



**START  
POINT**

Citizenship Learning in a Shifting Society

## National Report - Cyprus

Center for Social Innovation



## STARTPOINT RESEARCH - Citizenship and disadvantaged adults:

### Introduction:

This report uses desk and field research to figure out why there is lack of social and political participation of young vulnerable adults, what is being done about it and what can be done in the future. The findings of this research will help us design a toolkit to help those people in the barriers they face concerning this issue. Our main goal is to enable adults to adapt to their new or existing environments and overcome political, economic or social challenges through social and economic inclusion, which presupposes engagement as an active citizen (Toiviainen, Kersh, Hyytiä, 2019).

Evidence that Adult Education can enable citizens to become more active and resourceful members of their communities and to become more tolerant of diversity and cultural heritage. (Toiviainen, Kersh, Hyytiä, 2019). Education is key in creating emancipated and active citizens on a political level. (Papaioannou, Gravani, 2018). Vulnerable adults want to feel 'resilience' and 'self-efficacy'. (Papaioannou, Gravani, 2018)

### General issues:

- in the non-formal learning sector, and specifically in adult education, there are no standardised curricula for Citizenship education. (EAEA, 2019).
- The concern of raising the level of the economic and social skills of the adult population has characterized both national and European policy developments. Addressing these complex problems specifically through engaging and re-engaging the adult population in lifelong learning (LLL) and skills development has become an important target of national

governments across Europe and globally (Toiviainen, Kersh, Hyytiä, 2019).

- Tokenism and not actual participation of young people/vulnerable groups (Council of Europe).
- Lack of “social capital”

Therefore: Major barriers to political participation of vulnerable groups: socio-cultural and socio-economic.

Cyprus:

In general:

During my research, it became apparent to me that the information that exists regarding Cyprus and the Greek-speaking world in general, heavily focuses on the education of children on this topic. From preschool to teenage years, there is plenty of information on how to create active citizens through compulsory, basic education, (Kouraki H, Borilla B, 2014) the conflict between religious and citizenship education in schools (Zembylas & Loukaidis, 2016), how to teach about the constitution, on ideas of democracy and nation, on creating a European citizen and that person's participation in democracy and human rights (Topalidou F, 2021), national identity of teenagers (Stratoudaki H, 2016).

There seems to be this idea that the active citizen is built as early as possible, while there is not much interest or ways for this education to become life-long. While there seems to be an agreement that formal and informal learning is fundamental for the democratic participation of the individual (Gravani, Ioannidou, 2014). Therefore, the first obstacle we can easily observe, is the lack of resources for adults to be educated on the topic, evident from the lack of academia on the subject.

Some context:

Based on research we have among the lowest participation of youngsters in national elections. Between 1999 and 2009 young adults decreased their intentions to vote by 40%, from having the highest rate in 1999 to being closer to the lowest levels of European youngsters. (Hoskins et al, 2012). The same applies for participation of young adults in organization affiliated with a political party or union (ibid, p26). However, young people in southern and eastern Europe intend to protest the most with many of these countries having about one quarter of the youth population intending to do this. Countries such as Greece and Cyprus continue to maintain high levels of dispositions towards protest across the decade whilst in eastern European countries there has been a particularly large rise in interest to protest amongst the younger generations (ibid, p27). This reveals that there is no apathy towards politics or democratic participation, but simply dissatisfaction with the current state of being with trust in democratic institutions declining significantly (ibid, p48).

In Cyprus adult education is a field that has gained distinct attention only within the last few years. Despite the reforms taking place, the statistics still reflect low levels of participation of young age groups. At the same time the PIAAC survey (MoEC 2016) has revealed a low level of basic skills attainment among the young adult population. Albeit the low level of basic skills of low qualified adults (ISCED 0–2), their participation is still the lowest among all other groups. The attention given to the field by the state is an indicator of the significant role adult education has to play, especially in helping overcome the current financial crisis. The National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2014–2020 is an important step toward addressing key challenges in the field of adult education and lifelong learning, although the implementation of planned reforms is not always on time (Papaioannou 2016).

