**The Situation of Gender Equality in Greece**

**Introduction**

Gender equality is a cornerstone of democratic societies, contributing not only to social justice but also to economic prosperity and sustainable development. In Greece, the situation of gender equality reflects a complex interplay of socio-cultural norms, economic challenges, political efforts, and international obligations. Despite significant progress over recent decades, persistent disparities remain, influenced by traditional gender roles, economic barriers, and gaps in political representation. This essay provides an in-depth examination of the current status of gender equality in Greece, with a focus on its historical background, legislative framework, economic participation, political representation, education, gender-based violence, and the role of civil society and international actors.

**Historical Context of Gender Equality in Greece**

The status of gender equality in Greece has evolved significantly over the last century. Historically, Greek society has been shaped by strong patriarchal values, which assigned distinct roles to men and women, often restricting women’s public participation. The development of gender equality in Greece accelerated during the latter half of the 20th century, with the 1980s marking an important turning point, following the transition to democracy in 1974 and the subsequent rise of socialist governance.

The introduction of gender-specific legislation began in earnest during the 1980s under the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), which focused on advancing women's rights as part of its broader social reform agenda. This included reforms in family law, such as the recognition of gender equality in marriage, the abolishment of dowries, and the introduction of civil marriage as an alternative to the traditional religious ceremony. These legal changes represented a significant shift in the direction of gender equality, although deeply ingrained cultural attitudes were slower to change.

The 2000s brought further reforms in response to Greece's commitments to the European Union (EU), particularly in areas like employment rights, equal pay, and anti-discrimination policies. Despite this progress, the economic crisis of the 2010s presented new challenges for gender equality, impacting women's employment and social services in disproportionate ways, highlighting both the progress made and the ongoing gaps in gender equality.

**Legal and Institutional Framework for Gender Equality**

The Greek legal framework on gender equality is largely shaped by its obligations as a member of the EU, which has driven significant legislative reforms. The **Greek Constitution** guarantees gender equality, explicitly stating that men and women have equal rights and obligations. This constitutional guarantee is supplemented by numerous laws aimed at combating discrimination, promoting equal treatment, and supporting women's rights.

Key legislation includes the **Law on Gender Equality (Law 4604/2019)**, which consolidates provisions for equal treatment and strengthens mechanisms to promote equality in all aspects of social, political, and economic life. This law aims to align Greece’s legal system with EU directives on gender equality, focusing on areas like employment, education, healthcare, and political participation. Additionally, the **Law on Combating Violence Against Women (Law 3500/2006)**, and Greece’s ratification of the **Istanbul Convention** in 2018, represent significant steps in addressing gender-based violence.

The **General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality** (GSDFPGE) plays a central role in implementing gender equality policies. This governmental body is responsible for designing, monitoring, and evaluating gender equality policies across Greece. Despite a robust legal framework, however, implementation remains inconsistent, with enforcement often hindered by cultural attitudes, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and underfunding of equality initiatives.

**Economic Participation and Gender Disparities**

Gender disparities in economic participation are a significant challenge in Greece. The **labor force participation rate** for women is around **49%**, compared to approximately **71%** for men. This gap is partly attributable to deeply entrenched societal expectations that assign the primary responsibility for caregiving and domestic work to women. Women’s participation in the workforce is further limited by inadequate childcare facilities and the lack of family-friendly work policies, which makes balancing work and family responsibilities difficult.

The **gender pay gap** in Greece, while below the EU average, remains a concern. Women earn on average about **12%** less than men, reflecting both vertical and horizontal occupational segregation. Women are overrepresented in low-paying sectors, such as retail, healthcare, and education, while men dominate higher-paying industries, such as technology, finance, and construction. Moreover, women are significantly underrepresented in leadership roles across the private and public sectors, reflecting barriers to advancement often caused by discriminatory practices and a lack of supportive networks.

The **economic crisis of the 2010s** had a particularly severe impact on gender equality in the labor market. Austerity measures and cuts in public spending led to reductions in services that support working women, such as childcare and healthcare. Women faced higher rates of unemployment and were more likely to be employed in informal, precarious jobs without adequate social protections. Although there has been some recovery in recent years, the pandemic has further highlighted the vulnerability of women in the labor market, exacerbating existing inequalities.

**Political Representation and Participation**

Political representation is another area where Greece has seen progress but still faces significant challenges. Women's representation in the **Hellenic Parliament** has improved, with women currently holding about **22%** of parliamentary seats. However, this is still below the EU average, and women remain underrepresented in key ministerial positions and decision-making bodies. The **quota law**, which requires that at least **40%** of candidates on electoral lists be women, has helped increase female participation in elections, but this has not yet translated into proportionate leadership roles.

Local governance also reflects similar gender disparities. Despite quotas at the municipal level, women hold only a small percentage of mayoral and high-level administrative positions. The political landscape in Greece remains dominated by men, and cultural stereotypes regarding women’s capabilities as leaders persist. The political environment often lacks the necessary support mechanisms, such as mentorship programs or networks, to help women advance in political careers.

