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**The role of men and boys
in advancing gender
equality and breaking
gender stereotypes**
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Comments paper – Greece



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Gender challenges and reforms in a post-pandemic environment: Greece

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Abstract

According to [EIGE](#) (2021), Greece has a Gender Equality Index of 52.5, one of the lowest in Europe, and lower than the EU average of 68. However, since the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, the inclusion of ILO 194 into Greek law and other legislative changes, has driven horizontal changes in governmental bodies that had a positive impact in the reporting of domestic violence cases, in the way that gender-based violence is portrayed in the media, and the aggregation of data in areas that had not been previously discussed. These changes represent concrete steps forward, but there are significant changes that need to be implemented in order to improve Greece's overall gender policy structures.

1. Country Context

1.1. Gender-Based Violence

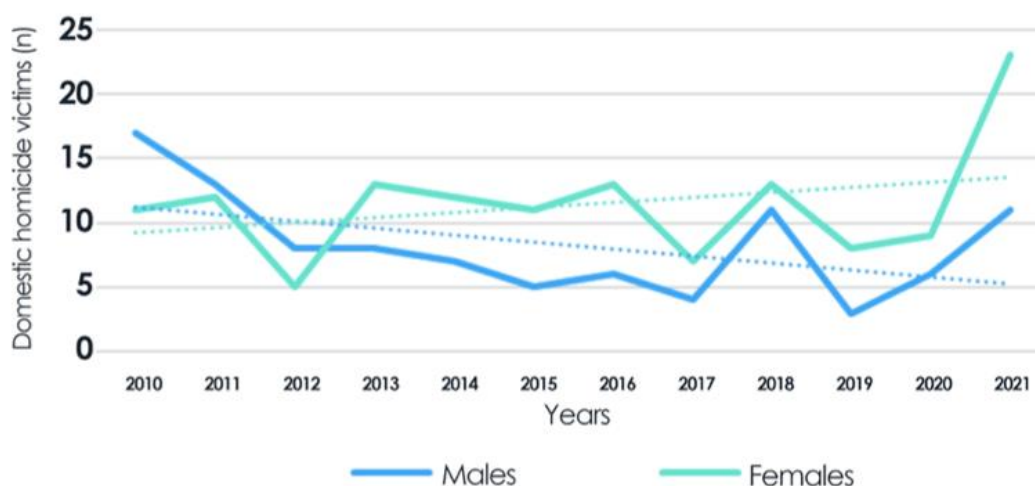
In the past five years, significant policy changes were implemented nationally in order to prevent and combat violence against women and children, vulnerable groups. Most policy changes were part of the [“National Action Plan for Gender Equality, 2021-2025”](#), introduced by the Gender Secretariat of the Ministry of Labor & Social Affairs. The ratification of the [Istanbul Convention through Greek law](#), was the driving force for these policy changes before the pandemic, while the COVID-19 health crisis saw a significant increase in reported cases of domestic violence in the national Women's Aid centres. Further, a number of high-profile femicides¹ that gathered significant media attention created a discussion of domestic homicide that was unprecedented in the country. At the same time, a significant change took place within the police, with the implementation of a [new core division](#) focusing on crimes of domestic violence.

1.1.1. Reporting

Statistics from the [Annual Domestic Violence Report](#) (2021) compiled by the Hellenic Police show a marked increase in the reporting of domestic violence cases from 5620 incidents in 2020 to 9303 in 2021. Monthly statistics published by the [Hellenic Police](#) depict the continuation of this increased reporting trend into 2022. The [3rd Annual Violence Against Women report](#) published by the Gender Secretariat reports 5,295

¹ Karakasi, M. V., Voultos, P., Fotou, E., Nikolaidis, I., Kyriakou, M. S., Markopoulou, M., ... & Pavlidis, P. (2022). Emerging trends in domestic homicide/femicide in Greece over the period 2010–2021. *Medicine, Science and the Law*, 00258024221103700

cases attended by the Women’s Aid Network, which represents an increase from the 4.767 cases presented in the previous year’s [annual report](#). Although the pandemic and the stay-at-home measures were initially expected to increase domestic violence, but decrease reporting², it appears that the joint campaigns organised by the police, and the gender secretariat lead to the significant increase of reporting. Moreover, in 2019, the Hellenic Police introduced a specialised [domestic violence division](#) that overlooked 73 strategic offices and 18 operational units, leading to increased levels of trust in civilians towards the police.



