



Able '20 **We Are Able to Work 2020**

Greek National Report about informative sessions on Europe 2020 strategy

General legislative framework about people with disability in Greece

The keystone for the establishment of equal treatment and gender equality of people with disability in Greece is the article 4 of the Greek Constitution, which states that “all the Greeks are equal before the Law” and “all men and women of Greece have equal rights and equal obligations” . Article 21 specified this general assertion in its paragraph 2, which declares that “persons suffering from incurable bodily or mental ailments are entitled to the special care of the State” and in its paragraph 6, which remarks that “people with disabilities have the right to benefit from measures ensuring their self-sufficiency, professional integration and participation in the social, economic and political life of the Country.”

Article 22 of the Constitution apply this general right to the working field, and it points out in its paragraph 1 that “All workers, irrespective of sex or other distinctions, shall be entitled to equal pay for work of equal value.”

Educational framework for people with disability in Greece

The Greek state has the obligation to provide people with special educational needs with a special type of education and training, which is declined at all levels, primary, secondary, and vocational.

As well as for other pupils and students, special education in Greece aims at

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- a) The development of the personality
- b) The improvement of skills and abilities, so as to make possible the integration in the common educational system and the inclusion in the society
- c) The professional training and the participation in the national production
- d) The acceptance by the society and the equal social evolution.

Measures for the achievement of these aims have been taken and special education is guaranteed to people with disability till the age of 22¹.

Special education is provided for free by the State in public schools. The type of these schools is defined by the kind and the level of the students' special educational needs.

Generally speaking, education of people with special educational needs, in the primary, secondary, and technical – professional level, is provided in schools which are organized and supported, depending on the kind of disability, in a way that the educative and psychological – pedagogic support of these persons is safeguarded. In this case, students with special educational needs can study:

- a) In the ordinary school classroom
- b) In special organized and properly manned departments of integration, which function inside the schools of general and technical professional education.

When the schooling of the persons with special educational needs in the schools of the common educational system or in the departments of integration is considered difficult, due to the kind and degree of their problem, the education of these children is provided:

- a) In self– contained Schools of Special Education

¹ Common education in Greece is ruled till students reach the age of 22 as well.



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- b) In Schools or Departments that function either as self-contained or as a branch of other schools, in Hospitals, Centers of rehabilitation, Institutions of Education for under age people or Institutions of long term ailing persons, with the term that the hospitalized are children with special educational needs
- c) In the house, in extreme cases.

Work related legislation for people with disability in Greece

Generally speaking, Greek work related law ensures that “the lack of physical abilities does not prevent the hiring process, provided that the employee, having the suitable and justified technical support, can fulfil the duties of their place” . It means that people with disability can be hired if their health enables them to perform the implementation of the duties of the corresponding place.²

The key law for the implementation of this concept is the law 3488/2006 (Official Journal of the Hellenic Republic 191/A, published: 11/09/2006) which regards the "Equal treatment irrespective of gender regarding accessibility in the field of employment, vocational training & evolution, terms & conditions of work and other relevant clauses". This law rules the accessibility, the trainings, and the basic working rights of people with disability.³

² New Greek Employee Code ruled by the Law 3528/2007 (Official Journal of the Hellenic Republic 26/A, published on 09/02/2007)

³ Law 3488/2006 (Official Journal of the Hellenic Republic 191/A, published on 11/09/2006)



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From a more specific point of view, the most important Greek law on the field of employment of people with disability is the Law 2643/98 “Provision for the employment of special social groups and other clauses”⁴, which defines the quota scheme of employees with disability for the private and the public sector. This law forecasts the obligatory placement of individuals from protected social groups to private companies, enterprises, and organizations, but also in public services and local–government bodies, via objective criteria of placement based on age, familial and economic conditions, formal qualifications, and percentage of disability⁵.

