

Chapter 6

Diaspora Policies, Consular Services and Social Protection for Cypriot Citizens Abroad



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6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the policies and programmes that Cyprus implements for its diaspora. The aim of the chapter is two-fold: first, to provide a broader discussion regarding general diaspora policies related to financial, political, citizenship and foreign affairs matters; and secondly, to discuss the key engagement policies that the country promotes in the field of social protection of its diaspora population. To do so, the first part of the chapter presents the general characteristics of the Cypriot diaspora in a broader historical context. Such historical background is particularly important as it has influenced the style of diaspora engagement promoted at the national level in Cyprus as well as the content of the policies implemented for non-resident citizens. The chapter shows that, for historical reasons, Cyprus has focused its actions mainly towards its diaspora in Greece and the United Kingdom (UK). The second part of the chapter examines the key engagement policies that Cyprus has adopted, including its diaspora infrastructure. Finally, the last part is devoted to the social protection policies that the country has put forward in the areas of pensions, unemployment, family benefits, health care, and guaranteed minimum income.

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6.2 Diaspora Characteristics and Home Country Engagement

This section presents the main historical features of the Cypriot emigration, its current characteristics and the homeland infrastructure and policy responses to deal with citizens abroad. As explained, the political and historical context are key elements in the understanding of the homeland-diaspora relation for the Cypriot case.

6.2.1 *The Cypriot Diaspora and its Relations to the Homeland*

The geopolitical situation of Cyprus influenced both the destination countries of the Cypriot diaspora as well as the type of policies that Cyprus adopted for this specific segment of the population. Currently, the Cypriot diaspora includes around 160,000 individuals living outside the geographical borders of the country, representing 14% of the Cypriot population.¹ In addition, approximately 190,000 foreigners are settled in Cyprus, representing 16% of the population. Thus, it can be argued that Cyprus is both an emigration and an immigration country (Demetriou 2003; Teerling and King 2011).² While the majority of the country's diaspora is settled in European Union (EU) Member States (64%), the UK and the United States of America (USA) are the two most frequent destinations. According to OECD data, approximately 76,000 Cypriots are settled in the UK, while around 30,000 Cypriots are based in the USA. Other selected countries with significant Cypriot populations are Greece (21,478), Australia (17,945), Turkey³ (4362), and Canada (3600).⁴

Even before becoming an independent state, Cyprus was an emigration country. It was a crown colony of Great Britain from the late nineteenth century until 1960. During the difficult economic times of the 1940s and the 1950s, Cypriots emigrated

¹These shares were calculated based on two UN population datasets. For emigrants and immigrants, the dataset "Trends in International Migrant Stock: the 2017 Revision" was used, while the total population of Cyprus is drawn from the "World Population Prospects 2019: Online Edition". For both datasets, the reference year is 2017. The UN data referring to Cyprus includes both the Republic of Cyprus as well as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).

²Idem 1.

³There is an ambiguity regarding the Cypriot population residing in Turkey. The explanatory note of the OECD DIOC-E 2010/11 metadata states that the statistics referring to Cyprus include only the southern part of the Island and that there is not a single authority that counts both sides of the island. The Turkish Statistical Institute data does not mention the Republic of Cyprus (Southern), except for the TRNC. Hence, the statistics referring to Turkey as a destination may not be fully accurate due to the lack of data standardisation and available sources (see also Teerling and King 2011).

⁴The OECD data refer to populations aged 15+. OECD (2011). Database on Immigrants in OECD and Non-OECD Countries, 2010/11 (DIOC-E 2010/11, Labour Force Status). <http://www.oecd.org/els/mig/dioc.htm>. Accessed 13 March 2019.

to English-speaking countries- in particular, the UK (Demetriou 2003; Teerling and King 2011). After Cyprus gained independence, a serious constitutional crisis emerged. There was disagreement over irredentism between two opposing groups, the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots. The result of the crisis was the partition⁵ of the island in 1974 (Mallinson 2005), along with another emigration wave (Bertrand 2004). A consequence of the partition was the displacement of thousands of people, some of whom chose to emigrate mainly to Greece and the UK (Teerling and King 2011). The UK is the most preferred destination for Cypriots, mainly due to past colonial ties. Similarly, other Commonwealth nations such as Canada and Australia have traditionally attracted Cypriots. Greece is also an important destination given the political, historical, cultural, linguistic, and religious bonds shared by the two countries. This bond is also visible in the description of emigration to Greece as a movement to the “motherland” (Bryant 2006). The USA has been a traditional country of destination for Cypriots after the Second World War (Demetriou 2003).

