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***INCLUD-ED***

*Strategies for inclusion and social cohesion in Europe from education*

**WORKING PAPER:**

**SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL EXCLUSION AND  
INCLUSION PROCESSES AMONG  
VULNERABLE GROUPS**

**Project 4, Work Package 16**

**(The perspective of Vulnerable Groups, Cyprus)**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The research reported in this Working Paper is part of **Project 4** of INCLUD-ed which aims to “investigate how educational exclusion affects diverse sectors of society, particularly the most vulnerable groups (i.e. migrants, cultural minorities, women, youth and people with disabilities), and what kind of educational provision contributes to overcome their respective discrimination” (Annex I, p.5). More specifically, the objective of **Work Package 16** is “to study trajectories moving towards social exclusion within five vulnerable groups (migrants, cultural minorities, women, youth and people with disabilities) in order to identify those processes and strategies that reproduce these trajectories and those that overcome them” (Annex I, p.38). This study focuses on the perspective of members from the aforementioned vulnerable groups and their own strategies in overcoming social and educational exclusion. Particularly, the aim was to identify key moments in people’s daily lives which have influenced the development of trajectories involving exclusion from the current knowledge society. Evidence of the processes and strategies which make it possible to overcome this exclusion was gathered, by placing a special emphasis on successful actions which contribute to it.

The empirical analysis is based on the Critical Communicative Methodology that enables an egalitarian dialogue between researchers and research participants whose voices have often been excluded. The empirical data analyzed in this report was gathered through communicative daily life stories and communicative focus groups with persons belonging to the five established vulnerable groups (migrants, cultural minorities, women, youth, and people with disabilities). Apart from Cyprus, research with the same methodology was carried out in Spain, Italy, Romania, and Hungary. The data from each country are analysed in individual reports.

### **National context in Cyprus**

All the information included in this report was extracted from the website of the Statistical Service of the Republic of Cyprus<sup>1</sup> (CYSTAT) using the latest information available which referred to statistics from 2008.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/index\\_en/index\\_en?OpenDocument](http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/index_en/index_en?OpenDocument). All the information presented here refers to the areas currently under the control of the Republic of Cyprus.

## Migrants

Net migration has been positive during the last decade, with high records over the last three years, although slightly decreasing in 2008. According to the Passenger Survey in 2008 the number of long-term immigrants (Cypriots and foreigners arriving for settlement or for temporary employment for 1 year or more) was 14.095 compared to 19.142 in 2007. In 2008 women comprised 55,4% of the migrant population. In terms of nationality, 51,19% come from the European Union (27), and 5,14% from the rest of Europe. The largest majorities of EU nationals come from the UK (19.7% of the total), followed by Romania, Greece and Bulgaria (at 17.7%, 16.7% and 15.2% respectively). Lower percentages relate to migrants from Africa (2,4%), the United States of America (1,06%), Asia (17,16%) and Oceania (0,61%). Approximately 70% of Cyprus migrants range between 15 and 64 years of age. The purpose of their arrival to the island was stated as follows: 47,37% for employment, 20,02% for settlement (including 5,44% of Cypriots who arrive for permanent settlement and 0,45% of Cypriots returning home from work abroad) 7,1% for studies or training whereas 22,44% did not state purpose of arrival. The number of non-Cypriots who arrive for studies or training was 601 in 2008 (64,3% women). In terms of nationality, 63,89% of these came from the European Union (27), 20,30% from other countries in Europe, 10,32% from Asia and 5,49% from Africa. There are no foreigners registered for studies or training coming from the United States of America or Oceania. Furthermore, during the last decade there has been an increase in the number of refugees and asylum seekers arriving in Cyprus. UNHCR recorded a number of 7,903 refugees and asylum seekers (2,888 refugees and 5,015 asylum seekers)<sup>2</sup>.

## Cultural minorities

According to the latest demographic report of the Cyprus Statistical Service, out of a total of 885,600 inhabitants, the estimated composition of the population by the end of 2008 was 75,5% Greek Cypriots at (668,700), 14,5% Turkish Cypriots 88,700 and 10,0% foreign residents (128,200). The report includes three cultural minorities namely Armenians at 2,700 (0,4%<sup>3</sup>), Maronites at 4,800 (0,7%) and Latins at 900 (0,1%). According to Varnava (2009), other cultural minorities in Cyprus are the Gypsies (Roma) and Anglican

<sup>2</sup> For more information see <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e48dba6>.

<sup>3</sup> The figure refers to the percentage of Armenians within the Greek Cypriot community.

minorities<sup>4</sup>; however they were not afforded minority rights or any other form of minority status as granted by the Constitution to the other three religious groups<sup>5</sup>.

### Women

According to the report "Mapping the Gender Social Map of the Republic of Cyprus<sup>6</sup>" Cypriot women deal with discrimination and obstacles to their integration process in the workplace and choice of profession as well as in the development of their career. Greek Cypriot women in Cyprus represent 50,43% of the total population of the Greek Cypriot community. According to information from the labour force report of 2009, the total labour force participation rate for the age group 15-64 was 390,534 persons out of which 54,55% were men and 45,45% women. Pertaining to unemployment, the number of unemployed persons amounted to 21.325 or a rate of 5,3% of the labour force; the unemployment rate was similar for men (5,1%) and women (5,5%). However, in 2008 there was more discrepancy in unemployment rates at 3,2% for men and 4,2% for women. Women are also more frequently found in part-time jobs where the rate of employment is 5,2% for men and 12,5% for women. With regard to education, women have progressively being more and more incorporated in the different educational levels since 1946. The number of women that never attended school or only graduated primary school has reduced to 9% in 2008 from 59% in 1946. Finally, gender violence is a problem that affects women primarily. According to information from the Association for the Handling and Prevention of Domestic Violence<sup>7</sup>, for 2009, there were 1148 cases of D.V. in Cyprus, whereas 83% were women exerted by their partners or ex-partners.

### Young people

According to the latest report of the Cyprus Youth Organization, "Unemployment, underemployment and hetero-employment: Survey of Labour Insecurity and Uncertainty of Youth in Cyprus 2004-2005<sup>8</sup>", young people face different types of job insecurity and uncertainty that stems from their age and their social status as young people. According to information from Cyprus Statistical Service, young people between the ages 15-34 constitute 54,15% of total unemployment in Cyprus. Within this age group, 36,3% are

<sup>4</sup> See, "The Minorities of Cyprus: Development Patterns and the Identity of the Internal-Exclusion", Varnava, Andrekos N.C. (2009).

<sup>5</sup> See, "The Cypriot Roma/Gypsies and the Failure of Education. Anti-Discrimination and Multiculturalism as a Post-accession Challenge," Trimicliiotis, N., & Demetriou, C. (2009).

<sup>6</sup> The report was prepared for the needs of project Open Doors, co financed by the EU and the Republic of Cyprus (2007). , The publisher is not mentioned, please see doc attached.

<sup>7</sup> [www.domviolence.org.cy](http://www.domviolence.org.cy)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.youthboard.org.cy/ereynes.shtm>

young people who have completed some form of tertiary education and 24.5% of this age group are temporary employees who possess tertiary education level. Enrolment rates for education reveal that young people have excellent access to education at the secondary level, however, moving to tertiary education, the percentages fall significantly. More specifically, for young people attending secondary education, the ratios are 98,5% and 93,5% for the age groups 12-14 and 15-17 respectively.

### People with disabilities

According to a 2002 report by the Statistical Service of Cyprus, which covered around 3500 households and 6,805 persons aged 16-64 years old 12,2% of the sample stated that they suffered with some form of disability. The disabled group was 52,8% men. In terms of employment, 47,8% of the disabled sample stated that they were employed, 48,3% stated to be inactive and 3,9% were unemployed. The age range where disabilities were more frequent was above 40. Focusing on perceived access to workplace<sup>9</sup>, 30,2% of the disabled sample stated to experience important restrictions regarding the kind of professions that they had access to, 43,5% stated that they experience some form of restrictions and 26,3% stated that they don't deal with any perceived restrictions. No significant gender differences were found in access to employment. Pertaining to access to education the percentages within the disabled sample were as follows: 15,8% did not graduate from primary education, 36,57% had completed primary education, 35,26% completed secondary education, 12,27% completed tertiary education and 0.1% had reached the PhD level. There appeared to be a higher percentage of women (65%) within the sample that had not completed primary education.

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<sup>9</sup> The survey included both employed and unemployed persons.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Data for this Work Package was collected and analysed through the use of Critical Communicative Methodology (CCM). CCM is based on establishing egalitarian dialogue between the researchers who contribute with their scientific knowledge and the researched persons or members of vulnerable groups who contribute by providing knowledge from their everyday reality. It is a methodological perspective that combines scientific rigour with social relevance and it is based on the idea that research knowledge should directly reflect the situation of those under study and also contribute towards changing conditions of social injustice. CCM emphasizes equality in the research process and it is based on intersubjective dialogue and the emergence of an egalitarian relationship between the researcher and the researched<sup>10</sup>. It aims for a consensual interpretation of reality through a cooperative process. Both researcher and researched reflect on their interpretations and they contribute towards constructing knowledge about the factors that contribute to overcoming social exclusion. The interactive dialogic process aids the construction of knowledge about successful actions that promote social inclusion.

### 2.1 Data collection

Empirical data were gathered using two data collection techniques: communicative daily life stories (CDLS) and communicative focus groups (CFG). A total of 25 CDLSs and 10 CFGs were carried out: 5 interviews and 2 focus groups with people from each of the 5 vulnerable groups (see Table 1 and Table 2). The interviewees and focus group participants were selected according to the following criteria:

- a) They represent the given vulnerable group (migrants, women, cultural groups, youth, and people with disabilities), in terms of being among those who within the vulnerable group are considered to be at most risk of social exclusion (the most socially vulnerable within the vulnerable group).
- b) Have a trajectory or being in the process of overcoming the inequalities that affect the group they represent: people who have experienced educational exclusion, defined

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<sup>10</sup> Flecha, Ramón, Jesús Gómez (2004) "Participatory Paradigms: Researching 'with' rather than 'on'." , pp. 129-140 in Michael Osborne, Jim Gallacher, Beth Crossan, eds., *Researching Widening Access to Lifelong Learning: Issues and approaches in an international context*. London: Routledge.

as consistently low-achievement or failure to obtain the minimum standard of performance, or who have never attended or left school before finishing primary or secondary level. This includes people who currently continue or have continued their education after having experienced educational exclusion.

The interviewees for the CDLS and the participants of the CFG's were contacted through NGO's working with the five vulnerable groups. More specifically, the migrant participants were recruited through Greek language classes for migrants, usually offered in school settings in the afternoons. The women and youth participants were recruited through the lists of graduates of the Evening school. This proved to be a particularly successful strategy because it allowed us to find individuals who had once dropped out of school (for financial reasons, academic reasons or social reasons) and then managed to re-enter education by going to the Evening school (while working) and, in many cases, managing to enter higher education. The cultural minority participants were recruited through the different organizations that represent cultural minorities. Finally, the disabled were recruited through NGOs that advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities.

The guidelines for conducting CDLS and CFG's included three main parts covering the life course, their educational experiences and the impact of these on other areas of life (namely, employment, health, housing, and social and political participation). Throughout the communicative daily life stories and focus group discussions, connections were established between the participants' situation in relation to other people in their vulnerable group. The goal was to promote a reflection about the strategies, conditions and factors that have helped them to be able to create a pathway to overcoming social exclusion. All interviewees were informed thoroughly about the research project and the objectives of the interview or the focus group discussion. They were asked to sign a consent form confirming that they agree to participate in the project voluntarily, anonymously and confidentially. The participants also filled in a short form providing some basic personal information about. All CDLS and CFGs were recorded with the permission of the participants.

**Table 1—Profile of the interviewees (CDLS)**

1	SIF1	Persian, Female, High school student
2	SIM2	Moroccan, Male, College student
3	SIF3	Philippino, Female, Private High school student
4	SIM4	Moroccan, Male, College student
5	SIF5	Russian, Female, college student
6	SMF1	Turkish Cypriot, Female, 18 years old, student at University of Cyprus
7	SMM2	Armenian, male, studied at university
8	SMM3	Armenian, Male, 44 years old, Executive Director of the Armenian General Benevolent Union
9	SMM4	Latin, male, 28 years old, works as civil servant
10	SMM5	Maronite, Male, 27 years old, Masters in Computer Science
11	SWF1	Greek Cypriot , 45 years old, graduate of evening school, works for Cooperative Bank
12	SWF2	Greek Cypriot , 33 years old, student in Computer Science, works as secretary.
13	SWF3	Greek Cypriot , 50 years old, works for an elderly care home of the Maronite community
14	SWF4	Greek Cypriot, 38 years old, graduate of evening school, works as insurance agent
15	SWF5	Greek Cypriot, 43 years old, Interior Designer
16	SYM1	Greek Cypriot, male, 29 years old, graduated from Technical Lyceum, works as Manager in mobile telephone company
17	SYM2	Greek Cypriot, male, 27 years old, student teacher, works at a factory
18	SYF3	Greek Cypriot, female, student in Economics, works for telecommunications company
19	SYM4	Greek Cypriot, male, 28 years old, works at government prison
20	SYF5	Greek Cypriot, female, 26 years old, studied Law, works for Law office
21	SDM1	Greek Cypriot, male, 27 years old, motor disability (artificial leg), student studying for his second BA degree, active with student organizations
22	SDF2	Greek Cypriot, female, 22 years old, deaf impairment, student in pre-primary education
23	SDM3	Greek-Cypriot, male, 32 years old, motor disability (artificial leg), works as a speech and language therapist
24	SDM4	Greek Cypriot, male, 50 years old, motor disability (on wheelchair), works as Assistant Head Master in secondary education
25	SDF5	Greek Cypriot, female, 24 years old, motor disability in hands and legs, secretarial studies

**Table 2—Profile of the interviewees (CFG)**

1	Focus Group 1—Migrants	6 male participants, Moroccan college students
2	Focus Group 2—Migrants	6 participants, 4 male and 2 female, from Morocco and the Philippines, college students
3	Focus Group 1—Cultural Minorities	3 participants: one Armenian woman, one Armenian man and one Maronite man.
4	Focus Group 2—Cultural Minorities	4 participants: 2 Armenian women, one Turkish Cypriot man and one Armenian man.
5	Focus Group 1—Women	5 participants, Greek Cypriot women
6	Focus Group 2—Women	5 participants, Greek Cypriot women
7	Focus Group 1—Youth	5 participants: 3 male and 2 female
8	Focus Group 2—Youth	6 participants: 5 male and 1 female
9	Focus Group 1—Disabled	6 participants: 4 male and 2 female
10	Focus Group 2—Disabled	5 participants: 3 male and 2 female

## 2.2 Data analysis

All recordings of the CDLSs and the CFGs were transcribed verbatim and assigned a code in order to maintain the anonymity of the participants (Table 3). The transcript code provides information on the data gathering technique, the vulnerable group, and gender. It also includes a number according to the chronological order of conducting the interview.