Disadvantaged social groups will be motivated to use the Internet in ways that can assist them in increasing bridging social capital. In line with similar findings from other countries, it strengthens the assumption that the Internet is used in a compensatory or remedial

fashion by young people, in an attempt to overcome existing physical and social barriers to association and personal development. (Miloni, Doudaki, Demertzis, 2014)

#### Challenges:

- A challenge for adult education in Cyprus is the need to bridge the world of education and training with the real world of work. (Kersh et al., 2021). Also, there is not much activity targeted at the identification and understanding of learners' needs. (ibid, p24). Most of the programmes offered in formal adult education, especially those offering second-chance education to low educated young adults (i.e., Evening Gymnasiums-Lyceums, Evening Technical Schools), do not use tools for assessing the learners' needs and adjusting to them (ibid).
- In terms of weaknesses, it is possible to cite the lack of a culture of learning, the lack of a workforce with specific training, and in some cases the utilisation of education as a partisan issue (Zarifis 2012, 2019)
- There seems to be a culture that the lack of education of adults is because of their personal failing, and many participate in education programmes just to get a certificate, because they have to. Life-long learning. Therefore we must address the perception of barriers of the learners themselves (Kersh et al., 2021). Need to improve outreach and widen participation (ibid.) We need to create conditions that will eventually allow greater collaboration and commitment among various social partners and the development of a sustainable information network (ibid.).
- Most south European countries do not show any favourable conditions for increasing participation of young adults in learning (see Carneiro 2011; Lucio-Villegas 2012; Mayo 2012; Papaioannou 2016; Zarifis 2008). This is an institutional issue.

- In Cyprus, there is still a lack of empirical research in the field of adult education, in general, and especially in the field of second chance education. (Papaioannou, Gravani, 2018)
- Adult students of second chance schools are characterised as displaying weak levels of economic, cultural and social capital as they come predominantly from the lowest social classes. The enhancement of their cultural and social capital has been considered important in the ongoing process of their empowerment. (ibid)
- Issues with existing educational programmes for adults: unresponsive to reform, unwillingness of relevant authority to develop educational programme on specific learners' needs (ibid).
- the learners seem to reproduce in their discourse the pattern of the dominant rhetoric, according to which early school leaving is a result of the learner's inability or failure to learn (ibid).
- the absence of an adult learning culture that recognizes, evaluates and serves the needs of this particular population. (Ibid).
- Socio-economic effects: lack of funding in adult education - the general economic and sociopolitical outlook in the majority of the European south, has a persisting –if not intensified– effect on adult participation in education in general. This tendency is more evident among young adults with low skills.

Good practices:

The National Lifelong Learning Strategy for 2014–2020 is focused on the promotion of vocational education and training especially targeted at young adults. The implemented and planned developments and reforms are a serious step towards combating skills mismatch and youth unemployment. The Cypriot Human Resource Development Agency (HRDA) is promoting research activities (skills forecasting) for understanding and harmonising

the supply of skills to the needs of the economy, with no reference to social and civic skills (Cyprus Government 2015).

In Cyprus at the moment, a major challenge for adult education that focuses on active citizenship is the planning and implementation of a special Administration of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning under the aegis of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The Administration is an opportunity for the creation of a group of adult education experts, which will lead to the promotion of reforms and developments under a unified plan. At the same time, this evolution will address the need for the creation of a database of information, data and literature on adult education on a local basis and will further promote the systematisation of the field (Papaioannou 2016). Additionally, this reform will ease the creation of a monitoring mechanism that will ensure the quality of the programmes. (Kersh et al., 2021).

Key strengths in the policy area in this region of Europe however, include the tradition that connects adult education and learning with local communities, and the work that is been done by several NGOs particularly with young migrants and refugees as well with young ROMA population (Kersh et al., 2021).

Recommendation for policymakers:

- Support the professionalization of adult educators as well as the development of new methods in order to better address learning needs of marginalised and disadvantaged groups (EAEA, 2019).
- Reform needs to be done in relation to the relevance between adult educational policies with provision of active citizenship programmes, as well as the improvement of lifelong counselling and guidance for those who are socially vulnerable. Otherwise

we will continue to see low skilled, migrants and long-term unemployed (Kersh et al., 2021).

- Establishment of a legislative framework that will define and regulate adult educational staff. (Kersh et al., 2021).
- Adult teaching staff need diversity training. The intercultural competence of adult educators in Europe needs to be strengthened (Zarifis 2019). The majority of adult educators who participated in the EduMAP research suggested that they also feel weak and vulnerable when it comes to perform in learning environments with diverse audiences. The use of effective methods for creating inclusive programmes is also essential. Most south European countries still tend to use traditional methods, resistant to change, not accessible for non-natives (Kersh et al., 2021).

