



City of Limassol

Intercultural Profile

Introduction¹

Like other countries of the Mediterranean basin Cyprus has historically been a country of emigration, exporting migrants to richer countries to the extent that the number of Cypriots currently living abroad nears halves the population of the island. Since the 1980s however the government controlled part of the Republic of Cyprus has experienced several large waves of immigration, most importantly as a result of the Lebanese Civil War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Gulf War, the conflicts in Yugoslavia and the accession of Cyprus to the EU in 2004. The Cypriot government has developed over the years and in a rather pragmatic way different policies which vary according to the economic status of the various migrant groups. The multiculturalist, assimilationist and guest-worker models co-exist side by side in a country where the development of a comprehensive integration policy is only just beginning.

Of all the cities on the island Limassol is beyond doubt the most cosmopolitan. Its population has more than doubled since the de facto division of Cyprus in 1974. Compared to other cities, Limassol hosts the largest group of refugees from the northern part of the island, the largest Russian community and the largest Roma community. Limassol is widely known as an important tourist destination and a hub for numerous offshore companies. It also harbours the biggest port in the Mediterranean transit trade and has traditionally strong links with nearby countries such as Lebanon and Israel. The UK sovereign base area of Akrotiri is located just West of the main port and provides a vivid reminder of the colonial past and the strategic importance of the island.² Together with the separation of the two main ethnic groups after 1974, these various elements explain to a large extent the specific cultural mix within the city as well as the way in which Limassolans perceive cultural diversity.

National context

Immigration policy

Cyprus has traditionally been a country of emigration. As is usually the case in former British colonies, many Cypriots migrated to the UK, as well as other English-speaking destinations such as Australia, the United States and South Africa. During the years 1965-1975 many Cypriots, particularly

¹ This report is based upon the visit of the CoE inspection team on 16 & 17 June 2011, comprising Daniel de Torres Barderi, Oliver Freeman and Irena Guidikova. The report has been updated in 2013. The report reflects the opinions of the experts involved in the visit and not necessarily the official position of the Council of Europe or the Limassol Municipality

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akrotiri_and_Dhekelia (accessed 27.10.2010)

men, obtained scholarships to study in eastern European Universities, mostly such as in Russia, Romania and Czechoslovakia where they often got married and returned to Cyprus with their spouses. Nowadays binational marriages between Greek-Cypriots and foreigners residing in Cyprus are commonplace.³ Getting married to a Cypriot national is virtually the only way of acquiring Cypriot citizenship and the civic rights that go with it.

Prior to the 1990s the policy towards migration was very selective, only allowing entrepreneurial positions and certain highly skilled managerial or technical posts to be filled by non-Cypriots. Work permits were granted to non-Cypriots only in exceptional circumstances wherever there were no Cypriots with the relevant qualifications to fill the position. The presence of migrant groups in Cyprus was viewed as a temporary phenomenon. This was indeed the case when many affluent Arabs came to Cyprus following the Lebanese Civil War or the Gulf War and returned to their countries once stability was restored.

In the 1990s the country's rapid economic development together with higher levels of education led to a situation in which low-skilled positions, especially in the tourist industry, could not be filled by the indigenous population. The Cypriot government decided therefore to allow more migrant workers into the country. In effect Cyprus was transformed almost overnight from a country that traditionally exported migrants to all corners of the earth to a net recipient of migrants from all over the globe. Many East Europeans, business people as well as temporary workers, came to Cyprus in the 1990s, mostly from Russia, Yugoslavia (primarily Serbs), Bulgaria and Romania.

In April 2003, for the first time in almost thirty years, the restrictions in movement between the government-controlled and the Turkish-occupied parts of the island were partly lifted. As a result several thousands Turkish-Cypriots began crossing the Green Line every day to work in the government-controlled area where manual jobs were more readily available and salaries higher. This had several on inter-communal relations. On the one hand, migrant workers in the government-controlled area are increasingly afraid of losing their jobs because most positions are gradually being taken up by Turkish-Cypriots who must be given priority by the employers.⁴ On the other hand, greater freedom of movement between the two zones has apparently enabled an unspecified number of undocumented migrants from Asia, northern Africa and the Middle East to enter the government-controlled area.

Another important event that increased immigration was Cyprus's entry into the EU in May 2004.⁵ As a EU-member, Cyprus became an attractive destination for migrant workers and asylum-seekers. Concerning the latter Cyprus is a prime instance of a southern European country which functions as the "entrance hall" to the EU, and often serves as a "waiting room" for many migrants who have the Northern European countries as a destination. Asylum seekers in Cyprus come from 40 different countries. Since late 2003 however half of them come from just two: Bangladesh and Pakistan. Most are "overstayers", either students who came to Cyprus with student visas or legal migrant workers who applied for asylum once their temporary residence permit elapses.⁶ For Cyprus this is a relatively new phenomenon and a cause of misunderstanding or resentment.

³ In 2009, Syrian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and British were the main nationalities of grooms who were civilly married to Cypriot spouses in 2009 while the main nationalities of brides wed to Cypriot men were Romanian, Bulgarian, Russian and Ukrainian. *Demographic Report 2009*. Republic of Cyprus : Statistical Office, 2010: 17

⁴ This concerns in particular the regions of Nicosia and Larnaca and to a lesser degree Limassol which is no so close to the Turkish-occupied area.

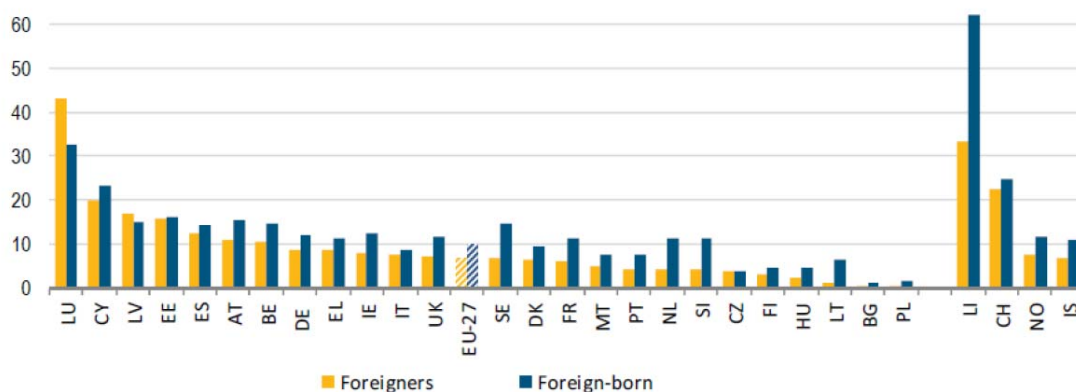
⁵ Although the whole island is de jure a EU-member, the EU acquis - the body of common rights and obligations - applies only to the government-controlled area and is suspended in the areas administered by Turkish-Cypriots.

