

CEDAW

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

SHADOW REPORT

CYPRUS 2006

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1. Introduction

Human rights and women's rights in particular are at a critical juncture in Cyprus. Cyprus's recent accession to the European Union has accelerated the pace of legislative and legal reform on issues of equality and significant achievements have been registered in all areas. However, the fulfilment of women's rights requires more than the removal of formal barriers. Rather, a range of government policy measures and allocation of resources is needed aimed at addressing the pervasive systematic and structural discrimination against women at all levels of society.

Despite extensive legislative improvements, there remain political, socio-economic, and cultural barriers to the advancement of women in Cyprus. For this reason the CEDAW Convention remains one of the most important international legal instruments providing the framework for the advancement and status of women in Cyprus and the achievement of real equality. The CEDAW Convention can be distinguished in language and in scope from other international conventions as it goes beyond the promotion and protection of civil rights, using a holistic approach that recognises the interdependence of civil, political, social, cultural and economic rights.

The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies was founded in 2001 as a non-profit organisation and was officially registered in August 2004. It is affiliated to Intercollege, the largest private higher education institution in the Republic of Cyprus. The Institute promotes and contributes to projects of social, political, and economic themes relating to gender. In the case of Cyprus, a gendered perspective and feminist activism comes at a very crucial time to link, prepare, and promote the socio-economic and political ideals necessary for a smoother adjustment to European Union membership.

The Institute's major aims are to act as a main contributor to the intellectual, political, and socio-political life of the region as this relates to issues of gender and to do so using a multidisciplinary approach and in collaboration with other institutions.

The Institute recognises the institutional discrimination against women in the Mediterranean and accepts that this discrimination takes different forms. It is committed to the elimination of this discrimination by using a combination of scholarship, academic research, training, and activism.

MIGS welcomes the opportunity to produce a shadow report to the Government report for the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. In our report we attempt to examine the national context in relation to women's rights and highlight a number of critical factors as well as put forward recommendations for action, and we hope we have succeeded in this task despite the short time given to prepare it. As reported to the International Women's Rights Action Watch - Asia Pacific, MIGS hoped to mobilise, in a short time, a group of NGOs active in the area of women's rights to provide input to this report. However, this was not entirely successful. One reason for this is that it became clear that most NGOs are unaware of the existence of the CEDAW Convention as well as of the government report. Indeed, the government report, contrary to government claims, has not been sufficiently promoted nor disseminated widely. The wide dissemination of this report is important in the context of transparency and we take this opportunity to urge the government to fulfil its obligations in this regard.

Also, it is important to point out that organizations working on women's and gender issues are very few and the majority of them are departments of trade unions and political parties whose agendas tend to concentrate on of the political situation in Cyprus in relation to the ethnic conflict and less so on gender equality.

Thus, for the reasons states above, as well as due to the limited time given to prepare the shadow report, the input of other NGOs, with the notable exception of the Cyprus Family Planning Association, has been limited.

2. Elimination of Legal and Real Discrimination

A number of committees/structures/organs/bodies have been set up in the public sector during the period of harmonization with the *acquis communautaire* [for the European Union membership] that promote gender equality according to their specific sphere of competence. However, many of these committees have poor visibility [with the notable exception of the Commissioner for Administration] and tend not to be supported by experts but rather by individuals who are high in predominantly governmental [or other] hierarchies in Cyprus and who are more often than not present in most if not all of these committees. No room exists for new faces, more qualified people, or alternative voices.

NGO's are not involved in policy making. Although the government report states that the newly set up committees are composed of NGOs among other institutions, it is not clear which NGOs are involved, if any, in what capacity, or the criteria under which they were selected. The process is not transparent and one tends to assume that the same people are involved in many committees.

Although on paper Cyprus' gender policies seem relatively good , little [and often nothing] is done to actively promote/implement 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. So the problem we are identifying relates here and in the points that follow most often to implementation rather than the drafting of legislation.

3. National Machinery for Women's Rights

'state parties shall take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.'

Although both the National Action Plan on employment and the National Action Plan on social exclusion state that funding for the NMWR has doubled, the NMWR remains under-funded and understaffed, undermining their capacity to effectively implement its objectives.

Projects funded by the NMWR have been poorly publicized and their results poorly disseminated. This lack of communication and dissemination of information does not contribute towards raising awareness on issues affecting women in Cyprus, nor does it encourage further scientific research on gender issues.

The training programmes/conferences/seminars organized by the government are few and far between (an average of three events per year for a period of seven years, according to the report).

We commend the efforts of the National Machinery for Women's Rights to draft a National Action Plan on Gender Equality and look forward to its publication.

Recommendations

- We encourage the government to further empower the role of the National Machinery for Women's Rights by increasing its budget and human resources to better meet its objectives.
- Better communication and dissemination of information on developments affecting gender equality in Cyprus and on projects and initiatives funded by the NMWR.

4. The Media and Violence against Women

The Convention in article 1 defines discrimination against women. This definition of discrimination includes gender-based violence, that is, violence that is directed against women because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty. Gender-based violence may breach specific provisions of the Convention, regardless of whether those provisions expressly mention violence.'

