

**PrECIVIM**  
**Promoting Effective Communication for Individuals**  
**with a Vision Impairment and Multiple Disabilities**













**I07**  
**Policy Recommendations**  
**and**  
**Guidelines Report**



# Policy Recommendations and Guidelines Report

## Intellectual Output 7 (IO7)



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<b>Policy Recommendations and Guidelines Report</b>	
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## 1. Executive Summary

The present Intellectual Output (IO7: “Policy Recommendations and Guidelines Report”) constitutes part of the activities of a European Project entitled “**PrECIVIM: Promoting Effective Communication for Individuals with a Vision Impairment and Multiple Disabilities**” (code number: 2017-1-EL01-KA201-036289/coordinating organization: The University of Thessaly, Greece).

As mentioned in the title of the project the target group are people with multiple disabilities and vision impairment (MDVI). This population constitute a population with an enormous heterogeneity due to the combination of various disabilities. Education of children with MDVI concerns different domains and it is considered one of the most demanding fields in Special Education as each student with MDVI has different needs and entails unique educational challenges.

The issue described in this report is two-fold; general and specific. It is general because it is situated on policy documents regarding disability and human rights and at the same time it is characterized as specific because it refers to the population of children with multiple disabilities and vision impairment (MDVI).

In essence, the aim of this report is to propose more targeted directions and strategies to existing laws in order to improve the effectiveness of existing policies and services regarding the education of people with MDVI.

Intellectual Output 7 (IO7), is a comprehensive report which consists of proposed recommendations and guidelines aiming to reach policy makers and stakeholders relevant to education, inclusion, and equitable education of good quality.

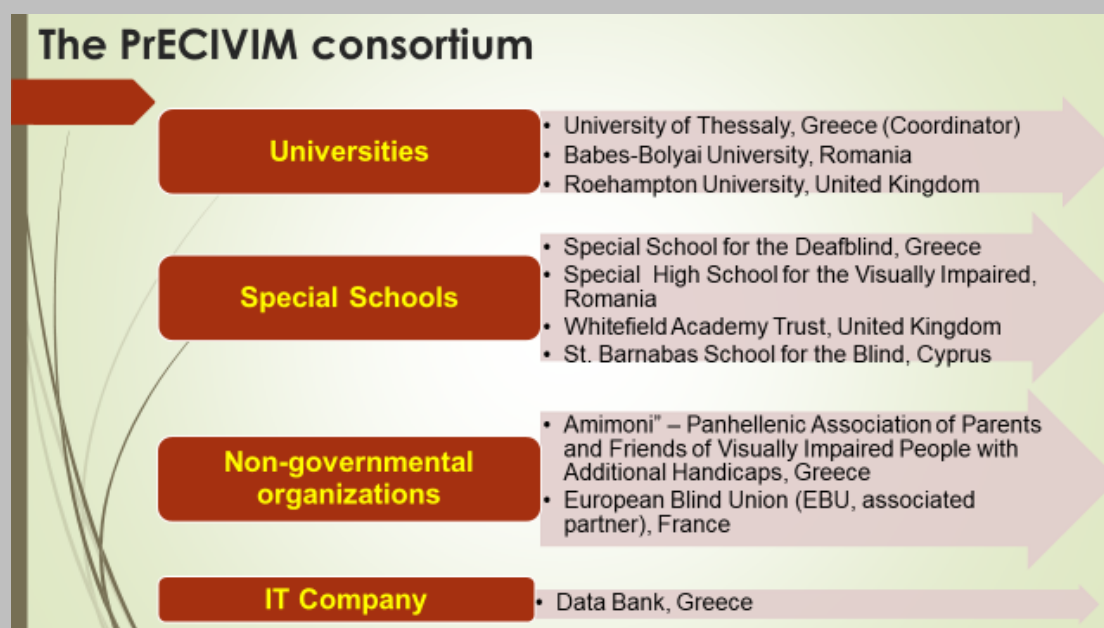
The structure of IO7, according to the project, is based on two pillars; the first one, refers to important frameworks, action plans and policy documents regarding disability and human rights such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Disability Action Plan 2004-2010 and the Strategy for the period 2010-2020 which is a comprehensive framework committing the Commission

to empowerment of people with disabilities to enjoy their full rights, and to removing everyday barriers in life.

The second pillar is dedicated to recommendations and guidelines which put great emphasis on developing effective tools to assess the needs of students with MDVI giving emphasis on communication and intervention enhancing collaboration and interagency partnerships between different institutions from different countries and different organisation within the same country. The content of IO7 interweaves effectively generality and locality through the prism of culture, social context, and working environment.

