

# Mapping child protection systems in the EU (27)

Cyprus

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Authors' note: The ministry with competency in children's education changed its name twice during the reference period of this report. For the sake of simplicity, this report uses the term 'Ministry of Education' to describe this ministry.

# 1. Legislative and regulatory framework and policies

## 1.1. Overview of normative and regulatory framework

Please provide an overview of the normative legal and regulatory framework of the national and sub-national child protection system. Include information on the scope of the child protection system, the specific needs it addresses, the human and financial resources allocated, and any relevant cultural, social, and historical factors. Please indicate the current priority areas in child protection.

Ca. 300 words

The legislative framework on child protection consists mainly of:

- The domestic violence law;<sup>1</sup>
- The law on child sexual abuse, child exploitation and child pornography<sup>2</sup> which purports to transpose Council Directive 2011/93 on child sexual abuse and the Lanzarote Convention;
- The law setting up a mechanism for the implementation of the national strategy on child sexual abuse and exploitation and child pornography;<sup>3</sup>
- The anti-trafficking law which includes provisions on the trafficking and exploitation of children;<sup>4</sup>
- The law regulating the employment of children;<sup>5</sup>
- The recently adopted law on children in conflict with the law;<sup>6</sup>
- The law ratifying the UN Convention on the rights of the child and its Protocols;<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cyprus, The Family Violence (Prevention and Protection of Victims) Act 2000 [Ο περί Βίας στην Οικογένεια (Πρόληψη και Προστασία Θυμάτων) Νόμος του 2000].

<sup>2</sup> Cyprus, The Prevention and Combating of Sexual Abuse, Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography Law 2014 (Ο περί της Πρόληψης και της Καταπολέμησης της Σεξουαλικής Κακοποίησης, της Σεξουαλικής Εκμετάλλευσης Παιδιών και της Παιδικής Πορνογραφίας Νόμος του 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Cyprus, The Implementation of the National Strategy for Combating Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation and Child Pornography Law of 2017 (Ο περί της Εφαρμογής της Εθνικής Στρατηγικής για την Καταπολέμηση της Σεξουαλικής Κακοποίησης και Εκμετάλλευσης Παιδιών και της Παιδικής Πορνογραφίας Νόμος του 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Cyprus, The Prevention and Combating of Trafficking and Exploitation of Persons and Protection of Victims Law of 2014 (Ο περί της Πρόληψης και της Καταπολέμησης της Εμπορίας και Εκμετάλλευσης Προσώπων και της Προστασίας των Θυμάτων Νόμος του 2014) N. 60(I)/2014.

<sup>5</sup> Cyprus, The Employment of Children and Young Persons Law (Ο περί Απασχόλησης Παιδιών και Νεαρών Προσώπων Νόμος), Cap. 178.

<sup>6</sup> Cyprus, Law providing for the establishment of a system of criminal justice friendly for children in conflict with the law (Νόμος που προβλέπει για την εγκαθίδρυση συστήματος ποινικής δικαιοσύνης φιλικής προς τα παιδιά που βρίσκονται σε σύγκρουση με το νόμο), N.55(I)/2021.

<sup>7</sup> Cyprus, The Convention on the Rights of the Child (Ratification) Law of 1990 [Ο περί της Συμβάσεως περί των Δικαιωμάτων του Παιδιού (Κυρωτικός) Νόμος του 1990] N. 243/1990.

- The law regulating the mandate of the Child Commissioner overseeing the implementation of the rights foreseen in the CRC;<sup>8</sup>

- The law transposing the Victims Directive, recently enhanced in 2022 with specific duties for the police to supply the victims with updated information on the situation of the convicted perpetrator and for all competent authorities to train their front-line staff and to issue codes of conduct.<sup>9</sup> This law creates duties for both the Social Welfare Services and the police;

- The obsolete law on children dating back to the pre-independence era that regulates the treatment of children under the care of the welfare services, remand homes, foster homes, nurseries and child minders, cruelty, neglect et al.<sup>10</sup> Efforts to update this law to bring it in line with contemporary approaches have not yielded results.

Domestic violence and child sexual abuse have topped the policy agenda for years, being the areas attracting most measures, including action plans and strategies, multi-disciplinary committees, steady funding resources and permanent structures.<sup>11</sup> The Social Welfare Services are mandated with the issues falling under the scope of the Law on Children and the implementation of the laws relating to trafficking, domestic violence and other family issues, such as adoptions, custody, kinship and legal status of children. A multi-disciplinary body oversees the implementation of the national strategy on child sexual abuse, child exploitation and child pornography, consisting of representatives from governmental and non-governmental bodies.<sup>12</sup> The competent body for the implementation of the law on children in conflict with the law is the Ministry of Justice,<sup>13</sup> which also oversees the implementation of the law transposing the Victims Directive.<sup>14</sup>

There is no single budget line allocated to child protection. Each of the bodies involved have their own budget but none of them deals exclusively with the protection of children.

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<sup>8</sup> Cyprus, Law on the Commissioner for the Protection of Children's Rights of 2007 (*Ο περί Επιτρόπου Προστασίας των Δικαιωμάτων του Παιδιού Νόμος του 2007*)

<sup>9</sup> Cyprus, Law on the Establishment of Minimum Standards on the Rights, Support and Protection of Victims of Crime of 2016 (*Ο περί της Θέσπισης Ελάχιστων Προτύπων σχετικά με τα Δικαιώματα, την Υποστήριξη και την Προστασία Θυμάτων της Εγκληματικότητας Νόμος του 2016*) N. 52(I)/2016.

<sup>10</sup> Cyprus, Law on children (*Ο περί Παιδίων Νόμος*) Cap. 352.

<sup>11</sup> See the website of the [Advisory Committee for the prevention and combating of domestic violence](#), the publicly funded NGO SPAVO and FONI which was set up in order to coordinate the implementation of the national strategy on child sexual abuse.

<sup>12</sup> See the composition of the Council of FONI [here](#).

<sup>13</sup> See the webpage of the human rights section of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order [here](#).

<sup>14</sup> Cyprus, Law on the Establishment of Minimum Standards on the Rights, Support and Protection of Victims of Crime of 2016 (*Ο περί της Θέσπισης Ελάχιστων Προτύπων σχετικά με τα Δικαιώματα, την Υποστήριξη και την Προστασία Θυμάτων της Εγκληματικότητας Νόμος του 2016*) N. 52(I)/2016.

1.2. Legal provisions in constitutional, civil, criminal, and administrative law related to children in need of protection

Question	YES	NO	Comments
1.2.1. Does the constitution contain any provisions on children's rights and child protection?	√		Article 20 provides for the right to education, subject to conditions and restrictions necessary in the interests of the Republic or the constitutional order or public safety or public health or public morals, et al. The same article provides for the right of the parents to ensure that education for their children is compliant with their religious beliefs.
1.2.2. Is there a single legal instrument devoted to child protection and child rights, e.g. a Children's Act?		√	There is a Children's Act that used to be the single legal instrument for child protection in previous decades. However new laws were adopted as separate instruments dealing with issues not specifically or adequately covered by the Children's Act, including domestic violence, trafficking, sexual abuse and juvenile justice.

**1.2.3. Please provide an inventory of key child protection related legislation, including hyperlinks, date of adoption and the areas covered. Please include civil, criminal, and administrative legislation covering different areas of child protection (please add rows, as needed).**

Legislation	Date passed	Child protection areas covered
<a href="#">Law on children</a>	1959 0\ but amended several times since	Custody, care, foster care, remand homes, nurseries and child minders, cruelty and neglect.
<a href="#">The probation and other treatment of offenders Law of 1996 N. 46(I)/1996</a>	1996	Issuance of court order placing an offender under probation.
<a href="#">The Family Violence (Prevention and Protection of Victims) Law of 2000</a>	2000	Domestic violence.
<a href="#">The Convention on the Rights of the Child (Ratification) Law of 1990</a>	1990	Ratification of CRC.
<a href="#">The Parent and Child Relations Law 1990 to 1998</a>	1990	Parental custody and care.

<a href="#">The Children (Relationship and Legal Status) Law N. 187/1991</a>	1991	Paternal recognition of children.
<a href="#">The Child Protection and Occupation Centres Law of 1996</a>	1996	Operation of centres for child protection and occupation.
<a href="#">Law on the Commissioner for the Protection of Children's Rights of 2007</a>	2007	Establishment of the institution of the child commissioner to monitor the implementation of the rights guaranteed under the CRC.
<a href="#">The Prevention and Combating of Sexual Abuse, Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography Law 2014</a>	2014	Child sexual abuse, child exploitation and child pornography.
<a href="#">The Implementation of the National Strategy for Combating Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation and Child Pornography Law of 2017</a>	2017	Mechanism for the implementation of the national strategy on child abuse, exploitation and pornography.
<a href="#">The Prevention and Combating of Trafficking and Exploitation of Persons and Protection of Victims Law of 2014</a>	2014	Trafficking of both adults and children.
<a href="#">The Employment of Children and Young Persons Law</a>	1964 and amended several times since	Terms under which children aged 15+ can be employed.
<a href="#">Law on the Establishment of Minimum Standards on the Rights, Support and Protection of Victims of Crime of 2016</a>	2016	Transposition of the EU Victims Directive.
<a href="#">The Education and Training of Children with Special Needs Law N. 113(I)/1999</a>	1999	Education for children with disabilities.
<a href="#">The Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities and other related matters (Ratification) N. 8(III)/2011</a>	2011	Ratification of the CRPD.
<a href="#">The Refugees Law N.6(I)/2000</a>	2000	Asylum law with provisions on unaccompanied minors and on children with families.
<a href="#">Law providing for the establishment of a system of criminal justice friendly for children in conflict with the law</a>	2021	Establishment of juvenile justice system.
<a href="#">The Child Benefit Law (167(I)/2002)</a>	2002	Child benefit- eligibility and mode of calculation.
<a href="#">Law on primary education Cap.166</a>	1962	Free education.

<b>Law on Holistic Sexual Education (L. 205(I)/2022)</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>Sexual education in primary and secondary education, both public and private</b>
<a href="#">Primary and secondary education (Compulsory attendance and provision of free education) Act of 1993.</a>	1993	Compulsory and free education at pre-school, primary and part of secondary level, until the age of 15.
The Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Inter-country Adoption	1994	Ratification of the Hague Convention on inter-country adoptions
<a href="#">Law on adoption of 1995</a>	1995	Adoption, placement, return to biological parents.

### 1.3. Policy framework

Question	YES	NO	Comments
1.3.1. Is there a specific national or sub-national policy framework and/or a national or sub-national strategy on child rights and/or child protection? <u>If yes</u> , does it require an integrated approach to child protection?		√	There is no specific policy framework covering the entirety of child rights or child protection.
1.3.2. Are there national or sub-national plans for action or policies targeting specific groups of children or particular areas, e.g. children with disabilities, children in care?	√		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- National Strategy for the Prevention and Combating of Sexual Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography 2021-2024, coordinated by FONI, a special inter-governmental body set up for this purpose.<sup>15</sup></li> <li>- National Strategy for Children's Rights in Health 2017-2025, implemented by the Ministry of Health.<sup>16</sup></li> <li>- National Strategy for sexual and reproductive health of adolescents 2018-2025, coordinated by the Ministry of Health.<sup>17</sup></li> <li>- National Strategy for Combating Addictions 2021-2028 (National Action Plan 2021-2024), coordinated by the National Addictions Authority.<sup>18</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>15</sup> For more details, see the website of FONI, [here](#).

<sup>16</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Health, [Εθνική Στρατηγική για τα Δικαιώματα των Παιδιών στην Υγεία](#), 2017-2025.

<sup>17</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Health, [Εθνική Στρατηγική για την σεξουαλική και αναπαραγωγική υγεία των νέων](#) 2018-2025.

<sup>18</sup> Cyprus, National Addictions Authority, [Εθνική Στρατηγική κατά των εξαρτήσεων](#),



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- National Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons 2019-2021, coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>19</sup></li> <li>- National Action Plan for the Establishment of a European Child Guarantee, coordinated by the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare.<sup>20</sup></li> <li>- Action Plan for Equality between Men and Women 2019-2023 (includes measures affecting girls), coordinated by the Ministry of Justice and Public Order.<sup>21</sup></li> <li>- First national strategy for disability (2018-2028) and second national action plan for disability (2018-2020), which include provisions for the establishment of a centre for the assessment of autism for pre-school children, provision of escorts and aids for children attending schools, support for transition from school to vocational training, awareness targeting school children for the rights of persons with disabilities, accessibility features in school infrastructure, transport of children with disabilities to and from school, training of teachers et al. The strategy and action plan are coordinated by the Department for Social Integration of Persons with Disability of the Ministry of Welfare and Social Insurance.<sup>22</sup></li> <li>- National Strategy for the Prevention and Management of Violence in Schools 2018-2024.<sup>23</sup></li> </ul> <p>There is no single authority coordinating all plans and strategies. Each plan provides for distinct measures and there is little coordination between them.</p>
1.3.3. Are there national or sub-national child protection policies regarding children in	√	<p>A national strategy for better internet for children in Cyprus was approved by the Council of Ministers in December 2017.<sup>24</sup> Its actions are being implemented by the Center for Safe Internet under the</p>

<sup>19</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of the Interior, [Σχέδιο Δράσης κατά της Εμπορίας Προσώπων](#), 2019-2021.

<sup>20</sup> Cyprus, Press and Information Office (2022), [‘Εθνικό Σχέδιο Δράσης για τη Θέσπιση Ευρωπαϊκής Εγγύησης για τα Παιδιά 2022-2030’](#), Press release, 22 October 2022.

<sup>21</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Justice and Public Order, [Εθνικό Σχέδιο Δράσης για την Ισότητα μεταξύ Ανδρών και Γυναικών](#), 2019-2023.

<sup>22</sup> Cyprus, Department for Social Integration of Persons with Disability, [Τρίτο Εθνικό Σχέδιο Δράσης για την Αναπηρία](#) 2021-2023.

<sup>23</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Education and Culture (2018), [‘Εθνική Στρατηγική για την Πρόληψη και Διαχείριση της Βίας στο Σχολείο 2018 - 2022’](#), October 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Working Group under Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth (2017), ‘National strategy for a better internet for children in Cyprus’ ([Εθνική στρατηγική για ένα καλύτερο διαδίκτυο για τα παιδιά στην Κύπρο](#)), June 2017.

<p>the digital space and when using online media?</p>		<p>coordination of the Pedagogical Institute of the Ministry of Education, utilising EU funds of the programme Better Internet for Kids.<sup>25</sup> The Center produces educational and awareness material and tools and carries out campaigns targeting children, youth, parents and teachers. It also runs a helpline providing information and advice on the use of digital technologies including cyber bullying, racist material, grooming and sexual abuse.</p>
<p>1.3.4. Is there a (regular) child participation policy and/or mechanism and/or body related to child rights and/or other child-related governance at national or sub-national level to ensure children have a (direct) voice in or can indirectly influence policy making, e.g. children's rights forum, child surveys, child participation platform? If <u>yes</u>, are appropriate child protection and safety measures in place?</p>	<p>v</p>	<p><i>The Children's Parliament</i> The Children's Parliament is an institution through which children's right to participation is exercised, holding sessions to debate issues of interest to children and adolescents, as analysed in their reports. It consists of 80 members aged 12-18 years, corresponding to the number of adult parliamentarians, and convenes every two months. Once a year, in November, they meet under the chairmanship of the President of the House of Representatives, during the celebrations of the anniversary of the signing and ratification of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>26</sup> To be eligible to stand for election as members of the Children's Parliament, all students aged 12-16 submit their candidacy to the teacher in charge of his class. Children are informed at school five days before each upcoming election and are handed with material providing information about the institution. The election takes place at school time in the presence of the member of children's parliament of the previous year and all candidates are given the chance to make an electoral speech before the election. The members of the children's parliament are elected by the student boards. The president is elected by the Plenary Assembly at the first working session after the 31<sup>st</sup> December each year and remains in office for a one-year term of office.<sup>27</sup></p> <p>In 2018, the Council of Ministers institutionalised a day for consultation with children once a year, to facilitate the children's expression of their views and recommendations on specific issues and measures</p>

<sup>25</sup> For more details, see the website of the Center for Safe Internet [here](#).

<sup>26</sup> Cyprus, Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of the Child Protection and Child Welfare, 'Rules of Procedure of the Cyprus Children's Parliament' (*Κανονισμός Λειτουργίας της Κυπριακής Παιδοβουλής*), adopted on 25 September 2004 and amended in 2012, 2014 and 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Cyprus, Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of the Child Protection and Child Welfare (2016), The regulation of functioning of children's parliament (*Κανονισμοί λειτουργίας της παιδοβουλής*), October 2016.

		<p>affecting them, so that the state can formulate an overview in the context of policy development.<sup>28</sup> The institutionalised consultation day took place in 2019 and was subsequently suspended due to the pandemic but did not resume thereafter.<sup>29</sup></p> <p><i>Adolescents Advisory Group</i></p> <p>Since 2010 the Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights operates the Adolescents Advisory Group, established in order to enable consultation between the Commissioner and the children, hear and record their views so as to promote them at policy making fora. The team consists of 30 boys and girls aged 13 to 17, they convene every two months and discuss issues related to children's rights. The Group is a member of the European Network of Youth Advisors (ENOC-Network of Youth Advisors).<sup>30</sup></p> <p><i>Children’s views in judicial proceedings</i></p> <p>A report from the Social Welfare Services is required for the legal representation of children in court, which must include the views and wishes of the children. Children aged 12+ may present their views before the Court;<sup>31</sup> however the children’s right to be directly heard in Court depends on the type of proceedings and on the discretion of the court. There is no fixed age above which the hearing of the child in court is mandatory; it is at the judge’s discretion to decide whether the child has the mental capacity to be heard.<sup>32</sup> Although legal precedent has established the right of the child to be heard and the court’s obligation to give priority to the best interests of the child, considerable discretion is placed in the hands of the judge who determines the best interests of the child and whether the child is mature enough to be</p>
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<sup>28</sup> Cyprus, Council of Ministers (2018), [Θεσμοθέτηση «Ημέρας Δημόσιας Διαβούλευσης με τα παιδιά»](#), Extract from the minutes of the meeting of the Council of Ministers, Ref. 189/2018, 11 November 2018,

<sup>29</sup> FRANET Consultation with the Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of the Child, 11 August 2023.

<sup>30</sup> For more details please see the relevant webpage of the Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights [here](#).

<sup>31</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor dated 20 March 2023.

<sup>32</sup> Liasides S. (2010), ‘Hearing the under-age child in family law’ in *The Family Law Review (Επιθεώρηση Οικογενειακού Δικαίου)* [2010] January- March, Vol. 1, 7, 12-16.

		<p>able to express a view or stand in court. Parental care cases are seen by the court to be of <i>inquisitive</i> rather than <i>adversarial</i> in nature, aiming at better serving the welfare and interests of the child. In practice, this means that the court is willing to look into evidence, both factual and legal, beyond what was presented by the advocates of the litigants, such as the views of the child, in order to establish the best interests of the child.<sup>33</sup></p> <p>A number of legislative provisions<sup>34</sup> and a body of case-law require the court to take into account the views of the child before a custody decision is made. The weight and significance to be attached to the child's view will depend on his/her age and degree of maturity. The rule that children's views must be taken into account applies beyond the scope of parental care cases and covers also non-criminal abductions<sup>35</sup> and adoptions.<sup>36</sup> In the case of adoptions, the children's consent is required if the children's age and mental capacity allow for it; the court must also be satisfied that the adoption serves the best interests of the child.<sup>37</sup> In family law proceedings, and depending on the age of the child, the judges often see the children in their chambers to hear their views directly in cases involving them. The Commissioner for the Protection of Children's Rights may legally represent a child whose interests conflict with those of their parents or guardians.</p>
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<sup>33</sup> Cyprus Family Court, Appeal Jurisdiction, *Esaias Ioannides v. Chada Ioannides* (2002), 1 AAD, 1446 (Appeal Nos 129 and 130), 30 September 2002.

<sup>34</sup> Cyprus, The Parent and Child Relations Acts 199 to 1998 (*Οι περί Σχέσεων Γονέων και Τέκνων Νόμοι του 199 έως 1998*), article 6(3); The Law ratifying the European Convention on Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions concerning Custody of Children and on Restoration of Custody of Children N.36/1986, article 15; The law ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child N.5(III)/2000, article 12(1).

<sup>35</sup> Cyprus, Law ratifying the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, N. 11(III)/94, Article 13.

<sup>36</sup> Cyprus, The Adoption Act 1995 (*Ο περί Υιοθεσίας Νόμος του 1995*) N.19(I)/1995, Article 4(1)(c).

<sup>37</sup> Demetriou, C. (2014), '[Study on children's involvement in judicial proceedings – contextual overview for civil justice – Cyprus](#)', Milieu-ICF for the European Commission, ISBN 978-92-79-47552-8.

#### 1.4. Particular groups of children: information on legislative and policy developments (if any) related to their protection

Please report on any significant developments in the last five years and comment briefly.

When answering you should consider all relevant civil, criminal, and administrative legislation, including regulations, ordinances, codes, ministerial decisions. On policy developments please include any relevant action plan, protocol, procedure, or guidance issued by competent authorities. Please always specify how children's participation in any respective judicial (civil, criminal, and administrative) proceedings are regulated and supported (e.g. procedural safeguards to be in place, ensuring children's right to be heard).