⁶ <http://www.unhcr.org/41e690364.html>

As a result of all these changes, Cyprus is by far the European country with the highest net migration rate in Europe (currently at 11.21 migrants / 1,000 population) and ranks 8th in the world in this respect.⁷ Non-Cypriot residents currently represent approximately 10% of the total population. The largest groups according to country of birth are from Greece, the Philippines, Sri-Lanka, Bulgaria and Russia.⁸

In 2011 there were 33.3 million foreign citizens resident in the EU-27, 6.6% of the total population. The majority, 20.5 million, were citizens of non-EU countries, while the remaining 12.8 million were citizens of other EU Member States. Cyprus, along with Luxembourg, Ireland, Hungary and Malta did foreign-born from other EU countries outnumber those born outside the EU. According to EUROSTAT figures, in Cyprus were a total of 167.800 foreigners (20% over population) in 2011. 105.400 were citizens of another EU Member State, while 62.400 were citizens of non-EU countries.⁹

Figure 1. Proportion of foreigners and foreign-born in the population, 2011 (%)



In May 2013, the Cyprus government announced the procedures for granting permanent residence (Immigration permits) to third country nationals who intend to invest in Cyprus. According to the regulation, the applicant should deposit in a reserve account at least €30.000 for a period of at least three years. The amount must show it was transferred from abroad. Furthermore, the applicant should demonstrate a familiar income of at least €30.000 increased by €5.000 for each dependent. Finally, the applicant should submit a title deed or purchase contract for a residential or other building, of a market value of at least €300,000 (excluding VAT) and official proof of payment of at least €200,000 (excluding VAT), regardless of the delivery date of the house.

Integration policy

The policy assumption for the employment of migrant workers formulated in 1990s was that their stay was to be short-term, temporary and restricted to specific sectors where labour shortages were most critical. This assumption still prevails nowadays and explains why there is no comprehensive national policy concerned with the integration of migrants in Cyprus.

The never ending political debate on the Cyprus problem tends to stifle thinking on other diversity issues. Two additional factors need to be considered: the role of the state and its policy on migrants and the question of cultural and structural racism. With the exception of two Parliamentary Reports,

⁷ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cy.html#Govt>

⁸ *Demographic Report 2009*. Republic of Cyprus : Statistical Office, 2010: 151.

⁹ Statistics in focus: "Nearly two-thirds of the foreigners living in EU Member States are citizens of countries outside the EU-27", 31/2012, EUROSTAT.

there has been little effort by policy makers of the main political parties to enhance the rights of migrants despite calls voiced repeatedly by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance [ECRI].¹⁰ The widespread belief that “foreign” labour is only a temporary phenomenon supports the view that enhancing migrants’ rights might be seen as encouraging them to stay longer. It seems that such views may be changing as a result of European incentives such as the European Fund for the Integration of third-country nationals.¹¹ Recently the Minister of the Interior presented the Cyprus` National Action Plan 2010-2012 for the integration of immigrants, who legally reside in Cyprus.¹² The Plan is based on the relevant European directives, the eleven Common Basic Principles for the integration of immigrants, the Common Integration Program, the Stockholm Program and the Immigration and Asylum Pact. The plan comprises eight priority aspects, which include information, service and transparency, employment, education and the learning of the Greek language, health, improvement of the quality of life and social protection, culture, basic elements of political and social reality and participation. This is a good example of a “top-down” approach to integration. For the time being at least, a “bottom-up” process remains jeopardised by two salient features of contemporary Cyprus, the weakness of civil society and the limited autonomy of local governments.

Civil society¹³

Concerning civil society, it is noteworthy that the turbulent history of the island has greatly affected the generations of Cypriots which today would have manned the civil society in Cyprus. The subsistence of the Cyprus problem for over three decades and the various ideological positions, beginning with the cause of Enosis (union with Greece), then independence, the Turkish invasion in 1974, the division of the island and one third of the Greek-Cypriots becoming refugees in their own country, the later efforts for a unitary state and subsequently the various types of federation and at the same time accession to the EU, have resulted in an almost religious adherence to these successive causes. In turn, the adherence to such, from time to time, ‘panaceas’ resulted in intolerance to the opposite view, and in allowing the Cyprus problem to be used for opportunistic purposes so as to serve internal political competitions. The Cypriots tend to think that almost everything has a political cause and expect the politicians to deal with almost all issues facing society. Political power, as exercised by the state and the political parties, thus assumes a hegemonic role, controlling not only the economy but also the society at large, mostly evident in education, the media, cultural production and volunteer organizations (which are mainly charities) and resulting in the underdevelopment of the civil society.

Local government

Cyprus is a small country with a rather conservative political culture. This may explain why power is concentrated at the national level and the political autonomy of local governments very limited.¹⁴ The legal base for local government is the Municipal Law of October 1985 (N. 111/85). According to the Law, the main responsibilities of municipalities are the construction, maintenance and lighting of streets, the collection, disposal and treatment of waste, the protection and improvement of the environment and the good appearance of the municipal areas, water supply, the construction,

¹⁰ ECRI has published 4 reports on Cyprus. The 4th report was published on May 2011 just before our visit to Limassol.

¹¹ For the period 2007 – 2012 Cyprus has received 7,2 million Euros from the European Fund for the Integration of third-country nationals.

¹² <http://famagusta-gazette.com/cyprus-rolls-out-immigration-plan-p10879-69.htm>

¹³ Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou, *Active Civic Participation of Immigrants in Cyprus*, Country Report prepared for the European research project POLITIS, Oldenburg, 2005: 47.

