

REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

Cyprus

National Report

*on the Implementation of the Beijing
Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)
and the Outcome of the Twenty-Third
Special Session of the
General Assembly (2000)*

**CYPRUS NATIONAL REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING
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Introduction

This report constitutes a brief but comprehensive review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995).

The Government of the Republic of Cyprus regrets that due to the continuing illegal occupation and effective control of 37% of its territory by Turkish military forces, the Government is unable to ensure the full realization of women's rights and gender equality in the whole of its territory and that, therefore, it is also deprived of its ability to apply gender equality laws, policies and programmes to those living in the part of the country under foreign occupation. Due to the above described situation, no reliable information and data are available regarding the enjoyment of the relevant rights by the Cypriot population living in the area that is not controlled by the Government. Therefore, all information and data presented in the Present Report concern the government controlled areas.

Part One: Overview of Achievements and Challenges in Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

The last five years, following the accession of Cyprus into the European Union and the enactment of an impressive number of legislative measures related to gender equality, has been a critical period for the development of a national policy on equality between women and men. In recent years, a number of National Action Plans (NAPs) and strategies have been developed that either specifically address issues of gender equality or routinely incorporate gender mainstreaming. The National Action Plans that specifically target issues of gender equality are those of employment (2004), trafficking in human beings (2005) and gender equality (2007). Additionally, the National Action Plan on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (2008) routinely incorporates gender mainstreaming and addresses policy areas such as health care, reconciliation of work and family life, pension plans, long-term care among others.

The most significant achievement in terms of the national policy on gender equality is the development of the first **National Action Plan on Gender Equality (2007-2013)**. The National Action Plan on Gender Equality was initiated by the National Machinery for Women's Rights (NMWR), and adopted by the Council of Ministers in August 2007. The National Action Plan on Gender Equality is significant in that it incorporates a holistic approach to gender equality addressing six priority areas, namely: employment, education, decision-making, social rights, violence and gender stereotypes. The development of the National Action Plan was a collective achievement thanks to close collaboration with all government departments and local authorities as well as women's organizations, NGOs, academic institutions and human rights bodies.

The National Action Plan on Gender Equality was formulated on the basis of international conventions and recommendations particularly the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** and the Concluding Comments to the Cyprus Report to the CEDAW Committee in 2006, the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), as well as EU policy frameworks such as the Roadmap for Equality between Men and Women and EU Directives.

Gender mainstreaming and positive action measures are gradually being implemented at all levels in various policy areas, particularly in the area of employment and vocational training, aiming at the economic empowerment of women and their integration into the labour market. These include measures such as the expansion of child-care facilities, vocational guidance and training, and schemes to support women's entrepreneurship.

Also important for the incorporation of gender mainstreaming in policy formulation is the development of **gender-disaggregated statistics** and more systematic data collection and in all areas, with the Cyprus Statistical Service playing a leading role in this effort. The publication of *The Statistical Portrait of Women in Cyprus* by the Cyprus Statistical Service (2008) which provides gender disaggregated data for all sectors including employment, education, health, poverty, and public life is but one example of this.

Research has also been developed during the period under review on gender equality issues by academic institutions, NGOs, and women's organisations, and the NMWR has actively supported these efforts.

Although **gender budgeting** at the national level has not yet been introduced, the first steps have been taken in this direction on the initiative of the NMWR. However, it should be noted that all development projects implemented in Cyprus with the support of Structural Funds of the European Union must comply with national and European gender equality laws and policies.¹

Major developments have taken place in the area of **violence against women**, particularly in the area of family violence and trafficking in women for sexual exploitation. With regard to **violence in the family**, awareness raising campaigns were implemented to encourage women to report incidents of violence and to sensitize professionals and the public. Also significant is the preparation of the first National Action Plan on Violence in the Family which is pending approval by the Council of Ministers. **Trafficking in women** has also been a priority issue for the Cyprus Government and, as a result, a number of major developments have taken place including a National Action Plan on Trafficking in Women, a new legal framework, the establishment of monitoring mechanisms, and the implementation of awareness raising campaigns.

Under the leadership of the NMWR major efforts were made toward the increased **representation of women in political and public life** particularly in view of the 2006 Parliamentary and Local Authority elections including awareness raising campaigns through the media, meetings and contacts with political parties, as well as training programmes for women candidates. It can be said that as a result of these efforts both the number of women candidates, as well as the number of women elected into political office has increased.

In terms of institutional development, the Equality Unit of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order and the NMWR continue to play a leading role in the overall promotion of gender equality and the protection of women's rights. Besides, the establishment of new bodies, authorities, and committees for the promotion of gender equality has given new impetus to the full implementation of gender equality laws and policies.

During the period of review the involvement of **women's organizations and NGOs** in policy formulation and implementation on gender equality has increased significantly and their contributions have been vitally important in ensuring that the needs of all women, including vulnerable groups, are taken into account.

Despite the significant positive developments outlined above, traditional perceptions regarding the role of women and men as well as gender stereotypes continue to impede *de facto* realisation of gender equality. This is reflected *inter alia* in the underrepresentation of women in political and public life, the continuing problem of violence against women, as well as the significant gender pay gap and gender segregation in employment. Based on this acknowledgment the government policy on gender equality will intensify efforts to eliminate gender stereotypes primarily in the sphere of education as well as the media. In addition, efforts will continue to ensure the full implementation of the existing legal framework safeguarding women's rights.

¹ The Structural Funds are the main financial instruments to reduce disparities in development and to promote economic and social cohesion in the European Union.

Part Two: Progress in implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action

A. WOMEN AND POVERTY

Women are at a higher risk of poverty as compared to men with a difference of 4 percentage points. The risk of poverty for women of the general population, irrespectively of age, is 18%. In Cyprus, single parent households (the majority of which are women) with at least one dependant child run double the risk of falling below the poverty line in comparison to the rest of the population.

Policies for reducing the risk of poverty are focused on the population age group of 65 years and over, single parent families and other vulnerable groups of the population.

The planning of new measures of allowances policy for the period 2008-2010 aims at increasing the income of social groups carrying the highest indicators of poverty risk which place them below the poverty line. These measures seek to reinforce the income of particular population groups, allowing for selective readjustment of allowances and benefits, while taking into account the adequacy of available financial resources and aiming at the containment of the various consequences of high poverty risk in which pensioners and single parent families find themselves.

Based on the decision of the Council of Ministers no:62.106, dated 10/12/2003, all pensioners that receive pensions less than a certain amount are entitled to a Special Allowance. This Special Allowance is also provided to all the Social Pension pensioners, of which 97.48% are women.

Although there have been no amendments in the pillar of financial benefits since 2007, it is important to stress that these amounts are annually adjusted.

