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1 Introduction

The article 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities clearly specifies the rights of people with disabilities to work and employment on an equal basis with others, in an open, inclusive and accessible environment. Cyprus has ratified and incorporated the convention into national legislation in 2011, and through legislative framework including laws, schemes and programmes seeks to ensure people with disabilities have access to open labour market.

Nonetheless, as data shows, the percentage of people with disabilities in employment in Cyprus is below EU average. Amongst them people with intellectual disabilities exhibit even lower employment rate, facing additional barriers to employment. Vocational training programmes and efforts to provide guidance and coaching within sheltered workshops to encourage transition to open labour market are effective, and many examples of good practices by the non-governmental organisations can be cited. However, significant issues pertaining to the education, awareness, collaboration with the private and legislation sector still persist, affecting the said persons possibility to fully participate in society.

This report will further specify the legal framework in Cyprus, provide recent data, discuss the system of sheltered workshops, provide examples of best practices, and finally draw recommendations for future.

1.1 Social and labour market policy concerning people with disabilities

According to the data gathered by Eurostat in 2018, 24% of Cypriot nationals are experiencing limitations considered to be a disability. With 48,5 % of those persons in employment, Cyprus is below the EU average of 51% (Grammenos & Priestley, 2018). As people with disabilities constitute almost a quarter of the population of Cyprus it is pertinent to review the national legal framework that ensures their rights. Moreover, as their participation in the open labour market is considered key to ensuring access to equal opportunities, full participation in social life and independence in the *UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol* (2016) as well as the *First National Strategy for Disability 2018-2028* by the *Department of Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities* (2018) current governmental efforts in enabling such opportunities ought to be outlined as well.

Table 1. Key statistical data concerning the employment of people with disabilities in Cyprus

People with Disabilities in Cyprus	Age	Percentage
Total of people with disabilities	16+	24%
Total of people with disabilities who are employed	16+	48,5 %
People with disabilities who are employed	16–24	27,2%
People with disabilities who are employed	35-44	59,3%
Women with disabilities who are employed	16+	45,8 %
Men with disabilities who are employed	16+	53,6 %

Eurostat (Grammenos & Priestley, 2018)

The rights of people with disabilities in the Republic of Cyprus (later referred to as Cyprus) are assured through the provisions included in the Articles 9, 28 and 35 of the Constitution, as well as 5 general laws and 30 specific laws and regulations (KTSOA, 2020). Those include *The Persons with Disabilities Law of 2000- 2007*, law regulating recruitment in public sector, and resolutions providing guidance on equal opportunities regarding employment, education and cultural infrastructure (Symeonidou, 2015).

Moreover, Cyprus has ratified and incorporated into national legislation the following 3 laws of International Conventions: *The International Labour Organisation Agreement no. 159 (1987)*, *the European Social Charter (1968 and 2000)*, and *the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2011)* (KYSOA, 2020).

Out of the national acts, *The Persons with Disabilities Law of 2000-2007*, L. 127(I) is the most comprehensive, outlining the rights of persons with disabilities and preventing discrimination on grounds of disability. The act specifies meaning of disability as inclusive of physical, mental, or intellectual long-lasting restriction, and seeks to establish the principle of equal treatment and non-discrimination. To ensure those aims, the rights of persons with disabilities are enumerated, including the right to independent living; medical and psychological care; assistive devices and necessary support; accessibility in housing, physical environment and public transport; access to education, information, social and financial services, training and employment; creation of family life; participation in cultural, social, athletic and religious activities. The act specifies the how those rights are to be safeguarded in the areas of employment, provision of facilities and services, transport, and communication. The prohibition of discrimination in those areas is detailed, and judicial protection established.

The right of persons with disabilities to work and employment on equal basis is established by the legal framework outlined above and mentioned in the national laws regarding work, employment, and prohibition of discrimination. Furthermore, regulations aiming to prevent and criminalise disability discrimination in employment are specifically detailed in the following policies concerning labour market:

- *The Persons with Disabilities Law of 2000- 2007* (Law 117/1989) stipulates that the principle of equal treatment applies to any employment where there is no justified need for special ability or characteristic that the disabled person does not possess. The act prohibits and criminalises employment related discrimination that affects access to employment and vocational training, as well as working conditions, and membership to workers' organisations. The responsibility to ensure compliance with those laws is assigned to the employers, who are obliged to take appropriate measures. Moreover, the law details specific actions to promote employability of persons with disability, which include creating employment schemes to incentivise employers to hire persons with disability, designing inclusive jobs in public sector, protection against dismissal and job reinstatement (if disability occurred during employment) and obligation to provide accessible conditions at work (incl. facilities and work hours). Finally the law establishes Special Needs Fund; among other objectives, the fund is to provide financial aid to the promotion of, or to subsidy businesses, that employ persons with disabilities.
- *Council Resolution of 17th July 1999 on providing equal opportunities for employment to people with disabilities [1999/C 186/02]* has been published to correspond with the *EU Employment Guidelines of 1999 (1)*. It reaffirms the objective of increasing equal employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. It pays special attention to addressing barriers to employment such as recruitment, appropriate vocational training and lifelong learning opportunities, access and arrangement of workplaces (including technical equipment and access to information and communication), obtaining formal qualifications, and access to vocational guidance.
- The provisions enabling employment in the public sector are further specified in *The Recruitment of Persons with Disabilities in the Wider Public Sector (Special Provisions) Law of 2009 (L. 146(I)/2009)*. This act specifies that 10% of vacancies in the public sector should be fulfilled by persons with disabilities and specifies conditions of such a recruitment.

