

**Indaqs**  
**January 2009**  
**National Commission Persons with Disability**

**Message from the Chairman, Mr Joseph M. Camilleri**  
**Access FOR ALL - Success FOR ALL**

I never cease to be amazed by how many people still regard having a disability as necessarily always being a misfortune. Indeed, when they see a disabled person, like myself, their immediate reaction is: 'I really pity him, poor thing!' In this year's annual message on the occasion of Persons with Disability Week (3 – 10 December) the Kummissjoni Nazzjonali Persuni b'Diżabilità (KNPD) had no intention of beating around the bush and denying or belittling the fact that severe physical and/or intellectual impairments may cause considerable difficulties in the lives of disabled people and their families. However, anyone, like myself, who has an impairment knows that as the day is composed of periods of light and periods of darkness, so the experience of disability is the same: it encapsulates both good times and bad.

Many disabled people who went through, or are currently experiencing, the reality of disability acknowledges that this experience has changed their life – but not necessarily for the worse. For example, a friend of mine and his wife, both of whom I greatly respect, has always admitted that in his youth, he was an extremely shy and insecure person. After they were married, two of the couple's children were born with very severe disabilities. As happens with many parents of disabled children, he and his wife had to learn to fight for the rights of their children. Actually, both ended up becoming disability activists, striving to change society's negative attitudes towards disabled people. My friend has always maintained that he would never have overcome his shyness, let alone negotiate with and lead others on a public level, if it were not for his experience of disability. He continually asserts that having to face up to the reality of disability changed him profoundly and in many ways made him a stronger person in the process.

Personally, I am convinced that my own - sometimes bitter - experience of disability helped me to become more aware of the prevailing inequalities between one social group and another. It was this experience of disability that motivated and spurred me to join the KNPD team so that together we could pursue our goal of continually improving the quality of life of disabled people in Malta and Gozo. Other volunteers and individuals working in the sector have passed through similar experiences and as a result they too are making a sterling contribution to the common good of our society as a whole.

The point I am trying to make is that the experience of disability can have a positive effect on individuals. I will dare to take the idea further by asserting that the experience of disability can also have positive effects on society in general. With this in mind, we at KNPD chose the slogan '*Access for All, Success for All!*' to mark this year's Persons with Disability Week.

When we talk of 'access', we are not just referring to access to the built environment but also to access in the wider sense of the word – access to means of communication, access to information, as well as access to services.

- Physical Access

A physically accessible environment (which includes, amongst other things, the provision of ramps and lifts) is of benefit not only to people with mobility impairments, but is also of benefit to elderly people, families using pushchairs, and people carrying heavy bags. The more our environment, including public transport, is physically accessible, the greater the number of tourists who visit us - especially elderly tourists from Northern countries who come to Malta during winter to benefit from our warmer weather. However, if we fail to make our environment accessible, we are the ones who risk losing out on their revenue.

- Access to means of communication

Having films and news with sub-titles, or running titles, not only help people with a hearing impairment but can also be of benefit to children or adults who are learning to write.

- Access to services

Nowadays, a greater number of public and private agencies and organisations are advertising and even providing certain services through the Internet. When a company or department ensures that their website is accessible, people with a visual impairment can use their services independently. For instance, today many blind people make use of Internet banking services. At the same time, accessible websites are easier to use by sighted people.

- Access to information

The majority of people who have an intellectual impairment require information in an easy-to-read format. However, many people without an intellectual impairment also prefer information in this format. In fact, when KNPD issues a new publication, the easy-to-read versions are the first to be taken.

It makes no sense to create 'special' facilities targeted exclusively at disabled people. It makes more sense to create facilities suitable for all. WCs that take into account everyone's needs, houses we can still use when we are no longer able to climb stairs. Let us remember that what is a basic necessity for me as a disabled person is often a luxury for a non-disabled person.

When we take into account the needs of disabled people in the planning stages, it is unlikely that we will incur exorbitant costs. However, if we are obstinate and persist in creating environments, goods and services that only cater for a small and 'elite' segment of the population, that is those people who have so-called 'average' health, age, size and intelligence, we risk paying a high price for neglecting to take into account the vast majority of other

people in the population. Thus, we could end up spending a great deal of money which could have been saved in the first place.

The main aim of the activities of KNPD for Disability Week 2008 (3 - 10 December) was to remind ourselves that in Malta we are required to respect the needs of everyone, including the needs of disabled people. This is not only because we have to adhere to the *Equal Opportunities (Persons with a Disability) Act*, which safeguards our civil rights as Maltese disabled people but also because we are now protected by the *United Nations Convention Rights of Disabled People* which also recognises our human rights as disabled people.

