

ECRI REPORT ON CYPRUS

(sixth monitoring cycle)



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FOREWORD

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), established by the Council of Europe, is an independent human rights monitoring body specialised in questions relating to the fight against racism, discrimination (on grounds of “race”, ethnic/national origin, colour, citizenship, religion, language, sexual orientation and gender identity), xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance. It is composed of independent and impartial members appointed on the basis of their moral authority and recognised expertise in dealing with racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance.

In the framework of its statutory activities, ECRI conducts country monitoring work, which analyses the situation in each of the member States of the Council of Europe regarding racism and intolerance and draws up suggestions and proposals for dealing with the problems identified.

ECRI’s country monitoring deals with all member States on an equal footing. The work takes place in 5-year cycles. The reports of the first round were completed at the end of 1998, those of the second round at the end of 2002, those of the third round at the end of 2007, those of the fourth round in the beginning of 2014, and those of the fifth round at the end of 2019. Work on the sixth round reports started at the end of 2018.

The working methods for the preparation of the reports involve documentary analyses, a visit to the country concerned, and then a confidential dialogue with the national authorities.

ECRI’s reports are not the result of inquiries or testimonial evidence. They are analyses based on information gathered from a wide variety of sources. Documentary studies are based on a large number of national and international written sources. The in situ visit provides the opportunity to meet with the parties directly concerned (both governmental and non-governmental) with a view to gathering detailed information. The process of confidential dialogue with the national authorities allows the latter to provide, if they consider it necessary, comments on the draft report, with a view to correcting any possible factual errors which the report might contain. At the end of the dialogue, the national authorities may request, if they so wish, that their viewpoints be appended to the final ECRI report.

The sixth round country reports focus on three topics common to all member States: (1) Effective equality and access to rights, (2) Hate speech and hate-motivated violence, and (3) Integration and inclusion, as well as a number of topics specific to each one of them.

In the framework of the sixth cycle, priority implementation is requested again for two specific recommendations chosen from those made in the report. A process of interim follow-up for these two recommendations will be conducted by ECRI no later than two years following the publication of this report.

The following report was drawn up by ECRI under its own responsibility. Unless otherwise indicated, it covers the situation up to 30 June 2022; as a rule, developments since that date are neither covered in the following analysis nor taken into account in the conclusions and proposals therein.

SUMMARY

Since the adoption of ECRI's fifth report on Cyprus on 17 March 2016, progress has been made and good practices have been developed in a number of fields.

In line with a recommendation in ECRI's fifth report, the Ombudsman institution was authorised in 2019 to organise its own recruitment examinations for hiring new staff.

The Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth (MOESY) developed a 2018-2022 National Strategy for Preventing and Combating School Violence, in addition to which the Cyprus Observatory on School Violence of the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute has been developing and implementing actions and programmes aiming at preventing and addressing bullying and violence in schools, while also promoting and monitoring the implementation of the MOESY's anti-bullying policy, introduced in 2020.

In February 2021, the Code of Principles and Ethics for Members of Parliament entered into force. It *inter alia* prohibits hate speech, incitement to violence and sexist/racist behaviour by MPs in the performance of their duties.

Further welcome steps were that the Ministry of the Interior in August 2019 made the change of names and gender in official documents easier, including for transgender people, while all restrictions linked to sexual orientation in the context of donating blood were lifted in April 2022.

In further positive developments, the procedures for employing asylum seekers were made significantly easier as of October 2021, while the range of sectors in which they are allowed to work was extended already in 2019.

ECRI was pleased to note during its visit to the Agios Antonios Primary School in Limassol that Roma pupils appear to be receiving considerable empowerment in their learning of Kurbetcha¹ while significant efforts have been made to minimise the impact on Roma pupils of the restrictions related to the Covid-19 sanitary crisis, including through the provision of tablets and internet access to all Roma pupils involved in online education.

ECRI welcomes these positive developments in Cyprus. However, despite the progress achieved, some issues give rise to concern.

The Ombudsman institution, which is the only equality body in Cyprus, still does not have the competence to initiate or participate in court proceedings on behalf of victims of discrimination or intolerance.

ECRI is concerned about Orthodox confessions reportedly being organised in schools without the consent of pupils or their parents, and with disregard to their views on religion, which cannot be considered as conducive to inclusive education.

ECRI regrets that so-called firewalls are not in place in all main policy areas relevant to the human rights of irregularly present migrants and that any procedures involving such migrants in labour tribunals are likely to lead to their deportation.

ECRI finds the reported practices of subjecting some gay and lesbian people to so-called conversion therapies a matter of serious concern.

Hate speech affecting several groups of concern to ECRI remains widespread in the Cypriot public discourse. There is no comprehensive system in place to monitor hate speech incidents. In addition, instances of firm and prompt condemnation of racist and other forms of hate speech and counter-speech by public figures remain sporadic.

The fact that child applicants for international protection who are of primary school age are usually placed in ordinary school classes based on their age, with disregard to their previously acquired skills in central school subjects and without preparatory Greek language classes is a major obstacle to their integration and achievements in school.

Despite the commendable work of many NGOs, especially but not limited to those in support of migrants in Cyprus, their possibilities to provide such support have been put at risk by new registration rules introduced in 2017.

In this report, ECRI requests that the authorities take action in a number of areas and makes a series of recommendations, including the following:

Measures should be taken to ensure the effective implementation by school managements of existing anti-racist policies developed by the MOESY.

¹ The language of the Turkish Cypriots Roma.

The Cypriot authorities should prepare a national LGBTI strategy, accompanied by a national action plan, with enhanced action against hate speech against LGBTI persons, among its central elements.*

The authorities should furthermore address a number of long-standing gaps in the implementation of criminal legislation to combat hate speech and hate-motivated violence. The authorities should *inter alia* review the criminal legislation pertaining to hate speech and hate-motivated violence, including remedies available to victims, and provide suitable training to police officers, prosecutors and judges on the use of appropriate criminal provisions on combating hate speech and hate-motivated violence.

Expedited action should be taken to support child asylum seekers and other migrant children in acquiring the Greek language skills they need to follow ordinary primary school classes taught in Greek, measures which should be accompanied by individual skills assessments to determine the most appropriate school grade to place such children in.*

Appropriately funded policies specific to supporting Roma in the areas of education, health care, housing and employment should be developed.

The registration rules introduced for NGOs in the reporting period should be reviewed in order to ensure that NGOs are not prevented from providing much needed support to asylum seekers and other migrants.

* This recommendation will be subject to a process of interim follow-up by ECRI no later than two years after the publication of this report.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. EFFECTIVE EQUALITY AND ACCESS TO RIGHTS

A. Equality bodies²

1. By Law No. 42(I)/2004, the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights (Ombudsman) was designated to act as Equality Body and was given the competence to combat racism and intolerance in both the private and public sectors. It is an independent quasi-judicial body that is mandated to deal with individual cases of discrimination brought before it.
2. The Commissioner has most of the prerogatives advocated in ECRI's General Policy Recommendation (GPR) No. 2 on equality bodies to combat racism and intolerance at national level, as well as in GPR No. 7 on national legislation to combat racism and racial discrimination (§ 24), with the notable exception that the institution has no right to initiate and participate in court proceedings, despite ECRI having recommended the addition of these competencies in its previous report. Staff of the Ombudsman's Office explained to ECRI that *amicus curiae* interventions by any person or institution are not regulated in law. However, courts are competent to decide whether to accept third party submissions or interventions, including by the equality body.
3. ECRI reiterates its recommendation that the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights be granted the right to initiate and participate *ex officio* in court proceedings, in line with § 14c of ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 2 on equality bodies to combat racism and intolerance at national level.
4. The Commissioner may take binding decisions or make recommendations. In line with § 17c of ECRI's GPR No. 2, it may impose fines (of up to € 598) in case of non-compliance with its decisions. An additional amount of € 85 per day may be imposed in case of continued lack of compliance. However, as explained by the Office staff, all decisions have so far been implemented without requiring the imposition of a fine. ECRI's civil society interlocutors have nevertheless regretted that the equality body predominantly issues recommendations instead of binding decisions.³ ECRI encourages the equality body to make the best use of its power to issue binding decisions on discrimination and hate speech complaints.
5. The number of staff members within the Commissioner's Office dealing with equality issues has remained fairly stable, at 10 for most of the reporting period, with an increase to 12 in 2021.⁴ In practice, however, the division of tasks between the different mandates and thus entities of the Commissioner's Office appears blurred, with staff often assigned to carry out specific tasks across the lines of the different mandates of the institution. The Office of the Commissioner has justified this practice by an insufficient amount of complaints in some policy areas to justify staff dealing exclusively with those. ECRI nonetheless considers that the staffing levels and competences of the Office staff need to be reviewed in order to determine whether sufficient staff are assigned to equality body functions and whether any support/litigation and decision-making functions are carried out by clearly distinct staff or units. Moreover, the relevant staff of the Office should receive appropriate training in the area of combating discrimination and hate speech. If necessary, Council of Europe support may be sought.
6. In its fourth and fifth reports on Cyprus, ECRI recommended that the Commissioner be consulted on all appointments of staff to her office, thereby contributing to the

² The term "national specialised bodies" was updated to "equality bodies" in the revised version of General Policy Recommendation No. 2, which was published on 27 February 2018.

³ The Office of the Commissioner made reference to some binding decisions it had issued after ECRI's visit, but none of these concerned groups of concern to ECRI.

⁴ The overall number of staff members in the Ombudsman's Office has varied between 26 and 28 in the reporting period and was 27 in May 2022, while the Office is in the process of recruiting seven additional officers until the end of 2022.

body's independence, and that the authorities allocate an adequate budget for her to carry out her functions properly. ECRI welcomes the fact that in 2019 the Cypriot Council of Ministers and Parliament authorised the Ombudsman institution to organise the recruitment of its staff.⁵ Selection competitions are thus organised by an Advisory Committee set up by the Commissioner. ECRI notes that, according to the data provided by the Commissioner's Office, its operational budget has remained relatively stable, with a slight annual increase in absolute terms, except in 2021.⁶ ECRI also notes that the budget for the operations of the equality body proper was of € 379,246 in 2020.⁷

7. According to data submitted to ECRI by the Commissioner's Office, 165 complaints were received in 2021; 65 in 2020; 71 on 2019; 52 in 2018; 57 in 2017 and 35 in 2016. The institution upheld the complaints and issued a recommendation in about one third to more than half of the cases. A significant number of these complaints related to religion and beliefs in 2021.⁸ In the light of ECRI's findings in the present report and in order to detect any underreporting, ECRI encourages the Commissioner to conduct inquiries into potential racism, intolerance and discrimination towards various groups, including refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, on the basis of the anti-discrimination legislation.
8. ECRI noted that the annual report of the equality body for the years 2017, 2018 and 2019 were published in a single document only in 2020 and encourages annual reporting.

B. Inclusive education

9. This section deals with education policies,⁹ which aim to combat exclusion and marginalisation through an inclusive education devised for all, and to create a tolerant multicultural society in accordance with sections II and III of GPR No. 10 on combating racism and racial discrimination in and through school education.
10. Public spending on education remains among the highest in the EU.¹⁰ The EU-funded DRASE (Actions for School and Social Inclusion) project supports vulnerable pupils across Cyprus and finances enhanced learning classes, after-school lessons and creative activities.¹¹ Some 25,000 pupils in total will benefit from it between 2015 and 2023.¹² Migrant and Roma children are among the main beneficiaries of the project. The Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth (MOESY) furthermore implements a set of measures to support the inclusive education of children belonging to the recognised religious groups.¹³ Armenian Nareg Schools and the Agios Maronas Primary School are fully subsidised by the MOESY and offer advanced learning opportunities, tailored to the needs of Armenian and Maronite children.
11. The MOESY's "Code of Conduct against Racism & Guide for Managing and Recording Racist Incidents" continues to be implemented since the school year

⁵ The recruitment of the successful candidates needs to be confirmed by the Public Service Commission.

⁶ Total operational budget in Euros, per year: 2022: 2.132.010; 2021: 2.096.182; 2020: 2.137.085; 2019: 1.988.239; 2018: 1.934.261; 2017: 1.896.141; 2016: 1.823.357. The proposed budget is approved as a whole by the Parliament via its submission by the Ministry of Finance. Following the approval of its budget, the Ombudsman's Office has absolute control of the use of its budget, on the condition that the limits set for each category of expense are respected.

⁷ [Office of the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights – Equinet \(equineteurope.org\)](https://www.equineteurope.org/)

⁸ 55 complaints related to religion and beliefs were made in 2021, 50 of which concerned restrictions linked to Covid-19.

⁹ This section relates to education for all children and young people. Specific measures for the education of migrants and Roma pupils are dealt with under the heading of integration and inclusion.

¹⁰ Indicatively, Cyprus spent 15.6 % of the total government expenditure on education in 2016, more than any other EU country ([European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Education and training monitor 2018](#), p. 90). Despite this, the low effectiveness and efficiency of the education system continues to be a major challenge (*ibid*, p. 96 *et seq*).

¹¹ The European Social Fund contributes EUR 30,600,000.00 to a total budget of EUR 36,000,000.00 for the project, which also includes psychological and welfare support services for pupils and their parents.

¹² More information on this project is available [here](#).

¹³ It is recalled that the Armenian, Maronite and Latin (Roman Catholic) religious groups are composed of citizens of the Republic of Cyprus, who at the time of establishment of the Republic in 1960 opted to be part of the Greek Cypriot Community, in accordance with its Constitution (Article 2, paragraph 3).

2014-2015.¹⁴ The MOESY has provided detailed guidelines for the code's implementation. Since 2018, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute (CPI) has also been organising a "School Network for Supporting the Implementation of the Anti-Racist Policy" for teachers from schools of all levels wishing to participate in the network. A support helpline is also available to teachers. Schools are instructed to submit an annual report to the MOESY regarding all racist incidents recorded and dealt with each school year. Regrettably, ECRI learnt that, in practice, a majority of schools do not or only rarely implement the code. They also exceptionally report racist incidents, allegedly for fear of stigmatisation, among other reasons.¹⁵

12. ECRI recommends that the relevant authorities take decisive action to secure the effective implementation of the Code of Conduct against Racism and Guide for Managing and Recording Racist Incidents in the field of education, notably by ensuring that the reporting of racist incidents is positively recognised.
13. ECRI notes that, in Cyprus, human rights education has not been formally introduced into the school curriculum. However, since 2011, health education, a subject in the syllabuses of primary and secondary education schools, has contained elements of human rights and anti-racist education.¹⁶
14. Sexuality education is included in the thematic unit "Family Planning, Sexual and Reproductive Health". Nevertheless, the existing curriculum appears to be placing emphasis on the anatomical / biological aspect of sexuality. Issues such as sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) are not touched upon in primary education. The possibility of selecting which educational priorities to focus on within this thematic unit in combination with the fact that the MOESY has not designated any particular textbook for this purpose¹⁷ means that, in practice, teachers do not choose to deal with SOGI issues. In secondary education, SOGI awareness is included in the educational objectives. However, there are virtually no references to SOGI in relevant textbooks.¹⁸
15. There is currently no mandatory teacher training on LGBTI awareness.¹⁹ The NGOs Cyprus Family Planning Association and ACCEPT-LGBT Cyprus continued co-organising the "Shield against homophobia", a series of voluntary trainings for teachers, in practice mostly attended by teachers already positively disposed towards fighting intolerance and discrimination against LGBTI people.²⁰ The two-year EU "HOMBAT-Combating HOMophobic And Transphobic bullying at schools" programme ended in 2019, with over 250 teachers trained. A network of

¹⁴ Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, Curriculum Development Unit (2016), Code of Conduct Against Racism and Guide for Managing and Recording Racist Incidents, available [here](#); see also ECRI's fifth report, § 50. The code sets forth the principles for handling, recording, reporting and responding to discriminatory incidents at schools. It defines "diversity" and "discrimination" in a broad manner, and outlines both the responsibilities of each member of the school community, and the measures to be taken by schools when dealing with racist and homophobic/ transphobic incidents.

¹⁵ It emerged from the findings during the ECRI visit that most school administrations refused to implement the code and/or failed to submit annual reports on racist/homophobic incidents on the assumption that such incidents do not occur in their establishments. At the same time, it was explained to the ECRI delegation that in practice, teachers have to ask for the code to be implemented in their school and it is at the school principal's discretion to approve the request. According to an estimate by ECRI's interlocutors, out of 475 schools in Cyprus, only a small share implement the code, whereas according to the Cypriot authorities, the number of schools that submitted annual reports on racist incidents varied between 41 and 129 per year in the period 2016-2021. According to the same data, the total number of racist incidents reported by schools ranged from 124 to 357 in the same period.

¹⁶ [Department of Secondary General Education \(moec.gov.cy\)](#).

¹⁷ It was explained to ECRI that teachers have the possibility of choosing among a list of teaching material available for this thematic unit. On the other hand, the authorities submitted that there exist two designated teaching manuals on how to deliver sexuality education, while practical guidelines to approach LGBTI issues have been developed in the context of the [iDecide](#) project, in cooperation with civil society.

¹⁸ Except for the [textbook of Home Economics of the second grade of Lyceum](#), which nevertheless constitutes an optional module.

¹⁹ LGBTQI Inclusive Education Report, IGLYO — The International LGBTQI Youth & Student Organisation, 2022, p. 53. That said, civil society organisations met by ECRI acknowledge that the relevant optional training programmes offered by the CPI are of high quality.

²⁰ LGBTQI Inclusive Education Report, IGLYO — The International LGBTQI Youth & Student Organisation, January 2018.

stakeholders²¹ was established, an Agreement on Co-operation and Declaration of Principles resulting from the project was signed by them, and a Teacher's Guide to Responding to Homophobia and Transphobia in Education was developed to inform and sensitise the school administrations on the prevention and effective management of homophobia and transphobia in education.

16. Despite these positive initiatives, the ECRI delegation consistently heard from its interlocutors during the visit that teachers felt unqualified or unwilling to discuss substantial SOGI questions in the school environment. Proactive discussion on SOGI issues is openly discouraged,²² if not forbidden according to oral instructions reportedly given to teachers. Discussing SOGI issues or showing support for LGBTI pupils has on occasions resulted in professional repercussions for the teachers²³ or in backlash from conservative parents or parents belonging to certain minority groups. It is also of concern that homophobic comments by education professionals themselves have been reported.²⁴
17. ECRI recommends that the authorities take further action to ensure greater LGBTI awareness in the school environment by i) providing initial and in-service training for all teachers and school principals in primary and secondary education with suitable training on SOGI issues and ii) addressing substantial questions on SOGI issues in designated textbooks on sexuality education. Furthermore, a firm message of zero tolerance of LGBTI-phobic²⁵ attitudes and behaviours should be conveyed to all education professionals interacting with pupils and parents.
18. The MOESY developed the National Strategy for Preventing and Combating School Violence (2018-2022).²⁶ In parallel, the Cyprus Observatory on School Violence (COSV)²⁷ of the CPI has been implementing actions and programmes aiming at addressing bullying and violence in schools.²⁸ The COSV is also responsible for promoting and monitoring the implementation of the MOESY's anti-bullying policy, introduced in 2020. Schools have the obligation to report incidents of bullying. Nevertheless, as was the case with the anti-racist code, schools avoid reporting bullying incidents in practice. ECRI notes that in order to remedy this, the COSV offers targeted training on the implementation of the anti-bullying policy.²⁹ Reference is also made to the recommendation made in § 12.
19. Between 2019 and 2023, a national-level research in all schools is being carried out by the University of Cyprus. This research aims at collecting quantitative and qualitative data about violence in education, including bullying, racism, physical or sexual violence. For this purpose, students, parents and teachers are requested to record such incidents online on a specific platform.³⁰

²¹ Including the MOESY, the Commissioner for Administration and Protection of Human Rights; the Commissioner for the Protection and Rights of the Child, the Cyprus Youth Organisation, University of Nicosia, Frederick University, and the NGOs Accept-LGBT Cyprus, CARDET and Cyprus Family Planning Association.

²² Hombat – Combating HOMophoBic And Transphobic bullying in schools, National Report: Cyprus, p. 21.

²³ See, for instance, HOMBAT report, p. 21.

²⁴ One example reported to ECRI was that of a biology inspector likening homosexuality to thalassemia at a parent-student event.

²⁵ For the definition of LGBTI-phobia, see ECRI's glossary available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/ecri-glossary>.

²⁶ See United Nations, Committee on the Rights of the Child (2020), Replies of Cyprus to the list of issues in relation to its combined fifth and sixth periodic reports, CRC/C/CYP/RQ/5-6, § 8, p. 4.

²⁷ Consisting of primary and secondary education teachers and a school counsellor.

²⁸ These programmes, which are school-based and have a two-year duration, are the "Conflict Resolution - School Mediation" and the "Recognition and Management of School Bullying". For more details, see [Cyprus Observatory on School Violence, Ministry of Education and Culture, September 2017](#).

²⁹ Currently, 60 schools are participating to the one- or two-year relevant training programmes.

³⁰ Unofficial data collected in the school year 2020-2021 reveal that, out of a sample of 500 pupils and 100 teachers who participated to the online study, 90% have reported some form of school violence. One fourth of the participating pupils reported that they had been victims of bullying, whereas only 1/10 acknowledged themselves as perpetrators of bullying.

20. ECRI learned that sessions of Christian Orthodox confessions were organised in school premises. It emerged during the visit that this is not an official policy of the MOESY, which nevertheless tolerates the practice.³¹ Although participation to such sessions are reportedly meant to be voluntary, there appears to be no clear procedure for obtaining the parents' consent.³² Teachers and human rights associations have decried both the coercion exercised on pupils to participate to confessions³³ and their stigmatisation if they decide not to.³⁴ In this respect, it is important to underline that, where public schools provide denominational religious education, effective procedures of discharge should be in place for children for whom an exemption is requested. ECRI invites the authorities to review the practice of providing denominational religious education in public schools in the light of Section II, §2 c) of General Policy Recommendation No. 10 on combating racism and racial discrimination in and through school education.

C. Irregularly present migrants

21. In its GPR No. 16, ECRI calls for the creation of effective measures (“firewalls”) to ensure fundamental human rights of irregularly present migrants in fields such as education, health care, housing, social security and assistance, labour protection and justice. Such firewalls should decouple the activities of state authorities which provide social services from immigration control and enforcement obligations to make sure that irregularly present migrants are not deterred from accessing their rights due to fear of deportation. From the outset, ECRI welcomes the fact that in Cyprus, the local and regional authorities are not legally obliged to check identity cards or residence permits before providing services.
22. Very little data is available about the numbers and living conditions of irregularly present migrants in Cyprus. It appears that the majority of them are either migrant workers who have over-stayed their visa or rejected asylum seekers. According to the Cypriot police, the number of deportations has increased significantly in recent years.³⁵ Cyprus has introduced incentives, which could include cash, to promote returns.
23. ECRI regrets that there are almost no avenues for regularising the status of irregularly present migrants, including for children who were born in Cyprus or came at a young age and have lived most of their lives in the country, after their parents overstayed their visas. There have, however, been some regularisations on humanitarian grounds as a result of respect for the non-refoulement principle. Such *ad hoc* interventions are discretionary and non-transparent as concerns the criteria applied.³⁶
24. In the field of education, access to tertiary education is often limited due to socioeconomic obstacles.³⁷ That said, as a rule, irregularly present migrant children enjoy full access to basic education.
25. When it comes to health care, according to the authorities, there is no obligation for any health care professionals to report irregularly present migrants to the immigration authorities. The authorities specify that irregularly present migrants, who are not entitled to healthcare benefits, can nonetheless use the Accident and

³¹ [Teacher reports bullying on pupils who do not wish to confess](#), article appeared on [alphanews.live](#) on 27 November 2018.

³² [Education ministry urged to stop priest confessions in schools](#), article appeared on [cyprus-mail.com](#) on 21 December 2017.

³³ Religion teachers reportedly exercise pressure on pupils by arguing that non-participation to the school-organised confessions is a sin (see the above-mentioned article, [Teacher reports bullying on pupils who do not wish to confess](#)).

³⁴ See the relevant letter sent by the Cyprus Humanist Association to, inter alia, the MOESY and the Commissioner of Administration on 16 December 2017 as an attachment to this [article](#).

³⁵ 2320 in 2021, 1272 in 2020 and 417 in 2019. Source: KNEWS (2022, 3 January), [More than two thousand deportations in 2021](#)

³⁶ Joint Submission by the Cyprus Refugee Council, The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, Caritas Cyprus, ACCEPT LGBT Cyprus for the Universal Periodic Review: 3rd Cycle, 32nd Session, in June 2018, available [here](#)

³⁷ Joint Submission by the Cyprus Refugee Council, The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, Caritas Cyprus, ACCEPT LGBT Cyprus for the Universal Periodic Review: 3rd Cycle, 32nd Session, in June 2018.

