

National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014-2020
Republic of Cyprus

Summary in English

1. Introduction

The European Union has recognized at an early stage that education and training contribute to the transition to the knowledge society and are essential elements both for personal fulfillment and for the development of skilled, trained and flexible workforce, that has the skills and qualifications needed by the European economy and European society to remain competitive and innovative, while contributing to the promotion of social cohesion and inclusion. The importance attached by the European Union in the fields of education and training is evident in various policies, such as the "Europe 2020" and the Cohesion Policy.

The need for investment in knowledge, skills and abilities, throughout people's lifetime and in all areas of education and training is imperative. Preschool education and school education lay the foundation. Vocational education and training plays a key role in facilitating the transition from the world of education to the world of work. Higher education trains the staff that is needed for the promotion of research, development and innovation. Upgrading the skills of adults is essential in order to have a productive workforce.

The education and training systems must be modernized in order to face current and future challenges, taking also into account the increasing impact of technology, in education, training and learning.

The downturn of the Cyprus economy in recent years resulted in very difficult consequences that spread across the economic and social life of Cyprus, and is expected to mark our country for many years. The crisis in the banking sector after the decisions of the Eurogroup in March 2013, and the deterioration of the financial conditions of the country in recent years affected the entire economic development model of Cyprus.

Under the present conditions of the economic crisis in Cyprus, where high levels of unemployment are being recorded, particularly among young people and the long-term unemployed, Lifelong Learning (LLL) is a factor sine qua non as it allows individuals to upgrade their skills, to adapt more easily to change, to move freely between different professions if needed by the circumstances.

The need for rigorous fiscal consolidation, the prospect for slow growth rates and high unemployment should not be an obstacle to the reform process in the fields of education and training.

This report presents the strategy of the Republic of Cyprus for LLL for the period 2014-2020. The Strategy covers the development of all kinds of learning (formal, non-formal and informal). The report was prepared by the Directorate General for European Programmes, Coordination and Development (DG EPCD) in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC), the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (MLWSI), the Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA) and the Productivity Centre (CPC). The Strategy was sent to the involved social partners for comments and their views have been incorporated in it. The Council of Ministers approved the Strategy in its meeting held on 18.06.2014.

The National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2014-2020 identifies the strategic objectives/priorities and specifies the categories of actions that will be promoted in Cyprus. The four priority axes are the following:

- Promoting Access and Participation in Lifelong Learning for All and recognition of learning outcomes
- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
- Promoting Research and Development for the Support of Lifelong Learning
- Promoting employability (promoting integration/reintegration into the labour market)

The implementation of the LLL Strategy is based on the assumption of joint responsibility of all stakeholders. Ensuring Lifelong Learning for all is a joint responsibility of the Government and the social partners. The strategy contributes to the future development of the country, as well as to the implementation of the common European objectives in education and training.

The existence of a National LLL Strategy is ex ante conditionality for the promotion and implementation of actions co-financed by the European Social Fund during the programming period 2014-2020.

2. Contents of the LLL Strategy

The report is divided into eleven chapters as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Environment in the European Union
3. Environment in Cyprus
4. The labour market in Cyprus
5. Lifelong Learning in Cyprus (opportunities for education and training)

6. European and national targets for LLL
 - Reducing the percentage of early leavers from education and training

- Increasing adult participation in LLL
 - Increasing the percentage of 30-34 year olds with tertiary educational attainment
 - Increasing participation in early childhood education
 - Reducing the percentage of people with low basic skills
7. Challenges for LLL
 - Addressing the impact of the economic crisis
 - Adjusting LLL systems to the new structure of the Cyprus economy
 - Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
 8. Targets/objectives of the LLL Strategy
 9. Financing measures for LLL
 10. Governance of the Strategy
 11. Annexes

3. Governance of the Strategy

The responsibility for coordinating the implementation of the LLL Strategy is delegated to:

- The *National LLL Committee* which has an enlarged composition, comprised of the services and organizations with major involvement in the provision of LLL and the social partners, and
- The *Technical LLL Committee* which assists the National LLL Committee and is comprised of the representatives of the DG EPCD, the MOEC, the MLWSI, the CPC and the HRDA.

The two committees are chaired by DG EPCD.

4. The Vision of Cyprus for LLL

The EU Environment for Lifelong Learning is determined by the policies included in the "Europe 2020 Strategy", the European Employment Strategy, the Youth Employment Initiative, the Strategic Framework Education and Training 2020, the Rethinking Education Initiative, the Cohesion Policy of the European Union, the European Programme Erasmus+ for education, training, youth and sports, the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, the European Programme Horizon 2020, the EU Youth Strategy: Investing and Empowering.

The vision of Cyprus as for Lifelong Learning is to define an integrated strategy which covers all kinds/types of learning - formal, non-formal and informal at all levels - from pre-school, primary, secondary general and vocational education to higher education, vocational training and adult education. This strategy aims to form a system that ensures that all individuals have the motivation, support, means, resources and time to participate in learning activities

throughout their lifetime, with the aim of creating a society in which all citizens have the skills that enable them to deal with any challenges, will have the opportunity to move freely between learning settings, jobs, regions and countries, will participate actively and equally, and will help to strengthen the country's productivity, innovation, competitiveness and dynamism.

