



CONNECTEDLEARNING@YW

COUNTRY REPORT

Republic of Cyprus

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Prepared by Emphasys Centre



1. In your partner country what is the state of play regarding digital skills and competencies? What is the level of attainment and gaps identified by employers and/or young people? What is the national strategy to support development of these strategies?

The Digital Economy and Society Index (or DESI), a yearly composite index developed by the European Commission to measure the development of member countries and assess their progress towards a digital community and society. Cyprus scored a total of 45.8%, ranking 22nd out of 28 member states, where the average score was 52.5%. DESI 2019 made it clear that although the majority of households have access to fast broadband connections (90% in Cyprus, compared to the overall 83% score of the EU), the population's skills do not match their connectivity. It was found that only 50% of the population possess at least basic levels of digital skills (ranking 19th), and only 54% possess at least basic software skills (ranking 20th).

In order to enhance the digital skills of the Cypriot population, the Republic of Cyprus has put together the **Digital Strategy for Cyprus** for the period 2012-2020, in accordance with and based on the Digital Agenda for Europe. The ultimate goal of the strategy is to empower ICT and promote the development of information society in Cyprus. Specific goals of the Digital Strategy include the installation of a comprehensive network throughout the island, the modernisation of public administration and the provision of electronic services to the population, to promote digital entrepreneurship and to use ICT for betterment in environmental matters. Other important aims are to promote the inclusion of all social groups in the digitalised era, including marginalised groups and to promote the digitalisation of education, which can provide tools for individuals with difficulties in accessing mainstream education. The Digital Strategy of Cyprus is of great importance to all of the population of the island, but the youth and marginalised communities especially can greatly benefit from it, as social inclusion and personal and professional development are the ultimate goals.

It is worth mentioning that as the current Digital Strategy period is nearing its end, the new National Digital Strategy is currently being drafted by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Work.

[http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/KEPA/kepa_new.nsf/F7ABB43262B79A20C225819C004C8C4F/\\$file/DESI%20Cypruscountryprofile%20EN%202016.pdf](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/KEPA/kepa_new.nsf/F7ABB43262B79A20C225819C004C8C4F/$file/DESI%20Cypruscountryprofile%20EN%202016.pdf)

<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/cyprus-launches-national-coalition-digital-skills-and-jobs>

2. What are the key statistics regarding YW in the partner country (numbers, growth, employed/unemployed, school leaver statistics, undertaking part-time work, volunteering, etc.)?

The concept of youth work in Cyprus is quite new, and volunteerism is largely intertwined with it. Youth Organisations have been a large part of youth culture in Cyprus for decades, but they were as a rule founded and run by and for volunteers. In recent years, with the help of the EU, steps were taken to bring youth work and non-formal learning to the forefront, in an effort to support the youth of Cyprus to acquire various skills, both for social and personal development, and to help them become more competitive in the labour market.

Until recent years, **the term Youth Worker** was largely unknown in Cyprus. The first steps for the recognition of the Youth Worker were taken in 2016, by the **Cyprus Youth Council** (CYC), which is the

representative body of non-governmental organisations in Cyprus, such as the youth organisations of political parties, ethnic minorities, and student parties. Itself a non-governmental, non-profit, volunteer organisation, the CYC organised an Erasmus+ conference titled *Recognition of the Youth Worker*. Identifying the lack of a formal definition, the participants coined the term Λειτουργός Νεολαίας (Youth Worker in Greek), and defined it as “a person who regularly empowers youth, professionally or voluntarily, through Non-Formal learning which takes into account their needs, aiming towards their social, financial and personal development”.

The legal public body responsible for youth-related matters in Cyprus is the **Youth Board of Cyprus**, or **ONEK**, from the Greek acronym. ONEK is also the Erasmus+ National Agency of Youth in Cyprus. Currently, the various youth organisations in Cyprus are run by volunteers. The **Cyprus Youth Clubs Organisation** (or **KOKEN**, as is the Greek acronym) is the largest non-governmental, non-profit youth organisation in Cyprus. It is the coordinating body of 85 of the island’s youth clubs, and a prominent member of both ONEK and the CYC.

