

FEM·ABLE



FEM-ABLE

Promoting women's participation  
in the political domain

# NATIONAL REPORT FOR GREECE

Deliverable D2.2

Women Do Business - Dospra Sylia

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Deliverable information</i> .....	2
1. National context: overview of the political and social landscape .....	5
1.1 Political Landscape in Greece .....	5
1.2 Social landscape in Greece .....	7
2. Historical background on women's participation in politics and power positions .....	9
2.1 History of feminism in Greece .....	9
Kalliroi Parren and the early feminist movement in Greece .....	9
2.2. Right to vote and law frame for women in Greece .....	10
2.3 History of women's participation in political acts in Greece .....	11
3. Current statistics about women's political participation.....	12
3.1. The feminist movement in Greece today .....	12
3.2 Current Participation of Women in the Political Domain .....	13
4. Results of the focus groups.....	15
4.1. Objectives of the focus group: .....	15
4.2 Participants and structure of the focus group.....	16
4.3. Results of the focus group: barriers, strategies and experiences faced by eight persons who participate in political domain .....	17
4.3.1) Stereotypes and gender bias.....	17
4.3.2) Role models .....	17
4.3.3) Work- Life Balance .....	17
4.3.4) Administrative vs. Decision – Making Roles .....	18
4.3.5) Societal attitudes and cultural norms .....	18
4.3.6) Media influence.....	18
4.3.7) Political Party Support and Promotion.....	19
4.3.8) Training, Mentorship and Support Programs .....	19
4.3.9) Role of men in gender equality .....	20
5. Results of the questionnaires .....	21
5.1. Structure of the questionnaire and its analysis .....	21
5.2. Demographics of respondents.....	22

5.3 Interpretation of results by barrier ..... 22

5.4 Interpretation of results by strategy ..... 24

5.5 Results by demographic groups..... 25

5.5.1. Interpretation of results for all respondents ..... 25

5.5. 2. Interpretation of results by gender ..... 28

6. Summary of key findings and national-specific recommendations..... 29

7. References..... 32

*Partners*.....35

## 1. National context: overview of the political and social landscape

Greece is a peninsular and mountainous country located in Southern-Eastern Europe, in the Balkans peninsula. The country has the largest coastline in Europe due to its numerous islands. Greece has a total of 2,000 Greek islands but only 168 are inhabited. The country is washed to the east by the Aegean Sea, to the west by the Ionian and the south by the Mediterranean Sea. Greece population is estimated at 10,7 million people in 2020. In terms of total world population, it represents 0.13% and it is ranked at number 87 of all countries.

Greece is recognized as a developed country and is ranked in place 52 of world economy ranking by nominal GDP. Greece is known for being the cradle of Western Civilization, the birthplace of democracy, the Olympic Games, and its ancient history and magnificent temples. It is also one of the most famous tourist destinations in Europe.

Greece is a parliamentary representative democratic republic, where the President of Greece is the head of state and the Prime Minister of Greece is the head of government within a multi-party system. In social level Greece is a collectivist society in the sense that there is strong loyalty shown to familial and social groups. Many aspects of Greek society have had to adapt to the pressures of the 21st century because Greece is still facing serious social issues such as gender equality, immigration, unemployment, domestic violence, healthcare, media corruption.

### 1.1 Political Landscape in Greece

Greece, officially the Hellenic Republic is a Parliamentary Republic. The President, elected by Parliament every five years, is Head of State. The Prime Minister is Head of Government. Legislative power is exercised by Parliament and the President of the Republic. Executive power is exercised by the President of the Republic and the Government. Judicial power is vested in the courts of law, whose decisions are executed in the name of the people.

Although the President of the Republic has limited political power, as most power lies with the government, his duties include formally appointing the Prime Minister, on whose recommendation he also appoints or dismisses other members of government, he represents the State in its relations to other States, proclaims referendums etc.

General elections are normally held every four years unless the Parliament is dissolved earlier. The electorate consists of all Greek citizens who are 18 years of age. Each new Government, after a

general election or after the previous government's resignation, has to appear before Parliament and request a vote of confidence.

For most of the post-authoritarian era (the so-called "Third Greek Republic"), which is the period starting with the return to democracy in 1974, after the end of the seven-year dictatorship of the colonels, Greece had one of the few remaining two-party systems in Europe, similar to Britain and Malta. The long tradition of majoritarianism in Greek politics was translated in the formation of single-party majority governments and an alternation to government between the socialist party of PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement) and the conservative party of New Democracy (ND), even though PASOK was for more years the incumbent party up to the onset of the economic crisis in 2010. The brief exception to this bipolar rotation of power were the two short-lived coalition governments between June 1989 and April 1990, with the participation of the communist left in the coalition. This was caused by a shift to a pure proportional representation electoral system, which had been orchestrated by the outgoing PASOK government in order to prevent outright majorities of ND in parliament. Noteworthy is the fact that in all other parliamentary elections of the post-authoritarian period the different electoral systems adopted were not purely majoritarian ones. On the contrary, over all these years different electoral systems of "reinforced proportionality" were in effect, which produced significantly disproportional results in terms of the conversion of votes to seats. Greece's tradition of single-party rule majoritarianism is also linked to the unbalanced relationship between the executive and the legislature. In other words, the executive dominated the legislature to a degree that was rarely seen in other European political systems.

The main characteristics of the political and party system from 1974 changed with the onset of the sovereign debt crisis that hit the country back in 2010. The political consequences of the crisis manifested relatively rapidly and were far reaching. The "double" earthquake elections of 2012 (May and June) in which the two-party system collapsed (e.g PASOK and ND saw their combined vote share drop by 45 percentage points) led to the fragmentation of the Greek party system. From 2012 to 2019 the country experienced a period of coalition governance, namely the coalition governments between PASOK, ND and the populist right party of LAOS (2012), then the one by PASOK and ND (2012-2015) with the participation of the centre-left party of Democratic Left (for one year), and finally the coalition between the radical left party of SYRIZA and the nationalist Independent Greeks (ANEL) party from 2015 to 2019. From the first bailout agreement signed by PASOK back in May 2010 and up to the last parliamentary elections of 2019, Greece held five parliamentary elections, two European elections, as well as a referendum over the terms of a new bailout agreement. This dense and busy political time-line was accompanied by two more bailout programs for the country. All this contributed to particularly high levels of fluidity in the political environment, upending established patterns of electoral behavior in the country. The European elections of 2019 and the snap parliamentary elections that took place a few weeks later ended the norm of coalition governments of the previous period and signaled the beginning of a return back

to the traditional two-party system with ND and SYRIZA as the two main political actors/protagonists. The latter party has replaced PASOK in this two-party system duopoly.

Another defining characteristic in this post-authoritarian period is the unidimensional structure of the ideological space around the left-right dimension. The salience of this single axis of political competition can be attributed to the historical legacy of the major political conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which produced enduring political identities that survived well into the post-authoritarian period, namely the “Right”, the “Centre” and the “Left” (Moschonas 1995). This feature has been a main characteristic of Greek politics for most of the 20th century despite political regime changes, and even though the only party that continues to exist from the pre-authoritarian period is the KKE (Communist party) (see Tsatsanis & Teperoglou 2020). Furthermore, for the study of the Greek political landscape, it is necessary to keep in mind that contrary to Western and Northern European countries -this unidimensional left-right space was never similar to its classic (materialistic) definition; it mostly captured a conflict over socio-political values given the late industrialization of the country and the absence of a classic labor-capital class cleavage. The period of the economic crisis saw the emergence of a new political divide that cut across the traditional left-right political dimension: the “pro-anti bailout divide”. This conflict, between those in favor of the bailout agreement and those against it, dominated the political landscape in Greece throughout the years of the economic crisis and overshadowed other political issues.

