



# INVOLVEMENT OF COMPANIES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

National Study for Greece

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## Executive Summary

The available figures about domestic gender based violence in Greece show that it is a relatively widespread crime, which seems to affect directly one out of three women. During the past fifteen years the legislative and policy response to gender based violence has gradually evolved in the country, following international trends for the treatment of violence committed against women, as a crime in infringement of human rights. In this context specific legal instruments that punish various forms of violence committed against women were enacted and two successive National Action Plans for Preventing and Combating Violence Committed Against Women were implemented, including a wide range of interventions for raising public awareness on the matter and for creating structures that provide assistance to women who had suffered violence.

Although it is widely recognized that enterprises can be crucial either at the level of awareness-raising or at the level of providing support to their female employees, who become victims of violence, the policies implemented so far did not include any actions that concern or specifically incorporate enterprises in the effort to address the phenomenon of gender-based violence and the Greek Law does not include any specific provisions for the obligation of victim support at their workplace or by their employers.

Therefore, the Greek companies that have been engaged so far with the issue of gender-based violence have done so mainly as part of their social responsibility initiatives and despite the fact that there is not any policy encouragement or concrete support to relevant action by businesses. The Cooperation Protocols signed between the General Secretariat for Gender Equality and the Hellenic Network for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR Network), which among other things concern the prevention and combating of sexual harassment at the work place and the commitments of social partners, included in National Collective Labour Agreements, to show zero tolerance to gender-based violence, are considered as marginal exceptions to the general exclusion of companies from the campaigns and measures promoted in the context of national policies on the topic of violence against women.

The representatives of companies noted that the issue of violence concerns the corporate gender equality policies that they apply and it is related with their corporate values. The survey recorded the realisation on the part of enterprises that the phenomenon of violence committed against women has significantly increased in recent years and concerns big sections of the population. The fact that neither the pertinent institutional framework for combating domestic violence, nor the corresponding programmes and policies promoted in recent years in Greece, include or encompass companies in their scope has an impact on the perception of companies regarding their role in combating this phenomenon. For most of the

participating enterprises, their role in combating violence committed against women is considered as ancillary or supplementary; in fact, they justify this position due to the perceived weakness of intervening more actively in incidents that fall under the personal - family life of their employees.

Most of the companies that participated in the survey, as well as those that were initially approached and refused to participate, could not demonstrate systematic involvement or initiatives specifically focusing on preventing domestic violence and providing support to victims. The most characteristic good practices employed by Greek companies to combat violence committed against women are distinguished into two categories: a) Those developed at the workplace and b) those related to the promotion or contribution of enterprises towards implementing actions of a broader range, which concern the combating of the phenomenon of violence committed against women more generally.

The biggest obstacle to the direct involvement in domestic violence by companies at the workplace recorded by survey participants concerns the sensitive dimension of the problem, in terms of the female employee's personal life, and the hesitation on the part of enterprises to touch upon issues that concern privacy. However, it is recognised that it is particularly challenging for enterprises to be able to communicate with their employees of both genders on such incidents at the workplace.

The main proposals derived from the analysis of data and information collected in the context of the survey and which have the potential to contribute towards enhancing the role played by companies in the endeavour to combat violence committed against women are the following:

- Inclusion of actions involving companies in the National Programmes for Preventing and Combating Violence Committed Against Women
- Provision of information to companies on the consequences of domestic violence and the role they could play in combating the phenomenon
- Complementation of the institutional framework with provisions on the obligations of companies concerning domestic violence victims
- Development and dissemination of business action tools for combating violence committed against women.

## **1. Introduction**

This report was authored within the framework of the project titled 'CARVE - Companies Against Gender Violence' and aims at presenting the role and extent of involvement of Greek companies in combating the phenomenon of domestic gender-based violence. The analysis is based on the existing institutional framework and the corresponding policies implemented in Greece for combating and preventing violence against women, as well as on practices adopted not only at the level of state policy but at a broader level by other stakeholders.

The CARVE project, which is co-funded by the DAPHNE III Programme of the European Union, aims at raising awareness on the problem of violence committed against women and particularly domestic violence, through mobilising enterprises and carrying out related actions at the workplace. Within the context of CARVE actions, studies and practices for combating violence against women regarding enterprises in Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Greece and Spain are being studied and a corresponding guide will be developed for enterprises, based on good practices recorded through interviews with representatives of enterprises and other stakeholders in these five countries.

The approach to domestic violence committed against women as an issue that concerns enterprises as employers and as corporate citizens is based on the assumption that successful enterprises create value through their operation, products and services not only for their shareholders, but also for the societies, in which their activities take place. The intensity of the phenomenon of violence committed against women and its particularly serious consequences at the level of social cohesion and economic impact underline the broader responsibility of enterprises to contribute both towards preventing gender-based violence and protecting victims, who are usually part of their workforce. Despite the fact that domestic violence mainly concerns the private life of female employees, the role played by enterprise can be crucial either at the level of information and awareness-raising or at the level of diagnosing the problem and providing support to their female employees who become victims of violence.

