50TH

Anniversary of

Malta Federation of
Organisations Persons with Disability

The Malta Federation of Organisations Persons with Disability (MFOPD) was founded in 1970 with the aim, among others, to bring together associations working in the disability sector and to promote and raise awareness about the different disabilities and their needs.

It is the national umbrella organisation for the disability sector.
MFOPD is a non governmental organisation and is the voice of approximately 35,000 persons with disability living in the Maltese islands. MFOPD has 34 enrolled NGOs all working within the disability sector. It is the Malta representative at the European Disability Forum (EDF), Inclusion Europe, the European Network for Independent Living (ENIL) and the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum.

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Malta Federation of Organisations Persons with Disability

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50 YEARS
OF HARD WORK

MARTHESE MUGLIETTE
President MFOPD

50 years of hard work on voluntary basis by NGO's, by persons with disability, by parents of persons with disability and by professionals are being celebrated by this special publication.

The journey was not an easy one; it was a long but successful one. The Malta Federation of Organisations Persons with Disability (MFOPD) still stands, today with 34 enrolled NGO's. During these years, the disability sector in Malta made extensive progress and improvement. Notwithstanding, a lot more still needs to be done.

The COVID-19 pandemic in Malta started during the year MFOPD celebrated its 50th anniversary and this has left its mark on its historic celebrations. All the events planned to commemorate this anniversary had to be postponed and kept on hold. At that early stage, no one knew what we were actually facing and its negative consequences. The COVID-19 pandemic has been life changing- for all.

During this uncertain period, MFOPD's members showed support and solidarity with each other. As a one voice for persons with disability, under the national umbrella organisation for the disability sector, they cooperatively discussed about the delicate situation of persons with disability and suggested best ways forward.

To date, MFOPD has thirty four enrolled organisations and nine individual members. Their sole purpose of coming together under MFOPD is to be the one voice for all persons with disability and to show solidarity with each other. The harmony and unity among the Malta Federation members stands out especially when voicing out concerns on disability issues. It is very unfortunate that during these years, MFOPD's voice was not always heeded or given the weight it merited by the authorities. It is a fact that today, we are still commenting on the same problems persons with disability have been raising for years. It is the relationships between the entities forming the hierarchy within the disability sector which are being flawed …. people in authority change, and this at various levels and entities. It takes just one person of this chain to disrupt effective communication and participation within our sector.

The very recent yearly agreements for the day to day running of the Federation with the Ministry for Inclusion and Social Wellbeing made a huge difference in our work. MFOPD has become more visible and is in a better position to be the one voice for the disability sector. The communication between the member organisations has become more successful and effective. MFOPD aims to have a better agreement so as to become more professional in its work.

As stated by Authors Liz Fosslien and Mollie West Duffy, "Diversity is having a seat at the table. Inclusion is having a voice. And belonging is having that voice be heard."

At national level, MFOPD constantly strives to make persons with disability belong. MFOPD is very grateful for its past Presidents and committee members' efforts, for the commitment of its present committee, for the continuous support of its enrolled member organisations and individuals and for all the encouraging professionals for their sterling work in favour of the rights for persons with disability.

Nothing About Us Without Us!

H.E. Dr George Vella,
President of Malta

> Dealing with persons with disability in the way we are dealing with them today is nothing but giving to these persons the rights and the privileges they always had.

Some disabilities are evident, others not so much. Where does one draw the line? What is 'normal'? What constitutes 'disability'?

Many years ago, people with disabilities were discriminated against. At the same time, they were 'pitied', in the wrong belief that such 'pity' was enough to allay any qualms of conscience felt while discriminating.

Such attitudes, rightly so, are unconditionally condemned today. Years had to pass for a different mentality to develop and take root. Education and action at national level through legislation and supportive social policies over the years, thankfully brought us to where we are today.

Dealing with persons with disability in the way we are dealing with them today is nothing but giving to these persons the rights and the privileges they always had, and should have enjoyed. We have to admit that we deprived them of these rights, privileges and respect, because of our thwarted misguided concepts distilled from ignorance, conceit, and lack of sensitivity.

Such change in mentality did not come by itself spontaneously or gradually. Neither did it evolve naturally.

It took small legislative steps, and lengthy education campaigns to start realising how cruel and discriminatory was the stance taken by society in general in disabled persons' regard.

All along, from the very beginning, organisations working in the disability sector were the standard bearers of change. Each with its own contribution towards change.

The setting up of the Malta Federation of Organisations Persons with Disability founded in 1970 channelled all these small contributions into something more robust, evident and effective.

Fifty years of activity in this field, roping in the efforts of no less than 34 enrolled voluntary organisations, helped in no small way to restore back the rights and privileges of the 'disabled'.

In the words of the MFOPD itself, this years' long mission "ensured that society in general came to understand and uphold the rights and needs of these persons, and ensured that past stigmas, misconceptions and outright injustices and lack of social, economic, cultural and political integration for persons with disabilities remain a thing of the past".

As patron of MFOPD I take this occasion to congratulate this Federation for its commitment, determination, and vision, and say how proud I feel to have the honour to be the patron of such a Federation.

My sincere wishes go to all who contribute to the functioning of the Federation and instigate in each of its enrolled organisation, wishing them all success in their endeavours to eliminate once and for all, all shreds of discrimination, or unequal treatment in our dealings with any person having whatever disability.

Human dignity and respect demand this from each and every one of us.

This is a labour of love – there is no price to it.

FIFTY YEARS YOUNG

Minister for Inclusion and Social Wellbeing,
Hon. Julia Farrugia Portelli

Fifty years is of course a golden anniversary worth commemorating. It shows the dedication and resilience of those voluntary organisations that have, over the decades, kept the Maltese disability sector thriving, sometimes against all odds. But it also augurs well for the future at a time when the sector and all the stakeholders involved, including my Ministry, are working in harmony to make of it not only a visible reality of achievement but also a bastion of equality and social inclusion that can only lead to a genuine feeling of wellbeing.

Government plays a pivotal role in the disability sector, something no Administration in the modern history of our island could possibly overlook, but awareness and real commitment are miles apart when it comes to implementing what the Maltese State is signatory to at European and international levels. We are proud to have made clear our ambitions in our 2013 and 2017 electoral manifestos and even prouder that we have stuck to our guns and started bringing them to fruition.

We had declared our intention to consult all those working in the sector and that is what we did and what we are determined to keep on doing, knowing full well that a fairer society can be established in this process of positive change expedited by the new spirit of cooperation and support whenever and wherever required.

The Malta Federation of Organisations Persons with Disability has been a rightful and enthusiastic partner in all our endeavours, be they policies and laws that needed to be drafted and put through all the channels towards realisation, as well as the direct contributions that the MFOPD has made throughout the years we have worked together and reached together goals some may have deemed impossible to achieve.

Special mention needs to be made of two most important national strategies undertaken with their full support during the public consultation process – the National Strategy for autistic children, young people and adults (2021 to 2026) and the 2021-2030 National Strategy on the Rights of Disabled Persons. I am more than certain the same spirit of cooperation and commitment will be there as we look ahead to more progress in a sector that needs and certainly deserves our constant attention. Disability is not an issue for yesterday's achievements, but a pledge in itself as we tackle new problems and new situations that, we know, never stop cropping up.

Looking to the future is the only way forward and this is clearly reflected in what the Budget for 2022 includes, in black and white, for the disability sector. Malta's fiscal allocation for the sector next year amounts to €50 million, an increase of €8 million on the previous year, making it not only Malta's most social budget ever, but it is also by far the strongest one ever for persons with a disability.

While congratulating MFOPD on this special landmark in the history of the Maltese disability sector, one feels there is so much more to come. No one knows more than these organisations which direction is best to take towards a better future, for they are the ones who experience disability from up close. It is what really makes them 50 years young and why we will look to them for sustained support, advice and allegiance.

ENOUGH STRATEGIES, WE NEED TO TAKE ACTION

In a 1991 Moscow Document, several countries agreed to "take steps to ensure the equal opportunity of persons with disabilities to participate fully in the life of their society and to promote the appropriate participation of such persons in decision-making in fields concerning them."

Hon David Agius
Deputy Leader for Parliamentary Affairs
Shadow Minister for Inclusion and quality of life

In December 2006, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In March 2021, as part of the Union of Equality, the European Commission presented a well-studied strategy about the rights of persons with disabilities for the next ten years. Whilst in June, the government of Malta published its own consultation document with its own targets and milestones for this decade.

Although consultations and forward planning are essential in every policy area, the disabled persons (also in Malta) are continuously urging policy-makers to take urgent action on several fronts at local and national level. We are aware that despite the progress made in recent decades in Malta, people with disabilities still face multiple barriers to accessing their rights and independence. We are aware also that accessibility is a factor that affects people beyond the community with disability, and therefore a more accessible community is beneficial to all population.

For a truly inclusive society, we need to put the persons with disabilities at the centre of our politics. For this purpose, we do not have to reinvent the wheel. We merely need to start implementing our action plans and deliver on what several other EU countries have already delivered.

The right to equal social, economic and political participation has a prominent place in the Nationalist Party's policy-making and decision-making process. To this end, we need to raise the bar, particularly by including the needs of persons with disabilities in every initiative and legislative proposal.

As part of a person-centred approach, a Nationalist government will be committed to invest in our educational system, to be equipped to handle the various disabilities, and for all persons with disability to be able to find employment that fits their abilities as much as possible. This will promote participation in society through careers and occupations.

A Nationalist government will be committed also to promote a barrier-free society, that provides spaces for disabled persons at the heart of an inclusive community and invest in professionals to provide specific personalised assistance, rather than spending millions on a new institution somewhere in the middle of nowhere.

Moreover, we need an independent Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) that reports to the Parliament of Malta, to hold the government accountable and to keep the government in check.

As a final note, I would like to thank the Malta Federation of Organisations Persons with Disability for all their work and support to our community, and for their continuous commitment and consultation to the development of our country, and in favour of all the persons with disabilities to reach their potential and participate fully in our society.

Address by CRPD Commissioner

> Disabled persons and their families have paved the way for the changes that we see today.

SAMANTHA PACE GASAN
CRPD COMMISSIONER

The disability sector is going through an unprecedented period of energy, drive and invigoration. Not only has the national disability strategy been launched, but this follows in the wake of a number of recent legal changes, which should gradually transform the lives of persons with disability and their families.

Some of these include the transposition of the United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD), which Malta had ratified in 2012, into Maltese law. Others include the strengthening of the tools in the fight against discrimination and of the role of the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) as the national regulatory body for the disability sector in Malta and Gozo.

In practice, what these will mean for persons with disability is that we will have stronger legal grounds to fight against discrimination; the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) will have more effective enforcement and investigation powers; a stronger implementation structure will be set up within the Government and there will be better co-ordination to ensure mainstreaming of rights of persons with disability.

These are hopeful and exciting changes, brought about after years of work from all those involved in the sector. But policies and legislation alone will not bring about tangible change, not unless persons with a disability and their families also get on board with them. One way of doing this is by filing reports with the Commission when persons with a disability feel that they have been discriminated against on the basis of disability. The Commission then acts on their behalf to investigate their claims and ensure that the rights of persons with a disability are safeguarded.

As the national regulatory body for disability in Malta and Gozo, the Commission's main role is to safeguard the rights and obligations of disabled people. We work to slowly change the fabric of society so that it will gradually come to understand and accept difference, removing social and economic barriers in the process.

Much, much remains to be done. But we must also remember how much has been achieved. Nowadays, disabled people want to lead happy and independent lives: they want to succeed in education, get a job and have a fulfilling career, live independently, build a family, enjoy life and be autonomous.

It is these expectations which have provided - and continue to act as - impetus for change. By refusing to accept discrimination; by organizing themselves and channeling the energy of their members into creative solutions for the whole sector and by bringing their concerns to the attention of policymakers, disabled persons and their families have paved the way for the changes that we see today.

As a Commission, our role is to ensure that more and more disabled people are granted equal opportunities to live the life they would like to lead. But the various organisations working in the sector also have a vital role to play. By coming together, staying in touch with persons with disability and their families, mobilizing their energy and guiding and supporting, they can spearhead further change.

For this, we thank them all, particularly the Malta Federation of Organisations Persons with Disability (MFOPD) which is commemorating the 50th anniversary of its setting up. By working together, we can ensure that the policies and legislation we come up with, truly reflect and improve the reality of everyday life for persons with a disability.

UNION OF EQUALITY: A NEW EU STRATEGY FOR THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

European Commissioner for Equality,
Helena Dalli

As European Commissioner for Equality, I am working towards a Union of Equality, where citizens – in all their diversity – are included, can assert their rights, are able to reach their full potential, and live freely and equally with others.

Much has already been done to make this Union of Equality a tangible reality. Since the beginning of this European Commission's mandate in 2019, we unveiled a series of strategies which pave the way to concrete legislative and policy action both at the EU and national levels.

In 2020, we presented the European Union's Gender Equality Strategy, the LGBTIQ equality strategy, the EU Anti-Racism action plan and the EU Roma Strategic Framework. In 2021, we adopted our Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

To leave no-one behind, all strategies have an intersectional approach, addressing the increased multiple discrimination that may be experienced on different personal characteristics, one's socioeconomic status and other grounds.

Ten years ago, the European Union ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It is the first human rights convention that the EU became party to, opening a new era in which respect and responsibility towards the rights of persons with disabilities is both a moral and a legal duty.

Over the past decade, the EU and its Member States have worked to deliver on their obligations under the Convention. For the EU, this means ensuring that EU rules, policies and programmes are inclusive of persons with disabilities, fully respect the Convention and promote an inclusive Europe.

The new Strategy thus provides a framework for action at the EU level to turn the rights enshrined in the UNCRPD into reality in the years to come. It is our joint tool to improve the lives of persons with disabilities in the EU and beyond.

In 2017, the European Pillar of Social Rights was jointly proclaimed by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission, with several principles that specifically relate to persons with disabilities.

At the Social Summit on 7-8 May 2021 in Porto, EU leaders reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring equal opportunities for all and that no-one is left behind. They recognised the Action Plan presented by the Commission in March 2021 as useful guidance for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Another major milestone was the adoption of the European Accessibility Act in 2019, requiring products and services such as phones, e-books and banking services to be accessible so that they can be used by persons with disabilities. This is now being turned into national law.

As inequalities widen and become more apparent in different sectors as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the urgency for implementing the existing instruments and taking further action has increased.

When schools were closed, online classes, learning material and equipment were not always accessible to students with disabilities. Teleconferencing, working from home and online shopping too presented obstacles to some. Even access to information on the virus itself has proven to be a challenge.

The Strategy takes an integrated approach and addresses accessibility, EU rights, quality of life and living independently, equal access and non-discrimination, global action, leading by example as a public administration, efficient delivery, awareness, governance and measuring progress.

These objectives will only be reached through coordinated action at both national and EU levels, with a strong commitment and political will from the Member States and regional and local authorities to deliver on the actions proposed by the Commission.

Civil society's key role

The Strategy is a clear example of a strong collaboration between the European Commission and civil society organisations.

In the preparation of this Strategy, we worked closely with representatives of numerous organisations of persons with disabilities. Civil society organisations know the needs and situation of persons with disabilities on the ground and how legislation is being implemented. They will continue to play a key role in the development and implementation of disability policies. Civil society also plays an important role in making sure that EU funds are used in line with the UNCRPD. Nothing about persons with disabilities should happen without their full involvement.

Member States should also foster the engagement of citizens with disabilities and ensure partnerships with their representative organisations, civil society and other stakeholders in the design and implementation of EU funds. This is precisely what we envision with the new Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme.

As a national organisation, the Maltese Federation of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities informs and raises awareness about disability issues towards government and all citizens, and you stand up to inequalities and challenge them. MFOPD is a member of EU network organisations, such as the European Disability Forum and Inclusion Europe. This allows the organisation's voice and the voices of the persons you represent to be heard and taken into account at the EU level. And this is absolutely crucial to make the European Union representative of diversity, and a model of inclusion and equal opportunities for all.

Your continuous support and engagement is critical for us to make further progress in Malta and at the European level.

I congratulate you on the hard work that your Federation has undertaken over the past 50 years. I value your work and look forward to further cooperating with you in the years ahead, notably on the implementation of the new Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030.

The European Disability Forum

is honoured to write this article to mark the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Malta Federation of Persons with Disabilities.

YANNIS VARDAKASTANIS, EDF President

As you may know, EDF is the umbrella organisation defending the rights of all persons with disabilities at the EU level. Our 100 members represent more than 3000 organisations in Europe. We have national members, like MFOPD in each EU member state. EDF marks its 25th anniversary next year. Our quarter of a century has seen many changes in Europe– but not as many as MFOPD. Your 50 years of action is a phenomenal achievement.

Our national members in EDF are incredibly important within the Disability Movement, and in disability policy making at the EU and national level. All EU laws are adopted with the approval of your government in Council.

In our long fight for equality, we have made significant progress in Europe. Thanks to sustained joint actions the EU has adopted legal measures to protect our rights. We can exercise our right to travel within the EU, with assistance at the airport, thanks to EU Passengers Rights legislation. Our right to employment, without discrimination, is based on EU anti-discrimination legislation in employment. The Directive on accessibility of Public Sector Websites should ensure that we can all access government websites in the future. These are just a few. You can read more about your rights in the EU in our booklet.