Until the 1990s, Cyprus was considered an emigration country, but the political stabilisation and economic development that occurred at the end of the twentieth century turned the country into an immigration country (Trimikliniotis 1999; Trimikliniotis and Demetriou 2007). Nevertheless, since the 2008 financial turmoil, emigration from Cyprus gained a new speed. Indicative of this situation is the increasing outflows of Cypriot citizens after 2011. Figure 6.1 shows that the outflows of emigration quadrupled between 2011 and 2012, when the financial crisis hit Cyprus.

6.2.2 *Diaspora Infrastructure*

This section shows that Cypriot authorities are eager to engage with their diaspora. This is mainly because they consider the diaspora as a critical actor for promoting and raising awareness on the “Cypriot Issue” abroad (Demetriou 2003). This

⁵Due to political instability and war, the island was de facto split in two sides, the Greek-Cypriot or the Republic of Cyprus, and the Turkish-Cypriot, also known as TRNC. The Republic of Cyprus has de jure sovereignty over the territory of the island, whereas the TRNC is only recognised by Turkey (James 1989; Mallinson 2005). Currently, the Republic of Cyprus is controlling 58% of the island territory, while TRNC covers 37% and it is self-governed. The remaining 5% of the territory is the buffer zone (also known as the Green Line) of the UN that splits the two sides, also including the British military bases (James 1989). This historical reference is important for this chapter, as it provides a key explanation for the lack of diaspora policies and diplomatic representation in Turkey. The Cypriot issue largely remains unsolved and the Cypriot population that currently resides in TRNC is very small, of approximately 400 individuals according to Cypriot authorities (Office of the Presidential Commissioner 2019; Γραφείο Επιτρόπου Προεδρίας 2019). Cyprus still pursues a policy line to safeguard the rights of this small population and to solve the pending issues of the lost properties that were evacuated due to the conflict and the subsequent reimbursement of those who lost their properties due to the partition of the island.

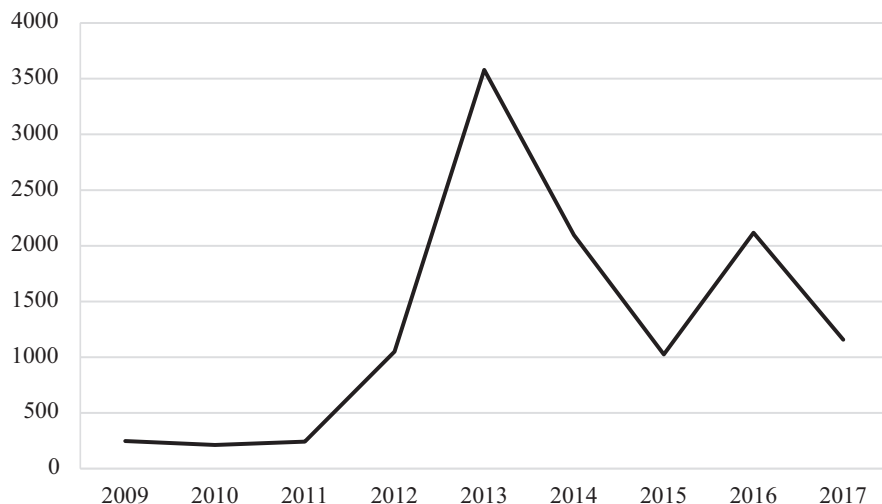


Fig. 6.1 Outflows of Cypriot citizens, 2009–2017 (Source: Own elaboration with Eurostat data. Eurostat 2018 (migr_emi1ctz))

interest from the homeland does not translate into a dedicated ministry or sub-ministry assuming responsibility for diaspora-related matters, although there is a developed infrastructure to deal with diaspora issues.

The main institution in Cyprus responsible for overseeing issues related to the diaspora and returnees is the Service for Overseas and Repatriated Cypriots/*Υπηρεσία Αποδήμων και Επαναπατρισθέντων* (SORC). Created by Archbishop and first President of the Republic, Makarios III, in 1976, this service was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Presidency until 1981, being transferred to the auspice of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) after this date. Since 2016, SORC is part of the Presidency of Cyprus under the supervision of the Presidency Commissioner.⁶ The target populations of this institution are all Cypriots living abroad, with and without the intention to return. Its services include systematic communication with overseas Cypriots (including aiding in education or other issues), the organisation of exhibitions and local/regional/world conferences on diaspora-related matters, and the publication of the bimonthly newsletter “Our Cyprus/*Η Κύπρος μας*” for overseas and repatriated Cypriots. SORC also assists overseas Cypriots in their efforts to preserve and promote the language, culture, history, and tradition of Cyprus abroad, organises visits to Cyprus, supports youth programmes, attracts investments from overseas Cypriot entrepreneurs, and promotes Cyprus as a business centre. The service also assists repatriated and overseas Cypriots through coordination with other governmental departments, equips Cypriot associations and schools abroad with material about the country’s history and culture, and provides support for cultural

