



INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (IECE) COUNTRY QUESTIONNAIRE – CYPRUS

1. ACCESS, PROCEDURES AND PARTICIPATION

Key principles

1.1 Provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children.

In Cyprus, there is a public education system where attendance is free for all children from the age of 4 years and 8 months onwards (up to 18 years old). Public schools offer access to wheelchair users.

1.2 Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity.

Even in primary or pre-primary schools where there is a special education unit, there is a common break-time, which is used for the initiation of social inclusion and the partial integration of children characterised as having special educational needs in the mainstream classroom. Generally speaking, the view that diversity is being embraced in the most inclusive ways cannot be supported. A lot of changes are still needed in order to embrace diversity, including provisions on a national level.

Guiding questions	Country response
<p><i>Legislation and policy at national level</i></p> <p>1. Is there a national policy and legislation that gives the right to all children, without exception, from at least 3 years onwards, to attend mainstream Early Childhood Education (ECE)?</p> <p>2. Is there support available to enable every child to attend ECE?</p> <p>3. Is there a period of compulsory ECE before</p>	<p>The 1999 Education Law for the Education and Training of Children with Special Needs establishes the right of all children to attend mainstream school from the age of 3. The state does not provide any help for the early identification of children with SEN or other support to parents before that age. Children can start attending Early Childhood Education (ECE) from the age of 3, but it is not free. The only period of compulsory education before primary school is between 4 years and 8 months and 5 years and 8 months, which is the year before primary school.</p> <p>Every district has its own District Office of Education which is responsible for co-ordinating multidisciplinary meetings and the necessary arrangements for transition from home to ECE or to primary school. In co-operation with the Office of Social Services, where necessary, the transition is carried out in the best possible way. In formal policy documents and declarations of the Ministry of</p>



Guiding questions	Country response
<p>school starts?</p> <p>4. Are arrangements in place for transition from home to ECE and from ECE to primary education for all children?</p> <p>5. Is inclusion stated as a goal of ECE provision? Is there a policy making ECE accessible to all children?</p> <p>6. Is there a policy that obliges mainstream publicly funded ECE to make adaptations so that all children can attend and participate? Please describe</p>	<p>Education and Culture, inclusion is stated as a goal of ECE. In practice, however, the existence of special education units, special schools and segregated provisions of education prove otherwise. The 1999 Law for Special Education determines schools' obligation to be accessible to all children and their diverse needs. The same legal framework also declares the responsibility of the state to fund the necessary alterations to schools in an attempt to not exclude any child from mainstream settings. This includes the technical equipment, accessible buildings, materials used, etc.</p>
<p><i>Practice at national level</i></p> <p>1. What percentage of children attend mainstream ECE provision at ages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 years • 4 years • 5 years (if not primary) • 6 years (if not primary)? <p>2. What are the main factors preventing some children from</p>	<p>1. 85% of children aged 4 years to 5 years and eight months (just before attending primary school) attend mainstream ECE provision in Cyprus.</p> <p>2. Education before the age of 4 years and 8 months is not obligatory and there is a fee which parents have to pay. This prevents some parents from enrolling their children. In some very rare cases, distance can function as a negative factor for enrolling a child in ECE, as public transport is not an option in some remote areas. It should be emphasised that this is a very rare situation.</p> <p>3. There are a number of children who attend special ECE settings (747 children). These settings are usually special education units (96 children) which function within the boundaries of mainstream schools. In addition to this, in a number of mainstream schools there are classrooms for special education, where children characterised as having special educational needs are individually supported by a</p>



Guiding questions	Country response
<p>accessing mainstream ECE?</p> <p>3. Are there children who attend special ECE settings? Please provide data if available.</p> <p>4. Describe arrangements for inter-service collaboration to enable children's attendance and participation?</p> <p>5. What proportion of children is formally identified as having additional needs at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3 years• 4 years• 5 years• 6 years	<p>specialist teacher or speech therapist (634 children). Although it is not officially considered as a separate educational setting, the child is discriminated against and attends this special setting for a number of hours per week. There are also 9 special schools which provide special education only for children with special educational needs. 17 children of ECE age are enrolled in these special schools.</p> <p>4. –</p> <p>5. 6% of children aged 3 years to 4 years and 8 months are formally identified as having additional needs.</p>



