

Over the past years, Cyprus has made significant progress in the promotion of equality between women and men. A number of National Action Plans and Strategies have been developed that address issues of gender equality, new laws tackling gender inequalities have been enacted, new equality bodies have been set up and new policies have been formulated in the field of violence against women, trafficking in human beings, employment, social inclusion, education, health, public and political life.

The most significant achievement in terms of the national policy on gender equality was the development of the first National Action Plan on Gender Equality (2007-2013), which was initiated by the National Machinery for Women's Rights (NMWR) and adopted by the Council of Ministers. 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.

A recent report on the evaluation of the implementation of the second National Action Plan on Gender Equality, covering the period 2014-2017, has revealed that, significant progress has been achieved in particular in the following areas:

- Legal reform aiming at the elimination of discrimination and the further safeguarding of women's rights in all fields of law has been pursued. In particular, amendments in the Family Law have brought national laws in line with relevant International Instruments.
- Economic empowerment of women has been pursued through measures facilitating the reconciliation of working and family responsibilities, promoting equal pay and the protection of maternity and paternity, the improvement of vocational guidance and training and schemes to support women's entrepreneurship.
- Violence against women has been tackled through legislative measures including new Laws on domestic violence and trafficking and exploitation of women, the setting up of new independent mechanisms for the protection and support of victims, the training of professionals, particularly police officers, involved in the handling of cases of domestic violence and trafficking. In November 2017, Cyprus proceeded with the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, while important developments have taken place onwards, such as the drafting of a bill criminalising harassment and stalking, as well as of a bill criminalising all forms of violence against women.
- Balanced participation of women and men in political life has been pursued through training and informational programmes, aimed at encouraging and supporting women to enter politics and the launching of public campaigns to support women candidates in Parliamentary and Local Elections.

At present, the Government is in the process of preparing the third National Action Plan on Gender Equality, covering the period 2018-2021, in close collaboration with all government departments, the Commissioner for Gender Equality, women's organizations and other NGOs, academic institutions and human rights bodies.

The Action Plan will include the following six thematic areas/objectives that could form the key priorities for action over the next three years:

- Combating all forms of violence against women and implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence;
- Promoting balanced participation between women and men in decision-making positions in public, political, social and economic life;
- Modernizing / Improving the Legislative Framework;
- Professional Empowerment of Women;
- Promoting equality between men and women in employment;
- Elimination of Gender Stereotypes and Social Prejudices.

Despite the fact that the budget of the National Machinery for Women's Rights had been considerably decreased due to financial constraints and the need to adhere to a rigorous economic adjustment programme, the annual subsidies to NGOs-members of the NMWR have not been decreased. In recent years, the budget of the NMWR has been increasing considerably, namely from 235.000 Euros in 2016 to 270.000 Euros in 2017 and 340.000 Euros in 2018.

Despite significant positive developments, traditional perceptions regarding the role of women and men, as well as gender stereotypes continue to impede de facto realization of gender equality. The prevalence of patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family, in the workplace, in political and public life contributes to this.

Cyprus will continue working for the further advancement of women, despite the global economic crisis, which has negatively affected the country's economy and social cohesion. The greatest challenge for the future is to maintain and secure the necessary resources for the further development of programmes promoting gender equality, so as to prevent any setback in what has been achieved so far.

Research on the Economic Consequences of Divorce on Both Spouses

It is worthwhile noting that in 2016, a research on the economic consequences of divorce on both spouses – gender-based economic disparities of divorced spouses has been conducted through a study entitled 'Research on the economic consequences of divorce on both spouses –gender-based economic disparities of divorced spouses'. The study was carried out by "YPATIA" Foundation Promoting Equality, with the financial support of the NMWR. This study examined the economic consequences of divorce for both men and women, taking into consideration gender-based economic disparities, especially during the economic crisis. The study also examined issues faced by divorced spouses in relation to possible legal voids / weak

points/lack of provisions of related family law. The research covered a representative and weighted random sample of 220 divorced spouses throughout Cyprus, so that the research could produce credible results and included personal interviews of 12 divorced spouses.