The youth clubs maintain a social character to this day, as they are founded and run by volunteers, who organise various activities and events of predominantly socio-cultural nature, aiming to bring young people together, while at the same time developing their sense of social responsibility. The predominantly voluntary character of youth work in Cyprus implies that the people involved in the organisations frequently change, leaving us with no concrete data on the number of youth workers/youth volunteers on the island.

The youth unemployment rate in Cyprus reached an all-time record of 40.5% in July 2013, a few months after the deposit haircut resulting from the economic crisis. Since then there was an improvement, however, putting the unemployment rate at 24.7% in 2017. That number has kept dropping, and at the time of this research it lies at 16.7%. Part-time work trends in youth have been closely related with the trends presented in full-time labour. However, there was an increase in the percentage of people who worked part-time, but instead preferred a full-time employment. This group amounted for just over one third in 2001, a number which went up to 60% in 2013.

Regarding school attendance, the percentage of early school leavers is under control in Cyprus. According to Eurostat statistics of April 2019, 7.8% of youth (ages 18-24) have not completed secondary education and are not in further training or education. To put this into perspective, the same group across the EU amounts to 10.6% of the youth aged 18-24 years old.

<https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/en/content/youthwiki/overview-cyprus>

<https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/sites/youthwiki/files/gdlcyprus.pdf>

https://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/populationcondition_24main_en/populationcondition_24main_en?OpenForm&sub=4&sel=2

<https://tradingeconomics.com/cyprus/youth-unemployment-rate>

[http://www.cystat.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/C91603BD82050327C22582030022C7F2/\\$file/CYPRUS_IN_FIGURES-2018-EN-311218.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.cystat.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/C91603BD82050327C22582030022C7F2/$file/CYPRUS_IN_FIGURES-2018-EN-311218.pdf?OpenElement)

<https://www.structuralfunds.org.cy/uploadfiles/e-Library/NationalActionPlan-for-YouthEmployment.pdf>

3. *What types of non-formal digital education exists in the partner country and what qualifications are offered?*

The Adult Education Centres offer various courses on a face-to-face basis, although some technological advancement has taken place in recent years, as nowadays people can enrol and pay their tuition fees online. After attendance of a series of courses, participants receive a plain certificate of completion, which is not graded or based on benchmarks of skills or knowledge acquired.

Youth Organisations organise various face-to-face activities, such as cultural nights and street parties, which aim to develop a sense of citizenship and desire for social contribution in young people. In addition to this, educational and art workshops are a common occurrence in youth organisations, with various subjects offered. One such instance is “The STEAMers” programme of ONEK, which offers workshops in various STEAM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics), such as creative writing, photography, robotics, coding and music. These courses are offered in specially designed spaces in each district, and the tuition fee is 60 EUR per workshop, per academic year. Another great example from ONEK is Youth Makerspace in Larnaka. This is a space with arts and crafts supplies, as well as advanced technological equipment such as 3D printers, virtual reality and laser cutter. Here young people can experiment, learn more about technology, create, and cooperate with peers. It is a space for the exchange of ideas and personal development, where young entrepreneurship is given the chance to blossom.

<https://onek.org.cy/>

4. *What types of formal digital education exists in the partner country and what qualifications are offered?*

Since primary school children are brought into contact with STEM and ICT, as they take a compulsory course entitled *Design & Technology/Digital Technologies*. In the context of this lesson, children learn about different technologies and are encouraged to develop problem-solving skills which involve cutting-edge technologies, in the context of the human environment.

