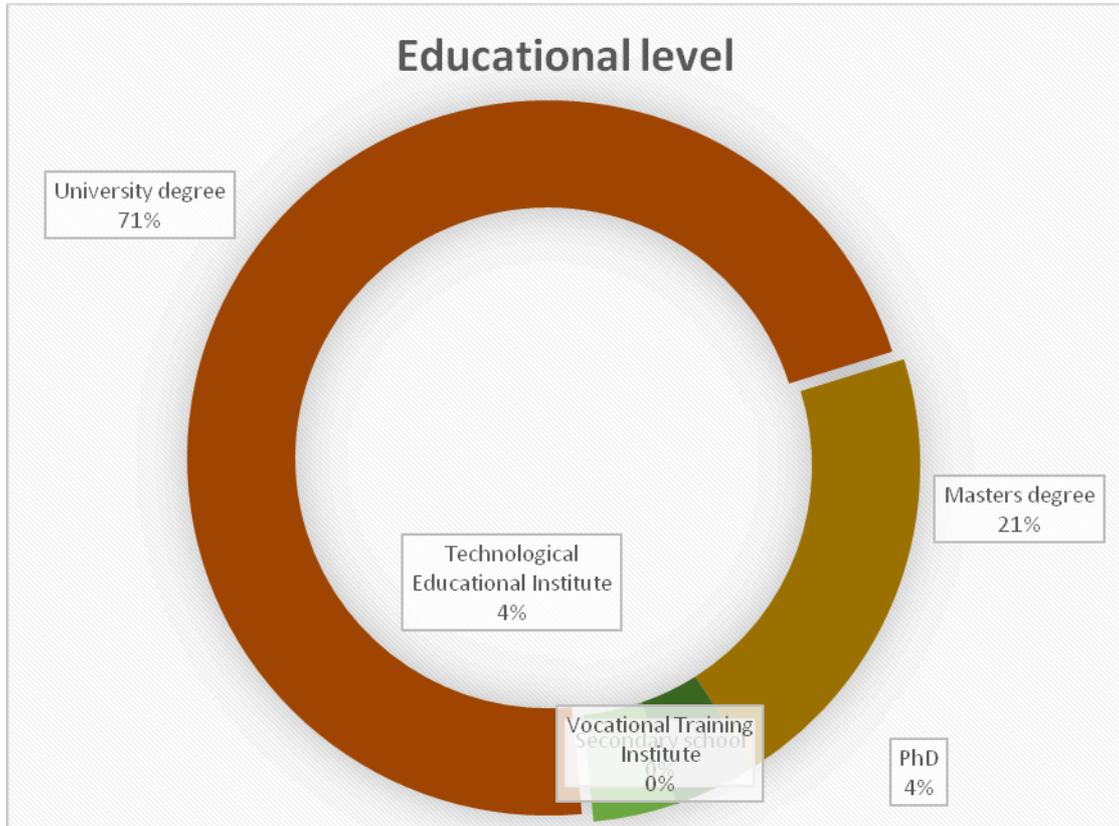


- Age: 21-35 (96.23%)

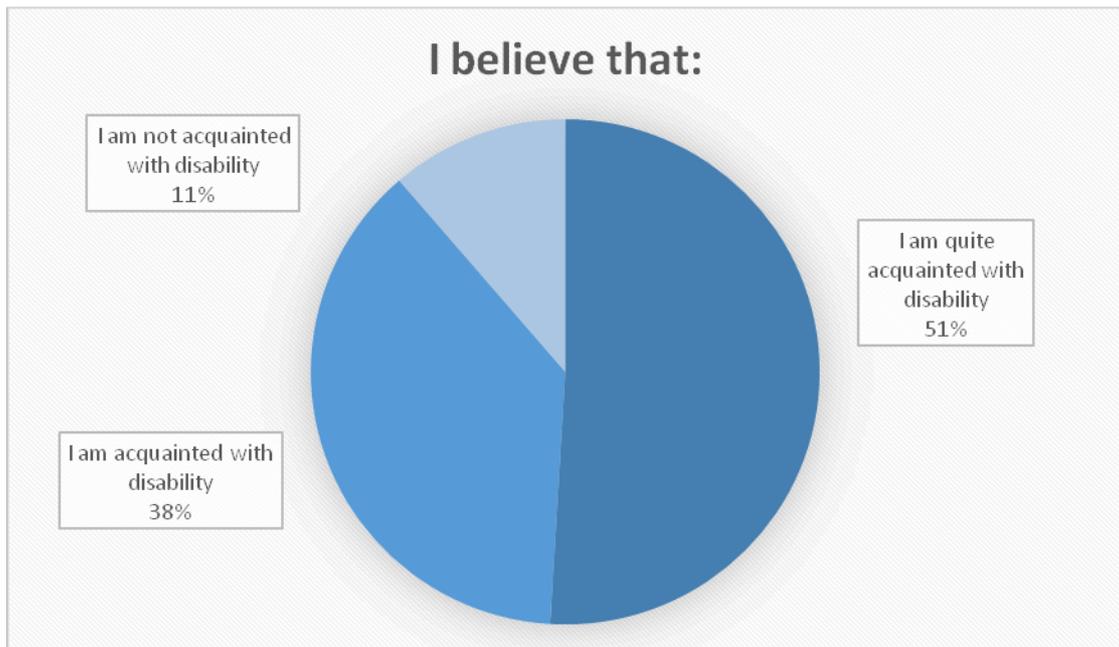


- Educational level

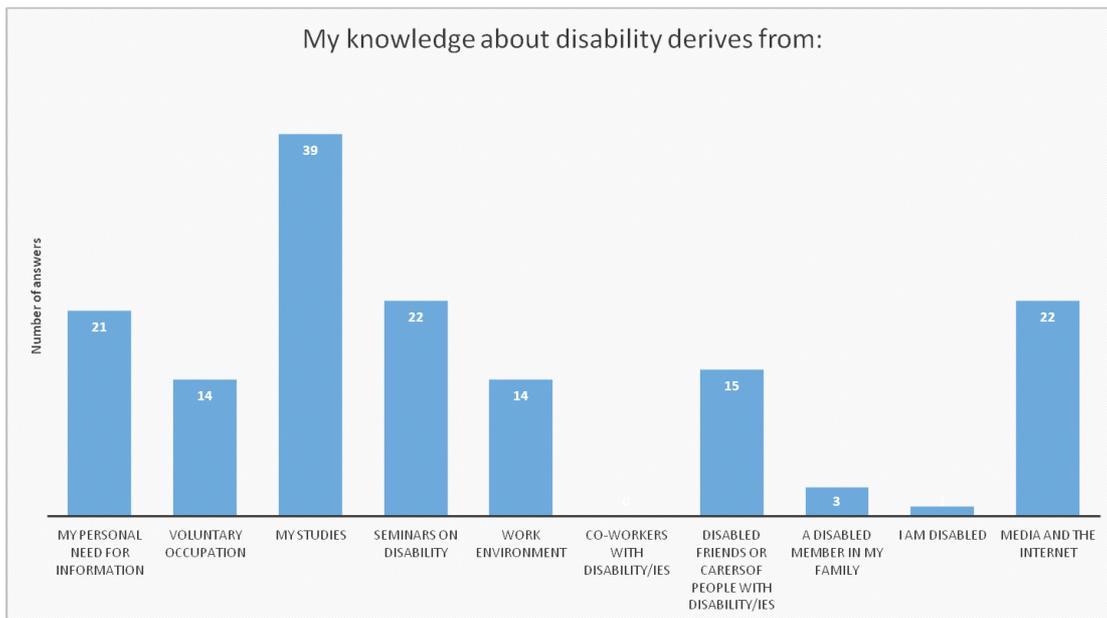
- University Degree: 71.70 %
- Master Degree: 20.75 %
- PhD: 3.77 %