Emergency Departments of State Health Services Organisation's (SHSO) hospitals, by paying €10. Pregnant women and children are granted free healthcare at the SHSO medical institutions. In addition, the Minister of Health may decide, in exceptional cases, to cover the cost of health services to irregularly present migrants who face severe health problems. In theory, it is possible for the Minister to grant access to more general health care for a limited period, but this is rarely requested and not always granted.³⁸ In any event, the lack of knowledge about applicable rules and fear among irregularly present migrants to approach public health care institutions are deterrent factors and they tend to, when having the means to do so, turn to private health care providers.

26. Vaccination against Covid-19 has been made available for everyone in the country regardless of status. According to the Ministry of the Interior, all non-EU nationals, including undocumented ones, could get vaccinated, through "walk-in" vaccination centres. ECRI considers this a **good practice**.
27. In respect of homeless undocumented persons, which include persons who have arrived in Cyprus after March 2020 and were not given access to asylum procedures, no measures have been taken to provide accommodation even in cases where the concerned persons are reported to have Covid-19 symptoms.³⁹
28. ECRI was told that notwithstanding the fact that there is a general shortage of accommodation in Cyprus, migrants who are irregularly present and employed in Cyprus, often rent accommodation. According to the authorities, landlords can in practice let accommodation to irregularly present migrants as tenants' migration status would not be checked by the authorities.
29. In the field of employment, irregularly present migrant employees are entitled to social contributions and unpaid wages that they would normally acquire in case of lawful employment. ECRI was informed that, in accordance with the Aliens and Immigration Law and the Law for the Protection of Wages, the Government Department of Labour Relations (LRD) strives to ensure that these rights are also respected for irregularly present migrants (e.g., in the context of labour inspections). Labour tribunals may therefore consider claims for such unpaid wages and social contributions.⁴⁰ However, in such cases, the immigration authorities would be informed and likely to organise deportation.⁴¹
30. In line with §§ 7 and 30 of ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 16 on safeguarding irregularly present migrants from discrimination, ECRI recommends that the authorities change their policies and procedures, and where necessary initiate legislative amendments, in order to decouple labour complaints by migrants, regardless of residence status, from the remit of authorities in charge of immigration control.

D. LGBTI equality⁴²

31. During its visit, the ECRI delegation learned that LGBTI matters are still considered a taboo in many respects in the Cypriot society, despite a certain breakthrough in the direction of their acceptance that has been achieved in the last years. According to the ILGA-Europe's Rainbow Map and Index, Cyprus is ranked 29th out of 49 European countries assessed and has achieved 31% of the criteria indicating that the human rights and freedoms of LGBTI persons are protected by

³⁸ Joint Submission by the Cyprus Refugee Council, The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, Caritas Cyprus, ACCEPT LGBT Cyprus for the Universal Periodic Review: 3rd Cycle, 32nd Session, in June 2018, available [here](#)

³⁹ Asylum Information Database (AIDA), Country Report Cyprus, 2019, page 15, available at <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/cyprus/>

⁴⁰ Cf. Article 3 of the Social Insurance Law (59 (I)/2010).

⁴¹ KISA report on labour rights in Cyprus, December 2021, pages 13-14., available at <https://kisa.org.cy/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/RP-CY-complaint-mechanisms-EN-070422-Fin.pdf>

⁴² For terminology, see the definitions set out in ECRI's Glossary.

law and in practice.⁴³ The results of a 2020 FRA survey on LGBTI equality indicate that LGBTI persons in Cyprus may face difficulties and discrimination in various fields of life, such as in school, at work and while reporting hate crimes to the police.⁴⁴ Furthermore, LGBTI matters continue lacking visibility or being subject to censorship.⁴⁵

32. A 2021 study on the social and psychological needs of transgender persons in Cyprus showed that many respondents reported negative experiences and reactions from peers, family and professionals at school, home, at work and while interacting with public and private services, including government services and health practitioners, particularly during the gender reassignment process.⁴⁶ To avoid facing transphobia, transgender persons often seek recommendations from other transgender persons as to which doctors or other service providers they should consult, including because many health practitioners and other service providers are not sufficiently aware of or trained in LGBTI issues.
33. ECRI is pleased to note that a directive was sent on 20 August 2019 from the Civil Registry and Migration Department of the Ministry of the Interior to the Cypriot District Administrations, thereby amending the procedure for changing names and gender in official documents of Cypriot citizens (such as birth certificate, identity card and passport).⁴⁷ Since then, adult transgender people are able to amend their details more easily. This does not require any medical interventions or medical certificates. Nonetheless, in some instances, people who have had gender reassignment surgery outside Cyprus had to wait three years before their identification documents were changed by the Cypriot authorities.⁴⁸ Gender affirming hormone treatment can be had in private hospitals in Cyprus. However, it is not covered by the public health insurance system.
34. Preparations for a more comprehensive draft bill on legal gender recognition (LGR) started at the beginning of the review period of ECRI's sixth report. In September 2018, the draft bill on LGR was put to public consultation by the Ministry of Justice and Public Order. Despite various delays, the bill is expected to be presented to Parliament in 2022. The bill has been characterised as progressive by many observers. It has been proposed to include in the bill a prohibition against non-medically necessary surgeries on newly born intersex babies.
35. Cyprus does not specifically prohibit discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics in its Constitution. Nevertheless, Article 28(2) does prohibit discrimination based on community, race, colour, religion, language, sex, political affiliation, ethnic origin, social status wealth or any other reasons.⁴⁹ It was also indicated to ECRI that sexual orientation is deemed as included in the term 'any other ground whatsoever' in Article 28.2. However, reports suggest that it was never considered by any courts in the context of Article 28.⁵⁰ ECRI encourages the Cypriot authorities to initiate amendments to explicitly in the Constitution prohibit discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics.

⁴³ ILGA, [Rainbow Map](#)

⁴⁴ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) (2020), EU-LGBTI II, A long way to go for LGBTI equality, see pages. 25, 32 and 48. In Cyprus, 47% of respondents aged 15 to 17 hide or disguise being LGBTI at school, among the highest number in this group among the states surveyed. The share of respondents who felt discriminated against when looking for work were second highest in Cyprus (18 %) and the proportion of respondents who felt discriminated against at work were third highest in Cyprus (30 %).

⁴⁵ As an example, in December 2021, a scene featuring two men kissing was cut from the popular local TV series "Agries Melisses" by the State Broadcasting Corporation.

⁴⁶ Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou, Franet National contribution to the Fundamental Rights Report 2022, CYPRUS, p. 12.

⁴⁷ See, in this connection, ECRI's fifth report, §112.

⁴⁸ Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou, Franet National contribution to the Fundamental Rights Report 2022, CYPRUS, p. 12.

⁴⁹ Cyprus Bar Association 2019, Kamenou N., Ethemer E., Gavrielides C. and Bullici O., The LGBTI movement in Cyprus. Activism, Law, and Change Across the Divide, Report 2019, p. 12.

⁵⁰ European network of legal experts in non-discrimination and gender equality (2021), Country report non-discrimination Cyprus, p. 6.

36. Regarding employment, discrimination based on sexual orientation is prohibited since 1 May 2004 by the Equal Treatment in Employment and Labour Law of 2004 (58 (I)/2004)⁵¹ – i.e., the harmonisation law for EU Directive 2000/78/EC. Even though this law does not specifically prohibit discrimination based on gender identity or sex characteristics, it is considered to indirectly include these grounds.⁵² ECRI encourages the Cypriot authorities to initiate amendments to explicitly prohibit discrimination on these grounds in employment.
37. Civil unions between same-sex partners have been allowed since 9 December 2015 (Law N184(I)/2015). Single-parent adoption, with no limitation on the sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex characteristics of the parent, is allowed but rarely succeeds because single parents are put at the end of waiting lists. The Law on Social Security, which refers to widows' pensions, was amended in 2019. However, the amendment did not address the issue of widowhood pensions for same-sex couples in civil unions.⁵³
38. According to civil society sources, Cyprus granted temporary protection or asylum on the ground of belonging to the LGBTI community more often in the earlier years of the present reporting period.⁵⁴ ECRI was further told that the Cypriot asylum policy in relation to LGBTI grounds is applied somewhat incoherently, at times resulting in one person in a gay couple being granted asylum, whereas the other is not. ECRI encourages the authorities to ensure further consistency in the application of their asylum policy.
39. In its fifth report (§122), ECRI recommended that the authorities adopt an action plan to combat homophobia and transphobia in all areas of everyday life. In June 2021 the Cypriot Council of Ministers adopted a national strategy for promoting human rights, which also includes LGBTI issues.⁵⁵ A national action plan linked to the Strategy and with concrete measures is foreseen. The Human Rights Strategy further includes the intention to, in the future, develop a separate LGBTI Strategy.
40. ECRI was told that so-called conversion therapies continue to be practiced in some quarters, including within the Church of Cyprus. One political party has proposed to make such practices a criminal offence included in the Criminal Code. A debate about this proposal was held in the Cypriot Parliament on 18 March 2022, during ECRI's visit.⁵⁶ ECRI trusts that such a criminal offence will be inserted in law and will contribute to the eradication of these practices.
41. ECRI recommends as a matter of priority that the authorities prepare a national LGBTI strategy, accompanied by a national action plan, with a sufficient separate budget for its implementation and with enhanced action against intolerance against LGBTI persons among its key elements.

⁵¹ European network of legal experts in non-discrimination and gender equality (2021), Country report non-discrimination Cyprus, p. 7.

⁵² European network of legal experts in non-discrimination and gender equality (2021), Country report non-discrimination Cyprus,

⁵³ More information available [here](#).

⁵⁴ The current legislation on the asylum procedure covers persecution based on sexual orientation or gender identity as reasons allowing migrants to seek asylum in Cyprus. (the Refugee Law of 2000 (6 (I) / 2000), 2000).

⁵⁵ The Strategy foresees the creation of a Committee for the Promotion of Multiculturalism, Respect and Acceptance of Diversity which will promote an Action Plan for LGBTI people. This Action Plan should include specific sets of actions, measures, programs and activities for the protection, promotion, professional and social inclusion, and advancement within the Cypriot society of LGBTI individuals, as well as other groups.

⁵⁶ [Priests 'forcing LGBTI people to undergo conversion therapy', MPs hear | Cyprus Mail \(cyprus-mail.com\)](#)

II. HATE SPEECH AND MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

A. Hate speech⁵⁷

- Data

42. According to publicly available data collected by the Cypriot police,⁵⁸ there were 41 instances in 2020 of what is classified as “incidents and/or cases of racial nature and/or with racial motive.” The corresponding numbers in 2019, 2018, 2017 and 2016 were 40, 30, 27 and 17 incidents respectively. This data does not present cases of hate speech and hate crime separately.⁵⁹ The police authorities distinguish between incidents which were simply recorded by them and incidents in which a criminal investigation was launched.⁶⁰ Seven cases reached the indictment level in 2020 against 6 in 2019, 7 in 2018, 6 in 2017 and 9 in 2016. Out of these, six cases in total resulted in a conviction between 2016 and 2020.⁶¹ It is nevertheless unclear to which extent these convictions concerned incidents of hate speech or hate-motivated violence.
43. ECRI regrets that neither the prosecution service nor the courts collect data on cases with racist and homophobic/ transphobic elements. However, as concerns the courts, an interim electronic registration system ([iJustice](#)) was put in place in 2021 and the setting-up of a fully-fledged system (eJustice) is underway. It is expected that this system will *inter alia* enable the collection of data on hate speech and hate crime cases.
44. According to civil society organisations, the widespread problem of underreporting of hate incidents persists. The main reasons are reportedly the lack of trust in the police and, more generally, in the criminal justice system in the handling of such cases and the lack of information on victims’ rights.⁶² The police authorities acknowledged that there is an underreporting problem and make efforts to tackle it. In this regard, ECRI was informed that the Strategic Police Plan 2020-2022 includes the preparation of a questionnaire to help police officers identify racist motives when interviewing victims and recording incidents as well as police cooperation with equality bodies in and beyond Cyprus and civil society organisations (such as the NGO Accept- LGBT Cyprus).⁶³ Further, the police reported having developed a Code of Conduct for the Handling of Victims of Crime, and having offered some relevant training, as well as the circulation of letters with relevant instructions within the police force.
45. Public discourse has become increasingly xenophobic in Cyprus,⁶⁴ in particular during election periods. This trend was partly related to the growing negative influence of the far-right political party National Popular Front (ELAM)⁶⁵ on mainstream political parties since it first entered Parliament in 2016. More generally, newcomers are often scapegoated for allegedly depriving Greek Cypriots of basic access to jobs and for abusing the asylum and the social welfare

⁵⁷ See definitions of hate speech and hate crime in [ECRI's Glossary](#).

⁵⁸ The official statistical data of the police is available [here](#) in English and [here](#) in Greek.

⁵⁹ See also [OSCE-ODIHR Hate Crime Reporting database](#).

⁶⁰ This concerned 22, 27, 19, 16 and 1 incidents of the former type and 19, 13, 11, 11 and 16 incidents of the latter type in 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017 and 2016 respectively.

⁶¹ According to the Greek version of the statistics, or four according to the English version.

⁶² KISA, Hate [Speech](#) in Public discourse – Cyprus, June 2019, p. 9.

⁶³ More specifically, the cooperation with NGOs includes a Memorandum of Cooperation signed with civil society organisations in 2018 to foster mutual training and information-sharing; an online conference on "Rights of LGBTQI Individuals" held in 2021, where Accept-LGBT Cyprus provided information to members of the police about broader issues concerning the LGBTQI community; and a conference the police plan to organise jointly with the same NGO on combating xenophobia and racism, with emphasis on the respect for diversity.

⁶⁴ This is corroborated by police data. For instance, “Nationality/ ethnic origin” was the most common motive in “cases of racial nature” for the year 2020 (30 out of 61 incidents, including hate speech and hate-motivated violence).

⁶⁵ For more detailed information about ELAM, see ECRI's fifth report, §§21-22. ELAM received a total of 6.8% of the votes in the elections of May 2021 (compared with 3.7% in 2016). See also [The remnants of Golden Dawn are winning support in Cyprus](#), article appeared on opendemocracy.net on 16 April 2021.

system.⁶⁶ The anti-migrant sentiment is all too often linked with anti-Turkish and anti-Muslim narratives, with Muslim migrants and asylum seekers being accused of changing the country's demography. ECRI regrets to note that officials from the Orthodox Church of Cyprus contributed to the development of such divisive public discourse.⁶⁷

46. Anti-Black racism - affecting in particular migrants of African descent and Black football players - has become increasingly visible in recent years.⁶⁸ By way of illustration, in February 2020, a Black football player was called a "slave" by players and fans of the opponent team at a football match.
47. The LGBTI community and its members are still stigmatised and portrayed as a threat to family and moral values. In this context, several Orthodox Church officials made homophobic comments.⁶⁹ By way of illustration, in June 2019, the bishop of Morfou told an audience at a primary school that "unborn babies turn gay when their pregnant mothers have anal sex".⁷⁰
48. On a positive note, ECRI received no reports on antisemitism or antigypsyism⁷¹ in Cyprus. Nevertheless, this could be linked to the very small size of the Jewish and Roma communities in Cyprus.
49. ECRI recommends that the authorities establish a comprehensive monitoring system for hate speech incidents, involving the police, the prosecution service, the courts, the equality body and relevant civil society organisations, especially those supporting refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, Black persons and LGBTI people. In doing so, the authorities should draw on the positive initiatives aimed at addressing underreporting with the police and take due account of § 3 c) and d) of ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 15 on combating hate speech and § 58 of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers' Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16 on combating hate speech.
50. As regards online hate speech, the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights received a number of complaints about online racist comments against foreigners. ECRI takes note of the statement issued by Commissioner in July 2021, which highlighted that such phenomena have become more pronounced in Cyprus in recent years.⁷²
 - *Action taken against hate speech*
51. ECRI notes that only sporadic condemnation of hate speech has been publicly expressed in the reporting period. For example, in March 2021, the Government's spokesperson condemned the vandalism of a mosque in the Episkopi area of

⁶⁶ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, A. Dilmac, O. Kocadal, O. Tringides, Public discourses of hate speech in Cyprus, 2021, pp.11-12. See also: Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights, Statement on the rhetoric that promotes racism and xenophobia and the specific implications of this rhetoric when pronounced on the internet, pp. 4-8.

⁶⁷ KISA report, op. cit., p. 23. By way of example, in 2017, in his Christmas circular, the Archbishop of Cyprus described refugees as a "threat to the nation" because they were Muslims and urged people "to fight against" this threat. He added that Muslims were "sent to Cyprus by Turkey as so-called refugees with the intention to alter our national and cultural identity" ([Archbishop's Christmas message with references to the Cyprus problem](#), article appeared on Kathimerini on 25 December 2017). See also Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, op.cit., p. 10.

⁶⁸ According to police data, colour was also the second most common motive in "cases of racial nature" for the year 2020 (8 out of 61 incidents).

⁶⁹ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, op cit., p. 13, with further references.

⁷⁰ [Outrage as bishop says gay people exist because pregnant women have anal sex](#), article appeared on mirror.co.uk on 27 July 2019.

⁷¹ The issue of structural discrimination against Roma in terms of access to education, health care, housing and employment is discussed below, §§ 105 *et seq.*

⁷² Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights, Statement of 14 July 2021 on the rhetoric that promotes racism and xenophobia and the specific implications of this rhetoric when pronounced on the internet, p. 18 *et seq.* The Commissioner recommended that media organisations set up a system to control the comments of their readers, in order to identify and delete promptly those comments that constitute hate speech.

Limassol.⁷³ Regarding educational programmes, ECRI notes the “AWARE” campaign, a programme co-funded by the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, and the Republic of Cyprus with the aim of fighting xenophobia.⁷⁴ In addition, since 2017, the CPI and the MOESY have been implementing the “Imagine” anti-racism project,⁷⁵ aimed at increasing contact between students and teachers from the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot communities.⁷⁶ The project has brought together around 5,000 students and 600 teachers from both communities. ECRI welcomes this initiative and considers it a **good practice**. Further, the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights has made some efforts since 2020 to address and increase awareness about hate speech.⁷⁷

52. ECRI nevertheless highlights that further action is necessary, including at the highest level, to ensure that hate speech incidents are speedily and firmly condemned and prompt counter-speech and alternative speech is used.

53. ECRI recommends that the authorities step up their efforts in encouraging public figures, in particular high-level officials and religious leaders, to firmly and promptly condemn the use of racist and other forms of hate speech, use counter-speech and alternative speech and promote intergroup understanding, including by expressing solidarity with those targeted by hate speech, in the light of § 4 g) of ECRI’s General Policy Recommendation No. 15 on combating hate speech and § 53 of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16 on combating hate speech.

54. In a development welcomed by ECRI, the Code of Principles and Ethics for Members of Parliament (MPs) entered into force in February 2021.⁷⁸ The Code *inter alia* prohibits hate speech, incitement to violence and sexist/racist behaviour by MPs in the performance of their duties.⁷⁹ Compliance with the Code, which sets forth solely political sanctions,⁸⁰ is monitored by a Special Parliamentary Committee on Ethics.⁸¹ ECRI was informed that the possibility of amending the Code to prohibit online hate speech is currently being considered by Parliament. In this context, ECRI trusts that due account will be taken of the Charter of European Political Parties for a non-racist and inclusive society⁸².

55. As regards the media field, ECRI notes that Law No. 197(I)/2021, which amended the 1998 Radio and Television Organisations Law,⁸³ *inter alia* prohibits broadcast

⁷³ The mosque’s walls were covered by graffiti with nationalist slogans, Greek flags and crosses. In his [statement](#), the spokesperson said the government “strongly and unreservedly condemn the actions of some brainless people who under the pretext of so-called patriotism, insult religious sites and the meaning and ideals of patriotism”.

⁷⁴ The campaign, which lasted 18 months and was completed in 2020, gave refugee and migrant communities the opportunity to speak directly to the host community about the experiences, problems and difficulties faced by them through a series of events such as seminars, conferences, workshops and festivals.

⁷⁵ [Association for Historical Dialogue and Research, Education for a Culture of Peace – ‘IMAGINE’](#)

⁷⁶ Including through “twinning” experiences (i.e. mixed classes), which are focused on peace education, and other joint activities ([Question of human rights in Cyprus, Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 31 January 2020, § 55](#)). Bi-communal activities include meetings at the “Home for Co-operation”, a community centre located in the middle of the UN Buffer Zone in Nicosia. More information on the Home for Co-operation is available [here](#).

⁷⁷ Indicatively, since 2020, the Commissioner has been carrying out an information campaign on hate speech and freedom of expression. In this context, a [dedicated page](#) created on the Office’s website presents the most important interventions made by the Commissioner on issues related to hate speech and freedom of expression. Furthermore, in April 2019, the Commissioner organised an [information campaign entitled “Combating Discrimination and Hate Speech in Election Campaigns”](#), ahead of the European Parliament elections of May 2019.

⁷⁸ The Code of Principles and Ethics for Members of Parliament is available [here](#).

⁷⁹ Code of Principles and Ethics for Members of Parliament, Section II, §§ 4-6.

⁸⁰ Section V, § (15). These include oral or written reprimand, censure and orders for an oral or written apology. It was reported that a suggestion to include the possibility of deduction of and MP’s salary as a sanction in case of a violation of the Code was ultimately not upheld (Source: [Cyprus Parliament approves Code of Conduct for MPs](#), article appeared on in-cyprus.philenews.com on 19 February 2021).

⁸¹ The Committee is competent to examine complaints filed by MPs and/or citizens, or to even act *ex officio* upon a perceived breach of the Code (Section V, § 1).

⁸² The text of the Charter is available on the website of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe [here](#).

⁸³ This was with a view to transposing the [Audio-visual Media Services Directive 2018/1808/EE](#) into the Cypriot legislation.

content and commercials containing incitement to violence or hatred against vulnerable groups.⁸⁴ The Cyprus Radio-Television Authority (CRTA)⁸⁵ is the independent regulatory body that examines violations of this legislation. Its decisions are directly enforceable and are subject only to judicial review. It was nevertheless explained to ECRI that only a few cases examined by the CRTA concern hateful content against vulnerable groups. Furthermore, the fines imposed are generally low.⁸⁶

56. When it comes to self-regulation, the Cyprus Media Complaints Commission (CMCC) is the body responsible for the supervision of both written and electronic news media. It examines violations of the Journalists' Code of Conduct,⁸⁷ including on the safeguards against discriminatory coverage. The CMCC is in the process of updating this Code with a view to including a specific provision on hate speech. In case of breach of the Code, the CMCC is not entitled to award compensation or to impose any penalty other than the obligation for the outlet concerned to publish the CMCC's decision establishing the breach of the Code.⁸⁸ The vast majority of ECRI's media interlocutors were thus in favour of introducing more effective sanctions, such as the possibility of imposing fines in cases of recurrent breaches of anti-discrimination rules. ECRI encourages the authorities to support training for media professionals on combating hate speech, and trusts that action will be taken to strengthen sanctions for the use of hate speech in the media.
57. In the field of sport, ECRI notes that Article 11 of the Disciplinary Rules of the Cyprus Football Association (CFA)⁸⁹ prohibits racist and otherwise intolerant behaviour by football players, clubs and fans during matches. Sanctions that may be imposed by the Sports Judge⁹⁰ include monetary fines and penalties related to the exercise of the sport, such as suspension from matches and conduct of matches behind closed doors. In case of recidivism, fines of at least € 50,000 and up to € 500,000, and bans from tournaments may be imposed.⁹¹
58. In relation to the above-mentioned incident of the football player having been called a "slave" (§ 46), the referee interrupted the match, not on account of racist abuse, but on the ground that the victim's teammates walked off the field. Furthermore, the police initially denied that there was a racist motive.⁹² These responses were criticised by the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights.⁹³ ECRI encourages the authorities to support appropriate training for sports and other officials as to the meaning and negative effects of hate speech, as well as about the ways in which its use can be challenged in the field of sport.
59. Article 148 of the Civil Code prohibits defamation. ECRI has not been able to obtain any data on its application but has been informed that the article is rarely invoked in the context of hate speech against vulnerable groups, mainly due to the length of civil proceedings.⁹⁴
60. ECRI notes that a number of criminal-law provisions regulate hate speech in Cyprus. A general provision criminalising hate speech can be found in Article 51A

⁸⁴ Law 197(I)/2021, Articles 30(1)(a) and 32 F.

