



# National State of the Art and Gap Analysis - Data Collection and Analysis in Cyprus

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Ecosystem of Needs, Practices Target  
Groups, Stakeholders and Mode of  
Work Report**



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# National Report – Cyprus

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# Introduction

Within the PASSAGE consortium, Slovenia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Lithuania will be taking appropriate measures to cope with increased level of third country nationals arriving in these destinations. In turn, this increase has been instrumental in revealing several limits of existing policies (either national, regional, or European) and current capacities for migrants' integration to local societies, in the field of educative integration. This gap was especially evident in the case of the early stage of arrival (i.e., reception), where integration action needs to be reinforced and supported to promote basic EU values and principles of inclusivity, diversity, and civic openness.

This document will serve as basis for further elaboration and could serve as comprehensive reference on the level of understanding, knowledge, and awareness of youth in all European participating countries, in issues related to pedagogies and pedagogical integration in the EU.

Within this document, partners will conduct a literature review of the pedagogical models and administrative structures and practices in securing the integration of children from a migrant background who enter new school environment. All partners will collect data from various resources, which will be summarized in the present report for further development. Part of this activity is the analysis of the limited findings available so far regarding comparative approaches and the utilization of integration in schools. Ecosystem Mapping State of The Art and Gap Analysis Report will be further developed into the compilation of national reports and a Transnational PASSAGE Ecosystem of Needs, Practices Target Groups, Stakeholders and Mode of Work.

Texts included in this Report should not be older than 2000, including books sections, scientific articles, policy briefs, policy documents (e.g., parliament reports, etc), grey literature (e.g., project reports).



# 1. Literature Review

## State of The Art and Gap Analysis

### Introduction to the national school system

The educational system of Cyprus is centralised as the schools are considered as government, not as community institutions and their administration is under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth (MoECSY), which is responsible for the education policy making, the enforcement of educational laws and for the preparation of the Curricula. The departments of the Ministry related to the education of pupils of age from 6-14 are:

- The Primary Education Department which deals with the education of children between the ages of 6 to 12 years old, who are attending public and private primary schools and the
- The Secondary Education Department which deals with the education of children between the ages of 12 to 18 years old, who are attending public and private secondary schools through two three-year cycles of study - the Gymnasium (12-15) and the Lyceum (15-18) (MoECSY, 2019).

### Systemic regulation on the education of newly arrived immigrants and refugees

All children in Cyprus have the right to enrol in public educational institutions, irrespective of their residence status or nationality. The Cypriot Refugee Law from 2000 stipulates that asylum-seeking children's school enrolment should start no later than three months from the date of their asylum application. State authorities (social welfare services, the MoECSY, the Ministry of Labour, etc.) facilitate the enrolment of asylum seekers' children and unaccompanied minors in schools and education in general.

According to data provided by the MoECSY, approximately 16% of the school population in Primary Education and 19% in Secondary Education during the school year 2020 - 2021 do not speak Greek as their first language. The top four countries of origin are Romania, Georgia, Bulgaria and Syria. Recently arrived migrant children



from war-torn or economically less-developed countries present particular challenges.

In 2016 the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth declared its commitment to the smooth integration of pupils with a migrant background<sup>1</sup> into the educational system of Cyprus through setting up an Interdepartmental Committee and a [Policy Paper](#). The policy paper aimed at providing a framework for every action and activity which falls within the Cyprus educational system in respect to the issue of the integration of pupils with migrant backgrounds. The text records the current situation and presents a new proposal for the reception of children with immigrant biographies and the teaching of Greek as a second language, which is developed around five priority axes, as follows: (1) Learning the Greek language, (2) Reception of newly arrived children with immigration biographies, (3) Education and training of teachers, (4) Collection and analysis of data on the needs of students with migrant background and (5) Intercultural approach to new curricula.

Competency in the school language is an essential - although not unique - prerequisite to ensure that migrant pupils get the maximum benefit from the right to education. As a matter of top priority, programmes for learning of Greek as a second language are offered to these pupils in Primary (ages 6-12) and Secondary (ages 12-14) Education (Gymnasium). In recent years, various models have been adopted in the Cypriot education system for the linguistic support of pupils with migrant backgrounds.

Primary Education: A programme for learning Greek as a second language is offered in Primary schools. As regards *language learning* at reception, in the case of Primary Education, the route followed includes the registration of the student in the local school and the use of an electronic platform for mapping migrant students' profile. In March every year, a diagnostic test (written test consisting of reading and oral comprehension, and writing) is being applied to identify language needs/level. Extra hours for teaching Greek as a second/additional language are given to the school for

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Children with migrant backgrounds are defined as children who are immigrants themselves or have immigrant parents. Usually these children have particular educational needs, which may include difficulties in overcoming barriers – such as low performance in the language of the host country – or are submitted to discrimination. In such cases it may be required to take actions for their integration in the educational system, in accordance to the strategies set out by the EU. (Education and Training Strategy (ET 2020) to reduce school failure and dropout in member states. (Cooke O' Dowd, S. (2014) SIRIUS Policy Briefs: Recommendations for successful policies on migrant education. Reference: migrationeducation.org/implementing-policies-and-networking (02/11/16).



each student for two years according to a Council of Ministers decision dating back to 2004. The extra teaching periods are provided depending on the number of migrant children that attend each school and not depending on their level of Greek. This leads to the employment of about 90 extra teachers in primary schools. Due to changes in numbers (e.g. flows of refugees) schools are not able to ensure that teaching periods provided correspond to real numbers of students, or that groups of students of the same level are formed and attend a specific number of teaching hours per week as schools are expected to form groups and allocate teaching hours freely.

Following this effort and knowing how important it is to evaluate their knowledge in cognitive subject courses, through the mother tongue of the child upon the arrival of the migrant students at school, from the year 2019 diagnostic tests of knowledge in Mathematics have been developed. This enables (a) the students to have an initial evaluation of their knowledge of certain courses without the language barrier, which reinforces to a great extent their self-confidence and (b) the teacher knows the starting point of their teaching, which enables differentiation of teaching.

Secondary Education (Gymnasium): An Intensive Learning Programme for Greek as a second language with elements of History and Culture is offered in Secondary Education Schools (established since 2008). Transition classes with 19 hours per week (out of 38), focusing on language learning, are implemented in 18 schools (36 classes) in Cyprus. Fewer hours (5-6 per week) are provided in schools with small numbers of migrant students (e.g. Lyceums, Technical Schools) as well as for unaccompanied minors.

