

Committee of the Parties

Council of Europe Convention
on preventing and combating violence
against women and domestic violence
(Istanbul Convention)

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Reply by Cyprus to the reporting form on the implementation of the Recommendations of the Committee of the Parties adopted on 6 December 2022

Document received by the Committee of the Parties
on 3 December 2025

IC-CP/Inf(2025)10

Published on 4 December 2025

Secretariat of the monitoring mechanism of the Council of Europe Convention
on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence

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CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, 3 June 2025

IC-CP(2025)20

**Committee of the Parties
Council of Europe Convention
on Preventing and Combating
Violence against Women
and Domestic Violence
(Istanbul Convention)**

Reporting form on the implementation of the recommendations addressed to state parties

Secretariat of the monitoring mechanism of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence

In accordance with Article 68, paragraph 12, of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, the Committee of the Parties adopts, on the basis of the report and conclusions of GREVIO, recommendations addressed to state parties concerning the measures to be taken to implement the conclusions of GREVIO.

The applicable procedure for issuing recommendations was settled by the Committee of the Parties at its 4th meeting and is described in document IC-CP(2018)6. In accordance with this procedure, the recommendations call upon state parties to implement all the proposals and suggestions set out in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report. However, the obligation to report on measures taken is limited to those specifically outlined in section A of the recommendation, namely: a) all the proposals and suggestions formulated by GREVIO throughout the report which require immediate action – these are qualified by the use of the verb “urge”, and b) the proposals and suggestions related to Chapters I and II of the convention which require taking remedial action in the near future and are qualified by the use of the expression “strongly encourage”. According to the agreed procedure, state parties are given a period of three years to implement the recommendations of the Committee of the Parties and report back to the Committee.

To facilitate this reporting, state parties are requested to use this questionnaire to report on the implementation of recommendations issued by the Committee of the Parties. Recommendations not issued in relation to Cyprus do not need to be reported on. **As a result, the Cypriot authorities are not required to answer question 16 and 20 in the reporting form.**

The reporting deadline given to Cyprus was set at **4 December 2025**. Information related to the monitoring of Cyprus is available on the dedicated [country monitoring webpage](#).

I. Fundamental rights, equality, and non-discrimination (Article 4)			
1	Have your authorities taken measures to ensure that the provisions of the Istanbul Convention are implemented without discrimination on any grounds listed in Article 4, paragraph 3, of the convention, including in terms of the availability of services and the protection by law enforcement agencies?	Yes ☒	No ☐
1.1	If yes, please specify: According to Article 4(1) of the Prevention and Combating of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence and Related Matters Law (Law 115(I)/2021): <i>“The provisions of this Law and the measures for the protection and promotion of the rights of victims of violence against women and domestic violence shall be enforced by all Services involved and non-governmental organizations, without discrimination based on sex, gender, race, color, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, state of health, disability, marital status, migrant or refugee status, or any other status.”</i>		

Furthermore, Article 18(a) stipulates that all Services involved and non-governmental organizations must treat victims with respect for their dignity during criminal proceedings and ensure that victims receive appropriate treatment based on their individual circumstances, age, and level of maturity.

In every case involving a victim of a criminal offense, the Cyprus Police provide written information in the victim's native language or a language they understand regarding their rights. Specific forms have been created for this purpose, translated into various languages, and given to victims, who sign a receipt confirming they have received them.

These forms detail all victims' rights and are titled:

Pol. Form.155 CYPRUS POLICE CRIME VICTIMS: VICTIMS' RIGHTS, SUPPORT AND PROTECTION.

This form is issued under Articles 6 and 8 of the Law establishing minimum standards concerning the rights, support, and protection of crime victims.

The form includes the following sections:

I. General Information – Interpretation of Terms

II. Reporting an Offense

III. Communication with the Police and Escort by a Person of Your Choice

- The right to be understood and to understand the information provided
- The right to be accompanied by a person of your choice
- IV. Knowing Your Police Rights
- The right to know the details of the Police Officer handling your case
- The right to interpretation during the first contact with the Police
- The right to receive information about the progress of your case
- The right to be informed in case of release or escape of the offender and possible protection measures
- V. Proof of Complaint
- Receipt of proof of complaint
- The right to translation of the proof of complaint
- VI. Provision of Support
- The right to interpretation and translation
- The right to support by Victim Support Services
- VII. Provision of Protection
- Protection of privacy
- Protection during the criminal investigation
- Protection of victims with special protection needs during criminal proceedings
- VIII. Compensation, Reimbursement of Expenses and Property
- The right to claim travel expenses related to participation in criminal proceedings

	• The right to compensation • The right to the return of property IX. Rights of Victims Who Are Not Residents of the Republic of Cyprus X. Child Victims • The right to privacy • Special protection needs XI. Procedure When Your Rights Are Not Respected Annex: Institutions for Victim Support The form is available at: Cyprus Police – Victims’ Rights In cases of domestic or gender-based violence, victims also receive a specialized form titled: <i>Rights, Support and Protection of Victims of Gender-Based Violence</i>, which includes information about the “STEP4GBV” Project.		
1.2	[Optional question: if not, please specify the reasons]:		
2	Have your authorities taken measures contributing to prevent and combat violence against women who are or might be exposed to intersectional discrimination?	Yes ☒	No ☐
2.1	If yes, please specify: According to the Cypriot legislative framework, particularly the Prevention and Combating of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence and Related Matters Law (Law 115(I)/2021), authorities are provided with the necessary support to prevent and combat violence against women, including those who may be exposed to intersectional discrimination. Additionally, risk assessment tools are applied by police officers during the investigation of domestic violence cases: 1. <i>Risk Assessment Protocol</i> for violence between former or current spouses, cohabitants, or partners, completed as part of the proper investigation and evaluation process. 2. <i>Individual Risk Assessment</i> of the victim to determine special protection needs, including the risk of death, the severity of the situation, and the likelihood of repeated violence. Furthermore, within the Police Service, and in accordance with established protocols and Police Directives, when a woman is subjected to domestic violence, the relevant authorities are promptly notified. These include governmental bodies such as the Welfare Office and Mental Health Services, as well as non-governmental organizations such as SPAVO (Association for the Prevention of Violence Against Women). This ensures that the victim receives comprehensive assistance and support, which may include financial aid, psychological counseling, or other forms of help. Continuous		