However, these measures pale in comparison with our challenges. In Europe, persons with disabilities are still segregated and institutionalised. We still have inaccessible railway stations, trains, town centres, schools, polling booths and hospitals. Member states still deny us the right to vote and stand for election. Our access to justice is still limited by prejudice and inaccessibility. Poverty and social exclusions are still the reality of persons with disabilities and their families.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is now the common framework for the EU and its member states. It is what MFOPD fights for, and what we fight for together. Your role at the national level, is critically important to ensure that persons with disabilities are meaningfully involved in all matters that concern persons with disabilities. Our motto - Nothing About us Without us - is enshrined in the Convention and guides how we work in the disability movement. It also places the responsibility on our governments to include us as partners in each step in disability policy making. We count on MFOPD to continue your work, and also to continue your contribution to EDF in the coming years so we can work together towards a more inclusive, accessible, social and human rights based European Union.

On behalf of the European Disability Movement, on behalf of EDF, congratulations for 50 strong years. You can count on the support of EDF for the years to come, and we also count on your continued support to ensure that Nothing about us without us becomes a reality.

Personal Assistance:
A KEY PIECE ON THE BATTLEFIELD OF DISABILITY EMANCIPATION

P.B. O'DEA
European Solidarity Corps volunteer at ENIL

TO USE A CLUMSILY PLACED CHESS ALLEGORY, PERSONAL ASSISTANCE IS TO DISABLED PEOPLE WHAT THE PIECE LABELLED THE QUEEN IS TO A CHESS PLAYER. THE QUEEN CAN MOVE ALL OVER THE BOARD, IN ALL DIRECTIONS AND IS NOT DISABLED (UNLESS SHE IS CAPTURED BY ANOTHER PIECE) BY OBSTACLES.

WITH THE AID OF PERSONAL ASSISTANCE, DISABLED PEOPLE ARE ABLE TO LIVE FULL, MOBILE AND INDEPENDENT LIVES. WE BECOME EMPLOYERS INSTEAD OF SUBJECTS, OWNERS OF OUR DESTINY INSTEAD OF DEFENCELESS TENANTS OF THE INSTITUTIONS.

This was not always the case and it may not be the case in the future, unless we fight for it in the present. From the 18th century until the conception of the civil rights movements in the 1960's, disabled people were largely out of sight, out of mind. As French historian and philosopher H. J. Stikier (1997) points out, there was a time period known as "the great confinement", when disabled people were simply locked away in institutions and private asylums. This corresponded and indeed overlapped with what Michel Foucault observed what happened to those who were labelled as 'mad.'

In the 1960's, disabled people began to grow a civil rights consciousness. Just as other civil rights movements, such as those led by Dr. Martin Luther King for racial equality sprang up, disabled people at the University of Berkeley, California began to organise. They were led by disabled students, such as Ed Roberts and Judith Heumann.

When did the Independent Living movement come to Europe?

Europe, was thankfully not immune to this, and in April 1989, activists from several European countries, including Ireland, the UK, France, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Switzerland, Italy, Denmark and Austria, decided to come together in Strasbourg to start a European network.

So, the European Network on Independent Living - ENIL was born and immediately one of the priorities was fighting for the right to personal assistance for all disabled people.

The first ten demands that were developed by ENIL show that the organisation was already strongly in favour of personal assistance, since it adopted its Strasbourg Resolution in 1989. The ten demands were aimed at European and national politicians across Europe. They stated:

1. Access to personal assistance service is a human and civil right. These services shall serve people with all types of disabilities, of all ages, on the basis of functional need irrespective of personal wealth, income or marital and family status.

2. Personal assistance users shall be able to choose from a variety of personal assistance service models which together offer the choice of various degrees of user control. User control, in our view, can be exercised by all persons, regardless of their ability to give legally informed consent.

3. Services shall enable the user to participate in every aspect of life such as home, work, school, leisure and travel and political life. These services shall enable disabled people to build up a family and fulfil all their responsibilities connected with this.

4. These services must be available long term for anything up to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and as a short term, or emergency basis. These services shall include assistance with personal, communicative, household, mobility and other related services.

5. The funding authority shall ensure that sufficient funds are available to the user for adequate training of the user and the assistant, if deemed necessary by the user.

6. Funding must include assistants' competitive wages and employment benefits, and all legal and union required benefits, plus the administrative costs.

7. Funding shall come from one guaranteed source, and to be paid to the individual wherever he/she chooses. Funding shall not be treated as disposable taxable income, and shall not make the user ineligible to other statutory benefits of services.

8. The user should be free to appoint all personal assistants, whoever he/she chooses, including family members.

9. Lack of resources, high costs, substantial or nonexistent services shall not be used as a rationale for placing an individual in an institutionalized setting.

10. There shall be a uniform judicial appeals procedure which works independently of the funders, providers or assessors, and is affected within a reasonable amount of time and enables the claimant to receive legal aid at the expense of the statutory authority.

What is personal assistance?

Personal assistance is defined by ENIL as "a tool which allows for independent living. Personal Assistance is purchased through earmarked cash allocations for disabled people, the purpose of which is to pay for any assistance needed. Personal assistance should be provided on the basis of an individual needs assessment and depending on the life situation of each individual. The rates allocated for personal assistance to disabled people need to be in line with the current salary rates in each country. As disabled people, we must have the right to recruit, train and manage our assistants with adequate support if we choose, and we should be the ones that choose the employment model which is most suitable for our needs. Personal assistance allocations must cover the salaries of personal assistants and other performance costs, such as all contributions due by the employer, administration costs and peer support for the person who needs assistance."

Characteristics of personal assistance are also set out in the General Comment 5[1], on living independently and being included in the community. These characteristics are very important, to ensure that what is referred to as "personal assistance" is not another form of care, which disabled people have no control of; such as that provided by nursing staff, agency carers or unpaid family members.

Despite the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and other positive developments since 1989, it is a struggle to get personal assistance in many countries across Europe. Instead, public and private funds, including those from the European Union (EU), continue to be funnelled by Member States into small and large institutions. This goes on despite the fact they directly break international human rights law, in particular Article 19 of the UNCRPD, which guarantees disabled people the freedom to live independently where, with whom and how they like.

What is independent living?

Much of ENIL's work has focused on making sure that "independent living" is correctly understood and defined by governments, service providers, disabled people and their organisations, and others. General Comment 5, which was adopted by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2017, provides practical guidance on what is independent living, what is an institution, what should be part of a deinstitutionalisation strategy and more.

Still, there remain many misconceptions about what independent living stands for; it is sometimes even used to describe institutions. ENIL has therefore published a Myth buster[2], which has been translated into many languages, and has been promoting a definition of independent living, which is aligned with Article 19 CRPD:

> "Independent living is the daily demonstration of human rights-based disability policies. Independent living is possible through the combination of various environmental and individual factors that allow disabled people* to have control over their own lives. This includes the opportunity to make real choices and decisions regarding where to live, with whom to live and how to live. Services must be available, accessible to all and provided on the basis of equal opportunity, free and informed consent and allowing disabled people flexibility in our daily life. Independent living requires that the built environment, transport and information are accessible, that there

1 General Comment no. 5 (2017) on living independently and being included in the community. See: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1311739?ln=en

2 ENIL Myth Buster on Independent Living (2014). See: https://enil.eu/resources/manuals/

is availability of technical aids, access to personal assistance and/or community-based services. It is necessary to point out that independent living is for all disabled persons, regardless of the gender, age and the level of their support needs."

To raise awareness about the right to independent living, and to help exchange strategies about how to advocate for independent living, ENIL has been organising the Freedom Drive every two years since 2003 – first in Strasbourg, and then in Brussels. The Freedom Drive brings together independent living activists and allies from across Europe, gives them a chance to meet with Members of the European Parliament, attend workshops and other events, and join a protest. For the first time, the Freedom Drive was postponed this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but will take place in September 2022.

Where do we go from here?

To quote the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Gerard Quinn, "Rome wasn't built in a day, but it was built"[3]. This means that we have to start putting in place building blocks to ensure that disabled people can live independently. Unless nation states across Europe (or indeed the world) fund personal assistance programmes and put them under the direct service and control of disabled people themselves, then we will never make progress.

3 Gerard Quinn made this statement in relation to the need to making concreate, measurable advances when it comes to independent living in an ENIL webinar on the 23rd of September 2021, on the monitoring of Article 19 of the UNCRPD. The webinar was part of ENIL's online "Freedom Surf." To watch the recording, visit: https://youtu.be/W7DejIR9Zmg

The pandemic has shown that disability rights still have a long way to go. For those states who have a history of locking up the so-called unwanted in society, it shall merely be stated that they are on the wrong side of history. If they wish to be on the right side of history, they must commit to legislation that allows for the full implementation of the UNCRPD into national law. As part of carrying out the requirements of Article 19, they must ensure that disabled people have full control of personal assistance, so we can live in the community and enjoy full personal growth and the wide-ranging experiences that non-disabled people often take for granted.

States should also consider intersectionality, so that women and girls, children, people of colour, LGBTQIA+, older people and disabled refugees are not omitted from these reforms. This will involve engagement with civil society organisations, which is called for under Aticle 32 of the UNCRPD. If all of this is taken on board, we might face the future together. Until then, we, the disabled people of the world will unite under the banner of "nothing about us, without us." We have nothing to lose but our institutional chains.

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HELEN PORTAL
Advocacy and Policy Officer,
Inclusion Europe

One Education FOR ALL

School inclusion is good for my daughter, it teaches her social skills”

inclusion europe

“Inclusion at school is good for my daughter because it teaches her social skills. She can cope in normal, fast environment and in contact with other people. She knows what kind of situations can come up, including the bad ones, and she learns to deal with them.”

Living in your own place. Having friends. Making your own choices. Being good at something. Belonging.

We all share these ambitions. For ourselves. For others. Parents have them for their children. Teachers have them for their students.

School is where these ambitions begin to take shape. It is where children learn to know what we think is important. It is where children learn to do what prepares them for life and work. It is where children learn to play and to be with others.

School is where the future of our children starts. “School is the manufactory of humanity,” as Comenius said.

This means we need schools where all students are together. Because they learn to work and to be with one another. To understand and respect various personalities and attitudes. To look beyond “categories” and “backgrounds”.

We need schools that are about relationships and skills for life and work. Because it is what students bring from school to their future. They learn to find answers and solutions to everyday problems. They find what they are good at and how they can contribute to others at work and in the community.

We need schools where teachers have the time and skills to support the special ways of learning each child can have. Because one size does not fit all. It never did.

Inclusive education is when everybody learns together and from one another, with education methods adapted to the needs of every individual.

Inclusive education is about going away from segregated “special” schools – while keeping the methods and practices of “special” education to support children with disabilities according to their needs. Inclusive education is for all children: with or without disability, children from minorities and poor backgrounds. They are also being segregated from mainstream education.

Inclusive education concerns every stage of a person’s life. Vocational and life-long learning must be inclusive too.

Inclusive education is not only about learning but also about shaping and delivering education, about having people with intellectual disabilities as teachers, education professionals or academic researchers...

ACHIEVEMENTS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Over the past years, a **strong legal background** was developed to support the right to education of people with disabilities.

The United Nations’ Committee on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities explains that inclusive education involves *“a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers* […]” which “*requires an in-depth transformation of education systems in legislation, policy and the mechanisms for financing, administering, designing, delivering, and monitoring education*”[1].

1 UN CRPD Committee, *General comment No. 4 (2016),* at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/57c977e34.html

A lot of **research** was done on the subject and plenty of **inclusive education policies** were developed.

In Portugal policies towards inclusive education started in the 1980's and involved a long process of consultation that resulted in the "Inclusive Education Law" of 2018. One of the main achievements has been the transformation of "Special Education Centres" into support and resource centres for inclusive education of people with disabilities.[2]

In Italy, inclusive education is required by the law and implemented throughout the country; less than 1% of students with disabilities are in segregated education settings. According to the Italian Framework Law for the Assistance, Social Inclusion, and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities no. 104 of 1992, appropriate support must be provided at all levels in mainstream education, with cooperation of all of those involved (teachers, parents, the administration...). Refusals to include a child can lead to prosecution and removal of funding, and there are detailed obligations regarding support, staff, and tailored plans for each student. Italy is the country in Europe with the highest level of inclusion, which has been rated as satisfactory by students with disabilities.

In Spain, certain regions have progressed towards the recognition of inclusive education as a right. In Catalonia, the regional government created a plan called "Learning Together to Live Together" which lasted from 2008 to 2015 and promoted inclusive education in the region.[3] In 2010, a regional law established the right to inclusive education.[4] Also, in the Basque Country, the 2019-2022 Plan for the development of an inclusive school promotes inclusive education as one which "assumes diversity as its basis for action and guarantees that everyone, boys, girls, and young people, have access to a high-quality education in equality of opportunities, fairness and equity"[5].

EDUCATION IS EVOLVING

Education is moving from a strict and rigid system, with lots of rules, memorisation and one-way communication, to a system where learners develop skills such as problem-solving, communication, and leadership.

One of the reasons to this might be the growing use of information and communication technology over the years, and is likely to continue. "Human" skills will be important more and more as they will remain the ones technology will not be able to replace.

SCHOOL SEGREGATION PERSISTS

Yet, across Europe, hundreds of thousands of children and adults with intellectual disabilities and complex support needs still do not receive any form of education. (See www.marantree.org for examples from France.) Few have access to education in their local mainstream schools with children without disabilities. For the rest, most often, the only option to access education is through segregated special education or through placement in "care institutions", sometimes far from their homes and families, or even in other countries.

2 Gerardo Echeita and Cecilia Simón, El papel de los Centros de Educación Especiales en el proceso hacia sistemas educativos más inclusivos. The role of Special Education Centres in the process towards more inclusive educational systems. Version for editing by the CNIIE (2020) – Spanish Government

3 Plan 2008-2015 de la Generalitat de Catalunya y el Departament d'Educació, Aprender Juntos para Vivir Juntos. Barcelona: Departament d'Educació, Generalitat de Catalunya, 2009

4 Ley 14/2010, de 27 de mayo, de los derechos y las oportunidades en la infancia y la adolescencia

5 Plan marco para el desarrollo de una escuela inclusiva 2019-2022, Departamento de Educación del Gobierno del País Vasco

CHANGE IN COMMUNICATION

Based on the successes we already achieved, we need to move from good practices here and there to structural changes and policies that will make the right to inclusive education a reality. One important step to achieve this is to change the way we talk about inclusive education. We should speak of segregated education when we designate mainstream schools which do not include learners with disabilities or "special" schools only for learners with disabilities. We are not alone in this fight, and we must strengthen our alliances with other groups who want the same changes as we do.

MORE RESOURCES ON EDUCATION

- THE ABCs OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
- INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
- INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND LEGAL CAPACITY
- EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH COMPLEX SUPPORT NEEDS

ABOUT INCLUSION EUROPE

Inclusion Europe is the European movement of 20 million people with intellectual disabilities and their families. We have 82 members in 39 countries. We are happy to count in our community MFOPD, which helps us towards the recognition of rights and full inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities.

ADVOCATING FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN MALTA

The Malta Federation of Organisations Persons with Disability (MFOPD) has become 50th years old. Quite an achievement. From my modest position and keyboard: Congratulations!

A lot has been done to advance the rights of persons with disabilities in Malta throughout the years and a lot shall be done still to advocate for and to contribute to develop an inclusive society in the country. A society that ensures equal and full access to persons with disabilities to the opportunities for developing their fullest potential, opportunities that others might take for granted. In better words: equal enjoyment of rights for persons with disabilities!

Several decades were required for organizations of persons with disabilities to develop a clear vision and a compass that can draw the paths of change and help us to move forward. Indeed, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2006. Since then, it has become the cornerstone for our advocacy to push for societal changes for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. This treaty recognizes the human rights of persons with disabilities, establishes States' obligations and creates an international monitoring body: the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Importantly, the Convention leaves behind outdated understandings of disability (e.g., charity and medical models) to adopt a human rights-based approach to disability, in which disability is conceived as occurring at the interaction between persons with impairments and the barriers in the environment, whether they are physical, attitudinal, informational and/or communicational, with the result of restricting their participation in social life and enjoyment of rights. Thus, the permanent task is to remove barriers and providing support to ensure participation and enjoyment of rights.

The Malta Federation of Organisations Persons with Disability (MFOPD) has the role of being the thriving force to push for legal and policy reforms in Malta for better compliance and implementation of the UNCRPD at the national level, together with other relevant and willing factors. The MFOPD is not alone in this endeavour, which pertains to a great number of committed organizations and activists world-wide, and which has also regional and international institutional dimensions. In this vein, the MFOPD is member of the regional organisation European Disability Forum (EDF), that gathers national organisations of persons with disabilities from European countries. On its turn, the European Disability Forum is a key regional member of the International Disability Alliance, an Alliance of 14 global and regional organisations of persons with disabilities. The EDF at the regional level and the IDA at the global level promote and advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities as enshrined under the UNCRPD and for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in line with the Convention, in order to "Leave No One Behind". In particular, the IDA has been and remains committed to provide support to national organisations of persons with disabilities seeking to influence UN processes, especially the work of the UNCRPD Committee.

This Committee, composed by 18 independent experts, has done its part in connection to Malta. In 2018, it has adopted its Concluding Observations, a document containing several key recommendations for Malta to implement the UNCRPD, a great roadmap that, if taken seriously by the State through legal and policy reforms and other measures, only leads to more and better inclusion of persons with disabilities and implementation of their rights. For civil society, a more precise and detailed advocacy tool. Among other things, the Committee has required Malta to "accelerate the promulgation and formal launch of the National Disability Strategy." Malta did advance and the MFOPD has provided its inputs. The strategy is now in place. The CRPD Committee has also recommended to Malta, among many other things to "amend all discriminatory legal provisions, including provisions of the Civil Code, with a view to abolishing substitute decision-making regimes" that deprive some persons with disabilities from their legal capacity, to "further enforcement mechanisms and incentives to ensure the implementation of the quota system under articles 15 and 16 of the Persons with Disability (Employment) Act", just to cite a few.