**Table 3—Code assignment**

Technique	Vulnerable group	Gender	Number
Life Story – S Focus group - G	Immigrants – I Cultural minorities – M Young people – Y Women – W People with disabilities - D	Female – F Male - M	1, 2, 3...

The interviews were codified and analyzed along the exclusionary and transformative axis according to the methodological principles of the Critical Communicative Methodology. Along these two axes, the experiences of the participants were analyzed in the following areas: education, health, employment, housing, and social and political participation (Table 4). The gender perspective was analyzed as a transversal category throughout the study.

**Table 4—Analysis Grid**

ACTIONS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO OVERCOME or REPRODUCE EXCLUSION/DISCRIMINATION									
Health		Work		Housing		Political and social participation		Education	
Non-Educational	Educational	Non-Educational	Educational	Non-Educational	Educational	Non-Educational	Educational	Non-Educational	Educational
Gender (a)									
<b>Exclusionary dimensions</b>	1	3	5	7	9	11	13	15	17
<b>Transformative dimensions</b>	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18

The exclusionary dimension row refers to the barriers that certain people or groups encounter and which have made it difficult for them to be included in society or to succeed. The transformative dimension row refers to those actions taken by the person which contributed towards overcoming the problem of exclusion. Given that the main objective of

Project 4 is to investigate how educational exclusion affects diverse sectors of society, particularly the most vulnerable groups we focused not only on the barriers but also on the transformative actions. The columns include all those areas of society which are related to the reproduction or overcoming of social exclusion in vulnerable groups, paying special attention to these actions which are being developed within the educational context. This is why for each of the categories we analyzed both the educational and the non-educational aspects of exclusion or transformation. During the process of codification and analysis the relevant parts of the transcripts were assigned a code where the first number identifies the number of the transcript, the second number refers to the corresponding number from the analytical grid, and the third number refers to the number of the paragraph in the transcript. For the quotes referring to gender issues the letter "a" was added to the code marking the transversal category of gender.

The following section describes the main findings from the analysis of the data by vulnerable group. Within each group, we present the findings from the 5 sectors of society, both through the exclusionary and transformative dimension. The findings present direct quotations from the participants, using the code for each interview. The number in the parenthesis represents the line number in the interview transcript where the quotation can be found.

### 3. MAIN FINDINGS

#### 3.1 Migrants

##### a. Health

##### i. Exclusionary Dimension

##### a. Non-educational

Regarding evidence of discriminatory situations or inequalities that support migrants' exclusion in the area of health, participants reported discrimination by health professionals which they felt was based on their nationality. For example, FSIF1 describes how a nurse mocked her when she visited the hospital for an examination: *"Yes, when I visited the hospital, to examine the condition of my heart, a nurse asked me "What do you have?" I told her that I feel pain in my heart and she said "Where is your heart" (40-42).* Another participant (SIM4) narrated his experience with a health professional when he visited the hospital after an injury. As he explained, he was excluded from receiving important information regarding his health and was verbally assaulted by a doctor because he could not speak Greek well:

*"Well I will tell you something happened to me one month or one month half ago. Well, I beat my head with one table in my job and then I decided to go to the hospital to stitch it, ok? Once I reached there I waited in the waiting room for more than four hours. Then the doctor came to me to see what is going on with me and he started talking in Greek. Actually, I know some Greek but I don't understand very well. Then he told me something in Greek and I told him: sorry I don't understand can you speak in English? Then he told me in a very very rude way: you are in Cyprus you are not ask me if I speak English you should speak Greek, even if you are going to die I don't care and he started talking with the nurse in Greek. Then he left the room and he left me with the nurse. The nurse knows very very bit of English I explained to her what happened to me and this and that. Then he came back and he told her: tell him to go home, he has nothing, tell him to go home. He didn't even explain to me anything, which medicine to buy, what to do in order to cover this wood, he said nothing. So that was a very very bad experience of discrimination" (41-55).*

##### b. Educational

Participants did not refer to any educational practices in schools which contribute towards their exclusion in the area of health.

## ii. Transformative Dimension

### a. Non-educational

Regarding non-educational practices which helped migrants to overcome exclusion and difficulties in the area of health, participants praised the social insurance system in Cyprus and especially the right to free medical care. For example, GIM1 discussed the advantages of the social insurance system in Cyprus. *"But I think it's better because for some people they come here let's say because of ignorance or because they don't know, because the system in their countries is different when they come here they don't look for social insurance and they don't think that something will happen to them but once you are forced to pay your social insurance then I think it's better for you because in case something happens to you will find help"* (548-553). Another participant (SIM2) talked about the importance of access to free medical care. *"Well thank God until now I don't have health problems but I believe that, I mean, the way the system is working is fine. I mean, in general it helps people to be in better health situation because once they pay for the social insurance they have free access to medical care for rest of the year"* (210-213).

### b. Educational

On the subject of the contribution of education in improving the situation of migrants in the area of health, most participants referred to the fact that it improved their language skills in Greek, which in turn improved their communication with health professionals and understanding of their health. In addition, a participant (SIF3) mentioned that educational institutions provide free internet access, which is a significant help for migrants which are usually in precarious positions and cannot afford to buy internet access at home (156-158).

Finally, another participant (GIM1) referred to the policy of some educational institutions in Cyprus to request incoming students to undergo medical examinations in order to control for contagious illnesses. As he states, he considers this policy to be a very good measure for personal and public health because it obliges people to get informed about their health: *"Something else is very good. Once you get to Cyprus as a student you are obliged to go and take medical tests. These medical tests are, I mean, it's very good step and it's the first step that it is done when you get inside the country"* (555-557).

## **b. Education**

### **i. Exclusionary dimension**

Pertaining to barriers in the educational context that made overcoming their social and educational exclusion difficult, participants were generally pleased with their educational experience. However, one of the issues that were raised addressed the incapacity of some educational institutions to address the specific financial needs of foreign students. SIM4 referred to the economic aspect of studying abroad, which sometimes can be difficult for students, in terms of getting the money on time, or even having to work for their education. He reported that some educational institutions are not sensitive to the special conditions and needs of foreign students and follow a very strict policy which can cause problems for some students:

“The college that I study is a bit expensive even we talked before that they can reduce the fees for us they refused and something they did that is very bad for me it happened to me once if you go to the college and you are just registering to new semester and you didn’t clear your balance I mean from the old semesters you are not registering even if it’s 2 euros in your balance left you will not. If you want to take paper like registration letter or transcript or whatever you cannot get it if you owe them money even if it is 2 euros as I have said. This is something that they have to work on it and try to change it like the other colleges they did already” (169-177).

GIM1 also referred to exclusionary factors related to language barriers. As he explains, some university programs and seminars are being taught only in Greek which makes it impossible for foreign students to follow them without learning the language first (640-643). Apparently, this is not something that the students had been informed about before registering for the degree.

### **ii. Transformative Dimension**

Referring to actions at school which contributed to overcoming social exclusion, participants were exceptionally interested in this subject and raised a number of topics coming from their personal experience. The first action that most participants mentioned as the most important in the process of overcoming their social inclusion is the provision of free language courses for migrants (SIF1, SIF3, SIF5, GIM1). As GIM1 reported: “*One of the main reasons why we get involved in the society of Cyprus and we become good in this is the free education that the European union provide for us to study Greek*” (147-149).

SIF3 raised another topic that she found very helpful, that of homogeneous ability classrooms. As she mentioned, at the school she attended, foreigners were segregated from Greek students during the Greek language courses, which was very helpful for them in

following their own pace *"Yes. In terms of Greek lessons it was useful because Cypriots were separated from us foreigners while they had Greek lessons with Cypriots while we had Greek lessons with us foreigners so we were separated from them"* (55-58).

Some participants referred to school activities which aim at bringing foreign students closer to the Cypriot culture and reduce stereotypes between students of different cultures. SIF1 and SIF3 referred to multicultural festivals and events organized at schools where foreign students get to share their culture and customs in an attempt to get to know each other. GIM1 mentioned the organizing of programs and conferences which focus at bringing foreigners and locals closer: *"There were a lot of programmes and conferences organised by NGO's and European Commission or something and all those activities, the purpose of these activities was to bring foreigners and locals together"* (157-161).

Some participants praised the educational system and practices of some schools in Cyprus for the provision of goods and services such as free access to internet and the distribution of free books from the government. As SIM2 described, *"The school I attended before had a lot of students, and that was one of the main problems, that not everybody had a book. This time because the books were given by the government, everybody has a book. Last time some people had a book some people didn't have a book so the level of the groups for some students was very good and some students were still very weak. I mean they didn't even know how to write their names, so one of the reasons was the book because they didn't buy the books"* (114-120).

Continuing on good school practices, participants referred to the support and guidance they received from their teachers. The participants described the teachers as considerate towards the language barriers of foreign students and understanding to the special needs of some students. They also added that teachers were willing to cooperate on issues such as arranging the courses timetable in order to meet the individual needs of students who are working or were not available during morning hours: *"And also the days. I mean we could agree all together about specific day which was very helpful for us and we had review day which was for the people that if they don't have or lets say they cannot make it in one day they can come the other day. That was also very helpful"* (GIM1, 431-434).

In addition, participants mentioned that, despite the discrimination they experience in society, at the school level they felt they were treated as equals. The pointed out that this was reflected in the attitudes of Cypriot students and the promotion of dialogue and "cultural sharing": *"Well they treat us equals with the Cypriots and I think we have some*

*good experience because the Cypriot students ask us some questions about our culture or religion so we have this cultural sharing so it was a very pleasant experience I can say"* (GIM2, 211-213).

Another participant (SIM2) addressed the topic of accessibility in education. As he explained, compared to his home country, the educational system and curriculum in Cyprus is organized in such way that students can follow their dream and start a career in any field they want, even if they are not exceptionally great in that field. He contrasts this quality to the situation back at his home country:

"I can say that my first educational experience especially the one in my country it was more difficult [...] in my country to have good grades or even to pass you need to read, many factors. First of all, you need to study very hard, second, you need to be clever, third, you need to be lucky I mean if you miss one for these three factors you will not even pass. Here in Cyprus if you really have the willingness to study you can study. I know people that maybe are not good in mathematics but because they want to study mathematics and they want to have in education in Cyprus I mean they could pass I am not saying they will get good grades but they will still pass" (184-182).

Finally, participants referred to the socio-cultural aspect of education as a factor which helped them overcome social exclusion. According to SIM4, the fact that he has been able to obtain a university degree helps him reduce the level of discrimination he experiences, even though he admits it is still present to some extent (85-88).

### **c. Work**

#### **i. Exclusionary dimension**

##### **a. Non-educational**

In reference to non-educational discriminatory situations experienced that made it difficult for them to access the labour market, migrant participants did not provide much information. The only comment that was made referred generally on the topic suggesting the existence of discriminatory situations without providing any examples: "*Sometimes I do experience discrimination at shopping or at work; it does exist in life, yes*" (SIF5, 18-19).

##### **b. Education**

Pertaining to practices developed in the school which aggravated their situation in this area, participants did not provide any information.

## ii. Transformative Dimension

### a. Non-educational

With regard to non-educational practices which helped them overcome exclusion and difficulties in the area of work, participants again did not provide any information.

### b. Educational

Referring to the contribution of education, participants mentioned how learning the local language improved their access to the labour market because it was easier for them to find work and show their true potential. As SIM4 described, *“Well when I first came to Cyprus it was very difficult to find job why? Because I didn’t know any word in the language and I felt shame to get inside a property or something that ask for job but once I start discovering the country and start having experiences I find job and my studies and the my Greek lessons helped me a lot to improve it and to sake and to show people my real value and well it helped me a lot”* (230-235).

## d. Housing

### i. Exclusionary dimension

#### a. Non-educational

Pertaining to non-educational situations that aggravated their housing conditions, participants referred to the precarious living conditions of some migrants. Many migrants face financial difficulties and are forced to share a room or a flat with several other people or live in conditions that below standard (GIM1, 566-671).

#### b. Educational

Participants did not refer to any practices developed in the school that aggravated their housing conditions.

### ii. Transformative Dimension

#### a. Non-educational

Regarding practices which helped them overcome exclusion and difficulties in the area of housing, most participants referred to finding a job. As they explained, the housing conditions are directly connected to their income, that is, if they earn more money they can find a better place to live. SIM2 shared his experience in changing his housing conditions: *“Personally, no, well, I can say that when I was student as everybody the way I was living I*

*was living as student I did live in camp I mean the college which means two people sharing the same room of the college campus or something and now after I finished my studies and I got my own job of course I have my own flat so it is very normal because before I used to study I had to pay the college and I didn't have income now I am working and I am making money I have better income it is normal I will move to a better situation" (217-223).*

#### b. Educational

Finally, referring to how education contributed in improving their situation in the area of housing, participants mainly referred to the advantages of learning Greek in school. As SIF3 reported, learning how to speak Greek allowed him to read and understand all the paperwork that is involved in renting a house and has improved his communication with her landlords. *"Yes I can understand all the paperwork that is in Greek related to my house better and I can also talk to the house owners in Greek so that helps a lot" (SIF3, 160-162).*

SIM4 and GIM1 stressed that learning how to communicate in Greek improved their competitiveness in the labour market, allowing them access to jobs with higher income which in turn contributes in improving their housing conditions: *"This successful trajectory can help people to improve their housing situation in the long term not in the short term. I mean if you study well Greek and you can speaking Greek then you use this Greek in order to find a job, after you find a job and you start getting a good salary you will improve your house (GIM1, 578-581).* In addition, SIF5 reports that learning Greek helped her with managing household-related issues more efficiently. She mentions the examples of being able to read and understand better the household invoices, house insurance papers and other (197-201).

