**HRC Res 43/22 - Submission for GA report 2021**

**Contribution – Cyprus Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth**

**2. How is gender and gender identity incorporated in existing legislative and policy frameworks on the eradication and prevention of the sale and sexual exploitation of children?**

So far, the policies that have been developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth do not include a gender dimension, since there is no such provision within The National Strategy and Action Plan to Combat Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography, which constitutes the basic policy text and guides the actions and initiatives of the Authorities of the Republic of Cyprus.

<http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/sws/sws.nsf/All/070F867D2763F568C2257FC70024C4F4/$file/1%20NATIONAL%20STRATEGY%20TO%20COMBAT%20CHILD%20ABUSE.pdf>

The policies of the **Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth aim to promote through** multi-level actions the awareness of the harmful effects of child sexual abuse and to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation and child pornography by:

* Reducing abuse and exploitation incidents through prevention strengthening, informing and educating children.
* Educating and informing professionals (teachers) who have contact with children to be able to identify vulnerable children or high risk individuals, notice the risk factors and know how to behave and what procedures to follow to handle this and protect children.

**6. Please indicate any specific measures aimed at reducing vulnerability of children to sale and sexual exploitation in a gender- and disability- responsive, as well as age- and child-sensitive manner.**

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth, recognising its responsibility and influence in the field of primary prevention for sexual abuse of children, has proceeded to the setting up and operation of a Coordinating Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children with representatives of all Ministry’s departments and services.

The Coordinating Committee of the Ministry has proposed a specific Action Plan which is incorporated in the National Strategy:

Multi-level actions have been carried out to promote awareness of the harmful effects of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation and to facilitate coordination, establishment of policies, work allocation and share of responsibilities:

* Set procedures of handling Child Sexual Abuse cases in schools. The procedures were discussed and approved by the representatives of the National Committee to Combat Child Sexual Abuse as well as representatives from Police Headquarters. From February 2016 the Ministry set out a detailed circular for schools that analyzed step-by-step procedures and **gave emphasis to child protection in case of abuse.**
* Specialized trainings were organized for strengthening teachers (Primary and Secondary Education) in their work of protecting children by realizing early the signs of sexual abuse (including child prostitution and child pornography) and tackling the problem as early as possible.
* A specialized training has also been organized for psychologists and school counselors, as this personnel is the people of the "first line" of contact and should have the appropriate skills to recognize cases of child sexual abuse (including child prostitution and child pornography) and to correctly handle child support and protection, as well as aiding guidance of the schools in their management.
* A **Teachers Manual** about Child Sexual Abuse has been distributed to all schools with information about the issue in order to help teachers recognise signs of sexual abuse and act to support child victims.
* The most important action for primary prevention of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation concerns the education and awareness-raising among children from an early age. This education should take place both at school and at home, focusing on the promotion of healthy relationships and managing negative emotions. This education, which is based on the guidelines of World Health Organisation ("WHO"), is called **“Sexuality Education”.**

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth has made considerable efforts to achieve a comprehensive and effective sexuality education in schools according to WHO guidelines. Sexuality education in Cyprus is part of the reformed Health Education Curriculum which has been implemented in schools since September 2011. The sexuality education lessons are included in the curriculum of the Health Education Course of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth. The objective of this Course is to foster attitudes, behaviours and skills aiming at enhancing the self-esteem of the individual, developing personal and social skills, building values and attitudes, as well choosing goals and decision making.

The Health Education Curriculum promotes active citizenship learning objectives related to critical awareness of stereotypes and social exclusion consequences. The inclusion of sexuality education through health education as a compulsory subject, begins from pre-school up to secondary school. The themes that are mostly related to sexuality education are included in the thematic unit called *"Family planning, sexual and reproductive health"*. This sub-thematic unit includes topics which are directly referred to a comprehensive understanding of sex and reproductive health, such as local and European Law, stereotypes, family violence, homophobia, the role of religion and the media. This fact gives the opportunity to teachers to directly relate themes of this particular thematic unit (and its sub-themes) to other thematic areas of the curriculum such as peer pressure, values of life, gender stereotypes, self-esteem, safety, assertiveness, rights and obligations and substance misuse. Pupils therefore have the opportunity to understand that sexuality and sexual behaviour are associated with their overall life, others’ lives and the society as a whole. Furthermore, sexuality education addresses the often false images and perceptions that young people acquire through their exposure to printed or online pornography.

* The Pedagogical Institute provides every year mandatory training courses for teachers on sexuality education.
* Special emphasis has been given to children and young people with disabilities and learning difficulties who are often more likely to fall victims of sexual abuse. Training courses for special needs teachers were organized in order to help them in their work of strengthening their students with special needs and disabilities to protect themselves from sexual violence and sexual abuse. As part of this training, the educational program “Keep me Safe” has been used and cooperation with the NGO “Cyprus Family Planning Association” has been developed for its implementation.

**7. What measures and safeguards can be put in place to identify the protection needs of vulnerable children in order to prevent, prohibit and protect them from all forms of sale and sexual exploitation, including examples of child friendly, independent, timely and effective reporting and complaints mechanisms made available without discrimination in child friendly spaces at community, national, and regional level.**

* Professionals who have frequent contact with children and vulnerable families (teachers, Educational Psychologists, counsellors) had been given mandatory trainings to be able to identify vulnerable children or notice the risk factors and know how to behave and what procedures to follow when they identify these cases.
* The Children’s House (CH) has been established (2018). CH is a child friendly, safe environment for sexually abused children, bringing together all relevant services under one roof, using a multidisciplinary and interagency approach. The basic principles are the provision of justice in a child-friendly way, and ensuring the protection, safety and well-being of the child following the best interest of the child, the right of the child to be heard and receive information while avoiding undue delay.

The coordination and operation of the Children’s House was assigned to “Hope for Children” CRC Policy Center by the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance, and the Social Welfare Services along with the involved public services that are responsible for the monitoring of its operation.

The CH operates with the direct involvement and cooperation of the Cyprus Police, the Social Welfare Services (SWS), the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth. (<https://www.uncrcpc.org.cy/programmes/>)