1.2 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its influence on social and labour market policies and regulations.

Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (2022) states that adopting and ratifying the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD) in Cyprus was the most important step for the people concerned. Upon ratifying the Convention in 2011 the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurances (DSIPD) was nominated as the focal point to implement the UNCRPD.

To address the recommendations made by the UNCRPD, as well as ratified European Conventions, DSIPD produced *First National Strategy for Disability 2018-2028* (2018), and corresponding three *National Action Plans for Disability (2013-2015, 2018-2020 and 2021-2023)* - guiding the actions undertaken by the government in form of schemes and regulations. The purpose of the strategy is to “define the vision, values, strategic aspirations and goals of the Republic of Cyprus for the realization of the rights of citizens with disabilities, directing all the state bodies towards actions that will improve the quality of the lives of people with disabilities.” (Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, 2022a). The latest Action Plan has been approved in 2023, detailing 135 actions (58 new actions and 77 ongoing ones), which will be implemented by 8 Ministries and 3 Deputy Ministries. The actions concern the following topics: (a) independent living, social integration, mobility and social protection of people with disabilities, (b) their employment and professional training, (c) education services, (d) the accessibility of people with disabilities to the natural and built environment, to transport and information, (e) the provision of health and rehabilitation services, (f) information and awareness on disability issues (Third National Action Plan for Disability 2021- 2023, 2020).

The funding schemes presented or referred to in the action plan are designed to address aforementioned aims. For the overview of the national efforts to support the employment of persons with disabilities, it is valuable to outline the most relevant and impactful schemes (KYSOA, 2020):

- *The Schemes for Vocational Training Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities* provided by the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, administer financial assistance to persons with disability seeking to establish small enterprise. Moreover, the schemes support vocational training programmes and distribute benefits to organisations of the persons with disabilities who run employment programmes.
- The Department of Labour enforces the *Incentive Scheme for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities in the Private Sector*, that subsidise the employment of persons with disabilities. In 2021 the grant was expected to benefit 100 people. The sponsorship is provided for registered unemployed people with disabilities who enter employment for 24 months of the employment.
- Supported Employment programme has been approved by the Ministry of Cyprus in 1995 and funded via the *Supported Employment Scheme*. Supported Employment was initiated upon the observation of the difficulty of persons with disabilities who were participating in the sheltered workshops programme to enter the labour market. The programme sought to address this issue by introducing job coaching, whereby the coach supports the person with disability in matching their skills to the employee’s requirements, followed by training in the place of work provided by the instructor. Certified non-governmental organisations can apply via the scheme to receive funding covering the expenditure of the employment of a job coach who should provide support to a min. of 5 persons. (Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, 2022b).
- The *Law for Recruitment of Trained Blind Telephone Operator* is prioritising the employment of qualified, visually impaired telephonists in the public sector.
- The exemption from income criteria are granted to the persons with disabilities and to the employers under certain conditions by Department of Social Welfare.

- The reimbursement of up to 1000 euro to employers for the arrangements undertaken to assist severely disabled persons.
- Persons with disabilities are also beneficiaries of broader employment schemes, such as the ones open to young people (NEET) or those incentivising training and apprenticeship (Mavrou et al., 2019).

2 Participation in working life of people with intellectual disabilities

People with intellectual disabilities are protected by the aforementioned legislation equally to those who are experiencing other forms of disability. Nonetheless, to ensure that their specific needs are addressed, additional laws have been published in Cyprus, as well as specific authorities have been designated to monitor actions undertaken by public and private organisations, to ensure the inclusion in the society of the people with intellectual disabilities.

The engagement in working life of people with intellectual disabilities often happens within sheltered workshops, which fulfil educational, therapeutic and vocational purposes. Those workshops primarily deliver creative activities; however, some are designated to produce items which are later sold by the organisations, benefiting both the trainees and the organisations. It has been noted however, that the workshops do not provide sufficient opportunities for the trainees to strive towards autonomous, self-sufficient lives. For this reason, the introduction of programmes which support the transition from the sheltered workshops to open labour market has been a widely spread practice in Cyprus, incentivised by relevant governmental schemes.

2.1 Definition of people with intellectual disabilities and the legal framework.

Key national laws and international conventions ratified in Cyprus include intellectual disability as a recognised form of disability, hence the legal framework outlined in points 1.1 and 1.2 applies to persons with intellectual disabilities. Moreover, the *1989 and 2018 Persons with Intellectual Disabilities Law (Law 117/1989 & 11(I)2018)* provides a definition of the intellectual disability as:

“Person with an intellectual disability means a person who has long-term mental disorders which, in interaction with various barriers, may prevent their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” (Law 117/1989 & 11(I)2018)

Laws 117/1989 and 11(I)2018 ensure the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities for social security, social welfare, education and vocational rehabilitation. Moreover, through this legislation the Committee for the Protection of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (CPPID) is appointed to advocate and promote rights of people with an intellectual disability. Besides fulfilling their duties to register persons with intellectual disability and monitor issues faced by them, the Committee is obliged to evaluate and design national programs that address the rights of said persons and publish annual reports describing the results. Additionally, the non-profit Pancyprrian Parents Association for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PASYGOANA), has been formed in 1983 to defend and protect the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities.

