



**Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women
Fifty-fourth session**

Summary record of the 1112th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 19 February 2013, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Ameline

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The meeting was called at order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention *(continued)*

Seventh periodic report of Greece (continued) (CEDAW/C/GRC/7; CEDAW/C/GRC/Q/7 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Greece took places at the Committee table.*
2. **Mr. Karatsolis** (Greece) said that while it was true that in the past women did not enter the diplomatic service, there were currently many women in various ambassadorial positions throughout the world. The selection of women to those posts was based on merit and on professional qualifications.

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3. **Ms. Acar** asked why the academic success of girls and young women in upper secondary and tertiary education did not translate into pay equality and higher levels of employment. She requested data disaggregated by gender and minority status on fields of study and occupations not traditionally taken up by women.
4. **Mr. Bruun** (Country Rapporteur) said that there were few gender-specific statistics on occupational segregation and the widening pay gap in Greece. In view of the concerns of the International Labour Organization about the limited competence of labour inspectors to deal with the numerous complaints regarding equal pay, did the Government envisage extending the scope of the labour inspectorate? Unfair dismissals of women owing to pregnancy and maternity leave, temporary and part-time work and unreported sexual harassment in the light of the current crisis were also matters of concern. He asked whether the Government had assessed the impact of the deterioration of collective bargaining and the dismantling of the Workers' Social Fund and the Workers' Housing Organization, including the disruption caused to childcare services. Further information would be appreciated on the trade union reports that the present crisis had led to an overrepresentation of women in sectors associated with precarious work, such as domestic services and agriculture.
5. **Ms. Pimentel** regretted the widespread use of abortion as a method of birth control and the lack of official data on that matter. What measures was the Government currently taking to address the problem? She welcomed the decrease in alcohol consumption and would appreciate any available gender-disaggregated data on the subject. She would also welcome details of relevant awareness-raising efforts in schools and teacher training programmes, strategies and long-term plans to address alcohol abuse and the results of television and radio spots to highlight the problem. What measures were taken to combat smoking, particularly given that girls started smoking at an earlier age than boys?
6. **Ms. Schulz** noted with concern that Greece had the highest number of abortions in the European Union and the highest number of caesarean births in the world, a high rate of teenage pregnancy and low prevalence of modern contraceptive use; it had also experienced an increase in HIV/AIDS-related deaths between 2007 and 2009. Would the Government consider reimbursing the costs of modern contraceptive methods with a view to reducing abortions? Were there plans to enhance sex education in schools? Were cuts to the health system envisaged and, if so, would they affect reproductive health?
7. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, asked whether the Government had a clear restructuring plan to cope with the impact of the current crisis on the health sector without jeopardizing women's health care.

8. **Ms. Makri** (Greece) said that several ministries had already undergone restructuring and cutbacks, but that there was no fixed restructuring plan to date.
9. **Ms. Katsaridou** (Greece) said that the fact that there were more boys than girls at the primary and lower secondary school level could be explained by the higher rate of male births. There were more women in higher education than men and slightly more men than women at doctoral level. However, there were far fewer women than men who chose to study such subjects as engineering, mathematics and science, although that situation was steadily improving. Furthermore, with subsidies from the Ministry of Education and the European Union, universities had developed projects to encourage girls to study those subjects, resulting in a sharp rise in the number of women opting for them.
10. The proportions of female and male Muslim students were similar to those of the majority population. Action plans had been drawn up to encourage Roma parents to send their children to school, and educational support was provided to them once they enrolled; Roma enrolment rates were thus increasing. There were various centres throughout the country that focused on supporting minority women, particularly in the area of education, employment, health care and housing. Teacher trainers for adult education were specially equipped to address the needs of vulnerable groups.
11. Despite the health care budget cuts, women's health projects were under way, including training for staff in certain health clinics to deal with women victims of violence, and a hotline had been set up for young people to discuss issues such as HIV/AIDS and family planning. Advice on HIV/AIDS was widely available, including in schools, and public health sector mobile units carried out medical visits to persons with HIV/AIDS throughout the country. Campaigns to raise awareness about cancer and smoking had also been launched and information was disseminated through various media. Early intervention programmes had been developed in schools to address the increase in the number of girls taking up smoking. Lastly, a programme was in place that enabled all school-age girls to be vaccinated against cervical cancer free of charge.
12. Reliable statistics on abortion were unavailable owing to the fact that abortion could be performed legally only on valid medical grounds. Doctors associations and public hospitals cooperated to monitor caesarean sections, which were performed on the basis of an obstetrical or medical indication and duly recorded. Caesarean sections had increased in Greece in recent years as more women gave birth at a later age than before, which carried higher medical risks.
13. **Ms. Makri** (Greece) said that there had indeed been a reduction in the health budget. However, with the assistance of a group of experts from partner countries in the European Union, the Government was restructuring existing services in that important sector in order to ensure the best use of its available resources.
14. **Ms. Megalou** (Greece) said that the dire economic straits in which Greece currently found itself, which had led to rampant unemployment and the closing down of many businesses, meant that the political decisions taken by the Government were, for the most part, simply unavoidable. The Workers' Housing Organization had not closed down, but had been merged with another organization, which had recently completed a new affordable housing project for workers.
15. A pregnant woman could be dismissed only in specific circumstances, such as the closure of the company where she worked. In cases brought before the courts in which a pregnant woman had been unfairly dismissed, the employer was ordered to reinstate the woman in her job. The law stipulated clearly that flexible forms of employment such as part-time or shift work could not be imposed on an employee. Accordingly, in cases in which part-time or shift work had been imposed on a woman following her return from maternity leave, the courts ordered the company to remedy the situation. No data were