Anniversaries generally, let alone 50 years anniversaries as the MFOPD's one, are times for joy and celebration, especially after the very exceptional and difficult Covid-19 pandemic period that has kept us all apart in 2020 and 2021 and that we are hopefully (fingers crossed!) starting to leave behind. But anniversaries are also times for thoughtful reflection and review of our achievements and of the challenges lying ahead for the time to come.

Probably, 20 years ago we probably would not have believed it, but soon a specific piece of international law ratified by most States of the world on the rights of persons with disabilities, the UNCRPD, will reach already its 15th years anniversary. In the big picture, incredible advancements of the disability movement worldwide and the international community that can only make us proud to be part of such a wave. Focusing back on Malta, three years have already passed since the adoption by the CRPD Committee of its Concluding Observations, two of which has been marked by the Covid-19 pandemic. Once Covid-19 concerns can be dissipated and put aside for good, and even while that advances in putting an end to the emergency, it is important to gather renewed energy and impetus and to recreate in Malta the opportunity and momentum for promoting building back better and doing what MFOPD and OPDs worldwide have learnt to do quite well: to identify and demand the removal of barriers that persons with disabilities face and to demand measures to support their inclusion and participation in society through a constructive and respectful but still firm engagement with public authorities or, in other words since 2012 for Malta, to advocate for the full implementation of the rights enshrined in the UNCRPD.

International Disability Alliance

THE COMMONWEALTH DISABLED PEOPLE'S FORUM
AND THE STRUGGLE TO ACHIEVE DISABILITY EQUALITY

RICHARD RIESER
General Secretary of Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum

BEFORE THE COVID PANDEMIC THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE COMMONWEALTH DISABLED PEOPLE'S FORUM (CDPF) WAS PLEASED TO HOLD OUR 3 DAY MEETING IN MALTA IN FEBRUARY 2020. WE HELD A JOINT SESSION WITH MALTA FEDERATION OF ORGANISATIONS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (MFOPD) WHO ARE A FULL MEMBER ORGANISATION OF CDPF AND WERE GRATEFUL FOR THE ORGANISATIONS' SUPPORT, ADVICE AND HOSPITALITY.

At the time of meeting we had no idea how weak the commitments entered into by the Government about ensuring disabled people's right would prove to be, faced with the threat of the Pandemic. Reports from our member organisations showed that Article 11 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which deals with responses to humanitarian situations and emergencies, was largely ignored.

Disabled people forced to live in institutions were hardest hit with high infections and death rates. Eugenicist ideas that breached our human rights came to the fore with ideas such as 'herd immunity' and involuntary 'do not resuscitate notices'. In the UK which has a data set of disabled people, the Office of National Statistics identified around 60% of deaths were amongst disabled people, more than 3 times higher than if the death rate was in proportion to numbers in the population. Curfews imposed in some countries led to deaf people being shot because they did not hear shouted warnings by police.

Many disabled people went without food, medication and essential equipment in lock down and only a few Governments, despite good intentions, managed to set up adequate distribution systems for their disabled population. Many people with learning difficulty did not know what was going on and so were more at risk for want of accessible communications. Mental health issues generally got worse due to the uncertainty and increased stress, without access to treatment or counselling. In education, most children were massively disrupted and disabled children often were not catered for where on-line learning replaced standard learning, especially in lower income countries.

The lessons of all of this have not been lost on the International Community with exhortations to 'build back better'. However, the lie to this is being shown by the richest countries failure to fund COVAX sufficiently to eradicate the virus and the very real possibility of new mutations.

On climate we are likely to see the same response from world leaders - lots of rhetoric but insufficient action and funding to halt climate change. Disabled people on many small island countries are very much at risk from rising sea levels and lack of preparation for emergency plans that are inclusive of disabled people.

Generally, as the rich get richer, the ability of states to meet the needs of the poorest in their countries and in the poorest countries of the world is getting less. Their ability to move from adopting the fine words, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) or the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to implementing them is getting less. This is why disabled people and their allies need to get organised nationally and internationally to pressure and campaign for our rights. In the CDPF we use language from a social model understanding of disability. Because the discrimination and oppression faced by people with physical, sensory, mental or psycho-social impairments is largely caused by barriers of attitude, organisation and environment, our movement unites us, disabled people, to challenge this discrimination. In this contest we are not people with disabilities, but proud to unite as disabled people, disabled by society. We oppose viewing the core of our problems as arising from our impairments, but rather from the barriers in society. Our impairments may or may not be altered by medical science and

we support getting the best treatments, but the barriers are socially created and can be demolished where there is a collective will to do so. The CDPF is a catalyst to this change we wish to see across all our societies.

Having initially started in 2008, the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF) was reconstituted at a General Assembly on 13th June 2019 in New York. This was attended by representatives from DPOs in 27 Commonwealth countries (a further 4 could not come due to visa restrictions). Today we have continued to grow. We now have member organisations in 47 Commonwealth countries, comprising 45 Full DPO umbrella organisations and 42 Associate DPO organisations and are now accredited by the Commonwealth. The Assembly adopted a revised constitution, elected a new Executive Committee and adopted a plan of work.

We are the only organisation representing both cross impairment national umbrella organisations and DPOs, in Commonwealth Countries to represent disabled people's collective views and interests to the Commonwealth Foundation and Secretariat and the Commonwealth Heads of Government biannual meetings. The CDPF is now a fully accredited Commonwealth Organisation and can link to the other 88 accredited organisations, to raise disabled people's rights and our aims. The Commonwealth is an organisation of 54 countries, comprising 40% of the worlds' population and more than 450 million disabled people and with member countries that adhere to having democratic parliaments, an independent judiciary and free media, make it a unique collection of countries in a world where autocracy is on the rise.

Utilising the lockdown and the postponing of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kigali where we planned to hold training CDPF developed and ran a successful online Disability Equality Capacity Building Course. The Course consisting of 14 modules with a Course book with activities, filmed presentation and two interactive seminars was delivered to initially 428 participants from 41 countries. The final numbers were less but 86 submitted work for accreditation and more than 340 participants joined the seminars. The materials for the course with captioning and international sign language are free and available to use by anyone who wants to increase their understanding of disability rights. https://commonwealthdpf.org/training/

After 3 years of wide engagement, 196 countries in 2015 adopted the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2030 Agenda has **17 goals for sustainable development** and 169 targets. There are 11 explicit references to persons with disabilities in the 2030 Agenda, and disaggregation of data by disability is a core principle.

The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will influence the direction of global and national policies relating to sustainable development for the next 15 years. If the 2030 Agenda is going to be successful, all of the UN Member States - **193 countries - must include 'persons with disabilities'** in their national plans for implementation and monitoring. Already after 6 years, it is clear many of the key targets will be missed. However, pressure from civil society and goals, unlike the previous Millenium Development Goals, cover all countries and still provide a strong framework for action on climate change, poverty, challenging women's and girls inequality, developing inclusive education, employment, health and caring for our planet and all it's people.

The text of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be interpreted through the lens of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in the following ways:

- All references to 'equal' must be underpinned by **CRPD article 5,** which promotes equality of opportunity and non-discrimination of persons with disabilities.
- References 'for all' include all persons with disabilities - people with different types of impairments and support requirements; women with disabilities (**CRPD article 6**) and children with disabilities (**CRPD article 7**).
- All references to 'access' or 'inclusion' can be fulfilled by **article 9 of the CRPD** on accessibility which requires governments to take action to ensure persons with disabilities the right to independent living and participate in all aspects of life.
- All references to 'those in vulnerable situations' include the right of protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies (**CRPD article 11**).
- All progress made by the SDGs must be monitored through disability disaggregated data (**CRPD article 31**).
- All References to 'development and/or least developed countries' relate to international cooperation and partnerships (**CRPD article 32**).

The specific info about the Sustainable Development Goals and the CRPD Articles can be found in the resources below on the right.

Disability

- **UN Flagship Report on Disability and Sustainable Development Goals** (2018)
- **Easy read version: Executive Summary** (PDF)
- **#Envision2030: 17 goals to transform the world for persons with disabilities**
  Imagine the world in 2030, fully inclusive of persons with disabilities!
- **Infographic Disability-inclusive SDGs (JPG)** (Image that graphically shows disability-inclusion in the SDGs)
- **Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for sustainable Development** (A/RES/70/1)
- **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) UN website**
- **Monitoring and Evaluation of Disability-Inclusive Development: Data and Statistics**

Disability-related events, statements and media

- **2030 Agenda Introductory Toolkit and Comprehensive Guide for persons with disabilities** (IDA/IDDC resource)
- **Agenda 2030 and the SDGs** (PDF, easy-read version)
- **Statement of the Secretary-General**
- **Statement by Vladimir Cuk at Summit** (IDA)
- **IDA/IDDC – Press Release: Today, we celebrate**

The Goals are very useful means of holding our governments to account.

HON OLIVER SCICLUNA
PL Member of Parliament

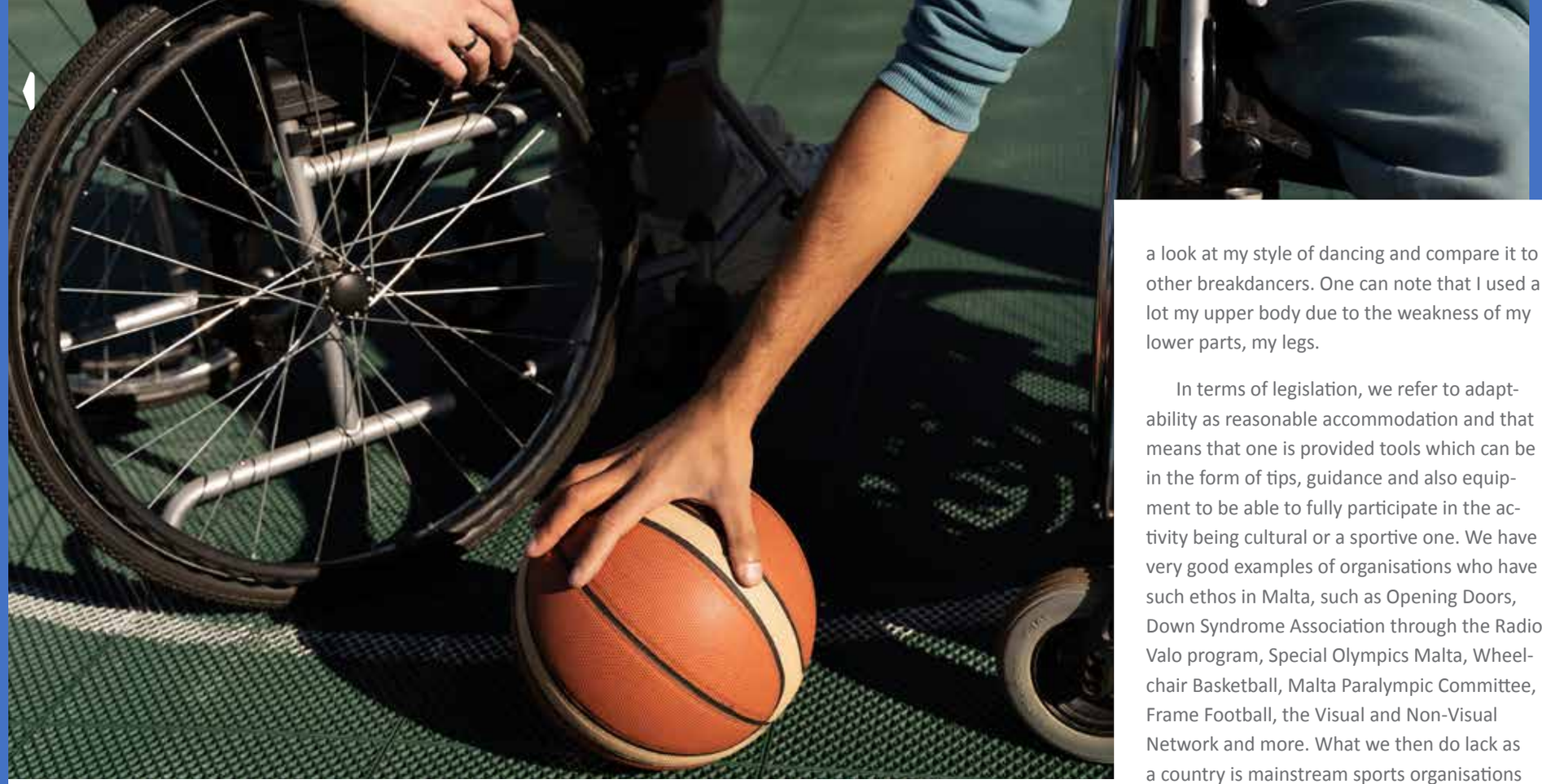
OUR RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE, TO BE ACTIVE...

CULTURE, ARTS AND SPORTS

MALTA RATIFIED AND SIGNED THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION FOR THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AROUND 10 YEARS AGO. THIS CONVENTION IS CONSIDERED AS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL TOOLS IN THE DISABILITY SECTOR ACROSS THE GLOBE NOT JUST BECAUSE IT CREATED BASIC STANDARDS TO BE REACHED BY THE SIGNATORY COUNTRIES BUT ALSO BECAUSE IT IS A CONVENTION DRAFTED BY PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES. ONE OF THE ARTICLES OF THIS CONVENTION, ARTICLE 30, SPEAKS ABOUT THE PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN CULTURE, RECREATION, LEISURE AND SPORTS. IN THIS WRITE UP I WILL FOCUS SPECIFICALLY ON CULTURE, ARTS AND SPORTS VIS-À-VIS THE PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES.

Article 30 of this convention speaks about the importance of state parties to recognize that disabled persons should have the equal opportunity with non-disabled peers to fully participate in culture and sports. It is not just essential for persons with disabilities to have access to culture materials in accessible formats, to have access to television programmes, films, theatre, cultural activities, and to access places for cultural performances such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourism services. As one can note, accessibility term has a wide meaning and doesn't just refer to physical accessibility but also access to information. In 2017, Malta made legally binding the access for all design standards, the standards for the built-in environment. This doesn't mean that the physical accessibility issue had been sorted but such legal notice gave power to the regulatory authorities to make sure that public facilities are required to be rendered accessible for all. The issue of accessible information is something that as a country we still have a long way to reach, especially when it comes to access to media which is accessible through sign language (for Deaf people) and through audio description (for those with visual impairment or who are blind).

In the past we have seen initiatives created by individual or NGOs which promote inclusion through reverse inclusion. One great initiative was the theatrical piece named Gawgaw: Panto in the Dark written by Marta Vella and Vikesh Godhwani which was supported by the Premju tal-President, Arts Council Malta, LESA and CRPD. This was a different form of Panto using a binaural audio technology in pitch dark environment. Due to the darkness, actors were only heard and not seen. To compliment this inclusive experience the main actor was Samuel



Farrugia, a young man with visual impairment. Apart of being an original theatrical piece, it had managed to bring out an important message, that arts can be made accessible and at the same time attractive to new audience. In this case not just people who are blind or visually impaired.

Sometimes participation of persons with disability can be quite complicated due to the different needs of each and every individual. I remember the time when I used to form part of a breakdancing team, with a number of successes locally and internationally. At the end of my dancing career, I decided to create a number of workshops targeted to persons with disabilities. After a while thinking about that initiative, I remember thinking that these workshops could be more powerful by promoting inclusion through them, apart from providing persons with disabilities an experience to discover the world of Hip Hop. Applications went out and a number of people applied, during the first session I felt worried since I couldn't imagine how I will be able to teach 2 kids using a wheelchair at the same time with a number of people who were either on the autism spectrum or had an intellectual disability. That shock meant nothing since we quickly adapted to the circumstances and was able to adapt for each and every student in the class. Innovation is the trick, and arts is something which is inclusive in itself since through each and every medium of art, being visual, music, dance etc one can express himself in the way s/he feels more comfortable. One example for you to understand is by taking a look at my style of dancing and compare it to other breakdancers. One can note that I used a lot my upper body due to the weakness of my lower parts, my legs.

In terms of legislation, we refer to adaptability as reasonable accommodation and that means that one is provided tools which can be in the form of tips, guidance and also equipment to be able to fully participate in the activity being cultural or a sportive one. We have very good examples of organisations who have such ethos in Malta, such as Opening Doors, Down Syndrome Association through the Radio Valo program, Special Olympics Malta, Wheelchair Basketball, Malta Paralympic Committee, Frame Football, the Visual and Non-Visual Network and more. What we then do lack as a country is mainstream sports organisations which offer opportunities to persons with disabilities.

When I used to lead Breaking Limits, an NGO, which intention was mainly to advocate for the rights of persons with disability in arts, culture and sports, we used to organise a number of events which gathered non disabled people to get together with disabled artists and sportsman. One of our main objectives was to see mainstream organisations incorporate inclusion as one of its principles. We wanted running clubs to make room for wheelchair racers to be involved with them and that is why we got wheelchair racers and participated in a number of running events and also triathlons. That is why we got non disabled people to sit in wheelchairs and play wheelchair basketball with their disabled peers, that is why organisations like Special Olympics play Unified sports (non-disabled and disabled people, playing in the same team) to show that we are open for mainstream. Unfortunately, mainstream clubs and organisations haven't yet managed to make this leap forward. This might be due to lack of knowledge, might be of the fear of the unknown or else because of financial burdens to be in a position to create an inclusive environment. This has a bigger negative impact on persons with intellectual disabilities and those on the autism spectrum since reasonable accommodation might be trickier to render.