The total number of persons with intellectual disabilities registered in Cyprus was 2739 at the end of 2021. Out of those 1717 persons were between 21 to 61 years of age (Committee for the Protection of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, 2021). Nonetheless, in 2021, only 290 of those people (17%), were employed in the open labour market, with over a half taking part in the Supported Employment programme (Table 2.). Furthermore, the employment of people with intellectual disabilities differs by gender, with less women (21%) than men (47%) working in the open labour market (Committee for the Protection of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, 2021). The location can also be

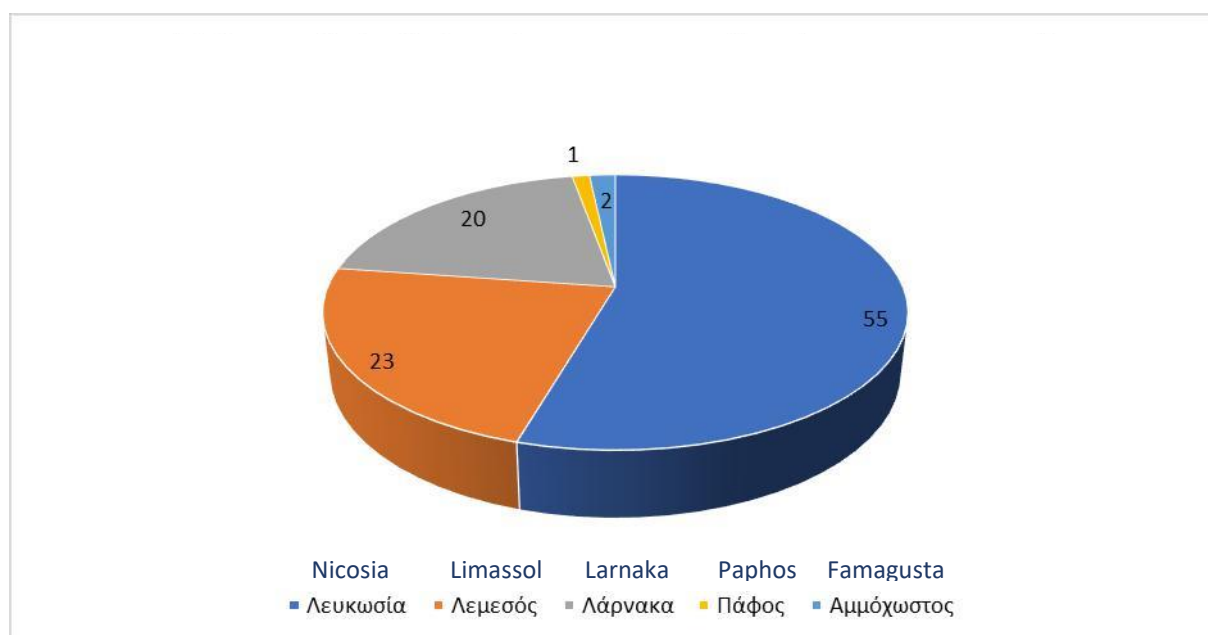
identified as a potential obstacle; as it can be seen from Graph 1., the largest percentage of employment occurs in Nicosia district (55%), followed by Limassol (23%), Larnaca (20%), Famagusta (2%) and the lowest being Paphos district (1 %).

Table 2. Employment of the people with intellectual disabilities in the open labour market.

People employed in the open labour market	No. of people	%
Receiving the Job Coach support	176	61
Not receiving the support	114	39
Total	290	100

Committee for the Protection of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (2021)

Graph 1. Supported Employment according to the region.



Committee for the Protection of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (2021)

2.2 The system of the sheltered workshops

Sheltered workshops in Cyprus are managed by certified non-governmental organisations such as Christou Steliou Ioannou Foundation, Skapaneas Club, Centre Agios Lazaros, Agios Stefanos Foundation and other smaller organisations. Additionally, governmental organisation, the Centre for the Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (CVRPD) operating under the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (2013) managed two sheltered workshops, however since 2012 the Centre has been modernized to promote integration into the open labour market, with fewer participants attending the workshop activities.

CVRPD has been established as a national centre and its funding is secured via the following legislation: *Special Fund of the Center for Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities Law of 2000 and Amending Law (Law 102 (I) 2010)*. The legislation specifies the purpose of the organisation being the promotion of vocational training and employment of people with disabilities through the programmes including establishment and operation of production workshops (sheltered workshops) inside and outside of the center; employment programmes in the open labour market; creation, operation and support of self-employment opportunities; well-being and leisure activities.

Similarly, non-governmental organisations operate sheltered workshops alongside other programs that promote the transition to the open labour market, such as the Supported Employment or Pre-Vocational Training. Their establishment of sheltered workshops is however not framed by a specific legislation and the admission requirements are established by the organisations themselves, in response to their evaluation of need and capacity. Those admission requirements may include the location of the trainee, their age, degree of disability as well as the organisation's capacity.

2.3 Vocational training concept in sheltered workshops

The overview of training and employment programmes is a responsibility of the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. The department established Organization of Vocational Development and Rehabilitation to coordinate and provide funding to the vocational training programs, in the open market as well as associated with the sheltered workshops.

The provision of vocational training is incentivised by the legislation as well as the schemes in place provided by the aforementioned department and the Organization of Vocational Development and Rehabilitation. Those include *Special Fund of the Center for Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities Law of 2000 and Amending Law (Law 102 (I) 2010)* that supports the provision of vocational training alongside the sheltered workshops. Moreover, *Vocational Training Grant Scheme* provides funding of up to 5000 euro per program to registered non-profit organisations that implement or facilitate vocational education for the persons with disabilities. Training programs funded via this scheme aim to educate professionals who support or facilitate vocational training for persons with disabilities (Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, 2022).

