



FEM-UNITED

united to prevent femicide in europe

**POLICY BRIEF ON FEMICIDE
PREVENTION: CYPRUS**

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Introduction

Femicide – the gender-motivated intentional killing of women – is not only the most extreme manifestation of gender-based violence against women but also the most violent manifestation of discrimination against them and their inequality.

Despite the magnitude of the problem, and calls by the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, data on femicide was not officially and systematically collected in the EU and there was a lack of transnational tools for the study of femicide, before the European Observatory on Femicide began to develop an internationally comparable data base. Nevertheless, femicide is a notably under-researched subject. A common definition of femicide does not exist. Furthermore, harmful attitudes, behaviours and stereotypes, as well as a lack of understanding of the gendered dynamics of intimate partner femicides, impede prevention measures, including early and effective intervention.

This policy brief consists of a summing up of the findings and outcomes of the research, capacity-building trainings and multi-stakeholder meetings conducted within the framework of the EU-funded project '**FEM-UNITED - United to prevent IPV/DV Femicide in Europe**'.

The FEM-UNITED Project

The FEM-UnitED project aims to improve responses to intimate partner violence (IPV) and domestic violence (DV) in order to reduce harm to women and children, and prevent femicide. The project aims to develop system-wide responses to IPV by creating an evidence base for raising public awareness and fostering multidisciplinary cooperation and capacity-building, adopting a gender-specific, victim-centred approach. In other words, FEM-UnitED is about creating evidence for collaborative policy change.

FEM-UnitED seeks to reinforce and contribute to international efforts – such as Femi(ni)cide Watch Platform¹ and the European Observatory on Femicide (EOF)² – by a) further developing quantitative and qualitative tools dealing with transnational and applied femicide data that measure the prevalence of femicide and related risk factors; b) identifying gaps in system responses to IPV/DV across partner countries; and c) initiating change through systematic stakeholder engagement that will result in specific commitments for action for femicide prevention based on the project's findings and results.

The FEM-UnitED partnership spans five EU countries and includes the University of Malta, the Cyprus University of Technology, the Institute for Empirical Sociology (IfeS) at the Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg in Germany, the University of Zaragoza in Spain, and the University of Porto in Portugal. The project team also includes women's rights and gender equality NGOs, such as the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (Cyprus), the Women's Rights Foundation (Malta), and the UMAR – União de Mulheres Alternativa e Resposta (Portugal).

This project builds on the work of the EU-funded project COST Action on Femicide across Europe (2014-2017)³ that resulted in the establishment of the European Observatory on Femicide (EOF),⁴ the first European-wide network monitoring cases of femicide and contributing to the prevention of femicide. The EOF has been systematically collecting data on femicide in Europe since 2020.⁵

¹ Femi(ni)cide Watch Platform: <https://femicide-watch.org/>.

² <http://eof.cut.ac.cy/>

³ COST Action IS1206: Femicide across Europe (2014-2017): <https://www.cost.eu/actions/IS1206/>.

⁴ European Observatory on Femicide (EOF): <http://eof.cut.ac.cy/>

⁵ Germany as project partner in this project has been participating also in the EOF network research group since 2018; the researchers collect statistical data and in-depth case information on the extent of femicide in Germany as well as analyse the findings in order to recommend ways to prevent femicides.

Prevalence of Femicide

The FEM-UNITED Project revealed that official national data collected by the police and the courts is not comparable between the [partner] countries due to different legal definitions and/or different statistical frameworks of counting cases. A key priority and aim of the FEM-UNITED Project therefore was the development of two data collection tools: one for quantitative and one for qualitative data collection. This provided a common agreed variables selection and produced comparable data. Information was collected through the media, police press releases or other sources available in the public domain for the years 2019-2020.

Based on the data collected, 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. Among the 5 partner countries participating in the FEM-UNITED project, the population-based rate [of femicide] was highest in Cyprus.

Based on the quantitative data collected, the key characteristics of femicide in Cyprus are: (i) the majority of femicides were perpetrated in the context of intimate partner violence and/or domestic violence; (ii) all of the perpetrators were male; (iii) the majority of victims were non-Cypriot nationals with a migrant background or status; (iv) the majority of perpetrators were Cypriot nationals; (v) only one case was known to the police and the Social Welfare Services, in which the victim had filed a complaint and a protection order had been issued against the perpetrator; (vi) the majority of femicide cases went to trial, where the perpetrator was convicted of murder.

Based on the qualitative analysis, the following common points could be identified: (i) there was a history of intimate partner violence and/or domestic violence; (ii) the femicides occurred in the context of separation between the victim and the perpetrator; and, (iii) the perpetrator had threatened to kill the victim prior to the femicide.

