



European Prevention Curriculum (EUPC) Experiences in Cyprus

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Abstract

This practitioner narrative provides a comprehensive overview of the implementation of the European Prevention Curriculum (EUPC) in Cyprus, contributing to the Special Issue on EUPC implementation practices and lessons learned. The Cyprus National Addictions Authority (NAAC) is the main coordinating body responsible for licit and illicit substances, as well as gambling disorders, as defined by national legislation. As the national reference point and coordination centre for the EUPC, NAAC has played a key role in introducing and establishing EUPC training in Cyprus. By the end of 2024, five training sessions had taken place with the participation of 68 Decision-Opinion-and Policy-Makers (DOPs) from various sectors, including governmental and non-governmental organizations, law enforcement, and education. These training sessions have been facilitated by four national trainers, with the goal of conducting two training cycles per year to ensure broad participation. The integration of the EUPC into the licensing and funding processes of prevention programs has streamlined associated procedures, providing a structured rationale and evidence-based knowledge to relevant stakeholders. Since the introduction of the EUPC, trainers have noticed a gradual shift in the perception of evidence-based prevention among NAAC and stakeholders in the field of addictions. However, embedding EUPC principles into national practices is an ongoing process that requires sustained efforts. Change does not occur overnight, and the full impact of the EUPC at the national level will only become evident over time. Looking ahead, NAAC is committed to advocating for the continued delivery of EUPC training for prevention DOPs. Data on process evaluation is being collected, with plans to analyze evaluation data in the future and assess the effectiveness of these training sessions.

Keywords Prevention · Addiction · EUPC · Prevention criteria

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Introducing the EUPC in Cyprus

According to its legislation (Republic of Cyprus, 2017), the Cyprus National Addictions Authority (NAAC) is the main coordinating body responsible for licit and illicit substances, as well as gambling disorders. Its primary responsibilities include, among others, drafting and monitoring the National Addictions Strategy and Action Plans, as well as overseeing the licensing, evaluation, funding and coordination of all programmes, actions, and activities related to substance use and gambling disorders. Through the National Strategy 2021–2028 (NAAC, 2020a), NAAC aims to enhance the quality and effectiveness of treatment and prevention programmes and services. Additionally, the Action Plan 2021–2024 (NAAC, 2020b), which accompanies the National Strategy, focuses on improving the quality of services provided through professional training and the evaluation of programmes and interventions, including the development and implementation of tools and mechanisms for assessing the needs of individuals participating in NAAC-licensed programmes. NAAC is currently structured in two departments: the Policy Department and the Monitoring Department, the latter also serving as the focal point for the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA).

NAAC also establishes methodological approaches and operational specifications for prevention programmes. To this end, prevention guidelines have been developed to ensure a nationwide system that upholds minimum quality standards in drug prevention. These guidelines were initially published in 2010 (CAC, 2010) and set the criteria for quality assurance. They were later updated in 2020 (NAAC, 2020c) to incorporate the latest European developments, such as the European Drug Prevention Quality Standards (EDPQS) (EMCDDA, 2011), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) International Standards on Drug Use Prevention (UNODC, 2015; UNODC, 2018) and the EUPC Manual (EMCDDA, 2019). These documents are instrumental at the policy level, ensuring that implemented programmes meet minimum quality standards. Key stakeholders responsible for programme implementation are also informed about the evaluation criteria necessary for approval and/or funding.

In 2019, NAAC was notified by the Monitoring Department that the EUDA, formerly known as the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), would be organising a basic training on EUPC. Subsequently, three NAAC officers completed the online basic module of the EUPC in October 2020. Following this, in December 2021, the first two National Trainers successfully completed the Training of Trainers (ToT). The first EUPC training in Cyprus took place in 2022. The version implemented in Cyprus is the “EUPC for Decision-, Opinion- and Policy-Makers (DOPs)”. In Greek, it is referred to as «Ευρωπαϊκό Εγχειρίδιο για την Πρόληψη» (Evropaiko Eggeridio gia tin Prolipsi). The EUPC training is available to all DOPs at the national level, (covering areas under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus). By the end of 2024, a total of 68 DOPs were trained (see Table 1).

Several stakeholders, including prevention workers, officers from the prevention unit of the Drug Law Enforcement Unit, Nursing Services,

Table 1 Number of DOPs trained

Year/semester	Male	Female	Total
2022/ 1st	1	6	7
2022/ 2nd	2	9	11
2023/ 1st	3	13	16
2023/ 2nd	3	16	19
2024/ 1st	3	12	15
TOTAL	12	56	68

semi-governmental organisations (SGOs), representatives from the Ministry of Education and school counsellors, have now been trained in the EUPC (see Table 2). Initially, most participants were selected from the two key Ministries responsible for shaping governmental policy on prevention. There number of NGOs actively engaged in the field of prevention in Cyprus is relatively small, but they have been fully represented in the training sessions. The geographical scope of DOP outreach encompasses the entire area of the island under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus. While the most relevant DOPs have been selected for training, estimating their total number remains challenging. Given Cyprus's size, the number of DOPs is likely to reach, at most, a few hundred.

