



Cyprus

Education for All 2015 National Review

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Republic of Cyprus National EFA 2015 Review Report

Introduction

The six EFA goals pervade the Cyprus Educational System from Pre-Primary Education to Upper Secondary Education. According to the statistical data provided by the Cyprus Statistical Service¹, the Republic of Cyprus (Cyprus) has already achieved the targets set in the Education for All Monitoring Report 2013/4.

The attainment of these percentages, as they appear in the aforementioned report, takes Cyprus' responsibilities further, in that more attention ought to be paid to the assessment of the quality of the education that is provided to all children.

It is noted that the Education Reform Plans and national targets are also based on the four European Union 2020 Strategic objectives². Special reference to these objectives is made where needed, while analyzing each goal.

The Government manifesto sets out a vision for “an education system which encourages a nation of free-thinking people within a democratic framework, an

¹ ANNEX I

² Through the strategic framework for education and training, EU countries have identified four common objectives to address challenges such as ageing societies, skills deficits in the workforce, and global competition. Through the strategic framework for education and training, EU countries have identified four common objectives to address these challenges by 2020:

Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;

Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;

Promoting equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship;

Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/index_en.htm

investment in education that is inclusive, allows for the individual to develop and express himself freely and provides opportunities for learning throughout life.”

There is high-level commitment, within the Government, to reform and modernize the education system. There is also consensus that the management of the system needs to be streamlined, to ensure more effective delivery of education and better learning outcomes. To date, this high-level commitment has only partially been translated into specific results-focused policy goals for the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) and into programs that can be implemented and monitored by its subsector departments and other units and offices.

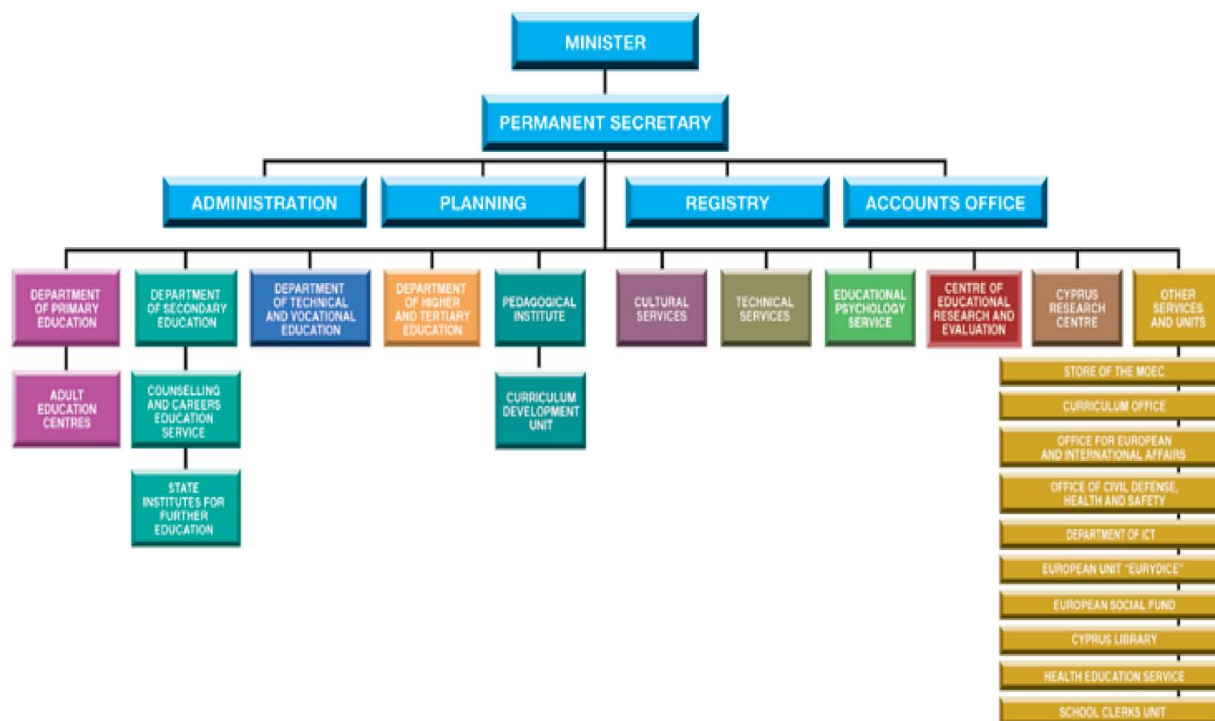
The organisational structure of the MoEC is displayed in [Figure 1](#). The MoEC offers free and accessible education to all pupils without prejudice based on the gender, abilities, language, color, religion, political beliefs or ethnic background. It is noted that, in addition to education, another major pillar of the MoEC is culture. As shown in [Figure 1](#), the Ministry is organised into four education departments:

- **Department of Primary Education**
- **Department of Secondary Education**
- **Department of Technical and Vocational Education and**
- **Department of Higher and Tertiary Education.**

The education departments are responsible for the administration of public schools and other education institutions, as well as the supervision of private institutions. As shown in [Figure 2](#), the education system is provided in five stages, namely:

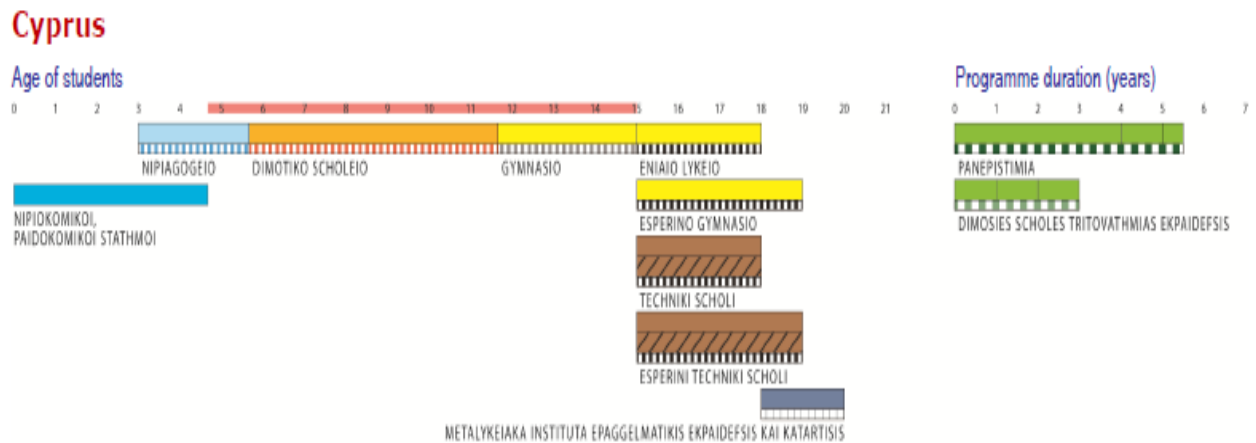
- **Kindergarten** – three to five years and eight months;
- **Primary School** – five years and eight months to 12 years;
- **Lower Secondary School (Gymnasium)** – 12 to 15 years;
- **Upper Secondary School (Unified Lyceum or Technical/Vocational School)** – 15 to 18 years;
- **Institutions of Higher Education and Universities.**

Figure 1 Current Organisational Structure of the Ministry of Education and Culture³



³ Source "The Cyprus Educational System: The way forward" MoEC, Nicosia 2012

Figure 2 Schematic Diagram of the education provided in the Cyprus Educational System⁴



National EFA 2015 Review process and preparation of National Report

This review was prepared by a “Core National EFA 2015 Review Team” coordinated by the European and International Affairs Office⁵. The team is

⁴ Source Euridyce: “The structure of the European Education Systems 2013/2014. Schematic Diagrams”, p.6, Brussels 2013 http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/facts_and_figures_en.php#diagrams

⁵ The European and International Affairs Office As from September 1st 2009, a new unit has been operating at the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) of Cyprus; the Office for European and International Affairs (GEDY). The creation of GEDY pertains within the framework of the implementation of the decision of the Cabinet according to which “the modern developments and the realities of the 21st century, along with the accession of Cyprus to the European Union have rendered the change in the structure and the organization of the MoEC necessary”.

The Office for European and International Affairs, serves as a contact point within the Ministry for the development, coordination and implementation of educational, cultural, youth and sports policy objectives of the Government of Cyprus, both bilateral and multilateral. GEDY’s mission is to contribute to a successful and creative participation of the MoEC in the European and international scene, on matters related to its competences.

A major parameter of GEDY’s mission has to do with the preparation for the assumption of the EU’s presidency by Cyprus in the second half of 2012.

comprised of members from the department of Primary Education, Secondary Education, Technical and Vocational Education, the Pedagogical Institute, the Center for Educational Research and Evaluation and the Cyprus Statistical Service.

Each Goal is analysed based on the suggested guiding questions. Some statistical data are provided within the main body of the text while the majority is thoroughly presented in the tables included in Annex I. Future challenges, shortfalls and any other identified difficulties are also included.

