The European Union (EU) is all about opportunities that deliver real benefits and make a difference at a local level. The promotion of growth, employment and well-being across Europe is one of its main priorities. By investing in people’s ideas and visions, the EU is removing obstacles and creating favourable conditions for development and modernisation across the continent. In support of the pioneering and entrepreneurial spirit of Europeans, the EU opens doors and empowers people to pursue their own innovative projects.

Europeans have already come up with original ideas for better education, modernised healthcare and greener transport infrastructure, to cite but a few examples, and the EU has provided the means to get tailored projects off the ground. Where valuable projects struggle to win investment due to the reluctance of investors to take risks, the EU steps in by backing loans or providing funding for projects that have the potential to succeed.

For instance, an urban development project undertaken by the city of Limassol has helped improve the quality of life for its citizens. The project has transformed the city’s seaside park and revamped the historical centre with the help of around EUR 63.5 million of EU funding between 2007 and 2015 – around 90% of the project’s total cost.

EU funding offers people more than just financial support for their projects. Project beneficiaries can also access hands-on coaching and expertise to ensure their projects provide real added value for the people and communities around them. Results are visible thanks to knowledge-sharing and research facilities, energy efficient buildings or smart mobility solutions, which, in turn, lead to a more sustainable future for Europe’s cities and regions.

Whether it’s supporting organic farming or rescuing evacuation ships from emergency, EU funding is essential to boosting innovations that can save and improve lives. From cultural heritage and urban development, to youth unemployment and entrepreneurship, EU funds improve everyday life for all Cypriot citizens. Only some of these stories feature in this brochure. But look around in your community and you will see that behind European investments there is a wealth of people’s stories to discover.
Regeneration work ushers in a new era for Limassol

Major urban regeneration projects have been carried out in Limassol thanks to funding from the EU’s European Regional Development Fund. The projects have significantly improved the quality of life in the city and the attractiveness of the historic centre, the seafront and other areas.

“Limassol was transformed along the coast,” says insurance company director Andreas Neokleous – who was born and works in the city – regarding the changes brought about by the regeneration of the city centre, the seaside park, the park alongside the Garyllis river and the Pattihio Municipal Theatre. With financing from the EU’s European Regional Development Fund via the Sustainable Development and Competitiveness operational programme, projects worth a total of €65 million have given a new lease of life to the second most populous city in Cyprus and one of the most important ports in the Mediterranean.

The aim was to improve Limassol’s environment and quality of life, as well as to increase the competitiveness and attractiveness of its centre, which in recent years has gradually been abandoned by residents and had its historic character spoiled.

According to project leader Korallia Mavrou, “by promoting its traditional architecture, the project helped to maintain the cultural identity of the historic centre of Limassol.”

“The city centre became a destination for us again. We’ve rediscovered Plateia Iroon with its Rialto cinema, the medieval castle square, neighbourhoods we’d forgotten since there hadn’t been anything of interest there for years,” adds Andreas Neokleous. Since the regeneration, these areas are buzzing with life thanks to their new-found popularity among families and students, as well as a large number of foreign visitors. “Linking the castle square to the luxury marina takes you on a journey from the Middle Ages to the present,” Andreas says.

“New businesses – mainly bars, cafes and restaurants – are operating in the project area and new jobs have been created,” explains Korallia Mavrou. “Even though there was a financial crisis, the significant thing is that the existing businesses haven’t closed and there’s been a continuous increase in interest in new businesses in the area.”

With the improvements to the seafront, which had long fallen into disuse, Limassol rediscovered its identity as a coastal town, turning to face the sea once more. The seaside park starts next to the city centre and covers an area of 65,000 square metres, stretching as far as the old port and the Akti Olympion and Enaerios beaches. A cycle path runs the length of the park, linking the Akti Olympion beach to the marina. Along with cycle paths, playgrounds, footpaths, ponds, fountains and a sculpture park create a unique setting which offers a wide array of activities for local residents and visitors alike.

