

Overview of Disability and Independent Living Movement in Cyprus

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

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

The choice of independent living is a fundamental human right. Disabled people need to be supported in their pursuit for independent or supported living through policies, schemes and direct payments offered by the state. People with learning difficulties, who have traditionally been left to the margins of policies for independent living, should also be informed of their options in ways that they can understand. They should be supported to decide about their future

and they should be entitled to support. However, considering the current context, it is still difficult to reach these goals.¹

As Mr. Michaelides affirms, in Cyprus the Independent Living movement is on a primitive stage and this is based on the wrong attitude of the persons with disabilities and their relatives (cares). The sated offer financial support to them but there is no interest because of the next reasons:

- The Persons with disabilities are afraid to live alone, and also they need information about their rights
- Their relatives are not trained to support them in an independent way of living.
- Their relatives are afraid to leave them alone.
- The city is not accessible.
- Until today there was no way to move with the wheelchairs, now our organization has a proper car and a trained companion in Lemesos to offer them mobility.
- In Lemesos our NGO supports two persons who live alone.
- The Cyprus Republic does not provide financial support to the NGOs for those projects. During the last two years our projects about the socialization of disabled people had no National support.

From the ESFC, they are asking for help to get more information about other experiences on the subject and also to develop E.U. projects to apply for financial support.

Cyprus has neither signed nor ratified the UN Convention and its Protocol yet. That means that from Enil we must work hard to persuade the Cyprian Government to do it and to adequate its legislation to facilitate the Independent living of disabled people. We also have a task of dissemination of the Independent Living philosophy, which is not adopted yet among disabled people in Cyprus.