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NATIONAL REPORT

Submitted by the Government of Cyprus

Unedited version prepared by the Government of Cyprus for the Regional Population Meeting (Budapest, 7-9 December 1998). The views expressed and the designations employed in the paper are those of the Government of Cyprus and do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Government of Hungary, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, or the United Nations Population Fund.

* The Regional Population Meeting is in the work programme of the Conference of European Statisticians.

Introduction

This report represents the national contribution of the Government of Cyprus to the Regional Population Meeting of the United Nations to be held in Budapest between 7-9 December 1998. The report deals with current population-related issues and policies, emphasizing at the same time the changes that took place in the last five years or so. The structure of the report follows the guidelines for national reports distributed to all member countries by the organisers.

Priority Themes

1. Perception and Policy Related to the Family, Fertility and Reproductive Health

In Cyprus there is a prejudice for marriages which take place during leap years. Because of this, marriages follow a four-year cycle with a drop during leap years and increases in the years preceding and following these years.

Marriages in Cyprus are the highest in Europe reflecting the importance which the people of Cyprus attach to this institution. The marriage rate however has been decreasing from 10,7 marriages per 1000 population in the period 1979-82 to 9,7 in the period 1993-96. This is some indication of the increase in the number of person cohabiting or living alone.

The total divorce rate in Cyprus has more than doubled in the past decade from 70 per thousand in 1987 to 164 in 1997. The proportion of children born out of wedlock followed a similar pattern and constituted 6,4 per 1000 of total births in 1987 in comparison to 15,7 in 1997. Of the divorced couples 41% had no dependent children while 6,2% had three or more children in 1997.

Single-parent families are on the rise as well constituting 8,6% of the total number of households with children in 1992. Such families are highly represented in the cases of people needing public assistance.

The Government of Cyprus considers these trends as constituting potential threats for the marriage institution and has taken various measures to address the problem. In particular the Cyprus Government:

- (a) encourages initiatives which support women and men in reconciling their occupational, family and upbringing responsibilities through the provision of day-care services for children,
- (b) supports through its Grants-in-Aid Scheme NGO's which promote the interests of single-parents,
- (c) promotes equal opportunities among family members and special attention has been paid to the rights of women and children,
- (d) has amended its constitution in order to make possible the introduction of civil marriage,
- (e) grants public assistance in the form of money or support services to all

persons legally residing in Cyprus and are in need of such assistance. Special provisions are made for single parents so that they are entitled to supplementary public assistance even if they are in full employment,

- (d) encourages part-time employment for women.

The total fertility rate in Cyprus follows that of most other European countries and recently has shown signs of a declining trend. This, however, has not yet reached the low levels of some European countries. This fell from 2,38 in the period 1988-91 to 2,11 in the period 1994-97, and to 2,00 in 1997, thus falling below the replacement level of 2,10. Given the country's small population base and the scarcity of labour, the Government's policy concerning fertility is pronatalist. The most significant policy measures to support fertility are the following:

- (a) the provision of day-care facilities for children of working parents and financial and technical assistance to community bodies that operate child-minding facilities both prior to compulsory schooling and for school children,
- (b) the provisions for income tax relief for families with dependent children and children attending day-care centres,
- (c) the improvement of the Child Benefit Scheme which provides for a monthly allowance for every dependent child to families with at least four children; the benefit is reviewed annually in accordance with the cost of living index,
- (d) the increase of the maternity allowance payable under the social system from 12 to 16 weeks; this has recently been extended to women employees who adopt a child,
- (e) a maternity grant is also given to a woman giving birth either on her own or on her husband's insurance.

Besides the provision of day-care facilities and the improvement of maternity benefits, the Government of Cyprus has taken other supportive measures to address family problems. The most important of these are described below:

- (a) Cyprus has enacted legislation dealing with domestic violence. More specifically existing legislation makes provision for:
 - the imposition of substantial penalties for ordinary acts of violence
 - the protection of victims (married persons and children) by excluding the offending party from the marital home
 - the acknowledgement that rape can be committed within marriage
 - the speeding up of trials dealing with cases of domestic violence
 - the facilitation for the reporting of violent incidents
 - the appointment of family counsellors and the setting up of an Advisory Committee to improve the implementation of the Law

- the granting of assistance to emergency cases during non-working hours through a system of social workers on call.
- (b) The Cyprus Government subsidizes voluntary organisations whose aim is the provision of immediate help in crisis situations upon the victim's request, psychological support to victims, guidance and counselling, legal advice and shelter in emergency situations.

