

Combined second and third periodic reports

Greece

(20th session)

172. The Committee considered the combined second and third periodic reports of Greece (CEDAW/C/GRC/2-3) at its 415th and 416th meetings, on 28 January 1999 (see CEDAW/C/SR.415 and 416).

(a) Introduction by the State party

173. The representative of Greece noted that the principle of gender equality had been established in Greece by the 1975 Constitution. The legislative and other measures adopted since then, including relevant directives of the European Union, to consolidate the elimination of discrimination against women in all sectors, had brought about significant changes in the status of women and their increased presence in all sectors. The equality policies adopted since 1994 had been aimed at further reducing inequalities, eradicating their causes and changing existing concepts and attitudes regarding the role of women and men in the family, at work and in politics and social life. Emphasis was also placed on the development of support mechanisms and structures to enhance implementation of such measures. As a sector of the Ministry of the Presidency, the General Secretariat for Equality, established in 1985, was the State agency responsible for equality issues.

174. The representative noted that notwithstanding the positive impact of those measures, gender inequalities continued to exist. The representative then reviewed the most important actions taken in favour of gender equality. She noted that the legislative framework in Greece was considered to be one of the most advanced and progressive in the world. Among recent legislative changes, she highlighted the revision of family law and new legislation concerning women's access to continuing education, vocational training and employment and labour relations. Enrolment in elementary and high school education was obligatory in Greece, and therefore illiteracy rates, in all parts of the country, had decreased significantly in the past decade.

175. The representative identified the elimination of violence against women and women's equal and active participation in all socio-economic development policies as the highest priorities for the General Secretariat for Equality for the period 1997-2000. Owing to a lack of adequate data, no clear picture on the extent and forms of violence against women existed. Among new actions taken to address the problem was the establishment of an expert committee to develop recommendations on further legislation, measures and strategies. The Research Centre for Equality Matters was conducting nationwide research on violence against women. Forced prostitution and trafficking had also become a serious problem in Greece.

176. The changes occurring in the economic and social system in recent years had particular consequences for women. The achievement of equal opportunities for women and the integration of women into the labour market required that attention be paid not only to quantitative but also to qualitative aspects in order to ensure the economic and social cohesion of the country. The General Secretariat for Equality promoted the adoption of an action plan for 1998-2000, which had as its centrepiece the mainstreaming of the equal opportunities policy into all governmental policies.

177. The representative noted the positive trends in women's participation in the labour market, including the increased participation of women in the labour force, an increase in women's economic activity rate and the fact that three quarters of newly created jobs were occupied by women.

178. While women had begun to participate more actively in political life, the percentage of women in the higher echelons of political power remained small. Various policies and affirmative action measures were sought to increase the number of women in public life, including through awareness-raising and training.

179. The right of Greek women to health care was guaranteed in the Constitution and was realized through a uniform and decentralized national health system, as confirmed by various indicators and demographic data. Specialized

health care was available to all women, including immigrants and refugees, but more programmes are also planned to address women's special health problems, including teenage abortion, and health issues related to menopause. A drop in AIDS cases among women had been reported.

(b) Concluding comments by the Committee

Introduction

180. The Committee expresses its appreciation to the Government of Greece for submitting a well-written and comprehensive combined second and third periodic report. It commends the Government for its oral presentation of the report and for the extensive and frank replies to the questions posed by the Committee, which enabled it to obtain a clear picture of the situation of women in Greece.

181. The Committee notes favourably that the Government of Greece considers that the implementation of the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women is substantially linked to the implementation of the Convention.

Positive aspects

182. The Committee commends the Government for creating a comprehensive constitutional and legislative framework for achieving equality between women and men. It notes in particular that the Constitution of 1975 enshrines the principle of equality between women and men and that a series of laws and policies have been put in place over the years to translate this principle into practice. The Committee notes the favourable legal situation, including with regard to employment, vocational training and health. It also notes that Greece has ratified the major conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) concerning women workers and workers with family responsibilities.

