

Joint Report By

the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies and
the Association of Women to Support Living

Policy Framework and Recommendations for Addressing Domestic Violence Against Women and Supporting Survivors in Cyprus



 MEDITERRANEAN
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Policy Framework and Recommendations for Addressing Violence against Women and Supporting Survivors across Cyprus

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Introduction

Violence Against Women (VAW) remains a pressing and pervasive issue that transcends geographical and societal boundaries, affecting individuals regardless of their cultural or regional affiliations. Cyprus, a small island in the Mediterranean has experienced ethnic conflict followed by a war which has led to the division of the island for almost 50 years. The Republic of Cyprus (the southern territory where a majority of Greek Cypriots live) has been a member of the European Union since May 2004 whereas the northern part of Cyprus (where a majority of Turkish Cypriots live) is considered by the international community to be under the effective control of Turkey. Although the northern part of Cyprus is outside of the European Acquis Communautaire it has its own functioning judicial system and legislative assembly.

There has been research that has disclosed how the issue of violence against women was used as a weapon of war in the history of Cyprus. Since then the country still grapples with the problem. Violence against women and domestic violence struggles to take its place as a priority on the political agenda island wide as it is considered peripheral to issues such as the 'Cyprus Problem'. In this context the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) in the Republic of Cyprus and the Association of Women to Support Living (KAYAD) in the northern part of Cyprus continue to work relentlessly to place empowerment of women on the agenda and overcome challenges that impact the lives of women and girls. This report aims to shed light on the current state of VAW in Cyprus across the divide, with a focus on the most recent developments and the crucial aspects of legislative and policy framework to combat domestic violence.

Background

VAW in Cyprus is a multifaceted problem that has garnered the attention of both international and national bodies. The Republic of Cyprus (RoC) ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1985, signalling its commitment to addressing gender-based discrimination. In June 2015, the RoC signed the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, commonly known as the Istanbul Convention, and later ratified it in 2017. However, these commitments have not yet translated into comprehensive change on the ground.

In the northern part of Cyprus there is a judiciary that applies legislation that is enacted by the legislative assembly. The foundations of its legal system are borrowed from the British Colonial era. The legal system has however developed with legislation enacted and revised in the legislative assembly. Although the Turkish Cypriot community enacts laws under the 'parliamentary assembly' of the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' this 'state' has no legal international recognition and, therefore, although it allegedly 'ratifies' international covenants the 'state' cannot be held accountable in international courts. Instead, international covenants are 'approved' as local legislation and is considered to be on the same level as the 'Constitution'. Both the CEDAW (1996) and the Istanbul Convention (2011) have been 'approved' into the legal system of northern Cyprus however just like the RoC there has been very limited real application of either of the conventions.

Purpose of the Report

The primary objective of this report is to provide a critical assessment of the legislative and policy framework in Cyprus related to VAW. It aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and shortcomings within the country's approach to addressing VAW. Moreover, it will emphasize the urgent need for improvement, particularly in light of the latest developments and the introduction of new victim support measures. The report is unique in the context of Cyprus as it puts forward an overview of the scope of the problem island-wide and not just limited to a particular territory.

Scope and Methodology

This report draws upon the most recent information available up to 2023, collected through a review of official documents, reports, and academic literature, combined with available data on the prevalence of violence against women. The analysis focuses on key areas, including the legal framework, support services for victims, prevention strategies, training and education, funding and resource allocation, the role of non-governmental organizations and civil society, recommendations for progress, data collection, and research efforts.

Recent Developments

The Republic of Cyprus (RoC) has recently introduced legal amendments, such as Law 115(I)/2021, which expanded the scope of domestic violence legislation and included provisions aligned with the Istanbul Convention. In northern Cyprus, a similar development occurred in 2015 when the 1/1998 family law was revised to include a definition of domestic violence as per the Istanbul Convention.

Unfortunately, in the northern part of Cyprus, although a draft domestic violence law was published in the official gazette in April 2021, the legislation was completely abandoned and has not yet been re-admitted into a legislative committee.

In December 2020, the RoC announced the establishment of the Women's House, a crisis centre aimed at providing vital support services to victims of VAW, including migrant women and refugees regardless of resident status. Similarly, in 2021 a new high capacity Women's Shelter was opened in the northern part of Cyprus run entirely by the Nicosia Turkish Municipality.