### e. Political and Social Participation

#### i. Exclusionary dimension

##### a. Non-educational

Pertaining to evidence of discriminatory situations that made their participation in social live or social movements or political parties difficult, participants referred to cases of racial discrimination. SIM2 shared an example of racial discrimination that he experienced, which involved a police officer:

*"The first time it happened to me with a police woman I think that she is working at an office and when I went to her I was talking to her she didn't even want to reply but it wasn't only with me it was with all people who were there because her office I*

don't want to mention the name exactly of the office it's an office that is serving foreigners so..."Hello hello hello" she didn't tell me hello or like sorry you should go to another place or we are closed now or something and I was saying hello for about 5 minutes she didn't turn and answer, what to do.....Well the greatest discrimination I have faced is what I mentioned now when I went to this lady and although she was very young I mean she was supposed to be very open-minded she was maybe between 20 and 30 years old and how it was overcome I got sick for a week after that, I didn't go out of the house, I had lot of stress" (19-30).

GIM2 referred to racial discrimination in Cyprus which is often related to how people react to his racial characteristics rather than his nationality: *"Yes here I have been discriminated a little bit because of the fact I am American but (by national) I am Filipino so some people here think that because I am Filipino I am just the son maybe of a housekeeper or something like that and I am actually not"* (24-28).

Finally, SIM2 talks about discrimination based on language barriers. He supported that people in Cyprus don't feel comfortable speaking with foreigners in English, especially when they are around other Cypriots. Quoting his narrative, *"Yes first of all is if you are educated, if you speak Greek that is sure very helpful for you, why, because lot of people here in Cyprus they don't want to speak English either because they don't speak English or maybe they don't speak good English so they don't want to put themselves in this situation that they are speaking English especially if they are with other Cypriots. So they always avoid to speak English and by avoiding to speak English they become racists"* (54-61).

#### b. Educational

Participants did not mention any practices developed in the school which hinder their social participation or participation in social movements and political parties.

### ii. Transformative Dimension

#### a. Non-educational

Regarding practices which helped them overcome exclusion and difficulties in the area of political or social participation, participants referred to the importance of taking part in events organized by local associations. GIF2 and GIM2 talked about their experience taking part in campaigns organized by local association, where they marched in the streets with Cypriot people giving flyers. As they described, this experience offered them the opportunity to meet Cypriot people and experience the feeling of belonging to a group (260-262).

#### b. Educational

Finally, regarding the importance of educational practises in improving their situation in the area of political and social participation, participants once again stressed the importance of

learning the local language. Migrant participants mentioned that it makes them feel more respected by Cypriots when they communicate in Greek (GIM1, 603-604). In addition, it improves the prospect of socializing with the locals and getting to know the local customs and culture (GIM2, 617-620). As one participant mentioned:

“I have always been an active person. I have always been part of lot of local organisations so I have always been socially active but when it comes to the fact of Greek language, Greek language helped me a lot to have more friends let’s say, to communicate about more things and even to get more respect” (SIM2. 227-232).

Apart from the advantages of learning the local language when it comes to successful educational practises, participants also referred to how educational institutions foster intercultural awareness and cooperation between students and challenge them to take part in festivals and events (SIF1, 186-187).

## 3.2 Cultural minorities

### a. Health

#### i. Exclusionary Dimension

##### a. Non-educational

Regarding discriminatory situations or inequalities experienced by cultural minorities that do not help them overcome their exclusion in the area of health, participants did not seem to have much information in this area. The only reference that was made involved a Turkish Cypriot's experience at the hospital. GMM2 said that when he applied for a health card at the public hospital, as part of his constitutional rights, the hospital officer reacted "strange" when he found out that he was a Turkish Cypriot (75-76). At this point, it is important to mention that according to the constitution of 1960, Turkish Cypriots are officially recognized as full citizens of the Republic of Cyprus. However, due to historic socio-political rivalry and physical segregation between the two communities (until 2003), the Turkish Cypriot community is often the subject of prejudice and discrimination from the Greek Cypriot community<sup>11</sup>.

##### b. Educational

Regarding practices developed in the school that restrict their access in the area of health, participants did not provide much information. There is one reference by GMF1 reporting the incapacity of the educational system to inform and educate young people about important health issues and sexual reproduction, but this may be an outdated comment since it is referring to the educational system in Cyprus in the 60's, during which the island was still under British rule: *"No, nothing on health. We only had one book and our lessons were based there. We were 16-17 years old and did not know how babies are made. I had to give birth to find out. We learned about child care and did not know how babies are made. We had military discipline at school, during 53-57, and we learn about sewing and cooking"* (219-223).

#### ii. Transformative Dimension

##### a. Non-educational

Pertaining to non-educational practices which are helping minority groups in Cyprus to overcome exclusion and difficulties in the area of health, again, participants did not provide much information on this subject. There was only one reference by SMM4 addressing the

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<sup>11</sup><http://igitur-archive.library.uu.nl/student-theses/2008-1016-202625/Masterthesis%20Filippou.pdf>

importance of entering a profession that secures free health provision: *"Yes, I have better health provision now and I don't have to spend all that money I used to spend before I secure a job in the public sector"* (91-93). However, this concern with health care provision is something that all Cypriots share (not only cultural minorities) and it is part of the reason why jobs in the public sector are so coveted.

#### b. Educational

Finally, regarding educational practices that contribute to improving the situation of cultural minority groups in the area of health, participants mentioned that education has improved their level of knowledge on health related issues and their comprehension on medical terminology: *"Yes it helped me, now when I read medical words such as bacteria, and staphylococcus I have the knowledge to easily understand them"* (GMF2, 282-285). Another participant mentioned: *"I cannot remember exactly what we were taught but I do remember that we had first aid courses at the English school and that we learned about medicines and how to watch out for ourselves"* (GMF2, 455-458).

### b. Education

#### i. Exclusionary dimension

Pertaining to barriers that cultural minorities come across in the educational context which are making overcoming of their social and educational exclusion difficult, participants reported several situations. Most participants stressed the importance of an inclusive educational system that is able to meet the individual needs of students coming from a cultural minority background. As they participants reported, the educational system in Cyprus is not able to cover the educational and social needs of students with a cultural minority background and they felt that the educational system actively promotes the Greek-Christian culture (GMF2, SMM3, GFM1). A participant said: *"Ok, I did not understand anything and I was one of many. The problems start with the religious courses and the Morning Prayer every day. It was only logical that I would get confused"* (GMM1, 88-91).

In addition, participants reported that students from a cultural minority background have very few options of available schools to attend and sometimes are they were forced to attend schools in inappropriate premises: *"For one year I attended the Melician primary school, as it was called back then, that due to the riots of the time, it was moved to some old shacks"* (SMM3, 146-148). [However, this person is mainly referring to the educational system in the 1950s in Cyprus.]

Moreover, participants reported the presence of a general racist trend towards cultural minorities at schools. (SMM2, SMM3, GMM1, GMM1, GMM1):

“Of course they discriminated me. Kids know whatever their parents tell them at home. Uneducated parents say that the Maronite community are bad people, of different religion and create a thousand other impressions. They thought we were Jehovah witnesses for God’s sake” GMM1, 110-113).

“The only thing I can remember was on the first day that I went to school, something happened and I said “Oh mother Mary” and a girl turned to me and said “But, do you have mother Mary as well?” (GMF2, 178-180).

Finally, participants reported the inability of the educational system to foster and support the preservation of the customs and traditions of cultural minorities in schools (SMM5, SMM5, GMM1). As one participant mentioned, “*There was no connection. Our school, during primary or even higher education, had no links with our community except from the religion courses. Nothing else connected the community of Maronites with the school*” (SMM5, 189-192).

## ii. Transformative Dimension

Moving on to evidence of successful actions which are contributing in overcoming social exclusion of cultural minorities, most participants stated that education was the best tool for advancement in their lives and that their educational experience contributed towards the improvement of their life standards (SMM5, SMM3, SMM3, SMM3):

“The school is number one, the knowledge to reach a certain level. It’s the weapon to claim for what is right. Only education can help you get there because it offers you confidence. If you are illiterate you find it hard to talk with other people. From the moment you are educated other people start paying attention to what you have to say and think about your qualifications, no matter what your cultural background is” (SMM5, 118-124).

“I must admit that it was the day school that planted the roots towards me becoming a better person, that’s the reality. I gained many things, I entered other situations. For starters I learned to be patient and tolerant whenever I had to, I learned how to discuss and what to say. I learned how to take advantage of every situation, to hold on to things” (SMM3, 244-248, 358-360).

Participants also stressed the importance of using education as the tool to overcome language barriers that might exist and that would potentially be the cause of discrimination for cultural minorities. (SMM3, SMM3, SMM3, GMM1). According to SMM5, “*We make sure that they learn the language of this country as well as their mother tongue or English. For us it is very important to know the language of the country where we live, in other words to know Greek here in Cyprus, but also to know equally well our mother tongue and even English if necessary. This closes a lot of holes in terms of discrimination. Because if you*

*cannot speak properly with the person standing next to you, if you can't speak fluently in their language they will discriminate you" (154-158).*

Moreover, participants commented on the positive experiences they gained through the educational process towards learning to co-exist and communicate with other people in a multicultural environment. They mentioned the role of the teachers in this process (SMM4, SMM5, SMM2, SMM3):

"We had a lot of respect towards our teachers. But they were also our friends. These people were our friends but we had a great deal of respect towards them. I only realise the importance of that when I went to college in England. At our school we respected our teachers even though we used to joke with them. Also, we had a lot of involvement in sport activities and our teachers also. They would come every afternoon to the games we used to organize and trained and we would play together as equals. In the morning they were teachers and in the afternoon they were our friends" (SMM5, 147-153).

Participants also stressed the importance of attending a school that is following a multicultural educational policy that is able to acknowledge and respect students' different cultural backgrounds (SMM2, SMM5). Apparently, this point refers to the private education sector as it creates a contrasting comparison between the participants that attended private schools and those that attended public schools (*see comments on exclusionary dimension*):

"Look here, we had the permission not attend school during religious holidays. Also, we were never forbidden to associate with each other and we were even encouraged to participate in cultural programs in order to present our culture there. Almost all private schools have these special provisions towards different cultural groups such as our own" (SMM2, 128-137).

"With regards to associations between students, the school, if not intentionally, at least it was permissive and avoided creating any problems. There was never discrimination in-favor or against anyone. Every morning we had our prayers. The Greek Cypriots would go to one room and sign anthems in English and the Turkish Cypriots had their own prayer. On Fridays the Greek Cypriots had a course where they learned about the New Testament and the Gospel, there wasn't even an issue between Orthodox and Protestants and the Turkish would go to their Mosque" (GMM1, 145-151).

## **c. Work**

### **i. Exclusionary dimension**

#### **a. Non-educational**

Referring to evidence of discriminatory situations that made it difficult for them to access the labour market, participants mentioned cases of religious discrimination that they experienced (GMM1, SMM3, GMM1):

"Recently I had problems with one of my co-workers at work. From the day he found out that I was a Maronite he started a war against me. He was fired after some time for some abuse he did but it took the management two years to realize all the lies he was saying about me. Eventually, the HR department came to apologize to me saying that they now realize why he was acting this way against me. Even in the public sector, when you go there for a job interview and they know you are a Maronite, they would say, "The Maronite doesn't have a chance, he won't get anywhere" (GMM1, 185-192).

b. Educational

Participants did not mention any practices developed in the school which made it more difficult for them to overcome exclusion from the labour market.

**ii. Transformative Dimension**

a. Non-educational

In reference to non-educational practices which are helping members of cultural minorities to overcome exclusion and difficulties in the area of work, participants also stressed the importance of having power positions at work. As they explain, it is easier to accept them as equal when they are in a power position, or perhaps it is more difficult to discriminate them: *"Not at all, no difficulties at all. Perhaps it is because my job was at the British Council and I had a good position there. Up to now I have very good communication with my colleagues; I dint even experience discrimination based on my gender"* (GMF1, 48-50).

b. Educational

Addressing the importance of education in improving the situation of cultural minority groups in their access to the labour market, participants recognized its contribution towards obtaining a better position in the labour market along with the rest of the benefits that are implied by that, such as higher salary, job benefits, free medical coverage etc (SMM3, GFM1, GMM2). As one participant argued: *"I believe that it does because education helped me very much in finding a job in the public sector<sup>12</sup> and that helped me very much in my life because it offers me advantages in many areas such as free medical coverage"* (SMM4 84-87).

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<sup>12</sup> In general the public sector is considered one of the best employers in Cyprus offering high salaries with multiple job benefits

## d. Housing

### i. Exclusionary dimension

#### a. Non-educational

In reference to non-educational evidence of discriminatory situations or inequalities experienced by cultural minority groups that made the improvement of their housing conditions difficult, participants mentioned some incidents of social discrimination as well as discrimination at the social policy level. At the social level, according to GMM2, some Greek Cypriot landlords refused to rent their properties simply because the potential tenants were members of cultural minority groups. As one participant said: *"Yes, some of my friends wanted to rent an apartment in the Greek Cypriot territory because it was more convenient for them to access their jobs, but it wasn't easy and they had problems with the landlords"* (GMM2, 86-88, 90).

At the social policy level, some participants reported that the Cypriot government was deliberately providing housing facilities to beneficiaries coming from cultural minorities in Turkish Cypriot land, which resulted in the ghettoization of the former (GMF1, 31-33).

#### b. Educational

In reference to practices developed in the school which do not help cultural minority groups overcome difficulties related with their housing, one participant commented about the lack of courses or training on household management skills, which is something they had to learn on their own as they say (GMF1, 241).

### ii. Transformative Dimension

#### a. Non-educational

Participants did not refer to any practices developed outside the educational environment which helped them overcome exclusion and difficulties in the area of housing.

#### b. Educational

Participants mentioned that the educational system enabled them to develop their knowledge and skills in certain housing areas such as cooking and managing household activities (SMM3, GMM1).