## 2. The PrECIVIM project in a snapshot

### 2.1 The PrECIVIM network



## 2.2 The aims and the objectives of the project

**Aims & Objectives**

- The PrECIVIM Project focuses on teachers' and professionals' training needs regarding assessment and instruction of communication skills
- Enhance skills and knowledge regarding the development of communication skills
- Promote collaboration between different organizations
- Point out best practices and guidelines

The aim of the PrECIVIM project is to **link the act of assessment with the act of intervention**

## 2.3 The deliverables of the project

**Intellectual Outputs = deliverables**

- IO1** Scoping and a situation analysis
- IO2** PrECIVIM learning and communication platform (portal)
- IO3** Training Material
- IO4** Mutual learning experience. Face to face learning/training events – Distance training events synchronous and asynchronous
- IO5** Guide of Best Practices
- IO6** Dissemination and Exploitation activities
- IO7** Policy recommendations and Guidelines Report



### 3. Pillar One: important legislative frameworks

In terms of policies, all participating countries in the PrECIVIM project have adopted generic legislation for the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities and some of them have established basic legislation regarding people with multiple disabilities and vision impairment (MDVI).

#### 3.1 The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD)

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) was adopted on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December 2006.

“It is the first comprehensive human rights treaty of the 21st century and is the first human rights convention to be open for signature by regional integration organizations. The Convention entered into force on 3 May 2008”

(<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>)

The Convention introduces some important provisions in the field of Disability Law, such as:

- The adoption of a modern sociological definition of disability, with emphasis on the barriers that Persons with Disability face. According to this definition, disability is a part of the variety of humanity and a universal experience around the world.
- The recognition of the philosophy of Human Rights, centralized on Persons with Disability and their anthropological and historical identity.
- The adoption of a mechanism of monitoring the implementation of CRPD by Member-States, which includes the obligation of periodical reports.
- The recognition of accessibility as Human Right, connecting with other human or collective rights (e.g. the right to education, access to justice, participation in cultural life etc.).
- The establishment of a competence of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. According to this mechanism the Committee

receives and considers communications from or on behalf of individuals or groups subject to its jurisdiction who claim to be victims of a violation by that State Party of the provisions of the Convention.

- The recognition of alternative accessible formats of communication, including languages, display of text, Braille, tactile communication, large print, accessible multimedia as well as written, audio, plain-language, human-reader and augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, including accessible information and communication technology and languages, including spoken and signed languages and other forms of non-spoken languages.

### 3.2 Disability Action Plan 2004-2010

It is estimated, that around eighty million people in the EU (one-sixth of the population) have disabilities ranging from mild to severe. These people, who are often prevented by their disability from taking part in society and the economy, have a rate of poverty 70 % higher than the EU average.

European Union, adopted in October 2003 a strategic policy document, entitled: "Equal opportunities for people with disabilities: a European action plan (2004-2010)". One important feature of the document is the broad approach of cultural life, from the scope of tourism and the rights of tourists and visitors with disability.

The Disability Action Plan, covering the period from 2004 to 2010, seeks to set out a sustainable and operational approach to disability issues in the enlarged Europe. It has three central objectives:

- to implement fully the Directive on equal treatment in employment and occupation;
- to reinforce mainstreaming of disability issues in the relevant Community policies;
- to improve accessibility for all.

(<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:c11414>)

### 3.3 European Disability Strategy 2010-2020

The strategy, which adopted on 15 November 2010, builds upon the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and it also complements Europe 2020 (the EU's strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth) and the European Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Lisbon Treaty. The strategy introduces 8 areas for joint action between the EU and EU countries highlighted in this strategy:

1. **Accessibility:** ensuring that people with disabilities have access to goods, services and assistive devices;
2. **Participation:** ensuring that people with disabilities can exercise all their fundamental rights as European citizens;
3. **Equality:** ensuring that policies are implemented (both at EU and national level) that promote equality;
4. **Employment:** ensuring an increase in the number of disabled workers in the labour market, and ensuring better accessibility to workplaces;
5. **Education and training:** ensuring that pupils with disabilities benefit from an accessible education system and lifelong learning programmes. The European Commission has launched several initiatives concerning education, such as the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education;
6. **Social protection:** tackling widespread social challenges endured by people with disabilities, such as income inequality, poverty risk and social exclusion. EU Structural Funds and EU countries' national measures can be used to ensure this social protection;
7. **Health:** ensuring that people with disabilities receive equal and affordable access to (mental) health services and facilities;
8. **External action:** promoting the rights of people with disabilities at an international level.