Initially, this report summarily presents the extent of the phenomenon in Greece and the related policies promoted in recent years to address it, underlining corresponding points or gaps that concern the role played by enterprises in particular. Subsequently, the report presents the individual fields where enterprises could carry out activities, thus contributing through their corporate responsibility policies towards combating violence committed against women and focusing on related initiatives and answers given by enterprises on the subject during a survey. The final section presents the conclusions of the report, aiming at stirring the interest of Greek enterprises and motivating them to participate actively in the efforts to raise awareness and combat domestic violence committed against women.

## **2. The phenomenon of domestic violence committed against women in Greece**

Violence committed against women and domestic violence, in particular, is pervasive globally. It is not only a violation of fundamental human rights, but also a crime with a particularly broad impact, which not only affects victims and their families but also has major social and economic consequences; according to the World Health Organisation, it is a global public health problem of epidemic proportions<sup>1</sup>. At the level of enterprises, this impact is perceived either directly as a problem that concerns their female employees or indirectly as an acute social issue that affects gender equality and human rights, therefore degrading social cohesion and the social capital of the countries/regions where enterprises carry out their activities.

According to globally adopted definitions<sup>2</sup>, domestic violence against women means any act of gender-based violence occurring in the family or household and committed by current or former partners; it can encompass physical, emotional, sexual or financial violence and functions, in practice, as a mechanism for subjugating women. The pertinent Greek legislation (Law 3500/2006) also includes any form of violence in the unlawful acts that are criminally persecuted as domestic violence, making no discrimination between threats, verbal abuse, sexual offences or other offences against one's person.

Violence committed against women is an expression of the relationship of power of men against women and appears in many variations and various dimensions. In the dimension related to domestic violence, or the relationship between partners and cohabiting individuals, violence can be physical, verbal, psychological, emotional, or may take on the form of sexual coercion or neglect<sup>3</sup> and appears in all socio-economic classes, regardless of educational, professional or social level. Apart from the more common forms of physical, psychological or financial violence between partners, violence can also take place in the form of harassment via stalking or even through the Internet and means of social networking, while in certain cases (e.g. Muslim populations that adhere to Sharia law), it can even take on institutional characteristics.

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation, 'Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner violence' (WHO, 2013), p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women of 1993, Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence of 2011.

<sup>3</sup> V. Artinopoulou, I. Farsedakis, 'Domestic violence against women. First nationwide epidemiological survey in Greece', 2003, KETHI, p. 12.

## 2.1. Facts and figures

In Greece, few studies have been conducted on violence committed against women<sup>4</sup> and particularly on domestic violence; as a result, there is relatively limited quantitative data available and is mainly based on statistics collected from calls to structures providing protection to victims of gender-based violence and on international research conducted at the European level. According to the General Secretariat for Gender Equality, one in three women will eventually be the victim of physical, psychological or sexual violence by her partner, while approximately 20% of women will be victims of rape or attempted rape. The extent of the phenomenon is also demonstrated by a similar Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2010<sup>5</sup>, according to which 34% of interviewees in Greece stated that they know of a woman in their circle of friends and family who has been the victim of domestic violence, while 31% stated that they know of someone who has committed domestic violence.

More detailed data can be found in the survey of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, which was published in 2014<sup>6</sup> and based on interviews with a broad sample of women (42,000) in all EU countries. According to this survey, 25% of women in Greece have suffered physical or sexual violence since the age of 15 by a partner or ex-partner or another individual, while the average percentage for the 28 Member States of the EU is 33%. 19% of interviewees had experienced violence by a partner (current or former), while 10% by non-partners. More specifically, the current partner was the perpetrator for 10% of Greek women (corresponding EU average: 8%) and the former partner for 17% (26% in the EU-28).

As regards physical or sexual violence, 6% of women in Greece (4% in the EU-28) stated that they had experienced such abuse in the last 12 months before the survey, with the current partner being the perpetrator in 5% of these cases and a former partner in 3% of these cases. It is characteristic for the existence of stereotypes and the psychological burden carried by victims of violence that only 14% of women, who were the victims of violence in Greece (20% in the EU-28) stated that they reported the most serious incident of violence against them by a partner to the police. The corresponding percentage for reports of incidents of violence by non-partners was also relatively low (17%).

Incidents of psychological violence via threats, bullying and emotional abuse appear more prevalent in this survey, with 33% of the Greek women in the sample (43% in the EU-28) stating that they have suffered psychological abuse by the current partner in 21% of cases and a former partner in 30% of cases.

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<sup>4</sup> Only one epidemiological study on domestic violence has been conducted in Greece in 2003 (V. Artinopoulou, I. Farsedakis, *ibid*).

<sup>5</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_344\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_344_en.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report>

12% of women in Greece state that they have been the victim of stalking since the age of 15, but only 8% have reported the incidents to the police. The corresponding average rates in the EU-28 are 18% and 26%, a fact that underlines the fear and broad impunity of such crimes against the dignity of women.

