

The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

Combating digital forms of violence against women

Finland, 6-7 February 2025

Comments paper – Cyprus



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>

Digital and Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women: Progress and remaining challenges in Cyprus

Maria Angeli

Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies

Abstract

This report outlines the current situation concerning digital and technology-based violence against women in Cyprus, underlining policy progress and ongoing challenges. While Cyprus has established a comprehensive legislative framework addressing digital abuse, cyberstalking, and online sexism, significant obstacles to effective implementation remain. Issues such as data collection, multi-agency collaboration, and access to services remain key challenges. This report explores promising initiatives and discusses transferable practices from Iceland and Finland.

1. Relevant Country Context

1.1 Policy Measures and Institutional Framework

The prevalence of violence against women in Cyprus is alarmingly high and above the EU average. According to the FRA, EIGE, and Eurostat study of 2024¹, 36.1% of women in Cyprus have experienced physical violence, threats, or sexual violence in their lifetime, while 44% reported physical violence, threats, sexual violence, or psychological violence by an intimate partner. Notably, 39.9% of women in Cyprus report experiencing harassment at work, including technology-facilitated harassment. However, despite these concerning figures, the prevalence and nature of digital or technology-facilitated violence against women in Cyprus remain largely unexplored, mirroring the broader reality across the EU, where data is scarce.²

As part of its efforts to align with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention, Cyprus has elaborated a comprehensive legal framework relating to violence against women, which also includes aspects on digital and technology-facilitated violence, hate speech, harassment, and image-based sexual abuse. The adoption of the *Law on the Prevention and Combating of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence and*

¹ FRA, EIGE, Eurostat (2024), EU gender-based violence survey. Available [here](#)

² EIGE report on Cyber Violence Against Women and Girls (2017), Available [here](#)

*Other Related Matters in 2021*³ criminalised for the first time the publication of pornographic or sexual material without the consent of the victim, as well as threats to publish such material by electronic, digital or other means. Additionally, harassment and stalking have been criminalised in 2021 under *The Protection from Harassment and Stalking Law, 2021 (L.114(I)/2021)*. The protection provided by this law extends to online communication and media, amongst other forms of interaction.⁴ Further, the *Combatting of Sexism and Online Sexism and for Related Matters Law*⁵ (L.209(I)/2020) criminalises sexism and online sexism as a form of gender-based discrimination strengthening the legislative framework of protection for victims of gender-based violence.

While the legal framework as described above is comprehensive, significant challenges remain for the effective application and implementation laws to prevent and combat violence against women in Cyprus.

The absence of robust data on digital and technology-facilitated violence impedes the development of evidence-based policies as well as the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the legal framework. Another persistent barrier is weak multi-agency collaboration and coordination in the area of violence against women and domestic violence. This is a direct outcome of the lack of systematic initial and in-service specialised training and the lack of robust in-service and multiagency protocols and procedures. The incapability of relevant services to collaborate effectively puts women at an increased risk of escalated violence. These challenges are underlined in the most recent GREVIO report⁶ and were considered in designing the Cyprus's National Strategy for the Prevention and Combating of Violence Against Women (2023-2028)⁷.

At the institutional level, pursuant to the provisions of the VAW Law 2021, a coordinating body was established in March 2022, which is responsible for the development and implementation of the National Strategy and Action Plan on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2023-2028). The National Coordinating Body for Preventing and Combatting Violence Against Women is responsible for the coordination, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and measures to prevent and combat violence as well as the coordination of data collection. The coordinating body comprises 11 members, representing the relevant ministries and public services, as well as two NGOs.

³ The Prevention and Combatting of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and for Related Matters Law of 2021 [here](#)

⁴ The Protection from Harassment and Stalking Law, 2021 (L.114(I)/2021). Available [here](#).

⁵ The Combatting of Sexism and Online Sexism and for Related Matters Law, 2020 (L.209(I)/2020). Available [here](#)

⁶ GreVio recommendation report (2022). Available [here](#)

⁷ National Strategy for the Prevention and Combating of Violence Against Women (2023-2028). Available [here](#)

On December 18, 2024, following a Ministerial Council decision, the Cyprus Commissioner for Gender Equality was assigned responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the Combating of Sexism and Online Sexism Law as well as the development of relevant actions and strategies to prevent and combat sexism.

2. Good practice examples

The Woman's House (Σπίτι της Γυναίκας) was set up at the end of 2020 in Nicosia. It is a multi-agency and multi-professional crisis centre for victims of violence against women and their children. It is based on the Family Justice Centre model and operates as a “one-stop-shop” where all relevant services are co-located under one roof, with the aim of effectively coordinate and co-manage cases. The multi-professional network at the Woman's House provides services through social workers, psychologists, healthcare professionals, legal experts, and police officers. Importantly, access to the services of the Woman's House is not dependent upon filing a complaint to the police or on the victim's resident status. The Woman's House is operated by the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family and fully funded by the state. It is currently operating only in Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, impeding nation-wide access to these services.

