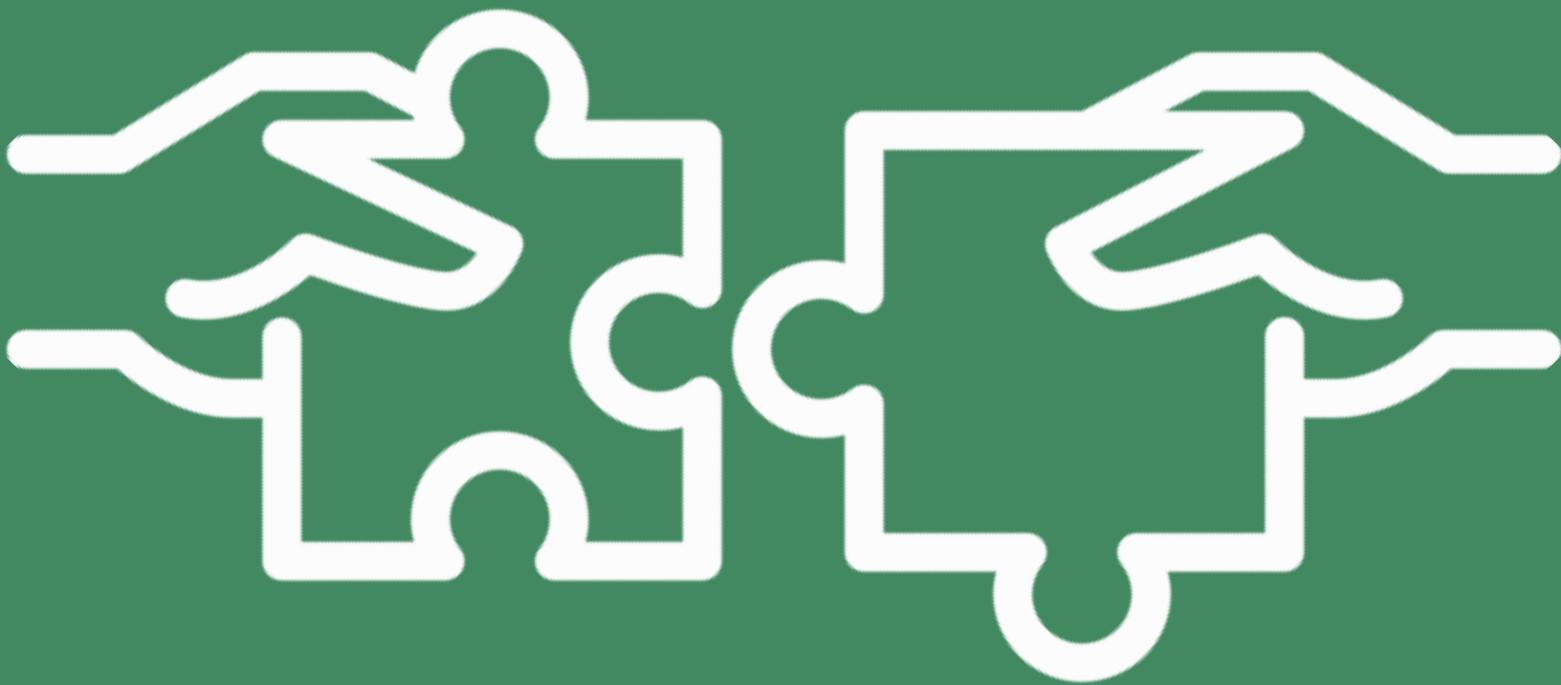


THE BI-COMMUNAL TECHNICAL COMMITTEES IN CYPRUS

How they work?

What they have achieved?

How can we further develop them?



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Author's note: The writing of this report was completed in July 2025. In October 2025, elections among the Turkish Cypriot community resulted in Mr Tatar losing power and being succeeded by Mr Tufan Erhürman. Thus, all references to, and criticisms of, the "current" Turkish Cypriot leadership refer to decisions taken by Mr Tatar. We hope that the new leadership will exhibit a greater willingness for cooperation within the framework of the Technical Committees, and that many of the challenges identified in this report will be overcome.

→ I INTRODUCTION

This report is the outcome of a 3-year research project, implemented in 2023-2026, that has been funded by the European Union under the Aid Programme for the Turkish Cypriot community and implemented by the Interdisciplinary Centre for Law, Alternative and Innovative Methods (ICLAIM) and the Human Rights Platform (IHP). The research on which this report is based and the drafting of the report itself have been the responsibility of the two partner organisations, the Interdisciplinary Centre for Law, Alternative and Innovative Methods (ICLAIM) and the Human Rights Platform. More information about, and additional research outputs of, InPeace can be found on the websites of the two organisations.¹

The report sheds light on 12 Technical Committees that were established in Cyprus by the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders between 2008 and 2015. The Technical Committees, which are comprised of volunteers who have been appointed to these positions by their respective leaders, are concerned with a series of thematic areas that have an impact on the daily lives of Cypriots. Their task is to address everyday issues that affect the lives of the people and, in the process, facilitate greater interaction and understanding between the two communities.

The report examines the extent to, and ways in, which the objectives of the Technical Committees have been met. It argues that many of the projects that have been devised and implemented by these bodies have been successful, making an important impact on Cypriots, often without the beneficiaries themselves realising. This confirms the position that long-term and fruitful cooperation between Greek and Turkish Cypriots is not only possible, but also necessary to address common challenges and improve the lives of the island's inhabitants. At the same time, the operation and effectiveness of the Technical Committees has also been undermined by a number of factors. The report identifies and explains the effect of these factors through examples, and proposes ways in which they can be addressed. Although it does not expressly refer to similar cooperative arrangements implemented elsewhere, lessons from the Technical Committees can also be useful to those who are interested in other frozen conflicts. In light of the EU's active involvement in, and support of the operations of the Technical Committees, such analysis is especially relevant to those in the European neighbourhood that have started accession discussions with the EU (Moldova was granted accession status in 2022² and Georgia in 2023).

The report is structured as follows. Section 2 outlines the methodology that we adopted in order to gather data about the little-known work of the Technical Committees. The desktop research we undertook, coupled with 56 interviews of key stakeholders and 3 focus groups with a total of 12 participants, makes this report the most well-informed publication on the work of the Technical Committees to date. Section 3 provides a brief historical background of Cyprus, the frozen conflict in which the Technical Committees operate. Section 4 describes the formation, rationale and ways of operation of the Technical Committees. Section 5 identifies and discusses in detail six particularly successful and impactful projects of the Technical Committees. Section 6 looks at these bodies more critically and identifies four of the most important challenges they face. Section 7 draws lessons for the more effective functioning of the Committees and Section 8 concludes.

¹ ICLAIM, 'Inclusive Peacebuilding – InPeace': <https://www.icclaimcentre.org/projects/inclusive-peacebuilding-inpeace> and Human Rights Platform, 'InPeace Project': <https://insanhaklariplatformu.eu/inpeace?lang=en>

² Notably, the Technical Committees share similarities with the confidence-building working groups established between Moldova and Transnistria in 2007. (Stefan Wolff Nadja Douglas, 'Confidence Building in the Shadow of War: Moldova, Transnistria, and the Uncertain Future of the 5+2 Process' (2023) *Security and Human Rights Monitor* 23-36; Marius Spechea, 'The Sectoral Working Groups: Innovation and Efficiency in Transnistrian Settlement' (2017) *Studia Securitatatis* XI(2): 148-155.)

| METHODOLOGY

The main challenge the team faced when conducting its research on the Technical Committees was lack of access to information. Most of these bodies – with the exception of the Technical Committees on Cultural Heritage³, the Environment⁴ and Culture⁵ – do not have their own websites. There is a generic United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) website on the Support Facility to the Technical Committees⁶ and another online factsheet produced by the UN Office of the Special Adviser (OSASG) on Cyprus and the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP),⁷ but these sources mention specific projects that have been implemented to date, without giving an overall picture of the Technical Committees' mandates, objectives and activities. In an attempt to address this limitation, Annex I provides a comprehensive list of all projects and activities that have been implemented by the Technical Committees until now.

In addition to the lack of primary sources, the research team was also faced with a dearth of information from secondary (academic) sources, published in Greek, Turkish or English. Two articles have been published on the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage, which provide clear information on this (rather unique) Technical Committee.⁸ Further, one more academic article discusses "Imagine", the flagship project of the Technical Committee on Education, but its authors choose to not mention by name either the project (calling it, instead, the "Peace Education Programme") or the Technical Committee that pushed it forward.⁹ Finally, with the exception of one forthcoming article that discusses the work on the Technical Committees as a whole,¹⁰ and another that is a research output of InPeace,¹¹ no other academic outputs have been concerned in any detail with these bodies.

As a result, most of the information in this report comes from four sources: (a) empirical research conducted with key stakeholders in Cyprus; (b) reports of the UN Secretary-General on Cyprus; (c) statements and videos on specific projects of the Technical Committees published by the UNDP; and (d) a review of newspapers published in Greek, Turkish or English.

The empirical research consisted of two parts, which were implemented between July 2023 and January 2025. In the first part, we attempted to interview one co-chair or member of each Technical Committee from each community (so, a total of 24 interviews). The objective of these interviews was to understand whether the Technical Committees operate in a similar manner between them, face common challenges, and the extent to which they have a shared understanding of their mandate. While the necessary number of interviews (12) was conducted among Greek Cypriots, this proved impossible among Turkish Cypriots (ultimately 8 interviews took place) due to a lack of sufficient support of the research from the Turkish Cypriot political leadership. Additionally, we conducted interviews with 8 members of the international community based in Cyprus, who are especially knowledgeable about the Technical Committees; interviewees included representatives of the UNDP, OSASG, and the EU.

3 Website of the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage: <https://www.tcchcyprus.com>.

4 Website of the Technical Committee on the Environment: <https://www.tcecyprus.org>.

5 Website of the Technical Committee on Culture: <https://www.tcculturecyprus.com>.

6 UNDP, 'Support Facility to the Technical Committees', <https://www.undp.org/cyprus/support-facility-technical-committees#:~:text=The%20Technical%20Committees%20were%20established,understanding%20between%20the%20two%20communities>.

7 OSASG Cyprus and UNFICYP, 'Technical Committees – Key Achievements', https://uncyprustalks.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/tc_overview_0.pdf.

8 Amy Reid, 'Heritage, Reconciliation and 'Cross-Border' Cooperation in Cyprus' (2021) 30(1) *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 144-152; Ali Tuncay, 'The Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage in Cyprus: From Conflict to Cooperation' (available online, no reference provided).

9 Michalinos Zembylas and Loizos Loukaides, 'Teachers' Strategies of Everyday Diplomacy in Peace Education: A Case Study of the "Infrapolitics" of Peacebuilding in Greek-Cypriot Schools' (2021) 16(1) *Research in Comparative and International Education* 43-63.

10 Gul M. Gur and Alexander Cromwell, 'Peacebuilding in Cyprus through Sustained Superordinate Cooperation: The case of the Technical Committees' (forthcoming).

11 Nasia Hadjigeorgiou, 'The Prospects and Limits of Engagement without Recognition between Parent and de Facto States: The bicomunal Technical Committees in Cyprus' (forthcoming).

The aim here was to understand whether the international community itself has a shared understanding of the mandate and objectives of the Technical Committees, as well as obtain insights on the strengths and weaknesses of these bodies from independent observers. During the first part of the empirical research, we also held interviews with 10 members of Cypriot civil society, in an effort to gauge their knowledge on the Technical Committees. These interviewees work in different thematic areas, namely gender, ecology, youth, accessibility and democratic rights. The information from the interviews was supplemented by two focus groups – one with Greek Cypriot and the other with Turkish Cypriot Technical Committee members. In total, during the first part of the empirical research, we interviewed 37 stakeholders and conducted focus groups with 8 participants.

