



European  
Commission

# The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

## Combating domestic violence

Romania, 26-27 April 2023

### Comments paper – Cyprus



Ein Unternehmen der ÖSB Gruppe.

*The information and views set out in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Commission. Neither the Commission nor any person acting on the Commission's behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.*



*This publication is supported by the European Union Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (2021-2027).*

*This programme is implemented by the European Commission and shall contribute to the further development of an area where equality and the rights of persons, as enshrined in the Treaty, the Charter and international human rights conventions, are promoted and protected.*

*For more information see: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/programmes/cerv>*

# Addressing Domestic Violence in Cyprus – Assessment, Policy Debate, and Good Practices

Maria Angeli

Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS)

## Abstract

Domestic violence is a pervasive issue in Cyprus, with a significant number of cases being reported to the police and the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (SPAVO). The Republic of Cyprus has taken significant steps to address domestic violence through policy reform, including the establishment of a law on femicide and the Prevention and Combatting of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence Law. However, the lack of coordination and communication among government bodies and services has led to fragmented implementation of measures to prevent and combat domestic violence. Good practice examples of policies and initiatives/projects in the field of combatting domestic violence in Cyprus include the Woman's House, the Cyprus Shelter for Battered Women and their Children, and the Police's District Teams for Domestic Violence. The paper also discusses the transferability of good practices from Romania and provides recommendations for combating domestic violence in Cyprus, including the need for a comprehensive national policy on combating violence against women, multidisciplinary approaches, systematic data collection, awareness-raising campaigns, and prevention programs.

## 1. Relevant country context

Domestic violence is a pervasive issue in Cyprus. Although we lack national data on the prevalence of domestic violence, there are available through the cases of violence handled by the police and the cases handled by the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (SPAVO). In 2021, the District Teams for Domestic Violence of the police handled a total of 3,362 reports, while approximately 3,200 reports were handled in 2022. According to statistics maintained by the Police Headquarters, 75% of victims of domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and child abuse in Cyprus are girls and women<sup>1</sup>. In 2021, SPAVO handled 2,854 cases of violence in the family. Of these cases, 1,399 were new cases and 1,455 were ongoing cases from previous years. 68% of the cases involved violence against women, while 32% involved violence against men<sup>2</sup>. It is important to note that these

---

<sup>1</sup> Source available in Greek <https://www.cypruspolice.com/archives/22078>

<sup>2</sup> Source available in Greek <https://domviolence.org.cy/statistika/>

statistics represent only cases reported to the police or SPAVO and may not reflect the full extent of the problem. Based on the data collected by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, during the years 2019-2020, the total number of femicide cases recorded were 11, as well as 2 girl-child victims; all of these cases, except one, were committed in the context of intimate partner violence and/or domestic violence.<sup>3</sup>

The Republic of Cyprus has taken significant steps to address domestic violence through policy reform. Domestic violence falls under criminal law, as defined by Violence in the Family Laws 2000 and 2004. The laws regulate domestic violence as an act, omission, or behaviour causing physical, sexual, or mental injury to a family member. Under the laws, family members include legally married or cohabiting partners, parents, children, grandchildren, and anyone residing with them. Cyprus ratified the Council of Europe Convention to Prevent and Combat Violence against Women and Domestic Violence in 2017. In line with the Convention, the Prevention and Combatting of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence Law 2021 has expanded the legal framework to cover all forms of gender-based violence against women, including psychological and economic violence. The requirement for previous or current cohabitation has been removed, ensuring application of the law to intimate partners that do not have a history of cohabitation. The previous gender-neutral approach has failed to recognise women as the primary victims of such violence. The criminal justice system's interpretation and implementation of the new law remains to be seen. The Criminal Code also has provisions against gender-based violence, such as rape, sexual assault, forced marriage and Female Genital Mutilation.

