

# Gender training in the European Union: Encouraging and supporting the participation of women in positions of political responsibility and representation at regional and local level, GREECE\*



## Encouraging and supporting the participation of women in positions of political responsibility and representation at regional and local level, GREECE

### *Background and general information*

<b>Name of the Organisation</b>	GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR GENDER EQUALITY, HELLENIC MINISTRY OF INTERIOR (ΓΕΝΙΚΗ ΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΕΙΑ ΙΣΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΤΩΝ ΦΥΛΩΝ, ΥΠΟΥΡΓΕΙΟ ΕΣΩΤΕΡΙΚΩΝ)
<b>Contact person</b>	Vaso Papadopoulou, Head of Directorate of Planning, Development and Employment of General Secretariat for Gender Equality
<b>Period</b>	2009 - 2015
<b>Context analysis</b>	The design and implementation of the project 'Encouraging and supporting the participation of women in positions of political responsibility and representation at regional and local level' (hereafter the project) was successfully combined with a significant change of the local and regional institutional framework in Greece. Of particular importance is the Law 3852/2010 (also known as the 'Kallikratis' programme), which reorganised the government structures at these two levels in 2010. It reformed the administrative division of Greece, redefined the borders of the locally self-administrated units, and modified the electoral procedure and responsibilities related to their governing bodies <sup>1</sup> .

\* 'Encouraging and supporting the participation of women in positions of political responsibility and representation at regional and local level, Greece' was selected as a practice on gender training in the European Union with potential based on the research findings from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) project on gender training in the European Union. The project aims to facilitate dialogue between policy makers, trainers and researchers on how gender training can be used to support informed policy making in the EU and Member States. The information collected for the study is based on desk research and stakeholder interviews conducted by ICF GHK in 2012. Other outputs from the study include online databases of gender trainers and training tools and resources available on EIGE's website at: <http://www.eige.europa.eu>



The new local and regional institutional framework also introduced important changes in the field of gender equality. At regional level, new Regional Committees on Gender Equality (PEPIS) have been created to mainstream gender into the programme development in each region and the implementation of specialised programmes focused on women. At the local level, all competencies in the field of care, social services and welfare have become the sole responsibility of the new municipalities, including the equality policies. By the end of 2012, they are obliged to include a Unit for Social Policy and Gender Equality Policies in their organisations, which is in charge of preventing and combating violence against women as well as the development of: actions combating gender stereotypes and increasing women's participation in the sphere of employment, special programmes for vulnerable social groups, measures for the reconciliation of professional and private/family life, and encouraging women's social and political participation and promoting women in decision-making centres. The new institutional framework also allows the municipalities to create specialised committees, such as the Committees for Gender Equality gathering elected representatives, municipal employees, gender experts and representatives of local NGOs.

The above mentioned changes became both an important incentive and a challenge for the development of gender equality actions at the local and regional level. One of the first issues that were to be tackled was to increase the participation of women in the decision making process at these levels. Although legal regulations have been adopted to promote gender equality by implementing quotas for women (one third of the total number of candidates in national, municipal and regional elections), the results of the last municipal and regional elections showed limited progress in this area<sup>2</sup>.

In response to these developments, GSGE designed the project in question. Accordingly, the 'European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life' was used as a tool for the accomplishment of the project's objectives. Ceremonies related to signing the Charter attracted the mayors', governors', and other local authorities' attention on gender equality issues, whereas the Charter's Implementation Guide offered specific ideas and good practices from other countries on the implementation of gender equality policies in municipalities and regions. The General Secretary for Gender Equality was invited by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions to participate in a meeting that was organised in Vilnius (May 2012) for representatives coming from countries where similar actions have been developed<sup>3</sup>.

## Evaluation criteria

### 'WORKS WELL'

#### (Gender equality) objectives

The main objectives of the GSGE project include:

- enhancing women's participation in decision making,
- informing elected women on gender equality issues / policies in the new institutional framework for local and regional structures ('Kallikratis' programme),
- developing women's knowledge on European and national gender equality policies,
- upgrading women's communication skills,
- increasing women's awareness on gender stereotypes,
- reconciliation of women's professional and private life.