Many of the vocational trainings that run alongside or within the sheltered workshops, are funded via the *Vocational Training Plan*. Persons with disabilities can apply for a financial support of up to 1708 euros via this scheme, to attend a training course of their choice, provided that it will increase their employment opportunities (Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, 2022e). It is further specified that such programs should preferably last up to 6 months, take place in an appropriate facility, present content adjusted to the needs of specified persons, and award a relevant certificate upon completion. To obtain funding for such a course, the applicant should have not received this grant within the last 3 years, needs to submit a reference letter from their physician alongside a detailed description of the program.

Main providers of vocational training in sheltered workshops for the persons with intellectual disability are the Special School in Nicosia and Christou Steliou Ioannou Foundation. Special School in Nicosia in collaboration with the Foundation run pre-vocational education for young people with intellectual disabilities and provide certificates upon completion of said programmes.

2.4 Counselling guidance concept in sheltered workshops

The counselling guidance services for persons with intellectual disabilities, that help them to make choices regarding their participation in the sheltered workshops, are provided through a number of organisations including the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. The Committee for the Protection of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities also offers consulting services to the said persons, their families, and organisations. Furthermore, NGOs that facilitate education within, or run sheltered workshops, often include in their services a range of counselling opportunities, such as psychological support and career advice.

However, the most important and widely practiced personal guidance service for persons with intellectual disability that aims to help their inclusion in the labour market, is provided via the aforementioned Supported Employment programme. The sponsorship dedicated towards the employment of one Job Coach amounts to 13,500 euros annually per programme. The job coach funded via this scheme, supports from 5 to 10 persons by helping them to identify their interests and skills, as well as are the initial link with the potential employer in the open labour market. During the following employment period, the coach provides further support and instruction to the trainees as long as it is necessary and required by the trainee. Further requirements of the scheme pertain to the qualifications of the job coach and reporting procedure (Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, 2022b).

Many of the NGOs that manage sheltered workshops also participate in the Supported Employment programme and encourage the workshop participants to take part in it. Such organisations include Christos Steliou Ioannou Foundation, Centre Agios Lazaros and Agios Stefanos Foundation.

The Supported Employment programme has been evaluated and cited as an example of good practice. The 2004 Committee for the Protection of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities report indicates, that in 2003, around 150 persons mainly with intellectual disabilities secured employment through the programme, whereas in 2011 22 projects were funded and resulted in the employment of 246 people (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2013). The 2004 report based on the quantitative research provided evidence that the programme has been rated effective by 69% of the employers and 85% of the employees (Committee for the Protection of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, 2004). The downsides of the programme included dissatisfaction of the employees as to the earnings and hours (only 32% employees worked above 25 hours a week), as well as dissatisfaction with the job itself (40%) (Committee for the Protection of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, 2004). The recommendations of the report addressed diverse issues that impact the programme, including lack of accessible information, the degrading charitable approach of employers, gaps in policy, lack of cooperation from the side of families, need of better skill and needs matching and programme management. The recommendations included in the report contributed to the development of the programme.

Moreover, the 'Supported Employment Country Report produced' in 2013 compares Supported Employment programmes in 5 European countries. While citing many good practices from Cyprus, the report states that the limitations of the programme pertain to the narrow field of available job opportunities. The positions offered within the programme are mainly low-skilled jobs within the food industry, contributing to the negative perception of persons with disabilities as those who are suitable only for such tasks. Furthermore, the report addresses the unmet needs of job coaches, who receive limited training and low salaries (E-C-C et al., 2013)

2.5 Transition from sheltered workshop to the labour market

The transition from the sheltered workshops to the labour market is strongly advocated by the organisations who promote equal opportunities and inclusion in the social life of the people with disabilities. The organisations that facilitate learning within sheltered workshops in Cyprus, reverberate this vision and seek opportunities through which such transition can be made possible.

The governmental bodies and organisations including the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities are aligned with this vision. Hence the Centre for the Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities operating under the DSIPD has undergone modernisation of their sheltered workshops and instead provided the trainees other opportunities which incentivised the integration into the open labour market (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2013).

The job placements which are offered by some of the schools, organisations and foundations in Cyprus who manage sheltered workshops and provide services for persons with intellectual disabilities, are arranged and monitored by said organisations. There isn't a specific legislation, scheme or a program emitted by the public bodies which facilitates such activities. Nonetheless, the schemes described in the section 1.2 of this report encourage employers to provide such opportunities to the persons with disabilities.

One of the schemes that requires special attention, as it is supporting a transition to the labour market, is the *Incentive Scheme for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities in the Private Sector*. This scheme operated in the years 2014-2020 and incentivised employment of 135 people (Department of Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, 2022). It has been re-announced by the Department of Labour in 2021, with a total budget of 2,000,000 euros, aiming to support 100 people. The purpose of the scheme is to encourage employers to hire persons with disabilities despite their potential reluctance which is based on the perception of high additional costs associated with hiring such persons. The scheme subsidises the employment of the persons with disabilities and offers the benefit of 48 euros per working day, paid to the beneficiary for the completion of each working day, regardless of the actual salary. The grant is provided for the maximum of 24 months of employment. The additional requirements of the fund include the condition that the applicant must be a person with disability, must be registered as unemployed prior to the application, cannot be employed by their family member or self-employed. The vacancy, which is to be undertaken by the applicant, has to be advertised via the Public Employment Service prior to the application. Further details regarding the scheme can be found on the website of the Department of Labour.

