

A decorative background consisting of a grid of grey dots of varying sizes, with several larger red dots scattered throughout, primarily on the left and right sides.

# Gender equality in the Greek labour market

The gaps narrow, inequalities persist

**NELLI KAMBOURI**  
February 2013

- Since the financial debt crisis in 2009 gender equality issues have been marginalised in public discourse and official policymaking processes.
- Several factors – including the rise of the tertiary sector, increased numbers of women in higher education, gender mainstreaming in legislation and policies, development of the child care system and the demise of the male breadwinner model – have contributed to the rise of female participation in the Greek labour market.
- Although female employment has risen significantly in recent decades, Greece still has one of the largest gender gaps in the EU with regard to labour market participation, unemployment and wages.
- As a result of the sovereign debt crisis and the economic recession, the unemployment gender gap has narrowed, but the employment rates of older women and the unemployment rates of, in particular, younger women have risen.
- The absence of gender equality objectives in the reforms and the economic adjustment programmes has led to the deregulation of the labour market, which has had a very negative impact on the implementation of gender equality objectives.
- Gender wage gaps and discrimination against female employees is widespread in the private sector, including arbitrary dismissals and the refusal of employers to fulfil their obligations, as well as forced acceptance of changes in employment status before or after return from maternity and parental leave.





## Content

<b>Women's participation in the labour market</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Unemployment</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Precarious employment</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Education</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Vertical and horizontal segregation</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>The gender wage gap</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Balancing working, private and family life</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Social security, social protection</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Fertility rate</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>The debate and reform discussion</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Policy recommendations</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Recommended sources for further information on gender equality in the Greek labour market</b> .....	<b>15</b>



## Women's participation in the labour market

Gender equality has been the object of law and policy-making in Greece mainly since the 1980s. Gender equality in the labour market, however, was introduced mostly through the harmonisation of the national legislation with the EU *acquis*. The priority given to gender equality in European employment strategies was a determining factor in the development of the legal framework in Greece. Until the late 2000s, the relevant legislation was aimed mainly at the reconciliation of working and family life among Greek women. The protection of women against dismissals during pregnancy, maternity and paternity leave, benefits for marriage and children were guaranteed under Greek law.

In 2006, Law 3488/2006 against gender discrimination in the labour market was approved by the Greek parliament in order to promote equal pay for equal work and measures against sexual harassment. In addition, several positive action pilot programmes were implemented by successive governments prioritizing women's entrepreneurship and the integration of vulnerable categories of women in the labour market (unemployed, poor, single mothers, dependent members, mothers with many children, migrant and ethnic women). Today, Greece has a progressive legal framework on gender equality in the labour market, but its implementation is partial and incomplete. Despite significant progress with regard to female participation in the labour market, deep-rooted practices of gender discrimination continue to undermine the implementation of gender equality objectives.

Since the 1980s, the combination of more employment opportunities in the tertiary sector, more educational opportunities for women and the extension and improvement of public child and elderly care services have propelled the steady increase in female labour force participation. During the third semester of 2012, the female participation rate in the labour force was 44.3 per cent, while the male participation rate was 62.1 per cent.<sup>1</sup> The gap between male and female participation has narrowed, especially since the economic crisis started in 2009, but inequalities persist. In 2012, the female em-

ployment rate was 41.5 per cent and the male employment rate was 60.4 per cent.<sup>2</sup>

Greece's transformation into a service-based economy was a determining factor in this process. Currently more than 78 per cent of women are employed in the tertiary sector. A large percentage of those are self-employed. Officially, self-employment in Greece is much more widespread than in other EU societies. It should be stressed, however, that self-employment in the Greek labour market often conceals long-term full-time employment relations without any of the rights attached to salaried employment. Until recently, there were no provisions for paid maternity leave, parental leave or other benefits, even for self-employed women who worked on a long-term basis for the same employer. In 2012, however, a new law (4097/2012) was voted in the Greek parliament mainstreaming gender equality in self-employment.

While a large percentage of women are self-employed, a significant number of women work as full-time salaried employees. In 2008, one-third of female salaried employees worked as permanent public servants. Although women are still underrepresented in the higher ranks of the public sector, it constitutes a safer working environment for female employees since gender equality provisions (including paid pregnancy leave, parental leave and benefits for children) are respected and the wage gap between men and women is minimal. The public sector acts as a protective net for women mainly because it is the only sector in which gender equality law is implemented effectively.

Female employment has risen also in the private sector, where there is a wide gender wage gap and gender discrimination is commonplace. Although women's labour participation rose faster than that of men in all sectors of the private labour market, women still cluster in the lower paid and low skill jobs and are still underrepresented in high ranking, executive and managerial jobs, especially in large companies. Women, especially ethnic and migrant ones, are also overrepresented in the »feminised« sectors of the labour market (such as in cleaning, health, children and elderly care, and private education), in which unregulated, informal and part-time employment is the norm. Finally, a large percentage of women are employed in

1. EL.STAT, 2012, »Population of Greece according to gender, age and employment status 1998–2012 (trimester)«, available at: <http://www.statistics.gr>

2. G.S.G.E., 2012, »Population over 15, employment status, age groups and gender«, available at: <http://www.isotita.gr/>

seasonal work, including tourism and agriculture, working mainly in family businesses.

The economic recession and the ensuing austerity measures have had a negative impact on both male and female participation and employment in the labour market.<sup>3</sup> In particular, the employment rates of older women have declined sharply, mainly because of the retirement incentives implemented as part of the economic adjustment programmes. Although male participation in the labour market is decreasing faster and gender gaps are narrowing, since 2010 the percentage of female employment has also dropped significantly, from 49 per cent to 41.5 per cent. These trends reflect the fact that male-dominated sectors, such as the construction industry, were affected much more at the initial stages of the crisis than sectors in which women are overrepresented. Gradually, however, women's employment has been hit by the crisis.

