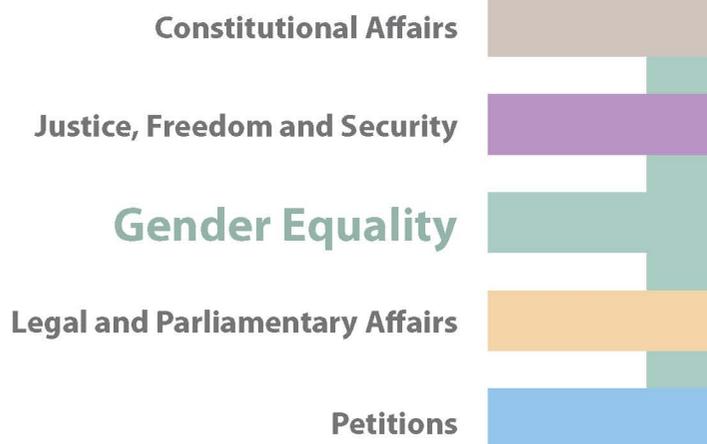


DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES

POLICY DEPARTMENT **C**
CITIZENS' RIGHTS AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS



The Policy on Gender Equality in Cyprus

NOTE



DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES
POLICY DEPARTMENT C: CITIZENS' RIGHTS AND
CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

GENDER EQUALITY

The Policy on Gender Equality in Cyprus

NOTE

Abstract

The note reviews gender equality legislation and policy developments in Cyprus in six key thematic areas including economic independence, the reconciliation of private and professional life, equal representation of women and men in decision-making, the eradication of all forms of violence against women, and the elimination of gender stereotypes, and women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

This document was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality.

AUTHORS

Ms Susana Pavlou, Director, Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, Cyprus
Ms Josie Christodoulou, Policy Coordinator, Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, Cyprus

RESPONSIBLE ADMINISTRATOR

Mrs Claire Genta
Policy Department C - Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs
European Parliament
B-1047 Brussels
E-mail: poldep-citizens@europarl.europa.eu

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ABOUT THE EDITOR

To contact the Policy Department or to subscribe to its newsletter please write to:
poldep-citizens@europarl.europa.eu

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- CEDAW** Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- CFPA** Cyprus Family Planning Association
- ESF** European Social Fund
- GRETA** Group of Experts on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings of the Council of Europe
- MLSI** Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance
- NMWR** National Machinery for Women's Rights
- NAP** National Action Plan
- NGO** Non-government organisation
- SWS** Social Welfare Services

1. GENERAL BACKGROUND

1.1. Key Legislation

Mostly due to Cyprus's harmonization with the *aquis communautaire*, but also to bring legislation in line with relevant international instruments, an impressive number of legislative measures relating to gender equality have been passed in the last decade. These include the Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Employment and Vocational Training Law, the Equal Pay Between Men and Women for the Same Work or for Work of Equal Value Law, the Maternity Protection Law, the Parental Leave and Leave on Grounds of Force Majeure Law, the Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Professional Social Insurance Schemes Law, the Equal Treatment of Men and Women (Access to and Supply of Good and Services) Law, the Violence in the Family (Prevention and Protection of Victims) Law, the Combating of Trafficking and Exploitation of Human Beings and the Protection of Victims Law, among others.

Cyprus is also a state party to core international human rights instruments covering the principle of gender equality including notably: the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, the Convention concerning the revision of the Maternity Protection Convention.

1.2. Key Gender Equality Institutions

In the last decade a number of institutions have been established to promote gender equality in the public sphere, according to their specific sphere of competence.

The National Machinery for Women's Rights (NMWR) under the Ministry of Justice and Public Order is the main coordinating body for the promotion of gender equality in Cyprus. It advises the Council of Ministers on policies, programmes and laws promoting women's rights, monitors, coordinates and evaluates the implementation and effectiveness of these programmes and laws, carries out information, education and training programmes on relevant issues, contributes to the mobilization and sensitization of the public sector on equality issues and serves as a cooperation channel between the Government and women's organisations and NGOs working on gender equality and women's rights.

The NMWR consists of four bodies:

- the Council, which is chaired by the Minister of Justice, consists of seventeen women's organizations, including two Turkish Cypriot organizations. The Council's mandate is to study policy issues and programmes and formulate opinions and decisions of an advisory nature.
- an additional 60 NGOs are members of the National Committee, which is the largest body of the NMWR. These organizations become involved in the projects, programmes and activities of the NMWR; they receive funding for projects and for operating costs, and are routinely consulted in decision making on policy issues such as the development of relevant national action plans.