According to this law, in the Greek private sector, enterprises with more than 50 employees are obliged to cover 8% of their staff with employees with disabilities and other socially sensitive groups. In the public sector, the corresponding percentage is 5%. Individuals with minimum disability percentage 50%, provided that they are registered in OAED unemployment records, are included in the categories of persons that are protected under the Law 2643/1998, for which is forecasted special hiring process. Moreover the law covers people who have relatives (children, sibling, or partner) with a percentage of disability of at least 67% proved by a special medical jury. In special occasions, when the ill relative suffers of mental disability or autism, the percentage of disability needed for accessing the law protection is 50%. The same law states that, once hired, employees with disabilities are given the choice of a flexible working timetable, as

⁴ Law 2643/1998 (Official Journal of the Hellenic Republic 220/A, published on 28/09/1998)

⁵ The “disability percentage” is an official tool intended to represent the extent of disability which also corresponds to different disability entitlements. The percentage is decided by statutory commissions within social security bodies on the basis of medical information for each individual case.



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well as special facilitations when weather conditions do not allow them to come to work, arrive on time, or stay till the end of their shift.

According to the circular "Data regarding the number of employees with disabilities that work within the Greek public sector. Problems in exercising their duties. Guidelines for dealing with the problems"⁶, public bodies and services are obliged to create the suitable working conditions for the employees with disabilities. Notably special technological equipment has to be available when needed (e.g. computers with special software and hardware, voice dictation systems, screen readers, special telephone operators for employees with visual impairment), offices need to be bright enough for facilitating employees with vision difficulties or deaf people who communicate by sign language or are "lip-readers", and workplaces have to be accessible for wheelchair users (e.g. workstations with adjustable dimensions, and accessible toilets).

Legislation also rules the so-called sheltered workshops foreseen by the law 2646/1998⁷, which run in most municipalities of Greece under the framework of the National System for Social Care. Those workshops are alternative but viable forms of employment, oriented in the majority of the cases in making and selling small craft, such as gifts, jewellery, handmade rugs, candles, and party favors.

Legislation about people with disability in relation with the job market also covers social enterprises and Centres of Vocational Training. Social enterprises, which run like productive and commercial units being at the same time mental health units for the

⁶ Ministry of the Interiors, Public Administration and Decentralization, 05 September 2006

⁷ Law 2646/1998 (Official Journal of the Hellenic Republic 220/A, published on 20/10/1998



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support, therapy and inclusion of people with mental health problems, are established by the law 2716/99. These enterprises run with national and EU funds, donations, as well as income from sales, and can be active in any industrial sector, while members retain limited legal responsibility. There is no official record of the number of social enterprises running in Greece, however the National Centre for Vocational Orientation mentions nine examples of such social enterprises across Greece, most of which are orientated in selling small craft, gardening, bakery, and catering.

Finally, law 2648/98 established more than 50 Centres of Vocational Training and more than 20 Specialized Centres of Vocational Training for people with disability across Greece. The Centres are services under the jurisdiction of the Institute of Social Protection and Solidarity, established by the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity as agencies for research, evaluation, and specialized implementations in the field of social policy. The Centres aim to promote employment, through vocational training that corresponds to particular needs of the current labour market. They include social support and counselling to encourage the entrance or re-entrance of long-term unemployed and vulnerable groups to the labour market. Furthermore, the Centres implement programmes co-funded by the Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity and EU, with regards to employment and vocational training. Vocational Training programs last between 150 and 400 hours and are oriented towards professions in health and welfare, finance and administration, informatics, tourism, farming sector, and technical professions. People with disability receive 4.99€/hour for participating in the programs.



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The real context

Working conditions

In spite of the legislative framework on work related matters and education, the reality in Greece is far away from the goals that European Union gave in its Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The lack of recent and comprehensive statistics is meaningful at this proposal. The only available statistics are offered by MDA Hellas, an association that works in the field of muscular dystrophy, and VPRC, an independent private company for project research consulting. Although both mentioned surveys are partial and not up-to-date, they help to show the reality in Greece about people with disability inclusion in the job market.

