

Country Report from Eutokia, Athens, Greece

In Greece we have [statistics 2008] 118,302 births per year (with doctor: 118,181, with midwife: 74, other: 3, stillborn births: 392). 99% of the births take place in state (30%) and private (59%) hospitals, and 1% at home and at the Birth Center, mainly in Athens.

From that percentage, 55% take place in Athens and 44% in other parts of Greece. 80% of births in Athens are induced, with the use of prostaglandin or oxytocin or PROM or all three methods. In these cases the woman in labour is bedbound, with an IV and continuous electronic fetal monitoring and 90% use of epidural, especially in private hospitals.

The timeline given for labour is 5-8 hours and if labour does not have a satisfactory progress they proceed in caesarean section.

The main reason for induced labour is the refusal of doctors to wait beyond 40 weeks of gestation; the 40 weeks are calculated from the last menstrual period and not from conception. Many of them purposefully ignore menstrual cycles longer than 30 days and make bad use of ultrasound, for example the Doppler, which they use to terrify the woman, by giving her excuses such as: old placenta, little amniotic fluid, fetus entangled in umbilical cord, and all these reasons are risk factors for the well being of the fetus.

The majority of pregnant women do not prepare for pregnancy and birth, as they expect their doctors to illuminate and inform them, and doctors practice medicine according to their own criteria.

A woman with previous caesarean has 99% chances of having a repeat caesarean. Only a small percentage of doctors and midwives dare to practice VBAC. There is no chance for a VBAC after two caesareans, as the hospitals are very hostile and will not allow the woman and willing practitioners to even try. Breech presentation, especially for a first time mother, is an absolute indication for caesarean. Only a few doctors and midwives dare to try vaginal birth for a first time mother with a breech baby, while it is still difficult to allow a multipara mother with a breech to try vaginal birth; they are usually terrified by doctors and proceed to caesarean section.

The percentage of caesarean sections in Greece is over 50%, while if we count previous c-sections, it reaches 60-65% in Greece.

Unfortunately the largest percentage of c-sections is scheduled at 37 weeks and not at 39 or 40, thus resulting to many infants spending the first hours or days in intensive care with respiratory problems. Women stay at the hospital of private maternity clinic for 3-4 days.

What is really lacking in Greece is the absence of mother/baby-friendly hospitals. This results to the fact that, even in public hospitals, babies spend their first hours away from their mothers, and experience breastfeeding problems. The percentage of breastfeeding mothers in public hospitals is 80%, but it drops after the first month by 30% and on the sixth month it reaches 10%. This happens because the new mother does not have adequate support at home by midwives, and the 3-4 days spent at the hospital are considered enough for the support they provide. The hospitals have not organized home support for the new mother, while state insurance does cover home support, but it is not implemented because of lack of adequate personnel.

At private hospitals, 99% of women begin breastfeeding 8-12 hours after birth, while the percentage of rooming-in is small: the mother has to sign if she wants to have the baby, taking the risk all upon herself.

The Associations that support breastfeeding and the new mother at home are Eutokia, La Leche League Greece, and the newly founded Association of Greek doulas.

The doulas are a new profession in our country. Eutokia trained 20 postnatal doulas, and only half of them are active. There are a couple of active doulas trained by international organizations.

The Association Eutokia organized a midwifery training workshop for home support to new mothers, but unfortunately only midwives from outside Athens responded, because 99% of Athenian midwives work.

Eutokia has been successfully organizing:

- Prenatal groups, aiming towards 'Preparation for birth and parenthood', lasting 3 hours each session, and including a) theoretical information on pregnancy, birth, postnatal period and breastfeeding issues. The groups are taught by trained midwives and a G.P. b) psychological support during pregnancy, birth and postnatal period. Taught by psychologists – psychotherapists trained on perinatal issues. c) exercise – yoga – chanting.
- Postnatal group, once a week. The group is co-ordinated by midwives, psychologists, special psychotherapist. There are discussions on practical issues, like the use of slings etc, singing lullabies, taught by a doula. The practical part of the meetings covers perineal physical recuperation after birth, taught by a physiotherapist.

The Birth Center has been working for the last 4 years and hosts around 8-10 births per month. In that time we have had 8 cesareans, and 2 transferrals of infants due to maternal infection. We co-operate with 3 ob-gyn's in case of caesarean or if the parents wish to have an ob-gyn present at birth. We co-operate with 2 anaesthesiologists and 2 paediatricians. At the Birth Center we do not use oxytocin or epidural. The woman births as if she is in her own home.

The Birth Center has two rooms with a pool, a special chair, ball and other items helpful for birth, as well as a room for the mother after the birth, which she can share with her partner for 1 night. We then visit her for 10 or more days at home.

Homebirth takes place by midwife teams and a G.P. The percentage of homebirths is 0.2% in Greece. There is a midwife and a physiotherapist that does homebirths in the north of Greece, as well as a doctor.

The ministry of health, the medical and hospital system do not support our efforts. Only a small number of doctors in Athens and Salonica are willing to cover us, only in the private sector.

We may transfer the labouring woman to a public hospital in case of emergency but we cannot escort her into the labouring room.

Childbirth in Greece is doctor-managed both in the private and public sectors. In Greece there are 3,000 midwives who are legally working, like the midwives of England. They work under the orders of a doctor both in private and public hospitals. In Health Centers and in the countryside they practice more as nurses and less as midwives. They do not attend births because they do not have the appropriate backup. The minimum cost of a birth in a private hospital is 4,000-5,000 euros, while in first class (single room) can reach 10,000 euros. Birth is covered in public hospitals, but women ask to have their own doctor, who gets an illegal fee of 1,000-2,000 euros.