The Cyprus Educational System: A brief historical overview of the reform since 2000, important milestones⁶

The Government of the Republic of Cyprus has initiated an ambitious educational reform programme, inviting dialogue among all stakeholders (political parties, teachers unions, parents' associations, pupils' associations, and the Government, represented by the MoEC and the Planning Bureau) with a view to turning into reality the vision for a better and more modern education system that would meet the needs and challenges of the 21st century.

In 2003, the Council of Ministers appointed the Committee of Seven Academics (CSA) with a mandate to examine the education system of Cyprus and to submit proposals for a comprehensive reform. In August 2004, the CSA submitted its report, entitled "Democratic and Humane Education in a Euro-Cypriot State: Prospects for Reconstruction and Modernization". This initiative was officially launched in January 2005 and identified the weaknesses of the Cyprus Education System as well as the areas in need of reform and made

⁶ Sources "Analysis of the Function and Structure of the MoEC of the Republic of Cyprus", The World Bank, May 2014.

"The Cyprus Educational System: The way forward" MoEC, pp. 18-23, Nicosia 2012

recommendations⁷. Soon after the beginning of the reform efforts, the coalition government, led by President Tassos Papadopoulos, stated that “an immediate qualitative upgrading and modernization of all levels of education” was a main goal of the administration. The reform initiative that followed the CSA’s report is seen by experts as “the first real major education reform in Cyprus.”

In 2007, after the reform initiative had already been launched, the MoEC undertook a review of the education sector that led to a comprehensive set of proposals– “Strategic Planning for Education: A Comprehensive Review of Our Education System– with the stated goal of improving the quality of education”.

Even though these three reports were produced by different experts from different institutions at different times and in different circumstances, their main conclusions follow the same lines and can be summarized in the following five areas:

- Evaluation/assessment
- Teacher policies
- Institutional organization
- Higher education
- Curriculum/pedagogy.

⁷ The process of the reform was based on a structured dialogue among all interested stakeholders. For this purpose, three Councils were set up:

The Council for Primary and Secondary Education: This included representatives of the Government, the teachers, the pupils, the parents and major political parties and discusses issues of interest to the school system.

The Council for Higher Education: This included representatives of the Government, the universities and other higher education institutions, the students, the parents, the bodies responsible for quality assessment in higher education and major political parties and discussed issues of interest to higher and tertiary education.

The Education Council: This consisted of representatives of the Government and major political parties. It set the agenda for issues that were addressed within the dialogue, reviewed issues which were discussed at the other two Councils and made final recommendations to the Government.

Following the studies' suggestions, a Committee of Experts for the Development of a New Curriculum for the Public Schools of Cyprus was appointed by the MoEC in the summer of 2008 with the aim of developing a new curriculum for all grades and levels of compulsory education. According to the MoEC, one of the main goals of the new curriculum initiative was the creation of an integrated continuum of early childhood education, primary education, and secondary education, that is, a ten-year course of compulsory education, and thus, to tackle the long-standing problems of the education system. In December 2008, the Committee submitted its proposals.

In February 2009, 20 different committees consisting of both academics and teachers were established, one for each school subject, in order to prepare the new curriculum. The work of these committees was published at the end of the 2009-2010 school year, and the new curriculum was piloted in a number of schools in the following school year. The new curriculum was introduced in all public schools in the 2011-2012 school year following minor revisions.

In order to introduce the new curriculum, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute designed and provided training to all teachers of all education levels. The new curriculum still emphasizes the acquisition of information but it also focuses on teaching methods, indicators of success, key skills and competencies, and methods of evaluation. The new curriculum also brings the family close to their children's education by indicating their role in after-school activities. However, although the curriculum was upgraded and the discontinuity between primary and lower secondary education was partly addressed, these two levels of education continue to be managed separately. Moreover, the disparity between general and vocational education remains.

The MoEC, in order to tackle the aforementioned shortfalls and assess the implementation of the new curriculum appointed in 2014 an Evaluation

Committee who has recently submitted to the Minister of Education and Culture its report. It is thus anticipated that new developments are on the way.

PROGRESS TOWARDS THE EFA GOALS

GOAL 1 Expanding ECCE (Early childhood Care and Education)

1.How well do national policies, legislation, strategies and plans cover ECCE? Where are the gaps?

Up to the age of 4 years and 8 months, children's care falls under the Children Law (Day nurseries) Decree 217 of 1993 amended by K.Δ.Π. 213/94. The Decree governs the operation of day nurseries: duties of the director; number of personnel according to the number and age of children; qualifications of the director and the personnel; health conditions and equipment; records.

Pre-school education is part of primary education, so a considerable part of it falls under the same law and regulations as those governing the operation of primary education. According to Law 12/1965 pre-school education falls administratively, as other levels of education, under the MoEC. The operation of public kindergartens is specified in the "Regulations of 2008 to 2012 on the operation of public schools of primary education". These regulations refer to the selection criteria for eligible children, for example age of enrolment and, in general, the operation of kindergartens. The regulations that govern the operation of public and private kindergartens were prepared by the MoEC and were published in the Official Gazette on 28.1.1961, issue 5/1961.

Private kindergartens are also obliged to conform to these regulations. Additionally, they are expected to satisfy the relevant provisions set out in the

Law concerning Private Schools and Institutes (Law 5/1971 incorporating amendments made to Law 77(I)/2008). These set the framework for establishing and operating private schools/institutes. Through this Law, an Advisory Committee was set up, responsible for advising the Minister on issues concerning private education. The schools are also obliged to meet the provisions of Law 25/1976, which refers to different types of schools, to the number of employed staff, the enrollment age of children, the infrastructure, its internal regulations, fees, supervision, certification, as well as to the curricula and timetables.

The Special Education Laws (N. 113(I)/1999 and N. 69(I)/2001) provide that children with special needs attend regular schools equipped with the necessary infrastructure, unless otherwise decided. The Law also provides for the following: The establishment of a Central Committee and District Committees; the establishment of a Board for Special Education; the establishment of specific procedures for the detection of children with special needs; and the type of education offered to children with special needs.

The Laws as well as the regulations governing the operation of both private schools and day nurseries are under evaluation before reproduction, in view of modernizing the current system.

2. Is ECCE considered an integral part of the right to education within national legislation?

Children under the age of 3 are under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance. According to the relevant legislation the Social Welfare Services are responsible for the registration and supervision of private and community day care centers and child minders who look after children up to the age of 4 years and 8 months. These centers provide care and not education.

As of the 2004-05 school year, pre-primary education in Cyprus (i.e. attending a kindergarten) is mandatory and offered free of charge to children aged 4 years and 8 months to 5 years and 8 months who attend public kindergartens.

It is compulsory for children of the above age to attend either public kindergartens, or community or private schools, which are registered and approved by the MoEC. Younger children aged 3 years to 4 years and 8 months take up vacant places in public kindergartens and pay low fees – a nominal amount of €42. The selection of younger children is done according to the Law of Primary Education (1997) and by a Committee concerned with the selection of children meeting the criteria and procedures set by a circular issued by the Director of Primary Education.

Irrespective of age, priority is given to the children of special education needs. For the rest of the children, selection is made according to criteria concerning children at risk of socioeconomic deprivation. For example: children under the protection/supervision of the Welfare Office, orphans, children from poor families, children belonging to a family with many children, single families and children of political refugees, gypsies etc.

Emphasis is given on the education of almost all children with special needs within mainstream schools, starting from the age of 3. Many factors have assisted integration, mainly the increased number of special educators and peripatetic teachers, public acceptance campaigns, staff seminars, setting up of special classes in mainstream schools and use of teaching aids. There are no pre-primary schools exclusively for children with special needs.

The Government subsidises the expenses for community kindergartens, which operate only in cases where the public kindergarten classes available do not meet the needs of all the children aged 3 to 4 years and 8 months old in the

community. Parents undertake the rest of the expenses for the operation of these schools. The attendance fees for community schools are much lower than those of the private schools.

Private kindergartens are established and set in operation by individuals in the private sector after the approval of the Ministry. Their operation is regulated by the Law regarding Private Schools and Institutes. These are for-profit organisations.

The education programme of kindergartens "aims to retain many elements of family life, and focuses on the encouragement of creative activities through child-centred approaches in an environment which promotes cooperative learning, experimentation and group work". (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013, p. 335).

3.Which sectors/agencies are actively providing ECCE in the country? What kind of ECCE services do they provide? How do they complement and/or overlap with each other? What are the successes in ensuring access for all children? What are the barriers? Which groups of children are most at risk of exclusion from ECCE? What efforts are being made to reach them?

Which sectors/agencies are actively providing ECCE in the country? What kind of ECCE services do they provide?

ECCE in Cyprus is organized in two discrete systems based on the children's age: the pre-school and the pre-primary system. The pre-school system involves day nurseries, childminders and after school day centers, all of them operating under the remit of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance. The pre-

primary system involves kindergartens operating under the remit of the MoEC. All types of institutions are co-educational.

