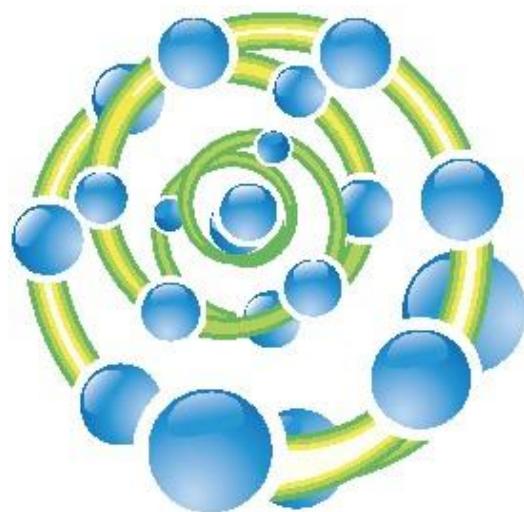




Early leaving from vocational education and training

Cyprus



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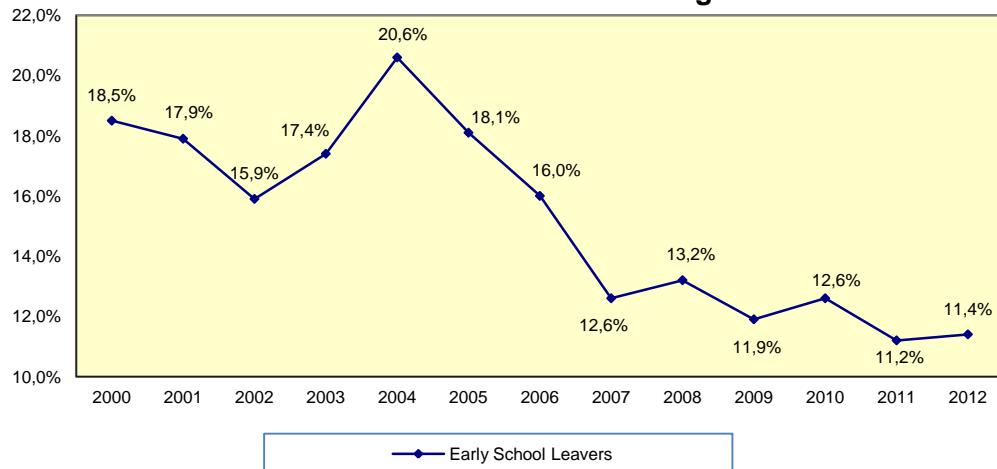
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A. EARLY LEAVING FROM EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN CYPRUS: DEFINITIONS AND STATISTICS

The definition of early leavers from education and training used in Cyprus is the same as the EU definition (% of population aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary education and not in further education). The data source is the Labour Force Survey, LFS ('Ερευνα Εργατικού Δυναμικού) conducted every quarter in all EU member states.

The percentage of early school leavers in Cyprus has decreased from 18,5% in 2000 to 11,4% in 2012. The EU27 average in 2012 was 12,8% and the EU2020 target is to reduce the dropout rate to 10% by 2020. Therefore, Cyprus performs better than the EU average in the area of early school leavers. A significant decrease of 38% in the number of early school leavers was observed between 2000 and 2012, reflecting an active policy in this field. It is also noted that Cypriot students abroad and soldiers aged 18-20 years are not included in the LFS sample, while temporary foreign workers usually of low educational attainment are included. If students abroad, soldiers and foreign workers are all taken into account the estimated percentage drops below 10%.

Figure 1: Percentage of the population 18-24 years with at most lower secondary education and not in education or training



Source: Statistical Service of Cyprus, LFS

Data on drop-outs from VET who are part of the early leavers from education and training, as it is described in the definitions of Cedefop (young people who started an upper secondary VET programme but did not successfully complete it), are not collected. On the other hand,

data is available for the number of drop-out students during a school year by type of education (general or vocational).