With regard to reproductive health, other than the services provided by public but mainly private sector clinics, Government also subsidizes non-governmental organisations for the granting of specialized services and advise. To this end the Family Planning Association of Cyprus, has been actively involved with the promotion and implementation of family planning ideas as a basic human right. Its aims have not been confined to the narrow meaning of population control. On the contrary, the Accosiation has focused all its efforts towards the promotion of sexual and reproductive rights, the education of individuals, mainly women and young people, to health and reprodutive choice, the education of adolescents in gender equality, the promotion of equal rights among men and women in sexual relationships, the provision of high quality birth control methods, and more recently the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

The Cyprus Family Planning Association runs a very well established information campaign which it implements in cooperation with the Government. Moreover, it operates counselling services both for couples and young people in relation to their interpersonal and sexual relations.

Birth control methods, which are legal in Cyprus but are not provided by the Government health system, are offered by medical experts in the family planning clinics in addition to contraceptive counselling. These services aim in allowing couples and individuals to freely and responsibly decide on the number and spacing of their children which constitutes the core of today's demographic philosophy.

2. Perception and Policy Concerning Mortality and Health

Health services in Cyprus are considered satisfactory and are provided by the public and private sector alike, the former free of charge to low income classes and other groups of the population, and the latter to the rest of the population at attractive rates. The private sector includes the various health schemes of semi-government organisations, banking institutions, etc. During the last decades health services have recorded tremendous expansion for highly specialised cases in diagnosis and treatment.

In 1997 the expectation of life at birth was for males 75,0 years and for females 80,0 compared to 71,9 and 74,9 respectively, twenty years ago. This increase is mainly due to the improvements of the sanitary conditions i.e. clean water and sanitation facilities, adequate nutrition, eradication of most of the infectious diseases mainly through vaccination. On the other hand a marked increase in costly chronic diseases, such as cancer, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, respiratory and digestive system diseases, as well as various forms of disability and disablement due to accidents among working age and elderly people has been noted. Also deaths occur as a result of the growing consumption of tobacco, alcohol and drugs and from changes in the lifestyles of the people.

In 1997 the main causes of death were due to neoplasms 15,9%, diseases of the circulatory system 59,0%, of the respiratory system 13,4%, to external causes of morbidity and mortality (accidents) 4,5%.

Mortality is relatively low, at 7,9 deaths per 1000 population, reflecting the satisfactory health standards prevailing in Cyprus; infant mortality is 8,0 per 1000 live births while maternal mortality is around zero.

The measures undertaken by the Government to reduce morbidity and mortality include, among others, the following:

(a) **Data collection and research**

- Establishment of cancer register.
- Participation in the INTERHEALTH project for the study of the risk factors contributing in the development of Cardiovascular Diseases.
- Survey on the smoking habits of Cypriots.

(b) **Information and health education**

- Awareness raising campaigns i.e. cancer, smoking, heart diseases, diabetes etc.
- Participation in the ENHPS programme (European Network for Health Promoting Schools).
- Training courses for doctors, nurses, teachers, parents, etc.
- Introduction of smoking control laws.
- Production of health education materials.

(c) **Early detection and screening**

- Introduction of mass screening for cervical and breast cancer.
- Screening of schoolchildren 12 years of age for all risk factors contributing to the development of cardiovascular and other chronic diseases.

(d) **Other measures**

- (1) The Government is currently working on the introduction of a national health service scheme which will be accessible and affordable by the entire population. This will involve the mobilisation of both the public and private health systems.
- (2) Abortion in Cyprus is not allowed except on medical and social grounds or if pregnancy is a result of rape.
- (3) Special emphasis is placed on prenatal care and counselling on the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and mainly HIV infection and Hepatitis B. All newborns are now immunised against Hepatitis B.
- (4) Sterilisation requires the consent of the spouse. It is usually not permitted for women under 30 years of age and if there are no children in the family.

- (5) Sex education is about to be introduced in the curriculum of secondary schools.

3. Perception and Policy Related to Population Ageing, Including Change in Population Age Structure

The population in Cyprus is in the process of ageing but has not yet reached the advanced stage attained by other European countries, where fertility declined much earlier than in Cyprus. More specifically, the proportion of children below 15 decreased to 24,2% while the proportion of old-aged persons 65 and over increased to 11,2% in 1997, compared to 25,0% and 10,8% respectively in 1982. The proportion of persons aged 65 and over is still relatively low, compared to European Union member-states where it ranges from 17,4% in Sweden, 16,0% in Greece, 15,7 in the United Kingdom and 11,5% in Ireland. The dependency ratio, defined here as the ratio of those aged 65 and over to those aged 15-64 is low, at 17,2% as against 23,6% in Greece and 24,2% in the United Kingdom.

