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WP6 – A.6.1.1 Mapping of Policy Frameworks Cyprus Report Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry

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Introduction and Methodology

This report is the result of the activities relating to the project Output 6.1 (A.6.1.1 - *Mapping of Policy Frameworks*), implemented within Work Package number 6 (*Raising awareness of public authorities to create supportive environment for employment*).

This report is therefore the result of several different actions carried out by the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry in coordination with the WP6 leader (General Agency for Regional Development, PP7), the Project Coordinator and all the project partners (PPs), namely: design and translation of the consultation for mapping policy frameworks related to fostering employability of youth and women; conduction of the consultation with public authorities and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs); and analysis of the feedback received complemented by desk research. This consultation and the elaboration of the report lasted for two months (October – November 2022).

The questions tackled the employment landscape in each project targeted country/region in the context of COVID-19, in addition to addressing the challenges of NEETs in accessing the labour market and the role of public institutions in combating their exclusion. The consultation also refers to the level of trust young people have in public institutions and the synergies that already exist between the government and external employment initiatives. This specific set of questions was designed by PP7 with the input and comments of all other PPs and the Project Coordinator.

For the compilation of this Report, CCCI conducted both desk research as well as field research: Desk research was conducted using the internet, paying special attention to focus only on reliable sources of information originating from official organisations/authorities/departments and studies/reports conducted by/for them.

Main sources consulted include the websites of the

- Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance
- Ministry of Education and Culture
- Youth Board of Cyprus
- Cyprus Youth Council
- Youth Guarantee country pages

Field research was conducted using online and electronic methods. An email message was first sent to the list of selected stakeholders, followed by a telephone call. Stakeholders were given the option:

- to fill out the research by themselves, answering the questions and emailing them back to the CCCI, and/or

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- arranging an online call to go over the questions together with the CCCI staff, while filling in the answers in the process.

List of people contacted

- Dr. Irene Paraskeva Rodosthenous; Career Counselling and Educational Services – Ministry of Education.
- Maria Miltiadou; Youth Board of Cyprus.
- Elena Siakidou; Career Counselling Services - University of Cyprus.
- Christos Charalambous; Human Resource Development Authority.
- Andreas Polydorou; Cyprus Productivity Centre – Ministry of Labour & Social Insurance.
- Alexandros Alexandrou; Department of Labour – Ministry of Labour & Social Insurance.
- Diamanto Zissimopoulou; Cyprus Youth Council.
- E. Papastefanou; Ministry of Education.

List of entities that participated in the consultation

- Career Counselling and Educational Services – Ministry of Education (online)
- Youth Board of Cyprus (online)

As it was expected, getting hold of people suitable to contribute and provide input to our research was extremely hard. When selecting our stakeholders, we intentionally reached out to persons with whom our Chamber collaborates closely and we know them personally, giving us direct access that allows us to send them reminders if the need arose.

Employment Landscape

In the case of Cyprus, Youth Unemployment refers to the share of the labor force aged 15-24 without work but available for and seeking employment.