The economic crisis that hit Greece led to a political one that altered the structure of the Greek party system. A new era for Greek politics started back in 2012 with coalition governments throughout the period of the crisis. Under these circumstances party competition reflected significant changes in the Greek political landscape. However, the Greek party system has seemingly entered into a new period of stabilization after the parliamentary elections of 2019. Its main feature is a familiar two-party structure with ND and SYRIZA in place of PASOK.

## 1.2 Social landscape in Greece

Greece’s society consists primarily from Greek people whose identity is centralized around the eastern orthodox Christian tradition. The Greek government does not collect information on the ethnic diversity of its citizens, but rather categorises them on the basis of whether they have citizenship or are a foreign migrant. There is one minority officially recognised by the government – the Thráki (Thrace) people. However, there are also large numbers of people identifying as Turks, Macedonians, Albanians, Bulgarians, Vlachs and Roma.

The official language is Greek. This is traditionally written in a distinct alphabet that ranges from alpha (Αα) to omega (Ωω). There are also some regional dialects spoken

throughout the country, such as Cypriot and Pontian. However, most of the population that speaks a local dialect is bilingual and also understands standard Greek.

Greece is geographically located in the east of Europe and has a majority Eastern Orthodox Christian population. However, unlike other Eastern Orthodox European countries, it is mostly associated with the West. This is partly because Greece managed to remain outside of Russia's sphere of influence after World War II; it allied with Western Europe and has been a long-term member of the European Union (EU). Furthermore, ancient Greece is generally regarded to be the birthplace of Western civilization. Its contributions to political thought, philosophy and science continue to be central to Western culture.

Greeks tend to structure their lives around the immediate social relationships important to them, taking an easy-going approach to time and socialisation. Society is not tightly organised and schedules are not closely followed. Those from rural or coastal areas and the older generation in particular tend to adopt quite a relaxed and slow pace of life, devoting more time to personal interactions. Afternoon naps are also a regular part of many people's days. Nevertheless, misconceptions occur when people perceive this cultural milieu to mean that Greeks are lazy. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Greeks work more hours than any other Europeans. A stereotype about their work ethic (or lack thereof) has perhaps been formed because a lot of socialisation occurs in the public eye.

Public spaces play a large role in community relationships, especially in summer. For example, outdoor cafes and coffee shops provide a place for Greeks to mingle without having to necessarily plan an occasion. People enjoy congregating to catch up with friends and hear the latest news. There is also a popular tradition of taking a leisurely stroll down the town promenade in the late afternoon/early evening – known as '*volta*'. This is especially common on the Greek islands. Informal social events such as these reinforce a sense of community belonging.

Currently, Greek society is experiencing significant economic, political and social change. Much has been written and said regarding the economic and political challenges that Greek society has to confront. However, the aspect of *social change* of this specific society has not received equal or systematic attention. Young Greeks are now experiencing a different social reality (in relation to older generations) which is characterised (*inter alia*) by uncertainty, insecurity, mobility and the incapability to produce specific projections for their future lives.

Greece has a wide list of really important social problems that affect the country's society structure and democracy. Firstly, migration is a major issue in Greek society. Greece hosts large numbers of asylum seekers while failing to protect their rights, including by pushing new arrivals back to Turkey. Migrant children face homelessness and lack of access to adequate healthcare and education while on January this year the European Committee of Social Rights found that Greece violates the rights of asylum-seeking children, citing inadequate, unhealthy, and dangerous living conditions, homelessness, and inadequate access to healthcare and education.



Concerning women's rights, Greece this year has the last position in gender equality according to the gender equality index. Violence against women was the subject of heated debate during the year, after Olympic medalist Sofia Bekatorou alleged in January she had been sexually assaulted in 1998 by an official of the Greek sailing federation, triggering a national #MeToo movement. In March, nongovernmental group Diotima noted that during the pandemic there was an increase of reported incidents of domestic and other gender-based violence. At least 11 women have been murdered by their current or former husbands or partners in the first nine months of the year. The killings shocked the public, opening a debate on the issue of domestic violence. Women face multiple barriers to reporting domestic violence and seeking help from the state.

Another major social issue for Greece is press freedom. This year, Greece came last among EU countries in Reporters Without Borders' (RSF) 2023 World Press Freedom Index. In April, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) raised concerns about restrictions on media freedom in Greece, including the withholding of government advertising from critical outlets, accusations of government censorship, as well as violence and harassments of journalists by police during demonstrations.

## 2. Historical background on women's participation in politics and power positions

### 2.1 History of feminism in Greece

While there were some proto-feminists in ancient Greece, feminism as a movement began in Greece in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when women across the US and Europe began fighting for their rights. Women from the US, UK, and Ireland in particular sparked an international feminist movement in the mid-nineteenth century, when they began advocating for women's suffrage and other feminist causes. For centuries, Greece, particularly in the rural areas, was an incredibly patriarchal society in which women were not afforded equal rights in the home, school, or workplace. Women in Greece did not gain the right to vote until 1952.

#### **Kalliroti Parren and the early feminist movement in Greece**

Kalliroti Parren (also known as Kalliroti Signaou), is widely considered to have founded the feminist movement in Greece. Born in Rethymno, Crete in 1859, Parren received a high quality education in some of the best schools in Greece at the time. Fluent in Russian, Italian, French, and English, Parren was highly intelligent and dedicated to spreading knowledge, a passion that led her to become a teacher. After traveling around the world to teach girls, Parren settled in Athens and married the French journalist Jean Parren. While in Athens, Parren became focused on women's rights to equal educational and employment opportunities, ideas which were unheard of at the time. She focused

less on suffrage, as she believed providing women access to employment and education would slowly but surely allow men to understand that women's suffrage was necessary. Parren began a feminist newspaper entitled *Ladies' Journal* (in Greek, *Ephemeris ton Kyrion*) in 1887. The publication was radical in that it was run entirely by women, and Parren often featured the work of the most famous and talented contemporary Greek women writers. The paper ran until 1917, when Parren was exiled to the Greek island of Hydra by Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos because she opposed Greece's position in World War I, favoring the Triple Entente. The *Ladies Journal* was incredibly influential in that it exposed Greek society to the concepts of equality, feminism, and women's rights, which were not prominent ideas at the time, and mirrored the changing role of women in Greek society, particularly in major cities like Athens.

## 2.2. Right to vote and law frame for women in Greece

The movement of feminism faded into the background until the 1950s, however, as Greece suffered a series of national tragedies, including the Asia Minor Catastrophe in 1922, the Nazi occupation of the country, and the ensuing Greek Civil War. Such events left little opportunity for feminism to develop in the country. Following this period of turmoil, Greece set its sights to modernizing and westernizing the country. This involved not only a major migration from rural villages to cities but also to a re-examination of many traditional aspects of Greek society, including the roles of women. Across Greece, women were still associated with the home and domestic life, and they did not play a major role in politics, art, or public life, except in a few isolated cases.

In 1952, Greek women finally gained the right to vote when Law 2159 was enacted, which was a major, albeit delayed, step toward equality of the sexes in Greece. The first election in which women were allowed to vote was in 1956. After women gained the right to vote, their role in Greek society began to change. The number of women in the workplace and in higher education boomed in Greece during the 1960s and throughout the 1970s. It was at this time that the strict romantic and sexual mores of conservative and religious Greek society began to change, as well. It became more commonly accepted for women to date and flirt with men, but it was still common for women to have a male relative escort them on dates, even in large cities. While some progress was made in this area, there were still aspects of society that were very conservative, as the ultimate goal for Greek women remained marriage and a family. Tragically, a woman's "reputation" could make her a victim of honor-based crimes in Greece even at that time, particularly in villages, where the amount of time a woman spent outside of the home was considered to reflect poor character.