These are to be achieved through gender seminars designed for women in order to:

- empower them and develop their personal skills,
- develop their knowledge on European and national gender equality policies,
- upgrade their communication and negotiation skills and techniques,
- make them aware of gender stereotypes and the construction of gender roles, and
- facilitate the reconciliation of their professional and private life.

Furthermore, the elected or candidate women have the opportunity to share and discuss the problems they have to face in their political activity. It is expected that such trainings will contribute to the promotion of gender equality through local level actions, practices and policies, and will improve women's participation (quantitatively and qualitatively) in policy making.

#### Target groups

The target groups addressed by the GSGE project are:

- women elected at a local or regional level,
- women candidates in local or regional elections (e.g. in the 2009 elections there were 11 099 female candidates at the municipal level and 846 at the regional level),
- municipal and regional officers in social services.

In every two-day seminar three women from each municipality are invited to participate. For instance, 500 women participated in the 2 daily seminars that were organised. By the end of the project, it is expected that 1 500 women will undergo training.

### **Aims, methods and tools used**

It is the first time in Greece when gender training at a local level has been implemented in such an integrated way. The seminars are well-organised and the thematic content of the teaching sessions is based on women's needs and interests. Such information was gathered through the research conducted before launching the seminars.

Gender training seminars are separated into 4 sessions, with each session gathering a group of max. 30 women. A participatory method is applied to encourage women to share their thoughts, problems and concerns through discussion.

The two-day educational seminars that are organised in the capital city of each of the 13 regions are built of the following five sessions:

- Session A: Presentation of the National Policy on Substantive Gender Equality / Gender Equality Policies in Local and Regional Governance.
- Session B: Introduction to Gender Perspective, Social Construction of Gender Roles, Reconciliation of Professional and Family Life, Women's Participation in Local Authorities.
- Session C: Self-Empowerment, Time Management Techniques.
- Session D: Communication and Negotiation Techniques and Skills (verbal and non-verbal communication, public speech, interviews, etc.).
- Session E: Networking and Social Dialogue.

Apart from the first session (Session A), which is more theoretical, experiential learning methods are used by trainers. Also, a CD for each session is distributed to all participants with useful informative and educational material (studies, guides, guidelines and lesson plans). Apart from the informative material, trainers apply several tools that they have designed in order to achieve their educational goals, such as the role playing games and training exercises. In addition, the 'European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life' is used as a training tool to sensitise the elected women to gender equality issues in all municipal and regional policies.

The tools and materials for each session were developed by gender experts and / or specialised trainers under the scientific guidance of GSGE's experienced staff. They are available (in Greek) at: <http://www.airetes.gr>, a web site created particularly for this project.

### **Gender equality results (long term and short term). Outcome/specific changes as an actual result of the process/activity**

- A combination of gender training seminars and other project activities contributes to the promotion of gender equality at the local level.
- Seminar participants develop the skills and knowledge that are necessary for their political activity and thus an increase in women's participation in decision-making.
- A gender mainstreaming policy framework is being innovated at the local level by women who have been empowered by the training experience and knowledge who contribute to the decision-making and the implementation of gender equality policy.
- The involvement of elected women in gender equality policy and the promotion of a bottom-up approach in policy making are expected to play a decisive role in gender mainstreaming at municipal and regional levels.

### **Evaluation of good practice**

The official evaluation of the project will take place when all project activities are completed. Its results will be available on the project's web site. As for the on-going training seminars, GSGE and PETA SA created a questionnaire to carry out internal evaluations in order to examine the participants' level of satisfaction with the training experience. The questionnaire includes rating scales to evaluate the seminar's content (10-grade scale), organisation (10-grade scale), trainers' competences, and the overall usefulness of the training (5-grade scale). The questionnaire also includes open questions that aim to examine the reasons for which the participants decided to attend a seminar, their main expectations from it, and the strengths and weaknesses they could observe. The evaluation questionnaires that have been collected so far show that gender training meets the needs of elected women and responds successfully to their expectations. The participants were satisfied with the seminar's content and expressed their special interest in Sessions B, C, and D.

### **Ways in which the good practice/activity could have been improved**

Specific proposals for further improvement could not be formulated given the on-going stage of the project. Once its final results are available, they will be considered when developing a similar initiative at national and European level (please see below on the spin-off effects).