Having established an understanding of the mandate, functioning, strengths and weaknesses of the Technical Committees, in the second part of the empirical research, we identified four projects implemented by the Committees, which were especially successful. The four projects are a) the “Imagine” project of the Technical Committee on Education, launched in 2016 and continuing to operate to date (albeit in a very truncated format since 2022); (b) the “In Culture we Trust” project of the Technical Committee on Culture, implemented in 2019-2020; (c) the “Mosquito” project of the Technical Committee on Health, implemented between 2019 and 2024; and (d) the total work of the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage between its establishment in 2008 until today. The objective was to conduct 24 additional interviews – with 12 Greek Cypriots and 12 Turkish Cypriots – who were involved in, or benefited from, these projects. While the objective was met among Greek Cypriots, only 7 interviews were conducted among Turkish Cypriots. Thus, a total of 56 people participated in the empirical research. This was supplemented by a public panel discussion on the Technical Committees that took place in October 2024, as part of The Cyprus Forum. The panel consisted of two Greek Cypriot and two Turkish Cypriot members of the Technical Committees, and was moderated by a member of the research team.¹²

Our biggest challenge when conducting the empirical research concerned participation from members of the Turkish Cypriot community. While in the Greek Cypriot community we had the full cooperation of the coordinator of the Technical Committees, which made obtaining access to interviewees much easier, this was not the case with Turkish Cypriots. Despite repeated efforts, it proved impossible to talk to the current Turkish Cypriot coordinator of the Technical Committees and, because of the lack of transparency that characterises these bodies, it was difficult to even identify potential Turkish Cypriot interviewees. When these were identified, some were reluctant to provide interviews without permission from the Turkish Cypriot coordinator, which was, however, not forthcoming. We observed a similar reluctance to provide interviews, even anonymously, in the second part of the empirical research, when we tried approaching Turkish Cypriots involved in successful Technical Committee projects. We partly addressed this challenge by approaching past members of the Technical Committees, who were, however, able to provide less up to date information.

The second source of information that we relied on were UN Secretary-General reports on Cyprus. While these do not go into much detail about the challenges faced by the Technical Committees – other than to repeatedly urge the two sides to insulate these bodies from political intervention¹³ – they provide information on the projects that have been implemented to date. The list of Technical Committee projects in Annex I of the report, was created by relying on these reports and UN announcements on social media and the website of the UNDP Cyprus.

¹² The panel discussion on the Technical Committees is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gG0g72jriog> (starting from 6:42 onwards).

¹³ See, for example, UN Secretary-General, ‘United Nations Operation in Cyprus: Report of the Secretary-General’ (3 January 2024, S/2024/12), [76].

Additional information on the Technical Committees was obtained from a series of videos that have been published by the UNDP on selected projects.¹⁴ Interesting in this respect was the very low number of views of these videos, despite the high impact of the projects on the everyday life of Cypriots.

The final source of information about the work of the Technical Committees came from a review of newspaper articles published in Greek, Turkish and English. This media review showed that the work of some Technical Committees was publicised to a greater extent than others; for instance, the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage was often the subject of (positive) media attention in a way that the work of other Committees was not. Further, we noticed that Technical Committees promoted some, but not all, of the projects they are implementing. For example, the co-chairs of the Technical Committee for Health appeared frequently in the media to discuss bicomunal cooperation relating to a response to COVID-19. Conversely, there has been comparatively less media attention paid to the (hugely important) Mosquito project implemented by the same Committee. These observations were taken up during the interviews in the empirical part of the research and our findings in relation to them are reported in more detail below.

| THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND IN CYPRUS

Much has been written on the disputed history of Cyprus, which this report will not attempt to reproduce. Instead, it will limit itself to outlining a set of well-accepted facts relevant to the development of the Technical Committees. The Republic of Cyprus (RoC) was formed in 1960 with its Constitution requiring cooperation between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot representatives at virtually all levels of government. This cooperation was short-lived and in 1963, following a series of proposals from President Makarios to change the power-sharing constitution, which he argued were necessary to make the state more functional after repeated deadlock in government. Turkey rejected the proposed changes, as do the Turkish Cypriots who see them as an attempt to undermine their political power in the Republic. In December 1963, an outbreak of intercommunal fighting took place. A ceasefire was declared in the days that follow but fighting continued. A "Green Line" was drawn through Nicosia to mark ceasefire lines and the Turkish Cypriot participation in the Cyprus Republic came to an end. In 1974, a coup d'état by a group of Greek Cypriot paramilitaries with the support of the Greek junta government aimed at Enosis of Cyprus with Greece and to overthrow the president of Cyprus. Five days later, Turkey conducted the first of two military operations on the island on July 20, followed by a second on August 14. There are two narratives of the 1974 events: one of invasion and occupation of the island by Turkey; and one of intervention to restore the constitutional order by invoking article 4 under the Treaty of Guarantee. This led to the division of the island with Turkish Cypriots in the north and Greek Cypriots in the south.¹⁵

The RoC maintains that it has sovereignty over the whole of the island (minus the Sovereign Base Areas, or SBA¹⁶) but exercises effective control over only the southern part of its territory. Although Turkish Cypriots declared the independence of the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)', this has not been recognised by the international community, in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 541 of 18 November 1983. Thus, the position of Greek Cypriots is that the northern part of Cyprus is not under the effective control of the Republic and is under the control of Turkey, which is responsible for violations of international law there.¹⁷

14 These are available on the UNDP Cyprus YouTube channel, at <https://www.youtube.com/@UNDPCyprus/videos>.

15 Cyprus Dialogue Forum (CDF), 'Political Guide: Chronology' <https://libguides.cydialogue.org/political>

16 Nasia Hadjigeorgiou, 'Sovereign Base Areas' in The Max Planck Encyclopedia of Public International Law, 2021.

17 Cyprus v. Turkey (App. No 25781/94) (European Court of Human Rights, 10 May 2001).

Conversely, the Turkish (Cypriot) position is that the existence of the RoC ended with the absence of representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community in the ROC as of 1963. According to this perspective, Greek Cypriots are wrongfully claiming to represent the RoC, which has led Turkey to refuse recognition of the Republic, often referring to it as the Greek Cypriot Administration instead. The respective positions of the two communities have remained largely unchanged for decades. This unwillingness of the two sides to recognise each other, and in particular the Republic's strong opposition to recognising the 'TRNC', has made collaboration between them virtually impossible.¹⁸ It is through this lens that the operation of the Technical Committees must be examined.

In the decades since 1983, there have been three notable developments. First, between 1974 and 2003, the two Cypriot communities were almost entirely physically separated by the impermeable UN-controlled buffer zone. In 2003, the buffer zone became partially permeable through the opening of a checkpoint that allowed the crossing of individuals from the areas that were under the effective control of the Republic to those that were not, and vice versa. This allowed Cypriots to interact for the first time in decades and, over time, made clear that this interaction also necessitated some cooperation between the two communities. Since 2003, eight more checkpoints have opened along the buffer zone, thus increasing both the interaction and need for cooperation. By way of illustration, there were 3,375,409 crossings of the buffer zone between May 2005 and April 2006,¹⁹ with the number more than doubling (7,068,924 crossings) for the period between January and December 2023.²⁰

The second development concerns the Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders reaching a comprehensive peace agreement, that was put to simultaneous and separate referenda to the two communities, in 2004. The peace agreement, most commonly referred to as the Annan Plan, was accepted by the majority of Turkish Cypriots, but overwhelmingly rejected by Greek Cypriots.²¹ Although negotiations have started and stopped repeatedly, they have not been successful. The third development concerns the accession of the RoC to the EU in the same year. The understanding was that, if both communities approved the Annan Plan and Cyprus was united, the whole of the island (minus the SBA) would join the EU. The rejection of the Annan Plan by the Greek Cypriots meant that Cyprus joined the EU as a whole, but EU law is temporarily suspended in the areas that are not under the effective control of the RoC until the resolution of the Cyprus Problem.²² Following this development, the EU committed to "put an end to the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community and to facilitate the reunification of Cyprus by encouraging the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community".²³ Thus, despite the suspension of the EU acquis, the European Commission established an "Aid Programme for the Turkish Cypriot community" based on Council Regulation (EC) No 389/2006, which seeks to facilitate the reunification of Cyprus. This programme funds the research that gave rise to this report, while also providing financial assistance to the Technical Committees themselves.

18 Nasia Hadjigeorgiou, 'The Practice of Engagement without Recognition under International Law: A Tool for Combatting Human Trafficking' (2024) 4(1) *Global Studies Quarterly* 1-14.

19 European Commission, 'Annual Report on the implementation of Council Regulation (EC) 866/2004 of 29 April 2004 and the situation resulting from its application' COM(2006) 551 final (Brussels, 25 September 2006).

20 European Commission, 'Twentieth report on the implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 866/2004 of 29 April 2004 and the situation resulting from its application covering the period 1 January until 31 December 2023' COM(2024) 265 final (Brussels, 4 July 2024).

21 UN Secretary-General, 'Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Operation in Cyprus' (28 May 2004, S/2004/437).

22 Protocol 10 of the Act concerning the conditions of accession of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Cyprus, the Republic of Latvia, the Republic of Lithuania, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Malta, the Republic of Poland, the Republic of Slovenia and the Slovak Republic and the adjustments to the Treaties on which the European Union is founded.

23 Council Regulation (EC) No 389/2006 of 27 February 2006 establishing an instrument of financial support for encouraging the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community and amending Council Regulation (EC) No 2667/2000 on the European Agency for Reconstruction, paragraph (2).



THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEES

The Technical Committees are arguably a product of a twin set of realisations among Cypriot leaders. First, that, following the failure of the Annan Plan, Cyprus was likely to remain divided for the foreseeable future. Second, that, especially after the opening of the checkpoints and the increased interaction among Cypriots, some sort of cooperation between the two communities had to take place. This cooperation would address everyday problems faced by Cypriots that could not wait for the comprehensive resolution of the Cyprus Problem. The twin realisations are reflected in the general mandate of the Technical Committees, which were formed in order “to address issues that affect the day-to-day life of people, through encouraging and facilitating greater interaction and understanding between the two communities.”²⁴ Thus, at their core, the Technical Committees (which, on paper, are presented as confidence-building measures) have dual, and potentially contradicting, objectives: on the one hand, do damage control within – and, therefore, somewhat normalise – the frozen conflict setting; and on the other hand, work towards dismantling the frozen conflict in which they operate.

When the two Cypriot leaders appreciated the need for greater cooperation, they identified nine thematic areas in which this was urgently needed: (1) Broadcasting and Telecommunications; (2) Cultural Heritage; (3) Crime and Criminal Matters; (4) Economic and Commercial Matters; (5) Environment; (6) Health; (7) Crisis Management; (8) Crossings; and (9) Humanitarian Affairs. Each thematic area became the focus of one of the first nine Technical Committees that were established in 2008. In 2015, Nikos Anastasiades and Mustafa Akinci agreed that there was a need for cooperation in three more thematic areas: (10) Culture; (11) Gender Equality and (12) Education.

In light of concerns, especially from Greek Cypriots, that engagement with the other entity could be misconstrued as international recognition, a formula had to be devised that squared the circle. On the one hand, the Technical Committees had to encourage effective communication, which in turn, allowed for the addressing of issues. On the other hand, these bodies had to exclude any officials, lest their involvement be perceived as cooperation, and therefore implied recognition, between the RoC and the areas not under its effective control. The agreed formula was for each leader to appoint one co-chair and a roughly equal number of members in each Technical Committee. Despite their appointment by their respective leader, co-chairs and members operate in their personal capacity and are not remunerated. These individuals discuss at the Committee level issues relevant to their thematic area and propose projects or solutions for addressing them. The proposals are then communicated to the two leaders and if both give the green light, they are implemented.²⁵ Presumably due to recognition concerns, the Technical Committees do not have any statutory footing, are not considered organs of any state or the international community, do not have written or transparent rules of procedure, and their decisions or actions cannot be challenged in any court.

²⁴ UNDP, ‘Support Facility to the Technical Committees’.

²⁵ Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage in Cyprus, ‘Who we are’, <https://www.tcchcyprus.com/who-we-are/>.

Despite the 12 bodies sharing a common mandate, there are significant differences between them. Most of these differences have developed organically, as a result of decisions by the different Committees' co-chairs, due to the absence of formal and uniform rules of procedure. For example, the size of each Technical Committee varies considerably. The Technical Committee on Crossings has a total of 6 members, while the Technical Committee on Education had, at some point, 24 members. Different still is the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage that has a total of 12 members, and an Advisory Board of experts with 18 additional members.²⁶

The background of each Committee's members also differs. While all participants operate in their personal capacity, Turkish Cypriot members are more likely to also be working as civil servants in the areas not under the effective control of the RoC. Presumably, the expectation is that their appointment to the Technical Committees sends the message that the de facto authorities themselves are represented in these bodies. Conversely, the background of Greek Cypriot members varies depending on the Technical Committee they happen to be on. Members of Technical Committees like Education, Gender Equality, Culture and the Environment mostly come from civil society; other Technical Committees, such as Health and Broadcasting choose their members based on their professional qualifications and knowledge of the specific sector. Different still are those Technical Committees that require specific knowledge of government procedures, such as those dealing with Crossings or Crisis Management. The Greek Cypriot members of these bodies often involve civil servants, who, in contrast to their Turkish Cypriot counterparts, are almost always retired.