([https://eur-](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0636:FIN:en:PDF)

[lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0636:FIN:en:PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0636:FIN:en:PDF))

In order to best implement the strategy, the EU institutions and EU countries must work together to:

- raise awareness of disability-related issues,
- develop funding possibilities,
- improve statistical data, and
- ensure that the UNCRPD is enforced.

### **3.4 Education 2030 Framework for Action**

The vision for a universal education with no barriers, is more than ever present, and it is captured in the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the 2030 Agenda which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030. The roadmap to achieve the education goal, adopted in November 2015, provides guidance to governments and partners on how to turn commitments into action (Education 2030 Framework for Action, <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education2030-sdg4>).

The Global Education 2030 Agenda is a new agenda which is based on the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education. This new agenda represents the culmination of global action in expanding educational opportunity. UNESCO is responsible for coordinating the international community to achieve this goal through partnerships, policy guidance, capacity development, monitoring and advocacy (<https://en.unesco.org/themes/education2030-sdg4/timeline>).

## 4. Pillar Two: policy recommendations and guidelines

### 4.1 Policy findings and recommendations

It was found that there are generic policies in all participating countries which set the context of inclusive education and ensure the rights for people with multiple disabilities and vision impairment to education and society in general. All participating countries have signed and ratified the CRPD - as described above - and have introduced extensive relevant legislation depending on societal and cultural norms.

The main finding which constituted the common denominator in all participating countries' in this project regarding the legislation for people with multiple disabilities is the gap between legislative generic forms and specific policies concerning teacher training and preparation for working with MDVI. In other words, the connection between global and local dimensions regarding this matter needs to be strengthened at an economic and legislative level. More specific the following recommendations are described as follows:

#### Recommendation 1

Legislation, specifically targeted for people with MDVI, should be made more extensive and systematic integrating the crucial area of teacher training and preparation on a constant basis.

#### Recommendation 2

Policy makers should legislate, permit, promote and credit collaborative active bridges between educational settings and organizations (such as associations, NGOs and other non-formal educational contexts which deal with disability) which promote inclusion and equity. Besides this is the ultimate goal for the next decade according to Education 2030 “

#### Recommendation 3

Policy makers should legislate, permit, promote and credit collaborative active bridges between different educational organizations. These “bridges” may be

seen as a collaborative network between different schools (such as mainstream and special schools) but also may be considered as legal entities such as the multi-academy trusts (MATs). A MAT is more than a formation of collaborative schools. As mentioned before it is legal entity and as such has responsibility for the governance of its schools. This particular legislative scheme of a MAT allows its schools to get easier a fund and improve their teaching practices and equipment by conducting intensive training events and seminars on a constant basis

#### **Recommendation 4**

Governments and EE should promote and fund more empirical research in the field of MDVI. There is need to obtain more data regarding strategies for effective communication in the population of people with MDVI, enhancing their acceptance and promoting their inclusion from a broader social context.

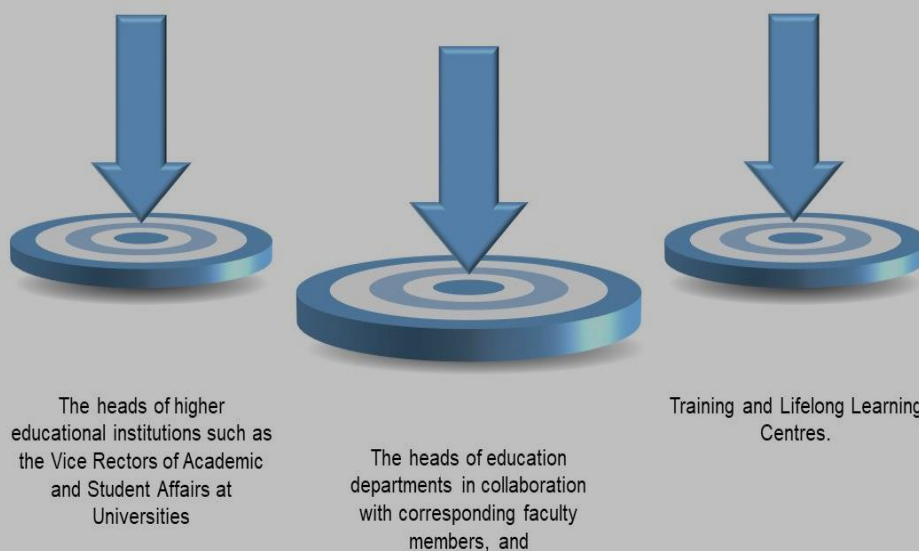
All the above are in line with the principles of important legislative frameworks (see Pillar One) and aim at specific points proposing means and methods to adopt or upgrade education facilities that are child-, disability-, and gender-sensitive creating safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments.