- 50.94% believe that are acquainted with disability

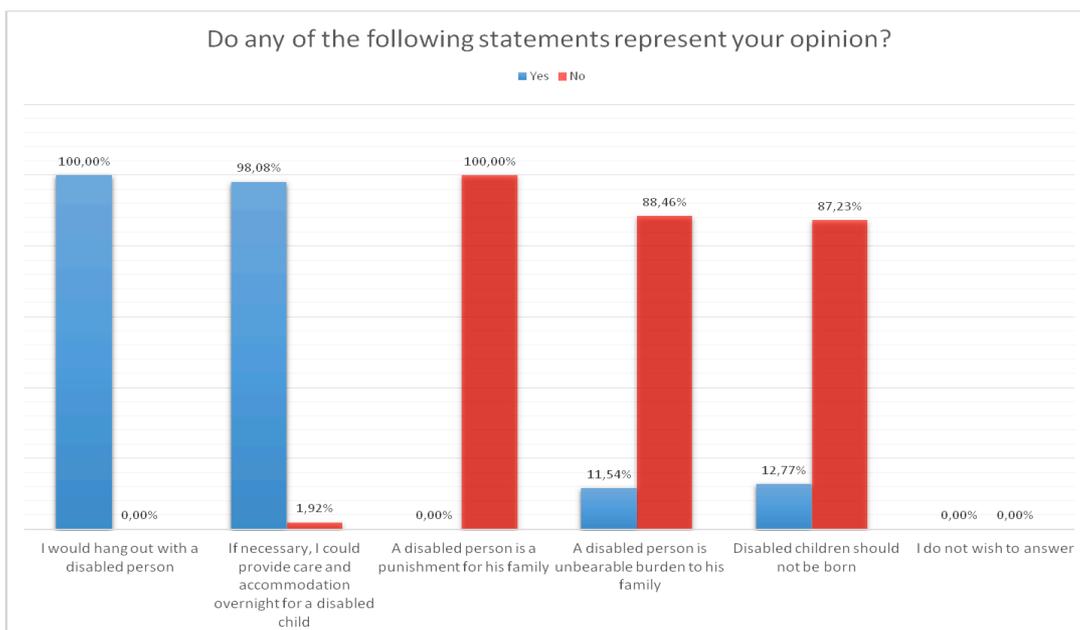


- Their knowledge about disability derives from their studies (39)

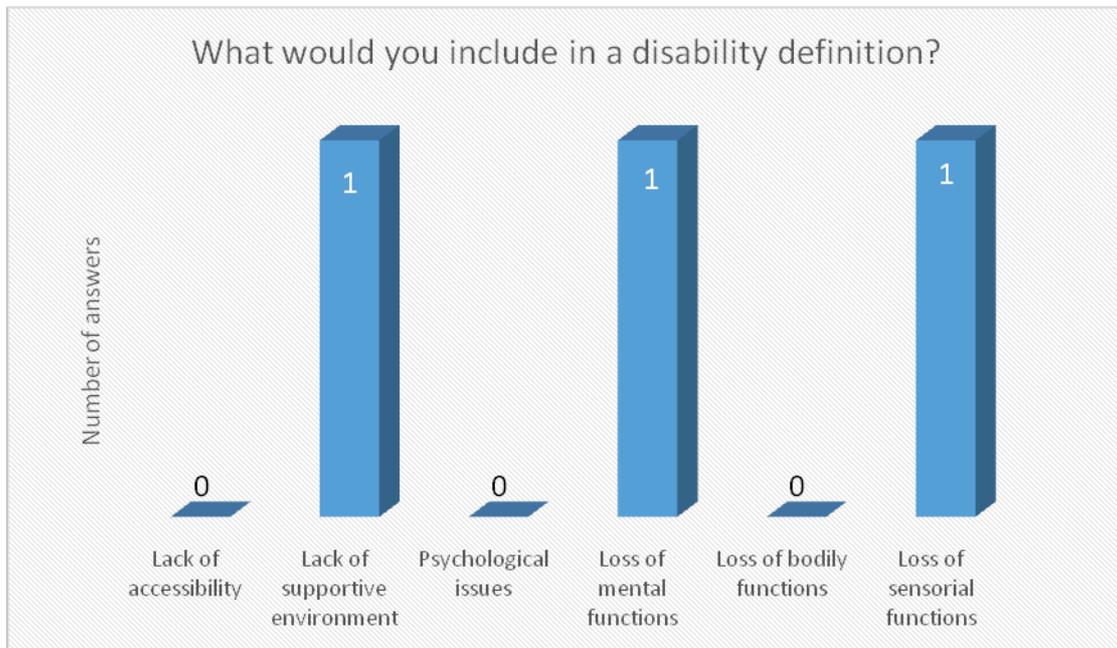


They declare that:

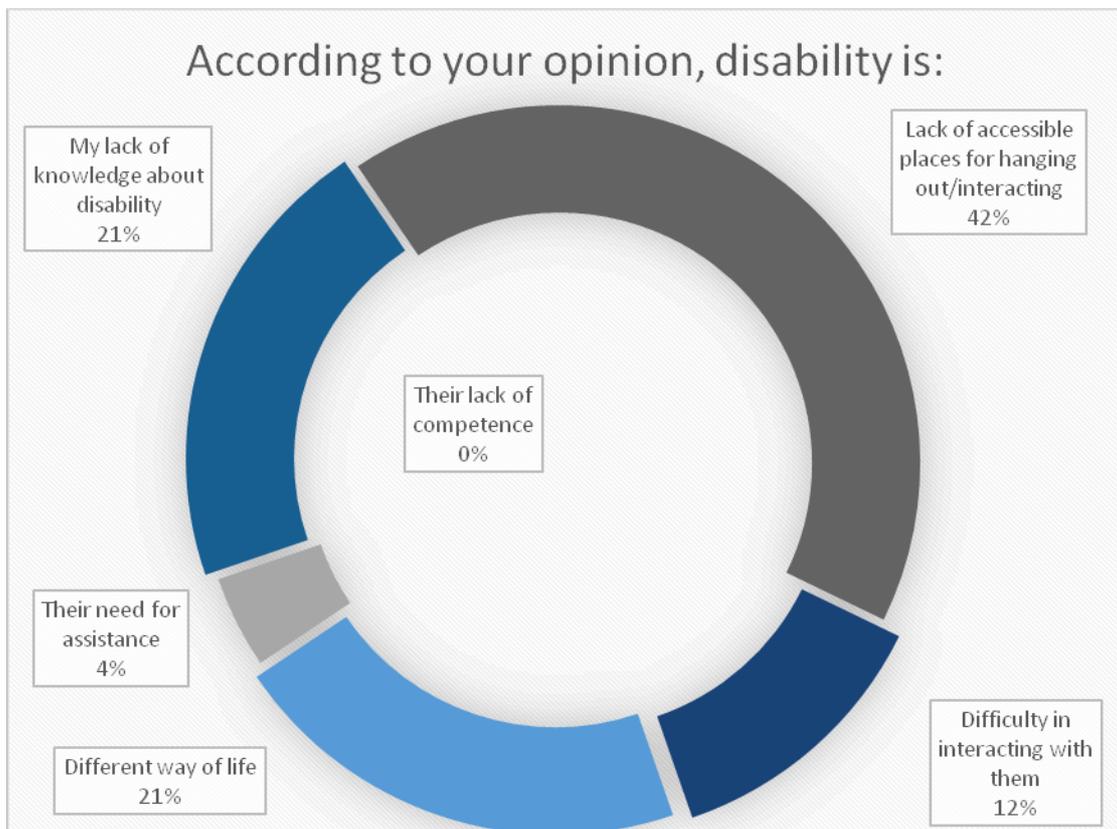
- All of them would hang out with a disabled person (100%)
- 98.08% could provide care and accommodation overnight for a disabled child, if necessary.
- All of them, that a disabled person is not a punishment for his family, at a percentage of 88.46% that is not unbearable burden to his family and that Disabled children should be born (87.23%)



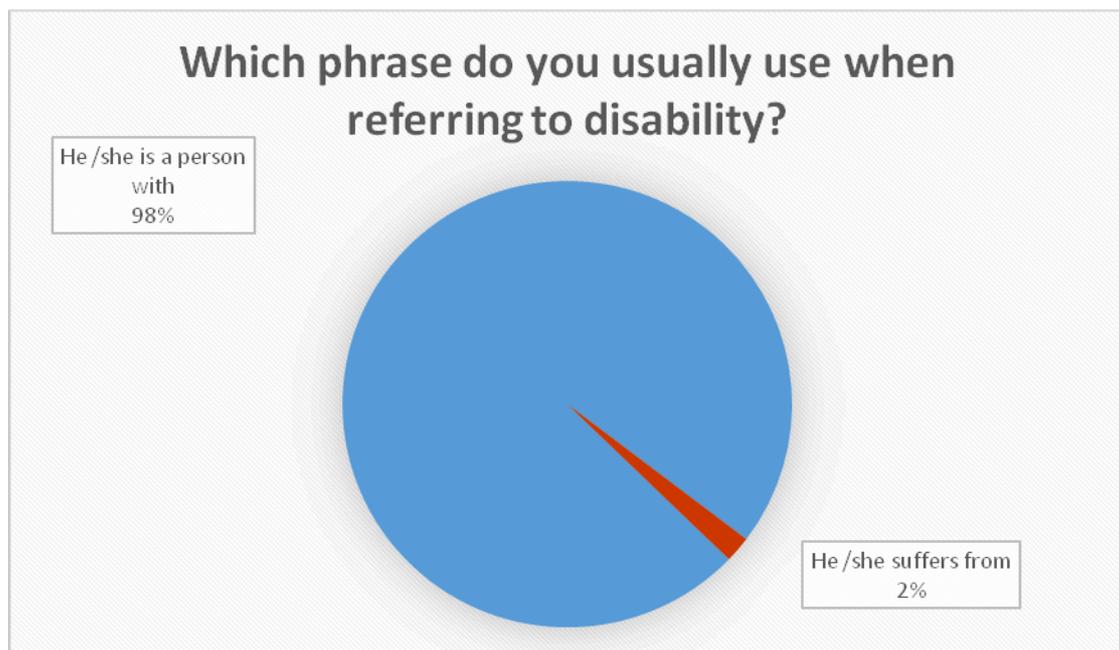
- The question “*What would you include in a disability definition?*” was not actually answered.



- **According to their opinion disability is a different way of life (88,24%)**

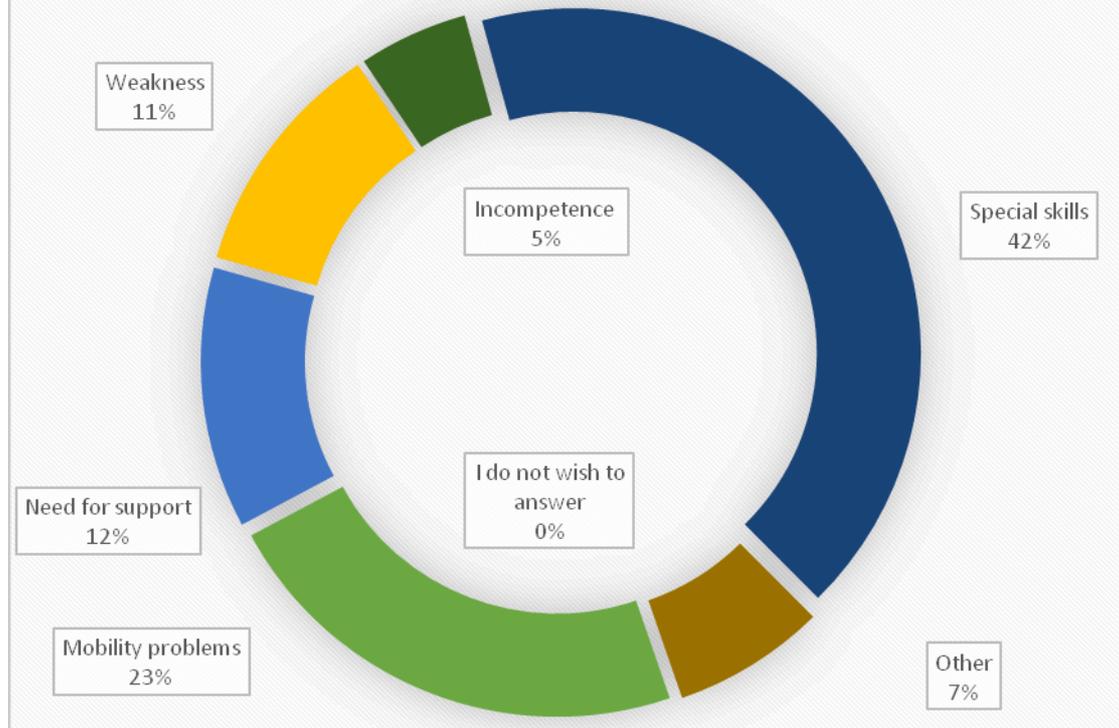


- 30 of them do not feel uncomfortable or face a mental barrier in interacting more with people with disability
- 10 of them who feel uncomfortable with the disabled do so because of *Lack of accessible places for hanging out/interacting* and 5 of them due to their *Different way of life*.
- 98.11% when referring to disability they use the phrase *he /she is a person with...*