Although there has been a significant reduction in women's employment in the public sector because of early retirement schemes and female permanent civil servants and public sector employees have suffered significant salary cuts, the public sector has not been affected by gender discrimination or the arbitrary dismissals that are increasingly observed in the private sector. The shrinking of the public sector through a plan to reduce the number of new entries is likely to put more pressure on female employment rates. Furthermore, the plans to reduce the number of active employees in the public sector through dismissals envisaged by the latest economic adjustment programmes are likely to have a very negative impact on female employment in Greece.

3. For more detailed analyses of the impact of the crisis, see Maria Karamessini (2011), »Crisis in Greece. Labour Market Impact on Men and Women«, external report commissioned by and presented to the European Commission, Directorate-General Employment and Social Affairs, Unit G1 Equality between women and men, forthcoming at: <http://www.fgb-egge.it/homepage.asp>; Antigone Lyberaki (2011), »Greece caught between labour market and macroeconomic imperatives«, in European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, *Gender Aspects of the Economic Downturn and Financial Crisis*, Note PE 453.208, Brussels: European Parliament, pp. 139–159; and Maria Karamessini (2012), »Strukturkrise, Schocktherapie und Gender in Griechenland«, in Ingrid Kurz-Scherf and Alexandra Scheele (eds), *Macht oder ökonomisches Gesetz? Zum Zusammenhang von Krise und Geschlecht*, Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2012, pp. 187–205.

## Unemployment

According to Eurostat, Greece has the highest increase in unemployment and the highest female unemployment rate in the EU27. Unemployment in Greece reached 26.8 per cent in the third quarter of 2012, up from 8.5 per cent in 2008. In the third quarter of 2012, the female unemployment rate was 28.9 per cent and the male unemployment rate was 21.7 per cent of the total employed population, whereas for 2008 these rates were 11.7 per cent and 5.3 per cent, respectively.<sup>4</sup> Although the rise in the overall unemployment levels was a direct result of the severe economic recession that the country is facing, the high female unemployment rate is a persistent feature of the Greek labour market rooted in long-term gender discrimination. From the perspective of gender mainstreaming, the recent narrowing of the gender unemployment gap cannot be considered a positive sign, since it was mainly the result of a dramatic rise in male unemployment rather than the outcome of positive measures against gender discrimination in the labour market.

Overall, the high female unemployment rate that the Greek economy is experiencing is an indication of the high female participation rate in the labour market that cannot be absorbed because of gender discrimination. The economic recession, however, has caused a further drop in overall labour demand and the market deregulation policies brought about by the economic adjustment programmes have facilitated the dismissals of both male and female employees in the private sector. In this context, the Greek ombudsman for gender equality reports cases of arbitrary dismissals after return from maternity leave.<sup>5</sup> These cases indicate that gender equality legislation in the labour market may be more and more coming into conflict with the labour strategies of private employers in a period of crisis: it is likely that more women will find themselves unemployed as they try to combine private, family and professional life.

At the same time, there are strong pressures on women with unemployed family members or partners who experience severe wage reductions or changes in employment status to cover up for the loss of income that their

4. EL.STAT, 2012

5. Greek Ombudsman for Gender Equality (2012), »Gender and Labour Relations: Special Report 2011«, available at: <http://www.synigoros.gr>

families are suffering. Those women who can no longer rely on other family members or partners will have more incentives to actively seek employment in order to support themselves and their families, but also more pressure to accept precarious working conditions and gender discrimination. These pressures are pushing Greek households to rethink gender stereotypes about women's employment and to re-orient their priorities in terms of their needs rather than in terms of stereotypical perceptions of femininity, motherhood and care-giving.

Young women are most vulnerable to unemployment. In the third semester of 2012, the highest unemployment rates were in the category of young women in the age category 20–29, namely 48.2 per cent as against 39.2 per cent for men of the same age.<sup>6</sup> In the past, it was common for Greek families to support their children, especially the girls, financially until they reached their late twenties in order to allow them to complete their studies, to find suitable employment or to get married. The sharp drop in incomes and the increase in the unemployment rate caused by the economic recession has put more pressure on younger people to seek employment earlier in order to finance their studies and/or contribute to the family income. There is evidence to suggest that the lack of employment prospects and the high unemployment rate will lead more young women to emigrate in search of better employment conditions and opportunities. Another issue with regard to women's unemployment is the fact that many women, especially self-employed ones, are not entitled to unemployment benefits. Since self-employment often conceals long-term salaried employment relations and women continue to be over-represented in this sector, the absence of unemployment benefits for the self-employed may also be said to constitute a form of gender discrimination.

## Precarious employment

During the 1990s and 2000s flexible regulated employment in the private and public sector was promoted by state policies as a strategy for combining professional, family and private life. Although labour flexibility has spread in the private sector, in most cases it remains unregulated. Greece, compared to other EU countries, does not appear to have a very large percentage of registered

flexible workers, but it has an extended grey economy in which informal and unregulated precarious work is normalised. These forms of employment are not registered in official statistics and cannot be measured and analysed accurately. However, as the economic recession deepens, precarious employment will broaden in scope and scale, putting in question gender equality objectives.

In the feminised sectors of the economy, such as cleaning, child and elderly care and nursing, but also in tourism and agriculture, informal working arrangements were the norm prior to the economic crisis. Many women, the majority of them migrants, who are employed in these sectors work without fixed contracts or social security for indeterminate working hours and payment. In these precarious working conditions, women have no protection against gender discrimination even when they are employed by companies that make contracts with state and government institutions. In 2008, the attack with vitriolic acid against Konstantina Kouneva, a Bulgarian cleaner who was working for a private company responsible for the cleaning of the public urban railway (ISAP) and secretary of the cleaners' trade union (PEKOP), brought to the forefront of public debates labour law violations and gender discrimination that take place in the state's subcontracting of cleaning services to private companies.

