

**COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
37TH SESSION (NEW YORK, 15 JANUARY – 2 FEBRUARY 2007)**

GREECE (6th PERIODIC REPORT)

Information Submitted to the Committee

On 24 January 2007, Greece submitted its 6th periodic report¹ under the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (the Convention), as well as written responses² and an annex to the responses³ to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women's (the Committee) list of issues and questions.⁴

The report outlines the legislative measures, programmes and national policy priorities that have been adopted and further developed since the submission of the last report at the Committee's 2002 Exceptional Session. It attempts to highlight the main developments and key reforms that have occurred in all areas of the Convention, but touches specifically on the areas of violence, employment, participation in decision-making, social security and education. While many of these issues are discussed at great length and backed by substantial data in the accompanying annex, the report lacks information about what specific measures, timetables and monitoring mechanisms have been implemented to uphold these commitments. Similarly, conclusive impact assessments are generally missing, particularly with regard to violence, trafficking and exploitation. Furthermore, the report discusses other important issues only briefly, notably stereotyping in the media, the situation of refugees and immigrants and prostitution.

The Committee's list of issues and questions focuses on stereotypes and education, participation of women in public life, violence against women, trafficking and exploitation of women, health care and minority women. It also raises extensive questions about relevant legislation and national machinery. The Committee presses for information detailing achieved results, targets and timelines, indicators of impact and specifics of proposed measures in these areas. Many of these questions repeated concerns raised in the Committee's previous Concluding Comments that were not adequately addressed in the State party's report. Greece's responses are exceptionally thorough in specifying the desired aims, projected goals and targeted audiences of relevant laws and initiatives, but again they are often framed in a legal context, which does not measure the actual level of achievement of these objectives or provide an assessment of the impact of these measures.

Two alternative reports from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were submitted on Greece. The first, a joint effort by Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM) and Minority Rights Group – Greece (MRG-G),⁵ provided an altogether discouraging picture of the status of women in Greece. It focused largely on the situation of minority women, with a special focus on the issue of trafficking, exploitation and domestic violence. The report noted that while men and women are equally represented before the law, the underlying social structure remains very male-dominated, and prevailing patriarchal values and sexist

¹ <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/405/79/PDF/N0540579.pdf?OpenElement>.

² <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/555/29/PDF/N0655529.pdf?OpenElement>.

³ http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw37/responses_annexes/grc.pdf.

⁴ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw37/landQ/Greece/0646763E.pdf>.

⁵ [http://www.iwraw-ap.org/resources/pdf/Greece\(1\).pdf](http://www.iwraw-ap.org/resources/pdf/Greece(1).pdf).

attitudes continue to perpetuate discrimination in both the private and public spheres. Particularly, it was noted that Muslim women suffer deeply under Sharia law, where some traditional practices are tolerated due to a cultural respect for safeguarding minority law. The NGO report suggested that the State party's report's focus on the legal reality in Greece leads to an embellished picture of the situation of women. Several documents from other sources were appended to the report, comprised chiefly of media stories, case studies and intergovernmental reports, which further emphasised the worrying developments highlighted by the report. The second NGO report, submitted by The European Network of Women – Greece (ENOW),⁶ voiced many of the same concerns. While it recognised that new initiatives on gender policy have greatly improved the lives of many Greek women, it argued that the greatest benefactors are those in the higher echelons of society. It noted a worrying trend in the socio-economic situation of poor women, particularly the marginalised and the Roma, such as rising unemployment and poverty and increased exploitation. ENOW called for improvements in victim re-integration programmes, victim representation in court and issue-sensitisation for relevant professionals. Both NGOs strongly advocated a redefinition and re-evaluation of cultural norms.

Themes and Issues

Domestic Violence

The Committee was greatly concerned with the practice of mediation in cases of domestic violence, which is often accused of favouring the perpetrator over the victim. The Committee was interested in acquiring statistics on domestic violence, particularly with regard to the number of cases that have gone to trial and the number of perpetrators who have been jailed. It reminded the delegation of women's reluctance to report domestic violence, saying that when a report is finally filed, women generally look for a restraining order, not mediation. It therefore pressed for a cautious review of the newly implemented *Law on Combating Domestic Violence*, which establishes the practice of mediation. One Committee member vehemently denounced mediation and opined that it should be done away with completely. The delegation initially denied that women are ill-protected in mediation processes, arguing that it actually guarantees more protection to the victim than the perpetrator. While they admitted that the law requires deeper analysis, they also stressed that its recent adoption means that it is too early to evaluate its positive or negative consequences. They obstinately pointed out that it takes time for societies to become accustomed to new laws, and that this one must therefore be allowed to take its course. Although the issue of mediation was raised on several occasions, the delegation did not seem particularly swayed by the Committee's final remarks on the issue.