**Plans to gather financial resources and/or institutional arrangements**

The initiative is funded within the 'National Strategic Reference Framework' (NSRF), under the Operational Programme 'Public Administration Reform' (Axis III: Enhancement of Gender Equality Policies across the Entire Range of Public Action) until 2015.

Greek Municipalities and Regions have the opportunity to design training seminars on gender equality issues according to their needs, in collaboration with the National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government (EKDDA), which is the strategic public agency for the training and education of public servants and local government employees.

**TRANSFERABILITY****Success factors**

- **The idea of using the 'European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life'.** The Charter is a substantive tool of communication that helped to attract mayors' and governors' interest on gender equality issues during the two signing ceremonies. It became a significant incentive which ensured political clout on gender mainstreaming and gender equality issues. In combination with the recent changes in the municipal and regional institutional framework, it fostered elected women's interest in active participation in gender training seminars that began after the ceremonies.
- **Frequent contacts between all municipalities and regions, PETA SA and the General Secretariat for Gender Equality.** Such collaboration ensured the creation of a permanent framework for dialogue that facilitated the implementation of gender training seminars and the development of an integrated intervention for the promotion of gender equality at the local level.
- **Covering the needs and interests of elected women in the seminars' teaching content.** This was ensured by the needs assessment conducted by PETA SA before the launch of the gender trainings. In an online questionnaire created for this purpose all elected women were asked to specify their expectations about the seminars and the reasons for attending the training.

**Main obstacles**

- **Every seminar is addressed to participants who have different training needs and different levels of knowledge and information on gender equality issues.** For instance, the training needs varied among participants from rural and urban areas. Contact with local authorities before seminars was necessary to collect information about the participants' profiles and expectations.
- **The practical organisation of the seminars** has been challenging as every seminar is carried out in a different city of Greece.

**Actual replication or spin-off effects**

Another project has been designed, on the same basis, to develop similar actions directed towards women in positions of political responsibility and representation at national and European level. The new project will be implemented in the upcoming months by the Research Centre for Gender Equality (KETHI) under GSGE's guidance. Its main aim is to increase women's participation in national and European decision making processes<sup>4</sup>. The implementation of this initiative is funded by the 'National Strategic Reference Framework' (NSRF).

**LEARNING****Lessons learned from the process**

The provision of similar training sessions and agendas to participants with different needs and knowledge was identified as a risk factor, which can lead to unsuccessful implementation of the practice. It is therefore crucial to ensure frequent contacts with all local authorities prior to training sessions in order to collect information about the profiles and needs of potential participants.

**Sources**

- Αιρετές στην αυτοδιοίκηση (special web site supporting the participation of women in positions of political responsibility), <http://www.airetes.gr> [in Greek]
- General Secretariat for Gender Equality, <http://www.isotita.gr>
- General Secretariat for Gender Equality, Special implementation service of co-financed programmes, <http://www.eyeisotita.gr>

**About EIGE:**

The European Institute for Gender Equality is an EU agency that supports policy makers and all relevant institutions in their efforts to make equality between women and men a reality, by providing them with specific expertise and comparable and reliable information on gender equality in the European Union. More information: <http://www.eige.europa.eu>

Neither EIGE nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for the content of the information contained in this publication.

**Footnotes**

- 1 The 'Kallikratis' programme relates to and interacts with the two levels of local government, that of the municipalities and regions, and the decentralised administrative units. The administrative structure of Greece consists of 13 regions (elected region heads) and 325 new municipalities.
- 2 For instance, according to data collected by the GSGE: out of the 325 mayors in total only 8 are women, there are no female elected governors in any of the 13 regions, only 11 women were elected as vice governors, and 115 women were elected as regional councillors, out of the 713 in total.
- 3 During the meeting, the participants could exchange their good practices and contribute to the creation of 'The Observatory of the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life'.
- 4 For instance, during the national elections held on 17 June 2012, only 63 women were elected to the Greek parliament (21 % out of the 963 women who were candidates in line with the legally defined quota (1/3), [http://www.isotita.gr/var/uploads/MELETES/SIMMETOXI-GYNAIKON\\_EKLOGES\\_17-6-2012.pdf](http://www.isotita.gr/var/uploads/MELETES/SIMMETOXI-GYNAIKON_EKLOGES_17-6-2012.pdf) [in Greek]