Media

The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies has recently completed a bi-communal project entitled "Gender, Conflict and the Media: Working towards Egalitarianism and Peace". The project was initiated in October 2003 and was supported with a grant from the Bi-Communal Development Program funded by USAID and UNDP and executed by UNOPS. The final phase of the project involved the publication of a policy handbook entitled *The Gender and Media Handbook* which includes an assessment of the situation in terms of gender in Cyprus.¹

According to *The Gender and Media Handbook* the issue of the role of the media in providing many of the resources which we use to think about women and gender issues, is largely neglected in Cyprus.

For example, women in the Greek Cypriot media are largely portrayed and discussed in ways which support gender inequality. They are defined in terms of their physical beauty, sexual attractiveness and motherhood. Furthermore, they are portrayed as only interested in domestic matters and that the only important role for them in the private and public spheres is motherhood.

There are different aspects of women's everyday experiences which are never portrayed or discussed in the media, such as those linked to significant changes taking place in the workplace, in gender relations and the family, which are shaped by globalisation, EU integration, immigration and developments related to the Cyprus Problem. These limited ways of thinking about and portraying women in the Greek Cypriot media means that the ability of Greek Cypriot women to challenge and change gender inequality remains severely hindered. These resources that focus

¹ [*The Gender and Media Handbook: Promoting Equality, Diversity and Empowerment*](#), Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, May 2005, Nicosia, Cyprus.

primarily on women's reproductive and physical attributes also work to limit the opportunities, experiences, roles and potentials of women in the private as well as the public domains – thus, they reinforce sexism and gender inequality. They hinder the full participation of women in Cypriot public life and the development of their abilities, talents and potentials as multifaceted human beings. This impoverishes women's lives, as well as Cypriot society and culture as a whole.

Violence against Women

There have been many positive developments with regard to increasing awareness and commitment towards preventing and combating violence against women – particularly domestic violence – in recent years. The improved legislative framework dealing specifically with family violence, as well as the establishment of the Advisory Committee on Family Violence, have been welcome developments. However, effective implementation of the law depends heavily on the adequate training and sensitisation of all relevant stakeholders as well as cooperation between them i.e. police, social workers, health care professionals etc. Furthermore, the law on domestic violence [119(1)/2000 Law on Domestic Violence] which applies to persons with various relationships within the family, only refers to heterosexual couples and does not protect homosexual couples, which is an issue that has yet to be addressed by Cyprus law.²

The Cyprus Police and the Social Services have only very recently collected data on the occurrence of domestic violence and it is not clear what the recording practices of governmental agencies are. For example, it is not clear how incidents are recorded, who decides that a report should be filed regarding a particular incident, and who defines the incidence as domestic violence. Since police reports are filed by individual officers, and police officers are not monitored, the question as to whether the number of reports filed reflect the true number of incidents remains.³ Furthermore, women are often reluctant to report incidents due to ingrained socio-cultural attitudes as well as economic inequalities. Although we commend the legislation passed by the government protecting victims' rights, more needs to be done to encourage the reporting of these crimes.

Emphasis has been on offering support and protection programmes, but little has been done in the area of prevention which is considered second priority. Prevention campaigns have been limited to sporadic lectures, conferences, and seminars organised by individuals and/or NGOs. A systematic plan of action for the prevention of violence against women is needed, that will include awareness campaigns through the media and other sources, which will be monitored as to its implementation, regularity, target group and evaluation.⁴

Another problem is the lack of systematic analysis and research which impedes a true understanding of the extent of these crimes in Cyprus and their root causes. Insufficient data and research also impedes informed analysis and policy making.

Finally, other forms of violence against women need to be addressed in Cyprus such as rape, honour-related violence, sexual assault, trafficking and prostitution. The government's emphasis on domestic violence reveals a general lack of awareness

² Kvinnoforum, 2005, Honour Related Violence - European Resource Book and Good Practice, Kvinnoforum, Stockholm, p. 222

³ Ibid., p.209

⁴ Ibid., p. 215

and understanding on the scope and nature of violence against women, and worse makes many of these crimes 'invisible'. Also, government responses to violence against women must take into account the needs of minority groups, particularly asylum seekers and refugees that are a particularly vulnerable. To date, no research or data has been collected on violence against women in migrant/minority communities.

State services such as shelters and other specially designed premises for housing and handling victims of family violence are inadequate and suffer from overcrowding. There is one shelter run by an NGO that dates back a long time and suffers from lack of funding and eventually expertise. There have been other attempts at setting up shelters, but these are of a dubious nature and are not monitored in any way by the relevant authorities. Such unsolicited attempts may often do more harm than good.

Recommendations

- Systematic research on the extent of these crimes needs to be conducted to better understand the real dimensions of the problem and to better inform policy and support and prevention campaigns. Furthermore, other forms of violence against women need to be addressed in Cyprus.
- Systematic plan of action for the prevention of violence against women that will be monitored as to its implementation, regularity, target group, and evaluation.
- Awareness campaigns using all mediums available, particularly the media, to sensitise the public and empower women to seek assistance and support.
- Measures should be adopted for the better coordination and communication between services.
- Education incorporated in the school curriculum regarding sexual rights, communications skills, human rights, non-violent behaviour etc.

5. Trafficking in Women

'State parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women.'

The Committee's concluding comments (53 and 61) stress the need for the Cyprus Government to take all necessary measures to combat trafficking in women including regulating the entry of foreign "artistes" and entertainers, as well as support measures for the entry of migrant workers into other occupations.

