



**RESIST**

Fostering Queer Feminist Intersectional Resistances against Transnational Anti-Gender Politics

# **The RESIST Project Report**

## Effects of, and Resistances to 'Anti-Gender' Mobilisations Across Europe: A Report on Greece



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## Greece

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### Executive Summary

This case study Report explores how people living in Greece experience and resist 'anti-gender' politics in their everyday lives. Our participants are not, nor do they wish to be seen as, “passive victims” of these conditions; rather, they emphasised how they engage in daily resistances from their different positions. We spoke with **27 people**, 12 of whom granted us a semi-structured interview, whilst 15 took part in four focus groups.

'Anti-gender' is not a term that circulates widely in Greece. Some participants first heard the term from the RESIST researchers when invited to take part in the research; indeed, in order to conduct the research, we needed to translate the term into Greek (to our knowledge for the first time). Alternate terms our participants were accustomed to using to describe what we broadly refer to as 'anti-gender' politics in this report include: patriarchy, anti-feminism, anti-woke, discrimination, TERFism (trans-exclusionary radical feminism), fascism, biopolitics, eugenics, institutional femicide, genocide. Moreover, many participants face multiple, intersecting experiences that extend the meaning of 'anti-gender' beyond gender and sexuality: race, legal status, and class are particularly important in the findings that follow.

We found that whilst **virtually all participants experienced 'anti-gender' attacks**, some of them were organised and involved political actors, including elected representatives; that transphobic discrimination is institutionalised and structural and present in virtually all spheres of trans people's lives, compounding acute oppression; and that violence and the fear of violence are prominent in participants' experiences. Yet, throughout the research, the participants emphasise resistance, solidarity, and community. Everyday resistances in which participants engage include forming communities, “bubbles,” and chosen families. Visibility is seen as a form of resistance; it is also identified as a risk or as making one vulnerable to homophobic/lesbophobic/transphobic attack, particularly in public space, in the family, or in camps—so-called ‘Closed Controlled Access Centres’, in which people seeking asylum are encamped. Migration is seen by some participants as a (personal) solution to escaping 'anti-gender' attacks, violence, oppression, and discrimination—both for people emigrating from Greece and for people seeking asylum in Greece. Whilst participants identify the far-right, alt-right, and the current government as sources of 'anti-gender' politics and discourses, they argued that 'anti-gender' ideologies are also present on the left and amongst some feminisms. Not only does 'anti-gender' not target all feminisms; but in fact, some feminisms reproduce 'anti-gender' logics and rhetorics. In particular, participants said trans-exclusionary radical feminism (TERF) is a definitive, if often occluded, aspect of 'anti-gender' politics. Rather than attributing 'anti-gender' exclusively to the far-right, participants spoke of it as a slippery discourse that sutures together what may otherwise be understood as opposing political positions. Specifically, they noted the emergence of “anti-woke mania” on the left, which dismisses feminist and antiracist struggles by reducing them pejoratively to ‘rightsism’ («δικαιωματισμός»). Manifestations of ‘anti-gender’ within supposedly progressive or radical social movements (including feminisms); racism and xenophobia; and the non-intersection of movements were seen by participants to undermine intersectional feminist resistance to ‘anti-gender’ politics.

**Keywords:** ‘Anti-gender’; transphobia; migration; violence; Greece

## Introduction

In the case study on Greece, we report on the lived experiences of **27 people**, all of whom have experienced the negative effects of ‘anti-gender’ politics, combined with structural discrimination. We also discuss their resistances to these oppressions. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 participants and held four focus groups with a total of 15 participants. This case study Report first outlines the social context; then, it presents the findings about their concrete experiences that emerge from the participants’ words, amongst which are findings that show the frequency and intensity of ‘anti-gender’ attacks as well as the multiple resistances in which our participants engage.

**‘Anti-gender’ is not a term that circulates widely in Greece.** Some participants heard the term for the first time from the RESIST researchers when invited to take part in the research; indeed, in order to conduct the research, we needed to translate the term into Greek (to our knowledge for the first time). Alternate terms our participants were accustomed to using to describe what might broadly be referred to as ‘anti-gender’ politics in this report include: discrimination, patriarchy, anti-feminism, anti-woke, TERFism (trans-exclusionary radical feminism), fascism, biopolitics, eugenics, institutional femicide, genocide. Moreover, many participants face **multiple, intersecting oppressions that extend the meaning of ‘anti-gender’ beyond gender and sexuality:** race, legal status, and class are particularly important in the findings that follow.

## Context

Greece is a postcolonial, ‘post-crisis’ society located at the periphery of contemporary Europe in the Eastern Mediterranean. A post-dictatorship society (1974–) and the site of one of the first proxy wars in the ‘Cold War’ era (1946-49),<sup>1</sup> Greece bears the legacy of the far-right’s control over the military and police forces.<sup>2</sup> The post-dictatorship (post-1974) period is widely viewed as a time of the reconstruction of democracy. This was also a time of flourishing social movements, including the autonomous feminist movement.<sup>3</sup> State feminism also emerged during this time.<sup>4</sup> The 1980s saw a series of political, legislative, and social changes. Abortion was legalised in 1986 (L. 1609/1986).<sup>5</sup> Yet, in recent years, anti-abortion campaigns led by religious

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<sup>1</sup> Gerolymatos, A. (2017). *International civil war: Greece, 1943-1949*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Stefatos, K. (2011). ‘The Psyche and the Body: Political Persecution and Gender Violence against Women in the Greek Civil War’. *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 29(2), pp.251–277. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mgs.2011.0018> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

Panourgíá, N. (2009). *Dangerous Citizens: the Greek left and the terror of the state*. New York: Fordham University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Tsoutsoumpis, S. (2018). The Far Right in Greece. Paramilitarism, Organized Crime and the Rise of “Golden Dawn”. *Südosteuropa*, 66(4), pp.503–531. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/soeu-2018-0039> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

<sup>3</sup> Vaiou, D. and Psarra, A. (eds.). (2018). *Conceptualisations and Practices of Feminism. Metapolitefsi and ‘After.’* Athens: Foundation of the Hellenic Parliament. [In Greek: *Εννοιολογήσεις και πρακτικές του φεμινισμού: Μεταπολίτευση και «Μετά»*]

<sup>4</sup> Varika, E. (2000). ‘Confronted by the modernisation of institutions.’ In Varika, E. (ed.) *With a Different Face: Gender, Difference, and Universality*. Athens: Katarti, pp.293–308. [In Greek: «Αντιμέτωπες με τον εκσυγχρονισμό των θεσμών» στο *Με Διαφορετικό Πρόσωπο. Φύλο, Διαφορά και Οικουμενικότητα*].

Pantelidou–Malouta, M. (2007). ‘State feminism, gender equality policies, and social perceptions.’ *Greek Political Science Review* 29(1), pp.5–39. [In Greek: «Κρατικός φεμινισμός, πολιτικές για την έμφυλη ισότητα και κοινωνικές αντιλήψεις»].

<sup>5</sup> Avdela, E., Papagiannaki, M. and Sklaveniti, K. (1986). ‘Abortion: Chronicle of a Demand.’ *Díni: A Feminist Journal* 1, 9-28. Available at: <https://notafeministproject.gr/timeline/1986/322> (Accessed: 5 September 2024). [In Greek: «Εκτρώση: Το Χρονικό μιας διεκδίκησης»].

Alexandra Halkias, *The Empty Cradle of Democracy: Sex, Abortion, and Nationalism in Modern Greece*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004.

organisations have resurfaced.<sup>6</sup> Greece is a society in which patriarchy is deeply rooted.<sup>7</sup> The state is not secular: the Greek Orthodox Church maintains financial, social, and political power, is seen to be aligned with the right, and members of the Church hierarchy have supported Golden Dawn.<sup>8</sup>

**Gendered violence**, particularly intimate partner violence and femicide, is a central focus of the contemporary grassroots feminist movement.<sup>9</sup> Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+)<sup>10</sup> people in Greece face routine **homophobia, lesbophobia, transphobia, and intersex-phobia**, ranging from violence to discrimination to social exclusion.<sup>11</sup> On September 21, 2018, the LGBTQI+ community was devastated by the killing of Zak Kostopoulos—an HIV-positive gay man who worked as a journalist and a drag performer (Zackie Oh!)—in broad daylight by civilians and police officers in the city centre of Athens. In the trial that ensued, the police officers were exonerated and only the civilians were found guilty of fatal bodily harm; they were released pending appeal, which they lost. On July 10, 2023, Anna Ivankova (Hernández)—a trans woman from Cuba who had been granted asylum in Greece and was a beloved performer at the trans club Koukles—was murdered in her apartment in central Athens. As fieldwork for this research was underway, a transphobic assault took place in Thessaloniki (March 9, 2024) involving between 150 and 300 young men who chased and physically assaulted two non-binary young people in the city centre during the Thessaloniki International Documentary Film Festival, where an LGBTQI+-affirmative feature called “Citizen Queer”<sup>12</sup> was showing.