## e. Political and Social Participation

### i. Exclusionary dimension

#### a. Non-educational

In reference to evidence of non-educational discriminatory situations or inequalities experienced by members of cultural minority groups that made their participation in social movements or political parties difficult, participants shared a lot of information from their personal experience. GMF2 stressed the importance of the family and especially the role of the parents in how the children develop their relations with their social environment. As GMF2 states, growing up as a female member in a religious minority group was very difficult in terms of developing associations with her social network because her father was overprotective. I quote her narrative here, *"My father was like that you know...any father would be this way I think... you know a bit conservative cause I am the first daughter. Before 1980 was... you can't do this or that...I am not sure if it is because he is Armenian or simply because that is how he is. But that aspect of being over protective was very evident"* (GMF2, 19-24).

Participants made references to perceived socio-culture pressure in assimilating cultural minorities from different ethnic and religious background towards the mainstream culture of the Greek Orthodox that is prevalent in Cyprus (GMM2, SMM2, GMM1, GMF1, SMM3):

*"Sometimes I feel like I should be grateful for being here because I am not a foreigner but I am like a guest. But that's not how things should be that's why when people ask me I always say that I am a Cypriot. But then when they ask what Cypriot they get upset when I say Armenian-Cypriot because they don't want me to proud for being Armenian. So if we don't declare ourselves as Cypriots we will never be able to grasp the Cypriot identity and establish ourselves as Cypriots and we will always be divided up"* (GMF2, 166-173).

*"When I say that my family is from Pafos and they understand from my accent that I can't speak proper Greek the reaction of the people sometimes embarrasses me. I remember once I was speaking with some guy I met in the street and when I mentioned that I come from Pafos he said 'How can that be since your Greek is so good. Because of that I had to prove myself as a Cypriot citizen on many occasions"* (GMM2, 34-38, 55-56).

In addition, participants report the absence of a governmental monitoring mechanism that will ensure the equal treatment of members coming from cultural minorities. According to GMM2, *"When I applied for a health card I noticed that the officer at the hospital reacted strange when I said that I was Turkish Cypriot"* (75-76). *"I applied for a position in the government once and I never received any reply for an interview or something"* (78-79).

b. Educational

Pertaining to educational practices which do not help cultural minority groups to overcome their situation in this area, participants did not make any references.

**ii. Transformative Dimension**

a. Non-educational

Pertaining to non-educational practices which helped participants overcome exclusion and difficulties in the area of political or social participation, contrary to the statements of some of the participants above, there are several references about the capacity of the Cypriot government to adequately recognize and foster the rights of cultural minorities in Cyprus.

SMM2 refers to the Cypriot constitution according to which every Cypriot citizen has the constitutional right to identify themselves as members of their own religious group.

*"Especially in Cyprus, under the current constitutional regime we, as a religious group, have the right to identify ourselves as different from the mainstream groups. In addition, the existence of European conventions, acknowledging us as cultural minority group, provides assurance that we will not be discriminated based on our ethnic or religious background"* (59-63).

b. Educational

Finally, similarly as before, participants place a lot of weight on the importance of education in improving the access of cultural minority groups in the area of political and social participation. Participants mentioned that education contributes towards overcoming the barriers of communication between members of cultural minority groups and members of the mainstream society which, in turn, contributes towards eliminating discrimination and improving access to social and political participation (SMM3, GMM1, SMM5). Participants also argued that the educational system plays an important role in eliminating discrimination (SMM5, SMM2, SMF5): *"I used to take religious courses on Christianity and I didn't change it because I liked learning about the religion of the other groups. I was taking religious courses until Lyceum and a friend of mine asked me "Why don't you change it since you are a Muslim?" and I explained to her that I enjoyed learning about Jesus, of who he was and what he did"* (SMF5 93-97).

### 3.3 Women

#### a. Health

##### i. Exclusionary Dimension

###### a. Non-educational

Pertaining to evidence of discriminatory situations or inequalities experienced by women that do not help them to overcome their exclusion in the area of health, participants did not mention much information. The only reference that was made refers to a gender-based discriminatory situation within the working environment. According to GWF1, due to pregnancy complications, she was forced to leave work twenty days before becoming a permanent employee. For that reason, her employer reduced her service record by one month, which had an impact on her salary and the date of her permanency. GWF1 argued that it is unfair for women to suffer consequences for situations pertaining to pregnancy which they have no control of: *"This situation made me feel disadvantaged next to my co-workers. For twenty days I lost a whole month. Why couldn't they be more understanding and supportive towards a woman whose only reason of absence was something beyond her will, it was a gynaecological problem which would put my life in danger if I did not have the operation"* (505-512).

###### b. Educational

Participants did not mention any practices developed in the school which promoted exclusion in this area.

##### ii. Transformative Dimension

###### a. Non-educational

Participants did not mention any practices outside education which helped them to overcome exclusion and difficulties in the area of health.

###### b. Educational

Pertaining to evidence of how education is contributing to improve the situation of women in the area of health, participants referred to how education made them more informed on health matters and enabled them to understand the language of the doctors, thus feeling more involved and included on health related decisions. GWF2 expressed this very clearly in her narrative:

"In the past I couldn't understand them. Two doctors might be sitting right in front of me, having a conversation about my health and I wouldn't understand many things. Now I understand much more. I m not saying I understand more than doctors do, god help us if I did. I just understand more" (635-639). "When I had to visit the doctor because I was sick, he prescribed me a medicine for my nose; this actually happened in the past. When I arrived home, I took the spray and read the instructions. I noticed a point where it said, "in case of use it might cause a brain or a heart stroke". Then I said to myself "how do I know that if I use this spray, this won't happen to me? Do I have sufficient knowledge to use this medicine?" So I threw the bottle away and as a rational person I told myself that I need to look after myself in order to get better and I healed myself. It helped me develop my rationale and spirit" (668-677).

## **b. Education**

### **i. Exclusionary dimension**

Pertaining to barriers that women come across in the educational context which is making overcoming of their social and educational exclusion difficult, participants provided a lot of information which can be examined on two levels, the socio-cultural and the economic level.

#### Socio-cultural level

This level includes references which pertain to perceived barriers from the participants' social network, such as family and peers as well as barriers attributed to social norms or customs. One of the most common references we extracted through the interviews refers to women that were compelled to drop out of school because they got engaged or married at an early age. Some even mention early age pregnancy as a subsequent factor which forces women to drop out of school and devote themselves to caring for the family. These women said that family and societal pressure were behind these decisions:

"So I got engaged at the age of fifteen, it was a very difficult time for me, hard work. I got married at eighteen and I gave birth to my fist child at the age of nineteen. As you can understand, after all these, any dreams I had about education and studies were wrecked" (SWF3, 18-23).

"Remember when I was telling you about my family history and how my father had as a primary goal to marry his daughters first? When he talked about his children, he only mentioned his sons and how he wanted to help them develop; the daughters had to get married. Do you know how discriminating that was for me? How inferior it made me feel? I am not saying this out of spitefulness for my father; I used to feel this way. But imagine how negative it was for me feeling that my father wants to get rid of me as early as possible (SWF3, 135-141).

"I got engaged very early and was forced to leave morning school. After that I had my children. It was a pity though that I left school so early. It was always my grievance that I didn't manage to get my school diploma" (GWF1, 7-9).

### Economic level

This level mainly refers to aspects of financial difficulties as a factor in educational exclusion even though all of these references are also related to socio-cultural reasons. For example, GWF2 explained how the economic difficulties of her family lead her to drop out of school:

“I left school at the age of sixteen and a half. There were different reasons I did that. The main one is because I was always a perfectionist and wanted to be good at my classes but my parents could not afford to send me to private school” (55-63). “I knew that my parents couldn’t afford to send me to college in the future. They could barely manage through their own expenses. So when I found the opportunity to leave school it was easier for me to make that choice. I think if I had the moral support and encouragement by my parents I wouldn’t do it then. But you see my parents don’t have a high educational level. My intention here is not to depreciate them but you can understand that back then, they could not realize how important it would be for me so they could help me” (65-78).

### **ii. Transformative Dimension**

Participants shared a lot of information related to evidence of successful actions, connected to education, which contributed to overcoming their social exclusion. Their comments concerned actions which can be seen at three levels: personal, social and institutional.

### Personal level

According to GWF2, one of the main reasons she decided to return to school and graduate was the “love” she had for the school and knowledge: *“The reason I returned was love. I mean, my love for the school was immeasurable. After my family, the first thing I loved was education. I am a very emotional person and get really attached with things. Once I lose something I bonded with it is unbearable. I really loved school. So you would understand, whenever I passed by a school driving to work I felt a knob in my throat. Only by looking at it made me feel nice. Because when I dropped out of school, I thought the world was angelic wonderfully made. When I face reality and the cruelty of the world it made me over-appreciate the value of the school”* (217-227).

Participants also said that their education was a way for them to develop, both personally and professionally:

“After I graduated, soon there were some openings at the cooperation bank at my village and I managed to get in. As part of the administration staff at first but later I passed some exams and got into the accounting office” (GWF1, 315-317).

“Without the evening school diploma I wouldn’t be able to do anything. My first thought was to get the high-school diploma at first, cause wherever I tried to look for a job they would always ask for the school diploma” (SWF3, 257-263).

“For me, evening school plays a crucial role in my life because after I finished I was working at our insurance office and I got the opportunity to use my diploma

to take the exams and get the insurer license and from there to take another exam that allowed me to prepare contracts with banks" (SWF4, 64-67).

"For me, the evening school was the starting point for everything that followed in my life. That was the inspiration for a poem I wrote for my teachers entitled "the lighthouse". In other words, without the light of the lighthouse I could never reach any of my destinations" (SWF5, 395-398).

### Social level

Participants also talked about the importance of peer influence and friendship as a factor of overcoming social and educational exclusion. Participants discussed how they developed true friendships through their educational course in the evening school and how that helped them to manage and overcome any difficulties they were facing. As SHF2 stated: "*The students and the teachers were only a few so we were like a family. You could talk and the other would understand you. You know about each other's problems, it was a family like and friendly environment*" (248-250). Another participant agreed: "*We were like a big family. So you can understand, we would organize excursions, of course not like those where you rent a bus and go someplace. We would go out at restaurants and eat like a family. The entire school would come and our teachers with their families and we would bring our families as well and we would all have fun together*" (SFF4, 168-171).

SWF5 talked about the importance of teamwork and cooperation among the students and between students and teachers. "*I don't know if it is the school that gives you this power or the thought that you belong in a team which strives to reach higher and higher and through that course you must dare to try things that you never did before*" (442-445). On the same level, GWF1 stressed the importance of respect within the group. "*You could address your questions without the hesitation that a student might mock you, like it happens at the morning schools. We didn't have these sort of situations at the evening school*" (194-198).

At the social level, participants also pointed out that education equipped them with the knowledge to resist cultural stereotypes on gender inequality and discrimination. As GWF2 describes "*The spiritual education we get empowers us to go out there and claim our part as equal members in the society. There should not be any exception against us just because we are women. I never considered myself inferior to men; I believe that when I have the same level of knowledge with a man I am equal with him. If someone is superior in education and all that, there I can acknowledge it, but not just because I am a woman*" (612-617).

Participants also discussed how the educational process helped them develop their interpersonal skills and expand their social network:

“Graduating from school makes you feel nice with yourself because you can take part in conversation on various topics like history or economics; topics you can discuss freely when you have the knowledge. Because when you have the knowledge you can participate otherwise you just sit there and watch” (GWF1, 365-368).

“We all felt like that before we join the evening school, like a blind person. We could understand things but could not express them. Slowly we learned how to express our thinking and even support it. The evening school has been a station in our lives” (GWF2, 693-699).

“I now participate in various events. I am a member of the Sociologist Association, of the *Antirheumatic Association*, at the *Stelios Ioannou foundation*; I also had the opportunity to join the *Greek Costume Company*” (SWF3, 321-324).

### Institutional level

Finally, at an institutional level, participants referred to strategies within the school system that supported their educational inclusion. Most participants emphasized the importance of good relations between students and teachers. They supported that when these relations are built upon mutual respect and equal treatment it stimulates and enables students to get more involved with the school activities: “*The most important thing of all was that our teachers treated us as equal from the first day. There was no distance between students and teachers*” (SWF1, 192-195). On the same level, GWF2 talked about the encouragement and support she received from her teachers: “*I took an exam in Civics as I remember and scored twenty. For some reason, on the second test, I only scored seventeen; I don’t know why maybe I dint study enough. But the teacher wrote on my paper “I know you have the potential, why did you score lower?” On the next test I scored twenty again. I don’t know, I liked what he said, having the potential, it encouraged me*” (1021-1024).

SWF1 talked about the importance of teachers having a humane approach and understanding to the individual needs of the students: “*I never felt distance, this thing that we are the students and they are the teachers. Most of the times we would discuss our personal problems with them and they would try to help us. Sometimes, a student might experience some family issues and be nervous about it; they would understand it from the moment we set our foot in the classroom. With their own way and talk they would get us to open up and discuss it and they were always there for us. I thank them so much for this*” (154-160).

## c. Work

### i. Exclusionary dimension

#### a. Non-educational

Gender discrimination in the workplace is well established in the literature for sociological and gender studies. Even though Cyprus adopted a legislation to protect gender equality, namely the Law for the Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Employment and Occupational Training of 2002, this phenomenon is far from extinct and is also reflected in the narratives of this research. Our participants report having experienced gender discrimination in the workplace at two levels, interpersonal and institutional.

#### Interpersonal level

At the interpersonal level, they explained how they experienced verbal attacks and mistrust about their abilities to perform work-related tasks, based on the single fact that they are women. As GWF1 described: *"At my job, besides the fund I mentioned earlier, we also have the welfare fund and a committee that is responsible to organize excursions and trips for the employees. Ever since that fund went operational, I was always a member of that committee. I remember distinctively twice at the elections when a colleague of mine was trying to enter the committee but didn't succeed, the following day of the elections, he came to my office and told me "What do you know in organizing excursions and how can a women manage to organize everything". And I distinctively remember him saying in a very nasty way "I know you are trying to stand in my way and I am going to have to deal do with you" (657-667).*

#### Institutional level

This level refers to discrimination related with the organizational structure and processes taking place in the workplace. In relation to the interpersonal level discussed above, GWF1 also describes how her attempt to complain to the administration about an incident that she experienced as interpersonal discrimination based on her gender, was ignored: *"I prepared a letter for the municipal administration explaining the situation and asking for help on how to deal with this. When I called, they replied that my claim is examined, I am still waiting for it to be examined" (521-528).*

Furthermore participants referred to other incidents of institutional discrimination in the workplace. SWF1 recalled some occasions in her workplace when some programs were allocated only to men, without any clear reason or excuse (479-483). Furthermore, GWF1 recalled experiencing discrimination on the first day of her job. As she described, on the first

day, the secretary general of her office addressed the newly recruited employees and said *"I was against of hiring women because they have their pregnancies and their gynaecological problems while men spend more time working"* (492-495).