Cyprus is both a country of transit as well as a destination country for women trafficked from Eastern and Central Europe for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Trafficked women or "cabaret artistes", as they are known in Cyprus, are victimised in the process of migration and are often forced into prostitution by traffickers who fraudulently recruit victims for work as entertainment dancers in cabarets and nightclubs on short-term "artiste" visas.

According to the annual "Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000: Trafficking in Persons Report" issued by the U.S. Department of State, Cyprus is on the TIER 2 Watch List. Countries rated under TIER 2 Watch List are those who have not yet complied with the minimum standards set forth in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (22 U.S.C. 7101 et seq.) but are making efforts to do so.

Legislative measures

Cyprus has enacted a number of laws besides those mentioned in the Cyprus Government report. The laws enacted are:

- Criminal Code – criminalizes prostitution in general.
- The Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Exploitation of Young Persons Law (L.3(I)/2000).
- The Prevention and Suppression of Money Laundering Activities Law (L. 61(I)/96) includes trafficking and prostitution.
- The Witness Protection Law (L. 95(I)/2001).

Despite this legislation, some weaknesses can still be detected. Legal provisions for prevention are inadequate and poorly implemented and the wording of existing anti-trafficking laws reinforces stereotypes. The major problem however is the implementation of all Laws.

Implementation

We welcome developments on the legislative level to combat trafficking in women. However, it is indicative of the general situation in Cyprus on this issue, that the government report concentrates only on legislative developments but does not make any reference to measures for the implementation and monitoring of these provisions.

First of all it is very important to point out that prior to 1997 there was no law regulating the operation of private employment agencies. In 1997 a Law to this effect did pass and three years later, in 2000, employment agents were required to apply for licences of operation, which was now obligatory under the law. In 2000 the law was suspended because the majority of agents did not meet its requirements and could not be granted a licence. For this reason, in 2002 the law was amended so that employment agencies could receive a licence without having to meet the stringent requirements of the 1997 law. Despite the law being created and passed for the purpose of controlling and monitoring employment agencies that are active in the recruitment of women for the purposes of employment as “artistes” or “entertainers”, it has not been effectively implemented. Interestingly, in 1982 there were 51 cabarets, 57 in 1990, and 108 in 2002 which reflects a 111% increase⁵.

The Anti-Trafficking Law (L. 31(I)/2000) provides for the protection, compensation and rehabilitation of victims of trafficking. However, there is no evidence that these provisions have been effectively implemented and what is definitely absent from all enacted laws is the criminalization of the demand for sexual services in the cases of coercion into prostitution.

More specifically Cyprus’s criminal code criminalizes prostitution in general, including soliciting, living off profits of prostitution, maintaining or managing a brothel. The Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Exploitation of Young Persons Law (L.3(I)/2000) criminalizes the trafficking of human beings for the purposes of sexual exploitation, regardless of the victim’s initial consent or knowledge of the fact that she will be trafficked. These legal provisions, however, are inconsistent with the

⁵ Commissioner for the Administration [Ombudsman office, 2005]

government's policy of allowing the operation of establishments considered 'high-risk' and the issuing of visas for the purpose of working in such 'high risk' establishments.

In addition, a significant provision in the law is the appointment of the Guardian of Victims of Sexual Exploitation. The Guardian of Victims of Sexual Exploitation is appointed to the Director of Department of Social Welfare who is responsible for the provision of humanitarian support and assistance to the victims. However, despite the public pronouncements for the establishment of a shelter specifically for victims of trafficking, the Department of Social Welfare currently places victims in centres for elderly people which does not provide adequate prevention from further abuse [for example sexual harassment from elderly people towards victims] and nor does it provide appropriate psychological and social support for the victims.

The Prevention and Suppression of Money Laundering Law is also a very important piece of legislation, since it allows for the tracking down, freezing of assets and the confiscation of profits that have been acquired through the commission of criminal acts including trafficking and prostitution⁶. The same law also provides for the investigation into suspect peoples' financial situation. Again, however, there is no evidence that this law is being effectively implemented.

Lastly, the Witness Protection Act gives trafficked victims protection, such as a change of location, change of identity and so on and so forth, however, in order to receive this protection victims must agree to cooperate with the authorities. Thus, although Cyprus has set the legal and legislative foundation emphasis needs to be put on implementation and monitoring.

The group of experts assigned by the Council of Ministers have drafted a National Action Plan (NAP) where all relevant authorities undertake administrative measures to combat trafficking. The NAP however has not yet been implemented nor has it been discussed in the House of Representatives in order for it to be passed.

Another weakness noticed in all the relevant laws is the lack of guidelines for the identification of victims of human trafficking which ultimately leads to the inadequate protection of a victim. Identifying the victim is the necessary prerequisite in offering immediate protection and assistance to the individual, but Cyprus does not yet have a mechanism for such identification victims which may result in their exclusion from protection under the Law.

Contracts of Employment

Though the official ministry for preparing employment contracts is the Ministry of Labour, in the case of "artists" the Ministry of Interior has undertaken this task, without, at the very least, consultation of the Ministry of Labour. Despite the government report stating that 'migrant workers are informed beforehand of their rights provided in the contract of employment', this is not done and the contract itself makes no mention of the rights of migrant workers, only of their obligations. Furthermore, the contract is a one page document in English with no available translation in the native language of migrants. Preparing employment contracts without the consultation of the Ministry of Labour is leading to the abuse of the human rights, and employment rights, of migrant workers.