In the '70s and '80s, Greek feminist publications questioning women's roles in Greek society began circulating across the country. These texts often provided information and statistics about birth control and abortion and supported women who could not or did not desire to have children or get married. These publications particularly targeted Greece's extremely conservative and oppressive family laws. At the time, Greek law required men to be the "head of the household," implying that

women were the wards of either their fathers or husbands. It also mandated that women take their husband's last name upon marriage.

It was not until over twenty years after women gained the right to vote in Greece that they were fully protected under Greek law. In 1983, Greece signed and ratified the landmark "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women," which is one of the most progressive of such laws in Europe.

The 1983 legislation totally reformed Greece's oppressive family law, as it provided for gender equality in marriage, abolished the dowry, expanded the divorce law, decriminalized adultery, and provided equal rights to children of unwed parents. Since this law was passed, women in Greece have rarely taken on their husband's last name.

Domestic violence, traditionally seen in Greece as a private issue, was still not extensively covered in the law, however, but this has begun to shift, as the Law 3500/2006, aimed at combating domestic violence, was enacted in 2006. The law criminalized domestic violence and marital rape.

## 2.3 History of women's participation in political acts in Greece

The history of the participation of Greek women in political acts and movements is largely lost and unknown to us today, although local poetry and literature have been a significant source of information on the subject, having provided us with images such as the resistance and subsequent self-sacrifice of the Suliote women during the Turkish rule (Varikas, 2003). The Suliotes were one of the first signs of representation of Greek women in political conflicts, although namely, in the Greek Revolution of 1821, the most well known female historical figures are Laskarina Bouboulina and Manto Mavrogenous, both of which were very active in the fight for independence (Hellenic College of Thessaloniki 1 ). One of the most important voices in the fight for women's rights in the late 1800s and early 1900s was Kalliroi Parren, publisher of the first feminist newspaper in Greece called the "Ladies' Journal". Parren created an editorial, as well as a writing team consisting only of women and published the first weekly 2 newspaper in the Greek press that was directed at a female audience. Having released 1106 issues from March 9 1887 until December of 1917, the newspaper dealt with issues such as equality and women's rights in education and in labor. Although they received backlash, they also gained a supporting following of mostly female readers, while the support of a small portion of the male public wasn't absent (Lekythos 3 ). Despite the few examples we do have, the participation of women in politics is greatly underrepresented in the Greek state, especially before the 1950s, when Greek women earned the right to vote. In a historical review, after the constitutional recognition of women as citizens in 1864, it wasn't for another century that women were able to participate in the ballot. The right to vote was initially given in 1930 to educated women (who knew how to read and write) over the age of 30 and it was only concerning municipal elections. For the first time in 1934, only 439 women voted in Athens. The first female mayor in Greece was Marika Botsi-Tsapalira, who was elected in Amaliada in 1944 and was followed by Maria

Desilli in 1956 in the municipality of Corfu (Drosou Kamilaki, 2019). All adult women in Greece were officially able to vote for the first time in municipal elections in 1951 and in parliamentary elections in 1952, although they weren't able to vote in that year's elections on account that there wasn't enough time to update the catalogs and let everyone register (Drosou Kamilaki, 2019). The first "universal" vote for Greek women was achieved in the elections of 1956, and that same year the first female minister in Greece, Lina Tsaldari, was elected as the Minister for Social Welfare. The first woman to be elected in the parliamentary elections came earlier with Eleni Skoura, on January 19 1953 in Thessaloniki, in which position she stayed until 1956 (D3, 2022 4 ). Since that period, very few women have received high rankings within the parliament, with some prominent examples being Fofi Gennimata as president of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement Anna Benaki-Psarouda as the first female speaker of the parliament in the 2004 elections and Aleka Pappariga as the first female General Secretary of the Communist Party of Greece, also being the first woman in Greece to lead a political party in 1991 (Hellenic Parliament 5 ). The highest parliamentary position of power a woman has ever received in the Greek state belongs to Katerina Sakellaropoulou, who was elected President of the Hellenic Republic by the Hellenic Parliament on January 22 2020. No woman has ever been elected Prime Minister of Greece thus far.

### **3. Current statistics about women's political participation**

#### **3.1. The feminist movement in Greece today**

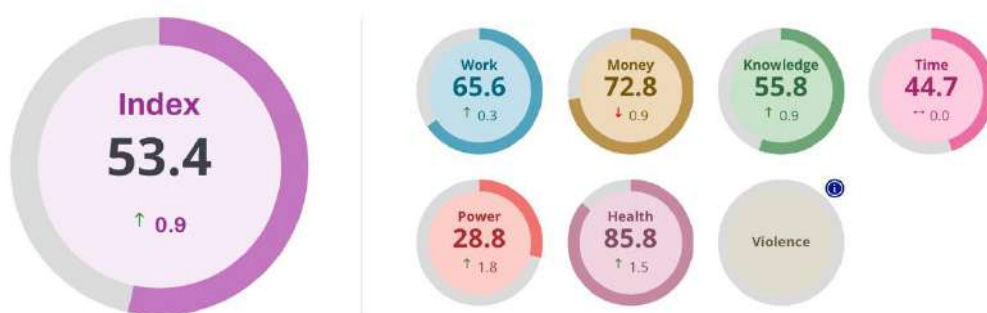
The feminist movement in Greece hasn't always been a front-page issue. Quite the opposite. When changemakers called for a demonstration, the streets were often empty, and only a bunch of activists would picket in front of the parliament (in some cases they got arrested for no reason). The public and media discourse often described feminists as aggressive and extreme. Konstantinos Bogdanos, a far-right politician, said in 2019, "there is a group of "satanist wiccans, pagan witches who want to impose their vegan lesbianism."

The momentum changed in 2017, when the #MeToo erupted in the US. It reached Greece more tangibly in January 2020, when Sofia Bekatorou, an Olympic champion in sailing, spoke up about being raped by the former vice president of the Hellenic Sailing Federation. Since then, more women have been speaking up about rape and sexual abuse.

The rise of gender-based violence incidents contributed to the kindling of the feminist movement in Greece. An increasing number of people have acknowledged the existence of gender-based discrimination and patriarchal abuse. Thus, feminist collectives and organizations multiplied and

became more vocal and vivid, with feminist social media platforms and groups getting more attention by the day. Migrant and refugee women also play an active role in the feminist movement in Greece, demanding their rights, and driving many groups and organizations to adopt a more intersectional approach to feminism.

Concerning, forms of discrimination against women the Greek parliament acts as a mirror of the societal structure and dynamics as well as of the extent to which the long-held stereotypes dictate people’s lives. A few days after the neo-conservative party Nea Dimokratia came into power in July 2019, the ‘General Secretariat for Gender Equality’ was renamed the ‘General Secretariat for Family Planning and Gender Equality’, and along with the Research Centre for Gender Equality (KETHI), they were transferred to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs; a move characterized by its employees, as well as by feminist groups, as a serious setback. In 2021, the name changed again into the ‘General Secretariat for Demography and Family Planning and Gender Equality’. The questionable hierarchical choice of words offers a first glimpse on the country’s current approach towards gender equality; it is last on the list of priorities, and the discrimination emerges officially from the top.



As it was mentioned in another chapter, the Gender Equality Index published by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) rated Greece with 52.5 out of 100 and placed it once again in the last position of the ranking in the European Union. Since 2010, Greece has remained almost stagnant in terms of gender equality in the following areas: time, money, health, power, education and employment.

