

System of early education/care and professionalisation in **Cyprus**

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A. Demographic Data

Historically, Cyprus was a former British colony and gained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1960 and became a Commonwealth republic in 1961. Thus, it is a relatively young state but it has undergone significant changes in terms of modernization and urbanization, moving from a traditional farming society to having a thriving economy comparable to the top 20 countries in the world. This is even more remarkable considering the fact that in 1974 the island was invaded by Turkey and 2/3 of its land was and still is occupied; a period during which 40% of the Greek Cypriots and 10% of the Turkish Cypriots were forced to leave their homes and become refugees in their own country.

Cyprus is the third largest and easternmost island in the Mediterranean Sea. It covers a total area of 9 250 square kilometres with a population of 837,300 (2004) from which 77.8% (651.100) are Greek Cypriots, 10.5% (88.100) Turkish Cypriots and 11.7% (98.100) foreign residents. Prior to the Turkish invasion the two communities lived together in roughly the same proportions (4 Greek Cypriots: 1 Turkish Cypriot). The Republic of Cyprus is a developed country and has been a member of the European Union since 1 May 2004.

Several factors have affected and are affecting the change in the population (e.g. migration, fertility rate, population aged 65+, birth rate). In 2004 the population of government control areas increased by 2.6% but 2.1% was the result of net migration. The following table shows the population change and the net migration rate pointing out the change due to this social variable which Cyprus is increasingly experiencing

Year	Rates		
	Natural Increase	Net Migration	Population Change
1990	10.0	15.0	25.0
1991	9.0	17.7	26.8
1992	10.1	16.4	26.5
1993	9.1	12.8	21.9
1994	8.5	11.0	19.5
1995	7.6	9.2	16.8
1996	7.1	8.0	15.1
1997	6.1	7.2	13.3
1998	5.1	6.2	11.3
1999	5.0	6.1	11.1
2000	4.5	5.7	10.2
2001	4.8	6.6	11.4
2002	3.8	9.7	13.5
2003	4.0	17.1	21.1
2004	4.2	21.3	25.5

Tab. 1 Population changes, 1990-2004

Moreover, another variable that has an impact on the Cypriot society and especially the population is the total fertility rate which has been low and decreasing with the slight exception of some years. The following table shows the total fertility rate over the past 5 years.

Year	Total fertility rate	Percent Change
2003	1.88	
2004	1.83	-2.66 %
2005	1.83	0.00 %
2006	1.82	-0.55 %
2007	1.8	-1.10 %

Tab. 2 Total fertility rate and percentage change

Further on, the following tables show the decrease in the birth rate over the period of 10 years, between 1990-2000 versus a slight increase in 2003-04 but with rates based on the mid year population estimates.

Year	Total	Birth rate	% change/year
1990	10.622	18.3	3.4
1991	10.442	17.6	-1.7
1992	11.372	18.6	8.9
1993	10.514	16.8	-7.5
1994	10.379	16.2	-1.3
1995	9.869	15.2	-4.9
1996	9.638	14.6	-2.3
1997	9.275	13.8	-3.8
1998	8.879	13.1	-4.3
1999	8.505	12.4	-4.2
2000	8.447	12.2	-0.7
2001	8.167	11.6	-3.3
2002	7.883	11.1	-3.5
2003	8.088	11.2	2.6
2004	8.309	11.3	2.7

Tab. 3 Live births and birth rates, 1990-2004 (Rates are based on the mid year population estimates)

Table 3 shows the birth rate as estimated at the end of the year and for the last 5 years. Again, pointing out the decrease in the years 2004 and 2006 and the 0.0% change for the years 2005 and 2007, suggesting a problem that Cyprus is facing with births compared to its overall population.

Year	Birth rate	Percent Change
2003	12.77	
2004	12.57	-1.57 %
2005	12.57	0.00 %
2006	12.56	-0.08 %
2007	12.56	0.00 %

Tab. 4 Birth rate and percent change

The next two variables appear to act as a minor balancing measure; infant mortality decreased by 2.13% in 2007 and life expectancy at birth increased by 0.21%.

On the other hand, Cyprus is also experiencing a rising percentage of the elderly people (65+ years) since 1994 although it is still as low as 11.7% compared to 16.3% in the European Union (2000). Moreover there is an increase in the life expectancy, 77 for males and 81.4 for women, 2002/3. Therefore, the low fertility and birth rate, the increasing percentage of elderly people and the life expectancy suggest that Cyprus is an ageing society.