⁶ Commissioner for the administration [Ombudsman's Office, 2005]

Prevention strategy

Despite the government claim to the contrary, to our knowledge, regular checks as to the living conditions of women working as “artistes” are rarely carried out. One could say that police is indeed conducting regular checks on their *employment* conditions and this is why Cyprus’s only recorded numbers of trafficked women available are those collected as a result of Police raids and inspections of cabarets, nightclubs and pubs. However, this does not mean that all possible victims are reporting to the police as a result of the raids as victims are often afraid of deportation and/or may be under threat by their employers. Another critical issue that is being avoided by the government is the general lack of adequate and systematic statistical data collection which prevents us from understanding the true extent of the problem.

Migrant women entering Cyprus as “artistes” have no opportunities for work elsewhere even after being identified as victims, unless they cooperate with the authorities. Furthermore, there are no measures or provisions for the integration of victims of trafficking in the host country once permission is granted to stay [dependent on cooperation with the authorities]. The fact that women identified as victims that do not agree to cooperate with the authorities are immediately deported puts them at risk of being re-trafficked and re-victimised.

The government report states that ‘the number of visas issued for the purpose of working in places, which are considered to be of high risk, is limited’. According to the independent study conducted by the Cypriot Ombudsman, however, about 2000 foreign women enter the island every year as “artistes”. This number is disproportionate to the number of inhabitants in Cyprus (about 700,000).

However, we would like to emphasize that the very existence of ‘artiste’ visas in Cyprus undermines all efforts to prevent trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Also, migrant workers under the labour system in Cyprus are employed in sectors where there is shortage in local or EU nationals as in, for example, agriculture/farms, construction, hotels and restaurants etc. These jobs are listed in the labour department and are open to third country nationals as well as Cypriots. However, occupations such as domestic work and/or ‘entertainment’ work in cabarets and nightclubs are not listed under the labour department which means that these jobs are not available to those third country nationals residing in Cyprus [or Cypriots for that matter] seeking employment. This puts into question the will of the government to curb the number of “artiste” visas being issued since the labour shortage in these sectors, under the current system, can only be filled by migrants employed on short-term visas. Furthermore, government policy prohibits third country nationals that are members of Cypriot families from working in places considered ‘high risk’.

Media and prevention

The media is a powerful tool for awareness raising and contributing toward prevention. However, this medium has been ignored by the government in anti-

trafficking initiatives. As mentioned above, the media reinforces negative gender stereotypes and this is equally true when reporting issues related to trafficking. Emphasis is usually placed on reporting 'shocking' events regarding the abuse and/or exploitation of migrant women rather than raising awareness and there is rarely any media follow-up on cases on trafficking.

Educational efforts and awareness campaigns on the trafficking in human beings are a powerful tool in creating a social conscience for the public and the ordinary citizen, and can greatly contribute toward naming and shaming the clients, as well as the "agents" and managers, of cabarets and nightclubs that are involved in trafficking and the exploitation of trafficked victims.

To this day, however, there have been no significant efforts in altering people's perceptions and prejudices as far as these women are concerned. This is exacerbated by the fact that the victims of sexual exploitation live outside conventional locations, in places where "they will not challenge public ethics", usually in disreputable neighbourhoods. By placing them out of sight and, essentially, out of mind, we promote these women's dependency on their employers, and exacerbate their feelings of insecurity and despair and recourse to the relevant authorities. Also, by not enlightening the public of the true status of these women as victims of sexual exploitation, we encourage their labelling as prostitutes and the mistreatment that result from such stereotypes.

The Media can be a powerful ally in such endeavours. It plays an indispensable role in educating us and presenting the problem in human terms. The representation in the Media should not be only a listing of things that have happened. It should also include criticism whenever these women are mistreated by employers, authorities, the government and they should also promote these women's status as victims. They must make use of the 'naming and shaming approach', so as to protect the victims and identify traffickers⁷.

Recommendations

- Our anti-trafficking laws are gender-specific but do not address internal or labour trafficking. Furthermore, the term "sexual exploitation" is limited to exploitation for the purpose of forced prostitution. The definition should be expanded so as to include further acts of sexual exploitation, such as sexually explicit performances, stripping and live shows, which take place in sexually oriented establishments.
- A mechanism should be developed for the identification of victims by the authorities at borders, during police raids, and during interviews with the Welfare Services and the Asylum Unit.
- Measures to deter and punish the purchaser of sexual services should be explored by the Cyprus Government along the lines of the newly adopted Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (Article 19) that criminalizes the buying of services of a victim of trafficking, including sexual services. The UN Protocol on Trafficking (Article 915) calls upon states to discourage demand that fosters exploitation and leads to trafficking. The European Parliament is also promoting measures criminalizing the demand for sexual services in the cases of coercion into prostitution.