The poll carried out by VPRC at the turn of 2003 shows the low levels of employment of disabled people in the private sector. Among the 32,929 workers, employed in the 360 surveyed enterprises, only 67 of them were people with disability (0.2%). When asked about the reasons why companies employed people with disability, 38% of them replied that they did so as they were required by the law and 33.3% that this was due to their own policy with regards to Corporate Social Responsibility. Only 9.5% answered that it was because they entrusted the high performance of the employee. Moreover the same research showed that even though 55% of the surveyed companies were aware of specific funding programs for the employment of people with disability in the private sector, only 14.6% had considered hiring such an employee.⁸

⁸ <http://www.disability-europe.net/content/aned/media/EL%20Employment%20report.pdf>, available online on 7th January 2014



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The research that MDA Hellas took over on the frame of the partnership I–nsist (a project funded by the Equal national thematic networks – 2nd Cycle) confirms the previously presented picture of employment of disabled people in the open market. The research was conducted on a sample of 98 companies employing in total 18.487 people. As stated above, according to Greek law, private companies with more than 50 staff members are required to employ people with disability at the percentage of 8% of the total staff. Nevertheless, only 20% of the surveyed companies actually implement the law. The findings showed that only 1.17% of all staff belong to any of the 14 vulnerable group categories (among them disabled people, immigrants, drug rehabilitated people, ex–prisoners and long–term unemployed). In particular, 72,4% of employers said they would not employ a person with mental health problems, while 32.7% would not employ people with physical impairments. These results are anyway in open contrast with the fact that, in theory, 96% of companies believe corporal social responsibility would serve better the goals of the company for development and profit, another 96% believe that people from vulnerable social groups should be given more opportunities for employment, and 88.8% believe that the private sector is as responsible as the state for promoting the social and economic inclusion of people from excluded social groups.

Moreover, only 20% of private enterprises have ramps inside their building and accessible toilets. Finally, 60% of the companies that do not employ people with disability declare that they would do so only under the condition that the salary of the employees with disability is co–funded or entirely paid by the state. This is indicative of the negative perceptions of people with disability as employees and of the disbelief about their skills. The change of attitudes and culture it is crucial here in overturning employment only under "special conditions" to employment on equal terms.⁹

⁹ <http://www.mdahellas.gr/en/content/program-equal-%CE%B9%CE%B9>, available online on 7th January 2014



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Accessibility issues

The Ministry of Interiors drew up on 2007 a follow-up report about the level of compliance of public services with the accessibility for people with disability. The study is based on the case of public services in the municipality of Larisa. The limited sample of the study is a considerable drawback in monitoring implementation of the legal duty, firstly, and secondly in appreciating the extent of inaccessibility of public services. Nevertheless it gives a real “taste” of the failing implementation of legislation on accessibility in the whole Greece.

The majority of the assessed public buildings have partial accessibility, which ends most of the times with the placement of a ramp. Elevators, grails, stands, parking spaces, and toilets accessible to people with disability exist only in few public services, where they do not always match to given standards of accessibility. Furthermore, most of the services do not have specific action plans for the necessary adjustments in spite of legislative regulation (article 28 of Law 2831/2000) that requires measures to secure accessibility. Moreover, the assessed public services did not operate a distinct unit to oversee implementation of accessibility standards as required by law (article 12 Law 3230/2004) or the units were not operating properly due to lack of staff and strategic planning.

The project Able ' 20 and the European 2020 strategy

Info session general data

ANTIGONE decided to implement 8 info sessions on Europe 2020 strategy instead of 6 that were initially foreseen by the application. The decision has been taken together with the trainer, so as to guarantee a more complete path of understanding of the strategy. Sessions have been implemented on 21st August 2013, 22nd August 2013, 28th August

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2013, 29th August 2013, 10th October 2013, 17th October 2013, 31st October 2013, and 7th November 2013. Sessions lasted 3 hours each, from 16:00 to 19:00, with a 20 minutes break in the middle. All the sessions have been implemented in Oikopolis – A Parallel Town for Ecology and Social Solidarity (Οικόπολις – μια παράλληλη πόλη για την οικολογία και την κοινωνική αλληλεγγύη), a social space for events, lectures, discussions, seminars, workshops and other activities about ecology, culture, and political and social issues. The place was very suitable for the meetings because is in the very city centre, it is accessible for people with mobility impairment, and a cozy and welcoming environment, where participants could freely move and feel at ease. After the first half of the sessions, the meetings were organized on Thursdays so to meet participants' needs.