Public assistance ensures the right to a decent standard of living through the provision of financial assistance and/or social services to persons, who legally reside in the Republic of Cyprus, face serious socio-economic problems, and whose resources are not sufficient to meet their basic and special needs. With the revised Public Assistance and Services Law (L.95/(1)/2006) there have been amendments which financially reinforce public assistance recipients and encourage their integration into the labour market.

With the wider application of certain provisions, as well as the introduction of new ones, the new legislation especially favours persons with disabilities and single-parent families. Half the income from employment of lone parents or €256.29- whichever is higher- is not taken into account when benefits are calculated. Lone parents may receive public assistance even though they are gainfully employed. Through public assistance, a care allowance may be provided to a family member who is obliged to withdraw from employment in order to care for a dependent elderly relative. In July 2008 the House of Representatives approved an increase of 12%, which is higher by 7.8% in relation to 2007 (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, Social Welfare Services).

The Grants-in-Aid Scheme for Voluntary Welfare Organisations (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, Social Welfare Services), which is a mechanism of the Cypriot system of social protection, aims at the support and activation of the volunteer movement in the

area of social welfare and the coverage of social needs at the local level. Through subsidizing voluntary agencies, the Government aims to enhance state policies dealing with the demographic problem and reversing the continuing low birth rate trend, to develop services aiming at the prevention of social problems, to support the Cypriot family through both primary and secondary intervention, and to encourage the integration and reintegration of women and other vulnerable groups both in society and the labour market.

Through the Grants-in-Aid Scheme for 2008, 210 Voluntary Social Welfare Organisations were subsidized for the operation of 292 Programmes of social care at the local level, with the amount of €8.063.823. Specifically, for 2008, subsidies were provided to 54 programmes for preschool aged children, 56 Centres for the Protection and Occupation of school aged children, 53 programmes for persons with special needs, 88 programmes for the elderly and 42 programmes aiming at covering the needs of other vulnerable population groups.

The Cyprus Government has made a commitment to address vulnerable groups of women such as migrants, women with disabilities, elderly women, lone mothers and others more systematically. In terms of migration, Cyprus has witnessed an increase in the number of migrant workers in recent years, the majority of which are women (63% in 2006). One particularly vulnerable group are female migrant domestic workers third country nationals. Efforts have been made by NGOs and women's organisations to map the specific needs of migrant domestic workers and raise awareness among relevant stakeholders. A Ministerial Committee has been set up to revise the employment policy concerning migrant domestic workers including their salaries. Furthermore, National Action Plans including the NAP on Gender Equality, as well as the NAP on Social Protection and Social Inclusion propose specific measures to take into account the needs of such vulnerable groups of women.

B. EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF WOMEN

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. Whereas in the past there was a higher proportion of men who had completed tertiary and secondary education, in 2006 this trend changed with a higher proportion of women (27%) completing tertiary education in comparison to 26% of men. Furthermore, over the years we have witnessed a gradual narrowing of the gender gap in the choice of fields of study that has also as a consequence a positive effect on the career development of women. Additionally, although the gender gap in internet use remains, the proportion of women using the internet has increased from 23% to 28% in 2006-2007. However, despite these achievements, statistics also demonstrate that in terms of faculty and staff although women dominate higher education they are still underrepresented in higher education.

A key priority for Cyprus is to achieve the goals and priorities of the Lisbon Strategy which is committed to strengthen the economic, social and environmental renewal of the EU, in the wider context of the knowledge society.

To achieve this goal the Ministry of Education and Culture is focused on ensuring equal opportunities in education for both genders on a non-discriminatory basis, both in the

urban and in the rural areas, and, at the same time, at all levels of education. Education is free from the age 5-18 (i.e. primary and secondary education), and compulsory from the age of 5 until the age of 15 (primary and secondary level).

Sex and health education is gradually being introduced at various educational levels on a pilot basis with the view to incorporating the subject in all schools in Cyprus. These programmes are supervised by the Inspectors of Biology and by the Department of Health Education. However, health education has been mainly promoted transversally through the teaching of such lessons as Biology, Natural Sciences, Home Economics, Civic Education and others.

Programmes include a “Mentor” Programme introduced in the second grade of the gymnasium that has the objective of providing information on gender relationships and the importance of cultivating mutual respect and enhancing decision-making skills in relationships. Health issues are also discussed such as pregnancy, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. Other programmes being implemented in several schools across the island on a pilot basis include a “Gender Relationships” Programme coordinated by a specially trained teacher and a Health Education Programme with special emphasis on sexual education, which is implemented in secondary schools across the island.

The University of Cyprus, as well as private Universities have exhibited a considerable amount of research on women’s issues.

- (a) The University of Cyprus offers courses or modules such as Issues of Equality and Gender, History of Women’s Education in Cyprus etc. Significant during this period is the establishment of the UNESCO CHAIR on Gender Equality and Empowerment which is of major importance for regional development in the area. The UNESCO Chair aims to provide a new paradigm on how common problems faced by the populations of the region, like conflicts in the Middle East and the Mediterranean region, and water supply, can be addressed through the gender perspective.
- (b) The University of Nicosia has a strong record of researching gender issues and in 2004 established the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS). MIGS aims at combating gender inequality through research, advocacy and lobbying, as well as trainings, conferences, and other activities.
- (c) The European University of Cyprus has established the Centre for the Study of Childhood and Adolescence, which aims to inform social policy in ways that enhance the lives of children and their families through research, education and consultation. The Centre has carried out a number of projects on domestic violence and single parent families, with a particular emphasis on the experiences of children and adolescence.
- (d) Frederick University has also implemented a number of projects on gender issues, specifically in the areas of family violence and reconciliation of work and family life.

The NMWR has also pursued initiatives during the period under review, aiming at changing stereotypes and creating a new consciousness regarding gender roles. In particular, two projects were implemented, the first aiming at encouraging girls to pursue new career paths, such as entrepreneurship and the other aimed at encouraging boys to become more involved in family and private life.

The National Action Plan on Gender Equality also gives particular emphasis on education and the elimination of gender stereotypes and includes activities such as research on gender and education and a comprehensive plan for the sensitization/training of teaching staff in various levels of education.

It is important to mention that educational reform is currently underway and that this reform puts greater emphasis on incorporating diversity, multiculturalism and gender equality, including sex education.

