**New EU-funded programme bolsters and expands pre-kindergarten programmes**

A major push to enhance the two-year pre-kindergarten programme at 978 schools nationwide will be supported by the EU Operational Programme"Human Resources Development, Education and Life Lifelong Learning 2014-2020", and will be endowed with an 18.9 million euro budget.

This project aims to bolster the operation of kindergartens during the 2016-2017 school year by upgrading the educational quality with a two-year pre-school programme.

Upgrading pre-school education and training (Early Childhood Education Care) with a two-year pre-kindergarten programme is, undoubtedly, a fundamental, if not crucial, priority for the Council of Europe, as regards efficiency and equality in the framework of the European educational and training systems (2007).

The Council of Europe Framework highlights the importance of the best possible start in life, with an emphasis on accessibility, upgrading the quality of the educational offering, and developing the skills of educational personnel, taking into consideration the basic targets of preventing dropouts and reducing the number of people who live in poverty.

It is estimated that the upgrade of the quality of early childhood education will be successfully accomplished within the framework of a pre-school educational programme.

Teachers hired for the aforementioned action will be employed in the two-year pre-kindergarten programme.