PROM-PAR Project

Promoting migrants' democratic participation and integration

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Desk research protocol

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Historical outlines:

There is not a clear policy in Cyprus about civic education. It has been stated that 'Citizenship represents a relationship between the individual and the state, in which the two are bound together by reciprocal rights and obligations. Although, it is generally agreed that schools prepare students for their role as citizens as well as for their 'reciprocal' rights and obligations, there is no agreement on either the content of civic education nor on the processes through which the balance of rights and duties are internalised. [1]

As the Republic of Cyprus moved to EU accession, its educational reform efforts were aimed at bringing its educational system into compliance with European Union principles and standards. Up to this point, citizenship education in Cyprus has been provided through an interdisciplinary approach and is infused into the secondary education subject areas of History, Civics, Greek Literature and Philosophy. In the Cypriot educational system, civic education is currently incorporated in the curriculum but has for the most part remained traditional in its content coverage and pedagogical methods. That is, contemporary efforts to incorporate diversity, human rights and social justice issues into the national curriculum as part of educating for citizenship have not been apparent in the Cypriot school system. [2]

The material and subsequently the textbooks for civic education are drafted the Curriculum Development Unit of the Ministry of Education, and teachers are obliged to teach the entire curriculum prescribed by the Ministry of Education. Civic education allows for some flexibility in choosing topics according to the time available, which is limited. At the primary level, civic education has no fixed teaching hours, and the textbooks 'Becoming a Good Citizen' (for the fifth and sixth grades of the primary school) are taught only occasionally.[3]

Furthermore, in relation to the target group (asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection) there is not any existing provision of civic education training. Even though, the

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[1] Cochliou, D. and Spaneas, S. (2009). Asylum System in Cyprus: A Field for Social Work Practice. *European Journal of Social Work*, 12(4), pp.535-540.

[2] NGO Network on Integration Focal Points, *"Policy Briefing on the Civic and Political Participation of Refugees and Migrants in EU''*

[3] Papamichael, E. and Zembylas, M. (2015). Code of conduct against racist and guide for management and recording of racist incidents, Nicosia: *Ministry of Education and Culture, Pedagogical Institute and Programs Development Unit*, available online at: The Living Conditions of Asylum-Seekers in Cyprus.

Refugee Law (2001) stipulates that all asylum-seeking children have access to education, there are not any evidences of specific policies regarding civic education training.

Legal framework of Civic Education teaching and training in the country:

As it was mentioned earlier there is not a specific legislative framework for Civic Education teaching and training in the country. Although it is generally agreed that schools prepare students for their role as citizens as well as for their 'reciprocal' rights and obligations, a legislative framework could not be identified. Civic education is officially embedded and delivered across several subjects. To be more precise, the separate 'civics' subject at upper secondary level was replaced in 2017/2018 by a cross-subject approach applied mainly in history and Greek lessons. Other subjects integrating citizenship education at both primary and secondary level include social sciences, ethics/religious education, health education, physical education and STEM (European Commission, 2018a). In addition, schools can join in various programmes programs that promote lifelong civic participation (e.g. UNESCO schools, Young Volunteers, MEDIMUN). The Cyprus Pedagogical Institute provides tailored training to teachers in citizenship education, covering areas such as racism prevention, stereotypes, empathy and practices for teaching controversial issues (European Commission, 2018b).

Civic education is becoming a point of focus in Cyprus, specifically in digital education. As part of the national digital strategy, each year 15-20 schools participate in a number of programmes with a specific citizenship focus. For example: (i) the EU-funded 'EduWeb-programme' where children educate digitally illiterate adults on safe and creative internet use; (ii) 'eSafe Schools' which helps schools develop strategies for safe and creative internet use; and (iii) 'Young Coaches for the Internet' which trains students to develop and apply an annual action plan and educate their peers on creative and safe internet use (NRP, 2018).

Key actors:

Government institutions involved, policies implemented:

The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the school curricula on civic education in all levels of education. Civic education is integrated at both primary and secondary level in other subjects including social sciences, ethics/religious education, health education, physical education and STEM (European Commission Eurydice, 2018). A separate subject on "Civics"

was being taught for one school year in middle school and for one year in high school. However, in 2017/2018 the "Civics" course, was replaced in high school by a cross-subject approach applied in history and Greek lessons.

