



THE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR GENDER EQUALITY: WOMEN, SPORTS AND MILITARY INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract:

In Greece, sport as a tool for the promotion of gender integration and social justice has been included in the upcoming National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAPGE) for 2021-2025 by the General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. The social space of sport is also included in the currently in effect NAPGE, formulated for 2016-2020 by the General Secretariat for Gender Equality (GSGE) of the Ministry of the Interior. This article begins with a presentation of the upcoming-updated NAPGE 2021-2025 and subsequently examines NAPGE 2016-2020 which is currently in effect. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether the strategic goals of the NAPGE are being implemented in the Hellenic Military Higher Education Institutions and specifically in their academic curricula and programs, focusing on coed sport activities. A strategic goal of the NAPGE 2016-2020, as in the one to follow for 2021-2025, is to promote equality in education, culture, sport, and the media. To eliminate gender inequalities the NAPGE, presently in effect in Greek society, sets six strategic goals, and incorporates the gender dimension in all social, political, educational and sports bodies. Following European Commission guidelines, the NAPGE priority areas focus on promoting health; eliminating gender-based violence; supporting equality in education, training, culture, sport, and the media; promoting social integration and equality. As regards education, the main objectives include eliminating gender stereotypes and all forms of discrimination. Research shows that women's sport participation challenges gender stereotypes. Subsequently, women's integration and gender equality in the military is discussed, using the curricula and sport programs at the five military schools/academies along with the interview data from our

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previous study with twelve active-duty female officers, former cadets at these five institutions. Our findings indicate that the gender dimension is taken into account: the NAPGE is being implemented, to a certain extent. Our results show that coed sport activities and team sports cultivate acceptance, cohesion, teamwork, and collaborations, leading to women's integration and inclusion, in addition to a healthier and more productive military environment and culture.

Keywords: gender equality, women, Covid pandemic, coronavirus lockdowns, gender-based violence, multiple discrimination, gender harassment, Armed Forces, hegemonic masculinity, military institutions, gender gaps, retention, sport activities, team sports, coed sports

1. Introduction

"Multiple Discrimination means any discrimination, exclusion or limitation, to a person, based on more than one reason (e.g., race, color, national or ethnic origin, birth, religion or other belief, disability or chronic illness, age, family or social status, sexual orientation, identity or gender" (NAPGE, 2018: 14).

In 2021 the European Parliament dedicated *International Women's Day* to the women throughout the world for their social, humanitarian, professional and scientific contributions during the Covid-19 pandemic, a period resulting in major social, political, and economic transformations. As is acknowledged globally, effective policies and measures, that include the gender dimension, are required to ensure growth and stability. Speaking at the informal Council of Ministers of Labor of the EU on "Gender equality as a driver of recovery in the post-Covid era", Maria Syregela, the Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs announced that the new National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAPGE) for 2021-2025 includes the effects of the pandemic, and the needs of the country; the integration of the gender dimension into all government policies; the fight against gender-based violence.ⁱ

We need point out here that during the Covid-19 lockdowns gender-based violence had risen, and not only in Greece, where the dialogue concerning the new National Action Plan for Gender Equality for 2021-2025 is ongoingⁱⁱ (NAPGE, 2021). Specifically, the new National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAPGE) was under public review until August 20, 2021 and is currently being prepared. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs posted on their official website, the digital version for public consultation-discussion and every public body, social partner and stakeholder was invited to participate by submitting comments, proposals or suggestions.ⁱⁱⁱ

The four priority axes of the new and updated NAPGE for 2021-2025, as the previous one, includes the social space of Sport and that of Health. Specifically, priority axis 4, titled "Gender mainstreaming in sectoral policies", focuses on the integration of the gender perspective/dimension in all sectoral policies and, when needed, close cooperation with ministries, public bodies, and local authorities. Through this axis,

efforts will be made to promote gender equality in budgets and policymaking in the fields of Education, Health, Sports, Culture, and the Media, and principally for vulnerable social groups (NAPGE, 2021).

Priority axis 4 also recommends producing more research that includes the gender dimension, specifically gender-based statistics and surveys to support monitoring (accountability), planning, promoting, and adapting gender equality actions. Each thematic axis and action subsequently deals with specific objectives, such as promoting gender equality in sport or promoting gender equality in culture. For example, *Action 2.2.1* in this priority axis concerns legislative interventions for the promotion of women in leadership and decision-making positions in sport governing bodies (SGBs), federations and associations with corporate social responsibility. *Objective 4.6* concentrates on promoting gender equality in sports and *Action 4.6.1* in increasing and reproducing women's participation in sports programs through awareness raising campaigns and cooperation with local authorities, as well as providing safe and accessible sports facilities for women through collaborations with the General Secretariat for Gender Equality. *Action 4.6.1* also deals with eliminating sexism, sexual harassment, and violence in sport. Additionally, the NAPGE includes health maintenance and health management through awareness-raising workshops for older women on the role of exercise and diet (NAPGE, 2021: 51, 60, 70, 86, 88).

The Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports^{iv} has submitted a series of actions, targets/objectives, actions, and priority axes, the first being preventing and eliminating gender-based violence, including domestic violence, which as previously cited has increased significantly during the coronavirus pandemic. Furthermore, the Ministry of Culture and Sports has already launched collaborations and discussions on including the gender dimension in education; promoting gender equality in sports; supporting women's participation in coaching and in decision-making positions; eliminating all forms of violence, such as abuse of power, including harassment and racism in sport (NAPGE, 2021: 39, 42, 51).

According to the new NAPGE (2021), women's participation in sports has been rising, although at a significantly smaller rate than that of men who have integrated sports as a leisure activity. This conclusion is drawn from the 2016 Eurobarometer study on the frequency of sport, exercise, or physical activity of those over the age of 18, which shows that women exercise less than men: only 6,1% women as compared to 12,3% men declared they exercise on a daily basis or almost every day, while in 2011 the respective percentages were 4,9% και 11,7%. Apparently, there is a slight increase for both genders. A similar difference is shown in the percentages of those who never play sports: 68.6% for women and 53.7% for men. Moreover, there is a decrease in the percentage of people with positive perceptions/views concerning their health during the 2005-2017 period. In 2018, 74.2% women and 78.4% men declared/believed they enjoyed good health, which was a slight decrease as compared to 2005 where the percentages were 75% and 80% respectively. Regarding their access to adequate health care, in 2018, about 11.3% women and 9% men, said they were satisfied (NAPGE, 2021: 8-9).

2. Material and Methods

We begin with a presentation of the upcoming National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAPGE) for 2021-2025 by the General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, and subsequently examine the NAPGE 2016-2020 which is currently in effect.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether the strategic goals of the National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAPGE) are being implemented in the Hellenic Military Higher Education Institutions, and if so, to what extent. Special importance will be placed on the military sports curricula and programs at the Hellenic Military, Naval, and Air Force Academies (five military academies/schools).

Accordingly, following a literature review on ensuring a gender balance in military institutions and implementing the NAPGE, we discuss the data of our previous study (Kefi-Chatzichamperi, Kamberidou, & Patsantaras, 2020), which included interviews with twelve active-duty female officers who had been enrolled as cadets in the five Hellenic Military Higher Education Institutions, and graduated in the years 2000, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015. We present their views regarding the promotion of gender equality in this military culture: to wit the implementation of the NAPGE in the five military academies.

