

# EMPLOYMENT IN CYPRUS – 2008

Employment Observatory  
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## CHAPTER 1. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ECONOMY AND THE LABOUR MARKET<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1. Macroeconomic Characteristics

In 2008, following a very satisfactory economic growth in the period 2004-2007 with an average annual growth rate of 4,1% in real terms, and as a result of the global financial crisis, economic activity in Cyprus has moderated and the average annual growth rate decreased to 3,7% (4,4% in 2007). A productivity increase was estimated at 0,8% compared to 1,3% in 2007.

### 1.2. Trends in the Labour Market

#### 1.2.1. Participation in employment

The strong economic growth during the period 2004-2008, led to the creation of 45.000 new work positions, which increased the overall employment rate to 70,9% from 69,1% in 2004. The vast majority of these jobs (88%) were created in the services sector, which during the above mentioned period exhibited an annual average employment growth rate of 3,6%.

In 2008, employment grew by only 1,3% and the overall employment rate of persons aged 15-64 decreased to 70,9% from 71% in 2007. However, Cyprus still remained above the corresponding EU Lisbon target for an overall employment rate of 70%. The employment rate of men decreased to 79,2% from 80% in 2007, whereas the female employment rate increased to 62,9% from 62,4% in 2007, and as from 2006 it steadily remains above the corresponding EU Lisbon target for a female employment rate of 60%. A small decrease of 1,1 percentage point was observed in the employment rate of older workers (55-64), which decreased to 54,8% from 55,9% in 2007, but still remains above the corresponding EU target (50%).

#### 1.2.2. Employment by gender

During the last years a steady improvement is observed in the position of women in the labour market which is reflected in rising employment participation rates, lower unemployment rates and higher wages. The average annual employment growth rate of women for the period 2004-2008 was 3,8% as compared to 2,7% for men. As a result, the employment gender gap narrowed to 16,3 percentage points in 2008, but still remains higher than the corresponding EU average (13,7 percentage points).

During the same year, women constituted 44,6% of total employment and for every 100 women aged 15-64, sixty-three (63) were employed, three (3) were unemployed and thirty-four (34) were inactive as compared to fifty-nine (59), four (4) and thirty-seven (37) respectively in 2004.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Labour Force Survey

### 1.2.3. Employment by education level

In 2008, the high skilled (i.e. those having completed tertiary education) represented 37,1% of total employment, while those with education up to lower secondary level represented 23,2%. The average employment rate among tertiary education graduates was 86,5% as compared to 74% for upper secondary level graduates and 50,9% for persons with an education level of lower secondary and below. Women with tertiary level education were more than twice as likely (83%) to be in employment than women with lower secondary education and below (40%).

### 1.2.4. Employment by age

The highest employment rate (88,5%) was observed in the age group 30-34, followed by the age groups of 40-44 (84,8%) and 35-39 (84,6%), while the lowest was observed among young people 15-24 years (38,0%). Young people (15-24) exhibit the narrower gender gap in employment, 2,6 percentage points. This increases to 31,5 percentage points for people aged 55-64 years.

### 1.2.5. Employment structure

During the period 2004-2008, the services sector expanded by 40.000 new jobs confirming once more to be the most dynamic sector with regard to employment creation with a rate of annual growth of around 3,6%.

A more detailed sectoral breakdown of net employment creation shows that the sectors of real estate and business activities, of wholesale and retail trade, of public administration and defence, of education and of construction, experienced the highest increase in employment, contrary to the sectors of hotels and restaurants that exhibited a negative employment growth.

In 2008, the occupational structure of employed population was composed of 31% in high skilled – non manual occupations (legislators, managers, professionals and professional assistants), 30% in middle and low skilled – non manual occupations (clerks and service and sales workers) and 38% in skilled and unskilled manual occupations (skilled agricultural workers, craft & related workers, plant & machinery operators, elementary workers). During the same year, the occupational categories with the highest number of employed persons were sales and services workers (63.141 persons), elementary workers (57.338 persons) and professional workers (56.501 persons).