<http://www.politis-europe.uni-oldenburg.de/download/Cyprus.pdf>

¹⁴ There is no general provision or protection for local government within the constitution.

development and maintenance of municipal gardens and parks and the protection of public health.¹⁵ The Ministry of the Interior is tasked with overseeing local government and formulating and implementing the government's policy in relation to urban development, district administration, town planning and housing, land surveying, migration, asylum, civil defence and communication.¹⁶

Municipal Councils have the authority to promote a vast range of activities and events including the arts, education, sport and social services. This depends however on their political will and finances. In Limassol there is clearly a political will to make the city more intercultural. The question of financing the activities needed to reach this goal is more problematic. The dependency of local on central government is well exemplified by the fact that local authorities can only recruit staff with the prior approval of the Ministry of the Interior who will then allocate the necessary funding. Such a process takes two years of average and is unlikely to succeed in the current economic situation given the fragile situation of the country's public finances.

Not surprisingly the financial autonomy of local governments is also very limited¹⁷. Their main sources of revenue are municipal taxes, fees and duties (professional tax, immovable property tax, hotel accommodation tax, fees for issuing permits and licences, fees for refuse collection, fines, etc.), as well as state subsidies. Taxes, duties and fees represent the major source of revenue while state grants and subsidies amount to only a small percentage of the income. Local authority spending generally covers operational costs and to a much more limited extent investment. It is the central government that usually finances major infrastructure projects undertaken by the municipalities, but this is dependent very much on each individual project.¹⁸

Municipality and Community Expenditure (2005)
according to the Classification of the Functions of
Government (SOFOG) Source: Eurostat¹⁹

Expenditure	%
General Public Services	44.2
Settlements and Utilities Networks	27.5
Recreation, Culture and Religion	15.0
Environmental Expenditures	13.2
Education	0.0
Public Order and Security	0.0
Health	0.0
Defense	0.0
Social Protection	0.0

¹⁵ In addition to the Municipalities Law, there are several laws giving municipalities important powers other than those already mentioned. Such laws are the Streets and Buildings Regulation Law, the Town Planning Law, the Civil Marriages Law and the Sewerage Systems Law.

¹⁶ <http://www.clgf.org.uk/userfiles/1/files/Cyprus%20local%20government%20profile%202011-12.pdf>

¹⁷ http://www.ucm.org.cy/eng/03_topikes_arxes/index.htm

¹⁸ http://www.ccre.org/chypre_en.htm

¹⁹ <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/emcc/erm/studies/tn1010012s/cy1010019g.htm>

TOTAL	100.00
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Migrants rights²⁰

The policy assumption for the employment of migrant workers formulated in 1990s was that their stay was to be short-term, temporary and restricted to specific sectors. Although the developments of the past decade have reversed this presumption, a number of institutional devices, designed with those goals in mind, have persisted and little thought has been given by policy-makers on how to encourage civic participation of migrants and help develop a sense of belonging to the Cypriot society. Only very recently did the debate on multiculturalism begin. It is still at an infancy stage and is more geared towards acceptance and tolerance rather than civic participation which, as a concept, is located at a stage several steps ahead from tolerance. Hence Cyprus rates far behind 'stage one', if we are to rate the country according to the Council of Europe's Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level three stage schema, whereby stage one is the equal right to freedom of expression, assembly and association, stage two involves consultative bodies of foreign residents at local level and stage three participation in local elections.²¹

Local context

Demography

Limassol is the second largest city in Cyprus after Nicosia, the capital. The Municipality of Limassol has a population of 98,000. The urban area of Limassol which includes the municipalities of Limassol, Mesa Geitonia, Agios Athanasios, Germasogeia, Pano and Kato Polemidia and Ypsonas has a population of 187 100.²²

Since 1974 the population of Limassol has more than doubled. This is due essentially to four factors:

- In 1974 one third of the Cyprus population (200,000) were internally displaced as a result of the Turkish invasion. 43,000 Greek-Cypriot refugees settled down in Limassol.
- In the 1980s and 1990s large numbers of foreign permanent or temporary residents settled in Limassol seeking refuge or opportunities as a consequence of the civil war in Lebanon, the conflict in Yugoslavia, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the accession of Cyprus to the EU.
- Cyprus has the third highest rate of natural increase among the 27 EU countries behind Ireland and France. During the period 1982-1985 the fertility rate was at 2.46. It has been diminishing since and lies currently below the replacement level of 2.10.
- Many Greek-Cypriots left the countryside to re-settle in urban areas

The population of Limassol has also become more culturally diverse. In the 1990s, a large group of Cypriot-Roma, wrongly considered by the Constitution as Turkish-Cypriots, returned from the

²⁰ Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou, *Active Civic Participation of Immigrants in Cyprus*, Country Report prepared for the European research project POLITIS, Oldenburg, 2005: <http://www.politis-europe.uni-oldenburg.de/download/Cyprus.pdf>

²¹ *Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level*, Strasbourg: 1997, Chapters A-C . <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Word/144.doc> (accessed 10.10.2011)

²² *Demographic Report 2009*. Republic of Cyprus : Statistical Office, 2010: 57. [http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/6C25304C1E70C304C2257833003432B3/\\$file/DEMOGRA_PHIC_REPORT-2009-100211.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/6C25304C1E70C304C2257833003432B3/$file/DEMOGRA_PHIC_REPORT-2009-100211.pdf?OpenElement) (accessed 06.06.2011)

northern part of the island to the Turkish quarter of Limassol.²³ The number of Romanian, Bulgarian and Polish workers arriving in Limassol increased considerably after the accession of Cyprus to the EU. Although their numbers have decreased during the last 2 years as a consequence of the economic crisis, the Bulgarian and Romanian presence in Limassol remains very visible. Finally the recent years have seen growing numbers of “visible minorities”, mostly women from Sri Lanka, the Philippines or Vietnam employed as domestic helpers.