183. The Committee commends the Government in particular for its important new legislative measures concerning family law.

184. The Committee notes that the General Secretariat for Equality, the national machinery for the advancement of women, continues to function as a section of the Ministry of the Presidency. It also notes the existence of additional institutions that work on equality issues, such as the Research Centre for Equality Matters.

185. The Committee welcomes the fact that a large number of women's non-governmental organizations are active in the country, and that good relationships exist between those organizations of civil society and the governmental machinery for the advancement of women. In this context, it welcomes the fact that a national committee, with the participation of government representatives and civil society, was established for the preparation of the combined second and third periodic reports.

186. The Committee welcomes the efforts undertaken by the Government to create equal opportunities for women in the labour market and the positive trends concerning the women's employment situation. It commends the Government of Greece for conducting a pilot survey on time use that aims at quantifying the unpaid household work of women. It also commends the Government for its strategies to use the mass media to improve the image of women.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

187. The Committee notes with concern that the prevailing patriarchal structures and societal attitudes concerning the roles of women and men perpetuate discrimination against women in all spheres of public and private life and constitute an obstacle to achieving equality.

188. The Committee notes that the impact of the prevailing global and regional economic policies and trends is an impediment to the implementation of the Convention.

Principal areas of concern and recommendations

189. The Committee expresses concern at the continuing existence of violence against women and notes the absence of comprehensive legislative measures to address violence. It is also concerned about the attitude of law enforcement personnel, especially the police, towards women victims of violence. It is also concerned that, notwithstanding a high incidence of sexual harassment in the workplace, its legal regulation remains unclear, and women do not avail themselves of available complaint mechanisms.

190. The Committee recommends that the Government strengthen the legislative and policy framework to prevent, eliminate and prosecute violence against women, in accordance with its general recommendation 19, and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. It recommends that data and information on the prevalence and types of violence in the family in general, and against women in particular, be gathered as a matter of priority. Urgent measures should be taken to institutionalize the training of police and law enforcement personnel to ensure the appropriate handling of cases of violence against women. Efforts should also be made to improve the accessibility and effectiveness of complaints mechanisms against sexual harassment in the workplace.

191. The Committee is concerned that the revision of the laws on rape has not led to the recognition of rape as a serious infringement of a woman's human right to personal security.

192. The Committee recommends that the law on rape, including marital rape, be reformed, and that forensic investigation be introduced in the light of general recommendation 19, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and recent developments in the laws of other European countries that face similar problems of violence against women.

193. The Committee notes with concern that, following a number of recent court cases, the legality of affirmative action and temporary special measures in accordance with article 4.1 of the Convention is unclear.

194. The Committee recommends that the Government clarify the compatibility of its legislative provisions with article 4.1 of the Convention to ensure its implementation.

195. The Committee notes with concern that, notwithstanding the availability of legal remedies to seek redress for discrimination and the fact that some court cases have been filed to challenge discrimination, very few women avail themselves of this right and are often reluctant to do so.

196. The Committee recommends that the Government develop programmes to raise awareness of the constitutional remedy among women and women's groups so that individual acts of discrimination will be consistently challenged and so that the Constitution will have an impact on government action and policy and on the private sector.

197. While noting positively the fact that prostitution is decriminalized and instead is dealt with in a regulatory manner, the Committee is concerned that inadequate structures exist to ensure compliance with the regulatory framework. The Committee is also concerned about the increase in trafficking in women. In this regard it notes that insufficient attention is given to possible links between lack of enforcement and trafficking in and migration of women.

198.The Committee recommends that compliance with the regulations governing prostitution be monitored effectively and adequate measures to address trafficking in women be introduced.

199.Noting the already low level of participation of women in political and public life, the Committee voices its concern at the apparent decrease in the percentage of women in elected office. It points to the consequences of this situation for the adoption of gender-sensitive legislative and policy measures.