2. WORKFORCE

Key principles

2.1. Well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role.

Both pre-primary school teachers and specialist teachers assigned to school units need to have at least a bachelor’s degree in education. The initial training constitutes an important support in the attempt to fulfil their professional role. Continuous training is not obligatory and this is one of the most important weaknesses of the Cypriot education system. Despite the fact that every teacher reports annually on training attended, attendance at any seminars or conferences is optional. A large amount of teachers attend seminars and conferences every year in an attempt to develop their teaching and update their knowledge.

2.2. Supportive working conditions including professional leadership that creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents.

In every school, mainstream or special, there is a head teacher. This leadership figure can be supportive or not to teachers’ attempts to make a more inclusive school. The working conditions in every school and the opportunities for observation reflection or team working substantially depend on this leading figure in the school. Besides that, every school has a supervisor and a liaison officer. These professionals are, among other things, responsible for the professional support of teachers. The liaison officers in particular have the responsibility of supporting teachers in their teaching, teaching problems, attempts to provide support for all their children and co-operation with their colleagues. In practice, this support is not provided due to the large number of schools (approximately 23) assigned to each officer. In a number of schools, the working conditions are excellent and the opportunities for collaboration and reflective teaching constitute the daily routine. This depends largely on the head teacher and the teachers in the school and less on the official policy of the Ministry or the support provided from outside the school.

Guiding questions	Country response
<p><i>Legislation and policy</i></p> <p>1. What level of qualification is required to work in ECE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for teachers? 	<p>For teachers, the level of qualification required is a bachelor’s degree in Pre-primary Education. A large number of teachers also hold a master’s degree, but this is not obligatory for the position of teacher. The Educational Service Commission in Cyprus determines the level of qualification required.</p>



Guiding questions	Country response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for other staff? <p>2. What regulation is there for staff-child ratios in ECE?</p> <p>3. What provision is there for additional staffing to support children with diverse and additional needs?</p> <p>4. Does the initial training of staff include understanding and supporting children with diverse and additional needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for teachers? • for other staff? <p>5. Does initial training include preparation for working in partnership with families:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for teachers? • for other staff? <p>6. Is there a policy for in-service training? Does it cover inclusive education skills?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for teachers? • for other staff? 	<p>Co-operation with families is not something which is part of the initial training. It may be mentioned as part of individual units in the university but it is not something that teachers can be expected to know. School experience is the only way to fill this void. Although in-service training is not mandatory, at the beginning of every year there is usually a 4–5 hour seminar that teachers attend. This is frequently related to issues of special education and attempts at more inclusive settings.</p> <p>For other staff, such as teacher’s assistants or assistants for children characterised as having special educational needs, the qualification required is simply the high school diploma. This does not therefore include any preparation for working with families or co-operation within the school unit. Staff undergo a short series of training sessions which are usually related to first aid (assistants) and duties within the school (teacher’s assistants). Apart from teachers, school staff are not employed by the Ministry of Education and Culture. There is no training relating to inclusion for the school staff. Seminars attended are related to other issues.</p>
<p><i>Practice at national level</i></p> <p>1. What proportion of staff has the required</p>	<p>According to the qualifications required by the government, all employed teachers have the mandatory qualifications for the position of pre-primary school teacher or specialist teacher. For the rest of the staff no specific qualifications are considered necessary. If an</p>