The pre-school system: Day nurseries are open to children under the age of 4^{8/12} years. There are public, community and private day nurseries. Public day nurseries are established by the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance in cooperation with the parents' association and the local authority for the area where the institution is located. Community day nurseries are established and run by local authorities on a not-for-profit basis. Private day-nurseries are established and supported by individuals on a for-profit basis. After school day centres provide protection and social activities to school age children after the end of each school day and during the school holidays. They are normally attached to schools or kindergartens. Childminders are persons entitled to look after a number of young children at home. Day nurseries, after school day centres and childminders are subject to inspection by the Social Welfare Services of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance.

The pre-primary system: Kindergartens are open to children of 3 - 5^{8/12} years of age. As of September 2004 attendance for children of 4^{8/12} – 5^{8/12} years of age is free and compulsory. There are public, community and private kindergartens. Public kindergartens are established by the MoEC in cooperation with the parents' association and the local authority for the area where the institution is located. Community kindergartens are established either by a parents' association, a local authority, a municipality, a welfare community council, a trade union or a charitable organization, following an approval by the MoEC. They operate on a non-profit basis, usually in areas where the number of public kindergartens is insufficient to meet the needs of the community. In many cases, they are co-located with public kindergartens and they serve children of 3 – 4^{8/12} years of age. Community kindergartens are subsidized by the government.

Private kindergartens are established and operated by private individuals with the approval of MoEC and they are run on a for-profit basis.

How do they complement and/or overlap with each other?

A day nursery may be integrated with a kindergarten. If so, it is open to children up to the age of 5^{8/12}. Integrated day nurseries/kindergartens are registered with both the Ministries of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance and the Education and Culture, each ministry being responsible for the respective age group of children. There is an overlap regarding the age range 3-4^{8/12} years of age, for which both ministries are responsible.

What are the successes in ensuring access for all children? What are the barriers?

Cyprus has a low participation rate in early childhood education (85%) and remains below the EU average (93,2%). Reaching the ambitious national target of 95% by 2020 requires systematic efforts from all stakeholders as well as a more coherent education policy, focusing on encouraging and motivating families to enroll their younger children at kindergartens. This can be achieved by giving more opportunities to these families to enroll their children in public schools and by increasing the number of available places. The MoEC needs to establish and operate a number of new classes and public kindergartens, as well as to increase the number of community schools. The Ministry subsidizes the community schools with an annual grant. Due to the allocated grants, tuition fees for community schools are lower than those of private kindergartens.

The continuous increase of immigrants requires specific educational policies focusing on teachers' in-service training as well as adjustment of the curriculum and educational practices (multicultural education, language learning etc.).

Differentiated support should be given to pupils according to their specific needs and be enhanced at every level. In view of this, teachers should be trained accordingly, in order to provide differentiated teaching in mixed-ability classes. Schools should provide specific support to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Finally, central and local education authorities should support schools with high percentages of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Which groups of children are most at risk of exclusion from ECCE? What efforts are being made to reach them?

Children of low socio-economic backgrounds and migrants are the groups most at risk of exclusion from ECCE. The Department of Primary Education has assessed and reviewed the criteria used to allocate the vacant places to younger children of non-compulsory education (aged 3 to 4 years and 8 months old), in public kindergartens, due to the socio-economic changes that have taken place in Cyprus during the last years. Based on the revised criteria, priority is now given to children at risk of socio-economic deprivation. For example, some of the new criteria include, among others, children whose parents are unemployed, children of political refugees or of different ethnic backgrounds.

4. What efforts are being made to ensure quality in different ECCE programmes? What are the challenges? What kind of good practices have been successful in raising quality in ECCE?

What efforts are being made to ensure quality in different ECCE programmes?

Quality assurance at day nurseries is the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance. Both, institutions and teaching staff are inspected by this Ministry.

At the pre-primary level of education overall responsibility for quality assurance rests with the Inspectorates of the Directorate of Primary Education. The inspectors are responsible for both supervising the public kindergartens and appraising their teaching and management staff. They also supervise the private kindergartens in order to assure that they comply with the provisions of the law, but they do not supervise their teaching personnel.

There is a system of teacher evaluation at all stages of their career in the public sector of school education, which is controlled by regulations ΚΔΠ 223/1976. Teachers are inspected and assessed during the first two-year probationary period. As part of the assessment procedure, teachers are usually observed in the classroom, followed by a meeting between the teacher and the inspector, during which the strengths and the weaknesses of the lesson are discussed. A different approach is followed for a headteacher's assessment. A team of inspectors evaluates head teachers and the focus is on school management and not on teaching.

The MoEC is also responsible for organising in-service trainings for teachers in the public sector. The Pedagogical Institute is the main provider of in-service trainings, offering both compulsory and optional courses. Some compulsory in-service training is also provided at school level. As regulated (Law 99/1989), two 45' periods per week are devoted to the teachers' professional development.

What are the challenges?

There are not many features of institutionalized internal evaluation in public schools in Cyprus. The only feature in use is an internal evaluation that public schools carry out at the end of each school year, in the form of an informal summary report on the operation of the school. The purpose is to report whether the school has reached its stated targets and bring any other important

information to the attention of the Ministry. The report serves as feedback for the MoEC.

Evaluation of the education system is not regulated. However, the recently established Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation (CERE) is expected to carry out research and evaluation studies on the whole education system. So far, a major evaluation has been carried out by a team of UNESCO experts, in 1996/97. Small scale research studies into specific areas of the education system have also been carried out by the Department for Educational Research and Evaluation of the Pedagogical Institute.

Some other measures that could raise quality in ECCE learning can be the following:

- upgrade the educational content and promote effectiveness in education, with special reference to the curricula
- modernize the system of appointment in the public education sector
- upgrade the teachers' in-service education and training
- modernize the evaluation system for the teachers
- promote school autonomy
- promote new technologies in the education system
- pursue high standards of literacy
- promote differentiation in the learning process.

What kind of good practices have been successful in raising quality in ECCE?

During the school year 2011-12, the MoEC introduced the new National Curriculum which gives an emphasis on the learning process and focuses on strategies which assist in developing their critical and creative thinking. The new curriculum gives also emphasis to the development of intercultural awareness,

tolerance and respect of otherness, aiming at the harmonious coexistence of pupils regardless of differences in ethnicity or cultural background. It aims at the continuous and systematic training of teaching staff, the upgrading and writing of new textbooks that will cater for the needs of the new curriculum and enrich society in general. Moreover, it aims towards the improvement of teaching methods and approaches, the design and implementation of modern developmental programmes, the increase of special education programmes and of programmes that will support pupils with learning difficulties.

5. What specific strategies and measures have been put in place to increase school-preparedness among all children, especially those from disadvantaged population groups? Does the country have policies to address the quality of public and/or private ECCE?

Differentiated support is given to pupils according to their specific needs. For this reason, teachers aim to provide differentiated teaching in their mixed-ability classes.

The MoEC reevaluated the criteria for the selection of younger children aged 3 to 4 years and 8 months who take up vacant places in public schools. Irrespective of age, priority is given to children of special educational needs. For the rest, selection is made according to criteria concerning children at risk of socioeconomic deprivation. For example, children under the protection/supervision of the Welfare office, orphans, children from poor families, children of a family with many children, or single families, and children of political refugees, gypsies or of another origin.

Emphasis is given on the education of almost all children with special needs within mainstream schools starting from the age of 3 years old. Many factors have assisted integration, mainly the increased number of special educators and

peripatetic teachers, through public acceptance campaigns, staff seminars, the setting up of special classes in mainstream schools and employment of teaching aids. There are no special pre-primary schools.

The MoEC established and operated a number of new classes and public kindergartens, and increased the number of community schools. The Ministry subsidizes the community schools with an annual grant. Due to the allocated grants, tuition fees for community schools are lower than those of private kindergartens.

The only policy to address the quality of public ECCE is the assessment of the inspectors who are responsible for both supervising the public kindergartens and appraising their teaching and management staff. They also supervise the private kindergartens in order to assure that they comply with the provisions of the law but not the quality of ECCE.

GOAL 2 Universalizing primary/basic education

1. Is the right to education enshrined in the national constitution and legislation? Is the right to education free, compulsory and universal, at least at the primary level? Is the principle of non-discrimination provided for within education related legislation and/or policies?

5. What policies and measures have been developed to anticipate and plan for the maximum absorption of primary school leavers into secondary schools?

Education in Cyprus is compulsory and free for all pupils from the age of 4 years and 8 months (one year before enrolling in a primary school) up to the age of fifteen (lower secondary education). The main concern of the Ministry of

Education and Culture (MoEC) is to ensure equal access to education for all children living on the island, taking into account that the right to education is safeguarded in the Republic's Constitution. The Law 24(I) of 1993 ensures the universal free availability of primary education. The Ministry offers free and accessible education to all pupils without prejudice based on gender, abilities, language, color, religion, political beliefs or ethnic background. All necessary measures are taken so that effective access to basic education for all is guaranteed. During the last few years a systematic effort is made to increase access to education for all children and strengthen the quality of the educational process.