The 12 women who participated in the semi-structured interviews, are all high-ranking military officers today, former graduates: seven from the Hellenic Army Academy; one from the Hellenic Military Nursing Academy; two from the Hellenic Military Academy of Corps Officers; one from the Hellenic Naval Academy; one from the Hellenic Air Force Academy. To protect their anonymity, we will not be using their names but addressing them as: Officer 1, Officer 2, Officer 3, and so forth. We chose the narrative which is rich in rhetorical statements that describe personal experiences, in addition to being more detailed, and focusing on facts and actions (Lidaki, 2016; Pantouli, 2015). Our findings show that women's participation in sport activities (individual, team or coed) can lead to eliminating or challenging gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality.

3. The upcoming National Action Plan for Gender Equality: NAPGE 2021-2025

The new National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAPGE) in Greece for 2021-2025 is in line with: the strategic framework of the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development; the Council of Europe Strategy for Gender Equality 2018-2023; the European Strategy for Gender Equality 2020-2025; the Development Plan for the Greek Economy and the Gender Equality requirements for 2021-2027.

NAPGE 2021-2025 is organized around four priority axes, each spotlighting a specific thematic dimension of gender equality policies. The theme of preventing and eliminating social stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination is integrated and highlighted in all four axes (and in all thematic policies, objectives, and actions).

In other words, the NAPGE 2021-2025 has four Priority Axes, the first being to eliminate gender and domestic violence. We need reiterate that domestic and gender-based violence has risen, and not only in Greece, with the coronavirus lockdowns being a major contributing factor. *Priority Axis 2* involves equal access to leadership positions and decision-making roles. *Priority Axis 3* promotes equal participation in the workplace (labor force), and *Priority Axis 4* gender mainstreaming in sectoral policies.

As regards domestic violence in Greece, the year 2020 was the year in which Law 4531/2018 was implemented, ratifying the *Istanbul Convention*,^v specifically the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, adapted to Greek Legislation. What followed was the country's assessment concerning the correct implementation of the *Istanbul Convention* by the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), with an evaluation period of three months (September 2021).^{vi} It is important to point out here that there is a significant gap in the data concerning violence against women which has increased despite legislation.

In 2019 legislation for the promotion of gender equality, and the prevention and elimination of gender-based violence was passed in Greece (Law 4604/2019, A' 50), ratifying the Convention of the Council of Europe for the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. The previous law (Law 4431/2018, A' 62) had set the first framework in this direction. However, the conception of a legislative framework is not enough to produce the desired results. Otherwise, the violence against women would not have increased.

We need coordinated efforts from all stakeholders (as provided in article 10 of Law 4604/2019) to integrate the gender dimension into public policies in order to develop projects and actions aimed at achieving equality and improving the country's rank in the annual Gender Equality Index of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). Greece ranks last in the EU in terms of the Gender Equality Index for 2020 with the data for 2018, remaining in the same position since 2010, despite the slight improvement in the index compared to 2010 and 2017. On the other hand, the data indicates that Greece performs well in the fields of Health and the Economy (NAPGE, 2021: 5).

Since the new NAPGE 2021-2025 has not been finalized yet, we will examine the NAPGE 2016-2020 which is the one presently being disseminated and implemented in Greek society. The purpose of this study is to determine whether the strategic goals of the NAPGE 2016-2020 are being implemented in the Hellenic Military Higher Education Institutions, and specifically the NAPGE goal that promotes equality in education, culture, sport and the media. The current NAPGE sets six strategic goals in order to eliminate gender inequalities, incorporating the gender dimension in all social, political, educational and sports bodies.

4. NAPGE 2016-2020: Sport and social inclusion

Gender equality is not only a "female issue" but a universal one, argued Foteini Kouvela, the Secretary-General for Gender Equality in 2018, in her introductory note, presenting

the National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAPGE). Gender equality is a universal principle, as formulated in the UN Millennium Development Goals, the declarations and documents of the European Union, and in those of other international organizations (NAPGE, 2018).

The General Secretariat for Gender Equality (GSGE) has been striving to eliminate diverse forms of social exclusion (socioeconomic inequalities) between women and men, which is clearly shown in the National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2016-2020 which has also incorporated the NAPGE 2010-2013. The GSGE had taken into account the conditions that emerged during the economic crisis, in addition to discussions and collaborations with experts and representatives from the academia, civil society, the public, social and political spheres (NAPGE, 2018).

The NAPGE 2016-2020, in its seven priority axes includes Sports and Health, emphasizing the significant role of sports in promoting social inclusion. It covers seven priority axes/chapters: (1) the social inclusion and equal treatment of women who confront multiple discrimination; (2) gender-based violence; (3) the workplace/labor market, in addition to the work-family imbalance; (4) education, training, culture, sports and media; (5) health; (6) women's participation in power structures; (7) women in decision-making centers and processes, to wit the leadership gap.

The NAPGE is of national scope and has the following goals: gender integration in all social and political fields; the implementation of special measures and/or positive actions to prevent, end or tackle gender inequalities; eliminating discrimination and stereotypes that undermine democracies. Accordingly, the strategic objectives of the NAPGE involve:

- Protecting women's rights, with an emphasis on vulnerable social groups^{vii} including migrant and refugee women.
- Preventing and confronting violence against women in society, the workplace, and the family.
- Supporting women's employment and dealing with the consequences of the decline in the male labor force in terms of gender identities and gender relations.
- Promoting equality in education, culture, sports and the media.
- Eliminating gender inequalities in health.
- Achieving a gender balance in decision-making positions/centers, namely eliminating women's underrepresentation.

4.1 Multiple discrimination

The NAPGE's Priority Axes—in accordance with the guidelines of the European Commission to Member States—covers the policy area which deals with the social inclusion and equal treatment of women who are subject to multiple forms of discrimination. The term *multiple discrimination* defines social exclusion which is based on more than one reason: e.g., gender, race, color, ethnic identity, national origin, religion, disability, age, etc. (NAPGE, 2018).

In this priority axis,^{viii} the Gender Secretariat for Gender Equality (GSGE) focuses on women who confront multiple discrimination, not only due to gender, but as a

vulnerable social group, namely social exclusion attributed to physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, and drug addiction; being homeless, a former prisoner, a refugee woman, a Roma, a single parent, a victim of domestic violence, a victim of trafficking, etc. The other five policy areas (priority axes) include: Gender-based violence; Work-life balance or rather imbalance; Education, training, culture, sports and the media; Health; Decision-making positions (NAPGE, 2018).

The third priority axis/chapter of the NAPGE 2016-2020 titled "Education, Training, Culture, Sports and Media", discusses eliminating stereotypes and all forms of discrimination based on gender, in view of the economic, social, cultural, and political changes in the past decades, and not only in Greece. This priority axis has adopted the model of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture, which includes the "Education and Training, Culture and Media, Youth, Sport and Languages" (NAPGE, 2018: 64).

Gender gaps or inequalities in education, in the education system, as regards curricula and perceptions, persist today, reproducing gender stereotypes in public and private spheres. Accordingly, in this priority axis Objective 1 discusses the long-standing goal of the General Secretariat for Gender Equality (GSGE) in promoting equality and respect for diversity through formal education, science, and research. *Objective 2* deals with promoting gender equality in lifelong learning and informal education and training. *Objective 3* focuses on eliminating social prejudices and promoting equality through the mass media. *Objective 4* examines the promotion of gender equality through cultural creations, cultural policies, and so forth (NAPGA, 2018: 79). We must not forget that sport, the social space of sport, is also a part of culture.

