



# Exchange of good practices on gender equality

Measures to fight  
violence against women  
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Comments Paper - Cyprus



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# Measures to fight violence against women

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## 1. Introduction

Cyprus has a comprehensive legislative framework to combat violence in the family. According to the Violence in the Family (Prevention and Protection of Victims) Laws, violence in the family “means any act, omission or behaviour which causes physical, sexual or mental injury to any member of the family by another member of the family and includes violence used for the purpose of having sexual intercourse without the consent of the victim as well as of restricting its freedom.”<sup>1</sup> The Cyprus law on domestic violence has been widely assessed to be adequate and its broad scope has been cited as an example of best practice. However, the ‘family violence’ framework has been widely criticised by experts on violence against women as this results in public policies that aim to combat domestic violence from a gender blind perspective, without consideration of the gendered power relations at stake in violence against women.

Cyprus has also adopted a National Action Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family (2010-2015). Although the National Action Plan recognises that violence disproportionately affects women and is perpetrated by men, gender equality does not feature in the ‘basic principles’ upon which the NAP is based. Women are referred to as a ‘vulnerable group’ along with children, persons with disabilities, and migrants. Having said that, there have been efforts to take into account the gender dimension of family violence particularly in the section on prevention, and the section on sensitisation and training of professionals and the public. Reference is made to actions to empower women, to the eradication of gender stereotypes and the promotion of gender equality, with a special focus on the educational system.

In terms of victim support services, state services have generally been evaluated as inadequate in responding to the needs of victims<sup>2</sup>. There is a deep gap in experience, professional and specialised staff, and interagency cooperation and coordination is weak.

There are currently no state operated shelters or counselling centres for victims of domestic violence – or any form of violence against women – in Cyprus. There is only one shelter and counselling centre in operation run the NGO Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (SPAVO). SPAVO runs a number of programmes for the support of victims of violence in the family, and is funded almost entirely by the state.

The Association runs the only crisis helpline for victims of family violence, as well as a shelter for women and children that has a capacity for 4 families (women and their

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<sup>1</sup> The Violence in the Family (Prevention and Protection of Victims) Law 119(I) of 2000 and 212(I) of 2004

<sup>2</sup> Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (2011), REACT to Domestic Violence: Building a Support System for victims of Domestic Violence, Nicosia, Cyprus

children) or 12 women, although there are plans to build a new shelter with external funding that will have a greater capacity. Although the Association runs its programmes in the capital Nicosia, they have support groups in all major cities. There are plans to expand their programmes, however funding is a major challenge, particularly in light of the current financial crisis.

## 2. Perpetrator programmes in Cyprus

### 2.1. The 'Love without Hurt' programme

The Association for the Prevention and Handling of Domestic Violence in the Family runs two related intervention programmes called "Love without Hurt" which are designed for perpetrators of domestic violence on the one hand, and victims of violence on the other. The first is directed toward men with violent behaviour and is designed to help them take responsibility for their anger and behaviour, change their attitudes and perceptions towards such violence, and thus prevent violent behaviour from reoccurring. The other is for women victims of violence aiming at empowering them through self-compassion techniques in order to find their inner strength and be able to take the best decisions for themselves, as well as for their relationships. Thus, the programme claims to have both a preventative as well as a treatment element in that it aims to prevent negative thoughts and feelings that may lead to violent behaviours, as well as to help women recuperate from emotional pain and abuse through the practice of specific self-healing techniques.

The programme has been running since 2007 and by 2011 had reached a total number of 98 persons, 43 men and 55 women. According to Association staff, the programme is evaluated internally through the use of questionnaires, and has achieved positive results in terms of behaviour change and building self-esteem. However, external evaluation of the programme has never been undertaken and thus there is little data on whom the programmes help and how, or whether the programmes' objectives have been achieved.

Similarly to the Irish case, perpetrator programmes are foreseen by the Law on Family Violence as an alternative to legal sanctions. SPAVO works with men who have been ordered to attend as part of a court mandate, as well as with men who voluntarily decide to attend.