One of the main characteristics of the labour market in Cyprus is the concentration of both men and women in a narrow spectrum of occupations. In specific, in 2008, 50% of all employed women were employed in only 4 of the 17 sectors of economic activity, namely,



in the sectors of wholesale and retail trade, education, real estate and business activities and private households, whereas, as 50% of all employed men were employed in only 3 of the 17 sectors of economic activity, namely, in the sectors of construction, wholesale and retail trade and manufacturing. The segmentation in the labour market is more evident in the case of women as 88% of women were employed in the services sector.

Concerning the gender distribution of employment by occupational category, in 2008, 43% of women were employed in middle skilled occupations, whereas, 49% of men were employed in skilled and unskilled manual occupations. Despite the fact that 30% of both men and women were employed in high skilled – non manual, the share of women in the occupational category of Legislators/Managers remains at low levels (16%).

#### **1.2.6. Labour market participation**

The labour force participation rate (activity rate), i.e. that part of the working age population (15-64) either in employment or actively looking for a job, continued to exhibit an upward trend during the period 2004-2007, reaching 73,9% in 2007. However, in 2008 the activity rate showed a small decrease to 73,6%. More specifically, for every 100 persons in the age group of 15-64, more than two-thirds (71) were employed, three (3) were unemployed and twenty six (26) were inactive. The female activity rate (65.7% in 2008) remains lower than the corresponding rate for men (82.0%).

#### **1.2.7. Demographic trends**

The phenomenon of an ageing population, which is observed in many countries and may have profound implications for many facets of human life as well as for the size and composition of the labour force, has started to become evident in Cyprus as well. During the period 2004-2008, both the population growth rate (3,9%) and the employment growth rate (6,2%) of older persons (age group 55-64) were much higher than the respective rates for young people (age group 15-24), which were 1% and 1,5% respectively.

In 2008, the population growth rate of young people was negative (- 0,3%) as compared to 2007, while the respective rate for older persons was 2,7%.

#### **1.2.8. Employment of foreign labour force**

On the basis of Labour Force Survey data, in 2008, of the total employed, 9,1% were EU nationals and 7,8% were third country nationals.

## **1.3. Unemployment Trends**

### **1.3.1. Unemployment rate**

In 2008, the number of unemployed persons decreased by 6% as compared to 2007 and unemployment rate dropped to 3,7% (from 3,9% in 2007). This rate is much lower than the EU27 average (7,0%) and the third lowest in the EU after the Netherlands with 2,8% and Denmark with 3,3%. The decreasing trend that has been observed since 2005 in both the unemployment rate of men and women continued in 2008 with the unemployment rate of women decreasing to 4,2% (from 4,6% in 2007) and of men to 3,2% (from 3,4% in 2007).

Despite this, young persons (15-24 years old) continue to face difficulties entering employment. This is reflected in the high unemployment rate of this age group that remains at high levels. In 2008, it was 9,0%.

### **1.3.2. Unemployment by sector of economic activity and educational attainment level**

The sector of Hotels and Restaurants, which is a highly labour intensive sector, has the highest number of unemployed (3.687 persons) and the highest unemployment rate (9,5%).

The majority of unemployed (39% of total unemployment) were upper secondary education graduates, whereas 30% were tertiary education graduates and 31% had educational level below upper secondary level. The highest unemployment rate (4,8%) is observed among persons with an educational level below upper secondary.

### **1.3.3. Unemployment by duration**

The majority of unemployed persons find employment in a short period of time and therefore long-term unemployment is at low levels. Specifically, during 2008, the 70% (64% in 2007) of unemployed entered employment in less than 6 months, whereas, 14% (19% in 2007) remained unemployed for more than one year. Long-term unemployment rate was further decreased to 0,5% from 0,7% in 2007 and 1,3% in 2004, remaining at very low levels.

## **1.4. The Global Economic Recession**

The effects of the global economic crisis began to be evident in Cyprus much later than in the other EU member states and in specific as from October 2008 by the gradual increase in the number of the registered unemployed. The construction industry was the first to be affected as a result of a fall in the housing demand. However, the effects of the crisis are expected to reduce the growth rates in 2009 and 2010 with a negative impact on the labour market well.