- an Interministerial Committee consisting of gender focal points from all eleven ministries meets on an ad hoc basis for coordination, information and exchange views on issues of Government policy on gender equality.
- the General Secretariat provides administrative scientific support to the advisory bodies of the National Machinery, and promotes and implements their decisions. The secretariat of the NMWR is performed by Equality Unit of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order.

In addition to the NMWR, the following relevant bodies have been established:

1. Ombudsman/Anti-Discrimination Body and Equal Treatment Authority

The Commissioner for Administration (Ombudsman) was established in May 2004 as an independent body to deal with and decide upon discrimination matters in Cyprus. As a result two separate authorities were created, namely the Cyprus Anti-Discrimination Body and the Equal Treatment Authority. The Anti-Discrimination Body investigates complaints of discrimination on all grounds, in relation to access to goods and services, social security, social protection schemes, education and health care, while the Equal Treatment Authority investigates complaints on the grounds of sex in the area of employment and vocational training, including sexual harassment, maternity protection rights, discrimination in access to employment and employment and working conditions. In 2008, the Equal Treatment Authority expanded its mandate further to cover the Equal Treatment of Men and Women (Access to Goods and Services) Law of 2008.

2. Gender Equality Committee in Employment and Vocational Training

The Gender Equality Committee of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance was established on 15th June 2003, as provided for in the Equal Treatment of Women and Men in Employment and Vocational Training Law (Law 205(I)/2002). The Committee is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the relevant law and can accept complaints of discrimination within the sphere of employment and vocational training.

In 2009 the Committee was further strengthened by adding to its powers the provision of independent assistance to victims of discrimination. This includes giving legal advice and legal representation for victims of discrimination in judicial or administrative procedures.

3. Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family

The Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating Domestic Violence work intensively to monitor the implementation of the relevant law on Family Violence and to raise awareness among professionals and the public more generally.

The Committee has been very active and has played a vital role in raising awareness, carrying out research, strengthening interdepartmental cooperation, monitoring implementation of the relevant law and evaluating existing services, providing training to relevant professionals, and most importantly, in developing a National Action Plan on Combating Violence in the Family.

4. Coordinating Multidisciplinary Group for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

The establishment of the Coordinating Multidisciplinary Group on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings is one of the most important developments undertaken by the Cyprus

Government in combating trafficking in human beings. The group was established in 2007 by the Law on Combating Trafficking and Exploitation of Human Beings and Protection of Victims (L.87 (1/ 2007]) and is chaired by the Minister of Interior. The group's purpose, among others, is to monitor the implementation of the Law and National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons 2010-2012 as well as to take all necessary measures, to monitor and evaluate the national referral mechanism of the victims and to collect, exchange information between the members of the team with regards to offences as these are foreseen by the law. All governmental agencies involved directly or indirectly in combating trafficking in human beings are members of the Group such as the Attorney General's Office, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Police Anti-trafficking Unit, the National Machinery for Women's Rights as well as two NGOs.

1.3. Key governmental-level policy documents

A number of National Action Plans (NAPs) and strategies have been developed that either specifically address gender inequality, or specific issues that directly relate to gender equality. These include the National Action Plan on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (2008-2010), the National Action Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings (2010-2012), the National Action Plan on the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family (2010-2015), and the National Action Plan on Equality between Women and Men (2007-2013).

The NAP on Equality between Women and Men is the most significant policy document on gender equality in Cyprus, and was initiated by the National Machinery for Women's Rights (NMWR), of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order and adopted by the Council of Ministers in August 2007. The NAP was formulated on the basis of international conventions and recommendations particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Concluding Comments to the Cyprus Report to the CEDAW Committee in 2006, the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), as well as EU policy frameworks such as the Roadmap for Equality between Men and Women and EU Directives.

The National Action Plan on Gender Equality is significant in that it incorporates a holistic approach to gender equality addressing six priority areas, namely: employment, education, decision-making, social rights, violence against women and gender stereotypes. The development of the National Action Plan was developed in close collaboration with all government departments and local authorities as well as women's organizations and NGOs.