⁶ http://www.presidentialcommissioner.gov.cy/anthropos/anthropos.nsf/page02c_gr/page02c_gr?opendocument. Accessed 5 March 2020.

activities. Recently, SORC has sought to support existing schemes and organisations for the diaspora youth by implementing exchange programmes, internships, and scholarships for Cypriots abroad.⁷

SORC also published a series of handbooks for the overseas and repatriated Cypriots/*Οδηγός Αποδήμων και Επαναπατρισθέντων Κυπρίων*, in both Greek and English, aiming to inform Cypriots abroad on the procedures for returning to Cyprus. The handbooks also contain useful information for those abroad on how to deal with issues regarding their rights in Cyprus (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009; Υπουργείο Εξωτερικών 2010; Γραφείο Επιτρόπου Προεδρίας 2019; Office of the Presidential Commissioner 2019). In 2014, the Cypriot Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (MLWSI) published a booklet on how repatriated Cypriots can access social security (Υπουργείο Εργασίας, Πρόνοιας και Κοινωνικών Ασφαλίσεων 2014).

Besides this service, Cyprus has a quite dense network of embassies, high commissions, consulates and honorary consulates around the world. The Republic of Cyprus has more than 150 diplomatic missions abroad and more than 80 honorary consulates, operating under the auspice of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁸ There are no Cypriot diplomatic missions in Turkey or the TRNC, due to the ongoing conflict.⁹

Determining the missions of Cypriot consulates is a difficult task due to the absence of a national consular law. The only relevant legislation in this regard are the laws implementing the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1968)¹⁰ and on Consular Relations (1976)¹¹ (Constantinides and Combos 2010). The competences of the honorary consulates, although not fully specified, are merely administrative and thus honorary consulates are less active than regular consulates and diplomatic missions (personal communication with Cypriot MFA). The consular services offered include the certification of documents to be used in the host country or in Cyprus, assistance with visas and residence permits, citizens' registration and

⁷ http://www.presidentialcommissioner.gov.cy/anthropos/anthropos.nsf/page02b_gr/page02b_gr?opendocument. Accessed 5 March 2020.

⁸ All diplomatic missions are listed on the MFA website: http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/mfa50_gr/mfa_50_gr?OpenDocument and http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/mfa52_gr/mfa52_gr?OpenDocument. Accessed 11 March 2019.

⁹ The TRNC Statistical Yearbooks only provide information regarding the number of foreign arrivals by nationality. The Yearbooks of 2011, 2015, and 2017 indicate that, during the decade 2007–2017, the arrivals of Greek Cypriots (South Cypriots in the TRNC data) increased from 495 individuals in 2007 to 1798 in 2012 to 2228 in 2017 (Başbakanlık 2017, 2018; Devlet Planlama Örgütü 2015). Nevertheless, these figures should be interpreted with caution.

¹⁰ Law No. 40/1968/ *Νόμος Ν. 40/1968: Ο περί της Συμβάσεως της Βιέννης του 1961 περί Διπλωματικών Σχέσεων (Κυρωτικός) Νόμος του 1968. Επίσημη Εφημερίδα της Δημοκρατίας Ν. 646 της 12^{ης} Απριλίου 1968.*

¹¹ Law No.7.1976/ *Νόμος Ν. 7/1976: Ο περί της Συμβάσεως της Βιέννης περί Προξενικών Σχέσεων (Κυρωτικός) Νόμος του 1976. Επίσημη Εφημερίδα της Δημοκρατίας Ν. 1258 της 27ης Φεβρουαρίου 1976.*

the issuance of passports, ID cards, emergency travel documents, and birth certificates.

