**QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE CULTURAL DIMENSION OF THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION**

***1. Please provide information on how, in your country, the issue of respect for cultural diversity and the cultural rights of each person is reflected in the school curricula (legislative institutional and policy framework, and implementation).***

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth (MOECSY) has taken great strides to recast the curricula to European guidelines and adopted an approach to education that aims to reorient the learning experience and equip pupils with skills crucial for life in the 21st century. The issue of respect for cultural diversity and the cultural rights of each person plays a seminal role in Education for Sustainable Development. Thus, relevant teaching and learning materials were developed to incorporate Education for Sustainable Development concepts, principles and values into the curricula, which are designed to give teachers the skills needed to manage culturally diverse classes and deal with the growing diversity of the society. Cyprus has been challenged by an influx of migrants and refugees which have, by and large, successfully been integrated in schools across the island. However, migrant children can successfully blend in their new environment when teachers are adept and well-supported. Therefore, emphasis is given to the in-service training of teachers who need to adapt their approaches in order to stay attuned to their pupils’ needs. In addition, migrant pupils are taught Greek as a second language, since this is vital for their integration. Moreover, peer-learning between countries is facilitated in the areas of teacher training, professional development and evaluation mechanisms.

One of the themes of the curriculum for the lesson of visual arts is cultural heritage. More specifically, in primary education pupils need to be able to:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Attainment targets** | **Adequacy targets** |
| 1.7. Distinguish the cultural heritage of Cyprus and its relations with other cultures, linking the past with the present | 1.7.1. Common and different characteristics related to the local cultural heritage and/or other cultures (e.g. children belonging to the school community) in relation to:  - authentic sites (e.g. buildings, monuments, religious sites, museums, galleries)  - artifacts, artwork/images/films  - ancient Cypriot art (e.g. sculptures from archaeological finds, pots etc.)  - myths, narratives and customs  - sustainable practices used by people of tradition in different areas of Cyprus (e.g. in crafts, architecture) |
| 1.8. Provide information on local and world cultural heritage | 1.8.1. The Cypriot, European and world cultural heritage in relation to the following (and their links to other thematic areas):  - form, colors and shapes  - reflection of emotions  - irrational, strange and random  - historical persons (e.g. queens and kings, knights)  - Greek mythology  1.8.2. The importance of protecting and preserving the cultural heritage of a place |

The Visual Arts curriculum in Secondary Education incorporates cultural heritage, both local and global, as a key thematic area. It focuses on research and creation in relation to the traditions, myths and narratives of Cyprus and its relations with other cultures, which are fully respected. The aim is thus the communication and gradual contact of pupils with the global visual arts, without the requisite of knowing the language. A conscious effort in highlighting diversity in traditions and cultural pluralism is made, as they are regarded as positive factors that enrich and bridge differences. Non-Cypriot pupils are encouraged to freely express their culture and traditions in every opportunity. Similar thematic events, exhibitions and competitions are organised, highlighting the intercultural competence of all pupils as a factor of communication, interaction and understanding.

***2. Please provide information on how, in your country, the issue of respect for cultural diversity and the cultural rights of each person is taken into account in the organization of the school system and schools (legislative institutional and policy framework, and implementation).***

Through the Ministry’s Strategic Plan for 2020-2022, the educational policy implemented embodies the values of equality, inclusiveness, creativity and innovation, and aiming at life-long, balanced development whilst at the same time strengthening culture and cultural creativity. Our vision is to help our students thrive in an environment conducive to authentic learning and grow up to be active global citizens with skills, responsibility, democratic ethos, historical identity as well as respect for diversity. The plan comprises the following core values of education in general:

• integrity and respect in interpersonal relations

• teamwork and collaborative spirit for common goals

• effectiveness and efficiency in order to satisfy the differentiated needs of learners

• accountability, transparency and evidence-based decision making

• active citizenship and participation in society, taking into account historical and cultural identity

• effective communication and unhindered flow of information, so as to facilitate communication both horizontally and vertically

• service to society by creating positive experiences for pupils and their families, the labour market and the community.