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<sup>6</sup> Mpampatzimopoulou, P. (2022). ‘Abortions, the fetus and the attempted “social regression” in Greece.’ *Feministiga* 5. Available at: <https://feministiga.net/ektroseis-embryo-koinoniki-opisthodromisi/> (Accessed: 5 September 2024). [In Greek: «Οι εκτρώσεις, το έμβρυο και η επιχειρούμενη ‘κοινωνική οπισθοδρόμηση’ στην Ελλάδα»]

<sup>7</sup> Tsiibiridou, F. (2022). ‘On Honor and Palimpsest Patriarchal Coloniality in Greece, the Western Balkans, and the Caucasus: Anthropological Comparative Accounts from a Post-Ottoman Decolonial Perspective.’ *Genealogy*, 6(73), pp1–22. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy6030073> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

<sup>8</sup> Once a political party, Golden Dawn is now recognised as a criminal organisation and is banned from electoral politics. Founded as an organisation that published a pro-junta magazine in 1980, the neo-Nazi party rose to prominence in the 2010s, mainly through its paramilitary wing’s racist attacks on people racialised as migrants, and its blood drives and soup kitchens “for Greeks only” in the midst of the debt and austerity crisis. Golden Dawn entered Parliament in the 2012 elections, becoming third most popular in the 2015 elections. After the murders of Pavlos Fyssas, a Greek anti-fascist rapper, and Shehzad Luqman, a Pakistani farmer’s market worker, an investigation into the party leadership ensued and charges were laid against them. The trial proceedings lasted 5 years with 68 defendants. On 7 October 2020, the Athens Court of Appeals found the leadership guilty of criminal organisation (as well as several other verdicts) and they were imprisoned. See Christopoulos, D. (ed.). (2014). *The ‘Deep State’ in Contemporary Greece and the Far Right: Police, Justice, Military, and Church*. Athens: Nisos. [In Greek: *Το «βαθύ κράτος» στη σημερινή Ελλάδα και η ακροδεξιά. Αστυνομία, Δικαιοσύνη, Στρατός, Εκκλησία*]. Psarras, D. (2012). *The Black Book of Golden Dawn: Documents From the History and Practice of a National Socialist Group*. Athens: Polis. *Η μαύρη βίβλος της Χρυσής Αυγής. Ντοκουμέντα από την ιστορία και τη δράση μιας ναζιστικής ομάδας*. Psarras, D. (2015). *Golden Dawn On Trial*. Athens: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung. Available at: [https://rosalux.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/gd\\_on\\_trial\\_web-1.pdf](https://rosalux.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/gd_on_trial_web-1.pdf) (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

<sup>9</sup> From 2019 until May 2024, the Greek Observatory on Femicide has recorded 115 femicides (using police statistics of intentional homicides of women as the outcome of domestic violence, as there is no legally defined crime of femicide in the Greek Criminal Code). See Greek Section of the European Observatory on Femicide (EOF) (n.d.). *Qualitative Data*. Available at: <https://femicide.gr/poiotika-dedomena/> (Accessed: 5 September 2024). [In Greek: «Ποιοτικά Δεδομένα»].

For a comparison of official statistics versus monitoring by non-official sources (e.g., NGOs) see Mediterranean Institute for Investigative Reporting. (2024). *Femicides and violence against women in Europe*. Available at: <https://miir.gr/en/femicides-violence-against-women-in-europe/> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

<sup>10</sup> In the report on the case study on Greece, we use the acronym ‘LGBTQI+’ (instead of ‘LGBTIQ+’, used in other Case Studies and the Transnational findings report) for consistency with the rendering of the acronym in Greek (ΛΟΑΤΚΙ+). The ‘plus’ sign is indicative of other sexualities and genders—including non-binary identity and asexual/aromantic identities—not explicitly mentioned in the acronym.

<sup>11</sup> Carastathis, A. (2018). “Gender Is the First Terrorist”: Homophobic and Transphobic Violence in Greece.’ *Frontiers*, 39(2), pp.265–296. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/fro.2018.a698459> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

<sup>12</sup> Thanopoulos, V. (2024). “We Won’t Leave It Like This”: What one of the victims of the homotransphobic attack in Aristotelous Square declares.’ *Antivirus Magazine*. Available at:

The southeastern national border of Greece (with Türkiye) is one of the external borders of the European Union. Since 2015, hotspots—offshore centres processing asylum claims and detaining or geographically limiting people from moving onto the mainland—have been instituted under a special provision on five islands in the Greek territory.<sup>13</sup> **Systematic border violence**, including widespread use of sexualised and physical violence,<sup>14</sup> pushbacks,<sup>15</sup> theft of people's belongings,<sup>16</sup> and conditions of encampment and detention of asylum seekers in so-called "Closed Controlled Access Centres" have been found to violate the basic human rights of people crossing into the Greek territory to seek international protection.<sup>17</sup> On 14 June 2023, the Hellenic Coast Guard allegedly attempted a pushback operation<sup>18</sup> causing the shipwreck of the *Adriana* vessel that cost more than 600 people their lives, including all of the women and children who were on board, "in the deadliest tragedy that comes as a direct result of a state's actions in the recent history of Europe."<sup>19</sup>

## Findings

### 1. Virtually all participants had experienced verbal and/or physical attacks, ranging from abusive comments to physical assault

*Online attacks and hate messages via social media about one's identity, political views, and/or activities were virtually universal in participants' experiences. But some participants had also experienced organised attacks, in some cases involving political actors, including elected representatives.*

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<https://avmag.gr/den-tha-to-afisoume-etsi-ti-dilonei-ena-apo-ta-thymata-tis-omotransfovikis-epithesis-stin-pl-aristotelous1/> (Accessed: 5 September 2024). [In Greek: «Δεν θα το αφήσουμε έτσι»: Τι δηλώνει ένα από τα θύματα της ομοτρανσφοβικής επίθεσης στην πλατεία Αριστοτέλους]

<sup>13</sup> European Commission. (2015). Explanatory Note on the Hotspot Approach. Available at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10962-2015-INIT/en/pdf> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

<sup>14</sup> Forensic Architecture. (2022). 'Pushbacks Across the Evros/Meriç River: The Case of Parvin.' Available at: <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/pushbacks-across-the-evros-meric-river-the-case-of-parvin> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

<sup>15</sup> See Greek Council for Refugees. (2023). *At Europe's Borders: Between Impunity and Criminalization*. Available at: <https://www.rte.ie/documents/news/2023/03/at-europes-borders-between-impunity-and-criminalization.pdf> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

<sup>16</sup> The investigation conducted by Solomon and El País revealed that "Greek security forces have stolen more than €2 million from refugees during pushbacks." Malichudis, S. (2023). 'The Great Robbery: During Illegal Pushbacks in Greece, Refugees are Robbed by Border Guards.' *Solomon*. Available at: <https://wearesolomon.com/mag/format/investigation/the-great-robbery-during-illegal-pushbacks-in-greece-refugees-are-robbed-by-border-guards/> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

<sup>17</sup> The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has repeatedly granted Interim Measures in cases concerning CCACs, as in the case of *A.R. and Others v. Greece*, where the ECtHR condemned the treatment of three asylum seekers in the hotspots of Kos, Samos, and Chios. *A.R. and Others v. Greece*. (2024). European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). Appl. No. 59841/19. Available at: <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/#%7B%22itemid%22:%5B%22001-233120%22%5D%7D> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

<sup>18</sup> 'Pushback' refers to the documented systemic practice of border police, coast guards, and Frontex, the European Union border agency, of expulsion (without due process) of individuals or groups to another country. The Border Violence Monitoring Network has published a 3,000–page report in four volumes, drawing on testimonies impacting more than 25,000 people on the move, all of whom experienced the violence of pushbacks at EU borders. Border Violence Monitoring Network. (2022). *Black Book of Pushbacks, Vol. I, II, III, IV*. Available at: <https://left.eu/issues/black-book-of-pushbacks-2022/> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

<sup>19</sup> #FreePylos9 Campaign et al. (2024). Joint Declaration: Justice for the victims and survivors of the Pylos state crime, Defence of Migrant Rights Across Borders Conference, Mytilene, Greece. Available at: <https://captainsupport.net/freepylos9/defence-of-migrant-rights-across-borders-conference-joint-declaration/> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

Attacks were perpetrated by various individuals and groups, including Members of Parliament (MPs) and government Ministers. For example, Georgia, a visual artist whose work “Flag” about femicides and domestic violence—shown at the Greek Consulate in New York City—was censored by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, was **attacked by “a far-right member of the Greek government.”**

He brought a copy of my piece [flag] to the Greek parliament and he said that “the flag is being ridiculed because it’s been [...] painted [...] pink”, and that the only time when the flag is allowed to be painted red is when it’s “stained by the blood of the male heroes of the nation.” So, the Minister of Foreign Affairs asked for my piece to come down [...] I ended up having to go and take down my work four days after the opening and actually the Flag piece was already taken out without me, taken down without my presence, and I received it folded inside a trash bag.

