



Employment developments in childcare services for school-age children

Cyprus

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Introduction

In recent years, more emphasis has been placed on high quality childcare in Europe, both with respect to the sector's workforce and the changing needs of children and parents. There is a great need for measures to be introduced that support sustainable and formal job creation in care services for school-age children.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions has commissioned ECOTEC Research and Consulting to carry out a study on sustainable childcare services currently available for school-age children in the 25 Member States of the European Union (EU25). The study aims to support the debate on modernisation of care systems in Europe, to review existing information on childcare services and pinpoint gaps in the level of service in the enlarged EU, and to identify measures at national, regional and local levels to create sustainable childcare services for school-age children.

This report is one of six in-depth country studies that have been conducted in order to complement the more general review of childcare systems in the EU25. It contains three examples of best practice identified from current childcare initiatives in Cyprus; these include:

- the Mazotos all-day primary school;
- a private institution, the G+E School;
- a non-governmental organisation (NGO), the Children's Centre.

Information was gathered through a combination of research and 14 stakeholder interviews.

The report is structured as follows:

- 1 – Policy background:** This section looks at the historic background to childcare policy and family structure since the island's independence in 1960, and it considers influencing factors such as the Turkish invasion in 1974. It also reflects on the childcare sector and policies that have influenced the functioning of children and families in the context of women's progression in the labour market.
- 2 – Childcare provision:** This section outlines current government responsibilities for out-of-school provision for five to 12 year olds. A profile of all types of provision is included: public sector, private sector non-governmental organisations (NGOs), informal provision of care and domestic workers.
- 3 – Childcare workers:** This section profiles the various childcare workers and looks at skills, qualifications, wages, and working hours.
- 4 – Future employment in childcare:** This section looks at the needs of creating a better standard of employment in childcare and highlights the gaps and shortages identified through research.
- 5 – Creating sustainable childcare:** This section includes a description of what is affordable, what is quality childcare and the current and future needs of parents and children.
- 6 – Case studies:** Best practice studies will be introduced.

Case study 1: Mazotos Primary School – All-day school

Case study 2: G+E School – Private institution

Case study 3: Children's Centre – Non-governmental organisation

Introduction

Cyprus is a relatively young state, since it gained independence only in 1960. Since then, however, Cyprus has undergone significant changes in terms of modernisation and urbanisation as it has moved from a traditional farming society to a country that now ranks among the top 20 most thriving economies in the world. Given the disruption caused by the Turkish invasion, Cyprus has reached a relatively high level of development and growth in a short period of time. Changes to the labour market have produced a strong country in terms of exports and imports and many migrant workers now chose Cyprus as a place to work and improve their financial prosperity. Such changes have impacted largely on the family structure in the country. Large extended families are disappearing and are being replaced by nuclear families. The increasing divorce rate has also led to an increase in single-parent households.

The Social Welfare Services, as they are known today, began in the 1950s under the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance. Childcare policy provided by Social Welfare Services was mainly focused on child protection issues, adoptions and delinquency rather than childcare services. Between 1962 and 1972, the primary policy concern was related to children under six years old. Following this, in 1968, the Youth Services were founded which aimed to bring together a cohesive approach in addressing youth issues. From 1972, the function of Social Welfare Services broadened to provide services that aim to improve child and family welfare. Social Welfare Services systematically inspect and supervise childcare provision, including day-care facilities, in accordance with the current Children Law.

Effects of Turkish invasion

Any aspect of Cypriot social policy is affected by partition and the occupation of the island in 1974. Cyprus gained its independence in the summer of 1960 and hence became an independent republic. Prior to and after this date, both Greek and Turkish Cypriots lived together on the island. During the Turkish invasion, nearly 200,000 Greek Cypriots, about 40% of the total Greek Cypriot population, were forced to leave their homes in the area under occupation and became refugees in their own country. Negotiations to reach an agreeable solution on this problem have been going on since 1975. In 1999, however, the situation began to change when plans for Cyprus to join the EU started, and settlement of the Cyprus problem was a precondition of EU accession. At present, Turkish Cypriots benefit from a package of measures including social and economic support. Positive steps are being taken to 'educate migrants' and schools are offering support to children who do not speak Greek, but these measures are the result of educational policies. Since there is no available research on childcare needs and services, it is not clear how this issue is currently being addressed. Prejudices and stereotyping continue to exist between the two communities and also among children.

Childcare as a sector

Childcare for school-age children is very much a new concept in Cyprus. What could be classified as childcare in Cyprus is more accurately described as extended schooling. Traditionally, the public school day in Cyprus ended at 13.00 and working families relied on informal childcare provision provided by relatives. The family has continued to provide much informal care for children but over the last two decades there has been a vast increase in the amount of demand for and availability of services for both pre-school and school-age children, particularly as the female employment rate continues to rise. Families tend to use both formal and informal childcare options such as family members or maids. Cyprus joined the EU in May 2004 and subsequently introduced policies supporting the reconciliation and balance between work and family life.

Instigators for change

National Action Plan for Social Inclusion

In June 2005, an update report was published by the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance to review what impact the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion has had since its submission. In March 2005, a seminar was held for all stakeholders (NGOs, Ministry of Education and Culture, Social Welfare Services, etc.) to look at policies affecting children and families.

The outcomes of this seminar included the following action points:

- there is a need to facilitate the integration of children's rights in legislation and social policies;
- a commissioner (ombudsman) for children's rights should be appointed;
- adult awareness of children's rights;
- civil servants should focus on the best interests and rights of children during service delivery;
- facilitate the empowerment of children by giving them the right to vote on issues that concern them;
- mental health and prevention programmes should be further strengthened;
- the government should place children at the centre of its policies;
- research in this area should be broadened.

The above outcomes offer a potential contribution to effective children's policies in Cyprus and it is too early to discern whether activities will be developed and how they can potentially improve all services offered to children. One positive step is the commitment of the 'joint' approach of the above-mentioned organisations.