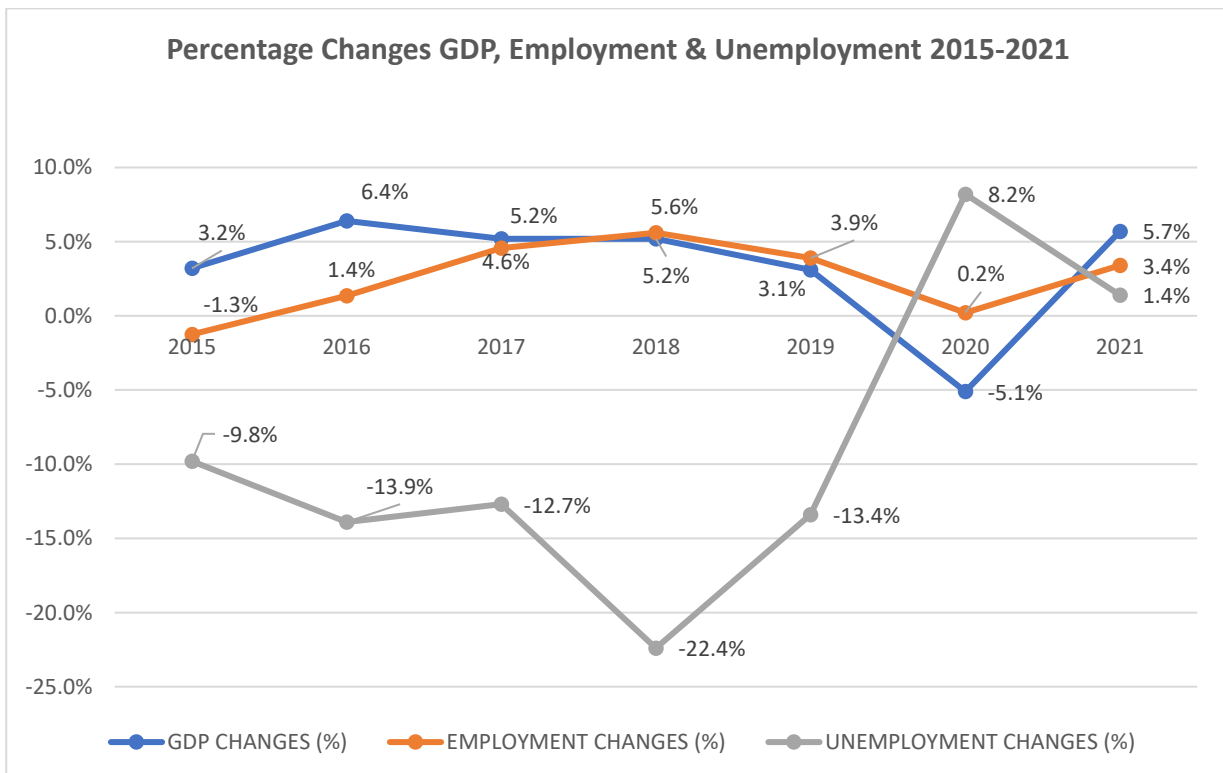
In 2021, the economy recovered with a positive growth rate of 5.7% compared to the previous year, causing an increase in employment and a decrease in the unemployment rate. The impact of the pandemic on the labour market had been limited to some extent due to the effectiveness of the state's economic measures to support workers and enhance the liquidity of businesses. The level of total unemployment in 2021 had decreased to 7.5% from 7.6% in 2020 and the level of youth unemployment of people aged 15-24 had decreased to 17.1% from 18.2% while long-term unemployment increased to 2.5% of the labour force from 2.1% in 2020. The employment level increased by 3.4% improving the employment rate of people aged 20-64 from 74.9% in 2020 to 75.9% in 2021. The evolution of the main labour market indicators over time is presented in the tables and charts below.

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Percentage Changes in GDP, Employment and Unemployment in the years 2015-2021

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Growth Rates (GDP) %	3.2%	6.4%	5.2%	5.2%	3.1%	-5.1%	5.7%
Changes in Employment (%)	-1.3%	1.4%	4.6%	5.6%	3.9%	0.2%	3.4%
Unemployment Changes (%)	-9.8%	-13.9%	-12.7%	-22.4%	-13.4%	8.2%	1.4%

Percentage Changes GDP, Employment & Unemployment 2015-2021



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KEY LABOUR MARKET INDICATORS (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021)

Source: Labour Force Survey*

Index	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Employment 15+		379,622	400,878	416,478	417,354	431,716
Men	188,424	196,811	210,162	221,253	222,096	229,363
Women	174,636	181,910	190,716	195,225	195,258	202,354
Employment (20-64)	351,876	367,953	386,935	400,438	402,085	413,740
Men	181,152	189,567	200,315	209,528	211,350	216,146
Women	170,724	178,386	186,620	190,910	190,735	197,595
Employment Rate (20-64)	68.7%	70.8%	73.9%	75.7%	74.9%	75.90%
Men	73.80%	75.70%	79.3%	81.7%	81.1%	82.20%
Women	64.10%	66.20%	68.9%	70.1%	69.1%	70.00%
Unemployment 15+	54,010	47,166	36,617	31,703	34,291	34,787
Men	27,179	24,079	18,347	14,770	18,196	17,385
Women	26,831	23,087	18,270	16,932	16,096	17,402
Unemployment Rate 15+	12.9%	11.1%	8.4%	7.1%	7.6%	7.5%
Men	12.6%	10.9%	8.0%	6.3%	7.6%	7.00%
Women	13.3%	11.3%	8.7%	8.0%	7.6%	7.90%
Long-term Unemployment 12+	23,998	19,143	11,613	9,224	9,616	11,885
Men	13,714	10,959	5,792	4,323	5,428	6,085
Women	10,285	8,185	5,823	4,901	4,191	5,800
Long-term Unemployment as % in the labour force	5.8%	4.5%	2.7%	2.1%	2.1%	2.5%
Men	6.4%	4.9%	2.5%	1.8%	2.3%	2.5%
Women	5.1%	4.0%	2.8%	2.3%	2.0%	2.6%
Youth Unemployment (15-24)	10,302	8,743	7,631	6,012	6,405	6,693
Men	4,168	4,192	4,272	3,200	4,212	3,572
Women	6,134	4,552	3,359	2,812	2,192	3,121
Youth Unemployment Rate (15-24)	29.1%	24.7%	20.2%	16.6%	18.2%	17.1%
Men	25.8%	27.0%	25.0%	19.3%	24.4%	17.8%
Women	31.8%	22.9%	16.2%	14.3%	12.3%	16.3%
NEET index (15-29)						15.4%
Number						25,578
Men %						14.5%
Number						11,658
Women %						16.3%
Number						13,921

