



**Consideration of the combined 8th and 9th Periodic Reports of Greece
by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
(CEDAW)**

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

By the Head of the Greek Delegation

Dr Zafeiroula Dimadama

Secretary General for Gender Equality and Human Rights

GENEVA

6 FEBRUARY 2024

Madame Chair,

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a special honor for me and for all the members of the Greek Delegation to be here today, to present and discuss the progress and challenges related to the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, on the basis of the combined 8th and 9th periodic Reports of my country submitted in March 2023.

Today's dialogue will give us the opportunity to share perspectives and showcase our positive interventions and policies. While we are making steady progress, it is essential to acknowledge the obstacles we face and work towards addressing them. I would like to assure you of the Greek government's commitment to improve areas where shortcomings and weaknesses have been identified. We are resolute in

implementing policies across all sectors, emphasizing the horizontal adoption of policies related to gender equality and human rights.

In this spirit, our goal is to leverage the valuable recommendations of this Committee, using them as a roadmap for meaningful improvements and steps towards achieving substantive gender equality.

At first, please allow me to introduce myself and the members of the Greek Delegation who will actively participate in today's dialogue. The composition of our delegation has been carefully selected to ensure representation of the pertinent issues under discussion. It is an honor to have senior officials from key Ministries accompanying me, underscoring our commitment to addressing the matters at hand:

I am **Zefi DIMADAMA**, Secretary General for Equality and Human Rights, Head of the Greek Delegation,

from the **Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations in Geneva**, His Excellency, Ambassador Ioannis Gkikas, Permanent Representative, and Mr. Iakovos Iakovidis, Deputy Permanent Representative,

Mr Sarantis MOSCHOVIS, Head of my Cabinet.

From the **Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family**, General Secretariat for Equality and Human Rights,

Ms Georgia PAPAGEORGIU, Ms Christina AGORITSA, Ms Eirini SIOZOU, Ms Eleni NTALAKA.

From the same Ministry, General Secretariat for Social Solidarity and Fight against Poverty:

Ms Athina DIAKOUMAKOU, Ms Evangelia ZERVA.

From the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**:

Mr Elias KASTANAS and Mr Michail RETALIS.

From the Ministry of Interior:

Mr Ioannis MATHIOUDAKIS.

From the **Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports**:

Ms Panagiota KARKALETSI, and Ms Sofia PAPAGEORGIU.

From the **Ministry of Citizen Protection**:

Mr Kimon TOLLIAS.

From the **Ministry of Labour and Social Security**:

Ms Souzana LASKARIDOU, Ms Eleni VREKOU and Ms Dimitra PROTOPSALTI.

From the Ministry of Justice:

Mr Panayiotis Nicholas KARAKONSTANTIS and Ms Vasiliki MASTROKOSTA.

From the Ministry of Migration and Asylum:

Ms Vasiliki KAKOSIMOU, and Ms Maria KOUTSOUKOU.

I would like to assure you that the Delegation will engage in today's Interactive Dialogue with openness and forthrightness.

The consolidated National Report of Greece provides a concise overview of the developments and challenges our country has faced over the past decade, spanning from the previous examination in 2013 to the present, with a particular emphasis on actions taken in the last five years.

I would like first of all to thank the Committee for making available to my country the simplified reporting procedure, which allowed us to prepare a more focused and streamlined report. The drafting process was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. We have endeavored to overcome such difficulties and present the main developments in the field of gender equality and the fight against discrimination faced by women and girls comprehensively and substantively, with a particular emphasis on the most recent advancements and challenges.

The drafting of the Report was coordinated by the General Secretariat for Equality and Human Rights of the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as all relevant Ministries and the Greek Parliament. This has involved extensive interministerial cooperation, aimed at incorporating all necessary information in a coherent and consistent manner. Notably, we have actively included input from academia and non-governmental organizations, offering a more comprehensive picture of the situation of women's rights in Greece. A draft of the report was also submitted to the National Commission for Human Rights, our National Human Rights Institution. The Commission's insights and comments have been duly considered in view of the finalization of our Report.

Before I begin to present the main challenges and achievements in combating discrimination against women, it is crucial to emphasize that my country prioritizes gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Although we recognize that progress may be slow, significant efforts have been made in recent years to promote the principle of gender equality in everyday life.

In this endeavor, the expertise of this Committee and the tools provided by the United Nations for addressing gender equality issues are invaluable. The

recommendations of the Committee adopted in the context of the previous evaluation cycle have been translated and disseminated for information and action among the relevant stakeholders. During the follow up procedure in 2015, the General Secretariat for Gender Equality compiled information and apprised the Committee of the issues requested to be prioritized.

