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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	2
DIAGNOSIS OF THE REALITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE: RELEVANT ELEMENTS TO BE HIGHLIGHTED	2
1. <i>Main Characteristics of the young population</i>	2
2. <i>Physical-spatial characterization</i>	3
3. <i>Measures and actions already done in the area aimed at young people</i>	4
ABOUT THIS REPORT	5
OBJECTIVES FOR THE PERIOD 2020-2021	6
ACTION PLAN/PROGRAMMING OF ACTIVITIES	6
1. <i>Strategic Line 1: Urban Ecosystem</i>	6
2. <i>Strategic Line 2: Social and Cultural Environment</i>	7
3. <i>Strategic Line 3: Economic Space</i>	8
4. <i>Monitoring the actions</i>	8
CONCLUSION.....	9

Introduction

The project “Enhancing Capacities of Youth Policy Makers Across Europe”, known as “Youth Capacity” has been designed and developed to address the needs and most importantly to identify any gaps of European youth and of the policy making process for the participating countries.

As the draft 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field acknowledges, youth is an asset for Europe. It is crucial to ensure that young people have the opportunity to develop and educate themselves. As education solely cannot contribute to personal development, practical experience is also a necessary tool to develop and as a result, to be able to assist people to shape the world through effective policy making. However, issues such as the instability and uncertainty of the economic and political landscapes, increased unemployment rates and social exclusion are becoming barriers for young Europeans in terms of personal development. Therefore, although the educational level of European youth has developed throughout the years, the threats have also increased, and several actions are required to ensure that the development of young people, who will become the future policy makers, continues and is effective.

Through the Youth Capacity project, each partner aims to identify the main gaps and deficiencies of its local youth and the extent of inclusion of youth in the policy making process via existing initiatives and the development of related soft skills. The project aims to develop tools to minimise and overcome the gaps that will be identified.

Diagnosis of the reality of young people: relevant elements to be highlighted

1. Main Characteristics of the young population

In Cyprus, the proportion of young people above 15 and below 35 is estimated at approximately 30% of the existing population of Cyprus at the end of 2018 while the vast majority of the youth is between the ages of 25 to 34. While this proportion might sound like a significant percentage as it covers almost one third of the population in Cyprus, it is significant to mention that the rate of young people living in Cyprus has been decreased throughout the years due to the decreasing fertility rate.¹ From the 30% of young people in Cyprus, the young women and men are estimated approximately at 15% each.

However, in regards of the statistics of the youth of several countries within the Europe, it is stated that Cyprus is among the countries that are characterized as the most “youthful nations” in the EU by having more than 24% of young people.² In addition, in the European Union it is stated that there is a

¹ Demographic Statistics, (2018), *Statistical Service of Cyprus*. Available at: [https://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/6C25304C1E70C304C2257833003432B3/\\$file/Demographic_Statistics_Results-2018-EN-291119.pdf?OpenElement](https://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/6C25304C1E70C304C2257833003432B3/$file/Demographic_Statistics_Results-2018-EN-291119.pdf?OpenElement) (Last accessed: 27/02/2020)

² Youth in Europe, (2013), *Eurostat statistics explained*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statisticsexplained/index.php?title=Archive:Youth_in_Europe&oldid=140446 (Last accessed: 27/02/2020)

slight fluctuation in regards to the youth employment (aged 15 to 24) since 2002³ and reaching the percentage of 35.4% in 2008. Meanwhile in Cyprus, the youth employment has decreased from 2010 to 2013 from 33.8% to 23.5%, reaching its lowest rate since 2002. However, since 2013, the youth employment in Cyprus is recovering by reaching the percentage of 31.3% in 2018³.

2. Physical-spatial characterization

For enhancing the personal development of young people, it is vital to provide opportunities for further engagement and inclusion in terms of the society, economy, etc. Those opportunities could be offered to young people by having infrastructures and facilities to them in combination with engagement events, courses, etc. In general, there are several facilities in Cyprus that are offering the chance to young people to undertake a sport or any other habit or even educate themselves as a mean for personal development. The main facilities offered in Cyprus by public or private institutions can be distinguished based on the below categories:

- i. Education: the educational level of the youth in Cyprus can be described as advanced as in 2016 almost 50% of the young population has managed to successfully graduate from higher educational institutions whereas the number of young people leaving in an early age from school is decreasing steady⁴. Therefore, several organisations and facilities are available to the young people in order to educate themselves such as high schools (as a mandatory measure at least until the age of 15), universities (offered as public and private organisations). In addition, the government is offering night classes for adults that have not successfully graduated high school in case they want to attend and is providing funding to young people especially unemployed people to attend certified training courses.
- ii. Culture: Through the existence of Youth Councils in local communities and municipalities in Cyprus within the facilities of the local communities and municipalities, the young people have the opportunity to cultivate their culture in terms of engaging into matters that involved policy making. Additionally, through the Youth Councils young people are organising several events (based on local and national celebrations) within their area for engaging more young people of the area into the concept of cooperation and working for the benefit of the community or the municipality. Furthermore, especially during the summer, several responsible youth bodies in Cyprus are organising youth festivals aiming to promote the inclusion of the youth towards the society and also to promote the volunteerism in general.
- iii. Sports: The young people in Cyprus have now the opportunity to attend several sport lessons and trained themselves physically. Several facilities are available in Cyprus for both men and women in order to promote the active involvement into sports such as football fields, gyms, swimming pools. Additionally, school gym halls are offered for

³ Employment Statistics, (2019), *Eurostat statistics explained*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Employment_statistics (Last accessed: 27/02/2020)

⁴ Εθνική στρατηγική για τη νεολαία (2017), *Οργανισμός Νεολαίας Κύπρου*. Available at: https://onek.org.cy/wp-content/uploads/ONEK_brochure.pdf (Last accessed: 27/02/2020)

organising any kind of sport course offered by the government or privately as well as to organise tournaments.

It is worth to mention that although great emphasis is provided in Cyprus for education, culture and sports, less attention is provided in elements such as sustainability and youth involvement into the political area.

3. Measures and actions already done in the area aimed at young people

Based on the national report of Cyprus of the Intellectual Output 1, created for the Youth Capacity project, currently in Cyprus there are limited initiatives for the young people to take for supporting youth policies. In addition, although some responsible institutions in Cyprus are making efforts to include the young people in the policy making process of Cyprus for developing youth policies, those efforts are not considered as adequate as their efforts are not consistent. In combination with the negative attitude of the vast majority of the young people towards the policy making process in Cyprus, the effective development of youth policies is characterised as difficult. Throughout the years, several policies have been developed that involves all the population including the youth with limited effectiveness due to the lack of focus on youth issues and commitment⁵.

However, the Youth Board of Cyprus, as the main responsible organisation for promoting the youth involvement and involvement as well as addressing youth issues, has taken all the required steps for developing a national strategy for the youth in Cyprus from 2017-2022. This national strategy has been developed in coordination with several institutional bodies in Cyprus with the contribution of approximately 300 young people through questionnaires, focus groups, interviews etc. The aim of this strategy is to promote the rights of the young people (aged from 14 to 25) to the government and other bodies in Cyprus for assisting young people to evolve and reach their full potentials⁴.

Specifically, the objectives set, as they are clearly set in the Youth policies in Cyprus report of 2017⁵, undertaken by the Youth Wiki national description on behalf of the European Commission are:

1. Education & training

- Objective 1: Assurance of quality education for all young people
- Objective 2: Assurance of equal opportunities for education and training for young people

2. Employment & entrepreneurship

- Objective 1: Development, support and promotion of entrepreneurship among young people
- Objective 2: Enhancement of the employability of young people and their integration into the labour market, while ensuring their labour rights

3. Health & well-being

- Objective 1: Equal and uninterrupted access to quality and youth friendly health services
- Objective 2: Promotion of health and well-being and prevention of diseases

⁵ Youth policies in Cyprus, (2017), *Youth Wiki national description*. Available at: <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/sites/youthwiki/files/gdlcyprus.pdf> (Last accessed: 27/02/2020)

4. Participation

- Objective 1: Assurance of youth participation in all decision-making stages for shaping policies that reflect the needs and views of the young people
- Objective 2: Empowerment of youth for active participation in democratic life

5. Voluntary activities

- Objective 1: Development of a volunteering mindset and promotion of voluntary involvement of young people
- Objective 2: Official recognition and validation of the skills acquired through volunteering

6. Social inclusion

- Objective 1: Ensure equality and respect for human rights
- Objective 2: Create a mindset that promotes social inclusion

7. Youth & the world

- Objective 1: Creation and utilization of opportunities for mobility
- Objective 2: Promotion of a universal ,inter-cultural and environmental mindset

8. Creativity & culture

- Objective 1: Creation of conditions for equal access and participation in the arts and culture
- Objective 2: Development of conditions for artistic creation

For each objective as described above, specific priorities are set as actions that need to be taken in order to successfully apply this strategy. Since this strategy is being developed based on the opinion of young people in general without setting further target groups, the actions set are concerning all the young people including people with fewer opportunities⁵. This strategy is distinguished in two phases/ action plans based on the actions set. The main responsibility for monitoring this strategy and its progress while providing annual progress reports lays to the Youth Board of Cyprus⁴. While this strategy is in progress of implementation, no further details regarding its progress are provided so far.