## CHAPTER 2. EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

### 2.1. European Employment Policy

In the 1990s, Europe was facing serious structural challenges in the labour market with low employment and high unemployment rates. In order to address these challenges the European Council launched the European Employment Strategy (EES) at the Luxembourg Jobs Summit in November 1997. This provided a tool for the Member States and the Commission, to reach common targets and objectives for more and better jobs in Europe through cooperation and sharing of experience. At the Lisbon European Council in March 2000 the European Union set a new strategic goal for the following decade: to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. The focus of the EES shifted from reducing unemployment to regaining the conditions of full employment. In 2005, the European Council and Commission agreed that the Lisbon Strategy needed to be amended and focussed on growth and jobs. This led to the presentation of an integrated package of Employment and Broad Economic Policy Guidelines, which encouraged the Member States to plan their policies with a view to implementing the following objectives and priorities for action:

**Full employment:** Achieving full employment, and reducing unemployment and inactivity, by increasing the demand for and supply of labour, is vital to sustain economic growth and reinforce social cohesion.

**Improving quality and productivity at work:** Efforts to raise employment rates go hand in hand with improving the attractiveness of jobs, quality at work and labour productivity growth, and reducing the proportion of working poor. Synergies between quality at work, productivity and employment should be fully exploited.

**Strengthening social and territorial cohesion:** Determined action is needed to strengthen social inclusion, prevent exclusion from the labour market and support integration in employment of people at a disadvantage, and to reduce regional disparities in terms of employment, unemployment and labour productivity, especially in regions lagging behind.

Equal opportunities and combating discrimination are essential for progress. Gender mainstreaming and the promotion of gender equality should be ensured in all actions taken. Moreover, as part of a new intergenerational approach, particular attention should be paid to the situation of young people, implementing the European Youth Pact, and to

promoting access to employment throughout working life. Particular attention must also be paid to significantly reducing employment gaps for people at a disadvantage, including disabled people, as well as between third-country nationals and EU citizens, in line with any national targets.

In addressing these objectives, action should concentrate on the following priorities:

- attract and retain more people in employment, increase labour supply and modernise social protection systems
- improve adaptability of workers and enterprises
- increase investment in human capital through better education and skills.

In 2008 a revision of the current European Employment Strategy was performed and it was decided that Member States should continue to make every effort to address the above priority areas. Therefore, it was decided that the Employment Guidelines will remain valid for the next three years until the end of 2010 but the focus now should be on the effective and timely implementation, but also on strengthening the social dimension of the Lisbon Strategy.

## **2.2. National Employment Policy**

### **2.2.1. Objectives and Challenges**

The main objectives of the employment policy in Cyprus, in line with the European Employment Strategy, are enhancing the conditions of full employment, improving quality and productivity at work and strengthening social cohesion. The achievement of these objectives requires an effective tackling of the major challenges confronting Cyprus which are:

1. Maintaining high rates of increase of labour supply, particularly by raising old-aged and female participation rates and reducing gender inequality.
2. Increasing the flexibility of the labour market.
3. Orderly management of foreign workers issues to serve the economic and social needs of the country.
4. Further development of human capital.
5. Further enhancement of the conditions of social cohesion.

## 2.2.2. Lisbon Targets and National Targets in relation to the European Employment Strategy by 2010

	EU Target	National Target
Overall employment rate	70%	71%
Employment rate of women	60%	63%
Employment rate of older workers	50%	53%

### 2.2.3. Policy Priorities and Implementation of Measures

In addressing the challenges faced by the labour market the following policy priorities and measures were set out in the Renewed National Lisbon Reform Programme of Cyprus for the period October 2008 - October 2010, which continues and enhances the previous National Reform Programme that covered the period October 2005 – October 2008, and it has been prepared with the maximum possible social consensus.

#### 1) Improve matching of labour market needs

##### POLICY PRIORITIES

- Modernisation and strengthening of labour market institutions.
- Better anticipation of skill needs, labour market shortages and bottlenecks.