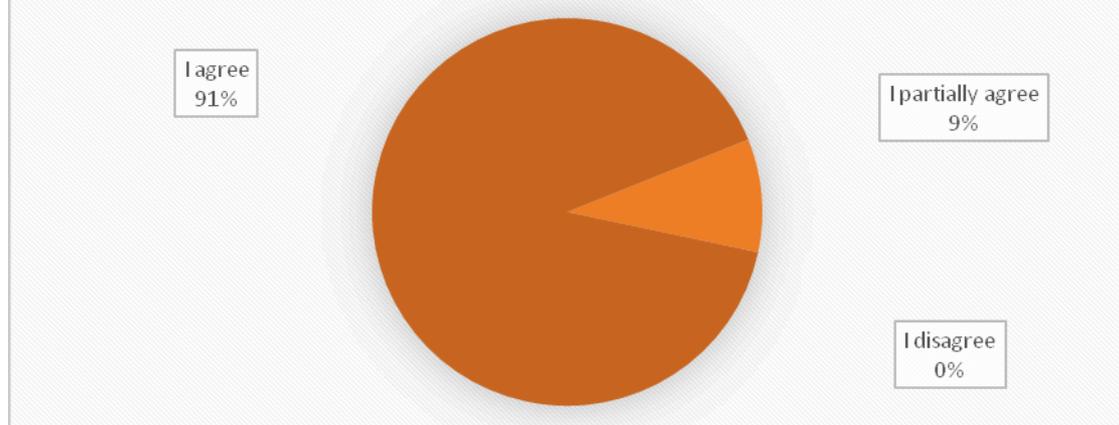
- Disability is mainly equivalent to Special skills (41) and Mobility problems (22)

What is for you the equivalent of disability?

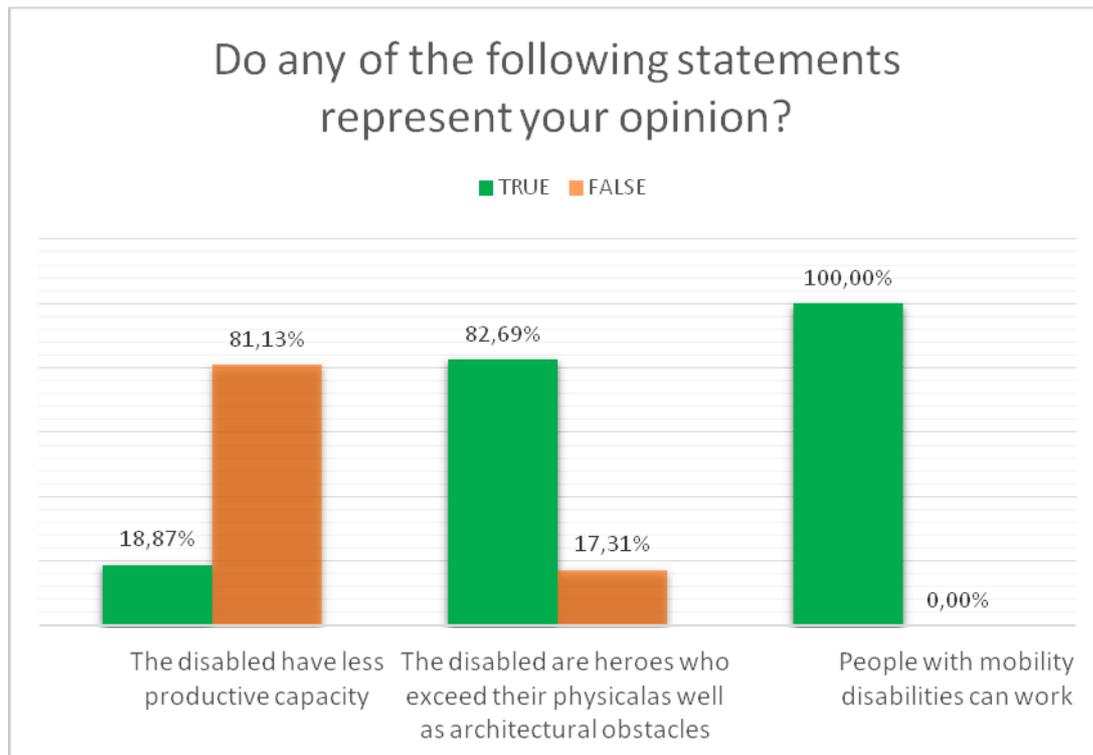


- 90.57 % believe that the disabled are individuals of common people with their own personality and abilities

People with disability are individuals of common people with their own personality and abilities

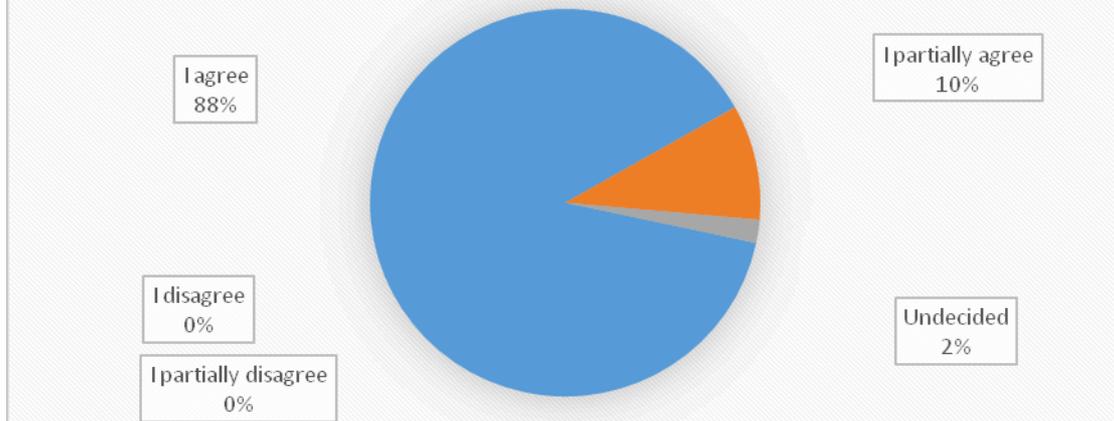


- The disabled do not have less productive capacity (81.13 %) and that are heroes who exceed their physical as well as architectural obstacles (82.69 %)
- All of them believe that people with mobility disabilities can work (100.00 %)