One of the most important effects of the economic adjustment programmes on female workers, however, is that precariousness is spreading in new sectors that affect migrant as well as Greek women's working and private lives. As a result, more women find themselves in a position in which they are forced to accept gender discrimination, especially with regard to gender equality law, in order to secure employment.

Instead of combating discrimination in the »feminised«, informal and unregulated sectors of the economy, the economic adjustment programmes have pushed towards the spread of precarious employment in new sectors of the economy. Trade unions, such as GSEE, report a sharp increase in full-time and permanent contracts that have been transformed into part-time or ad hoc contracts in Greece.<sup>7</sup> For women, such arbitrary transformations of working status imply also a loss of rights associated with the reconciliation of working, private and family life. The

6. G.S.G.E. (2012).

7. INE/GSEE, 2012, »The Greek Economy and Employment: Annual Report 2012«, available at: <http://www.inegsee.gr>

Greek Ombudsman for gender equality reports several cases of discrimination against female employees, including arbitrary dismissals and refusal of employers to fulfil their duties, as well as forced acceptance of changes in employment status (from full-time to part time) before and after the return from maternity leave and pregnancy. As long as market deregulation continues, the implementation of gender equality laws and policies in the labour market will be undermined.

## Education

In recent decades, an upward trend in the number of female students admitted to Greek universities has been observed. Girls perform in general better than boys in schools and this is mirrored in female students' higher admittance rate in higher education institutions. However, differences in the subject of degrees taken by male and female university graduates contribute to gender inequalities in the labour market, including the gender pay gap and occupational segregation. Women are overrepresented in education, humanities and social studies, which are also sectors of the labour market with lower wages. In contrast, women tend to be underrepresented in natural sciences and technology, which are areas with higher wages.<sup>8</sup> Other factors that play an important role in different choices of degrees by Greek men and women are gender stereotyping and the labour security of prospective jobs, which is higher in some sectors, especially the public sector, where women are overrepresented.

Furthermore, the education system plays a very important role in the reproduction of gender stereotyping, inequalities and hierarchies that prevail in the labour market. From an early age, girls and boys learn how to adjust themselves to social norms, including how to study subjects considered »more appropriate for girls and boys«. Several educational pilot projects have been implemented, mostly in the E.P.E.A.E.K. I and II frameworks for encouraging female pupils and students to attend educational courses and vocational training in areas in which females are underrepresented, such as new technologies of information and communication and the natural sciences. However, these programmes were not imple-

mented on a large scale and long-term. Gender mainstreaming in general and specialised courses, in particular gender equality career guidance and vocational training, are still rare in Greek schools and universities. Overall, there have been no systematic and nation-wide efforts to introduce gender equality education at different stages of the education system, nor to sensitise Greek pupils and students to the need to challenge gender stereotyping in employment, private and family life.

## Vertical and horizontal segregation

The main causes for the horizontal and vertical gender segregation in the Greek labour market are gender stereotyping, educational choices, differential income roles and care responsibilities between men and women, as well as organisational structures and biases. Undoubtedly, there were more opportunities especially for educated women to enter the labour market, even in male dominated sectors, and prejudices against both salaried and self-employed women have declined. However, several occupations continue to be stereotypically associated with essentialist notions of masculinity and femininity; for example, heavy industry or construction are commonly identified as sectors suitable for men because they require physical strength, while occupations associated with care and children, such as care services, education, nursing, or cleaning are identified as sectors more suitable for women. In addition, there are several professions, such as plumbers, drivers, pilots, police and army personnel, which are perceived to require »male skills«. In contrast, »female skills« tend to be associated with beauty services, secretarial or office work.

Horizontal and vertical segregation cannot be explained solely by reference to gender stereotyping, however. In professions that require a high level of education, differences in the educational choices of men and women determine labour market segregation. While there is clear segregation in the educational choices of male and female students with regard to, on one hand, the natural sciences and technology and, on the other, social sciences and humanities, there are also many study and professional areas that are increasingly perceived as gender neutral. For example law, medicine, economics, architecture, business administration and marketing are not perceived as male or female dominated. In such sectors, horizontal segregation tends to narrow as women acquire

8. G.S.G.E. (2008), »Science and Technology Graduates by Gender: Graduates (ISCED 5–6) in Mathematics, Science and Technology per 1000 population per gender aged 20–29, 1998–2007«, available at: <http://www.isotita.gr/>



higher educational skills and qualifications, but vertical segregation continues to be the norm.

Differential income roles and care responsibilities between men and women tend to determine both horizontal and vertical gender segregation in the Greek labour market. Pressures from the family and social environment to take responsibility for private and family duties push many women towards occupations that are less well paid, but offer more time flexibility and fewer working hours. This tendency explains the segregation of women in the public sector and in self-employment in Greece. It also explains the underrepresentation of women in the hierarchy of business sectors, in executive and directorial positions that require time investment. In addition, women tend to pay more attention to security of employment and the extent to which gender equality legislation is safeguarded, a factor that explains the high percentage of female civil servants.

Conversely, although the dual breadwinner model is increasingly becoming the norm, men tend to feel more pressure to rise in professional hierarchies and play the role of the main income provider in households. Although this allows them to enter more competitive business environments, rise in professional hierarchies and engage in long working hours much more than women, it also undermines their ability to participate in family and private life and puts more psychological pressure on them once they face unemployment, wage reductions or changes in employment status.

