



Exchange of good practices on gender equality

**Gender Impact
Assessment**
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Comments Paper - Cyprus

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Gender Impact Assessment in Cyprus

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1. Introduction

Despite Cyprus's legislative framework on equality between women and men, the fulfilment of women's rights requires more than the removal of formal barriers and there remain political, socio-economic, and cultural barriers to the advancement of women in Cyprus. The most important barriers for the purposes of the incorporation of gender mainstreaming in policy processes are political.

Cyprus does not have a long history of gender equality and there is no broad political agreement on gender equality policy. There is a lack of gender balance in almost all walks of life and thus masculine models throughout decision-making in all social and political structures and processes including government and political parties, parliament, judiciary, economy, and mass media as well as weak implementation and monitoring mechanisms.

Gender mainstreaming in Cyprus is neither fully understood nor implemented at any level. Gender issues continue to be treated as 'women's issues', i.e. issues related to women only, and not as issues relating to society as a whole. A number of National Action Plans have been adopted foreseeing concrete actions to address various gender equality issues such as employment, family violence, trafficking in human beings, poverty and social exclusion, integration of third-country nationals and so on. However, these are not accompanied by the sufficient political will and sufficient resources for their full and effective implementation. More importantly, gender analysis and gender mainstreaming are lacking in all these policy documents despite the inclusion of gender-disaggregated data (particularly with reference to employment, violence, and poverty and social exclusion) and, in some cases, stated gender equality policy priorities.

1.2. General Policy Context

In the absence of a specific law or legislative provision for gender mainstreaming in Cyprus, the most important national policy document that makes reference to gender mainstreaming is the National Action Plan on Equality between Women and Men (2007-2013). In this document several references are made to gender mainstreaming (“η ενσωμάτωση της διάστασης του φύλου”) although the principle of gender mainstreaming is not clearly defined, nor implemented in the policy frames and structure of the Plan. This mirrors the frequent use of the term in policy discourse on gender equality, demonstrating that gender mainstreaming is often confused with gender equality or ‘women's issues’ and not understood as a reorganisation of policy processes to promote equality between women and men.

According to a mid-term evaluation of the NAP carried out by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS), most progress seen in the field of promotion of women in the labour market and combating violence against women (mainly domestic violence) as these two issues have generally received more political and financial support. Unfortunately, due to the lack of political will and corresponding

lack of resources, there has not been any significant progress in other areas, particularly those that directly affect attitudes and perceptions towards equality between women and men such as education, media, and the representation of women in decision-making. More importantly, what was found to be most lacking was the incorporation of a gender mainstreaming approach in all policies horizontally and particularly in relation to areas such as tax and social insurance policy, economic policy and budget development, etc.

In relation to institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women's rights, a range of bodies/structures exist in the public sector, according to their specific sphere of competence. However, it is important to stress that in the absence of a national policy on gender equality, such bodies work in a fragmented manner and with little if any coordination/communication among them. The development of a holistic and integrated gender policy in Cyprus which would provide the necessary impetus and direction that is currently lacking in the implementation of gender equality policy in each individual ministry and government department, but also within the public administration as a whole in Cyprus. At the moment each ministry and municipality, and often services within such bodies, implement gender equality initiatives with little if any consultation or coordination. It is often unclear what the objectives of the policy initiatives or actions are, what their connection to gender equality is, and there is rarely any follow-up or evaluation.

2. Gender Mainstreaming in Cyprus

A small yet important development for the incorporation of gender mainstreaming in policy formulation are the development of gender-disaggregated statistics and more systematic data collection in all areas, with the Cyprus Statistical Service playing a leading role in this effort. Despite this, it is unclear how this data actually informs policy formulation. Research has also been developed on gender equality issues by academic institutions, NGOs, and women's organisations, and the National Machinery for Women's Rights (NMWR) of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order has actively supported these efforts. Again, however, it is not clear how this knowledge feeds into gender equality policy, if at all.

Gender budgeting at the national level has not yet been introduced, despite an initiative of the NMWR that organised an information seminar on the issue in 2008 with the involvement of relevant stakeholders such as the Ministry of Finance and the Parliamentary Committee on Finance. Unfortunately, there was never any follow-up to this initiative and with the onset of the economic crisis, the issue fell further down the list of priorities.

2.1. Gender Impact Assessments

In Cyprus there is currently neither the institutional framework nor the necessary expertise for systematic and rigorous impact assessments of the economic, social and environmental impacts of policy and legislation. Impact Assessments (IAs) are not used systematically as a tool to improve the quality of policy-making or the drafting of legislation. There are no formal/mandatory guidelines for carrying out IAs, but IAs are reportedly sometimes being carried out on an ad-hoc basis. However, it should be noted that all development projects implemented in Cyprus with the support of the European Structural Funds are evaluated and certified by the NMWR for compliance to national and European gender equality laws and policies.