2. KEY THEMATIC AREAS

2.1. Equal economic independence for women and men

According to national statistics, the Cyprus labour market is characterized by high rates of employment and participation in the labour market, with employment rates reaching 75.4% in 2010, exceeding the national target of 70% and the EU27 target of 65.4%. Women's employment rose from 60.3% in 2006 to 68.5% in 2010, also exceeding the Lisbon targets for 2010. Despite this, there are still significant gender gaps in labour market participation: a very wide gender pay gap of over 23% and gender segregation in employment, with women traditionally concentrated in the lower paid sectors such as health, education, and domestic work. As in other European countries, women also interrupt their careers more often to raise children, and have particular difficulties re-entering employment after periods of absence. Their marginal position in the labour market has long-term impacts, particularly

later in life as women receive lower pensions, and are more dependent on social benefits. However it must be noted that elderly women in Cyprus face the highest poverty risk in Europe with a rate of 52.4%. On another hand the self-employment rate of women has gradually increased over the last 4 years from 24.6% to 32.4% while the percentage of women working in family businesses without pay has been reduced from 82.9% to 71.7%.

The promotion of women in the labour market is a major priority for the Cyprus Government and has received the most significant political and financial support. This may be related to the level of attention given to issues of labour market integration policies for equality between women and men of the European Union as a whole.

A number of measures, co-financed by European Social Fund (ESF), have been implemented since 2007 to promote women in the labour market. One of the measures taken specifically for women is the *Scheme for Enhancing Women's Entrepreneurship* which aims at women of all ages [18-55 years] who wish to be active in sectors of manufacturing, in commerce, services and tourism, thereby developing their knowledge, training and talents with the use of new technologies and innovations, as well as the potential of information technology in the development, production and sale of "new" products and services. Further, there are specific training programmes for inactive women implemented by the Human Resources Development Authority and co-financed by the ESF aiming at the promotion of training and employability of the unemployed and the inactive female work force.

Other measures that target inactive women include the programme *Promotion of Flexible Forms of Employment (FFE) for the programming period 2004-2006 and 2007-2013*. On the basis of the project results of the period 2004-2006, a scheme for the subsidisation of businesses/ organisations is currently in operation in order to create work places with flexible employment regulations, for the benefit of young persons, the elderly, persons with dependants and, in general, persons from socially vulnerable population groups.

Insufficient provision of high quality and affordable care facilities for children and other family dependents has been identified as a major obstacle to increasing labour market participation for women. Furthermore, flexible forms of employment are not particularly widespread and the number of persons engaged in flexible employment is quite low compared to other European countries. (See section 2.2. on the reconciliation of private and professional life).

In order to address the gender pay gap, in 2007, the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance (MLSI) launched a comprehensive study in order to assess and analyze the magnitude of the problem in Cyprus, to identify the causes of the phenomenon, and provide recommendations on policies to address it. Based on the results of the above study, the MLSI has developed a project "Actions for Reducing the Gender Pay Gap" with concrete measures aimed at reducing the pay gap between men and women to be implemented during 2009-2013. The programme was launched in 2011 and has a budget of approx 4.5 million Euros and is co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF). The programme foresees, inter alia, the creation of an effective mechanism for enforcing the legislation on equal pay, preparing manuals and guides as tools for investigating cases of inequality in employment, interventions to promote reconciliation of work and family life, and measures to eliminate gender stereotypes through the education system.

2.2. The reconciliation of private and professional life

The Protection of Maternity Law No. 100 (I)97 with its last amendment in 2002 (64(I)/2002) provides for 16 weeks of maternity leave (14 weeks in the case of adoption), 9 of which have to be taken starting two weeks before the expected due date. Upon returning to work, women who gave birth and are breastfeeding, or who have increased responsibilities for the care of the child, are entitled to arrive at work one hour later, or leave one hour earlier, or interrupt their work for one hour for a period of six months after the birth. This hour is considered as working time.

The 2002 Law on Parental Leave and Leave on Grounds of Force Majeure N.69 (I)/2002 and its amendment of July 2007 provide for unpaid parental leave for each of the employed parents in order to take care or raise a child. In addition, it provides for seven days of unpaid leave annually in order to take care of family emergencies. In the case that collective or individual agreements between employers and employees provide more favourable conditions, those conditions are applicable. The duration of the leave is up to thirteen weeks, for either birth or adoption of a child and the right is individual and non-transferable. In case of natural parents, the leave can be taken after the end of the maternity leave until the child reaches the age of six. For adoptions, the parental leave is taken also after the maternity leave and within a period of six years, starting on the date of adoption, but before the child's 12th birthday. Employed parents can take a minimum period of one week and a maximum of four weeks per year. The leave is independent for each child. However, there is a requirement of a minimum of one year duration with the same employer between the periods of leave taken for each child. The employee is required to notify the employer at least 5 weeks before the expected start of the parental leave. The employer has the right to refuse, postpone, or terminate the leave based on justifiable reasons relating to the type of work affected.