⁸⁵ More information on the CRTA is available [here](#).

⁸⁶ Fines imposed on media outlets in respect of complaints examined in 2020 and 2021 have, in their vast majority, amounted to sums up to EUR 1,500.

⁸⁷ The Journalists' Code of Conduct is available [here](#).

⁸⁸ In addition, the CMCC is not vested with the power to enforce the publication of its decisions.

⁸⁹ In their version in force as from June 2021.

⁹⁰ The CFA first-instance disciplinary body (CFA Disciplinary Rules, Articles 22 and 26 § 1).

⁹¹ CFA Disciplinary Rules, Articles 11 (c) and 14.

⁹² [Racist incidents in sports](#), article appeared on dialogos.com on 24 February 2020.

⁹³ *Statement of the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights*, published on 5 March 2020, §§ 19-20.

⁹⁴ ECRI was nevertheless informed that a reform of the civil law system with a view to tackling in particular the problem of excessive length of proceedings is currently underway at an advanced stage.

of the Criminal Code.⁹⁵ Law 134(I)/2011⁹⁶ on Combating Certain Forms and Expressions of Racism and Xenophobia by means of Criminal Law (the main criminal anti-hate speech legislation, which aimed at transposing the European Union Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA into the Cypriot legislation) and Law 26(III)/2004 (by which Cyprus ratified the Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe's Cybercrime Convention)⁹⁷ provide legal tools to combat racist hate speech, including online. Furthermore, Article 99A of the Criminal Code sanctions public incitement to violence or hatred on the basis of sexual orientation or their gender identity. Finally, Law 12/1967 on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination is also of relevance.

61. In its fifth report, ECRI had recommended the criminalisation of the public expression, with a racist aim, of an ideology which claims the superiority of, or which depreciates or denigrates, a group of persons on the grounds of their "race", colour, language, religion, citizenship, or national or ethnic origin (§ 8) and that the authorities increase the penalties for homo/transphobic hate speech under the new Criminal Code provisions so that they are identical to those for racist hate speech in Law 134(I)/2011 (§ 28). ECRI regrets that no action has been taken in this respect.
62. At the implementation level, hate incidents are investigated by the Criminal Investigation Department and district police stations.⁹⁸ The Cybercrime Subdivision of the Police has responsibility for the investigation of online hate speech. Criminal files are sent, through the Crime Combating Department, to the Attorney General, who then gives instructions for the course of each case. The insufficient expertise of police officers dealing with these cases has been considered by many interlocutors of ECRI's delegation during the visit as one of the reasons for the ineffectiveness of the response mechanism. ECRI also learned that no specific training on combating hate speech, hate crime and discrimination have been provided to prosecutors and judges.⁹⁹ The prosecution service also enjoys unlimited discretionary power in deciding whether to press charges or not in relation to hate-related complaints, without any obligation to reason their decision. No remedy is available to the victims to challenge such a decision. ECRI was also informed that online platforms repeatedly bring online hate comments to the attention of prosecutors. However, they did not receive any information on the outcome of their reports.
63. Among six convictions imposed for hate incidents in the review period, two landmark cases are noteworthy in the fight against hate speech. In January 2019, the Regional Court of Nicosia found a Cypriot woman guilty of racist comments made on social media against a couple who had adopted a child of Asian origin.¹⁰⁰ It imposed a fine of €800 in application of the provisions of Law 26(III)/2004. In July 2021, a judgment issued by the Regional Court of Larnaka, which had imposed a fine of € 750 to two Cypriot women who had verbally abused a Russian woman, was overturned. The Appeal Court, applying Law 134(I)/2011, imposed harsher sanctions (a fine of € 3,000 and suspended prison sentences).¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ As per this provision, fostering the formation of a climate of intolerance constitutes a misdemeanour punishable by twelve-month imprisonment or a fine of one thousand pounds or both.

⁹⁶ As currently in force after its last amendment by Law 30(I)/2017.

⁹⁷ Concerning the criminalisation of acts of a racist and xenophobic nature committed through computer systems ([ETS no. 189](#)).

⁹⁸ Furthermore, two experienced police officers from each District Department (12 in total) have been appointed as liaison officers with the Legal Department and the Human Rights and Combating Discrimination Office of the Police. They are responsible for coordinating and supervising the investigation of hate-motivated incidents, ensuring accurate data collection, collaborating with NGOs and supporting victims.

⁹⁹ Targeted seminars are organised according to the needs of the courts, but their attendance is optional. So far, no seminars have been provided on hate speech, hate crime and combating discrimination.

¹⁰⁰ Case no. 775/2018.

¹⁰¹ On the ground that the Regional Court had failed to include in the indictment Article 35A of the Criminal Code, which provides for an aggravation of the penalty for offences motivated by racial bias.

64. However, these cases remain rare examples of racist hate speech that were ultimately sanctioned. In addition, no legal proceedings against LGBTI-phobic hate speech were initiated during the review period. ECRI is concerned by what was described to its delegation as a prevailing climate of impunity for perpetrators of hate speech, which has been highlighted by other international bodies¹⁰² and acknowledged by the authorities in their National Strategy on the protection and promotion of human rights.¹⁰³

65. ECRI recommends that the authorities i) revise the criminal legislation pertaining to hate speech, including remedies available to victims; ii) provide without delay suitable training to police officers, prosecutors and judges on how to make the best use of the existing legal provisions on combating hate speech and hate crime; and iii) develop awareness-raising measures for persons and groups targeted by hate speech to make them aware of their rights and of the possibility to obtain redress through criminal and other legal proceedings, taking due account of the relevant principles and guidelines contained in ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 15 on combating hate speech and in the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16 on combating hate speech.

B. Hate-motivated violence

66. In a development welcomed by ECRI, the Criminal Code was amended by Law 31(I)/2017 to include the homophobic and transphobic motivation to the list of aggravating circumstances of an offence.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, ECRI regrets that an amendment to Law 134(I)/2011¹⁰⁵ abolished the courts' duty to take into account racist and xenophobic bias as an aggravating factor.¹⁰⁶ ECRI strongly encourages the authorities to reinstate the *status quo ante* in respect of Article 8 of Law 134(I)/2011.

67. According to police data, between 2016 and 2020, 37 and 23 cases were recorded as "assaults against person" and "assaults against property" respectively, whereas a third category includes an unspecified number of "hate acts" committed during the same period. According to ECRI's various interlocutors, hate-motivated violence is not as acute a problem as hate speech.¹⁰⁷ However, some cases were of serious nature. For instance, in 2019, Cyprus was shaken by the murders of seven migrant women and their children by a Greek Cypriot serial killer, in what was seen as a demonstration of "structural racism in Cyprus against foreign workers".¹⁰⁸ Underreporting is also an issue, which can be partly attributed to a lack of trust in the police and in the criminal justice system as a whole. Reference can be made in this regard to an attack perpetrated in December 2018, when five persons wearing white hoods grabbed a person of African descent outside his home in Larnaca, severely beat him and, using pliers, extracted four of his teeth. The victim attributed his choice not to report the incident to the police to the "racist way in which he was treated by members of the police in the past".¹⁰⁹ Moreover, during the visit, several civil society interlocutors pointed to the failure of prosecutors and judges to look into racist or LGBTI-phobic motives in the

¹⁰² See, in particular, the 2017 Concluding observations of the UN Committee on Racial Discrimination on the twenty-third and twenty-fourth periodic reports of Cyprus, [CERD/C/CYP/CO/23-24](#).

¹⁰³ Adopted in June 2021.

¹⁰⁴ Other aggravating circumstances foreseen by Article 35A of the Criminal Code are race, colour, national or ethnic origin, religious or other beliefs and genealogical origin.

¹⁰⁵ By Law 30(I)/2017.

¹⁰⁶ As a result, the scope of Article 35A is now broader, but the judges are no longer under a duty to impose an aggravated sentence when prejudice is established.

¹⁰⁷ As regards xenophobic incidents in particular, stakeholders consulted converge, e.g., on the view that there have been no violent incidents during demonstrations for or against migrants in the recent years. In addition, it appears that there have also not been any attacks against reception or accommodation centres.

¹⁰⁸ [BBC: "Cyprus serial killer case exposes abuse of migrant women"](#), article appeared on in-cyprus.philenews.com on 2 May 2019.

¹⁰⁹ [Cyprus: Racist attack on African man – his teeth were pulled out with pliers](#), article appeared on athenvoice.gr on 28 December 2018.

prosecution and hearing of potentially racist or LGBTI-phobic hate crime-related cases.

68. In the light of the above, ECRI takes note of the efforts made to overcome the lack of trust of victims of hate incidents towards police services (see above, § 44). It strongly encourages the authorities to continue working towards establishing more solid frameworks for dialogue and co-operation between the police and different minority groups and to recruit members of under-represented minority groups in the police so as to ensure that the composition of the police reflects the diversity of the population.¹¹⁰ As regards specific training of police officers, prosecutors and judges on combating hate crime, reference is made to the recommendation made in §65.

III. INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION

A. Migrants

69. In its fifth report on Cyprus, ECRI strongly recommended that the authorities as a matter of priority develop a new integration plan for non-nationals, including foreign domestic workers, refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, and other migrants. The previous integration plan had expired at the end of 2012. When ECRI in June 2019 published its conclusion about Cyprus' implementation of this priority recommendation, it concluded that this recommendation had not been implemented. Since then, a new integration plan was developed for 2020-2022.¹¹¹ The final version of this draft plan was adopted by the Advisory Board on the Integration of Migrants,¹¹² after which implementation started, even though it was never submitted to the Council of Ministers for official adoption. Among the stated expected results of the plan are reductions in migrant unemployment, increased levels of training and education among migrants and a reduction of xenophobic incidents. NGOs have criticised the consultation process that took place in advance of the adoption of the plan by the Advisory Board, with an unrealistically short deadline for submission of comments. ECRI encourages the authorities to involve civil society organisations in the design and implementation of future integration measures.
70. The number of asylum seekers in Cyprus has grown sharply in recent years. Between 2002 and the end of September 2021, 15,322 persons are registered as having been granted international protection. The great majority of these are subsidiary protection beneficiaries. In 2021, 13,773 new asylum applications were lodged,¹¹³ ranking Cyprus as the top receiver of asylum applications, per capita, among EU Member States.¹¹⁴ The overall rejection rate was 81,4 %.¹¹⁵ The top ten countries of origin of new asylum seekers in Cyprus from January until the end of

¹¹⁰ GPR No. 11 on combating racism and racial discrimination in policing, §§ 18, 17 and 7.

¹¹¹ The Plan was drafted with co-funding by AMIF National Programme 2014-2020.

¹¹² The Advisory Board was established in 2007 and consists of representatives from the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth, the Ministry of Health, the Union of Cyprus Municipalities, the Union of Cyprus Communities, the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights (Ombudsman), the Pancyprian Federation of Labour, the Cyprus Workers Confederation-SEK, the Democratic Labour Federation of Cyprus, the Cyprus Employers and Industrialists Federation, and the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

¹¹³ AIDA country report 2021 updated, page 7, available at [Cyprus - Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(asylumineurope.org\)](https://www.refugees.org/cyprus)

¹¹⁴ In the present reporting period, many international bodies have expressed concern regarding allegations of “pushbacks” and violations of the right to asylum taking place (see UN [Secretary General's report](#) of 21 December 2021 on operations in Cyprus and the [letter](#) of 10 March 2021 addressed by the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights to the Cypriot Minister of Interior). ECRI is aware that if allegations of “pushbacks” have proved to be true, it has resulted in a smaller number of asylum seekers successfully entering the Republic of Cyprus in recent years, thereby affecting the number of refugees, subsidiary protection status holders and asylum seekers staying in the country and the conduct of integration policies concerning them. However, ECRI notes that other Council of Europe institutions and bodies, in particular the European Court of Human Rights, the Commissioner for Human Rights and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) are better placed, based on their respective mandates, to consider and pronounce themselves on this matter, and they have done so.

¹¹⁵ AIDA country report 2021 updated, page 7, available at [Cyprus - Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(asylumineurope.org\)](https://www.refugees.org/cyprus).

September 2021 were Syria, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Nepal, Somalia and Sierra Leone. About 80 % of all asylum seekers have arrived from the northern part of the island through the buffer zone to the Republic of Cyprus.¹¹⁶

71. Following the emergence of Covid-19, Cyprus suspended access to asylum procedures in early March 2020. Access to asylum procedures resumed in July 2020, but difficulties in access to asylum have persisted.¹¹⁷
72. With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Emergency Reception Centre in Kokkinotrimithia (Pournara) was converted into a First Reception Centre, which started to operate as a long-term reception facility.¹¹⁸ At one point in 2020, new arrivals in the Centre were not allowed to leave the facility as a result of protective measures to address Covid-19, leading to a massive increase of persons likely to need international protection being accommodated in the centre, without the infrastructure in place to host such a number, especially for a long duration.¹¹⁹ Residents had to stay for five to six months, resulting in severe overcrowding, substandard living conditions, and were *de facto* deprived of their liberty. Further, children were initially sharing accommodation quarters with adults,¹²⁰ leading to some allegations of sexual abuse, something women were also at risk of. Subsequently, Syrian asylum seekers were allowed to leave provided that they had relatives or friends who could provide housing.¹²¹ After strong reactions from other asylum seekers in the Centre, the Asylum Service started allowing 10 persons per day to leave, prioritising vulnerable persons and women, but only if they could present a valid address, a requirement that was difficult to meet unless they had contacts in the community.

¹¹⁶ S/2021/1110, UN. Secretary-General, para 40-41.

¹¹⁷ In November 2021 Cyprus asked the EU Commission to be allowed to suspend processing of asylum applications by migrants who had entered Cyprus irregularly, but it was rejected by the European Commission.

¹¹⁸ AIDA, Country Report Cyprus, 2020, p. 68.

¹¹⁹ In 2020 the asylum seekers were not permitted to make use of an SMS system in place, which allowed Cypriots to seek permission to go out for necessary errands during the Covid-19 lockdown. This policy continued throughout 2020 and into early 2021.

¹²⁰ According to the Cypriot authorities, no unaccompanied children were hosted with adults after the fourth quarter of 2020.

¹²¹ While no differences in treatment, based on asylum seekers' nationality, are generally observed, it was observed that persons coming from African countries were either not allowed or faced sudden restrictions in exiting the Centre. That was in contrast to Syrian families who were able to exit the Centre more easily. Throughout 2020 and 2021, this trend continued, primarily due to the Syrians' closer relations with friends and relatives in the community, which enabled them to secure accommodation and gather the necessary documents, more easily than the residents originating from African countries. AIDA country report 2021 updated, page 115, available at [Cyprus - Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(asylumineurope.org\)](https://asylumineurope.org/)

73. After a period of less crowded conditions in 2021, the population in the Pournara camp, which has a housing capacity for maximum 1,000 persons¹²² started increasing rapidly again, having reached 2,700 around the time ECRI visited the camp in March 2022.¹²³ ECRI witnessed the difficult conditions in the camp during a spell of cold weather, with night time temperatures around zero degrees Celsius, during which many asylum seekers were still accommodated in tents without heating.¹²⁴ In 2022, adult asylum seekers have increasingly been encouraged to accept a transfer to a centre in Limnes,¹²⁵ where the conditions are reportedly even worse, though with less overcrowding. If they do not accept, they may lose access to reception services.
74. The Cypriot Social Welfare Office as an institution serves as guardian for all children likely to need international protection.¹²⁶ ECRI was told at the time of its visit that there were only two persons serving as guardians from the Cypriot Social Welfare Office for a population of about 250 unaccompanied children.¹²⁷ In June 2022, the number of guardians was increased to four. Children have reportedly had to stay at the Pournara reception centre for up to eight months due to the requirement for an age assessment of older children and because their appointed guardian must be present at all stages of the asylum application procedure. From the time of ECRI's visit onwards, attempts were made to transfer the children in the Pournara camp to more appropriate accommodation, including hotels. However, for various reasons, these attempts failed. ECRI strongly encourages the Cypriot authorities to intensify their efforts to find appropriate accommodation in particular for unaccompanied children and to in any event shorten their stay in the Pournara reception centre to the strictest minimum.
75. While there is no reason to doubt that the staff of the Social Welfare Office does its best to address the challenges faced by asylum seekers, including especially unaccompanied children, the service appears to have a serious lack of sufficient human and other resources to deal with the situation. For that reason, the efforts by civil society actors in support of asylum seekers and other migrants have become all the more indispensable. The orientation and practical services offered to them by, for instance, the MiHub migrant information centres,¹²⁸ which are run by the University of Nicosia and NGOs, with some 90 % of funding from the European Union, have become crucial for migrants, as have those offered by Caritas Cyprus.¹²⁹ ECRI visited one such MiHub centre in Paphos. Orientation services typically concern registration with the Labour Office, access to a health insurance card and accommodation, as well as preparing CVs for the local labour market, all of which, apart from knowledge of procedures, require linguistic skills not possessed by most asylum seekers. Furthermore, ECRI learned from several

¹²² Analysing key fundamental rights concerns for EU preparedness and crisis management, 10 January 2022, Corina Demetriou, Corina Drousiotou and Nicos Trimikliniotis, Cyprus Migration Bulletin.

¹²³ This number appears to have further increased three weeks after ECRI's visit to reach approximately 3,000 people.

¹²⁴ Residents in the Pournara centre are hosted in confined areas, where they are accommodated in prefabricated housing units, tents, and refugee house units, which were provided by UNHCR with the purpose of replacing tents with more appropriate solutions. For more details, see AIDA country report 2021 updated, page 91, available at [Cyprus - Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(asylumineurope.org\)](#)

¹²⁵ In late 2021, the newly established Limnes Accommodation Centre began operations. The Centre has open and closed sections and a safe zone. Upon operation and continuing in 2022, rejected asylum seekers, the majority nationals from Pakistan and Bangladesh, are transferred to the Limnes Centre from Pournara, where they have all received a negative first-instance decision on their asylum claims. They are given the choice to either reside in the open sections of the Centre or to leave the Centre and live in the community. Those who choose to live in the community are obliged to waive their right to material reception conditions. Those who select to reside at the Centre are provided with a stipulated cash allowance of €100, which is allocated at the end of each month. The majority of persons transferred to Limnes opt to leave the Centre and reside in the community, without access to material reception conditions, mainly to access employment opportunities in the community. AIDA country report 2021 updated, page 95, available at [Cyprus - Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(asylumineurope.org\)](#)

¹²⁶ According to the Refugee Law, only social services staff can serve as guardians.

¹²⁷ For more details, see AIDA report 2021 updated, page 67, available at [Cyprus - Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(asylumineurope.org\)](#)

¹²⁸ [MiHub - Migrant Information Centre](#)

¹²⁹ [Caritas Cyprus – Ending poverty. promoting justice. restoring dignity.](#)

civil society sources that the information about such services provided by the authorities often contains errors, e.g., phone numbers and opening hours of public services. One further difficulty is that most public services needed by migrants are increasingly only available online and then usually in Greek only, or at best, in English as well.

76. ECRI recommends that the authorities increase the number of languages and channels in or through which essential information and services related to notably education, health, housing and employment are made available to migrants.
77. Apart from the NGOs providing information or tangible material support services, ECRI was particularly pleased to observe a rehearsal of the social-music orchestra Sistema Cyprus, which is an NGO-run orchestra for vulnerable children, many of whom have a migration background, be they asylum seekers, refugees, or other third country migrants. ECRI considers this kind of activity, which promotes integration and inclusion through music, a **good practice**.
78. By contrast, ECRI notes with regret that while encouraging participation in sport clubs would usually be a good way of promoting integration, some Cypriot sports associations, including the Gymnastics Association Pancypria, only allow Greek Cypriot citizens to become regular members.¹³⁰ In this context, ECRI refers to § 2 of its GPR No. 12 on combatting racism and racial discrimination in the field of sport, which *inter alia* calls on authorities to adopt adequate anti-discrimination legislation to prevent discrimination in access to sport.¹³¹
79. ECRI recommends that legislative or other appropriate measures be taken to prevent the exclusion of non-citizens from sport association membership.

Education

80. According to the Refugee Law of Cyprus of 2000,¹³² child applicants for international protection and children of applicants for international protection should be enrolled in schools no later than three months from the date of their asylum application. By and large migrant children do have access to and attend school. According to data from the Cypriot authorities, about 22% of registered children in preschools have a migrant background, while the share is about 19% in primary schools, about 18 % in lower secondary schools and some 14 % in upper secondary schools.
81. The exception to the overall satisfactory attendance of children with a migrant background in school are the children staying in the First Reception Centre of Pournara (see § 72). They do not attend school, regardless of the number of months they remain in the Centre. In April 2022, there were 354 children in the Centre, of whom 302 were unaccompanied.¹³³
82. In 2016, a policy paper on the education of children with a migrant background was initially adopted, and based on this, an action plan has been developed. It aimed to co-ordinate individual actions by schools and create a single educational policy on integrating migrant (including refugee) children. This action plan is guided by five priorities: 1. learning the Greek language; 2. reception of newly arrived children with a migrant background; 3. teacher education and continuing professional development; 4. collection and analysis of data on the needs of pupils with a migrant background and 5. an intercultural approach through the new curricula. Most refugee children follow general education. Support for their educational

¹³⁰ <https://kisa.org.cy/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CY-NHRI-Shadow-Rep-May-2021.pdf>

¹³¹ ECRI GPR No 12, Chapter I, Point 2a. Also see the related paragraphs 16 and 17 in the explanatory memorandum to this GPR, available at [ECRI General Policy Recommendation N°12 \(coe.int\)](https://www.refworld.org/docid/4a71aac22.html#:~:text=Refworld%20%7C%20Cyprus%3A%20Refugee%20Law%20of%202000&text=A%20Law%20to%20provide%20for.amendments%20made%20up%20to%202020)

¹³² Available in Greek at [Ο περί Προσφύγων Νόμος του 2000 - 6\(I\)/2000 \(cylaw.org\)](https://www.refworld.org/docid/4a71aac22.html#:~:text=Refworld%20%7C%20Cyprus%3A%20Refugee%20Law%20of%202000&text=A%20Law%20to%20provide%20for.amendments%20made%20up%20to%202020) and translated into English at <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4a71aac22.html#:~:text=Refworld%20%7C%20Cyprus%3A%20Refugee%20Law%20of%202000&text=A%20Law%20to%20provide%20for.amendments%20made%20up%20to%202020>.

¹³³ AIDA country report 2021 updated, page 106, available at [Cyprus - Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(asylumineurope.org\)](https://www.refworld.org/docid/4a71aac22.html#:~:text=Refworld%20%7C%20Cyprus%3A%20Refugee%20Law%20of%202000&text=A%20Law%20to%20provide%20for.amendments%20made%20up%20to%202020).

integration has come from the DRASE programme.¹³⁴ During its visit, the ECRI delegation was told that the overall approach is to mix migrant children with Greek-speaking children, including in kindergartens, trusting that the foreign children will learn Greek in this way.

83. Many interlocutors have drawn ECRI's attention to the difficulties asylum seeking and other newly-arrived migrant children face when being inserted into ordinary primary school classes, in which they are not able to follow subjects taught in Greek.¹³⁵ Further, there is usually no individual assessment of foreign children's previous skills in central school subjects when the school grade in which they are to be inserted is to be determined.
84. ECRI recommends as a matter of priority that the authorities take immediate action to support child asylum seekers and other migrant children in acquiring the Greek language skills necessary to allow them to follow ordinary primary school classes taught in Greek. Such action should be accompanied by individual skills assessments to determine the most appropriate school grade to place the child in.
85. In order to deal with the language barrier of migrant students, the MOESY has developed transitional classes for non-Greek speakers in secondary education. Greek classes tailored to the needs of non-Greek speakers are mostly offered separately, while they attend mainstream classes at all other times.¹³⁶ The MOESY is further implementing an upgraded educational policy aiming at the smooth integration of pupils with a migrant background into the educational system. According to the authorities, there are five different programmes running in secondary schools for the teaching of Greek as a second language, two of which are specifically meant for unaccompanied children.
86. The MOESY's State Institutes for Further Education (SIFFE)¹³⁷ organises various forms of evening classes for adult migrants, which include foreign language courses at a cost of €280-385 per year. Further, the SIFFE offer Greek language courses to Turkish Cypriots, Turkish Roma and non-Cypriots who live in Cyprus for a registration fee of €10.¹³⁸

Housing

87. Housing of asylum seekers is a major problem in Cyprus,¹³⁹ where reception centres have been overcrowded, there is a shortage of accommodation for rent, and the rental support for asylum seekers trying to find accommodation in the private market has not increased since 2013 and is insufficient in relation to current rent levels.¹⁴⁰ The rental support is much lower than the amounts paid to recipients of the Guaranteed Minimum Income. ECRI appreciates that the Social Welfare Office in its efforts to provide housing solutions attempts to prioritise asylum seeking families with underaged children, as well as particularly vulnerable asylum

¹³⁴ The DRASE programme is an EU-funded programme, co-financed by the European Social Fund with 24 650 000 EUR and with a timeframe of 2015-2023. For more information, please see [here](#).