Drop-outs refer to those students who have left school during a specific academic year, or have left school after they failed a class, or have been promoted but have dropped out of the educational system.

Table 1: Enrolments and drop-outs from Technical Schools

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Enrolments	4.245	4.235	3.988	4.071	4.161
Drop-outs	40	38	37	58	62
% of drop-outs	0,9%	0,9%	0,9%	1,4%	1,5%

Source: *Statistical Service of Cyprus*

B. DIFFERENT ASPECTS THAT MAY INFLUENCE THE DECISION TO REMAIN IN OR DROP OUT FROM VET

B.1 Structural characteristics of the education and training / VET system

Compulsory education in Cyprus lasts for ten years and covers pre-primary education, primary education (grades one to six), and lower secondary education in the gymnasium (γυμνάσιο), (grades seven to nine). Students are accepted at the pre-primary school at the age of four years and eight months. At the end of the gymnasium, they receive a certificate.

Upon completion of their compulsory lower-secondary education, successful lower secondary education graduates are eligible to enrol to upper secondary schools (grades 10 to 12). The typical age of students is between 15 and 18 years of age. There are two types of upper secondary schools, namely, the unified lyceum (ενιαίο λύκειο) and technical schools (τεχνικές σχολές). The unified lyceum provides general upper secondary education and its curricula aim to provide a wide knowledge base and flexibility in the selection of subjects.

The earliest level at which vocational education and training (VET) is available, is therefore the upper secondary level at the technical schools.

Initial vocational education and training is also available through the apprenticeship system (σύστημα μαθητείας).

Post-upper secondary VET is provided as of the academic year 2012-13 at the post-secondary institutes of vocational education and training (μεταλυκειακά ίνστιτούτα επαγγελματικής εκπαίδευσης και κατάρτισης). The programmes offered have been designed to be relevant to labour market needs and flexible, by meeting the changing demands of the Cyprus economy and labour market.

VET at tertiary level is provided at four public institutes/colleges, which come under the jurisdiction of various ministries and at several private institutes.

Furthermore, vocational training is extensively available in Cyprus through a mixture of public and private provision such as colleges, training institutions, consultancy firms and enterprises. A certificate of attendance is usually provided to participants, but a qualification is not provided.

A description of VET at upper secondary level and the apprenticeship system is provided below, outlining aspects that may influence the decision to remain in or drop out from VET.

Technical schools

Technical schools offer two distinct secondary school programmes free of charge: the theoretical direction (θεωρητική κατεύθυνση) and the practical direction (πρακτική κατεύθυνση). The duration of studies is three years for each direction. The first year of studies is common for the branch in each direction and students select a specialisation offered in the branch of their choice in the second and third year of their studies.

The theoretical direction is completely school-based and combines general education subjects with technological and workshop subjects.

The first and second year of the practical direction are also completely school-based and combine general education subjects with technological and workshop subjects, while the third year of studies in the practical direction combines a school-based environment with a real workplace, as final-year students are placed in industry for one day per week (seven teaching periods per week), where they follow a practical training programme.

The responsibility to find a training placement in an enterprise lies on the technical school and employers are given a specific programme of practical training, which they are bound to implement. A teacher of secondary technical and vocational education, STVE (μέση τεχνική και επαγγελματική εκπαίδευση) of each specialisation assumes a supervisory role, maintaining close contact with the employers and making sure that the practical training programme is implemented correctly and that students progress and benefit from it.

The programmes of practical training in industry aim to provide final-year students of the practical direction with specialised knowledge and skills, under actual working conditions and in accordance with authorised curricula. The programmes contribute to:

- The improvement of the students' vocational training, aiming at their smooth transition from school to the world of work.
- The consolidation and implementation of the skills and competencies provided to students at technical schools.
- The development of the professional ethics, attitudes and values that are required for the graduates' entry into the labour market and integration into society.
- The development of closer ties between the system of formal education and the system of industrial training.

