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**REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS**

**CYPRUS’ INPUT REGARDING THE REPORT OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER ΟF HUMAN RIGHTS PURSUANT TO HRC 51/17**

Cyprus recognizes the need to pursue targeted efforts in amplifying the knowledge of young persons in digital education as a means of empowering them to protect human rights. In view of the preparation and presentation of the report of the High Commissioner, as mandated by the Resolution in reference, the Cyprus Government shares its experience and information on existing policies on the subject matter.

**1) What are the main challenges that young people in your country face in accessing digital education? Please consider the specific situation of marginalized young people and those in vulnerable situations in your response.**

There are no significant barriers to young people’s access to digital education in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Cyprus. One challenge regarding digital accessibility seems to be the appropriate training of younger students in secondary schools so as to be well-equipped with skills for accessing and using safely all digital means when enrolled in HEIs.

**2) What steps is the Government taking to ensure that digital education is accessible and promoted among young people? Please provide examples of specific laws and regulations, measures, policies, and programmes directed at ensuring young people’s universal access to digital education.**

The most important step implemented in 2023, on behalf of the Information and Communication Technologies Unit of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, has been the signing of the lease agreement through which 9 million euro will be allocated, for schools to transition to the e-classroom environment. The specific strategic planning will lead to the creation of 1000 digital classrooms and will also provide the necessary equipment to another 8000 classrooms, across Cyprus. This action covers pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary schools. It is also important to note that in 2023 the Department of Primary Education began structuring the plan which will eventually lead to the production of digital material for the subjects of Greek Language, Mathematics and Physical Science.

The Department of Primary Education has set the ground for future ICT specialists by expanding the number of STEM schools from 9 to 14, across Cyprus. Also, it has placed emphasis on the development of digital material which can help the pupils’ transition from traditional skills to skills oriented towards digital technologies and ICT.

**3) What steps is the Government taking to ensure that young people can realize their human rights online in a safe, empowering, and inclusive way?**

One of the main steps Government taking to ensure that young people can realize their human rights online in a safe, empowering, and inclusive way is the operation of the [Cyprus Safer Internet Centre](https://cybersafety.cy/) . Cyprus SIC operating since 2016 utilizing European funding, implemented several actions during 2023, in the context of the European project [CYberSafety IV](https://cybersafety.cy/about/csiv-about/), aiming to inform and protect children online, while contributing to the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, in relation to the responsible, creative, and safer use of digital technologies and the Internet. These actions include:

* [Seminars, lectures and workshops for students, teachers and parents, regarding the safe and responsible use of the internet](https://internetsafety.pi.ac.cy/educational-workshops), offered by the CyberSafety partners, i.e. Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, Cyprus University of Technology, University of Cyprus, Digital Security Authority, Cyprus Telecommunication Authority, and Pancyprian School of Parents.
* [Internet safety portal](https://internetsafety.pi.ac.cy) with extensive educational and informational material, as well as resources and tools for children, adolescents, teachers and parents, to harness the potential of online technologies safely and responsibly.
* [Helpline service](https://cybersafety.cy/helpline) which provides information, advice and assistance to children, young people, parents and teachers on issues related to the use of digital technologies and the internet (e.g. cyberbullying, excessive use of the internet, online grooming, technical support).
* [Hotline service](https://cybersafety.cy/hotline) which provides a direct, easily accessible and responsible point of contact for users who wish to report illegal content or illegal actions online (e.g. child sexual abuse and exploitation content).
* [Media literacy Conference](https://medialiteracy.pi.ac.cy/events/medialiteracy2023), targeting teachers, university students, researchers, and anyone interested in understanding issues related to the impact of modern technological advances in education, and the formation of media literate citizens.
* [Media literacy website](https://medialiteracy.pi.ac.cy), which provides information on current educational programs and actions for teachers and students offered by Cyprus Pedagogical Institute in regard to media literacy.
* [CyberSafety Student Video Production Contest](https://internetsafety.pi.ac.cy/competitions), on the creative and safe use of the internet, organized by the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute. Through the contest, students explore the topic, form an opinion, write ideas and messages, produce a short film, communicate and inform other children and adults in a creative way.
* Educational programs offered to schools by the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute: [Young Coaches for the Internet](https://youngcoaches.pi.ac.cy/), [eSafe Schools](https://esafeschools.pi.ac.cy), [Student Web Radio Program](http://europeanschoolradio.eu).