## 4.2 Research findings and Guidelines

### 4.2.1 Guidelines for a flexible and effective training material

Based on the findings and actions of the present project, it seems that there is a substantial need for the development and maintenance of high quality training programmes and services regarding the population of people with multiple disabilities and vision impairment (MDVI).

The following section refers to proposed guidelines which can be applied to higher education modules and training content. These proposed guidelines can be exploited by:



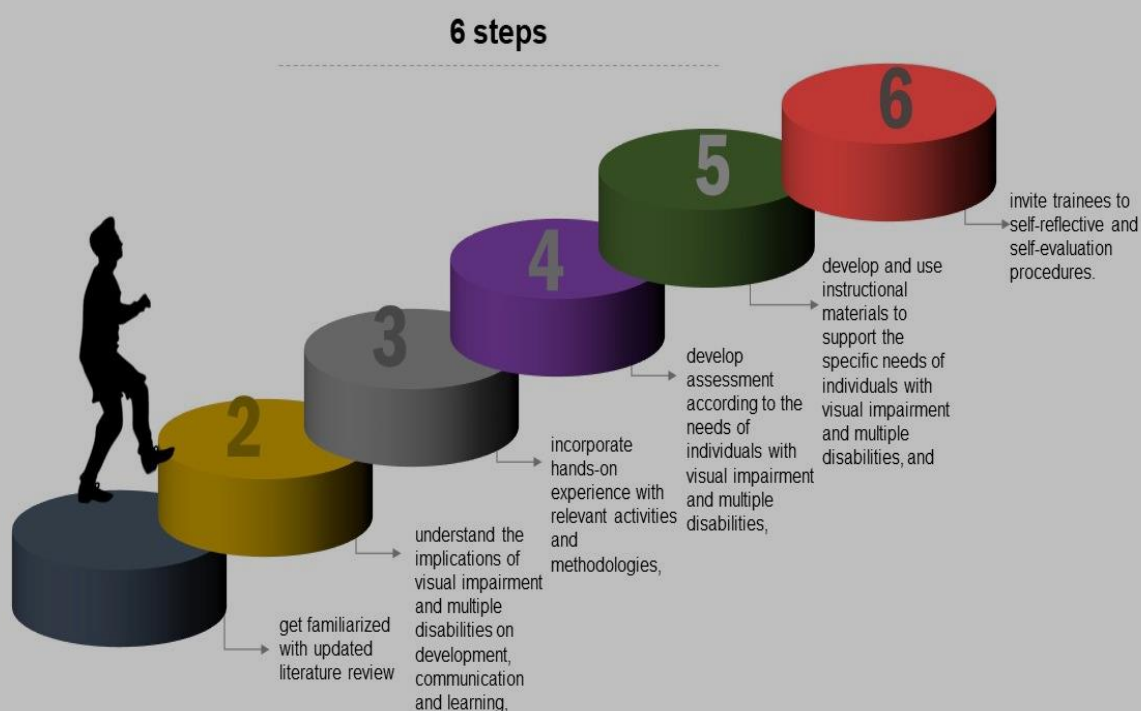
- a.** The heads of higher educational institutions such as the Vice Rectors of Academic and Student Affairs at Universities,
- b.** The heads of education departments in collaboration with corresponding faculty members, and
- c.** Training and Lifelong Learning Centres.

During the training events and the implementation phase of the PrECIVIM project, it was found that there is a great need to link in an effective way assessment and intervention; this need brought together, hand-in-hand, action

and research. The whole project – as mentioned in the beginning of the report – it was focused on communication and levels of communication in the education of people with multiple disabilities and vision impairment.

It was concluded, that communication in the population of children with MDVI depends significantly on a number of factors such as diagnosis, early intervention, system of support for professionals and families, assessment, teachers and professionals' competences, effective use of technology, alternative and augmentative communication as well as on the environment.

The structure which was designed and went under several pilot testing incorporated the following steps:



**Step 1:** get familiarized with updated literature review,



**Step 2:** understand the implications of visual impairment and multiple disabilities on development, communication and learning,

**Step 3:** incorporate hands-on experience with relevant activities and methodologies,

**Step 4:** develop assessment according to the needs of individuals with visual impairment and multiple disabilities,

**Step 5:** develop and use instructional materials to support the specific needs of individuals with visual impairment and multiple disabilities, and

**Step 6:** invite trainees to self-reflective and self-evaluation procedures.

All above six steps may constitute the modules of flexible training manuals which converge to an enriched resource for specialists in order to learn and extend on their knowledge regarding the population of children with MDVI as well as to provide them an opportunity to carry out practical activities and exercises that would improve working skills regarding evaluation and intervention.