Currently the population of the urban area of Limassol can be divided into the following groups:

- the majority ethnic group of Greek-Cypriots
- the affluent permanent residents of migrant origin
- the foreign workers (25% domestic helpers, 75% others)
- the Turkish-Cypriot, Roma-Cypriot, Armenian and Latin “national” minorities

It is quite reasonable to say that Limassol has never been so ethnically diverse as it is today.

Politics

The current distribution of seats at the Municipal Council of Limassol is as follows.

<i>Party</i>	<i>Ideology^[1]</i>	<i>Seats</i>
Democratic Rally - DISY	Right – Member of the European People’s Party	9
Progressive Party of Working People - AKEL	Communism (Left) – Member of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left, European Parliamentary Group	8
Democratic Party - DIKO	Centre (social centrism)	3
Movement for Social Democracy - EDEK	Socialist – Member of PES (Partial of European Socialist) and Socialist International	2
European Party - EVRO.KO.	Right	0
Citizen’s Alliance	Centre	1
Independent Movement of Architects		1
Independent		1
TOTAL OF SEATS	25 seats plus the Mayor (AKEL)	26

Andreas Christou, an AKEL member and former Interior Minister, is mayor of Limassol since December 2006. He is a very popular politician, often associated with some major investments in Limassol, in particular the construction of a brand new marina around the old fishing port, the revitalization of the old city centre and several other major urban development projects.²⁴ In the 2012 municipal elections, Mr Christou was re-elected. Mr Christou strongly supports the Intercultural Cities His support for the idea of an intercultural Limassol is not coincidental or tokenistic insofar as the idea of interculturality underpins all important future-oriented projects that are currently being developed in Limassol.

²³ According to ECRI there are approximately 700 Roma people living presently in the city. <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/cyprus/CYP-CbC-IV-2011-020-ENG.pdf> : 30

²⁴ http://www.limassolmunicipal.com.cy/lemesos/index_en.html

Plans for the future

Alongside Nicosia and Paphos, Limassol was one of the three Cypriot cities applying to be nominated European Capital of Culture in 2017. Participating in the Intercultural Cities network was seen as a way of increasing Limassol's chances of winning the contest. During our visit we met the person in charge of preparing the application and encouraged him to consider what participative mechanisms could be introduced to ensure that the important migrant community is associated to the process from the very beginning.

Participation is the key element of another interesting initiative called "Limassol Branding".²⁵ The Limassol Branding Project is a private initiative launched in July 2011 by seven of the city's top business leaders, under the umbrella of the Limassol Chamber of Commerce, with the full support of the municipal bodies, the Cyprus Tourism Organisation, the Limassol Tourism Development Company and the Cyprus Shipping Chamber. Claiming to be the world's first interactive city branding project, Limassol Branding calls on locals to use social media networks like Facebook and Twitter to share their ideas about what makes their city unique. Some of the slogans shown during the launch presentation show that cultural diversity may be viewed as one of the distinctive elements that could make Limassol an even more attractive destination : "*A City of Mixed Neighbourhoods*", - "*Friendly, Welcoming*" - "*No Ghetto*"- "*Diverse and Cosmpolitan*."²⁶ Project conclusions will be presented to the Municipalities and communities of the Greater Limassol area at the end of the year. Hopefully the "diversity advantage" will emerge as one of the Unique Selling Proposals [USP] Limassol may decide to invest in in the future.

Labour market

Business and economy

The Turkish invasion of 1974 and the consequent division of the island left the Cypriot society and economy devastated: 18 % fall of the GNP between 1973 to 1975, 30% rise in unemployment, mass poverty and a loss of 37% of the country's territory. Since then however, the government-controlled area of the island has made a rapid and remarkable economic recovery. This is due to the strong emphasis the authorities have put on opening the national economy to the outside world.

Firstly, the economy has turned to mass tourism and promoted Cyprus as a key destination because of the mild climate, the sea coast and, last but not least, the hospitality of its inhabitants. Tourism is indeed the dominant source of employment on the island with an estimated 25% of the working population directly and indirectly dependent on the tourism sector. It has in turn created a "boom" in the construction industry with massive investment in hotel complexes and holiday homes in the regions of Limassol, Paphos and Larnaca. In a social development sense, tourism has made a vital contribution by maintaining virtually full employment on the island. For the last two decades, unemployment has remained at about 3%. This has, in turn, stimulated the entry of women into the labour market who now represent around 50% of the total workforce compared to under 29% in 1976. At the same time, however it has been necessary to recruit a significant number of migrant workers to make up for a shortage in the labour market, especially in lower-grade jobs which the now better educated and trained Cypriots are not willing to occupy.²⁷

²⁵ http://www.limassolbranding.com/Limassol_Branding_Project/About.html

²⁶ <http://www.slideshare.net/kooboo/the-limassol-branding-project>

²⁷ With respect to sociocultural impacts, the development of tourism in Cyprus has been less problematic than might be expected, although in the popular resorts, such as Agia Napa, a degree of resentment against tourists has been found to exist.

Secondly, when the civil war ravaged Beirut from 1975 onwards, southern Cyprus was ideally located to become a substitute economic, financial and service hub for the Middle East. This in turn led to the development of high quality infrastructure (airports in Larnaca and Paphos) and a multiplication of offshore companies operating in Limassol. This has caused the immigration to Cyprus of many affluent migrants attracted by tax incentives and more recently the growing stability derived from EU membership.

Thirdly, Limassol has replaced Famagusta as the main maritime port in Cyprus. The creation of the zone franche constitutes a very convenient location for temporary storage and a point of transshipment for maritime freight in the eastern Mediterranean.

Sectors of employment

The ethnic composition of the labour force in Cyprus, like in Limassol, varies according to the various employment sectors. In the public sector, there are virtually no employees of foreign origin. Indeed one of the conditions to obtain an official position in the public sector of most countries in the world is the perfect knowledge of the native language. This amounts in effect to barring access to such positions to non-native Greek speakers even if they have Cypriot citizenship.

In the international business sector, the majority of non-Cypriot employees originate from Central and Eastern Europe, in particular Russia, Germany and the former Yugoslav Republics. Migrant employees in hotels, restaurants and trade also originate from Central and Eastern Europe but mainly from the Balkans, in particular Bulgaria and Romania.