Although women, especially those with higher educational qualifications, are able to gain access even to male dominated sectors, they cannot challenge prevailing gender discrimination practices that are deeply rooted in the organisational behaviour of both private and public systems. Although legal barriers to women's advancement have been removed, covert and informal barriers prevent both the access and the professional advancement of women. These include arbitrary and indeterminate criteria in the selection and career advancement processes that allow employers and managers to discriminate against women, or conversely the imposition of gender-biased selection and career advancement criteria that prevent the combination of professional, private and family life and thus privilege men. As a result of these organisational practices, women in Greece are still underrepresented in high executive and directorial positions,

mainly in the private sector, but also to a lesser extent in the public sector, too. Thus the »glass ceiling hypothesis« applies to the Greek case, confirming a trend that is common in all EU countries.

These obstacles tend to impact mainly on women with child and elderly care responsibilities. However, even career women, who prioritise their professional life over private and family life, face more obstacles than men in their attempts to rise up to higher posts and claim higher pay because they are considered potential mothers and wives. It is worth noting that these obstacles exist also in many »feminised« sectors of the economy, where men continue to be at the top of the business hierarchies, for example as personnel managers or directors.

## The gender wage gap

Since 1985 the gender wage gap in Greece has been slowly widening. Greece is below the OECD average with regard to the gender wage gap;<sup>9</sup> it also ranks among the EU countries with the widest gender pay gaps.<sup>10</sup> The implementation of legislation and policies aimed at gender equality in the labour market had a positive impact on reducing this gap in the public sector. However, in the private sector, where such anti-discrimination principles were less effectively implemented, the wage gap between men and women continues to be wide. Although the number of female higher education graduates exceeds that of male ones, women tend to be paid less than men for the same amount of work and to be overrepresented in low pay occupations. The gender pay gap tends to be narrower between highly skilled and highly educated professional men and women and higher among low skilled and unskilled professionals. However, in both categories there are biases and ad hoc regulations that privilege men's wages over women's. Moreover, there is very little differentiation between the wages of women with or without children, a fact that indicates that shorter periods of employment cannot fully explain gender discrimination.

Although factors such as work experience and period of employment may contribute to wage inequalities in the

9. OECD (2012), OECD Family Database, OECD, Paris, available at: [www.oecd.org/social/family/database](http://www.oecd.org/social/family/database)

10. EUROSTAT (2012), »Gender pay gap statistics«, available at: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu>

labour market, one of the main factors that can explain this tendency is the segregation of women in specific sectors that are undervalued. On one hand, employers in the private sector tend to devalue women's work and to consider it unworthy of equal pay for equal work and organisational biases privilege male pay over female pay. On the other hand, vertical gender segregation plays an important role in reinforcing the gender wage gap, since female-dominated sectors and professions are not as valued as male-dominated ones. Lower pay reproduces women's financial dependence not only during working life, but also in retirement since it may lead to lower pensions and thus an increased risk of poverty during old age. The failure to mainstream gender demands in collective labour negotiations and agreements, especially in sectors and professions in which women are overrepresented, and to implement gender equality objectives in the private sector further reinforces such forms of discrimination. The economic crisis has led to a sharp drop in the wages of both men and women and the economic adjustment programmes have reduced the influence of collective labour negotiations. Thus, the mainstreaming of demands for equal pay for equal work have become even more urgent.

In recent years, government policies have been implemented in order to combat the various facets of gender discrimination in the labour market. Most of these policies, however, were aimed at the supply side. The Ministry of Employment has implemented programmes for women's entrepreneurship that grant low-interest loans. The General Secretariat for Gender Equality (G.S.G.E.) has established specialised counselling centres for unemployed women and implemented training schemes with guaranteed employment. It has also implemented gender vocational training and counselling programs to allow salaried and self-employed women, as well as women entrepreneurs to enhance their position in the labour market. Several NGOs have also implemented similar EU-funded training and counselling programmes for unemployed women. The future of these actions is undermined by cuts in the funding of gender equality policies, however. Furthermore, with the exception of some media campaigns, very few policies to date have been aimed at the demand side. There is no gender equality training for employers and personnel departments of large companies; nor are there any incentives for large companies or private employers to introduce gender equality practices. The only exception is the »Memorandum of Understand-

ing« signed between the GSGE and the Greek Network for Corporate Social Responsibility, which is planned to encourage enterprises to develop »not only favourable activities for women, in order for women to become active participants in decision-making, but also policies that may help the balancing of professional and family duties of employed men and women. Under the Memorandum, an Equality Prize has been established for enterprises, as well as rewards for network members that implement gender equality policies.«

## Balancing working, private and family life

The abovementioned trends are linked to the dominance of gender stereotyping and the failure to renegotiate gender roles in Greek families. Although negative social attitudes towards working women have declined, women continue to be considered primarily responsible for domestic work, parenthood and care. Career interruptions due to child bearing and rearing are still perceived as an unnecessary cost for private employers and gender prejudices are widespread alleging women's inability to carry out complex and demanding tasks because of family duties. Employment in the public sector and self-employment offer women more opportunities to escape these obstacles and to successfully combine private and family life with full-time work.

Women in Greece experience a double burden because they are mainly responsible for care and domestic work. The stereotypes of women as the pillars of family and home are still strong in society, while the renegotiation of gender roles and duties within families has not progressed. Traditionally, the extended family (grandparents and other relatives) have played an important role in helping women with this double burden. However, women continued to be responsible also for elderly care. During the 1990s, a lot of the double workload of middle and upper class women was taken over by informal migrant female domestic workers and carers. Women were thus able to transfer some of their responsibilities to other women of different races, nations and classes. The economic crisis and households' drop in earnings have transformed this affordable form of »help« into a luxury, raising once more the question of the renegotiation of gender roles. Rising unemployment among males will undoubtedly push more households to renegotiate the traditional gender divisions in Greek households.

