

## **FLAGSHIP AGENCIES IN GREECE.**

# **CONFRONTING THE POSITION OF WOMEN AND MINORITIES IN A PERIOD OF MODERNIZATION**

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## **INTRODUCTION.**

The SOSTRIS project was designed to have two sections; the first part, Phase I, researched into the ways in which certain groups and individuals at risk of social exclusion by virtue of certain characteristics e.g. unemployment, single parenthood, minority status, negotiated and dealt with the risks they faced. The subsequent Phase II of the research work planned that each country would identify agencies of various kinds which help and support people deal with “risky” situations in innovative and helpful ways in line with the findings from the individual’s biographies. It was hoped to find innovatory projects, termed flagship agencies, acting in ways much wider than traditional public agencies e.g. employment bodies, social and community work agencies.

The difficulty of this approach for the Greek research team was that it assumed the existence of social and democratic infrastructures e.g. a well developed and systematic welfare state, and large scale publically supported non governmental organizations, that are in fact rudimentary and relatively recent. (Sirman 1998, Mouzelis 1978) The scale, history and funding of traditional public and private agencies dealing with individual’s social problems and needs, or with the phenomenon of social exclusion in various forms, is actually limited.(Yetimis 1993) Secondly setting up a variety of non-governmental organizations and pressure groups in response to community and individual needs as a public grass roots response, is also a recent phenomenon and rarely supported by governments. Thus the background for studying the Flagship projects, Phase II of the SOSTRIS project in Greece, is problematic given the very different socio-historical circumstances of the country. It also means that selecting flagship agencies is more difficult i.e. in finding ones with a long history, systematic work, long term strategies and plans. The weakness of civil society has been commented on by many social scientists; thus for example the trades unions have long been funded and controlled by the government in power (Nikolopoulos 1983, Ioannou, 1989, Svoronos 1981) and it can be argued that only since the restoration of democracy has there been a chance for the initiation and institutionalization of grass

roots democratic processes. It has been argued (Legg and Roberts 1997, p.113) that the post-dictatorship constitution of 1975 still remains paternalistic and anti-liberal, since human rights are granted and guaranteed by the state which is the protector, and are not inalienable.<sup>1</sup>

The weaknesses of civil society are apparent also in the operation and existence of any flagship agency, i.e. there is an inevitable tendency for such agencies to be highly vulnerable for several reasons. Firstly they are basically unsupported by the existing political system and government e.g. NGOs rarely receive funding on a regular basis. Secondly they rarely think strategically within a long term and planned perspective. Thirdly people in NGOs and voluntary bodies have difficulties operating in a collective and cooperative manner; they tend to reproduce Greek familial authoritarianism and as a result many organizations are dominated by the leader. Fourthly they are not able to operate from the grass roots upwards and organizations often are “high jacked” by specific and segmental interests<sup>2</sup>. As a consequence there is a significant reluctance for the public or private institutions to give to NGOs on a planned and systematic basis. Finally there is a difficulty for people who decide to support an organization to work together for the common cause since they normally calculate the personal (or familial) gain that accrues and fear competition from the others. Hence even the formation of federations or cooperation between NGOs is extremely difficult.

The two flagship projects selected for study and presented below are interesting as responses to two major problematics in Greek society that emerged in much of the work on biographies undertaken in Phase 1. These two issues firstly revolve around gender roles in a society still strongly marked by patriarchalism, and secondly around national identity and the issue of citizenship. Women and ethnic minorities represent two large groups who are vulnerable to the social changes that are occurring in Greece in what can be described as a process of modernization (Mouzelis 1978). Sections of them are at particular risk of social exclusion; some women because of their problems in the labour market related to high unemployment and worse labour market conditions, and national ethnic minorities because of cultural differences from the main society which socially excluded them.

### **Changes in Gender roles.**

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<sup>1</sup> A quotation from the Constitution illustrates this “The state shall have the right to claim of all citizens to fulfill the duty of social and national solidarity”, i.e. duties rather than rights.

<sup>2</sup> It is not uncommon for individuals to use associations as a direct way of promoting their own professional or political careers, something which is obvious to the public and makes them wary.

Traditional paternalistic Mediterranean families have provided one of the main structuring principles in Greek society and remain a dominant force in the thinking and perceptions of both men and women in Greece. The creation and maintenance of a family and common household are central values for both men and women and are enforced in the state and society. While the subservience of women to this model is often commented on, it is worth pointing to the fact that in this Mediterranean model of paternalism, though men participate as individuals in economic and political life and succeed or fail in the various arenas of public life, they are also judged ultimately within a social framework in terms of whether they are or have been a good husband and father. (Loizos, Papataxiarchis 1991) Again, the subservience of women is far more at the formal level than at the level of lived life. (Herzfeld, 1987) The traditional and formal understanding of central aspects of gender roles provides a framework of meaning and expectations for both men and women. As in other European countries increasing individualism associated with urbanism and the modern economy, provides alternative models of gender, or rather alternative roles not necessarily structured on gender principles. Family and kinship, though still important structuring principles, sources of meaning and practical support, no longer dominate individual's lives and often are unable to offer protection and support in the context of modern demands and expectations. Women in Greece who remain with traditional patriarchal structures are able to rely on economic support and protection from men; those women who do not receive male protection have always been vulnerable e.g. girls without fathers<sup>3</sup>. Older women without a husband, son or son in law willing to offer protection and economic support live in considerable poverty, taking into account that older people are the poorest section in Greek society and that women pensioners are the poorest of all (Emke-Poulopoulou 1994) while single mothers are a rare phenomenon<sup>4</sup>. Within the modern urban Greek context of changing gender and family expectations<sup>5</sup> and increasing stress on individualism and consumerism, women have sought to enter the paid labour market in order to increase family income and contribute to the household. For a growing section who have been educated, there has also been the notion of entering the labour market in order to work in

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<sup>3</sup> It should be born in mind that families were expected to provide a dowry for their daughters on marriage, which gave them considerable power since the house was usually their own. This situation varied by region and social class; since the abolition of the dowry in 1981 it is not clear what families are doing to protect their daughters economically. Additionally women also tended in most of the traditional communities to the managers of the household and even family finances.

<sup>4</sup> 2.8% of births per annum are to single women, the lowest figure in the EU by far.

<sup>5</sup> rising divorce rates

something which is interesting and provides meaning<sup>6</sup>. Economic independence has also contributed to lessening their dependence on men in the family. However only a section of women have been able to successfully find appropriate jobs and given the inability of the family to protect and support them, and their own wish for greater autonomy many find themselves trapped and vulnerable. The absence of welfare state support does not allow the independence of most young women<sup>7</sup> i.e. they cannot leave their families; does not provide any substantive support to single mothers; does not provide unemployment benefits or social security payments to the unemployed or divorced; thus any decision to stand alone as an independent autonomous woman, to leave the minimal but real protection offered by the family and kin groups is a dangerous and fraught one. Also knowing that finding employment in line with their expectations and wishes may be difficult, many women accept that marriage, family and domestic work, provide significant alternative roles offering considerable security and social status, though within the traditional social framework. The apparent submission to women's traditional roles may provide a "safer" alternative though sometimes at the cost of depression and frustration. There is thus an interplay between the patriarchalism of traditional Greek society which sees women as having their role in the family and reproduction, and women's own ambivalence. Those women who do seek greater economic and social independence cannot easily achieve this not only because of employer and patriarchal prejudice but also because of their lack of suitable labour market skills or experience, their lack of technical or vocational training or inappropriate choices of careers and their own feelings of contradiction. The lack of post school training until very recent years, the lack of recognition of skills obtained on the job, the use of female labour for temporary, seasonal and non insured work, also contributes to the inability of women to negotiate themselves into a better labour market position. . At all levels of education women find themselves excluded from the labour market as a result of employers' preference for men, their lower rates of self employment, the low or outdated skills they have and their uncertainties about their different female roles.

Yet families in Greece have invested and continue to invest considerable private resources in the education of their children of both sexes, since this is seen as conferring honour and prestige on them and the opportunity of maintaining their socially superior status or of upward social mobility<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> There is considerable ambivalence about work - since employment undertaken for someone outside the family, is not a core value in Greek culture - it is undertaken instrumentally, for economic rewards, not as conferring interests and pleasures in its own right.

<sup>7</sup> The emotional and practical support provided in most families is such that most young people don't even seek for independence before marrying.