Employment

Cyprus has traditionally followed a male breadwinner model, where males have a full time job and women stay home to take care of the children and/or the elderly parents. For the past thirty years though, Cyprus has been moving away from this model and partners, males and females are working and are financially providing for the family.

It is important to note that there was significant improvement of the unemployment rates of women, in comparison to those of men between 2000 and 2003. Women's unemployment rate decreased from 7.3% in 2000 to 4.6% in 2003 in comparison to that of men's, which increased from 3.2% to 3.8% in the same years. The participation rate of women (between 15 and 64) in the labour market showed a significant increase between 2000 and 2003 (from 57.3% in 2000 to 63.1% in 2003) while on the contrary the participation rate of men remained at the same levels (81.3% and 82.0% respectively).

In general, the gender employment gap fell from 19,8 percentage points to 18,6 while the gender unemployment gap fell from 1.6% to 0.8% between 2002 and 2003. According to data of the Statistical Service, the gender difference of the national average pay fell from 26% in 2001 to 25% in 2002.

Family Status and Services provided

In view of the status of families, the following table shows an increased trend of marriage and divorce especially during 2002-2004.

Year	Marriages	Divorces
1990	5.607	348
1991	6.222	304
1992	4.916	433
1993	6.078	504
1994	6.200	555

Year	Marriages	Divorces
1995	6.669	757
1996	5.761	725
1997	7.187	851
1998	7.738	852
1999	9.080	1.193
2000	9.282	1.182
2001	10.574	1.197
2002	10.284	1.320
2003	10.810 (5.556)	1.472
2004	10.931 (5.349)	1.614

Tab. 5 Marriages and divorces, 1990-2004

- Notes: – Figures include also marriages among the Catholic Church.
– Since 1990 Family Courts have been established.
– Marriages of residents of Cyprus are shown in parenthesis

The type of families and thus households have differentiated and for the year 2005 as presented in the National Report on Strategies for social protection and social inclusion. Out of the total population, the percentages of people living alone without any children include: 1.6% men, 3.5% women, 2.8% people under the age of 65 and 2.2% people of the age of 65 or more. Moreover, the percentage of single parents was 2.1% of the population, the percentage of two adults with one child was 16.8%, two adults with two children 12.3% and that of two adults with three or more children was 17.9%.

Social Welfare Services have developed specific legislation, policy, and programmes that can help families reconcile work and family life. Women who take care of children and other family dependents (e.g. elderly parents) are favoured by the Public Assistance and Services Laws of 1991 to 2003. Specific provisions provided include:

- Exemption of part of income from work for single-parents (usually women), who are fully employed and receive public assistance, so that the monthly public allowance becomes higher.
- A monthly “care allowance” when a family member is obliged to stay home and care for someone, hence either losing the opportunity for a paid job or having to leave the labor market.

Provision of home care services by public, community or private bodies

Provision of residential or day care services for children, older persons and persons with disabilities (NAP for Employment, 2004).

More specifically, the government provides the following three support measures for working parents as a step towards reconciliation of work and family life:

- “The maternity allowance which includes a basic benefit of 75% of the lower part of weekly average insurable earnings over the previous year, increased to 80%, 90% and 100% for one, two, or three dependants respectively. And a supplementary benefit of 75% of the upper part of weekly average insurable earnings over the previous year” (Joint Memorandum on social inclusion in Cyprus, p. 61).

- “The parental leave measure which since 1.1.2003, provides for a 13-week period of unpaid leave for the care of a biological or adopted child. The parent may use the right until the child reaches the age of six, or 12 in case of an adopted child. A parent may also take seven days per year on account of a child’s illness, an accident or other serious family reasons” (Joint Memorandum on social inclusion in Cyprus, p. 20).
- The child benefit measure through which every family residing in Cyprus with one or more children is entitled to a basic benefit, the rate of which depends on the number of children in the family (1 child-£200, 2 children-£400, 3 children- £1200, 4+ children- £600per child) (Joint Memorandum on social inclusion in Cyprus).

B. Child Care

Care for children aged 3 months to 5 8/12 years is offered in child care settings which are supervised and controlled by the Department of Welfare Services of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance. Child care also falls into the three categories:

- Public child care financed and supervised by the Department of Welfare Services.
- Community child care, which are established and supported by local communities on a non-profit basis
- Private child care, which are established and supported by individuals, usually on a profit basis.

Private and communal preschools, which are registered and supervised by the Ministry of Education and Culture are also registered and supervised by the Department of Welfare Services as child care settings.

