



## **REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS STATEMENT**

### **16<sup>th</sup> session of the Conference of the State Parties to the CRPD (COSP16) New York, 13-15 June 2023**

Cyprus would like to highlight the importance of the participation of organisations for persons with disabilities in conferences of this high stature. Reaching the under-represented groups of persons with disabilities are of outmost importance and should be treated as such.

Persons with disabilities continue to be at risk of exclusion, as they face barriers to full and effective participation across all sectors of society. The experience from the pandemic shows us that additional measures and reforms are required in all areas of life of persons with disabilities, especially in areas of digital accessibility, and accessibility of sexual and reproductive health services, which are the sub-themes to be discussed during this Conference.

After the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2011, the Republic of Cyprus has adopted its National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2018-2028 and implements three-yearly National Disability Action Plans (2013-2015, 2018- 2020 and 2021-2023), defining the vision, values, strategic goals and actions for further fulfillment of the rights of citizens with disabilities, in all areas of their life.

Our Disability Strategy and Action Plans are linked to the concluding observations made to the Republic of Cyprus by the UN Committee for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2017 and take into account the suggestions of the organizations representing persons with disabilities.

In Cyprus, we encourage the active involvement of civil society representatives in all actions concerning persons with disabilities. Consultation between public services and the organisations of persons with disabilities is not only an institution by practice

but is also a legal obligation. “The Consultation process between the Government and other Services for issues concerning Persons with Disabilities Law of 2006” (L.143 (I) / 2006) is a Law that puts an obligation on any public service before deciding on any matter that concerns persons with disabilities, to consult first with the Pancyprian Confederation of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities. Thus, this Law gives the opportunity to persons with disabilities to participate in the decision - making and problem solving- procedures being in consistence with Articles 4.3 and 33.3 of the Convention.

The representation and inclusion of underrepresented groups of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes is important as well. The implementation of the new pilot program "Decision Support Councelling Services for Persons with Disabilities" already assigned to Cyprus Confederation of Organisations of the Disabled (CCOD) for implementation, in collaboration with the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities and its results will feed into the preparation of the new decision-making support bill. The program was approved by a Decision of the Council of Ministers dated 22.3.2022 and within its framework three Decision Support Councillors were hired to provide free services to at least thirty adults with disabilities to support their decision-making in the areas of their daily life. The results of the pilot program were already very successful and the expansion with the recruitment of more Councillors is in progress.

We also recognize that digital technologies play a central role in nearly all aspects of persons with disabilities life. Reducing social and digital exclusion of persons with disabilities is one among other goals set in our National Disability Strategy and is reached through promoting accessible Websites and Mobile Apps. The reduction of the social and digital exclusion through accessible Internet Sites is being implemented in accordance with the Accessibility of Websites and Applications for Mobile Devices of Public Sector Bodies Law of 2019 (L. 50(I)/2019).

Strengthening the accessibility of persons with disabilities to audiovisual media services is being implemented by the amendment of the Law on Radio and Television Organisations and the harmonization with the Directive 2018/1808/EC, whereas the recording and publication of accessible tourism points in Cyprus

through smart applications have been set in place for the upgrading of accessible tourism infrastructure and facilities. The full digital access to the emergency number “112” by persons with disabilities is also one action that is being implemented.

Persons with disabilities in Cyprus are also entitled to a state financial aid to buy equipment and assistive technology which will facilitate digital inclusion such as computers, computer software, cell phones, communication devices, closed-circuit TVs, and other assistive technology and equipment (to be used either at home or at work), through the “Scheme for the provision of Financial Assistance to Persons with Disabilities for the Supply of Technical Means, Instruments and other Aids” (A Scheme that is being implemented by the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities).

Concerning sexual abuse, we would like to mention that, based on the national laws, policies and procedures, the Social Welfare Services provide a range of services for meeting the social needs of citizens belonging to vulnerable groups, including provision of services to victims of violence within the family, violence against women, child sexual abuse and trafficking. These services are provided to all persons in need of such services, including persons with disabilities.

Moreover, our legislation protects women and children with disabilities from forced sexual and reproductive health procedures, such as forced sterilization under Mental Health Laws 1997-2007 where the doctor is obliged to obtain informed consent from the patient or their legal representative for any intrusive therapy. Sexual and reproductive education is provided on a regular basis by specialized NGO family planning services and within the mental health interventions, through individualized interventions and psychoeducation.

In the framework of the CRPD, we are looking forward for additional drastic measures and reforms. We are open for further discussions and possible cooperation with other states in order to expand our actions for the ultimate goal, the full and equal enjoyment of the rights of persons with disabilities and the realization

to the fullest extent possible of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.