

Policy Paper

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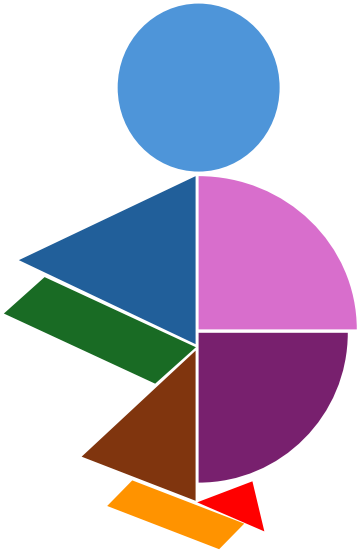
Power in YOUTH

Enhancing visibility and awareness of disabilities
in Cyprus through active youth participation



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"Power in YOUth: Enhancing visibility and awareness of disabilities in Cyprus through active youth participation" is a dynamic European Programme, designed and implemented by Cyprus Youth Clubs Organisation and its members, with the main objective of informing, educating and raising awareness among young people about sensory and physical disabilities! The programme focuses particularly on young people who live and/or work in remote areas, providing them with valuable knowledge and skills.

Power in YOUth

Enhancing visibility and awareness of disabilities in Cyprus through active youth participation

1. Introduction

The Cyprus Youth Clubs Organisation (KOKEN) held a structure dialogue on 26th of June 2024, in the presence of young people and policymakers on disability issues. It was preceded by a nationwide online survey conducted among young people aged 13-30 years old from urban and rural areas of Cyprus.

Present in the dialogue with young people were representatives of organised bodies with expertise on disability issues, such as Christakis Nicolaides (President of the Cyprus Confederation of Organizations of the Disabled [CCOD]), Marina Georgiou (President, Pancyprian Organisation of the Deaf), Andreas Apostolou (Member of Parliament) and Kyriakos Tsioupanis (President, Board of Directors, KOKEN). The young people had the opportunity to pose questions and concerns to the panel members and to develop their own views and suggestions on ways to reduce accessibility problems in physical environments, to educate themselves on disability-related issues and to enhance the participation of all young people in the community.

The following are the main conclusions and recommendations of the open debate on promoting volunteering and active participation of young people with and without disabilities, as they emerged from the interaction between young people and disability policymakers. (a) Accessibility, (b) Education and Awareness-Raising of Young People with Disabilities, and (c) Participation of Young People with and without Disabilities in Social Activities. Panellists' and audience's contributions were recorded and incorporated into a joint policy document by Dr. Lefki Kourea (Associate Professor, University of Nicosia) and Dr. Argyro Fella (Assistant Professor, University of Nicosia).

2. KOKEN | Youth Clubs

KOKEN

Cyprus Youth Clubs Organisation, KOKEN as it is more commonly known, is the largest non-governmental, non-profit youth organisation (NGO) in Cyprus. It is the central coordinating body of Youth Clubs across Cyprus and was founded in 2008, when the need for a qualitative upgrade and modernization of the institution of Youth Clubs was identified.

KOKEN is dedicated to the development, coordination and promotion of Youth Clubs. Its mission focuses on creating a dynamic environment that encourages volunteering, participation, education and social interaction among young people.

The purpose of KOKEN is to provide possibilities to educate, create and manage opportunities and develop young people as active citizens. The objectives of the KOKEN are the development of active citizenship, the cultivation of social and environmental awareness and the participation of young people in group activities.

In cooperation with governmental bodies, non-governmental organisations, the business world and civil society, KOKEN designs, develops and promotes the implementation of effective measures to empower young people.

As an organisation, KOKEN is governed by its members and is also accountable to its members, guided by the principles of democracy, integrity and transparency.

YOUTH CLUBS

Members of KOKEN are the Youth Clubs, which are voluntary, autonomous organisations created by young people for young people.

Each Youth Club is an independent, non-governmental, non-profit, non-partisan voluntary youth organisation created by at least ten young people aged 13-35 years old. This group consists of people of all origins, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, socio-economic and/or educational background.

Youth Clubs are long-standing hubs of healthy engagement in communities and remote areas of Cyprus, where young people can develop, mature, cultivate responsibility, take on administrative responsibilities and initiatives, coordinate activities and manage human relations and interactions.

Youth empowerment and task organization are the main achievements of the Youth Clubs. As of today, KOKEN consists of more than 70 Youth Clubs in Cyprus, which are divided into associations and informal youth groups.



www.kentraneofitas.org

The background is a solid yellow color. There are several large, white, abstract, organic shapes that overlap each other and the text. One large shape is in the upper left, another is in the upper right, and a third is in the lower left. The text is centered and consists of two lines: 'ACCESS' on the top line and '-IBILITY' on the bottom line. The text is in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font.

ACCESS
-IBILITY

First suggestion Accessibility barriers in physical environment, in freedom of expression and information, in education, and in health and employment impact all disability groups. It is necessary to re-establish the Accessibility Committee operating at the Ministry of Interior under the relevant legislation, to continue the discussion on aligning the Decree 262/2018 The Roads and Buildings (Amendment) Regulations of 2017 with international and European standards of accessibility.

Second suggestion The international accessibility standards focus not only on the physical environment (pavements, traffic lights, pedestrian crossings, squares, public buildings, recreational areas, etc.) but also on media, public websites, health services and products, recreational areas, use of governmental services, use of online services, etc. This requires the creation of a 'smart society' that follows the scientific principles of Universal Design and uses intelligent information and technology systems. Such a smart society provides opportunities for communication and interaction with social environment.

Third suggestion National accessibility requirements should be aligned with the Personal Data Processing (Protection of the Individual) Act of 2001 (Law 138(I)/2001), so that people with disabilities are not affected in their communication and interaction with others (e.g., finding an interpreter for people with hearing disabilities where the above regulations apply).