However, the greatest guarantee for positive change in our society involves a shift in attitudes. We must stop looking at society through 'blinkers' – focusing solely on what is best for 'us'. In society, there are no issues that are 'ours', 'yours', 'mine' or 'your'. We live in one society – it is 'our' society and 'we' are part of it: that means everyone. Therefore, it makes a lot of sense to build a society that welcomes everyone and works in everyone's interest – such is the true spirit behind our slogan for this year – **Access for All, Success for All.**

## Persons with Disability Week

The United Nations chose the 3<sup>rd</sup> December as the International Day of Disabled Persons. Every year, KNPD organises a whole week of activities around this day. This year, the Week started exactly on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December and ended on the 10<sup>th</sup> December, which is International Human Rights Day.

The chosen theme for this Week was “Access for All, Success for All”. This slogan was used for an attractive poster that was distributed around the whole of Malta and Gozo. Apart from this, the same poster was used during the Week and the following days for a billboard that was set up in Marsa, Qormi and Burmarrad.

During the Week, KNPD presented the message for the public by Mr Joseph M. Camilleri, Chair, which can be found in the first part of this edition of *Indaqs*. Apart from this, the Hon. John Dalli, Minister for Social Policy delivered the ministerial message together with Ms Mary Rose Attard, a disabled activist from Gozo. The message was broadcast exactly on the International Day of Disabled Persons. Another message for children, which can be found in another part of this magazine, was sent to all schools in Malta and Gozo. Apart from this, the KNPD Chairman presented this message in person at the Jeanne Antide School in Gudja. During this event, every student attending this school was given a book that KNPD published recently about children with different disabilities. The author, Mr Carmel Cauchi, read short excerpts from the books to the children while Mr Charles Borg entertained the children with songs and guitar playing.

The theme for the National Conference that was organised during this Week was “Access for All, Success for All through the UN Convention”. This conference was addressed by Ms Lydia la Riviere-Zijdel, an international disability consultant. The opening address was delivered by the Hon. John Dalli, Minister for Social Policy. Two panels made up of representatives from different entities discussed this theme. The members of the first panel were Ms Marica Gatt, Education Officer at the Directorate for Educational Services, Mr Felix Borg, General Manager of the Employment and Training Corporation, Dr Natasha Azzopardi Muscat, Director General of the Health Division, Mr Alfred Portelli, Assistant Director at the Department of Social Security, and Ms Audrey Testaferrata de Noto, Manager at the Transport Authority. The members of the second panel were Mr Marcel Pisani, Chief Operating Manager tal-Agenzija *Sapport*, Mr Stanley Debono, Chief Executive of the Foundation for Information Accessibility, Dr Marvic Sciberras Abdilla, Senior Lawyer at the Office of the Attorney General, Fr Anton Gouder, Pro Vicar at the Curia of the Catholic Church in Malta, Mr Lino Spiteri, representative of the private sector and Ms Louisa Grech, representative of the non-governmental sector. KNPD will post a summary of the discussions from this conference on its website in due course.

The Disabled People’s Parliament was addressed by Mr Joseph M. Camilleri, KNPD Chair since the foreign speaker who was scheduled to speak during

this event could not come. The Parliament was chaired by the Hon. Dr Louis Galea, Speaker of the House of Representatives. A good number of members of parliament attended. These were the Hon Carmelo Abela, David Agius, Dr Jasn Azzopardi, Dr Justyne Caruana, Dolores Cristina, Marie Louise Coleiro Preca, John Dalli, Dr Franco Debono, Mario Galea, Dr Beppe Fenech Adami, Dr Chris Said and Edwin Vassallo. The Hon. Dr Joseph Muscat, Leader of the Opposition and the Hon. Giovanna Debono, Acting Prime Minister, delivered the closing speeches.

The easy-to-read version of the Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons in Maltese was presented to the public by the KNPD Consultative Committee of Persons with Intellectual Disability. The presentation was made by Mr Joseph M. Camilleri, KNPD Chair together with Omar Jelassi, Brian Micallef, Marthese Deguara and Isabelle Bonello, all of whom are members of this Committee. Other members of the Committee participated in the discussion held during the presentation. The activity was concluded by a speech from the Hon Mario Galea, Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry for Social Policy. A copy of this version of the Convention can be obtained from the KNPD Secretariat or from the website [www.knpd.org](http://www.knpd.org).

Mr Joseph M. Camilleri and Mr Fred Bezzina, respectively the Chairman and Director of KNPD, also participated in a conference on the same subject held in Gozo by the Gozo Federation of Organisations for Disabled People. This Conference was address by the Hon. Giovanna Debono, Minister for Gozo, and Mons Mario Grech, Bishop for Gozo.

KNPD organised a consultation session with the private sector, to discuss the employment sector as well as the issue of physical accessibility. Unfortunately, attendance for this activity was quite poor.

