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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### Visit to Greece

#### Report of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls\*, \*\*

##### *Summary*

In the present report on its visit to Greece, from 1 to 12 April 2019, the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls sets out its assessment of the situation regarding the human rights of women in the country, taking note of achievements and challenges. It examines the legal, institutional and policy framework of Greece for promoting gender equality and the participation of women in family, economic, social, political and public life, paying particular attention to the impact of the imposed financial austerity measures on women who encounter multiple forms of discrimination, including migrant women. The Working Group also sets out recommendations for making further progress in eliminating discrimination and promoting equality.

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\* The summary of the report is being circulated in all official languages. The report itself, which is annexed to the summary, is being circulated in English only.

\*\* The present report was submitted after the deadline in order to reflect the most recent information.



## Annex

### Report of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls on its visit to Greece

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## I. Introduction

1. Experts of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice,<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Broderick and Alda Facio, visited Greece from 1 to 12 April 2019, at the invitation of the Government. In accordance with the mandate of the Working Group, the objective of the visit was to gain first-hand understanding of issues related to eliminating discrimination against women in law and in practice, including efforts made, promising practices and remaining challenges. The Working Group expresses its appreciation to the Government for its cooperation before and during the visit.

2. During the visit, the experts met with representatives of a broad range of central and local authorities, representatives of women's organizations, women's rights experts and other interlocutors in Athens, Thessaloniki, Aspropyrgos, Lesvos and Thiva. In Athens, the Working Group met with representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior, including its General Secretariat for Gender Equality, Department for Human Rights, Minorities, Migrants and Refugees and Department of European and International Cooperation, the Centre of Research for Equality Issues, the Ministry of Justice, including with the General Secretary for Human Rights and the Head of the Detention Centres Directorate, the General Secretariat for Transparency and Human Rights of the Ministry of Justice, the Office of the Public Prosecutor of the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Citizen Protection, including the Hellenic Police, the Ministry of Migration Policy and the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, including members of its Special Committee for Women's Issues. The experts also met with representatives of the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Rural Development, the Ministry of Economy and the Special Secretariat for Roma Social Inclusion, as well as prison staff. In Thessaloniki, the Working Group met with the Mayor, municipality officials and migration authorities. In Aspropyrgos, the Working Group visited a school and spoke with staff, students and Roma women. In Lesvos, the Working Group visited Moria refugee camp and met with the manager of the camp and migration authorities. In Thiva, the Working Group visited a women's prison and met with prison authorities, staff and prisoners. During the visit, the Working Group also met with the "Ombudsman",<sup>2</sup> representatives of the National Commission for Human Rights and numerous civil society organizations working on women's rights, migration, economic issues and United Nations officials, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The Working Group expresses its appreciation to all its interlocutors for their engagement and valuable input. The experts of the Working Group would also like to thank, in particular, the migrant and refugee women and women prisoners who shared their stories with them during the visit.

## II. Context

3. A prolonged period of austerity measures, imposed since 2010 by creditors, including the International Monetary Fund, the European Commission and the European Central Bank, and the ensuing government policies have had a profound impact on every aspect of life in Greece, causing economic and social instability, and have had particularly detrimental effects on women. Several bodies have pointed to the serious impact of the crisis and austerity measures on women, including the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations of the International Labour Organization (ILO),<sup>3</sup> the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In its resolution 41/6 of 11 July 2019, the Human Rights Council extended the mandate of the Working Group for another three years under the title of Working Group on discrimination against women and girls.

<sup>2</sup> The current official name of the office. The Working Group encourages the use of gender-neutral terms, such as Ombudsperson.

<sup>3</sup> ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, Observation on the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) (2014). Available at [www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:13100:0::NO::P13100\\_COMMENT\\_ID:3176793](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:13100:0::NO::P13100_COMMENT_ID:3176793).

<sup>4</sup> CEDAW/C/GRC/CO/7, para. 28.

and the European Committee of Social Rights of the Council of Europe,<sup>5</sup> as well as the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe.<sup>6</sup> Some 600,000 people, mostly young and educated, have emigrated, which, coupled with a low birth rate, has resulted in Greece losing 3 per cent of its population between 2011 and 2016.<sup>7</sup>

4. The arrival of unprecedented numbers of migrants and refugees since 2015<sup>8</sup> has added to the stress already imposed on the limited human and material resources.<sup>9</sup> The Working Group recognizes that the challenges facing Greece today are many.

5. Due to deep-rooted stereotypes about the role of women in the family and in society, the austerity measures have had a disproportionate impact on women. According to the Gender Equality Index of the European Institute for Gender Equality, Greece is ranked at the lowest end among European Union countries.<sup>10</sup>

6. The visit of the Working Group took place at a moment of optimism, as the country emerged from the preceding period of austerity and embarked upon a new path of economic recovery. The Working Group is of the view that Greece has a unique opportunity to simultaneously drive progress on gender equality and women's human rights while also strengthening its economy. The full and equal participation of women in the country's recovery is essential and must be a priority. As an interlocutor highlighted, "gender equality is not a luxury for better times".

### III. Legal, policy and institutional framework

#### A. Ratification of international instruments and cooperation with international human rights mechanisms

7. Greece has ratified nearly all of the core international human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Optional Protocol thereto. Greece has shown a strong commitment to cooperating with United Nations human rights mechanisms, as evidenced by its issuing a standing invitation to the special procedures of the Human Rights Council in 2001. It has still not ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. In June 2018, Greece took the important step of ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), the first legally binding instrument providing a comprehensive prevention, protection, prosecution and support framework for combating gender-based violence against women.

<sup>5</sup> Council of Europe, European Committee of Social Rights, "Activity report 2015". Available at <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900016805ab9c7>.

<sup>6</sup> Council of Europe, Commissioner for Human Rights, "Greece: progress in combating racism, but concerns remain about the impact of austerity", 8 July 2016. Available at [www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/greece-progress-in-combating-racism-but-concerns-remain-about-the-impact-of-austerity](http://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/greece-progress-in-combating-racism-but-concerns-remain-about-the-impact-of-austerity).

<sup>7</sup> Hellenic Statistical Authority, Estimated population, 2019. Available at [www.statistics.gr/en/statistics/-/publication/SPO18/-](http://www.statistics.gr/en/statistics/-/publication/SPO18/-).

<sup>8</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Data Portal, Mediterranean situation. Available at <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179>.

<sup>9</sup> At the time of the visit, the Working Group was informed that almost 5,000 migrants and refugees were housed in the Moria refugee camp. Subsequent reports indicated a huge increase in numbers. In his statement following his mission to Greece in November 2019, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that 16,100 asylum seekers were housed at the Moria reception centre – seven times over its capacity. See [www.unhcr.org/news/press/2019/11/5ddfc2ea4/head-unhcr-calls-urgent-response-overcrowding-greek-island-reception-centres.html](http://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2019/11/5ddfc2ea4/head-unhcr-calls-urgent-response-overcrowding-greek-island-reception-centres.html).

<sup>10</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index, Index score for Greece for 2019. Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2019/EL>.

