Education and Training Monitor 2016
Cyprus
Volume 2 of the Education and Training Monitor 2016 includes twenty-eight individual country reports. It builds on the most up-to-date quantitative and qualitative evidence to present and assess the main recent and ongoing policy measures in each EU Member State, with a focus on developments since mid-2015. It therefore complements the existing sources of information which offer descriptions of national education and training systems.

The structure of the country reports is as follows. Section 1 presents a statistical overview of the main education and training indicators. Section 2 briefly identifies the main strengths and challenges of the country’s education and training system. Section 3 looks at expenditure on education, and demographic and skill challenges. Section 4 focuses on early school leaving, early childhood education and care, and basic skills as important areas related to tackling inequalities and promoting inclusion. Section 5 deals with policies to modernise school education, covering, inter alia, the teaching profession and digital and language skills. Section 6 discusses measures to modernise higher education. Finally, section 7 covers vocational education and training, as well as adult learning.

The manuscript was completed on 15 September 2016.
Additional contextual data can be found online (ec.europa.eu/education/monitor)
## 1. Key indicators

### ET 2020 benchmarks

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<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Cyprus 2012</th>
<th>Cyprus 2015</th>
<th>EU average 2012</th>
<th>EU average 2015</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
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<td>Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
<td>54.6%</td>
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<td>Early childhood education and care (ECEC) (from age 4 to starting age of compulsory education)</td>
<td>85.0%</td>
<td>82.6%</td>
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<td>Proportion of 15 year-olds with underachievement in:</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Reading</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
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<td>Maths</td>
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<td>Science</td>
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<td>16.6%</td>
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<td>Employment rate of recent graduates by educational attainment (ISCED 3-8 (total)) (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year)</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
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<td>76.9%</td>
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<td>Adult participation in lifelong learning (age 25-64)</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
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### Other contextual indicators

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
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<th>Cyprus 2015</th>
<th>EU average 2012</th>
<th>EU average 2015</th>
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<td>Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP</td>
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<td>Expenditure on public and private institutions per student in € PPS ISCED 1-2</td>
<td>€9.162</td>
<td>€8.589</td>
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<td>ISCED 3-4</td>
<td>€10.795</td>
<td>€10.188</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISCED 5-8</td>
<td>€10.174</td>
<td>€10.667</td>
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<td>Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
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<td>11.6%</td>
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<td>Native-born</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
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<td>Foreign-born</td>
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<td>62.1%</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
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<td>Native-born</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
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<td>70.8%</td>
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<td>Foreign-born</td>
<td>74.7%</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
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<td>Employment rate of recent graduates by educational attainment (ISCED 3-4 (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year))</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISCED 5-8</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inbound graduates mobility (bachelor)</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inbound graduates mobility (master)</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sources
- Eurostat (see section 9 for more details); OECD (PISA).
- Notes: data refer to weighted EU averages, covering different numbers of Member States depending on the source; b = break in time series, d = definition differs, p = provisional, u = low reliability, 11 = 2011, 13 = 2013, 14 = 2014.
- Further information can be found in the relevant section of Volume 1 (ec.europa.eu/education/monitor).

### Figure 1. Position in relation to strongest (outer ring) and weakest performers (centre)

Source: DG Education and Culture calculations, based on data from Eurostat (LFS 2015) and OECD (PISA 2012).

Note: all scores are set between a maximum (the strongest performers, represented by the outer ring) and a minimum (the weakest performers, represented by the centre of the figure).
2. Highlights

- Cyprus has considerably improved its performance on early school leaving and has maintained a very high rate of tertiary educational attainment.
- It has also initiated a strategic reform of the vocational education and training sector, both at upper-secondary and post-secondary levels. This effort aims to achieve a better balance between that sector and mostly private higher education, which strongly predominates at present.
- However, the persistence of relatively low levels of basic skills and the continued lack of efficiency of public spending in the education system are still major challenges for the country.
- Cyprus has established a new Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in higher education. The question of ensuring proper quality assurance and accreditation of institutions and programmes — and particularly in private colleges — will constitute a test case for Cyprus in the future.

3. Investing in education to address demographic and skill challenges

Cyprus features a relatively high, though visibly decreasing level of general government expenditure on education. It was 6.5 % of GDP in 2013 and 5.8 % in 2014. The share of education spending in total general government expenditure has also been considerably reduced, from 15.7 % in 2013 to 11.8 % in 2014, converging towards the EU-28 average of 10.2 %.