The majority of these activities were partly funded by the Progress Programme of the European Union.

## A Story for Children

### Access for All, Success for All

Once upon a time, there was a pig called Grish. His fellow animals used to call him 'Rish' to tease him, because the animals all liked to tease each other. The pig because it was fat, the mouse because it was small, the bear because it was like a giant, the cat because it was slim, the mole because it can only see a little, the dog because it was deaf, and the cow because it was slow to understand. They all joked with each other but were all friends.

Grish was well known for his dinners. In summer, he delighted in cooking for his friends. They would meet under the big tree in front of his house. There, they would have a dinner like no other. Between one course and the other, Grish cracked one joke after another, or told the story of one of the escapades that he frequently found himself in.

One day, Rose the fox asked: 'Hey Rish, why don't you ever do a dinner like this in winter?'

Grish replied promptly: 'And where do you want me to seat you all? My house is too small for everyone to fit in it.'

The animals thought about this. They talked about it with each other. After a while, Frankie the Rabbit went up to Grish and told him: 'Rr-rish, (when he was feeling nervous, Frankie stammered a bit) if you want we can h-help you b-b-build a large hald near your h-h-house s-so we can all m-m-meet in w-w-w-winter.'

After a week, the animals met again. Everyone starting giving their opinion about how they wanted the hall to be built, and there were problems right from the start.

Olga the Bear wanted a beautiful entrance with a majestic staircase. But Jerry the mouse started screaming: 'And what about me, how can I go up a high staircase!'

Kevin the cat started planning the doors and windows when Kikka the Deer started laughing and told him: 'No way! Those doors are only fit for those who are thin like you! And how am I supposed to go through them with these tree-like antlers!'

Peppi the Bat wanted a dark hall because light blinded him. But Frankie the Rabbit, who was cowardly, wanted a well-lit hall because he was afraid someone would attack him.

At any rate, they couldn't agree at all. In the end, Grish let out one big shout. The animals fell silent and Grish told them: 'I will design the hall on my own. Then you can build it together as I tell you!'

And that's what they did. When it was ready, the animals found that:

- The entrance had a beautiful staircase. But next to it was a ramp for Jerry the mouse, his mates and all those who couldn't use the stairs.
- The front door was wide enough for Kikka the Deer and Kevin the cat to pass through.
- There was a dark corner where Peppi the Bat was very happy. The rest of the hall was well-lit.
- Grish told Sina the Woodworm to etch a copy of the menu onto a small wood table (like Braille) so that Peppi would know in advance what he'd be eating.
- Kris the Dog was left and often missed out on notices during meetings. So Grish arranged for Hena the Pigeon to deliver written messages to Kris.
- Benna the Cow was slow to understand. Grish arranged for her to receive picture messages. Hena the Pigeon even spent some time with Benna to explain to her slowly.

Grish served the food on flat plates, but also in long jugs. In this way, long-billed animals, like Adam the Stork could eat as well. Since the animals were all friends, Grish didn't want to leave anyone out. The animals only had words of praise for their friend the pig. Grish had thought of everyone. The hall was a huge success. Grish was so happy that after a few days he put up a sign on the front door that said 'Access for All, Success for All.'

### **Collaboration on Project between KNPD and *Sapport* Agency**

KNPD, in collaboration with *Sapport* Agency submitted an application for funds from the Leonardo Programme for representatives of the two organisations to carry out a study visit about Day Services for Disabled Persons with Complex Dependency Needs. The visits are taking place in the North Lanarkshire Social Services in the United Kingdom. This organisation has been certified as having excellent services in this area.

The first group comprised Ms Joyce Mifsud, Day Services Manager within Agenzija *Sapport*, Ms Jacqueline Tabone, Head of a Day Centre, and Ms Mary Camilleri, parent of a disabled person with complex dependency needs. The visit took place in October 2008, while the second visit is planned to take place in the early part of next year. The participants of the first study visit said that it was a very positive experience.

## **The Equal Opportunities Act**

The main function of KNPD is the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act 2000. During these six months, KNPD continued its commitment of working in this sector. As it does every year, in December KNPD presented its annual report of work in this area to the public in a press conference for all the media.

The KNPD Chair, Mr Joseph M. Camilleri, together with Ms Marianne Debono, manager at the KNPD Secretariat, presented the report. The Hon John Dalli, Minister for Social Policy, also delivered a speech which was followed by different questions from journalists. The full report is available in Maltese from the KNPD Secretariat in St Venera, while the English version can be downloaded from the KNPD website: [www.knpd.org](http://www.knpd.org).

KNPD will continue to give a summary account in *Indaqs* of the various complaints it has worked on in the preceding six months. These complaints are split into three groups: complaints that were closed in the past six months, complaints that are still being discussed, and complaints that have been taken to court or for arbitration.

