

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS ON EMPLOYABILITY, EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING



ΣΥΜΒΟΥΛΙΟ ΚΙΒΡΙΣ
ΝΕΟΛΑΙΑΣ ΓΕΝÇΛİK
ΚΥΠΡΟΥ ΚΟΝΣΕΥİ
CYPRUS YOUTH COUNCIL

Project title: Youth Ski(II)ing to future

Editor (s): Cyprus Youth Council

PROJECT INFORMATION

Project title: Youth Ski(II)ing to future

Project no.: 2023-1-CY02-KA154-YOU- 000149708

Coordinator: Cyprus Youth Council

TABLE OF CONTENT

<u>ANALYSIS</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>CONCLUSION</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</u>	<u>11</u>

ANALYSIS

The youth of Cyprus represent a dynamic group with significant potential and prospects, yet they face specific needs and concerns. According to Eurostat, Cyprus has positive elements in its education system, boasting the third-highest rate of tertiary education graduates in Europe, with 55.5%¹ of the population having completed higher education. In terms of secondary education completion, Cyprus ranks 12th among the 27 EU countries, with a completion rate of 88.4% in 2023.² Based on these statistics, one might expect that this educational foundation provides young people with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources for their professional careers and personal development.

However, in recent years, growing concerns have emerged regarding a lack of skills among young people and a mismatch between these skills and labor market demands,³ negatively affecting their employability and career prospects. Specifically, Cyprus ranks 20th in the EU for employment of recent graduates, with 80.6% of recent secondary or tertiary graduates finding a job within three years of completing their studies, compared to the European average of 83.5%.⁴

This issue is particularly prevalent in technical occupations, where both specialized and basic technical skills are lacking, even among those pursuing general education. According to CEDEFOP data, 42-45% of graduates reported being overqualified for their current jobs, while 15-21% experienced a horizontal mismatch between their qualifications and job roles.³ Many graduates indicated overskilling, with their hard, soft, digital, and green skills exceeding what their jobs required. Underskilling, though less common, was primarily observed in fields with rapidly evolving technical demands. More than 50% of graduates engaged in reskilling and upskilling activities, mostly provided by employers, focusing on acquiring relevant hard skills.

These findings suggest that the current educational framework, with its rigid structure of traditional models enforcing a uniform set of mandatory subjects, may not adequately prepare students and young people for the changing demands of the labor market.⁵ A

¹ Eurostat. (2024). *Educational attainment statistics*. European Commission. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Educational_attainment_statistics

² Eurostat. (2024). *Education and training - lifelong learning: Percentage of population having completed at least upper secondary education*. European Commission. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00186/default/table?lang=en&category=t_educ.t_educ_outc

³ Cedefop. (2023). *Cyprus: Bridging the gap between higher education and the labour market*. Cedefop. Retrieved from https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/cyprus-bridging-gap-between-higher-education-and-labour-market?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁴ Eurostat. (2024). *Educational attainment of the population: Percentage of population having completed at least upper secondary education*. European Commission. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00053/default/bar?lang=en&category=t_educ.t_educ_outc

⁵ University of Cyprus. (2021). *CyEPR Vol. 15, No. 2: Educational Policy Research in Cyprus*. University of Cyprus. Retrieved from https://www.ucy.ac.cy/erc2/wp-content/uploads/sites/125/2023/08/CyEPR_Vol15_No2_A3_12_2021.pdf

hybrid educational system combining core subjects with electives tailored to individual interests and talents could be a solution to this gap.

Low rates of participation is another significant concern in adult education. Notably, the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture⁶⁷ cautioned that: “At 6.7%, adult participation in learning [in Cyprus] remains below the EU average (11.1%). At 10.9%, it is highest among those with tertiary education (ISCED 5-8), but even for them it is significantly below the EU average of 19%. Upskilling and reskilling opportunities are most crucial for low-skilled adults (ISCED 0-2), who currently take least advantage of adult learning. The proportion of low-qualified adults in employment in Cyprus was 62% in 2018 (EU average: 56.8%) and higher than in 2017. During 2017, only around 50 adults aged 25 or above acquired an upper-secondary qualification, highlighting the need for a more substantial upskilling and reskilling effort.”⁶

Despite the commitment shown by young people to education, there is still a pressing need to enhance its quality. According to the European Commission's *Education and Training Monitor 2024* and the OECD (2023),⁷ there is a global decline in student performance in basic skills and persistent skills mismatches. Among these are life skills, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, effective communication, decision-making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness, empathy, and coping with stress and emotions—skills defined by UNICEF, UNESCO, and the WHO.⁸ The lack of these skills among high school and university graduates hampers their ability to succeed in the workforce. Without them, young people struggle to interact effectively in the workplace, adapt to challenges, and take initiative.