During the 1990s, significant progress was made with regard to the policies concerning the combination of working, private and family life. Pregnancy, maternity and parental leave were guaranteed by law, childcare and elderly care facilities were expanded and benefits and tax exemptions for families with children were implemented. As already mentioned, however, although these provisions are respected in the public sector, in the private sector and in self-employment their implementation is only partial. The fact that fathers rarely take advantage of these provisions manifests the need to address gender stereotypes and sharing of responsibilities for the bringing up of children. Policymaking and implementation are aimed mainly at combating the double workload of women and thereby fail to address men's crucial role in combining working, private and family life.

Public policies aimed at combating women's double workload also include the introduction of the all-day school system in public schools, the opening of new day care centres and kindergartens, as well as the establishment of public day centres for the elderly (KAPI). Although these institutions have had a positive impact on women's participation in the labour market, they are limited in number and scope, especially in urban centres. The limited number of places available for pre-school age children and the poor quality of care and education provided by some of these institutions has led many households to resort to the private sector. Most dual breadwinner families in the urban centres have to rely on private day care, kindergartens and tutoring, as well as migrant women carers for both their children and the elderly members of the family. The drop in household incomes after 2009 has led to a significant rise in the demand for public and subsidised private day care social services for under-aged children. The number of women who applied for such services rose from 24,856 in 2010 to 78,348 in 2012 and the number of children from 30,846 to 96,130. In 2012, only 47,881 women and 57,534 children were accepted as beneficiaries. More than 35 per cent of applicants were not accepted.<sup>11</sup>

The economic adjustment programmes have focused on severe cuts in public services spending, including reductions in personnel and funding, which have seriously undermined the ability of the public care system to provide

for people's needs. In addition, the economic recession, rising unemployment and falling wages have reduced most households' earnings and thus their ability to cover these needs through the private sector. In 2010, the number of households that did not use public or private care facilities for their children was very high, ranging from 93.8 per cent for single parent families, in which the head of the family was unemployed, to 69.3 per cent for families with both parents working.<sup>12</sup> These figures indicate, on one hand, a return to the extended family as the main provider of care and, on the other hand, a re-negotiation of gender equality issues taking place within Greek families. Despite or because of the economic crisis, however, a large percentage of women (77.7 per cent) decided not to leave the labour market in order to take over care responsibilities. As male unemployment rises, male wages drop and the quality of public services provision declines, there will be more pressure on men to share domestic and care duties.

## Social security, social protection

The Greek social security system is composed of different social security organisations for the public, private and professional sectors, with their own rules and provisions concerning women's social security entitlements. The system is very unequal and has been criticised for its redistributive failures. Although there are differences between social security organisations, overall, women, particularly mothers with under-aged children, have enjoyed favourable and preferential treatment with regard to social security entitlements, especially in the public sector. The only exception to this tendency is the largest social security organisation for the self-employed (OAEE).

With regard to pensions, in the social security organisation for permanent civil servants women have been able to claim pensions after 25 years of employment, while married or divorced mothers with under-aged children could claim pensions after only 15 years of employment. The widows of civil servants were entitled pensions even after five years of their husbands' employment. Unmarried or divorced daughters of deceased civil servants in some sectors were entitled to their fathers' pension for the duration of their lives, provided that they had a low

11. E.E.T.A. Hellenic Agency for Local Development and Local Government, 2012, »Statistics«, available at: [www.eetaa.gr](http://www.eetaa.gr)

12. EL.STAT, 2010, »Survey on the Reconciliation between Work and family Life«, available at: <http://www.statistics.gr>

income, while for sons these entitlements stopped once they reached adulthood (18 years old).

In the private sector, there are differences between social security organisations. Until 2010, women who were registered in the largest organisation for salaried employees in the private sector (IKA) had lower age and working days requirements for the same pension entitlements as men. For those who had completed 4,500 days of employment, a full pension could be claimed at the age of 65 for males and 60 for females. For those who had 10,000 days of employment, a full pension could be claimed at the age of 62 for males and 57 for females. The same provisions applied to those who claimed reduced pensions in order to leave retire early. Moreover, mothers and widowed fathers with under-aged children at the time of application have been able to claim a full pension at the age of 55, provided that they have completed 5,500 days of employment or a reduced pension at the age of 50 if they want to retire early. The wives of deceased employees are entitled to receive their husbands' pensions, irrespective of their own income.

These protective measures are intended to compensate women for discrimination in the labour market and in the family. The underlying assumption behind these measures is that women, who are mainly responsible for care and domestic work, have to be compensated for years spent combining family with working duties. In this context, family and marriage are privileged, while women are constructed as vulnerable categories in need of social protection. These measures are intended to give women an incentive to get married and have more children in order to combat the problem of low fertility rates. As the demographic statistics show, however, these measures have been ineffective in getting families to have more children. While these measures recognise women's devalued domestic and care work, their impact has not been the mainstreaming of gender equality in social security schemes, but rather the implementation of provisions that enable women to be good mothers and wives. In other words, social security provisions have assigned women and men fixed positions and have not encouraged the sharing of responsibilities.