At the Birth Center the pregnancy, birth and postpartum visits cost 2,200 euros, while homebirth can be between 1,500-2,000 euros.

We wish to have the insurance companies cover the cost so we do not have to discuss money with the couple, because strong bonds are created between us and money issues can alter that bond.

On behalf of Eutokia,

the President

Eleftheria Dimopolou

Report from LLL Greece

LLLGreece, branch of LLL International, was founded in 1979. Presently it has 20 leaders who answer around 3,000 phonecalls a year and run 6 groups in Athens, 4 greek-speaking, 2 english-speaking, 2 groups in Salonica, one in the island of Lesvos, one in Volos and one in Larisa. There are also breastfeeding information centers, which provide LLL material but don't have a leader, in Xanthi, Corfu and Naxos. LLL Greece has translated and published a pack of

28 leaflets that are sold at 30 salepoints around Greece. A magazine "Galouho" is also published twice a year which includes mothers' stories, scientific articles, LLLnews etc. The mothers are really grateful and enthusiastic about the support they receive from LLL. Our acceptance from the scientific community has been slow.

Report from Lactation Consultants of Greece Association 'Galaxias'

Galaxias is the name of the Hellenic Lactation Consultant Association, a NGO founded in 2007. All 16 IBCLCs of Greece are active members. The number of IBCLC's in Greece is growing steadily since 2006. (Until 2005 3 IBCLC's, 2006 + 3 , 2007 + 3 , 2008 + 4 , 2009 + 3, = 16 IBCLC's)

The goals of the association are:

- The promotion of Breastfeeding as inalienable right of each newborn, and the general information on the advantages and the profits that derive from breastfeeding, for the children, the women, the family and the all society.
- The promotion and observation of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and relevant WHA resolutions.
- The promotion of the recognition of IBCLC's (and the certification) in the all levels of society, as professionals with valid knowledge in the subjects and the technique of lactation.
- Provision of education, communication, networking and reciprocal support between IBCLC's.

Since 2008 Galaxias has organized 2 roundtable conferences, is responsible for translation of ABM protocols, WBW material and parts of the Baby-friendly Initiative into Greek. Members of Galaxias are also active in the National Breastfeeding Committee.

Report from northern Greece

-the cesarean section rate is at least 50% (Mossialos E. et al ,The European Journal of Public Health 2005 15(3):288-295),

-there is no baby-friendly hospital but 4 hospitals have started the process to get certification

- breastfeeding rates are low

group of 900 women, 2006-2008 in Greece (from website of Dr Malliarou

<http://www.mothereducation.gr/>)

Exclusive bfeeding		Any breastfeeding
1st day	41,1%	87,9%
1st week	37,4%	82,7%
1st month	20,7	60,2%
3rd month	11,1%	39,4%
6th month	0,9%	22,0%

A pediatrician organizing a breastfeeding seminar in the state hospital of Xanthi (Trace, north-eastern Greece) **felt the need to warn** the speakers in writing, that the majority of the audience (doctors, midwives and nurses) will be "madly (literally, he used the word rabidly, rabies=lyssa) OPPOSED to breastfeeding either openly or secretly, some for selfish reasons economic or professional, some for lack of knowledge, some because of indifference and some out of habit." The seminar took place but was boycotted both by the doctors (none attended) as by the majority of midwives and nurses.

-there are now 14 IBCLC's in Greece, we have founded the Panhellenic Association of IBCLC's

- Galaxias <http://galaxias.forumgreek.com/> - a member of VELB, the European Assoc. of IBCLC's

- Greece had 24 delegates in the 2010 Global Online Lactation Discussion

Report from the Association of Maternity Care Assistants of Greece

The concept of postpartum doulas was not widely recognized in Greece up until 3 years ago. A few individuals, trained by international organizations, offered doula services to a few mothers/couples. In 2004 Phyllis Klaus visited Greece, as the co-author of the book 'Bonding', where the role of doula is mentioned in many chapters of the book. There was a big public presentation for the Greek circulation of the book, with media coverage and Greek organizations involved, and this was probably the first official exposure of the Greek community to the role of the doula.

In October 2007 the NGO 'EUTOKIA' - Association for the Promotion of Natural Birth-, took the initiative and organized the first postpartum doula workshop in Greece. Twenty women were trained and since then they deliver their services to new mothers mainly in Athens Greece.

The Association of Maternity Care Assistants of Greece was formed approximately two years ago and is run through a temporary Board of Directors and the voluntary work of its members.

Currently, the Association has 25 registered members out of which 21 are professional postpartum doulas and 4 are members who support voluntarily its work and goals. Shortly, the first general assembly of the Association will take place as well as the elections for the nomination of the Board of Directors.

Our mission is to provide emotional support to new mothers and their partners during the postpartum period and to promote the profession of doulas as maternity care assistants in the Greek society. Our goal is to provide continuous education and training to our members and to create a network of cooperation with other professionals so that women and their partners have satisfying postpartum experiences.

Our vision is for every woman to have a maternity care assistant during her postpartum period.

In May 2010 the first workshop for birth doulas took place in Athens, Greece, with twenty two participants, out of which several were postpartum doulas, run by the international DONA approved trainer, Debra Pascali-Bonaro. Birth doulas are not yet part of the official medical birthing system, but we hope to integrate it soon into the Greek community.