New forms of psychological violence, such as 'cyber-harassment' are also interesting due to the increasing use of online communications and social networking. According to the survey by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 8% of women in Greece stated that they have suffered cyber-harassment.

The same survey also confirms that sexual harassment is the most common form of gender-based violence in Greece, as 43% of interviewees (55% in the EU-28) stated that they have suffered sexual harassment, while 15% stated that this had occurred at least once in the last 12 months before the survey. It is also noteworthy that among women with tertiary education, the percentage of those stating that they have suffered sexual harassment comes to 60%.

According to the Eurobarometer survey, 93% of individuals in Greece believe that domestic violence is unacceptable and should always be punished by law, a percentage relatively higher than all other Member States (84% in the EU-28) and only 5% believe that it should not always be punished.

From the data collected from women, who call the 'SOS 15900' hotline, certain conclusions have also been drawn regarding the characteristics of women who are the victims of violence, indicating that the phenomenon affects all women, regardless of social, educational or economic level of family status<sup>7</sup>. Thus, 48% of women who call the hotline are married, 53% are between 25 and 54 years of age, 71% are Greek and 27% are women of average and good financial standing.

From the same data, it emerges that between 28% and 31% of these women are employed (and approximately 12% are self-employed), while approximately 33% are unemployed. This proves that the majority of the victims of domestic violence are economically active and, therefore, it is highly likely that at most enterprises that employ staff there must be employees who have suffered abuse in their family environment or at home. Nevertheless, none of the abovementioned analyses or similar surveys include data on the impact of the abuse suffered by victims of domestic violence on the workplace.

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<sup>7</sup> Further and more detailed information can be found in the press releases of the General Secretariat for Gender Equality: <http://www.isotita.gr/index.php/news/2373>  
[http://www.isotita.gr/var/uploads/PRESS%20\(APO%20SEP%202010\)/DT\\_27-3-13\\_GRAMMI-SOS.pdf](http://www.isotita.gr/var/uploads/PRESS%20(APO%20SEP%202010)/DT_27-3-13_GRAMMI-SOS.pdf)  
[http://www.isotita.gr/var/uploads/Press/DT\\_THLEFONIKH%20GRAMMH%20SOS%2015900\\_MARTI OS%202012.pdf](http://www.isotita.gr/var/uploads/Press/DT_THLEFONIKH%20GRAMMH%20SOS%2015900_MARTI OS%202012.pdf)



## 2.2. Policies & Initiatives to Prevent and Combat Violence Committed Against Women

Following a recommendation by the Council of Europe in 2002 on the protection of women against violence<sup>8</sup>, as well as related announcements and initiatives by the EU<sup>9</sup>, specialised programmes on preventing and combating violence committed against women were designed and implemented in Greece; these programmes included a large number of actions that were co-funded by the structural funds of the EU. More specifically, during the 2004-2008 period, within the framework of the action axis of the Gender Equality Policy National Priorities, the General Secretariat for Gender Equality implemented a number of actions aiming at combating violence committed against women and providing support to victims. These actions included the promotion of a new legislative framework for combating domestic violence, documenting related policies through research and studies on the phenomenon of gender-based violence, providing systematic information and training to stakeholders on providing support to women who have been the victims of violence, providing information on and raising public awareness of, as well as developing and operating the first structures and services for hosting and supporting abused women.

In 2010, a four-year action plan for combating the phenomenon began being implemented and was also co-funded by the EU within the framework of the NSRF. The 'National Programme for Preventing and Combating Violence Committed Against Women 2010-2013' was part of the national policy for promoting gender equality and, apart from domestic violence, concerned all forms of gender-based violence, such as sexual harassment and the trafficking of women for the purpose of sexual exploitation. This plan placed emphasis on the creation and development of structures throughout the country to prevent and combat violence committed against women. In cooperation with local government agencies that developed structures at the local level, an integrated network of 61 structures was created, providing advice and shelter to women, who had suffered violence; of these, 21 are shelters for abused women. The advice and counselling centres were also used to organise the provision of psychosocial support, legal support, employment & entrepreneurship advice, as well as sexual / reproductive health advice to victims. At the same time, the SOS 15900 hotline and the e-mail address [sos15900@isotita.gr](mailto:sos15900@isotita.gr), providing psychological support and guidance to abused women, operated on a non-stop basis (24/365).

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<sup>8</sup> Council of Europe, 'The Protection of Women Against Violence. Recommendation Rec(2002) of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the Protection of Women Against Violence, Adopted on 30 April 2002

<sup>9</sup> Commission's Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015  
[http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/documents/strategy\\_equality\\_women\\_men\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/documents/strategy_equality_women_men_en.pdf)

Additionally, the provision of free legal aid to women who had suffered violence was organised in cooperation with bas associations, and a number of suitable tools for educating and informing the employees of victim support structures were developed. Finally, at the awareness-raising level, information campaigns were designed and implemented, which included communication using the mass media, educational actions, as well as networking and information actions for agencies involved in combating violence committed against women.