3. Single Case Studies of Good practice

According to the Committee for the Protection of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities there are 46 non-governmental private organisations that provide services to people with disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities, across Cyprus. For the purposes of this report 3 case studies have been chosen as examples of good practice in vocational training, counselling guidance and transition into labour market. The selected organisations have considerable experience in their field and have introduced innovative and acclaimed practices, recognised nationally and through their international collaborations.

3.1 Vocational training concept

Attribute	Single case study
Subject of single case studies	Vocational training concept
Project name	Christos Steliou Ioannou Foundation
Responsible institution(s)	Christos Steliou Ioannou Foundation in Nicosia has been established in 1983 by Stelios and Elli Ioannou in memory of their son Christos. The foundation is a private legal entity supported via public funding, delivering specialised programmes to adults with moderate and mild intellectual disabilities.
Target group	People with intellectual disabilities
Short project description	<p>The foundation aims to offer “education, employment, therapeutic and entertainment programs aimed at the social and vocational rehabilitation of people with intellectual disabilities.” (Christos Steliou Ioannou Foundation, 2016). Their motivation and vision are aligned with UN Convention:</p> <p>“The Vision of the Foundation is to offer services based on the innovative, modern methods of education and social rehabilitation of people with mental disabilities, taking into account the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, aiming to support the development of the potential of an individual to the greatest extent possible and by offering the opportunities for more equal life, close to his fellow human beings” (Christos Steliou Ioannou Foundation, 2016).</p>
Innovative aspects	In the academic year 2021/2022 211 adults have been registered in the foundation. Out of these 20 trainees attend the educational services, 110 take part in creative workshops, 10 are employed by the foundation and 75 take part in the Supported Employment programme and are employed in the open labour market.
Why is this project interesting for Include ³ ? Which aspects can be transferred to Include ³ ?	<p>The foundation aims to offer “education, employment, therapeutic and entertainment programs aimed at the social and vocational rehabilitation of people with intellectual disabilities.” (Christos Steliou Ioannou Foundation, 2016). Their motivation and vision are aligned with UN Convention:</p> <p>“The Vision of the Foundation is to offer services based on the innovative, modern methods of education and social rehabilitation of people with mental disabilities, taking into account the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, aiming to support the development of the potential of an individual to the greatest extent possible and by offering the</p>

opportunities for more equal life, close to his fellow human beings” (Christos Steliou Ioannou Foundation, 2016).

The programs and services offered by the foundation include:

- Educational Program is provided by the Center for Creative Activity and Social Inclusion within the foundation, the program provides hands on activities including personal hygiene, safety, sexual education, road safety, money management, social and emotional well-being, and independent living skills. The program is aimed to provide skills development to the beneficiaries with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities, who cannot participate in other of the foundation’s programs.
- Therapeutic and Social Program offers variety of activities to the beneficiaries of the foundation, including a specialist support by a psychologist, social worker, nurse, physiotherapist, music therapist, occupational therapist, special physical education teachers, music teacher and cooking-pastry trainer. Some of the activities are delivered in collaboration with Adult Education Centers of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth.
- Boarding House hosts 12 trainees, who do not have the possibility to travel to the facilities daily from their homes. The trainees stay in facilities form Monday to Friday and travel home for the weekend.
- The foundation actively takes part in the Erasmus+ Programmes to share their expertise and learn from other organisations on the European level.
- Employment and Rehabilitation Program.

The Employment and Rehabilitation Program in the Christos Steliou Ioannou Foundation requires a special attention of this report as it indicates good practices in relation to the vocational training within sheltered workshops as well as practices supporting the transition to the open labour market.

The Employment and Rehabilitation Program takes place within eight sheltered workshops: six creative workshops, basket making workshop and production assembly workshop. The purpose of the workshops is to encourage creativity and to prepare the trainees for the employment in the open labour market. This programme is specifically designed for the trainees who either need further training before they can join the open labour market or who do not have work opportunities at a given moment. The focus of the programme is to facilitate activities within Creative Workshops which are of relevance to the job market. The Foundation is continuously reviewing provided activities to match the needs of the employers and interests of the trainees. Thus, in 2021 two new workshops have been formed and the number of trainees in each workshop reduced to provide a more personalised assistance (Christou Steliou Ioannou Foundation, 2021).

	<p>Outside of the workshops the trainees can participate in the sale of some of their products, such as via the pastry shop operated through social media. Moreover, thanks to the Foundation's collaboration with many private businesses, such as bakeries, car wash, bookstores, coffee shops, sports venues and more, trainees who completed the pre-vocational training in the sheltered workshops, can undertake work in real working conditions. Those of the trainees who want to and are ready to enter the job market take part in placements via Trial Employment Program or undertake a job via the Supported Employment programme. The Trial Employment Program currently supports work placements of 11 trainees in factories or supermarkets. The participating trainees are receiving support from the guidance officers during their placements and learn social and practical skills necessary in the work environment outside of the foundation's facilities. The participation in the Supported Employment programme, which entails undertaking a job and receiving guidance, is also available to the trainees previously attending the workshops. The trainees can always go back to take part in the foundation's activities if they lost their job.</p>
Link to project information	https://ioannoufoundation.org/en/