Another participant (GWF1) brings up an example as to how she experienced discrimination in her workplace due to complications during her pregnancy. As she explained: *"Due to problems during my pregnancy I had an operation and had to leave work for twenty days. For twenty days, I lost an entire month. Ok, I lost that, there was no way to take that back. But they could show some understanding towards a woman that was forced to leave her job. It was a gynaecological problem, an operation that might endanger my life if I didn't have it on time. We have some openings for secretariat officers at the office now. I am an assistant officer and those twenty days are going to be important for me because I am going to lose the promotion"* (501-520).

#### b. Educational

Participants did not refer to any practises they experienced in the school which hindered their situation in the workplace.

### ii. Transformative Dimension

#### a. Non-educational

With regard to practices which helped women overcome exclusion and difficulties in the area of work, participants referred mainly to the importance of women recognizing their rights and equal position in the society and workplace and, most importantly, claiming these rights whenever they feel they are being mistreated. As SWF1 stated: *"Look, I believe that some discrimination against women in the workplace exists, but when you don't allow it, then it stops. I believe that when you are yourself, you are strong and claim your rights, then it doesn't affect you"* (474-478). She also added: *"There were some programs at work that were allocated only to men, without any clear reason or excuse. But I asked to take part in those programs and afterwards they gave me a position also because I claimed it"* (481-484).

GWF1 also discussed the importance for women to find jobs with flexible or convenient work hours, so that they can have time to take care of their family and care for the house: *"First of all the work hours. I work until 14:30 except one afternoon that I have to stay until six. Having this program allows me to spend the afternoon with my children, take them to the*

*extracurricular courses they attend, deal with my family, with the housekeeping and other social activities which under other circumstances I wouldn't be able to do" (646-650).*

b. Educational

In reference to how education contributed to improving their access to the labour market, participants only referred to education as a tool for social recognition and professional advancement and not to specific practises or policies developed within the educational environment.

**d. Housing**

**i. Exclusionary dimension**

a. Non-educational

Participants did not mention any evidence of discriminatory situations or inequalities that made the improvement of their housing conditions difficult.

b. Educational

Participants did not refer to any practices developed in the school which left them exposed to situations which made their housing conditions difficult.

**ii. Transformative Dimension**

a. Non-educational

Pertaining to practices which helped participants to overcome exclusion and difficulties in the area of housing, they only referred to the importance of financial security. They explained how professional development, related to higher income and financial security, allows women to claim more in the area of housing. According to SWF1: *"After I got a better job, with higher income, I felt more... I had a much better salary, and I felt stronger. I did a lot of renovations in my house, things that I wanted to do earlier but couldn't and it made me feel more complete as a person" (408-411).*

b. Educational

Participants discussed thoroughly as to how education helped them improve their situation in the area of housing. On one level, they discuss how education increased their knowledge on housing matters. GWF1 explained how the training she received from school enabled her of managing more adequately her family budget (395-396). In addition, GFW2 said that education made her more sensitive to environmental issues and that if she had the

opportunity to build a new house she would try to find environmentally friendly solutions to save energy and protect the environment.

On another level, participants argued that education contributed to the development of their interpersonal and negotiation skills, allowing them to be more critical with decisions related to housing. GWF2 talked about her experience with an estate agent who was trying to sell her a house which was superficially repaired to hide the fact that it was old: *"I wanted to make an investment just before the economic crisis, so I went to see a house. The house looked really nice. After further examining the house, I noticed that it was really old; it came at a good price but was really old. You know, one of those houses that you fix so it will look nice so people will buy it and after two months the wall would crack again. So I avoided it. But I had to speak with the estate agent and address him appropriately and fearless"* (727-740).

## **e. Political and Social Participation**

### **i. Exclusionary dimension**

#### **a. Non-educational**

Pertaining to discriminatory situations or inequalities experienced by women that are making their participation in social movements or political parties difficult, participants referred to gender-based discrimination. According to their descriptions, men create negative stereotypes against women in society: *"Whenever there is a conversation between men and women on daily issues, we always notice the exclusion from men. It is something very obvious. For example, we women can't drive, or park a car or we are not capable of doing some heavy job that a man can do. There are some chubby women that I know of that do heavy jobs. This happened to me many times in everyday debates with people"* (GWF2, 111-120).

#### **b. Educational**

With regard to practices developed in the school which promote exclusion of women from political and social participation, participants again discussed gender-based discrimination. Participants referred to discrimination they experienced from their teachers as well as other fellow students based on their gender. SWF2 shared an incident she recalled from her student life: *"When I was on the final grade, the seventh class of lyceum, we had elections and I received the most votes in class. But the teacher rejected the elections and did something else so that I wouldn't be elected president. In the end though, the president got*

*sick and I since I was the vice president I took the place of the president because the other people didn't want the responsibilities. In the end they all understood that I could handle every situation" (309-316).*

Participants also referred to other aspects of exclusion which are not gender-based. They talk about the importance of education and the social exclusion that is connected with school dropout. According to their descriptions, people who drop out of school feel inferior towards other people who graduated and feel excluded from certain social networks. As SWF5 described: *"Someone who drops out of school and leaves, subconsciously feels the exclusion. They feel that they are not equal with those that graduated school and they feel inferior to them" (418-419).*

## **ii. Transformative Dimension**

### **a. Non-educational**

In reference to non-educational practices which helped women overcome exclusion and difficulties in the area of political or social participation, participants did not mention anything specific from their experiences. They only stressed the importance of participation in social activities. According to GWF1: *"Just so you will understand, there was a time when I had three children attending school, one at the pre-primary school, one at the primary and one at the lyceum and I was a member at all three parents associations. Now I am a member of Europe Donna in Pafos. Yesterday I was at an event for children with autism. I belong in the Apostle Pavlos church network for welfare. I also participated many times at the Association for the prevention of cancer. Whatever I can do to help the society" (613-618).*

### **b. Educational**

Participants consider education as an important area contributing to improving the situation of women in the area of political and social participation and had a lot of information to share and discuss. In their narratives, they refer to education mostly as a process of self-discovery and socialization.

According to the participants, education can be a self-esteem booster for students with low social skills, thus improving their access to social or political groups. According to GWF3: *"I felt that my progress as a human being stopped when I stopped education. This may come out strong but that's how I feel. Your words matter more and people listen when you have your diploma. My graduation from the evening school increased the validity of my words" (303-308).* GWF2 commented on the same topic: *"It gave me something more than just*

*shields, I am proud that i attended the afternoon school because I feel that I developed spiritually. Once we open our spirit there is no turning back. I am not afraid to talk to anyone now while before I couldn't. I don't mean to talk back at someone, I just don't feel an inferiority complex and I can participate in conversations. " (627-632).*

In addition, participants reported that education developed their sensitivity on social issues. They referred to occasions at school where they got together with other students to raise money and buy presents for students in difficult financial positions: *"We would buy presents for people with financial difficulties. Let's say for example at Christmas, we had our lottery and it was the students responsibility to find the presents"* (SWF2, 251-255). In addition, they referred to how the educational environment helped them take part in organized students groups and organize conferences for parents and other students (SWF2, 261-270).

## 3.4 Youth

### a. Health

#### i. Exclusionary Dimension

##### a. Non-educational

Participants did not make any references to specific conditions or practices which they felt left them exposed to health risks.

##### b. Educational

It appears that early school dropout is perceived as a health risk factor by young people. As SYM2 describes, his decision to drop out of morning school at the age of 13 in order to get a job in constructions, was a decision which resulted in him getting into a serious life-threatening accident. Although SYM2 does not mention the specific socio-economic factors which lead him to this decision, he identifies "culture" and "peer influence", especially within the environment of primary education as two of them. As he described, when he left school he did so because he believed that was the right thing to do. He goes on to say that his primary school teachers promoted the idea that only excellent students should stay in school and continue their education and that mediocre or bad students should drop school and get a job (11-22).

#### ii. Transformative Dimension

##### a. Non-educational

Participants did not mention any specific practises that helped them overcome difficulties in the area of health.

##### b. Educational

Participants referred to several aspects of how education helped them improve their situation in the area of health. Most of them mentioned that the educational system has broadened their access to information and taught them not only to constantly seek new knowledge but also *how* to look for it. Participants supported that having more access to information contributed to helping them take more informed and rational decisions with their lives, which related to health (SYM1, SYM2, SYF3, GYF1, GYF2).

GYF2 provides us with an example regarding this perspective. She explained how the educational system taught her how to develop a critical mind towards certain topics regarding her health and brought up an example of when the doctor prescribed her

medication. As she explained, in the past, she would simply take the medicine, acknowledging the authenticity and legitimacy of the doctor in the field of health whereas now she will research the prescribed medicine and examine possible side-effects to her health. Although this transformative process that Kremer and Tonkens (2006) describe as the transition from “client” to “consumer” is debated as a potential health risk in the health sector, according to GYF2, it feels more rational (947-943).

Another transformative aspect identified by the focus group was how being in school and following a path through education allows individuals to have a more balanced life. GYM2 explained this through a comparison of his life trajectory before and after the completion of his studies. As he recalls, having to work full-time for a teenager was a very difficult and stressful process which didn’t leave much time for personal life (924-929).

## **b. Education**

### **i. Exclusionary dimension**

#### Economic Aspect

Based on young people narratives, we observed that one of the main barriers for young people in overcoming educational exclusion is the economic aspect. As most participants mentioned, they had to drop out of school and work because they could not bear the economic burden (SYM1, SYM4, GYF2, GYM2). As GYM1 describes: “I was forced to drop out of school and start work due to the economic problems in my family” (15-17). In addition, participants explained that tertiary education and the preceding processes that facilitate the entry to tertiary education institutions such as extra classes or tutoring, are very expensive for low income families (GYM2, 440-459).

#### Social level

Another barrier in overcoming educational and social exclusion is the stereotyping of school drop-out youth. According to GYM2, it is considered to be a taboo within the Cypriot culture to drop out of school and people might feel awkward or embarrassed to return back to school and finish their studies: “If we want to be honest here, in Cyprus we feel a bit awkward and our ego is offended let’s say to return back to school because we worry about what the people around us might say. Ok, I didn’t have such a problem, such a taboo, I only thought about myself so I moved on” (481-486).

Furthermore, on the social level, participants mentioned peer-pressure and school bullying to be an excluding factor from education. As they explain, it was very difficult, even

overwhelming for students with that failed to pass the school year to return back to school because the other students would mock them. As SYF5 states

“I left school because many children would make fun of me for wearing glasses, that was the first reason. The second reason was that I was ashamed that I had failed to pass a class twice and I didn’t want to go to the same school. I was also too embarrassed to go to another school and start from the first grade again because the other kids would ask me about my age and I didn’t want to tell them I was 14. I was feeling very down with myself about this because everybody would be younger than me and they would make fun of me for failing the class. What was I supposed to tell them?” (28-35).

### Family level

According to the participants, the family is perceived as a barrier in overcoming educational exclusion. They mainly referred to two interrelated factors that may arise from the family environment: family size and parenthood. With regards to family size, participants support that young people coming from large families deal with higher risks of educational exclusion. As they explain, parents may have low expectations and limited financial resources to support their children:

“When I went to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gymnasium grade I dropped out of school and started working in constructions. My parents were refugees with five children to raise; I don’t think that was the ideal family environment to push me back to school. We also had economic problems. These were the main two reasons I think (GYM2, 5-8).

Even though the economic barrier is discussed above, this specific reference addresses a specific type of barrier at the policy level reflecting insufficient financial support from the state for large families. SYM2 also talks about his experience with his parents regarding his decision to return back to school “*I didn’t mention them at first that I went back to school. We didn’t really discussed about my future, whether I was going to finish school. The reasons is because I think they didn’t expect much from me, they did not expect me to finish school and they didn’t know that I wanted to finish school or what I wanted to do with my life*” (108-114).

With regard to parenthood, participants stressed the importance of support from family members, especially the parents, in dealing with educational barriers. GYF1 explained how the decision to drop out of school was taken by her father as a punishment for her. “*I used to skip school a lot. When a letter arrived home revealing that I only attended school half of the school days my father said, “Since you don’t intent to go to school you will never go again”. It was not my decision*” (44-47). GYM2 expresses a similar opinion “*Personally, I*

*dropped out of school because I didn't have the family support to push me finish high school" (39-43).*

### Institutional level

On an institutional level, participants made reference to several aspects of the educational system which they perceived as exclusionary factors. One aspect was that the educational system does not motivate students to actively participate in their own education. Instead, they find education to be managed from a top-down approach that is perceived by students as a compelling aspect of their childhood, thus creating a natural negative reaction towards the system. As GYM1 describes *"In general the educational system, starting from the teachers and the curriculum, is wrong. They don't motivate students to go to school because they want to learn... there are people who find school as something that is forced upon them without their will and as long as they feel that way they will not sit and read because they want to learn (106-112).*

Another aspect that participants mentioned is the incapacity of the education system to include and integrate students with social or personal difficulties. As GYM1 expresses, *"Not only the system does not attract student towards education, it even repels them. When a student is different or causes trouble at school the teachers tend to label them as problematic and exclude them from the group so that they can go on with their work without having to deal with them" (77-81).* GYM2 shared his experience on how the educational system treated his "problematic" behaviour back when he was a student: *"I went to the third grade of the Gymnasium but I was doing so much trouble that the school headmaster personally invited my parents and recommended that I should drop out of school. Ok we all agreed to it, including me. The reason I dropped out of school was because I was causing too much trouble" (9-14).*

On the same level, participants dedicated a lot of time stressing the importance of the role of the teacher as a factor of social and educational exclusion. As most participants describe, the teacher had an influential role in their decision-making process during their childhood and adolescence. As GYM1 says, *"During primary school, his teachers embedded this idea into his mind that he shouldn't be at school and that he belongs to a group of people who should be working in constructions" (213-218).* SYM2 makes reference about the discriminative approach of some teachers to selectively exclude some students while favouring others: *"I distinctively remember some form of discrimination towards most students. Like I said, we already felt a culture of "good" and "bad" student in primary school*

*but when we went to the Gymnasium the teachers made it even more tangible for us. It was as if they placed us in the corner, ignoring us, and kept on their lessons with one or two students. This feeling was very intense” (118-124). Additionally, GYF1 recalls being physically abused by her teachers at school. “I was also beaten by my teacher, the one teaching religions courses. She was quite old, 50–55 years old and she used to beat us using her hands. I remember how she always tried to hit us in the face. I also remember another teacher who used to beat us, the one teaching physics” (237-240).*

Participants also recalled the lack of institutional support during an important transitional phase in their lives<sup>13</sup>, where students are called to choose a career path for themselves. According to SYM1, there was no career consultant at school nor did they have access to any other type of counselling support: *“When the time came to choose a path to follow and figure out what to do with my life, it was very difficult for me to do this as a Gymnasium third grader. I mean I would pay more attention to being with my friends. The only person who advised me during that time was a cousin of mine who was a lot older than me” (92-99).*

## ii. Transformative Dimension

Looking back to their childhood, participants provided a lot of information regarding actions and practises which contributed to overcoming their social and educational exclusion. These actions can be examined on different levels from the personal to the institutional.