As regards *Objective 5*, which focuses on promoting gender equality through sports, a brief sample of the NAPGE 2017-2020 timetable^{ix} follows:

Table 1: Objective 5: Promoting Gender Equality in Sports 2017-2020

| Actions | Implementing Bodies |
|---|---|
| Including-incorporating the gender perspective in the National Action Plan for Sports | General Secretariat for Gender Equality (GSGE), General Secretariat of Sports, KETHI: Research Centre for Gender Equality |
| Training seminars for Ministry staff responsible for design and implementation of sports policies that include the gender perspective (gender mainstreaming). | GSGE; General Secretariat for Sports. Ministry of Culture and Sports, INEP/ EKDDA: National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government |
| Monitoring-checking that the non-sexist language guide is applied in public documents | GSGE, Ministry of Culture & Sports, General Secretariat of Sports, supervised bodies |
| Establishing a double mandatory quota on number of men and women candidates, percentage of members on Boards of SGBs, associations, federations, etc. | GSGE, General Secretariat for Sports, Greek Parliament |
| Introducing gender perspective in sport federations, evaluations and financing | GSGE; General Secretariat for Sports, Sport associations/federations |
| Organizing Pan-Hellenic Congress with workshops on <i>Women and Sports</i> | GSGE, KETHI, General Secretariat for Sports, Academia-universities, Women's organizations, NGOs, SGBs, sports associations, federations |

| | |
|---|--|
| Awareness raising campaigns during <i>European Sports Week</i> every September: mass media, social media, printed material. | GSGE, General Secretariat for Sports, Municipalities, National Radio and Television (ERT), Hellenic Olympic Committee (HOC) |
| Encouraging women's participation in sports programs; Designing special programs for women who confront multiple discrimination | GSGE, Municipal Commissions for Gender Equality, Cultural, Sports and Youth Organizations, Municipal bodies in charge of Sports; INEP/EKDDA. |
| Education and training programs for athletes, coaches and administrative staff on preventing and eliminating violence against women, sexism and gender stereotypes. | GSGE, General Secretariat for Sports, Hellenic Olympic Committee (HOC), Sport and Coaching organizations, sport bodies, associations, SGBs |
| Preparing a <i>Code of Conduct for Coaches</i> with regard to sexual violence and harassment. | General Secretariat for Sports, GSGE, KETHI, HOC, University Departments and Schools of Physical Education & Sport Science, Sport bodies |

So, have all of the above actions, including those discussed in this paper so far, been implemented fully, partly or to some extent in Greece's Military Higher Education Institutions?

We need reiterate that this study examines the implementation of the National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAPGE) in the five Hellenic Military Higher Education Institutions (the five military academies/schools), and specifically the promotion of gender equality through sports, and coed sport activities in particular.

It is important to point out here that the Hellenic Military Higher Education Institutions are made up of five academies/schools of the Ministry of National Defence: (1) the Hellenic Army Academy, founded in 1828, (2) the Hellenic Military Academy of Corps Officers, founded in 1926, (3) the Hellenic Military Nursing Academy, founded in 1946, (4) the Hellenic Naval Academy, founded in 1845 and (5) the Hellenic Air Force Academy founded in 1931. The five military academies are equivalent to university studies, with the same entry requirements and qualifications as any other constitutionally recognized and accredited public university in Greece (Karabelias, 2009; Kaffes, 2013; Kefi-Chatzichamperi, Kamberidou, & Patsantaras, 2020).

We argue that coed sports (mixed-gender teams) can be used as an *integration tool* for women in military institutions, in the long-run contributing to women's inclusion. Coed sport participation and exercises serve as a means of bridging the gender-divide and eliminating "*gender harassment*" (Kamberidou, 2019: 23-24). At this point we need refer to *Objective 1* in the NAPGE's fourth priority axis (*education, training, culture, sport and media*) which proposes introducing seminars on gender equality (where they do not exist) at Higher Military Educational Institutions (the five military academies), as well as Police Academies (NAPGE, 2018: 68).

Additionally, gender awareness-raising programs and training for civilian and military personnel of the Ministry of National Defense is proposed in *Objective 2* of the fourth axis. This action recommends collaborations between the Ministry of Education, the Institute of Educational, Policy, the General Secretariat for Gender Equality (GSGE), the National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government (EKDDA), and the

General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning (NAPGE, 2018: 71), neglecting to include here the Ministry of Defense, which seems to be a grave oversight.

This is a serious oversight in view of the gender participation and leadership gaps, namely women's underrepresentation in military institutions in Greece, that will be examined in this paper: e.g., women make up only 10 percent of the cadets in Greece's higher education military institutions/academies, and only 15.5 percent in the country's Armed Forces (15.5 %).

5. Ensuring a gender balance: bridging the gender-divide

A main challenge in the military today is to ensure a gender balance through women's inclusion, active engagement, and retention, observes Kamberidou (2019), who discusses the socio-cultural aspects of gender integration in the Armed Forces, arguing for "*degendering*" the Armed Forces. In her article she points out that *degendering* means cultivating gender-neutral standards, namely promoting inclusivity and equality for all. Following a detailed literature review relevant to women's integration in the military, Kamberidou (2019) focuses on Greece, arguing that coed military sport participation or gender-mixed military sport activities, training and exercises serve as a means of bridging the gender-divide and eliminating gender harassment.

She argues that coed sports or mixed-gender teams can be used as a tool for women's inclusion and integration in the military, but it's only part of the solution, adding that research emphasizes the need for change in the military culture on all levels—legal and organizational—including gender-awareness and diversity training, especially on the complimentary skills that both genders bring to the table as opposed to the "*wastage of talent*" (Kamberidou, 2019: 23).

Few researchers have examined the benefits and impact of coed sports or the importance of gender-mixed integrated activities as opposed to the plethora of studies on the physical and social benefits^x of participation in team sports, such as social development, bonding, and fitness.

Messner (2002:166) argues that coed sport activities act as a means for "*leveling the playing field and simultaneously changing the rules of the game to make the world more just, equitable, and healthy for all.*"

Cohen and Melton (2014) argue that due to the scarcity of research on coed sports, their qualitative study focuses on the innovative and "*genuine sport of quidditch, based on the Harry Potter franchise*", since it offers an alternative to traditional sport and is growing in popularity. In using an exploratory qualitative approach, the purpose of their research was to examine the impact of the sport on its participants, and to determine how it influenced attitudes toward the opposite gender. Their findings indicate that the coed structure of the sport of quidditch has led to shifts in gender attitudes, specifically positive coed experience for men and women, who in turn developed an increased desire for inclusivity and equality. Both genders reported stereotype and attitude changes, while women also said they felt increased pride and self-confidence.

On the other hand, despite these shifts in attitude, underlying prejudice toward women athletes was still observable among the men who participated in the sport. As Cohen and Melton (2014) point out, the norms and traditions of sport reinforce and perpetuate notions of hegemonic masculinity. Certainly, we could argue that the same applies to the military culture, the norms and traditions of the military also reinforce and perpetuate notions of hegemonic masculinity.

Gendered discourses, belief systems, and policies in sport typically disadvantage women and privilege men, making it seem natural to view as superior athletes those who possess super-masculine or super-competitive traits, casting sport as a male domain in which women should play supportive roles or limit themselves to the boundaries of women's sports (Patsantaras, 2014). This has resulted in the leaky pipeline phenomenon in sports, in other words, as Cohen & Melton (2014) describe it, it has led to significant "dropout rates" among both male and female participants.

When a sport becomes too competitive, athletes lose the balance between health and social interaction, as opposed to mixed gender sports, to wit coed sports (Cohen & Melton, 2014: 220). Coed sports could serve or contribute to changing gender attitudes and stereotypes in the military's hegemonic culture. Gender integration in the military through coed sport is discussed for the first time in Kefi-Chatzichamperi's (2020) doctoral dissertation, the first scientific study on this subject in Greece. Her study focuses on women's inclusion in the five Hellenic Higher Education Military Institutions through sports, and in particular through coed sport activities. She also examines women's integration in all three sectors of the Armed Forces in Greece (Army, Navy and Air Force) as opposed to women's past experiences and engagements in secondary, subordinate or unofficial roles e.g., war nurses and volunteers.