Participants experienced organised attacks. One participant (GRCINT06) spoke of his photos being circulated on the web; verbal attacks by far-right and alt-right actors, **including an MP of the governing New Democracy party**; demands for the participant’s (GRCINT06) dismissal from his academic position and legal prosecution; hundreds of hate messages and death threats, which **expressed the violent desire to eliminate him**. He said:

GRCINT06: I was targeted precisely on the grounds of my profession, of my gender and sexual identity [...] of my field of study. This attack [...] drew a lot of [...] inspiration from my PhD, which was about BDSM, and I think it fit, because they had to do with an obviously ‘deviant’ person [...] having obviously ‘deviant’ research fields, who somehow teaches at the university.

Participants pointed to the **intersection of misogyny and nationalism** in some of the attacks they experienced. One participant linked this to violent hate speech targeting her in a “smear campaign on social media,” which accused her of being “a Turkish agent for Erdogan” and threatened sexual assault, poisoning her dogs, and burning down her house. “[I]t was horrible,” she said, “I have been psychologically damaged by it” (GRCINT08). The participant left Greece on the advice of authorities, and **couldn’t return to her home for six months**.

Organised attacks by the far-right on cultural events were also a feature of participants’ lives. Two participants, Scarlet and Harry, each discussed organised attacks by the far-right targeting festivals they were involved in:

Scarlet: At the L— Festival this year, we had received so many hate messages. Similarly, we also received an official complaint from a Municipal Councillor with V—’s party who denounced the organisation of the Festival and several people supported it, which, of course, entailed a fear of being targeted, of who is behind it [...]

Harry: Last year there had been an almost organised attack against comic artists [...] because Comic Con [Athens] banned an artist whose work glorified Metaxas’ dictatorship [...] And some people who supported this artist [...] [who] shared the same ideology, they used social media and started attacking the festival [...] they began to slander us on Twitter, they had found our photos, and they were posting it with the comment “Comic Con paedophiles,” but this had nothing to do with our identity [...] we were, like, “thank goodness they didn’t realise we are also trans.”<sup>20</sup>

Receiving hate messages online, and experiencing **hateful social media environments** was common to all participants’ experiences. These messages attack various marginalised identities as well as leftist, feminist,

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<sup>20</sup> Ioannis Metaxas was the fascist dictator of Greece between 1936 and 1941. Comic Con Athens made an exception to its stance of political neutrality due to the extent of the attacks, and explicitly opposed fascism.



LGBTQI+-affirmative, and antiracist political stances. This hostile climate created a fear of being targeted, avoidance of social media, and even relief that attacks weren't worse—as Harry said above—as they would have been had the perpetrators realised “we are also trans.”

## 2. Participants have experienced violence and the fear of violence

*Our participants include survivors of violence. Various forms and agents of violence and the fear of violence were mentioned frequently by participants.*

**Violence was an everyday feature of some participants' lives.** Cassandra, a trans woman with Palestinian-Syrian roots spoke of transphobic and, more generally, gendered violence as omnipresent: “And from my parents, the violence starts at home, also at school [...] in general we live in a violent society [...] we cannot avoid it, because violence is all around us. For me, just not being able to have your identities recognised is violence”. Deniz, a Kurdish trans woman and LGBTQI+ activist who received asylum in Greece due to ‘anti-gender’ politics in Türkiye, continues to experience transphobic attacks in public spaces, particularly when she leaves the “zones” in which she feels safe, such as her neighbourhood, where she lives and works:

[T]here have been murders recently here [in Greece], so yes, I've been granted asylum and I'm staying here, but the attack and the fear that I have to go through is still the same in terms of my personal safety. [...] For example when I was walking [in Athens] people in the cars were honking, coming closer to me, assaulting me [...] I had an altercation in the park as well, a couple of people held me from the arms, both sides, and tried to hassle [...] it's kind of the same, my experiences here and in Turkey [...] these things are still happening here and in Turkey. [...] At that park I usually like to spend time in, get a couple of beers after work, but I think after this incident a kind of trauma has formed, I don't go there any more without any friends.

Participants discussed how **witnessing or hearing about violent attacks generates fear**. GRCFG2.2: “Influenced by the event that happened in Thessaloniki—<sup>21</sup>I have a strong fear in my everyday life. To go out, to go for a walk, to come here, I will scan the faces of the people around me.” Fear of police violence limiting participation in political demonstrations was also expressed.

S.K.: I remember being scared to go to a demonstration, being very discouraged by police violence and the fact that it was during the lockdowns that repressive reactions by the police against women and femininities began to become more pronounced [...] there were also arrests of feminist associations.

One clear effect of violence that emerges through our research is that **people who fear being targeted will often change their behaviour** in order to avoid it.

Marachi: [You may] not be the person who has met physical violence, but you may have seen, say, how many of your trans brothers and sisters, how many of your non-binary mates, how many lesbians or how many gays have suffered violence [...] You may have internalised a form of policing, “oh, I should wear this and not the other in case someone says something”, or “I should be careful in the street not to hold hands with my girlfriend, e.g.” All this micropolicing that we do to protect ourselves, it is essentially a form of violence we have internalised and we deprive ourselves of our own freedom.

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<sup>21</sup> The participant is likely referring to the transphobic assault in Thessaloniki (March 9, 2024), days before the interview took place, described in the Introduction, during which as many as 300 young men chased and physically assaulted two non-binary young people.

Another participant drew the link between the organised attack they experienced and avoiding demonstrations. GRCINT06: "After experiencing an organised attack: It took me a year to join a demonstration after that, so policing did work to be honest, I mean discipline worked, fortunately with an expiration date." Fear was powerful but not all encompassing.

Violence is not totalising: as one survivor, GRINT06, put it, affirming queer life:

Thank goodness that I can be here talking with you, [I've experienced] many things, very threatening: I mean, I have been pursued by a man carrying a gun, a gun in his hand, I think the trick is to run fast and to know where to hide. [...] It sounds like it has often been abusive, and it was—because there had been many threats [...] but, at the same time, not enough to put a stop to the desire for life and the desire, you know, to devour all this amazing spectrum of experience, all the chaos of pleasure brought by queer life.

For this participant, as for many others in our research, the ubiquity and intensity of **violence does not extinguish joy and desire for queer life.**

### **3. Discrimination against trans people is institutionalised and structural in Greece**

*Trans participants of all genders, including non-binary people, experience structural and institutional discrimination in Greece. This was not a recent phenomenon associated with extremists.*

Participants did not tend to use the term 'anti-gender' to identify phenomena, including recent, organised attacks by far-right groups and elected representatives. Instead, for most of the participants, these 'anti-gender' mobilisations have deep roots in institutionalised and structural inequality, which manifests in education, healthcare, employment, and public services.

Participants who are transgender, in particular, noted the limitations of understanding 'anti-gender' as a recent phenomenon owing to political extremists. As Vanesa pointed out, "[t]he fact you need 12 to 15 thousand euros to have [gender affirmative] surgery is not a work of the far-right [...] it's a situation consolidated in Greece." **Trans participants reported discrimination is pervasive in schools, universities, health care, public services, workplaces, and law.**

Laws passed concerning Legal Gender Recognition (LGR; L. 4491/2017) and, more recently (2024), anti-discrimination protections for trans people in education, health, and housing are seen as positive developments. Yet, LGR is seen to contain elements of 'anti-gender' ideologies as they intersect with anti-migration ideologies. For instance, **LGR is not available to non-binary people and a clear procedure is not accessible to trans refugees or migrants**, even when they have been granted asylum on the basis of persecution for being trans. Even though LGR eliminated compulsory sterilisation and loss of parental rights as preconditions or consequences of legal recognition, trans reproduction and kinship is discouraged: "As a non-binary person, I don't have much access to adoption. I mean, if I want [...] to apply to adopt a child, I'll need to hide my non-binary identity," said Marachi. Vanesa, a trans mother, had to wage a legal battle to maintain custody of her own child, when, after her transition, her ex-wife told her "to forget about the child." A court case ensued, which Vanesa "lost at first instance because I faced a racist judge, who issued an extremely racist verdict; I won the appeal."