	collaboration is maintained among all parties involved, and cases are managed through a multidisciplinary approach in strict compliance with applicable protocols.		
2.2	[Optional question: if not, please specify the reasons]:		
3	In case your authorities have taken further measures contributing to the implementation of recommendations in relation to Article 4, which were not covered by the questions above, please report on these measures [word limit: 1000 words]: The enactment and implementation of two new legislative instruments: “The Prevention and Combating of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence and Related Matters Law of 2021 (Law 115(I)/2021)” and “The Protection from Harassment and Stalking Law of 2021 (Law 114(I)/2021)” have introduced new criminal offences and equipped the Police with legal mechanisms to safeguard victims, including the issuance of relevant court orders. Continuous training is being provided to investigators at all levels of the police force in relation to the effective implementation and enforcement of the provisions of these Laws		
II. Comprehensive and co-ordinated policies implemented under the responsibility of an adequately mandated and resourced co-ordinating body (Articles 7 and 10)			
4	Have your authorities developed a long-term plan/strategy to prevent and combat violence against women?	Yes ☒	No ☐ N/A (a plan/strategy was already developed at the time of GREVIO’s baseline evaluation) ☐
4.1	[Optional question: if not, please specify the reasons]:		
5	Which forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention are addressed by the plan/strategy? Please offer a brief description specifically indicating the forms of violence not previously addressed in plans or strategies at national level. In 2023, as part of efforts to achieve full compliance with the Istanbul Convention, a comprehensive national Strategy and Action Plan for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women was developed for the first time. This strategic framework is aligned with the Council		

	of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, ensuring the integration of international standards into national policy.		
6	Was specific attention given to place the rights of women victims at the centre of all measures planned?	Yes ☒	No ☐
6.1	If yes, please specify how: Both the National Strategy and the National Action Plan were prepared on the basis of the four main pillars of the Istanbul Convention, which are: a) Prevention, b) Protection of Victims, c) Prosecution of Perpetrators and d) Design of coordinated policies to effectively address the phenomenon of gender-based and domestic violence.		
6.2	[Optional question: if not, please specify the reasons]:		
7	Do the plan/strategy and the measures contained therein involve all relevant actors, such as government agencies, the national, regional and local parliaments and authorities, national human rights institutions and civil society organisations?	Yes ☒	No ☐
7.1	Please specify the actors involved: The Strategy and Action Plan were formulated through extensive consultations with all relevant governmental entities and civil society stakeholders. They establish clear objectives and priorities, which are further detailed into intermediate goals and actionable measures. The implementation framework encompasses a broad spectrum of actors, including central government agencies, competent ministries and deputy ministries, commissioner offices, law enforcement authorities, the judiciary, the national parliament, and all tiers of governance—national, regional, and local. It also involves municipal and community associations, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, and any entity committed to the prevention and eradication of violence against women.		
7.2	[Optional question: if not, please specify the reasons]:		
8	Have the authorities assigned the role of co-ordinating body to one or more fully institutionalised entities?	Yes ☒	No ☐ N/A (a co-ordinating body was already established at the time of GREVIO's baseline evaluation) ☐

8.1	[Optional question: if not, please specify the reasons]:		
9	Please specify the mandate, powers, and competences, as well as the composition, of the co-ordinating body/bodies: By decision of the Council of Ministers, dated 03.03.2022, which was published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Cyprus on 11.03.2022 (no. 4761), a National Coordinating Body for the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women has been established, in accordance with Law L.115(I)/2021 (article 39), which consists of a President and 11 members. The President and the members were reappointed for a period of three (3) years, from 03/03/2025 to 02/03/2028. The Coordinating Body is responsible for the coordination, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and measures for the prevention and combating of all forms of violence that fall within the scope of Law L.115(I)/2021. In detail, based on article 41 of Law L.115(I)/2021, the Body has the following responsibilities: (a) The Design of the National Strategy for the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women, which is submitted by the Minister for approval to the Council of Ministers and the related action plans, as well as their monitoring, evaluation and implementation. (b) the monitoring of all relevant policies and strategies implemented by the government, private and voluntary sectors. (c) the drafting of manuals and educational material on good practices to be followed by the services and non-governmental organizations involved for the protection of victims. (d) the submission of proposals for the revision of the provisions of this Law or other related laws or other measures harmonized with European and/or international policies and/or strategies and/or with the relevant conventions. (e) the planning and organization of seminars and educational programs for the officers of the services and non-governmental organizations involved and professionals of the governmental, private and voluntary sectors on violence against women and domestic violence. (f) undertaking and organizing actions to inform and raise awareness of society on issues of violence against women, domestic violence, equality and combating any discrimination based on gender, providing information on the measures available for reporting acts of violence and more generally on the issues falling within the provisions of this Law. (g) promoting cooperation protocols between non-governmental organizations and any of the services involved. (h) monitoring and studying international developments in the areas falling within the scope of the provisions of this Law. (i) developing cooperation with registered human rights associations or institutions and equality bodies, civil society and non-governmental organizations and with women's organizations for the purposes of achieving the objectives of this Law.		

(j) the development of cooperation with corresponding bodies in all areas of the Agency's competences, at an international level.

(k) the coordination of the collection, processing, analysis, study, dissemination and publication of statistical data, at regular intervals, in relation to violence against women and domestic violence in the Republic, in accordance with the provisions of article 43.

(l) the design, assignment or invitation to tender for the assignment of the implementation of interventions or programs, in compliance with the provisions of the Regulation of Public Procurement Procedures and Related Matters Laws.

(m) the promotion and adoption of interdepartmental procedures, with the aim of effectively addressing Violence against Women by the services involved, which should provide, inter alia, for cooperation with non-governmental organizations.

(n) the operation on a twenty-four-hour basis of telephone helplines for victims of violence against women and their staffing with appropriately qualified personnel.

(o) the exercise of any other duties assigned to it by the Minister.

The Coordinating Body is accountable to the Minister of Justice and Public Order and submits to him an annual Report of activities regarding its activities, the implementation of the provisions of the relevant law and the situation prevailing in the Republic in the field of preventing and combating all forms of violence against women.