The research results highlight that: (i) the issuance of a protection order against the perpetrator in one of the cases was not sufficient to prevent the femicide; (ii) although the refugee status of one of the victims led to the very early involvement of the social welfare services and the police, potential language and cultural barriers, as well as the victim's heightened vulnerability due to her refugee status, were not adequately addressed; (iii) in one of the cases, the perpetrator reportedly had mental health issues and had threatened to commit suicide before carrying out the femicide; (iv) the media portrayal identified the perpetrator's threat to kill himself as mental illness only, and not as a strategy of coercive control by the perpetrator over the victim.

Gaps & Challenges

1. **Protection measures for victims of IPV/DV:** Although the legal framework foresees the issuance of protection orders in cases of IPV/DV, there is no data available to ascertain the number and type of protection orders issued in Cyprus. It is therefore not possible to assess their prevalence or effectiveness in protecting victims or in preventing further violence, including femicide. In addition, there is no information as to whether protection orders are actively monitored or which activities the police/monitoring authorities undertake to check compliance with protection orders.
2. **Lack of a gender perspective in law, policy and practice:** the development of the legal and policy framework on the prevention and combatting of domestic violence and intimate partner violence in Cyprus has been based on 'family violence', without specifically taking into account the gendered dynamics of these forms of violence and framing them as violence against women. Consequently, this lack of a gender perspective has shaped the practice and operation of frontline services and has prevented the development of expertise and specialisation among frontline professionals. Although, a gender

dimension has been instated in the provisions of the Violence against Women Law 2021, any conflict between this law and the Violence in the Family Laws should be resolved in favour of ensuring the maximum protection for victims.

3. **Lack of an intersectional approach:** Despite the significant migrant population in Cyprus and a high incidence of violence against women and femicide among this group, migrant and ethnic minority women are not specifically addressed in National Action Plans, rendering them invisible on a policy level. Overall, National Action Plans do not make reference to or foresee actions to combat violence against migrant women, women with disabilities, single mothers, and other disadvantaged groups among women.
4. **Lack of data:** Public authorities do not collect comprehensive data on all forms of violence against women disaggregated by sex and age of victim and perpetrator, type of violence, relationship between the victim and perpetrator. Available data only include incidences of domestic violence, rape and sexual assault, reported to the police. Limited research or data exists on violence against women of ethnic minority or migrant background in Cyprus.
5. **(In)Effectiveness of risk assessment:** In terms of risk assessment, there is a protocol in place for risk assessment in cases of IPV, including in cases of ex-spouses and ex-partners, which has been implemented by the police since 2018. However, no evaluation of the risk assessment protocol has been carried out to date and it is therefore not possible to ascertain the use and effectiveness of the protocol in reducing and preventing IPV, and by extension femicide. Other frontline professionals (e.g. Social Welfare Services, Health Services) do not use risk assessment tools to evaluate risk and to inform responses to violence against women.
6. **Inter-agency cooperation is weak:** Although Cyprus has developed procedures for inter-agency cooperation between the police, social welfare services and the healthcare services on cases relating to domestic violence, there is a lack of a gender-perspective and of the connection between domestic violence/intimate partner violence and femicide. This has led to gaps at the systems-level in victim protection, hindering the prevention of femicide. Frontline services, for example within the healthcare sector, lack specialised or inter-departmental protocols, procedures and guidelines for identifying and handling cases of intimate partner violence and domestic violence.
7. **Training of frontline professionals is inconsistent and inadequate:** Overall, there is limited expertise in relation to violence against women among frontline professionals. This is a direct outcome of the lack of specialised training provided. Training is offered by NGOs, but not systematically due to lack of funding. Training on violence affecting specific groups of women is also lacking, particularly in relation to migrant women and women with disabilities.
8. **Absence of strategy to prevent and combat femicide and violence against women:** To date, National Action Plans have not made reference to or foreseen actions specifically on the prevention of femicide. Additionally, National Action Plans are not accompanied by specific objectives, qualitative and quantitative indicators, allocation of sufficient funding, and there is no evidence of any follow-up or evaluation. Overall, National Action Plans lack the political will and resources needed for their implementation and largely remain aspirations.
9. **The media promotes sexist and stereotypical views of women:** Media reporting on femicide lacks an understanding of the gender dimensions of femicide and the link with violence against women and domestic violence. This link is often overlooked by focusing on the masculine perspective. Further, media coverage of femicide(s) in Cyprus is also characterised by the use of sexist language which attributes blame to the victim, normalising the violence committed by men against women.