In the agricultural, manufacturing and construction sectors, which are low skill and hard working environments, a significant number of Asian migrant workers is employed. Since 2000 the Cypriot government has based its immigration policy on “selective” immigration from non EU countries. Cyprus has thus signed several agreements with Asian countries like Vietnam, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Népal, and Pakistan. Almost all the 37,000 domestic workers employed in Cyprus come from these countries.

Domestic helpers

Domestic helpers are mostly young women from the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. They constitute the most vulnerable labour group in Cyprus. In most cases they live in the house of their employers who cover their expenses with regards to rent, nutrition and everyday personal expenses and often have little contact with the outside world. Their gross minimum salary is set at € 456 / month (€ 311 net), four times less than the average gross salary in Cyprus, currently estimated at €1,987²⁸. In most cases they have to work for more than a year to reimburse the private agencies back home that served as intermediaries between the Cypriot employer and their country of origin. This means in effect that they are at the absolute mercy of their employers who can dismiss them at any moment, leaving them indebted and deprived of any legal status in Cyprus.

Although domestic helpers represent 25% of the legal migrants working in Cyprus, they are not organised in trade unions and have little protection against exploitation and personal abuse. There have been reports that the terms of contract of these workers are sometimes breached by employers, who may for instance force the women to work much longer hours or during their days off, assign them to duties not provided for by the contract, or dismiss them for a specific reason. There have also been reports of inhuman treatment and sexual harassment.²⁹

²⁸ <http://www.cyprus-mail.com/civil-servants/public-servants-salaries-are-30-cent-higher/20110824>

²⁹ Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou, *Active Civic Participation of Immigrants in Cyprus*, Country Report prepared for the European research project POLITIS, Oldenburg, 2005: <http://www.politis-europe.uni-oldenburg.de/download/Cyprus.pdf>: 34

ECRI has repeatedly denounced the lack of protection of domestic helpers in Cyprus, In its recently published 4th report on Cyprus it notes that the vulnerable situation of foreign domestic workers has not improved.³⁰ It is however undisputable that domestic helpers contribute much more to the economy than their low salaries seem to indicate. By looking after young children and elderly persons, they enable working adults, especially women, to remain in the labour market and increase substantially household revenues. In previous years such services were provided by Cypriot women from the countryside.

The Cypriot-Roma community³¹

The Roma in Cyprus have largely been ignored, avoided and socially marginalised. They have never been recognised as a national minority, religious group or anything that refers to their identity and culture. Nor are they recognised as a “Roma” community, but considered part of the Turkish Cypriot community.

The majority of the Cypriot-Roma community are unemployed or take up very low-skilled jobs such as collecting scrap metal. It is said that no Roma women at all are employed. Cypriots attribute this to their almost total illiteracy. ECRI notes that the Roma continue to face widespread prejudice and discrimination in all areas of life. The lack of any policy or measures to assist them specifically is attributed by the authorities to the fact that the Roma, as part of the Turkish-Cypriot community, may benefit from all the measures put in place to assist and support that community. This is the way the national government justifies why has taken no action to address the specific problems encountered by the Roma community. On the contrary, government policy contributes to the segregation of the Roma community, most notably in the settlement of Polemidia, outside Limassol. The settlement is the site of a former rubbish dump, away from any village or town and totally isolated from other communities, with no access to any form of public transport. For this reason Roma children living in the settlement cannot go to school and are deprived of their fundamental right to education.³²

The local government in Limassol has no influence on the Roma housing policy of the central government. It has however taken a concrete step to foster better integration of the Roma. Since 2008 and every summer since, the Limassol Municipality employs Roma during the summer to clean streets and public areas in the Turkish-Cypriot quarter of the city. The measure has reportedly been popular and many Roma have participated.

The impact of the economic crisis

Given its strong international orientation, the local economy in Limassol is particularly sensitive to upward or downward shifts in the global and regional economic situation. The global economic crisis hit Cyprus badly in 2012-2013, resulting in a severe bank and government-debt crisis and a subsequent international bailout, raising unemployment and a fall of the number of economic migrants.

The devastating explosion of the island’s biggest power station situated just east of Limassol in July 2011 has further weakened the financial prospects of Cyprus

Cyprus’s mid-term economic prospects are quite bleak. Unemployment has risen from from 3% in 2004 to 17% currently.³³ Among the adopted austerity measures the government plans to cut 5,000 jobs and freeze new recruits over five years. For the first time in the country’s history Cyprus has to

³⁰ <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/cyprus/CYP-CbC-IV-2011-020-ENG.pdf>

³¹ ECRI Report : 29-31

³² ECRI Report: 7

³³ http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/index_en/index_en

manage simultaneously a depressed labour and a more ethnically diversified working force. There is an increased feeling of economic insecurity and growing negative attitudes towards immigration, especially irregular migrants. This does not however take the form of overt xenophobia apart from in some very restricted circles.

Housing, neighbourhoods and public space

The rapid increase of Limassol's population after 1974 meant that apartment blocks had to be built rapidly where space was available to accommodate the 43,000 refugees from the North. This led to rather anarchistic urban development and the construction of many low quality buildings. Unfortunately the authorities granted permission to destroy the historical buildings along the seafront that were replaced by high-rising commercial buildings with wonderful seaviews but no link whatsoever with the material heritage of the past. Like in many seaside resorts developed at the time, this led to a situation where the traditional parts of the city were cut off from the sea by a wall of concrete and a road congested with traffic. However, a lot of historical buildings have been conserved, renovated and refurbished in the historical centre of the town where the Technological University of Cyprus was established in 2007.

Paradoxically a lot of the historical buildings that remain today are also to be found in the old Turkish quarter close to the fishing port and the marina. For many years the old Turkish quarter was abandoned and the buildings fell into decay. Recently the local government has launched an important programme of revitalization in the area with the result that the old Turkish quarter is now the most picturesque part of the city and the most popular area for cafes, bars and artisan workshops. For the unaware visitor the only visible sign of the Turkish-Cypriot presence in the area is the Grand Mosque or Kepir Mosque which is still used today by some of the Muslims that live in the city. For Limassolans the Grand Mosque symbolises the cultural diversity and bi-communal identity that characterised the city before the de facto division of the island.