1.1.2. Femicides

In 2021, a significant movement was brought about by civil societies on a discussion regarding femicides, reacting to a number of high-profile murders that received extensive media coverage³. The campaign “[strong me](#)” designed and carried out across many Greek cities to increase awareness, and to start a conversation on whether femicide should be a legally recognised term. In terms of data, there is an evident increasing trend on domestic homicide with female victims, raising from 11 victims in 2011 to 23 in 2021⁴. Most women (65.3%)⁵ were murdered by their intimate partner, while the rest by another family member. The past couple of years represent the first time the country was able to provide official data on [femicides](#), but the phenomenon needs to be evaluated and studied further before instituting policy and practice.

² Kourti, A., Stavridou, A., Panagouli, E., Psaltopoulou, T., Spiliopoulou, C., Tsolia, M., Sergentanis, T. N., & Tsitsika, A. (2021). Domestic Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 0*(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380211038690>

³ Al Agkmpari, F. (2020). The portrayal of femicide in Greek media.

⁴ Karakasi, M. V., Voultos, P., Fotou, E., Nikolaidis, I., Kyriakou, M. S., Markopoulou, M., ... & Pavlidis, P. (2022). Emerging trends in domestic homicide/femicide in Greece over the period 2010–2021. *Medicine, Science and the Law, 00258024221103700*

⁵ <https://isotita.gr/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/3h-ethsia-ekthesi-Via-kata-twn-Gynaikwn-GGDOPIF.pdf>

1.1.3. Risk Assessment & Panic Button

Within the framework of the ratification of the [Istanbul Convention](#), the Gender secretariat for Family Policy and Gender Equality (GSFPGE) designed two projects in accordance to articles 11 and the “Protection” pillar of the convention, which are the horizontal risk assessment tool and the [panic button application](#). Both these preventive measures that are in different stages of development are expected to have considerable impact in preventing repeat victimisation and lethal domestic violence.

1.1.4. #MeToo in Greece

The #MeToo movement has not received significant traction in [Greece until 2021](#), when in the midst of the pandemic Olympic medallist [Sofia Mbekatorou](#) publicly accused the vice president of the Hellenic Sailing Federation of sexually assaulting her, which in turn spawn many new allegations of sexual assault involving theatre directors, actors and sports authorities, that resulted to several public figures being brought to justice. The government rolled out a [platform](#) in February 2021 where victims could find information, and resources, as well as conducting research to discover the underpinnings behind sexual harassment in the workplace. However, there are significant obstacles and cultural perceptions of [keeping the home intact and failed negotiations with power](#), that victims still need to overcome in order to come forth with an allegation.

1.2. Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

Another important legislative change was the ratification of [ILO 190](#), which recognises that sexual harassment in the workplace constitutes a human rights violation, and creating a policy framework to [monitor, research and carry out protocols](#) for reporting incidents of sexual abuse in the workplace. A sector within the Labour Inspection Office was also established, in order to receive allegations of sexual harassment. The [2021 annual report](#) described 97 allegations, 67% involving women victims and 33% men, out of which 46% were taken to court.

1.3. Vulnerabilities and gender mainstreaming

According to [EIGE](#), Greece has scored 5.5 (out of 12) points in the gender mainstreaming indicator (H3), partially because the policy framework is still in the development stages, as well as there is a lack of legal obligation for gender equality training for all government employees. However, legislative action was taken in 2019 with the law for the promotion of [substantial equality](#). In the [National Strategic Framework](#) for Gender Equality (2021-2025) Axis II considers policies regarding the equal participation of women in the Workforce, Axis III considers actions on the equal participation of women in decision-making and leadership roles, and finally Axis IV describes policies for the incorporation of gender mainstreaming through all policies, including the implementation of education programs for schools on gender, and gender equality. However, there are gaps in concrete policies targeting LGBTQ+ individuals, and many governmental bodies do not have adequate training to consider multiple vulnerabilities.

2. Policy debate

2.1. Projects targeting men, masculinities and boys

Currently in Greece there are no projects or programmes that specifically target men, masculinities and boys. Although in certain local areas the role of men is beginning to slowly be recognised, specific actions are very sporadic and sparse. Instead, there are curricula under revision in the Ministry of Education on Gender, gender equality, that touch upon issues pertaining to gender roles, reproductive health and gender based violence. In 2022, the National Universities also created Gender Equality and multiple discrimination committees ([law N.4957/2022](#)), that begun to design targeted campaigns on gender equality.