Home Care

Another type of care, which is very common to working parents, is home care which for this report is defined as the care provided by mainly women in their home. People who are interested in taking care of children in their home need to apply to the Welfare Services and follow specific regulations. They also need to be above 18 years of age, be of good health (include a doctor’s certificate), have some knowledge of taking care young children, and have a good character. They need to show that they have a specific area in their house where they will take care of the children, including space for toys and if they will be taking care of infants they have to have a special place for cribs. One can take care up to three infants who are up to the age of two or 6 children of the ages of 2-6. Or they can have a combination of infants and older children with the ratio of 1:2 respectively. A social worker supervises these people and visits their homes once every three months. Today there are approximately 117 people who are registered and take care of children in their home (information provided by the Social Welfare Services department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance). This type of care is widely used but there are no specific statistical data to show the demand. Also often choices are made through acquaintances and people take their children to home carers who might not be registered with the Social Welfare Services. Thus, on this area the picture provided is vague.

Caregiver-child ratio

The caregiver child ratio in child care centres as suggested by the Social Welfare Services, of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, in child care settings is as follows

- A caregiver for every 28 children maximum, aged 4+ years
- A caregiver for every 24 children maximum, aged 3 years

- A caregiver for every 16 children maximum, aged 2 years
- A caregiver with 6 infants maximum, aged up to 2 years

Within the framework of child care there are settings that assist infants, toddlers, pre-schoolers and kindergartners.

Caregiver Qualifications

A caregiver who wants to work at a child care center needs to have the following qualifications:

- A certificate or diploma of a higher institution on subjects related to care and psychosocial and mental development of children.
- Be above 18 years of age.
- Have a good personality.

Moreover, the person, who is in charge of the child care setting, needs to have the following qualifications:

- A diploma or certificate in infant care or child care, social work, psychology or education.
- Have a good personality.
- Prove to the principal that he/she has the necessary physical and mental skills to run effectively the setting and make sure that the children are well taken care.

Currently, as presented on the web site of the Social Welfare Services, there are 8 public Child Care settings in the 4 cities of Cyprus (3 in Nicosia, 3 Larnaca, 1 Limassol, and 1 in Paphos) which have been founded after the Turkish invasion by the United Nations for the refugees. Their aim is to support families where both parents work and have problems in taking care of their children. They also aim to offer care enhancing children's mental, psychological, emotional and physical development. The infant care settings accept infants of 3 months to the age of 2 and the child care settings accept children of the age of 2-5 years. Priority is given to children who come from families that live on public assistance and children who are under the care of the social services.

Moreover, it is clear from the following table that there is no investment in the development of public child care (the care of children under the age of three). As a result there are more private child care settings which provide care for children under the age of three.

Type of school	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Child Care			
Public	15	12	12
Communal	46	47	46
Private	208	226	181
Preschool/ Kindergarten			
Public	237	241	242
Communal	65	66	65
Private	86	87	136

Tab. 6 Type and number of school for the years 2003-06

Moreover, for the year 2003/04 there was a total of 8869 children under the age of three that received care at either a public, communal or private preschool or child care centre. Whereas for the year 2005/6 this number increased to 10034 and most of the increase was seen in the care provided by the private preschools.

Number of children under three years	Public		Communal		Private	
	2003/04	2005/05	2003/04	2005/06	2003/04	2005/06
Preschool	762	630	738	705	1907	3676
Child Care	349	300	1122	1061	3991	3662
Total	1111	930	1860	1766	5898	7338

Tab. 7 Number of children under three attending the three types of schools for the years 2003-2006

C. Pre-Primary Education (Early Childhood Education)

Pre-Primary education is offered in preschools and kindergartens for children aged below 5 and 8/12 under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Culture. For this report the term kindergarten refers only to the ages 4 8/12-5 8/12. There are three categories of schools:

- Public preschools and kindergartens, depending on the number of classes they have are divided into single-teacher, two-teacher, three-teacher and multi-teacher (four classes and more) schools. There are 4 public schools that operate in the morning and afternoon. Since September 1st, 2004 with the implementation of one year free compulsory pre-primary education all the expenses of the public kindergartens (salary of teacher and assistants, educational items, building expenses, cleaning expenses, electricity, heat etc.) are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture. In addition the ministry is in charge of the supervision and continues professional development of the teachers. When the number of children in one school is less than 15 then two or more schools are combined. No school can operate with less than 10 children. When the schools are combined the Ministry of Education and Culture pays for the transportation of the children who might live in different communities/villages. During the school year 2005-2006, there were 433 classes in public kindergartens in 244 school units.
- Communal preschools, often operate along with public kindergartens, in the same space, having a common principal and a common Parents' Association. Communal kindergartens offer educational services to children of the ages of 3-4 8/12. They are organized by local municipalities, Parents' Association, clubs/co operations based on the law for Private schools of 1971. But they operate following the regulations and the program of the public schools. Also their operation is based on regular official announcements forwarded by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The government offers a yearly subsidy of 4.000-6.000 Cyprus Pounds and the Parents' Association is responsible for the salary of the teacher and the school assistant, for finding the space and supporting the daily expenses of the school. Children pay a fee. There are communal preschools that operate during the morning and afternoon or can offer a prolonged day until 2.45pm. (the day ends at 13.05). Also communal schools can operate