This report will provide an overview of the legal framework and policies in place to afford protection for victims, prosecution of perpetrators and prevention of violence against women, emphasizing the need for greater efforts to effectively combating VAW in Cyprus, and ensuring the well-being of women and girls who continue to be at risk in this environment.

Legal Framework

Republic of Cyprus

The Republic of Cyprus has undertaken significant international commitments to address Violence Against Women (VAW) through the ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1985, and, in 2017, the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, commonly referred to as the Istanbul Convention. These commitments signify the country's acknowledgment of the pressing need to prevent and combat VAW and uphold the rights of women and girls. However, while some progress has been made, there remain substantial gaps and challenges, particularly in relation to the implementation of laws and policies in the area.

As mentioned above, in 2017 the Istanbul Convention was ratified, but the RoC imposed reservations to specific articles. Specifically, the RoC imposed a reservation to Article 59 in relation to the provision of autonomous residence permits for migrant women experiencing violence. An additional reservation was imposed on Article 30, paragraph 2 on the provision of adequate state compensation for the victims that have sustained serious bodily injury or impairment of health. In addition, there is a reservation to article 44 paragraph 1, that foresees necessary legislative or other measures to establish jurisdiction over any offence established in accordance with this Convention, when the offence is committed overseas. In 2023, the RoC withdrew its reservations to Articles 59 and 44, but retained its reservation to Article 30 on state compensation of victims.

Cyprus has made efforts to align its legal definitions with the Istanbul Convention's framework for gender-based violence against women. The legislative framework in the Republic of Cyprus now recognizes four forms of domestic violence: physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, and economic violence. The inclusion of these forms of violence reflects the country's recognition of the diverse and complex nature of VAW. In addition, the definition of rape has been amended in the Criminal Code to align with the consent-based definition provided by Article 36 of the Convention.

Notably, Cyprus introduced Law 115(I)/2021, titled "On the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence," following the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. This law marks a significant step in criminalizing various forms of violence against women, including femicide, which was recognized as a distinct criminal offence with amendment 117(I)/2022, rendering gender-related killings as an aggravating factor when imposing sentences.

Law 115(I)/2021 represents a departure from the previous legislative framework established by Law 119 (I)/2000, which adopted a gender-neutral definition of domestic violence, encompassing both victims and perpetrators of both sexes. However, the new law has adjusted the definition of gender-based violence to align with the Istanbul Convention's principles. It has also eliminated the requirement for previous or current cohabitation, extending the law's application to intimate partners who do not have a history of cohabitation.

The transition from Law 119 (I)/2000 to Law 115(I)/2021 represents a marked shift towards a more gender-specific approach in addressing VAW. While the former law adopted a gender-neutral stance on domestic violence, the latter has realigned its definitions with international standards, acknowledging the distinct challenges and risks faced by women. In addition, stalking has been criminalised under the Protection from Harassment and Stalking Law 2021 (114(I)/2021) and sexism and online sexism have also been criminalised under the Combatting of Sexism and Online Sexism Law 2020 (209(I)/2020).

While these changes indicate progress in recognizing the gendered nature of VAW and aligning with international commitments, there is still a pressing need for stronger implementation, comprehensive protection, and the elimination of any remaining reservations on key articles of the Istanbul Convention.

For example, the Cyprus Family Law 1990 (23/1990) is in place, but in Family Court practice domestic violence is not taken into consideration when deciding on child custody and visitation rights in accordance with Article 31 of the Istanbul Convention. While there is little credible scientific support for the theory of “parental alienation syndrome”, the term is used abusively and with relative success by perpetrators of violence to gain credibility in the family law system. The consequences of court-mandated contact with violent men can endanger the lives of women and their children.

Furthermore, free legal aid is inaccessible to VAW/DV victims, as they are not recognized as a specific group in the relevant law. In addition, the application for legal aid is subject to a “means and merits” test. Regarding the “means” part of the test, a VAW/DV victim applying for legal aid must show that they do not have the means to pay for the services of a lawyer. This claim is examined by an officer of the Social Welfare Services who submits a report to the Court. In practice, however, the decision is at the discretion of the Court and very few applications for legal aid have been submitted and even less granted, leaving Cyprus exposed to article 57 (Legal Aid) of the Istanbul Convention.