### 3.2 Current Participation of Women in the Political Domain

The biggest inequalities are found in the field of power, where Greece ranks 26th in the EU - the sub-sector in which we have the lowest score is that of economic decision-making. If you are standing before the Greek Parliament entrance, the politicians you will see going are almost all men. Only 21,8% of Greek parliamentarians are women, according to [EIGE](#) (The Gender Equality Index published by the European Institute for Gender Equality). When asked by Zeinab Badawi, a BBC journalist, about the lack of women representation in the government, the Prime Minister Kyriakos

Mitsotakis responded: “Unfortunately, we don’t have that many women who are interested in stepping into politics.”

As we have previously mentioned, Greek women are greatly underrepresented, not only in the Greek Parliament, but in European Parliamentary positions as well. Even though the data for the European Elections seem to be relatively higher to the national level, the gender gap is still evident. Paving the way for the current –slightly- improved data, after the European Election of the 25 th of May 2014, Greece elected 5 women MPs in a total of 21 MPs, resulting in Greek women obtaining around 24% of the European Parliamentary positions the country can fill (European Parliament 6 ). In the last few years, the ratio of female to male candidates representing different political parties in the European Parliament has been no more than 4/10 (39%) (Hellenic Parliament Foundation for Parliamentarism and Democracy 7 ). In particular, the percentage of women in the EU Parliament was at an average of 38.9% in 2020, of which Greek women took up 23.8% (Karakatsani, 2022).

Concerning the National Elections, Greece has seen minor improvements in the amount of participation of women candidates over the last decade, which was a result of legal actions in favor of gender equality in politics. Article 3 of Law 3636/2008 8 was introduced in 2008, but it was first applied in the elections of October 2019. The article stated that the parliamentary candidates of each gender (here meaning male and female) in every party must constitute at least 1/3 of the total number of their candidates. With 52 women elected, the new legislation led to a 1,3% increase in the number of women joining the parliament, while in the 2019 elections 62 out of 300, or 19,3% of the total seats were held by women (Karakatsani, 2022). As of February 2021, women only held 21.7% of the seats in the national parliament (UN Women 9 ). It is apparent that in the last decade, the statistics for women in politics, in the Greek state especially, have made little progress. Even at a local level, data from 2014 states that 153 women were candidates for the position of Mayor from a total of 1441 candidates, only 15 of which were elected, consisting 4.6% of the elected mayoral positions, compared to 310 men (European Charter for Equality 10 , 2016) from a total of 325 municipalities (Skolarikos et al. 2014, pg.18).

Greece’s underrepresentation of women in political positions of power is still very high despite any measures that have been taken to close the gender gap, which have been proved to be insufficient. According to the World Economic Forum in the Global Gender Gap Report 11 (2018, pg. 17) Greece’s rank in the Political Empowerment domain was 88 out of 149 countries listed in 2018, with a score of 0.138 (with the highest score being 0.674 for Iceland and the lowest 0.014 for Yemen). While this places Greece in the bottom half of the list, low statistics in women’s political participation seem to be reflected in the entirety of the European continent as well. Evidently, inequalities concerning the participation of women in politics are still “in effect” both in Europe and in Greece alike and there’s still a long way to go for the gender gap, in the political domain especially, to close.

## 4. Results of the focus groups

### 4.1. Objectives of the focus group:

Based on partner knowledge and initial desk research, the FEM-ABLE project identified a set of obstacles and barriers that might explain the reasons why women participate less in politics, and when they do, why they are chosen less than men candidates. Namely:

1. Gender bias: there may be conscious or unconscious bias against women in politics and leadership roles, making it more difficult for them to be taken seriously or gain access to opportunities.
2. Stereotyping: women may be stereotyped as being less competent or less ambitious than men, which can discourage them from pursuing leadership roles.
3. Lack of role models: when there are few women in leadership positions, it can be difficult for other women to envision themselves in those roles.
4. Double standards: women may face higher expectations and scrutiny than men when it comes to their behavior and performance in leadership roles.
5. Work-life balance: women may feel that the demands of political or leadership roles would make it difficult to balance their work and family responsibilities.
6. Glass ceiling and wage gap in political careers of women: systemic barriers that prevent women from reaching higher positions and receiving equal pay as their men counterparts in the political field, such as preferential treatment, sexism, harassment and hostile work environment, limited networking opportunities (as many times these happen “after-hours”), lack of family-friendly policies, and lack of adequate promotion policies.
7. Traditional assignment of administrative role to women within political organisations: given the pervasiveness of gender roles within political organisations, women tend to take on tasks more related to administration, logistics, resource and team management, rather than more visible and directive roles focused on decision-making and on informing such decisions to staff and voter base.

Ultimately, the reasons why women are underrepresented in politics and leadership roles are complex and multifaceted. By hosting a focus group with women and men who have experience in political and leadership positions, we wish to explore the challenges that women face when attempting to break through these barriers and succeed in the traditionally men-dominated field of

politics. As such, the objective of the focus group was to validate the above barriers, identify additional barriers and identify strategies to address these barriers for Greece, based on the voice and experience of women who have faced leadership challenges and opportunities in their professional careers in the Greek context.

## 4.2 Participants and structure of the focus group

The focus group in Greece was held in an online panel in the evening of the 8th of March 2023. The panel was structured as follows:

- Presentation of Women Do Business
- Presentation of the participants
- Reasons why the participants chose to be occupied with politics
- Discussion about the underrepresentation of women in politics
- Discussion about the barriers they face
- Discussion about strategies in order to increase women's participation in political domain
- Closing of the panel

The panel was attended by eight participants with experience in politics, including political party members and community leaders. Participants were selected with criteria of age, sex, experience and territorial representation within Crete. The participants are presented as follows:

- Vardakis Antonis is deputy mayor for education in town Chania of Crete.
- Giannakakis Ioannis is deputy mayor for culture in town Chania of Crete
- Eleni Zervoudaki is deputy mayor for social politics, protection of disabled people, equity and volunteerism in Heraklion of Crete.
- Maria Kaloudioti is councilwoman in Heraklion since 2014.
- Maria Kanavaki is deputy mayor for administrative and economic services of Heraklion.
- Georgia Milaki is peripheral councilwoman for volunteerism and connection with organizations of Crete and is also parliamentary candidate for the next elections.
- George Sisamakis is deputy mayor for developmental planning, digital transformation and development of countryside and tourism in Heraklion of Crete.
- Despina Singelaki is deputy mayor for volunteerism, youth and administration of emergency situations in Heraklion of Crete.

The panel was coordinated by:

- Grigoraki Natasa: Co- founder of Women Do Business
- Pavlaki Eri : Co – founder of Women Do Business



## 4.3. Results of the focus group: barriers, strategies and experiences faced by eight persons who participate in political domain

### 4.3.1) Stereotypes and gender bias

Participants talked about the serious effects of gender bias and stereotypes, and referred to them as really important obstacles to women's participation in political and leadership roles. They emphasized the importance of intersectional discrimination and recounted their own stories and examples on how discrimination is applied. They also highlighted the stereotypes around age and the perception of young people about politics that affects their point of view and willing of participating into the political domain. They also made wide reference to the stereotypes of Greek society that want women are obliged to have more family obligations than men and not give too much attention and time to their career.

Participants agreed on that the problem for this situation is found on the structure and mentality of Greek society and on the state's law- frame. They proposed as a strategy that the state should implement more measures for facilitating families by giving them easier and cheaper access to childcare centers. In addition, the states should invest on education of young people so that they could deny the stereotypes that want women staying at home and being responsible for the children.

### 4.3.2) Role models

The main barrier identified by the participants concerning the role models, is that there are not enough role models. In Greece women in the parliament represent only the 21,8%. In addition women are a minority in power positions in politics and it is a fact that in Greece has never existed a woman prime minister. Women in political domain tend to be invisible and have administrative positions so they don't have a strong presentation in order to spread inspiration and empowerment among the younger generations. The fact that now in Greece we have for the first time a woman president of democracy (Katerina Sakelaropoulou) can work as a positive model in order to empower more women to participate in politics. As a strategy the participants referred to the need of media to cultivate more positive role models and give more voice and presence to women who are already part of the Greek political scene.

