

# Cyprus

## Working Paper

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# Adult Education as a Means to Active Participatory Citizenship





## **Adult Education as a Means to Active Participatory Citizenship (EduMAP)**

*EduMAP is a Horizon 2020 research project focusing on adult education among young adults at risk of social exclusion. Particular attention is paid to educational policies and practices needed to foster active citizenship among vulnerable young people.*

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## 1. Challenges in AE provision and access

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Based on the case “Migrants Centre” AE in Cyprus has a long way to go as far as migrants and vulnerable young adults is concerned. This does not mean that AE is not developed enough, but it certainly means that more cooperation among stakeholders and social partners is required. For example during the first six months from the date of submission of the asylum application, asylum seekers are not entitled to work. After the 6-months period, the employment of the asylum seekers is allowed only in some sectors of economic activity and only for blue-collar jobs (fishery laborers, agriculture laborers, etc.). Section 21B of the Cyprus Refugee Law provides that the person who is recognized as a refugee receives equal treatment as the citizens of the Republic as regards wage-earning employment. Employers however do not treat them equally, and the refugees cannot complain as they do not know where to go for submitting a formal complaint. The role of AE is to assist them with that but then there are limits. Practitioners’ work is limited to what they do in the classroom. Other services exist for supporting them and the educators are not eligible to provide either the service or advice on how to ask for assistance. They can refer the VYAs to these services but they cannot take the role of advisor. AE cannot do much for APC either, but what it can do is to empower participants to make decisions for themselves. AE in Cyprus is treated as low quality, socially irrelevant and in some cases even ministry officials suggest that it has no place in the society. This needs to change and the only way to achieve this is by making it relevant to society. Empowering participants by helping them acquire competences like APC, decision-making and critical thinking as well as other transversal skills and competences, is a way towards the right direction.

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## **2. Gender and diversity aspects tackled in the studied programmes**

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Gender and diversity aspects are not explicitly addressed on the programme studied. The current political situations and societal developments in Cyprus (e.g. poverty; movement of refugees; anti-feminism; away from gender mainstreaming and towards managing diversity) require new approaches and views of gender, also in adult education. For some adult educators via concepts such as diversity and intersectionality, the perspectives broaden. For adult education, this for example means that heterogeneity is to be taken into account within every gender category instead of merely focusing on differences between the sexes. For some AE practitioners diversity also encompasses the multitude of experiences, aptitudes and attitudes available in the student population. They believe that diversity initiatives encourage adult educators to empower their students as well as to tap into their wealth of differences in order to achieve synergistic results.

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### 3. The concept of APC as it is defined, understood or approached in the context of the study by different respondent groups

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*Policy-makers:* APC is not addressed at all when it comes to mainstream adult education such as VET for example. APC is not the focus of any adult education programme in the country and its definition is narrowed down to the basic legal rights and obligations of the citizen. APC appears only as a secondary policy target but it does not appear in the majority of adult education programmes.

*Educators:* APC is concerned with more than learning ‘the rules of the game’, and how to participate within existing models and structures. According to one educator, active citizenship should be defined more broadly to encompass active learning for political literacy and empowerment, addressing structures and relations of power and working to change these, where necessary, in the pursuit of social inclusion and social justice agendas. It also relates to how people can promote community cohesion and social solidarity, thereby strengthening civil society as well as empowering individual citizens. For the majority of the educators APC is about making the connections between individuals’ learning and the potential for collective social goals. For some of them these outcomes depend on the underpinning values, principles and approach of any learning – whether as part of a programme, part of action research or part of a collective experience. It is about ‘working both sides of the equation’ to build ‘a more active and engaged civil society and a more responsive and effective state that can deliver needed public services.

*Learners/Participants:* APC is not clearly defined. According to some learners it is about learning about the rights and obligations in the host country. For others however APC is about learning how to engage in the local society and understand that your needs are also the needs of that society. In addition many learners refer to social and political engagements that arise from citizenship, as well as to be able to make changes and get their voices heard, to know how the system operates, how decision-making structures are set up, how these structures work, who is involved, how accountable they are, who holds power in any given situation, and know where to go to get what you want.

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#### **4. Elements that are critical and or significant for enabling learners to become active citizens, or to develop APC competencies in the studied programmes**

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The most critical element in the programme is the module on legislation and policy. Many learners also found interesting the module on history and culture and the module on digital literacy because it involved the use of smartphone applications. The programme however seems to be fragmented in parts that are loosely connected. APC is missing from the agenda and a stronger element of the importance of citizenship is definitely needed. APC is not present as such and some relevance on how to use the acquired competences in learners' communities as multipliers is also required. It seems that besides the formal elements on which the entire programme is structured the element of practical usage is missing. Hence, how the acquired knowledge could be implemented.

More such programmes are needed. The educators and the infrastructure is good and adequate but some relevance to learners' reality is imperative.

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## **5. Competencies and qualifications possessed, represented and/or cultivated through by the AE practitioners who contribute to the design, development and delivery of APC programmes for VYAs**

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All AEC educators claimed that they hold a degree in educational science and a master degree in adult education. They have also received the HRDA certification (that is the professional certification provided by the Cypriot Human Resource Development Authority) and are therefore eligible to work in public AE institutions and training structures. HRDA certification is not enough to face the challenges in any group of adult participants and that working with migrants certainly raises the bar with regards to competences like foreign languages and intercultural communication as well as empathy. Advanced knowledge of the field of adult education, involving an intercultural awareness and an understanding of cultural complexities and diversity of our current times, from a variety of conceptual, disciplinary and professional perspectives is also required. Having these competences that are anyhow missing from practitioners' portfolios, can help them to consider what migration complexities might mean for the participants and also to develop further own intercultural awareness and skills as adult educators.