The trans parent's name is not changed on the child's birth certificate (L. 4491/2017, art. 5), which means that they are effectively outed as trans in a range of situations, which compromises their right to privacy (guaranteed in the LGR law, L. 4491/2017, art. 6). Being outed as a trans parent exposes them to further transphobic discrimination and, potentially, violence. Vanesa remarked:

Why should my child have a father's name, the name of a person who does not exist? Why should I [...] have to [...] show the court decision to any random clerk to prove that the person mentioned under "father's name" and me, the person I am today, is the same person?

Harry described how he faced transphobia when accessing public services and health care: when he "went to have the anti-COVID vaccine, it was issued on my dead name," which conflicted with his ID. When he was called to present himself to the conscription service:<sup>22</sup> "[r]eally, these people did not know, I had to explain [...] there was a guy there who [...] said, 'you mean you have [...]' and he did like [gestures pointing at his genitals]."

A clear procedure for LGR is not available to trans people who are not Greek citizens, who fall through the cracks due to **intersecting bureaucratic oppressions of legal status and gender status**. Cassandra explained the difficulties she faces in renewing her expired Palestinian passport at the Embassy in Athens, a process that does not acknowledge her gender identity as a trans woman and would require her "to appear with my deadname, of course, but not only that: with male presentation [...] they're asking me to play a part that for me is so traumatic to re-enter." Even in cases where asylum is granted on the basis of transphobic persecution, there is no clear pathway to LGR for trans refugees.

Trans people and gender nonconforming people are marginalised in the labour market, leading many, particularly women, to pursue work in grey and partly criminalised economies. Vanesa: "[t]rans women, we face more exclusion than trans men in employment, because there's the stereotype that if you are a trans woman you have to be a sex worker." Marachi, a non-binary teacher, shared that "I couldn't come out [as non-binary or lesbian] in any job I had. Certainly not when I was working in schools, especially in Crete, I could not imagine that I could come out." Non-binary participants shared experiences of employers using their dead names, and pointed out the "difficulty of even just writing your pronouns on your CV," as Victoria Sebastian stated.

#### 4. Legislative change does not entail or reflect social change

*The participants emphasised that the mere existence of formal rights does not guarantee these are realised in their lives, including through the discriminatory structures that were found to be oppressive.*

Some recent legislative changes that participants said have positively affected the queer community include marriage (L. 5089/2024) and civil unions (L. 4356/2015) being extended to include same-gender couples; and, as discussed, Legal Gender Recognition (LGR) processes for trans people to align their documents with their gender (L. 4491/2017). However, the consensus that **legislative change is insufficient to bring about substantive equality**, is reflected in this year's (2024) Athens Pride theme: "A law is not enough" [«Ένας νόμος δεν αρκεί»]. Moreover, recent legislative acts that seem, on the face of it, to promote equality—such as extending the right to marry to same-gender couples—are viewed, in the context of the governing party's politics, with scepticism and suspicion as "pink-washing" and as reluctantly meeting Greece's obligations as an EU member state. Referring to LGR, Vanessa said:

A law is legislated [...] many times this is done in spite of the will of the ruling party, it is done simply because you're in Europe and they have to do so [...] There's a long way to go until this law is applied, an even longer way until it is properly applied, and until it's optimised. I mean good, we have legal recognition of our gender identity, we have our ID, but do we have our body? No.

Speaking about extending marriage to same-gender couples, GRCINT07 reflected:

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<sup>22</sup> Military service is compulsory for adult (cis) male Greek citizens.

I think people breathed a sigh of relief [with the new legislation], and it was very important. [...] On the other hand, the way in which these things were done, politically, was obscene [...] it effectively deprived gay men of obtaining a right to parenthood, and in essence did not protect the parenthood of transgender people either. [...] I was also very disturbed by the way in which this whole thing was discussed [...] It kind of pink-washed the government [...] it did what it had to do in order to exist in the European Union anyway.

Progressive legislation is viewed by participants as a consequence not of widespread social transformation or of political will; but, rather more cynically, as the result of legal decisions at the level of the European Court of Human Rights<sup>23</sup> and the government's desire to avoid fines and penalties imposed by the European Union for allowing ongoing legal discrimination.

Further, **regressive legislation is passed alongside progressive legislation**. Participants pointed to what came to be known as the 'Mandatory Shared Custody law' (L.4800/2021), a law passed by the New Democracy government **after lobbying from 'men's rights' groups, and despite protest by feminist groups**. As was discussed in one of the focus groups in our research, the misleading notion of 'parental alienation' was reproduced uncritically in the parliamentary and media debate surrounding the law on Mandatory Shared Custody, confirming the 'anti-gender' narratives of 'men's rights' activists, who claimed that sole custody awarded to mothers deprived fathers of time with their children, deprived children of time with their fathers, and resulted in 'parental alienation'. This legislative development came under scrutiny by feminist legal experts in Greece, particularly because it often forces children and ex-spouses who have experienced domestic violence to maintain contact with the perpetrator.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, **positive legislative changes were noted by participants as including 'anti-gender' elements**: for instance, in the recent reform of marriage, **lesbian, gay, and trans parents still face legal discrimination concerning their reproductive and parental rights**.<sup>25</sup>

Harry: I feel that some things are progressing, say, the bill on civil partnership passed, the legal recognition of gender identity passed, [...] even though these laws were flawed and needed improving, it was something positive. But at the same time I feel as if not many things have changed [...] I don't see people's attitudes have changed much, I mean now you're hearing the

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<sup>23</sup> See, for instance *Vallianatos and Others v. Greece* [GC]. (2013). European Court of Human Rights, Appl. No. 29381/09 and 32684/09. Available at: <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre?i=002-9224> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

<sup>24</sup> According to the analysis of the Committee on Family Law and Consensual Joint Custody, a group of feminist legal experts, in their report to the GREVIO Committee, "[t]he judicial use of the concept of 'parental alienation' institutionally creates a new culture of degradation of women, misogyny and discrimination against women in the sensitive area of justice. In addition, it undermines the views of child victims of domestic violence who fear contact with perpetrators of domestic abuse, despite the obvious risks to both adult and child victims. Studies are already finding that allegations of so-called parental alienation are being used to deny allegations of domestic and sexual abuse, and that in many cases involving evidence or findings of domestic abuse, this evidence 'disappeared' when judges focused on this concept," Committee on Family Law and Consensual Joint Custody. (2023). *Report of the Commission on Family Law & Consensual Joint Custody, on the occasion of the 1st evaluation of the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Greece, conducted by a delegation of the GREVIO Committee*. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/pdf-english-final-shadow-report-13022023/1680aa2e44> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

<sup>25</sup> For instance, the non-biological parent in a same-gender marriage does not enjoy the same rights as a man in a heterosexual marriage who is 'presumed to be the father' of children who are born during the marriage ('presumption of paternity,' τεκμήριο πατρότητας). Instead, the 'non-biological' parent in a same-gender marriage would have to legally adopt their child (who is only legally recognised to the 'biological'/birthing parent) in order to be legally recognised as the child's parent. Amnesty International. (2024). 'Greece: Bill on Marriage Equality is Emblematic Progress But Further Changes Are Needed to Ensure Real Equality for LGBTIQ+ People.' Available at: [https://www.amnesty.gr/news/press/article/28010/ellada-ns-gia-tin-isotita-ston-gamo-einai-embλημα-tiko-prochorima-alla](https://www.amnesty.gr/news/press/article/28010/ellada-ns-gia-tin-isotita-ston-gamo-einai-embλημα-tiko-prochorima-alla-apaitountai-pekaitero-alla-ges-gia-na-diasphalistei-pragmatiki-isotita-gia-ta-LOATKI+-atoma) (Accessed: 5 September 2024). [In Greek: «Ελλάδα: Ν/Σ για την ισότητα στον γάμο είναι εμβληματικό προχώρημα αλλά απαιτούνται περαιτέρω αλλαγές για να διασφαλιστεί πραγματική ισότητα για τα ΛΟΑΤΚΙ+ άτομα»]

same hate speech you were hearing back then [...] A part of the society wants to progress, but other parts want to return to the past if possible.