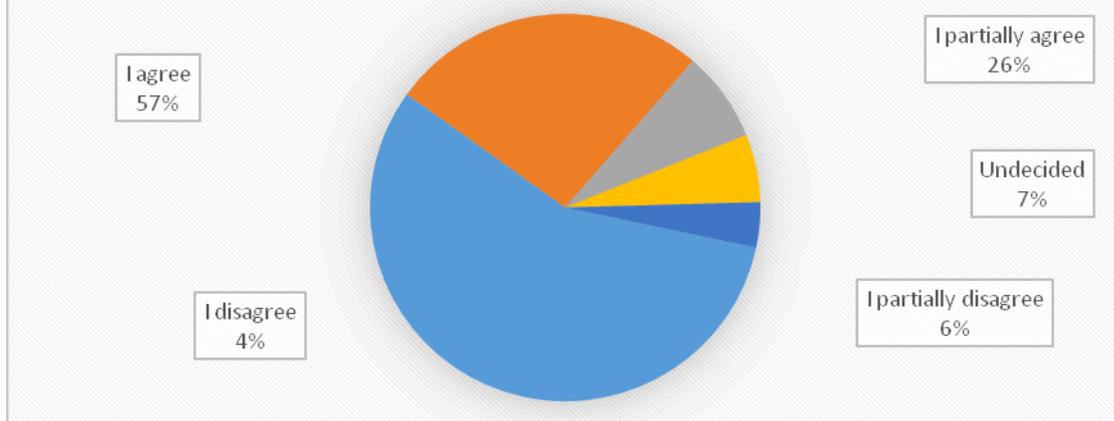
- 88.46% believe that Initiatives should be given by the State to encourage private enterprises to recruit people with disabilities

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



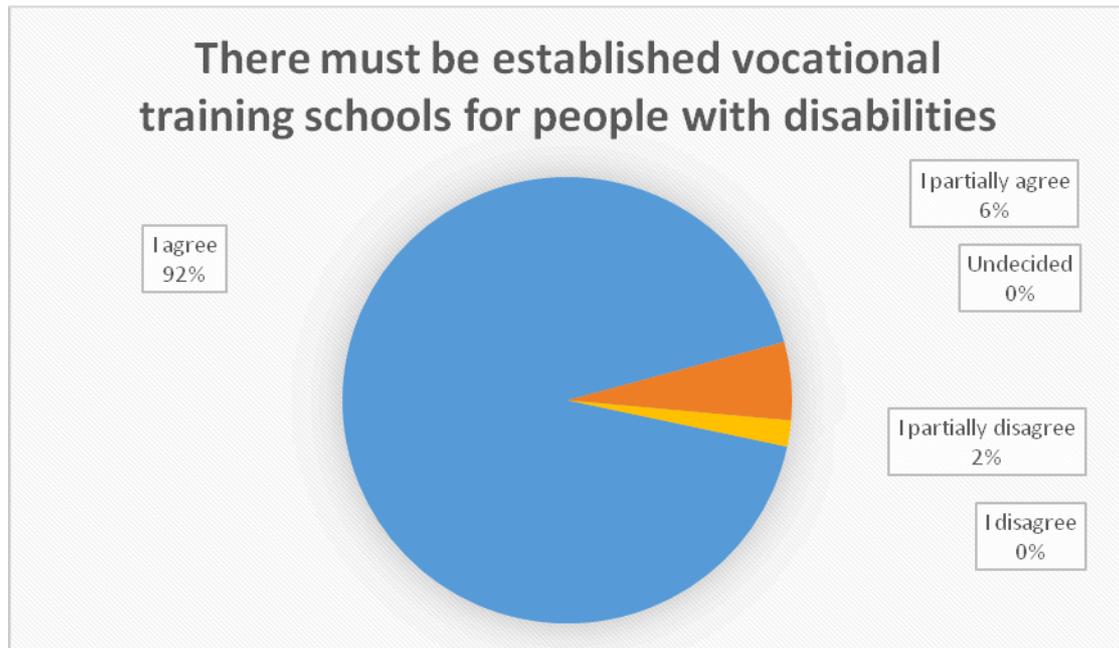
- 56.60% believe that there should be introduced more flexible working conditions for persons who take care of a disabled person

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

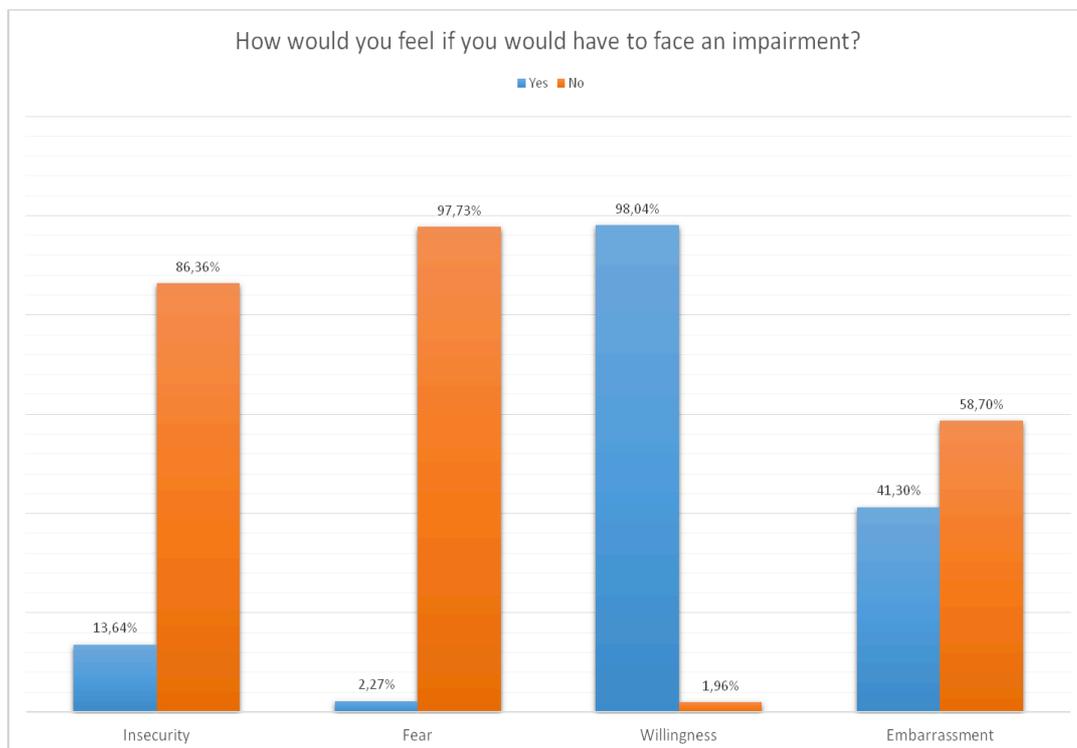


- 92.45 % believe that there must be established vocational training schools for people with disabilities