200.The Committee urges the Government to adopt innovative measures to raise the percentage of women in all public bodies, including in the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. Efforts should also be made to encourage other entities, such as political parties and the private sector, to increase the number of women at senior and decision-making levels.

201.The Committee is concerned that there is a relatively high level of functional illiteracy in Greece, in particular among elderly and rural women.

202.The Government is urged to intensify its efforts to prevent and to remedy functional illiteracy among women. The Government should also conduct a comprehensive review of all educational curricula at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels with a view to eliminating remaining discriminatory aspects, remedying the stereotypical portrayal of women and girls and creating an educational environment that is conducive to girls' and women's education and learning. The Government should include the achievement of equality between women and men and between girls and boys as a societal goal in its educational policy. The Committee urges the Government to establish degree-granting women's studies programmes to provide academic support to political and practical changes aimed at creating a non-patriarchal society.

203.Noting that there are positive trends in the employment situation of women, the Committee remains concerned about the situation of women in the formal and informal labour market, including the high percentage of unemployed women and the continuing pay gap between women and men. It is also concerned that many of the new jobs occupied by women might provide only low pay and limited career prospects. The Committee is further concerned that the employment prospects for women in rural areas, for women who are migrating from the agricultural sector into other employment areas and for immigrant women remain precarious, especially for those with low skills or who are functionally illiterate.

204.The Committee urges the Government to assess, in a comprehensive manner, the changing realities of women's work and to develop policies that aim at structural and long-term improvements in the employment situation of women. Particular attention should be paid to supporting women who work without pay in family enterprises and on family farms. It also urges the Government to address the issue of women migrant workers.

205.The Committee is concerned that insufficient attention is given to gender-specific causes and consequences of illness and disease and that, consequently, the country's health policy is insufficiently responding to gender factors associated with health.

206.The Committee recommends that all health-related data and statistics be disaggregated by sex and age so that health policies, service delivery and allocation of resources can be assessed in terms of their outcomes for women and men. It also recommends that governmental health policies, research and resources be adjusted so as to respond adequately to the rights of women and men to a high standard of health care and to the gender factors associated with health.

207.The Committee expresses its concern about the high rate of abortion in Greece, and especially of abortions by teenagers. The numbers are indicative of insufficient use of contraceptives, a lack of sex education and information about contraceptives, as well as insufficient or unfocused family-planning efforts. The Committee is also concerned in this respect about the extent of funding for contraception, given the comprehensive coverage of health insurance and funding for health services in Greece.

208.The Committee recommends that the Government introduce sex education as part of the school curriculum. It also recommends the improvement of family-planning policies and measures so that all women and men have access to information about and measures of contraception. It also urges the Government to target men in its family-planning efforts and to stress the shared responsibilities of women and men in this regard.

209. Given the sometimes traumatic flow of immigrants and refugees in the region and constant changes in their composition, the Committee is concerned at the low level of continuous attention given to them by the Government. Likewise, the Committee notes that while attention is given to the situation of certain groups of minority women, such as gypsies, insufficient information is available concerning the situation of other ethnic and religious minority women, such as Turks and Albanians.

210. The Committee urges the Government to develop a general policy to address the particular needs of immigrant and migrant women with regard to their protection, health, employment and educational needs. The Committee also urges the Government to ensure that repatriation efforts are consistent with women's safety and protection needs. The Government should also consider entering into bilateral agreements with women migrants' countries of origin to ensure adequate protection of women's rights and safety. The Committee encourages the Government to assess the situation of all minority women with a view to ensuring adequate support for them.

211. The Committee recommends that the Government, when preparing its next report, engage in consultations with groups that represent minority women.

212. The Committee requests the wide dissemination in Greece of the present concluding comments in order to make the people of Greece, and in particular its government administrators and politicians, aware of the steps that have been taken to ensure *de jure* and *de facto* equality and the further steps required in this regard. The Committee also requests the Government to continue to disseminate widely, in particular to women's and human rights organizations, the Convention, the Committee's general recommendations and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.