<sup>8</sup> This is not new behaviour. Mouzelis 1978 p.55 refers to the overinflated character of the Greek educational system in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century "the development of which was out of all proportions to available indigenous resources" as a result of the large

Despite the problematic position of women in the paid labour market, families often see investment in girl's education as a way of ensuring a "good" marriage to a suitable bridegroom, a way of maintaining or improving their social position. Attitudes towards education have tended to be highly instrumental and few women have developed individualistic strategies for education and training that will provide more choices and possibilities. Where appropriate jobs are limited and the competition fierce, then "retreat" to the family sphere and marriage represents an alternative strategy that is still perceived as culturally and socially valid.. Opportunities for finding work in what are seen as socially appropriate forms of employment for those women with an education have depended on the economic and political circumstances; economic growth in the 1960s, the expansion of state and service sector employment in the 1980s, particularly important for women, provided new job opportunities at all levels and increased their rates of labour market participation. The political decision to place limitations on state employment<sup>9</sup> in order to meet certain economic targets from the mid 1990s, has led to a growing crisis for many women.

As women have entered in increasing numbers into the paid labour force in urban Greece and have felt more independent, other issues have arisen concerning their social position and rights. Issues such as family law, pension rights, violence in the family, sexual harassment, have periodically been dealt with, initially through the various women's organizations, but systematic advocacy and campaigns at the highest political level by women drawn from all parties, had never previously occurred.

The biographies of the women interviewed and their relative "paralysis" in effectively confronting their situation made us believe that it was important to find flagship agencies that acted as mediators for women in both the political, personal and economic spheres. It was hoped that the Watch for Women's Rights flagship agency, in acting to bring together the voices and abilities of women from different political parties and as representatives of the various social partners, would be able to act as a new political and policy voice for women who needed their help. In earlier SOSTRIS work in Phase I the issue of reflexivity, i.e. the ability to consider one's situation and act strategically to ameliorate it, has been noted as critical for those vulnerable to social exclusion. Watch for Women's Rights was

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financial contributions of the Greek merchant communities abroad., a phenomenon which was still evident in 1961 where the OECD reported on the high ratio of Greek graduates to total population (3.6%) compared to countries like Western Germany (2.7%) or Spain (1.4%) However at the same time in 1940 illiteracy was 27% rising during the next ten years.<sup>9</sup> There is considerable political debate as to whether the numbers of jobs in the state sector have really been cut back or have remained static; but given the increased demand particularly by women for state employment, there is an effective block on recruitment.

selected since it appeared to be an agency which had as one of its functions the promotion of both personal and social reflexivity amongst women..

### **National Identity and emerging concepts of citizenship**

The second flagship agency chosen, the Centre for the Support of (Gypsy) Children and Families, takes up another central problematic in modern Greek society, the emerging concept of citizenship as opposed to the dominant ideological discourse of national identity. When Greece signed the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 there was probably little political and institutional understanding of the implications this would have on the rights of citizens and the implementation of democratic principles and practices. It should be born in mind that Greece did not complete its national borders until 1948, that during the early 1950s it was still engaged in a civil war between the forces of the right and those of the Communist party, and that until the 1960s it was still overwhelmingly a rural and poor country dominated by the Church, army and a political elite strongly influenced by the world powers. The development of Greek national identity has been a central and contentious issue (Svoronos 1981, Keyder 1998) since the formation of the modern Greek state, a process that had involved the “hellinisation” of various linguistic and cultural minorities within its borders<sup>10</sup>. Those that remained as national minorities, usually ones based on religious or cultural group membership, were allowed to stay as distinct communities, very much in the same way that they had been permitted under the Ottoman Empire as “millets”. Though there was considerable toleration for many of these e.g. Jews, Catholics, Protestants, gypsies, the suspicion often remained that they were not “true” Greeks. Those who were Muslims were treated as part of the “other”, a potential fifth column whose identification was with the former oppressor, i.e. the modern Turkish state as the inheritor of the old Ottoman Empire, and then partly confirmed through systematic processes of social exclusion and state control<sup>11</sup>.

The end of the seven year dictatorship in Greece in 1974 provided the first extended opportunity for the emergence of a debate on citizenship and human rights. The political and social reconciliation of the right wing government and parties with the left, including survivors of the civil war, gradually allowed views to emerge that did not assume that Greek identity had to be exclusively based on family

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<sup>10</sup> In recent years there have been contentious debates on the existence of a Macedonian minority in the northern borders of Greece with many Greek nationalists denying the possibility of such a minority.

<sup>11</sup> The granting of state licences e.g. for building, carrying out a profession, were systematically denied for extended periods to the Muslim residents of Thrace.

and kinship, language and culture including membership of the Greek Orthodox Church<sup>12</sup>. Membership of the European Union and the subsequent agreement to the Article 25 of the European Agreement on Human Rights in 1985 also stimulated a different concept of national identity which was less essentialist and more concerned with the political and social rights of the individual. Nonetheless perceived threats to hard won national sovereignty continues to reinforce some aspects of “traditional”<sup>13</sup> Greek national identity, including its periodic resistance to the economic, ideological and political domination of the “other” .<sup>14</sup>

The past ten years, which has seen the arrival of large numbers of repatriates and settlers claiming Greek origins, mainly from the ex-Soviet Union (Pontians) and Albania<sup>15</sup>, has again stimulated the mechanisms of incorporation into modern Greek society. However for others, both the many migrants present in the country legally and illegally, particularly from the ex-Communist countries, and for ethnic minorities there arises an increasing challenge to the assumption that “incorporation” through “hellenization” is what is desired. The possibilities of genuine multiculturalism are only recently being explored. Though at the personal and social level there is considerable toleration for some forms of individual cultural difference, there is little at the institutional and structural level. Since one of the major institutional mechanisms for incorporation is through education, resistance by ethnic minorities to Greek schooling becomes comprehensible. As described in the Flagship report, Greek schools make virtually no concessions to non Greek speakers or to cultural difference; teachers are not trained to help those from minority backgrounds and as a result many are effectively excluded from the educational system, and thus from the modern state and economic system. Though there are spasmodic attempts to help some ethnic minorities to have access to

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<sup>12</sup> However the construction of Greek national identity has been highly contentious, often posed as an opposition between idealised “Hellenism” associated with Ancient Greece and “re-invented” by the West, and “Romoissini” associated with the Byzantine Empire and including the experience of the Ottoman Empire and the survival of Greeks and Greekness in this context. (Herzfeld 1987 p.101-102)

<sup>13</sup> The constituents of this “tradition” are increasingly varied in political terms; elements from all political parties of left and right see themselves as defenders of national traditions, whilst the so called “modernisers”, including the current Prime Minister, are also to be found in all political parties.

<sup>14</sup> The nationalistic reactions to issues such as the name to be given to the Former Republic of Macedonia are in part a result of resistance to the manipulations of the major world political and economic players, particularly the USA. The role of the Great Powers from the start of the modern Greek state in manipulating socio-economic situations and political events to their own advantage is known widely and understood; the limits of independence and the realities of dependency account for much of the nationalist rhetoric.

<sup>15</sup> Actual numbers are hard to gauge accurately e.g. a number of Albanians claim Greek origins when settling or working in Greece. Pontians are estimated to number over 80,000. The figure of 700,000 immigrants is often quoted in the press but the recent procedure allowing migrants to register for work permits saw 370,000 approximately applications.

appropriate schooling<sup>16</sup>, other groups, particularly the various tribes of gypsies, still represent a problem. Resistance on both sides ensures the social reproduction of exclusion from modern Greek society. The Flagship Agency, in recognizing the key role

of literacy and numeracy for gypsies, tries to provide the young gypsy children attending with some education that will allow them not to be exploited, to have some choices. In so far as it seeks to prepare them for the Greek school system, it partially acts to try and incorporate the gypsies into modern Greek society. What is original in this Flagship agency is the attempt to go beyond the rhetoric of equality and human rights, supported by a number of NGOs, to action at the practical level which tries to genuinely promote cultural exchange and pluralism.. This action is thus important in the context of the development of a new human rights perspective. Cultivating or even just institutionally tolerating cultural pluralism based on the assumption and adoption of an individual rights perspective is a dialogue and even national dilemma which has repercussions for ethnic minorities<sup>17</sup>.