As a country we are not really short of policies and legislation in this regard, what we fall short of is the direct support to organisations to render themselves accessible for everyone who wishes to join them. One major draw back for persons with disabilities, especially those with a mobility impairment, is transportation. Those who can't drive their own vehicle end up depending on either their family members or rent accessible transport which is costly. This is because public transport is not yet entirely accessible. Recently the Malta Arts Council has also launched the National Culture Policy and through it they are also going to publish a resource kit to support organisations and other entities to promote inclusion in arts and culture activities and events.

Culture and Sports is a language that can be understood by everyone; therefore, I remain a true believer that together we can achieve much more in these two areas when it comes to accessibility and inclusion.

ARE POLITICAL ACTIVISM AND DISABILITY COMPATIBLE?

DR KEVIN CUTAJAR
PN Member of Parliament

LET US BE FRANK! AFTER ANNOUNCING THE CANDIDATURE FOR AN ELECTION OF ANY PERSON WITH DISABILITY, I'M SURE THAT AT SOME POINT, SOME WILL RAISE QUESTIONS IF NOT DOUBTS ABOUT THAT PERSON'S ABILITY TO TAKE THE CHALLENGE. I FEEL THIS HAS BEEN, AND TO A CERTAIN EXTENT STILL IS MY CASE, EVEN NOW THAT I MADE IT TO THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENT! SO, I HAVE DECIDED TO WRITE THIS ARTICLE IN ORDER TO DEMONSTRATE THAT WITH THE RIGHT KIND OF PREPARATION AND ASSISTANCE, A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY CAN BE SUCCESSFUL IN POLITICS TOO.

So why are questions and doubts raised as to disabled persons participating in politics? People of course know that a politician needs a team of helpers, to be in many places at the same time, to keep himself informed, to meet people and also to appear in the media and deliver his message, not to mention of course the commitment if elected to a representative body. People also know that all this is already difficult enough, let alone if the politician has a disability too. Without going into the fact that disabilities and the needs attached thereto, vary, the conclusion that it's hard or impossible for a politician to perform these tasks if, disabled is in my opinion, often based on stereotypes. The co-ordination of all the said tasks, is key for the final result, but there is nowhere written that the disability variable makes such co-ordination unattainable. What really makes all the difference here, is the ability to get organised. Clearly, disability might require from the politician a stronger effort on organisation, but in my case, I find this has worked.

As stated above, one important aspect is the team of helpers. Apart from the needs related to the technical aspect of politics, such helpers have to know the disabled politician well, the needs resulting from disability and the way such needs have to be addressed. In particular, they have to know how to assist the politician, especially through crowds and to introduce him to people without appearing to be in the way. As with other politicians, people will want to interact directly with the disabled politician without much intrusion by third parties. So, the best quality that a helper should have is the ability to anticipate the need of the disabled politician and to provide the right help at the right time.

Another important aspect is mobility. In fact, every politician is required to be at different places within a restricted time span. For obvious reasons, the disabled politician at times has limitations in his mobility and it is fundamental that such an issue is taken care of. One can of course rely upon the support of helpers. However, I learnt from experience that the disabled politician will be better off if he makes his own transport arrangements.

A fundamental aspect to which every politician should always give high consideration is information and it is absolutely important that access to news is constant. Thank God, nowadays, we can avail ourselves from all sorts of portable computers, tablets and smart phones with wireless connection to internet. This applies also to the disabled, because such devices can also be equipped with adaptive technology that makes a lot of information accessible. As a result, the disabled politician can use any of these devices to keep himself informed, at any time and at any place, more or less as any other politician. Hence, no time is wasted and the disabled politician avoids the risk of not knowing what's going on.

Meeting people is in my opinion the crème de la crème stage of political involvement. Without such meetings, the politician loses out. People, especially in the Maltese context, treasure a lot the personal contact with the politician. They feel it is the right moment to get to know the politician better, what he stands for and also to express their concerns and wishes. I find that for a disabled politician, this is the most difficult part. In fact, be it at house visits, house gatherings or other events, the disabled politician will sometimes need a person that helps him. Nevertheless, from experience I can tell that the more the disabled politician becomes known, the more people will take the initiative and introduce themselves to the politician to get acquainted without expecting that the politician does so himself first. Such helps a lot, because it's not always possible for the disabled politician to make the first step. People's reactions to the fact that the politician is disabled vary, but common ones are often sympathy and admiration. Although such sentiments can be of great encouragement, the disabled politician must remember that such sentiments are more often than not roused by his personal situation and that at the end of the day he still needs to convince people to vote for him as with any other politician.

One other important aspect in politics is appearances in the media. In fact, experts say media can make or break you. In my opinion, this is very true and more so in the case of a disabled politician. I say this, because I compare the media to a showcase and as in any other showcase, the product displayed, i.e. the politician in our case, has to be in top shape to attract people. So in the media, especially where a visual aspect is involved, the disabled politician has to be extra careful, because his impairment can easily throw him into difficult situations. In order to overcome this risk, some specialised advice might become necessary. Clearly, apart from the form, the substance of the product remains fundamental and hence, a disabled politician must always see that he is prepared and well-informed before addressing any media, precisely as any other politician.

Now, so far I have focused on the political experience without going into what serving on a representative body such as a Local Council or the Parliament really means. I did this on purpose, because this part of the experience is just the final one and it can only be reached if the other aspects are properly addressed first. To serve on a representative body is a story on its own and the experience varies from one politician to the other. However, this experience also requires from the disabled politician a stern commitment, in order that he can fulfil a legislative or executive role. The process to enact Laws or to take political decisions is exciting, but can also be very challenging. So, even here, it's important that the disabled politician seeks the necessary support.

Clearly, it goes without saying that all the itinerary of the disabled politician, described in this article, comes at a cost, which is often higher than that of a non-disabled politician. To date, this cost has to be covered by the politician himself and such is probably discouraging many persons with disability away from politics. So, if society truly wants to walk the talk and attract persons with disability into politics, the way ahead is just one. Give a fair amount of resources to the disabled politician so that he can cover the cost of the extra needs and hence compete on a level playing-field with other non-disabled politicians.

POVERTY, SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITY

I HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN THE DISABILITY SECTOR FOR ALMOST 35 YEARS. MY PASSION STARTED AS A RESULT OF A GOVERNMENT SCHEME OFFERED TO SIXTH FORM STUDENTS. AT THE TIME, THE EDUCATION AUTHORITIES HAD DEVELOPED A COMMUNITY WORK PROGRAMME THAT GAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO STUDENTS TO DO THEIR 'STUDENT-WORKER PLACEMENT' IN AN NGO INSTEAD OF LAZING AROUND GOVERNMENT OFFICES. AT THE TIME I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE 'WORKING' IN A MUSEUM IN VALLETTA AND JUMPED AT THIS OPPORTUNITY WITHOUT BLINKING AN EYE.

The rest is history. My placement was at Dar tal-Providenza. It must have been 1986 when this all started – I even remember very faintly Mons. Azzopardi, a saintly man bigger than life. I have never looked back since then. My love for the sector bloomed. I ended up going every week-end and I did that for years after the student-worker scheme was over. I was literally hooked on the place. I made friends with the residents and it was fun.

Anyway, this experience spurred me to take my involvement a step forward. Since then I have worked in the sector in every role one could imagine; I was a volunteer, supported a number of NGOs, did care work, was a back-up driver at Dar il-Kaptan, I helped in the kitchen, I washed toilets and showers, I organized care programs, later on managed a care service (at Dar il-Kaptan as well), worked as a community worker and later on as a social worker and also coordinated a government social work service, the first of its kind, for a number of years.

Of course, we have seen improvement in the legislative aspects and in the development of services, albeit patchy. Over the last years we have seen a revamp of CRPD and seen a number of organizations working with, for and by disabled people occasionally taking center stage – but only fleetingly. That is not anywhere close to good enough. By now the situation should be much better. It is way too much 'stop and go'. If you had to ask me, we are still light years away from how the situation should be.

PROF ANDREW AZZOPARDI
Professor in Disability Studies & Community Development, Dean, Faculty for Social Wellbeing, University of Malta

By now;

- we shouldn't have a sector that features mostly in our patronizing telethon campaigns, belittling people and expecting them to exchange their stories for some guilty-driven donation;
- we shouldn't have an inclusion system which is accepted half-heartedly by educators, policy makers and at times parents as well;
- we shouldn't have discrimination at places of work, leisure venues and in retail with such an encompassing anti-discrimination law;
- we shouldn't have vans loading and unloading their merchandise and people indiscriminately using reserved parking bays (and no, not even for a short period of time – because they are there for a purpose);
- we shouldn't have front liners whether they are from the health, education or social welfare sector, whether it's LSEs or care workers who are clearly unskilled, unapt and unmotivated - clearly in the wrong profession – proper psychosocial assessments need to be introduced;

- we shouldn't have care workers, LSEs and front-line staff with salaries which are a pittance;
- we shouldn't have professionals whether in the social, education, health or any other therapeutic sector who ask for exuberant fees for assessments or therapeutic sessions – these people need to remember that the state has paid for most of their studies and apart from that, being decent is part of their ethical demeanor;
- we shouldn't have politicians who are unable to articulate their ideas on this sector and still refer to people as 'anġli', 'vulnerabbli', 'jaħasra', 'anqas ixxurtjati' – can't they understand their pathetic use of language pulls people down and creates an 'us' and 'them' discourse which is very difficult to untangle;
- we shouldn't be talking about village feast decorations as being an obstacle and a hindrance for disabled people who try to gambit without the risk of injury;
- we shouldn't be speaking about inaccessible pavements with all the money that is being put into our roads infrastructure;
- we shouldn't have bedlam in early intervention services;
- we shouldn't be speaking about the need for a specialized clinic focusing on the reintegration of spinal injury patients;
- we shouldn't allow the State to embolden antagonism and bellicosity between NGOs struggling for financing;
- we shouldn't have families imploding or relationships collapsing at the breaking news phase because there aren't enough support systems;
- we shouldn't have journalists and program anchors refer to disabled persons in a supercilious way;
- we shouldn't have young disabled people who are not allowed to go out by their parents or even worse have nowhere and no one to go with;
- we shouldn't have, not even one person, begging in the streets let alone if the person is disabled;
- we shouldn't have such a lack of coordination between the social, educational and health sector when disability is an overarching issue;
- we shouldn't have such high prices for special equipment knowing well-enough that people have no choice but to buy this apparatus;
- we shouldn't have assessments and therapy offered by the state provided only in the mornings (so that the professionals can do their private practice in the evening) but services should be offered in the evening as well so that children do not lose out on their education;
- we shouldn't have a situation where so many disabled people, especially young ones do not have a strong voice;
- we shouldn't be seeing so many banks, churches, government services, parties, parks, clubs, bars, shopping centers, sports venues and so on that are physically or sensorially inaccessible;
- we shouldn't be expecting disabled people to do away with their sexuality and expect them to have a life dedicated to virginity;
- we shouldn't be lacking a law that protects disabled adults;
- we shouldn't be missing out on a social enterprise legislation;
- we shouldn't be spending so many resources on large capacity homes but providing services that will enable disabled people to live in a place of their choice in the community with people they chose to share their life with;
- we shouldn't be receiving calls, 'ara tirranġalix għal job', 'ara jaranix tabib ħi' or 'ara tkellimx ftit lil...' - practically the raison d'être of this sector;
- we shouldn't be lacking a deinstitutionalization strategy;
- we shouldn't be treating disabled people as eternal children;
- we shouldn't have so little resources dedicated to research;
- we shouldn't be placing disabled people in jobs that are not of their choice.

Disability and social exclusion is indeed a very complex issue.

Poverty and social exclusion hit high and dry this minority in our society. People with disability and their families have to struggle a great extend to keep up with the financial demands that disability often imposes on the family; whether it is therapists, specialised equipment and transportation, medical and social support of many sorts and other issues. Very true, our welfare system is abundantly generous but when it comes to specialised and personal needs it often becomes increasingly difficult for the system to cope with so many demands.

But probably the biggest challenge this minority has is that of having the space in our community to position themselves on the complex issues that they are faced with. This is still a minority in society which doesn't have a voice. People keep speaking on their behalf and little do we allow for those most affected, the insiders, to tackle these issues they experience. Our patronising attitude remains prevalent and so does the lack of space they have in policy. Have things improved? Of course, they have. But if the question was, have things changed in a way that this community can function autonomously, the answer would be very different. This community struggles big time.

The lack of voice in policy leads to silence.

It leads to decisions being taken that are not commiserate with the transformations needed.

Yes, we need to push the envelope.

Yes, we need to ensure that at the heart of our strategy and the way we manoeuvre around policies allows for the community to stand up and take heart from the decisions that are being taken.

Our communities are complex entities that require our commitment. Let's face it, with all the money being syphoned in social policy, educational and health one seriously questions why we still talk about poverty and social exclusion in this country.

I believe that we have a framework that can work and there is a strong third sector which contributes immensely to our society.

So what do we need more?

Well, what is needed is a greater commitment towards social issues. We also need to ensure we have coordination. The moment these issues can be fixed I believe that we can see less cases of people at risk of poverty or else socially excluded.

DR CLAIRE AZZOPARDI LANE PH.D
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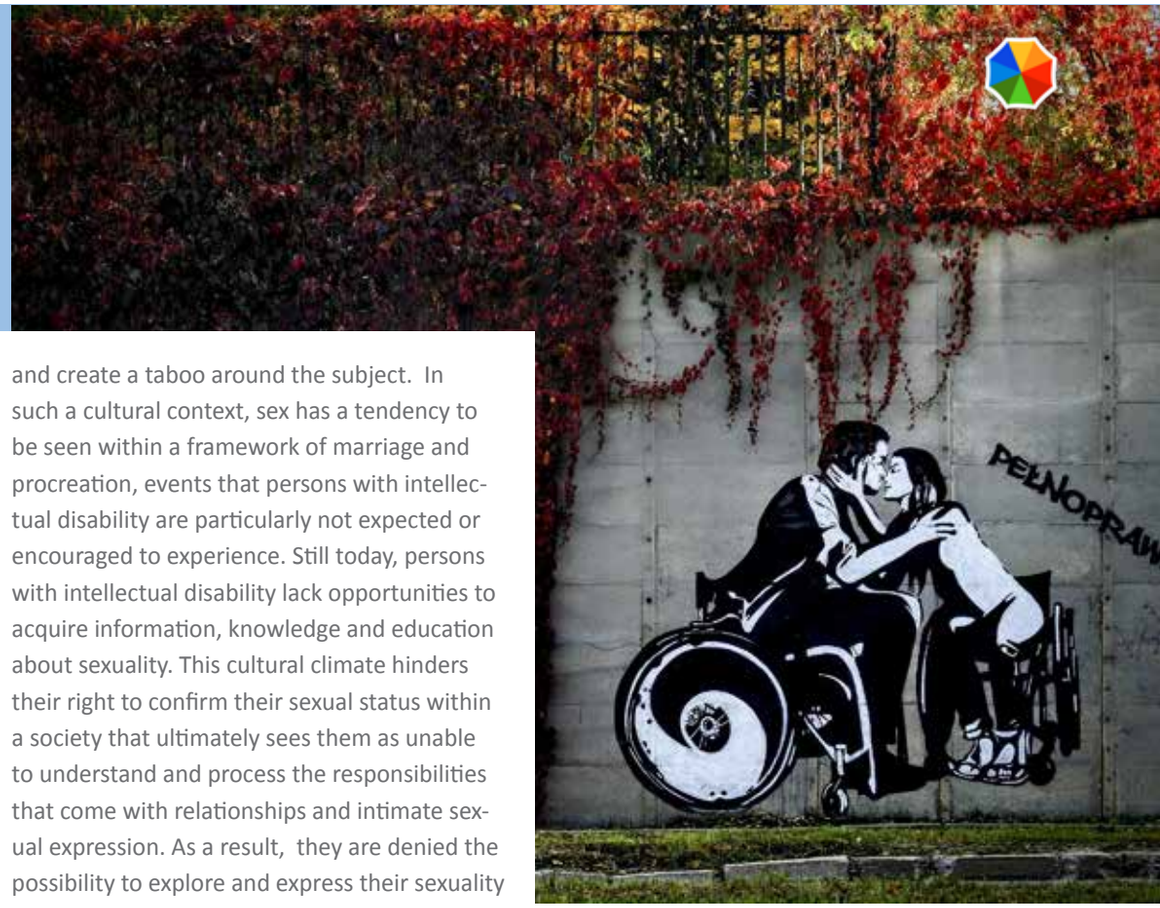
Disability & SEXUALITY