As a result of the March 2005 seminar, the government was encouraged to place children at the centre of its policies by giving top priority to issues that concern the family. If this suggestion is taken on board by the government it could potentially have an impact on childcare provision by highlighting gaps in the services currently available.

Within the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion single parents are identified as one of the six groups of people at risk. The main concern for single parents, if they are to return to the labour market, is that available day-care services will be adequate and will provide a good standard of care for infants and older children. The action plan gives much attention to childcare services for older children, but as mentioned above it opens the door for enhancing services by placing more emphasis on children's priorities.

European Social Fund support

The government has recently received funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) to increase women's labour market participation. In the second round of ESF Equal funding, Cyprus received support for three development partnerships under the equal opportunities pillar of the European Employment Strategy. The partnerships are relatively new as they started in 2004–2005. The projects entitled 'New routes for women,' 'Elani' and 'Pandora' promote activities to improve the position of Cypriot women in the workplace by challenging barriers and promoting reconciliation strategies. Since the projects are still in the early stages of development, it is not clear at this point how much impact they will have on childcare. However, childcare is viewed as an important issue for society and the programmes aim to enhance the development of childcare.

Demographic trends

Statistics for 2004 show that Cyprus, like other European countries, is experiencing a decline in the fertility rate (Statistical Service of the Republic of Cyprus). The sustained improvement in socioeconomic conditions, particularly health, has led to a decrease in infant mortality (estimated at 3.5 infant deaths per 1,000 births) and an increase in life expectancy (men 77 years and women 81.4 years) for the period 2002–2003. The most significant demographic trend is the rising female employment participation rates (see below).

Research

The National Action Plan for Employment focuses on providing childcare facilities for 90% of children between three years of age and the mandatory school age of six years by 2010. It also sets the task of commissioning research into family childcare needs for children less than three years of age. However, childcare for school-age children is neglected and there is no recognition of the importance of providing safe and affordable services to children of this age.

Government spending

The government spends 5.7% of its budget on education compared to the EU average of 5.3% (Eurostat, 2003). As childcare services fall under the education category, some of these funds are being directed towards childcare services (all-day schools and NGOs) but the percentage of funds allocated is not certain.

Interviews with parents revealed that they are not happy with the amount and quality of services that are provided by the public sector and are, therefore, not satisfied with the amount of government funding spent on childcare.

Due to the lack of resources put into childcare services, parents are forced to spend considerable amounts from the family budget in order to provide quality services for their children. The lack of choice in available services and the amount of money parents spend on these services is examined further below.

Women's labour market participation

Recent results from the Labour Force Survey for the first quarter of 2005 show that the number of employed persons amounted to 344,173 people (195,853 men and 148,320 women) and the number of unemployed persons came to 20,110 people (8,458 men and 11,651 women). The employment rate for persons aged between 15 and 64 years was 68.4% (79.3% men and 58.1% women) (Labour Statistics, 2003).

Although Cyprus is reaching the EU targets on women's employment rates set by the Lisbon Strategy in March 2000 (to reach a rate of 57% in 2005 and over 60% by 2010), women still encounter inequalities in the labour market. There are differences in the patterns of employment between men and women. Women are least likely to work in senior positions and are also more likely to work part time and in lower-paid jobs.

Women have become more active in the labour market in recent years; however, the employment rate for women aged from 20 to 49 years with one or two children under 12 years of age is 72% and for those with three or more children the employment rate is 52% (Eurostat, 2003). Interviewees indicated that women with three or more children generally find it more difficult as the childcare services available do not fit in with the typical working day.

Patterns in the labour market suggest that women face particular problems when trying to re-enter the labour market after a period of inactivity. Women also constitute the majority of long-term unemployed people which reflects the lack of opportunities for women and the level of inequality in the world of work. It is important to note that recorded rates of unemployment do not paint the full picture of unemployment in Cyprus. One reason for this is that a great number of people, particularly women, work in seasonal jobs during the tourist period, such as those in the services sector (hotels, restaurants, tourist shops); however, they are not eligible to claim unemployment benefit during the off-peak season.

Stereotypes in employment

The Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry undertook a research project looking at stereotypes in employment. The main objective of the project 'CH.A.S.E' (Chambers Against Stereotypes in Employment) was to identify prejudices and stereotypes affecting women in business and employment in Cyprus. CH.A.S.E is a EUROCHAMBRES initiative financially supported by the European Commission in the framework of programmes and actions in the social and employment sectors. The project started in November 2004 and was due to finish in February 2006.

One of the interim findings is that the main obstacle for women in having a career is the lack of proper childcare. This results in women either maintaining lower-paid jobs or postponing having children until their career path is more settled. The study identified that 83% of the women surveyed believe they could be in better positions at work if they did not have family constraints (CH.A.S.E, 2005). The research reveals that women interviewed have stated that better childcare provision would enable them to enter professions at a more senior level and support women in enterprise.

This section discusses the provision of childcare for school-age children in Cyprus, focusing first on national and local government responsibilities for childcare, and then discussing in detail the different types of provision.

Government responsibilities for childcare

National responsibilities

Ministry of Education and Culture: the Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for all educational activities in Cyprus including childcare for pre-school children and after-school activities through all-day schools. In addition, all private institutions providing after-school activities are answerable to the ministry through obligatory license applications.

The education administration in Cyprus is mainly centralised. The Ministry of Education and Culture of Cyprus is responsible for the following:

- the education of children aged three years and over;
- complementing the family's role by providing support, augmenting the child's development and satisfying their need for an integral personality, so as to enable the child to recognise their capabilities and enhance their self-esteem.

The education system in Cyprus is divided into five levels: pre-primary, primary, secondary, technical and vocational schools and higher education. Education is provided free of charge and there are no entrance requirements for public primary schools available throughout the country.

Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance: the Social Welfare Services operate under the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance. The legislation, policy and programmes of the Social Welfare Services include measures for reconciling work and family life. Particular attention is paid to women who continue to have the main responsibility for childcare and other family dependents. The Public Assistance and Services Laws of 1991 to 2003 and their implementation policies favour women. One favourable provision includes the residential or day-care services for children with disabilities. Although there has been a move to create more policies on childcare, interviews with parents and providers of services have shown that little is actually being done in this regard; for example, many mothers still rely on informal care while they are at work. In addition, the government needs to make a better effort to promote its policies and generate awareness of such policies to the public, decision makers and employers.

National Action Plan for Employment: the National Action Plan for Employment (2004–2006) makes specific reference to policies for the provision of childcare facilities. Measures include the expansion of all-day schools, the extension of compulsory pre-school education for children up to the age of four years and eight months, and the setting up of new community day-care centres.

Gender is a key priority area in the National Action Plan. Key policy measures focus on equality, with particular emphasis on the integration of unemployed and inactive women with targeted measures including the following:

- encouraging women to acquire specialised knowledge and skills through training and/or work experience;
- supporting women in work through job placements;
- targeting measures to support their relief from family obligations such as childcare and care for other dependents;
- providing the option of flexible working hours.

By 2010, the National Action Plan targets in relation to childcare are to provide childcare facilities to at least 90% of children between three and six years old, the mandatory school age. Currently, 12% of children under three years of age are provided with childcare facilities. While these targets are likely to have an impact on childcare provision and benefit women's access to the labour market, they do concentrate on pre-school education up to the age of four years and eight months with little or no mention of targeted policies for out-of-school provision for children aged five to 12 years old other than the expansion of all-day schools. The government's perspective on the all-day school is explained further below.

Regional responsibilities

There are Regional Education Offices in each of the main districts of Cyprus. These offices act as 'sub-branches' of the Ministry of Education and Culture so that matters are dealt with in the district on a more local level and offering a local focal point for parents and teachers so that they do not have to go to the capital city to address their concerns. The office supports the administration of all-day schools within the district, provides teachers with training information, and it allocates teaching staff (once they have been appointed by the ministry) to specific schools. The ministry's regional inspectors are also based in these offices.

As Cyprus is a small island that is divided into six districts (Famagusta, Kyrenia, Larnaca, Limassol, Nicosia and Paphos), the Regional Education Offices are the lowest level of administration. All villages would be covered under one of these six offices.

Types of provision

In Cyprus, there are not many parents who need to make special care arrangements in the morning, before school. This is because the school day begins at 07.30 and coincides with the start of the working day. Therefore, the types of provision described in this section relate to provision available after school.

Public provision

All-day school

Since schools in Cyprus operate only on a half-day basis (ending at 13.00), all-day schools are a type of provision that offers school services in the afternoons. As it is voluntary to attend all-day schools (and the majority of children do not attend them) they could be considered a form of childcare. However, all-day schools only serve children aged nine to 11 years (grades four to six). Based on current Ministry of Education and Culture information, only 37% of primary schools are all-day schools. Interviewees revealed that the government plans to extend all-day schools to children of all ages, but this has yet to be confirmed in policy documents.

Children attend all-day schools from 07.30 till 16.00. When school lessons finish at 13.00, lunch is provided in school and another teacher supervises the children until 16.00. The all-day school functions from October to May and attendance is optional. There are no services during the summer months (June to September). The afternoon programme (excluding Wednesday) each week involves carrying out assigned homework, four teaching periods for reinforcing teaching and four teaching periods of two of the following optional subjects: English, information technology, music, physical education, art, design and technology. In addition to the curriculum subjects, there are programmes to help pupils in modern Greek and mathematics. There is also the opportunity to learn Greek as a foreign language for non-native speakers.

As schools and childcare institutions do not traditionally coincide with parents' working hours, the Ministry of Education and Culture piloted the 'all-day school' concept in 1999–2000 in nine primary schools and the initiative was considered

by the Special Evaluation Committee as successful; this was because feedback from parents was positive and the education of the children in attendance was enhanced.

In 2003–2004, the number of ‘all-day schools’ had further increased to 110 schools. The total number of half-day primary schools amounted to 348 schools (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2003). In a document released by the Ministry of Education and Culture in July 2005, it was confirmed that the number of ‘all-day schools’ would be increased further. A representative from the ministry, when interviewed, said that increasing the number of all-day schools in Cyprus is high on the agenda. Interviews with the director of primary education at the ministry highlighted that the all-day school is considered very useful because it:

- helps towards the holistic education and development of the children;
- allows children to be taught by teachers and other expert staff for longer hours, with all the benefits that the extra hours bring;
- provides children with activities that promote socialising, creativity, interest in literature, research, artistic development, and practical skills;
- gives students time to do their homework and to address learning difficulties and problems;
- creates time for sport and cultural activities without influencing other aspects of school life;
- deals with problems faced by working mothers, such as child supervision;
- allows disabled students to observe the other kids during lunch, sports activities etc and encourages working and living together without prejudice;
- averts kids from antisocial behaviour through educational action;
- combats watching television too much;
- contributes to the use of the school buildings and the campuses for longer periods.

To date there have been four evaluations of the all-day school. The first of these was in 2000 by representatives of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Pancyprian Association of Parents of Primary School Pupils, the University of Cyprus and the Educational Institute of Cyprus. The second evaluation was in 2001 by the Educational Institute of Cyprus. The third evaluation was by the Department of Primary Education. This is an internal evaluation and refers to the school years of 2001–2002, 2002–2003, 2003–2004 and 2004–2005. The report that should be presented to the commission for educational reform can be regarded as the fourth evaluation.