## **FLAGSHIP AGENCY 1: WATCH FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS (WWR)**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The methodology used in examining the Flagship agency followed a similar procedure to the biographical-interpretive methods used in Phase I. The report on this agency is based on two main interviews, an analysis of documents produced by the organisation; an annual report, four (two per year) newsletters and extended contact with one of the main participants, interviews with three of the clients who had used the services of the agency and participant observation by one of the researchers. The published material represents the formal biographical presentation of the agency while the interviews varied; those from the staff member consisted of a presentation of the agency's everyday activities, while the person in charge of the agency presented a formal biography of the life history of the agency. The clients provided some evaluation of the work of the agency and their expectations as to its role in

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<sup>16</sup> The Pomaks minority in Thrace (about 22,000 people) can now have primary school teaching in their own language and some books in their language have now been written.

<sup>17</sup> The promotion of training and employment programmes by the Greek government and funded by the European Union for those experiencing social exclusion, included gypsies, is another example of where liberal values from the Northern European countries are promoted through the political and educated elite in Greece. The approach to human rights is thus a top-down one.

their lives. Given the relatively short time period in which the agency had been operating, its biographical data was extremely limited.

## **SOCIAL CONTEXT**

The massive socio-economic changes in Greece from 1960s onwards brought to the fore the issue of the legal and social inequalities faced by women. It was not until the 1980s that legal changes to improve women's position were introduced<sup>18</sup>, but there remained fundamental issues of how to transform these laws into real rights and opportunities in the labour market and socio-political life. In discussing the equality of the sexes the underrepresentation of women in political, business and working life is still evident and, it can be argued, this illustrates the problems of trying to effect rapid social change from above.

Urbanization and modernization offered women new roles with their entry into the paid labour market, specifically the secondary and tertiary sectors. However at the same time there was little development on a systematic or extensive basis of state support services to children and families enabling women easily to become independent and take up full time work while having children. The steady and rapid decline in the birth rate from the 1960s onwards amongst all sections of Greek society, a trend matched by similar declines in other Southern European societies, relates not only to the lack of state support but also to other social phenomena :

- a number of women, particularly educated, urban women, sought to have or keep their careers;
- families faced with growing relative economic inequalities seeking to increase or maintain their standard of living through women seeking for paid employment ;
- the changing role of the two sexes meant that many women wanted to assert their own economic and social independence through labour market participation; it is still the case that more traditional women abandon the labour market more easily with the birth of children;
- inflexibility's in the labour market e.g. absence of part time work, work sharing, flexible working, which makes it difficult for women to combine motherhood with working,
- inflexibility in the social insurance system that does not permit the transfer of contribution records between the various funds easily and thus does not encourage labour market flexibility by employees e.g. women leaving the labour market for a period of a few years and then reentering..

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<sup>18</sup> The abolition of the dowry, as already mentioned, was one such measure. Its actual impact has not been studied but it would seem that the ownership of a house/flat gave many Greek women a degree of security e.g. in case of divorce, widowhood, that has not been common for women in Northern Europe.

Entirely satisfactory explanations that are able to weight the importance of these various factors in contributing to the low birth rate have not been fully researched in Greece.(Simeonidou H. 1996) Some of these same factors also help account for the fairly low rate of women's participation in the Greek labour market, compounded by the unwillingness of employers to hire women, the lack of training opportunities for women seeking to reenter the labour market and the inappropriate education and training that many women have undertaken.

Political and legal relations between the two sexes have been issues since the 1930s; voting rights for the parliamentary elections were first granted to women only in 1952. The junta years (1967-74) pushed back the issue of women's position in Greek society but with the restoration of democratic government the various women's movements that emerged strongly, began actions and demands for legal and social rights. The political parties each had and indeed still have a women's party organization or section to promote women's rights as well as women's participation in the political process; however it is worth observing that after all these years this is still one of the lowest rates in Europe, with women representing only 6% of MPs. After the elections of 1981, which brought to power the populist and socialist political party of PASOK, the women's organization of the party came to have rather a larger voice and influence in Parliament by virtue of the fact that it was headed by the American born wife of the Prime Minister. Issues such as the introduction and recognition of civil marriage, the retention of a woman's surname at marriage and the right of choice for a child's surname, the promotion of women's participation in social and economic life, their legal independence from men, the promotion of women's enterprises, all came to the forefront, and many laws promoting this equality were voted in Parliament from 1982 onwards. These successes and the strength of the organization led to the creation of a new General Secretariat for Equality designed specifically to promote women's issues. Other women's organizations, subsidized by the government were also created e.g. KEGME (Research Centre for Women from the Mediterranean). There was an attempt to encourage women's cooperatives and enterprises<sup>19</sup> through various financial subsidies and training programmes.

This was a period when the state developed specific forms of welfare policies within what was described as "socialist" principles that included equal rights. Money and jobs were given to various social groups and individuals on the basis of what was assessed as "social need", though it can be

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<sup>19</sup> Typical were the AgroTourist cooperatives in rural areas mostly promoting tourism but managed by women in their own homes. This was again a continuation of an older development program e.g. of the Agricultural Bank in the early 1960s, which had given loans to families to create tourist rooms in their own homes as a way of increasing family incomes and supporting tourist development of rural areas.

argued that it represented a newer “urban” form of the old social practice of political patronage. The economic problems of the government led to various reassessments of fiscal and economic policy during 1987 leading to a cut back in social programmes and state recruitment on “social need” grounds. The elections of 1989 brought in a Coalition government and, after a short period, the Conservative party came to power. Both continued the policy of nominally supporting the women’s organizations through the General Secretariat for Equality. During the same period the Women’s Lobby was initiated, consisting of representatives from all the women’s organizations and parties, though for some time the PASOK women’s organization (EGE) was unwilling to participate in the Lobby. The Women’s Lobby was linked to other federations of women’s organizations in Europe. In the early 1990s the General Secretariat for Equality cooperated with the National Welfare Organization and the Municipality of Athens in setting up the first centre for battered women in Athens; similar centres were planned for other cities all over Greece. During this same period within the Children’s Centre (called “Mitera”) a special unit was started to help with the care of the children of poor and of single mothers while also offering hostel accommodation, financial and emotional support to pregnant single mothers and help with adoption where this was desired. The Organization for Workers’ Housing also gave the right to single mothers to obtain loans for housing.

By 1993 and the re-election of the PASOK government, the Prime Minister had divorced and the EGE’s had lost much of their power at the same time that feminism was out of fashion and women’s issues were put on the back burner. The lack of participation by women in political life, their difficulties in entering the labour market remained and indeed increased. Although the General Secretariat for Equality continues as a body, its effectiveness has continuously depended on the government appointment made. Thus for extended periods of time very little productive work or important initiatives have been undertaken and the profile of the General Secretariat is minimal amongst most women. This unwillingness of successive governments to support significant actions for women through the General Secretariat explains in part the stimulus for the founding of the Women’s Watch.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL DATA**

In 1983 the Council for Equality between the sexes was created which, by 1985, was upgraded into the General Secretariat for Equality within the Office of the Prime Minister and later transferred as a Secretariat to the Ministry of the Interior. In 1983 within the 54 Prefectures, Equality Committees

were initiated which had the responsibility of promoting the position of women in Greek society through the setting up of local offices on equality issues; this was done in direct cooperation with the General Secretariat for Equality. Within the Ministry of Labour offices for the promotion of labour equality were set up in the Labour Inspectorates throughout Greece. In 1986 the National Manpower and Employment Organization (OAED) set up its offices for equal opportunities, while the Transport Ministry also set up an equivalent service.

The WWR began as a “top-down” movement, an initiative from women from the various political parties who, meeting both in parliament, in the Central Committee of Municipalities and Villages, in trades unions and employers organizations, realised that the situation of women in Greece - whether on the social, legal, economic or political front, was improving rather slowly. They took the opportunity of setting up the WWR on the occasion of the announcement of the 4<sup>th</sup> Medium-Term Action Program on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (1996-2000) of the European Commission. This gave them access to finance to start the WWR, and their initiative was accepted, becoming one of the 67 programmes approved in this program context in Europe.

Part of its leadership came from a woman who was the senior woman in the party of Synaspismos,<sup>20</sup> who had lost her position in Parliament and as the head of the party, but who continued to work as head of the opposition in the Council of the Municipality of Athens. She was able to persuade other leading women in the political field to start this agency. It began functioning in October 1996 having as its main aims:

- the gathering of existing data on the situation of women e.g. unemployment, violence,
- the studying of the current legal situation and the implementation of legal rights,
- the undertaking of primary research,
- suggesting solutions to individual problems whether these are legal or personal,
- advocacy work and the promotion of actions with reference to the equality of opportunities between women and men.

The organization produced its report on its first year of operations for the Annual General meeting in June 1997. It has produced two newsletters per year which give details of its work.