In the case of Secondary Education, the children with migrant backgrounds are divided into classes according to their level of knowledge of Greek. For that purpose, a diagnostic test (not standardized) is used to identify language needs covering all four language competences (oral and written comprehension, and writing) at the beginning of the school year. There is monitoring of the students' progress in learning Greek as a second language through tests in January and in June.

In addition to language learning, from 2018, children with migrant backgrounds are attending extra subject courses (Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology). These courses are enhanced with extra hours so that they cover as much as possible basic terminology and knowledge of each course. This was a result of concerns raised by teachers that it is easy to reach the basic communication skills in two years in the



transitional classes, but this is not enough to understand academic vocabulary and concepts related to subject courses.

Following this effort, as in Primary Education, from the year 2020 diagnostic tests of knowledge in Mathematics and in the Sciences (Biology and Physics) have been developed and applied to students with migrant backgrounds in the beginning of the school year.

### Other national initiatives

#### 1. Programme "[Activities of School and Social Inclusion](#)" (DRA.S.E.)

The programme aims at reducing early school leaving, creating positive attitudes towards the school and improving learning outcomes. The programme, co-funded by the European Social Fund, aims to mitigate the negative impact of the economic crisis on education and to prevent the social exclusion of vulnerable groups of pupils. The various measures offered in 96 schools at pre-primary, primary, secondary and technical education levels in Cyprus and include, among others, the following: (a) provision of morning and afternoon programmes for reinforcing learning and creativity of pupils and their families and (b) psychosocial support for pupils and their families through the establishment of "Information and Social-emotional Support Centres. A great number of students with migrant backgrounds are attending these programmes every year.

#### 2. Program "[Measures to improve the Social and Educational Integration of third country children in Cyprus](#)"

The program lasted from January 2017 to June 2018. It was coordinated by the Pedagogical Institute and co-financed by the Asylum, Immigration and Integration Fund and the Republic of Cyprus. The program consisted of four actions aimed at:

1. Research on the current situation at the policy level for the education of children with migrant backgrounds.
2. The training of teachers and executives of education in matters of management of socio-cultural diversity.
3. The cooperation of the parents with the school and their work as supporters / mediators.
4. The training of teachers in matters of multilingualism and teaching Greek as a second language.





The program also aimed to create deliverables, which can serve as supports - material to be used for all schools in Cyprus, Primary and Secondary Education, which welcome children with migrant backgrounds. Specifically,

1. A website which presents all the material produced during the program (presentations, trainings, educational material, guides).
2. Educational videos for the action of the parents - mediators, for the management of the socio-cultural diversity in the school and for the teaching of Greek as a second language.
3. Three Guides: I. A teacher's guide for teaching Greek as a second language, II. A guide for managing socio-cultural diversity in school, and III. A guide for mediators-supporters (in this guide, the rules of primary and secondary education are available translated, as well as basic course terms in four languages: Arabic, Russian, Ukrainian, Georgian). The Guides are available here: [Εκπαιδευτική Ένταξη Παιδιών με Μεταναστευτική Βιογραφία - Οδηγοί Π.Ι. \(pi.ac.cy\)](http://www.pi.ac.cy/Εκπαιδευτική_Ένταξη_Παιδιών_με_Μεταναστευτική_Βιογραφία_-_Οδηγοί_Π.Ι._(pi.ac.cy))
4. Rosetta Stone language learning software available to schools with a large number of children with migrant backgrounds.
5. Conducting trainings all over Cyprus in Primary and Secondary Education on issues of teaching Greek as a second language.
6. Development of an open source distance teachers' training material through the Moodle platform of the CPI [Course: Ενίσχυση Ελληνομάθειας και Πολυγλωσσίας \(pi.ac.cy\)](http://www.pi.ac.cy/Κατάρτιση_Ελλήνων_Μαθητών_και_Πολυγλωσσίας_(pi.ac.cy))

### 3. Programme ["Greek Language Learning Programme for Minor Third Country Nationals – ΜΑΘΑΙΝΩ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΑ"](#)

The project is coordinated by the Pedagogical Institute in collaboration with the Directorate of Primary Education and the companies CARDET and INNOVADE and is co-financed by the Asylum, Immigration and Integration Fund and the Republic of Cyprus. Upon completion of the project, participants are expected to acquire basic communication skills in the Greek language (speaking, reading, writing).

Through these skills, participants are expected to be able to communicate effectively in their daily lives and consequently in their school environment, using oral and written language correctly, thus improving their ability to integrate into society, minimizing the risks of social exclusion. The program continues during the current school year 2020 - 2021 in all provinces of Cyprus with children from Primary Education and will be offered in the summer for unaccompanied minors.



4. Anti-racism policy of the Ministry "[Code of Conduct against Racism & Guide for the Management and Recording of Racist Incidents](#)" (2014 - until today).

The Ministry's anti-racism policy is based on a whole-school approach, with a broad understanding of racism in all its forms, to include all forms of discrimination. It also provides schools and teachers with a detailed plan for dealing with and preventing racist incidents.

It includes definitions of key concepts (e.g. racism, discrimination, stereotypes, diversity, etc.), describes the responsibilities and commitments expected of each member of the school community, the various forms of racism (verbal or physical violence, cyberbullying, social violence, hate speech, etc.) and provides schools with the steps to manage racist incidents in a practical table.

## Limited findings and evaluation of existing pedagogical integration models and practices

As part of this effort made by the MoECSY, since 2016 for the integration of students with migrant backgrounds in the educational system of Cyprus, in March 2019 a peer counselling session by the European Commission took place in Nicosia. As a result of this two-days visit, a Report was delivered to the Ministry by the European Commission.

For the purposes of this part of the National Report of the PASSAGE project, we will use examples of good practice and the recommendations for a reception phase that are presented in the [European Commission Report](#) and are related to PASSAGE and we will discuss their implementation.

## Policy suggestions for the reception phase and steps forward the last two years

### **1. Align reception in primary and secondary education better**

"There is currently an obvious misalignment between the reception phases implemented at primary and secondary level. Well-functioning elements and shortcomings exist at both levels with little overlap. Peers noted that Cyprus has a well-designed reception phase for secondary education: the school choice depends on whether teachers qualified for Greek as a second language are present at the school; the number of hours for support teaching is clearly defined; a separate



curriculum exists. In primary education, students are placed into mainstream classes for most of their presence at school. As described above, the flexible use of hours allocated to schools for language support results very often in small groups and few hours for the individual student, thereby making it more difficult for those children to follow mainstream lessons and ultimately delaying their integration into education." (European Commission, 2019:14)

This challenge still exists. The change in legislation has not yet been achieved. However, from the next school year, in primary schools with a large number of students with migrant backgrounds, teaching hours and teachers from DRA.S.E. will be used.