### **Closed complaints**

#### Employment with the Armed Forces

KNPD received a complaint that the Armed Forces of Malta had decided that a person who has colour blindness cannot be employed. An agreement was reached after research carried out by KNPD and discussions held with the Armed Forces and the Office of the Prime Minister. The Armed Forces changed its policy so that now a person with colour blindness can be considered for employment.

#### Insurance with BoV

KNPD had been working for a long time on a complaint that BoV was selling travel insurance that did not cover disabled persons because of their disability. Since this complaint also involved Middle Sea Insurance, KNPD started discussions with these two entities. Middle Sea Insurance immediately admitted that the wording was not correct and changed it. It took longer for BoV to accept to make these changes, however they were made.

#### Toilets in the Main Square in Mosta

After embellishment work in the main square in Mosta, KNPD received a complaint that the public toilets in this square were not physically accessible. The Mosta Local Council explained that it was planning to build an accessible toilet. The Council kept its promise and now the toilets in this square, which is one of the main squares in Malta, is accessible for all.

### Access to First Star shop

KNPD received a complaint that the First Star shop in Sliema that sells items for disabled persons did not have an accessible entrance. After lengthy discussions, including the presentation of a judiciary protest, the management of this shop changed the shop entrance so that it is now accessible to all.

### Regional Tribunal in Qormi.

KNPD commenced the process for the Local Councils Regional Tribunals to operate from buildings that are accessible to all. KNPD started lengthy discussions with the Qormi Region so that this too operates from an accessible building. The main problem is that this building is government property and the administration wanted to make the changes after the central government had passed the building on to it. Although this transfer was not done, this building is now reasonably accessible to all.

## **Complaints that are still being discussed**

### Computer Schools

KNPD received various complaints that some computer schools were not physically accessible. Since the use of computers is very important today, KNPD decided to investigate the matter with computer schools in Malta. In fact, KNPD investigated 26 of these schools.

Halfway through these investigations, there was a controversy at MCAST regarding the awarding of a contract for computer lessons in these schools. One of the conditions that these schools were supposed to comply with was that they had to be accessible to all. It is probable that not all schools conform to this condition. The Police also accused some schools of giving false information about this condition.

KNPD will continue with its investigation and with its commitment for these schools to become reasonably accessible for all.

### Banif Bank

KNPD received a complaint that the St Julian's branch of Banif Bank was not accessible to all. From KNPD investigations, it resulted that the Bank had not followed the plans approved by MEPA. It said that it had made a mistake. Instead, it installed a platform lift that was not according to KNPD guidelines, apart from the fact that one has to go up a step to get to the lift. KNPD maintained that this was not acceptable.

Apart from this, the main office of this bank is not accessible for all according to KNPD guidelines and is only accessible from a garage or from the showroom of a small enterprise. KNPD maintained that this was not acceptable either.

Moreover, Banif Bank was opening branches that were not accessible to all but that were going to be made accessible a few months after opening. Although KNPD does not agree with this procedure, it understood the Bank's argument and accepted the situation under certain conditions, including a

solution to the problem of accessibility of the main office and the St Julian's branch.

At present, discussions are still underway between KNPD and the Bank's management for a just solution to be found and to avoid the possibility of KNPD having to take the case to court.

#### The Excelsior Hotel

KNPD received a complaint that this hotel was organising national conferences when its sanitary facilities were not accessible to all. KNPD put forward this complaint and started discussions so that the whole hotel, that was built after the year 2000, conforms with the guidelines established by KNPD and the Equal Opportunities Act. Progress in this regard has been registered but a final agreement has not been reached.

#### Health Centres

KNPD received various complaints that Health Centres run by the Health Division were not accessible to all, with some having to be reached by stairs. Representatives from both sides visited all Health Centres in Malta and prepared a detailed report about what can be done to improve the situation, in the short and in the medium term. For example, KNPD recommended that, with immediate effect, all stairs are fitted with secure railings which are placed properly, and that the surface of the stairs is covered with non-slip material.

KNPD is requesting the Health Division to draw up a plan of action so that the recommendations made in the report are implemented within a reasonable time limit.

#### McDonald's and Food Chain

KNPD received a number of complaints that some McDonald's, Pizza Hut and Burger King outlets were not physically accessible. However, KNPD is also aware that there were other outlets of these companies that had reasonable access. Consequently, KNPD requested discussions with the two companies that represent these outlets so that an agreement is reached for the outlets to become as accessible as possible over a reasonable period of time. KNPD notes that to date it has met with a lot of cooperation from the two companies and hopes that this progress will be translated into more accessible outlets in the shortest time possible.