The Center has two different fields of operation: one consists of what are termed “research teams” and the other is a Social Service Bureau where women, who believe that they are victims of sexual discrimination in their work place or domestic life, can ask for advice and help. “WWR” through this work at the individual level, seeks to identify the main problems of women and promotes

their solution in Parliament. This is supposed to be achieved by mobilizing various groups of women MPs, who provide support in line with the issue and its significance.

At the time of the interviews, WWR had received small amounts of funding from the General Secretariat for Equality and worked closely with the Women's Lobby, since many of the members of the Administrative Council are also members of the Lobby. It also raised money from women entrepreneurs who gave money initially to start up the Centre of WWR. The longer term outlook for funding is not clear and once the European funding is ended the WWR contemplates returning to ask for money from women entrepreneurs; this may not be enough to allow the WWR to continue. Although women politicians from all parties are involved, the willingness of governments to fund such an agency initiative is also far from clear.

One of its tasks is concerned with helping women who are unemployed to find the right paths to advice, training and vacancies. In the Social Service Bureau in the period between 1/2/97-25/2/98 the following cases were registered :

#### **Number of cases reported by women by category**

Unemployment	52
Insurance-pension (divorced, widows, single)	42
Family problems (violence, difficult communication)	89
Labour relations	18
Acute psychological problems (isolation, social exclusion)	30
Single mothers	6
Sexual harassment	3
Mixed problems (family, labour, unemployment)	38
Other (provision of general information)	48
Total numbers	329

#### **Services provided by the social bureau during the same period**

legal support	132 Women were offered legal advice and support
psychological support	74 Women were offered psychological support
other	123 Women addressed the S.B for General advice

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<sup>20</sup> Synaspismos is also an alliance, of various left socialist parties.

	Thanks for the Watch Voluntary services General Information
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**Characteristics of the women in relation to the above problems\***

Age		Education		Financial situation	
18-25	10	elementary school	71	bad	121
25-35	50	high school	44	average	46
35-45	76	lyceum	71	good	45
45-60	93	tertiary education	34		
60-75	21				
75-80	3				
totals	276		220		212

\* Demographic characteristics were provided only by some of the women visiting the S.B. The data was obtained from the annual report of the WWR.

From both the cases reported above and from the interviews it was clear that many of the women who visit the Centre are those who can be described as facing social exclusion e.g. long term unemployed, low skilled, single mothers, battered wives, who resort to the Centre precisely because they lack the usual social networks and mechanisms of inclusion that operate in Greek society. The fact that WWR consists of women drawn from all political parties and ideological persuasions and is **not** identified with the government in power, attracts and reassures such women who are realistic enough to know that they do not have the “right” connections for political favours.

**AGENCY : LIVED LIFE/TOLD STORY**

In the interviews carried out with the Director of WWR and the woman in charge of the Social Services Bureau, the lived life of the agency was reported. The themes that initially emerge from the interview data are concerned primarily with presenting issues relating to **legitimacy, uniqueness and achievements**. The finance of the organization, a major issue in most NGOs and their future, was avoided, as was the way the organization is run, and WWR’s relations with the state and government. No overall assessment of a general nature as to the value of WWR’s work is given at all in the interviews.

## **Past History**

WWR was presented as an unique initiative for women, its uniqueness being stressed by providing its initial credentials and alliances: these included such facts as it being a non governmental organization, that it had the support of an Athenian political movement concerned with Athenian citizens' rights, was supported by the Research Institute of the Trades Union Federation, and was linked with several European bodies and partners<sup>21</sup>. Another justification for its uniqueness is that it will not just be a research body or observatory:

*“we wanted through our observations to determine specific actions and not just to research the problems.”*

Its credentials are presented as arising from its organizing committee, consisting of women from all political parties represented in Parliament, from various trades union bodies, from professional associations, and from the social partners. It is further justified when the gender focus of WWR is contrasted to organizations and bodies that focus on other forms of discrimination e.g. political, social. Another implicit contrast is made between bodies that observe and identify problems and the WWR which has to be an active leader in getting changes and results to the benefit of women's equal opportunities and their rights. This is given as the reason for its initial European funding:

*“since it is involved in mainstream policies that is the dimension of equality that the European Union is very interested in.”*

## **Present Operations**

A main aim of WWR is to provide a social advice and counselling service, accessible to any woman, providing psychological support as well as practical solutions. Yet the case presented to demonstrate WWR' active stance is that of unemployment which, though a major issue for women, is actually something where the only thing it can provide as an organization, is guidance and information on appropriate action to take e.g. where to go in local authorities and government agencies for the various training and employment programmes.

An important contribution underlying the uniqueness of WWR as presented, is to try and take the individual problem of one women and translate this into political action and solutions. In reviewing the achievements of WWR the case of social insurance and pensions for divorced women, particularly

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<sup>21</sup> The use of Europeans (as partners, visitors, consultants, experts) to legitimise an organization or action is common, and not just something imposed on an agency by the demands of a specific EU program.

widows, was presented where a new law draft has been formulated, soon to be voted on in Parliament<sup>22</sup> However the only vivid example recalled of **direct** success on behalf of an individual was the example of the successful intervention of WWR on behalf of a woman pilot who had not been allowed to fly large airplanes. The WWR had also played an active intervention role on behalf of small enterprises owned by women, where they have helped as intermediaries with state agencies to obtain information e.g. concerning loans, grants. They had also written to all the municipalities in Attica to find out if the latter had employment offices so that they could send women directly to these.

One activity is the publishing of a newsletter that is sent to all women's organizations, the mass media, universities, trades union organizations and covers all major social and political actors. The reason that it is not available to potential women clients is that the newsletter is primarily oriented to organizations who have some power since it contains news about their activities.

WWR's aims also includes research. It funded two projects in the past year; one on the background for the Law Proposal for Divorced Widows' insurance and pension rights; and the other a small qualitative study of the experience of women on reentering the labour market, a study that is still in progress.

## **Future Plans**

The issues as presented in the told story were concerned with the imminent future campaign of WWR in the coming year on the issue of sexual harassment; this was considered crucial since there is no legislation on this subject, in contrast to other European countries and the USA. Greek women did report problems related to sexual harassment to WWR. However the achievement of WWR's own future goals depended on support from other women's organizations represented in the Women's Lobby; thus one goal was to strengthen the formal establishment of the Women's Lobby. They also sought to use the media to better effect.

Given the critical importance of employment for many women, one of their future plans was to link up with and cooperate with large enterprises employing women and get them to report job opportunities. WWR also planned to get in touch with women in the labour market who are in positions of authority and decision making in both political and economic life, including those who have their own businesses - again they believed it was important to emphasize successful women as models, mentors and sponsors for other women. They planned to form support groups of women in enterprises and trades unions, and felt similar support groups were needed in such areas of public life as the law

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<sup>22</sup> Six months later there was still no Parliamentary vote

courts based on the argument that women needed a different style of support from men since their mentality is somewhat different

### **Self- Evaluation**

In a critical assessment of the development of WWR over the past year, it was evident that the Social Bureau's counselling service was rather limited, offering mainly comfort, information and moral support, where women could express themselves freely. WWR has to explain that it cannot solve all their problems e.g. it can't find them work, which was often very disappointing for women. Another difficulty for WWR was in extending its services to municipalities all over Greece. The main obstacle was obtaining funding.

*“This is always the obstacle since we function with very limited resources and this is what holds us back.”*

As stated earlier, the initial presentation of WWR did not include reference to its funding and long term viability, and only when evaluating its work does the subject of funding arise.

*“This year we renew our contract and we can operate till June 1999; from there on we shall see..”*

To avoid putting any responsibility on the staff and administrative committee a ready justification is presented for the limited activities of WWR in terms of the general trend in Greece for NGOs to have inadequate finance which limits their activities. Given that the funding from Europe would end in June 1999, there were unspecified plans to turn WWR into a Foundation, an Institute or a research institute. A further justification for WWR not being able or not having found funding is presented as being related to the fact that women's rights are no longer 'fashionable' as socio-political issues. Despite the fact that there were several other research centres concentrating on women, the necessity for the continuation of WWR's particular activities was stressed based on private contributions rather than state funding.

The gap, in terms of social and institutional provision, that WWR covered through its involvement in the mainstream policy of equality supported by the European Union, encourages their expectations for further funding from the EC. The fact that they served the needs of abused women - a new and developing issue in Greek society - single mothers with reference to custody rights, paternity recognition and other legal issues that the EU supports, encourages these expectations.