¹³⁵ In theory, all non-Greek speaking children of primary school age, regardless of the time or circumstances of arrival, are placed in an ordinary Greek school class and are then in parallel provided with Greek language classes. This means that they leave the mainstream class for certain periods/classes. The support classes in Greek are funded by the EU and taught by teachers many of whom are not permanent staff but need to be recruited. For this reason and general teaching staff shortages, they start of the Greek classes are delayed, if at all available.

¹³⁶ AIDA country report 2021 updated, page 106, available at [Cyprus - Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(asylumineurope.org\)](#)

¹³⁷ State institutes of further education, more information available [here](#)

¹³⁸ Ukrainian refugees have access to these language courses for free.

¹³⁹ As part of a 2020 Action Plan to address migration flows, the leasing of various premises, such as housing or hotel units by the State for the residence of asylum seekers was heavily reduced in 2020. Given the lack of capacity in reception centres, there was a significant rise in homelessness and use of below-standard accommodation. Furthermore, persons were removed from hotels/hostels with no prior warning and transferred to the Pournara reception centre. AIDA country report 2021 updated, page 13, available at [Cyprus - Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(asylumineurope.org\)](#)

¹⁴⁰ AIDA country report 2021 updated, page 139, available at [Cyprus - Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(asylumineurope.org\)](#)

seekers. ECRI nonetheless encourages the authorities to increase rental support for asylum seekers.

88. On a positive note, the Migrant Information Centre, run by the University of Nicosia, CARDET and Cyprus University of Technology, set up a temporary shelter for migrants in Nicosia in 2020. The shelter was created in response to the growing difficulties migrants are facing in securing housing.¹⁴¹

Employment

89. Cypriot employers who wish to hire a third country national must first advertise the job in at least two Cypriot newspapers, as well as at the European Employment Service (EURES), to exhaust any EU applicants.
90. When moving to Cyprus for employment, third country nationals should apply to the migration authorities for a work and residence permit, and sign the corresponding employment contract, prior to travelling to Cyprus. Upon registration with the authorities, an entry permit will be issued to the individual. It is possible to renew temporary work and residence permits.¹⁴²
91. Third country nationals are subject to a separate procedure for labour complaints compared with Cypriot or EU citizens. If a third country worker wishes to submit a complaint against his or her employer, it has to first be submitted to the Aliens and Immigration Unit of the Police, after which it can be submitted to the Labour Relations Department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance. According to civil society sources, complaints must be submitted within 15 days from the alleged violation by the employer. If this deadline is not respected and a complaint is submitted later by a third country worker, s/he is considered as irregularly present and his or her residence permit is cancelled, which may lead to the eventual deportation of the migrant.¹⁴³ ECRI encourages the authorities to review the labour complaints procedures for migrants to ensure that migrants are given reasonable time to submit complaints.
92. According to the Refugee Law, asylum seekers are permitted to access the labour market one month after the submission of an asylum application.¹⁴⁴ In case of unemployment, they are then able to register as unemployed. If they meet the insurance conditions, though this is far from always the case, they are entitled to unemployment benefits. Since 2021, the registrations (and their renewals) of unemployed persons are meant to be performed online through the website of the Public Employment Service. It has caused difficulties for less digitally skilled applicants.¹⁴⁵
93. Asylum seekers are only allowed to work in specific sectors of employment. In 2019, the Minister of Labour, Welfare, and Social Insurance extended access for asylum seekers to additional employment sectors. Currently, some permitted fields of employment for asylum seekers are in agriculture and the food industry (in restaurants, hotels, delivery services).¹⁴⁶ While there is a fair number of jobs in these sectors, the offer is not sufficient to provide employment for many asylum seekers, while there is a shortage of workers in some other sectors, such as construction and health care, in which asylum seekers are not permitted to work. ECRI encourages the authorities to consider further extending access for asylum seekers to additional employment sectors where a shortage of workers is recorded.

¹⁴¹ European Commission, New, temporary accommodation for migrants in Cyprus, 3.4.2020, available [here](#)

¹⁴² <https://mihub.eu/en/>

¹⁴³ KISA, Mapping of Labour Complain Mechanisms in Cyprus, December 2021, page 13, available at <https://kisa.org.cy/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/RP-CY-complaint-mechanisms-EN-070422-Fin.pdf>

¹⁴⁴ Article 90(1)(b) Refugee Law; Ministerial Decision 308/2018, 26 October 2018.

¹⁴⁵ AIDA country report 2021 updated, pages 101-103, available at [Cyprus - Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(asylumineurope.org\)](#)

¹⁴⁶ Asylum Information Database (AIDA), Country Report Cyprus, 2020, p. 87.

94. In a positive development, the Minister of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance announced through a decree that employers as of October 2021 can hire asylum seekers immediately by simply submitting a declaration of temporary employment.
95. Even if the procedures required for being hired may have been shortened as of the end of 2021, others prominent obstacles faced by asylum seekers in accessing the labour market are language barriers and long distances from the place of employment, at times without reasonable public transport. According to Caritas, asylum seekers are moreover often referred by labour authorities to jobs which are inappropriate for them, for example because of lack of childcare possibilities. If they repeatedly turn down job offers, their benefits may be discontinued. Asylum seekers are given no chance to explain why they are not in a position to accept certain job offers, in which case they may be considered as wilfully unemployed with the loss of benefits as the result.

Health care

96. Third country nationals who wish to study or work in Cyprus must buy private health care insurance, giving access to private or in some cases public health services.
97. All asylum seekers without adequate resources are entitled to free medical care covering emergency health care and essential treatment of illnesses in public institutions, including serious mental disorders. They need to submit an application in order to confirm their residence status, after which they will receive their medical card by post.¹⁴⁷
98. Asylum seekers staying in the Pournara reception centre have limited access to non-emergency health services. Asylum seekers who have found accommodation outside the Pournara reception centre and have managed to secure work must contribute to the GESY national health care system introduced in 2019 by an amount which is proportional to their salary and deducted every month.¹⁴⁸

Naturalisation

99. According to Cypriot officials, there were 354 positive naturalisation decisions in 2021, 350 in 2020, 961 in 2019, 1960 in 2018, 1415 in 2017 and 995 in 2016.
100. Generally speaking, naturalisation has become more difficult to access for the majority of refugees, including for those who have been living in Cyprus for well over 10 years, were born in the country or arrived at a very young age.¹⁴⁹ In many cases, applications are rejected citing that the refugee does not have sufficient ties to the country or is a burden on the State. Such assessments seem to reflect an overall strict and negative attitude toward granting citizenship to refugees. Furthermore, there is virtually no access to long term residence or any other permanent status for them.¹⁵⁰
101. According to the Civil Registry Law, prerequisites for naturalisation are five or seven consecutive years of residence;¹⁵¹ uninterrupted stay in Cyprus during the last twelve months; three guarantors who are all Cypriot nationals; a clean criminal record; and being of "good character". Although an applicant's financial situation is not among the official criteria, it is in practice a primary consideration. ECRI was informed that a new bill about naturalisation was pending in Parliament, which adds further criteria.

¹⁴⁷ [Mihub](#)

¹⁴⁸ For more details, see Analysing fundamental rights concerns for the migration and preparedness mechanism in selected EU Member States: Cyprus

¹⁴⁹ Since 2018, a smaller number of persons with international protection status than previously have been granted nationality.

¹⁵⁰ AIDA country report 2021 updated, page 16, available at [Cyprus - Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(asylumineurope.org\)](#)

¹⁵¹ The number of years required depend on the status of residency. Beneficiaries of international protection fall under the category that requires five years.

102. ECRI recommends that the authorities review the legislation in light of the relevant provisions of the European Convention on Nationality (ETS No. 166) and sign and ratify this Council of Europe's legal instrument. In the meantime, the relevant authorities should ensure that decisions about naturalisation are always sufficiently reasoned.¹⁵²

Family reunification

103. In 2014, amendments to the 2000 Refugee Law removed the right to family reunification from beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, thus it only remains possible for recognised refugees. The given justification was, incorrectly, that the 2003 EU Family Reunification Directive excludes beneficiaries of subsidiary protection from the scope of its application. Only in extremely rare and exceptional cases have family reunification been granted to such beneficiaries and then only on humanitarian grounds. In 2019, 2020 and 2021, no such cases were identified.¹⁵³

104. ECRI recommends that the Government initiate amendments to the Refugee Law to make persons benefitting from subsidiary protection eligible for family reunification.

B. Roma

105. Based on the 1960 Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus, Roma living in the Republic are considered to be citizens as members of the Turkish Community.¹⁵⁴ The Roma population is estimated to range between 650 and 1 250 people, amounting to a mere 0,11 % of the population.¹⁵⁵ As the Government does not recognise Roma as a distinct community, official statistics only provide figures for the broader category of "Turkish speakers". The most recent population census took place in October 2021. However, its results have not been made public at the time of the visit. It included Cypriot Roma as one possible answer to the question on belonging to any ethnic or religious group.

106. As regards education, school enrolment, attendance, and completion among Roma have increased at all school levels since 2010. However, the rate of early school-leavers among Roma remains high and only few of them attend secondary education, while even fewer complete it. No Roma have entered university education.¹⁵⁶ The high drop-out rates are illustrated by fieldwork research on the situation of Roma residing in the abandoned Turkish settlement of Limassol, using a sample of 52 % of the Roma population in the particular area, i.e., 31 families (156 persons), showed that only five out of 87 children, were enrolled in

¹⁵² In this connection, see AIDA country report 2021 updated, page 148, available at [Cyprus - Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(asylumineurope.org\)](https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/cyprus)

¹⁵³ In April 2019, the Commissioner for the Rights of the Child issued a report regarding access to family reunification for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, where the Commissioner concluded that the legislation in Cyprus which imposes a total ban on the right of family reunification to holders of subsidiary protection does not comply with the spirit of Directive 2003/86/EC on family reunification as interpreted by the Commission. Moreover, it is incompatible with the obligations under the ECHR, in particular Articles 8 and 14, as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Commissioner recommends an amendment to the Law, however, there have been no such developments. AIDA country report 2021 updated, page 151, available at [Cyprus - Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(asylumineurope.org\)](https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/cyprus)

¹⁵⁴ The Roma fall within the definition of Article 2 paragraph (2) thereof, which reads: "For the purposes of this Constitution - (2) the Turkish Community comprises all citizens of the Republic who are of Turkish origin and whose mother tongue is Turkish or who share the Turkish cultural traditions or who are Moslems."

¹⁵⁵ Pelekani C & Symeou L. (2018), "Έκθεση παρακολούθησης της κοινωνίας των πολιτών σχετικά με την εφαρμογή των εθνικών στρατηγικών ένταξης των Ρομά" (Civil society monitoring report regarding the implementation of the national Roma inclusion strategies), Roma Civil Monitor, available (in Greek language) at: <https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/3034/rcm-civil-society-monitoring-report-1-cyprus-2017-eprint-fin-cy.pdf>.

¹⁵⁶ SYMEOU, L. (2020). Practice, policy and change in the school education of Roma in Cyprus. In W. Pink (Ed.), Oxford Encyclopedia of School Reform. New York: Oxford University Press.: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1481>

kindergarten and only 30 children were attending primary school. The remaining children had fallen out of the education system.¹⁵⁷

107. ECRI was told that the practice of enrolling children in school based on their residential address is applied rigorously, even if this in certain neighbourhoods results in a high concentration of Roma pupils in the same school. However, according to the Cypriot authorities, there are no schools or classes with Roma children only. It appears that in reality, non-Roma parents try to move their children to other schools if there is a larger concentration of migrants or Roma pupils in their school. ECRI encourages the authorities to review the way in which pupils are admitted to schools to avoid any *de facto* segregation of Roma pupils in certain neighbourhoods.
108. In the Agios Antonios Primary School in Limassol, which the ECRI delegation visited, there is a relative concentration of Cypriot Roma pupils. The school administration implements a programme called "School and Social Inclusion Actions" that includes (a) additional support provided to pupils for language¹⁵⁸ and mathematics; (b) teacher assistants in all classes; (c) additional extra-curricular activities (such as sports and dancing). Moreover, the MOESY has implemented a project targeting Roma parents, which consisted of seminars aimed at presenting the benefits of schooling and the lifelong consequences of not attending school. This was a way to convince the parents to enrol their children in school.¹⁵⁹ Further, parents and guardians of Roma children are offered Greek language lessons free of charge. Roma pupils appear to be receiving considerable empowerment in their learning of Kurbetcha (the language of the Turkish Cypriot Roma) and are offered breakfast and lunch on a daily basis. Significant efforts have also been made to minimise the impact on Roma pupils of the restrictions related to the Covid-19 sanitary crisis. In this respect, the provision of tablets to all Roma pupils involved in online education and the steps taken to ensure that all Roma pupils have Internet connection are commendable practices.
109. According to the Cypriot authorities, some Roma housing is provided to Roma by the Turkish Cypriot Property Management Service of the Ministry of Interior. This is done for humanitarian reasons rather than based in legislation. The housing offered to Roma applicants is either prefabricated, container-like units in remote Roma segregated settlements, or in houses in the Limassol and Paphos districts, belonging to Turkish Cypriots who fled hostilities in 1964-1974. The Ministry of Interior has some budgetary resources for, and does carry out, some repairs.¹⁶⁰ Some of these houses reportedly do not have a functioning electricity and water supply.
110. Cypriot Roma experience high levels of unemployment due to poor knowledge of Greek, a low educational level, and lack of incentives to accept formal employment, such as long distance to workplaces and poor pay.¹⁶¹ The measures taken by the authorities target all socially vulnerable groups and all unemployed Cypriots. Even though public employment services provide some support, including vocational guidance, counselling, and training programmes, it appears that Cypriot Roma are not taking part in these schemes, be that because they are not informed about them or for other reasons.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ Panagiotopoulos C. & Zachariades A. (2016), 'Exploring the unknown aspects of Roma community in Cyprus and the role of social work practice', European Journal of Social Work, DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2016.1188773, published online on 19 June 2016. The abstract is available at www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13691457.2016.1188773

¹⁵⁸ Six periods of Greek and Turkish language respectively per week.

¹⁵⁹ Cyprus Authorities Feedback on ECRI List of questions.

¹⁶⁰ By means of example, Ministry representatives told ECRI 105 000 Euros had been spent on such repairs in 2020.

¹⁶¹ [Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategy in Cyprus: Assessing the progress in four key policy areas of the strategy](#), European Commission Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, 2019.

¹⁶² Ibid.

111. ECRI notes the preparation of the National Roma Strategic Framework 2021-2030. The Framework refers to the social priorities of the authorities for the period 2021-2030, outlining the relevant public sector programmes and setting the national goals and measures for enhancing equality, inclusion and participation of Roma living in areas under the effective control of the Cypriot Government. That means that overall, the general government policy for the promotion of social inclusion of Roma is not specific to Roma.¹⁶³ The Strategic Framework will be updated every five years to accommodate any new issues that will emerge, or sooner if necessary.¹⁶⁴ However, there is neither an action plan linked to the Strategic Framework, nor a separate budget earmarked for financing policy measures specifically targeting Roma.

112. ECRI recommends that a Roma-specific action plan be developed, in connection with the National Roma Strategic Framework 2021-2030, in close consultation with Roma representatives. In order to facilitate effective implementation, it should be funded by a budget earmarked for Roma and Roma mediators should be trained in sufficient number to serve in different policy areas, including education, health, employment and housing.

IV. TOPICS SPECIFIC TO CYPRUS

Civil society organisations supporting groups of concern to ECRI

113. Despite the commendable and indispensable work of many NGOs, especially but not limited to those in support of migrants, their working environment has become more restrictive with legislation introduced in 2017. The stated intention of the legislation is to make NGOs' work more transparent, while increasing their financial accountability. However, it has caused some NGOs to be deregistered, among them KISA, considered to be one of the most active NGOs promoting migrants' human rights and fighting racism and discrimination.¹⁶⁵

114. Several prominent international human rights institutions have expressed their concern about the decreasingly permissive environment such NGOs have to operate in, including the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights¹⁶⁶ and five United Nations Special Rapporteurs.¹⁶⁷

115. ECRI recommends that the authorities ensure that NGOs are always in a position to provide support services to persons of concern to ECRI, including refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, as well as Roma. In this context, the authorities should review the relevant legislation pertaining to the registration of NGOs and make every effort to make available to such NGOs funding for the provision of key services, such as those provided by the MiHub information centres.

¹⁶³ Pelekani, C. & Symeou, L. (2019), Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Cyprus: Assessing the progress in four key policy areas of the strategy. European Commission & Central European University.

¹⁶⁴ National Roma Strategic Framework 2021-2030 of Cyprus. More information available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/cyprus_roma_strategic_framework_final_10.12.2021.docx.

¹⁶⁵ On 14 December 2020, the Ministry of Interior published a list of NGOs, including KISA, a non-governmental organisation that provides support to migrants, asylum seekers, victims and potential victims of human trafficking and which works to combat racial discrimination and xenophobia in Cyprus, which were to be removed from the Register of Associations and Foundations, for not complying with formality requirements. KISA contested the decision on 17 December 2020 by means of an appeal to the General Registrar of Associations. The appeal was rejected on 7 January 2021. KISA then registered another appeal to the Administrative Court, which was rejected on 10 June 2021. In the meantime, KISA has applied and been granted the status of a non-profit association, which allows it to continue functioning, albeit at limited capacity and in an utterly precarious situation between legality and illegality.

¹⁶⁶ [Cypriot authorities should investigate allegations of pushbacks and ill-treatment of migrants, improve reception conditions, and ensure an enabling environment for NGOs - View \(coe.int\)](#)

¹⁶⁷ Joint communication of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants; and the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, available [here](#).

INTERIM FOLLOW-UP RECOMMENDATIONS

The two specific recommendations for which ECRI requests priority implementation from the authorities of Cyprus are the following:

- (§41) ECRI recommends that the authorities prepare a national LGBTI strategy, accompanied by a national action plan, with a sufficient separate budget for its implementation and with enhanced action against intolerance against LGBTI persons among its key elements.
- (§84) ECRI recommends that the Cypriot authorities take immediate action to support child asylum seekers and other migrant children in acquiring the Greek language skills necessary to allow them to follow ordinary primary school classes taught in Greek. Such action should be accompanied by individual skills assessments to determine the most appropriate school grade to place the child in.

A process of interim follow-up for these two recommendations will be conducted by ECRI no later than two years following the publication of this report.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The position of the recommendations in the text of the report is shown in parentheses.

1. (§3) ECRI reiterates its recommendation that the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights be granted the right to initiate and participate ex officio in court proceedings, in line with § 14c of ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 2 on equality bodies to combat racism and intolerance at national level.
2. (§12) ECRI recommends that the relevant authorities take decisive action to secure the effective implementation of the Code of Conduct against Racism and Guide for Managing and Recording Racist Incidents in the field of education, notably by ensuring that the reporting of racist incidents is positively recognised.
3. (§17) ECRI recommends that the authorities take further action to ensure greater LGBTI awareness in the school environment by i) providing initial and in-service training for all teachers and school principals in primary and secondary education with suitable training on SOGI issues and ii) addressing substantial questions on SOGI issues in designated textbooks on sexuality education. Furthermore, a firm message of zero tolerance of LGBTI-phobic attitudes and behaviours should be conveyed to all education professionals interacting with pupils and parents.
4. (§30) In line with §§ 7 and 30 of ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 16 on safeguarding irregularly present migrants from discrimination, ECRI recommends that the authorities change their policies and procedures, and where necessary initiate legislative amendments, in order to decouple labour complaints by migrants, regardless of residence status, from the remit of authorities in charge of immigration control.
5. (§41) ECRI recommends as a matter of priority that the authorities prepare a national LGBTI strategy, accompanied by a national action plan, with a sufficient separate budget for its implementation and with enhanced action against intolerance against LGBTI persons among its key elements.
6. (§49) ECRI recommends that the authorities establish a comprehensive monitoring system for hate speech incidents, involving the police, the prosecution service, the courts, the equality body and relevant civil society organisations, especially those supporting refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, Black persons and LGBTI people. In doing so, the authorities should draw on the positive initiatives aimed at addressing underreporting with the police and take due account of § 3 c) and d) of ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 15 on combating hate speech and § 58 of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers' Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16 on combating hate speech.
7. (§53) ECRI recommends that the authorities step up their efforts in encouraging public figures, in particular high-level officials and religious leaders, to firmly and promptly condemn the use of racist and other forms of hate speech, use counter-speech and alternative speech and promote intergroup understanding, including by expressing solidarity with those targeted by hate speech, in the light of § 4 g) of ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 15 on combating hate speech and § 53 of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16 on combating hate speech.
8. (§65) ECRI recommends that the authorities i) revise the criminal legislation pertaining to hate speech, including remedies available to victims; ii) provide without delay suitable training to police officers, prosecutors and judges on how to make the best use of the existing legal provisions on combating hate speech and hate crime; and iii) develop awareness-raising measures for persons and groups targeted by hate speech to make them aware of their rights and of the possibility to obtain redress through criminal and other legal proceedings, taking due account of the relevant principles and guidelines contained in ECRI's General Policy

Recommendation No. 15 on combating hate speech and in the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16 on combating hate speech.

9. (§76) ECRI recommends that the authorities increase the number of languages and channels in or through which essential information and services related to notably education, health, housing and employment are made available to migrants.
10. (§79) ECRI recommends that legislative or other appropriate measures be taken to prevent the exclusion of non-citizens from sport association membership.
11. (§84) ECRI recommends as a matter of priority that the authorities take immediate action to support child asylum seekers and other migrant children in acquiring the Greek language skills necessary to allow them to follow ordinary primary school classes taught in Greek. Such action should be accompanied by individual skills assessments to determine the most appropriate school grade to place the child in.
12. (§102) ECRI recommends that the authorities review the legislation in light of the relevant provisions of the European Convention on Nationality (ETS No. 166) and sign and ratify this Council of Europe's legal instrument. In the meantime, the relevant authorities should ensure that decisions about naturalisation are always sufficiently reasoned.
13. (§104) ECRI recommends that the Government initiate amendments to the Refugee Law to make persons benefitting from subsidiary protection eligible for family reunification.
14. (§112) ECRI recommends that a Roma-specific action plan be developed, in connection with the National Roma Strategic Framework 2021-2030, in close consultation with Roma representatives. In order to facilitate effective implementation, it should be funded by a budget earmarked for Roma and Roma mediators should be trained in sufficient number to serve in different policy areas, including education, health, employment and housing.
15. (§115) ECRI recommends that the authorities ensure that NGOs are always in a position to provide support services to persons of concern to ECRI, including refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, as well as Roma. In this context, the authorities should review the relevant legislation pertaining to the registration of NGOs and make every effort to make available to such NGOs funding for the provision of key services, such as those provided by the MiHub information centres.

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APPENDIX: GOVERNMENT'S VIEWPOINT

The following appendix does not form part of ECRI's analysis and proposals concerning the situation in Cyprus

ECRI, in accordance with its country-by-country procedure, engaged into confidential dialogue with the authorities of Cyprus on a first draft of the report. A number of the authorities' comments were taken on board and integrated into the report's final version (which, in line with ECRI's standard practice and unless otherwise indicated, could only take into account developments up until 30 June 2022, date of the examination of the first draft).

The authorities also requested that the following viewpoint be reproduced as an appendix to the report.

OMBUDSMAN

SUMMARY (page 5):

“The Ombudsman institution, which is the only equality body in Cyprus, still does not have the competence to initiate or participate in court proceedings on behalf of victims of discrimination or intolerance.”

Note 1:

In spite of the lack of specific procedural rules, dealing with amicus curiae issue, the Supreme Court, established guidelines upon its jurisprudence on how a person/Institution, acting as an expert for a specific subject matter, such the Attorney General of the Republic, or the Commissioner for Administration and Protection of Human Rights, as Equality Body can be a part of the trial, after the submission of a relevant application before the Competent Court.

The above-mentioned following procedure occurs, because of the fact that the Judicial Power has exclusively jurisdiction to regulate the proceedings before it, including the power to ensure the right of representation of any expert on the matter in the dispute, as amicus curiae.