Stereotyping

The Committee was pleased to learn of the sensitisation initiatives and training programmes outlined in the report dedicated to combating stereotyping. However, much in line with the views of the NGO shadow reports, Committee members considered these measures insufficient. They stressed the importance of addressing the structural aspects of inequality that inform stereotypical and patriarchal attitudes. They were eager to learn of any research conducted on this issue and urged the delegation to consider how these discriminatory cultural values affect women's *de facto* equality and their potential for greater social mobility. The delegation admitted that much work remains in re-defining cultural norms, particularly in the family context, and assured the Committee of their commitment to this issue.

⁶ [http://www.iwraw-ap.org/resources/pdf/Greece\(2\).pdf](http://www.iwraw-ap.org/resources/pdf/Greece(2).pdf).

Family Law and Minority Women

The Committee was puzzled about the current status of Muslim minorities in matters of family law. It expressed concern that while Greece had ratified the Convention without any reservation, Muslim minorities of Thrace and in the eastern region of the country continue to be subject to Sharia law, prompting the conclusion that there is a difference in treatment of national and minority law. Stressing the importance of Article 16,⁷ the Committee reminded the delegation that women are most discriminated against in personal and family matters and emphasised that the provisions set down in the Convention may not be compromised under the guise of safeguarding minority rights and expressions of culture. The delegation argued that Sharia principles in conflict with Greek law and international human rights are not legally recognised and claimed that the shadow reports' criticisms of Greek family law were exaggerated.

Health

The Committee noticed an alarming increase in C-sections and wondered whether women were coerced into accepting C-sections in the interest of efficiency. It was therefore curious to learn of the options available to those who complain about this practice, and particularly, whether they have recourse to an ethical code of conduct. The delegation confirmed the existence of a code of conduct, but admitted that it does not reference women's health issues in particular. In line with the shadow report, the Committee also raised questions about the availability of obstetric services and generally pressed for more information on how the needs of minority women are met in the health sector. The delegation did not provide any new information in this regard.

Trafficking and Prostitution

Trafficking and prostitution were touched on briefly with special emphasis placed on the importance of surveying the risk of exposure of Greek women to exploitation. While prostitution in Greece is not illegal, it is heavily restricted in populated urban centres, creating concern that marginalisation may result in insufficient regulation. The delegation assured the Committee of their dedication while fully acknowledging the obstacles they face. It specifically pointed to the difficulty of overcoming the negative social attitudes and stereotypes that inform this issue. Among the current measures cited were a National Plan of Action on counter-trafficking, a national team of anti-trafficking trainers, financial support for relevant NGOs and a new legal framework to prosecute men engaged in this trade.

Other Issues

The Committee was pleased to see that Greek women have a proven interest in life-long education programmes, but was curious to know what percentage women represent, and whether similar adult education programmes are made available to minority women. Committee members were displeased to learn of the low representation of women in tertiary education and disapproved of the absence of a quota system, which they explained could significantly increase the number of women who assume scientific and non-traditional posts. The delegation's responses were not particularly instructive.

⁷ Art. 16 addresses equality in marriage and family relations, which include the same rights for men and women to choose to enter into marriage, same rights and responsibilities as parents, same rights in respect of ownership, acquisition and administration of property, and protection against child marriage.

Committee members were concerned about the independence of the General Secretariat for Gender Equality, given its position within the Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation. The delegation argued that the purpose of this inclusive administrative relationship is to ensure dialogue between public service and civil society, claiming further that the Secretariat's housing within the Ministry secures greater participation on important issues by all Government units.

Conclusions and Next Steps

The delegation was pleased to announce some positive developments. These included the adoption of a legislative provision that provides temporary work and residence permits to illegal aliens and victims of trafficking and the recent adoption of a law establishing sexual harassment as a form of discrimination. The Government also plans to strengthen existing and create new institutional mechanisms.

Violence against women remains one of Greece's main obstacles in conforming to the Convention. The Committee Against Torture, the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights have all expressed concern for the lack of specific legislation in this regard, specifically the absence of provisions on domestic violence and marital rape. In its Concluding Comments,⁸ the Committee voiced similar concerns, citing traditional patriarchal attitudes and gender-role stereotyping as the root causes of violence against women. Other concerns included women's access to justice and legal aid services; access of Roma and ethnic women to health services, education and employment; the procedure of mediation in cases of domestic violence; the insufficient enforcement of legislation on trafficking; and the under-representation of women at all levels of political and public life and in decision-making.

Due to time constraints the session came to a close without the Committee providing a constructive closing statement. However, it was made amply clear during the dialogue that patriarchal values continue to deeply infuse all areas of society and that this phenomenon proves to be a major obstacle to the full implementation of the Convention. Throughout the session, the delegation was urged to gather clear data, so as to be better equipped to assess the *de facto* equality of women in the future. The delegation clearly indicated their understanding of the obstacles ahead and named the deconstruction and re-education of cultural norms, stricter monitoring of trafficking and exploitation and greater attunement to minority women's rights, as among those issues that require increased focus. They made every effort to respond to the Committee's questions, though they often took an indirect approach, resulting in an often long-winded dialogue. The State party was forthright in admitting they had not achieved the desired level of equality for women in Greece, yet they conveyed a level of commitment to the issues and an earnestness of will that seemed to hearten the Committee.