As far as vocational training is concerned, women have had a high participation percentage (over 40%) for a number of years in training activities financed by the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus (HRDA). Specifically, during the year 2008, 15.543 (41, 2%) of the 37.698 persons participating in the HRDA training activities were women. Specifically, during the year 2008, 15.543 (41,2%) of the 37.698 persons participating in the HRDA training activities were women and they participated in the programmes co-funded by the European Social Fund: (a) *Scheme for the promotion of training and employability of economically inactive women*. Over the period 2006-2008, approximately 780 women participated in the scheme, 230 for placements and 550 for participation in training programmes. The Scheme will continue to operate over the new programming period 2007-2013, co-financed by the ESF. (b) *Scheme for the promotion of training and employability of the unemployed, co-financed by the ESF*. Over the period 2006-2008, 800 persons benefited from the scheme, 584 for participation in training programmes and 216 for placements. It is worth mentioning that 86,3% of the total participation in the Scheme were women. The Scheme will continue to operate over the new programming period 2007-2013 co-financed by the ESF. (c) *Scheme for the enhancement of computer literacy of the unemployed, co-financed by the ESF*: Approximately 540 persons participated in the Scheme, from which 82,7% were women. The Scheme was completed in September 2008.

Finally, the Cyprus Academy of Public Administration (CAPA) has organised in the period 2007-2008 a number of seminars and training workshops aimed at increasing awareness and knowledge on European gender equality policies among civil servants. These included a seminar targeting the gender equality focal points. CAPA is now in the process of designing new activities on gender equality issues for the years 2009-2010.

C. WOMEN AND HEALTH

Health care in Cyprus is provided to all persons without discrimination on the basis of age, sex, religion, ethnicity or other attribute. Migrants receive free medical care and have access to all public health services. Families with three children or more also have free access to the public hospitals and health centers and to pharmaceutical care.

The quality of health care is high and this is reflected by the health indicators, which are comparable to those of other developed countries. Women enjoy a high level of health, with a life expectancy at birth estimated for the period 2006/2007, at 81.9 years, compared to 78.3 years for men. In 2008, 39 female doctors and 92 male were involved in decision making in the area of health. The absence of a National Health System could be considered a major obstacle although its development and implementation is one of the priorities of the National Health Care Strategy 2008-2010, which is already in an advanced stage of implementation.

It is worth noting that the new Nicosia General Hospital has been operating since 2006 and provides upgraded services in all sectors of health.

In terms of sexual and reproductive health the Archbishop Makarios the III Hospital continues to provide high quality services for the mother and child. The Ministry of Health is also aiming to contribute to the well-being of couples with fertility problems, by offering economical support for two trials of IVF (in vitro fertilizations) and the medication for a third trial. The new strategic plan includes the implementation of a national screening programme for cervical cancer funded by the Ministry of Health. This will decrease the incidence and mortality of the disease. Women in the age group of 30-60 years will be examined using the Papanikolaou smear test. Finally, a number of awareness-raising activities on women's health and safe motherhood have been organized within the framework of the European Programme Interreg 3B Archimed (WHEALTH Promoting Women's Health and Safe Motherhood).

Advice on family planning is also offered through the Maternal and Child Health Centers and by doctors of the public and the private sectors. All pregnant women are attended by either midwives or obstetricians and all deliveries take place under supervision by trained personnel. Breast feeding is actively promoted by the relevant services. Finally, doctors, health visitors and nurses in cooperation with the local authorities visit various rural areas and educate women on sexual and reproductive health.

Cyprus remains a low prevalence country for HIV/AIDS, particularly for women who are outnumbered by 1 to 6 by men with regard to HIV infection. This ratio may be even higher, because according to official figures, women have a higher likelihood of being tested if their partner is found to be HIV-positive and therefore more likely to be diagnosed if they are infected. According to the criteria of WHO, it is estimated that the number of people with HIV infection among the adult population in Cyprus is not more than 500. The main concern of the Ministry of Health has been to prevent the further spread of the virus.

The National AIDS programme has continued to be implemented according to the principles for prevention of transmission of the virus and the reduction of the social and personal consequences of HIV-infection. Prostitutes are offered condoms for free in order to protect themselves from HIV and STDs.

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 free regimens and advice to prevent the transmission of the virus to their babies.

A new strategic plan for prevention of AIDS is about to be prepared for the period of 2009-2012, based on the same principles.

Concerning the problem of cancer, the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Cyprus has prepared a national strategic plan in order to reduce cancer in the population.

Since 1995, a national breast screening programme provides women of the age group 50 to 69 years a mammography. The active role of an NGO, Europa Donna, has a complementary role to play in the campaign of the programme. Europa Donna contributes with fund and awareness raising and with continuous psychological support to women.

D. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women continues to be a priority for the Cyprus Government and commitments towards its eradication have been made at the highest level of the political leadership.

During the period of review, major developments have taken place. The violence in the family (Prevention and Protection of Victims) Law 47 (I)/1994, replaced by Law 119(I)/2000, was later amended in 2004 by Law 212(I)/2004. The Law *inter alia* condemns any act of violence within the family, raises substantially the penalties for violence, provides protection to victims mainly by empowering the Court to issue restraining orders, clarifies that rape can be committed within marriage, facilitates the reporting of violent incidents, provides for the appointment of Family Counselors, the setting up of the Advisory Committee to monitor the implementation of the Law, the taking of testimony of victims of violence by electronic means, the protection of victims and witnesses and makes the spouse a compellable witness.

Another development of particular importance is the drafting of a National Action Plan on the Prevention and Handling of Family Violence (2008-2013) by the Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence, which is pending approval by the Council of Ministers. The aim of the NAP is to monitor the extent of violence in the family in Cyprus; to raise awareness and sensitize the public as well as relevant professionals using various mediums, including special conferences and seminars and information campaigns and programmes; to promote scientific research on violence in the family; to promote services dealing with all aspects of the problem and specifically for support and protection of victims; monitor the effectiveness of services and the enforcement of the relevant legislation.

Also significant is the preparation of a Manual of Interdepartmental Procedures which provides a framework for the cooperation of relevant departments of family violence including the Social Welfare Services, the Police Force, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Law Office of the Republic, and relevant NGOs. The manual is currently being revised following evaluation and recommendations by all relevant stakeholders and will be submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval in 2009.

During the period of review, there has been a systematic effort by government authorities and NGOs alike to raise awareness on all forms of violence against women, their causes and consequences. Cyprus took part in the Council of Europe Campaign to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence (2006-2008). During this period the National Machinery for Women's Rights, the Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence, the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Family Violence (NGO), along with the Cyprus Parliament and other stakeholders including the media organised a series of public events and other activities under the slogan «No to Violence against Women». The President of the House of Representatives, Ministers and other high level officials participated in these events, in

order to reaffirm their commitment to the issue, as well as raise the profile of the event and increase media coverage.

