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# Independent Living for disabled people in Portugal: political rhetoric, policy and practice

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## Résumé

Disability policies in Portugal have been unable to safeguard disabled people's citizenship rights (Fontes, 2009, 2016). In fact, disabled people's lives continue to be limited by the phenomena of social exclusion, discrimination and oppression produced by a disabling society, structured around the idea of normality. Disabled people face, therefore, a structural inequality (Therborn, 2013) in Portugal, i.e. a form of inequality that transcends access to resources, and extends to the different spheres of disabled people's lives.

Independent Living for disabled people, enshrined in article 19<sup>o</sup> of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, condenses the trust in the transformative potential of disability social policies. Understood as the idea that disabled people should have control over their own lives, Independent Living encapsulates the right to live in contexts where disabled people are not dependent on family care or on solutions offered in institutional contexts. Despite early experiences of Independent Living in Europe dating back to the 1980s (Barnes and Mercer, 2006), in Portugal the first Independent Living pilot-project was created in Lisbon in December 2015 and only in 2019 has the government made this experience available, but still as pilot projects, in other areas of the country.

In fact, the second half of the 2010s has been marked in Portugal by the development of new disability policies with the proclaimed aim of eliminating disablist barriers and promoting an active citizenship for disabled people. One of the initiatives epitomizing this determination is the Independent Living Support Model (MAVI) that made possible the establishment of Centers for the Support of Independent Living (CAVIs) across the country in 2019.

Based on the research project "DECIDE - Disability and self-determination: the challenge of Independent living in Portugal" (reference no. PTDC/IVCSOC/6484/2014) and on the ongoing impact evaluation of one CAVI in the center region of Portugal and drawing on data from semi-structured interviews and from focus-groups with participants in this latter pilot-project, this paper will analyze this policy measure in the area of disability in Portugal, will assess its impact and will identify the factors that may favor or may capture its emancipatory potential for the lives of disabled people in Portugal.

## References:

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