**Education and Gender Segregation**

Education in Greece demonstrates both achievements and ongoing challenges in gender equality. At the primary and secondary levels, enrollment rates for girls and boys are virtually equal, and women tend to outperform men academically. At the **tertiary level**, women are well-represented, often exceeding men in university enrollment. However, significant gender segregation persists in fields of study, with women predominantly enrolling in humanities, education, and healthcare, while men are more likely to pursue engineering, technology, and natural sciences.

This educational segregation contributes to occupational segregation in the labor market, limiting women's opportunities in higher-paying fields like engineering and technology. Efforts to encourage girls to enter **STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)** fields have been introduced, but these initiatives face challenges, including gender stereotypes and a lack of role models in these fields.

**Gender-Based Violence and Societal Attitudes**

Gender-based violence remains a significant issue in Greece, despite legal protections and the ratification of the **Istanbul Convention**. Violence against women, including **domestic violence** and **sexual harassment**, is underreported, often due to societal stigma, fear of retaliation, and mistrust in the judicial system. The **COVID-19 pandemic** further exacerbated the situation, with reports indicating an increase in domestic violence cases during lockdowns.

The legal framework for combating gender-based violence is comprehensive, but its enforcement is inconsistent. Victims often face barriers in accessing justice, including lengthy legal procedures, inadequate support services, and insufficient training among law enforcement officers. The government operates a **24-hour hotline** and has established some shelters for victims of domestic violence, but the availability of these services is often insufficient, particularly in rural areas.

Efforts by civil society organizations have been instrumental in addressing gender-based violence. NGOs provide critical support services, raise awareness, and advocate for stronger protections. However, these organizations frequently face challenges, such as limited funding and political resistance, which hinder their ability to operate effectively.

**The Role of Civil Society and International Organizations**

Civil society organizations play a crucial role in promoting gender equality in Greece. Groups such as **Diotima Centre** and **the Greek League for Women’s Rights** are at the forefront of efforts to support women, provide educational programs, and advocate for policy changes. These organizations have been particularly important in addressing issues like gender-based violence and economic empowerment, often stepping in where governmental efforts fall short.

International organizations, including the **European Union**, **United Nations**, and various human rights bodies, have also had a significant influence on gender equality policies in Greece. EU funding has supported numerous initiatives aimed at increasing women’s employment, reducing gender-based violence, and promoting political participation. Greece’s commitment to the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly **Goal 5: Gender Equality**, also underpins many of its gender-focused policies and programs.

However, the impact of these international influences is often moderated by domestic political and cultural contexts. While EU alignment has driven many of the legal changes, implementation is often inconsistent due to cultural resistance, economic constraints, and political shifts.

**Cultural Attitudes and Barriers to Progress**

Cultural attitudes in Greece present a significant barrier to achieving gender equality. Traditional gender roles, which view men as breadwinners and women as caregivers, are deeply entrenched, particularly in rural areas and among older generations. These stereotypes influence not only the division of labor within households but also perceptions of women's capabilities in the public and professional spheres.

Recent surveys indicate that a significant proportion of the population still holds conservative views regarding gender roles, which affects women's participation in both the labor market and politics. Public discourse around gender issues often lacks the urgency seen in other European countries, reflecting a cultural lag in recognizing the importance of gender equality as a fundamental issue of social justice.

**Recent Developments and Future Directions**

Recent developments in Greece show both positive progress and ongoing challenges in gender equality. The Greek government has introduced several initiatives aimed at supporting women in the workforce, such as **entrepreneurship programs** and incentives for businesses to employ women. The introduction of **paternity leave** and extended parental leave is also a step towards reducing the burden of caregiving responsibilities on women, encouraging a more balanced sharing of domestic duties.

However, achieving true gender equality will require more than legal changes and individual initiatives. There is a need for comprehensive strategies that include educational reforms to challenge gender stereotypes, increased funding for gender equality initiatives, and stronger political commitment to enforcing existing laws. Engaging men and boys in the gender equality conversation is also crucial, as changing societal attitudes requires collective action that includes all segments of the population.

**Conclusion**

The situation of gender equality in Greece is characterized by both progress and persistent inequalities. Legal reforms and alignment with EU standards have provided a solid foundation for advancing gender equality, yet cultural attitudes, economic disparities, and inconsistent implementation continue to pose significant challenges. Women in Greece face barriers in the labor market, are underrepresented in political leadership, and continue to experience high levels of gender-based violence, issues that require concerted action from both the government and civil society.

To achieve meaningful progress, Greece must not only enforce existing laws but also address the socio-cultural factors that underpin gender inequality. This involves challenging traditional gender norms, improving access to services that support women, and ensuring that gender equality is a priority at all levels of policy-making. By building on its legal framework and leveraging the support of civil society and international partners, Greece has the potential to create a more equal and inclusive society where all individuals, regardless of gender, can thrive.