

Review of Labour Rights and Equality Law Post-1975 in Greece

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Abstract

Modern Greece has established, following the end of the dictatorship in 1975, an institutional framework for basic labor rights that promotes gender equality following international and European treaties. In recent years, there has been a deterioration of working conditions in Greece, characterized by an increase in overtime hours even though there is a 120% increase in hourly pay for illegal overtime compared to 80% in the past. Additionally, daily working hours have been lengthened, and a six-day workweek has been introduced despite government announcements on improving the country's economic indicators. Furthermore, stereotypes and the gender pay gap continue to persist despite the existing legal framework.

Keywords: labour rights, labour law, gender equality, treaties, working conditions

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1.Introduction

The Greek Constitution of 1975 established equality, and in the 1980s, laws on equality began to be created, with a large part of these being an adaptation of Greek law to European Community directives and international conventions. These laws concerned equal pay, employment, family/maternity, education, health, violence, and social security. The Constitution in Article 22, paragraph 1. 1 provides: "Employment is a right and is protected by the State, which ensures the creation of employment conditions for all citizens and the moral and material upliftment of the working rural and urban population. All employees, irrespective of sex or other discrimination, shall have the right to equal pay for work of equal value." With the International Labour Convention, No. 100 sanctioned with the Law 45/1975 men and women are paid equally for equal work. In the 2001 Constitution Revision, Article 116, par. 2 is stated:

"Positive measures to promote equality between men and women do not constitute gender discrimination. The State shall ensure that the inequalities which exist in practice, in particular to the detriment of women, are eliminated."

This article repeats the Council of State law which stated that equality before the law was breached when positive measures were taken in favor of a particular population group. This article examines how the development of labor and equality laws in Greece has contributed to protecting employees/workers rights and what challenges exist in reassuring that all workers/employees, especially women, receive equal opportunities and treatment.

2.Methodology

The article adopts a qualitative approach to analyzing legal data, focusing on a critical examination of the law. Content analysis is employed to understand the underlying structure of the Greek legal system, while comparative legal analysis enhances the understanding of various legal statuses.

The analysis includes an examination of laws by identifying and coding themes that highlight specific legal approaches to crucial issues and a short comparative analysis with other European countries. This qualitative analysis facilitates the examination of legal principles and aids in understanding how social perceptions are shaped through the legal system.

The main theme examines the legal protection of employee rights, particularly women's rights, such as equality in the workplace. The legal approach followed is the liberal legal theory, which supports the protection of individual rights and the equal treatment of everyone, combined with feminist legal theory, which highlights the inequalities present in laws.

3. Current Socio-Economic Context

The socio-economic environment in Greece has changed mainly due to the financial crisis which started in 2009. The crisis significantly affected the nation's labor market. Unemployment surged dramatically, peaking at over 28% in 2013 (Trading Economics, 2023).

Greece has a longstanding issue with social and economic inequality. The nation exhibits a considerable level of income disparity, This inequality has been intensified by the economic crisis, resulting in an even greater divide between the affluent and the impoverished. The wealth accumulated by the top 1% of the population is approximately equivalent to that of the bottom 50%, whereas the wealth of the top 10% is roughly four times greater than that of the poorest 50% (Fasianos, 2022).

The labor market is also marked by significant segmentation, where permanent employees typically enjoy superior working conditions, salaries, and benefits compared to their temporary or precarious counterparts. This segmentation is driven by the widespread use of temporary contracts and the insufficient social protections available to workers in these categories (Mastroianni, 2024).

The labor union movement in Greece has played a crucial role in advocating for the rights of workers and opposing labor market reforms. However, it has encountered obstacles in recent years due to the economic crisis and the enforcement of austerity measures. Despite these challenges, labor unions have remained instrumental in championing workers' rights and contesting labor market reforms, exemplified by the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE), which has actively criticized such reforms and organized strikes and protests to demand improved working conditions and wages for employees (Gatopoulos & Kantouris, 2024). The unemployment rate is still high along with economic instability. As a result, job insecurity which mainly affects women has risen. Furthermore, the financial crisis and the austerity measures that followed caused public sector budget cuts in welfare services, drop in wages and families cannot have a work - life balance (Anastasopoulou, Vraimaki, Trivellas, 2024).