##### *National strategies on sexual abuse, exploitation and pornography*

In 2016 the Council of Ministers adopted the first national strategy and action plan for the protection of children from sexual exploitation, sexual abuse and child pornography.<sup>38</sup> In 2021, Council of Ministers adopted the second National Strategy for the period 2021-2023.<sup>39</sup>

##### *The children's house*

One of priorities of the national strategy was the establishment of the Children's House with the aim of giving children victims of sexual abuse, exploitation or child pornography, direct access to all necessary services concentrated under one roof, reducing the possibility of re-victimisation and stigmatisation. The Children's House, operating

- The law on child sexual abuse, child exploitation and child pornography<sup>46</sup> which purports to transpose Council Directive 2011/93 on child sexual abuse and the Lanzarote Convention was adopted in 2014 and entered into force in 2015.<sup>47</sup>
- A comprehensive law on children in conflict with the law was adopted,<sup>48</sup> establishing for the first time a juvenile justice system.
- The Victims Directive was transposed in 2016 and updated in 2022.<sup>49</sup>
- A law was adopted in 2017 to set up a mechanism for the implementation of the national strategy on child sexual abuse, exploitation and pornography.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Cyprus, 'National Strategy and Action Plan for Combating Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation and Child Pornography 2016-2019' (*Εθνική Στρατηγική και Σχέδιο Δράσης για την Καταπολέμηση της Σεξουαλικής Κακοποίησης και Εκμετάλλευσης Παιδιών και της Παιδικής Πορνογραφίας 2016-2019*), adopted on 21 March 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Cyprus, 'National Strategy and Action Plan for Combating Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography 2021-2023' (*Εθνική Στρατηγική και Σχέδιο Δράσης για την Καταπολέμηση της Σεξουαλικής Κακοποίησης και Εκμετάλλευσης Παιδιών και της Παιδικής Πορνογραφίας 2021-2023*)

<sup>46</sup> Cyprus, The Prevention and Combating of Sexual Abuse, Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography Law 2014 (*Ο περί της Πρόληψης και της Καταπολέμησης της Σεξουαλικής Κακοποίησης, της Σεξουαλικής Εκμετάλλευσης Παιδιών και της Παιδικής Πορνογραφίας Νόμος του 2014*).

<sup>47</sup> Cyprus, The Prevention and Combating of Sexual Abuse, Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography Law 2014 (*Ο περί της Πρόληψης και της Καταπολέμησης της Σεξουαλικής Κακοποίησης, της Σεξουαλικής Εκμετάλλευσης Παιδιών και της Παιδικής Πορνογραφίας Νόμος του 2014*).

<sup>48</sup> Cyprus, Law providing for the establishment of a system of criminal justice friendly for children in conflict with the law (*Νόμος που προβλέπει για την εγκαθίδρυση συστήματος ποινικής δικαιοσύνης φιλικής προς τα παιδιά που βρίσκονται σε σύγκρουση με το νόμο*), N.55(I)/2021.

<sup>49</sup> Cyprus, Law on the Establishment of Minimum Standards on the Rights, Support and Protection of Victims of Crime of 2016 (*Ο περί της Θέσπισης Ελάχιστων Προτύπων σχετικά με τα Δικαιώματα, την Υποστήριξη και την Προστασία Θυμάτων της Εγκληματικότητας Νόμος του 2016*) N. 52(I)/2016.

<sup>50</sup> Cyprus, The Law on the Implementation of the National Strategy for Combating Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography (*Ο περί της Εφαρμογής της Εθνικής Στρατηγικής για την Καταπολέμηση της Σεξουαλικής Κακοποίησης και Εκμετάλλευσης Παιδιών και της Παιδικής Πορνογραφίας Νόμος*) N.112(I)/2017.

since September 2017, provides a multidisciplinary, child-friendly approach, based on good practices already in place in other European countries. It is operated by the NGO Hope for Children under the supervision of the Social Welfare Services<sup>40</sup> and is fully funded by national resources.<sup>41</sup>

#### *Teachers' manual for handling child sexual abuse*

In 2017 the Ministry of Education compiled a manual for the use of teachers in order to assist them in identifying children who are potentially victims of sexual abuse and set out the procedure for handling these cases. The manual provides definitions and clarifies the long and short term impact of sexual abuse on children, lists the possible physical, psychological or behavioural signs of abuse and lists the steps for reporting the incident, informing the family, support the child following the reporting, handle the family and adopt preventive measures at the school level.<sup>42</sup>

#### *Interdepartmental guide on domestic violence*

In 2017, the Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family in collaboration with the Social Welfare Services prepared a new manual of interdepartmental coordination, aiming to build on the experiences of previous years of implementing the earlier form of the manual, in order to improve the provision of coordinated services to children affected by domestic violence in the family, clarifying the role

- In September 2022, Parliament discussed a private bill that had been lodged in 2019 on introducing sexual education at schools.<sup>51</sup> The Ministry of Education published a policy paper on sexual education, committing itself to provide comprehensive sexual education to all students in primary and secondary education, setting out the broad strategic goals.<sup>52</sup> The bill was adopted in December 2022,<sup>53</sup> amidst a stormy parliamentary session,<sup>54</sup> followed by an official announcement that the President was going to impeach the law.<sup>55</sup> A few days later the President of the Republic announced that he would not impeach the law and signed it instead.<sup>56</sup> The law is now in force.
- In 2022, a bill was tabled in Parliament criminalising bullying and intimidating behaviour at schools, following a number of serious bullying incidents reported in the media.<sup>57</sup> The bill covers both off and on line bullying and offers a wide definition of acts amounting to bullying which include the dissemination of personal content, sexual preferences, personal photos or messages, fake accounts with the photo of the victim, abusive and humiliating messages and threats. The age of the students involved must be between 14-18 and the penalties foreseen are imprisonment up to 12

<sup>40</sup> See the relevant webpage of Hope for Children [here](#).

<sup>41</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>42</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth, Pedagogical Institute (2017), *Teacher's manual for recognising and handling incidents of child sexual abuse (Εγχειρίδιο εκπαιδευτικού για αναγνώριση και διαχείριση περιστατικών σεξουαλικής κακοποίησης παιδιών)*.

<sup>51</sup> Onoufriou, M. (2022), 'Σεξουαλική διαπαιδαγώγηση στα σχολεία', *Simerini*, 10 September 2022.

<sup>52</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Education and Culture, Policy on sexual education (*Πολιτική Υπουργείου Παιδείας και Πολιτισμού για τη σεξουαλική διαπαιδαγώγηση*), undated.

<sup>53</sup> Cyprus, The holistic sex education law of 2022 (*Ο περί της Ολιστικής Σεξουαλικής Διαπαιδαγώγησης Νόμος του 2022*).

<sup>54</sup> Nomoplatform (2022), '[Αποφάσεις Ολομέλειας: Σεξουαλική διαπαιδαγώγηση, οικογενειακό δίκαιο και συνταξιοδοτικό δημοσίου](#)', 5 December 2022

<sup>55</sup> ToThemaOnline (2022), '[Αναπέμπει τον Νόμο για τη σεξουαλική διαπαιδαγώγηση ο Πρόεδρος – Υπογράφει την στοχευμένη αναστολή εκποιήσεων](#)', 8 December 2022.

<sup>56</sup> Cyprus Times (2022), '[Δεν αναπέμπει το νόμο για σεξουαλική διαπαιδαγώγηση ο ΠτΔ](#)', 12 December 2022.

<sup>57</sup> Cyprus, Bill on school bullying and intimidating conduct in the school grounds and other related premises (Criminalisation, suppression and reform). Lodged with the Education House Committee on 12 May 2022.

#### 1.4.2. Children with disabilities

Please include children with learning difficulties, autism, and mental health impairments / psycho-social disabilities, severe chronic illnesses that prevent them e.g. from attending onsite school or sports activities

Policy developments	Legislative developments
<p><i>Responses to bill on inclusive education</i></p> <p>The Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights criticised the Government bill for inclusive education of children with disabilities describing it an attempt to marginally improve the current system of segregated structures in schools and for merely replacing the term ‘integrated education’ with ‘inclusive education’ without introducing institutional and holistic changes. The draft law was criticised for containing provisions medicalising disability, against the letter and the spirit of the CRPD.<sup>58</sup> The organisations Support Association for People with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) Cyprus, the Pancyprian Organization of Parents and Friends of Children with Cerebral Palsy "Embrace of Hope", the Pancyprian Association of Down Syndrome, the Association of Relatives and Friends of People with Autism "Mazi" issued a common statement calling on the government to redraft the proposed law embracing the philosophy of the CRPD and enter into dialogue with experts, academics, lawyers and civil society organisations. The common statement noted that the UN Committee on the CRPD had requested the Cypriot government to prepare a targeted legal framework for inclusive education but instead the bill proposes an upgrade of the existing segregated system, legitimising the practices of the past.<sup>59</sup></p>	<p>N/A</p> <p>A law on inclusive education of children with disabilities is under consideration for a number of years.</p>

<sup>43</sup> Cyprus, Advisory Committee on the prevention and combating of domestic violence (2017), ‘Manual of interdepartmental procedures for domestic violence for children’ (*Εγχειρίδιο διατμηματικών διαδικασιών για το χειρισμό περιστατικών βίας στην οικογένεια για παιδιά*).

<sup>44</sup> Cyprus, Advisory Committee on the prevention and combating of domestic violence (2017), ‘National action plan for the prevention and combating of domestic violence 2017-2019’.

<sup>45</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Education, Culture Sport and Youth (2020), ‘Prevention and handling of incidents of school bullying’ (*Πρόληψη και διαχείριση περιστατικών σχολικού εκφοβισμού*), 11 November 2020.

<sup>58</sup> Cyprus, Commissioner for the rights of the child (2021), ‘Θέση της Επιτρόπου προστασίας των δικαιωμάτων του παιδιού αναφορικά με το προτεινόμενο νομοσχέδιο και τους κανονισμούς ενιαίας εκπαίδευσης’, File No. 7.16.02, 11.11.29, 5 July 2021.

<sup>59</sup> RIK News (2021), ‘Ανασύνταξη του νομοσχεδίου για Ενιαία Εκπαίδευση ζητούν ενδιαφερόμενες οργανώσεις’, 17 June 2021.

### *Unaccompanied minors*

In the last five years, the Social Welfare Services created 900+ positions for unaccompanied minors through the establishment of shelters and programmes for unaccompanied minors.<sup>62</sup>

### *Responses of the Commissioner for the protection of children's rights*

In March 2022, the Commissioner for the protection of children's rights made a public intervention regarding the bad conditions where unaccompanied minors were held in the Pournara camp which led some 30 unaccompanied children to leave the camp and sleep on the street, as a preferable option than the camp. The Commissioner's investigation revealed that conditions in the Pournara camp were substandard, the amount of food and water supplied was inadequate, rooms are overcrowded and children shared beds or slept on the floor, there were two toilets and one shower for 300+ children and no activities or education. The Commissioner called on the state to ensure that the unaccompanied children are provided with hygienic and dignified conditions of stay, as their stay in the street entailed multiple dangers and infringed many of their rights, whilst the return to the conditions prevailing in Pournara had to be ruled out.<sup>63</sup>

N/A

In August 2022, the Commissioner intervened on behalf of a child whose father was deported from the Menoyia Detention Center without any warning, handcuffed and sedated. Following the father's deportation, the immigration authorities were planning the deportation of the child and his mother. The child, aged 15, was born in Cyprus and had long and established links with the country. The Commissioner stated that administrative discretion on immigration must be exercised in accordance

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<sup>60</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Education and Culture (2016), 'Presentation of a referral protocol for students with a possible eating disorder' (*Παρουσίαση Πρωτοκόλλου Παραπομπής-Παροχής Βοήθειας μαθητών/τριών με πιθανή Διατροφική Διαταραχή*), 17 November 2016.

<sup>61</sup> Cyprus, Council of Ministers (2022), Extract from the minutes of the meeting of the Council of Ministers dated 18 October 2022 (*Απόσπασμα από τα πρακτικά της συνεδρίας του Υπουργικού Συμβουλίου ημερομηνίας 18/10/2022*), decision no. 93.814

<sup>62</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>63</sup> Cyprus Child Commissioner (2022), '*Commissioner's Public Statement on the street stay of 30 unaccompanied children*' (*Δημόσια Τοποθέτηση Επιτρόπου σχετικά με την παραμονή στο δρόμο 30 ασυνόδευτων παιδιών*), 9 March 2022.



with the CRC and asked the Interior Minister to consider granting special leave of stay on humanitarian grounds for this family, in respect of the child's right to family life, health and education, so that he can complete his schooling in the language he understands.<sup>64</sup>

There are no unaccompanied children from Ukraine in Cyprus, as a result of a policy not to permit them to fly to Cyprus, in an effort to safeguard their safety. Permission to enter Cyprus was granted to minors from Ukraine where there was written consent on behalf of the parents that the person accompanying them was duly authorised and the Embassy of Ukraine in Cyprus agreed to take responsibility for the minor. Where children from Ukraine arrived with persons other than a parent or a guardian, the Social Welfare Services would ask the person accompanying the child to provide documents for the assignment of child care to the specific person. The Social Welfare Services pays a first visit to inspect the child's living conditions. UNHCR raised concerns over the fact that there is no ongoing assessment to ensure that the children are safe with the person accompanying them as well as over the lack of disaggregated data on children to facilitate interventions.<sup>65</sup> There are no schemes for private hosts accommodating Ukrainian displaced persons with or without compensation from the authorities. Accommodation was offered to Ukrainian displaced persons in hotels designated by the government although this proved insufficient to cover the entire population of displaced persons from Ukraine, most of whom were hosted by family or friends or rented accommodation which they paid themselves.<sup>66</sup> Access to free state education is provided to all children from Ukraine who are beneficiaries of temporary protection free of charge.

Ukrainian displaced persons who work and their children aged up to 4 and 8/12 years attend approved childcare centres are entitled to subsidy of €102 per child. The scheme covers the period 01/09/2022– 28/02/2023.

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<sup>64</sup> Cyprus Child Commissioner (2022), Intervention of the Commissioner, concerning the procedure for the investigation of the treatment of the family of long-term and established informal migrants by the Ministry of Interior (Παρέμβαση της Επιτρόπου, σχετικά με τη διαδικασία διερεύνησης της μεταχείρισης της οικογένειας, άτυπων μεταναστών με μακροχρόνια και εδραιωμένη παραμονή από το Υπουργείο Εσωτερικών), 18/08/2022.

<sup>65</sup> Consultation with UNHCR, 24 April 2023.

<sup>66</sup> Consultation with UNHCR, 24 April 2023.

1.4.4. Children in alternative care	
Specific thematic areas: residential – institutional care; foster care; adoption (including international adoption)	
Policy developments	Legislative developments
<p><i>State-run protection institutions for adolescents</i></p> <p>The Social Welfare Services detected a series of complex issues facing adolescents residing in state homes including mental health, substance abuse and delinquent behaviour. To address these, they introduced measures of inter-professional therapeutic interventions inside two adolescent protection institutions on a pilot basis, involving professionals from various disciplines including child psychiatrists, clinical educational or counselling psychologists and occupational therapists.<sup>68</sup></p> <p>No data is available as regards children fleeing the war in Ukraine or any other war.</p>	<p>N/A</p> <p><i>Foster care bill</i></p> <p>In the absence of a modern legislative framework to regulate foster care, the Social Welfare Services compiled a proposal purporting to regulate the care and protection of a child placed under the custody or care of the Director of Social Welfare Services, by law or court orders or with the consent of the parents or those exercising parental care. The bill seeks to regulate the procedure for approving the suitability of foster parents and determining their obligations, the services provided to foster parents, the procedure for foster care supervision, the criteria for the inclusion of a child in semi-independent living, the transition of the child to adulthood, and the keeping of a register. The bill has been approved by the Council of Ministers and is awaiting adoption by the House of Representatives.<sup>69</sup></p>
1.4.5. Children affected by custody disputes, including parental abduction	
Policy developments	Legislative developments
<p><i>Child abductions</i></p> <p>In January 2018, the Council of Ministers adopted a protocol of cooperation between governmental bodies in cases of parental abductions, kidnappings and detentions.<sup>70</sup> The</p>	<p>N/A</p>

<sup>67</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth (2022), 'Free Intensive Greek Language Courses for Ukrainian Refugees' (*Δωρεάν Εντατικά Μαθήματα Ελληνικής Γλώσσας σε Ουκρανούς Πρόσφυγες*), 3 June 2022.

<sup>68</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>69</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>70</sup> Cyprus, Council of Ministers (2018), Protocol of Cooperation between the Attorney General of the Republic, Ministry of Justice and Public Order, Cyprus Police, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior (Civil Registry and Immigration Department), Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (Social Welfare Services), Ministry of Health (Mental Health Services) in cases of parental abduction/abduction/detention [*Πρωτόκολλο Συνεργασίας μεταξύ Γενικού Εισαγγελέα της Δημοκρατίας, Υπουργείου Δικαιοσύνης και Δημοσίας Τάξεως, Αστυνομίας Κύπρου, Υπουργείου Εξωτερικών, Υπουργείου Εσωτερικών (Τμήμα Αρχείου Πληθυσμού και Μετανάστευσης), Υπουργείου*

<p>protocol nominates the Ministry of Justice and Public Order as coordinator; and the Attorney General of the Republic, the Cyprus Police, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Interior (Civil Registry and Migration Department), the Ministry of Health and the Social Welfare Services as competent bodies in their respective fields. The Protocol specifies the role of each agency in cases of parental abduction</p>	
<p>1.4.6. Missing children</p>	
<p>Policy developments</p>	<p>Legislative developments</p>
<p>The Social Welfare Services in collaboration with the Police have compiled a protocol of cooperation for procedures in cases of disappearances of children under the care of the Social Welfare Services, purporting to coordinate and record actions with the aim of locating the missing child, ensuring safety and protection and preventing other attempts to run away in the future.<sup>71</sup></p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>1.4.7. Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, or severely materially and socially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity (AROPE)</p>	
<p>Policy developments</p>	<p>Legislative developments</p>
<p>In 2022, the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare was appointed as National Coordinator for the European Child Guarantee. The Deputy Ministry established a working group which includes the Ministries of Labour and Social Insurance, Health, Education, Sport and Youth to compile the final draft of the National Action Plan for the Child Guarantee. The National Action Plan is aimed at providing free access to early childhood education, care, school-based activities, at least one healthy meal each school day, healthcare and access to healthy</p>	<p>Under the minimum guaranteed income law adopted in 2014, the Social Welfare Services have discretion to provide financial support to individuals/families who have been deemed to be in an emergency financial situation.<sup>78</sup> No guidelines are available as to how this discretion is to be exercised.</p>

*Εργασίας, Πρόνοιας και Κοινωνικών Ασφαλίσεων (Υπηρεσίες Κοινωνικής Ευημερίας), Υπουργείου Υγείας (Υπηρεσίες Ψυχικής Υγείας) για περιπτώσεις γονικών απαγωγών/αρπαγών/κατακρατήσεων], 9 January 2018.*

<sup>71</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>78</sup> Cyprus, Law on minimum guaranteed income and generally on social benefits of 2014 (*Ο περί Ελάχιστου Εγγυημένου Εισοδήματος και Γενικότερα περί Κοινωνικών Παροχών Νόμος του 2014*), article 11.

nutrition and adequate housing. The final draft of the national action plan for the European Child Guarantee was approved by the Council of Ministers in October 2022.<sup>72</sup>

A number of support schemes to address material deprivation of children are in place from previous years, subject to eligibility conditions usually related to the length of lawful residence in Cyprus. Three fresh measures were introduced in 2022:

- The subsidising of nursery/kindergarten fees for children from birth up to four years old providing for the payment of 80% of the monthly cost of each child's attendance at a nursery or kindergarten approved to participate in the scheme, subject to eligibility conditions related to the composition of the family, the family income, years of lawful residence and the age of the children.<sup>73</sup> The payment is made directly to the nursery or kindergarten. To be eligible for this, the family must have legally and continuously resided in the areas where the Republic of Cyprus exercises effective control for at least five years preceding the submission of the application. This requirement essentially excludes newly arrived migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, Turkish Cypriots residing in the north as well as Roma families who commute between north and south of the island.
- The subsidising of kindergarten fees for children to attend compulsory pre-schooling from the age of four in private kindergartens.<sup>74</sup> The

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<sup>72</sup> Cyprus, Extract from the minutes of the meeting of the Council of Ministers of 18 October 2022- National action plan on the adoption of the European Child Guarantee 2022-2030 (Απόσπασμα από τα Πρακτικά της Συνεδρίας του Υπουργικού Συμβουλίου ημερομηνίας 18/10/2022- Εθνικό Σχέδιο Δράσης για τη θέσπιση Ευρωπαϊκής Εγγύησης για τα παιδιά 2022-2030), Decision No. 93.813.

<sup>73</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (2022), 'Tuition and Feeding Subsidy Scheme for Children up to 4 years old' (Σχέδιο Επιδότησης Διδάκτρων και Σίτισης Παιδιών ηλικίας μέχρι 4ων ετών).

<sup>74</sup> Cyprus, Secretariat of the Council of Ministers (2022), 'Μείωση ορίου ηλικίας εισδοχής στην υποχρεωτική προδημοτική εκπαίδευση. α) Νομοσχέδιο με τίτλο: Ο περί Δημοτικής και Μέσης Εκπαίδευσης (Υποχρεωτική

expenditure will be covered by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP). The authorities rejected<sup>75</sup> a proposal of the national teachers' union POED to utilise the NRRP funds instead in order to extend and enhance the infrastructure and capacity of public kindergartens so as to receive the additional number of children and at the same time invest in public education.<sup>76</sup>

- A one-off payment in 2022 of €50-€80 to families with children aged 4-18 entitled "Back to school", subject to income and residence criteria and depending on the number of children in the family. For families with an income up to €80,000 in 2021, a lump sum of €80; for families with an income between €10,000-€19,500 the lump sum of €70, for families with income €19,501-€29,000 the lump sum of €60; for families with income €29,000-€39,000 the lump sum of €50, for families with income €39,000-€49,000 and provided they have three or more children, €50 for the third and the additional children. To be eligible for the scheme, the family must have legally and continuously resided in the areas where the Republic of Cyprus exercises effective control for at least five years preceding the submission of the application,<sup>77</sup> thus excluding some of the most vulnerable children, including the Roma commuting between north and south and the newly arrived asylum seeking children.

#### 1.4.8. Children belonging to minority ethnic groups, e.g. Roma, Sami, etc.

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Φοίτηση και Παροχή Δωρεάν Παιδείας (Τροποποιητικός) (Αρ.2) Νόμος του 2022. β) Οι περί Λειτουργίας των Δημόσιων Σχολείων Δημοτικής Εκπαίδευσης (Τροποποιητικοί) Κανονισμοί του 2022’

<sup>75</sup> Offsite (2022), ‘Προδρόμου: Από 4ων ετών η επέκταση δωρεάν προδημοτικής εκπαίδευσης’, 19 October 2022.