In April 2004, the Council of Ministers has approved the free and compulsory pre-primary education for children aged 4 8/12 to 5 8/12 years. According to the provisions of this decision, all children one year before their enrolment to a primary school should be enrolled in either public or private kindergartens that are approved by the MoEC and registered with the MoEC. This reform has contributed significantly to the upgrading of the quality of primary education, since children are inducted in the educational environment early; therefore the foundations for an all-round education and personality are strengthened.

As far as the education of children with special needs is concerned, the Ministry of Education and Culture has put into effect the Education and Training of Children with Special Needs Law, the Regulations regarding the Mechanisms for Early Detection of Children with Special Needs and the Regulations regarding the Education and Training of Children with Special Needs, which support the application of the Law.

Universal access to free primary education has been well established in the Republic of Cyprus and no specific difficulties have been encountered. Legislation provides for non-discrimination against children of migrant workers,

hence securing their unobstructed access to education. The Attorney General has advised that the Constitution of Cyprus clearly states that the right to education is not confined by citizenship; therefore even the children of illegal immigrants are allowed to enroll in Cyprus schools, without meaning that their parents gain any rights through this. As a result, all children, including girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of very high quality.

2.What specific policies and measures are in place to address the barriers that prevent children belonging to disadvantaged groups from accessing and successfully completing primary education?

During the last few years the MoEC, has designed, developed and implemented a new policy with regards to Multicultural Education, aiming at the smooth inclusion of pupils from third countries as well as other EU member states to the Cyprus Educational System. The policy priorities place particular emphasis on democratization, by cultivating respect for the dignity and uniqueness of each individual; respect for the opinion of the majority; creating opportunities for active participation in the decision-making process; providing equal opportunities in all aspects of school life; and encouraging cooperation and responsibility. The specific objectives of this policy include:

- The development and implementation of coordinated actions and interventions that promote the smooth inclusion of non-native speaking pupils (including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers) to the Cyprus Educational System
- The establishment of rules and regulations for the accountability and quality control of the educational provisions for non-native speaking pupils

- The in-service training of all teachers regarding the empirical and theoretical multidisciplinary teaching methods and tools based on the philosophy of multicultural education
- The development of special educational methods and the application of new teaching approaches in order to promote the objectives of a multicultural education.

In response to the demands of the contemporary society and the changing social environment, both national and international, the overall policy is to promote the implementation of educational measures, which will help groups from different cultural identities to integrate themselves in a creative environment, regardless of their background and enable teachers to support pupils' linguistic and cultural needs in an effective way.

Multicultural Education is currently being practiced in the form of various support measures. These measures can be categorized as measures for language support, which refer to the learning of Greek as a second language and measures for facilitating the inclusion of various groups with different cultural identities. The model that is currently being used is the mainstreaming programme, in which foreign pupils participate in the classrooms along with the native Greek-speaking pupils. A flexible system of intervention within the ordinary timetable exists. The Ministry also encourages several cultural measures to promote multicultural awareness. It provides all schools with educational material, which includes books for the teaching of the Greek language, activity and exercise books, as well as teachers' books with methodological instructions and a variety of suggestions for activities, of mainly communicative character.

The Ministry also recognizes the need to provide teachers with the opportunity to further develop their learning and teaching approaches to all children. Developing multicultural awareness, providing information among the pupil population of the

way of life, patterns of thought and attitudes of different people, attempting to understand these differences and communicating with these people, are important aspects of the Ministry's policy.

Furthermore, the Council of Ministers approved the *"Policy Report of the Ministry of Education for Multicultural Education"*. According to the relevant suggestions of the Educational Reform Committee and within the framework of the creation of a democratic school that will incorporate and include all pupils, the following measures, that aim to the inclusion of foreign pupils to the school system and the Cyprus society, are being implemented:

- Parallel classes for fast acquisition of the Greek language through intensive instruction
- In-service training seminars for teachers teaching Greek as a second or/and a foreign language organised by the Pedagogical Institute
- Preparation of a test that will be used by all schools, in order to rank and classify pupils to the appropriate level by the Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation
- Preparation of an induction guide for the new coming foreign pupils which is translated in eight languages, with basic information for the pupils and the parents regarding the Cyprus Educational System. The guide is available in: English, Turkish, Russian, Georgian, Bulgarian, Rumanian, Ukrainian and Arabic
- Addition of intercultural elements in the new Curricula and the school textbooks that will be prepared within the framework of the changes in the structure and the content of education
- Production and creation of appropriate educational and pedagogical material, as well as the usage of material that has been was produced in Greece.

Some areas with disadvantaged pupil population and with high registration and attendance of non-native language speakers operate as “*Zones of Educational Priority*”, deriving from UNESCO’s strategy for positive discrimination; that is to give more to those who have less and prevent social exclusion and marginalisation. The ultimate aim of this programme is to combat school dropout, to reduce functional illiteracy, to eliminate the dropout phenomenon and to reduce school failure and pupil’s delinquency. For these reasons additional resources are provided to the vulnerable groups of pupils.

Each Zone consists of one lower secondary school, the main primary schools in its capture area and the main kindergartens in degraded areas with a pupil population coming from families with a low socioeconomic and educational level. The criteria for defining a Zone is a high record of school failure and functional illiteracy in the area’s school units, a high share of migrant or foreign language speaking pupils, a high number of drop-outs and high incidence of violent and anti-social behavior (young delinquency).

Actions taken within the framework of the “*Zones of Educational Priority*” include:

- Reduction in the number of pupils per classroom
- Employment of teachers speaking the mother tongue of foreign language speaking pupils
- Free breakfast to pupils of kindergartens and primary schools
- Offer of free meals to underprivileged pupils of kindergartens and primary schools
- Afternoon activities (groups, clubs) at the gymnasiums included in the Zones
- Appointment of two teachers as coordinators in each Zone
- All-day operation of the primary schools and gymnasiums covered by the Zones.

The operation of the “*Zones of Educational Priority*” has had positive results, such as a reduction of pupil dropouts, of school failure (referrals and repetitions) and of referrals to the Educational Psychology Service, as well as improvement of school success. An indicative result of this innovation is the fact that in 2003 the percentage of early school leavers was 17,3% which dropped to 11,2% in 2011 and to 9,1% in 2013 after the introduction of this institution.

The Department of Primary Education has, also, enforced various programmes and measures for Special Education to meet the educational and other needs of primary school children during these years. The needs of these children are satisfied by well-qualified teachers of various specialties (teachers for intellectual, emotional and other problems, the deaf, the blind, special gymnastics, music therapy, work therapy, speech therapy, educational psychology, audiology and physiotherapy).

3. To what extent have these policies, strategies and mechanisms been implemented within the wider framework of poverty reduction policies?

4. What efforts (e.g. in terms of wider social policies, incentives, etc.) have been made to mitigate the opportunity costs of attending primary schools?

Cyprus is currently trying to recover from a severe financial crisis. The need to adopt specific measures regarding the negative social conditions such as widening disparities and marginalization of the vulnerable groups, especially pupils in need, becomes more eminent. The MoEC has promoted the implementation of educational measures and policies that would alleviate poverty and facilitate the smooth integration of all vulnerable groups, especially children regardless of background. Particular attention has been placed on public investment, in which education priorities have been re-examined and adequate adjustments have been made. At the same time, all financial assistance schemes

for pupils and students have been redesigned, on the basis of income-related criteria, thus providing the opportunity to better address the needs of the vulnerable groups. The approach of the equal treatment of inequalities has been lifted resulting in more just and socially acceptable schemes.

Pupils in public schools do not pay any amount for their school books. Free bus transportation is provided for pre-primary and primary education pupils. An additional fund in the budget of the MoEC is allocated to cover transportation expenses of pupils who meet eligibility criteria but are not served by bus routes.

Taking into consideration the fact that quite a few families face difficulties as a result of the crisis, new measures have also been introduced, while others have been redesigned, so as to better address the needs of the vulnerable groups of pupils and to fight against child poverty and social exclusion. The following measures are indicative:

- Provision of breakfast (sandwich and milk) to 12 000 pupils whom their school units identify as children in need. This initiative was highly welcomed by the private sector that contributed with donations and products. The MoEC has prepared an electronic platform for the collection of data on the number of children in need of support that will assist in the allocation of subsidies to School Boards.
- The MoEC's budget related to the provision of financial assistance to pupils and their families in need has been increased and broadened to include more areas. Low income families can apply for financial assistance in order to meet their children's nutrition, health, educational and social needs. The allowance is given once per school year. The provision in the budget has been increased from €60.000 in 2011 and 2012 to €370.000 in 2013 and 2014. The relevant fund is further enhanced

with private donations, following an appeal by the Minister of Education and Culture.

GOAL 3 Meeting the Learning Needs of Youths and Adults

Specific Policies and Implementation Mechanisms for Adult Education aiming to cover the learning needs of adults and youth. Main developments since 2000.

The economic crisis, the need for new skills as well as the demographic changes have all contributed to recognition that lifelong learning and mobility strategies should play a key role in the policies for competitiveness and employability, social inclusion and active citizenship. *A comprehensive national Lifelong Learning Strategy covering the period from 2014 until 2020* has been designed after a consultation with all the major stakeholders. It focuses on the following four axes:

- I. Enhancing access and participation of all in Lifelong Learning and recognition of its results
- II. Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
- III. Promoting Research and development to support Lifelong Learning
- IV. Improving employability (Promoting integration / reintegration into the labor market).