The Department of Primary Education has set the following objectives: 1) intercultural dialogue, 2) prevention of social exclusion through education, 3) growing culture of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and cooperation of all Cypriots within the framework of democratic and humane school through the new curriculum. Schools, within the context of promoting these objectives, developed their action plans in order to support:

1) Diversity with European and with other nations and all people. The different cultures do not divide people. Instead, diversity unites.

2) The democratic school that works for social inclusion of all children. The goal of preventing social exclusion is served by the new curriculum, which focuses on the prevention and eradication of negative consequences that often accompany children with disabilities, difficult family environment, economic hardship and different cultural backgrounds.

In addition, the Museum Education Programmes are based on the philosophy, content and fundamental pedagogical principles of the curricula. They aim at social, emotional and cognitive development, the cultivation of critical thinking and creativity, promotion of cooperation, lifelong learning and offering the joy of learning to pupils. The programmes also aim at connecting schools with museums allowing teachers and schools to open up to the museums and culture of Cyprus. The content of the programmes is based on the artefacts of each museum and covers the various historical periods of Cyprus from 3900 BC to 1960 AD. Pupils through various activities raise their awareness about Cyprus’ cultural heritage and, subsequently, express their thoughts and feelings -in cultural and artistic ways- regarding the way their own cultural identity relates to the past and present history of their place’s cultural environment. They also, experience the way of life as it was back then, where people from various cultural identities gathered and interacted with each other in peace. Thus, new possibilities are opened to pupils, in order to re-think and re-define the "other" so that a peaceful society is created where mutual understanding is fostered. As a result, pupils acquire useful experiences and develop positive attitudes towards cultural diversity.

Global education issues and values are also present in the Cyprus formal education system, within the various subjects across educational levels through the themes of peace education, citizenship, gender equality, education for sustainable development, anti-racism education, intercultural education and human rights education. Many NGOs collaborate with the MOECSY in various ways, particularly in the planning and undertaking training and educational activities in schools and offering seminars to teachers. Moreover, the MOECSY co-ordinates the Interdepartmental Committee on Global Education, that brings together representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and NGOs. The Committee members collaborate on different global education initiatives and work towards securing funding from various sources.

***3. Please clarify to what extent the measures described above relate not only to the issue of languages in education (in this regard, please briefly explain the context and provide details on the State language policy), but also to the arts, heritage, science, values and religions, or world views and ways of life, in all their diversity.***

In recent years the Cyprus educational system has been called upon to respond to the changes in the cultural composition of schools and to develop mechanisms to cater for culturally diverse pupil populations. Undeniably, language itself entails the power to shape peoples’ collective conscience and ethos, thus issues of language policy and planning are crucial in a multicultural and multiethnic state. Language education has always been at the core of multicultural education, since culture and language interrelate and, therefore, being a member of a linguistic community implies membership to a cultural community as well. Languages are used in the education system as the means of transmitting knowledge. They are also taught as subjects. For a truly diversity-oriented approach to linguistic pluralism, curricula must – from the earliest years of schooling, in order to capitalize on a child’s extraordinary capacity for language learning – cater for the array of mother tongues spoken within national boundaries, and introduce the other languages needed to improve standards of communication at the national and then international levels. Such an approach will reconcile the need to preserve cultural identities with those of communication and participation. Educating pupils in a number of different languages is both a psycholinguistic and political challenge. But there is no question that linguistic diversity is a necessary dimension of cultural diversity. The new generations must be offered linguistic tools enabling them to move from one world to another, thus developing a critical and reflexive competence.

The education system focuses on providing inclusive and quality education while reflecting and enabling the flourishing of cultural diversity and the cultural rights of each person. This entails looking not only at the teaching of languages, but also at the teaching of arts, heritage, science, history, values and religions, worldviews and lifestyles through programmes that encourage dialogue between pupils of different cultures, beliefs and religions. Education can make an important and meaningful contribution to sustainable and tolerant societies. It also means taking into consideration the various pedagogical approaches that resonate with the cultural environments in which they operate.