GRCINT06: The situation has indeed improved [...] numerous people [...] are openly queer, especially youth, at least in the cities [...] it is much easier to find information, it is much easier to find people like you, it is much easier to flirt, you have options, and rights [...] are progressing [...] And then a few years ago they killed Zackie at Omonoia, and a few years ago I went viral [laughter] for the wrong reasons, so I think that, still in Greece, it is not that easy; there is this everyday experience which reminds us that the letter of the law alone does not guarantee anything [...] It takes only a moment to find yourself turning from the subject of rights to the object of violence.

Whilst participants agreed that legislative change was important, it neither straightforwardly translates into, or indicates social transformation has occurred; nor is there any guarantee of its permanence or non-reversibility.

## **5. When asked to define ‘anti-gender,’ participants identified the far-right, the alt-right, the current government, and the Greek Orthodox Church**

*Several participants emphasised the interaction between structural discrimination and dimensions of ‘anti-gender’ politics that are institutionalised and represented by powerful social actors.*

In participants’ experience, ‘anti-gender’ “exists in the main societal structures, which may be mass media, the church, education, family, all these things somehow create it and preserve it” (GRCINT05). Participants critiqued a view of ‘anti-gender’, which assumes that it is a reactionary backlash against achieved gender equality and sexual and reproductive freedoms. They pointed out that, in a context where there hasn’t been a massive improvement in formal rights and equalities—let alone in everyday life—a clear distinction between what is structural oppression and what is ‘anti-gender’ could not be drawn. This is precisely because **state institutions in Greece have not reformed themselves to exceptionalise as ‘far-right’ the ‘anti-gender’ policies and politics they reproduce.**

As Vasilis explained, even in the absence of substantive gender and sexual rights and freedoms having been realised for all women and LGBTQI+ persons in Greece, there is nevertheless an ‘anti-gender’ discourse of feminism having “gone too far”: without the progress, a “backlash” has ensued anyway.

Vasilis: Greece is in the worst place because the [notion of a] backlash presupposes that certain serious steps [forward] have been taken. Here, the backlash is happening without these steps having taken place [laughter], without having completed these processes we are going backward.

Alexandra spoke of ‘anti-gender’ as a deceptively new phenomenon, as a way of “[r]e-branding of things we have been fighting for years [...] It is the monster we have been fighting until now, just more organised, more coordinated and with better PR [public relations].” Marachi stated that **‘anti-gender’ mobilisations are an attempt to distract people from a global crisis of capitalism** that has been unfolding since 2008: “the alt-right movement and the reactionary part of power has, essentially, been instrumentalising our bodies in order to create intensifying moral panic and to disorient people from the real problem, which is a crisis of capitalism.” Alexandra: “It’s easier to acknowledge that because you’re not X identity you don’t have a job, than to acknowledge [...] that we’re currently living in a broken system with huge unemployment. All of these messages use simple language, they tap into populism.”

Comparing 'anti-gender' to anti-immigration politics in Greece, Pati argued that "'anti-gender' is the lack of gender policies, not just the existence of policies." She critiqued a common narrative that, despite the longstanding presence of immigrant communities, Greece lacks [migration] policies:

It's not a lack of policies, it's policies that are against immigration. Today, when a femicide takes place outside the police station,<sup>26</sup> whilst for years now we have talked about the issue and have articulated specific proposals of what should be done. It's not a lack of politics, it's anti-gender politics. By choosing not to act, you are doing politics.

**The Greek Orthodox Church** was also identified by participants as a source of "a lot of pushback", organisers of 'anti-gender' campaigns or attacks, with a lot of influence over ordinary people in its constituency (Harry). Demetra referred to 'anti-gender' as "totalitarianism [...] with a more democratic guise, for example, in 2017 in Greece, when intersex was excluded, made invisible."<sup>27</sup> **Wealthy, powerful cis straight men** were identified as driving 'anti-gender' politics.

SK: Where I felt that I was being strangled: then, with the bill for so-called mandatory shared custody.<sup>28</sup> [...] All this was done in the name of the "child's interest" but basically it's in the interest of the cis straight privileged family man, it's anti-gender politics all the way! And it is no coincidence that from the Hellenic League for Human Rights to GREVIO<sup>29</sup> and other monitors from abroad [...] it has been recorded as a stain [on its human rights record].

The protection and accrual of cis straight men's privilege and entitlement is seen as a major function of 'anti-gender' politics. Yet, as we will see in what follows, 'anti-gender' politics are also seen by participants to be reproduced by certain feminist discourses.

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<sup>26</sup> The participant is likely referring to the murder of Kyriaki Griva by her abusive ex-partner, who had been stalking her. He murdered her on 1 April 2024 outside a police station in northern Athens, from which police officers had turned her away, refusing to assist her in any way. When Kyriaki Griva requested a police escort back home that night, she was reportedly told that "patrol cars are not a taxi service." Fallon, K. (2024). A Greek woman feared her ex-partner. He killed her outside a police station. Greece reckons with rising femicides as 28-year-old Kyriaki Griva becomes the fifth victim this year. *Al Jazeera*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/5/10/how-often-will-this-keep-happening-greece-reckons-with-rising-femicides> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

<sup>27</sup> The participant is likely referring to Law 4491/2017 on Legal Recognition of Gender Identity, of which Article 2 on sex characteristics was proposed in the Draft Law, which also included Article 7, banning the performance of surgeries on intersex minors. However, "Article 7 *disappeared* when the Draft Law was delivered to the Ministry of Justice by the Legislative Committee and it never reached the Parliament for vote." Five years later, the Greek Parliament passed L. 4958/2022, "which prohibit[s] IGM procedures and other medical treatments, fulfilling a core demand of the Greek and global intersex community for the protection of the bodily integrity and self-determination of intersex children" (Art. 17–20, *ibid.*). Pikramenou, N. (2022). 'Prohibition of Intersex Genital Mutilation (IGM) Procedures on Intersex Children.' Intersex Greece. Available at: <https://bitly.cx/hPoA> (Accessed: 5 September 2024), emphasis added.

<sup>28</sup> What came to be known as the 'Mandatory Shared Custody law', L.4800/2021, was passed by the New Democracy government after lobbying and pressure tactics from men's rights groups, and despite protest by feminist groups. See the previous finding and note 106 for details.

<sup>29</sup> GREVIO is the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, who monitor the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, widely known as the 'Istanbul Convention'. See GREVIO. (2023). Baseline Report: Greece. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-s-baseline-evaluation-report-on-legislative-and-other-measures-/1680ad469d> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

## 6. Not All Feminists: 'anti-gender' actors do not attack all feminisms; indeed, certain feminisms (re)produce 'anti-gender' repertoires

*Participants said 'anti-gender' politics are also present in trans-exclusionary feminisms and in "anti-wokeism" on the left.*

Several participants mentioned how 'Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism' (TERF) is a definitive, if often hidden part of 'anti-gender' politics. Scarlet connected 'anti-gender' with the alt-right: "[t]he most dangerous form it takes, for me, is that which appropriates feminist elements or elements from identity politics." She also identified TERFs as doing this: "TERFS have [...] adopted 'gender sceptical',<sup>30</sup> which, I think, is along this logic of 'anti-gender'."

Participants noted that not all feminisms are targeted by 'anti-gender' actors. Certain feminisms—such as **those that define 'women' in biologically essentialist, lesbian- and trans-exclusionary, hetero- and white-normative terms**—actually promote 'anti-gender' views. Eleni elaborated:

[...]the TERF issue is very crucial. [...]We're seeing with great anxiety also in the Greek context that we have signed statements, which are not only outraging but also, sometimes, painful—at least for me—that defend the category "women, with all their biological and social characteristics." [...] It's clear that they're knocking [...] feminisms that have critiqued the category 'women' and its identification with the white, cis, middle-class woman. So, I think that these feminisms are at the heart of this war and they are feminisms in which the concept of gender has always been a contested field, it has always been an open field. And that complicates things. [...] We do gender studies not because we like or love the concept of 'gender'; but, precisely because it is a way of deconstructing gender. And I think it's no coincidence that TERFS also self-identify as "gender-sceptical feminists",<sup>31</sup> right? That is, [as] feminists who don't want gender [...]

Another participant referred to how, in her experience, **racism and xenophobia** within white feminism undermine the agency of racialised women and queer people in their resistance of 'anti-gender' and patriarchal oppression on their own terms:

GRCINT09: I have two monsters to face. There is white feminism, and there is patriarchy in the place of my origin. [...] If I want to make my critique of patriarchal oppression in the place of my origin, then white feminism will insert itself to [...] use my oppression as a pretext to express its racist beliefs against us [...] I'm like, "shut up for a sec, if you want to talk about us, we will do it"; because patriarchy has been used quite a lot, as has the oppression of women and queer people face in Arab countries [...] it is a racist rant used by Europe, by white feminism.