Data on participants

Between 15 and 25 participants per session took part in the activities. Mainly boys participated in the meeting. Gender balance was not pursued because ANTIGONE preferred to work with very interested people belonging to already formed groups. The main group involved in the info sessions was from Kalamaria, a suburb of Thessaloniki. It is a group that works on a daily basis under the frame of the program “Autonomy and Communication”. The group is made by 20 people of different ages followed by 4 psychologists and social workers. They accepted to collaborate with ANTIGONE for the project Able ' 20 as a part of their daily activities. ANTIGONE invited to participate in the info sessions all the interested people, putting as single condition the age limit 18 to 30, according to Youth in Action requirements. Other participants with disability joined this group for the info sessions, without any problem of inclusion.

When asked to briefly present themselves, mentioning their best qualities and what they like the most, participants showed themselves as any other youngster aged 18 to 30 would



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have shown him or herself. The majority of them study, or attend vocational schools, they have hobbies, and they like having friends. Notably, Maria G. says she has many friends, she studies informatics, and she attends traditional dance classes. Efthimis K. works in his brother's laundry, he also works as craftsman, and he practices sport. Polixronis G. has many friends and attends geography classes. Natalia K. attends a vocational training for becoming a tailor, she already creates some clothes, and she has a passion for Facebook. Tassos X. is very good on playing board games. As a joke, Marios P. describes himself as “Balotelli of Kalamaria” , provoking fun and laugh in the whole group.

As a common decision of the trainer and the other staff members, ANTIGONE decided to open the meeting to people without disability as well, so as to do not “ghettoize” the main target group participating in the activities. Still, maintaining the age limit 18 – 30, volunteers and other people interested in the project were invited to attend the info sessions on a peer basis relationship with the other participants with disability.

Overall evaluation of the methodology

The info sessions on Europe 2020 strategy have been implemented using forum theatre techniques and other non-formal education based activities. Due to the complexity of the language used in the European strategy, while translating the guidelines prepared by Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini, ANTIGONE simplified the vocabulary, limiting as much as possible technical and “bureaucratic” jargon and preferring daily words and expressions. This made easier the trainer's work on the strategy and the comprehension by the participants.

The general participation has been very active and all the attendees were actively involved in the theatrical games and in the other activities. Due to their personality, some participants were much more active than others. Marios P. and Panagiotis L. for example



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were continuously intervening, commenting, and proposing themselves for the games. Other participants were active only if asked to do something. Natalia K., Maria G., Efthimis K., and Salim K. for example, started intervening only upon request, but then always gave very interesting and relevant contributions.

From a general perspective, the methodology based on forum theatre proved to be successful because it allowed the discussion of complex topics without tiring the participants. Moreover it let the participants free to choose and talk about the aspect that were more interesting and useful for them. As it is possible to understand from the short stories reported afterwards, participants actually reflected their real daily life in the theatrical play. They showed, sometime without realizing it, their struggles and the problems they face every day in all the aspects of their lives.

On the other side, due to the peculiar composition of the working group, the theatre methodology has not always been successful for an in depth discussion of the Europe 2020 strategy on its aspect about disability. It has been sometimes difficult for them staying concentrate on the same topic, in the same room, for many hours. Moreover often the atmosphere was very chaotic, because of the mix of various kinds of disabilities. As said above, people with both light and severe mental disabilities attended the meetings along with people with merely motor disability. This was due to the fact that the group ANTIGONE collaborated with uses a methodology that mixes group of people with very different kinds of disabilities.