⁷ Commissioner for the administration [Ombudsman's Office, 2005]

- Educational efforts and awareness campaigns on the subject are a powerful tool in creating a social conscience for the public and the ordinary citizen can greatly contribute in the naming and shaming the clients of as well as the “agents” and managers of cabarets and nightclubs that are involved in trafficking and the exploitation of trafficked victims. The media should be used to its full potential in this endeavour.
- Cyprus’s educational efforts should also extend to the victims. Upon entering Cyprus and before signing any employment contracts, migrant women should be given a full account of the possible risks of working as cabaret “artistes”.
- Research is sorely needed in Cyprus in order to comprehensively understand the phenomenon, identify potential target groups, and design effective interventions tailored to the needs of specific groups. More attention should also be given on research on the demand side of trafficking in women.

6. Political and Public Life

‘State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all political and public life of the country...’

Despite the increasing numbers of women actively involved in politics, women are still severely underrepresented in the Government. Only 23 out of the 87 (26.4%) judges are women, 51 out of the 244 (20.9%) senior level civil servants, and 74 out of the 398 (18.6%) members of the municipal councils. In the parliamentary elections of 2001, only six women out of 85 women candidates were elected. Furthermore, only four out of 33 mayors are women.⁸ These numbers indicate that Cypriot society, including the media, is not supportive and encouraging of women’s efforts to enter political life. Despite these bleak numbers it is worth mentioning that 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.

Some measures have been taken, through the National Machinery for Women’s Rights, to increase women’s participation in political and public life and support women political candidates. These measures include training seminars, contact with leaders of political parties requesting their support to increase the number of women in the candidate lists, contacts with the mass media to give equal opportunities and coverage to women candidates prior to elections, among others.⁹

The issues faced by women who wish to participate in political and public life are broad and multifaceted. The absence of high quality and low cost child care and the unequal distribution of responsibility within the family are important obstacles to women’s representation in politics. Other important issues include gender discrimination in the media that does not give equal coverage to women political candidates and continues to sustain negative gender stereotypes [it is worth noting that only 8.7% of Chief Editors of national newspapers are women], the inexorable patriarchal structure of political parties in Cyprus, and the enduring conservative

⁸ Questionnaire, Progress on Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, 1995 and The Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development (1995) and its Update (2000-2005), National Machinery for Women’s Rights, Ministry of Justice and Public Order, Nicosia p. 18-20

⁹ Cyprus National Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) an the outcome of the twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000), Nicosia, Cyprus 2005, p. 45-47

features of Cypriot society that still do not trust women to hold high office. All of the above result in a lack of confidence and support networks for women wishing to enter political life.

It is obvious, but worth mentioning here, that the absence or marginal presence of women in key decision making bodies hinders the inclusion of a gender perspective in these critical spheres of influence. This is especially true with the regard to the negotiations and resolution of the Cyprus conflict, where the presence of women is non-existent. The marginalisation of women in political and public life is not solely a question of numbers but also a question of the development of democratic principles and standards. The lack of role models for women is also a serious issue arising from the marginal presence of women in politics.

Recommendations

- Awareness campaigns targeting the public on the importance of the participation of women in politics and in decision and policy making systems, and to encourage the public to have confidence in women political candidates;
- The setting up of an observatory for the systematic collection of data, monitoring of progress, and publication and dissemination of information on issues related to women's access to decision making bodies and positions;
- The introduction of a quota system of at least a 70:30 gender balance among political candidates selected for general and local elections;
- Provision of comprehensive empowerment and training programmes for women seeking to enter political and public life;
- Measures should be taken, such as an incentive mechanism, to encourage the media to give equal opportunities and coverage to women candidates for general and local elections.

7. Education

State parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women

- (a) the same conditions for career and vocational guidance...*
- (b) the elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education...*
- (c) the same opportunities for access to programmes of continuing education...'*

In terms of education, Cyprus has achieved, to a great extent, equal access to education for women with statistics showing that women are in greater numbers at higher education institutions and often outperforming men academically. However, despite these achievements, statistics also demonstrate that in terms of faculty and staff there is a feminisation of lower education while women are grossly under-represented in higher education. Furthermore, women in Cyprus remain underrepresented in decision-making bodies and in competitive research and development systems.

Gender segregation in secondary and higher education remains pervasive, with men greatly outnumbering women in the fields of science and engineering.¹⁰ The gender segregation in education reflects the structures of the gender division of labour in the economy and decreases opportunities for women for upward mobility within and between sectors. Indeed, one of the main issues with regard to women in education in Cyprus is the selection of disciplines and the extent to which gender mainstreaming is taken into account when academic disciplines are determined. There is also a gender gap in the access to technology, with little being done to address this, with obvious adverse effects for the integration of women into certain employment sectors. Statistics show that the percentage of men over 15 who regularly use the Internet is 26.9% compared to only 20.1% of women.¹¹ The gender technology gap is important as it affects the effectiveness of employment policies that may end up excluding women, particularly older women, that are not as adept as men in the use of computers, the internet etc.

Another equally important issue is the inflexibility of the current state of tertiary educational system that is not open to working mothers, unemployed women, and female returnees to the workforce (that have taken time off to raise children). The University of Cyprus has extremely competitive entrance exams and classes are usually offered during the day and programmes are not geared toward older students with family responsibilities. This demonstrates that the gender dimension needs to be taken into account in future strategies for equal opportunities in education in order to ensure the inclusion of women mainly in the field of new technologies, as well as to reduce gender segregation in academic disciplines. The proposal for an Open University in Cyprus may have a positive impact in enabling working mothers, inactive and unemployed women, as well as older returnees, to enhance their skills and provide a more flexible alternative to more traditional education programme structures. Although it is true that the majority of students at the University of Cyprus are females, this has not resulted in the increased entry of women in high-level occupations and may also be indicative of sexism within the family and parents not allowing their daughters to study overseas.