3.2 Counselling guidance concept

Attribute	Single case study
Subject of single case studies	Counselling guidance concept
Project name	The Agios Stefanos Foundation
Responsible institution(s)	The organisation provided services through the Social Welfare Services Program since 1996. Moreover, it launched many employment programmes in collaboration with the Labour Department and the Social Inclusion Department within the organised framework of the foundation, and in 1998 started a personalised guidance program through the Supported Employment Scheme to help persons with disabilities enter the labour market.
Target group	People with intellectual disabilities
Short project description	<p>The Agios Stefanos Foundation (https://agiosstefanos.org/) in Limassol is a boarding school providing education, entertainment, housing, creative education in the sheltered workshops and specialised care for people with intellectual disabilities.</p> <p>The organisation was first created in 1960 by volunteers and benefactors, under a name of 'Psychopedagogical Center' and change its name to the current one in 1980, when it became registered as a non-profit, voluntary</p>

	<p>organisation. In 1993 the foundation acquired a physical infrastructure which became the boarding school, Day Center and the administration offices.</p>
<p>Innovative aspects</p>	<p>The mission of the foundation, based on the de- institutionalization approach, is to support their students transition into society. To meet those objectives, encourage autonomy and provide equal opportunities, the foundation operates pre-professional training for their students, as well as participates in the Supported Employment project.</p>
<p>Why is this project interesting for Include³? Which aspects can be transferred to Include³?</p>	<p>Currently the organisation operates the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A boarding school for adults with disabilities. • The Day Center which is an educational and entertainment space for people with disabilities. The center provides creative, cultural and sporting activities and engages in collaborative projects with other external organisations to develop alliances to fight against stigmatisation and social exclusion. • An Art Workshop and two Lab Workshops (candle and soap making) operating within the premises of the Day Center. • Four Social Inclusion Residencies where the residents have their own living spaces and are provided with accommodation, 24h support and career advice. • Supported Employment programme. • A provision of a range of services including: occupational therapy, linguistic therapy, physical therapy, physical education, music therapy, art psychotherapy, dance therapy, psychological counselling, social support, catering, education, nursing and healthcare. <p>The pre-professional training takes place within the creative activities of the boarding school, in the Department of Creative Employment, as well as within Art Workshop and Lab Workshops, which are sheltered workshops. The activities such as experimental games, storytelling, crafts, educational films, educational excursions, and discussion groups are part of the daily programme of the Department of Creative Employment. The purpose of those activities is to incentivise development of skills such as teamwork, cooperation, fair competition, taking an initiative, imagination. The activities address the central aim of the foundation which is to prepare the beneficiaries to an autonomous living by enhancing social interaction, providing the opportunity to learn and explore in a safe environment, nurturing creative thinking, encouraging expressing emotions and thoughts. The Agios Stefanos Foundation cites the values of acceptance, love, high self-esteem, collaboration as the guiding principles of the department (The Agios Stefanos Foundation, n.d.).</p> <p>The sheltered workshops operated within the foundation include the Art Workshop and the Lab Workshops which are set up to do soap making and candle making. The objective of the Lab Workshops, set up in 2021 and operating as a social enterprise is to support beneficiaries in the development of skills and abilities, while it also providing an employment and creative</p>

	<p>opportunities. The organisation sells the products of the workshop via their website (e shop) as well as during creative markets around the city. Similarly, some of the products made in the Art workshops are a source of income and increasing visibility for the organisation and beneficiaries. The Art Workshops however have a broader scope and range of activities, including clay sculpturing, printmaking, collage, craft, drawing, and aim to provide creative opportunities to all beneficiaries, regardless of skills or experience. The creative activities within this workshop have holistic objectives, supporting participants well-being, self-expression and self-development, while at the same time encouraging gaining skills such as developing fine motor skills, critical thinking, collaboration, concentration and observation.</p> <p>The foundation is participating in the Supported Employment scheme since 1998. The scheme is aiming to help adults with disabilities to join the open labour market, through the support of a job coach. Currently two work coaches with a professional background in sociology and psychology are employed in the organisation and funded via the scheme. The trainees are recruited from within the organisation and receive professional guidance including assessment of their skills, needs and wishes. It is the responsibility of the coach to find a suitable workplace for the trainees. Moreover, the job coaches fulfil the role of the ambassador for the trainees, negotiating and assuring suitable conditions and appropriate working environment with the employer through the employment. As long as necessary, job coaches offer further mentoring and hands on support, by ensuring specific needs of the trainees are met and seeking to increase the trainee's independence over time. Additionally, job coaches offer guidance in relation to other disability support schemes which can benefit the trainee's integration and autonomy. The organisation further supports the trainees by offering transport to and from workplace.</p> <p>According to Agios Stefanos Foundation, in the organisation there are currently fourteen people with disabilities who are taking part in the Supported Employment programme and working in external businesses such as supermarkets, clinics and hairdressers.</p>
Link to project information	https://agiosstefanos.org/

3.3 Transition into labour market

Attribute	Single case study
Subject of single case studies	Transition into labour market