Furthermore, the Court has the discretion to decide whether to allow a person who is not a party to the proceedings to be heard in a judicial proceeding as amicus curiae, provided that the person in question has no interest in the proceedings and cannot be characterised as an interested party in the outcome of the case.

The primary purpose for which the Court may allow such third-party intervention is to enable the third party to assist the Court in a case of legal doubt or legal error.

Even in the case of the Attorney General, as is the case for a Equality Body, there is no provision for his/her own initiative to intervene before the Court, unless the Court itself requests his/her intervention in the course of the proceedings or the Attorney General him/herself submits an application in order to be allowed to intervene provided, however, that the Attorney General ,is not directly involved or has no direct interest in the outcome of the case.

In the same way, when there is a specialised matter relating to Commissioner's mandate as an Equality Body, the Court may, on its own initiative to, request him/her to intervene during the proceedings, or the Commissioner him/herself submits an application in order to intervene as an expert on specific issues.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (pages 7 & 8)

I. EFFECTIVE EQUALITY AND ACCESS TO RIGHTS

A. Equality Bodies

2. [...] However, courts are competent to decide whether to accept third party submissions or interventions, including by the equality body.

3. ECRI reiterates its recommendation that the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights be granted the right to initiate and participate ex officio in court proceedings, in line with § 14c of ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 2 on equality bodies to combat racism and intolerance at national level.

Note 2:

See Note 1

4. [...] ECRI's civil society interlocutors have nevertheless regretted that the equality body predominantly issues recommendations instead of binding decisions. ECRI encourages the equality body to make the best use of its power to issue binding decisions on discrimination and hate speech complaints.

(footnote 3: The Office of the Commissioner made reference to some binding decisions it had issued after ECRI's visit, but none of these concerned groups of concern to ECRI.)

Note 3:

In recent months at least five reports have been submitted to the competent authorities with binding decisions. In all cases, relevant binding decisions were fully implemented after the consultations, and, therefore, no further action was required (e.g. imposition of fines).

Furthermore, given that, under the relevant legal framework that gives the Commissioner the power and competence to act as an Equality Body [Combating of Racism and Other Discrimination (Commissioner) Law of 2004 (L.42(I)/2004)], in his/her Reports as Equality Body, the Commissioner states his/her intention to impose a binding decision, following the consultations, which are also provided for by the legislation, the Commissioner's preliminary decisions are usually implemented and thus there is no need to proceed with imposition of a fine.

Indicatively, the Commissioner have submitted Reports with binding decisions/recommendations that were fully implemented by the concerned Authorities, in the following cases:

- [Report regarding Cyprus' Technological University protocol for the way of conducting courses during the autumn semester of 2021 \(December 16, 2021\).](#)
- [Report regarding gender discrimination in workplace against female non-commissioned officers \(December 17, 2021\).](#)
- [Report regarding the provision of reasonable accommodation to a student with disabilities during Pancyprian Entrance Examinations \(March 21, 2022\).](#)
- [Report regarding gender discrimination in workplace against female non-commissioned officers \(September 12, 2022\)](#)
- [Report on discriminatory treatment of retired regular members of the Cyprus Union of Journalists due to the deprivation of the right to vote \(November 18, 2022\)](#)
- *Commissioner's recommendations in a case concerning various verbal insults to a person of different ethnic origin, were implemented. Specifically, Police persecuted the perpetrators were persecuted under the Law which provides for "combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law". Additionally, the Police referred the case to the Attorney General of the Republic, who initiated criminal proceedings for the specific racist incident and the Court imposed the sentence of imprisonment (with suspension) on those involved.*
- *Commissioner's recommendations in a case concerning assaults with racist motives to migrants who worked in businesses that deliver food at homes, were implemented. Specifically, Police investigated the incidents and are awaiting instructions from the Legal Service on how to handle them, as the offenders were minors. Further, to prevent delinquency, the Police have increased patrols in the area and will proceed with the preparation of audio-visual material to raise awareness on such issues, as well as an information triptych in different languages to encourage persons belonging to vulnerable groups to make complaints.*
- *Commissioner's recommendations in a case concerning a man violently attacking and beating an African woman holding a baby in her arms, were implemented. Specifically, the suspect in the racist incident was arrested and the case is now pending before Court.*
- *Commissioner's recommendations in a case concerning racist verbal attacks to a footballer by opponent footballers, as well as other persons on and off the field, based on his color and racial origin, were implemented. Specifically, the Police appealed to the Attorney General of the of the Republic, who filed a criminal case in the Court for the specific racist incident.*
- *Commissioner submitted a systematic Report regarding online hate speech that promotes racism and xenophobia and recommended that specific measures should be taken to address the issue. The relevant recommendations of the Commissioner have already been implemented, e.g. the Police issued circulars on issues of preventing and*

combating racism and discrimination, is about to issue a new Police Ordinance to define the management of anti-discrimination issues, has been committed to participate in the Working Group on Hate Crimes undertaken by the Commissioner in collaboration with ODIHR-OSCE, has set up a Sub-Directorate for Cybercrime to combat offences committed online, will upgrade the training provided to its members on how to investigate such incidents, etc.

5. [...] **In practice, however, the division of tasks between the different mandates and thus entities of the Commissioner's Office appears blurred, with staff often assigned to carry out specific tasks across the lines of the different mandates of the institution. The Office of the Commissioner has justified this practice by an insufficient amount of complaints in some policy areas to justify staff dealing exclusively with those. ECRI nonetheless considers that the staffing levels and competences of the Office staff need to be reviewed in order to determine whether sufficient staff are assigned to equality body functions and whether any support/litigation and decision-making functions are carried out by clearly distinct staff or units. Moreover, the relevant staff of the Office should receive appropriate training in the area of combating discrimination and hate speech. If necessary, Council of Europe support may be sought.**

Note 4:

Based on the organizational chart of Commissioner's Institution, for all the mandates of the Commissioner, there is a supervisor/responsible/head (Officer A, Senior Officer or First Officer) under whose supervision there is a certain number of Officers. Some of these Officers are involved in more than one fields, due to the small amount of complaints received in some fields so they don't work exclusively under one competence.

Additionally, and depending on the type of discrimination that arises in each case that comes before the Commissioner, its handling is assigned on, to an Officer who has the appropriate knowledge and expertise for the specific issue and belongs to the team that working on discrimination issues.

As regards to the provision of training in issues relating to combat discrimination and hate speech, it is noted that Officers of Commissioner's Office who deal with issues of the Equality Body, systematically participate in relevant seminars/trainings/meetings organized for this purpose by international bodies, such as Equinet, FRA etc. and are also members of relevant working groups on the subject.

Additionally, in 2021, in cooperation with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Commissioner launched a joint initiative to explore the possibilities that exist for the development and promotion of interagency co-operation between competent public authorities and civil society bodies, in order to more effectively address hate crimes in Cyprus. In the framework of this cooperation, a Working Group has been set up, with the responsibility to define and promote specific actions that will strengthen and improve the national framework which deals with racist crimes and support of the victims.

Furthermore, the Commissioner, under her mandate as a NHRI, and Equality Body, has been carrying out since 2020 an [information campaign on hatred/hate speech and the freedom of expression](#). The purpose of this campaign is to guide the public as to the concept of hate speech and the freedom of expression, both for the purposes of information and awareness about specific issues.

Among others, a special page was created on the Office's website which gathers the most important interventions made by the Commissioner regarding to issues related to hate speech and the freedom of expression.

Specifically:

- [Own Initiative Intervention regarding the publication and immediate retransmission of videos with offensive content regarding the reputation of third parties](#)

- [Own Initiative Intervention on the occasion of comments by the Metropolitan of Morphou](#)
- [Intervention regarding financing of Product from the Business Innovation Plan and possible violation of the Gender Equality Legislation](#)
- [Public Position regarding the decision of the Municipal Council Sotira for cancellation of the THOC's theatrical performance "Cock"](#)
- [Intervention regarding rhetoric that promotes racism and xenophobia and the specific implications of this rhetoric when it is developed on the internet](#)
- [Ex-officio Intervention regarding the elimination of racist incidents from football and the wider field of sports](#)

Furthermore, in April 2019, and in view of the forthcoming elections to the European Parliament on 26 May, the Commissioner organized [an information campaign on Combating Discrimination and Hate Speech in Election Campaigns](#).

6. [...] ECRI notes that, according to the data provided by the Commissioner's Office, its operational budget has remained relatively stable, with a slight annual increase in absolute terms, except in 2021. ECRI also notes that the budget for the operations of the equality body proper was of € 379,246 in 2020.

Note 5:

Every year, Commissioner's budget is prepared by his/her Institution upon their needs and also upon its strategic plan. The proposed budget is approved as a whole by the Parliament via its submission by the Ministry of Finance. This way, the Commissioner is provided with the necessary financial, technical and human resources to fulfil his/her broad mandate. Following the approval of its budget, the Institution has absolute management and control of the appropriated funds.

The amount included in the budget is every year more than enough to meet the needs of the Institution, since it is prepared by our Institution upon our needs and the strategic plan. For this reason, in the last 10 years (at least), the entire amount included in the approved budget has never been spent, but by the end of each year, part of it remains unused.

Commissioner's Institution's operating budget for 2022 amounted to 2.132.010 euros, compared to 2016 which amounted to 1.823.357 euros.

At the same time, the corresponding budget of the Equality Body has also been increased. Specifically, the Officers dealing with Equality Body issues have increased from 10 to 12 and will be further increased after the recruitment of seven (7) new Officers.

7. According to data submitted to ECRI by the Commissioner's Office, 165 complaints were received in 2021; 65 in 2020; 71 on 2019; 52 in 2018; 57 in 2017 and 35 in 2016. The institution upheld the complaints and issued a recommendation in about one third to more than half of the cases. A significant number of these complaints related to religion and beliefs in 2021. In the light of ECRI's findings in the present report and in order to detect any underreporting, ECRI encourages the Commissioner to conduct inquiries into potential racism, intolerance and discrimination towards various groups, including refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, on the basis of the anti-discrimination legislation.

Note 6:

In all cases of complaints regarding racism, intolerance and discrimination, at which is found that there is discrimination and the competent authorities/services do not ensure its removal during the investigation of the complaints, a relevant report is submitted with specific recommendations and suggestions.

Indicative, many Reports/Interventions have been submitted regarding vulnerable groups of people, such as domestic workers, migrants, asylum seekers, Roma, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, prisoners etc.

However, because in some cases the competent authorities/services involved may remove discrimination against the vulnerable persons who apply to the Commissioner, there is no need to proceed with the submission of a Report about their cases.

Also, some times the relevant complaints submitted to the Commissioner are not justified and/or the claims of the complainants are not true, and therefore the Commissioner does not proceed to submission of a Report.

However, in all cases where the complaints are justified and discriminatory treatment exists, relevant reports are submitted, based on the provisions of the relevant anti-discrimination legislation [Combating of Racism and Other Discrimination (Commissioner) Law of 2004 (L.42(I)/2004)], as well as in the corresponding cases where a discrimination issue is examined by the Commissioner ex-officio.

8. ECRI noted that the annual report of the equality body for the years 2017, 2018 and 2019 were published in a single document only in 2020 and encourages annual reporting.

Note 7:

The Annual Report of the Equality Body was issued uniformly for the years 2017, 2018 and 2019, purely for practical reasons. However, at the same time, Commissioner's Annual Reports that were issued consistently every year, they included separate chapters on the work and actions under all the mandates of the Commissioner, including his/her mandate as an Equality Body.

However, in addition and over and above to the Annual Reports in which separate chapters are included regarding all the mandates of the Commissioner, since 2017 separate Annual/Activity Reports are published for all the mandates of the Commissioner.

Specifically:

- *Annual Report of the Commissioner acting as Equality Body, 2017 - 2018 – 2019*
- *Annual Report for the year 2020, under Commissioner's mandate to act as Equality Body*
- *Action Review 2017 - 2020 for the National Human Rights Institution*
- *Activity Report under Commissioner's mandate as an Independent Mechanism for the Promotion, Protection and Monitoring of the UNCRPD, 2017 - 2018 – 2019*
- *Activity Report for the year 2020, under Commissioner's mandate as an Independent Mechanism for the Promotion, Protection and Monitoring of the UN CRPD*
- *Action Review of National Preventing Mechanism for the years 2018 & 2019*
- *Action Review of National Preventing Mechanism for the year 2020*
- *Action Report 2018 - 2019 - 2020: Forced Returns Monitoring Mechanism*

The Annual Report for the year 2021, as well as separate Annual Reports for the year 2021 for all the mandates of the Commissioner, including a separate Annual Report regarding Commissioner's mandate to act as Equality Body, have been prepared and soon will be submitted to the President of the Republic and then been published.

At the same time, Annual Reports for the year 2022, are under preparation.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS (page 35)

1. (§3) ECRI reiterates its recommendation that the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights be granted the right to initiate and participate ex officio in court proceedings, in line with § 14c of ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 2 on equality bodies to combat racism and intolerance at national level.

Note 8:

See Note 1

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth (MOECSY)

COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS THROUGH THE CURRICULUM FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The “Curriculum for Public Schools of the Republic of Cyprus” (2010), aims to create a democratic school - a common school environment for all children where all children achieve the goals of education and a human school with respect for human dignity and to the right of childhood and youth. According to the Curriculum, "Democratic school" means a school in which all children attend together – independently of any particularity they may have - to prepare for their common future. It also means a school in which no child is excluded from having everything that characterizes an educated person. Unlike the traditional school, which focuses on providing equal opportunities to all children and rejects responsibility for inequality in results, the democratic school is organized in a way that provides all children with the opportunity to achieve all the goals of education, without any discounts on the quantity and quality of educational goods. "Human school" is defined as the school in which no child is excluded, marginalized, stigmatized, despised or is unhappy due to any particularity. It is a school of absolute respect for human dignity and a school in which students have the right and the opportunity not to experience childhood and adolescence exclusively as periods of particularly arduous preparation for adult human life (as in the traditional school) but as the most creative and happy periods of human life. Certain subject matters, such as Health Education contain specific learning objectives related to human rights education.

INCLUSION IN PRE-PRIMARY AND PRIMARY EDUCATION

Education in public schools is focused on the acceptance of difference, tolerance as well as the respect for other cultures, in order to prepare tomorrow’s citizens for living in a multicultural environment. Towards this end, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth (MOECSY) gives great emphasis on ensuring equal access to education for all children living on the island, taking into account that the right to education is safeguarded in the Republic’s Constitution. Free and accessible education is offered to all pupils without prejudice based on gender, abilities, language, color, religion, political beliefs or ethnic background. All necessary measures are taken so that effective access to basic and inclusive education for all is guaranteed. During the period under review, a systematic effort has been made to increase access to education for all children and strengthen the quality of the education provided. Through its three-year strategic plan for the period 2022-2024, the MOECSY is aiming to ensure the provision of learning opportunities to all learners, through the implementation of an educational policy which embodies the values of equality, inclusiveness, creativity and innovation. Our basic goal is to increase access to quality education and provide opportunities for all learners to become successful in their learning, through modernising teaching methods and approaches, designing and implementing modern developmental programmes and creating the infrastructure that can facilitate high quality education. The vision of the MOECSY is to form literate citizens with skills, responsibility, democratic ethos, historical identity as well as respect for diversity.

INCLUSION IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

The right of education for all children is safeguarded by Article 20 of the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus¹. Moreover, the equality of all the children enrolled in schools is guaranteed by the legislation. The new regulations for the operation of public secondary schools that were

¹ Available at [http://www.law.gov.cy/law/lawoffice.nsf/all/2C728033C2E52985C225742B003229FC/\\$file/Constitution%20of%20the%20Republic%20of%20Cyprus.doc](http://www.law.gov.cy/law/lawoffice.nsf/all/2C728033C2E52985C225742B003229FC/$file/Constitution%20of%20the%20Republic%20of%20Cyprus.doc)

issued in February 2017² clearly state that any person or public authority involved in the interpretation or implementation of the regulations is obliged to refrain from “*any discrimination based on race, colour, gender, language, religion, political and other beliefs of the child or his/her parents or guardians, citizenship, ethnic or social origin, economic situation, disability, birth, sexual orientation or any other situation*”. Thus, any discriminatory attitudes against all children are strictly forbidden.

The inclusion of children with special needs is a matter of major policy for the MOECSY in Cyprus, that is in line with current international conventions and philosophical thought. The adoption of this policy has been accompanied by a change in perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes of society towards children with special needs, whether they are in the educational system or in the community.

The policy is expressed within the Special Education Law 113(1) of 1999, the Regulations for the Early Detection of Children with Special Needs 185(1)/2001, and the Regulations for the Training and Education of Children with Special Needs 186(1)/2001. These last two regulate the implementation of the new law as from September 2001.

The legislative framework secures the children’s right to education, regulates the procedures regarding the identification of children with special needs and their placement in the most appropriate setting as well as the facilities and resources needed to be provided in each case.

The MOECSY has been working for three years on a new legislative framework under the umbrella of the Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) of the European Commission in cooperation with the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, in order to make the educational system more inclusive and ensure that mainstream schools are accessible to all pupils. The draft of the new legislation and regulations is under study by the competent authority and will be sent to the Legal Service for approval. The new law will provide better quality education and therefore all pupils regardless of their age, disability, race, language or religion will have equal opportunities to reach their full learning potential along with their peers.

Moreover, the Secondary General Education has undertaken a project for seeking comprehensive strategies and policies to combat the issue of dropouts and student disengagement. The project was also undertaken by Technical Support Instrument (TSI) of the European Commission. After studying thoroughly international and European literature and good practices, the support program considering situational characteristics and the views of many stakeholders in Cyprus and relevant policy measures already in action has ended last April by suggesting a comprehensive and holistic action plan consisting of five interwoven building blocks. The suggested measures were designed to benefit both General Secondary Schools and Vocational Educational Training (VET schools). The measures also provide answers to the existing gap between education and the labour market, and it is designed according to the principles of inclusive education.

The MOECSY has asked for a follow-up TSI support which will focus on the determinants of and barriers for the successful implementation of the proposed policy measures and provide a governance framework and an implementation roadmap. Moreover, the new TSI support will prepare the ground for the necessary legislative changes. The European Commission has agreed to provide this support to Cyprus. The new TSI project will be kicked-off early next year.

ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR ALL

The Strategic Plan of the MOECSY sets as a main goal the “Access to Higher Education for All”. In order to achieve this goal, several actions have been taken place, deriving from either the national laws/policies or the policies of the Institutions of Higher Education (IHE). For example,

² Available at

http://www.moec.gov.cy/dme/nomothesia/mesi/b_peri_leitourgias_dimosion_scholeion_mesis_ekpaidesis_kanonismoi_kdp_60_2_017.pdf, Part 2: 3.-(1) (α)

under the National Law of the Conduct of the Pancyprian Examinations for Entry at the Public Higher Education Institutions of Cyprus and Greece all secondary education graduates are entitled to participate in the Pancyprian (National) Exams, without exclusion. Additionally, a number of candidates from vulnerable groups who pass the Pancyprian Examinations can be admitted to Public Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) based on Special Criteria (including that of disadvantaged socio-economic background), provided that they satisfy the minimum entry requirements already set in the relevant law. Financial support is also provided to students (especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds), in several ways. Indicatively, a 'student grant' can be awarded to undergraduate and graduate students studying at the accredited programmes of study in order to support their studies in Cyprus and/or abroad. The amount of the grant is based on the family income. The 'student allowance' is a targeted need-based grant to cover living expenses, books, rental and computer expenses of undergraduate students based on their socioeconomic status. The grant provider is the Student Welfare Service, established under the MOECSY, which is responsible for both the 'student grant' and the 'student allowance'. At an institutional level, several IHE have set policies to address exclusion and marginalization. For example, the University of Cyprus has established the Office for Diversity, Equality and Inclusivity which aims to create a fair, safe and pleasant environment, where all students and staff members, within and beyond their multiple identities, will be supported, both in their professional and personal development.

SPECIAL EDUCATION REFORM

Special education and training is provided in public schools to children with special needs from the age of three until the completion of their studies. Within the current legal framework, the necessary assistance and support is provided to children with special needs, of all levels of education (Primary, Primary, Secondary and Higher). The aim is the development of children in all areas (social, emotional, educational) and their pre-vocational and vocational training, where possible.

Children with special needs, for whom the District Committees of Special Education and Training decide to provide special education and training or any other facilities, are entitled to free attendance at a public school. Following a decision of the District Committees of Special Education and Training, Special Education and Speech Therapy is provided to children attending ordinary public school (primary or kindergarten) classes, in which the appropriate infrastructure has been created. An Individual Education Program is prepared for each child, adapted to his own educational needs.

The MOECSY has as its primary goal, both the development of human resources, which staffs the various services of Special Education, as well as the information and awareness of inspectors, school principals, class teachers and Special Education teachers regarding basic provisions of the legislation and the obligations of each member of the school unit, towards the children with special needs, who attend their school. This is achieved through in-service conferences and meetings, optional seminars of the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute (CPI), conferences and seminars organized by specialized experts invited from abroad.

The European Agency for Special Education and Inclusive Education is, as it has already been mentioned, currently assisting the MOECSY in the framework of the reform of Special Education in Cyprus. This assistance is provided through the actions of the first and second phases of the EU Structural Change Support Program (SRSP). The Second Phase focused on the completion of the Special Education Reform in Cyprus. The recommendations propose various structures and bodies that are considered a key element for the successful implementation of the new law and the accompanying regulations. The work for the second phase of the reform is currently taking place.

ANTIRACIST POLICY

The MOECSY's antiracist policy «Code of Conduct against Racism & Guide for Managing and Recording Racist Incidents» is being implemented with the support of the CPI since the school year 2014-2015. The antiracist policy was developed based on the Follow-up Report of Cyprus for Recommendation No 20[1] and a recommendation by the Anti-Discrimination Body. The development and implementation of the policy responds to the European Commission's against Racism and Intolerance guideline No 10[2] and is also in line with various international and European conventions that Cyprus has ratified, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child[3], the Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states[4], the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women[5], and the European Social Charter[6].

The policy conceptualizes racism in a broad manner, including all sorts of discrimination. It includes definitions of basic concepts which form the theoretical background (e.g. racism, racist incident, discrimination, stereotypes, diversity, etc.), outlines the responsibilities and commitments, expected by each member of the school community, and provides the steps to be followed by schools for dealing with racist incidents in a practical rubric. It provides schools and teachers with a detailed plan on how to deal with and prevent racist incidents. As the antiracist views diversity as a multidimensional phenomenon, involving various aspects of people's identities, it is expected to contribute to the decrease of bullying and discrimination based on any form of diversity in schools, including religion, beliefs, ethnicity, language, appearance, disability, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

The anti-racist policy includes homophobia and transphobia within the types of racist incidents that may be identified, managed and recorded. Homophobia in the "Code of Conduct against Racism and Guide for Managing and Recording Racist Incidents" is defined as *"The fear, aversion or discrimination against homosexuality or homosexuals. Homophobia may also include hatred, hostility or disapproval of homosexual people and behaviour, which could ultimately lead to the manifestation of intolerance. It may also manifest in a dangerous manner such as through verbal abuse or homophobic hate crimes like assaults, beating and even murders"* and transphobia as *"The aversion, hostility or discrimination against people who may identify with a sex other than that which they were assigned to at birth through e.g. their wardrobe, use of cosmetics, hormone treatment or gender reassignment surgery"*. Based on the antiracist policy of the MOECSY, the steps for managing racist incidents at school (including sexist, homophobic or transphobic) are as follows:

1. The incident is observed by children or teachers and is reported to the teacher responsible for the policy at the school or another teacher who is closer, if necessary.
2. The teacher who is a witness or is the first to be informed about the incident:
 - intervenes to stop it
 - provides immediate support and safety to the victim
 - immediately informs the Responsible Teacher.
3. The Responsible Teacher:
 - confirms that the victim / victims who were the target of the racist incident are safe
 - informs the Director
 - discusses the incident in separate and joint meetings with all the children and teachers involved (victims, perpetrators, spectators)
 - notes the details in the racism report form.

4. The management of the school proceeds to the imposition of the appropriate sanctions based on the provisions of the Operating Regulations of the school. If the persons involved are monitored by an Educational Psychologist, then the process of imposing sanctions is done in collaboration with the Educational Psychology Service.