## B. Constitutional, legal and policy framework

8. Greece has strong constitutional guarantees for equality between men and women and the right to equal pay for work of equal value. Under articles 4 and 116 of the Constitution of Greece, the State is required to undertake positive measures to promote gender equality, including through affirmative action measures.<sup>11</sup> Marriage, family, motherhood and childhood are explicitly protected under the Constitution.

9. Furthermore, a legislative framework on equal treatment, covering a range of areas, has been established, aimed at implementing European Union directives. The Working Group welcomes the adoption on 26 March 2019 of Law No. 4604/2019 on promoting substantive gender equality and preventing and combating gender-based violence.<sup>12</sup> The Working Group also welcomes the comprehensive legal framework on substantive gender equality, which goes beyond the concept of equal treatment to focus on equality of outcomes across all spheres of women's lives. The framework is focused on multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, including on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. Addressing gender-based violence and mainstreaming a gender perspective across the public administration through the establishment of equality bodies at the regional and local levels are integral parts of Law No. 4604/2019. Importantly, the law also includes provisions on combating gender stereotypes in the education system and in the media. There is also a provision for a quota of 40 per cent women candidates standing for election to be put forth from each political party, an increase from the current quota of 33 per cent.

10. The adoption of Law No. 4198/2013 on preventing and combating trafficking in persons and protecting its victims is a welcome development. Law No. 3896/2010 concerning equality of opportunity and treatment prohibits gender discrimination in employment, covering issues such as equal pay, equal treatment with regard to social security and equal access to employment and opportunities for professional development among men and women.

11. The Working Group welcomes the adoption of numerous policies aimed at promoting women's rights and gender equality, such as the national action plan on gender equality, 2016–2020,<sup>13</sup> prepared by the General Secretariat for Gender Equality.

12. Although a comprehensive legal framework for the protection and promotion of women's human rights is in place, implementation is lagging behind. That was pointed out by many interlocutors throughout the visit, with one commenting that: "Our legislative framework is good, but when it comes to the application of the law, we face serious challenges due to the obstacles of the old mindset and the old practices."

13. The lack of available data or a strong monitoring capacity by independent entities are also key challenges that impede progress. The Working Group echoes the concerns of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and its call upon Greece to enhance the collection, analysis and dissemination of comprehensive data, disaggregated by sex, age, race, ethnicity, urban or rural location and socioeconomic background, and the use of measurable indicators to assess trends in the situation of women and progress towards the realization of substantive equality for women in all areas covered by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Constitution of Greece. Available at [www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/f3c70a23-7696-49db-9148-f24dce6a27c8/001-156%20aggliko.pdf](http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/f3c70a23-7696-49db-9148-f24dce6a27c8/001-156%20aggliko.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Law No. 4604/2019 on promoting substantive gender equality and preventing and combating gender-based violence. Available at [www.isotita.gr/en/law-4604-2019-substantive-gender-equality-preventing-combating-gender-based-violence/](http://www.isotita.gr/en/law-4604-2019-substantive-gender-equality-preventing-combating-gender-based-violence/).

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of the Interior, General Secretariat for Gender Equality, national action plan on gender equality, 2016–2021. Available at [www.isotita.gr/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/National-Action-Plan-for-Gender-Equality-2016-2020.pdf](http://www.isotita.gr/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/National-Action-Plan-for-Gender-Equality-2016-2020.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> See also Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, general recommendation No. 9 (1989) on statistical data concerning the situation of women. The lack of statistical data on the enjoyment of the rights encapsulated in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination was highlighted by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in its concluding observations on the combined twentieth through twenty-second periodic reports of Greece (CERD/C/GRC/CO/20-22, para. 8).

## **C. Institutional framework**

### **1. General Secretariat for Gender Equality**

14. The General Secretariat for Gender Equality, within the Ministry of the Interior, is a governmental body dedicated to gender equality with the broad mandate of designing, implementing and monitoring the implementation of gender equality policies in all areas. It runs an Observatory on Gender Equality Issues, providing a publicly available online platform which tracks and analyses statistical data from various sources on a broad range of policy areas. The Observatory is a useful tool for identifying progress or regression, thereby providing a basis for advocacy and policymaking. A challenge for the General Secretariat is its inadequate human and financial resources, which limits its influence and capacity to achieve its full potential.

### **2. Office of the Ombudsman**

15. There is no dedicated independent national institution for monitoring and eliminating discrimination against women. Gender equality is included in the mandate of the Office of the Ombudsman, a national body with a dedicated department for equal treatment, which includes gender equality among several other grounds, including discrimination on the basis of national-ethnic origin, disability and age.<sup>15</sup> The Office monitors discrimination mostly in the field of employment, in both the public and the private sectors. Complaints on gender-based discrimination have increased, from 40 per cent in 2017 to 57 per cent in 2018, and represent the largest number of all complaints by far handled by the Office. It has limited jurisprudence on discrimination against women. The Working Group is of the view that the Ombudsman should be able to seek leave to act as *amicus curiae* to provide an expert opinion on discrimination cases. The Office is working on ways to increase its visibility and raise awareness among the general public. Further investment in outreach is essential in order to ensure effective access to that crucial complaint mechanism for the most marginalized women.

### **3. National Commission for Human Rights**

16. The National Commission for Human Rights, a consultative and advisory body to the State, is an important independent voice on human rights, accredited with A status. The Commission does not have a dedicated focus on monitoring and eliminating discrimination against women embedded within its structure but addresses the issue in a cross-cutting manner in various areas of its work. As an independent national human rights institution, the Commission has a critical role in the monitoring of women's rights and must be adequately resourced and able to function independently and effectively.

### **4. General Secretariat for Transparency and Human Rights**

17. The General Secretariat for Transparency and Human Rights of the Ministry of Justice was established by Presidential Decree No. 94/2010. The General Secretariat is responsible for, among other things, the consolidation and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, by undertaking all necessary related initiatives, including ensuring compliance with the international obligations of Greece. Within that framework, the General Secretariat designs, elaborates and outlines policy priorities and plans of action to ensure the effective exercise of human rights, undertakes the relevant legislative, regulatory and administrative initiatives and monitors their implementation.

### **5. Special Secretariat for Roma Social Inclusion**

18. The Special Secretariat for Roma Social Inclusion of the Ministry of Labour was established by Law No. 4430/2016 and is mandated to determine priorities and design guidelines for all policy areas related to the social integration of Roma people. That includes the submission of relevant proposals to the Ministry of Labour and cooperation with other competent ministries, including on health and education at the national, regional

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<sup>15</sup> See Ombudsman of Greece, "Equal treatment" report series. Available at [www.synigoros.gr/?i=equality.en.recentinterentions.588550](http://www.synigoros.gr/?i=equality.en.recentinterentions.588550).

and local levels, on the design and implementation of interventions. Data collection, the assessment of policies and the implementation of the national strategic framework for the integration of Roma people are key elements of its work.