In addition to the consular authorities and the Service for the Overseas and Repatriated Cypriots, there are a series of non-governmental organizations, such as the World Federation of Overseas Cypriots (POMAK)/*Παγκόσμια Ομοσπονδία Απόδημων Κυπρίων (ΠΟΜΑΚ)* founded in 1976 (Demetriou 2003).¹² Although it is not a governmental institution, POMAK is worth mentioning as it acts as a coordinating body of all the federations and associations of Cypriots abroad, with lobbying and representative functions. In host countries, POMAK raises awareness about the “Cypriot Issue” and the country’s culture and history, while also encouraging ties between the Cypriot communities all around the globe. It further aims to represent the views of overseas Cypriots to the Cypriot government. A very active branch of POMAK is the Youth of the World Federation of Overseas Cypriots (NEPOMAK) / *Νεολαία Παγκόσμιας Ομοσπονδίας Αποδήμων Κυπρίων (ΝΕΠΟΜΑΚ)*. It connects the young Cypriot diaspora with the homeland by organising different activities ranging from language courses to internships with the Cypriot government.¹³ Besides POMAK, there is also the International Coordinating Committee “Cyprus Justice” (PSEKA)/*Παγκόσμια Συντονιστική Επιτροπή Κυπριακού Αγώνα (ΠΣΕΚΑ)*, founded by Makarios III in 1975–1976 to raise awareness abroad about the “Cypriot Issue” and tap into the resources of the diaspora. Its activity, however, appears to have diminished over the years.¹⁴ The timing of the creation of POMAK, PSEKA and SORC is of great significance, as all these institutions were created shortly after the partition of the country. This signalled the need and the willingness of Cyprus to connect with its diaspora after suffering both demographic and financial damages.

A final group of relevant actors that engage with the diaspora are the mainstream Cypriot political parties. They have created structures to maintain a political connection with potential voters abroad. The Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL) / *Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού (ΑΚΕΛ)* is a radical left-wing party with branches in Greece and the UK. Similarly, the Democratic Rally (DISI) / *Δημοκρατικός Συναγερμός (ΔΗΣΥ)* and the Movement of Social Democracy-United Democratic Union of the Centre (KS-EDEK) / *Κίνημα Σοσιαλδημοκρατών-Ενιαία Δημοκρατική Ένωση Κέντρου (ΚΣ-ΕΔΕΚ)* have two branches each in Greece, while DISI also has another branch in the UK.

¹² See: <http://pomakcyprus.com>. Accessed 11 March 2019.

¹³ NEPOMAK targets diasporic youth aged 18–30 who have at least one Cypriot grandparent. It receives financial support from different sources, including the Cypriot MFA. For more information: <https://nepomak.org/about>. Accessed 5 March 2020.

¹⁴ In 2020, PSEKA suspended its activities, website and social media accounts.

6.2.3 *Key Engagement Policies*

Despite the diversity of services listed above, it can be argued that Cyprus' diaspora policies respond mainly to two objectives: attracting potential returnees and diaspora investments and raising awareness abroad about the Cypriot conflict. According to Demetriou (2003), Cypriot policy-makers have historically aimed to create a bond with the diaspora and promote a discourse in which the diaspora is an integral part of the homeland even after the first generation. This proactive stance comes with the expectation that the diaspora will act as a lobbying force abroad on the issue of the Cypriot conflict (ibid). To create this bond, numerous initiatives assist the settlement of returnees by offering rent rebates for a year or facilitating the duty-free import of household items (Demetriou 2003; Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009; Υπουργείο Εξωτερικών 2010; Office of the Presidential Commissioner 2019).¹⁵

Regarding more conventional consular services that Cyprus offers to its citizens permanently residing abroad or Cypriot travellers, these includes (like in many other cases discussed in this volume): the issuance of birth certificates to minors and adults, the issuance of passports and emergency travel documents, and the certification of public documents. Consulates also provide assistance with applications to acquire the Cypriot citizenship.¹⁶

A relevant service in the area of social protection concerns the provisions related to the financial assistance for Cypriots abroad in situation of need. Such assistance is provided as long as a relative or friend deposits the amount of needed money at the MFA's Accounting Office, which then forwards it to the person in need. Alternatively, financial assistance can also take the form of a loan that entails a commitment to repayment as soon as the person returns to Cyprus.¹⁷ In the area of health care, consular assistance is limited to offering a contact list of hospitals and doctors.¹⁸ Similar assistance is provided in cases of accidents or emergency, including lists of doctors, hospitals, police, and lawyers.¹⁹ During major crisis situations in the host countries, the consulates are in charge of tracing Cypriot citizens and offering help ranging from medical assistance to repatriation.²⁰ Consulates can also

¹⁵The rent rebate policy seems to have been discontinued in recent years. In 2019, the Cypriot Government was offering rent allowance only to displaced persons/victims (Office of the Presidential Commissioner 2019).

¹⁶<http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/All/155489ED91614291C225802500387BB1?OpenDocument>. Accessed 8 March 2020.

¹⁷<http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/All/57948F7899818EDEC22580250037A60D?OpenDocument>. Accessed 11 March 2019.