Moreover, students of the hotel and catering field of study are placed in various hotels for two weeks during the second term of the first year. Furthermore, on completion of the second year of studies, they are placed in hotels for twenty weeks as apprentice waiters or cooks, where they follow a prescribed programme of practical training in different sections or areas of their specialisation.

A programme is implemented which allows teachers employed at technical schools to become attached to industry on a part-time basis (once a week), with their salary being paid by the state. The teachers have the opportunity to update their knowledge and they also act as links between STVE and industry.

One of the most significant features introduced in the National Education System is the facilitation of horizontal and vertical movement across the upper secondary level of education. This means that, up until the 15th of October of the first year of their studies, students have the opportunity of transferring from secondary general education to secondary technical and vocational education or vice versa automatically, i.e. without taking any exams. After the 15th of October of the first year of studies, or even after the first year of studies has been completed, students of secondary general or secondary technical and vocational education are still allowed to transfer, provided that they succeed in special exams.

Students of STVE have the opportunity of changing direction (from theoretical to practical and vice versa), field of studies or specialisation up until the 15th of October of the first year of their studies without taking any exams, provided that there are vacant places. After the 15th of October of the first year of their studies, students wishing to enroll in another direction, field or specialisation have to take special exams.

The revised curricula developed by the department of STVE (whose implementation was completed in 2004), have introduced a common first year of study for the field of study in each direction, providing students with solid general education and generic skills associated with their field of study, before choosing their specialisation in the second and third year of their studies.

In addition, students of upper secondary education can transfer to the apprenticeship system during the entire school year, without taking any exams.

Qualified guidance counsellors of the Counselling and Career Education Service of the Ministry of Education and Culture, MoEC (Υπουργείο Παιδείας και Πολιτισμού) offer students of STVE assistance, in order to develop personal awareness as regards their interests, needs and skills and therefore facilitate them in making the right decisions about their education and future career.

STVE school leavers are eligible for admission to universities and other tertiary education institutions in Cyprus and abroad. Qualifications provide access to regulated occupations, provided that all other requirements of the relevant legislation are met. It must be noted that partial qualifications are not awarded.

Apprenticeship system

In 2007, the Council of Ministers approved the proposal for the establishment of the new modern apprenticeship (NMA). The NMA aims to improve basic skills and address youth unemployment by providing an alternative pathway for education, training and development for young people who withdraw from the formal education system and is geared towards meeting the needs of the labour market.

The NMA embraces young people between 14 and 21 years of age at two apprenticeship levels (preparatory and core). The NMA is co-financed by the ESF and it will become fully operational by 2015.

The responsibility to find a training placement in an enterprise relies on the school. However there is close cooperation with the Cyprus Productivity Centre, CPC (Κέντρο Παραγωγικότητας) of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, MLSI (Υπουργείο Εργασίας και Κοινωνικών Ασφαλίσεων) which is implementing the NMA, in finding suitable training placement for apprenticeship students. In Cyprus enterprise-based training starts in parallel with school-based training.

The apprenticeship certificate allows access to several regulated occupations (e.g. building contractor and electrician), provided that all other requirements of the relevant legislation are observed.

The CPC is implementing a subsidy scheme, co-funded by the government and the ESF, designed to encourage employers to recruit apprentices and offer them satisfactory in-company training. The subsidy covers a percentage (10%) of the monthly salary of the company trainer in charge of the apprentice, the total of the employer's social insurance contributions for the apprentice, and the proportion of the apprentice's salary for the two days per week when he/she attends school.

B.2 Labour market and social policy related issues

There is a limited number of technical occupations that are legally regulated and require certification by the competent authority to practise the profession. Therefore persons may practise a technical occupation without having formal qualifications and this may be a

disincentive for people to remain in VET. The acquisition of a technical school leaving certificate (απολυτήριο) is, however, a prerequisite for a number of professions in the public service and semi-government organisations, as stated in the respective job descriptions. Partial VET qualifications are not recognised in Cyprus. Non-formally acquired knowledge, skills and competences are not fully recognised either. It should be noted, however, that a System of Vocational Qualifications is now in operation, providing opportunities to individuals to be assessed in order to be awarded vocational qualifications, irrespective of the way they learned and developed their competences.