Child care as a formal social welfare provision is a relatively new concept in Cyprus, and although it is a major concern for most employed as well as unemployed women, it has only recently been framed as a policy issue mainly due to the recent accession of Cyprus into the European Union and the EU emphasis on the reconciliation of work and family life for promoting gender equality and women's access to the labour market. Informal child care arrangements continue to prevail in Cyprus with the extended family (mostly grandmothers) playing the primary role in the provision of care. Care by migrant domestic workers, although not formally recognized as child care by the state, has become increasingly popular in the last two decades.

Within the framework of promoting the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities, the Social Welfare Services (SWS) has funded child-care services and programmes to community organisations and NGOs through the Grants-in-Aid Programme and the "Expansion and Improvement of Care Services for the Children, the Elderly, the Disabled and other Dependants". The SWS are also responsible for the implementation of the project "Expansion and Improvement of Care Services for the Children, the Elderly, the Disabled and other Dependants" under the Single Programming Document, Objective 3, "Human Resources" co-financed by the European Social Fund and the Government of Cyprus. The main aim of the project is the provision of low cost social care services on the local level and supports the integration of women to the labour market and the reconciliation of professional and family life, implemented by local authorities and NGOs. According to the Ministry of Labour, the programme, which began in 2005 and ended in 2009, has funded 31 programs to provide care to children, the elderly and persons with disabilities. During project implementation, 660 women benefited and 160 new jobs were created.

During the 2007-2013 programming period, the SWS are implementing a project entitled "Provision of Services for Covering Social Care within the Framework of Family and Employment Reconciliation". The project will subsidize the cost of day care for children, elderly or persons with disabilities with the aim to promote women's integration in the labour market.

2.3. Equal Representation of Women and Men in Decision-Making

There has been an increase in women actively involved in politics in Cyprus, but progress has been slow and women are still severely underrepresented in Government. Only 38% of judges are women and only 20.8% of senior level civil servants. In the parliamentary elections of 2001, only six women out of 85 women candidates were elected and in 2006 this number increased only to eight seats (14.6%) despite candidates increasing to 128 and a major campaign initiated by the Cyprus National Machinery for Women's Rights (NMWR) to encourage voters to support women. In the elections of 2011, this percentage fell even further, with only 6 women elected (10.7%). Furthermore, in the municipal elections of 2011 the number of mayors fell from 3% to 0% and members of municipal councils fell from 20.3% members to 17.5%. On a more positive note, Cyprus now has three women ministers (out of eleven posts) and two women were elected as members of the European Parliament in June 2009. It is also worth mentioning that in recent years political appointments at high-ranking posts have been filled by women for the first time including the Law Commissioner, the Commissioner for Administration (Ombudsman), the Auditor-General, the Deputy Accountant-General of the Republic, and the Commissioner for the Protection of Personal Data.

Most political parties have introduced the quota system to favour the participation of women in their decision-making bodies. Some of them also have quotas for their candidate lists. However, this has been made possible through the parties' memorandum/constitution and not through legislation. In addition, under the National Action Plan on Gender Equality and in particular under its chapter on the "Balanced Participation of Women and Men in Political/Social and Economic life", measures for the introduction of targets and quotas have been included, such as the target of 40% for the participation of women in political life, the introduction of a quota of 30% for women in ballots in municipal, parliamentary and euro-parliamentary elections, and a quota of 30% for women in the appointments in all public committees and boards. Despite these targets, the introduction of quotas has not received significant support in Cyprus and is generally not favoured.

It is worth mentioning that the Union of Municipalities established in February 2005 the Committee of Elected Women of the Union of Municipalities with the objective of promoting the equal representation of women and men in local councils.