Currently, a plan to unify social security organisations is being implemented for private sector employees. The plan includes measures to gradually bring women's and men's pension schemes in the private sector to the same

levels. Gradually, until the year 2015, the age limits for men and women's pension entitlements will be the same: 65 years for a full pension and 60 for a reduced pension. Provisions for the social security organisation of permanent civil servants have also changed: by 2015 male and female civil servants will be entitled a full pension at the age of 65 after 40 years of social security contributions. The gradual implementation of these provisions gives incentives to many women, especially in the public sector, to claim pensions earlier than anticipated in order to secure pensions they were entitled to before the changes. This has resulted into a large exodus of women (and men) from full-time employment, especially from the public sector. While this exodus does reduce the number of civil servants, which is one of the main goals of the economic adjustment programmes, it burdens the already fraught social security organisations with more costs and is contributing to the fall in female participation in the labour market.

With regard to women's health care, the regimes of the different social security organisations are very unequal. Public health and medical care has been free, provided that women register either as employees or as dependent members. Although some social security organisations have covered a large percentage of the costs of private hospitalisation and medical care, others only reimbursed part of them or gave women a fixed amount for each medical examination, hospitalisation or visits to doctors, irrespective of the overall cost. Different social security regimes have been very important because resort to private health services was widespread in Greece before the economic crisis because of low quality services, especially nursing, lack of available beds for hospitalisation, long waiting lists and bureaucratic complications in the reimbursement of expenses by social security organisations. In addition, inequalities in the social security system are not directly linked to contributions, but rather to different agreements between different social security organisations and the state. The further decline in the quality of health and medical care services because of budget and personnel cuts introduced by the economic adjustment programmes has already had severe implications for women's social protection.

As already explained, women have also enjoyed several other benefits aimed mainly at reconciling working and family life, including the prohibition of dismissal from employment after or before pregnancy, paid pregnancy

leave, unpaid maternity leave for the rearing of children and for monitoring children's educational progress, benefits for marriage and children and favourable tax provisions for families with children. In the public sector, women have also enjoyed a reduced hours' scheme during the first years of a child's life. Although parental leave was extended to include also fathers and male partners, it is mostly women that make use of these beneficial provisions. Certain categories of vulnerable parents, such as heads of single-parent families, which in Greece are almost all women, could also claim financial support from the state, tax exemptions and priority access to municipal care services. Families with three or more children have also enjoyed preferential treatment (including priority recruitment of parents and children in the public sector and access to municipal care services, early retirement, financial support and tax exemptions). Finally, some social security organisations have offered their members free or very low-cost day care centres and kindergartens, as well as summer camps for children.

Since 2009, public policy cuts in family allowances and benefits, child and elderly care services, tax exemptions and benefits for families with three or more children, as well as changes in the social security and pension system have been implemented within the framework of the economic adjustment programmes. The rationale behind these changes has been mainly to reduce public expenditure and to protect the social security organisations from collapse, rather than to promote gender equality in the labour market. In addition, small fees were imposed for childcare in public day care centres and for public health and medical care. As long as women in Greece continue to experience gender discrimination in the labour market and gender roles in society do not alter, however, these changes are likely to have a very negative impact on their lives, reinforcing their dependency on their male partners and husbands. The only positive change promoted in the economic adjustment programmes that encourages women's independence was the revision of the tax law according to which, from 2011 on, spouses shall make separate tax statements and shall be separately refunded according to their personal incomes.

## Fertility rate

Fertility rates in Greece are very low. In 2011, the fertility rate was 1.40, when the normal rate for developing

countries is 2.1.<sup>13</sup> The low fertility rate impacts negatively on the labour market and social security. As the proportion of Greeks of working age is shrinking, the percentage of those in retirement is expanding. In 2011, the ageing rate was 135.4 and the dependency rate 51.2 per cent. The estimates for the future Greece population are fairly negative since in the coming decades it is expected that a greater proportion of working age people will seek retirement, thus imposing even heavier burdens on working age people.

The average age of mothers at the birth of their first child has been rising steadily since the 1980s and has now reached 31.38. This figure shows that at the early stages of adulthood, women in Greece tend to prioritise education and working life over marriage, family and procreation. This tendency indicates changing gender roles in society and the overall commitment of women to enter the labour market in more advantageous terms than in the past. The policies aimed at combating Greece's demographic deficit by giving incentives to women and couples to have more children have failed so far to change these trends. On the contrary, more and more Greek women focus on combining family and working life, a choice that is associated mainly with having smaller families.

## The debate and reform discussion

The public debates on gender equality in Greece focus on women, rather than on gender relations. While negative attitudes towards working women have receded, stereotypical perceptions of women as mothers and care-givers remain dominant. The combination of working, private and family life is framed as an issue that concerns only women and their ability to raise their children and take care of their homes. Men are portrayed mainly as breadwinners and their domestic and care responsibilities are not on the agenda. Government policies on public childcare, pregnancy and maternity leave have been criticised for their failure to support working women to become good mothers and take care of their domestic duties. As a result, public debates on the gender equality reform centre mainly on the institutions of the family and marriage, which are considered the cornerstones of Greek society. Since 2009, female unemployment and women's

13. EL.STAT, 2012, »Living Conditions in Greece«, available at: <http://www.statistics.gr>

poverty have figured prominently in the media, but they are framed mainly as manifestations of the negative impact of the economic crisis on families and motherhood, rather than as indicators of deep-rooted gender discrimination.

The main official bodies that influence the debates on reform are the General Secretariat for Gender Equality (G.S.G.E.), which is attached to the Ministry of the Interior, and the Greek Ombudsman for Gender Equality, which is an independent body that monitors gender equality law violations and mediates between employers and employees on gender equality issues. The G.S.G.E. introduced the »National Programme for Substantive Gender Equality 2010–2013«, which stated as one of its main goals »supporting women’s employment and their financial independence«. The programme has emphasised the need to adopt active policies of empowerment in order to combat gender discrimination in the labour market by challenging stereotypical perceptions of women as primary or sole care givers. By emphasising the need to challenge unequal gender relations and to support and safeguard women’s autonomy, rather than family and marriage, it has made an impact on the reform discussions. Plans announced by the government in March 2013 to transform the G.S.G.E. into a Directorate in the Ministry of the Interior – significantly reducing its funding, personnel and scope of action – are likely to have a very negative impact on the implementation of gender equality objectives in the Greek labour market and gender mainstreaming in policymaking and public debates.