## IV. Economic and social life

### A. Participation of women in the labour force and economic leadership among women

19. Greece has historically had low labour force participation among women and one of the lowest rates of employment among women in the European Union. One serious impact of the financial crisis and austerity measures is the high level of unemployment and underemployment among women. In 2018, 23.7 per cent of women in the active population were unemployed, compared with 14.7 per cent of men. The data available shows that the gender gap in unemployment has been prevalent for many years, and, in the period 2013–2018, the largest gap was in December 2017, with 26 per cent of women unemployed, compared with 16.7 per cent of men.<sup>16</sup> That is a significantly large gap, given the European Union average of 0.5 per cent unemployment among women.<sup>17</sup>

20. Despite the adoption of Law No. 3896/2010<sup>18</sup> concerning equality of opportunity and treatment, the deregulation of the labour market due to the financial crisis and the consecutive austerity measures continues to affect women negatively, rendering them more vulnerable to poverty. That has been recognized by several international and regional monitoring bodies.<sup>19</sup>

21. In recognition of the adverse impact of the austerity measures on levels of employment among women, the national action plan for gender equality, 2016–2020,<sup>20</sup> sets out a number of targeted initiatives to strengthen efforts to enhance access for woman to economic opportunities and to reduce unemployment and underemployment among women. They include a project on positive actions for women to promote their participation in economic decision-making centres, funded jointly by the European Commission.<sup>21</sup>

22. Increasing the participation of women in the workforce will require economic and social policies to build equal access for women into the labour market and deliver improved pay and conditions of work.

23. There are limited data on the size of the informal labour market. It is estimated that the magnitude of undeclared work is equivalent to 24 per cent of the gross domestic product, which puts Greece among the countries with one of the largest undeclared economies in Europe. Informal forms of work include domestic work, cleaning, care for older persons and children, tutoring services for students and employment in the hospitality sector – all

<sup>16</sup> Ministry of the Interior, General Secretariat for Gender Equality “E-bulletin No. 19 on women’s unemployment”, table 3. Available at [www.isotita.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Observatory-19th-e-bulletin-Womens-Unemployment.pdf](http://www.isotita.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Observatory-19th-e-bulletin-Womens-Unemployment.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Statistics Database, Employment rates by sex, age and degree of urbanization. Available at [https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/ta\\_wrklab\\_lab\\_emprate\\_gen\\_\\_lfst\\_r\\_ergau](https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/ta_wrklab_lab_emprate_gen__lfst_r_ergau).

<sup>18</sup> Under Law No. 3896/2010, amending Law No. 3488/2006, discrimination on the basis of gender in employment is prohibited; it covers issues such as equal pay, equal treatment with regard to social security and equal access to employment and opportunities for professional development among men and women. See European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, “Note on the policy on gender equality in Greece”. Available at [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/493028/IPOL-FEMM\\_NT%282013%29493028\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/493028/IPOL-FEMM_NT%282013%29493028_EN.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Council of Europe, Commissioner for Human Rights, “Greece: progress in combating racism”.

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of the Interior, General Secretariat for Gender Equality, national action plan for gender equality.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

sectors which have a higher share of female workers. The informal sector appears to be an understudied sector, requiring further attention by the Government.<sup>22</sup>

24. The Working Group was unable to obtain meaningful sex-disaggregated data about the employment and representation of women in the private sector. However, discussions held during the country visit revealed that discrimination against women was present in the public sector and also evident in the private sector and that it contributes to a national mindset that women should exit paid work earlier than men.

25. The proportion of women on the boards of the largest publicly listed companies registered in European Union countries reached 26.7 per cent in October 2018. In Greece, women account for less than 10 per cent of board members,<sup>23</sup> a marginal increase from 7 per cent in 2005. In the same period, the European Union average has increased from 15 per cent to 26.7 per cent.

26. The new law on substantive gender equality (Law No. 4604/2019) encourages the development of equality plans by both the public and private sector to prevent all forms of discrimination against women and to ensure their promotion to senior roles. However, the plans are voluntary in the private sector, with the incentive of an “equality medal” for driving progress. The Working Group’s research reveals that mandatory interventions, and not voluntary ones, are the most effective way to increase the number of women at the decision-making level.<sup>24</sup> The requirement to regularly report and publish data on women in leadership roles is another effective strategy.

27. The Working Group was told by interlocutors that, in recent years, owing to the economic context, women have increasingly been employed in part-time or casual employment, with reduced pay and poor conditions and security, as well as in precarious work. In the private sector, the rapid growth of flexible forms of employment, as well as the replacement of contracts of indefinite duration by fixed-term contracts, has led to a reduction in wages and created a context in which women are more fearful to report gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, at the workplace.

## 1. Unequal share of unpaid care work and domestic work borne by women

28. In addition to the loss of jobs associated with the crisis, the unemployment and underemployment of women in the labour market is due in part to the unpaid care burden that falls largely on women.

29. A major issue of concern for gender equality is the severe reduction of State-provided care services for children and dependents, including care for older persons and persons with disabilities. That intensifies the level of unpaid care work done by women, limiting their ability to take up even low-paid forms of employment, in order to better balance their care work responsibilities. In parallel, rigid stereotypes perpetuate the idea that care work is largely, if not exclusively, the domain of women. In Greece, 85 per cent of women do cooking and housework every day for at least 1 hour, compared with only 16 per cent of men. Greece has very low rates of use of childcare services compared with other European Union countries.<sup>25</sup> Men’s time caring for children and grandchildren in Greece is among the lowest in the European Union.

30. Childcare is costly in Greece, with 61 per cent of households citing “economic difficulty” as a reason for not using childcare services.<sup>26</sup> School timetables do not

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, ILO, *Diagnostic Report on Undeclared Work in Greece* (Geneva, ILO, 2016).

Available at [www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/documents/projectdocumentation/wcms\\_531548.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/projectdocumentation/wcms_531548.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> European Commission, *2019 Report on equality between women and men in the EU* (Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2019), figure 8. Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/aid\\_development\\_cooperation\\_fundamental\\_rights/annual\\_report\\_ge\\_2019\\_en\\_1.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/aid_development_cooperation_fundamental_rights/annual_report_ge_2019_en_1.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> See A/HRC/26/39.

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of the Interior, General Secretariat on Gender Equality, “E-bulletin No. 18 on love as labor”, figure 2. Available at [www.isotita.gr/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Observatory-18th-e-bulletin-Love-as-labor.pdf](http://www.isotita.gr/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Observatory-18th-e-bulletin-Love-as-labor.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, table 3.



correspond to typical working hours, which necessitates parents working less or relying on family members, usually women, to provide childcare. The Government partially addressed those concerns through a funding programme on the harmonization of family life and work life. Additional policy measures and improved implementation of current measures are necessary to encourage higher rates of use of childcare services and preschool education. That will support parents, in particular women, in balancing paid work and care work.<sup>27</sup>

31. Prioritizing investment in social protection and public services is essential for ensuring that women benefit equally from the economic recovery measures. That includes investment in accessible, affordable and high-quality childcare and care services for older persons and persons with disabilities, to reduce the unpaid care workload for women and enable their economic participation. Furthermore, resources are urgently needed to close the gaps in the social protection system, in particular those benefits that lift women and their families out of poverty. A key priority should be the introduction of measures to support more equal sharing of care work responsibilities between women and men, which would be helped by increasing the entitlement of paid leave specifically for fathers, which is low by European Union and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development standards. That will require shifting the stereotype that care work is the domain of women.