The first evaluation focused on the objectives set by the Ministry of Education and Culture for the all-day schools and looked at the views of key stakeholders (teachers, parents, students). Moreover, it aimed to make recommendations for improvements. Among the four different types of schools that were implemented, the evaluation considered type 1 as a more effective approach. Type 1 required afternoon attendance, until 16.00, for students in fourth, fifth and sixth grades. Hence, this model was introduced to all of the all-day schools in Cyprus and its operation expanded from three to four afternoons each week.

In the second year of running (academic year 2000–2001), the Ministry of Education and Culture requested a smaller evaluation which was conducted by the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute. Within this evaluation, teachers and parents of students who attended the all-day schools were requested to fill in a questionnaire. The evaluation showed that both teachers and parents believed that the all-day school is beneficial and useful as an institution although there was also

room for improvements. The all-day school was also evaluated in the following four years (2001–2002, 2002–2003, 2003–2004, 2004–2005) with internal evaluation of the Ministry of Education and Culture, according to which the head teachers in cooperation with their staff had to fill in a questionnaire regarding the running of the institution in their school for each respective year.

These evaluations also showed that the all-day school has been generally implemented satisfactorily and that this innovation has been successful and useful from a social and educational aspect, although some aspects of it could be improved.

The need to expand the all-day school to the first classes of the primary schools was reported in the evaluation of the trial period, especially with regard to the provision of foreign languages, before children start ‘help school’; for example, this is the case for English when children start ‘help school’ on the second or third class of primary school. This expansion was also requested by the head teachers and the teachers of the all-day school, in the internal evaluations of the ministry for the school years 2001–2002 and 2002–2003, because some of the students could not attend the all-day schools as they had to look after their younger brothers/sisters at home. The ministry’s ultimate objective is to introduce this incentive to all interested schools, while they also investigate the possibility of an obligatory introduction for all students.

The agreed ‘all-day schools’ for the academic year 2005–2006 are shown in the table below:

All-day schools for the academic year 2005–2006

District	Number
Nicosia	61
Limassol	26
Larnaca	26
Famagusta	4
Paphos	12
Occupied area / Rizokarpasou	1
Total	130

Source: Ministry of Education and Culture ‘Circular 380’

Other than providing a service to children beyond the usual school hours, another aim of the all-day school is to enrich the curriculum with various creative activities such as music and arts. The Mazotos Primary School is a good practice example of a provision that offers a variety of stimulating activities for children (see case study 1).

A special committee assesses the Mazotos institution at regular intervals and evaluates its progress. The committee consists of representatives from the Ministry of Education and Culture, the primary school teachers association, the University of Cyprus, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, the association of inspectors of primary education, and the Pancyprrian Federation of Parents’ Associations of Primary Education.

Class numbers range from eight to 25 children according to the subject and needs of each school unit. In the Mazotos village in Larnaca, a teacher confirmed that there were two classes of 10 pupils split by age group. The formation of classes and groups depends on the pupils’ and teachers’ needs. For example, classes could be structured around homework subjects that students need special help with or children could choose to engage in computer activities. The all-day school is only available to the fourth, fifth and sixth grades of primary school, but the reason for this was not revealed in interviews. This is simply the age group that has been given initial priority. Based on the information

gathered in interviews, it is likely that when all-day schools are expanded by the ministry they will cover more age groups.

The table below shows the grades and ages of children at primary school in the Mazotos village.

Grades and ages of children in Mazotos Primary School

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6
Age	6	7	8	9	10	11

The Ministry of Education and Culture provides schools functioning as all-day schools with appropriate play equipment (i.e. sports, computers, arts and crafts materials). In the ministry's annual report it states that catering expenses and necessary arrangements for the provision/preparation of lunch were undertaken by pupils' parents. A teacher based at the Mazotos all-day school confirmed that previously a local woman was employed to provide food for the children during lunchtime; however, she has now left the post and meals are prepared outside of the school and served by the teachers.

In all other primary schools which do not operate as all-day schools, an extra hour of care is offered in the afternoon whereby children are supervised until 14.30 if parents cannot collect their child at 13.30. This extension has been requested by parents and arrangements have been put in place. Senior schools do not offer this provision.

Private provision

Private sector provision consists of organisations that are set up to offer a variety of additional 'lessons' to children after school hours. These after-school activities are, therefore, entirely educational and aim to build on the child's obligatory education at school. Lessons vary between academic and artistic/creative subjects, such as computers, English, gymnastics, swimming (schools do not have swimming facilities), drama, art and music.

These private institutions are widely spread throughout Cyprus, particularly in the urban areas. The Ministry of Education and Culture confirmed that there are around 300–500 registered institutions, but that there is no data regarding the number of students attending these private institutions.

Private institutions have become a cultural and social way of life for parents and children alike. There are many social and cultural connotations attached to sending your child to private lessons. For example, if your children's peers attend such an institution there is a fear among parents of 'what other parents will say' if they do not pay for additional educational activities and choose to leave their child at home. During an interview with a mother who has sent all three of her children to a private institution, she confirmed that there is no available alternative and if children do not attend private lessons it affects their education and socially excludes the child. Therefore, even though private provision is not mandatory for parents, most parents see private lessons for their children as a necessity for them to be successful in life. Interviews revealed that sending children to private school in Cyprus is a 'way of life' and many parents work second jobs so that they can afford to send their children to such schools. Private schools are a form of childcare, but they are viewed as a necessity by parents. Cypriot society places great emphasis on education and private schools play a key role in providing education to many children.

Parents on low incomes are under pressure to fund private lessons which can amount to as much as €175 a month (€50 per subject per child). In some cases this can be half of a mother's salary and some parents have to take on extra work to pay for this schooling.