In secondary education, the lesson of Information Technology is distinguished from that of Design & Technology. In the Gymnasium (lower secondary education), the lesson of *Information Technology* is compulsory for all students throughout the three years of attendance. In the Lyceum (higher secondary education) the lesson of *Information Technology* is only compulsory in the first year of attendance. Students can opt to follow Advanced Information Technology in the last two years of high school if they want to.

In recent years, and in line with the importance currently attributed to STEM and digital skills, an effort is being made to develop a digital culture in Cyprus. In this context, a coalition was formed in 2016 between the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the Ministry of Communication, Transport and Works, which decided to offer ECDL (European Computer Driving License) training and education to secondary education students, both in the private and in the public sector. This is the first time that public schools in Cyprus are offering vocational ICT certification.

Both in private schools and in public schools, education is mainly face-to-face, although in some cases in the private sector F2F teaching is supported by an online system which can be accessed from home in case a student cannot attend class.

[http://www.mcit.gov.cy/mcit/sit/sit.nsf/E847AA65A3C42659C22581AA00405E02/\\$file/Cyprus_EDPR_country_profile.pdf](http://www.mcit.gov.cy/mcit/sit/sit.nsf/E847AA65A3C42659C22581AA00405E02/$file/Cyprus_EDPR_country_profile.pdf)

<http://www.schools.ac.cy/klimakio/index.html>

<http://plirom.schools.ac.cy/index.php/el/>

5. *What types of formal learner (FL) digital education providers exist within the partner country? Who are these including size, location, ownership, educational offering, activities organised, etc.*

The vast majority of formal education providers in Cyprus are the state-run public schools. They are divided in primary (six years), lower secondary (three years) and higher secondary education (three years). There are currently 331 public primary schools in Cyprus, one of which is in the Turkish-occupied area of Rizokarpaso. In secondary education, there are a total of 64 Gymnasiums (Lower Secondary) and 38 Lyceums (Upper Secondary). There are an additional 5 Musical Gymnasiums and 5 Musical Lyceums, one in each district, while the same regime also applies for Athletic Schools. Joined schools, which combine Gymnasium and Lyceum do exist, but they are a minority, numbering a total of 7 on the island. One of them is located in Rizokarpaso, for those few individuals who still reside in the occupied portion of the island.

In addition to the public schools, there are also a few privately owned schools which provide equivalent certificates. Private schools adopt a similar system, although there are some differences. In some institutions, secondary education can require a total of 7 years to complete, instead of the six required in the public sector. Moreover, in some cases the language of teaching is English instead of Greek, although there are also some private Greek-speaking schools.

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture website, there are 171 private kindergartens, 28 private primary schools and 39 private secondary schools currently in operation on the island. These private institutions are divided into 3 categories, depending on the curriculum offered. **Schools of the same type** strictly follow the same curriculum as public schools. In **schools of similar type**, 2/3 of the major subjects follow those of public schools, both in duration and in content. Finally, the category **schools of a different type** includes schools that do not belong in any of the two other categories.

http://www.moec.gov.cy/en/schools_info/en_public_primary.pdf

http://www.moec.gov.cy/en/private_education.html

6. *What types of non-formal learner (NFL) digital education providers exist within the partner country? Who are these including size, location, ownership, educational offering and activities organised, etc.*

Private institutes play a major role in education in Cyprus. It is customary for students, since primary school, to attend extracurricular lessons at private institutions after school. Subjects include a variety of topics, from foreign languages (predominantly English) to computers and STEM. The majority of these

courses follow the curriculum of public schools and act as a form of tutoring for the Pancyprian exams at the end of each academic year. Moreover, private institute courses often serve as preparatory for internationally recognised exams, such as GCEs, ECDL and IELTS. Currently, the Ministry of Education and Culture has registered and approved the curriculum for 545 private institutes. Importantly, despite the fact that students attending private institutes can take formal exams based on the knowledge acquired, and the fact that they are registered and approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture, private institutes are not recognised as Formal Learning providers.