one month more during the summer to support working mothers, and also they can follow only public holidays and not school holidays.

- Private preschools, kindergartens are established and supported by the owners of the school, usually on a profit basis based on the Private Schools law of 1971, and with specific changes in 1983, 1985 and 1999. The schools are supervised and guided by inspectors of the Ministry of Education and Culture. They can operate during the morning and afternoon.

Curriculum

According to the guidelines of the Ministry of Education and Culture the following curriculum and daily schedule as presented in Table 8 is expected to be followed by all public schools and most of the times communal schools follow it as well.

The time schedule is flexible and the teacher can choose to set it up according to the needs and interests of the children. Free and Quiet Activities along with story telling are on a daily basis. The teacher is expected to provide an equal variety of activities on the different areas. The daily schedule is from 7.45-1.05 and the public and school holidays are the same as those of the primary schools. Children whose parents work in the afternoon are usually picked up from school by their grandparents or home maids, who are employed by the family for cooking or cleaning thus are not considered as child carers.

Time	Themes/Activities
7.45-8.25	Free Activity (social- collaborative-creative activities such as drawing, playdough, collage, pretend play, exploration and observation, early literacy activities, mathematical activities, development of skills, activities in centers)
8.25-9.05	A' teaching period (language, science, mathematics, environmental education, health education, ethical/religious/social studies)
9.05-10.25	Washing-Breakfast- Outdoor activities
10.25-10.45	Recess
10.45-11.25	B' teaching period (storytelling, puppet show, music, physical education, drama, theatre, movement, poetry)
11.25-12.05	Entertainment-Fruit-Outdoor activities
12.05-12.25	Recess
12.25-13.05	Quiet Activities (language, mathematics, literacy activities, skill development, individualized and group assessment)

Tab. 8 Daily schedule of a public school

Number of children in the classroom

Any preschool or kindergarten classroom according to the regulations of the Ministry of Education and Culture needs to have the following number of children based on their age:

- For the ages 4 8/12 – 5 8/12 there should be no more than 30 children
- For the ages 3 8/12 – 4 8/12 there should be no more than 28 children
- For the ages 3 - 5 8/12 there should be maximum 25 children.

Moreover a child cannot attend a public preschool unless they have turned three years before September 1st of the year they want to attend school. Thus children under three can only attend private preschools or public child care, if they are eligible for it.

School Assistant

For every two preschool or kindergarten classrooms in a school there should be one school assistant. A school assistant is responsible for cleaning and arranging the room according to the needs of the curriculum. The assistant is employed by a committee which includes the principal of the school, the principal of the neighbouring elementary school, the chair of the parents' Association or organisation that is responsible of the school administration, if it is not a public school. The necessary qualifications for a school assistant are to have a high school diploma and be of good character.

Provision of early childhood services

The public expenditure on pre-primary education has increased at a small rate from 1995-2003, and surprisingly enough the year when kindergarten becomes compulsory and free offered by the government and public kindergartens, the total expenditure on pre-primary education was reduced.

Year	Pre primary Expenditure	Total Expenditure
1995	8.3	193.4
1996	9.1	208.8
1997	10.0	247.7
1998	10.9	271.6
1999	11.5	284.6
2000	12.1	309.4
2001	19.7	370.7
2002	22.3	423.1
2003	24.7	504.1
2004	20.9	497.4

Tab. 9 Public Expenditure on Pre-primary Education, 1995-2004

Pre-primary schools increased in number in 2003/04 to 657 with 25.674 children enrolled, from 638 schools with 25.298 children in 2002/2003. Table 10 shows the number of pre-primary schools, the number of children, teachers and the pupil/teacher ratio. There is a constant low increase of teachers except in 2001/02 and the pupil/teacher ratio is mostly decreasing.