Cyprus has recently passed a law on femicide under the Law on the Prevention, Protection and Combating of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Amendment) (No. 2) Law of 2021. The law specifically defines femicide as the intentional killing of a woman because of her gender or in the context of intimate partner violence. This definition recognises that femicide is often motivated by gender-based discrimination and seeks to hold perpetrators accountable for the specific harm caused by gender-based violence. The law also mandates the development of prevention strategies, awareness-raising campaigns, and comprehensive support services for victims and survivors of femicide. Additionally, the law establishes a national database to track femicides and other forms of violence against women. Other relevant legislative provisions governing the prevention and combatting of gender-based violence and domestic violence in Cyprus are the following:

- Preventing and Combating the Sexual Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography Law 2014.
- Protection from Harassment and Stalking Law 2021.
- Combatting of Sexism and Online Sexism Law 2020.

---

<sup>3</sup> Source available here <https://medinstgenderstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Policy-Brief-CYPRUS.pdf>

## 2. Policy debate

In Cyprus there is fragmented implementation of measures to prevent and combat domestic violence across different government departments and services. The lack of coordination and communication among government bodies and services has led to a large number of initiatives and actions without any policy dialogue, involvement of women's organizations and NGOs, and often without specific objectives, impact indicators, funding allocation, follow-up or evaluation. The responsibility for implementing policies and measures on domestic violence rests with the competent state authorities by law, but the current coordinating body comprises members who work in a volunteer and advisory capacity without executive power or mandate to implement policies and measures on domestic violence. The Law on VAW 2021 foresees the establishment of a coordinating body that is accountable to the Minister of Justice and Public Order. However, the proposed structure and composition of the coordinating body seems to duplicate that of the Advisory Committee on Preventing and Combating Violence in the Family and does not have the necessary government machinery or resources to carry out its mandate. Therefore, a government unit/department under the Ministry of Justice and Public Order with sufficient technical, human, and financial resources to carry out its mandate is needed.

## 3. Good practice examples

Relevant good practice examples of policies and initiatives/projects in the field of combatting domestic violence in Cyprus include:

**The Woman's House** (Σπίτι της Γυναίκας) was set up at the end of 2020. It is a multiagency and multi-professional crisis centre for victims of VAW and their children. It is based on the Family Justice Centre model and operates as a "one-stop-shop" according to which all the services involved are co-located and coordinated under the same roof, with the aim of effectively managing cases. The provision of services is not conditional on the victim having to press charges against the perpetrator. The multiprofessional network of services in the Woman's House includes services provided by social workers, psychologists, healthcare professionals, legal professionals and the police. The mother and her dependent children will receive the initial services at the Woman's House in order to avoid their separation and thus avoid further revictimisation.

**The Cyprus Shelter for Battered Women and their Children**, which provides safe housing, counselling, and support services to victims of domestic violence. The shelter operates a 24-hour helpline.

**The District Teams for Domestic Violence in Cyprus** are specialised teams within the Cyprus Police Force that are responsible for dealing with cases of domestic violence. Their primary role is to protect victims of domestic violence and hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. They respond to reports of domestic violence, conduct investigations, and make arrests if necessary. They also provide

support and assistance to victims, such as referring them to social services or other organisations that can help them.

**The Advisory Committee on Preventing and Combating Violence in the Family** was established by a Council of Ministers Decree in 1996. The Committee consists of persons appointed in their personal capacity by the Council of Ministers and having knowledge and experience of the subject. According to the law, the members come from the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, the Ministry of Health, the Cyprus Police, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Social Welfare Services, the Law Services, and relevant organizations of the private sector. The Committee monitors the implementation of the relevant law on family violence, promotes multi-agency cooperation and coordination, and raises awareness among professionals and the public more generally. However, the Committee's role is strictly advisory, and lacks the sufficient human and financial resources to fully carry out its role as provided by law.

**The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS)**, within the framework of the EU funded project GEAR against IPV<sup>18</sup>, pilot-tested and evaluated educational material aimed at secondary school students' awareness raising and empowerment by specially trained teachers. The GEAR against IPV Approach<sup>19</sup> uses exclusively experiential activities through which, adolescents are guided to explore their personal gender stereotypical attitudes and their impact to their own lives, to "discover" and to exercise life skills that will help them to develop healthy relationships, free from any form of violence. It introduces gender equality in education as a violence prevention strategy, motivates and qualifies teachers with the necessary skills and the "know how" in order to implement such primary prevention interventions when integrated into the school curriculum. GEAR against IPV consists a precise fulfilment of Article 14 of the Convention but failed to receive the full support of the Ministry of Education in order to integrate into the school curricula.