From a broader perspective the city itself can be viewed as divided into two quite distinct parts, firstly the historic centre surrounded by a belt of modern suburbs, and secondly the tourist area which stretches for approximately 5km to the East along the coastal line. Foreign permanent residents tend to concentrate in the Agios Spyridonas, Agia Triada, Agios Ioannis, Neapolis, Omonoia, Chalkoutsa, Agiou Georgiou Frangoudi areas. They form mixed communities and there is no ghetto phenomenon.

As far as public space is concerned, the local authorities have launched several important projects which should eventually contribute to more frequent interaction between the different groups that form the city's population than is the case today. The most spectacular achievements are the new seafront promenade with its Sculpture Park, the seafront path and cycling track that runs for miles from the Sculpture Park to the end of the tourist area, the revitalized Old Market Square and Municipal Gardens, the reconstructed Heroes Square and finally the new Marina that is still under construction.³⁴

Social work

As mentioned above, it is the central government that holds the primary competence for social work and the city has no statutory responsibilities. The Municipality of Limassol has however taken several initiatives in the recent years that demonstrate its awareness that local policies, to be effective, need to be adapted to the cultural diversity of the city.

³⁴ For other projects being developed, see http://www.limassolmunicipal.com.cy/lemesos/index_en.html

Bi-communal centre

One of the most interesting initiatives of the local government is the setting-up in 2006 of a “Bi-communal Community Centre” in the heart of the old Turkish-Cypriot quarter, an area inhabited primarily by Turkish-Cypriots, Cypriot-Roma and other migrants. It is the only such centre in Cyprus and was created in 2006 following the opening of the Green Line in 2004 and the return of displaced Roma that followed. The centre is run by an NGO and funded by the municipality, the Government and private donations. As well as being an informal place for social gathering, it offers advice and support, and a variety of training programmes for children, teenagers, women, families and the elderly, focused in particular on learning the Greek language and acquiring computer skills. The centre has been running a programme called “Free Time” (3pm to 5pm) funded by the European Union (50%) and the national government (50%). The Centre is open every weekday and two afternoons per week a social worker and psychologist are present.

It is estimated that the bi-communal centre deals with approximately 50 families, most of whom are from the Cypriot-Roma community and who have little or no contacts with other parts of the city. The relaxed atmosphere and informal programmes attracts many Roma women and children. It plays a significant role in increasing their confidence, skills, job opportunities and integration. Since the centre started operating, the social worker has observed notable progress in social integration, most notably among young Roma. The Bi-communal Community Centre provides an excellent example of the efficiency of social policies based on direct interaction and mutual confidence-building.

Social street work programme

Limassol has also set up a social street work programme in the Agios Spyridonas area.³⁵ It is a popular multiethnic part of the city where apartments are often overcrowded and young people tend to hang out on the streets. Several days a week a social worker is present in the neighbourhood to listen to people’s concerns and offer assistance if necessary. The programme targets the 13-35 year-olds, mostly of Bulgarian, Romanian and Roma origin. It has been quite successful and it is foreseen that the programme will be expanded in other areas of the city.

Since 2012, the Municipality has participated to projects funded by the European Integration Fund implementing different social actions targeted for third country nationals through the method of Street Work.

In 2014, Limassol Municipality applied and got approval to lead the Project ‘Integration Programmes by Local Authorities’ which will implement activities in the area of Limassol and other neighboring municipalities...

Cultural and community life

The participation of migrant groups in the cultural and community life of Limassol varies considerably. The large and affluent Russian community (estimated at 20,000) is very visible through the numerous cultural events funded by Russian companies based in Limassol or in Russia. The participation of Asian minorities such as the Philipinos or the Sri-Lankans is much more discrete. The only moment when they really interact with the population is during the Limassol carnival which takes place during 10 days in February-March. Otherwise they tend to remain amongst themselves and organise cultural events or religious celebrations within their own community.

³⁵ The programme is funded within the Grant Project of Local Government of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance.

The Municipality of Limassol provides financial support for some events that can be considered as intercultural, for example the Russian Cypriot Festival or “Footprints”, an intercultural music festival organised by Epilogi, the cultural association of Limassol.³⁶ It also grants permission to migrant groups who wish to made use of public spaces to organise cultural or religious events. The traditional place they request is the Sea Front Promenade (Sculpture Park) which is located just close to the St. Catherine Catholic Church. It is the same place where practising Catholics from many many different countries meet up in groups before or after Mass.³⁷

Gastronomic Festival: At a recent meeting of Limassol Municipal staff, the Mayor, Councilors and relevant stakeholders, there was a discussion about the idea of organizing every year, a Gastronomic Festival. During the meeting it was specifically noted that the success of such a Festival will depend on the participation of all the communities existing in Cyprus: Armenians, Latinos, Maronites, British, Germans, Russians, Greek, Egyptians, Philipinos and Bangladeshi, with their associations and traditional cuisines. Actions like this, show the intercultural philosophy and orientation of the city’s administration and council and prove their sincere intentions to consider the city’s residents of all nationalities as the wealth of the Limassol culture.

Civil society

Migrant organisations

Only the large and well-established migrant groups are formally organised. In Limassol, there are 3 Russian associations (Romashka, Gorizont, Russian Business Association), a Bulgarian association and a Romanian association. We were also told that there is a Lebanese, an Egyptian and a Syrian association.

The Russian community

The Russians form by far the largest and most visible migrant community in Limassol. Prior to its accession to the EU, Cyprus allowed Russian citizens to enter the country without visas, in an effort to attract businessmen, holiday makers and investment. This policy resulted in several thousands of affluent Russians moving to Cyprus and establishing offshore companies. Since its EU accession, Cyprus has been forced to adopt a more restrictive policy in granting entry rights to Russian citizens. However, many of those who came to Cyprus before 2004 have settled down and reside in Limassol on a temporary residence visa which is renewed annually.

Cyprus has been a longtime Russian ally. Both the former president of Cyprus, Dimitris Christofias, and the Mayor of Limassol, Andreas Christou, were educated in the former Soviet Union and are fluent Russian speakers.