As various interviews suggest, the Ministry of Education and Culture does not intervene in the standard of provision offered by private institutions. As a result, parents rely on word of mouth/recommendations from other parents in determining their choice of school. During the research, both the owner of the G+E School and the ministry confirmed that inspections and visits are only carried out when they 'have to' be. This could be when a parent has complained directly to the ministry for example, which does not happen very often. Interviewees confirmed that the quality of provision is anecdotally good; however, it is not clear if standards and targets have been set on the operations of private institutions that provide lessons to groups of children after school hours. There was no available research on the monitoring and evaluation of standards of provision in these institutions. However, parental word of mouth seems to be the most reliable way of currently determining good schools. The G+E School is a representation of good practice because it has a reputation among parents as being the best school for their children. This school is known for the level of children passing exams, therefore parents recommend it to other parents (see case study 2).

The current system of children entering into further education in private services is problematic and needs addressing. Issues arise when children are kept in the same class and are not able to progress on to the next year if they do not pass a specific subject. This creates significant problems for the child and the family because the child is excluded socially from peers. Therefore, parents are forced to pay for extra lessons in particularly difficult subjects for their child so that the child will pass the school exams. In addition, if a child is good at art or interested in music, parents pay for additional private lessons for the child to benefit in this subject and be fulfilled. However, overall, parents encourage their children to attend additional afternoon private provision in order to enhance their personal interests and to keep them active.

During the summer holidays there is no such private facility or any other childcare services available to which parents can send their children while they are at work. A few NGOs offer some provision, but it is very limited. In many cases, children are home on their own, with other family members or with domestic workers. Summer schools do take place, but they are expensive. One parent who was employed as a lawyer was forced to send her child to summer school or she would have lost her job; the result was that she had to pay almost all of her salary to fund the summer school fees.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that overall teachers providing such private services receive a good salary, and the owners of the institutions receive an even higher wage; however, accurate figures on this were unavailable. Some teachers who cannot get work in schools will advertise and provide lessons at home. This practice causes some concern over the standard of provision that is been offered.

Non-governmental organisations

In terms of childcare, the NGO sector in Cyprus provides:

- 55 day-care centres for pre-school children;
- 71 centres for school children (during after-school hours, including holidays);
- a centre for disabled children aged five to 15 years.

The centres provide a variety of activities including homework help and both indoor and outdoor activities. The services provided by the NGO sector are less expensive than the private institutions but they are not as widely available. NGO services remain open until 18.00 which is longer than the all-day school and they also operate during the summer months. An example of a good practice NGO school, the Children's Centre, is described in case study 3. It represents one of the few NGO schools offering holiday care for children.

NGOs operate various programmes which contribute to the better reconciliation of work and family life, supporting to a large extent women's participation in the labour market. These programmes are supported financially by the Grants-

in-Aid Scheme. Within the scope of the Grants-in-Aid Scheme, the Social Welfare Services have, since 1968, been providing technical and financial support to NGOs for the development and provision of community care services. The Social Welfare Services are required by law to register and inspect these centres.

Other specialised programmes run by NGOs throughout Cyprus include services for children with illnesses, special needs, dyslexia, a history of violence in the family, recreational and rehabilitation services.

A substantial increase of financial support to NGOs through the Grants-in-Aid Scheme could assist in improving and expanding their programmes and introducing new ones, thus contributing to some extent to the reduction of youth unemployment (because the structures of the voluntary sector offer easier access and rich employment opportunities to young people).

If the financial support available through the Grants-In-Aid Scheme does not increase substantially then it may be necessary to terminate many social programmes resulting also in job losses. In addition, the termination of social programmes can negatively impact on women's access to the labour market, because a large number of women in Cypriot society are systematic users of these programmes, especially care facilities for dependent family members, children, older people and family members with special needs.

Domestic workers

Even though the care of children by domestic workers is not formally tracked in labour market statistics as childcare, it still plays an important role in childcare services. As the provision of out-of-school activities is not offered to all children in Cyprus, and in cases where parents do not opt for private provision, many are looked after by their non-working mothers, other relatives, foreign maids or other adults. Questions can be raised on the quality of this type of care, particularly the care offered by foreign maids who do not always speak the child's mother tongue.

In a country with a population of less than one million people, according to the Ministry of Interior, there are 17,995 legally employed female migrant domestic workers with a majority coming from Sri Lanka (7,802), the Philippines (5,761), Bulgaria (1,661), India (672), Romania (569) and others from China, Georgia, Russia and Indonesia (Pavlou, S.E., 2005).

The employment of female domestic workers in Cyprus has become like a status symbol, with an increasing number of families employing live-in domestic helpers; previously, only families that were financially better-off employed domestic workers.

The average monthly salary of foreign house maids is around €350 with the employers covering accommodation, national insurance, medical fees, food and clothing expenses. The female domestic workers live with the family and receive one day off a week, usually Sunday. The role of the 'maid' is to do all the housework including cooking and cleaning. In terms of childcare, the maid is always at home and helps the parents when children may be coming and going from school. For example, they may return from school for lunch, then be picked up by one of the private institution's mini buses and returned again later and the parents are assured that someone is home.

In cases where the child does not attend any afternoon facilities, then the child may stay home with the maid. In such cases, the level of care offered varies from household to household. It can depend on the age of the child and what the family has asked the maid to do. It is very common to see young children going out for walks or on their bikes with the maids. Whereas for older children videos may be put on or children may be left to play in the garden while the maid carries on with the housework.

The child and parents generally see the domestic worker as a 'maid' and treat her as a helper. This sort of 'care' cannot really be classed as childcare as it is known in other EU Member States but the 'maid' would have instructions to call the parents by phone in the event of any problems. A parent when asked if they felt their maid offers childcare replied:

The maid is there to put a plaster on my daughters' knee if she falls and cuts herself but I do not expect her to offer any stimulating childcare.

Although female domestic workers do not often speak the same language as the family, they usually pick up Greek within a short space of time.