Cyprus continues to face challenges in effectively addressing VAW, particularly in areas such as victim support services, prevention strategies, training and education, and data collection. These areas require focused attention to bridge the gap between legal frameworks and practical implementation, ultimately advancing the protection and well-being of women and girls in Cyprus.

Northern Cyprus

In northern Cyprus the legislative framework surrounding the prevention of violence against women is constituted by three legal instruments: The 1/1998 Family Law Act which affords women the right to a protection order; the 5/1996 act that ‘ratifies’ the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the 58/2011 act that ‘ratifies’ the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). As mentioned above, it is important to note that the term ‘ratification’ is not an accurate legal projection. Instead, the word ‘approval (endorsement)’ is used and it means that the conventions are regarded as domestic law.

In 2018, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime was also 'ratified'; however, there is no evidence of the legislation being utilized in court.

A detailed definition of domestic violence exists in the Turkish Cypriot family law; however, it is limited to the article regulating protection orders. The definition is borrowed from the Istanbul Convention and, like in the RoC, it covers physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence. In practice, however, this definition cannot be applied to other areas of divorce and family law including on matters relating to child custody and compensation. Thus, a court can make a finding regarding domestic violence in a ruling, but can give the custody of a child to a perpetrator in the same verdict. There has been one appeal decision regarding protection orders, which is in compliance both with the Istanbul Convention and with ECHR judgments regarding domestic violence, clearly stating that the court must give protection orders in instances when it is convinced not of violence but also the threat of violence.

In 2014, KAYAD embarked upon a journey to draft a comprehensive domestic violence legislation. The legislative draft received the input of hundreds of professionals from sectors including social services, municipal staff, law enforcement, and the body responsible for education and health workers. On the 14th of April 2021, the draft legislation was published in the official gazette awaiting approval from the legislative body. Unfortunately the 'general elections' held in the northern part of Cyprus and the formation of a new assembly rendered the draft law obsolete. As a result, no domestic violence legislation exists and perpetrators of domestic violence are prosecuted under the criminal code. Hence, a perpetrator who has been subjecting his partner to years of violence can only be prosecuted for his latest offence against her, and no evidence will be submitted to court detailing the scope and extent of the violence during the relationship.

Although the Istanbul Convention states clearly that domestic violence is a gender based phenomenon, the 1/1998 Family Law act makes no such gender specific references to domestic violence and perpetrators can also utilize the legislation to obtain protection orders against survivors and remove them from the home.

While the Istanbul Convention has been 'ratified' without any reservations, it is not applied at any level. Survivors still experience practical challenges with protection orders since they are not binding until they have been served by court officers to the perpetrator. Moreover, the police department has increasingly acquired the habit of prosecuting survivors for 'encouraging' perpetrators to breach protection orders.

While the Istanbul Convention, as well as the article on protection orders of the Family Law, provides basic protection for survivors in the northern part of Cyprus, a comprehensive strategy for the prevention of domestic violence, protection of victims and prosecution of perpetrators relies on the enactment of the Domestic Violence legislation. In particular, stakeholders have minimal communication and cooperation with each other and multi-agency cooperation is limited. Authorities are not held accountable for failing to uphold commitments outlined by both the CEDAW and Istanbul Convention, and the failure to effectively respond to violence has led to a high number of domestic violence related femicides and domestic violence.

To conclude, although there is an apparent attempt to adhere to international standards for combatting violence against women and domestic violence across the island, full application of international legal standards is still lacking. The northern part of Cyprus in particular is unable to comply due to the lack of comprehensive DV legislation. Both sides of the divide would benefit from the effective implementation of legislation in line with both the CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention.

Victim Support Services

Republic of Cyprus

The Republic of Cyprus has taken several steps in providing victim support services to victims/survivors of Violence Against Women (VAW). While these efforts reflect progress, several challenges persist in offering comprehensive and effective support services to all women without discrimination.

Shelters for victims/survivors of VAW/DV exist in each main city in the Republic of Cyprus, co-financed by the State with coverage of up to 50-60% of their annual budgets. The management of these shelters is outsourced to the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (SPAVO), an NGO that plays a pivotal role in providing services to women who have experienced VAW/DV. SPAVO operates a 24-hour helpline (1440) and offers women who have experienced VAW/DV a safe place in the shelter or alternative housing. The shelters also provide psychological support along with running a perpetrator programme and other social support services.