### **Court or Arbitration**

#### Hotel Calypso

KNPD received a complaint that, despite extensive refurbishment of this hotel, the main entrance was not accessible according to KNPD guidelines. This happened despite the fact that plans submitted to MEPA by the hotel management, which were vetted by KNPD, indicated that the entrance was going to be accessible according to the guidelines.

KNPD started discussions with the management but no agreement was reached, so much so that it had no choice but to take the case to the court in

Gozo. While the case was being heard, discussions were opened again and an agreement which is acceptable to both parties was reached. The management agreed to install a platform lift. This agreement was respected and the main entrance to the hotel is now reasonably accessible to all. Consequently, KNPD dropped the court case.

#### Administration of Medicine in Mainstream Schools

KNPD forwarded to the Ministry of Education a complaint made by a number of parents of disabled students who need to take medicine during school hours. At present, this medicine can only be administered by the parents, otherwise the students have to remain without it. This situation is not acceptable and intensive discussions commenced to solve this problem. The Ministry and KNPD set up a taskforce to prepare a report about this problem. The report was drawn up and was presented to the Ministry. Despite various requests, including a judiciary protest, no progress was registered, so much so that KNPD had to institute a court case which is still ongoing.

In the meantime, the new administration at the Ministry requested that the taskforce report be reviewed and simplified if possible. This was done with KNPD's full cooperation. The Ministry has now started internal discussions, with the full participation of KNPD representatives so that the recommendations are implemented. KNPD hopes that this problem will be solved amicably and in the shortest time possible.

#### Gzira Health Centre

KNPD, after having received a complaint, held discussions with the Health Division regarding the fact that this Health Centre was not physically accessible. Despite lengthy discussions, no just solution was found. The main problem is that the building is rented. KNPD had no choice but to take the case to court for the problem to be solved. One should note that during a KNPD activity, the Hon. John Dalli announced that the Health Division had plans for this Centre not to remain in the present premises but to move to a building that is accessible to all.

#### Rational Pharmacy in Birkirkara

KNPD received a complaint that this pharmacy was still not physically accessible despite extensive refurbishment, and despite the fact that plans approved by MEPA and vetted by KNPD indicated that a platform lift would be installed. After several attempts by KNPD to find a just solution failed, the two parties agreed to take the case to the Arbitration Centre. The Centre has started the hearing and it is hoped that a decision will be taken in the near future. The Centre's decision will be final and binding for both parties.

#### Empire Complex in Bugibba

Several disabled persons complained with KNPD that this cinema complex was not physically accessible according to KNPD guidelines. Despite various attempts for a solution to be found, the problem was still not solved. KNPD has now presented a judiciary protest against the management of this complex. If it does not receive any reply, it will have no choice but to take the case to court for this discrimination to stop.

### Tip Toes Shop in Birkirkara

KNPD received complaints that this shop became inaccessible after the road was resurfaced. After discussions with management, the situation is worse than it was. Despite several attempts for this problem to be solved, KNPD did not receive any reply and was forced to present a judiciary protest. If no agreement is reached, KNPD will have to take the case to court.

## **Research**

One of KNPD's important roles is research in the field of disability studies. At present, KNPD is involved in two research projects.

### Academic Network of European Disability (ANED)

KNPD has been a partner in the Academic Network of European Disability (ANED) since the latter's foundation in 2007. Since then, KNPD has submitted reports about the situation that disabled people find themselves in across a range of areas, including education, inclusion and social security. Mr Gordon Cardona, a member of KNPD's secretariat, represented KNPD in the Network's first General Meeting, held in Brussels in December 2008.

ANED was set up by the European Union (EU) with the aim of providing a network of national and regional bodies that carry out work with persons with disability, and cooperates with the EU's Disability Unit. Further objectives of the Network include the provision of assistance in research and policy making, and that of lending support to the securing of good practice among professionals in the field. Members states are thereby helped to build better inclusive policies that involve persons with disability both at the European and national level. Additional information may be obtained at <http://www.disability-europe.net/en/countries/Malta?jsEnabled=1>.

### Report on the National Census

In 2005, the National Statistics Office (NSO) organised a National Census, which made reference to disability issues and thereby made available valuable information on the socioeconomic situation of persons with disability in Malta. This information is currently being analysed by KNPD with a view to the drawing up of a report on the quality of life of persons with disability in relation to that of non-disabled people. The first part of the report compares the situation of persons with disability with that of the rest of society in areas like access to education, employment, housing and leisure. Apart from uncovering differences between the two groups, this study will also investigate variations across the quality of life among the various sub-groups of disabled people. Indeed, this study will go on to explore variations relating to education, employment, housing and leisure according to age, sex, location and type of disability. The final report aims to provide, for the first time and to all those working in the field, information drawn from the population as a whole. The final report, 'Quality of Life among Persons with Disability in Malta: Information Based on the National Census', should be completed by mid-2009.