Under-representation of women can also be found in postgraduate programmes. Although more women are now participating in postgraduate programmes the proportion is still 1:2. This fact is directly related to the under-representation of women in scientific research and their limited participation in the academic community.

In terms of vocational training, participation in training courses offered by the Human Resource Development Authority, which offers workforce training on a non-discriminatory basis, participation of women has risen from 37% in 1999 to 52.2% in 2002.¹² Although this is an encouraging development, more effort should be made to target women facing difficulties entering the labour force and to encourage women to train in new fields of occupation and to use new technologies. Also, measures should also directly address *employers* as without the power dynamics within organisations being effectively tackled, gender equality can never be a reality.

¹⁰ Vassiliadou, Myria, [b] 'Women Promote Technology: Reducing the Gender Digital Divide in Skills and Employment – The Case of Cyprus', January 2004,, p.48

¹¹ EU: Eurostat; Cyprus: Statistical Service of the Republic of Cyprus

¹² Cyprus National Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) an the outcome of the twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000), Nicosia, Cyprus 2005, p. 26

In terms of curriculum, research on history, Modern Greek, and social studies textbooks illustrate women and men in stereotypical roles that represent the public/private split and emphasize the domestic role of women and the public achievements of men. Furthermore, women are all but absent in history books, except as civilians or workers, and there is no mention of women's rights/movements and their impact on society.

With regard to sex education, the Ministry of Education does not have a clear policy in this area. In 2003, a pilot programme for 15 year old students on sex education was introduced. The objective of the programme was, after the first year, to expand this type of education to all students in this age group and eventually to all secondary school students. However, the programme still operates as a pilot and is currently in its fourth year. The Cyprus Family Planning Association has participated in the training of the teachers involved in the pilot programme and continues to offer training to teachers of all levels on sex and gender education in cooperation with the Pedagogical Institute (although its is offered only as an elective at this time).

Recommendations

- Design and materialize informational and awareness educational programmes to sensitize teachers, educators, and pupils on gender issues in primary and secondary education;
- The formation of a modern educational curriculum which will include gender dimensions and make women more visible;
- Career advisors should encourage girls (and boys) to contemplate non-stereotypical fields of study (and later career prospects);
- Sociology courses should be added in the curriculum in secondary schools and encourage children to attend in training organized by the Youth Board which is encouraging gender equality through its various EU programmes.
- Support should be given to the efforts of the University of Cyprus to set up a gender studies programme.
- The introduction, on a systematic basis, of sex education in secondary schools.

8. Employment

State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights, in particular

- (a) the right to the same employment opportunities*
- (b) the right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value...'*

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 including the Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Employment and Vocational Training Law, 2002 (L. 205(I)/2002), The Equal Pay Between Men and Women for the Same Work or for Work of Equal Value Law, 2002 (L. 177(I)/2002), the Maternity Protection (Amendment) Law, 2002 (L. 64(I)/2002), the Parental Leave and Leave on Grounds of Force Majeure Law, 2002, (L. 69(I)/2002), and The Equal Treatment of Men and

Women in Professional Social Insurance Schemes Law, 2002 (L. 133(I)/2002), among others.¹³

Some important efforts have been made by the Cyprus government aimed at combating discrimination, creating the infrastructure for childcare facilities, providing training programmes, as well as improving institutional mechanisms to increase women's participation and status in economic activity and society as a whole. Specific targets have been set through the National Action Plan for Employment 2004-2006 for increasing the number of children in childcare, for example, and special committees have been set up to promote gender equality, including a special committee for battling sexism in the workplace in the ombudsman's office. Moreover, statistics show that women's labour participation has increased significantly in the last two decades (although it remains much lower than men's).

Despite these reforms, however, challenges remain and statistical evidence demonstrates that, although on paper Cyprus' gender policies seem excellent, women are still confronted with a substantial gender wage gap and lag behind men in terms of access to employment opportunities and career advancement. Some effort has been made, notably by the Ombudsman's office, to generate awareness and promote policies, however more needs to be done particularly in promoting employment policies to employers and policy makers.

Cyprus's employment rate is relatively high, standing, according to the Labour Force Survey for 2003, at 72.2%. Of this number 63.1% was female and 36.9% male. According to the United Nations Statistics Division report *The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics*, labour force participation rates of women in Cyprus are relatively high. However, the *2006 Report on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men in the European Union* (by the DG Employment and Social Affairs) demonstrates that Cyprus had the highest gender segregation in employment amongst all member states. The services sectors absorbed in 2002 84% of female employment with almost 50% of employed women concentrated in the sectors of trade, hotels and restaurants, and manufacturing and education, while almost 58% of male employment is concentrated in the sectors of manufacturing, construction, trade and public administration.¹⁴ Furthermore, although there has been some improvement in recent years in terms of gender convergence in pay (the difference fell from 50.7% in 1992 to 36.2% in 1998), the gender wage gap remains the lowest among all EU member states with female monthly earnings 26% less than male earnings¹⁵. Although the gender wage gap can be partly explained by the gender segregation in employment where women are more frequently found in low-salaried jobs, there are gender wage differences even between men and women sharing similar occupation and educational characteristics. Wage discrimination based on gender is apparent in employer practices as well as in contract negotiations due to patriarchal attitudes that undervalue women's experience, as well as the limited powers of negotiation among women working in various professions and sectors.