Despite the fact that these action plans covered a somewhat broad range of interventions and involved several stakeholders, perhaps with the exception of the issue of sexual harassment at the workplace, they did not include actions that concern or specifically incorporate enterprises in the effort to address the phenomenon of gender-based violence.

### **2.3. The institutional framework for domestic violence and violence committed against women**

The legal response to domestic violence in Greece is covered by a set of general provisions of the Criminal Code and the Constitution, as well as specific legal instruments enacted after 2000, following international trends, which acquired an institutional basis after the 1990s for the recognition of women's rights and the treatment of violence committed against women as a crime in infringement of human rights.

At the constitutional level, gender equality is expressly established in Article 4(2) of the Constitution, which imposes the provision of equal opportunities to both genders and prohibits discrimination in terms of rights and obligations. Furthermore, Article 2 of the Constitution establishes the protection of human dignity as a primary obligation of the State, while Article 21 places the family under the protection of the State. It derives from the combination of these provisions that violence committed against women and domestic violence, in particular, is contrary to the Constitution as it infringes on a fundamental right of women, it degrades their position in the family and the free development of their personality and it increases gender inequality.

However, Law 3500/2006 regulated domestic violence in a more specific and strict manner, prohibiting any violence between family members, considering not only physical harm (light or grievous) as violence, but also threats that cause terror or concern or isolation of the victim or offence to dignity, while marital rape and offences against the dignity of women through words or actions that concern their sexual life are also punishable. The provisions of Law 3500/2006 also protect former spouses and permanent partners along with their children, if they reside with them. In fact, these offences are automatically persecuted by the competent judicial authorities, without a complaint by the victim being required.

An innovation for Greek criminal law introduced by this Law is the process of criminal mediation, as an alternative to criminal persecution, in cases where the perpetrator has agreed to attend a special consulting - therapy programme and to undertake commitments not to repeat their actions and to compensate for the consequences of their actions, provided the victim consents to this process. Moreover, the Law on domestic violence includes provisions for the material and moral support of domestic violence victims by the competent authorities and social services at the national and local level, and imposes on the authorities that address cases of domestic violence the observance of confidentiality regarding incidents and the identity of victims. It is noted that the Law makes no specific provision for the obligation of victim support at their workplace or by their employers.

Law 3488/2006 'Implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in labour issues and employment' transposed Directive 73/2002 as replaced by Directive 54/2006 of the EU into Greek law and the issue of sexual harassment was addressed for the first time in an integrated manner, establishing employer liability and compensation of harassment victims for moral harm. Most importantly, the law provides for reversal of the burden of proof, i.e. the employer must prove that harassment did not occur after a complaint has been lodged.

Furthermore, Law 3386/2005 'Entry, residence and social integration of third-country nationals on Greek territory' provided for the possibility of granting an independent temporary residence permit to domestic violence victims who are third-country nationals and who otherwise would be fully dependent for their residence in the country (and, thus, without protection) on the permit initially given, most commonly, to the spouse, who might be the perpetrator in such cases.

Apart from these specific legal instruments that punish various forms of violence committed against women, always on the condition that these incidents are reported or notified to the authorities, violence committed against women is also classified as a crime under the general provisions of the Criminal Code that concern crimes against Sexual Freedom and crimes involving the Financial Exploitation of Sexual Life.

#### **2.4. Policies that aim at promoting the participation of enterprises in preventing violence committed against women and protecting and re-integrating victims**

To date, no interventions have been designed or implemented in Greece specifically aiming at the mobilisation of enterprises in combating violence committed against women. Generally speaking, on the side of both the state and enterprises, this issue, perhaps with the exception of sexual harassment at the workplace, is not considered to come within the scope of enterprises as financial factors and corporate citizens. With very few exceptions, the prevention and combating of violence committed

against women in Greece is mainly the subject of state interventions and the action of NGOs and social movements.

An exception to the foregoing is the promotion of cooperation between the General Secretariat for Gender Equality and the Hellenic Network for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR Network), through the signing of two Protocols on Cooperation. The first protocol was concluded in February 2006 and the second, three-year protocol on 31 March 2011. These initiatives aimed at abolishing gender stereotypes and socially constructed gender roles in corporate environment, so that the establishment of equal opportunities between men and women, a principle that is a major productive factor, can enhance business competitiveness and boost employment and sustainable growth. Through this initiative, the Hellenic Network for CSR committed itself to promoting awareness-raising actions for its member enterprises that contribute towards implementing gender equality at the workplace. The actions included in the Protocol on Cooperation also concerned the prevention and combating of sexual harassment at the work place, favourable treatment of career break leave, as well as the organisation of programmes for re-integration into enterprises after a long absence, which are often necessary measures for the support and re-integration of abused women.