Over the years, economic relations between Cyprus and Russia avec strengthened to the point that one can speak of a “special relationship” between the two countries. Russian deposits in Cypriot banks and investments in real estate are estimated to more than €10bn.³⁸ According to official statistics Cyprus is the largest source of foreign direct investment into Russia even if most of investment capital is in fact of Russian origin. Last but not least, the recent deal by which Russia has granted a €2.5bn emergency loan to Cyprus sets an annual interest at 4.5 percent. This is less than half the going market rate and gives a good indication of the growing interdependency between the Cypriot and the Russian economies.

³⁶ <http://www.epilogi.info/home> (accessed 27.10.2011)

³⁷ Services are held each Sunday in English, Greek and Latin. Once or twice a month there are special services for the Philipino, Sri Lankan, Indian and Polish communities.

³⁸ <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/655a3fd2-de31-11e0-9fb7-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1cGCxT43t>

In such circumstances, it is not surprising that Russians are perceived more positively than most of the other migrant communities in Limassol. Such perceptions are also nurtured by the fact that the Russians are financially self-sufficient and viewed as sharing a religion close to Greek Orthodoxy.

The Russian community in Cyprus is well organized, with at least three associations (“Romashka”, “Gorizont” and the “Russian Business Association”) that are active in the fields of culture, education and business. There are also a number of private schools in Limassol where Russian language classes are taught, two private schools where all classes are taught in Russian and also a Russian ballet school. Several Russian newspapers and magazines are published nationwide to cater mostly for the needs of the Russian business community.

The more modest Russian and other Russian-speaking migrant workers are organized around the Russian Church of Limassol. This church delivers sermons in Slavic languages (Russian, Serbian) which are attended by Russians, Serbs and sometimes Pontian Greeks. The Church organises cultural activities such as music nights, invites speakers from Russia to talk about different topics, carries out charity work, offers advice to Russian speaking migrants about their rights and generally acts as a meeting place for Russian speakers to meet and socialise in their free time. The priest of this church is a Cypriot who speaks fluent Russian and who actively fights for the rights of the Russian speaking poor migrants, highlighting in particular the plight of the women-victims of human trafficking, with frequent newspaper articles, TV appearances and other initiatives and campaigns.

To a large extent the Russian community is culturally isolated from the rest of Limassolan society. The organisation of many Russian cultural events is not sufficient to build solid and long-lasting bridges between the Cypriots and the Russians. Like expats in other countries, few Russians feel the need to learn the local language and use either Russian or English to communicate with Cypriots.

Non-governmental organisations

As mentioned before, civil society is not as developed in Cyprus as in most other European countries. NGOs are something relatively new for most Cypriots who are unfamiliar with the fundamental role they play in the democratic process. It is therefore not surprising that there are only a handful of migrant support groups and NGOs that are active in the field of migrant integration in Limassol.

KISA - the Greek abbreviation for Equality, Support, Antiracism – has been active in the area of migrant support since 1997. KISA is based in Nicosia and manages two Migrant and Refugee Centres, one in Nicosia and another in Limassol. KISA’s overall long-term objective is the creation of a multicultural society, where there is equality of all persons, irrespective of nationality, race or ethnic origin, color, creed, gender, sexual or any other orientation, background or characteristic.

KISA’s activities focus on two general directions:

- Sensitisation of the Cypriot society about social discrimination and racism, the benefits of a multicultural society and reform of the immigration and asylum framework in Cyprus, through campaigns, conferences, cultural events, provision of information, publications and lobbying the authorities.
- Operation of Support Centres providing free legal and social services, guidance and advice to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, in order to enable them to claim their rights and facilitate their integration and full participation in society.³⁹

KISA has several migrants in its steering committee and many more take an active part in organizing its activities. It also has legal and administrative staff that advise immigrants of their rights and takes up cases when immigrants can file complaints against their employer. The number of complaints is disproportionately large to the manpower and financial capacity of KISA. Every year KISA organises

³⁹ http://www.kisa.org.cy/EN/about_kisa/index.html

the Rainbow festival, a multicultural event which attracts several hundreds of people and features cultural activities, exhibitions and NGO stalls. Many migrants contribute to the organizational side of the festival and consider this as the most important event of the year.

There are a few other NGOs that have recently become involved in issues related to migration. Such is the case of the Migrant Worker's Bureau created by PEO, the largest trade union in Cyprus. STIGMA is a local NGO which manages a Shelter for the Protection of Victims of Sexual Abuse and Violence and works in collaboration with the Police and the Orthodox Church. These few examples show that the main focus of the NGOs that support migrants in Cyprus is to protect the basic rights enshrined in European and international law. In the run up to the accession to the EU, several public awareness campaigns and discussions were organised to inform the general public of the harmonization process and the changes that this would bring in the area of non-discrimination and migrant rights. To our knowledge there has been no evaluation of their effects on public perceptions of migrants in Cyprus. Migrants support groups are fighting a uphill battle. Encouraging civic participation through consultative bodies, quotas or subsidies to migrant organizations is not yet an issue that lies at the top of their agenda.

Education and childcare

Education

The traditional educational model that prevails in Cyprus is monoculturally Greek and unadapted to the need of an increasingly culturally diverse society. Pupil drop-out rates, school failure and functional illiteracy is particularly high among non Greek-speaking and migrant children living in economically and socially depressed areas. In an attempt to reduce inequalities for disadvantaged pupils, the Ministry of Education established in 2003 three "Zones of Educational Priority", one of which was in the Limassol area. Although pupil drop-out rates and school failure have been reduced, the core issue of how to provide adequate teaching to non Greek-speaking and migrant children has not really been addressed.