¹³ Questionnaire, Progress on Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, 1995 and The Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development (1995) and its Update (2000-2005), National Machinery for Women's Rights, Ministry of Justice and Public Order, Nicosia, Cyprus, 2003, p.5

¹⁴ Questionnaire, Progress on Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, p. 22

¹⁵ Report from the Commission on equality between men and women - 2006

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/gender_equality/docs/com_2006_71_en.pdf

In terms of entrepreneurial activity, female business ownership in Cyprus (12%) is low compared to the EU (27%).¹⁶ Moreover, there is strong segmentation in traditionally 'female' activity sectors: the clothing and shoe industry, the medical and paramedical professions, the kiosks and mini markets, gift shops, hairdressers and florists. Financial support is by far the most important concern for women entrepreneurs but other important concerns include childcare support, reconciliation of entrepreneurial activity and family life, and access to information/further education.¹⁷

Although recorded unemployment rates in Cyprus remain low (4.3% in 2004), percentages of unemployed women have always been slightly higher than that of men and, in fact, have risen from 4.6% in 2003 to 5.4% in 2004. There is also a relatively high unemployment rate for women aged 35-44 suggesting that women face particular difficulties when trying to re-enter the labour force after a period of inactivity suggesting lack of governmental policies and societal support. Moreover, women constitute the majority of the long-term unemployed (long-term unemployed indicated a period of 12 months or longer) reflecting inequalities of opportunity in, and access to, employment. In 1990 long term unemployed women formed 55%, with this percentage increasing to 59% in 1995 and 63% in 2002.¹⁸

It is important to note here that recorded rates of unemployment do not paint the full picture of unemployment in Cyprus. One reason for this is that a great number of people, particularly women, working as seasonal staff, such as those working in the services (hotels, restaurants, gift shops during the tourist season (most of which are women), are not eligible to claim unemployment benefits during the off-peak season. Perhaps more important are the cultural and social practices in Cyprus that make people in general, but women in particular, unlikely to ask for benefits because of the negative social connotations attached to this. For example, in order to receive unemployment benefits one must visit the Department of Labour every two weeks to sign that they remain unemployed. This often discourages people from claiming their rights for fear of 'exposure' in a country where 'what people will say' still bears social significance. Another reason relates to societal norms on what constitutes 'women's work'. Women that do not work, but are actively looking for work, are often not considered 'unemployed' but, rather, women looking to make a financial contribution to the family rather than embark on a career.

There has not been any significant development in terms of flexible forms of employment, such as part-time and temporary work. In 2002 part-time employment accounted for 7.2% of total employment. 11.3% of employed women were working on a part-time basis in 2002 as compared to 4% of employed men. Similarly, temporary work accounted for 7% of total employment in 2002, while the proportion of women in temporary work to total employment of women was 10.8%.¹⁹ However, it is worth mentioning the enactment of The Part Time Employees (Prohibition of Discriminatory Treatment) Law of 2003 that, although not directly related to the principle of gender equality, can be considered as protecting women as most part-time employees are women.

¹⁶ Questionnaire, Progress on Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, p. 25

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.23

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 22

Some effort is being made, at least on paper, by the Cyprus government to encourage and support the integration of women in employment. There is particular emphasis on the upgrading of facilities offered to employed parents in order to reconcile work and family. Priorities include the expansion and improvement of child care facilities; the provision of special allowances for care givers; and the promotion of flexible work arrangements. The National Action Plan for Employment 2004-2006 includes some targets including raising the percentage of children ages 3-6 receiving care to 90% by 2010 from 82% today. Several committees have also been set up to stimulate women's active participation in the workforce. A Committee on the Equality of Sexes in Employment and Vocational Training was created in 2003 to pursue this goal. This committee has an advisory role and may recommend the introduction of measures and the implementation of programmes for the promotion of equality of the sexes and advise or formulate recommendations for introduction or revision of relevant legislation. A Special Committee for battling Sexism in the Workplace has also been set up in the Ombudsman's office which also deals with cases of sexual harassment and unequal pay. Another initiative is a special programme elaborated by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, *Scheme to enhance Female Entrepreneurial Activity*, to encourage women entrepreneurship by helping to finance the creation of women-owned companies with special grants. Another important development is the creation of the first Women's Cooperative Bank with the objective of improving women's access to financial resources.²⁰

However, provisions for increased child-care facilities, although positive, is presented as a cure-all for addressing the gender employment gap whereas references to gender discrimination and sexism are absent.

In reality, little is being done to implement these policies or facilitate awareness of the policies and measures the government is pursuing. In terms of child care, for example, women are more likely to entrust this task on the grandmothers who are customarily expected to undertake the care of their grandchildren, or, in the event that they are unable to do so, domestic workers are employed for this task.²¹ The same can be said regarding most of the developments on employment policy discussed above. Little or nothing has been done to generate awareness to the public, decision-makers, or employers so policies are rarely enforced and, worse, women are not aware of their rights and consequently do not claim them.