Finally, in this context, it should be noted that the issue of sexual harassment was first reported in the National Collective Labour Agreement of 1993 as an issue to which employer organisations made a joint commitment to show zero tolerance; subsequent collective labour agreements included similar provisions, but without notifying specific actions expressing this commitment in practice to date.

## **2.5. Agencies and stakeholders active in addressing violence committed against women**

The main role in promoting interventions to combat domestic violence and violence committed against women in Greece is mainly played by the State through the policy implemented by the General Secretariat for Gender Equality, which is subject to the Ministry of the Interior, Decentralisation and e-Governance. The General Secretariat has executive responsibility for the design of the related programmes and the promotion and coordination of legislative interventions on violence committed against women through other competent services that are involved in the implementation of measures for combating violence committed against women either directly (e.g. Hellenic Police, Ministry of Justice, National Centre for Social Solidarity) or indirectly.

At the documentation and information provision level, the Research Centre for Gender Equality contributes to the implementation of the related policies, while in recent years, a significant part of these policies and particularly interventions for providing support to abused women is being implemented through Local Government Agencies, which operate counselling and psychosocial support

structures and shelters for women, who have been the victims of violence. Finally, a major role in the implementation of related actions is played by a number of NGOs (women's associations, unions, feminist initiatives, networks, female divisions of labour unions and scientific agencies) that have assumed a leading role with awareness-raising campaigns and are successfully implementing related actions financed by national and European funds. Examples of such agencies include the European Anti-Violence Network, W.I.N. Hellas, DIOTIMA - Centre for Research on Women and the Feminist Initiative for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Certain member-enterprises of the Hellenic Network for CSR have collaborated with and aided action for combating violence against women being implemented by local government agencies and NGOs.

### **3. Companies and domestic violence committed against women**

This section of the report presents the findings of the survey conducted in 2015 on mainly major companies that are members of the Hellenic Network for Corporate Social Responsibility, recording their views on violence committed against women, as well as their related initiatives and the ways in which they either address the issue at the level of each enterprise or contribute to the efforts of other agencies. However, it should be noted that most enterprises we asked to complete the survey questionnaire were hesitant, noting that the issue in question does not concern their activity and their human resources management and corporate responsibility policies. This is indicative of the currently prevalent opinion among business executives that domestic violence, even if it is an actual problem, does not fall under the scope, wherein an enterprise can have substantial social impact, while simultaneously upgrading its human resources and improving its performance in terms of productivity.

#### **3.1. How companies perceive the issue of violence committed against women and what they believe their role is in addressing it**

The representatives of enterprises participating in the survey perceive violence committed against women in a conceptually correct and broad manner, recognising that it concerns all its forms (physical, verbal, psychological, etc.) and that it is committed in various environments, within and beyond the workplace. Enterprises note that the issue of violence concerns the corporate gender equality policies that they apply and on which they place particular emphasis on non-discrimination in terms of human resources recruitment and development. Additionally, participants noted the relation of the issue to corporate values, which, in any case, determine corporate responsibility, and the degree to which enterprises themselves perceive their role as corporate citizens, contributing towards achieving positive change in crucial socio-economic issues, such as gender-based violence. However, one representative of a major enterprise stated that the involvement of enterprises is not dictated by a type of norm, as violence committed against women violates fundamental human rights, so for an enterprise that operates in harmony with its social surroundings, involvement in this issue is a self-evident obligation.

The survey recorded the realisation on the part of enterprises that the phenomenon of violence committed against women has significantly increased in recent years and concerns significant sections of the population; moreover, the impact that this phenomenon can have in the field of labour rights and conditions was also stressed.

Certain interviewees believe that the contribution of enterprises towards combating the phenomenon may mainly be indirect, through the participation of enterprises in initiatives and actions undertaken by agencies that primarily deal with related issues, and less through direct actions that focus on the interior of enterprises. It is a fact that, as noted in previous sections of the report, neither the pertinent institutional

framework for combating domestic violence, nor the corresponding programmes and policies promoted in recent years in Greece, include or encompass companies in their scope. This fact also has an impact on the perception of companies regarding their role in combating this phenomenon, as it is usually not considered to be a criminal act with serious economic consequences, even at the level of the workplace, that requires active prevention and victim-employee support policies. For most of the participating enterprises, their role in combating violence committed against women is considered as ancillary or supplementary; in fact, they justify this position due to the perceived weakness of intervening more actively in incidents that fall under the personal - family life of their employees.

### **3.2. Actions and policies of companies for combating violence committed against women and providing relief to victims**

Most of the companies that participated in the survey, as well as those that were initially approached and refused to participate, could not demonstrate systematic involvement or initiatives specifically focusing on preventing domestic violence and providing support to victims. The most characteristic good practices employed by Greek companies to combat violence committed against women are presented in a subsequent section of the report. Generally speaking, though, the actions recorded through the survey are distinguished into two categories: a) Those developed at the workplace and b) those related to the promotion or contribution of enterprises towards implementing actions of a broader range, which concern the combating of the phenomenon of violence committed against women more generally.