The Cyprus's National Strategy for the Prevention and Combating of Violence Against Women (2023-2028) acknowledges the increasing prevalence of online and digital violence and highlights the need for targeted policies, strengthened media regulations, and systematic data collection. The strategy incorporates recommendations of the GREVIO expert group, including the creation of a centralised database and public awareness campaigns tailored to the needs of vulnerable groups.

The Cyprus CyberSafety Centre was established in 2016 through EU funding and is operated by the Pedagogical Institute of the Ministry of Education, Sport, and Youth. It aims to promote safe and responsible internet use by raising public awareness and through educational campaigns and the development of specialised resources for children, parents, and educators. It runs the Helpline 1480, providing free-of-charge anonymous support for youth experiencing cyber violence, including cyberbullying, sextortion, and grooming. It also empowers young people to have their voices heard on internet safety through the CyberSafety Youth Panel.

3. Transferability aspects

The examples of Finland and Iceland can transfer value for measures regarding digital and technology-facilitated violence against women in Cyprus including:

Evidence-Based Policy Framework

Finland's and Iceland's models focus on comprehensive data collection and research. The Finnish policy framework integrates various data sources, including Statistics Finland and the EU GBV Survey, alongside academic research to understand the prevalence and nature of digital violence. In Iceland academic research was utilized as a foundation for legal reforms. Cyprus could enhance its policy framework by

establishing systematic and robust collection of data on the prevalence of all forms of violence against women, including digital violence, to inform its policy development and evaluation.

Multi-agency collaboration

Finland's NAPE Committee model, comprising 16 governmental bodies and an NGO working group, provides a systematic framework for coordination. Cyprus could consider adopting the model to strengthen its multi-agency collaboration, particularly by establishing formal structures for regular cooperation between government bodies, NGOs, and other stakeholders.

Integrated Support Services for Digital Violence Victims

Iceland has incorporated support for technology-facilitated violence into its current victim services rather than establishing new frameworks. This approach involves domestic violence shelters and legal aid services to tackle instances of digital violence. Cyprus could improve its existing 'Woman's House' model and domestic violence shelters by training staff to offer specialised assistance for digital violence.

Capacity Building Programmes

Finland's experience in training professional staff through their Action Plan gives important lessons, while still noting gaps in specialised knowledge. Iceland has made digital violence training a requirement in its police education programs, ensuring that law enforcement officers are properly prepared to address cases of technology-facilitated abuse. Cyprus could adopt this approach in including mandatory training for multi-agency teams such as shelter staff, police officers, prosecutors, and judges, ensuring specific focus on digital/technology facilitated violence response. Additionally, developing online learning tools to complement face-to-face training could improve accessibility for professionals.

Awareness Raising Campaigns

Targeted campaigns, such as the one run by Save the Children Finland on online sexual violence and grooming in Finland, and Iceland's nationwide awareness campaign launched in schools and online, can be replicable and re-modelled to the Cyprus context.

Partnerships with Online Platforms

Iceland's approach to tackling technology-facilitated violence against women emphasizes collaboration among various sectors. A crucial element of this strategy is forming partnerships with digital platforms to integrate victim protection measures into their services. For examples, Iceland collaborated with Meta to train support service staff on the safety and security features of its platforms, improving the support available to victims of online harassment. Additionally, it partnered with Pornhub to create direct links to perpetrators' programmes for users searching for illegal or harmful content. Cyprus could benefit from a similar strategy by establishing formal partnerships with social media platforms and online content providers to strengthen victim protection and encourage accountability among platforms.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the analysis of the current legal, institutional, and policy framework in Cyprus regarding addressing technology-facilitated violence against women, coupled with the examination of transferable practices, recommendations at national and European levels are:

At the national level:

- Put in place systematic data collection mechanisms on digital violence against women to inform policy development and policy evaluation.
- Scale up the Woman's House multi-agency model nationwide to ensure comprehensive coverage of services and add specific support mechanisms for digital and technology facilitated violence victims.
- Enhance multi-agency collaboration and coordination among front-line services, including NGOs.
- Design and implement comprehensive capacity-building programmes for law enforcement and the judiciary.
- Elaborate and implement culturally adapted awareness campaigns with a focus on the prevention of digital and technology facilitated violence.

At the European level:

- Facilitate cross-border sharing of best practices in combatting digital violence.
- Assist Member States in developing evidence-based policy frameworks.
- Enhance international cooperation to address digital and technology facilitated VAW.
- Standardisation of data collection methodologies across EU Member States.