In 2016, the works helped lift Limassol to 88th place out of 230 for quality of life in the annual ranking of cities published by internationally renowned consultancy firm Mercer. The project was also recognised as an example of good practice by the URBACT European territorial cooperation programme for its contribution to managing the city’s sustainable development by focusing on economic, environmental, social and cultural revival.
Support for educational reform in Cyprus

Education is a long-term investment in the future of society, since quality education today means better citizens tomorrow. However, the quality of education is entirely dependent on the teachers who provide it. According to the Cyprus Education Reform Committee, good teacher training is a prerequisite for a successful education system. “It’s one of the key factors which have a profound impact on the performance of an education system. The role of the teacher in education reform is paramount,” the Committee notes in a report on the subject.

Based on this assessment and thanks to financing from the European Social Fund, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute has implemented a series of measures to ensure the systematic training of secondary school teachers and the redesign of the curriculum as part of its in-service teacher training project. A total of €15 million has been made available for this purpose.

“Co-funding by the European Social Fund was decisive for the implementation of these measures,” says Andreas Georgoudes, a Pedagogical Institute official and member of the team implementing the project.

Specifically regarding the changes made to the curriculum, Hadjikakou notes that “materials and handbooks were developed for secondary school teachers and pupils by working groups whose wages were funded by the European Social Fund.”

“One level of support is the provision of educational materials. But bringing teachers to seminars and telling them about the materials and their use is another level of support,” notes Andreas Georgoudes. The teachers who took part in the activities attended conferences on subjects such as ‘Teaching for sustainable development: school-community collaboration’, ‘Ancient Cypriot literature through the ages’ and ‘Intercultural education in the modern school’, to name but a few. The agendas covered both theoretical and technical matters, teaching issues and broader approaches to education.

Particular attention has also been paid to increasing teachers’ knowledge of information technologies and computing. Educational reform in Cyprus requires teachers to have more knowledge of areas such as information management and personal data protection, which they will also convey to their students.

“It was a particularly successful scheme because it managed to approach thousands of teachers throughout Cyprus and meet their real needs,” says Georgoudes.

Support for educational reform in Cyprus

The process of educational reform which began in Cyprus in 2010 is moving forward thanks to EU investment. The European Social Fund is financing the redesign of the curriculum, teacher training activities including seminars and conferences, and the production of printed and electronic support materials.
EU funds help save lives at sea

EU funding has supported the development of an innovative and economical maritime rescue system. It ensures the safe evacuation of ships and the immediate location of people in the sea after a shipwreck.

Tragedies at sea frequently remind us of what a difficult task it is to evacuate a ship which is in danger of capsizing and to locate and rescue people who are in the water after a shipwreck. Time and accuracy are decisive factors in saving lives.

Backed by funding of around €2.5 million from the European Commission’s FP7 programme for research and innovation, the Cyprus based Lynceus project opens up new avenues in maritime operations. Safe evacuation and rescue are ensured through the development of a revolutionary system based on radio sensors fitted into life jackets which send a passenger’s precise location to a special signal reception device using wireless technology.

“As soon as someone goes overboard, the device incorporated into the life jacket immediately sends signals which our equipment picks up in real time,” says Lynceus project’s technical director Antonis Kalis. “In this way, we can locate people and send their coordinates to either the rescue boats or the operations centre.”

Lynceus offers three important advantages over existing location systems. First, it ensures faster response times as it operates in real time, sending information directly to the rescue centre. Secondly, it is more accurate in determining the position of people in the sea than systems which use a satellite signal. Thirdly, costs are much lower than for satellite-based systems, thus allowing every life jacket on a ship to be equipped with the device.

“We have demonstrated that this system can work in real conditions,” notes Kalis. “We can save lives at sea, and that was the initial objective of Lynceus.”
Overcoming isolation by harnessing the power of the sun

With support from the Horizon 2020 programme, the Networking for Excellence in Solar Thermal Energy Research (NESTER) project is enabling Cyprus to overcome obstacles to innovation caused by its geographical isolation. The project is also exploiting the country’s unique location which means it has abundant sunshine and access to the markets of the Eastern Mediterranean.