<sup>76</sup> Pancyprian organisation of Greek Teachers (POED) (2021), ‘Θέσεις ΠΟΕΔ αναφορικά με τη δωρεάν υποχρεωτική Προδημοτική Εκπαίδευση από την ηλικία των τεσσάρων ετών-Εθνικό Σχέδιο Ανάκαμψης και Ανθεκτικότητας’, Press release, 2 November 2021.

<sup>77</sup> Cyprus Press and Information Office (2022), ‘Καταβάλλεται σήμερα η εφάπαξ χορηγία «Επιστροφή στο Σχολείο»’, Press release, 22 September 2022.

Policy developments	Legislative developments
<p>In December 2021, the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare submitted to the European Commission its Roma national strategic framework for the period 2021-2030,<sup>79</sup> prepared in collaboration with co-competent public authorities and approved by the Council of Ministers on 13/12/2021. There was no NGO involvement in the compilation of the strategy; the only NGO working on Roma rights was struck off the Registry of the Interior Ministry pursuant to a new law adopted in 2020 introducing new technical requirements and costs for NGOs, non-compliance with which led to forced dissolution. CypRom is currently in the process of trying to re-register, but at the time of the consultation there was no Roma NGO in place. The National Strategic Framework for Roma sets horizontal objectives under five thematic areas: education, employment, housing, health and social support. In order to better monitor its implementation of the Strategic Framework, a committee was established, composed of representatives of competent governmental and non-governmental organisations.<sup>80</sup> The strategic framework sets out measures targeting children, like school networks, the creation for infrastructure for the care of children aged 0-3, hosting units for children under the care of Social Welfare Services, incentives to attend schools including free meals. The measures do not target Roma children in particular but generally children at risk of socioeconomic deprivation.</p>	N/A
1.4.9. Children involved in judicial proceedings as victims or witnesses or parties	
Policy developments	Legislative developments
N/A	N/A
1.4.10. Children involved in judicial proceedings as suspects or accused persons	

<sup>79</sup> Republic of Cyprus (2021), '[Cyprus National Roma Strategic Framework 2021-2030](#)', November 2021.

<sup>80</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

Policy developments	Legislative developments
<p>In the context of implementing the juvenile justice law adopted in 2021,<sup>81</sup> juvenile courts were set up in every district and judges were appointed. During 2022, the Council of Ministers appointed the members of the Monitoring Committee of the Decriminalisation Programmes, the establishment and powers of which are provided for in the juvenile justice law of 2021. The Committee is mandated with the evaluation and effective functioning of the Decriminalisation Programmes and has a term of office of five years. It is composed of seven members, five from the public sector and two from the private sector.<sup>82</sup></p>	<p>In April 2021 the law establishing a criminal justice system that is friendly to children in conflict with the law was adopted,<sup>83</sup> which creates a new system of criminal justice and includes provisions transposing Council Directive 800/2016. The law regulates the treatment of children without criminal responsibility, i.e., children aged under 14, as well as persons who reached maturity but who committed an offence when they were still under 18. In addition to transposing Council Directive 800/2016, the law provides for special juvenile courts, alternative sentences and various councils aimed at supporting children and their parents in order to protect children and help them avoid repetition of delinquent behaviour. Part III of the law sets out the procedures to be followed when children under 14 are in conflict with the law, regulating the duties of state officials and establishing the institution of ‘family councils’, participated by both children and parents in order to evaluate the children’s conduct and propose ways of avoiding future delinquent conduct. Part IV sets the procedures to be followed when children over 14 are in conflict with the law, providing for conditions of detention, police investigation and referrals to programs and to the Child Council. A juvenile court is set up where children are to be referred as a last resort, to be housed in a separate building with its own supervisors with mandate to oversee the implementation of the law, where judges specialising in juvenile justice will be able to refer the child to one or more of the councils set up under the law to compile an action plan for the child that will correspond to the child’s personal needs and circumstances.</p>
<p>1.4.11. Children at risk of harmful practices, including female genital mutilation; child /forced marriages, honour-related violence</p>	
Policy developments	Legislative developments

<sup>81</sup> Cyprus, Law providing for the establishment of a system of criminal justice friendly for children in conflict with the law (*Νόμος που προβλέπει για την εγκαθίδρυση συστήματος ποινικής δικαιοσύνης φιλικής προς τα παιδιά που βρίσκονται σε σύγκρουση με το νόμο*), N.55(I)/2021.

<sup>82</sup> Communication from the Ministry of Justice to the FRANET contractor, 1 November 2022.

<sup>83</sup> Cyprus, Law providing for the establishment of a system of criminal justice friendly for children in conflict with the law (*Νόμος που προβλέπει για την εγκαθίδρυση συστήματος ποινικής δικαιοσύνης φιλικής προς τα παιδιά που βρίσκονται σε σύγκρουση με το νόμο*), N.55(I)/2021.

N/A	N/A
1.4.12. Children whose parents are in prison/custody	
Policy developments	Legislative developments
N/A	N/A
1.4.13. Children who drop out of compulsory education and working children under the legal age for work	
Policy developments	Legislative developments
N/A	N/A
1.4.14. Please insert any other group of children that is not listed above, such as children with drug or alcohol addictions ( <i>add rows as needed</i> )	
Policy developments	Legislative developments
A number of measures are in place at school level purporting to promote health-based activities for vulnerable children and children at risk of drug abuse. These include afternoon psycho-educational activities in various schools aiming at skills and personality development, based on the model of systemic intervention and multi-disciplinarity. <sup>84</sup>	N/a

#### 1.5. Contradictions, conflicts, or gaps between national legislation/policies on child protection and international / EU standards

Are there any contradictions, conflicts, or gaps between national legislation/policies on child protection and international / EU standards that have been pointed out by international bodies, national human rights institutions, ombudspersons, or civil society organisations? Please also refer to any contradictions within national and sub-national legislation.

*The Children's Parliament*

<sup>84</sup> Cyprus Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth (2022), 'Πρόγραμμα «Ιστός» στο πλαίσιο συνεργασίας ΥΠΑΝ και ΑΑΕΚ', Press release, 18 September 2022.



In 2019 the Commissioner for the protection of children's rights submitted a memo to Parliament expressing the concerns of the Children's Parliament that their proposals and views are not taken into consideration and that there is no mechanism to trigger procedures towards the consideration of their proposals. The members of the Children's Parliament highlighted that the adult members of House of Parliament do not attend the sessions of the Children's Parliament and are not informed of their proposals. In addition, the members of the Children's Parliament do not receive any feedback as to whether the proposals they submitted were utilised in any way. The Commissioner concluded that although in principle the institution promotes the children's right to participation, in practice it fails to promote their participation in a comprehensive and efficient manner. Although the proposals of the Children's Parliament are recorded in a report that is forwarded to all parliamentarians, the absence of feedback suggests that they were not studied carefully. The Commissioner proposed that at least one parliamentarian attends the sessions of the Children's Parliament and refers the issues discussed to the parliamentary groups in writing; that the sessions of the Children's Parliament be broadcasted live from the state TV channel so that their views are disseminated to society at large; that a working paper be drawn up after every session of the Children's Parliament including all their proposals, which must then be discussed at a joint session with the adults' Parliament; that the members of the Children's Parliament be invited to attend the parliamentary committees where issues of concern to them are discussed; that a child centred mechanism be set up to support the members of the Children's Parliament in formulating and presenting their positions; and that a link be added to the website of the Parliament with the positions of the Children's Parliament.<sup>85</sup>

#### *The Roma community and the horizontal measures*

The Cypriot government does not recognise the Roma as a distinct minority and all measures adopted from which the Roma are expected to benefit, are horizontal. The Roma community is expected to benefit from these measures in the same way as other vulnerable population groups, despite their special characteristics, including the fact that they do not speak Greek well or at all, they have few or no skills and therefore few chances of joining the labour market. Some members of the Roma community regularly travel between north and south of the island for various reasons, including accessing health care in the north where they speak the language, which may cause them to lose their residency and therefore their rights in the area controlled by the Republic.<sup>86</sup>

The Commissioner for the protection of children's rights has repeatedly opined that the government's immigration, asylum and citizenship policies infringe the CRC, including the policies regarding the grant of nationality to children from mixed marriages,<sup>87</sup> the grant of residency rights to children of parents with international protection status and the pushbacks of boats.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Cyprus, Commissioner for the protection of the rights of the child (2019), 'Memorandum by the Commissioner in the debate on the subject: Cypriot Children's Parliament - Examination twice a year of the conclusions of its plenary session and the extent of their implementation by the competent authorities, Meeting of the Parliamentary Committee on Education and Culture' (Υπόμνημα της Επιτρόπου στη συζήτηση του θέματος: Κυπριακή Παιδοβουλή – Εξέταση δύο φορές το χρόνο των συμπερασμάτων της Ολομέλειάς της και ο βαθμός υλοποίησης τους από πλευράς των αρμοδίων, Συνεδρίαση της Κοινοβουλευτικής Επιτροπής Παιδείας και Πολιτισμού) 6, February 2019.

<sup>86</sup> Cyprus, Commissioner for the protection of children's rights (2017), 'Report of the Commissioner regarding the requirement of residence for a certain period of time in the areas controlled by the Government of the Republic for the provision of social welfare benefits, September 2017' (Εκθεση Επιτρόπου αναφορικά με την προϋπόθεση διαμονής για συγκεκριμένο χρονικό διάστημα στις περιοχές που ελέγχονται από την Κυβέρνηση της Δημοκρατίας για παροχή επιδομάτων κοινωνικής πρόνοιας, Σεπτ.2017).

<sup>87</sup> Letter from the Commissioner for the protection of children's rights to the Minister of the Interior dated 12 October 2022, File no, G.E.P.11.11.85 et al.

<sup>88</sup> See the relevant webpage of the Commissioner for the protection of children's rights [here](#).

## 1.6. Orientation/fragmentation of national child protection policy and legislation

Policies targeting children are fragmented, with several actors involved. The Ministry of Education runs several educational-based measures on an on-going basis targeting children, teachers and parents, aiming at prevention and child empowerment, whilst the Social Welfare Services focus on intervention. In some areas which traditionally attract heightened institutional attention, including domestic violence and child sexual abuse, there are measures of structured coordination which are constantly updated based on evaluations of previous programs. There are very few measures in place targeting children at risk of racial or ethnic discrimination; a code for recording and handling racial incidents at schools introduced in 2014<sup>89</sup> is not adequately implemented and there is confusion amongst stakeholders as to whether it is compulsory or not and it is marked by under-reporting.

## 1.7. Development in the past years: achievements, gaps, and challenges

The policy emphasis continues to be on domestic violence and sexual abuse, with few measures being adopted to address other areas of child protection. Programs against sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and child abuse have been elaborated and become better coordinated through the establishment of the multi-disciplinary body [Foni](#). Domestic violence continues to be a priority area, with additional funds diverted to programs and mechanisms. In both these areas, there are synergies in place with two NGOs, with whom the Social Welfare Services maintain a long standing collaboration and who run shelters and protection programs, commissioned by the Social Welfare Services. A new set of measures were introduced to address internet safety, mostly relying on EU funds and EU initiatives. As in previous years, some areas remain completely unaddressed, including FGM and despite the increased presence in Cyprus of girls from FGM-affected countries, as well as issues of date rape, revenge porn, sexting and other issues affecting teenage girls. As in the past, there is also little policy attention to discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The establishment of the juvenile justice system is a major legislative development, although lacking in measures to monitor and evaluate its implementation.

## 1.8. Promising practices

Please list and briefly describe any promising practice in child protection legislation and policies that you come across. (if available please include references to documents or URLs in case of online tools/mechanisms)

N/A

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<sup>89</sup> For more details see the webpage of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, [here](#).

## 2. Governance, coordination structures, and services

### 2.1. Primary institutions and main service providers responsible for child protection

Question	Yes	No	Comments
<p>2.1.1. Is there any lead institution/body (e.g. child protection agency, ministry, etc.) primarily responsible for child protection at the national level?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, please provide the name in the comments box.</p>	√		<p>The Social Welfare Services are the central administrative point as regards children, although there are areas pertaining to protection from harm which are within the competency of the Police. The compilation of legislative proposals falls under the competence of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order and the technical processing of these proposals falls under the mandate of the Attorney General's office, whose dual role as legal advisor to the government as well public prosecutor regularly falls under criticism.</p>
<p>2.1.2. Are there different structures sharing the primary responsibility (e. g. departments in the same or different ministries, different agencies etc.)?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, please provide the name under the comments box and please also mention which body has the lead in coordinating child protection policies and actions.</p>	√		<p>Most ministries have sections or departments or dedicated personnel specialising on children, although not in a formal denomination.<sup>90</sup></p> <p>In some policy areas such as domestic violence and sexual abuse, there is structured cooperation between the various governmental bodies, sometimes supported by manuals for inter-departmental cooperation setting out step-by-step procedures for referrals and handling of incidents, as is the case for domestic violence. This is not the case with all areas, some of which attract very few, if any, policy measures.</p>
<p>2.1.3. Are there child focal points or similar in different ministries or agencies?</p>		√	

<sup>90</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

If yes, in which ministry are they located, what are they called, and what role/functions do they have? How do they coordinate?

Please provide in the table below a list of the national/regional/local bodies or authorities having certain responsibilities related to child protection, e.g. child ombuds institution.

Please note: For the regional and the local levels please indicate only the type of body, do not list all different bodies at regional/local level in the country.

Name of the body	Level (national/regional/local).	Area of responsibility and roles in child protection <i>(for example coordination, legislation, policy making, training, monitoring, financing, implementing)</i>	Comments <i>(for example in case of ombuds institution, compliance with the Paris Principles)</i>
Commissioner for the protection of children's rights	National	Informs and raises awareness of children's rights; consults children; campaigns and mobilises for children's rights in the family, school and community; monitors policies and practices of governmental and non-governmental bodies for their compatibility with the rights of the child; monitors legislation for compliance with the CRC and submits recommendations to policy makers and legislators; represents children in judicial and administrative proceedings.	Compliance with the CRC
Social Welfare Services	Both regional and national	Governmental body with competence in protection, guardianship, adoptions, foster care, neglect, Roma focal point, domestic violence, sexual abuse et al. The Social Welfare	National legislation on child protection and national strategies and action plans.

		Services are automatically considered to be the guardian of children in Cyprus without a legal guardian.	
Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth (including the Pedagogical Institute)		Education-based measures for school children, teachers and parents	National legal and policy, projects and strategies

2.1.4. Please indicate if there were in the past five years any important changes concerning the child protection mandate/roles/responsibilities and outline what caused or influenced these changes (for example, a transfer of responsibility for child protection from one ministry to another ministry or a body or merging of responsibilities, etc. Please indicate notably if an integrated approach has been sought and/or achieved.

N/A

There were no discussions or attempts in the past five years to change the mandate, role or responsibility concerning child protection. In 2019 the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance launched a public consultation on the restructuring of the Social Welfare Services proposing the setting up of new departments, the updating and establishment of institutionalised specialised groups, on-going training and utilisation of EU funds.<sup>91</sup>

One of the major contributions to this consultation was from the national association of psychologists who proposed measures to address under-staffing and turnover of personnel, to introduce additional specifications for recruitment procedures, collaborations with NGOs and protocols for handling incidents.<sup>92</sup> The restructuring of the Social Welfare Services currently under way focuses on the modernisation of the system, methods and working principles, the upgrading of the computerised system, in-service training, human resources management, strategic planning, the creation of a 24-hour call centre and collaborations with external service providers, including psychologists, psychiatrists and social needs assessors to enhance interdisciplinary intervention.<sup>93</sup> No change of mandate is foreseen nor is an integrated approach discussed, except in the context of the provision of services for the inter-disciplinary handling of incidents.

<sup>91</sup> Cyprus Press and Information Office (2019), 'Call for public consultation on the restructuring of Social Welfare Services' ([Πρόσκληση σε δημόσια διαβούλευση για την αναδιάρθρωση των Υπηρεσιών Κοινωνικής Ευημερίας](#)), Press release, 12 April 2019.

<sup>92</sup> Letter from the Cyprus Association of Psychologists to the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance, 30 April 2019. Available [here](#).

<sup>93</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Finance, Directorate General Growth (2022) '[Strengthening the Social Welfare Services \(SWS\)](#)'.

2.1.5. Please indicate, in the table below, the major service providers at national level in the area of child protection. Include family support services /measures (i.e. counselling, financial assistance) that are part of the overall social protection/welfare system for children in risk.

<b>Service providers</b> <i>(include the name and the type of institution i.e. public authority, NGOs, religious institutions, private)</i>	<b>Type of services</b> <i>(Include counselling, care institutions, day care centres, financial assistance, legal advice, rehabilitation services for victims, education awareness –training activities, etc.)</i>	<b>Target groups</b> <i>(For example, children with disability, children in risk of or living in poverty, immigrant children, children deprived form parental care, child victims of abuse or exploitation. When relevant, please indicate if third country nationals and irregular immigrants are entitled to such services)</i>	<b>Funding</b> <i>(national budget, EU funded, other)</i>
Social Welfare Services	Counselling, care institutions, financial assistance	Children at risk of poverty, immigrant children, children deprived of parental care, child victims of abuse or exploitation, including third country nationals and irregular immigrants. Financial assistance is subject to eligibility conditions relating to length of lawful residence.	National budget, EU funds
Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights	Legal advice, legal representation in administrative or judicial proceedings	All children irrespective of identity or status	National budget
Department for social integration for persons with disabilities	Day care centres, care institutions, financial assistance, assistive equipment	Children with disabilities (some services are subject to eligibility conditions relating to length of lawful residence)	National budget, EU funds

Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth (including Pedagogical Institute)	Education, awareness, training activities	All children irrespective of identity or status	National budget, EU funds
Ministry of Health	Medical care, rehabilitation services.	All children irrespective of identity or status, although for some services and medication eligibility conditions relating to length of lawful residence apply.	National budget
Police	Protection, information	All children irrespective of identity or status	National budget

2.1.6. Please indicate if any child participation or feedback mechanisms are part of child protection services.

The only child protection institution with a feedback mechanism is the Commissioner for the protection of children's rights. The Commissioner operates an advisory body consisting of 30 children aged 13-16 who serve for a year but can remain in the group as observants after their term ends.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>94</sup> For more details see the relevant webpage of the Commissioner for the protection of children's rights [here](#).

2.2. Civil society organisations active in the area of child protection. Please consider also including information on the role of religious institutions and groups active in the area of child protection.

Question	YES	NO	Comments
<p>2.2.1. Is there a registry of civil society organisations operating in the child protection area?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, briefly provide information on the legislative-regulatory framework and the responsible authority.</p>		√	
<p>2.2.2. Is there a legal obligation for the accrediting; licensing; registering; inspecting the activity of any type of civil society organisations, e. g. NGOs, charities, church organisations, etc. in the area of child protection?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, which is the responsible authority? How frequent are reviews and inspections?</p>		√	<p>There is no obligation in law for licensing or accrediting NGOs working with children. The Social Welfare Services conclude private agreements with NGOs working with children for services provided to children. Clean criminal records are required from people working with children, including people working in NGOs and volunteers. It is noted, however, that the only NGO consistently involved in child protection is Hope for Children which is an ongoing long-term partner of the Social Welfare Service. Hope for Children have their own specifications for hiring staff members, but these are not foreseen in any law or regulation. Beyond Hope for Children, there are few organisations operating in the field of child protection amongst their other fields of work and these concern mainly NGOs working with unaccompanied minors, where there are no standards or specifications. Occasionally the Social Services approach NGOs and professional organisations such as the teachers' unions asking them to provide recreational programs for unaccompanied minors, most of whom do not attend school, on a voluntary basis and without specifications or requirements.</p>
<p>2.2.3. Are there cooperation agreements/partnerships between government and the civil society at national or local level?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, What is the prevalence of this practice?</p> <p>Please provide <u>indicative examples</u> and information regarding the main areas covered, type of services</p>	√		<p>As a matter of standard practice, the Social Welfare Services contract out some of their competences to particular private organisations, mostly in the field of domestic violence, sexual abuse and for the operation of shelters for unaccompanied minors. In recent years the Social Welfare Services entered into protocols of cooperation with the following private sector organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Association for the Prevention and Treatment of Violence in the Family (SPAVO), for the operation of shelters and provision of additional support</li> </ul>



<p>targeted, and financial aspects of such partnerships (i.e. if done in view of accessing EU funds).</p>		<p>services to victims of domestic violence, under an agreement with the Social Welfare Services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Hope for Children" UNCRC Policy Center for the operation of a shelter for unaccompanied minors utilising EU funds and for the operation of a foster care program.</li> <li>- The Pancyprian Association of Foster Families "Nest of Love" for conducting awareness raising on foster care</li> <li>- The IOM for the operation of semi-independent living programmes for unaccompanied minors.<sup>95</sup></li> </ul>
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### 2.3. Inter-agency cooperation in the area of child protection

Question	YES	NO	Comments
<p>2.3.1. Is there <u>coordination between national, regional, or local authorities</u> in developing and implementing policies and legislation in the area of child protection?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, how is this done? Please comment on the strengths and weaknesses.</p> <p><u>For example</u>, is this cooperation – coordination regulated by the legislative framework? Does cooperation take place ad hoc, e.g. addressing specific issues and on specific thematic areas of interest or is it a key feature of the system?</p>	√		<p>Coordination between authorities is a key feature of the national child protection system. Case management is based on a multi-disciplinary approach, involving professionals from various fields and collaboration between agencies with different competencies. Cooperation between governmental non-governmental bodies is sometimes regulated by law or by inter-agency procedure manuals, cooperation protocols or ad hoc committees.<sup>96</sup></p> <p>Although the multi-agency cooperation is an indispensable feature of an effective multi-faceted child protection system, it render it is harder to identify the source of failures and the attribution of liability. This creates a climate of immunity amongst actors who escape responsibility for failures that have had serious consequences on victims' lives.</p>
<p>2.3.2. Is there inter-agency <u>cooperation between the relevant actors</u> having responsibility in the area of child protection (including civil society organisations)?</p>	√		<p>There is a standing inter-agency cooperation between bodies with competence in the field of child protection. Depending on the issue, the relevant department leads the committee.</p>

<sup>95</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>96</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<p>If <u>yes</u>, please mention <u>how this is done</u> (for examples are there standing inter-agency committees or meetings, are digital tools used?). Which actor has a leading role?</p>		<p>Within the framework of the Action Plan for the Restructuring of the Social Welfare Services,<sup>97</sup> both district multidisciplinary teams and a central multidisciplinary team were established, to ensure effective collaboration between the various competent agencies. The district committees deal with case management, whilst the central committee, staffed by senior managers, deals with broader policy issues and provides guidance deemed necessary in the work of the provincial committees.<sup>98</sup></p>
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2.3.3. What are the main challenges regarding effective cooperation and coordination? (For example, lack of clarity regarding responsibilities and roles of actors, overlaps of responsibilities, and communication between organisations is not adequately structured and resourced)?