## **Consultation**

One of KNPD's main roles is to provide consultation in the drawing up of national policies. At present there are various ongoing processes of consultation that KNPD is actively involved in.

### MEPA Reform

KNPD has a direct interest in the reform of MEPA. MEPA consults KNPD directly over a substantial number of development applications, the aim being that of ensuring that these follow the principle of Access for All.

The Office of the Prime Minister requested both KNPD and MEPA to draw up a joint report to ensure that the consultative process, apart from attaining the desired results, provides the best possible service to MEPA clients. Following detailed discussions between the two parties, a report was prepared that made a number of recommendations. These recommendations were first approved by KNPD's Board and were later approved also (practically in their entirety) by the Board of MEPA. At present MEPA is in consultation with third parties with the aim of finally presenting the report to the Office of the Prime Minister. Meanwhile a number of recommendations on which agreement was reached and which could be implemented as of now have already entered into effect.

### Rent Laws

After studying the White Paper issued by government on the Rent Laws, KNPD submitted a number of recommendations with the aim of ensuring that persons with disability avoid being adversely affected by reform of the Laws. These recommendations were presented to the Ministry of Social Policy, which is overseeing the reform.

### Local Councils

KNPD also submitted recommendations to the Office of the Prime Minister such that the planned reform of Local Councils ensures that the latter should take into consideration the particular needs of persons with disability. Among other factors, KNPD requested awareness training for Councillors and enhanced physical accessibility, as well as accessibility in information and communication.

### Public Transport

KNPD is very conscious of the need of persons with disability for accessible transport if they are truly to enjoy equal opportunities in various spheres of activity. It is also aware that at present accessibility in this area is practically inexistent, especially for those with a physical disability. Consequently KNPD raises awareness about this at every opportunity that presents itself, both in writing and through participation in relevant meetings, and is consistently vigilant where objectives in this area are concerned

### National Youth Policy

The Parliamentary Secretariat responsible for Youth within the Education Ministry appointed a Committee to review the national policy for youth. KNPD has accepted an invitation for representation on this Committee, thus helping to ensure appropriate prioritisation within the policy of issues relating to persons with disability.

### **UN Convention**

As already announced by KNPD, in December 2006 the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) adopted an International Convention about the Rights of Persons with Disability together with an Optional Protocol. Malta was among the first countries to sign, in May 2007, both the Convention and the Protocol, thereby indicating its intention to ratify both. The Convention came into effect in March 2008, following its ratification by 20 countries.

The Maltese government, both through the Electoral Programme and also through its inaugural address as delivered by the President of Malta, declared its commitment to taking the necessary measures to ensure that in the shortest possible time the Convention and the Protocol would be ratified. Accordingly, and following a suggestion by KNPD, the Office of the Prime Minister appointed an Inter-Ministerial Committee to prepare relevant recommendations. This Committee is led by the Permanent Secretary within the Ministry for Social Policy and include representatives from the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the Attorney General's Office, KNPD and the Maltese Federation of Organisations Persons with Disability. KNPD has overseen all the administrative aspects of this Committee.

The Committee has met nine times and prepared a final report containing a number of recommendations. At present a bill is being drafted with amendments to the laws in which changes are being recommended. The Committee hopes to present the report to the Office of the Prime Minister within the first weeks of 2009.

KNPD has continued to foreground the Convention in its work, such that in Persons with Disability Week both the National Conference as well as the Parliament of Persons with Disability had the Convention as their main theme for discussion. Additionally, KNPD lent its full support to the Conference about the Convention that the Gozo Federation of Organisations for Persons with Disability organised within the same Week. KNPD also published the Convention in Maltese and in an easy-to-read version, both of which may be obtained, together with the English version, from its office and through KNPD's website: [www.knpd.org](http://www.knpd.org). KNPD will also be working to provide an audio format of the Maltese version of the Convention as well as Maltese Sign Language version.

At the European level, KNPD has continued to follow and participate in the discussions about the Convention, particularly in debates taking place within

the High Level Group on Disability within the EU. A member of KNPDP represented Malta in the meeting of the Council Working Group on Human Rights (COHOM) that took place in December, and that also discussed the Convention.

### **The National Budget**

Every year, KNPDP presents recommendations ahead of the Budget. The principal recommendations, together with their outcomes, are set out below:

a) KNPDP requested the necessary funds for the implementation of the recommendations of the Inter-Ministerial Committee of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability. As the work of the Committee had not been completed, KNPDP presented estimates. Unfortunately the request was not acceded to.

b) KNPDP recommended an increase in the finances allocated to *Support Agency*, both in order to improve existing services as well as to reduce the number of people on the list of those waiting to benefit from residential services, service in the community or day services. Although the allocation for the Agency in the 2009 Budget was increased, the rise unfortunately only helps to cover operations as these stood in 2008, especially because salaries were raised following the signing of a new collective agreement.