Following a detailed literature review and discussion on gender and the military; gender and sports; coed sports; coed sport activities in the military, Kefi-Chatzichamperi (2020) focuses on women's integration in the military through sports. She combines a qualitative and quantitative approach for a better understanding of how women and men identify or perceive the meaning of their mixed-gender military sport experience in the Hellenic Military Higher Education Institutions.

Initially, twelve Greek women, all high-ranking active officers in the Armed Forces today, took part in semi-structured interviews. The twelve women— between the ages of 25 to 49 years old—were randomly chosen. Subsequently, a total of 120 active officers of both genders responded to the Greek version of the "Group Environment Questionnaire" (Angelonidis, Kakkos, Zervas & Psychoudaki, 1993-94 in Kefi-Chatzichamperi, 2020). From a total of 18 questions nine were selected to examine gender integration through sport. The main research question was whether sport activities in the five military academies/schools contribute to gender integration-inclusion as perceived and understood by the 120 participants (female and male officers).

The findings—from the responses of the 120 military officers—indicate that mixed-gender military sport programs contribute to women's integration. Other than strengthening physical capacity, fitness and performance, coed military sport activities could prevent sexism; eliminate or reduce gender harassment, gender discrimination,

and gender stereotypes; strengthen interpersonal communication/relationships and teamwork; reinforce team and social cohesion, unity, and cooperation skills.

Accordingly, this study indicates that coed sport activities in the five military academies have been contributing to the implementation of the current National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAPGE) and will also contribute to the upcoming one for the 2021-2025 period.

5.1 Gender integration efforts in the Greek Armed Forces: implementing the NAPGE

The National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAPGE) seems to have been implemented in many areas in military institutions. *Gender Equality Offices* have been established in the Hellenic Armed Forces: Army, Navy and Air Force. *Personnel Welfare Offices* are managing diverse gender issues, providing advice, guidelines, and assistance. A coed training program before deployment in Peace Support Operations is offered to all ranks in the military academies/schools. Additionally, the curricula at the academies includes gender psychology, human relationships, social exclusion and minorities, army sociology (the army as a social group), and the consequences of prejudice and racism (Kamberidou, 2019; Theodorakoudis, 2017).

As regards the implementation of the priority axis concerning the reconciliation of family and professional life in the National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2016-2020 (NAPGE, 2018: 47), we argue that it is being implemented in the Hellenic Armed Forces. For example, to support military families and facilitate a work-life balance, the following measures are in effect: five-month pregnancy leave for female personnel and nine months childcare leave, also granted to male military personnel; Women undergoing in-vitro fertilization are exempted from physical exercises and duties, and are granted extra leave; Up to two years parental leave allowed for those with children aged up to six years old, including one more year for every additional child. The duration of this leave may not exceed five years; Military personnel with a disabled child or spouse are allowed a reduced workday, extra leave, and are exempt from exercises and 24-hour duties; Single-parents with a disabled child, can also be exempt from exercises and 24-hour duties; Parental leave (one day every two months) is granted to monitor children's school progress; When both parents are members of the Armed Forces additional support is provided: e.g., Couples are assigned to the same location. They also have the option not to participate in exercises at the same time (Kamberidou, 2019; Theodorakoudis, 2017).

On the other hand, although the work-life-family balance is taken into account—women remain largely underrepresented in the Hellenic Armed Forces (15.5% women and 88.9% men), though Greece is in the top ten countries with the highest female participation rate after Canada (15.7%). Consequently, *Objective 1* in the fourth priority axis of the NAPGE 2016-2020 pertaining to "*the reinforcement of the equal participation of women in all fields of public and professional life*", including leadership roles (NAPGE, 2018: 103), has not been implemented yet, namely the gender participation gap in the Hellenic Armed Forces has not been closed but remains high (15.5%), and not only in Greece. Women active-duty military personnel in the Armed Forces of NATO member states

represent an overall average of 11.1%, with Hungary holding the highest female participation rate (19.3%) and Turkey the lowest (0.8%) (Kamberidou, 2019).

The historicity of women's exclusion, including socio-cultural barriers are major causes for women's underrepresentation in the military and other social spaces (e.g., Sport institutions). As regards Greece, women's enlistment in the Greek military was introduced in 1977 and established in 1978 with presidential decree 636/1978.^{xi} Women entering the military academies in the 1990s were initially in non-combat disciplines, and by 2002 in battle specialties without any quota compared to their male counterparts. It was not until 2001 (law 2936/2001) that women's participation in the Greek military increased substantially due to the institution of the soldier's profession. Of course, the 1990s gender mainstreaming policies and political actions had played their role (Kamberidou, 2019; Theodorakoudis, 2017).

For example, the gender mainstreaming policies and political actions of the 1990s obliged the Hellenic Air Force to increase the number of women pilots, and as a result, the first women pilots graduated from the Hellenic Air Force Academy in 2006 (Tzogani, 2017).

As regards the gender participation gap, in his study Theodorakoudis (2017) argues that there are no legal regulations in Greece that specifically promote the recruitment of women in the military, while enlistment requirements for women are different than those for men. As an example, he notes that admission and recruitment requirements, including physical tests are modified and adapted according to gender in the military academies or military higher education institutions.

This is also the case in competitive sports, where gender segregation is implemented for reasons of equality. A result of women's underrepresentation (participation gap) in the military is the leadership gap (women's underrepresentation in leadership roles). Despite women's admission/entrance in the Armed Forces and in the Military Higher Education Institutions in Greece, since 2002, they seem to have remained an *invisible minority*. It was not until 2019 when a woman was promoted to Head of the "Icarus" cadets at the Hellenic Air Force Academy.^{xii} In 2019 Marina Konstantinou became the first woman Head of the Hellenic Airforce Academy cadets: *"I am so proud that I made my dream come true, to serve in the Hellenic Armed Forces defending the airspace of our country as an Air Force Pilot."* It is important to reiterate here that the first women pilots graduated from the Hellenic Air Force Academy in 2006.

In 2013, about 150 years since its foundation, the Hellenic Naval Academy for the first time appointed a woman (Elena Iosif) as Head of the Naval Cadets. She is also the first female chief of the 4th class at the Hellenic Naval Academy.

Women commissioned officers have to work harder than their male counterparts, are usually well organized and extremely strict with themselves in order to be integrated into the military community and be accepted by their male peers, as is the case internationally, argues Theodorakoudis (2017), adding that in Greece professional women soldiers (EPOP), many reaching the rank of Sergeant Major, are assigned "tough" combat specializations such as shot-gunners, tank crews, artillery and machine-gun

operators, and confront major difficulties. In a study based on both interviews and a questionnaire, he argues for a gender balance in the military.

In the higher military hierarchies, such as the officers' corps over 70% of the women officers serve in non-battle corps (Technical, War Material, and Shipping Supplies) and in Services, having reached the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. However, there is a gender balance in the battle corps (Infantry, Tank, Artillery), women officers reaching the rank of Major (Theodorakoudis, 2017).

Women's underrepresentation—the large gender participation and leadership gaps—in the Hellenic Military Higher Education Institutions shows that the NAPGE's priority axis on achieving a gender balance “*in participation in power structures and decision-making centers and processes*” (NAPGE, 2018) has not been considered or implemented yet. Conversely, we could argue that the results of the gender equality policies in the Armed Forces and their Higher Education Institutions have not yet begun to bear fruit or show their results. To close the gender gaps, women's participation and retention needs to increase.