Finally, participants identified **'anti-gender' ideologies as present on the broader left**. A common way of dismissing feminist and antiracist struggles on the left is to reduce them pejoratively to 'rightsism' (δικαιωματισμός). The term seems to be a loan from the French neologism *droit-de-l'hommisme*; an English-language equivalent does not exist, to our knowledge. This is a class-reductionist position that assigns all oppressions that are gendered and racialised to the category of 'human rights'. As an antiracist feminist active in leftist politics, Pati encountered class-reductionist and anti-intersectional arguments on the left, which, she said, traffic in alt-right logics:

I'm very interested in what the political positions say of what we know as 'right' and as 'left'. The right has always had this conservatism, but the left has fallen into a trap of [human] rights

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<sup>30</sup> Or, more commonly, 'gender critical'.

<sup>31</sup> Or, more commonly, 'gender critical'.

versus classism, not seeing how these are part of the same oppressions. [...] From the right, there is anti-woke propaganda because it's in the ideology of the right [...] The anti-woke mania on the left is problematic. It had started with 'political correctness': there was an attack from all sides and derision and, like, "political correctness is not a solution but is oppressive." Even the left adopts alt-right evidence for arguments and we are in the position where we [have to] explain over and over again in simple terms.

Rather than locating 'anti-gender' firmly and exclusively on the far-right, participants spoke of it as a slippery discourse that sutures together political positions, which view themselves as being on opposite sides of the political spectrum.

## **7. Participants spoke about feeling isolated, trapped, suffocated, exhausted, burnt out because non-intersectional movements fail to address 'anti-gender' in its full scope**

*Participants face "intersectional disempowerment" ("the need to split one's political energies between two [or more] . . . opposing groups" to which one belongs, an experience specific to women of colour and other multiply oppressed groups<sup>32</sup>) in a situation of proliferating "sites of struggle" which is reinforced by a failure of social movements to address the various aspects of 'anti-gender' politics.*

Pati, who identifies as a migrant woman, shared how "constantly receiving blows" and the separations between movements, which pull multiply marginalised people in diverging directions lead to exhaustion:

The sites of struggle are so many, and taking care of ourselves and of each other is so necessary because a [feeling of] exhaustion prevails [...]. Specifically, I think that in recent years in Greece, we have several collectives that articulate the issues, however, the blows we receive are so constant, so targeted, that I think they follow a shock doctrine<sup>33</sup> against which you will not be able to stand up because it's so common on all fronts. [...] [E]very day, another demo. Especially when you are a woman who is an immigrant who also cares about the environment and you want to approach them intersectionally, what do you address first? So it's a kind of biopolitics. [...] I feel that I am personally at a point of exhaustion.

Alexandra emphasised that this **"burnout"** is, in part, a function of **non-intersectional movements that do not coalesce** with one another:

There were times when I worked endless hours, slept in the [organisation's] office and felt like I was digging a hole in the water.<sup>34</sup> The movements do not help each other and they don't understand that the goal is common and no human being is one identity, we are many. We haven't done anything since the other side is more united because for them we are one, one enemy. [...] [I]t is no coincidence that the burnout rates in activist spaces are huge; I, for one, in the last 5 years have gone through three [burnouts] for sure—or one in a row, I don't know if they should be separated [laughter].

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<sup>32</sup> Crenshaw, K. W. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), pp.1241–1299. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1229039> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

<sup>33</sup> The participant is likely referring to Naomi Klein's book of that title, which became popular in Greece during the financial crisis (2008–). Klein analyses how neoliberal politics constituting what she calls "disaster capitalism" have been so successful in entrenching themselves all over the world. She argues that this is because they exploit moments of crisis, natural and socially-manufactured disasters, and war to push through a "shock therapy" (e.g. austerity, structural adjustment, debt, and authoritarian governance) at times when the people are too distracted or overwhelmed with surviving to protest or to effectively resist. Klein, N. (2007). *The Shock Doctrine: The rise of disaster capitalism*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.

<sup>34</sup> An idiomatic expression in Greek that means labouring in vain and failing to bring about any result.



Participants spoke of how needing to engage in **small, everyday resistances can lead to “mental fatigue”** as Victoria Sebastian put it:

There's the mental fatigue [...] of sitting down to work over and over again, and that this is repeated every day maybe, that you will be stigmatised by these people, they will comment on you, so you don't have the stamina to stand up for yourself [...] When I see some malicious comments [on social media] from people like that, while I would like to step in and speak my mind, a lot of times I don't, so maybe this is kind of like a defence.

Resistance was also seen to be undermined within leftist, feminist, and LGBTQI+ spaces when **interpersonal violence occurs within collectives**, as two participants explained:

GRCINT07: A very important incident of gender-based violence took place in the political group I was in, and then we, the women, decided we would handle it, there were not even any queer people [...] and this resulted in a very strong reaction from the group's assembly: there was a cover-up of the abuse, and this was the end of my trajectory in the Left.

Marachi: I have been a victim of cancelling. [...] I really had nowhere to turn to, to ask for help, I didn't."

The data shows that **the feeling of having nowhere to turn** differentially impacts people who are excluded from straight social spaces, communities, and families. Moreover, it indicates that intersectional disempowerment affects multiply oppressed groups differentially.

## **8. Migration is seen as a (personal) solution to mitigate the negative effects of ‘anti-gender’ politics, both by people emigrating from Greece and by people migrating to Greece**

*For participants who identify as queer, lesbian, trans, and/or non-binary, emigration has figured as a solution to negotiating institutionalised homophobia and transphobia. It intersects with their experiences of unemployment due to the crisis, and diminished life chances due to institutional discrimination.*

Greece is a society marked by multidirectional migrations.<sup>35</sup> In this data, we found that **LGBTQI+ participants emigrated from Greece to other countries** in order to be able to experience and express gender and sexual identities and relationships, which were not deemed possible if they had stayed in the country. Harry, a trans man born and raised in Greece, shared what led him to emigrate to England:

Harry: I started coming out around 2009–2010, this took a while, and back then I wanted to transition but I couldn't, on the one hand I couldn't find any information nor support [...] so the only way out was migrating abroad, without having any plan [...] so I left and I moved to England, where I stayed for eight years and I transitioned there. [...] [I migrated] also because of the harsh financial circumstances, I couldn't find work as a freelancer anymore.

Economic necessity and the search for employment outside of Greece can also enable potential lives to be explored and lived. Marachi, a non-binary person, spoke of their experiences of migrating to Berlin:

Marachi: [The reason I migrated] was mostly the economic situation in Greece and the fact that I lost my job as a primary education teacher after the crisis. [...] What happened was magic because [...] moving to Berlin released the potential of what you can be and how you can do it,

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<sup>35</sup> According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), in 2022, “net migration is estimated at 16,355 persons corresponding to the difference between 96,662 immigrants and 80,307 emigrants” (p. 1), ELSTAT. (2023). ‘Estimated Population and Migration Flows.’ Available at: <https://www.statistics.gr/documents/20181/de3e26f6-9b77-d2e5-2ca3-e13bcafe482a> (Accessed: 26 September 2024).

so [...] for the first time in my life I let myself free to be what I am [...] My gender expression, since I left for Berlin, has changed very much, just think that I was 30 years old and I had never cut my hair short, which I wanted to do since I was a child.

In our data it was clear that, at the same time as people emigrate from Greece to other countries to realise their gender and sexual self-determination, people seek asylum in Greece on the basis of persecution for Sexual Orientation Gender Identity and Expression and Sexual Characteristics (SOGIESC). They are fleeing extreme homophobic, transphobic, and lesbophobic violence in their countries of origin. Yet, **rather than reach safety, participants who are SOGIESC asylum seekers found that Greece and the EU expose them to continued endangerment as LGBTQI+ people** in situations of forced encampment, whilst awaiting asylum decisions. Intrusive questions about sexual practices that violate privacy, and reliance on stereotypes consistent with 'anti-gender' views are common in asylum interviews. GRCFG3.4: "[I]n the interview, they ask you a lot of questions that sometimes you would not be comfortable to answer them, about your sexuality—deeply—about your partner, some things you don't want to share with anybody."

