

Time to break the circle of silence

Breaking the silence was the inspiration behind the project “Time to talk”, according to president of the Greek NGO Ladies Union of Drama, Alice Tsiamoura.

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Our main service was the helpline created as part of the project,” says Alice Tsiamoura from the Ladies Union of Drama. (Illustration photo: iStockphoto)

The project was established in 2021 to promote equality through specialised counselling for perpetrators and more effective support for victims of violence.

“We decided to create a project that vulnerable people in all ages could turn to for information, trust and help,” says Tsiamoura from the NGO in northern Greece.

“Our most successful results are the training courses, the research and the training we have received from the Norwegian organisation [Alternative to Violence](#) on the issue of dealing with perpetrators,” says Tsiamoura.

Educational training for 1,055 students

The training courses for students and teachers in the Drama region of northern Greece are one of the successful initiatives highlighted by Tsiamoura. The courses have dealt with violence and its forms, and how to deal with it, Tsiamoura explains.

Alice Tsiamoura, the president of the Greek NGO Ladies Union of Drama. (Photo: Ladies Union of Drama)

“Over the course of three years, 25 educational workshops have been held, which have informed and raised awareness among 1,055 students in schools in our region,” says Tsiamoura.

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The training courses are still run on a voluntary basis by the Ladies Union of Drama, among others (see fact box).

Another of the project’s objectives was to conduct research on cyberviolence.

“This was intended to highlight the growing phenomenon of cyberviolence and its increasing prevalence in society,” says Tsiamoura.

“The results confirm the seriousness and necessity of immediate action,” she says.

The research has been conducted in cooperation with three Greek universities: the Democritus University of Thrace, the University of West Attica and the University of Peloponnese.

Read: [Calls for a holistic approach to combating digital violence](#)

Guidelines on how to deal with perpetrators

One of the objectives of the project has been to provide counselling services to perpetrators of gender violence. In that context, two specialists from the Norwegian organisation Alternative to Violence (ATV) held training sessions on how to address and understand perpetrators and provided an introduction to the therapeutic work.

“This has been incredibly important for the organisation,” says Tsiamoura.

The training sessions were held during ATV’s two visits to Drama in northern Greece in 2022, and lasted three days each.

“For the first time, we had the opportunity to train our staff and people working in social services, in a very innovative technique conducted by experts,” Tsiamoura says.

In addition to the team from the Ladies Union of Drama, other representatives of Drama’s social agencies and institutions

participated in the sessions.

“As a result, our nonprofit organisation has adopted the guidelines and methodology for how to deal with perpetrators,” she explains.

Tsiamoura believes that the training from ATV has improved the Union’s psychological services and the way they approach both victims and perpetrators.

“I didn't know I was a victim. I didn't know what was wrong with me, so I became depressed, suffered from panic attacks, and had to take medication. But now I know, today I know. Thank you.”

The two specialists in clinical psychology from ATV, Ingunn Rangul Askeland and Bente Lømo, were impressed by how the Greek NGO organised their volunteer efforts to help vulnerable people and children in struggling families.

Ingunn Rangul Askeland, psychologist from Alternative to violence. (Photo: Alternative to violence)

“This involved everything from mobile schools for families where the adults struggled to get the children, to school to practical help for families with poor finances, to running a crisis centre providing social, legal and psychological assistance,” says Askeland.

A new helpline: “I didn't know I was a victim”

The whole project has largely been organised and conducted by psychologists.

“This has made it easy to provide counselling to the victims who ask for our help, and moreover to support them in other ways. Our main service was the [helpline](#) created as part of the project,” says Tsiamoura.

This helpline for abused women and children made it possible for anyone in Greece to call at any time and ask for help. In addition, the staff were on hand to conduct personal sessions and counsel individual victims on all issues, through the use of a multidisciplinary approach.

One good example is the testimony of 16-year-old Konstantina, explains Tsiamoura:

“I'm Konstantina, I don't know how to write properly. Today I was informed by the Union about the various types of violence. I didn't know I was a victim. I didn't know what was wrong with me, so I became depressed, suffered from panic attacks, and had to take medication. But now I know, today I know. Thank you”.

“We continue to provide assistance in connection with every call either in real time or via the helpline.”

More immediate response to victims of child abuse

Like the helpline, the project is still being run on a voluntary basis.

“We hope that we can continue these workshops in 2024, and maybe even next year, if we can get the grant we hope for,” says Tsiamoura.

The NGO will continue to develop and learn and in April 2024 they visited Norway for thematic training on gender-based violence. The visit also included a meeting with the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security (NMOJ) for an introduction to the SYNERGY Network and the potential for cooperation and networking.

The Greek NGO Ladies Union of Drama visited the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security to be introduced to the SYNERGY Network and exchange knowledge on gender-based and domestic violence. (Photo: NMOJ)

In front of the visit, we asked them:

What do you hope to experience and learn from the visit to Norway in April and the meeting with NMOJ?

“Our goal is to get information and train for the creation of a Child Protection Policy, to enable a more immediate and effective responses to incidences of child abuse,” said Tsiamoura.

“It will also help to organise social institutions’ and agencies’ work against child abuse, as the civil protection of children is

unfortunately not widespread enough in our country,” she says.

Bente Lømo, psychologist from Alternative to violence. (Photo: Alternative to violence)

Another challenge that the Greek organisation faces, according to Bente Lømo from ATV, is related to cooperation with others in the field of domestic violence.

While domestic violence has been on the public agenda in Norway for decades, it is not as firmly rooted in Greek society, says Lømo and adds:

"Increasing knowledge about violence among lawyers, police, somatic health personnel, child welfare, schools and other health and social services makes it easier to help and support each other in this demanding work,” Lømo says.

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