## **2. Ensure more hours for language and educational support in primary education**

"To better integrate migrant students into education, they need to receive more hours of educational support at primary level, especially at those schools with a high share of migrant students. It is generally acknowledged that parallel instruction in mainstream classes facilitates and accelerates integration of migrant students. Since Cyprus clearly advocates a reception phase that ensures fast and smooth integration and avoids segregation and isolation, peers concluded that this can best be accomplished by maintaining the general approach of immediate integration into mainstream classes while extending and reinforcing the provision of parallel educational support." (European Commission, 2019:15)

This challenge still exists.

## **3. Design a more flexible, easy to use mapping system that evaluates competences other than those in Greek language**

"Accurate mapping of students' knowledge and competences is essential for their effective integration into education. In Cyprus, in primary education diagnostic tests are administered in March, which measure Greek language attainment based on the Common European Framework of Reference in Languages (CEFR). A separate test is applied in secondary education assessing students with a migrant background arriving from primary level and those whose proficiency in Greek is considered insufficient by the school. [...]

Additional, non-educational data is collected and kept in the online repository, which is updated throughout the year. Despite the existing diagnostic practices and data at



primary level, so far, transfer and utilisation of data on students with a migrant background arriving at secondary level is insufficient. Cyprus is however working towards making the data on language proficiency from primary education available for mapping at secondary education. A pilot phase is under way at present and will be extended to all secondary schools as of next year.”

“There was broad agreement among peers that initial mapping should move beyond the current exclusive focus on Greek language proficiency. [...] To map students’ existing competences, they would have to be able to use their home language.” (European Commission, 2019:16-17)

The mapping system will be implemented to all schools as of September 2021. Students’ assessment in Mathematics and in Physics and Biology through their mother languages are being implemented the last two years.

#### **4. Widen the primarily language-focused teaching support to include other competences and school subjects**

“There was general agreement among peers that Cyprus’ current extensive focus on Greek language competences and acquisition needs to be broadened. It is evident that good competences in the language of schooling are the basis for broader successful educational performance and integration. However, the emphasis on a certain level of language skills before wider integration can be achieved could be counterproductive for fast integration. It underutilises the potential of other subjects and activities for supporting language and other skills and it puts a disproportionate responsibility on teachers of Greek as a second language for the successful integration of students with a migrant background.” (European Commission, 2019:19)

In order to implement this recommendation, in the last two years an effort has been made to apply the content and language integrated learning approach (CLIL) methodology in Primary Education schools. In Secondary Education, teaching courses have been granted for remedial teaching in Mathematics and Sciences. For that purpose, language-sensitive teaching can be very beneficial. It requires a certain linguistic knowledge and – even more important – linguistic awareness among subject teachers, which is not easy, but trainings to teachers from CPI have been done in the last two years.



## **5. Design/revise the curriculum for reception classes primary and secondary education**

As from September 2020, a unified Curriculum for all levels of education, the "Syllabus for Greek as a second language (Pre-primary, Primary, Secondary, Technical and Vocational Education of Cyprus)", has been communicated to all schools. The new Syllabus consists of a [Curriculum unified for all levels of education](#), Indicators for comprehension and production of oral and written speech and academic skills for [Primary](#) and [Secondary Education](#) combining language and content learning as well as introducing migrant students to Cypriot society and culture and using computers and/or teaching digital skills.

## **6. Improve monitoring of migrant students' performance**

In terms of student assessment, as from September 2019 teachers have at their disposal Initial, mid-year and final [assessment tests](#) of Greek as a second language, as well as diagnostic tests for Mathematics, Physics and Biology, in the students' home languages.

## **7. Better prepare and accompany transition into mainstream education**

"The measures described above can contribute to smooth integration into mainstream education. However, they are hardly ever enough. Experience in several countries shows that two years of learning support (either separate or integrated) is often not sufficient for many migrant students to follow mainstream education. It should therefore be supported by other measures including additional educational support, personnel, networking outside." (European Commission, 2019:24)

For that purpose schools and migrant students are using the Programmes mentioned above: Programme ["Activities of School and Social Inclusion" \(DRA.S.E.\)](#) and Programme ["Greek Language Learning Programme for Minor Third Country Nationals – ΜΑΘΑΙΝΩ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΑ"](#)

Policy suggestions for supporting educators – teachers, school leaders, inspectors and steps forward the last two years



## **8. Ensure that teachers have or gain adequate competences for teaching migrant students (through initial and continuing training)**

“Teachers teaching migrant students and in particular teaching Greek as a second language should have the qualification to do so. In practice this can however not always be ensured. Cyprus should therefore enlarge its efforts to widen the pool of second language teachers. [...] Initial training should ensure that teachers are acquainted with teaching in multilingual and diverse classrooms. [...] Establishing therefore a national competence framework for teachers that includes the multilingual and multicultural perspective can inform initial training programmes for teachers. [...]

Continuing training echoes much of what has been said for initial training as regards content. School leaders and education administrators are crucial for spreading new knowledge and good practice. The peer counselling identified a distinct need in Cyprus for training school leaders and school inspectors (who oversee curriculum implementation and conduct teacher evaluations) in diversity and inclusive education as well as in effectively supporting inclusive education in their schools.” (European Commission, 2019:27)

The CPI has already responded to this need by designing separate relevant training seminars for teachers and for school leaders of schools with significant migrant populations. To ensure participation, Cyprus can make the training mandatory. Intercultural competence should also become part of a/the mandatory training/qualification criterion for school leader candidates.

## **9. Better utilise existing teacher resources with regard to migrant education**

### **10. Facilitate networking among teachers and schools**

“Better mutual support among teachers (and school leaders) was discussed in the peer review as one of the major needs to help them integrate migrants better. More networking opportunities should be given to educators both within and between schools.” (European Commission, 2019:28)

For that purpose, the last two years networks of schools have been created, using the blended learning methodology, with the participation of teachers in a Moodle



platform and face to face training. The networks include teachers of primary and secondary education teaching Greek as a second language, School leaders in Primary Education and Teachers of Mathematics, Biology and Physics in Secondary Education.

### **11. Allow for more time beyond contact hours in the teaching process**

This does not only refer to training but in particular to day-to-day practice. Teaching schedules unfortunately do not allow enough time for reflection and reaction by teachers yet. (European Commission, 2019:29)

### **12. Provide specific training and support for school leaders and inspectors on migrant education and inclusion**

“School leaders in Cyprus are both teachers and administrators for primary education. In secondary education, they are administrators. Inspectors are administrators, working at assessing educational work and teachers, but they also have a counselling role for teachers and schools. [...] Training and support for school leaders (and inspectors) should concentrate on three main areas: (1) Diversity (2) Legal and administrative issues (3) Whole school approach.” (European Commission, 2019:30)

The current school year (2020-2021) online seminars were offered by the CPI to primary and secondary inspectors for the new Curricula as well as seminars to school directors and depute directors for whole school approach. However many steps still need to be taken in this direction.