The introduction of recent laws that allow a six-day workweek shows a trend of increased labor exploitation, particularly in agriculture and tourism where a lot of women are employed (Mastroianni, 2024).

The gender pay gap still exists despite the legal framework and underlines the need for more effective labour law enforcement. Social and cultural stereotypes impact Greek women's participation in the workforce, lower - paying jobs, and limited career opportunities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further increased these challenges, with women being responsible for most caregiving responsibilities and therefore, they had to face reduced working hours and higher risk of losing their jobs (Kampouri, 2022).

4. Laws on Labour Rights and Equality in the 20th Century

4.1 Laws from 1970s to 1980s

Greece's Constitution was enriched by the establishment of specific, internationally enshrined equality rights. In particular: Law 46/75 on equal pay for men and women was created, which ratified International Convention 100/51. Law 133/75 established the 45-hour working day and equal pay for men and women which ratified the Collective Agreement of 26/02/1975).

Decree 611/77 (Public Employment Code) and Law 1320/83 established the elimination of discrimination for appointment in the public sector. Law 1082/80 prohibited the dismissal of pregnant women and maternity protection was enshrined in Law 1302/82 which ratified UN International Convention 103/52. In 1983, Law 1342/83 was created to eliminate all types of discrimination against women, and Law 1239/83 with the Family Law adapts the principle of equality between men and women.

Law 1329/83 modernized Family Law and men are not considered anymore as the "head of the family" and men and women decide together for family matters.

In 1984 the International Convention 122/64 was ratified with the creation of Law 1423/84 under which measures are taken to deal with unemployment and underemployment which should ensure work without discrimination based on gender, religion, and race. Law 1414/84 harmonizes with EEC Directives 75/117 and 76/207 and eliminates direct or indirect discrimination based on gender, lays down the same conditions for access to employment for men and women, the prohibition of termination of employment contracts on the grounds of gender, states equal pay for work of equal value and the same professional orientation for both sexes and, finally, establishes uniform age limits for entry into employment for both sexes.

In 1984, Law 1424/84 was created, which prohibits all discrimination based on gender, race, religion, etc., and ratifies the International Labour Convention 111/58, while the European Social Charter of the International Convention is also ratified by Law 1424/84, which guarantees all social rights without discrimination based on gender. Law 1483/84 protects workers with family obligations by prohibiting the separation of workers due to their obligations, establishing parental leave of absence, leave of absence to monitor children's school progress, and leave of absence due to illness of dependents.

Working parents who have children with a serious illness are entitled to reduced working hours and employees who have requested reduced working hours due to family responsibilities retain their right to full-time employment. A pregnant woman is protected from dismissal during pregnancy and for one year after childbirth unless there is good cause, and employees are also protected from dismissal due to family responsibilities. Maternity leave is increased by Law 1539/85 to 14 weeks for the private sector and 16 weeks for the public sector.

Specifically, for workers with family responsibilities, Law 1576/85 ensures equal treatment and equal opportunities for both sexes and ratifies International Convention 156/81. This law also provides for the insurance coverage of people working on a piece-rate basis and Article 30 of the same law provides for the insurance in a fund or sickness insurance class of uninsured spouses, parents, and siblings.

Law 1541/85 establishes the granting of a maternity allowance to women farmers who are insured with the OGA (Organization of Agricultural Insurance).

Law 1649/86 enables women who got married before the amendment of the Family Law to regain their paternal surname if they so wish.

4.2 Laws in 1990s

Law 1892/90 establishes part-time work and safeguards the rights of part-time employees as regards minimum wages, paid leave, and social security. Article 63 of the same law grants a three-year allowance to women who have a third child, while mothers with many children are paid an allowance equal to 1.5 days' wages of an unskilled worker multiplied by the number of unmarried children until they reach the age of 25. A mother with many children who is no longer entitled to the allowance receives a pension for life which is four times the daily wage of an unskilled worker. The benefits received by the single mother are independent of any salary, pension, etc. she may receive. In the public sector, Law 2085/92 provided for the participation of at least one qualified woman in each service council, but this law was later repealed by Law 2190/94. However, Law 2190/94 stipulates that if among the successful candidates in a competition for employment in the public sector are single mothers as candidates then their total score is added 5/100 for each child they have.