32. In 2016, 62 per cent of women and 51 per cent of men between the ages of 20 and 49 (i.e., potential parents) were ineligible for parental leave in Greece, whereas those figures were 34 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively, in the European Union. Unemployment or inactivity in the workforce was the main reason for ineligibility for 71 per cent of women and 44 per cent of men. Self-employment was a reason for the ineligibility for 22 per cent of women and 48 per cent of men. The remaining 6 per cent of women and 8 per cent of men were ineligible, owing to an inadequate length of employment. Same-sex parents are ineligible for parental leave in Greece. Among the entire employed population, 32 per cent of women and 37 per cent of men were ineligible for parental leave.<sup>28</sup>

## 2. Maternity protection

33. Access for women to the labour market is also hampered by the lack of protection provided to employees who have been absent from work due to maternity or parental leave. As documented by the Office of the Ombudsman of Greece, access to maternity leave is not uniform, but rather differs based on employment status and whether the employee is in the public or private employment sector. Women who return to work following maternity leave are legally entitled to return to the same job or an equivalent one, with no less favourable working terms and conditions, while benefitting from any improvement of their working conditions that they would have been entitled to during their absence. However, in practice, a serious deficiency is observed in the application of the law on those matters, in particular in relation to women in high-ranking positions.<sup>29</sup> Some working women face strict restrictions, including the refusal to count the maternity leave period in the total length of service, which has a negative impact on their career development and pensions. In some cases, women are totally excluded from exercising their rights relating to maternity, facing wrongful dismissals from employment and changes in work terms, such as reduced hours, imposed by employers due to pregnancy and care work responsibilities. There are also gaps with regard to maternity protections for self-employed persons. As the experts heard from one woman: “Three times in job interviews I was told ‘you’re a woman; you’re going to get pregnant. That will bring us a difficult situation, so we cannot hire you’.”

34. Furthermore, the continuous reduction of the already insufficient day-care structures for children limits the ability of women to take up employment or to stay in jobs. In parallel,

<sup>27</sup> Childcare policy of Greece. Available at [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/early-childhood-education-and-care-33\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/early-childhood-education-and-care-33_en).

<sup>28</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index, Work-life balance (2019), Parental leave policies in Greece. Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/thematic-focus/work-life-balance/parental-leave-policies/EL>.

<sup>29</sup> Ombudsman of Greece, “Equal treatment special report, 2017”, p. 30. Available at [www.synigoros.gr/?i=equality.en.recentintention.541056](http://www.synigoros.gr/?i=equality.en.recentintention.541056).

it perpetuates gender stereotypes, given that men are not encouraged to participate in such care work.

### 3. Sexual harassment in the workplace

35. Sexual harassment in the workplace is prohibited by law, but there is no national-level data collected about its prevalence. In its concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of Greece, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women expressed concern with regard to the absence of statistical data disaggregated by sex on complaints related to gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment at the workplace.<sup>30</sup> The Working Group echoes that concern.

36. According to the Office of the Ombudsman, the number of cases of sexual harassment that occur in the workplace is much higher than the number of complaints submitted to the Office. Individuals are fearful to report such behaviour, because they fear reprisals, stigmatization, losing their jobs or facing judicial counter measures.<sup>31</sup> The Working Group heard from an interlocutor that: “Due to the financial crisis, acceptance of sexual harassment has increased. The women need to keep their jobs.”

37. Stronger regulatory measures and accountability mechanisms in the public and private sectors are essential to making progressive change.

## B. Education and the media hold the potential to shift gender stereotypes

### 1. Education

38. The experts of the Working Group were pleased to note the high level of educational attainment for girls at all levels, with 53.2 per cent of those finishing secondary education being women and 52.7 per cent of graduates from university being women, according to data from the General Secretariat for Gender Equality. Women dominate in the arts and humanities and health-related subjects and are also in the majority in subjects relating to business and law. They are in the minority, however, in subjects relating to science and engineering, signalling that more attention is needed in those areas.<sup>32</sup>

39. Achievement among women in education does not, however, translate into their progression in the economic sphere or ensure their career advancement. Even in educational institutions, women hold a lower percentage of senior leadership roles. For example, whereas women make up two thirds of educational personnel in public high schools, they hold only 40 per cent of director-level positions, although that has been improving over time.

40. In addition to enabling women and girls to achieve their potential, education can be a key medium for shifting rigid gender norms and stereotypes. Education on gender equality and gender norms begins in the family and continues at school, in the workplace and within society at large. Many interlocutors considered that an increased focus on gender equality in education would be a significant preventative measure to address the deeply held gender stereotypes that were inhibiting the ability of women to fully enjoy their rights.

41. In relation to gender equality education in the school curriculum, the Working Group was pleased to learn from the Ministry of Education that there were three streams of gender equality, sexual orientation and gender identity content within the school curriculum, however, other interlocutors described the content as limited in scope and, on occasion, implemented piecemeal. Gender equality content is included in the “democratic citizenship” subjects, which are mainstreamed throughout the school curriculum, there is a small amount of gender equality content built into religious instruction, which involves asking students to reflect on the place of women in religion, and gender equality and gender

<sup>30</sup> CEDAW/C/GRC/CO/7, para. 28.

<sup>31</sup> Ombudsman of Greece, “Equal treatment 2017”, p. 36.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Ministry of the Interior, General Secretariat for Gender Equality, “E-bulletin No. 9 on girls and education”. Available at [www.isotita.gr/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/observatory-9th-e-bulletin-girls-education.pdf](http://www.isotita.gr/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/observatory-9th-e-bulletin-girls-education.pdf).

identity is included as one subject choice for the thematic week conducted in every school once per year. However, in the thematic week, gender equality and gender identity is one choice among many, and although there are no data, the Working Group was told by interlocutors that it was a theme that was not often selected. In addition, there appears to be a gap in the teaching of comprehensive sexuality education.

42. On the effectiveness of school-based education to combat gender stereotypes, the Working Group learned from one interlocutor that “gender equality education is sporadic, not consistent, not developed and not really part of young people’s lives”. Given that prevailing narrative, it would be valuable for the Government to evaluate the effectiveness of the current curriculum with a view to strengthening it so that it is delivered in a systematic manner.

43. Promising practices observed in other countries include a whole-school approach, in which gender equality is embedded into the main curriculum, throughout all subjects. Gender equality is prioritized as a core value of the educational institution, and guidance is provided to teachers on the mandatory teaching of gender equality issues. The objectives of the coursework are to present a realistic picture of the status of women and men in society, demonstrate that gender stereotypes are damaging to everyone, help children to critically analyse cultural gender constructs, foster positive norms of respectful and equal relationships and, importantly, raise awareness of and encourage action on promoting women’s rights. Gender equality education, as a part of human rights education, is indispensable for shifting problematic gender stereotypes, which hold back both women and men, and also for addressing the problem of gender-based violence, including harassment and sexual harassment.