Also, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute organized in 2023 the conference [“Digital Education - Developments and pedagogical practices”](https://www.pi.ac.cy/digitaleducpi2023). The aim of the conference was to inform educators and policy makers in Cyprus on modern approaches and challenges related to Digital Education at both international and local level, with an emphasis on AI and its challenges in education. Policy makers and teachers from all levels of education attended the event. At the same time, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute also participates in the EU funded project [AI4EDU](https://ai4edu.eu/) (Contract Number: 101087451). The project involves all key aspects of AI implementation in education, which represent different facets of learning and AI interaction; learning with AI (use of AI for learning and assessment - use of AI to empower teachers and enhance teaching), learning about AI, and learning for AI-human collaboration (ethical, transparent, inclusive and equitable use of AI).

Furthermore,the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute (Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth) implemented in 2023, several actions aiming to contribute to the development of digital skills for in service teachers and students. These includes; annual educational programs ([Innovative schools and Teacher coaches](https://innovativeschools.pi.ac.cy), [Young Coaches for the Internet](https://youngcoaches.pi.ac.cy/), [eSafe Schools](https://esafeschools.pi.ac.cy), [Recording Memory](http://www.pi.ac.cy/katagrafoumemnimi), [Student Web Radio](http://www.pi.ac.cy/radio)), seminars, workshops, contests ([Radio and Music Student Contest “Make it Heard”](http://www.pi.ac.cy/kantonakoustei), [CyberSafety Video Production Contest](https://internetsafety.pi.ac.cy/competitions/short-video-2022-2023)), conferences ([Digital Education - Developments and pedagogical practices](https://www.pi.ac.cy/digitaleducpi2023), [Advancing Media Literacy in Education: Contemporary Approaches in Pedagogy](https://medialiteracy.pi.ac.cy/en/events/medialiteracy2023)), and pilot implementation of EU Projects such as [Learning from the Extremes](https://learningfromtheextremes.eu) (PPPA Grant Agreement No.LC-01760255/10105266) and [Social Radio 2.0 - The European School Radio and Podcasting Community for Active Citizenship Education](https://socialradio.europeanschoolradio.eu/) (KA2 Agreement No. 2020-1-PL01-KA201-081838).

**4) What are the main gaps and challenges to young people’s protection from online threats in law, policy, and practice in your country and the impacts on young people’s human rights? Please consider the specific situation of marginalized young people and those in vulnerable situations in your response.**

The main challenges include:

1. Cyberbullying and sexting threats: The prevalence of cyberbullying remains a significant challenge. Young people may experience harassment, humiliation, or threats online, affecting their mental health and well-being. Inadequate mechanisms to address and prevent cyberbullying exacerbate this issue.
2. Privacy Concerns: The digital environment often involves the collection and sharing of personal information. Young people may not fully comprehend the implications of sharing data online, leading to privacy breaches. Weak privacy regulations and insufficient awareness contribute to this challenge.
3. Misinformation Overload: Media literacy campaigns need to focus on developing practical skills to verify information and identify trustworthy sources.

Specifically, the main challenge pertains to further raising awareness among children and adolescents about the dangers of online grooming, the risks associated with personal data on the Internet, as well as sexting. Additionally, it is so crucial to provide psychological support to child victims and their families affected by these incidents. The Cyprus SIC and the helpline and reporting service 1480 have undertaken numerous actions in recent years in this direction (including seminars and lectures) targeting parents, students, and educators. They have successfully managed to provide psychological support to children and their families.

**5) What steps is the Government taking to ensure that young people are protected from online threats? Please provide examples of specific laws and regulations, measures, policies, and programmes.**

One of the main steps is the operation of the [Cyprus Safer Internet Centre](https://cybersafety.cy/) The SIC, operating since 2016 utilizing European funding, continued in 2023, in the context of the European project [CYberSafety IV](https://cybersafety.cy/about/csiv-about/), the operation of Helpline and Hotline services. [Helpline](https://cybersafety.cy/helpline) provides support to young people and their parents regarding harmful contact, offensive conduct (e.g. cyberbullying, hate speech, sexting) and undesirable or harmful content. [Hotline](https://cybersafety.cy/hotline) offers a direct, easily accessible, and responsible point of contact for users to report illegal content or actions, like child sexual abuse material, racism, xenophobia, etc for receiving and managing reports from the public related to illegal online child sexual abuse material. Qualified operators provide the necessary support and consultation and take the appropriate actions, utilizing established lines of communication and collaboration with relevant stakeholders such as social network services and the police. Both services are accessible to citizens (synchronously and asynchronously) through different tools: one-to-one conversations on the telephone (1480), online chat, mobile app, online form, and email.

The Cyprus SIC promotes the actions of the National Strategy for a Better Internet for Children in Cyprus (<https://www.esafecyprus.ac.cy/ethniki-stratigiki> ) and participates in the coordination and implementation of actions of the Cybersecurity Strategy of the Republic of Cyprus (Action 9.1 "Promotion of a National Cybersecurity Information and Awareness Program" and Action 10.1 "Development of appropriate human resources").