¹⁸<http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/All/86F70B8C906C2646C22580250033D031?OpenDocument>. Accessed 8 March 2020.

¹⁹<http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/All/04410C60166DE6C1C225802500381FB5?OpenDocument>. Accessed 8 March 2020.

²⁰<http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/All/0BFD0135B85373D5C22580250037BCD6?OpenDocument>. Accessed 8 March 2020.

help to find a missing person abroad and assist in case of imprisonment by helping citizens to find a lawyer.²¹

One area in which different levels of consular involvement exist across the EU is the repatriation of deceased nationals. In this case, Cypriot consulates can provide a death certificate, initiate the process of contacting the relatives of the deceased in Cyprus, and help with the procedural arrangements for the repatriation of the corpse. Yet, consular services can never cover the expenses for the repatriation of human remains, except in the form of a reimbursable prepayment.²²

A specificity of Cyprus is that consular services are adapted to the realities met by Cypriots in major destination countries. For instance, consulates operating in Greece, the UK, the USA, Australia, and Canada can inform and assist male Cypriots with military service matters, such as providing a certificate that the person is living abroad, information regarding the military service in Cyprus, or helping them in the process of postponing the military service. In some cases, the consulates assist in providing criminal records. The Cypriot embassy in Athens facilitates the repatriation of Cypriots in Greece in cases of financial, social, or health hardship, in coordination with the authorities of Cyprus.²³ The Cypriot missions in Canada and the USA offer repatriation services and explain the process that must be followed. However, it is not made clear whether repatriation occurs under specific social or economic circumstances. Conversely, because of the strained relations with Turkey, no consular services are offered to Cypriots in that country.

As previously stated, there is a shared perception among Cypriot authorities that the diaspora is an economic asset. Yet, this does not necessarily translate into concrete policies. While it does not target the diaspora exclusively, Cyprus has set up an open scheme for foreign investment that is also open to the diaspora. In 2007, the Cypriot Council of Ministers established the Cypriot Investment Promotion Agency (CIPA),²⁴ a non-profit agency aiming to promote Cyprus as an international investment centre, support the investors, and lobby for better investment regulations (Boukas and Ziakas 2013). On the other hand, a policy directly targeting the diaspora is the signature of more than 60 bilateral treaties for the avoidance of double taxation.²⁵

One area where the Cypriot authorities have been much more active is that of education and culture. Access to language courses is the cornerstone of this policy. The Service for Overseas and Repatriated Cypriots, for instance, offered (until

²¹ <http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/All/A64585B3925F777EC225802500385E11?OpenDocument> and <http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/All/FA5531459F237014C225802500377976?OpenDocument>. Accessed 11 March 2019.

²² <http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/All/106BEB797AD7213EC225802500375C6B?OpenDocument>. Accessed 11 March 2019.

²³ http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/Embassies/Embassy_Athens.nsf/DMLsocial_gr/DMLsocial_gr?OpenDocument. Accessed 19 July 2019.

²⁴ <https://www.investcyprus.org.cy/about/invest-cyprus>. Accessed 11 March 2019.

²⁵ The list of bilateral treaties for avoidance of double taxation can be found here: <http://mof.gov.cy/en/taxation-investment-policy/double-taxation-agreements/double-taxation-treaties>. Accessed 17 July 2019.

recently) the on-line platform/programme Filoglossia/*Φιλογλωσσία* for Greek language courses.²⁶ The Cypriot government also offers scholarships to Cypriots from the diaspora to study in universities in Cyprus.²⁷ Most importantly, however, the Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) and the Cypriot Educational Mission/*Κυπριακή Εκπαιδευτική Αποστολή* (KEA) have supported, since 1977, a network of Greek Schools Abroad/*Ελληνικά Παροικιακά Σχολεία* (EPS/EΠΣ) targeting Greek-speaking pupils.²⁸ More than 50 schools in the UK teach young children the Greek language, history, religion, geography, music, and dance. MOEC financially supports schools by providing books, educational material, and teachers.²⁹ These schools, along with those established and maintained by Greek-lead initiatives, are managed by the Coordinating Committee of Greek Educational Bodies in the UK/*Ενιαίος Φορέας Ελληνικής Παροικιακής Εκπαίδευσης*, presided and overseen by the Archbishop of Thyateira and Great Britain.³⁰ A related policy of SORC and MOEC is the organization of summer camps for the youth diaspora (up to the fourth generation), offering Greek language classes and information about the country.³¹ Furthermore, NEPOMAK supports two programmes, “NEPOMAK Discover Cyprus Programme”³² and “NEPOMAK Cyprus Culture Tour”.³³ The former one targets young Cypriots abroad aged 18–22, and its main aim is to introduce them to the Cypriot culture, history, and language. The latter programme is for Cypriots abroad aged 23–30, and it aims to forge relations between Cyprus and the diaspora. Both initiatives are funded by NEPOMAK. Another noteworthy initiative is “The house of Cyprus/*Το σπίτι της Κύπρου*”, hosted by the Cypriot embassy in Athens, which promotes both Cypriot culture and collaboration between the local Greek and Cypriot authorities and organisations.