Probably playing with classical theatre would have been more fruitful for introducing the participants to the Europe 2020 strategy. On the other hand it would not have been left them free to explore and experiment, shaping each meeting according to their interest and needs. Another suggestion could have been about limiting the activities to game and other light non-formal education based activities, that participants appreciated a lot because



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funny and less demanding than theatre. The risk in this case, would have been to stop at the amusing part of the activity, with reflecting enough on the contents.

How much each aspect of the strategy was discussed?

From a theoretical point of view, Europe 2020 strategy aims in the 8 main areas for action (accessibility, participation, equality, employment, education and training, social protection, health, external action) are very relevant for people with disability everyday life. They all touch problems and issues that people with disability daily in activities that are normal routine for people without disability. On the other side, these wise, but still too optimistic and idealized goals are very difficult to be put into practice, due to bureaucratic obstacles, economical complications, and, last but not least, cultural challenges.

A taste of this contradiction between theory and practice is given by a joke that trainer made as an answer to some participants' comments to the strategy. Various attendees stated that change should start from very small correction in our daily life, for example putting the buttons in the elevators at a suitable high for people on a wheelchair, as development of technology will probably contribute to a better inclusion. At this point the trainer said that thinking this way we should ask European Union to prepare a strategy for 2100, not for 2020.

The trainer tried to understand where the main responsibility for these goals implementation deems and asked the participants to state in which percentage public authorities, society, and single citizens with disability are responsible for the social inclusion of people with disability. Participants agreed that public entities have 40% of responsibility because they can change and promote inclusion policies and can give money and especially authorization for small changes. Society and single citizens with disability have both 30% of responsibility. Single citizens have such an important



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responsibility because they are actually part of the whole society and because they are often perceived as persons who just wait for help without committing or taking initiative.

The trainer insisted on the topic of people's responsibility asking the following question:

“If the State lacks the budget for building the facilities for people with disability, is there any possibility that society will make any important change in the lives of these people?”

Patrizia D. and Margarita I. underlined that even if people are willing and eager to build any facility, they still cannot replace the State's services; while Dimitra P. argued that every person can help, and facilitate the daily life of people with disability. Elisa N. and Patrizia D. claimed that the State main responsibility is education. If schools do not present disability issues to children, they will never become aware citizens who know how to deal with people with disability. Salim K. further stated that people are not sensitized to the difficulties that people with disability encounter, highlighting that the State lacks a policy for disability awareness and sensitization. On this topic Margarita I. added that future teachers are not trained at university on how to deal with pupils with disability.

It is interesting to see how in the reaction to the trainer's questions it is possible to read between the lines the controversial relationship that Greeks have between themselves and their government. On one hand they blame “the State” for not accomplishing its role, on the other hand they are aware that they have to act and stand for changes.

Another aspect of the strategy that has been very much discussed is about the main challenges for people with disability in the transition from education to work. Here again, discussions among participants show as there is a huge gap between the European Union goals and the reality of Greek youngsters with disability. The wide majority of the participants studies, or accomplished some studies. Still the majority of them is unemployed or has jobs for which they are over-qualified. This is probably a result of the severe economic crisis Greece is facing in the last years, but this was an aspect present in



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Greece before the crisis, as the statistics reported above clearly show. This problem came out several times during the meetings.

As Salim K. noticed: “Generally people think that as people with disability receive a pension by the State, they do not need to work. People do not think that even I have a disability and some money because of my pension, I want to work to fulfill my life, to collaborate with and for the society.” This feeling of refusal by the mainstream society is very often accompanied by low self-esteem and low perception of the inner value. For example, when asked about the job she would like to do Maria K. said she would really like to become a beautician, but she added: “I’m afraid I cannot do it.” It is interesting to notice that Maria K. only has a motor impairment and she already has experience as a beautician. Still her perception of herself does not reflect what she can actually do.