Examples of technical occupations which are legally regulated and require certification are the Electricians and Cooling technicians. The Department of Electrical and Mechanical Services is the competent authority for the examination, certification and licensing with regard to the occupation of Electricians. The Department of Environment is the national certifying authority for the personnel working with fixed cooling, air-conditioning, and heat pump equipment which contain certain fluorinated greenhouse gases.

As regards the relative difference in wages, from the collective agreements of technical occupations it can be seen that the newly recruited trainees that are graduates of technical schools and of the apprenticeship system (skilled workers) have a higher wage level and better prospects for progression than the newly recruited trainees of 16 years and above and part-time students that are drop-outs.

B.3 Individual reasons

No comprehensive studies or data are available regarding factors that may influence the decision to remain in or drop out from VET, since research and analysis on early leaving from initial VET is very limited in Cyprus. In the absence of research studies, the views of responsible bodies are taken into consideration.

The reasons that prompt young people in Cyprus to leave educational and training pathways before completing them are considered to be mainly individual ones, primarily low academic performance and behavioural problems. Children of the migrant workforce, in particular boys from low-income families, are at the highest risk of dropping out of school.

These reasons seem to be the main obstacles that prevent students of initial VET programmes from acquiring the necessary knowledge, skills and competences that will help them to progress within the context of school based VET or apprenticeship.

C. MEASURES TO REDUCE DROP OUT FROM VET

C.1 Measures to prevent drop out from school-based VET and apprenticeship-type training

The Cyprus NRP for Europe 2020 contains measures for reducing the rate of early school leavers, focusing on restructuring the education system and modernising the curricula, upgrading vocational education and adopting measures for facilitating the integration of students at risk in the school system.

The most significant incentive for students to remain in STVE programmes is the fact that, upon completing these programmes successfully, graduates of technical schools (theoretical or practical direction) are awarded a leaving certificate, which is equivalent to the leaving certificates awarded by other public schools of secondary general education, allowing them either to pursue further studies at Institutions of Higher and Tertiary Education, or enter the labour market as skilled workers. Qualifications provide access to regulated occupations, provided that all other requirements of the relevant legislation are observed.

Another incentive for learners to remain in STVE is the fact that the Government provides additional places at public Institutions of Tertiary Education in Cyprus exclusively to technical school and evening technical school graduates. In particular, according to the Pancyprian Examinations Law, technical school graduates are offered additional places that equal 10% of all places in specific fields of study, and graduates of evening schools, including evening technical schools, are offered additional places that equal 3% of all places in specific fields of studies. To be eligible for the additional places, graduates of technical and evening technical schools must attain at least 70% of the ranking grade of the last candidate who succeeded in securing a place in a field of study.

Other measures include early identification of literacy problems through specifically designed diagnostic assessment tests and an intensive training programme for bilingual students. The establishment of an "Observatory for Violent Behaviour in the School Environment" since May 2010 also helps towards the goal of reducing the number of early school leavers.

Measures to help integrate migrants and reduce drop-outs include initiatives to help teachers cope with this challenge and to improve the teaching of Greek to migrant children. A “Programme for Greek Language Teaching Applicable to Migrants and Other Foreign Language Speaking Residents of Cyprus”, is offered as of November 2010 by the Adult Education Centres of the MoEC and co-financed by the European Social Fund. The programme aims at the prevention of social exclusion, as well as at the reinforcement of social and economic cohesion. Residents of Cyprus over 15 years of age who are migrants and/or foreign language speakers are entitled to apply. Small groups of 10 to 15 students meet twice a week for two 90-minute sessions. Attendance is free of charge and the classes are conducted by experienced Greek language teachers specially trained in adult education. A total of 50 sessions take place per academic year, per group and the programme is offered with an island-wide coverage. The Programme will operate up to school year 2014-2015. It is estimated that by 2015, the total number of enrolments will reach 15.000.