Although specific efforts are under way, there is no comprehensive national strategy in Cyprus for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. In order to address this deficit, the cabinet of Ministers approved the establishment (Decision No 74.676, 11/2/2013) of an interdepartmental Committee, which has the task to develop and see to the implementation of a comprehensive action plan for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, in line with “Council

Recommendation of 20.12.12 for the validation of the non-formal and informal learning”.

The Committee will take into account the work which is already being done by the Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA) (see below). This work will be incorporated in a more comprehensive scheme, which will include the general education sector, the adult education sector as well as the non-formal learning that takes place within the volunteering and youth sector (eg. youth workers). For the realisation of the tasks of the Committee appointed by the Cabinet, specific provisions were incorporated in the National Strategic Reference Framework (2014-2020) and it is expected that relevant projects will be supported financially by the European Structural Funds (ESF).

The HRDA has already initiated the process of developing and establishing a competence-based system of vocational qualifications, which will constitute an integral part of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). During the first phase of the development of the system, covering the period between 2006 and 2009, five standards of vocational qualifications at level 2 were developed in the three economic sectors of Hotels and Restaurants, Construction, and Retail Trade, for the occupations of Waiter, Cook, Receptionist, Construction Mason and Sales Person.

During the second phase, which covers the period between 2007 and 2015 and is co-financed by the ESF and the Republic of Cyprus, 80 new standards are expected to be developed (67 of which have already been developed) in priority occupations at various levels. The standards cover a broad range of occupations in the sectors of Hotels and Restaurants, Retail and Wholesale Trade, Construction, Manufacturing, Repairs of Motor Vehicles, Systems and Networks of Communication etc. The new standards that are developed are discussed by

the sectoral technical committees of vocational qualifications and approved by the Board of Governors of the HRDA.

The System of Vocational Qualifications is designed for the assessment and certification of the competence of a person to carry out a specific job in real and/or accepted simulated working conditions. Opportunity for access is provided to persons regardless of the way they have acquired their knowledge, skills and competences.

Work is being done on establishing a National Qualifications Framework and referencing it to the European Qualification Framework (EQF). The referencing report was developed by the National Coordination Point and sent to five experts (four international and one Cypriot) for comments. Following their feedback, a second draft of the Referencing Report was developed and sent back to the experts for more feedback. This draft is expected to be eventually endorsed after receiving a positive feedback from EQF Advisory Group.

At the same time, a number of meetings with all the stakeholders involved (students' organizations, parents' organizations, education providers, VET providers, employers' organizations, employees' organizations, teachers' organizations, the HRDA, the Cyprus Productivity Centre etc) have taken place, as the first step of the implementation plan. The period between September 2014 and May 2015 will be the testing period of the implementation of the NQF, the results of which will be evaluated.

Challenges faced:

- The Finalisation of the NQF, which is directly linked with the development of the validation of non-formal and informal learning process, the easier transition between the several education and training sectors and the

recognition of learning outcomes gained outside the official educational system.

- The Establishment of mechanisms for the validation of non formal and informal learning.

European Alliance for Apprenticeships and Youth Guarantee

Considering the Council Declaration on the European Alliance for Apprenticeships of 15 October 2013, Cyprus is developing the following three measures in order to increase the quality, supply and attractiveness of apprenticeships:

- **New Modern Apprenticeship Scheme**

Apprenticeship in Cyprus is going through an extensive reform with co-funding from the ESF. The new reformed system (New Modern Apprenticeship - NMA) has been operating since the school year 2012/13 on a limited scale. The objective is to build on the results achieved so far and to extend its coverage and enrich its content. The impact expected is to make NMA an alternative and innovative learning approach by which apprentices will be able to learn by doing. In order to increase the supply, quality and attractiveness of apprenticeships, the following measures will be taken:

- accessible to young people from all districts/areas
- Introduction of specialisations based of forecasts of future needs
- Use of new and advanced technology
- Inclusion of Apprenticeships in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee.

- **Skills enhancement (Apprenticeship type training)**

This measure, which is to be promoted within the framework of Youth Guarantee, is targeted to young people aged 15 to 24 who lack the skills to gain a foothold in the labour market. Among the options available, a new action will include

vocational training organized in partnership with public and private vocational training institutions. The aim is to increase the apprenticeship places available to unemployed youth and expand the range of occupations for which training is available and, at the same time, to equip young beneficiaries with the skills required by the labour market. Training will lead to a vocational qualification.

Young people will be referred to these training programmes by Public Employment Services and Career guidance and Counseling Services of MoEC, on the basis of the results of individualized services provided to beneficiaries. Training providers will be responsible for placing apprentices in enterprises for their in-company training and also for monitoring their training. The number of young people to be benefited is 1250.

The main objectives of this measure are to increase the supply of apprenticeship places and address skills mismatches in mainly technical professions.

- **Reform and upgrading of the element of industrial placement and training in the curricula of initial VET**

The reform and upgrading of the industrial placement and training of the students of initial VET aims at the provision of relevant practical knowledge, skills and competences in their chosen field of studies, under actual working conditions and according to the approved content of the curricula. The reform and upgrading of the element of industrial placement and training in initial VET curricula has been proposed to be included in the financial framework 2014-2020.

The reform is expected to contribute to:

- the improvement of vocational training of students, safeguarding their smooth transition from school to work
- the consolidation and implementation of the theoretical knowledge, skills and competences acquired at Technical Schools

- the development of professional ethics and values which are necessary for the effective and productive integration of students in the world of work and in society in general
- the development of closer ties between the stakeholders involved in school education and industrial training
- the match-up between skills provided by Technical Schools and employers' needs
- the access to state-of-the-art equipment and infrastructure.

In order to achieve the above-mentioned objectives, the setting up of a modern training model in industry for enhanced cooperation between Technical Schools and businesses, by offering incentives to important industrial units or enterprises to employ Technical School students as part of their practical training, is currently being planned.

VET provision in tune with labour market needs and in support of innovation policies

- **Upper Secondary technical and vocational schools**

The process of reducing the number of specializations that are offered per field of study is currently underway, in order to offer students of initial VET the opportunity to gain wider knowledge of their chosen field of study. By placing emphasis on the acquisition of basic skills, key competences and the way knowledge is acquired (learning how to learn), rather than on narrow specialization (which they can pursue later by enrolling at the newly established Post Secondary Institutes of VET), students can become more competitive within the contemporary labour market. Through practical learning and industrial placement, they are given the opportunity to develop mathematical competences, as well as basic competences in science and technology. Moreover, through technological subjects, they are acquainted with technology and technological

products and procedures, and through theoretical and elective subjects, they are given the opportunity to develop foreign language and ICT skills. Finally, the inclusion of entrepreneurship components in the curricula is promoted.

The reformed curricula will be based on Units of Learning Outcomes and ECVET Points. They are expected to be implemented during the school year 2014-2015.

- **Post Secondary Institutes of VET**

The Post Secondary Institutes of VET began their operation in November 2012. They operate at existing Technical Schools in all major areas of Cyprus, offering an alternative learning pathway to secondary education graduates and adults, providing them with the opportunity to acquire, improve or upgrade their qualifications and skills, in order to become better prepared for participating in the labour market. Attendance at the Post-Secondary Institutes of VET is free of charge.

The Post Secondary Institutes of VET are a co-financed project by the ESF and the Republic of Cyprus and are included in the financial framework 2014-2020. They are envisaged to contribute to tackling the problem of skills mismatches and youth unemployment, since the programmes offered have been especially designed, after consultation with the social partners and stakeholders participating in the Advisory Body, to respond to the requirements of emerging economic sectors and be relevant to labour market needs. Maintaining the curricula's flexibility and relevance to the labour market is on-going, since they will be systematically evaluated, revised and updated on an annual basis, taking into account the views and suggestions of the members of the Advisory Body as well as current labour market needs determined after research of employment prospects in Cyprus. In addition, industry experts from the world of work and the academic community are selected and appointed to teach at the Institutes, in

order to further enhance the relevance of the programmes with labour market needs and ensure that they are up-to-date with current technological advances.

The two-year specialized programmes of study offered by the Post Secondary Institutes of VET will serve as a bridge between the qualifications acquired through upper Secondary Technical and Vocational Education (initial VET) and the qualifications required by Industry and the labour market, since initial VET curricula do not offer narrow specialization, but rather basic skills and key competences. Work based learning, which is a compulsory component of the Post Secondary Institutes of VET curricula

Even though there is no formal agreement between the social partners and the government to reinforce work based learning, nor there is a formal commitment to provide a number of training places, the organized Associations of Employers and Manufacturers, who participate in the Advisory Body, contribute to securing a number of training places for learners, by encouraging their members to provide such training places.