Guiding questions	Country response
<p>qualification:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• for teachers?• for other staff? <p>2. Please describe any proposed changes to the required qualifications.</p> <p>3. Describe the role of leaders of ECE settings in ensuring inclusive practice?</p> <p>4. Provide any data on staff–child ratio.</p> <p>5. Please describe the range of specialist support that is available and how it is organised?</p> <p>6. How do regular and support staff collaborate in IECE settings?</p> <p>7. Describe the role of support assistants in the ECE setting?</p>	<p>applicant has a bachelor’s degree in a related subject, it is considered an additional qualification, which is not required.</p> <p>The role of the head teacher is essential in promoting any changes within the setting. The school head teacher is the leading figure within the school and the only person who can take the initiative to organise team working or observations within the classrooms, provide or initiate reflection on the teaching of each staff member or support for a more inclusive setting. Their role is to promote everyday inclusive practice and assist individual teachers in alternating their teaching and including all in the learning process. The role of the school leader should be less administrative and more of a guiding figure within the school unit. Both mainstream and specialist teachers are well qualified for their professional positions. Despite that, training within the school should be mandatory and more practical. Teachers are in need of valuable guidance in confronting the difficulties arising within schools. This constant support is considered essential in an attempt to promote more inclusive practices. Every pre-primary school teacher can have up to 25 children in the classroom and the duties of the teacher’s assistant are not related to educational or teaching issues. Teacher’s assistants are responsible for the preparation of materials as instructed by teachers, cleaning the classroom, storing materials and assisting teachers in producing materials. They have no input regarding the teaching materials or the teaching methods within the classroom.</p> <p>Co-operation between mainstream and specialist teachers is based on the goodwill of the two and the support, if any, of the head teacher. The legal framework does not provide any hours for co-operation and co-ordination between the two teachers. In addition to this a number of specialist teachers move daily from one school to another, wasting valuable time which could be used for combined teaching planning, exchanging ideas and co-teaching within the mainstream classroom. In the majority of cases,</p>



Guiding questions	Country response
	the co-operation between the two is restricted to a simple exchange of educational aims. They both teach in their own space, in their own way and without any further exchange of ideas.



3. CURRICULUM

Key principles

3.1. A curriculum based on pedagogic goals, values and approaches that enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way.

3.2. A curriculum that requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice.

In Cyprus, the curriculum was recently revised. The recommended approaches and content have been changed. The new curriculum has been in the process of being implemented for the last two years. The ways in which staff reflect on their own practice and collaborate with parents or among themselves is not an issue which is regulated by the curriculum itself, but by the school supervisor and head teacher. Generally, the curriculum provides the guidelines regarding the subjects taught. Teachers have the freedom to choose the ways (teaching strategies) in which these will be presented to the children.

Guiding questions	Country response
<p>Legislation and policy</p> <p>1. Is there a national ECE curriculum for <i>all</i> children?</p> <p>2. Does it include skills and competences to be achieved by children?</p> <p>3. Describe how the curriculum facilitates inclusion?</p> <p>4. Is the use of new technologies included in the curriculum?</p> <p>5. Is the curriculum adaptable to meet the needs of all children?</p> <p>6. How are parents involved in the adaptation of the curriculum to individual</p>	<p>There is an ECE curriculum which is supposed to cover the varied educational needs of all children attending mainstream schools. The curriculum refers to the skills that need to be acquired by children and the age by which this should be done. A severe criticism expressed in Cyprus regarding the curriculum is that it continues to be established on the grounds of the typical development of a child, disregarding the fact that a number of children attending mainstream schools have a substantially different pace and differentiated educational needs. This is regarded as the responsibility of the mainstream and the specialist teachers. The simplification of the curriculum is frequently the approach used in an attempt to provide access to all, usually in separate educational settings. This might satisfy the need for the adaption of the curriculum but fails to create an inclusive educational setting. There is no official policy on the ways in which parents are involved in the adoption of the curriculum. Each school unit has its own guidelines regarding the issue of parents and their involvement.</p> <p>This is a personalised professional opinion on the last issue. Judging from the way the District Committees of</p>