School year	Schools (public and private)	Pupils	Teachers	Pupil/ Teacher ratio
1990/91	572 (204, 368)	23.694	1.015	23.3
1991/92	606 (211, 395)	24.793	1.111	22.3
1992/93	608 (218, 390)	24.977	1.225	20.4
1993/94	630 (233, 397)	25.236	1.257	20.1
1994/95	642 (237, 405)	25.819	1308	19.7
1995/96	647 (236, 411)	26.254	1.323	19.8

School year	Schools (public and private)	Pupils	Teachers	Pupil/ Teacher ratio
1996/97	659 (236, 423)	25.996	1.426	18.2
1997/98	665 (235, 430)	26.517	1.461	18.1
1998/99	679 (235, 444)	26.969	1.549	17.4
1999/00	675 (234, 441)	26.155	1.562	16.7
2000/01	642 (238, 404)	26.455	1.618	16.4
2001/02	630 (239, 391)	25.781	1.575	16.4
2002/03	638 (243, 395)	25.298	1.687	15.0
2003/04	657 (252, 405)	25.674	1.779	14.4

Tab. 10 Schools, pupils and teachers in formal education level, 2003-04 (Statistical services)

The Elementary School administration office of the Ministry of Education and Culture has recently composed the following table which points out the number of public, community schools, students and teachers for the years 2004-07. In this table children who attend child care are not included since these settings are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance.

Schools	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Public			
Schools	244	244	249
Students	9924	10035	9904
Teachers	590	606	620
Community			
Schools	69	66	65
Students	1935	1840	1697
Teachers	90	89	87
Schools in the occupied area			
Schools	1	1	1
Students	6	15	13
Teachers	1	1	1

Tab. 11 Number of public and community schools, students and teachers in 2004-07

It is important to note that there is a limited increase in the number of public kindergarten schools and a decrease in the communal schools suggesting either that the private sector is increasingly taking the responsibility for the education of young children or that the communal schools are being transformed into public schools.

Since 1990/91 as shown in Table 10 early childhood private schools (including pre-schools and child care) were almost double the number of public schools again sug-

gesting that the government is allowing the provision of care and education by the private sector rather than providing the necessary services on a public or even a communal level.

On the other hand, Table 12 suggests there has been a decrease in the number of children of the ages 4 and 5 attending communal and private care schools comparing the years of 2003/4 to 2005/06 suggesting that maybe more parents are taking advantage of the educational reform of the free and compulsory kindergarten offered by public schools.

No. of children 4 and 5 years of age	Public		Communal		Private	
	2003/04	2005/06	2003/04	2005/06	2003/04	2005/06
Preschool/ kindergarten	8407	8993	1060	1127	2743	4117
Child Care	318	152	459	304	3424	1571
Total	8725	9145	1519	1431	6167	5688

Tab. 12 Number of children of the ages 4 and 5 in the three types of schools for the years 2003-06

D. Employment and Career in the Early Childhood Education Sector

Currently there is a list of Early Childhood teachers (910 as of 22/6/2007) who are waiting to be employed in the public sector on a permanent basis. Some of these people might already be in the public sector. They might be: working by replacing other Early Childhood teachers on a part time basis, offering special services to children with special needs (after attending in-service training provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture), or working at the All-Day schools on a part time/non permanent basis.

There is a strong demand to work in public schools due to the fact that the work conditions such as teaching hours, pay and professional development are more attractive than in the private sector. The pay of an Early Childhood teacher ranges approximately from 350-750 Cyprus pounds per month and the work hours range from 7:45-1:05, 3 or 5.00pm.

In order for someone to become a permanent employ of the government as an Early Childhood teacher, she needs to go through a process that includes a number of years of experience, and 4 assessment reports by the Ministry's Early Childhood Education supervisors.

The Ministry of Education and Culture employs all teaching staff in Cyprus servicing public schools, including those in All-Day schools. There are different levels that the teachers go through starting from a yearly based contract to a more permanent basis depending on the need for teachers in schools.

Early Childhood Supervisors

In the Ministry of Education and Culture there are three Early Childhood Supervisors who are responsible for supervising and providing guidance to all early childhood teachers. Each supervisor is responsible for one or two main cities of the island. They also organize conferences, seminars and workshops for the teachers under the framework of

professional development in order to further enhance practice and quality. Even though the number of Early Childhood teachers might be increasing, there have been only three Early Childhood supervisors since 1987.