5. Labour Rights and Equality in Greece in the 21st Century

Article 20, paragraph 2 of Law 3896/2010 establishes the prohibition for employers to refuse to hire a woman due to maternity or pregnancy as well as the less favourable treatment on the grounds of gender. It also establishes the return to an equivalent position upon the woman's return from maternity leave.

According to the PD 176/97 Article 5 (which adapts Greek legislation to Directive 92/85/EEC), pregnant or breastfeeding women have the right, when the assessment shows that there are specific risks in the workplace, to request a change of position or permanent or temporary adjustment of working conditions or adjustment of working time¹.

5.1 Recent Labour Law 4808/2021

Law 4808/2021 (Government Gazette A' 101/19-06-2021) includes the following basic regulations:

In case there is no union or in case the union and the employer do not agree then the employee can request that the working time arrangement system be applied. The working time arrangement system must be agreed in writing. If the employee refuses the employer's proposal for an agreement on working time arrangements then termination of the employment contract is prohibited. The working time arrangement concerns the offsetting of increased working hours against fewer hours in another period.

¹ Koukiades, D.I. (2017) (in Greek) *Labour Law: Individual labour relations and the law of labour flexibility*, Athens-Komotini: Sakkoulas, S.A.

The former Law 3986/2011 defined two systems of working time adjustment. One system provided that both the period of increased working time and the period of reduced working time could not exceed six months. In the second system, the period of increased employment could reach up to eight months while the period of reduced employment would correspondingly cover the remaining four months. The daily working time, under both schemes, should not exceed ten hours per day.

About overtime, the number of overtime hours is increased from the previous 120 hours to 150 hours, while the daily limit for legal overtime is increased to three hours. Daily, if the three hours of overtime over and above the eight-hour limit are added together with the one hour of overtime, the daily working time is twelve hours. Employees who work overtime are entitled to a 40% increase in their hourly wage for each hour of legal overtime (which may be up to three hours per day) up to a maximum of 150 hours per year. If the overtime is illegal, then the employee is entitled to an hourly wage increase of up to 120% as compensation. Note that previously the increment was 80%. The Secretary General of the Ministry of Labour may grant overtime leave, in the case of work of an urgent nature, to employees of all enterprises over 150 hours. In this case, the hourly wage paid is increased by 60%.

Break - every employee is entitled to a break of 15 to 30 minutes after four consecutive hours of daily work. The break shall not be considered working time and shall not be provided consecutively with the start or end of the day's work.

Provision of additional work - Part-time employees may provide additional work if requested and able to provide it. Additional work may also be provided during hours that are not consecutive to the hours agreed upon between the employer and the employee on the same day.

Leisure Leave - Half of the leave must be granted from May 1 to September 30.

Unpaid leave - A full-time or part-time employee may agree with the employer to take up to one year of unpaid leave. This leave may be extended again if both parties agree. During this leave, no social security contributions are due and the employment contract is suspended. When the leave expires, the rights and obligations of both parties under the employment contract shall be revived.

The Information System "Ergani II" is the evolution of the P.S. Ergani. In this system, the employment contract, the notice of recruitment, any amendments to the employment contract and the corresponding declaration of changes to the data (in particular those relating to the change of remuneration) of the employee's employment relationship, the change of specialization, the conversion of the contract from fixed-term to indefinite duration and the conversion of part-time and rotational employment to full-time employment, any change of employer, the termination of employment, the working hours about the arrangement of working time, etc. are included. Registers relating to the exercise of trade union rights and collective bargaining are also kept in Ergani II. The drawing up of an employment contract through the Ergani II is a substitute for a written contract. Mandatory in Ergani II is the registration of the reduction of wages or salaries. An employer may also submit a late form which s/he is required to file.