### 4.3.3) Work- Life Balance

Balance between work and life was one of the most important barriers referred from the focus group. Work and life balance is a major struggle not only for women who want to participate in politics but for every woman in Greece who wants to combine a strong career with a personal and

a family life. It was highlighted that the word “life” here, is not referred exclusively to family life. We tend to confuse a woman’s personal life to a woman’s family life. In order to feel fulfilled, a woman should have a healthy work, family and personal life. The main problem here, is again the structure of Greek society that wants women to have more family obligations than men. Women have become multitaskers and try to combine everything at the same time. That leads them to have an exhausting routine that doesn’t let them enough time in order to be occupied with things they are interested in such as politics. In addition, women who are already politicians have also their job career and their family obligations, face a huge challenge to combine them all and they are not provided with enough support from the social structures of the state. As a strategy, once again the participants referred to the state. They mentioned that it is really important the state make more social structures for kids like public kindergartens and also to adopt strategies in order to make the work environment more supportive for women who want to participate in politics.

#### **4.3.4) Administrative vs. Decision – Making Roles**

The participants made a reference about the tiny percentage of women who get power positions in politics. The percentage of women in Greek parliament as we mentioned before is small ( 21,8% ) but the percentage of women who get decision making roles in the government is even smaller ( only 5% ). Even if women participate in politics and manage to gain their place in the parliament they are being rarely trusted to hold a higher position. Women usually are being placed in administrative positions and hold more typical roles. The participants mentioned here that the governments should trust women on higher positions and let them break the stereotypes even more.

#### **4.3.5) Societal attitudes and cultural norms**

Greek society evaluates women primarily based on their family life. If a woman isn’t a mother or she is not married she doesn’t have enough value. Career is considered to be a second choice for women. The participants mentioned that both women and men who have a family and at the same time a work and political career hold multiple roles. However, women are always asked by the media and society how they can combine their multiple roles while men are never being asked questions like this. In Greece a man has never been asked how he can combine his career with his role as a father and that proves the stereotypes that exist. It was referred here, the influence of media that should stop asking questions like these only to women and should concentrate more on empowering women hold their roles in a balance.

#### **4.3.6) Media influence**

Media have a really high influence in Greek society. The media market in Greece is characterised by digital fragmentation, lack of trust in news, high perceptions of undue influence, and high use of

social media for news. Media influence often sets important barriers by reproducing stereotypes for women. Participants referred to the fact that the media usually focus on the appearance of women for example what clothes they wear, how much is their weight, how old are they e.t.c and they don't mention their actual capacities. Furthermore, women politicians often get criticized about their lifestyle and family situation, if they are married and with who, if they have children. This situation creates even more stereotypes and cultivates a fear on women because of the way they will get exposed. The strategies proposed by the panel was the change of perspective of people who are involved on media so that they will evaluate better the way they talk about women. Also, it was referred again the value of education so that the younger generations avoid the reproduction of these negative stereotypes.

#### **4.3.7) Political Party Support and Promotion**

Even if political parties in Greece are obliged to include women in their ballot papers, most of the times women are included for typical reasons. In Greece, as in some other European countries there are a kind of measures named "quotas" which sets a minimum number of a particular group ( in this case women ) to participate in political parties. For these reason, political parties search for women in order to fulfill their ballot papers. Usually women who participate for this reason are not being prepared right and they do not have the same support and promotion. And also a lot of times they don't have the actual capacities in order to enter the political domain. The participants mentioned that it is really important political parties include women in their body according to their actual actions and capacities and not for typical reasons. In addition, political parties should show they actually trust women to be part of power positions and give them the same support and promotion as men.

#### **4.3.8) Training, Mentorship and Support Programs**

The participants mentioned clearly that in Greece there is not enough educational support for both genders to participate into political domain. In Greece the majority of politicians come from specific families who were also politicians. Furthermore, among younger people there is the perspective that everything in political domain is corrupted so they choose to not give attention to politics. Also, the educational system does not inform well and does not engage enough young people with politics. It was mentioned by the participants that from a school age young people should be more encouraged to participate and have an opinion in politics. Schools and educational system should promote social initiatives among students so that they could understand that despite how bad or how good political parties are, politics is a matter of all and everyone should be involved in and take part in decision making roles.

#### **4.3.9) Role of men in gender equality**

In the panel was mentioned that it is important that both genders should participate in gender equality issues and society should hear more men talking about gender equality. It is common that when actions and discussions about gender equality are being held, the participants of these actions are mostly women. It was proposed that men should be more engaged with gender equality issues and take actively part to activities that promote equal participation of both genders not only in political domain but in every sector of a human's life.

## 5. Results of the questionnaires

### 5.1. Structure of the questionnaire and its analysis

As part of the research to further study the barriers and strategies underlying the political participation of women in Greece, we conducted a questionnaire on “Perceptions and attitudes on women's political participation”. The questionnaire was released during April 2023 through mailings and social networks, and was answered anonymously. In this section we present the results of the questionnaire, aimed at understanding voters' perceptions about the participation of women in politics and leadership positions. The study was designed to shed light on the respondents' attitudes towards various aspects of gender equality in the political sphere, including gender bias, role models, work-life balance, and strategies to enhance female representation.

A total of 96 individuals participated in the survey, including a mix of men and women from diverse age groups, educational backgrounds, and political affiliations. The survey comprised a series of 38 questions, where respondents were asked to express their agreement or disagreement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), as follows:

1. Totally disagree
2. Disagree
3. I am not sure
4. Agree
5. Totally agree

We analysed results based on two focuses:

- By overall responses regarding the different barriers and strategies:
  - Bias and stereotypes (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9)
  - Role models (Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13)
  - Double standards and scrutiny (Q14, Q15, Q16, Q17)
  - Work-life Balance (Q18, Q19, Q20, Q21)
  - Other barriers (hostile work environments, media portrayals, cultural norms, etc.) (Q22, Q23, Q24, Q25, Q26, Q27, Q28, Q29, Q30, Q31, Q32, Q33, Q34)
  - Strategies (Q35, Q36, Q37, Q38)
- By demographic characteristics of the respondents:
  - All respondents
  - By gender (men / women)
  - By age (under 40 / 40 and over)
  - By education level (non-tertiary education / university degree or higher)
  - By political affiliation (left / non-disclosure or other)

In the analysis by demographic group, questions were grouped into four categories:

- 22 questions with a negative correlation to gender equality (a high score means less gender equality)
- 11 questions with a positive correlation to gender equality (a high score means more gender equality)
- 1 question on perception on leadership style differences between men and women
- 4 questions related to strategies to overcome gender inequality in politics.

At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were asked open ended questions about additional barriers and strategies, which were also analysed to identify additional information relevant to our research.

## 5.2. Demographics of respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents were as follows:

- Total Respondents: 96 individuals
- Place of residence: all respondents resided in Greece
- Gender:

Men: 6 respondents, making up approximately 6.25% of the total participants.

Women: 90 respondents, constituting approximately 93,75% of the total participants.

- Age:
  - The average age of respondents was 37 years.
  - The youngest respondent was 16 years old and the oldest was 60 years old.
  - The median age of respondents was 39 years.