Actions belonging to the first category are clearly fewer and one of the reasons reported as a cause for this lag is the non-identification of incidents or victims of domestic violence committed against women by employers. Nevertheless, participants in the survey believe that every enterprise could undertake similar positive actions. Apart from initiatives for generally supporting women employees in the direction of conciliating the work and personal life and prohibiting any gender-based discrimination, which are promoted by several companies, the internal rules of operation or codes of conduct of several companies include clear references to the issue of violence. More specifically, there were cases where violence committed against women is expressly condemned in internal documents, such as 'ethical business behaviour guides' and 'instructions on respect at the workplace' and codes of conduct. In any case, references to internal codes are most commonly associated with sexual violence and the procedures for reporting and investigating such incidents where female employees of the enterprise were victims. Finally, there was a case of a company that has established an internal procedure and system for the whistle-blowing of incidents of sexual harassment or violence committed against female employees to executives of the Directorate-General for Legal and Corporate Affairs, so as to ensure confidentiality and protection of the female employee lodging the complaint.

In at least one case, it was reported that companies are able to inform their staff, via targeted communication or, potentially, in cooperation with organisations involved in the issue of violence committed against women, encouraging victims that they employ to address special structures for this purpose for assistance. Moreover, as regards the provision of support to victims of violence, it was reported that enterprises are able to discriminate positively in their favour, providing jobs and thus contributing to the social reintegration of abused women; there was a case of one company that has helped female victims of trafficking in this manner. It should be noted that there is such a legal obligation in Greece for very large enterprises and specific groups of socially isolated or disadvantaged individuals, such as disabled persons; however, the pertinent legislation on violence committed against women has not been included in a corresponding legal provision to date, therefore the issue remains exclusively up to the sensitivity and social responsibility of employers. Another enterprise reported the operation of a social service within the company that, among other things, contributes by providing specialised consulting support to female employees who have been the victims of domestic violence.

The second category of actions includes interesting initiatives that mainly concerned partnerships between specific companies and agencies that systematically work on combating violence committed against women, for the purpose of disseminating the message of condemning this form of violence as broadly as possible and providing material and other support to structures and initiatives for supporting women, who have been the victims of violence. In this context, there were cases of campaigns which were associated with the brand or products of the enterprise, informing and inviting its customers to condemn violence committed against women. Campaigns were also held for special audiences, such as young persons and pupils, and support was given for the collection of funds from the public for the fight against various forms of gender-based violence. Finally, in the context of initiatives for social action and enhancing the local social capital of the areas where it is active, a company provided financial and material support to structures and programmes providing support to abused women, operated by local government and social agencies of the region.

### **3.3. Obstacles and limits in the actions of companies for combating violence committed against women**

The biggest obstacle to the direct involvement in domestic violence by enterprises at the workplace recorded by survey participants concerns the sensitive dimension of the problem, in terms of the female employee's personal life, and the hesitation on the part of enterprises to touch upon issues that concern privacy. As noted by interviewees, it is often difficult for the victims themselves to openly admit or notify employers and colleagues of the violence they have suffered by a partner or other member of their environment. However, it is recognised that it is particularly challenging for enterprises to be able to communicate with their employees of both



genders on such incidents at the workplace. Apart from fear on the part of the victims, certain representatives of enterprises stated that, as a rule, their direct involvement in such incidents of domestic violence in the capacity of employer is hindered, on the one hand, because they are not aware of the “personal affairs” of their employees and, on the other, even if they were, they do not have the right to become involved in them. In fact, it was noted that if such an incident is reported, the legally safe solution is to refer the victim to the competent police and other public authorities.

They also recognise that the only possibility of their involvement is if the incident is communicated to the employer at the initiative of the victim herself. In these cases, it is accepted that the company can either directly assist the employee (in terms of advice or financially, if necessary) or indirectly guide her so that she can reach out to agencies and experts on the handling of such incidents.

One company referred to the absence of Corporate Social Responsibility departments or social services departments within the enterprise as a hindrance for workplace involvement in issues related to violence committed against women, as only such structures are presumed to have the knowledge or availability to effectively intervene in such cases. Another company that can also demonstrate similar activity reported that ignorance of the consequences of domestic violence committed against women at the level of the workplace and employee productivity renders the undertaking of targeted action against the issue on the part of enterprises difficult or incidental. Lastly, special reference was made to the current economic difficulties which, for several enterprises, entail a reduction in available resources that can be earmarked for social actions, awareness-raising campaigns and other such actions the could make a positive contribution towards combating violence committed against women.

#### **4. Good practices for combating violence committed against women with the contribution of companies**

This section of the report presents the initiatives undertaken by Greek companies to combat violence committed against women that were recorded within the context of the survey and which are characterised as good practices, in the sense of being relevant to the topic, capable of being reproduced or adopted by other enterprises and having had a positive impact on combating violence committed against women and its consequences.