In addition to their Cypriot members and co-chairs, the Technical Committees are able to function due to the support they receive from the international community. This support takes two forms. First, for all Technical Committees, one representative of the UN acts as the facilitator. What the facilitator does, varies, depending on the Committee. For example, the facilitator of the Technical Committee on Gender takes an active role in the decision-making, often suggesting compromises and proposing ideas that the co-chairs then communicate to their respective leaders. Conversely, the facilitator of the Technical Committee of Cultural Heritage has a more ceremonial role, as it is the Cypriots who exclusively drive the agenda and decision-making. Moreover, while for most Technical Committees, the facilitator is a member of OSASG, for the Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters the facilitator is a member of UNPOL, and for the Technical Committee on Economic and Commercial Matters they are a member of UN-FICYP. Additionally, the UNDP takes an active part in the running of the Technical Committees by offering conceptual and operational support to them, for example, by helping with reporting to their funders.²⁷ The UNDP also serves the useful function of providing a formal front to projects that are implemented by the Technical Committees, which are entirely informal bodies.²⁸

26 Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage in Cyprus, 'Who we are', <https://www.tcchcyprus.com/who-we-are/>

27 For a description of the work being done by the Support Facility to the Bicomunal Technical Committees, see Sean McGearty, 'Evaluation of the Support facility to the bi-communal Technical Committees' (30 September 2022), https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/13276_12-14.

28 Ibid., 23.

The second way in which the international community has become involved in the work of the Technical Committees is through the provision of financial and technical support. In the early days of the Technical Committees, implementing projects proved difficult because there was no available money to fund these.²⁹ The gap was ultimately filled by the EU, which in 2019 made €1 million available to them.³⁰ By 2022, 64% of that money had been used, suggesting that there are additional factors, other than the original lack of funding, that explain the Technical Committees' sometimes underwhelming performance.³¹ In addition to EU funding, some Technical Committees have also received financial support from other international actors. For instance, the "Imagine" project of the Technical Committee on Education is funded by the German Federal Government; part of the work of the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage has been funded by the Aliph Foundation; and the Joint Contact Room, a sub-committee of the Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters, receives funding from UNPOL. Thus, although the Technical Committees are instances of cooperation between a parent and a de facto state, this would have been significantly harder, if not impossible, without assistance and support from the international community.

At the same time, the lack of clarity about which part of the international community is responsible for the Technical Committees can give rise to practical problems. As one Turkish Cypriot interviewee put it, "My feeling was that these Technical Committees were not properly owned by anyone, including the UN."³² This has practical implications because different international bodies (and even, different UN agencies) understand the mandate of the Technical Committees in different ways. For example, during the interviews, one UNDP representative noted: "I must say that we were never guided about the mandate of the Technical Committees."³³ Nevertheless, they continued, "[f]rom what I understand [their mandate] is to make the everyday lives of the people more manageable. The facilitation of the negotiations never took place. They shouldn't facilitate the negotiations anyway." Conversely, one OSASG representative argued that the main task of the Committees was to allow for interaction between the two communities, irrespective of whether or not this interaction produced any concrete positive outcomes. Thus, they concluded that the Technical Committees "may not be as effective [...], but as long as they continue working, that is the crucial part for us."³⁴ Thus, one international actor considered the Technical Committees to be detached from the political negotiation process, and another, to be actively involved in it. However, depending on how the mandate of the Committees is understood, the way these can be supported by international actors also varies.

29 This was a complaint that was made by almost all members of the Technical Committees that had been interviewed as part of the project.

30 McGearty, 'Evaluation of the Support facility to the bi-communal Technical Committees', 7.

31 As one interviewee put it, 'A budget and an office would have helped, but the most important thing we need is political support.'

32 Interview with former member of the Technical Committee on Education (6 November 2023).

33 Interview with UNDP representative (12 October 2023).

34 Interview with OSASG representative (9 October 2023).



THE SUCCESSES OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEES

This section describes some of the most successful projects of the Technical Committees, in order to illustrate both the wide range of their work, and the extent to which this has been essential to the well-being of Cypriots.

A | Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters – Joint Contact Room

The Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters was established in 2008 and in June 2009, it formed a sub-committee specifically tasked with promoting cooperation between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot law enforcement agencies. This sub-committee, called the Joint Contact Room (JCR), has been meeting on a daily basis, originally in the buffer zone in Nicosia. In 2024, a second JCR office was established to encourage increased police cooperation in Pyla.³⁵ The JCR consists of two Greek Cypriot and two Turkish Cypriot members, who share information between themselves about criminal matters. In practice, if the RoC police requires information about a criminal activity allegedly taking place in the areas not under the Republic's effective control, it conveys a request for information to the JCR's Greek Cypriot members. In turn, they communicate this request to their Turkish Cypriot counterparts, who ask that this information is shared by the Turkish Cypriot police. When the reply is received, it makes its way back to the RoC police through the same channels.³⁶ Similarly, if Turkish Cypriots require information about criminal activities in the areas effectively controlled by the RoC, they rely on the same process in reverse.

Although the procedure appears cumbersome, it had been used in more than 1,000 occasions between 2009 and the end of 2018.³⁷ Cooperation facilitated by the JCR involves sharing of information that can assist in police investigations (in 27% of cases), relates to stolen property (in 19% of cases), answers whether someone has crossed a checkpoint (in 16% of cases), or seeks to locate and return missing persons (in 9% of cases).³⁸ Roughly 38% of requests for cooperation come from Turkish Cypriots and 62% from Greek Cypriots, thus suggesting that both communities are keen to make use of this cooperative mechanism.³⁹

At the same time, the JCR is not without its limitations. For example, while it has proven very effective in the sharing of information relating to some categories of (mostly minor) crimes, it has been ineffective in terms of curbing human trafficking across the buffer zone.⁴⁰ Additionally, the JCR is well-suited in promoting communication during the investigative stage of a case, but is likely to be far less useful in later stages, involving the extradition of potential suspects that more directly rely on concrete legal processes.

35 UN Secretary-General, 'Report of the Secretary-General on his Mission of Good Offices in Cyprus' (S/2023/6, 3 January 2023), [14].

36 Nasia Hadjigeorgiou and Dina Kapardis, 'Police Cooperation in Cases of Unrecognised Secessions: The Joint Communications Room in Cyprus' (2023) 22(5) *Ethnopolitics* 527-549.

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Ibid.*

39 *Ibid.*

40 UN Secretary-General, 'United Nations Operation in Cyprus: Report of the Secretary-General (5 July 2023, S/2023/498), [11]; UN Secretary-General, 'United Nations operation in Cyprus: Report of the Secretary-General' (3 January 2023, S/2023/3), [10].

Thus, while there have been extraditions of third country nationals under the auspices of the JCR,⁴¹ these have proven very difficult in cases that involve Cypriots or even (in relation to the areas not under the effective control of the RoC) Turkish nationals.⁴² Finally, despite the generally excellent communication fostered by the JCR, there has been at least one high-profile example in which Turkish Cypriot police officers arrested a Turkish Cypriot murder suspect who had escaped to the areas under the effective control of the Republic, without informing, or asking assistance from, the Greek Cypriots through the JCR.⁴³ This suggests that when the stakes are high enough, even long-term and fruitful cooperation might be disregarded, in the altar of expediency.

B | Technical Committee on Education – “Imagine”

When the Technical Committee on Education was established in 2015, one of its objectives was to devise a mutually acceptable mechanism for the implementation of confidence-building measures in schools,⁴⁴ and promote contact and cooperation between students and educators from the two communities. This objective was achieved – very successfully, at least for a while⁴⁵ – through “Imagine”, which is being funded by the Foreign Office of the Republic of Germany and implemented by the NGO Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR).⁴⁶ “Imagine”, which was launched in 2016, is an umbrella programme that includes different initiatives and activities designed to bring students and educators from the two communities together. Included in these initiatives are anti-racism bicomunal workshops with students; teacher trainings; summer schools; afternoon activities, such as sports, cooking, music and art classes for children; a conference for head teachers of primary and secondary schools; and educational walking tours of Nicosia.

However, by far the most impactful initiative under “Imagine” was one that brought together Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot students during a school day. The initiative targeted primary, secondary and high school students, and was structured as follows.⁴⁷ AHDR staff visited the Greek or Turkish Cypriot school that had been chosen to participate in the programme and delivered a monocommunal educational session that focused on themes like anti-racism and multi-culturalism (but did not explicitly discuss the Cyprus Problem). Following this preparatory activity, the one Greek Cypriot and one Turkish Cypriot school that had been matched for the day, were taken to the Home for Cooperation in the buffer zone, and the students continued with educational activities, this time in a bicomunal setting. Roughly about 97% of the students who attended the monocommunal training, opted to attend the bicomunal meeting as well.⁴⁸

41 UN Secretary-General 'United Nations Operation in Cyprus: Report of the Secretary-General' (7 January 2020, S/2020/23), [25].

42 In one instance, there was an exchange of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot suspects (UN Secretary-General, 'Report of the Secretary-General on his Mission of Good Offices in Cyprus' (5 July 2018, S/2023/497), [18].) Also, when in 2023 a suspect for the murder of a teenage girl (with 'TRNC' and Turkish 'citizenship') escaped to the areas under the effective control of the Republic, he was quickly arrested by Greek Cypriot police and delivered to the Turkish Cypriots (see KNEWS, 'Suspect in Murder of Teen Girl Handed over to North' 25 January 2023, <https://knews.kathimerini.com.cy/en/news/suspect-in-murder-of-teen-girl-handed-over-to-north>).

43 Tom Cleaver, 'Three Arrested for Kidnapping North Murder Suspects (Updated)' (Cyprus Mail, 10 January 2024), <https://cyprus-mail.com/2024/01/10/murder-suspects-may-have-been-illegally-taken-to-north>.

44 Interview with member of the Technical Committee on Education (23 July 2023).

45 For its impact, 'Imagine' received the 'GENE Global Education Award 2020/2021: Quality and good practice in Global Education across Europe'. For more information see, Global Campaign for Peace Education, 'Imagine Project receives Global Education Award (Cyprus) (21 May 2021), <https://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/imagine-project-receives-global-education-award-cyprus/#>.

46 AHDR, 'The Numbers of Imagine', <https://www.ahdr.info/our-work/imagine/>.

47 For a description of the methodology adopted by 'Imagine', see Zembylas and Loukaides, 'Teachers' Strategies of Everyday Diplomacy in Peace Education'.

48 Interview with facilitator of the 'Imagine' programme (13 September 2023).

The reach, impact and importance of "Imagine" cannot be exaggerated. On a purely symbolic level, it marked the first time in Cyprus' history when Greek and Turkish Cypriot students co-existed, however briefly, during school time. Even between 1960 and 1963, this was not possible since education under the 1960 RoC Constitution was the responsibility of each community, resulting in two parallel educational systems. On a practical level, between 2017 and 2022, 6,117 students, accompanied by 714 teachers, were trained through "Imagine". For many, this was the first time in their life they had the opportunity to meet and interact with a member of the other community. Thus, "Imagine" addressed the massive knowledge gap about the 'other' that exists between the two Cypriot communities. This is reflected in the questions that 'Imagine' facilitators received during the preparatory monocommunal sessions, especially from primary school students. One Greek Cypriot facilitator was asked whether the Turkish Cypriot students would carry guns, or if they were the same colour as Greek Cypriots. A Turkish Cypriot facilitator was asked how many arms Greek Cypriots have and what kind of food they eat. Yet, by the end of the "Imagine" workshops, feelings were positive as "somehow the children always merged",⁴⁹ with facilitators being told that "Ah, they [i.e. students from the other community] are not so bad in the end" or "They are children like us."⁵⁰ What remains to be assessed is whether such positive interactions have more long-term effects; in all likelihood, more consistent contact between participants is needed for that.

Despite, or a cynic would argue because of, "Imagine"s success, it abruptly came to an end in 2022, following the election of Ersin Tatar as the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community.⁵¹ Specifically, while the "Imagine" initiatives that do not take place during school time continue, the most crucial part of the programme that was described in detail above, has been suspended. The justification for its suspension was that "Imagine" was not in line with the political objectives of the current Turkish Cypriot leadership, namely a 'two-state solution'. Despite its disappointing ending, the ambition and impact of 'Imagine' during the 5-year period it was in full operation, undoubtedly place it among the most successful projects of the Technical Committees. The programme also arguably had a more-long term impact. In the words of one Technical Committee on Education member,

*"You need to understand that no politician has ever asked for, and no politician has ever discussed, a single educational system. This is important, I want you to write it down. And "Imagine" taught us that at least some cooperation in the educational sphere is possible."*⁵²

49 Interview with former member of the Technical Committee on Education (21 August 2024).

50 Interview with facilitator of the 'Imagine' programme (13 September 2023).

51 UN Secretary-General, 'Report of the Secretary-General on his Mission of Good Offices in Cyprus' (5 July 2023, S/2023/497), [26].