As reported in the Cyprus Mail newspaper in 2001, ministers have admitted that foreign housemaids' wages were lower than they should be and was been discussed at the House Human Rights Committee. It could be argued that housemaids were poorly paid because there were very few Cypriots doing the job. By considering this in the context of childcare, Cypriot women are able to 'liberate' themselves from household chores and have somebody at hand to care for children when they are away from the home.

It is very difficult to evaluate the provision of childcare by domestic maids because it is not tracked in labour market statistics. In these statistics, domestic maids are classified as providing cooking and cleaning services. Even though many do provide childcare, they are not viewed as a formal type of childcare provision, but are more representative of a hidden type of provision.

Informal provision

This report has highlighted the many forms of informal and formal childcare facilities available. However, due to the strong family ethos in Cypriot society, the family as well as the community continue to play an instrumental role in the care of children. Though this is not as pivotal as it was historically, for many families it is a necessity. Typically in Cyprus many non-working grandparents see it as their role to offer assistance to their families and do as much as they can to help out; yet more and more families are deciding to use other means of childcare rather than burdening ageing family members.

The report entitled 'Children's Welfare and Everyday Life in Cyprus' reveals that in many cases care within the family is provided by grandparents. However, the move to the nuclear family structure has meant that distances between families and grandparents sometimes makes this difficult and children may be left at home alone or cared for by their older siblings (Kouloumou, T., 2004). Currently, there are no statistics available regarding the number of children 'home alone' or staying with older siblings but it is something that is not seen as a huge problem in Cyprus. Even though children are home alone, they are seen to be safer in their own familiar environment than being out on the streets. Although, there is the concern that children can almost do as they please until their parents return because they are not engaged in structured activities.

For children who attend one of the many private institutions there may be nobody at home when the bus collects them and returns them again, but this may only be for a short duration of time until their parents or siblings return.

Gaps in services

There are significant gaps in out-of-school care services in Cyprus because school is considered to be the main form of childcare. The main gaps include a lack of:

- all-day public schools for school-age children;
- summer childcare;
- extended childcare after typical school hours;
- childcare services during out-of-school hours.

As public schools in Cyprus are only morning schools there are significant periods out of the normal school hours when children need care. The all-day school has been put in place to provide school during the entire day, but not all of these schools offer all grades of primary education and most only cater for nine to 11 year olds and only until 16.00. Private schools operate all day for all ages of children, but these can be costly and difficult for parents to afford. NGOs offer school services, but they are not sufficient enough to cover the lack of public education and publicly supported childcare services. Private schools do not offer services in the summer; therefore, the only form of childcare available in the summer are NGOs. As confirmed in case study 3, the NGOs provide out-of-school activities for children and remain open for longer hours. However, interviews with the manager of the NGO Children's Centre revealed that there are not enough providers and there are waiting lists of children wishing to use the NGO provision.

Initial steps for the government to tackle this issue could be that they commit to developing a strategy on childcare provision and commission research into the childcare needs of families in order to truly understand parents' needs and the gaps in services.

Childcare workers

The primary and secondary research undertaken as part of this study has clearly indicated that childcare workers in Cyprus are mainly teachers employed in kindergartens and nurseries for children of pre-primary age, all-day schools, NGOs or private services. School-age childcare is connected to schools and the concept of an after-school centre does not exist in Cyprus. Maids play a central role in childcare, but as mentioned above they are not considered childcare workers because their main activity is cooking and cleaning.

The Ministry of Education and Culture employs all teaching staff in Cyprus servicing public schools, including those working in all-day schools. The ministry employs the largest amount of public sector employees in Cyprus. Teachers working in small businesses offering private lessons are employed by the owners who themselves are qualified teachers educated to university level. Teachers working in all-day schools have civil servant status and are university graduates.

Salaries of childcare workers

As shown in the 2003 Labour Statistics, the average monthly wage of childcare workers in Cyprus was €1,115 (in the statistics a specific category for teachers is not shown); however, the average monthly wage for a government employee was €1,250. A teacher working in the Mazotos Primary School confirmed that his rate of pay is €13 per hour and that he receives an extra €17 for working during lunchtime.

Salaries of teachers working in institutions providing after-school private group lessons were unavailable. There is no accurate information available on the salaries of private teachers. In addition, in the labour market statistics provided by the Statistical Service, there is no indication of exactly how many childcare workers there are in Cyprus working in all-day schools, NGOs, private services or as domestic workers.

Job creation initiatives

No clearly visible job creation initiatives came to light during this research. During the case study interviews, managers of the NGO and the private facilities stated that they advertised for positions in the usual way. For the staffing of all-day schools, teachers would have to apply to the Regional Education Offices; however, due to the waiting list of teachers looking for suitable posts, there has not been a problem staffing all-day schools. However, if the sector is to become better regulated with standards set across the board, the government should consider developing childcare as a stand alone sector and pushing forward job creation initiatives to respond to needs and its targets in both National Action Plans.

Public image of the sector

Overall, women are strongly represented in all aspects of childcare delivery, in particular at the pre-school level. Interviewees stated that professional teachers, whether they are working in schools or within the 300–500 private institutions, are highly regarded and parents see their work as important. However, the relationship between parents and teachers has changed in recent years since parents have a stronger voice in the education of their children which is evident in the increasing number of parents' associations. Many teachers are pressurised by parents and questioned over the education provision. In terms of private provision, parents have a much stronger voice as they can easily withdraw their child and chose another provider. This puts pressure on private institutions to become more competitive.

The idea of 'maids' providing childcare is regarded as a bridge to fill the gaps between school and other services rather than as a valued contributor to meeting the needs of children. Maids can provide for a child's basic needs but they do not assist with educational or creative tasks.

Skills and training for childcare workers

Staff of all-day schools, NGOs and private schools are in theory university trained teachers. However, it could not be confirmed for this report if this is the case in practice as there is no regulation. It should be noted that maids, who provide a great deal of care for children (although not formally tracked by labour market statistics as childcare), are not trained in any way and do not necessarily speak the child's native language.