Challenges faced:

(a) For decades, Apprenticeship in Cyprus has been associated with school failure and low achievement. It is important to raise the image and status of Apprenticeship and promote it through an awareness-raising range of activities so that it becomes a strong alternative pathway for students who want to continue their education through Apprenticeship.

(b) A reform in VET provision is deemed necessary as currently there is no formal agreement between the social partners and the government to reinforce work based learning, neither there is a formal commitment to provide a number of training places. The absence of a formal agreement between the social partners and the government is a major weakness that affects in an adverse way

the provision of VET in Cyprus. Related to this is the absence of a mechanism of practical support of the industrial world towards the system of formal VET.

Higher Education as a means of meeting the learning needs of youths and adults

The Cyprus higher education subsector is fairly young. The University of Cyprus, the oldest university on the island, admitted its first students in 1992. Since then, two other public universities the Open University of Cyprus and the Cyprus University of Technology and five private universities have been founded. This expansion of the Cypriot higher education subsector was driven mainly by:

- the high value that Cypriots attach to higher education;
- the EU's strategy of promoting tertiary education;
- the political desire to reduce student emigration;
- the Government's vision of making Cyprus a hub for higher education research.

Demand for higher education is high, since 82% of the pupils completing their upper secondary education seek placements at institutions of higher education. The Cyprus Government covers the cost of tuition fees for European Union students studying at public institutions of higher education in Cyprus, at both university and non-university level. Because of the rather limited supply of places in Cyprus, about 45% of Cypriot students study in other countries, with the most popular destinations being Greece, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Tertiary Education attainment in Cyprus is above the European target set for 2020. The enhancement of the quality of Higher Education, though, is an ongoing endeavour. The measures that Cyprus has developed to increase tertiary

education attainment and quality and to support HEIs to promote their internationalization strategy are the following:

- **Establishment of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education**

The operation of the new Agency will improve the quality of education offered by Cypriot Higher Education Institutions, and, as a consequence, will improve the attractiveness of Cypriot Higher Education System. At present, the relevant legislation has been submitted for discussion at the Education Committee of the Cyprus Parliament and is expected to be approved from the plenary session of the Cyprus Parliament.

- **Establishment of a strong, targeted student welfare system so as to enhance equity and widen access to higher education**

Cyprus, despite the economic crisis that affects the country, has managed to widen access to university education. This was accomplished including, inter alia, by initiatives such as the below mentioned

- (i) The establishment of the Open University of Cyprus which has managed to encourage distance and e-learning,
- (ii) Establishment of different options to university education, encouragement of Cypriot HEIs to offer short cycle courses,
- (iii) Subsidization by the state of the fees of undergraduate students of public universities,
- (iv) specific measures are taken in order to ensure equal access rights for underrepresented groups in public and private universities and to provide financial support based on socioeconomic criteria (student grant and student support package).

- **Promotion of international co-operations within the framework of inter-governmental Educational and Cultural Agreements.**

Cyprus has signed several bilateral agreements with the purpose of strengthening co-operation with other countries and promoting internationalization of Higher Education. These official agreements include academic exchanges of staff and students, exchanges of administrative staff, exchange of good practices and expertise. It should be noted that the most important bilateral agreement that Cyprus has signed recently is the one with China. Furthermore, several agreements have been signed or are in the process of being signed with other countries for the mutual recognition of degrees.

- **Introduction of programmes of study in English**

Introduction of English language in the public universities, establishment of the National Qualification Framework, use of ECTS and Diploma Supplement by Cyprus institutions in order to facilitate mobility of students.

The Ministry of Education and Culture has prepared the relevant legislation amendment regarding the introduction of programmes of study in English in the public universities and it is soon expected to be submitted for approval to the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cyprus. Moreover, twenty three (23) Cypriot Higher Education Institutions are already participating in Erasmus mobility for some years and have been accredited with the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education. Furthermore, three (3) private universities have been awarded the ECTS Label, while 7 Cypriot HEIs have been awarded the Diploma Supplement Label.

Challenges faced:

The most significant challenges to overcome in the aforementioned areas are the approval of the legislation for the establishment of the Cyprus Agency of Quality

Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education, the establishment of a framework for the provision of cross-border education, the maintenance of a strong targeted student welfare system in times of economic constraint, the implementation of ECTS in all Cypriot HEIs and the legislation amendment for introducing programmes of study in English in the public universities.

GOAL 4 Adult Literacy and Continuing Basic Education

Cyprus as a developed country having attained 98,68% in adult literacy has taken specific measures/programmes to improve the quality, participation and efficiency of adult learning and to provide basic skills (literacy, numeracy and digital skills) to low-skilled adults.

To this end the Adult Education Centres is a significant programme which provides general adult education in Cyprus within the lifelong learning context. The main objective of the Centres is the development of each adult's personality as well as the social, financial and cultural development of citizens and the society in general. The Centres function in all areas under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus, offering learning opportunities for further personal, professional as well as social development to thousands of adults aged 15 and above.

The Adult Education Centres offer a variety of interdisciplinary courses which mainly focus on the teaching of foreign languages, culture, arts and crafts, health and other issues of general interest, as well as on teaching professional and vocational skills. Furthermore, the Centres organise every year, free of charge, learning programmes for various target groups, such as people with special needs, handicapped, prisoners, mentally ill and elderly people. They also offer, free of charge, Greek language courses to children of repatriated Cypriots and

Greeks from ex-Russian Republics, to political refugees and to Turkish Cypriots as well as Turkish language courses to Greek Cypriots.

The Centres have been acknowledged by the citizens of the Republic of Cyprus as the most important programme of general adult education with the provision of a variety of qualitative courses. More than 30000 citizens have attended the Centres' courses during the school year 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 with about 70% attending courses in urban areas and 30% attending courses in rural areas. The female participants were about 70% and male participants were 30%. About 15% of the participants were over 65 years of age and 8% of the participants were attending courses free of charge. Children from foreign countries that attended the special programme for learning Greek were about 5% of the participants.

An assessment of the operation of the Adult Education Centers was conducted by the Center for Educational Research and Evaluation between 2009 and 2011. This assessment came up with several conclusions including the need to improve (a) the in-service training provision of adult teaching staff (b) the educational process and (c) the management of the institution. Having this assessment in mind, the Adult Education Centers introduced a number of improving measures such as new employment procedures of adult teaching staff, based on a common registration of all applicants. This new initiative is still under development and certain improvements might be introduced.

Regarding efforts to outreach low-skilled adults, Cyprus set various initiatives such as regional information days and conferences so as to communicate directly and more systematically information regarding the available educational and training opportunities. This area proved that it should be further pursued.

On the above basis, Cyprus set specific objectives for the implementation of the renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning 2012-14, with an overall aim to promote the importance of adult learning, by identifying and informing adult learners about the benefits of their participation to adult learning opportunities, with an emphasis on the disadvantaged groups, mainly unemployed and low skilled adults. Complementary to the above aims, the project is also paying attention to enhance the debate among the main representatives of Adult Education and Training in Cyprus on how to promote communication and better cooperation among them and achieve common objectives on adult education. Finally, the project aims to enhance professionalization of adult learning practitioners who work with vulnerable adult learners (eg. adult attending second chance schools). For the accomplishment of the above aims several activities have been implemented until now: publication material, conferences, regional information days, peer learning activities. All these are posted on the project's web-site⁸.

The Center for Educational Research and Evaluation implemented the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). The survey focused on the identification of adults' (aged 16-65) language, mathematical and technological literacy. The main phase of the study, which involved more than 5000 adults from Cyprus, was completed in 2012, while in 2013 the consortium undertook the data analysis. The national report of the study was prepared and released upon release of the international report by the OECD.

Afternoon and evening classes of Technical Schools

The Afternoon and Evening Classes of Technical Schools offer one-year programmes, which lead to the acquisition of a certificate, or three-year

⁸ <http://www.moec.gov.cy/aethee/>

programmes, which lead to the acquisition of a leaving certificate equivalent to that awarded to graduates of Technical Schools as far as the technical component is concerned. Their objective is to offer continuing education and training to employed or unemployed adults, in order to be able to respond more effectively to the contemporary demands of the labour market and achieve re-integration in the labour market where there is shortage of skilled workers.

Furthermore, one of the objectives of the one-year programmes is to offer vocational education and training to specific groups of people at risk of exclusion from the labour market. As a result, special programmes addressing prisoners, aiming at their re-integration into the labour market, are offered at the Central Prisons in Nicosia. These programmes include classes in cooking, graphic design, woodcraft and furniture making, and AUTOCAD design.

Challenges faced:

The most significant remaining challenges to overcome in this area are the following:

- (a) Establish an overarching quality framework for adult learning which will assure quality in non-formal adult learning (accreditation of providers, accreditation of programs offered).
- (b) Set more focused and defined policies for providing basic skills (literacy, numeracy and digital skills) for low skilled adults at national level (eg. for adult learners attending second chance schools or the adult education centers etc).
- (c) Development of legal requirements for adult learning staff that lacks initial training and continuing professional development.
- (d) Establish a national mechanism system for monitoring data in the adult learning sector (education and training sector) in order to ensure quality in provision and monitor its effectiveness.