THE MALTESE SCENARIO

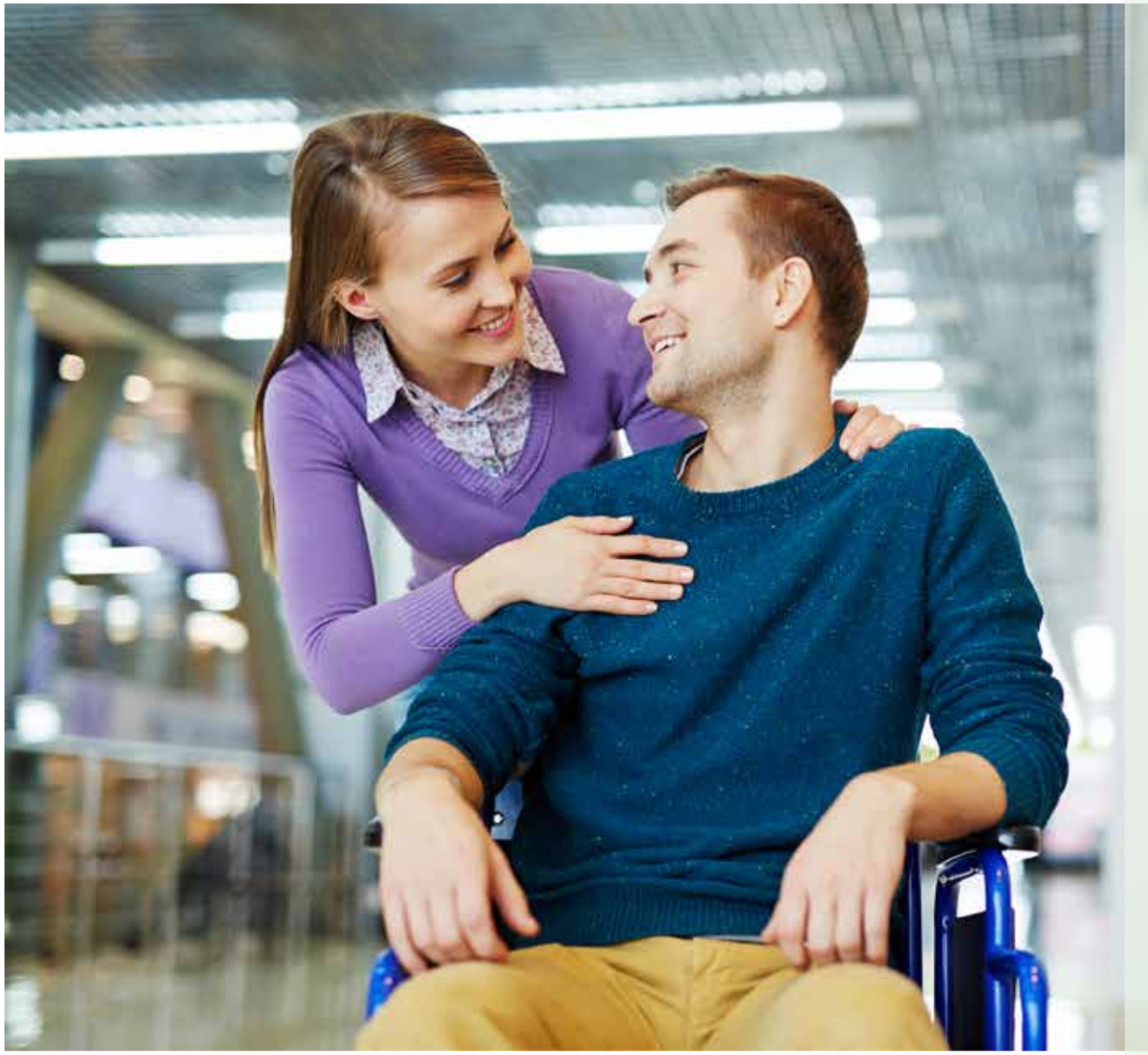
Social attitudes that lie at the very roots of society strongly influence the lives of people with disability. Social attitudes not only affect the lives of the persons directly involved, but also influence the beliefs of their parents, guardians and service providers. Disabling social attitudes and institutional structures have robbed people with a disability of opportunities, experiences and equality. The socio-cultural tendency to both infantilize and desexualize persons with disability has in turn restricted their opportunities to explore their sexuality and establish relationships, fostering a culture of caution and prohibition. This has limited opportunities for people with disability to be in social spheres and spaces from which to launch and develop special ties. Thus further inhibiting the possibility to establish friendships and engage in romantic relationships which are at times uncommon if not rare experiences.

The National Disability Policy (2015) recognised the rights of persons with disability to explore and express their sexuality and to have opportunities to form relationships like the rest of society. Maltese society has gradually experienced and consequently accepted persons with physical and sensory impairments as sexual beings, engaged in relationships. Some of these persons have married and become parents, somewhat creating a media sensation because of their unusual status within Maltese society. However, persons with intellectual disability are amongst those most affected by restrictive and disabling social attitudes. Traditional ways of looking at sexuality in Malta inadvertently carry additional cultural and religious implications, that inhibit discussion about sexual exploration and create a taboo around the subject. In such a cultural context, sex has a tendency to be seen within a framework of marriage and procreation, events that persons with intellectual disability are particularly not expected or encouraged to experience. Still today, persons with intellectual disability lack opportunities to acquire information, knowledge and education about sexuality. This cultural climate hinders their right to confirm their sexual status within a society that ultimately sees them as unable to understand and process the responsibilities that come with relationships and intimate sexual expression. As a result, they are denied the possibility to explore and express their sexuality and to establish romantic and intimate relationships.

Barriers to sexual expression are further enhanced by parental over-protection, which features strongly within the patriarchal Maltese context. Stances of over-protection re-inforce cultural norms that deem persons with disability as in need of charity, institutionalization and social control. Still today, the majority of parents resist the idea that their sons and daughters have a sexual identity, and that they could have intimate relationships. Some even disapprove of sex education, because they find it difficult to accept that their children are interested in this subject. Over-protection is reinforced when intersecting with gender norms within this context. This results in women with disability to countering even more difficulties than men when it comes to exploring and expressing sexuality and to engaging in relationships. Parental over-protection is often gender-oriented because women with intellectual disability are considered to be particularly more vulnerable and prone to sexual abuse. As a result, gender stereotypes, especially prominent within Maltese culture, expose women with disability to significant barriers associated with their sexuality.

Parents play a key role in ensuring that their sons and daughters with intellectual disability develop healthy attitudes towards their sexuality and any relationships they may embark on. Parents hold a central position and can be a principal source of sex education information

> The socio-cultural tendency to both infantilize and desexualize persons with disability has in turn restricted their opportunities to explore their sexuality and establish relationships, fostering a culture of caution and prohibition.



and support, however, they often remain cautious about discussing sexuality with their adolescent or even adult children. Many parents will confess to unwillingness to talk to their children about the subject, and tend to leave it to the school or providers of adult services to talk about these issues. Parents, who are typically pressed for time and often face financial burdens, might not consider sex education to be a parental priority. Cultural-religious influences that older parents were exposed to throughout their life, are known to result in them having less liberal, or rather traditional and conservative attitudes about sexuality, further inhibiting discussion about this topic. Furthermore, the continued dependence of people with intellectual disability on their parents keeps the relationship between parents and their offspring childlike, making it more difficult for parents to tackle adult topics such as sex. Parents are often concerned that knowledge on sexuality will increase the likelihood of displaying inappropriate sexual behaviour. Some might also believe that sexual activity will not happen if it is not discussed, or that knowledge of sexuality and reproduction may present their disabled son or daughter with false hopes and expectations. Some parents might feel that their children have enough to cope with and that to raise the subject of sex is both unnecessary and unkind. Many prefer that their adult sons and daughters engage in platonic relationships rather than intimate ones.

Since sexuality is often not a topic for family conversations, parents need to be informed about the value of discussing sex at home and also need to be taught how to approach the subject with their children. There is the need for information to be available for parents who very often find it a sensitive topic to talk about. Their feeling of uncertainty about how to address these issues is said to stem from their lack of confidence and discomfort related to the topic, as well as due to fear regarding their child's vulnerability and the risk of abuse. This perfectly normal parental instinct to protect their children, however could lead to an outright refusal to discuss sexuality and, perhaps worse, adopting an attitude which associates sexuality with negativity. Parents should be helped to understand that providing sex education to their children can help them stay safe and reduce their vulnerability to abuse. Training for parents is neither often requested nor generally available. However, it is associated with the opportunity for persons with intellectual disability to develop sexual autonomy and normalised sexual expression, and is therefore much needed.

The discourse on sexuality and disability in Malta has only recently been brought to national attention. In October 2017 the first conference on sexuality and disability was held in Malta, organised by the National Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability. The conference, entitled, Breaking the Silence, was a first step for the island at working towards Article 23 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability, that was ratified in 2012. The Article highlights the fundamental sexual rights of persons with disability, including their right to explore their sexuality and engage in relationships, acquire sexual education, marry and become parents. In the past few years, state service providers and NGOs working in the sector have been proactive in their approach to sexuality, and have sought staff training on the topic of sexuality and sex education. Others have supported young persons with intellectual disability to address sexuality through alternative artistic mediums. Pioneers Diane Cauchi and Lou Girlando in 2018 directed a performance involving young persons with intellectual disability, entitled I am Sex-Able. The expression of sexuality through the arts was further pursued by the NGO Opening Doors, who continue to showcase their performances to their audiences both in local theatres and on social media platforms.

The Maltese scenario is changing and persons with disability are advocating for their right to be acknowledged as sexual beings. Many of those who are paid to provide them with services, have also recognised this and so have some parents who are supporting their children in becoming informed and responsible sexual beings. The right to sex education, the right to explore ones sexuality in a safe manner and the right to consensual intimate relationships is another milestone in the acquisition of disability rights in Malta.

SUPPORTED DECISION-MAKING:
using the right tool to provide the right solution

Consider the situations of these two persons with disability:

Mary is 30 years old and has an intellectual disability. She can do a lot of things on her own, including washing and getting dressed, preparing a snack and using the bus. She finds it difficult to understand the value of money, to gauge whether something she would like to buy is fairly priced and to check the change. After a number of training courses and work placements, Mary has found a job. Her parents are very happy for her but want to make sure that there is someone to guide her in managing her money.

John is 40 years old and has a mental illness. As long as he takes his medication, his condition is under control. When he doesn't, he has a relapse and becomes paranoid. Recently, he fell victim to a predator who convinced him that he could protect him from his (imagined) attackers for a substantial sum of money. John was cheated out of half of his savings before his brother, who is his main carer, realised what was happening. His brother wants to make sure that John's money is protected.

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Mary and John clearly need support in some aspects of their daily lives, especially regarding decisions about how to spend their money. In both scenarios, the informal support that their family members give them may not be enough. They may therefore need legal protection to make sure that the necessary safeguards are in place. In this article, we consider what legal provisions are in place in Malta and what there should be in the future.

Previous Maltese Legislation: Interdiction and Incapacitation

For a very long time, family members of those who have problems with taking major decisions could only resort to interdiction or incapacitation orders. The problem with such orders is that they are permanent and cover all aspects of life. For example, for Mary an interdiction/incapacitation order would not just mean that she has no control over her money but that her signature on any document is worthless. That would include her signature on her own employment contract, which puts her employment at risk. It would also mean that she has no right to decide anything about her own life. In John's case, an interdiction or incapacitation order too would sort out the problem over the control on his money. However, this order would remain in place even when his mental illness is under control. He would end up not being able to decide anything even if he is capable of doing so. Using interdiction and incapacitation for disabled people is like using a meat cleaver to cut a slice of cheese. It gets the job done but it can also cause a lot of damage!

Legislation for interdiction and incapacitation is also problematic because the person being placed under such an order may not even be aware of it. They do not need to appear before a judge or magistrate for the order to be issued. Worse still, there are no safeguards against abuse from the curators who are appointed to act on their behalf. The curator is bound to act in the best interests of the disabled person but deciding what is in someone's best interest can be very subjective. A curator may genuinely believe that they are acting in the person's best interest but cause unintentional harm. There are also curators who abuse their position of control over the disabled person and there are no legal mechanisms to overturn interdiction or incapacitation orders in such cases. Unfortunately, many people are still caught in this system.

Current Maltese Legislation: Guardianship

Since 2012, another – more appropriate – option became available for Mary and John and their families, and others like them. The introduction of guardianship into Maltese legislation has been a positive step forward. In Mary's case, a partial guardianship order could be issued that would mean that she can take decisions over all aspects of her life, except for her money. And even when it comes to money, she can have an agreed amount that she can spend as she likes. For John, a temporary guardianship order could be issued which is in place only when it is needed.

Apart from the fact that guardianship can be temporary or partial, the system has further strengths over interdiction and incapacitation. There is a board that decides on guardianship orders which is composed of a judge as well as persons who come from the fields of mental illness and of the wider disability sector. The Guardianship Board needs to meet the person for whom a guardianship order has been applied for – an important requirement for the Board to get to know the person for whom they are taking a life-altering decision. The Guardianship Board can choose a different person to be the guardian if the one recommended is not considered appropriate, change the guardian if this is deemed necessary or even advice that what the person needs is added support rather than guardianship. Once appointed, a guardian continues to be accountable to the Board which means that abuse can be spotted and stopped. Very importantly, the guardian is obliged to act according to the will and preferences of the person as much as possible and to promote the person's autonomy. However, it remains a substitute decision-making mechanism. To continue with the cheese-slicing analogy, while the right knife is used the person with disability cannot choose the cheese themselves unless the guardian allows them to do so.

Prospective Maltese Legislation: Personal Autonomy

There is no doubt that both Mary and John, and thousands of people in similar situations, need support in making decisions. What is at issue is how that support should be provided. Supported decision-making legislation, such as the proposed Personal Autonomy Act, keeps persons' right to legal capacity intact while putting in place mechanisms to provide them with support. This act would allow for a system for persons with disability who have impaired legal capacity to have someone who is officially appointed to support them according to their rights, will and preferences. There will always remain the question of how to provide this support for those whose will and preferences are difficult to establish, such as persons with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities. In this regard, having someone who is obliged to consult with those close to the person to establish the best interpretation of their will and preferences can be a way forward. To return to our analogy, the person with disability gets to choose the cheese and even to slice it themselves, with support where they need it.

The Way Forward

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) – which Malta ratified in 2012 – states clearly that all persons with disability should have their legal capacity recognised. In the case of those who have impairments related to mental capacity, there should be supported-decision making rather than substitute-decision making legislation so that the rights, will and preferences of the persons concerned are fully respected. As can be seen from Mary and John's examples, the right to legal capacity is fundamental because without it the ability to exercise other rights is severely compromised. Supported decision-making legislation ensures that legal capacity – and therefore also control over one's life – is retained. It also ensures that persons like those in Mary and John's situation receive support which is proportionate to their needs, keeping in mind that a person's mental capacity to take decisions on their own can vary according to their current situation and the type of decision that needs to be taken. Therefore, using such legislation means using the right tool for the job of supporting persons with disability in decision-making processes as when necessary and solving any problems encountered without creating new ones.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities General Comment on Article 12: Equal recognition before the law: https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G14/031/20/PDF/G1403120.pdf?OpenElement

Office of the Guardianship Board in Malta: https://activeageingold.gov.mt/guardianship/Pages/default.aspx

On being recognised as persons before the law: http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2014-10-12/news-paper-opinions/On-being-recognised-as-persons-before-the-law-6736123541

Report on implementing supported decision-making in Europe: https://www.mhe-sme.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Report-ENNHRI-and-MHE-Implementing-supported-decision-making.pdf

COVID-19 AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN MALTA

IN JANUARY 2021, THE DEPARTMENT OF DISABILITY STUDIES COMPILED A REPORT FOR THE EUROPEAN DISABILITY EXPERTISE (PREVIOUSLY KNOWN AS THE ACADEMIC NETWORK OF EUROPEAN DISABILITY EXPERTS) ON THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN MALTA AND GOZO. THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE IS BASED ON THIS REPORT.

DR VICKIE GAUCI
Department of Disability Studies Faculty for Social Wellbeing University of Malta

The first cases of COVID-19 in Malta were diagnosed in March 2020. In April 2020, the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) set up a COVID-19 Disability Task Force in order to monitor the impact of the pandemic on the disability sector and to advise the government on related matters. Although a number of recommendations were taken on board, research carried out during 2020 by the Faculty for Social Wellbeing, University of Malta on behalf of CRPD[1], showed that as the pandemic progressed, disabled people and their families felt they had been forgotten. This indicated that although in its 2016 Peer Review Risk Assessment report, Malta recommended that 'vulnerable people' are to be involved in any future plans for disaster/emergency management, this did not happen when it mattered most.

The key factors that had a negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis on people with disabilities consisted of the termination of most of the disability services, the impact on the families, and the isolation experienced by many individuals and families.

1 Pace-Gasan, S., Camilleri, A., Azzopardi Lane, C., Callus, A. M., & Azzopardi, A. (2020). The impact of Covid-19 on Persons with Disability. Available from https://www.crpd.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/FSW-and-CRPD-The-Impact-of-Covid-19-on-Persons-with-Disability-Report-Final-1.pdf

Termination of Services

The majority of disability-related and therapeutic services were abruptly discontinued in March 2020 and although most of them offered some form of online support, disabled people and their families experienced high levels of disappointment and frustration. In order to offset some of the impact, the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE) set up a helpline for students with special educational needs, disadvantaged backgrounds and in need of psychological counselling. It also provided online lessons and activities for some students with disabilities with support from their parents, with some teachers and Learning Support Educators (LSEs) sending adapted work to the parents. Together with the National School Support Services (NSSS), the MEDE sent resources to Heads of Inclusion Department so that they could share LSEs. The NSSS also sent resources (mainly related to socio-emotional literacy) to Nurture Classes and Learning Support Zone teams. Online support was also provided for parents of children with autism and other disabilities. Meanwhile, Resource Centres communicated with parents on strategies to continue working with their children. Agenzija Sapport also provided online services such as weekly webinars where possible.

Furthermore, the CRPD collaborated with the Health Authorities to publish a number of documents for different impairment groups with the aim of making information about Covid-19, swab testing and mask use more accessible. These documents include:

- 'Information on Coronavirus' in easy-to-read version,
- 'Advice to Persons with Visual Impairment on Face Coverings',
- 'Q&A Resource for Deaf persons and hard-of-hearing persons on the wearing of masks and visors',
- 'Deaf people questions on Covid19 – Emergency department Mater Dei Hospital',
- 'Tips for Persons with Intellectual Disability on Matters Related to Covid19', and 'Enhancing Accessibility for Persons with Disability during Covid'[2] .