The evaluation of the teachers is done by the Early Childhood Supervisors. The evaluation includes an assessment report by the Early Childhood supervisor who can visit the school at any time of the year. The report comments on the teachers' professional development, their skills of organisation, administration and relationships, their overall behaviour and action. The teachers are also graded and the maximum score is 40, a score is considered excellent if it is 36 and above and very good, if it is 31-35. For a teacher to move from the yearly to a more permanent employment basis he/she needs to have an average grade of 38.

Moreover depending on the number of years in the public sector and any further education one can become an Assistant Principal and then a Principal. These positions are limited within the Early Childhood sector since in order for a school to need to have a principal it must have at least 3 public classes and there are not many schools that have that number of classes. It is important to note that an increase in the public schools does not always imply an increase in the principal's positions since a new school that develops might include only one classroom thus the classroom teacher is responsible for the education and care of children but also for all the necessary administrative work for the best organisation and functioning of the school. Currently, we have had cases where a public school of three classes was closed and two other public schools were opened with two classes in each one thus none of the two new schools required a principal's position. This creates stagnation in terms of the development of Early Childhood teachers. It takes a lot of years to be employed in the public sector and then it takes a lot more years to have the opportunity to become a principal of a school.

Moreover, Table 13 suggests that for the years 2004-06, a larger number of people work in the preschool and child care settings. There has been a higher increase in the number of teachers in the private sector than the public sector, thus one could assume that the private sector is providing more employment opportunities for Early Childhood teachers.

Full-time Teaching Personnel	2004/05	2005/06
Preschool		
Public	615	621
Communal	93	96
Private	356	585
Child Care		
Public	56	54
Communal	146	142
Private	648	450

Tab. 13 Full time personnel in preschool and child care in the years 2004-06.

Moreover, Table 14 provides a gender description of the teaching personnel in both pre-schools and child care suggesting that there are very few men involved in the education of young children.

Type of school and position	Full-time employment			
	2002/03		2003/04	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Principals in preschools and child care settings				
Public	0	78	0	78 (5 in child-care)
Communal	0	19	0	19 (17 in child care)
Private	8	202	8	202 (145 in child care)
Teaching personnel				
Public	4	551	4	551 (65 in child care)
Communal	0	206	0	206 (117 in child care)
Private	5	669	5	669 (407 in child care)

Tab. 14 Gender, type of school and position

Similar numbers exist for the year 2005/06 since 220 of the 226 principals in preschools are women and only 6 are men. Also in reference to child care, out of 175 principals 172 are women and 3 are men. The same situation exists with the teaching personnel in preschool, out of 1066 teachers, 1058 are women and 8 are men. And in child care there are 447 positions, 443 are taken by women and 4 by men.

Early childhood Education is definitely dominated by women but this is due to the fact that the salaries are not high enough to attract men

E. Reforms in Early Childhood Education

Compulsory and free public Kindergarten

According to the new legislation of 1 September 2004, children aged 4 years and 8 months to 5 years and 8 months are obliged to attend public, communal or private schools which are however, registered and approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Younger children, aged 3 years to 4 years and 8 months take up vacant places in public kindergartens and pay fees as set by the Ministry of Finance. The State was responsible to cover all expenses for the introduction of this innovation; while at the same time continues to subsidize the functioning of communal preschools.

All Day School

The council of the Ministers, decided (No. 48695 dated 18.11.98) to implement the All-Day School in primary education sector. It has expanded during the school year 2005-2006 to 150 primary schools and 9 kindergartens. In parallel, plans are under way for the operation of 9 primary schools as joint all-day schools (compulsory for all pupils in all

forms) on a pilot basis, as from the school year 2006-2007. The voluntary all-day public kindergarten will be expanded to 10 more public kindergartens. Except from the pilot schools, the schools operating as All-Day schools operate on a voluntary basis for grades 4, 5 and 6. The All-Day kindergarten functions from October to May with three additional periods until 4.00pm four times a week.

Multicultural Education

The pilot program Zone of Educational Priority (Zoni Ekpedeytikis Protereotitas, ZEII) includes schools that have many minority children and allows extra time to the teachers to work with these children and provide extra activities to enhance the children's language and socialization. The program continues to be implemented in three areas of Nicosia, Limassol and Paphos. It aims at the smooth integration of foreign-language speaking children into the educational system of Cyprus and not at their assimilation. The Ministry of Education and Culture has submitted a proposal to the Council of Ministers to develop a specific policy for this program and it has been approved.

Children with Special Needs

As from September 2001, the Ministry of Education and Culture, has put into effect the Education and Training of Children with Special Needs Law 1999 [113(I)/1999], the Mechanisms for Early Detection of Children with Special Needs [185(I) 2001] and the Regulations for Education and Training of Children with Special Needs [186(I) 2001], which support the application of the Law.