The **Adult Education Centres**, established and run by the Ministry of Education and Culture, are the most prominent Non-Formal Learning providers on the island. These Centres were first established in 1952, before even the Republic of Cyprus was formed, and were mainly situated in rural areas to assist people with less opportunities in education. Later on, the Adult Education Centres came under the jurisdiction of the MOEC, while their numbers increased and the network expanded to also include urban areas. The Adult Education Centres aim for the general development of individuals, on a personal, social, professional, financial and cultural level. In order to cover these needs, various courses are offered, ranging from arts and crafts to foreign languages and computer skills. The fees are very low, to make the courses accessible to everyone. Although not exclusive to Youth, these centres provide the basis for Non-Formal Learning on the island.

Youth Organisations, as mentioned above, also provide NFL opportunities in Cyprus. For instance, the **Cyprus Youth Council (CYC)** has formed a team of educators who specialise in NFL. This pool of trainers is not only in charge of creating and teaching various NFL courses, they are also involved in numerous other activities, such as the organisation of cultural events, monitoring developments in the field of education in Cyprus and offering advice on NFL matters. **ONEK** is another contributing organisation who has created The STEAMers programme and Youth Makerspace Larnaka. The **Youth for Exchange and Understanding Cyprus (YEU Cyprus)** is another great example of good practises. YEU Cyprus is a youth organisation which provides NFL courses, both nationally and internationally. They regularly organise various youth-focused trainings with NFL-based methodology. **Nautilus SAR** is another volunteer youth organisation that frequently offers training, and they base all their activities on non-formal and informal learning techniques.

The State Institutes of Further Education are another lifelong learning project of the Republic of Cyprus. Starting in the 1960s as foreign language institutes, the State Institutes have expanded their curriculum to include Accounting, ICT, preparatory courses for the Pancyprian Exams, consolidation lessons for Gymnasium and Lyceum pupils, and last, but vitally important, Greek to Foreigners, a lesson targeted towards speakers of other languages who live and work in Cyprus. The State Institutes offer allowances and scholarships to students, but tuition is low in general, making the courses available to a wider population.

Finally, some municipalities in Cyprus have established in the past decade “Open Schools” in an effort to promote lifelong learning. The Open Schools operate in afternoon hours, offering various courses, with affordable tuition fees, and they are open to individuals of all ages and backgrounds.

<http://www.moec.gov.cy/kie/>

<http://www.yeucyprus.org/>

<https://onek.org.cy/>

http://www.moec.gov.cy/pdf/el_en_egkekrimena_idiotika_frontistiria.pdf

<https://www.limassolmunicipal.com.cy/el/anoixto-sxoleio>

<https://aglantzia.org.cy/archiki-selida/i-drastiriotites-ekdilosis-mas/anoikto-scholeio/>

7. *What is the National Youth Work Strategy (or similar policy provision) in your partner country and the key priorities regarding work? How does this policy support developing digital competencies?*

The **National Youth Strategy of Cyprus** was created in 2017 and is in effect until the year 2022, targeting individuals aged 14-35 years old. As the Youth Board of Cyprus (ONEK) is the representative national agency for youth, it plays a major role in the formation of youth policies.

The vision of the National Youth Strategy is “to provide young people with the opportunities and empowerment to reach their full potential in all areas of their lives, and to be able to use their talents for the benefit of themselves and society”. In order to accomplish this, the policy targets 8 main areas, similarly to the EU Youth Strategy:

- Education & Training (assurance of quality and equal opportunities in for education and training)
- Employment & Entrepreneurship (promotion of employability, entrepreneurship, and labour rights)
- Health & Wellbeing (promotion of access to health services, well-being, health, and prevention of diseases)
- Participation (to ensure of participation of young people in decision-making, and active participation in democratic life)
- Voluntary Activities (encourage volunteerism and validation of skills developed through volunteering)
- Social Inclusion (ensure equality, respect for human rights create a mindset for social inclusion)
- Youth & the World (promote mobility, universality and multiculturalism)
- Creativity and Culture (promote artistic creation and equal access to arts and culture)

Coupled with the aforementioned Digital Strategy for Cyprus, areas such as Education and Training and Employment and Entrepreneurship take a new turn, and it is evident that the state is putting in great efforts to modernise institutions, concepts, processes, society, as well as the world of business.