52 Interview with member of the Technical Committee on Education (6 September 2024).

C | Technical Committee on Culture – “In Culture we Trust” and bicomunal theatre productions

The Technical Committee on Culture has implemented two successful projects that are worth discussing in more detail. The first, titled “In Culture We Trust”, involved the return of 219 paintings that belong to Greek Cypriots and had been left in the areas not under the effective control of the Republic in 1974.⁵³ In 2019, these paintings were restored by a group of Turkish Cypriot art experts. With the help of the Technical Committee on Culture, the paintings were publicly displayed for months in 2020, and were subsequently returned to their rightful owners. In exchange, and as a gesture of good will, Greek Cypriots shared with Turkish Cypriots 76 audio-visual archives of footage from the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation that had been prepared in Turkish between 1960 and 1963.⁵⁴ This project’s positive impact is arguably two-fold. First, it is historically and culturally important. In the words of the Technical Committee’s Turkish Cypriot co-chair: “The pictures of the artists, and the archives from that period show us this: Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots can live together, no matter what anyone says.”⁵⁵ Second, the bringing together of culture, also contributed to the bringing together of people. As the Greek Cypriot co-chair explained:

“It was [...] one of the most sensitive moments in my life. We got so emotional that we cried and we embraced each other because through the exchange we made our friendship and our fraternity stronger. And this will last forever. When you hear “Culture unites people”, yes, it does.”⁵⁶

The second successful project of this Technical Committee concerned a musical ensemble and two theatre productions, which took place at the Othello Tower and the ancient Salamis theatre respectively, both in the areas not under the effective control of the Republic. The two theatre productions were presented in Greek and hyper-titles were projected in Turkish. The musical ensemble and Hippolytus, the first theatre production, took place in 2015 and were supported by the Cypriot political leadership. Both leaders, with their wives, attended the musical ensemble, while a range of other politicians attended Hippolytus.⁵⁷ However, by the time Antigoni, the second theatre production, was presented to the public in 2017, the political climate had changed. Most politicians did not attend the play, which also attracted much nationalist criticism, especially within the Greek Cypriot community.⁵⁸ Despite this, all three events were attended by large crowds, with the audience sometimes standing, or sitting in the corridors, for the duration of the play. Each play was watched by approximately 4,000 persons and both events received considerable media attention.⁵⁹ Few, if any, projects of the Technical Committees have had such a wide reach to the Cypriot public; in the words of one of their key organisers, “for me, the plays at Salamis and Othello Tower are the most important things I have done in my life”.⁶⁰ Yet, similarly popular activities have not been organised since then. This is undoubtedly due to diminishing political support for such initiatives, a major handicap in the work of the Technical Committees, discussed in more detail below.

53 Technical Committee on Culture, ‘In Culture we Trust’ (2019), https://www.undp.org/cyprus/publications/culture-we-trust_9_

54 UNDP Cyprus, ‘In Culture we Trust’, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m7-XOGtxFVA>.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Technical Committee on Culture, ‘In Culture we Trust’ (2019), 15.

58 Interview with ex-member of the Technical Committee on Culture (20 August 2024).

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

D | Technical Committee on Economic and Commercial Matters – Electricity connection, marine cleaning and new projects to come

The Technical Committee on Economic and Commercial Matters has been among the most active of the 12 bodies, having implemented, albeit rather quietly, a series of projects that have had a positive impact on the lives of Cypriots. Among the first successes of the Technical Committee was the connection of the electricity grids in the areas that are and those that are not under the effective control of the Republic. Pre-1974, the island had a single electricity grid, which remained in operation even after the war, with Greek Cypriots meeting all of the Turkish Cypriot electricity needs until 1981 and continuing to send at least some power to Turkish Cypriots until 1996.⁶¹ Eventually, Turkish Cypriots started producing their own electricity and the single grid that connected the island was rendered obsolete. In 2011, a large explosion next to the RoC's biggest electricity production plant resulted in massive electricity shortages among the Greek Cypriot community. In order to respond to these shortages, between 2011 and 2012, a member of the Technical Committee bought (informally on behalf of the RoC and to be used by Greek Cypriots) 162,000 kWh of electricity worth almost €30 million.⁶² This emergency arrangement required the hasty reconnection of the old grid over the course of two days – an exercise that was not without peril for Turkish Cypriots, who also risked being plunged into total darkness.

In order to avoid the appearance of recognition through direct engagement with the Turkish Cypriot authorities, the RoC transferred the payment for the electricity to the Greek Cypriot co-chair of the Technical Committee, who then transferred the money to his Turkish Cypriot counterpart. The Turkish Cypriot co-chair paid the money to the Turkish Cypriot electricity authority and the transaction was complete.⁶³ Since 2011, the two communities have improved the connections between the two electricity grids, which can now be connected, without risk, at the click of a button.⁶⁴ This happens fairly regularly – approximately once per year – but now mostly in the opposite direction, with Greek Cypriots sending power to the areas that are not under the effective control of the Republic.⁶⁵ 2011 was also the last time that money was exchanged. Since then, the two communities have adopted a net-metering system, with Turkish Cypriots returning the electricity they borrowed when they have the capacity to do so. This arrangement has left both communities better off in two ways: first, they are able to acquire electricity from the other community in times of crisis or temporary shortages. Second, the interconnection provides greater stability of the grid, an ever more important consideration as both communities produce more of their electricity from renewable sources.

61 Timothy Moss, Ourania Papasozomenou, Marik Shtern, Sertac Sonan, 'Gridlocked: Governing 'Cross-border' Electricity Provision and Infrastructure in a Divided Cyprus since 1963' (2024) 115 *Energy Research & Social Science* 103635.

62 Ibid.

63 Interview with member of the Technical Committee on Economic and Commercial Matters (13 July 2023).

64 Moss et al., 'Gridlocked'.

65 The second time the Greek Cypriots requested electricity from Turkish Cypriots was in 2025. (Chrysanthos Manoli, 'Republic of Cyprus Draws Emergency Power from Occupied North to Avert Blackout' (18 February 2025, Philenews), <https://in-cyprus.philenews.com/insider/cyprus-electricity-grid-struggles-amid-power-shortages/>.)

The second successful project of the Technical Committee concerned the need to clean an oil spill in the Karpasia/Karpaz Peninsula in 2013.⁶⁶ When the oil spill appeared, the Turkish Cypriots asked for assistance from Turkey, but upon realising that this was not forthcoming, they turned – through the Technical Committee – to the Greek Cypriots for help. In turn, Greek Cypriots quickly made available cleaning material to Turkish Cypriots and the environmental disaster was averted. Payment for the cleaning material by the Turkish Cypriots followed the same format as the payment for electricity by Greek Cypriots in 2011. The implementation of both projects described here took place quickly and smoothly, largely building on the excellent working relationships of the members of the Technical Committee.

Three projects, which the Technical Committee is currently working on, are also worth mentioning. The first is the joint recycling of electrical and electronic waste from both communities. At the moment, there is an electrical and electronic waste recycling plant in the areas under the effective control of the Republic, which is, however, not receiving enough waste to be sustainable. At the same time, no such recycling plant is available in the areas not under the RoC's effective control.⁶⁷ Combining the electronic waste of both communities is expected to address both problems. Thus, two recycling sites have been designated in the areas not under effective control of the Republic for the collection of electrical waste, which will then be transferred across the buffer zone.⁶⁸ The second project of the Technical Committee involves cooperating with the Central Bank of the RoC to withdraw damaged euro notes that have accumulated in the areas not under the effective control of the Republic.⁶⁹ Third, the Committee is playing a key role in efforts to increase trade across the Green Line by, for example, facilitating the crossing of commercial vehicles.⁷⁰ All three projects are important developments in improving the everyday lives of Cypriots on the island.

E | Technical Committee for Health – The Mosquito project

The Mosquito Project of the Technical Committee for Health is, in fact, a series of EU-funded projects that started being implemented in 2019 and are likely to continue being implemented into the future.⁷¹ The funded projects officially take place under the auspices of the UNDP, but are in practice, being ran by a group of Greek and Turkish Cypriot scientists.⁷² The Mosquito Project became necessary when a group of Greek Cypriots discovered a non-endemic type of mosquito that could be the carrier of serious diseases, like the Zika virus and the Denge fever. Attempting to control the spreading of this mosquito proved to be challenging for two reasons. First, unlike endemic mosquitos that could only reproduce in large areas of water (such as rivers and the salt lakes), the non-endemic mosquitos could reproduce in even small flower pots and, therefore, every Cypriot house's back yard was a potential breeding site.

66 European Parliament, 'Parliamentary question – E-010578/2013: Environmental disaster caused by oil spill in Ammochostos Bay in Cyprus' (17 September 2013), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-7-2013-010578_EN.html?redirect.

67 Nasia Hadjigeorgiou, 'The Impact of the Cyprus Problem on the Protection of the Environment' Peace Research Institute Oslo (Cyprus Centre) (December 2024).

68 E mail communication with member of the Technical Committee on Economic and Commercial Matters (5 September 2024). While progress has been made in the implementation of this project, it has been frustratingly slow. The project had been proposed by the Technical Committee in November 2021, yet by November 2024, electronic waste from the Turkish Cypriot community had yet to be recycled.

69 UN Secretary-General, 'Report of the Secretary-General on his Mission of Good Offices in Cyprus' (3 January 2023, S/2023/6), [15]. Also see, Katy Turner, 'Bicommunal Committee Looking at Ways to Withdraw Damaged Euros from North' (5 January 2024), <https://cyprus-mail.com/2025/01/05/bicommunal-committee-looking-at-ways-to-withdraw-damaged-euros-from-north>.

70 UN Secretary-General, 'Report of the Secretary-General on his Mission of Good Offices in Cyprus' (3 January 2023, S/2023/6), [15].

71 Interview with scientist working on the implementation of the Mosquito project (3 July 2024).

72 For more information on the Mosquito project, see UNDP Cyprus, 'Technical Committee on Health: The Medical Importance of Mosquitos', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2D2xpcnPf9c>; and UNDP Cyprus, 'Identification and Distribution of Vectors of Medical Importance on the island of Cyprus', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rx7o0fbTXcA>.

Second, even if the RoC took adequate measures to control the spreading of the mosquitos in the areas under its effective control, this would yield no practical results unless a similar strategy was adopted by Turkish Cypriots as well.

This is what the Mosquito project has been doing over the last 6 years: scientists have identified where the non-endemic mosquitos are breeding by conducting fieldwork across 124 sampling sites. The collected data, analysed through morphological and molecular methods, was stored in a database to ensure continuity and standardization. Finally, campaigns are being organised to inform the public in the affected areas about the steps that must be taken to address the problem.⁷³ The Technical Committee has organised two bicommunal informative events disseminating its research findings. The first event was attended by 70 frontline workers and the second by 90 more participants, making them among the largest bicommunal events in the last years.⁷⁴ Thus, the work of a Technical Committee has been instrumental in improving, by making safer, the everyday life of Cypriots. In the words of an expert working on the project:

*"It goes without saying that the project has helped with the day-to-day life of the people. The project has also helped us learn how to work together. We managed to work on very complex issues, in a way that doesn't threaten the other community."*⁷⁵

F | The combined work of the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage

Arguably the most well-known among the Technical Committees is the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage. It has received a number of international awards in recognition of its work, most notably the 2021 European Heritage Award/Europa Nostra Award, for using cultural heritage as a tool for reconciliation and peaceful cooperation.⁷⁶ The secret to this success is not the implementation of a single impactful project, but the adoption of a well-thought out strategy resulting in the restoration of more than 33 major religious and cultural heritage sites around the island.⁷⁷ Combined, these projects have cost approximately €25 million and have largely been funded by the European Commission.⁷⁸ The Technical Committee was established in 2008 and by 2012, its members, with the support of an Advisory Group, had identified 40 sites that they considered needed to be restored as a matter of priority.⁷⁹ The sites were a combination of culturally, religiously or archeologically important monuments; sites that needed less extensive restorations and therefore could yield positive results quickly; and sites that were within communities and therefore, likely to attract greater public attention.⁸⁰

73 Interview with scientist working on the implementation of the Mosquito project (3 July 2024).

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage in Cyprus, 'Awards', <https://www.tcchcyprus.com/awards/#:-:text=The%202021%20European%20Heritage%20Awards,for%20reconciliation%20and%20peaceful%20cooperation>. Unlike other Committees, the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage has made an effort to document and make visible some of its work. See, for example, UNDP Cyprus, 'Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage – Europa Nostra Award', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQVyuRfyC_o_.