However, significant gaps exist in direct victim support in line with international standards. Notably, there is a significant need for legal aid as the currently legal framework renders legal aid inaccessible to victims of VAW/DV. Furthermore, access to information, protection measures is and compensation is limited.

The operation of the Women's House in December 2020 represents a step forward in offering comprehensive support services to VAW/DV victims/survivors, including migrant women and refugees regardless of their legal status. The establishment of the Women's House is a positive development as it potentially centralizes services and provides a safe space for victims. However, the effectiveness of the Women's House is contingent upon several factors. Adequate funding, resources, and expertise are vital for the centre to deliver comprehensive support services that address the specific needs of women who have experienced different forms of VAW/DV. Furthermore, state authorities such as the police, the social welfare services, and the health services must ensure that their internal protocols include referral to the Woman's House to all victims of VAW/DV, that it is fully resourced with trained professionals, and that they meaningfully engage in multi-agency work within the centre.

With respect to gender-based violence against women belonging to disadvantaged groups, there are gaps in the support and intervention system. The recently established Woman's House provides integrated specialised services to women and girls that are victims of violence against women without discrimination on any grounds, including migrant status or residence status.

However, migrant women often do not have access to services or lack adequate specialised support due to cultural, economic and other barriers, as well as institutional racism.

In terms of protecting women with disabilities, there are no specific legal or policy measures on preventing and combatting violence against women with disabilities. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in their concluding remarks (2017), expressed concern regarding the inadequacy of the legal framework to prevent and combat violence against persons with disabilities, particularly women, as well as the lack of specific and accessible mechanisms for reporting such violence.

It is also worth mentioning that, despite the significant migrant population in Cyprus, migrant women are not addressed in the National Action Plans, rendering them invisible on a policy level. There is no evidence to suggest that services for victims of violence are culturally sensitive or able to assist women with special needs or who are facing multiple discrimination. FGM and other harmful traditional practices such as honor related violence and forced marriage are not framed as issues in Cyprus, despite an increasing migrant population in Cyprus, and there is a lack of data on specific forms of harmful traditional practices.

While the Republic of Cyprus has made legislative advancements to address VAW/DV, emerging forms of violence like FGM and forced child marriage pose specific challenges. The need to develop expertise to address these issues is urgent. The absence of clear guidelines, protocols, and specialized services for victims of emerging forms of VAW/DV presents a significant challenge. Cyprus must focus on enhancing its capacity to address these specific types of violence through the comprehensive training of professionals.

Northern Cyprus

Between 2014 and 2020, the Turkish Cypriot Community maintained exceptional progress in terms of the provision of support services to victims/survivors of domestic violence. With the effective lobbying and advocacy of civil society organisations, backed by acknowledgment of the problem by leading politicians and public support, important progress was made in the struggle to combat domestic violence.

In March 2017, a workshop took place under the auspices of the body responsible for employment and social security and a report was published detailing short, medium and long-term objectives to overcome domestic violence. Unfortunately, since then there has been no follow up to this activity. All goals have been abandoned and the limited services outlined below compose the little support available to victims/survivors of domestic violence.

In 2016, the Nicosia Turkish Municipality (the northern part of the capital divided city) established the first ever women's shelter that would be run by local and/or central 'government'. In 2021, the shelter moved into a larger building with 12 rooms that can accommodate up to five women and children in each room (60 women and children in total). Victims/survivors who stay at the shelter can benefit from kindergarten and preschool services free of charge. Women can stay at the shelter for up to 6 months where they are provided with psychological, legal and health services, as well as have access to food and nourishment free of charge. Children of victims/survivors are

also provided with support to attend school including stationary and uniform. The shelter is also accessible to women victims of trafficking in human beings.

The body responsible for social services has a very limited support mechanism available to survivors of domestic violence. Although various bodies were established together with their legislative and statutory authorities in order to target domestic violence and provide support to survivors, staff were not recruited to the necessary units and they failed to function.