- Education:

- Primary Education: 0 respondents (0% of the total participants)
- Secondary Education: 7 respondents (~7.2% of the total participants)
- Post-secondary education (non-tertiary): 13 respondents (~13.5% of the total participants)
- Bachelor's Degree or Equivalent: 34 respondents (~35.4% of the total participants)
- Master's Degree or Equivalent: 40 respondents (~41.6% of the total participants)
- Doctoral Degree or Equivalent: 2 respondents (~2% of the total participants)

- Political Affiliation:

Did not respond: 68 respondents (~70.8% of the total participants)

Left: 11 respondents (~11.4% of the total participants)

Right: 10 respondents (~10.4% of the total participants)

Other: 7 respondents (~7.2% of the total participants)

## 5.3 Interpretation of results by barrier

Based on the average responses to the questions by all respondents, the following interpretations can be made:

Bias and stereotypes (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9): On average, respondents seem to recognize that gender bias and stereotypes negatively impact women in politics, with a

strong agreement that stereotypes about women's abilities (Q1: 3.8), perception of women as emotional decision-makers (Q2: 3.), and the need for women to downplay their femininity (Q3: 3.6) hinder their progress in politics. However, they also showed strong agreement that women are as capable as men in political leadership roles (Q4: 4.8), and that diverse representation in leadership positions is important (Q6: 4.6). The respondents disagreed with the statement that men candidates are usually better qualified (Q5: 1.5). Witnessing or experiencing gender bias or discrimination in politics (Q7: 3.1) and feeling discouraged from pursuing a leadership role because of gender (Q8: 2.6) were also acknowledged, but to a lesser extent.

Role models (Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13). The presence of women in political leadership roles as a source of inspiration for other women to pursue political careers received strong agreement (Q10: 4.5). Respondents agreed moderately with the availability of women political role models in their country (Q11: 3.2) and having had a female role model or mentor in a leadership position (Q12: 3.6). The statement that women frequently occupy leadership positions in their workplace or community (Q13: 3.6) received at some point agreement.

Double standards and scrutiny (Q14, Q15, Q16, Q17). There was strong agreement that women in politics are judged more harshly for their appearance than men (Q14: 4.3), and that they are more likely to be criticized for their personal life choices compared to men (Q15: 4.2). The respondents also agreed that women are held to higher standards or face more scrutiny than men in leadership roles (Q16: 3.9), and that women in leadership face a "double bind" where they are expected to be both assertive and nurturing (Q17: 4.1).

Work-life balance (Q18, Q19, Q20, Q21). There's a moderate agreement that it's challenging for women in politics to maintain a healthy work-life balance in relation to other career choices (Q18: 3.1), and in comparison to their male counterparts (Q19: 3.3). There's strong support for the implementation of family-friendly policies in political organizations (Q20: 4.3), and moderate agreement that respondents have felt they had to choose between family responsibilities and pursuing a leadership role (Q21: 3.4).

Other Barriers (Q22, Q23, Q24, Q25, Q26, Q27, Q28, Q29, Q30, Q31, Q32, Q33, Q34). On average, the respondents agree that wage disparities exist between men and women politicians (Q22: 3.4) and that women in politics face more hostile work environments, including sexism and discrimination, than their male counterparts (Q23: 4.1). There's a very moderate agreement about witnessing or experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace or politics (Q24: 2.9), and strong agreement that women are less likely to be promoted to leadership positions compared to men

with similar qualifications and experience (Q25: 4.0). There's also substantial agreement that women in political organizations are often limited to administrative roles instead of decision-making positions (Q26: 3.8). The highest level of agreement is seen regarding the need for political organizations to actively promote women to decision-making roles to achieve gender equality (Q27: 4.4). Respondents tend to agree that they have seen women being talked over or interrupted in meetings or discussions more frequently than their male counterparts (Q28: 3.9), and that societal norms and expectations limit women's political aspirations and opportunities (Q29: 3.9). Traditional gender roles and expectations discouraging women from pursuing political careers also get substantial agreement (Q30: 4.4). On the other hand, respondents are inclined to disagree that the cultural norms in their country support women's participation in politics (Q31:

2.6), and there's stronger disagreement that there are equal opportunities for women and men to pursue leadership roles in their community (Q32: 2.5). Respondents strongly disagree

that the media in their country portrays women politicians fairly and accurately (Q33: 2.7), and they moderately agree that media coverage of women in politics often focuses on their appearance rather than their achievements and qualifications (Q34: 3.5).

## 5.4 Interpretation of results by strategy

The strategies suggested (Q35, Q36, Q37, Q38) to increase the representation of women in leadership positions were highly rated by respondents, showing a strong consensus on the need for proactive measures:

Encourage women to pursue leadership roles from a young age (Q35): With an average rating of 4.5 respondents showed strong agreement on the importance of encouraging women from a young age to consider leadership roles. This could potentially counteract societal norms and stereotypes that discourage women from seeing themselves as leaders.

Implement diversity and inclusion policies in the workplace and in politics (Q36): This question received strongly agreement with an average of 4.4, suggesting a strong consensus among respondents on the need for policy interventions to promote diversity and inclusion. Such policies could include gender quotas, affirmative action, and measures to ensure a safe and supportive work environment.

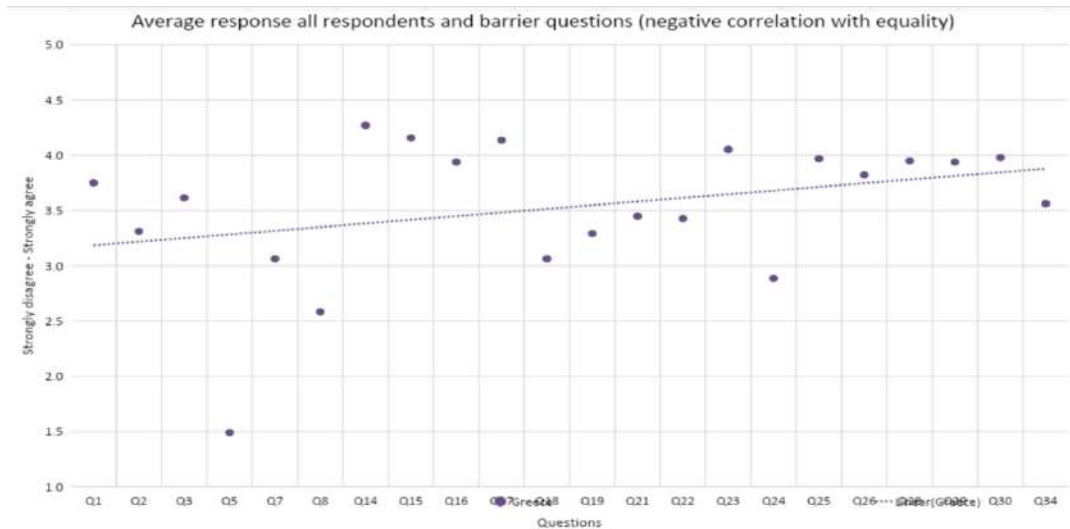
Provide mentorship and support for women in leadership positions (Q37): This question received one of the highest scores in the survey average rating of 4.5, respondents agreed on the importance of mentorship and support systems for women in leadership. This highlights the need for networking opportunities, training programs, and other forms of support that could help women build confidence, acquire necessary skills, and navigate the challenges they may face as leaders.

Engage in awareness raising campaigns (Q38): The average rating of 4.1 indicates that respondents believe in the effectiveness of awareness-raising campaigns in changing perceptions and attitudes towards women in politics and leadership. This could include campaigns to highlight the achievements of women leaders, challenge gender stereotypes, and promote the benefits of diversity in leadership.



