



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

Greece

2009-2015

Training Greek women to take their place in regional and local government

Summary

As part of its programme of local government reform, Greece has implemented a nationwide programme of gender training. It targets women who are councillors, candidates in regional and local elections, and social services workers. The courses are designed to increase the number of women who stand for election, and then to make them successful decision-makers.

This initiative is needed because despite the 2001 law that established a quota of one third of each sex in the candidate lists in local elections, very few have been elected. Women constitute none of the 13 regional governors, 11 vice governors, eight of the 325 mayors and 115 of the 713 regional councillors.

The training is delivered through a series of two-day training courses, which are held all over the country in each of the 13 regional capitals. Organising this required intensive contact with the regional authorities beforehand, not only on logistical matters, but also to ensure that the content matched local women's needs (the needs and pre-existing knowledge of urban and rural women was found to differ considerably).

The training was promoted to local decision-makers (mayors and regional governors) by ceremonies organised to sign the *European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life*. Three women from each municipality are invited to take part in each seminar. By the end of the project, it is expected that 1,500 women have been trained.

The courses run over two days for groups of up to 30 women, and are divided into five sessions, which cover gender policy, self-empowerment and time management, the gender perspective and gender issues, communication skills and networking. They adopt a participative method involving role plays and exercises. Evaluation is carried out through participant questionnaires which rate content, organisation, the trainers' skills and relevance to needs. A set of open questions also allow participants to comment on the reasons for attending, their expectations, and any strengths and weaknesses they observed.

The training forms part of the *Kallikratis* programme, under which regional and local government boundaries were redrawn and power devolved to newly-created municipalities. It runs from 2009 until 2015, and is funded through Greece's National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF). It was designed by PETA SA with the help of the General Secretariat for Gender Equality (GSGE).

A context of local government reform

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* was successfully combined with a significant change of the local and regional institutional framework in Greece. Of particular importance is Law 3852/2010 (also known as the

Kallikratis programme),¹ which reorganised the regional and local government structures. 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.

The new local and regional institutional framework also introduced important changes in the field of gender equality. New Regional Committees on Gender Equality (PEPIS) have been created to mainstream gender into all programmes and implement specialised programmes focused on women. Locally, all competencies in care, social services and welfare – including gender – have become the sole responsibility of the new municipalities. By the end of 2012, all municipalities were obliged to set up Units for Social Policy and Gender Equality Policies. These are in charge of preventing and combating violence against women, combating gender stereotypes, increasing women's participation in employment, reconciling professional and private life, encouraging women's social and political participation and promoting women in decision-making. There are also special programmes for vulnerable social groups. The new institutional framework also allows the municipalities to set up specialised committees, such as Committees for Gender Equality which bring together elected representatives, municipal employees, gender experts and representatives of local NGOs.

These 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 to be tackled was to increase the participation of women in decision-making. Although the law provides for quotas for women (one-third of candidates in national, municipal and regional elections), the results of the last municipal and regional elections showed limited progress in this area.²

The European Charter – something to strive for

In response to these developments, the General Secretariat for Gender Equality (GSGE) designed a training project, which runs from 2009 until 2015. It uses the *European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life* as a symbol of the project's objectives. Ceremonies to sign the charter serve to bring gender equality to the notice of mayors, governors and other local authorities. The charter's Implementation Guide offers specific ideas and good practices from other countries. The Council of European Municipalities and Regions, which was responsible for the charter, invited the General Secretary for Gender Equality to a meeting in Vilnius in May 2012 for representatives from countries where similar actions have been developed.³

Project design

The project targets 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 municipal level and 846 at regional level), and municipal and regional officers in social services.

It aims to enhance women's participation in decision-making, inform elected women on gender equality issues and policies in the new institutional framework for local and regional structures (the *Kallikratis* programme), develop women's knowledge of European and

¹The *Kallikratis* programme deals with the two levels of local government – the 13 regions (with elected heads) and the 325 new municipalities – as well as the decentralised administrative units.

²GSGE reports that only eight of the 325 mayors 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 713.