Participants told us how waiting several months for the decision of their asylum claim negatively affected them:

GRCFG3.4: Sometimes, we are tired of waiting. [...]for me, it's been three months, still no decision. [...]it's so stressful waiting for the decision, because you may think you waste your time and they'll reject you, or they'll give you a positive decision. All this, it's always on my mind—I'm always thinking about it [...] I don't know what is my fate [...]My friends, here, we are going through the same thing [...] we have similar stories [...]ometimes I'm thinking that the people in the asylum office don't consider gay people or lesbian people that much—we are left out somehow.

Marceline: [B]ecause of what I experienced in my country, I did not explain my real story [to the authorities]. I met a friend [...] I told him everything, I spoke with him, he told me "no, you are in Europe, you have to say everything." Because I don't know the Greek system, I didn't know if it's the same thing as in Haiti, that's why I couldn't tell my real story [...] I don't know what is going through the minds of the Greeks, because they change their minds every day [...] I'm always afraid. One day, the Greeks are going to deport everyone. That's what I'm afraid of. Because I don't have all the papers yet. [...] I have been waiting 12 months to do the [asylum] interview.

Some participants with Greek citizenship shared their "red lines," which, for them, would trigger emigration from a country they have been seeing in a downward spiral for years. S.K. has been thinking of emigrating since 2019, with the election of the New Democracy government, currently in its second term:

with the renaming of the General Secretariat for Equality<sup>36</sup>—that's when I wanted to leave, because [...] I began to see women in the Ministry or in various positions who started promoting in many ways even more the "Greek family" and having children and all this totally heteronormative stuff. From the moment it was called "demographic policy," I started to shudder inside. If the right to abortion is indeed banned I will indeed leave without a plan; each person has their own red lines. And this is a red line [for me].

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<sup>36</sup> It is not uncommon in Greek politics (or elsewhere) for Ministries and General Secretariats to be renamed after an election to reflect the new governing party's ideology, as happened with the General Secretariat for Gender Equality in 2019, when it was renamed by New Democracy the "General Secretariat for Family Policy and Gender Equality" and relocated from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. In 2023, after New Democracy's re-election to a second consecutive term, it formed a new Ministry for Social Cohesion and Family, including a "General Secretariat for Equality and Human Rights" (with no reference to "gender").

If for S.K. **the looming threat of banning abortion** would be that red line, for Alexandra it would be the **reproductive oppression** and, more generally the “uncertainty” facing LGBTQI+ people in Greece:

Whether ['anti-gender' politics] comes from above or from below, it creates a lot of insecurity for me about the future. Where will I go to live? What if I want to have my own child? With my friends, we've started discussing whether it will happen here and in what context will it happen? Should we go to another country? Which country would this be? [...] It creates a huge uncertainty regarding what choices you have. It worries me: just because we have two or three laws here does not mean that we will still have them tomorrow. And we have examples [of that] and that scares me. It pressures and angers me that we have to be activists permanently, whether we like it or not. [...] And there is a cost to choosing not to say anything. This part makes me very angry.

What emerges from the data is that migration is figured as a way to negotiate stifling, oppressive, and dehumanising conditions that particularly target LGBTQI+ people and cisgender, heterosexual women. Moreover, as we saw earlier in this report, some participants had to leave the country because of 'anti-gender' attacks.

## **9. Visibility—particularly queer/trans visibility—was discussed in ambivalent terms by participants**

*The majority of participants view visibility as a form of resistance, and sometimes equate visibility with resistance. But visibility is also seen as taking a risk that can endanger one's safety particularly in public space, in the family, or in camps.*

Visibility is seen as something utopian, yet to come, to arrive at. Public discourses are seen to give negative, objectifying, or dehumanising 'visibility' to LGBTQI+ people (that is, debates about our rights or existence) and are credited with increased hostility. For instance, Harry said that TERF rhetorics had “definitely” increased with greater trans visibility, “because more people learned that people like me exist.”

Several participants mentioned how **parliamentary debates have traded on distorted representations of LGBTQI+ people**. The parliamentary and media discourses surrounding proposed legislation that, if passed, would rectify structural and institutional discrimination, were experienced as **objectifying and dehumanising** of LGBTQI+ people. During the debate surrounding marriage equality, Harry noted that parliamentarians made “many invalid claims, words which should not even be mentioned in the parliament.” This dehumanising visibility means that participants seek to avoid violence and hate speech, including by limiting or avoiding media coverage of the issue entirely:

GRCINT05: To be completely honest I avoid them and I don't stay informed, because I wouldn't feel well then, so [laughter] [...] it scares me to know how much hatred there's in the world [...] All this debate about marriage, I deliberately didn't follow at all, because I knew that if I followed it I would simply listen to quite violent things every day.

Being 'visible' as an LGBTQI+ person was seen as especially dangerous by participants who are made to live in the Closed and Controlled Access Centres (CCAC) whilst applying for asylum. As Marceline, a trans woman, explained,

There's a lot of discrimination if someone knows you're gay. In the camp, too, you pretend. You hide your identity. Also, in M-, which is a small town, it's very hidden, you can't be open. It's always [...] For me, it's not the same as when I was in Haiti; it's more open here. [...] There is no protection for people who are gay in the camp.

One lesbian participant shared that they use a strategy in the CCAC that they first employed in their country of origin, namely, “staying indoors” (or, remaining 'closeted') to avoid discrimination or violence:

GRCFG3.4: I'm using that strategy over here, until I know Greece is safe for me, maybe till I spend like, two years, three years, till I understand Greece, to know whether this place is not like where I'm coming from. I don't want to have the same breakdown I was having before. [...] if you are, say, gay or a lesbian and you are comfortable to come out, you should expect discrimination because not everyone will accept you, but if you want to stay indoors, you will stay indoors and this will help you, if you are not strong to come out, [to] let the whole world know that you are this person.

GRCFG2.3, a lesbian mother with Greek citizenship living in a city in Crete, uses the opposite strategy in her everyday life. She explained how **being visible as a family with two lesbian parents empowers her in facing heteronormativity and homophobia**:

"We exist as well, this formulation of a family." Choosing not to hide empowers you, if you stand strong in front of people, it leaves no room to talk about you. It's like standing in front of the other person with your body present and saying "I'm here." So, this stance is definitely resistance.

Related to the importance participants gave to visibility, several also expressed their wish that the current research will contribute to the empowering visibility of marginalised and minoritised groups who are targeted by, and resist 'anti-gender' politics.

## **10. Participants emphasised the importance of resistances, community, solidarity, and/or creating a "bubble" or "chosen family", particularly when facing 'anti-gender' attacks or hostile institutional contexts**

*In a hostile climate, and when facing attacks, the participants often referred to spaces of resistance, community, and relationships as what gave them strength to resist and to persist.*

Participants spoke about structural discrimination, oppression, violence, and 'anti-gender' attacks through **the lens of resistance**. Eleni emphasised the importance of breaking isolation and resisting collectively:

I believe that in these circumstances—which are so suffocating—we need to see that the path is from isolation to collectivity. Many of us experience suffocating isolation inside institutions, outside institutions [...] and perhaps the answer to this is to rediscover the joys of killjoy feminism, but together, and to think that there is no vulnerability without resistance, because otherwise it's actually unlivable.

Whilst participants shared experiences of discrimination, violence, and attacks, they **emphasised their own agency**. As Cassandra shared:

I don't like to speak all the time about the negatives [...] what I can contribute, a more transformative speech, and more empowering, this is what it would interest me, a sort of a motivational talk [...] Because if I say only what they want to hear [...] and perhaps if I did so more doors would open to me, but they would be focused on the victim, and I don't find myself there [...] I've told my story, we understand it, I've told the difficulties, we understand it, but what I have to say through this, how I experience it, creatively [...] This is my true resistance.

The stakes in resisting are personal for people who experience attacks, in contrast to those who perpetrate them. Alexandra noted:

[W]e do activism for the identities we have. But he [the attacker] expresses his hate for identities he doesn't have. There is a different weight to trying for something that has to do directly with you—so, the defeats you face and the blows you take are heavy. They are personal. It also

doesn't help with setting boundaries, because that's why we do more than we can, sometimes. For the identity I have, I want to have my rights, and this makes it difficult to set limits and the defeats are heavy.

Resisting oppression was seen in collective terms: participants expressed they were both supported by, and supported others in self-organised collectives and civil society organisations. Participants often referred to their activist groups or collectives, and emotional ties with other members as what gave them strength to continue and to resist.

Participants shared that they surround themselves with their friends, their chosen family, and people in their “bubble.” This is particularly important for **people who are rejected by their families**. GRCINT09: “I don't have a family any more, but I do have a family I created with people whom, you know, I consider family the people I've chosen to have in my life [...] I'm kind of in my own bubble with folks with whom I feel authentically myself, safe, cool.” Marceline, who had been shunned and rejected by her family, identified the friends she made through her collective as her main support: “every day I say—the people in this LGBT group are my family.”

