

GREECE

Population: 11,0 Mio

Area: 131.626 km²

Part 1: Laws concerning Homosexuality

Forbidden by law: Basically no, but:

a. there's a law in the penal code against male-to-male sexual practices under certain conditions

b. there is no law protecting LGBT people against prejudices & discrimination

c. lesbians don't exist in Greek law - nor in Greek "normal" society.

Under Article 347 (b) of the Greek Penal Code acts of "unnatural debauchery" (implying male homosexual sex) are punishable crimes (3 months to 5 years imprisonment), when committed for financial gain, or by an adult through the seduction of a person under 17 years of age, or through abuse of power, or in a relationship of dependency between involved people. Male prostitution is supposed to be legal under recent prostitution law, but obviously not for "acts of unnatural debauchery". Heterosexual sex abuse or exploiting power/relationship/dependency, and generally acts where at least one of the involved persons is female, are not punishable!!! The mere phrasing of the above article is characteristic of the typical "acceptable" views of Greek society about homosexuality.

Age of consent: Heterosexual: 15 years, homosexual: 17 years

Registered partnership/marriage: No

Comments: The civil marriage law refers to "persons" but is explained to mean heterosexual couples.

The occasional homosexual couple referred to in the news is rather treated as a juicy scandalous exotic fruit, and a good occasion for homophobic gossip. There is a law about recognising couples married in different countries, it demands the original marriage certificate stamped/confirmed by the ministry of foreign affairs of the issuing country. But no homosexual couple has been heard of trying to use this law.

Thus, lesbian/gay couples have no rights, no right to marriage or receiving social/financial privileges, no right to visiting in hospital, no pension, no shared work-insurance, no inheritance. Just nothing.

Anti-discrimination law, protecting lesbians/gays (L/G) against discrimination: No Greek law yet

There is a bill that should have been validated before early December 2003, about equal treatment in employment and occupation - in order to comply with relative European Community directives valid since Dec. 2000. The bill actually avoids naming homosexuals as a protected social group, except when it absolutely has to, exempts much more than it should, and does not really provide any real protection (no serious prohibitive punishments provided, nor any supportive institutions for homosexual people). People who have been discriminated against can resort to European courts, but this is too difficult and too expensive for individuals, and organisations are still not allowed to offer much help - the above mentioned bill is also supposed to improve this, but is too vague about the subject, and will possibly be valid only referring to employment/occupation issues. (This bill was publicised on Nov.6, 2003, but has not been presented to the parliament for discussion yet)

Other groups in the society protected through such a law: Yes/no

There are laws offering some protection to handicapped people and to specific ethnic groups, like Sinti and Romas. The Greek Constitution prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, ethnic origin and disability, and recently there has been a lot of effort trying to support non-discrimination between men and women (the "Gender directive" of the EC has been translated into Greek as "equality between men and women" but does not exactly support all men and all women, especially not if their gender and sexual identities are not exactly what is perceived to be the "normal, typical" male and female social gender and sexual identity norms). ie. there is an anti-discrimination law prohibiting the media from discrimination on the basis of nationality, race and religion.

Incidents that briefly describe the situation of L/G in society:

- a. The occasional police raids in male-homosexual hang-out places, arresting almost everyone present, just because they were there, and hinting that they "might" have been guilty according to article 347 of the Greek penal code if they just may stretch it so far (i.e. meaning to indulge in acts of "unnatural debauchery" for financial gain – if someone has enough money on him.)
- b. The frequent TV-talk shows against homosexuality "educating" the public that it's a disease and an abhorrent crime, where church people and Christian fanatics are frequent guests of honour, explaining the above, and implying that "homosexuality can be cured", sometimes even appearing as medical experts.. With no proof about their alleged medical studies, but still claiming they're some undefined kind of "psychotherapist", and condemning the whole LGBT community in the worst possible offensive and derogative remarks. Sometimes, some of our few well-known activists are also invited to those shows, to be crucified "live" by the media people and the church people united against them.
- c. There are still school-books taught at university, schools and at the police academy, presenting homosexuals as criminals and suspect of all kinds of criminal acts, along with drug-addicts and paedophiles.
- d. There's no sex-education at high-schools, since it is not permitted by the Greek church. So our youth is not allowed to know anything about either safe-sex or alternative sexualities. If they happen to love someone of their own sex, they're gladly allowed to toil under the false social pretence that they're the only sinners in a "healthy" community, where everyone is supposed to be heterosexual until proven guilty.
- e. Every family is doing their best to "hide" from society the fact that one of their members is or seems or might be a homosexual – while at the same time gossiping about the possibly homosexual members of other families.