5. The school, where needed, will cooperate with the Educational Psychology Service for the incident management, which concerns all the children involved, victims / perpetrators / spectators. The cases, known to the Service, will be dealt with by the educational psychologist of the school, in order to manage the situation, serving mainly individual needs of students and at the same time, reducing tensions in the school environment, with targeted interventions. For cases where there was no prior cooperation and there is a need for intervention or evaluation, referrals will be sent to the Service, with an urgent nature, always in consultation with the educational psychologist of the school. Some incidents, which lurk further risk, the educational psychologist of the school will refer to the Department of Mental Health Services for Children and Adolescents - Ministry of Health, for further evaluation and possible intervention by a child psychiatrist. Emergencies can also be referred by the School Counselor, in consultation with the relevant educational psychologist, with a special, joint referral form of the two specialized services of the Ministry. It is also mentioned that some cases are served by Clinical Psychologists and Child Psychiatrists, through the European Program DRASE of the Ministry. All the schools that belong to this institution, are served by these two specialties by purchasing services, in the school area, as further reinforcement and support of the needs of the students.

6. The management of the school informs the Observatory for Violence by sending and inviting the Educational Psychology Service for their own actions and the OAP, if necessary, if the incident is considered very serious or if it is caused by the same person for the umpteenth time.

7. The Responsible Teacher submits electronically aggregated data on the racist incidents at the end of each year.

Since 2018, the CPI continues to organize and facilitate a “School Network for the Support of Antiracist Policy Implementation”, which supports teachers from schools of all levels wishing to participate in the network while their school implements the MOECSY antiracist policy³.

The network for the current school year, 2021-2022, consists of 33 schools of all levels. Several online (due to the pandemic) meetings are conducted each year, aiming to empower and train these teachers in relation to the theoretical and practical aspects of the antiracist policy. Specifically, in relation to the conceptualization of racism in a broad manner, including all sorts of discrimination on a local and global level, the definitions of basic concepts which form the theoretical background (e.g. racism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism, antigypsyism, racist incident, discrimination, stereotypes, diversity, etc.), the responsibilities and commitments, expected by each member of the school community, and the steps to be followed by schools for dealing with racist incidents. The theoretical concept of intersectionality permeates all trainings conducted, as the antiracist policy views diversity as a multidimensional phenomenon, involving various aspects of people’s identities and contributes to the decrease of discrimination based on any form of diversity in schools, including religion, beliefs, ethnicity, language, appearance, disability, gender, sexual orientation, etc. In addition to the trainings, every year, the CPI offers support to the Network schools in the following ways:

³. The antiracist policy «Code of Conduct against Racism & Guide for Managing and Recording Racist Incidents», implemented since 2014, was developed based on the Follow-up Report of Cyprus for Recommendation No 20 and a recommendation by the Anti-Discrimination Body. The development and implementation of the policy responds to the European Commission’s against Racism and Intolerance guideline No 10 and is also in line with various international and European conventions that Cyprus has ratified, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Council of Europe’s Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women, and the European Social Charter.

- Continuous update of website (presentations, FAQs, supportive material etc)
- Support helpline (phone and email)
- Parents information leaflet about the policy in 7 languages (Greek, English, Arabic, Turkish, Russian, Romanian, Bulgarian)
- Focused training opportunities (school based seminars, optional afternoon seminars, network meetings, conferences in collaboration with relevant NGOs and Bodies, e.g. UNHCR, Commissioner for Children’s Rights etc).

Overall, the Network, employing an intersectional approach, identifies and aims to empower teachers and schools in dealing with challenges that relate to the implementation of antiracist policies not only in Cyprus but across the world: the under-reporting of racist incidents, the need for accountability on behalf of organizations and individuals, the development of contextually appropriate pedagogical interventions based on the racisms operating in each context and, the constant awareness of the continually changing and evolving racisms across the globe.

During the school year 2020-2021, 124 out of 475 schools across Cyprus have sent the annual report of racist incidents in June 2021. Out of the 124 schools, 86 did not record any racist incidents, while 38 schools recorded 124 racist incidents:

RACIST INCIDENT BASED ON	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS
AGE	59
ETHNICITY	28
ABILITY	23
COLOUR	13
LANGUAGE	5
GENDER	9
COMMUNITY	9
OTHER CHARACTERISTIC	5
SEXUAL ORIENTATION	5
RELIGION	3
GENDER IDENTITY	3
DISABILITY	3
POLITICAL OR OTHER BELIEFS	1
CITIZENSHIP STATUS	1

The victims and perpetrators were mostly students and, in fewer cases, teachers or other school community members, as the following table shows:

	VICTIMS	PERPETRATORS
STUDENTS	120	135
TEACHERS	9	10
OTHER SCHOOL COMMUNITY MEMBERS	2	4
TOTAL	131	149

Most racist incidents that were recorded took place in the school yard and in the classroom, while fewer took place in the football court and the school corridors. At the same time, fewer racist incidents were recorded having taken place outside the school and in other spaces (eg. online):

SPACE	NUMER OF INCIDENTS
SCHOOL YARD	69
CLASSROOM	32
FOOTBALL COURT	17
CORRIDORS	1
ONLINE	7
OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL	6

Most racist incidents were reported to the teachers responsible for the recording by the victims, as the following table indicates:

REPORTS FROM	NUMBER OF CASES
VICTIM	100
TEACHER WITNESS	43
STUDENT WITNESS	42
STUDENT WHO HEARD ABOUT IT	9
TEACHER WHO HEARD ABOUT IT	9
OTHER INDIVIDUAL	5

Based on the antiracist policy guidelines, the recording and managing of racist incidents is accompanied by consequences, based on the school regulations. The schools which recorded racist incidents, reported the following consequences for students who were involved in racist behaviours:

CONSEQUENCE	NUMBER OF CASES
REMARK	111
COMMUNICATION WITH HOME	78
REFLECTION SHEET	68
DISCUSSION	64
DEPRIVATION OF PARTICIPATION	23
WRITTEN REMARK	18
COMMUNITY SERVICE	10
OTHER	4
COMPENSATION	1

The creation of the school network appears to be the most effective support strategy for schools implementing the policy. The school teams created in the various districts had the opportunity to exchange experiences and views on policy implementation processes and reflect on their role and ways of managing the behaviours of colleagues, children and parents. The support of schools and teachers for the implementation of antiracist policy by the CPI has been multi-dimensional and ongoing throughout the year (eg. educational activities in various contexts and lines of communication).

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR DISABILITY

The National Disability Strategy sets out the vision, values, strategic aspirations and goals of the Republic of Cyprus for the realization of the rights of citizens with disabilities and directs state actors to actions that will add value and further improve its quality. life of people with disabilities. The strategic aspirations and objectives of the MOECSY in the framework of the National Strategy for Disability are:

- Development, training and quality upgrade of the human resources of education
- Modernization of administrative structures of the educational system and school units
- Providing training and upgrading its content, evaluation and effectiveness
- Support and reinforcement of each student, with recognition of diversity
- Early diagnosis of disability, with the operation of appropriate structures and services to which the child will have access
- Early child intervention with services of the required specialties, which will prevent or treat or address the effects of disability and environmental barriers on the child
- Promoting access to education for all
- Promoting actions to remove stereotypes in education against women and girls with disabilities

The three-year National Action Plans for Disability are the main tool for achieving the strategic goals and objectives set with the First National Strategy for Disability 2018-2028 (Decision of the Ministry of Health 19.12.2017). The Third National Disability Action Plan (2021-2023) is now being implemented. The strategies, aspirations, goals and actions of the MOECSY for the third National Action Plan for Disability 2021-2023 respond to the following:

- Articles 1-4, 5, 7, 9, 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

- Recommendations 10, 12, 18, 20, 22, 40, 46, 50 of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities issued on 8.5.2017
- Proposals 8, 17, 37, 38, 39, 49, 58, 138-140, 142, 144, 147, 149, 151 of the Pancyprian Alliance for Disability, Strategic Action Plan for Civil Society Disability, December 2020.

In this context and based on its capabilities in relation to its human resources and budget, the CPI organizes various training activities for teachers in the field of Education for the Disabled, as the institutional body of professional learning of teachers in the MOECSY. The actions of PI in the last 3 years are part of the National Action Plans for Disability, utilizing its existing structures for the training, empowerment and support of teachers and parents. Conferences and Workshops and Specialized Seminars are also organized on the basis of diagnosed needs in collaboration with the Special Education offices of the School Education Directorates.

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR PREVENTING AND ADDRESSING SCHOOL VIOLENCE

The MOECSY has designed and developed the National Strategy for Preventing and addressing School Violence, which has a four-year timeframe of implementation (2018 -2022). According to its role and responsibilities, and based on the aforementioned Strategy, the Cyprus Observatory on School Violence (COSV) of the CPI has developed and implemented actions that aim to prevent and address bullying and violence in schools. COSV provides support to school units for the implementation of actions and programs aimed at improving the school climate, with the ultimate aim of reducing violence in schools. These programs, which are school-based and they have a two-year duration, are the “Conflict Resolution - School Mediation” and the “Recognition and Management of School Bullying”. The COSV supports schools in the implementation of anti-bullying programmes, which deal with recognizing, preventing and combating bullying. With the “Conflict Resolution - School Mediation” schools are encouraged to find effective way of resolving student conflicts as well as alternative way of managing conflict situations at school. During the school year 2019-2020, 64 schools (3 nursery schools, 52 primary schools and 9 secondary schools) received such training and support. Guidelines on how to handle conflicts or bullying were produced and disseminated at the training courses. Also, educational material to assist teachers on how to undertake activities with children to enhance their competences needed for prevention and management of school violence was produced and disseminated. The curriculum of this material includes activities to enhance anger management, team-building, empathy, emotional intelligence, social and communicative skills, tolerance, acceptance of diversity, mediation skills, anti-bullying skills, conflict management etc. It must also be noted that, the MOECSY in the framework of the implementation of the National Strategy for the Prevention and Management of School Violence, in June 2018, announced an Open Tender for services by a researcher to conduct a long-term research on the phenomenon of school violence. The responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the Convention was assigned to the Observatory for Violence at School (COSV), within the terms of its mandate. The project is part of the first section of this National Strategy, which provides for the creation of mechanisms for data collection, coding and analysis and reporting of key outcomes around the phenomenon, extent and forms of violence at school. The Ministry of Culture, through the creation of these mechanisms, seeks to monitor the phenomenon of violence at school, identify needs and evaluate the effectiveness of existing interventions / programs in order to make research-based decisions and, in general, to formulate effective policy. This research is the first step in the effort to reduce violence in the Cypriot population and is the first to be addressed to all schools in Cyprus. It will be completed in four (4) school years, from the date of signing the Contract and includes data collection for three (3) consecutive years (2020-2023) from all Public and Private schools in Cyprus, of all levels (Pre-primary, Primary, Secondary General, Secondary technical and Vocational. Moreover, the COSV collects data concerning good practices for the prevention of violence in schools, it evaluates these practices and it organizes an annual conference where the best practices are awarded, thus receiving visibility and outreach. Finally, COSV collaborates with other stakeholders involved in preventing and responding to school violence. In addition, COSV participates as a partner in the following European projects:

- Erasmus+ KA3 project entitled “SeBI: Securing the Best Interest of the Child in Educational School Administration” (November 2019 – November 2022). The SEBI project, aims at providing valuable advice and suggestions which can be adopted across Europe regarding the assuring of the best interest of the child in Educational School Administration. It particularly aims to safeguard the best interests of children with migrant background.
- Erasmus+ KA3 project entitled “SAFER: SociAl competences and FundamEntal Rights for preventing bullying (including on-line bullying)” (1/12/20 – 30/11/23). This project aims to experiment the innovative method of “Whole School & Community Approach” in preventing and combating bullying.
- Erasmus+ KA2 project entitled “CICADA: Children’s life quality: participation, recreation and play” (October 2019 – October 2021). This project aims to map children’s and young people’s quality of life and to inform policy about existing and emerging good practices, challenges and opportunities across the partner countries.

GENDER EQUALITY

The MOECSY is focused on ensuring equal opportunities in education for all genders on a non-discriminatory basis at all levels of education. The Ministry has formed an Interdepartmental Committee with representatives from all its departments and services. This Committee oversees and coordinates all gender equality issues related to actions taken. The work of the Committee focuses on the development of an Action Plan, every three years, which promotes gender equality which is targeting to the inclusion of gender equality in matters related to the structures of the educational system and to the teacher in-service training. Examples of the implementation of the action plan are given below:

- Training of teachers and parents on issues related to gender, through school-based training seminars, training programmes and conferences (CPI).
- Creative writing – Short story Competition regarding gender equality and mental empowerment during the pandemic of COVID-19 (school year 2020-2021)
- CPI website dedicated to Gender Equality with useful information, bibliography and teaching material for promoting equal opportunities of both genders and gender mainstreaming in the educational process.

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION THROUGH THE HEALTH EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The MOECSY invests into the task of promoting human rights education through the cross-curriculum and extra-curriculum dimensions. Active citizenship education is integrated into all subjects, is reinforced with teacher training and assessed through the work of the inspectors. The Health Education Curriculum and learning objectives include clearly defined success indicators related to human rights and further strengthen capacity building for human rights. The MOECSY implements human rights, antiracist and intercultural education through the Health Education Curriculum (HEC) since 2011. The HEC and the learning objectives include clearly defined success indicators related to issues concerning human rights education. More particularly, the success indicators of HEC include indicators associated with intimidating behavior (such as ... “perceive intimidating behavior, to recognize and resist this”, “to propose solutions for addressing the phenomenon of bullying in the school”) violence (such as “distinguish the negative consequence arising from any form of exclusion or discrimination”, “to distinguish forms of violence, physical, sexual, psychological, socioeconomic”) social identities/gender development (such as “recognizing factors that affect the development of social gender”). Additionally, the curriculum includes success indicators relating to respect for diversity (e.g. "To identify and judge the existence of stereotypes in the immediate and wider surroundings", "To engage in acts of respect for diversity ", "To highlight the positive effects of diversity in the classroom, in the family and in their community”, “critically analyze diversity in sexual orientation”). The success indicators included in HEC relate to human rights and taking action for peaceful coexistence (e.g. "To suggest and to manifest behaviors that show respect for the rights of others at school", "To describe the rights of the child, such as those contained in the Convention on the rights of the child of the UN" and "To propose and implement actions that contribute to defending the rights of the child in school and community”, "To recommend and to engage in acts or actions that promote healthy coexistence/symbiosis of people at school and in the community»).

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

The underlying philosophy of all subjects of the curriculum in secondary schools gives emphasis, amongst others, in raising awareness against racism and intolerance and in promoting the respect of human rights. More specifically, the Home Economics, Health Education curriculum has been established, taking into consideration, the development of healthy citizenship in a modern multicultural society, the raising awareness of racism and intolerance, the respect of human rights, the environmental protection and sustainable development. The content of Home Economics (Gymnasium and Lyceum) is analyzed in four fields, each one consists of different modules. Two of the four fields which analyze and emphasize the development of the above are:

- The creation and improvement of social self
- Creating an active citizen

Students taking the Home Economics course (obligatory module in Gymnasium, optional core module in Lyceum) have the opportunity not only to develop communication skills but also to emphasize in understanding the right to live in a multicultural society and to respect other people's boundaries. Through the modules of Healthy Relationships and Sexual and Reproductive Health, students have the ability to discuss about human rights in depth and to become familiar with all the aspects of a person's right in life.

The new regulations for the operation of public secondary schools that were issued in February 2017 strictly forbid any discriminatory attitudes against refugee and migrant children.

The creation of a sensitization culture against racism and intolerance and the promotion of equality and respect is also an integral part of the Curricula of various subjects in Secondary Education (e.g. History, Literature, Modern Greek Language, Religious Education).

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Although the Department of Higher Education of MOECSY is not involved in the design of the curriculum of the programmes of studies offered by the IHE, a recent mapping of the courses on human rights offered and the available personnel with expertise in human rights education (undertaken by the Department of Higher Education in the context of the activities of the Anti-corruption Committee of MOECSY) shows that the Institutions of Higher Education offer specific courses/programmes for human rights. Also, they have personnel with expertise in related subjects.

GUIDE TO PREVENTING AND CONTROLLING HOMOPHOBIC AND TRANSPHOVIC BULLYING IN EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NETWORK FOR THE PREVENTION AND COMBATING OF HOMOPHOBIC AND TRANSPHOVIC BULLYING IN EDUCATION

The CPI participates in the Network for the Prevention and Combating of Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying in Education, which is part of the activities of the HOMBAT Project mentioned above. In this context, the Teacher's Guide to Responding to Homophobia and Transphobia in Education was developed, which is posted on the website of the CPI. The Guide was published with the support of the "Network for the Prevention and Combating of Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying in Education", at the initiative of the European Program "HOMBAT: Combating HOMophoBic and Transphobic bullying in schools". The Network consists of the following bodies and organizations: Observatory for Violence at School, CPI, Counseling and Vocational Education Service and Home Economics Inspection Office of the MOECSY, Office of the Commissioner for Administration and Protection of Human Rights, Office of the Commissioner for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, Cyprus Youth Organization, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Academic Staff of the University of Nicosia, Frederick University of Cyprus in Educational Technology and Research Center CARDET. The purpose of the Guide developed is to inform and sensitize the School

Administrations, the teachers of all levels and specialties, the Inspectors, the Educational Psychologists, the Social Welfare Services Officers who work with schools, health visitors and in general all individuals and organizations working with / for children in education, on the prevention and effective management of homophobia and transphobia in education.

SEXUALITY EDUCATION

In terms of prevention of homophobia within the school, the MOECSY continues to implement sexuality education based on World Health Organisation guidelines⁴, through the implementation of the Health Education Curriculum. The topics that are related to sexuality education are mostly included in the thematic unit "*Family Planning, Sexual and Reproductive Health*". The unit includes topics that are related to a holistic understanding of sexual and reproductive health, such as the national and European legal framework, stereotypes, domestic and other forms of violence, risky sexual behaviour, homophobia, the role of religion and media etc. These topics are approached in relation to the role of peer pressure, life values, gender stereotypes, self-confidence, safety, human rights and responsibilities and substance abuse. This unit is not approached independently but is offered to draw links with other Health Education Curriculum thematic units as well as other subjects, in order to ensure the holistic negotiation of sexual health issues. Therefore, pupils have the opportunity to understand that sexuality and sexual behaviours are related to their lives in general, the lives of others and the so society as a whole⁵. The Health Education Curriculum does not agree or disagree with the ideas expressed in the media or by religion, as the aim is to enable pupils to critically discuss the potential roles of the media or religion in the way people think or behave. It therefore, provides a platform through which homophobia may be identified and prevented.

Sexuality education, as included in Health Education, may contribute to the prevention and dealing of social problems such as sexual violence, bullying, unwanted pregnancies in teenagers, homophobia, risky sexual behaviours, HIV/AIDS and other STDs, reproduction of gender stereotypes, violence against women, stigmatization and discrimination of marginalized groups such as LGBT students etc. Based on the methodological approach of Health Education, sexuality education is approached in a way that no students, from any background, will feel insulted, excluded or uncomfortable during the lesson. On the contrary, each student is empowered through their own cultural and ethical framework in order to acquire the skills and adopt the attitudes, values and behaviours which enhance their resistance to the early initiation of sexual activities and/or involvement in high risk sexual behaviours.

The learning objectives of sexuality education in the Health Education Curriculum aim to the promotion of critical analysis of the various perspectives on issues of sexuality and not to a moralistic position in favour of against any choice of sexual behaviour. Sexuality education, based on the Health Education Curriculum, does not aim to teach what is 'right' or 'wrong' in relation to family planning and sexual life⁶ - always in the context of international, European and national legal framework and of the International Declaration of Human Rights. The learning objectives are based on the health promotion approach and aim to provide opportunities to students in order to critically explore the various social factors which determine issues of sexuality, and to understand the ways in which society may influence the attitudes, choices and behaviours of a person in relation to sexuality issues.

The CPI continues to support teachers with multiple types of teacher training on the Health Education Curriculum every year. For example, the CPI repeated a series of trainings for primary

⁴ WHO-Europe and Federal Centre for Health Education BZgA, (2010). *Standards for sexuality in Europe. A framework for policy makers, educational and health authorities and specialists*. Cologne: WHO Europe and Federal Centre for Health Education BZgA

⁵ Ioannou, Kouta, Constantinidou, Ellina, (2014), Sexuality Education as a Collective Responsibility: Health Education Curriculum in Cyprus, *Sex Education Journal*.

⁶ Ioannou, Kouta, Andreou, (2015), "Cyprus Health Education Curriculum: from 'victim blaming to empowerment'", *Health Education*, Vol. 115 Iss ¾.

education teachers for the school year 2020-2021 on teaching sexuality education through the implementation of the Health Education curriculum. A total of 90 teachers participated in a total of three training seminars based on the sexuality education handbook for primary education “Life journey”. They were also informed of the policy regarding the prevention, recognition and dealing of child sexual abuse. The teachers were committed to implement the sexuality education activities in their classrooms and participated in a reflection process during the final meetings. Due to the pandemic restrictions, the trainings were conducted online.

MINORITY GROUPS OF CITIZENS OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

The term minority designates the following minority groups of citizens of the Republic of Cyprus, that is the Armenian, Maronite and Latin (Roman Catholic) religious groups composed of citizens of the Republic of Cyprus, who at the time of establishment of the Republic in 1960 opted in accordance with its Constitution to be part of the Greek Cypriot Community (Article 2, paragraph 3 of the Constitution) (hereinafter "*the religious groups*"). Children belonging to these religious groups can attend their respective minority schools.

The MOECSY, in close consultation with the Representatives of the recognized religious groups, the Armenians, the Maronites and the Latins, is promoting several measures to support an equal footing, of the pupils that belong in the religious groups in the school system.

The educational needs of the Armenians and the Maronites are supported mainly through the operation of the Armenian Nareg Schools and Agios Maronas Primary School that are fully subsidized by the MOEC. Furthermore, the Armenian and Maronite School Boards are also financed and the MOEC subsidizes the transportation of Maronite children to Agios Maronas Primary School.

The Armenian language, history, geography and religion are taught in all the Nareg Schools. Moreover, the Nareg schools promote the Armenian identity in extra-curricular activities such as the offering of Armenian dance and music lessons. The Armenian language is also taught in the University of Cyprus and the Adult Education Centres, on demand. Additionally, the MOEC is funding the operation of the NANOR Armenian Childcare Centre.

Agios Maronas Primary School operates as an optional all-day school. The curricula that are implemented in the school are enriched with issues associated with Maronites' history, religion and geography and the process to be further enriched is currently under way. Moreover, the teaching of Cypriot Maronite Arabic (CMA) is taught as an option during the afternoon timetable. CMA is also taught in the Adult Education Centres and the Annual Summer Language Camp for young Maronites in the village of Kormakitis. Additionally, with the initiative of the Maronites, CMA was taught to a group of children on a weekly basis, from 2017 until today.

The MOECSY supports the organization of training seminars for teachers of the Armenian language and CMA, as well as the rest of the staff of the Armenian and Maronite schools. Additionally, the MOECSY subsidizes the purchase and production of books and teaching material for the educational needs of the members belonging to the religious groups.

Regarding the children belonging to the religious groups that choose to attend private schools, the MOECSY subsidizes their tuition fees. The subsidization is significantly higher for Maronite and Latin children attending Terra Santa College and St Mary's School, the private schools that are particularly affiliated with these groups.

In addition to the above measures, it should be added that in the framework of the continuous educational reform the curricula for the subjects of History and Religious Education were enriched with units and success indicators regarding the history, culture, language, religion and identity of the religious groups. In the subject of History in particular, the curriculum contains proposed activities for the designing of projects by students and a list of monuments is included for the organization of planned visits by the teachers, thus promoting the better understanding of the history of the religious groups in Cyprus. Additionally, the curriculum specifically mentions

that through the teaching of history students are expected to develop respect for religious and cultural differences.

As far as the implementation of the Action Plan for the protection and revitalization of CMA is concerned, the scientific work carried out by the researchers, in accordance with the decisions of the relevant Committee of Experts, is now at its eighth phase. At this point the main focus of the researchers is the production of teaching material and the organization of training courses for teachers and speakers of the language. Thus, more emphasis is given at this point to the actual use of the language in everyday life, the production of written texts and the increase of its proficient speakers.

Children belonging to the religious groups also attend public schools, where awareness of the historical presence of religious groups in Cyprus is promoted. Thus, the MOECSY ensures that all children belonging to the religious groups are able to preserve their language, identity and culture.

TEACHER TRAININGS IN RELATION TO WORK IN A MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT ON ISSUES OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND DISCRIMINATION

Many measures have been taken in order to train teaching staff to work in a multicultural environment. More specifically, teacher training was provided in order to support and train educational staff in teaching Greek as a Second Language to children with a migrant background and to Turkish-Cypriot Roma Children.