Citizenship education is a central point in digital education strategy. Each year, 15-20 schools participate in different programmes that aim to promote citizenship education. This includes projects such as 'EduWeb-programme', 'eSafe Schools' and 'Young Coaches for the Internet' (NRP, 2018).

Furthermore, schools can join lifelong learning programmes that promote civic education such as UNESCO schools, Young Volunteers and MEDIMUN (European Union 2018).

Moreover, in 2015, MOEC introduced the programme DRASE (Actions for School and Social Integration) to schools at all levels. The programme aims to ensure the welfare of the students that are coming from weaker economical backgrounds (including migrants) and strengthen social cohesion by reducing the risk of social marginalization and exclusion.

The Cyprus Youth Board is a semi-governmental organization which takes part in a European-wide programme, the "EUth" which is a three-year research project funded by the European Commission. The project aims to get more young people involved in political decision-making and increase youth trust in political institutions. The project partners have developed an open and easy-to-use online participation platform which could also be used through smartphones and tablets (ONEK, Website).

In 2016, an action plan was developed to coordinate individual actions by schools and create a single educational policy on integrating migrant children. This was based on recommendations by the EU's SIRIUS network (European Union, 2018). The action plan includes the following five priorities in this area:

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 migrant background

5. Intercultural approach through the new curricula.

Main private organizations working in the field:

Cyprus Red Cross Society provides humanitarian assistance and support as well as medical, psychosocial and other services to migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees.

OASIS is a voluntary community group in Larnaca that supports refugees and asylum-seekers in Cyprus. They offer Greek and English Language courses for free and they run a Social Café meeting every Wednesday morning.

The Cyprus Refugee Council is a non-for-profit organisation that aims to safeguard, support and advocate for the rights of asylum seekers and refugees and promote their effective integration into the society.

The Dignity Center is a placed developed by the Refugee Support. It provides migrants with entertainment and a place to spend and share time and get support. It also implements activities on skills development, learning and resources to help migrants enter the labour market. They also provide weekly language courses English and Greek for adults and in Arabic to children.

Local NGOs and other organisations are implementing projects that are focused on the social integration of asylum-seekers and refugees. Some of these organisations have been providing courses such as Greek language courses, ICT education, course for the development of soft skills.

Between 2018-2019, SYNTHESIS Center for Research and Education was providing Greek Language courses (Survival Greek) to asylum seekers and refugees through the AMIF-funded project PandPAS.

The Migrant Information Centre has developed services to help migrants in Cyprus to feel protected, safe and adequately informed to move forward with their lives. CARDET (local NGO) together with INNOVADE have developed a guide with information about Cyprus that is specifically targeting asylum seekers and refugees through the project "Information Guide for TNCs with General Information about Cyprus" and it is co-funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (90%) and the Republic of Cyprus (10%).

Teaching methodology for Civic Education (CE) training used in the country:

The Cyprus Pedagogical Institute provides tailored training session in citizenship education to teachers at all levels. The training covers areas such as racism prevention, stereotypes, empathy and practices for teaching controversial issues (European Commission, 2018b).

Existing national tools for Civic Education (CE) training:

Books/manuals

INNOVADE LTD, CARDET LTD. 2019. Guide with general information about Cyprus. Available here: www.cyprus-guide.org/en/

Online resources

The project Lingua+ aims to support the linguistic integration of migrants by providing tools to language teachers through different methodologies and practices embedded into socio-cultural interplay

Website: http://linguaplusproject.eu/

IEUME is a 2-year Erasmus+ KA2 Project that aims to support the integration process of people with a migrant background through innovative educational tools. The educational resources that will be developed will cover topics such as EU Institutions, Access to Rights, Political Culture and Civic Participation, Employability and Cultural Heritage.