Guiding questions	Country response
<p>children?</p> <p>7. Is there awareness of the impact of labelling on children's participation</p>	<p>Special Education are functioning and the ways in which perceived needs should be identified and assessed according to the 1999 legal framework, it is strongly believed that not only is there no awareness of the impact of labelling but it is considered necessary in the school context in order to offer learning assistance. The assessment of the child's perceived needs by a multidisciplinary team is regarded as the first and essential step in the attempt to provide a place in a public setting and additional support (either in the form of special education or speech therapy). The label attached to the child is regarded as the guideline and the negative consequences deriving from it are not seen to exist.</p>
<p><i>Practice at national level</i></p> <p>1. Is there assessment of the learning and development of children from age 3 years?</p> <p>2. What arrangements are there for the screening of children's functioning?</p> <p>3. Is children's engagement and participation in ECE activities monitored?</p> <p>4. How do ECE settings reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of all children?</p> <p>5. How do staff adapt (prepare and present) the curriculum and the learning activities to</p>	<p>According to the 1999 legal framework, if there is any concern regarding the development of a child from the age of 3 onwards a multidisciplinary team is assigned the task of assessing the child's needs. Following this assessment the child is placed in an appropriate setting, based on their perceived needs. During the school year a team consisting of the child's teachers (special and mainstream), liaison officer and all the other professionals working with the child, meets once or twice a year to discuss the progress made and the problems confronted. This can lead in a change of placement for the child if necessary. The teachers working with the child monitor the child's progress and participation in the mainstream classroom through written assessments. The adaption of the curriculum is considered the work of the specialist educators and the mainstream teachers do little towards this since there is the option of excluding the child to be educated in the special education unit or in the special education classroom with specialist staff.</p> <p>Parents are not involved themselves in the assessment process. They have the right to be present and to be accompanied by the professionals of their choice, usually those who work with the child during the afternoons and are employed by the parents themselves.</p>



Guiding questions	Country response
<p>make them accessible to all children?</p> <p>6. How are parents involved in this process?</p> <p>7. How are children themselves involved in this process?</p> <p>8. How is ICT used to overcome barriers to participation and learning?</p> <p>9. What provisions are there for meeting children's additional needs?</p> <p>10. How is the environment adapted to the needs of all children?</p>	<p>The provisions for meeting children's additional needs are usually the exclusion of the child from the mainstream setting to a more specialised environment which is considered to be appropriate for the child's perceived needs. The environment of the mainstream school is not very frequently adapted to children's needs, apart from fundamental changes to accessibility, since there is the option of specialised settings.</p>



4. EVALUATION AND MONITORING

Key principles

4.1. Monitoring and evaluating produces information at the relevant local, regional and/or national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice.

The inspectors' evaluations and assessment during school visits provide important information regarding the quality of policy and practice. This information enables the development of in-service training programmes, which focus on specific teaching and learning areas.

4.2. Monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interest of the child.

The specialist teacher evaluates every child's progress on a regular basis. This is achieved through the recording and assessment of the educational aims in the individual education plan which is produced by the specialist teacher for each and every child characterised as having special educational needs. This plan is written at the beginning of the school year (September) and evaluated and re-assessed twice a year (January and June). This re-assessment process is carried out through multidisciplinary meetings in which the participants include the parents, teachers (specialist and mainstream), liaison officers, professionals who work with the child within the school or during the afternoons. When it is considered necessary, these meetings are more frequent.

Guiding questions	Country response
<p><i>Legislation and policy</i></p> <p>1. What standards are in place for ensuring the quality of ECE at national level?</p> <p>2. Describe the arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the quality of ECE provision?</p> <p>3. How is the participation of all children reflected in the national quality</p>	<p>1. The most important factor in ensuring the quality of teaching in ECE is the supervisors. Their role is to evaluate the tasks of pre-primary school teachers and report in writing to the Ministry of Education and Culture. The Ministry also participates in a number of European projects and conferences and the knowledge and experience of the people participating is transferred through written reports.</p> <p>2. The quality of ECE provision is mainly evaluated by the school inspectors who prepare an evaluation report straight after their school visit. There is also a concurrent assessment set by the class teacher in the form of a portfolio for each individual child.</p> <p>All children have the right to be enrolled in public schools, especially children above the age of 4 years and 8 months</p>