At the initiative of the National Coordinating Body, Cyprus has taken decisive steps to strengthen its framework for preventing and combating gender-based and domestic violence, fully aligning with the Istanbul Convention. Between 2023 and 2025, a comprehensive set of measures was implemented, encompassing strategic planning, legislative reforms, technological innovation, awareness campaigns, research initiatives, and enhanced inter-agency cooperation.

Briefly:

Strategic Framework

Adoption of the first National Strategy and Action Plan (2023–2028) for the prevention and elimination of violence against women. The implementation process is currently under review in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.

Technological Innovation

Launch of the “Elpis” mobile application (July 2025), enabling victims of domestic violence to discreetly alert law enforcement in cases of imminent danger. To date, 50 women have successfully used the application, with immediate police response reported.

Capacity Building

	Design and delivery of specialized training programs for frontline professionals, including healthcare providers, educators, and social workers, to strengthen responses to gender-based and domestic violence. Legislative Reforms Amendment of Law 115(I)/2021 to incorporate GREVIO recommendations and align with the Istanbul Convention. Updates to domestic violence legislation introducing removal and protection orders. Promotion of legislation ensuring independent assistance and legal aid for victims, recognizing them as a distinct group requiring specialized support. Awareness and Public Engagement Launch of a nationwide anti-sexism campaign in September 2025. Launch of an awareness campaign on gender-based violence in collaboration with the Commissioner for Gender Equality (November 2024). Research and Data Collection Initiation of a national study on the prevalence and impact of gender-based violence affecting vulnerable groups, including asylum seekers, migrants, and refugees (results forthcoming). Planning of a unified national database for statistical data on violence against women, supported by international cooperation. Partnerships and Funding Signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation with Greece on preventing and combating gender-based violence. Funding and implementation of programs aligned with the Istanbul Convention and the National Strategy. Continuous support for NGOs and women's organizations in securing European funding opportunities. International Engagement Active participation in Council of Europe and GREVIO meetings, alongside coordination of national efforts during the ongoing GREVIO evaluation period. Preparations for adoption of a pan-European helpline number, complementing the existing national helpline (1440). These actions, coordinated and implemented by the National Coordinating Body, reflect Cyprus's commitment to a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach to preventing and combating all forms of violence against women. By integrating international standards, fostering collaboration, and prioritizing victim protection, Cyprus continues to advance toward full compliance with the Istanbul Convention and the creation of a safer, more equitable society.		
9.1	In particular, please indicate whether the co-ordinating body/bodies is/are responsible for:		

	- Co-ordination of policies and measures to prevent and combat violence against women	Yes ☒ The co-ordination body responsible is:	No ☐
	- Implementation of policies and measures to prevent and combat violence against women	Yes ☒ The co-ordination body responsible is:	No ☐
	- Monitoring and evaluation of policies and measures to prevent and combat violence against women	Yes ☒ The co-ordination body responsible is:	No ☐
	- Co-ordination of the collection of data, analysis and dissemination of its results	Yes ☒ The co-ordination body responsible is:	No ☐
10	Please specify the human and financial resources allocated to the co-ordinating body/bodies: The co-ordinating body currently has one dedicated staff member responsible for managing and overseeing all coordination activities. National Coordinating Body's for the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women budget is covered by a fund of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order budget. 2022 – 144.000 2023 – 260.000 2024 – 220.000		

	2025 – 290.000		
11	In case your authorities have taken further measures contributing to the implementation of recommendations in relation to Articles 7 and 10, which were not covered by the questions above, please report on these measures [word limit: 1000 words]:		
III. Financial resources (Article 8)			
12	Have your authorities allocated specific funds at the		
	- national	Yes ☒	No ☐
	- and/or regional	Yes ☐	No ☐
	- and/or local	Yes ☐	No ☐
	levels of government for activities to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention?		
12.1	If yes, what is the annual amount of these funds? If possible, please specify the percentage of the total national state budget that the amount represents. - 220.000€, the fund for the National Coordinating Body's for the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women - 10.000€ for the Police's Sub-Directorate for Combating Department (allocated for awareness-raising and prevention initiatives related to domestic violence and the sexual abuse of minors)		
12.2	[Optional question: if not, please specify the reasons]:		
13	Have these funds increased since the publication of GREVIO's baseline evaluation report?	Yes ☒ If yes, by what amount:	No ☐
14	Have your authorities taken measures to foster long-term and sustainable financial support for non-governmental organisations working to support victims and prevent violence?	Yes ☒	No ☐
14.1	If yes, please specify: Within this framework, on 27 November 2019, the Council of Ministers of Cyprus approved the operation of the "Women's House," which began functioning at the end of 2020. The Women's House operates as a multidisciplinary, multi-agency crisis centre for women victims of violence and their children. Based on the Family Justice Centre model, it serves as a 'one-stop-shop' providing integrated services for victims of violence against women. Its mission is to ensure safety and protection, crisis management, and comprehensive support through quality, specialized, accessible, and coordinated services—all under one roof.		

	Specialist services from various disciplines, including social workers, psychologists, medical staff, legal professionals, and police officers, work together to provide appropriate support and protection to women and their children. Importantly, the Women's House fulfils Cyprus's obligations under Article 22 of the Istanbul Convention, which requires specialist support services for women victims of violence and their children, focusing on human rights and victim safety. Article 22 also recommends that a range of protection and support services be located on the same premises. The objectives of the Women's House include: • Improving multi-agency cooperation and coordination of services for victims. • Providing accessible, effective, and quality services to women and girls (under 18) victims of violence, as well as their minor children. • Offering a safe and supportive environment for victims seeking help. • Reducing the time required for victims to access services and preventing re-victimization. • Promoting reporting of violence against women and increasing criminal prosecutions. • Improving system responses to violence against women to reduce recidivism and prevent femicide. The Women's House operates under the supervision and in cooperation with the Social Welfare Services of the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare. In 2024, the government provided financial assistance of €1,410,000 for its operation. Furthermore, the government provides financial assistance through the Grants-in-Aid Scheme to the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (SPAVO) for the operation of several programmes related to domestic violence, including a helpline and three shelters for women victims of domestic violence and their children. Also, a Special Grant Scheme for programs and actions aimed at preventing and combating violence against women for the period 2023–2028 has been approved by the Council of Ministers. Under this scheme, all registered Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)—whether associations or foundations—as well as any other entity or individual, are eligible to receive funding from the National Coordinating Body for the Prevention and Combating of Violence Against Women. The grants are intended to support the implementation of programs and actions that advance the objectives of: • The Istanbul Convention, • The National Strategy and Action Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Violence Against Women (2023–2028), and • The policies and priorities of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order in this domain. This initiative reflects a commitment to fostering collaboration across sectors and ensuring that resources are available to organizations and individuals working toward the elimination of gender-based violence.
14.2	[Optional question: if not, please specify the reasons]:
15	In case your authorities have taken further measures contributing to the implementation of recommendations in relation to Article 8, which were not covered by the questions above, please report on these measures [word limit: 1000 words]:
IV. Non-governmental organisations and civil society (Article 9)	