Project name	Special School in Nicosia
Responsible institution(s)	Special School in Nicosia (http://eid-eidiko-lef.schools.ac.cy) in collaboration with Christos Steliou Ioannou Foundation (https://ioannoufoundation.org)
Target group	People with intellectual disabilities
Short project description	The Special School in Nicosia has emerged from the programme of ‘special classes’ created within primary school in Nicosia in 1973, which run until 1985. The school acquired current facilities in 2004 in the Aglantzia area of Nicosia. The school’s mission is to empower children and young people with disabilities in taking care of their well-being and improving quality of life, developing skills to be autonomous and independent, aiming for social inclusion. In the school year 2019/2020 the school was attended by 60 students, majority of them male, with 40 of the students being high school age of 16 to 21.
Innovative aspects	The Special School in Nicosia, offers pre-vocational education for young people with intellectual disabilities, and can be cited as a great example supporting the transition into labour market.
Why is this project interesting for Include ³ ? Which aspects can be transferred to Include ³ ?	<p>The objectives of the school are listed (Special School in Nicosia, 2022) as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of abilities in the areas of self-care, socialization, communication, mobility and cognitive ability. • Development of skills which promote social inclusion and independence, including vocational rehabilitation . • Support in the self-development, emotional well-being and socially acceptable behaviour. • Correct waste management. • Managing and mitigating aggressive behaviours . • Road safety. <p>The school runs a number of educational programs and therapeutic services in which students take part. Those include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distance Learning: archive of activities, freely accessible through their website. • General Education: reading, writing and speaking, math, social and cultural issues, social and psychological education, life skills • Special Education: art, home economics, music, physical education, carpentry, individual program of partial inclusion in the general education • Pre- vocational Education • Social Program: weekly social visits and excursions, joint activities with other schools and organisations • Artistic Program: theatre, dance, film and sport

- Therapeutic Support: linguistic therapy, occupational therapy, music therapy, physiotherapy, special physical education, psychological support and evaluation.

Beside best practices applied the organisation for the purpose of incentivising and encouraging employment through training, the school delivers pre-vocational programme for young people with intellectual disabilities. The participants are students at the Special School in Nicosia where some of the activities take place, whereas other activities are hosted within the Christos Steliou Ioannou Foundation workshops or in the collaboration with businesses in the open market. The purpose of the programme is to prepare young people to acquire general and social work skills needed to find and take up employment. There are 4 possible pathways within the pre-vocational programme:

1. The activities delivered within the school, focused on developing specific skills which can be used to secure employment. Those include training in the following areas:
 - Paper and Aluminium Recycling
 - Photocopying Center
 - Car Wash
 - Cafe
 - Gardening
 - Nursery
 - Meal preparation
 - Knitting Seats
 - Hairdressing and Beauty
2. The pre-vocational programme delivered in the sheltered laboratories of the Christos Stelios Ioannou Foundation. Those include basket weaving and assembly workshops, designed to meet the requirements of the labour market and open up possibility for employment.
3. The pre-vocational education program for students outside the school premises in workplaces in the open labour market, accompanied and supported by the school's staff. Students above 15 years old can be enrolled in this program. According to the Special School in Nicosia (2022), 35 students, 9 teachers and 5 school assistants participated in this program in the last school year. The frequency of the student's participation in the work activities outside of the school ranges from 1 to 3 times a week, and is dependent on the student's needs and abilities. The workplaces range from supermarkets, shops, nurseries to organisations in the public sector, such as the School Ephorate of Aglantzia and City Halls of Aglantzia and Latsia where students undertake clerical tasks.
4. Part-time study - part-time employment program (placement and part-time employment in positions on the open labour market with support from job coaches). This program has been implemented in the school since

	2016 and is delivered in partnership with organisations that specialise in the Supported Employment service. The students who are eligible to take part in this program attend the school on non-working days.
Link to project information	http://eid-eidiko-lef.schools.ac.cy/

4. Conclusion

With 24% of population of Cyprus experiencing limitations due to their disability, legislation promoting equality and inclusion is of primary importance. The national laws as well as international conventions that form a legal framework in Cyprus to protect and ensure the rights and equal opportunities of persons with disabilities do not fail to recognise what impact employment has on the lives of said persons. Work and employment are continuously highlighted as crucial aspects of persons' life, enabling one to participate in the society on equal level. Hence, a complex system of legislation and schemes has been put in place and is regularly monitored by the committees and organisations working closely with Labour Department and other ministries. Moreover, the civil society is also actively seeking to support people with disabilities by providing services and creating education and engagement opportunities, with 44 such non-governmental organisations being listed across Cyprus.

People with intellectual disabilities are included in the aforementioned legislation, however considering their specific needs, additional laws alongside relevant committees and organisations have been established. Besides providing education and therapeutic services, non-governmental organisations that cater specifically for the persons with intellectual disabilities seek to provide programmes that incentivise employment. Sheltered workshops that operate within said organisations are expected to fulfil such a myriad of functions. Providing a diverse set of activities, ranging from creative, craft- based and artistic, to skill and trade- based, they seek to address the interests of their trainees and to teach skills corresponding the needs of the market. In Cyprus those workshops function primarily within private non-governmental organisations, with one public institution offering access to limited activities. Following critical feedback on the ability of said workshops to provide opportunities to support the transition of the trainees to the open labour market, the attention of the public bodies has been directed on creating schemes, programmes and opportunities that incentivise employment outside of the sheltered workshops.

Programs and schemes designated to support employment of persons with intellectual disabilities in Cyprus range from providing a counselling services in form of a job coach, through funding for training courses for the persons with disabilities, to providing incentives for the employers in forms of the exemptions, additional funding to cover required physical adjustments in the workplace, and subsidising the employees' wages. Nonetheless, as data shows, only 17% of registered persons with intellectual disabilities are employed in the private sector, with over a half due to the Supported Employment programme.

The examples of good practice brought up in this report are represented by some of the most active organisations providing services, education and support in regarding the employment to people with intellectual disabilities. The impact of those organisations on the employment of persons with intellectual disabilities is indicated by the higher percentages of such employment in the corresponding regions where those organisations operate. Christos Steliou Ioannou Foundation, Special School in Nicosia and Agios Stefanos Foundation all run sheltered workshops alongside programs that help the trainees to transition to the labour market. All three organisations offer tailored counselling support to individually assess the needs of each of the trainees and to match those with the employers' requirements. They offer such counselling and vocational training support through the Supported Employment programme. Furthermore, Special School in Nicosia in collaboration with the Christos Steliou Ioannou Foundation run elaborate pre-vocational program focused on younger persons. Through the program students attend work placements in various industries, have the possibility to combine their school education with work, and receive practical and trade related training in the sheltered workshops of the school and the foundation.