77 McGearty, 'Evaluation of the Support facility to the bi-communal Technical Committees', 12. In addition to the major restorations, the Technical Committee has been involved in the restoration of smaller monuments. The Committee has reported that since 2012, 136 cultural heritage sites have been conserved, structurally supported, physically protected or restored. (UNDP Cyprus, 'UNDP Completion Event at the Panagia Chryseleousa and Agios Antonios', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34J4z8tcxss_).

78 McGearty, 'Evaluation of the Support facility to the bi-communal Technical Committees', 12; UNDP Cyprus, 'Support to Monuments of Great Importance for the Communities of Cyprus – Phase 7', <https://www.undp.org/cyprus/projects/support-monuments-great-importance-communities-cyprus-phase-7>.

79 These 40 sites were distilled from a study of 2,300 cultural heritage sites, the preparation of around 700 inventory charts, and the completion of 121 technical assessments. (Tuncay, 'The Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage in Cyprus'.)

80 Ibid.

It is unclear whether this was part of the strategy of the Technical Committee or merely a convenient coincidence, but most of the sites chosen for restoration within the Greek Cypriot community were churches or monasteries. This had the effect of bringing the Greek Orthodox Church (that has historically exhibited a nationalist approach to the Cyprus Problem) on board with the Committee's bicomunal trust-building agenda. In the words of one Greek Cypriot member of the Committee:

*"We have enough visibility to have gained the legitimacy we need from the public. The Committee has done this by building on everything that is holy to the Greek Cypriot community, in other words their churches, so even the greatest hardliners cannot really criticise the work that we do."*⁸¹

One could argue that the work of this Technical Committee is less crucial or urgent than that of other Committees dealing with more pressing life and death issues. A principled response to this criticism is that cultural heritage is of fundamental importance in preserving a nation's history – even more so when the history in question is a shared, yet contested one.⁸² Moreover, preservation work is important because, in the context of the frozen conflict, if it is not done by the Technical Committee, it will remain undone.⁸³

Perhaps most crucially, however, the work of this Technical Committee, more than any other, has shown that cooperation between the two communities is possible and, where good will is present, it can allow for "social interaction, sharing and acknowledging different histories and memories, caring for each other through cherishing each other's cultural heritage."⁸⁴ The importance that the Technical Committee attaches to the social impact of its work is reflected in a number of projects it has implemented over the years that go beyond the restoration of historical and religious sites. These include planning a "Heritage Away Day" as well as organising an arts and crafts event, where children were invited to draw their own model of the Venitan walls and were taught the importance of protecting monuments.⁸⁵ Most recently, the Technical Committee launched an Interactive Education Platform focused on cultural heritage in Cyprus, which can be accessed and used in classrooms and homes across the island.⁸⁶ Finally, there is evidence that the restoration of buildings can itself be a catalyst for bringing people together.⁸⁷

81 Interview with member of the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage (17 July 2023).

82 This point has been made by both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot members of the Technical Committee. See, for example, Sotos Ktoris' comments at UNDP Cyprus, 'UNDP Completion Event at the Kalo Chorio/Vuda Mosque', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUgOIQ5bLHM>; Ali Tuncay's comments, at UNDP Cyprus, 'Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage – Europa Nostra Award', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOVyuRfyC_o.

83 Interview with member of the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage (17 July 2023).

84 UNDP, 'Social and Environmental Screening Template of the Support Project' [of the Technical Committee of Cultural Heritage], https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/CYP/SES_00119182_2019_234.pdf.

85 Reid, 'Heritage, Reconciliation and 'Cross-Border' Cooperation in Cyprus'.

86 The Platform can be accessed here: <https://iep.cyprusdigitalheritage.com/login/index.php>.

87 The Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage in Cyprus, '2008-2018: 10 Years Working Together for our Common Heritage', https://www.undp.org/cyprus/publications/2018-tcch-publication_10.



THE CHALLENGES FACED BY THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEES

Despite the impressive work done by some Technical Committees to date, they have also faced important challenges, with detrimental effects on their productivity and ability to meet their objectives. This section identifies four of these challenges, while Section 7 proposes ways in which they can be addressed.

A | Political intervention in the work of the Technical Committees

The first challenge faced by the Technical Committees is that their work is subject to political intervention. This usually takes two forms: first, the appointment and removal of co-chairs and members are subject to discretionary decisions by politicians; and second, the projects proposed by the Technical Committees require approval from the two leaders. The detrimental impact of political intervention in the operation of the Technical Committees has been identified on numerous occasions by the UN Secretary-General, who has noted that:

*"I continue to call upon the two sides to provide the Technical Committees with the support and leeway necessary in order to preserve their ability to function, deliver results and address matters with island-wide implications. The Committees, where representatives can discuss and address issues of common concern in both communities, should be protected and insulated from larger political discussions and developments on the ground."*⁸⁸

Since the Technical Committees operate under the direct authority of the political leaderships, the two leaders can appoint or remove co-chairs and members, without providing any justifications for their decision. This wide discretion afforded to the leaders leaves the Technical Committees open to political interference at all times. In turn, the more extensive this interference, the greater the risk of undermining the Committees' effectiveness and independence.

When asked about the possible connection between the membership of the Technical Committees and political changes taking place on the ground, all interviewees confirmed that this exists. They mainly referred to the decision of Mr. Tatar, following his election, to remove several Turkish Cypriot co-chairs and members from their positions. This was different from past practices as, when Mr. Akıncı assumed office in 2015, he did not interfere with the composition of the Technical Committees, unless specific individuals had stopped attending meetings or themselves wished to resign.⁸⁹ Conversely, Mr. Tatar removed members from their positions without providing any justification or even notifying them of this decision. Some former members found this practice humiliating and disrespectful, complaining that their experiences and contributions had been sidelined by the new leadership, despite them working on a volunteer basis and with good intentions.⁹⁰ Additionally, such intervention is problematic because if membership depends on the ever-changing political climate, then Committee members are less likely to think outside the box and adopt innovative solutions to long standing problems.

88 UN Secretary-General, 'Report of the Secretary-General on his mission of good offices in Cyprus' (3 January 2024, S/2024/13), [40].

89 Interview with former member of Technical Committee on Education (6 November 2023).

90 Interview with former member of Technical Committee on Environment (25 October 2023).

Some Turkish Cypriot members, especially in the three Committees established in 2015,⁹¹ themselves resigned following Mr Tatar's election, stating that they would not like to work under the new political leadership.⁹² At the same time, some Greek Cypriot members also rendered their resignation when Mr. Christodulides was newly elected, but with a different reasoning: they believed that the new leader deserved to appoint persons who agreed with his political positions, which was not the case with the current members, few of whom had supported his presidential campaign.⁹³ Ultimately, none of the Greek Cypriot resignations were accepted by Mr Christodoulides, and the Committees mostly continued with their original compositions. This example shows that politics and the composition of the Technical Committees are inherently, and perhaps unavoidably, connected. What must be avoided, therefore, is not any kind of political intervention, but the sort of political micromanagement that is likely to make these bodies less productive.

In addition to shaping the membership of the Technical Committees, both leaders play a crucial role in deciding the projects that will be implemented by these bodies. Specifically, they have the final say when approving or rejecting project proposals, as well as controlling public communication related to such initiatives. In practice, each community has appointed a coordinator for the Technical Committees, who regularly meets with the OSASG.⁹⁴ Therefore, if a project is to go ahead, the coordinators (with the blessings of their leaders) have to agree to this during their meetings with the OSASG. Considering the politically sensitive work often done by the Technical Committees, this close monitoring of their activities is understandable. However, lessons from the experiences of these bodies suggest that the greater such political interference, the more it risks undermining the Committees' effectiveness and independence.

Especially following the change in the Turkish Cypriot leadership in 2020, several members observed a decline in the productivity of their Technical Committees. They noted that projects previously in progress were put on hold, while the frequency of their meetings had also decreased (as scheduled meetings would suddenly be cancelled⁹⁵), thus making it harder to brainstorm new ideas.⁹⁶ This was also acknowledged by the UN Secretary-General in 2021, who expressed concern about "delays in the full resumption of the activities of most Committees, owing to scheduling challenges and the need for familiarization by new members".⁹⁷ Shortly after, the UN Secretary-General highlighted additional challenges, noting that changes within the Technical Committees, disputes over terminology that would be used when talking about different projects, and the resignation of certain members, either halted or significantly delayed numerous projects that were close to completion.⁹⁸ The disruptions also meant that discussions on new initiatives and potential projects were taking longer than usual.

91 Evie Andreou, 'Turkish Cypriot members resign from bicomunal committee on culture' (Cyprus Mail, 27 October 2020), <https://archive.cyprus-mail.com/2020/10/27/turkish-cypriot-members-resign-from-bicomunal-committee-on-culture/>; UN Human Rights Council, 'Question of Human Rights in Cyprus: Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights' (46th session, 22 February–19 March 2021) UN Doc A/HRC/46/24, [68].

92 UN Secretary-General, 'Mission of Good Offices in Cyprus: Report of the Secretary-General' (31 December 2021, S/2021/1109), [19].

93 Interview with a member of Technical Committee on Economic Matters and Trade (13 July 2023).

94 Focus Group Meeting with former members of Technical Committees (31 January 2024).

95 Interview with member of Technical Committee on Gender Equality (20 July 2023).

96 Interview with member of the Technical Committee on Broadcasting and Telecommunications (14 July 2023); Interview with member of the Technical Committee on Education (25 July 2023).

97 UN Secretary-General, 'Mission of Good Offices in Cyprus: Report of the Secretary-General' (S/2021/634, 9 July 2021), [22].

98 UN Secretary-General, 'Mission of Good Offices in Cyprus: Report of the Secretary-General' (S/2021/1109, 31 December 2021), [19].

These observations have also been confirmed by our empirical findings. For example, one member explained that the Technical Committee on Humanitarian Affairs had been preparing to launch a major campaign on the rights of elderly persons.⁹⁹ This was meant to be a comprehensive initiative, featuring posters, research conducted in collaboration with two private universities, and the drafting of a Code of Conduct. The project was well-advanced, had secured funding and its implementation was about to begin. Yet, in the aftermath of the 2020 Turkish Cypriot elections, the initiative was suddenly blocked.

Several other projects have also been left pending, although they had been approved and funding was secured. One member of the Technical Committee on the Environment complained that a strategy of the new Turkish Cypriot leadership was to request time to review project proposals, and then delay indefinitely a decision on whether to proceed with the project or not.¹⁰⁰ Similar challenges have been faced by the Technical Committee on Culture. Here, Turkish Cypriots would request changes to submitted proposals; once these changes were made, they would demand further amendments, thus creating a cycle of delays and frustration.¹⁰¹ A former member of the Committee noted that project implementation had been much smoother in the previous term, when members had more autonomy.¹⁰² Under the new Turkish Cypriot leadership, however, the decision-making process of the Technical Committees became heavily restricted. For example, a simple project involving art and video competitions for youth proposed by the Technical Committee on Culture, remained incomplete for more than two years due to continuous delays and blockages (stemming from the fact that the Turkish Cypriot co-chair had to seek approval from the Turkish Cypriot coordinator for even minor decisions). As a result, three members of the Committee resigned because, as one interviewee explained, "after Tatar was elected, nothing was getting done".¹⁰³

Political intervention in the work of the Technical Committees has in some cases been subtler. For instance, most of the projects of the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage continue being approved by the leaders. However, following Mr Tatar's coming to power, the Committee has been prevented from effectively communicating with the public. The standard practice before 2020 was for speeches with a peacebuilding message to be delivered during the opening ceremonies of restored buildings. These speeches are no longer allowed.¹⁰⁴ As a result, the buildings are restored, thus on paper work is being produced, but an important objective of the Committee, namely to promote trust between Cypriots, has now become harder to achieve because it cannot be talked about.