16	Have your authorities taken measures contributing to further recognise, encourage and support the work of relevant non-governmental organisations and of civil society active in combating all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, including in terms of funding and co-operation?	Yes ☐	No ☐
16.1	If yes, please specify:		
16.2	[Optional question: if not, please specify the reasons]:		
V. Data collection and research (Article 11)			
17	In implementation of the recommendation addressed to your authorities, have new sectors of the administration started the collection of data in accordance with the requirements of Article 11, paragraph 1?	Yes ☐	No ☒
17.1	If yes, please specify which sectors:		
17.2	[Optional question: if not, please specify the reasons]: Due to the lack of a previous data collection mechanism, the project faces implementation difficulties. However, significant steps have already been taken towards achieving this goal, while a mechanism for the involved bodies has begun to be set up due to the harmonisation with Directive 2024/1385 of the European Council and Parliament. For the purpose of transposing the relevant article of the Directive into national legislation, and under the supervision of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, a dedicated Working Group has been duly constituted. The Working Group is composed of a representative of the Ministry, a representative of the Police, a representative of the Law Office, a representative of the Judiciary, and a representative of SPAVO (NGO).		
18	In implementation of the recommendation addressed to your authorities, have sectors of the administration improved their data collection?	Yes ☐	No ☐
18.1	If yes, please specify which sectors and how, in particular whether new data categories were added:		
18.2	[Optional question: if not, please specify the reasons]:		
19	Does statistical data collection by law-enforcement agencies and the judiciary enable cases of violence against women to be tracked in order to indicate:		
	- Conviction rates	Yes ☐	No ☒
	- Types of sentences	Yes ☐	No ☒
	- Attrition rates	Yes ☐	No ☒

	- Time-barred proceedings	Yes ☐	No ☐ N/A ☒
20	As regards population-based surveys, please indicate any survey conducted since the publication of GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, while specifying the forms of violence covered:		
21	In case your authorities have taken further measures contributing to the implementation of recommendations in relation to Article 11, which were not covered by the questions above, please report on these measures [word limit: 1000 words]: The Cyprus Police consistently maintain statistical records on reports of domestic violence and violence against women, in accordance with the relevant legislative framework. These records include detailed data on the number of reported incidents, the formation of criminal case files, and the number of cases that proceed to criminal prosecution. Furthermore, analytical assessments are conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of investigative procedures and the enforcement of relevant laws, particularly the Prevention and Combating of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence and Related Matters Law of 2021 (Law 115(I)/2021) and the Protection from Harassment and Stalking Law of 2021 (Law 114(I)/2021). However, there is a notable lack of statistical data from judicial authorities regarding the progress, adjudication, or final disposition of such cases. In many instances, cases are returned to the Police for classification or archiving purposes—often after a considerable lapse of time. This gap in data exchange and case tracking between the Police and the judiciary poses a challenge to the comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of the criminal justice response to gender-based and domestic violence.		
VI. Custody, visitation rights and safety (Article 31)			
22	Have your authorities taken measures contributing to ensure that incidents of violence covered by the scope of the Istanbul Convention are taken into account in the determination of custody and visitation rights of children, notably by judicial authorities?	Yes ☒	No ☐
22.1	If yes, please specify how this has been done (by legislative amendments or other means) Under Law 115(I)/2021, the Court may issue orders for the removal of the victim (Articles 30 and 31) or for the exclusion of the suspect or accused person (Articles 32 and 33). The Court may, upon an ex parte application by the victim, the Police, the Attorney General, the Social Welfare Services, or, in the case of a minor, the guardian appointed under the Parent-Child Relations Law (Law 216/1990), grant an interim order to: • Remove the victim from the suspect or accused person; and/or • Prohibit the suspect or accused from entering or approaching within a specified distance of the victim's residence or workplace, or any other location determined by the Court. Such interim orders may be granted where there is prima facie risk of violence against the victim. They are valid for up to 8 days and may be extended as deemed necessary by the Court, without exceeding a total of 60 days prior to the initiation of criminal proceedings. Furthermore, the Court has discretion to extend such orders against the accused until the trial and may impose them either as an alternative to or in addition to other sentences. Additionally, the Ministry of Justice and Public Order has prepared a bill currently pending before the Parliamentary Committee on Legal Affairs. The bill provides that incidents of violence against women and domestic violence must be taken into consideration by the Court when issuing orders		

	related to child custody and visitation rights. It also includes specific provisions to ensure that such incidents are considered when granting supervised visitation orders or modifying or recalling existing custody/visitation orders.		
22.2	If yes, please specify how the above obligation is implemented in practice, including by providing data indicating to what extent judicial authorities consider all issues related to violence against women in their decisions on custody and visitation rights: Although no specific data are available on this matter, the Courts take custody and visitation rights into account in proportion to the assessed risk of violence against the victim when granting any prohibition order under Law 115(I)/2021. In addition, the above-mentioned amending bill is currently pending before the Parliamentary Committee on Legal Affairs; therefore, its provisions have not yet been implemented. Discussions within the Committee are at a preliminary stage, and it is not expected that the bill will be submitted to the Plenary for adoption before the end of 2025.		
22.3	[Optional question: if not, please specify the reasons]:		
23	Have your authorities taken measures contributing to ensure that visitation rights do not jeopardise the rights and safety of the victim or children?	Yes ☒	No ☐
23.1	If yes, please specify: The Courts take all necessary measures to ensure that victims are treated with respect for their dignity, rights, and legitimate interests within the framework of criminal proceedings. Victims receive special treatment tailored to their best interests, individual circumstances, age, and level of maturity. Court orders are issued in accordance with the Law for the Establishment of Minimum Standards on the Rights, Support and Protection of Victims of Crime (Law 51(I)/2016) and the Witness Protection Law (Law 95(I)/2001). These measures are applied in line with the principle of proportionality to ensure that custody and visitation rights do not jeopardize the rights and safety of victims or children. The Courts also take reasonable steps to protect the identity of victims and ensure that safe living arrangements are in place before granting custody or visitation rights to parents or guardians. Furthermore, the Courts ensure that individuals are informed of their legal rights and receive support when required. All involved authorities, including the Courts, assess the special needs of each victim and provide appropriate protection. To this end, tools such as interim restraining or prohibition orders are available, as outlined in Articles 30–33 of Law 115(I)/2021. The above-mentioned Bill (see response in point 22.1) includes amendments to the Parents and Children Relations Laws of 1990, requiring that the Court and any other administrative authority, when exercising their powers, ensure that custody and/or visitation rights do not compromise the rights and safety of children.		
23.2	[Optional question: if not, please specify the reasons]:		
24	In case your authorities have taken further measures contributing to the implementation of recommendations in relation to Article 31, which were not covered by the questions above, please report on these measures [word limit: 1000 words]: N/A		
VII. Immediate response, prevention, and protection (Article 50)			

