

# Involving disabled people in decision-making: a case study from Cyprus



The Cyprus Office of the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights (Ombudsman) has responded to a number of complaints from disabled individuals, their family members and representatives. These complaints relate to services which have been designed without input from with people who have lived experience of disability and therefore fail to meet disabled people's needs.

The Ombudsman has used complaints to evidence their recommendations to government and taken a number of steps to make services and policies more accessible.

## What the complaints were about

### Accessing benefits

The Ombudsman received a significant number of complaints from disabled people whose conditions are considered 'moderate' or 'mild' and therefore do not meet the criteria to access disability benefits. Many complainants said that they do not receive any government financial support despite having additional costs that relate to their disability.

Using the UNCRPD principle of recognising and guaranteeing rights for all disabled people, regardless of the type or severity of their condition, the Ombudsman made a number of recommendations to government. It advocated for a more personalised approach that considers the needs of all disabled people individually before making a decision about their benefit payments.

## School support workers

After complaints from parents and families of disabled children, the Ombudsman intervened when a government ministry made an agreement with trade unions concerning recruitment of school support workers for disabled children. The agreement was made without consulting families or children and as a result, many of the support workers did not have the appropriate skills or qualifications to provide personalised care to disabled children.

The Ombudsman recommended that qualification requirements should be individualised according to the needs of the child and in every case, the views of the parent must be taken into account.

## The result

To ensure that all disabled people can access disability benefit payments, the Ombudsman made specific recommendations to the responsible government department to amend their assessment processes.

As of January 2022, a law has been amended to make sure that people with 'permanent irreversible disability' will no longer have to undergo reassessment processes to continue receiving their benefits. The Ombudsman continues to monitor the situation for those with 'moderate' or 'mild' conditions and work with government departments.

Following the Ombudsman's intervention, the government has agreed to consult with organisations representing disabled children's parents. The government ministry has committed to clarify the duties of school support workers to ensure that their work is focused on the child and considers the advice of their parents.