WWR justified the fact that a limited number of clients used their services by referring to two factors. Firstly that publicity had been carried out only for a limited period in the previous year,

when they had undertaken spot advertising, and they believed that it was now time to repeat their advertising publicity again. Their work in promoting the law to protect divorced women's rights to pensions, it was argued, would also give them the necessary publicity. Secondly the lack of referrals from previous clients, which might have been expected to bring in more women, was explained by the fact that women avoid mentioning WWR to friends since they were ashamed to admit they have visited the Centre about their problems.

### **Other Agencies**

The General Secretariat for Equality has recently started to offer some moral and financial support to WWR and this is related to the specific person who is head of the Secretariat who happens to believe and support NGOs. Initially these two bodies appear to be oriented to the same issues and in fact they do share some of the same financial problems. However the General Secretariat as a government agency has a more extensive role but with all the problems of Greek governmental bodies i.e. inflexibility, its inability to act directly and immediately and its inability to work with all the political parties and thus to unite women. On the other hand the WWR owes its flexibility to its organizational committee which consists of women in all political parties who are able to intervene directly with Ministers when necessary. Additionally women often prefer to go to WWR as an NGO that contains women from all political parties, rather than the government services where they have few expectations of immediate help and solutions.

As far as the role of the European Women's Lobby with which WWR cooperates, underlined is the sharing of the common vision of promoting women's active participation in society rather than the current perspective of women being "victims".

The relationship to the government is seen as problematic as the state has a rather negative attitude and is not taking the issue of women's rights seriously. This led to the necessity for a reorientation of WWR from being a "complaints" body to one which should aggressively project positive images of women that underlines that they will not reverse to traditional roles but will play an active participatory role in modern society. The fact that a considerable number of women called up to thank WWR for their work in helping them to find solutions to their problems was presented as a positive assessment of its work.

## **CASE STRUCTURE**

### **Staff, clients and potential clients**

The staff of WWR consists of 15 people with part time employment and only one secretary has full time employment. The contracts of staff run until June 1999. The other personnel in the WWR are volunteers who support the work of the professionals. It appears that the paid staff undertake the main body of the work. However only 5 staff people are actually apparent whether in the narrative of those interviewed or in participant observation.

The Social Bureau works Monday to Thursday from 5-8p.m. and there is also an SOS help line. It is run by a professional group consisting of 4 people - one lawyer, one administrator/counsellor, one secretary and a volunteer. The latter person is described in detail as a significant contributor to the work of the Social Bureau, chosen with care and a person who is very sensitive to women's issues and who attends twice weekly to answer the telephone. No mention was made of any training for any of the staff or details on how any of them were selected and indeed only for this volunteer was such information about training and suitability given. Recognition was given to the fact that the hours of opening of the WWR were insufficient and by September 1998 they planned to open regularly in the mornings.

A total of 670 women had been in touch directly or through the telephone line with the WWR. (see earlier analysis of characteristics of clients). They found out about WWR mainly through TV and women's magazines. The main subjects discussed in the Social Bureau by the clients concerned psychological problems, isolation, social exclusion, sexual harassment while many women ask for information about legal rights. The lack of specialist help for the clients, particularly a psychologist, as many of the clients were depressed, and an expert on the labour market was commented on since the problems women present are very varied.

### **Presentation of the work of WWR**

The person in charge of the Social Bureau presents the women clients as people having genuine needs - not only for practical support, which she acknowledges that the WWR cannot really give, but in terms of human support and counselling. She clearly identifies herself with these women and sometimes tries to intervene at a personal level to help individual women e.g. help in finding work, in finding information. In contrast the Director of WWR talked about it in terms of its organization, portraying the women who visit it as the "building blocks" of their achievements. Thus there is no reference to the individual women.

Since the numbers of women served through the Social Bureau by the WWR are relatively few, it was difficult to get access to women clients without visiting WWR premises and asking for contacts however during Phase I such contacts had already been established. Thus the researchers had already

located and talked to 3 clients, found through WWR, about the latter's services. In all three cases the women reported satisfaction in being able to talk about their problems with the person at WWR, problems relating to finding work and training. It was also evident from their narration that they retained the hope, which they expressed publicly, that having personal links with an organization made up of women MPs and other significant women players in public life would give them a real advantage in finding employment i.e. they would begin to obtain the necessary "connections" that up until then they had been missing..

While its potential clientele could include all women able to get in touch with WWR who have some relevant problem with respect to rights, access to the labour market, family relationship etc., the reality is that there is just one office and one telephone line manned for a limited period. Thus the women who effectively have physical access are relatively few. Yet at the same time the population in geographical terms is also not defined - thus though the office is in the Municipality of Athens, WWR does not address itself simply to women resident there. They do not define their population of potential clients, or define the number and characteristics of women at risk from social, political, economic and legal exclusion ; in this sense the potential clientele that they aim to serve is an unknown quantity.

## CONCLUSIONS

The WWR, exclusively aimed at women, is also run and organized by women. In terms of its social class composition it is slightly more difficult to evaluate given that the definition of social class in Greece is conceptually and empirically problematic. If indicators for social class such as education and income are used , then there are some significant differences that emerge between the characteristics of the staff and the clientele. The staff tend to be those with post secondary education; something that is less common among the clientele. However when examining income there are some striking commonalties in the situation of staff and clients. The staff appear also to be in situations of **precariousness** in the labour market, as self employed people, or with short term and part time contracts. The employment difference is thus not major between them and the unemployed women they seek to help. The contrast is thus between the staff who have been able to find work primarily because of their skills, training and political and social networks and the women clientele who do not have such skills and contacts to become self-employed or find part time work or short term contracts and who also have more limited social networks. Thus it could be argued that is not class per se which distinguish staff from clientele but **education and social networks**.

The main orientation of WWR is to Greek women rather than ethnic minority women or migrant women even though the latter are seen as part of the potential clientele of the agency. The agency does not orient itself to the problems faced by women from the national minorities e.g. gypsies, Muslims.

The close link between the movement “Citizens for Athens”, a political union in the Municipality of Athens between some sections of the governing party and Synaspizmos, and the WWR means that the fortunes of the former inevitably have repercussions for the latter. Municipal and Prefecture elections in October 1998 which saw “Citizens for Athens” being badly defeated, may lead to the removal of support from the governing party from the woman leading the movement<sup>23</sup>. This would undermine the chances of WWR receiving public funding, while even private funding would be less willing to “invest” in WWR since the perceived possibility of getting some political, economic or personal advantage from being a sponsor would be less. The lack of political support, unless the women MPs and those in key positions decide to independently support the WWR, along with the lack of interest in women’s issues, may lead to WWR’s effective demise after June 1999 when EU funding is no longer available.

In the staff’s own evaluation of WWR the effective weaknesses of the organization to mobilize, keep and attract more women as supporters or clients, indicates an inverse direction to that which should be happening; instead of increasing its public image and clientele, extending its services and influence in Greek public life, it has already started to limp. Its work on separate issues reflecting the concerns of individual women is also not an easy basis upon which a popular movement can be built. The economic and organizational viability of the WWR is also reflected in the staff’s own perspectives on planning; thus the one year remaining of certain funding at the time of the interviews, is projected by them as an entirely reasonable period in which to not only undertake its current work but also to ensure its continuation, financing and legal transformation.

The innovative aspect of WWR relates to the efforts by women of different political persuasion to work as a unified committee on women’s issues that other women’s organization cannot deal with - either because they are too small, or associated with the governing party, or because they have no political voice. Another innovatory element is that in creating an organizational channel through which individual cases and problems can be heard and transformed into collective issues, a basis is provided, if and where necessary, for legislative action and policy changes. The networking with women in positions of economic power or in senior positions in the various representative institutions e.g. social

partners, as contributors to the same goals is also an innovative aspect of WWR. If it could also ensure that in the coming years it could be economically supported by women, this would provide a sounder basis for its survival and would be innovative.

In the sense that WWR have developed strategies for their own expansion and have attempted to solve some of the problems of women, particularly with reference to employment e.g. cooperation with women's enterprises and municipalities in Attica so that they report on vacancies for women, it can be argued that the organization is reflexive. The experience of women throughout Greece of increasing vulnerability as traditional forms of social relations and family life no longer satisfy or offer adequate security, are shared by both the women who run the WWR and those who have tried to use its services. WWR arises out of the reflexivity of its staff and founders and the experiences they have with clients. If one examines the kinds of cases dealt with by WWR, the role of reflexivity is apparent with respect to some issues; sensitizing staff to the biographies of women clients could help them pick out those issues where counselling, support and information are the main areas where they can be effective. Thus

- unemployment depends mainly on structural factors but there are also aspects of the individual's biography which determine the approach to the labour market where reflexive interventions are feasible.
- Insurance-pension rights in relation to marital status are not reflexive issues.
- Family problems (e.g. violence, difficult communication) are partially open to reflexive interventions by women since the difficulties in human and gender relations are nearly always two sided.
- Labour relations, given that they are often about unequal power relations, are also not always open to reflexive interactions.
- acute socio- psychological problems such as social isolation, social exclusion, and being single mothers are again only partially reflexive.

