



EURO
CITIES



Assistance for independent living

Innovative service for disabled citizens

'Assistance for Independent Living' is a personalised, flexible service allowing disabled residents at high risk of social exclusion to fully participate in society. Participants can benefit from up to 300 hours of help each month from up to five assistants.

Help at hand

Provided free of charge by the municipality, the service allows users to select themselves up to five assistants, who can be family members and friends. The assistants, one of whom may support the user at any one time, are paid by the municipality.

Service users have the flexibility to choose what sort of help they need and when. Help can range from care in the home to shopping trips, excursions and tasks such as visiting the doctor.

This service is completely new to Sofia, and is the first of its kind in Bulgaria. Before Assistance for Independent Living was introduced, social services care in Sofia had been mainly restricted to care in the home.

Other assistance had to be paid for privately, and many disabled citizens were unable to afford private care and were therefore at high risk of social exclusion. This service gives disabled residents the chance to live independently.



This is the only service that allows families to breathe: to live a little more like everyone else. It is of great importance to us that the service continues in exactly the same way, managed by Sofia municipality.

Client, assistance for independent living

cities in action

July 2013

where: Sofia, Bulgaria
what: social affairs
when: 2008+

Preventing social exclusion

The service is fully financed by the municipality and available to all disabled residents over the age of five who are deemed to be at high risk of social exclusion, regardless of their income.

Each year, the city allocates the necessary funds, based on costs of the previous year and forecast demand. For 2013, this was €3 million, and around the same amount was set aside in 2012.

Applying for the service is simple: the documents are easily accessible on the municipality's website and service users are free to provide feedback and recommendations through group discussions and anonymous surveys.

The city uses this feedback, as well as consultation with relevant organisations, to propose changes to the services.

In the interest of inclusivity, all proposed changes are published on the website before implementation, and views and comments are taken into account.

Making it work better

Since its launch in 2008, the service has been adapted in several ways in order to better meet the needs of its users and to ensure fair access.

Initially, candidates were selected based on the order in which applications were received. This was later changed to a points system which takes into consideration the applicant's degree of impairment and the level of assistance required to facilitate independent living. A final ranking is based on the cumulative scores of each candidate.

The city also made the decision to split the service into two parts: assistance for independent and active living and assistance for an independent childhood.

This change resulted from criticism that the ranking system was not helping to ensure access for children, as it did not take an applicant's age into consideration.

By splitting the service into one for adults and one for children, the selection process can ensure a fair distribution of access for both children and adults.

Independent living

With over 90% of users reporting that their lives have become easier thanks to Assistance for Independent Living, the service has been credited with transforming the lives of service users and their families.

Since 2008, the number of users has tripled and regular surveys confirm the positive impact it is having on service users' lives, with 80% agreeing it is the most useful social service for disabled people and 74% saying it has enabled them to participate more actively in society.



For many of us this service is our only salvation and I hope it will continue.

Client, assistance for independent living