##### ***Identification and provision of support to female employees who have been the victims of violence.***

The company AB Vassilopoulos, which operates one of the largest networks of super markets in the country and employs approximately 12,000 workers, was one of the enterprises participating in the survey that stated that it has identified incidents of abused women-victims of domestic violence amongst its staff and provides these employees with specialised guidance and support. First of all, the company operates an organised social service, staffed with specialised employees (a social worker and a psychologist) that can address and properly handle incidents of domestic violence by providing consulting support and guidance.

As regards the diagnosis of the phenomenon and employees facing a similar problem, the company reported that its Social Service took over either, when employees themselves sought its assistance, or where there were characteristic indications of the occurrence of such incidents. These characteristic indications involved obvious physical harm in combination with absence from work and a tendency towards isolation and a generally poor psychological state of these employees. Moreover, the company operates a 24-hour Consulting and Psychological Support Hotline, which all employees can call to request assistance from professionals regarding personal issues they may be facing.

The company AB Vassilopoulos has not developed a system for the provision of support specifically to victims of domestic violence, but its Social Service is a structure that professionally and effectively handles incidents where female employees of the company are the victims. Moreover, the related documents and internal rules of operation ('Guide for Ethical Business Conduct'<sup>10</sup>) and the chapters that concern employees-associates make explicit references and commitments to the zero tolerance approach to violence at the workplace and the provision of a safe working environment for employees. This Guide recommends that if anyone observes violent or threatening behaviour by anyone in the workplace, they must notify a supervisor or a member of management immediately. Moreover, it is noted that if any employee observes or becomes aware of any violent or threatening behaviour that constitutes imminent risk of physical harm to any person, they must

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<sup>10</sup> p. 13-14 of the Guide [http://www.ab.gr/assets/pdf-files/150506\\_DLZ\\_CofC\\_GR\\_web.pdf](http://www.ab.gr/assets/pdf-files/150506_DLZ_CofC_GR_web.pdf)

contact the competent authorities immediately and the Company will promptly investigate all reported allegations of workplace violence and will take appropriate action in accordance with Company policy.

In the same text, it is noted that *“the Company does not tolerate verbal or physical conduct by any Associate or any other person that disrupts or interferes with the work performance of an Associate or which creates an intimidating, offensive or hostile work environment”*, expressly condemning workplace violence.

As regards sexual harassment in particular, the Guide notes that *“Unwelcome sexual advances, harassment and other inappropriate personal conduct are prohibited. This includes harassment based upon a person’s legally protected characteristics. Harassment can be verbal, non-verbal, or physical in nature and can take many forms, including behaviour that offends, bullies, humiliates, threatens, or disturbs others or which creates an unpleasant or hostile environment. Always remember that harassment, sexual or otherwise, is determined by your actions and how they impact others, regardless of your intentions”*.

### ***Raising the awareness of customers, associates and society at large regarding violence committed against women***

‘The Body Shop’ is an international company active in the field of cosmetics, with significant action in the fields of Corporate Responsibility and human rights protection. Since 1994, the company has been collecting money to combat violence committed against women and to raise public awareness concerning domestic violence. Since 2004, over £4m has been donated to local partners, who fund the prevention, support and protection of abused women and children.

Notable successes for this campaign include an organised street march and petition to condemn domestic violence in Seoul, Korea. This was followed by a government commitment to increase spending on domestic-violence shelters and invest in education programmes for the police. In other countries, the company supported awareness-raising actions in classrooms and a website was created to inform children about domestic violence.

In 2003, the company launched a global campaign in cooperation with the MTV television network to raise public awareness and funds to help the victims of domestic violence. The campaign was titled “Stop Violence in The Home” campaign and was implemented in various countries including Greece. Thus, in October 2004, *The Body Shop*, in cooperation with the European Women's Network, jointly launched this campaign in order to raise funds and public awareness in Greece on domestic violence. Through this initiative, the sum of €30,000 was raised in Greece and donated for the provision of social support to the victims of domestic violence and for the creation of a shelter to provide care to abused women.

In the same context, in September 2009, the company launched a special campaign titled *‘Stop Sex Trafficking of Children and Young People’*, implemented in numerous countries in cooperation with ECPAT International and local NGOs. At every store of

*The Body Shop* in the entire world, customers, their friends and families were asked to take a stand on the issue; at the same time, public awareness and funds were raised, signatures of related declarations were collected and street marches were held in various cities.

As a result of this campaign, 20 countries undertook the commitment to protect children from sex trafficking and 7,044,278 signatures were collected for a petition calling upon governments to raise public awareness on the issue of trafficking and take action by offering protecting and specialised support services to children and young peoples who were the victims of sex trafficking. These signatures were presented to the United Nations Human Rights Council, making this campaign one of the largest ever launched on the issue.

***Social contribution and development of partnerships for the sheltering and support of abused women.***

The FOURLIS Group is one of the leading commercial groups in Greece in providing durable consumer goods. The Group is active in the retail sale of domestic equipment and furnishings (IKEA stores) and the retail sale of sports products (INTERSPORT, THE ATHLETE'S FOOT stores).