One of the central objectives of the Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence is the sensitization and awareness-raising of the public as well as relevant professionals on all aspects of violence in the family. Within this framework, the Committee has published a number of booklets and other information material, including a booklet about the Cypriot legislation concerning family violence analyzing the most important legal aspects of the law. Posters, leaflets, and other material have also been published which are disseminated widely among relevant authorities and the public. The Committee has also been involved in the organisation of training seminars and workshops for professionals, aimed at providing information and training relevant professionals on handling cases of family violence.

The NMWR has also played an important role in funding a number of projects implemented by women's organisations and NGOs aimed at raising awareness and sensitizing the public on the issue of violence against women including research, training workshops, information seminars, conferences, exhibitions etc.

The Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence has taken a leading role in commissioning research on violence in the family, the most recent being "Dimensions and Forms of Violence against Children within the Cypriot Family". The Committee has also taken the lead in the development of a unified data collection system for family violence as well as in the completion of the mapping of all cases of violence in the family in Cyprus (1998-2005).

An intervention programme named "Compassion" was launched in 2006 by the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (NGO) designed to help people who practice domestic violence (perpetrators) as well as victims of domestic violence. This programme is subsidized by the Social Welfare Services and the NMWR.

During the period under review data collection has been improved and recent statistics show an increase in the number of reported cases of family violence to the police. More specifically, the number of reported cases increased from 505 in 2004 to 1053 in 2007. 80% of victims were women and girls.

In 2002 the Police established a special unit for combating domestic violence. The Police Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Office, Department C, is the competent department that investigates domestic violence cases, collects statistical data on the matter and provides assistance to Police Stations all over the country. Each Police Station has an average four specialized Police Officers. The Police Headquarters also operate a 24 hour helpline for victims.

Trafficking in Human Beings

A number of concrete measures have been taken on all levels to prevent and combat trafficking and in particular trafficking in women for sexual exploitation.

In April 2005 a National Action Plan on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Exploitation of Children was approved by the Council of Ministers. The National

Action Plan was developed by a Group of Experts appointed by the Council of Ministers consisting of all relevant ministries as well as NGOs.

The Action Plan includes legislative and administrative measures in line with relevant international instruments, covering the areas of (a) prevention, (b) protection of victims and (c) prosecution. The Ministry of Interior was appointed the National Coordinator of the National Action Plan.

A significant provision of the NAP was the establishment of a State Shelter for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking, run by the Social Welfare Services which are the legal guardians of victims of trafficking.

Another major development has been the enactment of the *Combating of Trafficking and Exploitation of Human Beings and the Protection of Victims Law* [L.87(I)/2007] in 2007 replacing the initial law of 2000. The purpose of this Law is the penalisation of trafficking, exploitation and child pornography, the promotion of measures for the protection and support of victims of such crimes and the creation of a monitoring system for the implementation of such measures. The Law provides, *inter alia*, for a national mechanism of cooperation between governmental services and non-governmental organisations for the identification of victims and the implementation of responsibilities stipulated in the Law for the protection of victims and the safeguarding of their rights. Such responsibilities include mandatory referral of suspected victims to the Social Welfare Services who inform them of their rights and immediately refer them to the Police, which is the competent agency to establish whether or not they are victims. The scope of the new law is to fully harmonize the national legislation with the European Acquis as well as to better implement the Council of Europe Convention on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings ratified in 2007 and other international instruments. It is worth mentioning that Cyprus was among the first ten countries to sign and ratify the Council of Europe Convention and it came into force in February 2008.

Since 2004 the Cyprus Police has been operating an Office for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings which has a central role in coordinating the anti-trafficking activities of the Police and in the recognition of victims.

One of the most important developments in the area of trafficking in human beings has been the establishment of a Multidisciplinary Coordinating Group as foreseen by the 2007 Law. The group's purpose, among others, is to monitor the implementation of the Law and National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons (2005), as well as to take all necessary measures, to monitor and evaluate the national referral mechanism of the victims and to collect, exchange information between the members of the team with regards to offences as these are foreseen by the Law.

In consultation with the Multidisciplinary Coordinating Group, a new policy for the entry, residence, and employment of third country nationals as 'artistes' was approved by the Council of Ministers on 29/10/2009. This new policy effectively abolishes the special visas for 'artistes' which are replaced by permits as 'creative artists' or as 'performing artists', outlines new procedures for the issuing of temporary residence and employment permits, and foresees revision of the contract of employment to conform to the employment procedures and policies followed for all third country nationals entering the Republic.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Interior, as the Coordinator of the National Action Plan on Trafficking in Human Beings, recently launched an ambitious awareness raising campaign all over Cyprus. The campaign includes the display of posters at key points on main roads, highways, airports and other important locations as well as the wide dissemination of information leaflets to universities, colleges, and airports.

Awareness raising activities have also been carried out intensively by women's organisations and NGOs often with the support of the National Machinery for Women's Rights. Most recently, a conference on Trafficking in Women for Sexual Exploitation was organised by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) with the support of the NMWR on the occasion of European Day against Trafficking 2008, with a special focus on the role of demand for sexual services. Research has also been developed aiming at mapping the extent of the problem by NGOs.

Finally, it is worth noting that a manual of interdepartmental procedures for the handling of cases of victims of trafficking is currently being drafted by relevant governmental departments in order to ensure interdepartmental cooperation and the safeguarding of the rights of victims.

E. WOMEN AND ARMED CONFLICT

Women continue to be actively involved in the promotion of reconciliation and peace through bi-communal activities and projects, but also more recently to address issues of common concern such as environmental issues and violence against women. One noteworthy initiative has been the establishment of the Women's Multicultural Centre, as foreseen by the National Action Plan on Gender Equality, aiming to bring together women from all communities in Cyprus in the promotion of gender equality, reconciliation, and peace. The NMWR also plays an important role in bringing women from both communities together by providing support to bi-communal initiatives and through the involvement of Turkish Cypriot women's organizations as full participants in its activities and funding schemes.

It is also worth noting that representation of women in the Foreign Service of the Republic of Cyprus has improved drastically. Whereas, there was only 1 woman ambassador until 1995, 5 women are now head of diplomatic missions. Further, whereas there were only 11 women diplomats until 1995, at present there are 37 out of the total number of 160, constituting 23% of the Diplomatic service. In 2007, the first woman Minister of Foreign Affairs was appointed and served an eight month term until the February 2008 presidential elections took place. She is currently the Greek Cypriot head of the Property Technical Committee under the new round of talks for a comprehensive solution to the Cyprus Problem that recently commenced between the leaders of the two communities.

In September 2008 fully fledged negotiations on the Cyprus Problem under the auspices of the United Nations commenced between the leaders of the two communities. The reunification of Cyprus is to be based on bi-zonal, bi-communal federation as envisaged by the 1977 and 1979 High Level Agreements, with a single sovereignty, single citizenship, single international personality, territorial integrity and political equality, as defined by the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions. Women of Cyprus have expressed their full support for the current negotiations.