Primary school

Teachers in all-day schools, private schools or NGOs can receive training at the University of Cyprus which accepted its first students in 1992 in the Department of Education for a four-year programme leading to a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree. Some primary school teachers receive their initial training in the Departments of Education at the following universities: Athens, Thessaloniki, Patras, Ioannina, Crete, Thrace, the Aegean, and Thessaly or elsewhere (very few in the United Kingdom).

For a Bachelor's degree in Primary School Education, a student has to complete at least 128 credit hours. The courses followed include, among others: Introduction to pedagogical sciences, Methodology of educational research, Developmental and cognitive psychology, Philosophy of education, Educational evaluation, Introduction to special education, Curriculum development, Educational psychology, and the teaching of various skills, especially in languages and mathematics. In addition, students are required to complete six credit hours in a foreign language.

Primary school teachers can specialise in any one of the following areas: languages, mathematics, natural sciences, and educational sciences (special education or psychology).

Sustainable employment in childcare

To make jobs in childcare sustainable, the right terms and conditions need to be offered to people so that they are attracted to and, more importantly, stay in the sector. This has meant more competitive salaries, flexible working hours, greater awareness of the benefits of working in the sector, training, more investment by the government and having a more regulated sector. In addition, there is a need to identify the status of those working with children outside regular school hours as a distinctive role.

National policies in Cyprus have highlighted the importance of childcare in relation to reconciling work and family life. However, this report has highlighted that, although there are well intended policies in place, in reality the situation is not as clearly defined and much of the 'childcare' provided out of school is largely unregulated. The increasing take-up of private provision should be a concerning factor when determining whether childcare is sustainable. In this regard, parents should not feel that private provision is their only option other than leaving children home alone or in inappropriate care.

Although implementing more all-day schools is a positive step forward, there is a clear gap in meeting the needs of mothers who work in the services sector. At present, over 80% of women are employed in the services sector in comparison with 61.7% of men. The hours of work for those employed in this sector extends well beyond 16.00, and apart from the private group lessons offered during term time there are no childcare services to meet the needs of mothers who work beyond 16.00.

Gaps in employment

The tourism sector remains the economy's most important driver. It is a significant contributor to the island's gross domestic product (GDP), and a determining factor in the performance of other sectors of the economy. The tourism sector employs many people in the summer months on many short-term contracts. For women employed in such seasonal work there is much reliance on informal and domestic workers to provide childcare. Formal childcare is virtually non-existent in the summer other than through the few NGOs that offer summer schooling or expensive private summer camps. Therefore, women's labour market participation in the summer could be significantly affected by the lack of childcare options available in the summer months.

The government needs to address key elements in the childcare system in order to address gaps in employment. Such measures should include:

- expanding public schools to cater for children of all ages throughout the entire day;
- developing after-school programmes that offer an alternative to paying for private school lessons in the late afternoon;
- creating an after-school job position that is not a teaching post.

Tackling shortages in the childcare sector

Currently, the childcare needs of 'all children' of working families are not being met because of the significant gaps in services. There is a risk of this trend continuing unless a comprehensive approach is developed based on needs and initiated by looking at all forms of provision (private, public, NGOs, informal and domestic workers). Interviews with the Pancyprian Welfare Council verified the need for research to explore the needs of parents and map the current provision. It is recognised that maids are providing informal childcare services, but this needs to be further researched to explore the actual impact on available services.

5

Creating sustainable childcare

Affordable provision for parents

As the school day finishes at 13.00 and only a proportion of schools operate ‘all day’ (until 16.00), working parents pay for additional private lessons in private institutions. These lessons can cost up to €175 per child per month based on the child receiving lessons in two to three different subjects each week. This is a substantial amount of money, particularly if there are more than two children in each family. Although the government has introduced the all-day school provision, the cost of childcare is still an issue in Cyprus. The all-day school is operational in around half of the primary schools in Cyprus and is not mandatory. There is an increasing number of private institutions and of private provision outside of term time. All of this means that many families are left without childcare services unless they pay high costs which is a financial burden and clearly takes up a substantial amount from the family budget.

It appears that parents make a financial contribution of some form to all out-of-school provisions whether the provision is public, private or a non-governmental organisation (NGO). Although it has become an accepted norm in Cyprus, there could be steps to increase the number of all-day schools and for the Ministry of Education and Culture to restructure how the provision is funded.

Providing quality provision

Interviews with parents revealed that there is a lack of information available for parents regarding childcare options. As childcare mainly consists of schooling, many parents feel obliged to pay for private schooling. Cost is a major factor and in many cases parents may choose a provider based on cost, rather than on the quality of services. Parents should have access to information that will enable them to confidently choose a service based on quality, appropriateness and standard of provision. All institutions that are registered with the Ministry of Education and Culture should be visited and inspected at regular intervals rather than when the need arises. This could lead to the provision of more public information so that parents are clear on the quality and standards of childcare on offer. This study has revealed that the lack of coherent services in terms of the availability between urban and rural areas and during the entire day may well be leading parents to make unsuitable and inadequate childcare choices. The quality of provision in all-day schools is monitored more closely but the government should investigate the reasons why many parents do not choose this provision.

Future needs for affordable and high quality childcare

There is an increasing concern for the safety of children who do not attend afternoon care and, therefore, have to stay at home either alone or with siblings. It is estimated that the extra financial burden is one of the reasons leading parents to this choice. To date, there has been a lack of existing research in this field; however, the analysis of current provision and choices parents are making raises questions on standards and quality of available childcare. One of the main issues is that all the provision available is optional and parents tend to use ‘word of mouth’ to make choices on provision. The all-day school is also optional and it appears that, for example, half of the pupils of Mazotos Primary School did not use the afternoon facility, meaning that many children are taken care of informally or by foreign maids. To achieve good quality, sustainable childcare, further intervention is required by the government, particularly in a ‘joined-up’ approach so that key ministries work more closely together. Collaboration has commenced, as stated in the National Action Plan for Employment, but more is needed to address the needs of childcare services in Cyprus.