2.4. The eradication of all forms of violence against women

2.4.1. Domestic Violence

The violence in the family (Prevention and Protection of Victims) Law 47 (I)/1994, replaced by Law 119(I)/2000, was later amended in 2004 by Law 212(I)/2004. The Law *inter alia* condemns any act of violence within the family, raises substantially the penalties for violence, provides protection to victims mainly by empowering the Court to issue restraining orders, clarifies that rape can be committed within marriage, facilitates the reporting of violent incidents, provides for the appointment of Family Counsellors, the setting up of the Advisory Committee to monitor the implementation of the Law, the taking

of testimony of victims of violence by electronic means, the protection of victims and witnesses and makes the spouse a compellable witness.

Another development of particular importance is the drafting of a National Action Plan on the Prevention and Handling of Family Violence (2008-2013) by the Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence, which is pending approval by the Council of Ministers. The aim of the NAP is to monitor the extent of violence in the family in Cyprus; to raise awareness and sensitize the public as well as relevant professionals using various mediums, including special conferences and seminars and information campaigns and programmes; to promote scientific research on violence in the family; to promote services dealing with all aspects of the problem and specifically for support and protection of victims; monitor the effectiveness of services and the enforcement of the relevant legislation.

The National Action Plan Equality between Men and Women (2007-2013) includes violence against women among its main priorities. The NAP on Equality takes a different approach towards violence against women and places the phenomenon squarely within the context of gender equality. It also makes reference to *all forms of violence against women* including domestic violence, trafficking in women, sexual harassment in the workplace, and rape and sexual assault. Although it recognizes the need for actions to address violence against women belonging to ethnic and other minorities there are no concrete actions foreseen to address this group.

Proposed actions include awareness raising campaigns, training of relevant professionals on issues of gender equality and violence against women, the establishment of an electronic observatory for the collection of data on all forms of violence against women, and the conducting of research on all forms of violence against women.

The Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family was established in 1996 as foreseen by Article 16 of the Law on Family Violence 47(1)/1994 (later replaced by 119(I)/2000 and amended by Law 212(I)/2004) and is a coordinating body with responsibilities also listed under Article 7(1) of the law. The Committee consists of persons from the private or the public sector, appointed according to their professional qualifications by the Council of Ministers. The Committee has the responsibility to record the problem of family violence in Cyprus; to increase public and health and/or other professional's awareness (through e.g. seminars, conferences); to promote research on family violence; to coordinate and cooperate with the various governmental services and to supervise the efficiency of those services and the implementation of the relevant law. The Advisory Committee also has the responsibility for the promotion of the harmonization of statistical data collection across all competent authorities (such as Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Education and Culture). In order to meet European criteria, the Advisory Committee hopes to achieve a unified system that will function under the Legal Services.

One important achievement of the Advisory Committee was the drafting of a Manual of Interdepartmental Procedures, with the aim to clarify the functions and role of professionals in the process handling cases of family violence and involved the Social Welfare Services, the Police, the Health Services, the Education Services, the Law Office of the Republic, as well as relevant NGOs. However, according to an internal evaluation of the Manual, it is clear that not all recommendations and guidelines are followed and, as such, the Manual is currently being revised based on the recommendations made in the evaluation.

2.4.2. Trafficking in Women

In 2007 a new law *Combating of Trafficking and Exploitation of Human Beings and the Protection of Victims Law* [L.87(I)/2007] has been adopted which replaced the initial law 2000. The purpose of this Law is the penalisation of trafficking, exploitation and child pornography, the promotion of measures for the protection and support of victims of such crimes and the creation of a monitoring system for the implementation of such measures. The Law provides, *inter alia*, for a national mechanism of cooperation between governmental services and non-governmental organisations for the identification of victims and the implementation of responsibilities stipulated in the Law for the protection of victims and the safeguarding of their rights. Such responsibilities include mandatory referral of suspected victims to the Social Welfare Services who inform them of their rights and immediately refer them to the Police, which is the competent agency to establish or the identification of victims. The scope of the new law is to fully harmonize the national legislation with the European Acquis as well as to better implement the Council of Europe Convention on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings ratified in 2007 and other international instruments. It is worth mentioning that Cyprus was among the first ten countries to sign and ratify the Council of Europe Convention and it came into force in February 2008.