99 Interview with member of the Technical Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (12 September 2023).

100 Interview with member of Technical Committee on Environment (2 August 2023).

101 Interview with former member of Technical Committee on Culture (8 November 2023).

102 Ibid.

103 Parikiaki, 'Vassiliou sorry to see Turkish Cypriot colleagues resign from bicomunal Committee on Culture' (27 October 2020), https://www.parikiaki.com/2020/10/vassiliou-sorry-to-see-turkish-cypriot-colleagues-resign-from-bicomunal-committee-on-culture/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=vassiliou-sorry-to-see-turkish-cypriot-colleagues-resign-from-bicomunal-committee-

104 Interview with member of the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage (17 July 2023).

Although many of the current criticisms relate to Mr Tatar's handling of the Technical Committees, such delaying and blocking tactics were also adopted before 2020, this time, mostly by Greek Cypriots. For instance, when the Technical Committee on Education was established in 2015, it was tasked with drafting its mandate. During this process, Greek Cypriots objected to the use of the term "federal education" (preferring "peace education" instead), while they also rejected a request for a comprehensive study comparing the education curricula in both communities.¹⁰⁵

While a comparison report based on existing research was prepared, many Turkish Cypriot members considered this inadequate. Proposals to create sister schools between the two communities and to arrange reciprocal school visits were also declined, with Greek Cypriots only agreeing to school visits in the areas under the RoC's effective control.¹⁰⁶ One former member of this Committee suggested that many of the proposals were rejected because of Greek Cypriot recognition phobia,¹⁰⁷ an explanation that was also provided by a former member of the Technical Committee on Crisis Management.¹⁰⁸

The experiences of the Technical Committees suggest that while some political intervention may be understandable, its excessive and unchecked nature, often amounting to micromanagement at every stage of the Technical Committees' work, significantly slows down or impedes these bodies' productivity. The suspension of projects without clear or well-founded justification, along with an overemphasis on the kind of language or terminology to be used in each project, contributes to an atmosphere of uncertainty and instability. Furthermore, sudden changes in the composition of Technical Committees, with the participation of experienced members being terminated without valid reason, also undermines the continuity and know-how of the Committees.

105 Interview with former member of Technical Committee on Education (6 November 2023).

106 Interview with former member of Technical Committee on Education (21 August 2024).

107 Interview with former member of Technical Committee on Education (31 August 2023).

108 Interview with former member of Technical Committee on Crisis Management (29 August 2023).

B | The lack of a clear mandate of the Technical Committees

The Technical Committees operate under a general and a specific mandate. The general mandate aims to foster confidence-building and address the daily concerns of Cypriots.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, when it was being formed, each Committee was assigned a specific mandate, which has not been disclosed to the public.¹¹⁰ This can have detrimental consequences on the functioning of the Technical Committees, with one interviewee remarking that their mode of operation has been “left somewhat ambiguous and up in the air”.¹¹¹ In turn, the lack of transparent working procedures affects both the productivity and credibility of these bodies.

The mandates of some Committees are publicly available through their publications.¹¹² However, the mandates of others remain largely inaccessible, thus raising concerns as to whether they operate in a transparent and accountable manner. The mandate of the Technical Committee on Gender, for example, only became known indirectly through an academic publication of one of its former members, rather than be available through official channels.¹¹³ Moreover, the specific mandates of Technical Committees are often outdated. In some cases, Committees are still working with concept notes that were drafted when they were originally set up. For example, the mandate of the Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters, prepared in 2008, refers to cooperation in the areas of money laundering, road safety, human smuggling, drug and arms trafficking, as well as terrorism.¹¹⁴ In recent years, questions have been raised as to why the Committee is not addressing human trafficking, which is becoming a growing concern on the island and is directly connected to the ongoing Cyprus Problem.¹¹⁵ The rather disappointing explanation by one Technical Committee member was that this issue was not included – back in 2008 – in the Committee’s mandate.¹¹⁶

Moreover, the ambiguity surrounding the Committees’ roles and responsibilities has led to confusion among some members. Specifically, the relationship of the Technical Committees with the de jure or de facto authorities, or civil society has not been defined, which creates a sense of uncertainty about their place within the broader framework of the peace process. Thus, according to an interviewee, the Technical Committees “are neither civil society, independent from the negotiations, nor fully connected to the official authorities”.¹¹⁷

109 UN Secretary-General, ‘United Nations Operation in Cyprus: Report of the Secretary-General’ (3 January 2023, S/2023/6), [12].

110 Interview with member of the Technical Committee on Crossings (26 July 2023); Interview with member of the Technical Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (12 September 2023).

111 Focus Group Meeting with former members of Technical Committees (31 January 2024).

112 See the mandate of Technical Committee on Environment here: <https://www.tcecyprus.org/about-us/mandate>; See the mandate of Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage here: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/cy/TTCCH-2015-Brochure-FINAL-PRINTED.pdf>

113 Olga Demetriou, ‘Gender in the Cyprus Negotiations’ *Peace Research Institute Oslo* (Cyprus Centre) (2019).

114 Interview with former member of Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters (31 August 2023).

115 Nasia Hadjigeorgiou, ‘Human Trafficking in Cyprus: The Crime, Victims, Perpetrators, and their Connection to the Island’s Frozen Conflict’ *Peace Research Institute Oslo (Cyprus Centre)* (2022); Hadjigeorgiou, ‘The Practice of Engagement without Recognition under International Law’.

116 Interview with member of Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters (25 July 2023).

117 Focus Group Meeting with former members of Technical Committees (31 January 2024).

Although the mandate of the Technical Committee on Gender, for instance, explicitly refers to contributing to the negotiation process by promoting female participation,¹¹⁸ its work seems to have been entirely disregarded by the leaders. During the Crans-Montana negotiations, the Committee worked on a truth commission proposal that would incorporate a gender perspective.¹¹⁹ Additionally, it suggested that at least one gender expert is involved in the negotiations, and proposed legislation to establish a Gender Equality Ministry under the Federal State. None of these proposals appear to have been considered by the leaders, who also ignored requests to provide Committee members with information on the negotiations.¹²⁰ As one former member explained:

*"We could neither enter the negotiation meetings nor were we informed about what was discussed in them. As a result, we didn't have to prioritise anything because we couldn't do much anyway."*¹²¹

Yet, not only is this a missed opportunity to make both the process and outcomes of the negotiation more inclusive, but it also directly contravenes the stated mandate of the Technical Committee, thus directly undermining both its productivity and credibility.

During the interviews, some Turkish Cypriot members suggested that formalising the mandates and establishing clear, uniform rules would enhance the effectiveness of the Technical Committees.¹²² Indeed, as has already been explained, the lack of a clear mandate for the Technical Committees and their ambiguous status present important challenges to their effectiveness. Yet, none of the Greek Cypriot interviewees proposed something similar and it is unlikely that they would support such a suggestion given prevailing concerns around recognition of the areas not under the RoC's effective control. A potential middle ground could be established by, first, ensuring that the specific mandates of the Technical Committees are shared transparently with all of their members and the wider public. Second, specific mandates should be reviewed and updated every two to three years. If such changes are adopted, they will allow the Committees to function more effectively and hold themselves more accountable to the general public for their actions.

118 'Action Plan on how to ensure women's full, equal and meaningful participation in the settlement process/an eventual settlement process', <https://uncyprustalks.unmissions.org/statement-United-nations-spokesperson-cyprus-13-april-2022>.

119 Interview with former member of Technical Committee on Gender (19 September 2023).

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid.

122 Focus Group Meeting with former members of Technical Committees (31 January 2024).

C | The international community's ambiguous relationship with the Technical Committees

During the empirical research, the team interviewed three main international actors involved with the Committees, namely OSASG, UNDP, and the EU. These actors directly work with the Technical Committees on a regular basis and also collaborate amongst themselves to coordinate their activities. Such coordination between the international actors and the Technical Committees is theoretically facilitated through regular Steering Committee meetings, which serve as a platform for exchanging ideas and monitoring project implementation. Although these meetings initially took place on a monthly basis, more recently, their frequency has declined in response to a drop in project numbers.

Coordination initiatives notwithstanding, our findings suggest that the different international actors' views and ways of engaging with the Committees do not follow a singular, coordinated approach. Specifically, each actor has a different view on whether the Committees are part of the official negotiation process, or they should rather be seen as more informal mechanisms promoting trust and addressing the day-to-day challenges faced by Cypriots. In turn, this has an impact on how concepts such as "effectiveness" and "success" of the Technical Committees are understood. This means that there is no consistency in terms of what is expected of the Technical Committees, and relatedly, how the international community can contribute to making sure that this happens.

As already alluded to in Section 4, for OSASG, the Technical Committees are viewed as Track 1 mechanisms and are considered part of the official negotiations.¹²³ Track 1, as defined by Lederach in his multi-track peace process framework, involves direct participation in peace negotiations and engagement with the top political leadership.¹²⁴ Track 2 processes relate to middle-range actors, while Track 3 initiatives focus on grassroots efforts. According to OSASG, the Technical Committees, under the authority of the two leaders, operate as parts of the official negotiations. Their continued functioning, even when not much is being produced by them, is a success in itself because it keeps communication between the two communities (and therefore, the prospect of restarting the negotiations) alive. Thus, OSASG interviewees emphasised that the Technical Committees should not be evaluated through a project-based perspective. Rather, their success lies in maintaining dialogue and collaboration, regardless of whether the projects they brainstorm are ultimately implemented successfully.¹²⁵

The UNDP has embraced a different approach. While acknowledging that the Technical Committees operate under the political authority of the leaders, its representatives also noted that, in practice, these bodies do not neatly fit into the Track 1 category.¹²⁶ Support for this position arises from two facts: first, that Technical Committee members have never sat at the negotiations table; and second, that they are concerned with technical issues, addressed through individual projects, rather than broader ideas discussed during the political negotiations.¹²⁷ This framing is directly linked to how the UNDP works with the Technical Committees: project ideas come from the Committees, and the UNDP works with them to turn the ideas into project proposals, while ensuring feasibility and due diligence.¹²⁸

123 Interview with OSASG representative (9 October 2023).

124 John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (1st edn, United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), 39.

125 Interview with OSASG representative (9 October 2023).

126 Interview with UNDP representative (12 October 2023).

127 Ibid.

128 Ibid.

In essence, the UNDP offers “handholding” through what is a technical process, sometimes co-drafting the proposals, other times reviewing drafts created by the Committees, and ultimately being responsible for the financial and logistical aspects of the projects.¹²⁹ Most of these projects are funded by the EU, which is the third main international actor engaging with the Committees. Thus, as a result of principled arguments and its own experiences with the Technical Committees, the UNDP views these bodies as something in-between: “Track 1.5 bodies”,¹³⁰ neither fully Track 1 nor Track 2.

When interviewees from the EU were asked how they would categorise the Technical Committees, they responded that they are not interested in Track 1, 2, or 3 labels. As they put it, “this is OSASG business — they do it. For the EU, it doesn’t matter. We get involved in whatever way makes sense.”¹³¹ According to the EU, the Technical Committees are expected to enhance confidence-building and contribute to reunification, which are the main criteria it uses for deciding which projects to fund.¹³² At the same time, the EU is in agreement with the UNDP that the Technical Committees should remain free from excessive political influence, as their mandate is primarily technical in nature. Thus, like the UNDP, the EU engages with the Technical Committees through various projects, and approaches them with a project mindset. As a result, what constitutes “success” of the Technical Committees for these two international actors is fundamentally different to how this is defined by OSASG. It follows that the way each international actor interacts with and supports the Technical Committees, as well as what it expects from them, also differs.

One example that illustrates the differences between the international actors relates to the suspension of “Imagine”. In the aftermath of its suspension, rather than actively encouraging cooperation between the two sides, OSASG adopted a passive stance. It refrained from mediation or any efforts to ensure the continuation of “Imagine”, arguing that this is what the principle of neutrality required.¹³³ Conversely, the EU strongly criticised the Turkish Cypriot suspension of the project, with the European Parliament Culture and Education Committee sending a letter to Mr Tatar, calling for the immediate re-launch of the project¹³⁴. These are clearly two distinct approaches: for one side, success lies in maintaining ongoing dialogue, while for the other, it is defined by the extent to which concrete progress is made on the ground to address shared challenges and build trust. Such divergence in expectations does not serve the Technical Committees well. Recently, we observe a growing imbalance in this respect: the EU/UNDP provides funding, expects tangible outcomes, and seeks to address various implementation challenges. Conversely, OSASG, which is on paper responsible for facilitating the Technical Committees, does not take corresponding action and is happy to adopt a more passive role.

129 Ibid.

130 Hussein Agha et al. (eds), *Track II Diplomacy: Lessons from the Middle East* (MIT Press, 2004), 49-50.

131 Interview with EU representative (26 October 2023).

132 Ibid.

133 Interview with CSO representative (13 September 2023).

134 Yeniduzen, ‘Imagine’ a Geri Dön’ (31 March 2023),

<https://www.yeniduzen.com/avrupa-parlamentosundan-ersin-tatara-imaginea-geri-don-162438h.htm>.