The Supported Employment programme has significant impact on the employment of the people with intellectual disabilities, with 40% of those employed in the open labour market benefiting from the programme in 2021 (Committee for the Protection of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, 2019). This points to the fact that counselling services, individual support and addressing personal needs and capabilities of the persons with intellectual disabilities has a significant effect on their participation in external employment. This evidence should encourage establishing and developing other programs within sheltered workshops that put the needs, preferences and aspirations of the said persons at the centre.

Despite wide-ranging policies and support of the non-governmental organisations, the percentage of the persons with intellectual disabilities employed in the private sector is much lower than the overall percentage of the employment of the persons with disabilities in Cyprus. This highlights the fact that the people with intellectual disabilities are experiencing additional barriers and need more eloquent support in form of policy as well as on the civil society and organisational level.

Reverberating the aforementioned strategy of centring the needs and voices of affected persons, perhaps the first step to improving this situation would be a nation-wide targeted research and in-depth study on the needs of said persons, their experiences and perception of the labour market, their learning and engagement within the sheltered workshops and their aspirations. A study of such a scope was last compiled 2004 (Committee for the Protection of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, 2004), over 18 years ago, to examine the effectiveness of the Supported Employment programme. The study highlighted several barriers experienced by the people with disability, many of which continue to be an issue today as it has been reported (E-C-C et al., 2014). One of such barriers is the lack of public awareness regarding the intellectual disabilities, especially in the open labour market. Often the employers' primary motivation behind hiring a person with disability is their perception of a charitable gesture. Such approach, although it may be initially encouraged by charitable organisations, is demeaning in the long term, as it undervalues the contribution that the person with disabilities makes through their work, as well as their skills and aspirations. Through the Supported Employment programme, the organisations providing support via the job coaches are solely responsible for making contacts with the potential employers and matching them

with employees. Perhaps an initiative encouraging the employers to take up training increasing their understanding of intellectual disabilities, as well as organisational amendments by the Ministry of Labour that would enable contacts between employers and potential employees being made through more diverse means, would be helpful.

Other potential barriers which may be affecting the transition of the people with intellectual disabilities from the sheltered workshops to opened labour market are related to the limited availability of potential trades and jobs. Usually being low skilled jobs, the tasks may be of little interest to some of the potential employees, additionally contributing to the negative image of the people with disabilities. This issue could be targeted by providing wider educational opportunities for the people with intellectual disabilities to gain professional skills in a variety of fields; an education which at the moment the system of sheltered workshops cannot provide.

Finally at a policy level, further efforts could be made to introduce a policy that regulates the employment of the people with disabilities in the private sector, similar to the existing policy concerning the public sector (N.146(I)/2009).

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[HdBA – the University of Applied Labour Studies](#), as the national institution responsible for the education of specialists to work in the Federal Employment Agency, has a particular expertise on questions of vocational education and training (VET) and counselling with regards to such questions. This includes the education and training of counsellors working in the specialist departments for supporting people with disabilities who are, among other things, responsible for assigning clients into the VET section of sheltered workshops. HdBA has a specialised chair for inclusion studies and focused resources on this area over recent years.

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[OZARA](#) service and disability company d.o.o. is one of the national key service providers in the field of vocational rehabilitation and social inclusion. Enjoying indisputable status of professional authority in the field of training, employment of persons with disabilities, social inclusion, vocational and employment rehabilitation in Slovenia, OZARA d.o.o. brings crucial resources to the consortium by transferring its knowledge regarding the needs identified in the scope of project proposal. It has around 150 potential end users, and tens of professional workers and mentors, supporting these disadvantaged groups.

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[The VHS Bildungsinstitut](#) (Adult Education Centre) is the educational service of the Christian Labour Movement (CAB) in East Belgium, in the German speaking Community. The CAB is the largest social movement in Belgium. The VHS is engaged mainly in social-political learning activities, such as trainings for project coordinators for cultural and social projects, and in the ACADEMY 50+ in training for elderly people in different subjects such as politic sciences, sociology, philosophy, history, cognitive stimulation, etc. After 2015, the VHS coordinated the integration pathway in East Belgium with language classes (German) on different levels and civic lessons for all people coming to the German speaking Community. The VHS is also involved in trainings for unemployed persons in application techniques, and integration into the labour market. These are also topics that are discussed in several Erasmus+ projects.

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[SYNTHESIS](#) Center for Research and Education Ltd is a pioneering organisation which initiates and implements projects of positive social impact, with a focus on social inclusion and accessibility of services and products for everyone. SYNTHESIS is one of the leading institutions in Cyprus in the fields of social entrepreneurship and social innovation. It founded and manages HUB NICOSIA, an educational centre and a community of organisations with cultural, environmental and social aims. SYNTHESIS main target groups are people from the marginalised/ disadvantaged / vulnerable parts of the society, such as youth, adults and the aging population, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, people with physical and mental disabilities.

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[VšĮ "eMundus"](#) has a broad expertise in the development of various ICT applications. The mission of eMundus is to actively promote the development of the knowledge society by developing services related to educational activities, information technology, innovation and practical applications in education and social activities, ecology, healthy lifestyles and harmonious education in order to ensure quality cooperation.

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