##### MEASURES PROMOTED

- *Modernisation and strengthening of labour market institutions*
  - Further enhancement and modernisation of the Public Employment Services.
  - Upgrading of IT tools for monitoring labour market developments.
- *Better anticipation of skill needs, labour market shortages and bottlenecks*
  - The strengthening and reinforcement of the Employment Observatory of the PES.
  - Annual investigations for the identification of initial training needs, with the involvement of the social partners.

- Employment Forecasts in the Cyprus Economy 2008-2018 (Forecasts of Employment Needs in High Level Occupations in Cyprus 2008-2018 and Forecasts of Employment Needs in Medium Level Occupations in Cyprus 2008-2018).

## 2) Expand and improve investment in human capital

### POLICY PRIORITIES

Improvement of lifelong learning ratio of 8,4% in 2007, so as to satisfy the set EU benchmark 12,5% in 2010 and improvement of Cyprus' early school leaving ratio of 12,6% in 2007, so as to satisfy the set EU benchmark of 10% in 2012.

### MEASURES PROMOTED

- *Reduce the number of early school leavers*
  - Continuation of Implementation of the Education Priorities Zones Programme (EPZ).
  - Continuation of implementation of the Reinforcement/Support Teaching Programme, the Programme Against Illiteracy, the Programme for Self-Esteem Reinforcement, the Programme for the Normal Transition from Primary School to Lower Secondary School and the Prevention Programme for High Risk Pupils.
  - Organizing short-term classes for foreign students.
  - Upgrading and supporting of the practice of Form Teacher.
- *Lifelong Learning*
  - Implementation of the National Lifelong learning strategy.
  - Enhancing the participation in the **ERASMUS** sectoral programme of the EU Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013.

## 3) Adapt education and training systems in response to new competence requirements

### POLICY PRIORITIES

- Respond to new occupational needs and future requirements and improving definition and transparency of qualifications.
- Ensure the attractiveness, openness and quality standards of education and training.

## MEASURES PROMOTED

➤ *Respond to new occupational needs and future requirements and improving definition and transparency of qualifications*

- Further development of a **Vocational Qualifications System**, co-financed by the ESF.
- *Ensure the attractiveness, openness and quality standards of education and training*
- Implementation of an action aiming at introducing modern technology in education, co-financed by the European Social Fund.
- Ensuring that secondary education teachers will become digitally literate, and continue strengthening the quality and attractiveness of the Secondary Technical and Vocational Education (STVE) and improving the organisation of STVE, co-financed by the ESF.
- Upgrading the Apprenticeship Scheme.
- Enrichment of the Learning Management System “e-Gnosis”.
- Further support to the training infrastructure of institutions and enterprises.
- Introduction of an Assessment and Certification System of Training Providers.

## 4) Ensure inclusive labour markets, enhance work attractiveness, and make work pay for job-seekers, including disadvantaged people, and the inactive

### POLICY PRIORITIES

- Promotion of active and preventive labour market measures to support the inclusion of those furthest away from the labour market.
- Build Employment Pathways for the Unemployed.

## MEASURES PROMOTED

➤ *Promotion of active and preventive labour market measures to support the inclusion of those furthest away from the labour market*

- Continuation of the provision of personalized customer-oriented approach to jobseekers.
- Development of close cooperation with local authorities and social partners in the promotion of employment of vulnerable groups.
- The development, accreditation and implementation of a quality system regarding the services provided by the Cyprus PES.

- The strengthening of the ability of PES to deliver its services to the most vulnerable.

➤ *Build Employment Pathways for the Unemployed*

- Continuation of the scheme for the promotion of training and employability of the unemployed, co-financed by the ESF. The scheme will be enriched in order to include actions regarding the promotion of training and employability of young secondary education school graduates and the enhancement of computer literacy of the unemployed.

## **5) Orderly management of economic migration issues and prevention of social exclusion of migrant workers**

### **POLICY PRIORITIES**

Review of overall strategy towards the employment of foreign labour force with the aim of establishing a balanced approach to the issue by taking into consideration the inter-play of three main factors: the strategic re-orientation of the economy towards higher added activities, the policy objective for the mobilization of the presently inactive labour force and the potential labour mobility from the EU25, and shortly EU27, labour market.