F. WOMEN AND ECONOMY

Women's employment rate in Cyprus is relatively high and for 2007 (for ages 15-64) stood at 62.4% exceeding the Lisbon targets in terms of employment. Furthermore, Cyprus has a very strong legislative framework guarding against discrimination in access to the labour market and discrimination in employment. Despite these achievements, however, Cyprus has a significant gender pay gap at 26%, which is one of the highest in Europe.

The legislative framework, providing for the application of the principle of equal pay between men and women has been in place since 2002, through the Equal Pay between Men and Women for the Same Work or for Work to which Equal Value is attributed Law (L.177(I)/2002), which was later amended by Law L.193(I)/2004), granting the Commissioner of Administration (Ombudsman) with the authority of independently examining complaints in relation to equal pay between men and women.

Bridging the gender pay gap seems to be a slow, gradual and complex process in all countries, and the Government is aware that no legislative framework is adequate unless combined with comprehensive and targeted measures. Furthermore, gender stereotypes is the main cause of horizontal and vertical segregation of the labour market, eventually leading to gender pay gaps, and the Government is aware that eliminating these stereotypes is a prerequisite for the successful enforcement of any substantive measure for reducing this gap. Therefore, the elimination of stereotypes has been set as a key priority and an integral part of our national employment policy.

Towards this end, in 2007 the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance assigned the preparation of a comprehensive study on the gender pay gap aiming at evaluating and analysing the extent of the gender pay gap in Cyprus, identifying and categorising its causes, and formulating suggestions for significantly reducing the gap.

Based on these results the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance has developed a Project with concrete measures aiming at reducing the gender pay gap to be implemented during 2009-2013. The estimated cost is 4.5 million euro and there are encouraging indications that the project will be approved and co-financed by the European Social Fund.

These measures include among others the establishment of an effective inspection mechanism for the enforcement of equal pay legislation, the preparation of manuals and guides as tools for investigating cases of inequality in employment, interventions promoting the reconciliation of work and family life, and measures for the elimination of gender stereotypes through the educational system.

In terms of maternity protection, in 2007 the Social Insurance Law was amended in order to extend maternity leave from 16 weeks to 18 weeks. Also, in 2008 there was an amendment in order to extend the maternity allowance covering period for women that adopted a child from 14 weeks to 16 weeks.

As a means to promoting the reconciliation of work and family life, which is directly related to preserving women's employability and preventing them from working under unfavourable conditions, the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance has engaged in a continuous effort to improve relevant legislation. Since the enactment of the Parental

Leave Law in 2003, several weaknesses of its context and enforceability have been identified, which prevent or complicate usage by working parents. Based on the weaknesses identified, and drawing on good practices from other countries, the Ministry has prepared a proposal of an amending law, aiming at the enhancement of parental leave take up rates, which will soon be discussed with the social partners before its submission to the Council of Ministers.

Having as a target the integration/reintegration of women in the labour market, a network of structures and services for social care has been developed which aims at the facilitation of working parents and the provision of quality care services to dependent members of families and other vulnerable groups. Within the framework of this policy, the Social Welfare Services in cooperation with local authorities have implemented the Project "Expansion and Improvement of care services for children, the elderly, disabled persons and other dependants", co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) which started in 2005 and was completed in 2008.

All day schools are gradually being introduced across the island with the intention of facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life. In the year 2005-2006 there were 130 all day schools in all major districts.

Finally, recognizing that women often carry the burden of transporting their children to and from school, the Ministry of Communications and Works has initiated an ambitious Programme for the enhancement of public transport in Cyprus. In this context, a plan was successfully launched at the start of the 2008/2009 school year offering free transportation to high school students. The plan has covered 63 out of 90 public schools throughout the island, serving more than 30,000 students and aims to gradually cover schools all over the country.

Cyprus Productivity Centre also implemented a pilot project co-funded by the European Social Fund and the Cyprus Government to attract to the labour market unemployed or economically inactive women, who wished to work on the basis of flexible employment arrangements, and who remained unemployed or inactive due to lack of suitable opportunities. The project also aimed at promoting the reconciliation of family and working life as well as promoting improvements in the organisation and the competitiveness of the business units.

In terms of female entrepreneurship, within the framework of the Strategic Development Plan 2007-2013, the Industrial Development Service of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism implemented a Grant Scheme for the Strengthening of Women Entrepreneurship. The Scheme will be implemented for period of six years from 2008 to 2013. A total amount of about 5.000.000 Euros will be available for the needs of the Scheme. The first call of the Scheme was announced in 2008 and the number of applications increased considerably in comparison to previous years. 105 applications were examined and approved.

Within the framework of the "Rural Development Programme 2004-2006", there were specific measures aiming at the female rural population. More specifically for measures for "Small scale processing units of agricultural products" 60% of the approved beneficiaries were women and for the measures for "Encouragement and support of small scale traditional handicraft activities", 39% of the approved beneficiaries were women.

G. WOMEN IN POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

Despite the increasing numbers of women actively involved in public and political life, women are still underrepresented at the decision-making level. Despite this, it is worth mentioning that, in terms of political appointments, 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, the Commissioner for the Protection of Personal Data, and the Commissioner for the Rights of the Child. However, there is only one woman in the Council of Ministers.

In the judiciary have been significant developments with an increase in women judges from 26% in 2003 to 38% in 2006. Also, a woman has been appointed to the Supreme Court for the first time in 2004.

The presence of women among senior civil servants increased with their participation reaching 26.8 % in 2006 and there are now and two Permanent Secretaries of Ministries (out of eleven), which is the highest ranking official in the Civil Service. Besides, 7 out of 51 Directors of the Ministries' Departments/Services are women.

Balanced participation of women and men in political life continues to be high on the agenda of the NMWR. In view of 2006 Parliamentary and Local Authorities elections the NMWR launched a campaign aiming at increasing women's participation in Parliament and the Local Authorities. Part of this campaign was devoted to contacts/meetings with the leaders of all political parties during which positive action measures to accelerate *de facto* equality in political life were discussed. The contacts and discussions with political parties were broadly covered by the Media. The campaign continued with contacts with the Mass Media in an effort to give visibility to women's issues and women candidates especially during the pre-election period. The NMWR came to an agreement with the major Media owners/directors for the screening of a TV spot urging citizens to vote for both men and women. In addition, the NMWR subsidized the production of a short film on the same lines to be used by NGOs and the Media during the pre-election period. A booklet for Women in 2006 Parliamentary Elections was also prepared by the NMWR and was widely distributed.