KNPDP lent its full support to the proposal that the government should introduce in this budget measures that would help the parents of persons with disability to plan for the future and care of their children following the parents' decease. Disabled people who inherit their parents' residence are now exempt from inheritance tax, thereby retaining more capital to pay for the care services that may be needed.

c) KNPDP recommended an increase in the financing of the Individualised Transport Service, currently provided by the Foundation for Respite Care Services. During 2008 the Foundation was given €28000 from KNPDP funds and €18000 by the Ministry for Social Policy. An administrative arrangement was reached whereby KNPDP was given an extra €18000 for 2009, such that the financial assistance for the Foundation in providing this service now stands at €46000, all of which is to be taken from the KNPDP vote.

d) KNPDP recommended that the sector providing for persons with disability should have a fair allocation of funds from the EU. It appears that this request has been acceded to and in fact KNPDP was awarded funds from the European Regional Development Fund to build a Centre for Independent Living at Hal Far, funds from the European Social Fund to train personnel employed in the Centre, and funds from the Progress Programme for an awareness-raising campaign. Additionally, the *Support Agency* was given funds for Day Services to organise the ME2 Programme.

e) KNPDP also recommended that the Ministry of Education should proceed with its implementation of the Spiteri Report. For the 2009 Budget, the

government decided to put into action the recommendation concerning Learning Support Assistants and independent schools. The State will now assist in their funding, as in the case of State and Church schools.

## **EU Directive**

The EU is proposing a Directive upholding the principle of equal treatment of all persons, irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual inclination. This Directive, or Law, of the EU complements a similar Directive issued in 2004 that however focuses solely on the question of employment. The Directive now proposed by the EU, by contrast, addresses all areas of life. This Directive provides further confirmation of the commitment of European countries to effective implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability.

The government has appointed an Inter-Ministerial Task Force that includes KNPD representatives to discuss the Directive and its impact on the country. A number of meetings of the Task Force have been held in which KNPD came out strongly in favour of the Directive. Discussion of the Directive, both at the European and local level, remains ongoing.

## **The Consultative Committee of Persons with Intellectual Disability**

In the past six months, this Committee continued with its work in putting forward the opinion of persons with intellectual disability to KNPD. This Committee held six meetings in which the following topics were discussed:

- acceptable and unacceptable language for persons with disability;
- the work carried out by KNPD to remove discrimination against persons with disability in Malta;
- the composition of the KNPD Board and the work it does;
- how a Committee works;
- a report was prepared to be presented to the new KNPD Board when this is set up;
- preparation for the presentation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability.

The Committee held an election for five posts. The following persons were elected:

- Omar Jelassi, Chairman
- Brian Micallef, Vice Chairman
- Marthese Deguara, Secretary
- Isabelle Bonello – Assistant Secretary
- Alison Bonello – PRO.

The Committee was presented with the easy to read version of the June 2008 edition of Indaq. It also participated actively in the presentation of the easy to read version of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability during Persons with Disability Week.

## High Level Group on Disability

The European Union has a High Level Group on Disability that has the aim of discussing issues relevant to this sector, especially on a European level, and of giving the officials who are a member of the Group the opportunity to share practical experiences. Malta is represented in this Group by KNPD, chiefly through the Director, Mr Fred Bezzina.

During 2008, this Group met three times: in March, June and October. As in the March meeting, the discussions in the other two meetings were primarily on:

- a) The UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People. The European Commission submitted a proposal in which it defined which parts of the Convention fall under its remit, and which ones fall under the remit of the Member States. A reporting mechanism was also proposed. The Member State representatives reported on the work that each country is carrying out to ratify the Convention and Optional Protocol. To date, Hungary, Spain, Slovenia and Austria have ratified both the Convention and the Protocol. The Group was also informed that the United Nations will be setting up a Committee of Experts as stipulated in the Convention itself. Three persons from European Union Member States contested this election and all three were elected.
- b) The implementation of the European Union Directive for the Equal Treatment between Persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

Other issues that were discussed included:

- c) The situation of supported employment of disabled people in different EU countries and a common policy on this subject at a European level;
- d) Work by this Group in the future and the EU Disability Action Plan;
- e) The Structural Funds and how these can be used to ensure accessibility and non-discrimination for disabled persons;
- f) Directives in favour of disabled persons in various areas of transport and the use of the Blue Sticker on a European basis;
- g) The collection of comparable statistics across EU Member States;
- h) Examples of good practice in accessible systems of voting and the UK's Independent Living Strategy;
- i) The work of the Academic Network of Experts on Disability (ANED) and information on other studies funded by the EU.