In the case where there are financial claims from the provision of labour, from compensation for not taking leave, and from compensation for dismissal, but also in the case where the employment is proven from the digital work card and the debts arise from the deposits made in the employee's bank account in connection with the salary agreed between the employee and the employer and are registered in Ergani or in connection with the applicable statutory wages and/or when the debt can also arise from the other documents, then it is possible to issue a payment order by Article 623 of the Code of Civil Procedure.

Employers are obliged to have and put into operation an electronic system for measuring employees' working time which is connected in real time to Ergani II. Using a digital timecard, working time will be measured and any change in the working time of employees, in particular about the start and end of their working time, their leave, their breaks, and any exceeding hours of working time, will be recorded in Ergani II. The data in the Digital Job Card shall be cross-checked with the Analytical Periodic Declaration (APD). The APD is submitted by the enterprise and can be pre-filled by Ergani II based on the data entered from the Digital Job Card.

The Labour Inspectorate can use the Digital Working Card to check whether working hours are respected. If the Labour Inspectorate finds during an on-site inspection that the employee's digital card

is not activated, it may impose a fine of ten thousand five hundred euros on the employer. If in three inspections and within twelve months a breach of this provision is found then a temporary suspension of the business for fifteen days may be imposed.

When the employer notifies the termination of the dependent employment contract with notice then the employer may release the employee partially or fully from the obligation to perform his/her work and pay the employee's wages in full until the time the notice period expires.

During the notice period, the employee can start working for a different employer without affecting the amount of compensation and the result of the termination. When the dismissal is invalid then the employee is re-hired and paid back wages for late payment. Dismissal is considered invalid in the following cases:

When the employee has exercised any legal right. It should be noted that before the existing law, re-hire was at the discretion of the Court.

Dismissal is invalid when there has been unfavorable discrimination or retaliation against the employee on grounds of sex, color, political opinion, race, disability/chronic illness, religious or philosophical beliefs, national or ethnic origin, sexual or gender orientation, age, being a member or not being a member in a trade union, gender identity or gender characteristics, as well as where violence and harassment have been used against the employee.

In the absence of good cause, pregnant women and fathers of a newborn child shall not be dismissed. It is also invalid to terminate the contract of a working father for six months after childbirth unless there is good cause for such termination. Termination of employment and any other unfavorable treatment of a person shall be null and void if it constitutes retaliatory behavior for incidents of violence and harassment.

The Law refers to and provides for work-life balance with the scope of application of natural, adoptive, foster, and foster working parents as well as presumed mothers who have a child through surrogacy and are employed on a full-time or part-time basis in the private sector, on a fixed-term private-law employment basis in the public sector and through temporary employment contracts.

Maternity leave is also extended to workers who adopt children from the time of the child's integration up to the age of eight and to presumed mothers who have a child through surrogacy. Parents, as defined above, regardless of whether one parent is working or not working, are entitled to alternative childcare leave. This leave shall be granted for thirty months from the end of maternity leave or special maternity protection benefit or parental leave as a reduced-hours leave. The special maternity protection benefit is a benefit to which an employee who adopts a child and a presumed mother who is employed in the public sector under a private fixed-term employment contract are entitled. This benefit is paid by the institution to which the employee belongs and is charged to her salary. Seven working days with pay shall be granted to employees undergoing a medically assisted reproduction procedure.

Full-time or part-time employees may be absent without reduction of pay and with the permission of the employer for certain hours or the whole day for up to four working days each year for each child until the child reaches the age of eighteen and attends elementary or secondary education. This leave is also granted to parents whose child is disabled and attends special schools for people with special needs, irrespective of the age of the child.

The purpose of this leave is to allow employees to visit their children's school to monitor their school performance. Parents who work in an enterprise with at least fifty employees and who have a child with a mental, psychological, or physical disability have the autonomous right for each of their children with the aforementioned conditions to request a reduction in their working hours by one hour per day with a corresponding reduction in their pay.

If the employee marries or enters a civil partnership, he or she is entitled to six working days' paid leave if he or she works a six-day working week and five working days' paid leave if he or she works a five-day working week.

Pregnant employees must inform the employer by all appropriate means of their intention to undergo prenatal examinations if such examinations are carried out during working hours. In this case, they are exempted from work without any reduction in pay. Working parents may take unpaid leave not exceeding six working days per year in the event of their dependent children or other members of their family falling ill. The leave may be paid in installments or a lump sum and shall be increased by eight working days if the parent protects two children and to fourteen working days if the parent protects more than two children.