Teacher training occurs:

- during specific seminars that take place at the beginning of the school year,
- during programmed school visits by supportive educational staff,
- during afternoon and/ or morning seminars,
- during conferences,
- during distance learning seminars.

All material from different trainings and guides is available on line at the website of CPI. In addition, a Moodle Learning Platform was set up at the CPI website since 2019, in order to support educators continuing training, facilitate networking among them, and help them better utilise existing teaching resources concerning the teaching of Greek as a second language.

The CPI organises more than one hundred seminars, conferences and workshops in collaboration with the other Departments of the Ministry and/or other partners yearly. All teacher professional activities are uploaded on the websites of the MOECSY as well as the CPI Facebook page. The CPI offers teacher trainings for the support of teachers in terms of working in a multicultural environment in the context of professional learning (school-based seminars, the yearly two-day teacher training for primary and secondary school teachers one-day trainings, afternoon seminars, professional learning scheme, newly appointed school leaders trainings). Indicative titles for the period in question are seen below:

- "I do not forget" and Critical Education for peace: New openings;
- Bullying;
- Conflict resolution;
- Cultivating empathy;
- Developing positive home-school relations;
- Empowering new generations: Encouraging and cultivating creativity and critical thinking;

- Human relations and crisis management in the school community: From conflict to respect of diversity;
- Implementing the antiracist policy at our school: Challenges in the management of racist incidents;
- Integration of pupils with migrant biography into the mainstream classroom;
- Management of pupils' problematic behaviors - Preventing and dealing with offensive behavior;
- Overcoming prejudice and racism;
- Promoting gender equality in children of 5th and 6th grade;
- Sexuality education and prevention of abuse incidents;
- Stereotypes, prejudices, racism: Towards an education on the basis of human rights;
- Teaching Greek as a second language;
- What if it was you? An approach for human rights and peace education.

A new continuous teacher professional learning system was approved by the Council of Ministers in 2015. The system, based on teachers' individual needs and the requirements of their schools, was set to better provide for the professional development of teachers leading to a positive impact on pupils' learning outcomes and quality in education. This was followed by assessment by the European Commission's Committee of Experts. The report submitted by the Committee recommended the continuation of the application of teachers' professional learning in schools, which was characterized as a policy of "developmental nature" (IPA/ SRSS (EC), 2017, p. 3)⁷. Based on this, a new decision by the Council of Ministers was adopted in July 2017. The new decision of the Council of Ministers, asserted that in order to improve teacher education, as well as pupils' learning outcomes, all schools at all levels would be required to prepare and implement an Action Plan for teachers' professional learning, as this constitutes an integral part of the wider School Unit Improvement Plan. Finally, it was argued that the aim of the teachers' professional learning policy is to create professional learning communities within the school. The professional learning policy was evaluated as dynamic and developmental, focusing on activities that not only have a practical application but also take into consideration the need for time and support in order to implement and to familiarize with the methodologies, so as to instigate a change in the learning process. Furthermore, a new framework for teachers' evaluation and the evaluation of the school work is currently in progress by the Ministry.

PARTICIPATION IN EUROPEAN PROJECTS

- The MOECSY and the CPI promote participation of students in a project co-funded by Asylum, Immigration and Integration Fund and Cyprus government (in cooperation with CARDET and Innovade) that offers Greek language lessons for non-EU country minors as part of the measures to integrate asylum-seeking, refugee and women and girls from migrant background into the education system. The project is titled "Geia Xara" (<https://www.geiaxara.eu/en/>).
- The CPI also participated in the European project BODI⁸. BODI aimed to: 1) Contribute to the development of education policies and practices on intercultural education, gender education and inclusion of children / parents of minority cultural backgrounds – through our analysis of existing practices and the assessment of the method we develop. 2) Contribute to the development of teachers' competences through new methods for teacher training and new practical tools ready to adapt, concretely:
 - Develop an understanding of cultural differences having an impact on early childhood education, develop tools to solve possible tensions and conflicts
 - Develop skills and creative tools to address issues

⁷ IPA/SRSS (EC) (2017). *A Study of the Teachers' Professional Learning Initiative (TPL): Cyprus Pedagogical Institute (CPI), a Directorate of the Ministry of Education and Culture Final Report*. IPA/SRSS (EC).

⁸ <http://bodi-project.eu/>

of cultural diversity, gender, and health with the children • Offer tools to involve parents (of migrant and non-migrant origin) and engage them in dialogue about sensitive issues such as cultural differences, gender, body, health 3) Contribute to the development of school's capacity to address cultural diversity, to ensure that children of different cultural backgrounds and their parents are not excluded and equip children for participation in an intercultural society tolerant towards gender diversity. Offer tools and strategies to address sensitive issues such as gender.

- The CPI and the Directorate of Primary Education co-organized a training workshop/experiential workshop in collaboration with the European transnational project SAFER: Systematic Approaches for Equality of Gender⁹, funded by the European Commission under the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) program (Nicosia 17 and 21/9/19 and Limassol 24 and 28/9/19). The purpose of the training was to present practices for the prevention of gender and all forms of violence in schools, as well as to inform teachers of their own contribution to the prevention and management of such phenomena. The training focused on the following topics: (a) Gender stereotypes and violence, (b) Character Education, (c) Resilience, and (d) Life Skills. At the end of the training, the participants were expected to be able to implement a variety of classroom techniques and activities to eliminate attitudes and behaviors that stem from gender stereotypes and may turn into incidents of gender-based violence. An important part of the curriculum material focused on techniques derived from the field of Positive Psychology.
- The CPI, under the guidelines of the Council of Europe (CoE), conducted one of the European workshops on piloting the Council of Europe's Descriptors of Competences for Democratic Culture (CDC)¹⁰ on 13th February 2017. The training was conducted based on and adapted for the needs of the Cypriot context, from a training guide provided by the CoE, which gives advice to education professionals on how to organize training for the piloting of the descriptors in the CDC framework. The Council of Europe has been actively promoting human rights and citizenship education for many years, providing comprehensive training programmes, manuals and educational materials both in schools and universities and through youth work and non-formal education. The methods are active and participative. The CDC model is based on four main categories of competence: values; knowledge and critical understanding; attitudes; and skills. Random examples would be valuing other human beings, human dignity and human rights; civic-mindedness; analytical and critical thinking skills; and knowledge and critical understanding of politics, law and human rights.
- The Erasmus + Program, EACEA 33/2014 - Key action 3: Support for policy reform - Initiatives for policy innovation "An innovative toolkit for inclusive decision making policies - iDecide" (2017-2018, <https://www.idecide-project.eu/>) aimed to support policy makers, school principals and teachers in developing inclusive policies and practices in schools. In the application developed in the context of this project, special references are made to people with disabilities or belonging to minorities (eg people with mobility, visual, auditory or other disabilities, people with learning or other difficulties, etc.).

⁹ <http://gendersafer.eu/>

¹⁰ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/competences-for-democratic-culture>

COLLABORATION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS ON ISSUES OF HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

- In terms of antisemitism, the MOECSY organizes educational visits in collaboration with the Vad Yashem International School of Holocaust Studies for teachers and students once a year. For the purposes of the programme, the MOECSY also organizes in Cyprus a special conference for teachers on the pedagogical practices of the Holocaust and a specialized educator gives in-service seminars on the subject both for students and teachers.
- The CPI, in collaboration with the UNHCR Cyprus Office, organised two conference on issues of migration and asylum in education: a) on 25th November 2017, at the University of Nicosia, titled “People on the move: pedagogical tools for cultivating empathy for refugee and migrant children”, and b) on 3rd November 2018, at the CPI, in Nicosia, titled “Refugees and Migrants: Pedagogical Approaches”.
- Since 2017, the CPI and MOECSY have been supporting, under the guidelines of the Bicomunal Technical Committee of Education, the IMAGINE programme¹¹, in collaboration with the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research¹² at the “*Home for Cooperation*”¹³. The programme includes experiential activities related to human rights and anti-racism within the education for a culture of peace. It is under the auspices of the Technical Committee on Education and has been approved by the negotiators of the two communities. Following the successful completion of the activities of the Imagine Education Programme (2017-2019) and the participation of approximately 5000 pupils and 600 teachers from all the communities in Cyprus, the programme team has announced its continuation for the school year 2019-2020 and has enriched it with more activities and meetings between children. During the programme, pupils engage in pedagogical activities in which Greek-Cypriot pupils will come into contact with Turkish-Cypriot pupils of the same age, accompanied by their teachers. Activities are held in the UN controlled area of Ledra Palace during school time. The programme pillars include an anti-racist workshop in schools and contact preparation (before the meeting with pupils from the Turkish Cypriot/Greek Cypriot community). Imagine trainers visit classrooms and engage children in experiential activities discussing issues of stereotyping, discrimination and racism as components of the culture of violence and preparing the conditions for a bi-communal meeting in the “*Home for Cooperation*”. Then the pupils participate in bi-communal activities that take place in three languages (Greek, Turkish, English), with the option of repetition.

EUROPEAN PROGRAM "HOMBAT: COMBATING HOMOPHOBIC AND TRANSPHOBIC BULLYING IN SCHOOLS"

CPI supported the implementation of the European Project "HOMBAT: Combating homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools - Combating homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools"¹⁴. The HOMBAT project aimed to raise awareness about homophobic and transphobic bullying in the school environment and to strengthen the prevention and fight against homophobic and transphobic behaviors, as well as discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation. The program was completed in September 2019, implemented by the Non-Governmental Organization Accept LGBT Cyprus in collaboration with the CARDET Research and Training Center and other partners in Europe (namely the Family and Child Care Center in Greece, the Global Alliance for LGBT Education in the Netherlands and the Diversity Development Group

¹¹ <https://www.ahdr.info/peace-education/58-education-for-a-culture-of-peace-imagine>

¹² <https://www.ahdr.info/>

¹³ <https://www.ahdr.info/project-and-research/45-home-for-cooperation-h4c>

¹⁴ www.hombat.eu

in Lithuania). In support of the program, the CPI supported and participated in the organization of a series of training activities. Specifically, the following actions were carried out:

- A series of workshops for teachers of all levels to combat homophobic and transphobic bullying at school (1-2 March 2019 in Nicosia for 20 people, 6 April 2019 in Larnaca for 16 people)
- Conference at the University of Nicosia (25/5/2019 for 34 people).

POLICY FOR THE SMOOTH INTEGRATION OF PUPILS WITH MIGRANT BACKGROUND AND PEER COUNSELLING BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Pupils with migrant and refugee background residing in the Republic of Cyprus have the right to enrol and receive free education in public schools in Cyprus, at all levels, from pre-school to higher education. Our education system makes no distinction as to race, community, language, colour, religion, political or other beliefs, sexual orientation, or ethnic origin of the pupils. This is safeguarded by Article 20 of the Constitution of Cyprus. All minors entering the country are obliged to register in primary or secondary schools, within three months of their arrival. The school also respects the right of freedom of thought, political or other beliefs and religion.

The MOECSY has developed and implemented an upgraded educational policy aiming at the smooth integration of pupils with migrant background into the educational system of Cyprus, based on the Peer Counselling Report submitted by the EU in 2019. The policy document had been approved by the Minister of Education and Culture in 2016 and the departments of the MOECSY developed a two-year action plan with a variety of targeted actions, through the prism of an intercultural approach, anti-racist education and the methodology of teaching Greek as a second language. The action plan 2016-18 was evaluated and based on this evaluation and the Peer Counselling results and recommendations, the action plan 2020-22 has been submitted to the Minister. The policy focuses on the revision of terms and definitions, mapping-out of the migrant population, combating racist incidents, preparatory, transition and induction-support phases, utilizing and teaching mother tongues, teaching Greek as a second language, teacher and school leaders training, and cooperation of schools with local authorities to open the school to the community.

The general aim of the policy of integrating pupils with migrant and refugee background into the educational system and consequently to Cypriot society, is to create the conditions which will ensure that all pupils have equal opportunities to access and success in education. Based on the above, the right to education is guaranteed for all without exception.

The Interdepartmental Committee of the MOECSY has published a [Policy Paper](#) on the Integration of pupils with migrant background to the Cyprus Educational System in 2016. Based on this the Committee develops adequate action plans for its implementation (Action Plan 2016-2018, Action Plan 2019-2022).

The CPI has published Reception and Integration Guidelines for [Primary](#) and [Secondary](#) Education. They have been distributed to all public schools and are being implemented by teachers wherever necessary.

INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION IN SENCONDARY AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Integration or inclusion strategies exist regarding pupils with special educational and other difficulties enrolled in Secondary and Technical Schools that get special support and provision, based on their individual special needs. The Special Needs programmes running in Secondary and Technical Education are the following:

- Educational Difficulties Programmes
- Special Units for pupils with mental disabilities.
- Programme for pupils with Vision Problem.
- Programme for pupils with Deficit Problem.
- Home schooling Programme.

These programmes are designed to help pupils advance and reinforce their educational and social skills and boost their self-confidence. Pupils are enrolled in these programmes either individually or in groups according to their needs. The educational support provided is based on curriculum subjects that pupils are expected to be examined in at the end of the school year. In order to be able to attend the supporting classes, pupils are exempted from some lessons, such as Ancient Greek or/and a second Foreign Language.

Special Units' pupils cannot be involved in the exam procedures and, therefore, they move to the next class without exams, being awarded only with a Certificate of Attendance. School assistants are employed for pupils with severe educational and other difficulties.

Integration or inclusion strategies exist regarding the integration of children with migrant background. In order to identify student's background knowledge placement tests are given in order to examine the level of knowledge in the Greek language, on Maths, Biology and Physics. Currently, five different "Programmes for the teaching of Greek as a second language" are running in secondary education schools.

1. The intensive programme in transitional classes:

As far as the operation of the intensive programme in transitional classes is concerned, children with a migrant background have the opportunity to attend Greek as a second language courses with elements of History and Culture 14 periods per week. They also attend mathematics, chemistry, physics' and biology for terminology and core knowledge for 5 periods per week. At the same time, they are enrolled in the general classes and attend lessons for 20 periods per week (compulsory attendance of Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, English, Music, Art, Computer Science and Physical Education). Towards this end, the timetable of the school units was modified and these children were exempted from evaluation in Modern Greek, History, Ancient Greek, Religious Studies and French.

2. The programme for the teaching of Greek as a second language:

As far as the operation of the programme for the teaching of Greek as a second language is concerned children with migrant background have the opportunity to attend Greek as a second language for five to eight periods in gymnasia and 4 periods in lyceums and technical schools. The children that participate in this programme have the opportunity to be exempted from Ancient Greek, Religious Studies, French and Core Course History in the lyceums.

3. The Educational Programme for Unaccompanied Minors / Applicants of International Protection in lyceums and technical schools:

As far as the operation of the Educational Programme for Unaccompanied Minors / Applicants of International Protection in lyceums and technical schools is concerned, Unaccompanied Minors or Applicants of International Protection have to the opportunity to attend lessons of Greek as a second language (14 periods per week in the technical schools and 16 in the lyceums), as well as core courses and workshops. These children stay in guesthouses under the protection and guardianship of the Social Welfare Services.

4. The programme for the intensive teaching of Greek as a second language in lyceums:

CITY	TRANSITIONAL CLASSES A1	TRANSITIONAL CLASSES A2	Greek as a second language A1+A2	Unaccompanied Minors / Applicants of International Protection in lyceums and technical schools	intensive teaching of Greek as a second language in lyceums A1+A2	OVERALL
NICOSIA	29	49	29	23	15	145
LIMASOL	50	56	-	30	19	155
LARNAKA / AMMOCHOSTOS	52	44	24	28	12	160
PAFOS	76	57	5	-	8	146
OVERALL	207	206	58	81	54	606

As far as the programme for the intensive teaching of Greek as a second language in lyceums, children with a migrant background that are enrolled in the first grade of upper secondary education have the opportunity to attend intensive lessons of Greek as a second language with elements of history and culture for 15 periods per week, as well as other lessons of general education for the acquisition of core knowledge.

that many schools with children with migrant background participate in the project “School and Social Inclusion Actions”.

5. The programme at the State Institutes for Further Education for Unaccompanied Minors / Applicants of International Protection:

As far as the programme at the State Institutes for Further Education for Unaccompanied Minors / Applicants of International Protection is concerned, unaccompanied Minors/ Applicants of International protection, attend lessons of Greek as a second language and Mathematics to unaccompanied minors in afternoon hours, four times per week. These children stay in guesthouses under the protection and guardianship of the Social Welfare Services.

Integration or inclusion strategies also exist regarding the integration of Turkish-Cypriot Roma Children that are enrolled in Saint Antonios Secondary School: Turkish Cypriot teachers are employed to teach Turkish language 6 periods per week, History and Muslim religion and other social issues and to facilitate the communication between teachers, pupils and parents (explaining official procedures, translating formal papers etc.). The MOECSY employed a bilingual teacher in order to overcome the linguistic barrier arising from the low proficiency of Roma Students in the Greek language. Turkish Cypriot/Roma children attend Greek language lessons 6 periods per week. It is important to stress that Greek is taught as a second language and following the different level of attainment in Greek (Ellinomatheia) a differentiated instruction is employed during the lessons. The teacher also helps students improve academic achievement in other lessons of the curriculum.

LANGUAGE LEARNING LESSONS FOR MIGRANTS

In recent years, various models have been adopted in the Cypriot education system for the linguistic support of pupils with migrant and refugee background:

- Lessons of Greek as a Second Language in Primary Education Schools: Students with migrant background attend lessons of Greek as a Second Language, following official and formative evaluation for a period of two years in specialised classes. Beginning from the current school year 2021-2022 major changes have been implemented aiming an

increased number of hours offered to all students. There are two major schemes applied in Primary Education:

- Schools under the DRASE+ programme: 92 primary schools offer a minimum of 10 hours per week to each group of students
- Other schools: offer a minimum of 5 hours per week to each group of students
- Intensive Learning Programme of Greek as a Second Language in Secondary Education Schools are offered under various schemes:
 - Transitional Classes: In the 24 Gymnasiums and 8 Lyceums with a large number of students with migrant and refugee background, students receive Language instruction for 14 hours per week, plus 5 hours for support in Mathematics and Science for a period of two years.
 - For schools with a small number of migrant students, fewer hours are provided: students receive language instruction for 5-8 hours per week for two years.
 - For unaccompanied minors/applicants for international protection a special programme is implemented in five schools (six lyceums and two technical schools) that includes intensive teaching of the Greek language (14-16 periods per week), as well as other core course subjects and workshops.
 - In the 26 secondary and technical schools participating in the DRASE+ programme, students are supported by the presence of a teacher assistant during regular/common core classes.

★The above mentioned programs are obligatory to all students registered in public schools. Attendance problems are reported in higher education, especially for unaccompanied minors.

In addition to the above, in September 2020, the “Syllabus for Greek as a second language (Pre-primary, Primary, Secondary, Technical and Vocational Education of Cyprus)” has been published and notified to all schools. It is a unified curriculum for all levels of education including indicators for language and academic skills, through a cross-cultural perspective.

- Offering Greek language courses - in the afternoon - from the Adult Education Centres (A.E.C.) and the State Institutes of Further Education (S.I.F.E.) of the MoEC for both minor and adult students
- Offering free Greek language courses through the “Greek Language Program and Mediation Services for Minor Third-Country Nationals” (TCNs) («Μαθαίνω ελληνικά!»). Through this program, primary school students receive after class lessons thought the school year, while secondary education students during the summer.

In primary education around 16% of the pupil population speak Greek as their second language. As of September 2021, the support teaching of the Greek language has been redesigned, following one of the recommendations of the European Commission’s (2019) peer counselling activity. The number of teaching periods for learning the Greek language has considerably been increased in all primary schools, so that pupils learn the language for free at an adequate level and the programme becomes more effective. Before the pandemic, the Adult Education Centres also provided lessons free of charge to pupils with a migrant background for learning the Greek language, during after school hours. The Centers also offer courses to migrant adults to learn the Greek language, as well as courses to Greek and Turkish Cypriot adults to learn the Turkish and Greek languages, respectively.

Regarding school education (primary, secondary, vocational), it should be stressed that second language teaching for migrants is part of a whole-school approach as promoted in the Action Plan of Interdepartmental Committee for the integration of pupils with a migrant background in the Cyprus Educational System.

Some of the IHE offer free language courses for learning Greek to migrants. For example, the School of Modern Greek of the University of Cyprus offers Greek language courses to immigrants residing in Cyprus, Turkish Cypriots, non-Greek speaking residents of Cyprus, and asylum seekers. Civil Refugees / Political Refugees in a Complementary Protection Scheme and Turkish Cypriots are exempted from paying fees. Also, the Examination Service of the Department of Higher Education conducts the Examination for the Certification of Greek Language (Basic Level) for Immigrants. The aim of this examination is the provision of the “Certificate of Success in Basic Knowledge of Greek Language” for immigrants living in Cyprus, according to the Law Amendment for Immigrants and Aliens [N143(I)/2009]. These examinations are conducted twice a year.

The needs of students attending pre-primary schools are addressed through differentiated instruction within the curriculum. In the 52 pre-primary schools participating in the DRASE+ program, this effort is reinforced by the presence of a teacher assistant for 10 hours per week. As part of the “Syllabus for Greek as a second language”, the “Supplementary Progression Framework for Pre-Primary Education” is applied complementing the official syllabus. Kindergarten classrooms are ideal learning environments for pupils with a migrant background at an age when the innate language acquisition mechanism is fully activated. Children learn and socialize not only in interaction with their teachers, but mainly with their peers through play which is the basic method of building their knowledge, spiritual and emotional development. As a result, the language of instruction is sufficiently mastered before entering primary school.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF STUDENTS

In pre-primary and primary education, all pupils are promoted from one class to the other and no grades are given to pupils, therefore there is no data as to their educational attainment.

Education is compulsory in Cyprus till the age of fifteen, for natives as well as immigrants, even not escorted migrant youths. In this sense, all school-age residents are obliged to be registered at public or private schools.

The data of registered immigrant students is as follows:

Upper secondary schools: Registered Male foreign students 14%

Registered Female foreign students 13%

Dropout foreign students: 1 student

Lower secondary schools: Registered Male foreign students 18%

Registered Female foreign students 18%

Dropout foreign students: 14 students

Each Institution of Higher Education keeps data on the number of migrant students enrolled in their programmes of studies. Recently, the Department of Higher Education of MOECSY has extended the administration data collected from the IHE to include variables related to disadvantaged groups. Such data will be available next year.

SUPPORT FOR MIGRANT CHILDREN

All provisions provided to students in all levels of education (e.g. Special Education Needs, Career Counseling and Education Service, Educational Psychology Services) are equally accessible to migrant children.

In all levers of pre-primary and compulsory education, schools in the DRASE+ program (usually with significant number of migrant and refugee students), the teaching process is supported by teacher assistants during common core lessons.

Moreover, the following measures are implemented to further support children:

1. *Interdepartmental Committee for the integration of pupils with a migrant background in the Cyprus Educational System:* After the introduction and the implementation of the new policy for the integration of pupils with a migrant background and for teaching Greek as a second language, an Interdepartmental Committee was established and an action plan is being implemented, in order to achieve the Committee's goals for the integration of pupils.
2. *System for mapping the migrant pupil population:* The Centre of Educational Research and Evaluation (CERE) is operating a common data entry and data processing platform, to create a flexible and easy-to-use system for mapping the pupil population. The data collected for migrant pupils are: parent's country of origin, year of entry in Cyprus, whether pupils speak Greek at an adequate level and whether pupils currently participate in remedial classes (and if yes for how many years) or need to participate in the following school year.
3. *Educational material for teaching Greek as a second language:* Appropriate educational material has been prepared and was sent to schools to help teachers in their teaching.
4. *Teacher trainings:*
 - On intercultural education and teaching Greek as a second language (2019-today): School Support Networks for pre-primary and primary education teachers for the teaching of Greek as a second language.
 - On the implementation of the anti-racist policy (2018-today): School Support Networks (primary and secondary education) for the implementation of the policy.
5. *Curriculum and syllabus for teaching Greek as a second language (2020):* Introduction of a new unified curriculum and syllabus for teaching Greek as a second language, covering all levels of education (pre-primary, primary and secondary).
6. *Validation and distribution of diagnostic tests (2016-today):* A central assessment programme is implemented by the CERE in order to identify Greek language level of pupils with a migrant background for primary education. The CERE distributes Greek language competence tests for the classification of pupils of primary education at levels, based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Pupils are then placed in small groups to attend a specific number of lessons per week.
7. *Tools for continuous assessment in language and other subject skills:* Implementation of tools for continuous assessment of children's with a migrant background Greek language learning (initial, intermediate and final assessment), as well as translated tools for assessing skills in Mathematics.
8. *Programme for migrant parents working in schools as cultural and language mediators (2017-today):* In 2021 the MOECSY continued the implementation of the programme for migrant parents working in schools as cultural and language mediators, funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the Cyprus Government.

