

**Questionnaire of the Working Group on the issue of Human Rights and  
Transnational corporations and other business enterprises  
Cyprus' Contribution**

**Q1 In what ways do women experience the impact of business-related human rights abuses differently and disproportionately? Please provide concrete examples in the context of both generic and sector – or – region –specific experiences of women**

The competences to combat discrimination on the **ground of gender** are granted by the Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Employment and Vocational Training Law (L.205(I)/2002). This legislation provides a framework for the **equal treatment of men and women in employment**, both in public and private sector, covers any discrimination based on sex (including sexual harassment and harassment) and protects mothers in relation to pregnancy, childbirth, nursing, maternity or sickness caused by pregnancy or childbirth. Unequal treatment between men and women in access to goods and services is also prohibited according to the Equal Treatment of Men and Women (access to goods and services and the Benefit of these) Law (L.18(I)/2008).

Moreover, the Commissioner for Administration and Protection of Human Rights defends extra judicially human rights and promotes equal treatment. Through the investigation of complaints and the ex officio interventions, contributes to the respect of human rights. At the same time, violation of human rights can be reported at the police or can be subject of appeal at the Court.

However, there is still a gap on the matter that complaints regarding discrimination are not filed very easily, either because of ignorance about the existing protective mechanisms or out of fear for the revenge actions that may occur, as a consequence for filing a complaint.

**Q2 Please share any good practices on how to deal with increased marginalization or vulnerabilities faced by women due to intersectionality, feminization of work, informal economy and conflicts.**

As a National Human Rights Institution, the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights observes violation or inadequate protection of human rights and proceeds to interventions when it is deemed necessary to promote in society a culture of respect for the rights of vulnerable groups of population. In this respect, the protection of the rights of women and girls has been discussed repeatedly and continuously and interventions were issued (eg. trafficking for purposes of labour or exploitation, prostitution and its institutional framework, sexism in politics and media, institutional framework for abortions, violence against women and domestic violence, stalking and female genital mutilations).

Emphasis should be given to women and girls to recognize whether their human rights are violated, and in this respect, they should be better informed and trained on discrimination issues regarding all the protected grounds (eg. Ethnic origin, age etc). For example, the previous years, following a number of complaints submitted, the

Commissioner realised that pregnant women or new mothers were not adequately informed about their rights and as a consequence, they were losing part of their benefits or other rights etc. For this reason, in 2016, the Commissioner as Equality Body, launched a campaign regarding the rights of pregnant women and new mothers.

The last years important initiatives aiming to inform, to raise awareness and to train groups of the population (eg. unemployed, mothers, caregivers, professionals) on issues related to gender equality have taken place. An indicative list of examples is the following:

- ✓ Trainings in schools, universities, in the public and private sector on gender equality, sexual harassment, respect of human rights.
- ✓ Campaign by the Commissioner's Office for the **gender based violence**<sup>1</sup>.
- ✓ Campaign by the Labour Relations Department **on equal pay**<sup>2</sup>.
- ✓ Publications by the Commissioner's Office – or provision of input – of relevant **Codes of Conduct (on preventing and combating sexual harassment)** or Handbooks (e.g. gender mainstreaming).
- ✓ The Ministry of Energy, Commerce, Industry and Tourism has introduced, the last few years, a **"Scheme for the Enhancement of Women's Entrepreneurship"**<sup>3</sup>, aiming to develop, support and encourage entrepreneurship by women between the ages of 18 – 55, who wish to establish an enterprise in the sectors of manufacturing, services, tourist activities and e-commerce, with an emphasis on the development of new technologies. This was a positive measure that was repeated for the last few years and opportunities were given to women to develop, for example, Small businesses in the countryside.
- ✓ The Police published a **well 'camouflaged' leaflet** with important information about handling cases of high risk of danger when a person is a victim of gender based violence. At the same time, the Police also prepared a very important training manual to be used in Police trainings<sup>4</sup>.
- ✓ The Ministry of Justice and Public Order has implemented (with the cooperation of other stakeholders from the public and private sector) a **Strategic Plan for the period 2014-2017 for Gender Equality**. The actions were related, among others, to the efficient promotion of gender equality, the modernization and improvement of the legal framework, the economic independence of women and the combating of stereotypes and social prejudices.
- ✓ The Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance has launched multiple