*The Labour Force Survey is conducted by the Statistical Service every quarter

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The unprecedented situation created by the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, directly affected the employment sector and consequently the viability of Cypriot businesses. With unemployment rates in the second quarter of 2022 at 6.8% and inflation at 8.6%, the increase in labor and energy costs, the challenges for both the period we are going through, and the future are a challenge.

The Cyprus economy in the last two years has been operating with increased growth rates, resulting in the prevailing conditions of labor shortage in several professions in all sectors of economic activity, especially in those of the hotel and food industry (Cleaners, kitchen assistants, table keepers, maids, etc.). An acute shortage of labour is observed in occupations of low-quality work, where there are no Cypriots or Europeans available (unskilled workers, production workers, shift workers, porters) to work. Where there are some, they are reluctant to work, preferring to remain unemployed to take advantage of social rights, or refuse to move from one province to another in demand.

In this direction, employers' organisations in Cyprus including the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) stress that in order to have satisfactory coverage of the needs of businesses in appropriate human resources, the policy of granting import licenses to foreign labor should inevitably continue. At the same time, it is necessary to modernize both the employment strategy and the licensing criteria for foreign workers in such a way as to meet the real needs of businesses. Other measures proposed to address the problem are the intensification of actions for the integration of third-country students into the labor market, stricter monitoring of UGS beneficiaries and re-proclamation or redesign of the employment support plans of the Human Resource Development Authority.

Policy Framework and Responses

Even though significant progress has been made in the above-mentioned field, there is still more progress to be made. For instance, as research suggests, social inclusion can be achieved not only through policy changes but also through minor yet vital changes that can be made to the society as a whole. For example, all actions taken from all stakeholders, can be planned and developed through a coordinated, national umbrella policy that will involve all actors concerned including the target group. Thus, though a broader coordinated collaboration, the development of further targeted initiatives and measures can be proposed that will provide support not only to the young people who are at risk of exclusion but also to all other vulnerable groups that are currently being excluded. More specifically, minor developments but yet crucial ones, can be promoted / suggested such as, the enrichment of available services and programmes, the appointment of female leaders and youth mentors in the political agenda, the development of certain mentorship programmes for instance STEM programmes for girls, the engagement and participation of youth in the policy making process,

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the enhancement and development of flexible work practices and other work–family related policy measures (including the availability of flexible and generous parental leave systems for parents and the availability of part-time employment and reduced working hours for those in need), the enrichment of the current apprenticeship, traineeship and work experience programmes, the proposal of affordable childcare support measures that will assist single parents in entering and remaining in the job market and the investment in preventive policies might possibly be some of the keys in promoting and assisting social inclusion of people in the labour market. As Dr Marguerite Evans-Galea, Co-Founder of Women in STEMM Australia, once said “our thinking and leadership need to be representative of our population” and should not exclude anyone.

Furthermore, the policies should facilitate information sharing among services and should therefore surpass any limitations governing the data protection law– for instance, information sharing among schools and community agencies and the Public Employment Services (PES) should be promoted in order to assist students who are at risk of becoming NEET.

In addition to the above, the development of a One Stop Shop for young people in a NEET situation can be suggested, where multiple services will be able to offer cross-professional support to those in need. As the European Commission outlines in its report (Publication date: March 2016) “youth employment agencies bring several actors in the field of youth unemployment together under one roof and provide a combination of preventive and intervention measures. One-stop-shop agencies provide preventive guidance and employment services to students and young unemployed people”. Politicians and other decision makers should be encouraged to collaborate and form transnational collaborations and partnerships in order to share and gain new knowledge and information on how to best tackle the above given issue.

The main governmental authority responsible for employment, including youth, is the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance. Within the framework of the National Action Plan for Youth Employment, the Ministry provided an incentive scheme for the recruitment of Young People¹ (aged 15-29) not in Employment nor Education or Training (NEETs).