Children with special needs are educated in public or communal schools, which are equipped with the suitable infrastructure, according to the Law for special education. The majority of children with special educational needs are educated within the mainstream classroom. Special educational provision is also given in special units at mainstream schools. These children are assigned to a mainstream class where they can attend integrated lessons and participate in celebratory or festive events.

Children with severe difficulties are educated in special schools, which are equipped with the appropriate staff (psychologists, speech therapists, doctors, physiotherapists and other specialists as well as auxiliary staff) in order to support and provide essential means to achieve their mission.

The Ministry of Education and Culture aims at reinforcing the awareness and sensitivity of School Supervisors, School Principals, class teachers and teachers of Special Education on the provisions of the Law and their obligations towards children with special needs attending their schools. This objective is achieved through in-service training seminars and personal contacts with people involved in the subject (inspectors of Special Education, educational psychologists, joining officials and teachers of Special Education). (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2006, p.263). All children with special needs are placed within mainstream schools. For the year 2005-06 there were 229 children with special needs attending public kindergartens, from every city of Cyprus.

F. Higher Education

The first higher educational institution for the training of teachers that existed in Cyprus was the Pedagogical Academy that was founded in 1959 right after the Independence of the island. At the beginning and for 12 years the Pedagogical Academy offered a program for the preparation of Elementary School teachers. Only in 1973 did they develop an Ear-

ly Childhood Program. So, for the following 18 years Early Childhood teachers graduated from the Pedagogical Academy where they attended a three year program. Another opportunity that people who wanted to become Early Childhood teachers had was to go to Greece and attend a four year program.

Since 1985 there were discussions about upgrading the educational level of the Pedagogical Academy in multiple ways. But it was not until 1991 that the government put into action the changes and the Pedagogical Academy became part of the newly founded University of Cyprus and was developed into the Department of Education. The University of Cyprus was founded in 1989 and accepted the first students in 1992 including the Department of Education as its largest department. The University of Cyprus accepted 440 students in 1992, out of which 180 were students of the Department of Education, 150 attending the Elementary School Program and 30 the Early Childhood Program. The new education programs offered by the University of Cyprus were four year programs and incorporated a lot more academic, theoretical and research courses. Currently, the University of Cyprus accepts 60 Early Childhood teachers and 60 Elementary school teachers (the number of new students increased from 30 to 60 in 2006).

The graduates of the Pedagogical Academy, who received degrees of a three year program, could have their degrees upgraded and they attended a number of courses offered by Greek Universities especially that offered by Aristotle University. It was a special program developed specifically for the Early Childhood teachers and was offered in Cyprus by the Greek professors.

Currently, in order to study to be an Early Childhood teacher a person has the following options:

- Studying at the University of Cyprus, at the Department of Education- Program of Early Childhood Education, a four year accredited program.
- Studying in Greece, in any 4 year accredited Early Childhood program of any Greek University.
- Studying in any other country at a university that offers an early childhood program, the number of years depends on each country.
- Studying at one of the Colleges in Cyprus (e.g. Intercollege Nicosia, Frederick Institute of Technology or Cyprus College) that offer a two and four year Early Childhood programs. The colleges developed education programs in the years 1987-89 since the Pedagogical Academy could not satisfy all the needs for Early Childhood teachers.

For choices c and d, candidates who want to work in the public sector and have a civil servant status, thus teach at a public kindergarten, need to follow an extra process. They have to have their degree assessed by the Cyprus Council for the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (KY.S.A.T.S), which was founded in 2000 and examines applications for degree recognition of any higher education degree besides those provided of the University of Cyprus, the Cyprus University of Technology, CUT, the Open University of Cyprus (all Cypriot public universities) and any four - year Greek University programs. KY.S.A.T.S is also responsible for providing information on the recognition of an institution or a specific degree.

For those who graduate from any Early Childhood program other than that of the University of Cyprus or any four year program of any university in Greece, KYSATS suggests that they all need to attend a number of courses, usually up to 4, offered by the University of Cyprus, or any university in Greece, to have their degree academically recognized. Attending these courses and passing them, allows these people to be employed by the government and thus work at a public or communal preschool or kindergarten.

In reference to people who want to work with children under the age of three, in child care settings, they have the following avenues to follow:

- Attend a two year Early Childhood education program at any of the colleges in Cyprus
- Attend any three year programs on Infant Care offered by Technological Educational Institutions (TEI) in Greece.

