

EUNEC CONFERENCE MIGRATION AND EDUCATION

The case of Cyprus

The biggest challenge for migration and education in Cyprus is related to the recognition of the multicultural character of the Cyprus society and the change in valuing diversity. A current discourse on issues and relations between different ethnic and/or social groups derives from recent flows of migration and gradual redefinitions of diversity and identity. A series of social, political and financial changes that have taken place in Cyprus after 2000 (becoming an EU member, the partial lifting of the restrictions since April 2003 which has further exposed members of the two Cyprus communities to each other, human mobility due to worldwide globalisation and the increasing number of immigrants and refugees) have made Cyprus very different from the seemingly culturally homogeneous place it once considered itself to be. Schools are experiencing the enrolment of greater numbers of children from diverse cultural backgrounds and countries of origin whereas, by and large, schools and society have traditionally considered themselves as being mono-cultural and monolingual.

There is then, specific challenge for Cyprus, to find ways to value and affirm the diversity of students, to confront the biases about ethnicity and to lift social and political barriers to student learning and development. In the early 2000s measures taken had been partial and focused on the "boutique multiculturalism" approach, shifting, gradually, towards issues of correlating identities and achievements. The emphasis was given to Greek language teaching. During the last few years an educational reform is in progress in Cyprus. As a result of the educational reform, a New Curriculum was developed. In the introduction of the New Curriculum (2008), where the Education Reform ideology is expressed, it is stated that Greek Cypriot children are encouraged to negotiate their identities and at the same time to respect the identities of both the members of the recognized religious minorities and communities in Cyprus, as well as of the people who have migrated to the island. As regards the latter, the education system cares for the fulfillment and development of their multiple identities. In this particular policy text it is stated that the right and obligation for education implies the determination of the society to reject any exclusion and that the democratic school entails a school where all children are entitled to become educated. Inequality in educational achievements is the enemy to be combated via the routes of methodology and material, strategies and practice.

The policy concepts related to migration and education are placed in the context of integration policies with an emphasis on language issues.

The first directive issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture "Intercultural Education" (dated 29.10.2002), declared the main policy and focused on the growing number of non-Greek language speakers in Greek-Cypriot schools and on the aim of integrating smoothly these children in the Greek-Cypriot educational system and society, instead of assimilating them. The route suggested for achieving this aim, was through supportive and differentiated programmes of Greek language learning. The intention of the Ministry of Education and Culture to secure freedom and human rights for all members of the society and to prevent racism and social exclusion was emphasized. The appendix accompanying this directive presented the philosophy of teaching Greek as a second language. According to this, regardless of the level of the Greek language knowledge, all pupils should learn Greek in order to be able to attend school classes, to communicate with teachers, classmates and other people and become socialized.

What was stressed was that by participating in the educational processes with the other pupils belonging in the classroom and the school at large, migrant pupils would have the chance to communicate with more adept language learners, in this case the native speakers, who have more linguistic resources in Greek. In addition to the mainstreaming programme, a flexible system of intervention within the ordinary timetable was suggested. This involved pulling bilingual pupils out of their classroom, in a separate group for some teaching periods per week, the number of which is decided by the Council of Ministers, for intensive learning of the Greek language and specialised assistance according to their specific needs.

At the same time, the framework of the Educational Reform going on in Cyprus since 2004, is targeted at modifying major aspects of the educational system and at exclusively upgrading and modernizing the Cyprus educational system. In this context it is stressed that all actions taken (preparation of the new Curricula, revised in-service training system for teachers, the implementation of a new appraisal scheme for teachers, and the introduction of new teaching methods), aim at eliminating obstacles constraining access to education while offering equal opportunities to children, young people and adults irrespective of their background or standards of achievement. In particular the action plan of the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture for migrants consists of five pillars promoting migrant educational and social

integration: Publication of a Reception guide in Education in different languages, Piloting different schemes of language support, side-based and centre-based teacher training, development of data reports on migration flow, diversity issues in the New Curricula. In addition, the introduction of the ZEP policy in the educational system in 2004 has promoted the affirmative action in migrant education.

Concluding we highlight the fact that there is still ground for further development of an holistic integration policy for migrants.