Special parental leave of up to ten working days per year with pay may be taken by a working parent to meet the needs of a child until the child reaches the age of eighteen when the child has a disease requiring a blood transfusion and its derivatives or dialysis, with a neoplastic disease or requiring a transplant or children who have autism or DOWN syndrome or mental retardation regardless of their age.

Special unpaid sick leave shall be granted to working parents for the duration of the hospitalization if their child is hospitalized, irrespective of his or her age, because of an illness or accident necessitating the presence of the working parent. The special leave for sick leave may not exceed thirty working days in any one year. Working fathers may be granted paid paternity leave of fourteen days. This leave may be taken as soon as the child is

born. If a child up to the age of eight is adopted or fostered, paternity leave is granted from the moment the child joins the family.

Every working parent or person having parental care has the individual and non-transferable right to take parental leave for the upbringing of a child for up to four months. This leave may be taken in installments or consecutively until the child reaches the age of eight years. The purpose of this leave is to fulfill the minimum child-rearing obligations. If the employee is a foster parent or adopts a child up to eight years of age, parental leave is granted from the moment the child joins the family. To receive the leave, the working parent must have completed one year of continuous employment or successive fixed-term employment contracts with the same employer. For the first two months of parental leave, the Public Employment Agency must pay each parent a parental leave allowance equal to the minimum statutory monthly wage.

An employee who has completed six months of continuous or successive fixed-term employment contracts may be granted a carer's leave to care for a person if that person needs care for a serious medical reason and this is confirmed by the relevant medical certificate. Carer's leave may be up to five working days in any one year. Twice a year and up to one working day at a time, a carer may be absent from work with pay for reasons of force majeure related to urgent matters of illness or accident where the immediate presence of the employee becomes necessary.

Flexible working arrangements for caring reasons e.g. teleworking, part-time work, flexible working hours can be requested by any working parent or carer of a child up to the age of twelve. Teleworking can be agreed between the employer and the employee when the latter is hired or by amending the employment contract.

The law also provides for digital platforms that are linked to dependent employment contracts or contracts for work or independent services with service providers. It also provides for rights to organize, strike, and negotiate collective agreements for those employed under work or independent service contracts. The same safety, welfare, and health obligations are established by the platforms for employees and self-employed. As regards health and safety provisions, they apply by analogy to service providers who are individuals and who are linked to the platforms by work or independent service contracts for the transport or distribution of products and objects. The relationship between the service provider and the collaborative digital platform is a special one, which is why, instead of providing a protective helmet, the value of the helmet may be reimbursed by adding a certain amount of money to a certain number of transports or distributions. Similarly, an increase of 15% on the statutory minimum wage may be applied if the employee uses his/her means of transport.

The law also includes health and safety at work. More specifically, it provides for the establishment of an annual National Program for Health and Safety at Work and establishes cooperation between the Ministry of Labour, the Labour Inspectorate, and the Hellenic Institute for Occupational Health and Safety. The cooperation will be in the field of studies, field surveys, consultancy services on occupational health, and safety issues, and training programs.

All forms of violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment and sexual harassment, in the workplace, whether arising from or related to it, are prohibited. In addition to employees working in the private sector, those employed through third-party service providers, apprentices, trainees, volunteers, workers in the informal economy, job applicants, and employees whose employment relationship has ended, are also included.

All companies employing more than twenty people are obliged to adopt a policy to prevent and combat violence and harassment in the workplace. They are also obliged to manage internal complaints about incidents of violence and harassment. The content of the prevention policies is subject to collective bargaining in the Labour Regulation or the company's Collective Labour Agreement. Alternatively, they may be drawn up by the employer in consultation with the representatives of the employees' trade union or with the employees directly if there is no union after the employees have been informed and the draft has been communicated to the workplace so that management can obtain their views. The employer must take all necessary measures against the complainant to prevent similar conduct from recurring. Among the measures may be a recommendation of compliance, termination of the employment relationship without prejudice to the abuse of the right under Article 281 CC, change of position, working hours, place or manner of work, etc.

