



REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Ref.MoH.5.21.01.91(9)

OHCHR Study on children's right to health – Human Rights Council resolution 19/37

Questions / Answers

1. Please provide information on the main health challenges related to children that your country is facing.

Health statistics demonstrate that the leading health related challenges of children in Cyprus are mainly related to lifestyle behaviours and include the following:

- a) Lack of physical activity
- b) Unhealthy dietary behaviours
- c) Use of addictive substances including alcohol, tobacco, drugs
- d) Injuries childhood/ traffic accidents
- e) Psychosocial problems

2. Please indicate the current status of the child's right to health under your country's legal framework. Please include information on legal provisions (including Constitutional provisions) which explicitly recognise the child's right to health. Also provide information on legal recognition of key determinants to children's health, including access to safe and adequate nutrition and housing, to water and sanitation and to health – related education and information.

All children in Cyprus have access to high quality health services. In addition, the children's rights are safeguarded in Cyprus with the children's law of June 2007(Law 74(I)/2007). The law enacted the institution of the Commissioner for the Protection of the Rights of the Child. The Commissioner's duty is to co-ordinate the uniform application of the provisions relating to the protection of children's rights. Therefore, the child's right to access to healthcare is ensured. The above mentioned key determinants are included to the children's rights and their application is monitored by the Commissioner.

3. Please provide information on national policies, strategies and plans of action for addressing the priority concerns and challenges identified in question 1. Please include information as to whether the child's right to health, including the right to healthcare, is explicitly referred to in existing policies, strategies and plans of action.

In Cyprus, children's health and wellbeing is set as a priority in all policies. All children living in the country enjoy free access to healthcare services. Additionally, special provisions have recently been introduced to ensure the immediate access to healthcare of children of illegal immigrants.

Furthermore, through the implementation of “Health in all Policies”, children's rights are protected and promoted through interdisciplinary / interdepartmental / interministerial programmes which are specifically developed with the aim to efficiently and effectively tackle determinants of health such as smoking, prevention of injuries, promotion of healthy eating, etc.

In relation to the psychosocial health of children in Cyprus, the Mental Health Services for Children and Adolescents of the Ministry of Health are child oriented and the right of children to health is one of the key principles underpinning their operation. Through diagnostic and therapeutic approaches mental health professionals defend the rights of the child and cooperate in this field with Social Services, Ministry of Education, other departments of the Ministry of Health, Legal Department, Court etc. Community centers and services have been developed in the community, in general hospitals of all districts, and their only dedicated clients are children - teenagers and their families. A great challenge faced by the Ministry of Health until recently was the need of a specialized unit for children with serious mental health illnesses. The first specialized Unit for children and teenagers with serious mental and psychosocial problems is expected to be in place before fall 2012.

In Cyprus, great importance is attributed to the development, implementation and evaluation of programmes of health education and health promotion, aiming at increasing children’s awareness on various health issues and the development of healthy attitudes and behavioural patterns. The health challenges as mentioned in Q.1 are mainly addressed via the School Health Services (SHS). More specifically, the School Health Services aim at maintaining health promotion of children and adolescents who attend public junior and high schools. The mission is the early detection, treatment and monitoring of health problems of children at school, the development of healthy attitudes and behaviour, the assurance of hygienic environment at school and the prevention of communicable diseases. SHS are provided to the schools by School Doctors and Health Visitors.

In relation to the issue of healthy eating, the SHS implement special educational programmes at schools for increasing awareness among children, through information by all appropriate means, education and training, such as lectures – discussions, slide projections, video tape screenings, preparing a healthy breakfast and/or a Mediterranean meal. More specifically, the children of Elementary schools are actively involved in the preparation of a Mediterranean meal which is then offered to them. This programme is implemented with the active participation of parents and the preparation of the meal is followed by a discussion on the subject.

Eating disorders are also addressed by the Mental Health Services of the Ministry of Health. They provide education to other professionals on early detection of psychological consequences of children with obesity and they are involved in the diagnosis and monitoring of treatment of children with eating disorders including children with obesity and concomitant psychological difficulties.

As regards the issue/challenge of inadequate physical activity, the aim of the implemented programmes include increasing awareness of children as to the benefits of physical exercise in controlling body weight and promoting physical and mental health. The long term goal of the programme is to establish the inclusion of exercise in the daily schedule of children.

The issue of tobacco use is approached by SHS with lectures, discussions, slide projections, video tape screenings as well as through the “Learning about smoking” model Educational Workshop. The particular workshop is addressed to pupils of the Elementary School and aims at increasing awareness in regards in relation to harmful use of tobacco, at developing skills to resist peer pressure and to claim their rights as nonsmokers. Through group projects, the children are

provided the opportunity to discuss, exchange views, solve crosswords as well as to play various roles.

For the prevention of accidents, a model educational Programme is being implemented among pupils of the Elementary school. With the aid of clever images on the computer and various other creative applications, the children learn what they themselves can do in order to avoid accidents.

Furthermore, the SHS give great emphasis on other health issues such as puberty, sexual education and prevention of HIV/AIDS. The particular issues are approached through lectures – discussions, slide projections and video tape screenings as well as through the “Travelling toward the Adult World” Educational Programme. The Programme “Travelling toward the Adult World” is addressed to pupils in the 1st grade of Secondary school and aims at maintaining and promoting the physical and psycho-emotional health during puberty. The basic aims of the programme are to help the pupils to acquaint themselves with the biological – physical changes taking place during puberty; to acquaint themselves with the psychological and emotional changes taking part during puberty; to acquire capabilities for the protection and the promotion of health during puberty, as well as to learn, acknowledge and manage their emotions in an efficient and effective way.

