



Press Release

Women in Governance

Athens, September 7 2021

The Centre for Gender Studies of Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences organized in June two online events, a lecture and a policy discussion panel, for the **ProGender** project. Both events were coordinated by Maria Stratigaki, Associate Professor at Panteion University and former Vice Mayor of the Municipality of Athens.

Anna Karamanou (Former Member of the European Parliament- President of FEMM Committee) gave a talk, which was entitled **“Gender in pandemic and post-crisis Governance”** in **June, 14 2021**. The **Rector of Panteion University Professor Christina Koulouri** opened the event with a welcome speech. She told the audience that among the 23 universities in Greece there are only 3 women Rectors. Although the majority of students who enter Panteion University are female, there is a disproportionate number of male M.Sc. and Ph.D. holders and the differences increase when it comes to faculty members. Of the 93 faculty members, 59 are men and 34 are women. As she explained, women in positions of power, especially politicians, should not be judged by their gender, but by their political positions, contributions, and policies.

Anna Karamanou argued that international data shows that Covid -19 has exposed gender vulnerabilities in a globalized world. It is not only health crisis, but also has socioeconomic impacts, increasing unemployment and the intensity of gender-based violence (GBV). The pandemic threatens to undo the progress in gender equality that has been achieved so far and acts as a multiplier of pre-existing systemic inequalities (payment, employment, family care responsibilities, work life balance, safety at work and democratic deficit in decision making bodies). In Greece, in January 2020, only 7 women were invited to participate in the 19 member WHO emergency committee for Covid- 19 and there are only 2 women of the 12 members of the advisory body.

Karamanou also talked about the remarkable role that women leaders play in pandemic management. Internationally, countries led by women had much better results with fewer deaths and lower spread of the disease (New Zealand, Taiwan, Finland, Norway, Denmark and Iceland). When women leaders were confronted with the pandemic, they took immediate actions and addressed their citizens, not shifting the responsibility to others, but using a language of sincerity, empathy and compassion. For women leaders, dealing with the pandemic was a marathon. For many men, it was war (Trump, Bolsonaro, Orban) with fatal results. Women leaders, according to a research from the Harvard Business School, have disproved the myth that compassion and emotion do not go well together with leadership.

In the post Covid-19 period the health systems require radical changes that should be based on gender mainstreaming. Open, inclusive and transparent communication must take precedence over traditional male-dominated forms of government. Data collection and governance policies must include sex and gender disaggregated data. The post Covid period will provide women with opportunities to participate in social and economic recovery, to push for a greener growth, with fairer distribution of wealth and a gender-balanced participation in all responsibilities in the public and private spheres. Key funds for reconstruction must integrate the gender dimension and ensure that women can benefit fully from employment and entrepreneurship. Gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting should guide the Government and the Local Government.

The discussion panel entitled “**Local Government in the Pandemic. Does Gender make the difference?**” took place on **June, 29, 2021**.

- **Maria Androutsou** (Mayor of Agios Dimitrios, Attica) presented how the Municipality reacted to the pandemic creating social welfare programs to support vulnerable groups of the population. Women were at the forefront of these efforts and some held high level positions in departments of crucial importance, such as in the Administrative and the Financial department. A 12-hour phone line was activated 7 days a week for vulnerable groups, where citizens, who could not move outside their homes (elderly, disabled and people chronically ill), could get support for their immediate needs. In the first lockdown social workers and psychologists of the municipality made 3000 phone calls to elderly and vulnerable citizens to offer them reassurance that their vital needs (medical prescriptions, home delivery, supermarket delivery, transportation to the vaccination centers) were of the highest priority. Part of the economic measures to support local markets was the decision to suspend for a 6 months period municipal fees and taxes for small businesses that have suspended their operation during the lockdown.
- **Alida Johanne Domaas** (Member of the Trondheim City Council) presented the gendered challenges that the council faced. Since 1982 three out of five mayors have

been women. Today 47% of the city council is composed by women. Female politicians experience leadership in a different way than men, because the harassment is personified, sexualized and focused on appearance. A survey conducted by the International Amnesty of Norway showed that 2 out of 3 female politicians have experienced online harassment. Also, despite parity, women are more silent and reluctant to express their opinions than men in city councils. Often men speak more and longer than women in debates and during the pandemic, where the meetings became digital, women refused to take the floor.

- **Dóra Björt Guðjónsdóttir** (Member of the Reykjavik City Council) said that the city Reykjavik City Council has more women than ever (15 women and 8 men). From the the 8 departments of the municipality, there are 5 with women leaders. Their strategy is a “Green plan”, a restoration plan, with three dimensions (financial, social and environmental). They launched a city watch on welfare and labour and they managed to get quarterly reports to the executive committee in order to adjust their measures, based on statistics. In the pandemic they assisted minorities, elderly people using new methods to prevent isolation and homeless, for example by renting houses for the homeless.
- **Irene Kounenaki** (Head of the opposition party “WE, our City” at the Municipality of Pallini, Attica) argued that during the pandemic gender inequality was hit once more. She pointed out that only 20% of local and regional elected politicians in Europe are women and 29% of the counselors are women. At the beginning of the pandemic no incidents were reported to the local Counseling Centers of Violence against Women, because of fear and traffic restrictions. The social services of the municipality developed the initiative and cared for women in need. The post Covid period is an opportunity to change what is happening and the perceptions of local governance and local participation. It is a wake-up call for gender equality especially in local governance.

The videos of the events have been posted on Facebook [@ProGenderproject](#)

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