Another pressing issue is the insufficient career guidance provided to students. Recent reports⁹ and surveys¹⁰ have highlighted the need to improve the education system in Cyprus to meet the evolving needs of young people. This includes strengthening the role of school counselors, providing better career guidance services, and transitioning to a more modern education model. Preliminary results from the first cycle of Cyprus' *National Graduate Tracking Survey (2023)* indicate that while upper secondary education offers relatively more comprehensive support, there is significant room for improvement in the services provided by the Career Counseling and Educational Services of the Ministry of Education, Sport, and Youth.¹¹ These findings stress the importance of enhancing career

⁶ European Commission. (2019). *Education and training monitor 2019: Volume 2, country analysis*. European Commission. Retrieved from <https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/volume-2-2019-education-and-training-monitor-country-analysis.pdf>

⁷ OECD. (2020). *Education at a glance 2020: OECD indicators*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/53f23881-en>

⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (n.d.). *ESCAP peers: A message to youth*. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Retrieved from https://www.unodc.org/pdf/youthnet/action/message/escap_peers_07.pdf

⁹ Οργανισμός Νεολαίας Κύπρου. (2022). *Έκθεση πορισμάτων 4ης Εθνικής Συνόδου Νέων 2022* [Report of findings from the 4th National Youth Summit 2022]. Οργανισμός Νεολαίας Κύπρου. Retrieved from <https://youthpolicy.onek.org.cy/wp-content/uploads/Εκθεση-Πορισμάτων-4ης-Εθνικής-Συνόδου-Νέων-2022-v.27.06.2022.pdf>

¹⁰ Οργανισμός Νεολαίας Κύπρου. (2022). *Youth barometer 4*. Οργανισμός Νεολαίας Κύπρου. Retrieved from <https://youthpolicy.onek.org.cy/wp-content/uploads/Youth-barometer-4.pdf>

¹¹ Ministry of Education and Culture. (2023). *Preliminary results of the first cycle of the Cyprus national graduate tracking survey*. Ministry of Education and Culture. Retrieved from https://archeia.moec.gov.cy/mc/895/2023_10_06_report_preliminary_results_first_cycle_cyprus_national_graduate_tracking_survey.pdf

guidance services to help students make informed decisions about their education and employment, as difficulties in transitioning from education to work persist.

More robust career guidance, both within and outside the education system, is needed, as well as career counseling services for young people already in the labor market or those who have completed their education. Furthermore, critical thinking and creativity are not sufficiently encouraged in the current education system, limiting young people's ability to make independent decisions and adapt to the constantly evolving job market.

To address these challenges, it is crucial to emphasize the development of soft skills, improve career guidance, and promote critical thinking through initiatives such as summer school programs and workshops on life skills. These programs can help prevent learning loss during breaks and equip students with the essential skills needed to succeed both academically and professionally. By implementing these measures, we can better prepare young people for the demands of the modern labor market and cultivate a more engaged and capable workforce.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Recommendation 1: Enhance Career Guidance and Career Counseling

To address the issue of insufficient career guidance provided to students and enhance/improve the services provided by the Career Counseling and Educational Services of the Ministry of Education, Sport, and Youth we suggest the following:

1. The implementation of a **Professional Guidance and Civic Education Program**:
This program will be led by qualified professionals in each thematic area to ensure high-quality instruction. The content will include career planning courses that incorporate interactive tools and discussions, along with social skills training covering key areas such as empathy, communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and adaptability. Additionally, career days will feature targeted presentations and workplace visits, providing students with practical insights into various professions. The program will begin in the academic year 2026-2027, with one 45-minute session held each week. Sessions will take place in school event halls, classrooms, and professional workplaces to offer diverse learning environments. Successful implementation will require the formation of a qualified group of instructors and the development of strong networks with professionals across different fields to enrich the program.
2. The **increase of provided Career Guidance Services** in all educational levels:
This program will increase the presence of school counselors and psychologists. In primary education, specialists in child psychology and counseling will be employed to provide year-round assistance to students, addressing emotional and developmental needs. In secondary education, the number of counselors in each school will be increased to offer more focused career orientation and guidance, with a target ratio of one counselor per 60 students. The program is set to launch in the academic year 2026-2027, with counseling services provided either on school premises or at professional workplaces, depending on the needs. The implementation will involve the hiring of additional counselors and the provision of

continuous professional training to ensure they remain well-equipped to support students effectively.

3. The introduction of **a volunteer Mentorship Program**:

This program aims to connect students with professionals from various fields, providing valuable career guidance. Volunteer professionals will serve as mentors, offering students insights into job requirements, prospects, and the realities of specific careers to help them make informed career choices. The program is set to begin in the academic year 2026-2027 and will take place either at the professionals' workplaces or at the schools, depending on convenience. Schools will maintain a list of available mentors, which students can access through school counselors to ensure a smooth and organized implementation of the program.

4. The **enhancement of comprehensive information** regarding various occupations and labor market trends, including future job prospects:

Through collaboration between the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the Youth Board, and career guidance professionals:

- a. Conduct information seminars at Multipurpose Centers to provide detailed insights into the labor market, including analysis of current and future trends, availability of positions, forecasts for popular occupations, best practices for professional development, and information on national and European funding programs. The seminars will also cover emerging occupations driven by technological and social changes in schools, with an outlook until 2030.
- b. Organize additional initiatives to enable young people to take on professional roles and develop entrepreneurial and life skills, with a target for completion by 2030.

Policy Recommendation 2: Development of essential Life Skills for Employability

To support the development of essential life skills that are critical prerequisites for young professionals to function efficiently and productively in the workplace, we propose the following to the Minister and the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth in collaboration with the Pancyprian Organization of Greek Teachers, the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Ministry of Labor and Social Insurance, and the Human Resources Development Authority:

- Starting from the academic year 2026-2027, the Ministry will introduce mandatory educational seminars to be held throughout the calendar year for teachers of all levels in public education. These seminars will focus on informing teachers about essential life skills and how to effectively teach and apply them to students within the framework of the proposals outlined below.
- Beginning in the 2027-2028 academic year, the Ministry will introduce a dedicated lesson, one period per week, at all levels of public education. This lesson will focus on teaching and practicing these life skills.
- From the 2027-2028 academic year onward, critical thinking will be integrated into the student assessment process in every subject in secondary education. For example, this could be achieved by incorporating dialogue and debates into the History curriculum.

- Starting in the 2027-2028 academic year, there will be further promotion and enhancement of extracurricular activity groups in secondary education, under the supervision of teachers, to develop these life skills.
- Beginning in the academic year 2027-2028, parents will be informed through seminars and/or circulars from the Ministry about the importance of these life skills and how the proposed changes will be integrated into the educational system.

Policy Recommendation 3: Development of a Gamified Learning Platform

To foster critical thinking and essential soft skills, thereby developing more active young adults, a gamified platform where schools and students compete while learning life skills can be an innovative way to increase engagement in civil life. Targeting students aged 15-18 from both high schools and technical schools, the platform will be available online, with a focus on schools in Cyprus. Over three academic years, students will engage in interactive games designed in collaboration with academic faculty, ministry of education officials, and professionals. The platform will feature courses on essential soft and life skills, and students will earn points for completing levels. The curriculum will cover:

- **First Aid Basics:** CPR, treating minor injuries, handling allergic reactions.
- **Financial Literacy:** Budgeting, understanding credit, investment basics.
- **Emotional Intelligence:** Managing emotions, conflict resolution, stress management.
- **Digital Literacy:** Safe internet use, cybersecurity, basic programming.
- **Civic Education:** Understanding civic responsibilities, human rights, global citizenship.
- **Sociology and Cultural Awareness:** Cultural sensitivity, global issues, sustainability.
- **Basic Mechanical Skills:** Car maintenance, household repairs, tool use.
- **Health and Nutrition:** Healthy eating habits, physical activity, mental health.
- **Time Management:** Goal setting, study habits, balancing school and life.
- **Career Skills:** Resume writing, interview preparation, workplace etiquette.
- **Environmental Awareness:** Recycling, climate change, reducing carbon footprints.