### Personal level

Participants talked about their personal motivation and will to learn, to improve their school performance and advance educationally. Although they did not explain exactly how this process worked for them or how they took the life-altering decision to return to school, they consider their determination as an important aspect of this transformation. GYF1 explained: *“It was clearly for personal reasons, so that I would feel better with myself. So at some point, I asked myself, “Where am I going without a school diploma, without knowing 5 things, why can’t I do what other people do? Are they supposed to be smarter than me?” So after that, I made up my mind to do this. It was meant for me mostly, to satisfy myself, to*

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<sup>13</sup> After completion of their studies at the Gymnasium level, approximately at the age of 15, students in Cyprus are required to choose an academic or a vocational Lyceum for the next three years. This decision is considered to be very important because it is strongly related to the future professional career of the students. Both Lyceums allow students the option to take university entrance exams. However, the least competent students end up in the vocational track and rarely succeed in pursuing a university degree.

feel better" (202-207). GYM1 shared a similar opinion "*The reason I returned to school, just like the saying goes, I wanted to give myself a second chance*" (218-220).

SYF1 shared her experience of how her personal motivation lead her from a school dropout student to graduating with honours:

"I went back determined to study. We see other people who are there to learn as well, nobody forced them to learn, they were there on their own free will. And we would compete as to who got the higher grades. We might sit through the entire night studying, because in the morning we had to go to work, so that we can compete as to who gets the higher grade. Or we might arrange group studying to explain each other the course. You might stay up all night studying just so that you can tell the other person "I helped you". Or if someone would ask you something, even if you didn't know the answer, you would study hard until you can learn it and explain it to them. Because we were a team, especially my class during that year, we bonded. So I kept getting good grades, I never got a grade below 18. Driven by stubbornness and the healthy competition we had between the group members. I had good grades, I graduated with honours in the end, I felt proud because I studied hard and got what I deserved" (140-159).

### Family and Peer influence

This level of analysis refers to the perceived influence from the social network of the participants, as a factor of overcoming educational exclusion. They particularly refer to the influence and support they received from their families and peers to return to school. GYF1 described how he was influenced by his friends: "*The most important thing is the influence and the friends you had when you were attending the evening school. So, for me it was another reason to go, my friends and the persistence of someone to explain that it was a second chance for me and I should take it. After that you could see things with a different eye and wanted to go to school. There was encouragement*" (129-133). GYM2 talked about the support and encouragement he received from his family to continue school:

"I went to the evening school in 98' and in May 98' I had an accident at work which left me no choice but to stop school, I have my mother to thank for not doing that. The doctors told me I was going to be paralyzed, since I fell from a construction block six meters high. It was the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 1998. What you said about God before, it was as if someone protected me from dying. The first two days the doctors told me I was going to stay paralyzed but on the third day I got up. Ok, I had to stay in bed for six months but my mother used to carry me back and forth from school every day" (273-280).

### Institutional level

At the institutional level, we should mention that due to the fact that all participants dropped out of school—or morning school as they call it—and later joined the evening school where they graduated from, there is a clear tendency towards comparing the two educational institutions, where the latter is favoured. This comparison is important because

it reveals practices which contributed to overcoming educational and social exclusion. One of the first points they stressed is the rewarding behaviour they received by their school teachers and the positive effect that had on their perception of the educational system and their motivation to learn. As GYM1 explained: *"I remember back at the primary school, we had a school inspector as a visitor in our class. Because I was tall, I was sitting way at the back and he sat next to me. And he noticed how I would raise my hand all the time to give the answers, he liked it so he gave me some patting on the back showing me that he liked it. It felt nice to see that he appreciate it"* (2274-285).

Another interesting point of good practice they mentioned at the institutional level is the simplified and more accessible school curriculum they experienced at the evening school, compared to the morning school. As SYM1 explained: *"The curriculum was very nice and worthy and in general the educational methods were better. If someone would truly go there to learn and was interested about what he was following, the teaching methods from some teachers were particularly helpful"* (120-123).

Following that, participants stressed the importance of equal dialogue and cooperation between the body of the students and the teachers. According to the descriptions, this level of communication is important because it provided the students with a sense of belonging to the student body and promoted commitment to the school regulations. As SYM2 describes *"On punishment issues it was necessary to ask for our help because we knew the students and we were going to submit our opinion regarding a student's delinquent behaviour. Our opinion was always accountable"* (288-291).

Furthermore, participants referred to the economic aspect of education as a factor of overcoming educational exclusion. According to their descriptions, free education attracts more young people from all economic classes thus enhancing their access and opportunities to education. As SYM4 explained: *"The decision to return back to school was exclusively mine. I didn't have any financial support but attendance was free at the evening school so I managed"* (46-49).

Furthermore, participants referred to the school extracurricular activities and explained how it provided the students a sense of belonging to the group, which they identify as a factor which enables students to get more involved with the school. As SYF3 described: *"We would organize our festivals, our theatrical plays, some kids even participated at a theatrical play competition after I left. We would organize excursions once a year to go someplace. We had our nights out. It was something different but it made us feel like we were reclaiming what"*

*we lost from the morning school. Because we never experienced these things that morning school students do. The teachers tried to provide them for us, maybe not to the same degree as at the morning school but we had them (203-208).*

### Religion

This level of analysis is not well represented in the narratives; however some participants made references on how their faith to God gave them the strength to return to school and graduate. As GYM2 described in his narrative: *"I returned to school because I experienced an incident which got me very close to the church and that helped me. I had the need to do something so I decided to return to school" (82-84). "The main factor which kept me going at the evening school from the beginning was the church. After the first six months I started going to school I also became a verger at our village church, something I still do. I had a lot of support from the church's priest" (251-254).*

## **c. Work**

### **i. Exclusionary dimension**

#### **a. Non-educational**

In reference to evidence of discriminatory situations or inequalities that made it difficult for them to access the labour market, participants mainly refer to the problems they faced due to the fact that they had dropped out of school and did not have a school diploma.

GYF1 says that she felt discriminated at a job interview because she did not have the school diploma. *"I felt this at a job interview before I registered at the evening school. When I went there they told me "We want a person with a school diploma". Even though I had my logistic certificates, the LCCI, and had the capabilities and experience for the job" (606-608).* SYF5 talked about the depreciation and humiliation she experienced at her working environment because she did not have her diploma and was attending the evening school. *"There was this girl at work that I used to do the copying and filing for her and she used to call me illiterate, just because I was attending the evening school. I felt much mistreated having to work there for five years. She would denigrate me all the time. I was only 16-17 years old then and I was very sensitive and would often cry for being mistreated" (82-86).*

#### **b. Educational**

Participants did not make any references to specific conditions or practices developed in the school which restricted their access to the labour market.

## i. Transformative Dimension

### a. Non-educational

With regard to practices which contributed in overcoming exclusion and difficulties in the area of work, participants referred to issues of self-motivation and professional encouragement from employers.

SYM2 explained how the challenges he faced at his working environment motivated him to return to school and claim a better future through education: *"Many factors helped me, even the treatment I had from my employers. The discrimination I experienced sometimes got me motivated to finish my goal and graduate intermediate school and after that high school and then continue my studies at the university"* (78-82).

SYF3 talks about the support and encouragement she received from her employers to continue her studies and graduate from school. *"One of my boss' colleagues approached me and asked me why I didn't advance my learning in logistics, since I was actually working with it. And it was him that put the idea to my head to move on and get a diploma, so I started the evening school"* (12-16). On the same level, SYF5 referred to her experience with her employer *"My employer helped me very much. Whenever I had exams he would let me take one or two weeks off to stay home and study"* (6-8).

### b. Educational

With regard to practices which contributed to overcoming exclusion and difficulties in the area of work through education, participants referred to how their working and social conditions improved as they advanced through education.

As SYM2 describes *"I still haven't finished my studies from the University of Cyprus but I can already see how it helped me. More specifically it helped me get a better position at my work but I even noticed that the treatment I get at work is different. It's just the simple things that I noticed. I notice them because I was working there before I entered the university and I can understand the difference of before and after. For example, when my boss wanted to ask me to do something, he would be very cold. Now, he tells me with a sweet smile in his face"* (311-318).

GYM2 explained why he thinks the educational environment improved his social skills and relation with his social network: *"I believe that my social skills have improved. And I find that normal because when you are working from the age of 15 the only people you see in your social network are about 5 people. When you work every day from 8am until 5pm,*

*your social network is bound to be small. After you leave working life behind and join the university and come in contact with so many people every day, day by day you improve” (877-883).*

#### **d. Housing**

##### **i. Exclusionary dimension**

###### **a. Non-educational**

Participants did not make any references to specific situations or practices which excluded them in the area of housing.

###### **b. Educational**

Participants did not make any references to specific practices developed in the school which restricted their access to housing.

##### **ii. Transformative Dimension**

###### **a. Non-educational**

Participants did not make any references to specific practices which helped them to overcome exclusion and difficulties in the area of housing.

###### **b. Educational**

In general, participants did not made a lot of references regarding exclusionary or transformative aspects of housing. It appears that this dimension does not create exclusionary barriers for young people in Cyprus. This is probably related to the socio-cultural conditions in Cyprus where most young people don't leave their parents' house before they get married. In fact, they are expected and sometimes pressured to stay close to the family especially when there are no compelling reasons to leave, such as getting married or working in another city. There are almost no cases of homeless youth in Cyprus and it is considered a taboo for parents to expel their children<sup>14</sup> as it is almost unthinkable for the children not to care or arrange for the care of their elderly parents.

The only transformative aspect we can identify as educational that is related to the participants' housing situation has to do with how education equipped them with the knowledge to manage their expenses more efficiently and developed their critical thinking on housing matters. As SYM2 described: *“Education taught me to be more organized, not to fall out of my budget and to calculate accurately how much I need to save on things” (342-*

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<sup>14</sup> Anecdotally, some exceptions would be: family disputes over property and parents' lack of tolerance for their son's or daughter's sexual orientation.

244). On the same level GYM2 commented: *"I personally think was organized to some level even before evening school. But it sure helped me a lot on how to file my receipts and manage my expenses better"* (965-968). Finally, regarding the development of critical thinking SYM4 commented: *"Yes, I can say it did help me. I feel that I know enough things now so I won't get caught easily by a scammer who wants to sell me something which isn't good. I will investigate it thoroughly before I buy it"* (213-216). GYF2 stressed that education is only the tool and that it is up to the person on how is going to use it: *"I also think that education helps but it is always up to the person whether they will use it to their benefit or not. As long as the knowledge exist, which we acquired through school. It is important to develop your critical thinking skills to be able to decide for yourself"* (975-979).

## **e. Political and Social Participation**

### **i. Exclusionary dimension**

#### **a. Non-educational**

With regard to discriminatory situations or inequalities experienced by young people that are making their participation in social movements or political parties difficult the only reference that participants made was the lack of personal free time. As SYF2 explained: *"I didn't get involved with any social groups or extra activities because I didn't have any free time to do so"* (346-347).

#### **b. Educational**

Pertaining to practices developed in the school which restricted their access to social movements or political parties, participants refer to the inadequacy of organization at the evening school. SYM2 stressed the importance of organized groups at the school level which in turn would empower students to get more involved with the school and social movements. *"There wasn't even a parent's association at our school. We had to be the parents' association for ourselves"* (294-296).

### **ii. Transformative Dimension**

#### **a. Non-educational**

Concerning non-educational practices which helped them overcome exclusion and difficulties in the area of political or social participation, participants did not point out any information.

#### **b. Educational**

Pertaining to how education contributed in improving the situation of young people in the area of political and social participation, participants shared a lot of information. Their

references reflect the experiences they acquired through their student life, covering different aspects from personal to social level.

Starting from the personal level, they described how the educational process helped them develop their interpersonal skills and enabled them to socialize with different groups of people. As SYF5 stated: *"I got very well connected with some lawyers, who used to look down upon me because I was only a secretary. Now I get involved with everyone and they look at me from a different perspective. We need to have a paper otherwise people look down upon you. Ever since I got my diploma they started showing an interest in me"* (322-330).

On the personal level, SYM4, SYM2 and GYM3 discussed how development of their interpersonal skills helped them develop their social network and build strong friendships: *"Friendships were created from the beginning. It helped us to open up as characters and get to learn each other better, which also helped us in classes later on"* (SYM4, 131-133). *"Many friendships were born at the evening school, true friendships and we still contact, as much as we can of course. Distance might have gotten in the way with some people but we still have good relations and often arrange meetings"* (SYM2, 218-211). *"I believe that my social skills have improved. And I find that normal because when you are working from the age of 15 they only people you see if your close social network, which is 5 people. When you work every day from 8am until 5pm, your social network is bound to be small. After you leave working life behind and join the university and come in contact with so many people every day, day by day you improve"* (GYM, 877-883).

Participants also described how the new dynamics of the university environment gave them the opportunity to get them involved in students unions and other student social groups and associations. SYM2 shared his experience: *"I used to be all my work and salary and I never went out. During my educational course I realized I needed to offer more to the society, I felt this need. So as soon as I came to the university I joined the archaeology club and became a blood donor. There is still so many things I want to do"* (350-353).