### **13. Allow schools more flexibility for the integration of migrant students**

“Putting in place legislation and a framework for the continuous reception of newly arrived migrant children into schools will be essential for creating certainty around the routines and procedures.” (European Commission, 2019:31)

Reception Guides for [Primary](#) and [Secondary](#) schools have been developed by the CPI: These Guides provide guidelines for the organization of a school that welcomes a small or a large number of students with migrant background, for a holistic approach by the school management, the teachers, the parents, the community and



for the cooperation between the teachers teaching Greek as a second language and those teaching other subjects.

In addition to that, the Pedagogical Institute has proceeded with the [translation of school documents in different languages](#) for primary and secondary school students with migrant background and their families. So, from September 2020, a school has at its disposal all the important documents that have to be given to students and their families in English, French, Arabic, Russian, Bulgarian and Romanian.

“However, all peers underlined that in order to ensure smooth and efficient implementation, a degree of flexibility and autonomy for the individual schools is crucial. This is currently not the case in Cyprus, where provisions are carried out in a standardised manner, which does not allow for case-by-case adaptations.” (European Commission, 2019:31)

### **14. Make integration of migrant students the responsibility of the whole school**

For whole school approach you can see the actions described for recommendations 12 and 13. However many steps still need to be taken in this direction.

### **15. Collaborate with whole community, including parents local authorities, organisations, volunteers, social workers, psychologists**

In Cyprus, as in many countries, migrant parents are less likely to be involved in the school community than native parents are. Apart from linguistic difficulties, cultural barriers, such as different understandings of authority, of education and the respective roles of schools, teachers and parents, are mentioned. For that reason, a [Guide for parents – mediators](#), which provides instructions for the cooperation of school and parents – mediators, has been published, as well as [Guide to managing socio-cultural diversity](#) by the CPI, with articles on the topic and examples from schools that welcome students with migrant background.

### Policy suggestions for policy makers





### **16. Review existing practice with regard to possible non-legislative (short-term) and legislative (longer-term)**

A non-exhaustive list of issues involving both legislative and non-legislative changes were discussed during the peer counselling. Non-legislative and therefore short-to-medium-term changes that were identified include: better networking between teachers and school; promoting good practice examples of successful integration practices by schools and teachers; improving parental and community involvement; provide training for teachers, school leaders and inspectors; enhancing – to some degree – flexibility of teacher allocation and hours.

Legislative changes discussed during the peer counselling also referred: to teacher allocation and hours; to a redefined inclusive and continuous mapping approach; to teaching time, changes in initial teacher education to systematically involve the diversity dimension.

### **17. Create an integration framework going beyond schools and develop synergies among authorities**

### **18. Set indicators/benchmarks for integration of migrants**

Guidance in the form of indicators and/or benchmarks can help schools and policy makers with the integration of migrant students. They should be both quantitative and qualitative to allow for comparability but also the assessment of non-measurable dimensions. (European Commission, 2019:31)

### **19. Reinforce the resource centre for overall coordination**

### **20. Create specific (mobile) support to assist schools**

## Diversity

### **21. Strengthen awareness and practice of diversity and antiracist education through training and other measures**



"In 2015 Cyprus has introduced a "Code of Conduct against Racism and a Guide to the Management and Recording of Racist Incidents" as well as a support network for schools which implement the code. According to this code of conduct, racist incidents should be reported by schools and penalties applied as proposed in the guide. [...] It will therefore be important to improve implementation of the existing policy. (European Commission, 2019:37-38)



## 2. Field Research

# Analysis of the focus group research with teachers

### Self efficacy

During the focus group discussion, teachers mentioned that they feel more efficient every year they are involved in teaching students with refugee or migrant backgrounds. The assistance of the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute (CPI) is important in both Primary and Secondary Education, through the continuous training (seminars etc) and the Educators' Support Network through the CPI's Moodle platform where they have the opportunity to exchange ideas and teaching material. Moreover, experience plays an important role, as it constantly provides teachers with self-efficacy, and gives them the opportunity to co-operate with other colleagues. In addition to that, they referred to the contribution of the School and Social Inclusion Actions with extra curriculum teaching hours offered to the students or with the contribution of the second teacher during the class hours. One of the more challenging issues that they face is finding and creating teaching material, as it is a very time-consuming process. At the same time, they have to deal with a lot of administrative tasks. Especially, communicating with the parents of students with refugee or migrant background is sometimes very difficult, because they cannot speak Greek or English. Teachers mentioned that they are using students with the same home language that are speaking Greek to act as mediators.

### Implementing Practices

Teachers mentioned that the first step is to identify the problems which the children with migrant and refugee backgrounds deal with and at the same time to inform the School Administration and the Teachers' Association. The teachers stressed that colleagues must be aware and cognitively self-sufficient, in order to achieve the smooth integration of students with refugee or migrant background



in the school environment. They also said that it would be better to establish a more flexible Curriculum for students with migrant backgrounds and that the Ministry should recognise the need to see each case individually and send guidelines directly to the schools, so that teachers would not have to find solutions on their own for every issue that comes up. At the same time, teachers mentioned that classrooms that are being used for language learning classes do not always have the appropriate equipment (e.g. computer and video projector).

On the other hand, they referred to fruitful cooperation with other organizations, e.g. the University of Nicosia, which offered workshops to students regarding diversity. The teachers also emphasized the participation of students with refugee or migrant backgrounds in various programs and activities that are taking place in school, like European Parliament Ambassador School Programme, School and Social Inclusion Actions (ΔΠΑ.Σ.Ε.), Children mediators, Competitions: Billiards, Dance, Football. All the above provide great confidence to students with refugee or migrant backgrounds, as their skills are recognised and in this way their integration into the school environment is facilitated.

## Cultural competency

All teachers referred to the concept CHALLENGE. Each school year is different from the previous one, for teaching students with refugee or migrant background. The children who arrive each year are from different countries and each one carries their own issues. The teachers said that they have to be constantly creative, in order to handle and take advantage of the diversity, for a better school environment. Respect of diversity, as well as empathy cultivation, are big challenges for schools. Moreover, they focused on their efforts to strengthen communication between students with refugee or migrant background and Cypriot students so that all students feel that they belong to the school community. An example they referred to is the decoration of a Christmas Tree with flags from different countries and linguistic wishes.