Since September 2018, survivors of domestic violence have been entitled to legal aid. Social services thus function as a referral service to ensure survivors know how to take the necessary steps to recruit a lawyer. Unfortunately, the legal aid system does not function as effectively as intended. There is varying information regarding the efficiency of payments to lawyers from the authorities, which would explain why victims/survivors are reporting delayed processes and difficulties finding lawyers who accept legal aid cases.

Social services also function as a referral service to the Nicosia Women's Shelter and provide women with up to 6 months of financial support. The amount provided is determined by the number of children the survivor has. Normally this time is satisfactory for an interim alimony payment order to be obtained by the court. Victims/survivors are also entitled to financial rent support if they are not staying at the women's shelter.

In court proceedings where the court is convinced by an applicant that the interest of the child/children are at risk, the court may order the family to be monitored by the body 'GADEM' Youth Family Support and Education Centre. Although social services previously had effective partnerships with civil society organisations such as KAYAD for the provision of domestic violence training, this practice has been abandoned. The staff of GADEM are therefore not domestic violence trained.

In 2018, the police force established a violence against women unit that would function to take complaints and investigate domestic violence related crimes. Although the unit continues to receive complaints and carry out investigations, recent reports from survivors demonstrate the police unit is in desperate need of training. Although the police force had previously carried out DV related trainings, no such protocol exists between the force and civil society for the continuation of the training. Moreover, a concerning practice of the police has recently started whereby survivors are being prosecuted by the police for encouraging and/or inciting a protection order breach. Thus, should a woman who has a protection order against her child's father, call to inform him of an emergency regarding her child, she could face prosecution for encouraging a breach of a protection order.

In 2018, KAYAD, with the support of two UK based organisations Tender and Brook and with the input of stakeholders, devised a 14 lesson curricula on healthy relationships, gender equality, domestic violence and sexual health. After a four-year struggle the curricula was endorsed and approved by the body responsible for education. However, the project that maintained the curricula would be taught in schools was halted and the body withdrew its support from the curricula.

Importantly for the purposes of this report, there is little to no intercommunal cooperation between organisations and institutions providing support services. However, as MIGS and KAYAD are both official members of WAVE (Women against Violence in Europe Network), data collection results do appear together in WAVE reports and material providing island wide statistics on important developments regarding support services for survivors of domestic violence.

In conclusion, the Republic of Cyprus has made progress in providing direct victim support for survivors of VAW/DV. However, significant gaps exist, particularly in offering legal aid services and addressing emerging forms of VAW/DV like FGM and forced child marriage. The role of the Women's House as a multi-agency crisis centre is promising, but its success depends on sufficient funding and the availability of resources and expertise to deliver comprehensive support services. In the northern part of Cyprus, although some progress was made as outlined above, developments have all but halted over the last few years is worrying. Although limited services are provided by the Nicosia Municipality to victims/survivors, the central administration is failing to uphold all responsibilities clearly put forward by both CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention.

To effectively address these challenges, Cyprus must prioritize the training of professionals and allocate resources to combat emerging forms of VAW/DV, thereby ensuring comprehensive support for victims and survivors.

Prevention, Training, and Funding to Combat Violence against Women and Domestic Violence

Integrated Policies to prevent and combat VAW/DV

The Republic of Cyprus has previously introduced National Action Plans for the Prevention of Violence in the Family, covering periods from 2010-2013 and 2017-2019. Most recently, the RoC adopted a national strategy and action plan for the years 2023-2028 to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women included in the Istanbul Convention. The strategy and action plan were drawn up based on the four pillars of the Istanbul Convention and the recommendations of the expert report of the Council of Europe's GREVIO Committee.

In northern Cyprus, in the absence of a legal framework on domestic violence or violence against women, there is currently no action plan in place to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence.

Prevention initiatives need to address the prevalence of prejudices and patriarchal attitudes that hinder progress. Such attitudes have led to inaction within the police and have contributed to significant underreporting of VAW/DV cases due to a lack of trust. This situation is an accurate description for both sides of the island.

Data Collection and Research

The data available on violence against women in the RoC and northern Cyprus is scarce, inconsistently collected and incapable of providing an overall picture on the prevalence of VAW/DV in Cyprus, or the support and protection provided to victims and the response of the relevant institutions. In particular, the insufficient collection of statistical data on the number of reports received by the police, the investigations opened, indictments made, and final convictions handed down by courts, for any form of violence against women, renders an assessment of attrition rates and the identification of gaps in the criminal justice response to violence against women extremely difficult.