In 2011 the Group of Experts on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings of the Council of Europe (GRETA) which monitors and supervise the implementation of the obligations of the Member States to the Convention published the first evaluation report on Cyprus. The reports highlight a number of gaps between the Cyprus legislation and the Convention. An example with regards to definitions is that the although "the definition of "trafficking in human beings" in the Cypriot legislation is in line with the definition in Article 4 of the Convention, however, GRETA is concerned that the definition of "victim of THB" contained in Law 87(I)/2007 requires that the person concerned has sustained damage or financial loss directly caused by the offence of THB". GRETA also considers that "the Cypriot authorities should step up the proactive investigation of potential cases of THB in sectors such as entertainment, tourism, agriculture and domestic work, including through close monitoring of the application of the visa regimes for performing artists". With regards to prevention of THB GRETA noted that "the Cypriot authorities have so far not taken adequate measures to discourage the demand of services from trafficked persons, which is critical to combating THB".

The GRETA report was well received by the Ministry of Interior and efforts are now underway to implement their recommendations.

Another important measure undertaken in recent years is the creation of the Multidisciplinary Coordinating Group against Trafficking in Human Beings, an advisory body foreseen by the Law to combat trafficking of 2007, coordinated by the Minister of Interior and composed by all relevant authorities such as Ministry of Justice, the Police, Ministry of Foreign affairs, the Social Welfare Department, the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance. The Group also includes two NGOs. The aim of the Group is to review, monitor and evaluate the National Action Plan on THB, monitor and evaluate the National Referral System, to collect and exchange information and data among in relation to offences provided in the law and the protection of victims. Further, the Group can make recommendations and proposals on amending the current law, organisation of seminars and training as well as awareness raising activities.

The Multidisciplinary Coordinating Group drafted the National Action Plan on Combating Trafficking in Persons 2010-2012 which was adopted by the Council of Ministers. The

National Action Plan includes chapters prevention, recognition of victims, victim support and protection, prosecution, research and data collection, education and training, international cooperation, and monitoring and evaluation of implementation. Although gender is not taken specifically into account and language is gender-neutral, the NAP does include actions to address the demand side of trafficking which is a positive step in tackling the root causes of trafficking.

An important development in relation to trafficking was in relation to the policy governing the entry, residence, and employment of third-country nationals as performing artists in cabarets and other entertainment establishments, following intense national and international criticism for the regime of "artiste" or "entertainment" visas. In 2006, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights reported that approximately 4,000 permits of "artiste visas" were issued each year, mostly for women from Eastern Europe, and that many of those women worked in prostitution. The European Court for Human Rights in its judgment of 7 January 2010 in the case *Rantsev v. Cyprus and Russia*, found that the regime of "artiste" visas in Cyprus had not given the victim practical and effective protection against trafficking and exploitation, and it concluded that there had been a violation of Article 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights in that regard. "Artiste" visas were abolished by a Ministerial Decision of 13 September 2008 (in force since 1 November 2008). The new policy includes the following elements: 1. All third country national entering Cyprus as 'artists' are issued employment permits as 'creative artists' or 'performing artists', 2. With the aim to curb exploitation of the system, applications for employment of third country nationals as 'artists' are submitted to the Department of Labour and reviewed by an interdepartmental committee, on the basis of specified criteria concerning their qualifications, experience, etc., 3. Revision of the contracts of employment to comply with the standard contract of the Department of Industrial Relations, which applied to all foreign workers, 3. New legislation regulating the operation of private employment agencies is pending before the Parliament.

2.5. The elimination of gender stereotypes

2.5.1. Media

Gender stereotypes and traditional attitudes have been recognized as one of the main obstacles to achieving de facto equality between women and men in Cyprus. The National Machinery for Women's Rights, through the National Action Plan on Equality between Women and Men has identified the media as a powerful tool in raising awareness and combating discrimination based on gender. Media can play a very important role in challenging the norms as these related to gender and attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality and gender based violence. Based on the most recent survey carried out by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) for the Global Media Monitoring Project 2010, women are severely underrepresented in the news media. Although women have an overall presence as news subjects, reporters and presenters, this presence only reaches 15% as compared to 85% men. This vast gender gap clearly demonstrates women's near invisibility in the media in Cyprus. Despite this, there have been encouraging developments in recent years as issues of human rights, including gender equality, have taken a more prominent place in media reporting – particularly in the print media. Journalists, particularly young women journalists, are taking an increased interest in human rights issues, including women's rights and gender equality.

