■ CYPRUS

Quest for cohesion: social policies and inclusive education

Human rights are often taken for granted. Legislation alone does not secure them; effective implementation of legislation and institutional initiatives is essential. The country has made progress in areas such as immigration, education and women's rights, however the EU harmonization process must be strengthened. So far, implementation of anti-discrimination laws and new policies adopted to address the social needs of immigrants has been minimal. Both procedures and the implementation process must become more efficient and effective.

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Basic Capabilities Index (BCI)

BCI = 99

100 / 99 — Children reaching 5th grade

0

100 / 99 — Births attended

100 / 100 — Surviving under-5

Gender Equity Index (GEI)

GEI = 65

100 — Empowerment

29

0

100 / 98 — Education
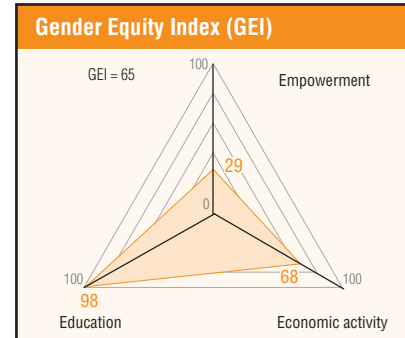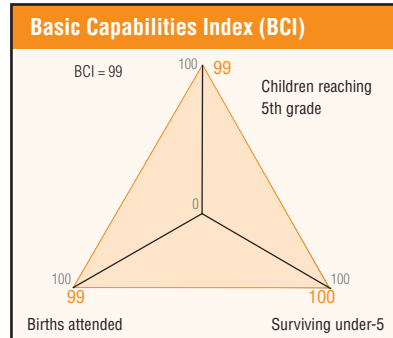
68 — Economic activity

100

In 1991, the Government created a Commissioner for Administration (Ombudsman) with a mandate to monitor and improve human rights laws. Subsequent legislation established a legal framework to ensure equal treatment and respect for diversity. Several NGOs have also played an important role in monitoring and reporting on the status of human rights.

Accession to the European Union (EU) on 1 May 2004 required many changes to the legal and legislative system, mainly to comply with the membership criteria laid down by the European Council. However, membership in the EU did not eliminate a major obstacle to human rights: Since the Turkish invasion in 1974, the island of Cyprus has been divided. The southern part, called the Republic of Cyprus, is internationally recognized as the sole legitimate State on the island, with sovereignty over its entire territory. However the northern part remains illegally under Turkish rule. Although this state of affairs violates the rights of all Cypriots, the focus of this report will be on issues related to human rights within the Republic of Cyprus, in the fields of education, gender, and migration. One of the major problems of the northern part of Cyprus is that, as an illegal state, it is not responsive to numerous international conventions, legal authorities and international bodies. Therefore, no official data are available regarding human rights concerns.

Migration

Migration, asylum and refugees are major EU policy concerns. One of the main factors responsible for illegal immigration is illegal employment. Cyprus relies on migrant workers, coming from many different countries, to compensate for labour shortages in a number of economic sectors; various national groups predominate in certain types of work. The Government issues work permits only in cases where employers can prove that no Cypriots are available; the permits are valid only for that employer. Complaints filed with the Ombudsman during 2005 focused mainly on issues involving working conditions, access to services, and equal treatment (Ombudsman, 2005).

The number of legal immigrants has risen to 130,000 (15% of the population), who have been joined by an estimated 20,000 illegal immigrants (CyStat, 2006). This is a massive influx in a country with less than a million inhabitants. In 2006, the population increased 1.6% over the previous year, primarily due to a net immigration of 8,671 people.

According to the 2001 and 2006 reports by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI, 2006), migrant workers do not enjoy full rights in Cyprus. Policies concerning them are determined by outmoded legislation and ad hoc ministerial decisions, both formulated on the premise that immigrants only stay in Cyprus for a limited time to meet specific labour needs.

The National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006-2008 does not reflect immigrant needs for integration and inclusion, according to the Cyprus-based NGO Action for Equality, Support and Antiracism (KISA). Immigrants continue to face discrimination and human rights violations, especially in employment, housing, education, health care and access to goods and services. Addressing their needs for integration, participation and social inclusion requires new immigration and asylum policies. Better policies for monitoring and managing employment of third country nationals are also essential (Georgiou et al., 2006). Cyprus needs to adopt modern migration laws that conform to international human rights law and standards.

Gender issues

Human rights – women's rights in particular – are at a critical juncture, according to the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies[1] (MIGS). Despite exten-

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1 MIGS is a Cyprus-based NGO which carries out projects of social, political, and economic themes related to gender issues.

sive legislative reforms, political, socio-economic and cultural barriers to the advancement of women remain formidable. MIGS notes that migration policies are not gender sensitive and do not include any gender specific policies. Female migrant workers are "more vulnerable to exploitation and to double or even triple discrimination because of their gender, their status as migrants and, in the case of domestic workers, their employment status" (MIGS, 2006).