Where there are established collaborations, predominantly in domestic violence and child abuse, these rely on structured cooperation that is adequately documented in legislation, manuals or other policy documents. Coordination problems arise in areas where there is no structured cooperation, no focal points and no adequately staffed central coordinator.

Question	YES	NO	Comments
<p>2.3.4. Are child protection authorities engaging in <u>transnational cooperation</u> in the area of child protection, for example with regards to missing children, parental abduction, or migrant children?</p>	v		<p>The Social Welfare Services collaborate with international organisations for the purpose of abductions, inter-country adoptions, family reunifications, etc.</p>

If yes, please briefly comment and include information on transnational agreements-protocols of cooperation as well as on the interaction between child protection authorities and other actors involved in transnational cooperation processes, for example law enforcement and judicial authorities, migration authorities, social services, Central Authorities under Brussels IIbis Regulation/Hague Convention, consular or diplomatic authorities. Are there any challenges relating to transnational cooperation? Are the challenges different for cross-border cases among EU countries or with third countries?

Please provide information on main relevant agreements – cooperation schemes in two of the following areas: missing children, parental abduction, inter-country adoption, migrant children (family tracing-family reunification –return-relocation).

Cyprus is a party to the following conventions:

- The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction of 1980;
- The Hague Convention on the Protection of Children of Migrants (Dublin Regulation);

<sup>97</sup> For more details on this plan, see the relevant webpage of the Deputy Ministry for Social Welfare, [here](#).

<sup>98</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

- Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Inter-country Adoption

The Social Welfare Services are partners of the International Social Service, through which they can receive or submit requests in the context of transfers of children to another state or parental abductions, including requests for tracing, investigating living conditions and informing about actions.<sup>99</sup>

#### 2.4. Developments in the past years: achievements, gaps, and challenges

Based on the output of the 2014 mapping exercise, please briefly describe the development of the child protection governance, coordination structures, and services in the past 8 years, incl. achievements and (persisting) gaps and challenges

The assignment of child protection services to non-governmental organisations increased in recent years, but in the absence of an evaluation it is impossible to conclude that this has increased the quality and efficiency of child protection services. Similarly, there is little publicly available statistical data on outcome indicators to enable an assessment of the effectiveness of the new and revised collaborative structures in place. Some areas of child protection remain outside the priorities of the state child protection system. The increased migration flows into Cyprus in recent years has created increased pressures on the welfare service system, to the effect that vulnerable third country children must seek protection and support from sources external to the state system, such as NGOs and projects funded by EU projects, by the Catholic Church or by UNHCR, while an increasing number of children inevitably fall through the cracks of the system, such as trafficked children whose chain of trafficking started from the Turkish controlled north and are not recognised as victims of trafficking.

#### 2.5. Promising practices

Please list and briefly describe any promising practice in governance, coordination structures, and services that you come across. (if available please include references to documents or URLs in case of online tools/mechanisms)

In 2017, for the purpose of implementing the national strategy for combating child sexual abuse and exploitation and child pornography, two bodies were set up by law:<sup>100</sup> an inter-ministerial committee and a council comprised of persons from the governmental and non-governmental sector. The president of the council is described in the law as a person of ‘recognised integrity and standing’ and is appointed by the President of the Republic; nine members of the Council are appointed by the Council of Ministers from a list of persons from the governmental and non-governmental sectors, drawn up by the inter-ministerial committee; three out of the nine members of the list are nominated by NGOs; and one member must represent the semi-governmental Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family. The mechanism created by this law, which took the name FONI, was mandated with strategic planning, the promotion, monitoring, evaluation and control of the implementation of the national strategy by the various agencies of the governmental or non-governmental sector; with promoting recommendations to the inter-ministerial committee for the adoption of legislative and other measures; for carrying out awareness campaigns; monitoring, funding, coordinating and evaluating all relevant prevention programmes, including in the governmental and non-governmental sector; developing the methodologies, guidelines and specifications for each prevention program; and

<sup>99</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>100</sup> Cyprus, The Implementation of the National Strategy for Combating Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation and Child Pornography Law of 2017 (*Ο περί της Εφαρμογής της Εθνικής Στρατηγικής για την Καταπολέμηση της Σεξουαλικής Κακοποίησης και Εκμετάλλευσης Παιδιών και της Παιδικής Πορνογραφίας Νόμος του 2017*)

developing and implementing training programmes for government and non-government sector officials and volunteers in relation to the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and child pornography.<sup>101</sup> FONI's website provides step-by step guidance to teachers and parents as well as awareness and on-line complaint link for the use of children.

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<sup>101</sup> For more details see the website of FONI [here](#).

### 3. Capacities (human and financial resources)

#### 3.1. Information on budget allocation and funding

Question	YES	NO	Comments
3.1.1. Is budget allocation on child protection incorporated into legislative and policy instruments?		✓	
3.1.2. Is the budget allocated to child protection (alternatively on children’s rights or on social welfare) clearly specified in the annual national budget? Please refer to the specific budget item allocated to this in 2022?		✓	
3.1.3. What percentage of the total state budget was allocated to child protection in the last five years? If data is not available, please provide information on the budget allocated to social protection/social welfare in general.			
<p>The identification of the proportion of Government spending allocated to children is not possible because expenses related to children’s rights are not under a single chapter but are instead spread across budgets of various Ministries/Departments, including the Ministries of Education, Health, Justice and Public Order, Social Welfare Services, Department of Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities and others. The budget classification is mainly done on the basis of economic analysis relying on the type of expenditure i.e. wages and salaries, goods and services, transfers etc. In 2018 the Ministry of Finance informed the UN Committee on the rights of the child that it is in the process of transforming the budget structure so as to present the budget in the form of ‘Objectives and Activities’, to the effect that ultimately each Ministry will be able to present its activities for children’s rights separately.<sup>102</sup> Although the implementation of the reform begun in 2016 and was expected to yield results by 2021, this did not happen until the end of 2022.<sup>103</sup> In its 2022 report the UN Committee on the rights of the child took note of the explanation of the Cypriot government regarding the difficulties and delays encountered in reforming its budget allocation on children’s rights and recommended that the government takes advantage of its new financial framework in order to integrate a child rights based approach to budgeting, clearly specifying the amount and proportion of the budget allocation to children’s rights and setting up a mechanism to evaluate the adequacy and efficacy of the distribution of resources.<sup>104</sup></p>			

<sup>102</sup> United Nations Committee on the rights of the child (2018), ‘[Combined fifth and sixth reports submitted by Cyprus under article 44 of the Convention](#)’, 7 May 2019.

<sup>103</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>104</sup> United Nations, Committee on the rights of the Child (2022), ‘[Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports on Cyprus](#)’, 24 June 2022.

There is no budget specifically allocated to social welfare and social inclusion. The Social Welfare Services were until June 2021 part of the Ministry of Labour and then became part of the newly established Deputy Ministry on Social Welfare. As of 2022 the Welfare Benefits Management Service operates with a mandate to pay several child related benefits, amongst other grants. No breakdown is available on expenditure relating specifically to social welfare/inclusion. The budget is not disaggregated by type of service provided but by type of the provider, e.g. cost of legal representation without specifying what the court case was about, office building expenses, cost of medical council that evaluates disability which could be for children or adults, in-house training for staff, digitalisation services, interpreters, guards for the office building, grants, compensation to victims of crime, purchase of office equipment, etc.<sup>105</sup>

In 2022 for the first time the government published a forecast budget for 2023 with details on the type of expenditure, however some amounts are still not child specific, e.g. there is one single amount earmarked for both the House of the Child and the House of the Woman; and separate amounts for: the operation of shelters accommodating children under the care of the Social Welfare Services, for the foster care program, for the grants given to private sector organisations for the implementation of projects etc. For the years 2022-2023 it is possible to identify budget lines that relate to children and add perform calculations in order to arrive at an estimate. At the time of writing, no annual reports had been published for the period 2014-2021.

Question	YES	NO	Comments
<p>3.1.4. Is the existing budget and funding of child protection services/institutions considered sufficient <u>and</u> sustainable (as compared to only project based for a limited period of time)?</p> <p><i>(Please consider available studies, reports at national level conducted by public or private institutions, child protection organisations, civil society, human rights institutions, academic community, and other sources such as the concluding observations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on country reports etc.)</i></p>	✓		<p>The 2019 UN report on Cyprus' implementation of the CRC described Cyprus' investment in children as substantial and wide-ranging, noting that despite the worldwide recession and its impact on the Cypriot economy, the levels of expenditure on children have been broadly maintained.<sup>106</sup></p> <p>In its 2022 report, the UN Committee on the CRC no longer states that the expenditure is sufficient. Instead it called on the government to allocate adequate resources towards combating child trafficking and violence against children, towards the implementation of the CRC, to hire more trained staff to work with children, to provide organisations working on children's rights with adequate resources, et al.<sup>107</sup></p>

<sup>105</sup>Cyprus, Ministry of Finance (2023), 'Explanatory note on the budget for the year 2023'(Επεξηγηματικό υπόμνημα για τον προϋπολογισμό του έτους 2023), p.319.

<sup>106</sup> United Nations Committee on the rights of the child (2018), 'Combined fifth and sixth reports submitted by Cyprus under article 44 of the Convention', 7 May 2019.

<sup>107</sup> United Nations, Committee on the rights of the Child (2022), 'Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports on Cyprus', 24 June 2022.

<p>3.1.5. Do EU funds play a substantial role in the funding of the national child protection system and/or related policies?</p> <p>Please provide information on the child protection areas and related services incl. providers that use EU funds (including what type of funds for which period of time).</p>	<p>√</p>		<p>EU funds play an important role in funding child protection measures. The Social Welfare Services run a number of co-funded projects in the field of child protection including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The "Baby's Dowry", a scheme of providing basic necessities for newborn children of vulnerable families. This scheme has a budget of €3.6 million and is co-funded by the government and by the EU under the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) from 2014 to 2020.<sup>108</sup></li> <li>- The two shelters for unaccompanied minors operating in Nicosia by the NGO Hope for Children;<sup>109</sup></li> <li>- The hiring of 50 social workers who are assigned tasks relating to asylum seekers' material reception conditions, other social issues and manage cases of unaccompanied minors.<sup>110</sup></li> </ul>
<p>3.1.6. Is corporate social responsibility developed at national level in relation to child protection services?</p> <p>If <u>yes</u>, please provide information on major child protection national programmes and actions that are primarily funded by the private sector or by public-private schemes/synergies.</p>		<p>√</p>	
<p>3.1.7. Has the involvement of the private sector in child protection recently significantly increased? Are there projects or programmes receiving governmental funding which outsource protection services for children? Please include civil society organisations and private companies contracted</p>	<p>√</p>		<p>The outsourcing to the private sector increased in recent years, as the workload that had to be performed exceeded the internal staff capacities of the Social Welfare Services. Following a general public sector trend to assign contracts to the private sector rather than hire additional personnel to perform the increased workload, in recent years the Social Welfare Services has assigned to the NGO Association for the Prevention and Treatment of Violence in the</p>

<sup>108</sup> Cyprus Profile (2020), '[Baby dowry scheme has helped over 1,200 families](#)', 11 February 2020.

<sup>109</sup> For more details, see the relevant webpage of Hope for Children [here](#).

<sup>110</sup> Letter from Social Welfare Services to FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<p>by government/local authorities to provide services.</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, please explain the changes and the reasons hereof. Please provide information on the legal provisions regulating this and on the main services / groups of children that are covered. Provide information based on indicative examples.</p>		<p>Family (SPAVO), the operation of shelters and provision of additional support services to victims of domestic violence; to the NGO Hope for Children the operation of shelters for unaccompanied minors; to the Pancyprian Association of Foster Families "Nest of Love" the operation of foster care awareness raising programs and to the IOM the operation of semi-independent living programmes for unaccompanied minors.<sup>111</sup></p>
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### 3.2. Information on human resources, qualification requirements, and training

Question	YES	NO	Comments
<p>3.2.1. Are the allocated human resources in the area of child protection at all levels sufficient? (services, institutions etc.)?</p> <p><i>(Please consider available studies, reports at national levels conducted by public or private institutions, child protection organisations, civil society, human rights institutions, academic community, and other sources such as concluding observations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on country reports etc.)</i></p>		<p>√</p>	<p>According to the NGO Hope for Children there is an insufficient number of case workers at the Social Welfare Services leading to delays that can have a significant negative impact on children’s lives. The report states that in cases of child abuse, the delays on the part of welfare officers in taking decisions invoking their workload, may ultimately result in severe failures for the child's future.<sup>112</sup></p> <p>The 2022 UNCRC report flagged the lack of legal representation for unaccompanied and separated children throughout the asylum procedure and the delays in processing their claims for international protection and family reunification, with the best interests of the child rarely being taken into account. The report additionally called on the government to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide all refugee, asylum-seeking and unaccompanied children with sustainable, open and high-quality accommodation and shelter with adequate living space, access to health care, psychosocial services, education and leisure and appropriately trained staff to work with children;</li> </ul>

<sup>111</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>112</sup> “Hope for Children” CRC Policy Center (2020), ‘Alternative Report by “Hope For Children” CRC Policy Center to the 85th session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the List of Issues for Cyprus’, 14 April 2020.



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Investigate reports of violence and prosecute and bring to justice the perpetrator;</li> <li>- Allocate adequate resources to the police anti-trafficking unit to effectively investigate and prosecute cases of trafficking of children and ensure appropriate convictions for perpetrators, including for official complicity, while reducing procedural delays;</li> <li>- Establish a hotline for victims of trafficking, allocate resources for its effective functioning, train staff to provide child-sensitive and child-friendly assistance and promote awareness among children on how to access it.<sup>113</sup></li> </ul> <p>The Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights also flagged the inadequate reception conditions of asylum seeking unaccompanied minors.<sup>114</sup></p>
<p>3.2.2. Are the allocated human resources competent in the area of child protection and appropriately trained?</p> <p><i>(Please consider available studies, reports at national levels conducted by public or private institutions, child protection organisations, civil society, human rights institutions, academic community, and other sources such as concluding observations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on country reports etc.)</i></p>	<p>v</p>	<p>The NGO Hope for Children reports that the Social Welfare officers who serve as case workers are not legally trained and are unable to follow up with the legal aspects of a case, despite efforts from the Social Welfare Services to equip them with basic legal training. Hope for Children raised concerns which had been voiced in previous years concerning the dual role of Social Welfare Services as both as guardian and officer of the state. The report described the Welfare Office as understaffed, which makes it even harder to fulfil their already demanding tasks, including the effective assessment of the best interest of the child. This is exacerbated by an apparent lack of communication among competent authorities and the lack of a child-based approach in favour of the rapidness in procedures. The combination of lack of specialization and of</p>

<sup>113</sup> United Nations, Committee on the rights of the Child (2022), [‘Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports on Cyprus’](#), 24 June 2022.

<sup>114</sup> Cyprus Child Commissioner (2022), [‘Commissioner’s Public Statement on the street stay of 30 unaccompanied children’](#) (Δημόσια Τοποθέτηση Επιτρόπου σχετικά με την παραμονή στο δρόμο 30 ασυνόδευτων παιδιών), 9 March 2022.

		<p>intercommunication has led to detrimental effects on the best interests’ assessment particularly as regards third country children. The report states that the best interests’ assessment is performed as a one-off assignment rather than as part of a long term comprehensive procedure that should accompany children from the lodging of their asylum application until the final determination of a durable solution affecting significantly the child’s future.</p> <p>The report located additional gaps in the practices related to age assessment and especially in the policy of immediately evicting children from the shelter and automatically interrupting the family reunification procedure, as soon as the age determination examination concludes that person is an adult. The report described the practices as fragmented and designed to serve the capacity needs of Cyprus as a host country rather than the best interest of the children concerned.<sup>115</sup></p>
<p>3.2.3. Is there a <u>compulsory certification or licencing</u> process for social workers and other professionals who work for child protection?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, briefly describe the process.</p>	<p>√</p>	<p>There is no compulsory certification or licensing process for social workers. The Social Welfare Services recruit persons on the basis of the terms of service announced with the vacancy. Most professionals including social workers, psychologists and sociologists can be registered in the professional registers of their profession but such membership is not necessarily or not always a prerequisite for recruitment.<sup>116</sup></p>
<p>3.2.4. Are there any <u>selection criteria</u> (for example qualification requirements) and <u>vetting procedures</u> for volunteers working with children in various areas?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, please describe briefly.</p>	<p>√</p>	<p>Different qualifications are required for different types of engagement with child rights. For volunteers working with children, the Social Welfare Services require a health certificate, a clean criminal record and a certificate that the person is not on the police registry of child sexual offenders.<sup>117</sup> The recruitment conditions depend on the post; generally speaking, for the position of a welfare officer, these will be a university degree in social work or psychology, both of which involve child-related training,</p>

<sup>115</sup> “Hope for Children” CRC Policy Center (2020), ‘Alternative Report by “Hope For Children” CRC Policy Center to the 85th session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the List of Issues for Cyprus’, 14 April 2020.

<sup>116</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>117</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

			although not necessarily any working experience. In-service training is provided by the Social Welfare Services to appointed Social Services Officers, but not on an on-going basis and not on all areas of child protection.
<p>3.2.5. Is there <u>regular training</u> on issues related to the identification, referral, and intervention for children delivered to specialists involved in this area?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, please include information on the training of law enforcement officials (judges, persecutors, police), health and education personnel (doctors, nurses, teachers, school counsellors).</p> <p>Please provide information on the mandatory nature of training, its frequency, funding, if it relates to specific needs of children, etc.</p>		v	<p>Police officers undergo a basic training prior to recruitment and follow up training on particular issues, however there is no regular training on matters pertaining to children’s referrals.</p> <p>The judicial academy offering non-compulsory monthly lectures to judges was only established in 2019 and the lecture topics differ each time. In 2022 two lectures were offered on children’s rights: on the newly adopted law establishing a system of juvenile justice and on children as vulnerable witnesses.<sup>118</sup></p> <p>At the beginning of each school year, teachers receive training on identification and referrals but only in the context of special education. Teachers are trained on identification and referrals beyond the context of special education only when there is a new protocol or law. The training is generally provided by the state pedagogical institute, although there are occasionally training opportunities offered by private institutions in collaboration with public services. Training on identification and referrals is also included in the pre-service training. Some teachers receive training as trainers for the European Manual of prevention at the Cyprus Addition Treatment Authority.<sup>119</sup></p> <p>Health professionals receive training from EASO on the use of medical examinations for the purpose of age determination, but the training is neither compulsory nor regular. UNHCR offered a training program for health professionals on FGM but it was also optional and not regular.<sup>120</sup></p>
<p>3.2.6. Are child rights and child protection topics included in the curriculum of studies for professionals other than social workers and psychologists</p>		v	<p>The Cyprus Bar Association is occasionally offering non-obligatory seminars on areas of law related to child protection. In the period 2017-2022, the seminars offered by the Cyprus Bar Association which included an angle on</p>

<sup>118</sup> For more information on the lecture topics, see the relevant webpage of the Supreme Court, [here](#).

<sup>119</sup> Letter from the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth to the FRANET contractor 17 March 2023.

<sup>120</sup> Telephone consultation with UNHCR, 17 March 2023.

<p>involved in child protection systems? (Please include information regarding law enforcement officials, judges, prosecutors, lawyers, health, and education personnel)</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, please describe briefly.</p>			<p>children’s rights were the following: representing minors,<sup>121</sup> child pornography,<sup>122</sup> bullying,<sup>123</sup> reform of family law,<sup>124</sup> evaluating the child’s best interests,<sup>125</sup> family law reform,<sup>126</sup> EU family law instruments,<sup>127</sup> cross-examining children,<sup>128</sup> integrated trauma-informed therapy for children victims of domestic violence,<sup>129</sup> joint custody of children after divorce.<sup>130</sup> Some of these seminars were part of a scheme of earning points in order to renew the bar association professional license.</p>
<p>3.2.7. Are there <u>joint training activities</u> involving professionals and personnel from various disciplines in place?</p> <p>Please provide some examples.</p>		<p>√</p>	
<p>3.2.8. Outline briefly the <u>main challenges and/ or gaps relating to human resources, qualification requirements and training</u> underlined the relevant authorities and/ or child protection civil society organisations.</p>	<p>In-service compulsory training reflects the policy priorities of the employer as well as the working conditions of trainees, as many of the professionals working in the field can barely get two days off yearly in order to attend trainings. Pre-service training is offered to many professionals which involves social work principles and fundamental rights but with little focus on children’s rights.</p>		

### 3.3. Developments in the past years: achievements, gaps, and challenges

The increased migration flows have generated pressures on the child protection system which the authorities have tried to partly alleviate by outsourcing some services to NGOs. There remain gaps related to delays, lack of communication, inadequate training of social workers and prevailing asylum policy priorities that impact on the quality and efficiency of child protection. The UN Committee on the rights of the child expressed concern over the extensive use of medical procedures for age assessment,

<sup>121</sup> For details see the relevant webpage of the Cyprus Bar Association [here](#).

<sup>122</sup> For details see the relevant webpage of the Cyprus Bar Association [here](#).