## 2. Media

44. In 2016, the Ministry of Digital Policy, Telecommunications and Information concluded a memorandum of cooperation with the General Secretariat for Gender Equality to identify and eliminate gender stereotypes in the media. In a study consisting of the review of 1,500 print articles, some 31 per cent were identified to have reproduced gender stereotypes. In only 9.5 per cent of all articles considered were women presented as experts.<sup>33</sup> Recognizing that problem, the new law on substantive gender equality (Law No. 4604/2019) requires mass media (print, electronic and advertising media) to promote gender equality by not reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes. That requirement is implemented through the codes of conduct and self-regulation mechanisms for public communications entities, and data will be collected by the General Secretariat. The experts welcome that positive development, given the prevalence of gender stereotyping in the media and the influential role of the media. The National Council for Radio and Television plays an important role in issuing guidelines, including on eliminating gender stereotypes and monitoring compliance. To be truly effective, the Council should undertake proactive measures and be adequately resourced.

## V. Political and public life

### A. Underrepresentation of women in political and public life: political participation and representation in public institutions

45. The participation of women in political life in Greece lags behind at every level – local, regional, national and European. Although there has been gradual progress over the years, change has been too slow. At the national level, since the first women entered the Hellenic Parliament in 1952, when women in Greece obtained the right to vote and to stand for election, the representation of women has increased gradually over the past decades, but it remains low.

46. At the time of the visit, with 18.7 per cent women parliamentarians, Greece ranked 112 of 191 countries considered globally, and was ranked among the lowest of all European

<sup>33</sup> Information received from the Government.

Union countries.<sup>34</sup> The government Cabinet had 13 women (5 ministers, 1 deputy minister and 7 vice-ministers) of a total of 52 members, comprising 25 per cent of the Cabinet.<sup>35</sup> The number of women ministers was even lower, at 21 per cent (5 of 24 ministers). With the elections held in July 2019, the ratio of women parliamentarians increased, to 20.67 per cent<sup>36</sup> – a welcome development.

47. At the regional level, according to information received from the Government, comparing the results of the local (municipal) elections held in 2010 and 2014, women comprised 2.46 per cent of mayors in 2010 and 4.62 per cent in 2014, and they comprised 16 per cent of local councillors in 2010 and 18 per cent in 2014. At the regional level, in 2010, there were no women regional governors, and 16.13 per cent of regional councillors were women; in 2014, 15.38 per cent of regional governors and 19.50 per cent of regional councillors were women.<sup>37</sup>

48. There has been regression in the representation of Greek women in the European Parliament, from 32 per cent in 2009 to 28 per cent in 2014 and 23.8 per cent in 2019,<sup>38</sup> despite the introduction of the one-third quota system in 2019, whereby the country will require at least 33 per cent of each gender on the lists for the European Parliament, with the list considered invalid in case of non-compliance.

49. The experts of the Working Group were pleased to learn that, in the justice sector, women are generally well represented.

50. The Supreme Civil and Criminal Court of Greece is composed of a president, a public prosecutor, 10 vice-presidents, 65 judges and 22 vice-prosecutors, and the first woman president was appointed in 2011. A total of 48.7 per cent of its current substantive staff are women.<sup>39</sup> The Council of State, the supreme administrative court of Greece, which comprises a president, 10 vice-presidents, 52 councillors, 58 associate councillors and 58 assistant judges, is currently led by a woman, and 40 per cent of the vice-presidents and 56 per cent of the councillors are women.<sup>40</sup> The Public Prosecutor of Greece is currently a woman, and according to information received from the Government, among the 22 vice-prosecutors, only six (27.3 per cent) are women.<sup>41</sup>

51. There has been a consistent increase in women judges on the Supreme Court, from 2 per cent in 2004 to 31 per cent in 2014.

52. In public administration, women are generally well represented, including at senior levels. Some areas of public service remain male-dominated, however. The foreign service currently has 34.3 per cent women diplomats, with the number of women increasing over the past decade. At the level of head of mission and head of directorate in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the rates are lower, at 27.5 per cent and 30.6 per cent, respectively.

53. The status of the participation of women in the country's political and public life calls for further action, including a review of the effectiveness of the quota system in the context of the current electoral system, which is focused on candidate selection rather than on elected representatives. Recent changes to the electoral law introduced ahead of the 2019 elections include an increase in the gender quota for party lists, from 30 to 40 per cent.

<sup>34</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Parline, Greece – Hellenic Parliament, data retrieved in January 2019. Available at [https://data.ipu.org/content/greece?chamber\\_id=13403](https://data.ipu.org/content/greece?chamber_id=13403).

<sup>35</sup> Ministry of the Interior, General Secretariat for Gender Equality, “The gender aspect of the Government of Greece after the reshuffle of 28 August 2018”, EuroGender, 7 September 2018. Available at <https://eurogender.eige.europa.eu/posts/gender-aspect-greek-government-after-reshuffle-28-8-2018>.

<sup>36</sup> IPU Parline, Greece – Hellenic Parliament, Data on women, data retrieved in January 2019. Available at [https://data.ipu.org/node/67/data-on-women?chamber\\_id=13403](https://data.ipu.org/node/67/data-on-women?chamber_id=13403).

<sup>37</sup> Information received from the Government. See also [http://old.isotita.gr/var/uploads/ANNOUNCEMENTS/2016/Paratiritirio\\_Second%20report\\_eng.pdf](http://old.isotita.gr/var/uploads/ANNOUNCEMENTS/2016/Paratiritirio_Second%20report_eng.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> See [www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/161126/EPRS\\_ATA\(2019\)635530\\_EN-Women-in-parliaments-2p.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/161126/EPRS_ATA(2019)635530_EN-Women-in-parliaments-2p.pdf) and <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/national-results/greece/2019-2024/>.

<sup>39</sup> Information received from the Government.

<sup>40</sup> Information received from the Government in April 2019.

<sup>41</sup> Information received from the Government.

Additional measures should be adopted to encourage and support women to stand for election to public office and to support women candidates so that they have a better chance of success. In its concluding observations on the second periodic report of Greece, the Human Rights Committee noted that, despite the then one-third representative quota for women candidates, women in Greece remained underrepresented in decision-making positions in legislative and executive bodies.<sup>42</sup>

## **B. Non-governmental organizations and the women's movement**

54. The Working Group met with members of civil society who were actively engaged in working on issues relevant to women's rights. Many of them also work on the front lines assisting migrant and refugee women. Those individuals and organizations have played an important role in the country's response to the inflow of migrants and refugees. Most are project-based and face sustainability challenges. They have developed valuable experience and expertise and should continue to play a role in the current efforts aimed at the integration of refugees into Greek society, including through the implementation of the recently developed national integration strategy.