Apart from the measures mentioned above, which also apply for secondary education, it should also be stressed that many schools where migrant children are enrolled, participate in the project "School and Social Inclusion Actions" since 2015. The implementation of this project aims to support the population living below the poverty line or being at risk of poverty and social exclusion. It also aims at ensuring social welfare and supporting financially the weaker groups of the population that are particularly affected by the economic crisis, reducing early school leaving, improving learning outcomes and reducing school failure and delinquency. Various measures are implemented which include, among others, the employment of a second/ assistant teacher in order to overcome difficulties during the lesson. Moreover, programmes for reinforcing learning and creativity for pupils (during the morning, afternoon and summer months). In this framework theatre, dance, graffiti, poetry recital, athletic events and other activities are offered to students

both in morning and afternoon hours. One major objective of the project is that participating schools could open their doors to their local communities, in order to develop cooperation and synergy with all stakeholders. In this context, Greek is taught as a second language in afternoon classes for both parents and students. Moreover, experts offered psychological support for both students and parents and training programmes for the staff involved. The project is co-funded by the European Social Fund.

Civil Refugees / Political Refugees in a Complementary Protection Scheme and members of the family of an EU citizen do not pay tuition fees during their undergraduate studies if they study at the Public Universities and Institutions of Higher Education of Cyprus. The tuition fees are covered by the Cyprus Government.

Migrant candidates from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds can apply for admission to Public IHE through the scheme of Admission to Public IHE based on Special Criteria. More specifically, a number of candidates from vulnerable groups (including that of disadvantaged socio-economic background) who pass the Pancyprian Examinations can be admitted to Public IHE, provided that they satisfy the minimum entry requirements already set in the relevant law.

At an institutional level, several IHE provide their migrant students with financial support and scholarships. For example, students with financial difficulties at the University of Cyprus can apply for guidance and assistance at the Social Support Office. Each year a number of migrant students with financial difficulties are financially supported by the Fund of the Student Welfare Association of the University of Cyprus and by other external funds upon the recommendation of the Association. Other provisions include accommodation in the Halls of Residence of the University, as well as free meals.

SUPPORT FOR ROMA CHILDREN

According to the constitution of Cyprus, the Roma community belongs to the Turkish Cypriots community. The total of Turkish Cypriot students registered in the public schools in Cyprus is 19 in Lower secondary schools and 2 in upper secondary schools. No Roma students are registered. No dropouts were registered.

The MOECSY implements various measures to cater for the particular needs of Turkish Cypriot/Roma pupils enrolled in public schools. Among others, the following measures are implemented in Agios Antonios Primary School:

- The school continues the implementation of the programme "*School and Social Inclusion Actions*" that includes the following additional measures: (a) Extra support provided to pupils in language and mathematics; (b) Teacher assistants in all classes; (c) Additional extra-curricular activities (such as sports and dancing) during school hours as well as after school hours.
- Provision of teachers who teach Turkish language and Maths to pupils and facilitate the communication between teachers, pupils and parents (explaining official procedures, translating formal papers etc.).
- The Adult Education Centers continue the provision of the course titled "*History-language-culture*", especially designed for Roma children, where their history and other elements of their cultural heritage are taught free of charge.
- Children are offered free meals, when attending the voluntary all-day school.
- A special project which focused on working with Roma families was implemented. In particular, the seminars were designed to convince parents to enrol their children/daughters in school. The benefits of schooling were emphasised along with the lifelong consequences of not attending school.

- Through the subject of Life and Social skills, which is taught in the 5th and 6th grades, pupils are involved in targeted activities that concern fighting discrimination based on sexual orientation and coping with social stereotypes and racism.
- The school, in cooperation with other schools, has participated in composing/ creating a song about racial discrimination. The song was presented at the High-Level conference on Protection from Racial Discrimination and Related Intolerance which was held on 20 April 2021, in the framework of the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union.
- An in-service programme for the school staff, which concerned training on how to embrace diversity and promote tolerance in their school, was implemented.

Agios Antonios Secondary School in Limassol, a school that has high attendance of Turkish Cypriot/Roma students, took the following actions for their integration during the school years 2016-2020:

- Employment of a Turkish Cypriot teacher who taught Turkish language 6 periods per week, History, Muslim religion and other social issues.
- Employment of a bilingual teacher in order to overcome the linguistic barrier arising from the low proficiency in the Greek language. Turkish Cypriot/Roma children attended Greek language lessons 6 periods per week. It is important to stress that Greek was taught as a second language and following the different level of attainment in Greek (Ellinomatheia) a differentiated instruction was employed during the lessons. The teacher also helped students improve academic achievement in other lessons of the curriculum.
- Active participation of Turkish Cypriot/Roma pupils in various school events (anti-racist events, school conferences, extra curriculum activities).
- Cooking, graffiti, athletic events and other activities, both in morning and afternoon hours, in the framework of the implementation of the programme "School and Social Inclusion Actions".
- Visit to the mosque of the region.
- Provision of access to a computer/ a tablet and internet at home, where storages in personal equipment and internet at home was reported and identified during Covid-19 pandemic.
- Provision of teaching of Greek as a second language, free of charge, in state institute for further education to Parents and Guardians of Roma Children, in order to encourage participation of Cyprus Roma parents and guardians to education.
- Provision of homeschool program to Turkish-Cypriot/ Roma students at a high risk for school failure.
- The MOEC has participated in the National Platform for Roma, coordinated by the Social Welfare Services of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance. As far as the promotion of respect and openness towards diversity is concerned, the creation of a sensitization culture against racism and intolerance and the promotion of equality and respect is an integral part of the Curricula of various subjects (e.g. History, Literature, Modern Greek Language, Religious Education).
- Each school formulates an Action Plan in the beginning of the school year and several of the activities and measures that are included promote inclusion and respect of diversity. Furthermore, schools are encouraged to use the "Code of Conduct Against Racism & Guide for Managing and Reporting Racist Incidents". The Code discusses research and policy which identifies the need for a whole-school 10 antiracist policy, with a broad conceptualization of racism in all forms, in order to include all sorts of discrimination.

There are no "Roma-only" schools and classes in the Cyprus Educational System.

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE AND PUBLIC ORDER

The bill regarding the Legal Gender Recognition was submitted to Cyprus Parliament in September 2022. The bill, which comes as a result of a wide consultation with all governmental and civil society actors, is based on the principles of the Council of Europe mainly a) self-determination b) lack of medical intervention and full depathologisation of transgender person and c) quick, low-cost and transparent process, accessible to all persons. A preliminary discussion of the bill was held in November 2022 at the Parliamentary Committee on Law Affairs and will continue shortly until the discussion of all Articles and the submission of the bill to the plenary of the House.

POLICE

- **As regards recommendation in paragraph 49, concerning the establishment of a comprehensive monitoring system, please be informed of the following:**
 - The Police **collects data** on hate crime incidents and cases investigated by the Police and they are analysed and published annually, upon the end of March (for the previous years). The data are available at the official website of the Cyprus Police. For this purpose, the Police has prepared the Form entitled "**Report of a racist offense or incident with racist motive or other related hate offenses**", which must be completed by the member of the Police receiving the complaint, which concerns any offense / incident with a racist motive. Subsequently, the form is sent to the Liaison Officer of the District Department, in the context of monitoring anti-discrimination issues in the relevant District, who forwards it to the Human Rights and Combating Discrimination Office, for statistical purposes.
 - As regards the collection of data, it is worth noting that a workshop entitled "**Improving the efficiency of the National Mechanisms for collecting and processing data on hate crimes**", took place on 24/02/2022, co-organized by the European Organization FRA (Fundamental Rights Agency), the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Human Rights and Combating Discrimination Office of the Cyprus Police. The aim of the workshop was to identify the gaps in data collection and to improve the procedures / practices followed in Cyprus. It should be noted that the two European Organizations prepared a Report with suggestions / recommendations, which is under study by the Police, in order to take the necessary actions to implement them, leading to structural changes in the collection of data, aiming to the creation of an automated mechanism.
 - The Police participates in the meetings of the **Working Group for Dealing with Hate Crimes** and assists in the initiative undertaken by the Office of the Commissioner for Administration and Protection of Human Rights with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. The active participation of the Police in this Working Group will provide the opportunity to disseminate knowledge and further train / raise awareness of police members in this area. It is worth noting that, the relevant Authorities, participating in the Working Group will sign a Memorandum of Understanding to enhance the inter-agency cooperation on addressing hate crime in Cyprus, with the purpose of establishing and strengthening cooperation in this field.
 - The Police has appointed two (2) members of each District Department, with experience in investigative duties, **as liaison officers** with the Legal Department and the Human Rights and Combating Discrimination Office of the Police. In particular, there are twelve (12) liaison officers, responsible for: coordinating and supervising the investigation of complaints concerning incidents / cases of discrimination, racism and / or racist motives or other related hate crimes, ensuring that the Human Rights and Combating Discrimination Office of the Police is immediately informed about incidents or offenses related to discrimination, collaborating with officials of other relevant Government Services or Non-Governmental Organizations, both to report / record racist incidents and to support victims of such crimes, etc.

- **As regards recommendation in paragraph 65, concerning training of police officer,** please be informed that the Police pays extra attention in the training of police officers on thematics related to Human Rights / Combating Discrimination and developing a culture in line with the respect of human rights. Additionally, police training focuses on harmonizing police culture mentality with the new multicultural environment of the Cyprus society. In this respect, emphasis is given on building and maintaining a positive approach by Police members towards all individuals, regardless of their culture, customs, religion, sexual orientation and place of origin. In particular, on 19/07/2022, a one-day training programme was organized at the Cyprus Police Academy entitled "Professional Approach of Cases of Racism and Discrimination". The training was attended by approximately 18 members of the Police, who investigate cases of a racist nature. The aim of the program was to inform and raise awareness among the participants in handling and investigating racist offenses and hate crimes. In addition, the Cyprus Police is organizing a Conference on 11/10/2022, entitled "The role of members of the Police in a society with respect to diversity". The Conference will be attended by approximately 40 members of the Police, who come into direct contact with citizens / investigate cases. The aim of the Conference is to raise awareness among the participants and to strengthen a culture of respect for equality and diversity. All the Programmes offered during the years 2021-2022 and the scheduled programmes for the year 2023 are attached **as Annex A.**
- **As regards lack of information on victims' rights mentioned in page 15 (paragraph 44),** please be informed of the following:
 - The Police, has prepared a document with **the Rights of Victims of Crime and a Victim Complaint Certificate**, which were distributed to all members of the Police. The document entitled "Rights of Victims of Crime" has been translated into nine (9) languages (Greek, English, Turkish, Arabic, French, Russian Chinese, Bulgarian and Romanian) and has been uploaded on both the official website of the Police, as well as in the internal portal. Furthermore, the document has been translated into "Braille" and has been distributed to the District Departments. Additionally, the document was designed and printed in booklet form, and is given to all victims coming into contact with the Police.
 - The Police has prepared and distributed an additional information booklet entitled **"Rights, Support and Protection of Victims of Gender-Based Violence"**, which was translated into nine (9) languages (Greek, English, Turkish, French, Arabic, Russian, Italian, Czech and Bulgarian). The said material was distributed to all the competent Departments / Offices of the Police. At the same time, it has been uploaded on the internal portal of the Police.
 - The Police has prepared a **"Code of Conduct for the Handling of Victims of Crime"**, which aims in creating a framework within members of the Police will act, when handling victims of crime and guiding them, for the proper performance of their duties.
 - The Police in 2023, is **planning to issue an informational leaflet**, translated in several languages on issues related to hate crime, which will be addressed to persons and groups targeted by hate crime.
- **As regards efforts to tackle the underreporting problem mentioned in page 15 (paragraph 44),** please be informed that further to measures mentioned above the Police has taken the following actions to fight racism / xenophobia:
 - A **questionnaire** was prepared and disseminated, as a useful tool for identifying incidents or offenses related to discrimination, racism or other related hate crimes. The questionnaire is intended to assist members of the Police investigating complaints related to discrimination, racism or other related hate crimes. In particular, members should seek information, through assistive questions to the victim, in order to determine whether the incident or offense had a racist background / motive, so that it can be managed accordingly.

- A **file entitled "Racism / Discrimination"** is uploaded in the internal portal of the Police, which includes all the relevant circular letters of the Chief of Police, as well as the Police Standing Orders on issues related to effective prevention and combating discrimination, racism and xenophobia. The relevant information and guidance material is accessible to all members of the Police.
- Additionally, on the official website of the Police, a file was created entitled **"Racism / Diversity"** in the category Promotional Leaflets for the enlightenment of the public and especially of vulnerable groups.
- The **Police Code of Ethics** was revised taking into consideration, inter alia, the European Police Code of Conduct and the Guide of Conduct and Ethics for Public Servants, which was prepared with the assistance of the Ombudsman. The Police has included the principle of equal treatment, without discrimination in the Code of Police Ethics, in the articles concerning the behavior during the police action, investigation / interrogation, etc. In addition, a specific article was included entitled "Equal treatment" which stipulates that: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Every person should be treated equally, and any discrimination should be avoided. In particular, every member of the Police must refrain from any acts that may cause discrimination, hatred, or violence against persons or groups of persons because of their racial or ethnic origin or religion, as well as from acts that constitute racial discrimination based on community, language, religion, political or other beliefs, national or ethnic origin, color, special needs, age and sexual orientation ". It should be noted that the Code of Ethics was uploaded on the Police Portal and the official website of the Cyprus Police, in Greek and in English. Additionally, it was printed as a booklet and disseminated to all members of the Police. Lastly, the Police Standing Order 1/73 "Police Code of Ethics" has also been amended. It is worth noting that Police Standing Orders are binding for police members.
- **Circular letters** are sent to all the members of the Police concerning human rights and issues relating to discrimination, xenophobia and racism.
- The Cyprus Police has signed a **Memorandum of Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights**. The purpose of the Memorandum is to further improve and develop closer cooperation between the Contracting Parties in this broad field. The Memorandum regulates, among others, issues such as the training of members of the Police and NGOs, the co-organization of information / awareness programs, the management of European and / or other programs, etc.
- The Police has prepared a **handbook, entitled "Human Rights Handbook"**, which includes a separate chapter entitled "Fight against Racism, Xenophobia and Intolerance". The purpose of the manual is to inform and raise awareness of members of the Police in the respect of the human rights of all citizens. The mentioned manual is uploaded on the internal portal of the Police and is expected to be printed, until the end of February 2023.
- The Police established the celebration of **Human Rights Day**, with the organization of Conferences, which focus on thematic sections concerning human rights, fundamental rights and freedoms.

The **Community Police Officers** organize various multicultural events with the cooperation of the relevant Embassies, Non-Governmental Organizations, the Local Authorities, foreign liaison officers, representatives of minorities / communities.

Annex A.

2021

	Programme	Date	Participants
1.	Training Programme for Recruit Special Constables Cohort No 19	09/11/2020-08/01/2021	12
2.	Training Programme for Recruit Police Constables Cohort No 150	07/12/2020-12/02/2021	62
3.	Training Programme for Recruit Police Constables Cohort No 151	22/02-16/04/2021	54
4.	Training Program for Police Officers serving at the detention facilities for prohibited immigrants (MOODLE)	26/05/2021 & 27/05/2021	36 37
5.	Training Program on Cognitive Objects of the New Policing Approach	06-10/09/2021	14
6.	Sergeants' Training Programme No. 113	04/10/2021-26/11/2021	15
7.	Training Programme for members of the Aliens and Immigration Service on border control issues	22/11-10/12/2021	16
8.	Training Program for Police Officers serving at the detention facilities for prohibited immigrants (MOODLE)	16/12/2021	36
9.	Training Program for Police Officers serving at the detention facilities for prohibited immigrants (MOODLE)	17/12/2021	39

*It is worth mentioning that due to the covid-19 pandemic, several training programs were postponed.

2022

	Programme	Date	Participants
10.	Training Programme for Recruit Police Constables, Cohort 153 (University of Cyprus - Semester D)	10/01/2022-22/05/2022	75
11.	Sergeants' Training Programme	24/01/2022-18/03/2022	15
12.	Advanced Crime Investigation (CID) Training Programme	31/01/2022-25/02/2022	17
13.	Training Programme for Inspectors (No.1)	14/02/2022-11/03/2022	58
14.	Training Programme for members of the Aliens and Immigration Service on border control issues	28/02/2022-18/03/2022	16
15.	Antisemitism and Counteraction Seminar	15/03/2022-16/03/2022	32
16.	Training Programme for Chief Inspectors	28/03/2022-22/04/2022	10
17.	Basic Criminal Investigation Course	02/05/2022-03/06/2022	16
18.	Training Programme for Members of Community Policing	10/05/2022-27/05/2022	21
19.	Training Program for Police Officers serving at the detention facilities for prohibited immigrants	06/07/2022-07/07/2022	65
20.	Seminar on Combating Racism and Securing Human Rights	19/07/2022	16
21.	Training Programme for Recruit Police Constables, Cohort 152 (Semesters A, B)	30/08/2021-13/05/2022	72
22.	Training Programme for Recruit Police Constables, Cohort 152+155 (University of Cyprus - Semester D)	02/09/2022-23/12/2022	131
23.	Training Programme for Recruit Special Constables, Cohort 20+21(part)	05/09/2022-11/11/2022	26

*Cyprus Police Academy Training Programmes, that took place in 2022(till September

2022-2023

	Programmes
24.	Seminar on Combating Xenophobia and Racism and Securing Human Rights
25.	Advanced Crime Investigation (CID) Training Programme
26.	Training Programme for Chief Inspectors
27.	Training Programme for Inspectors
28.	Training Programme for members of the Aliens and Immigration Service on border control issues
29.	Sergeants' Training Programmes(3)
30.	Training Programmes for Police Officers serving at the detention facilities for prohibited immigrants
31.	Basic Criminal Investigation Course
32.	Training Programmes for Recruit Police Constables(2)

*Cyprus Police Academy Training Programmes, scheduled to take place in 2022(from September and on) and in 2023

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

- Par.96 – Third country nationals employed in Cyprus are covered by the General Health System ([ΓεΣΥ \(gesy.org.cy\)](http://ΓεΣΥ (gesy.org.cy)))
- Par. 97-98 - All Asylum Seekers, including those staying in Pournara reception center are entitled to free medical care. Asylum Seekers, during the first year from the date of submission of the application for international protection, will be accepted in the Public Hospitals, upon presentation of the document "Confirmation of Submission of an Application for International Protection", issued by the Asylum Service. After that a medical card is issued. The procedure is described in the attached document of the Ministry dated 2/5/2022 ([MINISTRY OF HEALTH - Announcements \(moh.gov.cy\)](#))

DEPUTY MINISTRY OF SOCIAL WELFARE

74. The Cypriot Social Welfare Office as an institution serves as guardian for all children likely to need international protection.¹²⁶ ECRI was told at the time of its visit that there were only two persons serving as guardians from the Cypriot Social Welfare Office for a population of about 250 unaccompanied children.¹²⁷ In June 2022, the number of guardians was increased to four. Children have reportedly had to stay at the Pournara reception centre for up to eight months due to the requirement for an age assessment of older children and because their appointed guardian must be present at all stages of the asylum application procedure. From the time of ECRI's visit onwards, attempts were made to transfer the children in the Pournara camp to more appropriate accommodation, including hotels. However, for various reasons, these attempts failed. ECRI strongly encourages the Cypriot authorities to intensify their efforts to find appropriate accommodation in particular for unaccompanied children and to in any event shorten their stay in the Pournara reception centre to the strictest minimum.

It should be mentioned that the above numbers concern the guardians and unaccompanied minors at the Pournara Center. Currently the total number of unaccompanied minors in the Republic of Cyprus, due to the increasing numbers arriving, is about 1200 unaccompanied minors and the Social Welfare Services are employing 16 Social Services Officers, as guardians. Out of the 1200 unaccompanied minors 900 are placed in a one of the programmes of the Social Welfare Services (i.e. Homes, Foster Care, Semi-Independent Living Programme and Hotel accommodation).

75. While there is no reason to doubt that the staff of the Social Welfare Office does its best to address the challenges faced by asylum seekers, including especially unaccompanied children, the service appears to have a serious lack of sufficient human and other resources to deal with the situation. For that reason, the efforts by civil society actors in support of asylum seekers and other migrants have become all the more indispensable. The orientation and practical services offered to them by, for instance, the MiHub migrant information centres,¹²⁴ which are run by the University of Nicosia and NGOs, with some 90 % of funding from the European Union, have become crucial for migrants, as have those offered by Caritas Cyprus.¹²⁵ ECRI visited one such MiHub centre in Paphos. Orientation services typically concern registration with the Labour Office, access to a health insurance card and accommodation, as well as preparing CVs for the local labour market, all of which, apart from knowledge of procedures, require linguistic skills not possessed by most asylum seekers. Furthermore, ECRI learned from several civil society sources that the information about such services provided by the authorities often contains errors, e.g. phone numbers and opening hours of public services. One further difficulty is that most public services needed by migrants are increasingly only available online and then usually in Greek only, or at best, in English as well.

Since October 2020, through a European co-funded project, the Social Welfare Services have employed forty-two (42) Social Welfare Officers for the handling of asylum seekers, including unaccompanied minors. A number of them have been placed at the Receptions Centers ('Pournara' and 'Kofinou') to cover asylum seekers needs, including identification and monitoring vulnerable people. In May 2021 through the same program, nine (9) Institutional Officers have been placed at the Reception Centre 'Pournara' and are working on 24hours basis, in order to meet the needs of unaccompanied minors.

The SWS re-evaluated staff needs and have already proposed and approved a new project under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) for the employment of additional fifty (50) Social Welfare Officers for the handling of asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors, vulnerable people including potential and identified victims of trafficking and twenty six (26) Institutional Officers. On 1st of June 2022 the staff has been employed and the newly appointed Social Welfare Officers have been trained on issues related to Applicants of International Protection and unaccompanied minors, including training in the Refuges Law 2000-2020 and the procedures of covering Material Reception Conditions and assessment of vulnerable people.

Since 1st of August the first EUAA (European Union Agency for Asylum) team is working at the District Welfare Services in Lakatamia. The team is composed of one (1) information provider

and three (3) interpreters (covering Somali, French/Lingala, French/Arabic) and it provides i) administrative support to the provision of information to applicants of international protection regarding the procedures for Material Reception Conditions, as well as their rights and obligations ii) administrative support to the collection, processing and archiving documents submitted by the applicants, iii) assist with managing arriving groups of applicants contributing to a smooth functioning of the arrival in-processing.

Applications for Material Reception Conditions have been revised and translated into six languages. In addition the SWS have prepared a general information form regarding the Material Reception Conditions, the rights and obligations of the applicants and has been translated into six languages. Interest parties can find all the necessary information about services provided by the SWS at their website and at the District Welfare Offices.

Housing

87. Housing of asylum-seekers is a major problem in Cyprus, 133 where reception centres have been overcrowded, there is a shortage of accommodation for rent, and the rental support for asylum-seekers trying to find accommodation in the private market has not increased since 2013 and is insufficient in relation to current rent levels.¹³⁴ The rental support is much lower than the amounts paid to recipients of the Guaranteed Minimum Income. ECRI encourages the authorities to increase rental support for asylum-seekers.

The Social Welfare Services provide Material Reception Conditions (monthly allowances for their basic needs, for electricity, water supply, petty cash expenses and rent) to asylum seekers who cannot be accommodated at a Reception Centre. High priority is given to vulnerable people and families with children at risk, including arrangements for housing and accommodation.

With effect from June 1st 2019, the Council of Ministers decided to increase the monthly allowance for the material conditions of asylum seekers. Specific criteria for the rent establishments have been introduced, regarding how many people can reside in an establishment, based on the number of rooms. A rent deposit is also provided to asylum seekers.

At the same time, the SWS respond immediately to cases of asylum seekers who are unable to find accommodation and face issues of homelessness. With a Decision dated 7/10/2020, the Council of Ministers approved to cover the living expenses of families of Applicants for International Protection with minor children (regardless of vulnerability) and vulnerable persons, as defined in article 9KG of the Refugee Laws 2000-2020 (e.g. pregnant women, people with disabilities, former children in the care of the Director of SWS), in temporary accommodation (hotels and / or other accommodation) for a period of (1) one to (3) three months, in order to help them, as soon as possible, to find a permanent place of residence in the community.

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