



REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
MINISTRY OF JUSTICE AND PUBLIC ORDER

**WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND
RIGHTS IN SITUATION OF CRISIS**

In 2019 the Minister of Foreign Affairs appointed a Gender Advisor whose mandate, inter alia, includes:

- The implementation of specific actions and initiatives within the framework of the foreign policy of the Republic of Cyprus, on issues related to the advancement of women's rights and gender equality;
- The engagement and development of collaborations with civil society in the promotion of women's rights and gender equality in foreign policy;
- Drafting, designing, planning and evaluating the Policy Framework of Action related to mainstream gender in foreign policy of the Republic of Cyprus;
- Promoting the institutional strategy towards equality between women and men and the integration of the gender dimension within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Since the appointment of the Gender Advisor a number of activities have taken place on different issues such as Violence against Women, including sexual violence, trafficking in women, sexual and reproductive rights, women in diplomacy, women and education, women, peace and security.

A. Challenges and good practices

1. All women in Cyprus, regardless their economic or social background are offered scientifically accurate information about reproductive health matters and services through the National Health System.
2. Highly educated Health Professionals give non-biased information. The National Health System safeguards universal accessibility to health service provision based on Health and Safety standards, accurate equipment and technologies.

3. In recent years, significant progress has been made regarding HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care in Cyprus. This has become possible through the implementation of targeted interventions based on the declarations and guidelines of International Organizations as well as the recommendations of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Moreover, processes have been recently launched with the participation of stakeholders to define new objectives through updating the National Strategic plan. Given that Cyprus is a small country with limited resources, all HIV care and treatment is provided in the Gregorios Clinic in Larnaca, which meets the particular needs of people living with HIV for the provision of specialized and high quality health services. Notable is that medical care is provided free of charge by the government, while recently the cabinet has approved the provision of financial support to all HIV positive people. Prenatal transmission is kept at extremely low levels. This is due partly to the low prevalence of HIV infection in women, and partly to the measures taken for the prevention of prenatal transmission of the virus in isolated cases of pregnant women who are found to be positive. All pregnant women are offered testing and counseling for HIV and all seropositive pregnant women are provided to free regimens and advice to prevent the transmission of the virus to their babies.

A) Regarding Women in Childbearing years: At Family Planning and Maternity Centres, health visitors offer counseling services on reproductive and maternity issues. They also organize lectures on health education, nutrition, and healthy lifestyle in order to prepare young women for a healthy pregnancy.

B) Women in Pregnancy: During Pregnancy, young mothers are regularly examined by gynecologists and midwives. These examinations ensure mothers' physical condition and include weight control, glucose challenge test, urine examination and Fetus ultrasound regularly in the frame of a Fetal anomaly screening programme.

C) Post partum: Breast feeding Promotion, rooming in, Health visitors house visits (National Strategy on promotion and support of breast feeding in Cyprus).

4. Safe abortion services (surgical /non-surgical) are also offered in the frame of the National Health System.

5. Regarding Cancer Prevention there is a National mammography screening in place for women between 50-69, since 2004, and for cervical cancer screening

women are entitled to perform a Pap smear every two years (starting two years after their first sexual experience) until 60 in the frame of the National Health System.

6. Female Genital Mutilation represents a violation of human rights. It influences health, physical integrity and the psychosocial status of women. In order to eliminate this cultural and social phenomenon that has a harmful effect on women's security and bodily integrity, the Ministry of Health supports all international efforts and collaborates with UN and international organisations.

7. In the last years a series of measures have been taken in order to raise awareness on Female Genital Mutilation among Health Professionals.

8. A two days' workshop on violence for different groups of health professionals was organised by the Ministry of Health and experts from the WHO facilitated the discussions on female genital mutilation.

9. Additionally, in cooperation with the Cyprus Medical Association the Ministry has organised lectures in order to educate physicians how to recognise and handle with victims of genital mutilation.

10. As a monitoring tool, a reporting system of mutilation cases is about to be introduced in every Hospital of the country.

11. Moreover, gynaecologists and other related health professionals received a special train on how to deal with mutilated women and the critical mass of those women receives health care services from these trained professionals.

12. Besides, Cyprus is actively and substantially contributing on women and girls' rights on international, regional/European discussions, including on joint statements, recommendations and resolutions. The most recent and relevant examples in relation to the issue of female genital mutilation and early forced marriages include the following:

- Protecting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and Promoting Gender- responsiveness in the COVID-19 crisis
- Elimination of discrimination against women and girls
- Elimination of female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Extreme poverty and human rights

- Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children
- Financially contributing to the Anna Lindh Foundation for a specific project on the Empowerment of Women and Girls including on Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights through education.

B. Experiences of Crisis

1. The recent Covid-19 Crisis and the consecutive lockdown had as a result interfamilial violence issues. Although statistical data are not available to be published yet, it seems that girls and women of socio-economically vulnerable groups were the victims at most.
2. The Ministry of Health during the pandemic with cooperation with the “Foni” National Strategy Implementation Council and the Police, has offered a telephonic help line for children and adolescents who experienced violence related issues.
3. The main challenge was the lockdown itself. Due to the lack of socializing, a lot of issues occurred behind locked doors and it has been a brand-new situation for everybody.
4. All stakeholders have worked together and the Mass Media played an important role in preventing and handling these cases.
5. The main lesson learned during the crisis is that synergistic /Intersectoral and holistic approach is the best practice to address emerging problems.

Emergency responses-Reliance on foreign aid assistance

Financing women’s sexual and reproductive health

1. The Framework of Action on gender mainstreaming in foreign policy explicitly underlines the need for gender budgeting in relation to developmental assistance, cooperation and humanitarian support.
2. Given the economic capabilities of the country, the Republic of Cyprus, will continue to provide financial contributions to international and regional organizations and specifically on women’s rights. Related examples include the aforementioned contribution to the Anna Lindh Foundation, contribution to the UN Women, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) - Trust

Fund for Women's Empowerment, the contribution to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons, amongst others. Such contributions will continue to be at the heart of the development assistance, cooperation and humanitarian support of the Republic.

3. Given the current situation in Lebanon, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is currently designing a strategic plan for humanitarian support for the people of Lebanon including direct support to women and children.

C. Preparedness, recovery and resilience

1. The Government of Cyprus (Commissioner for Gender Equality), in close collaboration with civil society organizations, has undertaken to draft the first National Action Plan in view of implementing Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on "Women, Peace and Security", covering the period 2020-2024. This Plan aims to ensure full implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda and consists of four main pillars: (a) Participation and Empowerment; (b) Protection; (c) Prevention; and (d) Promoting and informing civil society about the aforementioned Resolution. The aforementioned Action Plan is expected to be concluded and adopted by the Council of Ministers by the end of the year.

2. In addition, under Pillar 2-Protection, there are actions to be implemented which refer to the enhancement of the provided psychological support, medical care and treatment to both victims and perpetrators.