55. Non-governmental organizations working on a broad range of issues relating to women's rights and gender equality rely on committed volunteers; they require support and sustainable funding to play a transformative role in society for the empowerment of women and gender equality. They should be able to benefit from public funding aimed at strengthening civil society, through a transparent and efficient process. Strategic collaboration and solidarity among women's organizations will be essential in energizing the women's movement for equality.

## **VI. Domestic violence**

### **A. Responding to gender-based violence against women**

56. The experts of the Working Group commend Greece for complying with the Istanbul Convention by including the prevention, prosecution and elimination of gender-based violence in Law No. 4604/2019 and for amending Law No 3500/2006 on domestic violence to expand the scope of its application to cover members of the extended family, such as life partners and their children, and allowing injunctive orders to be issued against perpetrators.

57. During the visit, the experts had expressed their concern about proposed amendments to provisions in the Criminal Code relating to rape. Those amendments appeared to be inconsistent with the international legal obligations of Greece under the Istanbul Convention, because they failed to introduce a consent-based definition and restricted further the circumstances in which the crime of rape could be established. In their end of mission statement, the experts urged the Government to ensure that the amended Criminal Code incorporated a consent-based definition of rape, and they were encouraged by reassurances from government interlocutors that the Government would abide by its obligations under international law. The experts of the Working Group were of the view that the proposed reform of the Criminal Code provided an opportunity to have a wider social conversation on the stigma and stereotypes that surround sexual violence in general and rape in particular. The experts were pleased to learn that, in June 2019, the Government of Greece had amended the Criminal Code to recognize in law that sex without consent is rape, which was hailed by civil society nationally and internationally as a victory for women.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> See CCPR/C/GRC/CO/2.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Amnesty International, "Greece: Newly amended rape law is a historic victory for women", press release, 6 June 2019. Available at [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/06/greece-newly-amended-rape-law-is-a-historic-victory-for-women/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/06/greece-newly-amended-rape-law-is-a-historic-victory-for-women/).

58. A number of concerns remain, however. The National Commission for Human Rights has deplored the fact that, although there was a significant number of cases of domestic violence reported, very few perpetrators were prosecuted and punished. Raising awareness about domestic violence is still essential, given that patriarchal attitudes and deeply rooted stereotypes regarding the role and responsibilities of women and men, as well as discriminatory practices, persist. In 2014, 3,914 victims of domestic violence were identified; 1,197 prosecutions were initiated, and 307 convictions handed down. In 502 cases, the victims opted for a mediation procedure, which is provided in the context of restorative justice as an alternative in order to avoid protracted and arduous court proceedings.<sup>44</sup>

59. According to the National Commission for Human Rights, statistical data on domestic violence are collected by the national police and are made publicly available. The data are disaggregated by gender and age of the victims only. Although the gender of the perpetrators is also provided, in a separate dataset, it is not linked to the data on the victim's gender. The number of female victims of male perpetrators can therefore not be assessed.<sup>45</sup> Domestic violence has been exacerbated by the economic crisis. There has been a backlash against gender equality, manifesting itself in disproportionate job losses among women in the public sector and cuts to services that women are more likely to require. The loss of socioeconomic autonomy leaves women in a more vulnerable situation, often leaving them with no option but to return to abusive partners.

60. The experts were informed by government interlocutors that, although mediation may not be mandatory under Greek law, it is routinely suggested to women who are victims of domestic and family violence. That is contrary to the Istanbul Convention, which explicitly states that mandatory mediation should be prohibited. The prevailing social norms in Greece related to the importance of the family unit and the preservation of family unity can present a significant barrier for women who wish to leave abusive relationships.

61. The Working Group is also concerned about the lack of data, disaggregated by sex, in relation to crimes, which would enable the tracking of femicide and domestic violence perpetrated against women, as mandated by the Istanbul Convention and general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Sex-disaggregated data on all forms of gender-based violence against women is essential to understanding its prevalence and tailoring response and prevention efforts.

62. Although the Working Group acknowledges that the constrained financial situation in Greece makes it more difficult to ensure a high level of services for victims of violence against women, the experts are concerned that there is uneven coordination of support services for victims of the various forms of gender-based violence, as well as programmes for perpetrators. There are currently 21 shelters for victims of gender-based violence across the country.<sup>46</sup> Demand for shelters has increased dramatically with the inflow of migrant and refugee women. There are insufficient shelters and emergency accommodations and inconsistent coordination of services.

63. The Working Group welcomes the specific training provided for judges, prosecutors, police officers, health-service providers, journalists and teaching staff to increase the awareness of all forms of violence against women and girls and to ensure that those actors are able to provide adequate gender-sensitive support to victims. The Working Group also welcomes the recent decision by the national police to establish dedicated domestic

<sup>44</sup> See European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, "Note on the policy on gender equality in Greece".

<sup>45</sup> Information submitted in July 2016 by the National Commission for Human Rights in relation to the implementation of the International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in Greece. Available at [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/GRC/INT\\_CERD\\_IFN\\_GRC\\_24494\\_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/GRC/INT_CERD_IFN_GRC_24494_E.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> The Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, Treaty Series No. 210) contains recommendations that States should provide a minimum of one woman's shelter space per every 10,000 inhabitants. Available at <https://rm.coe.int/16800d383a>.

violence units, with a view to enhancing its capacity to address gender-based violence sensitively and effectively.

## **B. Preventing gender-based violence against women**

64. The experts welcome the efforts by the Office of the Public Prosecutor of the Supreme Court, the General Secretariat for Gender Equality and other State entities to raise public awareness through the media and educational programmes, as part of the efforts of Greece aimed at preventing gender-based violence against women. However, a more strategic approach to prevention is needed, in particular in rural areas, including targeted and long-term education and awareness-raising on the causes and consequences of gender-based violence.

## **VII. Greater vulnerability and exclusion experienced by marginalized groups of women**

### **A. Migrant and refugee women**

65. Given that Greece is a first-line reception country, the Government, local authorities and people in Greece have faced the challenge of receiving unprecedented numbers of migrants and refugees since 2015. New arrivals were occurring daily at the time of the visit. That has placed additional pressures on government resources, services and infrastructure. In close coordination with UNHCR and other international organizations, and with support from civil society institutions, the Government has committed to upholding the principle of universal human rights, such as access to education for all children and universal medical care for all, including undocumented migrants and asylum seekers, and providing protection against gender-based violence against women. In practice, however, serious challenges and gaps remain.

66. The experts of the Working Group spoke with women migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in Athens, Thessaloniki and Lesbos and visited women's centres run by non-governmental organizations inside and outside Moria refugee camp in Lesbos; they were struck by the stories of resilience and strength and the expressions of hope for a better future. The experts were impressed with the work of civil society organizations, including those which provide safe spaces and support for women and their children. Those organizations enable women to build confidence, empowerment and agency. The experts were fortunate to see that first hand at the centre of the Melissa Network in Athens and the Bashira Centre in Lesbos.