Migrant Women

Although there is a separate section on trafficking above, we feel that it is important to mention migrant women under Article 11 – Employment, because of the large number of migrant women working in Cyprus that are not covered or taken into account in this section.

With the mass flow of immigrants from the Philippines and Sri Lanka arriving in Cyprus to become employed legally (and illegally) as domestic and/or agricultural workers, the high numbers of Eastern European women coming [or being trafficked] into Cyprus to work in the entertainment and sex industry, the opening of the

²⁰ Cyprus National Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, pp. 34-35

²¹ Vassiliadou, Myria [a] 'Women's Constructions of Women; On Entering the Front Door', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Special Issue: Feminist Challenges: Crossing Boundaries, Vol. 5, #3, May 2004, p. 56-57

illegally imposed Green Line between the northern and southern parts of the island [and thus undocumented immigrants arriving from the illegal entry point in the north and crossing into the south] and the growing number of asylum seekers [given relaxed immigration laws and processes as well as the recent European Union membership and Cyprus' economic geography], the demographics of the island are changing very fast. Migrant women are largely absent from the Cyprus government report except in Article 6 – Trafficking in Women. Migrant women are a special group who are more discriminated against and victimized in the process of migration and integration into the host country for all the known complex reasons associated with gender.

The Cyprus Government has not adopted any concrete policies or strategies for the integration of migrants in the labour force. There are also deficiencies on the legislative and institutional levels and a lack of control mechanisms with regards to the implementation and observance of the terms and conditions of their employment. The employment contracts for female migrant domestic workers and women on “entertainment” or “artiste” visas, as mentioned above, are prepared by the migration department of the Ministry of Interior without the consultation of the labour department of the Ministry of Labour.

Recognized refugees, particularly women, face enormous difficulties, regarding access to healthcare, employment, accommodation and generally, overall integration issues. Despite having equal rights with regard to the labour market in Cyprus, women refugees suffer discrimination and are often employed [if at all] in unskilled jobs whereas many are highly educated. Language and religious practices are also barriers; however, the government should take active measures to assist in their integration in the labour market as foreseen by law.

The employment of domestic workers in Cyprus is not based on the labour needs of the country but mostly due to the needs of working women. As mentioned above, their contracts are not drafted by the Ministry of Labour but by the Migration Department. This has resulted in domestic workers not even receiving the minimum wage and not receiving their social security donations upon leaving Cyprus. Also, their contract forbids their civic participation and their involvement in political activity. Female migrant workers in Cyprus, like in other countries, suffer from exploitation as well as marginalization. For example, according to the Nicosia District Labour office, 540 female migrant domestic workers complained to the authority for contract violations in 2004. Many complain of racism, discrimination and complete lack of empathy. Apart from the cases of severe mental and physical abuse, including sexual harassment and rape, there are the cases of women who report “not feeling wanted”, who live in shacks without proper hygiene, who are denied proper nutrition, or who are never allowed to eat with their employers or to eat from the same food. Some note that they are denied the opportunity to cook food from their country (“it smells bad”), they are denied their day off (Sunday), they have their passports withheld and that they work many more hours than specified in their contracts without compensation.

Recommendations

- Measures must urgently be taken to reduce the gender wage gap by firstly addressing gender segregation and targeting sectors traditionally dominated by men, and inform employers of their obligations under the equal pay for equal work law.

- Parental leave does not encourage parents, particularly men, to make use of it as it is unpaid. The government should consider revising the parental leave law to allow for at least partial pay during leave.
- A concerted effort is needed, through training and the creation of opportunities, to encourage women to enter occupations traditionally dominated by men and vice versa.
- Upgrading of existing childcare facilities as well as the creation of more centres.
- Encourage and provide incentives to employers to adopt family friendly policies and work environments.
- Information and sensitisation campaigns should be carried out for employers and union leaders.
- Revision of employment contracts of migrant domestic workers to increase their wages in line with the minimum wage in Cyprus [from 150 CYP to 362 CYP], to allow for their civic participation, among others. This revision should take place in consultation with the labour department.
- The adoption of concrete strategies and policies for the integration of migrant women in the wider society.

9. Article 12 – Health and AIDS

'State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality with men and women, access to health services, including those related to family planning.'

The services mentioned under 168 (a) of the government report do not make any reference to sexual and reproductive services which are NOT offered by the state. Primary health care includes maternal and child health care, as well as family planning which includes birth control methods. Sterilizations at the state hospitals are offered under special, unwritten internal regulations which restrict women from exercising their right to choose. Additionally, no sexual and reproductive health services are offered by the state targeted and appropriately adjusted to the needs of special groups (migrants, youth, etc).

With regard to abortion, no research has ever been conducted with reference to the extent of this practise in Cyprus. Despite the fact that the law on abortion in Cyprus allows termination of pregnancy if there is a risk of physical or mental (or psychological) health, in practise abortions in state hospitals (provided to people entitled to state medical health care) are performed strictly on physical grounds. Abortions are performed in private clinics only (and to those that can afford private health care) and this is one reason there is no statistical data on abortion in Cyprus.

Recommendations

- Improve family planning services and the availability of contraception also taking into account the needs of specific groups;
- Measures should be taken to ensure that the law on abortion is implemented to offer abortions in cases of risk to mental and psychological health.