There is no specific research and data on the prevalence of violence against women experienced by women exposed to intersectional discrimination. Lack of data and research impacts policy formulation and access by such groups to support services, protective measures and justice.

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. This data gap on violence against women and domestic violence is problematic, as it impedes an in-depth understanding of the root causes but also the extent of these issues in Cyprus. Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive data and research impedes informed analysis and policy-making that would create much needed services and mechanisms to support and protect victims.

Republic of Cyprus

Below are the statistics obtained the Cyprus Police on domestic violence, femicide, and rape. Please note that statistics are until the end of November 2023.

Reported cases of domestic violence per type of violence

Type of violence	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total	%
Sexual	16	27	28	51	30	152	1,45%
Physical	648	798	1076	1925	1752	6199	59,18%
Psychological	301	374	777	1371	1300	4123	39,36%
Total	965	1199	1881	3347	3082	10474	100,00%

Complainants of domestic violence by sex and age							
Sex	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total	%
Male	225	212	304	613	564	1918	16,96%
Male < 18	123	153	170	250	241	937	8,28%
Female	580	796	1398	2457	2253	7484	66,16%
Female < 18	97	137	159	247	333	973	8,60%
TOTAL	1025	1298	2031	3567	3391	11312	100,00%

Data on Femicide					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of victims	9	5	5	2	1
Number of perpetrators	6	5	7	2	1

Data on reported rape					
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total number of rapes	28	16	27	54	57
number of male victims	--	--	--	--	--
number of female victims	28	16	27	54	57

Northern Cyprus

Through KAYAD's advocacy efforts throughout 2014-2018, the family courts began to collect data on protection orders issues. However, the practice has not been maintained, Other than police

statistics (provided below) there is no single standard data collection system employed by the relevant institutions.

Below are the statistics obtained from the violence against women police departments over the last three years. Please note that statistics are until the end of November 2023.

Type of Violence	2020	2021	2022	2023
Murder	1	0	0	1
Sexual Violence	40	43	28	17
Verbal violence	487	403	213	181
Physical violence	370	400	407	423
Other issues	160	214	309	209
Total	1,058	1,060	957	831

Training and Education

Republic of Cyprus

Research carried out by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) (2008, 2011) among adolescents showed that there is a high tolerance for gender based violence, and that this is directly linked to negative gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes towards women. Despite the importance of creating strategic approach to adolescents and young adults on the prevention of gender-based violence and the promotion of gender equality, those involved in policy formulation and implementation in relation to education have largely ignored this dimension.

In recent years, the Ministry of Education has made some notable towards the implementation of actions and programmes for gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence. The Ministry of Education and Culture continues the implementation of the Action Plan for Gender Equality for the years 2018-2020 and for this purpose there is a special Interdepartmental Committee, in which representatives of all departments and services of the Ministry participate, and which coordinates all gender equality issues related to actions of the Ministry. However, the Action Plan does not include qualitative and quantitative indicators, allocation of sufficient funding, and there is no evidence of any impact evaluation.

Front line professionals (such as the Police, Social Welfare Services, and Health Services) often hold stereotypical attitudes towards victims of domestic violence and gender-based violence,

leading to secondary victimisation/re-victimisation. Overall, there is limited expertise in relation to violence against women among front-line professionals. This is a direct outcome of the lack of systematic initial and in-service specialised training provided. Front line professionals often lack the ability (human resources, lack of direction and supervision from senior government officials) to offer adequate support and protection due to insufficient human and financial resources, and the lack of robust in-service and multiagency protocols and procedures. Training is offered by NGOs and women's organisations, but mainly on a project basis and not systematically due to lack of funding. Training on violence affecting specific groups of at risk women is also lacking, particularly in relation to migrant women and women with disabilities.

Northern Cyprus

In the Turkish Cypriot community, there is no standard education curricula that is used in relation to prevention of VAW/DV. The review of educational curricula and training programs must be thorough to identify gaps and areas that need strengthening. A curricula can be developed and applied to both parts of the island to ensure an island wide standard. Particular attention should be paid to areas such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), trafficking in women and forced child marriage, which have not been common in the country but require expertise and awareness among professionals to address effectively.