If there is one source of energy which abounds in Cyprus, it is the sun. With more than 3,000 hours of sunshine a year, it is no coincidence that the Networking for Excellence in Solar Thermal Energy Research (NESTER) project is being coordinated by the science- and technology-oriented Cyprus Institute. The project aims to build links between researchers from leading solar energy research institutions to strengthen solar thermal energy research and foster sustainable solar energy use in Cyprus and beyond.

Benefiting from funding of €1 million from the European Commission’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, NESTER is breaking down the barriers to innovation in Cyprus caused by its geographical isolation. It is also exploiting the country’s unique location which offers exceptional opportunities for research and development of solar technology, as well as access to markets in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East.

“NESTER networks is a superb project, as is all of the Horizon 2020 training programmes,” says Cyprus Institute president Costas Papanicolas. Four leading institutions in the field of solar energy research from France, Germany and Italy are also involved in the network.

Other than providing training activities for scientific and technical personnel, NESTER also enables knowledge transfer among the scientific community through networking events and workshops. NESTER has already set up an annual series of autumn schools for concentrated solar technologies for postgraduate students and professionals starting out in their careers. These have been attended by more than 50 researchers from four continents.

Thanks to this collaboration, the Institute’s scientific and technical personnel have access to the most modern European solar thermal energy research facilities and are learning about the latest developments in the field, while forging links with European industry.

As Papanicolas notes, NESTER lowers the entry barriers to the EU’s knowledge economy for the citizens of isolated countries such as Cyprus and demonstrates in practice that the bright future promised by the knowledge economy is accessible to all EU citizens.

Support for young people’s business plans

Cyprus is investing in young people by backing their business plans. This has been made possible thanks to financing from the EU’s European Regional Development Fund through the Sustainable Development and Competitiveness Programme.

Stimulating entrepreneurship is one of the greatest challenges a country can face, especially when it is recovering from a severe financial crisis which rocked its economy.

The challenge becomes even greater when it is combined with the need to get young people into the labour market. Ambition, knowledge and skills have to be used intelligently to overcome lack of experience and to produce outcomes which create viable conditions for business growth.

The Cypriot Ministry for Industry and Technology allocated €12 million to the Youth Entrepreneurship Funding Schemes for the 2007–2013 period with financing from the European Regional Development Fund. The schemes funded business plans for people aged 20 to 40, whether unemployed or in paid work, who felt ready to start their own firm. The condition was that they operate in any sector of the economy other than the primary sector or trade. Ultimately this funding helped these young people to set up their business premises and buy equipment, as well as for training, promotion and start-up capital.

The success of the schemes led the Ministry to continue them in the 2014–2020 funding period using EU budget.

With support from the Horizon 2020 programme, the Networking for Excellence in Solar Thermal Energy Research (NESTER) project is enabling Cyprus to overcome obstacles to innovation caused by its geographical isolation. The project is also exploiting the country’s unique location which means it has abundant sunshine and access to the markets of the Eastern Mediterranean.
Funding opportunities for innovative companies in Cyprus

RCB Bank and Bank of Cyprus are offering attractive loans to innovative companies in Cyprus. The loans are being provided with the support of the European Investment Fund as part of the Investment Plan for Europe (in particular of the European Fund for Strategic Investments). Banks and enterprises in Cyprus were severely shaken during the financial crisis, which caused significant funding problems for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The innovation sector in particular, which has a high level of exposure to business risks, faced serious obstacles. With the aim of removing those obstacles, the European Investment Fund signed an agreement worth €10 million with each of the RCB Bank and the Bank of Cyprus, within the framework of the Investment Plan for Europe. RCB and the Bank of Cyprus are the first banks in Cyprus to work with the European Investment Fund, under the European Fund for Strategic Investments, to jointly bear the risk of providing credit for business. The agreement enables RCB and Bank of Cyprus to offer attractive loans of between €250,000 and €4 million on preferential terms to innovative SMEs and companies with moderate amounts of capital. Recipients have the possibility of combining the loans with funding under European Investment Bank schemes. This has the immediate effect of promoting the competitiveness of Cyprus SMEs, backing innovation and openness, and providing incentives for job creation. Businesses which have received research and innovation awards at European level or registered the right to exploit technology, and those for which spending on research and development constitutes a significant proportion of their overall operating costs are all eligible for funding. “Through such agreements, we are fulfilling an important part of our role. The role of the banking system in Cyprus is to provide much-needed liquidity to healthy businesses that want to materialise their investment and growth plans. This is how we help the efforts of the government to achieve viable growth,” said Kirill Zimarin, Chief Executive Officer of RCB Bank, on signing the agreement.