Repeated discussions and interviews with former female cadets who graduated from the five military academies in Greece in 2000, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015 (and are now active-duty officers), reveal that women still make up only one-third of the total students admitted. In other words, only 10 percent are women and 90 percent are men: out of the total of 1,049 cadets, only 91 cadets are women and 958 are men (Kefi-Chatzichamperi, 2020).

It is impossible to close gender gaps with these numbers! This underrepresentation of women cadets (10%), along with the leaky pipeline, namely the problem of retention, could lead to a further reduction in female officers. Consequently, we need role models and mentors to reproduce participation.

In a study that included interviews and official statistics of the Hellenic Air Force, Tzogani (2017), Sociology Instructor at the Hellenic Air Force Academy (HAFA), discusses the status of women pilots. In her interviews with women pilots, she poses the following questions: How easy is it for women to follow a profession still considered typically male? How feasible is it to overcome gender stereotypes? Are women pilots treated equally to their male colleagues? What specific roles/duties are they assigned in this military environment? Are women affected by the current economic crisis, more than their male counterparts?

The leaky pipeline (retention) seems to be an alarming result of her study. Specifically, since 2006, when the first women pilots graduated from HAFA, only a small number of female cadets have been entering the Academy annually, indicating we need to change mindsets!

Tzogani (2017) examines the reasons for this underrepresentation and also addresses the issue of what happens to the HAFA women graduates. Why do they abandon the profession (leaky pipeline)? Accordingly, she argues for upgrading the status of women pilots in order to increase participation and improve the functionality of the Hellenic Air Force (HAFA), as Greece has to face new challenges in the new defensive environment consisting of asymmetric threats.

More women are needed to maintain defense capacities at a high level, especially due to the Greece's geostrategic position, and especially today if you consider the expected influx of illegal migrants from Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover, and not only!

Certainly, high unemployment rates, the Greek Army's turn to professionalism due to conscript reduction, accelerated technological developments (e.g., smart weapons), and the need for women's complementary skills, as is the case globally, have been attracting women into the military. Even so, it seems they are confronting a number of gender barriers and difficulties due to perpetuated notions of hegemonic masculinity—the male domain—as is the case in the social space of sport (Cohen & Melton, 2014; Georgiou, Patsantaras, & Kamberidou, 2018; Patsantaras, 2014), demonstrating the need for further gender integration efforts so as to achieve a gender balance.

Women's underrepresentation in the five military academies of Greece could reinforce exclusionary patterns and mindsets, namely further reduce their numbers, thus promoting gender inequalities and maintaining the military's hegemonic culture. Historically, a common trait and ground for both institutions—Sport and the Military (Armed Forces)—is hegemonic masculinity, associated with power relations and male-dominated environments. Could the mandatory implementation of political measures, actions and policies, like the upcoming National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAPGE) for 2021-2025 contribute to changing the military's hegemonic structure of male superiority?

5.2 Women officers speak of their experiences at the five military academies

Cadets, men and women, at all five military academies in Greece, participate together in the daily morning sport activities and exercises (gymnastics and fitness) and in the afternoon sport teams: track and field (jumping, running, throwing), basketball, volleyball, tennis, shooting, swimming, military training, etc. The twelve female officers interviewed confirm that their coed sport activities cultivated social relations and teamwork; contributed to eliminating stereotypes and promoted gender equality.

Special attention is given to the sports-military curricula at the five Hellenic Higher Education Military Institutions/Academies—acquired from their course catalogues/programs (hardcopy or online), along with the information provided in the interviews by the female officers, who were all former cadets at these five higher education military academies. Our findings show that the National Plan for Gender Equality (NAPGE) is being implemented to some extent, and women's participation in sport activities contributes to eliminating or challenging gender stereotypes.

One need point out here that there are not enough women enrolled in the five military academies in order to establish women's sports teams, something which is proving to be an advantage, since coed sport participation cultivates relationships and teamwork, which contributes to women's inclusion. As regards the five military institutions:

A. Hellenic Military Academy of Nursing: "sport improved our teamwork and brought us closer together"

"Our main priority as university students has always been our academic education, consequently physical education and sports activities always came last," as Officer 1, who graduated from the academy in 1996, pointed out in her interview.

However, this comment does not imply or suggest that sport is not important and considered secondary at the Hellenic Military Nursing Academy since Officer 1, who was on the swim team, also acknowledges the importance of sport: *"It goes without saying that sport activities were part of our education, and sport improved our teamwork and brought us closer together, male and female cadets"*.

In response to the question concerning the work-life-family balance— her husband also an officer in the military— she acknowledges his contribution, his cooperation and support, and his team spirit.

The Military Nursing Academy/School was the first academy for female Officers, established in Athens in 1946: initially a three-year study program, and subsequently, in 1989 a four-year one, becoming coed in 1992 when men were admitted. *"What always surprised me was the fact that the male officers usually called us by our first names whereas they used the term Mr. in front of the men's names"*, observes Officer 1, adding: *another difficult situation for me [during her military career] was that there were no women's toilets/bathrooms and I had to use the men's [...] of course I was the only woman then"*. We need point out here that Officer 1 entered the Nursing Academy in 1994 and graduated in 1998.

In September 2005 the academic program was transferred to the School of Health Sciences of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA), the Military Nursing Academy supervising the academic program.^{xiii} Courses, other than Health, Nursing and Medicine, include Sociology, Culturology (cultural education of which sport is a part), Military Science, Psychology, Biology, Education, and Pharmacy.

Specifically, the cadets' education is divided into two parts: (1) Military education, which includes physical education and training, and (2) Academic education which includes foreign languages, the social sciences and the humanities, a sample of which are listed above. As regards physical education and sports, considered part of their cultural education, both genders participate in a variety of activities such as aerobic-Swedish gymnastics and dance. Male and female cadets take part in sport activities such as track and field, basketball, volleyball, tennis, swimming, and also start coed sports teams.

B. Hellenic Military Academy of Corps Officers: "a feeling of equality"

"What I enjoyed the most was a feeling of equality; the equality that existed among our team members. We ran together every morning; we did bends and bounces [...] During our free time, which was in the afternoon, we could choose team sports, like basketball, volleyball and football. I was on the track and field team; I ran 800 meters. Our swimming team used the swimming pool at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki" as Officer 3 pointed out in her interview.

Men and woman exercised together on a daily basis, and the trainers organized the daily morning gymnastics program according to the military physical education manual, after consulting with the sports officer, as Officer 2 points out, adding: *"We*

participated in gymnastics early in the mornings between 6:10 to 6:40. [...] The 3d year cadets did not participate. The trainers/coaches for 1st and 2nd year cadets were actually the 5th year cadets.

The Military Academy of Corps Officers, its headquarters at the military camp Kotta in Thessaloniki, was originally called the Military Medical School,^{xiv} which was founded in 1926 at Elpis Hospital and relocated in 1927, 1932, 1935 and 1937. It was destroyed in the beginning of World War II, reopening in 1947 in Thessaloniki, and 23 years later renamed Hellenic Military Academy of Corps Officers (Tsokou, 2006).