For a more detailed description of the proposed structure of the learning content please see Appendix A

#### 4.2.2 Guidelines for a generic best practices structure

After the training events and professionals' feedback during the combined training schemes and corresponding intervention programmes in all participating countries (Greece, Cyprus, United Kingdom and Romania), a range of good practices was revealed. All teachers' and professionals' concerns during their implementation programs seemed to converge in four domains:



- a. characteristics of MDVI and levels of communication,
- b. vision impairment and appropriate environmental adaptations,
- c. components of tactile perception and touch defensiveness, and
- d. assessment tools

To sum up, a good practice was considered as the practice which incorporates robust steps from a child's detailed communication profile up to a well-structured intervention program. A recommended example of a generic good practice with its components is presented in Appendix B

Finally, it is argued that the aforementioned issues, should be an integral part of a systematic educational policy for the provision of educational opportunities in terms of equality and inclusion for all children including children with MDVI.

## 5. To conclude

Every student with multiple disabilities and vision impairment (MDVI) presents a unique educational challenge. Teachers and other professionals need support and training to understand how these students experience and understand the world. The above guidelines incorporate on one hand generality regarding levels of communication in the population of children with MDVI in conjunction with globalized practices, and on the other hand, locality regarding culture, social context, and working environment.

We strongly believe that the PrECIVIM project highlights the added value of the development of partnerships between different organizations, collaborations between different specialists, and systematic evaluation of relevant activities in order to develop knowledge and good practices for equal educational and social opportunities for all children including children with MDVI.

Finally, it is our hope that the present material entitled ***“Policy recommendations and Guidelines Report”*** will offer to people who are in charge and have the authority to establish changes at legislative and executive level, the appropriate tools to enrich effectively educational systems, through data-driven recommendations and guidelines.

## 6. Appendices

### 6.1 Appendix A. Proposed structure of learning content - Modules

Modules	Description
Conceptual Framework of development and characteristics people with MDVI	Defining MDVI Typology of disabilities in the population with MDVI Characteristics of people with MDVI and implications for development Development of communication in the context of MDVI Development of communication Assessment and reflections
Development of communication in the context of MDVI	Goals and objectives of assessment Types of assessment Standardized assessment Developmental assessment The educational assessment Functional or ecological assessment Observation- assessment tool Initial observation within the assessment of communication Inventory on the student's repertoire Selection of assessment tool Assessment Plan Assessment Instruments of communication
Assessment of communication	Milieu approach in developing communication Routine based interventions Co-creative communication: method of intervention in communication Alternative and augmentative communication Examples AAC how to select an item from the AAC system Intervention program for the implementing of an AAC system The objects of reference Symbolic communication strategies Developing symbolic communication through calendars Pictures as communication symbols Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) Sign language The SCERTS Model (Social Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support) Speech development Communication environment Assistive technologies and individuals with visual impairments and multiple disabilities

**cited in:** Argyropoulos, V., Kanari, C., Hathazi, A., Kyriakou, M., Papazafiri, M., & Nikolarazi, M. (2020). Children with vision impairment and multiple disabilities: issues of communication skills and professionals' challenges. In M. Carmo (Ed.), *Proceedings of the International Conference on Education and New Developments* (pp. 271-275). Lisbon, Portugal: inScience Press

## 6.2 Appendix B. recommended example of a generic good practice

Components	Description
Input regarding student's communication profile	Defining MDVI Typology of disabilities Characteristics Communication level
Input regarding professionals' plan of their intervention	Goals and objectives of assessment Selection of assessment tool Prioritizing needs Assessment & Intervention Plan
Actions that were conducted during the intervention	PECs Books Objects of reference Hands-on activities Social stories Milieu Approach Routines based on imitations Games
Professionals' observations during intervention	Diary Checklists Discussions with the working team Assessment activities Children's products
Professionals' reflection on the results of the implementation	Was the implementation successful? Are we going to use the same assessment tool? Are we going to use the same approaches and strategies?

**cited in:** Argyropoulos, V., Kanari, C., Hathazi, A., Kyriakou, M., Papazafiri, M., & Nikolarazi, M. (2020). Children with vision impairment and multiple disabilities: issues of communication skills and professionals' challenges. In M. Carmo (Ed.), *Proceedings of the International Conference on Education and New Developments* (pp. 271-275). Lisbon, Portugal: inScience Press