About this report

This report has been developed based on the requirements of the Intellectual Output 2 of the project for the partner in Cyprus, the Cyprus Academy of Local Government. All the information mentioned in this report are based on the results and the best practices from the Intellectual Output 1. This report is part of the Strategy Plan to be developed by the project Youth Capacity and the Italian partner EURO-NET and the main objective is to develop a strategy plan for Youth Inclusion, for:

- Allowing young people to become the main authors of their own lives; support their personal development and their way towards autonomy; strengthen their resilience and provide them with life skills so that they can cope with a changing world;
- Encouraging young people and providing them with the necessary resources so they can become active citizens, solidarity players and positive change inspired on values of the EU and in one European identity;

- Improve the political decisions in all areas, regarding their impact on young people, particularly in employment, education, health and social integration.

The action plan described in this report is carried out based on the available information through the Intellectual Output 1 and the information provided by the Local Action Group of the partner in Cyprus, within the framework of the below strategic lines:

- i. Urban ecosystem;
- ii. Social and cultural environment; and
- iii. Economic Space.

Those strategic lines contain the main elements of Cyprus in order to enhance the personal development of young people and assist them towards becoming more educated and experienced for promoting the effectiveness of policy-making process with the contribution of young people.

Objectives for the period 2020-2021

The objectives of the strategy plan for the period 2020-2021 are to promote the inclusion of the young people in Cyprus towards the decision-making process. As the decision-making involves several areas of interest, it is significant to raise awareness of the young people towards issues that needed to be taken actions in order to overcome modern issues such as the climate change. As the young people in Cyprus tend to have a negative attitude towards policy makers, due to the several crises that the country has faced in the recent years, the trust of the young people needs to be gained through the consistent implementation of the strategic plan. Therefore, the main objectives are:

- i. To develop key competences of young people for assisting young people to successfully be involved in the decision-making process in Cyprus so they can deliver better their work;
- ii. To raise awareness of young people in terms of the various aspects and elements that the decision-making process can be involved in, for obtaining better involvement into the decision-making in Cyprus based on the modern issues, such as the climate change;
- iii. To gain the trust of the young people towards the effectiveness and the significance of being involved in the decision-making of Cyprus by offering measures and actions; and

Action Plan/Programming of Activities

1. Strategic Line 1: Urban Ecosystem

While Cyprus is offering several infrastructures and facilities to young people as a mean to achieve personal development and reach their full potentials, more actions could be undertaken for maintaining that the young people are having a variety of options based on practices that are offered by other countries. Those measures are crucial for making spaces in neighbourhoods and cities for personal and collective development, without exclusions. The actions mentioned below are based on the National Strategy of the Youth in Cyprus 2017-2022⁴ and the actions set:

- i. Environmental Sustainability: The young people need to be educated to invest into sustainable mobility especially nowadays, by taking into consideration the climate change

and the increased level of the emissions. For obtaining the inclusion of the youth into sustainable mobility and consistency into it, measures need to be taken and infrastructures to be adopted for creating the culture of sustainable mobility. For instance, enhance cycling by providing bicycles in the streets of a community and a municipality to be used by young people with the usage of a mobile application. Incentives should be given as well to the young people, especially in neighbourhoods and campus such as free of charge bicycle usage of up to one hour, for developing the sustainability culture of the youth.

2. Strategic Line 2: Social and Cultural Environment

Although measures are already taken in Cyprus regarding the inclusion of the young people into the society, more actions can be taken especially for young people with fewer opportunities to establish links between the citizenship for the improvement of coexistence and social cohesion. The measures to be taken into consideration for enhancing the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities into the social and cultural environment are:

- i. **Education:** Although as described above, Cyprus is making great efforts to educate young people through several courses, high school and universities, more actions can be taken for achieving higher levels of inclusion. For example, education of young people by offering online courses is the next significant step in order to achieve higher level of inclusion of young people with disabilities and fewer opportunities in the Educational sector. This e-learning courses could be applied for the courses implemented inside the school, particularly in times of emergency and for courses to be delivered outside the school. For example, arts or learning foreign languages can be delivered through e-learning and therefore young people with fewer opportunities and disabilities can be benefited by those courses. Through e-learning young people could educate themselves and achieve personal development in a better way and as a result, to improve their educational level and future career by developing several capacities.
- ii. **Equality and diversity:** equality and respect towards the young people should be more enhanced in Cyprus for ensuring that all people are aware of their rights and those rights are respected by people. For achieving this goal, it is important to create a culture of social cohesion for young people. For example, the rights and obligations of young people in terms of the society in Cyprus should be promoted to young people through education and also through workshops. In addition, the responsible body in Cyprus should take measures to prevent violations of the rights of young people in the society and to promote their inclusion by offering funding or other means to encourage workers to invest in young people.
- iii. **Voluntary work and European Participation:** Young people in Cyprus do not actively involve into voluntary work as volunteerism is not really promoted. Volunteerism should be communicated more effectively to young people through education (e.g. organisation of workshops for students at schools and universities for communicating the values of volunteerism and how the young students can become volunteers), or by using social media to create a community of volunteers. In addition, incentives should be provided to young people for motivating them towards volunteerism like providing more working opportunities to volunteers for recruitment or to offer special benefits for the young

workers that are active volunteers. Furthermore, since the European Union is providing several opportunities to young people to become volunteers within Europe, the responsible body in Cyprus and the educational institutions should promote those opportunities to young people for increasing the participation of young Cypriots. At the same time, young volunteers should be invited to share their stories through social media or other means as a way to increase the volunteerism and its positive experience.

3. Strategic Line 3: Economic Space

Another important line to be considered in this strategic plan is the economic aspect that involves the measures to be taken in order to support young people while seeking for a job especially in the aspect of policymaking. The economic crisis and the instability of the working environment in Cyprus, is currently being a great barrier for young people to seek for a job with fair working environment and conditions. Hence, the actions that can be applied within this strategic line based on the current needs of Cyprus are:

- i. Job orientation: Improved job orientation should be provided to young students at an early stage of their education (during high schools) for preparing and guiding them to make the right decision for their future employment. As the young people currently are not actively involved into the policy-making process of the country, an improved job orientation in high schools should communicate the aspects of the policy – making and the opportunities that young people can seized in order to actively involved in the policy-making process of the country. Additionally, the benefits of the policy-making process and the change that young people can bring if they get involved in the policy-making process of Cyprus should also be communicated to the young students as a mean to achieve better job orientation and increase the participation of the youth into the policy-making.
- ii. Support to the creation and maintenance of youth businesses: as the economic crisis in Cyprus caused several instabilities to the working environment and decreased working opportunities to young people, enhanced job orientation and communication should be provided to the youth in terms of the creation of youth businesses. Entrepreneurship is a significant aspect for young people to learn for creating their own future by designing and launching a new business. This methodology can assist young people to develop themselves and become more educated and experienced and as a result, to use their experience for improving the opportunities of young people in the society.
- iii. Favourable working environment: As mentioned before, in the strategic line of social and cultural environment, the working organisations in Cyprus should offer incentives and working opportunities for solely young people especially for young people with fewer opportunities. In the public sector, those opportunities should also be offered by the responsible body of policy making in Cyprus and communicated to young people. By doing this, young people could be encouraged to chase a career and involved into the policy making of the country and as a result, to increase the contribution of the youth into the policy-making process of Cyprus.

4. Monitoring the actions

The actions mentioned above as part of the strategic plan of this report involve the top priorities that need to be considered and apply for the well-being of the youth. However, the effectiveness of the

strategic plan entails the creation of a responsible body or commission to apply the strategic plan and monitor its application. Thus, this commission can set the priorities and the guidelines to other organisations in Cyprus in order to offer greater opportunities to the young people. Moreover, this commission can set the targets that need to be achieved each year for enhancing the involvement of the young people into the society and especially the policy-making. Yearly reports should also be conducted by this commission in regard to the progress of the plan and the future actions to be considered. For the successful operation of this commission, the responsible bodies in Cyprus in terms of the youth and the policy – making should support the actions and the vision of this commission in order to be able to operate and be respected by other organisations in Cyprus.

Last but not least, since the Youth Board in Cyprus has already set the priorities and a national strategy of the youth, this strategy should be combined with the actions set in the strategic plan of this report in order to increase the effectiveness of the personal development of the youth and its inclusion to the policy-making process of Cyprus.

Conclusion

As the young people in Cyprus are seeking greater opportunities in Cyprus in order to educate themselves, work and in general to evolve, the governance and the responsible bodies in Cyprus should consider the young people as an asset for the society. Thus, those assets should be treated in such a way, for achieving development and utilising them for the benefit of the society. As the future of Cyprus lays to the hands of the young people, the youth should be prepared and guided so to be able to become active citizens and effectively participate in the policy-making process.