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/Ombudsman/Ombudsman.nsf/All/6A6450EE9679B721C22581330033282F?OpenDocument>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dlr/dlr.nsf/page46\\_en/page46\\_en?OpenDocument](http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dlr/dlr.nsf/page46_en/page46_en?OpenDocument)

<sup>3</sup><http://www.mcit.gov.cy/mcit/sit/sit.nsf/32177ee11d0d6003c225816f001d4b05/cebd93d3c6ea2470c22581f300442024?OpenDocument?OpenElement>

<sup>4</sup> These activities were foreseen by the EU funded project called 'Circle of Change' that aims to prevent and combat violence against women and girls through gender equality awareness and it is still implemented by a partnership of NGOs and the Police.

schemes and took measures to enhance women's rate of activity in employment. One of this was the Scheme for the promotion of training and employability of economically inactive women, in 2007-2013, aiming to increase female participation in the labour market.

The informative material should be increased and distributed to the general public, so that more persons that need to be informed regarding women's rights, gender equality, and respect of human rights are reached and informed, about the mechanisms that can support and examine their complaints. Due to the technologies' developments, information should be distributed not only in publications and leaflets, but also via media and social media campaigns, so more people can be reached.

Moreover, a national model for certifying enterprises which adopt policies promoting gender equality in the workplace has been developed. Certification is being granted by the "National Certification Body for the implementation of Good Practices for Gender Equality in the Workplace", which was established in April 2014, by decision of the Council of Ministers. The National Body is chaired by the Ministry of Labour, while its members are the Gender Equality Commissioner and representatives of the employers' and workers' organisations. According to the model, companies have the right to apply for two types of certification, namely (a) "Best Practice" for individual practices applied, or (b) "Equality Employer" for adopting a comprehensive system of promoting gender equality in their workplace. So far, 47 companies have been awarded a certification.

The certification procedure has encouraged companies to review and assess their own policies in order to enhance the promotion of gender equality in their workplace. In this respect, enterprises have been motivated to apply policies promoting the reconciliation of work and family life, promoting women in managerial positions, eliminating discriminatory provisions in payment systems, and generally creating a gender free working environment friendly for all employees to pursue their professional aspirations.

Taking into consideration the various obstacles, difficulties and challenges faced by vulnerable groups of women, the Ministry of Justice and Public Order has included a series of actions in the New National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2018-2021, and in particular under the Objective "*Empowering the Vulnerable Groups of Women*", such as the following:

- ✓ Conducting research on the needs of vulnerable groups of women in Cyprus and drafting a strategic action plan for the integration and empowerment of vulnerable groups
- ✓ Study on how state institutions and other institutions, health services, etc. are treating vulnerable groups
- ✓ Access to free and / or affordable legal services for people belonging to vulnerable groups
- ✓ Training programmes especially designed for bodies/officers handling vulnerable groups
- ✓ Creation of a manual with guidelines for dealing with people belonging to vulnerable groups
- ✓ Accessibility of services to vulnerable groups
- ✓ Cultivating a climate of acceptance of the peculiarities of different cultural groups within the school unit

- ✓ Drafting the first National Action Plan regarding the implementation of the UN Resolution 1325 on «Women, Peace and Security».

Further, under the key priority area “Promoting equality between men and women in employment-Reconciliation of family and professional responsibilities” certain objectives will be emphasized: (a) Improvement/widening of child and elderly care facilities; (b) Creating creches in workplaces where a large number of women are employed; (c) Continuing the programme to strengthen Women’s Entrepreneurship; (d) Educational programme for employers in order for them to adopt family-friendly measures/policies; (e) Systematic monitoring and evaluation of legislative implementation and measures regarding equality in the workplace; (f) New measures aiming to reconcile family and professional life.