Both the Committee's Concluding Observations and the National Report have been published on the website of the General Secretariat, serving as guidance for the formulation of our national gender equality policies.

One of the primary challenges Greece has faced in recent years is the cumulative impact of the economic crisis, the migration crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic crisis, coupled with the prolonged implementation of austerity measures, negatively affected the entire population and deregulated social and labour relations to a great extent. Women found themselves in a more precarious position, both economically and socially. This was underscored by various organs of international organizations, including this Committee.

Furthermore, due to the economic crisis and the ensuing emigration, particularly of young and educated individuals, our country experienced a population loss of 3% from 2011 to 2016. According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority, the overall population in Greece is projected to increase slightly until 2050, with the elderly population expected to rise by 12% from 2011 to 2050. These figures highlight the serious demographic challenge, further exacerbated by the economic crisis.

After the conclusion of the economic adjustment programme, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged at the beginning of 2020, causing a tremendous impact on the health and well-being of people and, naturally, on employment and the economy. The most significant challenge for my country during the pandemic was initially to curb the spread of the disease, followed by addressing its repercussions on work and the economy. Existing inequalities, exacerbated by the economic crisis, created and intensified gender gaps during the pandemic, significantly affecting the female population.

The primary burden of responsibilities related to caregiving for dependent family members at home, fell on women. Professions that experienced the greatest workload and stress (such as healthcare, social care, and education) were disproportionately represented by women. Additionally, part-time and low-wage occupations primarily involved women. Moreover, during the implementation of restrictive measures on movement, there was a surge in incidents of violence against women, rightly characterized as a 'shadow pandemic.' Data collected at the European and international levels suggest that the consequences of the health crisis on women were disproportionately greater than those on men.

In this context, and in response to the gender inequalities exacerbated by the crises of previous years, it was decided in 2019, based on governmental priorities, that the portfolio of gender equality should be transferred to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. A Deputy Minister was appointed with specific responsibilities for these issues, aiming to place greater emphasis on enhancing women's participation in employment. The competent General Secretariat, along with all its organizational units and personnel, was placed under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to ensure optimal oversight and targeted policy planning for enhancing women's employment.

In 2023, following the recovery from the pandemic, a new Ministry was established, the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family, with the aim of integrating at a higher level, the policies on human rights, gender equality, the rights of the child and the rights of vulnerable social groups, in order to achieve social cohesion. The areas of competence of the new Ministry also include demography and family support policies. The portfolio of gender equality was then transferred to this Ministry, with the creation of the General Secretariat for Equality and Human Rights.

The General Secretariat for Equality and Human Rights, formerly known as the General Secretariat for Demographic, Family Policy, and Gender Equality, remains the government agency responsible for planning, implementing, and monitoring policies related to gender equality across all sectors. Additionally, its mandate has been expanded to include the promotion and protection of human rights.

The transfer of the General Secretariat to the new Ministry along with the human rights portfolio, reflects a comprehensive approach that not only acknowledges but also places human rights at the core of social policy and visibility. The Greek government prioritizes the inclusion and visibility of girls, women, and the LGBTQI community, as it is proven by the adoption and expansion of initiatives such as the Panic Button (an application addressing violence against women) throughout Greece from January 1, 2024. Additionally, the extension of the business equality label, aims to increase women's participation in the labor market and promote equal opportunity policies within businesses. Furthermore, the government supports the demand for marriage equality within the LGBTQI community.

Gender equality policies are implemented under the National Action Plan for Gender Equality, elaborated by the General Secretariat every four years. The current Action Plan has been drafted following extensive consultations with public entities and non-governmental organizations. Its priorities are fully aligned with international standards for gender equality, as defined within the framework of the United Nations and the European Union.

The National Action Plan is structured around four axes:

- Preventing and combating Violence against Women and domestic violence.
- Equal participation of women in decision-making processes.
- Equal participation of women in the labour market.
- Gender mainstreaming in sectoral policies.

In order to effectively coordinate the monitoring of the implementation of the Action Plan, contact points have been designated by the Ministries, so that actions can be implemented jointly and with the aim of the horizontal integration of the principle of gender equality in public policies.

Numerous meetings between the General Secretariat and the Ministries responsible for implementing gender equality actions are taking place during the drafting of the Ministries' Annual Action Plans. This illustrates the interconnectedness of the annual action plans with thematic action plans, like the National Action Plan on Gender Equality. It practically confirms the endeavor to incorporate thematic horizontal policies, such as gender equality, into the initiatives of each Ministry, thereby reinforcing a whole-of-government approach to gender equality.