The selection of DOPs was strategically aimed at facilitating the allocation of funds, shaping prevention policy, and influencing key players' conceptualisation of the field. Regarding evaluation, participants are required to complete a pre- and post-training questionnaire, which primarily assesses self-perceived knowledge of basic EUPC concepts, as along with a process evaluation. The pre- and post-training questionnaire is an integral part of the EUPC material. The process evaluation, developed by EUPC trainers, provides both qualitative and quantitative feedback on participants' training experience, including aspects such as duration, facilities, teaching quality and future recommendations. However, these results have yet to be analyzed or published. It is also important to note than an outcomes evaluation of the EUPC training has not yet been conducted.

Information about the training sessions is regularly shared through the NAAC website (<https://www.naac.org.cy/>), its Annual Reports, and monthly newsletters. Additionally, the accreditation procedures of prevention programmes in

Table 2 Participants' affiliation

Institution	Number of participants
Ministry of education, sport and youth	35
Ministry of health	10
Police drug law enforcement unit	6
NGOs	10
Semi- governmental organisations	6
Academics	1

Cyprus, including details on the EDPQS and the EUPC, have been published in the *Journal of Addictologie* (Kyprianou et al., 2023).

How the EUPC is Organised in Cyprus

NAAC serves as the national reference point and coordination centre for the EUPC basic training in Cyprus. Currently, four NAAC officers (the Head and three officers from the Policy Department) have been fully trained as National Trainer. Additionally, two other NAAC officers have completed the Basic Training and the PLATO Advanced Training. PLATO is an EUDA web-based platform supporting formal and informal professional training, networking and practice sharing in the field of drug prevention. All Policy Department officers involved in the EUPC training are part of the prevention team and have a background in social and political sciences. The fact that all national trainers belong to the same organization facilitates seamless coordination and organization of training sessions. In case a professional from a different organization becomes certified as a national trainer, NAAC must be formally notified. However, at present, no other organizations or individuals outside NAAC are involved in delivering EUPC training in Cyprus.

NAAC's management board has committed to providing the EUPC training with the goal of promoting knowledge on evidence-based prevention, which will also serve as the foundation for licencing prevention programmes in Cyprus. The objective is to conduct training sessions twice a year, ensuring that as many as DOPs as possible in the field of prevention participate in the EUPC basic training. Starting in 2024, participation in the EUPC basic training will be a prerequisite for the approval of prevention programs, requiring that their scientific coordinators have completed the training. To date, EUPC training has been conducted exclusively in a face-to-face format, spanning two to three days per session. The provision of regular EUPC basic training by NAAC is now regarded as a standard procedure. The initiative is ongoing, and there are no plans for its termination. The budget required to organize the training sessions is fully covered by NAAC, ensuring the project's sustainability.

In accordance with its governing legislation (Republic of Cyprus, 2017), NAAC is responsible for: “the licensing of any measures, programmes and interventions addressed to the public and concerning prevention of addiction, treatment, reduction of harm and social rehabilitation”. Furthermore, the law stipulates that: “No person, or body of public, private, or voluntary sector shall implement any measure or intervention, without obtaining the relevant permission by the Authority”.

The certified trainers work in close collaboration and are supervised by the Head of the Policy Department to ensure the quality of training delivery. The collected data includes: participants' names, affiliations, positions, email address, and their interest in advanced training and ToT. Additionally, records are maintained on the number of training sessions, their dates, and participant numbers.

A Typical EUPC Training in Cyprus

A typical EUPC training in Cyprus consists of a group of 15–18 participants and is conducted face-to-face over 3 days, with approximately six hours per day. The training is delivered by three national trainers in Greek and follows the full agenda outlined in the EUPC manual (EMCDDA, 2019).

Modifications to the training material primarily relate to epidemiology, incorporating national data on substance use trends in Cyprus. Some minor adaptations have also been made to accommodate time constraints and cultural relevance. For example, when discussing tobacco use, the training includes data on waterpipe smoking, which is particularly relevant in the local context. Additionally, certain exercises have been streamlined; for instance, when presenting case studies, trainers may provide two examples instead of three to better fit the available time.

In Cyprus, DOPs include stakeholders from NGOs, Ministries, Municipalities and NAAC itself, individuals and entities responsible for shaping prevention strategies, overseeing programmes, and allocating funding. The EUPC is promoted through collaboration between governmental and non-governmental sectors, utilizing all available communication channels (website, social media, newsletter, meetings etc.). The EUPC training is provided free of charge to all participants, including access to training materials. Due to high demand, a waiting list is maintained, with places allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.

Lessons Learnt

Since the implementation of the EUPC, there has possibly been a shift in how NAAC and relevant stakeholders in the field of addictions perceive evidence-based prevention. This shift is increasingly evident in licencing and funding applications for prevention programmes, where an increasing number of stakeholders are incorporating EUPC principles into their proposals.