The four priority axes:

- 1st priority axis: Promoting Access and Participation in Lifelong Learning for All and recognition of learning outcomes.

The measures to be implemented under this axis will aim, inter alia, to the better transition between the various education and training sectors, greater openness towards non-formal and informal learning, greater transparency and recognition of learning outcomes, further promotion of adult education, improve the quality of guidance systems, increasing visibility and attractiveness of opportunities for education and training, to offer equal learning opportunities to all including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with special needs and migrants.

- 2nd priority axis: Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training.

The measures to be implemented under this axis will aim, inter alia, to ensure the acquisition of basic skills and competencies by all citizens, reducing early school leaving, ensuring high quality teaching, adequate initial and continuing training of trainers, strengthening the links between technical and vocational education, training and the labour market, create partnership/ synergies with the business world to ensure a better focus on the skills and competencies needed in the labour market-contribution in addressing the mismatch in skills and meet the needs of the economy.

- 3rd priority axis: Promoting Research and Development for the Support of Lifelong Learning

The conduct of surveys and studies and the undertaking of relevant development initiatives aim at helping the formation of appropriate LLL strategy in Cyprus, to assist the effective promotion of actions included in the LLL strategy and to evaluate the effects of LLL actions.

The research and development actions that will be promoted reflect trends and forecasts for LLL needs, development of LLL systems and evaluation of the effects of LLL in the Cyprus economy.

- 4th priority axis: Promoting employability (promoting integration/reintegration into the labour market)

The measures to be implemented under this axis will aim, inter alia to, the provision of training to improve the employability of young people and in particular of secondary education graduates, tertiary education graduates, the long-term unemployed, people with specific characteristics / disabilities, to support businesses and the public sector to the further promotion of Lifelong Guidance.

5. European and National targets in relation to LLL

i. Reducing the share of early leavers from education and training:

The percentage of the population leaving early from education and training (percentage of population aged 18-24 whose highest level of education and training attained is lower secondary education - 3 years- and now is not studying anywhere) was 9,1% in 2013 (compared to 11,4% in 2012, 11,3% in 2011 and 12,7% in 2010) which is lower than the 11,9% that was the EU₂₈ average. The goal set by the EU for 2020, which is also the national target is to reduce this figure to 10% (Source Eurostat).

This figure does not reflect the Cypriot reality as due to the methodology used by Eurostat (1) the young Cypriots studying abroad (over 20,000, which represents 40% of all students and 23,4% of that age group) and (2) the soldiers are not included in the sample. On the contrary foreign workers from third countries (40% of them dropped out from education) are included in the sample.

ii. Increasing adult participation in LLL:

The percentage of adults (% of people aged 25-64) participating in LLL was 6,9% in 2013 (compared to 7,4% in 2012 and 8,5% in 2008) which is less than the 10,4% EU₂₈ average (Source Eurostat). The EU's target is to increase this percentage to 15% by 2020. The national target is to increase this percentage to 12% by 2020.

iii. Increasing the share of 30-34 year olds with tertiary educational attainment:

The percentage of the population aged 30-34 with tertiary education was 47,8% in 2013 (compared to 49,9% in 2012 and 47,1% in 2008). This percentage is much higher than the EU₂₈ average which was 36,8% (Source Eurostat). The EU's target is to increase this percentage to 40% by 2020. The national target is to keep this percentage above 46%.

iv. Increasing participation in early childhood education:

It concerns the percentage of the population (4 years old until the age primary education begins - in Cyprus 4-5 8/12 years) participating in early childhood education. The aim of the EU is this percentage to reach 95% by 2020. In Cyprus this percentage was 84,7% in 2006 and in 2011 it rose to 85% and in 2012 it decreased to 83,8%.

v. Reducing the share of people with low basic skills:

The MOEC participated for the first time during the period 2009-2012 in PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) which is organized by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and is focused on evaluating the quality and the effectiveness of educational systems, it records the extent to which 15 year old students (who are at the end of compulsory education) have gained basic knowledge and skills. The program, which is repeated every three years, is focused on three subjects: Mathematics, Reading Comprehension and Physical Sciences.

The results for Cyprus presented in the OECD Report (December 2013), which includes data for 65 countries taking part, show the following with regard to targeting indicators:

- Mathematics: Cyprus ranks 46th. 42% of students is below level 2 (basic level), and 3,7% is at the upper two levels (5 and 6).
- Reading comprehension: Cyprus ranks 44th. 32,8% of students is below Level 2 (basic level), while 4% is at the upper two levels (5 and 6).
- Science: Cyprus ranks 50th. 38,1% of pupils is below level 2 (basic level), and 2% is at the upper two levels (5 and 6).

The participation of Cyprus in the International Survey PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) of OECD, carried out for the first time during 2008-2013, recorded for the first time the basic cognitive skills (mathematical literacy (numeracy), language literacy (literacy) and problem solving) of the adult population aged 16-65 years old. The survey involved 24 countries, of which 17 countries are Member States of the EU.