³During the meeting, 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*.

national gender equality policies, upgrade their communication skills and increase their awareness of gender stereotypes and the reconciliation of professional and private life.

These objectives have been designed through gender seminars which would empower women and develop their personal skills, develop their knowledge of European and national gender policies, upgrade their communication and negotiation skills, make them aware of gender stereotypes and the construction of gender roles, and help them to reconcile their professional and private lives.

Furthermore, the elected or candidate women are given the opportunity to discuss the problems they face in their political activity. It is expected that such training 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.

The five sessions



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

The seminars are organised over two days in the capital city of each of the 13 regions, with a class size of up to 30. In every two-day seminar three women from each municipality are invited to participate. For instance, 500 women participated in the two one-day seminars that were organised. By the end of the project, it is expected that 1,500 women will undergo training.

A participatory method is used to encourage women to share their thoughts, problems and concerns through discussion. The following five sessions are delivered:

- Session A: National, regional and local policy on gender equality
- Session B: Gender perspective, social construction of gender roles, reconciliation of professional and family life, women's participation in local authorities
- Session C: Self-empowerment and time management
- 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, which is somewhat theoretical, experiential learning methods are used. Also, a CD for each session is distributed to all participants with useful informative and educational material (studies, guides, guidelines, etc.). Apart from the informative material, trainers use role playing games and exercises. They use the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life 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 specialist trainers under the scientific guidance of GSGE's experienced staff. They are available (in Greek) at: <http://www.airetes.gr>, a website created especially for this project.

Effects at local level

The main effects have been at local level. Seminar participants have developed the skills and knowledge that are necessary for their political activity, thus increasing women's participation in decision-making. Thus empowered, the participants are introducing an innovative gender mainstreaming policy framework at local level, where they can contribute to 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.

The official evaluation of the project will take place when all project activities are completed, and its results will be published on the project's website. As for evaluating the ongoing training seminars, GSGE and PETA SA have created a questionnaire which examines the participants' level of satisfaction with the training experience. The questionnaire asks participants to rate content (1-10), organisation (1-10), trainers' competences and the overall usefulness of the training (1-5). It also includes open questions that 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.

Success factors

The success of the training may be put down to several factors:

- **The idea of using the *European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life*.** The charter is a communication tool that helped to draw mayors' and governors' attention to gender issues during the two signing ceremonies that were held. It became a significant incentive which ensured political clout on gender mainstreaming and gender equality. In combination with the recent changes in the municipal and regional institutional framework, it encouraged elected women to take part in the gender training seminars, which 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 to promote gender equality at the local level.
- **Covering the needs and interests of elected women in the seminar content.** This was ensured by the needs assessment conducted by PETA SA before the launch of the training. In an online questionnaire created for this purpose all elected women were asked to specify what they expected from the seminars and why they were attending.

One hitch identified during the project was that a standardised programme does not meet everybody's needs, and a particular difference was observed between women from urban and rural areas. The content of training needs to be tailored to the needs and pre-existing knowledge of the participants. Training organisers should therefore ask local authorities to compile profiles of potential participants ahead of time. It was also challenging in practical terms to organise each seminar in a different city.

Follow-up

The initiative will continue until 2015, 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).

As a follow-up, a similar project has been designed for women in positions of political responsibility and representation at national and European level. The new project will be implemented by the Research Centre for Gender Equality (KETHI) under GSGE's guidance. Funded by the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF), its main aim is to increase women's participation in national and European decision-making. It addresses the situation that, for example, in the national elections of 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).⁴

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.

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Αιρετές στην αυτοδιοίκηση – web site supporting the participation of women in positions of political responsibility (in Greek): <http://www.airetes.gr/>

General Secretariat for Gender Equality: <http://www.isotita.gr/>

General Secretariat for Gender Equality, Special implementation service of co-financed programmes: <http://www.eyesotita.gr/el/Pages/Default.aspx>

European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life:
http://www.ccre.org/docs/charte_egalite_en.pdf

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⁴http://www.isotita.gr/var/uploads/MELETES/SIMMETOXI-GYNAIKON_EKLOGES_17-6-2012.pdf