²⁶ Filoglossia is no longer available from the SORC, nevertheless it is still available via the Consulate General of Greece in New York (<http://www.xanthi.ilsp.gr/filog/> Accessed 8 March 2020). Also, Kypros-Net (a USA-based non-profit organisation founded by Cypriots abroad) in collaboration with the Cypriot Broadcasting Cooperation offers an on-line Greek course (<http://kypros.org/LearnGreek/>. Accessed 8 March 2020).

²⁷ http://www.presidentialcommissioner.gov.cy/anthropos/anthropos.nsf/pc02_gr/pc02_gr?opendocument. Accessed 8 March 2020. In collaboration with the Open University of Cyprus and SORC, NEPOMAK also offers two courses for its members on Greek language and Cypriot history. The fees are covered by the Office of the Presidential Commissioner for 15 NEPOMAK members.

²⁸ <http://kea.schools.ac.cy/index.php?id=index>. Accessed 12 March 2019.

²⁹ <http://www.moec.gov.cy/dde/organogramma.html>. Accessed 8 March 2020.

³⁰ <http://www.thyateira.org.uk/co-ordinating-committee-of-greek-educational-bodies-in-u-k/>. Accessed 25 April 2019.

³¹ <http://www.moec.gov.cy/dde/organogramma.html> and http://www.presidentialcommissioner.gov.cy/anthropos/anthropos.nsf/hcayprogram_gr/hcayprogram_gr?opendocument. Accessed 4 March 2020.

³² http://www.presidentialcommissioner.gov.cy/anthropos/anthropos.nsf/ndcpprogram_gr/ndcpprogram_gr?opendocument. Accessed 8 March 2020.

³³ http://www.presidentialcommissioner.gov.cy/anthropos/anthropos.nsf/ncctprogram_gr/ncctprogram_gr?opendocument. Accessed 8 March 2020.

Cyprus' citizenship policies have gained attention in recent years because of an investor citizenship programme introduced in 2014 to facilitate access to citizenship for individuals making an investment in Cyprus (Džankić 2015).³⁴ For the diaspora, however, the critical element of the citizenship legislation—that combines elements of *jus solis* and *jus sanguinis*—is that all persons of Cypriot descent are entitled to apply. Cypriot descent, however, is vaguely defined as a person born in Cyprus and whose parents ordinarily resided in Cyprus at the time of birth (Trimikliniotis 2015). Citizens of the UK or Commonwealth countries who are of Cypriot descent and reside/resided in Cyprus for a continuous period of 12 months or serve at the civil or public service in Cyprus can apply for citizenship via registration (Trimikliniotis 2015). One additional consequence of the focus on descent in the citizenship law is to prevent Turkish-Cypriots from accessing the Cypriot nationality.

As for the engagement policy in the area of electoral rights, it is worth mentioning that, unlike most EU citizens, Cypriots residing abroad permanently do not have voting rights in the national legislative elections in Cyprus (nor in local elections) (Trimikliniotis 2018). Only specific categories of citizens residing abroad temporarily (civil servants, students, businesspersons, diplomats, etc.) have the right to vote from abroad in national and presidential elections and referenda,³⁵ provided that they have not lost their voting rights due to criminal convictions. In such cases, voter registration from abroad is done via the Electoral Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs or via the consulates (Trimikliniotis 2018). To cast a ballot, voters can either return to Cyprus or vote in polling stations abroad. Such polling stations can only be set up when at least 30 people are registered to vote abroad for legislative elections (50 people for presidential elections) (Charalambidou 2013; Trimikliniotis 2018). Despite these restrictions around the active voting rights of citizens residing permanently abroad, passive electoral rights are not tied to residence.