In a detailed report on trafficking of women, MIGS (2007a) states that many are "victimized in the process of migration for multiple reasons associated with gender" and that the "issue of trafficking women for the purpose of sexual exploitation takes unique and widespread dimensions". An estimated 2,000 foreign women enter the island every year with short-term "artist" or "entertainment" visas. The Government lacks a mechanism for identifying trafficking victims, which effectively denies them legal protection (MIGS, 2007b).

Female victims of trafficking may be granted permission to change employer or employment sector and are placed in homes for the elderly. However, research conducted by MIGS indicates "these *shelters* reinforce the victims' feelings of abandonment, hopelessness and helplessness and, therefore, they often do not want to testify against traffickers and employers". Protecting their rights requires a much more energetic response, including public education campaigns based on human rights and social justice principles.

Education for social justice

Few would disagree that improving the learning and life opportunities of typically marginalized students is the most basic social justice concern in education (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Delpit, 1995). Perhaps more

controversial is the accompanying goal of empowering students to act as agents of change in response to societal injustice (Ayers, 1998; Freire, 1970). In addition to their disagreements on the basic meaning of social justice in education, theoreticians and practitioners espouse differing goals, domains, content, audience, and agents of socially just teaching. Each of these components intersects and influences the rest (North, 2006). For purposes of this report, we are embracing the following holistic definition of social justice in education: efforts to transform educational policies and introduce pedagogies that improve the learning and life opportunities of typically underserved students, while equipping and empowering them to work for a more socially just society themselves. This composite definition includes intra-personal development in the teacher, pedagogy and dispositions that support equitable access to learning for all, a curriculum that can empower all students to become agents of social justice themselves, as well as activist teachers engaged in challenging and transforming inequitable structures and policies in schools and society. This conception is particularly important in a country like Cyprus, which is becoming more multicultural and diverse day by day.

The number of migrant children enrolled in public schools has increased dramatically. According to the 2006 Annual Education Report published by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC), 6.7% of students attending public primary schools have a mother language other than Greek. Since then the percentage has climbed even higher. More than 8,000 students have a native language other than Greek (Kyriakidou, 2008). In some schools, a high proportion of the children face language barriers. At the Faneromeni Primary School in Nicosia, for example, 71 out of 87 students have a mother tongue other than Greek; many of them understand no Greek at all. This inevitably leads to their marginalization.

Current education policies have not resulted in concrete long-term initiatives; they tend to function as general guidelines and, at times, as quick fixes for emerging problems. Another deficiency is that many teachers lack a thorough understanding of human rights and genuine sensitivity to them, despite the availability of professional development opportunities at the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute (ECRI, 2006). MOEC has introduced a Zone of Educational Priority (ZEP) pilot programme in an effort to combat social exclusion of children in primary and secondary schools. The programme introduces a holistic approach to education that takes children's differing needs and backgrounds into account. The programme was extended to new zones in the 2008-2009 school year.

In another measure to assist educators with heterogeneous classes and encourage non-discriminatory practices among students, in 2006 the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, working in collaboration with the MOEC, implemented "Youth against Prejudice", an EU-funded project. This project, however, devoted little attention to migrants and racial discrimination or racism (Georgiou et al., 2006).

In an effort to cope with the heavy influx of migrant children in public schools, the Government requested that all children who wished to enrol had to provide documentation proving that their parents were legal residents. This policy barred a large number of children from school, with no right to education. It was rescinded following the intervention of the Ombudsman. Another continuing problem is the absence of any educational opportunities for adult migrants, on the premise that they are in the country temporarily and employed in jobs requiring no skills. However, the new Government elected in 2008 has declared that ensuring a quality education for all will be one of its primary objectives. It is too early to know whether or not this promise will be kept.

Recommendations

Here are some recommendations that would significantly improve social justice:

- Establish closer collaboration between the Government and NGOs to create mechanisms that raise awareness, struggle against injustice and protect human rights.

- Implement all of the EU directives incorporated in the country's legislation in recent years.

- Improve the efficiency and speed of the asylum application review process. This is one of the major issues in illegal immigration.

- Develop a comprehensive policy that protects the human rights of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Fully integrating migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in all aspects of society, including the education system, requires a holistic approach.

- Enact gender-specific legislation against trafficking.

- Monitor and evaluate existing measures designed to ensure the rights of women.

- Provide professional development for teachers to give them the skills they need to reach out and serve the needs of all students.

- Invest in research on the educational experiences and needs of all children, especially those marginalized for social or other reasons

- Develop new curricula and educational approaches that respond to the complexities that diversity creates in schools. Current concepts of "inclusive pedagogies" should be re-evaluated and reconsidered, especially in the light of the increasing demographic diversity among Cypriot children. ∎

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