In reference to the curricula, the cadets are full-time students at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in the following six Departments and Schools: Medicine (Medical School, 6 years); Veterinary Medicine (5 years), Dental School (5 years), Pharmaceutics (5 years), Psychology (4 years), Law School: Law for Military Legal Advisers (4 years) and Economics (4 years). They have the same obligations and requirements as all the other non-military students. They attend classes, lectures, clinical studies, laboratories, etc. The Hellenic Military Academy of Corps Officers monitors their university progress and performance, while organizing their military training (practical and theoretical) throughout the academic year. After graduation the cadets can continue their studies and obtain a graduate degree at home or abroad.^{xv}

Their education at the Hellenic Military Academy of Corps Officers includes topics of general interest, lectures by experts or distinguished guests on issues of social interest; educational visits and trips to museums, historical locations and religious sites; foreign languages; teaching the Greek language to foreign students.^{xvi}

In reference to their sport and cultural education, the cadets also join sport clubs and participate in team and individual sports at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the Academies of the Armed Forces. They take part in concerts, orchestra-Byzantine and European choirs, as well as dance groups that perform at musical and artistic events at the Academy or elsewhere, at public events or in the community during holidays.^{xvii}

The cadets, women and men, participate in sport activities such as track and field, basketball, volleyball, tennis, swimming, and dance. They also take part in the Annual Coed Games - Championships of the Armed Forces Military Academies & Security Forces Academies.^{xviii}

Physical education and military training are unquestionably an important part of their program. Upon entering the Academy, the female and male cadets begin their basic training which lasts three weeks. Theoretical military training takes place along with their university studies and other educational activities, throughout the academic year. The applied-practical military training includes:

- A five-day morning and night sharpshooting course combined with academic activities.
- One-week winter survival and training course for all cadet, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year, in Trikala after the February university exam period.
- A three-week survival and training summer program for all cadets (1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year) in Chalkidiki, after the final exams at the university, which are usually held in June. After this three-week period the annual military training

cycle ends (the school year is completed) and the cadets begin their summer vacation.^{xix}

C. Hellenic Military Academy (Evelpidon): "when I entered the academy, we were only three women", "cooperation and mutual assistance"

The gender participation gap is clearly visible in the Hellenic Military Academy as well: out of the 204 cadets graduating in 2015, only 23 were women. One of the first women who entered the academy, Officer 3, describes her first experiences with the male cadets, which made her feel uncomfortable, however the support and positive encouragement she received from her trainer made up for it:

"The male cadets always looked at me strangely, and not only during sports activities. This was very difficult for me, especially the first semester as regards my successful participation in the activities and my academic courses [...] we were only three women and we had to participate with the male cadets in physical education classes, military sports activities, and battlefield and winter-summer living training and courses [...] a 4th year male cadet picked me up every afternoon and we trained together. He was my trainer, and we did gymnastics: running (1600m.), bends, pulls and the Battle Track. When I completed the Battlefield successfully, he was very happy we had achieved our goal. He understood me and always advised me".

On the other hand, Officers 4, who entered the Hellenic Military Academy in 1996 and graduated in the year 2000, informs us that she never felt excluded or any friction because of her gender, although the male cadets were not very happy to have women in their sports teams. It seems the Leader/Head of the cadets played a major role here. She also points out that the daily sport activities influenced her life. Today she continues organizing her schedule so as to be able to work out in the gym or run in the field:

"In 1996, when I entered the academy there were some teams: the volleyball team, the track and field team, the swimming team and the shooting team. The Leader of the Evelpis cadets and generally the 4th year cadets never excluded us [women]. Instead, they tried to include us, to accept us and therefore there was cooperation and mutual assistance, although they were not very happy to have women in their teams, but there was no friction. Our Leader always had us under his 'umbrella' [protection]."

Officer 5, a younger woman, claims the male cadets never made her feel different or excluded. They seemed to respect her efforts and cooperation did exist. However, she felt gender discrimination from the older cadets, the 4th year cadets, who strangely enough, as she pointed out in her interview, changed their attitudes and behavior when she and her team leader won first place in the mixed double tennis tournament (she was on the tennis team). This is an excellent example of how team sports can contribute to changing gender stereotypes!

Competitive sports and physical education have an important role at the Hellenic Military Academy, as confirmed in their curriculum for the academic year 2020-2021 (H.M.A, 2020). Competitive sports are offered and the Evelplides^{xx} cadets (men and women) can choose between individual or team sports (coed or not) from the following list: classical athletics (running, jumping, throwing), basketball, volleyball, shooting, military Pentathlon (swimming, obstacle course, grenade launcher), swimming, water polo, self-defense, fencing, tennis, climbing and chess (H.M.A., 2020).

During the exam period, first year cadets of both genders, participate in the 50m swimming, 1600m. (track and field) traction, throwing a grenade and passing a track of gymnastic instruments (in the second training period).

Second year cadets of both genders, in the first training period, participate in swimming 50m. and in crossing the obstacle course. In the second training period they do pulls, falls kicks, climbing and self-defense. In the third year, cadets take part in the following exams: 50m swimming, crossing an obstacle course (group of three cadets in the 1st training period and full load in the 2nd training period), and rescuing a person from drowning. They also take a written exam. The 4th year cadets take a written exam in the course *Physical Education* in which they are tested on organizing and planning their personal sports program, in addition to running (1000m) and footslog (8) kilometers (H.M.A., 2020).

A coed championship called "Velissariou-Paparrodou" is held every year at the Hellenic Military Academy in which only the "Evelpides" athletes participate (PaD3-19/2014).

D. Hellenic Naval Academy: "I never felt gender discrimination"

"The Hellenic Naval Academy supports and promotes equality in sport. I never felt gender discrimination, physical discrimination or any other form of unequal treatment from the male cadets or the male officers." as Officer 5 informs us, adding that they all had gymnastic early in the mornings between 6:00 – 6:20. They exercised together, did push-ups, crunches, pull-ups, and jumped rope, etc.

As Officer 5 pointed out in her interview, sport activities were mandatory, and they included basketball, volleyball, tennis, soccer, swimming, sailing, track and field events, throws and general physical education. According to her account, they exercised daily, and participated in coed teams. They participated in team sports with the men: they joined the men's teams, especially since women's teams could not be established due to the limited number of women:

"Women naval cadets are few, so you rarely see a woman's volleyball team in our academy, but we do participate in team sports. Women cadets usually join the men's teams" as Officer 5 informs us. This comes as no surprise if you consider that it took around 150 years for a woman to be appointed Head of the Naval Cadets. The Hellenic Naval Academy was founded in 1845. About 150 years since its foundation, in 2013, the Hellenic Naval Academy, as previously cited, appointed a woman (Elena Iosif) as Head of the Naval Cadets. Another example of women's underrepresentation is the graduating class of 2015: out of a total of 51 graduates only 5 were women (Kefi-Chatzichamperi, 2020: 364).

With regard to the Naval Academy's sports program, certainly both genders participate. Greek nationals are admitted, following preliminary exams that include gymnastics, physical tests, and psychological tests, in addition to succeeding in the annual national exams of the Ministry of Education. As regards the curriculum, male and female cadets participate in morning gymnastics, which include aerobic-anaerobic exercises, stretching, upper and lower limb, exercising with and without weights, and strengthening exercises. In general, the curriculum is based on the Hellenic Army General Staff (1962) military manual titled *"Military Physical Education"*.

In detail, the weekly program for the course *Physical Education* is implemented on a daily basis from Monday to Friday and is mandatory for 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th year naval cadets of both genders. The daily physical education program for all the naval cadets (men and women) begins every morning 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 am. At midday the naval cadets who belong to sport teams train four times a week (Mon-Thurs., 13.30-15:00) with their teams: e.g., basketball, swimming, athletics (throwing).