Finally the absence of strategic thinking and planning and the avoidance of confronting the problem of obtaining sufficient funding from national sources, makes the WWR a vulnerable agency. Despite the apparent representation of all the political parties, its fate appears to be closely linked to that of the person who started it and supports it (the offices of the WWR are located in the her political offices). This lack of separation between her political roles and those of the WWR leads to two possible future scenarios for WWR- either obliteration when funding stops and she is not in a key position to ensure public or even private funding; or alternatively if she is able to obtain a key governmental or

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<sup>23</sup> She has remained as the leader of the opposition in the Council of the Municipality of Athens

public role again, a more dynamic and central role. It is not that the WWR is a luxury or inessential agency in Greek society, but rather that the mechanisms for its institutionalization and expansion are so weak and little supported by the existing political structures, that it is not as effective or significant as it needs to be. In this sense it is the small weak child that comes out of the fragile civil society emerging in Greece.

## **FLAGSHIP PROJECT 2: THE CENTRE FOR THE SUPPORT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The report on this agency is based on two main interviews, an analysis of newspapers reports, a presentation produced by the organisation for potential interested sponsors and public bodies; contact with one of the main participants, and participant observation by the researchers. The published material represents the formal biographical presentation of the agency as does the interview with the initiator of the project since the latter is responsible for the former. The interview with the staff member consisted of a presentation of the agency's everyday activities and problems. It was not possible to interview the clients since most were children who were unprepared to speak to strangers. The mothers attending the centre also fell into this category and it was felt that since it had taken a long time for trust to be established between the flagship agency and the gypsy families, strangers entering and asking questions would pose a threat and it is highly unlikely that any answers would be sincere or informative.. Informal chats were held with volunteer staff members but no formal interviews were conducted partly because they were very active in the work of the school and the children could not be left unattended.

### **1. SOCIAL CONTEXT**

**Begging** on the Greek streets has been a long established custom since the foundation of the modern Greek state for certain categories of people including the disabled, those claiming to have serious health problems, old women and gypsy women, though children begging alone was relatively

rare until recently.<sup>24</sup> This has to be understood in the context of the absence of a welfare state and a labour market and agriculture which could not absorb all those seeking for work. Despite an extension of welfare rights in the past twenty years e.g. the provision of agricultural “pensions” for those not entitled to an old age pension from any pension funds; special payments for those with large families; unemployment entitlements; welfare provisions can still be described as residual, or conservative-corporatist’. (Esping-Anderson 1990) .

A special group who have long been marginal to mainstream Greek society, though contributing to the national economy, are gypsies. Gypsies in general have long used their children to get money by begging. One common way is through “playing” music - e.g. singing on trains, playing cassettes and instruments, while in the 1970-80s another “fashion” in begging was to send disabled children onto the trains and streets to beg. However the phenomenon of so many children begging at traffic lights has emerged as a social phenomenon of the past 8 years, associated with the end of the Communist regimes in the Balkan region and the arrival of many migrants and their families. This has changed the type of people who can be found begging on the streets since they now include whole families, disabled young men and children.<sup>25</sup> Families from the Balkan region, including Christian gypsies, have also arrived as beggars, though they tend to beg in family groups or else play music (accordion, singing). Many children and physically disabled persons and war wounded are reported as being organized and brought into Greece from all over the Balkans for the explicit purpose of begging, or forced to accept “protection” from organized criminal groups, which includes many Albanians. There have been reported cases in the media and police bulletins that children in Albanian villages are even “rented” to such criminal groups and brought to Greece to beg. A recent announcement by the Greek Ministry of Public Order in cooperation with the Greek Ministry of Health and Welfare of the implementation of a program to help the traffic light children, mentions two elements. One concerns the return of the children to their families and second concerns attempts to break up the criminal gangs that are exploiting these children. According to the data provided by the Ministry of Public Order there are approximately 3000 street children of whom 78% are Albanian, 12% from other Balkan countries and 10% gypsy children. The program involves initially the gathering up of these children from the street and the sending of them to two special welfare hostels. Specialized staff will try to identify and trace the children’s families in order to return them to their families. Where it is found that gangs are behind these children the police will expel the adults as well as their right to reenter the country. This is

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<sup>24</sup> These remarks are based on observation and newspaper reports.

considered to be a more effective measure than criminal proceedings which would take too long and also the crime involved bears only a small penal penalty. From the beginning of 1998 until November 1998 in the Prefecture of Attica of the 267 underage children which were arrested, 261 were from Albania, 1 Serbian, 1 Romanian, 1 Iraqi, and 3 Greek gypsies.

Greek society have become used to though unhappy at the experience of seeing children begging. This sight is no longer limited to some central streets or markets but has spread out throughout the city areas and people in cars, once separated from the misery and poverty, are now confronted with it on a daily level.

In contrast **street trading** and doing small errands has long been part of the unofficial Greek economy; at traffic lights, pretzels and sandwich sellers, mainly Greek men, have been a feature of Greek streets for decades. Gypsies, also involved as small traders, used their children for specific kinds of trade e.g. selling flowers round taverns and restaurants, a job which they still do. However the arrival of many families from Albania led to the development of new forms of street trading where children went out to sell such things as paper handkerchiefs and lottery tickets or else cleaned car windows. This may have influenced gypsies to push their children into this form of trading along with opportunistic begging.

A specific category amongst the gypsies are those who are from Thrace, in Northern Greece, who speak Turkish as well as Rom<sup>26</sup>, and are Moslems; a certain percentage of these came down to settle in Athens, and are concentrated mainly in the western central areas of Athens, near the railway lines and what used to be the gas works, which are or were both environmentally and socially deprived. Typically gypsies have large families, accounted for partly by the early age at which they marry, and live in very poor housing conditions. Those who work in the local factories are in the least skilled and most dangerous jobs.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Educational facilities which take into consideration the cultural differences between mainstream Greek society and Greek gypsy children have always been minimal. Efforts during the 1980s to start up caravan schools through the programme of Popular Education in the Prefectures, were initially staffed

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<sup>25</sup> Other groups of Greek citizens who can be found begging include drug addicts, ex-prisoners, people with Aids and psychologically disturbed people.

with enthusiasm but soon ran out of cash and steam. Only one or two persons dedicated to the issue have remained active in trying to help gypsy children obtain an education. Given that there are negative attitudes towards education amongst many gypsies and that they may depend on their children's income to support the family, one of the major problems is to encourage families to send their children to school.

The Flagship agency, the Centre for the Support of Children and Families, presented here is mainly aiming at the specific group of gypsy children working in Central Athens in these deprived areas. It does not exclude other street children, but the location of the Centre in the deprived area of Metaxourgeio, Central Athens partially dictates which kind of children will attend. The Centre has been in operation for 18 months, starting in March 1997, as a day Centre for children who sell and beg on the streets and who do not usually attend school. These children are known in Greek society as the "children of the traffic lights" - (ta paidia ton fanarion).

The Centre began as the result of the working experience of a social worker in other European funded programmes in Athens which aimed to help deprived families. Since the most deprived Greek citizens in Athens are the gypsies she had come to know many of them and their acute problems. She recognised that without any help the children of these families were condemned to reproduce the social exclusion of their families.. As a Greek she shared the values that stressed the role of education in allowing people to escape social exclusion since in Greek society education has been the key social mechanism for many "mainstream" Greeks to escape poverty, particularly in earlier decades. Thus she began the Centre as a bottom up approach, without any official support or backing but as a grass roots reaction by an individual to the appalling situation of the street children, an attitude which she believed was shared by many other Greeks.

In official terms the law states that children must attend school from the age of 6 years till 15 years, however for these street children there are no effective mechanisms to enforce their attendance e.g. school attendance officers, fines, special schools. Additionally the Greek school system, entirely unused to the concept of a multicultural society, has no mechanisms or flexibility in handling the cultural particularities of these students. The education system has trained teachers in old fashioned ways who cannot adapt to the multicultural needs of today's students<sup>27</sup>. Most of the teachers have no

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<sup>26</sup> In fact there are many significant differences between gypsies who can be divided in 9 different "tribes" (Batsioram Balamane, Roma, Souvaliotes, Tsigganoi, Horahagia, Meskarides, Arkoudiaridew, Dermezides, Hantouria) speaking many different dialects which are not necessarily mutually comprehensible.