Cyprus exited its protracted economic adjustment programme on 30 March 2016, showing that its fiscal situation is improving again after the crisis that has characterised the last few years. Figure 2 shows changes in education’s share of total public spending in Cyprus and in other present or past economic adjustment programme countries for 2008-2014. The annual expenditure per pupil/student in purchasing power standard (PPS) was at EUR 8 589 for ISCED level 1-2, at EUR 10 187 for ISCED 3-4 and at EUR 10 677 for ISCED 5-8 in 2013. It remained relatively higher than for other countries with a similar level of socio-economic development.

In Cyprus employment rates vary strongly in line with the level of education. For lower qualifications (ISCED 0-2 level) the employment rate was 54.5 % in 2014 and 55.5 % in 2015, only slightly above the EU-28 average. For medium qualifications (ISCED 3-4) the rate was 69.4 % in 2014 and 69.6 % in 2015, this time slightly below the EU average. For higher qualifications (ISCED 5-8) it stood at 79.7 % in 2014 and 80.2 % in 2015, but below the EU-28 average. A major challenge is to address increased unemployment, particularly youth and long-term unemployment. As regards systematic employment forecasting and the identification of skills gaps, the Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA) provides 10-year employment forecasts on a regular basis.

In December 2015 the House of Representatives approved a bill on the student grant, in line with the requirements of the then economic adjustment programme and the Memorandum of Understanding (European Commission 2016). It provides for new eligibility criteria and allows students to apply for all kinds of student welfare through a single application process. According to the new eligibility criteria a student is eligible for grant or allowance if the total value of

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1. Source: Eurostat, General government expenditure by function (COFOG) database.
2. According to national skills forecasts, by 2024 around half of employed people will continue to be in middle-level occupations, while almost 2 in 5 employed persons will be in high-level occupations. Hence, there is a need to develop more vocationally oriented education provision on the island, both at secondary and post-secondary level (Human Resources Development Authority 2016).
3. The MoU said the following: ‘1.32 Ensure a reduction in total outlays for social transfers (…) to be achieved through streamlining and better targeting of child benefits and educational grants, and the abolition of social cohesion benefits provided by welfare services’. 
his/her family property does not exceed the amount of EUR 1 200 000 (in 2013 prices). A student is also eligible for allowance if his/her family annual income does not exceed the amount of EUR 39 000 (EUR 59 000 for families with four or more children). Students who are enrolled in accredited programmes of study in private tertiary education can now also receive an allowance. The number of eligible applicants is therefore set to increase considerably in the near future (European Commission 2016a).

4. Tackling inequalities and promoting inclusion

The early school leaving (ESL) rate decreased significantly from 6.8 % in 2014 to 5.3 % in 2015, well below the EU-28 average of 11.2 % and 11.0 % respectively. However, the gender gap remains significant, with an ESL rate of 7.7 % for boys and 3.2 % for girls in 2015. At the same time the gap has narrowed significantly, from 8.3 pp. in 2014 to 4.5 pp. in 2015, while also getting closer to the EU-28 average difference. For foreign-born students the situation remains quite worrying: their ESL rate is more than five times higher than for native-born students (16.7 % vs 3.1 % in 2015), and still well above the EU-28 average. Nevertheless, this gap is also slightly diminishing from 14.9 pp in 2014 to 13.6 pp in 2015. These results also reflect a particularly weak performance of boys with an immigrant background in the 2012 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

On early childhood education and care Cyprus had a participation rate of 82.6 % in 2014, 11.7 pps. below the EU average of 94.3 %.

As of September 2015 the number of weekly teaching periods increased from 37 to 38 for secondary schools. The need to improve pupils’ language and mathematical skills is emphasised for all levels of school education. There is also provision for the operation of special interest schools, for instance for music, athletics or arts. An intensive programme of Greek language tuition of at least 1 year is provided for foreign pupils at any level of entry into the educational system. New changes are also provided with the modernised Lyceum system which provides for six concrete streams of specialisation (combinations of subjects) and a thorough reorganisation.

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4 Nonetheless, it is worth noting that Cyprus’s results in PISA 2012 were disappointing overall, with very high percentages of low achievers in mathematics, reading, and science.
5 A significant percentage of children below the age of 4 years and 8 months (that is before compulsory education), attend public and private day-care nursery schools. These schools are under the competence of the Social Welfare Services of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance, and therefore these students are not calculated under the ECEC figure.
of the provision of the numerous optional courses of study (Ministry of Education and Culture 2015).

The ‘Actions for social and school inclusion’ project is continuing the good practice of the ‘Zones of Educational Priority’ project, but with a more flexible approach (e.g. networks of schools and not designated particular areas as such). It tackles issues of low performance, truancy and early school leaving in primary and secondary education through a series of positive actions. The project is also set to contribute to alleviating inequalities in the schools participating.

The Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) has also proclaimed the school year 2015/2016 as the year of ‘raising awareness in schools about racism and intolerance and promoting equality and respect’. The main message of this initiative is that marginalisation, exclusion or discrimination against individuals or groups with different characteristics not only hurt the victims, both as individuals and as members of the group they belong to, but also have serious implications for the whole school community. To raise awareness of these issues among students, teachers, parents and the local community, a ‘code of practice against racist behaviour’ has been developed. It defines key concepts – e.g. racism, racist incidents, homophobia, transphobia, bullying, discrimination, stereotypes, diversity, etc. – and sets out the responsibilities and commitments expected from each member of the school community. The code also provides schools with a practical guide for managing related incidents. Presenting diversity as a complex phenomenon, which includes various aspects of human identity, is expected to help reduce all types of bullying and discrimination, whether on grounds of religion, ethnicity, language, appearance, disability or gender (European Commission 2016a).

5. Modernising school education

Although Cyprus invests significantly in education and training in budgetary terms, educational outcomes are insufficient, as reflected in its disappointing performance in international surveys such as PISA and the relatively low employability of recent graduates. The slow responsiveness of the education system to the country’s changing economic structure and its adaptation to future skills needs are still major sources of concern (European Commission 2016b).

The long-term policy goals of the MoEC, set out in the 2016-2018 strategic plan, are as follows:

- developing, training and increasing the professionalisation of educational staff;
- modernising the administrative structures of the educational system and of schools;
- enhancing the quality of education by upgrading educational content, introducing evaluation and increasing effectiveness;
- providing support to every pupil, while also acknowledging diversity; and
- improving the transition to tertiary education.

The related action plan for upgrading the educational sector contains a set of proposals for a new system for appointing and evaluating teachers and their in-service training. This was also a requirement of the economic adjustment programme (MoEC 2016). A new system for teacher appointment in public primary, secondary and technical schools is being established, aiming to modernise the existing one. The provision for a written examination with an increased weight (up to 50 %) is the core new element of this scheme. The first written examinations will be held between September 2017 and December 2017, and the first list of results be released by February 2018 (European Commission 2016a).

A new professional learning system for teachers and teaching both in elementary and secondary education was approved by the Council of Ministers in August 2015. It has been piloted in several schools since September 2015 and has been evaluated with positive results. Its review took place at the end of the 2015/2016 school year. The system, based on the individual needs of the teachers and the requirements of their schools, is set to better provide for the professional development of teachers. An ongoing social dialogue is also taking place between the MoEC and the relevant stakeholders on a new initiative which will introduce a system of evaluation for teachers and for school performance (Cyprus Government 2016).

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In terms of digitally proficient human capital, Cyprus’s performance is below the EU average but some progress is being made. In 2015 around 70% of the Cypriot population used the internet regularly, compared with the EU average of 76%, and only 43% possessed at least basic levels of digital skills. Moreover, Cyprus has a low share of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) graduates (ranking 27th in the EU) and a lower share of information and communication technology specialists in the workforce than the EU average. The digital skills deficit may impede the potential of the island’s digital economy (European Commission 2016c). This is a major issue for the Cypriot education system and requires an appropriate response from the authorities.

For the first time Cyprus is introducing entrepreneurship education in school curricula. This is being done by implementing the 2016 work plan set out under the National Policy Statement for the enhancement of the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

6. Modernising higher education

Cyprus has a very high tertiary educational attainment rate at 52.5% in 2014 and 54.6% in 2015, well above the respective EU averages. However, a widening gender gap persists, with women outperforming men by 12.2 pps. in 2014 and 14.9 pps. in 2015. At the same time, foreign-born students have a much lower participation rate than native-born ones; in 2014 the gap was 18.9 pps. and it widened to 25.4 pps. in 2015.

The employment rate of recent tertiary graduates\(^7\) remained relatively high and improved slightly, from 72.4% in 2014 to 73.6% in 2015. However, this was still 8.1 pps. below the EU-28 average in 2014 and 8.3 pps. in 2015. In Cyprus 44% of students were in the fields of social science, business and law in 2014, one of the largest shares of students in all Member States (Eurostat 2016). Figure 3 shows the employment rates for upper-secondary and tertiary graduates and the related gap for 2007-2015. It visualises a constant decrease in the employability of all types of graduates and a large difference (up to 20 pps.) between tertiary and secondary ones.

\(^7\) People aged 20-34 who left tertiary education between 1 and 3 years before the reference year.
In February 2016 the government approved a proposal for an alternative system of admission to public universities in Cyprus through special classification tests. All secondary-level students in public and private schools will have the same right to request admission to public universities (Cyprus Government 2016).

