

European Women's Lobby Campaign "Parity Now!"

Cyprus' contribution

Cyprus has prioritized the promotion of women's rights and gender equality in its public policies. Over the years, the country has made significant progress through institutional reforms, legislative initiatives, and strategic actions aimed at mainstreaming gender across public policies and promoting equal participation in all spheres of life.

To address the root causes of gender inequality and promote women's substantial and equal participation, Cyprus has adopted a holistic and horizontal approach. In 2024, the Commissioner for Gender Equality was formally established through legislation. This institutional recognition acknowledges gender equality as a vital prerequisite for social and economic stability, development, and growth. The law clearly defines the Commissioner's mandate, which includes, amongst others,

- Drafting the National Strategy for Gender Equality, and coordinating and monitoring its implementation,
- Drafting and coordinating the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, and overseeing its implementation,
- Mainstreaming gender in public policies,
- Overseeing the collection and analysis of sex-desegregated data,
- Submitting proposals for legislative and other reforms to Ministers and public authorities.

The National Strategy for Gender Equality places strong emphasis on achieving balanced representation of women and men in decision-making positions and on dismantling gender stereotypes across all sectors of society. Gender mainstreaming serves as the key tool for implementing the Strategy and related public policies.

Recognizing the vital role of women's rights organisations and civil society, the strategy was drafted with their active participation, strengthening the democratic process of policymaking. The monitoring and coordination of the strategy's implementation take place in close collaboration with the gender focal points of all Ministries. At the same time, a Civil Society Platform has been established to evaluate the progress of the strategy's implementation.

To support the overall effort, the Cyprus Statistical Service publishes "Gender Statistics", providing sex desegregated national data. This information is crucial for identifying gaps and inequalities, monitoring progress toward gender equality, and designing evidence-based policymaking.

In recent years, several important initiatives have been undertaken to strengthen women's participation in senior positions in public and political life and to promote their visibility in social, economic, and political spheres:

- Continuous mapping of the representation of women and men on the boards of semi-governmental organisations.
- Development of a digital database on women’s participation in political leadership, since 1960.
- Creation of a digital library with material and bibliographical information related to gender equality, the women’s movement and the protection of women’s rights in Cyprus.
- Drafting legislation for the transposition of the Gender Balance on Corporate Boards Directive.
- Promotion of transparency and meritocracy in appointments on Boards of Directors in semi-state organizations through the establishment of an Advisory Council by decision of the Council of Ministers. The Council compiles lists of eligible candidates and aims, wherever possible, to ensure equal representation of women and men.
- Institutionalization of an essay competition for female 2nd and 3rd grade students of upper secondary and technical schools entitled “What I Would Change If I Were a Minister/Deputy Minister for One Day.” The initiative encourages girls to engage in decision-making processes and promotes gender-balanced representation. Winners have the opportunity to act as “shadows” to Ministers, accompanying them during official duties and daily work programmes.
- Under the umbrella title “HerStory”, the Office of the Commissioner for Gender Equality promotes women role models in professional fields where women are underrepresented. Since 2023, three different editions of the campaign have been launched: the STEAM Edition, the Shipping Edition and the Diplomacy Edition.
- Collaboration with the media, sports, and business sectors to challenge gender stereotypes and promote equal participation of women and men, including Memoranda of Understanding signed with professional bodies such as the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Cyprus Scientific and Technical Chamber (ETEK) and sports federations.,.

The 2024 legislation establishing the Commissioner for Gender Equality also strengthened the role of the National Machinery for Women’s Rights, which has been advising the government on women’s rights since the late 1980s. The Office of the Commissioner for Gender Equality provides funding to civil society organizations for activities aligned with the objectives of the National Strategy.

Additionally, in 2024, the President of the Republic and all Ministers, Deputy Ministers and Commissioners to the President, signed a political declaration on gender equality, which was co-signed by the Commissioner for Gender Equality. Through this political

declaration, the President, the Council of Ministers and the Commissioners declare zero tolerance to sexism and gender-based harassment.

Furthermore, a bill entitled “The Gender Mainstreaming Law of 2025” has been drafted and approved by the Council of Ministers. The bill aims to incorporate into the national legislative framework the obligation to mainstream gender in legislative initiatives, the state budget, public contracts, and more broadly, in measures, actions, and policies.

It is also important to highlight that Cyprus's electoral legislation guarantees equal access to political participation. Several political parties have introduced gender quotas on their candidate lists, which has already led to increased female representation in local elections. Notably, on Government level, women now hold 37% of positions in the Council of Ministers - the highest proportion in Cyprus's history.

In view of the parliamentary elections in May 2026, the Commissioner for Gender Equality held meetings with the parliamentary political parties. During these meetings, the Commissioner highlighted that women remain underrepresented in Parliament, in local authorities and in the European Parliament. The Commissioner emphasized that women's underrepresentation in political leadership leads to democratic deficit.

During discussions with parliamentary political parties a number of measures were proposed:

- Implementation of quotas in party candidate lists and internal party committees.
- Establishment of an academy for women and youth, in collaboration with all political parties, to promote equal political participation.
- Creation of child care centers in or close to the Parliament building and party offices to facilitate the participation of parents in political life.
- Adoption of a political declaration of zero tolerance toward sexism and sexual harassment by all members of Parliament and political parties.
- Allocation of a part of the state funding to political parties to support women's political organizations and initiatives promoting equal participation and representation in political life.

Additionally, the government has taken a series of measures to facilitate work-life balance and enable women with multiple obligations to actively participate and lead professionally, which are important means for equal representation. These include:

- increasing maternity leave by four (4) weeks for the first child,
- gradual extension of compulsory preschool education from the age of four (4) and gradual extension of full-day school,
- extension of parental leave up to the age of 15,
- extension of parental leave allowance for the second, third and each subsequent child, and provision of parental leave allowance to self-employed parents,

- creation of new or expansion of existing nursery schools for children up to four (4) years of age and multipurpose child care centers. Eleven projects have already been approved and the relevant procedures are progressing.