<sup>27</sup> The excessive formalism of the Greek education system was commented on by many writers since the start of the modern Greek state; since the restoration of democracy in 1974 there have been real attempts to initiate change in the education

special training and cannot cope with the variations that they have to face in today's schools. Thus children and parents who are culturally different in significant ways are discouraged and thus expelled from the school system.

The ambiguity of the law as far as school attendance and the work of street children is concerned as well as the lack of a social service responsible for the protection of children, forces policemen to undertake the most unpleasant role, that of the 'bad guy'. When the police stop children working at the traffic lights and in the streets, it is interpreted in the children's value system as being unjust and unreasonable since it stops them from making their living. As a reaction the children are alert and hide everytime they see policemen around.

*"How are we going to survive if we don't work ?"* . They perceive themselves as doing an honest job since they do not steal. On the other hand the police are in a no win situation since they can only arrest the children and not the parents who are actually responsible for their children's actions. These children are then kept in the police department, an unacceptable place for children, and eventually released since no-one knows what to do with them. They are threatened that if they are arrested again they will put them in reform homes but in fact this rarely happens.

## **AGENCY: LIVED LIFE/TOLD STORY**

As outlined under the Institutional background, the Centre was the end result of a personal mission by a social worker to help the Athens street children at tremendous risk of social exclusion. The head of the project had come to know these street children and their families, mainly gypsies, and was worried that without education and training they would be condemned to the same fate as their parents. The Centre was a response to the recognition that though originally some children could survive by begging, since they were few, this was no longer feasible with so many children and adults now begging and unable to earn a living. They foresaw this as leading to future, uncontrollable juvenile delinquency. Attempts were made to try and persuade some local authorities, that something should be done about the street children but the latter's reaction made it clear that they would not do anything both because they felt it would be impossible to approach these children, because of their cultural differences and special features, and because there were organized groups (Mafia type) behind these children who might endanger the social worker's life if she tried to intervene. The setting up the Centre

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system e.g new books written in demotic, new subjects and technological subjects, new technological training schools and institutions, but problems still persist in terms of how people are taught.

was designed to be a practical example which could persuade local authorities and other bodies of the feasibility and relative ease of dealing with this problem.

The following words of the project innovator indicates her own attitudes to these children:

*”they are after all, children just like all the children in the world, they laugh, enjoy themselves, they aren’t from outer space”*

The perception that these children are eager to learn might be projects of central Greek social values of education which is extended to all “our” children as a right.

After a period of operation there was disappointment among the staff of the Centre that the authorities still didn’t show any interest and they didn’t even bother to see if they could use the Centre as a model project and develop similar projects in their own areas. One explanation for this was the well known tendency for political and personal reasons of local authorities and political persons to only adopt ideas and projects they can claim as their own so that they will gain all the glory. Another reason was that finding public employees willing to work in this kind of project was very difficult since it required commitment and hard work without adequate payment.

*“It’s hard for the authorities to hire people in this kind of work. It requires a certain madness, like me, to do this work from morning till night, it’s something you don’t get paid for”*

The experience of the Centre with preparing the street children for school was that it would be better to ensure that they started as early as possible with Greek language so that they could be integrated into the educational system easier. After 12 years it appears to be very difficult to persuade them to attend school. The future plans of the centre are to have a separate centre for children aged 4-7 years so that they can be prepared to attend the state school from the beginning.

Another plan for the Centre was to move to larger premises since currently children from all ages were sharing a tiny space where both lessons and games were going on. *(in October when contacted again for interviews with volunteers, we were informed that they have taken on new premises)* .

Integration remains very difficult as prejudice block these children from participating in activities often available to the “mainstream”. An example cited was the difficulty in getting passes for “their” children to go to the summer camps run by the Municipality of Athens primarily for the low income public sector employees; each political party representative had had to be approached separately in order to twist their arms and make them feel morally obliged to help. Racism existed amongst many parents who didn’t want their children to be with gypsies, while at the same time the street children’s parents also didn’t want them to go to the camps as they would lose the income they get from the work

of their children. In many cases they also don't have the appropriate papers (e.g. identity cards, health books). On the other hand the children act as allies in the work of the Centre since those who have participated in the camping program tell everyone what a good time they had. The parents generally do not visit these summer camps and the volunteers at the Centre visit the children in the camp to see how they are getting along.

The Centre gives the children material things such as sandwiches and clothing, and this has helped make some parents feel positive about its existence, since many are people who have got used to taking things as charity. However sometimes the parents see the Centre as a threat. since the children prefer to stay in the class and draw, instead of being in the cold and sun and not infrequently parents come and drag their child out of the class in order to force them to go to work. Another negative aspect for some of the parents is that their children begin to see another way of life and recognize that not all children have to work and beg in the street. The Centre's strategy is to avoid conflict with the parents, and it tries to deal with the accusation that they are trying to take the children away from their parents by suggesting that they send their children to the centre after work. Another argument used towards the parents is that education will allow their children to earn more money and that their children are smart and able to learn. At the same time the Centre avoids any criticism of the parents and advises children to help their parents.

Conflict over the values promulgated in the family and in the Centre exists in issues like theft. Children get confused when they are told not to steal from others since they hear from their parents that they should get whatever they can and take it home. Initially there was considerable theft of pens, pencils and notebooks but this gradually declined as the children realized that it was better to leave them at the Centre where they would find them the next day, rather than take them home where they would be thrown away or destroyed. They realised that the centre was more "theirs" than their own home.

The Centre is currently undertaking, in collaboration with a private training and research body, research on women and street children and have made applications for financial support from the General Secretary for Equality; the Van Leer Foundation has also promised some help though there are difficulties since the Van Leer Foundation insists on national funding at least for the premises, something which appears currently difficult to secure from central or local government. It is planned that the research results will be used as an instrument to aid in the advocacy of their work and as a way of pressurizing the government for some funding. The Centre has relied almost entirely on private and company donations - small amounts of money, second hand machinery and materials, books and

writing materials and furniture. An evaluation of the Centre in October 1998 showed that over 200 volunteers have helped and continue to offer their services in its 18 months of operations, everyday from 11:00-20:00 except weekends and holidays.

The Centre considers that behind these children there is a whole world which needs support and guidance since the children at the traffic lights are only the tip of the iceberg. The protection of the children cannot be achieved without due regulation and implementation of the laws concerning children's rights. In order to protect children from exploitation there must be the proper environment that can offer them equal opportunities for development, including institutions that will protect and take care of children's rights.

1. Protective measures should apply to all children in Greece regardless of their nationality.
2. Compulsory education should be enforced for all children, including those living in Greece on a temporary basis.
3. Parents need to be taught about their obligations to obey the law. In the case of violations they should be punished and made to follow an educational program run by specialists who will teach them their obligations as parents.
4. One of the conditions for obtaining a permanent residence permit for a migrant is that they send their children to school; those who do not should be expelled.
5. Local authorities, through their social services, should monitor and protect children's rights in their area. They should also promote private and public initiatives addressed to children and their families and coordinate networks of social support offered by the citizens.
6. The unemployed and socially excluded parents of these children should be given priority to attend the programmes by OAED against social exclusion.
7. Nurseries and kindergartens should recognise their obligation to accept children from poor and socially excluded families e.g. those with many children, or unemployed, and not only the children of working mothers.
8. The Ministry of Education with the support of local authorities should promote the establishment and support of "Day centers for children and adults out of School" whose main target should be to accept socially excluded children and to encourage them to learn how to read and write. This would require specialist teachers and counsellors.
9. Implementing the above proposals will require the establishment of a service body of street workers attached to the social services of the local authorities. They would be responsible for the care and

support of those citizens in most need and in finding solutions for their problems and follow-up on their cases..

The implementation of the above measures requires that the schools play a substantive role; they must ensure that the education of these children is culturally sensitive, adapted to their needs and the difficulties they have, providing them with the knowledge that is required for their future and equal opportunities with other children.