In the current Action Plan, as in the previous one, the focus on addressing multiple discrimination is highly prioritized, recognizing the complexity of individuals' experiences and identities. The commitment to tackle multiple discrimination reinforces the integration of policies aimed at promoting equality across diverse aspects of public policies and initiatives.

Beyond the National Action Plan for Gender Equality, Greece has placed emphasis in recent years on inter-ministerial collaboration concerning gender equality and human rights, coordinated at the highest governmental level by the General Secretariat of Coordination at the Presidency of the Government. Due to the complexity of the issues and ongoing crises in recent years, which necessitate coordinated action and specialized, multidimensional expertise on the subject, a centralized planning and monitoring of a series of horizontal action plans for human rights has been introduced. Gender perspective is inherently embedded in these plans. These include:

The National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities:

The first ever, for Greece, such dedicated Action Plan was drafted and implemented since 2020. This plan serves as a comprehensive roadmap providing a unified framework for the substantial protection and further enhancement of the rights of persons with disabilities, consolidating actions from all relevant Ministries, and highlighting the state's specific responsibility for the well-being of individuals with

disabilities. A national strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2024-2030 is under preparation with the participation of the disability movement.

The National Action Plan for the Protection of Children from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation:

It represents the national effort to establish a society with zero tolerance for instances of sexual violence against children. It emphasizes the need to create a culture that prioritizes the safety of children and eradicates sexual violence.

The National Strategy for Equality of LGBTQI+ Individuals:

Encompassing emerging issues, this strategy provides a set of guiding principles and proposals grounded in the principles of equality and the prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation, identity, characteristics, and gender expression. In this framework, we are happy to inform the distinguished members of the Committee, that a draft bill on “equality in civil marriage” was submitted to the parliament last week, establishing in the Greek legal order the same-sex marriage, aiming to achieve equality and legal protection for families. The institutionalization of equality in marriage also extends to the equal rights of children in same-sex couples that already exist.

The National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security:

Aligned with the United Nations Security Council Agenda on Women, Peace, and Security, this plan represents the Greek government's commitment to implementing the agenda. The Action Plan addresses the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on the human rights and security of women and girls. It is a five-year policy document destined to enhance policy coherence and gender mainstreaming, since it complies fully with the relevant national legal and institutional framework. The Action Plan is regularly mainstreamed in the Annual Action Plans of the Ministries and implemented under the coordination of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in close cooperation with the General Secretariat of Coordination of the Presidency of the Government.

Further to those, it should be emphasized that the social policies are also reflected in the National Strategy for Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction for the period 2021-2027. This constitutes the national strategic planning to respond to the needs of the vulnerable groups of the population, after a difficult and prolonged period of economic and health crisis.

Also worth noting is the National Strategy and Action Plan for Roma Social Inclusion for the period 2021-2030. One of the main Pillars of the Strategy is the empowerment of Roma women and youth, through programs co-funded by the EU,

the Council of Europe and the European Economic Area in order to achieve comprehensive results.

For the implementation of the policies described in all these action plans and national strategies we fully utilize all the necessary sources, from the state budget, the European Social Fund and the Resilience and Recovery Fund.

In the Greek Resilience and Recovery Plan, particular investments and reforms have been devoted to social inclusion of the most vulnerable groups, and to the digital transformation of social protection. These reforms will contribute significantly towards the promotion of gender equality.

Next, I would like to refer to specific actions and achievements of recent years in the context of gender equality.

A significant step forward worth emphasizing, is the adoption of the Law for Substantive Gender Equality in 2019. This law introduces a gender mainstreaming approach and aims to eradicate gender inequalities in both the public and private spheres. Notably, the concepts of gender impact assessment and gender budgeting were introduced into a legislative text for the first time.

In the field of combating violence against women, a significant milestone was achieved with the ratification of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention in 2018. In 2023, Greece submitted its first report to the Council of Europe, and committed to implement the recommendations put forth by the Convention's Committee of Experts (GREVIO). To protect women from violence and harassment in their working environment the ILO Convention on Combating Sexual Harassment in the Workplace was ratified in 2021. Greece was among the first eight countries to endorse it in its national legislation.

The funding for the network of structures supporting women victims of gender-based violence has been secured. This includes forty-four (44) Counseling Centers, twenty (20) shelters, and the 24-hour SOS helpline. The legal aid program for victims of domestic violence continues to be implemented, regardless of income criteria.