## Competency/Preparation

The teachers mentioned that, when they started teaching migrant students, they did not have the competency, but continuous professional learning from the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute is important in both Primary and Secondary



Education. Through continuous training (seminars etc) and the Educators' Support Network through the CPI's Moodle platform they have the opportunity to learn, exchange ideas and teaching material with other colleagues. At the same time, they mentioned that they need more training on differentiation of teaching, according to the needs of students, on strengthening their ability to distinguish whether the problems faced by the students with refugee or migrant background come from learning difficulties or from communication difficulties, on teaching methodology, on diversity and integration practices etc.

## Student needs

Students with refugee or migrant background have to integrate into the school environment in a way that does not interrupt their academic careers and their scientific literacy, due to immigration. For that reason, the school has to enable students to connect the knowledge they already possess with the new linguistic and cognitive knowledge provided by the school and the wider environment. The whole school has to create the appropriate structures for integration but in some cases teachers mentioned that it is important to have Educational Psychologists at school. In some cases, school has to meet basic needs of the students (food, clothing, school bag, mental empowerment, stationery, health issues, eyeglasses). For that reason, the school organizes bazaars for extra income.

The teachers stated that, in the absence of external motivation, they have to rely on their own personal initiative in order to continue to help students with refugee or migrant background in their integration process. For example, they said that, when there is no classroom with the appropriate equipment they have to plan their lesson in different ways every day and make suggestions to the school Director. The teachers also mentioned that a motivation would be to have reduced teaching hours, to utilize more educational staff, experienced in teaching migrant students, and not moving them to schools without migrant students. At the same time, they suggested the introduction of coordination hours and the reduction in the number of students with refugee or migrant background in classrooms. Students with refugee or migrant background should be evaluated for their efforts to integrate into the school environment.



## 3. Analysis of the focus group research with stakeholders

### National strategy and guidelines

The national strategy and guidelines concerning the integration and formal education of children with migrant biographies in the Cypriot Education System is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth (MoEC) with the contribution of an "Interdepartmental committee" consisting of representatives of all Directorates of Education (Secondary General, Secondary Technical and Vocational Education and Training, Primary Education) and officials of the Pedagogical Institute (P.I) and the K.E.E.A. (Center of Educational Research and Evaluation). This Committee is mandated to study the existing programmes for the integration of children with migrant background in Cypriot education and to submit recommendations for short- and long-term management of the issue and to improve integration programs within the context of the philosophy and planning for new curricula. As exemplified by Dr. Pavlina Hadjitheodoulou-Loizidou, Head of In-service Teacher Training Department at P.I. and presiding of the committee:

*"This committee has been assembled in 2016 following the "Policy Guidelines" put forward by the EU Policy Network on Migrant Education "SIRIUS"<sup>2</sup>, where the Ministry of Education was called to action and the then General Director gave his signed consent for their implementation. Based on these guidelines, we were called to create a Policy Document for the Interdepartmental Committee and reframe all previous and forthcoming actions for the integration of Migrant Students in this new context. The first Action Plan of the Committee was crafted and implemented in 2016-2018 and by the end of it we have made an evaluation and discussion for what has been its impact. We then organized a Peer Counselling with the contribution of the European Commission and talked with European peers. After these meetings a new document of guidelines has been proposed, which became a reference point for the following Action Plans of the Interdepartmental Committee."*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sirius-migrationeducation.org/>



The Interdepartmental Committee as an agency but also each of its members from their individual role positions are contributing to the formulation of an Action Plan setting key priorities and keystones. This committee is gathered every 2-3 months and is responsible for the submission of interim reports every six months. Based on new data and information, adjustments and revisions follow. The committee is following closely the recommendations made and promoted by the European Union, the Peer Counselling Report and the available literature based on the individual jurisdictions and expertise of its members (i.e. anti-racism policy, teaching of Greek as a second/foreign language, school administration) while considering all the particularities of the Cypriot context. The current policy paper put forward on a national level refers the provision of existing practices that will be described in the next section along with the recommendations and prediction of the stakeholders.

## Existing practices and long-term predictions

### 1. Training of Teachers

The Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, in cooperation with the Directorates of the MoEC has in recent years organized a variety of training activities (workshops, conferences, seminars – experiential learning workshops, optional seminars, school seminars, all year teachers' professional learning through networks etc.), with the aim of raising awareness and supporting primary and secondary education teachers on matters regarding the integration of pupils with migrant background. In particular, emphasis was placed on issues of addressing diversity and the implementation of an anti-racist policy, as well as on teaching Greek as a second language. Additionally, in the case of primary and secondary education, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute provides - on an annual basis since 2018 - school-level support to teachers participating in the 'Learning Greek as a Second Language Network' through a Moodle platform. In addition, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute created a website, which is hosted on the website of the Institute, which includes informative, educational and support material for the teaching of Greek as a second language, as well as material for the implementation of the anti-racist policy of the MoEC. Currently, continuous training is provided to teacher at all levels for the further enhancement of their role.

During the focus group, stakeholders have noted that emphasis on teachers' training needs to be placed not only in terms of the official but also the unofficial/hidden



curriculum (kryfo analytiko) of schools, meaning all the unofficial practices that take place outside of the formal curriculum that also impact the school life and integration of migrant students. As mentioned by Dr. Elena Papamichael: *"Teachers need to be trained to be alarmed at all instances. Racism is enacted despite the intentions of people. It is something that may be reproduced by the processes that we may do or we may not do. We need to recognize where racism is present at places that are not visible affecting the new coming students in many unforeseeable ways."*

Further on, as underlined by Dr. Androula Shimitra, Inspector of Primary Education, *"we need to find ways to strengthen the "Educators' Support Network" and their bank of resources as well as the exchange process in order to make the most out of the hard work made by the educators and disseminate valuable material customized to their needs". [...] It is important to mention that for the success of teaching programmes in schools our constant aim is to recruit experienced and trained teachers with the appropriate qualifications and specialisation in "Teaching Greek as a second language". Having the appropriate experience, knowledge as well as love and dedication are critical competencies and we have asked that the allocation of teaching time by the Ministry for the education of migrant students is made on the premise of teachers having these characteristics". Our great challenge is how not to "lose" experienced staff considering the mandatory annual "relocation" and "placement" of teachers into different schools.*

## 2. "Code of Conduct against Racism and a Guide to the Management and Recording of Racist Incidents"- Anti-racism policy

The successful integration of pupils with migrant background into the Cypriot education system also depends on combating any racist incidents they may be subjected to as victims, through the anti-racist policy of the MoEC "Code of Conduct against Racism and a Guide to the Management and Recording of Racist Incidents". Since the school is a state policy institution, the implementation of the anti-racist policy is in line with international and European conventions ratified by Cyprus and is an official state's stance against racism. This measure is even more appropriate in contexts such as the Cypriot context, which is characterized by specific historical and political particularities of the past, as well as by the present efforts to solve the Cyprus problem. The implementation of anti-racist policies on a general level contributes to fostering a culture of peace, non-violence and social justice in Cyprus, while responding to the objectives of education for human rights, education on citizenship and intercultural education.