6.3 Diaspora Policies and Social Protection in Cyprus

As mentioned in the previous section, Cypriot consulates conduct a series of administrative functions (e.g. notarisation of documents), which may indirectly allow access to home or host country social benefits. This section shows that, while there

³⁴The amount required for the investment varied over the years. In 2016, the amount has been set at 2 million euros: <http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/moi.nsf/All/36DB428D50A58C00C2257C1B00218CAB>. Accessed 9 March 2020. After the events of late 2019 when the citizenship criteria were deemed flawed, the scheme was scheduled to go through further revisions: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/cyprus-plan-to-strip-citizenship-to-golden-passport-holders-stalls-in-legal-vacuum/>. Accessed 9 March 2020.

³⁵So far, no referenda has been held in Cyprus.

are no special social protection programmes for the diaspora, some relevant ad-hoc schemes targeting Cypriots in the most important destination countries do exist.

An additional cornerstone of Cyprus' policies for citizens abroad in the area of social protection is the signature of Bilateral Social Security Agreements (BSSAs) which ensure that citizens of the signatory parties have equal treatment and access to different social security provisions.³⁶ Although the list of BSSAs includes agreements signed with EU Member States, the latter agreements are no longer in force due to the EU Directives 833/2004 and 987/2009 on the coordination of social security for mobile EU citizens. Furthermore, Cyprus has signed BSSAs with two of the top diaspora destinations, Australia and Canada.

6.3.1 Unemployment

As EU citizens, Cypriots who move to another Member State benefit from the EU legislation on the portability of unemployment benefits (Koutsampelas 2020). Beyond this, the Cypriot Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (MLWSI) and, in particular, the Department of Labour, offers limited services to nationals abroad. While the BSSAs can potentially cover the unemployment-related benefits of those abroad, only the BSSA signed with Serbia specifically includes the area of unemployment in its scope.

Looking at pre-departure policies, there is no targeted scheme on how to prepare the Cypriots who wish to work abroad or how they can claim unemployment benefits from abroad, with the exception of the EURES website. In terms of skills recognition, there is the Cyprus Council of Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (KYSATS)/ *Κυπριακό Συμβούλιο Αναγνώρισης Τίτλων Σπουδών (ΚΥΣΑΤΣ)*.³⁷ The latter also assists with the accreditation of degrees awarded from abroad and helps students find programmes of study in the country or abroad.

6.3.2 Health Care

Beyond EU legislation, Cypriots abroad receive very limited support from their homeland in the area of healthcare, the one provided from the general scheme of the consular services described above. Cyprus' policies for citizens abroad are for specific diasporic communities such as the one in Greece. The Cypriot embassy in Greece offers special provisions on health-related issues to both Cypriots residing

³⁶Overall, Cyprus has signed 13 BSSAs with 12 countries (one BSSA is signed with Quebec), out of which seven with EU/EEA countries (replaced by the EU Directives 833/2004 and 978/2009). The full list of BSSAs can be found here: http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/sid/sidv2.nsf/page92_gr/page92_gr?OpenDocument. Accessed 26 April 2019.

³⁷<http://www.kysats.ac.cy/index.php/el/>. Accessed 11 March 2019.

in Greece and Cypriots residing in Cyprus who need to be treated in Greece.³⁸ Within this scope, the Cypriot embassy in Greece can also provide psychological support to Cypriot patients and their families, and to permanent Cypriot residents in Greece who face social and psychological problems. Similarly, the embassy collaborates with unions, associations, and other public or private welfare institutions in Greece to promote the wellbeing of Cypriots settled in Greece and to inform them on how to access healthcare. A final example that shows Cyprus' special interest in this community is the transportation for medical treatment. The Cypriot embassy in Athens can arrange for Cypriots residing in Greece to travel back to Cyprus to receive medical treatment or sends those residing in Cyprus for treatment in Greece.³⁹

6.3.3 Pensions

In Cyprus, pensions are regulated by the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance and, in particular, by the Department of Social Insurance Services (SIS). In addition, this Department has a section dedicated to information on how a Cypriot abroad can apply for the Cypriot pension scheme. It is important to note that, for this policy area, the support of the consular services is key. The latter assist with the processing of documents, while also providing the necessary life certificates and documents that prove that the claimants are residing/resided abroad.

Beyond the EU framework, Cyprus' engagement in the area of pensions for citizens abroad is clear in the various BSSAs signed with major destination countries such as Australia and Canada. All the signed BSSAs follow a similar logic in terms of totalisation of benefits, periods of insurance, portability, and exportability of pensions. The most common types of pensions covered by the BSSAs include old age, invalidity and survivors' pensions, as well as orphans' benefits and funeral grants.

6.3.4 Family-Related Benefits

In the area of family benefits, Cypriots residing abroad can mostly rely on the EU framework and applicable BSSAs. Although the BSSAs signed with major non-EU destinations do not include any provisions on family-related benefits, the BSSA with Serbia cover provisions related to maternity benefits, thus safeguarding the derived rights between the two countries.