It can be said that the increase in the percentage of women elected from 18.6% to 20.7% in the local councils and from 10.7% to 14.3% in the House of Representatives, were largely a result of these efforts. It is also worth mentioning that there was a dramatic increase in women candidates for the 2006 Parliamentary elections from 10.7% to 23.2%. However, despite this increase, women's representation remains low and only two out of the 33 mayors elected in 2006 were women, although it is worth mentioning that a woman was elected as Mayor of the Cypriot capital for the first time.

In order to respond to the issue of underrepresentation of women in public life, the Union of Cyprus Municipalities established the Committee of Elected Women of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities in February 2005. The Committee's objectives include among others the promotion of equality and equal representation of men and women in local life through the participation of women in the municipal councils.

Most political parties have introduced the quota system to favour the participation of women in their decision-making bodies. Some of them also have quotas for their

candidate lists. However, this has been made possible through the parties' memorandum/constitution and not through legislation. In addition, under the National Action Plan on Gender Equality and in particular under its special chapter on the "Balanced Participation of Women and Men in Political/Social and Economic life", measures for the introduction of targets and quotas have been included, such as the target of 40% for the participation of women in political life, the introduction of a quota of 30% for women in ballots in municipal, parliamentary and euro-parliamentary elections, and a quota of 30% for women in the appointments in all public committees and boards. These measures will be discussed in depth with civil society, taking into account the critical perception regarding the use of quotas prevailing in Cyprus, even among women's organisations.

NGOs have been very active in promoting the participation of women in political and public life in recent years, and to this end, have organized campaigns and seminars as well as carried out much needed research in this area, often with the support of the NMWR. A research study of particular interest was on the gender preferences of the Cypriot electorate during the 2006 elections, which was carried out by the Cyprus Gender Research Center.

Finally, in the field of international institutions and bodies two women hold key positions namely the Commissioner for Health of the European Commission and a member of the UN Committee against Torture.

H. INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Please see Part Three: Institutional Development

I. HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Cyprus has ratified almost all international legal instruments relevant in the context of human rights including the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol. More recently, Cyprus ratified the Council of Europe Convention for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (2007).

As mentioned above, in order to harmonize Cyprus legislation and bring it in line with relevant international instruments such as CEDAW, an impressive number of legislative measures relating to gender equality have been passed particularly during the previous reporting period.

During the current period under review, the legal framework safeguarding women's rights has been improved further, with a number of new laws as well as amendment laws particularly in the spheres of family, employment, and violence against women.

Besides the laws that are mentioned under the relevant critical areas of concern, it is important to mention "The Equal Treatment of Men and Women (Access to Goods and Services) Law of 2007" which transposes into national legislation the provisions of the relevant EU Directive (No. 2004/113/EC). The purpose of this law is to lay down a framework for combating discrimination based on sex in access to and the supply of goods and services, with a view to putting into effect the principle of equal treatment between men and women.

Further, The Children and Parents Amendment Law as well as the Property Rights among Spouses Amendment Law of 2008 provide for the mandatory and automatic increase of the child and spouse maintenance payments by 10% every two years and the possibility of these payments to be automatically deducted from the salary of the responsible party. Despite the fact that these provisions concern both men and women, in practice they benefit mostly women who are usually awarded parental care, while being at a disadvantaged financial position due to their social and economic status.

There has been a tremendous effort on behalf of the NMWR, relevant government authorities, equality bodies, and NGOs to inform women of their rights and where they can seek support and assistance in claiming these rights. A special effort was made by the NMWR to raise awareness among relevant stakeholders regarding the CEDAW Convention and has published the Convention as well as the most recent Government Report in English and in Greek.

Women are increasingly taking advantage of the extra-judicial mechanisms (equality bodies) set up under various legislation that have the mandate to investigate complaints of discrimination and violations against human rights. We consider this a positive development as evidence has shown that women are reluctant to bring cases of sex discrimination before the courts.

J. WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

Although there are positive developments in the field of representation of women in the media with an increase of participation of women in the media at various levels, the actual power at the decision-making level continues to be in male hands. A male-dominated area is that of chief editors of national newspapers where, out of the 23 chief editors only 2 are women. Nonetheless, women's penetration in the field of the mass media, a vital field for the promotion of gender issues, is indisputable. While women journalists formed just 25.9% in 1990, their participation in the media increased to 31.3% in 1995 and reached 43.6% in recent years.

An important development is the establishment of the Cyprus Radio Television Authority which is the competent regulatory body for the establishment, installation and operation of private radio and television stations throughout the Republic of Cyprus. During the last five years, the Authority has examined, either at its own initiative, or after a complaint, various cases against radio and television stations concerning discrimination on the grounds of sex and for broadcasting programmes which present violent behaviour in the family.

The National Action Plan on Gender Equality recognizes the need for changing social stereotypes and traditional perceptions of women and men and their role in society and in doing so foresees measures to engage the media more effectively in promoting women's issues, including systematic research on how the media represents women in their programmes, lobbying for the introduction of specific programmes on radio and television that will promote women's issues, women personalities, and women's participation in all spheres of life more generally.

Research is also developing in the area of gender and the media by academic institutions, women's organisations and NGOs, often with the support of the NMWR.

It is also worth mentioning that there has been a general effort among all relevant stakeholders including women's organizations and NGOs toward the sensitization and awareness of the public on all issues related to women's rights and gender equality using all means available including the media with documentaries, television spots, and interventions in radio and television programmes.

It is worth noting that gender issues have increasingly been promoted both in the electronic and the printed media and journalists have recently shown an interest and sensitivity to issues related to gender and women's rights. With reference to the electronic media, such issues are frequently discussed, however, less frequently during prime time TV viewing. In the case of the printed media, articles on gender-related issues are published regularly (almost on a daily basis), however, they rarely make the headlines.

Furthermore, an increase in women's magazines covering issues directly affecting women such as health issues and others has recently been noted as well as other initiatives such as the Women of the Year Awards that includes categories such as science, education, media, and entrepreneurship among others.

K. WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The environment is an issue that has been taken up by women's organizations and NGOs in recent years, as many environmental issues often intersect with women's issues. An example of this was the issue of inter-city school buses that was promoted by both women's organizations and environmental groups, in order to promote the reconciliation of work and family life but also to reduce intercity traffic and encourage the use of public transportation.

Besides its strong agenda on gender equality, the Cyprus Green Party recently formed a Women's Organization (Women's Branch) that will further ensure that a gender perspective is incorporated in environmental policies and programmes and that women's roles and contributions to environmental sustainability are taken into account.