The programme was lauded by the Government as a necessary and innovative programme to fill the gap in the provision of support to perpetrators. However, there are some key weaknesses with the programme, particularly as compared to the Irish good practice.

According to Association staff, participation through court mandate is rare for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is a high level of 'attrition' in the course of investigations and prosecutions of domestic violence.<sup>3</sup> Most cases of reported domestic violence do not develop into criminal investigations and are either suspended or interrupted. Secondly, for those cases that do go through the justice system there is clear and overwhelming preference for imposing monetary fines and financial guarantees as on perpetrators. Another important issue is that in order for a

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<sup>3</sup> Kelly, L. & Lovett, J, 'Different Systems, similar outcomes? Tracking attrition in reported rape cases in eleven countries,' European Briefing, April 2009, CWASU

court to impose participation in a perpetrator programme, the perpetrator's lawyer must specifically request it, pointing perhaps to a lack of awareness on the part of both legal professionals as well as the judiciary on the availability of this option. Finally, since the programme only runs twice a year, participation may not always be feasible, particularly if the safety of the victim from further violence is a primary objective.

Another weakness of the programme is the lack of systematic and independent evaluation of its impact. As noted in the paper on the Irish good practice, there is limited evidence that such programmes are effective in addressing men's violent practices and a recent European study has showed wide disparity in approaches as well as results. Similarly, in Cyprus there is little available data on the concrete outcomes of the programme's implementation.

Furthermore, unlike the Irish good practice, the programme does not involve 'partner contact workers', thus there is no concrete link between the perpetrator's participation in the programme and improved safety for women and children. Working with perpetrators and partners or ex partners simultaneously is not mandatory in Cyprus, and although it is encouraged, it is completely voluntary. In fact, according to SPAVO, it is rare that both victim and perpetrator are involved in therapy at the same time. This disassociation between the work being done with perpetrators with that being done with victims goes contrary to the 'partnership approach' which is a key element of success in the Irish model. Thus, it is not possible to monitor men's compliance with the requirement to refrain from engaging in abusive behaviour, nor are their partners or ex partners accessing support services in their own right.

Another element of the Irish good practice that is lacking in Cyprus is systematic risk assessments for re-offending by the programme participants. In Ireland this is undertaken in conjunction with the partner support service which, as discussed above, is lacking in Cyprus.

Despite the above, the value of the perpetrator programme being run by SPAVO in Cyprus should not be dismissed. However, there are important questions for further study and consideration in order to ensure that the safety of victims is the uppermost priority and that scarce funds are not being diverted from much needed victims support services for perpetrator programmes that may not be delivering the desired results. As in the Irish example, perpetrator programmes must be run in close cooperation/coordination with programmes dealing with the protection of women. It is also necessary to implement systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of programmes and whether this effectiveness justifies their costs.

### **3. The use of ICT in combating violence against women in Cyprus**

#### **3.1. Helpline 1440 for victims of violence in the family**

The only use of ICT in fighting violence against women in Cyprus is the crisis helpline run by the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family for victims of domestic violence. The helpline is staffed by trained psychologists and social workers that provide immediate psychological support,

guidance, and information with regard to their rights, as well as to arrange personal appointments with the Association's psychologists and social workers. However, due to funding constraints the hotline is not accessible on a 24 hour basis but from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week including holidays and weekends. Although the helpline is not operative on a 24 hour basis, it is completely free of cost.

The Helpline 1440 offers:

- Counselling support in times of crisis
- Information and communication with other services related to the problems of domestic violence
- Provision for victims with information concerning their basic rights and their options as a victim of domestic violence in order to assist them to find solutions to their problems

The aim of the helpline is to give individuals the opportunity to talk about their problems and if they wish, to get advice on how to deal with it. Support can also be requested from various agencies such as the police, social services, psychologists, lawyers and shelters.

In addition to providing support to victims of violence, the Association collects statistical data by documenting all incidents of domestic violence brought to its attention. In 2011, the call centre received 1320 calls, of which 989 were women.