As regards the language policy, since September 2015, all pupils attending pre-primary education start learning English as a compulsory subject from the age of 3 until they reach 18. French, as a compulsory subject for all, is introduced when pupils are 12. The obligation to learn French lasts until pupils are 16 (15 for VET pupils). Pupils aged 16 to 18 in general education can choose a second foreign language as an option or take additional lessons in English. When they finish school, all VET pupils will have been taught English as a compulsory subject for 15 years and simultaneously English and French as compulsory subjects for three years.

***4. Please specify the specific and particular difficulties encountered in ensuring an inclusive and quality education that allows cultural diversity and the cultural rights of each person to flourish at the same time.***

The blend of ethnicities and value systems often places teachers in a "cultural minefield" where they must navigate a careful path of trying to respect the sensibilities of many different groups, which is a serious challenge as they are required to best manage the conflicting expectations prevalent in today’s increasingly diverse classrooms. Moreover, current policies and practices employed in the field of education face a number of major challenges, which relate in particular to sweeping changes taking place in the global society of the 21st century. Information and communication technology have advanced at an exponential rate, mobility is higher than ever and there has been a dramatic change in workforce skills and demands. Within this dynamic environment, one key issue is to understand the challenges that both teachers and learners are confronted with, and to take action in order to ensure that the educational system safeguards democracy, human rights and social justice, in order to help pupils have decent work opportunities and be the citizens who can build equitable societies and live together in conditions of security and of well-being, irrespective of cultural or ethnic background.

***5. Have specific mechanisms been established to consult and ensure the participation of stakeholders, in particular the populations concerned and parents, for a better understanding and effectiveness of the right to education, including its cultural dimension? What place is given in this context to the voice of children?***

The nature of the MOECSY’s work entails the principle of close consultation with all interested stakeholders and the process of the Educational Reform is based on a structured dialogue that is followed. The MOECSY believes that the participation and active involvement of all education stakeholders is very important in building consensus to the highest possible degree and assuring the continuity of educational policy, through extensive discussion of the main issues. Towards this end, the following are among the key stakeholders with whom the Ministry is in regular contact: teachers’ unions, parents’ associations, associations of pupils and students, representatives of the religious groups and political parties.

More specifically, the MOECSY has close cooperation with non-governmental organisations, with governmental committees, with the Office of the Commissioner for the Protection of Children’s Rights and the Ombudsperson’s Office and other competent Ministries. Intercultural dialogue and active citizenship are promoted by capitalising on pupils’ voice. Pupil councils represent pupils in major decisions affecting them. The school’s pupil council, especially in secondary education, takes part in monthly meetings with the school’s management and teacher representatives where current issues affecting school life are discussed and decisions are taken. The voice of children is also heard through the Cyprus Children’s Parliament who meet regularly. Once a year, they also meet under the chairmanship of the President of the House of Representatives, as well as through the Commissioner’s Youth Advisory Committee, established by the Commissioner for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, in order to hear children's views on issues that concern them. The Committee members meet regularly and discuss issues related to children's rights and twice a year the group meets with the Commissioner, to share their views, experiences and opinions on issues that concern children.

***6. What recommendations should be provided to States and other stakeholders on these issues?***

The protection of cultural diversity and the promotion of awareness of the cultural heritage of ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, as well as the creation of favourable conditions for them to preserve, develop, express and disseminate their identity, history, culture, language, traditions and customs should be among the priorities of all States. At the same time States should take all the necessary measures to respect, protect and fulfil their citizens right to participate in cultural life.

The MOECSY, school management teams and teachers need to collaborate to design development programmes to further inculcate their competencies necessary to perform effectively in a multicultural environment. What is more, the idea of cultural diversity observatories which will be interlinked in a global network coordinated by UNESCO could be further examined. Their aim could be to observe culture and be primarily engaged in the collection and processing of data, conduct targeted research, stimulate the exchange of knowledge and experiences, and organise meetings, conferences and workshops; they could thus be a source of contact in culture, and they could inform about events. The information collected could be made available for the purposes of culture management and cultural policy-making as well as facilitating cultural cooperation at all levels.