## Independent Living Centre

KNPD presented an application from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) which was accepted. The project involves the construction of an Independent Living Centre. The aim of this Centre is that professionals will have access to equipment necessary for them to offer professional assessments for disabled people to be able to buy the right equipment that will help them lead a more independent life. This Centre will also include equipment that will enable disabled persons drive adapted vehicles.

This project, which is being led by Ms Vickie Gauci, will cost around a million and a half euros and is expected to take two years to be completed. KNPD employed Ms Mary Rose Meli as the manager of the project. It is also purchasing services from Architect Anthony Robinson for him to oversee the technical aspect of the construction. At present, the works tenders are being processed so that construction work can start soon.

KNPD also presented another project, this time to the European Social Fund for funds to train professionals who will be providing services in this new Centre. The application was accepted and KNPD will receive around €350000.

KNPD has commenced discussions with the Health Division, which is responsible for the Occupation Therapy Department for this service to be given in collaboration between the two entities. This was agreed on in principle. Discussions will continue.

### **The KNPD Secretariat**

Every year, the KNPD Secretariat organised a development day for its staff. This year, this day was coordinated by Mr Hilary Caruana, from Outlook Coop. The chosen theme was Communication.

In the past six months, KNPD employed two Project Managers to work on EU funded projects. These are Ms Mary Rose Meli, who is working on the Independent Living Centre, and Mr Svetlik Muscat, who is working on the awareness-raising campaign funded by the Progress Programme. Mr Matthew Giordamaina was employed to replace Ms Mary Kay Vassallo who has resigned because of family commitments.

We wish Ms Meli, Mr Muscat and Mr Giordamaina well for their work, we would also like to thank Ms Vassallo for her work while she was employed with KNPD.

### **New KNPD Board Members**

According to the Equal Opportunities Act, the members of the KNPD Board are appointed every two years. The term expired last October. Therefore, the Prime Minister, on advice from the Minister for Social Policy, appointed the new Board as follows:

Mr Joseph M Camilleri	Chairman
Ms Rita Vella	Vice Chairman
Dr Marie Alexander	Representative of the University of Malta
Ms Tessa Anastasi	Representative of the voluntary sector
Ms Mary Rose Attard	Representative of the Ministry for Gozo
Mr Olaf Attard	Representative of the voluntary sector

Mr George Borg	Representative of the Ministry for Education, Youth and Culture
Mr Alfred Camilleri	Representative of the Ministry for Finance, the Economy and Investment
Mr Ronald Galea	Representative of the voluntary sector
Ms Marchita Mangiafico	Representative of the voluntary sector
Fr Martin Micallef	Representative of the Archdiocese of Malta
Ms Maria Natoli	Representative of the Association of Local Councils
Dr Marvic Sammut	Representative of the Ministry for Social Policy
Mr Joseph Stafrace	Representative of the voluntary sector
Mr Fred Bezzina	Secretary

The composition of the Board respects the requirements of the Law both in terms of the fact that at least half of the members are disabled persons or parents of persons with a mental disability, or also in terms of gender balance.

KNPD wishes all Board members the very best in their work in favour of disabled persons and their families. It would also like to take this occasion to thank those members who gave their valid contribution in the past and who are no longer Board members. A hearty thanks therefore goes to:

- Ms Miriam Bonnici
- Dr Elaine Birmingham
- Ms Sarah Cuschieri
- Dr Taygeta Firman
- Mr Noel Formosa
- Dr Daniela Mangion
- Ms Ingrid Valenzia
- Mr Epifanio Vella.

## **Equality Summit**

The French Presidency, together with the European Commission, organised the Second Equality Summit in which more than 400 high level officials from member states took part. Malta was represented in this important meeting by Mr Joseph M. Camilleri and Mr Fred Bezzina, representing KNPD, and Ms Sina Bugeja, representing the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality.

The main aim of this conference was so that these official discuss the main issues regarding the non-discrimination aspects of the Social Agenda, which was adopted recently by the European Commission. This Summit concluded that:

- a) the proposed directive of the European Commission to enhance the legal protection of persons who suffer discrimination because of their age, religion, disability or sexual orientation is an important step in the right direction;

- b) Laws can only be effective if all parties work to promote and respect rights and obligations imposed by these laws;
- c) New tools and policies need to be created to support these laws at a European level;
- d) The fight against discrimination should be owned by everyone and incorporated in all aspects of public policy;
- e) Multiple discrimination should be given more emphasis;
- f) Social partners, especially those from the world of work, have an important role to play in the fight against discrimination.

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An audio version in Maltese of this publication can be obtained from the KNPD Secretariat.

The Maltese version in full and the easy to read version in Maltese can be obtained from the KNPD Secretariat or from its website [www.knpd.org](http://www.knpd.org).

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