**Q3 How to address sexual harassment and sexual or physical violence suffered by women in the business-related context, including at the workplace, in supply chains and in surrounding communities? Please share any good practices which have proved to be effective in dealing with sexual harassment and violence against women.**

Preventing and combating violence of any form and, particularly, violence against women is an issue of high priority for Cyprus. In this regard, important developments have taken place in recent years, such as:

- ✓ the development of the second National Action Plan for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (2017-2019),
- ✓ the development and adoption of a Manual of Interdepartmental Procedures,
- ✓ the encouragement to report cases of violence,
- ✓ the launching of awareness-raising campaigns addressed to the general public and women in particular,
- ✓ the systematic training of professionals working in the field,
- ✓ the strengthening of the Police Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Office,
- ✓ the Government support to NGOs providing protection and assistance to women victims,
- ✓ the improvement of data collection, and
- ✓ the development of research in the field of Violence Against Women.

In line with the Istanbul Convention, a comprehensive bill, to criminalize harassment and stalking, is already tabled before Parliament. Furthermore, a bill aiming to transpose all provisions of the Istanbul Convention into national legal system has been prepared, which, inter alia, criminalises all forms of violence against women.

Moreover, the “National Certification Body for the implementation of Good Practices for Gender Equality in the Workplace” (see Q.2 above), considers the adoption of a code of conduct on sexual harassment in the workplace, as a good practice by

businesses or other organisations. Also, it is a prerequisite for an enterprise or organisation to be certified as an “Equality Employer”. The adoption of such a code of conduct clarifies what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, states the responsibilities of the employers and sets the appropriate procedures for filing a complaint.

**Q4 Which State laws and policies or social, cultural and religious norms continue to impede women’s integration into economic activities and public life generally?**

Stereotypes regarding women’s and men’s role in the family as well as in employment, impact on young people’s education and occupation choices, eventually leading to occupational segregation (both horizontal and vertical). 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 gender pay gap and gender segregation in employment. Inappropriate educational counseling maintains these phenomena. In order to eliminate stereotypes in education and family life in Cyprus, specialised training programmes were held during 2013-2015 for almost all primary and secondary teachers, all educational counsellors, and almost 3.500 parents of school-kids.

Government efforts will continue in the sphere of education as well as the media.

Moreover, the Committee on the Elimination of Stereotypes and Social Prejudices of the National Mechanism for Women’s Rights has already prepared and submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Education and Culture. This proposal aims to improve its current gender equality programmes as well as establish new ones, such as surveys and studies promoting the gender dimension and eliminating stereotypes and social prejudices.

In addition, efforts will continue to ensure the full implementation of the existing legal framework safeguarding women’s rights.

**Q5 Are there any good practices of integrating a gender perspective into States’ economic sphere (e.g state-owned enterprises, public procurement agencies, trade missions, export credit agencies, privatization of public services, public-private partnerships, and trade and investment agreements)?**

The Ministry of Justice and Public Order, in cooperation with the Commissioner for Gender Equality, the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights, the Cyprus Academy of Public Administration and the Gender Equality Committee in Employment and Vocational Training have prepared a Handbook for the integration of gender mainstreaming in public policies, as well as an Action Plan for the training/education of civil officers responsible for the preparation and implementation of the budget and the strategic development plans and of Equality officers.

The handbook has been adopted by the Council of Ministers and it will be distributed and used as a tool for training of public officers (Equality Officers, Education and Training Officers of the Ministries/ Departments/Services/Independent Offices, members of the Ministries’ team for the strategic planning and the budget drafting

and any other officers responsible for the policy making) by the end of 2018. Analysis of the social and biological sex, the legal framework for combating gender discrimination, gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting and good practices of other countries are expected to be presented during those seminars.

It is expected that when the abovementioned trainings are concluded, a new round of more specialised trainings on gender budgeting will take place. These trainings are included in the new National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2018-2021.

In addition to that, Enterprises that have been awarded a certification by the “National Certification Body for the implementation of Good Practices for Gender Equality in the Workplace” (see Q2 above), are at an advantage as regards their participation in public procurement tenders.

Moreover, the Ministry of Energy, Commerce, Industry and Tourism, through specific schemes, offers incentives to women by providing sponsorship for self-employment purposes.