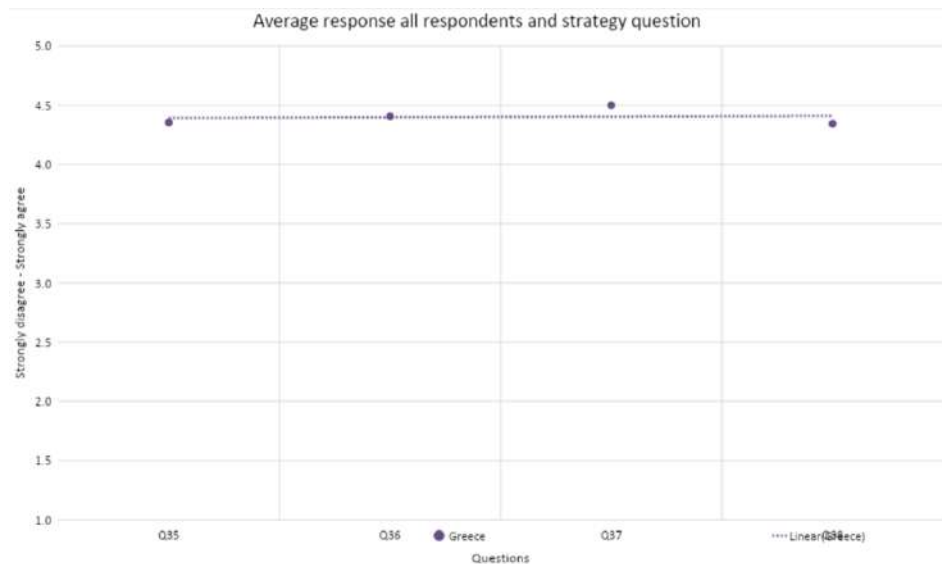
## 5.5 Results by demographic groups

### 5.5.1. Interpretation of results for all respondents



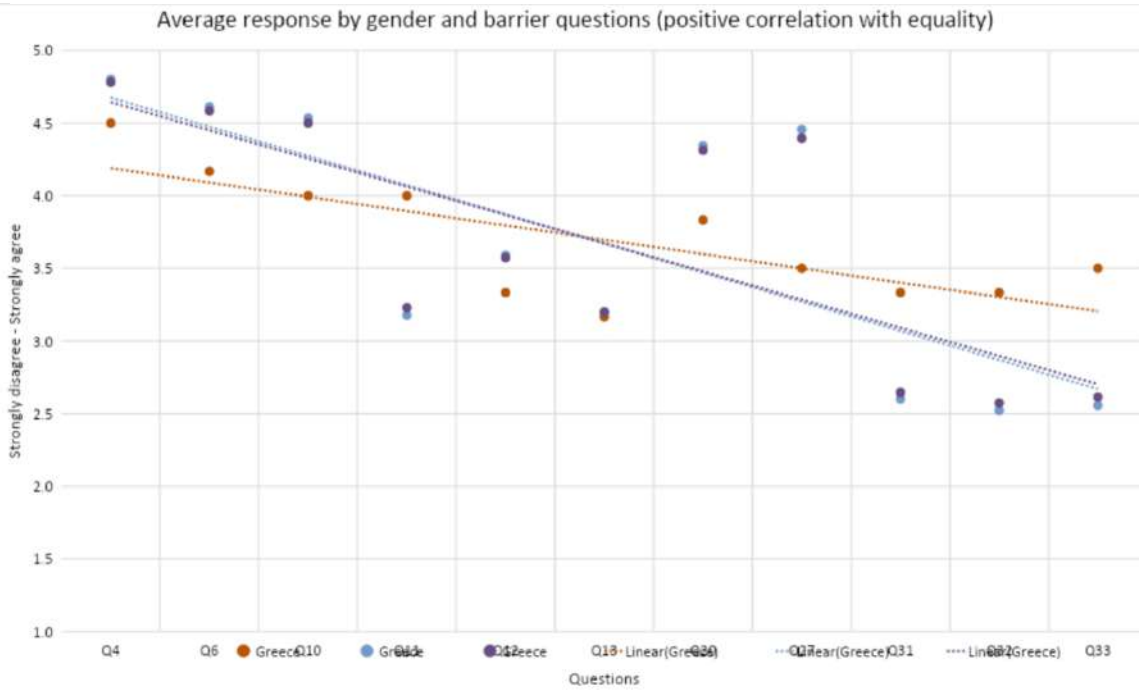
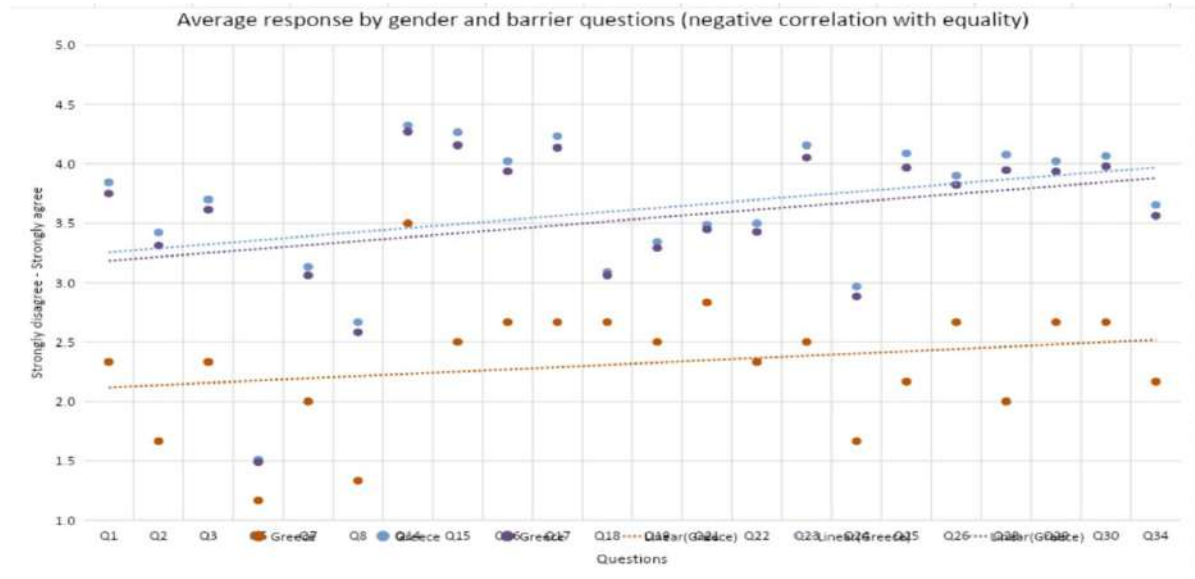
Respondents answers to barrier-related questions with a negative correlation with equality (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q5, Q7, Q8, Q14, Q15, Q16, Q17, Q18, Q19, Q21, Q22, Q23, Q24, Q25, Q26, Q28, Q29, Q30, and Q34). The average responses to these questions suggest that the respondents generally recognize and acknowledge the existence of gender bias and inequality in politics. For example they agreed that gender bias and stereotypes negatively impact women in politics (Q1: 3.8), and that women politicians are often criticized for their personal life choices compared to men (Q15: 4.2). Also, they agreed that women in leadership face a "double bind" where they are expected to be both assertive and nurturing (Q16: 4.1). However, it's important to note that not all respondents appear to have personally experienced these biases. For example, the responses to Q8 suggest that most respondents have not felt discouraged from pursuing a leadership role because of their gender (Q8: 2.6).