The Greek Ombudsman for Gender Equality has also influenced the reform debates by monitoring and making public everyday practices of gender discrimination in the Greek labour market that have been overlooked until recently. Its capacity to mediate in conflicts between employers and employees gives it an extra power over these issues.

Despite these influences, however, public discussion and political debates have not changed prevailing attitudes towards gender equality in the labour market in the government, the parliament and in political parties. In Greece, all political parties have to respect a 34.73 per cent quota for women candidates. In the national elections of 2012, the overall percentage of women elected to Parliament was 21 per cent. The largest percentages

of elected women were in the opposition political parties Syriza (35.21 per cent) and the Independent Greeks (35 per cent), while out of the leading coalition parties only DIMAR kept a relatively high percentage of female MPs (29.41 per cent), while New Democracy (13.95 %) and PASOK (9.09 per cent) had comparatively low percentages of women entering Parliament.<sup>14</sup> In addition to the statistical representation of women, there are differences in the priority different political parties put on gender equality in their political agenda and the inclusion of candidates (male and female) that promote gender equality in public debates.

Prior to the economic crisis, the vast majority of gender equality reforms were initiated and implemented by the governments of the PASOK socialist party, which was in power for most of the post-1981 period. PASOK’s commitment to promoting the reconciliation of women’s working and family life in accordance with EU directives was supported by traditional links with liberal feminist groups and the inclusion of several prominent feminists in its election lists. The number of elected female PASOK MPs kept rising until 2009, when it reached 21.25 per cent, only to drop below 10 per cent after the 2012 elections. The communist party KKE has mainly criticised liberal gender equality policies and promotes the view that the main cause of women’s oppression is capitalism. It is the only political party in Parliament with a female leader and has kept the percentage of women elected over 18 per cent since 1996.

SYRIZA has brought reform proposals and criticisms of existing gender equality policies to the forefront of public debates. It represents mainly the perspectives of second-wave feminist, as well as LGBT groups, with which it has strong links. There have been many feminist candidates and one leader of the party in the past. Its percentage of female MPs fell to 15.38 per cent in 2009 and rose over 35 per cent in the 2012 elections. Despite its strong feminist commitment, the impact of SYRIZA in public debates was limited until 2009 because of its low electoral percentages and exclusion from mainstream media, but since it became the main opposition party it has gained more influence.

14. G.S.G.E., 2012, »Women candidates and elected in the National Elections of 17<sup>th</sup> of June 2012« in <http://www.isotita.gr/>

For the conservative party, New Democracy, gender equality in the labour market has not been traditionally at the top of the agenda. The percentage of female elected MPs has been rising since 1996, from 5.60 per cent to 13.95 per cent in 2012. The main issues that New Democracy representatives have discussed in political debates on gender equality are motherhood, child-rearing and the need to combat the demographic deficit through measures supporting and protecting Greek family values and traditions. While in government in 2004, it was the conservative government of New Democracy that passed the reform of the welfare policy bill in order to support families with many children. The law established benefits for all families with three or more children irrespective of family income with the aim of giving incentives to couples to have more children in order to combat the demographic deficit. The agenda of the Independent Greeks and the Ultra right-wing party LAOS is similar, although the former had a large percentage of females elected to Parliament in 2012.

After the economic crisis, gender equality in the labour market has been marginalised in both public and political debates. The political parties that participate in the coalition governments (PASOK, New Democracy, first LAOS and then DIMAR) have failed to mainstream gender equality objectives into the economic adjustment programmes. The public policy cuts in family allowances, child and elderly care services, tax exemption and benefits for families with three or more children, as well as changes in the social security and pension system have been widely criticised by MPs across the political spectrum because of their negative impact on the Greek family, rather than on gender equality. Attempts by MPs in the government coalition – mainly from PASOK – to address gender discrimination in the labour market in parliamentary debates have been isolated and marginalised, manifesting the low percentages of women MPs after the 2012 elections. Although Dimar, which is composed of many former Syriza members, adopts a gender-sensitive approach and has some prominent feminists in its ranks, it has not prioritised gender equality in the labour market in the reforms.

Syriza, which has become the main opposition party, stands out in that respect as the only political party that continues to raise the issue of gender equality in the labour market in a systematic way and from a feminist perspective with the support of feminist intellectuals and

activists. Syriza and the KKE have also raised frequently the question of the »feminised« sectors of the economy, including questions related to migrant women's employment. On the contrary, the populist rhetoric of the rising ultra right-wing party, Golden Dawn, has pushed the political and public reform discussions further away from gender equality and into an ethno-nationalist discourse that stereotypes women as the mothers of the nation. Party representatives of the Golden Dawn, New Democracy and LAOS have also made strong statements about the threat of rising migrant fertility rates and the need to encourage Greek mothers to have more children in order to fight against this threat. Recently, the Golden Dawn has also made a proposal for women to enter compulsory military service in Greece.