**Q8 Are there any good practices of business enterprises adopting a gender perspective in making human rights policy commitments, addressing the gender wage gap and under-representation of women in boards and senior positions, or involving affected women in meaningful consultations and remediation processes?**

Some of the good practices of business enterprises as well as other organisations which have a genuine impact in promoting gender equality and for which the business enterprises and organisations were awarded certification by the “National Certification Body for the implementation of Good Practices for Gender Equality in the Workplace”, were the following:

- ✓ Appointment of Equality Officers, or establishment of an Equality Committee within the enterprise with the participation of both male and female employees, responsible for receiving and handling complaints of discrimination on grounds of sex, or more general equal treatment issues between men and women within the organization.
- ✓ Organising workshops on Women in Leadership, addressed to female employees who are either already in senior management positions or are candidates for such positions, with the aim of encouraging them to identify career barriers, engage in self-evaluation, improve their communication skills and upgrade their professional profile.
- ✓ Providing mentoring to high performance female employees with the goal of supporting them in setting and pursuing individual goals and offering them experiences and opportunities for their personal development.
- ✓ Applying a Working Mothers Scheme under which female employees have the right to flexible working arrangements after having children (and before they reach 18 years of age), as a way of balancing their work and family life better (flexible working hours, reduced hours, compressed work week, tele-working).
- ✓ Granting part of the kindergarten cost incurred by an employee (25% -50%),

on the provision that the choice of school allows the immediate response of the employee to the child's needs, while at the same time ensuring the employee's uninterrupted execution of duties at work.

- ✓ Offering summer school for employees' children, organised at the employer's premises, the cost being largely subsidized by the employer, while providing creative time, education and entertainment to children.
- ✓ Training programmes targeted to employees after long-term absence from their duties, aiming at their smooth reintegration, and their equal treatment in terms of evaluation, pay and career prospects.
- ✓ "First-day-of-school leave" granted to working parents, in order to be able to escort their children on the first day of elementary school.
- ✓ Special working facilities for pregnant workers during the last month of their pregnancy, providing the right to work from home several days a week.
- ✓ Temporary movement of a pregnant employee, from a position that requires manual work or increased physical effort, to office duties, until she returns from maternity leave.
- ✓ Complementing the social insurance maternity allowance of employees up to their salary level.
- ✓ Actions to increase the representation of women in male dominated departments of the enterprise / organization through the provision of full-time and part-time jobs, flexible working hours and recruitment of trainees.
- ✓ Professional guidance offered by the enterprise to employees' children, for guiding them in choosing education fields and professions.
- ✓ Establishing an on-line training platform within the enterprise, ensuring that every employee, regardless of their gender, family status, work duties or family responsibilities, has access to life-long learning.

**Q10 How could media and advertising industries fight against gender stereotyping and disempowerment of women?**

As far as the media and advertising companies are concerned, they still have very low contribution in combating discrimination and eliminating stereotypes. Much remains to be done on their behalf on better empowering women.

Constant awareness raising and information is essential in order for women to defend and demand their rights, to be encouraged to participate in employment and actions, which are traditionally assumed as male areas and in order to improve the attractiveness of jobs and promote work life balance. The Media and the advertising companies must ensure that through their publications and advertisements should be gender mainstreamed, aiming to promote equal opportunities and no discrimination.

**Q12 How could all types of remedial mechanisms, processes and outcomes be made more gender-sensitive?**

In Cyprus, there are different Mechanisms promoting women's rights and/or gender equality. However, there is not a regulated cooperation among them even though cooperation is essential for better outcomes. Those mechanisms are:

- ✓ The Commissioner for Administration and Protection of Human Rights (Ombudsman) is an independent body/authority acting as the national equality body and national human rights institution (extrajudicial protection).
- ✓ Gender Equality in Employment and Vocational Training Committee
- ✓ Department of Labour Relations – Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance designates Inspectors
- ✓ Labour Department – Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance designates Inspectors
- ✓ National Machinery for Women's Rights - Ministry of Justice and Public Order
- ✓ Gender Equality Commissioner (presiding the National Machinery for Women's rights, responsible for policy formulation on gender equality)

Moreover, most of these Mechanisms only have an advisory role, aiming to promote gender equality. The absence of cooperation is demonstrated by the fact that discrimination still exists, particularly in the form of sexual harassment and discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy and motherhood.