At present, there is no all year round provision for after-school childcare. This has major implications for mothers who work all year round and in particular for those that are employed as seasonal workers during summer months when there is no suitable forms of childcare available.

Case study 1: Mazotos Primary School

Organisational background

Mazotos Primary School is well established in Cyprus because it was one of the first all-day schools to be developed. Mazotos is a village situated around 10 kilometres from Larnaca. It has one primary school that currently has 71 pupils. It has been operating as an all-day school since 2001. During the last academic year 2004–2005, 32 out of 71 pupils benefited from the facility until 16.00 and stayed on the school premises until 16.00 with lunch provided. The pupils who attend this all-day school are ages nine, 10 and 11 years. The all-day school is optional. There is currently no provision for six, seven and eight year olds; the reasons for this are unknown.

Description of the initiative

During the afternoon session there are two teachers present, usually one male and one female teacher; sometimes there have been two female teachers on duty. After lunch the children take part in various activities such as sport, computers, English and art. The teacher working at the school in the afternoons during last year said that the activities provided were appropriate apart from English. The children stay behind because they ‘want to do something interesting’ but not English, as they learn English during normal school hours and generally the pupils and the teachers thought that it would be best to avoid further English lessons.

Good practice

Part of the reason why this school represents good practice is simply because it was one of the first all-day schools implemented and over time they have learned from experience what works well. A parent interviewed, whose nine year old son attends the Mazotos all-day school, was satisfied with the existing provision. Her son attends school from 07.30 until 16.00; after lunch he receives help with his homework, undertakes other activities such as sport, computers, English and art. Another parent felt that her child ‘was engaged at school in a range of extracurricular subjects, receives help with homework and interacts with other children’.

Further information

Contact: Theo Michael

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School telephone: (357) 24 43 22 00

Address: Mazotos, Larnaca, Cyprus

Case study 2: G+E School

Organisational background

The G+E School is a private institute based in Larnaca that provides group lessons to children aged between eight and 17 years during out-of-school hours. Lessons are offered in English, French and mathematics. Lessons cost €44 a month per subject for a total of eight hours of teaching. Lessons are given in groups with a maximum of 10 children.

Description of the initiative

The institute is registered with the Ministry of Education and Culture but the owner of the school stated that visits from the ministry were infrequent. When interviewed, he explained that ‘high quality education is provided and the standard is maintained through the parents and pupils’. Parents rely on word of mouth from other parents and on the good pass rates of pupils. Thirteen year old pupils are following the equivalent of the English language GCSE (Cambridge exams) and passing with B grades. The school’s owner believes that this is the best advertising for the school and reflects the high standard of teaching provided. Advertising is minimal, with an annual mail-out of flyers in supermarkets and to each household every August.

Development of the initiative

The school was opened in 1985 by a teacher offering lessons in her home to two or three pupils. Soon after, as the school expanded and demand increased, the owner built separate buildings to accommodate more pupils in purpose-built facilities adjacent to her house. The school currently employs eight qualified teachers, a cleaner and three minibus drivers who bring and take home children to and from lessons. All administrative work is undertaken by the owner during the day and lessons last until 19.00.

Good practice

Many of the out-of-school services available to children are of an educational nature; however, some leisure facilities are provided but they still remain few. The owner of the school stated that it is relatively easy to find qualified teachers to work in the institute given that there is currently a waiting list with the Ministry of Education and Culture of teachers wanting to work in government schools. This school is well established in the community and was one of the first schools in operation. Part of the reason it represents good practice is because it has an exemplary reputation. Parents choose to send their children to this school because other parents recommend it based on the fact that their children are passing their exams.

Further information

Contact: Elli Gabrielle

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Case study 3: Children's Centre

Organisational background

The Children's Centre is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and offers after-school activities for children aged seven to 12 years. Opened in 1990, the centre continues to offer services every day and during school holidays. During school holidays, it is open from 07.00 to 19.00. During term time it offers services to pre-school children in the early mornings and in the afternoons from 12.00 to 18.00.

On average, around 15 to 20 pupils use the centre and from 25 to 30 children attend during the summer holidays. There is currently a waiting list of children wanting to use the services as there is not enough room at present for more children according to the centre's manager.

Description of the initiative

The provision is subsidised by the government but parents pay for using the centre. Parents pay around €87 per month per child. This cost covers an afternoon meal and supervised care.

After lunch, pupils are given help with their homework and then there are multiple indoor and outdoor activities offered to the children until 18.00. Activities include arts and crafts, indoor and outdoor sports, and music. The groups are divided by age as appropriate. For every 15 children there are two childcare staff employed.

At present, the majority of staff at the centre are women. The person interviewed at the centre promotes the good quality childcare on offer. It seems that parents are confident that their children are safe at the centre.

Good practice

One of the reasons that the school represents good practice is because it operates during school holidays. This distinguishes it from most of the other schools because holiday care is difficult to find and most schools do not offer this

service. The Children's Centre is one of the few NGO schools operating during school holidays; the only other option for holiday care is for parents to pay for more expensive private services.

Further information

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¹ All links accessed on 31 May 2006

List of interviewees

Institution	Position	Contact	Location
Ministry of Education and Culture	Director – Primary Education	Phone	Larnaca
	Parent	Phone	Larnaca
	Parent	Phone	Larnaca
	Parent	Phone	Larnaca
Day School	Teacher	Phone	Larnaca
NGO Children's Centre	Manager	Phone	Nicosia
G + E School	Owner	Phone	Larnaca
Pancyprian Welfare Council	Project Officer	Phone	Nicosia
	Manager of Equal Developmental Partnership	Phone	Larnaca
Cyprus Embassy in		Phone	London