GOAL 5: Gender Equality

The Ministry of Justice and Public Order is the coordinating body of Gender Equality in Cyprus. The MoEC is responsible for Gender Equality in the field of Education, ensuring equal opportunities on a non-discriminatory basis at all levels of education.

The MoEC offers free and accessible education to all students at all education levels (pre-primary, primary, secondary general and secondary technical and vocational education and training) without discrimination. One year of pre-primary education, six years of primary education and three years of low secondary education are compulsory and provided free of charge by the Government of Cyprus to all children, irrespective of the residential status of the students' parents. Pre-primary, primary and secondary schools are established and functioning in all towns and rural areas. The above safeguard the right of all students for full access to different levels of education. At the same time, assertive measures are implemented to counterbalance disadvantages:

- **Zones of Educational Priority (mentioned in Goal 2)**

A key measure to facilitate school enrolment and school success for students from disadvantageous background, are the Zones of Educational Priority (ZEP). The programme aims to combat early school leaving, school failure and delinquency, through assertive actions. It is founded on the principle of identifying the causes of the various challenges that schools are faced with and establishing assertive actions towards long term improvement. The assessment of the ZEP programme for the period 2007-13 which was conducted by an External Committee appointed by the MoEC, indicated that the operation of the ZEP had positive results, such as reduction of student drop-outs, reduction of school failure (referrals and repetitions) and minimization of referrals to the Educational

Psychology Service. Overall, in school units where the ZEP programme was implemented, improvement was noted in all operational areas.

The expansion of the ZEP programme facilitates the integration of students at risk to the school system. The number of ZEP has been increased from four (4) in 2009 to eight (8) in 2013. ZEP programme was co-funded by the ESF (2007-2013) and remains a priority for the MoEC within the proposals submitted to get funding from ESF for the period 2014-2020.

- **Evaluation of the mechanism on the early identification of students with emotional, learning and other difficulties (2012)**

This pilot program, in relation to the early identification and support of students with emotional, learning and other difficulties, have started in 2009 and was evaluated in 2012 by CERE. Based on data analysis suggestions for improvement were provided to the MoEC, in order to inform decisions for the implementation of the program on a wider scale.

- **Implementation of the 'Programme for Functional Literacy' (longitudinal project)**

The CERE implements and evaluates the longitudinal research study 'Programme for Functional Literacy' on a national scale for all primary school students at the third and sixth primary school grade. This is a large scale programme that aims to identify students 'at risk' for functional illiteracy, when they finish compulsory education (15 years of age). The test provided assesses baseline knowledge and skills in language and mathematics, such as locating, reading, and understanding information in text. Results of this study are forwarded to schools and the Directorates of Education at the MoEC, so that these students receive early support, while in school.

- **Health promotion programme**

A health promotion programme, with specific actions and interventions is carried out in Cypriot schools. The programme focuses on developing pupils' personal and social skills, enhanced self-esteem and promotes health as a holistic process, support families' efficiency and children's creativity (e.g. through film and art workshops, learning IT together, drama workshops and music workshops), provide summer school activities in key target areas of social and economic deprivation and so forth⁹.

Additionally to all the above the Ministry has formed an Interdepartmental Committee with representatives from all the Ministry's departments and services. This Committee oversees and coordinates all gender equality issues related to actions taken by the MoEC. The work of this Committee resulted in the development of an Action Plan named "Strategic Planning for Equality between Men and Women 2014-2017" which promotes actions related to gender equality in the educational system and the teacher in-service training.

This action plan includes actions on gender equality awareness based on the following three objectives:

1. Inclusion of actions promoting gender equality in the educational system
2. Inclusion of gender equality in the teacher in-service training
3. Empowerment of the family to promote gender equality.

Examples of good practices promoting gender equality in the educational system are as follows:

⁹ The World Health Organisation (WHO) praised this programme and recent article published by the WHO Regional Office for Europe described this programme in Cyprus as an "innovative practice that will inform and inspire policy-makers, practitioners, managers, educators and researchers at country and European Levels", linked to the WHO European policy Health 2020 (Barnekow et al., 2013, p.ii).

- Setting active citizenship, with emphasis on social solidarity and elimination of stereotypes in the educational process, as one of the objectives of the school year 2013 – 2014 (MoEC).
- Launching a website dedicated to Gender Equality (Pedagogical Institute), which includes useful information, bibliography and material that teachers can use to ensure equal opportunities of both genders and promote gender mainstreaming in the learning process¹⁰
- Utilizing the All-day school initiative as a means to provide the pupils with the opportunity to extend their stay in school and participate in cultural, sporting, and other educational events related to gender equality
- Utilizing the “Educational Priority Zones” (Special Reference was made in Goal 2) to promote gender equality.
- Preventing and combating violence and delinquency in school and in the family
- Organising Essay Contests about Gender Equality for the 11th grade students.
- Conducting surveys on the needs and aspirations of women of ‘diverse’ cultural backgrounds and of their children and creating educational/professional structures aimed at providing language skills and professional orientation
- Collecting and processing statistical data, concerning students and teachers in all levels of education, broken down by gender
- Implementing various programmes in schools promoting gender equality and respect among all children, irrespective of their socioeconomic background or gender
- Implementing special programmes related to career choices so that female participation in the VET schools will increase. To this end VET is being reshaped (More details in Goal 3 about VET being reshaped)

¹⁰http://www.pi.ac.cy/pi/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=910&Itemid=383&lang=el

Examples of good practices for objectives 2 and 3 are as follows:

- Training courses aiming to raise awareness in relation to the gap between men and women in labour (1 - 3 days trainings). Target group: Teachers of Primary and Secondary Education, career counsellors, inspectors of Primary and Secondary Education and parents. (collaboration of the Pedagogical Institute, the Career Counselling and Educational Services of M.O.E.C and the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance).
- School based training seminars and programmes for teachers and parents on issues related to active citizenship, multiculturalism, social inclusion/exclusion, identity, relationships between girls and boys and gender equality awareness.
- Workshops for teachers (Primary and Secondary Education) organized by the Pedagogical Institute and the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS).
- In-service training for teachers on issues related to prevention and combating delinquency (Department of Primary Education, Department of Secondary General Education, Department of Secondary Technical and Vocational Education, the Pedagogical Institute).
- Conferences/seminars on gender issues for teachers of all levels (Pedagogical Institute).
- Workshops for teachers and students aiming at the promotion of equality and inclusion (Career Counselling and Educational Services).

All the above were also consistent with the objective set by MoEC for the school year 2013-2014 named “Elimination of stereotypes in the educational process”.

Cyprus’ participation in international research studies

Cyprus’ participation in international research studies has revealed only minor gender disparities in different fields of education.

The results from PIAAC (2012) indicated small differences in the literacy proficiency scores of adults (16-65) in favor of females (270 over 268) and a bit larger differences in numeracy, this time in favor of men (268 over 261).

However, in the last cycle of PISA (2012), 15 year old girls outperformed boys of the same age in reading, science and problem solving (Table 1). No gender differences were observed in mathematics.

Table 1. Proficiency scores by gender (PISA, 2012).

	Mathematics	Reading	Science	Problem Solving
Boys	440	418	431	441
Girls	440	481	444	450

Similar results were also obtained from the longitudinal research study Programme for Functional Literacy, which indicates that boys at the third and sixth grade of primary school are more prone to be identified in the “at risk” group of functionally illiterate, compared to girls.

Goal 6 Quality of Education

The lack of established, formal education standards against which the performance of pupils can be measured is one of the main problems within the Cyprus education system. Benchmarks are essential for providing information on how allocated resources are being spent. This is particularly important given the country's high public expenditures on education, that is, 7.8% of GDP compared to an average of 5.2% across the EU, supplemented also by parental voluntary contributions to the education system in the way of private lessons, outside school hours.

1. Is quality considered as part of the right to education enshrined in national education-related legislation? How is quality framed and defined in national education related legislation, policies and programmes?

2. What is meant by 'quality of education' in the country? Which aspects and what indicators and benchmarks are used in the country to gauge the status of education quality?

"Quality of education" is not directly defined in any national education related legislation or policy as part of the right to education. However, reforms are underway, to improve certain aspects related to "quality": the curriculum, teaching methods, teachers' training, textbooks, schools' leadership, the integration of ICT, the number of pupils in the classroom, schools' infrastructure etc. Moreover, in the new curriculum, success indicators for every subject and for all primary school levels are set. All these aim to improve learning and the quality of the education provided¹¹.

In Cyprus this is done in a conjunction of the evaluation of the education system as a whole, the evaluation of pupils during their studies and the evaluation of the

¹¹ The Directorate of Secondary Education has also set success indicators for some of the 17 subjects taught at secondary level. An attempt has also been made for setting competence indicators as well.

teaching personnel. The existing mechanisms are used for quality assurance in the country, although it is acknowledged that there exists a need for their further development.

3.What specific policies and measures are in place to further improve the quality of education? How effective are they based on the latest experiences? What other policies and measures are needed?