### **MEASURES PROMOTED**

- Evaluation and revision of the strategy for the effective management of foreign workers' issues and establishment of a policy framework and design of an action plan for the integration of migrants in the Cypriot society.
- Vocational training and Greek language programmes for beneficiaries of international protection/ third-country nationals (TCN) to facilitate their social inclusion, as well as a programme to raise awareness and inform the public in Cyprus on issues relating to this group.
- Employment of interpreters in public schools in order to develop communication trails and better relations between third-country nationals families and the school society.
- Investigation of attitudes and perceptions of Cypriot citizens regarding immigrants from third countries, production and publication of special information leaflets in different languages (including Greek) regarding the acceptance of difference and multicultural societies.
- Training seminars, specifically for teachers, including special training seminars on intercultural education and teaching of Greek as a second or foreign language, training seminars and/or programmes for intercultural training and development of capacity to handle diversity targeted at public officials who come into daily contact with issues concerning the integration of TCNs.



- Publication of an information guide including basic information for TCN students and parents, regarding the educational system of Cyprus, study prospects and choices, pupils' rights and responsibilities. Translated into the languages of the five most numerous nationalities of TCN students in Cyprus (Russian, Georgian, Ukrainian, Arabic and Turkish).
- Organisation of a Mediterranean Forum for the exchange of views, best practices and new approaches on integration, regarding sectors like education, labour market, society as a whole, raising public awareness, etc. (MOI).

## **6) Flexicurity: Promote flexibility combined with employment security and reduce labour market segmentation**

### **POLICY PRIORITIES**

- Promotion and dissemination of innovative and adaptable forms of work.
- Reviewing tax and benefit system to make work pay.
- Improving quality and productivity at work, including health and safety.

### **MEASURES PROMOTED**

- *Promotion and dissemination of innovative and adaptable forms of work organisation*
- Subsidy scheme for the promotion of Flexible Forms of Employment, for attracting and assisting to remain in the labour market, unemployed or economically inactive persons and generally persons in groups at risk of social exclusion.
- Subsidy schemes addressing companies/organizations in order to develop and apply within their company/organization integrated flexicurity policies.
- *Reviewing tax and benefit system to make work pay*

In the context of reviewing the tax and benefit system to make work pay the following measures are provided:

- Reforming labour income taxation;
- Reforming measures for welfare-related benefits;
- Increasing minimum wage;
- Addressing inflationary pressures.

➤ *Improving quality and productivity at work, including health and safety*

- Incentive scheme for companies and organisations to design and implement systems for continuous learning and improvement, continuation of the scheme providing Consultancy Services and Training to Micro-Enterprises employing 1-4 persons, co-financed by the ESF.
- Research project on the utilization of human resources aiming at the identification of factors and synergies of factors, which exercise an influence on the effective utilization of human resources in the Cyprus labour market.
- Continuation of the scheme for training new-entrants in the labour market on health and safety at work, of the Incentive scheme to facilitate the shift from low productivity jobs to high productivity jobs, co-financed by the ESF.
- Launching of the Go-on Line project, a training scheme for companies and organizations designed to provide them with the necessary support in order to improve the level of their e-Learning, e-Government and e-Business skills and of a new scheme aiming at increasing Human Capital Investments and Improving the Productivity in SMEs (5-249 persons), co-financed by the ESF.

**7) Promote a lifecycle approach to work through increasing the participation of women and older persons in the labour market, as well as build employment pathways for young people and the unemployed and reducing gender inequality**

**POLICY PRIORITIES**

- Building employment pathways for young people.
- Promotion of active ageing.
- Increasing female participation.
- Reducing gender inequality.
- Promoting reconciliation of work and family life.

**MEASURES PROMOTED**

- *Building employment pathways for young people*
- Continuation of the Scheme for youth entrepreneurship providing government grants with a view to fostering youth entrepreneurship.
- *Active ageing*
- Increase of the retirement age in the broader public sector from currently 60 to 63 years.