However, it is important to be measured when assessing the extent of EUPC's impact on prevention efforts in Cyprus. At this stage, discussions about results and impact are based primarily on trainers' perceptions. Many high-level decision-makers, such as MPs in the Committee of Health of the House of Representatives, who are responsible for passing or rejecting legislation related to addictions, have not yet received the EUPC training. The same applies to several high-ranking officials within Ministries and other stakeholders considered high-priority DOPs. Nevertheless, NAAC remains committed to promoting the core aspects of the EUPC beyond formal training sessions, engaging DOPs through meetings and conferences. Moreover, NAAC aims to establish follow-up meetings for all EUPC training recipients to assess how they apply their knowledge in their daily work. The first such meeting is scheduled to take place in 2025.

It is important to acknowledge that some concepts in the EUPC are entirely new to most DOPs, while others challenge long-standing approaches to

prevention programme development and implementation in Cyprus. For example, the previously common practice of using ex-users' testimonials was discontinued after EUPC data demonstrated that this method is ineffective and may even produce counterproductive results. According to the NAAC legislation (Republic of Cyprus, 2017), all prevention activities, including isolated prevention activities/ measures/ campaigns, must receive formal approval. Since 2023, no proposals for ex-users testimonials initiatives have been submitted. However, one of the most persistent challenges is that certain stakeholders continue to promote isolated prevention campaigns that do not align with EUPC principles, often without NAAC's consent. Notably, NAAC has been increasingly successful in addressing this issue by raising awareness among stakeholders about approval procedures. Furthermore, NAAC is actively working to promote the use of appropriate prevention language among media organizations, decision-makers, and other stakeholders. This remains a significant challenge, but it is crucial for eliminating the social stigma associated with substance use.

Based on the trainers' perspective, the main challenges faced by DOPs during the EUPC training included:

- Resistance to changing long-held beliefs about the provision of information in prevention,
- Helping participants understand the importance of prevention language,
- Completing the EDPQS group work exercise,
- Shifting the belief that boosting self-esteem and punishing inappropriate behaviour are ineffective prevention strategies,
- Developing a clear understanding on how to design an effective media campaign,
- Recognising the importance of evaluation and monitoring tools when implementing a prevention programme,
- Reinforcing basic theoretical concepts related to prevention and treatment, and
- Introducing and understanding the concept of environmental prevention.

It has been observed that these challenges are less associated with the professional backgrounds of the trainees and more closely linked to their prior experiences and existing perceptions.

These challenges can be addressed by grounding training in the latest European-level data, providing relevant examples, guiding participants through exercises, and reinforcing key EUPC concepts. It is unrealistic to expect stakeholders and prevention DOPs to fully implement EUPC principles immediately. Instead, the impact of the EUPC will become more visible over time as these concepts gradually take root at the national level.

NAAC has been actively promoting the EUPC in meetings with prevention programme stakeholders and coordinators, addiction specialists and policymakers. It also raised awareness through its annual network meetings, presentations to school personnel, and discussions with policymakers on the future of prevention. Additionally, when professionals such as teachers and social workers contact NAAC requesting a "lecture about addictive substances", EUPC training is offered as the preferred option.

Advocating for the participation of prevention DOPs in the EUPC training remains crucial. NAAC's ultimate goal is to expand training opportunities to reach a larger audience and train more national trainers. One main challenge that arises is that some stakeholders find it difficult to commit to a three-day training. Moving forward, it will be essential to explore more flexible training formats that accommodate participants' time constraints while maintaining the quality and effectiveness of the training.

Conclusions

In Cyprus, NAAC serves as the national coordinating body for addiction-related policies, including the implementation of the EUPC. To date, five training sessions have been conducted, with a total of 68 DOPs participating. Within the framework of licensing and funding, the EUPC has facilitated these processes by providing a structured rationale and evidence-based knowledge, supporting the development and approval of prevention programs.

Since the introduction of the EUPC, there has been a noticeable shift in how NAAC and many relevant stakeholders in the field of addictions perceive evidence-based prevention. This is particularly evident in the increasing number of licensing and funding applications for prevention programs that incorporate EUPC concepts, reflecting a growing commitment to scientifically grounded approaches.

Looking ahead, NAAC continues to advocate for the expansion of EUPC training for prevention DOPs. A key need identified through the training sessions is the provision of more targeted training for frontline prevention professionals, equipping them with practical skills for implementing evidence-based prevention strategies. NAAC aims to extend the reach of EUPC training to a broader audience and to train additional national trainers to ensure sustainability. Another priority for the future is to analyze existing evaluation data and conduct a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of the training.

Based on NAAC's experience, prospective EUPC training facilitators are advised to carefully plan all necessary steps for implementing the program, including securing financial and human resources, ensuring broad geographical coverage, and establishing long-term sustainability. Additionally, it is highly recommended to have multiple national trainers working collaboratively as a team to enhance the quality and efficiency of the training delivery.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors are staff members of the NAAC, which is responsible for implementing the EUPC in Cyprus.

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