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## 6. Critical factors and conditions (favourable and unfavourable) that affect the potential of AE policies to cultivate APC for VYAs

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*Favourable conditions:*

In Cyprus, a lot of adult educational programmes were previously out-dated and there were gaps in the provision of programmes. Over the past few years though and under pressure from the current economic crisis, important progress and major efforts have been made to adapt to the new situation. The implementation of reforms towards the enhancement of VET, the modernisation of out-dated adult education schemes, and the connection or linking of education with the labour market are some indicators of improvement in terms of the programmes' efficiency. Another strength of the adult educational system is the fact that most of the programmes, are either funded from local sources or co-funded from EU sources, are offered free-of-charge or at a very low cost. This factor creates an open-access adult educational system which offers opportunities.

*Unfavourable conditions:*

The nature of the Cypriot adult educational system provides few opportunities for the delegation and distribution of responsibilities to regional/local authorities. Cypriot AECs have no autonomy regarding their financial or human resources, teaching and learning. As a result, the main provider of adult learning is the State and the organisation and governance of the corresponding provisions are highly centralized. Besides the general appreciation on AE for migrants APC is not a priority in the policy agenda for AE and therefore it remains to NGOs that operate in the country to provide such services to migrants. Another unfavourable condition is the lack of a reliable quality assurance tool or mechanism that will guarantee the value of the provided programme and secure its prolonging.

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## 7. Lessons learnt from laws and policies that contribute effectively to cultivating APC for VYAs

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There are no policies that support APC within the AE system in Cyprus. VET is more advanced instead but yet no much progress is monitored. The legislative framework covering Adult Learning derives from the 1960 Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus and all amending laws<sup>1</sup>. A lot of official acts, laws and regulations concerning Adult Learning are scattered throughout many pieces of legislation, often at other levels of education, i.e., Primary (responsible for Adult Education Centres), Secondary (responsible for Evening Gymnasiums-Lyceums) or Technical (responsible for Evening Technical Schools). The main decisions concerning policy reforms and developments are taken by the Council of Ministers, the responsible body for co-ordination and supervision of all public services<sup>2</sup>, and the House of Representatives. Consequently, at this moment a single distinctive legislative framework governing Adult Learning does not exist<sup>3</sup>, a fact that obviously hinders the efforts toward implementation of a comprehensive policy framework for adult learning.

The adult education system plays a critical role in building the human capital of migrants who have limited host-country language proficiency, as well as for those who lack a high school diploma or equivalent. Language learning represents a key integration challenge, with such skills necessary for effective functioning in the community and the workforce. Against the backdrop of great need for adult education and language programmes however, are issues of capacity and replication of successful models.

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<sup>1</sup>The legislation covering adult learning in Cyprus is collected in two reports:

1) Country report on the action plan on adult learning: Cyprus (2011), GHK, Research voor Beleid. Available at: [http://adultlearning-budapest2011.teamwork.fr/docs/Country\\_Report-CY\\_final.pdf](http://adultlearning-budapest2011.teamwork.fr/docs/Country_Report-CY_final.pdf). [accessed 10/08/2018]

2) Gravani, M. & Ioannidou, A., (2014). Adult and Continuing Education in Cyprus, Bielefeld. Available at: <http://www.die-bonn.de/doks/2014-zypern-01.pdf>. [accessed 10/08/2018]

<sup>2</sup> See: [http://www.cm.gov.cy/cm/cm\\_2013/cm.nsf/page31\\_en/page31\\_en?OpenDocument](http://www.cm.gov.cy/cm/cm_2013/cm.nsf/page31_en/page31_en?OpenDocument) [accessed 08/08/2018]

<sup>3</sup> See: [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Cyprus:Adult\\_Education\\_and\\_Training](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Cyprus:Adult_Education_and_Training) [accessed 08/08/2018]

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## **8. Existing practices of information access and communication (emerging patterns and tendencies; people/social networks; media/platforms/channels; content/messages) about adult education in the studied programmes**

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Communication is initially made in person between the VYAs and the programme management. The use of SMS and telephone to provide information to selected VYAs to the programme is common. E-mail (when available) is also used for the communication between AE practitioners and VYAs. In person communication is sometimes problematic as the communication language is English most of the time and depending on the level of English knowledge by the VYAs it varies greatly. Instructions need to be repeated many times (one-to-one) before they are understood by the VYAs. When the interpreters are present the communication is easier.

The VYAs claimed that information provision is the best service they receive, and that the process of allocation to the AEC was very smooth. Communication was face to face during the information and allocation process and VYAs suggested that the only thing that they felt as negative was that it was too long (4 months). They also suggest that practitioners communicate with them in English most of the time and that they do not always understand what they want from them because the level of English is higher than theirs (the VYAs). They communicate with the practitioners by e-mail as well but only for small requests.

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## 9. Leveraging on VYA's information access and communication practices about adult education

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Expectations are relatively low because of the language barrier. All the information received by the VYAs from the programme is relevant but occasionally it is too hard for them to follow all the information they receive in English. Information in their native language could be useful. Interpreters are also very useful when they are present but they cannot help outside the classroom. A learning platform in English but also in other languages would also be very useful. SMS messages and phone calls are always clear and useful. The VYAs do not always have access to e-mails and therefore sometimes they miss the messages sent out by the practitioners. SMS messages by the practitioners would be more useful.

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## 10. Information accessed and used during the design of AE for APC programmes

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- Existing curricula that have been developed within the organization in the past.
- Relevant literature.
- Evaluation reports of similar programmes and courses in other EU countries.
- Relevant EU funded projects (e.g. ERASMUS+ KA2, LLP projects, etc.).
- Personal stories and biographies.



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