Local authorities have also played an important role in promoting environmental issues such as the introduction of mass recycling and awareness raising campaigns.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the Cyprus Government has appointed a Commissioner for the Environment.

L. THE GIRL CHILD

In line with the legislation that determines the minimum level of operation of programs of social care, the Social Welfare Services continued the inspection of Children Day-care Centres, at Home Children Day-care, Protection Centres of Children, Homes for the Elderly and Adult Centres. Aiming at upgrading the provided services, two preliminary drafts with modifications on the Regulations for Children Day Care Centres and at Home Children Day Care have been prepared.

A major development towards promoting children's rights and effectively implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has been the enactment, in 2007, of the

Commissioner for the Protection of Children's Rights Law [L. 74(I)/2007]. The Commissioner has the following competences [section 4(1)]:

- (a) to represent children and their interests at all levels,
- (b) to inform and sensitize society on children's rights in order to motivate society to safeguard children's rights in practice, in the family, in school, in the community and in society at large,
- (c) to procure and promote the views of children whenever they cannot be heard,
- (d) to supervise and monitor the implementation of the UN Convention and the European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights,
- (e) to examine and monitor legislative provisions and practices and submit proposals aiming at harmonising legislation with relevant international conventions, as well as promoting the ratification of such conventions by the Republic of Cyprus,
- (f) to undertake information campaigns in order to change outdated perceptions on the position of children in society,
- (g) to submit applications on behalf of any child for the appointment of a special representative in court proceedings affecting the child, when the law or the court precludes the holders of parental responsibility from representing the child, due to conflicts of interest,
- (h) to represent children and their interests in proceedings affecting the child, when this is provided for in legislation, as well as in court proceedings where the Commissioner may be appointed representative of the child by the court,
- (i) in general, to take any action the Commissioner deems necessary, for the fulfilment of his/her mission, within the framework of the Law.

There has been a dramatic increase in the use of information technology, particularly the internet and mobile phones, by young people and children. For example, nearly all children between the ages of 12-18 own a mobile phone. As a result, there have been concerns with regard to exposure to internet content, ethical use of mobile phones, and internet safety. In response to these concerns, a number of new initiatives have been implemented and a new specialized NGO has been established offering services such as help lines, hotlines and internet awareness nodes. Also significant is the establishment of a Cyber-Crime Unit at the Cyprus Police which investigates relevant complaints which have increased significantly from 8 to 61 in the period 2004-2008.

Part three: Institutional Development

Despite the development of new equality bodies and authorities that promote women's rights and gender equality in their own particular area of competence, the National Machinery for Women's Rights under the Ministry of Justice and Public Order continues to play a central coordinating role in the promotion of gender equality in Cyprus.

1. National Machinery for Women's Right's (NMWR)

The NMWR deals with all matters concerning women, focusing on the elimination of legal discrimination against women and the promotion of real equality between men and women. More specifically, it advises the Council of Ministers on policies, programmes and laws promoting women's rights, monitors, coordinates and evaluates the implementation and effectiveness of these programmes and laws, carries out information, education and training programmes on relevant issues, supports and subsidizes women's organizations, contributes to the mobilization and sensitization of the Government Sector on equality issues and serves as a cooperation channel between the Government and NGOs working in this field.

During the period under review, the NMWR has pursued a number of projects and activities including:

- Implementation of the project "European Policies and Strategies on Gender Equality and the necessary mechanisms for their implementation" in 2003-2004.
- Implementation of the project "Women in the Business World: Enhancement of Female Entrepreneurship" 2004-2005.
- Implementation of the project "Gender Equality: Responsibility of Both Sexes" 2005-2006.
- Implementation of the project "Gender Equality - The new dimension in Local Development" 2006-2007.
- Awareness raising campaigns aiming at the increase in representation of women in political and public life in view of the 2006 Parliamentary and Municipal elections.
- Development and funding of research in areas affecting the lives of women, including family violence, trafficking in women, women in education, migrant women, women in political and public life, gender and the media.
- Supporting women's groups and initiatives and most recently the establishment of the Women's Multicultural Centre.
- Contribution of law reform particularly in the area of family law, violence against women, and employment.
- Measures to introduce gender mainstreaming in public policies and action plans.
- Coordination of the preparation of reports including the Cyprus CEDAW Report and the Beijing Platform for Action.

The NMWR plays a leading role in ensuring the introduction of gender mainstreaming in all national policies and programmes. This is done through the encouragement of training of relevant professionals within the public service on gender equality issues, the support of the development of research on gender-related issues, the promotion of data collection and gender-disaggregated statistics, and the organisation of relevant training workshops, seminars, and conferences with the participation of international experts,

such as the Seminar on Gender Budgeting, in November 2008, with the involvement of relevant stakeholders such as the Ministry of Finance and the Parliamentary Committee on Finance. The NMWR also participates in a number of multidisciplinary committees under other ministries dealing with issues such as family, children, violence against women, trafficking, social inclusion, employment and contributes substantially in ensuring a gender perspective in the formulation and implementation of relevant policies. It should also be noted, that the government has developed much stronger ties with women's organisations by involving them in relevant spheres of policy formulation and decision-making processes.

During the period of review, the most important achievement of the NMWR is the development of the first **National Action Plan on Gender Equality (2007-2013)**. The National Action Plan on Gender Equality was adopted by the Council of Ministers in August 2007. The National Action Plan on Gender Equality is significant in that it incorporates a holistic approach to gender equality addressing six priority areas, namely: employment, education, decision-making, social rights, violence and gender stereotypes. The development of the National Action Plan was a collective achievement thanks to close collaboration with all government departments, the Cyprus Union of Municipalities, as well as women's organizations, NGOs, academic institutions, and human rights bodies.

The NMWR is involved in the procedure for ensuring gender mainstreaming is incorporated in all stages of the utilization of the funds granted to Cyprus from the Structural Funds (programming, selection of projects, implementation and evaluation). In particular, it is responsible for evaluating and certifying that projects funded by the Structural Funds comply with the national and EU legislation / policies on gender equality.

In terms of cooperation and collaboration with women's organizations and NGOs, the Council of the NMWR consists of sixteen women's organizations, including two Turkish Cypriot organizations. An additional 60 NGOs are members of the National Committee, which is the largest body of the four bodies of the NMWR. These organizations become involved in the projects, programmes and activities of the NMWR; they receive information, funding, and are consulted in decision making on serious issues such as the development of relevant national action plans.

The budget of the NMWR has been increasing considerably during the last years, namely from 366.000 Euros in 2003 to 980.000 Euros in 2008. The budget covers operational expenses of the Equality Unit, as well as a budget for grants and subsidies to women's organizations. The grants for women's organizations and NGOs cover two categories of sponsoring: a) an annual subsidy to cover operational costs of all members of the Council and National Committee, and b) the subsidies for the implementation of particular projects and activities such as conferences, training workshops and information seminars, research, on gender related issues.