<https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/sites/youthwiki/files/gdlcyprus.pdf>

8. *What is the type and size of marginalised communities in your partner country? What support is being developed/provided by government, social economy and voluntary sector to support these communities in their learning?*

12.2% of people in Cyprus between 16 and 64 years old stated that they are facing some sort of chronic health issue or disability. Out of these percentages 48.3% are not employed, and they are not looking for employment. 30.2% of the total disabled community in Cyprus stated that they are limited in what type

of labour they can perform, 28.6% are limited in the amount of labour they can perform, and 12.1% state that they face serious difficulties travelling to and from their workplace.

For primary and secondary education, the state has formed special schools, such as the School for the Deaf. In the past two decades, an effort is being made to integrate students with disabilities into regular schools. Therefore, the role of special schools has changed dramatically, as their current main function is to provide services to disabled children, and not to be in charge of their education. With regard to Higher Education, there are various facilities that disabled applicants if they would like to participate in the Pancyprian Exams for entry into the state-run universities, whilst 6% of all positions available each academic year in the aforementioned universities is reserved for individuals with serious health problems or other problems. Concerning lifelong learning, the Adult Educational Centres mentioned earlier offer their courses for free to individuals with proven disabilities of over 75%.

Cyprus, due to its geographic location, has taken in asylum seekers from many countries over the years, and continues to do so today in increasing numbers, which are, admittedly, disproportionate to the capacity of the island. In 2017 alone, 4582 applications for asylum were received. That number almost doubled in 2018, when 7761 new applications were received. The statistical data of the Asylum Service of the Republic of Cyprus indicated that at the end of the year 2018, 8502 applications for asylum were pending. According to Eurostat, 18.8% of immigrants in Cyprus are aged between 15-29 years old. The youth of asylum seekers want to build a future on lands unfamiliar to them, and it's a task made very hard by the abandonment of their homes, the language barrier, cultural differences and everything that being a refugee implies. Education can be the doorway to integration and development – both personal and professional.

The Refugee Law states that children who are seeking asylum can enrol in primary and secondary education, immediately after their application for asylum, and not exceeding 3 months from the date of application. Despite the 3-month timeframe mentioned earlier, there have been cases where children have stayed out of school for longer than this period, due to reasons such as difficulty in accessing specific schools, inability of schools to accommodate more students at specific times of the year, and lack of information.

Asylum seeker children have the same rights and obligations in education as citizens of the Republic of Cyprus. Although public school courses are taught in Greek, the Ministry of Education and Culture has introduced preparatory, transitional classes for non-Greek speakers where extra hours of Greek are taught, for the integration of non-Greek speaking population into the school system. These courses take place in specific public schools in each district. Despite this, the language barrier can still prove to be an insurmountable problem, especially for older children who first enter secondary education. To overcome this, the UNHCR and KASA high school have joined forces and offered the possibility to children asylum seekers who have good command over the English language, to study and obtain a high school diploma in English.

The **United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)** was first introduced in Cyprus in 1974, after the Turkish invasion. Aiming to provide humanitarian aid for Cypriot refugees chased away from their homes, the UNHCR provided emergency housing, food, as well as domestic and community equipment. Up to 1998 the UNHCR provided assistance with government infrastructures such as hospitals and schools, as the displaced populations proved too much for the capacity of the institutions. In 1998, as the scene changed and boats

The **Cyprus Refugee Council (CyRC)** is the first NGO on the island to deal mainly with refugees. An independent, non-profit organisation, the CyRC promotes the interests, rights and wellbeing of vulnerable groups in Cyprus, aiming for integration into the Cypriot society. The CyRC carries out its work by targeting various areas at the individual, community and policy level.