Analysing the findings of the field studies the following conclusions are derived:

Demographic findings: (a) According to the Statistical Service of Cyprus (Labour Force Survey 2016), 35,0% of men aged 20-64 have completed tertiary education, whereas the respective figure for women was 46,2%. According to the findings of the survey conducted in 2017 by "YPATIA" Foundation, the figures for divorced men and women aged 20+ present slight differences: a higher percentage of divorced men (41,17%) and a lower percentage of divorced women (38,52%) have completed tertiary education; (b) the number of children living with a single parent is mostly one child at 54,71% of the sample, and two children at 41,51% of sample surveyed. Child custody is granted to women at 70% of divorced spouses while single parents (majority are women) who experience a substantial decline in their financial circumstances after divorce, are loaded with the responsibility to pay defaulted loans created during their marriage.

The employment situation of divorces spouses included: (a) divorced men are employed full time at 83,53%, while women at 61,48%; (b) part-time employment for divorced women stands at 8,9% and for men at 2,35%; (c) unemployment for men is at 14,11% for man and 28,15 for women; (d) gender segregation in employment follows the national pattern with women to hold jobs mostly as administrative personnel and sales, while the findings show no participation in executive positions, few run their own business ,and fewer hold jobs as a technician; and (e) family and friends contribute financial assistance to the unemployed single parents more so than any state social protection schemes.

Divorced women with dependent children are faced with poverty and social exclusion at 51,45%, while 10,71% men are in this precarious situation. 67 % of divorced women with dependent children are unable to meet basic needs while 34% of men are in this situation. The economic crisis has had devastating effects on the standard of living of divorced spouses, especially women who are the primary caregivers of their children. Major issues include the reduction of income, the increase of unemployment, the elimination of social service programs for children and the defaulted loans.

Employment for divorced women remains insecure, and difficult to both maintain and progress professionally in their careers. A major issue is the reconciliation of family life and work. Research findings indicate: (a) 34% of divorced women were affected by job loss after the divorce versus 17,95% of men; (b) 59,70% of divorced women with depended children faced difficulties at work versus 38,46% of men; (c) 32,84% of divorced women with depended children were adversely affected in their career vs 17,95% of men; (d) 37,31% of divorced women with dependent children were adversely affected in their promotion at work while men 20,51% of men experienced the same. Divorced men were faced with loss of dwelling by 45% of the sample after the divorce and 18,51% of women. The majority of divorced spouses with dependent

children, experienced difficulty in meeting the mortgage payments (67,50% of women and 51,61% of men).

Difficulties were also experienced in acquiring business loans at 41,03% of sample. However, there was a disparity between man and women who had business loans: 45,89% of man had a loan while 28,89% of women.

Divorce resulted in the loss of social life for 79,25% of women and 52,94% of men. 58,97% of men with dependent children were affect by GMI (Guaranteed Minimum Income). The majority of divorced spouses pay legal fees on their own, the average costs stands at 1.000 – 3.000 Euros. Child support amount is acceptable for 25,68% of women and 66,67% of men. Only 51,47% of divorced women regularly receive child support from former spouse. 54,43% of women filed for a court order to receive child support at some stage during divorce. 48,57% of women in this study did not receive child support never filed for a court order. Evaluating the factors that lead to child support court orders the following findings emerge:

- 44,44% of women believe that the court does not take into consideration actual needs of children, vs 8,23% of men, noticing a considerable gender-based deviation;
- 57,78% of women believe that the court takes into consideration the economic capacity of the father vs 21,18% of men;
- 40% of men believe that the court takes into consideration the parent who has child custody vs 19,26% of women;
- 42% of the sample agreed that court order to receive unpaid child support is not effective and;
- Qualitative research indicates that child support and single parent benefits should include the period children serving in the army or when pursuing tertiary education. Quantitative research findings indicate that 58,82% of divorced men believe that the court should take into consideration how debt was created and to rule accordingly while 48,15% of women believed the same. Qualitative research findings indicate that divorced women “inherit” the family debt. The majority of divorced spouses choose to resolve property disputes extra judicially. However, 61,36% of women feel property settlements are not fair, while 56,75% of men felt they were fair. Findings from quantitative and qualitative research indicate that family laws in every aspect need to be amended. Multiple filings for divorce matters and adjudication is not took a lengthy period of time to arrive at court ruling and as a consequence the process is costly. Open to public deliberations and court proceedings violate privacy of contentious parties and become a humiliating experience.