According to the Equality Unit of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, it is mandatory for each Ministry to complete a questionnaire that includes a discussion of likely social impacts for all bills presented to parliament. It is not clear whether this actually takes place, and/or if it is just a 'tick-the-box' exercise with no real relevance to the law-drafting process.

The questionnaire is entitled "Questionnaire for analysis of impact on all proposed legislation" (Ερωτηματολόγιο ανάλυσης του αντίκτυπου σε όλες τις προτεινόμενες νομοθεσίες). The questionnaire's main headings include the following:

1. Main features and need for the proposed legislation
2. Public Dialogue with direct stakeholders - Social Participation
3. Overall analysis of economic, social and environmental impacts
 - Financial Implications
 - Economic Impact on the Public Sector
 - Economic impact on businesses
 - Social Impact
 - Employment
 - Working Conditions
 - Protecting young people in the work environment
 - **Gender Equality**
 - Consumer rights
 - The health of the population
 - The customs and traditions of our country
 - Citizens of third countries, children, women, the disabled, the unemployed, the elderly, religious organisations, minorities, asylum seekers etc.
 - Treatment of personal data
 - Other
 - Environmental Impact

Unfortunately, there are no guidelines on how gender impacts should be assessed and on what spheres of life. One can assume that a civil servant with little or no gender expertise or knowledge is unlikely to adequately assess the impact of a proposed legislation on women and men. Furthermore, there is no quantitative data on the number (%) of laws that have undergone impact assessment in each Ministry, or as to whether GIAs have had a qualitative impact on the content of draft laws.

Despite this, one way that the gender perspective is occasionally integrated into law drafting is through public dialogue and specifically through public consultation with NGOs and women's organisations. This has proven to have a positive impact in relation to gender mainstreaming in law drafting on issues such as trafficking in human beings, health and education, among others. Given that gender impact assessments are not formal procedures, consultation processes with women's organisations and the wider civil society can have a positive impact on law drafting in relation to gender equality. However, consultation with NGOs working on gender equality only takes place when the law in question is directly related to a gender equality issue, and is not a routine procedure in the law making process.

3. Transferability Issues

It is clear that in Finland the starting point for the implementation of Gender Impact Assessments (GIAs) is the Act on Equality between Women and Men (1986/609) that provides the legal basis for gender mainstreaming. The law seems to have laid the groundwork for the development of structures, processes, and procedures for the structural integration of gender mainstreaming in policy formulation and implementation. It provides for a holistic and comprehensive policy toward gender mainstreaming that covers institutional, administrative, and procedural issues. Furthermore, Finland has a long tradition of gender equality with broad political consensus on equality issues in general, and on gender mainstreaming as a strategy to achieve equality goals in the long-term. Similarly, in Austria, the obligation for effective gender budgeting is anchored in both the Austrian Federal Constitution and the Federal Budget Act of 2013. In Cyprus, as mentioned above, such legal provision is lacking.

Furthermore, one of the major weaknesses in the implementation of gender mainstreaming, and gender equality policy more generally in Cyprus, is the lack of political backing and high level support, as well as the lack of human and other resources, of the Equality Unit. As the Finnish expert points out, GIA in law drafting in Finland enjoys strong governmental support even though high level support within the government ministries could be stronger. In Austria, one of the main strengths of the good practice is the strong legal basis and broad political consensus.

Another issue that would impede transferability of the Finnish and Austrian good practices in GIA is the lack of interest in gender issues and expertise in the area within government ministries and departments. The implementation of gender equality goals and objectives depends to a large extent on the personal commitment and interest of individuals in the civil services. A key reason for this is the persistently low level of political support from the highest levels of government with regard to gender equality as described above. Gender equality issues continue to be treated as 'women's issues' and not as issues relating to society as a whole.

Equally important is the lack of systematic and mandatory training of gender equality issues among civil servants as cited by both the Austrian and Finnish experts.

Another issue is that in Cyprus GIAs are not seen as part of everyday administration but as an additional task that requires both financial resources and time. Thus, the Finnish example that requires little gender expertise and can be easily integrated in the everyday administrative work would be a good start for Cyprus, also considering that this 'check-list' approach is informally already in place as described above. Furthermore, theoretical understanding is completely lacking in Cyprus due to the weak feminist movement as well as the lack of gender expertise within academia, civil society, and among public officials responsible for formulating and implementing gender equality policy. Consequently, the Finnish approach which mainly encourages civil servants to make gender visible, based on the idea that women's and men's situations and needs are different, could easily be transferred and may, in turn, assist in raising awareness within the public service and have a 'snow-ball' effect as described by the Finnish expert.

However, what are needed are clear guidelines on how gender impacts should be assessed and on what spheres of life and gender equality training specifically tailored to civil servants working in various areas and departments.

To conclude, efforts at gender mainstreaming in Cyprus have been sporadic at best. There is a lack of general political will and consensus on gender equality policies, coupled with a lack of expertise for the effective structural integration of the gender dimension in policy processes.