Anyone who suffers violence and harassment against him or her may leave the workplace for a reasonable period of time without loss of pay or other adverse consequences if he or she considers that there is a serious risk to his or her safety, life, and health, in particular, if it is the employer who behaves in this way or if the employer does not take appropriate measures to restore working peace or has taken measures which cannot stop the violence and harassment.

An employee who leaves the workplace for the above reasons must inform the employer in writing, stating the incident of violence and harassment and giving reasons why he/she considers that there is a serious risk to

his/her life, safety, or health. If there is no risk or the risk has ceased to exist and the employee who has left refuses to return to work then the employer can take the matter to the Labour Inspectorate seeking a resolution of the dispute.

About strikes, if a strike or work stoppage declared by a primary trade union has been declared illegal, then a strike on the same subject cannot be declared by a corresponding secondary or tertiary trade union.

During strikes in the public utility sector, the minimum guaranteed service is in principle set at 33% and may be reduced by a Decree issued by the Minister responsible and the Minister of Labour after a substantiated request or agreement of the social partners. If the number of minimum guaranteed service staff is not agreed upon, the dispute is referred to the Public Employment Agency to mediate.

A strike cannot be declared without first having designated Security Personnel and where required Minimum Guaranteed Service Personnel must be designated or without such personnel being placed at the disposal of the employer under the responsibility of the trade union declaring the strike. Decree Law 80/2022 (Code of Individual Labour Law) contains regulations to combat discrimination for all employees regardless of their employment contract and against violence and harassment in the workplace. It also regulates six-day work in violation of the five-day work system with a daily wage paid plus 30% regardless of the penalties provided.

Law 5053/2023 establishes six-day work and ceases to be in violation for enterprises or holdings in continuous operation with a system of alternating shifts in which employees working a five-day work week may be employed on the 6th day of the week but on this day overtime and overtime work is not allowed and, on this day, a daily wage increased by 40% is paid. This Law allows the employee to work concurrently under a dependent employment contract as long as 11 hours of continuous rest per day is observed, in other words, the employee is allowed to work 13 hours per day.

6. Case Studies – Comparative Analysis

Sweden

Sweden allows parents to share 480 days of paid leave per child and emphasizes gender equality in caregiving (Savage, 2024). Furthermore, Swedish labor laws promote work-life balance through remote work options and flexible working hours. Swedish employees work 18% less than the OECD average (1441 hours per year on average) while productivity compares well with the other European Union countries (Sweden, 2024)

Germany

Maternity leave in Germany is 14 weeks and extensive parental leave options can be shared by the parents (Palacios, 2024). In addition, there is also strong anti-discrimination protection.

Collective bargaining and organized labor have remained strong in the country and the trade unions negotiate better working conditions (Jäger, Noy, Schoefe, 2022) which is less pronounced in Greece.

France

France introduced in 2000 a 35-hour workweek while recently announced a 4 - day workweek pilot (McParlane, 2024) while in Greece the working hours have been increased. French labor laws emphasize the right to disconnect from work outside working hours while concerning gender equality France has made significant progress in addressing the gender pay gap while legislative measures promote women in leadership roles (De Fougieres, 2024).

7. Effectiveness of Labor Laws in Practice: Challenges and Shortcomings

Labour laws in Greece especially concerning gender equality are robust however, in practice there are some important challenges which are the following:

7.1 Enforcement Gaps

In Greece, there is a gap between enforcement and legislation. Despite the robustness of the legal framework on gender equality and labor rights enforcement mechanisms are weak. The Labor Inspectorate is under-resourced and as a result, many labor law violations in small businesses or businesses in rural areas go unpunished (Anyfantis, Papagiannis, Rachiotis, 2021).

Women in Greece continue to face discrimination, and a persistent gender gap exists (ToVima, 2024). The existing laws have not fully addressed women's discrimination in hiring, wages, and promotion and there is a lack of serious penalties which weakens the impact of the labour laws.