2 https://www.crpd.org.mt/resources/covid-19/

Impact on Families

Families of persons with disabilities were impacted on multiple fronts. Due to the majority of services, such as education and therapy, converting to online platforms, parents found themselves having to juggle between supporting their children to follow lessons/

therapy sessions, and continuing with their own online work. Apart from this, some families did not have access to adequate internet, if at all. Parents who lost their jobs because of the pandemic were further disadvantaged because of financial difficulties. The government introduced financial social support including employment benefits to persons with disability who could not work, and benefits to parents of disabled children who had to stay at home to take care of their children.

Other families, such as where their family member had challenging behaviour, struggled enormously with the restrictive measures of the lockdown, especially where the homes are small. Another negative impact of the restrictive measures on families occurred when the family member had to be hospitalized or lived away from the family home. The inability to visit them caused many persons with disabilities and their families grave suffering.

Isolation

Due to the restrictive measures and the inability to go to school/work/day centres, many disabled people suffered from fear, frustration and isolation. For many disabled people, these were the only places where they could socialize, and therefore the isolation was even more acute. Apart from deaf and blind people, disabled persons with intellectual or communication impairments were the ones who suffered the most, because the benefits they could have acquired via the online sessions were further limited when compared to people with other impairments.

The second peak of cases experienced in July 2020 led to the re-introduction of another set of measures, which included the mandatory use of masks in public places. This particularly affected deaf people because of the inability to lip read. Another issue related to deaf people involved the lack of sub-titles and sign language interpreters during press conferences related to the pandemic, especially at the start of the crisis. The Deaf People's Association and CRPD brought the issue to the attention of the Superintendent of Public Health and the necessary accommodations were put in place.

Another issue highlighted in the CRPD/Faculty for Social Wellbeing research report was the situation faced by persons with disability who were not considered vulnerable and who therefore were not provided with assistance to buy groceries and other essentials. As the (then) Commissioner Oliver Scicluna stated: 'Not all people with disabilities are physically vulnerable to the novel coronavirus but many are socially vulnerable and this is not being taken into account'.[3]

Mortality among people with disabilities due to COVID-19

The Health Authorities in Malta did not keep records of COVID-19-related mortality rates of people with disability (Calleja, 2021)[4]. Discussions are currently underway between CRPD and the Department of Health to see what can be done to link the Department of Health's mortality records with CRPD's register of persons with disabilities so that such data can be extracted. It is however important to note that CRPD's database only contains the details of persons with disabilities who register with it and therefore it is not representative of the whole population of persons with disabilities in Malta and Gozo.

3 https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/restaurant-tables-could-keep-wheelchairs-off-pavements.793811

4 Calleja, N. (2021). Personal Communication. Director, Health Information and Research, Department of Health, Malta.

Opportunities for change

Recommendations that were put forward as a result of the CRPD/Faculty for Social Wellbeing research included the provision of additional emotional support and training, the reduction of bureaucracy and the revision of policies related to emergency situations.

Providing psychological and emotional support to persons with disability and their family members is fundamental because the psychological impact of the past year on disabled people, their families and their service providers is expected to be long-term. This should be accompanied by training, especially for family members of persons with disability who struggled with dealing with challenging behaviour during the pandemic.

Systematic operational analyses are to be implemented to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and see what can be shifted online whilst providing the logistical and technical setups required. In the light of COVID-19 exigencies, policies need to be reviewed to ensure that they capture the particular needs of persons with disabilities during times of emergency, disasters and pandemics. This should be carried out with the involvement of, and consultation with, disabled people and their families.

ENHANCING ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP FOR PERSONS WITH PSYCHOSOCIAL DISABILITIES"

DR JOHN M CACHIA
MD. MSC. FFPH MMCFD

by DR JOHN M CACHIA MD MSc FFPH MMCFD*[1]

IN MY 10-YEAR LONG TENURE AS THE COMMISSIONER FOR THE PROMOTION OF RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH MENTAL DISORDERS (2011-2021). I HAVE HAD SEVERAL OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE PUBLIC MY POSITION CONCERNING PERSONS WITH PSYCHOSOCIAL DISABILITIES. IN THIS ARTICLE COMMEMORATING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MALTA FEDERATION OF ORGANISATIONS PERSONS WITH DISABILITY (MFOPD) I, ONCE AGAIN AFFIRM THAT PERSONS WITH MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES AND CONDITIONS ARE PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN TERMS OF ALL APPLICABLE LEGISLATIVE INSTRUMENTS.

1 Dr Cachia is a Consultant in Public Health Medicine and the former Commissioner for Mental Health

This declaration is based on the principles listed hereunder, namely:

- that the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) affirms that '*Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, **mental**, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others*' (UNCRPD, 2006, Article 1);
- that an impairment, as well as societal barriers, are the two elements, the sum total of which is expressed as the notion of disability, which might be either long-term or temporary, in terms of the social model of disability embodied in the same UNCRPD;
- that, in terms of the UNCRPD, persons whose impairment or condition is classified as 'mental', are deemed to be persons with psychosocial disabilities;
- that persons with disabilities are diverse and not defined by their impairment; and
- that disabilities may be visible or invisible, and onset of the relevant impairment or condition can be at birth or at any later point throughout a person's lifespan.

Due to the divergent, and at times even inaccurate views on disability currently held within Maltese society, my observations over the years have led me to make the following statements:

(a) within the Maltese context and in line with relevant Maltese legislation, there are various instances where persons with mental health difficulties or conditions experience disability of a temporary or a more chronic basis, and this needs to be adequately recognised and addressed in order for these persons to be able to fully exercise and enjoy their rights;

(b) there is diversity in disability, and the impact of this on the individual's life varies. As a consequence, in order to adequately address the needs of persons with mental health difficulties or conditions, who furthermore face potentially disabling barriers in their everyday lives, such persons must be entitled to apply for recognition and registration as persons with disability under the relevant laws and administrative procedures currently in place. This would also enable such persons with mental health difficulties or conditions to access services and/ or benefits for which they would otherwise not be entitled to.

(c) no person experiencing mental health difficulties or diagnosed with a mental health conditions, whatever the degree of said difficulties or the intensity of said condition, shall be compelled to register against their will as a person with disability as described above.

(d) any person with a mental health difficulty or condition who has the required mental capacity to assimilate the relative information and to understand the implications of such a registration as a person with disability should be empowered to personally apply for such registration. Persons who are certified to lack such mental capacity shall nevertheless be entitled to benefit from access to services and/ or benefits as described above. An application to this effect can be submitted by a responsible carer appointed under Article 4 of the Mental Health Act (CAP. 525), or by any other person appointed by the Courts or the Guardianship Board to legally represent such person.

In view of the above, it is recommended that the following 3 recommendations are implemented with a view to enhancing active citizenship for persons with psychosocial diabilities:

(i) the degree of functional impairment of a person, together with a person's interactions with their environment and with society, need to be adequately assessed on the basis of internationally recognised tools. An instrument such as WHODAS 2.0 is a generic assessment instrument for health and disability. It provides standardized scoring for different disability profiles. It is applicable across cultures, in all adult populations and is directly linked at the conceptual level to classification systems such as the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). It is my firm belief that such international tools should be used as the basis for any further exercises performed to assess disability and determine eligibility for benefits, services and supports in respect thereof within the local context. This methodology ensures uniformity of assessment across all types of disabilities, thus reducing discriminatory approaches.

(ii) in order to facilitate the access to services, supports and/ or benefits for persons with a mental health difficulty or condition, there should be an established single centralized body which carries out holistic needs analysis using such standardised international tools, tailored to fit the national scenario.

(iii) carers who support persons with a mental health difficulty or condition should be considered eligible for services, support options and/or benefits. There should be an established single centralized body which sets the eligibility criteria and carries out holistic needs analysis.

These approaches are deemed necessary and acceptable, in order to direct the persons to the relevant support options and as a direct consequence decrease the burdens already suffered by persons with mental health difficulty or condition and the carers who support them.

I am confident that MFOPD fully supports this position and my appeal is for a unified front to elicit these imporatnt changes which will benefit all persons with disabilities.

AD MULTOS ANNOS, MFOPD!!!

THE NEED FOR STATISTICS ON THE DISABILITY SECTOR

NATIONAL STATISTICS OFFICE • MALTA

Etienne CARUANA – Director General
with the contribution of Ms. Catherine Vella and Ms. Joslyn Magro

INTRODUCTION

It is gratifying to note that as producers and disseminators of official statistics, National Statistical Institutes are generally recognised to be important players in shaping a better world. A tangible measure of a caring nation is the attention which policy makers give to certain areas that go beyond the domains of economy and industry. Such areas very often relate to the social domain and active consideration of them ensures an equal and inclusive society for all. One of these areas undoubtedly involves statistics on disability. For some years now, Malta's National Statistics Office has implemented a disability statistics programme. This article describes the issues raised and difficulties encountered but also records the achievements and reflects on changes that will potentially help this statistical programme develop further.

Across the European Statistical System, priority to the production and dissemination of statistics in respect of a wide range of social issues is increasing. Having said that, as regards statistical production, the domain on the disability sector has still not attained the major dimensions it merits. Testimony to this is the fact that, although the European Union has in place a large body of legislation on virtually every topic, there is still no regulation which governs the collection and compilation of disability statistics in a harmonised manner. By 'harmonised', we mean data collection according to a set of rules and norms common to all EU Member States, such that these statistics would be comparable across the EU countries and therefore, be of much greater value both supranationally and nationally. This was the first hurdle met by the NSO when devising its disability statistics programme, and it has to be seen against the background of the very specific problems that characterise this domain: complex classifications of disability which do not always talk to one another; non-suitability of traditional survey methodology; and lack of an exhaustive register of persons with disability within Malta. All these factors combine into one outcome which the NSO is experiencing first-hand: there is no robust base on which timely and relevant official statistics on the disability sector can be developed.

A NEW APPROACH

As a starting point to developing such a base, the NSO turned to the work of the Washington Group. This is an international body which promotes and coordinates activity to develop measures of disability suitable to censuses and national surveys. The Washington Group adheres to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). What is the difference between the ICF concept and previous conceptions of disability? A very ground-breaking one, and one that can spell vast improvements in the quality of life of persons with disability and their future prospects. While past ideas of disability concentrated on the medical aspects inherent within the person, characterised by defects and failures in bodily functions, the ICF takes a bio-psychosocial approach that looks at disability as a crossroads between a person's ability or limitation and the wider physical, social, legislative and cultural barriers that are holding such persons back from participating in society as fully as possible. The Washington Group has designed various sets of questions. A salient one is the WG Short Set on Functioning and consists of six questions which have purposely been kept (1) relevant to ensure optimal data comparability at the international level and (2) short – a single question per function with only four response categories to ensure accurate replies. The questions relate to difficulties experienced by persons when executing six basic functions: seeing, hearing, walking or climbing stairs, remembering or concentrating, self-care and communication.

SOURCES FOR DATA ON DISABILITY

This, then, is the modern conceptual framework which guided the NSO's ideas and aspirations when creating its statistical programme on the disability sector. In their preliminary research, the Office's social statisticians took stock of existing sources of data. The outlook was far from reassuring. Various administrative registers hold data on persons with disability, but all suffer from the well-known limitations associated with administrative records – they are fashioned primarily to satisfy the needs of the organisation responsible for them. In this way, the System for Administration of Social Benefits register known as SABS is benefits-oriented. The Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) holds data on persons who register their disability to access Commission-led services. The JobsPlus registers include data on unemployed persons with disability while the Education and Health authorities also have some disability-related information. But none are comprehensive let alone exhaustive in terms of coverage of the population groups with disability, the implication being, as the NSO found out throughout its research, that certain sub-groups are heavily under-covered, especially children. Furthermore, in terms of meanings and definitions, these registers are rarely compatible, and this is no surprise since the reason behind their creation was never national coherence or compatibility in concepts of disability.

At the EU level, two major surveys collect statistics on disability and these activities bear out what this article started out with – the increasing level of attention which the EU is paying to

disability statistics due to growing perceptions of their importance, albeit much remains to be done. The Health Interview Survey (EHIS) collects data on levels of functioning and activity limitations, expressed in questions on health status, health determinants and health care use. The EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) collects data on long-term barriers to activity on account of health conditions, incorporated in the Global Activity Limitation Instrument known as the GALI variable. Within the scope of the EU-SILC, the GALI variable links limitations due to disability with the state of poverty and social exclusion. A wider reading of the data yields important insights on the state of persons with disability.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND THE FUTURE

The NSO's achievements in the field of statistics for the disability sector are there for all to see and it is not an overstatement to say that the Office has played a significant role in raising awareness on the need for these statistics among policy makers and the wider public. The NSO participates actively in the EHIS survey, where it partners the Directorate for Health Information and Research. It is also the owner and operator of the EU-SILC survey. As from 2021, GALI variables were introduced in the Labour Force Survey (LFS) with a biennial frequency. For the first time nationally, the Washington Group's Short Set on Functioning (six questions) was introduced in the Census of Population and Housing 2021, currently underway. The results should produce useful insights on disability and pave the way for further refinement and inclusion in surveys.

The Census results should also provide the holders of administrative records with guidance on how to improve their registers. In this lies the seed of positive developments for the disability sector in the future, that the scope of registers should not only be to serve the needs of the host organisation but should be designed bearing in mind national coherence (among nationally held databases) and international harmonisation (comparable information among countries). The WG Short Set on Functioning is an excellent departure point and the NSO is leading by example by incorporating it in its activities and publicising its benefits during the many meetings it holds with its partners in the context of implementation of the disability statistics programme. The Office will continue to go the extra mile to prove that statistics can truly be a prime mover for enabling groups and sub-groups to face the diverse challenges their particular circumstances bring.

Supported Employment in Malta

MR MICHAEL J EVANS
Chartered Fellow FCIPD
Supported Employment Advisor

Introduction

Supported Employment is a method of working with disabled people and other disadvantaged groups to access and maintain paid employment in the open labour market. This method of working is a proactive policy in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

This article will endeavour to explain the differences with this methodology and other support mechanisms currently being used around Europe and will provide the position of the European Union of Supported Employment regarding the values, standards and process of Supported Employment. Additionally, I will make comment regarding my observations and thoughts as regards my experiences in developing Supported Employment in Malta and my work with the Malta Federation of Organisations Persons with Disability (MFOPD) and the Malta Association of Supported Employment (MASE).

Background

The concept, principles and values of Supported Employment are based on the early work from North America which demonstrated that people with significant learning disabilities could perform a variety of complex tasks, highlighting the potential and capabilities of people with learning disabilities to participate in paid work in the open labour market. Due to the success of Supported Employment assisting people with learning disabilities to access and maintain employment, the model was developed and expanded to include all areas of disability and disadvantage.

In the late 1980's, the model transferred across the Atlantic to Europe and a number of disability organisations in various European countries successfully piloted Supported Employment projects funded mainly under European Union programmes such as Helios and Horizon.

The European Union of Supported Employment (EUSE) was formed in 1993 and has developed its structure since that time. The definition of Supported Employment in Europe is recognised as:

"Providing support to people with disabilities or other disadvantaged groups to secure and maintain paid employment in the open labour market" Source: EUSE 2005.

Values and Principles

Supported Employment is completely consistent with the concepts of empowerment, social inclusion, dignity and respect for individuals. Within Europe, agreement has been reached on the values and principles that should be present at all Supported Employment stages and activities and adhere to full citizenship rights of individuals:

Individuality – Supported Employment regards everyone as unique, with his/her own interests, preferences, conditions and life history

Respect – Supported Employment activities are always age appropriate, dignifying and enhancing

Self-determination – Supported Employment assists individuals to improve their interests and preferences, express their choices and define their employment / life plan according to personal and contextual conditions. It promotes the principles of self-advocacy by service users

Informed Choice – Supported Employment assists individuals to understand their opportunities fully so they can choose consistently within their preferences and with an understanding of the consequences of their choices

Empowerment – Supported Employment assists individuals to make decisions on their lifestyle and participation in society. Individuals are centrally involved in the planning, evaluation and development of services

Confidentiality – The Supported Employment service provider considers information given by individuals to them as confidential. The service user has access to his/her personal information gathered by the provider and any disclosure is at the discretion of and with the agreement of the individual

Flexibility – Staff and organisational structures can change according to the needs of service users. Services are flexible and responsive to the needs of individuals and can be adapted to meet specific requirements

Accessibility – Supported Employment services, facilities and information are fully accessible to all people with disabilities.

Supported Employment Process

The values and principles of Supported Employment are supported and developed by a 5-stage process/methodology that has been identified and acknowledged as a European model of good practice which can be used as the framework within Supported Employment.

