

ESDN Conference 2023 – Stockholm Sweden

CYPRUS PRESENTATION 16-3-2023 - ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP FOR THE SDGS

Cyprus is taking steps to improve its performance on SDGs. Even though the country has low ranking compared to other EU Member States a lot of effort has been made and the situation is improving. As part of this effort Cyprus has submitted already two Voluntary National Reports – VNRs in 2017 and 2021 to the UN. We have also recently completed an EU-funded study, which focuses on providing expertise to monitor and promote the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and their integration into National Policies. The implementation of the project has been undertaken by the United Nations Institute of Training and Research (UNITAR).

Based on this study it has been decided to follow “Whole of Government approach” on the SDGs. A long-term action plan will be implemented and a strong high level coordination mechanism with representatives from ministries and other stakeholders will be created. The SDGs will be integrated into government policies and the budget of each ministry. A unified monitoring mechanism of all the strategies that contribute to the SDGs will also be implemented.

The proposed structure takes into account the following characteristics of the country:

- Cyprus is one of the most centralized countries in the EU, with central government employment being around 90% of total public employment
- Cyprus has, like most EU countries, a rather strong corporatist tradition: organised interest groups representing major groups of society (e.g., employers and employees or professional groups) as basis of the socio-political organisation of society; this is accompanied by a rather low general citizens’ participation.

What we have realized through the development of the SDG strategy is that the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires universal efforts not only by the Government, but also by the private sector and by all social actors whose contribution is imperative. These social actors include non-governmental organisations, local authorities, academic institutions, organised groups of citizens, and businesses. It is a diverse network united in promoting a multi-stakeholder approach for the implementation of the 2030 UN Agenda. The multi-stakeholder collaboration framework is further supported and enhanced by national, EU and international funding opportunities to promote and achieve the SDGs. Some of these stakeholders have also an active role in communicating and raising awareness about the SDGs among the general public.

In Cyprus the office of the Commissioner for the Citizen coordinates all voluntary and non-governmental organisations, and encourages the cooperation with local authorities. Through policy recommendations, the Commissioner for the Citizen encourages active citizen participation with emphasis on the young generation and utilizes European Programmes to fund NGOs and programmes that support active citizenship.

Cyprus has a tradition of voluntary engagement with 12.4% of the population aged 16 and older engaged in voluntary activity. This has been strengthened with the set up of a web platform: www.prosfero.com.cy, which supports NGOs in their effort to find volunteers and gain supporters/sponsors.

During the recent pandemic emergency, the volunteering movement once again demonstrated its value. With commitment to duty and discipline, working under difficult circumstances and faithfully following the protocols that the Office of the Commissioner for Volunteerism and NGOs had designed and published especially for the pandemic.

Implementation of the Project/Activity

With the activation of “The Volunteer Management Protocol in a Time Crisis” of The Office of the Commissioner for Volunteerism and NGOs, more than 1650 people were registered, including organized groups and organizations such as Political Parties, Educational Organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations, Motorcycle Clubs, etc. Approximately 850 volunteers were deployed around Cyprus, activating the minimum number of volunteers with targeted actions, in order to reduce the spreading of the pandemic, and protect public health. Special protocols were issued for volunteers and on-line training was provided. Special permission was issued by the office of the Commissioner for the activities of the volunteers and a follow up after the completion from each delivery or any other support was made by the volunteers. In addition to that, for any crisis situation the volunteers contact the officer in charge for further directions.

Sustainability and replicability

During the big explosion in Lebanon the same approach was used to gather 300 tons of food that was sent to Lebanon. The same approach has also been used in other similar circumstances.

New platform

Based on our previous experiences a new website related to the SDGs is under development <http://www.initiative2030.gov.cy>.

The platform aims to provide information in the context of the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The goal is to strengthen the effort to raise awareness among civil society and to encourage actions for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Specifically, this platform addresses the following categories of stakeholders:

1. Civil Society/Non-Governmental Organizations
2. Schools/Universities
3. Principles of Local Self-Government
4. Business - Private Sector

5. Wider Public Sector

The platform will be a central point from where the interested public (wider public and private sector, local authorities, NGOs, academic institutions, businesses, general public, etc.) will be informed about the actions and achievements related to these Goals.

The content of the Platform should achieve:

- Increase the degree of awareness for the promotion and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Cyprus.
- Improving the visibility of the results/achievements of the Sustainable Development Goals in Cyprus.

The completion is foreseen in February 2024

Other initiatives

European Youth Year

The European Union has decided to designate 2022 as the European Year of Youth (EYY). The main purpose of the EYY is to focus on the opportunities and prospects that must be secured for the younger generation. The EYY also aims at encouraging the participation of young people in the democratic and social life of the Member States, as part of the effort to build a greener, more digital and inclusive Europe. The National Coordinator of Cyprus for the European Year of Youth is the Office of the Commissioner for the Citizen. Several workshops took place at schools with the title Art as an Agent of Social Change. They focused on SDGs and raised awareness among children.