The Anti-Racist policy, despite being a well-crafted document, its implementation has not been yet satisfactory. Dr. Elena Papamichael, during the focus group has exemplified that *“currently we can see a huge gap between the policy recommendations and their actual implementation in schools. Despite being a national policy, it is not practiced in the majority of schools. We have a document for the reporting of “Racism Incidents” that is expected to be filled by school administrations and be returned to us every June and based on the results we can respond in questions that come from European bodies that require the number of racism incidents in relation to migration or sexual orientation etc. Unfortunately, a rather small number of schools – about 100- have provided us with this documentation each year and from this number only half of them actually refer to the occurrence of such incidents- which in our opinion does not reflect the reality.”*

Another way for the stakeholders to access empirical evidence in relation to the Anti-racism policy is through the participation of schools in the “Network for the Support of Anti-racism policy” that is coordinated by the Pedagogical Institute in the last 3-4 years. Each year approximately 30-35 schools participate which is a rather small number out of the thousand schools that operate in the island. What is mentioned by Dr. Pavlina Hadjitheodoulou in response to this situation is the following: *“We need to create an environment of “permittance” and “participation”; for every child in school to be allowed to participate in all aspects of school life, whether this is facilitated through the right resources or perspectives, layers of history and identity or with the capacity building and cultivation of skills for the engagement with such material or understandings. “Versatility” is critically needed in our educational system and it needs to be treated as an ongoing process overcoming all structural hindrances that may exist in the system. We need to create a culture of non-tolerance to racism and discrimination within schools; such a school will resist any single act that may be threatening to the smooth integration of migrant students. To make this possible a key suggestion is to make this culture an integral part for the evaluation of school units. This is not to say that “enforcing” such culture should be our end goal but nonetheless a required framework for finding solutions and a lens for the improvement of schools in many aspects.*

3. Diagnosis and evaluation of the level Greek language competence - Test for the knowledge of the Greek Language (Δοκίμιο Ελληνομάθειας)



In the context of the official education policy in Cyprus, the Cypriot education system systematically proceeds in diagnosing the level of Greek-language proficiency of children with migrant background, based on weighted and validated diagnostic tests at all levels. As Yiasemina Karagiorgi has mentioned in the focus group discussion: *"After the feedback given by the Directory of Primary Education, we needed to form a reliable testing document for mapping and diagnosing the needs of migrant children that needed our support. We took the time to create a tool with reliable and consistent results, using as a primary resource the document "Do you speak Greek" developed by the Aristoteleion University (Greece). We obtained the appropriate licensing and with the appropriate adjustments we are currently using it as a pre-testing and post-testing tool for diagnosing the level Greek language competence. All the results of the testing are then introduced in the platform offered by the K.E.E.A. (Center of Educational Research and Evaluation) for the mapping of all students and their needs with updated information that are enriched with the results of the testing conducted for this group of students. "It is a very demanding process for which we are nonetheless content for its development and strive towards its improvement", Dr. Androula Shimitra has pointed out.*

#### 4. Teaching time and the supporting role of a second teacher

One important step that has been achieved in addition to the practice of "transitional classrooms" in secondary education is the introduction of migrant students in the main classrooms for Greek-language learning to secondary education with the contribution of inspectors of different specialisations into to make appropriate readjustment of other courses such as Mathematics, Science, English language, Citizenship education, so that to secure the support and quality learning of this students (19 hours per week).

One key resource that is intended to be used more extensively is the School and Social Inclusion Actions Educational Programs (ΔΠΑ.Σ.Ε.), which are funding the introduction of a second support teacher into the classroom so that all schools have more teaching time for learning as second language and cover all needs based on the European Framework of Studies (Ευρωπαϊκό Πλαίσιο Σπουδών). As mentioned by Dr Andreas Tsiakkiros, this action is meant to provide the Multilevel support of teachers with the introduction of a second teacher in the classroom especially in the cases of newly arrived migrants in the middle of the school year. Currently, we are trying to overcome all the technocratic as well bureaucratic process linked with the



implementation of the DRASE programs and we hope that in September 2021 we will be able to implement our proposal as envisioned by all stakeholder as for the utilisation of funds and resources from the programme DRASE. This entails the empowerment and strengthening of the role of the second teacher for taking up more responsibilities which is currently limited.

e. Other recommendations considering the National Context

The particularities of the Cypriot Education System in relation to the National context, remain a focus point for contextualising further changes and recommendations in terms of policy implementation. From such perspective, Dr Elena Papamichael, has pointed out that *“we need a Critical Reformation of our National Programme that is promoting multiculturalism and we are not referring only to the introduction of cultural elements such as Festivals with food, dances and music that are implemented once or twice per year, but we are talking about the horizontal integration of texts, artwork and resources of different cultures in the actual curriculum. One key example is the “Tiles of Knowledge - Ψηφίδες γνώσης” (<https://www.ucy.ac.cy/psifides-gnosis/el/>) of the University of Cyprus that discusses the artwork of disabled artist where the emphasis is no placed on the aspect of disability but that of inclusiveness, competency and expression. Likewise, any attempt to include material on cultural diversity should not be done for emphasising whether someone is a migrant or not but rather the pluralism and contribution of multiculturalism to our lives and societies.”* Further on, Dr. Pavlina Hadjitheodoulou has also marked that it is necessary *“to find solutions based on the Cypriot context; in the cases of other countries that have a decentralised system and each school has its own resources changes can be implemented differently on a customised basis, whereas in Cyprus everything is run centrally and thus such thing is not possible. For example, at some point we have elaborated with the idea of creating a “Moving/Remote Unit” with specialised staff that could support the different schools based on their needs while moving from school to school providing guidance and support. Finally, Dr. Yiasemina Karageorgi has underlined that “every new guideline needs to be accustomed to the needs of each “Directorate” (i.e. primary, secondary) and therefore timely feedback is needed through constant interaction. For example, one important issue that can be examined in such way is the need for a smooth transition from primary to secondary education. This is a problematic matter for the national students let alone students with migrant biographies that arrive late and unprepared in our country”.*



### **3. Analysis of teachers' perspective on integration of immigrant children and refugees**

This survey was created to identify the key challenges that educators in Cyprus face in the implementation of an inclusive environment to students from a migrant background and investigate their training needs.