25	Have your authorities taken measures contributing to improve the prompt and appropriate response of law enforcement agencies, in particular by:		
	- Enhancing training of law enforcement officials on the gendered nature of violence against women and its consequences	Yes ☒	No ☐
	- Ensuring a sufficient number of female police officers	Yes ☒	No ☐
	- Setting up premises designed to establish a relationship of trust between the victim and the law enforcement personnel	Yes ☒	No ☐
	- Ensuring the efficient collection of evidence so that the reliance on the victim's testimony is lessened	Yes ☒	No ☐
25.1	If yes, please specify: With regard to strengthening police officers' training on the gendered nature of violence against women and its consequences, the Cyprus Police Academy provides training across all ranks. This includes curricula for police cadet programmes, as well as programmes for Sergeants and Officers, focusing on recent legislative developments in this area. Additionally, four specialised training programmes are conducted annually for frontline investigators who interact daily with vulnerable victims. Some programmes last one week, others two weeks, and one specific programme includes a practical training component. The training programmes are as follows: • Handling of Vulnerable Persons • Domestic and Gender-Based Violence • Rape • Forensic Interviewing of Vulnerable Persons and Children These specialised programmes are delivered by academic experts, experienced investigators (who present case studies), legal professionals, clinical psychologists, sociologists, and representatives from governmental and non-governmental organisations. Regarding the presence of female police officers, all Domestic Violence Units across the districts, as well as specialised departments dealing with sexual abuse of minors, are staffed by a significant number of female officers, who in most cases constitute the majority. A satisfactory number of female officers are also employed in the District Criminal Investigation Departments (CID), which handle cases of violence against women occurring outside the family context. In cases of child sexual abuse, all procedures involving a child take place in a child-friendly environment at the "Children's House." Children are never brought into contact with uniformed police officers or police stations. For adult or child victims in cases not related to sexual abuse, specialised Domestic Violence Units (established in 2021) provide support through well-trained personnel. To ensure effective evidence collection and reduce reliance on the victim's testimony, investigators follow strict protocols. While the victim's statement remains crucial and is taken in full detail, video-recorded interviews are conducted according to specific guidelines. For written statements involving adult victims, the psychological condition of the victim is always taken seriously into account, with an emphasis on avoiding re-traumatisation. Officers responsible for taking such statements receive specialised training. In all cases, investigators conduct thorough investigations, collect evidence and testimonial material to properly complete the criminal case file and substantiate the offences under investigation.		
25.2	[Optional question: if not, please specify the reasons]:		

26	Have your authorities taken measures contributing to enable the identification and careful analysis of any failure of protection?	Yes ☒	No ☐
26.1	If yes, please specify what kind of measures, and if further preventive measures were adopted to remedy this situation: The protection of victims is a top priority for the Cyprus Police. In accordance with applicable protocols, in cases involving domestic violence or violence against women, the primary objective of law enforcement authorities is to ensure the immediate and effective safeguarding of the victim. Risk assessment tools are applied by police officers during the investigation of domestic violence cases: 1) Risk Assessment Protocol for violence between former or current spouses, cohabitants, or partners, completed as part of the proper investigation and evaluation process. 2) Individual Risk Assessment of the victim to determine special protection needs, including the risk of death, the severity of the situation, and the likelihood of repeated violence. To this effect, the Welfare Services are promptly informed, as well as relevant non-governmental organizations such as the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (SPAVO) or the Children's House, depending on the circumstances of the case. Where deemed necessary, the Police may apply to the competent Court for an interim order, either for the removal of the victim to a safe location or for the exclusion of the alleged perpetrator from the shared residence. Where reasonable grounds exist, the Police shall issue an arrest warrant against the suspect and seek a remand order to ensure the victim's protection and the integrity of the investigation. In every case, the victim is informed of their rights, and every effort is made to avoid re-victimization during the investigation process. A multi-disciplinary approach is applied in cooperation with Social Workers. In cases where the suspect is known to possess firearms, the Police take immediate measures to seize such weapons, in line with applicable legal provisions and in the interest of public and victim safety.		
26.2	[Optional question: if not, please specify the reasons]:		
27	In case your authorities have taken further measures contributing to the implementation of recommendations in relation to Article 50, which were not covered by the questions above, please report on these measures [word limit: 1000 words]: In 2021, a Safeguarding Sub-Directorate was established within the Crime Combating Department at Police Headquarters. Its mandate and mission include, inter alia, the prevention and suppression of domestic violence, as well as violence against women and girls, through the effective implementation of all relevant legislation, regulations, and directives issued by the Chief of Police. The Sub-Directorate exercises overall control and supervisory authority over the newly established Specialized Police Units for Domestic Violence, ensuring a cohesive and robust framework for the investigation and management of such cases. Since 2021, Specialized Police Units dedicated to investigating domestic violence and related offenses have been established across all Police Divisions throughout the Republic of Cyprus. These Units comprise trained police personnel who operate in close collaboration with competent authorities, including the Social Welfare Services, Mental Health Services, the Ministry of Education, and non-governmental organizations such as		