Website: https://www.ieume.com/

Identified needs for Civic Education (CE) training of the target group in the country:

The main identified needs for civic education, in relation to the target group (asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, will be analyzed in the following theme areas:

- Language Barriers (Education)
- Integration with local community -Understanding the local culture
- Access to Information – Legislation – Labour Market -Skills and Abilities, for prompting participation in civic daily basis (festival, sports, Events-Recreational activities), about how and where to express complains and problematic situations

Language Barriers (Education)

Communication is identified as a major need and a barrier at the same time. Even though it is not an obligation for the target group to be registered in Greek classes, Greek language is considered as important element in order to achieve social inclusion. Moreover, lack of Greek language training hinders their interaction with the local society and their direct involvement

to the community. Sometimes locals do not want to speak English or they do not feel confident enough to speak the language. Yet the lack of understanding has a direct effect on their interaction with the public services as some of the officers that have to work with, cannot assist them in any other language except Greek. Moreover, proper information about organized Greek courses should be available, because language is an essential aspect of integration.

Integration with local community- Understanding the local culture

Understanding the local culture and environment is considered as an important element of integration. It is argued that there is a lack of information when it comes to local customs and habits. While the target group are eager to learn the local culture, norms, habits and behavioral patterns, there are not any available opportunities. Therefore, there is a need for better information in regard to where to asylum seekers can participate in local events, thus interact somehow with the local community. This issue can be addressed through a civic education training that will assist TCNs to acquire better understanding about their surrounding environment. As a result, will assist, support and enable the creation of local informal networks which will increase their self-autonomy in the long term and at the same time minimize marginalization and social exclusion in the society.

Access to Information – Legislation – Labour Market -Skills and Abilities, for prompting participation in civic daily basis (festival, sports, Events-Recreational activities), about how and where to express complains and problematic situations

The design of a potential civic education training should take in consideration the provision of valid and useful information towards the target group. The lack of participation in educational, recreational, and social activities, according to the findings, is also a result of the inadequate provision of information. The lack of proper information imposes further obstacles during their social inclusion process. Moreover, a civic educational training course should educate service users about their rights and obligations as well as about the restrictions in relation to their legal status. Moreover, the it is argued that limited assistance in terms of informational services is provided by formal networks. It is widely accepted that asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection have better access to information by Informal networks such as NGOs and voluntary organizations. In addition, it

has been identified that there is a need for a better access to information about education and recreational activities (such as religious and trade union formations, sports associations, festivals, events and so forth), in order to increase their participation in the community life and promote the interaction with the local population.

Other challenges and obstacles the target group faces during their social inclusion process in the country:

The target group (asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection) may be considered as a vulnerable group facing imminent danger of marginalization and social exclusion from mainstream society. In particular, during their social inclusion process they may face a number of social problems, challenges and obstacles.

For instance, one of the major obstacles is the provision of material and financial assistance by the Social Welfare Services (SWS). This occurs after being referred to a job by the labour office, which the person afterwards rejects, regardless of the reason. Such reasons may include not being able to immediately take up work because of having to relocate or due to the lack of available, accessible and affordable means of transportation. Furthermore, a number of additional obstacles are mostly related to the restrictions of their legal status. For example, language barriers, discrimination, unfair access to employment, housing, social services and mismatching jobs.

Other comments/remarks:

In a nutshell it is evident that civic education in Cyprus is not very well developed. Civic education, is considered an important element which can support and strengthen the social inclusion process of the target group.

For instance, when newcomers arrive in a host country, they need basic information about 'do's and don'ts' and services available. Moreover, information about attending language training is essential in order to be able to function independently. Although Cyprus is harmonized with the relevant EU directives for asylum and reception conditions, the target group is experiencing limitations in their living conditions because several obstacles have not

been effectively tackled. The lack of information, is a contributing factor and needs to be addressed in civic training course.

Furthermore, there is a need of better understanding of the host country's cultural aspects, traits, habits, customs, laws and patterns of behavior since in the long-term will assist them to overcome various obstacles. Moreover, by creating an online forum for new-comers, it will assist and promote the exchange of experiences, information as well as knowledge of how to overcome obstacles and facilitate integration. Migrants and asylum seekers, are keen to be taught, learn and work as they want a prosperous future in their new country of residence. Therefore, it is of great concern to provide civic education tools and mediums to succeed, to be able to integrate in the local labour market and become active members of the society in full sense.

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