Work experience for unemployed school-leavers

With the support of the European Social Fund, school-leavers in Cyprus are able to gain work experience. This should significantly improve their chances of subsequently finding employment. The economic crisis which hit Cyprus mainly affected young people, who either lost their jobs or were unable to enter the labour market immediately after leaving school. From 26.7 % in March 2012, the country’s youth unemployment rate rose to 38.5 % in September 2013. At that point, the EU’s European Social Fund and Youth Employment Initiative began providing co-funding for the “Scheme to place unemployed school-leavers in jobs to acquire work experience,” which was set up by the Cyprus Human Resources Development Authority and the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance. With a budget of €8.5 million, the scheme’s aim was to give young school- and college-leavers an opportunity to acquire significant work experience and to improve their chances of finding employment after the end of the programme. A total of 1,322 young people found work placements with more than 700 public- and private-sector businesses and organisations, working under supervision for 6 months. “I really liked working with technicians and couriers, in facilities in the buildings and maintenance,” says Chalarimpos Chalarimpos, who worked in a large telecommunications company. “I was unemployed for a long time,” says Eleni Liasidou from Nicosia, who spent 6 months working in the Labour Department of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance in 2016. “It was a unique experience for me and it helped me significantly to acquire new knowledge and to continue working for some time.” At the end of the programme, more than 50 % of the beneficiaries carried on working, with 20 % of them continuing with the same business.
Searching for the missing in Cyprus

With the support of the European Union, the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus provides answers in the search for and identification of missing persons from the island’s two communities. Establishing the fate of missing Greek and Turkish Cypriots is one of the most difficult and thorny issues for the two communities in Cyprus. Bi-communal meetings and negotiations which began in 1977 led to the establishment of the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus (CMP) in 1981. Over the following two decades, the CMP managed to compile an official list of 2,001 missing persons. Subsequently, between 2006 and 2016, it undertook more than a thousand excavations and exhumations across the island and managed – with remarkable success – to identify half of the people on the list. Since 2006, the European Union has been the CMP’s main donor with a total contribution of €22.4 million to date (covering approximately 80% of its operating costs), and has also been a valued partner, providing steady support through multi-year funding which ensures the continuity of CMP’s work.

The goal of ‘Projecting our past to the future’ is to create an innovative framework for the training of researchers which combines a strong academic foundation and high-level knowledge with market-oriented skills, so as to significantly enhance participants’ career prospects. The 20 researchers who were granted scholarships have received training in digital documentation, conservation and preservation of cultural heritage. This has taught them how to exploit the limitless possibilities offered in this field by the internet, digital photography, video, databases, digital imaging and other new technologies.

Digital conservation of cultural heritage

Funding from the EU’s FP7 research and innovation support programme is creating opportunities for young researchers to combine academic knowledge with technical training. They will use the new skills for the digital documentation and preservation of cultural heritage.

Cyprus has a rich cultural heritage and recording, preserving and exploiting that heritage is necessary in order to ensure that it is saved and promoted worldwide rather than lost in the mists of time. With the backing of the European Union’s FP7 research and innovation programme, 14 full partners and nine associate organisations from 10 EU Member States have created the Initial Training Network for Digital Cultural Heritage (ITN-DCH). Coordinated by the Digital Heritage Research Lab of the Cyprus University of Technology, ITN-DCH uses €3.7 million in FP7 funding to provide 20 scholarships for researchers under the ‘Projecting our past to the future’ project.

The project coordinator, Dr Marinos Ioannides says that the work at the Digital Heritage Research Lab is guided by the motto ‘our fathers’ memories are behind us, our children’s eyes before us.’
WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION:

General information about the Investment Plan for Europe:
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