There must be established vocational training schools for people with disabilities

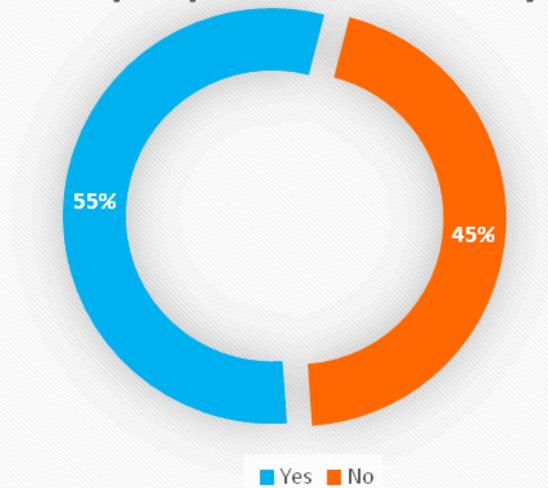


- Having to face an impairment 86.36% would not feel insecurity, fear (97,73%) or embarrassment (58,7%). Most of them (98.04%) would feel willingness.



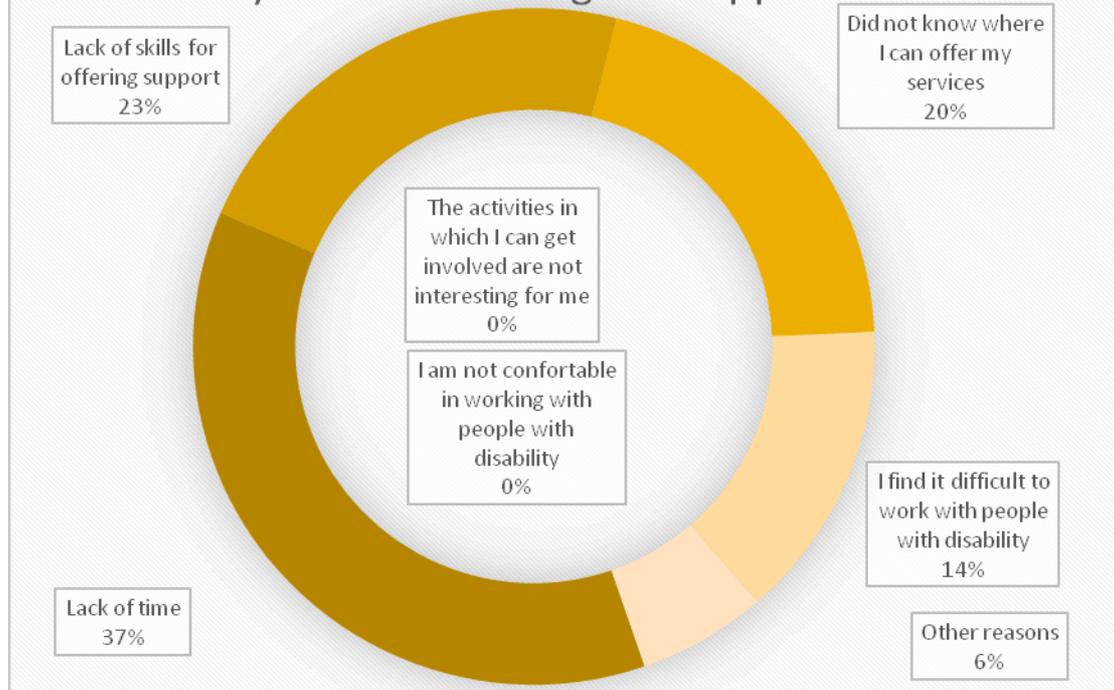
- 55.10 % Have considered offering support to people with disability?

Have you ever considered offering support to people with disability?



- In the question what was holding them from offering this support, most of them answered *Lack of time* (18), *Lack of skills for offering support* (11) and *Did not know where I can offer my services* (10)

Could you please tell us what was holding you from offering this support:



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	(50.6%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)
Study	(20%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)
Get married	(50%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)
Have children	(50%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)
Lead an autonomous life	(10%)	(80.6%)	(80%)	(50%)
Have a good time	(95%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)
Have social life	(75%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)
Travel	(90%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)
Elect	(15%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)
Be elected	(15%)	(90%)	(90%)	(90%)



Recognizing the various disability categories, we recognize various accessibility needs something that can be a key for the integration of all disabilities.

In a percentage of 88.24%, people recognize that disability involves a different way of life (is not a problem, aborts a series of stereotypes that marginalize persons with disabilities.

The promotion of the attitude that "disabled people are common people with their own personality and potential," (90%) contributes to an effective integration. People with special needs need more effort to complete everyday tasks compared to people without disability. The term "people with special needs" should be used exaggerating not only their deficiencies due to their disabilities as it has been done until now, but also in a rewarding way for their additional effort.

A key to integration process for people with disabilities is that people without disabilities understand that they **can respond in a number of roles and activities, provided that there are no exclusion criteria.**

Providing information on available programs and services in accessible **formats** to people with disabilities and their families, **is a key step to encourage their participation in services and institutions.**

Conclusions

Analysis of the questionnaires, allowed us **to take a closer look on what needs to be done in order to increase the participation of young people with visual impairments to various projects and activities.**

The two Focus Groups that took place was an opportunity to collect very interesting and useful information on

- **the needs** and challenges faced by young people with **visual impairments**
- **the 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 increase the capacity of NGOs to accommodate the needs of these participants

Main findings:

In regards to equal opportunities for accessing Civil Services, **88.24% of the disabled do not feel they would have the same chances** in accessing Civil Services in their area as anybody else.

In a percentage of 66,67%, young people with visual impairments felt that the Civil services provided in their area take into account their needs.

66.67% of the people with visual impairments declared that despite the fact that 85,71% of interviewed institutions **do not provide** information material available in appropriate format, properly structured space (72.73%), electronic reading devices (90.48%), **civil servants respond politely** on their needs and are ready to help with information and assistance in completing the paperwork. Their problems are bureaucracy and complex procedures that consume time and money and no efficient cooperation between governmental services resulting in the assignment of the procedure to be carried out by relatives, lawyers or any other who can help. **33.65 %** of them rated the public services as very good, 48.98% as good.

