What the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU did for the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities

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Introduction

Cyprus held the presidency of the Council of the European Union from 1 January to 30 June 2026.

Inclusion Europe monitored what Cyprus did for the rights of people with intellectual disabilities in Europe during its Presidency.

This short report looks at four things: the priorities Cyprus announced, the events it organised, the new EU measures it helped to agree, and what should happen next.

Priorities

The priorities of Cyprus on inclusion and social development were:[1]

- **Social inclusion:** Cyprus wanted to strengthen the European social model by fully implementing the **European Pillar of Social Rights**. For people with disabilities, this means removing barriers to participation.
- **Disability rights:** Cyprus wanted to promote active participation and full inclusion through high-quality, community-based and person-centred services. This follows the EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021 to 2030. Cyprus also wanted disability rights to be part of EU laws under discussion, such as the Equal Treatment Directive, the air passenger rights regulation and the regulation on the protection of adults in cross-border situations.
- **Children's support:** Cyprus announced its support for the European Child Guarantee at the start of its mandate. The Child Guarantee supports children in need across the EU, including children with disabilities.

[1] Cyprus Presidency programme, quoted by the European Disability Forum: Disability Rights in the Cypriot Presidency of the Council

- **Employment and poverty:** Cyprus wanted to strengthen the skills that are missing on the labour market. This should help people access quality jobs, break the cycle of poverty and take part fully in society.

Inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and their families in Presidency activities

Cyprus organised many events and high-level conferences during its Presidency. This report looks at the two that matter most for people with intellectual disabilities.

High-Level Conference on Disability: “Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities: Empowerment and Support in a Community for All” (7 May 2026)



The High-Level Conference on Disability took place in Lemesos on 7 May 2026. It focused on supported decision-making.[2]

Ministers and officials from Ireland, Spain and Malta, Cypriot authorities and civil society organisations took part. They exchanged good practices on supported decision-making for people with disabilities.

Soufiane El Amrani, self-advocate and accessibility expert, spoke at the conference about why supported decision-making matters for people with intellectual disabilities.

"A person makes 35,000 decisions a day.

That is what it means to live your life. Each one of them belongs to you. Not to a guardian. Not to a judge. Not to a system. To you.

So stop talking about whether people with intellectual disabilities can decide. Let's make sure they get to decide."

Soufiane El Amrani, High-Level Conference on Disability, Lemesos, 7 May 2026[3]

[2] Cyprus Presidency: High-Level Conference on Disability

[3] See the article "Let's make sure people get to decide" on the Inclusion Europe website



Camille Latimier, Director of Inclusion Czechia and member of the Inclusion Europe Board, also spoke at the conference. Camille highlighted the often-overlooked situation of people with complex support needs.

For people who are nonverbal, alternative forms of communication are key. For decision-making, this means that interpretative support must be available, accessible and accepted. Only then is no one left behind.

Cyprus also presented its plan to employ around 80 decision-making advisers. They will help people make their own decisions and live independently. Over time, they are expected to support about 4,000 adults with disabilities across the country.[4] This service is part of a wider reform of social services.[5] People with intellectual disabilities

[4] Cyprus Mail, 8 October 2025: Cabinet approves social integration project for the disabled

[5] Inclusion Europe's Supported Decision-making report for more information about the plan and other reforms in Europe

who use the service spoke about what the right to decide means in their daily life and how they get support.

Áine Flynn, Director of the Decision Support Service in Ireland, also took part. The service presented its challenges and the solutions it found after Ireland reformed its legal capacity law.

This was a promising event. It opened important discussions on the future of legal capacity in the EU.

High-Level Conference 'No child is left behind: promoting child well-being and combating child poverty' (20 to 21 May 2026)

Cyprus held a high-level conference in Lefkosia on 20 and 21 May 2026 to promote inclusive ways to tackle child poverty.[6] It came two weeks after the European Commission published the first EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and a Communication on strengthening the European Child Guarantee, both on 6 May 2026.[7] The Cyprus Presidency stressed its commitment to investing in children and social inclusion, including children with disabilities.