4. Please indicate what role schools have in promoting children’s right to health. Is health promotion included in the school curricula?

Promoting healthy and safe behaviours among children is an important part of the mission of schools, which is to provide young people with the knowledge and skills necessary to become healthy and productive adults. The new developed National Curriculum of the Ministry of education (2011) and the teaching methodologies adopted emphasize the learning process and focus on strategies which assist pupils in learning how to learn and in developing their critical and creative thinking. Among others, this curriculum promotes children’s rights already from the preschool time in an effective synergy with the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Education includes human rights and the rights of the child in their curriculum, which are taught in every school level and during different subjects. Parts of the new curriculum are implemented partially and are continuously evaluated before their full implementation. The aim of these programmes is to prevent bullying, school- violence, anti- social behaviour and contribute to psychological health of the child.

At the same time, the School Health Services as described in Q.4 offer various programmes for the prevention of illness as well as the protection and promotion of health and wellbeing of the children. Furthermore, since 1995, Cyprus participating in the European Network of Health Promoting Schools which is implemented in collaboration of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Culture. Various health issues are addressed in a holistic approach. Examples of programmes developed within the framework of the European Network of Health Promoting Schools are:

- The reinforcement of the pupils’ self-esteem
- Correct eating – correct attitudes of life
- Addictive substances
- Accepting differentiality
- Accountability and self-discipline
- Friendship and positive attitudes towards others.

In relation to mental health, the Mental Health Services of the Ministry of Health work in close collaboration with all involved professionals from the school, social and health sectors and through the implementation of multisectoral programmes they aim to prevent mental illnesses and promote mental and psychosocial health among children and teenagers. Special care is taken for children of immigrants and asylum seekers referred to Mental Health Services. After the first evaluation of the grounds of referral, these children are given priority in recognition of the peculiarities of living conditions and forced removal from their countries of origin. They are provided free services and translation facilities.

5. Please provide examples of good practices undertaken by your Government to protect and promote children's right to health, particularly in relation to children in especially difficult circumstances.

In the area of protection and promotion of children's right to health, the Ministry of Health Cyprus identifies the following good practices:

- **Access to healthcare:** All the necessary measures are taken by the responsible Ministry of Health to ensure that every child in the country has easy access to the healthcare system. Recent changes of the regulations related to the eligibility of children to free access to healthcare services, ensured that all children including children of illegal immigrants will be able to have immediate access
- **Education of healthcare personnel:** The Ministry of Health provides continuous opportunities to the personnel working in child health to attend seminars on children's right to health.
- **Health in all Policies:** The "Health in all Policies" is an important element for the planning and implementation of programmes towards the protection and promotion of the right of children to health. A great example of good practice in this area is the development of the new National Curriculum of the Ministry of Education which involves health as an integral part of education.
- **School Health Services and European Network of Health Promoting Schools:** The SHS of the Ministry of Health play an instrumental role in the protection and promotion of children's health. Among others they provide children with knowledge on various health issues with the active involvement of children and their families and the community. Additionally the MOH collaborated closely with a number of governmental and non-governmental organizations which offered their valuable expertise and knowledge on the children's right matter.
- **Protection and Promotion of Mental Health:** Mental Health Services for Children and Adolescents of the Ministry of Health participate in programmes like education and awareness in schools, in communities, education of other involved professionals (health visitors, police, etc.).

The Mental Health Services developed significant European research programmes aimed at combating the phenomenon of bullying in schools and domestic violence which have been proved good practices:

- Needs assessment and awareness raising programme for bullying in school (22/3/2006-21/03/2008), (European Daphne II program) co-financed by the EU and Cyprus

Government) through which the first nationwide survey was conducted in relation to the phenomenon of bullying and through this programme, manuals (manual for parents / students / teachers) were developed with the aim to identify and address the phenomenon of bullying.

- Cross-border research, education and introduction of technological innovation in services to prevent and control juvenile violence (2/06/2006-30/10/2008) program Interreg III, which among other actions nationwide, a survey was conducted on a representative sample of students from school A, using the United Nations (ICAST questionnaire on violence to children at school and home), a computerized log of abused children was developed
- «Awareness Raising and Prevention of Bullying Among students: Development and Implementation of a school Training Programme for Teachers (Daphne III program). A manual and experiential education programme for educating students and their teachers, for detection and management of the phenomenon of bullying. In cooperation with the Ministry of Education approved the incorporation of the health education course in several schools on a pilot basis initially.
- Research is being conducted in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Pedagogical Institute and the Greek Society for the Study of Addiction Disorder on the Internet for online habits of adolescents, including the Cyber bullying, and aims at examining the possible association of abuse with possible mental health problems.

The results of the above studies were disseminated to other professionals by organizing relevant workshops, presentations at conferences, writing articles, lectures to the public, posting manuals on the internet and spread in schools, organized parents, professionals, relevant ministries and services e.g. Ministry of Education and Culture and Social Services, etc.

6. Please indicate what the main barriers your Government finds when are trying to implement children's right to health.

A barrier to the implementation of children's right to health faced by the Cyprus' authorities is the issue of children of illegal immigrants who are not registered and therefore not known to the authorities. However, the Ministry of Health has proceeded with the necessary changes so that all children including children of illegal immigrants have immediate access to healthcare.

Other barriers faced by the government are the lack of resources and subsequent lack of personnel. Much more programmes could have been developed with additional funding and the sustainability of the programmes would be guaranteed.

However, regardless of any problems the authorities might face during implementation, children's rights are implemented in Cyprus in any case.

**Ministry of Health
Cyprus**

17th August, 2012