A vital initiative of the UNHCR, in collaboration with the CyRC, is the **HelpRefugeesWork** online platform, which pairs motivated refugees looking for employment with businesses and employers, as well as training providers in Cyprus. This is a simple, easy-to-use platform, providing services to all parties involved free of charge.

http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/asylum/asylumservice.nsf/asylumservice01_en/asylumservice01_en?OpenDocument

<https://www.unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2018/03/EducationCyprusApril2017.pdf>

<http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/cyprus/access-education-0>

[https://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/82B96785EF54A9F7C2257192002FBC9F/\\$file/DISABILITY_REPORT.pdf?OpenElement](https://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/82B96785EF54A9F7C2257192002FBC9F/$file/DISABILITY_REPORT.pdf?OpenElement)

http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/asylum/asylumservice.nsf/asylumservice18_en/asylumservice18_en?OpenDocument

<https://www.helprefugeeswork.org>

<https://cyrefugeecouncil.org/>

9. *What accreditation is given for Formal (FL) and Non-Formal (NFL) digital Learning in your partner country? Are these widely recognised by employers? Are there any digital competencies frameworks for young people to use to accredit their skills, learning and/or experiences?*

The Cyprus Country Report of 2016 stated that up to the date of the publication, the island's policies on the validation of non-formal and informal learning are fragmented, and the government did not have in place a comprehensive policy in place. Currently, the validation of skills in Cyprus is under the responsibility of the Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA), and more specifically under the System of Vocational Qualifications. As the name suggests, this is a system that focuses on the validation of vocational skills, acquired through previous employment, with little to no provision on other skills, which might prove equally important in the labour market.

However, EU incentives have kick-started the initiative for the development of a comprehensive framework for the recognition of informally acquired skills. An interdepartmental government committee was charged with the task of forming the *National Plan of Action for the Enactment of Validation Mechanisms for Non-Formal and Informal Learning*, which was finalised and published by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2018. The Action Plan describes the foundation on which the validation programme will be built, detailing not only the hierarchy of the organisation, the administration process and the validation systems, but also the process to be followed by individuals wanting to validate their skills.

The Action Plan is currently being implemented, with plans to develop the Pilot Testing Action Plan upon creation of the mechanism.

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is one more thing that will empower informal skills. It is currently under design, with plans to establish it as an in-service department to be implemented gradually. I will fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Culture, covering all levels and types of qualifications, including formal and non-formal learning from all subsystems of education and training.

<http://www.hrdauth.org.cy/images/media/assetfile/Trainer%20Of%20Vocational%20Training.pdf>

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning-14_en

10. Are there any examples of best practices/learning cities/learning maps within your partner country?

The idea of learning cities is not very known in Cyprus, but, it is a concept that is becoming more and more known. Given the rise of non-formal learning in recent years, people are starting to realise that there is a need for a tool that lists learning opportunities.

One such example is a start-up company called **ACTIVITYGOGO**. This is a website which features a map on which users can list and find courses and activities around them. The main focus of ACTIVITYGOGO is to make people aware of hobby opportunities in their vicinity, with no focus on marketable skills.

MYSEMINARS is a website where various training opportunities for professionals are listed. There are certified courses on a variety of topics ranging from management to vocational qualifications, with a separate section for online learning. Although it can be a useful tool, the map feature is not available on this site, making it harder for people to find certified courses near them.

It is evident that although many opportunities for learning exist all around the island, there is need for a comprehensive tool which can help learners make an informed decision on activities and courses around them to improve their employability. Moreover, it is made clear that although training opportunities exist, e-learning of non-formal and informal skills is currently practically non-existent.

<https://activitygogo.com/about-us/>

<https://www.myseminars.com.cy/>