	the Association for the Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence. This multi-agency cooperation is fundamental to the effective investigation and handling of cases involving domestic violence, child abuse, harassment, stalking, and violence against women. The Division for the Investigation of Offenses of Sexual Abuse of Minors operates as a specialized unit within the Safeguarding Sub-Directorate, tasked with investigating sexual abuse offenses against minors. Investigations are conducted by members of a Special Investigation Team who have received specialized training tailored to the complexities of these cases. The Team maintains active cooperation with other governmental bodies, authorities, and NGOs, with the dual objectives of preventing and combating sexual abuse crimes and ensuring that victims are identified and supported in accordance with Law 91(I)/2014. There is a close operational relationship with the Children's House, a specialized facility that facilitates the sensitive handling of child victims. Family consultants prepare child victims prior to their engagement with Police investigators, and psychological evaluations often serve as evidentiary material before judicial authorities. Members of the Special Investigation Team have been rigorously trained in internationally recognized models for taking statements and handling witnesses and perpetrators. Furthermore, they engage in continuous collaboration with the Children's House to promote a victim-centered and effective investigative approach. The Education, Awareness-Raising, and Communications Department was established as part of the Sub-Directorate for the Management of Cases Involving Vulnerable Persons. Its primary objective is to enhance public awareness regarding domestic violence, child abuse, child sexual abuse, and gender-based violence, as well as to collaborate with the Cyprus Police Academy in developing specialized training programs for officers working with vulnerable populations. To this end, informational materials have been produced under the following titles: "Important Information on Domestic Violence – You Can Stop the Violence... It Concerns All of Us." "Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence – Look for the Signs." "Child Sexual Abuse – Look for the Signs." "Protection Against Violence Concerns Us All – The Legal Framework" (addressing issues related to violence against women, domestic violence, harassment, and stalking). In addition to printed materials, television public service announcements addressing gender-based violence, domestic violence, and child sexual abuse have been produced and disseminated via television channels and social media platforms. Members of the Safeguarding Sub-Directorate actively participate in awareness-raising campaigns and provide continuous training to police officers at the Cyprus Police Academy on matters concerning violence against women, domestic violence, and child abuse.
VIII. Emergency barring, restraining or protection orders (Articles 52 and 53)	
28	As regards emergency barring orders, have your authorities taken measures contributing to ensure that the competent authorities are granted the power to order, in situations of immediate danger, a perpetrator of domestic violence to vacate the residence of the victim or person at risk, and to prohibit the perpetrator from entering the residence of or contacting the victim or person at risk.
28.1	If yes, please indicate which authorities have the power to issue emergency barring orders: Criminal Courts (District Courts and Assize Courts)

	When a complaint is filed with the Police for an offence of violence in accordance with the law 115(I)/2021, the Court may, upon a unilateral application by the victim, the Police, the Attorney General of the Republic, or the Social Welfare Services, issue an interim order prohibiting the offender from entering the residence or communicating with the victim until the case is filed against him. If the victim is a child, the application shall be submitted to the Commissioner appointed pursuant to the Law on Parent-Child Relations. As soon as the suspect is charged with an offence under Law N.115(I)/2021, the Court may issue an order effective for such period and under such terms as the Court may determine, prohibiting the accused from entering or approaching within a specified distance, or remaining in the residence or place of abode of the victim, or approaching the victim at their workplace or any other place as decided by the Court. When a complaint is filed with the Police for an offence of violence in accordance with the Law N.119(I)/2000, the Court may, upon application by a family member, the police, the prosecutor, the Attorney General of the Republic, the Family Counselor, or any other person acting on behalf of any of the aforementioned, issue a temporary exclusion or removal order against the suspect or the minor victim, until a criminal case against the accused for a violent criminal offence is filed and adjudicated. As soon as the suspect is charged under Law N.119(I)/2000, the Court may issue an order against them, effective for such period and under such terms as the Court may determine, prohibiting them from entering or remaining in the family residence. This order shall be referred to as an 'exclusion order' According to the Law N.114(I)/2021, the Court exercising criminal jurisdiction may, upon application by the Police, the Attorney General of the Republic, the victim, a family member of the victim, and/or any other person acting on behalf of any of them, issue an order imposing on the suspect any prohibition and/or restriction deemed necessary and/or desirable under the circumstances, until a criminal case is filed against them for an offence provided for under this Law. The court may, after the filing of criminal proceedings against the suspect, issue a new order or extend the order that was issued pursuant to the law. N.114(I)/2021.
28.2	If yes, please indicate the length of time for which emergency barring orders may remain in force: With regard to Law 115(I)/2021, the following orders are provided: 1. Temporary Order for the Removal of the Victim (Article 30) The Court may, upon application by the victim, the Police, the Attorney General, the Social Welfare Services, or, in the case of a child, a duly appointed Commissioner, issue a temporary removal order for the victim. This order remains in effect until a criminal case is filed and adjudicated against a suspect or accused for an offence of violence against a woman. Validity: 8 days initially, for a total period not exceeding 60 days. 2. Temporary Exclusion Order Against a Suspect or Accused Person (Article 32) The Court may, upon application by the victim, the Police, the Attorney General, the Social Welfare Services, or, in the case of a child, a

	duly appointed Commissioner, issue a temporary order prohibiting the suspect or accused from entering or approaching within a specified distance of the victim's residence or accommodation, or from approaching the victim at their workplace or any other location determined by the Court. Validity: 8 days initially, for a total period not exceeding 60 days. 3. Victim Removal Order (Article 31) The Court may, during or after the initiation of proceedings for an offence of violence against a woman, order the removal of the victim and their placement in a safe location, or, in the case of a child victim, assign their care to the Social Welfare Services. 4. Exclusion Order Against an Accused Person (Article 33) The Court may issue an order against a person charged with an offence of violence against a woman, valid for such period and under such conditions as it may determine, prohibiting the accused from entering or approaching within a specified distance of the victim's residence or accommodation, or from approaching the victim at their workplace or any other location determined by the Court.		
28.3	[Optional question: if not, please specify the reasons]:		
29	Have your authorities taken measures contributing to ensure the availability of restraining or protection orders to victims of the following forms of violence against women?		
	- Domestic violence	Yes ☒	No ☐
	- Stalking	Yes ☒	No ☐
	- Sexual violence	Yes ☒	No ☐
	- Sexual harassment	Yes ☒	No ☐
	- Forced marriage	Yes ☒	No ☐
	- Female genital mutilation	Yes ☒	No ☐
	- Forced abortion	Yes ☒	No ☐
	- Forced sterilisation	Yes ☒	No ☐
29.1	If yes, please specify: All of the above acts are criminalized under various pieces of legislation. During or after the initiation of criminal proceedings, the Court may order, for any period deemed necessary, the removal of the victim and their placement in a safe location. In the case of a child victim, and if it is considered necessary and in the best interests of the child, this may include assigning their care to the Director of Social Welfare Services, provided that other measures against the suspect do not ensure the victim's safety and protection. The Court may consider extending or amending the order after hearing the views of the suspect, the victim, and any other person affected by its issuance. The victim may request a review or annulment of the order upon expiry of the specified period. In relation to domestic violence and stalking, the protective orders referred to in Question 28.1 apply. Regarding offences of sexual violence and sexual harassment under Law N.91(I)/2014, the Court may, upon application by a family member, the police, the Attorney General of the Republic, a		