➤ *Increasing female participation*

- Continuation of the scheme for the encouragement, strengthening and reinforcement of women's entrepreneurship.
- Continuation of the scheme for the promotion of training and employability of economically inactive women.
- Promotion of modern and flexible forms of employment for vulnerable groups of the population with low levels of participation in the labour market.

➤ *Reducing gender inequality*

- Annual increase of the public funds allocated to NGOs and the National Machinery of Women Rights to promote and implement gender equality programmes, Ministry of Justice and Public Order.
- Implementation of a set of measures aiming to reduce the gender pay gap, and promotion of awareness raising activities and organisation of training seminars to enhance the Equality Inspectors' skills and knowledge of the gender equality legislation with an in-depth analysis of the provision of the laws, including a seminar on sexual harassment in the workplace.
- Preparation and distribution of informative leaflets entitled "Sexual Harassment in the Workplace", a Code of Good Practice for Pregnant Women at Work, informative leaflets on the rights of victims of discrimination on the grounds of age, sexual orientation, race and ethnic origin, religion and belief and a Guide for Combating Age Discrimination.

➤ *Promote reconciliation of work and family life*

- Continuation of the Grants-in-Aid Scheme to the non-profit voluntary organisation for the development of family support services
- Scheme for the promotion of care services within the framework of reconciling work and family life, proposed for co-financing by the ESF under the new programming period 2007-2013.
- Carrying out a study on long-term care with a view to implementing suitable policies and measures including improvement of home-care services provided to older persons.
- Promotion of a dialogue with local authorities in order to develop closer cooperation and strengthen structures of social care.

## 8) Further enhancement of social cohesion through social inclusion

### POLICY PRIORITIES

Ensuring an Adequate Standard of Living for Disadvantaged and Vulnerable Groups and Encouraging their Integration/Reintegration into the Labour Market.

### MEASURES PROMOTED

#### ➤ *Vulnerable Groups*

- Scheme for vocational training and employment of vulnerable groups of the population, proposed for co-financing by the ESF under the new programming period 2007-2013.
- Investigate the possibility of providing benefits to vulnerable groups that are linked to entry into the labour market.

#### ➤ *Further amendment of public assistance legislation.*

#### ➤ *The prevention of social exclusion of persons with disabilities through:*

- Carrying out specialised training programmes for the acquisition of vocational proficiency for people with visual impairment, hearing impairment and severe motor disability;
- Promoting a scheme to provide incentives to private sector employers for the employment of disabled people and thus combat the employer's reluctance in giving jobs to disabled people;
- Introducing by legislation of a quota system for the recruitment of persons with disabilities in the public sector by the Social Inclusion Unit;
- Developing and implementing of a new system for the assessment of disability and functionality with the aim, among others, to diagnose and utilize the prospects of persons with disabilities to be trained and employed according to the circumstances of each case;
- Re-organising the sector for vocational training and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities by modernization of the training programmes, the employment schemes and the procedures followed.

#### ➤ *The prevention of social exclusion of children and families at the risk of poverty through:*

- Conducting a study for the formulation of demographic policy and the identification of areas for intervention, with emphasis on family policies;

- Creating a Body for Demographic Issues and Family Policy;
- Evaluating and improving existing practices for lone parents and promotion of the expansion of provision to all lone parents, within the framework of a study to be conducted for the modernization of public assistance legislation.
- *The prevention of social exclusion of drug users through:*
  - Preparing and implementing of the National Drug Strategy and the Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction, (2009-2012) by the Cyprus Antidrug Council;
  - Continuing the scheme for the social integration of former drug dependent persons;
  - Continuation of the scheme "Access to housing".

#### **2.2.4. The short-term response to the economic crisis**

With the aim of mitigating the effects of the global economic crisis, and especially of preventing the anticipated increase in unemployment, at the end of 2008, the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance promoted the following actions:

- Establishment of mechanism for monitoring and assessing developments in the labour market.
- Intensification of support provided by the Public Employment Services (PES) to unemployed for quick re-entry into employment.

