

Greece: Domestic violence, including legislation; state protection and support services available to victims, including non-citizens (2009-April 2014)

Publisher [Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada](#)

Publication
Date 30 April 2014

Citation /
Document
Symbol GRC104858.E

Related
Document [Grèce : information sur la violence familiale, y compris les lois; la protection offerte par l'État et les services de soutien offerts aux victimes, y compris celles qui n'ont pas la citoyenneté grecque \(2009-avril 2014\)](#)

Cite as Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Greece: Domestic violence, including legislation; state protection and support services available to victims, including non-citizens (2009-April 2014)*, 30 April 2014, GRC104858.E, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/53b137394.html> [accessed 2 September 2014]

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1. Overview

The US Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 reports that "domestic violence, including spousal abuse, continued to be a problem" in Greece (US 27 Feb. 2014, 24). Country Reports 2013 further states that according to the General Secretariat for Gender Equality (GSGE), an independent government agency in Greece, "domestic violence was common" in Greece (ibid.). The General Secretary of the GSGE was quoted by the Greek Reporter, an English-language Greek newspaper, as saying that "[v]iolence against women is present and undeniable" (Greek Reporter 1 Nov. 2013).

According to a discussion paper published in 2012 by the European Anti-Violence Network (EAVN), an Athens-based NGO that aims to prevent domestic violence in Greece (EAVN n.d.),

there is a lack of data on the prevalence of violence against women (EAVN 7-8 Feb.2012, 3). Country Reports 2013 states that

[a]ccording to police figures presented to the Parliamentary Committee for Equality, Youth, and Human Rights ... , there was a 54 percent increase in cases of domestic violence in 2011 and another increase of 22 percent in 2012. The vast majority of the victims were women. Ten women were killed in domestic violence incidents in 2011, five in 2012, and eight in the first 11 months of [2013]. (US 27 Feb. 2014, 25)

According to the same report, there were 167 cases of rape or attempted rape in 2012 recorded by the police, compared with 172 cases in 2011 (ibid., 24). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Legislation

According to the information published on the website of the Embassy of the United States in Athens, domestic violence is a crime under the Law 3500, which came into effect in 2006 (US Jan. 2013, 7). Country Reports 2013 indicates that "[r]ape, including spousal rape, is a crime" (US 27 Feb. 2014, 24). According to Country Reports 2013, on 9 July 2013,

the GSGE announced that the codification of 317 Greek and EU laws and legal provisions on gender equality was completed. The law provides for the prosecution of all domestic violence crimes without the need for a victim to press charges. Penalties range from two to 10 years of imprisonment, depending on the gravity of the crime. The GSGE estimated that only 6 to 10 percent of domestic violence victims contacted police, and only a small fraction of those complaints went to trial. (ibid., 24, 25)

The information provided on the website of the Embassy of the United States indicates that

[r]estraining orders are available in urgent cases when immediate protection is required. A restraining order may be combined with an order specifying a time limit within which plaintiff must bring the principal action.... The court having jurisdiction over the main pending litigation has the power to modify or revoke restraining orders. (US Jan. 2013, 7)

Without providing details, Freedom House reported in March 2013 that the "2006 law designed to address domestic violence has been criticized for not giving the state the power to protect the rights of women" (16 Mar. 2013). The EAVN 2012 discussion paper also states that, although

[the] law to prevent and combat domestic violence was adopted 6 years ago and some improvements have been made to laws related to sexual harassment and trafficking, the gaps that remain in Greek legislation regarding various forms of VAW [violence against women], as well as in the way the law is applied, are still significant. (EAVN 7-8 Feb. 2012, 3)

Further information on the implementation of the legislation could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. State Protection

3.1 Police and Judiciary

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 states that "data on prosecutions, convictions, and prison sentences for rape and domestic violence were unavailable" (US 27 Feb. 2014, 24). A report published by the UN Committee against Torture also expresses concern about "the absence of comprehensive and disaggregated data on complaints, investigations, prosecutions and convictions of cases of ... domestic and sexual violence" (UN 27 June 2012, para 28).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Coordinator of the Gender Equality Office in Ioannina of the non-profit Institute of Labor, who is also a human rights activist working on gender issues, stated that any person living in Greece "has the same access and protection as all the other citizens" (Coordinator 26 Apr. 2014). Without providing details, the Coordinator noted that women from Albania or other countries who have an accent when they are speaking Greek may have difficulties reporting a crime to the police (ibid.). The Coordinator further stated that police officers "usually ignore [women] or even make fun of them" when they come to report a case of domestic violence (ibid.) According to the Coordinator, women reporting domestic violence cases at a police station in Greece often receive the following answers from police officers: "'ok, now go back to your family and try to make up with your husband'," or "'ok, you made your report, you can go'," but in practice the police officers "never ... write an official report" (ibid.). Country Reports for 2013 indicates that

[t]he GSGE, in cooperation with the Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection, trained police to work with domestic violence victims. NGOs reported that courts were lenient to male offenders in domestic violence cases. The GHM reported long delays in trial procedures until the final verdict. The GHM noted that the state did not provide legal aid to victims, or translation of key documents to non-Greek victims, which discouraged victims from pursuing their cases. Police stations generally had a manual on how police should treat victims of domestic violence. (US 27 Feb. 2014, 25)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3.2 Other Services

Country Reports for 2013 indicates that the GSGE developed policies to combat domestic violence problems, such as "encouraging and empowering victims to report domestic violence and offering services to victims" (ibid., 24). According to the EAVN discussion paper, the GSGE implemented the Greek Awareness Raising Campaign (ARC) as part of the national programme for prevention and combating of violence against women 2009-2013 (EAVN 7-8 Feb. 2012, 3, 4, 7). The campaign is designed to be implemented over a 3 year period (April 2011-April 2014) (ibid.). The campaign aims to "increase the general population's awareness and knowledge as well as to enhance professionals' capacity to appropriately approach women/girls suffering from VAW" (ibid., 7).