KAYAD was able to implement trainings for professional groups who have contact with survivors of domestic violence between 2014 and 2018. However, since then, there has been little to no training offered to professionals by experts. The authorities do not work with KAYAD and/or other specialist NGOs to provide training and expertise. For example, police officers who received expert bespoke DV trainings have been moved to other units where their expertise is underutilized. These qualified officers have been replaced with officers who have had no specialist training.

One significant challenge for both sides of the island is the prevalence of sexist and misogynist attitudes within the legal system, which can hinder the delivery of justice in VAW cases. Mandatory in-service training is crucial to sensitize professionals, including prosecutors, judges, law enforcement officers, and others. These training programs should address the need to record all reports of violence against women, debunk prejudices, and understand power dynamics within abusive relationships, among other aspects.

The allocation of financial resources for preventing and combating VAW, gender-responsive budgeting efforts, and support for women's organizations are critical aspects that require attention. Women's organizations play a significant role in preventing and combating VAW. These organizations require sufficient and sustainable funding to address the needs of women affected by violence. Transparent and accountable funding procedures should be established to support their work. Similarly, gender-responsive budgeting is a crucial tool that can help allocate appropriate funding and monitor public spending effectively. Cyprus should intensify efforts on both sides of the divide to implement gender-responsive budgeting to ensure adequate resources for combating VAW.

In conclusion, Cyprus has made strides in implementing prevention strategies, training and education efforts, and allocating resources for combating VAW. However, challenges persist due to the absence of comprehensive data collection on all forms of violence against women, current National Action Plan for VAW/DV or VAWG in northern Cyprus, the prevalence of sex based discrimination and patriarchal attitudes, and the need for comprehensive training and awareness programmes. Addressing these challenges requires dedicated action plans, mandatory in-service training, gender-responsive budgeting, and transparent funding procedures, which can contribute to a more effective approach to combating VAW in the country.

NGOs and Civil Society across Cyprus

Civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in influencing policy-making and offering vital support services for women victims of violence in Cyprus. This chapter evaluates the contributions of these organizations, state funding for the CSO sector, and provides recommendations for strengthening their capacity.

The Republic of Cyprus and the northern part of Cyprus benefits from a network of women's rights organizations that contribute significantly to the prevention and fight against gender-based violence against women. In the RoC, these CSOs and NGOs operate specialist support services, provide advocacy, raise awareness, offer training, and provide legal advice and assistance to victims. In the northern part of Cyprus, a collection of specialist and non-specialist NGO's came together to form a network in February 2020 with the main objective of lobbying and advocacy for the enactment of the DV law.

In the RoC, the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (APHVF) is a principal NGO that offers support services for victims of domestic violence. In the northern part of Cyprus, KAYAD was the only NGO providing front line services to survivors however the services were taken over (a welcomed move) by the Nicosia Turkish Municipality.

Numerous other NGOs also actively participate in addressing gender-based violence. In the RoC these organizations adhere to a victim-centered approach, providing essential services that the state does not currently offer. In the northern part of Cyprus NGO's carry out awareness raising campaigns and activities.

The contributions of CSOs and NGOs across Cyprus are invaluable. In the RoC they fill critical gaps in the state's response to violence against women. By offering support services, legal advice, and advocating for victims, they play an irreplaceable role in addressing domestic violence and other forms of violence. However, the effectiveness and sustainability of these organizations are heavily dependent on state funding and support. In the northern part of Cyprus, the democratic environment is not an enabling one for Civil Society. There is no central or local funding for NGO's such as KAYAD who are specialists in DV and gender based violence. All trainings and capacity building efforts are self funded or funded by the EU and other international donors.

State funding is essential to sustain the work of these organizations. While the RoC recognizes the contribution of women's rights organizations and involves them in policy formulation, there are challenges related to funding. The consultative processes with CSOs are limited to those represented in specific bodies, leaving out other active organizations. Consultation is often superficial and non-timely, leading to the exclusion of proposals from various NGOs. Furthermore, the criteria for membership of the National Machinery for Women's Rights (NMWR) lack transparency, potentially restricting the involvement of CSOs in policy development. The unstable and insufficient funding for these organizations further hampers their involvement in policy development and service provision.