Legal & Policy

Legal Framework

Overall, the legislative framework in Cyprus is comprehensive.

Forms of IPV and DV are criminalized under the Violence in the Family Laws 2000 (as amended) and under the Prevention and Combatting of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence Law 2021 (**VAW Law 2021**). Cyprus ratified the Council of Europe Convention to Prevent and Combat Violence against Women and Domestic Violence in 2017.

With the passage of the VAW Law 2021, the legal framework has been expanded and covers all forms of gender-based violence against women, in line with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention, including economic violence and psychological violence. Further, as a result of the recent amendment to the VAW Law 2021, femicide is now recognised as a crime distinct from homicide and as a form of violence against women.

Other relevant legislative provisions governing the prevention and combatting of gender-based violence in Cyprus can be found in criminal law, including in the Criminal Code.

Women victims of domestic violence in Cyprus have legal access to protection measures under both criminal law and civil law, including temporary protection orders restraining the perpetrator from contact with the victim, as well as restraining orders prohibiting perpetrators from entering or remaining in the marital home.

Former & current policies

As regards policies to prevent gender-based violence in Cyprus, there have been two National Action Plans for the Prevention of Violence in the Family: (i) between 2010-2013, and (ii) between 2017-2019.

Currently, there is no National Action Plan in place for the Prevention of Violence in the Family, nor is there a national action plan on the prevention of violence against women in general. There are no policies in place specifically on preventing femicide, nor is there any mention of femicide in existing and former National Action Plans for the Prevention of Violence in the Family or in the current National Action Plan for Equality between Men and Women 2019-2023.

It is worth noting that pursuant to the provisions of the VAW Law 2021, a coordinating body was established in March 2022 which is responsible for the development of a national strategy on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

Policy Recommendations for Effective Prevention & Intervention

1. **Robust data on violence against women and femicide:** The collection of reliable, regularly updated administrative and statistical data on victims and perpetrators of all forms of violence against women, disaggregated by sex, age and victim-perpetrator relationship, should be mandatory. A common tool for statistical data collection in order to reflect the specific circumstances relating to the killings of women should be adopted by all relevant stakeholders.
2. **Mandatory and systematic specialised training for frontline professionals:** Training of frontline professionals dealing with victims and perpetrators of all acts of violence against women – and specifically on the prevention of intimate partner femicide – should be mandatory and systematic. Training should be tailored to meet the specific needs of frontline services. A clear gender perspective should be incorporated in all protocols, guidelines and procedures system-wide for all frontline services.
3. **Standardized approach to risk assessment for the prevention of femicide:** A standardised approach to risk assessment must be adopted that would promote a shared understanding of risk across the system, and a common language to communicate risk.

Risk assessment protocols which are both gender sensitive and culturally competent should be used by all frontline professionals, and risk factors associated with coercive and controlling behaviour should be incorporated in such protocols. Specialized training for frontline professionals on the use of risk assessment tools is also essential.

4. **More effective use and monitoring of protection measures:** The use of protection orders should be increased and their effectiveness improved by ensuring that monitoring mechanisms are developed and put in place, so that protection orders effectively provide safety and protection for women and their children. Breaches of protection orders must be appropriately sanctioned in order to have a deterrent effect.
5. **Multi-agency cooperation and coordination should be strengthened:** Multi-agency and multidisciplinary cooperation involving all relevant stakeholders, including women's organizations and NGOs, should be strengthened and supported, as well as within the context of the Woman's House that operates as a "one-stop-shop" crisis intervention centre for victims of violence against women.
6. **Protecting migrant women from gender-based violence:** Barriers to access to comprehensive protection and support to all women and girls should be removed, particularly women who are in situations of disadvantage and facing multiple discrimination, including women of migrant background. The Cyprus government's reservation to Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention in relation to autonomous residence permits for migrant women experiencing violence should be lifted.
7. **Recognising children as victims in their own right:** Girl children must to be recognized as victims of femicide in their own right. The issue of children living with intimate partner violence must be recognised and effectively addressed.
8. **Adequate and sustainable funding for specialised services provided by NGOs:** Victim support services are assigned to specialised NGOs and they should therefore be provided with appropriate financial resources in order to meet demand.
9. **Awareness raising among the public and the media:** More attention should be given to primary prevention of violence against women by recognising the role of the educational system, as well as the media, as transmitters of traditional cultural and social norms that are conducive to violence against women. Sensitisation of media professionals through awareness raising and training are essential to strengthen skills in gender-sensitive, complete reporting on femicides.