In 2021 with the emergence of the «Me too» movement in Greece, a governmental specialized electronic platform was created with information and supportive material on violence, sexual harassment and abuse. Since 2019, seventy three Police Domestic Violence Services have been established throughout the country, aiming at coordinating, supervising and guiding Police regional services in addressing cases of gender-based violence more efficiently and effectively. One of the services operates within the Hellenic Police Headquarters.

In the field of equal participation of women in political decision-making, our country, in addition to the legislative framework and established quotas, undertakes awareness-raising campaigns during electoral processes. Moreover, through the Gender Equality Observatory, it monitors electoral procedures, records outcomes, and collects data on candidates.

As regards the representation of women on boards of directors in companies, it is progressing gradually. To further improve this trend, we are currently working on the transposition into national law of the EU Directive on improving the gender balance among directors of listed companies.

In the field of enhancing women's participation in the labor market, notable achievements include the transposition of the European directive on work-life balance in 2021, the ratification of the ILO Convention on the right to work free from violence and harassment, and the introduction of the gender equality label for businesses meeting specific criteria. Furthermore, the upgrading of the Labor Inspection Body to an independent authority and the designation of the Greek Ombudsperson as the entity promoting the principle of equal treatment with enhanced supervisory powers, constitute key milestones.

In the field of gender mainstreaming, a noteworthy initiative is the implementation of the European Commission's technical assistance project aiming at the introduction of Gender Impact Assessment in Public Policies and Budgets. The objective is to enhance the capacity of public administration to integrate the gender perspective into Ministries' budgets. Additionally, it is important to note that there is ongoing collaboration with all Ministries to enhance the integration of a gender perspective into the actions of each one of them.

Madame Chair,

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Against the background of recent achievements and looking towards the opportunities and challenges ahead, it is important to reflect on lessons learned and to discuss the future of gender equality policy in Greece.

The upcoming period will establish the strategic framework for gender equality issues, both within the European Union through the creation of the new European strategy and within the context of the Beijing Platform for Action. Therefore, it is crucial not only to assess the implemented actions but also to set the direction towards which we aim to progress, with the ultimate goal of achieving substantive gender equality.

Building upon the aforementioned achievements, the government's programming for the upcoming period in gender equality encompasses the significant goal of equal participation of women in the labor market and the harmonization of professional and personal-family life. Empowering women and girls, increasing their participation in STEM professions, challenging gender stereotypes, ameliorating the position of working women, raising the percentages of female representation in leadership positions, and promoting women's entrepreneurship, remain high priorities on the political agenda. In this context, a comprehensive network of policies is being developed to concretely support women.

We take great pride in establishing the Task Force for the "Climate Crisis and Gender" under our coordination. With the support and encouragement of the Greek government, and a team comprising eminent scientists, local government representatives, and members of civil society, the Task Force is actively preparing an action plan. This plan aims to address the significant impacts on women and contribute to achieving sustainable development goals, particularly emphasizing Goal 5 (on Gender Equality) alongside Goal 13 on climate, as well as specific goals such as Goal 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being). Our project focuses on natural disasters and extreme weather phenomena, recognizing that these events affect women more and differently than men. This action plan is expected to be published by summer 2024. This initiative lays the foundation for an Integrated Roadmap, guiding us in adopting policies to reduce the climate gender gap between men and women.

During the four-year period from 2023 to 2027, priority will be given to highlighting the issue of gender-based and domestic violence in all its forms, along with the implementation of preventive measures and support for victims. Specifically, efforts will focus on upgrading and ensuring the sustainability of the network of structures for women victims of violence. New, modern diagnostic and risk prevention tools are being introduced, and awareness, sensitization, and education activities are intensified within the framework of the Istanbul Convention, as well as under European law and national legislation.

Simultaneously, a framework for the accommodation of women victims of violence and their children, requiring immediate removal from their familial or partner environment, is being organized through the operation of the nationwide Network of Structures for Women victims of violence. The functioning of the Observatory for Gender Equality and the monitoring mechanism of implemented policies at the local and regional levels, as well as horizontally across all sectoral policies and for all high-risk victimization groups, is strengthened.

All the aforementioned initiatives are expected to significantly contribute to enhancing the protection of victims of gender-based and domestic violence.

To conclude, I would like to express my gratitude for the opportunity you provide us to engage in a constructive and frank dialogue. I want to assure you that your experience and guidance will serve as the compass for shaping our national policies on gender equality and empowering women and girls in my country.

Thank you, Madame Chair.