available concerning sexual harassment. The General Secretariat for Gender Equality encouraged women who believed that they had been subjected to that form of abuse to report it to the police, the courts or the Labour Inspectorate in order to obtain redress.

16. As a result of the adoption of austerity measures, it had been necessary to enact legislation to lower the minimum wage that had been negotiated by the social partners in the National General Collective Labour Agreement. Some women took up occupations that had traditionally been considered the exclusive domain of men, but men in those occupations continued to have greater prospects for advancement than women. Given the current high unemployment rate in Greece, anyone who had a job at all was grateful for it. The Labour Inspectorate dealt with matters pertaining to the pay gap. The pay gap in Greece had narrowed somewhat, primarily because men had had to take a cut in pay, not because women were receiving higher wages.

17. **Ms. Al-Jehani** asked whether the economic crisis had had an adverse impact on the mental health of the population and whether the Government was taking measures to strengthen the provision of psychiatric services as a result. She would appreciate any comparative data on the number of cases of suicide among women and children over the past few years.

18. **Ms. Schulz** said that she failed to understand how the claim could be made that abortion was illegal when it was permitted on grounds such as economic or social reasons and when abortion was a frequently practised method of contraception in the country. The high abortion rate was a cause for concern and should be addressed urgently. She would be interested to know whether modern contraceptives and abortion were reimbursed by health insurance.

19. She reiterated her previous question concerning caesarean deliveries, the prevalence of which seemed to be inordinately high in Greece, as it considerably surpassed the recommended threshold of 15 per cent established by the World Health Organization. She would appreciate clarification of the reasons for such a high prevalence. With regard to the provision of the cervical cancer vaccine to adolescent girls, she asked whether the Government considered the health benefits to outweigh any long-term undesirable side effects.

20. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, asked what type of safety net had been set up to cover the medical needs of persons who could not afford health insurance.

21. **Ms. Pimentel** said that she was concerned at the high number of abortions in Greece and the related problem of access to contraceptives. She would like to know how the Government assessed the problem and what measures it envisaged taking to remedy it.

22. **Ms. Katsaridou** (Greece) said that, in the case of an emergency, uninsured persons were admitted to hospitals and treated free of charge. Abortion was illegal unless there were medical reasons to justify it. Contraceptives were affordable and were reimbursed by insurance plans if they were prescribed by a medical doctor. Women could receive free cervical cancer vaccines at hospitals on request. The suicide rate had remained generally the same for the past several years.

23. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** asked whether the Government had established a special mechanism to assess the disparate impact that the economic crisis had on women as compared with men, particularly women heads of household, who seemed to bear the brunt of the economic crisis. In that connection, she wished to know whether the Government had taken measures to counteract the hardship implied by the substantial reductions in pensions payable to women and whether it provided small loans to women with insufficient means, especially women heads of household, in order to help them meet basic needs.

24. **Ms. Pomeranzi** said it was necessary to take stock of the gender equality policies of the past 10 years in Greece, and in the European Mediterranean region as a whole, in order to understand why the current crisis was having such a severe impact on women. As part of the constructive dialogue in that regard, more thought should be given to building capacity in the region in order to tap its still unrealized human potential. More specifically, she wondered whether the Government would consider taking temporary special measures to empower rural women through capacity-building strategies, for example in managing agritourism, while at the same time regarding such strategies as part of an economic stimulus plan and a way out of the crisis. She asked whether any cooperatives or credit schemes had been set up for women entrepreneurs in rural areas.