#### Recommendations for education providers:

- Use these methods in particular to address marginalised and disadvantaged groups that need the most support (EAEA, 2019)
- the development of social, political and economic capabilities of young adults in vulnerable situations can take place through different types of AE and LLL programmes (e.g. vocational education, basic skills classes, second-chance education) in both formal and informal settings (Toiviainen, Kersh, Hyytiä, 2019).
- reflect new social and economic requirements – adjust to new developments (Toiviainen, Kersh, Hyytiä, 2019).
- Must take into account the multi-dimensional vulnerabilities of their students, introduce the concept slowly, and taking into consideration language and cultural barriers – do not treat them as a common target group (Toiviainen, Kersh, Hyytiä, 2019).



## Survey results:

Within the implementation of this project we designed and disseminated a survey. Our target group was young adults of ages 20-30 at the risk of social exclusion and marginalization, including those with limited education and from a migrant background and those who work with them. The purpose of the survey, was to figure out the current state of being in the country in terms of social and political participation of vulnerable groups. Specifically, we asked about existing good practices, what barriers do they face, who they usually rely on for assistance and what improvements should be made.

The survey was made on google forms in English and translated in all partner languages. We disseminated throughout the months of March and April with different methods including social media posts, emails sent directly to organizations who work with the target group, as well as two face to face events which we participated/organized as an organization. In total, we gathered 74 answers.

The majority of the people that completed the survey belong in the target group (around 70%) while 30% of the respondents were people who work with them, half of which were from NGOs/Non-profits and some other notable minorities were people in the private sector and educational institutions. The majority of the respondents were women.

From the results we got in Cyprus, we can draw the following conclusions:

- A big part of our demographic is English-speaking and/or French speaking only, which creates an issue for them to fit in the general society. I was told by organizations who work with migrants and refugees in Cyprus that there are a lot of French-speakers among them and I translated the survey in French to reach them. There is lack of connection with the general public

due to the inaccessibility of Greek language courses by newly-arrived migrants and refugees or lack of effectiveness of them and therefore a lot live in the country without being able to speak in the native language. As a result they are isolated by the general population and therefore lack social and political participation.

- Our demographic does not have access to personal computers/technology. This is an issue I came across when trying to disseminate the survey through google forms. While this type of survey is pretty common and easily used, it is not accessible to our demographic. As a result, I had to print the survey to disseminate it to the majority of the interviewees.
- Our demographic does not have much access to technology or doesn't know how to use it, so the first issue is unequal access to technology therefore losing touch with other more privileged people their age, are not in the know for things that are happening and therefore missing out.
- This led to us having trouble finding people from the target group to complete set surveys and had to rely heavily on people and organizations who work with these people. While their perspective is important, that raises another issue: our target group must rely on people to speak on their behalf sometimes. This can be infantilizing, condescending and plain wrong since there is no one that can replace the perspective of someone facing a struggle, other than the person themselves.
- On whether there are good practices the most answers were negative. As "good practices" the following were identified:
  1. Some NGOs will accommodate volunteers and encourage participation
  2. Erasmus+ and similar initiatives e.g. YEU
  3. Avli, young greens
  4. Sports events, cultural events and various EU and NGOs projects
  5. there are public consultation for many legislations but they are in Greek and comments from the target group are not taken into account. there are also organisations that offer volunteering opportunities or initiatives such as the Youth

Parliament that promote active participation, but they usually require commitment, skills, and time that underrepresented youth don't have.

6. Cameroon National Youth Council (CNYC)
  7. Center for Social Innovation
  8. e-VELP: Young Volunteer Educators e-Learning Program was an Erasmus+ project that trained and supported migrants and refugees to conduct their own workshops in collaboration with local organizations to promote their skills, knowledge and cultures. Project Phoenix has a program through which they support and mentor recognized refugees to become entrepreneurs. UNHCR Refugee Outreach and Volunteer Programme
  9. Caritas cyprus, home 4 cooperation, mi-hub
  10. youth democracy forums, model of MUN, EYP and Youth Council
  11. EU programs focus on metropolitan cities, and individuals from rural areas or from cities outside capitals have less options to become involved
- The most popular weaknesses of existing "good practices" were the inaccessibility in terms of location and technology.
  - The credit for the majority of initiatives/good practices take NGOs and Nonprofits with over 87% and following with 51% are citizen initiatives.
  - As main obstacles to promote participation of the target group were (in order of most popular to least: lack of accessibility in terms of language, lack of motivation, location is inaccessible, lack of resources and lack of training programmes.
  - The main form of disseminating ways of participation in social and civic life seem to be social media with over 90%, which reveals the disparities among people who don't have access to those means.
  - The target group seems to be left out in access of information due to its lack of socialization with the main population.
  - Finally, the most popular ways of solving this issue according to the participants are (from most voted to least): promotion of organization-funded programmes, change existing programmes and make them more accessible to the target group, push for stronger governmental action and to fund new initiatives.