<sup>123</sup> For details see the relevant webpage of the Cyprus Bar Association [here](#).

<sup>124</sup> For details see the relevant webpage of the Cyprus Bar Association [here](#).

<sup>125</sup> For details see the relevant webpage of the Cyprus Bar Association [here](#).

<sup>126</sup> For details see the relevant webpage of the Cyprus Bar Association [here](#).

<sup>127</sup> For details see the relevant webpage of the Cyprus Bar Association [here](#).

<sup>128</sup> For details see the relevant webpage of the Cyprus Bar Association [here](#).

<sup>129</sup> For details see the relevant webpage of the Cyprus Bar Association [here](#).

<sup>130</sup> For details see the relevant webpage of the Cyprus Bar Association [here](#).

the lack of legal representation for unaccompanied and separated children throughout the asylum procedure and the delays in processing their applications for asylum and family reunification whilst the best interests of the child are rarely being taken into account; the substandard living conditions, especially in the Pournara and Kofinou reception camps, with insufficient access to health care, education and leisure, and the incidents of physical and sexual violence, which deteriorated with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic; the lack of early identification and referral to specialized services for children in situations of vulnerability and with specific needs; the exclusion of asylum-seeking children from access to child benefits and disability schemes and the five-year residence requirement for beneficiaries of international protection; the insufficient support for unaccompanied children transitioning into adulthood; and the lack of a migrant integration strategy and action plan including children.<sup>131</sup>

### 3.4. Promising practices

The Children’s House was established following the ratification of the Lanzarote Convention in order to provide a safe and efficient case management of sexual abuse and exploitation of children in a child friendly environment, based on European standards and the Icelandic “Barnahus” model. It brings together all relevant services under one roof, using a multidisciplinary and interagency approach and aiming to ensure that the safety and well-being of the child is aligned with the principle of the best interests of the child, the right of the child to be heard and receive information while avoiding undue delay. The operation of the Children’s House was assigned to the NGO Hope for Children under the supervision and in cooperation with the Social Welfare Services and it is one of the actions foreseen under the National Strategy and Action Plan to Combat the Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children and Children’s Pornography 2016-2019. The Children’s House is fully subsidised by government funds and operates with the direct involvement of the Police, the Social Welfare Services, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, based on a memorandum of understanding signed between Hope for Children and every partner to this project. The Children’s House follows an internal procedural protocol for the provision of services, which include the forensic interview, medical examinations, psychological evaluation, psychological support and therapy, social support and rehabilitation and family therapy and counselling. Appointed experts of the participating government agencies participate on an equal basis alongside the professionals of Hope for Children in a weekly multidisciplinary meeting, to discuss findings on referred cases and compile a plan for handling. Only the Police or the Social Welfare Services can refer cases to the Children’s House, following which a social worker conducts a needs assessment to compile the plan of support to be provided to the child and/or the family following a house visit when needed. Training is provided to all involved staff members on an ongoing basis during their engagement. As of 2019 the Children’s House is connected with the Court through a teleconferencing system which enables children to testify to court in cases of sexual abuse and exploitation while being in the Children’s House.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> United Nations, Committee on the rights of the Child (2022), ‘[Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports on Cyprus](#)’, 24 June 2022.

<sup>132</sup> “Hope for Children” CRC Policy Center (2020), ‘Alternative Report by “Hope For Children” CRC Policy Center to the 85th session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the List of Issues for Cyprus’, 14 April 2020.

## 4. Care

### 4.1. Prevention measures and services

#### 4.1.1. Please provide information on the interaction between the child protection system and the social welfare and social protection system in place. Is there an inherent coordination of measures and interventions? Are responsible authorities and service providers the same or different?

The child protection system and the social welfare and social protection system fall under the competency of the Social Welfare Services as the main coordinating authority. The police also has child protection competencies but this is subject to a duty to inform the Social Welfare Services and refer vulnerable victims. The Social Welfare Services are not the sole service providers in the field; some of the policy areas are served by the multi-disciplinary groups which were especially set up, such as [Foni](#) in the case of child sexual abuse and [the Advisory Committee on the Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence](#) who are implementing national strategies; and some services are outsourced to private organisations such as [Hope for Children](#) and [SPAVO](#) who work under the supervision of the Social Welfare Services.

#### 4.1.2. Is there evidence that families are supported in their role of primary caregivers? Is the primary position of families in child caregiving and protection recognised and supported through universal and targeted services and through every stage of the intervention, particularly through prevention? Which type of support (incl. financial, medical, psycho/social advice, legal advice, care staff, care equipment, guidance and training etc.) is available to families in need.

The Social Welfare Services have a declared policy of supporting and empowering families, through counselling services, referrals to other governmental and non-governmental services and sources of support in the community. In the course of their prevention activities, the Social Welfare Services aim at safeguarding the smooth functioning of the family through early psychosocial intervention in dysfunctional families.<sup>133</sup> Financial grants are available for families at risk of poverty, but they are subject to eligibility criteria that include lawful residence for five years.<sup>134</sup> Psycho-social advice is made available either from the staff members of the Social Welfare Services or through referrals to professionals of agencies either of the public or the private sector.

#### 4.1.3. When a child in need of care is identified, who coordinates support to the family and the child to ensure protection and prevent abuse and/ or placement of the child and how?

The Social Welfare Services are the central authority for determining and coordinating protection measures for the child. The needs of the children and capacities of parents to respond are assessed and counselling, social support and referrals to other professionals are decided, following a multidisciplinary cooperation approach. Where necessary, day care for children in child care programs, foster care or state child welfare institutions will be organised or in-home care will be provided to improve family living conditions.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>134</sup> For more details on eligibility to benefits, please see the relevant webpage of the Deputy Ministry for Social Welfare, [here](#).

<sup>135</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

#### 4.1.4. What are the crisis emergency responses in place?

There are Social Services Officers of the Social Welfare Service on call 24/7 in each city who can be contacted by the police in emergency cases and who will ensure the prompt intervention of all other competent services. When a complaint is submitted to the police about children at risk or affected by crime, the police will contact the welfare officer in charge to attend to the child's needs and coordinate the involvement of other services, if necessary. The on-call officer will escort the child to the hospital for medical care and will inform the parents unless there is reasonable suspicion that the parents might be implicated in the offence.<sup>136</sup>

#### 4.2. Identification and reporting procedures

Question	Yes	No	Comments
<p>4.2.1. Is there an identification/reporting obligation foreseen in the legislation?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, please provide the relevant provisions and indicate authorities and/or individuals that have identification/reporting obligations.</p>	v		<p>There is no explicit duty of identification. Various documents offer guidelines for identification but do not create liability or other consequences in case of non-identification. Failure to identify an apparent situation of child abuse may be construed as covert refusal to report it, which is an offence.</p> <p>The family counsellors of the Social Welfare Services have a duty to report to the police incidents that may amount to offences, alongside other competences bestowed on them by the domestic violence law.<sup>137</sup> The legislative framework provides a duty for all persons to report incidents of domestic violence against children, child sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation and child pornography as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Failure of any person to report domestic violence against a child that comes to that person's knowledge is an offence that carries a sentence of up to two years' imprisonment or/and a fine.<sup>138</sup></li> <li>- The law on child sexual abuse also criminalises the failure to report a situation of a child being affected by sexual abuse, child exploitation or child</li> </ul>

<sup>136</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>137</sup> Cyprus, The Family Violence (Prevention and Protection of Victims) Act 2000 [*Ο περί Βίας στην Οικογένεια (Πρόληψη και Προστασία Θυμάτων) Νόμος του 2000*].

<sup>138</sup> Cyprus, The Family Violence (Prevention and Protection of Victims) Act 2000 [*Ο περί Βίας στην Οικογένεια (Πρόληψη και Προστασία Θυμάτων) Νόμος του 2000*], article 35A.

		<p>pornography. The sentence foreseen is maximum 15 years' imprisonment or/and a fine of up to €20,000.<sup>139</sup></p> <p>The above provisions affect all persons irrespective of their professional capacity. In the case of child sexual abuse, exploitation or pornography, if the person who fails to report an incident or fails to promote a report being filed is a teacher, an officer of the Social Welfare Services, a practising lawyer, a police officer, a health professional or a professional of other related discipline, their failure to report is seen as aggravating and the court will take it into consideration when measuring the sentence to be imposed. Professionals who fail to report child sexual abuse cannot invoke the oath of confidentiality of their profession in their defence.<sup>140</sup> By virtue of an opinion of the Attorney General issued in 2009, health professionals are required to lift medical and professional confidentiality in cases of child abuse and inform in writing the Social Welfare Services within office hours, or the police outside office hours who will call the duty officer of the Social Welfare Services.<sup>141</sup></p>
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4.2.2. Please describe available national and/or sub-national reporting procedures for cases of abuse, exploitation, violence, harassment, discrimination, or neglect against children in all available reporting mechanisms, including, helplines and hotlines. Include the legislative and regulatory framework, actors involved (e.g. police, child protection centres, victims support organisations), and timeframe.

Please provide details such as if there a common or different procedures or helplines/hotlines for specific issues. What is the profession of the staff receiving the reporting? Is the staff competent and trained for the purpose?

By a circular of the Attorney General issued in 1998, all social welfare officers, police officers, teachers, and health professionals who receive information or a complaint of domestic violence, must report it

<sup>139</sup> Cyprus, The Prevention and Combating of Sexual Abuse, Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography Law 2014 (*Ο περί της Πρόληψης και της Καταπολέμησης της Σεξουαλικής Κακοποίησης, της Σεξουαλικής Εκμετάλλευσης Παιδιών και της Παιδικής Πορνογραφίας Νόμος του 2014*), article 30.

<sup>140</sup> Cyprus, The Prevention and Combating of Sexual Abuse, Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography Law 2014 (*Ο περί της Πρόληψης και της Καταπολέμησης της Σεξουαλικής Κακοποίησης, της Σεξουαλικής Εκμετάλλευσης Παιδιών και της Παιδικής Πορνογραφίας Νόμος του 2014*), article 30.

<sup>141</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (2017), Manual of inter-departmental procedures for handling incidents of domestic violence against children (*Εγχειρίδιο διατμηματικών διαδικασιών για τη διαχείριση περιστατικών βίας στην οικογένεια για παιδιά*).



in writing to the Attorney General within seven days. A prosecutor is on call 24/7 to receive such reports, whose mobile phone number is known to the police and to all other competent authorities.<sup>142</sup>

All Social Services Officers of the Social Welfare Services may serve as family counsellors receiving, recording and referring complaints regarding violence against children. For incidents outside working hours, the police must inform the family counsellors, who receive the complaint, record it in a special template and assess whether the child is in imminent danger in which case the family counsellors must inform their supervisors, provide emotional support to the child, file a report to the police, contact other professionals for a better evaluation of the incident, escort the child to the hospital for medical examination and attend the medical examination if this is in the child's interests, inform and collaborate with the family, pursue an interview with the child in the absence of other family members, escort the child to the police to file a complaint and be present during the videotaped interview and escort the child to the court. The family counsellor calls a meeting of the multi-thematic team, which evaluates the incident and determines the most suitable the care and protection measures. The manual clarifies that all incidents of sexual domestic violence must be referred to the Children's House.<sup>143</sup>

With regard to child abuse, whether domestic or not, according to the guidelines offered by the multi-thematic group Foni, teachers locating signs that a child was abused or is at risk of abuse are under a duty to report it to the school principal, without prejudice to the duty of all persons to report the incident to the police. The school principal informs the school's educational psychologist and files an anonymised report to the police, ensuring protection of personal data in the means of transmission of the complaint. The school is also obliged to inform the local Social Welfare Services and the child's family, provided that the suspect is not a family member. The teacher must not investigate the incident and no other person must take testimony from the child.<sup>144</sup>

When a complaint is filed at a helpline, the operator contacts the competent authority, depending on the nature of the complaint:<sup>145</sup>

- Helpline 1466 is operated by the NGO Hope for children and provides support to children facing any type of abuse and neglect.
- Helpline 1440 is operated by the NGO Association for the Prevention and Handling of Domestic Violence, also known as SPAVO, and provides information and support to victims of domestic violence.
- The European helpline 116000 addresses exclusively cases of disappeared children.
- The European helpline for children and teenagers 116111 provides support on any subject including abuse, domestic violence, anxiety, bullying, depression, body image, gender and sexuality, sexual abuse, self-harm, suicide, substance use, trauma and PTSD.
- Helpline 1460 is operated by the police for all citizens and on all matters.

Children can report abuse to any of the above helplines or to a teacher, to the police, to a health professional or a family member. According to the basic principles published by FONI, the specially designated multi-thematic council for the implementation of the national strategy on the prevention

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<sup>142</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (2017), Manual of inter-departmental procedures for handling incidents of domestic violence against children ([Εγχειρίδιο διατμηματικών διαδικασιών για τη διαχείριση περιστατικών βίας στην οικογένεια για παιδιά](#)).

<sup>143</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (2017), Manual of inter-departmental procedures for handling incidents of domestic violence against children ([Εγχειρίδιο διατμηματικών διαδικασιών για τη διαχείριση περιστατικών βίας στην οικογένεια για παιδιά](#)).

<sup>144</sup> Please see the relevant webpage of Foni, [here](#).

<sup>145</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Office to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

of child abuse, regarding the handling of a revelation of abuse, the teacher or parent or other adult at the receiving end must create circumstances of trust and privacy, listen to the child attentively and non-judgmentally, assure the child of having acted correctly and inform the child about the next steps. Following the active hearing with the child, the next step is to inform the police who will launch the investigation procedure and at the same time inform Social Services. The Social Services or the police will then refer the case to the Children’s House, which offers a child-friendly and safe environment with specially designed areas, staffed with professionals with child related expertise. At the Children’s House, social workers welcome the beneficiaries, explain the procedures and remain by the side of the child throughout the entire process. Specially trained members of the police in plain clothes conduct the forensic interview and explain the process of the audio-visual testimony. If necessary, doctors examine children in the child-friendly clinic on the premises of the Children’s House and psychologists are available to listen to and support the child and the family in specially designed treatment rooms equipped with toys, books and other creative materials to aid expression.<sup>146</sup>

Question	Yes	No	Comments
<p>4.2.3. Do children have the right to report independently?</p> <p>If <u>yes</u>, please provide information on the availability of <u>age-appropriate and child-friendly</u> reporting procedures (to whom and how children can report child rights’ violations and abuse). Is the anonymity and confidentiality of the child in the reporting protected? Please comment briefly.</p>	v		<p>Children can file complaints at any authority, including the Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights, the Social Welfare Services, their social welfare officer if they have one appointed for them or their teachers. For children residing in state institutions, there is a complaints box in each institution where children can place their complaint. Children can also file a complaint to the UN Committee on the rights of the child under the Optional Protocol to the CRC.</p> <p>The domestic violence law criminalises the disclosure of the identity of the victim or other information that may lead to the identification of the victim. The same law criminalises the use of testimonies delivered by witnesses or victims for the purposes of the criminal trial: the delivery, receipt or publication of any visualized statement of a victim or witness taken by any person; any statement of a victim or witness to a violent crime to or from any person not connected with the investigation, prosecution or trial of the case. During trial of a domestic violence offence, a person giving an audio-visual statement or an accused person who pleaded not guilty, is entitled to a copy of the transcribed and audio taped statement which can be adduced as evidence before the Court. Upon their written request to the prosecution, accused persons may be allowed to view the audio-visual tape on which the statement was recorded. Infringement of this provision is punishable with imprisonment for up</p>

<sup>146</sup> The process is set out in an interactive step-by-step guide in the website of FONI, [here](#).

		<p>to five years and/or with fine of up to CY€3,000 (€5,125).<sup>147</sup></p> <p>The law on child sexual abuse, exploitation and pornography requires the Attorney General and the prosecution authorities to take measures to protect the identity of child victims and child witnesses and to prevent the pollicisation of information that may lead to the identity of the child.<sup>148</sup></p> <p>The code of conduct of the Journalists Union prohibits the publication of the identity of victims of sexual crimes and of children under 16 who are plaintiffs, witnesses or accused in cases of sexual offences.<sup>149</sup></p>
4.2.4. Are children informed of their right to report and how they can do it? If yes, by whom and how?	v	<p>There is no systematic awareness policy on the right to report. The Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights regularly conducts awareness activities on children’s rights including the right to complain. The awareness material produced by the office of the child commissioner is invariably in a child-friendly format.<sup>150</sup> The Welfare Services inform children with whom they are in contact, including for the purpose of advisory guidance and the children under the care of the Social Welfare Services of the right and the avenues to complain.<sup>151</sup> Children are informed about the possibility to report abuse either through the general awareness campaigns or from the professional with whom either the children themselves or their guardians come into contact with – the teacher, the social worker, the health professional, the police. This communication is oral and there are no specific guidelines in place to render it child-friendly. FONI’s website offers written content targeting children, explaining what sexual abuse is and what to do when they are</p>

<sup>147</sup> Cyprus, The Family Violence (Prevention and Protection of Victims) Act 2000 [*Ο περί Βίας στην Οικογένεια (Πρόληψη και Προστασία Θυμάτων) Νόμος του 2000*], articles 34-35.

<sup>148</sup> Cyprus, The Prevention and Combating of Sexual Abuse, Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography Law 2014 [*Ο περί της Πρόληψης και της Καταπολέμησης της Σεξουαλικής Κακοποίησης, της Σεξουαλικής Εκμετάλλευσης Παιδιών και της Παιδικής Πορνογραφίας Νόμος του 2014*], articles 38(2)(a) and 43(2)(b).

<sup>149</sup> Cyprus, Journalists Union, Code of Conduct (*Κώδικας Δημοσιογραφικής Δεοντολογίας*), article 10.

<sup>150</sup> See for example the awareness material posted on the webpage of the Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights [here](#).

<sup>151</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor 20 March 2023.

		<p>confronted with it. The text however targets teenagers and is not in a particularly child-friendly language, although arguably suitable for teenagers.<sup>152</sup></p> <p>In addition to the in-service training offered to front line professionals, there is a step-by-step guidance offered on line by FONI, the council established in order to implement the national strategy on preventing child abuse.<sup>153</sup> Information about filing reports is offered orally by the NGOs Hope for Children and SPAVO.</p>
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**4.2.5. What are the main challenges and/or gaps relating to identification and reporting procedures underlined by relevant authorities and/or child protection civil society organisations?**

The UN Committee on the rights of the child referred to underreporting and a lack of coordination between competent authorities, which does not allow for proper data collection that would lead to an accurate assessment of the magnitude of the problem. The report pointed out that more awareness-raising is needed to encourage reporting, more accessible, confidential and child-friendly helplines for children and better access to legal aid. The report expressed concern over the absence of a comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, strategy and action plan that would encourage reporting of cases of discrimination and racism against children in situations of vulnerability, including bullying in school.<sup>154</sup> The Pancyprian Alliance for Disability reported that there is no adequate mechanism to encourage reporting by children with disability, including children in institutional care.<sup>155</sup> The Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights noted that the pandemic-related measures negatively affected the capacity of the authorities to provide adequate protection to asylum seeking children confined in camps, whose closure following the outbreak of the pandemic undermined the reporting of incidents of violence against them.<sup>156</sup> The Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights reported that the authorities did not pay sufficient attention to how the pandemic affected children’s mental health and the system of referrals to the mental health services deteriorated and became slower.<sup>157</sup>

<sup>152</sup> For more details see the relevant webpage of FONI [here](#).

<sup>153</sup> See the webpage of FONI [here](#).

<sup>154</sup> United Nations, Committee on the rights of the Child (2022), ‘[Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports on Cyprus](#)’, 24 June 2022.

<sup>155</sup> Pancyprian Alliance for Disability (2019), ‘[Submission of the Pancyprian Alliance for disability to the Committee on the rights of the child on the implementation of the Convention on the rights of the child with focus on children with disabilities](#)’, 1 July 2019.

<sup>156</sup> Cyprus, Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights (2020), Annual report 2020 ([Ετήσια έκθεση 2020](#)).

<sup>157</sup> Cyprus, Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights (2020), Annual report 2020 ([Ετήσια έκθεση 2020](#)).

### 4.3. Referral procedures(s) and investigation and protection

#### 4.3.1. Please describe the referral mechanisms in place following reporting and identification procedures.

**In the answer please include the legislative and regulatory framework, interagency protocols and guidelines, the actors involved and their role and responsibilities, as well as the applicable timeline. Please also specify the procedure, if different, for other groups of children (e.g. with disabilities, migrant, victim of a particular form of violence etc.)**

The referral, investigation and protection procedures are the same for all categories of children. Inter-agency referrals are performed only if they are deemed necessary. The main authority responsible for investigation and assessment of the situation of the children and their families is the Social Welfare Services, who decide whether referral to other services, including the mental health services, is needed. The role of each agency is specified in the manuals and protocols for collaboration, where these are available and in the relevant legislation, if such exists in the relevant area.<sup>158</sup> Reports can be made by the victims themselves or by persons who became aware of the incident to the police or the Social Welfare Services or the Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights. There are always Social Services Officers on call around the clock and if a report is filed outside government working hours, the police is under a duty to contact the Social Welfare Officer on call to provide services to the child. The social welfare officer will decide if a referral to another service is needed, including medical attention and will escort the child to the agencies referred to. The police will file a report on the incident to the Attorney General who then instructs the police on whether or not to prosecute the offender. The Attorney General’s office also has a legal officer on call around the clock in order to advise other governmental agencies how to deal with particular incidents especially where domestic violence is involved.<sup>159</sup>

Question	Yes	No	Comments
4.3.2. Are there applicable standards in the form of legal provisions, guidelines, protocols, interagency agreements or regulatory frameworks regarding investigation and assessment procedures following reporting and identification procedures?	✓		<p>The domestic violence law provides that the family counsellor can refer a complainant for medical examinations, file complaints to the police, refer a child to medical or other examinations where there is reasonable cause to suspect domestic abuse, refer children for whom there is reasonable suspicion that they have been abused to a psychologist or a psychiatrist, seek help from another state officer or the police, seek the opinion and advice of the multi-thematic team for domestic violence.<sup>160</sup></p> <p>The anti-trafficking law provides that the competent authorities take all the necessary measures for the support of the child victim of</p>

<sup>158</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>159</sup> United Nations, Committee on the rights of the Child (2022), ‘[Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports on Cyprus](#)’, 24 June 2022.