To overcome these differences, the three international actors should reach a consensus on their expectations from the Technical Committees. If the Technical Committees have a general mandate, each specific project that is being supported, as well as their work as a whole, should be explicitly linked to that mandate. Furthermore, the facilitation role of the UN, particularly OSASG, should be clarified. What is the main purpose of facilitation? Is OSASG's mandate limited to organising meetings, or does it also include fostering deeper engagement and actively providing mediation when necessary? Clarifying this role is crucial, as it would establish a basis for accountability, both in terms of actions taken and the choice to remain inactive when intervention is needed. Regarding the EU, the funding should be used more effectively, through creating a feedback mechanism, where new funds would become available only after previous funding has been utilised effectively. Additionally, such funding should be made available in a way that promotes the continuity and sustainability of the Technical Committee, rather than merely be concerned with the implementation of individual projects. For example, more Technical Committees should consider whether they would benefit from hiring at least some paid members, as is currently the case with the Technical Committees on Cultural Heritage, the Environment, and Crime and Criminal Matters.

D | Lack of engagement with civil society

Civil society is a natural ally of the Technical Committees and, as such, should be both well-informed about, and meaningfully contribute to, their work. However, our empirical research suggests that a significant portion of civil society actors are either unaware of the existence of the Technical Committees or lack a clear understanding of their mandates and operations. Thus, several civil society organisation (CSO) representatives we interviewed admitted that they do not know how many Technical Committees exist and what sort of work they do.¹³⁵ For example one of the interviewees from an environmental CSO stated: "We found out about the Technical Committee on the Environment through a meeting at the UNDP years ago. The meeting wasn't to inform us about the Technical Committee; this is just something that turned up".¹³⁶ Those interviewees that were somewhat aware of the Committees said that they had been informed through their own research,¹³⁷ media reports,¹³⁸ personal ties with Committee members,¹³⁹ or previous professional roles.¹⁴⁰ All interviewees confirmed that neither them nor their organisations were ever specifically contacted by, or informed about, the Technical Committees.

Additionally, interviewees stated that their CSOs had been unable to collaborate with the Technical Committees because they do not know how to reach them. They are unaware of the names of the co-chairs and members, and do not have access to their contact details. Some Committees, such as the Technical Committees on Cultural Heritage and the Environment have addressed this problem by creating websites (although at least some interviewees were not aware of the existence of these websites); others, like the Technical Committee on Health have a relatively strong media presence. These exceptions notwithstanding, CSOs generally remain disconnected from the Technical Committees as there is no particular framework or formal channel of communication between them. As one interviewee stated:

135 Interviews with 3 different CSO representatives (6 September 2023, 10 January 2025, and 6 November 2023).

136 Interview with CSO representative (6 September 2023).

137 Interview with CSO representative (5 October 2023).

138 Interview with CSO representative (15 September 2023).

139 Interview with CSO representative (6 November 2023).

140 Ibid.

"The Technical Committees need to improve their communication. How often do they meet? What do they talk about? You can't see these at all. It seems like they carry out their work in a somewhat closed way".¹⁴¹ Another interviewee explained: "We would like to know what they are doing, how they are doing it, when they are doing it. Are they soliciting opinions? Are they having discussions with other civil society players?".¹⁴² A lack of communication with civil society is detrimental to the objectives of the Technical Committees because "If you involve someone, they remain involved. If you ignore them, after a while they don't remember that you exist, and when you need them, they are not there."¹⁴³

Further, civil society representatives reported that they are not aware of the kind of projects the Committees are working on. Even those who are informed of the activities of the Committees, complained that they only hear about them on social media or in the press, after the events are over.¹⁴⁴ Finally, although some CSOs were aware of the EU funding provided to the Technical Committees, they did not know how this budget is spent and whether, through these projects, there is room for collaboration between Technical Committees and civil society. All interviewees said that they would be interested in collaborating with the Technical Committees and support their work, even without getting paid, if they are given a chance to do that. This is an important finding since according to the original conception of the Technical Committees, these bodies were formed to brainstorm project ideas, which would then be implemented by civil society (rather than the Committees themselves). It is for this reason, for example, that the Technical Committee on Education outsourced the implementation of "Imagine" to the ADHR and did not attempt to implement this project itself. In this respect, civil society engagement is the key, as it gives the Technical Committees the tools to expand their activities. At the same time, such collaboration will increase the legitimacy of the Committees, allowing them to make well-informed decisions, have an impact on more people, and more effectively communicate with the public.

An additional problem with the lack of communication between the Technical Committees and CSOs is that it makes it much harder to mainstream areas that civil society actors are working on in their own projects (these areas include rights-based approaches, gender equality, accessibility, ecology, and youth). Thus, when asked about this, CSO representatives either stated that they do not have enough information on the Committees to assess their mainstreaming efforts or that they do not think that such efforts take place at all. One questioned whether the Technical Committee members are aware of these cross-cutting issues in the first place and suggested that they should have received guidelines and training, which does not appear to have been done. This has also been confirmed in interviews with the members of the Technical Committees, who generally showed a disinterest to discuss such cross-cutting issues, or outright rejected the value of mainstreaming them in their work.

141 Interview with CSO representative (10 January 2025).

142 Interview with CSO representative (6 September 2023).

143 Ibid.

144 Interview with CSO representative (20 October 2023).



LESSONS FOR THE MORE EFFICIENT FUNCTIONING OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEES

The Technical Committees do not operate through unified structures; rather, each Committee is unique, functioning relatively independently from the rest. They differ in the number of members and their profiles, their specific mandates, how often they meet, and how productive they are. As a result, the experiences of each Committee can teach us different lessons. Below are some lessons that can be distilled from the preceding analysis. If taken seriously, these can contribute to the more efficient functioning of what, in principle, are promising initiatives.

1 | The functioning of the Technical Committees lacks transparency. From their initial establishment, to the appointment of members and the management of projects, decisions are made politically, without clear rules or procedures to guide them. While a certain level of political involvement is understandable, the greater the interference, the more likely it is to hinder the productivity of the Technical Committees. Especially the suspension of projects without good reasons or ongoing disagreements over the terminology to be used by different actors undermines their efficiency. In this regard, leaders should exercise caution when taking decisions likely to affect the overall functioning of a Committee (e.g. those relating to membership or the wholesale approval or rejection of projects) and should entirely avoid the temptation of micro-managing how specific projects are implemented on a day-to-day basis.

2 | Members of the Technical Committees should be selected based on their expertise, through objective criteria and transparent processes. This will improve the credibility of the Committees and further increase the subject-matter expertise of their members.

3 | The lack of a clearly defined status of the Technical Committees has caused confusion both among Committee members and international actors engaging with them. If the Technical Committees are indeed intended to function as Track 1 mechanisms, they should be granted access to information related to the negotiations and be provided with opportunities to contribute to the process. Alternatively, if it is decided that they have a more technical (rather than political) function, the specific mandate of each body should be shared with its members and the general public, while this should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

4 | The absence of a shared vision and common expectations among key international actors – namely, OSASG, the UNDP and EU – weakens the coherence and impact of the Technical Committees' work. Each project implemented by a Technical Committee should contribute to a broader, clearly defined purpose that connects to the general mandate of these bodies. At the same time, lessons can also be drawn about the involvement of specific international actors. The role of the OSASG in facilitating the Committees remains unclear. Clarifying whether their mandate includes only logistical support or also active mediation is essential for accountability and more effective engagement. EU resources should be managed through a feedback-based system, ensuring that new funding is contingent on the effective use of previous support. Finally, the Technical Committees themselves should consider asking for contributions from the international community that more sustainably support their activities (for example, salaries for at least some of their members, who would be formally employed by the UNDP).

5 | Information about the Technical Committees, including the names of their co-chairs and members, as well as their activities and objectives, is not shared with the public. This lack of proper communication prevents the public from being informed about what the Technical Committees do, and engaging with their efforts. Ideally, Technical Committees should have a website, linked to a more comprehensive communication strategy, to share this information, along with contact details. The website should also regularly provide information on the Committees' activities.

6 | The invisibility of the Committees' work to civil society, due to poor outreach and a lack of contact points, is a missed opportunity. Active civil society engagement would not only provide valuable expertise but also enhance the legitimacy and public relevance of the Committees' work. Transparency and outreach must be prioritised to build this bridge. Technical Committees should consider publishing regular updates, such as newsletters, to keep CSOs informed, while also coordinating periodic meetings or joint activities to facilitate information exchange and identify opportunities for collaboration.

| CONCLUSION

The Technical Committees have played an important role in normalising bicomunal work and sustaining hope, even during times when the overall political climate has been less than positive. Their continued functioning has shown that, despite political deadlocks, cooperation on practical issues between Greek and Turkish Cypriots is not only possible but essential. The value of the Committees in this respect has been recognised by both sides. Thus, even when negotiations have been on hold, both leaders made public statements supporting their work and also continued taking (albeit less enthusiastic) action in this regard.

While this policy paper shared important insights about the Technical Committees, it also showed that accessing information about them has not been easy. Publicly available material is limited, and academic or policy research on the Committees is scarce. We hope that this work helps close some of these knowledge gaps. What has become clear through our research is how deeply the Technical Committees touch the lives of people across the island in ways that are often overlooked, even by the intended beneficiaries themselves. To put it differently, the role of the Technical Committees is far from symbolic. They matter in very practical ways.

One of the clearest messages from their work is that many of the island's key challenges, whether related to the environment, health, education, crime, or humanitarian issues, simply cannot be addressed without collaboration. The COVID-19 pandemic made this obvious: no one can control a contagious disease through a monocommunal approach. The same goes for environmental or policing concerns as, neither climate threats nor criminals stop at checkpoints. Actions taken on one side of the island will always be less effective if they are not coordinated with the other. These examples, and many others, underline a simple reality and the inspiration for the Technical Committees: we share common problems that require common solutions, and that requires building trust and working together.

The Technical Committees have also helped sustain relationships and open channels of communication. Whether they are perceived as Track 1 mechanisms or something else, they have the potential to feed into the broader negotiation process, if they are given the opportunity. They can bring in perspectives often left out of formal talks, like gender, education, or the environment, and they can break the top-down, leader-focused structure that has dominated peace efforts in Cyprus for too long. Even if they are not allowed to directly contribute to the negotiations, their work can send the message to Cypriots that communicating with the other is not only possible, but also beneficial.

At the same time, some concerning issues emerged regarding the Technical Committees. Their ambiguous operational framework leaves them vulnerable to political pressure and interference. The lack of transparent rules, unclear mandates, and the opaque processes around the appointment and removal of members and co-chairs are particularly troubling. The international community's unclear relationship with these bodies is also unhelpful in terms of promoting their productivity and effectiveness. It is also concerning that civil society remains largely disconnected from the Committees' work, despite the strong potential for meaningful collaboration. We hope that the lessons that we outlined in this report will help address some of these limitations.

Annex 1 | Projects implemented by all Technical Committees from their creation until 2025

1 | Technical Committee on Broadcasting and Telecommunications

- Addressing issues relating to interference in civil aviation and radio frequencies [ongoing].
- Reached an agreement to deploy 5G networks across the island. The implementation of the project has been completed in 2023-2024 in the areas under the effective control of the RoC, and is pending in the areas not under its effective control.
- Overcame interference on the frequency spectrum including for FM commercial radio and TV channels and the clearing of analogue TV frequencies, as dictated by the International Telecommunication Union [2016].