7.2 Cultural and Societal Barriers

Important challenges are the traditional gender roles where the man is considered the strong provider of the family whereas women despite their high educational level are expected to contribute to the family income along with being responsible for the household duties (Evason, 2019). As a result, their participation in the workforce can be limited along with their ability to take advantage of their rights.

Women are discouraged from reporting discrimination or harassment in the workplace out of fear of being stigmatized (Manessi et al.2022). As a result, violations are not formally addressed and the impact of equality laws is undermined.

7.3 Economic Constraints

Labour laws in Greece and their effectiveness have been constrained by the economic crisis which began in 2009, and the austerity measures imposed. Austerity measures caused significant cuts in public sector funding and the ability of the state to enforce laws has been weakened. Furthermore, many companies prioritized survival and implemented insecure job contracts, underpayment, and unpaid overtime which have mostly affected women employees (Mastroianni, 2024). The high unemployment rate means that employees and especially, women are willing to accept, out of necessity, substandard working conditions which often lack social benefits and protections (Mastroianni, 2024). The lack of job security enhances labor law violations and inequality is perpetuated (Livanos & Tzika, 2022).

Due to austerity measures, taxes increased, wages were cut, and pensions were reformed. As a result, the gap between the rich and the poor widened. Vulnerable groups such as young people, women, and low-income workers were negatively impacted (Maganara, 2012).

7.4 Shortcomings in Legal Reforms

Despite the robust legal framework, there are underlying structural issues that have not been fully addressed. Although flexible work arrangements have been introduced there are not sufficient measures in place to prevent exploitation (Papadopoulos, 2021).

Legal provisions for parental leave have been expanded, however, not all employees/workers are included. Precarious or informal employment workers cannot access these rights. Furthermore, there is a lack of affordable childcare (Samarkou, 2024) and this results in women not being able to work promptly or take full advantage of parental leave.

7.5 Gender Pay Gap

The Gender Pay Gap in Greece is 18% despite the efforts for gender equality (GWI, 2024). The Gender Equality Index is the lowest in Europe for a decade. In 2022 it was 53.4% while the EU average is 68.6% (UNICEF, 2022).

7.6 Corruption and Clientelism

Greek politics and society are plagued by corruption and clientelism (Kapetopoulos, 2023), which hinder the effective implementation of laws in general and labor and equality laws. Therefore, employers in many cases are not held accountable for labor law violations.

8. Complexities of Labor Rights in Greece

Complexity 1

The interplay between economic growth and workers' rights represents a significant complexity in the development of labor rights in Greece. The Greek government faces considerable pressure to lower labor costs and enhance competitiveness to attract foreign investment and foster economic expansion (Pantelidis & Paneta,2017). Consequently, this has resulted in a series of labor market reforms that have diminished workers' rights and increased flexibility within the workforce. Conversely, numerous workers and labor unions contend that these reforms have adversely affected workers' rights and social protections. They argue that the drive to reduce labor costs and enhance flexibility has led to a deterioration in wages and working conditions, particularly impacting low-skilled workers (Livanos & Tzika, 2022) . This complexity is further exacerbated by the external pressures exerted on the Greek government by international lenders, including the European Union and the International Monetary Fund, which have urged the implementation of austerity measures and labor cost reductions (Mastroianni, 2024). As a result, there exists a prevailing sense of external influence compelling the Greek government to prioritize economic growth over the safeguarding of workers' rights.

Complexity 2

The influence of EU legislation on labor rights constitutes another intricate aspect of the evolution of labor rights in Greece. The European Union has instituted a variety of labor standards and regulations that member states are obligated to adopt. However, these regulations can be intricate and challenging to navigate, particularly for smaller enterprises or those with limited resources. For instance, the EU's Working Time Directive 2003/88/EC mandates that employers grant workers a minimum of 20 days of annual leave, while also permitting flexible working arrangements that may benefit employees. Nevertheless, some employers may fail to adhere fully to these regulations, potentially resulting in conflicts with their workforce. Moreover, the EU's Social Chapter has established various social protections, including the principle of equal pay for equal work, maternity rights, and other essential labor standards.