<sup>160</sup> Cyprus, The Family Violence (Prevention and Protection of Victims) Act 2000 [*Ο περί Βίας στην Οικογένεια (Πρόληψη και Προστασία Θυμάτων) Νόμος του 2000*], art. 6.

		<p>trafficking following an individual assessment of the child’s personal condition and opinion depending on age and evolving capacity. If the Social Welfare Services verify that the victim’s parents or guardians do not safeguard the child’s interests and cannot represent the child due to conflict of interest, then they must take measures for a commissioner to be appointed. In the case of victims who are unaccompanied minors, the director of the Social Welfare Services as the minor’s guardian acts in collaboration with the Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights.<sup>161</sup></p> <p>The Children’s law grants to the Social Welfare Services the right to receive a child below 16 under their care if it appears to them that the child does not have a parent or a guardian, or is abandoned or lost or the parents or guardians are temporarily or permanently prevented from providing for the child’s proper accommodation, maintenance or upbringing and there is no available person capable and willing to undertake the care of the child.<sup>162</sup> This rather obsolete provision is very rarely used except in the case of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum who are automatically deemed to be under the guardianship of the Social Welfare Services.</p> <p>The step-by-step procedure to be followed in the case of domestic violence is recorded in the inter-departmental manual compiled by the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance in collaboration with the multi-agency Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family.<sup>163</sup></p> <p>In 2017 the Ministry of Education compiled a teacher’s manual for handling child sexual abuse</p>
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<sup>161</sup> Cyprus, The Prevention and Combating of Trafficking and Exploitation of Persons and Protection of Victims Law of 2014 (*Ο περί της Πρόληψης και της Καταπολέμησης της Εμπορίας και Εκμετάλλευσης Προσώπων και της Προστασίας των Θυμάτων Νόμος του 2014*) N. 60(I)/2014, article 41, 49, 50.

<sup>162</sup> Cyprus, Law on children (*Ο περί Παιδίων Νόμος*) Cap. 352.

<sup>163</sup> Cyprus, Advisory Committee on the prevention and combating of domestic violence (2017), ‘Manual of interdepartmental procedures for domestic violence for children’ (*Εγχειρίδιο διατμηματικών διαδικασιών για το χειρισμό περιστατικών βίας στην οικογένεια για παιδιά*).

			which includes guidance on how to identify abuse and steps on reporting the incident. <sup>164</sup>
4.3.3. Is the assessment carried out by a multidisciplinary team of professionals?	✓		<p>Where the Social Welfare Services deem that a multidisciplinary assessment is needed, they will convene the multidisciplinary team to assess the incident. Cases of child sexual abuse are referred to the Children’s House where a multi-disciplinary team is on call to evaluate the case and decide on the course to be taken. For other cases the social welfare officer may collect information from other professionals involved with the child, including the teacher, the psychologist and the health professional and may seek to assess the family situation.</p> <p>The law transposing the Victims Directive defines the competencies of the Police and of the Social Welfare Services.<sup>165</sup></p>
4.3.4. Please provide information on who is responsible to investigate and assess the situation of the child and the family and how this is done. Please provide information and describe the role and responsibilities of judicial authorities in the reporting and referral procedure.			
<p>The central authority in charge of the investigation is the Social Welfare Services, who assign the task to one of its family counsellors. This officer will carry out the interviews with both the child and the child’s family, where this is deemed necessary. The interview with the child must be conducted with two family counsellors present or one family counsellor and one police officer. If the child is deemed to be in immediate danger, the family counsellor will inform the police who may apply to the Attorney General’s office for an order to remove either the child or the offender from the family home. Children removed from their homes are placed either with an extended family member, a foster family or at one of the designated state child protection institutions. The judicial authorities are involved only if a court order is to be sought or if a criminal case will be launched.</p>			
Question	Yes	No	Comments
4.3.5. Are the roles and responsibilities of the various actors and	✓		The domestic violence law sets out in detail the role and duties of the family counsellor, <sup>166</sup> the

<sup>164</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth, Pedagogical Institute (2017), Teacher’s manual for recognising and handling incidents of child sexual abuse (*Εγχειρίδιο εκπαιδευτικού για αναγνώριση και διαχείριση περιστατικών σεξουαλικής κακοποίησης παιδιών*).

<sup>165</sup> Cyprus, Law on the Establishment of Minimum Standards on the Rights, Support and Protection of Victims of Crime of 2016 (*Ο περί της Θέσπισης Ελάχιστων Προτύπων σχετικά με τα Δικαιώματα, την Υποστήριξη και την Προστασία Θυμάτων της Εγκληματικότητας Νόμος του 2016*) Ν. 52(Ι)/2016.

<sup>166</sup> Cyprus, The Family Violence (Prevention and Protection of Victims) Act 2000 [*Ο περί Βίας στην Οικογένεια (Πρόληψη και Προστασία Θυμάτων) Νόμος του 2000*], article 6.

<p>professionals involved in these procedures (including civil society organisations) clearly stated in the legislative and regulatory framework?</p>		<p>multi-disciplinary committee <sup>167</sup> and the court. The manual on inter-departmental procedures provides step-by-step guidance on the procedures of report, referral, investigation and provision of services, including the role and competencies of each agency.<sup>168</sup></p> <p>The law transposing the Victims Directive also defines the competencies of the Police and of the Social Welfare Services.<sup>169</sup></p> <p>The anti-trafficking law sets out a referral mechanism in which the central role is assigned to the Social Welfare Services whose role and duties are clearly defined. In addition the law establishes an identification mechanism where the duties of the police are spelled out. The law provides that the Social Welfare Services will set up shelters and may assign their operation to NGOs or to local governance bodies on the basis of a cooperation protocol or an assignment agreement.<sup>170</sup></p> <p>The law on the implementation of the national strategy on child sexual abuse describes in detail the establishment of the multi-disciplinary council and sets out its competencies and duties.<sup>171</sup></p>
<p>4.3.6. Are there any inter-agency cooperation protocols and agreements in place to strengthen cooperation between actors with responsibility in the</p>	<p>✓</p>	<p>A referral protocol is in place as regards domestic violence, defining the cooperation between the actors involved in the procedure.<sup>172</sup> In the areas of trafficking and child sexual abuse, inter-agency cooperation is described in the respective legislation. The handling of incidents in other</p>

<sup>167</sup> Cyprus, The Family Violence (Prevention and Protection of Victims) Act 2000 [*Ο περί Βίας στην Οικογένεια (Πρόληψη και Προστασία Θυμάτων) Νόμος του 2000*], article 8.

<sup>168</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (2017), Manual of inter-departmental procedures for handling incidents of domestic violence against children ([Εγχειρίδιο διατμηματικών διαδικασιών για τη διαχείριση περιστατικών βίας στην οικογένεια για παιδιά](#)).

<sup>169</sup> Cyprus, Law on the Establishment of Minimum Standards on the Rights, Support and Protection of Victims of Crime of 2016 (*Ο περί της Θέσπισης Ελάχιστων Προτύπων σχετικά με τα Δικαιώματα, την Υποστήριξη και την Προστασία Θυμάτων της Εγκληματικότητας Νόμος του 2016*) N. 52(I)/2016.

<sup>170</sup> Cyprus, The Prevention and Combating of Trafficking and Exploitation of Persons and Protection of Victims Law of 2014 (*Ο περί της Πρόληψης και της Καταπολέμησης της Εμπορίας και Εκμετάλλευσης Προσώπων και της Προστασίας των Θυμάτων Νόμος του 2014*) N. 60(I)/2014.

<sup>171</sup> Cyprus, The Implementation of the National Strategy for Combating Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation and Child Pornography Law of 2017 (*Ο περί της Εφαρμογής της Εθνικής Στρατηγικής για την Καταπολέμηση της Σεξουαλικής Κακοποίησης και Εκμετάλλευσης Παιδιών και της Παιδικής Πορνογραφίας Νόμος του 2017*)

<sup>172</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (2017), Manual of inter-departmental procedures for handling incidents of domestic violence against children ([Εγχειρίδιο διατμηματικών διαδικασιών για τη διαχείριση περιστατικών βίας στην οικογένεια για παιδιά](#)).



referral procedure and enhance the efficiency of their actions?			categories is not defined in protocols but follows to a large extent the procedure defined in the field of domestic violence.
4.3.7. Is it likely that procedures will differ, depending on the migration – residential status of the child concerned? <i>Please also consider potential divergences depending on main actors involved.</i>		√	There is no special protocol in place to define the procedures to be followed where the children are migrants or asylum seekers or with another residential status. Although legally speaking services are provided to children regardless of their residential status, based on the procedures and protocols concerning all children residing in Cyprus, the confinement of asylum seeking children in camps and in shelters have led to several cases of children not attending school and access to healthcare has been cumbersome, whilst protection and the safeguarding of rights were not prioritised. <sup>173</sup>
4.3.8. Are affected children heard as part of the procedures?  <i>If yes, are the hearings child-sensitive and designed age-appropriately and in child-friendly language? Do children receive information and support by competent and trained professionals?</i>		√	The family counsellors handling an incident hold interviews with the affected children, during which children of all ages can express their views. These are informal interviews and no particular rules apply. If the interviewing officer decides that the child is mature enough to speak, then the child will be heard. There are no guidelines or benchmarks to guide the decision of the officer on the interviewed child’s level of maturity.  There is no guarantee that their views will be taken on board, because there are no guidelines on how the best interests’ determination is carried out. <sup>174</sup> The family counsellors performing the interviews are trained and provide information in a child-friendly manner, however there are no procedures in place for the children to be empowered to self-advocate.
4.3.9. Are there mental health support services available for affected children?  <i>If yes, how are services working together? How is it ensured that the child is informed and can make use of these services?</i>		√	The family counsellor handling the case may refer the affected child to the public mental health services and/ or may invite mental health professionals to participate in a multi-disciplinary committee to determine the course of action to be followed.

<sup>173</sup> Cyprus Child Commissioner (2022), ‘*Commissioner’s Public Statement on the street stay of 30 unaccompanied children*’ (Δημόσια Τοποθέτηση Επιτρόπου σχετικά με την παραμονή στο δρόμο 30 ασυνόδευτων παιδιών), 9 March 2022.

<sup>174</sup> “Hope for Children” CRC Policy Center (2020), ‘Alternative Report by “Hope For Children” CRC Policy Center to the 85th session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the List of Issues for Cyprus’, 14 April 2020.

4.3.10. What are the main challenges and gaps in the referral and investigation highlighted by relevant authorities, child protection, and civil society organisations? Briefly describe.

The UN Committee on the rights of the child flagged the referral to specialized services for vulnerable children as a main issue of concern, pointing out that there is no formal or comprehensive procedure for identifying, assessing, addressing and following up the specific needs of asylum-seeking children, with the aim of providing durable solutions. There are no mechanisms and no adequate professional training to ensure the early identification, assessment and referral of victims of human trafficking, with particular attention given to unaccompanied children, children of migrant, Roma and asylum-seeking parents and other children in vulnerable situations. The Committee stated that the resources allocated and the training provided is inadequate to ensure child-sensitive and child-friendly assistance and no measures were adopted to promote awareness among children on how to access it.<sup>175</sup>

The NGO Hope for Children criticised the fact that, under the current legal framework, parental consent of both parents is required for the provision of services to children that are in their best interests, a problem which the NGO repeatedly raised in Parliament. For children below the age of 14, where the Family Counsellor determines that the service is in the child's interests, then the child should be provided with the service regardless of parental consent; children aged 14+ one parent's consent should be required or the children should be permitted to make their own decisions on whether to receive the services deemed to be in their best interests.<sup>176</sup>

The CRPD Committee flagged the fact that the views of children with disabilities are insufficiently respected in matters concerning children and recommends that the State party, in collaboration with representative organizations of children with disabilities, adopt regulations and programmes to ensure that children with disabilities can express their views on all matters affecting them and that their views are fully respected.<sup>177</sup> The Pancyprian Alliance for Disability criticised the absence of representation for children with disabilities, who are represented absolutely and exclusively by their parents, guardians or other adults. The Alliance recommended that the state provides to children with disabilities support in decision-making including equipping them and enabling them to use suitable modes of communication and adequate support for self-advocacy. The Alliance noted that services to protect and support children with disabilities who were exposed to violence are not adequately accessible as they are not adjusted to the needs of children with disabilities.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> United Nations, Committee on the rights of the Child (2022), '[Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports on Cyprus](#)', 24 June 2022.

<sup>176</sup> "Hope for Children" CRC Policy Center (2020), 'Alternative Report by "Hope For Children" CRC Policy Center to the 85th session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the List of Issues for Cyprus', 14 April 2020.

<sup>177</sup> UN Committee on the rights of persons with disabilities (2017), '[Concluding Observations published by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Cyprus](#)'

<sup>178</sup> Pancyprian Alliance for Disability (2019), '[Submission of the Pancyprian Alliance for disability to the Committee on the rights of the child on the implementation of the Convention on the rights of the child with focus on children with disabilities](#)', 1 July 2019.

#### 4.4. Placement decisions – care orders

##### 4.4.1. Following the investigation and assessment of the child’s situation, who is responsible to decide upon issuing a care order/decision and the placement of the child in alternative care?

Care orders and placement of children in alternative care are decided by the court, upon application from the Social Welfare Services. A provision in the Children’s Law to the effect that the Director of the Social Welfare Services decides to take a child under his care without a court order<sup>179</sup> is obsolete and no longer applied.

Question	Yes	No	Comments
<p>4.4.2. Are there legislative and or regulatory provisions clearly stating the criteria that should be taken into consideration in the assessment of the situation and in the decision-making process?</p> <p>Are there provisions specifying the criteria that should be considered when deciding to remove the child from its family? Are the principles of necessity and appropriateness considered?</p>	√		<p>The court may decide to remove children from their families if one or both parents violate the duties bestowed upon them by their function or in the administration of the child's property, or if they exercise their parental duties improperly or are unable to perform the. The Court may deprive one parent of the exercise of parental authority, in whole or in part, or may entrust the child exclusively to the other parent. Removal in whole or in part of the custody of the child from both parents and the assignment of the custody to a guardian is ordered by the court only where other measures have failed or where it is considered that they are not sufficient to prevent danger to the physical, mental or psychological health of the child. In this case the court may entrust the custody of the child in whole or in part to a Commissioner.</p> <p>The court may decide on the assignment to a guardian after an examination of the guardian's morals, living conditions and general suitability. The assignment of the guardianship shall preferably be made to relatives of the child. The court determines the extent of the parental authority granted to the guardian and the conditions of its exercise.<sup>180</sup></p>
<p>4.4.3. Are there provisions requiring that the views of the child should be taken</p>	√		<p>A child’s opinion regarding parental care may be taken into account depending on the child’s</p>

<sup>179</sup> Cyprus, Law on children (*Ο περί Παιδίων Νόμος*) Cap. 352, article 3.

<sup>180</sup> Cyprus, The Parent and Child Relations Law 1990 to 1998 (*Ο περί σχέσεων γονέων και τέκνων νόμος 1990-1998*), article 18.

<p>into consideration in the decision-making process?</p> <p>If <u>yes</u>, please specify if this is mandatory or left to the discretion of the responsible authorities, and if there are age-related requirements.</p>			<p>maturity and degree of understanding.<sup>181</sup> No particular age is mentioned in the law. There is a family law judicial tradition of judges inviting the children into their parents prior to issuing a decision in order to assess their maturity before deciding how much weight can be placed on the children’s opinion.</p>
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#### 4.5. Types of care with focus on alternative care

Types of care existing in the country	Yes	No	Who is offering such services? (State, regional, local authorities, civil society, religious institutions)	Please make differences between the different types of care explicit
Foster care	√		Foster care is regulated by legislation and is operated by the Social Welfare Services; any foster care outside the scheme operated by the Social Welfare Services is prohibited. <sup>182</sup> The Social Welfare Services from time to time assign certain tasks of this scheme to civil society organisations, by issuing public calls for services, whenever there are needs to be addressed which cannot be met by the in-house staff. The NGO that usually responds to the public calls of the Social Welfare Services is Hope for Children, as it is one of the few NGOs in Cyprus that has the capacity and its own funding, in order to respond to the tasks foreseen in the call. Social Welfare funding is neither constant nor regular and relies on availability of EU funds, which makes it hard for other NGOs with a lesser financial capacity to respond. In the case of foster care, Hope for Children undertakes the evaluation of the family and provides support. There is no legal barrier for NGOs to access children in foster care to provide support, however the Social Welfare Services remain the guardian of the children in foster care and therefore any contact with them must be mediated by the Social Welfare Services, which inevitably involves bureaucracy and leads to delays. Not many NGOs have the capacity and availability to offer support services to children in foster care beyond the funded projects mentioned above. <sup>183</sup>	

<sup>181</sup> Cyprus, The Parent and Child Relations Law 1990 to 1998 ([Ο περί σχέσεων γονέων και τέκνων νόμος 1990-1998](#)), article 6(3).

<sup>182</sup> Cyprus, Law on children ([Ο περί Παιδίων Νόμος](#)) Cap. 352, articles 41-51.

<sup>183</sup> FRANET consultation with UNHCR, 30 May 2023.

Residential – institutional care	√		<p>The Social Welfare Services operate shelters for children including unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. The operation of some of these shelters is assigned to NGOs who run them under the supervision of the Social Welfare Services. Until end of 2022, the operation of children’s shelters was assigned by the Social Welfare Services only to one NGO, namely Hope for Children.</p> <p>Other shelters in operation are shelters for victims of trafficking and shelters for victims of domestic violence, where children can reside with their parent; the former was until some years ago operated by the NGO Cyprus Stop Trafficking and is now operated by the state; and the latter was and still is operated by the NGO SPAVO. A shelter for victims of trafficking who are mothers with children, initially operated by Cyprus Stop Trafficking was subsequently passed to SPAVO.</p>
Other forms of family-based or family-like care placements	√		<p>Although this type of care is not formally available,<sup>184</sup> it is used in the case of displaced and/or separated third country children who have relatives in Cyprus or who arrived in Cyprus with a relative. In such cases the children may be placed with their relative already living in Cyprus or the relative with whom they travelled to Cyprus, subject to a check performed by the Social Welfare Services to ensure the adequacy of the accommodation and the suitability of the relative. There is no special regulatory framework governing private placements. The Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights expressed concern over the legislative gap on private placement of children and in particular the private placement of children without the condition of payment of a fee to the foster family, pointing out that children placed under this scheme remain without legal protection and without support and monitoring by the Social Welfare Services.<sup>185</sup></p> <p>The Social Welfare Services are automatically deemed to be the legal guardian of all children who do not have a legal guardian in Cyprus, in which case any access to the children is mediated by the Social Welfare Services. As in all other types of placement, NGOs may be permitted access to the children to provide support. There is no database on the duration of these placements, which may last until the</p>

<sup>184</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>185</sup> Cyprus, Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights (2022), ‘The children of the state: Position of the commissioner for the protection of the rights of the child with regard to the alternative care system provided for children under the legal care of the state’ (*Τα παιδιά του κράτους: Θέση της Επιτροπής προστασίας των δικαιωμάτων το παιδιών αναφορικά με το σύστημα εναλλακτικής φροντίδας που παρέχεται στα παιδιά υπό τη νομική φροντίδα του κράτους*), April 2022.

			children reach maturity or are reunited with their families. <sup>186</sup>
Supervised independent living arrangements for children	√		<p>The Social Welfare Services run a scheme in collaboration with the IOM for semi-independent homes in rural communities for unaccompanied minors seeking asylum, serviced by the IOM. The program "Creating Semi-Independent Housing Structures for Hosting Unaccompanied Children Over 16 Years" creates homes in rural communities for unaccompanied teenagers where they are offered accommodation and training, whilst they attend school and take up part time jobs in the community.<sup>187</sup></p> <p>The process of identifying the children to join these projects is unclear and the criteria are not transparent. The selection is made by the Social Welfare Services who justify their choice by identifying specific children as ready without providing a detailed report. It may be that the children are selected because they stayed in the Pournara camp for too long or because they are close to maturity age.<sup>188</sup> The Commissioner for the protection of children's rights opined that the circular issued by the Social Welfare Services regulating the operation of the semi-independent homes is unsatisfactory for failing to specify the process and individualized criteria on the basis of which a decision is made that the placement of minors in the particular setting is in their best interests. In particular, Commissioner found that there is no procedure for assessing the child's vulnerability, concluding that, rather than a product of a best interests assessment, the selection process suggests that the institution is used as an emergency solution for cases of children with aggressive, anti-social and delinquent behaviour, who have multiple difficulties in adapting to other contexts; however their placement in a context with lax control, limited monitoring, less protection and care does not serve their best interests.<sup>189</sup></p>
<b>Question</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Comments</b>

<sup>186</sup> FRANET consultation with UNHCR, 30 May 2023.

<sup>187</sup> IOM Cyprus (2020), '[IOM Supports the Transition to Adulthood of Unaccompanied Migrant Children in Cyprus](#)', Press release, 15 April 2020.

<sup>188</sup> FRANET consultation with UNHCR, 30 May 2023.

<sup>189</sup> Cyprus, Commissioner for the protection of children's rights (2022), 'The children of the state: Position of the commissioner for the protection of the rights of the child with regard to the alternative care system provided for children under the legal care of the state' ([Τα παιδιά του κράτους: Θέση της Επιτρόπου προστασίας των δικαιωμάτων του παιδιού αναφορικά με το σύστημα εναλλακτικής φροντίδας που παρέχεται στα παιδιά υπό τη νομική φροντίδα του κράτους](#)), April 2022.