Points earned by students will contribute to their final grade reports and can be added to their LinkedIn profiles, Europass, and CVs. Upon completing the three-year program, students will receive certification, further enhancing their educational and professional credentials.

Policy Recommendation 4: Redefining Secondary Education/ Merged Vocational and General High Schools

To enhance the current educational system and better prepare students and young people for the evolving demands of the labor market, **we propose the development of a new system of merged vocational and general high schools.** This approach will enable students from both educational backgrounds to acquire essential skills and knowledge from each other's sectors. Our goal is to establish at least one merged high school in each province by 2034.

The new system will preserve the core structure of secondary education while introducing a flexible system for selecting minor subjects. Currently, high school students have 35 teaching hours per week, which **we propose to divide into 23 hours for mandatory subjects and 12 hours for optional subjects**. Mandatory subjects will continue to be based on the existing high school sectors, chosen by the students. The optional subjects, however, will allow students to personalize their learning experience by choosing from a broad range of topics aligned with their interests. This selection may include Ancient Greek, Fine Arts, Engineering, Religious Education, Sexual Education, Social-Emotional Learning, Financial Literacy, and more, based on further exploration of students' preferences.

Curriculum development will be supervised by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with educational experts and industry leaders to ensure that the system meets both the necessary academic standards and the demands of the labor market. The model will begin as a pilot program, with the first merged school opening in Nicosia, where it will be tested before wider implementation across the country.

Teachers will be required to have expertise in their respective areas, supported by a new teacher training program that will provide current educators the opportunity to upskill. Schools must also be equipped with the necessary infrastructure to support the diverse learning goals of all students.

To ensure the program's success, evaluation and assessment will be key components. Student progress will be monitored through questionnaires assessing satisfaction, education levels, graduation and dropout rates, and career choices. Regular teacher assessments will be conducted via questionnaires and supervisory councils, and there will be effective feedback channels for ongoing communication. **Continuous evaluation of the system will ensure that it evolves to meet the changing needs of society and its youth.**

In conclusion, the ultimate goal of this system is to foster a culture of lifelong learning and to create an adaptable, skilled workforce. The system will also serve as a unifying force, bridging the gap between students from different educational and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Policy Recommendation 5: Promote Adult Education

To address the low participation rates in adult formal and non-formal education programs, we recommend launching targeted information campaigns to raise awareness. Specifically, a promotion campaign should be designed utilizing social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), and TikTok.

To manage these accounts effectively, a freelancer aged 18+ with at least two years of experience in managing social media accounts for businesses or the public sector should be hired. A background in marketing, journalism, videography, or photography will be considered an asset. The accounts should post at least twice a week to promote events, engage the audience, and provide information about upcoming opportunities. The effectiveness of this campaign will be evaluated after two years by comparing participation rates before and after the initiative.

Additionally, to maximize the outreach, students of this program should attend other classes and events (festivals, galleries, theatres) to increase awareness and participation.

Policy Recommendation 6: Development of Summer School Program

To provide additional academic support to students and help bridge any learning gaps, we propose that the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports implements summer school programs. These programs will run during summer break, utilizing public school facilities, with sessions starting at 8:30 am to ensure students are not overwhelmed by long hours. In July, students will attend three days a week, split into two age-based groups. Each group will alternate weeks, with one group attending one week and the second group the next. The program will provide teaching opportunities to unemployed teachers or recent graduates, allowing them to practice their skills. The Primary Group will consist of students aged 6 to 12, and teachers will be assigned accordingly. A second group for students aged 13 to 15 will also be formed, ensuring that each teacher caters to an appropriate age group. This program aims to offer additional academic support, prevent summer learning loss, and promote social interaction, peer engagement and development of new friendships.