Guiding questions	Country response
<p>standards for ECE?</p> <p>4. How does national policy identify and address inequalities in participation in ECE?</p> <p>5. How does research inform policy and practice in ECE?</p>	<p>old. However, this does not guarantee the participation of the child, and little is done about this at a national level. School supervisors or liaison officers might provide advice, but at a national level there are no guidelines or support for the school setting to attempt to minimise discrimination.</p>
<p><i>Practice at national level</i></p> <p>1. How do staff monitor and evaluate the participation and learning of all children?</p> <p>2. How are parents involved in this process?</p> <p>3. How are children themselves involved in this process?</p>	<p>The recording of educational plans constitutes the official method of monitoring and evaluating the participation and progress of all children. Although this technique is solely used by the specialist teachers, the education plan should be enriched through discussion with and feedback from the classroom teacher. Mainstream class teachers are requested to submit a teaching plan to the head teacher on a weekly basis. The educational aims pursued promote the maximum participation and learning of all children in the mainstream classroom. With the constant exchange of ideas between teachers, when and where this happens, mainstream and specialist teachers improve the education plan.</p> <p>Parents are not involved in this process. Even if they are invited to school to discuss their child's progress or any arising problems this is done outside the classroom. In pre-primary education children are hardly ever included in the process, apart from when their perceived needs are assessed by an educational psychologist or other professional.</p>



5. GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING

Key principles

5.1. Stakeholders in the ECE system have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations.

5.2. Legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded ECE, and progress is regularly reported to all stakeholders.

Guiding questions	Country response
<p><i>Legislation and policy</i></p> <p>1. Under which ministry(ies) / department(s) are ECE provisions regulated and funded?</p> <p>2. How is intersectorial (health, social and education) collaboration promoted among all stakeholders in ECE?</p> <p>3. How is free or affordable provision guaranteed to all children age 3 years and over?</p> <p>4. What additional economic measures are available for children with additional needs and their families to access mainstream ECE?</p> <p>5. How is additional funding allocated?</p>	<p>1. Under the age of 4 years and 8 months ECE provisions are controlled, and some funded, by the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance. From the age of 3 years to 5 years and 8 months the Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the regulation and funding of ECE provisions.</p> <p>2. Intersectorial collaboration is generally poor and begins with the participation of health professionals or social workers in the task of evaluating a child’s needs. If there is a case of child abuse, the two ministries continue to work together in monitoring the child’s attendance at school.</p> <p>3. The enrolment of children aged 4 years and 8 months to 5 years and 8 months is compulsory and free. If there are places available, younger children (3 years to 4 years and 8 months) can enrol, depending on certain criteria. These children pay a symbolic amount of 42 euros per month. No places are guaranteed for children of non-compulsory age.</p> <p>4. The government financially supports children’s families with a monthly contribution which is to cover the expenses of private afternoon treatments for the child, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy or anything else which might be considered necessary for the child. Parents report constantly to the government regarding the use of this contribution.</p>



Guiding questions	Country response
<p data-bbox="150 320 464 398"><i>Practice at national level</i></p> <p data-bbox="150 427 491 600">1. How far does the standard of ECE provision vary across regions and localities?</p> <p data-bbox="150 629 501 887">2. How effective is collaboration between the ECE and health, social and other relevant agencies for children and families?</p> <p data-bbox="150 916 501 1128">3. What proportion of children (3 years to primary education) make use of additional funding?</p> <p data-bbox="150 1158 437 1330">4. How well does additional funding support inclusive education?</p>	<p data-bbox="545 320 1430 629">1. The fact that every ECE provision (in the case of Cyprus this is the towns of the island) has its own supervisor and liaison officers does not really facilitate co-operation among them. Besides meetings between the supervisors, the everyday practices vary significantly due to different interpretations of the legal framework instructions for practitioners.</p> <p data-bbox="545 658 1445 875">2. Although no data was found regarding the effectiveness of the collaboration between these agencies, personal experience and feedback from field practitioners is not encouraging. The co-operation is not continuous and only occurs in cases of particular children.</p> <p data-bbox="545 904 1410 983">3. There is no data available regarding the proportion of children that make use of additional funding.</p> <p data-bbox="545 1012 1437 1319">4. Not only does the additional funding given to families not promote inclusion, it actually works in the opposite direction. Parents are using it to fund individual therapies. This only persuades everyone, parents included, of the need for separate and specialised education and the necessity of therapies as a method for normalisation of the child.</p>