Moreover, the Youth Board of Cyprus coordinates the implementation of the National Youth Strategy (2017-2022)², which is a product of cross-sectoral cooperation, based on the active and direct involvement of Ministries, government agencies dealing with young people, youth organisations and young people themselves. One of the eight pillars of the Strategy is Employment and Entrepreneurship. Especially for this 3rd pillar, the two main goals are the development, support

¹ <https://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/dl.nsf/All/386EC97669184131C22587880048E424?OpenDocument>

² <https://youthpolicy.onek.org.cy/en/national-youth-strategy/>

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and promotion of entrepreneurship of young people, as well as enhancing the employability of young people and their integration into the labor market, while safeguarding their labor rights.

The Counselling and Career Educational Service (C.C.E.S.) plays a vital and an integral role in combating the labour market exclusion of youth and women. Through its programmes and overall services, it does not only promote the integration of vulnerable groups in the labour market and in society in general, but it also promotes prevention mechanisms for assisting and empowering young people and preventing them from becoming NEET.

- Through the professional help and assistance of school counsellors' counsees (youngsters and other individuals) have the opportunity to learn and accept themselves (self-knowledge, acceptance and reflection), develop their social and academic skills, learn and explore their academic and professional options, identify their interests and strengths, and work through any personal problems / issues they might face. Furthermore, counsellors assist citizens in general, in pursuing their educational and training needs since they provide them with information regarding formal / informal learning opportunities, upskilling and reskilling options and other career and academic / educational related issues in regard to their professional and academic development and gradual integration into the labour market. As an example, the CCES is participating in a programme for the validation and certification of informal and formal training entitled, "Support for the development of Vocational Counselling mechanisms to validate Non-Formal and Informal Learning".

- In addition, and as mentioned and above counsellors work proactively since, they identify potential school dropouts, and they work closely with them (in assistance with other professionals) in order to help them stay in school and / or find alternative means of completing their education. For instance, substantial part of the counsellors' work is devoted in liaising with other teachers, parents / guardians and with a range of external services and professionals, including educational and clinical psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists and the police for the best benefit of the students.

- Working with parents may include the hosting of parents' informational sessions relating to educational and career choices and the development of parent related workshops on topics like parent-child relationships etc. A more recent example is the co - organisation of a series of Provincial Informational Evening Sessions for parents/guardians and students titled "The Process of Vocational Education - Professional Prospects and Trends in the Labour Market", which were organised by the CCES in collaboration with the Pan-Cypriot Confederation of Federations of Associations of Parents of Public Secondary Schools. The informational sessions explored the current and future career prospects and trends in the labour market.

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Further to the above, CCES prepares and develops materials and informational books for educational choices. Material for these books can be found in the publications of C.C.E.S.³

- The counsellors placed in the CCES, in addition to their administrative duties, they also organise trainings for the Secondary School Counsellors' professional development. Indicative is the organisation of the Cyprus-Greece Counselling Conference 2022, titled "Career Management Skills: Hard Skills Vs Soft Skills, in the Postmodern Era".

- Furthermore, they deliver the following prevention programmes to teachers and students:

- Mediation and conflict resolution;
- Fred Goes to School;
- Students Assistance Programme (this is delivered by the school counsellor of each school).

The goal of the above-mentioned programmes, is to act proactively and assist students in developing a sense of belonging, which will help them learn important social and emotional skills and achieve academic success.

- The CCES acting as the official coordinator of the "National Agency for Lifelong Guidance" has announced the meeting of all of its members on the 28th of November 2022. The aims of the National Agency, as also stated on the official website are:

- The coordination and communication between services that provide guidance.
- The creation of a national system for the provision of quality guidance.
- Strengthening citizens' access to guidance services.
- The promotion of research in the subject of guidance. Quality assurance and evaluation of guidance services.
- The representation of Cyprus in meetings and working groups at the European and international level on issues of lifelong guidance.

Through the above-mentioned vital meeting, critical decisions and future action plans are expected to be discussed.

- Furthermore, through our representations in educational fairs and through our overall established collaborations, with the Department of Higher Education, with the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus, with Higher Educational Institutions, with the Foundation for the Management of European Lifelong Learning Programmes (FFMELLP), with The Examination Service, with The Youth Board of Cyprus, with The Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, with The Police and with many other private and public organisations the CCES service, strives to assist and empower its counselees academically and professionally (making informed and appropriate choices of courses

³ <http://www.moec.gov.cy/ysea/ekdoseis.html>

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of study, assisting them in transitioning from one school level to another and from school to employment) and preventing them from becoming NEETs. For instance, in collaboration with the immigration Sector of the Ministry of Education, Sport and youth, the CCES will offer seminars and experiential workshops for teachers of all specialties who teach in schools where Programmes for students with Immigrant Biography operate. The purpose of these seminars is to further inform and empower the educators in order to assist students with migrant background smoothly evolve in the community.