2.2. Policy Challenge: Data privacy

A major policy debate in Greece pertains to [data privacy, and sharing of information](#). Many governmental agencies are very reluctant to communicate openly over cases, including even high risk cases of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and child maltreatment. This often leads to delays in the handling of these cases. It could even be perceived that in certain instances the protection of personal data is more important than the protection of the victims, and ultimately the only parties directly benefiting from data protection laws are the perpetrators. The data privacy legislation could potentially create obstacles in the risk assessment and the panic button projects, and should be resolved before MARACs, multi-agency risk management and police body-worn cameras could even be considered. The revision of the [domestic violence law](#), which is currently being discussed presents a good opportunity for legislative and policy changes, that could have profound impacts.

3. Good practice examples

3.1. Gender Based Violence Awareness campaigns during COVID-19

During the pandemic, victims or third parties could report an incident of DV through SMS, calls, or emails to the police, and a media awareness campaign was rolled out (Image 1 below), while the Gender secretariat for Family Policy and Gender Equality (GSFPG) implemented a thorough [protective campaign](#), utilising strategic alliances with governmental agencies (i.e. SOS 15900 helpline, Hellenic Society of Forensic Medicine), as well as with civil society organisations (i.e. “Smile of the Child”). Both campaigns used the same slogan (“We Stay at Home but We Don’t Stay Silent”). This joined, comprehensive campaign is thought to have led to the increased domestic violence reports that were brought in [2021](#) and [2022](#).

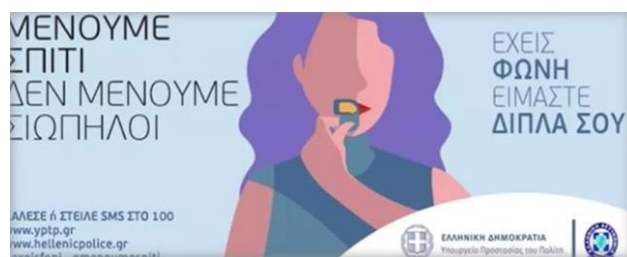


Image 1. Poster on Reporting Methods by the Hellenic Police

3.2. Paternity Leave

In a [research](#) conducted by the civil society organisation Women-On-Top (2022), 47% of fathers replied that they did not exercise their paternity leave rights, 58% of men believes that the labour market views unfavourably fathers who take paternity leaves, and most responders had insufficient knowledge on their rights. However, in 2021, the Greek parliament passed a [law](#) that established a 14-day paternity leave for all natural, adoptive and foster fathers, which raises the country's status to the 5th place in the [OECD](#). This represents a significant increase to the previous 2-day leave that was granted to fathers and is aimed at the equal representation of women in the workforce, through having fathers acquiring a more concrete role in child rearing.

4. Transferability aspects

One of the most valuable practices from Austria is the counselling initiatives targeting men, as well as the “Helpline Männerinfo”. In Greece at the moment the counselling centres and the 15900 SOS helpline in the Gender secretariat for Family Policy and Gender Equality (GSFPGE) Network cater to women, so the establishment of support structures for men would be very appropriate, especially since [police statistics report](#) 1566 male victims in 2020 and 2567 male victims in 2021. Irish policies on gender norms, aiming at closing the gender income gap could represent the next step forward for the Greek labour reforms, following the already established legislation on parental leave.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Although in the past 4 years significant steps have been made towards a more holistic and robust policy targeting violence against Women, Gender issues and gender mainstreaming, there are still many areas where radical changes must be implemented.

In Greece, there are currently very limited policy programmes on gender targeting health professionals. In the past years, the strategic plans were aimed at gender responsive training for law enforcement, that took place at regular intervals annually. However, medical and paramedical staff have been overlooked. Primary care facilities, hospitals, midwives, and other health professionals are not trained in gender related matters or in awareness for the signs of domestic violence. It is therefore

recommended that new policies regarding violence should focus on health, and in particular in training emergency rooms staff in the handling of victims of domestic violence and varied sexual orientations, and to create awareness for the frequently hidden signs of abuse.

Moreover, the judicial system is often disconnected from other agencies, as most justice officials consider their position to be discrete and separate. This leads to gaps in communications with other agencies and stakeholders (i.e. social services, police, health) and a generally flawed perception of risk surrounding cases of domestic violence. In addition, the long waiting times for court procedures, the low number of convictions, could potentially lead victims to retractions, and in many cases for perpetrators to walk away with more power and control over the victim. Therefore, it is recommended that justice officials, including prosecutors and judges, should be trained on specific aspects of gender-based violence, such as risk, victim and offender behaviour. Also, there should be policy strategically implemented, to enforce close communication between the judicial authorities and all other front liners who work with victims and offenders of domestic abuse.

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