In 2013 and in cooperation with the Municipality of Thessaloniki, the FOURLIS Group undertook the complete creation and furnishing of a shelter for women who were the victims of violence and their children in Thessaloniki. In this context, the IKEA and Fournalis Trade store donated all the furniture and equipment of the shelter, while experienced decorators of the IKEA store in Thessaloniki undertook the design of the shelter's spaces, transforming it into a hospitable home for the provision of shelter, recuperation and care to abused women and their children.

This initiative, which was directly linked to the products sold by the company, aimed at providing relief and care to the victims of domestic violence in the region of Thessaloniki and made a decisive contribution both towards upgrading the services provided to abused women and the conditions of their care and social reintegration and towards disseminating the message of the need to support the victims of violence committed against women.

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

Despite the fact that violence committed against women and domestic violence, in particular, affects a large section of the population and has a significant economic impact, affecting the productivity of female employees, enterprises are generally apprehensive in approaching the issue; this is mainly due to the widespread perception that this touches upon sensitive issues that concern the private lives of employees, which the company can either not be aware of, or is not permitted to intervene on.

Additionally, despite the fact that specific legislative regulations and relevant programmes for addressing the phenomenon at the level of prevention and provision of support to victims have been promoted in recent years, enterprises have not been included in factors that play any role in the implementation of these policies, perhaps with the exception of the issue of sexual harassment at the workplace, which directly concerns employers by definition. Thus, the issue of domestic violence has been addressed as an important priority by a relatively limited number of companies, which have contributed towards combating it both at the micro-level of their internal operation and more broadly by supporting initiatives for raising social awareness and generally providing support to abused women.

Certain proposals are formulated below, mainly concerning the competent national authorities for drafting policy on addressing gender-based violence in Greece; these proposals derived from the analysis of data and information collected in the context of the survey and their implementation could contribute towards enhancing the role played by enterprises in the endeavour to combat violence committed against women.

### ***Inclusion of actions involving companies in the National Programmes for Preventing and Combating Violence Committed Against Women***

It would be greatly helpful if the official initiatives launched at the national level provided for actions that involve the participation of companies through actions to raise awareness on domestic violence at the workplace and for the interconnection of enterprises with networks and agencies that provide support to the victims of violence, so that they can receive relevant technical knowledge on diagnosing such incidents and providing their female employees with suitable guidance in order to receive specialised assistance.

### ***Provision of information to companies on the consequences of domestic violence and the role they could play in combating the phenomenon***

In combination with further exploration and study of the phenomenon of domestic violence and its economic impact, in particular, at the national level, it would exceptionally useful to see the organisation of targeted actions to inform Greek businesses about the extent of the phenomenon and its impact on the health of women and, consequently, on their work life and performance as employees. In the

context of similar actions, companies must also be informed in an accurate and integrated manner on the ways to diagnose and responsibly address incidents of violence, by providing supporting to victims and referring them to specialised consulting and assistance structures. It would also be useful to enable companies that wish to participate in information and awareness-raising campaigns on preventing and combating violence committed against women to do so.

***Complementation of the institutional framework with provisions on the obligations of companies concerning domestic violence victims***

Following the example of legislative provisions in force in other countries, there could be an explicit reference in Greek law and/or the collective labour agreements concluded between social partners for the protection of the labour rights of female victims of violence, in order to facilitate their empowerment and re-integration in cases where abuse forces them to be absent from work for a period of time. Furthermore, domestic violence victims could be explicitly included in vulnerable groups that are beneficiaries of various programmes and actions to combat social exclusion and unemployment, so as to provide integrated support to their empowerment and social reintegration. Finally, as regards legislation on labour conditions, it could also be complemented with provisions on ensuring the safety of employees at the workplace and the observance of strict confidentiality concerning the employment of domestic violence in respect of third parties and particularly individuals of their environment who might threaten them.

***Development and dissemination of business action tools for combating violence committed against women***

Given the shortcomings in the provision of information to and participation of companies in initiatives that concern violence committed against women, the promotion of targeted tools for raising their awareness and mobilising them in regard to this issue would be exceptionally beneficial. More specifically, informative material could be developed (posters, brochures, videos, guides, etc.) that specifically target the workplace and female employees; this material could be provided to companies for utilisation in programmes and actions for the growth of and provision of information to their workforce. Moreover, the establishment of awards and the organisation of events for the promotion of successful actions undertaken by companies in order to combat violence committed against women could stir the interest of more enterprises in undertaking similar actions.

## 6. Annex - List of sources

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**Fondation Agir Contre l'Exclusion (Coordinator)**

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Les entreprises contre l'exclusion

**Pour la Solidarité**



**Center for Women's Studies and Policies**

Center of Women's  
Studies and Policies



**The Hellenic Network for CSR**



**Associated partner**

**The European Association for People Management**



**CEPS Projectes Socials**



**Social Accountability**



**Coordination du Lobby Européen des Femmes**