In the afternoon (15:50-17:20) all the cadets continue with their physical education program. Divided into groups, they participate in sport activities such as circuit training exercises, activities to improve strength and flexibility, swimming, interrupted training, free training activities, and aerobic exercises. Training is also provided (15:50-17:20) for the volleyball team (three times a week), the fencing team (twice a week), the track and field team (sprints, middle and long-distance events) (four days a week) and the rowing team (twice a week).

The 1st year naval cadets follow the weekly circular training program which includes naval obstacles, triangle sailing, swimming and sport activities that improve their strength and flexibility. The 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th year cadets are divided into groups and on different days participate in the sport activities of rowing and sailing. Additionally, all the cadets (1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th year) can take the Dance course. Dance is mandatory/required for all 1st year cadets and an elective for all the others.

E. Hellenic Air Force Academy (HAFA): *"I didn't know we had a Gender Equality Office."*

"I didn't know we had a Gender Equality Office," replied Officer 11 in response to the interviewer's question, and as regards the question on team sports, she acknowledged that sport promotes equality, but there were not enough women in the Airforce Academy to establish a women's team, which we argue is an excellent example of women's underrepresentation. A perfect illustration of this gender participation gap in the Hellenic Airforce Academy is also reflected in the number of graduates from 2008 to 2014: only 26 women out of 421 cadets (395 men).

We need note that in the graduating class of 2014, out of 107 cadets graduating only four were women: i.e., 103 men and 4 women graduates. As regards the graduating class of 2012, out of 102 cadets, only 8 women: i.e., 94 men and 8 women. In 2009, out of the 95 graduates, only two were women: i.e., 93 men and 2 women. In 2008, out of 117 graduates, only 12 were women and 105 men (Kefi-Chatzichamperi, 2020).

The Hellenic Air Force Academy (HAFA) accepted the first female engineer students/cadets in 1991 and in the year 2000 the first women pilots (cadets). The first women pilots graduated from HAFA in 2006, and since then only a small number of women have been entering the Academy annually, indicating we need to change mindsets!

It is important to point out that the first women pilots graduated in 2006 and until the summer of 2021, only a total of 14 women pilots have graduated: two of which (Athanasia Maria Terzopoulou and Katerina Kouskoviti) were among the first to start flights to Tatoi with military training aircraft.

"I love airplanes very much and [...] I am not afraid of the fact that it is a male-dominated profession" replied Marina Konstantinou, in a recent article on *"Female pilots in the Battle of the Aegean against Turkish fighters"*^{xxi} Konstantinou, the first female Head/Leader of the Hellenic Air Force Academy (HAFA), graduated as a flying lieutenant and is now training in Kalamata to undertake missions in both fighter (F-16) and transport (C-130 and C-27 Spartan), or by helicopter.^{xxii}

The Hellenic Air Force Academy (HAFA), a member of the European Air Force Academies (EUFAFA), is responsible for providing the Hellenic Air Force with military pilots, aeronautical engineers, defence controllers and air traffic controllers. The first Greek institution for aviation training was the Military Academy of Aviation, founded in 1919 in Thessaloniki, the second largest city in Greece. However, it was in 1931 that HAFA was founded in Tatoi, Athens, taking the unofficial name of the *Icarus School* in 1967.^{xxiii}

As regards the HAFA curricula for the academic year 2020-2021, the physical condition of the cadet is developed, improved, and maintained through the physical fitness program, which is prepared by the Department of academic education in collaboration with the Directorate of Military Training. It includes physical education and sport activities implemented by qualified, in physical education, staff and personnel (H.A.F.A., 2020-2021).

Understandably, physical education and sport activities are very important. In her interview Officer 11 pointed out that: *"Physical education and sport activities were mandatory. We had gymnastics (we exercised) early in the morning between 6:00 to 6:30, the training program usually included running and bending. Sports activities included basketball, volleyball, tennis, football, swimming, and general sports."*

According to the H.A.F.A 2020-2021 curriculum, the evaluation of the physical condition is carried out by measuring individual performance (practical application) by a committee made up of three, academically qualified in physical education and sports personnel and staff. The assessment of the physical condition is carried out every semester, at least two weeks before the exams of the academic period.

A cadet who has not completed at least 70% of the hours of the fitness program cannot take the exams and is considered to have failed (not having completed his/her military training). An Icarus cadet who, after the evaluation of the Health Committee, has been granted sick leave and is unable to carry out his/her fitness program, is not considered absent during the that period and may participate in the exams, or be re-

examined after the recovery of his/her health within 90 days from the scheduled date of the semester examination. In case he/she misses the exams or the re-examination within this time period, he/she is considered to have failed the specific examination or re-examination. Furthermore, the semester grade for physical condition is calculated as the average of the grades of all the examined subjects of the semester.

A cadet has completed and succeeded in his/her physical education course when he/she achieves a semester grade-average of 50% or more. If the grade-average is less than 50%, he/she fails and can retake the exams after seven days and no more than 45 days from the end of the exam period of the spring semester. Cadets enrolled in the *Flight Training Program* can be re-examined after seven days and no more than 30 days from the end of the exam period of the winter semester.

If a cadet receives a score of 50% or more during his/her review, the cadet is considered "successful" (to have passed) and is scored with 50%. If he/she achieves an average of less than 50%, the cadet has failed his/her military training. An Icarus cadet who is absent from the exams or the re-examination of the fitness assessment but has submitted a certified health document will be allowed to participate in the exams after he/she recovers, and within a period of 90 days from the date of the exam or re-examination. If the cadet does not take the exam within the above time period, he/she is considered to have failed the specific exam or re-examination. The military training final grade average (theoretical, practical, physical condition) is calculated from the individual's weighted factor/coefficient of 0.2, 0.3 and 0.5, respectively. The final grade is taken into account when calculating the annual grade point average, as defined in section 6.5 of the curriculum (H.A.F.A, 2020).

6. Concluding remarks and recommendations: *it's still a man's world*

The aim of this study was to investigate the implementation of the Hellenic National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAPGE) in the five Hellenic Military Higher Education Institutions, giving special importance to the sports-military curricula-programs. Our literature review, in addition to our in-depth examination of the military curricula acquired from their course catalogues/programs (hardcopy and online), indicates that the NAPGE is being implemented to a certain extent or up to a point in some areas, such as provisions in achieving the work-life balance which includes childcare and family support. Additionally, the data selected from the interviews and discussions with the twelve female officers shows that participation in sport activities, and coed sports in particular, could contribute to eliminating or challenging gender stereotypes. For instance, Officer 5, had pointed out in her interview, that the male cadets changed their negative attitudes and behaviors towards her, after she won first place in the mixed doubles tennis tournament.

Clearly, coed sport activities in the five military academies contribute to the promotion of gender equality by cultivating social relations, collaboration and teamwork, consequently eliminating gender stereotypes, and facilitating the implementation of the NAPGE. Such efforts and policies are necessary, and not only in Greece, if we take into

account the plethora of international research that shows women continue to experience gender discrimination: the gender leadership gap, the gender participation gap, in addition to sexual harassment, gender harassment, sexism, sexual and gender-based violence, in many areas of the hegemonic (male-centric hierarchal) military structures. (Kamberidou, 2019, Lape, 2016; NATO, 2016; Patsantaras, 2014).

Although women have served in the Armed Forces for decades, it is clearly *a man's world* (Kamberidou, 2020). However, it is important to point out that the # *Me Too Movement*—which has spread like wildfire in Greece—from sport to the entertainment industry—has not appeared in the Greek military; there are no accusations, accounts, reports, or academic studies on the subject of sexual harassment in the Hellenic Armed Forces (Navy, Army, Air Force) or in the Hellenic Military Higher Education Institutions (the five academies). In essence, not one of the 12 female officers interviewed implied, insinuated, hinted, suggested, or testified to having experienced sexual harassment, or any other form of violence or abuse of power.