2 | 2. Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage

The following projects benefited from emergency support:

- **Between 2012-2013:**
 1. Denia/Denya Mosque
 2. Fyllia/Filya/Serhatköy Profitis Elias Church
 3. Panagia Melandrina Church
 4. Mustafa Pasha Mosque – Famagusta
 5. Paphos Hamam
 6. Trachoni/Demirhan Panagia Church
 7. Othello Tower/Citadel in Famagusta
 8. Famagusta Walls between Arsenal and Sea Gate
 9. Martinengo Bastion in Famagusta
 10. Completed the stabilisation of the buildings at the Ledra Street crossing point

- **Between 2013-2017:**

11. Agios Nicolaos Church in Syrianochori/Siryanochoro/Yayla
12. Mosques in Evretou/Evretu
13. Mosque in Tserkezoi/Çerkez
14. Agios Afksentios Church in Buyukkonuk/Komi
15. Millhouse/Aqueduct in Chrysochou/Hirsofu
16. Designs for the improvement of the exhibition room of the Kyrenia shipwreck at the Kyrenia Castle
17. Old St. George Church in Kormakitis/Kormacit/Korucam
18. Agios Panteleimonas Monastery in Çamlıbel/Myrtou

- **Between 2017-2018:**

19. Ravelin/Land Gate in Famagusta
20. Agios Philon archaeological site

- **Between 2018-2019, the following benefited from emergency support:**

21. Mary of the Armenians in Famagusta
22. Hamam/Bath (near Hasan Ağa) in Paphos
23. Archangelos Michael church in Lefkonoiko/Geçitkale
24. Church of the Holy Cross of Karpaseia / Karpaşa
25. Agia Marina church in Agia Marina/Gurpinar

- **Between 2019-2020:**

26. Carmelite (St Mary of Carmel) church in Famagusta
27. Mosque in Agios Nicolaos/Aynikola
28. Mosque in Agios Ioannis/Ayanni
29. Minaret of Camii-Kebir in Paphos
30. St. Anne's church in Famagusta
31. Tanners' mosque in Famagusta
32. Panagia church – Askeia/Pasakoy
33. Agios Artemon Church in Afanteia/Gazikoy

- **Between 2020-2021:**

34. Agios Philon Archaeological Site – Phase 2
35. Agia Triada Basilica & Baptistery – Phase 2
36. Agios Andronicos church
37. Nicosia Walls (Kyrenia Gate to Flatros Bastion) vegetation removal
38. Agios Sergios and Vakos Church
39. Sourp Magar Monastery
40. Afendrika Archeological Site
41. Agios Georgios and Agios Iacovos Church
42. Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot cemeteries

- **Between 2022-2023:**

43. Agios Georgios church in the Famagusta area.
44. Agia Marina - Ayios Theodoros Ruin church
45. Agios Georgios Church Nergisli/Yenagra
46. Arsenal/Canbulat Bastion in Famagusta
47. Zuhuri Mosque and Tekke in Larnaca
48. Agios Georgios Church in Vasili/Vatili village
49. Tuzla Bath in Larnaca
50. Panagia Agia Napa Church in Famagusta
51. Mosque Maroni Village in Larnaca
52. Mosque in Kalo Chorio/Vuda
53. Aqueduct in Lefka/Lefke
54. Agios Georgios Church
55. Profitis Elias Church
56. Arsenal / Canbulat Bastion in Famagusta

- **Between 2024-2025:**

57. Quirini Bastion in Nicosia
58. Agios Sergios and Vakhos Church in Neta/Taşlıca
59. Arif Bey Aqueduct in Afanteia/Gaziköy
60. Hamidiye Mosque in Lefkara
61. Agios Georgios Church in Flamoudi/Mersinlik
62. Mosque in Alaminos/Alamino
63. Church in Agios Elias/Yarköy
64. Mosque in Kalavastos/Kalavason
65. Agios Georgios Church in Limnia/Mormenekşe
66. Agia Paraskevi Church in Famagusta
67. Mosque in Alektora/Gökağaç
68. Timios Prodromos Church in Yipsou/Akova
69. Agios Elias Church in Agios Elias/Yarköy
70. Mosque in Kalavastos/Kalavason
71. Mosque in Alaminos/Alamino
72. Agia Paraskevi Church in Famagusta
73. Chrysopolitissa Church in Kyrenia/Girne
74. Mosque in Avdimou/Evdim
75. Panagia Evangelistria Church in Lysi/Akdoğan
76. Mosque and Cemetery in Tochni/Taşkent
77. Panagia Kanakaria Monastery in Karpas/Karpaz
78. Apostolos Andreas Monastery in Karpas/Karpaz
79. St George of the Latins Church in Famagusta
80. Tuzla Mosque in Larnaca/Larnaka

The Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage also held the following key activities:

- Many of the projects described above were accompanied by bicommunal events that marked their successful completion.
- Delivered presentation session at ETEK introducing the Technical Committee's work and UNDP conservation procedures [2024].
- Organised International Day for Monuments and Sites event with approximately 100 Greek Cypriot, Turkish Cypriot, and international students [2024].
- Launched of Interactive Education Platform on cultural heritage in Cyprus [2024]. Engaged with students at an event in Famagusta using the new platform established by the Committee. The platform is available here: <https://iep.cyprusdigitalheritage.com/login/index.php> [2024].
- Organised International Day of Peace event with United for Peace EU and United World Colleges students, featuring a virtual reality experience of the Cyprus Digital Heritage Website [2024].
- Organised guided tour of Soli archaeological area, including St. Auxibus Basilica and Soli Theatre [2024].
- Organised bi-communal afforestation activity to promote cultural heritage protection and environmental sustainability [2024].
- Received funding from the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas to work on the conservation of two important cultural heritage sites: St. George of the Latins church in the walled city of Famagusta and the Tuzla Mosque in Larnaca. This marks the first funding partnership between a private foundation and a Technical Committee [2023].
- Started working on video and drawing competition inspired by the cultural heritage sites of the island [2022].
- Received the 2021 European Heritage Award/Europa Nostra Award [2021].
- Created and shared on social media a series of videos of the various Cypriot cultural heritage sites [2021].
- Organised walking trip in the Paphos area, which brought together 29 Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots and people from other communities [2019].
- Received 190 applications from young Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots to participate in the Heritage Youth Ambassadors initiative. Of these, 16 young people from each side were selected to lead efforts to promote and preserve the cultural heritage of Cyprus [2019].
- Organised an event to mark the International Day for Monuments and Sites, to which more than 200 persons from both sides of the divide participated [2016].

3 | Technical Committee on Culture

- Organised the 'Connecting Arts 2' event, which brought together over 60 Greek Cypriot, and Turkish Cypriot artists, academics and experts [2024].
- Organised the 'Connecting arts' event, which brought together more than 60 Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot artists, academics and experts [2023].
- Facilitated the 'Walk/run for peace' event to mark the International Day of Peace [2023].
- Organised a video and drawing competition: 'Cultural Monuments on the Island – Video and Drawing Competition for Children and Youth' [2023].
- Organised 'In Culture We Trust': Exhibition of artworks and audio-visual recordings that were exchanged by the two sides [2000].
- Organised poetry contest in which 5 poets from each community were selected to be filmed reciting their own poems written during COVID-19 [2020].
- Organised concert of Cyprus Chamber Orchestra at Pallas Theatre [2018].
- Organised concert of classical music performed by young musicians from both communities at Othello Tower [2016].
- Organised theatre performance 'Antigone' at the Ancient Theatre of Salamis in Famagusta [2016].
- Organised a poetry and music evening organised at Casteliotissa [2016].
- Organised theatre performance 'Hippolytus' at the Ancient Theatre of Salamis in Famagusta [2015].

4 | Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters

- Running of the Joint Contact Rooms. The Joint Contact Room has been operating in Nicosia since 2009 and in Pyla since 2024.
- The two communities exchanged 5 suspects [2024].
- Organised bicommunal seminar on economic cybercrimes targeting vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly, in response to shared concerns about the increasing threat of such crimes on the island [2024].
- Organised joint workshop on preventing child abuse and gender-based violence [2023].
- Organised joint police raids in Pyla, coordinated by UNFICYP [2023].
- In collaboration with the Technical Committee on Education, implemented the Prevalence, Correlates and Prevention of Conventional Bullying in Schools and Cyberbullying [2020].
- Co-chair attended workshop at the University of Cambridge to examine the Joint Contact Room from an international perspective [2019].
- Organised joint seminar on federal policing [2016].
- Organised joint seminar on prevention of domestic violence [2015].
- Organised joint seminar on the use of illegal drugs, attended by students and teachers [2011].
- Organised joint seminar on children at risk [2010].
- Launched the distribution of road safety leaflets at crossing points [2010].

5 | Technical Committee on Economic and Commercial Matters

- Organised the Young Professionals Internship Programme [2024].
- The Central Bank of Cyprus issued a circular authorising local banks to allow Turkish Cypriots to open basic personal bank accounts in the areas under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus, as a consequence of ongoing efforts of the Committee [2023].
- Undertook the initiative to recycle electronic and electrical waste in Cyprus [2022].
- Contributed to discussions about the Halloumi/Hellim Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) [2021]
- Established the interoperability of mobile phones across the island [2019].
- Contributed to a feasibility study for the Nicosia Master Plan [2018]
- Connected the electricity grids between the two sides of the buffer zone [2013].

6 | Technical Committee on the Environment

- Organises regular joint visits to assess and propose ways to address environmental island-wide issues [Ongoing].
- Implemented the 'Exploring the geological heritage of the island of Cyprus' Project [2024].
- Implemented the 'Environmental caretakers – empowering youth on environment' Project [2024].
- Implemented the 'Preserving biodiversity – analysing poison use in remote wildlife habitats' Project [2024]
- Co-chairs of the Committee gave a presentation to the third cohort of the UN Youth Champions for Environment and Peace [2022].
- Developed the website of the Technical Committee on the Environment [2022].
- Photo competition aimed at young people on 'What does water mean to you' [with US Embassy, in 2021]
- Organised the 'Healthy Environment Webinar' [2021].
- Organised 'Geo-Heritage' Project aiming to promote geo-education and raise awareness on the geological heritage of the island [2021-2024].
- Implemented fire prevention campaign [2013].
- Participated in debate about the environmental impact of past mining activities and ways to redress the situation [2010].
- Organised a joint awareness campaign aimed at saving water [2009].

7 | Technical Committee on Gender equality

- Organised networking event for women entrepreneurs from both sides of the island [2023].
- Organised seminar on women's participation in the Cyprus peace process [2023].
- Organised exhibition on 'Inclusive Diplomacy: Women's Participation in the Cyprus Talks' [2023].
- Organised two seminars on leadership and women's entrepreneurship [2023].
- Drafted the 'Action Plan on ways to ensure women's full, equal and meaningful participation in the settlement process/an eventual settlement process' which was adopted by the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders [2022].
- Issued joint statement in which the Committee noted the upsurge in violence against women and girls during COVID-19 [2020].
- Organised panel discussion on women and peacebuilding [2016].

8 | Technical Committee on Health

- Has been exchanging information on the epidemiological situation on both sides and been delivered COVID-19 vaccines to the Turkish Cypriot community [Ongoing since 2020].
- Has been organising meetings for the sharing of information relating to medical issues. Also in relation to the Subcommittee on Veterinary Affairs [Ongoing].
- Implemented the 'Mapping Risk for Aedes Invasive Mosquito Spread (ID-AIM)' Project. [2019-2024]
- Organised training focusing on Aedes invasive mosquitoes with participants from both communities. Also organised follow-up practical field visits and sessions on best practice sharing, further enhancing bi-communal collaboration in combating mosquito-borne diseases in Cyprus [2024].
- Provided medicines and vaccines to the Turkish Cypriot community following the interruption of supply lines from Turkey in the aftermath of the 2023 earthquakes [2023].
- Activated a communications mechanism in the event of an outbreak of a communicable disease [2013].
- Put in place a procedure to facilitate medical evacuation across the buffer zone on humanitarian grounds [2010].
- Coordinated the passage of ambulances from the buffer zone checkpoints [2009].

9 | Technical Committee on Crisis Management

- Organised meetings among members of the Technical Committee and experts from both sides to discuss preparedness, prevention and response protocols in the case of earthquakes and wildfires [2023].
- Organised 'Disaster Ready School' Project in Pyla schools to raise awareness on earthquakes and fire incidents [2020].
- Organised joint firefighting exercise within the UN-controlled buffer zone [2013].

10 | Technical Committee on Crossings

- Expanded the Agios Dometios/Metehan crossing point in Nicosia, where long delays are often caused by limited lanes and limited staff for document checks [2025].
- Opened two crossings at Lefka-Aplici/Lefke-Aplic and Deryneia/Derinya [2022].
- This report notes the opening of the new crossing point at Limnitis/Yesilirmak. It also notes the creation of a joint committee to consider the establishment of other crossing points. [2010]

11 | Technical Committee on Education

- Brainstormed 'Imagine' Project [implemented by the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research and the Home for Cooperation, with the support of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany, 2017-2022].
- Piloted webinar for Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot teachers [2020].
- Organised 'Bicommunal Walks: Learning from Nicosia' [2019].
- Organised a series of events to mark the International Children's Day, which brought together more than 100 children across the divide [2016].

12 | Technical Committee on Humanitarian Affairs

- Organised 'Angels of pace: Social inclusion – leaving no one behind': approximately 40 children and youth with autism and Down's syndrome from both sides performed modern and folk dance together and participated in other activities [2019].



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