- Lastly but not least, the CCES staff works closely and cooperates with companies / organisations that implement programmes targeting youth inactivity and disengagement from the labour market – for instance, the CCES has contributed to the research conducted by the Cyprus Energy Agency for the YENESIS project - Youth Employment Network for Energy Sustainability in Islands, which aimed to reduce youth unemployment in the islands of Europe by promoting green, sustainable occupations.

The Youth Board of Cyprus, through its Counselling Services which is available, for free, to all the youth, offers “Career Counselling and Career Management Services”. In addition, we conduct various studies (available only in Greek) -carried by academic institutions and research organisations – concerning, among others, topics that are linked to the employment of the youth and women. New Entrepreneurship Support Plan We actively support the New Entrepreneurship Support Plan, which is administered by the Ministry of Energy, Commerce, and Industry, as the implementing body of this Programme. The Project is included in the "Th.AI.E.I.A" Programme 2021-2027 and is cofinanced by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) of the European Union and the Republic of Cyprus. It aims to develop, support and promote entrepreneurship, emphasizing on special population groups such as young people and women who wish to be active in business in any economic activity excluding those mentioned in the Guides of the Plans, making use of their knowledge, experience, their training and talents. Eligible to participate are: young people aged 18-29. The intensity of their sponsorship amounts to 70% Men aged 30-50 and women aged 30-55. Sponsorship intensity amounts to 60% Are unemployed or employed at the date of submission of the proposal They were not engaged in business activity for at least six months before the date of submission of the proposal. The Youth Board of Cyprus is responsible for projecting and promoting the Plan and providing all relevant information to interested parties.

Career Counselling and Career Management Services

The Youth Board of Cyprus, responding to the need for proper guidance of young people in the process of choosing their professional direction, but also to the need for subsequent guidance of young professionals, has developed the Career Counselling and Career Management Services. It is

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an integrated programme which, through its four pillars of action, offers young people of different ages and different needs, guidance and opportunities for personal development. The 4 action pillars of this Service are:

1. Personalized guidance from vocational and career guidance counselors. Each young person can arrange a personal appointment with one of our counselors to receive personalized counseling. Appointments take place at all Youth Information Centers in all provinces.
2. Providing skills tests: This is an important tool that can lead young people to self-awareness and guide them to the most appropriate choice of field of study and professional direction. Middle school and high school students can take the test for free and then have the results analyzed by our counselors.
3. Organisation of workshops for the development and cultivation of "soft skills" for young people who are looking for work and for young people who are already working. The workshops are implemented throughout Cyprus at the Youth Information Centers of the Youth Board of Cyprus. The workshops focus on the development of skills to navigate the labor market (preparation of a CV, preparation for a job interview, good job search practices) and at the same time provide the opportunity for young professionals to develop the necessary skills that will help them in their professional development (young ways of perceiving the career, self-esteem and self-awareness, abilities and skills of the professional of the 21st century, etc.).
4. Organisation of Career Academies. During the two- or three-day Career Academies organised by the Youth Board of Cyprus, the participants are given the opportunity to attend informative lectures at an intensive rate and participate in experiential workshops by leading lecturers on topics such as career choice, job search, the advancement of a of a new professional as well as more specialized topics such as financial programmes, development of professional skills, while at the same time 5 inspirational speeches are made by young professionals, good practices for the development of innovation are presented, etc.

Youth Makerspace and the “STEAMers” Programmes

Youth Makerspace Larnaka⁴ is based on the Makerspace standards developed by university institutions or communities abroad. It provides young people with access to high-quality and state-of-the-art equipment for developing prototypes and implementing their business ideas.

“The STEAMers” programme⁵ operates along the international S.T.E.A.M Centers standards. Its initials refer to Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics. The programme offers a series of workshops on Robotics, Coding, Film Making, Photography, Graphic Design, Creative

⁴ <https://makerspace.onek.org.cy/en/>

⁵ <https://thesteammers.onek.org.cy/>

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Writing, Music, Drama and Art. The workshops aim for young people's creative development, entertainment and learning, the enhancement of their creativity and communication skills, as well as their personal development and wellbeing. Additionally, the Youth Board of Cyprus organises - and is planning to keep organising- events, activities and workshops that promote leadership among the youth and women (such as co-operations and co-hosting with other organisations of such activities, signing and implementing memorandum of understandings with partners that include such scopes). Also, we target through all our relevant programmes and activities to enhance skills in order to increase the chances of the youth, and young women, to get employed and succeed in life.