	Commissioner appointed under the provisions of the Parents and Children Relations Law, as amended or replaced from time to time, the Director of Social Welfare Services, the said Commissioner, or any other person acting on behalf of any of the aforementioned, issue a temporary exclusion order against the suspect or an order for the removal of the victim, effective until a criminal case is filed and adjudicated against the accused for a criminal offence provided for under this Law." With regard to the offences of forced marriage, female genital mutilation, forced abortion, and forced sterilisation, and insofar as these fall within the scope of acts of violence, the general provisions mentioned above in response to Question 28.1 apply, concerning the protective orders that may be issued under Laws N.115(I)/2021 and N.119(I)/2000. With regard to the restraining measures detailed in response number 28.2, investigators assigned to such cases are duly informed and properly trained. These investigators apply for restraining and protective measures before the Court, aiming to safeguard victims in all the aforementioned categories of cases. Furthermore, in cases of domestic violence, statistical records of issued orders are systematically maintained and compiled on a bimonthly basis		
29.2	[Optional question: if not, please specify the reasons]:		
30	Have your authorities taken measures contributing to ensure the effective enforcement of barring, restraining or protection orders?	Yes ☒	No ☐
30.1	If yes, please specify: If a person against whom a restraining or prohibition order has been granted breaches any of the conditions contained therein, he commits an offence and if convicted, is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 2 years (Article 33 of the Law 115(I)/2021).		
30.2	[Optional question: if not, please specify the reasons]:		
31	In case your authorities have taken further measures contributing to the implementation of recommendations in relation to Articles 52 and 53, which were not covered by the questions above, in particular in relation to the collection of data on the number of orders issued and their violations, please report on these measures [word limit: 1000 words]: In cases of domestic violence, statistical records of the issued orders are systematically maintained and compiled on a bimonthly basis by the Safeguarding Sub-Directorate of the Police.		

Specific recommendations	
32	Please report on measures taken by your authorities contributing to the implementation of the recommendation to qualify with more precision the concept of consent in the context of the rape and sexual violence offences criminalised by the Criminal Code, align Article 146e of the Criminal Code

	more closely to Article 36c of the Istanbul Convention and ensure harmonised and appropriate sanctions for all sexual acts without the consent of the victim, including where the circumstances of the case preclude valid consent (Recommendation A.10, IC-CP/Inf(2022)10). According to GREVIO's Baseline Evaluation Report for Cyprus, the Cypriot authorities were urged to: - Take legislative or other measures to define more precisely the concept of consent in the context of rape and sexual violence offences under the Criminal Code, clarifying that consent must be given voluntarily as a result of the person's free will, assessed in light of the surrounding circumstances; - Align Article 146e of the Criminal Code (on coercion into sexual intercourse or other acts of a sexual nature) more closely with Article 36c of the Istanbul Convention, basing it on the notion of freely given consent by the victim; - Ensure harmonised and appropriate sanctions for all sexual acts committed without the victim's consent, including cases where circumstances preclude valid consent. In response to these recommendations, the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, in collaboration with the Law Commissioner, has initiated procedures to amend the existing legal framework to achieve full harmonisation with Article 36c of the Istanbul Convention. In recent years, the definition of rape in the Criminal Code has been modernized to align with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention. The revised definition places the absence of consent at the core of its protective framework, ensuring that consent is the decisive factor in determining sexual violence. Furthermore, the scope of the definition has been expanded to cover all persons regardless of gender, reflecting an inclusive and rights-based approach. Additional provisions have been introduced to address other forms of abuse, such as: • Sexual abuse involving penetration • Coercion to commit rape • Coercion to engage in sexual abuse involving penetration • Coercion to perform intercourse or other acts of a sexual nature These legislative changes complement the revision of Police Protocols for handling cases of sexual violence and rape, which were updated to fully adopt a victim-centered approach. This ensures that victims are treated with respect and sensitivity through an individualized, professional, and non-discriminatory process. Following the directives of the Ministry of Justice, the integration of a gender perspective into the revised Protocols was considered of paramount importance. This guarantees the full protection of women victims' rights under conditions of safety, confidentiality, and trust, while preventing any risk of secondary or repeated victimization. The revised procedures aim to create an environment where victims feel secure and supported, fostering confidence in the justice system and promoting equal treatment without bias.
33	Please report on measures taken by your authorities contributing to the implementation of the recommendation in the area of accommodation of asylum seeking women and girls, notably to: develop standard operating procedures to screen victims of violence against women upon arrival, or swiftly after, with a view to ensuring their prompt transfer to open reception facilities or private accommodation and their access to specialist support services and counselling; ensure safe and adequate accommodation, including through single-sex accommodation for women; develop and

implement guidelines on gender-sensitive reception of asylum seekers and on the prevention of gender-based violence against women and girls in asylum accommodation and take urgent measures to prevent the commission of acts of violence against women in the Pournara reception centre (Recommendation A.15, IC-CP/Inf(2022)10).