## **CASE STRUCTURE**

### **Staff and volunteers**

The lack of funds for the Centre meant that from its start it had to rely on public support and concern, sensitivity to the issue and people with time and interest enough to help. In order to start up the Centre and find enough money for the rent and the minimal operation of the centre, the same tactics were used by the founder of the Centre - if on a larger scale - as used in the world of the street children : this is evident in her words about starting the Centre:

*“I said to myself, well I can go out begging, in a slightly different way, to gather the money for the rent”*

Another time consuming task is finding and managing the volunteers for the Centre, compared by the Centre’s founder as a similar process to bringing up a child i.e. taking time and effort. 500 children have passed through the Centre and 200 volunteers, but there is a rapid turnover, and few volunteers come on a regular basis since working persons find it hard to devote regular hours to be at the Centre. Particular problems arise with students who, while initially very enthusiastic, take a lot of time to train and manage but just come a couple of times and then stop. In the month of September ’98, when the interview was carried out, 45 volunteers had attended from once to 10 times. While some volunteers came regularly these were the minority. Most volunteers tired quickly as they found the children very difficult to deal with. The Centre records everyday which volunteers come and for how long and their observation is that few come on a steady basis. Volunteers need to be supported and a psychologist has now been found who will lead a regular group of volunteers in the coming year, for training and the exchange of ideas, experiences and problems. This is seen as vital if volunteers are not to get disappointed and disappear.

There are only two permanent persons at the Centre, the founder and a sociologist, while some other student volunteers come regularly as part of their studies course. Amongst the 200 volunteers on their lists are some older people who are those who seem to attend regularly. However the lack of

volunteers on a regular basis limits the extension of their activities. In the summer when volunteers are particularly needed to help the children get to summer camp, (which involves put them on the coaches, getting medical certificates, persuading reluctant parents to let their children go on holiday) holidays and student examinations reduce numbers drastically.

The children attending the Centre are encouraged to realise that they can obtain skills that will permit them to find prestigious jobs e.g. in offices, with computers, as teachers. The future aim of the Centre, if funding is found, is to hire some of the street children, who have acquired some education, to act as assistants in the Centre since currently the children cannot identify with anyone there.

### **Clients**

The major clients of the Centre are street children, while the future target group is their parents, particularly mothers. A major difficulty for the workers in the Centre is that the children consider their “work” normal, since they have been led to believe that it is their duty to help their families financially, they don’t criticize them but on the contrary express their love and respect for them. Frequently these children are proud of the substantial sums of money they gain and earn praise from their parents. The majority of these children have never been enrolled in school or else have quit very quickly. Even those who declare that they go to school, very rarely attend classes. The majority of the parents of these children are illiterate, unemployed and without any training. Most come from rural areas and life in the city makes them very vulnerable to pressures in conflict with their traditional society. The state tolerance until recently of the phenomenon of children working on the streets has created an institutionalized situation in which children’s income supports the whole family and as a result the parents are completely inactive, indeed many do much better out of this than they can do as adult wage earners. Parents have come to depend on their children and entrapped in this present survival strategy and without any school education, are unable to realise that what keeps them from being integrated into the wider society is their own lack of training or specific knowledge. These parents are involved in an ideology in which fate decides and is responsible for their lives and their children have the duty to help them. They are unaware that schooling is compulsory. Of complete unconcern to them is the future of their children and their survival in adult life, where technology and special skills will be necessary for their survival.

### **Potential clients**

The Centre having observed that the mothers of these street children are in particular need of training and support, since many are very young women, decided that one of its future major areas of

work should be concerned with their training and support. They received a small amount of funding to undertake some research that aims to identify the children's mothers who would like to learn some skills in workshops and at the same time be offered a safe place to leave their small children. The issue of the kind of training that the fathers should receive is also one which concerns the Centre since this is essential if the parents are to be enabled to enter into the labour market and social programmes. The Centre, having secured new premises for its expansion in October 1998, now also sees as one of its aims, cooperation with other NGOs, e.g. Doctors of the World, in order to promote the health care of the street children and their parents e.g. vaccinations, (none have been vaccinated), family planning to learn about contraceptive methods (the women have had multiple abortions e.g. 10 abortions and 8 children) and general health education (hygiene since the living conditions are very bad).

## CONCLUSIONS

Taking into account that this Centre was set up entirely as the result of the action of one social worker supported by citizens and volunteers; noting what it has achieved despite the lack of state support, it can be considered an innovative and positive action. The centrality of the issue of street children is evident in the mass media e.g. reports in Greek newspapers, and everyday experiences. More importantly the issue has finally become one of concern to the government as they have announced that they will take action to help the street children.<sup>28</sup> Those street children of Greek gypsy origins are however, unlikely to be dealt with under Ministry's program since they constitute a small cultural distinctive minority which has long been ignored and, on the other hand, also have their own negative attitudes towards social integration. This flagship agency is thus addressing a long term and long standing issue - that of the problem of Greek minorities in the Greek state. In this Centre are those who have lived and got to know these minority children and see them as having rights to their own culture though needing to have access to a more flexible education system that will allow them to develop and have choices in Greek society. In contrast others, significantly many being in positions of authority, have no personal contact with gypsies and tend to condemn them as different, difficult and dangerous, a group that can choose to remain separate but cannot be incorporated without their willingness to change towards the values and behaviours of the majority. There is thus a dichotomy in Greek society between those who wish to include minorities into modern Greek society only through

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<sup>28</sup> After the police gathered up many of the street children in December 1998, placing them in an orphanage until their parents came to pick them up, most children escaped and are back on the streets. The Centre declared that it was an inappropriate way of dealing with these children since it was inevitable that they would try to go back to their families, who they perceived as needing and living them.

their incorporation into Greek society effected particularly through the educational system, and those who are willing to contemplate a multicultural Greece. The work undertaken at the Centre supports this latter position and they have had to avoid insensitive if well meant overtures by Greek bodies which seek the ideological incorporation of these children and their families e.g. the Orthodox Church.

The Centre is not homogenous concerning social class; the volunteers and staff belong to relatively highly educated and middle class strata in Greek society, as opposed to the client group. With respect to gender the dominance of women as volunteers and staff may reflect the focus of the Centre on children - though companies and men are known to give financial and material support. In a sense this simply is a reproduction of traditional Greek values of the men being responsible for the material care of the family. The interest in expanding the work of the Centre to encompass women will meet difficulties in that the gypsy women cannot easily identify with the women who help in the Centre. On the other hand it is very difficult to find trained educated gypsy women. In the future if funding is forthcoming, this problem can be overcome; already the plan to employ educated street children to work at the Centre, shows a recognition of this particular problem. This indicates an ability to be reflexive on the work of the Centre and how it can best achieve its goals. Another indication of reflexivity that emerges in interviews is the attitude of the staff towards respecting the cultural particularities of these children and their families. They seek to avoid direct confrontation and try and help within a context that avoids breaking up the families however dysfunctional the latter are in terms of integration in modern society.

The Centre focuses almost exclusively on gypsy children; it does not appear to have attracted Albanian and other Balkan children who are the majority at the traffic lights. This may reflect the fact that the latter are often under the control of gangs, and cannot escape easily, but more likely reflects the location of the Centre and the previous personal contacts of the Centre's founder with the gypsy families.

The Centre offers several useful lessons in terms of social policy :

1. that an initiative by a citizen can rapidly gain support from others in Greece, despite the fact that generally civil society which includes the formation of NGOs, self-help organizations, has been weak. The emergence of more people who see themselves as having an active role to play in solving the problems found in modern states, not in the old philanthropic tradition, but as actual volunteers and workers, is a valuable paradigm.

2. an NGO has the flexibility to deal with a difficult and sensitive issue, such as that of gypsies who (as in most modern European states) experience social exclusion and racism, and can be more culturally sensitive and reflexive.

3. the perception that eventually gypsies must be involved in their own self help and development is an important way of empowering Greek citizens; currently while the Centre still does things “for” the children and their parents, it recognises that the only long term solution is supported self help. Whether they will find the funding and the children to assume this new strategy is not yet known.

One of the criticism leveled by outsiders at the Centre is that it acts as a parallel education undermining the authority of the school; that since the law requires that all Greek children attend school, the Centre has no role to play or rights in intervening. This criticism does not recognise that the mechanism to enforce this law are inoperative; the law also requires children to be placed according to their age in school classes. Again this does not help the gypsy children - or other street children whose mother tongue is not Greek or whose culture does not encompass the same educational and cultural values.

The weakness of the initiative clearly lies in its very heavy reliance on one person ; more permanent funding would allow this reliance to be reduced and staff to be appointed. The question as to whether there would be other volunteers and staff, as well as gypsies eventually, to share the vision as to the necessity for an intervention program to help the traffic light children must be an open one.

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