Fourth suggestion Compliance with accessibility requirements needs to be strengthened by clearly defining the authority responsible for monitoring compliance and by imposing penalties on violators, in accordance with the General Regulation of the European Funds and as required by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in its comments to our country (e.g.,

inaccessible buildings for people with disabilities, traffic lights without audible signage, unavailable parking spaces for people with disabilities).

,Fifth

suggestion

Youth Clubs need redesigning in building accessibility to ensure that spaces are friendly and accessible to all people regardless of disability, gender, and age. Young people are therefore invited to consider the positions and views of people with disabilities for the successful implementation of communication systems and other spatial infrastructure changes.

Sixth

suggestion

Careful selection of event venues for Youth Clubs and other voluntary organisations is necessary to enable free and equal access for people with disabilities. Venues need to meet the physical (e.g., safe and unhindered access), sensory, as well as digital accessibility of materials and activities (e.g., event programme, lectures, presentations, etc.).

Seventh

suggestion

The use of social media to promote equal and fair participation of all young people in society contributes to the direct dissemination of issues of concern to all young people. Additionally, involving young professionals with expertise in software development and web platforms design allows creating accessible spaces by young people for all young people.

**DISABILITY
EDUCATION
AND
AWARENESS-
RAISING FOR
YOUNG PEOPLE**

First suggestion Effectively implementing inclusive, adapted, quality and accessible education and ensuring equal access for all students, regardless of their level of disability and age, in their local community, together with their friends and peers, without discrimination, segregation and exclusion, by providing meaningful, high quality educational opportunities.

Second suggestion Educational and/or social activities that promote charity and compassion (e.g., Radio Marathon, Telethon, fundraising) should be avoided, because they create tendencies of disablism and discrimination against persons with disabilities and violate their human rights.

Third suggestion Review the concept of the welfare state in the light of human rights. The current concept of the welfare state has become associated with the image of benefits and social services, which promote feelings of pity and charity towards people with disabilities.

Fourth suggestion The establishment of integrated education is an absolute necessity. The promotion of a bill on this is a long-standing demand of the disability movements and the families of people with disabilities. Existing legislation perpetuates the trend of separation and discrimination between young people with and without disabilities.

Fifth suggestion Local youth organisations, in cooperation with disability movements, are encouraged to engage in systematic cooperation to inform and train all stakeholders on disability issues and communication systems (e.g., training young people without disabilities who wish to learn sign language).

Sixth suggestion Based on the Article 27 of the International Convention, it is necessary to recruit, train and employ young people with disabilities in the private and public sector by extending the institution of quota without loss of benefits

(e.g., employing a person with a disability without loss of disability allowance). The State is urged to proceed with legislation to ensure that the implementation of this article is targeted to the employment of all young people.

Seventh suggestion The use of social media to promote equal and fair participation of all young people in society contributes to the direct dissemination of issues of concern to all young people. Additionally, involving young people with academic training in the development of software and web platforms is necessary to design spaces accessible by young people for all young people.

**PARTICIPATION
OF YOUNG
PEOPLE WITH
AND WITHOUT
DISABILITIES IN
VOLUNTARY
ACTIVITIES**



**First
suggestion**

The Board of Directors of KOKEN is invited to develop a strategic plan for the restructuring of the Youth Clubs, so that actions and accessibility strengthen the sense of belonging among youth. This strategic planning should follow the philosophy and regulations of the [International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), so that the participation of all young people in social actions is based on the respect for human rights.

**Second
suggestion**

Youth Clubs should be designed to include young people with and without disabilities in social activities. The members of the Youth Clubs will seek to find common areas of voluntary activity (e.g., sport), with a view to exploiting their creative, artistic and intellectual potential, not only for their own benefit but also for the enrichment of the local community.

**Third
suggestion**

Disabled people's organisations need to communicate their action and vision to all young people with disabilities and promote the importance of claiming equal and fair voluntary involvement and action in society.

**Fourth
suggestion**

The Board of KOKEN in collaboration with the disability movements to organise events on human rights visibility in various thematic areas (e.g., employment, recreation, education) to highlight the issues of young people for change.

3. Project Supporters

Cyprus Confederation of Organisations of the Disabled (CCOD) KYSOA

KYSOA officially holds the position of Social Partner in issues that directly or indirectly affect people with disabilities and strives to promote measures that contribute to their full participation in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the country.

It aims to create a European policy framework for disability, focusing on equal opportunities and anti-discrimination, and is a member of the European Disability Forum, which represents people with disabilities in the Member States in dialogue with the institutions of the European Union.

Find out more: <https://www.kysoa.org.cy>

Pancyprian Organisation of the Deaf (PA.O.K)

The Pancyprian Organisation of the Deaf (PA.O.K) was founded in 1990 when deaf people decided to strengthen their community in Cypriot society. The purpose and goal are for all deaf people in Cyprus to have a place where they can discuss their problems, concerns and worries about their future and their socialization in Cypriot society.

Also, the deaf community is strengthened through various events and the development of the Cypriot sign language. Finally, PA.O.K helps the deaf learn about their rights and obligations.

PA.O.K is a member of the Cyprus Federation of the Deaf.

Learn more: https://www.facebook.com/paokdeaf?locale=el_GR

4. Contacts

Cyprus Youth Clubs Organisation

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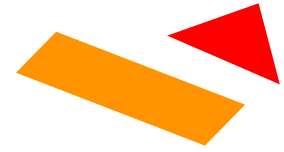
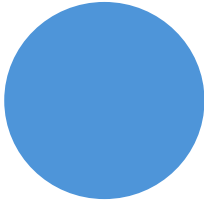
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