All in all, 236 questionnaires were completed by educators, that teach in Elementary (34%) and High school (66%). The participants' experience in teaching varies from 0-2 years (7%), 3-5 years (6%), 6-8 years (2%), 9-10 years (5%) and most of them teach for more than 11 years (81%). At last, only 26% of the participants consider themselves a refugee or immigrant.

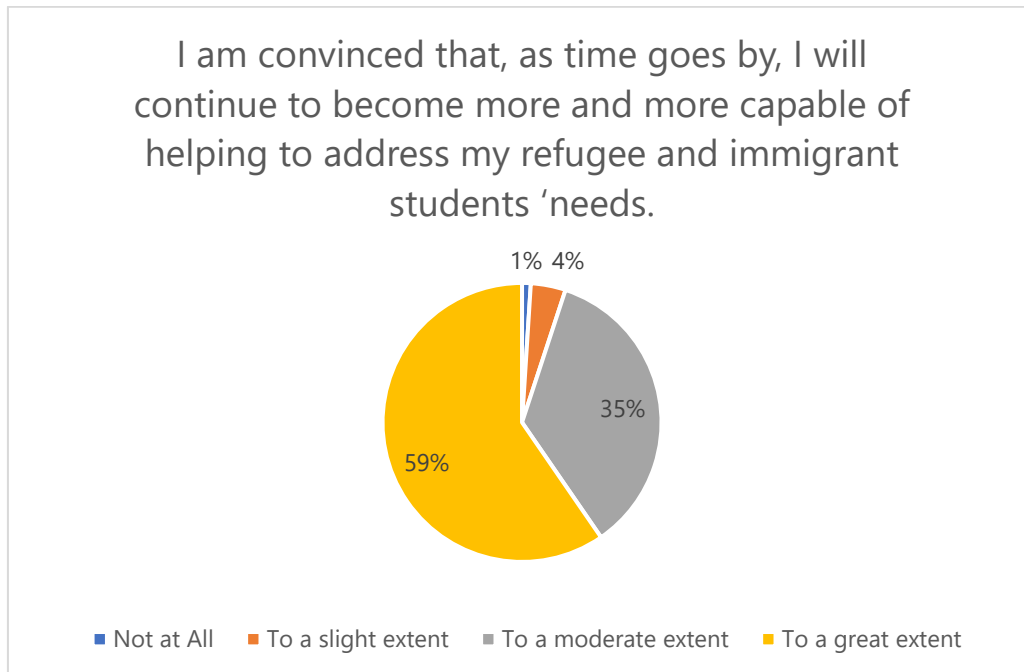
Our national online survey of 236 educators found that:

- Educators in Cyprus are aware that refugee and immigrant students have different needs and experiences than other students.
- Educators in Cyprus do not feel they have enough experience to support refugee and immigrant children in the classroom, although they are willing to learn new practices and ideas that will help student's integration.
- There are not enough programs or courses that can offer a training to help educators on how to promote an inclusive classroom with students from different cultural backgrounds.

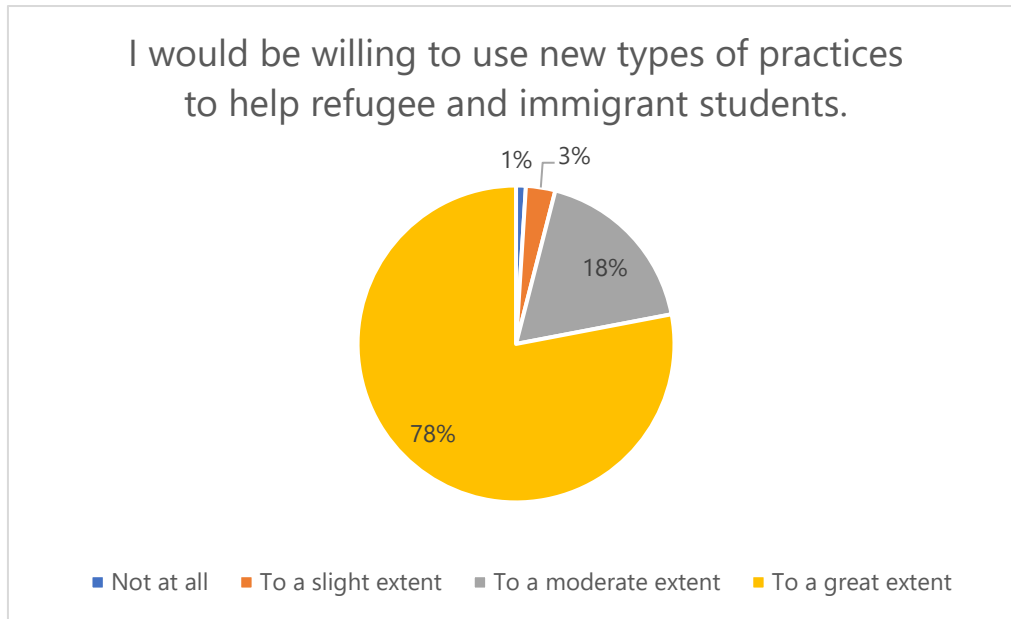
The comments from educators in statements related to how confident they are in teaching and their relationship with refugee and immigrant students is mostly positive with the largest percentage of 59% of them answering that as time goes by, they believe that they will be more capable to help and address their refugee and immigrant student's needs. The majority of them answered that they feel that they will be able to successfully teach all relevant subject content to refugee and immigrant students. Only 15% of educators answered that they do not believe they can maintain a positive relationship with refugee and immigrant parents when tensions arise and only 21% of them do not feel confident enough to be responsive