Stage 1. Engagement – Underpinned by the core values of accessibility to ensure informed choices are made. The stage of Engagement involves the initial meeting with a potential job seeker and to discuss employment aspirations, motivation and possible support needs

Stage 2. Vocational Profiling – Ensuring empowerment to the individual throughout the process. The stage of Vocational Profiling is to assess the needs of the job seeker and identify their job preferences, employment strengths and weaknesses and any levels of support that may be required

Stage 3. Job Finding – Self-determination and informed choice are key values in Supported Employment. This stage involves both the job seeker and the Supported Employment service using both formal and informal methods of job finding and engaging with employers

Stage 4. Employer Engagement – Accessibility, flexibility and confidentiality are key values to be nurtured through this process. Employer Engagement will endeavour to 'match' a job seeker to a potential job vacancy. Considerations will be given to the type of job involved, hours of work, wages and the support requirement of both the employer and the potential employee

Stage 5. On/Off Job Support – Flexibility, confidentiality and respect are the key components to successful support measures. Support measures particularly refer to when the individual is in paid employment and are delivered through the provision of an Employment Support Worker/Job Coach. The stage of On/Off the Job Support often separates Supported Employment services from other more mainstream employment services. Provision of support is given to both the employer and the employee and the frequency of any support and the duration of support is usually determined by the Supported Employment service and the Job Coach

Position of the European Union of Supported Employment

The European Union of Supported Employment promotes the concept of Supported Employment as a vehicle/methodology to assist disabled and disadvantaged people access their right to work.

Whilst there are slight variations of the definition across the world, there remain three consistent elements that are fundamental to the European Supported Employment model:

1. Paid Work - Individuals should receive commensurate pay for work carried out – if a country operates a national minimum wage, then the individual must be paid at least this rate or the going rate for the job

2. Open Labour Market – People with disabilities should be regular employees with the same wages, terms and conditions as other employees who are employed in businesses/organisations within the public, private or voluntary sectors

3. Ongoing Support - This refers to job support in its widest concept whilst in paid employment. Support is individualised and is on a need's basis for both the employee and the employer

Developments in Malta

As an 'outsider' it is difficult to always understand what activities and services take place in another country. Moreover, it can be seen, to an extent, that a person who is not from nor lives in Malta, is interfering. Having said that, I have found that representatives of MFOPD and MASE have recognised that outsider experience is essential to develop employment services and have been warmly welcomed and received by members of the afore-mentioned organisations.

What has been clear to me is that members of MFOPD have not been satisfied with the employment opportunities (or lack of) for people with a disability.

My first Supported Employment connection came through my attendance at the MFOPD Conference held in St Julian's in November 2010. I was invited in my capacity as the President of the European Union of Supported Employment (EUSE). What impressed me then was the drive, enthusiasm and determination of members of the MFOPD to introduce Supported Employment in Malta and around that time I recall a report by the KNPD (now the CRPD) recommending improved employment services for disabled people.

The situation at that time in Malta inspired me to create the European Supported Employment Toolkit to define to organisations at both local and national levels as to what Supported Employment is and, just as importantly, what it is not.

Can it be said that since then there has been real progress in Malta? I have met several Ministers over the past ten years there has been much discussion about Supported Employment and yet I find that the general dissatisfaction I experienced in 2010 is still there in 2021.

There surely is a need for more dialogue with the members of MFOPD and the people they represent. Government and authorities could be well served by listening to what the members are experiencing with a view to taking the necessary steps to improve the situation.

Existing services for people with disabilities perhaps should be more transparent and accountable about who they are supporting, how they are being supported, the duration of support and publishing verifiable job outcome results.

I also recall from a few years ago that there were some excellent support measures that could be of benefit to disabled people and potential employers; there is/was a quota system in Malta and whilst it does not appear to be enforced it does nevertheless exist and is a good reason for larger employers to consider employing a person with a disability. There is/was also a wage subsidy available to employers who employ a disabled person of around 75% for up to 3 years and as I understand it (as told by CRPD), there may also be tax breaks for employers who employ a disabled worker. Moreover, the opportunity there is/was the opportunity for a person with a disability to earn wages and retain their disability benefits. If some or all these support measures are still in place, then job outcomes and employer engagement may not be as difficult as one would imagine.

In concluding this article, I congratulate the MFOPD in achieving a 50th anniversary, quite an achievement.

Supported Employment is a method of intervention which assists individuals with disability or disadvantage to access paid jobs in the open labour market. There are clearly stated values and principles with ethical guidelines for professionals to ensure that the needs of the individual are paramount regarding all decisions in relation to the Supported Employment process.

VOLUNTEERING IN AN EVOLVING COMMUNITY

MAURO PACE PARASCANDALO
CEO - Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector

Our community, as is the world all over, is ever evolving and we are witnesses to changes and encountering challenges that will call us all to use our resources wisely and respond creatively. Participation, engagement and collaboration are becoming a must. Volunteering is a positive, natural and spirited way to realise meaningful human interaction, collaboration and purposeful contribution. The transformative effect of volunteering on individuals, organisations, communities and society is a portal to active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity. For these reasons it is imperative that an infrastructure, supported by Governments, should be strengthened in order to support sustainable volunteering nation wide.

Volunteering is changing and the way people seek to volunteer and the way that organisations engage and value the contribution of volunteers is shifting. Through this, we are watching the emerging landscape and preparing to respond nimbly and constructively. We should be looking at various models of how to support volunteering so that it is an easily accessible, meaningful, and enjoyable human experience. We need to remain attentive to ethics and continue to convey the philosophy of quality volunteering and how it can serve causes and policies practically. One may notice that the corporate world is becoming a potential and interesting partner to volunteering, especially meaningful volunteering that supports worthy causes and has positive impact. This is

considered a good way to engage employees, build teams and meet corporate social responsibility targets. The sector should also look into responding to the needs of the corporate world and to people who wish to volunteer as part of specific corporate initiatives. All this has to be undertaken in ethical, practical and innovative ways.

On the otherhand, Governments, while supporting the voluntary sector, must be aware not to interfere in such a manner that may hinder the independence of the voluntary sector or by creating an over-dependence on the support provided. It is crucial that the delicate balance is sought between direct support and support through empowerment and facilitation. In this regard the Voluntary Sector must be alert to the challenges that changes in government policy may bring, the way the economy can impact volunteering, the effect that expectations and shifting patterns and norms in society may have and the emergence of new ways to resource our work.

The value of volunteering is deepening as it is recognised as a measure and means to encourage engagement, connectedness, community and social inclusion. Authorities and policy makers should deliver the strategic vision in the next years, external collaboration will be critical, working closely with other non-profit organisations, government bodies and companies.

Inorder to see a meaningful growth in the Voluntary Sector one must see a greater democratic participation accompanied by a tangible economic and social improvement for all. For this to be achieved we must guarantee an accurate inclusive landscape where all volunteers and their organisations can claim ownership of the strategies that effect them and are active stakeholders in the direction of policies that effect them for the future. Such policies and strategies must be built on the knowledge and experience gained over the years by the sector and take into account both the local, European and international perspective and developments which are continuously taking place and shaping the reality around us. It must have a clear action plan with measurable outcomes so that volunteers and the community in which they operate will benefit from the Strategy in a tangible way. The positive role that the voluntary sector and other relevant stakeholders can play in actively supporting and implementing the strategy must be clearly defined and put into practice.

This is correct for all spheres of the voluntary sector, but more so for the disability sector. The voluntary sector is in many areas very specialised and is made up of persons directly involved, effected or interested in the specific area. As such, the disability sector has over the years grown to voice, through direct experience and involvement, the realities and the needs of the individuals directly effected, referring not simply to the person with the disability but also to the persons close and thus directly involved with the same individual.

For any volunteer strategy to be a success and deliver the needed results with the full involvement of the voluntary sector, we firstly need to understand the reality of the community in which the same community exists in Malta and Gozo today, with all the realities that affect the lives and the environment in which we live in, thus being the cathalists to see that coherent policies are put in to place with their effective implementation, support communities in an active and effective manner to address realities, needs and aspirations.

Secondly, we must monitor that the legislation is kept abreast of the ever changing needs and realities of the voluntary sector and amended accordingly when and where required, creating the tools, administrative frameworks and financial support for the sector to work within such legislation.

Thirdly, we must guarantee a greater democratic participation, equitable economic and social progress for all, and inclusive participation. This direction is already enacted in the newly amended VO Act 2018 where the framework for more democratization has been embedded in the law, but now needs to cascade in the various Government policies and initiatives which relate to and effect the VO Sector.

It is our strong belief that to support volunteering as an integral part of our evolving community we must agree on a number of common values about the role of individuals and communities in a modern democracy which will underpin all aspects of any future strategy. We must strive to offer equality of opportunity to all its members regardless of race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, disability, language preference, religion or family/domestic responsibilities; be inclusive and enables people to participate in all its economic, social and cultural activities; empower people to participate in the development of their communities; rely on people's voluntary action to foster community leadership and enhance local democracy; comprise public, private and voluntary sectors and its problems best addressed through partnership between them.

In conclusion it is clear that in an evolving community we must be ready for the change by being part of the change, while where change is striving to happen, let us be the change we want to see.

MS CATERINE GREIF |

VOLUNTEERING, A TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE

ACCORDING TO EUROSTAT 18.9 % OF EUROPE POPULATION TO PARTICIPATE IN FORMAL OR INFORMAL VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES OR ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP. IN MALTA THIS NUMBER REACHES 8,7%. HOWEVER, WHY IS THIS ACTIVITY SO IMPORTANT? ACCORDING TO EUROSTAT 3,9% OF THE EUROPEAN POPULATION DO NOT HAVE SOMEONE TO ASK FOR HELP, BUT THIS NUMBER COULD REACH 13% OF THE PEOPLE IN OTHER COUNTRIES OF EUROPE, SUCH AS ITALY. SO, VOLUNTEERING IS A GOOD WAY TO SUPPORT THE PEOPLE WHO NEED SOME HELP AND BUILD A BETTER SOCIETY. SOMETHING PEOPLE DON'T TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION IS THAT THIS ACTIVITY COULD BE A VERY GOOD WAY FOR THE VOLUNTEERING PERSON TO GET A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE AND IMPROVE THEMSELVES AS A PERSON TOO.

I wish to share my experience as a volunteer: I volunteered a few times in my life. I worked with a pet rescue NGO, I participated in the organization of some events aimed at IT, and I worked in an independent group of people improving their communication and leadership. Those experiences were very good for me. It made me feel useful and more connected with people. But to work voluntarily at the Malta Federation of Organizations Persons with Disability (MFOPD) was a deeper experience, because I could have more contact with the world and challenges of people with disabilities. I understand their situation more.

I am a Brazilian woman who came to Malta aiming to experience a new culture, language and habits. I arrived in the country in October of 2020 thinking that volunteering would be a very good way to connect with life on the island. The experience in Malta has been amazing, but in the beginning it was difficult, because I arrived here during the pandemic and I felt a little isolated from life here. I didn't know anyone and I preferred to keep my distance until I was vaccinated. So, just after that I started to look for volunteer work.

When I started to volunteer at MFODP, it was a very nice surprise for me, because the people there are very kind and welcoming. Even with my difficulty in communicating in English, the group was very friendly and patient and I could help with things like producing images, videos and posts for Facebook and other social media, PPT edition, amongst other things. Those are tasks that support the advertisement of projects and the NGO itself and get more visibility to such an important cause. In the beginning I felt insecure as my English was not very good but it was very important to try, and I discovered that I could be useful.

According to World Report on Disability, 15% of the global population experience some form of disability, and to know this number and get more contact with this reality makes me think more about the different needs the people could have. I know I have a lot to learn, but I think I am more empathic and attentive today than I was before. I feel like I have left my social bubble a little bit. And I'm very grateful for this. When I started this volunteering I was looking for more contact with life in Malta, and I found much more. I've learnt some things that make all the difference for the people around me, like writing very short and objective content on Social Media to make it easier for people with vulnerability to understand, using resources like subtitles and narration on video and images to support blind and deaf people, amongst others.

Volunteering could be a good way for you to evolve in your community, make friends, make a difference for other people and to use your free time wisely . If you want to have this experience as well, you can contact NGOs or organizations offering your help.

https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-017-4561-8
https://www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/why-volunteer
https://www.volunteerscotland.net/for-volunteers/why-volunteer/benefits-of-volunteering/
https://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report.pdf

PROBLEMS THAT PERSONS WITH DISABILITY FACE IN GOZO

DR ING. STEPHEN ABELA
Secretary, Voice for Inclusion Gozo Association

Gozo locally known as Għawdex, is the 2nd largest island of the Maltese archipelago. The island is rural in character and less developed than the island of Malta. Gozo is valued as a holiday retreat for many people living in the significantly more chaotic island of Malta. This brings a huge influx of people in the summer months to Gozo seriously stressing its limited infrastructure. The island of Gozo is embellished by numerous natural features, foremost of which are: the Azure Window, a natural limestone arch, was a remarkable geological feature until its collapse on March 8, 2017. There are few sandy beaches on the island, all small, as well as seaside resorts that are popular with both locals and tourists, the most popular being Marsalforn and Xlendi. Gozo is considered one of the top diving destinations in the Mediterranean and a centre for water sports. These characteristics have saved the island of Gozo from the rampant development which took place in Malta until a couple of decades ago. The population of Gozo permanent residents is 34,430 as opposed to 460,200 of those living in Malta.

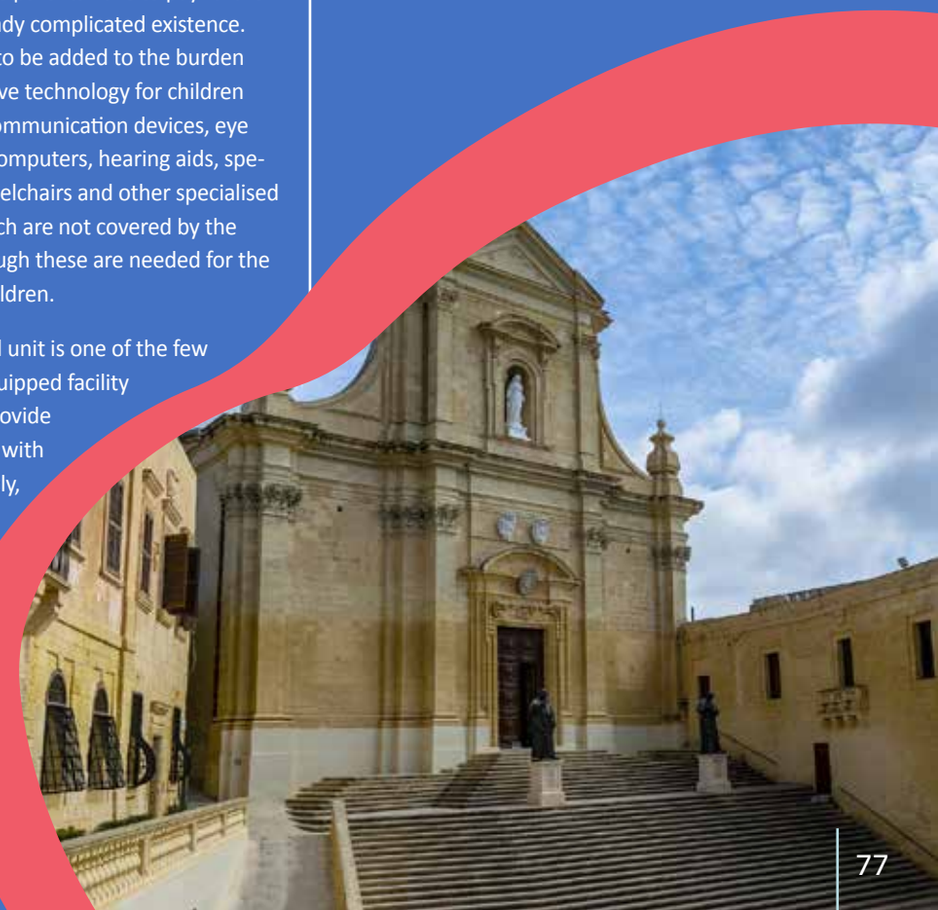
Our organisation 'Voice For Inclusion Gozo Association' has been created by parents of children with disabilities in Gozo. Living with disability is no mean feat wherever you live but the environment in which one lives make a huge difference. This is currently the case for persons with disability living in Gozo. Living in the Maltese sister island, housing just 6% of the Maltese populations means that the resources allocated to the Gozitan population in general are watered down. This means that many of the services available to persons with disability in Malta are virtually non-existent in Gozo. To mention a few shortcomings; CDAU services, statementing, and reviewing boards are not provided in Gozo, ACTU services waiting time in Gozo is approximately 18 months - 2 years (This department caters for specialised software and technology required for children). This means that children with disability often need to travel to Malta adding an additional 6 hours commuting to an already time-consuming exercise.

To further complicate matters, persons with disability face serious difficulties in their day-to-day life as well. These children are not always awarded with LSEs in school transport. There is no pool of LSEs in Gozo, therefore when LSE is unavailable, these children are being refused their education. Due to a serious shortage of personnel, visual impairment, and autism support teachers in schools, as well as behaviour therapy is not being provided by the government. There are no specific programs for down syndrome children in Gozo, not even by the Inspire foundation. Due to the lack of adequate premises, the services that are provided by the government are so sporadic that these are hardly effective; hearing impairment teachers come to Gozo once a week while autism support teachers and visual impairment teachers do not come to Gozo at all. Speech and occupational therapy are held once a month and the former are held in the Gozo mental hospital, where the children have to experience episodes for which they are not yet prepared. Such premises are not fit for children!

The lack of proper services provided by the government has forced many persons with disability to seek the proper care from private service providers. Apart from the difficulty in persuading these to offer their services in Gozo due to the double insulation of the island, this also means that persons with disability living in Gozo must also incur heightened therapeutic costs. Costs that disability allowance does not cover and the parents have to pay further aggravating their already complicated existence. These expenses have to be added to the burden of providing for assistive technology for children which need tablets, communication devices, eye tracking equipment, computers, hearing aids, specialised software, wheelchairs and other specialised equipment. Costs which are not covered by the government even though these are needed for the education of these children.