Regarding the above, in the area of accommodation of asylum-seeking women and girls (Recommendation A.15, IC-CP/Inf (2022)10) we would like to inform you that the Asylum Service has already taken the following measures:

- Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are currently being developed for the Pournara First Reception Centre, covering pre-vulnerability assessments and pre-medical screenings. These procedures aim to facilitate the early identification of vulnerabilities, special reception needs, and/or special procedural guarantees. The drafting and implementation of these SOPs are carried out within the framework of the new EU Screening Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2024/1356).
- Regarding women and girls seeking international protection, the Asylum Service has instituted targeted measures to ensure procedural fairness, prioritization, and systematic identification of vulnerabilities. In July 2023, in close cooperation with the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), the Asylum Service developed and formally adopted Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the identification, assessment, and referral of individuals with specific needs. All women, families, and unaccompanied minors are subject to a comprehensive vulnerability assessment upon arrival at the Pournara First Reception Centre. Particular attention is given to women belonging to vulnerable categories, including survivors of physical, psychological, or sexual violence, single mothers with minor children, and individuals identified as potential victims of trafficking in human beings.
- Therefore, upon arrival at the Pournara First Reception Centre, all individuals undergo a preliminary health screening and an initial vulnerability assessment to facilitate the prompt identification of urgent needs and the implementation of immediate protective measures. Vulnerable single women and women with children—including those who may be victims of trafficking, domestic violence, or other forms of gender-based violence (GBV) are accommodated in designated “safe zones” within the Centre. These zones are staffed with carers, social workers, and female security personnel available on a 24/7 basis, ensuring continuous support, protection, and follow-up on relevant referrals.
- During the vulnerability assessment process, applicants identified as having special reception needs are referred to the appropriate competent authorities for further action. Depending on the nature and severity of the needs identified, women who have experienced violence may be referred to the Social Welfare Services for accommodation support and to the Mental Health Centre for psychological assistance. Social Welfare Officers are stationed at the Pournara First Reception Centre, enabling them to respond promptly to housing referrals initiated by vulnerability assessment experts.
- Although formal Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on gender-sensitive reception and the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) against women and girls in asylum accommodation are not yet established, staff members at reception centres, including social workers, reception officers, registration officers, and police personnel, receive regular training. Some of these training programs focus broadly on vulnerability identification, while others address specific issues in greater detail. In 2024, to support the prevention of violence against women within reception centres, targeted awareness-raising posters addressing sexual and gender-based violence were prominently displayed in the emergency zones of the Pournara Centre.
- Registration and reception procedures are currently completed within six days, and at most within two weeks, after which applicants are released from the Centre.
- In regards to the recommendation for the transfer of asylum seekers victims of violence or gender-based violence to open reception facilities, Kofinou reception center is available. Depending on the availability in Kofinou, asylum seekers who complete the asylum and reception procedures in Pournara may be offered accommodation in Kofinou Reception Center if certain criteria are met: the categories include families with minor children,

single women and single men who have indicators of vulnerability, and do not have family or social network in the country. Asylum seekers with more serious vulnerability issues such as a high percentage of disability, or severe psychological/psychiatric issues are not accommodated in Kofinou, as they need more special accommodation that may be offered by the Social Welfare Services. Asylum seekers with criminal record or accusations against them are not permitted in the center. The duration of the accommodation in Kofinou varies from 1 month to 1 year, and includes housing, medical care, food, and education for minors. Asylum seekers have the right to refuse or end their accommodation in Kofinou. Further, applicants may be referred.

Also, is the intention of the Social Welfare Services to establish an Open Centre for Vulnerable Persons Seeking International Protection, which will be funded by EU funds. Given the obligation of the EU Member States to ensure that all programs supported by EU funds have effective mechanisms to ensure that these programs comply with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Office of the Commissioner of Administration and the Protection of Human Rights, in its capacity to advise and guide the competent national Managing Authorities on the compliance of the Programs with the provisions of the Charter, in December 2023 assessed the project.

In particular, the Centre will provide accommodation to applicants for international Protection, who have been identified by the Asylum Service as members of a vulnerable population group (e.g., pregnant women, persons with disabilities).

Priority will be given to vulnerable women and single women with children (single- parent families). All the areas of the Centre shall be accessible to persons with disabilities and equipped with furniture and means adapted to their needs. The location of the Centre shall ensure interaction between beneficiaries and the local community, so as to avoid their isolation, to facilitate their integration and to ensure their effective geographical access to social, educational and health care services. Finally, the project beneficiary is expected to provide skills development programmes to the Centre's residents, based on their specific needs (e.g. language courses, cooking classes, citizenship classes, social skills and social integration classes, etc.), as well as psychological support, interpretation and/or translation services, assistance on procedural issues etc.

On the basis of the above and having taken into account the stressed need for the provision of additional protection to vulnerable persons, including vulnerable women, through targeted measures, the Office of the Commissioner of Administration and the Protection of Human Rights Office reached the conclusion that the objectives pursued by the project are legitimate and consistent with Directive 2013/33/EU laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection and it does not raise any issues of conformity with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

On another occasion, in March 2024, within the framework of providing guidance in relation to the proposed co-funded programme with title "Support for the First Reception Center Pournara", which was aiming to enhance the functions and services provided at the Center, the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights (Ombudsman) had particularly drawn the attention of the relevant authorities to the need of setting the required safeguards in place as far as female asylum seekers are concerned, including, among others, the conduct of private interviews in the presence of neutral interviewers and interpreters of the same sex, in an effort to foster the feeling of trust and remove any potential power imbalances. It has been highlighted that the existence of such safeguards would encourage any persons who would otherwise be reluctant to share sensitive personal issues, to engage more in a discussion with the responsible officer, whilst it is equally important that special care should be taken to ensure that the handling and submission of such sensitive data is not, in any way, gender-specific or gender-biased.

It shall be noted that, in the guidance provided with respect to the proposed co-funded projects, including the ones indicatively shown above, great emphasis has been placed on the need of the involved authorities / persons to duly respect the situation / condition / protected characteristics of

each of the vulnerable persons which may be affected within this context, including pregnant women, single- parent families with minor children, victims of human trafficking, persons who have been subjected to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence, such as female victims of genital mutilation.

In view of the above, the objectives pursued by the said projects have been considered as legitimate, however, the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights (Ombudsman) had, in all instances, reiterated the need to ensure, throughout all stages of the implementation of the projects, as well as during the subsequent operation of the Centres, respect for the rights of the persons seeking international protection, with particular emphasis on the special characteristics / needs of vulnerable categories of persons, within the context of which the strengthening of the protection of the rights and welfare of vulnerable women seeking international protection will also be achieved.