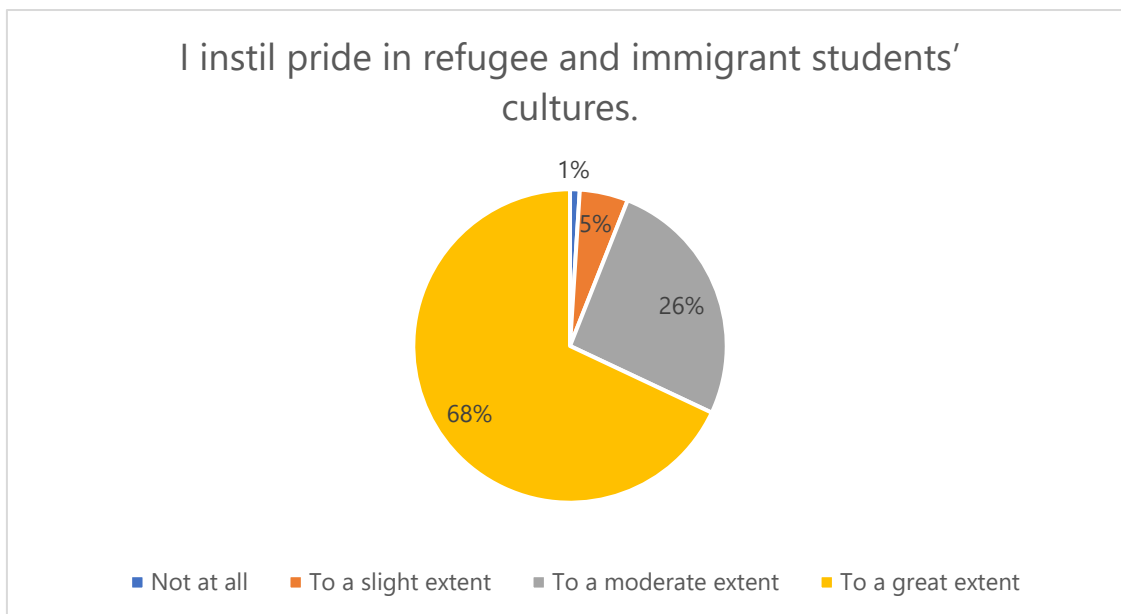
to their refugee and immigrant student’s needs even if they are having a bad day. Also, almost all educators replied that when they try hard, they can reach refugee and immigrant students and a slightly smallest percentage answered that if they try hard, they know that they will exert a positive influence on both their personal and academic development. Last on this category, most educators are certain that they can motivate their refugee and immigrant students to participate in innovative projects.



The results also presented a positive approach from most educators concerning their interest and will to learn more about implementation practices for refugee and immigrant students, where a high rate of 78% answered that they are willing to use new types of practices to help refugees and immigrant students and another large percentage (69%) are open to trying new types of practices even if they have to follow a treatment manual. Only 17% of the educators replied negatively to use research to learn how to implement practices for refugee and immigrant students, while an even smaller percentage of 5% replied that they are not willing to use new and different types of practices for refugees and immigrants. Educators seemed very positive towards research-based practices and interventions since 92% of them believe that they are useful for refugee and immigrant students. Overall, their responses show an indication of a positive direction to inclusive learning, since 95% of them are willing to use manualized practices or interventions for refugee and immigrant students and a 96% of them are open to trying a new practice or intervention for refugee and immigrant students even if it were different from what they are used to doing.



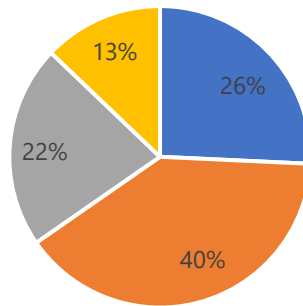
The next category concerns the awareness of their students' cultural background, language and cultural, which shows that most educators believe it is important to be aware and an 80% of them believe that teaching methods need to be adapted to meet the needs of refugee and immigrant children. Taking into consideration the abovementioned points, it is important to mention that a small percentage (3%) answered that they are not aware of the diversity of cultural backgrounds of refugee and immigrant and some of them (22%) answered that they are slightly aware of it. Only a 10% of the educators believes that they cannot learn a lot from refugee and immigrant students whose cultural background is different from theirs, while an even smaller percentage (4%) do not believe that teaching methods need to be adapted to meet the needs of refugee and immigrant children. The majority of educators (90%) believe that they have the responsibility to be aware of their refugee and immigrant students' cultural backgrounds while an even larger percentage (94%) instill pride in refugee and immigrant students' cultures. At last, 80% of educators confess that they are aware of refugee and immigrant students' language differences in their classroom.



Following, educators were asked different questions to show how prepared they feel to support refugee and immigrant students. The answers showed that less than half the educators (43%) do not feel prepared by their university preparation program to meet the needs of refugee and immigrant children. Furthermore, 40% of them replied that they have received sufficient in-service professional development on how best to support refugee and immigrant students in the classroom, but concerning their experience, most of them feel that they have not gained a lot while working with refugee and immigrant children. Also, not even half of them have been involved in coursework to learn practices on how to response to children from different cultural backgrounds, while more than half reported that their school does not spend time or energy to discuss how to promote the well-being of refugee and immigrant students.



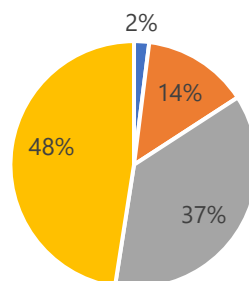
I have received sufficient in-service professional development on how best to support refugee and immigrant students in the classroom.



■ Not at all ■ To a slight extent ■ To a moderate extent ■ To a great extent

The last category shows that educators understand that refugee and immigrant children have unique social and emotional needs compared to other children and they seem to experience more social problems than other children. From their everyday observations, most educators recall that refugee and immigrant children seem more anxious, nervous, depressed, or sad than other students where nearly half the educators believe that they have more acting out behaviors than other students. Last, most educators believe that refugee and immigrant children seem to be negatively affected by traumatic experiences that have occurred in their lives compared to other students.

Refugee and immigrant children have unique social and emotional needs compared to other students.



■ Not at all ■ To a slight extent ■ To a moderate extent ■ To a great extent





## 4. Conclusion

Integration of students with migrant and refugee backgrounds seems to be a big challenge for the educational system of Cyprus due to the big numbers of migrants and refugees that are coming to the island the last few years. Cyprus has taken active steps to integrate students with migrant backgrounds into schools. It has developed a policy in line with international recommendations. However, challenges still exist with regard to turning theory or policy into practice, as shown and above.

As mentioned in the Report, students with migrant backgrounds are extremely heterogeneous. For that reason, a more learner-centred approach that gives more attention to the individual student's strengths and needs is called for. In addition to that, although teachers report that many steps have been taken in this direction, effectively support to teachers and schools in working with migrant students is still a challenge.

That is why we are expecting that the PASSAGE project would give us the opportunity and the resources to contribute to the direction of smooth integration of students with migrant backgrounds in school.



## 5. Literature

Ministry of Education, Culture Sport and Youth (2019) Annual Report, Nicosia, 2019

European Commission (2019). Report of the Peer Counselling Group for the integration of students with migrant backgrounds in the Cypriot education system.

European Commission. [Peer counselling integration of migrant students final report.pdf \(pi.ac.cy\)](#)