Public Employment Services

The Department of Labour (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance) and specifically PES will play a significant role to integrate NEETs in the labour market starting in December 2022. More specifically, the following actions have been promoted:

- Development and operation of four mobile PES units for the outreach of NEETs and providing them with guidance, counselling and employment services. These mobile units will promote outreach activities for NEETs in all districts of Cyprus with the purpose of minimizing the risks of social exclusion and increasing the opportunities for their integration in the labour market. Two calls for tenders have been realized and contracts have been signed for both the purchase of automobiles and the purchase of services of the operational team of Employment Counsellors which will staff the mobile PES units.
- Promotion of actions for the development of an early warning system for NEETs to avoid the risk of becoming Long-Term Unemployed (LTU) through the implementation of Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs).
- Development of an Employer Unit in each district Labour Office for increasing and attracting more and better jobs and upgrading the effectiveness of matchings between demand and supply of labour.
- The Department of Labour implemented an employment Scheme targeting youth between the ages of 15 to 29 .The scheme provides incentives to employers to recruit these young NEETs with a total budget of 15m. The Scheme aims to alleviate youth unemployment and the sustainable integration of young people in the labor market, by placing them in subsidized jobs and further gaining work experience. The Scheme is included in the measures of active employment policy promoted by the Government for the implementation of the "Youth Guarantee" and 2297 young persons are recruited.

Furthermore, the capacity of the Cyprus PES has been strengthened with the temporary recruitment of 30 Employment Counsellors which has been extended until the end of 2029 . The new qualified

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staff has a considerable positive and qualitative impact on the PES performance. In particular, the capacity of the PES has been enhanced in dealing effectively with its customers, especially with the most vulnerable, including NEETs and women. The four mobile units of PES have the target to approach and provide individualised guidance and support to at least 2400 NEETs until June 2026.

Main Challenges

All of the topics mentioned above (mobility, training, current legislation, institutions, politics, gender, origin, level of qualification, surroundings, informality) constitute important factors / challenges that NEET encounter / face in finding employment. In addition, motherhood and is often cited as one of the main reasons for young women to become NEET and the fact that many job openings require prior working experience and / or highly skilled candidates – and unfortunately, some of the young people do not meet the requirements.

Furthermore, another barrier is the fact that a portion of the young people many do not acquire the funds for pursuing a degree / certificate in tertiary education or the grants to start their own business. Further, despite the schemes and programmes announced by various stakeholders, many NEETs are unaware of the opportunities available to them (entrepreneurship funding opportunities, employment opportunities, academic opportunities and so on) and they therefore lack of motivation and hope. Further, some NEETs may not have positive role models or people they can talk to, who can keep them motivated or they may reside on the comfort economic zone of their family.

Further barriers include and are not limited to the mismatch between the skills and the expectations young people have to offer and those required by the employers – these skills include the acquisition of soft skills as well. For young immigrants, the language barrier and the inability to communicate effectively with others may limit their employment opportunities. Disability, mental health problems, discouragement and boredom also contribute to the withdrawal of young people from the workforce.

The lack of experience in combination with the level of qualification are of the main challenges NEETs seem to face in finding employment nowadays in Cyprus. Moreover, the lack of awareness or access to information for the available opportunities is also a factor.

According to the Department of Labour, some of the challenges that NEETs face nowadays are the following:

- low quality of the terms and conditions of the available vacancies;

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- mismatching between their qualifications and the demanded qualifications of available vacancies;
- ambitious expectations regarding employment which do not align with available vacancies;
- need for upskilling or reskilling based on the needs of available vacancies.

The level of trust that young people in Cyprus have in public institutions is something that needs to be studied and researched. The results of this study will surely be vital in the planning and scheduling of all future activities and strategies. Significantly, what it needs to be studied, is the impact that current initiatives and services / measures have with the NEETs. European research / literature suggests that young people and more especially an indicative portion of the NEET's show a great deal of disbelief in public institutions therefore, we must be prepared to invest in measures that will enhance and regain the trust that young people have in public institutions. As far as the CCES service is concerned, the results of the 2010 External Scientific Evaluation Committee suggested, the CCES is widely valued by students and their parents, by school principals and other teachers, by external agencies, and by the community as a whole.⁶

The results of the Youth Barometer⁷ carried by the University of Nicosia after the request of the Youth Board of Cyprus (September 2021), concerning the level of trust that young people of Cyprus have in public institutions remains below average, as it was recorded in previous studies, which may be related to the low level of interest in politics. Specifically, the lowest level of trust was recorded about the political parties, scoring an average of 2.75 out of 10. They are followed, in ascending order, by the media (3.19 / 10), the Government (3.51 / 10), and Parliament (3.56 / 10). The level of trust in the Courts (4.91 / 10) and the Local Government (4.74 / 10) is comparatively higher and closer to the average. These findings demonstrate the urgent need of the state to increase the interest of the youth of Cyprus and promote the candidates and politicians, who will encourage participation and trust in young people regarding decision-making processes.