## Conclusions:

Overall, we see some strong resistance on the part of people in power to cause systemic change. The protagonist of efforts to help the

target group seems to be NGOs and Nonprofits.

There is need to update education curriculum for adults and encourage a culture of learning. The main barriers that the target group is facing seem to have to do with isolation from the main population through lack of access to technology, language and resources.

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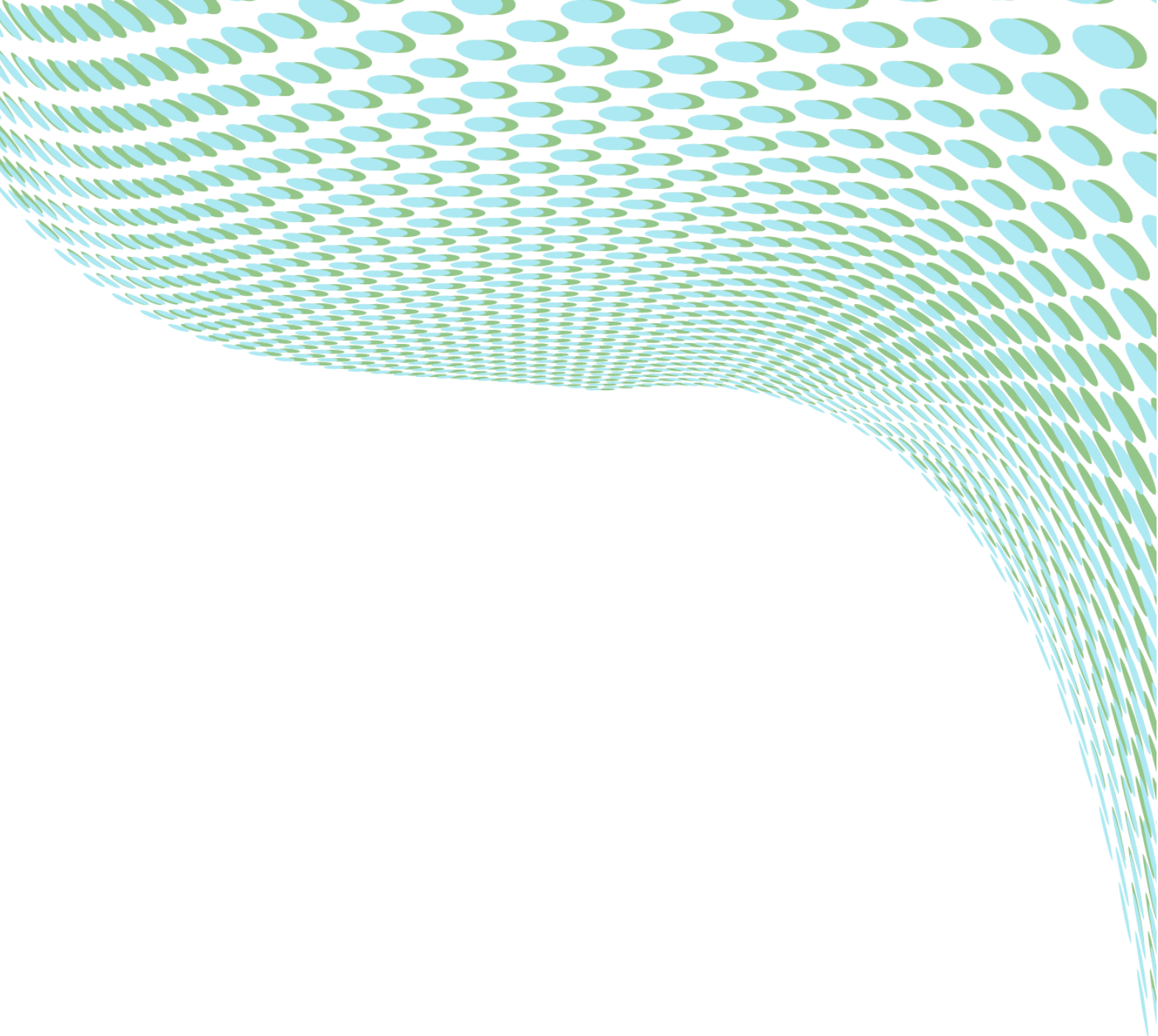
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