It is important to note that issues such as the gender wage gap, discrimination in recruitment and career advancement, sexual harassment, precarious employment and violations of the labour legislation on gender equality are almost silenced in public discourse. The fact that these issues remain outside the dominant debates demonstrates how, despite the imposition of quotas with regard to the number of women MPs, gender representation continues to be thin in political processes. Feminist activism and demands tend to influence public debates less than in the past. Their demands for equal pay for equal work and their struggles for recognition of women's double burden are largely silenced in parliamentary debates. Feminist groups are very rarely asked to participate in public discussions or decision-making processes and they are almost excluded from mainstream media. Another obstacle to raising demands concerning gender equality reform in the labour market is the fact that women are underrepresented in trade unions, especially in positions of authority. As a result, the demands for reform made by feminist groups are becoming more and more marginalised in both public discourse and decision-making processes.

## Conclusion

Greece is going through an unprecedented economic and social crisis that impacts on both the private and the public life of men and women. In this context, gender equality objectives tend to be marginalised in public and policy debates. The progress made during recent decades in women's labour market participation is be-

ing undermined because of the transformations that are currently taking place. Unless gender equality objectives are mainstreamed into the economic adjustment programmes and prior government commitments to implement gender equality legislation are taken seriously, gender discrimination in the labour market will rise. As market deregulation and precarious employment are becoming normalised, violations of gender labour rights risk becoming normalised.

In order to address gender equality in the Greek labour market, however, gender roles and stereotyping in Greek society should change, too. The sharing of private, domestic and care responsibilities is increasingly becoming a necessity for many families who are experiencing severe economic problems. However, unless social policies on education, care, social security, medical and health care are implemented in such a way as to encourage women's autonomy, traditional and new forms of gender discrimination in the labour market will continue to undermine women's labour rights.

## Policy recommendations

- Gender mainstreaming in the economic adjustment programmes. Gender experts and the main institutions responsible for the implementation and monitoring of gender equality law (General Secretariat for Gender Equality and Greek Ombudsman) should be asked to recommend appropriate changes in existing and future economic adjustment programmes in order to promote gender equality in the labour market.
- Implementation of existing legislation on gender equality in the labour market in the private sector through stricter controls and penalties for violations of gender labour rights on employers and companies.
- Monitoring and positive actions for the implementation of the new law on gender equality in self-employment, including gender equality training programmes for self-employed women.
- Extension and specialisation of legislation on gender equality in the labour market in precarious forms of employment, mostly domestic work, nursing, cleaning, project-based work and new media work.
- Gender equality training programmes for private employers, business owners, heads of personnel departments of large companies and other professionals in order to challenge gender stereotyping in the recruitment of new employees and in the progress of existing employees.
- Extension of unemployment benefit to all categories of workers, including the self-employed.
- Implementation of vocational and training programmes for unemployed women, including migrant women.
- Creation of networks of unemployed and employed women in specific sectors of the economy in order to promote synergies and empowerment.
- Incentives for private companies to adopt gender equality objectives, such as creation of databases on companies that respect gender equality and promote marketing and organisational strategies that encourage gender equality in the labour market.
- Creation of an interactive electronic portal for job searching especially designed for women, which will include openings in companies that respect gender equality law, information on gender equality law and complaints about companies that promote gender discrimination in the labour market.
- Specialised campaign on sexual harassment addressing the needs and rights of women and men who work in the private and the public sector.
- Public campaign for the equal sharing of domestic and care responsibilities of men and women at home and dissemination of information challenging stereotypes and social prejudices about men's role in domestic and care work.
- Compulsory gender equality courses in primary, secondary and higher education.
- Vocational training of teachers and professors on gender equality in education and vocational training for female students encouraging them to enter male-dominated professions, and for male students to enter female-dominated professions.



- Incentives for trade unions to impose quotas and encourage women's representation particularly in the higher ranks of the trade union hierarchies, as well as to promote gender equality in collective labour agreements across the private and the public sector.
- Promotion of scientific research on the impact of the economic crisis and the economic adjustment programmes on gender equality in the labour market, including the introduction of more gender variables in the collection of statistical data by the Greek statistical authority EL.STAT.

## Recommended sources for further information on gender equality in the Greek labour market

General Secretariat for Gender Equality  
<http://www.isotita.gr/>

Greek Ombudsman for Gender Equality  
<http://www.synigoros.gr/?i=isotita-ton-fylon.el>

Hellenic Statistical Authority (EL.STAT.)  
<http://www.statistics.gr/portal/page/portal/ESYE>

European Industrial Relations Observatory Online  
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/industrialrelations/dictionary/definitions/europeanindustrialrelationsobservatory.htm>

EUROSTAT [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/employment\\_social\\_policy\\_equality/equality/gender\\_indicators](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/employment_social_policy_equality/equality/gender_indicators)

KETHI Research Centre for Gender equality  
<http://www.kethi.gr/>

Institute of the General Confederation of Greek Workers INE/GSEE  
<http://www.inegsee.gr>



### About the author

**Nelli Kambouri** holds a PhD from the London School of Economics and Political Science, UK. She has been conducting research on gender equality, migration and social movements and has worked as an occasional lecturer teaching gender, social policy and the labour market at the Department of Social Policy at Panteion University. She was part of the research team of the projects Mig@net and GeMIC, which were coordinated by the Centre for Gender Studies at Panteion University and funded by the FP7 programme for research of the European Commission. She is currently working in Athens as a research fellow at the Centre for Gender Studies, Panteion University and as an advisor on research at the General Secretariat for Gender Equality.

### Imprint

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Western Europe/North America |  
Hiroshimastraße 28 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

Responsible:  
Anne Seyfferth, Head, Western Europe/North America

Tel.: ++49-30-269-35-7736 | Fax: ++49-30-269-35-9249  
<http://www.fes.de/international/wil>

Orders/Contact:  
[ID-INFO-WENA@fes.de](mailto:ID-INFO-WENA@fes.de)

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung or of the organization for which the author works.

This publication is printed on paper from sustainable forestry.



ISBN 978-3-86498-504-1