<p>4.5.1. Is there data available on the number of children in care (disaggregated by type of care, gender/age, length of placement, etc)?</p>		<p>By end of 2022, there was an approximate total of 1,500 children under the care of the Social Welfare Services, of whom 1,210 were unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. The numbers are fluid because the situation changes all the time, as children reach maturity or are reunited with a relative abroad or there are new arrivals. No data is available as regards gender, age or length of placement.<sup>190</sup> By the end of 2022, 94 unaccompanied minors resided in approved foster care families, 117 resided in child or adolescent institutions, 427 were in semi-independent living, 272 in hotels with 24 care from the Social Welfare Office and 300 were in the Pournara reception camp. Out of the remaining 290 children under the care of the state who are not seeking asylum, 29% were placed in institutions for children and adolescents, 65% were in foster care and 6% were in semi-independent living structures.<sup>191</sup></p>
<p>4.5.2. Is there data available on the number of children placed in alternative care that disappeared and/or went missing from residential care institutions?</p>		<p>When it comes to the attention of any staff member of the Social Welfare Services or any staff member in the Pournara camp that an unaccompanied minor is absent, Social Welfare Services activate the procedures to locate them within the camp. If it is not possible to locate them, the social services officer acting as the guardian of the disappeared minor is notified and the Police is informed. The same procedure is followed if unaccompanied children go missing from one of the shelters that accommodate unaccompanied minors, including the shelters run by Hope For Children or the International Organization for Migration.<sup>192</sup> In the case of Pournara, the incidence of a missing child is usually located when a child does not appear to receive a meal. This procedure is, however, not secure because other children may turn up to receive the meal in the missing child's stead.</p> <p>The Commissioner for the rights of the child reported to Parliament that, based on data supplied by the Social Welfare Services, the police and the media, 14 unaccompanied minors disappeared in the period 2019-2022: Five disappeared in 2019 from shelters where they were hosted and the remaining nine disappeared between October 2021 and April 2022 from the Pournara camp. Two</p>

<sup>190</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>191</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>192</sup> Hadjivasilis, C. (2022), 'Πιθανόν να μη βρεθούν ποτέ τα 11 ασυνόδευτα παιδιά', *Phileltheros*, 18 April 2022.

	<p>more unaccompanied children disappeared in 2015 and one in 2016.<sup>193</sup></p> <p>According to police data, there were four instances of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum who disappeared in 2019; no cases were recorded in 2020 presumably as a result of the Covid-19 lockdowns and service disruptions; three disappearances in 2021; and four disappearances in 2022. The disappearances of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum were discussed in parliament where fears were expressed that they never be found, unlike other children who are reported missing and are traced within a short period of time. The approach taken by the authorities is that unaccompanied asylum seeking minors who go missing are likely to have left Cyprus with a passport that they secured, or went to friends' or relatives' homes without declaring it.<sup>194</sup></p> <p>The Commissioner for the protection of children's rights informed Parliament of serious violations of the rights of unaccompanied minor asylum applicants, particularly during their stay at the Pournara camp, where they were informally detained, denied of their freedom of movement, there was overcrowding and inadequate exercise of guardianship and representation, inadequate protection and care, deplorable living conditions and huge delays in the completion of procedures. The Commissioner further reported a lack of coordination and cooperation between the Ministry of Interior and the Deputy Ministry for Social Welfare, violations of material infrastructural conditions, long delays in advancing and completing vulnerability and assessments, attributed to the inadequate number of officers employed in Pournara, gaps in the holistic/interdisciplinary approach, the possibility of challenging the age assessment decision, the role of the guardian, the role of the legal representative and the requirement for independence of all professionals involved with the process, highlighting the inherent conflict of interest, both in law and in fact, of government bodies representing the interests of unaccompanied minors vis-à-vis the state. These violations created serious conditions and potentially multiple risks for unaccompanied minors, who may easily fall victim to various forms of exploitation</p>
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<sup>193</sup> Cyprus, Commissioner for the protection of children's rights (2022), 'Memorandum of the Commissioner for the Protection of Children's Rights for the debate on "The recent revelation by the Ministry of Social Welfare on the disappearance of 14 minors from the Pournara migrant reception centre" at the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women on 16/05/2022' ([Υπόμνημα της Επιτρόπου Προστασίας των Δικαιωμάτων του Παιδιού για τη συζήτηση με θέμα «Η πρόσφατη αποκάλυψη του Υφυπουργείου Κοινωνικής Πρόνοιας για την εξαφάνιση 14 ανήλικων από το κέντρο υποδοχής μεταναστών Πουρνάρα» στην Κοινοβουλευτική Επιτροπή Ανθρωπίνων Δικαιωμάτων και Ίσων Ευκαιριών μεταξύ Ανδρών και Γυναικών, στις 16/05/2022](#)),

<sup>194</sup> Hadjivasilis, C. (2022), '[Πιθανόν να μη βρεθούν ποτέ τα 11 ασυνόδευτα παιδιά](#)', *Phileltheros*, 18 April 2022.



			and trafficking, or be forced to seek other risky alternatives in order to secure better living conditions. <sup>195</sup>
4.5.3. Is there a <u>national</u> registry of foster care families?  How many children can be fostered in one family?			There is no national registry of foster homes; registries are kept at district level. Up to three children may be placed in a foster family, however in special circumstances where the foster family has been approved for fostering a larger group of children, up to six children may reside in that home including the children of the foster parents themselves. <sup>196</sup>
4.5.4. How and by whom foster families are <u>recruited, vetted, and trained?</u> Provide information on the legal framework and responsible authorities, recruitment requirements, selection criteria, reimbursement of costs, etc.			
<p>Foster families are recruited and vetted by the Social Welfare Services. The law sets out exclusion criteria for persons from whom care for any child has been removed or for premises from which any child has been removed because they were dangerous or insanitary or unfit for the child's health. The Social Welfare Services may place a ceiling on the number of children that may be placed in a particular foster home.<sup>197</sup> The Social Welfare Services provide social and financial support services to foster families, based on amounts approved by the Council of Ministers. The Commissioner for the protection of children's rights received several complaints for the late start of child support payments and for non-implementation of the duty to provide child care support to foster families, citing a particular case where child support payments started approximately nine months after the child started to be cared for in the foster family. The Commissioner opined that the amounts foreseen for the care of children in foster homes are not satisfactory and do not meet the needs of the children.<sup>198</sup></p> <p>According to an information booklet published by the Social Welfare Services, the criteria to become a foster parent are the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The applicants must be adults in good physical, mental and emotional health;</li> <li>- Their main motivation should be their reserves of love for a foreign child;</li> </ul>			

<sup>195</sup> Cyprus, Commissioner for the protection of children's rights (2022), 'Memorandum of the Commissioner for the Protection of Children's Rights for the debate on "The recent revelation by the Ministry of Social Welfare on the disappearance of 14 minors from the Pournara migrant reception centre" at the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women on 16/05/2022' ([Υπόμνημα της Επιτρόπου Προστασίας των Δικαιωμάτων του Παιδιού για τη συζήτηση με θέμα «Η πρόσφατη αποκάλυψη του Υφυπουργείου Κοινωνικής Πρόνοιας για την εξαφάνιση 14 ανήλικων από το κέντρο υποδοχής μεταναστών Πουρνάρα» στην Κοινοβουλευτική Επιτροπή Ανθρωπίνων Δικαιωμάτων και Ίσων Ευκαιριών μεταξύ Ανδρών και Γυναικών, στις 16/05/2022](#)),

<sup>196</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>197</sup> Cyprus, Law on children ([Ο περί Παιδίων Νόμος](#)) Cap. 352, articles 41-51.

<sup>198</sup> Cyprus, Commissioner for the protection of children's rights (2022), 'The children of the state: Position of the commissioner for the protection of the rights of the child with regard to the alternative care system provided for children under the legal care of the state' ([ΤΤα παιδιά του κράτους: Θέση της Επιτρόπου προστασίας των δικαιωμάτων του παιδιού αναφορικά με το σύστημα εναλλακτικής φροντίδας που παρέχεται στα παιδιά υπο τη νομική φροντίδα του κράτους](#)), April 2022.

- Any children of their own should know and expect to share that love;
- Be able to cope with a variety of situations, behaviours and feelings of foster children;
- Have patience and skill in handling and caring for children;
- Provide positive experiences of normal family life;
- Be flexible and have a high level of understanding, tolerance and acceptance of the child's natural family;
- Have a clean criminal record and a certificate that they have not been convicted of sexual offences involving children;
- have medical certificates that they do not suffer from infectious diseases.<sup>199</sup>

4.5.5. Are any types of care (foster homes, residential care, other form of care arrangements) monitored once children are placed therein? If so, provide information on the applicable legislative provisions on monitoring procedures. Please specify the difference between the monitoring of different types of care. How frequently are they monitored, how and by whom?

The legal framework does not impose duties on any government service to monitor children once they are placed in any type of residential arrangement, although the right to inspect and monitor may be inferred from the provisions of the law. The Children's law provides that the director of social services has a duty to exercise 'any powers' with respect to children under their care to further the children's best interests. In this context, the Director can make all necessary arrangements for the children's accommodation and maintenance and where the accommodation is not provided by the social services, then the conditions may be agreed between the Director and the service provider. The law further provides for the power of the Director and the welfare officers to supervise and inspect the boarding of the children and order the children's removal from those premises if their welfare requires it.<sup>200</sup>

Question	Yes	No	Comments
4.5.6. Are children placed in foster care homes geographically <u>close to their biological families</u> , school, friends, and/or community?	√		The Social Welfare Services endeavour to place the children in homes in the same district where they grew up, but other considerations will also play a part in the placement decision. The primary consideration is whether a relative from the child's extended relations can assume care of the child as a foster family. The foster family is also selected on the basis of the best possible pairing between the children. <sup>201</sup>
4.5.7. Is there a <u>national registry</u> of			There is a national registry of institutional care homes for children and adolescents, which currently lists 12 such

<sup>199</sup> Cyprus, Deputy Ministry for Social Welfare, Social Welfare Services, 'Foster care' (*Αναδοχή*). Undated.

<sup>200</sup> Cyprus, Law on children (*Ο περί Παιδίων Νόμος*) Cap. 352, articles 11-19 and 41-51.

<sup>201</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<p>residential institutions for children?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, please provide information regarding the existent number of residential institutions and their capacity (beds).</p>	√		<p>institutions.<sup>202</sup> Their capacity and number of beds is variable and UNHCR visits have at times found them overcrowded.</p>
<p>4.5.8. Are there <u>accreditation and licensing procedures</u> for residential institutions in place?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, please provide information on the legislative framework, the responsible authority and procedure.</p>	√		<p>The institutions are state-owned. The competent authorities inspect them every year for the issuance of a certificate of suitability for operation.<sup>203</sup> There is no legal framework as regards the accreditation and licensing of these state institutions.</p>
<p>4.5.9. Are there <u>national applicable standards</u> relating to the operational framework of such institutions (requirements or quality standards related to the personnel, the infrastructures, the living conditions, and daily care of children)?</p>	√		<p>There is no national regulatory framework for the operation of state institutions.</p> <p>The staff of the institutions are recruited by the Social Welfare Services on the basis of service plans and checks are made according to the recruitment procedure in the civil service. The Welfare Services reports that the staff receive regular training.<sup>204</sup></p>
<p>4.5.10. How is the residential care staff recruited, vetted, and trained?</p>			

<sup>202</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>203</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>204</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

The Social Welfare Office hire residential staff based on service plans. There is no legislative/regulatory framework on the recruitment, vetting and training of residential care personnel.

Question	Yes	No	Comments
<p>4.5.11. Are children placed in alternative care allowed to <u>lodge complaints</u> against the personnel /foster parents and care workers and report abuse or violations of their rights? Are these procedures child-friendly and respective of confidentiality?</p> <p>If <u>yes</u>, briefly describe to whom and how children can lodge complaints.</p>	√		<p>Children placed in alternative care are informed of their rights, including the procedure for filing complaints. State institutions have complaint boxes in which children can submit their complaints, even anonymously. An inter-service hierarchy is in place which the children are informed about and the children can submit their complaint to the hierarchically suitable person, which would normally be their social worker.<sup>205</sup> In cases where children want to submit a complaint concerning their social services officer, the children can apply to any other social services officer, to a supervisor or to the Director. No procedure is foreseen for those instances where the social worker does not adequately address the child’s complaint. An online complaints form is available on the website of the Social Welfare Services but no regular information or training on how to use it is made available to the children.<sup>206</sup> A research conducted by the Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights revealed that the current system of submitting complaints against welfare officers does not provide adequate opportunity for children to express their dissatisfaction.<sup>207</sup> Children can file complaints to the Commissioner for the protection of children's rights. Cyprus has ratified the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Complaints Procedure, however the children do not receive any information or training on how to utilise it.</p>
<p>4.5.12. What is the <u>assistance available to adolescents that leave alternative care</u> to live independently?</p> <p>(e.g. financial, housing, vocational, educational,</p>			<p>The Social Welfare Services provide counselling and financial support to children in alternative care who reach adulthood. Financial support may be granted in order to cover tuition fees for studies or for vocational training, or towards the cost for purchasing equipment. The NGO Hope for Children has criticised the lack of support for children residing in shelters who are assessed to be adults, as they</p>

<sup>205</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>206</sup> For details please see the relevant webpage of the Social Welfare Services, [here](#).

<sup>207</sup> Cyprus, Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights (2022), ‘The children of the state: Position of the commissioner for the protection of the rights of the child with regard to the alternative care system provided for children under the legal care of the state’ (*Τα παιδιά του κράτους: Θέση της Επιτροπής προστασίας των δικαιωμάτων του παιδιού αναφορικά με το σύστημα εναλλακτικής φροντίδας που παρέχεται στα παιδιά υπό τη νομική φροντίδα του κράτους*), April 2022.

<p>employment, life skills, mental health services, social or emotional)?</p> <p>Briefly describe who is responsible for such assistance?</p>			<p>often find themselves suddenly without shelter, without support and at risk of deportation.<sup>208</sup></p>
<p>4.5.13. What assistance is provided to families - while the child is placed to alternative care - to support the return of the child in the family? By whom? Who coordinates the assistance? Please briefly describe.</p>			
<p>Social Welfare Services in cooperation with other competent agencies provide social support and guidance with targeted interventions to empower biological parents in their parental role to reconnect with the child. The assistance is coordinated by the Social Welfare Services.<sup>209</sup> There is no official program in place specifying the steps and actions.</p>			
<p>4.5.14. Is any <u>assistance</u> provided to children and families <u>upon return of the child in the family</u>? Briefly describe. Who is responsible for such assistance?</p> <p>Is there any monitoring and follow-up of such cases?</p> <p>Who is coordinating assistance and support?</p>	<p>√</p>		<p>Social Welfare Services in cooperation with other competent agencies provide social support. The assistance is coordinated by the Social Welfare Services, who decide the type and length of post-return monitoring and follow up.<sup>210</sup> There is no official program in place specifying the steps and actions; the Social Welfare Services make ad hoc decisions after assessing the situation.</p>
<p>4.5.15. Are decisions of placement in alternative care reviewed?</p> <p>If <u>yes</u>, please provide the applicable legislative</p>	<p>√</p>		<p>The Social Welfare Services can have a child removed from a foster care home in the case of insanitary, overcrowded or dangerous conditions, in case of foster parents suffering from ill health or infirmity or they are of old age or have demonstrated ignorance, negligence, immorality or criminal conduct or for other reasons rendering them unfit.<sup>211</sup></p>

<sup>208</sup> “Hope for Children” CRC Policy Center (2020), ‘Alternative Report by “Hope For Children” CRC Policy Center to the 85th session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the List of Issues for Cyprus’, 14 April 2020.

<sup>209</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>210</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>211</sup> Cyprus, Law on children (*Ο περί Παιδίων Νόμος*) Cap. 352, articles 41-51.

<p>provisions. How frequently is this done? By whom?</p> <p>Are the children’s views taken into consideration?</p>	<p>The Social Welfare Services compile an individual care, protection and rehabilitation plan for each child in care, which is reviewed annually or earlier if required. For the development of the care plan, the Social Welfare Services collaborate with other competent agencies in order to benefit from a multidisciplinary approach and the views of the child are taken into account in every decision taken that affects the child.<sup>212</sup></p> <p>Children who reach maturity age or unaccompanied minors who are assessed to be adults following an age determination procedure are asked to leave the institutional care homes. There is no structured program to support children transitioning to adulthood. The provision of support depends on the willingness of the shelter staff to help their maturing residents secure accommodation or claim benefits. The Social Welfare Services issued a public call inviting applications from NGOs to run a program supporting unaccompanied minors in their transition to maturity but received only one application and this was incomplete. Upon re-issuing the call, there were no applications submitted, although negotiations are under way with a new applicant organisation who expressed interest in applying at the next public call.</p> <p>The semi-independent living houses operated by the IOM in communities have their own program helping children on their transition to adulthood, however this is more focused on helping them find work rather than enhance their potential through education. The guardians supervising these residences are often inexperienced and overburdened and a high rate of the girls residing in these homes get pregnant whilst in several instances boys were found staying in unsuitable houses.<sup>213</sup> The Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights recommended that the institution of semi-independent living be revisited on the basis of international literature and good practices in other countries, in order to establish clear criteria and quality standards, adding that the institution does not seem to be suitable for children in care with high and multiple vulnerabilities.<sup>214</sup></p>
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<sup>212</sup> Letter from the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor, 20 March 2023.

<sup>213</sup> FRANET consultation with UNHCR, 30 May 2023.

<sup>214</sup> Cyprus, Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights (2022), ‘The children of the state: Position of the commissioner for the protection of the rights of the child with regard to the alternative care system provided for children under the legal care of the state’ ([Τα παιδιά του κράτους: Θέση της Επιτρόπου προστασίας των δικαιωμάτων του παιδιού αναφορικά με το σύστημα εναλλακτικής φροντίδας που παρέχεται στα παιδιά υπό τη νομική φροντίδα του κράτους](#)), April 2022.

4.5.16. Is there a legal framework regarding adoption? Briefly describe the core elements and responsible authorities, also considering differences between within-country and between-country adoptions. Is private adoption permitted in the country?

Adoptions are regulated by a law introduced in 1995 and amended in 2020 which sets out the preconditions for adoption and the duties of the social services officer assigned to each case, the conditions for return of the child to the biological parents, the legal consequences of adoption and the creation and operation of a registry listing adoptions. The adoption law provides that the court will issue the adoption decree if this will serve the best interests of the child taking into account the child's wishes, if the child's mental capacity so permits.<sup>215</sup> There are no guidelines as to how the child's capacity is to be evaluated; in practice this is determined largely by the judge depending on each case and, where needed, following an informal interview with the child in the judge's chambers.<sup>216</sup> The law contains prohibitions against remunerations in return for adoptions, against advertising for adoptions and regulates the transfer of a child abroad in order to be adopted.<sup>217</sup> Private adoptions are not permitted in Cyprus; a court order is needed in order for an adoption to be lawful. The application for adoption is filed by a person who is: a permanent resident in Cyprus or was residing in Cyprus for two years prior to the application for adoption; at least 25 years of age; or 21 years of age if the applicant is a relative of the child to be adopted. The child's consent for the adoption is sought only if the child's age and mental capacity permit. The court will grant the adoption order if it is satisfied that all parties consent, the order will be in the interests of the child taking into account the child's views if age and mental capacity permit, no money was exchanged and the Social Welfare Services' confirmation that the applicant is suitable. The law does not permit adoptions by persons who have concluded a civil partnership, which is the only way through which homosexual couples can formalise their relationships.<sup>218</sup>

4.5.17. What are the main challenges encountered and gaps at the policy and legislative level in relation to alternative care? *Please consider available studies reports at national levels conducted by public or private institutions, child protection organisations, civil society, human rights institutions, academic community, and other sources such as concluding observations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on country reports etc.*

The main issue of concern is the situation of unaccompanied minors residing in reception camps in substandard conditions for unjustifiably long periods of time. During the pandemic, the camps were closed for disproportionately long periods of time and children were denied access to their schools when all other children were attending. Unaccompanied minors residing in the Pournara camp as well as in some of the shelters set up during and in the post-pandemic era have no access to education or recreational activities, even in the post-pandemic period their situation has described by the Commissioner for the protection of children's rights as unhygienic, undignified and unacceptable.<sup>219</sup> The smuggling and trafficking through Cyprus's buffer zone of vulnerable third

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<sup>215</sup> Cyprus, Law on adoption of 1995 ([Ο περί Υιοθεσίας Νόμος του 1995](#)), Article 5(1)(b).

<sup>216</sup> Liasides S. (2010), 'Hearing the under-age child in family law' in *The Family Law Review (Επιθεώρηση Οικογενειακού Δικαίου)* [2010] January- March, Vol. 1, 7, 12-16.

<sup>217</sup> Cyprus, Law on adoption of 1995 ([Ο περί Υιοθεσίας Νόμος του 1995](#)).

<sup>218</sup> Cyprus, The Civil Partnership Act 2015 ([Ο περί Πολιτικής Συμβίωσης Νόμος του 2015](#)).

<sup>219</sup> Cyprus Child Commissioner (2022), '[Commissioner's Public Statement on the street stay of 30 unaccompanied children](#)' (*Δημόσια Τοποθέτηση Επιτρόπου σχετικά με την παραμονή στο δρόμο 30 ασυνόδευτων παιδιών*), 9 March 2022.

country children seeking asylum is inadequately addressed by the police, who refrain from identifying third country asylum seeking children as trafficked victims, on the justification that some of the activities complained of took place in the Turkish controlled north of the country where the Republic does not exercise control.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Telephone consultation with UNHCR, 8 January 2023.