The Sannat special unit is one of the few adequate and well-equipped facility available in Gozo to provide education for persons with disability. Unfortunately, due to the lack of personnel this unit closes its doors in summer causing serious distress to the children availing from these services. Also, this unit lacks a therapeutic pool and has been trying to build one for a number of years. This application has met the approval of the FTS some 3 years ago but the pool is still in the pipeline. This means that the handful of trained personnel have to waste time commuting to take their pupils for hydrotherapy sessions detracting from their time and further compounding the problem of lack of professional personnel in Gozo.

The Gozo residents with disability are hardy, hardworking and resourceful people, however they are becoming increasingly frustrated by the lack of tangible progress and proper services. This frustration is further amplified by the significantly better situation just an armlength away in their own country, experienced by the rest of the Maltese citizens. Though they wish continued prosperity for the Maltese citizens with disability, they can't feel but utterly let down by their own government.



PREMJU SOĊJETÀ ĠUSTA 2021

The scope behind this award ceremony is to celebrate the achievement of individuals and organisations whose endeavours implement the rights for persons with disability.

MS VENERA MICALLEF
Secretary MFOPD

On a national level the Government shows its appreciation towards those who strive to ensure an inclusive society where persons with disability and their significant others experience accessibility and independent living conditions.

During this ceremony, five persons / entities received an award:

- The Lifetime Achievement Award in the Disability Sector
- The Award for the strengthening of rights of persons with disability
- The Premju Soċjeta' Ġusta
- The Award for Active Participation in Sports, Arts and Culture
- The Award for Most Inclusive Employer

MFOPD received the Award for the strengthening of rights of persons with disability. This award recognises an individual or non-governmental organisation whose contribution left an impact on the promotion of rights for persons with disability.

This award is very much appreciated by MFOPD. The one voice of persons with disability is finally being recognised and considered.

2020...

50th Anniversary of MFOPD

The past & present Presidents of the Malta Federation of Organisations Persons with Disability (MFOPD) are the following :

Mr Justice Wallace Gulia (1st President)

Mr John Micallef

Mr Dennis Azzopardi

Mr Joseph Borg Bonello

Mr John L Peel

Mr Tony Charles

Perit Philip Grech

Mr Valdemar Beck

Ms Marchita Mangiafico

Mr Ron Colombo

Ms Marthese Mugliette present President

The officials of the Federation (names as per sequence below) during a courtesy visit to H. E. Agatha Barbara, President of Malta

Photo

Federation of Societies for the Handicapped call on H.E. Miss A. Barbara Hon. President

Joe Borg, Joe Borg Bonello, John [illegible], Seph Gatt, [illegible] – Friends of Ottavi; P.H.R.F; Society for the Blind; Society for the Blind President; J.P. Vella Secretary; H.E.; [illegible] (Gozo?); [illegible] Malta Welfare Society for the Mentally Handicapped; [illegible] Society; Fr. [illegible] St. Francis Guild for the Blind; Mr. C[illegible] Welfare for the [illegible]; Mrs Attard [illegible] Society; Mrs [illegible] Kumitat [illegible] Kattoliċi

* only 4 surviving members

Foundation Societies existing much before Government started working with Voluntary Bodies

Physically Handicapped Rehabilitation Fund
Malta Welfare Society for the Mentally Handicapped
Friends of Ottavi
St. Francis Guild for the Blind
Kummissjoni Żgħażagħ fl-Azzjoni Kattolika

After a letter written by me in The Times the above Societies joined forces and formed the
National Council for the Handicapped
Council for the Handicapped — Mintoff ordered dropping the word 'National'
Federation of Societies for the Handicapped – on the advice of the late Sir A. Mamo

The National Council for the Handicapped delegated me to approach Government to form a Joint Committee.
This was accepted and after discussions the following Committee was formed
President appointed by the Government (Mr A. Zammit Montebello / Dr. L. Gonzi
Representative of the Ministry of Education
Representative of the Ministry for Social Welfare
President of the National Council
Secretary of the Council

The Committee met once monthly at the Centre [illegible], Santa Venera and consultation was constant.
I do not know what happened after many years as Secretary. I reluctantly resigned as I felt Government stopped consulting us and a domineering attitude, I felt, was taking over. When lately I offered Mr Camilleri to give him the background of how the Voluntary Bodies started working together he, in the presence of Mr Bezzina, simply ignored me.

J.P. Vella 31/1/2011

ARKA FOUNDATION

ARKA's mission aims to foster a positive attitude towards disabled persons and at enriching their quality of life and of their families. Integrating them in the society, irrespective of their creed, or nationality while also providing a vast range of services including residential and respite.

NIXTIEQ LI NARA AKTAR DJAR FIL-KOMUNITÀ GĦAL PERSUNI B'DIŻABILITÀ. I WANT TO SEE MORE HOMES IN THE COMMUNITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITY.

JOHN GRECH

ADHD MALTA

We are here to support, educate and embrace ADHDers their family members and offer information and guidance to the general public, especially educators and other professionals working closely with families of people with ADHD.

I WISH TO BE UNDERSTOOD BY ALL THOSE AROUND ME.

BY ADHAM, 16 YR OLD.

MALTA ASSOCIATION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

The Association aims to promote good practice among vulnerable persons, to disseminate information, to influence the co-ordination of activities in the field of Supported Employment, and to create initiatives in this field.

MASE COMMITTEE WISHES TO SEE TRUE PROFESSIONAL SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES IMPLEMENTED WITH VULNERABLE PERSONS IN MALTA AND GOZO AND THAT THEY COULD CHOOSE THE SERVICE PROVIDERS THEMSELVES.

MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION MALTA

Mental Health Association Malta (VO/0317) was set up by relatives of persons with mental health problems together with professionals working in the field of mental health who felt the need to support and empower family caregivers.

TO HAVE A PLACE AS RESPITE FOR THEIR ILL FAMILY MEMBERS, A PLACE THEY WOULD ENJOY GOING TO (LIKE A CLUB).

CATHERINE VASSALLO (64 YEARS)

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SOCIETY OF MALTA

OUR WISH IS THAT PAVEMENTS ARE FREE FROM ANY TYPE OF OBSTACLES SUCH AS POLES, CARS, GARBAGE BAGS ETC

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Malta provides a voluntary means to enhance and expand public awareness, individual and family services and rehabilitation in Multiple Sclerosis (MS). It primarily offers subsidised physiotherapy to its members with Multiple Sclerosis and group psychotherapy for the whole family. It also seeks new knowledge, disseminates it and applies it for the benefit of persons with MS.

CARITAS EPILEPSY

Our Goals:

- to make Malta epilepsy aware
- to improve healthcare for people with epilepsy
- to offer practical support to people with epilepsy at key points of need

A BETTER LIFE FOR PEOPLE WITH EPILEPSY

I WISH PEOPLE WOULD BE MORE AWARE OF THE PROBLEMS THAT FLASHING LIGHTS CAUSE TO PERSONS WITH EPILEPSY

I WISH MORE PEOPLE KNEW HOW COMMON EPILEPSY IS AND HOW MANY DIFFERENT TYPES THERE ARE

FRANK PORTELLI AGE 70

MOVEMENT
IN FAVOUR OF THE
RIGHTS FOR PERSONS
WITH DISABILITY

MOVEMENT IN FAVOUR OF THE RIGHTS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITY

The Movement in Favour of the Rights for Persons with Disability is an advocacy group with its main aim to support persons with disability and their immediate family on any individual issue. It also acts as a pressure group.

"THE COMMITTEE HOPES THAT PERSONAL ASSISTANCE TO ALL PERSONS WITH DISABILITY WHO NEED THIS ASSISTANCE WILL VERY SOON BE THE NORM IN THIS COUNTRY."

OPENING DOORS ASSOCIATION

www.openingdoors.org.mt

Opening Doors Association is an autonomous, non-governmental, not-for- profit association that works for the promotion of and active involvement of persons with intellectual disabilities in the artistic and creative sector.

"I WISH THAT THERE ARE MORE OPPORTUNITIES IN MIXED ABILITIES DANCE PERFORMANCES."

MARIA GAUCI AGE: 27

MALTA GUIDE DOGS FOUNDATION

To ensure equal opportunities for all, in particular for blind and visually impaired persons.

"I WISH THAT ALL PAVEMENTS ARE LEFT FREE OF OBSTACLES."

ALFRED REALE AGE: 57

ME/CSF & FM ALLIANCE

TO ACT AS A SUPPORT GROUP AND ADVOCATE FOR PATIENTS WITH ME/CSF & FIBROMYALGIA AND TO HELP INDIVIDUALS ACHIEVE A DIAGNOSIS AND TO OFFER ADVICE ON PERSONAL NEEDS.

TO PROMOTE ONGOING PUBLIC AWARENESS AND SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE AREA OF ME/CSF & FM.

S.T.A.N.D.

THE MISSION OF THE ASSOCIATION IS TO HELP PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY INTEGRATE BETTER IN SOCIETY.

ST LAZARUS FOUNDATION

THE AIM IS TO CHANNEL, THROUGH THIS NON-GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE, ALL THE HOSPITALLER WORK OF THE ORDER. THE FOUNDATION WILL FOCUS ON HOSPICE RELATED CHARITY, AS IS CONSISTENT WITH THE ORDER OF SAINT LAZARUS OF JERUSALEM.

TORBALL SOCIETY OF THE BLIND

To promote inclusion of visually impaired and non sighted persons in society

DOWN SYNDROME ASSOCIATION MALTA

Our MISSION is to provide the means necessary to empower individuals who have Down syndrome to reach their full potential.

Our VISION is to become a model organization that will not cease until every person who has Down syndrome is a valued member of society.

AFTER FINISHING MAINSTREAM EDUCATION AT 16 YEARS OF AGE, I FEEL THAT ALL MY SCHOOL FRIENDS HAVE VANISHED. I WANT TO LIVE AN INDEPENDENT LIFE WITHIN THE COMMUNITY AND THIS INCLUDES GETTING A JOB AND HAVE SOMEWHERE TO GO AND ENJOY MYSELF. I FEEL UPSET NOT HAVING FOR EXAMPLE A LEISURE CLUB WHERE I CAN MAKE AND MEET NEW FRIENDS.

Karl Xerri Age 17
– member of the Down Syndrome Association

FONDAZZJONI WENS

We aim to develop the potential of the individual with disability and the quality of life enjoyed by that individual.

I WISH THAT THERE WOULD BE NO DISCRIMINATION AT THE WORKPLACE

FRANCES FARRUGIA – AGE 52 YEARS

FRIENDS OF MOUNT CARMEL HOSPITAL SOCIETY

The Friends of Mount Carmel Hospital Society, formerly known as Friends of Attard Hospital Society, seeks to promote awareness within the community towards persons who are receiving treatment at Mt Carmel Hospital.

I WISH THERE IS MORE AWARENESS ABOUT INVISIBLE DISABILITIES.

THE PRESIDENT OF OUR SOCIETY, MS CHANTELLE SCIBERRAS

EQUAL PARTNERS FOUNDATION

To be in partnership with individuals with disabilities, their families, the community and to promote and facilitate informed personal choices and meaningful lives.

I WISH I HAVE MORE OPTIONS AFTER SECONDARY SCHOOL

ALESSIA BONNICI (15 YEARS)

inspire

THE FOUNDATION FOR INCLUSION

Inspire believes that everyone has a right to equality and inclusion. Our mission is to try to help everyone with a disability achieve this.

DAR IL-KAPTAN

The Foundation for Respite Care Services is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation (NGO), committed to providing a professional respite service to persons with disability and their families.

I WISH THAT WHEN WE GO SWIMMING WE HAVE A SUPPORT PERSON WITH US.

CHARLES FORMOSA – AGE 49 YEARS

I WISH WE TAKE CARE MORE OF THE ENVIRONMENT TO ENJOY CLEAN AIR WITH LESS POLLUTION.

ANNALISE MICALLEF – AGE 31 YEARS

ID-DAR TAL-PROVIDENZA

Id-Dar tal-Providenza which takes its name and charism from the Gospel is primarily a residential organisation committed to empowering persons with disabilities in a family-like environment which enhances and maximises their abilities with a view to ensuring their full participation in society in accordance to the Gospel and the teaching of the Catholic Church.

FUNDING ID-DAR TAL-PROVIDENZA, WHICH IS BUILT ON FAITH IN DIVINE PROVIDENCE, RELIES TO A VERY LARGE EXTENT ON THE GENEROSITY OF ITS BENEFACTORS AND THE PUBLIC DONATIONS IT RECEIVES TO LIVE UP TO ITS MISSION.

GĦAQDA ŻGĦAŻAGĦ B'DIŻABILITA'

TO CREATE A SYNERGIC ENVIRONMENTS FOR YOUTHS WITH DISABILITY AND OFFER THEM THE BEST POSSIBILITIES OF COMMUNAL INTEGRATION, INDEPENDENT LIVING, ASSISTED EMPLOYMENT AND OTHER SERVICES.

AUTISM PARENTS ASSOCIATION

The aim of the Association (APA) is to create awareness in our local Society, since Autism is a condition which is not visible and the number of children being diagnosed with (ASD) Autism Spectrum Disorder is on the increase. APA also aims to create opportunities for parents to become educated in developing opportunities both locally and hopefully internationally.

FONDAZZJONI NANNIET MALTA

FONDAZZJONI NANNIET MALTA WAS CREATED PRIMARILY TO ENCOURAGE THE GRANDCHILDREN TO KEEP CARING FOR THEIR PARENTS AND THEIR GRANDPARENTS IN APPRECIATION, AND CHERISHING THE LOVE AND WISDOM THEY RECEIVED FROM THEIR GRANDPARENTS.

MALTA SPORT FOR ALL

The Association aims to promote, to organise, to regulate and to spread Sports among all people, all disabilities. Its structure is based on egalitarian criteria, aimed at guaranteeing the right to take part in the sport practice to all its members, in condition to equality.

HAND IN HAND

The mission of the association is to offer services available to anyone who may benefit from individualised learning and behavioural support. Children with specific learning needs, autism, ADHD and other developmental disabilities may benefit from individualised and specialised intervention.

MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION GOZO

TO PROMOTE POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND TO ACTIVELY SUPPORT PERSONS WITH HEALTH ILLNESS, THEIR FAMILIES AND CARERS BY IDENTIFYING THEIR NEED AND ADVOCATING THEIR STATUTORY RIGHTS

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PENSIONERS

THE MISSION OF THE ASSOCIATION IS TO MONITOR THE SITUATION OF PENSIONERS IN MALTA AND TO VOICE THE OPINIONS AND CONCERNS OF PENSIONERS IN SOCIETY.

MALTA DYSLEXIA ASSOCIATION

To advance the education of persons with a profile of SpLD/LD, which includes profiles such as dyslexia and dyscalculia.

"OUR DREAM IS THAT ALL CHILDREN AND YOUTH WOULD HAVE ACCESS TO LEARNING AND THAT ALL PROFESSIONALS WOULD HAVE THE NECESSARY TRAINING AND ATTITUDE TO PROMOTE AND IMPLEMENT AN INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT."

MALTA ASSOCIATION OF CROHN'S & COLITIS

AMONG OTHERS, MACC OFFERS SUPPORT AND INFORMATION TO PERSONS AND RELATIVES OF PERSONS SUFFERING FROM CROHN'S DISEASE AND ULCERATIVE COLITIS, AND TO PROMOTE PUBLIC AWARENESS ABOUT THESE TWO CHRONIC CONDITIONS.

T1D LITTLE WARRIORS

This group is exclusively for parents/guardians of young children with T1D residing in Malta. It emphasis the importance of education in order to empower its members to deal with their day to day management and problems.

"OUR WISH IS THAT OUR LOVED ONES CAN HAVE A PANCREAS TRANSPLANT."

VOICE FOR INCLUSION GOZO ASSOCIATION (VIGA)

Voice for Inclusion Gozo Association (VIGA) was instituted to strive in order to better the opportunities available for people with disabilities living in our society.

HILA HOMES LTD

www.hila.com.mt

I wish that there is a dedicated small space in MDH for persons who need to go to emergency which is targeted for persons with sensory processing issues since the emergency context and environment and the long period of waiting can be very distressful to such persons.

"EMPOWERING PERSONS THROUGH CHOICE AND DEVELOPING INDIVIDUAL ABILITIES TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE AND FULFILLING LIFE"

MALTA SOCIETY OF THE BLIND

To aid people who are blind or visually impaired, to live an independent and fulfilling life and to speak on behalf of these people both to raise awareness as well as to protect their interests.

I WISH ALL PAVEMENTS WERE ACCESSIBLE, FLAT WITHOUT SLOPES AND A SAFE AND SMOOTH SURFACE, CLEAR OF OBSTACLES LIKE POLES, GARBAGE BAGS, ABANDONED E-SCOOTERS OR OTHER DROPPED ITEMS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PAVEMENT, CLEAR FROM OBSTRUCTING TREE BRANCHES LEFT HANGING AT EYE LEVEL THAT ARE A DANGER FOR BLIND PEOPLE.

ANNA SULTANA AGE: 66

PHYSICALLY DISABLED REHABILITATION CENTRE

Among others, the aims of the PDRC are to assist governmental agencies /authorities and private enterprise in their programs for the rehabilitation of the disabled and co-operate with other organisations, both government and voluntary in advancing the welfare of the disabled.

PAVEMENTS SHOULD BE PROPERLY TILED FOR DISABLED PERSONS AND VEHICLES SHOULD NOT OBSTRUCT WHEEL CHAIR RAMPS ON PAVEMENTS.

FRANCES BUGELLI AGE: 75

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managed by the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector(MCVS)”