The National Action Plan on Equality between Women and Men (2007-2013) foresees a number of activities in order to raise awareness among the media and to promote more

gender balanced and gender sensitive reporting. The activities include inter alia training programmes for journalists and media professionals, comprehensive research on the way the Cypriot media present women, as well as the design and implementation of a Journalist Code of Ethics. The Code of Ethics is currently being drafted by the Equality Authority of the Commissioner for Administration, and is expected to be published soon.

2.5.2. Education

The National Action Plan on Equality between Women and Men (2007-2013) puts particular emphasis on the elimination of stereotypes in its Chapter on Education and this is being pursued within the framework of the educational reform that is currently underway aiming at incorporating diversity, multiculturalism, and gender equality. Sex education has been incorporated in the new curriculum under the module of health education and material on violence against women and gender equality has been included.

The Health Education Program consists of the following major thematic areas: 1) personal development and empowerment 2) healthy lifestyle and safety 3) development of social self 4) creating active citizenship. Each thematic area consists of subthemes.

Family planning and sexual reproductive health is incorporated in the area "development of social self" and is taught at Pre primary school (children at the age of 5, at all levels of Primary school (pupils aged 6 – 11years old) and in Secondary School (pupils aged 12 – 16 years old) first, second and third grade of Gymnasium and first grade of Lyceum.

The NMWR has pursued a number of initiatives aiming at challenging stereotyped traditional gender roles. In particular, two projects were implemented: the first aiming at encouraging girls to pursue new career paths and the other aimed at encouraging boys to become more involved in family and private life.

2.6. Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Apart from an Action Plan by the Ministry of Health that deals with HIV/AIDS, there is no National Action Plan or Strategy that deals with Sexual and Reproductive Health. There are no national statements on how prevention/health promotion is viewed. A Health Education Committee involving government and officials and NGO representatives has been established, but is currently inactive. There are no formal policies and action plans with regard to contraception, abortion, sexuality education and SRHR services for young people.

2.6.1. Abortion

The abortion law in Cyprus enacted in 1974 and amended in 1986 prohibits abortion except under specific conditions. Abortion might be allowed in cases where at least two medical doctors agree that continuation of the pregnancy would constitute a serious physiological or emotional hazard to the mother or child, including foetal malformation. The law also permits abortion in cases of rape, provided that a certificate from the appropriate police authority is presented along with a medical report, stating that the pregnancy was a result of rape and its continuance would seriously harm the social status of the pregnant woman, or her family, or both.

2.6.2. Reproductive Health and Care

The Ministry of Health offers pregnancy related services including pre and post natal care through public hospitals and maternity clinics throughout the island. Maternal and child care services are offered through health care centres. However, primary health also includes family planning, which is not offered in public hospitals. Although most legislation is not overly prohibitive over matters of reproductive health, there are strict internal regulations in public hospitals. For instance, sterilization to women is offered only under the condition that the woman is at least 30 years of age, has at least 4 children, and with written spousal consent.

Contraceptive methods available in Cyprus are limited to the male condom, few brands of combined oral contraceptives, the Intra-Uterine Device (IUD), and hormonal Intra-Uterine Systems (IUS). These are available only through private clinics, pharmacies at market prices, and at reduced prices or for free by the Cyprus Family Planning Association (CFPA). Emergency contraception is provided by pharmacies without prescription.

2.6.3. Cancer Screening

The Breast Cancer Screening Programme began as a pilot programme in July 2003 in one health centre in the capital Nicosia. The programme is now implemented in all major areas of Cyprus. The programme is population-based and targets women aged 50-69 years. The programme is offered free of charge to all women regardless of whether they are illegible or not for free public health care.

There is currently no running population or non-population based public screening programme for cervical cancer in Cyprus.

3. CONCLUSION

Despite impressive changes have taken place at the legislative and institutional level with regard to gender equality, mostly due to the harmonization process with the *aquis communautaire*, challenges remain and statistical evidence demonstrate that, although on paper Cyprus' gender policies seem excellent, little has been done to actively promote these policies and generate awareness such as disseminate information to citizens relating to this new legislation or provide information and training to employers, policy makers, and decision-makers to effectively implement these measures.

From the brief overview of gender equality policy in Cyprus, the need for a comprehensive effort toward the implementation of planned gender-equality measures and to raise awareness through appropriate training and special campaigns is evident. Since little has been done to tackle the lack of gender awareness and appropriate sensitivity of those involved with the implementation of gender equality policies, we risk the policies not actually enhancing gender equality as intended.

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