Also, a recent study of the Youth Board of Cyprus that focused on the rural youth of Cyprus (sample: 500 young people aged 18-35 years old) examined, among others, their awareness level on the existing programmes and incentive plans of the State. According to the findings, the Housing Scheme for the Revitalization of Mountainous, Border and Disadvantaged Areas is the scheme with the highest levels of awareness (60%) and the Incentives for the Promotion of Entrepreneurship (30%). Kindly note that the study has not been published yet.

⁶ http://archeia.moec.gov.cy/mc/613/ekthesi_axiologisis_ysea_2010.pdf

⁷ https://youthpolicy.onek.org.cy/wp-content/uploads/IMR-UNIC_Quantitative-Survey-Report_Youth-Barometer-3.pdf

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The Department of Labour mentions that many young people are expressing their gratitude to the PES Employment Counsellors for being guided on how to design or update their CVs, how to properly behave in an interview with employers in order to gain their trust and be recruited, how to remain focused on their employment targets despite the changing labour market needs and conditions, how to maintain their self-confidence or improve their self-esteem in order to keep themselves always motivated that they deserve to secure a stable and of good-quality job. They often feel appreciative of the fact that through PES they can be referred to Employment subsidy Schemes or training programmes (approved by the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus) and be informed about job-fairs, events etc. organised by universities or the Youth Board of Cyprus.

Something that the CCES is trying to achieve through the upcoming meeting of all members of the Lifelong Guidance Agenda, is the coordination and collaboration of all stakeholders to act under one umbrella. Even though currently a lot of activities/ actions are taking place, due to lack of coordination, some of the actions overlap each other and do not reach the target group. Thus, through the formation of stronger partnerships and collaborations, this limitation can be overcome. In addition, what has been discussed among various stakeholders, is the fact that some NEETs are often reluctant in participating in various schemes and need cross professional motivational and social support to engage (subcategories of the NEET include people with an immigration background, with health issues or a difficult family background, etc). Therefore, synergies and partnerships among all concerned (businesses, universities, the public sector) should be emphasized and stressed. In such a way, the target group will be reached more easily (through pre-organised outreach activities and social media campaigns) the possibility of further youth engagement will more likely be achieved. Ideally, fragmented political agendas of each organisation will be replaced, by a common strategy and goal. Lastly but not least, the information sharing legal barrier should also be stressed and overcome to assist the formation of partnerships.

The mapping of NEETs and the identification of their needs is the first crucial point in improving the employment opportunities of NEETs. Moreover, since there are various actors, both from the public and non - public sector- involved in youth employment, an effective and a cross sectoral cooperation is required.

One of the main objectives of PES is the building and maintenance of trustful and productive co-operations with the employers and employees' organisations as well as with employers in local and central level with the ultimate goal to promote and support the fast and stable integration of all unemployed, especially the NEETs, in the labour market.

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Approaches Going Forward

Despite the fact that various schemes and other programmes are currently being offered in Cyprus in order to enhance the inclusion of NEETs in the labour market, there is always room for improvement.

Mapping and tracking NEETs

First of all, the CCES suggests the implementation of a national study in which it will explore the composition / diversity, characteristics, needs, of this group of young people and assist policymakers and other public and private institutions in the designing of adequate support measures and outreach activities and schemes that will meet the wide variety of needs. For instance, through the scope of the suggested study, not only the mapping and tracking of NEETs will better be achieved (mapping should include inactive young NEETs who are not registered with the Public Employment Service and should therefore, examine the reasons of their disengagement too), but it will also explore other important factors such as, and not limited to, the testimonies of youth transition in the labour market, the working conditions of young entrants to the labour market, the characteristics and values of youth entrepreneurship, and various other factors that affect the smooth transition of young people in the world of work. In addition, the mapping will provide us with insight information regarding the young people's perception of current governmental interventions and policies, the level of trust that they have in public institutions, and the overall awareness of governmental programmes. As a consequence, when the mapping of this diverse group is achieved, we can all focus in creating and developing tailored strategies and services that will adhere to the different needs / subgroups of NEET's (ideally, outreach activities and incentives will be tailored to the needs of each group). For instance, young people with a disability may require better accessibility measures, young people with caring responsibilities may require access to childcare and on the other hand, young immigrants may need support improving their language skills.