Policy Recommendation 7: Development of essential Life Skills for Employability

To support the development of essential life skills that are critical prerequisites for young professionals to function efficiently and productively in the workplace, we propose the following to the Minister and the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth in collaboration with the Pancyprian Organization of Greek Teachers, the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Ministry of Labor and Social Insurance, and the Human Resources Development Authority:

- Starting from the academic year 2026-2027, the Ministry will introduce mandatory educational seminars to be held throughout the calendar year for teachers of all levels in public education. These seminars will focus on informing teachers about essential life skills and how to effectively teach and apply them to students within the framework of the proposals outlined below.
- Beginning in the 2027-2028 academic year, the Ministry will introduce a dedicated lesson, one period per week, at all levels of public education. This lesson will focus on teaching and practicing these life skills.
- From the 2027-2028 academic year onward, critical thinking will be integrated into the student assessment process in every subject in secondary education. For example, this could be achieved by incorporating dialogue and debates into the History curriculum.
- Starting in the 2027-2028 academic year, there will be further promotion and enhancement of extracurricular activity groups in secondary education, under the supervision of teachers, to develop these life skills.

- Beginning in the academic year 2027-2028, parents will be informed through seminars and/or circulars from the Ministry about the importance of these life skills and how the proposed changes will be integrated into the educational system.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, these policy recommendations aim to strengthen career guidance, secondary education, and life skills, better preparing students for the evolving job market. By enhancing career counseling, mentorship programs, and labor market information, students will be equipped to make informed decisions. Integrating life skills, critical thinking, and gamified learning into the curriculum will create a more adaptable workforce. The introduction of merged vocational and general high schools will promote inclusivity and lifelong learning, while extracurricular activities, adult education, and summer programs will foster personal and professional growth. These reforms will modernize the education system, cultivate well-rounded, employable young adults, and help students meet the evolving demands of both the labor market and society.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Eurostat. (2024). *Educational attainment statistics*. European Commission. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Educational_attainment_statistics
2. Eurostat. (2024). *Education and training - lifelong learning: Percentage of population having completed at least upper secondary education*. European Commission. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00186/default/table?lang=en&category=t_educ.t_educ_outc
3. Cedefop. (2023). *Cyprus: Bridging the gap between higher education and the labour market*. Cedefop. Retrieved from https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/cyprus-bridging-gap-between-higher-education-and-labour-market?utm_source=chatgpt.com
4. Eurostat. (2024). *Educational attainment of the population: Percentage of population having completed at least upper secondary education*. European Commission. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00053/default/bar?lang=en&category=t_educ.t_educ_outc
5. University of Cyprus. (2021). *CyEPR Vol. 15, No. 2: Educational Policy Research in Cyprus*. University of Cyprus. Retrieved from https://www.ucy.ac.cy/erc2/wp-content/uploads/sites/125/2023/08/CyEPR_Vol15_No2_A3_12_2021.pdf
6. European Commission. (2019). *Education and training monitor 2019: Volume 2, country analysis*. European Commission. Retrieved from <https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/volume-2-2019-education-and-training-monitor-country-analysis.pdf>
7. OECD. (2020). *Education at a glance 2020: OECD indicators*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/53f23881-en>
8. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (n.d.). *ESCAP peers: A message to youth*. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Retrieved from https://www.unodc.org/pdf/youthnet/action/message/escap_peers_07.pdf
9. Οργανισμός Νεολαίας Κύπρου. (2022). *Έκθεση πορισμάτων 4ης Εθνικής Συνόδου Νέων 2022* [Report of findings from the 4th National Youth Summit 2022]. Οργανισμός Νεολαίας Κύπρου. Retrieved from <https://youthpolicy.onek.org.cy/wp-content/uploads/Εκθεση-Πορισμάτων-4ης-Εθνικής-Συνόδου-Νέων-2022-v.27.06.2022.pdf>
10. Οργανισμός Νεολαίας Κύπρου. (2022). *Youth barometer 4*. Οργανισμός Νεολαίας Κύπρου. Retrieved from <https://youthpolicy.onek.org.cy/wp-content/uploads/Youth-barometer-4.pdf>
11. Ministry of Education and Culture. (2023). *Preliminary results of the first cycle of the Cyprus national graduate tracking survey*. Ministry of Education and Culture. Retrieved from https://archeia.moec.gov.cy/mc/895/2023_10_06_report_preliminary_results_first_cycle_cyprus_national_graduate_tracking_survey.pdf