65.22% of institutions do not have a policy for evaluating the efficacy and quality of the support offered to people with disabilities. A policy of evaluating the efficacy and quality of provided services can help us to reform them according to the needs of people with different types of disability. Development of an integration policy should be based on a three level intervention: personal, organisational and structural. Personal interventions are directed towards the individual, organizational interventions are related to service interactions in life domains such as education, employment and health and structural interventions, are related to the enactment, implementation and enforcement of policy and legislation.

43.48 % of interviewed institutions **had not taken any measures/initiatives to combat staff's negative perceptions,** stereotyping and prejudices for people with disabilities **because “there is no need for this”**. The staff responsible for such an issue is the administration, Complaints' Officer, human resource manager, personnel manager or the career counselor.

In regards to whether people with disabilities have the opportunity to report to an authorized member of the staff when they are subject to discrimination, stereotyping and prejudice from the Organization staff, **91,30 % of the respondents said yes**. People with disabilities have the opportunity to contact the Citizen's Advocate for Equal Treatment which , is an independent monitoring body established with L. 2477/1997 authorized to respond to citizens' complaints, investigate cases of discrimination, call for judicial action and make legislative recommendations, including discrimination on the basis of disability.

59.18% are unaware of the existence of European/international learning opportunities that are addressing to the disabled.

Regarding the experience of young people with visual impairments on the various learning and volunteering opportunities, data from the questionnaire showed that:

- **86.27 % are not aware** of the existence of different NGOs in their local community offering volunteering opportunities for youngsters
- **38.46 % have tried to volunteer** in such an NGO.
- 71.43 % succeeded in being a volunteer for an NGO in his/her local community

For those who didn't participate for any reason, the main causes were:

They did not have the necessary means, there was not provided necessary financial resources for participation, there was no accessibility and relevant assistive technologies as well. *"My parents prevented me from participating being afraid that this experience might deteriorate my condition physically and psychologically", "The topic was not interesting for me", "I didn't want other fellow volunteers to feel sorry for me not being able to do the*

same things as them”, “I was afraid that I would make others feel uncomfortably having to face my disability”

VIPs who have been involved in different activities organized by NGOs **found their experiences apart from interesting, useful as well.** VIPs were offered the chance to further develop personally and socially, by being included in new and various activities, meeting many new and different people who do not belong to their family or their immediate social circle, **exercise responsibility and take on leadership roles.**

The most interesting and significant experience for them was getting involved in sports activities. Sharing their experience with us, VIPs point out that getting involved in sports helps them increase their sense of inclusion and well-being mainly in the following ways (changing what communities think and feel about people with disabilities, changing what people with disabilities think and feel about themselves)

52.38 % of Institutions are offering volunteering opportunities that are accessible to people with disabilities

88.10% of interviewed institutions are offering leisure/free time spending opportunities that are accessible to people with disabilities

84.09% of interviewed institutions involve people with disabilities in learning/volunteering/leisure activities

81.40% of them say that they have a policy for evaluating the efficacy and quality of the support offered to people with disabilities.

83% of the institutions have multidisciplinary team: psychologist, social worker, speech-therapist and physiotherapist

Most of the institutions use evaluation methods for the Disabled and for the provided services and supervised in therapeutic groups

80% of the NGO (especially institutions who offer education for autonomous life, art and pet therapy, international camps for disabled)

are interested to integrate in the educational/leisure activities young/people with visual impairment.

All participants (NGO's and Public Sector) **need further training in the field of Disability** especially for the characteristics of the visually impaired (e.g. how to offer help, sighted guide techniques, help with practicalities, use of special equipment in working with visually impaired)

Recognizing the various disability categories, we recognize various accessibility needs something that can be **a key for the integration of all disabilities.**

In a percentage of 88.24%, people **recognize that disability involves a different way of life** (is not a problem, **aborts a series of stereotypes** that marginalize persons with disabilities.

The **promotion of the attitude that "disabled people are common people with their own personality and potential," (90%) contributes to an effective integration.** People with special needs need more effort to complete everyday tasks compared to people without disability. The term "people with special needs" should be used exaggerating not only their deficiencies due to their disabilities as it has been done until now, but also in a rewarding way for their additional effort.

A key to integration process for people with disabilities is that people without disabilities understand that they **can respond in a number of roles and activities, provided that there are no exclusion criteria.**

Providing information on available programs and services in accessible **formats** to people with disabilities and their families, **is a key step to encourage their participation in services and institutions.**

People with disabilities use media and internet to find information about the opportunities, goods and services.

Recommendations:

Proposals regarding accessibility

Limiting a city's access to just a part of the population while ignoring a significant other part, is **economically, socially and politically unsustainable**. All **people should be able** to enjoy their human rights, under conditions that enable them to **enjoy a full life**.

Local authorities in collaboration with Organizations/Associations of the disabled, have an important role in improving their living conditions since the disabled themselves know their needs. People with visual disabilities in the focus group declared that **depend on others for transportation or use private taxi services** at very high cost so they proposed a series of measures that can improve accessibility such as: acoustic signs, Braille signs, audio materials, mounting equipment operators at traffic lights and buzzers, sound indication of the entrances of the institutions, installation of speed limiters, distinctive for passage of disabled people and leading railing, contrast color marking intersections and staircases, installation of tactile paving, marking the end of sidewalks, ramps at stations and other places associated with the movement of people with visual impairments, placing of enlarged number plates in the appropriate places in the vehicle about the transport line

Improving proposals for the provided services for people with disabilities:

Participation of people with disabilities in Consultation and decision-making procedures, strengthen their role as users of services.

Public Institutions should appeal to people with disabilities, learn the way or ways in which they believe they can be served more **effectively**. Their view should not be perceived as a weakness or lack of knowledge, but as an initiative to encourage their participation.

Civil servants should be trained in disability field and become able to respond to the specific needs of the disabled.

Creation of Supportive and Educational Centers for disabled across Greece. There is a difficulty in accessing the existing Centres in Thessaloniki and Athens for children with visual impairments who live in the province. Children who live in the Province find difficulty staying in the Centre's boarding school. What actually happens is that the family is forced to move to Athens or Thessaloniki seeking employment in order for the child to be supported and educated. This usually ends in deadlock with family and child to move back due to the economic pressure. Unfortunately, the opportunity to provide special education / learning to the child is lost.

The establishment of collaboration between Organization of Blind and NGO across the country, which will provide blind children throughout Greece with services considering mobility, speech therapy, physical therapy, psychological support and physiotherapy helping the children gain a holistic education and treatment.