Another proof of the gap between the European Union goals and the reality of Greek youngsters with disability on the issue of transition from education to work is given by the short theatrical plays created and discussed during the activities. Among the numerous fictional characters that were living in the participants’ stories, only Emma, a deaf girl, was looking for a qualified job. Katerina, affected by Down syndrome, was a licensed beautician, but she was working as shop assistant in the big perfume shop. Dimitris was a psychology student, but he was working as coffee maker in a café. Christos was an actor, but he worked as a waiter in a pizzeria. The general feeling is that does not matter if a person with disability studies, if she has skills, if she is qualified for a specific job. She cannot strive for a more qualified job than waiter or shop assistant. This perception is so in depth in participants’ minds, that has been unconsciously reproduced in the fictional characters that were created.

Discrimination on ground of disability it has also been a very much discussed topic. In one the short theatrical play, both Nikos, a guy without disability, and Pavlos, a guy in a



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wheelchair, applied for a job. The employer chose Nikos because of his lack of physical problems, but he justified the choice telling to Pavlos that Nikos needed more the job because he has a family and some loans. The employer did not take into any consideration the eventual economic problems that Pavlos could have.

In another play, Dimitris is a student in psychology with a motor impairment that does not allow him to move and to speak normally. He found a job as a coffee maker in a bar, but as he cannot communicate very well he received a smaller salary than his colleagues. Marios P. explained that this happens very often and as a confirmation we had the real story Salim K told us, in a previous meeting. Salim had an interview for a job as flyer distributor for 4 hours per day for a salary of 4 Euro per hour. As he can only walk using crutches, the employer told him that he was not suitable for the job. Salim tried to convince him that he would have accomplished the job, probably in more hours, but without asking for extra money. Still the employer did not accept and Salim did not get the job.

Even Emma, a young deaf girl, with an impressive curriculum, who applied for a job as a secretary, did not mention her disability in her resume because she was afraid to do not be selected for the interview and she wanted to have the possibility to prove the possible employer that she could perfectly accomplish her tasks as a secretary.

When the trainer asked if, wearing the employer' s shoes, the participants would have hired a not skilled or capable person, just to make her a favor, all of them agreed that they only would have chosen a person who could accomplish the job. Still, even if in theory participants know they can work and implement due tasks, in practice they perceive as totally normal asking for less money and renouncing to their rights, or trying to hide their disability, so to get a job.



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Conclusions

After the info sessions about Europe 2020 strategy on its parts on disability, conclusions are not very positive and hopeful. It is clear that the goals set by the European Union for a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth are too high and far to be reached in 6 years. The general feeling is that they do not take into account the reality people with disability experiment every day, especially in a country as Greece, which has many structural problems, intensified nowadays by the economic crisis.

Moreover people without disability often have a “romantic” perception of people with disability. Inclusion also means understanding that people with disability are people as everybody else and accepting they can have a very bad personality and many character limits as well. Thinking they all are “nice people with a very sweet personality” drives to undermine them with consequences that are prejudicial to their participation on a peer-to-peer basis in the society.

On the other side people with disability should work more on their self-esteem and on their standing for rights. During the representation of one of the theatrical short plays, the trainer acting as the employer insulted the fictional character Marios. When Marios, a waiter, broke some glasses the employer shouted at him telling him: “I hired you just because I felt pity for you when I saw you this way.” Marios did not answer, nor did it the other participants who were attending as public. Speaking this way, the trainer wanted the participants to strongly react, but they did not do it. They perceived there was something wrong, they understood the insult, but not Marios, nor the public, stand to say: “You should not speak to me this way!”

As the trainer made them notice, if they do not demand for equal treatment, and fight for their rights, nobody will do it for them.



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Suggestions

The most important suggestion that came out from the info session is working more on education. Especially in a country as Greece, where children with disability almost exclusively attend special schools, it is very important that children meet and learn to deal with disability. As Elisa N. said in the very first meeting: “Citizens need to be used to think: as the State doesn’ t do it, I’ ll do it!” The assumption for getting to this result is making children without disability stay with children with disability. This is the only way for them to understand they are people with good aspects, limits, and rights.