67. There are a number of positive developments in support of refugee women, including Law No. 45/31 of 2018 giving undocumented persons the right to report gender-based violence without fear of deportation. Despite that law, survivors of gender-based violence still lack access to support and safety. In some cases, women are unable to report cases of such violence, because of the lack of trained staff at police stations or the unwillingness of the police to take the case, because it is considered a "family matter". The lack of interpretation services at hospitals was systematically reported to the experts as a key concern directly affecting the ability of women to receive the medical care that they needed.

68. The experts learned that the overwhelming majority of the women in Moria refugee camp were considered vulnerable, from multiple points of view. Many have been victims of human rights violations in their countries of origin and endured further suffering on their journeys, including at the hands of human traffickers and smugglers. Many stakeholders pointed out that the current migration policy of the containment of asylum seekers in camps exacerbates the vulnerability of women, given that they have no options other than to live in the difficult conditions in the camps while awaiting the processing of their asylum applications. The experts are pleased to learn that the authorities have revised the protocol and guidelines for the transfer of vulnerable women to the mainland.

69. In Moria refugee camp, the experts witnessed the vulnerable situation of women, despite the efforts employed by the authorities to provide separate spaces for single women

with and without children. Women in the camp told the experts that they did not feel safe and experienced harassment, especially at night and when seeking access to toilets in common spaces.

70. The experts learned of the concerns about the poor health condition of some women in the camp and the difficulty in acquiring access to medical care. With regard to gender-based violence, including domestic violence, within the confines of the camp, the available solutions are not working in practice, with the requirement of confidentiality often being breached, making the victim an easily identifiable target to all, including the perpetrator. There is limited availability of shelter, a lack of awareness by police officers of the need for a gender-sensitive response and a need for more women police officers. Interpretation capacity at police stations must also be increased.

71. The migrant and refugee women with whom the experts spoke expressed a strong desire for educational opportunities for themselves and their children. They want to become a positive asset and to enrich and contribute to the economy and cultural development of the country. Satisfactory system-wide solutions for women refugees can only be found with the improvement of the overall institutional procedures, processes and culture. The reliance on the goodwill of individuals is insufficient. A systemic response that holds institutions accountable is required.

72. The situation has deteriorated since the experts' visit in April 2019. Following his visit to Greece in November 2019, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees spoke of "extremely disturbing" conditions in Moria refugee camp, called for the urgent improvement of living conditions on the islands and welcomed the Government's intended measures to alleviate the situation.

## **B. Roma women**

73. Roma people in Greece continue to suffer deep-rooted prejudice. Social exclusion, the risk of poverty, high school dropout rates and inadequate housing conditions are among the main problems faced by the Roma population. Despite efforts by the Government to improve outcomes for Roma women and girls, including through the national strategy for the social inclusion of Roma people, 2012–2020, and initiatives such as the appointment of special prosecutors to investigate crimes motivated by racism and the creation of special police units to assist victims of violence and other crimes motivated by racism and xenophobia, high levels of discrimination, exclusion and stereotypes persist.<sup>47</sup>

74. In 2016, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination noted that austerity measures taken to address the economic crisis in Greece had had a disproportionate impact on minority groups, such as Roma, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The Committee also expressed its concerns regarding the decrease in budgetary allocations to public institutions that worked on combating racial discrimination, such as the National Commission for Human Rights, the Ombudsman and the labour inspectorate.<sup>48</sup>

75. Roma women encounter serious obstacles in gaining access to basic social services, such as housing, employment, education and health care, including the persistence of educational barriers and poor living conditions. They reportedly continue to be disproportionately subjected to arbitrary arrest by the police and other law enforcement officials. Roma women comprise one third of the population of women in detention in Greece, despite being a very small percentage of the overall Greek population.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> In its concluding observations on the combined twentieth through twenty-second periodic reports of Greece, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concern about the fact that Roma people, especially those living in informal settlements, still encountered serious obstacles in gaining access to basic social services, such as housing, employment, education and health care (CERD/C/GRC/CO/20-22, para. 20 (a)).

<sup>48</sup> See also A/HRC/32/50/Add.1.

<sup>49</sup> According to the former Prime Minister of Greece, Alexis Tsipras, there are 110,000 Greek Roma. See <https://greece.greekreporter.com/2019/04/09/premier-tsipras-hosts-roma-delegation-for-international-romani-day/>. Others, including Minority Rights Group Greece, put the figure at 265,000. See <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-7/>.



76. According to data from a European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights survey conducted in 2011, about 20 per cent of Roma respondents 16 years of age and older said that they could not read or write, compared with less than 1 per cent of the non-Roma respondents living close by. Indeed, 43 per cent of school-age Roma children surveyed did not attend school.<sup>50</sup>

77. The experts were informed by the Ministry of Education of a project on the integration and education of Roma children, which is part of the operational programme on human resources development, education and lifelong learning, funded jointly with the European Social Fund of the European Commission. It is being implemented by three universities, namely, the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, which is the main beneficiary and has the overall responsibility for the project's implementation, the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the University of Thessaly. The project runs from 2016 to 2020 and is aimed at enhancing access for Roma children to, and attendance at, nursery and primary school, and supporting Roma young people and Roma adults who have dropped out of school in completing primary education. The programme also includes the implementation of school psychology programmes aimed at preventing school dropout at the primary and secondary levels.<sup>51</sup>

78. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women expressed its concern about the very low level of school attendance and the high dropout rates among Roma and migrant girls and those belonging to the Muslim minority group in Thrace and about the lack of data, disaggregated by sex, region and minority, on enrolment at the preschool, primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The Committee was also concerned about the prevalence of studies oriented towards traditional career paths among girls and about the low level of their participation in technical-vocational areas.<sup>52</sup>

79. Roma women have very limited access to employment and economic opportunities, due to high rates of early marriage and school drop-out among Roma girls. During the visit, the experts of the Working Group were inspired by individual school principals who were working with families to support Roma girls to stay in school.

80. The experts met with Roma women who shared their stories and concerns. A Roma woman told the experts: "We have a lot of problems, but there are no ears that can listen to us [or that] can hear us. We have been trying for years to live better lives."

81. The lack of statistical data on the enjoyment of human rights by Roma people, in particular Roma women, is of concern. In 2016, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination recommended that Greece diversify its data collection activities, on the basis of anonymity and self-identification of persons and groups, to provide an adequate empirical basis for policies to enhance the equal enjoyment by all of the rights enshrined in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The Committee noted that reliable, detailed socioeconomic information was necessary for the monitoring and evaluation of policies in favour of minority groups and for assessing the level of implementation of the Convention. The Working Group reiterates that recommendation.

82. The experts welcome the positive steps taken by the Greek authorities in recent years to improve the situation of Roma women, including the creation of the Special Secretariat for Roma Social Inclusion. A focus on implementation and monitoring will be essential to ensuring that it delivers on its objectives.

### C. Women in prison

83. The experts of the Working Group visited the largest women's prison in Greece and were pleased by efforts to uphold women's human rights in detention, including through

<sup>50</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Roma survey – Data in focus – Education: the situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States* (Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2014). Available at [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014\\_roma-survey\\_education\\_tk0113748enc.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014_roma-survey_education_tk0113748enc.pdf), p. 11.