A report published by the UN Committee against Torture in 2012 states that

[t]he Committee takes note of the legislative and other measures adopted by the State party to combat violence against women, including the enactment of Law 3500/2006 for combating domestic violence and the adoption of a National Action Plan on Violence against Women (2009-

2013). However, the Committee remains concerned at the persistence of violence against women and children, including domestic and sexual violence, and at the limited number of prosecutions and convictions of the perpetrators. (UN 27 June 2012, para. 23)

Further information on the effectiveness of the campaign could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to Country Reports for 2013,

[t]he GSGE operated a 24-hour emergency telephone hotline for abused women, and the National Center for Social Solidarity of the Ministry of Labor operated a hotline that provided referrals and psychological counseling for victims. (US 27 Feb. 2014, 25)

The EAVN discussion paper states that the SOS line [for female victims of violence (US 27 Feb. 2014, 25)] has been operating since March 2011 as part of the National Programme for prevention and combating of violence against women 2009-2013 (EAVN 7-8 Feb. 2012, 4). The SOS line operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and also provides services in English (ibid.). According to the discussion paper, the line received approximately 2,795 phone calls between March and November 2011 (on average, 12 calls per day) for all types of violence (ibid.). Country Reports 2013 states that, according to the GSGE, the SOS line received 12,313 calls from March 2011 to November 2013 (US 27 Feb. 2014, 25).

4. Support Services

4.1 Shelters

Without providing details, the EAVN discussion paper published in 2012 indicates that there was one counselling centre and six shelters throughout the country for female victims of domestic violence and their children (EAVN 7-8 Feb. 2012, 3). According to the discussion paper, "[i]t is not rare for shelters to close and re-open (or not) depending on the available financial resources" (ibid.). The Coordinator for the Gender Equality Office of the Institute of Labor also noted that shelters and counseling offices depend on financial support from the European Union and further indicated that whenever EU funding stopped, the provided services stopped too (Coordinator 26 Apr. 2014). The EAVN discussion paper states that

[t]he existing shelters cover the basic housing needs for victims and offer counselling services - but not multilingual; there are no employment programmes, no services for children and, in general, there are no "second stage" provisions and facilities after the end of the short term accommodation in a shelter. (EAVN 7-8 Feb. 2012, 3)

However, in 2013 correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Coordinator indicated that there were 16 shelters across the country that are located in Ioannina, Athens, Thessaloniki, Iraklio, Chania, Parta, Korintho, Alexandroupoli, Veria, Kordelio Thessaloniki, Kozani, Corfu, Larisa, Lamia, Tripoli and Rhodes (Coordinator 26 Apr. 2014). According to the Coordinator, most of the shelters have 20 beds for women and their children (age limit for boys is 12 years old) (ibid.). Women and children can "usually" stay in a shelter for two months and a "little longer" if needed (ibid.). According to the Coordinator, shelters accept all female victims of domestic violence, "even if they don't have legal papers" (ibid.). However, before accessing a shelter, women are required to

report domestic violence to the police (ibid.). According to the Coordinator, it is difficult for female victims of domestic violence to leave their homes because of the high unemployment rate in Greece; women are afraid that they will not be able to find a job (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Greek Reporter indicates that in June 2013, the new Women's Support and Consultation Center opened in Kavala district [northern Greece], providing psychological and legal assistance to abused women and referring them to other social services (Greek Reporter 1 Nov. 2013). According to Country Reports for 2013, the "Greek Orthodox Church and a variety of NGOs also operated shelters and walk-in centers, providing counseling and assistance to victims" (US 27 Feb. 2014, 25).

Country Reports 2013 states that

[a]n initiative funded by the EU structural funds program financed the creation of 19 shelters for victims of violence and the establishment of 25 counseling and support services centers in all major cities. The GSGE also oversaw 14 separate counseling and support services centers at the headquarters of each governing district and funded the upgrading of two shelters for battered women in Athens and Thessaloniki operated by the National Solidarity Center. (ibid., 24)

Further information on whether the shelters and counseling centers were established could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Oral sources: Attempts to contact the following organizations were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: Antigone NGO; Athena NGO; European Network of Women in Greece; Greece - General Secretariat for Gender Equality of the Ministry of Interior; Panteion University Centre for Gender Studies.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International; Antigone NGO; Athena NGO; Athens News; Athens Times; Australia - Government Refugee Review Tribunal; The Balkan Chronicle; Balkan Insight; British Broadcasting Corporation; ecoi.net; European Network of Migrant Women; EUR-lex; European Commission; Factiva; Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California Berkeley; Greece - Ermis.gov.gr, General Secretariat for Gender Equality of the Ministry of Interior, Ombudsman; Greek Helsinki Committee; Greek Herald; Harvard School of Public Health; Human Rights Watch; International Family Law; International Federation for Human Rights; Panteion University Centre for Gender Studies; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; Social Empowerment NGO; United Nations - Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Refworld, UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, UN Women; Victim Support Europe; Women Against Violence Europe.

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