Prevention and early intervention measures

Through closer collaboration and cooperation among all key partners such as, public institutions and services, schools and educational institutions, the private sector, youth, and civil society organisations, municipalities, health and social work services - that are active in the education, health and labour market we can target and develop prevention and early intervention measures, mechanisms and programmes in order to support and empower the NEETs. In addition, events, workshops, and other awareness raising activities, will be co-organised under one umbrella. More

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specifically, through discussion we can develop and implement new approaches, methodologies, and solutions for employing young people and further assisting them in remaining to the school / training/ labour market and thus preventing them from becoming 'NEET'. However, as discussed and above, the legal barriers in regard to the sharing of data among institutions (governed by the data protection law) will limit the information that will be shared among the institutions and will probably create limitations / barriers to the collaboration. Nevertheless, despite the foreseen challenges and legal limitations, the development of a strategic approach that will involve all partners / actors concerned, will help ensure consistency, coordination, and the placement of common standards, among all involved.

Social media campaigns and online portals can also be used to convey / communicate the messages to a larger group of people including parents and guardians and society as a whole. The importance of education, active participation / engagement, social inclusion, the value of formal, non-formal, informal education, training and the consequences of inactivity should be stressed! Therefore, fostering cooperation between education, employment and social services should certainly be reinforced to identify those at-risk of becoming inactive and provide information on alternative career trajectories and / or help.

Further, as mentioned and above, the Career Counselling and Educational Services (CCES) in an effort to assist and smoothen the transition from school to the work environment, through the upcoming meeting of 'The Cyprus National Forum of Lifelong Guidance', will explore the on-the-job training and apprenticeships currently available, will develop cooperative education agreements and / or other programmes that will be designed to prepare and assist students in entering the job market and further record, any reskilling options and programmes currently offered. In addition, based on the information received from The Human Resources Development Authority (HRDA) in regards to the surveys performed on labour market needs and current trends, and also based on the results that will be gained from the research project: "Creation of a National Monitoring Mechanism for Higher Education Graduates and Planning and Conducting a Pan-Cypriot Survey of Employers for the needs of the labor market", conducted by the Directorate of Higher Education counselors of the CCES, will have all the available national resources that will help them guide students and all other counselees accordingly.

In our future plans, we are planning to extend the services (working hours) of our central offices in order to provide guidance and counseling services during the afternoon hours and better accommodate / assist more counselees. In addition, we are planning to get involved in European partnerships / collaborations so that we can share experiences and best practices in the field of counseling. Further, as an answer to the question "What do you think could be improved, and how, to include NEETs in the labour market of Cyprus?" we emphasize the fact that European

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collaborations and funds should further be sought in order to share and learn new knowledge and experiences, tools and resources, that will help us tackle better the disengagement and inactivity of the NEETs and enhance their overall involvement.

Lastly but not least, ideally the funding of the CCES service in order to hire additional school counsellors and have the ability to offer more personal – tailored to the individual’s specific needs – guidance would surely help. For example, the development and formation of ‘One Stop Shop’ for young people in a NEET situation. As explained and above, through a cross professional plan / action, we can categorize any apprenticeships, internships and / or training/re-training courses currently available and help young people improve their employability skills for easier inclusion in the labour market.

Summing up, through guidance and collaborate working, we can assist individuals in placing realistic goals and expectations, acknowledge the problems and barriers they currently face, and motivate, encourage, support and inform them on how to surpass those obstacles and become an active member of the society.

- Coordinated action between all the main stakeholders (public and non-public) is required, on an agreed action plan and a specific timeframe, which should be monitored in a systematic way.
- Graduates’ tracking over a period of 10 years for collecting data regarding the employment/education status of the graduates.
- Awareness campaign / youth-friendly information on social media on the current opportunities and the incentives provided for registration on PES.
- Cooperation with NGOs, youth organisations and local youth clubs for the development of soft skills and identifying NEETs at local level.
- Targeted incentive schemes for NEETs, which should be designed after consultation with all the involved parties.
- Reskilling and upskilling opportunities in line with the labour market needs.
- Recognition of non-formal and informal learning and the skills acquired.

The Department of Labour reminds us that if all stakeholders of the labour market want to promote and support the NEETs’ integration in the labour market, they must trust in the NEETs’ abilities to work efficiently and effectively, providing them with the proper guidance and room to adjust themselves to the new employment environment.

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