³⁸ http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/Embassies/Embassy_Athens.nsf/DMLsocial_gr/DMLsocial_gr?OpenDocument. Accessed 9 March 2020.

³⁹ *Idem* 38

The role of consular authorities in this area is limited to providing administrative documents such as birth certificates. Once again, Cypriots in Greece are particularly favoured, as consular services in Athens collaborate with the Office of Wellbeing of Cyprus to offer support to citizens in terms of counselling for parents or assistance in cases of domestic violence, nutrition, and adoption.⁴⁰

6.3.5 *Economic Hardship*

Cyprus does not have a specific scheme to provide financial relief to its diasporic populations facing economic hardship. Nor does it allow or facilitate access to the guaranteed minimum income schemes in the home or host country. In exceptional circumstances, consular services can intervene in the provision of a repayable loan paid by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to individuals in need (see above). The loan is granted in exchange for a commitment to fully return the amount to the MFA. Alternatively, the interested person can acquire the needed amount of money directly from the consular services, if a deposit of an equal amount has been made by a relative or a friend on the MFA's account department.⁴¹ Lastly, the MLWSI provides a destitute allowance for Cypriots studying in higher education institutions in Greece.⁴²

6.4 Conclusions

This chapter aimed to discuss the policies that Cyprus uses to support and engage with its diaspora. As shown, diaspora policies are strongly influenced by the country's historical and geopolitical context. The historical affinity of Cyprus with the UK has made the latter the most important destination country, with a concentration of almost 50% of the diaspora. The political, religious, and cultural ties that Cyprus shares with Greece also make it a desirable destination for the Cypriot diaspora. Overall, around 60% of the Cypriot diaspora is concentrated in these two countries, which is reflected in the development of specific policies focusing on Cypriot

⁴⁰ http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/Embassies/Embassy_Athens.nsf/DMLsocial_gr/DMLsocial_gr?OpenDocument. Accessed 13 March 2019.

⁴¹ <http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/All/57948F7899818EDEC22580250037A60D?OpenDocument>. Accessed 9 March 2020

⁴² This allowance is means-tested:

[http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/mlsi.nsf/All/39769D4913CAF865C22584560018A891/\\$file/%CE%95%CF%80%CE%AF%CE%B4%CE%BF%CE%BC%CE%B1%20%CE%91%CF%80%CE%BF%CF%81%CE%AF%CE%B1%CF%82%20%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%B1%20%CF%84%CE%BF%202019_2020.pdf](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/mlsi.nsf/All/39769D4913CAF865C22584560018A891/$file/%CE%95%CF%80%CE%AF%CE%B4%CE%BF%CE%BC%CE%B1%20%CE%91%CF%80%CE%BF%CF%81%CE%AF%CE%B1%CF%82%20%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%B1%20%CF%84%CE%BF%202019_2020.pdf). Accessed 9 March 2020.

communities living there.⁴³ This is particularly visible in the area of social protection where a number of ad-hoc policies and services are designed for Cypriots residing in Greece.

In terms of the infrastructure for citizens abroad, Cyprus relies mostly on its consular network and the Service for Overseas and Repatriated Cypriots. In addition, the Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture plays an active role in maintaining cultural connections with citizens abroad and their descendants. A specificity of the Cypriot case is that, unlike other EU Member States which have public institutions fostering dialogue with citizens abroad, Cyprus has partially delegated the task of consulting the diaspora to the World Federation of the Overseas Cypriots (POMAK). As explained, this federation also acts as a lobby to raise awareness abroad about the Cypriot conflict.

Whereas Cypriot authorities often underline the political and economic importance of the diaspora, the main policy areas that they pursue are of a socio-cultural nature, as shown by the extensive support provided to schools and languages classes. In terms of social protection policies, the EU framework and a limited number of BSSAs form the bulk of Cyprus' engagement with its diaspora. Yet, considering the concentration of citizens in just a handful of countries with whom Cyprus has close ties for historical and political reasons or via social security agreements, Cyprus provides with adequate social protection coverage to the majority of its nationals residing abroad. Thus, it cannot be qualified as a disinterested homeland when it comes to its diaspora, but rather as homeland that selectively engages with what it perceives as key communities abroad.

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⁴³ OECD (2011). Database on Immigrants in OECD and Non-OECD Countries, 2010/11 (DIOC-E 2010/11, Labour Force Status). <http://www.oecd.org/els/mig/dioc.htm>. Accessed 13 March 2019.

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