On the same level, SYF5 shared her experience: *"I learned more about politics, I learned more about history that I didn't have a clue before. The more I learned I was able to comprehend things that I couldn't comprehend before. I don't need to hear things twice now. As you get more mature you understand things better"* (303-306).

## 3.5 People with Disabilities

### a. Health

#### i. Exclusionary Dimension

##### a. Non-educational

Regarding evidence of discriminatory situations or inequalities experienced by people with disabilities that do not help them to overcome their exclusion in the area of health, participants referred to their personal experiences.

SDM3 mentioned a recent incident of discrimination he experienced with an insurer, when he was denied any type of insurance other than life insurance because the company evaluated him as a person prone to getting into an accident:

“Basically, what I felt very strongly in relation to my health was when I recently went to get a life insurance. What I felt so strongly as racism was the fact that I was not allowed to be insured against any illness related to cancer, which I understand to some extent, but what bothered me the most was that the insurance company would not insure me for anything related to health. I asked the insurer “What if I get into a car accident, like anyone else, and I am left paralyzed, shouldn’t I be allowed to get insured for that?” His response was, although at least he seemed to understand, that as a person with a disability I am more prone to accidents so the risk for the company is higher and basically the only thing they would insure me for was in case of death; which is something that made me really angry because anyone could have a heart problem despite his disabilities” (152-167).

GDM1 also shared the insensitivity and cruelty of some health professionals when it comes to dealing with people with disabilities: *“I had spent 42 days in the clinic and paid more than 7000 pounds and nobody came to examine me. One nurse came and did something to my leg which left me sleepless for a week because I couldn’t sleep from the pain. And I heard her saying “his leg condition is serious, we should save it before they cut it of”, imagine listening to that. Another doctor, who is considered to be very good, told me recently, wherever you go, whatever you do, no matter which hospital you go or whoever surgeon operates on you, there is nothing that can be done for you. Did he have to say that in my face? Sometimes, there is total lack of sensitivity”* (275-283).

Another participant pointed out that people with disabilities deal with discrimination when they visit the public hospital. He believes that priority is given to foreigners and migrants and people with disabilities are served last: *“I come to realize that in Cyprus in the health sector we are being discriminated because when you go to see the doctor at a public*

*hospital, first it going to be the foreigners, then the Turkish Cypriots, the Vietnamese, the Filipinos and then the people with disabilities” (GDM2, 596-598). What is interesting here is how disabled individuals view themselves as a minority that is in conflict with other minorities, mainly ethnic ones. In this way, the Greek Cypriot disabled individuals feel that they have to emphasize their autochthonous identity to argue for their rights.*

Finally, SDM3 reported that even though the government provides whatever is necessary for people with disabilities, access to this support is sometimes limited or restrained because of bureaucracy and he suggested that some improvements should be made to speed up the processes: *“For some disable people, for example in my case, there is a need for an artificial part replacement, for maintenance and other services offered by the Health Ministry. Personally, whenever I applied I got a response, but sometimes there is a time consuming procedure which... especially if the artificial part malfunctions and you are in immediate need to repair it, you understand, you feel like you are chocking over a class of water. I mean, the whole procedure might take up to one month. Of course, to be fair, they do show understanding but again, there is this relevant delay which could be avoided. Perhaps there should be a procedure that would speed up the process” (370-380).*

#### b. Educational

Regarding practices developed in the schools which do not help people with disabilities to overcome their situation in this area, participants did not have any comments to make.

### ii. Transformative Dimension

#### a. Non-educational

With regard to non-educational practices which help people with disabilities to overcome exclusion and difficulties in the area of health, participants did not have a lot of information to share. The only reference is made by SDM1, who is involved with sports and also participates in the Paralympics. According to his descriptions, sports, especially recognition through sports, made him feel good about himself and his disability (63-66).

#### b. Educational

When asked about how education contributed to improve their situation in the area of health, participants found this topic very interesting. As most participants support, education is the strongest asset for people with disabilities. It is the area where they can feel equal and even better than people without disabilities. Aside from this perspective, they provide other examples as to why education is so important to them.

SDM4 refers to education as the process of staying informed about all the latest developments regarding his condition. As he explains, having this information enables him to deal with his condition the best way he can and also claim for his rights whenever necessary: *"Ever since I can remember, whenever I visit the hospital the director comes and invites me over for coffee. They are afraid of me because I know my rights and not only I know them but I also know which buttons to press when necessary. And if those buttons don't work I will press other buttons. So they know that if they mess with me they will have consequences"* (131-134).

On the same topic, GDM1 explains that it is important for people with disabilities to be informed about their condition so they negotiate better their condition with the health experts: *"In the old times whatever the doctor said it was like words from the bible. But because we have more experience with doctors and we also learned a few things from their terminology we can ask more specific questions. I am not going to have the doctor come and tell me whatever he wants"* (592-599).

## **b. Education**

### **i. Exclusionary dimension**

As mentioned above, according to the participants, education is very important for people with disabilities. When asked to discuss the barriers that people with disabilities come across in the educational context which are making overcoming of their social and educational exclusion difficult, they had a lot of information to share and discuss.

One of the first topics that participants mentioned is transportation difficulties, especially for those with mobility disabilities. This is especially a problem in Cyprus due to the lack of a viable public transport system, let alone one that supports the needs of disabled individuals. As they explained, even going back and forth from the university to their house was extremely challenging: *"Ok, basically I had some difficulties regarding my transportation, which was enhanced by the fact that it snows very often in Bulgaria. One thing that I had to have was a car, because even for 200 or 300 meters, when it was snowy it was very difficult to walk. Of course I have an artificial part which I use but moving around was very difficult so I needed the car"* (SDM3, 5-10).

Another topic which was common among the participants was the stigmatization they experienced by their fellow students and teachers. As SDM1 described: *"Because my disability is not so obvious, discrimination came by my fellow students. I experienced this*

mostly in Athens when I joined a new social network of fellow students among strangers where everybody would ask me what is my disability, how it happened, how do I use the prosthetic part etc." (102-106). On the same topic, SDF5 reported a similar experience: "My teachers neglected me. They felt that I could not participate in their class. When my mother came to school and ask about my performance, they told her "You daughter doesn't have a clue in mathematics" (19-25).

Another issue was the lack of special programs for the socialization of students with disabilities at the university. As SDM4 reported, he didn't have this sort of programs at his university nor was he aware of any attempt by the administration of the university to get involved in this sort of actions (284-286). In addition, SDF2 reported another issue regarding the incapacity of some universities to facilitate programs that will foster the access of students with disabilities in education. As SDF2 explained, even though as a person with disabilities should be allowed more time during exams, some teachers denied her of that right.

## ii. Transformative Dimension

This topic was also very interesting for the participants and they were very willing to share their experiences as to how education helped them to overcome social exclusion. Participants mostly referred to good practices in education which were important factors towards their social inclusion.

Here it is important to mention that it was only in September 2001 when the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture enforced the law for "The Education and Training of Children with Special Needs of 1999 (113(I)/1999)" and "The Education and Training of Children with Special Needs" regulations<sup>15</sup>. According to the description of the Ministry, the law and regulations are very comprehensive covering all levels of education (pre-primary, primary, secondary and technical, and higher) and pre-vocational and vocational training in schools.

The participants in this study argued that this law was an important transformative aspect in their education: "*Currently our educational system in Cyprus is subject to the law of special education to children with any disability, learning, cognitive or motor. The most important thing is to be recognized and get the approval from the provincial committee for special education. Once they get the approval, they have every right for support from the*

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.moec.gov.cy/eidiki/>

*government. This support ranges from simple assistance for transportation, to psychological support, even one-on-one lessons by teachers. The law covers pre-primary education, up to university, referring of course to state schools" (SDM4, 299-314).*

At the school level, participants identified the support and encouragement they received by their teachers who were also influential in shaping their perspective for their future:

*"The best support I had came from a professor at the University. When we met and asked about my problem he then told me that the best civil engineer in Greece was disabled and is permanently on a wheel chair. These words meant a lot to me because it convinced me that I can become a very good civil engineer despite my problem" (SDM1, 312-320).*

Another aspect which is mentioned at the school level is the overall support that some (private) colleges offer for students with disabilities. According to GDM2, his college was very friendly for people with disabilities and the teachers were caring and understanding to his problem. In addition, he mentions that the university even offered him a scholarship which was an important help for him, from a financial perspective (119-121). On the same level, SDF2 explained some other strategies that universities use that can be helpful to them: *"I get the notes from another student in the class and she gets paid by the student welfare office. The welfare office tries to help students with disabilities; I heard that from my student counselor" (354-355).*

Furthermore on this subject, participants stressed the importance of individual and extra courses for the improvement and advancement of students with disabilities. According to SDF2, the help she received from one of her university professors was very important for her academically as well as psychologically because it helped her overcome any difficulties she faced (314-317). SDF5 explains how she took advantage of the free time she had during gymnastics class, which she couldn't attend, in order to take extra courses. She also mentioned that this process helped her academically as well as psychologically (51-56).

Apart from school education, participants stressed the importance of education through extracurricular activities such as workshops and trainings for people with disabilities persons. According to SDM1, his participation in seminars, competitions and international conferences with other people with disabilities enriched his experiences and made him feel more welcome by the society (283-286).

## c. Work

### i. Exclusionary dimension

#### a. Non-educational

Regarding evidence of discriminatory situations or inequalities that made it difficult for them to access the labour market, participants referred to discriminatory behaviour by the employer and their colleagues. SDM4 described his experiences of being rejected from several job interviews because of his disability: *"I have experiences discrimination at all levels. For example, when I was looking for a job I went to many potential employers and most of them would turn me down saying "Yes, I do want an accountant but when he won't be busy I want him to be able to get into the warehouse and clean a bit or put the boxes in order". I would reply that aside from the fact that this is not within the work obligations of an accountant, I won't be able to do those tasks because of my disability and then they would turn me down (75-79).*

GDM2 shared his experiences from his job which can be described as being the victim of bullying by his colleagues because of his disability. *"On a daily basis I hear "who are you and why are you here? We don't want disabled people here, we only want able-bodied and we keep our feet on the ground" Or when I ask to go to the hospital, they don't like that. This is a violation of human rights. I am only asking for my rights, whether that is to go to the hospital or to receive subsidies from the government (55-60).*

#### b. Educational

Participants did not refer to any practices developed in the school which hindered their situation in this area.

### ii. Transformative Dimension

#### a. Non-educational

Pertaining to practices which help people with disabilities overcoming exclusion and difficulties in the area of work, participants referred to the important role of the government in including disabled people in the labour force. They referred to two types of programs that they had experience with. SDM4 talked about a governmental program that aims at encouraging people with disabilities to look for a job by offering an extra subsidy for full timers: *"After I got a job I started receiving another cheque for 20, 30 pounds a month as a subsidy for people with disabilities who work. And ever since I have the "post polio" I am considered paraplegic and I get the subsidy for people with severe disabilities" (225-228).*

SDM3 discussed the importance of special legislations that offer opportunities for people with disabilities to get employed in the government. He referred to the equal opportunities policy (EOP) which stipulates that for a certain percentage of positions in the government sector, priority shall be given to people with disabilities: *"Ok there is a new law that was adopted in December 2009 that stipulates that a certain percentage of people with disabilities will be hired in the public sector, where I also submitted my application. I hope, based on this specific law, that I will be hired in the educational service where I submitted my application"* (65-69).

#### b. Educational

Regarding the contribution of education in improving the situation of people with disabilities in their access to the labour market, participants referred to two examples from their experience. SDM4 referred to educational qualifications as an important advantage for people with disabilities in the labour market. As he explained, his academic credentials got him into his current career as a school teacher, which was considered as an accomplishment at the time that he graduated: *"Without a doubt, having a university degree in a period where only 3 to 5 out of 100 people with disabilities helped a lot. But that wasn't the only aspect that education helped me. Back then in Cyprus there was a special list for school teacher candidates, because people with disabilities were not allowed to register on the same list with the other teachers. So we had our own list and I was hired based on that list"* (333-338).

GDF2 also commented on the importance of educational qualifications in finding a job in a competitive labour market: *"Definitely I find it very important. This is a difficult period for anyone to get a job so for people with disabilities is definitely a big help"* (635-637).

### d. Housing

#### i. Exclusionary dimension

##### a. Non-educational

In reference to evidence of discriminatory situations or inequalities experienced by the participants that made the improvement of their housing conditions difficult, they referred to several examples, mainly during the period where they had to relocate abroad for their studies. SDM1 referred to the difficulties he faced in finding accessible housing during his studies in Greece: *"I had too much trouble in Athens in the beginning because my school was in the North area of the City where there aren't many apartment blocks but rather two and three floor buildings that usually don't have a lift. I would be obliged to use the stairs to*

*enter my flat which would be very difficult for me. So I chose to stay far from my school but in a building with a lift and I chose to stay on the first floor in case the lift would break I could use the stairs” (131-137). SDM3 shared a similar experience. “Definitely the buildings I stayed had to have a lift. Also, I was always trying to find a flat in the second, maximum third floor, in case something happened I could have easy access to it” (136-139).*

b. Educational

Participants did not refer to any practices developed in the school which impaired their situation in this area.

**ii. Transformative Dimension**

a. Non-educational

Participants did not refer to any non-educational practises which prevented them from overcoming exclusion and difficulties in the area of housing

b. Educational

With regard to how education is contributing to improve the situation of people with disabilities in the area of housing, participants referred to the knowledge they obtained through education as a factor which made them feel informed in this subject and more confident in signing their rental agreements. As SDM1 said: *“Definitely education helped me because when I found my flat in Athens I had no idea about rent or house bills. After I got involved though, the first thing I requested to see after I found the house was the rental agreement. I wanted to see exactly what was there so that I would know what it was that I was signing. Then I wanted to speak with the building manager and explain me all the procedures before I was convinced to sign the agreement” (525-531).*

SDM3 explained how he became accustomed in preparing applications and reading contracts because of his experiences as a student: *“It truly helped me yes. As a student and as a cancer patient back then, even as a person with a disability, I had to apply for various things in different services. That is how I got to know how the system works. When I decided to buy my house, I already knew the services I had to apply for in order to get what I wanted” (428-435).*

## e. Political and Social Participation

### i. Exclusionary dimension

#### a. Non-educational

The subject of discriminatory situations or inequalities experienced by people with disabilities that excludes them from political and social participation dominated the discussion with the participants. They identified many areas in the Cypriot reality where they experienced these restrictions. SMD1 talked about the cultural aspect of exclusion in social and political participation. He stated that disability in Cyprus is connected with stigmatization which makes it difficult for people with disabilities to blend in with the society:

“In my neighbourhood they used to stare at me a bit awkward to examine if am able of walking or if they could tell there is a difference between my legs. I had difficulties because I live in a village that doesn’t have the infrastructure to support access for people with disabilities” (156-161).