Following the publication of the HRDA’s recent job forecast reports, the authorities have encouraged tertiary education institutions to offer more short vocationally-oriented programmes, which are presently lacking. These are needed in areas of strong demand, especially in the natural resources sector (European Commission 2016b).

A scheme to employ and train tertiary education graduates aims to provide opportunities for former students below 30 years of age and with less than 8 months’ work experience. Its goal is to enable graduates to secure a suitable job and acquire work experience as well as specialised knowledge and skills. The HRDA is implementing the scheme. To link academia and businesses more closely, ‘industry liaison offices’ have been set up in all seven of Cyprus’s universities (three public and four private ones). To date 36 agreements have been signed between universities and businesses to promote better mutual communication and cooperation. So far, the industry liaison offices have succeeded in placing 2,472 students in the business sector. They have also undertaken dissemination activities and promotion through a designated website.

Box 1: The new quality assurance and accreditation system for higher education

After a long period of consultation, which began in 2007, the Cypriot Parliament adopted in July 2015 a law setting up an Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education. The Agency aims to be instrumental both in ensuring the quality of the higher education offered by Cypriot institutions and in establishing Cyprus as a regional higher education centre of excellence.

The Agency will periodically evaluate and certify the public and private universities, higher education colleges and their study programmes. In addition, Cypriot higher education institutions will have the opportunity to confer degrees abroad through cross-border education.

In the longer run the Agency is supposed to help achieve better quality by evaluating not only the content of higher education programmes but also the actual learning outcomes. It should also evaluate the quality of the research carried out in each institution, as well as to its impact (scientific citations), etc. This is a key factor for success as research is considered fundamental to promoting university attractiveness.

In this context the following challenges faced by the Agency should be addressed in the future:

- The evaluation process should be designed in a way that makes it possible to compare the performance of institutions based on the quality of the study programmes they offer. This may also create useful peer pressure, which is key to improving higher education institutions. Universities will be able to develop policies and take measures to improve their study programmes based on the actual evaluation.

- The Agency should ensure that it assesses not only the quality of the proposed study programmes but also the actual results achieved (i.e. based on learning outcomes).

- It is important that the Agency also evaluates the quality of research undertaken at higher education institutions, but the evaluation criteria to be used by the Agency have not yet been announced.

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7. Modernising vocational education and training and promoting adult learning

Participation in vocational education and training (VET) in Cyprus was modest in 2013 at 13.6%, slightly higher than a year earlier, but 35.3 pps. below the EU average (European Commission 2016b). Participation in adult learning has also continued to rise, from 12.6% in 2014 to 13.4% in 2015. It nonetheless remained respectively 13.3 and 13.1 pps. below the EU-28 averages in those years. Finally Cyprus has an average employment rate for upper-secondary level VET graduates. In 2015 it stood at 70.3%, close to the EU-28 of 73%.

Efforts are under way to improve the quality, attractiveness and relevance of VET in Cyprus. The Council of Ministers approved a Strategic Plan for the System of Technical and Vocational Education and Training 2015-2020 in April 2015. This includes measures and activities that cover all the public VET programmes, namely:

- secondary technical and vocational education (STVE),
- the evening technical schools (second chance schools),
- the Apprenticeship Scheme,
- the afternoon and evening classes of technical schools, and
- the post-secondary institutes of VET (PSIVET).

The proposal to upgrade STVE was approved by the government in December 2015. The Council of Ministers assigned full responsibility for operating the Apprenticeship Scheme to the Directorate of STVE of the MoEC in April 2016 and approved a comprehensive proposal to upgrade the scheme in August 2016. One of the MoEC’s top priorities is to ensure the classification of PSIVET programmes at level 5 of the European Qualifications Framework. This would upgrade its status to tertiary VET, which is a novelty for Cyprus.

The EU structural funds, in particular the 2014-2020 European Social Fund (ESF)-supported Operational Programme, will finance measures to help improve access to lifelong learning for all age groups and strengthen VET provision. Most of the measures to be financed are a continuation of those started under the 2007-2013 ESF-financed Operational Programme.

They aim in particular to:

- improve the quality, attractiveness and performance of VET in Cyprus
- ensure the functioning of the system of professional qualification in Cyprus;
- establish a mechanism for validating formal, non-formal and informal learning and pilot implementation;
- apply more broadly the ‘new modern apprenticeship’, which is mostly a ‘back-to education’ or second chance scheme at present; and
- link universities with the business sector.

8. References


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Comments and questions on this report are welcome and can be sent by email to: Krzysztof KANIA krzysztof.kania@ec.europa.eu or EAC-UNITE-A2@ec.europa.eu