**Participants spoke about their identities with pride**, as Binfish stated: “I'm a lesbian, and I'm proud to be a lesbian, yeah. Because after everything I've been through in my life, I still have the courage that I'm a lesbian, and I'm proud to be a lesbian.” As another participant (GRCINT05) succinctly put it: “How do I resist, um [...] by existing? [laughter]”.

## Conclusion

This report is based on what **27 people** shared with us in the case study on Greece. They described the effects of ‘anti-gender’ politics on their lives, as well as how they engage in resistance. The findings presented in this report draw from their words and **seek to amplify their voices**. We are grateful to everyone who shared their experiences for the purposes of this research.

**Virtually all of the participants had experienced verbal and/or physical attacks**, ranging from abusive comments to physical assault. Online attacks and hate messages via social media about one's identity, political views, and/or activities were virtually universal in participants' experiences. But several had also experienced organised attacks, in some cases involving political actors. Participants have experienced violence and the fear of violence. The participants include survivors of violence, or they are in community or relation with survivors of violence.

The participants emphasised that **discrimination against trans people is institutionalised and structural in Greece**. Whilst laws passed concerning Legal Gender Recognition (LGR; 2017) and, more recently anti-discrimination protections for trans people in education, health, and housing (2024) are seen as positive developments, trans participants reported discrimination is pervasive in education, universities, public services, public space, workplaces, and the family. LGR is not available to non-binary people and a clear procedure is not accessible to trans refugees, even when they have been granted asylum on the basis of persecution for being trans.

When asked to define ‘anti-gender’—a term that is not commonly used in Greek—participants identified the **far-right, the alt-right, and the current government** as sources of ‘anti-gender’ politics and discourses. Cis straight men are seen as driving, and benefiting from ‘anti-gender’ politics, accruing privilege and entitlement. The intersection of patriarchy and religion was also mentioned by participants, specifically Orthodox Christianity, Islam, and Catholicism. However, participants pointed out that **‘anti-gender’ is also reproduced on the left and within some feminisms**. Indeed, ‘anti-gender’ actors do not attack all feminisms in the same ways, as certain feminisms actually (re)produce ‘anti-gender’ repertoires: biological and cultural essentialism,

trans- and lesbian-exclusion, racism and xenophobia. Several participants mentioned how trans-exclusionary radical feminism (or TERFism) is a definitive, if often occluded part of 'anti-gender' politics.

Migration is seen as a (personal) solution to mitigate the negative effects of 'anti-gender' politics, both by people emigrating from Greece and by people migrating to Greece. Particularly for people who identify as queer, non-binary, and/or trans, emigration has figured as a solution to negotiating institutionalised homophobia and transphobia, as it intersects with unemployment and diminished life chances due to structural discrimination. **Some participants had to leave the country after experiencing an organised 'anti-gender' attack.** At the same time, people seek asylum in Greece on the basis of persecution for Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sexual Characteristics (SOGIESC). They have fled extreme homophobic, transphobic, and misogynistic violence in their countries of origin, but rather than reach safety, **migration and border politics in Greece and the EU expose them to continued endangerment as LGBTQI+ people** in situations of forced encampment, whilst awaiting asylum decisions.

Visibility—particularly queer/trans visibility—was discussed in ambivalent terms by the participants. The majority of participants view **visibility as a form of resistance**, and sometimes equate visibility with resistance. But **visibility is also seen as taking a risk that can endanger one's safety** particularly in public space, in the family, or in camps. Visibility is seen as something utopian, yet to come, to arrive at. Public discourses that are seen to give **negative 'visibility' to LGBTQI+ people** (that is, **debates about our rights or existence**) are credited with increased hostility.

**In this hostile climate, the participants emphasised the importance of resistances**, community, solidarity, and/or creating a "bubble" or "chosen family"—particularly when facing 'anti-gender' attacks or hostile institutional contexts. Yet, resistance is undermined by 'anti-gender', particularly by those forms that manifest on the left, or within supposedly 'progressive' or 'radical' social movements, including certain feminisms. Participants spoke about feeling isolated, trapped, suffocated, exhausted, burnt out and facing "intersectional disempowerment" in a situation of proliferating "sites of struggle" as a result of non-intersectional movements failing to address 'anti-gender' in its full scope.

The case study on Greece is, to our knowledge, the first systematic attempt in this context to study how people targeted by 'anti-gender' politics experience their effects and engage in resistances. As such, further research is needed to amplify a diversity of voices, which are marginalised in public discourses. For instance, research is needed that centres the experiences of people who identify as intersex and/or Roma, two groups that are likely primary targets of 'anti-gender' politics in Greece—and elsewhere. Further research is also needed to illuminate the intersection between ableist oppression and the eugenicist dimensions of 'anti-gender' politics. Since this research only focussed on the experiences of adults (18+), future research could also address how young people and children experience the effects of 'anti-gender' politics and discourses, which seems particularly relevant since 'anti-gender' rhetorics often invoke the figure of 'the child' to gain traction and mobilise popular support.

## Respondent Profiles

Although optional demographic forms were circulated to participants as part of this research, most participants (19) in the case study on Greece chose not to complete them; only 8 participants did. Thus, the below profiles are based on a combination of voluntary demographic information and self-identification during the interview/focus group.

Table 1: Respondent profiles Greece

Profile	No. of Responses	Sample Outline
<b>Age groups</b>	8	<p>Participants ranged in ages from their 20s to their 70s. Of participants who indicated their ages on the demographic form, they are as follows:</p> <p>1 - 57 years old</p> <p>1- 44 years old</p> <p>1- 34 years old</p> <p>1- 33 years old</p> <p>2 - 35-49 years old</p> <p>1 - 40 years old</p> <p>1 - 41.5 years old</p>
<b>Gender</b>	27	<p>Most participants in the research identify as cis women (13); four participants are trans women; four participants are non-binary people; two participants are trans men; one participant identifies as a cis man; two participants identified as queer or genderqueer; one participant did not identify their gender.</p>
<b>Sexual orientation / identity</b>	27	<p>Several participants are lesbians; some identify as queer, pansexual, bisexual, or straight. Other participants did not indicate their sexual orientation/identity on the demographic form or in the interview.</p>
<b>Origin</b>	27	<p>Participants trace their origins to Greece, Asia Minor, Kurdistan, Türkiye, Syria, Palestine, North Africa, Albania, Sierra Leone, Haiti, and western Europe.</p>
<b>Country of residence / legal status</b>	27	<p>Most participants are Greek citizens who live in Greece. Several participants have migration backgrounds: some emigrated from Greece, particularly during the crisis (2009-2018); others immigrated to or sought asylum in Greece and were recognised refugees, asylum seekers, or immigrants (naturalised citizens and precarious statuses).</p>
<b>Ethnic / racial identity</b>	27	<p>Participants identified as Greek, Albanian, Arab, Sierra Leonean, Haitian, Kurdish, white, Palestinian-Syrian.</p>

<b>National identity</b>	8	Of those eight participants who filled demographic forms, six identified their national identity as "Greek", whilst two wrote "none."
<b>Education level</b>	8	Of the eight participants who filled demographic forms, one was a High School graduate; one had studied at University but hadn't received their degree; two were graduates of Higher Education Institutions (University); two have Master's degrees; and two have Ph.D. degrees.
<b>Religion</b>	8	Of the eight participants who filled demographic forms, seven indicated their religion as "none" and one "agnostic."
<b>Social Class</b>	8	Of the eight participants who filled demographic forms, two indicated working class; one "lowest" class; one lower middle-class (1); one "precarious, previously lower middle-class"; one "precarious"; two left the answer blank.
<b>Dis/ability</b>	27	Three participants identified as disabled.
<b>Settlement type</b>	27	Most participants (15) live in the capital city, Athens (population 3.1 million). Some (4) live on the island of Crete, in a small city (population: 179,302). Others live on Lesbos island, specifically, they are encamped in the Closed Controlled Access Centre at Kara Tepe (4). Two live between Berlin and Athens; one lives between New York and Athens; and one lives between Athens and Portugal.
<b>Parental status</b>	27	Five participants are mothers, including single-parent mothers, trans mothers, and lesbian mothers.
<b>Occupation / Work</b>	27	Occupations of participants include: visual artist, teacher, researcher, academic, nurse, doctor, journalist, musician, actor, cook, sex worker, playwright, student; two have been candidates in elections.