New EU measures for rights and inclusion

Did the Cyprus Presidency deliver on its commitments to the rights and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and their families?

Cross-border protection of adults: On 6 March 2026, the Council of the EU agreed its position on a law that protects the rights of adults who need support in cross-border situations.[8] The stated aim is to protect their autonomy and their freedom to make their own choices across the EU. The text says that protection measures and supported

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[6] Cyprus Presidency: No Child Is Left Behind conference

[7] European Commission: EU Anti-Poverty Strategy

[8] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/03/06/council-agrees-position-on-eu-law-to-protect-vulnerable-adults/

decision-making measures should be recognised across the EU. But the text also allows guardianship measures to be recognised across the EU. This goes against the right to decide.

Air passenger rights: On 15 June 2026, the Council and the European Parliament reached a provisional agreement on stronger EU air passenger rights, after 13 years of negotiations.[9] Both institutions still have to adopt it formally. For people with disabilities, this means that:

1) People with disabilities or reduced mobility get new compensation rights when airports do not provide enough assistance.
2) Families and the people accompanying passengers with disabilities can sit together at no extra cost. They no longer pay for a seat next to the person they accompany.
3) People with disabilities have priority rights for assistance and rerouting.
4) Lost or damaged mobility equipment is replaced at no cost. People can also travel with their mobility equipment and assistance dogs without paying extra insurance.

Children's support: On 9 March 2026, the Council approved conclusions that call for greater efforts to support children and to fight poverty and social exclusion.[10] The conclusions call for adequate funding and for full use of the European Child Guarantee. The Council also asked the Commission to protect children from online violence and harmful content.

On 22 June 2026, the Council and the European Parliament reached a provisional agreement to update EU criminal law rules on child sexual abuse and sexual

[9] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/06/15/council-and-parliament-reach-landmark-agreement-on-stronger-eu-air-passenger-rights/

[10] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/03/09/investing-in-the-eu-s-future-council-calls-for-greater-efforts-to-combat-child-poverty/

exploitation of children.[11] The Cyprus Presidency also organised a high-level conference on online violence against girls on 18 and 19 May 2026.[12]

What should be done next?

Cyprus promoted good practices, events and policies that matter to people with intellectual disabilities throughout its Presidency.

Future Presidencies can do more for the inclusion and participation of people with intellectual disabilities and their families in Europe.

- **Improve participation:** The conference on supported decision-making was a success. It addressed an important topic and invited self-advocates to speak. This should not be limited to events on disability rights. All policy discussions, especially on employment, poverty, housing and the budget, should make room for disability rights and inclusion. They should also include self-advocates. This requires accessible events, easy-to-read materials and understandable policy discussions.

- **Equal Treatment Directive:** The Cyprus Presidency made the Equal Treatment Directive a priority. But the directive is still not adopted. The European Commission proposed it in 2008, so it has been unresolved for 18 years.[13] It could change the lives of people with intellectual disabilities. Their disability could no longer be used to exclude them from jobs, education, healthcare, housing, and goods and services. Without it, people with intellectual disabilities are more exposed to unequal treatment.

[11] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/06/22/combatting-child-sexual-abuse-eu-agrees-stronger-criminal-law-rules-and-enhanced-support-to-victims/

[12] https://cyprus-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/high-level-european-conference-on-preventing-and-combating-online-violence-against-girls/

[13] European Commission proposal COM(2008) 426: Equal Treatment Directive proposal, 2 July 2008

- **Next EU long-term budget (Multiannual Financial Framework, MFF):** The Commission's proposals of July 2025 for 2028 to 2034 give people with intellectual disabilities few guarantees.[14] The plan puts cohesion policy, including the European Social Fund Plus and the European Regional Development Fund, into one national plan per country. This can weaken disability-specific safeguards and undermine deinstitutionalisation. These safeguards should be made explicit. Then EU funding can support the move to community-based support and respect the obligations of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD).

[14] European Commission: EU budget 2028-2034

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