Currently a major reform of the Cypriot education system is on-going which takes better account of the cultural diversity of children attending schools in Cyprus. The reform is based on the concept of "multicultural education", adapted to the needs of an increasingly diverse society. Courses and conferences are offered every year on teaching Greek as a second language, intercultural education with an emphasis on teaching children with migrant background and peaceful coexistence, and discrimination with an emphasis on ethnic and linguistic discrimination and refugee issues. It remains to be seen whether teachers trained specifically in intercultural education will be recruited in the schools where such competences are the most needed. In our opinion this is not yet the case and priority is still given to "classically" trained teachers. ECRI also notes that Greek Cypriot parents seem to have no trouble enrolling their children in schools which are not the closest to where they live and which have better school results, thereby perpetuating a form of ethnic segregation in the school system. In its 4th Report on Cyprus, ECRI expresses great concern about the 18th Primary School (also called Ayios Antonis), situated in an economically underdeveloped part of Limassol where a lot of Roma attend the school. There are no provisions such as the use of teachers specifically trained to teach Greek as a second language or teach non-Greek speaking pupils. This approach faces the pupils with the risk of costly social marginalisation and exclusion when they approach adulthood.

In 2009, following a Ministry of Education funding, the Limassol Municipality introduced the institution of the "Open School", which currently operates at the following areas: Agios. Nicholas and

Neapolis, Agios Ioannis, Apostolos Andreas, Zakaki (Omonia and Agios Spyridonas).⁴⁰ The programme is supported by the Ministry of Education and aims to exploit the infrastructure of public schools by developing a healthy and constructive engagement of citizens, outside school hours. The school offers Greek language training for foreigners.

In Limassol there are no mother-tongue courses supported by public funds. In addition to the Russian schools mentioned above, there is a private Bulgarian school as well as an Iranian school run by the Iranian Embassy.

Childcare

With regards to childcare, an interesting local initiative is the 'Elefthera Cheria' ('Hands Free') nursery set up in the multi-ethnic area of Agios Ioannis in a building donated to the city by a former Mayor of Limassol. It is the only municipal nursery in Limassol (other public nurseries exist and are managed by central government) and is co-financed by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Municipality of Limassol. Currently there are currently 54 children registered in the nursery from many different ethnic backgrounds. During our visit we were greatly impressed by the positive atmosphere among the children and the devoted staff. Like the persons in charge of the bi-communal community centre they told us about the important contribution of the nursery to the improvement of intercultural relations, not only among the children but also between the parents.

Media and public communication

The media play a crucial role in shaping negative or positive perceptions of diversity. According to Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou⁴¹ there is in Cyprus a regular pattern that is being reproduced and largely media generated about the 'negative' social consequences of the presence of migrants in Cyprus, the dangers from 'excessive numbers, the 'floods', 'chords' or 'waves' of migrants who are allegedly just waiting for the opportunity to 'move in', and exploit the opportunities that are available (work, social, welfare, education etc). Such patterns include undocumented presumptions according to which :

- there is a connection between the inflow of migrant workers and the 'rise' in unemployment among Cypriots;
- Cyprus is too small to absorb the current numbers of foreign workers;
- Cypriot national culture and heritage is threatened by alien cultures and religions;
- there is a direct connection between migration and increased crime rates;
- Cyprus cannot offer refuge to asylum seekers or host illegal immigrants because it is a semi-occupied and threatened country and its national survival needs to be ensured by a restrictive migration policy so that the demographic balance is not altered any further.

A recent exploratory survey carried out by the Ipsos Social Research Institute on a non-representative sample of the Limassol population indicates that perceptions of diversity are particularly negative in Limassol compared to 6 other European cities (Coimbra, Dingley, Lyon, Reggio Emilia, Patras, Valencia). Even if the results could be disputed from the strictly methodological point of view, they seem quite plausible given the negative image of migration portrayed by the media,

⁴⁰ <http://www.limassolmunicipal.com.cy/OpenSchool-Programmes-February-2010-English.pdf>

⁴¹ Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou, Active Civic Participation of Immigrants in Cyprus: <http://www.politis-europe.uni-oldenburg.de/download/Cyprus.pdf>

the low score of Cyprus in the Migration Integration Policy Index⁴² and the circumstantial evidence provided in this report.

Conclusions

This short overview of cultural diversity management in Cyprus and Limassol seems to support the idea that intercultural policies result more often from a « bottom-up » process than from a « top-down » one. The various grassroots initiatives launched discretely by the local authorities in Limassol are contributing more to the social cohesion of an increasingly culturally diverse society than the relatively sterile political debate taking place at the national level on the Cyprus question. The question remains open as to what will eventually enable Cypriot society to adopt a more positive attitude towards cultural diversity and overcome the rather simplistic idea that claiming to be “welcoming” and “hospitable” is sufficient to anchor interculturality as a effective way of thinking and acting to ensure the future social, cultural and economic development of Cyprus. Despite its limited competences Limassol appears nonetheless at the forefront of change in this respect and may serve as a source of inspiration to other regions of Cyprus that may not have been confronted so directly with the destabilising effects of international migration.

Recommendations

The city of Limassol participates in several European Programmes dealing with diversity issues. It also collaborates closely with several ministries, NGO's and private companies. To ensure optimal efficiency and avoid information loss it is highly recommended that the city appoint a person to collect information and serve as a city coordinator between the various projects and stakeholders concerned with interculturality in Limassol.

Developing an effective intercultural strategy requires regular consultation with a large variety of stakeholders, many of whom need still to be identified, especially within the migrant communities themselves. The city should consider taking adequate measures to be well informed about all the actors concerned by the process and outputs of the future municipal intercultural strategy.

Once the actors concerned by the process and outputs of a municipal intercultural strategy are identified, it is strongly recommended that the Municipality set up a support group to assist the city coordinator and the Municipality during the policy-making process. Ideally the support group should enjoy strong political support, be non-profit and include a board of well-known personalities committed to interculturality as defined by the Council of Europe.

To diminish stereotypes and prejudice the Municipality should encourage the dissemination of information highlighting the positive contribution of migrants from all ethnic groups to the cultural, social and economic life of Limassol. This could be done through public declarations, via the city website, in the Municipal Bulletin or in collaboration with the local media or NGO's active in the field of intercultural integration.

The Municipality should continue to encourage the organisation of intercultural events in popular public spaces such as Heroes Square, the Seafront Promenade, the Municipal Gardens or the future Marina. Such events should be organised with the active participation of several communities, in particular the Asian communities. They should emphasise what the communities have in common and promote the idea of intercultural Limassol.

⁴² <http://www.mipex.eu/cyprus>

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