Nevertheless, international research indicates that gender discrimination persists in current military organizations. International studies highlight two major gender gaps, the participation gap and the leadership gap, and Greece is no exception. We need reiterate here that women still make up only one-third of the total cadets admitted into the Hellenic Military Higher Education Institutions: out of a total of 1,049 cadets, only 91 are women (10%) and 958 are men (90%). In essence, women remain largely underrepresented in the Hellenic Armed Forces (15.5% women and 88.9% men), though Greece (15.5%) is in the top ten countries with the highest female participation rate after Canada (15.7%) (Kamberidou, 2019; Kefi-Chatzichamperi, 2020).

Militaries around the world are addressing the issue of institutional abuse, since women are penalized for their gender, and not promoted, despite their contributions, as is the case in the workplace, where they encounter gender stereotypes that reinforce the status quo (gender hierarchy) that obstructs advancement to higher levels of leadership, hindering career aspirations and consequently retention.

In summing up our key points, and the results of international research, we recommend emphasis be placed on women's recruitment and retention. Retention requires gender awareness and diversity training; changing hegemonic structures, to wit gender stereotypes, mindsets and sexist military cultures; sharing lessons learnt; accountability and penalties; early cohort management; eliminating the gender leadership gap and other barriers to inclusion, such as the work-life-family imbalance, covert and overt discrimination, bullying, sexual harassment, and sexual violence.

All these recommendations are in line with the priority axes of the current and the upcoming National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAPGE) in Greece. Certainly, the objectives of the NAPGE priority axes could be achieved much faster when (or if) women's participation is increased and reproduced in military institutions (in effect providing role-models and mentors to accomplish this), and especially in leadership positions.^{xxiv}

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Endnotes

ⁱ Interview in *Athina* 9,84: "The countdown to the presentation of the new National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2021-2025 has begun" <https://www.athina984.gr/en/2021/02/22/paroyiazetai-syntoma-to-ethniko-schedio-drasis-gia-tin-isotita-ton-fylon-2021-2025/> (last access September 12, 2021)

ⁱⁱ The deadline for submitting proposals, recommendations or comments extended to August 20, 2021 (NAPGE, 2021).

ⁱⁱⁱ The Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, Kostis Hatzidakis, on July 13, 2021, posted for public consultation/discussion the digital version of the National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2021-2025 on the official website <http://www.opengov.gr/minlab/?p=5334>. Every public body, social partner and stakeholder was invited to participate in the open public consultation by submitting any comments and suggestions.

^{iv} Ministry of Culture and Sports in Greece: <https://www.culture.gov.gr/en/SitePages/default.aspx>

^v Analytically see: Law No. 4531/2018 on the (I) Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence and Adaptation of the Greek Legislation, (II) Incorporating the Framework Decision No. 2005/214/JHA, as amended by Framework Decision 2009/299/JHA, on the Application of the Principle of Mutual Recognition to Financial Penalties, and (III) Other Provisions of the Ministry of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights and Other Provisions <https://wipolex.wipo.int/en/legislation/details/18209>

See: Istanbul Convention: All member states must ratify it without delay, say MEPs <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20191121IPR67113/istanbul-convention-all-member-states-must-ratify-it-without-delay-say-meps>

^{vi} GREVIO is the independent expert body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) by the Parties (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/grevio>)

^{vii} "In Greek legislation, the term *vulnerable social groups* describes population categories that have unequal opportunities in education, finding work and generally living in dignity and are at greater risk of experiencing poverty and social exclusion. Indicatively, features considered to be linked with such unequal opportunities are psychomotor problems, chronic health problems, geographical exclusion, lack of access to information, lack of substantial educational qualifications and skills, etc" (KETHI 2013 in NAPGE, 2018: 14).

^{viii} See chapter titled: Social inclusion and equal treatment of women who are subject to multiple discrimination, pp. 12-27.

^{ix} See detailed table of National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2016-2020 (NAPGE, 2018: 83-86).

^x Such as studies focusing on sport as a tool or means that contributes to refugee integration processes. For example, since refugees have joined over 3,000 sport clubs in Germany, Stura's (2019) study examines possible factors in sport clubs that may support or delay refugees' integration. She conducted semi-structured interviews with 35 refugees and 32 professional and voluntary staff members from 15 German sport clubs. Her results show that coaches, team members, and club leadership play a major role in helping refugees overcome challenges, facilitating integration. However, studies on coed sport's ability to facilitate integration, and encourage equality and inclusion are extremely rare (Cohen & Melton, 2014), but even scarcer is research on mixed-gender or coed sport activities in the military.

^{xi} On March 6, 1986 the Greek Parliament passed a law stipulating that Greek men and women have equal rights and obligations (Law 1414, par. 2, article 4), article 16 of the law stating that education is free for all Greek citizens (male and female), and this includes the Hellenic Armed Forces and the Hellenic Military Academies/Schools which are higher education institutions.

^{xii} Available in <https://www.haf.gr/2019/07/orkomosia-neon-anthyposminagon-tis-polemikis-aeroporias-at037-2019/> retrieved on 25/7/2021.

^{xiii} "Since the academic year 2005-2006, the Academic training of the students of the Military Nursing Academy is offered by the Department of Nursing of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens,

while the military training is offered in the Military Academy according to their internal schedule"
<http://en.nurs.uoa.gr/>

^{xiv} Military Medical School FEK4 / 7-01-1926.

^{xv} See Academic training: (<https://ssas.army.gr/en/content/academic-training>).

^{xvi} See broader-general educational training: [Educational Training | Στρατιωτική Σχολή Αξιωματικών Σωμάτων \(army.gr\)](#)

^{xvii} Ibid.

^{xviii} See Annual Coed Games - Championships of Armed Forces Military Academies & Security Forces Academies: (<https://ssas.army.gr/el/news/agones-xifaskias-enoplon-dynameon-somaton-asfaleias-2018>).

^{xix} See Military training: (<https://ssas.army.gr/en/content/military-training>).

^{xx} The term "Evelpides" which means "bearers of high hopes", is from a passage by the ancient Greek historian Thucydides, where the Corinthians describe their adversaries, the Athenians, as "adventurous beyond their power, daring beyond their judgement, and bearers of high hopes when in danger" ([History of the Peloponnesian War, Book I](#), 70).

^{xxi} See: Famagusta.News <https://en.famagusta.news/lifestyle/gyneka/gynaikes-pilotoi-sti-machi-tou-aigaiou-kata-ton-tourkikon-machitikon/>

^{xxii} See: Female pilots "scan" the Aegean and intercept Turkish fighters. In: *Breaking News* <https://remonews.com/greeceeng/female-pilots-scan-the-aegean-and-intercept-turkish-fighters/> 10/9/2021)

^{xxiii} In Greek mythology, *Icarus* was the son of Daedalus, the creator of the Labyrinth. Icarus and Daedalus wanted to escape from the island of Crete, so Daedalus constructed wings from feathers and wax to fly. He warned his son Icarus not to fly too low otherwise the sea would dampen his wings, nor too high, since the sun could melt the wax holding them together. Icarus ignored his father's advice and flew too close to sun. His wings melted off and he fell into the sea and drowned. The myth would later be coined "[don't fly too close to the sun](#)".

^{xxiv} See: Priority Axis 2 in NAPGE 2021-2025 which deals with equal access to leadership positions and decision-making roles (NAPGE, 2021).