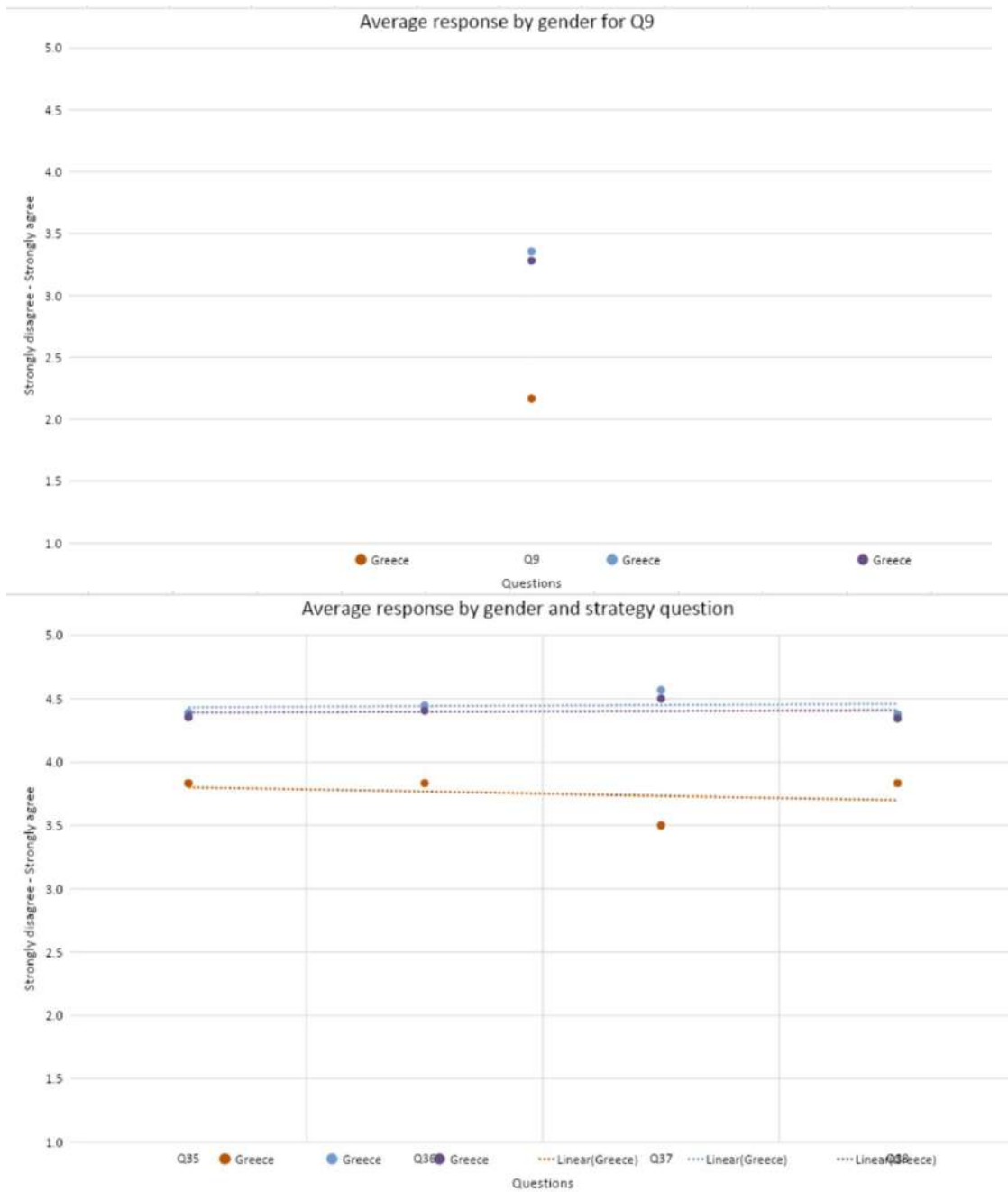




Respondents answers to questions related to strategies (Q35, Q36, Q37, Q38). The responses to these questions suggest that respondents strongly support measures aimed at increasing the representation of women in leadership positions. These include encouraging women to pursue leadership roles from a young age (Q35: 4.25), implementing diversity and inclusion policies in the workplace and politics (Q36: 4.4), providing mentorship and support for women in leadership positions (Q37: 4.5), and engaging in awareness-raising campaigns (Q38: 4.1). Overall, the survey results suggest a recognition of gender inequality in politics and support for measures to increase women's representation in leadership roles. However, they also highlight perceived barriers and challenges, such as gender bias, media representation, and lack of equal opportunities.

## 5.5. 2. Interpretation of results by gender





## 6. Summary of key findings and national-specific recommendations

Based on the questionnaires and the results of the focus groups, the following are the **key findings** on the reasons behind low levels of political participation and election of women:

- Gender bias and stereotypes: The stereotypes of Greek society are based on the belief that women need to be more responsible for their family than men and not give too much attention and time to their career.
- Greek society: Greek society evaluates women's worth primarily based on their family life, not taking into account their work/personality/interests.
- Greek state: Even women who are already politicians in Greece are significantly challenged to combine their career and their personal and family life, since social structures of the state don't provide them with enough support.
- Lack of role models: Women in Greece are rarely elected in positions of power, and even when they do, their parties don't promote them as much as their male candidates, hence making them almost invisible to younger girls/women who want to take on politics.
- Mistrust in women's ability to lead by the state: Even if women in the political domain manage to join the parliament, they are not likely to be trusted to hold a high position. Women usually are being placed in administrative positions or hold more typical roles and they very rarely obtain decision-making positions.
- Education: There is not enough educational support for people of any gender to participate in the political domain. Furthermore, the educational system does not inform students well and does not engage young people enough with politics.
- Mistrust in the system: Belief among young people that the political system is so corrupted that they can't do anything, thus making them uninterested in politics.
- Media: Women are always asked by the media and society how they can combine their multiple roles, while men are never being asked questions like this. On the same subject, women politicians often get criticized about their lifestyle and family situation, if they are married and with whom or if they have children. This situation creates even more stereotypes and cultivates a fear in women that they will get exposed. Additionally, the media usually focus on the appearance of women and they don't mention the actual capacities they have that have helped them in their career.
- Political promotion: Even if political parties in Greece are obliged to include women in their ballot papers, women are often included for typical reasons.
- Work-life balance: The main problem here is the structure of Greek society that wants women to have more family obligations than men. Due to this, women have become

multitaskers, which leads them to have an exhausting routine that doesn't leave them with enough time, so they either have to sacrifice their career, their personal/social life or time with their family.

- Lack of support: there are no measures taken by the state to alleviate the pressure from working women (education, training programmes, business opportunities, access to childcare, etc)
- Participation in the fight for gender equality: Greek men don't really participate in gender equality issues, thus making the people feel like it is a subject that only concerns women and leads them to be absent in the conversation on gender bias.

Based on these findings, the following are **recommendations** to enhance the participation and performance of women in politics in Greece:

- Access to cheaper childcare
- Education of young people: The states should invest in the education of young people so that they can learn to avoid the reproduction of sexist stereotypes, like women having to stay at home and be responsible for their children.
- Making more social structures for kids like kindergartens & making childcare accessible.
- Altering the state's law-frame
- Adopting strategies in order to make the work environment more supportive for women who want to participate in politics.
- Governments should trust women in higher positions and let them break the stereotypes even more.
- It is really important that political parties include women in their body according to their actual actions and capacities and not for typical reasons or because they have to oblige to the "quotas".
- Political parties should show they actually trust women to be part of power positions and give them the same support and promotion as men.
- Young people should be more encouraged to participate and have an opinion in politics.
- Schools and educational systems should promote social initiatives among students so that they could understand that despite how bad or how good political parties are, politics is a matter of all and everyone should be involved in and take part in decision making roles.

- All genders should participate in gender equality issues and society should hear more men talking about gender equality. Men should be more engaged with gender equality issues and actively take part in activities that promote equal participation of both genders not only in the political domain, but in every sector of a human's life.
- Media: The Media should present the presence and positive role of women in political positions of power & they should stop asking questions about balancing parenthood/family life and work only to women and should concentrate more on empowering women in those positions.
- Change of perspective of people who are involved in the media so that they will re-evaluate the way they talk about women.

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