25. **Ms. Katsaridou** (Greece) said that tourism was a major income-generating activity in Greece, and greater efforts were needed to develop it further. The role of the gender equality offices that had been set up throughout Greece played an important role not only in promoting equality but also in establishing regional tourism networks and cooperative, or collectively owned, enterprises. Greece had a strong cooperative movement, which had been active since the 1980s and which empowered women in rural areas to develop and market their products nationwide and elsewhere in Europe by means of cooperative networks. The Government further supported rural women through programmes offering vocational training and assistance in creating a cooperative. There were some 146 artisan and agritourism cooperatives throughout the country, and many projects had sprung up around the movement, including in the areas of alternative tourism, assistance in setting up business information technology systems and support for the production of rural foodstuffs. Some 450 women living in rural areas participated in such projects.

26. The Ministry of Rural Development and Food offered several projects that were designed to promote environmental protection, sustainable development and a spirit of enterprise among farmers. Some of the projects specifically targeted female farmers, including those belonging to socially vulnerable groups and women with disabilities. Training was also provided to farmers living in inaccessible areas through distance learning programmes.

27. The Government was doing its utmost to prevent illegal abortions through the organization of awareness-raising campaigns and the implementation of programmes of sexual and reproductive health education in secondary schools. In addition, women could obtain information and advice from counselling centres run by the General Secretariat for Gender Equality.

28. **Ms. Megalou** (Greece) said that social insurance funds has suffered disastrous losses as a result of the economic collapse, which meant that pensions had been slashed severely for men and women alike. Current old-age or retirement pensioners tended to belong to a more traditional generation in which husbands had been breadwinners and wives had worked as homemakers. When women outlived their husbands, they received survivors' pensions amounting to only a percentage of their husband's entitlement. Therefore, when survivors' pensions, like those of everyone else, had been reduced during the crisis, some women's pensions were very small indeed. The General Secretariat for Gender Equality was exploring ways to help women heads of household to deal with the economic hardships they faced.

29. **Ms. Katsaridou** (Greece) said that 48 mental health day centres had been set up throughout the country to provide support and assistance to persons requiring psychiatric care. The centres provided indirect assistance to women who cared for mentally disabled members of their family, as they allowed such women time to pursue training or a career. Similar support was provided to women caring for physically disabled members of their family.

30. **Mr. Bruun** requested additional information concerning minority groups, particularly Muslim and Roma women. What were the most important measures taken to address their situation and what were the most serious problems that required the Government's attention?

31. **Ms. Pomeranzi** specified that, in her previous question regarding rural women, she had meant to suggest that the General Secretariat for Gender Equality should advocate the introduction of temporary special measures for women living in rural areas that could be regarded as building a greener economy. Did the Secretariat consider it possible to negotiate such measures with the Government during the current crisis?

32. **Mr. Kastanas** (Greece), referring to the Muslim minority in Greece, said that the Government's main achievement over the past few years had been the elimination of obstacles to school attendance by Muslim girls and an increase in number of female Muslim graduates of secondary schools. Although there was no question that education was essential for economic development, it should be noted that the Muslim minority lived in a region that was not among the most prosperous in the country. Thus, greater efforts were needed to assist not only the Muslim minority but also the Christian population living in that region.

33. Technically, the Roma were considered to be a vulnerable social group, not a minority. Special policies had been formulated for the Roma, and much progress had been made in providing them with improved education, housing and health services. Nevertheless, further progress was needed.

34. **Mr. Moscov** (Greece) said that Roma women and children were at significant risk of trafficking and exploitation, including being forced into begging. Greece had therefore been working with Albania at the bilateral level under the Transnational Action against Child Trafficking project, in coordination with NGOs, to protect child victims of trafficking and was currently taking similar steps with Bulgaria and Romania.

35. **Ms. Katsaridou** (Greece) said that her Government had given priority to supporting and building the capacities of women living in rural areas. To date, approximately €30,000 of microcredit had been extended to women belonging to minority and vulnerable groups in rural parts of Thrace to enable them to start up small businesses. Efforts were also under way in the region to raise women's awareness about career opportunities and their rights, to build their capacity and to help them to establish networks.

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36. **Ms. Al-Jehani** expressed concern at the increasing number of early marriages in Greece, citing the case of a girl married off at age 11. Could the delegation provide statistics on early marriages? What access did Muslim women who married under sharia law have to civil courts in the event of divorce?

37. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari**, noting with regret that there had not been more coverage of sharia law and its connection with Greek family law in the State party's periodic report, would like to know the status of current draft legislation to abolish sharia law. What was the Government doing to raise awareness about the option of marrying under either civil or sharia law among Muslim women in particular? Did Muslims have the option of settling inheritance matters in civil courts? She asked for examples of how courts were exercising their power of judicial review over the decisions made by muftis, or the religious leaders of Greek Muslims, that ran contrary to the Greek Constitution. Under Greek family law, how was property divided following a divorce and how did divorce affect spousal pension rights? Did unmarried couples living in de facto unions have any legal protection?

38. **Mr. Kastanas** (Greece) said that under domestic law, Muslims were free to choose between Islamic and civil court jurisdiction in family and inheritance matters. However, Islamic law applied only to Greek citizens of Muslim faith residing in Thrace. In recent times, Muslim couples had tended to opt for civil weddings rather than traditional, religious ceremonies. Sharia law was implemented only to the extent that it did not conflict with the fundamental values, legal order and Constitution of Greece, or the international treaties that it had signed. Practices such as polygamy and proxy marriages, for example, were prohibited and, as such, could be challenged before the courts. The judicial competence of muftis was limited in scope and did not extend, for example, to the custody and guardianship of children, which were handled by the civil court. There was, nevertheless, a need to strengthen judicial review of mufti decisions to ensure that they were in keeping with the Constitution and international law.

39. The Government was still considering the draft legislation to abolish sharia law. For that purpose, it must enter into discussions with the local Muslim community and canvass members for their views. No demands to abolish sharia law had been made by members of the community itself, including women.

40. There was no empirical or statistical evidence to suggest that early marriage was widespread in Greece. Underage marriage was only permitted in exceptional circumstances, for example if the girl was pregnant, and only with parental consent and court approval. The case of the 11-year-old bride had prompted an outcry when it had come to light a decade ago, but it did not reflect a broader trend. On the contrary, marriage law had been enforced more effectively since 2005, and the requirements for civil court approval of early marriages had become stricter.

41. **Ms. Megalou** (Greece) said that, in divorce cases, if the property of one spouse had increased in the course of the marriage, the other spouse was legally entitled to a third of the property, provided that he or she could prove that they had contributed to the increase. Either spouse could appeal to the courts if a greater or lesser contribution, or no contribution at all, could be proved. Unmarried couples living in de facto unions could draw up partnership agreements stipulating the same division of property in the event of separation.

42. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** asked what became of de facto couples who had not drawn up partnership agreements. What was deemed to be divisible property in cases of divorce? For example, was a third of one spouse's savings, business assets and potential earnings also accorded to the other spouse?

43. **Ms. Haidar** asked whether there were any regulations in place to govern interfaith marriages, between Muslims and Christians in particular, and whether such marriages were discouraged. Were interfaith couples who had entered into civil marriage contracts covered only by civil law?

44. **Ms. Gabr** advised the State party to follow the example of certain States members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation with regard to sharia law, as those States were also parties to the Convention and Convention on the Rights of the Child. It would be difficult politically for most Governments with Muslim majorities to abolish sharia law, but building on the experience of those States could lead to positive solutions.

45. **Ms. Acar** requested clarification on whether decisions made by the muftis that were not in conformity with national law were automatically brought to the attention of the courts and, if not, how they could be challenged. Had any training been given to judges to help them to handle decisions made under sharia law?

46. **Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani** said that her country had managed to strike a balance between applying a non-religious Family Code and sharia law, without violating either

body of law. All marriages had to be recorded in a registry, but couples could choose how to formalize their union and how to proceed in the event of divorce.

47. **Ms. Pomeranzi** asked whether there was any training for muftis on women's rights, including matters relating to marriage.

48. **Mr. Kastanas** (Greece) said that while marriages between Muslims and Christians were not common in Greece, such marriages were in no way discouraged. There was a tendency for interfaith couples to marry under civil law. Appeals against decisions made by muftis were referred to the local courts. Appropriate legislation to monitor the application of sharia law was in place. Judges, however, were in need of further training in the handling of such cases.

49. **Ms. Megalou** (Greece) said that, in the absence of a partnership agreement, unmarried couples living in de facto unions were not protected by the law. Divisible property included spouses' potential earnings in the event of divorce.

50. **Ms. Makri** (Greece) said that the State was fully aware of the impact of the current crisis on the most vulnerable segments of society, including women. Despite the crisis, the State was committed to the social and political empowerment of women and to the achievement of true gender equality based on merit.

51. **The Chairperson** said that it was important to continue implementing the Convention in times of crisis, not only to protect women's rights and access to essential services, but also to capitalize on their potential to help in overcoming the crisis. She encouraged the State party to reconsider its position on quotas, as it was an effective means of accelerating the achievement of equality, and to identify European sources of funding to support the promotion of women's rights and implementation of the Convention in Greece.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.