The Department of Primary Education has adopted several measures for quality assurance and improvement of education. Such measures include the provision of staff development programmes, the upgrading of instructional material, the reduction in the maximum number of pupils in each classroom, the promotion and implementation of the “all-day” school programme, the development of environmental awareness, health promotion and other educational programmes, the introduction of Information and Communication Technology in all schools and the modernization of the curriculum and timetables in primary schools.

Currently, a national survey carried out by the Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation (CERE), taking place at the 3rd and 6th grade of the elementary school, is used to identify pupils at risk of remaining functionally illiterate in Language and Maths when they complete their compulsory education. The results of the study are forwarded to schools and the Directorates of Primary and Secondary Education, in order for these pupils receive early support, while in school.

The Directorate of Primary Education has established a Committee on Functional Literacy. The Committee has prepared a detailed circular, which clarifies terms of the process to be followed, while describing actions that can be initiated at the school and the classroom levels. Additionally, another circular including suggestions for support in Language and Maths, for children with an increased

risk for functional illiteracy, was sent to schools. The support for these children is given during teaching and consolidation time.

At the same time a publication of a Teacher's Guide is planned which will include the theoretical background, ways of identifying children experiencing literacy problems and monitor their progress from pre-school up to the first grade of primary school. The training of teachers for the implementation of intervention measures for preventing and combating illiteracy is another activity that the Committee will promote with the cooperation of the Pedagogical Institute. The content of this training will also include teaching strategies and differentiation of teaching and learning, so that teachers are in a better position to cater for the individual needs of these pupils. Special emphasis for support will be given to schools with a high percentage of pupils at risk.

The Administration of Secondary General Education (ASGE) acknowledges the challenges emerging from the PISA and other reports regarding Cyprus. In this respect, (ASGE) proposes a number of specific evidence based measures required to further improve the quality of education:

1. Introduction of compulsory national standardized tests and surveys aiming at:
 - a. recording the attainment of students at the end of a particular educational stage
 - b. monitoring and evaluating schools and the education system as a whole
 - c. identifying specific educational needs of students.
2. Increase of the actual instruction time, learning opportunities and student engagement.
3. Introduction of a school self-evaluation program aiming at identifying and fulfilling:
 - a. specific teacher professional development needs
 - b. specific school administration needs

4. Evaluation of the current instructional time allocated to the different knowledge areas in light of the ET2020 strategic objective 2.
5. Evaluation and restructuring towards reducing the plethora of electives offered at upper secondary education.
6. Evaluation of school regulations related to student absenteeism aiming at the reduction of the relative figure.
7. Evaluation of the current induction programs for foreigners and the introduction of a program, aiming for a fast and competent acquisition of the Greek language by foreign students, and their early registration as regular students.
8. Modernisation of the Special Education programmes offered. The existing structures which focus on providing extra supportive teaching during the regular school time-table have not led to the expected outcomes and therefore (ASGE) is planning to modernize them according to new perceptions of effective teaching (e.g. enhancing differentiated teaching, provision of a second teacher in the classroom, offering after school learning opportunities for filling-up learning needs as well as opportunities for charismatic pupils).
9. Development and introduction of teachers' assessment tools (generic and domain specific) will facilitate an effective feedback.
10. Improvement of student assessment practices and methods
11. Acquisition and processing of all necessary process variables regarding schools and teachers in order for the (ASGE) to implement differentiated educational policies.

4. What has been the country's experience regarding the impact of quality inputs to education (e.g. teachers, textbooks, school environment, teaching learning methodologies, support services, etc.) in improving learning outcomes?

During the school year 2010-2011 the preparation of the new curriculum and the design of new school timetables were completed and the authoring of new

textbooks based on the new curriculum was initiated. General training of the teaching staff on issues relating to the new curriculum also took place. During the school year 2011-2012 the new curricula and the new timetables were implemented and an organized training programme was initiated while the production of new educational materials continued. In the school years 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 the implementation of the new curriculum continued in all primary and secondary schools. During the last two years the organization of a series of in-service training actions continued, in cooperation with the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute. Support groups created in the previous years continued to support the whole process through the development of print and digital teaching materials, the preparation of teacher guides and the provision of school-based support to teachers.

Within the framework of modernizing and upgrading the Cyprus Educational System and in order to provide quality assurance of the textbooks and other teaching materials prepared in previous years, a gradual evaluation process was initiated. It involves the evaluation of policies implemented in relation to the National Curriculum and the new school timetable with the intention to adopt changes and improvements wherever such an action is needed. For this reason, the MoEC has formed the “Interdepartmental Committee for the Evaluation of the National Curriculum” which is supported by the “Coordinating Committee for the National Curriculum” and the “Academic Committee” which consists of leading academics.

5.How can successful quality improvements measures be extended to disadvantaged schools and students?

An effort will be made during the next school year (2014-2015) to support primary schools with high percentage of pupils at risk of remaining functionally illiterate in Language and Maths (based on the results of the research mentioned above). These schools will get support to design and implement an action plan to

promote literacy and numeracy and to help those pupils at risk, based on each pupil's individual learning plan. Intervention programmes will be designed according to the needs of each of these schools, with an emphasis on differentiated teaching and learning. These programmes will involve the parents as well. The progress of the pupils at risk will be closely monitored.

6.How can learning outcomes with regard to literacy, numeracy and life skills be ensured and more accurately measured?

The recent participation of the Ministry of Education and Culture in international studies provides a good indicator of the current status of the education quality in Cyprus. At the same time, it enables more targeted and effective actions through specific policies.

Currently, a process has been initiated to feed results from the PISA 2012 Programme into the education policy. Specifically, the MoEC has reviewed the main outcomes of the PISA 2012 Programme and has initiated discussions among stakeholders (the Pedagogical Institute, the Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation, and the Directorates of Secondary Education) on the respective challenges for the Cyprus education system. The discussion has mainly focused on the "low" results in Mathematics, Science and Reading with the view to design strategies that will lead to more satisfactory results.

Areas that have emerged as issues to be addressed include the following:

- (a) The early identification of low achievers at the elementary schools and provision for extra support and resources for these students (Q3)
- (b) The early identification of high achievers and the provision for extra support and resources

(c) The review of syllabuses/curricula of Mathematics, Science, and Reading and reflection on problem solving abilities (cognitive or metacognitive) as these are addressed in the current curricula

(d) The teacher in-service training on inquiry-based learning as well as other teaching and learning approaches towards an enhancement of student problem-solving skills

(e) The monitoring/evaluation of students' results within the educational system

(f) Structural changes e.g. addressing the 'actual teaching time', in accordance to the number of late arrivals at school, student and teacher absences, and other extracurricular activities

(g) The establishment of a school culture focusing on learning and educational outcomes

(h) The establishment of positive attitudes towards the school and learning areas/domains.

It is expected that careful design of actions on both short- and long- term basis will have a positive impact on student results in comparative international studies.

Yet it is quite clear that despite the design and implementation of certain strategies currently under discussion in Cyprus, it is unlikely that the related performance challenges can be fully addressed in the near future. It is worth mentioning that reform, in the framework of the envisaged three year strategic plan¹², is more likely to focus on areas that do not involve significant budgetary changes considering the substantial public finance consolidation needs that the country is currently facing.

¹² More is written about this three year strategic plan in the final chapter: "Prospects for post-2015 education agenda".

Prospects for the post-2015 education agenda

The MoEC, acknowledging the need of a more systematic evaluation and assessment framework of the education provided at pre-primary, primary and secondary levels in order to approve its quality, is now preparing a three year annual goal-oriented policy-based strategic plan with an accompanying program of operational work and activities with medium-term results-based budgets and capacity development plans.

International experience makes it clear that having short-, medium-, and long-term plans with measurable outcomes against which progress is regularly monitored is the best way to produce the evidence needed for policymaking and for making the most efficient use of available resources. More regular and formal assessments of learning, teaching, and administration in schools and of the operation of the MoEC would yield evidence of the achievement or otherwise of the sector's policy goals. It would also make possible regular evidence-based reviews of the curriculum, learning materials, and teaching methods and management.

Reforming the education system to focus strongly on the relevance and quality of Education For All and to give the MoEC a strong policy, strategy, and assessment role (while retaining many of its service delivery functions) should result in better learning outcomes across Cyprus. This process will undoubtedly need careful planning and management.

To this end, the MoEC agreed with the recommendation of the World Bank, urging for the establishment of a "Department of Policy and Strategic Planning" that would bare responsibility for policy and strategic planning. Namely: (i) medium-term planning and goal setting; (ii) the assessment of strategic goals; (iii) quality assurance (setting standards as opposed to evaluating if the standards are being met, which would be the role of the Inspectorate), (iv) the supervision of the education management information system (EMIS) including data collection, analysis, and feedback; and (v) program

budgeting and medium-term expenditure development (public finance management functions).

Bringing the policy, planning, and quality assurance functions together, by moving the CERE from the CPI to the new department would allow for a coherent and complementary approach to policymaking, goal setting, and quality assurance. It would thus make it possible for the MoEC to better argue for funding for its programs during the annual budget-setting process.