Collaboration between Special Schools, NGO with activity in disability field, Supportive and Educational Centers in order to **adapt the vocational curricula of special schools to labor market demands.**

Collaboration with the non –profit association, subsidized and overseen by the Ministry of Public Health and Social Solidarity of Greece **“Lighthouse for the Blind”** for the Provision of assistive technology (two advisory committees have been created for monitoring

matters of physical and electronic access, Provision of Braille and Audio books, Adaptation and transcription of documents)

NGOs which are going to include blind participants in their activities should be trained on:

- **how to create opportunities** for all participants, to better understand the unique experience and perspective of blind participant
- **how to encourage** the participants, to reach out and include their blind classmate in informal and formal social activities
- how the participants in the program can better bond with a blind person
- how to offer social assistance
- how to keep a natural conversation with the blind
- **ways to involve** Vip's in their activity and how to adapt learning methodology, tools and equipment, space, according to their needs
- the opportunity for all participants to learn about diverse life experiences
- the topics that are relevant for the needs of young people with visual impairments (Independent living achieved by means of special training on orientation, mobility and daily living skills adjusted to the age, state of vision capabilities and particular needs of each individual, communication and social skills, body language, foreign language skills in order to participate in international workshops, trainings and voluntary services, skills for getting a job)
- the benefits of inclusive opportunities on sports teams, a theatrical production, chorus, debate club and so on
- the benefits of collaboration with visually impaired people, Associations / Organizations Schools for Blind in order to

implement attractive projects in accordance to the capabilities and aspirations of these people

All NGO's staff should have a basic training while at least one person should be especially **trained in working with/for visually impaired** young people (methods, equipment, etc).

In public institutions it was suggested that each person who might serve a VIP, should have at least a basic training.

Organization of a training course for the sighted assistants of VIP in the five Community Centres (premises of A Municipality Enterprises for Health and Social Services in Volos Greece - KEKPA – DIEK) including a simple, adequate and efficient presentation of a variety of techniques that are easy to learn and provide a blind person with meaningful assistance.

Organization of a basic training course with the members of the Association of Taxi drivers aiming to teach them useful techniques for interacting and guiding a blind client successfully

Initiatives to appoint meetings with the representatives of Organizations / Associations / of Blind and NGO working in disability field, for adjusting the existent various formal and non – formal educational opportunities / material / tools e.t.c., enabling them to participate despite their special needs.

Development of disability awareness programs for the general population, aiming at: teaching how to interact with someone who has a disability, reduce the fear of the unknown, use proper terminology, acknowledge personal abilities and limits towards disability. eg. People without disability **will benefit from awareness training programs** in

which they will be able **to experience directly** some of the **difficulties faced by people with a disability**.

Contacting people with disability is not always sufficient to change negative stereotypes. To overcome the limitations of mere exposure (Zajonc 1968), Murffit (2006) suggests that 'attitude change is more likely to be successful when contact occurs within a supportive environment, where each party has equal status and pursue shared goals' (cited in Kleeman & Wilson 2007).

initiative for the creation of a "Time Bank" in the premises of the already existent "Support Center for the Disabled" that belongs to Municipal Organization of Health and Social Affairs (KEKPA-DIEK) and at Association for the Blind "Magnites Tifli" aiming at offering basic training in volunteers who could share their free time in the interest of the visually impaired and their families.

Enhancement of the existent collaboration between the Association for the Blind "Magnites Tifli", KEKPA-DIEK and the Department of Special Education (SED), School of Humanities, University of Thessaly aiming at student's workshops being held in the premises of the Association as well as the premises of KEKPA-DIEK in a regular basis, in order to jointly organize awareness raising actions for visual impairments and all types of disabilities respectively.

Elaboration of an e-platform as well as the social media for the exchange of information, experience and best practices concerning disability with emphasis in visual impairment. The platform will be free to use for People with disabilities Organizations, individuals, local and central administration Institutions, legislative structures etc, in order to provide opportunities concerning the socio –professional integration of the disabled. Discussion could refer to:

- Programs and services offered by NGO's / Institutions etc for people with disabilities, dealing with their socio-professional integration
- Useful information about companies or institutions in various fields that offer services to people with disabilities
- Issues related to legislation, education, work, terminology, sport, Disabled's profile and stereotypes in society, independent living, accessibility, etc. as well as any related field to the Disabled's social integration in Greece.
- Fundamental human rights Violations of people with disabilities
- Funding opportunities for the Organizations / Associations / NGO's etc working in the field of social integration for people with disabilities

Disabled people are likely to have a below average level of access to information. This may be due to financial reasons, limited mobility or because absorbing information can require extra effort. According to British Population Survey (2012: July - September 2012) people with a visual impairment have higher ownership levels of some devices and services, higher levels of home smartphone ownership, home PC ownership and personal internet access

The most appropriate channels for communicating the availability of learning and volunteering opportunities were considered to be, in order:

- Phone
- TV/Radio
- School
- E-mail
- Specific websites which gives the users some control over their access to information, as they can alter font size, color and contrast
- Directly with the person in charge

Other options were also presented as appropriate, like

- **Audio Channels** (internet, talking newspapers, audio magazine Daisy books) in audio formats (audiotape, digital audio files, cd-rom, cd)

Proposals for raising public awareness on the issue of people with visual disabilities

Organization of Awareness raising campaigns in order to demystify blindness and break down the barriers to inclusion, discomfort, pity, fear, stigma, bring down any stereotypes and inspire the sighted population to cast a glance at the full social, professional and academic capabilities of the blind population.

Organization of the Campaign “If you were in my shoes”, aiming to attract public attention and lead authorities to support blind people with concrete actions through which they increase their degree of autonomy.

Campaign’s activities:

Engage common people in an awareness raising campaign where on December 3 preferably, they will take part in an event where they will be asked to cover their eyes with a scarf for 30 minutes and try to perform their daily routine, thus accepting the challenge of being blind. Practically, they will be invited to walk a 10 minutes distance, without being able to see and using a white cane. Then, they will be encouraged to share their experience on a facebook campaign group.

Organization of the event “Dinner in the Dark”. The event will be held in the premises of “Iliotropia” Greenhouse of the Municipal Organization of Health and Social Affair (KEKPA-DIEK). In “Iliotropia” Greenhouse work 12 young people with visual and

associate disabilities. The participants will have the opportunity to dine without being able to see, in absolute darkness, prepared and served by people with disabilities. Then, they will be encouraged to share their experience in the Facebook page mentioned above.

This Face book group account will be open to anyone who would like to leave a message for the blind. The messages will be automatically transcribed in Braille and will be printed in a book printed in Braille

Mass media (newspapers, radio, television and advertising) **have an enormous influence on the way people see the world.** If people with disability want to make changes in the way they are viewed, then “*we must make use of the mighty power of the media*” organizing radio and television broadcasts, short films on daily life and the successes achieved by the disabled people in various fields. E.g. there is a Local Radio Broadcast by the Association for the Blind “Magnites Tifli” about communicating information for the visually impaired.

Organization of a campaign with the volunteers from the Support Center for Disabled belongs to Municipal Organization of Health and Social Affair (KEKPA–DIEK) aiming to raise awareness of the barriers people with sight loss face when shopping independently.