The staff of the Equality Unit has also increased from two to three professionals who are assisted by external experts.

2. Commissioner for Administration/Cyprus Equality Body

As of May 2004 the Commissioner for Administration was appointed the competent body (an independent authority) to deal with and decide upon discrimination matters in Cyprus. As a result two separate Authorities were created, namely the Cyprus Anti-Discrimination Body and the Equality Authority, which together comprise the “Cyprus Equality Body”.

The Anti-Discrimination Body investigates complaints of discrimination on all grounds in relation to access to goods and services, social security, social protection schemes, education and health care, while the Equality Authority investigates complaints on the grounds of sex in the area of employment and vocational training, including sexual harassment, implementation of maternity protection and rights, discrimination in access to employment, and employment and working conditions (including dismissal and pay). In 2008, the Equality Authority expanded its mandate further to cover the Equal Treatment of Men and Women (Access to Goods and Services) Law of 2007.

In the period 2004-2008, 40% of the complaints received by the Equality Authority are complaints of discrimination on the grounds of sex while 8% of complaints filed with the Anti-Discrimination Body are complaints of discrimination on the grounds of sex.

The Ombudsman has the power to issue orders or impose fines against the guilty party. Furthermore, she can advise on what measures must be implemented, in order for the discriminatory behavior or practice to cease and set a certain time-frame by which this should be achieved. The Ombudsman’s decisions, when acting as the Equality Body are binding.

3. National Institution for the Protection of Human Rights

The National Institution for the Protection of Human Rights established in 1998 continues to monitor respect for human rights according to the relevant decisions of the United Nations and Recommendation of the Council of Europe. The National Institution receives a number of complaints per year, a considerable number of which come from women on issues of health, housing, migration, sexual harassment, and family violence. Based on the findings of the investigation, the Institution makes suggestions to the Government and relevant Parliamentary Committees.

4. Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence

The Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence continues to work intensively to monitor the implementation of the relevant law on Family Violence and to raise awareness among professionals and the public more generally.

During the period under review, the Committee has been very active and has played a vital role in raising awareness, carrying out research, strengthening interdepartmental cooperation, monitoring implementation of the relevant law and evaluating existing services, providing training to relevant professionals, and most importantly, in developing a National Action Plan on Combating Violence in the Family.

5. Gender Equality Committee in Employment and Vocational Training

The Gender Equality Committee of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance was established on 15th June 2003, as provided for in the Equal Treatment of Women and Men in Employment and Vocational Training Law (Law 205(I)/2002). The Committee is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the relevant law and can accept complaints of discrimination within the sphere of employment and vocational training.

Recent developments have taken place whereby the legislation was amended in 2007, giving the Equality Committee the responsibility for providing independent assistance to victims of discrimination. In order to ensure that the Committee was well equipped in implementing this role, it was decided that further amendments to the law were needed, so as to strengthen the Committee's independence in matters that fall under its jurisdiction and give it the necessary support to do so.

6. Parliamentary Committee on Equal Opportunities between Men and Women

The Committee for Equal Opportunities was established in June 2006 with the decision of the Committee of Choice of the House of Representatives after the elections of May 2006. The aim of this committee is to monitor the governmental policies and actions on the issue of equal opportunities between men and women. More specifically the Committee monitors and supports the implementation of the National Action Plan for Gender Equality, the National Machinery for Women's Rights, and the efforts of governmental and non-governmental organisations which promote gender equality. This is done through the examination of legislative bills and regulations that fall within the scope of the committee and the exercise of the parliamentary scrutiny through the examination of self commissioned issues that are proposed for discussions.

7. Coordinating Multidisciplinary Group for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

The establishment of the Coordinating Multidisciplinary Group on Trafficking in Persons is one of the most important developments undertaken by the Cyprus Government in combating trafficking in human beings. The group was established by the Law on Combating Trafficking and Exploitation of Human Beings and Protection of Victims (L.87 (I)/ 2007]. The group's purpose, among others, is to monitor the implementation of the Law and National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons (2005) as well as to take all necessary measures, to monitor and evaluate the national referral mechanism of the victims and to collect, exchange information between the members of the team with regards to offences as these are foreseen by the law. All agencies involved directly or indirectly in combating trafficking in human beings are members of the Group such as the Attorney General's Office, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Police Anti-trafficking Unit, the National Machinery for Women's Rights, as well as two NGOs.

Part Four: Remaining challenges and actions to address them

During the period under review there have been significant positive developments in all areas covered by the Beijing Platform for Action and undoubtedly the position of women in the Cypriot society has improved. Nevertheless, much remains to be done until we achieve full *de facto* gender equality in all walks of life.

We intend and plan to continue our efforts and work intensively and effectively towards the following goals:

- Changing social attitudes among women and men with regard to gender equality issues and eliminating gender stereotypes, which are still identified as the major obstacles for the advancement of women. This is one of the priorities of the National Action Plan on Gender Equality and an issue which will be tackled in the framework of the educational reform which is currently under way.
- Better enforcement of the legislation safeguarding women's rights through awareness raising programmes, specialized training of relevant professionals, as well as the strengthening of the institutional framework, in particular, with additional human and financial resources.
- Promoting further positive action measures as well as gender mainstreaming in all Government policies including gender budgeting.
- Closing the pay-gap through concrete measures including the elimination of gender stereotypes, specialised training programmes for inspectors, the financing of equality schemes of enterprises, the establishment of a Certification Body authorized to issue certifications to enterprises that adopt policies promoting gender neutrality in the workplace, as well as measures for eliminating occupational and sectoral segregation.
- Reconciliation of professional and family life, including the expansion and improvement of child care facilities and the improvement of parental leave legislation is becoming a central issue for women's participation in employment and political life. A Technical Committee under the Labour Advisory Board has already been set up to submit proposals on the issue.
- Supporting and meeting more sufficiently the special needs of vulnerable groups of women including migrant and foreign women, the number of which has been constantly increasing in the last years. The National Action Plan on Social Inclusion and Social Protection incorporates specific measures to address these needs.
- Promoting a balanced participation of women and men at the decision making level of public and political life through the implementation of a number of concrete measures as foreseen in the National Action Plan on Gender Equality including research, awareness raising campaigns, and other positive action measures.
- Preventing and combating all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence and trafficking of human beings, through the implementation of the relevant National Action Plans, with special emphasis on the multisectoral approach and collaboration, the effective enforcement of legislation, measures for the protection of victims, the sensitization of the justice system, and the systematic collection and evaluation of relevant data through a central data bank.