## 4. Transferability aspects

Good practice 1. The national network of sheltered houses for victims of domestic violence, that is implemented in Romania could be a valuable practice for Cyprus. Cyprus already has some shelters for victims of domestic violence, but a national network with integrated services and support could provide better assistance to victims and would increase accessibility.

Good practice 2. The creation of referral centres for victims and perpetrators of sexual violence in Romania could serve as a good practice example for Cyprus as there are no specialised services for the victims of sexual violence.

Good practice 3. The National Plan of measures regarding the protection and inclusion of displaced persons from Ukraine, beneficiaries of temporary protection in Romania - could potentially be transferable to Cyprus, with some adaptations to the specific context. The aim of the plan is to identify women asylum seekers from Ukraine who are fleeing the war and have experienced or are at risk of gender-based violence,

and to ensure they have access to adequate accommodation, support services, and protection, while reducing the risk of refoulement. In Cyprus, there are refugees and asylum seekers, including women and children, who have experienced or are at risk of gender-based violence<sup>4</sup>. A similar plan could be developed to ensure these individuals have access to appropriate services, including safe and secure housing, healthcare, education, and legal support.

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

**The development of a holistic and integrated policy on combating violence against women in Cyprus** would provide the necessary impetus and direction that is currently lacking in each individual ministry and government department, but also within the public administration as a whole. At the moment, government bodies, and often services within these bodies, implement initiatives with little, if any, consultation or coordination. This has resulted in a large ‘catalogue’ of initiatives and actions without any policy dialogue and/or deliberation and often with no involvement of women’s organisations and NGOs. Policies and measures are not accompanied by specific objectives, impact indicators, allocating of funding, and there is no evidence of any follow-up or evaluation. On a national level, there is a strong need in general for a more multidisciplinary approach on the issue on behalf of the governmental services as well as more systematic cooperation between NGOs and government agencies.

**The proposed structure of the National Coordinating Body that is responsible for preventing and combating all forms of violence against women, needs necessary government resources to carry out its mandate effectively.** A government unit or department under the Ministry of Justice and Public Order with sufficient resources is needed, along with a technical committee to support its work. This committee should consist of representatives from relevant state services and NGOs.

**Comprehensive data collection on all forms of violence against women disaggregated by sex and age of victim and perpetrator, type of violence, relationship between victim and perpetrator is urgently needed** as foreseen by the Istanbul Convention and the Victims’ Rights Directive. With the only survey that of the Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family in 2012<sup>5</sup>. Research is lacking on all forms of violence against women, including forms such as female genital mutilation and forced marriage; the effects on children of

---

<sup>4</sup> See more on Sexual and Gender-based Violence among Asylum-Seekers in Cyprus of UNHCR in collaboration with the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies <https://www.unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2021/12/Sexual-and-Gender-based-Violence-Report.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence in the Family, 2012, “Extent, Frequency, Nature and Consequences of Domestic Violence against Women in Cyprus”. Available at: <http://www.familyviolence.gov.cy/cgi-bin/hweb?-A=971&-V=research>

witnessing domestic violence; violence against women experienced by specific groups of women, such as elderly women, women with disabilities, lesbian women, migrant women and/or women from ethnic minorities.

**There is a need for systematic awareness raising campaigns and prevention programs on violence against women in Cyprus.** NGOs often carry out such initiatives on a project basis, and specific forms of violence, such as FGM, forced marriage, sexual violence, and rape, receive even less attention.

**Despite a major educational reform that included the revision of the school curricula at all levels, there are still substantial gaps that need to be addressed** in the inclusion of issues such as sex education, gender roles, and gender relations. This contributes to maintaining the patriarchal character of Cypriot society in which there is still prejudice against open discussion of issues concerning matters such as gender and sexual orientation. Although, some progress has been made in terms of eliminating gender stereotypes in the curricula and the inclusion of gender equality issues in health education, this fell short of the hopes of civil society activists that lobbied for the inclusion of comprehensive sex education at all levels. Furthermore, the educational reform does not include awareness raising activities to combat gender stereotypes at all levels of the educational system. Such activities are largely carried out by NGOs in a limited number of schools due to limited resources and funding.