The importance of the helpline 1440 in fighting domestic violence against women in Cyprus cannot be underestimated. Although it does not run 24 hours a day (mostly due to lack of human and financial resources), it provides the only line of direct support and information to victims available in Cyprus. It is fully anonymous; calls cannot be traced, and the helpline is accessible across the island. The number 1440 is easy to remember and the Association has been successful in its efforts to raise awareness about its availability through its information and awareness campaigns.

Among its weaknesses is first and foremost that it is restricted to cases of family violence only and there is no alternative helpline for victims of other forms of violence against women such as rape and sexual assault. Another weakness is that it is not currently accessible to women with hearing or speaking disabilities. Furthermore, although the number is widely known in Nicosia and in other major cities, more work needs to be done to reach women outside urban centres. Another weakness is that, unlike the Spanish case, the helpline is not interconnected with other emergency services. However, it should be noted that emergency cases are immediately referred to the Police, the Social Welfare Services, and the Health Services as appropriate.

## 4. Policy debate and measures

During the Cyprus Presidency, and within the framework of its activities on gender equality, priority was given to the issue of violence against women, with a particular focus on support services for victims of domestic violence. Within this framework, the Cyprus government worked closely with the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE) in drawing up a report on victim support services in the 27 Member

States and Croatia and organised a two-day conference on Domestic Violence against Women on the 8-9 November 2012. Also important was the drafting of the Council Conclusions on Violence against Women that were adopted by the Council of the European Union that made strong recommendations for all relevant stakeholders on combating violence against women. Relevant to the good practices under review, the Conclusions call on the Member States and the European Commission to proceed with the establishment of a European helpline on gender based violence.

Another important issue under debate in Cyprus is the signing of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. Despite strong calls from civil society organisations and well as members of the Cyprus Parliament, the Cyprus Government has not yet signed the Convention citing the economic cost of its implementation.

## 5. Transferability issues

With regard to the use of ICT to fight violence against women, as discussed above the only measure currently being implemented in Cyprus is the crisis helpline 1440 for victims of violence in the family. Thus, it is safe to say that ICT is not being fully utilised in preventing and combating violence against women in the Cyprus context. The good practices being implemented in Spain are all foreseen in the Organic Law 1/2004 to fight gender violence but such legal provisions do not currently feature in the Cyprus Laws on violence in family.

Despite this, there are elements of the Spanish good practices that can be transferred to Cyprus. For example, the web resource for support and prevention of gender violence could easily be implemented in Cyprus as low cost given the small size of the island. The web resource could be linked to the website of the Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family ([www.familyviolence.gov.cy](http://www.familyviolence.gov.cy)), which is an advisory body foreseen by law which aims inter alia to raise awareness among the general public on the issue of family violence. The Committee's website is already a valuable resource on domestic violence in Cyprus with a wealth of informational material, research, and other resources. One could argue that this site in many ways already provides such a service, although it has not been promoted as such.

The other practices described in the Spanish discussion paper, namely the telephone service for care and protection of victims of gender violence, and the telematic tracking system to monitor restraining orders, are not easily transferable to the Cyprus context for a number of reasons. Firstly, such systems are not mandated by the current Laws on violence in the family nor are they foreseen in the National Action Plan on Preventing and Combating Violence in the Family. Thus, it is unlikely that the provision of such services will be given any priority. Also important is the fact that other basic victim support services, such as the provision of shelter for victims and other emergency services, are still in need of expansion and improvement. Additionally, such services as described in the Spanish discussion paper require a very strong system of inter-agency coordination, an element that is still lacking in Cyprus.

The perpetrator programmes as discussed in the Irish paper have many similarities to the programme being run in Cyprus, although there are key elements that are

lacking in the Cyprus case as discussed above. These include systematic risk assessments of the programme participants, the 'dedicated partner contact' element that ensures the link between work with the perpetrator and support for the victim, and systematic, independent evaluation of the programme and its outcomes. It is my evaluation that these elements can easily be transferred to Cyprus with the adequate political support as well as funding.