In reference to the programs of study offered by the Cypriot Colleges one can see that the two year programs include the first courses one would attend when following the 4 year Early Childhood program. Thus, there is not a differentiated program of study except a limited number of courses such as Infant Care and Dietics in the case of Intercollege.

Table 15 provides a resume of the institutions, personnel, qualifications based on the children's ages as expected from the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance.

Child Age	Institution	Personnel Title	Qualification/ Institution/ Years of study
0-6 years	Home Care	Home Care Provider	Some knowledge on the care of young children
3 months - 5 8/12 years	Child/Day Care: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public • Communal • Private 	Infant Care Giver	Certificate or diploma of a higher institution on subjects related to care and psychosocial and mental development of children. -Private Colleges in Cyprus -Technological Educational Institutions (TEI) in Greece - 2 or 3 years of study
3 years - 4 8/12 years	Preschool: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public • Communal • Private 	Early Childhood Teacher	A Degree in Early Childhood Education - University of Cyprus - Private Colleges with a follow up accreditation of their degree - 4 years of study
4 8/12 years – 5 8/12 years	Kindergarten: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public • Private 	Early Childhood Teacher	A Degree in Early Childhood Education - University of Cyprus - Private Colleges with a follow up accreditation of their degree - 4 years of study

Tab. 15 Children's age, teachers' titles and qualifications

The Cyprus Pedagogical Institution

Another institution that has been involved in the education and professional development of Early Childhood teachers is the Cyprus Pedagogical Institution. The Pedagogical Institution was founded in 1972 and its main activities involve: in-service training of teachers,

educational research and educational technology and educational documentation. In reference to Early Childhood the pedagogical institution offers in service training, undertakes various research projects, publishes a variety of educational materials and books disseminating information to Early Childhood teachers

G. Main Issues

In reviewing all the information on Early Childhood Education the following issues highlight the case of Cyprus:

The issue of low birth rate, which is essential for the Cypriot society since it is slowly aging, is closely related to the fact that there are no specific social services that would support women in balancing their work and family life thus motivate them to have more children. Measures for reconciliation of work and family life need to be developed and where they are developed they need to be implemented.

Closely related is the fact that provisions for public child care are poor and lack quality. There is a need for the government to develop more public child care, raise the standards of the personnel working with young children as well as develop a more specific curriculum that provides the best care and education for young children. The Ministry of Education and Culture needs to collaborate with the Ministry of Labour and Social Service in order to develop the best services for women and children and raise the standards of education and care.

If the government wants to continue to invest in the private sector in reference to providing services for young children, due to either economic or other reasons, then there is need for much better guidance, supervision and continued education of all those working in the private sector. There is need to ensure that the private sector is functioning following all the regulations, especially those in terms of personnel qualifications (these might need to be reconceptualized), curriculum, space and materials regulations. In order to do this there is a need to increase the specialized personnel on early childhood education within the Ministry of Education and Culture as well as the personnel in the Ministry of Labour and Social Services to ensure availability of services; there is a need to hire more early childhood supervisors, officers, and researchers.

Closely related is the Early Childhood teacher evaluation system. There is a need to create a more systematic way to observe, guide, supervise and evaluate in-service Early Childhood teachers. By developing more positions within the two Ministries it will be easier to follow all the in-service teachers and caregivers.

Higher education: There has been a change in the numbers of new coming students in the program of Early Childhood of the Department of Education at the University of Cyprus, from 30 to 60 starting 2006. And at the same time twice a year, the University of Cyprus offers the specific courses suggested by ΚΥΣΑΤΣ to college graduates who want their degree to become equivalent to that of the University of Cyprus. This creates a situation where a lot of Early Childhood people are looking for jobs thus facing the low paid positions offered by the private sector due to the large supply of teachers. At the same time, the employers are beginning to fire the teachers after a year's work in order to avoid giving them a raise.

Another issue of the case of Cyprus is the lack of research within the Cypriot context and follow up research of newly implemented programs. Unfortunately, there are not enough studies or even consistent demographic data that can provide a clear picture of the provision of care and education of children from the ages of 3 months until 5 years and 8 months. It is not clear how many children are taken care in the homes of home care pro-

viders since there is not always thorough supervision of child care. Also it is not clear how many classes are created and thus how many teacher positions are available. Moreover, there are no research, empirical studies investigating the Cypriot reality of Early Childhood Education in reference to the teacher's experiences, comparison of graduates from the University of Cyprus and the colleges, the use and implementation of curricula, parents' needs etc.

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