To strengthen the capacity of CSOs and NGOs in Cyprus, several steps are crucial. Firstly, effective cooperation with these organizations in policy-making should be ensured, particularly in the development of central policy documents such as national strategies or action plans on violence against women and domestic violence. These organizations possess invaluable knowledge in their respective fields of expertise that can contribute to the formulation of effective policies to improve the lives of women and girls. Secondly, the criteria for NGO membership of the Council of the National Machinery for Women's Rights in the RoC should be made clearer and more transparent to facilitate inclusive participation. Finally, addressing the issue of insufficient and unstable funding is vital to maintain the full involvement of CSOs in policy development and service provision.

In conclusion, CSOs and NGOs in Cyprus play an indispensable role in combating violence against women and providing support to victims. Their contributions are critical to addressing the existing gaps in the state's response. It is imperative that their role in policy-making is enhanced, transparent membership criteria of consultative bodies are established, and adequate and stable funding is provided to ensure their continued contribution to the prevention of violence and the provision of life-saving services to women and girls.

Recommendations and Conclusion

In this report on Violence Against Women (VAW) across Cyprus, a critical evaluation of the legal framework, institutional mechanisms, support services, prevention strategies, training and education, funding and resource allocation, and the role of non-governmental organizations and civil society has been conducted. The following recommendations and conclusion encapsulate the main findings and provide a roadmap for addressing VAW in Cyprus.

1. The RoC should reconsider its reservation to Article 30 of the Istanbul Convention on state compensation of victims and ensure that mechanisms are in place for full implementation of its legal obligations on preventing and combating VAW/DV.
2. The RoC and northern part of Cyprus should redefine legal definitions of violence against women and domestic violence to cover a broader spectrum of violence and ensure that the DV and family laws comply with international standards.

3. The RoC and northern part of Cyprus should ensure access to comprehensive legal aid service to victims of all forms of violence against women and domestic violence, including to women experiencing intersecting forms of vulnerability and discrimination.
4. The RoC and northern part of Cyprus should allocate adequate financial and other resources for the development of a 5-Year Action Plan to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence.
5. The RoC and northern part of Cyprus integrate the perspectives and needs of women who are or may be exposed to or at risk of intersectional discrimination, such as domestic workers, asylum-seeking and/or migrant women and women with disabilities, into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of comprehensive and co-ordinated policies for preventing and combating violence against women.
6. The RoC and northern part of Cyprus should improve data collection efforts, ensuring consistency and quality in the information gathered, to monitor the prevalence of VAW accurately. They should also systematic support research to gain a better understanding of the issue and inform policy-making. KAYAD and MIGS should continue to share this information to maintain a single document detailing progress island-wide.
7. The RoC and northern part of Cyprus should foster transparent cooperation between the government (authorities) and civil society organizations, ensuring a consultative process that includes a wider range of NGOs actively working on VAW.
8. The RoC and northern part of Cyprus should allocate financial resources that are gender-responsive, ensuring women's organizations receive the necessary support for their crucial work.
9. KAYAD and MIGS should work together with other NGO's and relevant bodies to produce an island wide curricula targeting the root cause of domestic violence and gender based violence and the RoC and northern part of Cyprus should take necessary measures to maintain this curricula is taught in schools.

The struggle to end violence against women in Cyprus is far from complete. While commendable efforts have been made across the island, significant shortcomings persist. This report aims to provide a concise but comprehensive assessment of the current situation island wide, highlighting the urgent need for improvement in several key areas.

The government and authorities must enhance legal definitions, and allocate resources to implement the comprehensive legal framework effectively. In addition, efforts should focus on data collection and research, ensuring that a clear and consistent body of evidence is available to guide and monitor policies. Transparency and collaboration with NGOs are essential, as their work complements government initiatives. Gender-responsive budgeting is vital to support women's organizations and ensure they can continue to provide vital services.

In conclusion, addressing VAW in Cyprus requires a multi-faceted approach, with changes needed at the legal, institutional, and societal levels. With the right measures, Cyprus can make significant progress towards eliminating violence against women, protecting the rights and dignity of all its citizens. It is an effort that requires unwavering commitment and continuous monitoring, but one that is both necessary and achievable.

MIGS and KAYAD will continue their efforts to combat violence against women and domestic violence and continue to produce such reports detailing the situation on both sides of the island.