<sup>51</sup> Information provided by the Ministry of Education.

<sup>52</sup> CEDAW/C/GRC/CO/7, para. 26.

the provision of primary, secondary and higher education and rehabilitation programmes. Childcare is available at the prison, and children can stay with their mothers until they are 3 years of age. In certain circumstances, women with children under 8 years of age are entitled to alternative forms of detention. However, some inmates shared their concerns with the experts regarding the judicial system and barriers to access to justice.

## VIII. Health

### **Voluntary termination of pregnancy and caesarean sections without medical necessity**

84. The number of abortions has increased by 100,000 yearly over the past 10 years, which places Greece first among States members of the European Union in the number of abortions performed. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women expressed its concern about the very high rate of abortions and the very low use of high-quality, effective methods of contraception in Greece, given that such rates indicate that women resort to abortions as a method of family planning. In 2013, the Committee urged Greece to subsidise contraception, reduce the practice of abortion as a method of family planning, reduce the rate of caesarean sections performed without medical necessity and guarantee access to sexual and reproductive health services for women belonging to disadvantaged groups.<sup>53</sup>

85. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women also expressed its concern about the extremely high rate of caesarean sections performed in public hospitals (40 per cent) and private hospitals (up to 65 per cent) without medical justification, noting that the rates in Greece are the highest in the world, significantly above the 15 per cent rate considered by the World Health Organization (WHO) as covering medical needs. It urged Greece to reduce the rate of caesarean sections performed without medical necessity by training or retraining medical personnel on natural birth and to introduce the strict control of medical indications for caesarean sections in order to reach the WHO-recognized rates. The Working Group echoes those concerns and supports the Committee's recommendations.

## IX. Conclusions and recommendations

### A. Conclusions

86. **The Working Group's visit to Greece has revealed a number of key challenges, but also immense opportunities, as the State transitions out of a period of financial crisis and austerity measures. There is a comprehensive legal and policy framework in place, but it requires much stronger implementation. Given the persistence of discriminatory norms and stereotypes and the lingering impact of the crisis and austerity measures, the realization of women's rights in Greece is lagging behind compared with other European Union countries. The situation for marginalized groups of women, such as migrant and Roma women, is even worse.**

87. **Greece now has a significant opportunity to ensure that women's right to equality in all spheres of life is central to the country's economic and social renewal. To harness that opportunity, the General Secretariat for Gender Equality must play a pivotal and transformative role under the new Law No. 4604/2019 on substantive gender equality, ensuring its position as a significantly strengthened, centrally placed governmental body for gender equality.**

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., para. 31.

## **B. Recommendations**

88. In the spirit of cooperation, the Working Group has formulated the following recommendations for Greece, with a view to strengthening measures designed to guarantee gender equality, the empowerment of women and the promotion and protection of women's human rights.

89. In the area of institutional frameworks, the Working Group recommends that the Government:

(a) Increase investment in existing institutions, including the General Secretariat for Gender Equality, to ensure that they have adequate and sustainable human, financial and technical resources in order to be able to effectively fulfil their mandates and outreach activities;

(b) Establish institutional frameworks, or mandates for existing ones, with a special focus on the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of laws and programmes on women's equality and freedom from gender-based violence, and ensure that such data feed into a decision-making process to improve laws and programmes.

90. With regard to the participation of women in economic and social life, the Working Group recommends that the Government:

(a) Remove barriers to the full and equal participation of women in the labour force by adopting specific policy measures to address discrimination in the workplace and the fact that the responsibility for unpaid care work disproportionately falls on women;

(b) Implement measures to close the gender pay gap, including through research on the most significant factors contributing to the gender pay gap;

(c) Increase the participation of women in entrepreneurship and economic decision-making by establishing quotas for boards of directors in large companies and regularly report and monitor progress in that regard;

(d) Require the regular collection and reporting of sex-disaggregated data and statistics on all aspects of employment, in the public and private sectors, including recruitment, promotion, training and ancillary benefits, such as bonuses, travel expenses and pensions;

(e) Administer a national survey to measure the prevalence of sexual harassment and discrimination related to pregnancy and return to work from parental leave;

(f) Establish a mechanism for capturing robust data on the prevalence of sexual harassment and sex-based discrimination in the workplace, to inform prevention and response efforts;

(g) Adopt specific measures to encourage more fathers to make use of parental leave entitlements;

(h) Conduct research into the nature and dynamics of the deep-rooted negative gender stereotypes having an impact on girls' education, empower girls and young women to engage in a broad range of fields of study and facilitate that engagement;

(i) Collect data, disaggregated by sex, geographical location and minority group status, on the situation of women and men in the area of employment in order to monitor and improve working conditions among women;

(j) Ensure that the education system plays its essential role in combating the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the role and responsibilities of women and men in the family and society and in eliminating gender-based violence, including domestic violence;

(k) Review and reform school textbooks and curricula in all schools, public and private, to eliminate gender stereotypes and ensure that non-discrimination and gender equality are an integral part of the values underpinning the core curriculum;

(l) Provide comprehensive, age-appropriate, scientifically based sexuality education, based on the principles of gender equality and human rights, and remove any stereotypical teaching material and content from the school curriculum;

(m) Design, in cooperation with Roma communities, improved integration policies for girls' education, avoiding ghettoization, and bridge the gap for Roma girls in secondary and higher education by means of targeted results-based programmes;

(n) Take steps to implement measures to ensure equal access for girls and women to all levels of education in all regions, in particular for girls belonging to all minority groups, including through temporary special measures in accordance with article 4 (1) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and general recommendation No. 25 (2004) on temporary special measures of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women;

91. With regard to the participation of women in political and public life, the Working Group recommends that the Government apply temporary special measures to bring a gender balance to public administration, including at the highest levels, at the national, regional and municipal levels.

92. With regard to combating violence against women, the Working Group recommends that the Government:

(a) Increase prevention efforts that also consider the diversity of women in Greece and their specific needs, especially the needs of those who are facing intersecting forms of discrimination or those who are in vulnerable situations, such as minority, migrant and refugee women, women with disabilities, older women, lesbian and transgender women and intersex persons;

(b) Ensure universal access to high-quality services for victims/survivors of gender-based violence and access to justice for them, in particular women in vulnerable situations, such as women belonging to minority groups, including access to adequate shelters and long-term support;

(c) Deploy the dedicated domestic violence units recently established by the national police throughout the country as quickly as possible.

93. With regard to marginalized groups of women experiencing greater vulnerability and exclusion, the Working Group recommends that:

(a) External donors, including the European Union, ensure that their support addresses the needs of women migrants and refugees;

(b) Greece ensure the meaningful participation of refugee and asylum-seeking women in decision-making on matters affecting their lives in the camps, or in any closed or open facility in which they are held or housed, ensuring that they are treated with dignity and respect;

(c) Greece regularly monitor and review the health, safety and living conditions of refugee and asylum-seeking women and ensure access to appropriate and high-quality services for them.

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