The derogatory word used for male homosexuals is considered one of the worst "bad words" and at the same time is the bad word mostly used by the youth and practically anyone on any occasion.

Lesbians "normally" do not exist, except in pornography and in heterosexual men's extreme sexual fantasies.

f. The private TV Company MEGA has broadcasted a kissing scene between two men in a regular family show on "primetime" TV in 2003. Afterwards the company was attacked by the president of the National Radio and Broadcasting Council (ESR) Jiannes Laskaridis. The TV Company had to pay 100.000 Euros as punishment for the kiss. It was stated, that „the scene is outside of society's norms, vulgar and unacceptable“.

This decision is alarming, especially since the Greek EU commissioner for social Affairs, Anna Diamantopoulou, has opened a European meeting of lesbian and gay organisations in November 2003 in Brussels with the following statement: „The demands (of equal rights for

all and protection against discrimination) are the fundamental basis of democracy and human rights.“ About 30 lesbian and gay couples had a public “kiss-in” in Athens after the incident in order to protest against the unjust punishment. (source: Ermis, Newsletter of the Greek lesbian and gay Community in Germany).

Part 2: Situation in the Church(es)

Open L/G welcome to

Eucharist: No. I've never heard of anyone daring to admit their homosexuality in church. We usually know we're not-so-welcome to church long before we dare be out to our own selves. So, everyone is welcome to the Eucharist, especially in most big-city churches, as long as they don't mention their sexual identity.

Do volunteer work: Yes, of course, as long as they are fully closeted and secretive enough about their sexual identity.

Work as ordained ministers: No

Comments: Same as above. The “Holy closet”. There's a lot of hearsay about male homosexuality, especially in closed male monastic societies. There are also some testimonies, mostly from young and beautiful male foreign visitors, but this is a hush-hush subject and anyone referring to it is just trying to undermine the Greek Church. But the Orthodox Church is still heavily discriminatory against women, considering them as "dirty". Women are not allowed to access the church altar, nor are they allowed to be church-singers. They are even forbidden to touch the icons during their menses.

In answer to a letter asking the Greek Church to reduce discrimination against women in Dec. 2003, the archbishop answered that the church is not discriminating against women, it goes so far as to allow them to be "deacons" i.e. to help with the church choirs. Women are typically the unpaid church servants. But don't even think of anything close to ministry! Forget about lesbians and gays ...

Other employment in church(es): No

Comments: The very closeted, (and often also internally homophobic ones), just might. Most of the lesbians and gays rather do not want come close to a church that's been treating them so negatively. Out-of-closet people would not even think of seeking employment in church.

Partnership blessing possible: No

Comment: I understand that the question is serious, but this really sounds funny here. May I repeat the question to my friends and lesbian groups?

Actually some lesbian women have expressed the need to know if there is any church on the globe that supports blessing ceremonies for gays/lesbians, and find it very difficult to believe there are some. We would be grateful for any shred of relevant information.

Incidents/outspoken attitudes that briefly describe the situation of L/G in the churches:

Not many outspoken things – except for the TV-talk-shows, where church people fight against homosexual "corruption" and for their own lives as the norm. The official view is that homosexuals are welcome to church, as long as they don't practice their homosexuality and they try to "heal" it.

Part 3: Christian Lesbian/Gay Networks

No Christian lesbian/gay networks. Here some general ones:

Network name: Sapphites, Greek: Greek-speaking women communication e-group (non-discriminating on the grounds of religion, but most of the members happen to be Christians, mostly not by personal choice)

Number of members: approx. 100

Year of foundation: 2000

Web page/contact address: <http://www.SapphoGR.net> (Currently under major reconstruction)

Network name: Omofylofilia – open communication about homosexuality in Greece (religion-independent and non-discriminating in general)

Number of members: 88

Year of foundation: 2003

Web page/contact address: <http://geocities.com/omofylofilia>

Network name: Rainbow Forum (religion-independent)

Number of members: varies (its open monthly meetings on 1st Wednesday each month)

Year of foundation: 2003

Web page/contact address:

Best through posting to the Omofylofilia e-list (above) or contacting any Greek organisation or group supporting LGBT rights (more info about groups/organisations in the Omofylofilia page, and in the Sapphites-Greek Groups page)

Network name: Athens Lesbian Group (open to all lesbian, bisexual and inquiring women)

Number of members: varies (open weekly meetings on Tuesday late evenings, usually 20-35 members, depends greatly on the season)

Year of foundation: 2003

Web page/contact address: <http://geocities.com/sapphida/loa/> (EG/GR)

e-mail: lesbiangroup@hotmail.com

<http://clubs.pathfinder.gr/lesviakiomadaathinas/> (Greek-only e-club)

Questionnaire filled in by Hermeia, Athens