Complexity 3

The obstacles encountered by female employees represent a significant complexity in the progression of labor rights in Greece. Women in the workforce confront various issues, such as workplace discrimination, disparities in pay for equivalent roles, and restricted access to childcare and other family-oriented benefits. For instance, research conducted by the European Commission indicates that women in Greece earn, on average, 13% less than their male counterparts for comparable positions (ToVima, 2024). Furthermore, women frequently find themselves in lower-paying roles or part-time employment, which can hinder their earning capacity and opportunities for career growth (Mastroianni, 2024). The scarcity of affordable childcare services poses another substantial challenge for female employees in Greece.

Complexity 4

The consequences of the financial crisis on labor rights constitute another intricate aspect of the evolution of labor rights in Greece. The financial crisis has severely impacted the Greek economy, resulting in widespread unemployment and increased poverty levels. Moreover, the crisis has prompted a series of austerity measures that have undermined workers' rights and social protections. For example, the Greek government has enacted various pension reforms that have diminished benefits for numerous employees. Additionally, the government has introduced tax hikes and budget cuts that have disproportionately impacted low-income workers. The crisis has also resulted in a reduction of collective bargaining power for employees, as many employers have exploited the situation to lower wages and benefits. This has fostered a sense of helplessness among workers and has contributed to widespread dissatisfaction and protests (Maganara, 2012).

In summary, these complexities underscore the difficulties faced by workers in Greece as they navigate the continually evolving landscape of labor rights and social protections.

9. Epilogue

While Greece has established a comprehensive legal framework for labor rights, particularly in promoting gender equality, challenges remain in place.

Greece constantly reduces employees' rights to minimize labour costs and increase the profitability of companies. This fact is demonstrated by the reactions caused by Law 5053/2023 on the extension of the working week from five to six days if the working week is extended by increasing overtime to 150 hours, thus making it easier, by transferring overtime, for businesses to operate on Sundays without recruiting staff.

The extension of working hours in Greece does not help the corresponding increase in productivity, which remains extremely low. The World Economic Forum claims that employees who work four days a week are more productive, happier and at the same time environmental pollution is minimized due to reduced commute ¹.

The Greek employee, despite working the longest hours compared to other employees in the European Union and being among the lowest paid, plagued by the country's ongoing economic crisis and high unemployment, is forced to forgo basic labour rights to find a job.

Although there has been substantial progress towards gender equality and labour law (despite the implementation of a six-day working week), there are still significant issues that need to be addressed, such as

¹ McHugh – Dillon, R. (2024) Enjoy your day off: Greece has introduced a six-day work week. Available at: <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/enjoy-your-day-off-greece-has-introduced-a-six-day-work-week/xd80iu7t>, [Access July 11 2024]

gender stereotypes and a lack of information; many employees are unaware of their rights or do not know how to claim them. The implementation of existing laws is insufficient, resulting in offenders not being held accountable appropriately. Furthermore, even though laws mandate equal pay for equal work, women in Greece continue to earn less than men.

Compared with Sweden, Germany, and France which offer policies that enhance work-life balance and protect employees' rights, Greece is left behind. It can learn from these case studies and implement potential reforms that could improve gender equality and labour rights.

Labour rights and gender equality law in Greece can be strengthened by providing increased resources to the Labour Inspectorate, by educating workers/employees on their rights, by supporting vulnerable workers through programs targeted on them, and by encouraging social dialogue and collective bargaining.

As we contemplate the future, it is important to recognize that the obstacles confronting Greece are not isolated to this nation alone. The decline of social welfare systems, and the widening wealth gap between affluent and impoverished citizens are global issues that demand a unified response from governments, civil society, and international entities. In this light, it is vital to shift the discourse surrounding labor rights and equality in Greece. Instead of concentrating exclusively on the enforcement of laws and regulations, we should emphasize a more inclusive and participatory framework that empowers workers, marginalized groups, and other stakeholders to influence policy-making processes. Ultimately, the advancement of labor rights and equality in Greece hinges on our capacity to envision a more just and equitable society. This endeavor necessitates a dedication to solidarity, collective action, and innovative strategies that tackle the fundamental causes of inequality. By collaborating towards this shared vision, we can foster a more promising future for all Greeks, ensuring that every individual has the chance to flourish and realize their full potential.

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