

National Stakeholder Event

Strategies for building the resilience of women's specialist services *University of Nicosia, 20th June 2024*

The national stakeholder event “Strategies for building the resilience of women’s specialist services” took place on 20 June 2024, from 13:30 to 18:00. The event was organized by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) and the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (SPAVO) within the framework of the EU project *TRUST - towards replicable forms of support and tools in crises*.

TRUST is a two-year transnational project that aims to ensure the capacity and resilience of women’s specialist services (WSS) to more effectively adapt and upscale their services and interventions in response to the challenges brought by the COVID-19 crisis and the [post-pandemic environment](#); and to develop robust mechanisms in preparation for future emergencies/crises.

The event aimed to bring together relevant stakeholders, including NGOs and policy makers in the violence against women sector in Cyprus to discuss the main findings and results of the TRUST, with a focus on addressing the digital dimension of violence against women.

The event was attended by over 30 participants from various sectors, including government officials, the police, embassy representatives, civil society organisations, women's rights organisations, and the [media](#).

The event began with a welcome address by the Minister of Justice, Mr Marios Hartsiotis followed by Ms Pantelia Vyrides, the National Focal Point for the “Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme.

The Minister of Justice, Marios Hartsiotis, in his opening speech, highlighted the need to focus their efforts in the systematic and continuous awareness raising on violence against women, invest in education and training of young people, and reinforce multi-agency cooperation and coordination. He also presented action taken the Ministry of Justice to improve data collection on all forms of violence against women, and strengthen victim support mechanisms, particularly for vulnerable women and girls.

Ms Pantelia Vyrides presented the objectives of the CERV programme, as well as the open call for proposals "Prevention and Combating of Gender-Based Violence and Violence against Children", through which a total of 1.61 million euros will be allocated in grants to civil society in Cyprus and Greece. She highlighted the importance of NGO initiatives, encouraging them to make full use of the funding opportunities available by the CERV Programme.

Susana Pavlou, Director of MIGS, presented the rationale of the TRUST project, and its main activities and findings. Highlights include the launch of an [online repository of measures and practices](#) implemented in selected EU Member States to address violence against women in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and post-pandemic environment. The toolkit is the result of secondary literature research and an online survey carried out in Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. Also of note is publication the *Manual for change: A collection of practices & processes for Women Support Services* introduced by the project partners in response to the challenges brought about by the pandemic and focusing on eight main areas of intervention including self-care and wellbeing, the digital dimension of violence, fundraising, and community outreach, among others.

A roundtable discussion followed on addressing the digital dimension of violence against women, an emerging issue of significant concern presenting unique challenges that are not adequately or comprehensively addressed by the current policy framework and victim support system.

Key expert inputs included:

- *Iro Michael, Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family*, that presented the pilot programme carried out by SPAVO within framework of the TRUST project that focused on strengthening support mechanisms for victims of technology-facilitated violence against women, including through risk assessment and safety planning.
- *Aristos Tsiartas, President of the Coordinating Body for the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*, presented the legal and policy framework on violence against women in Cyprus, with focus on provisions criminalising digital forms of violence including the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, cyber stalking, and cyber harassment.
- *Andreas Anastassiades, Cybercrime Office of the Cyprus Police*, presented police action to combat violence against women in the digital sphere, including innovative investigation tools, and cooperation with the private sector, including social media companies. He stressed the need for timely reporting of digital forms of violence, and the challenges in tracking and taking down content that has been posted online.
- *Athena Kontou, representing the Cybersafety project, Cyprus Pedagogical Institute* presented the [Cyprus Safe Internet Center – CYberSafety](#) that promotes the safe use of the internet and digital technologies and operates a helpline 1480 for young people for the provision of information and support, as well as for reporting of violations.

The presentations were followed by interactive Q&A sessions and networking opportunities, facilitating mutual exchange of expertise among participants.

Key recommendations that emerged through the discussion:

- Strengthen sustainable funding mechanisms for the support of women's specialist services to respond to crises, including in the context of the digital transitions and emerging forms of violence against women perpetrated in the digital sphere.
- Strengthen investigation and prosecution of violence against women perpetrated online, including by investing in technological tools and the systematic training of police and prosecutors.
- Integrate digital dimensions of violence in multi-agency protocols and guidelines.
- Collect sex and age disaggregated data on digital forms of violence in order to inform, monitor and evaluate state policies and measures.
- Carry out information campaigns on an island wide basis to inform the public on the legal framework, emerging forms of digital violence, and available support services and legal remedies.
- Invest in prevention programmes, particularly within the framework of comprehensive sexuality education and citizenship education from pre-primary education, as well as exploring the link between pornography and violence against women.