The Educational Psychology Service of the MoEC protects and promotes mental health and facilitates learning and development by empowering all students within the educational system, including students attending IVET programmes. Educational psychologists respond to requests from teachers and parents for specialised help in a wide range of difficulties that students may face at school, including learning, emotional and behavioural problems. The Educational Psychology Service is also involved in support programmes for secondary school students in response to their needs (literacy, learning difficulties etc).

In-service optional training programmes, seminars and meetings are provided to teachers of special education in STVE. Special educational support is provided in public STVE, to students with special needs such as students having serious learning or special learning difficulties due to physical or mental conditions, students whose learning, adaptation or functioning skills are impaired and students who suffer from disabilities.

The Cyprus Youth Organisation has established a service aiming at informing drop-outs about the opportunities provided to them for resuming their education in the context of the formal education system and also about training programmes that will prepare them to enter the labour market.

C.2 Remedial measures within VET / related to VET

Second chance schools operate in all main towns across Cyprus and offer early school leavers the opportunity to re-enter the school system, obtain a qualification at secondary level, move on to tertiary education if they wish and / or re-enter the labour market. These second chance schools include evening technical schools.

Evening technical schools (εσπερινές τεχνικές σχολές) have been established in order to promote participation in secondary technical and vocational education and combat early leaving from education. An evening technical school was established in Nicosia in 1999 and another evening technical school in Limassol in 2012. They operate from September to the end of May, under the supervision of the directorate of STVE of the MoEC. The programmes offered by the evening technical schools aim at providing initial TVE to individuals who are fifteen years old and over and have completed lower secondary education successfully. The programmes are equivalent to the STVE programmes that are offered in mainstream technical schools. This means that the leaving certificate awarded by the evening technical schools entitles graduates either to pursue further studies at Institutions of Tertiary Education in Cyprus or abroad, provided that they meet the entry requirements, or enter directly the labour market as skilled workers.

The afternoon and evening classes of technical schools offer education and training to adults in the form of either one-year programmes, which lead to the acquisition of a certificate, or three-year programmes, which lead to the acquisition of a leaving certificate. Their objective is to offer continuing education and training to employed or unemployed adults, in order to be able to respond more effectively to the contemporary demands of the labour market and achieve re-integration in the labour market in areas where there is shortage of skilled workers.

In the case of the three-year programmes of the afternoon and evening classes of technical schools, which lead to the acquisition of a leaving certificate equivalent to that awarded to graduates of technical schools as far as the technical component is concerned (technological and workshop subjects), the knowledge, skills and competences acquired in this context are recognised only if they are accompanied by an upper secondary (general or technical/vocational) education leaving certificate. This means that individuals who already hold an upper secondary education leaving certificate (απολυτήριο) are given the opportunity to obtain a second leaving certificate in their chosen VET field of study.

D. CONCLUSIONS

The significant decrease in the number of early school leavers during the last ten years reflects an active policy in this field.

However, Cyprus has a low percentage of students in technical schools, one of the lowest among European countries, as most students prefer to continue into higher education, and the path to follow for most tertiary education institutions is the general direction. Despite the fact that since 2011 there is an increase in the number of students choosing STVE (from 11,9% in 2010 has increased to 16,8% in 2013 and it is expected to rise to 18% in 2014) there is still a strong cultural trend among the Cypriot population in favour of general secondary education followed by higher education and family plays a significant influence.

The most significant problem that persists is the low status of the technical schools and the apprenticeship system. As a consequence, they attract students with limited educational attainment that are most likely to drop out.

A challenge that remains is to increase the participation in vocational education and training mainly by improving the attractiveness of the upper secondary technical and vocational education through the development of infrastructure, the introduction of modern technology and new areas of study in the curricula as well as fully implementing the new modern apprenticeship.

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