#### 4.6. Developments in the past years: achievements, gaps, and challenges

The increased migration flows of the recent years have led to the adoption of ad hoc measures in order to accommodate the increasing number of unaccompanied minors, including the setting up of temporary shelters in different parts of the cities without proper regulation or adequate infrastructure. In order to relieve some of the pressure resulting from the overpopulation of the children's section in the Pournara camp, the Social Welfare Services have also made use of hotels, where the children have little supervision, recreational activities or access to education. The division of the country and the fact that the Republic does not exercise effective control over the north has been a source of several protection issues, as the police often justify disappearances of children as a willing transfer to the north. In some of these cases, the children were subsequently found murdered in the Republic controlled area and in others the disappearing children were never located. The recommendation of the Commissioner for the rights of the child to activate and involve the police anti-trafficking unit in the search for the missing unaccompanied minors<sup>221</sup> was not taken up by the authorities, who take the approach that the missing children are more likely to have left willingly rather than have been trafficked.<sup>222</sup> To address the issue of missing children, the government assigned to a consortium of two NGOs, namely Hope For Children and the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (SPAVO), the joint operation of the European Missing Children Hotline 116000, as a tool for preventing and handling missing children, accessing support services for relatives of missing children and for coordinating with authorities and NGOs at national and transnational level. The consortium has signed a cooperation protocol with the Ministry of Justice and Public Order for the operation of this helpline.<sup>223</sup>

#### 4.7. Promising practices

N/A

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<sup>221</sup> Cyprus, Commissioner for the protection of children's rights (2022), 'Memorandum of the Commissioner for the Protection of Children's Rights for the debate on "The recent revelation by the Ministry of Social Welfare on the disappearance of 14 minors from the Pournara migrant reception centre" at the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women on 16/05/2022' ([Υπόμνημα της Επιτρόπου Προστασίας των Δικαιωμάτων του Παιδιού για τη συζήτηση με θέμα «Η πρόσφατη αποκάλυψη του Υφυπουργείου Κοινωνικής Πρόνοιας για την εξαφάνιση 14 ανήλικων από το κέντρο υποδοχής μεταναστών Πουρνάρα» στην Κοινοβουλευτική Επιτροπή Ανθρωπίνων Δικαιωμάτων και Ίσων Ευκαιριών μεταξύ Ανδρών και Γυναικών, στις 16/05/2022](#)),

<sup>222</sup> Hadjivasilis, C. (2022), '[Πιθανόν να μη βρεθούν ποτέ τα 11 ασυνόδευτα παιδιά](#)', *Phileltheros*, 18 April 2022.

<sup>223</sup> For more details see the relevant webpage of Hope for Children, [here](#).

## 5. Accountability, data collection, and monitoring mechanisms

### 5.1. Accountability mechanisms

#### 5.1.1. Are there accountability mechanisms in place regarding the functioning of the child protection system? Is there any independent monitoring or reporting mechanisms on the performance of the child protection system? What is the role of child’s ombudspersons, child commissioners or other independent national human rights institutions in monitoring child protection?

There is no accountability mechanism in place regarding the child protection system in its entirety. The Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights has a monitoring and reporting role on the performance of the system, of the work of any public authority involved directly or indirectly with child protection and compliance with the CRC. The Commissioner can propose corrective measures to improve practices, regulations and legislation but the recommendations are not binding and there is no system of accountability for the authorities who ignore the Commissioner’s recommendations.<sup>224</sup>

The Ombuds institution, whose mandate covers the NHRI and the Equality Body amongst others has at times dealt with children’s issues but not in significant depth and without consequences in the context of policy development.

A number of multi-disciplinary bodies set up in order to monitor the implementation of strategies, action plans and polices, including the Advisory Committee on the Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence and Foni, which was set up in order to coordinate efforts against child sexual abuse, are mainly confined to monitoring the implementation of policies rather than serve as accountability mechanisms. The fact that the major NGOs working in the field of child rights are partners of the Social Welfare Services and are funded by them in order to provide services to children on their behalf inevitably serves as a disincentive in openly criticizing the government.

#### 5.1.2. How is the implementation of national action plans and strategies or other policy actions on child protection monitored? Briefly describe the established procedures and mention the actors involved and their roles.

National action plans and strategies contain an evaluation element although there have been cases where the evaluation was conducted internally and often with considerable delay. There is no systematic mechanism for the evaluation of policies, although this is performed in the reporting of the multi-thematic groups set up in order to monitor the implementation of strategies, in NGO reports and in the reports of the Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights.

Question	YES	NO	Comments
5.1.3. Is there a child rights assessment existing or foreseen? Please note that child rights’		√	The parliament has an impact assessment mechanism in place, whereby parliamentarians are asked to tick a box if the proposed legislation is

<sup>224</sup> Cyprus, Commissioner for the Protection of Children’s Rights Law of 2007, ([Ο περί Επιτρόπου Προστασίας των Δικαιωμάτων του Παιδιού Νόμος του 2007](#)).

assessment stands for the measurement of the impact of proposed or adopted legislation on children as a group. It is usually done at the parliamentary or ministerial level.			expected to have any impact on fundamental rights in general, but not on children's rights in particular.
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5.1.4. Are there quality standards for child protection services set in the legislation (including prevention programmes)? (e.g. number of cases per case workers, requirements regarding infrastructures of residential care and number of personnel, performance, and fiscal accountability mechanisms) Please describe.

There are no such standards in the legislative framework. The Social Welfare Services reports a commitment of compliance to international specifications and standards in general.<sup>225</sup>

Question	YES	NO	Comments
5.1.5. Is consultation with children and families foreseen and/or taking place in the process of the evaluation of services and measures and in the development of child protection policies and legislation?  <u>If yes</u> , at what level is this done? Please provide indicative examples.		√	There is no structured consultation process in place that involves children and/or their families, although their views may be taken into account for the purposes of policy development, via the reports prepared by the Social Welfare Services in the context of case management. The only consultation with children regularly taking place is the procedure run by the Commissioner for the protection of children's rights with the group of adolescent advisors.
5.1.6. Is the responsibility for data collection on child protection determined in the legislative framework?		√	There is no legal responsibility for data collection on child protection.
5.1.7. Is there a single authority responsible for monitoring data collection and centralised coordination and data sharing at national level?  <u>If yes</u> , Is there a national database (a joint database for		√	

<sup>225</sup> Letter of the Social Welfare Services to the FRANET contractor 20 March 2023.

monitoring and tracking children) for collecting data in the child protection area at the national, regional, or local level?			
5.1.8. Are there common indicators in place to monitor the performance of the child protection system?		√	
5.1.9. Are there data protection protocols in place and adhered to?		√	
5.1.10. Are there any gaps in the data collection system related to child protection in the country, which have been identified by relevant child protection authorities/institutions, civil society organisations or other institutions active in the child protection field? Is there a systematic and consistent collection of data related to child protection at national, regional, or local level? Please mention if efforts are made to address these gaps.			
There is no centralised data collection system related to child protection. Individual agencies record incidents and complaints received, such as the NGO SPAVO that records the calls for help through its helplines. The state statistical service records data provided by the police and by the court relating to complaints, incidents and convictions. The NGO Hope for Children highlighted a serious problem of underreporting, which undermines data collection efforts. <sup>226</sup>			

## 5.2. Developments in the past years: achievements, gaps, and challenges

Various systemic problems persist from previous years, which undermine accountability:

- The absence of reliable data to document gaps and policy failures;
- The absence of an independent mechanism for measuring successes and failures of policies with a mandate rendering the competent services accountable;
- The constitutional arrangements which prohibit parliamentarians from tabling proposals that can increase the state budget and which enable the President of the Republic to refer back to Parliament and then to the Supreme Court any legislative proposal that can have the effect of increasing the state budget.<sup>227</sup>

The shrinking of civic space in recent years, with the dissolution of organisations and initiatives acting in the defence of vulnerable groups including children coupled with a new practice of the Interior Ministry to consult only those NGOs which are on its registry has essentially limited NGO activity in the field of

<sup>226</sup> “Hope for Children” CRC Policy Center (2020), ‘Alternative Report by “Hope For Children” CRC Policy Center to the 85th session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the List of Issues for Cyprus’, 14 April 2020.

<sup>227</sup> Cyprus, The Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus (*Το Σύνταγμα της Κυπριακής Δημοκρατίας*), [article 80](#) and [article 52](#).

child rights to the two NGOs who are at the same time partners of and funded by the Social Welfare Services in order to provide services to children victims or children under state care.

### 5.3. Promising practices

Please list and briefly describe any promising practice in child protection accountability that you come across. (if available please include references to documents or URLs in case of online tools/mechanisms)

N/A

## 6. General education, promotion, and awareness raising

### 6.1. Education on child rights

**6.1.1. Does education on child rights form part of the (national) formal school curricula? If yes, please provide details such as in which types of school and targeting which grade(s) (age group), as part of which school subject and for how many periods in a pupil's school career.**

*Ca. 200 words*

Yes, the official curriculum includes the health education subject, also referred to as domestic economy at different levels, which provide education on the characteristics of maturity, on interpersonal and inter-gender relations, on locating the difference between biological and social gender, on myths and realities concerning domestic and other forms of violence, on the right to personal safety and on how to promote it and on the various institutions working in the field of violence and bullying. This lesson is offered to students at second grade of secondary education in six teaching periods of 40 minutes each, totalling four hours.

A lesson of sexual and reproductive rights is taught to students of third grade of secondary school over four teaching periods of 40 minutes each totalling 2,6 hours. It includes training on healthy interpersonal and sexual relations, on recognising sexual abuse and skills to resist and report it, family planning and contraception.

Under the thematic area of improving the social self, students at all levels are taught the significance of interculturalism and acceptance and management of diversity, critically engaging with social stereotypes, the definitions, sources and consequences of racism and homophobia and the development of multicultural consciousness.

Under the thematic area of healthy relationships, students of second grade of the lyceum are taught about gendered norms and gender-based violence and the characteristics of healthy relationships, sexuality, human trafficking, reproductive health and responsible sexual behaviour.

**6.1.2. Please provide an overview of the most important national and/or sub-national implemented programmes and activities aiming at educating children, parents, teachers, and/or society at large about child rights and/or child protection at national or sub-national level. By which actors were those commissioned, funded, and implemented?**

The Pedagogical institute of the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Observatory for school violence provides regular seminars for teachers on prevention and management of bullying at schools at all levels. The programs are offered to those schools who apply for participation and they are delivered in seminars and workshops of four two-hourly meetings.

The Observatory for school violence offers non-compulsory seminars for parents on school bullying, upon request from particular school units. The seminars are offered in the school premises in the afternoons and last between one or two two-hourly sessions which are also attended by the teaching staff of the school.

During 2022, the Observatory for school violence collaborated with the NGO Hope for Children for jointly running five workshops for children at schools, on preventing and handling school violence, including training on the rights of the child, bullying, anger management, diversity and racism and prevention of sexual abuse. The workshops were run in 17 schools with a total participation of 2,000 children.

The bi-communal program “Imagine” which run between 2017-2022 offered to 6,117 students, 50% from the Greek Cypriot and 50% from Turkish Cypriot communities and to the 714 teachers who escorted them, joint training session on peace, inter-cultural and inter-ethnic dialogue and cooperation. An additional number of 518 teachers and 92 school headteachers attended training on peace education in the context of the same program.

The Pedagogical Institute of the Ministry of Education operates a network of schools consisting of about 30 schools of all levels in order to support the implementation of the anti-racist policy<sup>228</sup> by training teachers on the theoretical and practical aspects of the policy, on the theoretical premise of racism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism, anti-gypsyism, discrimination, stereotypes and diversity, the duties of the school community and the steps for handling racist incidents. In addition to the annual training, the Pedagogical Institute produces material in various languages to enable the teachers to inform the parents and regularly updates its website with content to support the implementation of the anti-racist policy. These activities are mainly delivered by state institutions so no funding involved. In the program offered by Hope for Children, the latter secured funding from external sources in order to deliver the workshops. There is no standard funding line for these activities.

## 6.2. Promotion and awareness raising

**6.2.1. Please provide information on awareness raising and/or promotion campaigns or relevant activities on child rights (possibly including on the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights) and/or protection issues targeting the general public or children in general at national or sub-national level. Please provide information on the most recent and representative awareness raising campaigns, including information on the target groups, the thematic areas covered, the actors involved, funding, the method of dissemination chosen and the impact of the campaign, if assessed.**

The Ministry of Education reported that training on the rights of the child is covered through horizontal activities in the context of classical subjects including literature, history, modern and ancient Greek and Latin.

The Pedagogical Institute also organises optional afternoon seminars to teachers delivered in collaboration with the Commissioner for the protection of Children’s rights, UNHCR or NGOs.

During 2017-2018 nine secondary schools across the country implemented the educational programme “Away from the Homeland and from Fear”, aiming at facilitating the integration of migrant and refugee children in the school environment. The programme had been developed by the Pedagogical Institute, the Directorate of Secondary General Education of the Ministry of Education, the Commissioner for the Protection of Children's Rights and the UNHCR Delegation in Cyprus. In each school, a ten-member team of children, teachers and parents was created under the name "I care and I act", which designed and implemented actions that corresponded to the needs and specificities of the school unit. The actions developed included, among others, meetings with parents of children outside school hours, the translation of school forms and regulations into languages understandable to parents/guardians, the implementation of the ‘child mentor’ system for each new child enrolled in school during the period of adaptation of the child to the school environment, the organization of educational visits to learn about Cypriot history and culture, the implementation of experiential

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<sup>228</sup> For more details on the anti-racist policy, see the relevant webpage of the Pedagogical Institute, [here](#).

workshops for children and teachers on issues of concern to the school community, the contact of the school community with other cultures and civilizations through participation in competitions with creations bearing elements of other cultures or the projection of these elements through various forms of art or through intercultural dialogues on children's radio stations, as well as raising awareness of the wider community about people on the move through school theatres and events. The activities of the school units were funded by EU funds on lifelong learning.<sup>229</sup>

No training is offered on the EU Charter or other instruments except for the awareness activities on the CRC provided by the office of the Commissioner for the protection of the rights of the Child.

6.2.2. Are there any awareness raising activities regarding complaint mechanisms at national or sub-national level, e.g. for the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights on a communications procedure<sup>230</sup>? Please briefly describe.

There are no activities related to accessing complaints mechanisms, except in the context of the lesson of Health and Domestic economy, where children are taught how to report abuse. A protocol is in place for the use of the teachers, prescribing a step-by-step procedure on handling and reporting information about child sexual abuse. The Commissioner for the protection of children's rights regularly produces child-friendly material on the rights of children under the CRC which is posted on the institution's website<sup>231</sup> and visits schools in order to discuss with school staff the various issues of concern at the particular school units; during the visit, an officer of the Commissioner's office holds experiential workshops with the students on thematic areas selected as significant to that school unit.<sup>232</sup>

6.2.3. Are there any awareness raising or training activities at national or sub-national level on digital literacy, privacy and online safety for children, parents, teachers, and other relevant professionals?

In the context of the national strategy for better internet for children,<sup>233</sup> the Center for Safe Internet runs the programme 'Better Internet for Kids'<sup>234</sup> which produced material and tools and runs campaigns targeting children, youth, parents and teachers. It also runs a helpline providing information and advice on the use of digital technologies including cyber bullying, racist material, grooming and sexual abuse.

Awareness on the protection of private life and internet safety is also included in the main curriculum taught at various levels in schools, including the health education subject taught at fourth grade of primary school, the design and technology lesson taught at fifth and sixth grade of primary school, the afternoon classes offered through the program STEM and the robotics class offered at the all-day optional schools.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> For details see the webpage of the Commissioner for the protection of children's rights [here](#).

<sup>230</sup> URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/optional-protocol-convention-rights-child-communications> [12/12/2022]

<sup>231</sup> For details see the relevant webpage of the Commissioner for the protection of children's rights [here](#).

<sup>232</sup> For more details, see the relevant webpage of the Commissioner for the protection of children's rights [here](#).

<sup>233</sup> "Working Group under Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth (2017), 'National strategy for a better internet for children in Cyprus' (*Εθνική στρατηγική για ένα καλύτερο διαδίκτυο για τα παιδιά στην Κύπρο*), June 2017.

<sup>234</sup> For more details, see the website of the Center for Safe Internet [here](#).

<sup>235</sup> Letter from the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth to FRANET contractor, 17 March 2023.



A number of programs aimed at raising awareness to school children for internet safety are being implemented at schools. These include the program '[Safe school for the internet](#)' which was implemented in three schools during 2020-2021, the program '[Young coaches for the internet](#)' which involved the students themselves training their peers, their parents and their teachers on the safe use of the internet implemented in two schools during 2020-2021, a [competition](#) for the production on a short awareness raising [video](#) on safer internet, several lectures and workshops, the certification [eSafety Label](#) for schools implementing programs on internet safety given to 70 out of 103 schools participating and a number of digital games.<sup>236</sup>

### 6.3. Promising practices

Please list and briefly describe any challenges and promising practice regarding child rights and/or child protection outreach activities/measure targeting relevant groups of society or society at large that you come across. (if available please include references to documents or URLs in case of online tools/mechanisms)

N/A

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<sup>236</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth (2022), '[Annual Report 2021](#)'.

## 7. Child participation and community engagement

### 7.1. Complaint procedures

Question	YES	NO	Comments
<p>7.1.1. Are there independent child complaints procedures (e.g. an ombuds institution) that are fully compliant with the Paris Principles<sup>237</sup> in place, with an ability to hear, review and enforce individual complaints from children?</p>		v	<p>The Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights was not granted the status of NHRI. The Commissioner is selected and appointed by the President of the Republic, its budget is decided by the government, its composition does not reflect the diversity of society and does not have powers to issue binding decisions or impose sanctions. The institution of the ombudsperson, also known as the Commissioner for Administration, was granted the status of NHRI, however its human rights mandate is not focused on children’s rights and the institution itself has little engagement with the subject.<sup>238</sup></p> <p>The mandate of the Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Representing children and their interests at all levels;</li> <li>• Promoting children's views where they themselves cannot be heard;</li> <li>• Supervising and monitoring the implementation of the provisions of the UN Convention and the European Convention;</li> <li>• Monitoring legislation and practices and submitting proposals with a view to harmonizing legislation with relevant international conventions;</li> <li>• Submitting ex officio complaints to the competent authorities for violations of the rights of the child and transmitting complaints received to the authorities, monitoring the progress of investigation by the authorities and assessing the outcome of the investigation of</li> </ul>

<sup>237</sup>

URL:

[https://ganhri.org/paris-principles/#:~:text=The%20Paris%20Principles%20\(%27Principles%20Relating,are%20pluralism%2C%20independence%20and%20effectiveness](https://ganhri.org/paris-principles/#:~:text=The%20Paris%20Principles%20(%27Principles%20Relating,are%20pluralism%2C%20independence%20and%20effectiveness) [12/12/2022]

<sup>238</sup> For details please see the relevant webpage of the Ombuds institution, [here](#).

			<p>complaints by any authority regarding the violation of the rights of any child.<sup>239</sup></p> <p>The Commissioner does not have the power to issue binding decisions or impose sanctions.</p>
7.1.2. Are there specialised Courts and compliant procedures with international standards in place for children in contact with the law and for children to access justice and seek redress and remedies for violations of the child protection rights?	v		<p>In the framework of the juvenile justice law adopted in 2021,<sup>240</sup> juvenile courts were set up in every district and judges were appointed. The law was not fully implemented by end of 2022, as the budget was still awaiting approval by parliament. Currently the juvenile court which hears cases of children in conflict with the law convenes in different rooms or on different days or times or in a different building than the other courts and only the persons directly involved with the case can be present.<sup>241</sup> District courts continue to hear cases of violations of the rights of children although very rarely would children appear in the court room. In the case of children victims of abuse, the children’s testimony can now be delivered via teleconferencing from the Children’s house, whilst in family court cases children may appear to express their views either in the judge’s chambers or in the court room behind closed doors.</p> <p>During 2022, the Council of Ministers appointed the members of the Monitoring Committee of the Decriminalisation Programmes, the establishment and powers of which are provided for in the juvenile justice law of 2021. The Committee is mandated with the evaluation and effective functioning of the decriminalisation programmes and has a term of office of five years. It is composed of seven members - five from the public sector and two from the private sector.<sup>242</sup></p> <p>There are no specialised courts for children</p>

<sup>239</sup> Cyprus, The Commissioner for the Protection of Children's Rights Act 2007 ([Ο περί Επιτρόπου Προστασίας των Δικαιωμάτων του Παιδιού Νόμος του 2007](#)), article 4.

<sup>240</sup> Cyprus, Law providing for the establishment of a system of criminal justice friendly for children in conflict with the law ([Νόμος που προβλέπει για την εγκαθίδρυση συστήματος ποινικής δικαιοσύνης φιλικής προς τα παιδιά που βρίσκονται σε σύγκρουση με το νόμο](#)), N.55(I)/2021.

<sup>241</sup> Stephanou E. (2022), [‘Σε ποιο δικαστήριο δικάζονται οι ανήλικοι;’](#) 17 June 2023.

<sup>242</sup> Communication from the Ministry of Justice to the FRANET contractor, 1 November 2022.

			seeking redress and remedies for violation of their rights. <sup>243</sup>
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### 7.2. Feedback mechanisms

Question	YES	NO	Comments
7.2.1. Are there government support fora such as children’s groups established at local/community level, and is a formal mechanism in place through which national/sub-national/local government receive and respond to the feedback and ideas from children and children’s groups who have received child protection services?		√	The only mechanisms in place for children to provide feedback and ideas without assistance from adults are the Children’s Parliament and the Advisory Group established by the Commissioner for the protection of children’s rights.
7.2.2. Are community-based mechanisms functional across the country where necessary and per applicability and per protocols and procedures? Is their effectiveness monitored by independent accountability mechanisms?		√	

### 7.3. Promising practices

Please list and briefly describe any challenges and promising practice regarding child participation and community engagement that you come across. (if available please include references to documents or URLs in case of online tools/mechanisms)

There are no good practices.

There are no measures in place to tackle the negative stereotypes and stigma affecting the participation of children in situations of vulnerability. There are various participatory structures in place, including the Children’s Parliament, the central student councils, the Youth Advisory Committee and the Youth Board. The first three comprise entirely of children but do not always represent children with distinct ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural backgrounds or children with disabilities; additionally, these structures are not provided with adequate resources to fulfil their mandates. There are no systems or procedures

<sup>243</sup> United Nations, Committee on the rights of the Child (2022), ‘[Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports on Cyprus](#)’, 24 June 2022.

for the courts and for professionals working with children to safeguard the children's right to be heard and to build their capacity to exercise this right at all ages. There is little awareness and no awareness measures at community level about the CRC.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> United Nations, Committee on the rights of the Child (2022), '[Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports on Cyprus](#)', 24 June 2022.