Regarding the targeting indicators, Cyprus appears to differ from the international and European average in language skills, mathematical and technological literacy, with indicators being lower.

In relation to reading literacy, the largest percentage of Cypriots aged 16-65 years old appears to have skills that allow them to read and understand words, sentences and simple texts.

As for technological literacy skills, the PIAAC showed that almost one in four Cypriots have no experience or basic computer skills. This percentage is higher than the relevant worldwide and Europe wide, which reaches 14% and 15%, respectively.

In contrast to the results of most countries, the younger generation (16-24 years old) appears to have lower skill levels than the age group 35-54. The performance of young people (aged 16-29) with upper-secondary education/ qualifications is not significantly better than that of people with lower secondary education. Recent graduates of higher education (up to age 29) are at a lower level of language literacy and numeracy compared to recent graduates of upper secondary education in EU countries with the best performance.

The survey also reveals that the percentage of low skilled adults is below the average of the EU (11% for literacy and 15% for numeracy, compared with 20% and 24% respectively). The unskilled persons in Cyprus are three times less likely to participate in work -related learning than highly skilled people.

5. Challenges for Lifelong Learning

The structure of the economy has changed dramatically due to the contraction of the banking sector as well as other associated sectors, the further shrinking of the public sector and the growth prospects that arise from new or existing economic sectors such as Oil and Natural Gas, the Green economy, tourism, health and social care.

Despite the adverse effects of the global economic and financial crisis on the island's economy, and the efforts for financial consolidation and implementation of commitments arising from the Memorandum of Understanding, the vision, goals, objectives and policy axes for education, training and LLL in general are not suspended. The Government has set as a priority to modernize the educational system and to upgrade and improve the provided education and training. According to the official data of the Statistical Service, the costs relating to the education sector as a percentage of GDP stood at 8.1%, which ranks Cyprus at the top of Europe in terms of public expenditure on education. The main aim for the MOEC is that the high percentage of costs will be reflected in the results of students and adults participating in international surveys which reflect the level of knowledge and skills acquired.

Education and training, regain a key role in strategies for combating inequality and maintaining sustainable development and economic growth. Key focus areas are presented here below:

i. Addressing the impact of economic crisis

The economic crisis in Cyprus has a significant negative impact on the labor market with a contraction in employment and a dramatic increase in unemployment. An important tool in the effort to address the impact of the economic crisis is to exploit education and training to the maximum extent possible.

The enrichment of the employees' knowledge and skills as well as the acquisition of new knowledge and skills contributes to a better exploitation of workers by business and their active employment.

Facilitating the adaptation of newcomers and unemployed people, particularly young people and the long-term unemployed, as well as people with disabilities, to the new conditions of the labor market is necessary. The promotion of work based learning incorporating elements such as internships, work experience and professional qualifications is considered an important tool.

ii. *Adapting the lifelong learning system to the new structure of the Cyprus economy*

There are drastic differences in the structure of the economy with a reduction of the contribution of traditionally strong sectors of economic activity and the emergence of development perspective of new or existing sectors.

The evolution of the economy to a greener economy that is based on the rational use of resources, reduces carbon emissions, increases the use of renewable energy sources, upgrades transport and promotes energy efficiency is a high priority for Cyprus. This implies the need of acquisition of green knowledge, skills and attitudes by the workforce in both new professions created and in existing ones.

The existence of natural gas in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Cyprus leads to the creation of auspicious perspectives for economic growth both through the emergence of new sectors of economic activity, and through strengthening the growth potential of existing sectors. A prerequisite for the maximum possible exploitation of emerging growth prospects of the economy is the existence of personnel that is sufficient in number and properly trained. This implies that the education and training systems of Cyprus have to be adjusted accordingly so as to provide the required knowledge, skills and qualifications.

It is noted that the MOEC in cooperation with the MLWSI, the Ministry of Energy, Commerce, Industry and Tourism, the HRDA and the CPC undertook the development of a Strategy for Education and Training in the hydrocarbons sector. The aim is to meet the immediate, medium and long term needs of the economy in this sector.

According to a relevant study carried out by the HRDA, the exploration and exploitation of natural gas, result to/create employment and training needs, which are divided into four main stages: exploration, extraction and transportation on land, processing and production, distribution and export.

Most employment needs arise from the creation of the necessary infrastructure required for the processing, liquefaction, transportation and distribution of natural gas.

iii. Improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training

Effective and qualitative education and training is vital especially for enhancing employability. Great attention should be paid to the acquisition of basic skills by all.

The education and training infrastructure available to schools, institutions, education and training organizations as well as businesses need to be modernized further exploiting the opportunities offered by information and communication technologies.

iv. Promoting transparency of qualifications and mobility

The recognition of qualifications regardless of how they were acquired (through formal, non-formal or informal learning) contributes to a smoother transition between different education and training sectors.

The development of an integrated National Qualifications Framework and in particular the further promotion of the System of Vocational Qualifications is expected to have crucial effects on lifelong learning and human resource mobility.