In relation to social stigmatization, SDM4 referred to the terminology that is used in the media as a factor which sustains or even enhances this phenomenon.

“There was this TV show with a girl on a wheelchair that kept referring to the wheelchair as the “amaksoui” (Greek for chariot), in the end I called them and reported this. It appears that the genius script writer that prepared that show could not comprehend the difference in the meaning between those words. Cause what is the meaning of an amaksoui? The person who sits in it is incapable of moving himself thus we cultivate the stereotypic perception of people in wheelchairs as the marginal people who in the end are useless and instead of paying attention to them we should give them a pension and find our peace of mind” (111-118).

SDM4 also talks about the importance of the family in supporting or discouraging people with disabilities overcoming their exclusionary positions. He talks about his experience with his mother.

“The first problem in overcoming their disability that people with disabilities face is their family. Even if the persons can get over their disability, their parents are often unable to, which is a factor that aggravates their psychological situation (451-454). My mother died at the age of 76 years old and just a few months before she passed away I went to visit her and she was crying. I asked why and she said, “Because you got sick”. Come on mum, I am 50 years old and you ask me now why I got sick 48 years ago? Parents never get over it’ (41-44).

SDF2 refers to the exclusion from social groups due to physical difficulties which prevents communication with other people. She brought up the example of people with hearing impairment. “*Definitely people with hearing impairment feel rejected by their society. People with no hearing problems often see them as problematic beings that live in their own*

*society, with their own language, isolated from theirs. This is definitely discriminating and it makes me sad"* (464-469).

SDM3 also talked about discrimination from social groups which is directly related with the condition of people with disabilities. He referred to examples from his daily life. *"Some people treated me as a person with serious chances of getting sick and dying in the near future. This happened mostly in my personal relations, I mean affairs, and of course by the families of the girls I used to date. This situation proves that the previous generation of Cypriot carries a more strict and puritan perception about people with disabilities"* (125-130).

Finally, SDF5 discussed the importance of a coordinating body that would provide guidance and support to people with disabilities. She reports that even though this association exists in Cyprus, they lack organization and their role is marginal. *"It would be nice if you could get informed by the Pancyprian Association for the rehabilitation of the Disabled, that is the purpose of their existence but unfortunately their association is unorganized and uninformed"*.

#### b. Educational

Pertaining to practices developed in the school which make it hard for people with disabilities to overcome social and political exclusion, participants only mentioned one aspect, exclusion from school activities.

According to GDF2 and GDM2, especially during secondary education, they faced exclusion from some school activities such as school theatrical plays. As they describe, they were not formally excluded from these activities by the teachers nor were they given an excuse as to why they should not participate. As GDM2 stated, it was obvious from the procedures that they did not have the right to participate: *"I was excluded from some activities but nobody ever explained the reasons that I wasn't supposed to participate to some specific activities. However, the procedure made it obvious that I didn't have to right to take part in it"* (85-89).

### ii. Transformative Dimension

#### a. Non-educational

Referring to practices which helped them overcome exclusion and difficulties in the area of political or social participation, participants reported a number of factors. SDM1 stressed the importance of social acceptance and recognition of the efforts of people with disabilities. As

he explains, recognition at this level gives people with disabilities the strength and will to continue their lives as part of the society. In his interview, he describes the change in the attitudes of his neighbours seeing him dealing with his disability day after day: *"Now my neighbours look at me with admiration as they see this young person that was left with a permanent disability surviving in this society"* (173-178).

SDM1 also talked about the importance of receiving support and comfort by other people with disabilities that can understand the problems and difficulties of this lifestyle: *"The first time I accepted to get psychological support was from some people with similar disabilities as mine. They approach me and explain me how to deal with my disability, what I needed to do. To be honest, I don't even know how the first contact occurred with these people, because they were strangers to me. But they found me through some mutual acquaintances. What amazed me the most was that these people heard about my accident in the media and they felt the need to find me and contact me on their own"* (244-250).

SDM4 raised a central issue on this subject, that of self-transportation. According to his description, it appears that for people with disabilities, being self-supported during their daily transportation is probably the most important link that keeps them connected with the rest of the society:

*"Sometimes I say half-serious that on the day that I got my driving license I was happier than the day I got married or the day my children were born. Because for me, the driving license is not like it is for you or any other person. It was an independence from the support I constantly needed from friends, family and relatives in order to move around daily. I was trapped without the support. Getting my license and a car meant that I no longer required any support"* (210-217).

Finally, SDM3 discussed another aspect related to the subject of transportation of people with disabilities as he denounced the lack of infrastructure to support the transportation of people with disabilities. According to SDM3, having experienced the infrastructure on this topic in some foreign countries made him realize how excluding this factor can be for people with disabilities in Cyprus to move freely (356-368).

#### b. Educational

Referring to evidence of how education contributed in improving their access in the area of political and social participation, participants referred to the advantages the educational environment has to offer for people with disabilities.

Most participants agreed that the educational environment provides opportunities to socialize with new people (SDM1, GDM2, SDF2). They mentioned the examples of student

unions and cultural groups which are organized within the student community. GDM2 stressed that the educational environment not only provides the onset to take part in social groups but also extends their social network outside the educational environment. In addition, education also offers the credentials which sometimes are requirements to be part of some groups:

“I am 100% confident that education helped me because a lot of social groups out there require formal education or a degree or some university acquaintances. This can be seen in volunteer and cultural groups. Even in our association that I am involved, I have noticed that people who lead them usually have a university degree” (690-695).

SDF2 talked about the significance of the role of the teacher and peers in fostering the socializing process of people with disabilities. *“During the first years at the primary school I definitely had a problem of socializing with other children. I was shy, I didn’t want to speak and I couldn’t express myself feely. Slowly and with the support of my teachers and fellow students I started making friends”* (333-335).

### 3.6 Gender Dimension

Although we have indications about the existence of gender-based discrimination and exclusion for all the vulnerable groups included in this research, this fieldwork failed to produce substantial evidence for this. The main reason for this failure lays in the fact that the interview protocol did not specifically ask for information on gender discrimination. Rather, it was assumed that the participants would have provided information on their awareness about the role of gender in their trajectory of social marginalization and their efforts to overcome it.

Furthermore, we argue that there are cultural reasons that contribute to the invisibility of gender issues in Cyprus. More specifically, there is a gaping lack of gender awareness in Cyprus which is related both to the fact that the island has been experiencing ethnic strife since the early 1960s (which culminated in the Turkish invasion and semi-occupation of the island in 1974) and the fact that there has never been a feminist movement here. In fact, the two phenomena are related given that what has been called the “second feminist movement” of the 1960s and 1970s coincided with political upheaval in the island which has effectively overshadowed any concern for all other social issues. This resulted in a situation where the “Cyprus Problem” consumes every aspect of daily life and dominates public discourse. The political issue on the island has been the main topic on the news for the past 36 years and it is the issue that absorbs the island’s financial and cultural resources. This means that any references to other problems that arise from internal divisions or discriminations within the Greek Cypriot community are silenced not only because they are deemed secondary to the political problem but, more importantly, because they are perceived as a threat to it.

There is a very specific example from the area of gender which shows this conflict: for the past 36 years, the government has been providing financial benefits to 1974 refugees and their children. However, children are recognized as refugee children only if their father is a refugee but not their mother. This blatantly sexist law has survived until today and any challenge to it by women’s organizations has been perceived as a distraction from the ‘real’ problem which is the one of occupation. The law is even more unreasonable if one takes into account the fact that in Cyprus (and especially 50 years ago) it was the women who provided the dowry which often included a piece of land. Efforts to rectify this injustice against children of refugee mothers have recently been met only with willingness to provide

symbolic but not financial benefits. The main argument from the government has been that this is a complicated issue and it would set back the government's budget by millions if such a provision would take place.

Given all these limitations, we discuss the findings on the gender dimension along with some clarifications about the national context that can provide a broader interpretation of the phenomenon.

## 1. Health

No information was provided by the participants regarding gender-related discriminations in the area of health.

## 2. Employment

One of the participants in the women's group brought up obstacles she faced at work when her pregnancy complications were used to prevent her from getting a promotion. This is a typical problem for many women in Cyprus that is often not recognized as a gender issue but rather justified by employers as "fairness" to other employees. Other participants in the women group also mentioned gender-based discrimination in the form of verbal attacks or questioning of their abilities to perform work-related tasks. They also reported that the administration may show tolerance towards such forms of discrimination.

None of the other groups mentioned any gender issues related to health provisions. It is important to mention here that lack of gender mainstreaming in official statistics makes it difficult to even recognize that there may be a gender dimension in labour-related issues. There was also no reference to the gender pay gap even though it is well documented in official labour statistics<sup>16</sup>. Furthermore, there are also indications that women continue to serve a "second shift" at home by taking a leading role in caring for the children, the house and elderly parents but this was not mentioned by the participants as a potential obstacle in their path against social exclusion.

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<sup>16</sup> See, "Labour Statistics" (2008), Cyprus Statistical Service. Also available at [http://www.pio.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/45093BCB88A1C158C2257712003F5524/\\$file/LABOUR\\_STATISTICS-2008.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.pio.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/45093BCB88A1C158C2257712003F5524/$file/LABOUR_STATISTICS-2008.pdf?OpenElement)

### 3. Housing

No information was provided by the participants regarding gender-related discriminations in the area of housing.

### 4. Social and Political participation

Within the group of cultural minorities, there is a reference from a female participant that suggested the existence of gender-based family influence as a restricting factor towards social participation: *"My father was like that you know...any father would be this way I think... you know a bit conservative cause I am the first daughter. Before 1980 was... you can't do this or that...I am not sure if it is because he is Armenian or simply because that is how he is. But that aspect of being over protective was very evident"* (GMF2, 19-24).

No other gender-related references were made to the issue of social and political participation. However, statistical information about the participation of women in public life in Cyprus shows that they are under-represented, especially if one takes into account the high levels of education by many women.

### 5. Education

Regarding comments on the educational dimension, there is a reference from a female participant from the migrant group which supported that the public educational system in Cyprus contributes to the reduction of gender-based discrimination because it supports mixed gender school attendance, which was not the case at the schools in her home country (SIF1, 104-105).

Indeed levels of education for women in Cyprus are high and in some cases they surpass the level of men's education. For example, women enter the university in higher numbers and graduate with more BA and MA degrees compared to men whereas at the PhD level there is still a predominance of male graduates. However, these figures are often misleading because if one takes into account the field of studies and the subsequent career followed by women, it is obvious that their choices are compromised in order to accommodate a future of being the main caretaker of the home and family. Many women enter the field of education or aspire to a position in the public sector where the time schedule allows them to be with their children in the afternoons. The role of the family is central in cultivating these

ideals. In his research on the role of gender in educational choice-making, Vryonides (2007) argues that some Greek Cypriot parents take decisions about economic and cultural investment on their children's education based on the child's gender. Most of them believe that it is important for their daughter to be educated but not in a way that would hinder her prospects of raising a family.

Finally, within the women group there were important indications about the gender dimension of educational and social exclusion. The women participants were initially excluded from education (e.g. forced to drop out of school even at the age of 14) because of marriage or family obligations. Their exclusion was not related to their performance in the school but to social reasons.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The fieldwork for WP16 has provided important information about the perspectives of vulnerable group members regarding their exclusion from different sectors of society and possible factors that can contribute towards overcoming social exclusion. In conclusion the main exclusionary and transformative factors for each group are:

Migrants face discrimination in multiple areas and the most important one seems to be the language barrier which excludes them from fully participating or having control of their situation in all areas of society. In this regard, education is also central in supporting their language learning and providing them access to vital information. Their participation in local cultural organizations is also a transformative factor.

Cultural minorities face discrimination in areas of work, housing, health and education. They feel pressure to assimilate with the mainstream group and they report racist attitudes by the majority culture. For all of them, education played an important role in helping them overcome discrimination and social exclusion. They pointed out that education is both a tool for personal advancement but also a way for creating channels of communication between cultural groups that can prevent racist attitudes.

People with disabilities face discrimination in all areas of society. Their exclusion begins from the basic level of having physical access to buildings and institutions and continues with problems of stigmatization and lack of sensitivity by professionals. Their discrimination often goes unnoticed and for many is a basic issue of everyday survival. The most important transformative aspect for disabled people is the existence of laws and regulations that guarantee their inclusion in different institutions, e.g. education and employment. Access to education seems to be especially important for this vulnerable group as it allows them to feel equal to other people and demand a better future. Furthermore, individual support provided by family, peers and teachers is also important in supporting their efforts towards social inclusion.

Women have been educationally excluded, mostly from education and in the workplace. In both cases, their exclusion is related to their stereotypical perceptions of women's role in society. This is a factor that also influences their social and political participation. A major transformative aspect for women is, again, the field of education. It provides them with the

knowledge and the status to fight discrimination. Through education women become aware of their rights and they can more effectively pursue them. Overall, education contributes to their self-esteem and to improve their skills for social and political participation.

Youth face exclusion mostly from education mainly because of lack of information about the educational system or lack of family support to continue with their studies. Their exclusion from education determines all their future options which are of course limited. Again, returning to education is the most important factor towards their social inclusion and the encouragement of teachers at the evening school was a major factor in sustaining their educational process. Access to education equips them with knowledge for social participation.

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### Internet Resources

Cyprus Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family, [www.domviolence.org.cy](http://www.domviolence.org.cy)

Cyprus Ministry of Finance, [www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/index\\_en/index\\_en?OpenDocument](http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/index_en/index_en?OpenDocument).

Cyprus Youth Board, <http://www.youthboard.org.cy/ereynes.shtml>

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e48dba6>.

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