The ageing of the population is a matter of great concern to the Government of Cyprus as it affects the size and quality of the labour force and increases the burden on the active labour members to support the increasing number of pensioners. The gradual ageing of the population will also have severe consequences on the finances of the Social Security Scheme. The ratio of pensioners to active contributors is projected to deteriorate in the future with the gradual ageing of the population. Thus the demographic ratio, that is the number of pensioners to contributors, is expected to rise from 27,9% for the basic and 18,7% for the supplementary part in 1994, to 49,3% and 48,5% in 2050 respectively. Essentially this means that for every 2 contributors there will be one pensioner. Hence, the burden of maintaining the Social Security Scheme in its present form is anticipated to increase substantially in the future with negative effects on fiscal finances and the growth potential of the economy, if no corrective measures are taken. The measures include the increases in the participation rate of the elderly, the adoption of growth oriented policies and the stabilization of the number of pensioners by extending the retirement age.

The Government policy to address the problem aims, on the one hand, at maintaining population growth and fertility at current levels and encouraging the return of Cypriot expatriates. On the other hand, Government policy aims at safeguarding a respectable living standard for all, by providing satisfactory care and attention to those who need it and at encouraging the elderly to continue participating in the economic and social life, thus avoiding social exclusion and marginalisation.

The three pillars of the social protection system in Cyprus are:

- (a) the Social Insurance Scheme, which offers old age, invalidity and widows pensions to contributors of the Fund,
- (b) the Public Assistance Scheme, which ensures to all persons lawfully residing in Cyprus a socially acceptable minimum standard of living and
- (c) the Social Pensions Scheme, which secures a pension to all persons over the age of 68 who are not entitled to a pension from any other source.

In addition, a wide variety of services are offered to elderly persons, such as home help, day care and residential care, the aim being that institutionalisation should be limited only to cases where the particular needs of elderly persons cannot be met by the family or

other supportive services.

Other Themes:

4. Perception and policy concerning international migration

Migration movements have been very sensitive to political and economic reasons. Emigration peaks have been recorded after independence in 1960, in 1964 because of inter-communal strife and during 1974-76 as a result of the Turkish invasion.

However, in the last two decades, Cyprus has witnessed a high migration flow with Cypriots emigrants returning home as well as foreign workers coming to Cyprus for temporary employment.

There are two types of residence permits issued to foreign nationals. The immigration permits which are issued to immigrants and are of unlimited duration and the temporary resident permits issued to foreign nationals staying temporarily in Cyprus for visit, business, employment, studies, or medical treatment etc, and are valid for limited periods with the possibility of being renewed.

The Government of Cyprus encourages the return of Cypriot expatriates with a view to addressing the overall labour shortages problem, through financial and other incentives.

In the past Cyprus has been used as a temporary refuge for nationals of neighbouring countries in periods of crises e.g. Lebanon. More recently, though, aliens have been entering Cyprus illegally either through the occupied part or from the sea shores of the Government controlled areas. Illegal immigrants are either repatriated or sent to another country of their own choice. There are also cases where illegal immigrants are given political asylum in Cyprus.

5. Perception and policy of the Government related to population growth

Population policies in Cyprus gained significance following the Turkish invasion in 1974 and occupation of the northern part of the island ever since, which caused a drastic reduction of population through war losses and emigration. While the population in the Government controlled area increased gradually since 1977 at a rate which ranged between 0,7%-2,7%, in the Turkish occupied area on the contrary the Turkish Cypriot community decreased since 1986 and at faster rates in the last few years.

This difference in population growth is exclusively due to migration movements, since both the fertility and mortality of Turkish Cypriots are similar to those of the rest of the island. It is estimated that about 54,000 Turkish Cypriots have emigrated between 1974 and 1997. Notwithstanding this decline in the Turkish Cypriot population in the occupied part of Cyprus it is estimated, that there are currently 114,000 illegal settlers from Turkey residing in Cyprus.

Cyprus attaches great importance to population issues in view of its small population base. The main objectives are to increase or at least maintain population growth at current levels by encouraging fertility and the return of Cypriots living abroad.

6. Policy related collection of data and research

Although the existing system of collection and analysis of statistical data and research relating to population issues may be considered satisfactory, further enhancement of the system is anticipated including inter alia, the improvement of civil registration, the establishment of a system of collecting data on international migration, the establishment of a computerised population register and the computerisation of the aliens register. In addition, in the process of harmonisation with the European acquis, various social and health indicators are to be established, household surveys will be carried out on a regular basis and other data collection mechanisms will be introduced.

Regional and international co-operation in data collection, analysis and research is supported. Cyprus is participating in the MEDSTAT programme co-operating in the field of statistics with Mediterranean countries and the European Union. The programme aims at the adoption by all countries of international standards concerning concepts, methodology and classification systems.

NATIONAL COMMITTEE
ON POPULATION ISSUES

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